

THE AMERICAN TRADITION IN A PILGRIM'S RECORD. (The Genuine History in Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography)

Manuel MULLOR JUNTÁDEZ

ABSTRACT:

What did Franklin really intend when he was writing his *Autobiography* in 1771? Previous diaries had dealt with personal recording and they, memoirs or confessions, had never gone beyond intimate expression. Franklin's chronicle crossed the limit: it recalled and reflected the long way from the very beginning of colonial settlements to the moment when the colonies achieved independence. The technique involved masking a hidden collective experience behind a physical embodiment of the new nation—the first literary hero in American Literature.

KEYWORDS:

Benjamin Franklin; William Bradford; American Literature; Autobiography; Puritan diaries; American Man; American History.

The most remarkable value to be found in Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* involves much more than a simple narrative; in fact, it lies as much in its historical mood as in its detachment from the Puritan habit of a private diary recording. There is also an internal, metaphorical dimension that is constant throughout the book. In the end it becomes a decisive and enriching element that raises the *Autobiography* to the top of the literary scale and concerns the overlay of Franklin's personal experience on the historical events that created the new American nation. Thus, American society as a whole undertakes the role of an inherent hero who shares centre stage with the human, flesh-and-blood Franklin.

Undoubtedly, the author was conscious of being immersed in the making of the real history of the United States of America at the same time as he was writing down his own life, so he recorded in his book his rise from social anonymity to political pre-eminence and, by clever literary means, made that personal career run along the path that his own country was taking. The two histories then became reversible: they complemented each other. Consequently it would have been unwise to popularise such great events using other literary means than autobiography --the best representative for historical literature and the best way to highlight faithfully the excellence present in both processes. We must consider that in North America, prior to the colonial independence, autobiographical recording was, if not the only literary type, perhaps the most widely written and read. This was so because the hazardous transoceanic journeys and the pilgrims' subsequent settlements demanded an accurate written chronicle which might provide

a permanent statement and example. We can talk then of a careful, previously well-planned relationship between both stories in Franklin's account. He constantly overlaid their elements in order to blend both identities -national and individual- in an indivisible course that gave birth to his highest creation: the *American man*.

But Franklin's universalist inclination could not end at the simple creation of that typical American hero, because in his time it was a copious identity to be sure; that personal disposition had besides to submit to the desirable temptation of exporting the invention and subsequently making it eternal. Franklin could offer no better solution for the purpose than the reverting to a favourable means: the self-portrait drawn with the diachronic technique of the great classical writers he had become so fond of. In that case the outline involved the legacy of a historical model for future generations. Since this outwards self-portrait symbolizes the American nation itself -a growing country which proved innovative in social affairs- then we find a definite picture: a kind of country that obviously matches the kind of free man Franklin was putting forward.

There are many evident signs of that complex, deliberate make-up; we find them especially in the selection of the episodes and the way they had to be written and in the structural design of the book.

One of those cross-roads where both stories run into each other has a counterpart at the very beginning of American literary history: the expression of the American spirit as it was formed in its origin; that is, the image of a man facing a piece of paper, recording his adversities in the new land he was discovering and building. There is nothing more American than such a picture. And if there is a no more American literary genre than autobiography, then no other American scene can be more important, conclusive and recurrent to the History and Literature than that of the pilgrim's arrival into a promised land after banishment. William Bradford led the Mayflower pilgrims to the threshold of the New World and in his *Of Plymouth Plantation* he simply happened to write the first chapter of American History. Entering into Philadelphia for his first time in 1723 Franklin could hardly have written anything other than a small piece of the history of the new nation -at least one as decisive as that of Bradford-, but many years later he played his role as a pioneering writer and created the eternal, first chapter of American Literature. He took some of the simple lines of Bradford's experience and most of the personal epic of his first arrival in Philadelphia, mixed them up and produced an elaborate picture, that genetic visual scene which still stands as the standard, recurrent mark of the whole of American Literature.

