



THE JILTED MUSE: A Chance Smattering of Choice Francis Hopkinson.

Signer of the Declaration of Independence (for New Jersey); (purported) designer of the first United States flag; devised the Great Seal of the United States, and was the first known *American born* musical composer (of a *written* composition); as well as, along with John Trumbull (the poet), Freneau, and Brackenridge, one of the most noted satirists the Revolutionary War era produced -- are just *some* of the honors and credits for which Francis Hopkinson (1737–1791) characteristically receives recognition. And yet these are merely the conspicuous surface of his many accomplishments. For Hopkinson, like Franklin and Jefferson (with whom he was friends as well as political associates), was one of those renaissance men of colonial America whose desire for learning and intellectual self-improvement scarce knew bounds. Scientist, mechanic, minor inventor, chemist, draughtsman, sketch artist,¹ psychologist, poet, lyricist, composer, keyboard musician (harpsichord and organ), essayist, humorist, lawyer, legislator, and judge are all occupations in which he exhibited proficient or better competence and expertise. Granted, as he would himself doubtless concede, in most of these fields he was but a dabbling, if ardent, amateur. Yet endowed with an encyclopedic outlook combined with an astute and insatiable proclivity for nearly all branches of fashionable higher learning, Hopkinson nonetheless ranks as one of early America's genuine enlightenment thinkers.

Yet such a vastly broad scope of endeavor comes not without its price, and Hopkinson usually knew or was aware of his intrinsic and otherwise unavoidable limitations; at one point stating:

"I have been long urged by an invincible property to attempt some thing for the public good, or public convenience, so as to render my name famous amongst the benefactors of mankind. As my desire is much stronger than my abilities, I am obliged to be content with humble attempts at discoveries of limited importance; for I confess that my genius is not of the highest rank."²

For over-extending himself as he did, Hopkinson did not always achieve results commensurate with his ability, and had he narrowed his focus and energies to a few areas rather than to so many, he might, for instance, have garnered fame as an author or musical composer of the first rate. As it was, however, his literary and musical works, although typically displaying a commendable appreciation for grace and refinement, are generally, and rightly, accorded at best a second class standing; so that, all in all, they tend to be more of pronounced historical and curiosity interest than illustrious specimens of Western culture and art; indeed, several of writings and compositions hardly merit even third rank status; with his satires, for example, at times verging on the facile and sophomoric.

¹ Having at one time received personal instruction from Benjamin West.

² From his essay "Surveying," see *The Miscellaneous Essays and Occasional Writings of Francis Hopkinson, Esq.* (1792), Vol. 2, p. 127.

But again this was evidently much more the result of attempting too much rather than lack of talent or inspiration. For while such as Brockden Brown, Irving, and Bryant forsook law for the Muse, Hopkinson conversely forsook the Muse for the Law -- and it very much often shows in his various literary and musical productions.

This notwithstanding -- and fortunately -- is not the case with *all* he did, and in addition to his famous ‘The Battle of the Kegs’ (1778),³ some of his compositions (including music) evince a promise that we can only deeply regret was not better realized than it might else have been. To give you instances of such, here are samples in the way of extracts of poetry most of them written in his youth (at the time of the French and Indian War), and a humorous essay he penned much later.⁴ Though these are the exception rather than the rule as applied to his writings as a whole, there are further and other such pieces that we might have included, not least of which his forays into questions of government and jurisprudence. Yet in the interest of brevity and convenience, we’ve relegated this introductory presentation to some of his poetry and humorous prose. For more (and from which the following are taken), see the three volume and posthumously published *The Miscellaneous Essays and Occasional Writings of Francis Hopkinson, Esq.* (1792).

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#### ODE on MUSIC

Hark! hark! the sweet vibrating lyre  
Sets my attentive soul on fire;  
Thro’ all my frame what pleasures thrill  
Whilst the loud treble warbles shrill,  
And the more slow and solemn bass  
Adds charm to charm and grace to grace.

Sometimes in sweetly languid strains  
The guilty trembling string complains:  
How it delights may ravished ear  
When the expiring notes I hear  
Vanish distant and decay! --  
They steal my yielding soul away.

Neatly trip the merry dance,  
And lightly touch and swiftly glance;  
Let boundless transport laugh aloud  
Sounds madly ramble mix and crowd,  
Till all in one loud rapture rise,  
Spread thro’ the air and reach the skies.

But when you touch the solemn air,  
Oh! swell each note distinct and clear;  
In ev’ry strain let sorrow sigh,  
Languish soft and sweetly die.

