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## Representing the Eighteenth-Century World: Benjamin Franklin, Trickster

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At the age of sixteen, he made his entry on the public stage as an elderly woman, criticizing the pretensions and hypocrisy of Massachusetts' lapsed puritanical elite. At eighty-four, he took his final bow as a North African Muslim, fallaciously arguing for the enslavement of Christians using the arguments offered by pro-slavery advocates in the United States to keep Africans in bondage. In between, he appeared as a "poor" writer of almanacs, a pregnant unmarried woman, a "plain man," the King of Prussia, and in many more guises, including an enigmatic character in his autobiography known as "I." He is the only person in history simultaneously ranked among the finest authors, serious scientists, practical inventors, and political figures of his age. He so effectively hid whatever true self he possessed that over two centuries after his death, scholars have built careers arguing whether he was a capitalist or a communitarian, a shameless self-promoter or a selfless public servant, a deist or a child of the Puritans, a patriot or (as one serious scholar makes a plausible case) an enemy spy.<sup>1</sup>

Of course "he" is Benjamin Franklin. As preparations are under way to celebrate the three hundredth anniversary of his birth, what more can be said about one of the most "biographied" characters in history? Franklin's fictional personae are the clue to understanding him as the embodiment of the classic figure of Trickster. C. W. Spinks, Professor of English at Trinity University in San Antonio, founder of the on-line journal *Trickster's Way*, author and editor of numerous books on the subject, variously defines Trickster as: "the hero who . . . is used to satirize the conventions of culture." But he grows "from being a buffoon and joker to being a culture hero who will forward the goals of culture or slay the monsters that threaten the culture." Despite his humorous exterior, he "risks all and brings whatever sacred gifts a people use." He accomplishes his task not through the heavy-handed indoctrination of the ideologue, but through the "generation of marginal signs, either as personifying cultural change, or dissolution and growth"; he is "the border creature who plays at the margins of self, symbol, and culture."<sup>2</sup>

The signs Franklin created to play at the margins of society were marginal people (aged women or unwed mothers; "poor" and "plain" men) behaving or arguing sensibly, or authority figures (the King of Prussia or a Muslim aristocrat) acting or ranting tyrannically. He also perpetuated hoaxes which made fun of social prejudices, but whose authenticity continued to be argued after his death. Like the jester-figures from Native American, Australian Aboriginal, Hawaiian, and South American mythology who are more frequently investigated by scholars of Trickster, Franklin is best known not as the great Dr. Franklin, an exalted personage like Washington, Adams, or Jefferson. Instead, we see him as "Ben" (imagine Georgie, Johnnie, or Tommy!), the amorphous embodiment of whatever one wishes to believe, good or bad, represents America: "the first downright American" for D. H. Lawrence, the "father of all the Yankees" for Thomas Carlyle.<sup>3</sup> Franklin was the man who consciously, in a lifetime of writing and playing the trickster, undertook to represent nearly the entire world of the eighteenth century: men, women, black, whites, and people from different classes and continents. His writings under assumed names offer us rich insights and delightful anecdotes of contemporary life.

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It is easy enough to locate the roots of Franklin's populism. Although his father was a reasonably prosperous candle maker in Boston, Ben was his seventeenth child, his mother's seventh. Apprenticed to his brother James, a printer and publisher of the *New England Courant*, America's first anti-establishment newspaper, young Ben became Silence Dogood, an elderly woman, wise but unlearned. He described Harvard College as a temple where wealth rather than merit guaranteed admittance to "dunces and blockheads" who graduated "as great blockheads as ever, only more proud and self-conceited."<sup>4</sup> Franklin chose the name Dogood in honor of Cotton Mather, the Boston minister who had allowed him to borrow books from his large personal library, and author of a collection of writings popularly known as *Essays to Do Good*. Yet Franklin was playing the double trickster. Mather wrote and preached incessantly, identifying his pronouncements with those of the Deity. The name "Silence" suggests implicitly that without his pretentious and argumentative personality, Mather's ideas would have been taken more seriously.

