

Writing the Self: Philip Freneau's Homeostatic Poetic Production

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Traditional research has focused on the figure of Philip Freneau (1752-1832) as the champion of the late-eighteenth-century North American colonies' idiosyncrasy rather than on the reasons why Romantic and Neoclassical fashions coexist in his poetry. The present study aims to broaden current critical horizons by exploring the presence of a systematic pattern within Freneau's poetic production wherein the Neoclassical and Romantic literary traditions lie in complementary distribution—a distribution conditioned by the public and private nature of the texts and explainable in terms of an underlying principle of literary homeostasis. The major features of a representative selection of Freneau's poetic writings are thoroughly examined and correlated with the process whereby the author's private and public identities are constructed. Ultimately, the analysis evinces Philip Freneau's deliberate use of poetry as an esthetic conduit meant for individual and communal self-representation and elaboration.

Keywords: Philip Freneau; Neoclassicism; Romanticism; self-expression; self-construction; homeostasis

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Escritura e identidad: la poesía homeostática de Philip Freneau

La crítica literaria tradicional se ha centrado en la figura de Philip Freneau (1752-1832) como el campeón de la idiosincrasia propia de las colonias norteamericanas de finales del siglo XVIII en lugar de en las razones por las que en su poesía coexisten rasgos del Romanticismo y del Neoclasicismo. El presente estudio tiene como objeto ampliar los horizontes críticos actuales explorando la presencia de un patrón sistemático que se da en la producción poética de Freneau según el cual las tradiciones literarias neoclásica y romántica se hallan en distribución complementaria: una distribución condicionada por la naturaleza pública y privada de los textos y explicable en términos de un principio subyacente de

homeostasis literaria. Se analizan en detalle las principales características de una selección representativa de los escritos poéticos de Freneau, correlacionándolas con el proceso por el que el autor construye sus identidades privada y pública. En última instancia, el análisis evidencia cómo Philip Freneau empleó la poesía como un conducto estético que sirviera para la representación y elaboración de una identidad individual y comunal.

Palabras clave: Philip Freneau; Neoclasicismo; Romanticismo; expresión de la identidad; construcción de la identidad; homeostasis

1. INTRODUCTION

The co-existence of the Neoclassical and Romantic traditions is perhaps one of the defining features of the poetry produced by Philip Morin Freneau (1752-1832), as already pointed out by some early critics such as Lowell Coolidge (1928, 68) and Harry Clark (1925, 32), or, more recently, Robert Arner (1974, 54) and Lewis Leary (1976, 157). Also known as the “Poet of the American Revolution,” Freneau was one of the major heralds of the Revolutionary ideals of the 1770s and 1780s. Due to his historically determinant role as an ardent adherent to the anti-British attitude that prevailed in those who fought for the Revolution, traditional research has tended to focus on Freneau’s figure as the champion of the late-eighteenth-century North American colonies’ idiosyncrasy rather than on the reasons why the Romantic and Neoclassical trends coexist in his poetry. In order to contribute to a more accurate critical appraisal of the poet, the aim of this essay is to shed light on the presence of a thus far overlooked systematic pattern within Freneau’s poetic production wherein the two traditions lie in complementary distribution. The objective of the present study is threefold. First, the essay aims to evince Freneau’s deliberate use of distinct esthetic devices in the elaboration of his public and private writings, and, hence, in the construction of his public and private personae. Second, the essay attempts to expound the differences between Freneau’s public and private poetic production in terms of an underlying principle of literary homeostasis, following the use of the term proposed by Timothy Clark (2011, 18-19). Third, the essay endeavors to elucidate the complex dynamics that govern the poet’s resort to both conservative and avant-garde fashions, a dynamics defined by Freneau’s attempt to deploy his writings as an esthetic vehicle meant to satisfy his needs for communal and individual self-expression, elaboration and assertion.

2. AN ENLIGHTENED REVOLUTION: NEOCLASSICISM AND ROMANTICISM IN LATE-EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY NORTH AMERICA

In a letter to Hezekiah Niles (February 13, 1818), John Adams observed that “[t]he Revolution was effected before the war commenced. The Revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people; a change in their religious sentiments of their duties and obligations” ([1818] 1856, 282). Adams’s remark reads as a fit beginning to this study for three main reasons. First, because it displays an obvious yet commonly overlooked fact about the American Revolution, namely that the Revolution was the product of a process of transition initiated, developed and concluded not on a physical battlefield but in a spiritual, ideological and private arena. Second, because of its writer, one of the major agents in the articulation and elaboration of the ideological foundations that propelled the process of identity transition of “the North American colonists” into “the American people.” Third, because of its addressee, a personal friend to the former president who was also a publisher and editor, a position that operated as the central vehicle for the transmission of the Revolutionary ideas propounded by the intellectual elites among the North American population, to which, along with other important figures, Philip Freneau belonged.

The American Revolution, that is, the colonial revolt that granted independence to thirteen colonies formerly under the rule of Britain, bloomed from a prolific volume of philosophical, cultural and literary discourses that cohered around a complex sociopolitical dialectics based on the North American population's demands for the resignification of their national identity. As George Coutris argues, in the aftermath of the French and Indian War (1754-1763), "congeniality between England and her colonies began to disintegrate" (1987, 1), fostering the distressed colonists' examination of their (so-deemed) precarious socioeconomic and political condition. This process of self-scrutiny triggered a growing need to reformulate their status as a community, which resulted, as D.H. Meyer explains, in the increasing use of the label the *American* people within Revolutionary rhetorics as a self-asserting statement that the North American population was now a nascent and altogether distinct community (1976, 172). What exactly was meant by "being American," however, remained a question to be settled, as Jeffrey Pasley concludes, "by force of documents, texts, and clashing forms of rhetorics" ([2009] 2012, 101). Arguably, in the second half of the eighteenth century, the delineation of the defining features that comprised the essence of Americanness became the prime focus of discussion in the dominant discourses produced and consumed by the colonists. Robert Ferguson suggests, indeed, that the ultimate triumph of the Revolution depended on the sort of "consensual literature" that developed during this period with the aim of establishing the ideological foundations upon which the American identity was to be based: "To read the works of the early Republic as they were written is to recognize that the tone, scope, meaning, and shape of those writings were forged decisively in the difficulty of bringing millions to agree" (1997, 6-7). In other words, the multifarious periodicals and pieces of literature that circulated through the colonies sprang from the newborn Americans' collective efforts to articulate a communal identity independent of the British self with which they had so far identified (Meyer 1976, 178). Paradoxically, in their endeavor to outline the specifics of their identity, the American people appropriated the ideological and sociopolitical proposals of an originally European intellectual movement, which was gradually elaborated into what came to be known as the American Enlightenment.

