Articles

Fit to Be Imitated: The Federal Franklin

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EACH new biography of Benjamin Franklin, among the relative flurry published in recent years, asserts some particular angle of vision as the best perspective from which to appreciate the "true," the "accurate," or the "historic" Franklin. This is precisely the task Gordon S. Wood frames in *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin*, declaring his attempt to "recover the historic Franklin who did not know the kind of massively symbolic folk hero he would become" (2004, ix). Such is perhaps the luxury of the biographer. The literary scholar, however, must reconcile symbolic iterations of Franklin with the rhetorical as well as the historical record. As we near the three-hundredth anniversary of his birth, increased public interest adds urgency to an already necessary reexamination. It is essential to recover the textual Franklin in addition to the historical figure.

Franklin has long held a touchstone position within autobiography studies. In their detailed account of the history of autobiographical criticism, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson tacitly acknowledge this condition by placing Franklin's *Autobiography* within a canon of life narratives that had become established by the time autobiography studies emerged as a field in the 1960s. They observe a particular

pattern in the establishment of an American lifewriting canon: "[Scholars] assumed the autobiographer to be an autonomous and enlightened 'individual' who understands his relationship to the world as one of separateness in which he exercised the agency of free will" (2001, 121). This scholarly assumption, however, has been attributed to Franklin by scholars in so naturalized a fashion that a flawed conception of autonomy and individuality is treated as a self-evident truth of the text. Smith and Watson describe the autobiography, in contrast to Rousseau's *Confessions,* as "Aimed at molding the individual to the community" (2001, 98). This essay fundamentally contests such a gloss, but Smith and Watson identify an axiomatic conception of the nature of Franklin and his writing. Their observation is followed up by an apt description of the autobiography's place in history:

> Written over several decades and only published in the mid-nineteenth century, well after his death, Franklin's autobiography becomes a prototypical narrative for America's myth of the self-made man and the entrepreneurial republican subject, specifically marked as male, white, propertied, and socially and politically enfranchised. (Smith and Watson 2001, 98)

I do not dispute the assessment of Smith and Watson that Franklin is the consummate figure of Enlightenment identity, nor that he was received, by friends and foes alike, just as they describe. Rather I assert, based on the belief that the above description is no longer justifiable through close reading of Franklin's text, that Franklin represents an invaluable opportunity to explore the possibility that the Enlightenment self is a more nuanced, more performative, more socially transformative category than is presently understood in autobiographical studies. Rather than attempting to mold the individual to society, the self enacted in Franklin's *Autobiography* is inextricable from the construction of new social contexts.

Smith and Watson identify the disjunction between the narrative's creation and its public availability, but the significance of the gap cannot be overestimated. While a full rehearsal of the manuscript's history is beyond the scope of this essay J. A. Leo Lemay and P. M. Zall provide, in their introduction to their *Genetic Text* (1981), a fascinating account of historical mishap and editorial bungling that may still come between the text and a fair reading. The worst editorial

meddling, according to Lemay and Zall, can be attributed to William Temple Franklin, who inherited his grandfather's papers and failed to publish them until 1818, twenty-eight years after Franklin's death. Lemay and Zall compellingly argue that Temple Franklin used a retranslation as a source text in lieu of the original manuscript and substituted formal, British diction for several American expressions. He also introduced political anachronisms to his grandfather's text substituting, for example, the word "States" for Franklin's "Colonies" (Lemay and Zall 1981). The first complete edition based on the original manuscript was not published by John Bigelow until 1868, and even that preserved errors from earlier versions. Though Franklin's other writing and public image certainly added his voice to American culture, the nascent American identity—to which Franklin might have meant to contribute the autobiography—is well developed, for better or worse, by the time it becomes fully available. We can only speculate on the difference a complete, well-produced version of Franklin's original manuscript would have made to the world were it published in the 1790s. It is crucial to understand, however, that the text originally entered a post-Enlightenment social context in a form quite different from what Franklin wrote. The entrenched assumptions that continue to inflect critical readings, therefore, may have more to do with the political crises of the nineteenth century than with the autobiographical self Franklin strove to enact in eighteenth-century America. In describing the interests of autobiographical scholars, however, Smith and Watson imply that the perception of Franklin as the isolated ego may be entrenched by virtue of a scholarly projection onto Franklin's text as part of a process of autobiographical canon formation that continued into the 1960s.

In *How Our Lives Become Stories*, Paul John Eakin identifies a mechanism by which such projections adhere to an autobiographical text well after the expectations of a particular moment of canonization have been subject to critique. Eakin points to the work of Phillipe Lejeune and Karl J. Weintraub that "Traced the rise of modern autobiography to Rousseau and Enlightenment individualism" (1999, 47). Importantly, then, a concept of the Enlightenment is applied to autobiography in retrospect as an explanatory discourse theorizing the dramatic increase in both the kinds and numbers of autobiographical narratives in the eighteenth century. The next wave of theoretical evolution comes via a series of feminist interventions that, in Eakin's

words, "Repudiate the universalizing claims of this model and question its place in the history of the genre. The model might suitably describe the experience of Augustine and Rousseau [...] but it did not fit the contours of women's lives" (1999, 47). Eakin then identifies a significant gap in autobiographical criticism. The autobiographical self has been redefined for *women's* life narratives as a relational rather than isolated ego, but the presumption of autonomy was still thought a fitting expectation to apply to male authors for whom Enlightenment selfhood was historically available. Eakin, thus, notices a gender-based polarization in readings of autobiography and that a "related consequence of the attempt to define women's autobiography has been the widespread acceptance of a concomitantly narrow definition of male selfhood and autobiography" (1999, 49). He urges critics to question the category of autonomy: "Consolidating the gains of feminist scholarship, and emulating what Sidonie Smith and others have achieved for women's autobiography, we need to liberate men's autobiography from the inadequate model that has guided our reading to date" (1999, 49). In this essay, I accept Eakin's call to interpretive action while asserting the possibility of a complex performative notion of what autonomy means in the case of Franklin. An additional consequence of the process Eakin describes is to recognize that the meanings of "Enlightenment" and "autonomy" have usually been applied in autobiographical criticism as they are understood in retrospect, rather than as gleaned from Enlightenment texts themselves.

Change, though, is afoot in the realm of Franklin scholarship. H. W. Brands writes that "Franklin's story is the story of a man—an exceedingly gifted man and a most engaging one. It is also the story of the birth of America—an America this man discovered in himself, then helped create in the world at large" (2000, 8). Such a union of self and society as homologous entities is a Franklinian precept that has gone unappreciated for much too long. Updated theoretical approaches, meanwhile, include the work of Christopher Looby and Sidonie Smith. Looby (1996) applies a Lacanian analysis to establish Franklin's manipulation of linguistic identity. Smith (1995) expounds the concept of autobiographical performativity to identify Franklin's use of printed media in creating a reproducible, consumable identity category. Both analyses are made possible largely by Benedict Anderson's theorization of printing as a producer of vast audiences of

simultaneous readers to receive and imagine a connection to distant, linguistically constructed identities (1991). Indeed, Anderson's insight into the "imagined" aspects of nation building generates a useful framework for assessing Franklin's autobiographical contribution to American culture. Thus, the critical vocabulary of Franklin scholarship has undergone a profound shift. What a previous wave of scholarship conceived of as irony can now be figured more deftly as performativity or linguistic manipulation.

Franklin's autobiography, though, illuminates such manipulations as rhetorical contributions to his social context that render new, liberatory identity categories recognizable to an emerging American discourse community. Theories of performativity, therefore, engender readings that resist the reduction of ironic self-awareness to a fleeting wink of the eye from a sly snake oil salesman. Attention to the material effects of performance enables Karen Weyler, for example, to comment in *Intricate Relations* that "As the life story he [Franklin] recounts illustrates, self-interest is best advanced not through ambition, but through private virtue and industry which in turn benefit the larger community" (2004, 125). Here we see acknowledgment of a symbiosis between self and community, but Weyler diverts her attention to a new purpose before interrogating the term "virtue" as Franklin applies it, and she doesn't consider how the benefits enjoyed by the larger community return again to Franklin to support his further development and civic engagement. Franklin's autobiographical technique renders literary performance inextricable from reality inasmuch as it depends upon the intelligibility standards of a real audience and links self-interest as well as self-construction to the interested construction of communities that are simultaneously performative and material. Throughout the *Autobiography*, the liberatory power of performance to create new categories of identity is invoked in a cycle of symbiosis, and it is amplified by an ironic distance through which Franklin becomes his own evaluative audience.

The notion of autobiographical performativity as delineated by Sidonie Smith in "Performativity, Autobiographical Practice, Resistance" facilitates theorization of Franklin's ironic authorial voice. Building on Judith Butler's articulations of gender performativity, Smith asserts that when a specific self is constructed through expression, the unity of a subject exists in the expression, not

ontologically, and details are mindfully excluded as the coherent narrative is purposefully effected by the narrating self. Autobiographical performativity also inheres in its audience. Smith explains that "the audience comes to expect a certain kind of performativity that conforms relatively comfortably to criteria of intelligibility" (1995, 20). She then treats Franklin's *Autobiography* as a "conduct book" that breaks away from the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century commonplace of proffering manners to aristocrats to offer a formula for living "in service to a new bourgeois notion of identity" (1995, 22). The famous scene in which Franklin performs industriousness by carrying paper through the streets of Philadelphia in a wheelbarrow, "to show that I was not above my Business" (1964, 126), exemplifies the conduct book phenomenon. Smith interprets this scene compellingly to notice the emergence of an external public discourse of "tradesman" that then comes to influence or impact the body by imposing characteristics upon a physical being. The set of ideas in public circulation combining to form the character of the "tradesman" in the latter half of the eighteenth century results in actual bodies doing new things.

Smith asserts that the eighteenth-century idea of "character" expresses the period's dissonance regarding "the essentialist notion of a personal identity tied to birth and social status and the more flexible notion of an earnable identity, a notion central to the emerging ideology of the bourgeois republican subject" (1995, 23). In identifying the performativity of social roles such as "tradesman," Franklin enables reflection on the nature and fairness of societies. Within the range of culturally intelligible performances, there is room for considerable variety and exercise of conscious decision. Smith, however, makes too little of this point, emphasizing the fact that the "ideology of the bourgeois republican subject," via Franklin's wheelbarrow, regulates bodily acts (1995, 23). The bodily acts, then, that produce emergent identities are controlled by a bourgeois ideology, and the *Autobiography*, as a conduct book, both rehearses and recommends bourgeois bodily acts. Smith explains, "The interiorized character or identity of the tradesman is an *effect* of bodily acts and behaviors, the regulatory practices of emergent bourgeois identity formation" (1995, 23). She sums up with a more general gloss on the text: "The *Autobiography* serves as a conduct book through which

American men become 'self-made men' by interiorizing the performativity of individualist masculinity" (1995, 24).

