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*Oh Burke, degenerate slave! with grief and shame*

*The Muse indignant must repeat thy name*

Literary Imagination and American Revolution

# 文学想象与文化美国

——美国独立革命时期诗歌研究



朱丽田/著

*Since wrecks and outcast relics still remain*

*Whirl'd ceaseless round Confusion's dreary reign*

*Declare, from all these fragments, whence you sto*

*That genius wild, that monstrous mass of sor*

*Where spreads the widest waste of all extrem*

*Full darkness frowns, and heav'n's own splendour beam*

*Truth, Error, Falsehood, Rhetoric's raging tide*

*And Pomp and Meanness, Prejudice and Pri*

*Strain to an endless clang thy voice of fir*

*Thy thoughts bewilder and thy audience tr*



东南大学出版社

SOUTHEAST UNIVERSITY PRESS

本研究是江苏省教育厅高校哲学社会科学基金项目(07SJD750035)成果

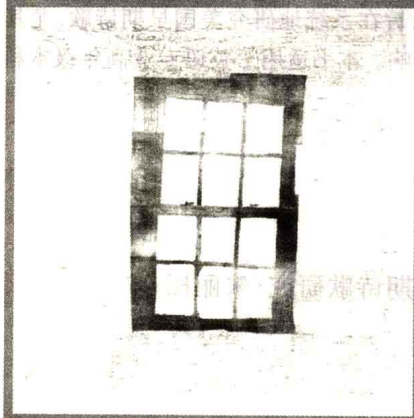
本书由

东南大学科技出版基金

国家留学基金管理委员会

资助出版

◎ 朱丽田 著



# 文学想象与文化美国

江苏工业学院图书馆  
藏书章

美国独立革命时期诗歌研究



东南大学出版社  
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## 内容提要

本书论述了美国早期诗歌的主要特点及其对美国国族建构、民族身份的形成和文化独立所起到的重要作用。作者提出了“展望诗”的新概念,旨在系统地研究美国早期诗歌,尤其是独立革命时期的诗歌,对美国建国和建国后美国文学的影响。本书适用于英语专业高年级本科生、研究生、高校教师研究参考使用。

## 图书在版编目(CIP)数据

文学想象与文化美国:美国独立革命时期诗歌研究/朱丽田  
著. —南京:东南大学出版社,2009.12

ISBN 978-7-5641-1949-2

I. 文… II. 朱… III. 诗歌—文学研究—美国  
IV. I712.072

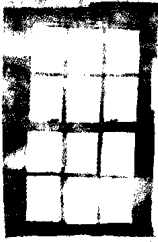
中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2009)第 216572 号

## 文学想象与文化美国——美国独立革命时期诗歌研究

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出版发行 东南大学出版社  
出版人 江 汉  
社 址 南京市四牌楼2号  
邮 编 210096  
网 址 <http://press.seu.edu.cn>  
电子邮件 [press@seu.edu.cn](mailto:press@seu.edu.cn)  
经 销 全国各地新华书店  
印 刷 南京京新印刷厂  
开 本 700mm×1000mm 1/16  
印 张 14.25  
字 数 264千字  
版 次 2009年12月第1版  
印 次 2009年12月第1次印刷  
书 号 ISBN 978-7-5641-1949-2  
印 数 1-1200册  
定 价 28.00元

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## Acknowledgements

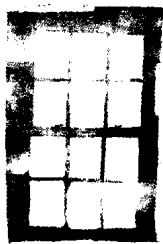
In the long process of bringing this book to its present form, I have been fortunate to receive help from many people. Since it is impossible to make a complete list to name each who helped me along the way, those whose assistance is most crucial in the completion deserve immense appreciation.

I would like to express here my deepest gratitude to all whose advice and generosity have made this book possible. I am greatly indebted to Professor Zhang Chong, my supervisor, for his expert guidance, strict demands and much-needed encouragement from its earliest stage. Without his time and energy devoted in collecting resources abroad, discussing and commenting various forms of this book, the completion of this project is impossible.

I am also grateful to the professors on the supervisory committee, Professor Wang Shouren, Professor Liu Haiping, Professor Zhu Gang, Professor Yang Jincai, Professor Jiang Ningkan, Professor He Chengzhou, Professor Zhao Wenshu and Professor He Ning for their informative and insightful instructions in my doctoral classes as well as their critical comments and suggestions on my proposal.

