

GOETHE AND FRANKLIN

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«**D**id it ever occur to you that [Goethe] was in some points like Ben Franklin,—a kind of rhymed Ben Franklin? The practical tendency of his mind was the same; his love of science was the same; his benignant, philosophic spirit was the same; and a vast number of his little poetic maxims and soothsayings seem nothing more than the worldly wisdom of Poor Richard, versified.» This image taken from the conversation of two fictional friends as they visit Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's birthplace in Frankfurt am Main, was the creation of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in his novel, *Hyperion*.¹ Of course, comparisons can go the other way as well. For example, the Russian Decembrist, Aleksander Bestuzhev, known as Marlinski, struggled through *Faust* part I during his 1827-1829 Siberian exile and complained «My efforts to get to the bottom of his incomprehensible profundities often tire me. I throw the book aside and send the author to the devil.»² And as André von Gronicka describes: «For consolation and release from the rigors of Goethe's 'philosophic, esthetic idealism' [Bestuzhev] turns to the warm and human, sound and practical Benjamin Franklin: 'Of late I have been consoled by Franklin. What a warm love of mankind! What convincing clarity of explication! Now there is a man for you!」»³

The excerpt from *Hyperion* brings together some of the more obvious similarities between two towering figures who were contemporaries, although Goethe (1749-1832) was much younger than Franklin (1706-1790). The two neither met nor corresponded. And yet Goethe might have actually met Franklin had he emigrated to the British colonies in America in 1775 as he had fleetingly contemplated. It would not strain logic to conclude that he would have chosen to settle in Pennsylvania, quite probably in Philadelphia, as Voltaire considered doing in 1754. One prominent scholar even speculates that if Goethe had emigrated, he might well have become one of the Founding Fathers, or at least worked to further their cause.⁴

Goethe knew that Philadelphia was the epicentre of the Enlightenment in the thirteen American colonies. He had read about Benjamin Franklin's experiments and he appreciated Franklin's many abilities and achievements. Goethe conducted his own scientific experiments with electricity and investigated geology, geomorphology, anatomy, and the phenomenon of light. Like Franklin he was involved in matters of state, in the Duchy of Weimar, where he was responsible for directing, amongst other things, the mines, the fire department, and the theatre. He supported the University of Jena as well as the local library, which happen to reflect only two institutions — the Library Company of Philadelphia and the University of Pennsylvania — that Franklin is credited with founding. Goethe, who wrote an autobiography, read Franklin's with great profit and pleasure; Franklin toured parts of Germany, including Frankfurt am Main.⁵ Both were of course Free Masons.⁶ Both were committed to the project of the Enlightenment, particularly in developing the idea of tolerance.⁷ Finally, Goethe and Franklin both witnessed revolution: Franklin as an active participant during the War of Independence and Goethe as an attaché to the Austro-Prussian armies as they engaged with French revolutionary armies. Franklin conquered Paris and won the respect and admiration of the French. And later when the French conquered most of the Germanic lands and occupied Weimar, Napoleon showed his respect and admiration for Goethe by awarding him the cross of the Légion d'honneur.

Yet there is more going on here than parallel lives. Goethe, on a number of occasions, recognised Franklin's achievements and in fact draws on Franklin's observations in one of his own scientific treatises, *Farbenlehre* (Theory of Colours, 1810). Most interesting of all is that Goethe revisits his yearning as a twenty-six-year-old to emigrate to America, but as an older man of eighty in one of his final works, *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre oder die Entsagenden* (Wilhelm Meister's Journeyman Years or the Renunciants, 1829). It is not surprising that the destination of one of the groups in this novel is apparently Penn-

sylvania. The aim here, then, is to work genetically and examine Goethe's account of his intellectual relationship to Franklin and to explore how certain ideas in *Wanderjahre* throw aspects of these into relief.⁸

Goethe's most extended description of Franklin occurs as a high compliment to Justus Möser from Osnabrück, a politically active historian, in Goethe's autobiography *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (Truth and Poetry, 1811-1814, 1833).⁹ Goethe had read in Franklin's *Autobiography* in 1810,¹⁰ so Franklin's own self-portrait would have been a recent memory. Goethe writes of Möser:

We find that the objects of his serious and jocular observations are the changes in manners and customs, clothing, diet, domestic life, and education. One would have to rubricate everything that happens in the civil and moral world if one wanted to make an exhaustive list of the subjects he treats. And his treatment is an admirable one. A perfect public official is speaking to the people in a weekly gazette, in order to explain to each individual, from the proper perspective, the things undertaken or executed by a reasonable, benevolent government. But this is by no means done in a didactic way; on the contrary, the forms are so varied they could be called poetic, and at any rate are to be classified as rhetorical, in the best sense of the word. He is always elevated above his subject and manages to give a cheerful view of the gravest matters. Half hidden behind one mask or another, or speaking in his own person, he is always complete and detailed, but at the same time lighthearted, somewhat ironical, absolutely thorough, upright, well meaning, and sometimes even blunt and vehement. All this is done so judiciously that one has to admire the author's wit, understanding, facility, skill, taste, and character, all at the same time. With regard to his choice of generally useful subject matter, deep insight, wide-ranging vision, felicitous treatment, and both genuine and joyous humor, I can compare him with none but Franklin.¹¹