In 1723, writing again in the *Courant* under the pseudonym Timothy Wagstaff, Franklin took on the New England clergy collectively. He condemned preachers who "serve our God . . . with all the dismal solemnities of a gloomy Soul, and a dejected Countenance . . . who upon all Occasions are so apt to condemn their Brethren." Rather, they "should study to know the State of their Flocks in General, and acquit themselves in their office accordingly."<sup>5</sup>

Subsequently, in 1729 in Philadelphia, as the "Busy-Body" in the *American Mercury*, published by his soon-to-be competitor Andrew Bradford, Franklin remarked: "Thou sower Philosopher! Thou cunning Statesman! Thou art crafty, but far from being Wise." He suggested government officials imitate Cato, the virtuous, simple-living Roman, who was treated with "unfeign'd Respect and warm Good-Will" rather than the "cringing, mean, submissive" deportment of those who flattered the high and mighty. Even in his twenties, Franklin exemplified the optimistic and generous spirit of the American Enlightenment he would ultimately embody.<sup>6</sup>

Franklin did more than criticize Harvard and the dreary clergy. He founded his own educational institutions, the first in America if not the world which -- as their historian George Boudreau has pointed out -- made available to aspiring middle-class men the learning only obtainable in the colonies' three colleges. After he settled permanently in Philadelphia in the 1720s, Franklin founded the Junto, a club where members would discuss philosophical and practical issues, and the Library Company of Philadelphia. Those who purchased a membership in the latter -- the money was used to buy the books -- would have the borrowing privileges Mather gave the young Franklin. Franklin replaced the traditional classroom setting and juvenile discipline of the colonial colleges with a vigorous symposium attended only by those who craved learning and intelligent conversation. The Library Company persists to this day at Thirteenth and Locust Streets, a statue of Franklin (minus a nose) enclosed within its façade. It contains Franklin's own library and one of the most extensive collections of early American printed matter in the nation: serious researchers are no longer charged.<sup>7</sup>

In Philadelphia, other women followed in Silence Dogood's footsteps. Martha Careful and Celia Shortface wrote letters protesting that Samuel Keimer -- with Franklin and Andrew Bradford one of three printers in the city -- had begun publishing a serial encyclopedia that spoke of "abortion" in the first issue. Childbirth in colonial America

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was largely the realm of midwives, many of whom, such as the German women discussed by historian Renate Wilson, and Martha Ballard of Maine, the subject of Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's biography, enjoyed a percentage of healthy births that would still be enviable today. By pretending to know the secrets of this female art, and making it available to the "vulgar" in taverns and coffee houses. Keimer left himself open for Franklin's fictional women to threaten to cut off his beard and his ear.<sup>8</sup>

Franklin also produced two of his most famous hoaxes, the witchcraft trial at Mt. Holly, New Jersey, and the story of Polly Baker, to protest mistreatment of women. Colonial witches were found almost exclusively in Puritan New England, the society Franklin found oppressive. And in arguing that she ought to be rewarded rather than punished for increasing the population, unwed mother Polly Baker was a riposte to those who criticized Franklin's own common-law marriage and the offspring he himself sired.<sup>9</sup>

Franklin was not above taking both sides in the battle of the sexes in letters he wrote to his own *Pennsylvania Gazette* to drum up sales. Having himself sought a dowry from a wealthy father for a woman he did not marry, Franklin arranged for "Anthony Afterwit" to complain that not only did his father-in-law renege on the promised dowry, but his wife expected to be supported in the genteel manner to which she was accustomed. Calling attention to the numerous "baubles from Britain" historian T. H. Breen has shown were becoming increasingly more desirable and available to colonists in the mid-eighteenth century, Afterwit complained that his wife sought a fancy new looking glass, table, china, silverware, a maid, a horse, and a clock – a very rare and expensive item at the time. In keeping with a nascent upper-class habit, she began to experience imaginary ailments and withdraw from the city in the summer to avoid the heat and. Afterwit planned to solve these problems by getting rid of all these items and putting his wife to work spinning flax. But he nevertheless offered to restore his wife to her "former way of living . . . if [her] *Dad* will be at the expense of it."<sup>10</sup>

Two weeks later, Afterwit met his match in Celia Single, another Franklin character. She chided men who promised during courtship to treat their wives like gentlewomen only to lack the means once married. As for idleness, Mr. Billiard the pool shooter, Mr. Husselcap the dice player, Mr. Finikin the dandy, Mr. Crownhim the checker-board enthusiast, Mr. T'otherpot "the tavern-haunter, Mr. Bookish the everlasting reader" and others were "mightily diligent at anything besides their business." Their families only survived thanks to the diligence of their wives. Franklin even used Miss Single to satirize himself: she told the printer he ought not to stir up marital disputes by printing articles such as Afterwit's. In this exchange, Franklin not only offers a glimpse of colonial leisure and the contemporary version of the battle between the sexes, but catches the ambivalence industrious inhabitants felt upon the influx of luxury goods, which they both desired yet feared as a threat to a virtuous social order.<sup>11</sup>

