

# Printers of the Kosmos

## Designing a Variorum of the First *Leaves of Grass*

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### ABSTRACT

This essay describes the editorial logic behind a recently released variorum of the 1855 edition of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. The history of the composition, printing, binding, distribution, and reading of this set of books informs the design and apparatus of the variorum, which attempts to represent something of the fundamental textual and material instability of the copies that make up the edition.

WHEN WALT WHITMAN TOOK A MIND TO SELF-PUBLISH A radically new book of poems, he turned to an old, familiar model: Shakespeare. A former printer himself, Whitman would have been accustomed to making print-related calculations, though not perhaps for books of poetry. On a manuscript that may be found at the Harry Ransom Center, he started the process of casting off *Leaves of Grass*. He outlined the intended order for his poems, then added up the number of manuscript pages associated with each. He then estimated the “letters in one of my closely written MS pages like page 2”, multiplied that by the manuscript pages (127), then divided by the number of letters on a printed page of poetry, to estimate 181 printed pages. His estimate of 1120 letters on a printed page of poems is based on a count of 28 lines per page and 40 letters per line in, as he describes it, “Shakspere’s poems”. This count is a close match to what was probably his 1847 copy of Shakespeare’s poems, a 279-page octavo volume now held at the Folger Shakespeare Library.<sup>1</sup>

But the printing didn’t go as Whitman planned here. Ed Folsom has observed that the printer, Andrew Rome, a friend of Whitman’s, was a job printer who at this time typically issued functional documents like legal

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1. See SHAKESPEARE 1847. Whitman’s name is written on the title page. Page 15 of the volume, part of the poem “Venus and Adonis”, has 28 lines (including both printed and blank lines), and the first two printed lines have 40 characters each (including punctuation and spaces).

forms.<sup>2</sup> A broadside at the New York Historical Society, advertising the 1854 auction of lots in Brooklyn, provides another example of the kind of material the firm printed. Perhaps Rome insisted on a larger size for the pages of the book to better accommodate the work of printing *Leaves of Grass* between other jobs; perhaps, with all the blank space poetry would require, the format was a function of how much type Rome could summon to the form. Whatever the case, whatever combination of authorial intention foiled by the forces of economy or concurrent production the decision involved, at some point it became clear that the book was going to be big. And now there wasn't really an easy-to-hand model anymore. On what could Whitman base his calculations — was it like a gift book, or an album, or a scrapbook? How much room would the poems take up, with their long lines, their varying lengths?

Understanding the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*, today the most valuable edition of the title, requires thinking about the intention of the author. There were a lot of people with ambition, healthy egos, and printer friends in the nineteenth century. Only one of those managed to produce around 1000 copies of an outsized, candid book of prosy poetry and poetic prose without precedent in nineteenth-century literary publishing.<sup>3</sup> But the story of the 1855 *Leaves* is extraordinary not just because of that ambition. It is a story of how human determination and explosive imagination ran headlong into the realities of one corner of the printing world in the nineteenth-century United States. It is a story that resulted in a series of objects that incarnate that collision, writ large as a cosmic struggle between human passion and larger social, material, historical, and spiritual forces. And it is the story of passionate subsequent imaginings about how all of this unfolded — of how Walt Whitman the poet and his first *Leaves* came to be.

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2. FOLSOM 2006, 72.

3. Based on the binder's statement, White asserts that the edition consisted of 795 copies (1963, 353). An 1856 announcement in *Life Illustrated* stated that the "first edition of a thousand copies rapidly disappeared" (ALLEN 1955, 178). In his 1856 public letter to Ralph Waldo Emerson, printed as part of the 1856 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman wrote "I printed a thousand copies" (346). In a letter to unidentified correspondents dated March 31, 1885, he wrote that "800 copies were struck off on a hand press". He may not have had all of the copies bound, although based on later comments it seems unlikely that he kept or distributed any unbound copies. In any case, the total number of copies printed was almost certainly between 795 and 1000. About 200 copies are known to survive today.

In this essay we discuss a digital edition of the first *Leaves of Grass*, recently published on the *Walt Whitman Archive*.<sup>4</sup> The poet who laments the wet paper and cold types between us adapted his intentions visibly and to some extent recoverably in the first edition of his poems. But with this edition we argue that the text must also be edited with some attention to characteristics that betray the processes involved in the manufacture and distribution of the book — shifting type, missing characters, printed insertions, and individual copy variations — as well as to authorial revisions. The drift of type, of the book's contents, and of the copies in the marketplace: all of this has the power to give form. The imagination of reproducibility within and subject to the realities of production and the passage of time — this was all *part of it* for Whitman.

The accounting that goes into editorial and bibliographical work is similar in some ways to Whitman's casting off of his book. It requires counting and calculation as part of a reckoning with the specific evidence in existing copies or manuscript pages, and with the capacity of that evidence to be expressed in a particular medium and format. In this case we counted copies, lines, characters, and pages. We counted manuscripts and notebooks and insertions and variants and gatherings and bindings. This edition, like other editions, is designed to convey and provide access to that kind of accounting, a practical assessment for the purpose of planning, building, investment, or interpretation. But it is also designed to account for the copies of *Leaves of Grass* in a metaphorical way that Whitman describes in his poetry. This kind of accounting tallies the past in concrete ways. But it also tries to create space for the future: the unexpected, like the large page size that Whitman ended up with for the 1855 *Leaves*, or, in our case, the emerging affordances of the digital medium, and the discovery of texts and contexts previously unknown.

