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“Dr. Franklin’s School of Politics:” Community and *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

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Abstract

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Frank D. Casale

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This dissertation argues that in *The Autobiography*, Franklin provides his model for constructing the American community. Fundamentally, Franklin’s model of community is informed by his understanding of models of communication, which are themselves inscribed in *The Autobiography*. The different parts of *The Autobiography* were written at different times, and, although he attempted to connect them, Franklin’s understanding of communication and community changed from part to part of the text.

Franklin’s model of communication can be termed a republican or dialogic model, which he opposed to an aristocratic or monologic model. Franklin’s conception of the republican/dialogic model of communication grew out of his lifelong participation two emergent Enlightenment discourses: the republic of letters and the community of science. His aristocratic/monologic model was informed by his interactions with British society, especially the aristocratic elite of England, which is primarily explored through his involvement in the Hutchinson letter affair.

The Autobiography is read as Franklin’s final argument for the shape of a free, republican American community. Franklin’s text is read as proposing that a community based on a republican/dialogic model of communication will produce republican citizens, capable of maintaining and expanding a republican community.

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Prelude: Public Letters, Public Liberty

Public Affairs or Private Jewels?

In 1772, Benjamin Franklin was in England, acting as the colonial agent for the colonies of Massachusetts, New Jersey, Georgia, and Pennsylvania. Serving as agent for Massachusetts, the most vocal and troublesome of the American colonies, had brought Franklin squarely into the heart of the increasingly heated and widening rift between Great Britain and its American Empire. Although Franklin jealously guarded the liberties of the colonies, and vigorously defended them in letters to the various English newspapers and to the English ministries, he at first sought a reconciliation between England and America¹. He hoped to settle what he saw, at first, as policy differences, rationally, through the use of negotiation and an exchange of viewpoints. His various publications of the period stressed the need for mutual understanding between England and America.

That autumn, Franklin acquired a package that he believed would bring about the desired reconciliation and clear up the misunderstanding between crown and colony. A packet of letters, written by Thomas Hutchinson, Royal Governor of Massachusetts (although composed when Hutchinson was Lt. Governor), to various English officials fell into Franklin's hands². The letters dealt with a variety of issues, but they also outlined Hutchinson's opinions about dealing with colonial unrest. In these official letters, providing the Royal authorities with a loyalist's reading of the situation in Boston, Hutchinson called for "an abridgement of what are called English liberties" and hoped for "some further restraint of liberty rather than the connection with the parent state should be broken" (20: 550). The letters were read by Franklin and the Boston radicals as proof

that Hutchinson was acting in a conspiratorial manner, trading the public good for private gain, or as Franklin put it “bartering away the liberties of their native country for posts and negotiating for salaries to be extorted from the people”. In fact, Franklin came to believe that Hutchinson’s ambitiously motivated misreading of the colonial situation caused the Crown’s misunderstanding of colonial intentions. Franklin’s reaction here can be read as enacting a certain literary or communicative role. Franklin responded to this misunderstanding the same way he had to previous “errata” he had encountered in his life. Hutchinson was miscasting the colonies and the result was the same as from any printer’s “errata”: misunderstanding. The way to solve the miscast production of Hutchinson was the same as any other miscast type: the type, or Hutchinson, must be removed. Acting like the good printer he was, Franklin would publicize the “erratum” and produce a corrected edition. Thus, he would use the letters as means for recasting the relationship between England and America, “and by that means promote a reconciliation” (21: 109)

With hopes for reconciliation, Franklin sent the letters to Thomas Cushing, the speaker of the Massachusetts House. Massachusetts petitioned for Hutchinson’s removal as governor; however, the letters did not have the effect that Franklin desired. ‘While they did turn the spotlight upon Hutchinson, they also had the effect of inflaming the colonies. The quick dissemination of the letters throughout the colonies is a fine example of the eighteenth century American public sphere in action. The letters were originally published in a pamphlet, which went through ten printings. The letters were also published in various periodicals and newspapers in all thirteen colonies. They became the subjects of editorials and commentaries, and dominated conversations, sermons, and

speeches throughout the Americas. The letters solidified opposition to English rule, and rallied large segments of the population around the leaders of the resistance, providing a stark lesson in the ability of the public sphere to mold public opinion and to garner public assent to a position. Even though Franklin appears to have been taken by surprise by the passionate public response to the letters, the effects of this firestorm of public debate could not have been lost on the veteran newspaper man and publisher.³ Apparently, the Hutchinson letters had struck a general cord throughout American society.

At first, the failure of his plan for the letters perplexed Franklin.⁴ However, the culmination of the affair revealed the reason why. The Hutchinson letter affair allowed Franklin to discover the differences between the emerging republican culture of the colonies and the residual aristocratic culture of England. The roles played by Franklin and the British in the letter affair display those differences in the discursive practices each used. The misunderstanding and miscommunication between the crown and the colonies were not the result of one simple misprint. Instead, they were the result of the fundamentally different communication models employed by the two fundamentally different societies. The letter affair exposed the polarities of the Anglo-American relationship, and the very different perception of social policy and community that existed for both. In the colonies, the publication of the letters was seen as exposing the private conspiracies of self-interested individuals to the glare of the public eye. As Franklin wrote, “if falsehoods have been maliciously covered under cloak of confidence, tis perfectly just the incendiary writers should be exposed and published” (20: 381). The English, however, had a rather different view of the matter. Needless to say, the British were not amused by the letter affair or the petition to remove Hutchinson. Franklin was

already viewed by the ministry as an upstart and an annoyance.⁵ When Franklin's role in the controversy emerged, he was not seen as a virtuous servant of the public, but as a treasonous scoundrel seeking placement by stirring up the mob. The affair culminated on January 11 and January 29, 1774 in the Privy Council. Solicitor General Alexander Wedderburn, in an acid-tongued diatribe, presented the British position: the letters were the private property of, and private correspondence between, gentlemen. Wedderburn argued that private writing was "as sacred and as precious to a gentleman of integrity as their family plate or private jewels are" (21: 51). Franklin's position, rejected by the British, but accepted in America, was that the letters were public because they addressed public affairs and were written by public men. His public acknowledgement of his role in the affair, appearing characteristically in a newspaper, the December 25, 1773 edition of *The London Chronicle*, best sums up his position: the letters "were not of the nature of 'private letters between friends:' They were written by public officers to persons in public stations, on public affairs, and intended to procure public measures" (20: 515-516).

As Franklin noted in his announcement of responsibility for the release of the letters, when writing is performed by people in public roles, there can be no doubt that such writing is in the public domain. The difference between the position of Franklin and the position of Wedderburn, representing the English court, is striking. Wedderburn sees writing as the sacred holding of the few—a covenant between writer and receiver. Letters are a closed system of communication. Information and discourse are contained within the bond of a private covenant, a precious resource for the select. Writing is the closed circuit of communication between gentlemen, with all the political implications of that

term for aristocratic England. It is a private privilege bequeathed between families, much like the family title, crest, and estate. Wedderburn thematizes an aristocratic, feudal model of writing; it is a family heirloom held on to and passed down. Franklin's argument is exactly the opposite, creating a more public and open network of communication. Writing is plainly visible to all because it potentially affects all. Wedderburn seemed to sense the stakes involved in the different definition that Franklin was presenting. In a keen image, Wedderburn declared of Franklin that "men...will hide their papers from him and lock up their escritaires" (21:49). Playing off Franklin's common origin, Wedderburn casts Franklin as a thief of writing, a "homo trium literarum," a commoner coming to steal the privilege of the aristocrats. Carl Van Doren aptly surmises Wedderburn's attack as "a clever hit at the electrician who had meddled with politics, which were for lords and gentlemen"(Van Doren 474). Wedderburn makes no bones about what is at stake in these differing definitions of public writing: it is the very authority of the king upon which all the privilege and power of the aristocratic system was based. As Looby correctly notes, letters were the vehicle for the transmission of Imperial power⁶; Franklin's meddling with an official's letters equaled Franklin's meddling with the transmission of the crown's authority. By applying his definition of writing to letters composed according to the official definition, Franklin committed an act of discursive treason.

Franklin's defense reflects the changing definitions of public and private writing occurring during the eighteenth century. The definition and purpose of public writing changed with the growth of the public sphere in the Enlightenment period, and letters were a central component of this transformation.⁷ The letter affair crystallized for

Franklin something he had been learning, and practicing, his entire life: that writing, by its very nature, had a public component. In the ideologic environment of the eighteenth century, new conceptions of writing were part and parcel of new conceptions about community and society. Wedderburn realized as much, when, during his privy council assault on Franklin he defamed not only the “good Doctor” but also Franklin’s ideas about society, arguing that “Mr. Hutchinson and Mr. Oliver were public persons, and their letters, according to the Doctor’s new code of morality, may be lawful prize”(21:57). This new code of morality, as Wedderburn called Franklin’s conception of writing, went hand in hand with a new idea for organizing society. For Wedderburn, the “new morality” Franklin represented was part of “the idea of a great American Republic” (21:58).

Communities of Consent

The cockpit affair has often been seen as a watershed event in Franklin’s life, radicalizing him politically and driving him, this late in his life, from royal subject to revolutionary citizen. Shockingly, the relation of the letter affair to Franklin’s written life has rarely been considered.⁸ In many ways it confirmed ideas he had been developing his entire life through his writing. Franklin’s Enlightenment, American understanding of public and civic life, shaped over a life time out of a career of printing, writing, and public service, clashed with the political reality of England. The results of this clash are imprinted in the shape and content of *The Autobiography*. Franklin realized it wasn’t just the political realities of aristocratic England that sought dominion over the colonies; it was also the model of communication employed by an aristocratic society.

If Wedderburn was able to detect a “new morality” of discourse in Franklin’s actions and writings, what exactly was this new morality, and why did Wedderburn connect it to the radical political thought of the day, republicanism? The source for Franklin’s new understanding and definition of communication, and the political implications of them for the late eighteenth century, is Franklin’s participation in two fields of social activity: the community of science and the republic of letters. While, for the purpose of analysis, these will, for the most part, be looked at separately, it must be remembered that participation in one of these fields often implied participation in the other, and that they both contributed to the development of each other and the eighteenth century public sphere.⁹ Both of these discursive fields were forging new social bonds and relations, and helping to form the emerging non monarchic ideologies across Europe and America.

Both the discourse of science and the republic of letters can be considered as emergent communities within the general social field of the eighteenth century. Benedict Anderson has argued that “communities are to be distinguished...by the style in which they are imagined” (Anderson 15). Norms, especially norms governing communication, are central to the way a community imagines itself. Discourse ethics, as William Rehg has aptly summarized, claims that an analysis of the everyday institutions guiding individual actions can serve as a heuristic device for understanding the way a society or community organizes itself (Rehg 25). Thus, if the model of communication a community practices is central to the way a community imagines itself, highlighting communicative norms can allow the conceptualization and understanding of a community and its culture.

Norms, of course, seek to guide the actions of members of a community.

However, norms only have motivating power within a social world of shared expectations about how the members of that world ought to behave (Rehg 25). Thus a community is a shared horizon of understanding, or to use Habermas' term, redefined from Husserl, a "lifeworld". As Habermas has defined it "the lifeworld is the intuitively present, in this sense familiar and transparent, and at the same time vast and incalculable web of presuppositions that have to be satisfied if an actual utterance is to be at all meaningful, that is valid, or invalid" (*Theory of Communicative Action 2*: 131).

Communities, then, in addition to being constituted and defined by their members and practices, also act as the shared background that all members experience in order to make communication between members of the community intelligible.

Both of these discursive communities, the lifeworld of science and the lifeworld of the republic of letters contributed to the development of the public sphere.¹⁰ The public sphere, emerging across the Enlightenment world in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, provided individuals with space for the public use of reasonable critique, debate, and argument separate from the institutions of monarchy. In doing so, the public sphere also transformed the definitions of public and private¹¹. The medium of this development was, as Habermas has stated, "without historical precedent: people's public use of their reason" (*Structural Transformation 27*). Both of these discourse communities, as constituents of the public sphere, can be considered as outside the domain of the court and monarchy and inside the domain of public critique and reason. As a result, the shared background of these communities, the models and methods of communication they employed, were different than the dominant life world of the

monarchic organization of society. The communicative norm developing in both these communities, which in turn helped them to imagine themselves as distinct communities, was the norm of communicative reason, or the belief that understanding and agreement could be arrived at through rational, intersubjective argument and exchange. As Fish, in another context, has discovered, a community is a “community of agreement” (Fish 97).

The communicative process of reaching agreement through argument is key. Consensus is a result of rational, intersubjective communication. The communicative, intersubjective action of reasoned dialogue can lead to the discovery or creation of common, shared, communal interests. Thus, norms and the ‘general interest’ of a community are established and developed by the community through reasoned, intersubjective argumentation, for this intersubjective model “presupposes language as a medium of uncurtailed communication whereby speakers and hearers, out of the context of their preinterpreted life world, refer simultaneously to things in the objective, social, and subjective worlds in order to negotiate common definitions of the situation” (*Theory of Communicative Action* 1: 95). It is the intersubjective, reasoned dialogue between individuals that allows a community to imagine itself as reasonable, or in eighteenth century terms, as “enlightened.” However, it is not only in the content of communication (i.e., what is agreed upon) but also the formal process of communicating and reaching agreement (i.e., the communicative model employed) which helps to produce and reproduce a community. The agreement individuals reach and the formal model they use to reach that agreement both construct a community. Thus, by employing norms which constituted a reasonable, argumentative, intersubjective model of communication the

republic of letters and the community of science were able to imagine themselves as enlightened communities of public reason.

One of the greatest influences on Franklin, and one of the main, if not the primary, passions in his life was science. Franklin studied and practiced science his entire life, from his earliest days in Boston to the last days of his life in Philadelphia. It must be remembered that Franklin was one of the scientific heroes of his day, often mentioned in the same breath as Newton and Bacon.¹² His discoveries in electricity revolutionized that area of study, and the practical implications of his research brought people, for the first time, some degree of safety from, and control over, the elements. It was no stretch of the imagination for Turgot to write that Franklin "...snatched the lightning from the sky and the scepter from tyrants." Indeed, Franklin was portrayed as the culmination of the Enlightenment project; the self-made man who became not the philosopher king but the philosopher republican. When Franklin was awarded the Copley Medal by the Royal Society in 1753, George Parker, the society president praised Franklin's contributions to the 'learned Republick of world science'(in Schlereth 27). To understand why both Wedderburn before the revolution and Turgot after were able to connect Franklin's scientific fame with a political threat to monarchy, it is necessary to understand the changes science was forging in eighteenth century ways of thinking. Beginning with Bacon's project of rejecting the scholastic method and replacing it with a method that involved the collection and interpretation of data, and the carrying out of experiments to test that data, and continuing with Newton's rational, scientific interpretation of the natural universe, the discourse of science had a profound impact on the way eighteenth century thinkers viewed and interpreted the world.¹³ Science "came

to be regarded as the truest form of knowledge and its systems became the model for other systems of knowledge”(Sambrook 1).

A telling example from late in Franklin’s life illustrates the manner in which the discourse of science acted as a set of assumptions for Franklin’s interpretation of the world. As Carl Van Doren relates, during a break in the debates at the Constitutional Convention, Franklin was visited by a party led by Elbridge Gerry and containing the botanist Manasseh Cutler. While the seeming purpose of the visit was to discuss politics, Franklin was more interested in showing off his complete edition of Linnaeus’ *Systema Vegetabilium* to his guests. Cutler later wrote of the meeting that Franklin was “extremely fond...of dwelling...on natural philosophy, while the other gentleman were swallowed up with politics” (in Van Doren 751). To a modern reader, with our division of science from the world of politics, Franklin’s activities seem a bit puzzling, perhaps the image of an old man taking a break from tiring political debates. But, to Franklin, referring to Linnaeus would have been a political act; the means and methods of science provided the means and methods for political thought. If political discussions were getting muddled, perhaps recourse to the clarity of scientific method would clear things up. That Franklin would discuss a system for classifying and organizing the different aspects of nature at the same time as he was engaged in helping to create a document which would organize the diverse states of America is itself revealing of the impact scientific thinking had on Franklin. As Jacobs records, to the Enlightenment, the methods of science were “vital elements in any alternative social ideology” (Jacobs 73).

The Community of Science

The centers and transmitters of the norms and methods of the community of science were the scientific societies, like the Royal Society, of which Franklin was a member, and the American Philosophic Society, founded by Franklin. These institutions “instilled in individual scientists like Franklin a real sense of participation in what appeared to be a community of like minded men interested in similar problems” (Schlereth 40). The methods of scientific research had a profound impact on the method of language used to communicate the practice of science. Scientific discourse provided Franklin with a model of the rational dialogic construction of knowledge. As Bazerman, Shapin and Schaffer, and others have shown, by the eighteenth century, scientific writing had moved toward the norms of finding truth, or at least finding an acceptable statement, through the testing and establishment of proofs for a claim. The central function of scientific writing became less to inform than to establish the rational basis for a claim through the testing and use of proofs. This, in turn, gave scientific writing an argumentative, dialogic bent, as claims could be challenged or debated, and results contested. Journals like the *Transactions* often presented rational debates between members, and scientific correspondence often functioned to serve as a vehicle for debate between several scientists. Thus, in the Enlightenment, for a scientific writer, “the most significant task becomes to present [that] meaning and persuade others of it” (Bazerman 78). The dialogic basis of scientific writing developed a communicative strategy where “a precise account of methodology, with detailed results allowing critique, comparison, and replication became a part of the argument” (Bazerman 74). This rational method of contesting and verifying claims created a community which sought a consensual understanding and construction of knowledge. Knowledge was clarified through the

dialogic process of challenge and verification; for a claim to be accepted as true, or at least correct, the other members of the community had to consent to it, by assenting to its claims and ceasing challenges. Both the challenge and the assent had to be publicly communicated. As Shapin and Schaffer point out, “the foundational item of experimental knowledge, and of that counted as properly grounded knowledge generally, was an artifact of communication and whatever social forms were deemed necessary to sustain and enhance communication” (Shapin & Schaffer 25). Knowledge is thus both contextual and formal, as knowledge is constructed both by the means of experimentation and the means of communication. As Bazerman has insightfully remarked:

the collective intelligence [of the scientific community] is embodied in the way the members of the community have chosen to communicate with one another. Whether the emergence of an argumentative community necessitated a conventional genre in which to carry on that argument, or whether the clarification of forms of argument allowed a coherent community to coalesce in discussion is an unanswerable dialectic conundrum. A more exact formulation might be that a community constitutes itself in modes of regular discourse (Bazerman 79).

The transmission of knowledge and the constitution of the scientific community occurred in two primary formats, letters and journals. Correspondence served as the primary vehicle for establishing the interpersonal links of the discursive community, and the journal acted as the primary public forum for the establishment of claims. These vehicles also mark the spot of the participation of the scientific community in the more general developments of the Enlightenment public sphere. Scientific correspondence became a key constituent of the “republic of letters,” and journals functioned to bring scientific discourse to the public and to make the scientist a public figure. According to Bazerman, in an analysis similar to Habermas’ discussion of learned journals, “the journal facilitated not only criticism, but the public role of critic...the journal made

critical activity public. And the answer also became public, casting the natural philosopher into the regular role of public defender of his work” (Bazerman 135). In the discourse of science, accepted knowledge was public knowledge. And to be public was to be published. Publication meant knowledge, or the formal norms of communicating knowledge, was available.

It was common practice for scientific journals like the transactions to simply print letters received from members.¹⁴ It was a communal norm for writers of scientific correspondence that letters to a society’s secretary or editor, or to other members, might be published. In this sense, scientific correspondence mirrored a trend of the general republic of letters, because “to the eighteenth century reader there was nothing inherently improbable of someone having kept a whole series of letters which might be later found and published” (Myline 146). In this regard all scientific writing of the period could be considered public. Scientists and natural philosophers wrote with the expectation that others, very often the public at large, would read what they wrote, even if their original intent was not widespread publication. This was another way the community of science contributed to the changing definitions of public/private writing and of communication in general. Franklin’s own *Experiments and Observations on Electricity* began as a series of letters sent to fellow scientists, who then copied Franklin’s letters and further distributed them. The letters were eventually collected and published by Peter Collinson.¹⁵ Franklin, who served as secretary for both the American Philosophic Society and the Philadelphia Library Company, was at the center of a flurry of letters. The *Papers of Benjamin Franklin* are filled with examples of Franklin not only sending out his own work, but reading and transmitting the correspondence of others.¹⁶ Franklin

outlined the duties of the secretary as such: “to receive all letters intended for the society...to abstract, correct and methodize such papers...to enter copies thereof in the society’s books, and to make out copies for distant members”(2: 382-383). To Franklin, transmitting Hutchinson’s letters must not have seemed that improper or underhanded; quite literally, Franklin had been involved in retransmitting and publicizing letters for the majority of his life.

To be engaged in the world of science was not seen, as it is today, to be engaged in a specialized profession, but was seen rather as to be a member of a cosmopolitan, enlightened community. Natural philosophers, who could come from all walks of life and any nation in the world, imagined themselves as participating in a communal project of increasing and clarifying humanity’s knowledge of the natural world. The discourse of science was thought to be a universal discourse; it extended beyond the borders of specific countries or governments. A scientist’s origins were unimportant; what mattered was that the scientist adhered to and accepted the norms of the community of science. Membership was based on a publicly demonstrated acceptance and use of the norms of discourse and the methods of science. Just as science could cross national boundaries, so to did it cross social ones. The scientific community was not ruled by a “king” or “master” of science; it was ruled by reason and fact. A scientific argument was not won based on a man’s pedigree, but on the strength of his reasons and evidence. The observations of a “noble” member and a “common” one were treated, in the realm of science at least, equally. This provided Franklin with the experience of a community radically different from the dominant political community of the time. The world of science acted differently than the world of aristocratic politics. This contrast must have

been one of the most shocking results of the cockpit affair. Franklin's reputation for sound reasons and method in the world of science, his acceptance based on the importance and quality of his findings, meant nothing in the world of the court. In the royal society, he and various Lords could act as equals; in the cockpit, with dozens of Lords in the gallery laughing at Franklin during the proceedings, it was never more clear how unequal they were. However, the world of science provided Franklin with a model of a far more functional community to fall back on. It provided him with an experience of a community ruled not by power, but by reason, and a community where membership, and the ability to rise, was not based on ancestry or patronage, but on assent to and strength of method. The community of science, based on consent to rational, dialogic, public communication provided Franklin with a system for conceptualizing a new model of communication and community, and a chance to experience aspects of that community in action.

The Republic of Letters

The second great influence on Franklin's conception of communication and community was his participation in the republic of letters. Franklin was active in all of the various institutions of the republic of letters –reading, writing, printing, correspondence- his entire life. It is no stretch of the imagination to argue that Franklin's character was shaped by his participation in these two communities. Indeed, the most lasting images of Franklin emanate from these communities. First, Franklin flying his kite, representing the world of science, and second Franklin's *Autobiography*, representing the republic of letters.

As noted, the community of science shared several characteristics of the more general republic of letters. In fact, most natural philosophers were active participants of the republic of letters, and the republic of letters began as a primarily scholarly network. The term, republic of letters, became commonplace as a result of Pierre Bayle's journal *Nouvelles de la Republique des Letters*, first published in 1684. Bayle's journal acted for the republic of letters much the same way the Royal Society's *Transactions* did for the world of science. While the *Transactions* published new findings and criticism in the world of science, *Nouvelles de la Republique des Letters* documented newly published material and related criticism. The republic of letters was imagined to be an egalitarian, open, and rational community of writers, readers, and intellectuals, stretched out across Europe and the new world. In fact, the republic of letters in America was as vibrant and active as its European counterpart. The republic of letters was fundamental in creating a sense of community in the colonies. This sense of community was two fold. On the one hand, it allowed colonial intellectuals and writers like Franklin to imagine themselves as part of the intellectual and written life of Europe. On the other hand, the epistolary networks that grew in America, facilitated by Franklin's development and management of the postal system, allowed participants to begin to formulate a sense of a separate American community.¹⁷ While there were several institutions that allowed participants to position themselves as members of a community (print shops, coffee houses, newspapers, books, journals, salons) it was the letter that acted as the glue that held this egalitarian community together.

The republic of letters also fostered a sense of rational exchange and shared knowledge. It valued egalitarianism, as once again, all members of the community were

considered equal and deserving of the same respect and possessing the same right to criticize the written work of others. Admission to the republic of letters, like admission to the community of science, was ideally imagined to be open to all; membership was an act of assent and participation. The norms of the republic of letters pertained to, of course, writing, and consent to them was demonstrated in one's own writing. As Dena Goodman has established,

the letter was already prevalent by 1760 as the form of writing that brought writers and readers together to interact on a footing of equality...by the end of the century, the copied and circulated letter, and the letter to the editor were uniting a vast web of readers into a network of intellectual exchanges that often began in the salons of Paris but spread outward from them to the four corners of the Europe and the new world. This vibrant epistolary network was a two way street, as readers responded to writers, becoming writers themselves in pamphlets and in the columns of an emerging periodical press that was itself an institutional extension of the epistolary network. The reciprocal exchange crucial to the Republic of Letters from its inception became the means of expanding a scholarly republic into what Habermas has called a 'critically debating public', a 'public engaged in rational-critical debate'(138).

The egalitarian, or republican, structure of the community of the republic of letters should be considered as the result of the communicative norms governing the epistolary network. The primary norms of writing in the republic of letters were: scholarly cooperation and exchange, reciprocity, and dialogue.

The epistolary networks that grew across Europe and America served to keep together the scholarly and intellectual community of the Enlightenment. There was a strong commitment to cooperation between members and to sharing information. If one member possessed information or a text another needed, they were expected to provide the requested material. As in the community of science, this cooperative exchange of information, this constant communication and collaborative learning, fostered a sense of community through commonality and courtesy. In sharing information, members

affirmed their affiliation to the common goal of expanding knowledge. As a result of members adhering to the same norm, a sense of identity between members, even if they never met in person, was created. Communal identity and similarity was formed because members imagined that all other members would act the same way.¹⁸

The norm of reciprocity resulted from the formal considerations of epistolary writing. The writer of a letter is always forced to consider the other, the audience, the recipient of the letter. The very term, correspondence, implies an ongoing exchange of letters between participants. Consider Franklin's 1755 letter to Jared Elliot: "I not only send you manuscript but living letters...read them both...and answer by sending me two of the like kind...if you fail at this I shall think I have overbalanced my epistolary account" (6: 175). As Goodman notes, "The reciprocity of correspondence both reflected and strengthened the sense of equality that structured relations among citizens of the republic of letters" (Goodman 18). The writer of the letter was expected to invite a response, and the receiver was expected to respond. By holding to these norms, both participants in the epistolary exchange could imagine themselves as equals, as the receiver is invited to participate and the sender has his invitation accepted. By this process, each is assenting to the assumed norm of obligations that are owed to another citizen. Citizens have a right to be expected to be invited to join a conversation; likewise, citizens have a right to expect a degree of recognition by the receiver accepting the invitation. Reciprocity highlights that the letter is considered an ongoing conversation.

Letters were considered an extension of conversation, a continuation of dialogue. As Franklin wrote to Lord Kames, "we may enjoy the privilege that knowledge of letters affords us, of conversing at a distance by the pen"(16: 1). Letters served to create a

virtual extension of the space of conversation, of the coffee house and the salon. As a result, the epistolary form forced the writer to position himself in a relationship of dialogue with another. A true letter can never be monologic, as it must always situate itself as part of a dialogue in process. As a result of the reciprocal nature of correspondence and the fact that the letter always calls for a response, the writer and reader in the epistolary exchange are united in a dialogic bond. Reader and writer enter into a discursive intersubjectivity. Both are necessary for the dialogue, the conversation, to take place. Each must consider the other and the fact that he is engaging the other. This intersubjectivity allows both members of the dialogue to imagine themselves as equal members, and architects, of the community.