This description captures something of Franklin's persona in his *Autobiography*, not to mention his editorials, and provides evidence that Goethe had analysed Franklin's literary technique. But an internal reference to an obscure point in Franklin's *Autobiography* provides further proof that Goethe had read it carefully. In an 1811 letter to his friend Carl Friedrich Zelter, which contained a reference to Goethe's recently published *Farbenlehre* (1810), Goethe observes that Franklin had an aversion towards mathematicians, particularly their perceived lack of social skills.¹² Franklin lists the members of his Junto or «club of mutual improvement» and amongst them is «Thomas Godfrey, a self-taught mathematician, great in his way, and afterward inventor of what is now called Hadley's Quadrant. But he knew little out of his way, and was not a pleasing companion; as, like most great mathematicians I have met with, he expected universal precision in everything said, or was for ever denying or distinguishing upon trifles,

to the disturbance of conversation. He soon left us.»¹³ Furthermore, the description of the Junto left an impression on Goethe, who along with Johann Gottfried Herder and Christoph Martin Wieland formed a «Friday Club» in 1791, modelled to some degree on Franklin's club.¹⁴

Goethe became intensely interested in light and the phenomenon of colour during his fruitful two-year sojourn in Italy (1786-1788), which included an intensive study of the visual arts. Throughout the 1790s he wrote scientific essays and *Farbenlehre* represented the culmination of his work on optics and colour. The treatise is divided into three sections and it is in the final historical section that Goethe quotes from a German translation of Benjamin Franklin's *Experiments and Observations on Electricity*, published in London in 1769. The paragraph contains a summary of Franklin's observations on how the eye responds to light and colour. It will be recalled that Goethe had been reading in Franklin's *Autobiography* on 5 May 1810, prior to the publication of the *Farbenlehre*.¹⁵ Franklin is again mentioned in the summary conclusion of Goethe's scientific treatise.¹⁶ The historical section of the work shows not only Goethe's commitment to self-understanding through history—he argues that the history of a discipline is nothing short of the discipline itself—he seeks to buttress his theories through calling on the practise of others. The entry for Franklin occurs just prior to the «zweite Epoche» or second epoch of science that leads to Goethe's own time. Franklin is therefore implicitly the zenith of his age, a turning point, but not a part of the second epoch of which Goethe was a part.¹⁷ The touch is subtle, but it is also undeniable, Goethe casts himself as one who builds on Franklin but also as one who surpasses him. This of course is overshadowed because *Farbenlehre* challenged Newton's ideas and Goethe's book received a quiet reception, even a negative one in many quarters.¹⁸ Nearly twenty years after its publication, Goethe was still bitter about the lack of impact that it had made. In an 1829 letter of lament to Zelter, he turns Franklin into an emblem (he had once again been reading in the *Autobiography*) by designating him «den wackern Franklin», meaning «trusty Franklin.»¹⁹

In 1827 Goethe would tell his biographer, Eckermann, that he was fortunate that his life had occurred during the time of so many scientific discoveries, «already as a child, I came into contact with Franklin's teaching on electricity, which law he had just discovered. And so one great discovery after another has followed throughout my entire life until this hour, through which I was led to Nature not only early, but also which has continued to hold my active interest.»²⁰ Certainly Goethe harboured an interest in electricity, which he studied at the University of Leipzig and he conducted his own electrical experiments.²¹ Yet here Goethe is using the same strategy he had used in the *Farbenlehre*, in-

serting himself amidst the most important scientific developments of his age and Franklin is once again deployed as the key marker. Goethe actively nurtured this image of himself as one born «after the lightning rod», as can be seen in a letter in which one correspondent tells another that Goethe had told him just that.²² In the paralipomena of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Goethe notes that he was born during a dearth of German literature and a lack of German scientific and cultural advance. Interestingly, Franklin is noted,²³ as if Goethe is placing himself as the inheritor of his tradition, for Franklin, too, came of age in a country that had not produced much notable literature or other cultural and scientific achievements.

The lightning rod empowered individuals to not only describe nature, but to control it — Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanack* of 1752 contained instructions on how to install them — and this conceptual shift made a significant impact in Germany, where Franklin became known as the new «Prometheus», a title that originated with none other than Immanuel Kant.²⁴ Indeed, the metaphor of the lightning rod competed with that of the earthquake as a way to effect rational political changes as opposed to violent upheavals. In Germany, Franklin's scientific and political roles were merged by Johann Christian Schmohl who published anonymously *Ueber Nordamerika und Demokratie* (On North America and Democracy, 1782): «Franklin Prometheus, der du dem Himmel den Donner und den Tyrannen das Zepter entrisset»,²⁵ which echoed the famous phrase of the French finance minister Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot: «'Eripuit coelo, fulmen, sceptrumque tyrannis' (He snatched the lightning from the skies and the scepter from the tyrants).»²⁶ In *Dichtung und Wahrheit* Goethe recalls that as a young man he wished the Americans well as the names of Franklin and Washington began to glow and spark in the firmament of politics and war.²⁷

The ensuing demythologization of lightning as a mysterious force of nature or as a symbol of divine displeasure and mysterious power helps to situate Goethe's poem, *Prometheus* (1774), which evinces human optimism and irreverence toward the gods:

Bedecke deinen Himmel, Zeus, Mit Wolkendunst!	Go cover up your heaven, Zeus, With cloudy haze!
Und übe, Knaben gleich, Der Disteln köpft,	And practise, like some boy Topping thistle-heads,
An Eichen dich und Bergeshöhn! Mußt mir meine Erde	Your strength on oaks and mountain peaks! Still you must leave standing
Doch lassen stehn, Und meine Hütte,	This my earth, And my shelter
Die du nicht gebaut, Und meinen Herd,	Which you did not build, And this my hearth

Um dessen Glut
Du mich beneidest.

