"Deny Self for Self's Sake"?

Identity, Authorship, Print Culture, and Benjamin Franklin

游錫熙/ Joseph Hsi-hsi Yu

淡江大學英文學系 助理教授

Department of English, Tamkang University

【摘要】

本文以晚近的研究重新評估富蘭克林，重新想像新的共和國誕生時，他建構身分認同的社會歷史背景，以及他面對十八世紀跨大西洋地區新時代出現時的回應。本文不以國家主義的方式去想像富蘭克林，而將他視爲轉型中的人物，出生在一個變化中、涉及跨大西洋事物的新英格蘭。本文也將討論印刷文化在富蘭克林身上所造成的獨特身分。

【關鍵詞】 富蘭克林、認同、作者身分、印刷文化

【Abstract】

This article aims to reassess Franklin in light of recent scholarship. It proposes to re-historicize Franklin, to re-imagine the social and historical conditions Franklin faced when he was fashioning or negotiating his identity in response to his disillusionment toward an imperial power (England) and the founding of a new republic (the U.S.) as well as in response to the emergence of a new era in the eighteenth-century transatlantic regions. This article will not conceive of Franklin in nationalistic terms, but rather treat him as a transitional figure situated in a changing New England which was involved in transatlantic enterprises. This article will also discuss the unique situations that Franklin, as author and printer, faced during the Enlightenment era. The emergence of print culture fostered Franklin's career as a businessman and man of letters but also created a peculiar identity out of him.

【Keywords】 Benjamin Franklin, identity, authorship, print culture

I. Introduction

"There has been a surprising surge of books about Benjamin Franklin recently," one scholar of early American history observes, "all attempting to tell the story of his remarkable life."[1] Among the books that attempt to tell Franklin's fascinating story are nothing less than six biographies: Edmund S. Morgan, *Benjamin Franklin* (2003); Walter J. Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* (2004); Gordon S. Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* (2004); Philip Dray, *Stealing God's Thunder: Benjamin Franklin's Lightning Rod and the Invention of America* (2005); Joyce E. Chaplin, *The First Scientific American: Benjamin Franklin and the Pursuit of Genius* (2006); and J. A. Leo Lemay, *The Life of Benjamin Franklin* (2006- ; two volumes published so far). On top of these biographies, there is also a wide array of critical studies—among them, David Waldstreicher, *Runaway America: Benjamin Franklin, Slavery, and the American Revolution* (2004); Lester C. Olsen, *Benjamin Franklin's Vision of American Community: A Study in Rhetorical Iconology* (2004); Seymour Stanton Block, *Benjamin Franklin: Genius of Kites, Flights and Voting Rights* (2004); and Jerry Weinberger, *Benjamin Franklin Unmasked: On the Unity of His Moral, Religious, and Political Thought* (2005). Coming out on the eve of his tercentennial birth (2006), these books and biographies attest to scholars and critics' unflagging interest in Benjamin Franklin—a quintessential exemplar of the American success story, a versatile statesman and diplomat, an internationally-renowned scientist, and the author of America's most widely-read autobiography, the immensely popular *Poor Richard's Almanack*, and many other writings, as well as a man of vast controversies and contradictions. Most important of all, critics display an unabated interest in Franklin because his life is central to America's idea of itself.

The tercentennial birth also marks a fitting point to re-examine and re-appraise Benjamin Franklin. Since the late eighteenth century, the image of Benjamin Franklin has undergone innumerable changes in the American minds.[2] With the

[1] Joseph J. Ellis's review of Gordon S. Wood's *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin*. Quoted from the back jacket of the book.

[2] For a summary account of the fluctuations of Franklin's reputations, see Melvin H. Buxbaum, "Introduction," *Critical Essays on Benjamin Franklin*, or Gordon S. Wood, "Introduction," *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin*.

publication of numerous new materials in recent years, his image will again come under close scrutiny. *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, especially, has unearthed an untold wealth of information about Franklin heretofore unknown to scholars. It is a huge, on-going project by the Yale University Press, the entire edition of which is estimated to reach 47 volumes. As of today, 39 volumes were published. Its completion is destined to help make great strides in Franklin scholarship.

Franklin, however, as numerous critics have pointed out, is a man of many masks,[3] and many scholars have undertaken to do more or less the same thing: unmasking Franklin. This is what one recent book aims to do. In *Benjamin Franklin Unmasked: On the Unity of His Moral, Religious, and Political Thought*, Jerry Weinberger, as the title of his book suggests, proposes to unmask Franklin by exploring the "Unity of His Moral, Religious, and Political Thought." The title of the book's conclusion "Will the Real Ben Franklin Please Stand Up?" reflects Weinberger's as well as many scholars' preoccupation: identifying the "real" Benjamin Franklin. Nevertheless, the result of Weinberger's unmasking is a little disappointing. His conclusion is that "Franklin did wear masks and practiced an amazingly elusive art of writing" (Weinberger xiv), which does not contribute much toward Franklin criticism, but it goes to show that the true self is forever a slippery, or an elusive thing, always hidden from plain view, especially in Franklin's case.

