

FRANCIS HOPKINSON AND PHILIP FRENEAU:

POLITICAL POETS

OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

THESIS

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INTRODUCTION

When one thinks of the influential political writers of the Revolutionary period, many names come to mind. Thomas Jefferson and his enlightened Republicanism or James Madison and his scholarly historical explorations would be two individuals at the top of most lists. Perhaps James Otis and his provocative pre-Revolutionary rhetoric or Thomas Paine and his inspirational pamphlets would head another's roster. Francis Hopkinson (1737-1791) and Philip Freneau (1752-1852), however, would not dominate most historians' registers of influential early American writers. Both Hopkinson and Freneau are absent from Bernard Bailyn's Ideological Origins of the American Revolution and are mentioned only once in Gordon S. Wood's Creation of the American Republic. Despite this omission or limited treatment in "the two most important books in scholarly interpretation of the founding period,"¹ Hopkinson's and Freneau's contributions to the political writings of the colonial era are substantial.² Through their verse and essays, these poets reflected, and at times molded, the Revolutionary ideas of their more celebrated contemporaries.

Perhaps it was their chosen literary vehicle of poetry which explains their absence in many of the studies of revolutionary writers. Paine, Madison, Jefferson, and Otis all wrote primarily in prose, and the effect of their writings on the revolutionary era is well researched. Hopkinson and Freneau, however, chose to write principally in poetry. While

¹Quotation concerning Bailyn and Wood from William Lee Miller, The Business of May Next: James Madison and the Founding (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1992), 291.

²For a comprehensive biography of Francis Hopkinson see George Everett Hastings, The Life and Works of Francis Hopkinson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1926); for an examination of Hopkinson's contributions in music see Oscar G. T. Sonneck, Francis Hopkinson: The First American Poet-Composer (1737-1789) (New York: Da Capo Press, 1967). For two excellent biographies on Philip Freneau see Lewis Leary, That Rascal Freneau: A Study in Literary Failure (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1941) and Jacob Axelrad, Philip Freneau: Champion of Democracy (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1967). For a sweeping study of American culture in the Revolutionary era, including the poetry of Freneau and Hopkinson and others, see Kenneth Silverman, A Cultural History of the American Revolution (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1976).

verse is a literary art form frequently examined in the field of English, investigations into poetry's influence on revolutionary ideology remain elusive at best. This study will focus on Hopkinson's and Freneau's poetry and the immense popularity and influence these writers enjoyed during their lives.

Most early American political writers supported themselves with non-literary occupations. Hopkinson, like many of his American peers, practiced law and held various political positions. Freneau was a school teacher, editor of an influential patriot newspaper, and also had a political career. Both, however, wrote in a highly sophisticated literary style reminiscent of Pope, Swift, and Locke. While Hopkinson and Freneau wrote primarily in verse, they also composed political tracts in prose. Hopkinson was "rational and witty" while Freneau's language was "full of invective, bitter and fiery." Most of their works, whether in poetic or allegorical form, were published in colonial newspapers as well as in pamphlets. Pamphlets were the colonial vehicle for expressing "the ideas, attitudes, and motivations, that lay at the heart of the revolution."³

Poetry was not the only common thread linking the works of Hopkinson and Freneau. Both were men of the middle colonies, which served as the cultural center for the American Revolution. Hopkinson was born in Philadelphia, while Freneau was born in New York. The cities of Philadelphia and New York had societies which patronized art, philosophy, literature, and intellectual development. The middle colonies played a significant role in shaping the development of these two extraordinary writers.⁴

³The occupational characteristics of the colonial writers and the quotation concerning the significance of pamphlets from Bernard Bailyn, The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1967), 16, 8; background information from Dumas Malone, ed., Dictionary of American Biography (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932), 9: 221 and 6: 27; quotation describing literary styles from William D. Andrews, "Philip Freneau and Francis Hopkinson," in Everett Emerson, ed., American Literature: 1764-1789 The Revolutionary Years (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970), 135.

⁴The middle colonies as a cultural center from Andrews, "Hopkinson and Freneau," 127; biographical information from Malone, Dictionary of American Biography, 6: 27 and 9: 221; statistical information for text and Appendix from United States, Bureau of Census, Historical Statistics of the United States (Washington: Bureau of the Census, 1976) 1: 24-27.

Both benefited from the dynamic intellectual life found in their hometowns.

Freneau's father was a wealthy wine merchant who filled his house with great works of art and literature. Hopkinson's father helped form the American Philosophical Society and the Library Company, and exposed his son to a substantial body of classical and modern literature. The young Francis eventually became an accomplished harpsichordist and musician, earning himself the title of "first American composer." Hopkinson and Freneau were also proficient writers, who served "the cause of patriotism with the literary skills . . . trained through the educational experience of the middle colonies."⁵

One cannot over-emphasize the influence and significance of the middle colonies on the development of these two writers. While Jefferson and Madison relied on culture imported to their plantations, Hopkinson and Freneau had such culture at their doorsteps. These "sons of the middle colonies" shared a highly literary writing style, which differed dramatically from the straightforward, informative essays of their contemporaries. While the founding fathers of the New England colonies are often recognized for influencing the ideological development of the revolution, it was the men of the middle colonies who "provided organizers and penmen, who planned goals and popularized them, through writing." Hopkinson and Freneau were two such literary coordinators.⁶

While both poets had a great deal in common, their literary styles were quite opposite. Hopkinson's work was humorous and witty whereas, Freneau's compositions were serious and bitter. The sources of the latter poet's bitterness may lie in the financial crises caused by his father's death. Portions of the family estate were sold and his wages as a poet were not enough to support his family during this period of financial uncertainty.

⁵Quotation and information concerning the significance of the "middle colonies" from Andrews, "Hopkinson and Freneau," 127-28; additional background information from Malone, Dictionary of American Biography, 6: 27 and 9: 220-21; for an excellent study of Hopkinson's musical contributions see Oscar G.T. Sonneck, Francis Hopkinson: The First American Poet Composer (1737-1739) (New York: Da Capo Press, 1967).

⁶Andrews, "Hopkinson and Freneau," 127.

Furthermore, Freneau's six-week sojourn during the revolution as a captive on a British prison ship only added to his bitterness. Hopkinson had few monetary or emotional hardships in his youth, a circumstance that allowed his intrinsic sharp wit and humorous nature to flourish. Consequently, one writer was comical and the other antagonistic.⁷

In addition to two distinct literary styles, the political ideologies of the poets were substantially different. Hopkinson was a conservative who vehemently supported the ratification of the Constitution. After a presidential appointment in 1788, he became the champion of the status quo defending the traditionalist views of Washington and Hamilton. Freneau, on the other hand, who struggled much of his life to meet the financial needs of his family, was a liberal who believed the constitution protected those of wealth at the expense of the common man. Despite their opposite political beliefs, both men used poetry to express their distinct convictions in order to help sway the opinion of the American public.⁸

This study will examine the writings of these urban patriots through three pivotal periods in the American Revolution. Chapter one examines Hopkinson's and Freneau's poetry from 1765 through 1776. Here a strict chronological approach will document one common and essential theme, which was the changing attitudes of the colonists towards King George III. Hopkinson initially celebrated the virtues of one king while eventually satirizing the actions of his successor. Freneau's poetry, on the other hand, glorified the uniqueness of America, and, ultimately, attacked vehemently the actions of King George III. This severing of the paternalistic ties to the mother country was essential for the revolution to begin.

Chapter two addresses the plethora of poetry written during the years of the conflict which helped sway the public to the side of the patriots. Because of the tremendous volume

⁷Background information and sources of Freneau's bitterness and Hopkinson's wit from John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes, eds., American National Biography (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 8: 467-68 and 11: 191.

⁸Information on the sources of the political ideologies of Hopkinson and Freneau from Garraty and Carnes, American National Biography, 11: 191 and 8: 468.

of works written in this period, a more thematic approach was necessary. However, within each theme, a chronological examination will trace the development of each theme in a historical context. The poetry written during this period falls into the following themes: the horrors of British warfare, the bravery and patriotism of American colonists, the disloyalty of the tories and loyalists, and finally the vilification of George III and the glorification of George Washington. The poetry during the revolt helped win the propaganda war by effectively criticizing Britain's role in the revolution, while supporting the cause of the patriots. Therefore, both Hopkinson and Freneau played a substantial role in winning the war of words which dramatically changed the history of the emerging republic.

The last chapter of this thesis will look at the role these influential writers played in setting the final stage of the American Revolution, which was in the creation of our own Constitution. Here the differences in political ideologies of Hopkinson and Freneau were most dramatic. The former represented the conservative, elitist side of the American Revolution and the latter represented a more liberal perspective championing the rights of the people. Hopkinson strongly supported the Federalist agenda celebrating the ratification of the federal constitution. Freneau, on the other hand, was a staunch Anti-federalist, who openly criticized the policies of Alexander Hamilton and George Washington, which he believed were not democratic. Regardless of their political differences, both poets played a pivotal role in helping create a nation during one of its most dynamic periods.

Although Freneau engaged in many paper wars well into the nineteenth century, this study ends in 1793, several years after Hopkinson's death, for two reasons.⁹ First, in 1783 the *National Gazette*, a newspaper that Freneau edited and used for one his most controversial attacks against the Federalist regime discussed in the final chapter, ceased publication, and he withdrew from the public arena and retired to his country estate. However, the most important reason to end the thesis in 1793 is the absence of Hopkinson,

⁹For a comprehensive study of early American newspapers see Clarence S. Brigham, History and Bibliography of American Newspapers (1690-1820) (London: Archon Books, 1962).

who died two years earlier. This is a study of how the works of both poets collectively responded to the events of the revolution. Therefore, continuing the study considerably beyond the death of Hopkinson goes beyond the scope of this paper.

All three chapters cover an era in American history in which words were as important as military strength in determining the future of a nation. From 1765 through 1793 both Francis Hopkinson and Philip Freneau were at the forefront of the revolution. They used poetry to help persuade the colonists and future Americans to revolt and helped guide them in the creation of a new republic. Hopkinson was comical and satirical, while Freneau was emotional and at times bitter. Although greatly ignored by current historians and scholars, this thesis will investigate their profound influence on the ideology of the revolutionary era.

CHAPTER ONE

THE ROAD TO REVOLUTION

The chain of events leading to the American Revolution demonstrates a dramatic ideological shift from a deep-rooted paternalistic relationship with Britain's monarchy to the decision to take up arms and fight against one's own familiar ties. This metamorphosis did not come easily or quickly. The poems in this chapter reflect this struggle and transformation. While contributing to the conflict with the mother country, these poems indicated the beginnings of a strong consciousness of cultural identity. Many of them glorify the beauty of the colonies and their inhabitants and hint at nationalism long before there was a nation. Therefore, this gradual American disillusionment with the British monarchy matched a strong sense of colonial self-esteem and made the road to the revolution possible.

Francis Hopkinson, who was fourteen years Philip Freneau's senior, was not surprisingly the earlier contributor to this prolific and prophetic series of political writings. One of Hopkinson's first published poems was written in response to a message delivered by the ship, *Rising Sun*, in New York harbor on January 12, 1761. The dispatch from England informed the colonists of the death of King George II and the proclamation of King George III. News of the death of their "late and most gracious Sovereign" caused an intense feeling of great loss to spread throughout the colonies. Villages were "hung in mourning." Sermons were delivered consoling citizens as if they had lost a member of the family. One such minister, Gilbert Tennent, eulogized George II as "the father of his people" and urged the colonists "to drop your filial tears over the sacred dust of your Common father."¹

¹ The events surrounded the colonial reaction to the death of George II were recorded in The Pennsylvania Gazette (Philadelphia), 22 January 1761, 2. Gilbert Tennent's sermon quoted in Winthrop

The following spring, Hopkinson wrote and delivered a poem capturing this public sentiment at the commencement exercises for the College of Philadelphia. Entitled “An Exercise in Memory of George the II,” this dialogue and ode reflected the early colonial paternalistic devotion to their monarch. In the following stanza, Hopkinson lamented the death of a King:

Down in Deep and dreary Tomb
His mortal part must lie;
And every bell
Now tolls his knell,
Tears flow from every eye.²

From these lines one sees a genuine remorse, which Hopkinson and, presumably, his fellow colonists experienced because of the death of King George.

Hopkinson was not the only one to write poems concerning the death of the beloved monarch. One anonymous poem, published in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, also reflected the nation's sadness and sense of great loss. Perhaps poetry, more than any other literary vehicle, could capture the strong emotional outpouring of the colonists. While the poem lacked the literary sophistication of Hopkinson's ode, the unknown poet ends the elegy on an optimistic note: “And while their loss thy son and subjects mourn,/ May He to us thy happy Reign restore.”³ That son, George III, became the subject matter of Hopkinson's second political poem, delivered the following year during commencement exercises at the College of Philadelphia.

This ode, entitled an “Exercise on the Accession of George III,” glorified a monarch whom Hopkinson would lambaste in subsequent verse. In this poem the author crowned

Jordan's "Familial Politics: Thomas Paine and the Killing of the King, 1776," *The Journal of American History* 60 (September 1973): 305.

²Francis Hopkinson, *An Exercise Containing A Dialogue and Ode Sacred to the Memory of his Late and Gracious Majesty George II* (Philadelphia: Dunlop, 1761), 7; also performed at the public commencement at the College of Philadelphia.

³Anonymous poem, "On the Death of His late Majesty King GEORGE the Second.," found in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 29 January 1761, 3. Comments concerning the paternalistic relationship lasting until mid 1770s from Jordan, "Familial Politics," 299.

the new King: “The Darling of his people George the good./ Bright clustering round his throne virtues stand.” Both Hopkinson and the anonymous poet reflected the early colonial endorsement of the new king and the paternalistic relationship that would last until the mid-1770s. These poems demonstrate just how much ground was necessary to travel in order to make the patricidal transformation. Hopkinson, and eventually Freneau, would soon help sever this connection, as the “King's bright clustering virtues” no longer stood “round his throne.”⁴

Four years later Hopkinson was asked to deliver another commencement speech at the College of Philadelphia. The topic at hand was the “Reciprocal Advantages of the Union between Great Britain and her Colonies.” Hopkinson's oration was in response to the economic problems resulting from the Currency Act of 1764 and the Stamp Act of 1765. These British administrative policies and parliamentary legislation were essentially the attempts of the mother country to recoup monetary losses resulting from the Seven Years' War. In his speech, Hopkinson argued for continual unity between the colonies and Great Britain. Commerce, liberty, and religion, the poet believed, were reinforced by such a union. He viewed any bloodshed which might eventually occur as “unnatural,” like parents harming their children.⁵

He quickly dismissed the idea of disunity and violence by asking: “But why should the connection between her parent country ever come into question? Are we not one nation and one people? And do we not own obedience to one king?” Hopkinson concluded this line of argument with the declarative assertion: “We of America are in all respects Englishmen.”⁶ This speech used the strong paternalistic images found in Hopkinson's

⁴Francis Hopkinson, An Exercise Containing A Dialogue and Ode On the Accession of His Present Majesty George III (Philadelphia: printed by Dunlop in Market Street, 1672), 5. Comments concerning the paternalistic relationship lasting until the mid 1770s are based on Jordan, “Familial Politics,” 299.

⁵Francis Hopkinson, Four Dissertations on the Reciprocal Advantages of the Union Between Great Britain and her American Colonies (Philadelphia: William and Thomas Bradford, 1766), 111, 112, 107.

⁶Ibid., 108-09.

earlier poetry. The address revealed that in 1765 the young poet turned orator still believed that the colonies should remain united to the mother country. However, in this commencement speech the familiar relationship appeared to be unraveling. The oration does not celebrate a harmonious union which was currently in existence, but rather one which was in jeopardy.

The previous year another political orator and pamphleteer, James Otis, wrote a similar response to the economical oppression caused by the Revenue Act of 1764. This pamphlet, "The Rights of the British Colonists Asserted and Proved," may have influenced Hopkinson's dissertation. Like Hopkinson, Otis argued for reciprocity between the colonists and England. Otis, however, went beyond his fellow patriot's appeals by demanding that the colonists should have direct representation in Parliament, which would "firmly unite all parts of the British Empire, in the greatest peace and prosperity; and render it invulnerable and perpetual." This pamphlet reflected the revolutionary battle cry "No taxation without representation," and earned Otis a place in revolutionary history.⁷

Hopkinson's oration was possibly inspired by one of Otis's popular political manifestos. Both writers emphasized unity as key to future economic prosperity. They also ultimately believed in the obedience of the colonists to British monarchical authority. One other characteristic united Hopkinson's oration with the influential essay of his contemporary. These works depicted a relationship between the mother country and her colonies which was showing signs of stress and discord, signs that all was not quite well and that a peaceful solution to the conflict might not be possible.