The optical and psychological effect caused on the reader by this passage is nothing more than the final result of a carefully studied narrative outline. Such design involves the author's aims of a certain kind of punctual refinement in the description of the details of his journey and arrival. Despite the fact that some of those details cannot possibly be proven true, Franklin uses such a conscious and premeditated strategy in order to

maintain his audience alert and aware. Together with the other journeys included in Franklin's chronicle, this episode remains almost the only trace of the physical and material mobility shown by the character. Furthermore, this expedition to Philadelphia, within the vast context marked by the hero's lifetime journey, represents the decisive turning point in the oncoming events narrated throughout the book:

I have been the more particular in this Description of my Journey, and shall be so of my first Entry into that City, that you may in your Mind compare such unlikely Beginning with the Figure I have since made there.¹

With his speech, the writer directly targets his reader and shows himself in the action as it goes on, splitting his personality for a moment. We must recall that old Franklin had talked directly to his audience only at the very beginning of the *Autobiography*, just when the duality of author-hero still appears undefined; but the plan seems rather different now: not a word about an explanation on the book's purpose is offered. Instead, Franklin's goal becomes his reader's utmost attention. In return for the attention the reader is generously supplied with the key that decodes the evolution of Franklin's future events.

The richest part of the image comes from the thorough description of the young Franklin entering into Philadelphia. That shocking visual depiction of a shabby young man requires an act of mental retention so as to set a suitable similitude between the unlikely beginning and the splendid future that was stalking the hero. Suddenly, we feel ourselves contemplating a very familiar resort --that literary contrast which praises and emphasises two elements after a relatively accurate comparison:

I was in my working Dress, my best Clothes being to come round by Sea. I was dirty from my Journey: my Pockets were stuff'd out with Shirts and Stockings; I knew no Soul, nor where to look for Lodging. I was fatigu'd with Travelling, Rowing and Want of Rest.²

After a careful reading of such a fully detailed description of a pilgrim, could we ignore the Mayflower tenants' arrival into Plymouth Rock, so faithfully narrated by William Bradford?:

Being thus passed the vast ocean, and a sea of troubles in their preparation (as may be remembered by that which went before), they had now no friends to welcome them nor inns to entertain or refresh their weatherbeaten bodies.³

¹Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography*, Joseph A. Leo Lemay & P. M. Zall, eds., W. W. Norton, New York, 1986, p. 20.

²Benjamin Franklin, *Op. Cit.*, p. 20.

³William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, in Perry Miller, comp., *Major Writers of America*, New York, 1962, p. 18.

There are three noteworthy, parallel ideas in these two masterpieces and the way they are reported. First, there is the physical aspect of weariness: fatigue has severely affected the travellers on their voyages; that is the reason why the sentences "I was dirty from my Journey (...) and fatigu'd with Travelling, Rowing and Want of Rest" in Franklin's book becomes the equivalent for Bradford's "Being thus passed the vast ocean, and a sea of troubles in their preparation".

In this case, both characters -in *Of Plymouth Plantation* there are more than one- arrive at their destinations after long, exhausting voyages. Playing their roles as literary heroes they must endure this kind of situation in which the feeling of deep distress and uneasiness -due to rejection- underlies the whole process during every escape.

The second common topic refers to the complaint about the absence of a reception and welcome as a result of stress on that feeling of weariness. Thus the "I knew no Soul" in Franklin's passage stands in for Bradford's "they had now no friends to welcome them". But in this case the comparison becomes a little more intricate: while in 1620 the Mayflower pilgrims had certainly expected no kind of welcome beforehand, Franklin perhaps was looking forward to something different from what he finally found in 1723 --for it seems quite unreal to expect crowded and noisy docks in Philadelphia on a Sunday morning. We have then an impression that what Franklin missed on arrival was not a reception itself, but a generally livelier atmosphere around him. Furthermore, the lack of a warm welcome does magnify the emotional interest of the scene and the dramatic value of its whole narration thereafter. In fact, we probably cannot imagine the arrival of Bradford's expedition on the American shore as well as their coming across a grievous landscape, since both images are not only distant but also graphically impossible to relate to our own life. On the other hand, the Mayflower *epopeia* was undeniably a leading path for the American readers in the eighteenth century: the cornerstone in their understanding of the new concept of *adventure*. That is the way Franklin saw it and that is the reason why he used the idea when writing his book.

