
Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV

University of Mississippi

Follow this and additional works at: https://egrove.olemiss.edu/studies_eng_new

Part of the American Literature Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://egrove.olemiss.edu/studies_eng_new/vol6/iss1/39

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Studies in English at eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in Studies in English, New Series by an authorized editor of eGrove. For more information, please contact egrove@olemiss.edu.
REVIEWS


These recent titles enhance the Northwestern-Newberry Melville edition in progress and increase our debts to those who had hands in the making. With *The Confidence-Man*, Volume Ten, the edition is now two-thirds completed. Although every Melvillean eagerly awaits *Moby-Dick* from these hands, the present pair of books ought to stanch for a time those who wait. Useful texts and many extra's await those who open these books.

A sound rationale for copy-text from the first American edition of *The Confidence-Man* appears in the "textual Note" for that volume. The "Historical Note," of 102 pages, sets forth background and analytical information. Variants are recorded, notes to manuscript fragments provided, and a facsimile of "Melville's Indian-Hating Source"—James Hall's *Sketches of the West* (1835)—included. Altogether, text and apparatus stand as more than merely functional.

*The Piazza Tales* volume divides into four bodies of texts: 1. *The Piazza Tales* proper 2. uncollected prose (including non-fiction) 3. reconstructed lectures (from Merton Sealts's *Melville as Lecturer* [1957]) and 4. attributed items. Ascriptions for these last to Melville is based primarily upon internal evidence. Merton Sealts's "Historical Note" (of nearly 180 pages!) comes to us as one more of the scholarly undertakings by this professor that will long maintain its factual importance and that—unlike so much so-called "scholarship" in these times—is excellent prose as well. Melville the writer of short fiction and of brief non-fictional work is, as has been so often the case, Sealts's topic. Since he pioneered in promoting this aspect of Melville, and since the short fiction in particular has captured and recaptured attention and analyses from and by many other academics, such an essay comes naturally from his desk. To supplant the customary presentation of Melville's work in short forms as part of his later years in authorship, a revaluation based on Sealts's work here will be in order. What the few have known will be accessible to the many, and so another plus for the Melville edition may be tallied. Melville's acquaintance with the English Romantics, notably Byron and Moore, as
well as with the *Arabian Nights*, not surprisingly, are linked with his own ventures into Gothicism. This subject invites further exploration to supplement what has been done. Seals likewise illuminates such matters as Melville and Hawthorne, Poe, or Irving: Melville and the periodical world of his day, Melville and American thought. By others, the textual notes, comments on sources, and the facsimile of Amasa Delano’s account that underlies “Benito Cereno,” evince like breadth and depth in Melville scholarship. Along with Lea Newman’s excellent G. K. Hall overview of the short fiction, this volume serves as a bibliographical guide to Melville’s shorter prose writings.

All in all, the two latest volumes in the Northwestern-Newberry edition supply an embarrassment of riches for the study of Melville. We come away from them with a sense of facts handled well but without pedantry, and we return for additional dips into or lingerings over primary and secondary sections. “Magisterial” is the term undeniable when one has once turned their pages and read with an alert eye. More of this edition is what we ask.

Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV

The University of Mississippi

Barton Levi St. Armand. *Emily Dickinson and Her Culture: The Soul’s Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985. 368 pp. $32.50 (Cloth); 1986, $14.95 (Paper)

No one, I believe, can ever read Emily Dickinson again in quite the same way after reading this splendidly interdisciplinary study. Barton St. Armand, Professor of English at Brown University, uses his wide and special knowledge of mid-nineteenth-century literature, literary theory, art, religion, and popular culture to explicate the poems of Emily Dickinson in terms of the personal, intellectual, generic, and stylistic background out of which they came. Starting with the concept of the portfolio, that usually feminine patchwork quilt-like compilation of highly personal literary sketches and fragments so characteristic of the middle century, he goes on to read Dickinson’s work in relation to her time’s images of death, sentimental fiction and Gothic romance, “image of heaven,” often grotesque folk art, and conventions of portraiture and landscape painting. Though he bases his book in part on his lively acquaintance with a wide range of modern Dickinson scholarship, he has eagerly and understandingly explored many hitherto overlooked or slighted areas of Dickinson’s emotional, intellectual, and artistic background. The results are new and exciting.