On May 22, 1765, Francis Hopkinson left the colonies for England to visit his cousins and investigate employment opportunities in the mother country. While staying at an inn in Coventry, the poet found the following couplet written on the wall: "Oh England, England,

⁷James Otis "The Rights of the British Colonists Asserted and Proved," printed in Merrill Jensen, ed., Tracts of the American Revolution 1763-1776 (New York: The Bobbs - Merrill Company, Inc., 1967), 40.

miserable grown, / Since who has no brains enjoys thy thrown.” Hopkinson, displeased with the anti-British graffiti responded with his own composition:

To Decency at least, the scourge should bring
The wretch who dares insult so good a King;
Or banished hence, far from this happy land,
Go! Feel the weight of some proud tyrant’s hand;
Then would’s’t thou be convinc’d and glad to own
That George with Glory, fills the British Throne!⁸

The significance of this short poem was that despite the ongoing disputes between England and America, the poet’s devotion to the mother country remained unchanged. His steadfast loyalty to the British monarchy remained strong. In many ways these lines reflected the ideology of his fellow colonists and also showed just how far they needed to change in order to revolt. Ironically, Hopkinson would eventually describe his beloved monarch using similar terminology to that of the anonymous poet in his couplet. In the following decade, Hopkinson and his fellow colonists began to look at England as “miserable grown” as they moved closer to severing ties with the mother country.⁹

For the remainder of the decade Hopkinson wrote little in the way of political poetry or speeches. This was possibly due to events in his personal life. On September 1, 1768, he married Ann Borden and soon opened a shop which sold dry goods imported from England. Undoubtedly the demands of a new business and the welcome diversion of his matrimonial condition left little time for his literary ambitions.

By contrast, in 1771, a precocious Philip Freneau graduated from the College of New Jersey. He did not have the marital diversions or vocational demands of his predecessor. In collaboration with a classmate, Hugh Henry Brackenridge, Freneau wrote a poem, “The Rising

⁸Hopkinson’s response to the couplet found in the *Rose Bud*, a journal kept by Hopkinson from the *Edward Hopkinson Collection*, as found in Hastings, *Francis Hopkinson*, 140; also additional information from Hastings, *Francis Hopkinson*, 123.

⁹*Ibid.*, 140.

Glory of America,” which essentially began the nineteen-year-old’s long and prolific career as a political poet.¹⁰

The poem was an ambitious attempt to summarize the history of the colonies. Beginning with Columbus's discovery and working their way through the heroes of the French and Indian War, the two Princeton scholars emphasized the uniqueness and superior attributes of the American colonies. Unlike the barbaric cruelty of the Spanish conquistadors, the North American Colonies were “discovered by Britannia for her sons, / undiluted with seas of Indian Blood.” Furthermore, North America offered greater economic opportunities for its inhabitants than its “resentful” South American neighbors. “More wealth and pleasure agriculture brings . . . nor less from commerce flow the streams.”¹¹

In the poem Freneau and Brackenridge praised the cultural and commercial excellence of Francis Hopkinson's hometown of Philadelphia. The city was “The seat of art, science and fame / Derive[ing] her Grandeur from the pow'r of trade.”¹² These lines show the artistic and intellectual influence which the thriving urban center had on these writers. Not surprisingly, a Philadelphia publisher printed this poem as a pamphlet the following year. With such glowing commentary on the city offered by Freneau and Brackenridge, one can imagine the pamphlet being eagerly distributed at the local chamber of commerce had there been one.

Perhaps the final lines of the stanza captured the essence of this urban center's profound impression on the two young graduates. “Hail Happy city where muses play, / where deep Philosophy convenes on her sons.”¹³ The city, according to the poets, was not only an intellectual center but also one which was uniquely American. For Freneau and

¹⁰Malone, Dictionary of American Biography, 9: 221, 6: 27.

¹¹Philip Freneau and H. H. Brackenridge, A Poem on the Rising Glory of America (Philadelphia: Cruikshank, Raitken, 1772), 1, 4, 15, 16.

¹²Ibid., 17.

¹³Ibid.

Brackenridge, the citizens of this city were no longer the sons of Britain, but the progeny of this cultural Mecca found in the American colonies. The fact that the poem was also published in pamphlet form implied that the composition enjoyed some degree of popularity. This indicated that other colonists shared in the intense pride the poets had for their treasured city.

Perhaps the significance of the “Rising Glory of America” was that the poem captured an intense nationalism only hinted at in Hopkinson's previous poems and orations. This nationalism was essential for the colonists to embrace if the colonies were to unite and declare independence. For a truly American nationalism to exist, an independent nation was essential. The final lines of this early poem, which Brackenridge delivered at their graduation ceremony from the College of New Jersey, also optimistically predicted America's glorious future: “And such America shall have . . . Future years of bliss alone remain.”¹⁴ Freneau's subsequent poetry continued to emphasize America's distinguished past and reflected a nationalistic spirit which helped move the colonies down the road to Revolution.

The following year, in 1772, Freneau published his own composition, “The American Village.” However, he paid tribute to English poet Oliver Goldsmith’s “Deserted Village” by also calling the city in his American town “Auburn.” This solo venture continued along the same nationalistic parameters of his previous work; however, the poet took such themes to Utopian extremes. At times the verse sounds like a promotional advertising campaign, even more excessive than his adulation of Philadelphia.

Each year fall Harvest crown the fields
And every joy and every bliss is there
And healthful labor crowns the flowing year.¹⁵

¹⁴Freneau and Brackenridge, Rising Glory, 18.

¹⁵Philip Freneau, The American Village: To Which are Addressed Several other Original Pieces in Verse (New York: S. Insler and A. Carr, 1772), 1.

The abundance of land and its agricultural possibilities, was certainly worth celebrating. The poet essentially outlined in this composition many of the qualities of North America which would attract immigrants up into the twentieth century.

Freneau was also correct in rejoicing in the delight of the new harvest. Such miracles of nature are quite “joyful” and “blissful.”¹⁶ One doubts, however, that the indentured servants and slaves, who performed the labor in such settings, were as “healthful” and “blissful” as portrayed. While the poet eventually condemned the institution of slavery in subsequent verse, Freneau avoided the inclusion of any images which might detract from his romanticized picture of the colonies. The poem, to a certain degree, borders on propaganda, which was a vehicle Freneau and Hopkinson would both use quite effectively in their poems during the war years of the American Revolution.

While the young poet painted a very romantic and at times an unrealistic picture of America's pastoral heartland, the poem dramatically shifted to more serious and significant issues when the subject of Great Britain arose. In the following lines the poet turned to the offensive:

Thus fell the mistress of the conquered earth,
 . . . Fell to the monster of luxury, a prey,
 Who forced a hundred nations to obey.

Freneau believed that Britain's successes in conquest also resulted in the creation of a materialistic and militaristic empire. He shared this opinion with his peers Thomas Jefferson and James Otis. Together, they “saw their own provincial virtues--rustic and old fashioned, sturdy and effective--challenged by the corruption at the center of power, by the threat of tyranny, and by a constitution gone wrong.”¹⁷

Freneau and many of his fellow colonists believed that King George's ministerial system was an impure form of government. Appointed cabinet members usurped the parliament's power to check the authority of the monarch; therefore, “it was widely believed

¹⁶ Freneau, American Village, 1.

¹⁷Ibid., 9. For the quotation on Britain's corruptive influence on the American colonies see

. . . that the influence of the Crown was being used to staff the administration with new Favourites and 'King's Friends,' who formed a secret Closet party, beyond the control of Parliament."¹⁸ While many of the colonists were troubled over the actions of the Crown, in 1772 revolution was still not a viable option.

Perhaps the greatest concern experienced by Freneau and his American contemporaries was that Britain's corruption and degeneration would spread to the colonies. Freneau addressed this concern in the following lines of the poem, "But if America, by this decay, / The World itself must fall as she." The fear of falling victim to British corruption was a real concern for these revolutionary writers. The solution for many was to escape to a virtuous and patriotic past, in order to avoid the present, which they perceived as "venal, cynical, and oppressive."¹⁹ It was this fear that England's vices would inevitably spread to the colonies that eventually helped lead colonists to believe that a separation from such an oppressive nation was necessary.

The uniqueness of Freneau's "American Village" lay in its direct and open questions concerning the actions of the mother country. All poems written by either Hopkinson or Freneau up to this point either ignored or only indirectly questioned Britain's actions. This poem, which was written in 1772, showed the beginnings of discontent toward a nation that in four years would explode into violence and bloodshed. At this time, however, the war was in words. Freneau's "American Village" captured a revolutionary zeal years before the conflict.

This dedication to resistance was also extremely pronounced in Francis Hopkinson's native environment of Philadelphia. Britain's attempt to use punitive measures such as the "Coercive Acts" to bring the rebellious colonists to their senses only heightened anti-British

Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 26.

¹⁸Quotation from George Rude, *Wilkes and Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 186. Additional information from Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 144-45.

¹⁹Freneau, *An American Village*, 9; also see Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 25.

fervor. While historians often point to Thomas Paine's Common Sense as one of the most influential political tracts of the colonial era, the editorials published in the Pennsylvania Packet remain the true precursors to Paine's pamphlet. In 1774, two years before Common Sense, an anonymous letter in the colonial newspaper urged the colonists “to neither think, write, or speak without keeping our eyes fixed upon the period which shall dissolve our connection with Great Britain.” This letter indicated a movement toward colonial independence and offered little in the way of encouraging reconciliation with the mother country. Moreover, the following words, also found in the letter, illustrated the role of the middle colonies in the organization and planning of such a revolt: “A noble task awaits you, instruct them in the great science of securing freedom.”²⁰

Francis Hopkinson, who also contributed to the Pennsylvania Packet, was undoubtedly influenced by the revolutionary zeal eloquently expressed in the articles of the colonial newspaper. Inspired by the increasingly revolutionary rhetoric of his native Pennsylvania, he embraced the “noble task” which “awaited” him, and in 1774 began to write again. Instead of poetry he chose to use the format of the political allegory, a form inspired by Swift, Pope, and Arbuthnot. These British writers used this style to make explicit and provocative political statements. This literary style became Hopkinson's most prolific and prophetic vehicle for capturing the revolutionary spirit of his generation.²¹

The political allegory, “A Pretty Story,” recounted the history of America from the pilgrims to the present. Hopkinson described Britain as a “valuable farm” run by a “nobleman,” while the idealized English constitution was the “Great paper.” The nobleman, who became corrupt, “violated” this Great paper and “would not [render] obedience to it.” This concept, that the British monarchy was now corrupt and no longer adhered to their constitution, reflected a common colonial conviction borrowed from the British radical Whig movement. The radical

²⁰Discussion of Common Sense from Jordan, “Thomas Paine and the Killing,” 295; editorials found in The Pennsylvania Packet (Philadelphia), 14 November 1774, 2.

²¹Malone, Dictionary of American Bibliography, 9: 221.

Whigs believed that the British political system had become impure and no longer followed the ideals of “liberty” and “virtue” which their constitution had helped secure. Therefore, this violation of the “great paper” was one of the primary reasons behind colonists’ discontent. As historian Gordon S. Wood explained, “They revolted not against the English constitution but on behalf of it.”²²

While Hopkinson's sharp attack against the violation of the British constitution represented a departure from the passive, often pensive, poetry of his youth, the paternalistic images found in his earlier works remained. In “A Pretty Story,” he described the American Colonies as the “new farm,” whose inhabitants “believed that their father's affections were alienated from them.” These lines reflected the continual paternalistic connection with the monarchy, which Hopkinson and many of his fellow colonists maintained until Paine's Common Sense ultimately helped to sever such ties. However, in “A Pretty Story,” the familiar relationship began to show signs of stress and strain. Hopkinson humorously and prophetically ended this tale with a series of ellipses, indicating that more was yet to come and the story was not quite finished. Thus, the allegory left the disillusioned colonists with a problem that needed some sort of action in order to find a resolution: “These harsh and unconstitutional proceedings irritated the inhabitants of the new farm to such a degree that ...”²³

Although “A Pretty Story” effectively outlined the colonists’ dilemma, a disadvantage of using the political allegory as a method of political expression was that the literary form tended to oversimplify history, even turning such events into children's fables. This format, however, allowed Hopkinson to explain complex situations, such as the corruption of the British constitution, in terms which even a colonist with limited intellectual capabilities could understand. As a fellow American writer Moses Coit Tyler explained:

²²Francis Hopkinson, A Pretty Story written in the Year of Our Lord 2774 (Philadelphia: Printed and Sold by John Dunlop. 1774), 5, 13-17. Discussions on the corruption found in the British constitution from Bailyn, Ideological Origins, 132-34; quotation from Gordon S. Wood, The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1972), 10.

²³Hopkinson, “A Pretty Story,” 16, 23; Paine's role in severing the paternalistic tie between the colonists and the crown found in Jordan, “Familiar Politics,” 299-300.

“the personages included in 'A Pretty Story' are few, its topics are simple and palpable, and even now in but little need of elucidation.”²⁴ By using the allegorical style, Hopkinson found a vehicle for clearly expressing his political ideas and making his convictions accessible to a wide audience. While some critics questioned the literary merits of the composition, the pamphlet was widely read, as evidenced by its three editions published before 1775.²⁵

One of the most enduring aspects of Hopkinson's “A Pretty Story” is that it argued for a peaceful resolution to the conflict. Although the allegory addressed the problems between the colonies and the mother country, unity and reconciliation were encouraged. It is not surprising that the composition was resurrected shortly before the outbreak of the Civil War when the unity of the United States was in jeopardy. The 1860s edition was marketed for young readers of the northern states. Certainly the moralistic and didactic nature of the allegory made the composition an excellent vehicle for arguing harmony and unity among the states. Unfortunately, “A Pretty Story” was no more effective at stopping the impending conflict in the 1860s than it was in the 1770s.

Perhaps the problem lay not in Hopkinson's piece but in the timing of its publication. In both cases, the roads were already paved toward conflict and a peaceful resolution was not possible. The punitive “Coercive Acts” imposed by the British only added fuel to the growing anti-ministerial frenzy which culminated in the First Continental Congress in September of 1774. Nowhere was this revolutionary fervor more obvious than in the open defiance found in Philip Freneau's “A Political Litany,” published in 1774, the same year as “A Pretty Story.” Unlike Hopkinson's allegory, Freneau explicitly and unreservedly took aim at all aspects of British society and attacked with derisive precision. The poet not only desired emancipation from Britain, but from all things British. He

²⁴Professor Tyler's defense of Francis Hopkinson and information concerning popularity of “A Pretty Story” found in Hastings, Francis Hopkinson, 198.

²⁵Silverman, Cultural History of the American Revolution, 265; and Hastings, Francis Hopkinson, 198.

demanded liberty from the Lords of the Council, who “fight against freedom,” as well as the “pirates” sent by King George III “who murder and plunder.” He also demanded freedom from the “bishops in Britain, who butchers are grown, from slaves, that would die for a smile from the throne.”²⁶

The poem not only listed a series of demands and attacked British society, but Freneau also gave advice to his fellow colonists. In the final declarative lines the poet instructed his audience “That we disunited, may freeman be still, / And Britain go on ---to be damned if she will.”²⁷ The above lines indicate that there was absolutely no doubt as to the poet’s answer to the problems of British oppression and his recommendation to his fellow colonists. For Freneau, the solution to the crisis was independence, a condition the colonists would soon formally declare.

Nothing was sacred in Freneau’s “Political Litany.” Whether parliamentary officials or Anglican prelates, all who represented British tyrannical authority were taunted in a most caustic manner. Where Hopkinson’s “A Pretty Story” offered a window of opportunity for reconciliation, Freneau’s political poem left little hope for the colonies to restore their reciprocal relationship with Britain. Moreover, the latter poet chose to challenge a relationship with the mother country that demanded a subservient role for the colony. Considering the events which would transpire in the following years, Freneau’s attitudes toward Britain were much more prophetic than Hopkinson’s wishful thinking.

In the spring of 1775 discontent between England and America increased, especially over General Thomas Gage’s infamous April nineteenth military clash with the “minutemen” of Lexington and Concord. As the war of words turned into a war with weapons, George Washington began to prepare untrained militia for battle. Also a strong feeling of patriotism spread throughout the colonies. Citizens erected monuments celebrating liberty and

²⁶Philip Freneau's "A Political Litany" found in Harry Hayden Clark, ed., Poems of Freneau (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929), 20-21.

²⁷Freneau, “A Political Litany,” 21.

freedom. One such monument was the liberty pole which was placed in public squares in major cities across the colonies. However, when a giant pole of eighty feet was set up in New York, a group of colonists who did not support the American cause, cut it into thirteen separate pieces. Freneau described this event as producing a “spirit of frenzy among the Whig populace and their leaders almost bordering on frenzy.”²⁸

When a new liberty pole was finally erected, Freneau celebrated the event in verse. The poem, read at the dedication, succinctly summarized the purpose behind such a monument:

Seized from the woods, this honored Tree
We dedicate to Liberty:
Here it stands while Time remains,
Or Liberty, with reason, reigns.²⁹

Not only were the verses read to the large crowd at the ceremony, but they were also printed in a handbill, and distributed to every house in the city. The active circulation of Freneau’s verses door to door was one indication of the importance the colonists placed on patriotic poetry as a vehicle for furthering the American cause.