My article is not another attempt at discovering the "real" Benjamin Franklin. Drawing on recent scholarship and the publication of new materials, it proposes to re-historicize Franklin, to re-imagine the social and historical conditions Franklin must have faced when he was fashioning or negotiating his identity in response to his disillusionment toward an imperial power (England) and the founding of a new republic (the U.S.) as well as in response to the emergence of a new era in the eighteenth-century transatlantic regions. Critics tend to treat Franklin's New England as either part of the British Empire (during the colonial period) or part of the later United States. New England in the eighteen century, however, was much more than that. As one critic in Early American literature has observed on a different

[3] Edmund Morgan, for example, warns us that "Franklin was never the simple man he *enjoyed appearing to be*" ("Foreword" 7; my emphasis). Poor Richard also advises: "Let all Men know thee, but no man know thee thoroughly: Men freely ford that see the shallows" (Lemay, *Writings* 1229).

occasion, “New England was inextricably involved in the Atlantic transformation from an economy based on local production to one based on transoceanic mercantile capitalism and credit that fundamentally transformed conceptions of language, money, and self.”[4] My study of Benjamin Franklin will be based on this new conception: Franklin as a transitional figure situated in a changing New England which is involved in transoceanic enterprises. When examined from this perspective, Benjamin Franklin will take on a new significance. He will not just be America’s Ben, the shrewd and practical Founding Father whose face is etched on the $100 bill; he is also a Renaissance man, capitalizing on his unique role as printer and author to promote the love of liberty and the dissemination of knowledge in the eighteenth-century New England which was deeply implicated in transatlantic economy and politics.

II. The Quintessential American?

Of the aforementioned six biographies, it can readily be perceived that Philip Dray’s *Stealing God's Thunder* and Joyce E. Chaplin’s *The First Scientific American* approach Franklin as a scientist. Lemay’s is a colossal undertaking. This new biography of Franklin, when completed, will be an ambitious multi-volume project, the first two volumes of which, both published in 2006, covers Franklin’s career as a journalist (1706-1730) and as a printer and publisher (1730-1747). A comprehensive and very nearly exhaustive biography, it should be an indispensable work for later Franklin scholars and critics. Of the other biographies, Wood’s work is especially intriguing because it takes an unusual approach. "It was not the Franklin I knew—the American patriot," Wood recalled his shocked recognition when he first began reading *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* in the 1970s. Alerting readers in his Preface with the caveat that “Franklin was not even destined to be an American,” Wood proceeds to tell the story of Franklin’s Americanization (Wood x). Wood’s biography, then, can be read as a thematic story about Franklin’s emotional and intellectual journey from a staunch imperialist to a revolutionary, to one of the

[4] Ralph Bauer, “The Literature of ‘British America,’” *American Literary History* 21.4 (Winter 2009): 823. This is Bauer’s book review of Michelle Burnham’s *Folded Selves* (2007), a study of colonial New England writing.

Founding Fathers of the United States. In this sense, Wood, as one book reviewer has put it, "has written more of a biographical essay than a full-fledged life of Franklin."[5]

In contrast to Weinberger's *Benjamin Franklin Unmasked*, Wood's book does shed significant new light on Franklin. His book reflects an important issue in Franklin criticism: the changing image of Franklin. For the sake of convenience, Wood's book can be divided into two (uneven) parts: Franklin's anxiety to become a gentleman, which makes up Chapter One, and the long and slow process of his Americanization, which comprises the remainder of the book. In "Becoming a Gentleman," Wood distinguishes colonial American people into two types: "Many people in the eighteenth-century English-speaking world, especially those in the topmost ranks, still tended to divide the society into only two parts, a tiny elite of gentlemen on the top dominating the bulk of commoners on the bottom" (35). In Franklin's words, this was a society of "the BETTER SORT of People" set against that of "the meaner Sort." "This separation between gentlemen and commoners," Wood proceeds to inform us, "which John Adams called 'the most ancient and universal of all Divisions of People,' overwhelmed all other divisions in colonial culture, even that between free and enslaved that we today find so horribly conspicuous" (35). Several instances in Wood's biography, as well as in Franklin's *Autobiography*, demonstrate that Franklin felt anguished about being treated as a commoner in his early career. When he was considering marital prospects, for example, Franklin discovered that "the Business of a Printer being generally thought a poor one, I was not to expect Money with a Wife unless with such a one, as I should not otherwise think agreeable" (Franklin, *Autobiography* 128). Small wonder that people of "the Middling Sorts" like Franklin would find it imperative to become a gentleman. He finally achieved that status in 1748, at the age of forty-two, when he believed that he had acquired sufficient wealth and gentility, and he decided to retire from active business. To celebrate that memorable occasion, therefore, Franklin commissioned a portrait to announce the arrival of a new gentleman. Wood noted that there was none of the "famous Franklin simplicity of dress found in his later

[5] Unsigned review of *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin*. Accessed 20 Sept. 2010 <http://brothersjudd.com/index.cfm/fuseaction/reviews.detail/book_id/1381/Americanizat.htm>.

portraits": "Although his dress is not as elegant as that of many colonial aristocrats, Franklin nevertheless stands in an aristocratic pose, stiff and mannered and wearing a dark green velvet coat and tightly curled brown wig, with his right arm extended to reveal the frilled ruffle of his silk sleeve" (57-58). In contrast to the image of "the Poor Richard moralist" or "the symbol of rustic democracy, and the simple backwoods philosopher" at the French court, Franklin in this portrait flaunts his upward mobility: becoming a gentleman. The class barrier, firmly entrenched in colonial culture, was difficult to break through, and Franklin felt entitled to commemorate the occasion of being a "full-fledged gentleman" in a conspicuous, ceremonious manner.

In the latter part of the biography, Wood details the process of Franklin's Americanization. Earlier in his life, Franklin had always been a fervent British imperialist. In 1751, he published "Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, Etc.," in which he estimated that the population of America must at least be doubled every 25 years. At this rate, the population of North America "will in another Century be more than the People of *England*." As Wood elucidates, this vision of the people in North America eventually outnumbering those in Britain was not anticipating the separation of the colonies from Great Britain. Instead, the growth of British subjects in America would only make the British Empire more powerful. As a "true-blue Englishman," Franklin prided himself on being part of this great empire (Wood 71).