There is a third coincidence between the two passages: the absence of proper lodging for the newcomers. Thus the sentence "nor where to look for Lodging" in Franklin's story matches Bradford's "nor inns to entertain or refresh their weatherbeaten bodies". In both cases we face the peak of a creative process that not only uses those touching special effects to emphasise the fugitive's disturbing solitude, but also creates a distinctive merging feature for the other characteristics. As we have mentioned before, the literary value of both chronicles lies in their apparently artificial design, for the contemporary reader is quite clear of the fact that there is an insuperable abyss between the real incidents in both stories and the final words which describe them. The events related by Franklin can be taken in a different way from their literary purposes. For instance, his hasty escape from Boston was not really so, since he easily found an arrangement with

a ship that took him to New York; when he arrived in Philadelphia he certainly had enough money to obtain comfortable lodging as well as the puffy rolls of bread; finally, his ragged aspect was not due to the lack of clothes because these, as he stated, were travelling after him.

In Bradford's case the careful reader cannot ignore a crucial situation: the complex structures of European thought inevitably bounded not only the way in which the first settlers contemplated their final destination, but also the whole range of things they saw. They simply tried to reproduce a picture that was directly drawn from those concrete visual realities by means of European linguistic canons; then, they just brought about, accidentally, a certain kind of literary fault. That is the reason why the books like *Of Plymouth Plantation* are equipped with literary techniques that had to be amended after a time with the new writings, so as to let the unexpected, but unavoidable, future events be adapted. In 1771 Franklin was however free from those linguistic ties, though he was conscious of the fact that most of the people who arrived at the colonies at that time carried that heavy burden with them. Probably this made him look to the past and recall Bradford's source to strengthen his own travelling experience. Anyway we must restate the impossibility of achieving proven historical data which provide the necessary certainty in both episodes.

But let us go on contrasting common ideas in the journey of the first puritan pilgrims and in that of Franklin, in order to reinforce our thesis that the latter purposely shaped the actual autobiography of the American nation in his story.

One of those coincidences has much to do with the reasons that forced the respective migrations. Many volumes have been written to try to solve definitely the problem of the true nature of the reasons that urged the first groups of pilgrims to go to the American coast. The discrepancies between the different opinions still appear so wide that even the simple naming of them either as *settlers* or *pilgrims* sets off a heated argument. Avoiding any controversy beyond our study, we can state that there were two main forces that pushed migrants from Leyden to Plymouth: the decisive and determinant religious impulsion and the hidden and hazardous, profitable, economical drive. We find the same motives when we inquire into the reasons why Franklin rushed southward from Boston to Philadelphia: he left one city for the other, running from an external *socio-religious* pressure, with the help of his fierce inner *economical* resolution.

A good part of the prejudices and mental habits of the first settlers obviously affected the forthcoming New England dwellers, something which Franklin soon identified and fought against. The religious atmosphere that could almost be breathed in Boston in 1722 -the year in which the *New England Courant* was censored by the Puritan authorities- was deeply related to the process of politization that the whole puritan doctrine had suffered. At least for a century after the first settlements were established the social and intellectual world in New England was controlled by means

of zealous puritan thought. The religious and political leaders happened to be the same people and the limits shown by the rules of behaviour of both institutions - Church and Government - were blurred and generally identical. The powerful Mather dynasty ruled colonial life and even though a new wave of thought - portrayed by the Episcopalians and the Deists - was slowly becoming a silent yet emergent opposition, the Congregationalist churches went on gaining power in a monolithic way. In this reactionary world Franklin stood out as an advanced mind for his foretelling of the huge possibilities his nation offered the working man. He put it down in the *Autobiography*: if the Founding Fathers had reached Massachusetts in order to build a model community for the Christendom, thus he had landed in Philadelphia to create a new society that should be admired by the Enlightened world.

When on the 11th June 1723 in the *New England Courant* it was hinted that there could be some kind of connivance between the local authorities and the raiders who had been steadily plundering the harbour of Boston, the heavy New England legal machinery was suddenly activated. Just one day after this report came out, the Courant editor, James Franklin, was sent to prison and the publication of his newspaper banned. Such repressive proceedings sparked young Franklin's ideological alarm. Indeed, he was asked to testify at his brother's trial. A fervent promoter of the liberty of the press like Franklin would never accept an editor's imprisonment - even though he was a brother with whom he had a stormy relationship - simply for having expressed his opinions freely.