Perhaps the most interesting lines in “The New Liberty Pole” fell in the following quatrain, in which the poet offered some strong words to chastise those who had initially destroyed the original pole:

Let them advance, by night and day,
Let them attempt anew affray,
And speedy vengeance will ensue,
---At least their hides beat black and blue.³⁰

In these lines the poet essentially endorsed violence as a punishment for those who questioned colonial opposition to Britain. While Freneau’s solution may seem out of character for a poet who in the following years would oppose violence, his remedy was not as intense as that recommended by one of his peers, James Madison. Madison suggested that those against

²⁸Lewis Leary, *That Rascal Freneau: A Study in Literary Failure* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press. 1941), 54.

²⁹Freneau’s poem “THE NEW LIBERTY POLE -----Take Care!” and descriptions of the ceremony from *Ibid.*, 54.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 55.

colonial opposition should be tarred and feathered. While Freneau and his former classmate from Princeton approved of violent measures to thwart those who challenged the American cause, many of the colonists still hoped for reconciliation with the mother country. However, most of the colonists believed that they had constitutional rights that were currently being violated. Therefore, the designation of liberty trees and the training of volunteer militias were for both the celebration and defense of the liberties that the colonists believed were justly due.

In the summer of 1775 Freneau composed one of his most celebrated poems, “American Liberty.” It captured the “patriot’s rage” over the bloodshed resulting from “the war’s red lamp” occurring in the fields of New England. Moreover, “American Liberty” did not offer reconciliation with the mother country as an alternative for preserving the liberty of the colonies. Instead Freneau correctly predicted America’s destiny as a nation in which all those who are oppressed could find a home where “mighty towns shall flourish free and great.”³¹

In the poem Freneau also focused on King George, whom he depicted as a “Monarch first of vulgar soul” who was “born to oppress, to propagate and rot.”³² While Hopkinson humorously disguised the monarch as a nobleman in his political allegory “A Pretty Story,” Freneau openly and directly denigrated the king in his sardonic poem. Whereas in his previous poems, such as “A Political Litany,” Freneau attacked those representing King George III, “American Liberty” went straight to the source. In his fiery attack against the monarch himself, the paternalistic ties between the Crown and the colonists were essentially denied, several months before Thomas Paine’s Common Sense challenged this kinship bond.

The strained relationship between Britain and her American colonies did not improve as spring turned into summer. On July 20, 1775, the colonists observed a day of fasting and prayer in protest of the ongoing conflict. Hopkinson commented on the event in essay form appealing to a higher authority for support: “To Fasting & Prayer let Virtue & private Morality & Piety be

³¹Freneau referring to “American Liberty” as an example of a “patriot’s rage” and his reference to the revolt as “the wars red lamp” from Freneau, A Voyage to Boston (New York: John Anderson, September 1775), 24; Philip Freneau, American Liberty (New York: J. Anderson, July 6, 1775), 11,12.

³²Freneau, American Liberty, 8, 9.

added, and we have the strong Reason to hope that God the righteous Judge . . . will support us under our present difficulties.”³³ The poet ends his composition asking the lord to deliver himself and his fellow colonists from the evils of British oppression and restore peace to the inhabitants of America.

The following month Freneau published “General Gage’s Soliloquy,” a satire which directly ridiculed the despised adversary of the American colonists. Freneau portrayed Gage as an indecisive commander wavering between his obligations to the British monarch and his own sense of doubt concerning the loss of British soldiers’ lives for a cause which was not virtuous. While Freneau’s portrayal of the general was speculative at best, the poet effectively used illusory soliloquies in this and his later works to defame and ridicule his opponents. The validity of his characterizations was not as important to his audience as the humorous message Freneau conveyed. Therefore, as expressed in the lines of “General Gage’s Soliloquy,” even the foes of the rebellion did not believe in the justness of the British cause.³⁴

In October of 1775 the Continental Congress published a letter from Gage written to Washington calling the patriots “rebels” and threatening to execute every captured militiamen for treason. Freneau countered with “Reflections of General Gage’s Letter to George Washington, Aug 13” making fun of the general’s bombastic threats. The poet responded to Gage’s accusations that those taking arms against the crown were essentially dissidents in the following quatrain:

If to protest against a tyrant’s laws,
And arm for battle for a righteous cause,
Be deem’d rebellion---’tis a harmless thing
This bug-bear name, like death has lost its sting.

As the lines revealed, Freneau believed that as long as those who revolted were doing so for a cause which was righteous, then calling them “rebels” did not carry the same implication as if

³³Essay “On the Late Continental Fast” from second volume of the Huntington Collection, which are in manuscript form, as reprinted in Hastings, Francis Hopkinson, 204.

³⁴The poem, “General Gage’s Soliloquy,” was originally printed as a broadside and later republished in Francis Bailey, ed., Poems of Philip Freneau Written Chiefly during the Late War (Philadelphia: 1786), 67-71; additional information from Leary, That Rascal Freneau, 57.

they were true insurrectionists. This insight was important because many of the colonists took offense at Gage's calling them rebels, as the term implied disloyalty and treason. However, as the poet implied, the negative insinuations associated with the term "lost its sting" when one protested against "a tyrant's laws."³⁵

Freneau ended his poem concerning the correspondence between Gage and Washington with the couplet, "To arms, to arms, and let the trusty sword, / Decide who best deserves the hangman's cord."³⁶ In the lines the poet of the middle colonies formally committed himself to the armed conflict. While Gage's accusations caused quite a reaction among the colonists, ultimately the general had to back his threats with actions on the battlefield. Meanwhile, Freneau continued to contribute to the revolt with a barrage of rhetoric.

In October of 1775 Freneau wrote "A Voyage to Boston." The poem, resembling his previous compositions, ridiculed the tyrannical actions of the English establishment. He also praised the virtues of the patriots who were risking their lives for the rebellion. Moreover, Freneau challenged the actions of the Americans who supported and remained loyal to Britain. "What is a Tory? Heavens and earth reveal! / What strange blind monster does the name conceal?" The poet's rhetorical question and the bluntness found in the rejoinder echoed past comments concerning those who did not support the American cause found in "The New Liberty Pole." However, instead of beating the hides of those disloyal to the American cause, his solution in "A Voyage to Boston" was to lay the monster's "heart and entrails bare."³⁷ The curtness of expression found in the couplet showed just how intensely the bitterness and animosity between the Tories and the patriots had escalated.

³⁵"Reflections on General Gage's Letter to George Washington," from Lydia R. Bailey, ed., Poems Written and Published During the Revolutionary War (Philadelphia: 1809) I: 201-05. For colonial perceptions of the word "rebel" see Leary, That Rascal Freneau, 58.

³⁶"Reflections of General Gage's Letter" from Bailey, Poems Written During the Revolutionary War, 205.

³⁷"A Voyage to Boston" found in F. L. Patte ed., The Poems of Philip Freneau, Vol. I (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1902), 158.

“A Voyage to Boston” was Freneau’s most ambitious and successful satire to date. The poem appeared in the advertisements in the New York press for over a month. Furthermore, by November the pamphlet sold enough copies to warrant a second edition. One Pennsylvania paper posted an advertisement larger than it had ever used for a single literary composition. While the poem lacked the sophisticated language and vivid imagery found in his serious poetry, the tremendous popularity of the composition showed the effectiveness of using humor and simplistic language in appealing to the masses. Pure poetry was for the elite few, who had the time and education to enjoy and understand the nuances of the erudite verses. However, Freneau “was now writing for the many, for the common people, for all those to whom the sentiments of liberty, the rollicking and astringent humor of the simple verses, . . . were more exciting than the soaring strophes of which, in other times, he was equally capable.”³⁸

When the British Ministry recalled General Gage in October of 1775, Freneau’s satires temporarily ceased. However, as tensions between the colonies and the mother country continued to increase in the following months, Francis Hopkinson began to write again. Instead of poetry, he decided to write another political allegory, “A Prophecy,” which predicted the “Declaration of Independence.” Ironically, several months earlier a friend and former teacher, Dr. William Smith, wrote and published an influential series of essays urging the colonists to abandon ideas of separation but to continue resistance “till Great Britain is convinced . . . of her fatal policy.” His teacher’s essays, known as the “Cato Letters,” were extremely popular and inspired Hopkinson to write “A Prophecy.”³⁹

³⁸For information on the popularity of “A Voyage to Boston” see Leary, That Rascal Freneau, 58; quotation concerning the appeal of Freneau’s poem to the masses from Jacob Axelrod, Philip Freneau: Champion of Democracy (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1967), 66-67.

³⁹Dr. Smith’s “Cato Letters,” not to be confused with Trenchard and Gordon’s influential tract, appeared in the Pennsylvania Gazette in March and April of 1776; quotation taken from Hastings, Francis Hopkinson, 206.

Hopkinson used tree symbolism in order to explain the reasons for such a declaration. He described how a tree, symbolizing the failing British monarchy, was no longer of any use for the colonists:

A North wind, blast the tree, for it shall
No longer bear fruit, or afford shelter to
the people, but it shall come rotten at the
heart.

Thomas Paine used similar imagery in Common Sense. In the following lines, Paine, like Hopkinson, described the government as a “convenient tree . . . [which] will afford them a state house, under the branches [of] which the whole colony may assemble. . . .”⁴⁰ While Paine's pamphlet preceded Hopkinson's allegory by several months, one should not hastily conclude that the poet borrowed the image from his famed contemporary.

The inspiration for both writers may well lie in the influential essays of Philadelphia's Pennsylvania Packet of 1774, which proclaimed: “Let us form the glorious tree in such a matter as to impregnate it with such principles of life, that it shall last forever.”⁴¹ Liberty trees were popular, yet powerful symbols of colonial resistance and Hopkinson's use of this symbolic image effectively capitalized on American sentiments in his composition. However, the significance of Francis Hopkinson's “The Prophecy” and Thomas Paine's Common Sense was that both offered cogent arguments for colonial independence.

Hopkinson, who once mourned the death of one king and celebrated the arrival of another, now led the fight for the monarchy's ultimate demise. He ended “The Prophecy” with the final instructions concerning the tree, which no longer protected the colonists: “Let us cut it down and remove it from us: And in its place we will plant another tree, young and

⁴⁰Francis Hopkinson “The Prophecy” found in The Miscellaneous Essays and Occasional Writings of Francis Hopkinson, (Philadelphia: T. Dobson, 1792), 2: 92-97. Thomas Paine's Common Sense reprinted in Jenson, Tracts of the American Revolution, 401-46.

⁴¹Quotation involving “tree imagery” in an essay from Pennsylvania Packet 14 November 1774, 2.

vigorous . . . and it shall grow.”⁴² In the months that followed, Thomas Jefferson fulfilled Hopkinson's prophecy by writing “The Declaration of Independence,” a document whose signers included the political poet from Philadelphia.

While the work of Francis Hopkinson and Philip Freneau remains elusive in the annals of Revolutionary history, their contributions were substantial. These political patriots, the sons of the middle colonies, through their poems and allegories, encouraged and instructed the colonists to unite and revolt against their mother country. Hopkinson used humor and wit to point out the hypocrisy and corruption of the British monarchy, anticipating Paine's use of “tree imagery” in Common Sense by several months. Freneau expressed his Revolutionary zeal by combining his intense nationalism and optimism concerning America's destiny with his fiery attacks against British oppression. Together, they led America on the road to revolution, a road which was yet unfinished. Now was not the time for Francis Hopkinson or Philip Freneau to rest upon their laurels; a war was at hand, and the two had more writing to do.

⁴² Hopkinson, Miscellaneous Essays, 2: 92-97; Malone, Dictionary of American Biography, 9: 221.

CHAPTER TWO

POEMS OF WAR AND REBELLION

Poets are ...the trumpets which sing to battle and feel
not what they inspire: the influence which is moved not,
but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of
the world.¹

While the Declaration of Independence formally committed the patriots to the rebellion, the months that followed provided little optimism for the colonists. In the fall of 1776, George Washington narrowly escaped capture by the advancing British forces. The eighteen thousand ill-trained patriots were outmatched by the thirty-five thousand redcoats under the command of General Sir William Howe. During this period, and throughout the rest of the war, the nature of the political poetry and verse shifted its focus from persuading colonists to engage in the rebellion to poems relating to the battles which followed. Reacting to the events of the war Francis Hopkinson and Philip Freneau wrote a plethora of propaganda poetry. Some poems condemned the brutality of British warfare while others denigrated the military actions of the redcoats. Other compositions celebrated the victories of the patriots in battle while others mourned the losses of those killed in the conflict. Some of the compositions ridiculed and or vehemently attacked the disloyalty of the Tories and Loyalists. Also, the poetry of this period continued to deride a king whose virtue was lost to corruption, while replacing him with a new hero of unquestionable virtue and honor. All in all these poems helped win a war of words, by helping sway public opinion, which played such a critical role in determining the outcome of conflict.²

¹Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defense of Poetry," Donald H. Reiman, ed., The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994), 22: 257, 259.

²General information concerning the military campaigns of 1776 from Don Higginbotham, The War of American Independence: Military Attitudes, Policies, and Practice, 1763-1789 (New York: Collier-Macmillan Ltd. 1971), 159-165. Biographical information on Freneau from Malone, Dictionary of American Biography, 6: 27.

While Hopkinson immediately entered this war of words, Freneau decided to leave New York for the Caribbean Islands. There is much speculation in the numerous biographies of the poet as to why he chose to spend the first half of the conflict in a remote paradise instead of joining Washington's troops, especially since he made such violent and caustic attacks against British tyranny and oppression before the war. However, in a poem entitled "MacSwiggín," which he wrote in 1775, the disillusioned patriot foreshadowed his departure as follows: "In distant isles some happier scene I'll choose, / And court the softer shades the unwilling muse."³

Hopkinson remained in America throughout the war. Although a strong patriot, his age and physical condition made it almost impossible for him to be very effective on the battlefield. At the time of the Revolution, he was approaching middle age, and his physical appearance was more amusing than intimidating. John Adams, after meeting Hopkinson in August of 1776, described the encounter to his wife Abigail: "He is one of your pretty little, curious, ingenuous Men. His head is not bigger than a large apple . . . I have not met with anything in natural history more amusing and entertaining, than his personal appearance."⁴ While John Adams was quite amused by Hopkinson's appearance, he was also enamored by the poet's culture, artistic talents, and sociability.

Hopkinson's age and physical condition may have kept him from actively participating in any military engagements, yet his energy, creativity, and wit made him a perfect recruit for the pamphlet war which played such a pivotal role in the conflict. While cannons and muskets fired on the battlefields of North America, pens and printing presses were perhaps as important in determining the final outcome of the war. Hopkinson

³Information on "MacSwiggín" from Leary, That Rascal Freneau, 64. See also Samuel E. Forman, The Political Activities of Philip Freneau (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1902), 20, Mary Witherspoon Bowden, Philip Freneau (Boston: Twayne Publishers: G. K. Hall and Company, 1976), 43, 44, and Silverman, A Cultural History of the American Revolution, 305.

⁴ John Adams to Abigail Adams, Philadelphia August 21, 1776, in L. H. Butterfield, et al, eds., Adams Family Correspondence (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1963), 2: 606.

himself best explained his role in a letter to his close friend and benefactor Benjamin Franklin: "I have not [the] abilities to assist our righteous cause by personal prowess and force of arms, but I have done it all in the service I could with my pen, throwing in my mite at times in prose and verse, serious and satirical." ⁵

Using his pen instead of his "personal prowess" as a "force of arms," Hopkinson penned numerous pamphlets during the Revolutionary era. Most initially appeared in newspaper form and were direct responses to actual military events. Ironically, Hopkinson's initial revolutionary writing was in prose not in poetry. In a "Letter to Lord Howe," written in 1777, Hopkinson objected "against the brutality to the non-combatants." At the beginning of the pamphlet, Hopkinson legitimized the revolt by claiming "That the inflexible rules of right and honour, and the spirit of the British constitution, fully authorized the war." This passage reflected the colonists' pre-Revolutionary ideology, which was inspired by the radical Whig movement in England. The radical Whigs believed that Britain degenerated into corruption and lacked "liberty" and "virtue," which were essential conditions for their constitution to work effectively.⁶

Although not in verse, poetic imagery and symbolism permeate the open letter. In the following lines Hopkinson continued his attack on British brutality:

It is not enough that the manly youth, with heart high, beating in his
countries cause, is called forth, and cut in the field of battle, an early
sacrifice at the shrine of liberty; but the voice of a helpless virgin aloud
against the brutal force of a salacious ravager.⁷

Clearly, Hopkinson played to the public's emotions in his description of young women

⁵Francis Hopkinson to Benjamin Franklin, 22 October 1778, in Claude A. Lopez, et al, eds., The Papers of Benjamin Franklin (New Haven: Yale University Press 1988), 27: 606. For an excellent study of the role of pamphlets in the American Revolution see Bailyn, Ideological Origins, 1-21

⁶"A Letter to Lord Howe," from Hopkinson, Miscellaneous Essays, 1: 124. Opening quotation from Bailyn, Ideological Origins, 8. Information on Hopkinson and pamphlets from Malone, Dictionary of American Biography, 9: 221. Information on the colonial attitudes to the British constitution from Wood, Creation of the American Republic, 10.