In 1757 Franklin was elected emissary of the Pennsylvania assembly—later he would also represent Georgia, New Jersey, and Massachusetts—and went to England to argue the assembly's case of taxing proprietary estates with the Privy Council of the British government. The mission did not go smoothly, and Franklin's stay in England turned out to be unexpectedly long: from June 1757 to August 1762, and again from November 1762 to March 1775. During this time, Franklin relished his stay in England, visiting ancestral homes and relatives, accepting dinner invitations on a daily basis, and establishing warm friendships with the English and Scottish intellectual circles. An internationally acclaimed scientist at that time, he was respected and welcomed everywhere he went. In fact, he enjoyed his stay in London to the extent that he entertained the thought of becoming "a Londoner for the rest of my Days."

Two events, among others, transformed Franklin's life: the Stamp Act and Franklin's indictment before the Privy Council. When the British government needed more revenue to maintain the army in the colonies, the Parliament enacted the Stamp Act in 1765. Although Franklin objected to the imposition of a new tax, he was willing to make compromises and did not foresee the possibility of the colonists' vehement reaction to it. In this, he was obviously out of touch with American opinion. After the passage of the Act, he even named an ally and friend John Hughes as stamp distributor. The consequence was disastrous. It led to wild speculation that Franklin was the original proponent of the Act, and, with mob violence raging in the colonies, the mobs in Pennsylvania threatened to level his Philadelphia house. Some people even warned that "Franklin might be hanged in effigy" (Wood 112). His loyalty to the colonies openly disputed, Franklin was considered more English than "American." It might be at this point that Franklin began to seriously question his own judgment and identity. And then, the affair of the Hutchinson letters finally led Franklin inexorably to his Americanization.

Thomas Hutchinson, lieutenant governor of Massachusetts in the 1760s, had written some letters to a British under-secretary, urging that stern measures, including "an abridgment of what are called English liberties," be taken in America to maintain colonies' dependency on Great Britain. Franklin managed to have the originals copied and sent the duplicates to the colonies. Unfortunately, these copied letters were indiscreetly publicized in the colonies, creating a public uproar in England and devastating Franklin's reputation in British politics. In January 1774, Franklin was summoned before the Privy Council for a full-scale indictment, in which Solicitor General Alexander Wedderburn viciously abused him in front of a raucous crowd. After the indictment, Franklin approached Wedderburn and whispered in his ears: "I will make your master a LITTLE KING for this" (qtd. in Wood 147). A year later, he left England and was chosen, one day after his arrival in Philadelphia, delegate to the second Continental Congress. From thence forward, he dedicated himself to the founding of a new republic, and a staunch imperialist turned into a fervent patriot.

Gordon Wood well documented Franklin's life, grounding his analysis of Franklin's decisions at critical moments upon meticulously researched and adroitly handled historical archives. He traces Franklin's progress from aspiring tradesman

to self-made gentleman to quintessential American. More importantly, he gives us a different story about the man who has become an American symbol since the nineteenth century. As one book reviewer puts it, "In this brilliantly iconoclastic and utterly convincing reappraisal, Gordon Wood has shattered forever the comforting stereotype of Benjamin Franklin as the plainspoken, homespun American patriot, the cracker-barrel philosopher who dispensed dry quips and always exemplified middle-class values and democratic virtues."[6] With the "crushing heap of retrospective myths," Franklin is too readily assumed to be an undisputable patriot. It is precisely these "myths" that Wood sets out to dismantle: "We have more than two hundred years of images imposed on Franklin that have to be peeled away before we can recover the man who existed before the Revolution" (Wood 12). Wood "recovers" the pre-Revolutionary Franklin brilliantly.

Wood is also successful in deconstructing the image that Franklin is the exemplary figure who embraced "middle-class values and democratic virtues." It is of course Franklin himself who constructed such an image in writings such as the *Autobiography*, *Poor Richard's Almanack*, and the like. At the very beginning of the *Autobiography*, Franklin sets the tone of celebrating his rise from humble origins: "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. . ." (Franklin 43). After he attained certain prominence in Philadelphia society, Franklin organized a group of artisans—calling themselves "the Junto"—who met weekly for learned conversation. Aiming at self-improvement, these middle-class businessmen also believed they could do good for and reform the society. In the *Almanack*, Franklin deliberately chooses a rural, folksy eccentric—Poor Richard—as his persona. Poor Richard peddles aphorisms that often display his aversion for kings or aristocrats: "Kings & Bears often worry their keepers," "An innocent *Plowman* is more worthy than a vicious *Prince*," "The King's cheese is half wasted in parings: But no matter, 'tis made of the peoples [sic] milk" (Lemay, *Writings* 1186, 1193, 1197). Underneath these middle-class values, however, lies his recognition of the importance of becoming a gentleman and his relish for a patrician life—as a celebrity—during his lengthy stays in England and France. Being snubbed at his first marriage proposal

[6] Ron Chernow's review of Wood's book. Quoted from the back jacket of the book.

painfully reminded him of his lowly beginnings. Therefore, he conspicuously announced his retirement *as* a gentleman and ceremoniously celebrated the occasion. He enjoyed his English life so much so that he considered spending the remainder of his life there. In short, he was "too English" at that time. Likewise, when he served as minister plenipotentiary to the court of France in 1776, he immediately loved France, which, to him, was "the civilest Nation upon Earth." He wrote in a letter: "I am here among a People that love and respect me, a most amiable Nation to live with, and perhaps I may conclude to die among them; for my Friends in America are dying off one after another, and I have been so long abroad that I should now be almost a Stranger in my own country" (qtd. in Wood 209). At that time, he was probably "too French." Although often dubbed a village philosopher or leather-apron philosopher, Franklin often led a life that was quite contrary to his American middle-class beliefs or his Poor Richard philosophy of economy. In the *Autobiography*, various essays, and letters, Franklin expressed, time after time, his distrust of "mobs," referring to them as "the unthinking undiscerning Multitude." On top of that, Franklin was exceedingly critical of human nature. These, as one critic points out, reveal Franklin's "undemocratic distrust of ordinary humanity and of the majority" (Silverman 246).