Franklin indeed performs a part that coheres with an emergent bourgeois republican subject. Certain conditions, however, underlie Smith's assertions, which I would emphasize to a much greater degree than she does. If the autobiography is a conduct book, one of the things it models is the performance of a self. If that is true, and if conduct books offer identities as effects of physical practices, the autobiography must also model the performance of a self through the specific cultural practice of autobiographical storytelling. Franklin gives us no reason to assume that his younger self is a more appropriate model than the figure whom we access through Franklin's elder narrative voice. As a narrator he models the habit of authorship over the parts one performs. The distinction between appearance and reality becomes one between the realities a person is given and those one creates. The particular individuality Franklin performs, however, is richly nuanced by—and staged within—a discourse of the democratic community-building subject. Therefore, I proceed on the assumption that symbolic aspects of his self-representation in the *Autobiography* are a vital tool of Franklin's political expression, rather than mild chicanery or distortion of historical facts.

The long-appreciated ironic posture which prevails through much of the book reveals that Franklin fully understands the doubling of his identity that occurs as he renders himself an emblematic type. He approaches this doubling playfully, and he views it as a necessary feature of the American citizen analogous to the doubling of national identity effected by the revolution for which Franklin spends most of the narrative preparing. If one wants to change one's condition, one must first examine the self in the world with consciousness and critical distance. This implies a distinction between the self and its immediate surroundings, as well as ability to objectify the self by a theoretical and temporary separation of consciousness from self. The gestating nation, likewise, distinguishes itself politically from England even as the culture of Franklin's adopted Philadelphia, not to mention his native Boston, remains linked to that country. Furthermore, the nation that results from the revolution is, at the same time, one nation and many states. The desire for sovereignty necessitates union because the colonies lack the ability to maintain and manifest sovereignty individually. The colonies each sacrifice a measure of sovereignty in

joining the union; such relinquishment makes possible any degree of sovereignty *for that union*. Thus, contradiction and the pragmatic tolerance of contradiction within social contracts are inherent in the nascent American character. In the *Autobiography*, Franklin prepares and performs personal independence, mirroring the colonies' gradual political dissociation from England until he interrupts the narrative he began in 1771. Recommencing his account from an even more venerable position in 1784, Franklin interprets the new reality of national independence and development through his personal maturing process. Both before and after the revolution, he figures selfhood as a social model. Casting his own identity as an emblematic model of self-invention, he also trains the reader in the interpretation of models such that the self-conscious application of one's own reasoned judgment becomes his most palpable directive.

Contriv'd to Disguise My Hand: Rhetorical Strategies

The text establishes the agenda of being read emblematically with the words "Dear Son" (Franklin 1964, 43). Undertaking the story as an epistle from father to son suggests an advisory, directive document. The omission of a name, however, creates a generic resonance. The salutation emphasizes the relationship of forebear to scion and de-emphasizes the principals in Franklin's relationship with his son. Any sense of a limited familial audience generated by the epistolary gesture is obliterated very early in the text when Franklin declares his purpose quite plainly:

> Having emerg'd from the Poverty and Obscurity in which I was born and bred, to a State of Affluence and some Degree of Reputation in the world, and having gone so far thro' Life with a considerable Share of Felicity, the conducing Means I made use of, which, with the Blessing of God, so well succeeded, my Posterity may like to know, as they may find some of them suitable to their own Situations, and therefore fit to be imitated. (1964, 43)

Declaring that the information contained in the autobiography might be useful to his here undefined posterity, Franklin opens the text up to a very general audience. Additionally, this passage establishes a narrative trajectory from poverty to affluence concomitant with a trajectory from obscurity to reputation. The sense of movement

Franklin inaugurates here is literary and dualistic. He embarks upon this narration with a preordained navigational chart that promises to bring his protagonist to particular ends (affluence and reputation) for a particular narrative purpose (the instruction of posterity). The identity he enacts in the text, thus, will be limited and defined by a literary plot arc. This passage also establishes the principle of reason as the foundation of, and justification for, the narrative. With complex subordination throughout the sentence, Franklin qualifies the means he employed as relevant by virtue of their efficacy, and he then submits those means to the consideration and judgment of posterity.

Although Franklin's narration gives readers a chain of historical facts, the plotted structure of his telling demands that we interpret those facts as chosen elements that execute a literary narrative. Franklin moves the astute critic's eye from episodes and facts to an excess of meaning produced by literary strategies. That is, the clever reader can attend to meaning generated by the choice and arrangement of episodes and facts. Franklin hints at the relevance of novels as a model for the autobiography simply by evoking a sense of plot on the first page. He makes this relevance more explicit with his discussion of John Bunyan and other novelists:

> Honest John was the first that I know of who mix'd Narration and Dialogue, a Method of Writing very engaging to the Reader, who in the most interesting Parts finds himself as it were brought into the Company, and present at the Discourse. Defoe in his Cruso, his Moll Flanders, Religious Courtship, Family Instructor, and other pieces has imitated it with Success. And Richardson has done the same with his Pamela, &c. (1964, 72)

As Ormond Seavey (1988) observes, Bunyan is far from being the first author to ensconce dialogue in narrative description. It occurs even in the Bible and in other material that Franklin would surely have read. What *was* a novelistic innovation in Bunyan's time, though, was the creation of a persona who joins the reader as a spectator (31). Franklin's constant commentary on the events he relates subsequently establishes a spectating figure consistent with his comment on Bunyan. Indeed he imports the novelistic technique of a spectating persona to the *Autobiography* in the very space of this comment because it interrupts narration of his voyage from New York to Philadelphia (the second leg of his first migration from Boston) to

address the reader directly on the comparatively unrelated subject of the literary legacies of Bunyan, Defoe, and Richardson. This sort of narrative aside increases awareness of the narrator's backward-looking perspective and personality and allows a reflective frame narrative. The technique, thus, controls the plot in the fashion of the eighteenth-century British novel and Franklin is well aware that it does so. Quite crucial, though, is the point that the literary is as dependent on the factual, as the factual is on the literary. It is not that the "real" or "true" meaning is carried metaphorically, and that we must attend exclusively to literary resonance. Rather, there is symbiosis between the literary and historical characters of the text. Franklin's organizing facts in such a way as to grant them metaphorical significance adds flesh to the skeleton of history so that it may be used for human, cultural purposes. His telling the truth through his own narrative agenda protects it from the narrative agendas of both his own and America's detractors inasmuch as it fills a discursive power vacuum. His own vantage point is occupied with pride, and the facts as he sees them are presented with a view to his specific personal and political purposes.

Upon first consideration, the twinned plot movement of poverty to affluence and obscurity to reputation might not appear particularly noteworthy since both pairs of terms strike the ear as complementary. This perception of the pairs' complementarity, however, might well be a symptom of cultural saturation with self-improvement narratives. In artistic and scholarly professions, reputation exists without much affluence, and many affluent people pass through busy streets unrecognized. The connection is constructed, not ontologically necessary, and may emerge through the kinds of writing Franklin pioneers. The America in which Franklin lives is a place of new expectations. Even the affluent must engage in industrious behavior to catch a complimentary glance from Franklin. Those who do elevate themselves require witnesses to their having risen. It would stand to reason that the society which would soon justify its political independence by a principle of equality of opportunity would not only make it possible to rise above one's inherited social standing, but would urge such ascension and reward it with notoriety. Nascent American culture, with an entire continent ripe for conquest (at least in the imagination), requires evidence of the industry and success that would be unleashed were the strict social and economic limitations traditionally associated with bloodlines and class relaxed. This

circumstance merges the practice of celebrating the individual with the pursuit of wealth. In such an environment, it will not do to achieve one without the other because the task before the emergent culture is to unmoor the assumptions that inherited identity determines one's status, and that status is given and fixed. In the new America, status is to be linked to individual endeavor, the success of which is most easily discerned by visible affluence. The particulars of an individual's success must be scrutinized and praised for their trailblazing cleverness. Franklin's extensive and deliberate revisions of Part One allow us to see also that he means more by "reputation" than mere notoriety since he purposely canceled the word "fame" on the first page of his original manuscript (Lemay and Zall 1981, lvi). In its place he put "Reputation," which engenders a stronger sense of engagement with a community to which one has presented oneself as a thinking, self-possessed individual.

Franklin's precision in articulating four distinct nodes of identification—poverty, affluence, obscurity, and reputation—that are intersected by the same life over time allows modern readers to clear away the presumed conflation of affluence, reputation, and their less desirable counterparts to see something more in the *Autobiography* than Abel James was looking for when he urged Franklin in a letter likely written in 1782 to continue a didactic tale (Franklin 1964, 133). The two nodes at each pole of Franklin's plot trajectory represent a relation between an individual and a society. The public's perception of Franklin's position in Philadelphia has changed through his contributions to it, and his personal fortune has developed through his attention to business. Community-building activity has been helpful in business, but he has had to make it so and bend the two tracks of existence toward one another. They are not the same thing, and Franklin mindfully expresses them both, making his model of the self-made man a multifarious protagonist who balances dualistic purposes. His own independence is a process of movement from isolation and secondary status as an apprentice to a self-possessed individual who participates as a conscious constituent of a civic community. Such participation culminates in reputation and affluence. As the nation moves from a state of fragmented colonization toward a united independence, Franklin as a minister to France will quite literally represent the nation as a new autonomous participant in the community of nations. The common threads between the two narrative

tracks are the primacy of reason in determining the boundaries of the individual—the instantiation of independence (both personal and political) by declaring it to a community and engaging the community from the perspective of a self-conscious entity—and the importance of secular unity through equal opportunity. In short, the principles of equal opportunity can benefit individuals of multiple sects as long as no particular religious group dominates the civic realm. Franklin thus figures individual development and opportunity as alternatives to sectarian doctrines as sources of identity and civic unity.

