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Dean
PHILIP FRENEAU
HIS RELATION TO THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT

BY
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INTRODUCTION

The slow working of time has reversed many a verdict once rendered against a reputation, literary or otherwise, relegating to a minor place or even to oblivion many a personage famous in his own day, raising many another to a position of respect, even of esteem.

Elizabeth Tudor lavishly praised by her subjects as "good Queen Bess" has of late been depicted in her true character as a vain, selfish, dissolute hypocrite. The high intellectual gifts and attainments long credited to her by historians have been called into question by such recent studies as *The Monstrous Regiment* by Christopher Hollis.

On the other hand history abounds in examples such as those of Socrates, Columbus, Pasteur, and Father Damien—men who met with opposition and neglect in their lifetime, only to be accorded increasing honor as years go by.

In this latter category seems to be the place of Philip Freneau whose noisy career as a political satirist and journalist, together with his title "Poet of the Revolution," has long obscured other claims to recognition. Various reasons—the bitterness of the political struggles in which he engaged, the lack of discerning literary criticism in America in his day, the obscurity into which he had fallen in the last years of his life—may be adduced for the scant notice accorded him by the professional critics for decades following his death in December, 1832. True it is that there were always some critics of insight as well as loyal friends who raised their voices in protest
regarding the indifference with which he was treated by literary scholars.

Late in the nineties and at the beginning of the present century interest in Freneau's non-political verse was re-awakened, with the result that now a considerable body of writing favorable to him is to be found. Instead of the epithets "that rascally Freneau,"¹ "a mere incendiary,"² and "a despicable tool"³ hurled at him during his lifetime, Freneau is called not only "Poet of the Revolution"⁴ but also "America's First Poet"⁵ and "The Father of American Poetry."⁶

Writing more than forty years ago, Professor Tyler would class Freneau "with Cowper, Burns, Wordsworth, and their mighty comrades."⁷ Within the past ten years Mr. Dickinson has deemed the poet "a precursor of the romanticists on both sides of the Atlantic" and "a herald of romanticism in both England and America."⁹

Aside from the divergency of the views expressed by Freneau's contemporaries and those held by later critics, a growing regard

2. Fred Lewis Pattee, The Poems of Philip Freneau, lxi.
3. Ibid.
9. Ibid. 239.
for the author as an artist in his own right leads to some questions regarding his relation to the romantic movement.

What elements of romanticism are manifested in the writings of Freneau? Is he more than a transitional figure of the latter eighteenth century? Was his influence a shaping force in the romantic movement either in England or in America? Does the role of "precursor" assigned him in any sense include some measure of leadership?

A study of such questions requires some survey of Freneau's long and varied career as well as a review of the eighteenth century transitional group. A comparison of his poetry with that of the major romanticists needs to be made in order to ascertain the extent of resemblance that they may contain. From such findings one may presume to make some statements regarding the relation of Freneau to the romantic movement.

In the preparation of this study the chief primary source used was a three-volume edition of the poems of Freneau prepared for the Princeton Historical Association by Fred Lewis Pattee and covering a publication period of 1902-1907. A single-volume edition of selections by Harry Hayden Clark, with a preface by the editor, published in 1929, was also used.

A fire at Mount Pleasant, the home of the poet, in 1815 destroyed a large collection of papers, manuscript poems, letters, and books, thereby closing invaluable approaches to the study of Freneau. The painstaking research of Mr. Pattee has unearthed most of the remaining primary evidence, and this firsthand information he has presented in
the work already mentioned. He has included also a study of Mr. H. V. Paltsits, a bibliography of the separate and collected works of the poet.

Mr. Clark has made further studies of firsthand reference material, the results of which he published in 1923. Miss Austin's biography of Philip Freneau, published in 1901, edited by Helen Kearney Vreeland, great-granddaughter of the poet, contains several extracts from firsthand source material.

Various other standard works of reference and articles which were used are listed in the bibliography.
CHAPTER I
THE MAN AND HIS TIMES

Viewing Freneau's period, Paul Elmer More has written that "Before the time" might be considered a text for the life of Freneau. Mr. Dickinson asserts that the poet appeared under circumstances "unpropitious for the development of his genius."

The outward events show Freneau in a bewildering variety of occupations, apparently successful in their execution, if not in financial returns. During the eighty years of his life (1752-1832) Freneau was in turn teacher, pamphleteer, poet, sea-captain, editor, journalist, government employee, essayist, and farmer of an extensive estate, ever busy with his pen, the unceasing champion of freedom and democracy.

Freneau was born in New York in 1752, the son of a prosperous wine-merchant of French-Huguenot descent. He was educated in New York until he was thirteen, and after that in New Jersey, to which the family had moved during his boyhood. After four years at Princeton, he was graduated in 1771, at the age of nineteen. Among his classmates were James Madison and Hugh Brackenridge, the latter reading at the commencement exercises an ode, The Rising Glory of America, which he and Freneau had composed.

After graduation Freneau taught school for a short time and may have made some studies in the ministry and in law. Then in 1775, when the long strained relations between the British Crown and the American colonies were about to reach the breaking point, Freneau made a name for himself by publishing in New York a series of fiery pamphlets and satires, the first of his notable services to the American cause in writing. 4

For some reason, never fully ascertained by his biographers, Freneau suddenly abandoned his pamphleteering and turned first sailor, then later sea-captain. For three years he lived in Santa Cruz in the West Indies. During that time he engaged in frequent voyages for his host, Captain Hanson, gaining that practical knowledge of nautical matters which he used to advantage in his sea poems. The years at Santa Cruz are noteworthy also for the production of some of Freneau's genuinely lyrical and artistic poetry.

He was back in the United States in 1778, soon to enter upon a course of writing, editing, and following the sea. In the latter occupation he at one time suffered capture and imprisonment by the British, an experience commemorated in The Prison Ship.

His government clerkship and the publication of the "National Gazette," which he published in Philadelphia from 1791 to 1793, were climaxed by his disastrous affair with Citizen Genêt and the ignominy heaped upon him by the Federalists. The details of this matter and the

result upon Freneau's career will be discussed somewhat later in this chapter.

Some five years more of editing were attempted before Freneau retired in 1798 to Mount Pleasant, his New Jersey home, where he spent the rest of his life "in retirement and increasing obscurity, writing letters, farming, spending much of his time in difficult circumstances," at times still going to sea.

The War of 1812 occasioned some more of his verse, a sixth edition of which he was planning when he died in 1832.

So bare an outline omits many aspects under which Freneau's powers unfolded and were exercised. It is not unimportant that the poet grew to manhood in an atmosphere of books, music, and association with persons of intellectual tastes, that the Freneau family had the means and leisure to enjoy whatever culture and urbanity the colonies then afforded. The New York home, where the boy Freneau spent the first ten years of his life, was "one of comfort, even refinement." with its "large and well selected library, the pride of its owner," advantages likewise in evidence at Mount Pleasant, the family estate in New Jersey.

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7. Ibid.
The natural beauty of Mount Pleasant, where young Freneau spent his vacations, had an influence on the boy noted by his biographer, Mary S. Austin. His love for the sea, his keen, sympathetic observation of nature, his familiarity with the flora and fauna of this country, all had their beginnings in the New Jersey region.

In a period of little popular education Freneau was fortunate to have been tutored in a New York boarding school, given three years' instruction at the Penolopen Latin School, and to have attended Princeton with its well planned courses in the classics, modern languages, science, and history, under the able management of President John Witherspoon.

Other influences at Princeton made college days important for Freneau. His life-long friendship with Madison and Brackenridge began there. With the latter he dreamed of a literary career. With both of them and other companions he carried on a literary war in behalf of the Whig Society against its rival, the Cliosophic Society with its Tory loyalties, even at that early date wedding poetry and politics, foreshadowing "his hatred of English and American Tories. . .his never failing theme down to his death in 1832." 

It must be borne in mind that the period of Freneau's boyhood and young manhood was an era of common sense, of practical affairs for

the two million colonists. Although the Puritan had turned Yankee, the Yankee had not yet grown lyrical. Widespread printing took the form of pamphlets rather than of books. There were twenty-five newspapers in America in 1771; the magazines, however, showed but slight literary trend and were short-lived. Poetry coming chiefly from college circles, imitative of English models, was struggling toward an artistic standard, when the Revolutionary War and the preceding period of dissension turned all minds and all talents to that contest between America and England.

Thus from his college days onward for nearly a quarter of a century the services of his country demanded that Freneau give his pen first to the satires and songs of the War, and after that to the prose and verse whereby he believed he best aided democracy and safeguarded freedom in the political issues arising in the youthful nation.

Therefore, the three years (1775-1778) that Freneau spent in the West Indies constitute the only interval in more than twenty years in which the storms of political rancor and bitter opposition did not constantly blow about his head, giving rise to the opinion that this was an interlude fruitful in artistic expression, by which the poet may be favorably judged.13

Besides the tendency for all American writing to be merely practical in the Revolutionary and early national eras, thereby

rewarding scantily in fortune and reputation purely artistic writers, political satire had descended from the dignified or humorous manner of Pope, Butler, and Churchill to the bitterness and scurrility of Cobbett, Carey, and Cliffton, reflecting the intense feeling characteristic of that era of scathing attack.

These unfortunate conditions affected Freneau in two ways. First, of his twelve hundred pages of published verse, there are many productions blighted by the practical and satiric trends, poems that in their entirety do not exemplify Freneau's true artistic expression, although they contain indications of his poetic power.

Next, these conditions explain the catastrophe Freneau suffered in his "National Gazette." He was French translator in the Department of State under Jefferson. At the same time he edited in Philadelphia the "National Gazette," in which he attacked Hamilton, Adams, and the Federalists, with side thrusts at Washington. The paper of the Federalists, the "United States Gazette," edited by John Fenno, answered in kind.

Freneau had warmly championed Citizen Genêt, and when feeling turned against the latter, charges were made that Jefferson subsidized Freneau's paper. Public opinion against the editor was exceedingly bitter, causing the collapse of the paper that Jefferson said had "saved our constitution, which was fast galloping into monarchy."

bringing to Freneau financial ruin, a host of enemies, and a reputa-
tion as "a barking cur" and "that rascally Freneau."

Mr. Pattee has considered Freneau's Celtic temperament both
an advantage and a drawback to his writing.16 Easily exalted, easily
depressed, too sensitive to criticism, the storm and stress of the
times deflected the true course of his ability and practically
terminated his literary career thirty years before his death.

CHAPTER II

THE BRITISH BACKGROUND

It has been already stated that the American poetry of Freneau's day followed English models.\(^1\) In view of this situation and of Professor Elton's insistence on the debt of romanticism to the first three quarters of the eighteenth century\(^2\) a glance at Freneau's English predecessors and contemporaries is necessary.

Investigations have shown that Freneau's reading lay in three fields: the Latin classics—Virgil, Ovid, Horace, Lucretius, and Seneca among others; the English masters—Shakespeare, Milton, Addison, and Pope; the transitional groups—chiefly Thomson, Collins, Young, Gray, and Goldsmith.\(^3\)

Pope died in 1774, the last master of a fettered poetry,\(^4\)

\[\ldots\] intellectual rather than emotional, dealing with philosophical niceties rather than the common thoughts of man...nearly destitute of tenderness and pathos...marked by a total indifference to nature, and dominated by a brilliant artificial style.\(^5\)

This artificial style showed itself in an almost exclusive use of the heroic couplet and in a conventional diction wherein

\(^{1}\) Dickinson, \textit{op. cit.}, 180, 225-227.
\(^{3}\) Clark, \textit{op. cit.}, 5 et seq.
\(^{5}\) Ibid., 8.
mythological terms and excessive personifications abounded. Strong impassioned feelings no longer inspired an expression glowing with ardour and freshness, a natural style unrestrained by art. In their stead the dictum that "Nature and Homer" are "the same" had taught men to secure their ideas from books, not from a direct observation of nature, and to convey these ideas in a language circumscribed by bookish rules, not in an expression kindled by imagination and spontaneous enthusiasm.

"First follow Nature" was the shibboleth of the period, but not nature as we understand it today—an enjoyment of the various changes of seasons, a delight in scenery, a response to the beauty of field and stream and wood, and the experiencing in these various aspects the "inspiring and mysterious influence" of nature with her lessons of moderation in joy and resignation in grief.

Nature in Pope's day meant, on the contrary, the study of human nature—the life and manners of polite society, "methodizing" imagination and fancy to the dictates of good sense and judgment, and avoiding the "folly" of enthusiasm or of emotion unregulated by artificial restraints. Even as a setting for a man's action, nature was regarded with abstract formalism.