⁷Hopkinson, Miscellaneous Essays, 1: 124.

assaulted by the “brutal force of the salacious ravagers.” He also increased the scope of his victims by the inclusion of a young soldier who was “an early sacrifice at the shrine of liberty.” Hopkinson used vivid and excessively dramatic imagery (the “voices of helpless virgins”) and revolutionary terminology (the “shrine of liberty”) in order to enhance the resentment of the colonists toward British troops.

Lord Howe commanded the British forces who occupied Philadelphia at the time Hopkinson wrote this condemning letter. While the general was a popular foil for much of the propaganda literature of this era, the poet-turned-pamphleteer also capitalized on the frenzy of anti-British sentiment fueled by the murder of Jane McCrae. The young McCrae, a Tory sympathizer, was accidentally murdered on her way to meet her loyalist fiancée, serving in British General John Burgoyne’s command. The Indians had no idea why they were escorting the young colonial woman, and since the redcoats offered bounty for scalps, the native Americans opted for the lighter cargo. Miss McCrae became the most celebrated martyr of the American revolution and remained the “voice of helpless virgins” throughout the war. Even Britain’s Edmund Burke, who was sympathetic to the colonists, immortalized the slain virgin in a poem:

The cruel Indians seiz’d her life away
As the next morn began her bridal day
Stretched on the ground, struggling there with breath.
She cannot live, she must resign her death.⁸

Hopkinson’s next piece of political propaganda, “An Answer to General Burgoyne’s Proclamation,” also fell into the theme of recounting British brutality. This open letter was a rhetorical response to the British commander’s address to the American people presuming the inevitable defeat of the colonists. In his bombastic proclamation the general urged the colonists to stop this unnatural rebellion and to “partake in the glorious task of re-deeming

⁸Information on Lord Howe from Sidney Lee ed., Dictionary of National Biography (London: Smith, Elder, & Co. 1891), 28: 95. Particulars surrounding the McCrae affair (including the Burke poem) from Samuel Y. Edgerton’s article “The Murder of Jane McCrae,” Early American Life, 8, No. 3 (1977): 28-30; additional information on McCrae from Higginbotham, War of American Independence, 191.

their countryman . . . and re-establishing the blessings of the legal government.”⁹ He emphasized the Indians’ entrance into the conflict and his own numerous armies and fleets as additional rationale for colonial surrender. Hopkinson cleverly counters with:

We humbly offer our heads to the tomahawk,
and our bellies to the bayonet - for who can
resist the power of your eloquence? Who can
withstand the terror of your arms?¹⁰

In this pamphlet Hopkinson effectively used images of Indian and British weaponry and the horror and savagery of their use as examples of colonial martyrdom. Moreover, he skillfully employed sarcasm such as the line “Who can resist the power of your eloquence?”

Fortunately for Hopkinson and his fellow colonists, General Burgoyne’s threats turned out to be more talk than terror. His ambitious plan was to organize an army of 12,000 English soldiers, which would unite with 2,000 Canadian loyalists and 1,000 Indians. With this formidable force he could sweep across North America, unite with General Howe, and split the youthful country in half. However, Howe, enamored with Philadelphia’s society and culture, decided to remain in Pennsylvania. Burgoyne’s troops, consisting only of 6,400 soldiers and 649 Indians, lost to a small colonial army at Bennington. This allowed Benedict Arnold to cut off Burgoyne’s attack and ultimately led to the British General’s humiliating defeat and surrender to Gates at Saratoga on October 17, 1777. While Hopkinson did not have a military role in the general’s defeat, his persuasive pamphlets, which stressed the brutality of British warfare, helped sway public opinion against the “redcoats” and also justified the patriots’ cause.¹¹

⁹General Burgoyne’s “Proclamation” reprinted by Hezekiah Niles, ed., Principles and Acts of the American Revolution (Baltimore: Printed and Published by the Editor, 1822), 262-63.

¹⁰Hopkinson, Miscellaneous Essays, 1: 149.

¹¹Information concerning General Burgoyne’s disastrous American experience see Lee, Dictionary of National Biography, 7: 341; also see Higginbotham, War of American Independence, 188-97

Perhaps one of the most graphic and detailed accounts of British savagery during the revolt came from Philip Freneau, who returned from his ocean voyages eight months after the Battle of Saratoga. His decision to return was just as mysterious as his reasons for leaving the conflict. Possibly the war had turned to the side of the patriots, and the young poet decided he could no longer remain neutral. Perhaps he longed to be home with family and friends. Regardless, on June 15, 1778, Freneau left the beauties of Santa Cruz for his homeland. Off the coast of South Carolina, however, the young poet was rudely awakened to the realities of war as his vessel was captured by a British privateer. As he would write in subsequent verse: “Returned, a captive, to my native shore, / How changed I find the scenes that pleased before!”¹²

Although Freneau was soon released as a non-combatant, the experience played a pivotal role in shifting the wandering patriot’s attitudes toward the rebellion. No longer would he sail the Caribbean while his peers were fighting in the battlefields and newspapers of the colonies. On July 15, Freneau enlisted in the New Jersey militia. He also decided to use his literary talents and enlist in the pamphlet war, a decision which eventually earned him the title “Poet of the American Revolution.” However, it was his experiences as an enlisted soldier which would add authenticity to his poems detailing the horrors of Britain’s military actions.¹³

When The United States Magazine, a periodical featuring most of his literary contributions, failed because of the financial instability of the wartime economy, Freneau’s response was to quit the New Jersey militia and enlist as a third mate on the warship Aurora. Ironically, the vessel was conveniently headed for Santa Cruz. Unfortunately, a British frigate curtailed the poet’s Caribbean military excursion by capturing his vessel, for a second time, just off the New Jersey coast. For the next six

¹²Biographical information on Freneau and final couplet from Leary, That Rascal Freneau, 73.

¹³*Ibid.*, 75.

weeks, Freneau remained captive on a British prison ship, an experience which became the subject of perhaps his one of his most gripping and passionate poems.¹⁴

“The British Prison Ship” combined the neo-Romanticism and Gothic dreariness of his earlier works with the added realism of personal experience. His vivid descriptions reflected his knowledge as an accomplished sailor. The first part of the poem chronicled in great detail the naval battle which led to his imprisonment. The final lines of the first canto foreshadowed his eventual nightmare, which was not unlike those of African slaves on their voyage to America:

There doom'd to famine, shackles and despair,
Condemn'd to breathe a foul, infected air
In silky hulks, devoted while we lay,
Successive funerals gloom'd each dismal day---¹⁵

For the young poet, the product of a middle-class, cultured upbringing, his six-week adventure as a prisoner was perhaps the most trying time of his life. Surrounded by death and devastation, the prison ship was a far cry from the taverns of Princeton or the beaches of Santa Cruz. The following stanza graphically and vividly complained of the meals served to the captives:

Why should I tell what putrid oil they deal,
Why the dread horrors of a scanty meal?

The rotton pork, the lumpy damaged flour,
Soaked in salt water, and with age grown sour.¹⁶

This stanza revealed much about the poet's trials on board the British prison ship. With a diet consisting solely of decaying bread and meat, it was no wonder that there were so many “successive funerals” as each day passed.¹⁷

¹⁴Biographical information on Freneau from Leary, That Rascal Freneau, 80-82.

¹⁵Philip Freneau, The British Prison Ship, in Four Cantos . . . (Philadelphia: F. Bailey, 1781), 7.

¹⁶Freneau, The British Ship, 14.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

In the weeks that followed Freneau developed a fever, possibly from contaminated water, and was subsequently transferred to the Hunter, a recently converted hospital ship. However, as the final selection from this epic poem made clear, a hospital ship was not a destination one preferred over imprisonment:

Now toward the *Hunter's* black abode we came,
A slaughter house, yet hospital in name;
For none came there (to pass thro'h all degrees)
'Till half consum'd, and dying with disease;--- ¹⁸

Fortunately for Freneau, his fever was not a fatal one, and the poet survived his experience on the "death ship." Unlike Hopkinson's excessively dramatic and satirical descriptions of British brutality, "The British Prison Ship" was somber and vivid. The realism and detail added authenticity to Freneau's verse. By informing the public in the summer of 1781 of his own experiences, the poet helped spread intense feelings of animosity and hatred for the British and ultimately instructed his fellow colonists to "Rouse from your sleep, and crush the thievish band, / Defeat, destroy, and sweep them from this land...."¹⁹

In a following composition, "On the fall of General Earl Cornwallis," Freneau continued to express his animosity towards the English by lamenting the loss of Americans during the Southern campaigns of the summer and fall of 1781. British troops under Cornwallis' aggressive command had soundly defeated colonial forces at Camden. Therefore, Freneau did not celebrate Cornwallis's ultimate surrender at Yorktown, but mourned the loss of human life that the prior military engagements produced. In the following lines the poet described the casualties of war and held Cornwallis personally responsible for American casualties

By him the orphans mourn --the widow'd dame
Saw ruined spreading in the wasteful flame;
Gash'd o'er with wounds beheld the streaming eye
son, a brother, a consort, die!²⁰

¹⁸Ibid., 15.

¹⁹Ibid., 17.

²⁰Philip Freneau, "On the fall of General Earl Cornwallis," The Freeman's Journal (Philadelphia),

Although all patriots celebrated Washington's pivotal victory over Cornwallis, Freneau mourned those who had fallen for the cause.

Freneau followed the eulogy with yet another poem memorializing the brave Americans who died in the battle of Eutaw Springs.²¹ This military engagement was the last major engagement of the American Revolution. Both sides suffered horribly in the battle, losing over one-quarter of their men. The irony of the battle was that the fate of the Revolution had already been determined, making the loss of life so senseless. These poems, which lamented the death of Americans during the conflict, also helped promote patriotism by emphasizing just how high the price was for colonial victory.

In January of 1782, Freneau wrote an occasional poem to serve as a prologue for a performance at a Philadelphia playhouse. George Washington and the minister of France attended this French comedy entitled Eugenie. Freneau began his prologue with the following couplet: "Wars, bloody wars and hostile Britain's rage / Have banish'd long the pleasures of the stage." The lines echoed much of the sentiment of his previous eulogies, which focused on the death and destruction of the Revolution and the cruelty of British warfare. In the final couplet, Freneau hoped that despite the devastation, "Peace, heaven born peace, o'er spacious regions spread, / While discord sinking veils her ghastly head."²²

Freneau's accounts of British cruelty during warfare used vivid imagery and factual detail while Hopkinson used humor and exaggeration to describe his own military encounters. In 1777 Washington appointed Hopkinson chairman of the Navy board. An

7 November 1781, 1; additional information on Cornwallis from Higginbotham, War of American Independence, 376-83.

²¹Philip Freneau, "To the memory of brave Americans, under general Greene, who fell in the action of September 8, 1781." in The Freeman's Journal, 14 November 1781, 2. For information on Eutaw Springs see Higginbotham, War of American Independence, 373-74.

²²Philip Freneau, "Prologue," The Freeman's Journal, 9 January 1781, 2; notice concerning performance in same issue; additional information on the evening from Silverman, Cultural History of the American Revolution, 414.

amateur inventor in exile in Bordontown, he embarked on a bold experiment, which became one of the first excursions in mine warfare. He designed kegs which were filled with gunpowder and sent floating down the Delaware river towards Howe's troops in Pennsylvania. The events which transpired in the campaign were immortally depicted in what may be Hopkinson's most popular and enduring work of verse, entitled "The Battle of the Kegs."²³

According to Hopkinson's poetic account, the results of his experiment were more than moderately successful. As the exploding kegs floated down the river, they produced quite a ruckus. The initial explosions caused great confusion:

Now up and down throughout the town
Most frantic scenes were acted;
And some ran here, and others ran there,
Like men almost distracted.

Some fire cr'd, which some denied,
But said the earth had quaked;
And girls and boys, with hidious noise,
Ran through the streets half naked.²⁴

These passages demonstrate the humorous side of Francis Hopkinson's poetry. His simple vocabulary and rhetoric throughout the selection made the poem accessible to a larger audience. Moreover, the poet exploited visual imagery as he described the "frantic scene" and chaotic atmosphere caused by the explosions. This exploitation of images could also have been a vehicle aimed at those who could not read well. Those with limited reading abilities could visualize words and images easier than they could grasp complex ideas or emotions expressed in writing.²⁵ This could explain why Hopkinson's ballad became one

²³Hastings, Francis Hopkinson, 290-91; also see Silverman, Cultural History of the American Revolution, 335.

²⁴Frances Hopkinson, "The Battle of the Kegs," Pennsylvania Packet (Philadelphia), 4 March 1778, 4.

²⁵The idea that "exploitive visuals" could be a vehicle aimed at those who could not read well was suggested in a letter from Hopkinson scholar Pall M. Zall to James W. Scott, 26 March 1997. For the popularity of the ballad, see Hastings, Francis Hopkinson, 295.

of the most popular songs of the American Revolution and was sung by the soldiers at the front. The piece was also republished as a pamphlet and broadside.

The *Pennsylvania Ledger*, a royalist paper published in Philadelphia, issued another description of the incident dramatically different than Hopkinson's exaggerated rendition. According to this account the affair "was so trifling as to not take notice by this paper." The paper reports that some barrels "of odd appearance" floating down the river were discovered by several boys. One of the barrels exploded, killing or injuring one of the unfortunate lads and several shots were fired as additional buoys were discovered.²⁶ While this account may have been more accurate than Hopkinson's farce, one also has to consider the source. A royalist newspaper would want to downplay any event which might embarrass the redcoats; therefore, floating kegs designed by a patriotic poet were possibly more of a nuisance than the paper would admit. Hopkinson, on the other hand, writing for a patriot newspaper would have equal reasons to exaggerate his account of the skirmish.

Regardless of what actually transpired, Hopkinson's version, as in all effective propaganda, appeared to be the one the colonists accepted. As a case in point, a recollection of the episode, written in the memoirs by a fellow colonist, confirmed Hopkinson's version of the incident. The aging Philadelphian recalled, a half century later, that the floating buoys caused quite a commotion as they exploded in the river. Another detailed recollection concluded that the "matter was a source of merriment among the Whigs and vexation for the British."²⁷ As in most successful propaganda campaigns, what matters is what people believe more than what actually transpired.

²⁶Royalist description of affair from The Pennsylvania Ledger (Philadelphia), 11 February 1778, 2.

²⁷John Cox (1754-1847) unpublished memoir found in The Historical Society of Pennsylvania under Sketches and Recollections of Prominent Friends and Historic Facts (1847-1848), 92 The additional account is taken from Major E.M. Woodward, History of Burlington County New Jersey, with Biographical Sketches of many of its Pioneers and Prominent Men (Philadelphia: Everts and Peck, 1883), 463

The timing of the piece could not have been more appropriate. In the same issue of the *Pennsylvania Packet* articles reported the hardships faced by Washington's troops still stationed at Valley Forge. The general issued a proclamation requesting as many stock of cattle as the colonists could spare which would "render a most essential service to the illustrious cause of their country."²⁸ Hopkinson's poem provided optimism and humor for Washington's army during a period when morale and provisions were low by portraying the Revolutionaries as victorious, despite British military strength. In "The Battle of the Kegs" the colonists used their ingenuity and intellect to confuse and baffle the British. All of these factors accounted for the success of Hopkinson's humorous poem and, with his other Revolutionary writings, "The Battle of the Kegs" was an excellent example of political propaganda.

Francis Hopkinson immediately followed the "The Battle of the Kegs" with several additional ballads designed to motivate the troops, who suffered through the winter at Valley Forge. Both "A Camp Ballad" and "The Toast" were inspired by Thomas Paine's "American Crisis" written one year earlier. While Paine's immortal words, "these are the times that try men's souls," are forever remembered in the annals of colonial discourse, Hopkinson's ballads remain less commemorated words of encouragement. Unlike Paine's pamphlet, both of Hopkinson's ballads were sung to popular tunes of the day. The inspirational songs were also reprinted in several of the leading Pennsylvania papers---thus hinting at their mass appeal.²⁹

Philip Freneau also wrote poems chronicling American success during the revolution. In one of his first compositions for *The Freeman's Journal* he celebrated the memorable victory of John Paul Jones. Jones' gallant naval victory over the British was a

²⁸"Washington's Proclamation," *Pennsylvania Packet*, 4 March 1778.

