

1997

# Benjamin Franklin and His Critics: John Adams, Mark Twain, and David Herbert Lawrence

Marzuki Jamil Baki Bin Haji Mohamed Johar

*Eastern Illinois University*

This research is a product of the graduate program in [English](#) at Eastern Illinois University. [Find out more](#) about the program.

---

## Recommended Citation

Johar, Marzuki Jamil Baki Bin Haji Mohamed, "Benjamin Franklin and His Critics: John Adams, Mark Twain, and David Herbert Lawrence" (1997). *Masters Theses*. 1832.  
<https://thekeep.eiu.edu/theses/1832>

This is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Theses & Publications at The Keep. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses by an authorized administrator of The Keep. For more information, please contact [tabruns@eiu.edu](mailto:tabruns@eiu.edu).

THESIS REPRODUCTION CERTIFICATE

TO: Graduate Degree Candidates (who have written formal theses)

SUBJECT: Permission to Reproduce Theses

The University Library is receiving a number of requests from other institutions asking permission to reproduce dissertations for inclusion in their library holdings. Although no copyright laws are involved, we feel that professional courtesy demands that permission be obtained from the author before we allow theses to be copied.

PLEASE SIGN ONE OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS:

Booth Library of Eastern Illinois University has my permission to lend my thesis to a reputable college or university for the purpose of copying it for inclusion in that institution's library or research holdings.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Author

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I respectfully request Booth Library of Eastern Illinois University not allow my thesis to be reproduced because:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Author

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN AND HIS CRITICS : JOHN ADAMS,

MARK TWAIN, AND DAVID HERBERT LAWRENCE

(TITLE)

BY

MARZUKI @ JAMIL BAKI BIN HAJI MOHAMED JOHAR

**THESIS**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS in ENGLISH LITERATURE

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY  
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

**1997**

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING  
THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE CITED ABOVE

\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE

\_\_\_\_\_  
ADVISER

\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE

\_\_\_\_\_  
DEPARTMENT HEAD

## Abstract

Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) provided the paradigm for special qualities in each of his multiple careers which have since been regarded as characteristically American. Franklin's Autobiography is the epitome of Franklin's spirit. The first edition of the Autobiography appeared in French in 1791 and the first edition in English, published in 1793, was actually an anonymous retranslation of the French edition. Franklin's grandson, William Temple Franklin prepared Parts One, Two, and Three in 1818. In John Bigelow's 1868 edition, all four parts appear for the first time in English. In the twentieth century, there have been three major editions, each more complete, more accurate, and fully annotated than the previous one. They were by Max Farrand (1949), Leonard Labaree in 1964; J.A. Leo Lemay and Paul M. Zall's text published in 1981.

In Franklin's Autobiography, we see him as a typical, though great, example of eighteenth century Enlightenment, a Yankee Puritan who could agree with Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), a French Swiss-born philosopher and writer and Francois Marie Arouet Voltaire (1694-1778), a French writer, and who could use the language of Daniel Defoe (1660-1731), an English journalist and novelist and Joseph Addison (1672-1719), an English essayist and poet, with a genial homely resonance. His style, perfectly adapted to the ends to which he devoted it, is lucid, precise, and piquant, revealing both his mental and moral temper. His mind was pragmatic, and though his greatest enthusiasm was reserved for science, he had a mellow temperance for all types of thought. With candor, gumption, and savvy, he relished the various turns in his life and took them easily, understanding and sharing the Gallic spirit while remaining pungently American.

Although Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography has long been regarded one of the chef d'oeuvre of American autobiography, the memoirs has always attracted negative criticism, especially from other American and British writers. Well into the twentieth century, Franklin's account continues to attract the attention of writers who find various faults and shortcomings in both Franklin and his writing.

Three of the most substantial responses written about Franklin and the Autobiography, those of Franklin's contemporary, John Adams, whose letters about Franklin are numerous; Mark Twain's essay "The Late Benjamin Franklin" (1870); and D.H. Lawrence's essay "Benjamin Franklin" in Classic Studies in American Literature (1924) represent the three most thoughtful and negative treatments of Franklin and his writing.

John Adams, who worked with Franklin many times between 1770 and 1790, felt very strong distrust for Franklin. As Robert Middlekauff explains in Benjamin Franklin and His Enemies, Adams "professed to feel only contempt for Franklin" (200). In Mark Twain's essay, Twain blames the philosophical lessons in Franklin's Autobiography for his own troubled childhood, since as a boy he felt that Franklin's lessons for youth ruined "boys who might otherwise be happy" (Middlekauff, xvi). D.H. Lawrence refers to Franklin as "Old Daddy Franklin" and the "First Dummy American," and describes Franklin as "a threat to the imagination and the spirit" (xviii).

The criticisms of Adams, Twain, and Lawrence, instead of undermining from the Autobiography or diminishing its reputation, have helped contemporary scholars, among them especially Franklin scholars such as Alfred Owen Aldridge, Joseph Alberic, Leo Lemay, Paul M. Zall, Carl Van Doren, Francis Jennings, and Robert Middlekauff, to study and understand Franklin's Autobiography.

**Dedication**

**HAJI MOHAMED JOHAR BIN BACHEK**

**(May 8, 1939 - April 2, 1997)**

**MARCELLA SHARINA MARZUKI**

**(December 29, 1996 - December 30, 1996)**

MERE WORDS AND EMOTION ARE INSUFFICIENT TO DESCRIBE THE  
SCATHING LACERATION AND INDELIBLE IMPRINT FELT AT A CRUCIAL  
CROSSROAD IN LIFE AND ONE HOPES FERVENTLY THEIR SOULS ARE  
BLESSED. MAY OUR PATHS CROSS AGAIN IN THE PROMISED HAVEN.

## Acknowledgments

The completion of this thesis supplicates mixed emotion from me. Without the great support and insistence from my beloved late father, I would not have even dared dream of exorcising the fear of stepping where angels dare not tread: completing my second masters in English. He was there from the beginning, but without warning was not present at the end. I shudder to think what the future holds without his sagacious words of wisdom. Both these major irreplaceable privations: my wonderful “AYAH” and daughter almost left me devastated and like a ship without the admiral.

Thank God, the Cherisher did not forsake me in times of need by gathering all the sincere people to guide me through this bleakest moment of my life. Dr. Parley Ann Boswell, my thesis director is like a Godsend angel guiding me through this arduous task of completing my thesis. For all her unlimited sacrifices and sincere devotion for the quest of knowledge, I have no known words to show my appreciation except to pray that her life is blessed forever.

I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to my two readers, Dr. Roger Whitlow and Dr. Stephen Swords. I thank my family back home, especially my heart-wrenching mother, Hajjah Maznah Ghulam Dastagir, who despite her lost seems to exude every ounce of strength based on her faith and conviction to guide all her loved ones.

I am grateful to my three beautiful and sometimes frivolous children, Marissa Serene, Marina Shahnaz, and Muzaffar Shamil, whose laughter and naivete partially restored my destination. Finally, I thank my sincere and beautiful wife, Badariah Safiah. This work would not have been satisfactorily completed without her constant patience and guidance.

To all these people who directly or indirectly spurred me on, I pray sincerely to the Cherisher for His blessings for them.

## Table of Contents

Contents	Page
ABSTRACT .....	i
DEDICATION .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	v
EPIGRAM .....	1
 I: INTRODUCTION .....	 2
II: FRANKLIN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY .....	4
III: FRANKLIN AND HIS CRITICS .....	16
IV: RECENT CRITICAL RESPONSES .....	31
V: CONCLUSION .....	55
VI: APPENDIX .....	59
VII: WORKS CITED .....	61

## **Epigram**

**To be Great is to be Misunderstood.**

-Ralph Waldo EMERSON (1803-1882)

“Self-reliance,” **ESSAYS: FIRST SERIES** (1941)

**To vilify a great man is the readiest way in which a little man can himself attain greatness.**

-Edgar Allan POE (1809-1849)

**Marginalia** (1844-49), 14.

**No man was ever great by imitation.**

-Dr. Samuel JOHNSON (1709-1784)

**Rasselas** (1759), 10.

**Men are like the stars: some generate their own light while others reflect the brilliance they receive.**

-Jose MARTI

**Granos** (1942)

## I. Introduction

Although Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography (1790) has long been considered one of the masterpieces of American autobiography, the book has always attracted negative criticism, especially from other American and British writers. Some of the most famous reactions to Franklin have been pointed toward his image as an American diplomat; Samuel Johnson referred to him as "a barbarian" in his diatribe against American independence, Taxation No Tyranny (1775).

Other writers have reacted to Franklin by criticizing his Autobiography directly. Well into the twentieth century, Franklin's work continues to attract the attention of writers who find various faults and shortcomings in both Franklin and his writings. Benjamin Franklin began his Autobiography, which he personally called his Memoirs, at the age of sixty-five while vacationing in England at the home of Bishop Jonathan Shipley.

The first section, addressed to Franklin's son William, was written in 1771. The remaining three sections, written over a period of nineteen years, were not completed until the final year of Franklin's life. The account stops in 1758, before his greatest achievement as a representative of the Pennsylvania Assembly to present the colony's side of its controversy to King George. The account also stops at a time when Franklin's public service accomplishments were many.

Franklin was the Postmaster General for the colonies from 1753 to 1774, elected to the French Academy of Sciences in 1772, started a career of nearly forty years in the Pennsylvania Assembly, led a military expedition to the Lehigh Valley during the French and Indian War (1754-1763), appointment as agent for Georgia (1768), New Jersey (1769), and Massachusetts (1770), and Minister to France (1776), and not to mention his pivotal role in the drafting of the Declaration of Independence.

Mac E. Barrick says that "thus it is not a true indication of the depth of his mind or breadth of his accomplishments" (42). Nevertheless, Franklin's Autobiography remains a masterpiece of autobiography and one of America's literary monuments. This statement

however does not hold true. To many of his most famous critics, among them especially John Adams, Mark Twain, and D.H. Lawrence, his Autobiography was a monumental sham. I have chosen to explore seriously the comments of these three writers, for they represent substantial responses to Franklin's work which span three different centuries.

I will study their texts about Franklin and his Autobiography which will allow me to ask the following questions: What were their criticisms of Franklin's Autobiography? What seemed to bother them about the text: the writing or the writer? Do these three responses, all written in different centuries, share characteristics which might help us understand something more about Franklin's Autobiography itself? Finally, I will study how the responses of Adams, Twain and Lawrence contributed to twentieth-century responses to Benjamin Franklin.

## II. Franklin's Autobiography

When Franklin was forty-two, wealthy, and famous, he retired from business to devote himself to science and public service. As a self-educated man, as a statesman, and as the writer in the cause of independence from Great Britain, Franklin's work and life characterized the struggle of the American nation. He was the only American to sign the four important documents that created the republic.

The four documents were the Declaration of Independence (1776), the treaty of alliance with France (1778), the treaty of peace with England (1783), and the Constitution (1785). At the time of his death on April 17, 1790 in Philadelphia, his countrymen considered him, "more than George Washington, to be the father of his country" (Ketcham 12).

Franklin was a primary figure in the rise of American pragmatism. He helped articulate the concept of American self-reliance that blossomed into the wonders of transcendentalism and into the excessive materialism of modern American industrial society. His life and popular writings became traditional instruments of instruction used by parents to teach wayward children that public virtue and courage are keys to the kingdom of worldly success.

He came to be invoked as the patron of businessmen and bankers, of rugged individualists who wanted to believe that, as Franklin had written, "God helps those who help themselves." As popular as Franklin's Autobiography has been, he has always had his detractors. Franklin was derided as the shallow philosopher of the full and tight purse, or as the capitalist saint. His detractors took the remarks of his literary characters to Franklin's full and total thought.

They blamed him for faults they found in his ethical heirs and in the excesses of American capitalism. Critics misunderstood his subtleties and ironies for simple-minded pieties. The first section of Franklin's Autobiography was intended for Franklin's own posterity and it contains what he called: "several little family anecdotes of no importance

to others.” Franklin was already a great diplomat and statesman and an honored citizen of the world when he began the Autobiography, but as Carl Van Doren says “he assumed no posture in presenting his small beginnings as a printer and provincial politician” (136).

The first part of Benjamin Franklin’s Memoirs was written in the form of a letter (dated Twyford, 1771) to his illegitimate son, William (royal governor of New Jersey since 1763). Part I of the Autobiography explains the reason why Franklin write the book: to acquaint his son with his English ancestors; to tell him parts of his father’s life with which he was yet unacquainted; to familiarize future descendants of Franklin’s family with the means of his success, for which he thanked “Divine Providence”; and finally with characteristic objectivity and humor, to relive the past and to gratify his own vanity.

Franklin also detailed his family background from the year 1555 to the time of his parents, giving short sketches of several persons. In general, Part I of the Autobiography then proceeds to deal with Franklin’s growth from poor apprentice to master printer with his own shop; his trips to Boston and London; his marriage to Deborah read; and the start of his public projects such as the Junto and the Library Company.

Part Two of the Autobiography (dated Passy, 1784) considers mainly the causes for his success in later life – his bourgeois virtues of industry and frugality, religious principles, and the “bold and arduous project” in which he attempted, but failed, to achieve moral perfection.

Part Three of the Autobiography (at home, August 1788) continues with the application of this experiment – “The Art of Virtue” from an individual to a worldwide basis by means of a projected Society for the Free and Easy. Mainly, however, Part Three provides a record of his public projects, including his role in the disastrous Braddock expedition. This part relates to the preceding one by the implied premise that the attainment of individual virtue is inseparable from projects designed for one’s fellow man.

Part Four of the Autobiography was presumably written during the winter of 1789-1790 by evidence of his shaky handwriting. This part provides continuity by treating one large project – the dispute with the British government and its settlement through the mediations of Lord Mansfield.

Nothing can exceed the candor with which he tells of his struggles for a livelihood, unless it be the lack of modesty with which he recounts his successes. In the Autobiography Franklin is actually the hero or protagonist of one of the few universally interesting plots, that in which a person wins his way unaided.

In 1732 I first published my Almanac, under the Name of **Richard Saunders**, it was continu'd by me about 25 Years, commonly call'd **Poor Richard's Almanac**. I endeavour'd to make it both entertaining and useful, and it accordingly came to be in such Demand that I reap'd considerable Profit from it, vending annually near ten Thousand. (The Autobiography, 79).

There is something essentially dramatic in Franklin's story of his steady progress to wealth and influence; he had the golden touch that enabled him to turn every material thing to some human advantage. According to Carl Van Doren, some of the material things that received his golden touch were the Franklin stove, a printing press, a type of chair with one arm extended for a writing surface, electrical machine, electrostatic generator, and modern inventions new to America.