7. Ibid., 69.
How far all this conventionality, poetic diction, and restraint prevailed may be judged when Pope with "his eye on the object" in the English scene wrote:

See Pan with flocks, with fruits Pomona crown'd  
Here blushing Flora paints the enamel'd ground,  
Here Ceres' gifts in waving prospect stand,  
And nodding tempt the joyful reaper's hand;  
Rich Industry sits smiling on the plains  
And peace and plenty tell a Stuart reigns.¹⁰

Poets could not, however, wholly ignore the innate power of nature to elevate the mind and heart. Dryden, yielding to her force of suggestion, strikingly illustrates an abstract truth in these lines:

Dim as the borrowed beams of moon and stars  
To lonely, weary, wandering travelers  
is reason to the soul.¹¹

Most of the nature verse of the school of Dryden and Pope remained, nevertheless, merely trivial or openly didactic, such as the passage below which points out rules of prosody:

Soft is the strain when zephyr gently blows,  
And the smooth stream in smoother numbers flows,  
And when loud surges lash the sounding shore,  
The hoarse, rough verse should like the current roar.¹²

Chiefly didactic in aim, artificial in style, indifferent to nature, this school of neo-Classicism held supremacy till the middle of the eighteenth century, although its tenets did not pass unchallenged, especially in its later days.

¹⁰. Pope, Windsor Forest, 36-41.  
Meantime a reactionary movement long felt in English prose had begun to manifest itself in poetry. Not a conscious revolt, its growth was gradual and for a long time unobserved.

The movement has been called naturalism, and certain aspects give it a claim to that name. It has but slight connection with philosophic naturalism that found expression in the works of Shaftesbury somewhat as follows:

God and Nature are one; and Man is instinctively good, his cardinal virtue being love of humanity, his true religion the love of nature. . . lead mankind to the return to the natural and they will find happiness.  

The "natural religion" with its emphasis upon the beauty of external nature helped to exalt sensations of nature into something half-mystical for poets who had neither interest in these philosophical theories nor understanding of them.  

The movement has a claim to be called naturalism in the sense that it was an instinctive grasping for something fresh and spontaneous, for the enthusiasm and the emotion of the natural style unrestrained by art, which has been mentioned before.

Its great right to be called naturalism is in the "return to nature," shown by several of these transitional poets in their awareness to the grandeur and beauty of the world that lay around them. In this meaning, a "return to nature," an expression that is emphasized by the

romanticists, there was a direct approach to the external world of
nature, a sensitiveness to the sights and sounds, not in Homer, not in
any of the ancients, but in the landscape near at hand. The expression
of sensitiveness was to develop gradually for nearly a century before
culminating in Wordsworth.

This sensitiveness to the attractions of the varied aspects of
nature first appeared in a marked degree in The Seasons by James Thomson,
published in 1730. Judged by present standards, this first long poem
in English written primarily to describe nature may be justly criticized
for its florid, diffuse style, slight emotional quality, and cumbersome
moral reflections. In the second quarter of the eighteenth century,
however, there was a novel appeal in Thomson's use of blank verse in
place of the couplet and in his detailed delineation of landscapes.

Thomson's attitude toward nature was largely objective. He
did not find in it "a life instinct with emotions akin and responsive
to his own," nor did man play more than an incidental part in the
variety of scenes the poet depicted. Nevertheless, Thomson showed an
accuracy of observation and a true, if restrained, enjoyment, of scenic
charms far beyond the poets immediately preceding him. Limited in his
imagination, Thomson was often content with the merely conventional

15. Ibid., 357.
16. A. Hamilton Thompson, "Thomson and Natural Description,"
Cambridge History of English Literature, X, 113.
17. Ibid., 110.
18. Ibid., 109
phrase. On the other hand, his direct observation at times lifted his expression above the stilted term. Thus amid his neo-Classic diction of "plumy nations," "copious fry," and "gelid founts," Thomson attains a happier touch as well as a basis of reality in such flashes as, "the humid hay perfumed with flow'rs," "the yellow mist Far-smoking o'er the plain," and "a burst of rain from the far horizon."

Something of the poet's direct approach to nature, spontaneity of treatment, and "native English simplicity" may be seen in the following lines, a direct contrast to the passage above quoted from Pope's Windsor Forest, although both extracts deal with the same subject—a country in harvest time. Thomson has:

-while broad and brown below
Extensive harvests hang their heavy head.
Rich, silent, deep they stand: for not a gale
Rolls its light billows o'er the bending plain.19

Other naturalistic trends are also evident in his work—namely, touches of the subjective note20 and an interest in the Elizabethan masters. The influence of Milton may be noted at several points in The Seasons.21 Thomson's concern with Spenser was, however, not consciously reactionary. His Castle of Indolence, considered the best of a host of contemporaneous imitations of the Faerie Queene,22 he regarded

21. Thompson, op. cit., 107 et seq.
22. Phelps, op. cit., 74.
as only a humorous attempt on his part to produce some verse in a prevailing mode.

Consequently, it may be said that Thomson's importance was in his centering attention on a field of verse long ignored by the neo-Classic poets, in arousing a consciousness of the power of nature to give pleasure, in showing at rare intervals glimpses of its inspiring influences, in basing nature descriptions upon reality, and in breaking away from the couplet.

His influence in this last respect may be judged better by recalling that in over fifty years (1672-1726) from Milton to Thomson only one writer, John Philips, had used blank verse in other than dramatic poetry, and that in the quarter century following The Seasons in some nine or ten editions of poetic collections not one serious poem may be found in the couplet.

Following Thomson in the use of blank verse was Edward Young in his Night Thoughts, published in 1742. This reaction in form the author vigorously defended against the opposition of Dr. Johnson and Goldsmith. He showed other leanings toward the naturalism out of which romanticism developed in turning to the authors of the past for

25. Edmund A. Gosse, Eighteenth Century Literature, 207.
inspiration—in his case, Milton—and his "graveyard" joy in melancholy, "the crude ore of Romanticism." Here his connection with naturalism ends, for the Night Thoughts was avowedly written with the didactic aim to teach "the need of faith in heavenly immortality as the only adequate satisfaction of the spiritual elements of Man."

Contemporaries of Thomson and Young showed various trends in naturalism, often with so little artistry as to draw upon them the deserved contempt of Dr. Johnson and his associates. There arose a group of "landscape" poets: among others, John Dyer with his Grongar Hill and The Fleece; Richard Jago, who followed with his Edge-Hill; and William Somerville, author of The Chase. The melancholy cultivated by such writers as Young, Mark Akenside, and the Wartons, earning for them the name of the "graveyard" school, indicated a searching for a sense of mystery long absent from English poetry. The turn to medieval themes and folk-lore by Collins, Gray, and Macpherson was another expression of the shift from neo-Classic standards.

Prior even to the interest in the medieval there was among these transitional poets a reversion to the English masters, especially to Spenser and Milton. As previously stated, Thomson was among the many to imitate Spenser's form and archaic speech—an

27. Ibid., 100
imitation for the most part in a burlesque rather than in a serious spirit. Nevertheless, Thomson's Castle of Indolence had the romantic iridescence, the 'atmosphere' which is lacking in the sharp contours of Augustan verse... (and) touches of an imagination reflecting something of Spenser's power in colour and pictorial art, while William Shenstone's The Schoolmistress possess 'the true idyllic touch,' genuine humour, and 'a certain tenderness' that presage the coming romanticism.

Not only Thomson and Young drew inspiration from Milton. The Warton brothers, Collins, Mason, and Gray also acknowledge him as master. In the case of the Wartons their imitation was so slavish that their poetry perhaps deserves the slights and neglect it has received. The poetic gifts of Collins and Gray, however, were enhanced by their study of Milton, especially by their attention to his minor poems.

More than passing mention should be given to the Wartons. Whatever they lacked in lyric contributions to naturalism they compensated for by their services in the field of prose. The first conscious naturalists, avowed supporters of the movement in all its phases, they gave impetus to romantic trends, Joseph especially with his essay on Pope, published in 1756 and again in 1782, wherein he openly attacked the poetry of the neo-Classic school and set up the standards later accepted as those of the romantic movement.


30. Ibid.
The younger Warton brother, Thomas, likewise exerted his influence in favour of the growing naturalism by his Observations on the Faerie Queene, his History of English Poetry, and his critical edition of Milton's poems, to which all subsequent editors have been indebted.

William Collins, a friend of the Wartons, may, on the other hand, be considered as both classical and romantic. His verse has the finish and grace of the Greek form; his heart was all with aims and aspirations of the Wartons. It has been said that his poetic deficiencies were typical of the eighteenth century poetaster, his achievements those of a master in any age. Among the latter may be listed the flute-like music of his verse, exquisite imagery, and delicate poetic suggestion. In the small bulk of his work—some fifteen hundred lines—are to be found the romantic qualities of pensive melancholy, love of the mysterious, feeling for the common man, and freedom of verse forms.

Although influenced to some extent by Thomson in his treatment of nature, Collins rises above the earlier poet by conveying a subtle suggestion of the atmosphere of a scene, such as in his Ode To Evening, as in the lines:

31. Phelps, op. cit., 95.
But when chill blustering winds or driving rain
Forbid my willing feet, be mine the hut
That from the mountain’s side
Views wilds, and swelling floods,

And hamlets brown, and dim-discovered spires,
And hears their simple bell, and marks o’er all
Thy dewy fingers draw
The gradual dusky veil.

Here we find that Collins sustains a fluent melody, choice
diction, delicately sketched pictures, and a finely wrought effect
of the feelings experienced in such scenes.

In Thomas Gray, the most important English poet between Pope
and Wordsworth, are found not only the classic perfection of form
that characterized the work of Collins combined with various natural-
istic elements but also a gradual, yet unmistakable, change from the
neo-Classic to the romantic spirit. The Elegy, published in 1751,
marks the transition point in Gray’s work. Hitherto he had been
classed as a rather superior poet of the school of Dryden and Pope.
The Elegy, regarded as an outstanding contribution to "graveyard"
poetry, was not especially considered as a break with tradition, prob-
ably because its romantic "love of nature," depth of sentiment, and
sympathy for the common man33 were balanced by the neo-Classic per-
sonifications, smoothness of verse, and didactic strain. The Pindaric
Odes of 1757, however, both annoyed and startled Gray’s contemporaries.
The originality of structure, bold concept, and majestic spirit of
the poems showed that the poet had cast aside the shackles of an

artificial taste and conventional versification. Criticized then as well as later for their "obscurity, overflown magnificence, . . . excess of allegorical structure, and the too manifest metrical artifice," the Odes were, nevertheless, successful, and established Gray's reputation as the leading poet of the day. With the Norse poems of the 1760's Gray had achieved true romanticism in the medieval theme, aura of the supernatural, Gothic overtones, and genuine lyricism of his work.

Meantime Dr. Johnson scarcely aware that he was opposing a new movement lashed the naturalists for their themes, their attitudes, and above all for their verse forms. In the last he was supported by Goldsmith, who in spite of some naturalistic notes was in the matter of form thoroughly of the neo-Classic persuasion.

Consequently, while Freneau was yet at Princeton, naturalism had progressed to the point where it had engaged a poet of Gray's stamp, who in technique and attitude was a true, if restrained, exponent of romantic aspirations.

In the quarter of a century following Gray's death (1771) English poetry showed slight, if any, advance in romantic trends. George Crabbe, William Cowper, and Robert Burns--the immediate predecessors of Wordsworth and Coleridge--appeared in the 1780's. Of these three only Burns produced any work between 1786 and the publication of the Lyrical Ballads. Chronologically William Blake belongs

34. Gosse, op. cit., 241.
with this group. He is, however, "a poet... for whom time and
habit and the conventions of an age do not exist;... on whom his
epoch with its tastes and limitations has left no mark whatever,"35
who influenced his contemporaries as little as they influenced him.36
Therefore, for the present purpose he need be considered no further.

It is perhaps extreme to dismiss Cowper, Crabbe, and Burns
by denying them any degree of romanticism, as one literary historian
has done.37 Their break with tradition lay in their sincere and
natural expression of interest in the familiar, the lowly, and the
commonplace. Their originality is due to their individualism and
their self-restriction to a definite field. As for form, Crabbe
went back to Dryden for his precise prosody, and Burns sought his
metrical patterns in his Scottish predecessors. Furthermore, before
they had appeared, Freneau had already produced a considerable body
of poetry, anticipating Crabbe's genre sketches38 and Burns's ardent
championship of the common man. Consequently, we need give no further
consideration to the romantic trends of these writers.