In discussing the influence that the Enlightened proposals had on the process of self-elaboration that the North American people was experiencing, Coutris claims that "the enlightenment ideals exerted a considerable impact in weaving moral values and a national self-image" (1987, 3). The spread of the Enlightened ideals provided the colonists with a new critical spirit that drove them to question the metropolitan government that had allegedly broken the Lockean "social contract" that bound them together. Eventually, the underlying rage at the basis of this questioning incited a growing desire for independence, which Revolutionary rhetorics justified by analogizing the Revolutionary claims to the Enlightened proposals (Blair, Horbenger and Stewart [1964] 1974, 52). It should be noted that, as opposed to its European equivalents, the American Enlightenment did not develop in the philosophical discussions conducted by an elitist sphere. On the contrary, as Meyer asserts, "[t]he Enlightenment was nowhere

a more public event than in America" (1976, 171), whose population "adopted the principles of the Enlightenment and of the age of democratic revolution and exalted them in public documents, national monuments, and, presumably, in their own hearts and minds" (180). The American Enlightenment's prominently public nature today remains an area under intense scrutiny. Yet, the male population's remarkably high rates of literacy and, most significantly, the political deployment of the several periodicals that were sprouting through the colonies appear to have considerably contributed to the rapid diffusion of its key proposals (Himmelfarb 2005, 218). Arguably, the role played by publishers, editors and writers was pivotal for the ultimate triumph of the Revolutionary cause, which explains the substantial amount of literature once devoted to exploring Philip Freneau's production. Poet, polemicist and editor, Philip Morin Freneau (1752-1832) acted as one of the major heralds of the Revolutionary claims during the 1770s and 1780s, a period when he strove to "unite and hold in line a Revolutionary party [by] appeal[ing] to the interests and the prejudices of as many different groups as [he] could" (Blair, Horbenger and Stewart [1964] 1974, 52). His pieces of criticism against the British malady and supporters, together with the poems where he glorified the values and heroes of the Revolution, brought Freneau to great public recognition and, further, urged the American people to join in the fight for both political and sociocultural independence.

Much has been said and written about the role that Freneau and other Revolutionary artists played in the process of identity transition that the colonists were undergoing—see Blair, Horbenger and Stewart ([1964] 1974), Andrews (1987) and Winterer (2005), among others. The literature, architecture and pictorial art produced during the Revolution may be argued to be further manifestations of the Americans' desire to construct a distinctive communal identity through the establishment of a culture and art of their own (Blair, Horbenger and Stewart [1964] 1974, 48). For this purpose, the different North American artistic circles began to grow interested in the appropriation not only of the Enlightened proposals but also of the artistic trend to which these gave way in Europe: Neoclassicism. Caroline Winterer explains how, just as the Enlightened propositions were used to justify the legitimacy of the Revolutionary claims, the type of art produced in North America in the late eighteenth century attempted to deploy "the familiar medium of the Classical world to articulate a critical and complex transition in national mythology" and "us[e] the moral authority of Greek and Roman antiquity to convey new meanings" (2005, 1268). In some ways, a translation of the Enlightened rationalist proposals into the realm of the arts, Neoclassicism resorted to ancient Greek and Roman culture as a guide for creation and criticism, promoting the conception of art as a craft or technique, a product resulting from the imitation of established patterns meant to fulfill a social and didactic purpose (Abrams [1953] 1971, 15, 17). It follows that the literary manifestations produced in North America during the Revolution were expected to collaborate in the process of self-construction that the American people was experiencing, spreading the Enlightened proposals and ascribing the prestige and power associated with the Classical tradition to the newborn American people and culture.

However, it should be remembered that the end of the eighteenth century stands as a major period of transition not only in America but also in Europe. As a reaction against the highly normative Neoclassical trend, a new artistic sensibility began to spread among the European avant-garde, eventually giving rise to Romanticism. As Rafey Habib notes, Romanticism emerged in literature as an alternative mode of writing that centered on the exploration of the subject's inner experience of reality, advocated for the use of the individual's unique creative capacities and vindicated the notion that poetry was meant to fulfill an expressive rather than pragmatic function (2004, 332-333). The relevance of the rise of Romanticism, however, lies in the fact that, as Meyer Howard Abrams expounds, it marked the transition from the perception of the individual as necessarily subordinated to a group to the promotion of the subject as an entity above community itself: "[T]he stress was shifted more and more to the poet's natural genius, creative imagination, and emotional spontaneity [...]. As a result the audience gradually receded into the background, giving place to the poet himself, and his own mental powers and emotional needs, as the predominant cause and even the end and test of art" ([1953] 1971, 21). The literature produced in North America in the mid and late eighteenth century was seemingly articulated as a similar exercise of self-development as the one propounded by the Romantic tradition. Yet, rather than targeted at individual self-construction, it actually impelled the sublimation of the subject into the communal self that was, at that time, still in the making; as Coutris suggests: "The Founding Fathers envisioned the emergence of an American nation based on the traditions of classical republicanism. This view stressed a civic humanism anchored by reason, virtue, duty, and social responsibility. Individualism would be subordinated to the collective good" (1987, 4). This might explain the poor reception that Romanticism had in North America by the end of the eighteenth century in comparison with the great attention it obtained within the continental avant-garde: for the benefit of articulating and diffusing Revolutionary ideals and, hence, the elaboration of the American identity, Neoclassicism remained the preferred mode of writing.