III. Lawrence, Weber, and Franklin

The inconsistencies in his personality and identity lead to not a few heated debates about and indeed attacks on Franklin, although the debates and attacks, for the most part, have nothing to do with his Americanness but with his middle-class values. Among his disparagers are a host of imaginative writers and creative artists, who flatly refuse to accept his Poor Richardisms. To them, Franklin embodies all those superficial bourgeois moneymaking values. Mark Twain, for instance, accused Franklin of having "early prostituted his talents to the invention of maxims and aphorisms calculated to inflict suffering upon the rising generation of all subsequent ages" (qtd. in Wood 4). It is of course D. H. Lawrence who launched the severest attack on Franklin: "Oh, Franklin was the first downright American. He knew what he was about, the sharp little man. He set up the first dummy American" (15). Lawrence taunted Franklin's notion of the perfectibility of man and his list of virtues:

"This is Benjamin's barbed wire fence. He made himself a list of virtues, which he trotted inside like a grey nag in a paddock" (17). Perhaps the differences can easily be resolved because Franklin and Lawrence have, as critic Ormond Seavey argues, "conflicting modes of consciousness" (Seavey 60). Looking from a different perspective, however, Franklin was born in an age when earning a decent livelihood was no easy task for a lot of families, and fine arts were certainly not much appreciated at that time. Besides, Franklin, as Herman Melville said, was everything but a poet. He wrote graceful prose in the Puritans' plain style; he was, therefore, adept at essays and pamphlets, the genres flourishing in the age of newspapers and magazines and making an enormous impact in promoting social and political changes. He even tried his hands at mock elegies, doggerels, and bagatelles, but he was no genuine poet. A butterfly could not inspire his poetic touch. In his 1758 "Preface" to *Poor Richard's Almanack* (more commonly known as "The Way to Wealth"), he versified his idea of a butterfly:

> *What is a Butterfly? At best*
> *He's but a Caterpillar drest.*
> *The gaudy Fop's his Picture just.* (Lemay, *Writings* 1300)

Nathaniel Hawthorne, on the other hand, viewed a butterfly very differently. In his "Preface" to *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), Hawthorne commented on how an imaginative writer like him would dole out his moral purpose in a story or romance: "The author has considered it hardly worth his while, therefore, relentlessly to impale the story with its moral, as with an iron rod,—or, rather as by sticking a pin through a butterfly,—thus at once depriving it of life, and causing it to stiffen in an ungainly and unnatural attitude" ("Preface," *House* 2). For Hawthorne, a butterfly is not just a caterpillar or fop dressed up; it is symbolic of an artistic work. It inspires beauty, creation, and imagination, with which to "dress up" the moral of a story so that it will not stiffen or rigidify in an ungainly or unnatural manner. Poetic temperament (or "conflicting modes of consciousness") may have accounted for the differences between Franklin and Hawthorne, but it also takes nearly a hundred years before that poetic temperament could develop on the U.S. soil which Hawthorne considered too barren to fertilize a romance. He complained about this situation in his "Preface" to

The Marble Faun: "No author, without a trial, can conceive of the difficulty of writing a Romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything—but a common-place prosperity, in broad and simple daylight, as is happily the case with my dear native land" ("Preface," *Marble* 3). In Franklin's days, even "a common-place prosperity, in broad and simple daylight" was yet to be imagined.

Another famous attack on Franklin comes from Max Weber. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904-1905), Weber asserts that Franklin embodies the spirit of capitalism "in almost classical purity." Basing his argument on "The Way to Wealth," Weber considers Franklin's economic view as a philosophy of avarice: "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 *as 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" (16; my emphasis). Weber proceeds to comment on Franklin's utilitarianism: "Now, all Franklin's moral attitudes are coloured with utilitarianism. Honesty is useful, because it assures credit; so are punctuality, industry, frugality, and that is the reason they are virtues" (17). He then concludes by relating his discussion of Franklin with the Protestant ethic: "The earning of money within the modern economic order is, so long as it is done legally, the result and the expression of virtue and proficiency in a calling" (18). In other words, to be financially successful bespeaks God's blessing upon an individual.

Weber summarizes eighteenth-century New England—or more generally modern Euro-American—economic condition with great acumen. More importantly, he deftly weaves his narrative of the condition with the social and religious milieu at that time. Nonetheless, his judgment of Franklin is decidedly too one-sided, considering he bases his understanding of Franklin on his reading of "The Way to Wealth" alone. "The Way to Wealth" is a subtle and complicated text which allows for various interpretations. For one thing, the personae in the preface create ambiguity. The almanac-maker Richard Saunders claims to have authored the preface, but prefers to let his alter-ego "Poor Richard" peddle his worldly wisdom in his stead. Poor Richard in turn "overhears" Father Abraham "hawking" his aphorisms—the new-age

secular sermon—in the marketplace. All the while, publisher Franklin remained behind the scene, secretly basking himself in delight because the almanacs were doing very well and he could gratify his vanity of being quoted and admired in anonymity. In all this displacement of identities, it is virtually impossible to locate the "author." It is a tour de force. Perhaps Franklin does this complacently, but not without a tinge of conscious self-critique. The last paragraph especially leaves room for ambiguity: "Thus the old Gentleman ended his Harangue. The People heard it, and approved the Doctrine, and immediately practised the contrary, just as if it had been a common Sermon; for the Vendue [i.e. auction or sale] opened, and they began to buy extravagantly, notwithstanding all his Cautions, and their own Fear of Taxes" (Lemay, *Writings* 1302). This passage could of course be read as Poor Richard's satire on the common herd: knowing what is good for them, they simply cannot act on that information. Nevertheless, it could also be argued that Poor Richard is poking fun at himself in good humor. If so, the entire incident could take on a different significance. To take Poor Richard as Franklin himself and conclude that Franklin's—or Poor Richard's—goal in life is money as an end in itself are incautious. Franklin retired at the age of forty-two and dedicated his remaining life to civil service. Besides, as his life in London and Paris could attest, he was certainly not one who did not know how to enjoy life. Weber's reading of Franklin is cut-and-dried. He fails to take into account the nuances or ambiguities of literary works, and he probably does not appreciate Franklin's humor or satire.