The autobiography continues to assert an emblematic purpose as Franklin contextualizes the information he chronicles with reflections that generalize about the lessons readers are to take from his experience. Whereas, in asserting its truth value, autobiography might be taken to narrow the field of interpretation to that which "actually happened," Franklin demonstrates that the things we actually do can be symbols for others. He tutors the reader early in the text with an otherwise unnecessary identification with his uncle Thomas. Franklin writes to his son:

> Thomas was bred a Smith under his father, but being ingenious and encourag'd in learning (as all his brothers like wise were) by an Esquire Palmer, then the principal Gentleman in that Parish, he qualify'd for the business of scrivener, became a considerable Man in the County Affairs, was a chief Mover of all publick Spirited Undertakings for the County or Town of Northampton and his own Village, of which many Instances were told us at Ecton and he was much taken Notice of and patroniz'd by Lord Halifax. He died in 1702, Jan. 6, old stile, just 4 Years to a Day before I was born. The Account we receiv'd of his Life and Character from some old people at Ecton, I remember struck you as something extraordinary from its Similarity to what you knew of me. Had he died on the same Day, you said, one might have suppos'd a Transmigration. (1964, 47–48)

Early in the text, Franklin here makes a special cause of finding this historical antecedent and saying that this man's characteristics are similar to his own. Perhaps this uncle had other characteristics that are quite unlike Franklin's and were simply not listed. In the passage, Franklin interprets a life, finds the similarity in their two lives well after Thomas' death and attends to it by choice. Since Thomas did not die on the day of Franklin's birth, no transmigration is supposed. Instead, this passage emphasizes Franklin's willful choices. In the

context of autobiography, Franklin takes the opportunity to cultivate a certain image of himself, which he conveys in this enumeration of his uncle's interests and civic qualities. By engaging in this interpretation himself at the beginning of his narrative—using biographical material that represents his own life as the scaled-down life story of his uncle—Franklin suggests that the reader engage his own autobiography the same way. He is aware of the possibility of differences between himself and his uncle, but as a self-made man, he chooses characteristics that he wants as part of his public reputation and edits those that are unfitting. He mindfully selects similarities with Thomas that can serve as a comparative standard by which his own life can be judged. The past, or reality, is not undone, denied, or cursed. Rather, it is met with considerable good humor. Nonetheless, Franklin's practice here implies that to pursue self-knowledge is to take a perspective on the self, to analyze it, and to edit it. Most importantly, this passage models interpretive behavior, putting the reader in a proper frame of mind to attend to the metaphorical possibilities of a personal history. In the process, Franklin suggests by example that his autobiography is not to be engaged emotionally but rather, analytically. Readers should judge what is fit to be imitated and take what they need from the *Autobiography*. Franklin unashamedly proceeds to provide some of the things that, in his judgment, his readers may need.

As part of his preemptive strike against any accusation of vanity, Franklin begins the project with a justification to his son: "Now imagining it may be equally agreeable to you to know the Circumstances of *my* Life [...] I sit down to write them for you" (1964, 43). As Franklin's development gets underway, however, the pretense of private conversation becomes increasingly unwieldy. The process of engaging with a community to create a venue for one's individual specificity grows in importance in the plot of the narrative. Accordingly, Franklin adjusts the structural form of his narrative to remain consistent with his established rhetorical method of textually instantiating thematic points through his narrative posture. When he wants thinking readers to make judgments for themselves on the first page, he constructs complex subordinate clauses that demand analysis, as when he writes of his rise from poverty and obscurity to affluence and reputation. Similarly, the device of a fading direct address to his son parallels the moment in Franklin's intellectual evolution when his

Silence Dogood Papers meet with a limited but approving audience, his brother's acquaintances:

> I suppose now that I was rather lucky in my Judges: And that perhaps they were not really so very good as I then esteem'd them. Encourag'd however by this, I wrote and convey'd in the same Way to the Press several more Papers, which were equally approv'd, and I kept my Secret till my small Fund of Sense for such performances was pretty well exhausted [...]. (1964, 68)

Franklin explains "I contriv'd to disguise my hand," and then he submitted his work anonymously under the door of his brother's printing house to circumvent an expected bias (1964, 67). This device of anonymity proves a good way of getting started in civic debate, and the approval of his brother's acquaintances is a useful boost in confidence. Once a measure of success is achieved, however, he must abandon the device of anonymity or the point that he is in fact a thinking being could not be made. Likewise, after a lifetime of successes in political writing, his brother's acquaintances appear less significant as judges of his work. This vignette about the publication of the *Silence Dogood Papers* directly parallels the epistolary gesture that begins the *Autobiography* and is abandoned once Franklin slips under the door of the narrative the point that his purpose is much broader than the typical advice given to a son in private. Like the pretense of anonymity, the device of direct address enables a receptive reading until Franklin can establish sufficient sympathy on intellectual grounds. By beginning privately and gradually spinning out more and more public dialogue over the course of his four sections, Franklin renders his autobiography in a form that reflects his purpose. He demonstrates that although ego indeed begins locally, the self can be better discovered and better defined through interaction with larger and larger communities. Narratively, then, he opens the text to an ever-larger pool of more suitable judges who will apply reasoned judgment to his agenda. As we have seen, he first declares independence to a community of judges by showing them his reason in the *Dogood Papers*. He then further demonstrates that independence, both political and personal, consists of voluntary reasoned engagement with others. This movement from private to public in the book demonstrates that voluntary civic engagement at once calls independence into being and attests to its existence.

The Upright Sack: Print Culture and the Civic Self

Franklin's first voyage from Boston to Philadelphia transforms the New England of his youth to the Old England abandoned by his ancestors. Thus, as the colonies move toward a radical reconfiguration, he crafts an episode in his life into a parable of change and renewal, offering himself up as an individual symbolizing the nation-to-be. As his narrative purposes become more and more public, it becomes increasingly crucial that the content of the standards Franklin establishes when he interprets the life of his uncle Thomas not be ignored. The characteristics with which he chooses to identify pertain as much to nation building as to self-invention. Thomas Franklin is a civic leader and scrivener whose trade allows for the exchange of ideas, thus making possible reasoned debate within a large society. As a printer, Franklin indeed builds on the vocation of his uncle. Concomitant with the rise of print media, the eighteenth century also sees the rise of nationalism as a primary feature of identity, as Benedict Anderson's now paradigmatic work in *Imagined Communities* testifies: "print-capitalism [...] made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others in profoundly new ways" (1991, 36). Anderson's larger point is that these imagined, though rational, connections to distant people and activities produces the discourses of "nation-ness" and nationalism that replace spiritual or cosmological discourses in defining self in relation to cultural surroundings. An effective tool for comprehending the effects of this imagined relation is Anderson's explication of the modern practice of reading newspapers. Anderson extends Hegel's account of newspaper reading as a substitute for morning prayer and explains:

> It is performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull. Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. (1991, 35)

It is less than the whole truth, though, that readers have "not the slightest notion" of the identities of their fellows. There remain urban streets in which the news is discussed. There can be reflective

engagement with editorial matter whose author is identified and subsequent face-to-face engagement with other citizens around shared cultural discourse. Nor is it correct to assume that the imagined community is divorced from the production of material community. With the bond of print media, intellectual engagement can overcome distance, and component selves can find community in their thinking despite their geographical dispersion. Though individual readers remain anonymous during the reading, the content of publicly distributed printed matter verifies their existence to others and creates a real relationship among them by engaging minds and providing common information. The private moment of reading allows one to interpret, reason, and evaluate, thus gathering together a coherent consciousness on a given subject, which can be followed by one's own contribution to discourse on that same topic. The introduction of newspapers means that a much larger number of people can stake a claim to the role of the discourse-producing citizen as a constituent part of a linguistic community.

In short, what Franklin emphasizes, and Anderson perhaps makes too little of, is the increased intellectual agency facilitated by the creation of large discourse communities that value debate and information. What can be known, imagined, and subsequently realized is less constrained by local power structures and inherited social status. It is unsurprising, then, that Franklin the printer associates himself with his ancestor whose work as a scrivener thrust him into civic leadership. Franklin sets a tone that values typography and exposition, and he establishes a connection between civic activity and identity. Just as Thomas Franklin is remembered for his discursive contributions and civic participation, these characteristics become the foregrounded elements of Benjamin Franklin's identity. Printing will be a key factor in Franklin's internal unity as it is the conduit between himself and civic life. Through typography, he will contribute a wealth of printed material to fuel public discourse paralleling the economic wealth he will gain in return. The newspaper business will provide a platform for his social criticism throughout his career, and its profitability will enable him to make a number of other printed contributions to civic discourse.

To Franklin, printing *is* civic engagement. He begins in anonymity as the intellectually colonized writer of the *Dogood Papers* precluded from owning his own thoughts due to indenture and bias against his

youth. Having made an anonymous foray into public discourse, though, he is rewarded by the civic realm when his "small Fund of Sense for such Performances was pretty well exhausted" (Franklin 1964, 68), and he can no longer keep his authorship secret. This is a man with ideas, and public respect for them advances him toward self-consciousness. Franklin states that this episode improves his position in the eyes of some, which ultimately moves him toward his decision to leave. He writes, "I began to be considered a little more by my Brother's Acquaintance, and in a manner that did not quite please him, as he thought, probably with reason, that it tended to make me too vain. And perhaps this might be one Occasion of the Differences that we frequently had about this Time" (1964, 68). Those differences included beatings. Humiliated by his brother's tyranny, Benjamin takes the first opportunity to escape and make his own way in the world. The juxtaposition of his *Silence Dogood* success and his refusal to continue submitting to the conditions of his indenture renders printed thought publicly appreciated an early step toward self-knowledge, resulting in his increased resistance to his subsidiary status as an apprentice printer. On a larger scale, writing and printing are the tools by which a shared discourse can unify fragmented colonies that are subordinate to the crown. The tenor and ubiquity of that public discourse will lead literally to a declaration of independence as the injustices of the king become increasingly intolerable in the face of a self-conscious civic body. While Franklin provides some details about his wife and family in the *Autobiography* and lists errata now and again, it is clear that he wants to be remembered mainly for his exchange of reason in debate, his contributions to Philadelphia, his success in business, and service to the nation he helps create. Civic participation thus determines his autobiographical identity.