The norms of epistolary writing in the republic of letters -exchange, reciprocity, and dialogue- when combined create a dialogic model of communication and a dialogic model of the community. Beginning with Habermas' demonstration that the republic of letters and its institutions contributed to the construction of a public sphere, which struggled to be independent of feudal control, in which private individuals publicly expressed their reason as acts of critical power, critics and historians have explored the political implications of the republic of letters. Warner and Ferguson noted that the spread of writing and literacy was depicted by the eighteenth century as the spread of knowledge and the democratization of power. Bernard Bailyn and Gordon Wood have shown the manner in which this public sphere contributed to the construction of the revolutionary and republican ideology in America.

Perhaps the most important political implication to note is that the republic of letters, with its communicative norms and practices, provided an ideologic alternative to

the monarchic hegemony. Janet Altman has shown how in France, the republic of letters and the courtly system of writing offered different conceptions of writing and individualism and struggled with each other to control the means of communication¹⁹. In the seventeenth century the republic of letters “went underground...when it was repressed from the public arena by a courtly ideology which attempted to subordinate the republic of letters to a feudal monarchy” (Altman 58). However, in the eighteenth century, the ideology of the republic reemerged as “explicitly intellectual and political movements were beginning to propound their own alternatives to the existing monarchic courtly system” (Altman 57). Likewise, Goodman argues that those who sought to spread Enlightenment through the republic of letters sought to “create a readership in their own image and in so doing to transform society in the image of the republic. In creating through epistolary means a public that was an extension of the republic of letters, they challenged the monarchy and its ability to shape society according to its own notions of authority and hierarchy” (Goodman 139). Wedderburn, it seems, was justified in highlighting the political implications of Franklin’s positions, and it is understandable why the aristocrats in the privy council saw Franklin’s actions as possible treason. The republic of letters and the community of science were altering the way people related to each other. In doing so they were challenging the ways people related to government.

Republican Dialogue versus Aristocratic Monologue

The Hutchinson letters affair helped Franklin conceptualize the monologic communication model of Great Britain. Franklin realized the communication strategies he had developed through his participation in the two discursive communities, and which he had begun to thematize when he started writing his *Autobiography* three years earlier,

were different from those employed by an aristocratic organization of society. Against the aristocratic, monologic model he encountered in England, Franklin would posit an enlightened, republican, dialogic model of communication and society. The *Autobiography*, through the filter of his own experience, presents Franklin's rejection of the aristocratic model and posits his model for a rational, enlightened organization of society, and the language model it would employ to diffuse power and language throughout the community. Franklin's model is not a closed monologic circuit, but an open, dialogic network. In the republican, Enlightenment system, rational individuals spoke to each other, seeking response. Communication, in Franklin's model, was an intersubjective activity of consent building and served as the basis of community.

Franklin's dialogic model can be understood by three theoretical associations: one contemporary to him, Locke's thoughts on the contractual basis of society and language in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, the second, Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, and the third Habermas' discussion of discourse ethics. The following exposition attempts to establish theoretical differences between what I call the dialogic/republican and the monologic/aristocratic model of communication and society. The primary eighteenth century voices used to represent these two models are Locke and Hobbes, respectively. While it may not be fair to associate each figure to these different sets²⁰, my primary reason for doing so was based on each thinker's different arguments for how the "lexicon" or shared language of community is formed.

Locke's theorizing remained a central framework for all investigations into language and society in the period. Locke's idea of a contract or constitution of language can help shed light on Franklin's model. According to Locke, because words have no

natural or inherent connection to things, and they are only associated to ideas in the mind of the speaker, there is no guarantee that words have the same meaning from person to person. Words “signify only men’s peculiar ideas, and that by a perfectly arbitrary imposition”(Locke 408). To Locke, it is conceivable that every individual has a separate set of associations of words and ideas, thus rendering communication and understanding nearly impossible, for as Locke notes, “every man has so inviolable a liberty, to make words stand for what ideas he pleases”(408). Locke’s escape from this epistemological chaos is the community, and here is where his ideas resonate with Franklin’s. In order to effectively communicate with others there must be an agreed upon –a consented to– scheme of classification used by all speakers and receivers. A scheme of classifications is a constitution of language, a set lexicon of fixed associations and definitions, so that various individuals have the same meaning for a word available to them. This scheme of classifications is not given by nature, or imposed on all by one man, but made by men, created through dialogic intersubjective intercourse. In other words, the definitions of words are created by individuals speaking to each other. The constitution of language is created by the community, by communal assent to a certain scheme which all members of a community must then use. Locke notes that “the necessity of communication by language, brings men to an agreement in the signification of common words”(522).

It can be argued that Locke’s constituted, communal language requires intersubjective dialogue between speaking individuals. The constitution of language cannot happen if individuals do not speak with each other, because by speaking with each other they form the meaning of words through a give and take process of negotiation. However, Locke did not theorize this process on the micro level, only the macro. If

anywhere, it is at this point that Franklin would have felt the need to build on Locke's work. Locke had theorized the necessity for communal construction of language, but he did not theorize how this social practice worked. However, Franklin was able to draw on the models of the public sphere, the republic of letters and the discourse of science, to analyze the intersubjective dialogue of people. The importance of intersubjectivity at the micro level to Franklin cannot be overemphasized, and it is here that Bakhtin's idea of dialogism is most useful. Holquist correctly claims that "dialogism liberates precisely because it insists we are all necessarily involved in the making of meaning" (Holquist 348). The meaning of utterances, the meaning of words, is a process which includes both the self and the other. Much like a letter's reciprocity, the response of the other is anticipated in every utterance. In Franklin's model, dialogue is encouraged and not suppressed because through dialogue communal meanings are created. In Franklin's model, communication between individuals constitutes the creation of a community's language and the community itself. To participate in a community, a speaker must participate in its discourse. This model of individuals communicating and negotiating with each other expands into a model of the intersubjective organization of society and government. However, for Franklin and other republican and Enlightenment thinkers, communication must be reasonable to be valuable.

Habermas intersects with Franklin because the communicative norms Franklin wanted to import from the communities of science and letters correspond to Habermas' theory of communicative rationality. In the community of science "matters of fact were the outcome of the process of having an empirical experience, warranting it to one self, and assuring others the grounds for their belief were adequate" (Shapin & Schaffer 25).

As we have seen, this process occurred through the communicative act of reaching agreement through rational argumentation. Habermas calls this process the redemption of validity claims, and the ultimate source for a rational construction of knowledge and a rationally structured lifeworld²¹. Just as important, the possible redemption of validity claims gives them their motivating force, both in content (the specific proposition) and formally (the structure of the communication). This rational model outlined by Habermas attempts to remove the force of coercion from motivation –i.e., “you must because I am king”- and replace it with the force of reason- i.e., “you should because it makes the most sense.” This is Habermas’ idea of rational motivation. A validity claim will rationally motivate the other because the other accepts that there are good reasons for accepting the claim, or as Franklin put it “they are reasonable. Reasonable laws will not require force” (13: 224). Thus the very structure of rationally motivated communication insures a model of consent , as agreement is a voluntary act. Franklin’s ideal enlightened republic was rationally structured and based on consent through rational dialogue. This communicative value, as shall be seen, informed nearly all of Franklin’s written work and especially the design of *The Autobiography*.

In aristocratic England, however, Franklin encountered a different model, one far from his ideal. The structure of English power did not value openness or seek to include public debate. Instead the voice of the public was an unwelcome irritant, as Franklin complained to Thomas Cushing:

When I see that all petitions and complaints of grievance are so odious to government, that even the mere pipe which conveys them becomes obnoxious, I am at a loss to know how peace and union are to be maintained or restored between the different parts of the Empire. Grievances cannot be redressed unless they are known; and they cannot be known but through complaints and petitions (21: 93-94).

Finding the voice of the public unwelcome did more than make it annoying; it excluded the voice of the public from power and from the discussions which shaped and coordinated social action. In his stark assessment of the Privy Council's behavior, Franklin realized that the ministry did not wish to hear the voices of its subjects; instead it wished to silence them. The Lords did not seek a dialogue; they desired only one voice to be heard: that of aristocratic authority.

In realizing that the English government would not allow its word to be challenged, and that it did not seek public participation, Franklin was able to conceptualize that aristocratic England had a different model of communication than an ideal, enlightened society should. In his clash with the Lords of the Privy Council, Franklin experienced what I am calling the aristocratic or monologic model of communication. The monologic model did not seek discussion with others, but to force others to submit to it as the sole voice of authority –indeed it is the only voice to be heard. Franklin viewed this as a corrupt model which brought power into communication through the use of coercion and punishment, privileging flattery, invective, and eloquence over reason and consent. Wedderburn's own position was proof of this. His rise to power was not the fruit of talent and virtue; rather the ministry bought him off to keep his "scurrility" and character assassinations aimed at the opposition and not the administration of Lord North. The corruption of language went hand in hand with the corruption of the state, resulting in conspiracy, cabals, and tyranny. As Franklin complained to Joseph Galloway, "consider the extreme corruption prevalent among all orders of men in this old rotten state...here numberless and needless places, enormous salaries, pensions, perquisites, bribes, groundless quarrels...devour all revenue" (21:509).

The monologic, authoritarian voice sought not dialogue but dominion. It was the voice of absolute authority, the voice of the absolute monarch, depicted and justified in Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*. Hobbes' philosophy can be used as a presentation of this aristocratic voice. Hobbes' absolute sovereign has absolute power not only over the apparatus of the state but also over the apparatus of language. The image of a monologic power structure can be sensed at the very foundations of the commonwealth in Hobbes' philosophy. In order to form the commonwealth, the people must become subject to a sovereign and "confer all their power and strength upon one man, or upon one assembly of men, that may reduce all their wills, by plurality of voices, unto one will" (*Leviathan* 120). It is not a great leap at this point to assume that in submitting their will to the sovereign, the subjects must also submit their voices, or their role in public communication, to the sovereign. The plurality of voices must be subsumed into one voice, which must be adhered to. Giving up one's voice to the sovereign entails giving up one's will and the ability to make decisions for oneself, as subjects must "submit their wills, every one to his will, and their judgments to his judgment" (*Leviathan* 120). In effect, the loss of voice equals the loss of self authorship, as the social contract of the commonwealth requires that "I authorize and give up my right of governing my self to this man" (*Leviathan* 120). The sovereign speaks for each subject, and in doing so, constitutes and defines them as subjects. As a result, each subject loses the ability to speak for themselves. Giving up the ability to govern the self entails giving up the ability to define the self. In this monologic model, self definition and self authorship do not emanate from within the community, but are a mantle received from above.

Hobbes' sovereign not only defines and speaks for the subject, but also has the power to dominate public discourse. Hobbes writes,

it is annexed to the sovereignty, to be the judge of what opinions and doctrines are averse, and what conducting to peace and consequently, on what occasions, how far, and what, men are to be trusted withal, in speaking to multitudes of people; and who shall examine the doctrines of all books before they are published (124).

Public discourse is the voice of the sovereign as only what the sovereign has authorized can be public. Just as self authorship is lost by subsuming the individual's voice to the voice of the sovereign, the ability to influence social or communal affairs is lost by not having the ability to speak publicly. By retaining the power of evaluation for itself, the sovereign retains the power to decide who can speak. Therefore, every official public voice is the voice of the sovereign. Thus, through the power of evaluation and censorship, the sovereign makes all public voices into an image of its voice.

Along with the ability to empower speech and make all speech its own, the sovereign has dominion over the very usage of the language. The monologic authority of the sovereign has the power to define. The sovereign allocates the words good and evil, right and wrong, legislating their meaning and usage. Other definitions are not allowed. Hobbes writes, "It belongs to the same chief power to make some common rules for all men, and to declare them publicly, by which every man may know what is called his, what another's, what just, what unjust...what good, what evil"(Hobbes 1983). The attempt by the sovereign to make discourse in its own image resonates with Bakhtin's ideas about the actions of monologic discourse. Generally speaking, monologism can be thought of as a closed system of communication that does not seek to speak with, but instead down to, others. Bakhtin made the coercive non-rational nature of authoritarian

discourse quite clear, writing that “the authoritarian word demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us quite independently of any power it might have to persuade us internally” (*Dialogic* 342). It is not persuasion, but force and power that the monologic voice uses to interpolate others. Monologism is an all-pervasive world view that does not expect others to respond to it but only to repeat it, thus establishing its discourse as the only discourse present. Bakhtin remarks that “it is not a free appropriation and assimilation of the word that authoritative discourse seeks to elicit from us; rather it demands our unconditional allegiance” (*Dialogic* 343). The monologic voice may not be challenged; it demands submission, or as Hirschkop noted, “ratify or repudiate: the authority of the authoritarian can be acknowledged or recognized, but cannot be something which one responds to or develops, and to accept it means to accept it as something utterly unlike oneself” (Hirshkop 87). What Franklin learned that day in the privy council was how “utterly unlike” the Lords of the realm he, or any other commoner, was.

In considering the different models of communication being posited here, one dialogic and republican, the other monologic and aristocratic, it may be useful to examine an intersection of political and scientific discourse. The debate between Thomas Hobbes, representative of the monologic communicative model, and Robert Boyle, one of the founding figures of scientific discourse, illuminates the drastic differences between the two models of communication. The dispute between the two centered on Boyle’s air pump, but more specifically, Hobbes’ objection to Boyle’s program of systematic experimentation for the production of knowledge.²² Boyle used his pump (Franklin, years later would own one) to experimentally prove the existence of a state of vacuum.

Hobbes responded by attempting to prove that a vacuum could not exist and was a logical impossibility. As Shapin and Schaffer show, Hobbes' objections to Boyle's method centered on Hobbes' rejection of Boyle's experimental generation of fact and the "constitution of such facts into the foundations of consensual knowledge" (Schapin & Schaffer 20). To Hobbes, Boyle's program "was not philosophy" because philosophy "secured a total and irrevocable assent, not the partial assent at which Boyle aimed" (Shapin & Schaffer 20). Hobbes criticizes Boyle's consensual, dialogic procedure for creating knowledge from a monologic position. To Hobbes, the "correct" position, much like his sovereign, must have dominance; there can be no debate about it because it is the only possible position. Hobbes' rejection by the scientific community represents as much the error of his position as his inability to understand the consensual norms of communication emerging in the community of science, which highlights the interpretive fractures that were developing between the dominant and emergent discursive communities. By the end of the eighteenth century, Hobbes, the loser in the debate, had been written out of the history of science, just as the aristocratic model of communication would be written over and replaced by Franklin in his *Autobiography*.

Is it, however, appropriate to posit Franklin as performing a linguistic operation as the basis of his conception of the new American community? As we have seen, the norms of the republic of letters and the community of science both focused attention on writing. The strategies and methods of communication were fundamental to the existence of these emergent fields. Thus, this was a topic Franklin was forced to be familiar with, and his numerous commentaries on writing bear this out. Additionally, Locke had made an understanding of language a basic component of understanding the world. More

importantly, however, was that in the Enlightenment, there was a direct connection between scientific method and studying the use of language. The discourse of science also turned its attention to the study of language. The development of a universal scientific method, usable by men from all nations and cultures, gave birth to the desire for a universal language which would reach across all boundaries to transfer knowledge, and like the language of mathematics, would not need translation. The thinkers of the Enlightenment felt “a universal language, emancipated from personal and local prejudice, would eventually foster international understanding between individuals and countries” (Schlereth 43). Franklin was a student of this theory, and took notes on John Wilkins’ *Real Character or Philosophical Language* (6:177) and published William Thorton’s attempt at formulating a universal language in the *Transactions* of the American Philosophic Society (Schlereth 43). As investigating language was part of the corpus of scientific work, Franklin’s involvement in the community of science provided him with a frame of reference and philosophic underpinnings for his study of language, as well as his conclusion that models of communication were mediated in the structure of society.

The idea of using language structure as a model for social structure was not a foreign one to the eighteenth century. Nor was it an area Franklin avoided. As Looby stated about Franklin’s attempt to create a phonetic alphabet: “it was a model, for him, of what a rationally administered society ought to be: it represented the imposition of normative structure on the world of human experience” (“Alphabet” 1).²³ Franklin’s alphabet, Looby claims, was symbolic of political separation from England, as “Franklin’s new alphabet represented not the phonetic norms of London, but those of Philadelphia; it transferred the center of linguistic authority from England to America”

(13). Begun in 1768, the study of alphabet can also be seen as Franklin's mind turning to the languages used by colony and motherland as he attempts to find some common ground between them. By 1771, however, the colonial crisis had deepened, and, as I will argue, Franklin's writing of "Part One" of *The Autobiography* represented Franklin's investigation into the relationship between the structure of a community's language and the structure of that community. Franklin's conception of a shared language between England and America faded as his dream of a shared empire faded. The cockpit affair was the death blow to the possibility of union with England, either politically or communicatively.

The experience of the cockpit affair is emblematic of the monologic model of communication. Weddeburn's vitriolic assault upon Franklin, which Edmund Burke described as going "beyond all bounds and measures" (in Brands 471), was pure monologue. Weddeburn did not seek a dialogue with Franklin or his audience; he demanded a silent acceptance of his speech. Franklin clearly understood Weddeburn's point. Franklin remained totally silent during the harangue, as he stood perfectly still throughout, never displaying any reaction. Franklin's silence and absence of visible response drove home the point that this was a one-way communication. This was no reasonable dialogue, but a tyrannical monologue; it was the voice of one, the voice of a corrupted authority. The voice of the King, transmitted through the Lords of the Privy Council, allowed no response or rejection. The decree of the King must be accepted as final and assimilated into the receivers. The monologic decision of the Privy council must become a part of Franklin's very character. Indeed, Weddeburn's personal attacks seem to enact this very point. Weddeburn sought to not only eliminate Franklin's

political claim, but to brand and define his very character, so that Franklin would always be viewed by others as the troublemaker the king had dubbed him.

¹ For a complete description of Franklin's time in London see Carl Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin*.

² *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* Vol. 19, pg 402-407. How Franklin acquired the letters remains a historical mystery.

³ My account of the affair is greatly indebted to Bailyn's *The Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson*, Van Doren's *Benjamin Franklin*, and Brands *The First American: The Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin*.

⁴ Franklin's handling of the affair has long puzzled Historians. See Brands, Van Doren, Looby, and Morgan.

⁵ Van Doren 441.

⁶ Looby 67.

⁷ See Habermas, Warner.

⁸ Looby, in *Voicing America*, does examine the Hutchinson letter's affair in a literary vein. Looby examines the letters as part of the communicative, written chain of Imperial power, and Franklin's role as one of conciliator. Michael Warner in *The Letters of the Republic* sees the letter affair as representing the change from the paradigm of imperial orality to the paradigm of republican print discourse, while I hold the affair highlights the difference between authoritarian monologism and republican rational dialogue.

⁹ See Charles Bazerman *Shaping Written Knowledge*, Dena Goodman *The Republic of Letters*, and Jurgen Habermas *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.

¹⁰ As Habermas and others have shown, both of these discourses were central to the development of modernity.

¹¹ See Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.

¹² Consider lines from an anonymous American poem composed around 1756: "There will thy Genius other worlds survey/And there adore the glorious God of day/There Bacon Newton will our Franklin greet/And place him in his Electric seat" (Vol. 7: 74).

¹³ See James Sambrook, *The Eighteenth Century* 1-30.

¹⁴ See Bazerman.

¹⁵ *Papers of Benjamin Franklin* Vol. 3; 115-118.

¹⁶ See, for example, the many exchanges between Franklin and Cadwallader Colden Vol. 3, *Papers*.

¹⁷ Franklin's first conceptions of uniting the colonies, later expressed in the 1754 Albany Plan, first developed in a 1751 letter to James Parker. Franklin's letter was itself in response to a circulated essay by Archibald Kennedy on Indian affairs, and was published along with Franklin's epistolary remarks. *Papers* Vol.4: 117-121.

¹⁸ For a full discussion of the importance of this imagined similarity, see Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

¹⁹ For a full treatment of this issue see her excellent article "The Letter Book as a Literary Institution".

²⁰ It is only fair to note that Hobbes himself was the victim of attempts at censorship.

²¹ See *TCA* Vol. 1&2, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, et. al.

²² For a complete discussion of this issue see Shapin and Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump*.

²³ For a full understanding of Looby's position, see *The Voicing of America* 99-144, and "Phonetics and Politics: Franklin's Alphabet as Political Design".

Chapter One: Early Writings

In a 1768 letter to Lord Kames, one of Franklin's favorite correspondents for discussing moral and social theory, Franklin wrote: "I have long been of an opinion similar to that you express, and think happiness consists more in small conveniences or pleasures that occur every day, than in great pieces of good fortune that happen but seldom to a man in the course of his life" (15: 60-61). What Franklin is highlighting here is not some crass materialism, but his belief that the good life is not the result of predestination; it is not caused by random patronage from above, but is instead the result of the daily living and daily actions of people. The good life is found in the everyday details of a life. The aggregation of small details of a life determined whether a life were well lived or not. This logic can be carried one step further. The evidence of a good society was to be found in the details of that society, in the day to day intersubjectivity of its members.

Franklin's interests in the relations of people was not something that only preoccupied the later days of his life. His entire career demonstrated his studying the importance of the intersubjective nature of communication and community. Nearly all of Franklin's writings, from the *Silence Dogood* letters to the last pages of *The Autobiography*, describe, represent, analyze, and evaluate the daily interactions of people, both physically and linguistically. Unlike Adams or Jefferson, who tended to think in abstract or legally general terms about society, Franklin focused on society at its most basic level: the actions of the people composing it. Although Franklin was well versed in the political and social theories of his day, Franklin's own social thinking and writing tended to focus on the application of those bigger macro- or meta- theories to the micro

level of everyday life. A theory of social organization like Leviathan or those found in Locke or Shaftesbury might be well and good on paper, but unless they were actually present in the day to day relations of people, they were as useless as theology or superstition. Franklin discovered models of societal organization observing and writing about the manners and means people used to speak and act towards one another. For Franklin, political life was everyday life. If a community was to be an enlightened or republican community, then the individuals who composed society necessarily had to interact with each other in a rational and republican manner. A community was the aggregate of its member's actions. Franklin began to learn what he considered the norms for an enlightened society through his participation in the discourse of science and the republic of letters, as demonstrated in his early writings.

Reciprocity and Reading the Public

Franklin's earliest writings appeared in the most public of places, his brother James' Boston newspaper *The New England Courant*. *The Courant*, first published on August 7, 1721, attempted to capture the flavor of English coffee house culture and the periodicals of the republic of letters. Its pages were filled with essays, satires, and commentaries on public affairs. *The Courant* attempted to establish critical space by taking an oppositional stance to the status quo and ruling elite of Boston, the result being a very heated printed exchange with the Mathers and the newspaper that supported them. *The Silence Dogood* letters fit the milieu of the paper perfectly. Stylized after portions of Addison's and Steele's *The Spectator*, the letters (fourteen in all) focused on the cultural and daily actions of Boston. The similarity of the style and form of *The Spectator* and *Silence Dogood* is important because Franklin's first understandings of the basic

relationships between society, communication, and power formed from reading *The Spectator* and attempting to write a version of it for the Boston community. Franklin needed to find a form to express his observations of society. But he also needed a form which would enable him to communicate with his community in a manner he thought proper yet different from the style employed by the Boston elite. Franklin would not use the sermon or lecture format, which preached down to the community because Silence would be positioned within the community. Franklin wanted to speak within the community not from a position of the “elect” but from position within; he wanted his voice to be the voice of the community, and needed a form which would represent this. Franklin found that form in the epistolary conventions of *The Spectator* and other periodicals of the republic of letters. *The Dogood Letters* allowed Franklin to formulate several concepts: the public nature of writing; the equality of reader and the writer, the reciprocal basis for imagining community, and the possibility of public critical reasoning.

Upon taking up the pen and deciding to be a writer, Franklin had to deal with the relationship of the writer to the community at large. As has been noted, the idea of authorship also began to change in the eighteenth century.¹ In trying to come to an understanding of the emerging public role of the writer, Franklin focused on the relationship between writer and audience. The first thing Franklin discovered was the writer’s public presence, in other words, that for the most part, the writer and the text were joined in the reader’s mind. Franklin came to an understanding of writing as a public performance of the public character of the writer. In *Silence Dogood No. 1*, appearing on April 2, 1722, Franklin wrote:

And since it is observed that the generality of people, now a days, are unwilling either to commend or dispraise what they read, until they are

in some measure informed who, or what the Author is, whether he be *poor* or *rich*, *old* or *young*, a *scholar* or a *Leather Apron Man*, and give their opinion of the performance, according to the knowledge they have of the author's circumstances. (1: 9)

The public character of a writer, even if it is only constructed and transmitted through writing, as is the case in the pseudonym Silence, is as much a component of the text's communication as the content of the text itself. The public character of the writer becomes part of the transmission of information in the message. What the readers are trying to determine when evaluating the author is the author's position within the community. What role, what place, does the writer hold in the community? It can be imagined that what is being asked is, "is the writer one of us," or "how do I relate to this person?" In doing this, the readers are evaluating the writer's assent to the norms of the community. Before being able to take a public role in the community, the role of writer, the author must first publicly demonstrate that he/she is a part of the community. Once this is established, the writer and his/her text is accepted and evaluated according to the shared life world of the community. Franklin used the body of the letter to provide a fictionalized life story for Silence, describing her as a simple and good-natured member of the community, but it is the close of the letter which identifies her position

The close of the first letter establishes Silence's position as one of equality with her readers. Franklin asks his readers to "exercise their patience and bear with my humours" (1: 11). Silence is establishing a relationship with her reader, as she requires and requests something back from them. Thus, an avenue of reciprocity is opened. Silence will exchange the "entertainment" of her public letters for the goodwill of the reader. Silence's productions are dependent on the reader; as a result, she relinquishes any possible claim to authority over the reader. Because the reader is asked to enter into

an exchange with Silence, the reader and Silence are placed in a position of equality. The reader is not coerced by Silence; the reader is free to like or dislike her letter: “I am not insensible to the impossibility of pleasing all” (1:11). All that matters is that the reader extend his or her good will. The extension of good will is the extension of civility and begins the bond of community. Those who refuse to extend their good will are rejecting this bond of reciprocity and are thus rejecting the equality of civility: “those who will take offense where none is intended, they are beneath the notice of your humble servant” (1:11). To exclude oneself from the common conversation of civility is to make oneself unworthy of notice. Since Silence is in a position of equality with her readers, to not be noticed by Silence is to not be noticed by the other members of the community. If one is not noticed, one literally has no public character, and thus is not a member of the public.

What exactly was the public character that Franklin crafted for Silence Dogood? She provides a roll call of Enlightenment, whiggish values: “enemy to vice and a friend to virtue...a mortal enemy to arbitrary government and unlimited power” (1:13). But Silence also describes her social practice as part of her character, as she declares “I pass away my leisure hours in conversation” and that she “took more than ordinary delight in reading ingenious books,” and spent time “with the best of company, books” (1:10). Silence’s main trait is that she is a reader. By her practice, Silence establishes herself as a member, not only of the community of Boston, but of the more general learned community of the republic of letters.

However, Silence is not only a reader of books, but is also a reader of people and their manners in society, as she warns “I have likewise a natural inclination to observe and reprove the faults of others”(1:13). In this sense, her public character becomes

another agent of reciprocity, as the author reads the character of the public, but the public is invited to read the author's character. This maneuver is a constructive one, as it draws the author and his/her audience into a reciprocal network of relations. This creates a sense of similarity and equality between the writer/reader positions in the relationship, as Silence can be read the same as any other member of the community. Thus, Silence and the reader are equal members of the community; both have the ability to perform the same action. This was another lesson Franklin imported from Addison and Steele. *The Spectator*, according to Michael Ketcham, helped strengthen the bonds of community by focusing on "people's various forms of self presentation, in order to reveal a more fundamental basis for social order" (Ketcham 3). Franklin's *Dogood* letters enact the same process; they reveal that the shared daily interactions of people could serve as the basis for a shared sense of community. Silence and her readers share the same practices and the equal ability to observe and comment upon them.

