

Creating a Digital Scholarly Edition of Walt Whitman's Short Fiction: A Case Study in TEI/XML

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Introduction

Walt Whitman is primarily known as the author of *Leaves of Grass*. However, from 1841 to 1848, when he was in his twenties, he published approximately 24 short stories and 1 temperance novel in New York periodicals—newspapers and magazines.

Literary critics and biographers have long believed Whitman's fiction was "pretty terrible" and, therefore, unpopular. But the stories were widely circulated and often reprinted in 19th-century periodicals.

Using periodical databases, I have discovered 324 reprints of Whitman's short fiction since 2010.

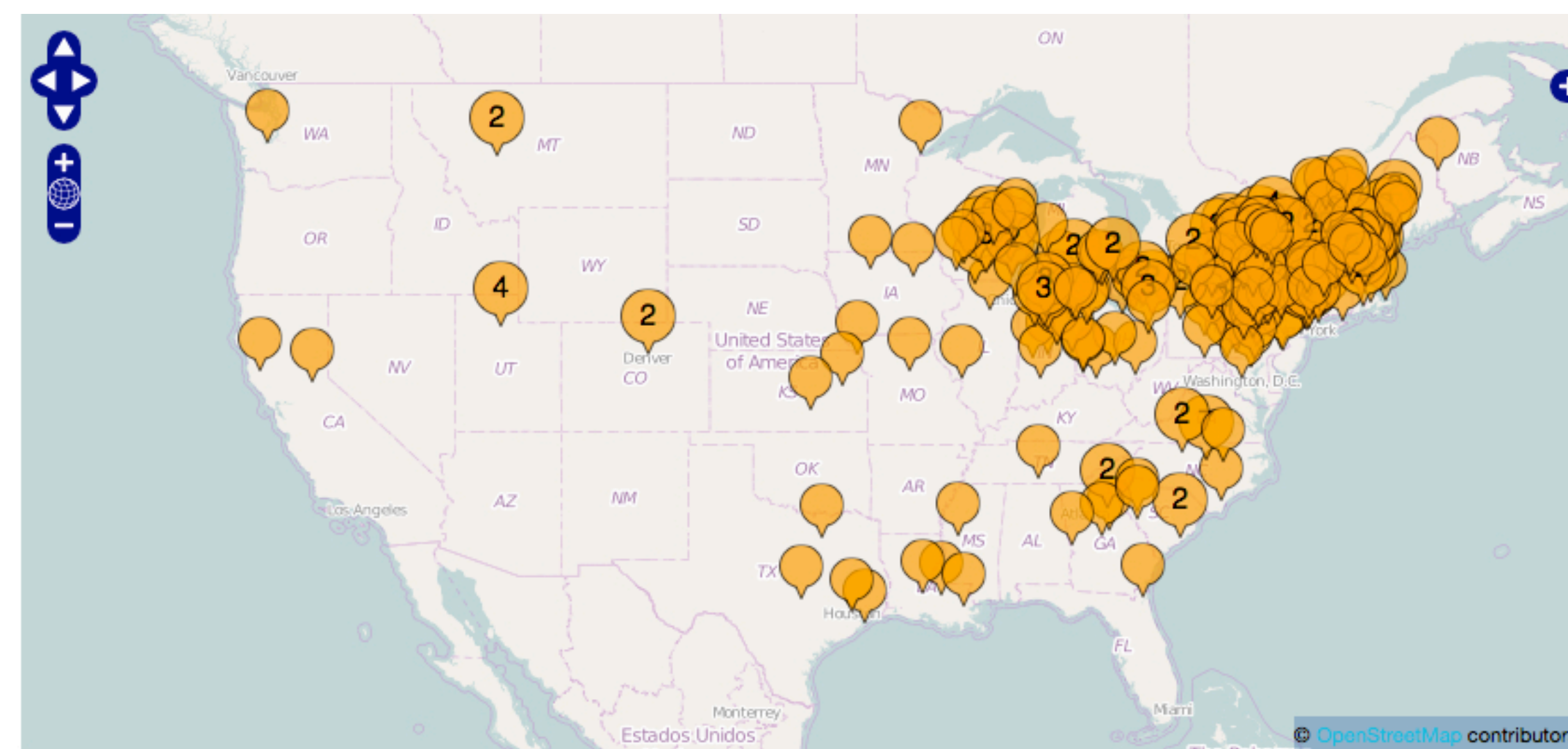


Figure 1: This map shows the locations of all known printings and reprints of Walt Whitman's fiction in the United States. This map was created with Viewshare.