Perhaps the most striking example of the way in which Franklin unites personal prosperity and civic contribution lies in his support for the production of paper money in Pennsylvania. Franklin states his position in detail:

> I was on the side of an Addition [of paper currency], being persuaded that the first small sum struck in 1723 had done much good, by increasing the Trade Employment, and Number of Inhabitants in the Province, since I now saw all the old Houses inhabited, and many new ones building, where as I remember'd well, that when I first walk'd about the Streets of Philadelphia, eating my Roll, I saw most

> of the houses in Walnut street between Second and Front streets with Bills on their Doors, to be let; and many likewise in Chestnut Street, and other Streets; which made me then think the inhabitants of the City were one after another deserting it. Our debates posess'd me so fully of the Subject, that I wrote and printed an anonymous Pamphlet on it, entituled [sic], *The Nature and Necessity of a Paper Currency*. (1964, 124)

Importantly, Franklin's is an essentially populist position as he perceives that only the wealthy inhabitants of the province are inclined to oppose the paper money, citing fears that it will depreciate their wealth. Franklin is concerned about the unequal distribution of wealth and interested in the possibility of economic growth being shared by the populace. The more currency available in the colony, the more citizens can be paid for their work, he reasons. Equally crucial is the remembered tour through the Philadelphia to which Franklin arrived. The narrator's enumeration of streets and the evocation of his walk places him in the city, surrounded by it as an integral part of its activity. Franklin's ability to contrast the condition of Philadelphia in its former state of decline with its current state of growth emphasizes its organic character as a conglomeration of persons determined by the movements and activities of individuals. The city is a living body of citizenry, and its individual components serve their own interests by serving the interest of that body. What is good for the conglomerate will benefit individuals in the long run. The cynical reader is likely to dismiss Franklin's position on paper money as pure self-interest because he follows the above quote with a slippery notation of the fact that he received the printing contract for this currency. This, however, confirms rather than refutes my point. Franklin makes a self-interested case but emphasizes the fact that the project that turned out to be such a great benefit to Pennsylvania that " The Utility of this Currency became by Time and Experience so evident, as never afterwards to be much disputed [...] Trade, Building and Inhabitants all the while increasing" (1964, 125) also proved "a very profitable jobb [sic], and a great Help to me" (1964, 124). The improvement of the colony can be made to profit the individual and will avail him of many more opportunities in the long run than would a pure self-interest that might undermine trade and growth.

Elsewhere in the *Autobiography*, Franklin demonstrates that the purposes of ego and personal aggrandizement are served by the silver

coin he parades past his brother's journeymen, making a "raree-show" of his Philadelphia currency. The coin, however, does not provide the long-term shared benefits of sound public policy. Thus his decision to include his involvement in the currency debate in the *Autobiography* inextricably links personal prosperity to civic contribution and supports the claim of Tocqueville that "In the United States there is hardly any talk of the beauty of virtue. But they maintain that virtue is useful and prove it every day [...]. (1969, 525). The presentation of the coins occurs during such a staccato sequence of efforts to impress the journeymen at his brother's expense that Franklin tacitly recognizes it as a vacuous boast (1964, 81–82). The contrast between his youthful ostentation with silver coin in tow and his mature advocacy of paper money suggests that Franklin is eager to point out that it is the long-term abstraction of self-interest that qualifies as useful virtue.

Civic contribution becomes the paradigm by which the self can be thought extant outside the biological and religious conditions Franklin leaves behind in Boston. Civic engagement is the moment of self-constitution for Franklin, and he repeatedly demonstrates it as his autobiography becomes an enumeration of civic activities. He understands the narration of civic activities as the narration of self. Ormond Seavey points out that a series of civic projects follows the debate on paper currency:

> In 1731 he and the junto members formed the Library Company. Soon after came the Union Fire Company, a volunteer fire company that also served as a social club for its members. He served as a clerk of the Provincial Assembly, as postmaster, as justice of the peace, and later as member of the Philadelphia Council and of the Assembly. (1988, 157–58)

Throughout such enumerations, Franklin casts himself as a member of a body. He crafts a career as a legislator extraordinaire, but does not highlight his executive roles as Postmaster and military leader, mentioning them only as they help him to right wrongs and achieve the goals of the Assembly. Self-invention, then, is an abstraction that consists of a self-conscious contribution to the construction of community. The establishment of the Library Company powerfully combines the concepts of civic participation and independent exercise of reason. When Franklin takes up is pen again to begin Part Two, the establishment of the Library Company is the only major repetition

despite his having left the manuscript of Part One in Pennsylvania and probably not having touched it for many years. He prioritizes, therefore, this mechanism by which the community unites to provide resources for individuals to develop their minds and critique the ideas of others. The individual who contributes to the library pursues his self-interest because a society of better informed, more reasonable citizens will make better communal decisions that will affect the individual in turn. Perhaps, however, the most interesting expressions of Franklin's view of self as inextricable from community come in Part Three where he weaves the banal issues of his day together with the weighty under the unifying precept that he defines and communicates his own being by relating his contributions to a series of communities.

The beginning of Part Three is largely concerned with questions of religion, which preoccupy Franklin throughout the text, that I will soon address. It is important to note, however, that his rehearsal of religious principles is repeatedly contextualized by Franklin's interest that Philadelphia be a cosmopolitan place, and that multiple religions be supported by its populous. He contributes to the building funds for many churches, regardless of the sects that will fill them. Importantly, though, in reflecting upon these contributions, he recalls that the want of new churches is connected to the influx of people as "our Province increas'd" (Franklin 1964, 146). The economic growth of Philadelphia depends on sustaining and accommodating the growing population. Maintaining a variety of religions serves secular development, which is outside the purview of any single sect. Likewise, Franklin always links a certain social utility to religion, claiming that virtuous behavior is the important outcome and justification of doctrine. From this topic, Franklin moves to the subject of *Poor Richard's Almanack*, reaffirming some of the "proverbs" offered therein although he recognizes their simplicity. The trajectory of Part Three is from basic religious principles to the ways in which trade and social engagement can replace religious doctrine as a source of virtuous behavior. His remarks on the almanac emphasize the social utility of simple communication of basic principles. Franklin reports, "I consider'd it [the almanac] as a proper Vehicle for conveying Instruction among the common People, who bought scarce any other Books" (1964, 164). So he acknowledges that while the almanac did not provide advanced philosophical argument, it strove to inculcate certain virtues among the

"common People" in the absence of other intellectual influences. He then reminds his present audience that he filled the spaces between significant dates in the almanac "With proverbial Sentences, chiefly such as inculcated Industry and Frugality as the Means of procuring Wealth and thereby securing Virtue, it being more difficult for a Man in Want to act always honestly, as (to use here one of those proverbs) *it is hard for an empty Sack to stand upright"* (Franklin 1964, 164). This passage, more than any other segment of the *Autobiography*, supports Max Weber's accusation that

> The peculiarity of this philosophy of avarice appears to be the ideal of the honest man of recognized credit, and above all the idea of a duty of the individual toward the increase of his capital, which is assumed to be an end in itself. Truly what is here preached is not simply a means of making one's way in the world, but a peculiar ethic. (1979, 17)

Indeed Weber's point accords with my own argument that Franklin constructs an ethos with the proverb of the upright sack in the *Autobiography*. Weber, however, misconstrues the impact of his observation. Rather than a philosophy of avarice, the ethos advanced by Franklin is one of balance and responsibility. The upright sack links personal wealth and well being to public wealth and well being, but Weber is incorrect to say that the increase of the individual's capital is assumed to be an end in itself. Instead, the increase of personal capital makes it more possible for the individual to be honest by eliminating want as a motivation for deception. In actuality, mere avarice disrupts Franklin's belief system because it spurs dishonesty as a means to gain wealth for its own sake. Franklin's ethos prizes communal growth that respects individual opportunity. He recommends that communities and entire societies provide opportunities on a large scale so that individuals might define themselves. The metaphor of an empty sack versus a full, and therefore upright, sack transmits this agenda. To fill something is to define it, to give it shape. An empty sack, then, is a person lacking self-consciousness. The colonized subject of indenture, the unrepresented American under British rule, or the subject of an inherited social position, must fill himself. He must be present unto himself and take up a vantage point from within the world in order to stand upright. An empty being who does not define himself, pursue self-knowledge and consciously adopt a cultural perspective cannot be

relied on to share a community's code of ethics because the identities of such people remain preordained and immutable. Under the paradigm of an undefined self, the actions of individuals do not matter. Such helplessness, it may be reasoned, engenders a lack of self-control and accountability and cannot be good for the society at large.

For the almanac and the "common People," Franklin keeps to the upright sack metaphor and limits his advice to the economic realm, but it is clear that wealth is just one method of self-definition in the *Autobiography*. Another is to take an active role in a community. His reprisal of the almanac's upright sack metaphor in the *Autobiography* serves as a transition to the many specific ways that he makes his community into a superior place to live, and in so doing, creates a reputation and identity for himself. Just as the empty sack must first fill itself through industry and frugality, the slightly more upright sack turns its industry outward to further develop itself by developing the community. After many accounts of public positions and projects, Franklin makes this turn explicit:

> My Business was now continually augmenting, and my Circumstances growing daily easier, my Newspaper having become very profitable, as being for a time almost the only one in this and neighbouring Provinces. I experienc'd too the Truth of the Observation, that *after getting the first hundred Pound it is more easy to get the second:* Money itself being of a prolific Nature. (1964, 181)

The movement from one proverb to another structures the plot movement in this section of Part Three. Economics is the basis of the narrative, but capital always bears a close metaphoric relationship to social capital and community building. The activities that have proved profitable to Franklin all carry a civic aspect. The newspaper provides a needed service and facilitates the congress of rational selves that comes to formulate public policy in this slowly democratizing society. Printing itself facilitates public discourse, and Franklin has just listed numerous opportunities that come as a result of his involvement in public affairs. Civic involvement becomes a parallel storyline alongside the economic narrative in this section, and he signals this by bringing us to the second proverb above that speaks to the cyclical nature of self-improvement as much as to money. The audience can sense this by reading it in relation to the upright sack. The earlier metaphor requires large-scale social improvement if the individual is

to benefit from the honesty of others. The prolific nature of money, it turns out, is enacted by engagement with others as well. Thus, the next step in his economic cycle is to serve others. The paragraph immediately following the above quote is devoted to his investment in workers by establishing them with printing houses. This of course will return to him in the form of profit if the workers are successful, but the investment must be risked in order to achieve that next level of profitability. After this discussion of partnerships, however, Franklin switches with no identifiable transition, as though he views it as a continuation of the same subject, to the topic of public needs in Pennsylvania. In effect, he doubles back to give his audience the civic-service version of the economic narrative he has just provided. Civic activity is also structured by a cycle of gradual increase.

