Journal of American Studies, **44** (2010), 1. doi:10.1017/S0021875810000125

J. A. Leo Lemay, *The Life of Benjamin Franklin*, Volume III, *Soldier, Scientist, and Politician, 1748–1757* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009, $45.00/£29.50). Pp. xx + 768. ISBN 978 0 8122 4121 1.

"*Jakes* on our Table"! That fragrant image, of excrement dumped before unsuspecting American diners, is the signature of this volume, the third in a series that examines the life, written works, and accomplishments of Benjamin Franklin. The present volume has close to six hundred pages of narrative (with fifty-seven figures and six maps), nine appendices (including a sixteen-item list of new attributions, works previously unattributed to Franklin), and sixty-five pages of notes (including a guide to the extensive abbreviations used in the notes). This is thorough. At his current rate of progress, a volume for every decade of his subject's life, J. A. Leo Lemay will need to complete three more books of at least the size of the present volume; though, given that Franklin's life became more eventful over time, more than three additional volumes may be necessary.

Big, multivolume biographical studies are in style, at least for certain kinds of historical subject, including those who lived in the eighteenth century and those who were major figures in science. J. G. A. Pocock's study of Edward Gibbon, for example, is projected to encompass six volumes. Janet Browne's two-volume biography of Charles Darwin is briefer, if no less monumental. A man of science, a man of the eighteenth century – surely, Franklin deserves such attention as well?

Indeed, Lemay's present volume covers some pretty monumental stuff, as his subtitle indicates. It was during the years 1748 to 1757 that Franklin made himself into a person well known beyond his adopted home of Pennsylvania. While Lemay's previous two volumes focussed on Franklin's work in educating himself and then establishing himself as a sucessful printer (complete with the acquisition of property, family, and a network of patrons and protégés), the present volume concentrates on Franklin's successful efforts in making himself famous and important. He did so with a double-headed attack: he made his way into Pennsylvania politics and he brought himself to the attention of European savants through his work in science. If anything, it was the latter that assisted the former, as Franklin's growing fame as a man of science helped him gain a coveted appointment as a colonial postmaster. That office, along with his election to the Pennsylvania House of Assembly, brought yet more political appointments, including military rank, as Pennsylvania joined the conflicts that began the Seven Years War.

Lemay explains these developments in detail, often in an astonishingly day-to-day account of Franklin's life. His book is essentially a narrative, a careful recounting of events, both as background to Franklin's actions and as the result of them. The twenty-two narrative chapters appear between a preface that is a chronicle of the overall period and a concluding chapter that offers some summary comments on Franklin's life during this decade.

What is difficult to pick up within this exhaustive narration is any analysis, and this is what sets Lemay's work off from Pocock's on Gibbon or Browne's on Darwin. What, in this cavalcade of Franklinian events, are we supposed to pay

attention to? Lemay is coy, and for the most part hides his analysis in the ninth and final of his appendices, where he poses a question: when did Franklin become an American, a person with sentiments and interests distinct from those of the British empire in which he had been born and which he had served? Lemay's answer is that Franklin had had these sentiments and interests since his youth in Boston, and that his antipathy to inherited position and to hierarchical visions of society poorly disposed him toward the imperial politics which began to boil around him in the 1740s and 1750s, as the text also hints, if more obliquely.

But equally plausible answers to the question of when Franklin became an American (within Lemay's definition) might be "never" or "impossible to tell." It bears remembering that Franklin boasted of the number of kings he had met and that he had a grandson named "Lewis" after the king of France. It also bears remembering that Franklin was a great and charming dissimulator, who candidly admitted that he was disinclined ever to contradict another person and whose ill-matched opinions (one truth for one correspondent, an opposite one for another) make him hard to pin down. True, he criticized the misuse of power and the abuse of authority, and he often declared birth or inheritance irrelevant because the low-born (including him – especially him) were as intelligent and able as their so-called superiors. But all that did not prevent Franklin from obsessively tracing his genealogy or from glorying in his aristocratic contacts, even those within the Great Britain he increasingly criticized as high-handed, shortsighted, and poorly governed.

It may be more interesting to consider not when Franklin became an American, but how he expressed himself as one. On this, Lemay's analysis is far better, indeed superb, if fleeting. Consider his reading of one of Franklin's critiques of the British policy of sending felons to the colonies: "In what can *Britain* show a more Sovereign Contempt for us, than by emptying their *Jails* into our Settlements; unless they would likewise empty their *Jakes* on our Tables?" The image is a shock, and was meant to be. Lemay adds that "the assonance and consonance of '*Jails* … *Jakes*,' the hard *a* assonance repeated in '*tables*,' and the repeated rhythm of the two clauses all add to the rhetorical effect." (He might also have noted Franklin's criticism of British sovereignty in the sarcastic phrase "Sovereign Contempt" and the tellingly italicized progression from *Britain* to *Jails* to *Jakes*.) The jails-and-jakes essay was rapidly and widely reprinted in colonial newspapers, becoming, in Lemay's estimation, "the first popular American editorial and, proportionally, the most reprinted one America ever had" (223–24).

But this is one of the only times, and the only sustained time, that Lemay digs into something that Franklin wrote. More of this kind of analysis, of the media and language with which eighteenth-century people made their age into an age of revolution, would have made this large and thorough volume into an insightful one as well.

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