My heartfelt thanks also go to Professor Emory Elliott for all his help and advice. The talk on the phone and the book he posted from the United States encouraged me to stand firm in my choice. The discussion and the book proved very valuable to my research.

To my family, I want to extend my sincere gratitude for their consistent support and love. My husband and my parents shared my joy when my writing went along smoothly. When I came across difficulties, it was their trust and understanding that inspired me to go on. This book was born together with my dearest baby daughter Tan Mingchen. The births are the most valuable gifts in my life. To those acknowledged above and many others who are not named here, my gratitude goes beyond the description of words.



## 内容简介

美国十八世纪末、十九世纪初的“展望诗”诞生在独立革命时期，它既是美国革命号角中的强音，也对美利坚民族的身份建构产生了重要的影响。从历史和文化的角度讲，展望诗是美国民族文化独立的起始之作，因为展望诗诗人具有强烈的爱国思想，致力于创造一个完美独立的“美国”。文化民族主义是这些诗人的基本创作推动力，而史诗式的抒情状物更为展望诗的艺术魅力奠定了基础。

在近几十年的美国文学研究中，独立革命时期的文学作品，特别是诗歌作品，因其浓重的“革命”和“政治”意识而不太受人重视。本书将研究重点放在了这一时期三位主要诗人展望未来美利坚民族的诗歌上，重新细读他们的作品，并参照其他同时代诗人的有关作品，指出诞生在独立革命时期的“展望诗”对美利坚民族身份建构产生了重要影响。通过分析这些“展望诗”中清教思想，从而说明，这一时期的文学作品作为意识形态的力量，实际上延续并参与了美国“建国神话”的构建，而其中对“哥伦布”形象的文学表述，更可以被认为是这一构建的典型内容。

展望诗中的“美国”不同于现实意义上的民族国家，它只是一个想象中的文化政治空间，是对美国未来的美好憧憬。诗人们相信经过漫长的黑夜就会迎来黎明，所以他们在展望诗中对新共和国的光明未来满怀希望，同时基于现实又表达了对未来的担心与恐惧。由于当时还没有一个真正成形的“美国”来验证诗人的预见，所以诗人只能将他们的期望和担心同时投射到一个根植于清教文化土壤上的想象的国度，从而在诗歌中表达了对一个新兴民族国家的期盼与忧虑。

本书集中分析菲利浦·弗瑞诺、蒂莫西·德怀特和乔尔·巴洛三位诗人的作品，同时兼以讨论他们同时代诗人约翰·特朗布尔和戴维·亨弗雷的展望诗作为补充。虽然他们的政治立场和文学主张各不

相同,但他们诗中洋溢的爱国热情和对未来国家的乐观展望都对当时的读者影响很大。诗人们在展望诗中聚焦在建构文化美国早期存在的内外矛盾,该矛盾存在于欧洲移民与美洲土著、英国殖民者与美国人、对未来美国远大前程的期望和当时美国现实之间。作者并非意在化解这些矛盾,而是将清教传统作为出发点,审视在文化美国形成中存在的各种对立及对立双方在当时历史条件下既有冲突又有妥协的复杂关系。作者选取三个方面来探寻展望诗中清教思想在美国独立革命时期经历的变化及建构文化美国中所起的作用。

第一章以展望诗中哥伦布发现美洲这一历史事件为中心,探讨欧洲移民在征服与开发新大陆过程中与美洲土著的对立。通过分析展望诗中哥伦布的美国英雄形象,本书作者指出在这些诗人的文学想象中,他们在构建文化美国时将自己和哥伦布置于殖民者的优势位置,而将美洲土著视为被殖民对象。一方面,诗人们的清教背景强化了欧洲移民尤其是白人在面对土著时的自我优越感;另一方面,他们宗教信仰中的道德评价标准又促使他们反思在征服和开发美洲过程中对待土著时所施行的暴行。

在这些展望诗中欧洲移民将土著居民视为他者。诗人们将欧洲移民和哥伦布放在优势位置,而将土著居民置于劣势位置。这种位置优势,与赛义德所批判的“东方主义”在本质上是完全一致的。诗人们以哥伦布发现美洲为起点着力建构一个想象的国度。这个美国根植于诗人清教徒祖先的建国构想,它通过诗人的文学想象被描绘成强大的帝国,是世界诸国的榜样。通过突出这段历史他们塑造了地道的美国英雄哥伦布。然而,在面对土著居民时,哥伦布发现美洲的这段历史至今仍使相当一部分欧洲白人后裔处于尴尬的境地。