Treating kindly his minor characters once again, Franklin tried to persuade his reader that this incident had no effect on his flight; he blamed instead his release from James's tyrannical authority on his own foolishness:

At length a fresh Difference arising between my Brother and me, I took upon me to assert my Freedom, presuming that he would not venture to produce the new Indentures (...) But the Unfairness of it weigh'd little with me, when under the Impressions of Resentment. for the Blows his Passion too often urg'd him to bestow upon me. Tho' he was otherwise not an ill-natur'd Man: Perhaps I was too saucy and provoking.⁴

Compelled by the deep fear this event had put into him, Franklin thought not only of rushing to New York for a new job, but at least of leaving Boston:

And I was rather inclin'd to leave Boston, when I reflected that I had already made myself a little obnoxious to the governing Party; and from the arbitrary Proceedings the Assembly in my Brother's Case it was likely I might if I stay'd soon bring myself into Scrapes; and farther that

⁴Benjamin Franklin, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 16-7.

my indiscreet Disputations about Religion began to make me pointed at with Horror by good People, as an Infidel or Atheist.⁵

There was no doubt he had a clear idea: for Franklin those suppositions were nothing but a real certainty about his social situation regarding the authorities. We must not forget that while James was kept in prison Benjamin edited the *Courant* and went on, to his brother's delight, lashing out at the dominant class with his critiques:

During my Brother's Confinement, which I resented a good deal, notwithstanding our private Differences, I had the Management of the Paper, and I made bold to give our Rulers some Rubs in it, which my Brother took very kindly, while others began to consider me in an unfavorable Light, as a young Genius that had a Turn for Libelling and Satire.⁶

The Harvard elite that controlled the city as a fixed and closed social structure was indirectly starting to press upon Franklin's conscience, and enough so to force him to run away from a place that resembled a provincial British port and from a people who would never forsake their British origins.

But, just as had previously happened with the Puritan pilgrims, there were more forces that secretly increased the migratory impulsion of that sixteen-year old man of letters. In Boston his economical prospects were rather slight: his father's candle-making business did not belong to a prosperous industry; his brother's paper was more likely an insidious pamphlet than a solvent publication; finally, his condition as an apprentice was starting to resemble something permanent. One cannot doubt that when Josiah Franklin took his son away from the school and his beloved books -where he happened to be a brilliant mind among the other students- Benjamin felt seriously restricted and upset. Of course he accepted it without complaint, but the academic medals awarded by Harvard and Yale led Franklin secretly to begrudge the deep wounding setback his father's decision had caused him. For Franklin was genuinely aware of his limits and of the fact that he actually stood, at this early age, as the best of his brothers, intellectually. Thus, he decided he would never again bear another unfortunate decision from a father who had left him under his brother James in the printing house. Some years later, in Philadelphia, free from his family entanglements, Franklin set about the task of taking a personal revenge on every unfavourable paternal mistake made against him.

What could Philadelphia offer Franklin? Nothing in the recent history of the city forecasted economical success for a young man just arrived there. On the other hand, there was an unfavourable environment for book reading: an insignificant interest if we compare it to Boston. There was therefore an unquestionable lack of commercial space not only for the

⁵Idem, p. 17.

⁶Benjamin Franklin, *Op. Cit.*, p. 16.

second printer, Samuel Keimer, but also for a third one. But in Philadelphia Franklin found a sense of freedom he had never known or dreamed of before, though he often had to face coarseness and mediocrity. Nevertheless he had then neither a rebuking father nor an upbraiding brother; furthermore, he soon realized he was a skilful worker with a pocket full of money for his labour. So Franklin soon retreated from the Bostonian history that had denied him professional and economical adulthood: his life-work after all. It was something extremely similar to what England was going to do with its American colonies. At this point we must recall Franklin the politician, moved by the high interests that concerned his colony's right for a loud voice in the problems of its own governing, far removed from the selfish and distant intrusions of the British proprietors and crown. A quiescent authority from the metropolis would never fulfil the American democratic enthusiasm, just as his father's restricting advice would never have anything to do with young Franklin's professional restlessness.

