1991

The Perpetual Journey: Jonathan Edwards' "Personal Narrative" and Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography

Pamela A. Masden
Eastern Illinois University

THESIS REPRODUCTION CERTIFICATE

TO: Graduate Degree Candidates who have written formal theses.

SUBJECT: Permission to reproduce theses.

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

Please sign one of the following statements:

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

8/8/91

Date Author

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

_____

_____

_____ _____

Date Author

The Perpetual Journey: Jonathan Edwards'

"Personal Narrative" and Benjamin Franklin's

(TITLE) Autobiography

BY

Pamela A. Masden

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Arts in English

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1991
YEAR

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

8.7.91
DATE

ADVISER

8/8/91
DATE

DEPARTMENT HEAD

ABSTRACT

Scholarly readers seem to have avoided a comparison of the writings of Jonathan Edwards (1703-58) and Benjamin Franklin (1706-90). Although they were born three years apart, they are rarely represented in anthologies as having been contemporaries, primarily because Edwards was a Puritan preacher and Franklin was an "Enlightenment" politician and inventor. However, when we disregard these critical constraints and assumptions, we find that as writers and thinkers, they have a great deal in common.

In my thesis, I have examined the autobiographies of these contemporary works: Edwards' "Personal Narrative" (c. 1739-42) and Franklin's Autobiography (1771-88). The theoretical approaches of Jane P. Tompkins, Wolfgang Iser, and others have provided me the critical background by which to read these texts. In considering the reader's roles of choosing an "authoritative" voice, interpreting, and responding, we find that the reader is vital to life-writings. Also, we learn that in examining the text, the reader enters into and participates in the autobiographers' lives.

An examination of the two narratives reveals three bases for comparison. The first is the way they remember themselves as young men. Following a

convention established by earlier Puritan autobiography, Edwards and Franklin write about their childhoods in order to understand that their lives are journeys of trial and error. Both discover that although their adult lives are valuable, their early experiences contributed significantly to their lifelong education: Edwards was educated by God, and Franklin was educated by writing.

A second comparison between Edwards and Franklin is their method of identification of errors and failures in their lives. When we read their life-writings, we may expect them to follow the tradition in autobiography of stressing factual details and success. Instead, both men are "silent" about the historical facts of their lives, providing minimal detail of the instances that made them well-known. From the events that are included, Edwards and Franklin articulate their lives in relation to their errors and failures. As a result, they judge themselves for their readers in very human terms: imperfect, humble, and frail.

The final examination made between Edwards and Franklin is their struggles with language. Even though they were known for their communicative abilities, Edwards as a preacher and Franklin as a writer, both men demonstrate an inability to choose the precise words to describe their feelings in their autobiographies. In

their very search for words, however, they often underestimate their capacity to articulate: what they can express to us is their suspicions of the very institutions they helped establish. Their difficulty of expression allows us to understand their "worlds" because we recognize their fears and struggles. In addition, we share the struggle of the perpetual journeys of Jonathan Edwards and Benjamin Franklin.

DEDICATION

My thesis is dedicated with all of my Puritan heart and soul to my director and friend, Dr. Ann Boswell. I sincerely admire the strength and courage she had throughout this project. I would like to thank her for teaching me not only everything about the early Americans, but also to appreciate their literature. I can only express how I feel about her teaching style in Puritan terms: I emulate it more than I can articulate.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The most important people in the development of my thesis deserve priority recogintion. I thank my director Dr. Ann Boswell and reader Dr. Lee Steinmetz for their enthusiasm in my topic as well as for stimulating my interest in Colonial American Literature. My other reader, Dr. Linda Coleman, deserves a round of applause for her insightful comments and for her delivery skills.

I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to numerous others. I must first thank my family for their support, most especially my sister Lynne Kelliher for endless hours gathering my reading material, saving me much frustration from library loan. I appreciate the overwhelming number of spirit-lifters given by my wonderful colleagues, Andrea Chile-Bean Campana and Timothy Poremba. Many special thanks to Tricia Andrews for her friendship, to Toni Aumann for her patience with my "verbal thesis," and to Elwood for taking me to five stores for the correct paper. I must also give a BIG thank you to everyone who thought Edwards and Franklin were incomparable--I fooled you all!

Finally, for all the love (and support) in the world, I would like to thank the sweetest man on earth, Michael B. Barger. I would never have started or finished my thesis without him.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents Page Number

"The life is represented in autobiography
not as something established but as a process;
it is not simply the narrative of the voyage,
but also the voyage itself."

Roy Pascal, Design and Truth in Autobiography (1960)

I

INTRODUCTION

Jonathan Edwards (1703-58) and Benjamin Franklin (1706-90) are among the most significant writers and men of the American Colonial period. Although they were born three years apart, they are almost never represented in anthologies as having been contemporaries because Edwards was a Puritan preacher and Franklin was a "voice" of the colonial Enlightenment. As a result, many anthologies place Edwards in a "Puritan" section and then place Franklin in a later "Enlightenment" section. If the men are considered chronologically, however, they should be examined together. When we disregard the constraints of anthology divisions, and when we read Edwards and Franklin as contemporaries, we find that as writers and thinkers, they have a great deal in common.

As writers, Edwards and Franklin are similar in that they both wrote autobiographies, one of the most common modes of expression during the eighteenth century. Beginning with the early seventeenth century, many men and women produced some kind of personal writing in the form of diaries, spiritual autobiographies, personal narratives, or memoirs. Edwards and Franklin, conforming to this tradition, both

wrote about themselves: Edwards created a narrative of his conversion, later called the "Personal Narrative" (c. 1739-42), and Franklin wrote a set of four memoirs, later titled The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin (1771-88). In a comparison of these life-writings, striking similarities emerge as to how these men perceive and judge themselves.

As thinkers, both Edwards and Franklin are similar in three ways in their narratives. The first is how they judge themselves through perceptions of their youth. Edwards, at age twenty, had encountered what he thought was a religious conversion, a testimony of personal religious experience as evidence of the applicant's visible sainthood (Caldwell 1). Reexamining the experience as an older man, Edwards learns that he was wrong. In the same way, Franklin had been an idealistic young man who thought he might be capable of perfection. Yet, it takes the writing of his autobiography at age seventy to make him look back and recognize his then immature view of the world and of himself. Through these and other examples of their variable opinions about their youth, Edwards and Franklin show that as mature writers, they must continually readjust their perceptions of themselves.

A second similarity Edwards and Franklin share is how they deal with their successes and failures.

We know that Edwards and Franklin were famous during their own lifetimes, yet in their life-writing, they rarely, if ever, mention those "episodes" for which they were--and are--well-known. It is from what these men do not say in their narratives and from the failures of their lives which they identify that we begin to understand what they defined as their successes. Because they often mention seemingly self-condemning episodes and mistakes, Edwards and Franklin seem to articulate not pride in themselves, but humility and fragility.

In a final comparison, Edwards and Franklin seem to indicate a desire to be remembered in their life-writings for their struggles rather than for their public lives and accomplishments. Even though they were expected to be articulate, both men demonstrate the inability to choose the precise words to describe their feelings. Similarly, they are suspicious of the very institutions they helped to establish. In the examination of these fears, we find that these men are more concerned with the future of others than with themselves.

A way in which the reader can begin to understand Edwards' and Franklin's narratives is by acknowledging that readers bring their texts back to life, that in the process of reading, we contribute to their

autobiographies. By first examining the relationship of a reader to a text, specifically to a life-writing, we might begin to understand the perpetual journeys of Jonathan Edwards and Benjamin Franklin.

II

RECEPTION THEORY AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

It might be reasonable to say that the reader is essential to a literary work, for it is ultimately the reader who brings the text back to life and prevents writings of any kind from being simply words printed on a page. Just as a writer has certain responsibilities in the process of writing, a reader has specific roles to perform before, during, and after reading a text. These examinations of the reader and her responses, especially as applied to autobiography, help to explain what readers significantly contribute to life-writings.