Before considering the relation of Freneau's poetry to the
romantic movement, as will be done in the following chapters, it is

35. Edmund Gosse, Modern English Literature, 270-271.
Britannica, 14th ed., III, 696.
<table>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Freneau's Productions</th>
<th>Contemporary Literary Events</th>
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| 1768 | History of the Prophet Jonah  
Adventures of Simon Swaugum | Gray's Poems republished |
| 1770 | The Pyramids of Egypt  
The Monument of Phaon  
The Power of Fancy | Goldsmith's The Deserted Village  
Johnson's The Alarm  
Wordsworth born (died 1850) |
| 1771 | The Rising Glory of America | Death of Gray  
Scott born (died 1832) |
| 1772 | The Deserted Farm House  
The American Village | Goldsmith's She Stoops to Conquer  
Coleridge born (died 1834) |
| 1773 | | Johnson's The Patriot |
| 1774 | The Pictures of Columbus | Trumbull's M'Fingal—Cantos  
One and Two  
Johnson's Taxation No Tyranny |
| 1775 | Timothy Taurus  
Series of pamphlets | Paine's Common Sense, The Crisis |
| 1776 | The Beauties of Santa Cruz | Thomas Warton's Poems  
Campbell born (died 1844) |
| 1777 | | Cowper's Olney Hymns  
Johnson's English Poets: I-IV |
| 1779 | The House of Night  
The Dying Elm | Crabbe's The Library  
Johnson's English Poets: V-X  
Trumbull's M'Fingal—Cantos  
Three and Four |
| 1781 | The Vanity of Existence  
To the Memory of the Brave Americans | Cowper's Poems and Table Talk |
| 1782 | The Scandanavian War Song | Crabbe's The Village  
Blake's Poetical Sketches |
| 1783 | | Death of Johnson |
| 1784 | The Dying Indian | Cowper's The Task |
| 1785 | The Wild Honey Suckle | Burns's Poems, Kilmarnock Edition  
Dwight's Conquest of Canaan |
Burns's Poems, London Edition |
| 1787 | Death Song of a Cherokee Indian | |
1788 Poems, Second Edition
1789
1792 St. Catharine's
1793 Ode (on the occasion of the civic celebration for Genet in Philadelphia)
1794
1795 Poems, Third Edition
1796'
1797 The Book of Odes To a Caty-Did
1798
1800
1802
1805
1807
1808
1809 Poems, Fourth Edition
1810
1812
1813
1815 Poems, Fifth Edition

Byron born (died 1824)
Blake's Songs of Innocence
Shelley born (died 1822)
Cowper's To Mary
Wordsworth's Descriptive Sketches and Evening Walk
Blake's Songs of Experience
Keats born (died 1821)
Barlow's Hasty Pudding
Coleridge's Poems
Death of Burns
Poems by Coleridge, Lamb, and Lloyd
Lyrical Ballads by Wordsworth and Coleridge
Lyrical Ballads, second edition
Death of Cowper
Lyrical Ballads, third edition
Campbell's Hohenlinden
Scott's Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border
Scott's Lay of the Last Minstrel
Barlow's Columbiad
Byron's Hours of Idleness
Crabbe's The Parish Register
Scott's Marmion
Crabbe's The Borough
Scott's The Lady of the Lake
Byron's Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, I-II
Crabbe's Tales
Shelley's Queen Mab
necessary to compare the time of his productions with that of his contemporaries.

By referring to the accompanying table one may observe that by the time of Goldsmith's death in 1775, the young American had already written several thousand lines including *The Power of Fancy*, *The Pictures of Columbus*, and *To a Dying Elm*. Before Cowper had published his *Table Talk* and *Poems of 1782* and Crabbe had won fame with *The Village* in 1783, Freneau had written reams of lesser verses, the Santa Cruz poems, and his patriotic piece, *To the Memory of the Brave Americans*.

The same year (1786) that the famous Kilmarnock edition of Burns appeared, Francis Bailey of Philadelphia brought out the first edition of Freneau's collected poems. Two years later the same editor published a second collection of forty-nine additional productions. During these years Freneau was away at sea the greater part of the time, and exercised but slight jurisdiction over the work. The poems were printed for the most part without change from the various publications in which they had already appeared.39

Concerning this output Mr. Pattee writes:

This edition (1786) is the most spontaneous and poetic of the poet's work. In it we see Freneau before he has lost his early poetic dream... This and the 1788 edition contain by far the more valuable part of his poetic work.40


Freneau's third edition of his works, critically revised by himself appeared in 1795, three years before the *Lyrical Ballads* marked the culmination of the romantic movement. One must agree with Mr. Tucker that the revisions are not always improvements. This statement pertains also to his edition of 1809, containing no new material. His 1815 edition consisting exclusively of new material is distinguished only by his sea ballads.

Hence the study of Freneau's poetry should center around the first three editions with emphasis on the first two, a sufficient store for his best lyrical material. The edition of 1815 need not be ignored, but it should be borne in mind that by that date Wordsworth and Coleridge had twice enlarged the *Lyrical Ballads* and that Wordsworth was soon to end the best period of his work (1788-1818). By 1815 Scott had published all but one of his eight long poems; Byron was famous with his *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Shelley had written prose and verse, publishing his *Queen Mab* in 1813.

Scott and Crabbe died in 1832, the year of Freneau's death; Keats, Shelley, Byron were already dead. The creative force of romanticism had nearly spent itself. One may conclude, then, that in point of

42. Ibid., 183.
time this movement touched Freneau not at all. His best work ante-
dates, or is contemporaneous with, that of Cowper and Burns, an
important consideration in the study of his poetry for romantic prin-
ciples, qualities, and themes.
CHAPTER III

NATURE IN THE POETRY OF FRENÉAU

The poet in every man—that innate need to think searching thoughts and dream glorious dreams—has ever been stirred by the world of external nature. Inarticulate as vast myriads have remained in the presence of a smiling country-side, the graceful flight of a bird, or the majestic terror of a storm, nevertheless, so instinctively do all men respond to the impressions of nature that the poet who sings of these experiences is recognized as one who speaks the language of the human heart. What a poet has to say of nature and what she has said to him become, then, of primary importance in appraising a writer. This is the common ground on which man and poet meet; this is the balance in which man weighs whether or not poetic claims be wanting.

We turn, then, to Frenéau to determine what his poetry reveals regarding his attitude toward nature, to gauge his response to what always remains a powerful incentive to lyric achievement.

Frenéau wrote The Beauties of Santa Cruz in 1776, during his sojourn in the West Indies. The natural scene was such as to fire a poetic temperament. The islands are semi-volcanic in origin, the sharp, craggy shores broken here and there by excellent harbors with smooth sandy beaches. The surface rises abruptly, often attaining an altitude

over fifteen hundred feet. As one travels inland, the pebbly shores give place to stretches of plateau that are replaced by mountainous-like hills, where short rapid streams dash down to sea. Waving palms and venerable old gum trees are the homes of brilliantly plumaged birds that dart about among bright hued flowers. Fields of cotton with glossy green foliage and bursting white bolls, plantations of cane whose towering stalks are topped by feathery bloom present an ever-changing panorama with some planter's pretentious villa surrounded by its sprawling barns and servants' huts perched upon a hillside and some sleepy little port with box-like white buildings huddling near a sunny wharf.

The island as viewed from an approaching vessel is thus described by Freneau:

From the vast caverns of old ocean's bed,  
Fair Santa Cruz, arising, laves her waist,  
The threat'ning waters roar on every side,  
For every side by ocean, is embraced.  

The poetic imagination flashed back to the pre-historic formation of the island. With that idea the author blends a hint of mythological lore, as if Santa Cruz were some sea goddess emerging from the ocean. From this personification, suggesting beauty of sight and grace of motion, he hastens to present the ceaseless sound and movement of the water and the far-stretching expanse of the ocean. Hence, the scene is enhanced by the imagination of the poet transfiguring realism by his lyric treatment.

Freneau can picture a scene by setting forth concrete details, achieving a pleasing effect by sense appeals and smoothly flowing lines as in:

Cool, woodland streams from shaded clifts descend,
The dripping rock no want of moisture knows,
Supply'd by springs that on the skies depend,
That fountain feeding as the current flows. ³

Here there is created for us by the poet's imagination an atmosphere of leisurely enjoyment in the scene depicted. We feel the moist coolness of the breeze, see and hear the rustle of the leaves. We listen to the trickle of the falling water and to its steady flow in the bed of the stream. We catch the glint of light and shadow, gaze upward to the sky, then downward to the stream, which our eye follows out of sight.

In Santa Cruz there grows a giant species of the pineapple known as the jayama, often called the "prince of fruits." This term set Freneau's imagination working, for to him the plant "spread his crest," turning his "diadem in fiery blossoms drest" to "the parent sun," and "stands armed with swords from potent nature won" ⁴—all apt phrases to suggest the princely warrior, and all founded on a basis of reality.

Freneau was not free from some of the faults of his poetic forbears. He was many times guilty of such neo-Classicism as

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3. Ibid., 252.
4. Ibid., 257.
"stripling tree," "life's sober evening," and "clouds distended by the gale." His showed his artistry, on the other hand, in his "cotton shrubs with bursting knobs," the trees in the storm which "torn by the winds, flew piece-meal to the seas" and the ship whose "thousand sails...fluttered in the face of day." In these phrases marked by something of Arnold's "noble plainness," the pleasure of the reader arises from the recognition of a reality expressed in an original way.

Like Thomson in The Seasons, Freneau introduces people into his scenes from time to time. Like Thomson he occasionally sketches a tale of sentimental tone, such as that of Aurelia and Philander in The Beauties of Santa Cruz. Yet when Freneau brings to our notice the slaves of the Santa Cruz plantations, his earnestness in denouncing slavery convinces us that the negro is introduced not merely as a touch of local color, but as an indictment of the white man's greed, against which the beauty of the scenes depicted stand out in vivid contrast. This, however, is not unadulterated didacticism. Setting and theme are so balanced that it presages much of what

5. Ibid., 258.
6. Ibid., 265.
7. Ibid., 294.
8. Thompson, op. cit., 112-113.
10. Ibid., 262-264.
Wordsworth was to voice twenty-two years later in his grief of "What man has made of man." 11

Personification, always a challenge to the poet's artistry, had become, as we have seen, heavy and stale in the neo-Classic time. The transitional poets were often unable to wholly cast off this incubus, turning but too often to the easy expedient of triteness and mere capitalization to secure their personifications. In the following stanzas we may note Freneau's skill in this figure:

Such were the isles which happy Flaccus sung,
Where one tree blossoms while another bears,
Where spring forever gay and ever young,
Walks her gay round through her unwearied years. 12

The background is sketched with simple strokes, the contrast of the blossoming tree set against that of its fruit-laden neighbor. The pleasing figure of a young person with vigorous but unhurried step moves against this background. Eternal spring is no longer an abstraction, but something concrete, tangible, and real. Here the poetic imagination building upon the reality of his surroundings has resulted in true lyric expression.

The style of Gray is recalled and that of Bryant is fore­shadowed in the brief sketch of evening:

The drowsy pelican wings home his way.
The misty eve sits heavy on the sea. 13

13. Ibid., 267.
Alliteration, onomatopoeia, the alternation of open and closed vowels, and the use of the musical sound of "v" are all technical devices. Imagination has been set aglow by reality, and the result is a picture briefly sketched but charged with atmosphere. The cumbersome, tired flight of the bird seeking his nest, the approaching darkness with no sunset after-glow, the chill of the mist convey a subtle suggestion of the oppression of the fog that will grow with the increasing darkness. A tinge of loneliness and melancholy settles down upon reader as the mist settles upon the sea.

Another poem of Freneau's first period is The House of Night, written in 1779. The production may seem lurid and unreal, marked by "purple" passages. The luxuriant garden choked with weeds is highly probable in view of the tropic vegetation of the West Indies. Of such a neglected garden surrounding the house of Death the poet writes:

The poppy there companion to repose,
Displayed her blossoms that began to fall,
And here the purple amaranthus rose
With mint strong-scented for the funeral.14

Description of this type can be a mere catalog. The passage is raised above that status by such suggestive phrases as "companion to repose" and "mint... for the funeral." There should be noted
too that the personification befits the growth of each flower. The showy brilliance of the poppy is aptly suggested by the verb "displayed." The stately dignity of the amaranthus which grows on a tall slender stalk is conveyed by the verb "rose."

In another selection concerning the garden, contrast of the withered present with the fancied glowing past is combined with subtle personification in one of Freneau's richest descriptions:

The Primrose there, the violet darkly blue,
Daisies and fair Narcissus ceased to rise,
Gay spotted pinks their charming bloom withdrew,
And Polyanthus quenched its thousand dyes.15

As in the previous passage the aptness and vigor of the verbs are telling factors in conveying personification; the appeal of color and the suggestive adjectives are further forceful notes in securing the poetic effect.

Not all Freneau's description is ornate. In his long Santa Cruz poem are these lines describing the West Indian water plant, called the "Animal" by the natives:

Along the shore a wondrous flower is seen,
Where rocky ponds receive the surging wave,
Some drest in yellow, some arrayed in green,
Beneath the water their gay branches lave.

From the smooth rock its little branches rise,
The objects of thy view and that alone,
Feast on its beauties with thy ravish'd eyes,
But aim to touch it, and--the flower is gone.

15. Ibid., 215.
Nay, if thy shade but intercept the beam
That gilds their boughs beneath the briny lake,
Swift they retire, like a deluding dream,
And even a shadow for destruction take.

Warn'd by experience, seek thou not to gain
The magic plant thy curious hand invades;
Returning to the light, it mocks thy pain,
Deceives all grasp, and seeks its native shades.

Simplicity of diction, arrangement, and effect dominate these smoothly flowing lines. The sense appeals are subdued: the colors merely "green" and "yellow" unadorned by qualifications; the rock, "smooth"; the branches, "little"; the movement, quiet with "lave," "retire like a deluding dream," and the beam "gilding" the blossoms. Strength and contrast are secured by such words as "surging" and "ravished" and by the line,

But aim to touch it, and--the flower is gone.

