

Persona-ly Appealing: Benjamin Franklin's Poor Richard and Authorial Self-Representation

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Abstract: While scholarship on Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* describes his use of persona in nuanced terms, scholarship on Franklin's earlier writings tends to characterize his use of persona as simply a device he used to eliminate personal details from his texts. This article, focused on Franklin's Poor Richard persona, argues that he conceived of literary persona not simply as a tool to protect his anonymity, but also as a means of self-promotion and self-representation. Franklin used Poor Richard to make a space for himself in the literary marketplace, build a readership for the almanac, and create a positive public reputation for himself. Franklin's early experiments in performing sincerity and authenticity through an invented personality prefigure the performances of identity he would deploy through his authorial persona in *The Autobiography*. Thus, by examining Franklin's construction of identity in *Poor Richard's Almanack*, we learn more about how he crafted a public identity for himself.

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Scholars who write about the public sphere tend to see literary persona, the use of an invented personality or character who claims authorship of a work, as a device eighteenth-century American authors, writing in the republican tradition, used to eliminate the personal from their printed texts. Michael Warner, for example, suggests that the contrivance aided writers in achieving "the general principle of negativity" (43), self-negation in print. By disguising themselves by means of personae, writers could create rhetorical distance between themselves and their political self-interests, which lent their work credibility and implied their rational and disinterested concern for the reading audience. Studies that have considered Benjamin Franklin's literary personae have tended to view his use of the device from this critical perspective. Christopher Looby describes Franklin's use of persona as "self-alienation in language" (115); Ann Dean argues that "the elusive writing performed in the persona of Silence Dogood or Poor Richard" serves to "bracke[t] the personal"(93); and Todd Nothstein mentions

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Silence Dogood briefly as a tool of “anonymity” (16).² While Franklin’s literary personae are interpreted in such a limited way, the same is not true of Franklin’s autobiographical persona.³ In scholarship on Franklin’s construction of self in the *Autobiography* (1791), his use of persona is described in more complicated and nuanced terms, as “performativity” (Smith 24), for example, and “linguistic manipulation” (Nothstein 5). Such criticism has examined Franklin’s production of identity in relation to civil society (as in Glazener), politics (as in Cutting-Gray), and even history (as in Schiff). While I agree with these critics that Franklin is employing persona in *The Autobiography* in complex and engaging ways, I think the same could and should be said of Franklin’s earlier literary personae.

This article, which focuses on Poor Richard, the persona of Franklin’s popular *Poor Richard’s Almanack* (1732-1758), aims to show that Franklin used his earlier personae in more complicated ways than current scholarship suggests, and in ways that further challenge the dominant critical view of literary persona as a device that is deployed to create distance between the author and the audience. He conceived of literary persona not simply as a tool to protect his anonymity or disguise his interests, but also as a means of self-promotion and self-representation. Franklin was writing at a time when the republican mode of authorship, focused on promoting patriotism and encouraging moral behavior among citizens, was being challenged and gradually replaced by a more liberal model, one that emphasized Lockean individualism and accounted for an author’s ambitions.⁴ In Franklin’s writings, it is possible to see the interplay between these two contesting ideologies. While the value of literary anonymity in early eighteenth-century America was mostly political—in particular, it was used to create the effect of political disinterestedness and distance between the author and the audience—Franklin had more self-interested motivations for employing the device of literary persona. He found that the use of an engaging and sympathetic author-figure, rather than creating distance, could in fact connect him more closely to his readers. By introducing an embodied speaker, like Poor Richard, defined by humor and irony, particularities and eccentricities, private interests, and personal motivations, his works would offer his audience more engaging and active reading experiences than those provided by authors writing in an abstract, disinterested style. Not only did a literary persona make his writings more entertaining to read, and thus more appealing to consumers, but a persona allowed Franklin the rhetorical space he needed to write about himself in a

² Most scholarship on Franklin’s literary personae tends to be descriptive rather than analytical, as in Horner, Lemay, and Ross. A number of critics have made arguments about Poor Richard; however, they focus on his portrayal in “The Way to Wealth,” the preface to the final almanac, instead of considering his role in the almanac as a whole, as I will do. See Gallagher, Sullivan, Drexler, and Lupton.

³ For scholarly accounts examining issues of self-construction, identity, and authorship in *The Autobiography* see Baker, Cutting-Gray, Glazener, Osburne, Jehlen, Kennedy, Nothstein, Schiff, Smith, and Terrell.