²⁹"A Camp Ballad" and "The Toast" appeared in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 4 April 1778, 4; Thomas Paine's *The (American) Crises, by the Author of Common Sense*, (Philadelphia: Syner and Cist, September 12, 1777) 1. Information concerning success of ballads from Hastings, *Francis Hopkinson*, 299.

remarkable accomplishment by America's infant navy. Freneau's experience as a sailor made him the perfect choice to document the event in verse. Recounting a battle in which America emerged victorious, in spite of insurmountable odds, helped boost morale during this low point of the war. Jones' victory even inspired Britain's poets, many of whom were already disenchanted with the war, as this couplet suggested: "The tradesman stand still, and the merchant bemouns/ The losses he meets with from such as Paul Jones."³⁰

Another group of revolutionary poems, quite different from Freneau's somber eulogies, were the furious attacks directed at the disloyalty of the Tories. In 1778, Hopkinson wrote a pamphlet entitled "A Letter to Joseph Galloway," a prominent Loyalist who fled to London several months after the poet wrote this pamphlet. The patriots did not allow Galloway to return to America after the war. In the following passage Hopkinson vehemently attacked the Loyalist and his ideology:

You find it not hard talk to come into his [General Howe's] views; to banish every virtuous sensibility, and even steel your heart against the cries of suffering humanity, and wade through the blood of your fellow citizens to your promised reward.

Hopkinson, once again, used revolutionary rhetoric in his arguments. For example, Galloway's loyalist views caused him "to banish" his "virtuous sensibility." Hopkinson also foreshadowed Galloway's eventual exodus in the final lines of this political pamphlet, "fly - fly to England, for you will not be safe here."³¹

In many ways this open letter to the infamous Loyalist was an example of life imitating art. At the time Hopkinson wrote these strong patriotic dispatches, the poet's

³⁰Philip Freneau, "A POEM on the memorable victory obtained by the gallant capt. Paul Jones, . . ." from The Freeman's Journal, 8 August 1781, 2; couplet from an anonymous song found in Bailey, The American Pageant, 127; for a realistic description of Jones's military accomplishments see Higginbotham, War of American Independence, 340-45.

³¹"A Letter to Joseph Galloway," Pennsylvania Packet, 21 Jan. 1778, 2. For background information on Joseph Galloway and his loyalist positions, see Garraty and Carnes, eds, American National Biography, 8: 658.

brother-in-law, Jacob Duché, chaplain for the First Continental Congress, was involved in a widely known controversy. Although he initially supported the colonial cause, in the fall of 1777 the minister wrote Washington a letter urging the commander to surrender to British authority, while pleading for “the necessity of rescinding the hasty and ill-advised declary [sic] of Independency.”³² Duché’s letter became a loyalist pamphlet and was distributed throughout the colonies and England in hopes of gaining British support for their offensive. Perhaps Hopkinson’s motive for publicly condemning Loyalists, as in his attack on Joseph Galloway, grew partially from defensiveness over his brother-in-law’s actions. Therefore, Hopkinson clarified his revolutionary positions in the pamphlet war by attacking those disloyal to the cause and eliminating any questions concerning his own loyalty resulting from his brother-in-law’s controversy.

Freneau also sent a message to his fellow colonists who still supported the British monarch and opposed the cause of the patriots. Instead of narrowing his focus to one specific loyalist, as in Hopkinson’s “Letter to Joseph Galloway,” Freneau took aim at all anti-patriotic colonists in a poem aptly entitled “The Loyalists.” He portrayed his fellow colonists as traitors, holding them just as responsible for the horrors of the war as the British forces. For Freneau there was no question about what should be done with the loyalists after the war. The newly independent nation should “expel them from the ravag’d shore;/ Far, far remove them to return no more.”³³

In 1780, the humorist Hopkinson, returned with a series of four ballads entitled “A Tory Medley.” As in some of Freneau’s creative works, the song cycle contained a conversation between three prominent loyalists: a broker (William Smith), a printer (James Rivington), and a Quaker (Samuel Rhodes Fisher). In the poem, the broker tried

³²Washington-Duché Letters. Now Printed for the First Time, From the Original Manuscripts, with an Introductory Note by Worthington Chauncy Ford (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Printed Privately, 1890), 21.

³³Philip Freneau, “The Loyalist,” U. S. Magazine, July 1779, 1. Reprinted in Judith R. Hiltner, ed., The Newspaper Verse of Philip Freneau: An Edition and Bibliographical Survey (New York: The Whitston Publishing Company, 1986), 46.

to remain optimistic in spite of the Franco-American Alliance. The printer, Rivington, who published the Tory newspaper Rivington's Gazette, lamented the loss at Saratoga and was less optimistic than the broker. The Quaker in the song was the victim of rebel persecution for attempting to supply the British with information concerning patriot activities. All three characters fear Britain's eventual defeat and have a very negative view of the revolution.³⁴

As in Hopkinson's other ballads, he wrote the pieces to popular melodies of the day. For example, the printer's dialogue was set to the tune of "God Save the Queen." Also, Hopkinson cleverly captured a sweeping cross-section of the Tory population in the characters he created, which were based on actual members of the community. The broker represented the wealthy elite of the Loyalist faction with strong English ties. The printer represented the other side of the pamphlet and press war, engaged in their own campaign of pro-British propaganda. Finally, the Quaker represented the fairly large bloc of pacifists who were generally sympathetic to the British. This diverse group of dissidents, from various levels in colonial society, made up a substantial portion of the Loyalists, and, for Hopkinson, the cause they embraced was lost.³⁵

Hopkinson also wrote a poem for those who were undecided on whether to embrace the cause of the patriots or remain loyal to the monarch. For this composition, the poet decided to use his inherent skills at rhyme and meter to transcribe Aesop's fable, "The Birds, the Beasts, and the Bat," into verse. The moral of this story was directed at those who tried to take both sides in the war. The poet warned his colonists not to be like the bat, "Inclined to this side and that / As interests leads---or wait to see / Which party will the strongest be." ³⁶ Hopkinson not only admonished those who were Loyalists, but

³⁴Francis Hopkinson, A Tory Melody (Philadelphia: T. Dobson, 1780), 1.

³⁵Hastings, Francis Hopkinson, 305-08.

³⁶Hopkinson, Miscellaneous Essays, 3: 177-80.

also condemned the undecided. These poems were written to help promote the side of the patriots and to sway public opinion away from British support.

Perhaps one of the most effective vehicles for turning public support away from the British monarchy was to attack the king himself. As with the poetry of the pre-revolutionary period, numerous compositions by Hopkinson and Freneau denigrated King George. Most of these works equated his depravity with the downfall of the nation as well. In "Date Obolum Belisario," Hopkinson decided to return to the allegorical format which he used so effectively before the war. The patriotic poet decided to combine his talents of rhyme and meter to the satire of political allegories. The poem directly alluded to the Roman general Belisarius, whom Emperor Justinian ignored after many years of success. The emperor did, however, allow the general to beg in the streets. The poem, which symbolized fallen greatness, became quite popular in the pamphlet and printing war and appeared in many of the colonial newspapers during the rebellion. The allegory also displayed the enlightenment admiration for classical antiquity.³⁷

The poem was about the downfall of Great Britain. Because of the nation's ultimate corruption and decay, Britannia appeared as a beggar in the following passages:

Twas there a dirty drab I saw
All seated on the ground.
With oaken staff and hat and straw
And taters hanging round.

Britannia now in rags you see
I beg from door to door.
Oh! give kind fire for charity.
A penny for the poor.³⁸

As the poem continued the beggar blamed her troubles on George III, "her worthless youngest son." These stanzas reflected the opinions held by many of the colonists about

³⁷Information concerning "Date Obolum Bellesario" from Paul M. Zall, Comical Spirit of Seventy Six: The Humor of Francis Hopkinson (San Marino, California: The Huntington University Press, 1976), 101; the enlightenment admiration of classical antiquity from Robert A. Venables, "Gen'l. Harkemer's Battle," New York History 53, no. 4, (October 1977): 472.

³⁸Francis Hopkinson, "Date Obolum Bellesario," Pennsylvania Packet, 22 April 1778, 3.

the British monarch. George III was naturally blamed for Britannia's downfall and the tyranny imposed on the colonists. This view, borrowed from the radical Whig movement in Britain, became one of the colonists' initial reasons for the rebellion. Britain's apparent corruption and decay, and the fear that this sickness might spread to the colonies, were also concerns of the patriots.³⁹

Perhaps the most conspicuous complaint by the revolutionaries was the king's failure to follow the British constitution. Hopkinson addressed this issue in his earlier essays "A Pretty Story" and "The Prophecy"; he also described King George's accountability in "Date Obolum Bellasario":

Ruthless he broke the sacred rod,
The cap he tumbled down;
Destroying thus, what with there blood
His ancestors had won.⁴⁰

The "sacred rod" here referred to the British Constitution, while George III's actions were both "ruthless" and "destructive." This poem, as did Hopkinson's other allegories, blamed the king for the problems faced by the colonists. While the shattering of the paternalistic ties with the British monarchy was a theme found in the poems and essays before the war, "Date Obolum Belasario" was more of a confirmation of that theme. Furthermore, the poem reminded the colonists of the reasons for the conflict and also made a cogent argument against the loyalist cause.

Freneau also wrote poems denigrating the British monarch. One of his most clever pieces, entitled "King George the Third's SOLILOQUY," depicted a desperate monarch anguishing over France's recent entry into the conflict. The king continued to agonize over the failed military campaigns, the abandonment of his finest forces, and the thousands of British troops killed in the war. In the final stanza, the monarch lamented

³⁹ Hopkinson, "Date Obolum Bellesario," 3. For an excellent discussion on the radical Whig movement see "The Whig Science in Politics" in Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, 3-45.

⁴⁰ Pennsylvania Packet, 22 April 1778, 3.

his dismal destiny: "My future years I consecrate to woe, / For this great loss my soul to tears shall flow."⁴¹

Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of the soliloquy was how truthful Freneau's exaggerated portrayal of George the Third was, especially in lieu of the king's subsequent agonizing over the outcome of the conflict. The events of the war greatly distressed the monarch and he believed that the loss of the war meant "the downfall of his once respectable empire."⁴² In this poem Freneau ingeniously and intuitively used the soliloquy to paint a very realistic portrait of the King's personal dilemma. By continuing to ridicule the monarch, much in the same way as in their pre-Revolutionary poems, Hopkinson and Freneau helped bolster the cause of the patriots. Moreover, they argued that anyone who still continued to support the British monarchy was clasp to a cause which was a lost one at best.

Although both Hopkinson and Freneau steadfastly condemned King George in many of their works, another George became glorified along similar monarchical parameters. In "To his Excellency General Washington," Freneau praised the virtues of the commander of the troops. This glorification of Washington was tinged with monarchical imagery:

With patriot kings and generous chiefs to shine,
Whose virtues rais'd them to be deem'd divine;
May Louis only equal honors claim,
Alike in merits and alike in fame.⁴³

The poet also alluded to British Viscount Bolingbroke's concept of a "patriot King." A patriot King was a monarch, unlike George the Third, who would rule honorably

⁴¹Philip Freneau, "King George the Third's SOLILOQUY." U.S. Magazine (May 1779), reprinted in Hiltner, Newspaper Verse, 47-48.

⁴²For the quotation and discussion of George the Third's attitudes concerning the "American Question," see Richard Pares, King George III And The Politicians (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 68.

⁴³Philip Freneau, "To his Excellency GENERAL WASHINGTON," from The Freeman's Journal, 5 September 1781, 1.

and virtuously for the good of his country instead of for his personal good.⁴⁴ The poem also alluded to the Franco-American alliance in Freneau's reference to Louis XVI.

Hopkinson also praised France and gloried Washington in one of his most ambitious works, a patriotic oratorio entitled "The Temple of Minerva." The oratorio was an operatic extravaganza in two scenes performed on December 11, 1781, in front of General Washington and the Minister of France. This political music celebrated France's participation and alliance in the American Revolution. In the following lines of the musical opus, the lyrical poet addressed Franco-American coalition in the Revolution:

From the friendly shores of France,
See the martial troup advance,
With Columbia's sons unite,
And share the dangers of the fight,
Equal heroes of the day,
Equal honors to them pay.⁴⁵

Hopkinson stressed the importance of friendship and equality in the lines above. He also alluded to the French role in the defeat at Yorktown, in which the Count de Grasse's fleet cut off the British naval force during the battle.

In the final lines of the oratorio, the composer paid tribute to his hero and friend:

Fill the golden trump of fame.
Through the world his work proclaim;
Let rocks, and hills, and vales, resound--
He comes, he comes, with conquest crown
'Hail Columbia's godlike son!
Hail the glorious Washington.⁴⁶

These lines in "The Temple of Minerva" inspired Hopkinson's son Joseph to write "Hail

⁴⁴For an excellent discussion of Bolingbroke's concept of a 'patriot king' see Isaac Kramnick, Bolingbroke and His Circle: The Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), 30-38.

⁴⁵Libretto of Hopkinson's "Temple of Minerva" from Sonneck, First American Poet-Composer, 110; additional information on the performance from the notice in The Freeman's Journal, 19 December 1781, 3, and in Silverman, Cultural History of the American Revolution, 413.

⁴⁶Sonneck, First American Composer, 110

Columbia” in 1798.⁴⁷ Another interesting aspect of the last stanza was the glorification of Washington along monarchical parameters. By using phrases like “conquest crowned” and “godlike son,” ironically, Hopkinson employed terms similar to those found in his reverential poems dedicated to George II and III written several decades earlier.

While the colonists in many ways rejected the British crown, the poems glorifying Washington show that old customs persist. In many ways the compositions show that the poets merely shifted or switched their paternalistic ties away from the monarch to the general who led the colonists to victory. Perhaps these poems reflected a need by the poets and their fellow colonists for a replacement for a monarch who no longer was virtuous and benevolent. In a way, Washington was their “Patriot King,” one who would sacrifice all for the good of his country as opposed to his own good.

A favorable review in *The Freeman’s Journal* revealed the apparent success of the musical extravaganza. The notice described the affair as an “elegant concert” and a “most sensible pleasure.” Hopkinson’s extraordinary musical ability and success in this venture helped earn him the title of “First American Composer.”⁴⁸ Setting patriotic poetry to music became a very successful venture for Hopkinson and a potent combination for creating national propaganda.

While Washington’s skills as a talented and resourceful commander contributed to the victory of the patriots, the propaganda poetry of Hopkinson and Freneau helped win the war fought in the press. Together they wrote pieces designed to promote the patriot side and dissuade those still supporting the British monarchy. The popularity of their

⁴⁷See Sonneck, *First American Composer*, for Hopkinson’s influence on his son’s composition, “Hail Columbia.”

⁴⁸*The Freeman’s Journal*, 19 December 1781, 3. For recent scholarly research challenging Hopkinson’s musical significance see Gillian B. Anderson “The Temple of Minerva and Francis Hopkinson: A Reprisal of America’s First Composer,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 120, no. 3 (1976): 166, 173.

compositions, as evidenced by the numerous reprintings in both newspaper and pamphlet form, showed the power these poems had in molding patriot ideology.

The poetry of Francis Hopkinson and Philip Freneau were effective vehicles for political propaganda. By the late 1770s Hopkinson discovered that by writing humorous, simplistic poetry, he could reach a larger audience--thus influencing public opinion. Freneau, on the other hand, had great success continuing with his verbal style filled with invective and combined with the added realism of his personal experience. Together they represented both the humorous and horrid sides of the revolt, swaying public opinion with their poetry concerning many of the essential issues surrounding the conflict.

One important theme was recounting the horrors of British warfare. Hopkinson responded with his "Letter to Lord Howe," objecting to the brutality to non-combatants. Freneau reported his intensely personal and descriptive verse in "The British Prison Ship," which captured the horror and atrocities of his imprisonment. These compositions helped produce bitterness and hatred against the British and their military practices, furthering the cause of the colonists. Hopkinson chose to use his sarcasm and wit in his poems and allegories, allowing the colonists to laugh at British blunders, as in the "Battle of the Kegs." This piece in particular rewrote history, taking an insignificant military event and turning it into a colonial victory and British faux pas. This helped boost the moral of the colonial troops while diminishing, in perception at least, the military superiority of the "red coats."

Freneau, on the other hand, praised the bravery of colonial heroes, as in his poem concerning the victory of John Paul Jones. He also eulogized those who had fallen in battle in his compositions concerning Cornwallis and Eutaw Springs. These poems celebrated the victories of the patriots and lamented the loss of life which resulted from the war. Together Freneau's poems demonstrated that with each victory the colonists achieved there was also a tremendous price to pay for the pursuit of freedom.