As a case in point, Silence tells us her marriage furnished her neighbors "with discourse for a long time after; some approving it, others disliking it" (1:12). What is important in this is that Silences actions are public. Whether observed in real life or read about in print, the effect is the same. A discourse forms around Silence's actions; all of her neighbors are free to discuss them. Her actions have been read; she has been noticed by the community. Although her neighbors are free to like or dislike her marriage, their discussing her is a mark of her membership in the community. By observing and discussing her actions, her neighbors indicate that Silence is a fit subject for the dialogue of the community.

What is to be gained by this dialogue? Silence indicated in *No. 1* that reading the writer's character may aid in the establishment of communication. Now that communication and reciprocity between writer and reader have been established, the exchange of knowledge can take place: In letter *No. 3* (April 30, 1722) Silence informs the community that she has spent her time learning "useful and desirable knowledge, especially such as tends to improve the mind and enlarge the understanding" (1:13). Keeping with the norms of the republic of letters, Silence must share her knowledge for the betterment of all: "I am not without hope...that communicating my small stock...may be at least in some measure useful" (1:13). Here, through the voice of a member of the community, Franklin is attempting to reform the community of Boston into his adolescent image of the republic of letters. In *No. 2* Silence indicates what type of knowledge may be transferred as "Histories of lives are seldom entertaining, unless they contain something either admirable or exemplar" (1:11). In this, Silence is echoing a general eighteenth century convention about biography, that it was only useful if it "help[ed] to imitate virtue and avoid vice"(Granger 211). But Franklin again doubles this commonplace; it is not just by reading the character of the author that information will be gained, but also by reading the character of the audience, and in *No. 3* Silence warns that her eye and pen will always be observing the public with the aim of making public any vice or folly she encounters.

As a result, Silence is setting herself up to play the role of the censor, voicing the norms of the community not from a position above the community but from a position within it. In a sense, a community of readers is established, as the public is able to read, and thus imagine, itself in the character of Silence Dogood. Silence plays a necessary

role in the construction of a public sphere: she is the receiver who views/reads the communication of the speaker/writer, thus establishing a chain of transmission. Yet at the same time, she is a speaker/writer herself, transmitting her own message to the public. Thus by her mirror image of writer to and reader of the public, she dramatizes the necessary double role every citizen must possess: that of speaker and responder. Silence establishes the possibility of dialogue, a possibility founded on reciprocity and participation. Every citizen can play the public role of censor.

The importance of this idea remained with Franklin as he revisited the idea of the public censor in “On Censure, or Backbiting,” an essay, published in the *Philadelphia Gazette*, September 7, 1732.² Franklin, with ten more years of intellectual and social experience under his belt, theorizes some of the ideas he had only sketched in *Silence Dogood* about the nature of public character in shaping a community’s identity. Franklin points out that censure, or backbiting, i.e., pointing out the faults of others, has nearly always been decried as a vice. However, Franklin takes the opposite position, arguing that in a rational public sphere, censure can instead be a virtue. Franklin begins his defense by first noting that publicizing an individual’s virtue is a good thing because it results in demonstrating “the great good it does to society” (LOA 192). Franklin adds that bringing vice into the public light will result in the same “great good for society.” Franklin’s method of argument mirrors the action of publicity. Publicity displays a thing’s utility, allowing the public to understand that thing as a virtue. Franklin aims to prove the usefulness of censure in constituting a community’s definition of virtuous activity.

The image Franklin uses to visualize censure is striking. Censure “with her hundred eyes and her thousand tongues soon discovers and speedily divulges in all quarters, every the last crime or foible that is a part of their true character” (*LOA* 193). Censure is not embodied in any one person or official position; rather it is a performance of the community as a whole. Censure is literally the eye and tongue of the entire community. It gains its motivating power by its multiplicity. Censure allows communal self-regulation without having authority localized in any one position in the community. Instead, the authority or regulation is performed by every member. In fact, censure acts as a check on power and authority, as its shared nature is the “means of preventing powerful, politick, ill designing men from growing too popular,” and “clips the wings of their ambition” (*LOA* 193). This self regulation is a public process. Publication of a person’s fault should not be considered slander, because the publicity is an acknowledgment of what the public has already seen and noticed. Once again, the importance of being seen, of character being on display, is emphasized. What is published in the public sphere is a mirror of what the public’s eye sees, and the expression of what its tongue already says. As Warner noted of republican print culture, “social authority, like truth, holds validity not in persons but in the light of day, in the supervision of publicity itself(Warner 82). The countless eyes and tongues of the public represents the authority of the community in print. The community finds its sight and voice in publicly exchanged writing. The writer does not simply mold public opinion but reflects and expresses what is already there, using the world of print to embody the community. The censor acts as a device by which the community imagines itself.

The next argument Franklin will make in his case for censure examines the relationship between public and private. In this model the private is formed by its relation to and participation in the public. “Censure is a mighty restraint upon the actions of every private man,” Franklin writes, adding “what will the world say of me, if I act thus, is often a reflection strong enough to enable us to resist the most powerful temptation to vice or folly” (*LOA* 193). The private man must consider his reputation and his standing in the community whenever undertaking an activity. Franklin here again echoes Locke, who wrote, “he, who imagines commendation and disgrace, not to be strong motives on men, to accommodate themselves to the opinions and rules of those with whom they converse seems little skilled in the nature or the history of mankind” (*Essay* 357). Censure creates consent to social norms, but in a rationally motivating way. Franklin’s ideas about censure resonate with Locke’s “Law of Opinion.” Locke defined public opinion as “the measure of what is everywhere called and esteemed virtue and vice...which by a secret and tact consent establishes itself” (*Essay* 353). Both can be considered examples of how publicity is central to constructing a community. For both thinkers, the community decides for itself the definition of virtue and vice, but in doing so, at the same time, creates itself as a community. The act of defining a community’s virtues and norms is an act of defining the community. The private individual decides how to act based on how he imagines the public will receive his actions. He is thus imagining himself in relation to a community and rationally evaluating his actions accordingly. Censure is a dialogic influence, an intersubjective influence. Censure does not prevent through coercion and punishment; it prevents through persuasion and publicity.

As a result, censure not only helps to imagine the community, it also acts to create the individual character. Franklin notes that “censure is exceedingly serviceable in helping a man to the knowledge of himself” (*LOA* 193). Most people, Franklin argues, can only conceive of the best parts of themselves. They are often not aware of their faults. Censure, as the mirror of the public, can allow an individual to view his/her public character, good and bad, as *others* see it. Through awareness of how others view the self, the self can achieve self-knowledge. Franklin is defining dialogic intersubjectivity. The self can only be conceived in relation to another. The self is thus communally constructed. This is a positive activity as it allows the individual to alter his/her character to alter how others view it. In other words, private virtue was something that could be developed; it was not a static stock trait of a set character; it was a trait which could be acquired and honed through training: “we have the advantage of mending our manners accordingly” (*LOA* 194). The public sphere, acting with the power of publicity, served as a dialogic, communal source for acquiring and learning virtue.

In *Silence Dogood No. 3*, Franklin seems aware of the necessity of shared definitions for every community:

I am very sensible to that it is impossible for me, or indeed any one writer to please all readers at once. Various persons have different sentiments; and that which is pleasant and delightful to one, gives another disgust. He that would (in this way of writing) please all, is under a necessity to make his themes almost as numerous as his letters...thus will everyone one time or other find something agreeable...and in turn be delighted (1: 13-14).

Franklin recognizes the public as composed of many different positions, interests, and definitions. What some find interesting, others will find boring. This reflection resonates with Locke’s problematizing of the unity of language, as every man is free to define words as he will. It also speaks to the questions of social theory and organization that

both Franklin and Habermas ask: how is one to build a community, or come to an understanding of the public/general good if the public is rife with differences? Franklin's initial answer to those questions is to look to the daily actions and interactions of life. Silence will observe society and describe and disseminate behavior. In the very next paragraph, Franklin writes, "according to this method I intend to proceed, bestowing now and then a few gentle reproofs on those who deserve them, not forgetting at the same time to applaud those whose actions merit commendation" (1:14). Franklin will attempt to reach all members of his audience, and to get them to agree to shared definitions, by showing which daily actions are bad and which are good. Common understanding is to be found in the common experience of daily interactions that all share. The public dialogue about these daily, shared experiences and interactions is what will allow the transmission of shared definitions and the establishment of a community around those shared experiences and definitions. In the next line, Franklin invites the public to participate and converse with him, writing "I must not forget to invite the ingenious part of your readers...into a correspondence with me" (1:14). Letters from the public symbolize public participation in dialogue. By soliciting letters from the members of the public, Franklin is soliciting public participation in the definition and construction of a shared community. The republic of letters thus facilitates communal relations.

Public Reading, Public Reason

By *No.'s 8 & 9* (July 9 & 23, 1722), Franklin had altered the content of his letters. In doing so, Franklin seems to be enacting the development of the public sphere as traced by Habermas, as Silence's public reason in the earlier letters now becomes public critical reason, applying the language of moral and literary criticism developed in the earlier

letters to public policy. His brother, James Franklin, had been imprisoned as a result of his continuous attacks on the Mathers and the religious establishment in Boston. This situation could be read as an instance of a monologic authority attempting to eliminate public dialogue and to silence voices different from its own. With the paper in danger of being shut down, young Franklin found himself as the acting editor, and in the unexpected role of defender of the plurality of voices. In *No. 8*, he publishes a defense of free speech and freedom of the press, a brave act in itself, but in *No. 9* he goes further, as he applies his model from the earlier letters to the religious hierarchy of the town, using satire to depict the hypocrisy of the local clergy.

In this sense, Franklin turns from commenting upon the public to commenting upon public policy as directed by those in authority, an authority that is actively seeking to silence public debate. As his audience had grown accustomed to reading Silence's other satires as depictions of the folly and vice of public individuals, one can argue that it was not a great stretch of the imagination for them to read Silence's satire on religion as a coded implication that the religious leaders of Boston had fallen under her eye and were themselves guilty of improper behavior. As Habermas established, public reason, which had emerged in the learned articles and papers like *The Spectator*, expanded to include public criticism of public policy³. The behavior Franklin seeks to condemn in *No. 9* is that some men are hypocrites, or in other words, that they use a virtuous public character to cover a vice filled private one. Why would this be the danger Franklin focuses on at this point? The model Franklin had been employing in the earlier letters was the construction of a community which established its communal definitions and cohesions through a reading and writing of public character and daily actions. If a public character

is false, or a daily interaction misconstrued, the very basis of a participatory, equal community could be in danger. Franklin warns if a person's "actions often contradict his pious discourse, we may with great reason conclude, that he has some other design in his religion besides barely getting to heaven" (1:30-31). Even more dangerous is if someone can cloak his/her public ambitions behind an appearance of public virtue; it is not just a community's cohesion that is at stake, but its very freedom from tyranny, as Franklin bravely writes, "a man compounded of law and gospel, is able to cheat a whole country with his religion, and then destroy them under color of law...until the monster arrives to such power and wealth...and can oppress the people with their own blind assistance" (1:31). The only defense the public has against this tyranny is a free and vigilant public censor, freely able to bring such pretenders to the light of the public eye and public opinion. Franklin writes, "We cannot better manifest our love to religion and country, than by setting the deceivers in a true light, and undeceiving the deceived" (1:31).

Interestingly enough, in the very next issue, Franklin makes his first proposal for directing public policy, the setting up of a charitable club for widows. It is almost as if turning his pen upon the actions of those in authority had made him aware of the necessity of placing public policy before the public's eye. Thus, early on, Franklin made his first connections between publicity, criticism, and public policy. If corrupt authority could not be depended on to act virtuously, Franklin seemed to ask, then where could a discussion of the proper administration of society be found? The answer was the same place as the discussion of proper behavior. Just as *Silence* could satirize colleges or the vanity of dressing in hoop skirts for all to comment on and respond to, so to could she propose public policy to her readers. Franklin made the transition from reading social

practice to reading political practice. Public policy could be made the subject of public discourse. In these early letters Franklin made the first outline of his model of rational communication and a rational society. It was a structure which grew out of his study of people's interactions and could apply to both an individual's behavior and to the direction of the community itself.

Negotiation and Consent

Franklin continued to see the republic of letters as a means for private citizens to interject themselves into public debates and thus take on a public role. The institutions of the republic of letters were the means for the public to attempt to influence the course of public policy and socially coordinated actions. A clear example of Franklin's understanding of the role of public reason is the 1729 pamphlet "A Modest Enquiry into the Nature and Necessity of a Paper-Currency." Published in Philadelphia during a debate about the wisdom of increasing the supply of paper currency available in the colony, it was one of the first productions of the new printing firm of Franklin and Meredith.⁴ In writing the essay, Franklin had to decide not only how much currency he thought was necessary for a community's business interests to thrive, but also how to interact with those who disagreed with him. To solve this problem, Franklin drew on his experience writing *Silence Dogood*, and the similar *BusyBody* (February 4-March 27, 1729), in which he had developed a model of establishing reciprocal relationships with his readers to craft a sense of shared community. Here, Franklin had to build on that reciprocal relationship and forge a rational dialogue with his readers, to open up a path for negotiation. In writing "Modest Enquiry," Franklin was not only developing his economic theory, he was also developing his rhetorical strategy for conducting

arguments. Interestingly enough, Franklin favored an increase in the supply of paper money, feeling it would cause the community to grow. One of Franklin's primary reasons for supporting the increase was that money "properly called a medium of exchange" (1:148) greatly improved the efficiency of exchange and interaction between people, just as dialogue did.

Franklin begins by declaring that the purpose of public debate should only be to find the true public good or general interest: "There is no science, the study of which is more useful and commendable than the knowledge of the true interest of one's country" (1:141). Argument should lead not to disputation but to a scientific, rational consensus on the public good. By declaring that determining the public good is a science, Franklin clearly establishes argument and public discourse as part of the scientific method and thus conducted in the manner of science. Campbell correctly remarked that "Franklin believed that publicity and debate were as essential to any attempts to advance the common good in political matters as they were to science"(Campbell 206). The public good is to be determined the same way any other scientific facts are: by a rational, cooperative process of verification. Science, as Johnson's dictionary would eventually define it, held for the eighteenth century a sense of "certainty grounded on demonstrations." Scientific fact and knowledge were the result of verified claims, just as in Habermas' Discourse Ethics, consensus is built on validity claims, or demonstrations of an argument's rationality. The scientific method became Franklin's personal method for acquiring social knowledge: observing the daily actions and interactions of people. After Newton, the scientific method became far more standard, and "other thinkers followed the practice of ascending gradually from observation and experiment, by way of

analysis, towards general theories”(Sambrook 3). Franklin’s understanding of social theories, and his ideas about argument, were built on the same method. In his essay “On Literary Style” (August 2, 1733) Franklin transposed the scientific method into a rhetorical method: “if a writer would persuade, he should proceed gradually from things already allowed, to those from which assent is yet withheld. If he would inform, he must advance regularly from things known to things unknown, distinctly without confusion, and the lower he begins the better” (*LOA* 329-330). Franklin did not work from social theory down to the people, but from a study of the people up, surely the lowest place one could begin in political thinking. Before the implications or meanings of broad social theory can be understood, one must first observe and analyze the subject matter of social theory: people in society. Franklin warns in “Modest” that failure to head his rational, scientific method leads to arguing from vague generalities as “every day we find men in conversation contending warmly on some point in politicks, which, although it may nearly concern them both, neither of them understand any more than they do each other” (1:142).

However, Franklin’s move here is also an inclusive one, as he does not deny the motives of adversaries, even if he disagrees with their positions, as all are involved not just in arguing, but in the science of finding the public good. It is important to have this shared background, as “men will always be powerfully influenced in their opinions and actions by what appears to be their particular interest” (1:146). In *Silence Dogood*, Franklin found community in the shared experience of common life. In “Modest Enquiry,” Franklin enclosed the various different positions within the same rational model of communication: debating about and discovering the true public interest to

coordinate communal action. That's why particular interests only appear to be beneficial. When multiple interests are voiced and considered, a more general interest can be discovered, which, following the method of science, is more likely to be correct because multiple people agree to it. By enveloping debate within communicative action, Franklin hopes to turn discord into dialogue. In other words, the process of rational dialogue is as important to the science of finding the true public good as the content of the debate itself. It is acceptable that people disagree (as long as disagreement is performed in accordance with reason) as that disagreement itself is part of the fabric of communal consent and an act of communal membership.

The *Enquiry* closes with a remarkable picture of Franklin's ideal model of public debate about public governance. In a clear display of communicative reason, he invites his audience to question him, to point out any errors in his method, and to respond to his conclusions.

I hope I shall be censured with candor...I sincerely desire to be acquainted with the truth and on that account shall think myself obliged to anyone, who will take pains to show me, or the public, where I am mistaken in my conclusions, and as we all know there are among us several gentlemen of acute parts and profound learning who are very much against any addition to our money, it were to be wished that they would favor the country with their sentiments on this head in print, which, supported with truth and good reasoning, may probably be very convincing (1:156).

Habermas would call this the testing and redemption of Franklin's validity claims. In this manner, all will be "acquainted with the truth" and the "true interest of Pennsylvania" (1:156), and a public consensus will be reached. Truth, and the common public good, are publicly communicated dialogues which will "inevitably convince our superiors of the reasonableness and integrity of our designs" (1:157). Truth is determined

after the presentation of reasons which can be redeemed, or proven valid. Following the method of the community of science, truth is also communally constructed. Truth must be demonstrated before the public by making it public. Thus the potentially disruptive element of disagreement is contained within the rational method of argumentation.

Consenting to the “study of what is the true interest of Pennsylvania” will allow members of the community “to reason pertinently with one another” (1:157). The key is that individuals participate in the process; by participating they share at least, if not the same reasons, the belief that reasonable argument should be employed. In the face of a enlightened model of communication, silence is not golden, but is rather indicative of seeking private interest over the public good, as Franklin argues in the last paragraph that to withhold arguments from a reasoned exchange of positions must indicate the lack of solid or acceptable reasons for one’s position: “to construe their silence in this as an argument of a bad one” (1:156).

Further proof that Franklin was a close and keen observer of the relationship between language and society can be found in the essay “On Conversation,” first published in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* on October 15, 1730. By 1730, Franklin had moved from arguing in favor of increasing currency to increasing conversation. The goal of both essays was to facilitate exchange and interaction between members of a growing community. Franklin sought to improve the communicative practice of his fellow citizens, to make them more efficient members of the community. This essay can be considered a republican version of a courtesy manual or letter-book. Courtesy manuals and letter-books, generally aristocratic publications, sought to disseminate the culture of politeness among the upper class and court society to harden class boundaries.⁵ This

culture of politeness, as defined by Lawrence Klein, was concerned with coordinating and reconciling differences among people through the art of pleasing conversation (Klein). It was a cultural convention that taught polite conversation as a refined sociability. The culture of politeness sought to reaffirm the good taste and manners of gentlemen as a social and class barrier. Ultimately, it was a way of securing agreement through eloquence and tact, not through a rationally established consensus. Franklin at first seems to reaffirm the traditions of the culture of politeness, calling conversation the “art of pleasing” (1:178); however, Franklin radically transforms the aristocratic culture of politeness into a convention that would fit his rational model of communication. Unlike courtesy manuals, which for the most part disseminated the culture of politeness among the upper classes and sought to teach manners to a distinct few, Franklin’s advice crafts a rational and clear sphere of communication fit for reaching mutual understanding for all. It was a theme Franklin maintained his entire life. In a 1768 letter to the editor of *The Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* in London Franklin reminded participants, “I would recommend all writers on American affairs (however hard their arguments may be) soft words, civility, and good manners” (15: 13). Reasonable rhetoric is a necessity for a reasonable public sphere. By publishing his rational version of the courtesy manual in his newspaper, Franklin ensures the widest possible dissemination of this material among the common people, and thus the widest possible expansion of a rational and civil public sphere. Pleasing conversation, in Franklin’s world, is not the province of the aristocratic few but the birthright of the many. Anyone who could read his newspaper would be able to insert these practices into his/her daily life.

The first thing Franklin teaches about conversation is its dialogic and reciprocal nature. The speaker must be cognizant of the other; the speaker must always take the other into consideration, as “complaisance is a seeming preference of others to ourselves, and good nature a readiness to overlook their foibles and do them all the services we can” (1:178). The basis of dialogic intersubjectivity is, as Habermas and Bakhtin have argued, is a recognition of the necessity of the other, an acceptance of the other as other. In Franklin’s scheme, as in Bakhtin’s, we must consider the other when we speak; the other must be implicit in every utterance that we make. A good speaker must have “respect for those he talks to” (1:181) A consideration of the other includes the realization of the other’s right to speak: “be he ever ready to hear what others say” (1:181). Dialogue and rational intersubjective communication can only occur if all parties are allowed an equal opportunity to participate.

Franklin notes that the most common fault ruining conversation is “talking overmuch, and robbing others of their share of discourse. This is not only incivility but injustice, for everyone has a natural right to speak in turn, and to hinder it is an usurpation of common liberty” (1:178). Liberty is directly connected to the ability to join a conversation. One voice attempting to dominate others –in other words monologism- prevents discourse and is a form of injustice and tyranny. The natural condition of society, the state of pleasure, is a condition of equal dialogue and communication. However, just having the right to speak is not enough. One must participate if one is to fully enjoy the implications of that right. Non-participation in dialogue is a character fault. Sociability ensures this equality. Franklin notes, it is a fault to seem “wholly unconcerned in conversation...this inattention and indifference appears so like

disrespect” (1:179). For Franklin, recognizing and respecting the other is more than just recognizing his/her right to participate; it is also participating oneself.

Franklin then moves on to clearly define conversation as a rational process:

Another very disagreeable error, is, a spirit of wrangling and disputing, which some perpetually bring with them into company: insomuch that say whatever you will, they’ll be sure to contradict you: and if you go about to give reasons for your opinion, however just they may be, or however modestly proposed, you throw them into rage and passion... what they want in knowledge they endeavor to supply by obstinacy, noise, and fury: and when you press hard upon them, instead of argument they fly to personal reproaches and invective (1:180).

The opposite of argument is noise and disputation; the opposite of reasonable conversation is rage and passion. Franklin will revisit this terminology in *The Autobiography*, establishing a dichotomy between these forms of communication, discord and dialogue, eventually connecting uncontrolled passions with the abuses of uncontrolled coercive monologism and authority. However, for now, what is clear is that just as Franklin sought to set communal definitions of behavior in the *Silence Dogood* letters, he also saw the need to set communal bounds for discourse. Proper behavior and proper methods of communication could be codified. Reason has its method, as passion has its. As Franklin instructed, “when he dissents from others propose his reasons with calmness and complaisance” (1:181). What is necessary for those seeking membership in the rational community and its public sphere is choosing the right one. In a way, just as the aristocratic culture of politeness sought to use tact and eloquence to mark the boundary of an aristocratic sphere, Franklin sets rational, inclusive markers to set the boundary of the enlightened public sphere.

Much of Franklin’s earlier writing served as an opportunity to develop in practice his understanding of the relation between people and the daily operations and form of

society. Through his early writings, Franklin was able to forge connections between the norms of the republic of letters he was learning, and the norms governing the daily interactions of common people. When he began to write *The Autobiography*, seeking answers to the problems of the day, it was to these concepts of community and communication that Franklin would return.

¹ See R. Jackson Wilson and others.

²This book follows Lemay in attributing this *Gazette* article to Franklin.

³ Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.

⁴ *Papers* Vol.1: 140.

⁵ For a good discussion of letter-books see Altman, "The Letter Book as Literary Institution".

Chapter Two: *The Autobiography: Part One*

By 1771, the tensions between America and England were reaching a boiling point, and the rhetoric and tempers of both sides were rising to an alarming level. Franklin, reappointed as colonial agent to Massachusetts, found that his welcome with the colonial ministry was wearing thin. In fact, in January of that year, Lord Hillsborough had refused to accept Franklin's credentials. Franklin retreated to Bishop Jonathan Shipley's estate, fifty miles south of London, to contemplate the seriousness of the current colonial situation. His dreams for a unified, expanding English empire seemed to be fading, and his own hopes to be given a land grant now seemed next to impossible. His belief in the integrity of British society and government had been badly shaken by his relationship with the highest levels of power and authority. Carl Van Doren correctly remarked that as Franklin "lost hope in the imperial union on which he had set his heart, he came to be dramatically aware of differences between Britain and America" (Doren 372). Franklin's agitated mind responded to the difficulties of 1771, and the growing tensions between America and England, the same way it had responded to problems in the past: by writing. However, when he began writing at Shipley's estate, Franklin did not write another political tract for the London newspapers, as he had been doing, rather, he found himself writing about his family and his early life. This was not an aversion or escape tactic on Franklin's part. Instead, Franklin sought the answer to the difficulties between American and England in his history. He found himself writing about his life and examining his character, but at the same time he was writing an examination of American life and the American character. If America had outgrown the paternal embrace of mother England, why did that growth occur? Franklin felt this growth most

keenly in the communication difficulties between England and her colonies; neither side felt the other heard or understood its position. In his 1770 essay “The Rise and Present State of Our Misunderstanding,” Franklin published his belief in the linguistic nature of the crisis. Franklin complained that soldiers had been sent to “silence” the colonists, and that “the ancient and well contrived channel of communication between the head and members of this great empire...hath been cut off” (LOA 661). How, Franklin must have wondered, did this difference in language emerge? Why did the crown want to silence its subjects? Part One of *The Autobiography* is partly an attempt to find an answer to those questions.

There is evidence that writing “Part One” changed and clarified Franklin’s understanding of the relationship between England and America. In August 1771, just after finishing his first draft of “Part One,” Franklin took a tour of Ireland. His description of that tour reveals an animosity toward England and its aristocracy that had never before surfaced in his career. The problem in Ireland was that “a small part of the society are Landlords, great Noblemen and Gentleman, extremely opulent, living in the highest affluence and magnificence: the bulk of the people tenants, extremely poor” (19:7). After viewing the effect of aristocracy on the country, Franklin decided, in a tone almost Swiftian, “had I never been in the American colonies, but was to form my judgment of civil society by what I have lately seen, I should never advise a nation of savages to admit of civilization” (19:7). The purpose of aristocracy, Franklin concluded, “seems only to be, depressing multitudes below the savage state that a few may rise above it” (19:7). After viewing the devastating effect of an aristocratic social system, Franklin made a stark contrast with “the happiness of New England, where everyman is

a freeholder, has a vote in public affairs, lives in a tidy warm house...long may they continue in this situation!" (19:7). "Part One" revealed a colonial society far different from the Irish and English countryside. He had written about a colonial society infused with a dialogic model of communication, far different from the monologic model of the aristocracy, which, as Franklin complained, sought to enforce "Silence" by force of arms. Franklin had discovered social and linguistic differences between England and America, differences which would be confirmed in the cockpit trial.

However, "Part One" was also revised by Franklin after the Revolutionary War ended.¹ After the war, a great concern among the founding generation was to create a virtuous and informed citizenry, capable of sustaining a republican government. The fear that the revolution had released anarchic impulses and passions was common. Many worried that the inhabitants of the colonies were not prepared to assume the tasks of republican citizenship. Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, warned "the minds of the citizens of the United States were wholly unprepared for their new situation" (Rush 243). As the founders debated with each other about establishing secure social foundations after the war, Franklin returned to the writing of his memoirs and found that his 1771 examination of his life and character not only provided a contrast with England, but also provided a model for a stable social system. "Part One" of *The Autobiography*, then, addresses both the concerns Franklin felt before the war, and the concerns of the founding period after the war. The manuscript begun in 1771 revealed the basis of the difference between the American character and social structure from the British; however, when returning to his manuscript, Franklin discovered that he had

outlined not only his life but also a model of a rationally, enlightened republic and the communicative strategy upon which it would be built.