Before the act of reading occurs, the reader experiences a number of external factors which influence how a text is read. In her article "Criticism and Feeling," Jane P. Tompkins names these factors, among them age, sex, family background, hemisphere, and century, which she sees as affecting what can or cannot be derived from a text. The most important point she stresses is that these factors are "subject in varying degrees to change" (177). As simple as it seems, readers and their interpretations, especially with autobiography, are always changing throughout the reading experience. For example, the devout Christian reader of Jonathan Edwards' "Personal Narrative" would

likely read the text much differently than a reader who believes in no god at all. Likewise, Franklin's Autobiography would elicit very different responses from someone reading the text at two different times during her lifetime. In much the same way that Edwards and Franklin wrote the events of their lives after the events had occurred, thus separating their past lives from their presents lives, the process of reading demands that successful readers also must attempt to separate their active lives from their reading lives.

Wolfgang Iser suggests that if a reader detaches herself from her social system and beliefs, she will enable herself to reconstruct the historical situation of a text as well as to experience "the specific deficiencies brought about by those historical norms, and to recognize the answers implicit in the text" (Response 74). Despite varying interpretations among readers due to the various external factors, there seem to be constants which all readers, including those of autobiography, must take into consideration: the time period in which the text was produced, and the understanding that all responses are elicited, in one way or another, from the texts themselves. Although different readers will always have different responses, the texts themselves provide the common raw material from which readers can begin to process information

from texts.

As when reading any genre, readers of autobiography bring with them certain generic preconceptions. When a life-writing is examined, for example, the reader must agree to accept that the text is written as the author "planned" the life to be written, and that the work is, for the most part, nonfiction. Because the autobiographer has control of what is written, however, the reader should remember that the autobiographer commands what he includes as well as excludes from his narrative. At times, the events an autobiographer chooses to include can give the reader a distorted impression of the author, and therefore author's ideas can become "a poor tangle of distortions and vulgar simplifications" (Bruss 165). But as any text allows for different ways of fulfillment (Iser, Response 37), each reader of an autobiography will have the opportunity to discriminate and judge the value of the text for themselves.

Further, as autobiography is an act of communication, "the readers who look on as the autobiographer explains himself have their own explanations and impressions of the writer" (Bruss 170) as well as pre-understandings of the work itself. For example, we may know from other sources that Edwards was relieved of his duties at the Northampton church in

1750; therefore, when we read his "Personal Narrative," we expect him to relate that incident to us. When he does not even mention it, our perception of him changes. Likewise, when Franklin describes how he tried to be perfect, twentieth-century readers acknowledge his irony. An eighteenth-century reader, however, may have taken the incident quite seriously.

In literary texts, then, we must constantly readjust our perceptions of authors and texts, and realize that our expectations are always changing. If the authors of books fully conformed to the expectations of every reader, there would almost be no need for the authors to create the texts. Further, the reader becomes less active in her interpretations when she can, at best, only accept or reject the anticipated thesis (Iser, Implied 278). The reader of autobiography may ask the question, "Why does the narrator include this instance in his life as opposed to another?" No matter how many expectations collide in any given text, the reader can concern herself with determining why an event or character is included in a text rather than with determining the intentions of the author or editors.

For readers of autobiography, the authoritative role of the author becomes especially important. In autobiography, in addition to the autobiographer,

editors, critics, and readers become "authorities" in their individual expectations of what may or may not be included in the life-writing (Couser, Egos 253). The reader of life-writing, then, differs from other readers because she can examine other versions of the author's life as well as his autobiographical text in order to find an authoritative voice with which to interpret the writing. As William Howarth observes, this double narrator-persona creates an opportunity for a satisfying and exciting interpretation by the reader: "A narrator always knows more than his protagonist, yet he remains faithful to the latter's ignorance for the sake of credible suspense" (36). In fact, there emerge three "authorities" in autobiography: the author of the life-writing, the character the author creates within the autobiography, and the reader.

Because autobiography is "an examination of the self as both a sovereign integrity and a member of society" (Sayre 6), the reader has much to accomplish in the way of discriminating and understanding the two "selves" created by the autobiographer. The reader can attempt to identify places where the autobiographer appears to be an authority of the events as well as the instances where he projects an image of himself. Franklin, for example, describes himself in the third person at several points in his narrative as if he is

detaching himself as a writer from the Franklin he is desribing. This allows the reader to participate in transforming Franklin's story "into a narrative which has the shape and resonance of a myth" (Couser, Prophetic 41).

The reader, then, from a close examination of the "two" selves of the autobiographer, becomes actively involved with the different modes of narration as well as with examining options that the autobiographer might have used. An autobiographer, unlike a novelist, cannot falsify facts without giving up his claim to the name autobiographer since "the world of autobiography is dependent on the real world of the author" (Mandel 220). It would seem, then, that the reader's interpretation relies heavily upon distinguishing the autobiographer's projected selves. It is through the interaction of these two authorities that the reader's reponses become valuable.

Throughout the reading process, a reader often has particular responses to a text. Usually, a text will motivate the reader to process the information in a way that she can see what she is entangled in rather than to create a distance from the text (Iser, Response 131). A reading of Edwards, for example, allows us to experience the merging of his childhood religious conversion with the more mature Edwards attempting to

comprehend his spiritual self. The need to fully understand a text occurs when the reader's emotional and intellectual responses combine. Tompkins insists that "emotional reactions, whether they occur simultaneously with cognition or a split second after, are the main component of the literary experience" (169). Tompkins, however, also implies that emotions are often what distinguish the "feeling" readers from "unfeeling" critics: "The human emotions are less likely to appear outdated and malapropos to future readers than are the lumbering apparatuses which critics bring to bear on texts" (177). Because they are vital to human nature, emotions become a vital part of the reading process.

Certainly, a reader's responses to Edwards and Franklin are vital to their autobiographies. We enter into and participate in their lives as we read their texts. As we journey with them, we respond to the personas they have created and choose for ourselves the most authoritative voices. We also begin to understand their needs and fears as writers and as humans. As we will see from specific examples within their texts, Edwards and Franklin shared similar characteristics as writers of their life stories.

III

EDUCATION FROM YOUTH

Possibly the greatest advantage autobiographers have in creating a life-writing is the opportunity to make their own judgments about themselves. While some historically prominent figures such as Thomas Jefferson leave their lives for biographers to describe (Seavy 4), autobiographers discuss and interpret their lives firsthand. Because they wrote autobiographies, Jonathan Edwards and Benjamin Franklin share the opportunity to describe characters and events of importance to them. More specifically, Edwards and Franklin share two concepts by which they judge themselves in their autobiographies, one which follows a tradition in autobiography, and the other that is uncharacteristic of the expectations we have as readers of such narratives.

The first parallel of how Edwards and Franklin judge themselves is the way they look at themselves and their experiences as young men. To the modern reader, an autobiography that investigates childhood seems typical, and in fact, the convention appeared in early Puritan autobiography. In describing an early narrative, Daniel B. Shea observes that the opening of John Winthrop's "Christian Experience" (1636) "could be

transposed to any of hundreds of other narratives without notice and with no special discredit to its new owner" (106). In the same way, when Jonathan Edwards begins his narrative with "I had a variety of concerns and exercises about my soul from my childhood" (121), he follows the tradition of Puritan narratives by reflecting on his childhood.[1] As they matured, however, these eighteenth century Americans became concerned with "putting away childish things and to face whatever [was] to be faced" (Caldwell 23-4). For Edwards, however, the contemplation of childhood allows him to become a better judge of his present self.

In his "Personal Narrative," Edwards begins by articulating the ignorance inherent in his childhood:

> The delights which I now felt in things of religion were of an exceeding different kind . . . [than] I had when I was a boy. They were totally of another kind; and what I then had no more notion or idea of, than one born blind has of pleasant and beautiful colors (124).

Edwards examines the differences between his present views of religion and the views he had when he was a boy. He sees that both his past and present "selves" experienced the "delights" of religion, but that the

[1]All references to and quotations from Jonathan Edwards' "Personal Narrative" are from the Yale edition in The Norton Anthology of American Literature, ed. Nina Baym et al., 3rd ed. (New York: Norton, 1989).

present self sees religion in a different, even "exceeding different," manner. Edwards even goes as far as saying that he was blinded from the real delights of religion, which he saw as being of "a more inward, pure, soul-animating and refreshing nature" (124). Rather than just see the delights of religion, Edwards is now able to feel them within his soul.