Unconsciously one senses the disappointment that the loveliness of nature often has about it a fleeting quality, that its beauty vanishes even at the moment one enjoys it most. Hence, in these lines Freneau secures very simply, yet effectively, an atmosphere of quiet beauty and faint melancholy.

It is not only tropic beauty that Freneau pictures. The Rising Glory of America is one of Freneau's earliest poems. Written in collaboration with Hugh Brackenridge, his classmate at Princeton, the poem was printed in 1772 as "an Exercise delivered at the Public

16. Ibid., 261-262.
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16. Ibid., 261-262.
Commencement at Nassau Hall. For the first edition of his poems Freneau reprinted his own part with several changes. The following passage, however, is fairly close to the original and reads:

See old Laertes in his shepherd weeds
Far from his pompous throne and court august,
Digging the grateful soil, where round his rise,
Sons of the earth, the tall aspiring oaks,
Or orchards, boasting of more fertile boughs
Laden with apples red, sweet scented peach,
Pear, cherry, apricot, or spungy plumb.

There is, of course, Milton's influence in the first lines; but Freneau evinces originality and vigor in his phrase, "the grateful soil" and in his reference to the oaks as "aspiring" and as "sons of earth." In listing the fruits of the orchard as concrete details in his picture Freneau showed that he had already grasped the principle Wordsworth was to enunciate later--namely, the use of the near-at-hand as poetic material.

In his earlier poems, notably in *The Rising Glory* and *The American Village*, Freneau emphasized the American scene, lauding all the natural features, the flora, and the fauna of his native land. It must be conceded that much of this lacked the genuinely lyric note. Yet it indicated his early recognition of the romantic principle that everyday surroundings could set the poetic imagination

17. Ibid., 50.
18. Ibid., 49.
19. Ibid., 69.
aglow. It led, too, in time to giving to other of his nature poems their charm of unstudied originality.

Turning to the natural features in his immediate surrounding, Freneau's poetic genius invested them with the quality which Wordsworth indicates in his lines:

And 't is my faith that every flower
Enjoys the air it breathes.20

This idea of nature experiencing pain or pleasure akin to that felt by man found expression in Freneau's verses on The Dying Elm. The first stanza of the poem reads:

Sweet, lovely Elm, who here dost grow
Companion of my musing care,
Loi thy dejected branches die
Amidst this torrid air--
Smit by the sun or blasting moon
Like fainting flowers that die at noon.21

The sympathy expressed in the poem shows a tenderness of affection toward an individual tree. Imagination has its play not only in "dejected branches" and "torrid air," which are mildly hyperbolic, but especially in the "blasting moon" which conveys something of the preternatural, some malignant power. The personification of "fainting flowers" evokes our sympathy, while the entire last line,

Like fainting flowers that die at noon,

has in it glimmerings of Poe's great appeal, beauty dying untimely.

Further in the poem are the lines:

Forbear to die—this weeping eve
Shall shed her little drops on you,
Shall o'er thy sad disaster grieve
And wash thy wounds with pearly dew,
Shall pity you and pity me
And heal the languor of my tree.  

The apostrophe in this stanza carries with it an air of artless charm, for Freneau identifies himself with the tree as one would with a suffering child, whose pain we partly share and in whose recovery we are made happy.

This same idea of a personal joy and sorrow he expresses in his poem on a fallen oak. Of the leaves that fell each autumn he said,

Each spring again beheld them grow,
And we were pleased, and so were you.  

His sorrow at finding the tree gone he thus expresses:

Old Oak, I to your place return
Where late you stood, and viewing mourn,

For the great loss my heart sustained
When you declined. Long will I sigh,
That hour when you no more remained
To cheer the summer, passing by;
No longer blessed my eager view,
But like some dying friend withdrew.  

The associations which endeared the tree to Freneau he speaks of as if the oak could understand the sentiments he reveals in these lines:

22. Ibid., 46.
24. Ibid.
A prince among your towering race,
What more your vanished form endears
Is that your presence in this place
Had been at least one hundred years,
And men that long in dust have laid
When boys, beneath your shadow played.  

This sympathy with nature Freneau at times expressed in a
mildly humorous strain. Because he saw a kinship between man and
nature, he invested some simple occurrence in the natural sphere
with gentle irony. This quality appears in his lines To a Night
Fly in which he addresses the insect fluttering around a candle:

O Fly, I bid you have a care!
You do not heed the danger near;
This light to you a blazing star.

Ah me! you touch this little sun—
One circuit more and all is done.  

A bee, hovering on the edge of a glass, drank, fell into the
liquor, and was drowned. In the stanzas On a Honeybee Freneau used
this incident to remark:

This fluid never fails to please
And drown the grief of men and bees.  

He also observes:

Here bigger bees than you might sink
Even bees full six feet high.
Like Pharaoh, then you would be said
To perish in a sea of red.  

25. Ibid., 286.
26. Ibid., 189.
27. Ibid., 284.
His final lines are,

Go take your seat in Charon's boat
We'll tell the hive you died afloat. 29

Nature had yet another aspect for Freneau. It evoked more than a response to the beauty of the "might world of ear and eye." It called forth more than an expression of man's kinship with nature, whether that expression conveyed sentiment or gently humor.

Nature had rewards to offer in surroundings where

A hermit's house beside a stream
With forests planted round
A little garden walled with stone
The wall with ivy overgrown
A limpid fountain near,

Would more substantial joy afford
More real bliss impart
Than all the wealth that misers hoard,
Than vanquished worlds or worlds restored--
Mere cankers of the heart. 30

In much the same tenor are these lines from The Pictures of Columbus:

In these green groves who would not wish to stay
Where guardian nature holds her quiet reign, 31

and in the stanza from St. Catherine's:

Who would not here, a hermit, stay
In yonder fragrant vale, 32

29. Ibid., 286.
30. Ibid., I, 84.
31. Ibid., I, 115-116.
32. Ibid., III, 398.
Could he enjoy what few can find
That coy unwilling guest
(All avarice banish'd from the mind)
Contentment in the breast. 33

Nature offered to Freneau more than an escape from pressing cares.

Far more frequently she spoke that "all things are passing," to

Learn wisdom from the falling leaf. 34

In April to May, the warning is,

Time on the wing, May ends the spring
And summer dances on her tomb. 35

More openly is the message stated in another poem on the seasons,

Winter, alas, shall spring restore
But youth returns to man no more. 36

A deserted farm-house fallen into ruin, with its trees, flowers, and vines dying from lack of care could arouse in Freneau's mind a picture of the happy life once led there. It could cause him to see in the scene a parallel to the ancient kingdoms leveled by time, as expressed in the lines,

So sits in tears on Palestina's shore
The Hebrew town of splendor once divine
Her kings, her lords, her triumphs are no more;
Slain are her priests, and ruin'd every shrine. 37

33. Ibid., III, 398.
34. Ibid., II, 376.
35. Ibid., 331.
36. Ibid., 382.
37. Ibid., I, 41.
Perhaps the poet's most impressive lines on this idea of transience occur in The House of Night wherein he writes:

The towering Alps, the haughty Appennine
The Andes, wrapt in everlasting snow,
The Apalachin and the Ararat
Sooner or later must to ruin go.

Hills sink to plains, and man returns to dust,
That dust supports a reptile or a flower;
Each changeful atom by some other nurs'd
Takes some new form, to perish in an hour.38

The nature poetry of Freneau emphasized that the things of time pass away, that youth returns no more, that beauty fades or dies prematurely. Man by his very nature craves happiness. In this world he reaches out to grasp it in the enjoyment of the things of time--among them, his instinctive response to the beauty of natural phenomena, the sweetness of his home-ties, the comradeship of his friends. But always his enjoyment of these is lessened by the lurking shadow of their impermanency. A certain disquietude arises, a longing for imperishable happiness, a happiness never to be realized in this life. As man comes to recognize this as a common experience of his fellow-men, his sympathy is naturally aroused by the expression of this yearning. Hence, this theme of transience in the nature poetry of Freneau gives to it an atmosphere of vague longing, which is the basis of artistic appeal.

In the lyric, The Wild Honey Suckle, Freneau attained his most artistic expression of nature; in it he achieved perhaps the

38. Ibid., 238.
masterpiece of his poetic production. The various aspects of nature which have been discussed blend almost imperceptibly in its lines. The charm of seclusion and retirement are expressed in the first two stanzas, especially in:

Untouched thy honied blossoms blow
Unseen thy little branches greet
No roving foot shall crush thee here,
No busy hand provoke a tear.39

and in:

By nature's self in white arrayed,
She bade thee shun the vulgar eye,
And planted here the guardian shade,
And sent soft waters murmuring by.40

The same lines as well as nearly all others in the poem indicate the quality of the poet's sympathy, and his investing the flower with a personality.

The idea of transience occurs in lines such as,

Smit with those charms, that must decay,
I grieve to see your future doom;

Unpitying frosts, and Autumn's power
Shall leave no vestige of this flower.41

Deep, sincere emotion has fired the poetic imagination, and through that crucible has been passed the "truth of substance and matter." From this has resulted an expression--simple, quiet, tinged with melancholy, and glowing with a restrained feeling. The

39. Ibid., II, 306.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid.
height of its concentration and suggestiveness is reached in the lines,

They died—nor were those flowers more gay
The flowers that did in Eden bloom;42

and in the closing couplet,

The space between, is but an hour,
The frail duration of a flower.43

The last line is a fitting climax to a poem permeated with concentrated thought, feeling, and imagination. The transferred epithet "frail," which properly belongs to "flower," not to "duration," does double duty, suggesting both the ephemeral quality of time and the dainty grace of the flower. The imagination is teased by the contrast of "duration," connoting strength, permanency, and the term "frail," which implies delicacy and fragility. Lastly and chiefly, Freneau fulfills here one of the poet's chief missions—to convey truth expressed with beauty. His is the interpretation of an elemental truth—namely, the evanescence of all things transitory and the ultimate facing of the stern reality of death, conveyed with the bald yet suggestive simplicity of the Scriptural

All flesh is grass.44

Mr. Clarke would make philosophic naturalism the source of transience in Freneau's poetry.45 He states in this regard:

42. Ibid.
43. Ibid., 307.
44. Isaiah, XL, 6.
With the decline of faith in the reality of the world of spirit, which accompanied deism, with the progressive identification of God and nature, there remained nothing immutable above the stream of sensation and men became sadly conscious that the sensuous life is fleeting. . . Wordsworth found the need of reinforcing his naturalistic creed with the Christian creed, and "the faith that looks through death." The deist naturalist Freneau was unable to find that peace which the mystic Vaughan found. . . for to him (that is, Freneau) "God is One" who tended more and more to merge in sense, and sense is fleeting.46

It is true that much of Freneau's nature poetry emphasized that things of "sense" are "fleeting." He insisted that "all things are passing," and did not add, "God only is changeless." Neither did he add that God is not changeless, nor that no happiness awaits man hereafter. In his nature poetry Freneau stopped short of affirmation or of denial that man is mortal.

In his other poetry not dealing with nature Freneau is inconsistent regarding his belief in a future life. For example in The House of Night he wrote:

When Nature bids thee from the world retire,
With Joy thy lodging leave, a fated guest;
In Paradise, the land of thy desire,
Existing always, always to be blest.47

A poem entitled The Sexton's Sermon with the sub-title At the Burial of a Deist has these same lines changed thus;

With joy thy lodging leave, a sated guest,
In sleep's blest state (our Dullman's fond desire)
Existing always - always to be blest.48

46. Ibid.
47. Pattee, op. cit., I, 239.
48. Ibid., III, 123.
Freneau has written also:

Ye thoughtless fair!--her early death bemoan
And while you mourn your fate, think on your own. 49

The last line was later changed to:

Sense, virtue, beauty, to oblivion gone. 50

The doctrine that man's life—spiritual and intellectual, as well as physical—ceased with death was not, however, a conviction with Freneau, for he has these lines in his poem,

. . . if returned to dread nihility
You'd still be happy, for you will not be. 51

In virtue of the "if" one may conclude that Freneau was not fully convinced on the matter. Incidentally, he reasons poorly in implying that either happiness or unhappiness could exist in a state of non-existence. His heart belied whatever mental assent he may have given to the teaching, for it is "dread" nihility to him, as indeed the idea must be to the generality of mankind in view of our instinctive craving for immortality.