Letters, Language, and the Pursuit of Happiness

At its beginning, Franklin's *Autobiography* appears to be a private letter written from an elderly father, contemplating his life, to his younger son. Critics have been unable to come to a consensus on whether the opening really represents a letter to William Franklin or if it is simply an epistolary device to allow Franklin to 'speak' to posterity.² Whether Franklin was originally writing to his son or to posterity, while of great importance for the textual history of the memoirs, is in many ways a moot point. What is obvious is that Franklin consciously decided to make the opening of his memoirs resemble a letter. Lemay has demonstrated that Franklin revised "Part One" several times between 1788-1790. Most importantly, in 1789, Franklin added the date and location, "Tywford 1771," to the top of the first page, giving it a truly epistolary appearance (*BFA* 155). Since Franklin had ample opportunity to remove the "dear son" opening, especially in light of his poor relationship with his son,³ but instead added another formal epistolary element, it is evident that Franklin meant for the opening to be taken as a letter. The question remains, why?

First, in 1788 when he added the date marker, Franklin was attempting to use *The Autobiography* to depict a social and communication model for the new republic. That model was in many ways based on the lessons Franklin had learned in the republic of letters and in the community of science. As detailed in the prelude of this study, for both of those communities, their very meaning and existence as communities was dependent on the models of writing they employed, most significantly, the letter. As discourse

communities they employed the letter, but the letter very much enabled them to function as communities. As a result, the epistolary form would have been central to Franklin's ability to conceptualize community. The formal and theoretical characteristics of letters infused Franklin's thinking about society.

Secondly, both communities used the letter as a vehicle for the circulation of knowledge. Letters had served as the underlying network of both the republic of letters and the community of science, so it is logical that Franklin would turn to the epistolary form as he was trying to establish the networks of the American community. Most important was that the letter form initiated reciprocity. Reciprocity, as highlighted in this paper's prelude, created a sense of equality between reader and writer. Franklin was well aware of the esteem he was held in by his contemporaries, and the fact that the public at large saw him as the most honest of patriots. For his model of the American republic to succeed, it was essential that his memoirs take on a dialogic cast; it must be read as one citizen speaking to another; not as Franklin the great speaking down to the common man. The epistolary opening engendered Franklin's readers as fellow citizens. Because letters, by their very form, instigate a response from the reader, the opening highlights the intersubjective relationship of dialogue so fundamental to Franklin's understanding of American society.

The first pages of *The Autobiography* establish the role communication must play as the ground for the republican, Enlightenment conception of character and the means by which that character may be acquired by individuals. While most often noted and celebrated for establishing the rags-to-riches mythology of the American dream, and Franklin as a emblematic figure of that mythology, the opening lines also stress the link

between language and membership in the American community. Franklin's first paragraph is correctly read as a negation of rank and privilege, for Franklin was "born and bred" in "poverty and obscurity" (*LOA* 1306). After establishing reciprocal equality with his reader through the epistolary opening, Franklin's rejection of breeding cements his association with the readers, with whom he would have shared similar origins. Thus, Franklin and the reader operate from the same social position. A reciprocal relationship and shared social space would require a shared language, and this leads to considering a second meaning for Franklin's opening words. If birth is rejected as a social determinant, what would replace it? The answer was again found in language.

"Obscurity" not only implied Franklin's humble beginnings, but also implied a sense of not being comprehended, of an unintelligible use of language. To be obscure is to not speak clearly. Franklin connects the inability to use language correctly with poverty, not just a poverty of wealth but also a poverty of words. The necessity for clarity in language was a constant theme for Franklin. In a 1789 letter to Noah Webster thanking him for dedicating his dictionary to Franklin, Franklin wrote that he hoped the dictionary would turn "the thoughts of our countrymen to correct writing" and preserve "the purity of our language, both in its expressions and pronunciations" for "a book...ill printed or a pronunciation in speaking not well articulated would render a sentence unintelligible" (*LOA* 1173-1174). Clarity of expression is crucial to Franklin, because to lack clarity is to lack both meaning and comprehensibility. If one cannot be understood, one cannot contribute to the building of consensus. It is not possible to be the author of one's own life, to construct an enlightened or republican character, if one is unable to use the material to build it. Additionally, if people can't speak clearly, the possibility of

rational intersubjectivity is dimmed, and a constitution of language is impossible, resulting in the fragmentation of community.

Franklin overcame obscurity and reached a “state of affluence and some degree of reputation in the world,” gaining a “considerable share of felicity” (*LOA* 1307).

Certainly, this could be read as Franklin’s formula for material success, but it can also be read as his formula for linguistic performance. Poverty is to wealth as affluence is to reputation. Franklin will detail his rise from poverty to wealth, but he will also detail his transformation from obscurity to reputation, or from the unknown to the known.

Franklin’s use of “felicity” plays into this conceit, as felicity, in addition to meaning material happiness can also mean a clear faculty of speech and an aptness of expression.⁴

Franklin’s “degree of reputation in the world” was the result of his ability to express himself in the most appropriate manner so that others could understand him. Reputation, being known, only exists within a community of shared meanings. If individuals can understand each other they can enter into a dialogue or exchange with each other, thus coming to know each other and in the process, forming a shared lifeworld. Clarity and being understood become the central linguistic values of community. Language and reason replace birth and blood as social and communal determinants.

Members of a community can thus share a lexicon and exchange information. Franklin’s linguistic model can also be applied to the exchange of character. Character becomes another commodity that can be constituted, exchanged, and shared. Franklin’s “conducting means” are “fit to be imitated.” Franklin is subtly playing off the double meaning of conducting; the word can refer to directing or guiding one’s actions, but the word also had a specific meaning to the world of science. In an electrical sense,

conducting means “to transmit, act as a conductor of , serve as a channel or vehicle for.”⁵ In this sense, language is dialogic and acts as a facilitator of exchange, language acts as the foundation of community and the conductor of its values. Readers are able to acquire “the means” of Franklin’s character because Franklin’s character can be conducted through Franklin’s language. In other words, Franklin will make the means of obtaining an American character so clear that any reader could understand, and enter into a dialogue with it. Learning the appropriate use of language is necessary for success because it allows one to create oneself out of the resources made available through language. Franklin solidifies the connection between the written and lived life by noting that “the thing most like living one’s life over again, seems to be a recollection of that life; and to make that recollection as durable as possible, the putting it down in writing” (LOA 1307).

Genealogy of Language

If there was a new model of communication in the new American society, then it would be necessary to document the origin and growth of that language. Logically, then, Franklin’s ‘letter’ turns to his family’s genealogy. Franklin begins his autobiography by writing a history of his family. Franklin’s tracing of “this obscure family” (LOA 1311)⁶ does more than list family names and birthplaces. Franklin’s genealogy is a genealogy of literacy and language. Franklin provides a literary history, as he makes over seven references to his ancestor’s practices of reading and writing. Through the figures of his relatives, specifically Uncle Benjamin and his father Josiah, Franklin presents a model of a dialogic, republican public sphere and how individual character may be acquired by participation in it. The first writer who directly influenced young Franklin was Uncle

Benjamin. Franklin presents Uncle Benjamin, who was a hero to young Franklin, as a progenitor not just of his family, but also of a rational, enlightened model of communication. Uncle Benjamin is both a writer and a recorder of language. He writes instructive poetry which teaches morality and virtue⁷; however he also “records in a shorthand of his own” the “sermons of the best preachers” (1311). In this image, Uncle Benjamin is presented as writing down and diffusing the virtues of the community. His use of shorthand is a metaphor of assimilation of communal norms, as the shorthand is a private language. The public language of the community, in the form of the sermon, is transcribed into the private language of the citizen. In a highly advanced image of the censor, Franklin depicts a model of rational, communal self-regulation, as Uncle Benjamin makes the language of the community, and the norms it conducts, his own; they become part of his private self. The community is literally written into the consciousness of the receiver. That internalized information then reappears in the public language of poetry, which may now be read by others. Uncle Benjamin is both a conductor and a creator of community.

Franklin ensures this process is not read as an example of monologic regurgitation or blind acceptance of authority by closing the image with a volume of political pamphlets collected by Uncle Benjamin with “many of his notes in the margins” (1311). Marginalia is an activity of response and reciprocity; it is an image of dialogue between reader and writer. In this model, the reader is not a blind receiver who must take the word of the other on faith. Rather, the reader is to respond, and thus demonstrate engagement with the text. The reader reasonably decides to accept or reject the text, just

as Franklin's *Autobiography* can "be read or not as anyone pleases" (1307). Responding is an act of social reason and intersubjectivity; it is a participatory act.

Franklin's use of family figures to present the institutions and practices of the public sphere and rational communication is an example of what Stephen Greenblatt has termed "social circulation."⁸ In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, paternal figures were common images of both authority and learning, and a grounds for struggle between consent and coercion. Fliegelman's study *Prodigals and Pilgrims* demonstrated that images of family were heavily vested with debates over the nature of education, authority, and autonomy. Concern focused on the "essential part the family was believed to play in returning purity and virtue to society" (Fliegelman 36). Franklin uses his audience's expectations about family figures, but transforms them to deliver a new model of instruction and authority, a communal model instead of a coercive model. Franklin's innovation is to use the image of the adult child relationship to develop a paradigm of rationally motivated consent to the community. Here my reading of *The Autobiography* diverges most dramatically from previous readings. Most critics view this section as Franklin revolting against parental authority, while I read it as an image of consent to communal authority, figured in the images of Uncle Benjamin and Josiah Franklin.⁹

Franklin's father, Josiah, is the most prominent familial image of the public sphere. Josiah possesses the social rationality necessary for public involvement as he has "a sound understanding and solid judgment in private and public affairs" (1315). Because of these public credentials, Josiah has a public role. He was "frequently visited by leading people, who consulted him for his opinion on affairs of the town...he was also much consulted by private persons about their affairs when any difficulty occurred, and

frequently chosen an arbitrator between contending parties” (1315). The role of the arbitrator is to contain difference within the accepted bounds of the community; individuals may disagree, but they agree to give reasons for their different positions. The arbitrator brings the contending parties into dialogue and negotiation to reach consent. Through his public reason, Josiah acts as a normative force in the community, using his reason to decide between contesting claims. Coercion is absent from this model, as both parties are rationally motivated to assent to the decision. In this way, Josiah serves as a republican and Enlightenment model of how to settle disagreements.

In a remarkable image, Franklin transforms his father into one of the central institutions of the Enlightenment: the coffee house. In coffee houses, “people met exchanged opinions, formed groups, gathered number. It was through them that a public opinion began to evolve” (Beljame 162). Just as private individuals met in the coffee houses to publicly discuss journals, newspapers, and politics, Bostonians met at Josiah’s house to engage in public debate. “At his table,” Franklin relates, “he liked to have as often as he could, some sensible friend or neighbor, to converse with, and always took care to start some ingenious or useful topic for discourse, which might tend to improve the minds of his children” (1315). Coffeehouses were the epicenter of the republic of letters; they were central to the developing concepts of equality, sociability and dialogue.¹⁰ The discussions at Josiah’s table were instructive in nature, teaching the virtues and norms of society: “by this means he turned our attention to what was good, just, and prudent in the conduct of life; and little or no notice was ever taken of what related to the victuals on the table”(1315). That these discussion were normative is driven home by the reference to the effect they had on the listener’s appetite. The

regulation of appetite as a stand in for the regulation of passion is a eighteenth century commonplace¹¹ and a tenet of republicanism. It is a motif which is prevalent throughout *The Autobiography*. Public use of reason focuses the attention on morality and virtue rather than on appetites and passions.

Josiah also acts as a voice of the community when he censors young Franklin for stealing some rocks from a local building project to construct a wharf with his friends. Young Franklin defends his actions by pleading “the usefulness of the work,” but Josiah responds that “nothing was useful which was not honest” (1314). Josiah corrects and instructs Franklin, but not in a coercive, monologic manner, by using his authority to force Franklin to comply. Rather, Josiah reasons with Franklin, engaging him in a dialogue to explain why the action was wrong. Franklin presents his claim-pure utility-while Josiah presents his –means justifying the ends. Franklin evaluates both positions and voluntarily assents to Josiah’s position. By employing dialogue and reason, Franklin reaches consensus and thus his character is refashioned. The episode “shows an early public spirit, tho’ not then justly conducted” (1314). Franklin admits that he had to alter his conduct to take into consideration the communal values of honesty and justice.

In addition to teaching through purely linguistic means, Josiah also taught Franklin the performance of character by taking him on walks around Boston. The purpose of the walks was to decide upon a trade for Franklin by letting him view the various leather-apron men at their tasks: “took me to walk with him, and see joiners, bricklayers, turners, braziers at their work” (1316). But these walks can also be considered another example of reading the public and the public character of individuals. If, following Michel De Certeau’s theorizing in *The Practice of Everyday life*, walking

the city is considered a locutionary act, Franklin's walks around town become another means of establishing communication with the other. According to De Certeau, the act of walking urban spaces "is a process of appropriation of the topographical system...just as the speaker appropriates and takes on language" and implies "relations among different positions" (De Certeau 97). By viewing the public demonstration of the leather-apron men, Franklin acquires their values: "it has ever since been a great pleasure to me to see good workmen handle their tools; and it has been useful to me, having learnt so much by it" (1317). The communication situation also has a relation of reciprocity, as the leather-apron men view Franklin walking around viewing them, thus demonstrating his candidacy for membership in the community. Franklin will now recognize these tradesmen, and they will recognize him, thus giving him a base of a public character as well. Equating communication and craftsmanship (remember that to the grave Franklin identified himself by his trade, printer) here also speaks to post revolutionary anxieties. The leather-apron men, the "middling" sort are as much a part of the fabric of community as the leading writers and public speakers of the day. The public performance of the middleclass tradesmen is a form of public communication.

Josiah continues to act as the voice of communal, consensual authority as Franklin begins to acquire and use public language. Franklin's first venture into public writing was as a poet, "in the grubstreet ballad style." Franklin was "sent about town to sell them. The first sold wonderfully, the event being recent, having made a great noise" (1318). In perhaps the most misread image of the *Autobiography*, which has led to a continual misreading of Franklin, Josiah censors Franklin by "ridiculing my performances, and telling me Verse-makers were generally beggars"(1318). The

anecdote is often read as proof of Franklin's materialistic rejection of artistic values, but what critics fail to notice is what exactly is being criticized in this scene. Josiah is criticizing Franklin's "performances" which does not refer to his poetry, but to another seventeenth/eighteenth century sense of the word: the performing of a play, of music, publicly performed, a public exhibition or entertainment.¹² Josiah is criticizing Franklin's performance of his poetry, his hawking of his poetry which contributed to the creation of "noise" which disrupts the community. Noise is the condition of disturbance, of contention, of chaos, anarchy. Noise is the opposite of the reasoned public sphere; it represents the chaotic potential of the public that the Enlightenment sought to contain. When noise is present in the community, the public interest is lost as private interest, represented in the noise of many voices loudly clamoring to be heard over the din of the other voices, dominates. Franklin continues that his high sales, the rising of his voice over others, "flattered my vanity"(1318). Thus noise is further associated with the seeking of private gain. The voice of the self is valued over the voice of the other; when one voice implies its inherent value over others the opportunity for dialogue is lost, and communication becomes one way. When compared with Uncle Benjamin's poetry, the point of Josiah's criticism becomes clear, poetry must help to constitute the community, not disrupt it.

It seems unfair to conceive of either Josiah or Benjamin Franklin as being philistines in regard to poetry.¹³ A few paragraphs later, Franklin include as a few lines by Pope (certainly an example that not all verse makers are beggars) and even suggests improvements upon them. Franklin's maneuver here is to link his social model directly to the republic of letters in a highly skilled rhetorical, dialogic presentation. Josiah,

remember, is acting as a communal figurehead for the public sphere and its institutions, like the coffee house. One of the central public roles, besides censor and arbitrator, was critic.¹⁴ Josiah not only censors Franklin's public performance, but also critiques Franklin's writing, thus enacting the role of literary critic. Franklin had been engaged in an epistolary debate with a friend, (on the losing end, he notes) when several of the letters fell into Josiah's hands. Josiah, performing the role of literary critic "observed that tho' I had the advantage of my antagonist in correct spelling and pointing...I fell short far short in elegance of expression, in method, and in perspicuity, of which he convinced me several instances. I saw the justice of his remarks" (1319). Josiah uses reasonable argument to criticize young Franklin's essays, pointing out examples to back up his claims, to teach Franklin how to argue better, or in other words, to argue according to the communal standards. Franklin needs to learn proper method, which Josiah teaches him by the example of his methodical criticism. Franklin is rationally motivated to agree: "I saw the justice of his remarks" (1319). Franklin's word choice is striking. He could have stated that his father was correct, or insightful. Rather, he casts his father's criticism in moral and legal terms; this reinforces the critic's position as transmitter of communal norms. Criticism becomes a model of reasoned argument, opening up the ability to speak in the realms of law and public policy.¹⁵ The act of criticism opens channels of negotiation.

Just as Josiah instructed Franklin with literary criticism, Franklin will now do the same with the reader of his text. Franklin provides a sample of Pope for the reader.

Franklin writes:

Pope says, judiciously,

Men should be taught as if you taught them not,

And things unknown propos'd as things forgot

farther recommending it to us,

To speak tho' sure with seeming Diffidence

And he might have coupl'd with this line that which he has

coupled with another, I think less properly,

For want of modesty is want of Sense.

If you ask why less properly, I must repeat the lines;

“Immodest words admit of *no* Defense;

For Want of Modesty is Want of Sense”

Now, is not want of sense...some apology for his want of modesty? And

would not the lines stand more justly thus?

Immodest words admit *but this* defense,

That want of Modesty is Want of Sense.

This however I should submit to better judgments (1322-1323).

Franklin makes suggestions to alter Pope's poetry, and uses the method he learned from his father, giving reasons and examples why his critical claims are valid. The key to the whole passage, however, is that Franklin does not pronounce that his claim is correct; rather he leaves it up to others to decide, namely the reader. The reader must evaluate Franklin's argument and decide if it is just or not. Thus, the reader is engaged in a rhetorical dialogue with the text, and, in order to respond, must use his/her reason to decide. Whether the reader agrees or not with Franklin's change is immaterial; what matters is that the reader uses the proper, reasonable method in deciding. Doing so guarantees the reader's consent to the communal norms of the form of argument.

These family figures served Franklin at both compositional moments. In 1771, textualizing his childhood allowed Franklin, surrounded by the tensions between colony and empire, to clarify the differences between England and America. Franklin's history had been one of dialogue, reason, and communal consent. His experience with the English ministry was exactly the opposite: monologue, preference, coercion. Much of the rest of "Part One" depicts Franklin's encounters with characters that represent the aristocratic monologic model of communication. The rational model for solving disagreement that Franklin learned from his father was nowhere to be found in the halls of aristocratic power. In 1771, Franklin described Lord Hillsborough in a manner starkly opposite his father: "his character is conceit, wrongheadedness, obstinacy and passion" (18: 24) and "fond of everyone that can stoop to flatter him" (18:122). Lord Hillsborough's public character is flawed, yet under the British model he possess more power than Josiah, or Franklin, ever would. By 1773, Franklin realized that this flawed model of communication engendered tyrannical politics as England claimed "the right of the crown...to make laws of sufficient force and validity to bind its subjects in America in all cases whatsoever" (20: 280) and to back up those laws with "compulsive methods" (20:281). During 1788-1790, when Franklin was rereading and revising "Part One," his childhood provided a model of how a dialogic republic socialized its citizens. Assent to the community was gained through public reason and dialogue, not coercion and preference.

Compositional Models, Communal Models

As examples of coercion, Franklin mentions "books in polemic divinity." These books presented a model of communication which Franklin rejected. Polemics are

monologic, seeking to aggressively force the other to agree with the position of the writer. Polemic is a different model of argument, for it is argument for argument's sake, not to reach a consensus. Franklin calls the model of dispute "a very bad habit, making people often extremely disagreeable in company, by the contradiction that is necessary to bring it into practice...productive of disgusts and perhaps enmities" (1318). He then goes on to add, in a seemingly offhand remark that this model is only used by "lawyers, University Men, and men of all sorts that have been bred at Edinborough" (1319). However, this seemingly offhand comment acts to connect the model of communication Franklin is rejecting -polemic dispute- with the argumentative model of scholasticism. Scholasticism was an argumentative model which taught rhetoric through dispute, and sought to create efficient arguers, not rational thinkers. Scholasticism was thus the polar opposite of the argumentative model employed by the community of science and the Enlightenment; in fact, scientists and philosophers as eminent as Bacon, Boyle, and Locke denounced it.¹⁶ Even in Franklin's day, the Royal Society still struggled to eliminate scholasticism from places of education. By rejecting the books of polemic, and by association, the model of scholasticism, Franklin ensures his society operates according to the models of the Enlightenment. As Franklin says, he needed more "proper books."

Franklin provides two luminary examples of proper books, John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and Addison's and Steele's *The Spectator*. Bunyan is an example of a proper book, not because of the religious theme or moral of the book, but because of the method by which it was composed. "Honest John" Franklin writes, "was the first that I know of who mix'd narration and dialogue, a method of writing very engaging to the

reader, who in the most interesting parts finds himself as it were brought into the company and present at the discourse” (1326). That, in a shell, is Franklin’s model of republican communication: the writer engages the readers in dialogue to bring them into the community of discourse, not shut them out. *The Spectator* is an example of how, once the reader is engaged in dialogue, acquisition and exchange can take place. After reading *The Spectator*, Franklin “thought the writing excellent & wished if possible to imitate it”. Franklin begins to learn the model presented in *The Spectator* by imitating its method. At first Franklin tries to copy Addison’s and Steele’s style by memory, but “I compared my Spectator with the original, discovered my faults & corrected them. But I found I wanted a stock of words or a readiness in recollecting & using, which I thought I should have acquired before” (1319). Clearly, Franklin is implying that imitation is not memorization or rote repetition. One doesn’t build one’s style, or one’s character, by simply copying because copying does not engage one’s reason in a dialogue. Instead, Franklin strikes upon an new procedure. “Therefore I took some of the tales and turned them into verse: and after a time, when I had pretty well forgotten the prose, turned them back again” (1320). Here, Franklin is actively and dialogically engaged with the text; he is engaged in an activity of translation, not memorization, changing the sentiment of *The Spectator* into his own language, causing him to find his own words to express the same ideas. This leads Franklin to experimenting with method, discovering his own method of arraigining textual materials: “I also sometimes jumbled my collection of hints into confusion, and after some weeks, endeavored to reduce them into the best order...this was to teach me method in the arraignment of thoughts” (1320). As a result of active, dialogic engagement with the text, this time, when Franklin compared his version with

the original “I sometimes had the pleasure of fancying that in certain particulars of small import, I had been lucky enough to improve the method or the language” (1320).

Franklin had acquired language from the public sphere, but by engaging it, and making it his own, personal growth and development had taken place.

The next model Franklin acquires is the Socratic method, that of “the humble enquirer and doubter” (1321). This has often been read as Franklin assuming another mask for his personality, but actually he is assuming another method for developing, arranging, and presenting his character: the Socratic method is not a mask to cover the self, it is a tool for expressing and creating the self within discourse. Franklin finds the Socratic method a very effective way to win arguments, but the form of these arguments worries him; although not engaged in polemic, Franklin found himself “obtaining victories that neither myself nor my cause always deserved” (1321). Here Franklin learns an important lesson; eloquence of expression and rhetoric could be used for positive, republican purposes; however, they could also be used to stifle debate and exchange, replacing science with sophism. As Gustafson notes, “for early Americans, eloquence was liberty but also power- and a potentially tyrannical power” (Gustafson 119). Elegance of expression and mastery of rhetoric could be an elevating and liberating power, allowing the higher faculties to develop and guide man, building communicative relations of equality and exchange with other individuals. However, eloquence and rhetoric could also be employed by a monologic or one-sided model of communication. Ambitious demagogues or polemicists could use eloquence to fool people into an imagined consent when they are really being coerced. Eloquence and rhetoric, instead of enabling reason, could take reason’s place, using flattery, invective, and unclear words to

cloud the higher faculties and motivate the lower. Franklin's solution to the potentially dangerous qualities of language is to reject the self gratifying elements of language, like Socratic irony or his earlier poetic performances which only flattered his vanity, and to make virtues out of the dialogic and reasonable aspects of language. "The chief ends of conversation," Franklin declares, "are to inform or be informed, to please or to persuade...the purposes for which speech was given to us, to wit, giving or receiving information, or pleasure" (1322). If language is kept within these communal parameters, of exchange and cordial equality, the negative aspects of language will be contained.

Failed Models

Franklin next encounters a series of individuals who embody failed models of communication and character. Keimer, a Philadelphia printer, and Keith, Royal Governor of Pennsylvania, highlight the dangerous uses of language Franklin had previously rejected. Keimer is associated with enthusiasm and passion, and Keith with flattery and patronage. Keimer, perhaps the most memorable of these figures, is Franklin's first boss in Philadelphia. Keimer is described as being "ignorant of the world", but worse, he had "a good deal of the knave in his composition" (1331). Franklin, once again, is subtly playing with the double meaning of words. Both Keimer's character and his inability to compose with language are being described. The weakness of Keimer's character is linked to the weakness of his compositional ability. Keimer produced poems, "but could not be said to write them" (1331); his press consisted of a "worn out font of English" (1331). Keimer's print shop is in disarray; his press "he had not yet used & of which he understood nothing" (1331), remains inactive until Franklin

arrives. Just as Keimer is unable to compose type, he will be unable to compose an enlightened or republican character.

Keimer, more than any other character in the book, is set up as the antithesis of Franklin. He is governed by his emotions and passions instead of reason. He follows scripture literally, thus making the error of memorizing instead of engaging. As a result, he is full of enthusiasm and very polemical: “he retained a great deal of his old enthusiasms, and loved an argumentation. We therefore had many disputations” (1339). Since Keimer practices enthusiasm instead of reason, he is unable to control or regulate himself. In the most humorous scene in *The Autobiography*, Keimer’s table manners are shown to be quite different from Josiah’s or Franklin’s: “Poor Keimer...longed for the flesh-pots of Egypt, and ordered a roast pig: He invited me and two women friends to dine with him, but it being brought too soon upon the table, he could not resist the temptation, and ate it all up before we came”(1340). Keimer lacks self-control, and is unable to subjugate his self-interest to the common good. Just as he is unable to consider the other, Keimer is unable to effectively communicate or enter into exchange with them. He “would hardly answer me the most common question, without asking first, *what do you mean to infer from that?*” (1339). As a result of Keimer’s inability to consider the common good or enter into dialogic exchange with others, he is unfit for communal membership, and thus stands no chance to succeed. Excommunicated, he dies penniless in the Caribbean.

Another failed communication and social model is presented in the character of “Sir William Keith, Governor of the Province.” Keith is an avatar of the monologic, aristocratic model of communication in *The Autobiography*. His presentation bears this

out, as he is described as “finely dressed” with rich tastes, and he drinks “excellent Maderia”. His language fits his pedigree, composed of “condescension and politeness” (1322-1323). Keith uses false eloquence, the type feared by the colonists and earlier rejected by Franklin. It is a false language, meant to deceive men and lead their reason astray by means of flattery and evoking self-interest. As an example, consider Keith’s main interaction with Franklin; Keith flatters Franklin’s vanity by telling the teenage Franklin he is a great printer and should be in business by himself. Keith speaks to Franklin’s vanity, attempting to arouse Franklin’s ambition. When he promises Franklin credit, he does so “with such an air of cordiality that I had not the least doubt of his meaning what he said.” Yet Keith knew he could not procure the needed credit for Franklin; the episode highlights the ability of eloquence and rhetoric to overshadow reason and the real. Franklin believed something that wasn’t true because it sounded good; Keith’s rhetoric prevented Franklin from being reasonable.