Whose glowing heat you envy me.

Ich kenne nichts Ärmer's
Unter der Sonn' als euch Götter.
Ihr nähret kümmerlich
Von Opfersteuern
Und Gebetshauch
Eure Majestät
Und darbtet, wären
Nicht Kinder und Bettler
Hoffnungsvolle Toren.

There's nothing more pitiful
Under the sun than you gods.
You feed your majesty
With meagre victuals
Of sacrifices
And vaporous prayer,
And would be starving were not
Children and beggars
Credulous simpletons.

Da ich ein Kind war,
Nicht wußt', wo aus, wo ein
Kehrte mein verirrtes Aug'
Zur Sonne, als wenn drüber wär'
Ein Ohr, zu hören meine Klage,
Ein Herz wie meins,
Sich des Bedrängten zu erbarmen.

When I was a child,
Didn't know which way to go,
My bewildered eye turned
To the sun, as if up there were
An ear to hear my lamentations,
A heart like mine
With mercy to comfort the afflicted.

Wer half mir wider
Der Titanen Übermut?
Wer rettete vom Tode mich,
Von Sklaverei?
Hast du's nicht alles selbst vollendet,
Heilig glühend Herz?
Und glühtest, jung und gut,
Betrogen, Rettungsdank
Dem Schlafenden da droben?

Who helped me counter
The Titans' arrogance?
From death who was it rescued me,
From slavery?
Was it not you that accomplished all,
Heart in sacred glow?
And yet glowed, young and good,
Deluded, with gratitude
To that sleeping one up there?

Ich dich ehren? Wofür?
Hast du die Schmerzen gelindert
Je des Beladenen?
Hast du die Tränen gestillet
Je des Geängsteten?
Hat nicht mich zum Manne geschmiedet
Die allmächtige Zeit
Und das ewige Schicksal,
Meine Herrn und deine?

I honour you? For what?
Did you just once ease the torments
Of him who was burdened?
Did you just once still the weeping
Of him who was anguished?
Was not I made a man on the anvil
Of all-powerful time
And of fate everlasting,
My masters and yours?

Wähntest du etwa,
Ich sollte das Leben hassen,
In Wüsten fliehn,

Did you imagine
Perhaps I would hate existence,
Run off to deserts,

Weil nicht alle Knabenmorgen- Blütenträume reiften?	If not all my boyhood morning's Blossom-dreaming fruited?
Hier sitz' ich, forme Menschen Nach meinem Bilde, Ein Geschlecht, das mir gleich sei Zu leiden, weinen, Genießen und zu freuen sich, Und dein nicht zu achten, Wie ich.	Here I sit, fashion humans In my own image, A breed to be my equal, To suffer, sorrow, To enjoy and be joyful, And to ignore you, Like me. ²⁸

There is further literary evidence to suggest Goethe's long interest in Franklin. His final novel, *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*, was published in 1829, three years before his death and after a fresh re-reading of Franklin's *Autobiography*.²⁹ In some ways, this book represents a culmination of Goethe's thought on subjects he had pondered for many years.

Several ideal communities are introduced in the novel and one of the most prominent — it is the first one the reader learns about — connects Goethe firmly to Pennsylvania. This community is established in an alpine area and its benefactor is referred to simply as «uncle.» Through the course of the novel it is revealed that the uncle's grandfather was an active member of a legation in England and became acquainted with William Penn. Goethe probably knew that the Quaker leader visited Frankfurt Pietists in 1677 and invited them to New Jersey, where he wanted to settle with his persecuted co-religionists. But in 1681 King Charles II of England discharged a debt owed to Penn by giving him land in the English colonies that became known as Pennsylvania. He was able to establish a safe haven, called a «city of brotherly love» — Philadelphia — in 1683. Penn wanted the province so «that an example may be Sett up to the nations» for «an holy experiment.»³⁰ Tolerance was fundamental to Penn's «Frame of Government» (1682) of the Province of Pennsylvania. Article XXXVI reads:

That all persons living in this province who confess and acknowledge the one almighty and eternal God to be the creator, upholder, and ruler of the world, and that hold themselves obliged in conscience to live peaceably and justly in civil society, shall in no ways be molested or prejudiced for their religious persuasion or practice in matters of faith and worship, nor shall they be compelled at any time to frequent or maintain any religious worship, place, or ministry whatever.³¹

Penn had made a strong impression on the uncle's grandfather:

The high good will, the pure intentions, the unswerving activity of such a first-rate man, the conflict, into which he therefore came with the world, the dangers and

tribulations which the noble man had appeared to succumb, aroused in the receptive spirit of the young man a decided interest; he felt a brotherly affinity with the episode and moved finally to America.³²