第二章对美国独立革命时期展望诗中未来国家的美好前景进行进一步分析。十八世纪中期美国独立革命揭开序幕,各殖民地移民的国家意识逐渐增强。十八世纪末、十九世纪初,爱国主义情绪在美国达到顶点。这段时期,由于政治独立的要求呼声渐高,诗人们的身份已逐渐从欧洲移民向美国人转化,但美洲本土居民的地位变化不大。尽管在对待美洲土著居民时展望诗人中不乏怜悯同情者,但是在他们的展望诗中,美洲土著的劣势位置依然没有改变,帝国主义和殖民主义的痕迹清晰可见。这些诗人的清教背景使得“天定命运”的理念成为展望诗的核心,它深植于欧洲移民的人心,对美国独立革命及后来的西进运动起到推波助澜的作用。

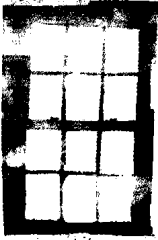
通过对未来国家前景的乐观展望,这些诗鼓舞着当时的美国人(主要是欧洲移民)积极争取独立,脱离英国的殖民统治,建立一个全新的国家。诗中所预示的未来美国深受其清教徒先辈所宣扬的“山巅之城”和“新耶路撒冷”观念影响。虽然随着政治、经济、文化的发展,清教思想由于和宗教的紧密关系不断受到挑战,经历了世

俗化过程,然而源于宗教传统的对于北美大陆“新迦南”的观念似乎依然存在并深深扎根于移民的意识中。这种观念在展望诗中不断被强化进而转化为对未来国度的乐观想象,成为美国“建国神话”的本源。从这种意义上说,展望诗同美国独立革命时期的其他政论文本一样,参与并推动了新共和国的建立。

第三章讨论独立革命后期展望诗中美国“哀诉”布道的性质及诗人们在建构文化美国过程中表现出的各种复杂矛盾的情感。“哀诉”布道是北美殖民地清教徒的创新,肯定了美国文明的自身起源。它是“统一社会意识的一种仪式,是美利坚民族的象征,造就了美国文化,为美利坚民族身份的建构提供了基本框架”。这些展望诗呼应美国清教文化中“哀诉”布道的传统,借用该形式来表达诗人对未来国家的种种忧虑,提醒人们在国家建立及社会变化中不要丧失天真单纯的特质和独立革命时期的种种展望。

美国独立革命后期对这些诗人来说是个既激动人心又沮丧悲观的困难时期。一方面,他们为脱离英国殖民统治、建立新共和国而欣喜不已;另一方面,建国后的社会现状又使他们失望沮丧。在这一阶段的展望诗中,诗人们不断警告人们不要忘记他们对未来美国的梦想,这个梦想直接来自于美国殖民时期的清教徒先辈。展望诗人有意识或无意识地将他们的清教传统贯穿创作过程始终,而后来的美国文艺复兴又将同样地受益于这种传统并将其发扬光大。

在对独立革命时期文化美国的想象作了纵向梳理后,本书在结论部分指出,这一时期展望诗中的文化美国概念实质上是从欧洲移民眼中的清教乌托邦到美国独立革命后人们想象中的世俗“新迦南”的转化。综观这一时期的展望诗不难发现这些作品和当时其他政论文本同样参与建构文化美国,参与书写建国时期的美国历史。时至今日,这种文学视域中的想象国度依然存在于美国文化和美国文学作品中。正如一股暗流涌动,它蕴含着人们对于国家和社会的理想,在内容和形式方面启示着后来的美国作家和作品,对清教思想传统起到传承推动作用。



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## Abstract

The American Revolution facilitated the emergence of Poems of Prospects in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. The prosperity of Poems of Prospects during the revolutionary period exerted great influences on the construction of American national identity. Historically and culturally, these poems marked the beginning of the cultural independence of the new nation. Relevant poets took up the mission to create an America which was rooted in their patriotism. Such a creative impulse is usually conceptualized as cultural nationalism. Meanwhile, the epic style of the poems added much to their thematic grandeur and artistic value.

