



# Whitman, Walt. Franklin Evans, or The Inebriate: A Tale of the Times., Ed. Christopher Castiglia and Glenn Hendler [review]

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## REVIEWS

WALT WHITMAN. *Franklin Evans, or The Inebriate: A Tale of the Times*. Ed. Christopher Castiglia and Glenn Hendler. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007. lvii + 148 pp.

Christopher Castiglia and Glenn Hendler present this edition of the first printing of Whitman's temperance novel, *Franklin Evans*, with a long introduction, three supplementary texts, and a brief bibliography. The two brief introductory chapters of Whitman's second, aborted temperance serial, "The Madman," are followed by the 1844 *Columbian Magazine* edition of Whitman's short story, "The Child and the Profligate" (which he created by revising his better-known 1841 story, "The Child's Champion"). For the third supplementary text, the editors have chosen Abraham Lincoln's famous 1842 address before the Springfield Washingtonian Temperance Society.

Following editions by Emory Holloway (1929), Thomas Brasher (1963), and Jean Downey (1967), this handsome Duke University Press edition is the fourth reprinting of the novel since Whitman revised it for the *Brooklyn Eagle* in late 1846. At \$21.95 in paperback, this *Franklin Evans* will appeal to professors who would consider the novel as required reading in any undergraduate or graduate seminar. It might also appeal to the general reader interested in this part of Whitman's long foreground. For scholars interested in the textual history of *Franklin Evans*, Castiglia and Hendler point to Brasher's edition, a part of *The Early Poems and Fiction* volume of the New York University Press *Collected Writings of Walt Whitman*; the editors of this new edition have no ambition to supplement or correct Brasher's annotations and textual commentary.

The introduction, the joint work of Castiglia and Hendler, is somewhat incoherent. Wide-ranging and daring in argument, it attempts, in about 18,000 words and three illustrations, to summarize and interpret Whitman's early life and its relationship to the social history of New York City's people, literary periodicals, and reform movements. It also devotes considerable attention to reading *Franklin Evans* in a variety of interesting critical lights. Toward the end, however, I found the logic of the arguments, and some of the sentences and transitions, tough to follow.

The summary of Whitman's early biography draws, surprisingly, almost exclusively from Gay Wilson Allen's *A Solitary Singer* (1967) and Justin Kaplan's *Walt Whitman: A Life* (1980). The introduction does not reference more recent and appropriate biographical work by, for example, Jerome Loving, Joann Krieg, Ed Folsom, or Jonathan Ned Katz. David S. Reynolds makes only a single brief appearance, in a role supporting a biographical interpretation also attributed to Kaplan. As Van Wyck Brooks and Leslie Fiedler made appearances in the footnotes, I found myself double-checking the date of publication. The main details of Whitman's early biography have been well

known for some time, so the only harm done in this neglect of more recent biographical scholarship, I suppose, is the poor example that it sets for graduate students.

After asserting that *Franklin Evans* contains a great deal of anti-urbanism, the introduction provides a useful social history of New York City that draws primarily on the work of Sean Wilentz and Richard Briggs Stott. From here the editors document, through reference to his journalism, Whitman's relevant concerns for working people adopting "bourgeois affectations," his capacity for directing a xenophobic anti-Catholicism at New York's Irish, and his interest in the novelty and dangers of the period's all-male "boardinghouse fellowship." After a quick summary of the novel's textual history, the introduction then delves into various interpretations of the novel's economic arguments and their relationship to what the novel has to say about class, gender, and race.

The introduction's general neglect of recent scholarship is most apparent in the discussion of Whitman's relationship to reform movements. James Hart is invoked to support dated generalizations about temperance fiction, and while the introduction appears to proceed with David S. Reynolds' observation that much reform literature employs (or freely indulges) some kind of literary sensationalism, his *Beneath the American Renaissance* (1988) is not cited, and neither is his edition, with Debra J. Rosenthal, of essays on temperance literature, *The Serpent and the Cup* (1997). Also missed, especially in the introduction's description of gender in the novel, is some reference to Elaine Parson's *Manhood Lost: Fallen Drunkards and Redeeming Women in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (2003).

The supplementary texts are interesting. "The Madman," with its "celerity of mastication and swallowing," is surely one of the more mysterious things Whitman wrote (118). "The Child and the Profligate," another temperance tale that Whitman revised, also deserves more scholarly attention. Much could be said about Whitman's development as a prose writer and literary reformer through a comparison of the very similar revisions Whitman made to this story and to *Franklin Evans*. The decision to include Lincoln's often-reprinted Washingtonian address is more curious. On the one hand, there are many more hard-to-find temperance writings from Whitman's early career that might appear in Lincoln's place. On the other hand, Lincoln's address does provide a very useful introduction to the Washingtonian period—which only lasted a few years—in the broader temperance movement. If I were using this edition in the classroom, I would most certainly assign Lincoln's address before assigning chapters from the novel. It effectively explains the innovations of Washingtonianism that had Whitman excited about temperance as a partisan political movement for only a year or two.

Finally, there can be no doubt that we still have much to learn about Whitman and Whitman's writings from this novel. It is central, in its themes and concerns and literary style, to what is now a very large body of well-edited writings by Whitman from the 1840s. "It is almost incredible," Thomas Brasher comments in his 1963 edition of *Franklin Evans*, "that the man who wrote *Leaves of Grass* also wrote *Franklin Evans*" (EPF, 125 n.1). Today, only the reverse can be true. We cannot say that there is anything "incredible" about

this novel. *Franklin Evans* is not an unusual work in Whitman's early career. It is a typical one. And, as Castiglia and Hendler so amply document in their introduction, today the novel speaks to us—as Whitman fans, as biographers, and as literary and cultural historians—on more levels than we can easily articulate. *Franklin Evans* is no longer an outlier for the Whitman scholar, but an essential text, and we should cheer its republication in an inexpensive and scholarly paperback edition.

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