William Penn contributed to the tolerance discourse, and the uncle and his father in *Wanderjahre* are encoded similarly, as one character in the novel explains: «The father of our master was born in Philadelphia and both claimed to have assisted in bringing about a generally freer practice of religion in the colonies.»³³ Franklin's role as an «apostle of tolerance» is considered by Walter Isaacson to be «the most important religious role Franklin played» as he shaped the new republic.³⁴ Philadelphia grew from being a small Quaker settlement to become one of the leading centres of commerce and industry in the colonies and, as the home of Benjamin Rush, David Rittenhouse, and the American Philosophical Society which Franklin founded, emerged as the major city of the American Enlightenment.³⁵

A key concept is enunciated in connection with the uncle's alpine settlement, that of *Religionsfreiheit* or religious freedom. This appears to be the first time in Goethe's writings that the word is mentioned. The uncle decided to return to Europe — mirroring the return of one of William Penn's grandsons to England — and found a utopian society. The uncle's community appears in certain respects similar to the Society of Friends. A group of Elders teach and preside over social ceremonies and the overall ethos of the religion, to which the practical multi-purpose building contributes, appears to be a balanced life, with the example given that Elders could be giving instruction while young people dance under the same roof.³⁶ The building functions as a registry office for weddings and serves the general public by sponsoring activities for edification and entertainment.

Questions of appropriate moral behaviour are left up to the individual, reflecting an Enlightenment tendency to self-determination.³⁷ Whereas morality is a private matter, there is a way to address concerns. Sundays are set aside as a day of rest and discussion to construct a way of life conducive to a regular fresh start each week. Matters with which medical practitioners, government officials, or good friends cannot assist are left to the Divine.³⁸ As envisioned by Enlightenment thinkers, individuals are responsible for their own actions and accountable to their consciences.³⁹

Another community that is introduced in *Wanderjahre* will establish themselves not in the Old World, but in the New and it seems that they will do so in Pennsylvania. The uncle's father purchased a tract of land in the colonies and as his father lived and worked with William Penn, it is not unfeasible that he would have purchased land west of Philadelphia, where other German emi-

grants had populated villages and towns. In the novel, the tract has been purchased by a new German Christian community which embraces utopian and communal ideals, similar to other emigrant communities of the period.⁴⁰ In fact, during this time in Pennsylvania's history a wide range of non-traditional German-Christian communities flourished there—and not only the larger and more well-known groups that constituted the Amish, Mennonites, Moravians, Dunkards, and Hutterites, let alone German Catholics and Lutherans, but rather German Christian communities with roots in Pennsylvania such as Johann Conrad Beissel's Ephrata community and Johann Georg Rapp's Harmony Society.⁴¹ Indeed, Pennsylvania's policy of religious tolerance allowed it to become the home to many sectaries and persecuted religious communities and thus one of the most diverse and flourishing colonies.

This fact did not escape one of Goethe's associates: Carl Bernhard, Prince of Sachsen-Weimar-Eisenach, second son of the Duke of Weimar, Goethe's friend and patron, Carl August. Bernhard travelled to the United States in 1825-1826 and explored the new republic, particularly Pennsylvania. He wrote a travel journal of his experiences which Goethe read with interest. Bernhard was impressed with how religions coexisted peacefully in the United States, especially in Philadelphia. He read that twenty-two sects (including Jews)⁴² lived there: «And all these sects live peacefully next to and with each other.»⁴³ Bernhard also visited the German-American Harmony Society.⁴⁴ This accords with Franklin's description of how religions in Philadelphia worked together, as he explains in his *Autobiography*, when it was decided to create a building for the education of poor children and occasional preachers in Philadelphia. A committee was established consisting of members of diverse Christian confessions: «it was therefore that one of each Sect was appointed, viz. one Church-of-England man, one Presbyterian, one Baptist, one Moravian, &c.»⁴⁵ Franklin did not only support religious pluralism in theory, but he «contributed to the building funds of each and every sect in Philadelphia ... and he opposed religious oaths and tests in both the Pennsylvania and federal constitutions.»⁴⁶

In 1829, several months after Goethe had completed *Wanderjahre*, an associate spoke to him about recent heated theological controversies in Germany. Goethe's reply, tinged perhaps with irony, is a reminder of his Enlightenment view of religion and how much he valued religious pluralism as he describes a certain city in the United States, which could well have been Philadelphia or New York: «The finest thing, he opined, was now that in a city in North America about which he read recently, there were sixty churches in which each preached a different system of belief; there one could edify oneself each Sunday in the year in a different confession.»⁴⁷

The evidence for the positive impression that Franklin's life and work made on Goethe is scattered throughout his oeuvre. It is Franklin's commitment to the central projects of the Enlightenment which Goethe approves, that confirms his own investment in those undertakings. Goethe chose not to emigrate, but remained in a German principality, and chose to develop the Enlightenment's universal claims in specifically European registers. One of the most famous images of Franklin in France was the 1777 print portrait by Augustin de Saint-Aubin, after Charles-Nicholas Cochin, showing off Franklin in his fur cap and spectacles in a slightly rumpled jacket. He wanted to be out of place «among the Powder'd Heads of Paris», consciously cultivating the image of virtue and simplicity; after all, his government was receiving two million livres in French aid and he would be asking for more.⁴⁸ This can be contrasted with an equally iconic image of Goethe, painted about ten years after the Franklin print, Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein's «Goethe in the Campagna.» Goethe sports a large hat and lounges on Roman ruins, his right leg planted on the earth as the left one dangles over the edge of a stone block. His right hand, his writing hand, is exposed and relaxed, and his left hand rests on his right knee. The scene is framed by soft hills in the distance in front of which stand large Roman architectural remains. Plants are beginning to overgrow the ruins in the foreground, including a relief featuring what appears to be a scene from *Iphigenia in Tauris* by Euripides, the scene which would set in motion the conflict between representatives of European civilization and supposed barbarians, which Goethe drew on for inspiration for his own play of the same name, on which he was working at the time. Goethe is completely at home in a European landscape, amidst European history and culture, working out Enlightenment solutions to European challenges of the kind he produced in *Iphigenie auf Tauris*.