This edition, then, is an effort to combine a representation of the counting and accounting that we and others have done with the construction of a framework that can accommodate the counting and accounting yet to be done. Many have pointed out that the digital medium provides opportunities for this well beyond those that were available to printed editions. Yet in addition to considering the affordances of the medium, we had to shift our mindset, to strike a compromise between accuracy and completeness in our descriptions of the past — important goals of both accounting and textual editions — and flexibility and openness to the interpretations, discoveries, and corrections of the future.

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4. See GRAY 2020.

We refer to our work (and that of the many others contributing to this edition) as a “variorum”, an old term to describe an edition that gathers variants of a text, or of opinion about it, across time. Such a definition might suggest that all of the printed editions of *Leaves*, published over almost half a century, should be represented — as they were, for instance, in the New York University Press *Collected Writings* variorum. The variorum form has been imagined as a way to gain mastery, most visibly over the temporality of a text, its chronological development through successive versions or interpretations. With this undertaking, though, we wanted to emphasize the variation within and leading up to a single edition of *Leaves*. Linking that set of changes to those that occurred during and after the production of the books, we hope to show the multiple temporalities constellating this first set of copies of *Leaves of Grass*.

The title of our essay alludes to D.F. McKenzie’s essay “Printers of the Mind”, invoking our place in a long progression of compositor studies in pursuit of author-based composition chronologies. The goal in those studies was often to establish a definitive text and a reading of authorial intention, or in McKenzie’s case, a labor history of the press-room and what Michael Suarez calls the “actual praxis” of the book-related trades.<sup>5</sup> Ours sits somewhere between those goals, and it is also cued by the ways in which Whitman’s readers, scholarly and otherwise, have tended to *want* to read the 1855 *Leaves*. Taking McKenzie’s warning in that essay to heart, we wanted to create a framework for describing forms of variation potentially meaningful to the ongoing study of America’s most famous book of poetry.

It is hard to understand the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* as a fixed manifestation produced at a single point in time for several reasons — reasons that also make it difficult to imagine an ideal authorially intended version of the text. Gatherings were bound apparently without reference to the order of variant text, making it impossible to say that some copies were “early” and others “late”. A frontispiece portrait was included, printed from an engraving based on a daguerreotype, but the crotch and pant leg of the engraving were altered at some point in the printing of the copies. One surviving copy has no printed copyright statement, and two more have handwritten versions of it. It is possible that it took weeks or months to print the book; it is possible that Whitman was composing part of it at the last minute. The 1855 *Leaves* was in a state of more or less continuous composition and decomposition. The agents involved in that compositional process were, we might say, a cosmos: Whitman; the workers in the Rome print shop adjusting the forms and type and furniture of the set-up text; the engraver,

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5. SUAREZ 2002, 38; MCKENZIE 1969.

either Samuel Hollyer or John C. McRae; the binders Charles Jenkins and Davies & Hands; William Horsell, the London distributor whose address was printed onto a label affixed to the title page of some copies; George F. Betts, clerk of the Southern District Court of New York, who wrote out the wording of the copyright statement, and others.<sup>6</sup>

Some copies of the 1855 *Leaves* also include eight pages of essays and reviews, three self-authored, that Whitman had printed and bound into several of the books. An understudied feature of the 1855 copies, these materials present a unique set of challenges. Versions of the essays and reviews, some of them much longer than the extracts Whitman included in his insertion, had previously appeared in periodicals. There are printed proofs, manuscript fragments, and later published versions of some of these materials.<sup>7</sup> Some of the differences between the periodical versions of the reviews Whitman wrote and the *Leaves* versions hint at his shifting imagination of how to represent the book and its author. But the influence of the editors and printers of the periodical versions on the text is one factor that makes it difficult to decipher the role of authorial intention in these revisions. Are the versions bound into *Leaves* examples of Whitman revising back to his original text, which had been altered by editors in their first periodical publication? Or are they examples of Whitman revising his own text to fit better within the context of the 1855 *Leaves*? The reviews were included at the front of the volume in most known cases, meaning that for recipients of the copies of *Leaves* with these materials added, the first encounters with lines of Whitman's shocking new poetry might well have come in reading these reviews, rather than in the body text itself.

In the variorum we have also made an ambitious effort to link textual units in the known manuscripts and notebooks that Whitman kept in the years leading up to the publication of *Leaves of Grass* with textual units in the printed version. We assigned relations between manuscript and printed text, using the line, where possible, as the foundational unit of relation. Because of the generic variety, even indeterminacy (as Virginia Jackson might caution us) visible in these manuscripts, we also created links between chunks of text in prose manuscripts and lines of printed poetry, as well as between manuscript text and printed text in the prose preface to the 1855 edition of *Leaves*.<sup>8</sup> Whitman famously converted some

6. For more about each of these, see FOLSOM 2006, GENOWAYS 2007, STERN 1971, WHITE 1963 and 1957, and BLODGETT 1934.

7. Whitman would use several of the reviews again in the "Leaves-Droppings" section of the 1856 edition of *Leaves* and in the 1860 pamphlet *Leaves of Grass Imprints*.