His golden touch also found its way in a circulating library (1731), a fire company (1736), the American Philosophical Society (1743), a college chartered as an academy, later to become the University of Pennsylvania (1749), and an insurance company and a city hospital (1751). In short, we can say that Franklin had his hands full with humanity his main concern.

The Autobiography has no romantic coloring. The family are neither intimate nor sentimental, and the comments upon style, politics, morals, and religion take no higher tone than that of good sense. His noble achievements as scientist and philanthropist are narrated as modestly as the purchase of his first silver spoon. In part, of course, this classic simplicity is due to the fact that Franklin wrote as a richly experienced man, incomparably bland, smooth-tempered, prudent, and impartial.

What gave my Book the more sudden and general celebrity, was the Success of one of its propos'd Experiments, made by Messrs. Dalibard and Delor, at Marly, for drawing Lightning from the Clouds. .... I will not swell this Narrative with an account of that capital Experiment, nor of the infinite pleasure I receiv'd in the

success of a similar one I made soon after with a kite at Philadelphia, as both are to be found in the Histories of Electricity. (The Autobiography, 133).

Franklin was, above all, a citizen of a community and his whole adult life he devoted to civic affairs. Therefore it only seemed fitting for him to leave behind a living legacy to close the chapter on his illustrious career and life. His language is the plain speech of a man who keeps his private eccentricities of thought or feeling to himself. He chose to reveal about himself only those aspects of his life which he thought would be important to future generations of readers. As Malini Schueller says Franklin's Autobiography has established "The straightforward, realistic style" that anticipated the style of many later autobiographers (98).

This leads us to question why Franklin has been criticized so often and so fervently. Why, out of thousands of men and women equally important in their time, has he been targeted for such severe criticism by other writers? Franklin himself might never have guessed that his writings would receive such attention or scrutiny. He might not even recognize his own writings when described by others. Ormond Seavey says that "even the title Autobiography, is a word that Franklin never used" and probably had not intended for this word to be used instead of a simple memoir" (68).

Scholar Robert Erwin has suggested that Franklin's successes and fame during his own lifetime may be responsible for much of the negative criticism his memoir has attracted. Erwin suggests four ways in which Franklin distinguished himself.

First, Franklin had an appealing personality, resolute, and witty. Next, he had a kind of "vision" and the uncanny ability to anticipate mainstream values and specific habits of the American society. In the third place, besides understanding and sharing American attitudes, Franklin was an astute businessman who could identify the needs for services and institutions which he thought ought to be provided as the nation developed. His last attribute was that his level of achievement was extraordinary (Erwin, 4-15). Looking at the four parts of the Autobiography specifically might help us to have a better understanding of what these memoirs really include, so that we might discover what critics found so objectionable.

Part I of Franklin's Autobiography is a unified composition distinct from the three later parts. Part I was written in 1771, before the Revolutionary War, when Colonial America's future was uncertain. What is certain was that Franklin was considering giving his support to an illegal rebellion against the British empire, which many people on both sides of the Atlantic doubted would be successful. Part I was also written when Franklin and his son William were still enjoying a very healthy relationship.

As he wrote Part I, Franklin made a list of topics he would subsequently treat. The first part was written in an easy and personal tone, more familiar manner, appropriate to a communication with one's son. It is in these early pages of Part I of the Autobiography that Franklin talks more freely and openly about his many faults and shortcomings, his "frequent intrigues with low women," and display that rather cool and calculating attitude toward his wife (Autobiography, 47).

Part I was written by a man of sixty-five, at a crossroad in his life and in the life of his colonial homeland. Understanding as he did the critical time in which he was living, he fashioned Part I to function as a kind of "testament" for his son, a "will" of sorts that would live beyond him, if he were to perish in the coming troubles.

Part I reads like a moral tale, designed to help or warn the younger Franklin. Franklin includes specific cautionary tales about himself as an innocent young man who loses money because he trusted someone he shouldn't have trusted:

Thus I spent about 18 Months in London. Most Part of the time, I work'd hard at my Business, and spent but little upon myself except in seeing Plays, and in Books. My Friend Ralph had kept me poor. He owed me about 27 Pounds; which I was now never likely to receive; a great Sum out of my small Earnings. I lov'd him notwithstanding, for he had many amiable qualities. (The Autobiography, 40).

Economy and self-reliance are Franklin's constant refrain in Part I. Franklin boasts about "gaining Money by my Industry and Frugality" (46). If we take the Autobiography as a straightforward book of advice and wisdom, then it is quite ironic that a sixty-five year old man would still want to advise a forty-one year old son who was at that time Governor of New Jersey. A grown son would hardly seem to need parental supervision

on financial matters. In fact, William was already a successful and powerful man himself by 1771. Why would Franklin need to advise his son?

Quite possibly in 1771 Franklin considered William a more successful figure than himself. At this time, Franklin was merely one of many colonial agents, and William was the Royal Governor of New Jersey, a man living a princely life in the colonies, who took pride in the fact that he had been appointed to that post by the King himself.

We know that Franklin knew that his son enjoyed privileges at Court. According to Ormond Seavey, William had attended the coronation of King George III in 1768, as had Franklin himself. William was invited to join the royal procession and take a seat inside Westminster Abbey, while Franklin had to be contented with standing outside the coronation place with other colonials (153).

Is it possible that Franklin is not writing to his son only to instruct him or persuade him, but to justify his own importance to his son? Could it be that he needs to explain some things to his son and to strengthen some aspects of their relationship for his own sake? At this time Franklin was considering joining the rebellious faction in the colonies, and he certainly anticipated that his son would not approve. Was Franklin writing to William to save and justify himself in his son's eyes?

Part I is a personal testimony covertly soliciting the aid and protection of his Royal Governor son as sort of a cautionary step towards any eventualities from the war. Franklin knew that his son would be in a precarious position if Franklin participated in rebellion, and Part I demonstrates Franklin's attempt to "shore up" his relationship with William before the storm hit. By offering William advice he does not need, Franklin is really justifying his own life by recounting his struggles as a boy.

Part I reads as a reminder to William: "you enjoy privilege because of my hard work," Franklin seems to imply; "I deserve your respect." Part I also represents Franklin's appeal to William for the respect he fears to lose if he should join the American rebellion. Franklin wrote Part 2 of the Autobiography thirteen years later after the Revolutionary War, while he was the American Ambassador to France. The peace treaty with England had been signed (1783), and the writer was once again a successful statesman whose financial position was secure.

Part 2 is mainly an explanation of Franklin's bookkeeping method for attaining perfection through practice of the virtues. Carl Van Doren says that Part 2 was resumed after encouraging letters from Abel James and Benjamin Vaughn (616). Franklin included James's and Vaughn's letters in his manuscript to explain why he resumed his narrative. What had gone before had been written for his family; "what follows," he said in his "Memo," "was written... in compliance with the advice contained in these letters, and accordingly intended for the public (The autobiography, 156).

According to John William Ward, when Franklin resumed his story, he did so "in full consciousness that he was offering himself to the world as a representative type, the American" (326). As Benjamin Vaughn said in Part 2 of the Autobiography, Franklin's life would "give a noble rule and example of self-education" because of Franklin's "discovery that the thing is in many a man's private power" (321).

Before the Revolutionary War, Franklin might have had hopes for a closer relationship with his successful son, as Part I of the Autobiography suggests. However Parts 2, 3, and 4 were written long after the War when Franklin and William were estranged, Franklin having disinherited and disowned William in a most humiliating manner in 1776. By Franklin's own admission Parts 2, 3, and 4 were written at the earnest persuasion of friends, and therefore were addressed to a completely different audience.

If in Part I, William was Franklin's sole listener, then the other parts made clear that they were intended for an unknown readership of both fathers and sons. Why did Franklin write Parts 2, 3, and 4? He was urged incessantly by friends and admirers alike to spill out his lifelong story.

For example, a Quaker by the name of Abel James said that Franklin's life story would be a work which would be useful and entertaining not only to a few but millions (58). Another friend, Benjamin Vaughn, when asked for advice by Franklin had this to say. "All that has happened to you," he reminded Franklin, "is also connected with the detail of the manners and situation of a rising people" (59).

Intended for the public, Franklin's story was to be an example for your Americans and an advertisement to the world. At this time, America had just concluded a successful

revolution and the eyes of the world were upon her. Just as America had succeeded in creating itself a nation, Franklin had set out to show how the American went about creating his own character. Franklin then becomes "The American."

How well Franklin filled the part that his public urged him to play, we can see by observing what he immediately proceeds to provide. In Part 2, 3, and 4 of the Autobiography, Franklin appropriately treats four matters: the establishment of a lending library to satisfy the need for self-education; the importance of frugality and diligence in one's calling; the social utility of religion; and of course the thirteen rules for ordering one's life.

Here, in Parts 2, 3, and 4 were all the materials that went into the making of the self-made man. This is the formula on how one goes about making a success of one's self. Family, class, religious orthodoxy, higher education: all these were secondary to character and common sense. What Franklin had tried to do was to inform people that all these features are within anyone's reach.

The Autobiography is not simply a formless record of personal experience, or just a charming success story. Whether consciously or unconsciously, it is a great work of imagination which achieves the level of folk myth. According to Franklin, he combined narrative and dialogue in his Autobiography in order to convey the felt immediacy of his experience (143).

Paul M. Zall says that by relating his themes to John Bunyan's details of his new environment in Pilgrim's Progress, Franklin had managed to create an Allegory of American middle-class superiority. Franklin states his central organizing theme at the beginning of his Autobiography: his emergence "from the poverty and obscurity" in which he was born and bred "to a state of affluence and some degree of reputation in the world" (21). He gives to this secular "rise" a moral and spiritual meaning discoverable in the special blessings of God.

The boy entering Philadelphia with three loaves under his arm is obviously the paradigm of Bunyan's Christian beginning his arduous ascent to the final destination of life. Franklin increases the drama of his struggle upward against odds in his more worldly

pilgrimage by reiterating the contrast between his humble beginnings and his improved position in life.

It is more fulfilling and rewarding to fail while trying than not to have tried at all. In his Autobiography, Franklin halts his narrative three times at conspicuous points in order to invoke in the readers the pathetic picture of his first humble arrival in Philadelphia. He frames the Philadelphia anecdote as carefully as if he were deliberately setting out to create an immortal legend which I am pretty sure he had no desire to do.

“I have been the more particular,” he writes, “in this description of my journey, and shall be so of my first entry into the city, that you may in your mind compare such unlikely beginnings with the figure I have since made there” (Autobiography, 23). Though his success story is a triumph of moral individualism and personal salvation, Franklin identifies it with the rise of a whole people.

His rise in life thus parallels the growth of Philadelphia. When finally, he achieves world wide fame through his electrical experiments, he confesses to being flattered by the honors heaped upon him: “for, considering my low beginning, they were great things to me” (Autobiography, 123). Carl Van Doren says that Franklin owed his success to “natural gifts of which **Poor Richard** could not tell the secret” (118). But Franklin was not altogether without a sense of sin, and he believed that good works were the necessary means to personal salvation, or success.

In direct antithesis, as his attitude towards charity in the Autobiography indicates, Franklin felt that failure to rise in life was the result of moral depravity. Accordingly, in one of the most famous passages of the Autobiography, Franklin “conceived the bold and arduous project of arriving at moral perfection: (Autobiography, 83). The important result is not that he failed, but that he tried and that the program of good works which he outlined here completed the long process of dismantling the heavenly city.

In the Autobiography, Franklin describes his later and more successful years because the Autobiography is not about success. It is about the formation of the character that makes success possible. The subject of the Autobiography is the making of a character. Franklin described it this way:

Having ermeg'd from the Poverty and Obscurity in which I was born and bred, to a State of Affluence and some Degree of Reputation in the World, and having gone so far thro' Life with a considerable Share of Felicity, the conducting Means I made use of, which, with the Blessing of God, so well succeeded, my Posterity may like to know, as they may find some of them suitable to their own Situations, and therefore fit to be imitated. That Felicity, when I reflected on it, has induc'd me sometimes to say, that were it offer'd to my choice, I should have no Objection to a Repetition of the same Life from its Beginning, only asking the Advantage Authors have in a second Edition to correct some Faults of the first.

(Autobiography, 1)

The character was for life, of course, and not for fiction where we usually expect to encounter the made-up.

Franklin's memoir is uniform in tone and masterfully organized. It adheres to a fairly strict chronological order, yet it is also held together by several continuing themes – his ambition to be in business for himself, his education in writing, his struggle to repay the debt to Vernon, his regret over such errors as the effort to seduce his friend James Ralph's mistress, and his uneven progress toward marriage with Debbie Read.

In many ways, Franklin's memoirs is just like a short picaresque novel, with deceitful villains like Governor Keith, proud persons like Samuel Keimer, and adventurous travels from Boston through New York and New Jersey to Philadelphia, back to Boston, to London, and back to Philadelphia. Franklin and the other "characters" occasionally masquerade and mistake one another or fail to distinguish between real and apparent natures. The hero is a bright, yet vainglorious and ambitious, young man whose impatience to succeed makes him incompatible with his brother and vulnerable to the empty promises of Governor William Keith (1680-1749). Franklin writes a lengthy description in regard to this episode with the Governor:

Having taken leave of my Friends, and interchang'd some Promises with Miss Read, I left Philadelphia in the Ship, which anchor'd at New Castle. The Governor was there. But when I went to his Lodging, the Secretary came to me from him with the civillest Message in the World, that he could not then see me being

engag'd in Business of the utmost Importance, but should send the Letters to me on board, wish'd me heartily a good Voyage and a speedy Return, etc. I return'd on board, a little puzzled, but still not doubting.

Mr. Andrew Hamilton, a famous Lawyer of Philadelphia,.... We arriv'd in London the 24<sup>th</sup> of December, 1724. I waited upon the Stationer who came first in my Way, delivering the Letter as from Governor Keith. I don't know such a Person, says he: but opening the Letter, O, this is from Riddlesden; I have lately found him to be a complete Rascal, and I will have nothing to do with him, nor receive any Letters from him. (*Autobiography*, 31-32).

The narrator, on the other hand, is a skilled storyteller and indulgent older man who is now amused by the slips and falls of his younger self and now ashamed and penitent. In Franklin's *Autobiography*, Franklin is not telling sarcastic jokes on himself, but he is enjoying the natural ironies which the seventy-eight year old autobiographer watched quietly emerge in a detailed and truthful record of his youthful vanity.

The *Autobiography* is a complex work reflecting at least some of the intricacies of its author. It is a sad fact that people do not possess the full *Autobiography* as Franklin had prepared for the press. Both manuscripts that he had sent to his British editor and a copy for safe-keeping to his landlord in France are both lost. We have no idea how these versions might be different from modern editions.