The strength of Freneau's genuine belief in deism may likewise be questioned—that is, that God has created the world, but exerts no influence on it or on men. The man who holds that the Creator is a disinterested spectator of man's affairs could scarcely have written:

49. Ibid., II, 329.
50. Ibid., note.
51. Clarke, op. cit., 295.
And yet that Being you address,
Who shaped old Chaos into form,
May speak—and with a word suppress
The tyrant and the storm,\textsuperscript{52}
nor would he have identified himself with the frightened sailor
struggling in the storm at sea, as he does in the stanza,

O'er the wild main dejected and afraid,
The trembling pilot lash'd his helm a-lee,
Or, swiftly scudding, asked thy potent aid,
Dear pilot of the Galilean sea.\textsuperscript{53}

Mr. Clark's statement that for Freneau "God is One" who
tended more and more to merge in sense may also be called into
question. Freneau's own testimony is in lines like the following:

Enlightened Reason proves, that God is One
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Beneath whose view perpetual daylight shines
At whose command all worlds their circuits run.
. . . That Intellectual Flame
From whose vast stores all human genius came.\textsuperscript{54}

Then also in \textit{The Power of Fancy} the poet says:

Oh! what is all this, mighty whole,
These suns are stars that round us roll!
What are they all, where'er they shine,
But Fancies of the Power Divine.\textsuperscript{55}

Then he continues:

What is this globe, these lands, and seas,
And heat, and cold, and flowers, and trees\textsuperscript{56}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{52} Pattee, op. cit., III, 175.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Ibid., I, 264.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Ibid., II, 307-309.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Ibid., I, 35.
\item \textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
But thoughts on reason's scale combined,
Ideas of the Almighty Mind.

Man, however, is higher than the creation around him, for in the same poem Freneau states of fancy:

This spark of bright, celestial flame,
From Jove's seraphic altar came,
And hence alone in man we trace
Resemblance to the immortal race.

From this extract one may judge that Freneau saw in man's intellect an endowment that lifted him above all earthly creation and made him in some respects like to God. Consequently, Mr. Clark's contention that for Freneau God tended to merge more and more in sense does not appear tenable.

As has been seen, Freneau at times turned away from the deistic creed that God holds Himself aloof from man. He expressed instead the instinctive feelings of mankind that God as the Creator has fatherly regard even for man's physical welfare and that His aid is to be invoked in heartfelt prayer.

It has also been seen that death as the end of man's entire existence was not a matter of settled conviction with him. As often as he doubted, he as often expressed man's immortality. This element of doubt in his poetry was not deeply rooted in philosophic naturalism, but shows rather Freneau's unsettled state of mind concerning current religious opinions.

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid., I, 34.
Consequently, Freneau's nature poetry is neither proof nor refutation that any naturalistic tendencies he may have entertained on philosophical grounds cause the theme of transience in that group of poems. It was probably caused by the natural reaction all men experience in considering that sooner or later beauty fades in all earthly things and that man must leave what in some respects is "this delightful world." A man of highly sensitive and changeable disposition, as was Freneau, would feel and express this reaction more markedly than a poet whose temperament was more restrained and stable.

It may be concluded, then, that Freneau's nature poetry is aesthetic rather than moral. Based upon his immediate surroundings and his actual experiences, his poems often represent natural features as if invested with a personality. Feeling, imagination, and fact are fused in a lyric expression, the charm of which lies in its suggestiveness and concentration. From the viewpoint of artistry this class of Freneau's poetry is a "return to nature" in the sense that man's natural response to the phenomena of the physical world elevates the mind and heart, arouses his sense of wonder and is, therefore, rightly conveyed in a style suffused with the play of fancy and the glow of imagination.
CHAPTER IV

ROMANTIC FORESHADOWINGS IN FRENÉAU

Romanticism has ever remained a term difficult to define. Indeed it seems to defy definition that is at one and the same time both "specific and adequate." It is better understood perhaps by considering elements of its complex structure.

In the opinion of William Lyon Phelps these elements are three: first, subjectivity, that is, a manifestation in the written production of the author's longing for some unrealized ideal; secondly, a love of the picturesque, beauty touched by strangeness; and lastly, a reactionary spirit, an attempt to secure a natural, fresh expression both in content and form.

According to another critic imagination is the dominant factor in romanticism, an imagination based on reality. He lists three objects with which the imagination deals—medievalism, subjectivity, and the "return to nature." Medievalism, however, must deal with the true spirit of the middle ages, not its grotesque distortion. Subjectivity must be the "direct cry forced from the heart by sheer internal pressure," sincere and personal. The "return to nature" includes not only external nature, but also

1. Phelps, op. cit.
2. Ibid., 3-4.
human nature, men both as individuals and as members of society. This "return to nature" has a large measure of reality, showing itself in simple expression, a democratic attitude toward the rights of men, interest in primitive men and those in the lowly walks of life, together with an increasing use of natural description in poetry. These realistic aspects must be sublimated by the imagination, just as the other two elements must be based on reality.3

These two explanations overlap at several points, but at no place do they contradict one another. Hence it can be said that outwardly romanticism manifested itself by an imaginative treatment of reality, a "renascence of wonder" in such different phases as "the love of nature in all her aspects; the love of mankind and country; the yearning for the remote in time and space, with particular reference to the medieval and primitive; the passionate expression of the poet's own inmost thoughts and feelings—restless, unsatisfied, ever changing; the contemplation of death and...the revival of the age-old interest in the supernatural."4

It may be readily seen that naturalism contained the germs of all these elements. Indeed that great burst of literary activity that is called the romantic movement is but the flowering of the slow growth of naturalism. In the stages immediately preceding this bursting into bloom it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine

at what point the terms naturalism and romanticism may not be used interchangeably.

In the choice of his themes Freneau showed foreshadowings of nearly all the external phases of romanticism mentioned above. The chapter on his nature poetry shows his frequent treatment of numerous aspects of nature. He wrote of the hills, the rivers, and the sea. He showed firsthand information on the trees of the forests, the animals of the woods and streams, the flowers of the wilderness and of cultivated gardens, the fruits of the orchard, and the crops of the fields. The insects, the changes of season, and the storms—these realities he set aglow by his imaginative faculty. Nature had for him a personality akin to man's. An entirely original note appeared in American poetry with his use of the natural features indigenous to the American scene. Nature was a refuge from the avarice and discontent of man. Nature spoke constantly to the poet that the things of sense were fleeting, thereby pervading earthly beauty with gentle melancholy. In these ways, then, did Freneau's poetry forecast the romantic "love of nature in all her aspects."

The democratic attitude and the rights of man received much attention from the romantic poets in Europe. Freneau dealt with such themes again and again. The great bulk of his war poetry was his protest against tyranny. It is in the subject matter in these poems rather than in the treatment that Freneau shows romantic foreshadowings.
The height of his achievement in this type of work probably was reached in his Ode of 1793, which may have been written two years earlier.\(^5\) It reads in part:

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

The world at last will join
To aid thy grand design,
Dear Liberty!
To Russia's frozen lands
The generous flame expands;
On Africa's burning sands
Shall man be free!

In this our western world
Be Freedom's flag unfurl'd
Through all its shores!

May no proud despot daunt--
Should he his standard plant
Freedom will never want
Her hearts of oak! \(^6\)

Such impassioned lines are rare in comparison with such mediocrity as

Curs'd be the day, how bright so e'er it shin'd
That first made kings the masters of mankind;
And curs'd the wretch who first with regal pride
Their equal rights to equal men deny'd,

while Freeneau delighted in such diatribes as,

None e'er before essay'd such desperate crimes,
Alone he stood, arch--butcher of the times,
Rov'd uncontroll'd this wasted country o'er,
Strew'd plains with dead, and bath'd his jaws with gore.\(^8\)


\(^6\) Ibid., 99-101.

\(^7\) Ibid., III, 165.

\(^8\) Ibid., II, 92-93.
Slavery aroused his pity and his indignation. In lines addressed to Sir Toby, a sugar planter of Jamaica, he says:

If there exists a hell—the case is clear—
Sir Toby's slaves enjoy that portion here:

Are such the fruits that spring from vast domains?
Is wealth, thus got, Sir Toby, worth your pains?—

Talk not of blossoms, and your endless spring;
What joy, what smile, can scenes of misery bring? 9

One does not doubt the sincerity nor the strength of the author's feeling. Yet the verse lacks the requisite touch to raise this expression into the realm of genuinely romantic poetry. It foreshadows romanticism in aim, not in actual achievement.

In some of his earliest works, in satires of colonial backwoods society, Freneau dealt with the common man, at times investing his characters with a strong dash of the picaresque. Three of these satires were written before 1775—namely, The Adventures of Simon Swaugum, The Citizen's Resolve, and The Expedition of Timothy Taurus; his Slender's Journey was published in 1787. In these writings Freneau is said to have anticipated Crabbe, Holmes, and Lowell. 10 Simon Swaugum has been considered almost equal to Crabbe's Tales, containing, moreover, "bits of genre painting which might actually be passed on by any but the knowing as Crabbe's." 11 That Freneau was ahead of Crabbe in this point is evident if it is remembered that

9. Ibid., 258-259.
11. Ibid.
Crabbe published nothing before 1781, *The Village* appearing in 1783 and the *Tales* in 1812. The original strain of his satiric manner is likewise seen by noting that Freneau's countryman, John Trumbull, was "still trying to reproduce the form and wit of Butler's *Hudibras* tinctured...with...Churchill" in *M'Fingal*, written in 1781.

It is in the light, swift manner of Freneau that the critic sees anticipations of Holmes and Lowell. This manner causes him to regret that Freneau "did not leave a complete picture of American society in this humorous—satiric vein." In this discussion Mr. More touches upon the real weakness of Freneau. Without aid from men or books, he perceived his true goal as a poet, he pressed on toward it, but seldom reached it with complete success except in shorter productions wherein his abilities were equal to his aspirations.

Such a success he attains, however, in a poem entitled *The Man of Ninety*, published in 1788. In this poem Freneau is close to Wordsworth in subject and treatment. The old man visits an oak tree which has been both an object of his care and a pleasure in his rest from labor. The man of ninety communes with the tree and seems like Wordsworth's Michael to draw sustaining power from the contemplation of nature to,

> Learn Wisdom from the falling leaf

12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
to see man's destiny paralleled in nature, since

Your blossoms die, but you remain,
Your fruit lies scattered o'er the plain,15

and since

The enlivening sun, that burns so bright,
Ne'er had a noon without a night
So Life and Death agree.16

Love of country is a theme that readily lends itself to romantic treatment. Patriotic emotions are naturally enthusiastic and call forth a heightened expression. Freneau often let this enthusiasm lead him into excesses. It appears frequently as fierce denunciation of the enemy in his satires, as has already been noted. At times it is mere bombast, such as in this prediction of America's future:

A new Jerusalem, sent down from heaven

Myriads of saints
To live and reign on earth a thousand years.
Paradise anew

Shall flourish, by no second Adam lost

The happy people free from toils and death
Shall find secure repose.17

When, however, the expression is tempered, Freneau secures a distinctly romantic air. This attainment is seen in his tribute to the American soldiers who died in battle in South Carolina under

15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., I, 82-83.
General Greene. Entitled To the Memory of the Brave Americans, the poem is popularly known as Eutaw Springs from the opening lines:

At Eutaw Springs the valiant died,
Their limbs with dust are covered o'er
Weep on, ye springs, your tearful tide,
How many heroes are no more.  

Here the language is simple and direct—"the real language of man in a state of vivid sensation." Each of the lines carries its own suggestion—the battle, the burial of the slain, nature mourning for the fallen, and that vast army of men who from the dawn of time have died in freedom's cause.

The use of the archaic "ye" in the phrase, "ye springs" gives a tone of dignity and of supplication. The smoothness of the verse is due to the liberal use of the liquids. The open vowels gives a somber tone suited to the elegiac strain.

Freneau's imaginative trend is seen also in another stanza which reads:

Stranger, their humble graves adorn;
You too may fall and ask a tear;
'Tis not the beauty of the morn
That proves the evening shall be clear.

The first line is packed with suggestion. The graves are "humble," not pretentious sepulchres. The epithet connotes the hasty burial after the battle. One of mankind's strongest instincts, veneration for the resting places of the dead, has its pathetic appeal intensified by asking this tribute of respect from a stranger,

19. Ibid., 102.
a passer-by. The other lines deepen the sympathetic response by presenting the varying fortunes of life and man's common destiny. The antithesis drawn from morning and evening is heightened by its abrupt presentation.

The climax is reached in the stanza:

They saw their injured country's woe,
The flaming town, the wasted field;
They rushed to meet the insulting foe;
They took the spear--but left the shield.20

The speed of these lines suggests the suddenness of the attack and of the battle. The imagination draws the picture in rapid, concrete terms that are unforgettable—"the flaming town" and "the wasted field." The symbolism of the last line is the crowning touch. The American soldiers are linked with the heroes of old in the courage that seeks defense of one's country with no thought of self-protection.

Scott declared this poem "to be as fine a thing as there is of the kind in the language."21 The last line of the stanza he used in the introduction to Canto Third of _Marmion_ by changing only one word—"took" to "snatched."22 Scott's high sense of honor leads one to believe that this was an unconscious plagiarism.