Notwithstanding the above, the writings of various late-eighteenth-century North American authors such as Washington Irving (1753-1859), Phillis Wheatley (1753-1784) and Philip Freneau evince some early Romantic influences, which traditional research has tended to analyze in terms of a superficial or anecdotal resort to the avant-garde tradition's esthetics and imagery. As Walter Blair, Theodore Horbenger and Randall Stewart claim, for instance, these authors "use many of the themes which preoccupied their successors—nature and the picturesque, the common man, the legendary past—but they lack the underlying philosophy [...] This is why they are commonly called pre-romantics" ([1964] 1974, 65). To date, the general critical consensus concerning Freneau and his contemporaries' seemingly desultory resort to Romantic fashions remains unquestioned. In the case of Freneau, this is partly due to the fact that, although his poetic production was a major object of study among the critics of the early twentieth century, from the 1960s onwards interest in him and his poetry gradually dwindled,

resulting in a marked shortage of contemporary academic material. Nevertheless, the fact that the poetry of such a canonical public writer as Philip Freneau displays major traces of both Neoclassicism and Romanticism deserves further examination.

For this purpose, the present study sets out to broaden current critical horizons by elucidating the presence of a thus far overlooked systematic pattern within Freneau's production wherein the Neoclassical and Romantic traditions appear to lie in complementary distribution—a distribution conditioned by the public and private nature of the texts, and explainable in terms of an underlying principle of “literary homeostasis,” following Timothy Clark's use of the term (2011). In discussing the reactionary spirit controlling the production of late-eighteenth-century British writers, Clark claims that the main aim of these authors was to elaborate “a psychic and ethical counterbalance” (18) to the previous overly restricted, anti-individualistic and rationalist mode of writing, thence attempting to elaborate a less “artificial” style that might privilege a subjective perception and expression of reality. Stemming from Clark's proposals, what follows endeavors to prove how the differences between Freneau's private and public writings may be argued to respond to a similar principle of literary homeostasis, that is, to the author's attempt to construct his public and private personae upon a deliberately discriminative resort to two distinct literary modes: a style adapted to the sociopolitical needs and tastes of his audience versus a style centered on the exploration and elaboration of his individual identity.

3. NEOCLASSICISM AND THE PUBLIC SELF

Freneau's public production attests to the author's remarkably percipient poetic sensitivity. Aware of the role that writers were expected to perform in the configuration of the American communal identity, Freneau set out to exert the function of spokesman for the Revolutionary cause when addressing his readers, contributing to the delineation of the American people's specifics by setting out the ideological foundations upon which the American identity was to stand and instructing his audience thereon. Hence, as a manifestation of the “consensual” mode of literature that typifies the writings of the Revolution (Ferguson 1997, 20), Freneau's public verse may be readily defined by its “tendency toward direct statement, moralizing illustration, and frank didacticism” (Brooks, Lewis and Penn Warren 1973, 206), or, rather, for the pragmatic and didactic function it aims to fulfill—the conceptualization and diffusion of a totalizing view of the thirteen colonies' population as a distinctive community homogenized under a unique identity.

“Prefatory Lines to a Periodical Publication” (1815) may exemplify what has been mentioned above. The text is an edition of “Poetical Address” (1797), a salutatory poem with which the writer opened his period of editorship. In the text, Freneau greets his readers and promises to offer good-quality and varied pieces of news and literature: “Here are dishes by dozens; whoever will eat / Will have no just cause to complain of the treat” ([1815] 1976, lines 3-4). Yet, in what appears to be merely an advertising poem, the author

comments on several issues of sociopolitical and literary interest, adopting a markedly patriotic stand and an assumption that his audience demands the commitment of writers and editors to the defense of Enlightened or, rather, American ideals. Throughout the poem, the author argues that his editorial choices, though questioned by some (lines 13-16), will be based on his desire to work “in the service of freedom” (line 17), that is, America and its people. Freneau justifies his position by arguing that “[i]n a country like this [...] [t]he trade of an author importance may claim” (lines 21-22). The writer, he asserts, is able to enlighten his readers into reason and virtue, providing them with the tools to protect themselves from those “[w]hose views are to chain and be-darken the mind” (line 24). Freneau goes on to identify good-quality writing with pro-American writing, stating that the job of the writer is essential so that tyranny and ignorance, associated with Europe (lines 19-20), do not triumph over freedom and reason. In other words, for Freneau, the writer acts as the herald and protector of freedom, virtue, reason and, by metonymic association, North America: “[To virtue and freedom] all attracting, all views should submit / All labors of learning, all essays of wit” (lines 51-52).

Freneau closes the poem with a series of stanzas wherein he discusses how America is not the first country in history which can boast “of [its] liberty” (line 30). The author appeals to two ancient republican regimes, Athens and Rome, and comments they were once the seat of “virtue and wisdom” (line 31), much as America, according to him, is in his times. And yet, these formerly splendid republics, the bastions of freedom and reason, were eventually degraded into enslaving and tyrannical states (lines 43-44). As usual in his public poetry, Freneau associates America with the Classical world. In this text, he proposes an equation between the two milieux to encourage his readers to “learn a sad lesson” (line 46) from the Classical tradition: never to fail to defend freedom, virtue and reason. By never yielding to moral, political or intellectual corruption, the system would be maintained and serve as an example, as Freneau puts it, “for the honor of man” (line 56), obliterating tyranny once and for all.