The *Autobiography* was surely written under many impulses, as all confessional works are. If only critics would just concentrate solely on the initial intended meaning on the surface of the *Autobiography*, and block out any devious interpretations attached to it, then may be, it will bring readers closer to the inner life of Franklin, whom as William H. Shurr has mentioned, that all critics and biographers have found to be a remarkably distant figure. Just by looking at the rationale for Franklin's selection of incidents would be thought-provoking as to what this biographer would have people read.

Despite what supporters with valid arguments have to say about this master of all new adventurous and inventions, there are bound to be as many opponents. David Hume thought Franklin as "the first philosopher and indeed the first great man of letters for whom we are beholden to America" (231). This was not a view universally held.

“Honest but splenetic,” wrote John Adams who never felt until his dying days that he (John Adams) received adequate recognition. “The history of our Revolution will be one continued lie from one end to the other. The essence of the whole will be that Dr. Franklin’s electrical rod smote the earth and out sprang General Washington. That Franklin electrified him with his rod and thenceforward these two conducted all the policy, negotiations, legislatures, and war” (242).

Balzac said succinctly of Benjamin Franklin that he invented “the lightning rod, the hoax and the Republic” (35). Franklin, with all his vision, could never have envisioned the reactions his Autobiography would have on later writers. Only in recent years has the Autobiography been looked upon as a literary work distinct from a cultural artifact or historical window on our past.

According to Paul M. Zall, professional critics face an especially hard task in dealing with a text that was composed as “four fragments at four different times in three different countries under widely varying circumstances” (11-12). What makes the task even worse is that the book’s first appearance in print was in a bad translation into French made from an early version of the manuscript. When this bad translation was translated back into English it became ludicrous, yet that flawed text remains the basis for many editions.

### III. Franklin and His Critics: John Adams, Mark Twain, D. H. Lawrence

Franklin's stature as a prominent American figure of the Revolutionary era has endured for three centuries; however, the portrait of Benjamin Franklin most conspicuously etched in the perceptions of many readers is still that caricatured by the likes of John Adams, Mark Twain, and finally by that twentieth-century explorer of the dark and passionate side of human life, D.H. Lawrence.

These three figures represent the three most dominant commentaries about Franklin during the three centuries after the publication of the Autobiography. The eighteenth-century opinions about Franklin were shaped mainly by political views. From the 1730s to the 1760s Franklin was the most outspoken voice on the popular colonial faction party against the Royal faction.

According to J.A. Leo Lemay, Franklin personified American resistance to British imperialism in England and America during the pre-revolutionary period. Lemay also concludes that in America and France during the Revolution, he was the most famous American rebel and furthermore after the Revolution, in America, "Franklin was an outspoken Federalist" (231).

Aside from politics, some people disliked Franklin because of his avowed deistic opinions and religious satires. Franklin comes out honestly in his Autobiography on how he feels about religion. One such instance recorded in the Autobiography is:

Some of Rev. Mr. Whitefield's Enemies affected to suppose that he would apply these Collections to his own private Emolument: but I, who was intimately acquainted with him, never had the least suspicion of his Integrity, but am to this day decidedly of Opinion that he was in all his Conduct, a perfectly **honest** Man. And methinks my Testimony in his Favor ought to have more Weight, as we had no religious Connection. He us'd indeed sometimes to pray for my Conversion, but never had the Satisfaction of believing that his Prayers were heard. Ours was a mere civil Friendship .... He replied, that if I made that kind Offer for Christ's

sake, I should not miss of a Reward.—And I return'd, **Don't let me be mistaken; it was not for Christ's sake, but for your sake.** One of our common Acquaintance jocosely remark'd, that knowing it to be the Custom of the Saints, when they receiv'd any favor, to shift the Burden of the Obligation from off their own Shoulders, and place it in Heaven, I had contriv'd to fix it on Earth.  
(*Autobiography*, 89).

Some of Franklin's contemporaries, among them John Adams, were probably jealous because Franklin was so famous and so widely respected. As we will see, Adams especially felt that he did not receive enough recognition for his own contributions during the Revolution. He was lost in a sea of monumental praises heaped on Franklin.

In the latter part of Franklin's life, he was probably the best and most widely respected scientist in the Western world. Max Farrand says that upon resuming his third installment of the memoirs, Franklin "was now over seventy-eight years old. He was not merely a man of consequence; he was one of the great figures of the world. But, even in his greatness, he never forgot his lifelong passion for the improvement of others as well as of himself" (xxi).

Henry Cabot Lodge called him "A man of the people, (who) was American by the character of his genius, by his versatility, the vivacity of his intellect, and his mental dexterity" (304). One of the greatest tribute accoladed on Franklin was given by Thomas Jefferson, a few days after Franklin's death. In a letter to Ferdinand Grand, Jefferson wrote that "the good old Doctor Franklin, so long the ornament of our country and I may say of the world, has at length closed his eminent career" (Robert Middlekauff, 1).

Franklin was undoubtedly America's most famous citizen and writer. He had one of the most numerous and varied correspondences of any American during the eighteenth century, probably due to his varied interests and reputation, Franklin had attracted such literary and philosophical disciplines such as Benjamin Vaughn and Jacques Barbeu-Dubourg (Max Farrand, xxxvi).

According to Paul M. Zall, in 1929 French scholar Bernard Fay published 600 letters exchanged between Franklin and his French friends (14). A few years later, another smaller collection of Franklin's letters appeared through the collection of an American

collector A.S.W. Rosenbach. According to Rosenbach, these letters were phenomenal because “if they were as well known as his experiments in electricity or his feats of statesmanship, we would be even prouder of him than we are today... as America’s upstanding genius (Paul M. Zall, 4).

During the nineteenth-century, Franklin’s deism remained objectionable to many readers, even though some ministers like New England Reverend Edward Everett Hale, were devoted supporters of Franklin. As the population of the United States grew, and as problems – economic, political, social – began surfacing in the nineteenth-century, more and more critics were beginning to look for scapegoats to blame for the characterization of American society as materialistic and pragmatic.

Who better to shoulder this blame than the first so-called, self-made man in American culture? His writings, most especially his Autobiography became easy targets for other writers to react against as they dealt with issues of their own time. Franklin’s best-known writings, The Way to Wealth and the Autobiography were popular titles among working classes in nineteenth-century American, but Franklin’s themes of frugality, hard work, and self-discipline were sometimes read as superficial, simplistic prescriptions. Some leaders assumed that Franklin’s prescriptive advice was responsible for both American economic growth and for deteriorating standards for workers.

Resentment of the wealth and power of the burgeoning United States caused both Americans and foreigners to revile “the Father of all the Yankees,” a sobriquet given to Franklin, according to Paul M. Zall, by Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), a Scottish essayist and historian. Zall says that name was probably given to mean the cartoon-type “Yankee” familiar on the stage and in comical stories (9).

In addition, old family animosities continued to influence a few writers, including Leigh Hunt and Charles Francis Adams (John Adam’s grandson), who found Franklin’s work to be unagreeable with him. According to Charles Francis Adams in Diary of Charles Francis Adams, “There is too much selfishness in his philosophy, though I do not doubt that it has been serviceable in the world” (61).

Further still in a brilliant, though somewhat thoroughly partisan view and elaboration of Franklin's character, Charles Francis Adams writes in Works of John Adams that:

The ethics of Franklin permitted of the enjoyment of advantages, obtained at the expense of others, that might come by passively permitting them to happen or even by indirectly promoting them. Though the attractive benevolence which overspreads his writings, is visible a shade of thrift seldom insensible to the profit side of the account, in even the best actions. He is the embodiment of one great class of New England character, as well in his virtues as defects. And unluckily the lustre reflected from the virtues has done a little too much to dazzle the eyes of his countrymen, naturally delighting in his well-earned fame, and prevent all scrutiny of the more doubtful qualities. The errors of Franklin's theory of life may be detected almost anywhere in his familiar compositions. They sprang from a defective early education, which made his morality superficial even to laxness, and undermined his religious faith. His system resolves itself into the ancient and specious dogma, of **honesty the best policy**. These are defects in the life of that great man which it is not wise to palliate or to excuse. They cannot be overlooked in any examination of his personal relations with his contemporaries pretending to be faithful (The Works of John Adams, 317-320)

Mark Twain disliked Franklin for a different reason. As we will see, Twain despised Franklin indirectly for something that happened to Twain's older brother, Orion Clemens. When we reach the twentieth-century, we find more dispassionate, specialized studies on Franklin, such as the famous biography by Carl Van Doren (1938), and the great edition of The Papers of Benjamin Franklin (20 vols. To 1978), edited by Leonard W. Larabee, Whitfield J. Bell, Jr., William B. Willcox, and others, and published by Yale University Press.

During these same years, the great German sociologist Max Weber introduced a new twist by portraying Franklin as a typical example of the Protestant ethic and continuing a long standing criticism from the nineteenth century that Franklin embodied American capitalism. D.H. Lawrence, who seems to have read only The Way to Wealth

and the Autobiography, published his classic attack on Franklin in Studies in Classic American Literature (1923).

It is ironic that the most interesting and detailed appreciation of Franklin by any contemporary was written by John Adams – who abhorred him tremendously. The ostensible cause of Adam's hatred was that Franklin was both too generous in his opinions of the French and too influenced by Vergennes and French officials' policy.

The underlying cause, which was obvious to many of their contemporaries, was undoubtedly Adam's jealousy. Yet, for all his puritan provinciality and impossible vanity, Adams always tried "to do justice to his merits," even when he indiscreetly attacked Franklin before perfect strangers.

Robert Middlekauff says that Adams was warm, impulsive, and open. John Adams envied and suspected people with no rough edges, people who moved easily in the finer circles, people who knew what to say and said confidently and at the right moment. Adams rarely felt comfortable under any such circumstances. He was an awkward man, seemingly incapable of the easy gesture, and incapable too of the small hypocrisies that carry other men through life. He had a sense of humor but his timing was usually off, as it was in most things.

I talk to Paine about Greek, that makes him laugh. I talk to Sam Quincy about Resolution, and being a great Man, and study and improving Time, which makes him laugh. I talk to Ned, about the Folly of affecting to be Heretick, which makes him mad. I talk to Hannah and Easter about the Folly of Love, about despising it, about being above it, pretend to be insensible of tender Passions, which makes them laugh. (Robert Middlekauff, Benjamin Franklin and His Enemies, 172).

When others laughed, he scowled; when others preferred obliqueness, he went straight to the point. In short, Adams lacked a sense of the appropriate – the appropriate in behavior, words, and responses. Adams was not an introvert – he loved company and small talk, but he was introspective. John Adam's Diary reveals young Adams to have been a driven, compulsive creature, full of ambition to make a name for himself, troubled by doubts that he would fail and sometimes guilt that he would succeed.

Along with this internal imperative to strive, to work, to learn, he felt cravings for recognition:

Reputation ought to be the perpetual subject of my Thoughts, and Aim of my Behavior. How shall I gain a Reputation! How shall I spread an Opinion of myself as a Lawyer of distinguished Genius, Learning, and Virtue. (Robert Middlekauff, from John Adam's Diary, 175).

This lifelong ambition was already in direct confrontation with Franklin, who did not set out for recognition but found it anyway. As this short reconstruction of Adam's character suggests, life for him was difficult even during those times when it was fulfilling.

Adams did not meet Benjamin Franklin until May 1775, when Franklin, after his return to America, took up his seat in the Second Continental Congress. Franklin's reputation had long been known to John Adams. When John Adams arrived in Paris in April, 1778 as colonial representative to France, he was a mature man, well-educated by American standards, learned in law, history, and political theory, but still uneasy and concerned about himself and his reputation.

Middlekauff states that Adams was "courageous yet full of fears about his abilities" (184). He was, after all, from New England Puritan heritage, and his writings suggest a kind of Puritan self-doubt and suspicion.

Sheila L. Skemp affirms that one thing was certain about Adams – "his country's national interest" (25). Though John Adams was a magnificent patriot, for all his learning and his intellect, he was not quite prepared for what he found when he moved to Paris. In the next four years he was to learn much and was to contribute to his country's interest despite his temperament, which according to Middlekauff, was unsuited "to the obliqueness and slow rhythms of European diplomatic life" (185).

Adam's cast of mind led him frequently to mistake the actions which French diplomats took in the interests of their country for treachery and betrayal. Adams's impatience colored his perceptions of delay and slowness, and to him, inaction seemed sinister. This type of work ethic had suited Franklin fine in France; these same qualities brought Adams to a harsh condemnation of Benjamin Franklin.

According to Robert Middlekauff, Franklin was a quiet man who did not easily reveal what he wanted, and this led to Adams complaining of Franklin's reserve a number of times (204). Adams read into this taciturn attitude as a disagreement rather than caution. It alarmed and surprised Adams. On the contrary, for Franklin, remaining silent armed him, for others' chatter exposed their real purposes. Adams' strong opinion on Franklin was:

Franklin's moral character can neither be applauded nor condemned, without discrimination and many limitations. To all those talents and qualities for the foundation of a great and lasting character, which were held up to the view of the whole world by the University of Oxford, the Royal Society of London, and the Royal Academy of Sciences in Paris, were added, it is believed, more artificial modes of diffusing, celebrating, and exaggerating his reputation, than were ever before or since practiced in favor of any individual. (Charles Francis Adams, ed., The Works of John Adams, 659).

Middlekauff also says that Adams brought no claims of social prominence to the commission. He was a provincial and unable to come to terms with the larger sophisticated world. Although Paris dazzled him at first, it never softened him, and his virtue remained hard and true. "The core of the man could not be touched," says Middlekauff (205). In Adams Family Correspondence, John Adams related to his wife, Abigail on his thoughts about Paris.

"I admire the ladies here and the delights France has to offer" but he also took note of how the ladies of France were "perpetually embracing" Franklin. In his letters, Adams was full of praise about the "Magnificence" of the physical environment – the buildings, public and private; the furniture; the dress of the French he encountered; and especially the "Entertainments," that is, the dinners and evening gatherings of the learned and the mighty (291-297).

According to his grandson, Charles Francis Adams in The Works of John Adams, the astonished reports to his wife were only part of his reaction; unease prevented him from really enjoying what he saw, "the guilt of one saturated with the austerities of the Protestant ethic" (465). His moral nature asserted itself immediately, for Adams

recognized that the style and opulence of the French court could not be sacrificed with the republican simplicity of the new nation across Atlantic. His disapproval was clear in his judgment that “the more Elegance, the less Virtue in all Times and Countries” (Adams Family Correspondence, 1778, vol. 3, 31-32).

Adams proved troublesome to Franklin in 1780, early in his second mission to Europe. Adams failed to recognize that the diplomatic race would go to those who conserved their energies and treated the French with good will. Adams complained of Franklin’s taciturn nature a number of times.