Different from the modern concept of a nation-state, however, the image of America in Poems of Prospects is only an imagined cultural and political space. These poets held the belief that the dawn would arrive through a long-drawn night, and suggested the very openness of the future nation. Therefore, the brightness of a full hope for a new Republic and the darkness of apprehension and fear about the reality coexist in these poems. The two kinds of prophecies, opposite in conclusion, are ultimately those in their imaginative extremity. Since there was not yet an America against which to validate a prophecy, the poets could only project both their expectation and fear upon an unformed polity and an imagined landscape on the basis of the Puritan background. The ideal images and worries of the new nation can both be detected in these poems concurrently.

This book takes Poems of Prospects in American revolutionary period as its subject for research, focusing on Philip Freneau (1752—1832), Timothy Dwight (1752—1817) and Joel Barlow (1754—1812), with their contemporaries John Trumbull (1750—1831) and David Humphreys (1752—1818) as supplements. The study discusses three pairs of conflicts in the process of the literary creation of an imagined nation: European immigrants versus the natives, British colonizers versus Americans, and

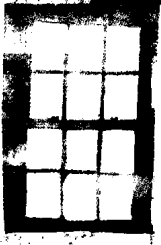
great expectation for the new Republic versus unsatisfactory reality. However, this study is not meant to provide ready solutions to these conflicts. It takes the Puritan heritage as a point of departure to scrutinize the confrontation and compromise in the process of forming the cultural concept of the new nation. This book selects three main aspects to discuss the transformation of Puritanism in American revolutionary period and the conflicts in *Poems of Prospects*.

The first chapter explores the confrontation between European immigrants and the natives through Columbus' discovery of America in *Poems of Prospects*. It focuses on the conflicts between the two during the period of the colonizers' conquest and exploration. The poets made Columbus, a European adventurer, a national hero and an archetype through their construction of the future nation. In their literary imagination, the poets positioned themselves and Columbus as colonizers and the natives as the colonized. On the one hand, their Puritan background intensified their sense of superiority when the European immigrants, particularly the white, encountered the natives. On the other hand, the Puritan heritage was remonstrative against the cruelty inflicted by the immigrants on the natives in their conquest and exploration in America.

These poets treated the natives as the Other and positioned them directly in opposition to such an "Orientalist" tradition. They made their efforts in building up an America with Columbus' discovery of America as the beginning. This America is rooted in the blueprint of the future nation of their Puritan ancestors and in the poets' prospects, America turned out to be a powerful empire which set an example for the other nations in the world. The poets aimed to foreground the contribution of the European immigrants to the making of American history. By doing so, they depicted Columbus as a national hero. Nevertheless, the embeddedness of Columbus as an archetype poses a dilemma that quite a few European immigrants are still in when facing the natives today.

The second chapter presents the rising glory of the future nation in *Poems of Prospects* in the revolutionary period. This is the reification of combining the poems with the glory of Puritan thoughts. In the middle of the eighteenth century, the national consciousness in the colonies called forth the American Revolution. In the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century, patriotism and a quest for political independence reached the climax. Despite the sympathetic attitude of the poets towards the American natives, the implication of colonialism and imperialism can be obviously picked up. The concept of Manifest Destiny, as the core of *Poems of Prospects*, was deeply implanted in the mind of the descendants of the European colonists. With optimistic narration of the future nation, the poems encouraged the Americans to strive for liberty and independence and to build a new nation.

The concept of the future nation in their narration was the transformation of the



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## A List of Abbreviations

**PPF:** *Poems of Philip Freneau*

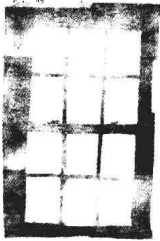
**Pictures:** *The Pictures of Columbus*

Puritan ancestors' ideal of "the city upon the hill" and "New Jerusalem." Despite the development of economy, politics and culture, Puritanism as a religious faith had faced constant challenges and experienced the process of secularization in the revolutionary period. But the Puritan concept of America as "New Canaan" seemed to take its root in the consciousness of European immigrants and ultimately evolved as the groundwork of American Founding Myth. In other words, the poems participated in and impelled the founding of the nation together with other political texts.

The third chapter discusses the relationship between American jeremiad and Poems of Prospects and the ambivalence in the poets' imagination of the future nation. The American jeremiad is the Puritans' innovation in the early American colonies and the product of American tradition. It "reassures the Puritan origin of the American self". Besides, American jeremiad is "the ritual which unites various social ideologies and is the symbol of American nation". It appears as a fundamental structure in American expression and brings up American culture.