The delights the older Edwards experiences become even more satisfying because the past delights were not enough for him: "Those former delights never reached the heart, and did not arise from any sight of the divine excellency of the things of God or any taste of the soul-satisfying and life-giving good there is in them" (124). Since Edwards continually looks for signs within himself of a religious conversion--to truly feel God within the soul and to thus receive "saving grace"--it is important to note that he has twice referred to the religious delights reaching or affecting his soul: "soul-animating" and "soul-satisfying." Despite the continual soul-searching many Puritans experienced in trying to know their identity as well as their own hearts (Caldwell 128), Edwards appears to have overcome the difficulties his predecessors faced, and discovered his soul. Edwards finds the possibility of a true religious conversion because he feels deeper religious feelings at the present time than those he felt during

his youth. As a result, Edwards appears to judge his older self as more satisfied with his feelings than his younger self.

Like Edwards, Benjamin Franklin judges himself via his youth in his Autobiography. While Roy Pascal suggests that Franklin "recalls only those incidents which illustrate some useful problem of personal relationships and give a lesson on how to get on with or manage others" (37), Franklin appears to recall the youthful incidents that help him decipher his own feelings, enabling him to become his own critic. What Franklin discovers, much like Edwards, is that his present situation is preferable to his youth.

Franklin begins the journey into his past life by focusing on his first encounter with reading:

> My father's little Library consisted chiefly of Books in polemic Divinity, most of which I read, and have since often regretted, that at a time when I had such a Thirst for Knowledge, more proper Books had not fallen in my Way, since it was now resolv'd I should not become a Clergyman (58). [2]

Considering that Franklin was self-educated through books, his reading any books with regret seems strange. But since he recognizes that these particular books were

[2]All references to and quotations from Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography are from The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin, ed. Leonard W. Labaree, et al. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1964).

not useful for his intended profession, Franklin tries to establish a difference between his present "writing" self and the young man he once was (Griffith 88). Because Franklin indicates that he had "a Thirst for Knowledge" when he was young, he now feels justified in separating his older self from his younger self since he was forced to read his father's books as opposed to other books. Therefore, just as Edwards discriminates between the religious delights that did or did not reach his soul, Franklin finds himself respecting only the books that benefit him. In this way, Franklin sees what Edwards had discovered: his life is a way of acknowledging his trials and errors.

When Franklin at last discovers the books he was sure would please him, he takes advantage of his opportunity to read: "Often I sat up in my Room reading the greatest Part of the Night, when the Book was borrow'd in the Evening and to be return'd early in the Morning lest it should be miss'd or wanted" (59). Franklin encounters the ironic fortune of profiting from a profession he was forced into. Yet, Franklin also remembers the bad habits learned from the books he regretted reading: " . . . besides souring and spoiling the Conversation, [argumentation] is productive of disgusts . . . . I had caught it by reading my Father's Books of Dispute about Religion" (60). As he looks

closer at his past reading habits, Franklin realizes that some negative aspects have emerged from his bookish education. Franklin also seems to be "writing to himself as well as about himself, developing correspondences between the past and present" (Sayre 19), by separating his past from his present viewpoints. Because he concedes that his past "wronged" him, Franklin, like Edwards, appears to be more comfortable with his "writing" self than with his childhood "reading" self.

Even though they are more at ease with their adult lives, both Edwards and Franklin begin to recognize the importance of their youth. Though he does not see children as particularly close to God, Edwards seems to suggest the value of "a return to a 'childlike' faith and dependence upon God in the person of Christ" (McNerney 25). Exemplifying this, Edwards articulates how much he delights in "becoming a child of God, and disciple of Christ" (125). Though he had previously established his youth as ignorant of his adult viewpoint, Edwards indicates that he values youthful ignorance when applied to God. In becoming a child mentally while remaining an adult physically, Edwards becomes a "disciple" or servant of Christ. Consequently, Edwards projects the feeling that as he contemplates God, a youthlike dependence on someone or

something is necessary to a saintly adulthood.

Faith was always a complicated term for Puritan believers. Protestant theologians tried to teach that men were saved through faith, defined as belief, trust, loyalty, and dependence on God (McGiffert 11). Recognizing this, Edwards works toward a greater reliance on God: "I sought an increase of grace and holiness, and that I might live a holy life with vastly more earnestness than ever I sought grace, before I had it" (125). Though more serious about conversion and achieving grace than he has ever been, Edwards reasons that he has been too independent. With "too great a dependence" on his own strength which afterwards "proved a great damage" to him (125), Edwards begins to distinguish his past from his present. As he once judged himself not mature enough, he now characterizes himself as knowing too much, and being too dependent upon his eagerness to experience religion. As a result, Edwards continues his search for grace, but with a dependence on others, especially God: " . . . I went on with my eager pursuit after more holiness, and sweet conformity to Christ" (125). Edwards, then, finds that his true identity must evolve from an interplay of world and mind that involves an interplay between present and past (PD Johnson 271). As a child depends upon parents for guidance, Edwards creates a childlike reliance

on God.

As Edwards wrote about his childlike dependence upon God, Franklin also describes a youthful reliance upon others. He refers to a former need he had, to be guided by "the kind hand of Providence, or some guardian Angel" that preserved him through a "dangerous Time of Youth" and "hazardous Situations" (115). Franklin addresses the nature of this experience in relation to his youthfulness, as though he still needed someone other than himself to lead him through his difficult times. In addition, Franklin expresses his pride in his youthful nature and a desire to maintain it: " . . . the Instances I have mentioned, had something of Necessity in them, from my Youth, Inexperience . . . I had therefore a tolerable Character to begin the World with, I valued it properly, and determin'd to preserve it" (115). Because he indicates a desire to preserve his youth, Franklin finds himself more comfortable with his youth as Edwards finds his.

Just as Edwards redefines his dependence upon God, Franklin realizes that he, too, should depend upon others as a way of progressing from an ignorant youth to an adult who makes his self-interest more public (Spengemann 56). At the same time, Franklin experiences injustices from those whom he thought to be helping him. When he learns that the governor of Pennsylvania will

lend him money to establish his own print-shop, Franklin never imagines that the man will hurt him:

> Had it been known that I depended on the Governor, probably some Friend that knew him better would have advis'd me not to rely on him . . . [yet] how could I think his generous Offers insincere? I believ'd him one of the best Men in the World (86-7).

After one friend deceives him, Franklin quickly learns that others may wrong him. At the later point where he encourages himself to become a Deist, Franklin reconsiders:

> My Arguments perverted some others, particularly Collins and Ralph: but each of them having afterwards wrong'd me greatly without the least Compunction and recollecting Keith's Conduct towards me . . . and my own towards Vernon and Miss Read which at Times gave me great Trouble, I began to suspect that this Doctrine [Deism] tho' it might be true, was not very useful (114).

In this example, Franklin finds that he cannot trust people--Collins, Ralph, Governor Keith--who have wronged him, yet he also realizes that he, too, has deceived others like Vernon and Miss Read through that bookish-learned nemesis from his childhood, argumentation. Even though he is surrounded by corruption in which he often participates (Fichtelberg 203), Franklin is anxious for friends upon whom he can depend as well as fully trust. The solution for Franklin, then, as it was for Edwards, becomes balancing the importance of the lessons of his youth with the lessons learned from adulthood.

In attempting to find his medium, Edwards attempts to separate his youth from his maturity. More than once, Edwards states how ignorant he felt during his youth: " . . . it is affecting to think, how ignorant I was, when a young Christian, of the bottomless, infinite depths of wickedness, pride, hypocrisy and deceit, left in my heart" (71). Even though he has humbled himself into the "depths of wickedness," Edwards appears to have created contradictions. First, he refers to himself as "a young Christian." This is the first instance in which Edwards indicates that he is a Christian, but the very word complicates the "sins" he names: wickedness, pride, hypocrisy, and deceit. Second, Edwards indicates that these sins are in his heart, which is contrary to the "inward, pure, soul animating and refreshing nature" that he felt when he first addressed the ignorance of his soul as a child. Edwards, then, suffers from what Shea calls an "adolescent disease that masqueraded as true conviction until it disappeared and left . . . a heart more depraved than ever" (106). Only by falling deeper into contradiction can Edwards begin to find his true self.

