Notes

The references cited below offer a selective account of the most important commentary on Franklin’s book, particularly work written on the memoir since the simultaneous appearance of the 1964 Yale edition and of Robert Sayre’s pioneering study of American autobiography, *The Examined Self*. I have emphasized the sources that were most helpful to me, and I have tried to clarify the many instances in which this study differs from well-established lines of interpretation. Franklin’s critics have not always shared his interest in curtailing verbal disputes, but it was my intent to keep to Franklin’s standards of modest diffidence in the disagreements that I document here. Although each note number links to a specific place in the text, I have tried to replicate the experience of a bibliographic essay in the notes as a whole, so that readers who are inclined to do so may postpone consulting any annotation until they have finished the entire book.

**Introduction:** Accident and Design


Notes to Pages 4–9

and Zall insist that Franklin did not intend to print the “Notes,” but nothing in the memoir itself or in the few letters where Franklin mentioned the memoir near the end of his life suggests any change in the structural intentions that he expressed in his manuscript. See the excerpts from the correspondence that Lemay and Zall collect in Benjamin Franklin’s Autobiography (New York: W. W. Norton, 1986), pp. 205–7.

3. The “Notes,” in other words, recast the figure of the segmented serpent in textual form. Franklin’s failure to mention the emblem in the memoir itself has discouraged most readers from pursuing the comparison, though Karen S. Cook suggests some of the adaptive possibilities of the image in “Benjamin Franklin and the Snake That Would Not Die,” British Library Journal 22 (1996): 88–111. Lester Olson’s book, Benjamin Franklin’s Vision of American Community: A Study in Rhetorical Iconology (Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 2004), explores Franklin’s lifelong interest in emblems of social wholeness and fragmentation, including the segmented serpent (27–76). Timothy Shannon treats the image in the immediate context of the Albany Congress, along with the many variants that Franklin’s cartoon inspired in other colonial newspapers. See Indians and Colonists at the Crossroads of Empire: The Albany Congress of 1754 (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2000), pp. 83–113.

4. Modern editors have cleared up the Riddlesden-Cornwallis confusion, but none have touched on the odd fact that Franklin used the alias in his “Notes” and “Riddlesden” in his text, when he was writing both documents during the same visit to the Shipley estate in 1771. Though he went over the “Notes” carefully after Abel James had supplied him with a copy, he never corrected this slip himself. A brief account of William Riddlesden’s career appears in the appendices to the Yale edition (A, 296), with more detail provided by Lemay and Zall in their notes to the Norton edition of Benjamin Franklin’s Autobiography (196).

5. The memoir has often struck readers as emotionally impoverished, particularly when Franklin touches on his children or his marriage. See, for instance, Eric Wertheimer’s observation, in Underwriting: The Poetics of Insurance in America, 1722–1872 (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2006), that Franklin was unable “to account for sentiment” in his book or to confront the consequences of traumatic loss, a conclusion that neglects the complex effects of reticence that the narrative repeatedly exploits. Claude-Anne Lopez takes a far more subtle approach to Franklin’s affective life, both in his correspondence and in his memoir, though she too struggles to capture its essence: “Neither demigod nor unfeeling egoist, this is the Franklin I have been groping to understand.” See her “Subjective Preface” to Claude-Anne Lopez and Eugenia Herbert, The Private Franklin: The Man and His Family (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975). On the death of Francis Folger Franklin, see J. A. Leo Lemay, The Life of Benjamin Franklin, vol. 2: Printer and Publisher, 1730–1747 (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2006), pp. 23–24.


7. Jefferson was particularly troubled by the dismissive attitude that William Temple Franklin displayed when Jefferson returned the manuscript: “As he put it into his pocket,” Jefferson recalled, “he said carelessly he had either the original, or another copy of it, I do not recollect which. This last expression struck my attention forcibly, and for the first time suggested to me the thought that Dr. Franklin had meant it as a confidential deposit in my hands, and that I had done wrong in parting from it” (ibid.,
100). See Jennifer Kennedy’s account of the episode in “Parricide of Memory: Thomas Jefferson’s Memoir and the French Revolution,” American Literature 72 (September 2000): 553–73. The editors of the Yale Papers call Franklin’s 1775 narrative “one of the most vivid that he ever wrote” and conclude that Franklin intended it to be part of his autobiography. See P, 21.541.