Notwithstanding the attacks, Lawrence identifies Franklin as a practical and rational being, product of the Enlightenment era, the iconoclastic thinking of that historic age empowered individuals, like Franklin, to dare to "conceiv[e] the bold and arduous Project of arriving at moral Perfection" (*Autobiography* 148). Weber recognizes the emergence of the economic man—with Franklin as a prime example—and its significance in the eighteenth century. New England in the eighteenth century already played a key role in the transatlantic economic system, especially in its trade with the home country. As a shrewd businessman, Franklin was able to seize on the opportunity and turn it to his advantage. He was not, however, a mere economic man, but a man with a vision. As a British imperialist, he was able to foresee the importance of North America in the British Empire, as was indicated in the aforementioned essay "Observations Concerning the Increase of

Mankind, Peopling of Countries, Etc." Moreover, as an Enlightenment thinker, he could also envision himself, in our words today, a citizen of a global village, as the James Cook incident demonstrates. For critic Jim Egan, he was a man of "antipodean cosmopolitanism."

IV. Exchange of Goods, Rationality of Commerce

Captain James Cook, a British explorer, navigator and cartographer, made three voyages (1768-1771, 1772-1775, and 1776-1779) to the Pacific Ocean during which he surveyed the coast of New Zealand, charted the eastern coast of Australia, and discovered the Sandwich (Hawaiian) Islands. He made one of the earliest European encounters with the Southern Hemisphere. Cook commanded HMS *Resolution* on his last voyage, but was murdered by natives in Hawaii. Just before his last voyage in 1776 when the Revolutionary War was at its height, Franklin, then minister plenipotentiary at the court of France, wrote a letter ("Passport for Captain Cook") to "all Captains and Commanders of armed Ships by Commission from the Congress of the United States of America now in war with Great Britain," recommending that "in case the said Ship . . . should happen to fall into your Hands, you would not consider her as an Enemy . . . but that you would treat the said Captain Cook and his People with all Civility and Kindness, affording them, as common Friends to Mankind, all the Assistance in your Power, which they may happen to stand in need of" (Lemay, *Writings* 927). Franklin made the recommendation because he believed that Cook's undertaking was truly laudable in itself, "as the Increase of Geographical Knowledge facilitates the Communication between distant Nations, in the Exchange of useful Products and Manufactures, and the Extension of Arts, whereby the common Enjoyments of human Life are multiply'd and augmented, and science of other kinds increased to the benefit of Mankind in general" (Lemay, *Writings* 927).

For Franklin, the importance of "the common Enjoyments of human Life" and "the benefit of Mankind in general" far outweighed the interest of one single nation, even though the interest, in this particular case, meant the survival of that nation, whose future still hung in the balance, depending for its independence on the outcomes of the war still raging between the United States and the Great Britain. For critic Jim Egan, the incident has an even more profound significance. Franklin

not only believed that the increase of geographical knowledge, thanks to Cook's voyages, would facilitate the communication between distant nations; he also wished the communication between distant nations could eventually transform the British people from imperialists to people of the world. Through "the Exchange of useful Products and Manufactures, and the Extension of Arts," Egan contends in his "Turning Identity Upside Down: Benjamin Franklin's Antipodean Cosmopolitanism," Franklin was hoping that the British people would eventually come to view people of the Southern Hemisphere (or people of North America?) "as part of a single, uniform human nature in that they would respond to exchange in precisely the way that emerging eighteen-century economic theory would predict any person would respond" (212). In this way, encounters with people of the Southern Hemisphere would be "a way of making British subjects over into cosmopolites" (216).

Paul Giles, however, would take exception to Egan's projection of Franklin as an idealist. In "Antipodean American Literature: Franklin, Twain, and the Sphere of Subalternity," Giles first acknowledges Franklin's "internationalist gesture": "As fellow citizens [Franklin and Cook] of the Enlightenment they shared a belief in the open pursuit of exploration and knowledge for the universal benefit of mankind, and it was this sense of being engaged in a common intellectual project that motivated Franklin's subsequent effort to obtain a passport for Cook. . ." (25). Nevertheless, he immediately revises this gesture: "But whereas Franklin in the middle of the eighteenth century tended to deploy his cosmopolitan idiom with an exuberant iconoclasm to challenge entrenched dogma and prejudice, during the last 20 years of his life he became less confident about the uses of rationalism in the public sphere" (26). Giles drives home his point by comparing Franklin's 1751 article "On Transported Felons" with a similar piece, "On Sending Felons to America," in 1787. In the former piece, Franklin, while mocking the mother country's policy of transporting felons across the Atlantic, couches his rhetorical figure in terms of "colonization as a benign parental structure" (26). Giles then notes that Franklin's satire became, quoting John Updike, "more savage and Swiftian" as America got closer to war with Britain. After the war America gained its independence. Franklin remembered the days when the mother country showed "her parental Tenderness" by emptying her jails into the habitations of America "*for the* BETTER *Peopling . . . of the Colonies*" (Lemay, *Writings* 1142; original italics and