¹ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Hyperion. A Romance* (Boston: Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, 1853), p. 159. See: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Maxims and Reflections*, trans. Elisabeth Stopp and ed. Peter Hutschinson (London: Penguin, 1998).

² André von Gronicka, *The Russian Image of Goethe. Goethe in Russian Literature of the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*, vol. 1, (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1968), pp. 98-99.

³ Ibid. There is a long reception history of *Faust* in Russia. See: Lew Kopelew, *Zwei Epochen deutsch-russischer Literatur-beziehungen*, trans. Heddy Pross-Weerth (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1973).

⁴ Katharina Mommsen, *Goethe und unsere Zeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999), p. 39. Except where otherwise stated, all translations from the German are mine.

⁵ Franklin's travels in Germany are an often neglected area, particularly in connection with what he learned about the political state of affairs in the Holy Roman Empire of the Germanic Nation. This is being rectified by Jürgen Overhoff in *Benjamin Franklin. Erfinder, Freigeist, Staatenlenker* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2006).

⁶ See Hans Christian Freiesleben, *Goethe als Freimaurer. Seine Bedeutung für die königliche Kunst* (Hamburg: Akazien, 1949); *Goethe und die Freimaurerei* (Basel: Verlag der Freimaurerloge «Freundschaft und Beständigkeit», 1949); J.A. Leo Lemay writes that Franklin was elected Grand Master in 1734, «a heady moment for the twenty-eight-year-old» in «The Life of Benjamin Franklin.» in *Benjamin Franklin in Search of a Better World* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2005), pp. 17-53 (p. 28).

⁷ See Paul E. Kerry, *Enlightenment Thought in the Writings of Goethe. A Contribution to the History of Ideas* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2001).

⁸ The subject of Goethe and Franklin, although a reference point when examining Goethe's attitude towards America, is usually only fleetingly acknowledged. Eduard Baumgarten does more than most in *Benjamin Franklin. Der Lehrmeister der amerikanischen Revolution, Die geistigen Grundlagen des amerikanischen Gemeinwesens*, 1 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1936), pp. 24-25. He argues that Goethe see Franklin in three ways, as a «Politiker» (political figure); a «Menschen-erzieher (teacher of humanity); and a «Naturforscher» (natural scientist).

⁹ «Da nun aber alles Öffentliche auf dem Familienwesen ruht, so wendet er auch dahin vorzüglich seinen Blick. Als Gegenstände seiner ernsten und scherzhaften Betrachtungen finden wir die Veränderung der Sitten und Gewohnheiten, der Kleidungen, der Diät, des häuslichen Lebens, der Erziehung. Man müßte eben alles was in der bürgerlichen und sittlichen Welt vorgeht, rubrizieren, wenn man die Gegenstände erschöpfen wollte, die er behandelt. Und diese Behandlung ist bewundernswürdig. Ein vollkommener Geschäftsmann spricht zum Volke in Wochenblättern, um dasjenige, was eine einsichtige wohlwollende Regierung sich vornimmt oder ausführt, einem Jeden von der rechten Seite faßlich zu machen; keineswegs aber lehrhaft, sondern in den mannigfaltigsten Formen, die man poetisch nennen könnte, und die gewiß in dem besten Sinn für rhetorisch gelten müssen. Immer ist er über seinen Gegenstand erhaben, und weiß uns seine heitere Ansicht des Ernstesten zu geben; bald hinter dieser bald hinter jener Maske halb versteckt, bald in eigner Person sprechend, immer vollständig und erschöpfend, dabei immer froh, mehr oder weniger ironisch, durchaus tüchtig, rechtschaffen, wohlmeinend, ja manchmal derb und heftig, und dieses alles so abgemessen, daß man zugleich den Geist, den Verstand, die Leichtigkeit, Gewandtheit, den Geschmack und Charakter des Schriftstellers bewundern muß. In Absicht auf Wahl gemeinnütziger Gegenstände, auf tiefe Einsicht, freie Übersicht, glückliche Behandlung, so gründlichen als frohen Humor, wüßte ich ihm Niemand als *Franklin* zu vergleichen.» Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke, Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche*, ed. Hendrik Birus et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1986-1999), 14/I: *Aus Meinem Leben Dichtung und Wahrheit*, ed. Klaus-Detlef Müller, Bibliothek deutscher Klassiker, 15 (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1986), pp. 649-650. Hereafter this edition will be cited FA.