So shall th’ admir’d celestial art,  
Raise and transport my ravish’d heart  
Exalt my soul, and give my mind  
Ideas of sublimer kind.  
So great the bliss it seems to prove

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<sup>3</sup> Lamponing Howe’s troops waging war on explosive kegs, or mines, set afloat in the Delaware River. These miniature mines, by the way, were conceived and designed by submarine inventor David Bushnell.

<sup>4</sup> In poetry and or song his influences were Milton, Dryden, Pope, Shenstone, Thomson, Young, Gay, and Prior; while with regard to satire Samuel Butler, The Spectator, Swift, and Sterne would appear to have been among his favorites.

There must be music too above.  
That from the trumpets silver sound  
Of wing'd arch-angels plac'd around  
Thy burning throne -- Oh! king of Heaven!  
Most perfect harmony is giv'n:  
Whilst happy saints in concert join  
To make the music more divine,  
And with immortal voices sing  
HOSANNAHS to their glorious KING.

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SONG.

Beauty and merit now are join'd,
An angel's form, an angel's mind
Are sweetly met *in thee*,
Thy soul, which all the virtues grace,
Shines forth with lustre in thy face,
From affectation free.

II.

Who in thy form, too lovely maid!
Can read thy temper there display'd;
Can look and calmly see?
The face that with such beauty charms,
The breast which so much virtue warms,
Is sure too much for me!

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from ADVICE To AMANDA.

...III.

When next you see your faithful swain,  
Your Strephon at your feet;  
When next you hear him sigh his pain  
And tend'rest vows repeat.

IV.

Then think 'tis fit a love so true  
Should meet a kind regard;  
And think 'tis given alone to you  
His virtue to reward...

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from L' ALLEGRO.

...'Where the linnet's warbling lay
Still attends my flow'ry way;
And the lark's melodious song
Charms me as I go along:
Or let me pause and view the scene,
The blooming vales, the hillocks green;

The stream, that winding in meanders,
Thro' the tufted meadow wanders;
The fields where flocks in safety stray,
And harmless lambkins sport and play.

Behold far off, with roaming eye,
Between two oaks a cot I spy,
Where Darby sits beside the door,
Nor envies kings their royal store:
Whilst Joan, a matron staid and lage,
Remains the comfort of his age;
And Phillis near, with voice so sweet,
Phillis their hand-maid, spruce and neat,
Cheers their old hearts with merry song,
And spins and sings the whole day long...

...But hark! the music's sudden sound
Spreads universal gladness round;
Joy lightens quick in ev'ry face,
An instant buz fills all the place:
And now prepared on either hand,
The beaux and belles in order stand:
And now they trip the merry dance,
And to quick movements smoothly glance.
Each fair her partner leads astray,
Thro' a long labyrinthian way;
Each swain his flying fair pursues,
Who still the pleasing toil renews.

Me the shrill soaring sounds inspire,
With transports that can rise no higher;
My body skims along the floor,
I feel my willing feet no more:
The music lends me wings; and I
In waving motions seem to fly:
And beaux and belles and tapers bright,
Swim undistinguish'd in my sight.

If such thy pleasures, smiling joy,
Oh! may'st thou e'er my mind employ;
Dawn in my breast perpetual day,
And chase intruding care away.

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from IL PENSEROSO.

...Whilst thus the elements engage,  
And with encreasing fury rage;  
Oh! let me find some stony shed,  
Where I may safely lodge my head,  
T' enjoy the horrors of the storm,  
And to its God due rites perform.  
Beneath yon rock, whose mossy side  
With fearful bend o'erhangs the tide,  
Grotesque and wild, a cave I spy,  
And to its shelter quickly fly.

But as I climb the grass-grown steep,  
Whose darksome height juts o'er the deep;  
Sent from aloft, with startled ear,  
A sudden voice of woe I hear --

"Rage on thou tempest of the sky,  
"Your fiercest vengeance I defy:  
"A ruder storm whirls in my breast,  
"And death alone can give me rest;  
"My sorrows in this stream shall steep,  
"And I" -- then plunges in the deep.  
Nature a-while yet fond of life  
Maintains with death an equal strife;  
The lover strives to gain the shore,  
But sinks, alas! to rise no more.

Save me, ye powers, from scenes so sad,  
Scenes not of melancholy bred;  
But sprung from furious wild despair,  
In Stygian cell begot of care.