Franklin had a great genius, original, sagacious, and inventive, capable of discoveries in science no less than of improvements in the fine arts and the mechanic arts. He had a vast imagination, equal to the comprehension of the greatest objects, and capable of a steady and cool comprehension of them. He had wit at will. He had humor that, when he pleased, was delicate and delightful. He had a satire that was good-natured or caustic, .... Had he been blessed with the same advantages of scholastic education in his early youth, and pursued a course of studies as unembarrassed with occupations of public private life, as Sir Isaac Newton, he might have emulated the first philosopher (Charles Francis Adams, The Works of John Adams, 662).

Adams’s disapproval of Franklin on moral grounds could never be erased. Franklin, unlike Adams, was at home in France. As Louis P. Masur suggests, “Paris appealed to Franklin’s ideal of romance ... Paris drew out his wit and playfulness” (11). Adams responded harshly to Franklin’s behavior in Paris; he saw Franklin’s life as “a Scene of Continual Dissipation” (11).

According to Middlekauff, Franklin publicly played the role of the American innocent, full of respect for the sophisticated courts of Europe. He was popular “in salon society, he became a cultural icon, his image reproduced ... everywhere... It mattered little that he spent extravagantly, flirted continuously, and understood minimally the spoken language” (11).

However, Franklin advised Adams and his cronies not to portray America’s independence with arrogance to the French, and to be careful. Franklin had a deeper

understanding of power and the role of interest in diplomacy than Adams understood, for Franklin was no fool; he understood that in case of conflict, American interests were more important than personal ties.

Adams and his supporters believed that Franklin did not share their concern or thought that Franklin's means to the ends were not justified. Adams also had a narrower vision of the world than Franklin and Adams translated questions of politics into questions of morality. He disapproved of Franklin's surface behavior, which he thought was most revealing of the inner man.

That the French loved Franklin made the situation worse for Adams. Many of the French thought Franklin an innocent genius, the classic natural man from the wilderness of America. To them, Benjamin Franklin was a simple, honest, uncorrupted with his fur cap and the spectacles that gave his face an owl-like, wise look.

Adams thought since Franklin was so at ease with the old world's ways, that he must be very comfortable and accepting of the luxury, idleness, and sexual immorality of the French. But acceptance did not imply approval, a concept that John Adams could never maturely grasp.

Adams was quick to condemn whatever he saw in French aristocracy that he disapproved, where Franklin accepted the French in order to use what he could for American interests. Adams never acknowledged Franklin's astute diplomatic talents, not even after Franklin's death in 1790.

Adams did, however, address Franklin's stature as a world figure. He wrote that Franklin's "reputation was more universal than that of Leibnitz or Newton, Frederick or Voltaire, and his character more esteemed than any of them" (Masur, 11). However, Adams's dislike and envy of Franklin surfaces again and again in his own writings and letters; Franklin was all that Adams was not: beloved for his actions and famous for his writings, especially for the Autobiography.

As a newspaperman, printer, humorist and writer, Twain followed in an American tradition begun by Franklin. Although "the Late Benjamin Franklin" is his only preserved piece on Franklin, Twain shows by allusions throughout other writings that he, too, has read widely in Franklin. As Alan Gribben shows in his great study Mark Twain's Library,

2 vols. (1980, 241-243), Twain's attitude was strongly influenced by the great admiration for Franklin of Orion Clemens, Twain's beloved older brother, who died at a young age. This brother of Twain's had imitated the regiments Franklin had imposed upon himself, and his attempts had left a lasting impression on Samuel Langhorne Clemens, who revered his dead older brother, and who thought of himself, by comparison, as a failure.

Twain admired technological genius, and that side of Franklin did not draw his disdain. But Franklin's apparent pleasure in work, pursued early and late, his desire to get something done, and his habit of telling the world about his achievements did – and in “The Late Benjamin Franklin” become targets for his humor, irony, and ultimately, for his disdain.

“The Late Benjamin Franklin,” begins in a way characteristic of some of his best humor: “This part (Franklin) was one of those persons whom they call Philosophers” (138). It is clear from that point in the sketch that Twain has little use for those bearing such a designation. For Twain explains that Franklin's philosophy was simply a smokescreen for ideas and conduct calculated to make miserable the lives of boys, “boys who might otherwise have been happy” (Margaret Sanborn, Mark Twain – The Bachelor Years, 1990, 72).

Twain's Franklin acted with “a malevolence which is without parallel in history” – he “would work all day and then sit up nights, and let on to be studying algebra by the light of a smoldering fire, so ~~that~~ all other boys might have to do that also, or else have Benjamin Franklin thrown up to them.” As if the hard work were not enough, the Franklin of malevolence also led an ascetic life; “He had a fashion of living wholly on bread and water, and studying astronomy at mealtimes – a thing which has brought affliction to millions of boys since, whose fathers had read Franklin's pernicious biography” (139).

Asceticism extended to early rising in the morning, with a boy “hounded to death and robbed of his natural rest because Franklin said once in one of his inspired flights of malignity – ‘early to bed and early to rise / Makes a man healthy and wealthy and wise’” (Sanborn, 74).

The cost to Twain of his parents' experiments on him with this maxim were, he reported, "my present state of general debility, indigence, and mental aberration" (139). Forced to rise before nine o'clock in the morning, he experienced "sorrow" so deep as to defy description. Where, he asks, would he be now had his parents "let me take my natural rest." The answer – "keeping store, no doubt, and respected by all" (139).,

This final line suggests multiple meanings, and Twain's ostensible complaints turn upon themselves. Left to his own devices, including getting up after nine in the morning, he would have attained respectability, but he would not have become a writer. Twain had little use for the life of a storekeeper, and his example becomes both humorous and serious: Franklin's advice made Twain rebel, and in doing so, actually allowed him to search out his own calling. The Benjamin Franklin who advocated a regular life, which in its own way was intended to make a man out of a boy – "respected by all" – clashed with Twain's values, and also helped form them.

Franklin's inconvenient advice, says Twain, made a man out of a boy, but only by default. Twain came of age not because of Franklin's advice in the Autobiography, but in spite of it. Twain's demolition of the virtues Franklin advocated depended upon an ironic appreciation of what might happen if Franklin's life were not taken as a model. There is a sense of macabre in Twain's little anecdote, for all its apparent simplicity and indirectness. Twain goes on to describe an invention of Franklin with a tint of malice attached to it.

He invented a stove that would smoke your head off in four hours by the clock.

One can see that almost devilish satisfaction he took in it, by his giving it his name (139).

If we continue deciphering Twain's piece, we might even begin to feel a sense of bitterness toward Franklin which seems misplaced: "I merely desired to do away with somewhat of the prevalent calamitous idea among heads of families that Franklin **acquired** his great genius by working for nothing, studying by moonlight, and getting up in the night instead of waiting till morning like a Christian, and that this programme, rigidly inflicted, will make a Franklin of every father's fool. It is time these gentlemen were finding out that these execrable eccentricities of instinct and conduct are only the **evidences** of genius, not the **creators** of it" (140).

If Twain's assessment of the Autobiography seems bitter, then D.H. Lawrence, writing in 1923, seems altogether hostile toward the work. D.H. Lawrence admits that he is confused by Franklin's Autobiography, but he sees that it recognized a kind of order, and a view of the self, which imposed a planned control on natural feelings. His reaction to Franklin's sense of order is contempt. "The ideal self! He cries scornful in his critique of Franklin:

Oh, but I have a strange and fugitive self shut out and howling like a wolf or a coyote under the ideal windows. See his red eyes in the dark? This is the self who is coming into his own . . . The perfectability of man, dear God! When every man as long as he remains alive is in himself a multitude of conflicting men. Which of these do you choose to perfect, at the expense of every other? . . . Old Daddy Franklin will tell you. He'll rig him up for you, the pattern American. Oh, Franklin was the first downright American (D.H. Lawrence, Studies in Classic American Literature, 15).

This caricature of "the sharp little man" may reflect some imperfections in Franklin's ability to communicate with ages beyond his own, but it also reflects an inability or unwillingness in Lawrence to read carefully and critically. Lawrence's response to Franklin sounds "knee-jerk"; certainly his essay on the Autobiography is uninformed in any historical sense, or by any acknowledgment of the art of autobiographical writing. Franklin's art is that in which the author tries to understand himself, to evaluate himself, to see himself, in a broad sense from the outside; it is a portrayal of the self rather than simply an expression of current feeling.

If Lawrence seeks to celebrate those multitude selves, then Old Daddy Franklin did indeed know what he was about. The very terms in which Franklin expresses his admirable self-awareness limit his communication in a way that obscures the identity of the author which allow his readers to hear several persona, never just one. This ability of Franklin's to provide multiple persona, along with his candor about techniques of influence and persuasion are aspects of the Autobiography which occasionally make us wonder which of several selves Benjamin Franklin is.

Lawrence accuses Franklin of prescribing one “model,” where Franklin provides many – indeed, a “multitude.” As Levin points out, there are three essential ways in which Franklin establishes this story of the self-made man which escape Lawrence’s understanding; at least Lawrence never suggests their importance. The first context is that of Puritanism, represented in the *Autobiography* by Franklin’s admiration for John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* and Cotton Mather’s *Essays To Do Good*.

The second concerns the difficulties and dangers of being a youth alone in an unstable eighteenth-century society; the third is his insistence that experimental and scientific are significant to his life. What Lawrence failed – or refused – to see beyond the surface information of the *Autobiography* is that Franklin’s life story represented a complex narrative, not a simple prescription, or a pattern for a model (Levin, 65).

The detractors of D.H. Lawrence employ two techniques. First he blames Franklin for faults and vulgarities which are not Franklin’s but those of men we are encouraged to believe are his ethical heirs.

Now if Mr. Andrew Carnegie, or any other millionaire, had wished to invent a God to suit his ends, he could not have done better. Benjamin did it for him in the eighteenth century. God is the supreme servant of men who want to get on, to **produce**. Providence. The provider. The heavenly storekeeper. The everlasting Wanamaker.

And this is all the god the grandsons of the Pilgrim Fathers had left. Aloft on a pillar of dollars. (16)

Second, Lawrence abstracts portions of the *Autobiography* and condemns the whole by those particular parts which he finds most contemptible. He focuses on the parts of the *Autobiography* which deal with Franklin’s attempts to perfect himself. These are the very points in the book where Franklin is most self-deprecating and humorous, but Lawrence does not understand Franklin’s humor and sophistication. Whenever Lawrence treats Franklin’s remarks on his creeds as a hypocrite’s, Lawrence misses Franklin’s great control of irony. Lawrence takes seriously those points which Franklin uses not to show his perfectability, but his flaws.

Carl Van Doren observed that the supposed “wisdom” of Poor Richard is hardly Franklin’s (238). Robert E. Spiller concurs, adding that “it must also be remembered that the maxims are first and foremost folk sayings that go back hundreds of years (105-6). Here, Lawrence is fighting symbol, rather than historical fact, and he completely misses the point:

I can remember, when I was a little boy, my father used to buy a scrubby yearly almanac... And... crammed in corners it had little anecdotes and humorisms, with a moral tag. And I used to have my little priggish laugh at the woman who counted her chickens before they were hatched, and so forth, and I was convinced that honesty was the best policy, also a little priggishly. The author of these bits was Poor Richard, and Poor Richard was Benjamin Franklin, writing in Philadelphia well over a hundred years before.

And probably I haven’t got over those Poor Richard tags yet. I rankle still with them. They are thorns in young flesh. (24)

He criticizes himself, not Franklin. Lawrence also uses the direct attack approach. Lawrence presents Franklin as “snuff-colored little man,” a bourgeois, self-satisfied man and a threat to the imagination and the spirit. Again, Lawrence seems to have read only Franklin’s Autobiography and not to have understood much of its context. He begins by proclaiming that Franklin believed in the perfectability of man, an erroneous assumption about Franklin that leads him to still other false conclusions.

Clearly what Lawrence despised most in Franklin was the order he represented and exemplified. Franklin, he writes, was good at setting up barbed wire fences, within which “he trotted ... like a grey nag in a paddock” (24). The worst of it was that Franklin wanted everyone to emulate the “pattern” American, a peculiar creature recognizable in his materialism, conventional behavior, and complacency.

The essay Lawrence wrote about Franklin does not really argue a thesis about the great man, the snuff-colored automaton, the enemy of man’s mysterious depths. Rather, as Middlekauff writes, “it erupts with anger and violence and makes its point through its explosiveness” (xviii). There is no celebration in Lawrence’s demolition of Franklin, no

happiness, and his essay's errors and misunderstandings are only important in what they suggest to us about Lawrence, not Franklin.

What is important is the expression of Lawrence's animus against both Franklin and America as enemies of Europe. Franklin, Lawrence wrote, "knew that the breaking of the old world was a long process. In the depths of his unconsciousness he hated England, he hated Europe, he hated the whole corpus of the European being. He wanted to be an American" (168). Lawrence, a European himself, writing only a few years after World War I, cannot help but sound hostile toward this symbol of an energetic, victorious America. He sees in Franklin a smugness with which no European figure can compare, and he also sees in Franklin an American profile he finds ominous and suspect.

And what was an American, besides an enemy of Europe and the unfettered spirit? Lawrence's America as seen through Franklin was materialistic and repressive, "tangled in her own barbed wire, and mastered by her own machines. Absolutely got down by her own barbed wire of shall-nots, and shut up fast in her own 'productive' machines of squirrels running in million of cages. It is just farce" (Middlekauff, xviii-xix).

Franklin ~~more~~ than personified all of this. As far as Lawrence was concerned, Franklin had helped produce it and was solely responsible. Franklin's account of the thirteen-week course he gave himself in the Art of Virtue only made Lawrence angry. He fails to grasp the humorous self-criticism with which Franklin introduces the account, because he has no humor himself with which to meet Old Daddy Franklin in the Autobiography.

The ~~essence of~~ Lawrence's attack on Franklin was that Franklin protected himself from ~~experience behind~~ a "wall of maxims and moral dogma" (Robert E. Spiller, 322). The very nature of the Autobiography disproves the notion that Franklin held a static, moralistic attitude toward his experience. Its three main sections demonstrate that he was continually reassessing his early life and past in the terms and style of his present. It reflects the ceaseless adventure of his personality and his always fresh receptivity to new points of view.

#### **IV. Recent Critical Responses to Franklin's Autobiography and Their Relationship to the Criticisms of Adams, Twain, and Lawrence**

Benjamin Franklin looms large in American' national consciousness, occupying the same pedestal with George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Abraham Lincoln. Yet it is hard to say what it means to name Franklin one of America's cultural heroes. John Griffith says that it could be Franklin's "many-sided" personality (167). The sheer variety of his achievements and the elusive persona he created in the Autobiography have allowed writers and scholars to extol him and disparage him with equal vigor.