Both poets continued to ridicule the monarch they had rejected before the war. Hopkinson's "Date Obolum Bellasario" was not only an assault on King George, but also a scathing, satirical chronicle of Britain's woes and vices. Moreover, as a talented musician he arranged and wrote "The Temple of Minerva," a celebration of America's alliance with France. In Freneau's imaginary dialogues between King George and his constituents, the poet accurately revealed the pensive musings of his targets. At times the poet even incorporated parliamentary speeches into his dialogues to add authenticity to his perceptive verse.

Together, Hopkinson and Freneau helped win the propaganda war, through their popular and influential writings. While one chose humor, sarcasm, and wit to ridicule the enemy in the public arena, the other used realism, anger, and empathy to produce animosity toward the enemy and compassion for the victims. Taken as a whole, their political poetry appealed to all levels of patriotic emotion. During the war, Freneau and Hopkinson became the "trumpets which sing into battle,"⁴⁹ encouraging a nation to win a war of freedom against tyranny and oppression. However, their work was still not quite finished --the task of creating a glorious and virtuous republic was just beginning.

⁴⁹Shelley, "A Defense of Poetry," 259.

CHAPTER THREE

POEMS CONCERNING THE CREATION OF A NEW REPUBLIC

While the poetry of Francis Hopkinson and Philip Freneau played a substantial role in helping win the propaganda war during the battles of the American Revolution, the two also had an important role in the creation of the new republic. The period in which that occurred, lasting from 1782 to 1793, was perhaps the most important part of the Revolutionary era. Previously, the poetry and verse concentrated primarily on the lack of virtue in the British government as well as chronicling battles. Now, finally separated from England, the patriots' task was to create a system of government that would not develop the vices which plagued the mother country. As the writings of Hopkinson and Freneau revealed, Americans were not as united, as they had been during the revolt, concerning the formation of the new republic. While the press war continued, the conflict in this instance was not with Great Britain, but with each other. Hopkinson represented one of the more conservative factions, which wanted to protect the rights and wealth of the mercantile elite. Freneau, on the other hand, championed the rights of the common man by challenging the actions of the more conservative factions. Their struggle, in many ways, prophetically mirrored the two-party system in the United States today.

The poetry in this era fell into three distinct periods, all essential to the development of the new republic. The first contained poems concerning the adoption of state constitutions, in which the differences in views of Hopkinson and Freneau were most pronounced. The second consisted of Hopkinson's persuasive poetry convincing Americans to adopt the Federal Constitution. The final period contained Freneau's anti-federalist poetry, which challenged the actions of such prominent Americans as George Washington and Alexander Hamilton. In all three periods, the poetry both reflected and, at

times, molded the thinking of the American people and greatly influenced the political landscape of the new republic.

The roots of the paper war that would become the primary concern of both Hopkinson and Freneau during the 1780s and 1790s actually began before the revolt ended. During the revolution the primary political organization in Pennsylvania was the Whig Society, which traced its roots back to the radical Whig movement in Britain. The radical Whigs and their attacks on the corruption of the British constitution played a tremendous role in encouraging the colonists to revolt. However, by the end of the American Revolution a new element emerged which challenged the American Whig Society. Calling itself the Republican Society, its charter members were such prominent Philadelphians as Benjamin Rush, James Wilson, and Robert Morris. Hopkinson was also a member of this conservative organization and together they wanted a new state constitution which would establish an upper chamber to balance the unicameral Pennsylvania assembly. Those opposed to this creation of this new legislative branch were known as Constitutionalists.¹

The Republicans also accused the Whig Society of graft and corruption and blamed them for the economic hardships, such as currency depreciation, caused by the war. *The Freeman's Journal*, however, did not accept the Republican Society's claims or their political ideas. Consequently, the editorials found in the liberal newspaper attacked Hopkinson's conservative party. The paper's owner, Francis Bailey, supported the Whig Society, and criticized the allegations of the Republicans in many of his editorials. Francis Hopkinson responded with a parody entitled "The Rise of the *Freeman's Journal*," published in the *Pennsylvania Packet* on April 2, 1782. In this poem Hopkinson accused "the scribblers" of the *Freeman's Journal* of writing solely out of vindictiveness without any justification:

¹Hastings, Francis Hopkinson, 371-72.

Seeds of Discord will we sow,
 Seeds that never fail to grow,
 Dire, Dissension, Envy, Hate
 Will, not cease, to propagate.

Hopkinson's attack on "the scribblers" and "their infernal ink" was in many ways similar to his earlier assaults on the British monarchy. This time, however, his targets were his fellow citizens. In order to avoid any suits for slander or libel, Hopkinson signed the piece under a pen name, "Caluminator."²

One such "scribner" of the *Freeman's Journal*, who was not amused by Hopkinson's invective, was the paper's editor, Philip Freneau. Freneau and Bailey openly supported the Constitutionalist party. They believed that a second legislative branch, composed of wealthy elite, would add "an aristocratic social and political philosophy" that would not protect the rights of the common man. Freneau attacked the editorials in the conservative press with "To the Foe of Tyrants," published in the *Freeman's Journal* edition of September 4, 1782. In the opening lines he denigrated his political adversaries:

Vile as you are, this lukewarm tory crew
 Seem viler still, when they are prais'd by you
 By you adorn'd, in yellow robes they shine,
 Sweat through your verse, and stink in every line.³

While Hopkinson strategically initiated his attacks against the Constitutionlists under a pseudonym, Freneau wrote under his own name. He thus left himself open to harsh personal criticism, as evidenced by a rebuttal to his "To the Foe of Tyrants" entitled "To the Foe of Malice. The Farewell," published in a conservative newspaper, the *Independent Gazetteer*. An anonymous writer opened with scathing lines targeting Freneau: "When men will prostitute the power of rhyme / Their dirt and malice jingling out of time."

²"The Rise of the Freeman's Journal," printed in the *Pennsylvania Packet*, 2 April 1782. Additional information found in Hastings, *Francis Hopkinson*, 372-73, and in Leary, *That Rascal Freneau*, 109-10.

³"To the Foe to Tyrants," printed in *The Freeman's Journal*, 2 September 1782. Additional information from Leary, *That Rascal Freneau*, 111-12.

These lines unquestionably hurt Freneau, as evidenced by his rebuttal “scented from your song, / I stopt my nose, and quickly pass’d along.”⁴

These lines illustrated just how bitter and destructive the print war had become. In many ways it shifted from a forum for debating ideological disputes to a vehicle for hurling personal insults. Freneau responded to the hurtful, defamatory editorials by retreating in much the same way as he did during the beginning of the Revolution. The poet expressed his bitterness and sentiment concerning the quarrel in which he had tried to champion the rights of the common man in the following lines:

To some retreat of solitude and rest ---
Nor let another pang disturb my breast,
When I have wept to think the world shall know
I had to combat with so mean a foe.⁵

For Freneau retreating meant shifting his focus from the paper wars to nonpolitical poetry. Also, as he had done during the Revolution, he took to the sea. From 1784 to 1790, he was captain of the schooner *Columbia* and spent his time sailing the Caribbean and writing serious poetry. The poet was disenchanted with the Revolution. Freneau feared that the revolution as he knew it was over. Replacing the virtuous ideology of the Radical Whigs was a new faction “ascending to power who seemed worthy of no public trust. Men who stood on the sidelines to watch which way the victory would now use their wealth and influence to support measures which would threaten the rights of free men.”⁶ Freneau’s poetry and opinions reflected the ideology of many of his peers. While a substantial contingent embraced the Whig philosophy, they as yet were unorganized and ineffective.

⁴“To the Foe of Malice. The Farewell,” from The (Philadelphia) Independent Gazetteer, 7 September 1782 in Leary, That Rascal Freneau, 114; Freneau’s response from “To the Foe to Tyrants on his Farewell,” from The Freeman’s Journal, 11 September 1782.

⁵“To Those Whom It may Concern,” The Freeman’s Journal, 25 September 1782.

⁶Quotation eloquently summarizing Freneau’s concerns about the shifting ideology of the revolution from Leary, That Rascal Freneau, 119.

On the other side of the debate, one such member of the new, highly organized, conservative faction was none other than Francis Hopkinson. With Freneau in retreat, Hopkinson continued to use his skills as a poet to further the conservative views of the Republican Society. One interesting example of this was his cogent argument concerning the role and duty of Philadelphia's grand jury. *The Freeman's Journal's* editors believed that the grand jury had overstepped its legal boundaries. Hopkinson, on the other hand, believed that the grand jury was justified in using any means necessary to make the indictment. The poet responded to the debate by lampooning the opinions of his critics in verse. In these clever and humorous lines Hopkinson created a fictitious dialogue where a quibbler of the "legal machine" tried to justify his position to a social group sitting around a hearth on a cold winter's night:

So a grand jury's but a besom,
Which judges use as it may please 'em
To sweep poor rogues and felons great
From all precincts of the state.⁷

While the verses appear to criticize the court's practices, Hopkinson personally believed that a trial of a grand jury gave the accused "all possible chance of vindication." Ultimately, the grand jury was a vehicle used by a judge to achieve justice as illustrated in the following lines:

A jury's power exists or ceases,
According to the court's caprices,
Nor dare, or to release, or damn us,
By a *true bill*, or *ignoramus* ;
Unless the judge first gives the cue,
T'inform them what they ought to do.⁸

These lines, in Hopkinson's trademark satirical style, revealed the poet's conservative views concerning the legal system. The author attempted to justify his own position by poking fun

⁷"I've a Thought --- What's its Like?," found in Hopkinson, *Miscellaneous Essays*, 1: 228-38; additional information from Hastings, *Francis Hopkinson*, 377.

⁸Quotation on Hopkinson's belief in the purpose of a grand jury trial from Hastings, *Francis Hopkinson*, 376; "I've a Thought --- What's its Like?," found in Hopkinson, *Miscellaneous Essays*, 1: 228-38. Additional information from Hastings, *Francis Hopkinson*, 378.

at his adversaries when he humorously deliberated their positions. Nowhere in these writings does one find any mention of the rights of those who were accused. What about the rights of those who have been falsely or mistakenly swept off the streets? These lines are in many ways indicative of a strict Federalist ideology, a conservatism that influenced his writings in support of a new constitution--a constitution which Philip Freneau adamantly opposed.

Hopkinson possibly best captured the intensity and divisions within the two political parties in a letter to Thomas Jefferson days before the state election:

Party Politics run high ---& the Fever heightens as the general election approaches. We are divided distinctly into two Parties under the names the Constitutionals & and the Republicans. The Republicans are those who wish for two Branches of Legislature ----The Constitutionals wish to have one, especially since they have the Power & have the management of it.⁹

Hopkinson and his Republican party won the overall election which made Benjamin Franklin president. However, the Constitutionalist party still had substantial representation within the assembly. In the months that followed, the Republicans supported the ideology of the Federalists and actively lobbied for a new constitution. Many of the Constitutionals championed the cause of the Anti-Federalists.

The significance of poetry during this period was that the poems reflected the disunity of the American people. Hopkinson used his gift at humor to push his conservative ideology. Freneau, on the other hand, countered with his own poems championing the cause of the common man. His retreat, in many ways, reflected the relative ineffectiveness of the Constitutionalist party. The battles concerning the state constitution of Philadelphia set the stage for the ensuing debates over the federal constitution. With the rising, enterprising, Republican party embracing Federalism and the poorly organized Constitutionals supporting Anti-Federalism, the adoption of a new national constitution seemed inevitable.

⁹Francis Hopkinson to Thomas Jefferson, 28 September 1785, from Hastings, Francis Hopkinson, 390-91.

During the Federal Convention of 1787 Hopkinson wrote “The New Roof.” This political allegory, an impressive piece of Federalist propaganda, offered a cogent argument for the creation of a new constitution. The author described the ill-fated Articles of Confederation in the following manner:

The roof of a certain Mansion-house was observed to be in very bad condition and quite insufficient for the purposes of protection from the clemences of weather.

Hopkinson continued this analogy by referring to the founders as “skillful architects sent to repair the roof.” The writer explained the decision to write a new Constitution in the following manner: “It would be altogether fruitless to attempt any alterations or repairs in a roof so defective in all points.”¹⁰

While Hopkinson praised those “skilled architects” who supported the new constitution, he had less flattering ways of describing those who were against it. He referred to those who were Anti-Federalists as “Margery the housewife, who had got a comfortable apartment in the mansion house, refusing to change.” Using the analogy of a “comfortable apartment” under the existing roof was an effective way of describing the lost cause of those supporting the doomed Articles of Confederation. Furthermore referring to Anti-Federalists as a housewife appealed to the eighteenth century values which offered a relatively inferior perception of women. Consequently, “Margery the housewife,” an intentional metaphor, chosen specifically to demean those who supported the Articles of Confederation, added to the potency of “The New Roof.”¹¹

Perhaps the most ingenious aspect of “The New Roof” is its relative simplicity. While Hopkinson’s use of political allegory in this essay may seem overly unsophisticated and naïve, not all of the patriots had the time to understand the nuances of republican theory as Madison, Adams, and Jefferson did. Consequently, any one could understand a “defective

¹⁰“The New Roof,” published in the Pennsylvania Packet, 29 December 1787, found in Hopkinson, Miscellaneous Essays, 2: 282-84.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 2: 285.

roof” needing to be replaced, as opposed to trying to grasp the Confederation's vices of “Democratic despotism” and “anarchical licentiousness.” In “The New Roof,” Hopkinson addressed the subtle and complex issues of Federalism in an expressive discourse accessible to a variety of citizens.¹²

Hopkinson’s allegory was tremendously popular and was reprinted in the *Independent Gazetteer*, the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, and the *Pennsylvania Herald*, as well as other newspapers in each and every state. The frequency with which the essay appeared in the various colonial newspapers showed the enormous publicity Hopkinson’s composition received.¹³ Also, this popularity, reminiscent of the attention paid to his other allegories, revealed the effectiveness of his method of writing. Explaining complex ideas using metaphors and parables was a very powerful tool for persuasion. With the adoption of the new federal constitution, Hopkinson saw the replacement of his weakened roof with a new, stronger structure.

Philadelphia marked the ratification of the constitution with tremendous enthusiasm and spectacle. The day chosen for the festivities was July, 4, 1788, which would celebrate the new constitution along with the twelfth anniversary of Declaration of Independence. Not surprisingly, Francis Hopkinson was chosen to direct the “Grand Federal Procession.” Not only had the poet championed the creation of the new constitution, he was also one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. The parade, which Hopkinson described as “a spectacle as singular in itself as the occasion was extraordinary,” inspired the poet to celebrate the event in verse:

Oh! for a muse of fire! To mount the skies!
And to a listening world proclaim;
Behold! Behold! an Empire Rise!
An Aera new time as he flies,

¹²For a superb discussion on the finer aspects of Anti-federalism, see Wood, Creation of the American Republic, 409-11.

¹³For the frequency of publication of “The New Roof,” see Hastings, Francis Hopkinson, 400.

Hath entered in the book of fame.¹⁴

Shortly after the adoption of the Constitution, Hopkinson wrote his friend Thomas Jefferson in Paris. In his letter Hopkinson asked Jefferson's opinions about the new constitution and questioned his friend's support of the Federalist cause. Jefferson eloquently replied, "I am not a federalist because I have never submitted . . . my opinions to any creed of any party of men whatever, in religion, in philosophy, in politics, where I was capable of thinking for myself." While Jefferson conceded he was more a federalist than an antifederalist, he had some reservations concerning the "new roof." First, he disapproved of the absence of a bill of rights which would "guard liberty against the legislative and executive branches." He also objected to the "perceptual re-eligibility of the president."¹⁵ These two areas of concern linked Thomas Jefferson's ideas more closely to the opinions of another of his friends, Philip Freneau.

Hopkinson's two poems captured the spirit of Federalism and reflected the views of his constituents. The popularity of the "The New Roof" suggests that the piece helped persuade Americans to accept the constitution. His "Ode" was a celebration of its ratification. Hopkinson and his other Federalist allies used "the most popular and democratic rhetoric available to explain and justify their aristocratic system."¹⁶ Consequently, it was the effectiveness of pieces such as Hopkinson's "New Roof" which played a substantial role in helping convince the American public to accept a document that did not necessarily meet the social interests of all its citizens.

¹⁴Quotation from Hopkinson concerning the procession from the Pennsylvania Packet, 4 July 1788; the "Ode," which was distributed at the procession can be found in its entirety in Hopkinson, Miscellaneous Essays, 2: 386-87.

¹⁵Thomas Jefferson to Francis Hopkinson, 21 December 1788, found in A. A. Lipscomb, ed., The Writings of Thomas Jefferson (Washington, D. C.: The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1907), 3: 299-303.

¹⁶Quotation from Wood, Creation of the American Republic, 562.

For the remainder of his life, Hopkinson concentrated on non-political poetry and music. Perhaps one of his best known musical compositions were a series of lyrical poems entitled “Seven Songs,” which were published in 1788. The pieces were written for voice with harpsichord accompaniment. “Song VII” describes the common theme of lost love:

My gen'rous heart disdains
The slave of love to be.
I scorn his servile chains
And boast my liberty.