These poems echo the American jeremiad and borrow its ritualistic form to call for a return to a former innocence and the optimistic vision of the future nation in the early years of the Revolution. But post-revolutionary period is a hard time for the poets who experienced both excitement and despondence. On the one hand, they were excited about their political independence and the founding of the new Republic. On the other hand, they were dissatisfied with the reality after the Revolution. A sense of disillusionment in these poems exerts great influences upon American literature in the following years. The warning to remind people of their national dreams was derived from their Puritan forefathers in American colonization. The Puritan heritage haunted these poets from the beginning to the end of their writing. In the same way, this background and tradition would foreshadow the later prosperity of American literature.

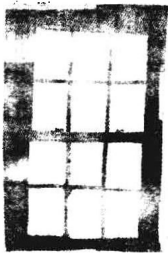
To reveal the interrelations among the conflicting issues, this study concludes with a diachronic summary of the formation of the vision of the new nation in the revolutionary period. It is an imaginative form of transformation from Puritan utopian Eden in the eyes of the European immigrants into a secular "New Canaan" for the people after the American Revolution. This literary imagination of the new nation still exists both in American culture and in American literature. It functions as an undercurrent and contains the seeds of national and social ideals as well as literary themes. The themes inspire both the content and the form of American literature. It can be summarized that Poems of Prospects, together with other texts in American revolutionary period, link two periods—American colonial period and American Renaissance and promote the inheritance and development of Puritanism in American literature.



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# Introduction

This study originated from the interest in the image of America, a result of the study in the forming process of “America” as a nation in the revolutionary period. Though the embryo of the image can be traced back to the colonial period in American history, the Revolution procured its maturity and the founding of the new Republic. The poems in the revolutionary era offered the future prospects of a new nation with religious faith and secular enthusiasm, which helped the formation of the image of the new nation.

The revolutionary poems, together with the contemporary rhetoric, “function within a culture” which “reflects and affects a set of particular psychic, social, and historical needs” (Bercovitch, “The American Jeremiad” xi). The effort of putting literature in a social context is “not to ask whether literature accords with history, but to read in order to discover history” (Bercovitch and Jehlen 9). A further research of the neglected poems in the revolutionary period might help understand history better. ①

This book takes three poets, Philip Freneau (1752—1832), Timothy Dwight (1752—1817) and Joel Barlow (1754—1812), as its main subjects. In the poems, they presented their imagination of the future nation on the Puritan soil, and the images of the new nation experienced great changes in the revolutionary period. The poets provided their prospects about the new nation in their own ways. Despite the different views of politics and literature, these poets were popular for their patriotism and optimistic prospects in their works at that time. Philip Freneau passionately committed to the American cause and launched violent attacks on England. As a questioner of authority from his youth, he spent much of his literary energy and public life defending Jefferson’s republic policies. Philosophical and religious uncertainty kept disturbing Freneau and he held the view that people would cast off the trappings of Christian theology. However, he could not be

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①The author of the book has discussed this with Professor Emory Elliott in December 2003. He shared the view and believed that these neglected texts are a good subject for further research.



divorced from his former religious training in his literary creation. Timothy Dwight was the most conservative among the three poets and embraced religious and social traditions and beliefs. He greeted the Revolution with enthusiasm and reacted to the moral decay and social turmoil of the post-war period with fiery language in his works. Joel Barlow underwent changes of the mind that led him from his early conservatism at Yale to radicalism. Optimistic and ambitious, he was convinced that he was living at the start of a new age, though finally he experienced regression to the Puritan heritage.

The three poets were nurtured in the Puritan culture. They experienced the transitional period from the colony to the new Republic and manifested the same feeling from excitement to disappointment with the changes of the social environment. Furthermore, there were some other poets worth mentioning in this significant period. But due to the length of the book, only some of their poems are to be mentioned.<sup>①</sup>

In an attempt to conduct a research on the poets and their works, two terms are to be made clear. One that recurs throughout this book is the term "Puritanism", which is used to refer to a point of view, a way of life rather than a religious belief. It foregrounds its social and cultural codes and emphasizes the power of the European tradition and its influence on the formation of the new Republic. The definition of the term is borrowed directly from Perry Miller, a scholar on Puritan studies, and is applied in this book.