Coming back to the parallelism with Bradford's chronicle we can see that concordance has turned into divergence. The change comes from those events that happened just immediately after Franklin's removal to Philadelphia. In this case we can find the traces of a deep irony, a scornful, yet humorous tone that underlies almost every religious passage in the *Autobiography*. So when in Bradford's text we read grievous sentences like "What could now sustain them but the Spirit of God and His grace?"⁷ in Franklin's he suggests a more mundane and natural means of nourishing:

Then I walk'd up the Street, gazing about, till near the Market House I met a Boy with Bread (...) and inquiring where he got it, I went immediately to the Baker's (...) and he gave me accordingly three great Puffy Rolls.⁸

A century and a half later, the first puritan settlers' mystical spirituality has given way to Franklin's visceral pragmatism: with his bread rolls under his arm he has turned himself into a renewed vision of those pilgrims. But the great religious hoax the old deist had prepared for the time came a few lines later:

Thus refresh'd I walk'd again up the Street, which by this time had many clean dress'd People in it who were all walking the same Way; I join'd them, and thereby was led into the great Meeting House of the Quakers near the Market. I sat down among them, and after looking round a while and hearing nothing said, being very drowsy thro' Labour and want of Rest the preceding Night, I fell asleep and continu'd so till the Meeting broke up, when one was kind enough to rouse me.⁹

⁷William Bradford, *Op. Cit.*, p.19.

⁸Benjamin Franklin, *Op. Cit.*, p. 20.

⁹Benjamin Franklin, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 20-21.

The previously mentioned parallelism between the Mayflower pilgrims and the rising Bostonian printer ended at this point: the former confined their religious freedom -and the search for it- first as a hejira from an oppressive condition; then as a banner when they arrived in the new promised land; finally as a puzzling socio-political question in the future New England. On his side, Franklin confronted his own religious freedom -his personal concept of it- in an extremely literal sense of the word. He always maintained his natural religious beliefs and his deist theories against the medieval omnipresence of puritan conviction about predestination. All his life he strained to understate and demythicize such severe creed. In fact, his fight chased personal desertion from that eternal introspective towards one's soul in search of the sign of salvation. And he finally succeeded in wiping that anxious inner debate out of his life. That is why he set up his free-and-easy attitude in the Quakers' Meeting House against the fervid religious effusiveness that pervaded the first colonial years. It is also quite revealing that he chose the Quakers as his first hosts, since they represented a sect formed by fastidious men: they obstinately addressed each other as *thee*; used to greet no one; dressed in a different style; rejected ritual and formal ministry, and had fled *en masse* in a land where everybody could talk and pray freely. Perhaps by keeping his opinions secret behind the conclusive condition that the Quakers were the most numerous of the Pennsylvania dwellers did Franklin try to draw -in opposition to the Puritan narrowness- the prevailing tolerance in Philadelphia. After all, Pennsylvania had been founded neither by intolerant citizens nor by people who actively sought out and persecuted dissidence and its history lacked New England's theocratic tradition.

Nevertheless so wide a difference between Boston and Philadelphia could hardly fail to be spotted by young Franklin at first sight. He had otherwise to wait at least for his first winter in Pennsylvania until he could enjoy the freedom he had never had before.

That sense of humour that overruns almost the whole of the *Autobiography* clearly comes from the pleasant amusement that Franklin found in writing his experiences and in describing the primeval qualities of the provincial society in which they took place. In 1771 old Franklin was obviously rejoicing in the steady process of change of his personality as the main character in the *Autobiography*, by means of a role-play technique. Consequently, we must consider Franklin's falling asleep in the Quakers' meeting room during a religious service only in a metaphorical sense, as we must many other of his literary creations throughout the book. Coming back to the resemblance to the Mayflower incident, a curious question arises: how can we explain Franklin's attempt at a parallel collective story and his own lonely experience? The Calvinist tradition that overflowed in the first American settlements often managed to explain the development of the Christian community within society by means of the individual example of one of its members. Two of the most important books of Franklin's

contemporaries can be mentioned here as examples. In his *Magnalia Christi Americana*, Cotton Mather tried to reflect the evolution of a wide social group through the account of the life and works of several particular individuals. In Franklin's favourite book, John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, the author used a similar narrative device: the individual adventure as an explanation for social behaviour.