In America, such dissimilar Yankees as the laconic President Calvin Coolidge and the passionate preacher Theodore Parker could each find reason to admire him (Weintraub, 235). Aborad, David Hume could say that Franklin was "the first great man of letters" for whom Europe was "beholden" to America (Seavey, 118). Yet D.H. Lawrence, brought up, he tells us, in the industrial wastelands of midland England on the pious saws of "Poor Richard," could only "utter a long, loud curse" against "this dry, moral, utilitarian little democrat" (12).

Part of the difficulty in comprehending the merit of Franklin's work and writings is that in the story he writes about himself, he seems to embody a series of paradoxes. He was an eminently reasonable man who maintained a deep skepticism about the power of reasoning. He was a man whose life suggested hard work, but who did not hold a "job" for forty years. Christopher Looby states that Franklin was a "model of industriousness" who, "preaching the gospel of hardwork," kept his shop until the shop kept him, and retired at forty-two (17).

Franklin was a cautious and prudent man who was also a revolutionary. He also had a keen eye for his own advantage and personal advancement, but he spent nearly all his adult life in the service of others. Finally, he was a writer who chronicled his life in the Autobiography, yet because he barely mentioned his wife and children, his private life remains elusive.

Small wonder that there have been various interpretations of so paradoxical a character, and small wonder that because of his seeming contradictions, other writers have had such disparate responses to his Autobiography. When we read Franklin through the writings of Adams, Twain, or Lawrence, we learn not so much about Franklin, but instead about how often these critics resemble him in the Autobiography. We immediately recall Adams's insecurity, envy, and fumbling of things and we think of Franklin's recounting of his own failures. We remember Twain's naïve exploration of the old west and we may remember Franklin's tale of himself as a boy, exploring the colonies on his own.

We remember Lawrence's atavistic urge to explore the dark side of human nature by exposing vulnerabilities in his writing, and we recall Franklin's own exploration of those weaknesses and temptations he outlined in The Autobiography. In his own words, Franklin suggested in his character so many divergent aspects that all of these responses to him seem to focus on those aspects of Franklin which they might also see in themselves.

I. Bernard Cohen, a twentieth century scholar who has written on Franklin, has remarked that "an account of Franklin...is apt to be a personal testament of the commentator concerning the America he most admires" (143). Franklin's Autobiography has the power to serve as a mirror for other readers – and other writers – who might find their own vulnerabilities or aspirations by experiencing his.

There have been numerous recent critical treatments of Franklin which are either directly or indirectly linked to the famous critiques of Adams, Twain, and Lawrence. Because these critical essays acknowledge Adams, Twain, and Lawrence, they have augmented the power of the Autobiography, instead of diminishing it.

W. Somerset Maugham, writing in "The Classic Books of America," (1940), judges no autobiography "more consistently interesting," than Franklin's and he also says that Franklin is "the typical American." He concludes that the reason why in America Franklin is often spoken of with depreciation is that he "was entirely devoid of nonsense" (64).

V.S. Pritchett, in a review of Franklin's Autobiography, in New Statesman and Nation, (1941), goes a step further by bringing in Lawrence's criticism by labeling it "a typical misfire." Pritchett continues to say that before "Franklin's irony, urbanity and

benevolence, Lawrence cuts an absurd figure” (309). Viewing Franklin in the tradition of Puritan autobiography, Pritchett believes that Franklin’s distinctive qualities are “the variety of his interests and the originality of his mind,” and that “Use, Method and Order” were only the immense stimulus for his genius. Pritchett further slams Lawrence by saying that the Romantic Lawrence thought of Franklin’s qualities as Franklin’s “dreary objectives” (309).

Robert E. Spiller writes in his long essay, “Benjamin Franklin: Student of Life,” (1943), that he considers Franklin to be a pragmatist and therefore he reads Franklin’s scheme of moral perfection as merely a working guide for the youthful Franklin, not an ideal of perfection. Spiller contends that “Franklin tested all matters for truth on the basis of experience in the immediate sense” (323). As an American pragmatist, “Franklin is not tainted by European skepticism. Instead the vitality of the frontier permeates his thinking” (324).

Spiller further argues that Franklin applied experimental methods to conduct as well as to nature, reflecting and creating a pragmatism which distinguishes American character. Spiller seems to echo the underlying sentiments of both Twain’s and Lawrence’s. Twain’s essay captures this pragmatism aspect of Franklin as criticized by Spiller when he says that, “No; the simple idea of this memoir is to snub those pretentious maxims of his, which he worked up with great show of originality out of truisms that had become wearisome platitudes as early as the dispersion from Babel” (3).

Lawrence’s essay was trying to be funny in caricaturing Franklin as an automated dummy of a perfect middle-class American citizen, the product of Puritan repression. His essay makes no pretense to objectivity or rational argument in the direction of pragmatism, but tries to show in its style the frenzied energy Lawrence claimed Franklin lacked: “Middle-sized, sturdy, snuff-colored Doctor Franklin, one of the soundest citizens that ever trod ventry” (19-20).

Spiller concludes, after examining the “Art of Virtue” in comparison to similar plans and discussing the derivation and tradition of Franklin’s individual virtues, that Franklin was a major figure, and reaffirms that his pragmatic, scientific spirit is still relevant.

In 1946, Louis B. Wright concluded in his article, "Franklin's Legacy to the Gilded Age," by suggesting that Franklin appears as the patron saint of the gospel wealth:

By a credible though partial perception of Benjamin Franklin's philosophy, the later nineteenth century made that great American its high priest of the religion of commercial success. But first it stripped him of his urbanity, his humor, his understanding of intellectual values, and his genuine wisdom. An age which was fond of quoting "A Psalm of Life" to prove that "Life is real! Life is earnest!" and we must "Learn to Labor and to wait," could easily interpret Franklin through one work alone, "The Way to Wealth." By a curious irony, one of the least ascetic of Americans became the scriptural authority for the least desirable of all types of asceticism, that which ended in mere material acquisition" (279).

This clearly reflects Lawrence's attitude of condemning Franklin for professing his genius in championing the quest of opulence.

In "The American image of Benjamin Franklin," (1957), Richard D. Miles chronologically surveys American attitudes toward Franklin from eighteenth-century political enemies to specialized scholars of the twentieth-century. He finds that Franklin's dominant image is the self-made man, but he also notes two others. One popular attitude portrays Franklin as "Poor Richard," for example, as an embodiment of the ascetic-material qualities of industry, frugality, and thrift; the other sees Franklin as the embodiment of Americanism, a jingoistic approach popular in the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-centuries:

Through the nineteenth century it was "Dr. Franklin." But by 1920 the American public was urged to find out "What I Have Learned From Old Ben Franklin" —it was that he was a self-made man . . . Franklin's practical traits had already been harnessed to the cause of Americanism by his most partisan pre Civil-War apologist, William Duane. The erstwhile partner of Franklin's grandson complained that Poor Richard had always been misrepresented "as inculcating a paltry and niggard economy." But Franklin's harping on frugality had been really an anti-British stratagem, a means by which the repressive British colonial policies could be frustrated (136, 138).

Jesse Bier, in "Franklin's Autobiography: Benchmark of American Literature" (1958), believes the Autobiography is the most significant book in American literature because it "holds in solution" the four major themes in American literature: the relation between the individual and society, the opposition between democracy and aristocracy, the tension between appearance and reality, and the values of Romantic Idealism (Franklin's belief in "the almost infinite possibilities of self-improvement") as against Pragmatic Realism (Franklin's utilitarianism) 57-65).

Bier continues to contend that "later writers have stressed one of the other of these themes, thus expressing the disintegration of American society" (63). He concludes that Franklin's time was better integrated, if superficial, and so the Autobiography reveals the "superficial balance" of the major themes (65).

On the other hand, Walter Shear writes in "Franklin's Self-Portrait," (1962), that he finds the Autobiography "flat" because Franklin records the actions of his younger self with detachment. Franklin abstractly investigates, in himself, a "chief philosophic problem of the age, self-interest." The Autobiography records that the young Franklin gradually came to identify his self-interest with the public good and shows that the discovery on one's true interest "demands a partial submission of the self to the dictates of the systematic reason" (71-86).

Further testimony of the interests generated by Adams, Twain, and Lawrence are found in Robert Freeman's Sayre's essay, "The Worldly Franklin and the Provincial Critics," (1963). Sayre argues that Franklin's critics such as D.H. Lawrence, Dr. William Carlos Williams, and Charles Angoff, who attack him for middle-class virtues, have actually ignored the facts in order to make Benjamin Franklin a symbol. These critics reveal their own provinciality in failing to appreciate Franklin's "sophistication and humor" (315):

The failure of Lawrence, Angoff, and Williams in understanding Franklin's statement of his creed in the famous letter to Ezra Stiles (President of Yale) and in the opening of the third memoir is a failure of sophistication and humor" (315).

Sayre also stresses Franklin's literary art, pointing out the dramatic interplay between the old Franklin as an author and the young Franklin as a subject:

The Passy Franklin could remain quite serious, but he mixed the seriousness with the style and artfulness of play. In this way he was both the rural philosopher in the plain Poor Richard sense and also the rural philosopher in a pastoral sense, a man who gave in simplicity the furthest and most natural expression of his worldliness and experience (321).

Sayre also maintains that the different times of composition (1771, 1784, and 1788-90) influenced both Franklin's roles as narrator (printer, philosophical Quaker, and projector) and his attitudes (322).

John William Ward in his essay, "Who was Benjamin Franklin," (1963), claims that Franklin's self-aware and ironic tone as witnessed in his Autobiography, is especially suitable for such subjects as reality and identity in a mobile and secular society. As if in direct response to both Twain and Lawrence, Ward further says that, "Franklin stands most clearly as an exemplary American because his life's story is a witness to the uncertainties about social status that have characterized our society, a society caught up in the constant process of change" (542).

One of the scholars who supports Franklin's views and disputes Adams, Twain, and Lawrence's perceptions on wealth and morality is John G. Cawelti. In his book, entitled "Apostles of the Self-Made Man," (1965), Cawelti believes that Franklin, "more than any other individual... exemplified in his own person and articulated in his writings a new hero, different in character from traditional military, religious, and aristocratic conceptions of human excellence and virtue" (9).

He finds that the essence of Franklin's new conception of social order was "the belief that the individual's place in society should be defined by his ability to perform useful actions and not by his rank in a traditional hierarchy" (12). He further claims that the Autobiography has too often been read as an elaboration of **The Way To Wealth**, even though it presents "a broad and humane ideal of self-improvement" (16), "based on the industrious pursuit of a profession, the cultivation of the moral and intellectual virtues, and the assumption of a responsible role in the general progress of society" (23).

John F. Lynen, in "The Design of the Present: Essays on Time and Form in American Literature," (1965), really echoes Franklin when he argues that Franklin's main

role in the Autobiography is that of the sage offering lessons for the reader's instruction. He comes to this conclusion after examining the philosophic subtlety of Franklin's values, along with Franklin's views of reality and of identity.

Lynen points to a letter written by Franklin to William Vaughn dated December 9, 1788, where Franklin wrote that even though old age and health did not allow him to write as much as possible, he continued to write: "I am now employing myself in a Work your good brother once strongly recommended to me, which is writing the History of my own life" (206). Lynen also points out Franklin's genuine wish to pass along all the knowledge that he had acquired.

Another critic whose work reflects a balanced approach to the Autobiography was Alfred Owen Aldridge. In his essay "Form and Substance in Franklin's Autobiography," published in Essays on American Literature in Honor of Jay B. Hubbell, (1967), Aldridge argues strongly that Franklin's Autobiography is, in form, a "virtual disaster" because of its different times of composition, resulting in different tones and in several repetitions (56).

He further claims that its only unity is psychological – a unity arising from the delight and satisfaction that Franklin felt in writing his memoirs. Aldridge also discusses the style, which he describes as "an exquisite balance between reflection and anecdote," the functions of the anecdotes, the parallel development of Franklin and America, and the Autobiography within the eighteenth-century English and European autobiographical traditions (47-62).

The different parts of the book are uneven and inconsistent in a number of important ways, and it has enjoyed only moderate reputation among the influence on other writers of autobiography. The greatest and most enduring literary value of Franklin's memoirs is psychological rather than artistic – the delight and satisfaction in fulfilling and recording a life of superior achievement (60-61).

Morton L. Ross, in "Form and Moral Balance in Franklin's Autobiography," (1976), defends Franklin. Ross answers critics like Twain and Lawrence, who complain of Franklin's frugality, by pointing out a "moral balance" between the first half of the Autobiography where those virtues and self-advertisement are stressed and the second half

where Franklin emphasizes self-effacement and a “responsible use of wealth and leisure” (38-52):

This shift causes both the texture and focus of the book to create the change necessary to Franklin’s purpose in using his own career as the exemplum of a balanced ethical program . . . Franklin adopted the Socratic mask of the humble seeker after truth to argue more effectively, embarrass his adversaries, and please his audience (45, 47).

In the last three decades at the end of the twentieth-century, scholars have continued the tradition of tearing Franklin’s *Autobiography* apart or defining the strengths of the book. Joseph Alberic Leo Lemay has written ten essays on Franklin. In his article “Franklin and the *Autobiography*: An Essay on Recent Scholarship,” (1967), Lemay concludes that in the course of reviewing a decade of Franklin scholarship, he has found that scholars are drawn to the *Autobiography*’s intimate tone, its dominant visual image, and the project of achieving “moral perfection” (201):

Some readers (notably D.H. Lawrence) have mistaken Franklin’s means as his ends. That famous chart of the day, and that infamous list of virtues to be acquired, are not the ends that Franklin aims at; they are merely the means of discipline that will allow the ends to be achieved. Franklin’s own ultimate values are there in the book as well, for it is a book about values even more than it is a book about the means to achievement (195).

Daniel Bartholomew Shea, in “Franklin and Spiritual Autobiography,” (1968), points out explicitly that several motifs in the *Autobiography* are common in the eighteenth-century English literature and society. Finding a utilitarian and Newtonian habit of mind throughout, Shea suggests that Franklin wrote for two audiences – sophisticated literary contemporaries and plain-minded readers. Thus when Franklin took up the project of attaining moral perfection, Shea believes that Franklin offered the method, not the achievement, as exemplary, but that, although irony is indeed present, Franklin seriously presented a “hope of triumph over nature and limitation” (234-48).

Shea further says that although Franklin used irony and other literary devices to enable his memoirs to appeal to sophisticated as well as plain readers, “his life’s story is

essentially a type of all the secular covenants made between Americans and a Puritanism trimmed of its forbidding theology” (246).