Puritanism may perhaps best be described as that point of view, that philosophy of life, that code of values, which was carried to New England by the first settlers in the early seventeenth century. Beginning thus, it has become one of the continuous factors in American life and American thought. Any inventory of the elements that have gone into the making of the "American mind" would have to commence with Puritanism. (Miller 1)

The tradition of Puritanism stipulates American political and social life from the colonial period to the present time. It makes American nation the unique one in the world. It can be concluded, as Perry Miller did, "Without some understanding of Puritanism it may safely be said, there is no understanding of America" (Miller 1). The book attempts to search for an implied link between the Puritan vision and nation building in the early

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<sup>①</sup>Besides the three major poets, other poets also created poems that were full of optimistic prospects. They are John Trumbull (1750—1831) with his poem "Prospect of the Future Glory of America" (1770) and David Humphreys (1752—1818) with his poems "The Glory of America" (1783) and "A Poem on the Industry of the United States of America" (1804). They are also in the field of this book, and will be discussed in Chapter Two. Other poems of these poets could not be discussed in detail in this book and they will be the future aim of this academic research.

American history through the revolutionary poems.<sup>①</sup>

The second term which is frequently used in the study is "Poem(s) of Prospects".<sup>②</sup> Poem(s) of Prospects is a piece of writing in which the words are chosen for the images and ideas of expectations they suggest, especially the ideas of future success. In this book it refers to the poem(s) written during the revolutionary period and provides a vision of future success in America in terms of politics, economy and arts. The pioneering immigrants from Europe came to the new land with expectations, dreaming of prosperity and fortune. Their religious dream of a new millennium was transferred into a secular vision of a new Eden in America. Their concept of America was more or less the transformation of the "New Canaan" chosen by God. Optimism was an evident feature in these poems.

In a series of Poems of Prospects, Philip Freneau, Timothy Dwight and Joel Barlow predicted the future glory of a new era in America. They proclaimed that the political and economic system of a new nation would be the most successful one and would make glorious progress in the future. They also called for the cultural independence coming together with the political independence. Under these circumstances, Dwight composed *The Conquest of Canaan* (1785), and *Greenfield Hill* (1794); Joel Barlow wrote *The Columbiad* (1807) (based on *The Vision of Columbus*); Philip Freneau's *The Rising Glory of America* (1772) and *The Pictures of Columbus* (1786) were the products of the optimistic spirit. They composed these patriotic poems to celebrate the founding of the new Republic. Full of hope, they expected the establishment of the new Republic and the advent of the ascendance of the arts in the new nation.

The poets combined their works with political and moral tasks. Joel Barlow expressed

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①But it is too subjective to interpret Puritanism as a monolithic entity which will bring about some questionable assumptions; that American Puritanism is so different from the European Reformed tradition, especially in England, as to create an origin for a distinctive American mode; that American Puritanism is a unified system of thought and belief, and as such remains intact in later years; and that the post-colonial history of American culture and literature can be traced exclusively from the New England Puritans, without attaching much importance to other different geographic, religious, and ethnic traditions. Therefore, in *Puritanism in America* (1973), Larzer Ziff casts doubts on the rightness of so many positive claims for Puritanism's influence, "I would want... to be misunderstood as offering a modern version of the silly theory that the real history of America is the history of the spread on the continent of Anglo-Saxon habits and Anglo-Saxon ideals. The influence Puritanism exerts on modern life is great, but it is far from exclusive, and here I say so explicitly" (1973 xi). In this book there is no judgment on the Puritan influence upon these poets.

②Here the present author is indebted to Professor Emory Elliott. In his book *Columbia Literary History of the United States* there are three similar names for this kind of poetry: the prospect poem, the vision poem and the rising glory poem. It is "an oratorical prophecy, between 200 and 600 lines in length, written in heroic couplets or (less frequently) blank verse". See more in Elliott, Emory. *Columbia Literary History of the United States*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988, 159.

the seriousness clearly in the preface in *The Columbiad*.