⁴ See Rice for the ways the American literary market changed over the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth.

positive manner and attempt to influence the way his readers felt about him. Franklin's early experiments in performing sincerity and authenticity through an invented personality prefigure the performances of identity he would deploy through his authorial persona in later writings, including *The Autobiography*. By looking at how Franklin constructs identity in *Poor Richard's Almanack*, we can understand more about how he crafted a public identity for himself.

Franklin's Literary Persona

In his use of Poor Richard as a persona in his almanac, Franklin was preceded slightly by contemporaries who employed the device in newspaper writing and in some almanacs. Unlike Franklin, however, these contemporaries tended to use the device conventionally—to establish rhetorical distance, disinterestedness, and rational concern for their audiences. Franklin's brother James, editor of Boston's *New-England Courant* (1721-1726), and the writers for this newspaper were the first to use literary personae in colonial America. They modeled aspects of their publication on Joseph Addison and Richard Steele's very popular British serial, *The Spectator* (1711-1712, 1714), that sought to teach and entertain through amusing essays, purportedly written by an anonymous observer, on a wide variety of topics from morality and philosophy to social etiquette and literary criticism.⁵ Other newspaper writers quickly followed the Couranteers' example. Some of the most popular personae of the time included the *Boston Weekly's* Proteus Echo (1727-1728), the *Virginia Gazette's* Monitor (1736-1737), the *South-Carolina Gazette's* Humourist (1753-1754), and the *American Magazine's* Prattler (1757-1758).⁶ Newspaper writers found literary personae to be useful devices because with them they could freely express their ideas about government, society, literature, and manners without fearing negative repercussions. While literary personae were not as commonly used in American almanacs, they were not unprecedented. In fact, at the time that Franklin started publishing *Poor Richard*, James Franklin was publishing an almanac in Rhode Island that he called *Poor Robin's Almanack* (1727-1735) (Pencak 185).

In *Poor Richard's Almanack*, Franklin creates a persona that served to enlarge Franklin's readership, appeal to consumers in the literary marketplace, promote him as a writer, sell almanacs, and increase his printing business and profits. Thus, it was not simply Franklin's use of the device that differed from his contemporaries, but more significantly, it was his motivations for deploying the persona of Poor Richard that

⁵ For more information on the history of *The Spectator*, see Newman's introduction to *The Spectator: Emerging Discourses*.

⁶ For information on Proteus Echo, see Clark 148-157. For information on the other personae mentioned, see Chevalier 15.

differed as well. During the colonial period, almanacs were the most widely read and widely distributed of all printed materials. Unlike other publications, which were often targeted at a specific reading audience, almanac readership extended to people of all social ranks, occupations, and geographic areas. For example, Marion Stowell notes that in the 1770s, the average circulation for major newspapers in the most populated areas was about 2,500, whereas the circulation for Nathaniel Ames's Boston-based *Astronomical Diary* (1726-1764), the most popular colonial almanac, was 50,000-60,000. Even almanacs that did not gain an especially large readership reached circulations of about 2,000 (42). Franklin's *Poor Richard* would circulate roughly 10,000 copies a year, though, as Thomas Horrocks points out, Franklin's almanac would exert a greater influence on American almanac trade, as it was the only almanac of its time circulated intercolonially. Given the amount of business almanacs generated, printers were in competition with each other trying to negotiate terms with almanac writers. In 1730 and 1731, Franklin's print shop was able to secure the printing of two Philadelphia almanacs, Thomas Godfrey's and John Jerman's; however, Franklin was unable to acquire Titan Leeds's almanac, which was more popular than both of those that Franklin was publishing (Pencak 184-185).

Since he could not secure all the almanac business that he desired, Franklin decided to generate business by publishing his own. Through *Poor Richard*, he targeted Leeds in print, with the hopes of drawing readership away from him. In his initial almanac, Franklin has *Poor Richard* predict Leeds's death, which he claims will occur precisely "on Oct. 17. 1773. 3 ho. 29 m. P.M." *Poor Richard* argues that since readers "may not longer [sic] expect to see any of [Leeds's] performances after this Year," they should grant him "a share of publick Encouragement" (445). By fictionally killing off his competition, a move that mimics one made by Jonathan Swift in his satiric almanac, *Isaac Bickerstaff's Predictions for the Year 1708*, Franklin created a space for himself in the almanac market (Palmeri 377). Whereas Swift was writing to poke fun at almanac writers and only published his almanac once, Franklin ridicules his competitor but sets *Poor Richard* up as a legitimate, though entertaining, almanac-writer, and presents his audience with an actual almanac, not a parody of one, for many years to come.