Lending more weight to the rebuttal and response to Adams, Twain, and Lawrence, is Ralph Louis Ketcham, who writes in “Benjamin Franklin: Autobiography,” (1969), that he views the story of Franklin’s rise from obscurity and poverty to reputation and wealth as profoundly revolutionary in the eighteenth-century. Ketcham finds that the diction (homely and vernacular), the purpose (showing the common man the way to prosperity), and such details as the Junto episode – all imply a democratic American society fundamentally different from the hierarchical European society (28):

Unlike the other autobiographies of the time, Franklin’s deals neither with political and social success through position and intrigue nor with a successful spiritual journey. Instead Franklin’s memoirs is a truly revolutionary document because it shows that a common man can rise in the world by application of character traits accessible to anyone. The Autobiography is therefore universally relevant (25).

Carol Ohmann goes a step further by comparing Franklin’s Autobiography to Malcolm X’s in “The Autobiography of Malcolm X: A Revolutionary Use of the Franklin Tradition,” (1970). She finds that both Franklin and Malcolm X told about self-made men who neither analyzed nor explored the self. Ohmann further argues that although both measured achievement against the standards of an acquisitive society, only Malcolm X grew spiritually, thus aligning his story with the earlier traditions of spiritual autobiography:

Neither is Malcolm X very much inclined to describe the inner life, to explore it or to analyze it, whether his own or anyone else’s . . . Both Franklin and Malcolm X admire men who make conquest of the external or material world: who learns its principles and use them to practical ends, who **solve** problems and **make** things. Each accordingly cherishes an idea of the self wherein the faculties that permit making and solving are primarily valued . . . The similarity between the autobiographies of Franklin and Malcom X points out finally, then, to common areas of experience and suggests that black and white, we share a common

problem: to render human or humane the ideas by which we have traditionally shaped ourselves and our programs or institutions (134, 135, 148).

James M. Cox relates four key autobiographies, Franklin's Autobiography, Thoreau's Walden, Henry Adam's Education, and Gertrude Stein's Alice B. Toklas, to the development of American civilization in "Autobiography and America," (1971). He finds Franklin's Autobiography to be a conscious paradigm of the American Revolution and a step toward the liberation of the modern self:

What literally happens in the form of Franklin's work is that the history of the revolution, in which Franklin played such a conspicuous part, is displayed by the narrative of Franklin's early life, so that Franklin's personal history **stands in place of the revolution**. Now the personal history which Franklin puts in place of revolutionary history recounts Franklin's rise from political anonymity . . . . But this represented history was not the actual revolution. There still remained the form which would realize the revolution and thus stand for it. That form was the autobiography – the life of a self-made, self-governing man written by the man himself (259).

Taking the central theme of the Autobiography as the conflict between order and chaos, A.B. England, in "Some Thematic Patterns in Franklin's Autobiography," (1972), gives examples of this conflict in its form, character sketches, anecdotes, imagery, style, and Franklin's personality. Quickly coming to the defense of Franklin and his Autobiography was J.A. Leo Lemay, who after discussing the Autobiography's fictions and its American Dream theme (explaining its appeal as "archetypal recapitulation of the development of every individual"), Lemay argues that the main persona is Franklin as the friend of mankind, with no malicious intentions as proclaimed by critics.

John H. McLaughlin argues in his article "His brother's Keeper: Franklin's sibling Rivalry," (1973), that Franklin's drive for wealth and accumulation of knowledge were responses to his childhood disappointments and to his rivalry with his brother, James. Paul Ilie contrasts Franklin's social ethic with that of Diego de Torres Villarroel, a Spanish philosopher and statesman. Ilie finds that aristocracy and moral idealism characteristically Spanish, and democracy and ethical paradigm characteristically American.

Melvin H. Buxbaum, in "Benjamin Franklin and the Zealous Presbyterians," (1968), stresses Franklin's supposed Anglophilism, his promotion of America, and the Autobiography as apologia and a refutation of public and private criticisms of Franklin:

During the Great Awakening, Franklin used his press again to play on tensions within the Presbyterian Synod between those favoring evangelism and those opposed to it to exacerbate the problem. He supported first the evangelists, led by Whitefield and the Tennents, and then switched his support to their opponents just months before the critical Synod meeting that brought about the schism in the Presbyterian church in America. Franklin, who was a firm supporter of education and labored hard to bring about the Academy and College of Philadelphia, turned against the institution when it seemed in danger of falling into the hands of Presbyterians because of the political alliances of its provost, William Smith (264).

David M. Larson argues in "Franklin on the Nature of Man and the Possibility of Virtue," (1975), that Franklin bases his "moral theory upon consensus rather than metaphysics" and that he rejects "the theoretical extremes of Hobbesian pessimism and Shaftesburian optimism" (116-118). Thomas Cooley, in "Educated Lives: The Rise of Modern Autobiography in America," (1976), argues that Franklin and Thoreau adhered to the same psychology and theories of identity, both believing that character can only develop, but cannot change. Therefore their stories concern "fulfilling the self's innate capacities" (178).

Another great critic of Franklin who found it irresistible not to utilize the Puritan factor to the fullest is Karl J. Weintraub. He wrote an essay in the Journal of Religion (1976), called "The Puritan ethic and Benjamin Franklin," in which Weintraub echoes the strong resentment of Max Weber at the beginning of the century.

Weintraub believes that Franklin has "the Puritan personality without the Puritan motivation and the Puritan objective" (227). Weintraub argues that "Franklin, 'a tepid Deist all his life,' secularized the Puritan ethic' (234). He also criticizes Franklin for retaining a trace of religion: Franklin is not Voltaire, who saw no meaning written into the universe. And in that sense Franklin has not fully gone toward secularization' (223-37).

Another scholar who compared Franklin's Autobiography with Rousseau was Jean A. Perkins. Perkins in "The Ironic Mode in Autobiography: Franklin and Rousseau," (1977), argues that the eighteenth-century fashion of seeking causes or origins along with the new stylistic fictional techniques transformed autobiography. Perkins shows how Franklin and Rousseau, in stressing childhood and youth as keys to their adult selves, employed an ironic tone to manipulate aesthetic distance:

Franklin was fully aware of the novel and its new devices and used them. He was successful in handling the problem of reporting on his own youth and earlier manhood. Franklin awarded the inappropriateness of complete identification of writer and subject by adopting the ironic point of view toward his youth, and he learned of this device from the novels of his time, which, in characteristic eighteenth-century manner, sought out the origins of things. In Franklin's case, this meant discovering and reporting what in his youth made him the man the narrator had become. The distance between author and subject enables him to treat his past humorously and humor is a tone not to be found in spiritual autobiographies or conduct books (225).

In "Benjamin Franklin's 'Perfect Character,'" (1978), Robert H. Bell criticizes D.H. Lawrence for missing the irony in Franklin's attempt to achieve a "Perfect Character," but finds Franklin's basic self "insufficiently complex" because he "yielded to the autobiographer's strongest temptation: to make external, retrospective assessments of himself at the expense of an internal, authentically realized presentation of character" (17-19).

Bell also finds the book lacks unity, being "episodic, like a picaresque novel, with little pretense of exploring the relationship of one segment to another," and Bell further observes that although religious issues pervade throughout the Autobiography, Franklin invariably banters with the rigorous theological core of the old faith" (13-25).

In a direct response to Max Weber and Karl J. Weintraub, who had all been influenced by Adams, Twain, and Lawrence, Norman S. Fiering, in "Benjamin Franklin and the Way to Virtue," (1978), argues that Franklin's approach to virtue was not Puritan, which is characterized by scrupulosity, "that intense self-examination that worries

primarily about purity of intention,” but Aristotelian, which stresses the contribution that habit makes to virtue and was common among eighteenth-century thinkers, especially the British associationists, who believed in a mechanistic model of behavior, whereby the slow, incremental inculcation of habits modified external behavior (210).

Fiering also goes further in classifying Franklin’s thirteen virtues. He divides them into separate categories. For example, four (order, frugality, industry, and cleanliness) are bourgeoisie; three (silence, chastity, and humility) are Christian (as much Roman Catholic as Puritan); one sincerity or honesty is unclassifiable; and the remaining five list are the traditional classical virtues. And Fiering also points out that in eighteenth-century ethics, Franklin’s virtues would be classified as “duties to self, as distinguished from duties to God and duties to other men” (199-223).

J.A. Leo Lemay, in “Benjamin Franklin, Universal Genius,” (1978), dichotomizes Franklin’s presentation of the American Dream motif into I, the rise from rags to riches; and 2, the rise from impotence to importance, with the latter theme giving the book much of its allegorical meaning. Franklin’s development parallels the rising independence of the American colonies and its archetypal power. Furthermore, Franklin’s rise parallels every individual’s development from helplessness and nebulousness to the adult’s comparative power and identity.

Lemay also sketches three of Benjamin Franklin’s underlying philosophic implications of the American Dream: 1, a philosophy of individualism; 2, a philosophy of Free Will; and 3, a deliberate espousal of hope, even of optimism. And Lemay further contends that the *Autobiography*’s fictive world is “the first completely modern world...in Western literature: nonfeudal, nonaristocratic, and non-religious” (1-44).

A. Thomas Couser, in “Deism and Prophecy: Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography*,” (1979), finds that Franklin’s “sense of delight” in his “succession roles” and his belief in the “values and consequence” of the individual distinguish Franklin’s *Autobiography* “from the spiritual autobiographies preceding it” (45). The “overall pattern” in Franklin’s *Autobiography* is “a gradual but dramatic extension of the scope of his interest, knowledge, and influence” (46).

In “contexts of Autobiography in the eighteenth Century: France and America,” (1979), Jean A. Perkins continued her arguments in comparing both Franklin and Rousseau from her earlier scholarship. Perkins believes that Franklin and Rousseau both reflect the historical situation of their countries. “America was a new land and pragmatic solutions pursued with rationality and a spirit of compromise could succeed,” whereas “France was going through the agonies of a mortal illness which could only be cured by a monstrous upheaval” (231-41).

Hugh J. Dawson tries to justify the psychological reason prompting Franklin to write his memoirs. In “Fathers and Sons: Franklin’s ‘Memoirs’ as Myth and Metaphor,” (1979/80), Dawson says that Franklin wrote his memoirs to justify and to reconcile himself with the values and personality of his father, Josiah. Dawson points out passages in the Autobiography where he believes Franklin displays “his guilty ambivalence at having disobeyed his father in the process of surpassing him” (285).

There are many interpretations that can be culled from reading the Autobiography and these scholars may not be far off the mark in suggesting all these various suppositions. Some, like Tom Bailey who writes in an essay about Franklin called “Benjamin Franklin’s Autobiography: The Self and Society in a New world,” (1981), suggests that the Autobiography advocates “a radical, generous displaying of selfishness for cultural goals,” giving examples, on the one hand, of Franklin’s downplaying the pleasure he felt at exhibiting his swimming feats in London, and, on the other hand, of his downplaying the anguish he felt at the death of his son Francis, who died at an early age (97).

In one of the best scholarly treatments of the Autobiography, by Ruth A. Banes, “The Exemplary Self: Autobiography in Eighteenth Century America,” (1982), she examines the autobiographies of John Woolman, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin to prove that “the exemplary self was the prevailing autobiographical persona during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” (231). Banes identifies that all four authors use “apologetic openings, parable form, and the purposes of Divine Providence” (226).

In Philip D. Beidler’s essay “the ‘Author’ of Franklin’s Autobiography,” (1981-82), he argues that Franklin’s Autobiography reveals a fundamentally Augustinian view of

the relationship between human imperfection and “of our utter presumptuousness in ever attempting a final pronouncement on anything.” He further claims that Franklin’s “apparently ‘modern’ rhetorical self-consciousness is in fact a direct response to much older imperatives of religion”(264).

More and more contemporary scholars are beginning to explore the value of Franklin’s Autobiography. Gary Lindberg, in “Benjamin Franklin and the Model Self,” (1982), finds that Franklin assembled the most influential model or self in American history – the do-it-yourself self. But Lindberg warns readers not to treat Franklin’s Autobiography as the epitome for the rags-to-riches story. Falling into the misconception would only deny readers to overlook his larger importance. Franklin was less interested in riches than in developing “means and techniques” for getting ahead (74).

Lindberg further argues that the hero of the Autobiography has appealed to Americans because his model self in this memoirs gives the ways one can achieve success, and these ways can be imitated:

Franklin is actually emotionally removed from his created, model self, who makes his way independently in a shifty but dynamic world and learns to survive and prosper. The model self also learns that life is public performance and one must cultivate appearances and be a publicist for himself and for his causes. Franklin avoids introspection and questions that lead to awe and concentrates instead on how the created self accomplished what he intended (85).

This is especially true of the misunderstood chart of thirteen virtues. Lindberg says that Franklin was serious about the project while amused at the young self who undertook it. Probably, Franklin found it easy, perhaps too easy, to compartmentalize his feelings and roles, and therefore many critics, lacking his detachment, have misconstrued his ideas on becoming perfect. The point is not that he failed at perfection, but that he did become a better person through a technique anyone could employ.

Walter Shear, in “Franklin’s Self-Portrait,” (1962), claims that the major fault in Franklin’s Autobiography is the weakness of its self-portrayal. Shear supports his thesis by saying that “Franklin comes across as a lifeless, one-dimensional being.” However, the

Autobiography, according to Shear, “is hardly a failure,” since he aptly points out that “the quality of the style and the book itself fits the character extremely well” (74).

Shear further contends that Franklin wanted to make such an abstract character of himself, since he approached life as a philosopher:

He used his story to concentrate on the important problem of self-interest, and in doing so sacrifices individuality, as he makes himself Everyman. His quest to discover his true interest therefore became all of ours. At the heart of self-interest was vanity, a quality inimical to success; therefore, Franklin devotes considerable space to the philosophical effort to overcome his pride. This is his method of composing the Autobiography elsewhere (84).

In 1982, Charles Mabee, in “Benjamin Franklin’s Literary Response to Dogmatic Religion,” (1982), contends that Franklin did not reject Christianity and actually accepted its moral teachings. Mabee says that Franklin, however, reject “the heresy and orthodoxy categories” (62). Franklin recognized that the major problems confronting American churches was the need to profess that truth was one while accepting “a certain degree of relativity” as a concession to “their fragmented existence” (62).

Mabee further claims that Franklin never solved this problem, but “neither did he abandon Christianity” (63). Instead he tried to reform Presbyterianism in particular from its “idolatrous dogmatism” and urged in his fictional and nonfictional writings the adoption of “a proper Christianity free of dogmatism and clerical strife” (67).

Finally, two scholars who have devoted much of their time and effort in researching Benjamin Franklin, and who disagree with each other, are Francis Jennings and Robert Middlekauff. Jennings, in his latest book on Franklin, Benjamin Franklin, Politician – The Mask and the Man, (1996), has tried to interpret Franklin’s role in the formation of the Republic. He provides a new view of the beginnings of the American Revolution by studying Franklin’s struggle with Thomas Penn. Jennings argues that by striving against Penn’s feudal lordship, and indirectly against King George, Franklin inevitably became master of the Pennsylvania assembly.

