# Besides Benjamin Franklin: Autobiography in America, 1750-1800

#### STEPHEN CARL ARCH

Benjamin Franklin would be amused, I think, at the way his self-biographical narrative, which he referred to as "the History of my Life" and which we have come to know as *The Autobiography*, has been canonized by scholars both of American literature and of self-life-writing. The text's status puts me in mind of the story Franklin tells in Part One about him and his three young friends and their youthful attempts to write poetry. Franklin thinks that writing poetry is useful only as a way of improving "one's Language," and so he dabbles at the writing of poetry; but his friend James Ralph is resolute in becoming a poet. For practice, the four friends each agree to poetize the 18th Psalm. Ralph worries that his version will be criticized by Osborne, one of the friends who never allows him "the least Merit in any thing," and so he persuades Franklin to put his name to it. Franklin reads the poem and Osborne responds with enthusiasm: "But who would have imagined it ... that Franklin had been capable of such a Performance; such Painting, such Force! Such Fire! He has even improv'd the Original... . Good God, how he writes."

Osborne's praise for Ralph's version of Psalm 18 is not very different from the language critics have applied to Franklin's Autobiography - or, as I will insist upon calling it, his *History of my Life*. Franklin's narrative has dominated our attempts to imagine the literary history of the late-18th century in English-speaking America, particularly the literary history of the first-person narrative. It is a literary history which we need to re-imagine. We need to understand that Franklin's self-biography is not revolutionary; it is, in fact, anything but revolutionary. Unlike Jean-Jacques Rousseau, writing at the same time as Franklin was in Part One of his History of my Life, Franklin is fully and completely uninterested in portraying a self that, as Rousseau has it, is "unlike any one I have ever met." Where Rousseau wishes to be original and singular, Franklin wishes to be imitative and typical. He takes great care throughout History of my Life to describe the way he was formed in imitation of other selves, particularly and not surprisingly older men like his father and the merchant, Mr. Denham, but also models he gleans from his wide reading. In what seems at first to be an off-hand comment, Franklin says about handwriting: "those who aim at perfect Writing by imitating ... engraved Copies, tho' they never reach the wish'd for Excellence of those Copies, [have] their Hand ... mended by the Endeavour" (1391). This imitative method of learning is typical of all of Franklin's learning, including his learning about the "self." The concept of imitation drives Franklin's understanding of how to become a good writer, and in a much more pervasive manner it dominates his account of how me came to be "himself."