My work on Whitman's fiction became part of the basis for the forthcoming NEH-Funded *Whitman's Pre-Leaves of Grass Fiction* project (co-edited with Nicole Gray of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln) for *The Walt Whitman Archive* (<http://www.whitmanarchive.org/>).

The Challenges of Encoding Periodical Fiction: Walt Whitman's "The Tomb-Blossoms"

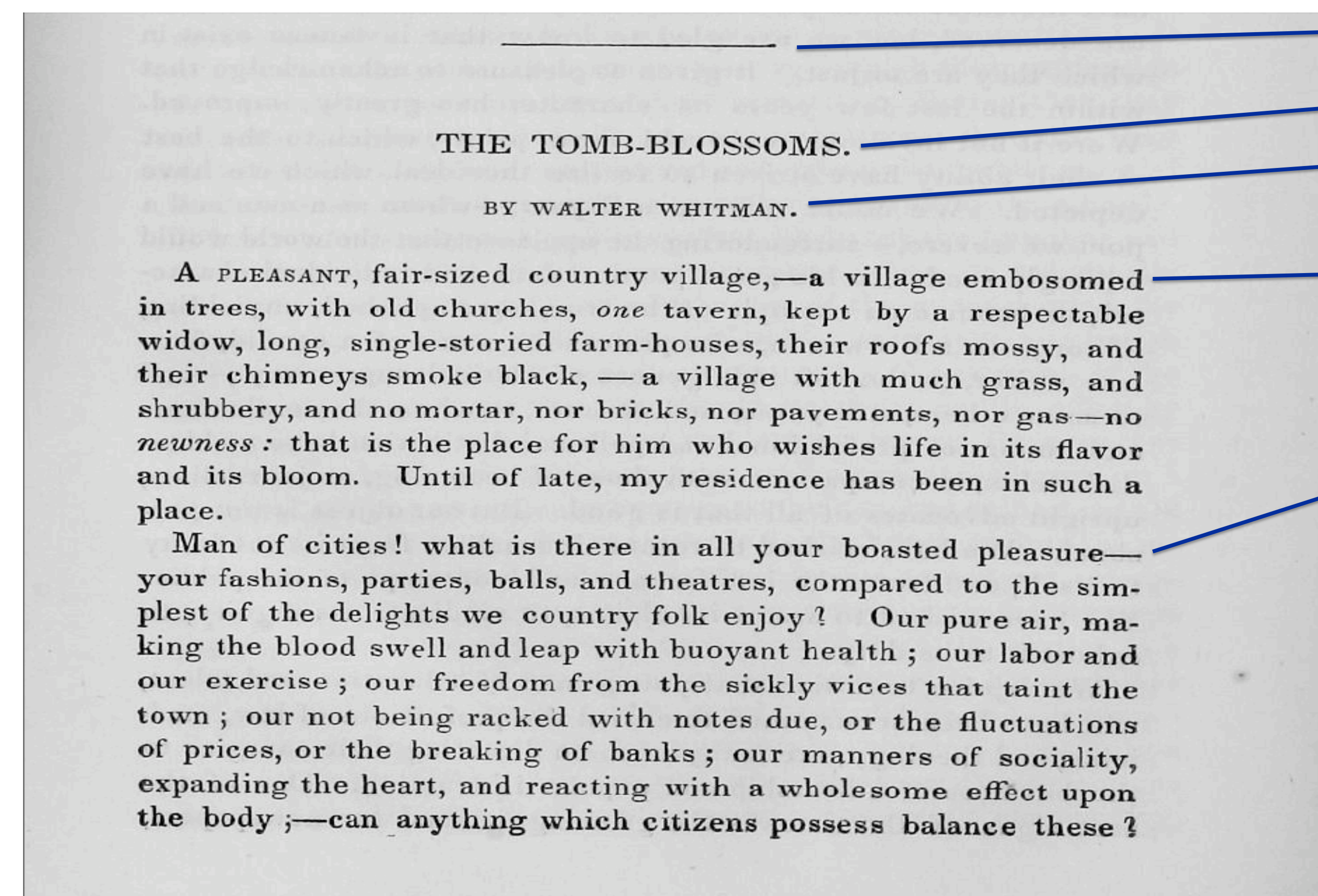


Figure 2: "The Tomb-Blossoms" from the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, January 1842

Historical print periodicals may be illegible and/or unavailable, and digital scans can also be illegible and/or of low quality.

Choosing the source text for encoding projects is a difficult editorial decision. In this case, I chose the original periodical printing over later, revised versions of the short fiction.

TEI guidelines do not have a specific set of instructions for encoding short stories originally published in 19th-century periodicals. But there are guidelines for prose texts and for structural elements that appear in periodicals.

```
83 <!-->
84 <!-->
85 <head rend="center" type="main-authorial">THE TOMB-BLOSSOMS.</head>
86
87 <byline>BY WALTER WHITMAN.</byline>
88
89 <div1 type="story" xml:id="tombblossoms">
90
91 <p><hi rend="smallcaps">PLEASANT</hi>, fair-sized country village&#8212;a village embosomed in trees,
92 with old churches, <hi rend="italics">one</hi> tavern, kept by a respectable widow&#8212;long, single-storied
93 farm-houses, their roofs mossy, and their chimneys smoke black&#8212;a village with much grass and shrubbery,
94 and no mortar, nor bricks, nor pavements, nor gas&#8212;no <hi rend="italics">newness :</hi> that is the place
95 for him who wishes life in its flavor and its bloom. Until of late, my residence has been in such a place.</p>