8. JACKSON 2005.

of the preface from prose to poetry in later editions of *Leaves*, but generic shifts happened on the way to the first edition, too.<sup>9</sup> Although we selected a single edition as our focus for this project, the evolution of *Leaves of Grass* did not proceed in neat or orderly stages. Whitman revised relentlessly, retaining his manuscripts and notebooks and using sections from them in later editions. He also used text from the first edition again in revised forms in later editions. These compositional habits make conclusively dating the manuscripts a challenge, and they emphasize the overlap among editions.

Tracing the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* beyond the point of production, our edition also includes a series of links to a list of known surviving copies. Based on data collected as part of Folsom's 2005 census and updated with information from recent sales and examinations of copies, this list includes approximately 200 entries with information about repository, provenance, and bibliographical characteristics. These descriptions offer a sense of who purchased many of the volumes and how they were passed along from the nineteenth century to today. The story of the variation of the 1855 *Leaves* did not end when the books were printed: it continues today, in their ongoing existence in repositories, in the libraries of private collectors, and in the narratives of booksellers and auctioneers.

## A Kosmos

One feature that remained consistent across not only all the copies of this edition, but all the editions of *Leaves* to come, was the dramatic announcement of the name of its author, squarely in the middle of its best-known poem.<sup>10</sup> In an unsigned 1855 review of the book, Boston critic Charles Eliot Norton described this moment with a barb:

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9. For one of many examples of Whitman shifting between genres in his revisions, see the passage beginning at lines 982 and 983 in the variorum, part of the poem eventually titled "Song of Myself": "They descend in new forms from the tips of his fingers, / They are wafted with the odor of his body or breath . . . they fly out of the glance of his eyes" (2020; 1855, 44). We have linked these lines and several others to the prose manuscript "The genuine miracles of Christ".
  10. The wording of the line in what would become section 24 of "Song of Myself" changes in the various editions, but, with the exception of the 1867 edition, the word "kosmos" is retained. The line reads: "Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos" (1855, 29; 1856, 41; 1860–1861, 54); "Walt Whitman am I, of mighty Manhattan the son" (1867, 49); "Walt Whitman am I, a Kosmos, of mighty Manhattan the son" (1871, 54); and "Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son" (1881–1882, 48).

As seems very proper in a book of transcendental poetry, the author withholds his name from the title page, and presents his portrait, neatly engraved on steel, instead [ . . . ] [T]his significant reticence does not prevail throughout the volume, for we learn on p. 29, that our poet is “Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos.” That he was an American, we knew before, for, aside from America, there is no quarter of the universe where such a production could have had a genesis. That he was one of the roughs was also tolerably plain; but that he was a kosmos, is a piece of news we were hardly prepared for. Precisely what a kosmos is, we trust Mr. Whitman will take an early occasion to inform the impatient public.

(1855, 323)

Whitman printed this review among the others in the insertions that were bound into some copies. He clearly had a fondness for the term “kosmos”, using it five times in the 1855 preface and twice in the poetry. Probably he took it from Alexander von Humboldt’s study *Kosmos*, which had appeared in English translation the previous decade.<sup>11</sup> In the 1855 poems “kosmos” appears in the climactic identification of the author and again in the poem later titled “To Think of Time”. In the poems the term seems to equate to the poet or poets themselves, as in the case of Walt Whitman being “a kosmos”, or, in “To Think of Time”, where Whitman writes: “The great masters and kosmos are well as they go . . . the heroes and good-doers are well”.<sup>12</sup> In the preface, however, “kosmos” also describes a world separate from the poet: “The poets of the kosmos advance through all interpositions and coverings and turmoils and stratagems to first principles”.<sup>13</sup>