But might I hear true love complain,  
In a more mild and temp'rate strain;  
Then let my frequent feet be seen  
On yonder steep romantic green;  
Along whose yellow gravelly side,  
*Schuylkill* sweeps his lucid tide:  
\*<sup>5</sup>Where waters fall with constant roar,  
Re-bellowing down the rocky shore.  
Where nightly at the turf-clad grave,  
In concert with the bird of eve;  
Beneath the glimpses of the moon,  
The hermit mourns *Amelia* gone:

Till reason lifts his eye to heav'n,  
And mild submitting thoughts are given.

Thus, melancholy, shalt thou please,  
If thou wilt find me scenes like these:  
Thus may'st thou e'er my mind employ,  
And banish ev'ry lighter joy.

But when the summer scenes are lost,  
Welcome winter! welcome frost!  
Then I'll spend the long, long night,  
By the lamp's pale and glimm'ring light:  
Creeping nigher still and nigher  
To the half extinguish'd fire,  
Where midst the glowing coals I view  
Lambent flames of livid blue:  
Or listen to the crackling tread  
Of heavy foot on snowy bed:  
While howling blasts around me rage,

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<sup>5</sup> [Hopkinson's note.] \*Alluding to the affecting story of Theodore and Amelia, in the first number of the Hermit. – Vide Amer. Mag. for October, 1757.

And wind, and snow, and hail, engage;  
And through a crevice in the wall,  
Boreas whistles shrill and small;  
And the doors, by time grown weak,  
On their iron hinges creak:  
There I'll muse on stories old,  
By a toothless matron told;  
Of a tall, wan, and slender sp'rit,  
Stalking in the dead of night;  
Whose long trailing winding sheet  
Flows luxuriant round his feet:  
Gaping wounds all o'er him bleed,  
To disclose some horrid deed:  
With beck'ning hands he seems to say,  
"Haste to my grave, come, come away!"  
Thus should my fancy ever find  
Some dreary scene to sill my mind;  
And thus I'd sit with fixed eye,  
To see the crumbling embers die,  
Fearing to turn to either side,  
Lest there the horned spectres glide:  
Till morn, slow peeping from on high,  
Should twinkle with unwelcome eye;  
Then would I shun th' intruding ray,  
And hide me from the garish day;  
Darkling to bed would silent creep,  
Hush'd by the howling winds to sleep.

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from AN EVENING HYMN.

...When mortal pangs his frame shall seize,
And the chill'd blood begins to freeze;
When my fixt eyes must roll no more,
And life escapes thro' ev'ry pore.

Ah! what shall cheer my drooping heart.
Shall worldly honours joy impart?
Can sensual pleasure sweeten death,
Or wealth redeem one parting breath?

Therefore, my soul, thy thoughts employ,
On *God*, thy *Glory*, *wealth* and joy:
Virtue alone is stable here,
Nought but religion is sincere.

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from EXTEMPORE VERSES FROM The Top Of MOUNT PARNASSUS, A Lofty Hill In Lancaster County.

... With anxious care, let others strive  
Uncertain bliss to find,  
And for expected wealth and fame  
Resign their peace of mind.

In some such blest retreat as this,  
Let me my hours employ,  
And *Rosalinda* still be near,  
To Brighten ev'ry joy.

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from A SENTIMENT:

Occasioned by a conversation with Mr. P-- M--, one of the principal men among the Christian Society, called Dunkars, at EPHRATA, in the province of Pennsylvania.

...Each may be right in their peculiar way,
If proper motives mould their worship sway:
If but the *love divine of God* is there,
The spirit genuine of unfeigned pray'r;
Tis true devotion; and the Lord of love
Such pray'rs and praises kindly will approve.
Whether from golden altars they should rise,
And wrapt in sound, roll to the lofty skies,
Or from Ephrata's seat, so meek, so low,
The soft and silent aspirations flow...

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SONG I. [From Hopkinson's "Seven Songs"<sup>6</sup> (1759-1760)]

I.

Come, fair Rosina, come away,  
Long since stern Winter's storms have ceas'd;  
See! Nature, in her best array,  
Invites us to her rural feast:  
The season shall her treasure spread,  
Her mellow fruits and harvests brown,  
Her flowers their richest odours shed,  
And ev'ry breeze pour fragrance down.

II.

At noon we'll seek the wild wood's shade,  
And o'er the pathless verdure rove;  
Or, near a mossy fountain laid,  
Attend the music of the groves;  
At eve, the sloping mead invites  
'Midst lowing herds and flocks to stray;  
Each hour shall furnish new delights,  
And love and joy (hall crown the day.