The exchange between Josiah Franklin and Governor Keith, the main avatars of the competing communication models, is rich with implications. Keith, representing the aristocratic model, writes Josiah a letter, offering his son preference and patronage (of course without any funds to back it up), the main means of advancement in an aristocratic society. Keith’s letter is filled with “many flattering things” (1333), in the manner aristocrats expect to motivate response. Keith expects that Josiah will go along with the plan simply because he has endorsed it, expecting compliance based on his personage. Josiah, however, responds to the letter by employing his reason. Josiah finds the aristocratic Keith to lack reason, stating he must “be of small discretion” and full of “impropriety” (1334) Josiah evaluates Keith’s claim, that Franklin is prepared to run a

business, and reasonably decides that his son is too young to be entrusted with such responsibility and capital. In another example of the reader being asked to use his reason to judge the text, Franklin provides proof that his father was right. Franklin shows he can't handle money, because he improperly manages a loan given to him by an older business associate. Likewise he reveals his immaturity by returning to his brother's print shop, not to make amends with his brother, but, acting a bit aristocratic himself, to show off his fine clothes and pocket cash. The reader, by censoring Franklin for these improper acts, agrees with Josiah's use of reason and thus assents to the superiority of Josiah's model over Keith's.

In Keith's model, assent is not based on reasonable motivation, but on authority, patronage, and flattery. Keith's monologic model is revealed to be the exact opposite of the republican, enlightened model of communication, and is depicted as being, literally and figuratively, bankrupt. Both Keith's word and his purse are without credit. One cannot credit what he says, and he cannot raise capital on credit. It is interesting that both prominent exemplars of the aristocratic model of communication, Keimer and Keith, end up bankrupt in *The Autobiography*. In his opening, Franklin had connected affluence with mastery of language; here he completes the circle. If one chooses mastery of the wrong uses of language, failure and rejection is the result. The importance of being able to decide between composing models of language and ordering one's life is highlighted in the fish episode Franklin has placed between Josiah's rejection of Keith, and Franklin's learning the truth about Keith's duplicity in London. Franklin relates how he cast aside his vegetarianism in what seems to be a clear digression. However, it is woven directly into the thematic unity of the section, and serves as a counterbalance to

the authority of Keith and the passion of Keimer. Franklin watches his shipmates eat some freshly cooked fish. Franklin happily abstains, as a result of his vegetarianism, which “seemed very reasonable” (1338). However when he smells the fish, his appetite, or passion, starts to eat away at his self control. Franklin “balanced some time between principle & inclination till I recollected that when the fish were opened, I saw smaller fish taken out of their stomachs then I thought, if you eat one another, I don’t see why we mayn’t eat you” (1339). Franklin, unlike Keimer with the pig, does not abandon his principle because of his appetite, but because he finds reasons in favor of eating the fish. Franklin concluded, “so convenient a thing it is to be a reasonable creature, since it enables one to find or make a reason for everything one has a mind to do” (1339). It is often pointed out that Franklin is being ironic here, highlighting the potential danger of instrumental reason, but at the same moment he is giving the solution to avoid that problem by showing the equality of positions and the need for negotiation between them. One position is not necessarily better than others. Franklin could have remained a self-righteous vegetarian, holding himself in a position of superiority to his shipmates, like Keimer and his enthusiastic following of strict Mosaic law. Instead, Franklin “continued to eat with other people” (1339). However, he returned “now and then occasionally to a vegetable diet”(1339). Because both eating the fish and not eating the fish are reasonable, they are equal and thus brought into a stable unity where there is room for both. Both positions are equally reasonable and are both communally accepted.

Public Communication, Public Community

Much of the end of “Part One” deals with Franklin’s material, social, and political rise in the world, translating the language skills he had learned into social performance.

However, at the same time, the last few pages also reveal a Franklin undergoing a process of self-criticism and self-censorship. Franklin, having internalized the virtues and norms of the Enlightenment community through the republican public sphere, will now apply those norms to his character and to the world around him. Franklin's desire to fully enter the community leads to an evaluation of his character in the mirror of the public. As Franklin notes, "I had therefore a tolerable character to begin the world with, I valued it properly and determined to preserve it" (1360). Franklin makes it very clear that it will be by communal, not religious, standards that he will judge his character. Franklin rejects deism, "tho' it might be true, was not very useful" (1359) but at the same time rejects any belief that the source of proper character lies outside the bounds of human reason:

Revelation had indeed no weight with me as such; but I entertained an opinion that tho' certain actions might not be bad because they were forbidden by it, or good because it commanded them; yet probably those actions might be forbidden because they were bad for us, or commended because they were beneficial to us, in their own natures (1359-1360).

Franklin squarely places morality in the natural and social world. The origin of morality does not lie in revelation, or in some otherworldly judge, but in the nature of actions and deed themselves. If a practice is good or bad can be decided by evaluating the outcome of that practice. The ultimate judge would not be god, but the social and general good: "I grew convinced that truth, sincerity, and integrity in dealings between man & man were of utmost importance to the felicity of life, and I formed written resolutions... to practice them ever while I lived" (1359). It is no accident that Franklin again selects the word felicity as he mentions forming written resolutions of proper social behavior. Felicity, as in the opening page of *The Autobiography* can refer to both living and speaking well.

Franklin's triumvirate of moral principles for living well are consistent with his earlier advice for good writing; his social morality matches his method for writing. "truth, sincerity, and integrity" can be communicative values; they are prerequisites for clear, understandable, reciprocal communication. In order to follow those precepts in the social world, one must follow them in the linguistic.

Just as Franklin had dedicated much of the early sections of "Part One" to providing examples of proper and improper methods of communicating, he dedicates much of the last pages to competing images of proper and improper character. Character becomes the public performance of an individual's consent to and application of communal norms. Character, the perception others have of either one's written or social persona, is what allows the one to express and establish communal membership. Consider the importance of the letter of introduction to the seventeenth and eighteenth century. A letter of introduction vouched that an unknown person's character fit within a certain community. As Franklin had discovered in *Silence Dogood* and other early writings, character can be read, making it, in many ways, another element of communication. It is a form of nonverbal communication that acts the same as verbal communication and is able to conduct information and rhetorical effect. If a virtuous character is performed, it can convince the reader of that character.

Franklin uses himself as proof. He performs his work publicly, and as a result "this industry being visible to our neighbors began to give us character and credit" (1363). In perhaps the most famous example in the text, Franklin elaborates on this point:

in order to secure my credit and character...I took care not only to be in reality industrious and frugal, but to avoid all appearances of the

contrary. I drest plainly; I was seen at no places of idle diversion...and to show that I was not above my business, I sometimes brought home the paper I purchased at the stores thro' the streets on a wheelbarrow (1369).

Franklin's public performance matches his private virtue. He measures his adherence to communal norms by gauging the reaction to his performance. Note also the difference from Josiah's earlier injunction against public performance. Josiah had criticized Franklin's walking around the community making noise and satisfying his private vanity. Here, Franklin walks around the community performing work, and satisfying others that he is committed to the general good. Likewise, the production of Franklin's industry, his newspaper and pamphlets succeed partly because of content, but also because of the appearance of that content. Once again, character and writing are twinned. Franklin tells us his success was "one of the first good effects of my having learned to scribble" (1365), but his success was also due to the fact that "our first papers made quite a different appearance from any before in the province, a better type and better printed" (1364). Just as his neighbors recognized the performance of his industry, after viewing his printing "they were sensible of the difference" (1365).

It is no accident that these episodes of credit and trust being earned through proper social performance are intermixed with episodes of Franklin eliminating his debts. Credit is both monetary and social capital. This is one of the lessons Franklin repeated most often. *Poor Richard* and *Father Abraham* abound with advice about social credit being as good as money. In "Advice to a Young Tradesman, Written by an Old One," published in 1748, Franklin covered similar ground, revealing his belief that it is the compilation of everyday events that make a life. Franklin warns that "the most trifling actions that affect a man's credit are to be regarded. The sound of your hammer at five in

the morning or nine at night, heard by a creditor, makes him easy six months longer” (LOA 321). Character is composed of the things one does. Just as Keimer and Keith necessarily had to fail because of their improper method, others must fail because of their improper character. Franklin ends his partnership with Meredith, because Meredith “was often seen drunk in the streets & playing at low games in alehouses, much to our discredit” (1366). Meredith does not display his adherence to communal norms, and as a result, the public does not like Franklin’s association with him. Public opinion responds as people tell Franklin that “they did not like my continuing partnership with Meredith” (1366). In order to maintain his public status, Franklin must follow public opinion and end the partnership.

In 1771, as Franklin painfully watched his dream of an English-American empire fade, and sensed the immanent disintegration of the relationship between the two societies, he must have felt some fear mixed with his regret. If English society as he had imagined it did not work, what social model did? Franklin, as we have seen, found his investigation into his life in his memoirs revealed real differences between American and British models of society. He found comfort, no doubt, in tracing the current of the republic of letters and the community of science in the fabric of colonial life, but what society was the result? If British society had failed, what American model could be counted on? These concerns seek answers in the last major image of “Part One,” the *junto*. Just as Franklin’s family as models of acquisition and instruction had dominated the early pages, and tests of character the middle, the *junto* brings “Part One” of Franklin’s *Autobiography* to a close. In the *junto*, Franklin finds a perfect example of community.

The *junto* becomes the last image of both a discursive community and a social community, and in many ways is the culmination of the lessons of “Part One.” It has the elements of the coffee house and salon; it is composed of both scholars and leather apron men; it is guided above all, by reason and a quest for the common good. The first thing to note is that Franklin’s community, much like his Albany Plan, is formed by voluntary association. It is “a club, for mutual improvement” (1361). To be a member of this club requires assenting to its rules by discursively participating in the club: “The rules I drew up, required that every member in his turn should produce one or more queries on any point of morals, politics, or natural philosophy to be discussed by the company” (1361). By participating, each member not only expresses his assent to the community, but helps to create the community. The discussions that follow are the discursive relations of the community, where the members define and debate the meaning of morals and philosophy, creating a shared definition and background which allows them to imagine themselves as a community. It is not only the content of the discussion but the communicative form that shapes and defines the community: “our debates were to be conducted in the sincere spirit of enquiry after truth, without fondness for dispute, or desire of victory, and to prevent warmth, all expressions of positiveness of opinions, or of direct contradiction were after some time made contraband and prohibited” (1361). The norms governing the shape of the discourse, reasonable and enlightened, also govern the shape of the community, which became “the best school of philosophy, morals & politics that then existed” (1362).

The *junto*, however, is not only a discursive community, but also a social one. The members are all described as having good characters, either being “lovers of

reading¹, sensible, or industrious tradesmen. These solid characters which formed the club, provided it with a great deal of stability, as “our friendship continued without interruption...upwards of 40 years, and the club continued almost as long” (1362).

Remembering this stability must have been comforting to Franklin, as he sat at Twyford contemplating replacing the coercive bonds of colonialism with the voluntary bonds of republican community.

¹ There are 44 documented revisions made to “Part One” between 1788 and 1790. Apparently Franklin reread “Part One” several times during that period, making his various changes. See Lemay and Zall *Genetic Text* (xvi) and their *Norton Critical Edition* of *The Autobiography* (xiii, 155).

² For one of the strongest cases against “Part One” being a real letter to William Franklin see Lemay, *Writing the American Classics*, 4-7; Dawson, in “Fathers and Sons” holds that “Part One” really is written to his son, a case made compellingly by William Shurr in “Now Gods Stand up for Bastards: A Case for Reinterpreting Franklin’s Autobiography”.

³ In a 1775 dinner with Joseph Galloway, Franklin and William declared their allegiance to separate causes. In 1776, William was declared “dangerous to the country” and placed under arrest. Franklin did nothing to alleviate his son’s arrest or condition, ignoring the pleas of his daughter in law. Franklin rebuffed William’s attempt at reconciliation, writing “there are natural duties which proceed political ones, and cannot be extinguished by them”. In his will, Franklin left William next to nothing, writing “the part he played against me in the late war...will account for my leaving him no more of an estate he endeavored to deprive me of”.

⁴ *The Oxford English Dictionary* marks the use of felicity this way as far back as 1605.

⁵ The word was first used in this manner in 1740, *OED*.

⁶ All *Autobiography* quotes are from *Writings*, The Library of America, New York, 1987.

⁷ Franklin includes a sample poem, in which each letter of Franklin’s name becomes a moral aphorism (1310-11).

⁸ See “The Circulation of Social Energy” in Greenblat, *Shakespearean Negotiations*.

⁹ Dawson, in “Father’s and Sons: Franklin’s Memoirs as Myth and Metaphor” argues Franklin works out his identity by rebelling and reconciling with Josiah, and that this is the main organizing principle of the book.

¹⁰ For a discussion of coffee house sociability and equality, see Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters*.

¹¹ See R. Jackson Wilson, 47-51, for a good discussion of appetite and passion.

¹² The *OED* has references for this meaning dating to 1611, and specifically notes the public nature of performance by quoting Steele's *Tattler* No. 4, 1709.

¹³ Franklin continued to write poetry his entire life.

¹⁴ This is important because Habermas has demonstrated how "the public sphere in the political realm evolved from the public sphere in the world of letters", and that "critical debate ignited by works of literature and art was soon to extend to include economic and political dispute", *Transformation* 30-33. Thus literary criticism acted to open the public space for public use of reason.

¹⁵ For an important discussion of how criticism opens space for public reason, see Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism*.

¹⁶ For a full discussion see Peter Walmsley, "Dispute and Conversation: Probability and Rhetoric of Natural Philosophy in Locke's Essay".

Chapter Three: Letters, Libraries, and a Republican Printer

The early 1780's were a remarkably busy time for Benjamin Franklin. Franklin maintained the alliance with France, not an easy task with John Adams and Arthur Lee present in Europe, directed the operations of the American navy, and in 1782 was, along with John Jay and John Adams, one of the architects of the Treaty of Paris, which effectively brought the War for Independence to an end, and nationhood to America.¹ In addition to his diplomatic work, Franklin found time (too much, according to John Adams) to participate in the French institutions of the republic of letters, making the rounds between Masonic halls (he acted as Grand Master of the Lodge of the Nine Sisters) and literary salons, most famously the salon of Madame Helvetius, and participated in French literary culture, writing his bagatelles and other satires. At the same time that Franklin was negotiating with the British for the recognition of America as an independent state, and reassuring the French that America would not forget her debt to France, Abel James came into the possession of "Part One" of Franklin's memoirs. Sometime around June of 1782 James wrote a letter to Franklin informing him of the find, and urging Franklin to consider returning to it. Franklin received James' letter sometime around December of 1782, and initiated a correspondence with Benjamin Vaughan about "Part One." In January of 1783, Vaughan wrote his letter, agreeing that Franklin should continue the story of his life.²

But Franklin did not return immediately to that task. On the one hand, he was still incredibly busy, not only with official business with France, England, and the Continental Congress, but also with business as the unofficial representative of America to the rest of the world. The king of Sweden would only sign a treaty recognizing the

United States if Franklin was the American diplomat.³ He was literally swamped with letters and callers seeking information about America, or advice on emigrating there, or just plain solutions to the problems of common people. Yet, amidst all this, it was the world of science that drew Franklin's first post war energies. In 1783 Franklin witnessed humanity's first escape from gravity, watching the first manned balloon flights, reporting on them to the Royal Society. In early 1784, Franklin was appointed to the commission to investigate Mesmerism, then a raging fad in France, for the king. In June of 1784, Franklin wrote a theoretical essay on "Universal Fluid." The war had not dampened Franklin's belief in the community of science.

However, Franklin could not keep his attention from returning to the prospect of America, and to the prospect of creating a new, enlightened society. In a series of political writings in 1784 can be found ample evidence of Franklin's ideas about the shape this new society would take, and how jealously he would guard his vision of it. It was this, more than anything else, which motivated Franklin to return to his *Autobiography* in mid 1784 as he awaited Jefferson's arrival to replace him as American minister to France. The specific date of the composition of "Part Two" has never been established, although Lemay and Zall estimate it to be between May and August. This seems most logical, not only because of the historical tasks they cite that Franklin was involved in before June and after August⁴, but also because of three documents he produced around the same time: his essays on the Order of the Cincinnati (January), "Information" (February) and a remarkable letter to Strahan on August 19. The first two documents reveal Franklin's concern that aristocracy was attempting to gain a foothold in

America; the last draws a very sharp contrast between America and Europe, almost as if the question had been settled in Franklin's mind.

Turkeys versus Kingbirds

On January 26, 1784, Franklin composed a long essay to his daughter Sara Bache in response to a series of newspaper clippings she had sent him about the controversy regarding the founding of the Society of the Cincinnati.⁵ The Society of the Cincinnati was to be an order of "knights," composed of officers who served in the continental army, and whose honors would be hereditary and eligible to be passed down through the generations, in effect, creating a feudal institution in America. Franklin's response was immediate and harsh. The society was a danger to the republic. The plan reeked of privileging private interest over the general good:

I only wonder that, when the united wisdom of our nation had, in the Articles of Confederation, manifested their dislike of establishing ranks of nobility by authority either of the congress or of any particular state a number of private persons should think proper to distinguish themselves and their posterity from their fellow citizens and form an order of *hereditary knights* in direct opposition to the solemnly declared sense of their country! (LOA 1085).

The society threatened to disrupt the harmony of the community, replacing equality and reciprocity with titles and prestige. It was the very opposite of the goals of the revolution, but what was worse, it went against the expressed will of the people as represented in the voice of communal governance. Much like Franklin's noisy poetic performance in "Part One," which served only his personal vanity, the titles of these knights would only benefit the bearers. Something must have interfered with the reasonable faculties of these individuals. In "Part One," Franklin had connected dangerous uses of rhetoric and eloquence with monologism, outlining how those

practices could blind people's reason and coerce them into assent. Franklin finds the same culprit at work here as the "good sense" of the officers has been lost because of the "persuasion of its projectors, who have been too much struck with the ribbons and crosses they have seen among them hanging to the buttonholes of foreign officers" (1084). The reason of those who join the society has been blinded by the semiotic eloquence of the appearance of the medals. The medals act like the linguistic blinds of Keith's aristocratic speech. The medals make an emotional appeal to vanity, which serves to enflame only the private appetites, not the virtues of public service. Titles and feudal distinctions are foreign, not American.

Once the monologic communicative practice blinds reason and promotes vanity, the evil of hereditary aristocracy can take hold. Hereditary titles went against everything republicanism and the Enlightenment believed. In an enlightened republic, character was a product of interaction of the self and the community, not of genealogy: "for honor worthily obtained...is in its nature a personal thing, and incommunicable to any but those who had some share in obtaining it" (1084). Honor is a public commodity; the public can communicate it to deserving individuals, but honored individuals cannot privately transfer it to those the community has not acknowledged. The validity of Franklin's claims against aristocracy, however, are not just political speculations; for Franklin they are scientific fact. Franklin writes that "the absurdity of descending honors is not a mere matter of philosophical opinion; it is capable of mathematical demonstration" (1085-86). Franklin then provides a long mathematical proof to demonstrate that aristocracy is illogical. Using the opposite of the logic of replication he will later employ to show that virtue and citizenship can be shared across larger and larger social spaces, he argues that

“arithmetic makes it quite plain and clear that, in proportion as the antiquity of the family shall augment, the right to the honor of the ancestor will diminish; and a few generations more would reduce it to something so small as to be very near and absolute nullity” (1087).

The ultimate danger of aristocracy is, of course, a return to monarchy. Franklin doesn't explicitly state this fear, but it is implicit his criticism of the Society's choice of the eagle as its symbol. In a satirical image, Franklin explains why the proper symbol for America would be the turkey. He portrays the eagle as a solitary animal that lives off the industry of other birds, and as a coward: “he is therefore by no means a proper emblem for the brave and honest Cincinnati of America, who have driven all the *kingbirds* from our country” (1088). The eagle, of course, was the symbol of Imperial Rome, and to the classical republican minds of the Enlightenment, would have served as a reminder of the overthrow of the Roman republic. Or, at least it should have reminded the Americans of that, so Franklin, under the guise of criticizing the grammar of the Latin phrases of the Society, also critiques their forgetting of classic Roman history: “Some find fault with the Latin, as wanting classic elegance and correctness; and since our nine universities were not able to furnish better Latin, it was a pity, they say, that the mottos had not been in English” (1087-88). A better emblem would have been the American turkey “who would not hesitate to attack a grenadier of the British Guards, who should presume to invade his farmyard with a *red* coat on” (1088). While the turkey image obviously represents the common and virtuous citizens of America, one wonders if there is a tone of warning to those who would don the “red coat” of aristocracy.

In February, Franklin composed and published “Information to Those Who Would Remove to America.” While part of the prompt for writing this essay was, as Franklin claimed in text, being overrun with queries from people looking to emigrate to America, there is almost certainly another motive. Franklin, it can be assumed, was still brooding over the aristocratic airs of the Society of the Cincinnati, and the improper regard some Americans still had for titles and estates. At the same time, European “strangers of birth,” as Franklin called them, were inquiring about obtaining lands and peerage in the newly independent colonies. It was time to settle the issue in his mind, once and for all. “Information” is not a description of America, or a bit of advertising looking to attract a proper sort of people to America. Rather, just as his Cincinnati essay provided a mathematical proof that hereditary nobility was a scientific impossibility, “Information to Those Who Would Remove to America” is a proof of demography, a science Franklin was helping to found⁶, scientifically demonstrating why aristocracy could not take hold in America.

America, as Franklin famously put it, was a land of “a happy mediocrity,” composed of yeoman farmers and independent craftspeople. What is absent in America are the institutions and effects of aristocracy. The social practices and means of rising in the aristocratic cultures of Europe were not only absent in America, they were illegal. Patronage and office holding for an annual salary, mainstays of aristocracy, are banned. Franklin quotes the Constitution of Pennsylvania, which he helped to write: “as every freeman, to preserve his independence...ought to have some profession...there can be no necessity for, nor use in establishing, offices of profit” (*LOA* 976). Remarkably, the Constitution goes on to posit the effects of patronage: “the usual effects of which are

dependence and servility...faction, contention, corruption and disorder among the people” (976). The institutions of aristocracy are completely incompatible with the institutions of democracy and a republic. Patronage, like the bright ribbons of the officers, or noisy vanity, divides citizen from citizen, blocks reciprocity, and disrupts the community.

Not only are aristocratic practices outlawed in America, the social relations of America prevent the trappings of nobility: idleness and empty honor. In a searing bit of wit, Franklin compares aristocrats to pigs, because, unlike all the other inhabitants of America, human or animal, the pig refuses to work and therefore lives like a gentleman. However, Franklin notes that Americans regard nobles as “doing nothing of value, but living idly on the labor of others” (977) and ominously warns that “their estates, like the carcass of the negro’s gentleman hog, come to be cut up” (977). Franklin seems to be referring to the leveling and popular energies released by the revolution,⁷ which he seems to have, at least for awhile, regarded in a positive light. In a letter dated December 25, 1783 to Robert Morris, Franklin, sounding far from D. H. Lawrence’s “snuff colored” bourgeoisie or Max Weber’s “spirit of capitalism,” wrote “all property...seems to me to be the creature of public convention. Hence the public has the right of regulating descents, and all other conveyances of property” (*LOA* 1081-82). In his zeal to ensure the absence of hereditary aristocracy, Franklin was willing to do away with an individual’s right to distribute his property after he passes. In effect, the community writes the will of the individual, as the individual would give up his property to the common good. What is necessary to live comfortably, in happy mediocrity, is man’s “natural right...but all property superfluous to such purposes is the property of the public,

who by their laws have created it, and may therefore by other laws dispose of it, whenever the welfare of the public shall demand such disposition” (1082). The penalty for refusing to subsume private property to the common good is the same as not assenting to the morals or norms of a community- exclusion: “he who does not like civil society on these terms, let him retire and live upon savages” (1082). Franklin’s venom in these passages matches the vehemence with which he negotiated the clause in the Treaty of Paris regarding the property of loyalists after the war. The British wanted such property either guaranteed or compensated for. Franklin, however, refused; he would not budge, even threatening to scuttle the entire peace process over the issue. He was so obstinate on this point that the British caved in, agreeing only to petition for compensation. Franklin may have believed there was no such thing as a “bad peace,” but apparently any peace which left intact, or recognized, any institutions of aristocracy in America, was not a peace worth having.⁸ If aristocratic culture remained in America after the war, then for all intents and purposes, the war was lost.

The point is that the revolution, at least at this moment, radicalized Franklin, and this attitude must be considered when discussing “Part Two” of *The Autobiography*. These documents show that while Franklin may have desired continuity in “Part Two,” he sought a total break from the political and ideologic culture of European monarchies and aristocracies. The old European political currencies, like birth, can not be exchanged for American currency, for “in Europe,” Franklin writes, “It has value, but it is a commodity that cannot be carried to a worse market than America” (976). Franklin applies the literary lesson he learned in *Silence Dogood* to the political economy of a new country. Just as readers in *Silence*’s republic of letters ask about the public character of

the author, members of Franklin's political republic don't enquire "what is he, but what can he do?" (977). In what could be read as a further rebuke to the pretensions of the Cincinnati, Franklin describes those who earn the public honor in America as "the husbandman is in honor there & even the mechanic" (977). Here is the virtuous base of the American republic: the virtuous common man.

By the time Franklin writes his August 19, 1784 letter to William Strahan, much of his anxiety about the republicanism of America seems to have been settled in his mind. Franklin lists for Strahan all the ways, legislatively, militarily, and diplomatically, the American character out performed the British. Franklin then recalls that Strahan, himself a printer, had once stated "that no two journeymen printers...had met with such success in the world as ourselves" (LOA 1101). Franklin agrees but draws a sharp distinction, one that clearly states what he had discovered in writing "Part Two," that America and England employed different methods for structuring community and society. Franklin notes:

But we have risen from different modes. I, as a republican printer, always liked a form well plained down being averse to those overbearing letters that hold their heads so high, as to hinder their neighbors from appearing. You as a monarchist, chose to work upon crown paper, and found it profitable, while I worked on pro patia (1101).

Franklin clearly establishes the link between the different linguistic and social models employed by England and America. The monologic model of England served only the crown, coercively imposing its voice on others, actually blocking the appearance of other letters. Franklin's republican, dialogic model, worked on behalf of the country, and employed a middle style, much as America is peopled by the happy mediocrity, which allowed all letters to work together for the common cause.

A New Republic?

These three documents confirm that Franklin felt America was a new society, an enlightened republic, far different than anything ever seen before. It was a sentiment shared by many throughout the eighteenth century world. At the end of the Revolution, the Americans felt as if they had won more than just a military victory. It was, to many of them, Franklin included, a moral victory, a victory of their public virtue over the corrupt tyranny of England. Gordon Wood notes that the victory had a “moral dimension, a utopian depth, to the political separation from England –a depth that involved the very character of their society” and that “the Americans had come to believe that the Revolution would mean nothing less than a reordering of eighteenth century society and politics...a reordering that was summed up by the conception of republicanism” (*Creation* 47-48). As Bailyn, Wood, Kerber, and others have shown, the colonists were seen as being exemplars of morality and virtue.⁹ The colonists were morality and virtue in action; they were a vindication of Enlightenment ideals, including the intertwined ideologies of the republic of letters, the discourse of science, and republicanism. To the eyes of the rest of the world, the leaders of the American Revolution were Franklin and Washington; Franklin became the figure of the highest achievement of the Enlightenment, while Washington became the emblem of republicanism at its best. Perhaps the most influential image of the period was Washington’s living up to republican ideals by resigning his commission as commander in chief of the continental army on December 23, 1783, just as Franklin’s attention was turning to writing about the shape of American society. Thus the reality of the new possibilities of virtue and morality was associated with both men, Franklin demonstrating

man's control of nature, Washington man's control of himself.¹⁰ The revolution had thus enabled some of the colonists to think beyond the classical structure of a cycle of rising and falling civilizations, and to imagine that social and historical forces could be controlled. As Kerber notes, "they learned from a republican interpretation of history that social change could be controlled. History itself...was open to direction, improvement, and progress" (Kerber 5). This awareness on the macro level confirmed Franklin's belief on the micro level that individual character could be controlled, improved, and subject to change. In 1784, this was Franklin's position, and his endorsement of progress will be seen infusing "Part Two."