Chapter 1: Great Works and Little Anecdotes

1. For the detailed and affectionate letter of September 6, 1758, that Franklin wrote to Deborah (“My Dear Child”) describing this genealogical trip, see P, 8.133–46.


3. The Interpreter’s House is Christian’s first stop after Good Will admits him through the Wicket-gate and his journey begins. After lighting a candle that signals his role as a source of illumination, the Interpreter schools Christian on how to read the similitudes on which Bunyan bases his narrative. Sixty years ago Charles Sanford called Franklin’s memoir a secularized version of The Pilgrim’s Progress, but he made very little effort to explore this broad, thematic judgment. See American Quarterly 6 (Winter 1954): 297–310. More recently William Spengeman treats the memoir as an allegorical successor to Bunyan, with “the rule of human Reason” as its object. See The Forms of Autobiography: Episodes in the History of a Literary Genre (New Haven: Yale UP, 1980), pp. 53–60. Myra Jehlen, in Readings at the Edge of Literature (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2002), suggests that the memoir strives to tie Bunyan’s trope of the Pilgrim’s Progress to Poor Richard’s “Way to Wealth,” making “the world safe for a fertile selfishness and duplicity,” as Jehlen puts it (31). None of these approaches seems to me to account for the obvious pleasure Franklin took in Bunyan’s work—a riddle that the
balance of this chapter hopes to address. R. Jackson Wilson is more perceptive concerning Franklin’s invocation of literary models, including Bunyan, though he focuses most closely on the intriguing links between Franklin’s moral principles and Paul’s letter to the Philippians, which Franklin cites in the 1784 fragment of the memoir. See *Figures of Speech: American Writers and the Literary Marketplace from Benjamin Franklin to Emily Dickinson* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1989), pp. 33–40.


5. Edwin Wolfe expressed doubts about the attribution of the pamphlet collection to Franklin’s uncle, based on his comparison of marginalia from a few of the recovered pamphlet volumes to some commonplace books “known to have been kept by Uncle Benjamin.” But Franklin was convinced, by “the handwriting and various other circumstances” connected with the collection, that the volumes were assembled by his uncle (P, 18.176). I am inclined to accept Franklin’s opinion, but see Wolfe’s comment in “The Reconstruction of Benjamin Franklin’s Library: An Unorthodox Jigsaw Puzzle,” *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 56 (1962): 1–26.


7. Stanley Fish stresses the intimate links between “reading and wayfaring” in Bunyan’s book but neglects to point out that the frontispiece to *The Pilgrim’s Progress* is itself a visual statement of this relationship, extending it to authors as well. Franklin invites us to consider the implications of this image when he recalls with such fondness the book’s famous “cuts.” See *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1972), pp. 224–64. Fish, along with Wolfgang Iser in *The Implied Reader* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1974), is among the most useful students of Bunyan’s figurative methods. Together Fish and Iser suggest models for understanding Franklin’s adaptation of similitudes and parallels to his own story.

8. The memoir keeps “accounts” in several senses of the term, but beginning with Joseph Dennie’s fierce attack, in an 1802 edition of his *Portfolio* magazine, on the “pittiful system of [spiritual] economics” that he believed Franklin represented, many critics have insisted on applying the ancient bookkeeping trope literally in treating the memoir. D. H. Lawrence is only the most famous of these hostile readers. For a recent instance, see Rekha Rosha, “Accounting Capital, Race, and Benjamin Franklin’s ‘Pecuniary Habits’ of Mind in the Autobiography,” in *Culture, Capital, and Representation*, ed. Robert J. Balfour (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 35–48. Grantland Rice quotes Joseph Dennie’s attack in *The Transformation of Authorship in America*, p. 67.

9. Both of these public examinations continue to be popular dramatic vignettes with biographers, but the 1766 interview before Parliament was also famous in Frank-

10. The Yale editors document Franklin's misattribution without comment, but this extended performance of the modest reader as reluctant editor is surely presented as a subtle piece of theater. Franklin appears to have confused the Earl of Roscommon's *Essay on Translated Verse* (1684) with the work of Pope, but within a few lines of the passage that Franklin transcribes, Roscommon offers a couplet on human self-entrapment that sheds an interesting light on Franklin's purposes: "But what a thoughtless Animal is Man,/ How very Active in his own Trepan!"