Freneau's love of country, aided by his familiarity with the sea, produced these stirring lines of Captain Paul Jones'
victory over the British ship, the "Serapis":

She felt the fury of the ball,
Down, prostrate down, the Britons fall;
The decks were strewn with slain;
Jones to the foe his vessel lash'd;
And, while the black artillery flash'd,
Loud thunders shook the main.\(^{23}\)

Reality set aglow by the poet's emotion results in this spirited stanza,

And can thy ships these strokes sustain?
Behold thy brave companions slain,
All clasp'd in ocean's dark embrace.
"Strike, or be sunk!" the Briton cries--
"Sink, if you can!" the chief replies,
Fierce lightnings blazing in his face.\(^{24}\)

The rapid movement does not prevent the effect the poet secures by alliteration and by the pictures conjured by "ocean's dark embrace" and by "Fierce lightnings blazing in his face." In no other production does Freneau appeal in such rapid succession to sight, sound, motion, and to the emotions to which "every bosom returns an echo."

These two stanzas foreshadow much of the atmosphere and even the ideas which Thomas Campbell was to express later in his Hohenlinden, written in 1802, more than twenty years after Freneau penned his poem.

Like love of country the past is a romantic theme. Imagination must be called to aid the memory in re-con structing the past

\(^{23}\) Ibid., 77.

\(^{24}\) Ibid., 78.
if the re-creation is to be vital and impressive. Freneau turned to the past in some of his earliest poems—paraphrases of the Old Testament, a dialogue on the pyramids, the ancient tales of Phaon and Sappho and of Orpheus and Eurydice.

In these verses he used both blank verse and various stanza patterns in different meters—the quatrain, octosyllabic couplets, and decasyllabic lines in varying rhyme schemes. Neither the meters nor the rhymes are poor. The poems fail to achieve a romantic tone because of flatness of expression and conventionality of diction.

Only occasionally does Freneau rise above lines like these,

In that season when the sun
Bids his glowing charioteer
Phoebus, native of the sphere,
Nigh the burning zenith run;
Then our much lamented swain
Slew the monsters of the waste.25

However, the past can stir him to such touches as,

...all, all are gone,
And like the phantom snows of a May morning
Left not a vestige to discover them.26

It can also impel him to lines like

...down, down, low to endless ruin verging,27

and

To strike the silver sounding string.28

25. Ibid., I, 32.
26. Ibid., 27.
27. Ibid., 26.
28. Ibid., 270.
Love of country and love of the past were joined in Freneau in his admiration for Columbus. At Princeton he dreamed of an epic with Columbus as the central figure. The dream was dimly reflected in The Pictures of Columbus, parts of The Rising Glory of America, Discovery, and similar poems.

Most of these poems betray the same failing short of sufficient power to cause the thought to glow. Nevertheless, in these poems appear such passages as the speech of the enchantress,

Who dares attempt this gloomy grove
Where never shepherd dreamed of love
And birds of night are only found
The winds are high, the moon is low--
Would you enter? No-- no-- no.\(^\text{29}\)

and lines such as,

Ah what a waste of ocean here begins
And lonely waves so black and comfortless.\(^\text{30}\)

The sunset on the ocean is described,

His angry globe through black abysses gliding
Burns in the briny bosom of the deep.\(^\text{31}\)

There are two speeches of the dying Columbus that indicate imaginative treatment. The first reads,

How sweet is sleep when gain'd by length of toil
No dreams disturb the slumbers of the dead.\(^\text{32}\)

\(^{29}\) Ibid., 92.

\(^{30}\) Ibid., 96.

\(^{31}\) Ibid., 109.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., 121.
The slow, languid movement conveys the weariness of the dis­
appointed old man, his welcoming of death as a release from his
sorrows. It appeals because there is no tumultuous grief but rather
"the language of the heart that comes face to face with the wide and
impersonal idea of death."33

The other lines spoken by Columbus are,

The winds blow high; one other world remains
Once more without a guide I find the way.34

Here the poet's imagination conveys personal courage, a
meeting with death as another journey with the confidence of ultimate
happiness. Here are suggested the pictures in the dying man's mind—
his ship again leaving port, the terrors of the sea, and again a
vision of a new world at the end of the voyage. To these lines has
been accorded the praise that they showed America had produced her
first original poet.35

Interest in the past likewise led the romantic poets to con­
sider primitive man as a subject for imaginative treatment. Gray's
work in Norse mythology opened an entirely new field in this respect.
The Norse folklore did not particularly attract Freneau. He con­
sidered the Scandinavian war songs "horrible... (but) full of... savage notions of valor and romantic heroism."36 Nevertheless, he

34. Pattee, op. cit., I, 121.
35. Tucker, op. cit.
was drawn by the romantic qualities in the Norse folklore to produce a translation entitled Scandanavian \[\text{sig}\] War Song, which is short enough to quote in full. The poem follows:

Brave deeds achieved, at death's approach I smile,
In Balder's hall I see the table spread,
The enlivening ale shall now reward my toil,
Quaffed from their sculls, that by my faulchion bled.

Heroes no more at death's approach shall groan:
In lofty Odin's dome all sighs forbear--
Conscious of bloody deeds, my fearless soul
Mounts to great Odin's hall, and revels there.\[37\]

Freeneau attains much of his imaginative atmosphere by his diction--"enlivening ale," "quaffed," "faulchion," "revel," and "lofty Odin's dome." These are not unusual words, but he has succeeded in placing them so as to suggest the archaic.

The paradox of the last two lines heightens the climax. The bloody deeds of a Norse warrior were a guarantee of admission to the revels of Odin's hall, not as in Christian belief, a hindrance to supernatural reward.

A variation of his Norse theme appears in one of the four stanzas composing the poem, On a Hessian Debarkation. In spite of its allusion to the Hessian mercenaries the stanza shows imaginative handling in its rendition:

In the slow breeze I hear their funeral song,
The dance of ghosts the infernal tribe prepare
To hell's dark mansion haste, ye abandoned throng
Drinking from German sculls old Odin's beer.\[38\]

37. Ibid., II, 159.

38. Ibid., I, 269.
The romantic traces are evident in the breeze suggesting a funeral song, in a dance of ghosts, and in the touch of the Gothic element in the last two lines.

Freneau wrote several poems on the North American Indians. He considered many of their notions romantic, as he did those of the Norse folk tales. He was well aware, however, that the Indian possessed characteristics that were most unromantic. He referred to their cruelty in The Rising Glory of America and in The American Village as well as in other poems. In The Indian Convert he deals with the red man realistically as not caring for a heaven, where there's nothing to eat and but little to steal.40

The Indian Student is a satire on the attempts to educate the Indian in the academic branches. None of these poems is romantic in outlook or treatment.

Freneau's natural love of freedom made him sympathetic to the Indians in the encroachments of the white man upon the domains of the savages. He voices this sympathy in The Prophecy of King Tammany. The chieftain rehearses the wrongs of the Indians at the hands of the European settlers. He knows resistance has proven useless, that

The bow has lost its wonted spring,
The arrow faulters on the wing,
Nor carries ruin from the string
To end their being and our woes.41

40. Ibid., II, 190.
41. Ibid., 188.
The prophecy he makes is that these settlers shall suffer war and bloodshed from their own race, an allusion to the Revolutionary War.

Life has lost its charms for the tribal lord. He prepares for a self-inflicted death; he is to be burned alive on his funeral pyre. He reasons:

Are there not gardens in the west,  
Where all our far-famed Sachems rest?—  
I'll go, an unexpected guest,  
And the dark horrors of the way despise.42

Thus the note of the strange and the mysterious enters, to be emphasized in the death of Tammany when

. . .the freed soul, her debt to nature paid,  
Rose from her ashes that her prison made,  
And sought the world unknown, and dark oblivion's shade.43

Freneau used a monologue form in *The Dying Indian*, wherein Tomo-Chequi, who is at the point of death, shows his reluctance to quit this world. He is a somewhat individualized Indian, a skeptic about the material pleasures of the happy hunting ground. He says in this regard:

Fine tales, indeed, they tell  
Of shades and purling rills  
Where our dead fathers dwell  
Beyond the western hills,  
But when did ghost return his state to shew;  
Or who can promise half the tale is true?44

42. Ibid.
43. Ibid., 189.
44. Ibid., 244.
He takes farewell of his surroundings, naming them in detail:

Adieu the mountain's lofty swell,
Adieu, thou little verdant hill,
And seas, and stars, and skies—farewell
For some remoter sphere. 45

"Perplexed with doubt" concerning the remoter sphere, he is still influenced by tribal traditions and accepts death as inevitable, concluding his dying speech thus:

Farewell, sweet lake; farewell surrounding woods,
To other groves through midnight glooms, I stray,
Beyond the mountains, and beyond the floods
Beyond the Huron bay!
Prepare the hollow tomb, and lay me low,
My trusty bow and arrows by my side
For long the journey is that I must go,
Without a partner and without a guide. 46

Freneau shows romantic trends in this poem in his technique. He varies the length of the lines and the rhyme schemes. He shows his imaginative treatment more strongly by his characterization of Tomo-Chequi, by portraying his skepticism and his reluctance to meet death.

An aura of "shadows and delusions" surrounds The Indian Burying Ground. Freneau's fancy is delicately expressed in the forty lines composing the poem. It is based on the custom of some North American Indians of burying their dead in a sitting posture.

Freneau says he believes

45. Ibid., 245.
46. Ibid.
The posture, that we give the dead,  
Points out the soul's eternal sleep.  

The food, weapons, and other articles buried with the Indian  
Bespeak the nature of the soul  
Activity, that knows no rest.

The poet continues that the rocks bearing the Indian picture writing remain. The elm tree beneath which the Indians played is still standing. So do the spirits of those buried in the Indian cemetery tarry about the graves and may be glimpsed by "timorous fancy."

He pictures these spirits hovering near the graves in this way:

There oft a restless Indian queen  
(Pale Shebah with her braided hair)  
And many a barbarous form is seen  
To chide the man that lingers there.

By midnight moons, o'er moistening dews;  
In habit for the chase arrayed,  
The hunter still the deer pursues,  
The hunter and the deer a shade.

The charm of these lines scarcely bears analysis. There is to be noted, however, the suggestiveness of "pale Shebah." It connotes the waness of a spirit as well as the royal magnificence associated with the Oriental queen. The definite detail "braided hair" keeps the Indian picture clearly before us.

47. Ibid., 369.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid., 370.
The next stanza is suffused with the misty beauty of the scene depicted in a few details. The sense of motion has its particular appeal. One should note also the alliteration and the effect produced by the repetition of "hunter" and "deer."

In this poem Freneau succeeded in uniting a romantic theme with a romantic expression. It was in his own words, "Reason's self bowing the knee to fancy."50

Freneau often united several romantic aspects in one subject. Thus the contemplation of death, the love of nature, interest in primitive man, and the interest in the supernatural are interwoven in the Indian poems discussed above.

The subjective element, likewise, is invariably connected with some theme he treats. Often Freneau makes a direct statement of his thoughts, for example, when he writes as preface to *The Indian Burying Ground*:

> In spite of all the learned have said I still my old opinion keep.51

His reflections are stated in the first person in *The Wild Honey Suckle*, *On the Vanity of Existence* and *The Beauties of Santa Cruz*. *The House of Night* is told in the first person.

Therefore, in subject matter there is scarcely any phase of

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid., 369.
romanticism that Freneau did not treat in his verse. He often failed to attain a marked degree of romantic expression, especially in work of any length. Nevertheless, he showed flashes of imaginative power, smoothness of verse, a variety of metric patterns, and a rather fluent blank verse. Moreover, in several of his shorter poems he maintained a lyric strain of uniform quality.

Critics have seen in Freneau's works foreshadowings of various later authors. Thus Paul Elmer More points out a similarity to Crabbe, in satiric sketches in which Freneau's productions antedated Crabbe's. A probable indebtedness of Thomas Campbell to Freneau in the poem Hohenlinden has also been noted. Moreover, one entire line, "The hunter and the deer a shade," from Freneau's The Indian Burying Ground was used verbatim by Campbell in his poem O'Connor's Child. As Campbell made no acknowledgement of Freneau as a source, this borrowing has remained a matter for puzzled comment on the part of critics and editors.

At various points in this discussion references have been made to similarities between Freneau and Wordsworth. It remains now to summarize what has been already discussed in this regard. It has already been noted that Freneau based his poetry on reality, drawing from his immediate surroundings and direct observation but expressing this reality in language set aglow by emotion. This method was an

52. Ibid., 370.
unconscious anticipation of the ideas to be set forth later by Wordsworth—namely, to look steadily at the subject, to deal with the common things of life, yet to throw over them a certain colouring of the imagination.

Likewise it has been pointed out in the discussion on nature poetry that Freneau ascribed to plants, trees, and the insects a certain capacity for enjoyment and grief similar to that felt by man.

Whereas Wordsworth writes

And 't is my belief that every flower
Enjoys the air it breathes,53

Freneau in the stanzas On the Sleep of Plants says of a garden plant closing its blossoms at night;

Like us the slave of cold and heat,
She too enjoys her little span—
With reason only less complete
Than that which makes the boast of man.54

In the discussion on the romantic interest in the common man it was pointed out that Wordworth's Michael was partly foreshadowed by Freneau in the speaker of The Man of Ninety. Both characters are sturdy peasants. Both have suffered from life and are advanced in years. Both have drawn their philosophy from nature.