Writing in his own *Gazette* again, in 1732 as Alice Addertongue, Franklin criticized the "Idiot Mock-Moralists" who blamed the "enormous" crime of gossiping on the "fair sex." Alice rebutted that judging by the way Pennsylvania's male voters gossiped about their political leaders, you would think that they "chose into all their Offices of Hour and Trust, the veriest Knaves, Fools, and Rascals in the whole Province."<sup>12</sup> In 1733, also in the *Gazette*, Franklin impersonated a "Blackamore, or Molatto Gentleman," who lamented that mulattoes were shunned by both blacks and whites as a prelude to denouncing snobbery of all kinds: "*The true Gentleman*, who is

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well-known to be such, can take a Walk, or drink a Glass, and converse freely, with honest Men of any Degree below him, without degrading or fearing to degrade himself.” Franklin became a “Blackamore” to attack racism and explode the pretensions of the nouveau riche, that “monstrously ridiculous Molatto gentleman,” “an unnatural compound of clay and Brass, like the Feet of Nebuchadnezzar’s idol.” “For my part,” the Blackamore/Franklin claimed “I am an ordinary Mechanick, and I pray I may always have the grace to know my place and Station.” When he met people who put on airs, the Blackamore dubbed them “*half Gentry*. . . the Ridicule and Contempt” of both rich and poor, the real “*Molattoes in Religion, in Politicks*.”<sup>13</sup>

The young Franklin not only transformed himself into a variety of lower-class people: he did not publish his almanac in his own name, but took on the sobriquet “Poor Richard” Saunders. To show identification with the common man, it was customary for American colonial writers to lower themselves a peg or two on the class hierarchy: John Adams, for instance, first appeared in print as Humphrey Ploughjogger [a derogatory term for farmer] while wealthy lawyer and estate owner John Dickinson penned the famous “Letters from a Pennsylvania Farmer.” Few Americans would have known that Franklin was paying tribute to Richard Saunders, one of the finest almanac makers in England, whose work Franklin encountered on his youthful journey to the mother country. But in the late 1770s, everyone knew that John Paul Jones’ warship, “the Bonhomme [Poor] Richard” was both financed and named after Franklin, the almanac writer and minister to France, its guns trained upon the coast of a nation which had failed to understand the people he represented in so many ways.<sup>14</sup>

Franklin transformed himself again, into Obadiah Plainman, when he defended the evangelist Rev. George Whitefield on his first visit to Philadelphia in 1740. Whitefield’s supporters included Richard Bolton, the owner of the building in which the city’s elite Dancing Assembly met -- it still holds a formal ball each year. Bolton barred the group -- which would not admit tradesmen such as Franklin, regardless of his wealth or social standing -- from his premises. The Assembly’s anonymous apologist responded with a letter to Franklin’s *Gazette* on May 8 charging that Whitefield’s ministry was false. His language was condescending: the Dancing School rooms were “theirs” [the members’] even though Bolton owned the space they had merely rented. The spokesman also condemned Whitefield’s “low Craft” in pretending that “he had met with great Success among the better Sort of People in Pennsylvania,” who in fact “had both him and his mischievous tenets in the utmost Contempt.”<sup>15</sup>

“Obadiah Plainman” responded with a letter which appeared in the *Gazette* on May 15. . . The pseudonym he chose is significant: it sounds like “Obeyed I A Plain Man.” He leveled his cannon at the two words – “BETTER SORT” – that his opponents used to describe themselves. Franklin made sure to capitalize these words whenever Plainman quoted them to mock his opponents’ inflated self-opinion. For instance: *We take Notice, that you have ranked yourself under the Denomination of the BETTER SORT of People, which is an Expression always made use of in Contradistinction to the meaner Sort, i. e. the Mob, or the Rabble. . . Terms of outrageous Reproach, when applied to Us by our enemies. . . Your Demonsthene and Ciceroes, your Sidneys and Trenchards never approached Us but with Reverence: The High and Mighty Mob, the Majesty of the Rabble, the Honour and Dignity of the Populace, Or such like Terms of Respect.*

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Franklin here appealed to the canon of English “New Whig” thought, where ancient statesmen like Greece’s Demosthenes and Rome’s Cicero took their places as exemplary defenders of popular liberty beside British figures such as the Elizabethans Philip and Algernon Sidney and the contemporary writer John Trenchard. A real elite, worthy to govern, these heroes “never took upon them to make a Difference of Persons, but as they were distinguished by the Virtues and Vices.”