This technique is also present in the *Autobiography*, but it appears slightly altered, for Franklin's intentions go further than Mather's and Bunyan's: he looked for a thorough connection of social and individual entities through their permanent interrelationships. It is a complex personification whose final purpose involves an especial effect that underlies that constant and inherent polarity in American culture and history: the successful linking of collectivity and individuality in the background of national identity. We need now to delve into the essence of the general concept of *autobiography*, so as to let our reasoning be adjusted with a minimum level of precision. That *sui generis* metaphor of the first person and the self-identity that the American autobiography has always represented turned out to be a subject for the self-consciousness that unavoidably had to emerge with the European arrival on the shores of the New World. This was the starting point for the essence of the general definition of the word *americanism*. There were few better ways, then, to reflect the life experience of American man plausibly, and therefore make it extend worldwide. Throughout the thousands of autobiographical volumes written in America the Americans have sung the praises of a vast national undertaking and have satisfied the need to inscribe their signature and make eternal their own identity.

It is in this cultural question of joining collectivity and individuality that we can frame the parallel accounts of Bradford and Franklin. Bradford and his travelling companions portray the whole of American society. Franklin stands out as the most radical claim to the individual as a response to social pompousness. His progress after the arrival into Philadelphia is an open but peaceable challenge at the stillness of the social systems. He happened to craft the American society with his own actions, his manners, his ubiquity, his revolutionary working theory and his brand new political and religious ideas. Nevertheless, he also put forward constructive material such as his inventions. They were not so striking, however, but they proved to be comforting as well: every one of them was designed to improve the life of those whom they surrounded. That was the *other* uncrossed frontier, that little *further away* only imagined by him: human welfare paradoxically pushed through the singularity of the individual man.

Literarily speaking, Franklin was not only the first important American author, but also the maker of the final model for a component inherent in the New World mind: the *American Dream*.

From the structural point of view we find, that the first part of the book refers to young Franklin's fight to free himself from the family ties that had restricted his movements. His struggle to flee from Boston and achieve

financial success in Philadelphia matches up with the forthcoming colonial fight in search of independence from the mother country. The account of these early years is quick and minute in its more notable episodes: the events that accelerated the War of Independence in America were no less hasty and expedite. Both characters became similar in terms of strength and precocity; and this similitude, though probably a little accidental, revealed itself as conclusive: Franklin attained his commercial maturity -and here we talk of working self-reliance- at a very early age, which happened to be extremely surprising and revolutionary for the society of his time. Something more or less similar can be said of the proportional and comparatively brief period of time in which the conversion of the English colonies into an independent nation took place.

The second part of the *Autobiography* shows us Franklin's struggle to reach personal perfection and the settling down of the individual's inner spiritual question after a previously rough existence. Once he had achieved the first objective, the next step involved the search for a personal reassertion. The internal consolidation of the different states that formed the growing American nation -and here we are referring to the making of the legal and political bases that should have to govern and look after the interests of each and every colony- undoubtedly stands for that inward-looking level so well drawn in the part of the *Autobiography* called of *The Art of Virtue*.

Finally, in the third and fourth parts of the book we find the hero's political rise within his own country's boundaries first, then abroad during the early years of his mission as colonial ambassador in England. The notable coincidences in this case basically deal with the portrayal of the rising outer influence of the new nation. But there is something more internal that is hardly visible to the less inquisitive reader: the problem of the role of man in society as a whole. In this case there is an implicit reference to one of the most important problems in the puritan concept of social framework. The puritan beliefs demanded of the individuals in a community their being arranged according to a special social order --in fact, the puritans used to travel and settle in communities. They moved that way because their social theories made them think of the society not as a simple association of citizens but also as a unity with all its parts subordinate to the whole. Franklin's useful scientific activities altogether with his political deeds in Philadelphia, London and Paris helped to highlight the possibilities of the common man.