Finally, Edwards can only convey his feelings by means of another contradiction. Once again, he uses his older self by which to judge his younger self:

> The very thought of any joy arising in me, on any consideration of my own amiableness,

> performances, or experiences, or any goodness of heart or life, is nauseous and detestable to me. And yet I am greatly afflicted with a proud and selfrighteous spirit, much more sensibly than I used to be formerly (71).

Edwards articulates that thinking positive thoughts of himself makes him ill, but yet he still feels a "proud and selfrighteous spirit." He further develops his contradictions by writing that even though he felt himself a better Christian two or three years after his conversion than in his present state, he has "a more full and constant sense of the absolute sovereignty of God, and a delight in that sovereignty" (71). It seems that the only way Edwards could see God in the most supreme state as possible was to lower himself first, almost denying the success of his religious conversion. Edwards also realizes that as long as he maintains his faith in God, he will be in a perpetual state of naivety, constantly feeling his youthlike dependence upon God in his eagerness to learn of and from him.

As his life progresses, Franklin also begins to contradict his feelings for his younger and older selves. At first, he wants to prevent his younger self from intruding upon his potential success. Though he was relatively young, Franklin had felt he should cautiously try his hand at writing: "But being still a Boy, and suspecting that my Brother would object to printing any Thing of mine in his Paper if he knew it

to be mine, I contriv'd to disguise my Hand . . . writing an anonymous Paper" (67). Franklin concedes that his "being still a Boy" could possibly have prevented him from achieving his end, but he remains determined and hopeful of his opportunity to be published. When his brother and others find his piece, Franklin listens with "exquisite Pleasure," as " . . . in their different Guesses at the Author none were named but Men of some Character among us for Learning and Ingenuity" (68). Yet when Franklin realizes that he can never escape the connotations that come with being young and ignorant, he proceeds to contradict his elated feelings for his brother's reactions by humbling himself: "I suppose now that I was rather lucky in my Judges: And that perhaps they were not really so very good ones as I then esteem'd them" (68). Franklin goes through a series of contradictory feelings: he previously indicated that he wanted to relive his childhood, but at the same time, he wants to prevent his innocence from intruding into his future. Franklin now feels the same deep depravity of the heart and the contradictions that Edwards also could not avoid.

As they further struggle with judging their present selves by their past ones, both Edwards and Franklin conclude that they will always be children, in need of

guidance. Edwards, then, continues his dependence upon God. As Owen C. Watkins observes, religious conversion does not occur from a state of sin to a state of grace, but rather from a "turning from everyday affairs to a divine mission that overrides every other concern" (144). Edwards seems to reflect that notion of making God his primary concern: "It has often appeared sweet to me to be united to Christ; to have Him for my head, and to be a member of His body; and also to have Christ for my teacher and prophet" (128). Edwards becomes so involved with Christ that the two interchange: Christ becomes Edwards' head as Edwards becomes part of Christ's body.

Since Edwards learns to depend upon God almost completely, innocence becomes useful, but, once again, only when he contemplates God. As he once longed to be "a child of God, a disciple of Christ," Edwards similarly thinks "with sweetness and longings and pantings of soul, of being a little child, taking hold of Christ, to be led by Him through the wilderness of this world" (128). Edwards, like other Puritans, considers himself lost in the "wilderness" and in need of Christ's guidance as a child of God. Edwards also sees Christ as beneficial to him; therefore, as he depends more upon Christ, Edwards feels his soul will be excited, just as much as he feels he had flourished

in the delights of religion. As a result, Edwards realizes that he has progressed from seeing his youth as inadequate to recognizing that he still needs youthlike qualities. As an adult, he prefers to be a lamb of God.

Just as Edwards looks to God for guidance, Franklin finds his childlike dependence through writing. As he is often referred to as the "man of letters," Franklin sees his act of writing as the next best thing to living his life over again (Cox 258). Franklin yearns to write from the beginning of his narrative, making the "Recollection [of his life] as durable as possible, [by] the putting it down in Writing" (44). Further, Franklin indicates that his writing in a journal has been his guide, especially from his youth and on. Since the journal contained a plan to regulate his future conduct in life, Franklin favorably remembers himself as a youth writing the journal: "It is the more remarkable, as being form'd when I was so young, and yet being pretty faithfully adhered to quite thro' to old Age" (106). Each time Franklin looks at his journal, he can imagine reliving his youth. In addition, Franklin begins to notice just how beneficial his writing, especially from his youth, has become.

In his later years, Franklin becomes increasingly dependent upon writing. While Franklin thought it to be

simply entertaining and useful, his Poor Richard's Almanack "came to be in such Demand" that he "reap'd considerable Profit from it, vending annually near ten Thousand" (164). Aside from personal profit, Franklin proceeds to make a "public profit" from his writing. First, Franklin's writing contributes to implimenting the military draft: "The Pamphlet had a sudden and surprizing Effect . . . . [I] distributed the Copies, which were eagerly signed, not the least Objection being made" (183). Next, he is warmly received for his writing concerning his invention of the stove: "This Pamphlet had a good Effect, Govr. Thomas was so pleas'd with the Construction of this Stove, as describ'd in it that he offer'd to give me a Patent" (191-2). Though he was extremely knowledgeable and successful, Franklin presents himself as continually learning in the same way that Edwards was a preacher continually teaching himself about Christ (Seed 47). It seems, then, that both men had permanent youthlike "dependencies" that turned out to be their lifelong means of education: Edwards was dependent upon God, and Franklin was dependent upon writing.

As reminiscing is common to autobiography, Edwards and Franklin have followed the tradition. By concluding that they are comfortable with their childlike states, however, they contradict the way in which they first

judged themselves in their youth. Yet in the ongoing process of examining themselves, Edwards and Franklin will remain consistent in their contradictions and write about their lives in a truly unexpected manner.

IV

UNEXPECTED EXPRESSION

Both Jonathan Edwards and Benjamin Franklin judge themselves in their autobiographies by identifying errors and failures they have encountered in their lives. One convention of autobiography, according to Howarth, is to stress spectacle and the visual (373). The reader, however, finds neither of these characteristics in the texts of Edwards and Franklin. Instead, both men minimize mention of, and even exclude the instances which made them well-known. By addressing the mistakes they have made, Edwards and Franklin suggest that even though they were prominent figures during their own lifetimes, they chose to remember episodes in which they experienced humility and a sense of failure.

A true Puritan thought of himself as being in a constant state of doubt, for "the better the man, the more continually he lives on a knife edge in an endless process of wayfaring and wayfaring" (Caldwell 15-16). It was never enough for the Puritan to do good deeds or to accomplish great things in his lifetime; living was a continual process, a journey of trial and error. One of the most intriguing aspects of Edwards is that he excludes much of his journey through life in his

"Personal Narrative." Though Barrett John Mandel concludes that literary works cannot be valuable or significant for what they do not contain (217), the events that Edwards chooses to exclude are usually significant to other spiritual autobiographies. He fails to mention some of his most famous sermons, including "God Glorified in the Work of Redemption," "A Divine and Supernatural Light," and "A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God" in his autobiography. In addition, Edwards never indicates that he is a preacher, which is surprising simply because he continually expresses that he lived and breathed by the word of God.

Not only does he not mention his calling, but Edwards also excludes information about "his marriage and six children, none even of the tumultous activity that had already brought him international reputation as a revivalist and probably motivated the autobiography in the first place" (Garbo 143). He never gives any hint that he wrote his narrative during the years of the largest religious revival of his lifetime, the "Great Awakening" (c. 1734-1746). Further, Edwards never mentions times, places, or persons involved in his first conversion (DeProspo 198).

Edwards also excludes many times and dates concerning events in his life besides his conversion.

For this reason, it has been impossible to determine when the "Personal Narrative" was written, though Edwards says enough only to assume that it was composed sometime between February 1739 and December 1740. In dismissing the most important events of his life from his autobiography, as well as leaving uncertainty as to the context in which it was written, Edwards indicates that his was a spiritual autobiography written to provide a universal "reliable model of christic identity." In describing himself as the fallible man, Edwards documents the anguish of process (Bercovitch, Origins 24). A possible explanation for his silences, then, is that Edwards wants his readers to concentrate on the religious conversion process rather than on the events of his life.