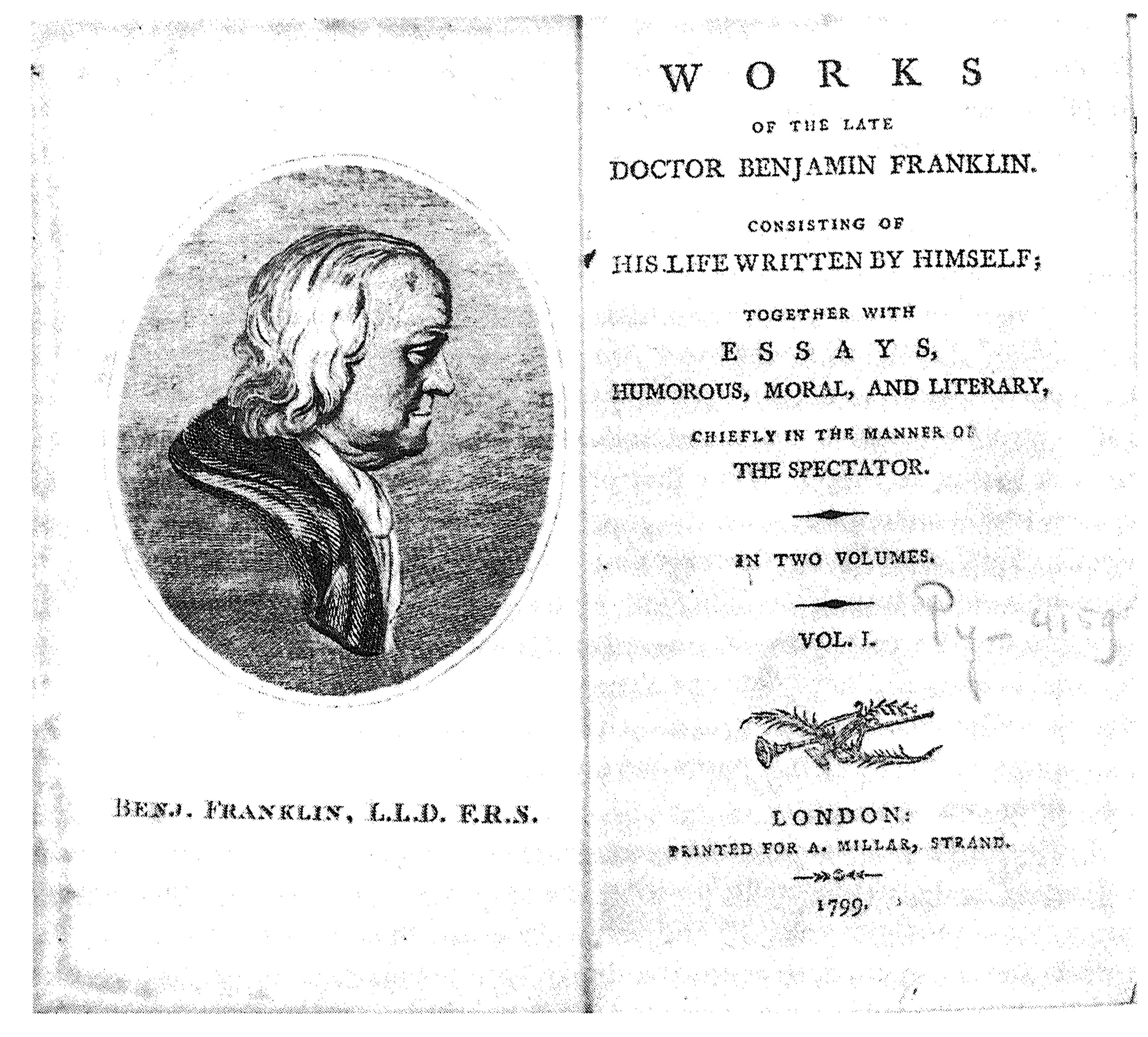
Historically, the art of self-biography always edged toward the conception of the self as unique, original, or singular, but prior to the early nineteenth century it was always driven away from that conception by conscious or unconscious demands that the self subordinate itself to Christ or to society or to already-known types. Elsewhere, I have urged scholars to restrict the term "autobiography" specifically to the kind of writing that emerges from an ideology that permits authors to imagine themselves as unique, original, or singular. Franklin's narrative, in this sense, is not an autobiography; it is, in a way, an anti-autobiography, as is a narrative like Augustine's *Confessions*. Even Rousseau's *Confessions*, in this sense, is not an "autobiography." As Charles Taylor points out, "Rousseau never took the radical step to [a] more subjectivist position."

The notion that the self is imitative undergirds traditional notions of self-lifewriting in the second half of the eighteenth century in America. Franklin's narrative is normative. Ruth Banes, for example, has noted how a cluster of self-biographies written in this period, including Franklin's History, John Woolman's The Journal of John Woolman (1774), John Adams's The Autobiography of John Adams (wr. 1802), and Thomas Jefferson's The Autobiography of Thomas Jefferson (wr. 1821),<sup>5</sup> prove that "the exemplary self was the prevailing autobiographical persona" during the eighteenth century.<sup>6</sup> It was necessary for these writers to imagine the self as typical, not unusual or singular. Even a self-biography as revealing and as assertive as Elizabeth Ashbridge's Some Account of the Fore Part of the Life of Elizabeth Ashbridge (1774; wr. before 1755) conforms to this demand. Ashbridge's narrative is plotted like an eighteenth-century novel: she falls in love with a young man and elopes, he dies, her father refuses to see her, she sells herself into an indenture, ships for the new world, and so on. Her story is highly novelistic. She recounts being exposed to and testing several religions until she accepts the "inner light" of the Quakers. To accept this light, she must empty herself of "self": "Now I began to be lifted up with Spiritual Pride & thought my Self better than [others], but thro' Mercy this did not Last Long, for in a Little time I was brought Low & saw that these were the People to whom I must join." Her skeptical husband remarks about her conversion: "If it be of God I can't over throw it, & if it be of your self it will soon fall." Though critics have often read Ashbridge's narrative in terms of the "voice within" – the self of the autobiographical impulse – the narrative itself is more insistently interested in the voice "without," that is, the shaping hand of God's will: "sitting by a fire in Company with Several [others] ... there arose a Thunder Gust, & with the Noise that struck my Ear, a voice attended, even as the Sound of a Mighty Trumpet, piercing thro' me with these words, 'O! Eternity, Eternity'...." It is this voice which fills Ashbridge with the "inner light" and permits her – if she keeps her own "self" subordinated – to speak in front of Quaker congregations. Ashbridge, like other Quakers, would have recoiled at the thought that her voice at a meeting or in a narrative "belonged" to her, not to her God.