In contrast stood those Philadelphians who “usurp’d the title of the BETTER SORT . . . without any previous application to or Consent first had of their Fellow-Citizens.” By styling themselves the “better sort,” the members had sinned against history, political theory, and a true civility embodied in public spirit and mutual respect rather than private affectation.

To clinch his case, Plainman accused his adversaries of entering public life and placing their case before the reading public yet refusing to play by the rules. The elite had voluntarily forsaken the walled-in spaces of churches, government buildings, and dancing societies to write for the papers, thus ironically making the very “Mob” they condemned into their own “*Judges* of this IMPORTANT Controversy.” Franklin put IMPORTANT in capitals to indicate that much was being made of little. Using the same capital letters he did to denote “BETTER SORT,” he suggested, literally, that they were falsely elevating themselves. In contrast Franklin italicized *Us*, *Mob*, and *Rabble*, a typesetting convention indicating that something was indeed worthy of emphasis, to call attention to the derogatory words the Dancing Assembly’s defenders used to describe their critics.<sup>16</sup>

As he won honors for his scientific experiments and praise for his colonial agency, Franklin ceased to be a creator of symbols and became one himself. Fellow almanac maker Nathaniel Ames of Dedham, Massachusetts, whose work sold some 60,000 copies per year in New England, six times the circulation of Franklin’s *Poor Richard*, presented Franklin as proof that America could produce geniuses as well as Europe even though it had only been settled for a little over a hundred years. In his 1755 almanac, referring to Franklin’s famous kite experiment, Ames waxed poetic:

who’ere presum’d, till FRANKLIN led the Way,  
To climb the amazing Highth of Heaven,  
And rob the Sky of its Tremendous Thunder.<sup>17</sup>

Interestingly, as Tom Tucker has recently argued, Franklin’s kite experiment may have been his greatest hoax. The experiment as he described it would have been nearly impossible to survive.<sup>18</sup>

Yet this possibility went unnoticed until 2003. At the time, Ames echoed the general consensus the Franklin ranked with Newton as one of the greatest scientists of all time. He had written the last chapter in human intellectual history thus far, permitting new insight into the principles by which the Almighty had structured the cosmos. Eight years later, Ames recalled Franklin the demographer, who in 1751 had written in his “Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind . . .” that land in America was so plentiful that “the Farmer may have Land for nothing,” in a “territory large enough for a Kingdom.” In the last of the Ames, Sr. almanacs, completed in 1764, it was “the Bostonian the Hon. Benjamin Franklin” that Ames praised, claiming Franklin’s hometown as the source of his public spirit and intellectual bent although he had left in

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1723 and never returned. Franklin's observations were "justly held in the greatest honor by all the polite and enlightened Nations of Europe. Ames even predicted that a musical instrument Franklin invented, the glass harmonica, a mechanical version of producing sounds on glasses filled to different levels, would "chant forth his honor for generations to come," although its main function has been providing occasionally ghostly background music.<sup>19</sup>

A major change occurred in Franklin's self-presentation in the year 1748. Previously, his almanacs had praised women and rarely entered the political arena. But shortly before he retired from the printing business – although he continued to compile Poor Richard's almanac until 1758 – Franklin became involved in provincial politics in spite of himself. In his twenties and thirties, his efforts to do good were uncontroversial: promotion of discussion groups, libraries, fire companies, and street paving. But in 1747, when defenseless Pennsylvania was threatened by privateers during King George's War, Franklin again turned to the voluntary association. To get around the pacifist Quakers who dominated the Assembly, he enrolled those willing to fight in companies of associators. Even this limited effort at defense, however, generated a huge controversy in the press: Quaker spokesmen argued the Almighty had spared Pennsylvania the ravages of war precisely because it refrained from any military activity, and tried to disband the association.<sup>20</sup>

Both Franklin and Poor Richard thereafter turned more and more to the public sphere. The almanac praised the "HERO" of "PUBLICK SPIRIT" (1752) as opposed to the military/dynastic "Hero" who "in horrid grandeur . . . reigns," rulers such as Louis XIV of France and Charles XII of Sweden who ruined their kingdoms through military ambition. The plebeian hero, of course, was none other than Franklin himself.