11. This scene of reading has attracted the attention of Franklin's critics, many of whom see it as an example of the furtive influence of print in Franklin's narrative or of the paternalistic power of "text" in his story. See, for instance, Jennifer Kennedy's comments on the joint stool—Bible combination as a "machine . . . for deception" in "Death Effects: Revisiting the Conceit of Franklin's Memoir," *Early American Literature* 36 (2001): 211–12. Read as an emblem, however, the scene is a much more intriguing mental drama.

12. For an account of the history of the Breughel engraving and the proverb it illustrates, see Wolfgang Mieder, *Proverbs: A Handbook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2004), pp. 34–43. Breughel's image is part of the family of emblems depicting the integration of parts into wholes to which the segmented serpent also belongs. The frontispiece to Hobbes's *Leviathan* is perhaps the most famous of these: an image of the king as a crowned head set on a torso composed of the aggregate heads of his subjects. The Library Company of Philadelphia owned Hobbes's book, probably the same "very scarce" edition that Franklin had advertised for sale from his printshop ten years before using the segmented serpent to dramatize the need for union at the Albany Conference. See *A Catalogue of Choice and Valuable Books* (Philadelphia: B. Franklin, 1744).

13. Franklin's "Notes of my Life" records his "return to eating Flesh" in its proper chronological place during his 1723 voyage from Boston to New York (A, 268). His decision to move the story keeps the fragmented nature of the narrative in the forefront of the reader's mind, as well as extending the implications of the Breughel emblem to portions of his life in Philadelphia. R. Jackson Wilson stresses this connection too, calling the episode a "parable" of eighteenth-century hierarchical social relations that signals Franklin's interest in becoming one of the "terminal predators" in the eating chain. See *Figures of Speech*, p. 48. John Lynen's metaphor of the "snapshot" scene strikes me as more applicable to this instance of Franklin's emblematic imagination. See *The Design of the Present: Essays on Time and Form in American Literature* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1969), p. 146. This particular snapshot is aimed less at social relations than at the psychological imbalance between principle and inclination that Franklin places on a figurative scale as he retells this story.

14. The curious absence of Deborah Read's father from this portion of Franklin's
book leads Leo LeMay to speculate that Franklin must have proposed marriage to Deborah at some point after John Read’s death on September 2, 1724. But Franklin’s decision not to mention this fact, at any point in the memoir, confers an unusual measure of authority on Deborah’s mother, making her one of a series of influential women who help shape the first part of his story. See The Life of Benjamin Franklin, vol. 1: Journalist, 1706–1730, p. 257.

15. Franklin takes some pains, in these portions of his book, to establish a sense of dependency that many readers confuse with religious indifference. Revelation “as such” exerts no claim on his convictions, but revelation as a storehouse of psychological and moral truth does. The second part of the memoir makes clear that in Franklin’s view this storehouse is not entirely the product of human accumulation. Many readers, though, see Franklin’s religious life in sharply different terms. “The piety and the contrition of the early pages of the Autobiography are a rhetorical ruse,” Mitchell Breitwieser bluntly declares in Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin: The Price of Representative Personality (New York: Cambridge UP, 1984), p. 239; Myra Jehlen largely agrees in Readings at the Edge of Literature (29). Nancy Glazener recently concluded that religious feeling was no more than a shadowy residue in Franklin’s mind, replaced by a focus on the socially useful effects of mutual self-interest. See “Benjamin Franklin and the Limits of Secular Civil Society,” American Literature 80 (June 2008): 223–25.

16. As the paragraphs that follow try to make clear, the memoir’s vivid portrait of Josiah Franklin is one of the finest features of the 1771 fragment, concise and yet sufficiently rich in suggestive detail to convey the complexity and depth of this influential relationship. Jennifer Kennedy, however, is representative of many readers who detect a latent hostility in these episodes: “Franklin’s sketch of Josiah Franklin does not bring him back to life, as his own autobiography does, but rather seals his grave.” See “Death Effects: Revisiting the Conceit of Franklin’s Memoir,” Early American Literature 36 (2001): 218–19. One could just as easily argue that Franklin’s narrative exposes the emotional texture of the epitaph that he wrote for his parents, filling in the intimate particulars that lie behind its conventional lessons and bringing the epitaph itself to life. That may be why Franklin breaks into the narrative immediately after transcribing the epitaph: to dramatize the power of memory over the impersonal claims of method. For a more favorable response to the portrait of Josiah, see Herbert Leibowitz, Fabricating Lives: Explorations in American Autobiography (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1989), pp. 37–38.