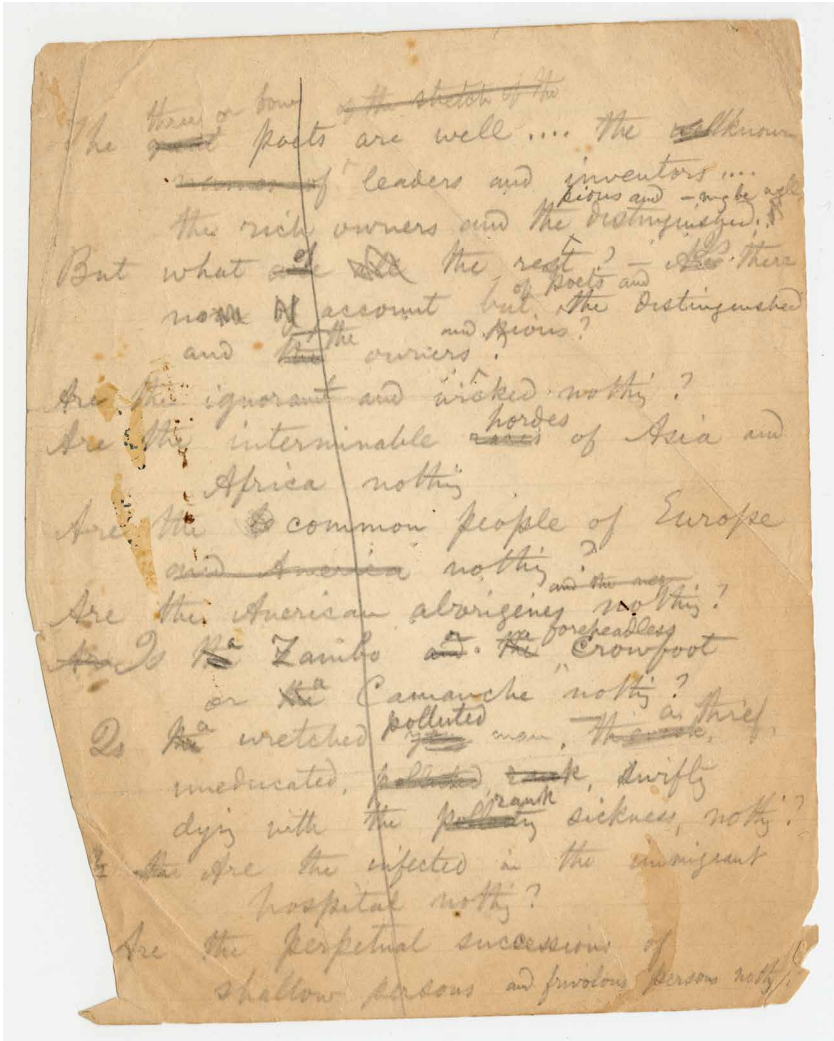
11. See REYNOLDS 1995, 244–46; and MATTESON 1998. Unfortunately we have not located Whitman’s copies of any of the volumes, although unsubstantiated rumor has it that he wrote *Leaves of Grass* with a copy sitting on his desk. See also WALLS 2011 and EDWARDS 2015.

12. WHITMAN 1855, 68. The poem eventually titled “To Think of Time” (1872; 1881–1882) had previously been titled “Burial Poem” (1856) and “Burial” (1860–1861; 1867). These uses of “kosmos” are consistent with a definition that Whitman wrote in a makeshift notebook about language probably compiled shortly after 1856: “Kosmos, noun masculine or feminine, a person who[se] scope of mind, or whose range in a particular science, includes all, the whole known universe” (WHITE 1978, 669). The 1860–1861 edition of *Leaves* introduced a poem titled “Kosmos”. See also MILLER 2010, where Whitman’s notion of kosmos is related to his exploration of the concept of dilation.

13. WHITMAN 1855, ix.

A manuscript version of the line in "To Think of Time" shows Whitman working through the idea of the kosmos:

The ~~great~~ three or four poets <sup>of the stretch of the</sup> are well . . . .



What appear in print as “The great masters and kosmos” here take shape as “The great poets”, then “The three or four poets”, and finally Whitman adds and then deletes the truncated phrase “of the stretch of the”. The printed version is a broader, more encompassing vision — “masters and kosmos” rather than “three or four poets” — and the manuscript revision shows Whitman edging toward his notion of “kosmos”: poets “of the stretch of the”. We are left to wonder what might have been the conclusion of this fragment — the universe? the history of literature? — but evident is the purposeful shift between the poet “of” something broader and the poet “as” kosmos. The poets, the leaders, the inventors, the rich owners, and the pious and distinguished may be well, “But what ~~are~~ of ~~all~~ the rest?” The printed version of the poem provides an answer: “there is strict account of all”, from the “ignorant and wicked” to the “American aborigines” to the “infected in the immigrant hospital”. The manuscript shows Whitman struggling with the terms to use for his accounting, and his inclusive vision is cast in the language of racial bias common to his era: the “interminable ~~raees~~ <sup>hordes</sup>” that he uses in the manuscript in conjunction with “Asia and Africa” appear as the “interminable hordes of the ignorant and wicked” and the “barbarians of Africa and Asia” in the printed text.<sup>14</sup>