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SONG III.

I.

Beneath a weeping willow's shade

⁶ Actually eight songs; as another was added before publication.

She sat and sang alone;
Her hand upon her heart she laid
And plaintive was her moan.
The mock bird fat upon a bough
And list'ned to her lay,
Then to the distant hills he bore
The dulcet notes away.

II.

Fond echo to her strains reply'd,
The winds her sorrows bore;
Adieu! dear youth—adieu! she cry'd,
I ne'er shall see thee more.
The mock-bird sat upon a bough
And list'ned to her lay,
Then to the distant hills he bore
The dulcet notes away.

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SONG VIII.

I.

The traveller benighted and lost,  
O'er the mountains pursues his lone way;  
The stream is all candy'd with frost  
And the icicle hangs on the spray,  
He wanders in hope some kind shelter to find  
“Whilst thro' the sharp hawthorn keen blows the cold wind.”

II.

The tempest howls dreary around  
And rends the tall oak in its flight;  
Fast falls the cold snow on the ground,  
And dark is the gloom of the night.  
Lone wanders the trav'ler a shelter to find,  
“Whilst thro' the sharp hawthorn still blows the cold wind.”

III.

No comfort the wild woods afford,  
No shelter the trav'ler can see—  
Far off are his bed and his board  
And his home, where he wishes to be.  
His hearth's cheerful blaze still engages his mind  
“Whilst thro' the sharp hawthorn keen blows the cold wind.”

N. B. The last eight Songs were set to Music by the Author.<sup>7</sup>

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⁷ The above verse and airs can be found in volume 3 of *The Miscellaneous Essays, etc.*

*⁸ For the Pennsylvania Packet.

A Man who is *disposed* to be entertained may find amusement in the mod common occurrences of life. Objects strike the eye, and incidents affect the mind, very differently in different persons. Some men accustom themselves to see every thing in a ludicrous point of view; others, in a serious light; and the multitude are content with mere perception; that is, barely seeing and hearing, without making any other further use of their senses.

This diversity of disposition is founded in the original constitutions of the parties. The *humorist* was funny and roguish when a boy; following the propensity of his nature, he acquires an habitual facility in associating ludicrous ideas with the most ordinary, and seemingly the most barren incidents of life. His eye immediately discovers any Angularity of countenance, or manner, because he is always looking for Angularities; and he finds something to divert him in the mod common transactions, because he is always hunting for diversion.

I have myself, some tincture of this disposition; and, when disengaged from more serious business, I sally forth with a design to seek for entertainment. A variety of sources immediately present. For instance: it requires no great effort of imagination to suppose that the major part of the inhabitants of this great city [Philadelphia] are actually *mad*. Impressed with this idea, I observe the countenance, gait, and manner of every one I meet, and endeavour to class my lunatics under different species of frenzy.

One fellow drives along with such heedless impetuosity, that he treads in the gutters instead of stepping over them, and runs against the [lamp] posts, which he might easily avoid. Another, has such strong marks of anxiety, expressed in every feature of his face, that his whole soul seems to be absorbed in some sale, purchase, or other pursuit. A third, is haranguing with great vehemence to two or three ignoramuses who devour his politics with open ears. And, I see a fourth, in a violent passion, cursing and swearing like a sailor in a storm. But there is no end to the variety of characters that present, and consequently no end to this source of observation and entertainment.

At another time, I apply to the streets for a different species of diversion. I walk round a square, and attend to all the scraps and fragments of conversation I can pick up *en passant*. When I return home I write these on separate pieces of paper: and then amuse myself with arranging them in such order as to produce, if possible some apparent connection. If this cannot be done, I make another excursion, and collect more materials, till out of a great number, I am enabled to accomplish my purpose. For example --

{What's the price of butter to-day?
{It will fell for 4/. per gallon by the hogshead.

{Is your cousin married?
{She will be launched next Thursday.

{She is a good beast, and will carry you through thick and thin.
{Ay! to be sure we mud support the constitution.

{Do you think *the funding bill**⁹ will pass?
{No friend. The insurers must bear the loss: we have nothing to do with it.

{They say *Longchamp**¹⁰ will be given up.

⁸ *Ibid.* Vol. 2, p. 138. [Hopkinson's note.] * Some personal altercations in the public papers occasioned this piece of ridicule.

⁹ [Hopkinson's note.] * A bill for funding the public debt was at this time before the house. Those who had contributed nothing in the late war, were unwilling to be taxed for the payment of interest on the funds lent to government for carrying it on: and therefore opposed the bill.