¹⁰ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke, Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche*, ed. Hendrik Birus et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1986-1999), 23/I: *Zur Farbenlehre*, ed. Manfred Wenzel, Bibliothek deutscher Klassiker, 65 (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1991), p. 1411.

¹¹ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *From My Life Poetry and Truth. Parts One to Three*, trans. Robert R. Heitner, ed. Thomas P. Saine and Jeffrey L. Sammons, Goethe's Collected Works, vol. 4 (New York: Suhrkamp, 1987), pp. 438-39.

¹² 28 February 1811: «Auch hat schon Franklin eine besondere Aversion gegen die Mathematiker, in Absicht auf geselligen Umgang, klar und deutlich ausgedrückt, wo er ihren Kleinigkeits- und Widerspruchsgeist unerträglich findet.» Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke nach Epochen seines Schaffens*. Münchner Ausgabe, ed. Karl Richter et al. (Munich: Hanser, 1985-1998), 20.1: *Briefwechsel zwischen Goethe und Zelter in den Jahren 1799 bis 1827*, ed. Edith Zehm et al. (Munich: Hanser, 1998), p. 249. Hereafter this edition cited as MA.

¹³ *The Autobiography*, in *A Benjamin Franklin Reader*, ed. Walter Isaacson (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), p. 453. The full text of Franklin's *Autobiography* is reproduced here. It was first published in French translation in 1791.

¹⁴ Louis K. Wechsler, *Benjamin Franklin. American and World Educator*, Twayne's World Leader Series, 56 (Boston: Hall, 1976)

¹⁵ «Der Eindruck, den ein leuchtender Gegenstand auf die Sehnerven macht, dauert zwanzig bis dreißig Sekunden. Sieht man an einem heitern Tage, wenn man im Zimmer sitzt, eine Zeit lang in die Mitte eines Fensters, und schließt sodann die Augen, so bleibt die Gestalt des Fensters eine Zeit lang im Auge, und zwar so deutlich, daß man im Stande ist, die einzelnen Fächer zu zählen. Merkwürdig ist bei dieser Erfahrung der Umstand, daß der Eindruck der Form sich besser erhält, als der Eindruck der Farbe. Denn sobald man die Augen schließt, scheinen die Glasfächer, wenn man das Bild des Fensters anfängt wahrzunehmen, dunkel, die Querhölzer der Kreuze aber, die Rahmen und die Wand umher weiß oder glänzend. Vermehrt man jedoch die Dunkelheit der Augen dadurch, daß man die Hände über sie halt, so erfolgt sogleich das Gegenteil. Die Fächer erscheinen leuchtend und die Querhölzer dunkel. Zieht man die Hand weg, so erfolgt eine neue Veränderung, die alles wieder in den ersten Stand setzt. Ein Phänomen, das ich so wenig zu erklären weiß als folgendes. Hat man lange durch eine gemeine grüne, oder sogenannte Konservationsbrille gesehn, und nimmt sie nun ab, so sieht das weiße Papier eines Buchs rötlich aus, so wie es grünlich aussieht, wenn man lange durch rote Brillen gesehen hat. Dies scheint eine noch nicht erklärte Verwandtschaft der grünen und roten Farbe anzuzeigen» (FA, 23/I, 912 and 1411).

¹⁶ FA 23/I, 1055

¹⁷ FA 23/I, 913.

¹⁸ Christoph Gögelein, *Zu Goethes Begriff von Wissenschaft, auf dem Wege der Methodik seiner Farbstudien* (Munich: Hanser, 1972); Frederick Burwick, *The Damnation of Newton: Goethe's Color Theory and Romantic Perception* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1986); Theda Rehbok, *Goethe und die «Rettung der Phänomene»*. *Philosophische Kritik des naturwissenschaftlichen Weltbilds am Beispiel der Farbenlehre* (Constance: Verlag am Hockgraben, 1995); Henri Bortoft, *The Wholeness of Nature. Goethe's Way toward a Science of Conscious Participation in Nature* (New York: Lindisfarne Press, 1996). See especially: Felix Höpfer, *Wissenschaft wider die Zeit. Goethes Farbenlehre aus rezeptionsgeschichtlicher Sicht. Mit einer Bibliographie zur Farbenlehre* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1990).

¹⁹ 2 April 1829: «Wäre meine Farbenlehre nicht ein verbotenes Buch, und deshalb schwer aufzufinden, so würde ich sagen: die unter dem Datum 2r Januar 1766 von dem wackern Franklin als problematisch hinterlassenen Erscheinungen sind in obgedachtem meinem Büchlein» (MA 20.2, 1215).

²⁰ 1 February 1827: «Wenn ich aber in denen Gegenständen, die in meinem Wege lagen, etwas geleistet, so kam mir dabei zu gute, daß mein Leben in eine Zeit fiel, die an großen Entdeckungen in der Natur reicher war als irgend eine andere. Schon als Kind begegnete mir Franklins Lehre von der Elektrizität, welches Gesetz er damals soeben gefunden hatte. Und so folgte durch mein ganzes Leben, bis zu dieser Stunde, eine große Entdeckung der andern; wodurch ich denn nicht allein früh auf die Natur hingeleitet, sondern auch später immer fort in der bedeutendsten Anregung erhalten wurde.» Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke nach Epochen seines Schaffens*. Münchner Ausgabe, ed. Karl Richter *et al.* (Munich: Hanser, 1985-1998), 19: *Johann Peter Eckermann. Gespräche mit Goethe in den letzten Jahren seines Lebens*, ed. Heinz Schlaffer (Munich: Hanser, 1986), p. 215.