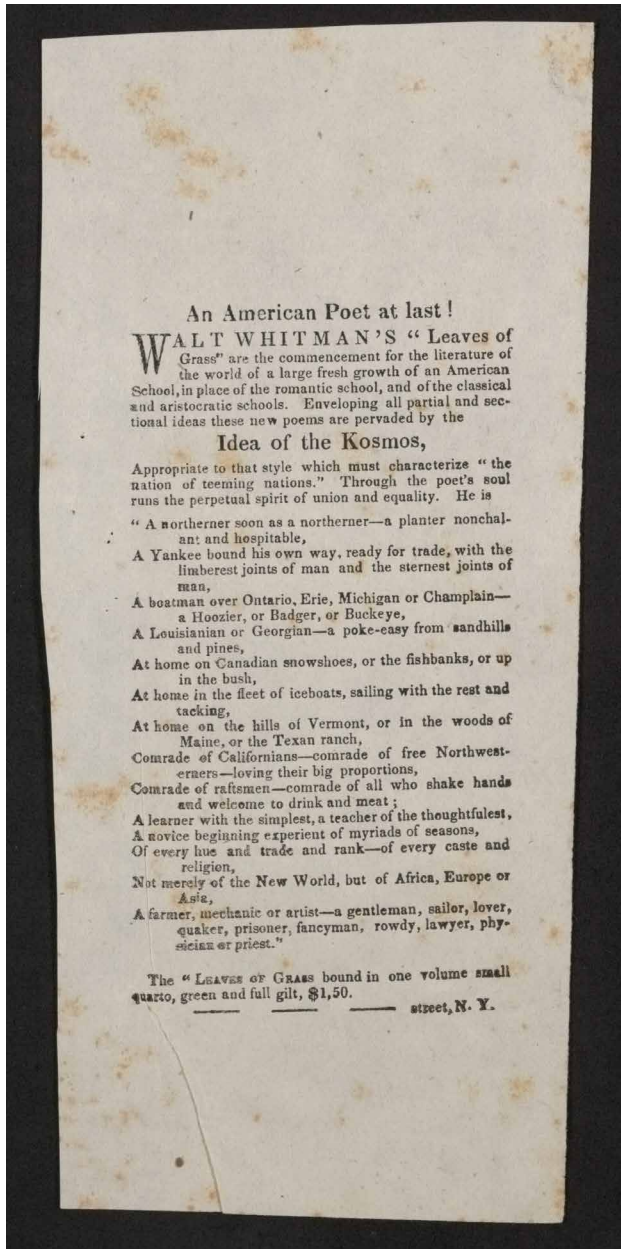
Like a Borgesian library, this accounting of all includes the poet-kosmos, but reaches beyond the poet to the broader cosmos, even as it is contained within the lines written by, and the book produced by, the poet. In a printed slip with text apparently intended as an early, and as far as we know unpublished, advertisement for the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman included the following fragment, culminating in a subhead: “Enveloping all partial and sectional ideas these new poems are pervaded by the Idea of the Kosmos”.<sup>15</sup> The ad goes on to describe the poet in a series of lines that appeared in the 1855 *Leaves*. Eric Conrad speculates that Whitman probably printed the document before the 1855 edition was in press, or early in the process, because the lines of poetry seem to be early versions that differ from the lines as they appeared in the printed copies.<sup>16</sup>

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14. WHITMAN 1855, 68.

15. For more about the rhetorical approach taken in these draft advertisements, see BLALOCK 2020.

16. CONRAD 2013, 35.



An American Poet at last!

WAL T WHITMAN'S "Leaves of Grass" are the commencement for the literature of the world of a large fresh growth of an American School, in place of the romantic school, and of the classical and aristocratic schools. Enveloping all partial and sectional ideas these new poems are pervaded by the

Idea of the Kosmos,

Appropriate to that style which must characterize "the nation of teeming nations." Through the poet's soul runs the perpetual spirit of union and equality. He is

"A northerner soon as a northerner—a planter nonchalant and hospitable,

A Yankee bound his own way, ready for trade, with the limberest joints of man and the sternest joints of man,

A boatman over Ontario, Erie, Michigan or Champlain—a Hoozier, or Badger, or Buckeye,

A Louisianian or Georgian—a poke-easy from sandhills and pines,

At home on Canadian snowshoes, or the fishbanks, or up in the bush,

At home in the fleet of iceboats, sailing with the rest and tacking,

At home on the hills of Vermont, or in the woods of Maine, or the Texan ranch,

Comrade of Californians—comrade of free Northwest-erners—loving their big proportions,

Comrade of raftsmen—comrade of all who shake hands and welcome to drink and meat;

A learner with the simplest, a teacher of the thoughtfulest, A novice beginning experient of myriads of seasons,

Of every hue and trade and rank—of every caste and religion,

Not merely of the New World, but of Africa, Europe or Asia,

A farmer, mechanic or artist—a gentleman, sailor, lover, quaker, prisoner, fancyman, rowdy, lawyer, physician or priest."

The "LEAVES OF GRASS" bound in one volume small quarto, green and full gilt, \$1.50.

\_\_\_\_\_ street, N. Y.

Figure 2. Printed slip with draft ad copy for the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*. Charles E. Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Some of these differences, for example a switch between “my own” and “his own” in the line about the Yankee, were likely changes made for the sake of the advertisement, which describes the poet rather than speaking as the poet. But other differences suggest the ad lines were based on *or even constituted* draft lines. The “Yankee” line, for example, makes a broader comparison in the 1855 version, even as a later line is more specific.<sup>17</sup> The “nation of teeming nations” in the ad appears on the first page of the preface as “a teeming nation of nations”.<sup>18</sup> The draft ad, like the reviews, thus also functions as an example of the broader constellation of documents that manifest the 1855 *Leaves*, a constellation that includes draft lines in both manuscript and print, print in both proof slips and copies, manuscript notations and revisions written after the books were printed. This draft ad and the other proof slips Whitman had printed throughout his career constitute a realm of print ancillary to the world of nineteenth-century publication, catachrestic uses of print — here functionally *as* manuscript, type-writing *avant la lettre* — that facilitated unusual textual and generic relationships and temporalities.<sup>19</sup>

### “Slowmoving and black lines”

“To Think of Time” situates the poet’s accounting within a larger reflection on death and the renewal of life. Whitman begins the 1855 version of the poem with a meditation: “To think of time”, he writes: “. . . to think through the retrospection, / To think of today . . . and the ages continued henceforward”.<sup>20</sup> The infinitive form here hovers between an imperative

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17. In the draft ad, the lines read: “A Yankee bound his own way, ready for trade, with the limberest joints of man and the sternest joints of man”, and “At home on Canadian snowshoes, or the fishbanks, or up in the bush”. In the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* they read: “A Yankee bound my own way . . . ready for trade . . . my joints the limberest joints on earth and the sternest joints on earth”, and “At home on Canadian snowshoes or up in the bush, or with fishermen off Newfoundland” (1855, 23). For more about the differences between the ad lines and the published lines, see BLALOCK 2020 and CONRAD 2013.