Although edited in 1815, the text offers a good overview of the literary stance that Freneau adopted throughout his career as a public writer. The author states that his major concern when addressing his audience will be the production of a type of poetry where a didactic, pragmatic function and a patriotic, pro-American content will predominate. Not coincidentally, the virtues that Freneau presents as intrinsically American—freedom and reason—and the vices that he associates with Europe—tyranny and ignorance—are the attributes and flaws which the Enlightenment respectively privileged and combatted. The poet presents the Enlightened ideals as being at the core of the American identity and suggests their obliteration would lead not only to a new tyrannical government but also to the loss of Americanness itself. Significantly, the idealization of America and its people as the physical manifestation of the Enlightened proposals is a recurrent motif of Freneau’s public poetry. “American Liberty,” published in John Holt’s *New York Journal* in 1775, for instance, also discusses the Enlightened ideals as fundamental traits of the American self. In the text, Freneau examines a number of parallelisms between the current state of affairs

in the colonies and their early history, praising the American people and identifying the British as their malady. Hence, the poet justifies the Revolution as a necessary vindication of reason and virtue, exhorting the American population to join in a legitimate fight for independence while elaborating the American identity upon the construction of an Other.

The poem begins by offering a brief account of the early history of North America. Freneau alludes to the first settlers as an example of a subjugated people who refused to tolerate the tyranny of a British king and sought freedom in the New World (Freneau [1775] 1963, lines 31-38). After this account, Freneau addresses his fellow colonists and urges them not to “submit to what [their] fathers shunn’d before” (line 90), tyranny, but to “fight and in [the Revolutionary] cause be slain” (line 94) if necessary. Freneau justifies the fight by implicitly appealing to the Lockean social contract which bound the colonies and the British metropolis, but which the latter had broken. According to the text, no “oath [bound the British] to act below the worth of man” (lines 108-109), to “enslave their brethren in a foreign land” (line 106) or advocate for “vile despotic sway” (line 110). By alluding to the mid-eighteenth-century British colonial policies, Freneau dismisses any potential anti-Revolutionary claim, whether based on fear or treason to America (lines 125-138). As he asserts, nothing “[c]ould draw the virtuous man from virtue’s way” (line 163) for “Virtue disdains to own tyrannic laws, / Takes part with freedom and assumes its cause” (lines 165-166).

It should be noted that the poet consistently constructs the American and British communities as inherently antonymous throughout the text. While the Americans are depicted as a “virtu[ous]” (line 300), “honor[able]” (line 215) and “brave” (line 263) people, led by reason and “by heaven inspir’d” (line 141) to protect freedom (lines 7-10), the British are depicted as a “cruel” (line 133), “fiend[ish]” (line 188), brutish (lines 116-118) and “alien” (line 303) people. This pattern of antonymic correspondences is rendered even clearer in descriptions of General George Washington (1732-1799) and King George III (1738-1820). According to the author, only liberty should rule in America; George III was, thus, nothing but a foreign oppressor. Freneau attempts to justify his claims by appealing to reason, legitimizing the Revolution by claiming that the British king had broken oaths “that th’Arch-Devil would blush to violate” (line 184). The representative of the British cause is depicted as a “foe to truth” (line 185), a “devilish” (line 186) and abusive ruler “[w]hose lengthen’d reign no deed of worth should grace” (line 177). The poet suggests the king’s supporters are just as brutish and insidious, asserting the British have been “[b]less’d with as little sense as God e’er gave” (line 192) and are hence led by ambition and lies. This is why, Freneau explains, the British army, “[w]ho fights to take [the Americans’] liberty away, / Dead-hearted fights and falls an easy prey” (lines 99-100). This description of King George III clearly intentionally opposes that of General Washington, the representative of the American cause, whom the poet portrays as a mighty figure who could have “aw’d / A Roman Hero, or a Grecian God” (lines 221-222), being a “bold” (line 221) and “undaunted” (line 224) leader responsible for the protection of “New Albion’s freedom” (line 219).

As expected of a wartime poem, the author presents his enemy with a series of negative features while praising the virtues of his faction. Yet, Freneau's aim is not to criticize the British per se, but to justify the Revolutionary claims by evincing his enemy's wickedness. Hence, he exemplifies in thorough detail and in a sorrowful tone how the British, referred to as "strangers" at several points in the text (lines 106, 207, 303), first abused and then attacked the Americans: "Ah, see with grief fair Massachusetts' plains, / The seat of war, and death's terrific scenes" (lines 21-22). Through this depiction, Freneau encourages his readers to join in a war portrayed not as a causeless insurgence against their own kin, but as a legitimate fight against foreign tyrants and brutes. Still, as suggested above, the portrayal of the British and American peoples as inherently antonymic is not accidental; rather, the terms that the poet deploys in the text are deliberately meant to fulfill a markedly sociopolitical function. The poem can be seen as an exercise of "Othering," following the use of the term proposed by Lajos Brons (2015). The author defines "Othering" as "the simultaneous construction of the self or in-group and the other or out-group in mutual and unequal opposition through identification of some desirable characteristic that the self/in-group has and the other/out-group lacks and/or some undesirable characteristic that the other/out-group has and the self/in-group lacks" (2015, 70). In his public writings, Freneau renders the British with a series of vices that systematically oppose the virtues ascribed to the Americans. The poet finds an Other in the British and, thereby, constructs the American self through binary opposition: the British self functions, therefore, as the foil to American identity.

To a certain extent, the text follows the proposals which Freneau articulates in "Prefatory Lines to a Periodical Publication." "American Liberty" has a clearly patriotic message, meant to carry out a didactic and propagandistic function by legitimizing the Revolution through the praise of America and criticism of the British. The poet provides the reader with several arguments to assert the rightfulness of the American cause at a political, social and even moral level. In both texts, Freneau analyzes his people's enemy, elaborating on the antonymic correspondences between his Self (the American people) and its Other (the British). Ultimately, the author attempts to outline the American self by means of the appropriation of the Enlightened proposals and its opposition with a non-Enlightened enemy—a technique of self-construction based on the Othering that the poet also deploys in several other poems such as "On General Washington's Arrival in Philadelphia" (1786b). Originally published in 1783 in the *Freeman's Journal*, the text is an edition of a laudatory poem addressed to General Washington as he returned to Virginia after the end of the war. The poet accumulates a series of compliments celebrating Washington's figure and deeds, further praising the oft-portrayed representative of Americanness through the appropriation of the esthetics, imagery and sociocultural prestige associated with the Classical tradition.