Franklin occasionally adopted fictional personae during his years as a diplomat, but with much less frequency. Scholars are familiar with his "Edict of the King of Prussia," where he selected Europe's most despotic monarch to impose fictive regulations on unrepresented Britons in the hope of persuading them not to treat the colonists so arbitrarily. As minister to France he wore a fur cap rather than the elite powdered wig to suggest the French were allied to an uncorrupted people living close to nature. (Earlier in his career, he made sure his portraits depicted him with a wig and in elegant clothes.) And if we are to believe Cecil Currey, Franklin was Code Number 72 or Moses, a double agent for the British secret service who kept them informed of French and American plans during the war. (It is more probable that Franklin as always never revealed a "true" self; in a complex world of diplomatic intrigue, he stayed in touch with people from different nations, playing them against each other. If he was pro-British, he certainly fooled his fellow negotiators John Jay and John Adams, who thought he was too submissive to the French.)

Returning to America just short of his eightieth birthday, Franklin was not allowed to rest. He was elected as a Pennsylvania delegate to the Constitutional Convention. Franklin never spoke except when fellow Pennsylvania delegate James Wilson read his speeches. During the hot Philadelphia summer of 1787, the Convention kept its doors and windows closed in order that people outside would not mistake disagreements over particular points for fundamental divisions over the need for a Constitution. Franklin probably dozed off a fair amount. But when the disputes awakened him or threatened to become as hot as the room, he had Wilson remind the

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delegates of their need for unanimity, for if a handful of committed nationalists could not bury their differences, what hope was there for the nation as a whole? Franklin's final plea to the convention contains, as his biographer Walter Isaacson notes, "the most eloquent words Franklin ever wrote – and perhaps the best ever written about the magic of the American system and the spirit that created it."<sup>21</sup> Admitting that as he grew older he was more inclined to doubt his own infallibility, Franklin agreed "to this Constitution with all its faults, if they are such, because I think a general government necessary for us, [and] there is no form of government but what may be a blessing to the people if well administered." Predicting the Constitution would last until "the people shall become so corrupted as to need despotic government," he urged the delegates to forget their objections: "Within these walls they were born, and here they shall die."<sup>22</sup>

Not only was Franklin's speech an inspiration to the delegates, it was widely circulated among the American people and played an immeasurable but important role in popular ratification. At the Constitutional Convention, Franklin had become the representative of an entire nation that put the common need for a strong central government ahead of their particular interests. Perhaps as many citizens voted against the Constitution as for it, and final approval was only obtained after considerable skullduggery by the victors. Yet following Franklin's cue, with the election of Washington as President, the people put aside their doubts and gave the republic a fair chance. Except for the southern secession, they have continued to do so to this day.

Yet even the Convention did not end the octogenarian Franklin's service. He trained his grandson Benjamin Franklin Bache to follow in his footsteps as a printer and engaged participant in public life. As editor of the *Philadelphia Aurora* during the 1790s, Bache championed Americans of diverse religions and ethnic groups such as the Jews, the French, and the Irish, who the Federalists would have excluded as un-American. On pleasant days, Franklin would sit in his front yard with a model of a bridge designed by Thomas Paine to cross the Schuylkill River. Such a bridge was built shortly after his death. The aged Franklin became a spokesman for the nation's commercial and economic development.<sup>23</sup>

In his last work, published less than a month before his death in 1790 and a month after he had personally petitioned Congress to abolish slavery, Franklin assumed the identity of Sidi Mehemet Ibrahim, an Algerian potentate, justifying the enslavement of Christians on exactly the same grounds a southern representative had recently used to support African slavery. (To make the argument more telling, at that very moment American sailors were enslaved in North Africa.) Without Christian slaves, the Muslim argued, the economy of North Africa would collapse, since the people there were unsuited to doing heavy work in a hot climate; furthermore, by living in an Islamic nation, the Christians could be civilized and their souls saved as they could not in the heathen and barbaric lands of Europe and America. "Let us then hear no more of this detestable proposition, the manumission of Christian slaves, the adoption of which would, by depreciating our lands and houses, and thereby depriving so many good citizens of their properties, create universal discontent, and provoke insurrections, to the endangering of government, and reducing general confusion." Franklin closed his public career as President of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, pleading that "Mankind are all formed by the same Almighty Being, alike objects of his care, and equally destined for the enjoyment of happiness."<sup>24</sup>