18. WHITMAN 1855, [iii]. Conrad concludes that “Whitman’s promotional vision for *Leaves of Grass* was not an afterthought to the publication of his book [. . .] it developed alongside the poetry itself” (35).

19. For further discussions of this phenomenon see STALLYBRASS 2019 and GROSSMAN 2019.

20. WHITMAN 1855, [65].

(“think of time”) and an invitation (“consider what happens when we think about time”). To convey the sensibility toward time described in the poem, of the overlapping histories of individuals, earth, sea, “markets, the government, the workingman’s wages”, the poet must alter readers’ time sensibilities, jarring us out of our quotidian frame and understanding all of these histories to be related, notwithstanding the barriers death seems to set so clearly, so finally. Later in the poem, Whitman includes the lines:

The difference between sin and goodness is no apparition;  
The earth is not an echo . . . man and his life and all the things of his  
life are well-considered.

(1855, 67)

These lines appear in the context of the poet marveling at the meaning of worldly things, discussing the thought that in time and after death such things will matter to other people, perhaps, but not to the reader or the poet. “To think how eager we are in building our houses”, he muses; “To think others shall be just as eager . . . and we quite indifferent” (66). But the qualifier “to think” is salutary, because after tracing the thoughts and indifferences that might follow death the poet swings back around to insist on the realities of this world, suggesting that it is their very reality that proves immortality. “The domestic joys, the daily housework or business, the building of houses — they are not phantasms”, the poet declares, “they have weight and form and location” (67). The ecstatic concluding lines of the poem, in which the poet exclaims, “I swear I see now that every thing has an eternal soul!” and “I swear I think there is nothing but immortality!”, combine all the realities inventoried in the poem into a vast preparation, a satisfaction tied to the realization of life in and through accounting for these acts and interests (69–70).

The variorum tracks a series of early manuscript and notebook versions that show Whitman working through these thoughts, the poem emerging reflexively from the very process it seems to describe. A line similar to “The earth is not an echo . . . .” appears as an addition to a manuscript written on the back of the same University of Texas leaf on which Whitman did his printing calculations. The added line — “And I say the stars are not echoes” — appears alongside other lines that ended up in “Song of Myself”, as well as lines that were not used in the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*.<sup>21</sup>

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21. The fourth and sixth lines do not appear to relate to any text used in the 1855 *Leaves*. The third, fifth, eighth, and tenth lines relate to lines in “Song

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<sup>tr</sup>  
 \* And to me each minute of the night and day is ~~check with something~~ <sup>vital and visible</sup>  
~~in here page 34 - And I see, the stars are~~ <sup>with ~~in~~ a state of</sup>  
 And I perceive that the salt marsh has delicious odors;  
 And potatoes and milk afford a ~~fine breakfast~~ <sup>refreshing</sup> ~~of state~~  
 And I ~~do not say~~ <sup>guess the</sup> ~~the way more is less than~~ <sup>chipped bird</sup> ~~never learned the game;~~ <sup>is as well as I</sup>  
~~because she reads no newspaper;~~  
 And to shake my friendly right hand governors  
 and millionaires shall stand all day,  
 waiting their turns.

<sup>to me</sup>  
 And ~~on~~ each acre of the <sup>land</sup> earth and sea, I behold  
~~perfect~~ <sup>marvellous</sup> pictures;  
 They fill the worm-fence, and lie on the heaped stones,  
 and are hooked to the elder and poke-weed;  
<sup>to me</sup> And the cow crunching with depressed head ~~surpasses~~ <sup>every</sup>  
~~every statue~~ <sup>perfect and plumb</sup>

Figure 3. Manuscript draft. Walt Whitman Collection, Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

This line, an addition with the note “trs in here page 34”, likely was copied over from another manuscript or notebook draft. One possibility is a manuscript now at the Library of Congress, in which the “echo” involves both earth and stars. In that manuscript, a declaration about reality leads into the draft segment:

of Myself”. The first, seventh, and ninth lines are similar to language used in both the preface and a line in the poem eventually titled “A Song for Occupations”, as well as a long manuscript poem titled “Pictures”, which scholars have loosely dated to the 1850s. Several of the lines in this manuscript appear in other manuscripts and notebooks. For further discussion of this manuscript and its relationships to other drafts, see FOLSOM and PRICE 2005, 31–4, and MILLER 2010, 52–9.