In these lines Hopkinson defined his love using revolutionary terminology. “Love” has “enslaved” him and unchained he regains his freedom or “liberty.” The piece is an example of how revolutionary rhetoric filtered into the non-political verse of the era.¹⁷

In 1789 Hopkinson composed another piece which also contained some revolutionary rhetoric. Published in the *Columbia Magazine*, the composition captured his whimsical nature with an added aura of optimism.

Give me thy heart as I give mine,
Our hands in mutual Bonds well join;
Propitious shall our Union prove,
What’s life without the joys of love? ¹⁸

The verses would also be Hopkinson’s last known composition. In his final years the poet had a many reasons for his optimistic view of life and love. His poems and allegories helped establish a “union” and “mutual bond” of his fellow colonists. Together, this coalition defeated the British, thus allowing a independent nation to emerge. The nation could now build its own form of government free of the vice and corruption of the mother country. While the poet’s life ended content with the direction in which his country was headed, his rival Philip Freneau did not share Hopkinson’s optimism. For Freneau, the “new roof” was leaking and in danger of falling into the same corruptive path of the British

¹⁷Lyrics for the seven songs are found in Hopkinson, *Miscellaneous Essays*, 3: Part 2, 185-92.

¹⁸“A New Song” *The Columbia Magazine*, August 1789, reprinted in Hastings, *Francis Hopkinson*, 445.

constitution. Therefore, the poet from New Jersey had more writing to do in order to save the constitution by protecting the rights of the common man.

In 1790, after seven years of writing “serious” non-political poetry and sailing the seas as a captain of a merchant vessel, Philip Freneau decided to move to the temporary capital of the United States, New York City. Marriage plans were in the works, and the life of a sailor was not conducive to the constraints of matrimonial demands. Upon his return to New York, Freneau began to write for a prudently anti-Federalist paper called the *Daily Advertiser*. While there were many editorials reflecting the political bias of the paper’s owners, Freneau’s initial contributions avoided controversial political matters. There were several possible reasons for this hesitation. Perhaps he was reluctant to re-enter immediately the paper wars which had been so injurious in the past. Another reason could stem from his desire to write light-hearted poetry reflecting his preoccupation with his upcoming marriage.¹⁹

One interesting poem eulogized the recent death of Francis Hopkinson’s godfather, Benjamin Franklin. Although Franklin represented the conservative, Federalist faction in his latter years, the poet did not hesitate to praise the accomplishments of this ingenious elderly statesman:

When monarchs tumble to the ground,
Successors easily are found:
But, matchless Franklin! what a few
Can hope to rival such as you,
Who seized from kings their sceptred pride,
And turned the lightning’s darts aside.²⁰

Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of the lines was that they foreshadowed the poet’s subsequent compositions. For Freneau, successors were “easily found,” and if those in power began to show the corrupt signs of their predecessors, then the current

¹⁹Biographical information on Freneau during 1790 from Leary, *That Rascal Freneau*, 166-69.

²⁰“Stanzas Occasioned by the Death of Dr. Franklin,” published in *The (New York) Daily Advertiser*, 28 April 1790, reprinted in Harry Hayden Clark ed., *Poems of Freneau* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929), 103-04.

leaders needed to be challenged. The poet eventually challenged a successor, who was a hero of the American Revolution, whose virtue had yet to be questioned, and who currently was the first president of the new republic. When the discussion of the removal of the capital from New York to Philadelphia began, Freneau could no longer avoid writing political poetry. The proposed move would have a substantial effect on New York's economy and its civic improvement projects. In his satirical composition, entitled "The River Delaware to the River Hudson," the poet mocked the excitement and expectations of the Philadelphians:

What honour on our town awaits!
Lift up your heads, ye Dutchmen gates,
Fame says, they now are on the wing,
They're welcome---for the wealth they bring.²¹

Freneau believed the temporary move was not necessary, especially since the senate had voted for the permanent capital to be located on the Potomac, some sixty miles from Baltimore. For Freneau, the move was essentially another example of the new power elite in Congress, represented by a conservative Philadelphia faction, motivated solely by greed. Upon the approval of the measure, Freneau wrote the following stanzas:

From Hudson's banks, in proud array,
(Too mean to claim a longer stay)
Their new ideas to approve,
Behold the *generous* congress move!

New chaplains now shall open their jaws,
New salaries grease unworthy paws:
Some reverend men, that turtle carves,
Will fatten, while the soldier starves.²²

These lines reflected some of the poet's many concerns for the new republic. He believed that a powerful aristocratic element had taken control of America at the expense of the common man. Those with "unworthy paws" would benefit, while forgetting or neglecting

²¹"The River Delaware to the River Hudson," published in the Daily Advertiser, 5 July 1790, reprinted Leary, That Rascal Freneau, 173.

²²"The Removal," published in The New York Daily Gazette, 10 Aug. 1790, reprinted in Clark, Poems, 105-07; additional information from Leary, That Rascal Freneau, 173.

the needs of the common man or “soldier.” Freneau used the soldier to symbolize the average citizen. He believed it was these enlisted men who led the nation and essentially won the revolution for the benefit of those of the new power elite, and now the needs of these real heroes of the revolution were not being met.

Another poem published the following January elaborated upon his theme of the heroic soldier now neglected by the conservative political establishment. In “The American Soldier,” Freneau painted a vivid picture of the life of a war veteran whose contribution to freedom had left him penniless. Reminiscent of his portrayal of his own sufferings on the British prison ship, the poet effectively used verse to stir up emotions and pity.

Deep in a vale, a stranger now in arms,
Too poor to shine in courts, too proud to beg,
He, who once warred on Saratoga’s plains,
Sits musing o’er his scars, and wooden leg.

Remembering still the toil of former days,
To *other* hands he sees his earnings paid; ---
They share the due reward---*he* feeds on praise
Lost in the abyss of want, misfortune’s shade.²³

Perhaps the source of the poet’s empathy for the American soldier resulted more from his personal experience than from his observation. Freneau was, like the soldier in his poem, a veteran of the war, whose more liberal views were neglected by the powerful conservative elite. Furthermore, unlike those of the mercantile class, the poet had not benefited financially from the war. He was in many ways like the soldier whose “due reward” was yet unpaid. Financial difficulties soon became a problem for Freneau in the following months, especially with the new domestic obligations of his recent marriage.²⁴

Editing a newspaper and writing political poetry, regardless of his talent, was not a profitable venture. This was particularly true since the paper Freneau edited had strong

²³“The American Soldier,” published in the Daily Advertiser, 24 January 1791, reprinted in Clark, Poems, 107-08.

²⁴Information concerning Freneau’s financial difficulties from Leary, That Rascal Freneau. 186-87.

Anti-Federalist leanings, which did not represent the ideology of the power elite. His financial situation became a great concern for his friends James Madison and Thomas Jefferson. Not only did these two statesman help him financially, they also helped defend him during his most controversial period. During this period Freneau used his gift for verse to criticize the actions of two of the nation's most powerful Federalist figures, Alexander Hamilton and George Washington.²⁵

While Freneau grappled with his own personal dilemmas, the nation struggled with an unpaid Continental debt which exceeded fifty million dollars. A representative from North Carolina suggested that a tax on newspapers was in order to help pay the debt. Freneau viewed this idea as a threat to the freedom of the press. He responded with the following poem envisioning the press becoming a single instrument of the power elite.

The well-born sort alone, should read the news,
No common herds should get behind the scene
To view the movements of the state machine,
One paper only, filled with courtly stuff,
One paper, for one country is enough,²⁶

Disgust at the proposal to tax newspapers was just one of the many concerns Freneau had for the new republic. He believed that the nation was headed for catastrophe. He thought that the objective of the Federalist faction led by Hamilton bordered on monarchy. Hamilton apparently distrusted democratic masses and feared that Freneau's common man would hinder the growth of a powerful nation. Instead, the Secretary of the Treasury believed that, to ensure economic growth, firm ties between the government and the wealthy were essential. Furthermore, he was convinced that an effective nation was one which was governed by the few. Therefore, a powerful executive branch was imperative if a strong, unified nation were to emerge. Freneau viewed Hamilton's

²⁵For Thomas Jefferson's and James Madison's defense of Freneau see Leary, That Rascal Freneau, 233. Also see Philip Marsh, "Madison's Defense of Freneau," The William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd Series, III, 2 (April 1946): 269-80.

²⁶"On the Proposed Taxation of Newspapers," printed in the Daily Advertiser, 18 February 1791, reprinted in Clarke, Poems, 108. See also Leary, That Rascal Freneau, 180

convictions as selective aristocracy at best and tyranny at worst. The only means of combating the policies of Secretary of the Treasury were for Freneau to challenge him directly.²⁷

However, the poet first needed to resolve his own financial problems before he could reasonably focus on the problems faced by the nation. Madison, concerned about his former college mate's financial difficulties, turned to mutual friend Jefferson for help. Jefferson's solution was to appoint Freneau to a recently vacant clerkship position in foreign languages, which would provide a modest salary and enough free time to pursue his writing. In a letter to the poet, Jefferson sweetened the proposal by assuring Freneau that, "Should anything better turn up within my department, that might suit you, I would be very happy to bestow it as well."²⁸ While the prospect of steady income was alluring, Freneau had already made plans to retire to his country home and start a small rural newspaper. Therefore, the poet did not immediately respond to his friend's generous offer.

Freneau was not the only prominent American to champion the cause of the common man. In 1791 Thomas Paine published an influential book entitled The Rights of Man. The lengthy essay cogently argued against the recent policies of the Federalists which bordered on monarchical despotism. In many ways Paine's tract echoed the ideas eloquently and courageously expressed in Freneau's work. The poet responded to Paine's essay in verse instructing Americans to avoid the traps of tyranny:

Be ours the task, the ambitious to restrain,
And this great lesson teach, That kings are vain,
That warring realms to certain ruin haste,
That kings subsist on war, and wars are waste;

²⁷For information on Hamilton's plan and Freneau's opinion of the young conservative, see Leary, That Rascal Freneau, 180.

²⁸Jefferson to Freneau, 28 February 1791, in Lipscomb, Writings of Thomas Jefferson, 8: 133.

So shall our nation (form'd on Reason's plan,)
 Remain the guardian of the Rights of Man,²⁹

With the publication of Paine's Rights of Man, Freneau had found a kindred spirit, one who shared his republican ideals and advocated a nation in which the rights of the individual were protected from the vested interests of the mercantile elite. While the poet had not responded to the offer by Jefferson of a position in his office, Freneau considered opening a paper of his own. Both Jefferson and Madison suggested the poet edit a Republican newspaper in the nation's capital, but Freneau initially declined the offer. However, the lure of heading a publication, one which echoed his own ideas, was an offer the political poet could not refuse. Therefore, he moved to Philadelphia in September of 1791 with full editorial control of the newspaper, the National Gazette, which Jefferson and Madison had devised. He also took up the position he had initially declined and became a clerk for foreign languages in the office of the Secretary of State.³⁰

When Philip Freneau arrived in Philadelphia, he found a city in which "the free spirit of the American revolution seemed to have vanished from the people, and democracy was held in contempt." Hamilton was perhaps one of the most powerful and dynamic political figures in the city. Furthermore, the young and vigorous Secretary of Treasury's vision of a strong central government at the expense of the states' powers and the common man appeared to be becoming a reality. His measures gave economic opportunities to the mercantile elite, while ignoring the working class. Both Jefferson and Madison hoped that Philip Freneau's *National Gazette* would help unite many of the republicans who had been unable to check Hamilton's powerful federalist faction. On October 31, the first issue of Freneau's paper arrived on the streets of Philadelphia with the poet promising:

This launch'd as we are in an ocean of news.
In hopes that your pleasure our pains will repay,

²⁹"Lines Occasioned by Reading Mr. Paine's Rights of Man," from the Daily Advertiser, 27 May 1791, reprinted in Clark, Poems, 124-25.

³⁰Leary, That Rascal Freneau, 190-91.

All honest endeavors the author will use
To furnish a feast for the grave and the gay;

At least he'll essay such a track to pursue
That the world shall approve---and his news shall be true.³¹

Time would prove that a paper whose news offered “truth” was also a paper destined for controversy. For the first six months, however, Freneau avoided publishing any of his own poetry which might attack the Federalist establishment. When evidence suggested that the paper was gaining a large constituency, the poet's contributions became much more polemical. On July 4, 1792, Freneau celebrated the sixteenth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence with a poem cautioning Americans to protect steadfastly the freedoms for which they had so diligently fought:

Peace to all feuds! ---and come the happier day
When reason's sun shall light us on our way;
When erring man shall all RIGHTS retrieve,
No despots rule him, and no priests deceive;³²

The poem was aptly entitled “Independence,” and the tract could not have been written at a more opportune time. Freneau called for a new declaration of independence, which challenged the Federalist ideology which threatened or “retrieved” the liberties of the common man. The poem also alluded to “the feud” which was just beginning between the *National Gazette* and the supporters of Hamilton. As Freneau's paper's popularity increased, so did the editor's attacks on the Secretary of Treasury and his supporters. The poet's caustic satires assailed and derided all that was Hamiltonian. Whether it was his funding system, his national bank, or his “monarchist” constituents in the Federalist party, Freneau released one denunciation after another against the Secretary and his agendas.³³

³¹“Poetical Address to the Public of the United States,” from *The National Gazette* (Philadelphia), 31 October 1791. For additional information on Hamilton and his Federalist measures see Leary, *That Rascal Freneau*, 193-96.

³²“Independence,” from *The National Gazette*, 4 July 1792; also see Leary, *That Rascal Freneau*, 198-99.

³³Information on the impending feud between Hamilton and Freneau see Leary, *That Rascal Freneau*, 207; also see Marsh, “Madison's Defense of Freneau,” 269.

Hamilton's response to Freneau's maledictions was to counter the poet with his own diatribes. Contributing to the *Gazette of the United States* under the signature of "T.L.," Hamilton offered a very cogent argument accusing Freneau of being a puppet of Jefferson, hired by the Secretary of State not only to translate but to publish propaganda to "oppose the measures of government, and, by false insinuations, to disturb the public peace." Hamilton believed that Freneau was specifically brought to Philadelphia to edit the newspaper under the guise of becoming a clerk in the foreign language office. Therefore, Freneau's job in Jefferson's office was essentially just a bribe to lure the poet to Philadelphia.³⁴

Hamilton's reactions to Freneau's satirical verse featured in the *National Gazette* show the power and effectiveness of poetry as a weapon of political commentary. Had Freneau's poetry been merely a whimsical oddity, the Secretary would merely have ignored Freneau's sardonic meter. However, it reached a wide audience and was also reprinted in many of the leading republican papers throughout America.³⁵ With Hamilton trying to preserve his control of Congress in the summer of 1792, he needed to discredit his attacker. While his suggestion that Freneau's clerkship and editorial position suggested a rather blatant conflict in interest, Hamilton also prepared himself for a counterattack.

Freneau wasted little time in responding to Hamilton's accusations. However, since the Secretary of the Treasury submitted the article under an assumed name, the poet did not respond directly to Hamilton. Instead Freneau directed his denunciatory meter toward the driving editorial force behind the *Gazette of the United States*, John Fenno. First the poet responded in prose, reprinting the "Query" of Hamilton, and responding directly to the article. In the counterattack Freneau proposed that the editor, through his

³⁴For Hamilton's attacks on Freneau published in the *Gazette of the United States* see Henry Cabot Lodge, ed., *The Works of Alexander Hamilton* (New York: G.P. Putnam's sons, 1904), "The Jefferson Controversy," 7: 229-306.

³⁵For the numerous reprinting of Freneau's articles in the *National Gazette* see the year by year publication record of Freneau's poetry in the Bibliography section of Leary, *That Rascal Freneau*, 455-56.

erroneous accusations, was attempting to “poison the minds of the people by propagating and disseminating principles and sentiments utterly subversive of the true republican interests of the country.”³⁶

The poet continued his attack in verse in the same edition of the *National Gazette*. In his “Odes of Various Subjects” the poet painted a farcical picture of the editor of the *Gazette of the United States*, whose paper’s attacks on Freneau were alleged to be made out of jealousy and fear. According to the poet, Fenno was merely jealous of Freneau’s skills at writing persuasive verse and feared the effectiveness of the poetry in exposing the fallacies of the Federalists’ agenda. Freneau crafted a humorous characterization of the contributors to the Federalist paper:

Since the day we attempted the NATIONS GAZETTE
 Pomposo’s dull printer does nothing but fret;
 Now preaching,
 And screeching,
 Then nibbling,
 And scribbling,
 Remarking
 And Barking,
 Repining
 And whining
 And still in a pet
 From morning till night with the Nation’s Gazette.³⁷

Freneau even offered a farcical entry in the form of a “Help Wanted” advertisement in the same issue in which his “Odes on Various Subjects” had been printed. The poet humorously announced the potential opening of a “Place of Public-Office in the city” where there was no “objections to acting as a French Translator in the Department of State.”³⁸ Freneau’s response to the accusations, which Hamilton made entirely on conjecture, was to use his skill at sarcasm and humor to vindicate his actions by mocking his attackers. To

³⁶Quotation from Freneau’s attack on Fenno found in the *National Gazette*, 28 July 1792. For biographical information on John Fenno see Garraty and Carnes, *American National Biography*, 7: 819-20.