But there was also the fear that republicanism could equal a loss of stability; the people had to be trusted and prepared to control social and historical processes. The social forces let loose by the revolution had to be controlled and directed. Institutions needed to be founded to enable citizens to do just that. At this foundational moment "defining citizenship and its rights and responsibilities posed urgent questions that had immediate importance as well as fundamental, long term consequences" (Brown xiv). The Americans had succeeded in throwing off English tyranny and protecting their liberties, but they had also enacted radical changes to their understanding of the nature and function of society. If the revolution caused traditional modes of authority and society to be cast aside, new forms had to be developed to take their place. Gordon Wood details the extraordinary changes wrought by the revolution and its republican ideology in his comprehensive *Radicalism of The American Revolution*. He notes that republicanism

challenged the primary assumptions and practices of monarchy-its hierarchy its inequality, its devotion to kinship, its patriarchy, its patronage, and its

dependency. It offered new conceptions of the individual, the family, the state, and the individual's relationship to the family, the state, and other individuals. Indeed, republicanism offered nothing less than new ways of organizing society. It defined and dissolved the old monarchical connections and presented people with...new sorts of social relationships (*Radicalism* 96).

It was a utopian moment, a chance, quite literally, to use Paine's expression "to make the world anew." In being recalled to his memoirs by receiving the Abel James letter and his outline, Franklin remembered that he had written an account of the everyday social relations of colonial America. By returning to the memoirs, he could further explore the republican character, and make that character the main institution of a republican society. Franklin's motivation to return to his life story was to write the model of the institutions necessary for developing and diffusing the traits of the republican character. The republican character would be the ultimate guarantee of both the total rejection of aristocracy and the engine of a self-regulating, stable society. "Part Two" is not so much a continuance of Franklin's life story as it is his detailing of an enlightened republican character.

Letters to a Young Republic

When constructing his manuscript, Franklin decided to insert the letters he had received from Abel James and Benjamin Vaughan as a bridge between the first two parts of his *Autobiography*, interrupted, as he notes, by "the affairs of the Revolution." To some readers, the letters could seem like little more than accolades, and the inclusion of them an example of Franklin's vanity getting the better of him as he takes an opportunity to demonstrate how highly regarded he was by his peers. To others, Franklin's apparent motivation for including the letters was as proof that Franklin returned to the writing of his life story not primarily to satisfy his own desires, but rather as his claimed of his

involvement in public affairs, only in response to the admonitions from his fellow citizens. Critics have long sensed the binding functions of the letters, reading their use as a device to provide a transition from “Part One” to “Part Two.” Reading the differences between the sections as a complete change in Franklin’s focus or intentions, scholars have seen the inclusion of the letters as a way to create a sense of unity in the text. These readings rarely ascribe any function to the letters besides providing Franklin permission to continue his project or assenting to his changing focus. Fichtelberg writes “in the interior drama of the text’s composition, these letters mark a decisive turn-away from the personal narrative of a rising printer toward prescriptions for a young republic” (Fichtelberg 1). Dawson, among others, feels that the letters “provided the warrant of his friends’ approval for a change in the book’s design”(Dawson 3).¹¹ The letters are more than just a transitional device. The letters do bridge “Part One” and “Part Two,” but they do so in a way that enables them to act as an example of the very model Franklin was textualizing in his *Autobiography*. The letters do more than just indicate that the focus of the memoirs is shifting from individual to public history; they act as a dialogic device in two ways, first by bringing the positions of “Part One” and “Part Two” into a consensual agreement, and second they act as a reciprocal device between the reader and the author of the text. The letters serve to negotiate the differences between “Part One” and “Part Two,” but their very action is an example of the communicative model Franklin developed in “Part One” and the republican implications of that model in “Part Two.” Both occur because Franklin is mirroring the epistolary opening of “Part One,” which began as Franklin writing to his posterity. In the opening of “Part Two,” his posterity is writing back to him.

Critics have been right to read Franklin's desire that the letters convey a sense of approval and acceptance of his project, but not for the reasons normally defined. It is the above-mentioned sense of communal union that Franklin desired the letters to convey.¹² The letters serve as the voice of the public included in a text that is designed to speak to the public. *The Autobiography* thus contains both Franklin the author speaking to the community (or readers), and the community speaking back to Franklin. Writer and reader are brought into a dialogue and thus a communicative unity. The letters carry the voice of the public agreeing that Franklin's text is a suitable vehicle for defining the community they all share. This is important because as Habermas argued in his *Theory of Communicative Action*, socialization, or to use Franklin's term instruction, develops out of the process of agreement and consensus. Both letters are an argument, an attempt to persuade Franklin through reasons and claims that Franklin should continue his project. As such, they are prime examples of communicative reason, of communication as an act of intersubjective dialogue and negotiation. The fact that Franklin does continue his autobiography is his mark of agreement, and consent, to the letters, which, as noted, are the voice of the community in the text. Thus, Franklin's very act of writing his life story becomes an act of consent to communal norms. It is actually a reversal of the standard argument that Franklin is imposing his character on America. Instead, Franklin is using the letters to show that the character presented in *The Autobiography* is acquired from the community and communally constructed definitions. Franklin possesses self-authorship, but he created and regulated himself according to communal norms, and thus is as much communally as self-authored. As he had his entire life, Franklin once again turned to letters to help him textualize his models of communication and society.

There are two things noteworthy about the Abel James letter. The first is that it clearly shows communal approval of Franklin's character, reinforcing the point Franklin had made in his "Cincinnati" and "Information" essays (remember that he received the Abel James letter just a few weeks before writing those texts) that in America, honor is given by public opinion and by no other means. The second point is that James argued that Franklin's communally accepted character is the perfect model for American youth to copy; for James this point is so important that "I know nothing that can equal it" (*LOA* 1373). The urgency of James' tone seems out of place unless seen in the context of the moment. James's urgency is about the need to establish a stable republic in the face of residual aristocratic trends, and that is Franklin's reason for placing it first. To contemporaries, James' letter would have read as an endorsement of republicanism because the aspects of Franklin's character that he highlights - "a spirit of industry and early attention to business" (1373)- had specific political currency. In the ideological struggle to root out aristocracy from America, the references to industry and trade were depicted as the republican alternatives to aristocracy. Those were exactly the traits absent in aristocrats. As Franklin pointed out in his "Information" essay, gentlemen were seen as being lazy and living off the labor of others. Gordon Wood confirms this, noting, "idleness, leisure, or what was best described as not exerting oneself for profit was supposed to be the prerogative of gentlemen" (*Radicalism* 36). Thus, James validates Franklin's character type as a model of republicanism. In a sense, James and Franklin are refashioning and recreating the image of the accomplished or model citizen from the gentleman or estate holder to the productive tradesman or farmer. James correctly read

Franklin's memoirs as proof that virtuous and reasonable citizens could be found among the common people of every day America.

Benjamin Vaughan's letter functions to further establish the republican infrastructure of Franklin's life. Vaughan's first argument plays with an association between identity and the written word, a convention of Enlightenment belief and a theme Franklin has used throughout "Part One." To the Enlightenment, identity and the written word were linked, and the eighteenth century American mind looked "to the printed word as the basis of its Identity" and believed that authorship controlled identity (Ferguson 4). Vaughan demonstrated this by arguing "your history is so remarkable, that if you do not give it, somebody else will certainly give it; and perhaps so as nearly to do as much harm, as your own management of the thing might do good" (1374). If the written word is the basis of identity, than Franklin must write his own life if he is to retain control over his own identity. Franklin's entire life had been dedicated to constructing and defining himself. Letting another person write his life would be tantamount to a betrayal of the principals which fueled it. Self-authorship and self-creation were the hallmarks of the free individual in a republican society. To be written by another was to be subjected to another's definition; to be written was to be a subject, while to be self-authored was to be a citizen. As we have seen, Franklin's conception of self-authorship was a consensual process of negotiation with the community. Vaughan picks up on this as Franklin's life "will moreover present a table of the internal circumstances of your country" and all that has happened to Franklin "is also connected with the detail of the manners and situation of a rising people; and in this respect I do not think the writings of Caesar and Tacitus can be more interesting to a true judge of human

nature and society” (1374). Franklin’s narrative is not just the narrative of one self-fashioned man, but of the self-fashioned man in a society which enables self-authorship. Franklin must be the self-fashioned man in a society of self-fashioning men. His life will aid in the “forming of future great men” and allow improvement in “all happiness both public and domestic” (1374). It is not a simple imitational model that is being stressed here; it is a model of mutual self-construction. Franklin’s depiction of his life and of the society which engendered it is itself a negotiation with that society to help define a republican community.

It is Vaughan’s hope that Franklin’s life will provide the “means” of self-authorship. This idea is developed in the next paragraph of the letter. What Franklin presents, according to Vaughan, is an “example of self education” which “is in many a man’s private power” (1375). Vaughan reads Franklin’s life as evidence that the potential for growth and participation in the community is universal. All that is necessary is access to the means of self-authorship, which the institutions of the public sphere provide, for as Warner notes, in the culture of republicanism “it was possible to consume printed goods with an awareness that the same printed goods were being consumed by an indefinite number of others” (Warner 380). Franklin’s communicative model has sought to diffuse authority by diffusing the responsibility for language throughout the community. Here Franklin continues that trend as the means of improvement are distributed equally among all members of the community. Franklin’s method is indeed a restructuring of authority, as the responsibility for education is diffused among the people. The inclusive nature of a republican public sphere puts the means of improvement “in any man’s private power” (1375) which, as Franklin wrote in his

opening paragraph, “may be read or not as any one pleases” (1307). If it was generally believed that education was the responsibility of a republican government, as Ferguson, Fliegelman, and Wood have detailed, then by putting that responsibility in the hands of the people, Franklin is putting the responsibilities of government into the hands of the people at the same time. Self-authorship through self-education becomes self-government. This is an idea that Franklin developed in depth in “Part Two.”

Building on this theme of self-education, Vaughan’s next argument demonstrates the heart of Franklin’s republicanism. Franklin’s republicanism is not a republicanism grounded in transcendent ideas or academic studies of Greek and Roman texts (although he was familiar with these, of course); rather, Franklin’s republicanism is a republicanism of daily life. Republicanism to Franklin did not descend from ideas to the people but grew up from the people’s daily lives. If the success of American society depended on the development of virtuous citizens, it was necessary to republicanize their daily lives and interactions. Vaughan correctly picks up on Franklin’s focus on intersubjectivity when he remarks:

the little private incidents which you will also have to relate, will have considerable use, as we want above all things, rules of prudence in ordinary affairs; and it will be curious to see how you have acted in these. It will be so far a sort of key to life, and explain many things, that all men ought to have once explained to them to give them a chance of becoming wise by foresight. The nearest thing to having experience of one’s own, is to have other people’s affairs brought before us...I am convinced you have conducted them with as much originality as if you had been conducting discussions in politics or philosophy; and what more worthy of experiments and system, (its importance and its errors considered) than human life (1375-6).

The argument is striking. Republicanism does not survive because of theories but because of republican living. Drawing not only on Locke’s epistemology but also

Franklin's focus on intersubjectivity, Vaughan argues that Franklin's depiction of his day-to-day living and his interactions with other people are as important to read as political science. All the philosophies of republicanism will mean little if people don't recreate their daily relations to each other and the community in a republican fashion. A republican society comes from the relations of people, not from the pens of philosophers. Philosophy may act as a guide to life, but only if practically applied. And since Franklin's life has already been connected with the community, it is possible to read his life as the community establishing what the republican norms of interaction will be.

The republican implications of Franklin's life story continue to be stressed as the letter develops. In addition to his other Enlightenment qualities, Franklin depicts "modesty, and your disinterestedness, without which you never could have waited for your advancement...which is a strong lesson to shew the poverty of glory, and the importance of regulating our minds" (1377). Ambition was one of the great vices to the revolutionary mind. Any attempt to single oneself out, to make pretensions to superiority and private glorification over the public good was harshly criticized as disrupting communal equality. Instead of ambition for glory and exaltation, a republic needed citizens who merged their private interest into the public good. Citizens should actually seek to be detached and anonymous, serving only for the honor of doing the public good and not as a result of any desire to achieve fame or greatness.¹³ Ambition and passion must be controlled through self-regulation and self-government, the means of which Franklin's model of communal self-education provides. The new world needed new models. When compared to the models of the past, the implications of redefining the "good life" are made clear. Against "the lives of various public cutthroats and intriguers,

and with absurd monastic self tormentors, or vain literary triflers,” Franklin’s life will encourage “more writings of the same kind as your own, and induce[s] more men to spend lives fit to be written; it will be worth all Plutarch’s Lives put together” (1377).

When Vaughan writes in the following paragraph that “the immense revolution will necessarily turn our attention toward the author of it all,” (1377) he is continuing the theme of self regulation to make explicit the utopian impulse of the republican foundational moment, but also to make a not so subtle dig at the rotten old world Franklin and the Americans had cast off. “Author of it all” is a play on Wedderburn’s attack on Franklin in the cockpit a decade earlier which had forced Franklin to realize the profound differences between England and America. Wedderburn had used the phrase “author of it all” to cast Franklin as the malicious heart of a treasonous conspiracy; the author of the discontent between Britain and her colonies. (Franklin must have enjoyed Vaughan’s usage. He never stopped holding a grudge against Wedderburn, and the suit he wore to negotiate the Treaty of Paris was the same suit of Manchester velvet that he wore on the day of the cockpit trial). Vaughan, however, takes Wedderburn’s slander and turns it into a republican principal. Franklin was the “author of it all” not because he was the “first mover and prime conductor” of the revolution but because he stands as the prime example of the republican and Enlightenment ideologies which had triumphed in the revolution over the aristocratic values of England. Wedderburn’s wording symbolizes monologic thinking: Franklin must be *the prime* mover, or the sole author, the one voice causing trouble –there must be one voice directing the others. Vaughan and Franklin think dialogically: Franklin is a composite American, self-authored within a self-authoring community. The importance of this victory to Enlightenment thinking is clear,

as Franklin's life will reverberate far beyond American shores; it is proof of the Enlightenment's beliefs to the whole world:

I have always maintained that it is necessary to prove that man is not even at present a vicious and detestable animal; and still more to prove that good management may greatly amend him...extend your views even further; do not stop at those who speak the English tongue, but after having settled so many points in nature and politics, think of bettering the whole race of men (1378).

The universal implications are clear: Franklin's life is proof that the Enlightenment's principles, principles that Franklin has demonstrated are available for all men to acquire, can improve the very nature of man.

Vaughan's last argument speaks directly to Franklin's desire to establish a continuity between "Part One" and "Part Two" of the memoirs, and between pre- and post-revolutionary America: "prove yourself as one who from your infancy have loved justice, liberty, and concord, in a way that has made it natural and consistent for you to have acted, as we have seen you act in the last seventeen years of your life" (1378). Franklin's breaking with the old world and creating a new one is now recast not as a radical break or rupture, but as the logical continuation of the virtues and character acquired in America is presented in "Part One". Vaughan's use of the word "concord" is illuminating. It is a character trait possessed by Franklin, and thus it is one also possessed by the community. The ability to come into agreement, harmony, and accord is just as important a republican principle as a love of liberty and justice. It can be argued that liberty and justice depend upon concord, as a free society depends upon the ability of its members to live in harmony with each other and to settle and negotiate differences rationally.

The Library: Republican Institution

When Franklin finally decided to return to his memoirs, he was flush with zeal for promoting and establishing republicanism in America, and to ensure that his fellow citizens would see the obsolescence of aristocracy. He decided to reintroduce his narrative by beginning “Part Two” with a discussion of the Philadelphia library, even though he had used it to close “Part One.” Franklin goes out of his way to inform the reader that he knows he may be repeating himself, and that the second account “may be struck out if found to have been already given” (1379). However, as pointed out, Franklin had the opportunity to revise “Part Two” several times in 1788 and 1789,¹⁴ with “Part One” in front of him, so it is clear that Franklin had the chance to “correct and improve” (1379) his manuscript by removing the repetition. Yet, he did not. William Templeton Franklin, likewise, when editing the full manuscript for publication, decided to include both accounts, claiming “it was thought advisable not to suppress the fuller one” (Farrand 200), perhaps echoing advice Franklin had given him before his death. Thus there is sufficient evidence to conclude that Franklin intended to retain both accounts of the library. A close reading of both descriptions provides hints as to why; they both textualize the themes Franklin was stressing at the time of their composition. By including both, and purposefully drawing the reader’s attention to the repetition, Franklin is highlighting the continuity and connection between “Part One” and “Part Two,” and thus the continuity between pre and post revolutionary America.

“Part One,” as we have seen, focused on the acquisition of character from a communicative interaction with the community. At the end of “Part One,” the library is discussed as another of the institutions of the public sphere that had been developed

throughout the section. Speaking of his library, and the others that have followed it, Franklin wrote “these libraries have improved the general conversation of the Americans” (1372). Like *The Spectator*, Pope’s poetry, and the proper books, the library provides an opportunity for the acquisition of character and language, and serves to facilitate and improve the means of communication. Yet, in the last sentences of “Part One,” the troubled mind of Franklin, riding the crest of the increasing tensions between England and her colonies, seemed to sense the profound, if not permanent, gulf between England and America. The most overtly, and radically, republican sentiment in the entire memoir up to this point emerges as Franklin contemplates his library. Besides improving the conversation of Americans, the libraries have “made common tradesmen and farmers as intelligent as most gentlemen from other countries, and perhaps contributed in some degree to the stand so generally made throughout the colonies in defense of their privileges” (1372). The most common people in America, if given access to opportunities like the library were equal to “gentlemen.” Aristocrats were not better by blood, but only by privilege and access to knowledge and language. Privilege was a term used to imply the “naturally” superior position of aristocrats; yet here Franklin redefines the term to level society and transforms it to apply to the concept of public access to the means of improvement. It was this liberty, this privilege, to make one self, to create oneself, that must be defended, and which led, eventually, to the American stand against the absolute power of the English system.

At the beginning of “Part Two,” after the colonies have successfully defended their privileges, the library acts as a key institution in the founding of a republican community and the communicative model Franklin believes must serve as the foundation

of such a society. At the end of “Part One,” Franklin calls the library “the mother of all N. American subscription libraries,” but here at the opening of Part Two, Franklin refers to it as “the Philadelphia publick Library” (1379). The change in wording is significant. A public library is clearly a republican symbol. All of the other libraries encountered in *The Autobiography* had been private libraries. Private and public libraries can be understood as another representation of different models of communication. The volumes in a private library are privately held, serving only self-interest. Private libraries act as class boundaries, curtailing communication and keeping information in the hands of the few. They represent aristocratic privilege while public libraries represent the placing of the communal over the self. Public libraries facilitate communication and diffuse language and character among the people. The library is a key symbol of republican equality, as it makes “the benefit from books more common” (1380). Literally, by entering the library, one can enter the community of knowledge and discourse.

Franklin’s use of the library as a republican symbol reflects the actual history of the Philadelphia library. In actuality, Franklin’s Philadelphia library did act as a center of the community and eventually republican culture. The founding of the library, and the composition of its collection, were public, communal acts. The library was founded by a group of individuals putting the public good ahead of their private interest. It was organized as a company, with all members of the company having an equal say in the running of the library and a voice in deciding what volumes would be added to the collection.¹⁵ It can be argued that the definition of the library was decided communally, through the dialogic interaction of its members. Membership in the library company was

a voluntary act of rationally motivated consent. In a personal demonstration of placing the public good over private gain, Franklin did not charge for the printing of the library's catalogue. As the colonies moved towards republicanism and revolution, the library followed. It served as a depository for political pamphlets. Library rooms were used as committee rooms for the Continental Congress, and congressional delegates were granted free use of the collections. Eleven members of the library company served as delegates to the congress, and ten, including Franklin of course, signed the Declaration of Independence. After the war, the library served as the first library of congress.¹⁶

Franklin was proud of how the library had become a bedrock, if not the center, of republican public life in Philadelphia, and this helps to understand why he choose to begin "Part Two" with the library. "Part Two" was going to address the public needs of a new society, and the library was a central republican institution. Franklin's description of the library also enacts two of the prescriptions from Vaughan's letter. The first virtue Franklin displays in "Part Two" is republican disinterest. Although the library company was a communal project, Franklin was the driving force behind it. Yet, in *The Autobiography*, Franklin writes of disavowing any public credit for the project. In a rebuke to those, like the Cincinnati, who sought to distinguish themselves from their fellow citizens, Franklin notes that it is improper to "be supposed to raise one's reputation in the smallest degree above that of one's neighbors" (1380). Public projects should be undertaken for the sake of the public good, not to seek private interests like self-gratification. In a republic, "the present sacrifice of your vanity will afterwards be amply repaid" (1381). For a republic to succeed the desire for self gratification must give way to communal desire; instead of an individual seeking acclaim through public

displays, public action in a republic should be the “scheme of a number of friends” (1381). Obviously, Franklin is recommending coordinated group action.

The library also begins to enact the educational component that Vaughan’s letter argued in favor of. Franklin tells the reader that “the library afforded me the means of improvement by constant study” (1381). The library becomes a key republican institution of instruction. The same means that were made available to Franklin are now available to all. Education and the means of self-improvement and self-creation are made public; and the process of socialization is made inclusive. Franklin again gives demographic evidence to prove the ability of the library to diffuse republican virtue among the “happy mediocrity” of America. At the founding of the library “so few were the readers at that time in Philadelphia” (1380). But after “the institution [soon] manifested its utility...reading became fashionable” (1380). The library alters the social practices of the people in Philadelphia, actually bringing Enlightenment and republicanism into their lives. This was Franklin’s argument; the relations of people’s everyday lives had to be republicanized and the network of self-governing republican individuals needed to constantly expand. To this effect the library “was imitated by other towns and in other provinces” (1380). Society, too, can imitate successful models. In a republic the same institutions must be present in every part of it if the ideas of equality and self-rule are to succeed. People in one area cannot have privileges that people in another area do not; in this sense, imitation can be seen as a process of expansion and inclusion. Philip Fisher has called a similar concept “democratic social space.” This democratic social space is marked by repetition. It is identical from point to point, and any one point can be taken as representative of the whole; it is “a universal and

everywhere similar medium in which rights and opportunities are identical” (Fisher 74). Wood notes that among republican thinkers “it was widely believed that equality of opportunity would necessarily result in a rough equality of station...with social movement founded only on merit, no distinctions could have time to harden”(Creation 72). As more libraries imitate the original founded by Franklin, the republican public sphere spreads, expanding the network to provide opportunities for acquiring the “means” of improvement (or proper character) to more and more people. Thus the process of socialization can accommodate an ever expanding number of individuals.

Franklin closes his discussion of the library with imagery that develops the implications of both republicanism and Franklin’s model of character acquisition through the means of communication. As Franklin fills the reader in on his continuing efforts to improve himself, he remembers a proverb that his father once taught him: “seest thou a man diligent in his calling , he shall stand before kings, he shall not stand before mean men” (1381). Remember that Franklin has established his father as a vehicle for teaching public, social reason. Franklin could have placed this proverb anywhere in his manuscript. Placing it in a discussion of the library was an politically rhetorical act. In a twist Franklin’s readers could not have missed, Franklin turns the virtuous instruction of his father into a victory of republican ideology: “I have stood before five & even had the honor of sitting down with one, the King of Denmark, to dinner” (1381). Franklin the commoner is doing something unimaginable before the revolutionary war, sitting down with a king. Franklin, as a result of applying Enlightenment and republican ideals is brought to the same level as a king. The concept of innate, inborn superiority is demolished in the image, as the new social relations of republicanism replace those of

aristocracy. It is a victory for self-rule; the image of the equal dining table establishes that the uneven balance of power between ruler and ruled has been destroyed. The individual is now ruler of himself. The connection has been made complete. The virtue acquired in “Part One,” which prefaced the revolution, has led to the literal sitting down of America and England at the Treaty of Paris. That virtue will now become the foundation of republican political and public life.

The Art of Virtue

After his republican parable, Franklin begins to ground the foundation of the republic in the principles of the Enlightenment. He begins with one of the Enlightenment’s great foes, religion. From the end of the Roman Empire into the early modern period, religion had been one of the pillars of feudal and aristocratic organizations of society. There is no room for such old models Franklin’s conception of the new American society. Public life was not to be founded on theologic grounds. Reason, not revelation, was to guide personal and communal action. Franklin’s desire to have Enlightenment institutions replace religious ones can be seen in his 1785 letter to Richard Price. Franklin explains that a town in Massachusetts had named itself after him, and has asked Franklin to donate a bell so the town could build a church steeple. Instead of sending a church bell, Franklin sent a stock of books to begin a library, stating: “I have advised sparing themselves the expense of a steeple, for the present, and that they would accept books instead of a bell, sense being preferable to sound” (LOA 1104). Franklin makes the connection between superstitious religion and noise, one of the vices of his republican community. Instead of the noise of a church, Franklin gives “a little parochial

library for the use of a society of intelligent, respectable farmers” (1104). It is the institutions of the Enlightenment, not religion, that will engender the republican citizen.

Franklin’s thinking in this letter reflects his position in “Part Two.” Speaking of the validity of religion, Franklin declares the “dogmas” of religion “appeared to me unintelligible, others doubtful” (1382). The problem with religion is that what virtues may be present in it are obfuscated by “being mixed with other articles which without any tendency to inspire, promote or confirm morality, served principally to divide us and make us unfriendly to one another” (1382). Doctrine and dogma are the opposite of republican dialogism, and as a result, only serve to fracture society. The superstitious dogma of religion promotes the lower faculties in man, causing individuals to place their private beliefs above the beliefs of others. The communication model employed by dogma is made clear in Franklin’s description of a preacher:

his discourses were chiefly either polemic arguments, or explications of the peculiar doctrines of our sect, and were all to me very dry, uninteresting and unedifying, since not a single moral principle was inculcated or enforced, their ambition seeming to make us Presbyterians than good citizens (1383).

Preaching doctrine is monologism, as it seeks to be the only voice defining a discourse, and as such, it, like the other vestiges of aristocracy, must be rooted out and eliminated from American society. The polemic preacher is just as coercive as the king; both deny self-authorship and seek to force a predetermined definition upon the other.

If the basis of proper citizenship was not to be grounded in the authority of a supreme being, or another authoritative figure like a king, what would provide the incentive necessary for individuals to behave in a proper way? The definition of the common good would not come from above, but, as we have seen, would be communally

defined. Individuals would be rationally motivated by their participation in public and communal life to create themselves as virtuous citizens. Self-government in the political sphere was a mirror image of literal self-government, of governing the self, making the passions and lower faculties obey and serve the higher faculties like reason and public morality. All that would be required would be a method or means of improvement, a “bold and arduous project of arriving at moral perfection” (1383). Franklin takes the power to regulate the self away from the outside, from the coercive power of the king or “angry god” and places it in humanity’s hands: “I would conquer all that either natural inclination, custom, or company might lead me into” (1384).

Changing character, or self-authorship, would not be an easy task. People might hear and read about morality and civics, and agree on what is a proper way to live, but discursive practice alone does not ensure progress. Social practice must make verbal practice concrete. Franklin writes:

I concluded at length, that the mere speculative conviction that it was in our interest to be completely virtuous, was not sufficient to prevent our slipping, and the contrary habits must be broken and good ones acquired and established, before we can have any dependence on a steady uniform rectitude of conduct. For this purpose I therefore contrived the following method (1384).