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Even after his death, Franklin hoped to represent the American people. He left the money he had earned as President of the state of Pennsylvania to the cities of Philadelphia and Boston to educate young tradesmen to duplicate his path to fame and fortune. The Franklin Institute, in Philadelphia and Franklin Union (now the Franklin Trade Institute) in Boston were two fruits of the interest on his bequest after a century. Yet his gifts exposed the problems of passing on his legacy, of reproducing Franklin's success in an increasingly complex society. Just as the University of Pennsylvania became an elite institution, defeating Franklin's hope – at least until the present age of tuition scholarships – that it would serve to advance lower and middle-class people, the trade schools that opened a century after his death in Philadelphia and Boston provided vocational training that, in the late nineteenth century, educators were urging as the only way immigrants and their children, like African Americans, could attain a limited social mobility while children of the established elite continued to receive the traditional college educations that trained them for political and business leadership.

The fate of most of Franklin's bequests to his own family showed that his rhetoric of patriotism and industry represented one sort of America, his later life another, less savory, one. To his son, William Franklin, who through his father's efforts had been appointed royal Governor of New Jersey and who remained loyal to the crown, Franklin left some worthless land in British Canada. To his daughter Sally, on the condition it remained intact, Franklin left a portrait of King Louis XVI framed by 417 diamonds that the monarch had presented to Franklin. She promptly broke up the frame, sold the jewels, and used the money to travel in high style in England with her husband and reunite with her much-loved brother, William. Sally had been born in 1743, and her father had been absent in Europe from her fourteenth through thirty-second years except for two years in the early 1760s. Sally thus symbolically and retrospectively sided with her brother and former mother country against Franklin and the French alliance that had facilitated independence. Franklin left most of his property to her husband, Richard Bache, on the condition he freed his slave Bob. Bache did so, but lacking education or opportunity Bob took to drink, asked to be re-enslaved, and lived out his life as a dependent.<sup>25</sup>

Franklin's heirs, with the exception of his grandson "Benny" Bache, whose brief career – he died of smallpox aged 29 in 1798 – places him among the small minority who carried on the spirit of Franklin's revolution on behalf of the common person, followed the example of his mature life rather than his carefully cultivated image as the common man. Franklin lived twenty-five of the last thirty-three years of his life in Paris and London, enjoying the high way of life, company, and praise of the very aristocrats he mocked in his earlier writings. For all his sympathy for ordinary people of whatever race or gender, Franklin remains the quintessential American in that like the nation he founded, he never confronted the fact that the success he enjoyed was only possible in a society where some workers would always serve masters.

Perhaps this is why Franklin's final, and most puzzling persona, "I", never finished his story. In reading *The Autobiography*, which Franklin began in 1771 and left unfinished in at his death, the memorable passages concern the young man who came to town with the loaves of bread under his arms, who strove to be virtuous, and who created various associations to benefit the city of Philadelphia. Once Franklin retired from printing in 1748 and entered the morally complicated realm of high politics, his story

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became convoluted, the justice of his causes less clear, and he soon ceased to tell it. That he was too old and ill to finish the book is one explanation he never finished.<sup>26</sup> But I prefer to think that Franklin wanted to be remembered as Ben rather than the man who, in stealing thunder from the skies and the scepter from tyrants, was so effectively seduced by the very aristocratic society and political intrigue he had satirized so effectively earlier on in both word and deed. The eighteenth century brought political liberty to the white men who owned property in France, America, and elsewhere without laying the foundation for a society that enabled all people to own property. Rhetorically, and to some extent by example and financial donations, Franklin tried to expand that class. But like the America for which he still stands, these efforts were far too little, and now they are far too late. We continue in theory to venerate the poor boy who makes good while making it tough for poor girls and boys to follow in Franklin's footsteps. We have put Franklin on the hundred dollar bill, and institutionalized him in mints and institutes to pat ourselves on the back. Franklin is no longer the jester and critic, but the paragon of virtue. We need to bring back Trickster Ben, as he did himself at the last minute, when he became Sidi Mehemet Ibrahim.