Leeds did not take kindly to *Poor Richard*'s prediction of his death, and his anger worked to Franklin's advantage as his competitor responded furiously to *Poor Richard* in the preface to his 1734 almanac, and in turn provoked a humorous exchange between the two almanac writers that lasted for several years. In provoking Leeds, Franklin created an entertaining storyline for readers to follow over time and promoted the sale of his almanacs. In *Poor Richard*'s first year alone, the almanac went through three printings and, in addition to being sold in Philadelphia, was sold in other major cities: Charleston, Newport, and Boston (Miller 97).

The introductory preface of the first *Poor Richard* takes advantage of Leeds's popularity to promote the new publication, but it also establishes the beginnings of a

comic narrative, which was unique for an American almanac at that time and another shrewd promotional technique on Franklin's part. From the first issue, Franklin creates internal conflict for the persona of the almanac writer, and in so doing adapts the genre of the almanac from calendrical and informational to more of a narrative work that reflects and even critiques social character and relationships. In introducing himself, Poor Richard explains his motivation for writing, saying he is "excessive poor," while his wife is "excessive proud." He laments that she "cannot bear" for him to do "nothing but gaze at the Stars," and has threatened to burn his books and "Rattling Traps (as she calls [his] Instruments)" if he does not start making money for his family (445). In this passage, Franklin suggests that Poor Richard has marital problems, ones that have a great deal of comic potential. It becomes obvious to a reader that Poor Richard's wife is domineering and unappreciative of his intellectual hobbies. Though Poor Richard says nothing against her directly, the fact that he has mentioned the conflict between them in the opening preface suggests that he will reveal more conflicts in prefaces to come, which he does, in fact, do. Even many of the maxims that Franklin intersperses in the calendar section of the almanac reinforce the implication of Poor Richard's marital conflict. For example, the 1733 almanac includes the sayings "Ne'er take a wife till thou hast a house (& a fire) to put her in" (446) and "Many estates are spent in the getting, Since women for tea forsook spinning & knitting" (447), both of which poke fun at wives. Franklin's almanac, then, not only promises to deliver the typical substance of almanacs—the calendar, the listings of important feast days, the weather predictions—but also promises to provide readers with ongoing literary entertainment with narrative qualities. Readers could expect that they would learn more about Poor Richard and his misadventures in the following year's almanac. The continuity of the subject matter worked to improve the marketability of Franklin's almanac; he offered his readers narrative entertainment for their money as well as an incentive for purchasing future copies of his almanac.

In addition to establishing the comic charm of the persona, Franklin sought to appeal to his readers through Poor Richard's seeming openness and honesty, contriving a semblance of sincerity and authenticity. Throughout the prefaces, Poor Richard frequently reminds readers of his humble station in life.⁷ He tells his audience that he is "excessive poor"(445), as I mentioned above, makes an "honest Declaration" of his "Poverty" (481), and characterizes himself as an "honest Husbandmen (sic)" (539). While it would be impossible to say for sure what about Poor Richard made him popular with his audience, as that kind of evidence of reader response is not available to us, it is possible to focus on Franklin's rhetorical decisions and speculate why Franklin wrote the way he did. His consideration of the concerns and ambitions of working class

⁷ According to Perkins, Franklin likely modeled his persona on that of an English almanac, *Poor Robin* (1661-1776), written from the perspective of a poor, somewhat naïve character (123).

consumers, both represented through and facilitated by Poor Richard's persona, suggests that Franklin aimed to achieve readership within this demographic. His emphasis on the commonness of his speaker contrasts speakers of contemporary works who deliberately distanced themselves from readers in order to gain authority and credibility. Todd Thompson has argued that Franklin's use of literary personae lent "the authority of print to fictional characters whose personality traits were crafted to be representative of colonists otherwise excluded from public-sphere discourse" (450), and although Thompson does not analyze the Poor Richard persona specifically, his argument applies to this persona as well. Poor Richard represents a perspective that conventional discourse had obscured. In speaking as a lower-class character, Franklin works to earn the trust and yearly readership of this group of almanac consumers. Even after the almanac had become a financial success, Franklin was careful to keep Richard "poor," as this helped him connect with readers. In the 1739 preface, Poor Richard mentions that because of the popularity of his publication people had been speculating about his financial situation. He assures his readers that he is indeed still a poor man, in spite of his almanac's success because the agreement he made with the printer when he first started out gave the printer "the greatest Part of the Profit" (471). Poor Richard's poverty is an essential aspect of his character because it helps him appeal to an important demographic.