96 <p>Man of cities! what is there in all your boasted pleasure&#8212;your fashions, parties, balls, and theatres,
97 compared to the simplest of the delights we country folk enjoy? Our pure air, making the blood swell and leap
98 with buoyant health; our labor and our exercise; our freedom from the sickly vices that taint the town;
99 our not being racked with notes due, or the fluctuations of prices, or the breaking of banks; our manners
100 of sociality, expanding the heart, and reacting with a wholesome effect upon the body;&#8212;can anything,
101 which citizens possess, balance these?</p>
102
103 <pb xml:id="leaf002r" facs="per_sb.00068_large.jpg" type="recto">
104
105 <p>One Saturday, after paying a few days visit at New York, I returned to my quarters at the country inn.
106 The day was hot, and my journey a disagreeable one. I had been forced to stir myself beyond comfort,
107 and <choice><orig>despatch</orig><reg>dispatch</reg></choice> my affairs quickly, for fear of being left
108 by the cars. As it was, I arrived panting and covered with sweat, just as they were about to start.
109
110 </div1>
```

Figure 4: Text Encoding (TEI/XML) for "The Tomb-Blossoms" in Oxygen XML Editor

Periodical Features/Challenges

- Titles
- Milestones
- Epigraphs
- Older Spellings
- Trailers ("To be continued")
- Small Caps
- Illegible Texts (damage)
- Column Headings

TEI/XML Solutions for the Pre-Leaves of Grass Fiction

```
<head rend="center" type="main-authorial"></head>
<milestone unit="undeclared" rend="horbar-short-center"/>
<lg></lg>
<choice><orig></orig><reg></reg></choice>
<trailer></trailer>
<hi rend="smallcaps"></hi>
<supplied reason="damage" source="xml:id"></supplied>
<head rend="center" type="sub"></head>
```