Chapter 2: Imposing Forms

1. The March 22, 1775, letter has remained in the Franklin papers, rather than joining the other parts of the memoir, despite the clear intentions expressed in “Notes of my Life” and in the deathbed exchanges with Thomas Jefferson that strongly suggest Franklin meant to include some form of the letter in his narrative. Its absence has led Christopher Looby, for instance, to conclude that Franklin sought to avoid writing about the Revolution altogether in the memoir. See Voicing America: Language, Literary Form and the Origins of the United States (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996), pp. 99–144. David Waldstreicher presents Franklin’s 1775 departure from England as the culminating escape of a crafty “runaway,” but even a cursory look at the story the March 1775 letter tells would have led him to dramatically alter that characterization.

2. Jonathan Shipley’s aphorism on admirable works and wretched tools suggests a model of the mixed nature of writing as well as a model of character. By contrast with the finished product that Benjamin Vaughan or Abel James had hoped to see, Franklin’s surviving memoir-in-manuscript is a wretched compromise—as any book inevitably is—but, as such, the narrative blends principle with contingency, in its mixed form, very much as Franklin does in the ethical systems that he devises for himself. In this sense the memoir is more carefully shaped than it has seemed to be to many readers, though not in the “bifocal” fashion that R. Jackson Wilson suggests in Figures of Speech: American Writers and the Literary Marketplace from Benjamin Franklin to Emily Dickinson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1989), where he divides the book into halves that describe a trajectory from “being good” to “doing good,” from “private” to “public” stories. Divisions are never that pure in Franklin’s mind.


5. As the codfish-eating episode among others indicates, Franklin is interested in states of balance, and in the constant adjustments that a restless equilibrium requires, not in the notion of static cancellation—of “books” that are “closed”—that many readers adapt from a reductive model of the ledger and apply to Franklin’s ethical system.


7. See the note to this passage in A, 82.

8. Stanley Fish’s observations in Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature (Berkeley: U of California P, 1972), pp. 238–50, on the significance of what Christian clearly sees and what he only “thinks” he sees, as he begins his pilgrimage, suggest that Franklin may have derived this sly stress on what one “thinks” one likes or believes from The Pilgrim’s Progress. The speckled ax story is frequently slighted by inattentive readers who take it to be a comparatively grim exhortation to grind relentlessly away at ineradicable faults. See, for instance, Wilson, Figures of Speech, p. 40, or Gordon Wood, The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin (New York: Penguin, 2004), p. 206.

9. For the most complete and perceptive account of Franklin’s interest in an extended parallel between his memoir and the Letter to the Philippians, see Wilson, Figures of Speech, pp. 37–40.
10. The motto for Sincerity is an especially vivid instance of the manner in which Franklin’s explanatory precepts repeatedly dramatize the constant and bewildering interchange between any given virtue and its opposite, not the silencing of economically disadvantageous traits that Mitchell Breitwieser detects in his admittedly “quick survey” of these complicated ethical statements. See Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin: The Price of Representative Personality (New York: Cambridge UP, 1984), pp. 282–85.

11. This motto contains the seeds of Robert Middlekauf’s theme in Benjamin Franklin and His Enemies (Berkeley: U of California P, 1996).

12. Franklin thought highly enough of this prayer to include it in his daily regimen, yet even readers who do attend to it frequently slight its language. Nancy Glazener, for instance, finds in it only “the leftovers of religious feeling,” the outcome of what she sees as “the deforming effects of interest-thinking” on Franklin’s consciousness. See “Benjamin Franklin and the Limits of Secular Civil Society,” American Literature 80 (June 2008): 225.


14. Some readers see the precepts for Chastity and Humility, in particular, as representative of Franklin’s pervasive insincerity. “Franklin’s humility has no more to do with Christian humility than his purity has to do with Christian purity,” Mitchell Breitwieser declares in Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin: The Price of Representative Personality, p. 284. Myra Jehlen is much less strident but no less dismissive when she suggests that Franklin meant “Imitate Jesus and Socrates” as a joke. See Readings at the Edge of Literature (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2002), p. 8.

CHAPTER 3: The Scramble of Life

attention to Franklin's own interest in the figures of unity and disunity, of joining and breaking apart, that pervade the memoir. These in turn suggest his determination to sustain the debate itself rather than settle its outcome. The Junto is not the first of these emblematic details, but it is among the most significant. In the final chapter of *The Implied Reader* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1974), Wolfgang Iser stresses “the building and the breaking of illusions” that mark the reader's “recreative” progress through any extensive narrative. Interruptions and discontinuity, Iser suggests, lend dynamism to the page. Franklin clearly exploits this dynamism wherever he can in the course of the memoir.