Ashbridge subordinates personal agency to the will of a divine Father, much as Woolman does in his Journal. For many elite white men in eighteenth-century America like Franklin, Jefferson, and Adams, personal agency is subordinated to higher laws derived by the use of reason from the natural world. In talking about moral virtues in Part Two of History of my Life, for example, Franklin tells us that he narrowed his list of important virtues through extensive reading; "different Writers included more or fewer Ideas under the same Name," he says, but "I propos'd ... to use rather more Names with fewer Ideas annex'd to each, than a few Names with more Ideas" (1384). Improving these virtues is like weeding a garden: "like him who having a Garden to weed, does not attempt to eradicate all the bad Herbs at once, which would exceed his Reach and his Strength, but works on one of the Beds at a time, & having accomplish'd the first proceeds to a second" (1387). In reality, of course, weeds are entirely a relative matter. Your flowers in my kitchen garden are weeds; your flowers in your flower garden are not weeds. But for Franklin, the moral virtues he gleans from his reading are not invented by the individual in some private, interior space; they are discovered and isolated in nature (i.e., human behavior) and in reading. They are found elements, not invented ones. They are not relative. Franklin's conduct as he describes it in his narrative is, in this sense, exemplary and (necessarily) social. It is patterned after other, reasonable and shared conceptions of proper behavior.

Charles Taylor points out, and I agree, that while "Rousseau never took the radical step to [a] more subjectivist position," he does, however, "immensely enlarge ... the scope of the inner voice." And on the American side of the trans-Atlantic divide, in the late eighteenth century, a similar kind of enlargement takes place, one that has not been adequately discussed either by scholars of American literature or scholars of self-life-writing. Beside Benjamin Franklin – and *besides* Benjamin Franklin – several American writers try to push the art of self-biography toward the radical subjectivist position that, later, defines its complete transposition into "autobiography." I would like to discuss three writers whose self narratives exemplify this transformation and, in the process, anticipate the full emergence of the genre of autobiography in the first half of the nineteenth century: John Fitch, K. White, and Venture Smith. Writing at the end of the eighteenth century from marginalized social positions, each of these writers moves toward a radically subjective conception of personal identity in which the self is invented as an agent of its own destiny and significance, rather than formed by imitation as an exemplary "selfless" type.

John Fitch was one of the inventors of the steamboat. He was born in Connecticut in 1744; he died in 1798. His life story echoes Benjamin Franklin's in a number of ways. Like Franklin, Fitch was from a large family headed by a hard-working, industrious father. Like Franklin, he had little formal education, but managed to read fairly widely, become accomplished in a number of fields, and move easily in the circles of men who possessed a formal education. Like Franklin, he was an improver and an inventor. They both "tinkered" with machines and with ideas. And



Benjamin Franklin, portrait from his Works (1799) (Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague).