By publicizing private details about his life, such as his strained relationship with his wife and his desperate need for income, Poor Richard represents a rejection of the republican authorial tradition of disinterestedness and distance, and instead engenders a kind of authorial accessibility, conjuring an author who, despite his low social status, is not hiding behind anonymity. He reveals to his readers that his incentive for writing is money, again appealing to fundamental economic, financial, and social concerns that would be taboo for the disembodied republican author subscribing to the ideology of disinterestedness to admit. Poor Richard's willingness to reveal his inner thoughts and motivations effectively constructs his authority as a speaker, by creating an embodied voice that provides a forcible counterpoint to the disembodied authority of republican literature. Through Poor Richard's voice and example, Franklin demonstrates that an author need not write in a disembodied, disinterested style in order to construct authority within a text; rather, the revelation of self-interest, even feigned self-interest, could help a writer create a powerful and persuasive voice.

Franklin's Public Persona

While Franklin developed a unique and entertaining literary voice in Poor Richard, one in contrast to the abstract speakers popular in his time, and used this voice to directly promote his almanac, the persona served another important and innovative function, distinct from its literary and commercial achievements: Franklin used the

literary persona to begin to develop his own public persona. In the prefaces, he sets Poor Richard up as a foil to his own identity and, in contrasting “B. Franklin, printer” to his almanac writer, represents himself as a hardworking and intelligent public figure concerned with social good. Poor Richard, though humble and honest, is primarily a comic character, one who does not have the substance of a public servant. Throughout the almanac, Franklin has Poor Richard frequently differentiate himself from his creator, a rhetorical move that implies his concern that readers would conflate his personality with that of his persona. Though Franklin did not explicitly take credit for the almanac’s authorship, many readers came to realize that he was writing it. As Trish Loughran explains, even when printed works were written without an author’s real name, the local nature of print culture often made it impossible for authors to remain anonymous (136). In the 1736 preface, the persona responds to rumors that Franklin is actually Poor Richard, claiming “I need not, indeed, have taken any Notice of so idle a Report, if it had not been for the sake of my Printer, to whom my Enemies are pleased to ascribe my Productions; and who it seems is as unwilling to father my Offspring, as I am to lose credit of it” (459). Poor Richard, never afraid of expressing his ambition as a writer, assures his readers that he, and he alone, deserves credit for his words. He claims responsibility for the thoughts, observations, and stories that have appeared in the almanacs. He stresses that his voice is separate from Franklin’s. In fact, he indicates that the printer is somewhat embarrassed by what Poor Richard is writing. Of course, Franklin was not genuinely ashamed of Poor Richard. On the contrary, Franklin wanted his readers to appreciate the literary ability necessary for crafting not only such an entertaining character but also such a complex rhetorical and literary device. Indeed, the images of the text as offspring, the persona as displaced father, and Franklin as a surrogate father to the text suggest a sense of dramatic lineage between the author, persona, and text and highlight Franklin’s concern with crafting a literary reputation for himself. As Stephanie Pietros has explained, the trope of literary writings as children reflected not only authors’ desires to create a legacy for themselves, but also their anxieties on how their writings would be received once they were circulated to the public. In making the comparison between literary legacy and biological legacy, authors were acknowledging their inability to manage their reception: just as a parent cannot control how a child behaves, a writer cannot control how an audience understands, interprets, or appropriates a text (66-67). In other words, once a text is published, it takes on a life of its own. In the almanac, Franklin clearly recognizes, and pokes fun at, this aspect of textual transmission in creating a fictional character who insists upon his own reality and boldly asserts his authorship. While Franklin acknowledges the limitations of textual self-representation here, he nonetheless attempts to use the text to shape readers’ views of him. He insists upon fundamental personality differences between himself and his literary persona because Poor Richard does not embody many of the qualities for which Franklin wanted to be publicly known. At the same time,

Franklin utilizes this moment to showcase both his literary and authorial prowess and his reputable moral character.