Like Edwards, Franklin leaves gaps throughout his narrative. James Olney, possibly with Franklin in mind, writes:

> Perhaps the greatest mystery is that men so often refuse credit for what they have achieved, disclaiming their accomplishment as something objective . . . instead of proclaiming it as their own and emotionally satisfying (8-9).

Although he includes some of the instances that made him famous, Franklin often turns his public life into insignificant moments in time. For example, Franklin writes, "I began now to turn my Thoughts a little to public Affairs, beginning however with small Matters"

(173). First, it is unusual to note that Franklin, who became famous because of his public life, writes this more than halfway through his narrative. Second, the "small Matters" were "great" matters for which Franklin alone was responsible, including creating municipal police and fire departments, and the invention of the Franklin stove. Franklin, in a sense, denies his individualism, "suppressing the accomplishments which had made his own life so remarkable, so satisfactory, and so potentially interesting as a subject for autobiography" (Spengemann 60). While the reader may expect the Autobiography to include details about the life of Franklin, she may be surprised when he barely mentions his most famous accomplishments almost as if in passing.

When he finally discusses his public affairs at length, Franklin disclaims what he has accomplished. When the governor offers him a patent for the invention of his stove, Franklin declines, remembering a principle of his which emphasized, as it is italicized in editions of his text: "That as we enjoy great Advantages from the Inventions of others, we should be glad of an Opportunity to serve others by any Invention of ours, and this we should do freely and generously" (192). Franklin continues to thrive upon the opportunity to serve the public at every opportunity he sees. When he

sets up a proposal for what was to become the University of Pennsylvania, Franklin is considerate of the public by denying his identity: "In the Introduction to these Proposals, I stated their Publication not as an Act of mine, but of some publick-spirited Gentlemen" (193). Franklin reaches the point where he spends more time attributing an invention to someone else than he does discussing his own contribution:

> It was by a private person, the late Mr. John Clifton . . . that the People were first impress'd with the Idea of enlightning all the City. The Honour of this public Benefit has also been ascrib'd to me, but it belongs truly to that Gentleman. I did but follow his Example; and have only some Merit to claim respecting the Form of our Lamps as differing from the Globe Lamps we at first were supply'd with from London (203-4).

Franklin wants to be remembered as having used as much of his time and energy as possible to benefit his generation and others to follow. By minimizing mention of his name in relation to his inventions, Franklin seems to suggest that he wants to be remembered for serving the public rather than for serving himself. He sees the dwelling on the self as a threat to all, robbing one of the ability to project oneself actively into the world (Porter 234). As a result, the reader may feel that Franklin is more comfortable writing about people other than himself.

Just as they include silences and gaps, Edwards and Franklin write about their errors and failures

throughout their narratives. In his book Errand Into the Wilderness, Perry Miller identifies the mission of the first American immigrants. The Puritans desired to have the eyes of the world fixed upon them as part of fulfilling their "covenant" with God to create a flourishing religion and community in the New World. If the world "looked elsewhere, or turned to another model, or simply got distracted and forgot about New England...then every success in fulfilling the terms of the covenant would become a diabolical measure of failure" (12). Edwards, as a Puritan preacher, articulated ways in which his congregation could fulfill their obligation to themselves and to God. But as his followers as well as the modern reader look to the "Personal Narrative" for guidance, Edwards gives the answers only through his failures.

At the beginning of his narrative, Edwards recognizes his failure to articulate feelings within his soul. After it "pleased God" to affect him with pleurisy, Edwards states: " . . . it was not long after my recovery before I fell again into my old ways of sin. But God would not suffer me to go on with any quietness; but I had great and violent inward struggles" (122). Not only has Edwards failed himself, but he has failed God; therefore, Edwards is punished with continual struggles. Even when he becomes almost mesmerized with

"a sense of the glory of the Divine Being" after reading the scriptures, Edwards is still unsure of himself: "But it never came into my thought that there was anything spiritual or of a saving nature in this" (123). Even after the Bible assures him, Edwards still expresses difficulty comprehending the saving grace of God. As William J. Scheick notes that the reader joins Edwards in feeling ignorant and helpless before God's mysterious ways (65), Edwards is only beginning to address his failures.

One reason Edwards lacks a means of expression is because of the nature of his subject matter. Miller suggests in The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century that to the Puritans, God is entirely incomprehensible to man, a realm of awful mystery, and the ultimate secret. Miller adds that God cannot be approached directly because "his thoughts go beyond man's thoughts" (10). Thus, the more Edwards strives to express his delight in religion, the deeper he falls into failure. At one point, he feels joy in contemplating Christ, yet concludes in a state of lamentation: "The person of Christ appeared ineffably excellent . . . which continued, as near as I can judge, about an hour, which kept me, the bigger part of the time, in a flood of tears, and weeping aloud" (129). Not only does he weep during the contemplation of

Christ, but in viewing his own sinfulness, Edwards describes his frequent crying spells: "[they were] a kind of loud weeping, sometimes for a considerable time together, so that I have often been forced to shut myself up" (130). Edwards never resolves his feelings about himself, so he tries to resolve those he has for God:

> I had at the same time, a very affecting sense how meet and suitable it was that God should govern the world, and order all things according to His own pleasure, and I rejoiced in it, and God reigned, and that His will was done (131).

Even though he never experiences personal satisfaction, Edwards, according to Puritan theology, still succeeds. Sacvan Bercovitch explains: "The future, though divinely assured, was never quite there, and New England's Jeremiahs set out to provide the sense of insecurity that would ensure the outcome" (Jeremiad 23). In admitting failure, Edwards does precisely what was expected of a devout Puritan: the deeper failure he felt, the better chance that he and his followers would have for salvation.

While Edwards uses "reason" to acknowledge failure, Franklin freely admits "motives and perceptions that we [the reader], along with most of his contemporaries, prefer to conceal" (Levin, "Experimenter" 265). From the start of his narrative, Franklin admits the general errata of his life in a delightful analogy to writing:

"I should have no Objection to a Repetition of the same Life from its Beginning, only asking the Advantage Authors have in a second Edition to correct some Faults of the first" (43). It seems he desires to perfect his life through rewriting, yet at the same time, Franklin addresses his imperfect struggle with putting pen to paper:

> my Father observ'd . . . I fell far short in elegance of Expression, in Method Perspicuity, of which he convinc'd me by several Instances.
>
> I compar'd my Spectator with the Original, discover'd some of my Faults and corrected them. But I found I wanted a Stock of Words or a Readiness in recollecting and using them.
>
> By comparing my work afterwards with the original, I discover'd many faults and amended them (61-2).

By noting instances of his failure in the very act he enjoyed and practiced the most, Franklin sees his life in the traditional Puritan manner, articulating that his life is a never-ending journey of trial and error.

Besides admitting his faults as a writer, Franklin also confesses to the errata of his life in general. The letter from Benjamin Vaughan that Franklin includes in his narrative indicates that the inclusion of errata is valuable to others: " . . . what more worthy of experiments and system (its importance and its errors considered) than human life! . . . . Your account of yourself...will shew that you are ashamed of no origin"

(137). Taking Vaughan's suggestion that errors should be emphasized, Franklin proceeds to strive for moral perfection by living "without committing any Fault at any time" (148). At the same time, the humorous Franklin emerges. As he marks "a little black Spot every Fault" he finds (151), he later marks his faults with "a black Lead Pencil, which Marks [he] could easily wipe out with a wet Sponge" (155). As Franklin once again admits that he falls far short of perfection, he ends where he began, with an analogy of his life to the writing process: "Writing by imitating the engraved Copies, tho' they never reach the wish'd for Excellence of those Copies, their Hand is mended by the Endeavour, and is tolerable while it continues fair and legible" (156). Franklin seems to feel enough satisfaction from the mere attempt to correct his life, with the mistakes altered only as well as can be expected. He sees errors as a means of self-teaching; not in the sense of conclusions, but through repeated new beginnings (Sayre 13). Thus, Franklin learns as much about his life through writing as his audience does through reading the Autobiography.

