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# “Digression Personified: Whitman, The New York School, and the Drift of Poetry”

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The outline to *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* presents modern readers with a blueprint for the rational, orderly, and deliberate construction of an Enlightenment self upon the unruly terrain of a New

World. In Franklin's schema, marriage, Great Industry, savvy business partnerships, Constant Study, fatherhood, and the author's famous experiment in the Art of Virtue are carefully assembled like so many units of masonry within a deliberate architectural design. Yet, this idealized blueprint for the autobiography, like the arrangement of moral values into a chart for self-examination in Franklin's "Art of Virtue" experiment, also effaces the disorderly or unruly aspects of self-invention in the period.<sup>2</sup> It comes as no surprise, then, that Franklin's difficulty in "ordering" his inner life and social affairs...

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