These connections were carefully recorded by Franklin in a book which became as necessary to the making of America as the lightning rod or any other of his deliberately unpatented inventions. Despite the fact that the individual subsists under the society's domain Franklin was certain that his resolution might make him improve the aspect of that society, or even change it. This conflicting relationship between the collectivity and the individuality also affected the evolution of the new American nation. A

problem which arose immediately after the process of territorial union and just before the completion of the national fusion, exactly at the point of time when some political matters started being questioned just because they seemed new. We must not forget that the Americans always preferred the comfort of the particular laws and the sovereignty of every state in problems like inner affairs, citizens' rights and relationships, and the improvement of moral and intellectual life. That way they were always trying to combine and harmonize the individual independence and the collective security, matching Franklin's doctrine that members of society should engage to afford their advice, assistance and support to each other in promoting one another's interest, business and advancement in life.

But after their union the American colonies kept some other aspects that were common and linked each other. Thus, we find that the Americans held on to the basic principles concerning merely their liberty: freedom of religion, press, education and conscience. But they did not stop at their mere maintenance, in fact they aired those precepts as the banners for a new tolerant order, so as to unite as one nation without betraying their most personal and particular traditions. Franklin's enlightened ideas, for which the *Autobiography* was the best of the vehicles, succeeded in bringing these tolerant premises forward to their extreme in the third part of the book. There he went back to his *The Art of Virtue*: the reminder of the liberal confessional attitude that proposed the deist belief as a common and collective benefit for men. Franklin also considered other favourite subjects such as the *liberty of the press*, offering his *Pennsylvania Gazette* as the best example for communication within the limits shown by libelling and personal abuse; *female education*, strengthening women's right for work; and the *liberty of the human conscience*, laughing at the funny means he managed to bypass the Quakers' opposition to the purchase of weapons of war.

But the most important political theme that Franklin developed in his book is that concerning the colonial union. It became the linkage between Franklin's personal experience and America's national history. In 1754 the eight Anglo-American territories congregated in Albany in order to discuss a likely plan of union. After much debating, Franklin's plan -representing Pennsylvania- was finally accepted as the most suitable and temperate. It was in fact a wide compilation of his personal beliefs in social, political and moral affairs and proved to be the first serious attempt at a firm national union. If Franklin's flight from Boston to Philadelphia is the starting point in this parallel way between him and his nation, then this plan of union entails the closest junction in both lines. We can state that until the Albany Congress the two stories had moved together with similar *causes*, and since 1754 they were impelled by common *goals*, for their paths ran together from then on.

Speaking exclusively about this intended comparison between both stories, the *Autobiography* could not stop at a different point from which it really did, just because the American history the author tried to slyly report would otherwise not be anything but mere ventures for the future.

We have seen in other words how Franklin portrayed, more or less faithfully, the role of the first settlers in America in the figure of his main character. With his defiant and revolutionary Bostonian attitude he staged the puritans' struggle with the monolithic power of the Church of England. Then, with his pilgrimage in Philadelphia he recalled the steady advent of those puritans to their destination. The internal setting up of both characters came just after the external acknowledgement of them both: the united colonies and the independent printer. For when Franklin was introspectively seeking his moral convictions, the American nation examined its chances for a well-balanced co-existence of the diverse territories. At the very end it became the correspondence between Franklin's universal projection as an ambassador and the brand new American nation as the seed of a modern and powerful country.

In conclusion, we must remember that Franklin was contemplating a thoroughly wide literary landscape when he started writing his book. He realized that the author had already ceased to be as overseas traveller and consequently the new texts required a new technical dimension. If the other previous diaries and personal recordings had shown an innermost style -as they only noted day-to-day facts- then a longer lifetime record endorsed with a deeper narrative perspective was needed. Just sheltered under this literary panorama was the real autobiographical writing born; throughout its pages, Franklin's book chronicled the evolution of a dominant main character that gave depth and colour to the cold actions expressed in the previous diary tradition. Franklin's *Autobiography* shared of course some features common to the puritan diaries, basically its didacticism and outliving desires --but the book did not stop at the mere *mimesis* of its predecessors: it was supplied with new light and new elements that empowered its value as the first literary-shaped American text. For when he outlined and described his own life and when he cast himself in the role of an exemplary hero in his autobiography, he was fully aware of being himself a prototype for a new concept of American man. Therefore, the works prior to Franklin's *Autobiography* did not make an American literature itself, but a colonial one: they all lacked of that collective consciousness Franklin was going to provide henceforth.