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### Notes

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<sup>1</sup> For the capitalist, see Peter Baida, *Poor Richard's Legacy: American Business Values from Benjamin Franklin to Donald Trump* (New York: William Morrow, 1990); the communitarian and public servant, James Campbell, *Recovering Benjamin Franklin: An Exemplary Life of Science and Service* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999); the self-promoter, D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (New York: Viking, 1951), 19-31; the deist, Alfred O. Aldridge, *Benjamin Franklin and Nature's God* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1967) the Puritan, David Levin, *The Puritan in the Enlightenment: Franklin and Edwards* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1963); the patriot, Paul W. Conner, *Poor Richard's Politicks: Benjamin Franklin and the New American Order* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965); the spy, Cecil B. Currey, *Code Number 72: Benjamin Franklin, Patriot or Spy?* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1972).

<sup>2</sup> For the journal, see <http://www.trinity.edu/org/tricksters/TrixWay/>; for quotations in this paragraphs, see C. W. Spinks, "The Laughter of Signs: Semiosis as Trickster," <http://www.trinity.edu/cspinks/myth/trixsem.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature*, 19-31; Esmond Wright, *Franklin of Philadelphia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1986): 7.

<sup>4</sup> *New England Courant*, May 14, 1722. Numerous editions of Franklin's writings include a volume in the Library of America, a website (The History Carper), and a complete edition of his papers being edited at Yale University Press. Most writings can be consulted wherever found, but it is important, however, only to use the authoritative edition of the *Autobiography* edited by J. A. Leo Lemay and Paul Zall (New York: Norton, 1986) which shows additions and corrections Franklin made over the last two

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decades of his life which are a valuable guide to his changing thoughts and conception of himself.

<sup>5</sup> *New England Courant*, April 15, 1723.

<sup>6</sup> *American Weekly Mercury*, February 18, 1729,

<sup>7</sup> George Boudreau, "Done By A Tradesman": Franklin's Educational Proposals and the Culture of Eighteenth Century Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania History*, 69 (2002): 524-57; "Highly Valuable and Extensively Useful": Community and Readership Among the Eighteenth Century Philadelphia Middling Sort," *Pennsylvania History*, 63 (1996): 302-29.

<sup>8</sup> *American Weekly Mercury*, February 18, 1729; Renate Wilson, *Pious Traders in Medicine: A German Pharmaceutical Network in Eighteenth Century North America* (University Park: Penn State Press, 2000); Laurel Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Knopf, 1990).

<sup>9</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, October 22, 1730; Max Hall, *Benjamin Franklin & Polly Baker: The History of a Literary Deception* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997).

<sup>10</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, July 10, 1732;; T. H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004);

<sup>11</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, July 24, 1732; J. E. Crowley, *This Sheba, Self: The Economic Life of Eighteenth Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974).

<sup>12</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, September 12, 1732.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, August 20, 1733.

<sup>14</sup> William Pencak, "Politics and Ideology in Poor Richard's Almanack," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 116 (1992): 183-211.

<sup>15</sup> William Pencak, "Beginning of a Beautiful Friendship: Benjamin Franklin, George Whitefield, the 'Dancing School Blockheads,' and a Defense of the 'Meaner Sort'" *Proteus*, 19 (2002): 45-50; John Williams, "The Strange Case of Dr. Franklin and Mr. Whitefield" *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 102 (1978): 399-421.

<sup>16</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 15, 1740.

<sup>17</sup> William Pencak, "Nathaniel Ames, Sr., and the Political Culture of New England," *Historical Journal of Massachusetts*, 22 (1994): 141-158.

<sup>18</sup> Tom Tucker, *Bolt of Fate: Benjamin Franklin and the Electric Kite Hoax* (New York: Public Affairs Press, 2003).

<sup>19</sup> Pencak, "Nathaniel Ames, Sr."

<sup>20</sup> Pencak, "Politics and Ideology in Poor Richard's Almanack"

<sup>21</sup> Walter Isaacson, *A Benjamin Franklin Reader* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 363.

<sup>22</sup> William George Carr, *The Oldest Delegate: Benjamin Franklin in the Constitutional Convention* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1990).

<sup>23</sup> I owe this information to Barbara Oberg, currently editor-in-chief of the Papers of Thomas Jefferson, who presented it in a paper at the Pennsylvania Historical Association annual meeting, October, 2002.

<sup>24</sup> *The Federal Gazette*, March 23, 1790.

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<sup>25</sup> See Isaacson, *Franklin Reader*, 380-393 for Franklin's will.

<sup>26</sup> For my own attempt to interpret the Autobiography, see "Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*, Cotton Mather, and a Puritan God," *Pennsylvania History*, 51 (1984): 1-25.