Wordsworth is the poet of the secluded life of the country. He is the recluse who in close connection with nature and people of

53. Lines Written in Early Spring, 11-12.

54. Ibid., III, 32.
lowly ways comes to learn the power of nature to "chasten and subdue." Freneau also took nature as a teacher—namely of contentment in a life spent apart from the busy ways of man, and of the transience of things of time, aspects which have been discussed in detail in the previous chapter.

Wordsworth often wrote in a simple, unadorned fashion—part of his theories of poetic language "a selection of language really used by men...in simple and unelaborated expressions." Thus he has:

She dwelt among the untrodden ways
Beside the springs of Dove,
A maid whom there were none to praise
And very few to love.

Freneau writes of an eloquent parson in an obscure parish:

To those that courts and titles please
How dismal is his lot;
Beyond the hills, beneath some trees
To live—and be forgot.

Poetry was for Wordsworth "a spontaneous overflow" of emotions. In this mood he wrote:

My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky.

Freneau viewed the wooded hills of New Jersey and expressed the emotions he felt in this way:

55. Preface to the _Lyrical Ballads_.
56. _She Dwelt among the Untrodden Ways_, 1-4.
57. Pattee, _op. cit_. , III, 41.
58. _My Heart Leaps Up_, 1-2.
These heights for solitude designed
This rude, resounding shore—
These vales impervious to the wind
Tall oaks that to the tempest bend
Half Druid, I adore.59

In The Wild Honey Suckle Freneau came close to Wordsworth, not the Wordsworth of the Intimations, of the sonnet on Milton, or of Tintern Abbey, but the Wordsworth of the daisy poem, of the celandine, and of the other simpler aspects of the Grasmere region.

Freneau's opening lines of the poem are:

Fair Flower, that dost so comely grow
Hid in this silent dull retreat,
Untouched thy honied blossoms blow
Unseen thy little branches greet:
No busy hand provoke a tear.60

In unaffected verse Freneau communicates in this poem an atmosphere of reverie, of calm yet deep enjoyment in the seclusion of the "silent dull retreat." He causes us to share his love for the beauty of the "comely," but little known, flower, to feel his sympathy that the lovely blossoms must fade so soon. He here expresses some of those elemental yet obscure sensations men feel when faced with natural phenomena.

Wordsworth begins his poems to the daisy:

With little here to do or see
Of things that in the great world be,
Daisy! again I talk to thee
For thou art worthy,

60. Ibid., II, 306.
Thou unassuming Commonplace
Of Nature with that homely face,
Any yet with something of a grace
Which love makes for thee.61

Several of the same factors enter into Wordsworth's stanza—the retirement, the direct address to the flower, the fancy of the poet which causes him to see beauty in the lowly daisy.

Then as Wordsworth regards the daisy now as "A nun demure of lowly port" again as a fairy shield, and next as "A little Cyclops with one eye," so does Freneau linger over each detail of the "honied blossoms," on "little branches" "in white arrayed."

Further in the poem, Wordsworth more openly conveys his idea of the flower's having a personality by expressing this desire for the well-being of the daisy:

Yet like a star with glittering crest
Self-poised in air thou seems't to rest--
May peace come never to his nest
Who shall reprove thee.62

As the honeysuckle spoke to Freneau of the fleeting quality of beauty, so did the daisy speak a clear if somewhat different message to Wordsworth, who finishes his poem:

Sweet silent creature!
That breath'st with me in sun and air,
Do thou, as thou art wont, repair
My heart with gladness and a share
Of thy meek nature.63

62. Ibid.
63. Ibid.
Both poets, then, find in nature a retreat from the bustle of life; for them there is beauty in the common aspects of the external world. In both there is a "minute, precise, loving observation" of the details in nature, which imagination transfigures with delicate fancy. For both nature has a meaning that affects the character of man.

This is not a claim that Freneau's best work is great as Wordsworth's is great. It is a claim, however, that in the underlying ideas of poetry and poetic expression and at times in the execution of these ideas Freneau showed the romantic qualities of which Wordsworth was an undisputed master.

Paul Elmer More speaks of Freneau's "outreaching for the romanticism then preparing in England."64 These outreaching may be seen in certain aspects wherein Freneau shows affiliations with Coleridge. A similarity of elements in their descriptions may be noted. For example, Freneau describes the fish in the tropic water surrounding Santa Cruz in this way:

Some streak'd with burnish'd gold, resplendent glare,  
Some cleave the limpid deep, all silver'd o'er,  
Some, clad in living green, delight the eye 
Some red, some blue; of mingled colours more.65

He goes on to say:

Here glides the spangled Dolphin through the deep, The giant-carcas'd whales at distance stray,

64. More, op. cit., 96.
The huge green turtles wallow through the wave,  
Well pleased alike with land or water they. 66

Coleridge's lines from The Ancient Mariner follow. This is  
one of the night scenes of the ballad:

Beyond the shadow of the ship  
I watched the water snakes;  
They moved in tracks of shining white  
And when they reared, the elfish light  
Fell off in hoary flakes. 67

Then with a shifting of scene he continues:

Within the shadow of the ship  
I watched their rich attire;  
Blue, glassy green, and velvet black,  
They coiled and swam; and every track  
Was a flash of golden fire. 68

In the selection from Freneau one may justly object to the  
unnatural wording of the line,  
Well pleased alike with land or water they.  
Likewise one may point out the inept repetition of "some" in the first  
stanza.

The metric pattern of Coleridge is more flexible, but the long  
lines of Freneau indicate something of the languid atmosphere of the  
tropics.

The passages show that both writers had in common the tendency  
to make vivid sense appeals of colour and of motion. They had skill  
to convey the impression of flashing reflections of light. The verbs

66. Ibid., 215.
68. Ibid., 277-281.
of both are suggestive: Freneau uses "stray," "glide," "cleave," and "wallow"; Coleridge has "reared," "fell off," and "coiled."

In suggesting weird atmosphere there are hints of Freneau in Coleridge's poems. Thus the later poet wrote:

But where the ship's huge shadow lay,
The charmed water burnt alway,
A still and awful red.69

Freneau has a similar note in The House of Night in the lines,

Dark was the night, but at the enchanted dome
I saw the infernal windows flaming red.70

The effect of contrast is apparent in both passages—darkness and redness. There is a like suggestion in "charmed" and "infernal" as epithets.

Another instance of such similarity occurs in the following passages. The first is from Freneau:

Dark was the sky, and not one friendly star
Shone from the zenith or horizon, clear,
Mist sate upon the woods, and darkness rode
In her black chariot, with a wild career.

Rude from the wide extending Chesapeake
I heard the winds the dashing waves assail,
And saw from far, by picturing fancy formed,
The black ship traveling through the noisy gale.71

The passage from Coleridge follows:

The coming wind did roar more loud,
And the sails did sigh like sedge;

69. Ibid., 269-271.
70. Pattee, op. cit., I, 234.
71. Ibid., 214-215.
And the rain poured down from one black cloud;  
The Moon was at its edge.\textsuperscript{72}

The superiority of Coleridge's passage to that of Freneau's
is evident. It is both compact and restrained. Freneau over-
multiplies his details in regard to darkness in the first stanza.
His word arrangement is awkward in the line,

\textit{Rude, from the wide extending Chesapeake.}

The explanation of the ship is far-fetched but the detail itself is
an excellent touch. Freneau's passage is faulty; nevertheless, it
foreshadows Coleridge's poetic use of the supernatural.

Freneau's description of this storm has in it likewise a
suggestion of a section of Wordsworth's \textit{Elegiac Stanzas} in which
the English poet says of the picture of Peele Castle in a storm as
painted by Sir George Beaumont:

\begin{verbatim}
O 'tis a passionate Work!--yet wise and well,  
Well chosen is the spirit that is here;  
That Hulk which labors in the deadly swell  
This rueful sky, this pageantry of fear:

And this huge Castle, standing here sublime,  
I love to see the look with which it braves,  
Cased in the unfeeling armor of old time,  
The lightning, the fierce wind, and trampling waves.\textsuperscript{73}
\end{verbatim}

Wordsworth's description of Beaumont's painting has some of
the same telling details that Freneau uses— the ship in the storm,
the darkness, the wind, and the surging waves. Like the painting

\textsuperscript{72} Coleridge, op. cit., V, 318-321.

\textsuperscript{73} Andrews and Percival, op. cit., 16.
too it has a spirit that is well chosen.

The House of Night is over-long, uneven and marred by an excess of Gothic details. Inferior to The Ancient Mariner, it, nevertheless, shows some similarity to Coleridge's poem. In both works the narrator has undergone supernatural experiences. In both this experience has influenced the character of the narrator, to a marked degree and permanently in the case of the mariner, to a lesser degree and temporarily in the case of the poet in The House of Night. In both poems there is a moral interpretation, although this has been charged as a fault against Coleridge's production. When the poet fled from the house of Death with "substantial darkness" lying beneath his feet and hearing "screams... from the distempered ground," he became the fore-runner of the mariner who was to pass "like night from land to land... with strange power of speech," and Freneau clearly anticipated the unearthly atmosphere that Coleridge was to transfuse into his poetry twenty years later.

In The Power of Fancy by Freneau one critic has seen "a distinct suggestion of Keats' 'Ever let the fancy roam,' which dates at least forty-eight years later." In general structure, length, and classical allusions both poems show the influence of Milton's minor poems. The similarities as well as the differences may be seen from the following passages. Freneau begins his poem:

75. More, op. cit., 96.
Wakeful, vagrant, restless thing,
Ever wandering on the wing,
Who thy wondrous source can find,
Fancy, regent of the mind;
A spark from Jove's resplendent throne,
But thy nature all unknown.76

The opening lines from Keats are;

Ever let the fancy roam,
Pleasure never is at home:
At a touch sweet pleasure melteth,
Like to bubbles when rain pelteth;
Then let winged Fancy wander.77

The treatment of Freneau may be judged from this description:

Waft me far to southerm isles
Where the soften'd winter smiles,
To Bermuda's orange groves
Or Demarara's lovely glades.78

There is a richer hint in the passage,

Or some dark enchanted steep,
By the full moonlight doth shew
Forests of a dusky blue.79

Fancy, according to Keats, presents such scenes:

Thou shalt, at one glance, behold
The daisy and the marigold
White-plumed lilies and the first
Hedge-grown primrose that hath burst.80

Freneau's Fancy takes the poet on a flight over the entire world. Keats's Fancy brings to the mind the pleasures of the simple countryside.

76. Pattee, op. cit., I, 34.
77. Fancy, 1-5.
78. Pattee, op. cit., I, 37.
79. Ibid., I, 36.
80. Fancy, 48-51.
Then Freneau has Fancy lead him to "some lonely dome"

Where Religion loves to come,
Where the bride of Jesus dwells,
And the deep ton'd organ swells,
In notes with lofty anthems join'd
Notes that half distract the mind.81

These lines, of course, are indebted to Milton.

In Keats's poem Fancy will bring these pleasures to the imagination:

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. . . thou shalt hear
Distant harvest-carols clear;
Rustle of the reaped corn
Sweet birds antheming the morn;
And in the same moment— hark!
'Tis the early April lark.82
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Whatever Keats owed to Milton there are boldly original notes here.

In general, the idea of a winged Fancy and of various pleasures presented to the mind are the elements the poems have in common, in addition to the similarity in structure. There are anticipations of Keats in Freneau in this poem, but they are not marked likenesses.

In the poetry of Keats an atmosphere of glamour, of adventure, and of the remote is often brought by the use of place names that in themselves connote the far-away, the strange, and the mysterious.

Thus in the lines below the place names suggest the color, and the mystery of the Orient,


82. Fancy, 39-44.
Manna and dates in argosy transferred
From Fez: and spiced dainties every one,
From silken Samarcand to cedared Lebanon.83

Something of the same romantic suggestion Freneau obtains in references such as,

On Taiti's sea-beat coast84

and in the line,

Upon Orca's howling steep.85

A similar instance occurs in his passage on commerce in The Rising Glory of America:

Till Commerce first had wing'd the adventurous prow
Or sent the slow-paced caravan, afar,

Thus came, of old,

Golconda's golden ore and thus the wealth
Of Ophir.86

Mr. Clark writes of "Freneau's all-embracing sensuousness... (as) almost Keatsian." He then selects his examples from The Beauties of Santa Cruz. With phrases from various lines he draws the picture of the poet "luxuriously reclined" by "cool woodland streams" from "shaded clifts" where amid "soft breezes" he languidly watches the fishes. His mouth waters at the thought of "this luscious food," "delicious to the taste." He cools his thirst with "the sweet syrups of this liquorish clime." The "fragrant" fruit of the tropics is "alluring to the smell."87

83. The Eve of St. Agnes, 268-270.
84. Pattee, op. cit., I, 38.
85. Ibid., 36.
86. Ibid., 72.
87. Clarke, editor, Poems of Freneau, xlix-1.
This composite picture gives an idea of the sense appeals. It is hardly a fair judgment of the poetry, since a few details from several hundred lines are selected and arranged at will, not as Freneau wrote them.