like Franklin, he wrote his self-biography both in order to prevent others from telling his story wrongly and in order to provide "useful lessons to mankind." The parallels between the two men – one the most famous American of his age, the other soon (and still) forgotten – run deep. However, in 1790, the year of Franklin's death, Fitch begins to recount his life in a narrative which he refers to as "a detail of my life," a narrative which moves toward entirely different conclusions about the formation of selfhood than does Franklin's. In his narrative, Fitch struggles to understand himself not as a social being formed by imitation, but as a unique being capable of original thought and independent agency

In contrast to Franklin's effort to write himself as a self within society, imitating and emulating others, Fitch writes himself as "singular." I am, he remarks near the beginning of the manuscript, "one of the most singular men perhaps that has been born this age" (22). His singularity manifests itself in any number of ways. For example, he is treated in "singular" ways by other people: "The usage I met with in the house [of my master] perhaps was as singular as is to be found in the United States"

(40), he complains. His relationship with his master is typical of his relationships with everyone with whom he comes into contact. Singularity is even written on his body, which was, he reports, formed into "disproportioned shapes." His father imposed hard labor on him in youth, stunting his growth. At eighteen, "as nature required growth," he "started up all at once without giving nature time to consult herself" (32). He is, as a result, disfigured in some way that he will not specify, though he alludes to it at several points. I am, he remarks, for example, "slendermade and had the appearance of one being considerably advanced in the consumption" (50), even though he apparently is not actually tubercular. I am not "a very handsome man" (137), he says; I am "contemptable" (102, 121) and "despicable [in] appearance" (123), with an "uncouth way of speaking and holding up extravigant Ideas" (124). His singularity is physical as well as social, and he insists upon it with a relentless fervor. He wants to be perceived as different, as singular, as "extravigant." Here, again, is an instructive difference between Fitch and Franklin (and between Rousseau and Franklin), for Franklin rarely mentions his body in a personal way in his self-biography. Generalized comments about health can be found in *History of* my Life, but Franklin never particularizes those comments. It never occurs to him to describe and analyze his physical self.

Singularity was a word that had been in use for several centuries by the time Fitch took hold of it as an organizing trope for his self-biography in 1790. Samuel Johnson had defined it in his 1755 Dictionary as "Some character or quality by which one is distinguished from others" and "Character or manners different from those of others." The Oxford English Dictionary offers nine definitions, including one that seems closest to Fitch's meaning and which was first used by Laurence Sterne in 1768: "The fact or condition of departing or deviating from what is customary, usual, or normal; peculiarity, eccentricity, oddity, strangeness." By the middle of the nineteenth century, an American autobiographer like Henry David Thoreau was concerned both to foster and to articulate his eccentricities: "I fear chiefly lest my expression may not be extra-vagant enough, may not wander far enough beyond the narrow limits of my daily experiences, so as to be adequate to the truth of which I have been convinced." 12 What is remarkable in Fitch's Detail of my Life is both the extent of his singularity and its origins. The origins are various and include every source for human behavior that the eighteenth century could imagine: society, God, heaven, fate, nature, family, and the self. Wherever he turns, Fitch sees himself marked by others as eccentric and odd.

The most significant place where Fitch imagines his singularity is his invention of the steamboat. Seeing a gentleman pass him in a "Chair" drawn by a horse one day, Fitch is "struck" by the "thought ... that it would be a noble thing if I could have such a carriage without the expense of keeping a hors" (113). The idea, he says, "strongly impressed my mind," and he immediately set about drafting plans for, first, a steam-driven carriage and, then, a steam-driven boat. He claims that the idea, both in its whole and in its parts, was essentially his. Even when a friend, learning of his

idea, shows him pictures of a steam engine in the 1759 edition of *Philosophia Britannia*, Fitch insists that "Till then I did not know that there was such a thing in nature as a Steam Engine." In other words, he did not simply invent or discover the idea that steam could power a boat; he also independently invented or discovered the concept of a condensing steam engine! Seeing that someone had beat him to that invention "chagreaned me considerably," he says, but on the other hand it reassures him that he can procure "the force" of steam and so realize his first idea of a steamboat (113).