In addition to their emphasis on errors, both Edwards and Franklin write openly about their humility and fragility. Edwards begins his narrative by dissecting his personal feelings about life. To Miller,

the "Personal Narrative" represents "as astonishing a piece of clinical dissection as the history of analysis affords" (Edwards 206). Edwards at first feels that "all happiness consisted in living in pure, humble, heavenly, divine love" (125). As he understands humility to be equated with the divine, Edwards proceeds to describe humility in terms of nature. The soul of any true Christian, writes Edwards, appears "like such a little white flower as we see in the spring of the year, low and humble on the ground" (125). Once he recognizes the humility in other entities, Edwards wishes the modest qualities for himself:

> There was no part of creature holiness that I then, and at other times, had so great a sense of the loveliness of, as humility, brokenness of heart and poverty of spirit, and there was nothing that I had such a spirit to long for (125-6).

Edwards expressly desires humility and a broken heart, for the deeper humility he feels, the more satisfied he will become. If Edwards thinks that he is the lowest, most humble human being, he will have a better chance of receiving saving grace.

Characteristic of a preacher, Edwards proceeds to express his desire to be humble in relation to the divine. As he solemnly vowed to receive God and be governed by His law, Edwards writes, "But [I] have reason to be infintely humbled, when I consider, how much I have failed of answering my obligation" (126).

Further, Edwards repeats his plea to God for a broken heart, and his desire to be the most lowly human possible:

> When I ask for humility of God, I can't bear the thoughts of being no more humble than other Christians. . . .Others speak of their longing to be humbled to the dust. Though that may be a proper expression for them I always think for myself that I ought to be humbled down below hell (130-1).

Edwards proclaims himself to be the greatest sinner in the world, which implies that he alone is the worst (Bercovitch, Origins 15). While the modern reader might be uncomfortable with his intense humility, Edwards, striving to be a "good" Puritan, was expected to display humbleness. As a result, we see that though Edwards describes himself in a manner unconventional to the reader, humility becomes imperative to his "Personal Narrative" as well as to his life as a Puritan.

Franklin introduces humility in a humorous manner in his autobiography. Franklin is half serious and half joking throughout his narrative, yet many readers fail to recognize his facetious nature. To account for this discrepancy, Ormond Seavy suggests that the reader of the Autobiography is drawn into Franklin's world rather than forced to pass judgment on him, so the reader who is taken in by Franklin's prose will miss his irony (58-9). One of the ways that Franklin entices the reader into "his" world is by admitting his vanity,

stating that he may as well confess it, since the "Denial of it will be believ'd by no body" (44). Because he expects his peers and readers to know that he is vain, Franklin simply conceeds his vanity. After this demonstration of his wit, Franklin has a valid and humbling explanation for not only admitting his vanity but also for indicating its worth:

> Indeed I scarce ever heard or saw the introductory Words, Without Vanity I may say, &c. but some vain thing immediately follow'd . . . [yet] it is often productive of Good to the Possessor and to others that are within his Sphere of Action (44).

Franklin acknowledges that the pretense of modesty is a rhetorical device: it is only meant to delude the reader into thinking the author is sincere when he is not. Therefore, Franklin asserts the truth--that vanity is an undeniable but useful quality in humans--and this "open admittance" in itself constitutes an assertion of humility.

Besides recognizing the humility in himself, Franklin is humbled by the actions of supposed friends. After Governor Keith's making him false promises to get him printing supplies, Franklin has only praise for the governor: "He was otherwise an ingenious sensible Man, a pretty good Writer, and a good Governor for the People . . . . Several of our best Laws were of his Planning, and pass'd during his Administration" (95). Despite his friend Ralph's owing him money which was

never repaid, Franklin "lov'd him notwithstanding, for he had many amiable Qualities" and was an "ingenious Acquaintance whose Conversation was of great Advantage" to Franklin (106).

More humbling than the actions of friends was the situation with his family. When his brother James was imprisoned for printing an offensive article, Franklin continued to print the newspaper in his own name, under his brother's direction. Yet when Franklin decided to leave the newspaper, his brother saw to it that none of the other town papers would hire him. Later in life, Franklin not only cares for this brother's son, but also educates him through the printing business. Franklin thus proclaims, "Thus it was that I made my Brother ample Amends for the Service I had depriv'd him of by leaving him so early" (170). Franklin sounds humble, but even after all the wrong his brother caused him, he feels he owes more to his brother, and that he should be further humbled. Only at this time, far removed from the situation, does Franklin feel as if he has "corrected" the wrong he thinks he caused. Further, Franklin is deeply saddened by the death of his own son, which, in turn, he uses as an occasion to give advice to those who might encounter a similar situation:

> I long regretted bitterly and still regret that I had not given it [a vaccination] to him by Inoculation; This I mention for the Sake of Parents, who omit that Operation on the

> Supposition that they should never forgive themselves if a Child died under it (170).

Though Philip D. Beidler seems to think that Franklin levels criticism against himself for his unsuccessful struggle with humility (266), Franklin appears to portray himself as fragile as well as humble. Moreover, Franklin's stance resembles Edwards' Puritan ethic of "the worst sinner in the world": he must put himself farther below his worst thoughts of himself in an attempt to correct his faults.

Though they were famous in their lifetimes, Edwards and Franklin leave gaps in their life-writings, causing the modern reader to have distorted opinions of their achievements. As they are both "silent" about historical facts of their lives, one must discover aspects of these men elsewhere than in their life-writings. Yet from the instances that are included, Edwards and Franklin judge themselves in very human terms: imperfect, faulty, and frail. In the attempt to express feelings about themselves and their societies, both men continue to struggle with expression. As we will see, Edwards and Franklin were not only fearful and concerned for the very institutions they created, but they also were suspicious of the very language they used in their life-writings.

V

SILENCES AND DOUBT

The final examination to make is of Edwards' and Franklin's struggles with language, and of how we as readers respond to the attitudes they have for the institutions they helped to establish. Even though both men were public figures, Edwards, a preacher, and Franklin, an internationally known political leader and "man of letters," it seems unusual for them to have been suspicious of their words or actions. The reader joins in this struggle as well, since writers of personal narratives, in addition to trying to find their identities, display attiudes which they probably understand little better than their readers (Shea 112). In their very search for words, Edwards and Franklin often underestimate their capacity to articulate.

For the Puritans, words lie beyond their control and comprehension. Wrestling with the idea of God, the Puritans found that they had no other place to search but within themselves (Miller, Errand 15), using their only vehicle, language. Yet human language cannot cope, writes Scheick, with "God's sovereign and mysterious providence, even though it is divinely ordained to provide clues to the spiritual condition of one's will" (60). Because God is incomprehensible, words

to describe him are an effort at best, and just as difficult to retain are words to describe oneself in relation to this indescribable God. As a devout Puritan, Edwards concedes his loss for words throughout the "Personal Narrative."

It is ironic that Edwards states, at the beginning of his narrative, "I experienced I know not what kind of delight in religion" (121). Immediately following this example, he proceeds to verbalize the very experience he claims to not know: "My mind was much engaged in it [religion], and had much self-righteous pleasure; and it was my delight to abound in religious duties" (121). Besides supposedly knowing "not otherwise how to express" religious delights, Edwards eloquently writes of his "exceedingly small and faint" conviction of sin: " . . . I should appear sunk down in my sins infinitely below hell itself, far beyond sight of everything but the piercing eye of God's grace, than can pierce down to such a depth and to the bottom of such an abyss" (130). For "not knowing" how to articulate, Edwards seems able to say exceedingly well what he wishes to write. Because he is so steeped in his faith, his feelings for God are even easier to articulate.

Edwards continues to employ the same method, and in another example, he vigorously expresses what he again claims to "know not otherwise how to express" his

feelings for Christ:

> I felt withal an ardency of soul to be . . . emptied and annihilated; to lie in the dust, and to be full of Christ alone; to love Him with a holy and pure love; to trust in Him; to live upon Him; to serve and follow Him, and to be totally wrapt up in the fullness of Christ; and to be perfectly sanctified and made pure with a divine and heavenly purity (129).

In the same way that had easily expressed his humility, Edwards is actually able to express his feelings. Appropriately, Shea perceives that Edwards appears to have "a greater dissatisfaction with attempts to convey a sense of his wickedness than with parallel attempts to express his delight in divine things" (205). Because he is more accepting of God's graces than of his own wickedness, Edwards can easily articulate his delight in the divine, despite the fact that he says he cannot.