To make this point I too must double back to the moment just before Franklin discusses the various controversies and activities inspired by the arrival of George Whitefield. Franklin explains that, upon his appointment to the office of postmaster, he was able to increase the circulation and advertising of his newspaper. This he accomplishes not by an abuse of his office, but by the *correction* of an abuse. The previous postmaster, Andrew Bradford, who was relieved of the position for poor accounting, had denied free carriage of Franklin's paper because it was in competition with his own. So without retaliating, Franklin increases his income by promoting the free exchange of information. Franklin writes,

> Thus he [Bradford] suffered greatly from his Neglect in due Accounting; and I mention it as a Lesson to those young Men who may be employ'd in managing Affairs for others that they should always render Accounts and make remittances with great Clearness and Punctuality. The Character of observing such a Conduct is the most powerful of all Recommendations to new Employments and Increase of Business. (1964, 172–73)

Interestingly, he glosses this vignette, which has a great deal to do with lofty issues like free press and free speech, as a personal business success yielding accounting advice. Throughout Part Three, Franklin weaves civic and personal business together and simultaneously separates them, glossing examples with separate labels, which nonetheless establishes them as intertwined. The next paragraph begins, "I began now to turn my Thoughts a little to public Affairs,

beginning however with small Matters" (1964, 173). Thus, Franklin proceeds as though he has not already been speaking of public affairs despite the fact that we've already read the story of the Library Company and heard of the junto's various activities in Part Two. More interesting, though, are the facts that he begins with small matters and always covers personal success first. Before an individual can engage society, one must first, in some sense, estrange oneself from it to become a complete and independent being who can comment upon and critique it. Economic independence symbolizes Franklin's escape from indenture and the colonization of his identity that took place under the religiously reified paternal authority in force in his native Boston. As such, it underwrites his ability to master his own consciousness, which renders him fit for civic activity. The civic activity he reports as a concern with small matters is quite important, but local in its focus. Over the next page and a half, Franklin quickly details his arguments to reform the City Watch and to establish the Union Fire Company.

Not Black'd Enough: Authority and the Colonial Constituent

Franklin later advances to another step in a cycle of civic participation. Partnerships and the success of his newspaper grant him additional status as a rational actor within the narrative, and he reflects,

> I had on the whole abundant Reason to be satisfied with my being established in Pennsylvania. There were however two things that I regretted: There being no Provision for Defence, nor for a compleat Education of Youth; No Militia nor any College. (1964, 181)

This marks a shift to a slightly higher level of civic participation. While they are enacted locally, the concerns reach out to the world beyond Philadelphia and represent long-range social planning. Like money, civic activity is prolific. Attention to smaller things enables attention to larger things if only because small crises help identify the need for long-term policy. Franklin dispenses fairly quickly with the stories of establishing the academy and making some provisions for the city's defense. An overriding feature in Part Three, however, is the staccato juxtaposition of personal business and civic participation nuanced by the mysterious fact that both categories always seem

inflected by one another. In the civic realm, small matters gradually give way to broad philosophical interests, a fact about the *Autobiography* that disarms the conventional accusation that Franklin advances a banal pragmatism unconcerned with social matters beyond personal acquisition. Finally, in Part Three, Franklin turns away from the subject of personal acquisition altogether and relates the highlights of his political career. In doing so, he again doubles back to simpler matters, reproducing the narrative of his own development toward rational self-consciousness on the scale of the city. Only after taking care of its own development can Philadelphia offer something to a larger unity. Franklin writes,

> Our City, tho' laid out with a beautiful Regularity, the Streets large, strait, and crossing each other at right Angles, had the Disgrace of suffering those Streets to remain long unpav'd, and in wet Weather the Wheels of heavy Carriages plough'd them into a Quagmire, so that it was difficult to cross them. And in dry Weather the Dust was offensive. [...] By talking and writing on the Subject, I was at length instrumental in getting the Street pav'd with Stone between the Market and brick'd Foot-Pavement that was on each side next to the Houses. This for some time gave an easy Access to the Market, dry-shod. But the rest of the Street not being pav'd, whenever a Carriage came out of the Mud upon this pavement, it shook off and left its Dirt upon it, and it was soon cover'd with Mire, which was not remov'd, the City as yet having no Scavengers. After some Enquiry I found a poor industrious Man, who was willing to undertake keeping the Pavement clean, by sweeping it twice a week and carrying off the Dirt from before all the Neighbors Doors, for the Sum of Sixpence per Month, to be paid by each House. (1964, 202–03)

I quote this passage at length, not out of fascination with late eighteenth-century street sweeping, but to capture the sense that no public irritation or cause is beneath the intellectual process of writing and debating in order to achieve a decision made by a federation of rational beings. This democratic process frames Franklin's entire worldview and defines the procedure by which the most daily irritations are to be solved. Note also the nature of the solution. Success in the civic realm lies in convincing others that it is in their best interest to contribute in the community's interest. Expenses are distributed and benefits shared while an opportunity is provided to an

industrious man in need. The street cleaner will make his own way and achieve greater independence.

So Franklin, in discussing civic life, returns to the basic elements of making one's own living and managing day-to-day living within the context of a community. Perhaps the strongest point to be gleaned from the above passage is that Franklin takes pains, at a crucial juncture, to remind readers that colonial life could be quite naturally democratic, and burdens distributed more fairly, when managed locally among communities of relative equals. Repeatedly in Part Three, Franklin deploys a standard economic uplift narrative to make the point that individuals lay claim to self-knowledge by taking action within a social context. To be self-conscious is to be conscious of the self in society. A moment of independent action starts the pattern of development by rendering the self aware of its capacity to analyze its surroundings, its decision-making capacity, and its society. From this moment, civic participation becomes an option that increases cyclically as civic investments yield returns to the individual. Fundamentally, therefore, the cycle of civic participation and personal improvement begins with the individual as the seat of human reason. The moment of taking a human, context-bound perspective is the moment at which democracy begins to develop organically because it is the moment at which the individual becomes a discrete and conscious component rather than a chance element of society with a prescribed position in it. Democracy grows organically from this phenomenon and develops cyclically in tandem with its constituent rational citizens. The American colonies hold a unique opportunity to support the development of rational citizens and the organic growth of democracy because of their distance from the British crown, with its interest in quashing rational self-consciousness in favor of immutable status. Philadelphia's gradual emergence from the mud, Franklin reminds us, is the product of the local exercise of reason giving rise to the congress of rational selves that constitutes local democracy.

As the cycle of investment and return continues in both the commercial and civic realms, communities begin to conduct themselves as conglomerate individuals in the sense that they find a stake in the functioning of larger communities. It is this particular loop in the cycle of civic development toward which much of Part Three builds. Assemblies govern the affairs of each province. Americans are quite used to considerable autonomy by the time Franklin, as a

representative of the Pennsylvania Assembly to the colony's proprietors and the crown, comes to confront the proprietors' authority. In addition to chronicling the inadequacy of the British government's attempt to protect Americans from the French and Indian hostilities of 1755–57, a substantial portion of Part Three is devoted to the wrangling between the Assembly and Governor Morris, who represented the Penns as the proprietors of Pennsylvania. The essential issue of dispute is the refusal of the Penn family in London to contribute financially to the colonial government in Pennsylvania. In 1755, the issue comes to a head when the Assembly attempts to tax the proprietary estates of the Penns directly. Meanwhile, the dispute is further colored by the Albany Plan, through which the several colonies attempt to form an umbrella legislature.

Franklin's tone in discussing the British government's opposition to the Albany Plan departs from the levelheaded attitude he maintains regarding other disputes with the crown and the proprietors. According to Franklin,

> The British Government not chusing to permit the Union of the Colonies, as propos'd at Albany, and to trust that Union with their Defence, lest they should thereby grow too military, and feel their own Strength, Suspicions and Jealousies at this time being entertain'd of them; sent over General Braddock with two Regiments of Regular English Troops for that purpose. (1964, 216)

The historical likelihood of the colonies successfully defending themselves against the French and Indian hostilities of 1755–57 being minimal, Franklin's mild diatribe can be explained as post-revolutionary anger (1964, 216). From a literary standpoint, however, it is all the more powerful that Franklin relates the British opposition to colonial unification with more acrimony than he might have in 1755. The fact that he inserts acrimony in Part Three after demonstrating, in sometimes tedious detail, cycle after overlapping cycle of personal and civic development in America suggests that he is moving toward larger and larger arenas of self-consciousness. He thus builds a metaphor between selves and the large bodies constituted by rational selves. In this case, the British crown denies the assemblies the right to unify, to act as independent rational components of a larger community. The narrator's exaggerating British hostility in opposing the Albany plan demonstrates Franklin's opinion that such

infringement on independent consciousness is a grave affront. The rest of Part Three is devoted to pointing out that Americans were not, after all, living in a democratic society, but under a monarchy that did not grant them the same constitutional protections that had become traditional in England. This argument tightens the comparison between bodies of rational selves and individual rational selves. When Britain refuses the status of autonomous citizen actors to the assemblies, and when the proprietors demand that the Pennsylvania Assembly raise funds for defense while refusing to allow the taxation of their own estates, Franklin takes these collective infringements to be an assault on the consciousness of independent beings who have developed into rational components of organically democratic social units.