2. David Waldstreicher sees this incident as spurious, suggesting that Franklin carried with him his brother's discharge when he left Boston, but with or without such a document as a form of insurance, Franklin is still implicated in a pattern of broken “engagements” throughout this portion of his story. See Runaway America: Benjamin Franklin, Slavery, and the American Revolution (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), p. 57.

3. At such moments, John Lynen suggests, Franklin is inviting the reader to appreciate the “beautifully managed gradations” by which the geopolitical crisis of the 1770s emerges from the narrative. See *The Design of the Present*, p. 146.

4. The anxieties that Vaughan and James express emerge from, rather than disclose, the pattern of shattered obligations that the first part of the memoir has systematically introduced, drastically expanding the scale of failure in preparation for the 1731 library memorandum that Franklin introduces into the book at the beginning of the 1788 section of his story. Vaughan, in other words, does not “give Franklin away,” as Eric Wertheimer suggests; Franklin fits Vaughan carefully into his segmented vision. See Underwriting: The Poetics of Insurance in America: 1722–1872 (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2006), p. 35.


6. The term considerable and Vaughan's emphasis on happiness, virtue, and greatness as the ideal outcomes a diligent reader might hope to attain by emulating Franklin are all pointedly different from mere “prosperity” or material comfort. Abel James does indeed stress the comparatively narrow goals of frugality and industry that he associates with Franklin's example. Vaughan's letter dramatically expands the scope of Franklin's didactic goals in a fashion that Franklin clearly intends to endorse by inserting the letter at this juncture of the narrative.

7. Christopher Looby's determination, in Voicing America, to present Franklin as being anxious to exclude the Revolution from his book requires Looby to conclude that the memo inserting the Vaughan and James letters into the memoir, along with “Notes of my Life,” was never meant to be printed (127). Franklin's language and the shape of the manuscript, however, make clear that he wants to underscore this momentous interruption in every way possible, not paper it over. See J. A. Leo Lemay and P. M. Zall, eds., *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin: A Genetic Text* (Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1981), pp. 72–73, which confirms that Franklin entered the memo in the right-hand column of his draft and revised its wording, in a clear anticipation of its appearance in print with the rest of the book.

8. The Junto too is another instance of the scales that Franklin repeatedly invites his reader to envision as a model of the equilibria that mark ethical and social experi-
ence. Its meetings were designed to serve as instructive performances in themselves, as well as preliminary stages of social engineering or networking.


10. These scattered pieces of paper join the scattered “pie” of Franklin’s Quaker history, the “scattered counsels” of Poor Richard that form “The Way to Wealth,” or the scattered membership of the “united Party for Virtue,” a “regular Body” dispersed over all nations, as a few of the memoir’s many variations on the join-or-die motif.

11. “The Way to Wealth” is actually a collaboration between two avid collectors of scattered counsels, not one. Poor Richard concludes his account of Father Abraham’s failure by explaining that “not a tenth Part of the Wisdom” that the old man had uttered was his own, “but rather the Gleanings I had made of the Sense of all Ages and Nations.” See the preface to Poor Richard Improved, 1758, in Benjamin Franklin: Writings (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1987), p. 1302.

12. This phrase from the 1731 library memorandum reverberates through the third section of the memoir as a means of emphasizing Franklin’s commitment not to “interest-thinking” (as Nancy Glazener terms it) but to anti-interest or “true interest” thinking, the phrase that Franklin’s daily prayer to Powerful Goodness employs. The “one great error in communication” that the memoir commits, David Levin observed almost fifty years ago, is Franklin’s failure to anticipate how easily readers might misunderstand his distinction between mere self-interest and the immaterial rewards of virtue that he associated with happiness. See “The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin: The Puritan Experimenter in Life and Art,” Yale Review 53 (1964): 258–75.

13. Alan Houston offers the most detailed and illuminating account of the relationship between Plain Truth and the circumstances that the pamphlet both addressed and shaped. See Benjamin Franklin and the Politics of Improvement (New Haven: Yale UP, 2008), pp. 60–105.