The most famous American inventor of the century, Benjamin Franklin, tinkers with objects or ideas, imitating or emulating in order to improve the performance of something. Let me review several of the examples he provides in History of my Life. The glass lamps introduced in Philadelphia by Franklin were "his" invention, he says, only inasmuch as he could "claim" "some Merit ... respecting the Form of our Lamps as differing from the Globe Lamps we at first were supplied with from London" (1425). He "studied & practis'd all Thevenot's Motions & Positions [for swimming]"; only then did he add "some of my own" (1351). His "Philadelphia Experiments" with electricity are modeled upon the experiments he observed in Boston in 1746; Franklin merely improves them and adds some of his own. But John Fitch's ideas do not come from previous models, like Franklin's lamps or experiments, nor do they come from books, like Franklin's swimming techniques or his writing style. They come to him – "struck" him, he reports several times in Detail and repeats in his 1788 defense of his steamboat – from out of thin air, and hence are essentially and originally his: "the principle part of the original thoughts of any part of the Works [of the steamboat] proceeded from me" (116), he insists. Unlike apprentices who learned by imitating their masters and unlike inventors such as Franklin who emulated and improved the work of others, Fitch in his self-biographical account is the creator or inventor of things new "in nature" (113), that is, of the steamboat and – I would argue – of a distinct, original self that is an agent of its own destiny.

"Genius," Edward Young wrote in the mid-eighteenth century in his treatise on originality, "is [the] God within." It is Fitch, not the more famous Franklin, who first creates an American narrative self that begins to epitomize Young's assertion. As Laura Rigal has recently put it, Fitch repeatedly expresses "a rage for person-hood." The "opening of new territories in the western interior," she writes about Fitch's *Detail*, "is linked inseparably to the (violent and painful) forging of new territories of subjective interiority, or new 'mental properties'." Fitch steps beyond the world of "memoirs" and self-biographies and personal "histories" and struggles to express himself in what we now recognize as the discourse of autobiography. He conceives a world, like that conceived by historians following the French Revolution, in which radical discontinuity between people and between time periods is possible. Fitch, it should come as no surprise, tried in the early 1790s to begin the calendar anew, as did the French revolutionaries. Only, unlike the French revolu-

Benjamin Franklin's works, including his autobiography, remained influential throughout the nineteenth century.

Title page from a Dutch popular edition (Universiteitsbibliotheek Amsterdam).

## LERRIJKE KEUR

UIT

## BENJAMIN FRANKLIN'S

ZEDEKUNDIGE SCHRIFTEN.

Ultregeven door de

MAATSCHAPPIJ:

TOT NUTVAN'T ALGEMEEN.

1843.

Te Ameterdam, by De erven H. van munster en zoon

J. VAN DER HEY EN ZOON.

de priis is f 0.25.

tionaries, Fitch attempted to use his own birthday as the first day of the new millennium! Fitch's invention of himself as distinct, original, and singular – something "new in nature" – is not conservative or progressive; it is radical and revolutionary. History, in this view, moves by leaps and bounds, by discontinuous alterations, much as, by analogy, ideas came to Fitch "out of nowhere." It is, indeed, how romantic historians like Hegel and William Hickling Prescott come to understand the historical process, and how individuals like Thoreau come to understand their private selves. Franklin may be a founding father of the American political system, but Fitch is a founder, an originator, an inventor, of American autobiographical discourse. In his insistence of originality, on his own independent agency as inventor and self, Fitch, not Franklin, voices the emergent democratic conception that his individual genius was the inimitable God within.

K. White was born one full generation after Fitch, in Edinburgh in 1772, and she was brought to America by her father, a Tory merchant who because of his loyalty to King George III was forced to return to Scotland in 1780. She published her self-narrative in 1809. In it, she tells how, at seventeen, she fell in love with an American army officer who, it turns out, was already married to a women whom he did not love. He commits suicide one week before his scheduled wedding date with the author. After several months in mourning, she is urged by her father to marry a distant relation, a Mr. S. White, who "possessed insinuating manners" (48). As readers of eighteenth-century novels would have immediately suspected from the author's brief comment, S. White was a lecher, hypocrite, and liar. Soon after the wedding, he seduces the chambermaid and then flees Boston, leaving the chambermaid and her child destitute and White herself pregnant.