Franklin makes it quite clear in Part Three when he describes his relationship with Governor Morris that collective civic rationality is based on the same principles as individual self-consciousness. Morris is a bitter political rival and the representative of Pennsylvania's proprietor. Franklin describes a particular encounter with him:

> In gay Conversation over our Wine after Supper he told us Jokingly that he much admir'd the Idea of Sancho Panza, who when it was propos'd to give him a Government, requested it might be a Government of *Blacks*, as then, if he could not agree with his People he might sell them. One of his Friends who sat next to me, says, "Franklin, why do you continue to side with these damn'd Quakers? had not you better sell them? the Proprietor would give you a good Price." The Governor says I has not yet *black'd* them enough. He had indeed labour'd hard to blacken the Assembly in all his Messages, but they wip'd off his Colouring as fast as he laid it on, and plac'd it in return thick upon his own Face; so that finding he was likely to be negrify'd himself, he as well as Mr. Hamilton, grew tir'd of the Contest, and quitted the Government. (1964, 213–14)

The relevant lesson of this anecdote is not Franklin's loyalty to the Quakers. The exchange has to do with a much deeper philosophical rupture between Morris and Franklin that indicates how radically the proprietor's representative, and the company he keeps, misunderstand the relationship between citizens and representatives. The contemplation of what it means to be metaphorically negrified in this passage relates the status of slaves directly to the issue of enfranchisement. A "*Black"* within this construct is a being whose contract with governors is laughable. Jokingly or otherwise, Morris's

reading of Sancho Panza reveals the presumption that a slave is precisely one who cannot constitute a rational component of a civic body because his or her consciousness is owned by another. The suggestion of a man at Morris's table that Franklin treat the Quakers as slaves is not taken as genuine humor. In fact, it is a posture which Franklin fears the British take, at least on some level, toward Americans. Colonial citizens are symbolically negrified when the Albany Plan is rejected, when the laws of the assembly are ignored or reversed, and when Morris and his friends chuckle at their expense and compare them to slaves. Because British authority chooses to "black" the Assembly, it puts all citizens in the same position, refusing to recognize their right to form their own civic bodies as rational selves. The continued bondage of American slaves, then, constitutes a contradiction with the principles on which, in Franklin's perception, the new nation is to be founded. The precise thing that cannot be tolerated is the reduction of individual minds to claimed objects with the same auxiliary status to a ruler as colonized land bears to a parent nation. Colonization of an Assembly, or any action which abridges the power of citizens to participate in civic life, is colonization of an individual consciousness.

The primary tension in the above quotation arises over whether Americans have the right to view themselves as rational beings or not. The governor seems to feel that the status of civic participants can be given or taken at will. For Morris and Sancho Panza, freedom is a matter of convenience and agreeability. When the suggestion is made that Franklin adopt that posture toward those with whom he does in fact occasionally disagree, he rejects the idea as untenable and directs a cutting remark toward the governor. For Franklin, the Quakers are among his constituents in the purest sense of the term. They are not *subject to* his authority but the *source* of it. They, along with other constituents, make him what he is as a member of the Assembly. In America, and especially in Philadelphia, local democracy has developed gradually just as, Franklin demonstrates, selves do when left to their own devices. This political development confirms to Franklin that democracy is a right, a natural extension of the development of rational selves, and therefore inherent and inalienable. Nonetheless, negrification will continue to be visited upon American slaves of African descent and women as the nation suffers the constitutional crises of arbitrary limits on civic eligibility. With the

logic of this anecdote, Franklin necessitates universal enfranchisement, intentionally or not. In establishing slavery as a paradigmatic metaphor for undesirable intellectual colonization, he condemns the governor, the proprietor, and in essence the British crown, for taking the liberty of negrifying others. Given this logic, it is unjust to deny any being capable of developing toward rational selfhood the right to do so through civic participation.

Throughout the *Autobiography*, the development of Franklin's identity as a civic participant parallels the development of disparate colonies into a coherent nation through the typographical dissemination of reason and intellectual debate as well as through the concept of equality of opportunity. The thematic principles that connect the factual and metaphorical resonances of his narrative are American unity as a self-made nation and the fact that self-made communities and individuals share the self-consciousness and independence born of the ability to reason. In order to establish unity among the colonies and to differentiate the new nation from England culturally, the new land must also differentiate itself from its past identity as discrete colonies governed by England. The Puritans' settlement of New England is perhaps the most familiar example of religious freedom being the impetus for the colonial voyage across the Atlantic. Franklin's adopted Pennsylvania was founded by Quakers and became host to Moravians, Mennonites, Amish, and the same Presbyterian stock as Franklin's Boston forebears. In short, many different European groups realized that the colonies in North America were a promising location for their new or persecuted denomination. The scene of Franklin's arrival in Philadelphia emphasizes the cultural disparity between two of the colonies:

> Then I walk'd up the Street, gazing about, till near the Market House I met a Boy with Bread. I had made many a Meal on Bread, and inquiring where he got it, I went immediately to the Baker's he directed me to in second Street; and ask'd for Bisket, intending such as we had in Boston, but they it seems were not made in Philadelphia, then I ask'd for a threepenny loaf, and was told they had none such: so not considering or knowing the Difference of Money and the greater Cheapness nor the Names of his Bread, I bad him give me three penny worth of any sort. He gave me accordingly three great Puffy Rolls. I was surpriz'd at the Quantity, but took it, and having

> no room in my Pockets, walk'd off with a Roll under each Arm, and eating the other. (1964, 76)

Franklin's personal moment of displacement, confusion, and foreignness occurs in a moment in history during which the colonies are disparate places, foreign to one another, and without the necessary means or motivation to unite in a common cause. Franklin will directly address this cultural diffusion in making the argument that wins over the Pennsylvania legislature and achieves the production of paper money, which was already the currency of his native Boston. Doing anything he can to promote truck and barter among colonies, Franklin's roles as a printer, editor of newspapers, and postmaster all serve instrumental functions in expanding Americans' sense of affiliation along the Eastern seaboard. Through much of Part One, though, the confused, false-starting individual parallels a diffuse, divided, self-estranged North America. The procedure by which a developing individual transforms himself into a rational citizen possessed of self-knowledge proves to be the same mechanism by which a nation comes into self-knowledge, namely, commerce with others, the establishment of reasoned ideology, and the performance of a coherent identity within a civic arena where a unified self can be observed, verified, and received by an audience. Additionally, the two entities (nation and individual) will undergo a gradual secularization as they develop toward self-actualization. Franklin alternately figures Philadelphia and his own body as synecdochal representations of the new nation so that he may offer equality of opportunity as a unifying secular theme that will resonate across religious boundaries and link individual quests to civic ones.

In the temporal and spatial progression of the narrative, the New England Franklin leaves operates as an old land. He leaves to escape indenture and the limitations of his "breeding." The selection of an apprenticeship is limited to choices afforded by the connections of one's father, and the judgment of one's father finally determines the trade one learns. Personal choice plays a small role in the system, and the connections and judgment of a father are limited by his social and economic situation. Consider Franklin's reflections on his own "inclination":

> This bookish inclination at length determin'd my father to make me a Printer, tho' he already had one Son (James) of that Profession. In

> 1717 my brother, James, return'd from England with a Press and Letters to set up his business in Boston. I lik'd it much better than that of my Father, but still had a Hankering for the Sea. To prevent the apprehended Effect of such an Inclination, my father was impatient to have me bound to my Brother. I stood out some time, but at last was persuaded and signed the indenture when I was but 12 years old. I was to serve as apprentice till I was twenty-one years of age. (1964, 58–59)

Signed by Franklin at the age of twelve, this indenture can hardly be seen as an act of free will. Given his age, the length of the indenture is oppressive. This conscription of his labor for such a long period will determine his ability to earn a living and define the activity in which he will spend the majority of his time. The system of apprenticeship stifles multiple inclinations. Although the boy's interest in reading has put his father in mind of printing as a vocation, this is only after a scholarly profession has been dismissed. Franklin explains, "But my Father, in the mean time, from a View of the Expence of a College Education which, having so large a Family, he could not well afford, and the mean Living many so educated were able to obtain, Reasons that he gave to his Friends in my Hearing, altered his first Intention [...]" (1964, 53). Franklin's bookish inclination is limited rather than fostered by the suggestion of printing since a more fitting venue for it has been eliminated. The system of indenture not only *happens* to function as a mechanism of control in addition to education, but it is expressly used for that primary purpose by his father. The fact that the term "bred" so thickly populates the early part of this narrative is no small coincidence. Using the term eleven times in Part One, with a marked decline once he departs for Philadelphia, Franklin deploys the verb with greater concentration during the rehearsal of his family history and personal apprenticeship. One's training is appropriate to one's pedigree. In the Boston of Franklin's youth, where a boy of intelligence and a penchant for debate chafes uncomfortably against the remnants of Puritan theocracy, identity is a matter of the future to which one is "bred."

Associating "to breed to" with New England, where reason is stifled and where he is oppressed by indenture, Franklin first extends the concept back to his forebears in England. The aforementioned Thomas "was bred a smith under his Father [...]." (1964, 47). Later the other uncles are given their due identifications: "John was bred a dyer,

I believe of Woolens. Benjamin was bred a Silk Dyer, serving an apprenticeship at London" (1964, 48). A few pages later, we get the key information on the breeding of Franklin's father Josiah: "At Ten Years old, I was taken home to assist my Father in his Business, which was that of a Tallow Chandler and Sope-Boiler. A Business he was not bred to, but had assumed on his Arrival in New England and on finding his Dying Trade would not maintain his Family, being in little Request" (1964, 53). A rare example, one might think, of individualism and resistance to breeding if not for the qualifications that Josiah had removed to New England and economic circumstances mandated the change of occupations. Moreover, the genetic figuration of sons' careers continues in Boston, as is revealed in the discussion of Franklin's own breeding and that of his brothers. The verb "to breed to" conveys a family tradition that crosses the Atlantic and gives Franklin considerable vexation early in his life. The fact that it first gained currency during the early Puritan period in England (Breitwieser 1984, 241) and survived the voyage across the Atlantic enlarges the ideology of "breeding" beyond Franklin's family. "Breeding" represents an ideology of an entire region, New England, that is traceable to the Old World its people fled to escape religious persecution. Franklin, then, as a victim of "breeding," functions metaphorically as a new land that has been contaminated by the old hierarchy. Citizens of the future democracy must make the trek again to correct the situation. Mitchell Breitwieser also observes this relation of Franklin's voyage to an originary journey across the Atlantic, as well as the relationship of both journeys to the system of apprenticeship that Franklin flees. He relates Franklin's journey of escape specifically to Puritan migration:

> According to Puritan casuistry the duties of masters were synonymous with those of natural fathers. Though Franklin would represent his Exodus to Philadelphia as a reprise of the great migration, it was in fact a direct rejection of Puritanism as it manifested itself in the economic lives of young men in the early years of the eighteenth century. (1984, 186)

I would change Breitwieser's "Though" to "Because." Franklin effects this rejection of Puritanism *by* representing his own Exodus as a reprise of the great migration. Destiny remains in this "New" England very much a function of an inherited social condition. This is the

Puritan legacy that Franklin first rehearses to establish a history against which to define himself. The mature Franklin, writing of his escape, crafts it carefully to reiterate and renew the need to escape the most pernicious traditions carried over from the Old World. If America is to realize its potential as a nation unified in its commitment to equality of opportunity, Franklin implies, it will have to renew the ideologically based migration that founded the colonies. In short, New England is figured as Old England and must be forsaken.