The relations and behavior of everyday life must be altered if the character of the individual is to change. If the relations between people changed to be in accord with republicanism, the ensuing society will be a republic. But change must be more than just verbal; it must be an active, lived change; it must be in words and actions. In a letter to Lord Kames (May 3rd, 1760), discussing his “Art of Virtue”, (which Franklin briefly summarized in a paragraph at this point in *The Autobiography*¹⁷) Franklin wrote

“To exhort people to be good, to be just, to be temperate, &c. without *shewing* them *how* they shall *become* so, seems like the ineffectual Charity mentioned by the Apostle, which consisted in saying to the Hungry, the Cold, the Naked, *be ye fed, be ye warmed, be ye clothed*, without shewing them how they should get Food, Fire or Clothing” (LOA 765). This letter, I believe, reveals a good deal of Franklin’s conception of the public sphere and socialization. Instruction that was simply textual, simply discursive was ineffective. Just as charity without the means is ineffective charity, rhetoric and instruction without practical implications are ineffective and meaningless. This is not to imply a simple pragmatism or utilitarianism on Franklin’s part, rather it is a deft combination of the social and the discursive. Discourse is a living part of the social context, and the social context is directly affected by discourse. Franklin’s italics are especially revealing. He emphasizes showing, how, and becoming, which when abstracted become a flow chart of how Franklin’s ideas of socialization and imitation work. First is the textual and performative act, the showing of virtue. An example could be the image of Franklin pushing the wheelbarrow, or his disavowing of fame. He performs the role and shows it to the public. The everyday detail of Franklin’s social interactions that he included in his writings can be considered the how. The reader actually learns how Franklin altered his behavior and thinking to accommodate his new republican virtue. The reader is shown the idea, and how to behave according to it. It is not only ideology which must change, but lived social relations. This leads to the last step, the becoming of a proper citizen. This occurs because the individual accepts and performs the virtue of the public sphere.

The italics Franklin uses in the next section of the Kames letter are just as revealing. “To *acquire* those [virtues] that are wanting, and *secure* what we acquire as

well as those we have naturally, is the Subject of *an art*” (LOA 766). Character can be acquired; it is a process of self-creation, not the revealing of innate qualities of a person. Once acquired from a negotiation with the community, character becomes secured by the repetition of its performance. One becomes one’s character by performing it. Acquiring virtue is an art; it is something learnable, something a man can become, just as he can become a painter: “If a man would become a painter...it is not enough that he be advised to be one, that he is convinced by the arguments of his advisor...and that he resolves to be one, but he must also be taught the principles of the art, be shown the methods of working, and how to acquire the habits” (766). Being virtuous or being a painter is not a matter of innate superiority, but rather the result of a socially acquired practice of becoming. One becomes virtuous by being virtuous; one becomes a painter by painting. These are not ahistorical, asocial, or transcendent positions; instead they are acquired social roles, learned through communal negotiation and performance.

Franklin continues the letter by showing his concern for finding a secular, rational basis for change and moral motivation. He realizes that Christian rhetoric has tried to instill virtue in men by giving them “*faith in Christ.*” The written life of Christ is used as a model, as the showing, but instead of a how and a way to become (the reasonable why it is in your best interest to become virtuous) Christian rhetoric offers “reward and punishment” in the next world. This is not rationally motivated consent, but a coercive monologic rhetoric based on fear. Franklin finds this ineffective and inefficient, as “all men cannot have faith in Christ, and many have it in so weak a degree that it does not produce the effect” (765). Purely religious rhetoric is monologic, and thus not a fit basis for underpinning a republican society. Norms based on religious polemic are coercive

and thus static; they attempt to define the individual and offer the individual no opportunity for self authorship. Franklin's dialogic norms, however, are rationally motivating and thus dynamic, as they can be proven through practice, experiment, and repetition. Franklin has shown that the proper use of language was slowly learned through the repeated application of proper method to one's writing, and that learning proper method was a process of correcting "errata." The same holds true for proper behavior. Proper civics and morality were learned through the constant application and repetition of a proper method to the activities of social life. Learning to live is a process similar to learning to write.

Franklin's decision to aim at moral perfection based on reason and civic performance brings his memoirs to the next episode, his famous book of thirteen virtues. This section has often been misread as Franklin's attempt to found a morality or force his conception of the perfect capitalist or pragmatic spirit on young American minds. Instead, this episode should be read as a catalogue of communally defined virtues necessary for republican citizens. The definitions of the virtues are acquired from intersubjective participation in the community. Before listing the virtues, Franklin made sure to note that he did not create the meaning of these virtues; he was establishing no creed or doctrine (or, worse, writing a moral polemic). Instead, he is clarifying communally available virtues: "In the various enumerations of the moral virtues I had met in my reading, I found the catalogue more or less numerous, as different writers included more or fewer ideas under the same name" (1384). The virtues are found in the discourse of the public sphere, in the voices and writings of others. Franklin performs an act of reasonable negotiation with the public sphere, and engages in a process of Lockean

definition and constitution: “for the sake of clearness, to use rather more names with fewer ideas annexed to each, than a few names with more ideas” (1384). Franklin did not create the virtues, he simply compounded and clarified them.

Further proof that Franklin wants to emphasize the communally negotiated aspects of his list of virtues is his last virtue, humility. Franklin added humility to his list after an exchange with a member of the community:

my list of virtues contained at first but twelve: but a Quaker friend having kindly informed me that I was generally thought proud; that my pride showed itself frequently in conversation; that I was not content with being in the right when discussing any point, but was overbearing & rather insolent...I determined endeavoring to cure myself if I could of this vice or folly among the rest, and I added *humility* to my list (1392-93).

Through dialogue with the other, Franklin alters his idea of a virtuous character. The community helps to form his definitions. Franklin’s political model held that the public interest was found through a process of public debate; likewise morality was found not in revelation, but through a process of public discussion. In this episode we also see public opinion acting as a censor of Franklin’s performance. Franklin discovers that public opinion finds him proud. As a result, he endeavors to change his behavior to be more in line with accepted public norms. Franklin’s definitions of the vice of pride and the virtue of humility fit into his overall model of communication. Pride disrupts communication. It is a polemical form of argument, rather than argument based on reason. To alter his character, Franklin alters his method of arguing, modifying his social performance and public image. For Franklin, humility is a rhetorical position. Franklin’s humility is a rhetoric of inclusion. It is a rhetoric of negotiating a discourse with the other and bringing the other into a shared, communal dialogic space. The virtue of humility becomes, for all intents and purposes, “pleasant conversation.” Franklin ends

this paragraph by enumerating the benefits of adopting the rhetorical position of humility:

“I think it principally owing, that I had early so much weight with my fellow citizens, when I proposed new institutions, or alterations in the old; and so much influence in public councils when I became a member” (1393). Franklin’s rhetoric of humility is a republican rhetoric. Franklin’s rhetoric seeks to include the other in the discussion. He does not speak down to the public from a position of superiority, but speaks to them from a humble position of equality. Franklin and the reader thus share the same public, social, and dialogic space.

Franklin closes “Part Two” with a warning that “there is perhaps no one of our natural passions so hard to subdue as pride” (1393). Republican humility, like republican liberty, requires constant vigilance: “Disguise it, struggle with it, beat it down...it is still alive and will every now and then peep out and show itself” (1393). Pride -personal vanity or personal interest- is the great danger to the republic. Like the noise of Franklin’s childhood poems, or the hypnotizing ribbons of the Cincinnati, pride breaks the reciprocal bonds of republican community. Pride is the path of the aristocrat. Franklin’s urgent call to be ever vigilant against signs of emerging pride or titles in the American community is a theme he carries into his contributions to the emerging constitutional discourse.

¹ For fuller discussions of Franklin's time and achievements in France, see Isaacson *Benjamin Franklin*, Morgan *Benjamin Franklin*, and Van Doren *Benjamin Franklin*.

² Lemay and Zall, *Genetic Text*, 182-190.

³ Van Doren 703.

⁴ Lemay and Zall, xxi.

⁵ Van Doren argues that Franklin meant the letter to be published as an essay out of the small printing press he had set up in Passy, but was dissuaded from doing so for fear of offending the French, and with doubts that the essay would survive the office of the French censors, pg 709.

⁶ For a discussion of Franklin as one of the founders of demography and the scientific study of population, see Cohen *Science and the Founding Fathers*, 156-164.

⁷ See Bailyn

⁸ See Isaacson 412-415, Van Doern 689-693.

⁹ My discussion of republicanism is greatly influenced by the following writers: Joyce Appleby, Bernard Bailyn, Richard Brown, Richard Ferguson, Eric Foner, Linda Kerber, Edmund Morgan, J. G. A. Pocock, Robert Shalhope, Michael Warner, and Gordon Wood.

¹⁰ For a full discussion of Washington's resignation, see Gary Wills, *Cincinnatus*.

¹¹ See also Dawson "Fathers and Sons", "Memoirs in 1784", Aldridge "Form and Substance in Franklin's *Autobiography*" p 48.

¹² Altman also explores the role of letters as "a mediator of desire in the communication process"(19).

¹³ See Michael Warner *The Letters of the Republic*.

¹⁴ Lemay and Zall, *Genetic Text*, xxi.

¹⁵ See Gray, *Benjamin Franklin's Library*, pages 7-10.

¹⁶ For a full study of Franklin and the Philadelphia Library, see Grey, *Benjamin Franklin's Library: A Short Account of the Library Company of Philadelphia*.

¹⁷ Page 1392.

Chapter Four: “Part Three” Constitutional Communities

Although Franklin had been telling his associates in France and America that he wished to retire from public life, upon his arrival in Philadelphia in September of 1785, Franklin again took a prominent role in American politics, quickly being elected to serve as president of Pennsylvania. During the years of the Articles of Confederation, leading up to the constitutional convention, Franklin, more of a radical democrat than many of the other founders, did not view the popular tumult with as much panic. He remained dedicated to his republican Enlightenment ideals, which were reflected in his primary response to the troubled times, his founding, along with Washington and Jefferson in February 1787, of the Society for Political Enquiries. Franklin served as first president of this society, which aimed to act much like the philosophical society did for science and philosophy. As the constitutional convention convened in Philadelphia, his home became a pilgrimage for delegates, and served as a kind of political salon, keeping Franklin in communication with most of the other members. The first thing Washington did upon arriving in Philadelphia for the convention was call upon Franklin to discuss plans for the proceedings of the convention. Franklin was selected in May of 1787 to serve with the Pennsylvania delegation, and the plan was to have Franklin nominate Washington for president of the convention, thus having the symbol of the learned Enlightenment endorse the symbol of the virtuous republican citizen. Unfortunately, bad weather and Franklin's health combined to cause him to miss the opening day.

Franklin's role in the constitutional convention as a conciliator and negotiator has been well documented.¹ Franklin rarely spoke except to broker a compromise, or to remind the delegates of the necessity for keeping passion out of their debates; as Van

Doren notes, “Franklin’s influence in the convention was...conciliatory, aimed rather at keeping the delegates in agreement than at leading them in a particular direction” (Van Doren 745). Although best known for proposing the Great Compromise, Franklin’s main issue during the convention was to argue against paying those in government any salary. His arguments against salaries throughout the convention reveal that he was still deeply concerned with rooting out aristocracy and replacing it with republicanism. Franklin’s speeches and writings during this period show that he acted as a voice of republicanism, serving as a reminder of the Enlightenment ideals and the danger of aristocratic pretences. The radical republicanism of “Part Two” of *The Autobiography* had not faded.

Linguistic Republicanism, Legal Republicanism

Franklin’s speeches and comments during the Constitutional Convention are instructive of how important he thought his communicative ideas about republicanism were. Through his speeches and motions at the convention, Franklin is reaffirming his belief in the communicative practices of the republican Enlightenment, and remaining steadfast against the practices of aristocracy. Franklin is trying to literally legislate his ideas about republican dialogue as the foundation of republican law. These speeches illustrate, perhaps more clearly than any other point in his life, his belief that the communicative model he had outlined in his *Autobiography* and other writings was truly a model for building a society.

Franklin’s “Speech on the Subject of Salaries” on the surface is a plain argument against paying government employees; however, with his usual sly wit, the speech also acts as a subtle critique of delegates who are growing too fond of aristocratic language and manners as a method of restraining the populism unleashed by the revolution. “I am

apprehensive,” Franklin wrote, “perhaps too apprehensive, that the government of these states may in future times end in a Monarchy” (*LOA* 1132). One reason for Franklin’s fear is the argument he had been making against salaried government officials since he helped to write the Constitution of Pennsylvania, which outlawed such practices. Salaries cause “cabal, the heat of contention, the infinite mutual abuse of parties,” (*LOA* 1131) and only serve to inflame “two passions which have a powerful influence in the affairs of men. These are ambition and avarice” (*LOA* 1131). However, Franklin had another point, which, as a result of the ideologic struggles of the day, the other delegates could not have missed. “It is said that we do not propose to establish kings,” Franklin cautioned, “but there is a natural inclination in mankind to kingly government. It sometimes relieves them from aristocratic domination. They had rather have one tyrant than 500. It gives more of the appearance of equality among citizens, and that they like” (*LOA* 1132). This is not so much a comment on ‘human nature’ as a criticism of his fellow delegates. Franklin had always tied salaried positions to aristocratic government, a very logical connection in the eighteenth century, where mobility and success were built on patronage, position, and connections to those in power. To the revolutionary generation, it was exactly the king and his highest minister’s ability to control patronage that had corrupted the English state. Franklin is obviously critiquing the idea of importing such a corrupting aristocratic practice into a republican government. However, in the ideologic context of the day, the critique is even more biting. As Bailyn and Wood have shown, even before the federalist/anti-federalist debates, the delegates to the convention, and those who thought like them, were accused of wishing to establish themselves as aristocrats in America. Although not true for all, many of the delegates did

seriously consider the idea of a 'natural aristocracy' of talent, merit, and wealth in order to stem the tide of populist democracy gaining hold in the thirteen states. While reforming the articles of confederation into a federal constitution may have been necessary –and Franklin had long been a supporter of a strong union of the colonies- the reformers must watch that they do not become tyrants. The new government must not do away with the equality among citizens. "If we do, I fear," Franklin warned, "tho we employ at first a number and not a single person, the number will in time be set aside; it will only nourish the fetus of a King...and a King will the sooner be set over us" (LOA 1133). Any seed of aristocracy will bloom into monarchy. Aristocratic models of intersubjectivity had to be rejected and replaced once and for all. The connection between aristocratic social practice and aristocratic politics is clearly linked.

Franklin's speech at the close of the constitutional convention is on the surface an endorsement of the Constitution, but it is also an attempt to connect the Constitution to the communal and communication models he had envisioned for America and written into the earlier parts of his *Autobiography*. The speech, which was addressed to the delegates, was also directed to the public at large, for Franklin had it printed and distributed, and together with one other essay, was the only public statement Franklin made about the Constitution. It is as much a plea for accepting his vision of America as it is for accepting the Constitution. By adopting the speech's linguistic lessons, the new nation would be adopting Franklin's Enlightenment institutions.

The speech begins with another exposition of Franklin's dialogic model of communication, stressing the need to consider the other when communicating:

I have experienced many instances of being obliged, by better information or fuller consideration, to change opinions even on important subjects...It

is therefore that the older I grow the more apt I am to doubt my own judgment and to pay more respect to the judgment of others. (*LOA 1139*).

This repeats the lessons of the discourse of science. Knowledge must include the “judgment” of the other; it is formed by interacting with the other; it is a communal construct. And the Constitution was likewise communally constructed by a group of men considering each other’s judgments and interests to find the common good, “for when you assemble a number of men to have the advantage of their joint wisdom, you inevitably with those men all their prejudices....their local interests”(LOA 1140). In the construction of knowledge or community, all members must sacrifice a little of themselves, a little of their private interest, or vanity, for the construction to be possible at all. The constitution does not meet every need of every member, just as a community is composed of varied interests. What is important is that each member consider the position of the others in order to work towards producing the common good: “it therefore astonished me, sir, to find this system approaching so far near to perfection as it does,” adding “the opinions I have had of its errors I sacrifice to the public good” (*LOA 1140*).

As opposed to this reasoned, dialogic model, Franklin presents two negative models to be avoided: monologism and noise, two bugbears of his thought since his earliest writings. Franklin uses a parable to describe an example of monologic communication: “ a certain French lady, who in a little dispute with her sister, said...I meet with nobody but myself that’s always in the right” (*LOA 1140*). He then overtly criticizes this communication model in which “most men indeed as well as most sects in religion, think themselves in possession of all truth” (*LOA 1139*) because they prevent community because no one can agree with or consider the other. The other error to avoid is his old nemesis, noise, which Franklin has used, in his earlier writings and in “Part

One” of *The Autobiography* as a symbol of vanity and self-interest. If people try to shout over each other, then “our councils are confounded, like those of the builders of Babel” (LOA 1140). This was the second warning Franklin had made using the image of the tower of Babel. In June, when he made his “Motion for Prayers in the Convention” Franklin warned that if the convention followed the model of the builders of Babel “we shall be divided by little partial, local interests, our projects will be confounded...and what is worse, mankind may hereafter...despair of establishing a government by human wisdom and may leave it to chance, war, and conquest” (LOA 1139). Noise, the communication vice Franklin had condemned in “Part One” as a type of communication which privileged the self over others, here becomes associated with anarchy. It is not democracy which will cause anarchy; anarchy is the result of the babel of competing vanity. Republican reason and self-rule must control this. Instead of a babel of individual voices, the constitutional community will form a reasonable give and take of dialogue. Dialogue, guided by reason, replaces both aristocracy (monologism) and anarchy (babel).

The speech draws to a conclusion by reiterating Franklin’s idea of publicity as a moderator of not only behavior, as he has stressed since *Silence Dogood*, but also as a check on government: “much of the strength and efficiency of any government, in procuring & securing happiness to the people depends on opinion, on the general opinion of the goodness of the government” (LOA 1141). As a result, just as the individual must publicly perform and demonstrate acceptance of the norms of the community, the delegates must, if the Constitution is to succeed, live the republican principles of the document. The delegates must not return to their local areas and “report the

objections...and endeavor to gain partisans” (LOA 1140). Instead, since the delegates are “a part of the people,” they must demonstrate that the people have created this republic and can live as equals in it. To close, Franklin requested that each delegate “to make manifest our unanimity put his name to this document” (LOA 1141). It is the final union of language, social performance, and government. The people are the Constitution, and the Constitution is the people.

Constitution as the Party of Virtue

As the Constitution neared ratification in the summer of 1788, Franklin must have been in a reflective mood. His long involvement in the public affairs of his country, and particularly his engagement in the relationship between England and America, had resulted in the creation of the United States of America, a truly new form of government, founded on the authority of the common people. It is not hard to imagine Franklin looking back with wonder to the bleak situation in 1771, when he had retreated from the troubles and conflict with England, and sought the origin of that conflict in his life history. Now, in August of 1788, as a citizen of a new republic he played a major role in freeing and forming, his pen again turned to his memoirs. Certainly, Franklin may have begun writing again because he felt the weight of his age and wished to finish his life story while he could, however, spurred by the historical moment, I argue his motivation was again political. Franklin’s motivation for writing “Part Three” was to establish that the new federal United States was founded on the republican and Enlightenment model he had been creating and outlining in the earlier sections of his *Autobiography*. He wished to stress the continuity of the three stages of American life, as understood through

his life: pre-Revolutionary (“Part One”), Revolutionary Period (“Part Two”), and the Constitution (“Part Three”).

Franklin’s choice of material to begin “Part Three” helps to reveal his desire to show the Constitution as the culmination of American history and his version of American society. He begins with his “United Party for Virtue.” This party of virtue is described as being the completion of the “*great and extensive project*” mentioned in “Part Two,” namely his project of moral and ethical development for citizens of a republic. By this maneuver, Franklin has established the models deployed in “Part One” and “Part Two” as the origin and grounds for the Constitutional organization of society. Continuity from “Part One” to “Part Two” to “Part Three” (and from the Declaration to the Constitution) is established. The Constitution is the rational culmination and evolution of Franklin’s narrative of his life. The Constitution is not, as the Anti-Federalists argued, the imposing of a model on society from the outside. Rather, it is the logical and reasonable evolution from inside society. The rationale for the founding of his “united party for virtue” is couched in the language of the constitutional debate. Franklin makes references to factions, revolutions, and parties. His discussion of competing personal interests, written in 1788, is similar to Madison’s idea of competing factions in *The Federalist X* (November 22, 1787). A critique of the Articles of Confederation can also be read in this rational manner. Franklin’s tracing of politics in “reading history” seems like a history of America following the Treaty of Paris. In Franklin’s parable, as in post-revolutionary America, as soon as the uniting principle of independence was achieved, the states fell to quarrelling among themselves: “as soon as a party has gained its general point, each member becomes intent upon his particular interest, which thwarting others,

breaks that party into divisions and occasions more confusions” (1395). This moral seems to have manifold applications to Franklin’s work. It reminds one of Franklin’s critique of polemic, explicated in “Part One,” which destroyed harmony and instituted discord. It also resonates with Franklin’s speech at the closing of the Constitutional convention. Not heeding Franklin’s moral results in confusion, one of Franklin’s errata from the opening page of *The Autobiography*, where confusion is obscurity and the inability to be understood. The result of this mixing of errors rejected by *The Autobiography*, was not a reasonable society but the ‘Babel’ of noise and anarchy of warning personal interests. The solution was to form a united party and “regular body,” which can be read as a federal government, which would be guided by clearly established and constituted rules: “there seems to me at present to be great occasion for raising an united party of virtue, by forming the virtuous and good men of all nations into a regular body, to be governed by suitable good and wise rules” (1395). Disorder is replaced by clarity, disunion by the union.

In perhaps the most transparent moment of the text, Franklin describes how this body was to spread and grow:

the sect should be begun and spread at first among young and single men only; that each person initiated should not only declare his assent to such creed, but should have exercised himself with the thirteen weeks examination and practice of the virtues as in the before mentioned model; that the existence of such a society should be kept a secret till it was become considerable, to prevent the solicitations for the admission of improper persons (1396).

The virtues necessary for successful civic participation must be assented to through words and performance. This model, if followed, would form “a great number of good citizens” (1397) who both know and live by the norms of society. In a direct connection

to “Part Two,” citizens must socialize themselves by practicing and performing the thirteen virtues outlined in “Part Two”’s book of virtue. Realizing that Franklin saw the thirteen virtues as the bedrock of a republican character makes the directive even more revealing of Franklin’s model for growth. The republic would prosper as long as new members knew and practiced Franklin’s definition of republican virtues. In a sense, Franklin’s community could accommodate any one, as long as the materials and method of enlightened republicanism were made available, and as long as they acquired and practiced them.

The last line of Franklin’s outline for his united party of virtue almost seems to indicate that there will be a closed, secretive, conspiratorial element to his society. To read the line “such a society should be kept secret” conspiratorially or as suggesting a social elite or natural aristocracy would be in error and miss the entire point of the anecdote. To think that Franklin would be arguing in favor of a conspiratorial model here is illogical, as the fear of cabal and conspiracy was one of the driving ideologies of the revolutionaries. Bernard Bailyn noted:

suspicion that the ever present, latent danger of an active conspiracy of power against liberty was becoming manifest within the British Empire assuming specific form and developing in coordinated phases, rose in the consciousness of a larger segment of the American population before any of the famous political events of the struggle with England took place (*Origins* 95).²

Reading Franklin’s party of virtue as a cabal neglects to notice when, exactly, the society was to remain secret. It was to be secret in the past, in the time of British rule, when public or republican virtue (Franklin now identifies them as one and the same thing) was not rewarded by authority, but instead punished or marginalized. Also, consider what “improper persons” might mean. Throughout *The Autobiography*, Franklin has used

“improper” to refer to or describe monologic methods of communication, like polemics and dogma. Improper method was to seek to aggrandize the self at the expense of others. Under a monologic aristocracy, “improper persons” would seek to join the society for improper reasons, namely because of their pedigree or peerage. The secrecy of the party of virtue is the silence of Franklin before the privy council over a decade earlier, the silence in the face of monologism. The society was only to remain secret “till it was become considerable” (1396). That considerable moment was the constitutional moment which brought all Americans into one community. The “society of the free and easy” (1396) is republican, federal American. It does not make any rhetorical sense that Franklin, a federalist, would promote secret or conspiratorial politics. Much of the rhetoric of the anti-federalists attempted to paint the federalists as exactly that, conspirators: “the fear of conspiracy against the fragile structure of freedom, the same fear that had lain at the heart of the resistance movement before 1776, pervaded the thought of the anti-federalists” (*Origins* 333). Franklin would have just been giving the anti-federalists ammunition. Franklin’s point is that he is publishing his design for the society of the free and easy, just as the Constitution is being published for all to join voluntarily, by popular election. Franklin is publishing and making known his secret society for all to know about and join, just as he published his speech at the close of the convention, to make his support for the Constitution public. All that is required to join is to “declare” and “practice” assent - to “put his name to this instrument” (1141) as Franklin required of the Constitution’s writers. This is, again, Franklin’s model of socialization. Rationally accept communal norms and then practice them in day to day

life. Not accidentally, this is also what the states must do to join the union, declare acceptance of The Constitution and practice its laws.

Republican Replication

Much of “Part Three” is concerned with detailing the growth of both the American Republic and the American republic of letters. Of course, to Franklin’s mind, these were one and the same thing. Extending one meant extending the other. Franklin’s concern for expansion in “Part Three” echoes with Madison in *Federalist X*. Madison had argued that the greatest defense against faction was to “extend the sphere”(*Debate 1*: 410). The growth of the republic was seen as vital, because “greater security is afforded by a greater variety of parties” (1:411). American expansion, both geographically, and in terms of population, was another critical issue facing the foundational period. Before the war, Franklin had used demography to calculate the growth rate of America, and listed its growth as one of the primary reasons America was bound to win any conflict with Britain. The war was partly brought about by colonial desires to expand westward clashing with British Imperial policy expressly forbidding it. Now that the colonists had won the right, and territory, to expand, what would come of it? Would these new lands be an extension of the United States? Or would they develop on their own, isolated from eastern influence? The new territories lead to other problems as well. Clashes over which states had dominion over which territories erupted into violence, both physical and rhetorical. It was imperative to find some means of dealing with the “frontier.” In *Federalist X*, Madison argued that a large, expanding, republic would ensure the stability of the government and protect liberty. In a large republic no faction or passion could sweep the entire nation as it could a small section of it. In *Federalist XIV* (1787)

Madison referred to concerns that arose about a large, spread out republican society. How would the culture and political community of the federal republic remain bound together over such great distances? Did the vast size of America limit the effectiveness, or even the possibility, of political representation? Madison responded to these worries by stating that “intercourse throughout the union will be daily facilitated by new improvements” and that “communication between the western and Atlantic districts, and between different parts of each, will be rendered more and more easy” (1:434). While Madison’s paper argued in theoretical, macro level, he did not provide any specific day to day explanation of how this expansion would be managed.

In the pages of *The Autobiography*, Franklin seemed to concur that growth was not just a definite possibility, but a vital source of strength for the new republic. Once again, Franklin would turn his attention, not to grand theories or macro politics, but to the daily interactions of people to depict exactly how such growth could be managed. Speaking of the growth of the party of virtue, already acting as a stand in for the federal United States, Franklin wrote, “I was not discouraged by the seeming magnitude of the undertaking” (1397). A life time of involvement in the trans-continental republic of letters and the community of science had taught him that geographic distances could be mitigated by communicative practice. In “Part Three” of *The Autobiography* Franklin put those lessons into practice to demonstrate how the American community could grow across space, in a stable, controlled manner. The next three episodes Franklin decided to include in the text are examples of the spread of the public sphere, and thus socialization, among the growing population not as a cell of secrecy, but as a model of participation and communication available to all. As Franklin describes his almanac, his newspaper,

and his founding of a chain of printing presses, he is really describing the task of expanding the republic of letters and banding together distinct and distant individuals into one community.