²¹ Rudolf Magnus, *Goethe as Scientist*, trans. Heinz Norden (New York: Schuman, 1949), pp. 12, 15, 25, 231.

²² Letter of A. E. Odyniec to J. Korsak, 25 August 1829: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke, Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche*, ed. Hendrik Birus *et al.* (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1986-1999), 38/II: *Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche von 1823 bis zu Goethe's Tod, Teil II: Vom Dornburger Aufenthalt 1828 bis zum Tode*, ed. Horst Fleig, Bibliothek deutscher

Klassiker, 90 (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1993), p. 158. Sibum argues that most of Franklin's scientific followers were to be found in France and Germany: «It is more exact to describe Franklin's work as out of time with the old doctrines of natural philosophy and exactly in time with the emerging thought style of enlightened science characterizing the scientific academies of Berlin and Paris.» Heinz Otto Sibum, «The Bookkeeper of Nature: Benjamin Franklin's Electrical Research and the Development of Experimental Natural Philosophy in the Eighteenth Century,» in *Reappraising Benjamin Franklin. A Bicentennial Perspective*, ed. J. A. Leo Lemay (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1993), pp. 221-46.

²³ FA 14/I, 931.

²⁴ Aeka Ishihara, *Goethes Buch der Natur. Ein Beispiel der Rezeption naturwissenschaftlicher Erkenntnisse und Methoden in der Literatur seiner Zeit* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2005), pp. 76-77. See Reiner Wild, «Prometheus-Franklin: Die Gestalt Benjamin Franklins in der deutschen Literatur des 18. Jahrhunderts,» *Amerikastudien*, 23.1 (1978), 30-39.

²⁵ Ishihara, *Goethes Buch der Natur*, pp. 75-85. Dippel shows that some prominent Germans would have preferred if Franklin, whose prestige they saw stemming from his scientific achievement and election to the Göttingen Academy of Science, had not merged the roles of scientist and political activist, for example the philosopher Georg Christoph Lichtenberg and the mathematician Gotthelf Kästner. Horst Dippel, «Franklin: An Idol of the Times,» in *Critical Essays on Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Melvin H. Buxbaum, *Critical Essays on American Literature* (Boston: Hall, 1987), pp. 202-10.

²⁶ Lemay, «The Life of Benjamin Franklin,» p. 46.

²⁷ FA 14/I, 770.

²⁸ *Goethe. Selected Poems*, trans. John Whaley, intro. Matthew Bell (London: Dent, 1998), pp. 18-21. Goethe's literary writings continue to be productively interpreted in light of his scientific work. See: *Goethe und die Naturwissenschaften*, ed. Bernd Wilhelmi (Jena: Friedrich-Schiller-Universität, 1984); *Goethe und die Natur. Referate des Triestiner Kongresses*, ed. Horst Albert Glaser (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1986); *Goethe und die Verzeitlichung der Natur*, ed. Peter Matussek (Munich: Beck, 1998); *Durchgeistete Natur. Ihre Präsenz in Goethes Dichtung, Wissenschaft und Philosophie*, ed. Alfred Schmidt and Klaus-Jürgen Grün (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2000). Another trend has been to view Goethe's approach to science as related not only to his style of expression, but also to his conception of knowledge. See: H. B. Nisbet, *Goethe and the Scientific Tradition*, Publications of the Institute of Germanic Studies, 14 (London: Institute of Germanic Studies, University of London, 1972); R. H. Stephenson, *Goethe's Conception of Knowledge and Science* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1995); *Von der Pansophie zur Weltweisheit. Goethes analogisch-philosophische Konzepte*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Schrader and Katharine Weder (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2004).

²⁹ See Goethe's diary entries from 30 December 1828 to 18 January 1829. The novel, broadly construed, is a sequel to *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (*Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, published in 1795-1796).

³⁰ Penn's letter of 25 August 1681 to James Harrison William in: *The Papers of William Penn, 1680-1684*, ed. Richard S. Dunn and Mary Maples Dunn, 5 vols (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1981-1987), 2: 1680-1684, (1982), p. 108.

³¹ *William Penn and the Founding of Pennsylvania: A Documentary History*, ed. by Jean R. Sunderland (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1983), p. 132.

³² «Das hohe Wohlwollen, die reinen Absichten, die unverrückte Tätigkeit eines so vorzüglichen Mannes, der Konflikt, in den er deshalb mit der Welt geriet, die Gefahren und Bedrängnisse, unter denen der Edle zu erliegen schien, erregten in dem empfänglichen Geiste des jungen Mannes ein entschiedenes Interesse; er verbrüdete sich mit der Angelegenheit, und zog endlich selbst nach America.» Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke. Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche*, ed. Hendrick Birus *et al.*, 40 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1986-1999), 10/I:

Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre, ed. Gerhard Neumann and Hans-Georg Dewitz, Bibliothek deutscher Klassiker, 50 (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1989), pp. 342-43. «Verbrüdern» in the German has a double meaning in this context: it means not only to become acquainted with, but also to become a brother a possible reference to his association with the Quakers.