My object is altogether of a moral and political nature. I wish to encourage and strengthen, in the rising generation, a sense of the importance of republican constitutions; as being the great foundation of public and private happiness, the necessary aliment of future and permanent meliorations in the condition of human nature. (Preface xix)

By the mid-1790s these writers had come to realize that their hope could only be an unattainable dream. This can be seen from their changing attitudes and the contrast between their early and later works. The best example to illustrate this was Joel Barlow's change. The sharp contrast between the optimism in Barlow's early poem, *The Prospect of Peace* (1778) and the discouragement he expressed in his deathbed poem *Advice to a Raven in Russia* (1812) fully demonstrated the disillusionment of many writers during the two decades.

Finally, "ideological reading" is supposed to be defined. As Myra Jehlen put it,

The emergence of ideological literary criticism as an approach in its own right represents a special coincidence between a sense that "social context" was both illuminating and problematical in the study of literature and the development of an analytical method that rendered ideology as an interpretive, indeed a linguistic, construction in many ways analogous to literature itself. (Bercovitch & Jehlen 4-5)

The word "ideology" deserves clarification since the study is the ideological reading of the poems.<sup>①</sup> Its various definitions account for its complex background. Louis Althusser's illustration as "a whole form of material practice, woven into the texture of everyday life" was further elaborated into "the Gramscian notion of hegemony" (qtd. in Yang 13). Raymond Williams stated his conception of the word as "a living system of meanings and values—constitutive and constituting—which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming... a sense of absolute because experienced reality beyond which it is very difficult to move". Thus for Williams, this implies that ideologies are "dynamic rather than static and consensual, always in conflict with one another" (qtd. in Yang 13).<sup>②</sup> The word "ideology" here is as Yang Jincai put it,

<sup>①</sup>The ideological literary criticism was defined and elaborated from its origin to the present practice in *Ideology and Classic American Literature*, eds. Sacvan Bercovitch and Myra Jehlen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986, 1-15) and in Yang Jincai, *Herman Melville and Imperialism* (Nanjing: Nanjing University Press, 2001, 1-4, 13-15) he also did a thorough elaboration on the term "ideology" and the ideological approach. The author of this dissertation borrowed several ideas from these two books.

<sup>②</sup>Yang Jincai set a proper example of the ideological reading of literature in *Herman Melville and Imperialism* and in the introduction of his book he presented his thorough understanding of the word "ideology". Here the author of this study is indebted to him for his insightful argument and discussion on this point.

Ideology... seeks its realization specifically by mobilizing such institutions as schools, the family, the law, the religion, arts, literature, and culture. It works to legitimate inequality and exploration by representing the social order which perpetuates these things as unchangeable and immutable—as decreed by God or more simply by nature. (Yang 14)

A close ideological reading of the revolutionary poems may facilitate understanding of the American Founding Myth and provide a systematic set of social and political ideas. Meanwhile, Sacvan Bercovitch in *The American Jeremaid* argued, “Myth may clothe history as fiction, but it persuades in proportion to its capacity to help people act in history. Ultimately, its effectiveness derives from its functional relationship to facts” (xi).

Thus, an ideological reading establishes a cultural link between history and literature because ideology has become a term that “mediates the finite entities of text and context, and also of individual author and cultural history” (Bercovitch & Jehlen 10). Above all, at the transitional moment in history, the revolutionary poems contained many complicated social and cultural codes that need urgent interpretations. Consequently, the study of the poems can better shed some light on that part of history, or, even, the poems participated in making the history in the revolutionary period.

A research on Poems of Prospects may be preceded by some questions. Why was there the existence of Poems of Prospects in the revolutionary era? How did these poets exercise their imagination of the future nation on the Puritan soil? How can it be that Puritan heritage exerted a great influence on Poets of Prospects? Is there any possibility for the poets to express both hopes and fears about the future nation in their works? These questions are so significant that they prompted the present author to view these poems in a different light and called for a systematic study of Poems of Prospects.

In these poems, the literary imagination of the new nation foreshadowed the establishment of a powerful empire. It is easy to associate this future empire with the present nation—the United States. But the relationship between the Puritan imagination of the future nation and Poems of Prospects has rarely been explored since the poems were published.

According to Proquest Digital Dissertation Abstract, from 1916 to 2003 there were 268 dissertations on Puritanism, but most of them were associated with religion and history. Only 12 dissertations were related to Puritanism in American literature among which none particularly covered this period. From 1941 to 2002 there were 32 dissertations on Timothy Dwight, but none on his long poems; from 1927 to 1997 there were 16 on Joel Barlow and from 1897 to 2003 there were 21 on Philip Freneau, among