The importance of these sense appeals in the Santa Cruz poem is their unusualness in poetry in 1776. They are an indication of romantic trends in Freneau, they foreshadow Keats, but they are not "almost Keatsian."

Two stanzas are given from this poem which Freneau maintains best the appeal to taste:

And with it (water) mix the liquid of the lime.
The old ag'd essence of the generous cave,
And sweetest syrups of this liquorish clime,
And drink, to cool thy thirst, and drink again.\textsuperscript{88}

The other stanza reads:

Sweet orange groves in lonely vallies rise
And drop their fruits, unnotic'd and unknown,
And cooling acid limes in hedges grow,
And juicy lemons swell in shades their own.\textsuperscript{89}

A passage from Keats dealing with the same sense appeal follows:

. . . a heap
Of candied apple, quince, and plum, and gourd.
With jellies smoother than the creamy curd,
And lucent syrups, tinct with cinnamon.\textsuperscript{90}

This extract has been criticized as over-sensuous, "an ideal-ized appeal to the less inferior senses, without any justifications

\textsuperscript{88} Pattee, op. cit., I, 255.

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., 256.

\textsuperscript{90} The Eve of St. Agnes, 263-266.
from the context of the poem," and rescued from coarseness only by
the elegance of the diction.91

One may differ from this opinion for several reasons. In the
old folk tale upon which Keats based his romance of Porphyro and
Madeline the banquet is an integral part; hence the passage is well
justified. Moreover, the luxurious atmosphere befitting the tale is
heightened by the scene of the table loaded with dainties. Further­
more, while the distinction between the so-called intellectual and
corporeal senses is legitimate, it does not follow that an appeal to
the inferior senses may not convey the beautiful, the enjoyment of
which is neither wrong nor unworthy of man. Consequently, the
stricture against the inferior senses is not wholly justified. There
is in this passage a certain intellectual quality which appears in
"the elegance of the diction." The nice discrimination which selects
the telling epithets and musical flow of the lines, the archaic
flavor, and even the word arrangement calls forth from the reader
an intellectual response as well as an emotional one.

Keats deals here with a situation based on reality, but
reality enriched and heightened by his imagination, "with a con­
summate instinct for beauty which explores and exhausts all sources
of sensuous appeal, yet so transfigures them that nothing merely
sensuous is left."92

Literature, XVI, 95.
It is this transfiguring power which is lacking in the stanzas quoted from Freneau. There is missing to some extent the hard thinking whereby the poet searches out the essence of what he wishes to convey. He talks about but does not actually transmit the appeals. Where Keats is concentrated, vivid, or "surprising by a fine excess," Freneau is diffuse, passive, or over-detailed. The American lacks in degree, not altogether in kind, the sustaining force of imagination which in Keats enabled him to elevate sensations to the point whereby "Pleasure becomes spiritualized into joy and joy becomes irradiated with beauty." 

Consequently, in his sense appeals Freneau often fails to seize upon the essential and lacks the transforming power, the intensity, and the concentration to be "almost Keatsian." He merely foreshadows Keats in an innate recognition that sense appeals have great possibilities as poetic material.

A closer affiliation of Freneau with Keats is in his melancholy at the inevitable passing of beauty. For Keats

A thing of beauty is a joy forever.95

But in the Ode on Melancholy he says

She dwells with Beauty—Beauty that must die
And Joy whose hand is ever at his lips
Bidding adieu; and aching Pleasure nigh.96

93. Ibid., 89.
95. Endymion, 1.
96. Ode on Melancholy, 21-23.
This is distinctly foreshadowed in Freneau in *The Wild Honey Suckle*. The "comely flower" with its "untouched... honied blossoms," "arrayed in white" whose "little being" which came "from morning suns and evening dews" "must decay," and this causes the poet to grieve over the future doom of the flower. This delicate, subdued tone indicates a pensive melancholy—an "aching Pleasure" caused by considering the frail duration of a flower.97

Hence Freneau foreshadows romantic trends that found rich and adequate expression in Keats—namely, an appreciation of the imaginative faculty, the suggestiveness of place names, vivid sense-appeals, and the union of melancholy pensiveness with the transience of beauty.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing study of Freneau has viewed the poet's career as one pursued for the most part under unfavorable circumstances. While the body of his genuinely artistic poetry is small compared to his verse of satiric and journalistic trend, it furnishes, nevertheless, a sufficient store by which his genius may be judged.

The growth of naturalism in English poetry has been traced in order to view Freneau's work in relation to the chief literary development of his productive period. With "the return to nature" as the connecting link between the transitional group and the romantic poets an examination has been made of Freneau's nature poetry to determine its essential elements. Finally his work has been discussed in relation to the general aspects of romanticism, and in particular in regard to the poetry of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats--the three major romantic poets with whom students have seen his closest affiliations.

In point of time Freneau stands between the transitional group and the romantic poets. Less than thirty years after Thomson published The Seasons in 1730 Freneau had begun his poetic career. Within less than two decades following the death of Gray in 1771 and that of Goldsmith in 1775 his career was virtually ended. Widely read in the transitional poets, practically a contemporary of the later members of the group, Freneau reflected their defects as well as their merits. However much at times he may resemble this group
from Thomson to Gray, he differs essentially from them in his interpretation of nature, and it is this difference that marks him as a poet apart from the strictly transitional group.

It is true that like them he turned to his natural surroundings for his poetic inspiration, drawing his imagery from a first-hand observation of natural phenomena. Like them he shows in his nature poetry certain subjective qualities and the faculty of evoking a mood, usually that of a subdued melancholy. Like Thomson he sensed the need of an expression freed from neo-Classic restrictions, while in sincerity, simplicity, and artistic restraint he is the worthy disciple of Collins and Gray.

Yet none of the transitional group found in nature, as Freneau did, a "life instinct with emotions akin and responsive to his own." Freneau surpassed his predecessors and contemporaries in a certain vigor of imagination and delicacy of perception whereby he grieved with the dying elm, learned wisdom from the falling leaf, rejoiced with the oak in its newly-budded branches, and mused with the plants concerning their enjoyment of refreshing sleep. Throughout his poetry Freneau reiterated his belief that in this relationship with nature man is ennobled and spiritualized—a view that transcended both the objective enjoyment of nature and the didactic aspect of the transitional poets.

It is not surprising that in the choice of themes Freneau shows some influence of his immediate predecessors. It would be more surprising if he showed none, for like them he learned from Milton
and Pope. From them in turn he learned the use of the "Gothic," of Norse folklore, and of certain notes of "graveyard" melancholy. It is surprising that in variety of subject matter Freneau surpassed them all, looking forward to the coming romanticism. He ran the whole gamut of romantic themes—love of nature, subjectivity, patriotic fervor, attention to the primitive ages, interest in the remote in time and place, as well as the use of the supernatural and the contemplation of death. In aim and aspiration Freneau was a true romantic.

The same cannot be held for his poetic expression as a whole. Only a small store of his nature lyrics, some of his Indian poems, a patriotic piece or so, and a group of his sea poems merit the distinction of a romantic expression. Even in these shorter poems one is at times disappointed in the faulty stanzas and marred lines, especially since in The Wild Honey Suckle and some similar lyrics Freneau reaches a high standard of genuinely romantic expression.

As for his longer poems, they are particularly uneven. In considering them one is forcibly reminded of Poe's contention that a long poem is a contradiction in terms.¹ The House of Night, A Jamaica Funeral, and The Beauties of Santa Cruz contain small groups of stanzas that in themselves possess a distinctly poetic style; isolated stanzas and lines glow with lyric beauty. From the viewpoint of artistic execution, however, there are too many dull stretches

¹ The Poetic Principle, 16 et. seq.
to regard them as consistently romantic in their expression. Consequently, only a small group of Freneau's work justly deserves to be considered romantic in both theme and expression, although in aim and aspiration Freneau was consistently romantic.

In view of these romantic elements in Freneau there naturally arises the question regarding his influence as a shaping force of the romantic movement in England and in America.

That Freneau's poetry was known and admired in England is evident from Scott's praise of *Eutaw Springs* and Campbell's indebtedness to him, as already noted. It is doubtful that he in any way influenced the English romantic poets except in a few isolated cases and then only to a limited extent. English romanticism was of gradual growth, shaped by political, social, and philosophical forces, influenced by a "hundred and one factors ranging from the re-discovery of the medieval ballads to the French revolution"2 with individualism as the common denominator of its literature.3 Freneau was himself influenced by these general tendencies already under way when he began writing. With his particularly receptive poetic sensibilities he was impressed by all these tides of thoughts, and took on some of the coloring of all these "hundred and one factors" which were influencing the eighteenth-century poets in varying degrees. Freneau

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3. Ibid.
sensed rather than grasped their purport. He felt rather than knew their ultimate direction. He spoke spontaneously a poetic language which later poets were to attain and inculcate as a result of their philosophical study of nature.

Freneau was like some traveler that by chance has stood upon a mountain height at dawn. He saw the last stars disappear and the darkness grow pale. He caught the first glimmerings of light in the east and glimpsed the faint glow along the horizon. Through the mists he envisioned the promise of the coming day and greeted it long before the ascending rays smiled down upon the valleys and dispelled the last vestiges of night. But his paeans did not hasten the sunrise nor awaken the sleepers in the valleys. Only a few dwellers in the heights or other travelers abroad caught the echo of his strains. Only afterward did they remember when the sun had ascended and the songs of other singers swelled to a mighty chorus that they already had heard the prelude, faint but clear, sung by the solitary singer at dawn.

So far as English romanticism is concerned Freneau’s influence cannot be considered a shaping force. Rather he must be regarded as one who responded fully to the growing power of romanticism and expressed his impressions with individuality. The role of “precursor” is rightfully his. Nor is it an empty honor in view of the increasing recognition of his vision and the artistry of his poetic message.

In considering Freneau’s relation to the romantic movement in America it is first necessary to comment briefly on the relationship
of English and American literature. Even into the present century the study of American literature has suffered from the mistaken idea that our literary store was but a part of the greater English literature, a mere reflection of English belles-lettres, and wholly derivative. Subconsciously the notion persists to this day.

From such a viewpoint American romanticism came wholly from England. It was the old story of English literary movements cropping up in America a generation after they had appeared in England, enjoying their heyday here when in England they were all but forgotten. Those who hold this theory consider Freneau either as a minor transitional poet or grudgingly grant him a place sandwiched in between Goldsmith and Wordsworth.

On the other hand, there early appeared in America a group determined to create a distinctly national literature, among them the Hartford Wits, Joseph Drake, and Fitz-Green Halleck. Laudable as was their aim, it led among their successors to the distorted, chauvinistic view that our literature could be and was produced entirely uninfluenced by the European and especially the English contribution. It was this view which caused Rufus Griswold to protest as early as 1847: "But there never was and never can be an exclusively national literature. All nations are indebted to each other and to preceding ages for the means of advancement."


Granting, then, the debt of American literature to the European tradition and especially to the English contribution, one must likewise concede that the American environment has its peculiar force in our literary history. This environment has given a romantic cast to our early national literature and has recently led a scholar of literary history to declare "that the literature of the United States from the birth of the nation to the twentieth century is part of the Romantic Movement." From this viewpoint one does not hesitate to agree that Freneau was the most distinguished precursor of American romanticism.

From this same viewpoint Freneau may be regarded as a shaping influence of American romanticism,

the most versatile and pronounced exponent of dawning nationalism, as well as a pioneer in poetic appreciation of the sea, of native Indian civilization, and of natural scenes on the new continent. Beginning before the Revolution and living to 1832, he represents the most complete embodiment of this period of nationalistic romanticism. In literary importance he is the greatest forerunner of that vigorous independence which is given a universal philosophical sanction by Emerson's "American Scholar" and which culminates in the rhapsodies of Whitman.

It must be borne in mind, nevertheless, that this influence was in emphasizing the poetic possibilities in American themes, in pointing out the wealth of romantic subjects inherent in American natural features, in her history, life, and customs. There still

6. Foerster, op. cit., 32.

7. Ibid.

remains the fact that Freneau's style was not consistently romantic and that later American authors looked more to English poets than to Freneau in framing their lyric expression.

Freneau occupies a place wholly unique among his contemporaries, standing "half in the Age of Reason, half in the Romantic Movement." 9 His original interpretation of nature marks him apart from the eighteenth century transitional poets, for "his best work points ahead." 10 Always a romantic at heart, at times achieving a truly romantic expression, Freneau is no mean "precursor" of Wordsworth and the English romantic movement. Uncontestably the forerunner of American romanticism, he is to some degree a leader of the movement, as it is judged from a revaluated study of our literary history.

Each year Freneau is becoming better known, not as the poet of the Revolution, but as America's first poet of unquestioned originality, 11 as a pioneer of the new poetic age of Wordsworth. 12 Consequently, in any study of romanticism Philip Freneau's place cannot be ignored. Whatever conclusion one reaches concerning his relation to the romantic movement, his position will continue to command consideration. He who would see the picture of romanticism in true perspective may well

10. Ibid.
12. Ibid., 56.
give more than passing attention to Freneau, the first American poet to love beauty for beauty's sake.
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