After setting the poem in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution, Freneau starts by claiming the world "hail[s] the Hero of [America]" ([1786b] 1975, line 12), that is, General Washington, whose feats have granted him immortality in his renown (lines

14-16) and “due rewards” (line 20). As the poet notes, Washington was a source both of inspiration for his troops (line 41) and of fear for his enemies. Freneau comments that, without him, the Revolution could have never been victorious (lines 47-48) and insists that his praise is not to be taken as “swelling verse” (line 49), since, he asserts, Washington does not need such vain compliment: “[W]ithout such aid [the general’s] triumphs spread” (line 51). Freneau further praises his attainments by suggesting writers are not able to faithfully reproduce his figure and acts of grandeur (lines 93-95). Yet, as the poet underlines, Fame, the goddess, and her “thousand tongues” (line 14) will herald the general’s glory, ensuring that his persona, actions and victory are known worldwide. To a certain extent, the representation of the American self, embodied in the figure of Washington, follows the same pattern of antonymic correspondences discussed above and, hence, serves a similar sociopolitical function. The general is portrayed as an “honorable” (line 29) and “virtu[ous]” (line 23) “hero” (line 12) and “patriot” (line 72) who fought not for fame or material rewards, but for America and freedom (lines 21-24), whereas the British are depicted as tyrannical (line 38) and monster-like (line 39) figures. Freneau extends his criticism of the British to “the Old World” (line 56), a land presumably controlled by “barbarous laws” (line 57) and “proud” (line 60) despots. Nevertheless, the poet explains, the “sun” (line 85) that the Americans have ignited will light “on other worlds” (line 88), so that tyranny will melt away in other states following the example of America: “Cold climes beneath his influence glow, / And frozen rivers learn to flow” (lines 89-90). Thus, Freneau asserts that the European people, once acquainted with Washington’s fame and the Revolution’s triumph, will “learn instruction from the New [World]” (line 58) and fight against tyranny in the name of freedom, virtue and reason.

The imagery used to praise the figure of Washington is most noteworthy. The general is equated to a military leader from the early Roman republic, Cincinnatus (lines 77-78). The poet refers to Washington as America’s “hero” (lines 12, 34, 47) and calls upon Classical literary motifs to magnify his persona: Washington is portrayed as a slayer of beasts (lines 37-40), a man “[grown] immortal by distress” (line 16) who stands as the protective entity or “Genius” (line 13) that guards America. Still, Freneau’s depiction does not simply equate Washington with the Classical world; it further presents him as excelling in terms of its models of heroism. Favored by the goddess of Virtue (lines 23-24), Washington’s feats have granted him unparalleled glory: “What Muse can boast of equal lays” (line 92). His deeds are far “brighter” (line 35) than those of Classical heroes for, as Freneau claims, “[f]or ravag’d realms and conquer’d seas / Rome gave the great imperial prize” (lines 31-32). The general, however, has “gain[ed] those heights a different way” (line 36). Freneau’s praise is thus based upon the establishment of a number of correspondences between the Classical world and the figure of Washington. Yet, the superiority of the latter is always underlined.

In discussing the use of Classical imagery in the Revolutionary and early Republican periods, Stuart Andrews notes that “the symbols, slogans, political ideas and architectural forms of the American Revolution are an impressive tribute to the power of Classical literature in moulding the minds of men of action” (1987, 42). Late-eighteenth-century

North American art, politics and architecture are doubtless inheritors of the Classical tradition. Still, rather than a “tribute,” the use of Classical imagery may be seen as yet another device for communal self-construction based on an exercise of appropriation and opposition. In his public writings, Freneau set out to channel the American self through the appropriation of Classical literary patterns. As Winterer claims, the colonists regarded the Classical world as a symbol of power and prestige (2005, 1268). By reading America, its people and its representatives in terms of the Classical world, Freneau aims to ascribe the positive values associated with this tradition to the American identity. But the relationship that the poet establishes between the American and the Classical milieu often steps beyond mere parallelism. The Americans are not only equated to the Classical world; they are rendered superior. Somehow, Freneau appears to find in the Classical world not a debased contrary, but an illustrious and respectable Other, which, though a most laudable foil, is ultimately excelled by its better—the American self.

“On General Washington’s Arrival in Philadelphia” (1786b) proves how Freneau delineated the American identity through opposition to an Other, through the appropriation of the Enlightened ideals and through the filter of the Classical tradition. In the text, the author is most concerned with the portrayal of the triumph of the Revolutionary claims, embodied in the figure of General Washington, as self-asserting attainment. For Freneau, the success of the Revolution confirmed the political and sociocultural independence of the American people for which he had so fervently advocated during the war. Godfrey Hodgson argues that the aftermath of the Revolution brought a number of socioeconomic and political developments to the newborn nation that contributed to spreading the view of the North American people as a community that was both respectable and somewhat special, indeed: “[A] new and dynamic republic was coming into existence under the banner of a political ideology that was [deemed] genuinely new [...]. This was seen by Americans as an ideology of liberty” (2009, 60). The Americans should now rejoice, but also serve as an example for the rest of the world. Encouraged by the triumph of the Revolution, therefore, Freneau and his contemporaries started to portray the American self as both *Enlightened* and *Enlightening*—a common post-Revolutionary depiction that, developed from ideas already cherished by the early colonists, lay the foundations of what came to be known as the myth of “American Exceptionalism” (Madsen 1998, 38).