The principle of equality, therefore, more than religious freedom, is what that mythic journey must symbolize. As he makes his trip to Philadelphia, Franklin participates in a shift from a religiously defined cacophonous America to one defined by rugged self-reliance. The water cure he employs for his fever en route is an unmistakable symbol of purgation:

> In the Evening I found my self very feverish, and went in to Bed. But having read somewhere that cold Water drank plentifully was good for a Fever, I follow'd the Prescription, sweat plentifully most of the Night, my Fever left me, and in the morning crossing the Ferry, I proceeded on my Journey, on foot, having fifty miles to Burlington, where I was told I should find Boats that would carry me the rest of the Way to Philadelphia. (1964, 73)

The voyage is troubled and delayed, but when the fever has oozed through the permeable, yet discrete, surface of his body, he can continue. Importantly, the fever comes during a transition stage, and it will not accompany him into the land of the future. Here, his body as well as Philadelphia itself are both symbolically the new nation. His skin defines the boundaries of his being, but he will not be limited by the fever historically contained within it. He floods it with the new, the fresh, the liquid, and his porous borders regulate, but do not completely contain, nor completely exclude, anything. His body is transformed from a former, diseased condition to a new and healthy state. Franklin enters the new land a cleansed being. Ultimately, he will have to return and humble himself by asking for his father's help setting up in business. Only when the new is confident of itself as a positivity, however, can a nod be given to whatever interdependence lies in history and origins.

Although Philadelphia was founded as the capital of a proprietorship dominated by Quakers, William Penn established a

policy of religious toleration from the start of its life as a colonial city. This circumstance makes Philadelphia an inherently more hospitable site than Boston for the vision of citizenship that Franklin carries through the autobiography. The founding of Pennsylvania as a refuge from persecution contrasts with that of Massachusetts Bay, which was intended to be a shining example of what a particular religion can accomplish when free to construct its own society. Toleration for religious diversity in Philadelphia though, leaves many Protestant sects vying for predominance. In such an environment, some secular bonding agent was necessary to promote public unity. Seavey explains,

> No sense of special calling united Pennsylvania the way New England was united, and its economy was too mixed to foster the agrarian solidarity of the southern colonies. What held Pennsylvania together was trade and certain voluntary associations for mutual benefit, for example the fire companies of Philadelphia. The Enlightenment model of a society comprised of independent and self-interested individuals was realized in Pennsylvania as nowhere else. (1988, 145)

In other words, what held Pennsylvania together was the (at least tacit) understanding of each group as an equal claimant to refuge and the equal opportunity of individuals to interact with others for the common good. Although group relations were sometimes decidedly discordant, civil arrangements, reasoning between individuals, and the terms of trade are already key elements of Philadelphia culture when Franklin arrived there. Performing self-consciousness in Philadelphia creates self-consciousness because the freedom to interact as a discrete unit with rights of self-determination is the very social fabric of the place. Purging himself, and by extension his future country, of the aleatory bonds of breeding and theocracy, Franklin enters Philadelphia an unpolished, tattered, but independent young man. Our access to this fact is his conduct as a constituent of a larger entity. The nation eventually becomes part of the world rather than a collection of ancillary states that relate to the world through a mother country. Philadelphia and Pennsylvania become part of the nation, each with their own spheres of sovereignty. Franklin becomes a citizen of all of these dynamic social contexts. These nesting relationships of constituent to whole are relationships of contract. Citizens have

enumerated rights and powers to effect legislative and electoral politics. States sign on to the Constitution as entities empowered by their constituents to make a contract with a larger whole. This exchange of authority between selves and societies builds a productive paradox consistent with the pragmatic acceptance of contradiction found throughout the autobiography. A macrocosmic contract instantiates the very sovereignty necessary for an individual's self-aware entrance into any given contract. More simply, civic arrangements in which sovereignty is exchanged and managed become the mechanism by which the basic sovereignty of thinking individuals is made manifest and developed. Any abridgment of the selfhood of rational components represents a true constitutional crisis. Without the free rationality of components, the nation is undefinable and unimaginable.

Some Books Against Deism

For Franklin, the most problematic abridgment of the independence of rational beings, and the greatest impediment to the free contract of citizenship, derives from religious doctrines that intervene in the exercise of reason by demanding that doctrinal principles be assumed absolutely as articles of faith. The variation in doctrinal truths among colonists in America disrupts the smooth operation of civic contracts among rational selves to the extent that individuals attempt to apply articles of faith to civic matters. Franklin's preoccupation with sects provides a glimpse of the complexity of seeking religious freedom in America alongside others with irreconcilable beliefs. The word "sect," implying fragmentation of a whole into branches, is sprinkled liberally throughout the text whenever Franklin begins to touch on matters of religion and morality. The fanciful attempt at establishing a sect with Keimer in Part One serves the dual purpose of developing Franklin's debating skills and punishing Keimer's poorly reasoned fanaticism. Franklin juxtaposes Keimer's unreasonable adherence to Leviticus (because he won't hear or exchange reason on the subject) against his gluttonous consumption of an entire pig. Pork, of course, is every bit as forbidden by Leviticus as the prohibition on marring the corners of one's beard with which Keimer is so passionately enamored. The fact that Keimer's gluttony gets the better of him *before his guests arrive* conveys Franklin's

concern that fanaticism separates one from society. In this anecdote religion proves a cumbersome, isolating phenomenon that comes to no good when it is followed at the expense of sound pragmatic reasoning (Franklin 1964, 88–89).

His own religious views aside, it is interesting that so much of Franklin's life in business and politics is colored by the management of various sects occupying a shared community. On numerous occasions he treats his reader to an account of his encounters with curious religious practices. Taking a detached anthropological tone as he relates the idiosyncrasies of the Dunkards, the Moravians, and the Quakers, Franklin habitually meditates on the impact of religious sects and factionalism on Philadelphia. What must be addressed here, however, is the relationship between reason and religion in the *Autobiography*. Franklin associates himself with the phenomenon of intellectual, culturally situated self-knowledge over a religious experience of divinely bestowed identity. He rejects aleatory social position, he is unwilling to allow religious dogma to go unexamined, and he insists that religious precepts offer some civic utility to be considered valid. Franklin was once, and I would argue, remained an ostensible Deist. Deism, in essence, is the rejection of providence. More accurately, Deism is the religious philosophy that avows the existence of a divine creator but denies the existence of divine revelation of truths unknowable to human reason. Deism thus elevates human reason to the status that providence might otherwise hold. Faith that God will simply provide what one needs becomes an abdication of responsibility if human reason is indeed the sole revelation God has granted to guide one through life. It follows then, that Deists subject everything to human reason as the only reliable tool through which anything can be known about the universe. Franklin manifests this behavior, repeatedly submitting religious questions to debate. He does so with Keimer, who follows rules on principle rather than evaluating their efficacy through his own faculty for reason. Franklin's Deism guides his preference for civic activity over dogmatic religion and influences his sense of self-invention as the invention of a reasoning unit of participation within a large democratic conglomeration of reasoning beings.

This reading of the book, however, flies in the face of many passages in which Franklin habitually thanks "his Providence" or pays homage to "the Blessings of God." It further seems to contradict the

very deliberate statement in Part Two: "I never doubted, for instance, the Existance of the Deity, that he made the World, and govern'd it by his Providence [...]." (1964, 146), and again in Part Three:

> I put down from time to time on Pieces of Paper such Thoughts as occur'd to me respecting it. Most of these are lost; but I find one purporting to be the Substance of an intended Creed, containing as I thought the Essentials of every known Religion, and being free of every thing that might shock the Professors of any Religion. It is express'd in these Words. viz.
> "that there is one God who made all things.
> "That he governs the World by his Providence. (1964, 162)

All of this, however, can be answered without jeopardizing the conclusion that Franklin remained a Deist from the age of fifteen. The contradiction is essentially eliminated if one takes "Providence" to refer to the sole revelation of God to humanity. That is, if one presumes that Franklin's use of "Providence" constitutes an expression of the Deist principle that God provides human reason and the vast creation but no other divine revelation. Furthermore, this Deism contextualizes the priority Franklin gives to secular civic participation over religious identifications. His religion *is* reason. His identity is that of a citizen.

Ironically, the most productive text in the service of this point is Franklin's apparent renunciation of Deism:

> But I was scarce 15 when, after doubting by turns of several Points as I found them disputed in the different Books I read, I began to doubt of Revelation itself. Some books against Deism fell into my Hands; they were said to be the Substance of Sermons preached at Boyle's Lectures. It happened that they wrought an Effect on me quite contrary to what was intended by them: For the Arguments of the Deists which were quoted to be refuted, appeared to me much stronger than the Refutations. In short I soon became a thorough Deist. My Arguments perverted some others, particularly Collins and Ralph: but each of them having afterwards wrong'd me greatly without the least Compunction and recollecting Keith's Conduct towards me, (who was another Freethinker) and my own towards Vernon and Miss Read which at Times gave me great Trouble, I began to suspect that this Doctrine tho' it might be true, was not very useful. (1964, 113–14)

On its face this reads like, and is often taken as, a repudiation of a youthful intellectual experiment with Deism. It is crucial to understand, however, that religion and paternal authority share the same locus of disagreement with pre-democratic social conditions, and Franklin disagrees with his forebears on the grounds that rational selves think for themselves. Relationships with fathers and father-surrogates ought to entail training in the independent use of reason, Franklin feels. Gleaning such sentiments from Franklin's *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania,* Breitwieser explains,

> The trustee-parents do not intervene against the self of the student-son: rather, they are technical advisers, showing the self the most expeditious course to its own ends, and reducing the number of false starts (or errata). They correct mistakes (rather than profound wrongs) that the son would have corrected on his own, as Franklin did: they prevent the waste of time. They teach by incentive, showing the son the utility of learning, but they do not impose standards for what the learning is to be useful for. (1984, 180)

The relationship Franklin envisions is not utterly free of authority in the sense of expertise or earned power, but it is free of assumed and absolute authority that preempts the judgment of the student-son.