Franklin admits his lack of expression with a slight variation of Edwards' confession. Rather than saying, "I lack the words to say this," Franklin says that he is not good at something, and then proceeds to eloquently explain how good at it he really is. After he proposes that the country institute a military draft, Franklin decides to join his own cause, though he does not conceive himself well-qualified. Yet Franklin proceeds to present himself, through his writing, as capable of handling the task: "[I was given] a Parcel of blank Commissions for Officers, to be given to whom

I thought fit. I had but little Difficulty in raising Men, having soon 560 under my Command" (231). He also demonstrates his skill in the designation of troops:

> I assembled the Companies at Bethlehem. . . . sent one Detachment towards the Minisinks, with Instructions to erect one for the Security of that upper part of the Country; and another to the lower Part, with similar Instructions. And I concluded to go myself with the rest of my Force to Gnadenhut (231-32).

Though he may not feel himself adequate for the task, Franklin portrays other qualities, such as organization and leadership, which are necessary for a person in charge. Franklin judges himself harshly, thinking that if he lacks any characteristics as an officer, he should completely disqualify himself.

After he was pardoned from his post, Franklin soon after was called to become a Colonel under the Militia Act. He once again articulates his lack of knowledge as a military officer, feeling he should not be escorted, not having been "previously acquainted with the Project . . . being naturally averse to the assuming of State on any Occasion" (238). From here, instead of Franklin "unknowingly" describing his knowledge of command, he writes that he received praise from his regiment, which he seems to humorously push aside: "they accompanied me to my House, and would salute me with some Rounds fired before my Door, which shook down and broke several Glasses of my Electrical Apparatus" (238). In addition,

the officers of his regiment even paid Franklin an enormous amount of respect: "they came to my door, between 30 and 40, mounted, and all in their Uniforms . . . . What made it worse, was, that as soon as we began to move, they drew their Swords, and rode with them naked all the way" (238-39). Because no honor had ever before been paid to the proprietor in the province, the situation magnifies Franklin's importance as a military figure. His troops, as well as officers, recognized the leadership and military expertise that he would never admit. Nevertheless, Franklin is still able to tell his readers how they appeared to admire him. Beidler sees that Franklin expresses his own limitations in an attempt to realize his prideful nature, which he sees as the chief defect of his own imperfect nature (263). Franklin is merely allowing his vehicle, writing, to allow others to "write" for him what he is too humble to express.

Not only do both men claim to "lack the words," but Edwards and Franklin also concede their lack of the right words. David Seed recognizes that Edwards is continually using words of contrast--"but," "yet," "however"--which stand in the way of any progression in his writing Edwards may encounter. Parker H. Johnson also sees that the "Personal Narrative" contains a "persistence of the word 'appear' and the word 'seems'

throughout . . . [which] draws attention to the narrator as the subjective center of the experience" (32). To supplement his hesitant language, Edwards uses abstractions to further complicate his struggle with articulation. In one instance, Edwards mentions "a sweet sense of the glorious majesty and grace of God," which he follows with the expected "that I know not how to express" (123). As he proceeds, Edwards creates his own abstraction by overusing the word 'sweet': "I seemed to see them both in a sweet conjunction, majesty and meekness joined together. It was a sweet and gentle, and holy majesty; and also a majestic meekness; an awful sweetness; a high, and great, and holy gentleness (123). The more Edwards tries to explain, the more he can only articulate both majesty and meekness in a kind of circular articulation, ending with the same words he started with.

Even when he finds the correct words, Edwards still has the battle with language, a struggle that every Puritan experienced. The New England preacher not only had a private vision to convey, but also "he had to convey it in metaphors that overturned the conventions from which those metaphors arose" (Bercovitch, Origins 113). Edwards exemplifies the "metaphor upon metaphor" idea in his attempt to define his wickedness: "I know not how to express better what my sins appear to me to

be than by heaping infinite upon infinite, and multiplying infinite by infinite" (130). Edwards takes this idea one step farther, becoming more vague despite the fact that he is simply being repetitious: "I go about very often, for this many years, with these expressions in my mind and in my mouth, 'Infinite upon infinite. Infinite upon infinite!' When I look into my heart . . . [my wickedness] looks like an abyss infinitely deeper than hell" (130). In the continuous longing for the right words, Edwards will look deeper and deeper within himself through his metaphors and abstractions. The reader can only travel with Edwards into the infinite: she is seeing Edwards only from the way his metaphors "replace" his identity.

Franklin shows that he has little more security with his precise use of words than Edwards. Franklin indicates a desire to avoid any words that would imply an "Air of Positiveness to an Opinion" (65). In identifying his replacement words, Franklin appears to have complicated his situation, as the words become phrases: "[I would] rather say, I conceive, or I apprehend a Thing to be so or so, It appears to me, or I should think it so or so for such and such Reasons, or I imagine it to be so, or it is so if I am not mistaken" (65). Like Edwards, Franklin is repetitious and abstract with his use of the word "so." In

addition, Franklin seems to be struggling with "just the right phrase" so that he avoids being positive. Further, he becomes even more repetitious as he reiterates the same concept later in his narrative:

> I even forbid myself . . . the Use of every Word or Expression in the Language that imported a fix'd Opinion . . . and I adopted instead of them, I conceive, I apprehend, or I imagine a thing to be so or so, or it so appears to me at present (159).

This is the only passage that Franklin actually repeats in his Autobiography. In addition, the content of these passages reflect Franklin's stuggle with language, attempting to articulate his "human frailty, erring motive, incomplete understanding, and misguided apprehension" (Beidler 264). Whether or not he was aware of this repetition, Franklin apparently wants to be sure he includes uncertainties in his narrative.

Because he is a public writer, Franklin also wishes his peers to use the "correct" words. He is careful to exclude from his newspaper "all Libelling and Personal Abuse, which is of late Years become so disgraceful to our Country" (165). Franklin perceives that if others have been abusing the language, he feels subject to the corruption as well. He tries to project to others his concern for language through advice to young printers, "that they may be encouraged not to pollute the Presses and disgrace their Profession by such infamous Practices, but refuse steadily" (165-66). Franklin

invites others to join him in keeping the writing profession as reputable as possible. In keeping with his love for writing, Franklin wants the assurance that the public will use the "correct" language.

Besides their "fears" of language, Edwards and Franklin indicate their suspicions of the very institutions they established. Because he was a preacher, Edwards was always in public view; yet he made himself even more infamous during the Great Revival. In his "Personal Narrative," however, Edwards continuously articulates his desire to be alone. He tells us that his need to keep to himself began when he was younger, where besides having hidden places of prayer with schoolmates, he also had secret places of his own in the woods, where he would retire by himself to contemplate God (121). As he grew older, Edwards, at one point, even desires to be "alone in the mountains or some solitary wilderness, far from all mankind" (123). Even in referring to a part of nature as solitary, Edwards seems almost obsessed with desire to be alone, thus fully able to contemplate the majesty and grace of God. Yet, in his longing to be alone, Edwards resists his role as a preacher and as a pastor to his congregation.

The frequent times Edwards thinks of God are the times he especially desires solitude. He states: "And

[I] used to spend abundance of my time in walking alone in the woods and solitary places for meditation, soliloquy and prayer, and converse with God" (124). It appears that to completely feel the true nature of Christ, Edwards has to center himself alone around Him. Yet the more he contemplates Christ, the more Edwards feels the need to associate with those who share his devotion: "My heart was knit in affection to those in whom were appearances of true piety, and I could bear the thoughts of no other companions but such as were holy, and the disciples of the blessed Jesus" (126). As a result, Edwards finds himself able to contemplate God with others: "Sometimes Mr. Smith and I walked [in a solitary place] together to converse of the things of God, and our conversation used much to turn on the advancement of Christ's kingdom in the world" (126).

Even though he enjoys moments alone, Edwards finds that contemplation of God is similar to the reading of a book: he feels the need to discuss his thoughts and responses with those who understand what he is experiencing. At the same time, Edwards is seems to comply with Shea's assertion that in autobiography, seclusion is a luxury that could interfere with accomplishment in the society of other men (118); part of the reason Edwards was dismissed from his Northampton pulpit was because he refused to make himself more

public to his congregation. He confesses this need for solitude and this suspicion of his calling, so much that he required time alone or time spent only with devout "others."