Franklin recounts that *Poor Richard's Almanac* was read by a large portion of the population, and that the almanac was both a source of profit and an opportunity to spread communal norms. The almanac acts as an example of how the means of socialization are made available to all. There was “scarce any neighborhood in the province” without the almanac, and “being universally approved was copied in all the newspapers of the continent...and great numbers bought by the clergy & Gentry to distribute gratis among the poor parishioners and tenants” (1397-98). Through the spreading of the almanac, as the republic of letters expands to include previously excluded sections of society. Through the almanac, Franklin makes the proper means are available to all potential members of the community. As a result of this universal accessibility, the almanac is “a proper vehicle for conveying instruction among the common people” (1397). The rhetorical strategy employed to communicate with the common people fit the audience: the proverb. Franklin fills *Poor Richard's Almanac* with “proverbial sentences” which teach advanced but necessary topics for a republic in a simple, clear form devoid of all philosophical jargon or eloquent baggage. The proverbs put moral or civic guidance in a form which combined a simple definition of the communal norm with a simple to imitate performative act. As an example take Poor Richard's 1749 advice: “words may show a man's wit, but actions his meaning”(LOA 1251). For many of Franklin's almanac readers, scientific discourses on moral philosophy would have been unreadable, but

Franklin provides everyday instruction. The almanac reader may not be able to speak as well as the philosopher, but he can act as well.

From the socialization of the almanac, Franklin turned to his newspaper, the classic institution of the republic of letters, and one Franklin had long recognized for its potential as an educational and socially binding institution. In a 1782 letter to Richard Price, Franklin argued that modern technology like the printing press made the failures of the ancient republics avoidable:

The ancient Roman and Greek orators could only speak to the number of citizens capable of being assembled within the reach of their voice. Their writings had little effect...Now by the press we can speak to nations, and good books and well written pamphlets have a great and general influence, The facility, with which the same truths may be repeatedly enforced by placing them in different lights in newspapers, which are everywhere read gives a great chance of establishing them” (*LOA* 1049).

Clearly, Franklin sees the republic of letters, and the newspaper especially, as the transmitter of communal norms. However, the key is that the printing press has eliminated the problem of space; as long as the public sphere has expanded to include a region, that region is a part of the body politic. Like the almanac, the newspaper continues the process of socialization –“I considered my newspaper also as another means of communicating instruction” (1398)- but unlike the almanac, which taught by the proverb, the newspaper is primarily a vehicle for social, public reason and carries dialogues and learned essays. Franklin “reprinted in it extracts from the Spectator and other moral writers, and sometimes published little pieces of my own” (1398). When ideas needed to be brought before the public for debate, the newspaper was the perfect organ. When changes in communal policy were introduced by Franklin, he “endeavored to prepare the minds of the people by writing on the subject in the newspapers, which

was my usual custom in such cases” (1423). The newspaper is made a republican device. Franklin makes very clear it is a place for public, not private concerns. In a striking image which serves his social and communication model, Franklin defines the newspaper as a public contract between reader and writer, or between both positions, sender and receiver, in the chain of communication. The contract, which brings to the mind images of Locke’s constitution of language and the Constitution of the United States, is to agree to discuss public affairs and define communal norms, not to “fill their papers with private altercation” (1398). In writing for, and publishing, his newspaper, Franklin had “contracted with my subscribers to furnish them with what might be either useful or entertaining” (1398). The newspaper is a social contract of shared expectations. It is part of the shared background life-world of members of a community. Both reader and writer share the same expectations of the limits of discourse that will be present within the newspaper, and thus share the same norms, establishing a communal bond. Subscribing to the newspaper is to subscribe to, consent to, the shared background of definitions and norms of a community.

The very act of publishing or subscribing to a newspaper is an act of communal construction and consent. Thus, simply expanding the realm of the newspaper expands the realm of the republic. As Goodman contends, “to subscribe also means to join a community of subscribers...it was one means of becoming part of a public” (Goodman 177). Both parties are contracted to each other to create a circle of rational communication. The purpose of the newspaper is public communication; the duty of the reader is to read it, and thus respond to it, either through imitation, which is open assent, or rational debate, which is consent to the forms of discourse in the community.

Likewise, when Franklin turns to describing his chain of printing partnerships, founded throughout the colonies, he informs us that his partnerships always ended amicably because of the presence of a clear and explicit contract between the two. Contracts are agreements reached after a period of negotiation, and thus symbolize a definition crafted by and shared by both parties. Both parties agree to the terms of the contract in a successful act of consent. The contract becomes another metaphor for Franklin's model of communicative action. The language Franklin uses to describe the contract carries Constitutional implications as well, for what is the constitution but a contract established among all the states to form a shared government and community. Contracts state "everything to be done or expected from each partner" (1399), just as the Constitution clearly delineated the realm of the federal government and the realm of the state governments. Thus, the Constitution is again shown to be the logical continuance of Franklin's earlier communicative and social model, as it acts as the ultimate social contract.

In the last paragraph of this section, Franklin depicts the actual physical growth of the public sphere and the American community. Franklin establishes a partnership to set up a printer's shop in South Carolina "where a printer was wanting" (1399). Obviously, if a colony is without a printer it is in danger of being outside the influence of the public sphere and thus without a voice in defining the norms of the republic. As a result of the success of the Carolina partnership, Franklin sends his other journeymen out to establish "them with printing houses in different colonies" (1410). Franklin is creating an expanding network for the public sphere. Ensuring the spread of the institutions of the republic of letters, likewise ensures the spread of the republic. As more people have

access to the republic of letters, more have access to the proper means of acquiring character and participating in communal discourse. Thus, Madison's large republic is made into one community.

The expansion and replication metaphors continue as Franklin returns to his discussion of the *junto*. The *junto*, Franklin informs the reader, was so successful, it needed to expand. Each original member of the *junto* is directed to establish a new club, and to recruit citizens willing to improve themselves; "every member separately should endeavor to form a subordinate club, with the same rules" (1402). The *junto* becomes another model of networking by republican imitation. As imitations of the original *junto* spread throughout Philadelphia, the benefits of membership become available to more people. This is another example of republican or democratic space, as the same institutions, like the print shop before it, spread in an interconnected network across the country. As a result of this expansion, social stability is ensured, as multiplying membership in the *juntos* equals a multiplication of improvement dedicated to the public good. Franklin's description of how these multiple *juntos* would operate to coordinate social action towards the general good is also a lesson in how to maneuver in a republic. It serves as the beginning of *The Autobiography's* political lessons. The *junto* operates as a lesson in rational lobbying. In a republican government, people need to negotiate with each other and form majorities in order to ensure action. "Part One" had depicted how to acquire character, "Part Two" how to turn that character into the foundation of a self-governing republican society, and "Part Three" demonstrated how virtuous citizens actually engage in self-government.

The example continues through the next paragraph, as Franklin details his first stint of public service. After a year as the clerk of the general assembly, Franklin's reappointment is opposed by a member of the assembly. This is exactly the kind of situation citizens can expect to find in a republican government. People will have different positions on an issue. Franklin uses this episode to act as an example of reaching a negotiated agreement. Franklin does not engage the dissenting member in a war of words or act in a divisive manner. Rather he seeks conciliation and negotiation. These are the political skills critical to the success of the republic: negotiation, dialogue, and coalition building.

Another episode which follows the model of the spreading network of libraries, printing presses, and juntas is the episode of the founding of the fire department. The fire department is another metaphor for security and stability through growth and expansion, as "the utility of this institution soon appeared, and many more desiring to be admitted than we thought convenient for one company, they were advised to form another; which was accordingly done. And this went on, one new company being formed after another, till they became so numerous as to include most of the inhabitants who were men of property" (1405). The establishing of fire departments and public watches ensures the stability of the new republic. Yet, it is not only the stability and security of property they ensure, although that is a specific purpose. They also serve as metaphor for the stability and existence of republican communal life in general. The fire department was another "company", that signed "articles of agreement" and "agreed to meet once a month & spend a social evening together, in discoursing, and communicating such ideas as occurred to us upon the subject of fires" (1405). In addition to preventing fires, the fire

department acts as yet another forum for public discussion and public participation in the directing of coordinated social action. In a republic, without a king or aristocracy to “take care” of the people, the people must be responsible for themselves and their communities. They must make the decisions about how to direct the actions of society; they must take the roles of authority, and they must inscribe that responsibility into their lived relations.

Franklin’s forming of the Pennsylvania militia is another example of a republican association of the people. Franklin proposes the idea in a pamphlet, *Plain Truth*, thus putting his idea for the founding of the militia into the public sphere. The people, after reading the pamphlet, respond to it. Meetings are held; public discussions take place; and the people agree and consent to join the association. Once again, companies are formed and spread throughout the colony, and another network of people is established. Keeping with the republican imagery, Franklin, in a scene that would certainly bring to his reader’s minds images of Washington’s resignation, is offered the leadership position of the militia, but he “declined that station” and “among the rest I regularly took my turn of duty there as a common soldier” (1412). The republican citizen does not seek aggrandizement through the military; military service is public service, not a path to rank and social station.

After several pages detailing the physical improvements he helps to procure for Philadelphia, like lamps and street cleaning, Franklin breaks his narrative to interject to the reader a passage which, for the most part, sums up his social theory:

some may think these trifling matters not worth minding or relating: but when they consider that tho’ dust blown into the eyes of a single person or into a single shop on a windy day, is but of small importance, yet the great number of the instances in a populous city, and its frequent repetitions give it weight &

consequence; perhaps they will not censure very severely those who bestow some attention to affairs of this seemingly low nature. Human felicity is produced not so much by great pieces of good fortune that seldom happen, as by little advantages that occur every day (1429).

It is when change happens in the day-to-day lives and the lived relations of the people that happiness is secured. Republican replication happens not only in the expansion of institutions, but in the alteration of people's day to day intersubjectivity. The new republic would entail entirely new social relations. It is not chance, fortune, or divine providence that secures stability, happiness, or upward mobility. It is the constant repetition of proper acts that secures "felicity." As Franklin instructed at the opening of his *Autobiography*, the means of attaining felicity should be imitated, or repeated. The recounting of all of the small details of Franklin's life is not to escape from the realities of his day, or to establish his life as the representative bourgeoisie, but to demonstrate that social change is not the result of grand ideas but of changes in the way people live and relate to each other. Just as Philadelphia slowly improves by making small change after small change to the structure of the city, America itself will change as people make changes in the way they live. One person living by republican virtue, like dust in one person's eye, may be insignificant, but when a great number of people live by republican standards, social change will result. Franklin reminded the delegates at the constitutional convention that they were "part of the people"; here he reminds the reader that it is the way the people live, not the words on a document, that will ensure or destroy the felicity of the American experiment. The parable Franklin uses to close his argument here is instructive. If you "teach a poor young man to shave himself and keep his razor in order, you may contribute more to the happiness of his life...he escapes the frequent vexation of waiting for barbers...he shaves when most convenient to him, and enjoys daily the

pleasure of its being done with a good instrument” (1429). Authority cannot be external to the republican citizen; it must be internal. The responsibility for society cannot lie with others but with the self. The Constitution may be a “good instrument,” but unless the people know how to use it, it is useless and society will fail.

Close of the Autobiography: Failure of Aristocracy and Rejection of the Sovereign

Throughout “Part Three,” and the brief “Part Four,” Franklin presents his run in with various representatives of the British system. They all practice improper means of communication, and are meant to serve as figurative reminders of the vanity, coerciveness, and failings of the aristocracy. These aristocratic figures, coming at the end of the narrative, serve as a final rejection of aristocracy and its social relations. The first example of this is General Braddock, who “might probably have made a figure as a good officer in some European war” (1440). But Braddock, as a practitioner of the monologic, aristocratic model of communication is unable to make reasonable or informed decisions here in the Americas. Braddock is lacking republican virtues, as “he had too much self-confidence, too high an opinion of the validity of regular troops, and too mean a one of both Americans and Indians” (1440). His interaction with Americans is not dialogic or reasoned, but monologic and coercive. When offered American and Indian scouts “he slighted and neglected them” (1440). After General Braddock tells Franklin his plans for fighting the French in the American back country, Franklin attempts to question the general’s validity claims; Braddock does not engage in a reasonable debate, but “smiled at [Franklin’s] ignorance” and replied in a condescending manner, shutting down the communication. As a result of his aristocratic manner, Braddock’s army is routed in a terrible defeat, proving Franklin and the Americans right, and the aristocrats wrong.

However, this is not simply a nationalistic maneuver; Franklin is correct because he based his thoughts on communicative reason, while Braddock based his thinking on vanity and his position of power. The result, Franklin tells us, is that “this whole transaction gave us Americans the first suspicion that our exalted ideas of the prowess of British regulars had not been well founded” (1442).

The next figure of the aristocratic communication model is Lord Loudon. In a remarkable image, the voice of the aristocratic Lord Loudon is actually depicted as controlling the movement and mobility of the common people. Franklin, joined by several merchants, is attempting to sail for England via a British packet (a small fast frigate). The ship keeps being delayed, and when the passengers inquire as to why, they are told they “were detained for the general’s letters” (1459). Thus, Franklin and his party of commoners must wait for the word of the aristocracy before they have permission to move. In a twist of the image, although Lord Loudon has the power of voice, he lacks the ability to communicate, as the letters never arrive. Loudon is always found “at his desk, pen in hand” (1459), yet he never produces any letters. Loudon can only use the power of his voice coercively, to restrain the liberty of others, but when it comes time to write a letter, Franklin’s image of dialogic communication, Loudon is impotent. In fact, most of the British aristocrats fail in their attempt to use letters. Governor Keith promised letters of credit, which he never produced. General Gage’s letters were never delivered, as they were captured by the enemy when his army was destroyed, and Lord Loudon, arguably the most aristocratic figure in the text, is completely impotent when it comes to the task of writing. These aristocratic figures completely lack the quality of reciprocity. If writing was the private correspondence

between gentlemen, as Wedderburn had argued in 1773, than it was a failed correspondence, unable to produce anything of value. Loudon is such a useless figure that Franklin is forced to wonder “how such a man came to be entrusted with so important a business” (1460). The answer is provided by the British system, which, as the reader will soon see in “Part Four,” values eloquence, title, and ancestry far more than reason or ability.

“Part Four,” although only fragmentary, does have as a consistent theme the clear communicative differences between America and the communicative model employed by British aristocrats. Upon arriving in England, Franklin presents his credentials to Lord Granville, “that nobleman,” who informed Franklin that “THE KING IS THE LETGISLATOR OF THE COLONIES”(1465). Franklin capitalized the quote to emphasize the monologic, coercive nature of the communication. It is only the king’s voice which is “*the law of the land.*” Franklin replies by presenting a much more dialogic model of legislation, but Granville informs him “you Americans have the wrong ideas” (1465).

The course of Franklin’s life has lead him directly into conflict with the Hobbes’ sovereign. There is, ultimately, only one voice which rules all. The voice of the sovereign is not communally constructed, and is not receptive of debate. Granville’s comment highlights this clearly. The king is the legislator of the colonies. The multi-voiced dialogue of the colonial legislatures, cradles of republicanism, are written over by the sole voice of the king. The voice of the people is delegitimized, while the voice of the king, and those, like the aristocrats, who diffuse it, are the sole source of social or communal authority. Granville even removes the ability of the colonies to construct their

own lexicon or their own norms. In a Hobbesian move, Franklin is reminded that only the king has the power to determine what is right or wrong. The power of the censor is removed from the public and retained by the king, as the king can determine what ideas are wrong. This contradicts everything Franklin had learned and experienced about community and communication.

As a result, Franklin's depiction of the British Aristocracy turns far more pejorative as Franklin recalls his encounters with the nemesis of Pennsylvania, the Penn's, who were the proprietors of the colony. Franklin presents his petition in according with his communicative model, expecting exchange and reasonable negotiation, but he soon discovered that "each party had its own idea of what was reasonable" (1466). The aristocratic and republican models of communication do not only differ in the means of communication, but in their very understanding of reason. By this maneuver, Franklin is excluding the British Aristocracy from the culture of the Enlightenment, as, instead of reason, the aristocrats focus on insult and ad hominem attacks. Franklin discovers the Penns do not debate the validity of his claims, but instead focus on decorum and manners. The aristocrats will not respond to Franklin's reasonable arguments because Franklin did not address them with the proper hereditary titles. Their lawyer was "a proud angry man...weak in point of argument" (1466). Thus, Franklin and the aristocrats did not have a shared communicative background. As a result, communication is not possible, and only noise and discord remain.

Although incomplete, "Part Four" can be read as bringing the action of *The Autobiography* full circle. "Part One" began with Franklin's attempt to locate the source of the communication difficulties between the colonies and England. "Part Four"

established that communication difference as fact; enlightened Americans employed reason and dialogue, corrupt aristocrats employed coercion and monologue. The dialogic communication model present in the colonies lead to the establishment of a republican political and social model, which provided the opportunities for the virtue and liberty of the American people. Now, it was up to the people to employ it.

¹ Se Van Doren.

² Bailyn goes so far as to argue that fear of conspiracy “above all else in the end propelled them into revolution”(95). See *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*.

Chapter Five: Epilogue: The Age of Experiments

Near the very end of “Part Three” of his *Autobiography*, Franklin, in the last expository digression of the text, recalls that the captain of the ship carrying him to London bragged that his vessel could travel as fast as thirteen knots an hour. A fellow captain, also traveling as a passenger, disputed the possibility of a ship traveling that fast. Measurements were taken; the ship was found to be traveling thirteen knots, and the second captain admitted to his mistake. Franklin comments that:

the above fact I give for the sake of the following observation. It has been remarked as an imperfection in the art of ship-building that it can never be known till she is tried, whether a new ship will or will not be a good sailor...I apprehend this may be partially occasioned by the different opinions of seamen...each has his system. And the same vessel, laden by the judgments and orders of one captain shall sail better or worse than when by the orders of another. Besides, it scarce ever happens that a ship is formed, fitted for the sea and sailed by the same person. One man builds the hull, another riggs her, a third lades and sails her. No one of these has the advantage of knowing all the ideas and experience of the others and therefore cannot draw just conclusions from a combination of the whole.(1463)

This confused state of affairs resembles the epistemological confusion warned of by Locke in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Just as each captain in Franklin’s episode associates different ideas with the different parts of the ship, each individual, according to Locke, can have a separate set of associations between words and ideas. The rigging has one meaning for one captain, and another for a different captain, while a word could have one meaning to one speaker, and a different meaning to a different speaker. No one captain, or speaker, can be sure of what another might mean by the same word.

The problem is exacerbated if, as in the case of the ship builders, there is no normative practice to regulate meaning within a group. One person builds one part of the ship in isolation from another who builds a different part of the ship. As a result no one can clearly communicate their meaning. No one individual can get a sense of the whole, and no conclusions can be drawn. The solution that Franklin proposes for this epistemological quandary is that:

a set of experiments might be instituted, first to determine the most proper form of the hull...next the best dimensions and proper place for the masts then the form and quantity of the sail...and lastly the disposition of her landing. This is the age of experiments, and such a set accurately made and combined would be of great use (1463).

Just as Locke argued that a standard lexicon of definition must be established to enable communication between individuals, Franklin argues that a standard set of measurements is needed to ensure communication between captains and shipbuilders. An “accurate” set of definitions would allow meaningful communication. In both cases, communication is facilitated by normalized and regulated discourse.

It is Franklin’s method for finding the normalized form for communication, for fixing the lexicon, that is most instructive here: the experiment. It is the model of the experiment, of the community of science, that allows normalized communication to occur. The experiment allows two different viewpoints, or two different ways of understanding something, to be publicly aired and reconciled rationally. As an example of this, the second captain, after observing the log-line being cast and the speed measured, agreed that his internal understanding, in the face of public, external evidence, was wrong.

This example is further evidence of the importance of the community of science to Franklin's thinking and his manner for resolving disputes. The community of science provided Franklin with a model of finding and accepting common ground between people; it provided a method for reaching agreement, for establishing definitions all could accept. Indeed, the behavior of the two captains in this episode, enact several of the key practices of the community of science. First, the entire dispute was resolved publicly; after publicly stating their positions, the dispute is resolved by observing the evidence. In the community of science, in order for knowledge to be considered valid, that knowledge and its justifications had to be public. Second, the validity claim of each captain can be tested, again, publicly. Third, the experiment can be repeated, with the same results occurring again and again. Every individual could determine the validity of a position for themselves, and thus become a part of a shared method of communication.

The model of the community of science was one of the main influences on Franklin's way of understanding both language and society, and the methods of the community of science informed all of his writing, especially *The Autobiography*. It is revealing that Franklin refers to his age not as the age of revolutions, as a modern reader might think of the eighteenth century, but as "the age of experiments". The American revolution and the new American republic were not so much the result of political radicalism but of political reason. The American experiment was the result of public, social reason. Indeed, Franklin's entire life, as recounted in *The Autobiography*, had been an experiment. His life was an experiment in using language and in structuring community. It should be no surprise that this episode is the last expository digression Franklin makes in the text. *The Autobiography* itself is a record of "a set of

experiments” to find the best models of communication and community- the “best form for the hull”- from Franklin’s testing of communication in “Part One” to his arguing in favor of The Constitution in “Part Three.”

That his life story was an experiment means of course that its validity could be tested, and its result replicated. This recalls the epistolary opening of both “Part One” and the letters bridging “Part One” and “Part Two”. In these epistolary moments, Franklin’s life is presented as a method that can be acquired and repeated. Franklin’s method of life is “fit to be imitated” (1307). His posterity may achieve the same results by acquiring the same means and methods.

The concept of imitation is a reoccurring theme throughout Franklin’s work. To think of Franklin’s imitation as simple copying or rote repetition is missing the subtlety of Franklin’s thought. Throughout *The Autobiography*, as well as in his earlier writings, Franklin shows that imitation is acquiring a communally approved method, but once that method has been acquired, it allows the individual a voice to help shape communal norms, as well as to shape the self. Imitation is much closer to a process of self-authorship and self-creation. The idea was that many individuals could use the same “proper” means to achieve their specific individuality. As long as the “means” they used to express themselves were republican and dialogic, each unique individual could find a place in the community. I have termed this process Franklin’s logic of replication, which is more a theory of growth than of copying. For Franklin, the idea that the republican character could be replicated was one of the prime proofs of its validity. Like much of Franklin’s thinking, this concept grew out of the method of the discourse of science. As noted, Enlightenment scientific discourse was both reasonable and

communally designed. As a result, a central way to establish the validity or “truthfulness” of a claim or experiment was its ability to be duplicated. If an experiment could be duplicated at various locations by various individuals, employing the same method as the original experiment, the experiment was accepted as valid, or true. Franklin applied the same manner of thinking to the republican experiment. For republicanism to be valid, it needed to be replicated. The truth of republicanism would lie in the ability of any individual to acquire and apply its methods and gain similar results.

The logic of replication applied to society as well as individuals. The institutions of society could also be replicated and grow, thus expanding the republic. Franklin inscribed this model in much of the descriptions of his civic projects in “Part Three.” Franklin’s logic of replication was also a major component of his famous will. Added to his will in June of 1789, Franklin’s codicil attempted to write his model of social and individual growth, textualized in *The Autobiography*, onto the very future of the nation. Franklin left two thousand pounds to the cities of Boston and Philadelphia with the instructions that small loans be made to young married men setting out on a trade, and with good moral character. The loans were to bear low interest, but were to be repaid back to the treasuries of the respective cities. As a result of the constant lending and repayment “It is hoped that no part of the money will at any time be dead...but be continually augmented by the interest.” Franklin estimated that at the end of two hundred years, the funds would total four million pounds, at which time the cities would be free to use the money for projects benefiting the public good. The plan allowed Franklin one last opportunity to impose his model of society on America. The republic would

continue to grow, as long as the communal values were borrowed by new citizens who then repaid into the general fund of communal good.

The other model Franklin applied to his understanding of community and communication was the model of the republic of letters. The influence of that model was one of the main reasons Franklin selected the epistolary format to begin both “Part One” and “Part Two” of *The Autobiography*. Writing was a central metaphor to Franklin’s thought because in the enlightenment, the written word was the primary form of communication, and in radical circles, writing was seen as emancipating. Writing came to be seen as one of the central binding forces of a community, but because of the properties attributed to writing by the republic of letters and the discourse of science, writing engendered a far different society than the feudal/aristocratic relations dominant at the time, as Alexander Wedderburn so insightfully remarked in his assassination of Franklin’s character during the Hutchinson letter affair. Franklin discovered that there were fundamental differences between the communication models employed by the aristocrats in England, and by participants in the republic of letters. I have structured this difference using the terminology dialogic/republican and monologic/aristocratic, and claim that Franklin believed that the republican model of communication was the proper basis for a republican model of society and community.

Republican/dialogic concepts of writing centered on the reciprocal nature of writing, creating a sense of equality between both positions in the communication chain. As a result of this egalitarian reciprocity, dialogue became a central virtue. Along with this mutual sense of recognition and equality, came the belief in a public, open, and rational community of writers and readers, or to borrow Habermas’ term, the public

sphere. The republic of letters believed in expanding the public sphere, bringing more and more individuals into the conversation, while at the same time giving each individual a chance to publicly express their reason and individuality. Franklin's conception of self authorship germinated in this soil. The republic of letters provided Franklin with another viable alternative to the aristocratic organization of society. Key to the conception of both the community of science and the republic of letters was the idea that both communities had open membership. Ideally, participation was open to all as long as they consented to the norms of the community. Thus, Franklin was able to envision a society based on reasonable assent rather than on feudal coercion.

In a 1788 letter to the Reverend John Lathrop, Franklin expanded on his idea of the progressive character of history:

I have been long impressed with the same sentiments you so well express of the growing felicity of mankind, from the improvements in philosophy, morals, politics, and even the conveniences of common living, by the invention and acquisition of new and useful utensils and instruments, that I have sometimes almost wished it had been my destiny to be born two or three centuries hence. For invention and improvement are prolific; and beget more of their kind (*LOA* 1167).

This letter, in many ways, surmises Franklin's view of life as expressed in his *Autobiography*. Models for acquiring improvements in philosophy, morals, and politics, were written into the various parts of *The Autobiography*, as understood and implemented through common, daily living. And those improvements kept replicating, allowing republican communities to "beget more of their kind."

Through his life long interaction with the enlightenment discourses of the republic of letters and the discourse of science, Franklin had learned, and contributed to, the improvements in philosophy, science, morals, and politics, and the grounding of those

fields in social reason instead of theology, coercion, or superstition. And for Franklin, the progress in those fields was directly related to his understanding of writing and communication. Indeed, in Franklin's mind, it was writing, and the changing definition and public role attributed to writing, that greatly contributed to progress. It is no surprise, then, to find Franklin's political and philosophic ideas couched in metaphors of writing throughout *The Autobiography*.

It was to the reciprocal, dialogic principles, learned in his earliest writings, that Franklin stayed true to till the end of his life. While much has been written of the epitaph he wrote for himself in 1728, where he again couched his life in images of writing, it was the actual inscription on his tombstone that best drives home his republican, enlightenment beliefs. The simple unadorned gravestone, in a corner of Christ Church cemetery simply reads "Benjamin and Deborah Franklin." There was to be no monument or estate to act as a seat of pilgrimage or remembrance. His death, like his life, would serve as an example of republican and enlightenment principles. In death, as in life, Franklin would not demarcate himself from his fellow citizens. In his last letter to his sister Jane Mecom, written just months before his death, Franklin reminded her that "the word Excellency does not belong to me, and Dr. will be sufficient to distinguish me from my grandson" (LOA 1171). In his last written act, preserved for all eternity, Franklin had inscribed his belief in civic equality as the basis of republicanism. For Franklin knew that as long as his readers could relate to him as an equal, his conversation would not end.

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