White's child apparently dies at birth, and she at that point enters the public world of trade, travel, and the law. She becomes a merchant in order to "acquire an independency, or at least, a compatency [sic]." Her husband's creditors sue her, however, and she is forced to appear in court to defend herself. She is acquitted. She then tries to start over in business in Providence, Rhode Island, only to fail; then moves, consecutively, to Schenectady, Herkimer County, Canada, Buffalo Creek, Onondaga, and finally Albany, where she is living when the narrative ends. Along her peripatetic route, she is accused of being both a French spy and a British spy, toys with the affections of a young woman who thinks that White is a man, and tracks down her husband in Canada and forces him to give her a piece of land – a "separate maintenance" (117) – in exchange for her agreement not to go public with the fact of his bigamy. At the end of her narrative, in good health but poor, legally independent but bound by "fate," White reflects upon the "novel and eccentric" course (126) her life as a woman has taken.

The figures of novelty and eccentricity – that is, departing or deviating from the regular or established norm – apply to White's behavior as a woman. Her eccentric course has led her to poverty and isolation, an inverted picture of the then-stillemergent middle-class ideal of wedded, domestic bliss. White recognizes her eccentricity as a "wandering situation" (84), both a literal travelling beyond acceptable boundaries and a metaphorical challenging of cultural and social norms. Her narrative is continually concerned with thresholds: a "timid female" like myself, she writes at the beginning, "approaches the threshold of her 'tale of woe' " with a trembling step; but she then goes over it (9-10). Figuratively speaking, White is willing and able to cross all sorts of thresholds and boundaries. She turns out not to be the "timid female" afraid of telling her story that she invokes in the "Preface." Hence, for example, when she is sued for the first time, she attends a packed courtroom whose visitors have been "attracted [by] the novelty of the scene." White is not silent and passive, as might be expected: she challenges potential jurors until finally a jury sympathetic to her plight is sworn in (57). The jury returns a not guilty verdict. In Herkimer County a few years later, White is arrested on suspicion of being a

French spy. She wittily characterizes the justices before whom she is examined as "justasses" (75), as "simply asses," and parries their ineffectual questions with ease and humor:

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Justice – How do you support yourself?

Answer – By good eating and drinking.

Justice – That is no answer – How do you gain your livelihood?

Answer – By hard industry.

Justice – What occupation do you follow?

Answer – Travelling.

Justice – To what purpose?

Answer – Pleasure. (79)
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These are not the answers of a shy and retiring woman, and in fact they allude to two of her most persistent concerns in the narrative: her body and her eccentric wanderings. In that instance, she is not only released from confinement, she initiates charges of false imprisonment against the justices and wins from them a "most humble apology ... for their conduct towards me" (82-83).

Figuratively, White's very body – her "figure" – crosses accepted boundaries: "as I advanced in age, I became large in stature[,] somewhat of a masculine form, of a robust strong complexion, so that upon the whole I would not make a bad appearance as a man, were I dressed in masculine attire" (63). Nature pushes her toward masculinity. It is her "masculine appearance" (74) that causes the justices of Herkimer County to suspect her of spying; something in her appearance or behavior as a woman makes them suspicious of her identity. In Schenectady that "something" leads a "young lady struck with [White's] appearance" (64) to arrange an "interview" with her. White, whimsically, plays along, disguising herself further with a false beard and using doublespeak to lead the young lady on. The affair, with its mixed message of homoeroticism and irony, leads eventually to an "engagement ... of matrimony" (68), until another suitor for the young lady's hand charges White with "attempting to seduce a lady in disguise" – an accurate charge, of course, only not in the way the other suitor imagined – and forces her to leave town. My "form," White sighs later in her travels, often tended to "become a subject of suspicion" (101).