capitalization). Franklin thus suggested discharging America's debt to the mother country by transporting America's felons to Britain. This latter piece was written in the context when Franklin reflected back from a post-war situation. In it, Franklin "effectively highlights the brutal pre-war conditions of domination and subordination, center and periphery, which, as he now acknowledges, always structured this imperial Anglo-American relationship" (27). This article is, therefore, based around "a recognition of colonization as power" (26). By then, Franklin had realized that British ships' voyages to the Southern Hemisphere were not meant for scientific undertakings only. Facing the grim possibility that North American colonies might be lost, the British government already entertained, even before Cook's last voyage, the notion of using Australia or New Zealand as substitute dumping grounds for felons. In the latter article, therefore, Franklin came to "a more somber understanding of colonization as both a consolidation of hierarchical authority and an institutionalization of subalternity" (28).

In his essay Giles compellingly modifies Egan's idealistic gesture of Franklin. That, however, does not necessarily mean that Egan is wrong. J. L. Leo Lemay once observed: "Though pessimistic and cynical about human nature, he was also idealistic" (Lemay, *Life*, II, 200). Franklin has many different sides. Although he is not someone who would embrace the notion of "a single, uniform human nature" (Egan 212), he does display his idealism in many of his writings. Whatever their differences, however, both Egan and Giles ground their analyses in transnational contexts. Giles specifically stresses this point: "The larger point is that the global range of Franklin's cultural agendas can only be understood in something other than merely nationalistic terms" (33). Gordon Wood does an excellent job in excavating the little-known Franklin, but he still conceives of him in nationalistic terms. Weber can envision Franklin as a pioneer in an eighteen-century transatlantic economy, but for him Franklin is nothing more than an economic man. With literary critics like Egan and Giles, future Franklin scholars should be ready to sail into transoceanic territories.

Both Egan and Giles often discuss Franklin in terms of exchange, as Myra Jehlen before them has also done. Jehlen sees Franklin as a figure during a period of "ideological transition." Comparing the works of Franklin and Rousseau, Jehlen

contends that the "*Autobiography* and the *Confessions* recount the birth of modern selfhood, recapitulating in their phylogeny the ontogeny that transformed feudal continuities between individual and society into free-market dialectics" (504). The paramount thing for an individual is to formulate rules to navigate oneself in the free-market system. For Franklin, virtues like truth, sincerity, and integrity are "not rules of conduct but rules of the game," and the large purpose of these rules is "the formulation of a moral ideology that can both regulate and enable the exercise of modern power, both that of the individual and of the productive market" (510). All virtues—especially Christian values—are, in this sense, socially instrumental or utilitarian. Franklin constantly rephrases common expressions in terms of interpersonal relationships. In talking about the ends of conversations, for example, Franklin states: "And as the chief Ends of Conversation are to *inform*, or to be *informed*, to *please* or to *persuade*, I wish wellmeaning [sic] sensible Men would not lessen their Power of doing Good by a Positive assuming Manner that seldom fails to disgust, tends to create Opposition, and to defeat every one of those Purposes for which Speech was given, to wit, giving or receiving Information, or Pleasure" (Franklin 65; original italics). What Franklin is doing here, according to Jehlen, is a re-interpretation or redefinition: "All the definitions here and all the considerations are matters of exchange. Humility has developed from a posture before God to a stance that permits a man to trade goods with other men: that way, in giving one access to what others have produced, Humility becomes no longer the opposite but the complement of a Vanity that quickens one's own production" (Jehlen 509; original capitalization). Franklin redefines "Humility" and "Vanity" in terms of economic production or the trade of goods. For Jehlen, Franklin's concept of virtue "is a political matter," and the *Autobiography* "is unabashedly a work of ideological persuasion" (514).

Jehlen's assessment of Franklin sounds surprisingly like that of Weber, defining Franklin basically in economic terms. In contrast, Giles and Egan employ the idea of exchange in its various significations. Giles notes Franklin's universalist circumference where New Zealand should be "connected" within a common universe of trade and communication, for "a mutual exchange of benefits" (Lemay, *Writings* 672), but he proceeds to remind us that by 1787 Franklin "understands antipodean exchange more in relation to power" (Giles 28). Egan also emphasizes the

importance for Franklin of "the power of products circulating in networks of exchange" (Egan 214). He maintains that "Franklin casts the New Zealanders as part of a single, uniform human nature in that they would respond to exchange in precisely the way that emerging eighteenth-century economic theory would predict any person would respond" (212). Moreover, Egan combines his discussion of the idea of exchange with that of circulation: "Franklin . . . uses the figure of circulation to justify his scheme for exchange with New Zealand. . . . The introduction of circulation as a culturally defining figure, as how a culture conceives of itself, represents a positive good in and of itself for Franklin" (214-15). Egan adds interesting dimensions to Franklin's idea of exchange. However, to delimit the idea of exchange to its application in commerce only is too narrow.

V. Exchange of Ideas, Rationality of Printing and Writing

Franklin was, first and foremost, a printer and an author. Apprenticed to his brother James at the age of twelve, Franklin was closely involved with the printing industry most of his life. Submitting his Silence Dogood essays secretly to the *New England Courant*—his brother's newspaper and one of the earliest in Boston—at the age of sixteen, Franklin exerted his public influence through his writing all his life, since he was not much of an orator, which seemed to symbolize the transition of the old oral culture into the new print culture. Franklin's life was interwoven with the history of writing in the eighteen century, whether in authoring it or in publishing it. He observed in the *Autobiography*: "Prose Writing has been of great Use to me in the Course of my Life, and was a principal Means of my Advancement" (Franklin 60). With the emergence of the public sphere and the formation of the public forum,[7] writing and printing assumed the important role of disseminating ideas and knowledge. Franklin, as author and printer, advanced and facilitated the dissemination. For him, therefore, printing serves as a means to economic exchange as well as a means to cultural exchange. The idea of exchange, in Franklin's case, leads to the exchange of ideas.