4. ROMANTICISM AND THE PRIVATE SELF

As the analysis provided illustrates, Freneau’s public production portrays the utter submission of the poet to the audience that his work addresses. The poet’s “I” rarely occurs in his public verses, for Freneau therein resolved to blend his individual self into the totalizing communal identity or “We” that the American people so fervently needed and that he so earnestly set to define. As discussed above, Freneau’s public persona was inherently defined in pluralistic terms, which explains why, as he states in “Prefatory Lines to a Periodical Publication,” his public verse was always “adapt[ed] to the taste

of the day" (Freneau [1815] 1976, line 10). In parallel to his public writings, however, Freneau penned a number of poems where, as Richard Vitzthum argues, he adopted a less political stance and focused on the exploration of a set of topics intimately related to his private sphere, privileging his artistic sensitivity and his subjective perception of reality over the non-private concerns and modes of self-representation that typify his public production (1978, 12). To evince this, this section centers on the analysis of a selection of texts where the poet primarily addresses his individual experiences, reflections and concerns, and where he therefore departs from the literary and esthetic conventions that define his public verse in order to resort to the mode of writing which the continental avant-garde was starting to formulate.

"The Power of Fancy" (1786a) may serve as an insightful introduction to the commitment of Freneau's private poetry to the need to give literary preeminence to the poet's subjective experience of reality. Written in 1770, the text portrays imagination as a superior creative power that enables the poet to transcend the barriers of the physical world and, hence, incorporate supranatural experiences into his writings. It begins by personifying fancy as the "regent of the mind" (Freneau [1786a] 1975, line 4), a powerful entity engaged in swift and constant wandering, whose "restless" (line 1) nature is exemplified by the accumulation of a set of images where, transported by this winged creature, the poet engages in a world journey, traveling to far-off places such as Norway (line 64), India (line 113) and Tahiti (line 120). Fancy does not, however, only transport the poet through space: it also grants him the ability to travel to the past and visit the "faded scenes" (line 101) of lands that, although consumed by time, are rendered into "livelier colours" (line 108) by the power of imagination.

The speaker's description of fancy's power to traverse time and space implies that fancy is not limited by physical constraints, which is further emphasized by the fact that it allows the speaker to transcend into supranatural dimensions: Fancy leads the poet to the skies, where they listen to "the song of angels" (line 33), after which they descend into hell, "the prison of the fiends" (line 42), only to reemerge in the utopian land of Arcadia (line 47). It should be noted that neither of the experiences that the text describes is mediated by the poet's senses: they are all filtered by the creative potency of fancy since, as the poet underlines, "[s]ense [could] never follow [Fancy]" (line 82) for she is even "[s]wifter than [...] instantaneous rays of light" (lines 61-62). Significantly, as Vitzthum suggests, the poem depicts fancy "as the activity of mind celebrated by the mid-[eighteenth]-century British poets—memory cut loose from its sense-experience moorings, splicing together previously unrelated data stored in the brain and creating images not found in nature" (1978, 72). As portrayed in the text, fancy is indeed not an imitative faculty, unavoidably reliant on memories or physical experiences. On the contrary, fancy is able to engender experiences not dependent on sensible stimuli. This is the reason why the poem opens and closes by referring not to reason, but to fancy as the quality that truly proves humans' "[r]esemblance to the immortal race" (Freneau [1786a] 1975, line 10). The poet equates the creative power of human fancy

to God's by claiming that the whole creation is but the product of divine imagination: "Ah! what is all this mighty whole [...] But Fancies of the Power Divine" (lines 12-14). Granted by divinity, the power of fancy offers humans a similar opportunity to create "[e]ndless images of things" (line 143), one that cannot be found in the physical world—"In thy painted realms reside [...] Ideal objects, such a store, / The universe could hold no more" (lines 142-146). A claim that the poet strives to prove by using his own imagination to travel across and beyond nature in the text.

The poem portrays Freneau's rejection of the Lockean view of the human mind as a passive receptor, dependent on external experiences and sensory input. As Rafey Habib suggests in discussing late-eighteenth-century European philosophy, "in the wake of the philosophical systems of [Fichte, Schelling and Hegel] human perception [was seen as] playing an active role rather than merely receiving impressions passively from the outside world" (2004, 332). Freneau follows his European contemporaries and advocates a view of the human mind as an active principle, ruled by fancy rather than reason. The poem celebrates the creative potency of the human mind and, implicitly, the author's ability to create impressions not based on sensible experiences but on the transient nature of his imagination, privileging the use of the individual's subjective skills as a legitimate source of artistic inspiration. In effecting the power of fancy to transcend the limitations of the senses, the poet manages to exert the faculty that, as he states, proves his resemblance to the divinity. "The Power of Fancy" provides a good overview of the literary principles at the core of Freneau's private production. Following Abrams, Freneau's private texts can be argued to fulfill a markedly "expressive" function, for these poems are not meant to be "an end, an instrument for getting something done" ([1953] 1971, 15), but are rather "defined in terms of the imaginative process which modifies and synthesizes the images, thoughts, and feelings of the poet" (22). Hence, as opposed to the didactic and propagandistic function that Freneau's public poetry fulfills, his private texts, as the poem claims, are based on the exercise of imagination to externalize, explore and understand his inner, private self.

As suggested above, Freneau is primarily concerned with the projection of his individual voice onto his private writings. In order to do so, the poet often resorts to nature, whose presence is, it must be acknowledged, highlighted in his public texts as well. Indeed, Freneau recurrently resorts to nature in his public writings to depict America as the physical manifestation of the Enlightened ideals, reading New England as an idealized Arcadia. Freneau's private poetry, however, particularly displays a more complex depiction and understanding of the natural world. Nature becomes the medium whereby the author channels his reflections, feelings and apprehensions. In some cases, as in "The Beauties of Santa Cruz" (1779), nature stands as a vast source of spiritual renewal. In others, such as "The Vernal Ague" (1786), nature becomes a gloomy and unsympathetic setting to which the poet helplessly turns for shelter. The representation of nature in Freneau's private poetry, then, varies in accordance with the poet's mood and state of mind. Yet, despite its multifarious manifestations, nature

always channels Freneau's observations toward the bonds that connect fauna, flora and humans, his reflections upon transience, life and death, and, in essence, his attempt to project his inner self into his private poetic writings.