15. Readers who take the trouble to reconstruct the entire March 22, 1775, letter as Franklin intended it to be read by placing the inserts where he indicated they should go will find the analogy to the segmented serpent design almost unavoidable. The text and its pieces are all contained in volume 21 of the Yale Papers, with the body of the letter itself on pp. 540–99, and its inserts scattered throughout the preceding pages. The Library of Congress microfilm of the bound manuscript letter, in its collection of Franklin’s papers, includes all the fragments in their places.

Chapter 4: Litera Scripta Manet

2. The Yale editors print the draft of annotations that Franklin prepared for Pitt's act. See P. 21.459–62. The wording of the annotations suggests that Franklin may have intended to call Pitt's attention to the 1754 Albany Plan of Union or at least take a copy of the plan itself to the meeting in which Pitt had intended to ask for Franklin's comments.

3. My comments throughout this chapter on Franklin's complex verbal world draw repeatedly but indirectly on Walter Ong's study, *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (1967; rpt., Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1981). In particular, Ong's chapter on “The Word and the Quest for Peace” (192–286) describes the gradual displacement of Late Latin oral polemic by the far less confrontational print culture of modernity—a transition that Franklin's memoir depicts in some detail, from his subordination of Latin to the study of modern foreign languages through his own lifelong struggle to control his combative oral gifts. The mix of written and spoken media, in Franklin's story, is almost as central to his self-portrait in the memoir as the more familiar prominence of print alone, beginning with his boyhood conflicts with John Collins through his astute observations on the verbal and written performances of George Whitefield.

4. By transcribing his parent's epitaph in the manuscript's opening pages and concluding with a brief Clerk's Chamber conversation in London, Franklin invites the reader to trace the progress of the memoir across the complete spectrum of fixed and ephemeral forms that words are capable of taking.

5. This genealogical oddity is the starting point for R. Jackson Wilson's account of what he sees as Franklin's systematic attack on the “entrenched and ominous system of social predation” in the memoir. See *Figures of Speech: American Writers and the Literary Marketplace from Benjamin Franklin to Emily Dickinson* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1989), pp. 43–44. But this form of “fixity” too is deceiving, as Franklin presents it. The privileged status of the eldest child is a ludicrously ineffective restraint on the migratory nature of individual gifts and individual character.

6. Franklin's famous account of this self-tutorial in how to write strikes many readers as an additional instance of his manipulative nature, of a desire (as Christopher Looby puts it) to become “an instrument of a language system” rather than a distinct voice in his own right. See *Voicing America: Language, Literary Form and the Origins of the United States* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996), p. 117. The memoir, though, clearly stresses Franklin's ingenious efforts to teach himself how to play the “instrument” as well or better than Addison does, not how to become one.

7. Franklin invariably describes print as if it were continuous with, not distinct from, the social intimacy of speech. His interest in writing the Dogood letters springs from a desire to be part of his brother's convivial circle of printing house wits—an oral, not a textual, community. The letters themselves give “rubs” to James's critics in the Massachusetts Assembly, much as if Franklin relished the idea of manhandling them. In his London pamphlet he makes "Remarks" on Wollaston's book—a work of theology that he goes “into” very much as he does Thomas Tryon's printed account of vegetarianism or Cocker's arithmetic. Reading and writing are kinetic, physical activities as Franklin presents them in the memoir, a posture quite different from the sharp division between private writing and public print that Larzer Ziff presents in *Writing in the New Nation: Prose, Print, and Politics in the Early United States* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1991), pp. 83–106. By contrast, Michael Warner recognizes this tactile
relation to language in Franklin but sees it as a strictly utilitarian instinct: “[Franklin] does not just confront or see the texts; he handles them. And he handles them not for pleasure or for violence but in a strictly instrumental way” (79). The first part of this observation makes perfect sense; the second is to my mind inconsistent with the passion Franklin clearly brings to his reading and writing. See *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1990).

8. This reaction to the London pamphlet is especially illuminating, since it captures Franklin’s recognition that print is not entirely subject to any measure of authorial control. In many ways, it is as laden with unpredictable potential as speech.

9. The figurative uses to which Franklin puts paper currency, in these passages, are far more varied and more playful than the grim account that Mitchell Breitwieser offers of what he calls the “spark and the dollar,” electricity and money, in the memoir: “the Franklinian self,” Breitwieser writes, “like the electrician and the economist, views the things and persons of its world as abstract quanta, as vessels that contain or lack amounts of the substance that the self epitomizes perfectly.” See Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin: *The Price of Representative Personality* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1984), pp. 215–26.