[7] For an account of this point, see Lewis P. Simpson, "The Printer as American Man of Letters"; or Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteen-Century America*, especially Chapter 1.

In his "Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* and Republican Print Rationality," Grantland S. Rice suggests that in the *Autobiography* we can detect a certain alignment of "the activity of public writing with eighteenth-century theories of commerce" (48). Although Rice does not specify what type of alignment that is, it seems evident that both—public writing and commerce—are associated with the idea of exchange: exchange of ideas and exchange of goods respectively. In their discussions on these two kinds of exchanges, critics often suggest that Franklin believed in the existence of something transcendent in these exchanges which would eventually transform the public sphere or the international community. In one of the aforementioned quotations, for instance, Jim Egan suggests Franklin was hoping that, through the communication of distant nations or exchange of useful products and manufactures, the British people would eventually come to view people of the Southern Hemisphere "as part of a single, uniform human nature in that they would respond to exchange in precisely the way that emerging eighteen-century economic theory would predict any person would respond" (Egan 212). There seems to be a "magical power of exchange" here (Egan 212). Or, to take another instance, in his *Life of Benjamin Franklin*, J. A. Leo Lemay thus concludes his discussion of *Poor Richard's Almanack*: "The shrewd businessman-printer and man of letters, Benjamin Franklin, transformed himself into the naïve, simple, henpecked, humble lover of astrology and of learning, Poor Richard. The Third Realm was moving from the world of Milton, Swift, Bayle, Voltaire, and Hume to the poor farmer, in great part because of the '*democratic literacy inherent in the technology of print*'" (*Life*, II 191; my emphasis). The technology of print, through its dissemination of knowledge, will contribute to democratic literacy. In other words, democratic literacy is attainable through what Grantland Rice calls "the rational virtues of an objectifying commercial print culture" in his essay (45). The idealistic Franklin, the Enlightenment man, believed in the impalpable existence of "the rational virtues" not only of the commercial print culture but, it can be inferred, of commerce as well because of their capacity of objectification. It was Franklin's conviction that the exchange and circulation of ideas and goods would eventually increase the benefit of humankind in general because of their "rational virtues." This is the idealistic Franklin speaking, not the one who feels "undemocratic distrust of ordinary humanity and of the majority."

How does Franklin, as printer and author, achieve "rational virtues," and at what price? At the beginning of his career as a printer, Franklin stated in "Apology for Printers" (1731): "Printers are educated in the Belief, that when Men differ in Opinion, both Sides ought equally to have the Advantage of being heard by the Publick; and that when Truth and Error have fair Play, the former is always an overmatch for the latter" (Lemay, *Writings* 172). Like his contemporaries in the Age of Reason, Franklin believed that truth would always prevail over error. He then proceeded: "Being thus continually employ'd in serving all Parties, Printers naturally acquire a vast Unconcernedness as to the right or wrong Opinions contain'd in what they print; regarding it only as the Matter of their daily labour; They print things full of Spleen and Animosity, with the utmost Calmness and Indifference, and without the least Ill-will to the Persons reflected on" (Lemay, *Writings* 172). Written by a 25-year-older who received only two years of formal education and published 280 years ago, "Apology" displays Franklin's precocious wisdom and his understanding of the ethics of newspaper publishing. His belief in truth and his tenets of "fair Play" and "Unconcernedness" or "Indifference" do not have to give much ground even today.

Franklin the author had a different concern. In the *Autobiography*, he told us that he came by a copy of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* in Dutch on his first voyage to London. Franklin was impressed with Bunyan's manner of writing: "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" (Franklin 72). Franklin imitated this "Method" in his *Autobiography* partly because it adds a personal touch to the writing. In his other writings, however, he adopted a different approach. Michael Warner argues that Franklin often hides behinds a screen. In *Poor Richard Almanack*, for instance, Poor Richard is "the pseudonymous screen for B. Franklin, Printer" (78). In Chapter 3 of his book ("Franklin: The Representational Politics of the Man of Letters"), he discusses Franklin's strategy in the preface to the 1736 almanac. In his previous prefaces, Poor Richard has been predicting, up to the exact hour and minute, the death of Titan Leeds, another competing almanac-maker. When Leeds in turn accuses Poor

Richard of being a fictitious character, Poor Richard defends his existence: "But as long as I know my self [sic] to walk about, eat, drink and sleep, I am satisfied that *there is really such a Man as I am* . . . for if there were no such Man as I am, how is it possible I should appear publickly to hundreds of People, as I have done for several years past in print?" (Lemay, *Writings* 1199; original italics). On top of that, Poor Richard goes out of the way to disarm people's suspicion that he is Benjamin Franklin the printer: "I need not, indeed, have taken any Notice of so idle a Report, if it had not been for the sake of my Printer, to whom my Enemies are pleased to ascribe my Productions; and who it seems is as unwilling to father my Offspring, as I am to lose the Credit of it" ((Lemay, *Writings* 1199). Warner argues that Franklin is playing a game here; his strategy is to let his writing "stray onto the page unaffiliated: "The game Franklin typically plays with his personae often take this form: a fantasmatic [sic] self-splitting or self-objectification that results in a concealed or absent agent behind a manipulated surface" (78). According to Warner, Franklin achieves "a fantasy of being-in-print" (74). Franklin was unwilling to father the offspring; instead, he allowed Poor Richard to take the credit. The advantage of this strategy is that he could enjoy anonymity while reaping the benefits. In the process Franklin the author recedes into a baffling array of endless images because he used hundreds of personae. Self-objectification is attained at a price.

