inevitably white, audience: ‘Remember Christians, Negros, black as Cain, / May be refin’d and join th’angelic train.’ That conclusion is a perfect example of how Wheatley could develop consciousness of self into an exploration of the black community, its experiences and its potential. It is also an illustration of how she could strike a pose, for herself and others of ‘Afric’s sable race’, that both deferred to white patrons and audience and subtly made a claim for dignity, even equality – that, in short, combined Christian humility with a kind of racial pride. The difficult position of African American poets in the emerging literary marketplace is, perhaps, suggested by Wheatley’s failure to find many readers for her published poetry – or, after 1773, to publish any further collections of her work. As late as 1778, she could complain about ‘books that remain unsold’; her Poems were never reprinted during her lifetime; and all her many proposals for publication in Boston were rejected. One projected volume that never saw publica- tion was advertised by the printers with the remark that they could scarcely credit ‘ye performances to be by a Negro’. The work was evidently too good, or too literate, to suggest such a source to them. That measures the extent of the problem poets like Hammon and Wheatley faced.

Poetry, even perhaps literacy, was seen as the prerogative of white poets, like Philip Freneau (1752–1832), Timothy Dwight (1752–1817), and Joel Barlow (1754–1826). Of these three poets who set out to explore and celebrate the new republic in verse, Freneau was probably the most accomplished. Born in New York City, of a French Huguenot father and a Scottish mother, he began his poetic career as a celebrant of ‘Fancy, regent of the mind’, and the power Fancy gave him to roam far to ‘Britain’s fertile land’, ‘her proud command’ or empire around the globe, then back to ‘California’s golden shore’ (‘The Power of Fancy’ [1770] ). Events, however, soon conspired to turn his inter- ests in a more political and less Anglophile direction. With college friends, Hugh Brackenridge and James Madison, he wrote some Satires Against the Tories (1775); and with Brackenridge he also wrote a long poem in celebration of The Rising Glory of America. The Rising Glory of America, written in 1771, published a year later, then drastically revised in 1786, marked Freneau’s full conversion to the American cause: a cause that he was later to serve both as a satirical poet and as a strongly partisan editor and journalist. Yet for all its rhetorical energy this poem about the emerging splendour of the New World is as much a tribute to the continuing importance of the Old World, at least in matters cultural and intellectual, as anything else. The theme may be new. The form, however, is basically imitative. So is the style, a pale echo of the English poet John Milton and Miltonic orotundities. ‘A Canaan here, / Another Canaan shall excel the old, /’ the poem announces, ‘And from a fairer Pisgah’s top be seen.’ ‘Such days the world, / And such America at last shall have /’, it concludes, looking boldly to the future of the nation, ‘When ages, yet to come, shall run their round, / And future years of bliss alone remain.’ In short, The Rising Glory of America tends to confirm the power of the mother country even while Freneau and Brackenridge struggle to deny it. Freneau was, as it happened, acutely aware of this power. A poem like ‘A Political Litany’ (1775) is a bitter diatribe against the political domination of Britai

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