¹⁰ [Hopkinson's note.] A Frenchman who had insulted the consul and minister of France, and immediately took the oath of allegiance to the date of Pennsylvania, and claimed protection as a citizen of the common-wealth: but the minister of France demanded him as a French subject, and a deserter from the army. This matter occasioned a great deal of confusion, and much trouble to government.

{That's my man -- no, its mine -- I swear its mine: it rolled into the gutter; it struck against that gentleman's foot, and he kicked it into the gutter. -- Didn't it Tom? Didn't it jack? -- You lie! I say it didn't. -- Did it Cuff? Did it Pompey? And here a boxing match.

But my present fancy is to suppose the public newspapers to be so many real theatres, on which some comedy or farce is daily exhibited for my entertainment. About nine o'clock the packet of the day is brought in: I take my feat: the curtain rides, and the play begins.

For instance:

Scene -- Philadelphia.

Enter a doctor of divinity,
and a doctor of medicine.*¹¹

A very familiar dialogue commences, in which each performer endeavours to display the character of his antagonist in as striking a manner as possible to my great satisfaction. I imagine I see the professional battle. The divine throws text off scripture in the face of his adversary, and hampers him with the cords of logical conclusions; whilst the physician squirts clysters at the divine, and claps cantharides on his back.

But the most comical part of the scene is this. The learned divine *hoists* the university, and exposing its naked flesh, exclaims with admiration -- "Oh, charming! behold and see what a broad bottom is here!" Whereupon the physician immediately *hoists Dickenson college*, and with equal eloquence descants upon its *narrow bottom* -- "Look, says the divine, on this capacious disk -- on the one side sits the *pope*; on the other side sits Luther; and see how snug: *Calvin* lies between them both." "Its all wrong, replies the physician, *Calvin* has no business there: he will be choaked -- he will be suffocated -- he will be squeezed to death -- here is a fine narrow bottom more fit for his accommodation. He can have it all to himself -- he is a *usurper* there, but this is his own flesh and blood." From words they proceed to blows. The divine is heated with zeal seven times hotter than Nebuchadnezzar's furnace: he vociferates -- "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" and forthwith flogs away on the narrow bottom of poor Carlisle. The physician is also enraged. "By the bones oi Boerhaave, and the dust of Hypocrates, says he, I will be even with you:" and without further prelude, falls to scourging the pope, Luther, and Calvin all at once upon the broad bottom of the university. But the scene changes ---

Enter two musicians.

(Another battle.)

*¹² Mr. *Tweedledum* begins the attack with a full *discord* in a sharp third, and leaves it *unresolved*, which to be sure is very shocking. Mr. *Tweedle-dee* replies in the *natural key*; but in a *sharp third* also. *Tweedledum* then changes the modulation, and after running a rapid division, closes with a chromatic arp[p]legio in a flat third. There is no bearing this. The parties are enraged -- *Tweedledum* seizes the diapason pipe of an organ -- *Twee-dledee* defends himself with a silver mounted flute: and to it they go -- blasting away at each other with astonishing vigour and dexterity. Methinks I hear the shrill tones of the flute, now ranging through the upper octave, and maintaining acknowledged superiority; and now descending into the flowery plains of the fruitful tenor, and yielding to the powerful vibrations of the dreadful organ pipe.

Thus it is, that by the help of imagination, and a talent for considering circumstances in a Angular point of view, I am enabled to find entertainment in occurrences which are scarcely noticed by others. But I never make sport of matters really serious. The miseries, misfortunes, and sufferings of our fellow creatures

¹¹ [Hopkinson's note.] * A warm controversy between Dr. E-- and Dr. R-- , respecting the *university of Pennsylvania*, and the *college at Carlisle*: in which the broad bottom of the university was too frequently mentioned to pass unnoticed.

¹² [Hopkinson's note.] * A dispute between Mr. Brown, an eminent performer on the flute, and Mr. Bentley, an organist.

can never be proper subjects of ridicule; but the passions, follies, and absurdities of mankind are surely lawful occasions of laughter.

A.B.

March, 1785.

For the complete text of *The Miscellaneous Essays and Occasional Writings of Francis Hopkinson, Esq.* (1792), see:

Vol. 1: <http://www.archive.org/details/miscellaneous00hopkgoog>

Vol. 2: <http://www.archive.org/details/miscellaneous02hopkgoog>

Vol. 3: <http://www.archive.org/details/miscellaneous03hopkgoog>

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