I am the Poet of Reality;

And I say this <sup>the</sup> earth <sup>globe</sup> <sup>world</sup> is not an <sup>earth and</sup> the stars are not echos,  
 And [~~Not~~] <sup>I say that</sup> ~~And I say that~~ man <sup>is not</sup> <sup>space is not</sup> an apparition;  
 But ~~that~~ all the things seen or demonstrated are so;  
 Witnesses and albic dawns of things equally great,  
 not yet seen.—<sup>22</sup>

Here the unseen is not exactly a structural parallel to the seen, as an apparition or a phantasm might be. Nor is it a short-lived repetition, a phenomenon primarily of space and prolonged disappearance, like an echo. It is a phenomenon not of the future, exactly, but of future *perception*: “things seen or demonstrated” are “witnesses and albic dawns of things equally great, not yet seen”.

Probably the earliest draft of the lines appears in “Talbot Wilson”, an early notebook:

I am the poet of reality  
 I say ~~The~~ <sup>I know the</sup> earth is not <sup>an</sup> echo;  
~~Man is not~~ <sup>Nor man</sup> an apparition;  
~~What we see is real,~~ <sup>But that all I see</sup> <sup>[the things seen?]</sup> [all?] is real  
 And <sup>it</sup> is ~~the~~ witness and  
 albic dawn of <sup>things equally real</sup> ~~wh[illegible]th~~  
~~we~~ <sup>filligible]</sup> ~~do [illegible]~~ not <sup>yet</sup> seen,  
 But ~~which~~ <sup>I know to be</sup> equally  
 real, I know.

Moving from echoes and apparitions to witnesses in the manuscripts and notebook associated with these lines from “To Think of Time”, Whitman works out a way of expressing the real, the *now*, and what it means for the imagination of the future. The result is the poet’s recognition of the eternal soul in everything, his ecstatic vision of immortality — or, as Matt Miller has put it, “the true kosmos poet must not only dilate to include the world but also enter into his audience so that they too shall dilate and ‘realise’ him, assuming what he claims to assume, which is nothing less than the totality of being”.<sup>23</sup>

The lead-in line in the manuscript versions, with its resounding present-tense assertion — “I am the poet of reality” — did not end up in the

22. WHITMAN, “And I say the stars”.

23. MILLER 2010, 150.

1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, although it is similar to a line in the poem eventually titled “Song of Myself”: “I am the poet of commonsense and of the demonstrable and of immortality”.<sup>24</sup> Neither do these witnesses and albic dawns appear in the printed text in 1855, although we have postulated relations to two different locations in “Song of Myself”: the early lines “Lack one lacks both . . . and the unseen is proved by the seen, / Till that becomes unseen and receives proof in its turn”, and the line “Witnesses of us . . . one side a balance and the antipodal side a balance”.<sup>25</sup> In “To Think of Time”, however, Whitman turns the focus back to the reader:

The difference between sin and goodness is no apparition;  
The earth is not an echo . . . man and his life and all the things of his life are well-considered.

You are not thrown to the winds . . . you gather certainly and safely around yourself,  
Yourself! Yourself! Yourself forever and ever!

(1855, 67)

There are as many ways to read these lines and the drafts that informed them as there are methods of literary and philosophical interpretation, from formalism to historicism, from transcendentalism to Vedantic mysticism.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps there is an editorial way of reading them as well. For these lines, like the earth and the man which take the place of stars and space in the printed text, are not echoes, although they iterate across versions, through notebooks, and across manuscript leaves. “You are not thrown to the winds”, Whitman writes: consideration goes into “man and his life and all the things of his life”.

To see the stars and space, the witnesses and albic dawns, that disappeared from this passage when it was printed in the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* is to think of time. And the goal of the variorum edition — of any variorum edition — is, in effect, to challenge the user to think of time. It is to prompt the reader to think of time when reading any line in a digital surrogate of a printed copy of the 1855 *Leaves*. It is to think of time as something that underwrites every line in Whitman’s poetry and prose, in manuscript and in print: time in the form of ongoing revision, both of the language and of the material characteristics it assumed in the copies that

24. WHITMAN 1855, 27.

25. WHITMAN 1855, 14; 28.

26. For a discussion of a draft of this passage in relation to Whitman’s “instinctive materialism and materialistic spiritualism”, see ASSELINEAU 1999, 23–6. For a discussion of it in relation to the Vedanta, see ALLEN 1970, 147–48.

make up each edition. It is to think of the copies that make up the 1855 *Leaves* as witnesses and albic dawns of future editions, not yet seen. But it is also to think of time as retrospection, as a provocation to interrogate what Jerome McGann has called the “textual condition”. As editors we are not outside the temporality of the text; we are a part, however small in the grand scheme of things, of its eternal soul. Even as we create an edition that prompts readers to think of time, we recognize a future in which new discoveries will continue to transform the text we are creating.