Jennings argues further that Franklin left out much information about his confrontation and battle with Penn in the Autobiography and, in so doing, “robs history of

his true role in the making of the new country” (18). “It is through an accurate accounting of what Franklin did, not what he said he did in his Autobiography that we understand Jennings’s meaning of the term “first American” (16).

Although Jennings reassessment of Franklin as a vain and egotistical genius is amusing, he nevertheless recognizes Franklin’s heroic qualities, and regards his limitations as those of the Enlightenment itself:

Besides his tough political leadership in Philadelphia, marked throughout by principle, Franklin’s tour of the countryside to fashion defenses was genuinely courageous in the face of real danger. Indian enemies were everywhere. Hidden bowmen were quite as capable of bringing down a colonel as a private. By his personal example, Franklin stiffened the morale of his people . . . In 1775, Franklin knew he had to join the Presbyterian radicals or subside into nonentity. In turn, they needed a leader with prestige, and no American colonial had more prestige than Franklin despite all his setbacks. (they were famous setbacks) . . . We must see Franklin in a very real sense as more than a genius, more than a man. He was a mirror of his times. But a human mirror, which meant that his reflections could be different from those of other humans of the same era (137, 195, 196).

In a disclaimer under the title of “Personal Note,” Jennings clearly spells out that his reverence for Franklin has not dampened, despite his exhaustive study on Franklin’s political career from 1744 to 1775, before the American:

Some findings of this book have gone against my bias. Since youth, I have admired Franklin intensely and without reservation. I have kept the Van Doren through all removals for half a century. Until I began serious research for the present book, I swallowed it whole. To the critic, therefore, I request please do not accuse me of writing with a desire to cry down Benjamin Franklin. ‘Twas not so. What is reported herein is the product of evidence that surprised me and taught me that Franklin was a real man rather than the chaste idol of an adolescent. My admiration has not been lessened by its object’s assumption of recognizable humanity. The evidence is cited (22).

Most critics might swallow Jennings's personal testimony if not for a number of factors. This disclaimer comes at the beginning of the book before it is assumed all the facts and evidence are gathered; probably if it appears at the end of Chapter 19 – Coda, then it lends credence.

Despite all the overwhelming findings and evidence stacking up against Franklin, Jennings could have counter balance with reasons and supporting proofs to paint Franklin in a favorable light. For example, on the issue dealing with Indians, Jennings does not try to find a mediating solution to explain Franklin's conflicting principles on the Indians:

I do not believe we shall ever have a firm Peace with the Indians till we have well drubbed them . . . Every Thing relating to Indian Affairs and the Defence of all the Colonies could be put under a general Council form'd by all the Colonies with a general Governor appointed by the Crown (85, 86).

We can compare the above statement presumably made by Franklin with the one below. Because the statement starts with "It remains to note that Franklin suggested that ..." We see that Jennings does not have any solid proof to support his supposition against Franklin's presumed ambivalence:

The only crime of these poor Wretches seems to have been, that they had a reddish brown skin, and black Hair; and some People of that Sort, it seems, had murdered some of our Relations. If it be right to kill Men for such a Reason, then, should any Man with a freckled Face and red Hair, kill a Wife or Child of mine, it would be right for me to revenge it, by killing all the freckled red-haired Men, Women and Children, I could afterwards anywhere meet with" (Francis Jennings quoted from **Franklin's Papers** 11:55).

From the beginning of this book, Jennings has already set the tone that follows, "Franklin did not slant his Autobiography by actual lying," but, according to Jennings, "he contrived strategic omissions and suggestions," so that he could "guide a reader to self-delusion" (38). Jennings argues at a number of places in the book showing the reason why Franklin had omitted certain facts and in conclusion in the last chapter, he equated Franklin with Henry Kissinger and Richard M. Nixon, who, according to Jennings, were "men known as compulsive liars during their public lives" (201).

He goes further by condemning Franklin zealously with thought-provoking questions as to whether “the passage of time,” in a way, “has somehow purified the writings and characters of other famous men such as Benjamin Franklin – men who presented themselves, like Nixon, draped in Virtue” (201). Jennings questions the value of history if we base our perceptions on people such as Franklin and Nixon. There are many factors to be considered if both of these historical figures are compared, and the findings will completely wipe out Jennings’s wild conclusion.

Jennings claims that “his book [Franklin’s Autobiography] is pollution in the wells of history, requiring a serious task of purification to save readers from the ethnic and political malaise” (20). For example, Franklin, according to Jennings, purposely left out his love-hate relationship with the Quakers in the assembly and his final revenge upon their leaders from his Autobiography:

Although Quakers complained of being snubbed by Franklin, he used his unique talents and status to gain influence in high places” . . . He (Franklin) said nothing in their (Quakers) favor, either to notice the many benefits they had conferred on the community (often in partnership with himself) or to ease the hardships of their banishment to western Virginia, which was then a frontier outpost lacking in comforts. Israel Pemberton, Jr., “King of the Quakers,” was one of those punished, and his exile was transparently a political warning to all Quakers to shut up (183, 222).

This bitter episode, says Jennings, of the Quakers’ banishment, was swept under the carpet by “writers making Franklin an icon of virtue” (200). Franklin carefully avoided any mention of Pemberton in his memoirs, including Pemberton’s role in the institutions they were involved in together. In fact, Jennings claimed that Pemberton “worked harder and longer than Franklin,” for this institution, yet the glory was showered on Franklin, “but Franklin took the credit” (200). Jennings claims that Franklin had no intention of including this because:

Events reveal the ego hidden so carefully behind his words. When Franklin discovered that Pennsylvania’s Proprietary Thomas Penn, whose cause he had been serving loyally, had spied on him and plotted his political destruction, the

furious genius campaigned to extinguish Penn's estate in Pennsylvania. When Quakers worked against his campaign to make the province royal instead of Proprietary, Franklin harbored such deep resentment that he colluded with their disfranchisement a few years later (15).

This resentment towards the Quakers, claims Jennings, fits into Franklin's practice of omitting some facts to suit his purpose. Franklin's defeats at the hand of Thomas Penn were omitted from his Autobiography, because "Franklin was constitutionally unable to admit error or failure" (17). But another stronger reason for dismissing this suggestion of "feudalism," was the "domination of American history, and especially the American Revolution," in Jennings' contention, by New England's historians who regarded "feudal lordship [as] an irrelevant issue" (170).

Furthermore, Jennings argues that personal reasons, such as betrayal and greed, prompted Franklin to carefully eradicate of his early association with "those feudal Penns" (17). Franklin, according to Jennings, did not want to remind Autobiography readers of how he turned against the Penns, and "became their most bitter enemy," so that he could become in the people's eyes, "the people's tribune, the one man who could lead the multitude of squabbling sects and parties against feudal oppression" (17).

Robert Middlekauff portrays Franklin as a different sort of person. In some parts of his most recent work, published about six months earlier than Jennings' study, Benjamin Franklin and His Enemies, (1996), Middlekauff provides the reasons behind Franklin's acrimonious relationship with Thomas Penn.

Middlekauff's best chapter unravels the acrid, protracted struggle between Franklin and Pennsylvania's proprietor, Thomas Penn. Middlekauff intelligently captures the ways in which Franklin's deepening hatred for Penn justified his irrational and self-damaging obsession with overthrowing the Proprietary. He manages to show the ways in which Penn's paranoia about Franklin conditioned his incompetence to control his colony.

Middlekauff also catches the ways in which the contest for local power led to a Revolution about which Franklin was no more prescient than anyone else. Middlekauff understands Franklin as a man for whom country was always the great love of his life. He presents him as a man who took England and its empire to be his country until he made

the belated and unwelcome discovery that England was an enemy, and the transforming discovery that he himself was an American:

It was the monarchy that he (Franklin) clung to in these years before independence, a monarchy that served as a symbol of both power and virtue . . . Initially the feeling he found hardest to admit to himself was that the king was an enemy. His reluctance . . . some basis in the old convention . . . that the monarch could do no wrong though his government could . . . But bringing himself to denounce George III was difficult even as the colonies approached and then plunged into war. Early in the monarch's reign Franklin had declared himself convinced that the king was a man of virtue. After the crisis of the Stamp Act, George III largely disappeared from Franklin's thought as a decisive figure. He saw nothing of the king . . . but much of the king's ministers. These men drew his attention and eventually produced his deepest disillusionment and then his anger and hatred . . . They (the king's ministers) seemed indifferent to American interests and American opinion. And before long they seemed to Franklin unyielding enemies of America (120, 121-122, 123).

Middlekauff's Franklin as contrasted with Jennings', comes across as a man who cannot abide affronts to his sense of elemental human dignity. None of Franklin's enemies was elevated enough to condescend to him in any way that disturbed unduly. An essential part of the power of Middlekauff's argument is that the rest of the book is less about Franklin's enmities than about his enemies. His treatment of John Adams is among the most damning indictments of that pathetically tormented man ever written:

Benjamin Franklin, this man of extraordinary talent of a range unsurpassed in the eighteenth century, made enemies, with few exceptions, only in politics. The break with his son was more complicated and must have had sources besides their political disagreements. What they were is not clear, although Franklin's insistence that "natural duties" take precedence over political allegiances suggests that his conception of fatherhood was somehow at stake . . . The early enemies of Franklin, the Penns and the governors they sent to America, all had an understanding of the rights of Americans that differed from Franklin's (209, 210).

According to Middlekauff, there was also another factor involved in the disdain the Penns felt for Franklin. Franklin was an American colonial who dared to challenge proprietary authority, which “crossed the boundaries of good taste,” and by doing so inevitably “trespassed on the territory of the English governing class” (210).

Some of the later political enemies, such as John Adams, were equally enthusiastic to defend America’s liberty, but they believed Franklin, “really shared their concern or thought that his means were inappropriate” (210). Middlekauff also suspects that Adams “had a narrower vision of the world,” than Franklin did and thus Adams misconstrued “questions of politics into questions of morality” (210).

Another important issue that separated Franklin from his political enemies was how the young republic was to play the right cards when dealing with European states. Franklin understood the meaning of “power and the role of interest in diplomacy,” which brought about strong animosity from these people, and Middlekauff also reveals that, “these colleagues, who thought him without principles, who described him as debauched, not only hated him but at times seemed to feel a physical revulsion from him” (211).

Franklin’s other enemies, according to Middlekauff, were obsessed with him, while he was sometimes ignorant and almost always tolerant of their enmity. His very virtues, as Middlekauff maintains, made men who abhorred anyone larger than themselves his foes:

Franklin’s virtues and his strength made some men his enemies. These men disliked anyone larger than themselves. Perhaps such men exist in every generation. From the time that fame came to Franklin after his experiments revealed that lightning and electricity were the same thing, he stood out as a tempting target. As his fame increased, and as he showed his gifts as political leader, first in Pennsylvania, then in Congress, and finally Europe, his shadow lengthened. There was also his immense charm. People of all sorts took to him, liked and admired him enormously. Wherever he was he played to this disposition in others to find in him something attractive and reassuring. And there was of course much that was attractive and reassuring. And there was of course much that was attractive as well as remarkable about him. The variousness of his talents

and his careers, some pursued simultaneously, aroused admiration when they did not inspire awe.

Not all were charmed of course. Not all felt admiration, let alone awe. Restless in his shadow, they could not wait to get at him, to diminish him, to show that there were dark sides to his character. Without realizing it, they really wanted to prove that he was like them. To a certain extent these men were right, and Franklin invited the hostility that came his way. Everyone knew that there was a powerful temperament beneath his placid surface (22-23).

If Franklin loathed those men who forced him to confront his own limitations, he was despised in turn by Americans who, like he, were trying to establish a place for themselves in an incipient social structure. Adams was jealous of Franklin's success, threatened by what appeared to be his easy rise to fame. Middlekauff's delineation of Adams as a man whose Puritan background gave him the "urge to work and to accomplish something" and who "craved fame and reputation" (173) could well be the stumbling block in his acceptance of Franklin's contribution to the new nation.

Finally, if a man may be judged by his enemies, Middlekauff's Franklin emerges as a more admirable figure than the canonical Franklin himself: more candid, generous, decent, and democratic. He was assailed as an Indian sympathizer, which he was, by the cold-blooded Indian-slaughterers of Paxton. He was denounced as a democrat, which he was, by skulking William Smith. He was feared as a tribune of the people, which he was, by profiteering Thomas Penn. And he was scourged as a sensualist, which he was, by self-pitying John Adams, who wielded a pen every bit as petty, poisonous, and bitter as William Smith's. It is Middlekauff's artistry to allow Franklin's immensity to emerge from the diatribes he drew from such small spirited men who had their own personal agenda to fulfill.

Middlekauff concludes that Franklin was one of the only men of the Anglo-American Enlightenment who was neither an ethnocentric bigot nor an imperial seeker after universal human nature:

Franklin did not reveal his affectionate side easily. He usually expressed it in some slightly disguised form – in his advice to his friends, his concern for their welfare,

and his generosity to them and to his family and relatives. His public spirit, evident in so much of what he did, had its enlightened – or rational – side. But it also grew from a genuine affection for humankind. To be sure, Franklin's enlightenment had bleakness as well as hope at its core. He did not really have much faith in human nature, despite his splendid commitment to making human life better (212).

## V. Conclusion

Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* has a few factual inaccuracies and exaggerations. His editors stated that Franklin "frequently misremembered public and private details, and occasionally even distorted versions of important events." Others have pointed out too, that the image of Franklin projected in his memoirs does always reflect the real man. John Adams, Mark Twain, and D.H. Lawrence found fault with Franklin – for a narrow sense of freedom and life, for turning political differences into morality issues, for suggesting an adolescent life which parents tried to emulate, for preaching chastity while practicing immorality.

But the fact remains that the book is extremely readable. Its style – "smooth, clear, and short" Franklin's own recipe for the good style – makes it an outstanding example of his best expository writing. Furthermore, despite the notoriety of his critics' popular caricature of him, the influence of this book has been tremendous.

As Clinton Rossiter said, it has been "translated and retranslated into a dozen languages, printed and reprinted in hundreds of editions, read and reread by millions of people, especially by young and impressionable Americans. The influence of these few hundred pages has been matched by no other American book" (*The American Quest*, 1790-1970, xiv).

Franklin's versatility as a writer extended far beyond his *Autobiography*. In proverbs, satires, essays, letters, and philosophical writings such as his playful but highly logical *Dissertation upon Liberty and Necessity*, a Deistic work of 1725, he exhibited amazing versatility. Franklin's ingenious revisions of popular sayings have influenced the minds and lives of his contemporaries and of later readers, and have played a powerful role in shaping popular culture in America.