Instead of associating himself with Poor Richard's humor, Franklin links himself with the more serious and useful elements of the almanac: the didactic maxims encouraging self-reliance, frugality, and industry, which he inserted in the calendar section of the almanacs each year. Notably, not all of the maxims encourage virtuous behavior. There are humorous maxims mixed in, such as those about wives which I mentioned earlier. However, after 1736, the maxims become increasingly focused on virtue. One way that Franklin associates himself with the useful aspects of the almanacs is by breaking character in several prefaces to explain to his readers how the maxims should be interpreted. In so doing, he emphasizes the constructed nature of Poor Richard while also highlighting his own interest in helping the community. For example, the preface to the 1739 almanac begins rather typically with Poor Richard thanking his readers for their continued support and then proceeding to tell a humorous story. In this case, Poor Richard, describing astrologers' methods, details some of the images he has seen in the stars. He relates how he has seen Virgo squatting down to urinate, and suggests that by calculating the speed of the urination's descent, he can predict when April showers will occur. This ridiculous account is consistent in tone and style with Poor Richard's earlier prefaces. The piece is interrupted, however, by a paragraph that is strangely, and uncharacteristically, serious:

Besides the usual Things expected in an Almanack, I hope the profess'd Teachers of Mankind will excuse my scattering here and there some instructive Hints in Matters of Morality and Religion. And be not thou disturbed, O grave and sober Reader, if among the many serious Sentences in my Book, thou findest me trifling now and then, and talking idly. In all the Dishes I have hitherto cook'd for thee, there is solid Meat enough for thy Money. There are Scraps from the Table of Wisdom, that will if well digested, yield strong Nourishment to thy Mind. But squeamish Stomachs cannot eat without Pickles; which, 'tis true are good for nothing else, but they provoke an Appetite. The Vain Youth that reads my Almanack for the sake of an idle Joke, will perhaps meet with a serious Reflection, that he may ever after be the better for. (471)

This passage encourages the readers to see the maxims as useful instruction that, if taken seriously, could improve the readers' lives. This seems odd, coming from Poor Richard, since he has never before suggested that readers could improve themselves by reading his work. As noted earlier, Poor Richard states that his primary goal in writing the almanacs is to support himself and his wife. Additionally, this paragraph seems out of place because it seeks to excuse the entertaining aspects of the work, something that

Poor Richard has never seemed concerned to do—although this is something that Poor Richard has implied that Franklin has been apt to do all along. In preface after preface, Poor Richard has expressed his desire to please his audience in whatever ways he can. He does not always recognize his own humor and certainly does not realize that some of the things he writes may be considered bawdy or inappropriate, but he consistently demonstrates his intention to amuse his readers. It seems unlikely, then, that such a figure would be reflecting about the utility of the maxims and apologizing for the humor of the prefaces in such a serious, eloquent, and self-aware fashion.

I argue that this discrepancy in voice is purposeful on Franklin's part. He wanted to ensure that his readers would understand the larger purpose of his almanac and would not allow Poor Richard's humor to distract them from utilizing the almanac to the fullest extent. In fact, in this passage, Franklin reveals his authorial purpose to his readers. In addition to providing readers with what they expect for their money, an almanac, he has also incorporated helpful instruction. However, at the same time he delivers these maxims, he also recognizes that people are not apt to accept advice if it is presented in a boring or off-putting way. Therefore, along with the "solid Meat" of his writing, those aspects of the almanac, like the maxims, that provide "strong Nourishment to thy Mind," Franklin has included "Pickles," comic relief that encourages his audience to read. Poor Richard may seem like an "idle Joke" to some "grave and sober" readers, but Franklin insists that Poor Richard's foolishness serves a larger, more important purpose. Readers who open the almanac looking for a laugh also will encounter moral instruction and may be better off for it.

Here, readers are meant to realize that though Poor Richard takes the credit, there is a more serious force, "B. Franklin, printer," controlling the content of the almanacs, a force that is concerned about the community and interested in readers' moral development. This second identity is, to borrow Wayne Booth's terms, the "implied author," or the "author's second-self," the idealized image of the author that readers induce from their reading. Franklin interrupts Poor Richard's preface to emphasize the utility of the yearly almanacs that he is providing and downplay the humor, even though the humor is obviously an important component and a likely reason why so many people purchase them. He leads readers to discover private aspects of his character through Poor Richard's depiction of him. Just as he constructs a sincere, authoritative voice for his persona by using print to reveal personal details, he hopes to do the same for himself. He uses *Poor Richard's Almanack* to craft not one persona, but two: Poor Richard, a comic speaker who adds entertainment value to the almanacs, and Benjamin Franklin, the talented writer and serious guiding force behind the almanacs who includes practical information and wise advice for his readers. Moreover, this double persona works further in Franklin's favor; by highlighting the constructedness of the Poor Richard persona to his audience, Franklin downplays the constructed nature of his own authorial persona. He appears to be letting his readers in on a private secret—the

authorship of the almanacs—which makes the revelation seem more sincere; however, despite this demonstrative performance of sincerity, Franklin has strategically disclosed his authorship in order to shape the way his readers perceive him.