The two sides of the manuscript leaf at the University of Texas would seem to represent very different forms of accounting. The first was a practical calculation, designed to facilitate the production of a particular, tangible result: a set of books. The second is a kind of poetic accounting, a revisionary stepping stone to lines pervaded by the poet’s emerging idea of the kosmos. The variorum attempts to bring both of these forms of accounting together in ways that show them to be more than just two sides of the same leaf. If you look at a copy of the 1855 *Leaves* in a certain way, you can see the preparation and some evidence of the intentions of the author who wrote the lines that appeared in it; you can see the writers and speakers and mystics before him whose words he had read and filtered through himself; you can see the suspicion and the satisfaction of readers and critics and poets to come. You can also see the compositors who set the type alongside the author, the marks of the old press in Andrew Rome’s small shop, the other jobs that may have shaped and interrupted it — and the commercial and legal valences of those jobs, the power of paper and ink. You can see the phrenologists and health reformers who sold the books, the reviewers whose words would end up in some copies, the owners who would keep a copy, pass it on, or throw it into the fire. And perhaps you can see yourself, finally, sitting in front of the text of *Leaves of Grass*, an accounting of the characteristics wrought by the old machinery of reproduction calling to your notice the affordances of the new machinery of reproduction: files, web servers, screens and pixels.

§

In an 1888 conversation with his friend and disciple Horace Traubel, Whitman claimed that the complete “printer’s copy” manuscript of the 1855 edition was lost. “You have asked me questions about the manuscript of the first edition”, he said. “It was burned. Rome kept it several years, but one day, by accident, it got away from us entirely — was used to kindle the fire or to feed the rag man”.<sup>27</sup> Other evidence seems to confirm this recollec-

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27. TRAUBEL 1906, 1: 92.

tion.<sup>28</sup> And yet the account to Traubel is more than retrospection. Whitman here begins to build a myth of the 1855 *Leaves* that has continued to influence scholarship, the absence of the storied printer's copy fueling the idea of this first book of poems as breakthrough, *sui generis*, pure authorial expression without messy origins, everyday delays, or literary parallels. With the description of the destroyed printer's copy he distances the surviving manuscript and notebook fragments from the printed volumes, separating off the book from the world. Breaking down this myth requires looking closely at everything related to the 1855 *Leaves*: manuscript and notebook antecedents, printed slips and insertions, binders' records, surviving copies, variations and drifts.

The lure of a romantic reading of Whitman's making of the 1855 *Leaves*, with the poet, in a state of cosmic epiphany, composing his big book literally and metaphorically at the same time, is powerful. The slippage between a poet who *is* a kosmos and a poet who *is of* the kosmos is at the heart of the way Whitman prompted readers to imagine the books. When you witness these objects, when you take them in textually and visually, the feeling is uncanny. They are a set of books made in the middle of the nineteenth century, that seem to have been written much later, that look like they were printed in Shakespeare's London. That aesthesis is part of the books' charm.

During another of Traubel's 1888 visits to Whitman, he picked up an old piece of manuscript from the floor of the poet's cluttered room. "Had it ever been used?" he asked Whitman. "Maybe — maybe not", Whitman responded. "Have you much unused manuscript about here?" Traubel (ever intent on collecting it) queried. "Not a great deal", Whitman answered, "though I have made a good bit of manuscript that never got directly into print. Think how many things go to produce the weather — east, west, north, south: things unaccounted for, at least to the eye. Out of such a process of selection *Leaves of Grass* assumed the shape you know".<sup>29</sup> It would be impossible to show comprehensively the process of selection and aggregation out of which the first edition of *Leaves* assumed the shape scholars and readers of the poet now know. But we can begin to do some stricter

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28. Whitman's memory is consistent with a note added by Thomas Rome to the bottom of a printed, undated list of Whitman manuscripts for sale "in possession of T. H. Rome, 513 Lafayette Avenue, Brooklyn, N.Y.". The note reads: "The manuscript of the first edition (1855) was accidentally destroyed in 1858" (BOWERS 1955, xx).

29. TRAUBEL 1915, 2: 246.

accounting of all, providing readers with another glimpse into the foreground of *Leaves of Grass* and perhaps some hints about the processes of selection and revision that went into the formation of this extraordinary book of poems. An ongoing challenge for the *Walt Whitman Archive* is to create editorial structures that remain supple and changeable, that capture different moments in the evolution of Whitman's writing and production. It is our hope that the connections and multiple temporalities, the resonances between manuscript and print created by our linking and juxtaposition of similar lines, will enable scholars to create new associations and new interpretations about the meaning and ongoing influence of Whitman's poems.

Near the end of Whitman's life, Traubel and the good gray poet sat discussing Humboldt and a contemporary author and bibliographer, Samuel Austin Allibone. Of Allibone, Whitman said:

Allibone was a sort of chief-cook-and-bottle-washer in literature — a hunter after dates, — made up of curioish tendencies — a searcher after hidden lines, useless origins, ridiculous gossipries — a sweeper of the literary floorboards — how many editions — and how bound — and where was the cloth bought — and who printed: a literary branch leading mostly into lies — not artificiality merely, but downright lies.

(TRAUBEL 1982, 6: 309)

Accounting for this edition included tasks suspiciously like sweeping the literary floorboards and scanning the records in search of how the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* was bound, and where the cloth was bought, and who printed the books, in pursuit of Whitman's kosmos. Yet with details like these and the revelation of "hidden lines, useless origins, ridiculous gossipries", a view of the book begins to emerge that is temporally rich in ways that resonate with the poetry itself. Each copy appears as a striking combination of intentionality and drift, a powerful dialectic of being in the world and a world unto itself that shapes any book or act of imaginative expression — or the experience of any reader or editor, from the nineteenth century to our digital present.

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