Poor Richard advises in the 1735 preface: "Deny Self for Self's sake" (Lemay, *Writings* 1198). Denying oneself here probably means abstaining from enjoying desired things, but it could easily be read figuratively to refer to Franklin's strategy in writing to achieve self-objectification or to his codes of interpersonal behavior. He famously talked about his "Habit of expressing my self in Terms of modest Diffidence" in the *Autobiography*: "never using when I advance any thing that may possibly be disputed, the Words, *Certainly, undoubtedly,* or any others that give the Air of Positiveness to an Opinion; but rather say, I conceive, or I apprehend a Thing to be so or so, It appears to me, or I should think it so or so for such and such Reasons, or I imagine it to be so, or it is so if I am not mistaken" (Franklin 65). These gestures of self-negation, as Michael Warner maintains, "foreground the self only to eliminate it from discourse. . . . It is as though the personal is, for literal intellection and rational society, a necessary postulation, nothing more" (Warner 81). Grantland Rice argues that "Warner's account elides Franklin's anxieties about the objectifying

tendencies of print culture as well as his fear of the political consequences of a print sphere evacuated of authors" (48). Franklin's denial of self works so successfully that his self strays onto the pages and is hardly traceable. His pursuit for "rational values" leads to dispersal of the self into the text.

Franklin was a publisher and an author, and it was often difficult for him to strike a balance between the two. Franklin the publisher of newspapers maintains a policy of "Unconcernedness" or "Indifference." Franklin the publisher of almanacs, however, hides behind Poor Richard and sells his worldly wisdom with "quiet aggressivity."[8] As an author, he uses personae such as Mrs. Silence Dogood and Miss Polly Baker to achieve objectification, but Mrs. Silence Dogood and Miss Polly Baker exude strong and fascinating personality. As hard as he tries to hide himself, some personality of Franklin's or his personae's still captivates our attention. His personality resembles his pride: "In reality there is perhaps no one of our natural Passions so hard to subdue as *Pride*. Disguise it, struggle with it, beat it down, stifle it, mortify it as much as one pleases, it is still alive, and will every now and then peep out and show itself" (Franklin 160; original italic). When his personality peeps out, the objectification that he strives to achieve evaporates. The rationality of print culture creates a peculiar identity out of Franklin, effecting a split between the publisher and the author.

VI. Conclusion

At the very beginning of the Silence Dogood essays, Mrs. Silence Dogood—sixteen-year-old Franklin's first persona—relates the story of how she came into the world: "At the time of my Birth, my Parents were on Ship-board in their Way from *London* to *N. England*" (Lemay *Writings* 5; original italics). Silence Dogood's "Entrance into this troublesome World," as well as Franklin's, is symbolic: a journey from the old world to the new. Benjamin Franklin was born into what Felicity Nussbaum calls the "global eighteenth century,"[9] and it was an age in which many epoch-making social and historical events occurred: the Age of Enlightenment, the

[8] Kenneth Silverman's words in describing how Franklin addresses readers in the *Autobiography* (Silverman 232).

[9] See Felicity A. Nussbaum, ed. *The Global Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2003).

arrival of capitalism and modern economy, the emergence of print culture and growing universal literacy, the arising of the metropolis, the appearance of the public sphere and the formation of public forum, the democratization of power, transoceanic commerce, voyages and explorations, and so on. In an era of "ideological transition," Franklin strove to fashion a new identity for himself and his nation. Before he eventually emerged to be what Perry Miller calls a massively symbolic figure of the nation, he underwent the transformation from an aspiring artisan to a gentleman of wealth and leisure to an internationally acclaimed scientist and intellectual, from a mere almanac publisher to "a tolerable English Writer" (Franklin 62), whose *Autobiography* has become a must-read for the younger generations. Franklin is a transitional figure in an age of radical and sweeping changes. Although widely believed to have invented the American identity, he himself had his own share of identity crisis: being an Englishman or American and his "fantasy of being-in-print." To do him justice, all inconsistencies or contradictions in his personality or identity must be taken into account. In one of his last comments on politics in 1789, he wrote: "God grant, that not only the love of liberty, but a thorough knowledge of the rights of man, may pervade the nations of the earth, so that a philosopher may set his foot anywhere on its surface, and say, 'This is my country'" (qtd. in Nye xvii-xviii). This highly idealistic Franklin should be placed alongside Weber's man of avarice whose aim in life is "the increase of his capital, which is assumed *as an end in itself*." Critic William Shurr once observed: "The actual Franklin needs to be decanonized" (Shurr 447).[10] The occasion of his tercentennial birth marks a good point to decanonize him. In addition, it is time to stop conceiving of Franklin in purely nationalistic terms. Situating him in a transatlantic or transoceanic trajectory would allow us to achieve a better understanding of the diverse roles Franklin played during the Enlightenment. The unique situations of

[10] See Shurr, "'Now, Gods, Stand Up for Bastards': Reinterpreting Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*." In this essay, Shurr argues that Part 1 of the *Autobiography* should stand as a separate work of literature. He boldly challenges traditional readings of Part 1: "Thus the *Autobiography Part 1* may be an accidental classic, the attempt of an aging father, seriously embattled by enemies and engaged in dangerous sedition, to insure the concern of his successful and politically powerful son" (446). One need not agree with him completely, but some of his points in the essay are worth investigating.

New England in that era enabled Franklin to envision himself as a world citizen, not just a British subject or an American national.

本論文於 2011 年 5 月 3 日到稿，2011 年 6 月 14 日通過審查。

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