10. The extraordinary lengths to which Franklin goes, in the memoir, to depict the verbal nexus of which print is only one part make a disproportionate stress on print alone seem especially inattentive to the book’s performance. See, for instance, Michael Warner’s conclusion that Franklin sought, throughout his career, to submerge his own voice in the “fictive speaking voice” of the “pseudonymous text” (*Letters of the Republic*, p. 96).

11. This interdependence of speech and print, as the memoir depicts it, is a far more volatile equilibrium than Larzer Ziff suggests, when he contends that Franklin divided the two expressive media into sharply divided spheres: speech for private relations and print for public business. See *Writing in the New Nation*, pp. 101–2.

12. “When will it suit you to have another interview,” Whitefield wrote Franklin on January 21, 1768, while the two of them were pursuing their very different paths in England: “The College affair lies dormant.” He went on to congratulate Franklin on the recent marriage of his daughter and to tease him with the expectation that, at their age, they could expect to “goe out” of the world at any moment and meet again at the apocalypse “to attend on the funeral of Time” together (P, 15.28–29). Religious differences do not seem to have affected the durability and the warmth of their friendship.


14. This famous scene in Franklin’s book is a good example of the subtle roles that he allows money to play as an emblem of fine distinctions in character.

15. Grantland Rice touches on this passage concerning Whitefield’s written and oral legacies as an indication of how the “objectification of the self in writing” could threaten individual autonomy. See *The Transformation of Authorship in America* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1997), pp. 66–67. But the memoir’s discussion of Whitefield’s example makes plain that neither speech nor print is entirely “objectified” or entirely autonomous; in different ways, each medium is carefully calibrated to the needs of the
speaker as well the audience, while each remains vulnerable to that audience’s own carefully (or impulsively) calibrated responses.

Chapter 5: Some Uses of Cunning

1. In disclosing Franklin’s own “cunning” this passage works both ways at least twice over by enticing the memoir’s unwary reader to underestimate the productive interplay between generosity and self-interest that Franklin explores throughout this portion of his book. Cynthia Jordan, for instance, finds only verbal artifice and political expediency in the anecdotes Franklin includes in the 1788 fragment of the memoir—a stark conclusion that neglects the dramatic richness of these political vignettes. See Second Stories: The Politics of Language, Form, and Gender in Early American Fictions (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1989), pp. 56–57. Edward White is clearly thinking of the hospital bill episode when he remarks on Franklin’s “cunning antipathy to agrarian democracy” in the memoir’s third part, but I find no indications of antipathy in this or any other anecdote that Franklin includes in this section of the book. See “Urban Bifocals: The Federalist Sociology of Benjamin Franklin’s Autobiography,” ALH 11 (Spring 1999): 23. For an account of the hospital bill episode that stresses its relation to Franklin’s personal candor rather than his “cunning,” see Jennifer J. Baker, Securing the Commonwealth: Debt, Speculation, and Writing in the Making of Early America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2005), pp. 90–91.


3. Franklin’s description of this incident is another interesting application of the idea of working both ways: with Governor Thomas’s help, he is assisting in the creation of useful excuses.

4. The episodes in the memoir that toy with the emblematic or figurative uses of “fire” suggest Franklin’s interest in extending the struggle to govern his private passions and appetites to the government of public “bodies.” See Betsy Erkkila’s account of the underlying continuity between the second and third parts of the memoir in “Franklin and the Revolutionary Body,” ELH 67 (Fall 2000): 730–41.


6. In The Design of the Present: Essays on Time and Form in American Literature (New Haven: Yale UP, 1969), John Lynen suggests that Franklin binds the memoir together in a common “atmosphere of relevance” that points toward Franklin’s own emergence as a revolutionary leader. That goal may be part of the book’s aim, but the Robert Hunter Morris episodes in particular suggest that Franklin is directing his words at the evolving consciousness of his contemporaries, not at his own ideological evolution.

7. See chapter 2 for a gloss on this analogy between the dusty room that cannot be cleaned and the heart’s intractable nature (PP, 30). In recasting the emblematic scene, Franklin has added dramatic scope to its elements by preserving the street sweeper’s speech, conferring on her a savvy intelligence that hints at the sense of latent force lying behind her performance, waiting to be tapped.

