
Walt Whitman. *Franklin Evans or The Inebriate, A Tale of the Times*.
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Walt Whitman famously came to believe that *Franklin Evans* was “rot” not worth the three days of concerted drunken effort he claimed it took him to write the temperance novel. In their outstanding introduction Christopher Castiglia and Glenn Hendler convincingly counter Whitman’s own negative review and clear space for renewed appreciation of Whitman’s only novel. Continuing and adding to Michael Warner’s work in *Breaking Bounds: Whitman and American Cultural Studies*, Castiglia and Hendler treat the inconsistencies, contradictions and plot contortions of *Franklin Evans* as emblematic of the temperance novel genre and reflective of the political ideologies of Whitman’s audience. They also do a thorough job of mapping the “central motifs in *Franklin Evans*—speculative economics and social reform, gender and sexualized transmission of capital, and racial nationalism” (xl). In so doing, they have produced an incredibly teachable edition of an important work that was impossible to find in print.

Franklin Evans certainly deserves more attention than it has been paid. Only a handful of articles since the mid-’90s and an occasional chapter in a book length treatment of Whitman have been written about a text that clearly requires a more substantial evaluation than previous generations have afforded. While servicing temperance novel clichés, Whitman is clearly beginning to develop some of the aesthetic and political concerns he deals with at length in *Leaves of Grass*. His introductory remarks claim that he is bending the form of the novel by bridging the gap between sentiment and the real in order to appeal to “THE PEOPLE.” Whether or not one comes to believe that this early democratic aesthetic has more to do with his desire for a profitable return on his labor than an honest investment in “the masses,” there are clear and discernable links between Whitman the novelist and Whitman the poet. This is not to say that *Franklin Evans* will ever be confused with *Leaves of Grass*. The novel contains plot developments that seem simply strange (Evans nearly spontaneous trip South and his marriage to a slave, Margaret) and random (a lengthy interlude about a Native American tragedy is ostensibly used to reinforce the temperance message of the novel, but seems more like a meditation upon the foundation of the United States).

Castiglia and Hendler contextualize the reasons for the novel’s randomness and seeming contradictions so well that they have made an implicit case for the return of *Franklin Evans* not only to graduate but undergraduate coursework on Whitman.

Contextualizing Whitman is often difficult for the simple fact that there are so many existent representations of Whitman. In addition, Whitman is always there ahead of his critics, offering his own self-fashioning as a possible interpretation. Castiglia and Hendler do not attempt to decide upon any one “Whitman,” but instead offer up the historical backdrop of Whitman’s New York, the Washingtonian temperance society and Whitman’s commentary upon both as a means of allowing their readers to situate the novel in the context of nineteenth-century reform. Beginning with a brief biographical sketch, the introduction quickly situates the production of the novel in Whitman’s career as a New York City journalist. Whitman’s journalism has often proved difficult ground for critics because it is difficult to decide what amount of faith Whitman had in his own journalistic claims and how much he sought to please publisher, editor, or audience. Castiglia and Hendler offer up selections of Whitman’s journalism, with a special focus on labor and social reform, less as a means of deciding upon Whitman’s own views and more as sites where it is possible to locate the source of *Franklin Evans*’ contradictions.

As much as the contextual elements of the introduction seem to be geared toward making it possible for those unfamiliar with the novel to appreciate both Whitman and his milieu, scholars looking to reexamine *Franklin Evans* will want to read the introduction to this new edition. The authors have managed to uniquely tie the self-management ethos of the reform plot with the gendered and racialized solutions to mismanagement presented in the novel. Looking closely at the intersection of speculation, slavery, and gender, Castiglia and Hendler locate the “cultural logic of temperance” in a desire for temperance of character that both maintains and subverts the contradictions it is meant to erase.

Beyond the introduction and the 1842 text of *Franklin Evans*, this edition contains two Whitman short stories obviously incorporated into the make-up of the novel and a speech by Abraham Lincoln to the Washingtonian society of Springfield, Illinois. Lincoln’s speech is a welcome addition for those looking to contextualize temperance as a national movement and also for those that will want to mark Whitman’s involvement with temperance as part and parcel with his later nationalism. The Whitman short stories are interesting in their own regard, but I would like to have seen the inclusion of other shorter works. Whitman’s “Half-Breed” might have been an interesting addition in light of the digression concerning the “removal” of Native Americans Whitman makes at the beginning of the novel. While I believe that the 1842 edition of the text was the correct version of the novel to use as definitive, because Castiglia and Hendler do not footnote the main text of the novel, there are lost opportunities for comparison between versions of the novel. (Whitman later revised the novel and excised the temperance elements in order to present the

novel as one of “dissipation” rather than intemperance.) For this reason, Thomas L. Brasher’s 1963 edition found in *Walt Whitman: The Early Poems and the Fiction* (which Castiglia and Hendler thank and cite) will remain an important tool for scholars. But “rot” or not, *Franklin Evans* has now been deservedly made available to a wider audience. ✱