"The Wild Honey Suckle" (1795) may help to illustrate the author's attempt to appeal to nature as a means to channel his individual identity. First published in the *Columbian Herald* (Charleston, SC), the text is one of Freneau's most frequently anthologized poems. In the text, the poet addresses a wild honeysuckle, praising the flower, whose beauty, though simple, induces his lament on the brevity of life. The poem is structured in four sestets that follow the speaker's observation of the wild honeysuckle and the consequent development of his understanding of the flower, its surroundings, and the very essence of natural and human existence. The poet begins by addressing the honeysuckle as a "fair flower" (Freneau [1795] 1976, line 1) "[h]id in [a] silent, dull retreat" (line 2), a shelter in the midst of the wilderness. Nature itself, depicted as a protective entity that counsels and guards the flower (lines 7-8), is claimed to have "planted here the guardian shade / And sent soft waters murmuring by" (lines 9-10). Protected by Nature from external agents, the honeysuckle has been able to "grow" (line 1) "[u]ntouch'd" (line 3) and "[u]nseen" (line 4). The speaker praises the honeysuckle's beauty throughout the text, for, although simple and "little" (line 4), he deems it superior even to paradisiacal flowers (line 15-16). However, the honeysuckle's "charms" (line 13) are not only naively described as a source of sensuous pleasure; they also induce the poet's lament on the flower's eventual and inevitable decay and death: "I grieve to see your future doom" (line 14). In the last stanza, the speaker melancholically reflects on the brevity of the flower's existence. The poet notes that the honeysuckle's "little being" (line 20) emerged from "the morning suns and evening dews" (line 19). Before its birth, the flower was "nothing" (line 21), for it did not exist but in a vacuum of non-existence. For this reason, the speaker argues that, after death, the honeysuckle will be "the same" (line 22), ceasing its existence and returning to naught. In the end, as the poet muses, the flower's life spans a "space between" (line 23) pre-existence and post-existence—a brief hour, indeed, "[t]he frail duration of a flower" (line 24).

In discussing the poem, Brooks, Lewis and Penn Warren claim that "one has to regard the poem as sentimental; it exhibits superficial reaction rather than presenting a profound insight" (1973, 207). The text may be described as a sentimental poem. The speaker's melancholy pervades the description of the wild honeysuckle, as well as his final lament on its unavoidable death and the fragility and brevity of its existence. Yet, the speaker's attitude toward the honeysuckle is not only melancholic, it is also sympathetic, to the extent that he even refers to the flower in human terms at several points: the honeysuckle is "fair" and "comely" (Freneau [1795] 1976, line 1), its branches "greet" (line 4), if abused, it may cry (line 6), etc. Hence, though sentimental, the poem is also profoundly introspective: the author is using the flower as a vehicle to reflect on human existence. The personification of the honeysuckle is likely meant to equate the human and the natural experience: just as the flower is allowed a brief span of time to live, only to eventually perish, so too are humans. In this reading, the text is not a superficial description of the

flower or the speaker's feelings, but a somewhat nihilistic reflection on the brevity and fragility of human and nature's existence, and on death, obliterating and unavoidable.

"The Deserted Farm-House" (1809) is yet another poem that illustrates the features discussed above. Originally published in 1785 in the *Freeman's Journal* (Philadelphia, PA), the text is an edition of a lyric poem where the speaker's observation of the ruins of an abandoned farmhouse induces his melancholic reflections on the merciless and unavoidable passing of time. Although centered on the description of the farmhouse's ruins and potential past, the poem ultimately celebrates the poet's unique talent and sensitivity, which allow him to generate impressions not found in nature and to find in the seemingly unpleasant a source of artistic inspiration. The text begins with the speaker's reference to the ruins of a farmhouse that has been almost utterly consumed by "the insatiate tooth of time" (Freneau [1809] 1976, line 1). Before the rest of the structure crumbles down, the speaker sets out to record the farmhouse in his writing: "I seize my humble theme / From these low ruins" (lines 3-4). The poet addresses the reader by means of imperatives—"Behold" (line 5), "See!" (line 7)—as he proceeds to melancholically describe the building, emphasizing its physical decay and its loneliness (lines 5-6). The farmhouse's present "dismal" (line 40) state is further emphasized by the fact that the speaker does not merely describe the ruins: inspired by its remains, he also fancies on its potential past (lines 28-29), which, as he stresses, is now forever gone: "Time has reduced the fabrick to a shed" (line 38). Whatever its past might have been, the farmhouse's ruins induce the poet's meditation on time and decay, which centers on the connection between the ruins and two major ancient cities, Rome and Joppa. Both cities, though once powerful and "of splendour [...] divine" (line 25), were eventually consumed by Time and, as Freneau puts it, lie "in tears" (line 24). In his public writings, the poet often appeals to Classical and, sometimes, Biblical references to emphasize the grandeur of America and its people. In this passage, however, he resorts to these references to equate the farmhouse and these cities' experiences, suggesting that splendor and power are not eternal, but subjected to the same devouring force that has led an ordinary farmhouse to ruins: time.