Franklin's Autobiographical Persona

As I suggested earlier, though critics have recognized that Franklin harnesses the power of “appearance and perception”(Baker 288) in his *Autobiography*, they have not explored the significant relationship between Franklin's earlier personae and his autobiographical persona. For example, Jeff Osborne writes about the value of “manufactured self-appearance” (15) for Franklin in *The Autobiography*. He is concerned with reconciling “the duplicitous nature of Franklin's self-fashionings”(17) with the public project of virtue that Franklin espouses. He argues that embracing appearance was an essential practice of republican ideology, and not paradoxical to it. I am less concerned with the ethics of Franklin's self-representation and more interested in the rhetorical function of his manufactured personalities. Osborne points out, and I agree, that “Franklin's recognition that the self functions as print allowed him the coincident insight into the function of the self in the public eye. The Franklin self is not only to be read, but to be invested in by the public; and through this investment by the public the self accrues the power of both authority and independence”(19). In other words, Franklin realizes the power of a sympathetic and seemingly sincere personality to influence public perception, a point that I made earlier in relation to *Poor Richard*. Whereas Osborne attributes Franklin's realization of the power of personality to his interactions with his father and other men symbolic of paternal authority and the rifts he recognized between who they actually were and who they appeared to be, and this may indeed have affected him, I see his experimentation with personae also contributing to this realization.

There is a strong connection between Franklin's self-representation in *The Autobiography* and the representation of earlier personae, like Poor Richard. Consider, for instance, the scene in *The Autobiography* where Franklin aims to demonstrate his hardworking nature so he acts the part until community members believe he is what he appears to be. Franklin writes that to secure his “Credit and Character as a Tradesmen (sic),” he made the effort “not only to be in Reality Industrious and frugal, but to avoid all Appearances of the Contrary.” To achieve this image, he explains he “drest plainly,” “was seen at no Places of idle Diversion,” and “gave no Scandal.” Emphasizing perception, he explains, “Thus being esteem'd an industrious thriving young Man . . . I went on swimmingly” (629). Osborne cites this as an example of how the appearance of virtue, rather than the intention, makes an action virtuous, a principle that Franklin believed and put into practice throughout his life (24). I agree with Osborne's understanding of

the scene, but I think there is much more to be said about it. This passage reflects the kind of complex self-fashioning that Franklin engaged in while writing *Poor Richard's Almanack*. Here, Franklin is using one persona, that of Franklin the narrator, to write about a related, but separate identity, young Franklin, to reveal the constructedness of the moment being described. By admitting that young Franklin was simply acting a part for a very self-interested reason, Franklin the narrator makes himself seem like an honest chronicler of his life. The revelation of his earlier self's duplicity, which reads as a secret shared between himself and readers, rhetorically creates a sense of intimacy between Franklin the narrator and his audience, just as the revelation of the constructed nature of Poor Richard accomplishes a similar purpose in the almanac. Paradoxically, in exposing the artifice involved in his attempts of self-fashioning in his early life, Franklin draws attention away from the artifice he is using to establish a sense of identity for himself through the text. In fact, the passage may not even be biographically accurate, but whether or not Franklin actually behaved in the manner he describes is not the point. By fashioning an image of himself as a hardworking youth, Franklin suggests that he is, and apparently always was, ingenuous and enterprising. By exposing the self-interested motives driving him—the desire for wealth and success—he attempts, as he did through his persona of Poor Richard, to identify with readers whom he encourages to improve themselves as they read. The strategies he utilized in *Poor Richard*—the creation of realistic and engaging personalities, the exposure of self-interest, and the interplay between multiple related personae—are apparent in, and essential to, *The Autobiography*, and far from hiding himself behind created identities, he worked to reveal himself, a particularly stylized self, through them.

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