8. A willingness to acknowledge, and even to embrace, the hazardous implications
of radical democratic reform marked Franklin as a uniquely dangerous figure with his more conservative contemporaries. See Betsy Erkkila’s stress on this aspect of his eighteenth-century reputation in “Franklin and the Revolutionary Body,” p. 736.

9. Myra Jehlen is representative of many readers who see the precept for Humility as Machiavellian: a pragmatic fusion of humility and vanity, with economic ends in mind. But since martyrdom rather than profit or comfort is among the features shared by Jesus and Socrates, Franklin’s motives in invoking their joint example seem much less worldly. See Readings at the Edge of Literature (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2002), pp. 24–31.

10. See J. A. Leo Lemay and P. M. Zall, eds., The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin: A Genetic Text (Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1981), p. 121, for Franklin’s editorial polishing of the Old Counselor’s speech at Carlisle. Betsy Erkkila sees this passage, too, as another signal on Franklin’s part of his alertness to Benjamin Vaughan’s post- Revolutionary anxieties, but the cultural narrative that the episode brings into play is much richer than these ideological uses require.

11. Jennifer Baker points to the Braddock wagon advertisement as another instance of the personal basis of credit that Franklin depicts in the third part of the memoir (Securing the Commonwealth, p. 92). See A, 228, for an account of Shirley’s intervention in Franklin’s financial plight.

12. This list was sufficiently important, in Franklin’s eyes, that he transcribed it directly and without correction into the memoir. By contrast, early editors had to track down the broadside text of the wagon advertisement that Franklin prepared, since the “Quire Book of Letters,” in which, he said, it could be found, had seemingly been lost. An anonymous British pamphlet published in 1755, purportedly reprinting letters from one of Braddock’s officers, complained bitterly and at great length about the food the army encountered in America. The Pennsylvania delegation that arrived at the army’s camp—“pure plump men, on brave fat horses”—were (this author claimed) “the first plump creatures I had seen in this country.” It is possible that Franklin remembered this caustic account of colonial life when he itemized the luxurious contents of the junior officers’ parcels. See The Expedition of Major General Braddock to Virginia; with The Two Regiments of Hacket and Dunbar (London: H. Carpenter, 1755).

13. This subtle identification with the Indian point of view begins with Franklin’s account of the Carlisle treaty, where the Old Counselors illustrate the same principle that lies behind Franklin’s boyhood experience with eating cod: how convenient a thing it is to be a reasonable creature whenever we are in search of excuses. The identification extends through the building of the fort at Gnadenhütten, when the memoir tacitly links the ingenuity of the Indian scouts with the independent skill and efficiency of Franklin’s militia.

14. The report of Braddock’s death has very little to do with the large political framework that shapes much of Franklin’s account of the Duquesne expedition. It does, however, closely mimic the intimate experience of the eighteenth psalm writing contest in the memoir’s 1771 fragment, where Franklin’s friend Osborne anticipates Braddock’s dying words: “But who would have imagin’d, says he, that Franklin had been capable of such a Performance” (A, 91). In attending so carefully to Braddock’s reticence and to his bewilderment, Franklin confers an emotional complexity on this moment characteristic of many of his narrative’s subtle dramatic scenes.
CONCLUSION: Segmentated Serpent

1. The Yale editors note various places in the 1788 fragment where Franklin’s memory seems to have failed him in reconstructing an accurate sequence of events (A, 193, 209, 250), but at least some of these lapses are surely intentional. The 1753 Carlisle treaty episode, for instance, is undated in the memoir, where Franklin includes it just before discussing the 1751 hospital bill instead of in the months immediately preceding the 1754 Albany Congress, where it properly belongs. This displacement allows the memoir to present Franklin’s brief stint as a justice of the peace, the Carlisle negotiation, and the founding of a hospital as tightly linked experiences in addressing pathologies of the physical and communal “body.”


3. The most ambitious of these federal experiments, the 1643 Articles of Confederation that formed the United Colonies of New England, lasted until 1690. Franklin could easily have learned its history from his father or from Cotton Mather’s Magnalia Christi Americana.

4. For the dating and the compositional sequence of these last passages that Franklin wrote, see the introduction to The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin: A Genetic Text (Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1981), p. xxiii, where Lemay and Zall place Franklin’s writing about his scientific career between December 1788 and May 1789. After May 1789 he stopped adding to the manuscript and drafted only the few paragraphs of the final fragment in the last five months of his life.
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