The text evinces several points of divergence from the literary proposals Freneau articulates and follows in his public poetry. First, the poem fulfills a markedly expressive function, rather than a didactic and propagandistic one, its main concern being with the speaker's description of the dismal ruins of a farmhouse and his melancholic reflections thereupon. Second, in relation to "The Power of Fancy" (1786a), the poet is not merely describing the ruins; he is recreating their past by means of the power of his imagination, proving fancy is not just an imitative faculty, for it can create impressions not found in nature. The text is particularly revealing, however, because of the terms the poet uses to portray himself as a unique being, gifted not only with the creative power of fancy but also with a special sensitivity. The poem concludes with the speaker's lament upon the ruins' decay; yet, in his words, there is implicit self-praise, for, in essence, he asserts he is the only person who can be moved enough by a bleak and forlorn farmhouse's fate to write a poem in its honor: "And none but I its dismal case lament—/ None, none,

but I o'er its cold relics mourn" (Freneau [1809] 1976, lines 40-41). In his private poetry, Freneau often makes suggestions of this sort. "The Power of Fancy," for instance, concludes with a similarly implicit self-praise: "Come, O come—perceiv'd by none, / You and I will walk alone" (Freneau [1786a] 1975, lines 153-154). The poet "walk[s] alone" with Fancy, which suggests not only that he does not need his senses or memories in order to create but also that he possesses a unique poetic imagination or genius that enables him to appreciate reality in a different, more sensitive way.

In discussing the transition from early to late-eighteenth-century literature, Abrams comments how, for several British authors such as William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Blake, "[t]he poet's audience [was] reduced to a single member, consisting of the poet himself [...]. The purpose of producing effects upon other men, which for centuries had been the defining character of the art of poetry, now serv[e]d precisely the opposite function: it disqualif[e]d by proving it to be rhetoric instead" ([1953] 1971, 25). Freneau's public poetry, as stated, is inherently defined in pluralistic terms. In his private writings, however, the author's self is no longer blended into a communal voice; rather, Freneau's private poetry acts as an exercise of self-assertion. The poet advocates his uniqueness as an individual endowed with a special sensitivity that enables him to perceive reality in a different way. This is why the poet makes use of the ruins of a farmhouse as a source of inspiration and melancholic brooding on transience. Ultimately, the description of the ruined farmhouse is but the excuse that the poet finds to discuss his apprehensions and individuality. Freneau's private writings are, in fact, defined in egotistic terms and primarily centered on the poet's concerns, feelings and reflections, advocating for his individual talent to perceive and project reality in unique terms.

Notwithstanding the above, in the three texts discussed in this section, the influence of British literature on Freneau should be noted. In "The Deserted Farm-House" (1809), this can be seen in the esthetics and subject matter that the poet employs. Freneau's melancholic attention to a farmhouse's ruins follows the delight in picturesque settings that typifies late-eighteenth-century British esthetics. The portrayal of the poet as a unique, gifted being, the use of nature as a channel for self-exploration or the promotion of imagination as a creative faculty superior to reason further evince the influence of the continental avant-garde fashions on the author's private writings. Despite his claims, Freneau's private poetry suggests the poet's adherence to the incoming literary tradition that was being developed in Europe during the years when he was active as a poet. Still, it may be argued that the poet does not target mere imitation. In his private writings, Freneau attempts to project a voice of his own, making use of poetry as a conduit for self-construction. For this purpose, the author carries out an exercise of literary appropriation, directed at elaborating a personal style that deliberately deviates from the conventions upon which his public poetry and persona are constructed. In other words, the poet's private writings portray Freneau's attempt to carry out a homeostatic process of stylistic- and self-elaboration rooted in the appropriation of the new fashions that were being developed in Europe and that advocated, among other things, for the value of the individual over the communal.

5. FINAL REMARKS

The analysis carried out in the present study allows the following conclusions to be drawn. On the one hand, Philip Freneau's public persona is elaborated upon the use of Neoclassical fashions. This can be seen at three different levels. First, Freneau's public poetry has a markedly patriotic nature, while also serving a didactic or propagandistic function. Second, Freneau's public poetry fulfills a markedly sociocultural function: contributing to the process of elaboration of the American communal identity. The author makes use of poetry as a conduit for dialectical discourses on Americanness. In essence, he advocates the supremacy of the Enlightened ideals and posits them as the constituent traits of the American people's identity, further delineated by means of the establishment of a set of antonymic correspondences with an Other, the British and the Europeans. Third, Freneau channels the American self through the filter of the Classical world, reading Americanness in terms of the Classical tradition and thereby appropriating its associated legitimacy, prestige and power. On the other hand, Freneau's private persona is constructed upon the use of Romantic fashions. Again, this can be seen at three different levels. First, Freneau's private poetry deviates from his public writings' pragmatic or didactic nature, instead aiming at the expression and exploration of the poet's feelings, worries and reflections. Second, Freneau's private poetry is markedly egotistic and, hence, centered on the elaboration of the author's individual identity. The poet advocates and celebrates his unique talent and sensitivity, privileging his individual perception of reality and the creative potency of his imagination over the communal concerns and modes of representation that characterize his public production. Third, Freneau's private poetry departs from his public production's attention to the Classical world and figures, channeling his private identity through alternative sources of esthetic inspiration.

As the analysis evinces, therefore, the poet's deployment of Neoclassical and Romantic fashions conforms to a systematically discriminative pattern wherein the two traditions lie in complementary distribution, conditioned by the public or private nature of the texts. Paradoxically, in spite of his public pieces of criticism against Europe and Britain, and in spite of his private claims for individuality and creativity, neither Freneau's public nor private personae can be said to be the original product of the author's imagination: both are constructed upon the appropriation of originally European literary, esthetic and ideological proposals. The poet does not merely imitate, however, but carries out a complex exercise of homeostatic stylistic and self elaboration, deliberately outlining his public and private selves by means of two distinct literary modes. Ultimately, Freneau's poetic production evinces the author's restless and percipient sensitivity. Concerned with the projection of a public poetry in accordance with the tastes and needs of his audience and of a private poetry that explored and asserted his individuality, the poet engaged in a search for literary and esthetic models that could serve his twofold process of self elaboration—a search invariably governed by an underlying principle of homeostatic stylistic appropriation.

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