³³ «Der Vater unseres Herrn ist in Philadelphia geboren und beide rühmten sich beigetragen zu haben, daß eine allgemein freiere Religionsübung in den Kolonien stattfand» (FA 10/I, 342-43). Near Philadelphia is the city of Germantown, the first German settlement in America (1683). Many German religious settlements arose in Pennsylvania during the eighteenth century. Cf. Julius Friedrich Sachse, *The German Pietists of Pennsylvania, 1694-1708* (Philadelphia: Stockhausen, 1895).

³⁴ «Franklin had never fully joined a church nor subscribed to a sectarian dogma, and he found it more useful to focus on earthly issues rather than spiritual ones. When he narrowly escaped a shipwreck as he neared the English coast in 1757, he had joked to [his wife] Debbie that 'were I a Roman Catholic, perhaps I should on this occasion vow to build a chapel to some saint; but as I am not, if I were to vow at all, it would be to build a *lighthouse*.' Likewise, when a town in Massachusetts named itself Franklin in 1785 and asked him to donate a church bell, he told them to forsake the steeple and build a library, for which he sent 'books instead of a bell, sense being preferable to sound.' As he grew older, Franklin's faith in a benevolent God seemed to become more firm. 'If it had not been for the justice of our cause and the consequent interposition of Providence, in which we had faith, we must have been ruined,' he wrote Strahan after the war. 'If I had ever before been an atheist, I should now have been convinced of the Being and government of Deity!'» Walter Isaacson, *A Benjamin Franklin Reader*, p. 376. For an overview of Goethe's evolving attitudes towards religion, see the articles by various scholars in *Goethe and Religion, a Special Issue of Literature and Belief*, guest editor Paul E. Kerry, 20.2 (2000), 1-182.

³⁵ Gustafson reminds us that Herder, in the *Briefe zur Beförderung der Humanität* (Letters on the Promotion of Humanity; a work Goethe read), praises Franklin. She makes a strong case for Franklin's intellectual influence on a certain organization in the novel known as the Society of the Tower. Susan Gustafson, «The Religious Significance of Goethe's 'Amerikabil,'» *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 24 (1990), 69-91 (75-77).

³⁶ FA 10/I, 344. Pietists live in the uncle's district (FA 10/I, 394).

³⁷ Franklin writes that he created a list of virtues he intended to «acquire» until he should «master» all: Temperance, Silence, Order, Resolution, Frugality, Industry, Sincerity, Justice, Moderation, Cleanliness, Tranquility, Chastity, Humility. *The Autobiography*, in *A Benjamin Franklin Reader*, pp. 468-69.

³⁸ FA 10/I, 345.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ See Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992). See also Julius Friedrich Sachse, *The German Pietists of Pennsylvania, 1694-1708* (Philadelphia: Stockhausen, 1895).

⁴¹ La Vern J. Rippley, *The German-Americans* (Boston: Twayne, 1976), pp. 100-106. Kriegleder also suggests that the community in Goethe's novel will emigrate to Pennsylvania. Wynfried Kriegleder, «Wilhelm Meisters Amerika: Das Bild der Vereinigten Staaten in den Wanderjahren,» *Jahrbuch des Wiener Goethe-Vereins*, 95 (1991), 15-31 (26).

⁴² In 1788 Franklin pledged five pounds in support of a new synagogue in Philadelphia. The *Wanderjahre* emigrant society, as a Christian community within a pluralistic religious polity, does not admit Jews.

⁴³ «Und alle diese Secten leben friedlich neben einander und mit einander.» Prince Carl Bernhard von Sachsen-Weimar-Eisenach, *Reise Sr. Hoheit des Herzogs Bernhard zu Sachsen-Weimar-*

Eisenach durch Nord-Amerika in den Jahren 1825 und 1826, ed. Heinrich Luden (Weimar: Wilhelm Hoffmann, 1828), 220-21 and 204-12.

⁴⁴ See Walter Wadepuhl, *Goethe's Interest in the New World* (Jena: Biedermann, 1934). He lists works Goethe read about America including those he borrowed from the Grand-Ducal Library.

⁴⁵ *The Autobiography*, in *A Benjamin Franklin Reader*, p. 501. In 1790 the *Pennsylvania Gazette* reported that all of the clergy of the city, including the Jewish religious leaders, marched in Franklin's funeral procession. See Walter Isaacson, *A Benjamin Franklin Reader*, pp. 376-77.

⁴⁶ Walter Isaacson, *A Benjamin Franklin Reader*, pp. 376-77.

⁴⁷ «Am schönsten, meinte er, sei es jetzt in einer Stadt Nordamerikas, von der er neulich gelesen, daß in ihr an die sechzig Kirchen seien, in deren jeder ein anderes Glaubenssystem gepredigt werde; da könne man also an jedem Sonntag im Jahr sich in einer andern Confession erbauen.» Conversation with L. Löw von und zu Steinfurt, 3 October 1829 in: *Goethes Gespräche: Eine Sammlung zeitgenössischer Berichte aus seinem Umgang auf Grund der Ausgabe und des Nachlasses von Flodoard Freiherrn von Biedermann*, ed. Wolfgang Herwig. 4 vols (Zurich: Artemis, 1965-1984): III/2, p. 532.

⁴⁸ Lemay, «The Life of Benjamin Franklin,» pp. 45-46.