Carl Van Doren's monumental biography of Franklin in 1938 helped to restore a sense of balance to the critics' zealous supporters by supplying the mass of accurate historical information previously lacking in many interpretations of Franklin's

Autobiography. Van Doren showed him as what would now be called a great communicator reporting as he “moved serenely through the visible world, trying to understand at all.” This was a world far different from the mysterious interior world of private emotion and glandular excretions some critics expected from an autobiography.

As this thesis has shown, Franklin’s three major critics all had their own personal agendas to satisfy. They at least agree that Franklin was a great man who contributed more than his fair share of worth. However, the faults that Adams, Twain, and Lawrence discovered are insignificant when compared to Franklin’s overall contribution to humankind.

According to Middlekauff, Franklin had long given up the kind of morality cherished by John Adams. He was growing old and tired in his years in France, and he was a little cynical, and certainly skeptical of most conventional beliefs about religion and politics. He was different in style and in moral perceptions from his American enemies. They recognized the difference and, misunderstanding what it meant, hated him for it. Middlekauff also suggests that part of the hatred came out of differences in temperament and culture, partly due to genuine disagreements on policy, and partly for some reason that is “simply mysterious, and perhaps defies explanation” (212).

Mark Twain took a gamble in adhering closely to Franklin’s precepts of Poor Richard’s proverbs and to the example presented in the Autobiography. According to Twain’s biographer, Margaret Sanborn, Twain himself had zealously followed the rules laid down:

He (Twain) was more reconciled to his job because of his study of Benjamin Franklin’s Autobiography. He wrote his mother that he was “closely imitating” the great Franklin, even to living on bread and water. He was amazed to discover how clear his mind had become on that diet (62).

James C. Cowan says that D.H. Lawrence was suspicious of perfectionist schemes because he saw in them as “exertions of conscious will” which he considered “mechanistic” (27). Lawrence’s purpose was to ridicule Franklin’s belief in human perfectibility by parodying Franklin’s pride, his compulsive reification of living into a code,

and his emphasis on extrinsic rather than intrinsic reality: "Benjamin had no concern, really, with the immortal soul. He was too busy with social man" (13).

Lawrence found some things to admire in Franklin – "his sturdy courage, ... his sagacity, ... his glimpsing into the thunders of electricity, ... his common-sense humour" – but he adds, "**I do not like him**" (13-14). Essentially what Lawrence disliked in Franklin was his manipulation of himself and others in static perfectionism, rather than being himself and relating to others in dynamic communion.

Apart from taking Franklin's Autobiography at face value, Lawrence only successfully depicted himself as a humorless person with a disconcerted attitude guiding him. If the Autobiography was as ineffective as Lawrence suggested, then Davy Crockett would not have taken the Autobiography with him on the journey that ended at the Alamo (Paul M. Zall, 16).

Despite what these writers have written about Franklin, he was a great man with a great story to tell. His pragmatic habit of thought made him shun the ideal conceptions of the philosophers. Insatiably curious, knowing neither inhibitions nor repressions, Franklin accepted serenely the world as it was and brought to its understanding and mastery rare common sense, genuine disinterestedness, and a cool, flexible intelligence, fortified by exact knowledge and chastened and humanized by practical experience.

Rising from poverty to affluence, from obscurity to fame, he was equally at ease with rich and poor, the cultivated and the untutored; he spoke with equal facility the language of vagabonds and kings, politicians and philosophers, and men of letters. The whole world was his field of activity. He was indeed the most universal and cosmopolitan spirit of his age, a true citizen of the world, and yet remained throughout his life more voraciously American than any of his famous countrymen. The secret of Franklin's amazing capacity for assimilating experience lay perhaps in his final refusal to commit complete to any issue or cause. No one enterprise ever absorbed all his energies.

In all of Franklin's dealings with men and affairs, genuine, sincere, loyal as he surely was, one feels that he is nevertheless not wholly committed; some thought remains uncommunicated; some penetrating observation is held in reserve. This characteristic is plain in his famous Autobiography, which is anything but a frank personal revelation.

However, his language is the plain speech of a man who has nothing to lose by relating those aspects of this life which he deemed valuable to others. One of the greatest of autobiographies ever written, in English, Franklin's Autobiography established the straightforward, realistic style that has been followed by most modern autobiographers, which testifies to this book's worthiness and "perfectibility."

## VI. Appendix

### ULTIMATE TESTAMENT

You desire to know something of  
my religion. It is the first time  
I have been questioned upon it. But  
I cannot take your curiosity amiss, and  
shall endeavor in a few words to gratify it.  
Here is my creed. I believe in one God, creator  
of the universe. That He governs it by His  
Providence. That He ought to be worshipped. That the  
most acceptable service we render Him is doing good to  
his other children. That the soul of man is immortal, and  
will be treated with justice in another life respecting its  
conduct in this. These I take to be the fundamental principles  
of all sound religion, and I regard them as you do in whatever  
sect I meet with them. As to Jesus of Nazareth, my opinion of  
whom you particularly desire, I think the system of morals, and his  
religion, as he left them to us, the best the world ever saw or is  
likely to see; but I apprehend it has received various corrupting  
changes, and I have with most of the present dissenters in England,  
some doubts as to his divinity; tho' it is a question I do not dogmatize  
upon, having never studied it, and think it needless to busy myself  
with it now, when I expect soon an opportunity of knowing the truth  
with less trouble. I see no harm however, in its being believed,  
if that belief has the good consequence, as it probably has, of  
making his doctrines more respected and better observed;

especially as I do not perceive that the Supreme takes it amiss, by distinguishing the unbelievers in his government of the world with any peculiar marks of his displeasure.

I shall only add respecting myself that, having experienced the goodness of that Being in conducting me prosperously through a long life, I have no doubt of its continuance in the next, though without the smallest conceit of meriting such goodness.

March 9, 1790. Benjamin Franklin wrote an explanatory letter to Ezra Stiles, President of Yale, to clarify his often-questioned conviction in religious affiliation and faith. Franklin died almost a month later, April 17, 1790.

## VII. Works Cited

- Adams, John. The Works of John Adams. Ed. Charles Francis Adams. Boston: Little & Brown, 1856.
- Aldridge, Alfred Owen. Benjamin Franklin and Natural God. North Carolina: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1967.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The First Published Memoir of Franklin." William & Mary Quarterly 3:24 (1967): 624-28.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Form and Substance in Franklin's Autobiography." Essays on American Literature in Honor of Jay B. Hubbell. Ed. Clarence Gohdes. Durham: Duke UP, 1967, 47-62.
- Bailey, Tom. "Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography: The Self and Society in a New World." Midwest Quarterly 22 (1981): 93-104.
- Banes, Ruth A. "The Exemplary Self: Autobiography in Eighteenth Century America." Biography 5 (1982): 226-39.
- Barrick, Mac E. "On the Franklin Anecdote." American Notes & Queries 24 (1985): 42.
- Beidler, Philip D. "The 'Author' of Franklin's Autobiography." Early American Literature 16 (1981/82): 257-69.
- Bell, Robert H. "Benjamin Franklin's 'Perfect Character.'" Eighteenth-Century Life 5:ii (Winter, 1978): 13-25.
- Bier, Jesse. "Franklin's Autobiography: Benchmark of American Literature." Western Humanities Review 12:1 (1958): 57-65.
- Buxbaum, Melvin H. Benjamin Franklin and the Zealous Presbyterians. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1968.
- Cawalti, John G. Apostles of the Self-Made Man. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1965.
- Cooley, Thomas. Educated Lives: The Rise of Modern Autobiography in America. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1976.

- Couser, A. Thomas. "Deism and Prophecy: Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography." American Autobiography. Anherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1979, 41-50.
- Cowan, James C. D.H. Lawrence's American Journey: A Study in Literature and Myth. Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1970.
- Cox, James M. "Autobiography and America." Virginia Quarterly Review 47- (1971): 252-77.
- Dauber, Kenneth. "Benjamin Franklin and the Idea of Authorship." Criticism 28 (1986): 255-86.
- Dawson, Hugh J. "Fathers and Sons: Franklin's 'Memoirs' as Myth and Metaphor." Early American Literature 14 (Winter, 1979/80): 269-92.
- England, A.B. "Some Thematic Patterns in Franklin's Autobiography." Eighteenth-Century Studies 5 (1972): 421-30.
- Erwin, Robert. "Benjamin Franklin: A Face as Familiar as that of the Moon." The North American Review 280 (1995): 4-15.
- Fichtelberg, Joseph. "The Complex Image and Reader in the Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin." Early American Literature 23:2 (1988): 202-16.
- Fiering, Norman S. "Benjamin Franklin and the Way to Virtue." American Quarterly 30 (1978): 199-223.
- Franklin, Benjamin. Benjamin Franklin's Memoirs: Parallel Text Edition. Ed. Max Farrand. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1949.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin. Ed. Leonard Labaree, Ralph Louis Ketcham, H.C. Boatfield, and H.H. Fineman. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography. Ed. J.A. Leo Lemay and Paul M. Zall. New York: W.W. Norton, 1986.
- Friedlaeder, Marc, and Butterfield, L.H. Diary of Charles Francis Adams. Vol. 3 1829-1831. Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1988.
- Griffith, John. "Franklin's Sanity and the Man behind the Masks." The Oldest Revolutionary: Essays on Benjamin Franklin. Ed. J.A. Leo Lemay. Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1976, 123-38.

- Ilie, Paul. "Franklin and Villarroel: Social Consequences in Two Autobiographies." Eighteenth-Century Studies 7 (1974): 321-42.
- Jennings, Francis. Benjamin Franklin, Politician: The Mask and the Man. New York: W.W. Norton, 1996.
- Ketcham, Ralph Louis. "Benjamin Franklin: Autobiography." Landmark of American Writing. Ed. Hennig Cohen. New York: Basic Books, 1969.
- Larson, David M. "Franklin on the Nature of Man and the Possibility of Virtue." Early American Literature 10 (1975): 111-20.
- Lawrence, D.H. "Benjamin Franklin." Studies in Classic American Literature. New York: T. Seltzer, 1923, 13-31.
- Lemay, Joseph Alberic Leo. "Franklin and the Autobiography: An Essay on Recent Scholarship." Eighteenth-Century Studies 2 (1967): 185-211.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Benjamin Franklin." Major Writers of Early American Literature. Ed. Everett H. Emerson. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1972. 205-43.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Benjamin Franklin, Universal Genius." The Renaissance Man in the Eighteenth Century. Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1978, 1-44.
- Levin, David. "The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin: The Puritan Experimenter in Life and Art." Yale Review 53 (1964): 258-75.
- Lindberg, Gary. "Benjamin Franklin and the Model Self." The Confidence Man in American Literature. New York: Oxford UP, 1982.
- Lodge, Henry Cabot. George Washington. Vol. II. Boston and New York: The University Press, 1898.
- Lynen, John F. The Design of the Present: Essays on Time and Form in American Literature. New Haven: Yale UP, 1965.
- Mabee, Charles. "Benjamin Franklin's Literary Response to Dogmatic Religion." American Journal of Theology & Philosophy 2 (1980): 60-68.
- Masur, Louis P. The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin. New York: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1993.
- Maugham, W. Somerset. "The Classic Books of America." Saturday Evening Post 212 (Jan. 6, 1940).

- McLaughlin, John H. "His Brother's Keeper: Franklin's Sibling Rivalry." South Atlantic Bulletin 38:4 (1973): 62-69.
- Middlekauff, Robert. Benjamin Franklin and His Enemies. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.
- Miles, Richard D. "The American Image of Benjamin Franklin." American Quarterly 9 (1957): 117-43.
- Morgan, David T. The Devious Dr. Franklin, Colonial Agent: Benjamin Franklin's Years in London. Georgia: Mercer UP, 1996.
- Morse, John T., Jr., Benjamin Franklin. Boston: Cambridge, 1898.
- Nolan, J. Bennett. General Benjamin Franklin. Philadelphia: Univeristy of Pennsylvania Press, 1936.
- Perkins, Jean A. "The Ironic Mode in Autobiography: Franklin and Rousseau." Ed. Ronald C. Rosbottom. Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture 6 (1977): 215-28.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Contexts of Autobiography in the Eighteenth Century: France and America." Enlightenment Studies in Honour of Lester G. Crocker. Eds. Alfred J. Bingham, Jr., and Virgil W. Topazio. Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 1979, 231-41.
- Ross, Morton L. "Form and Substance in Franklin's Autobiography." Ariel 3 (1976): 38-52.
- Sanborn, Margaret. Mark Twain: The Bachelor Years. New York: Bantam, 1990.
- Sayre, Robert Freeman. "The Worldly Franklin and the Provincial Critics." Texas Studies in Literature & Language 4 (1963): 512-24.
- Schueller, Malini. "Authorial Discourse and Pseudo-Dialogue in Franklin's Autobiography." Early American Literature 22 (1987): 94-107.
- Seavey, Ormond. "D.H. Lawrence and 'The First Dummy American.'" The Georgia Review 39 (1985): 113-28.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Becoming Benjamin Franklin: The Autobiography and the Life. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1988.
- Shea, Daniel Bartholomew, Jr., "Franklin and Spiritual Autobiography." Spiritual Autobiography in Early America. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1968.
- Shear, Walter. "Franklin's Self-Portrait." Midwest Quarterly 4 (1962): 71-86.

- Shurr, William H. "Now, Gods, Stand Up for Bastards": Reinterpreting Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography. American Literature 64 (Sept. 1992): 435-51.
- Skemp, Sheila L. William Franklin: Son of a Patriot, Servant of a King. New York: Oxford UP, 1990.
- Spiller, Robert Ernest. "Benjamin Franklin: Student of Life." Journal of the Franklin Institute 233:4 (1942): 309-29.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Franklin on the Art of Being Human." Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society 100 (1956): 304-15.
- Twain, Mark. "The Late Benjamin Franklin." The Galaxy 10 (1870).
- \_\_\_\_\_. Critics on Mark Twain. Ed. David B. Kesterson. Florida: University of Miami Press, 1973.
- Van Doren, Carl. Benjamin Franklin's Autobiographical Writings. New York: Viking, 1945.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Meet Dr. Franklin. Journal of the Franklin Institute, 1963.
- Ward, John William. "Who was Benjamin Franklin?" American Scholar 32 (1963): 541-53.
- Weintraub, Karl J. "The Puritan Ethic and Benjamin Franklin." Journal of Religion 56 (1976): 223-37.
- Wright, Esmond. "Benjamin Franklin, The Old England Man." Contemporary Review 256 (1990): 169-77.
- Wright, Louis B. "Franklin's Legacy to the Gilded Age." Virginia Quarterly Review 22 (1946): 268-79.
- Zall, Paul M. Franklin's Autobiography: A Model Life. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989.