In the Deism passage from the *Autobiography*, Franklin purports to conclude that Deist principles are not useful. If one reads the passage as a concrete statement, he still concludes this after analyzing his own behavior, that of his friends Collins and Ralph, and the pretending Governor Keith. His pragmatic judgment of a doctrine is based on its utility in *governing the treatment of people*. In clear relief against a pragmatism that judges doctrine for its utility in getting one whatever one wants, Franklin's ethos evaluates the power of a belief in facilitating harmonious exchange among people in a society. Moreover, his reasoning in discussing Deism is founded upon an investment in interaction with others. All of this is so consistent with the premise that human reason is the sole divine revelation that one must conclude that Franklin does not hold Deism in poor regard when he writes the autobiography.

The passage above lends itself to a variety of ironic interpretations, most of which can work in tandem with my reading.

Most important, however, are the things not said in the passage. Nowhere does Franklin make the explicit statement "I rejected Deism." He does not say that his discovery that the doctrine was not very useful restored the religion of his forefathers. Later, he will explain that he once felt compelled to attend the preachings of a Presbyterian minister for five Sundays in a row, but only after being prevailed upon by friends, Sunday being his regular studying day. In that episode, he rejects the minister's preachings for their lack of broad social application, "their Aim seeming to be rather to make us Presbyterians than good Citizens" (Franklin 1964, 147). He neither embraces his parents' religion, nor does he mention any other religion or doctrine he finds more useful. Franklin devotes much of the paragraph to the issue of argumentation. We see him declare that he was convinced of Deism by reading bad arguments against it. He then proceeds to give a bad argument against it that indulges in a false attribution of individual moral failings to Deism. This reading is strengthened by the observation that our narrator once aspired to imitate Jesus and Socrates as a path to humility (Franklin 1964, 150). The ego required to emulate these massively symbolic figures draws its humor from Franklin's pursuit of humility elsewhere in the book, but it is crucial to recall that Socrates deploys humility ironically as a pedagogic strategy. The structure of Franklin's humble comments on Deism reflect both a strategy and a specific logic lesson from *The Republic*.

Franklin goads his student-reader to repair the bad argument he has himself put forward. Anecdotes about misbehavior by Deists prove nothing because those parties may be diverting from the Deist tenets at the time. As such, they are not Deists *qua* Deists, and their behavior makes no coherent argument pertaining to Deism's ultimate truth or use value. By extrapolating the anecdotal fallibility of humans to rulers, Socrates skirts the core of Thrasymachus's might-makes-right assertion, which is a definitional argument. Thus, he goads Thrasymachus to come up with the ruler *qua* ruler thesis to defend the argument that a ruler, in the capacity of his or her rulerhood, makes no errors because he or she *determines* what right is (Plato 2003, 18–21). Socrates promotes this outcome by unfairly reducing a ruler to the errors of those who are called rulers. Franklin's suspicions about Deism are based on the extrapolation of the errors of those who are called Deists to Deism as a philosophy. He could make the correction

himself, but leaves the task to an argumentative reader of the same bent of mind as his youthful self. This enacts the principle from *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania*, that it is more productive to draw a student-son to his own reasoned conclusion than for a father-authority to expound his own theories as truth. Such an ironic operation draws the resistant reader into the community of self-conscious reasoners. Like Socratic method, the merit of the ironic approach can be seen once the reader has amended his reasoning or made a counter argument to his instructor. Thrasymachus comes to see that his own reasoning is much improved by Socrates' diffusion of authority.

This false refutation is consistent with Franklin's narrative method throughout the *Autobiography*. Franklin shows himself a brilliant literary strategist when he exposes Keimer's hypocrisy without having to directly call him a hypocrite. In that short episode, Franklin also manages to overlay a parable about arbitrary doctrines that isolate individuals from society. This, I maintain, is also the point of the vegetarianism anecdote, which equally transmits a cavalier pragmatism at face value. That cavalier pragmatism, though, is troped and improved when the episode also allows a reader to comprehend the point that social interaction, debate, and public exchange are all the essence of reason. In fact, one who enables himself to "find or make a Reason for every thing one has a mind to do" is not a "*reasonable Creature*" at all (Franklin 1964, 88). To be a reasonable creature is to *exchange* reason, to offer it, solicit it, receive it, and critique it. It is because of this concern that Franklin pragmatically throws over his isolating vegetarianism, and for this reason that he relates the episode with two interdependent tracks of meaning. He slips a point under the radar of potentially narrow-minded readers about the necessity of staging the rational self in a social venue by making a humorous, though sincere, point about the extreme pragmatism of reason in isolation. The same structural analysis applies to the declaration and near repudiation of Deism. Franklin yet again confirms himself a shrewd literary strategist as he crafts a disguise for his Deist beliefs, disarming the average Christian reader by seeming to disavow his youthful experiment with Deism without *quite* doing so. Meanwhile, an excess of meaning created by the spectating posture of the narrator plants a kernel of reason in the text that may flourish all the more in

the minds of others because he demands that their minds be "present at the discourse."

This worldview then founds Franklin's metaphorical representation of himself as a nascent nation. Much as he becomes more secular than his ancestors in his religious outlook, he advocates the secularization of societies so that individuals may be free to contribute their reasoned judgments unimpeded by aleatory or authoritarian social strictures. Anything less obstructs or ignores God's sole providence and cannot lead to public well-being, ethical conduct, or individual success. This worldview underpins an attendant set of ethical principles that define the boundaries between individuals. The inalienable rights of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution's Bill of Rights are united by a common spirit of governance of rational beings. These foundational values determine what government can and cannot do to citizens, and what citizens cannot do to others. The concept of rights establishes the boundary between rational selves that may not be abridged. Franklin advocates these limitations of authority to protect the conscience and consciousness of the individual, and in the *Autobiography*, he makes an argument promoting and defending the adoption of these Deist principles to preserve the quality of civic discourse and the lives of the rational beings of which civic discourse is constituted. Like a novel, the power of the *Autobiography* to make an argument extends beyond an overt syllogistic claim. In it, Franklin marshals a cultural argument, harnessing the metaphorical resonance of the power of reason and self-knowledge in a particular life and extrapolating that resonance to the larger entities of which each self is a component. Thus, Franklin parallels himself to a secular nation that will build community around secular commonalities such as equality of opportunity. Only this freedom provides the necessary civic stage for the Franklinian self-made man, a stage that, as Breitwieser observes, "substitute[s] general human consensus for the judging divinity embodied in the father" (1984, 182). A congress of rational selves will make more just decisions than any imposed undebated doctrine propped up by an irrational belief in private revelations and mystical remembrance. Franklin thus rewrites foundational cultural narratives of American origin to center on equality and civic participation rather than religious identities. He also takes care that the rational self remains consistent with itself. The development of self-knowledge brings no shame upon

the past lack of it. Reason bears the self-conscious being on a journey toward self-improvement, but the openness to debate and change inherent in the concept of self-improvement precludes any disavowal of a prior condition.

In closing, this substitution of general human consciousness for judging divinity returns us to the observation of Smith and Watson that Franklin's place in autobiographical history is that of "a prototypical narrative for America's myth of the self-made man and the entrepreneurial republican subject, specifically marked as male, white, propertied, and socially and politically enfranchised" (2001, 98). Reliance on general human consciousness as a source of rights and ethics depends on each individual consciousness having contributive access to the conglomerate. I contest, then, the proposition that the self-made man envisioned by Franklin can be so easily categorized. Rather, Franklin obligates autobiographical scholars to ask why the myth of "America's self-made man" is such a fractured, contradictory motif in American literature. The American literary canon is replete with self-making disaster narratives populated by characters like Jay Gatsby and Thomas Sutpen, which meditate on the theme of social eligibility and personal shame. Meanwhile, the political crises over civic eligibility manifest themselves as autobiographical identity crises in the nineteenth century when legally disenfranchised voices like those of Frederick Douglass and members of the women's suffrage movement struggle to perform the self-possession for which Franklin had become famous. It would seem clear that, between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, something intervened to fill both the production and reception of self-making narratives with anxiety and suspicion and to gradually transfer the motif of self-invention into fiction, where the expression of shame and humble origins is less fraught with personal risk.

The most obvious culprits in this intervention are the human, political, and logical disasters of slavery and the disenfranchisement of women. Any hypothesis about our modern preoccupation with civic eligibility in self-invention narratives, however, would be overly simplistic if it presumed this turn to be a rejection of Franklin's promise. While the *Autobiography* is typically understood as a white, male, and enfranchised, self-making narrative, it became so marked through too little attention to the fact that it models the creation of enfranchisement. Franklin makes the point that our capacity for

performative self-possession and development, not the final product of personal development, drives the evolution of societies toward greater enfranchisement. A degree of shame surfaces in the simplest revision of self, with tension between that from which and that into which one transforms. The willingness to integrate the two, or to recognize a dialectical relationship, makes the difference between purpose and paralysis. Franklin is pleased to have risen in the world, but it is his youthful self who made the change possible. Opportunity knocks on Franklin's door, not because he is the only man in the colonies with the ingenuity to avail himself of it, but because he engenders it through the creation of a cultural milieu in which opportunity abounds. He creates personal success through the process of helping to carve a place for Philadelphia as a commercial and intellectual fountainhead. More importantly, however, this method of self-construction is dependent upon the assumption that the capacity for reason is the essential criterion for civic eligibility. One must be aware of oneself in a social context to craft a performative identity, and one must be given one's chance to manifest the capacity for self-awareness through contributive cultural performance.

Finally, the reflexive marking of Franklin as a figure of a priori privilege may be the greatest obstruction to understanding the liberatory power of his contribution to autobiographical selfhood. The responsibility for autobiography studies engendered by this realization is to consider the American Enlightenment anew. That is, with a view to its understanding of social construction and its use of reason and individualism as a tool for the self-conscious transformation of social constructs. In Franklin's case, the separation of self from society is a rhetorical tool, mindfully applied, to denaturalize existing social stratifications. Social construction begins, therefore, with individuals as the seat of collective human reason. I hypothesize that American fiction and autobiography, given their abiding motifs of shame, self-making, and social eligibility, impulsively mourn the loss of Franklin's promised civic self. Taking a more performative view of his *Autobiography,* applied through fresh close readings, autobiographical scholarship has the potential to restore some of that democratic promise.

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