³⁷Freneau’s “Odes on Various Subjects” printed in *Ibid*.

³⁸Advertisement found in the *National Gazette*, 28 July 1792; Freneau’s affidavit found in Leary, *That Rascal Freneau*, 212.

attempt to put an end to the scandal, Freneau even visited the mayor of Philadelphia and swore his innocence in an affidavit. While Freneau's articles revealed a satirical approach to Hamilton's accusations, the affidavit represented a rather legalistic approach to clearing his name. Both responses indicated the seriousness with which the poet took the allegations.

Freneau also had some friends in very high places who rose to defend their fellow partisan. One was Jefferson, who conceded that he had secured subscriptions of the *National Gazette* with his friends, but denied submitting essays or influencing the editorship of the paper. Jefferson, who had retired to Monticello, wrote to Hamilton stating, "I can protest, in the presence of heaven, that I never did by myself or any other, directly or indirectly, say a syllable, nor attempt any kind of influence."³⁹ Having the author of the Declaration of Independence coming to your defense, certainly offered a persuasive argument to establish one's innocence. While Jefferson may have not played an active role in the editorship of the paper, Freneau's political ideas, in many ways, reflected those of Jefferson.

Another prominent contemporary who defended Freneau was his old college roommate, Madison. With the help of James Monroe, Madison publicly defended the poet in an unsigned article in John Dunlap's *American Daily Advertiser*. Madison's brilliantly argued defense eloquently explained the reason Freneau was chosen for the clerkship of foreign languages. Madison pointed to the poet's "accurate knowledge and refined taste in the English language . . . [and] he had added a similar acquirement of the French; the nation with whom we have the most intimate connection." Madison further described his friend as a hero of the revolution who had suffered as prisoner of war and who "through his life and morals was without blemish."⁴⁰ Not only does the article offer a cogent

³⁹For Jefferson's letter to Hamilton see Lipscomb, *Writings of Jefferson*, 6: 105-08.

⁴⁰Madison's defense of Freneau found in *The American Daily Advertiser*, 20 October 1792, reprinted in Marsh, "Madison's Defense of Freneau," 269.

defense of Freneau, it also revealed Madison's loyalty, high regard, and respect.

Having the two most prominent Republican political leaders demonstrate such forthright support gave the poet the incentive to continue fighting for the rights of the common man. No longer would he retreat when the paper wars intensified. Instead Freneau continued to lambaste his attackers. In the following lines Freneau summarized the failed attempts of Hamilton and Fenno to create a scandal that would discredit the poet and disable his newspaper:

Three well fed lads, in solemn junto met,
Swore to destroy the National Gazette;
One smelt a bribe, that never did exist,
One scrawl'd some nonsense with his mutton fist,
One, swoln with fancied state and fancied power,
Reported lies, that scarcely lived an hour:⁴¹

With that calumny finally behind him, Freneau set his sights on the President of the United States. Criticizing such a national hero as George Washington was quite a courageous and audacious undertaking. However, Freneau believed that the president's alliance with Hamilton's elitist agenda was dangerous. The administration, he believed, bordered on monarchy at best and dictatorship at worst. Missing was an agenda which protected the rights of the common man. In an open letter to the president Freneau asked Washington if he was "so much buoyed by official importance as to think it beneath his dignity to mix occasionally with the people." Freneau's boldness also reflected the newly found national fervor, which favored democratic ideals over elitist Federalist doctrines. Paine's book, The Rights of Man, enjoyed tremendous popularity during this period, while many Americans formed Democratic clubs celebrating the spirit of republicanism. Furthermore, the French Revolution, stressing that government should protect the rights of citizens, helped reinforce the democratic values of many Americans.⁴²

⁴¹Poem attacking his accusers found in the National Gazette, 22 September 1792.

⁴²Freneau's open letter to Washington found in the National Gazette, 5 June 1793. On the popularity of Paine's Rights of Man and the "Democratic Clubs," see Leary, That Rascal Freneau, 233.

Celebrating an environment which embraced Freneau's liberal ideas, the poet wrote an ode, "God Save the Rights of Man." The poem, presented at an assembly for French ambassador Edmond Genêt, demonstrated that Freneau's enduring spirit of liberty still shined brightly despite his recent discontent with some of the nation's leaders:

God save the Rights of Man!
Give us a heart to scan
Blessings so dear;
Let them be spread around
Wherever man is found,
And with welcome sound
Ravish the ear.

The poem was well received and continued to enjoy popularity after the French minister's visit, becoming an anthem of sorts for republican America.⁴³ The popularity of this piece demonstrated the power and potency of poetry as a vehicle for perpetuating the convictions of those with similar creeds. Furthermore, the verses were easily converted to song, increasing the mass appeal of the composition. What was once a dispersed republican constituency was now a powerful united party. Freneau's poetry, daring and prophetic, played a substantial role in helping bring about this union.

Freneau decided to criticize Washington and his policies in a series of open letters entitled "To the President of the United States." In these tracts the poet argued that the president's neutrality proclamation did not represent the will of the American people. The poet believed that the ideology of the mercantile elite had persuaded Washington to remain neutral despite the convictions of the people. Freneau reminded and warned the president, "Let not the buzz of an aristocratic few and their contemptible minions of Speculators, Tories, and British emissaries be mistaken for the exalted and generous voice of the American people." Washington, outraged and frustrated by the poet's articles and poems

⁴³ Popularity of the song from Leary, That Rascal Freneau, 254; Freneau's poem and song "God Save the Rights of Man," published in the General Advertiser, 4 June 1793, reprinted in Leary, That Rascal Freneau, 234.

in the *National Gazette*, openly attacked the publication and its editor in a cabinet meeting shouting, “That rascal Freneau!”⁴⁴

While Freneau’s *National Gazette* was an effective vehicle for spreading and defending the republican ideology, an epidemic of “malignant fever” suspended and eventually extinguished the newspaper. The epidemic also caused Freneau’s competitor, Fenno’s *Gazette of the United States*, to suspend publication. This ended one of the most controversial and pivotal series of political verse in the poet’s career and therefore stands as an appropriate place to end this study. Although Freneau continued to participate in a series of newspaper and pamphlet wars throughout the 1790s, his decision to retire to his country estate in Monmouth, New Jersey, showed a desire to remain no longer in the center of such conflicts. As he explained to Madison: “I desire to pass the remainder of my days on a couple hundred acres of sandy patrimony.” However, his achievements in the press during the formation of the early republic were evident as Jefferson summed up the accomplishments of poet’s contribution to and editorship of the *National Gazette*. When pressured by Washington to withdraw Freneau’s appointment, Jefferson responded, “I will not do it . . . His paper has saved our constitution which was galloping fast into monarchy.”⁴⁵

Both the poetry and occasional prose of Francis Hopkinson and Philip Freneau played a substantial role in reflecting, and, at times, molding the political ideologies of the new republic. Initially, both poets expressed their different opinions concerning the direction of their own state constitutions. Hopkinson, a conservative, challenged the original Pennsylvania constitution, which was dominated by a single legislative branch. Freneau, a liberal, disagreed with the creation of a new constitution because he believed that the new legislative branch

⁴⁴“To the President of United States,” found in “The Probationary Odes” published in the *National Gazette*, 5 June 1793. Washington’s explosion in the cabinet meeting reported in Lipscomb, *Writings of Jefferson*, 1: 254.

⁴⁵Information on the fate of the *National Gazette* and the epidemic from Leary, *That Rascal Freneau*, 240, 245; Freneau’s plans for retirement also in *ibid.*, 247. Jefferson’s defense of Freneau to Washington from Lipscomb, *Writings of Jefferson*, 1: 165.

represented the ideals of the mercantile elite. Together, their battles in the press reflected a nation whose people were not united concerning the political direction of the new republic.

While Freneau escaped the paper wars preferring the safety of the sea, Hopkinson used his skill as a writer to persuade the American people to accept the new federal constitution. His immensely popular “New Roof” offered a very cogent argument supporting his federalist views. Perhaps the effectiveness of the “New Roof” lay in the allegorical form, which allowed the imaginative and creative writer to explain complex ideas and issues in very simplistic prose. Hopkinson, on the other hand, celebrated the ratification of the constitution in verse, thus returning to the artistic vehicle in which he was most skilled. Sadly, Hopkinson died in his mid fifties, thus ending a very short but productive career as a political poet.

In the early 1790s Freneau defended the rights of the common man in his powerful and effective anti-federalist poetry. His persuasive arguments, stressing democratic ideals of liberty and freedom, helped unite a strong republican faction which before had been poorly organized and ineffective. This involved some bold and daring attacks against such prominent Federalists as Hamilton and Washington. Although the contributions of both Hopkinson and Freneau have largely been unacknowledged in the classrooms and monographs of recent historians, their effect on the political and revolutionary landscape was both essential and indisputable.

CONCLUSION

While Bernard Bailyn was certainly correct in asserting that the American Revolution was a war of words, ignoring or overlooking the works of Francis Hopkinson and Philip Freneau misses a very important opportunity. This is particularly true if one researches the power of words as a vehicle for influencing the ideology of the colonists during the American Revolution. Unlike Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson, Hopkinson and Freneau primarily focused their talents on poetry as the literary vehicle for influencing the minds and hearts of the American public. Poetry offered many elements absent from prose, making it more accessible to a wider audience, thus increasing its range of influence.

One advantage was that poetry, with its emphasis on rhyme and meter, was easier to memorize and recite than prose. Furthermore, the same elements made the pieces pleasing to the ear when read aloud. In addition to being read, the pieces of Hopkinson and Freneau were memorized and recited during the American Revolution. This allowed the compositions to reach audiences who could not read or could not read well. Therefore, using poetry instead of prose allowed the poetry and its patriotic message to reach a more intellectually diverse audience than ordinary writing.

Another advantage of using poetry instead of prose was that the compositions could easily be turned into song. Many of Hopkinson's poems, such as "Battle of the Kegs" and "A Camp Ballad," were set to music. "Battle of the Kegs" became one of the

most popular songs of the revolution and was sung by the soldiers on the battlefields.¹ Setting poems to music, regardless of their literary finish, added another dimension to the compositions which appealed to the emotions of the patriots. While the power, popularity, and effectiveness of such influential tracts as Thomas Paine's Common Sense are not here challenged or disputed, one should not ignore the study of revolutionary poetry and songs, which also had a profound influence on colonial society.

Although a gifted composer in his own right, Hopkinson often used popular melodies, instead of his own compositions, when setting his poems to music. One such example was his ambitious oratorio, "Temple of Minerva." Recent scholarly research focusing on the oratorio challenged Hopkinson's title as the First American Composer, because he borrowed most of the music for the composition from popular European and American melodies.² However, the setting of his lyrics to popular melodies made his composition a more effective vehicle of propaganda. This method allowed audiences and even those unable to attend the performance to connect the words with the well-known melodies. Consequently, Gillian Anderson's dismissal of Hopkinson as a composer because of this one work was somewhat presumptive, especially in lieu of the numerous compositions already credited to this multi-faceted patriot.

One of the best examples of Hopkinson's musical abilities was his patriotic composition "Washington's March," which was very popular during the Revolution. Bands played the tune in the battlefields and in parades during the war. "Washington's

¹Hastings, Francis Hopkinson, 295. For an excellent synthesis on colonial music see Irving Lowens, Music and Musicians of in Early America (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1964).

²The Freeman's Journal, 19 December 1781, 3. For recent scholarly research discrediting Hopkinson's musical significance see Anderson, Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society, 166, 173; for Hopkinson's musical contributions see Sonneck, First American Composer.

March” remained a popular song after the Revolution as indicated in George Washington Parke Custis’ collection of memoirs:

The audience applauded at the entrance of the president. ‘Washington’s March’ was called for by the deafening din of a hundred voices at once, and upon its being played, three hearty cheers would rock the building to its base. ³

The description reflected the tremendous mass appeal which the piece enjoyed. ⁴ The march was not only a source of inspiration for soldiers during the revolution, but also became a reminder of America’s triumph after the war was over. While the march’s popularity diminished after Washington’s presidency, it remained an important example of Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary patriotism. The popularity of the composition testified to the power of music as a vehicle for propaganda. Therefore, the ability to incorporate poetry into music constituted a very potent combination at influencing the minds of American colonists.

In 1793 Philip Freneau, whose musical abilities were limited at best, set one of his most celebrated poems to music, which increased the popularity of the piece. His “God Save the Rights of Man” or “Ode----`a la Liberte,” inspired by Paine’s popular *Rights of Man*, became the anthem of American Republicans. Set to a familiar tune, Republicans throughout America sang “Ode----`a la Liberte” and adopted the anthem as their national hymn. Combining a patriotic poem with the melody of a popular song also proved to be a very effective mixture for Freneau. The following year the citizens of Monmouth sang

³Memoir reflecting on audience reaction to Hopkinson’s “Washington’s March” from Sonneck, First American Composer, 95. For an interesting monograph on colonial concert life see Sonneck, Early Concert Life in Colonial America (1731-1800) (Limpsic: Brietkopft and Hartell, 1907).

⁴Description of crowds reaction to “Washington’s March” from Sonneck, First American Composer, 95.

the piece at Middletown, New Jersey, on the Fourth of July, even during a period when Freneau endured much hostility for his outspoken attacks on Washington's and Hamilton's Federalist agendas.⁵ Therefore the approval of the song, and its ability to promote public spirit, withstood the controversy surrounding its author. The process of setting poems to music not only increased the popularity of a composition, but also allowed the piece to become a more powerful instrument of propaganda and patriotism.

Poetry without music also lent itself to depicting events in a highly emotional manner which proved to be very successful for Philip Freneau. His composition, "The British Prison Ship," was perhaps one of the greatest indictments of England written during the Revolution. Recalling the details of his capture and imprisonment in vivid, emotionally charged verse, Freneau inflamed a nation. Through poetry he was able "to arouse the faltering patriots to every last ounce of their energy, to incite them to every last bit of their feeling,(and) to instill in them his own vast hatred so they might fight with utmost abandon as they had never fought before."⁶ "The British Prison Ship's" gothic realism proved that serious, emotional poetry could also influence colonists against the actions of the British.

Not only were the poems of both writers important during the time in which they were written, but the compositions also offer an excellent window of opportunity for historians to develop a better understanding of the revolutionary era. When looking at this war of words one needs to apprehend the entire story. Therefore, focusing only on

⁵Information on popularity of Freneau's "God Save the Rights of Man" and reaction of Monmouth citizens from Axelrod, Champion of Democracy, 258, 274 and Leary, That Rascal Freneau, 234, 253.

⁶For colonial reaction to "British Prison Ship" see Leary. That Rascal Freneau, 84; quotation from Axelrod, Champion of Democracy, 112.

prose, while ignoring verse, leaves the historian with only part of the narrative. However, including Hopkinson's whimsical verse and Freneau's invective filled rhetoric one can sharpen the focus and develop a clearer understanding of the period.

Revolutionary poetry not only benefits scholars and historians, but also has tremendous potential as an instructional tool for secondary teachers. In fact, noted earlier in chapter one, Francis Hopkinson's "A Pretty Story" was revived shortly before the Civil War to try to teach school children the importance of national unity. The didactic nature of Hopkinson's allegories lends itself to teaching children. Also, Freneau's fiery language could help secondary students understand the extreme hatred which many of the colonists felt towards Britain. With the movement in education towards developing a multidisciplinary curriculum, using revolutionary poetry offers an excellent opportunity for secondary teachers.

The poetry of Francis Hopkinson and Philip Freneau played a substantial role in influencing the republican ideology and the revolutionary spirit of the American colonists during an extremely volatile period in the history of the United States. Jefferson believed the poetry of Freneau helped save the American Constitution, while military historian Don Higginbotham described Hopkinson as the "most skillful war satirist (next to Thomas Paine) on the American side."⁷ The omission of their work in recent scholarly studies and curricula across the country is an oversight that should be corrected. Perhaps if anything, this thesis tried to re-examine and give due credit to these two "unacknowledged legislators,"⁸ who used their talent, patriotism, and creativity to create

⁷Leary, That Rascal Freneau, 233. Quotation from Higginbotham, War of American Independence, 261.

⁸Shelley, "A Defense of Poetry," 22: 259.

words of rhyme and rhythm which played such a profound part in creating a nation during the American Revolution.

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