As Edwards seems suspicious of his profession, Franklin makes it apparent that he was weary of the very politics he helped establish. As Robert Sayre observes, the third section of the Autobiography strikes the reader as entirely in the public interest (32). It is also this section in which Franklin projects his fears about the government. When his plan to unite the colonies is rejected, Franklin at first discusses the logic of the plan: "The Colonies so united would have been sufficiently strong to have defended themselves; there would then have been no need of Troops from England" (211). In his next statement, however, Franklin seems bitter about the negative effects caused by the plan's disapproval, laying partial blame upon accumulated attitudes: "of course the subsequent Pretence for Taxing America, and the bloody Contest it occasioned, would have been avoided. But such Mistakes are not new; History is full of the Errors of States and Princes" (211). Franklin also voices his thoughts about the unusual attitude of government leadership:

> Those who govern, having much Business on their hands, do not generally like to take the Trouble of considering and carrying into Execution new Projects. The best public

> Measures are therefore seldom adopted from previous Wisdom, but forc'd by the Occasion (212).

At this point, Franklin has become adamant about his weariness of government. He recognizes that the only time, past or present, when suggestions are considered is when the institution is in need; otherwise, the prominent attitude is that of hesitation or inaction. Franklin, then, expresses for his readers apprehension toward government.

Not only is he fearful of the government in general, but Franklin also is concerned for all government-related activities. Franklin feels that the general of the French-Indian War "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" (223). He further reasons that he had doubts and fears about the entire war situation (223). At the end of his narrative, Franklin also sees the proprietors of the country as selfish and careless when they reject the proprietary tax: " . . . the Repeal would strike it down dead in their [proprietors'] Hands to the Ruin of many, and the total Discouragement of future Grants" (265). Franklin implies that what seems to affect the present situation will cause even greater harm in the future. He also anticipates the abuses of power by a government. Thus, Franklin shares with us

his suspicions: though he helped establish the institutions, Franklin feels that the power of the government should remain with the common people, the very people who seem to him to have no control.

In their suspicions of both the words they used and the activities in which they were involved, Edwards and Franklin reflect another example of their fragility. As both men were gifted at language--Edwards as a preacher and Franklin as a writer--their difficulty in articulating their feelings, coupled with a fear for their "worlds," shows that they worried for not only themselves, but for the future of their people. As Edwards and Franklin struggle to express "the astonishing vitality of rhetoric and myth in shaping the American way" (Bercovtich, "Ritual" 149), the reader of their autobiographies also struggles to understand the very language these writers are using.

VI

CONCLUSION

Many critics seem to have rejected the comparison of Jonathan Edwards to Benjamin Franklin. David Levin sees that though both discuss virtue, they were writing on entirely different planes and inhabited different worlds (Enlightenment 22). Frederic I. Carpenter insists that the two men are alike "in one thing only--their love of America, and of American ideas" (631). Another critic proclaims that intimate confession, a fundamental characteristic in autobiography, is lacking in both Edwards' and Franklin's writings (Seed 38). Yet a close comparison of the "Personal Narrative" of Jonathan Edwards with The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin reveals that these men were writing about the same types of fears. They were both concerned with their communities and how these communities would remember them. Rather than our stereotypical images of Edwards the "hell-fire" preacher and Franklin the pompous autocrat, our responses to their texts allow us to recognize that these men wanted to see themselves as human and frail by writing more about their errors, failures, and fears than about their accomplishments.

The final passages of the life-writings of Edwards and Franklin are incomplete. Had they attempted

substantial conclusions, they would have failed, for their own lives were unfinished. Instead, they left the responsibility of concluding to their audience: the journey of reading these narratives is a perpetual one, always subject to change. With each reading, the texts will reveal new insights to the reader.

WORKS CITED

Beidler, Philip D. "The 'Author' of Franklin's Autobiography." Early American Literature 16 (Winter 1981-2): 257-69.

Bercovitch, Sacvan. The American Jeremiad. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1978.

_____. The Puritan Origins of the American Self. New Haven: Yale UP, 1975.

_____. "The Ritual of American Autobiography: Edwards, Franklin, Thoreau." Revue Francaise D'Etudes Americaines 7 (May 1982): 139-50.

Bruss, Elizabeth. Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976.

Caldwell, Patricia. The Puritan Conversion Narrative: The Beginnings of American Expression. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983.

Carpenter, Frederic I. "The Radicalism of Jonathan Edwards." The New England Quarterly 4 (1931): 629-44.

Couser, G. Thomas. American Autobiography: The Prophetic Mode. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1979.

_____. Altered Egos: Authority in American Autobiography. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989.

Cox, James M. "Autobiography and America." Virginia Quarterly Review 47 (Spring 1971): 252-77.

DeProspo, R. C. "The 'New Simple Idea' of Edwards' Personal Narrative." Early American Literature 14 (Fall 1979): 193-204.

Edwards, Jonathan. "Personal Narrative." Yale ed. The Norton Anthology of American Literature. 3rd ed, shorter. Ed. Nina Baym, et al. New York: Norton, 1989. 121-31.

Fichtelberg, Joseph. "The Complex Image: Text and Reader in the Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin." Early American Literature 23 (1988): 202-16.

Frankin, Benajmin. The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin. Ed. Leonard W. Labaree, et al. New Haven: Yale UP, 1964.

Garbo, Norman S. "Jonathan Edwards' Personal Narrative: Dynamic Stasis." Literatur in Wissenschaft und Unterricht 2 (1969): 141-48.

Griffith, John. "The Rhetoric of Franklin's 'Autobiography.'" Criticism 13 (Winter 1971): 77-94.

Howarth, William L. "Some Principles of Autobiography." New Literary History 5 (1974): 363-81.

Iser, Wolfgang. The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1974.

_____. The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978.

Johnson, Parker H. "Jonathan Edwards' 'Personal Narrative' and the Northampton Controversy." Cithara: Essays in the Judaeo-Christian Tradition 26 (May 1987): 31-47.

Johnson, Paul David. "Jonathan Edwards's 'Sweet Conjunction.'" Early American Literature 16 (Winter 1981-2): 270-81.

Levin, David. "The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin: The Puritan Experimenter in Life and Art." Yale Review 53 (1964): 258-75.

_____, ed. The Puritan in the Enlightenment: Franklin and Edwards. Chicago: Rand McNally, 1963.

Mandel, Barrett John. "The Autobiographer's Art." Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 27 (Winter 1968): 215-26.

McGiffert, Michael. Introduction. God's Plot--The Paradoxes of Puritan Piety: Being the Autobiography and Journal of Thomas Shepard. Ed. Michael McGiffert. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1972. 3-32.

McNerney, J. R. "The Mystical Journey of Jonathan Edwards." Studia Mystica 8 (Spring 1985): 20-29.

Miller, Perry. Errand Into the Wilderness. Cambridge: Belknap of Harvard UP, 1956.

_____. Jonathan Edwards. The American Men of Letters Series. New York: William Sloane, 1949.

_____. The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century. New York: Macmillan, 1939.

Olney, James, ed. Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1972.

Pascal, Roy. Design and Truth in Autobiography. London: Routledge & Kegan, 1960.

Porter, Roger J. "Unspeakable Practices, Writable Acts: Franklin's Autobiography." The Hudson Review 32 (Summer 1979): 229-38.

Sayre, Robert. The Examined Self: Benjamin Franklin, Henry Adams, and Henry James. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1964.

Scheick, William J. The Writings of Jonathan Edwards: Theme, Motif, and Style. College Station: Texas A & M UP, 1975.

Seavy, Ormond. Becoming Benjamin Franklin: The Autobiography and the Life. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1988.

Seed, David. "Exemplary Selves: Jonathan Edwards and Benjamin Franklin." First Person Singular: Studies in American Autobiography. Ed. A. Robert Lee. London: Vision P, 1988. 37-56.

Shea, Daniel B. Spiritual Autobiography in Early America. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1988.

Spengemann, William. The Forms of Autobiography: Episodes in the History of a Literary Genre. New Haven: Yale UP, 1980.

Tompkins, Jane P. "Criticism and Feeling." College English 39 (October 1977): 169-78.

Watkins, Owen C. The Puritan Experience: Studies in Spiritual Autobiography. New York: Schoken, 1972.