White, I must emphasize, accepts her masculine appearance, and even plays upon it. "Tis true," she jokes in a poem near the end of her *Narrative*,

I'm strong and masculine,
What then? My size is justly mine,
If living well can make it;
The fat I boast I've justly gained,
Yet if another it has claimed,
Why he is free to take it. (104)

Her masculine appearance accompanies her growing sense of her own power at law and within society. When a "gentleman" accuses her of being a British spy (107), White responds by challenging him to that quintessential male test, a duel. She writes to her accuser: "you have dared to traduce my reputation and to wound my feelings, trusting to the fallacious hope that a woman's weapons were but her innocence and good conduct. But, sir, you shall find I am not totally destitute of others" (108). The accuser's response to her challenge is ill-written, misspelled, and almost illegible, and White prints it with glee: the "gentleman" was obviously not what he seemed. When, the next morning at the appointed site, he discovers that White is a woman, he tries to turn the duel into a boxing match; she puts a gun to his ear and makes him offer "concessions" to her in writing, concessions which of course she has to write for him. "'I acknowledge'," she ventriloquizes, "'to have circulated a report implicating the reputation of K- W-, and representing her as [a spy]' " (111-112). K. White will control her own representations, however extravagant or eccentric they might be.

This pushing at boundaries is generic, as well. White nods in the direction of the spiritual narrative at the end of Narrative: "on the 10 July [1804] the 'grace of God,' under 'seal,' was poured out upon me. My soul was ever 'free and independent,' and the littleness and persecutions of relentless creditors I despised the more they accumulated these persecutions" (119-120). But that is, quite literally, the only reference in the narrative to her conversion, and I take it to be simply less relevant than the force of her self-characterization elsewhere. In the narrative itself, as her allusion to not "rising" in the world suggests, White is grappling with the "self," not the "soul," and like some of her contemporaries she is struggling to comprehend how that self knows itself, how it relates to other selves, and what, finally, undergirds it. Generically, then, her narrative is not a spiritual narrative, but is instead an emergent autobiography. Indeed, White's narrative is so insistent about the protagonist's agency, and so willing to find purpose and meaning in isolation – what White calls "my solitary situation" (127) – that it could be considered one of the earliest autobiographies written in the West. Rousseau declared at the beginning of his Confessions that his purpose was "to display to my kind a portrait in every way true to nature," a purpose which I take White to be repeating in 1809, though from the perspective of a spurned, marginalized woman.

It is significant that the third writer whom I wish to discuss is African-American. Autobiography, as distinct from earlier forms of self-biographical writing which downplayed or denied the self, begins to emerge in the second half of the eighteenth century in America and the United States largely through the efforts of lower-class white men, women, and African-Americans who struggle to understand themselves as agents of their own destinies. Wenture Smith was born in Africa in 1729 and was brought as a slave to America at about the age of six. In 1798, at the age of sixty-nine, he related his life story to an unnamed person who had the narrative printed as *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, A Native of* 

Africa. 19 Smith's Narrative is not long; the story is told economically in three brief parts: pre-slavery life in Africa, bondage, and freedom. Smith tells how he saved money to purchase his freedom from his master, despite being cheated by white men at nearly every turn. He then purchases his wife, his children, three other male slaves (whom he liberates), land, boats, sails, and other property. His story is one of how he came to manipulate the world around him, forcing others to recognize him as an agent who controlled his own decisions. Many of the early narratives by other African-American or Afro-British writers, like John Marrant's A Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, A Black (1785), focus on the narrator's acceptance of evangelical Christianity and concomitant conversion to a type of Christ. Thus, Marrant sees himself at crucial points in his narrative in terms of the Biblical figure of Daniel, surviving a figurative lion's den and being preserved from wild beasts.<sup>20</sup> As William Andrews has written, most early African-American slave narratives (1760 – 1830) "reinforced the tendency ... to absent the individual self from narrative attention and to put in its stead some institution – the church or the state most often – to represent the narrator's 'better self,' to which he ought to conform."21 Smith, however, is fully and completely alienated from religion and the state, and he stands alone at the end of his narrative, positing (as Andrews puts it) a "stoic pride in his own uncompromised and alien self as a secular standard for heroism in black autobiography."22 That stance is one that will define the modern self as it emerges in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, particularly as it recounts its history in the also-emergent genre of autobiography.

The critical tradition in the United States has elided the voices of writers like Fitch, White, and Smith. And while feminism and African-American criticism have enabled us in the last thirty years to recover numerous voices from the American past, we have not yet adequately probed the extensive but largely unread archive of self-narratives written in the late eighteenth century by authors other than Benjamin Franklin. I have tried in this paper to suggest something of the ferment which the discourse of selfhood stimulated in the late eighteenth century in America. The "enlargement" of the scope of the inner voice that we associate primarily with Rousseau in the eighteenth century was certainly present in America, though traditional Christian and classical conceptions of exemplary or typed selfhood still dominated the cultural landscape. A broader recovery of voices like Fitch's and White's and Smith's – working-class men, independent women, freed slaves – will, I am certain, continue to reveal the cultural birth pangs of that subject that we now recognize as the modern self whose unique vehicle of self-expression is the autobiography.

### NOTES

1. Franklin refers to the narrative as "the History of my life" in an October 4, 1788 letter to Benjamin Vaughan (in Benjamin Franklin, *Writings*, ed. J. A. Leo Lemay (New York: Library of America, 1987), 1168. The narrative was first published as *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* in 1868 in John Bigelow's edi-

- tion (Philadelphia: Lippincott); prior to that, it was published under the title of *The Memoirs of Benjamin Franklin*.
- 2. Benjamin Franklin, Writings, 1342. Further references to Franklin's narrative will be cited parenthetically.
- 3. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions*, trans. J. M. Cohen (New York: Penguin, 1953), 17. Franklin wrote his narrative in four Parts: Part One was written in 1771 while Franklin was in England; Part Two was written in 1784 while he was in France; and Parts Three and Four were written in Philadelphia in 1788-1789. See J. A. Leo Lemay and P. M Zall, eds., *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin: A Genetic Text* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981).
- 4. Charles Taylor, *The Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 362.
- 5. Adams's and Jefferson's narratives were re-titled in the nineteenth century as "autobiographies." Both authors used the more familiar eighteenth-century designation of "memoirs" or "histories" or "memorandum" to refer to his narrative.
- 6. Ruth Banes, "The Exemplary Self: Autobiography in Eighteenth-Century America," *Biography* 5 (1982), 228.
- 7. Elizabeth Ashbridge, Some Account of the Fore Part of the Life of Elizabeth Ashbridge, ed. Daniel B. Shea (in Journeys in the New World: Early American Women's Narratives, ed. William Andrews (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 159.
- 8. Ibid., 167.
- 9. Ibid., 156.
- 10. Taylor, Sources, 362.
- 11. John Fitch, *Detail of my Life*, published as *The Autobiography of John Fitch*, ed. Frank D. Prager (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1976), 19. Further references to Fitch's narrative will be cited parenthetically.
- 12. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden; or Life in the Woods*, in *Henry David Thoreau*, ed. Robert F. Sayre (New York: Library of America, 1985), 580.
- 13. Edward Young, Conjectures on Original Composition (1759); (reprint Leeds: Scolar Press, 1966), 31.
- 14. Laura Rigal, *The American Manufactory: Art, Labor, and the World of Things in the Early Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 59.
- 15. Ibid., 71.
- 16. K. White, A Narrative of the Life, Occurrences, Vicissitudes and Present Situation of K. White (Schenectady, NY: Printer for the Authoress, 1809), 54. Further references to White's narrative will be cited parenthetically.
- 17. Rousseau, Confessions, 17.
- 18. I would include here other categories of marginalized persons, such as criminals. I have argued elsewhere that Stephen Burroughs's *The Memoirs of the Notorious Stephen Burroughs* (1798, 1804) is another textual site at which we can witness the emergence of the modern self (Stephen Carl Arch, *After Franklin: The Emergence of Autobiography in Post-Revolutionary America, 1780 1830* (Durham, NH: University Press of New England, 2001)).
- 19. Venture Smith, A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, A Native of Africa, in Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, ed. Vincent Carretta (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996).
- 20. John Marrant, A Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, A Slave, in Unchained Voices, 118 and 116.
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