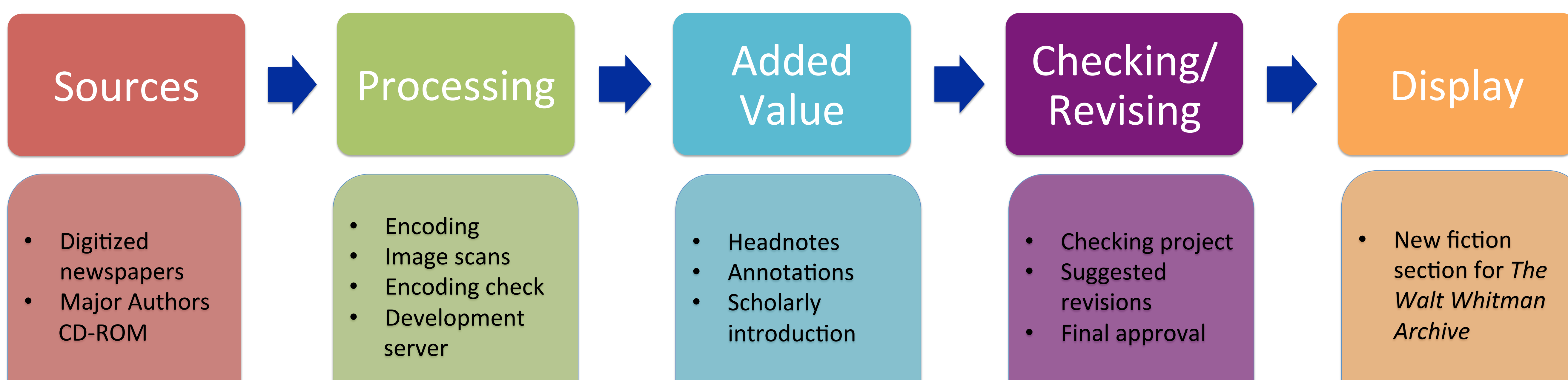
The What and Why of TEI/XML

Text encoding refers to the process of marking up a text with code in order to create a machine-readable version for display on the web.

Text encoding uses Extensible Markup Language (XML). XML is a markup language like HTML, but XML is largely concerned with the structure of a text. TEI, or the Text Encoding Initiative, is an extension of XML that provides guidelines—a standard—for marking up texts.

Encoding Whitman's stories with TEI/XML and creating a digital scholarly edition makes them accessible, searchable, and allows for the added value of annotations and a scholarly introduction.

Project Workflow



Future Research: Encoding More Than 300 Reprints of the Short Fiction



Figure 3: "The Tomb-Blossoms" reprinted as "Her Offerings" in the *Rochester Daily Republican* (Indiana), October 25, 1892

This project can serve as the foundation for *The Walt Whitman Archive's* future work with the fiction and the reprints because the reprints share many of the same features as the original printings. However, they also introduce new challenges, including editorial changes. For example, "The Tomb-Blossoms" was reprinted under variant titles, including "The Tomb-Flowers" in 1881 and "Her Offerings" in 1892.

I hope to create data visualizations based on the metadata I have recorded for each reprint in order to document trends in national and international circulation.

I would like to start my own digital humanities project in addition to writing a book on Whitman's fiction.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the assistance and/or support of the following:

The National Endowment for the Humanities, *The Walt Whitman Archive*, The Digital Studio for Public Arts and Humanities, the faculty and staff of the School of Library and Information Science at The University of Iowa, The University of Iowa Libraries, especially Special Collections and Interlibrary Loan. My co-editor, Nicole Gray, Kenneth Price of *The Walt Whitman Archive*, my advisor, Jim Elmborg, Nicole White of the Digital Studio, The Transatlantic Walt Whitman Association, Thomas Blake, Jennifer Bradshaw, and Patrick Curtis.

I would especially like to thank Ed Folsom of The University of Iowa English Department for introducing me to Whitman and for being my mentor, colleague, and friend since my first year of graduate school.

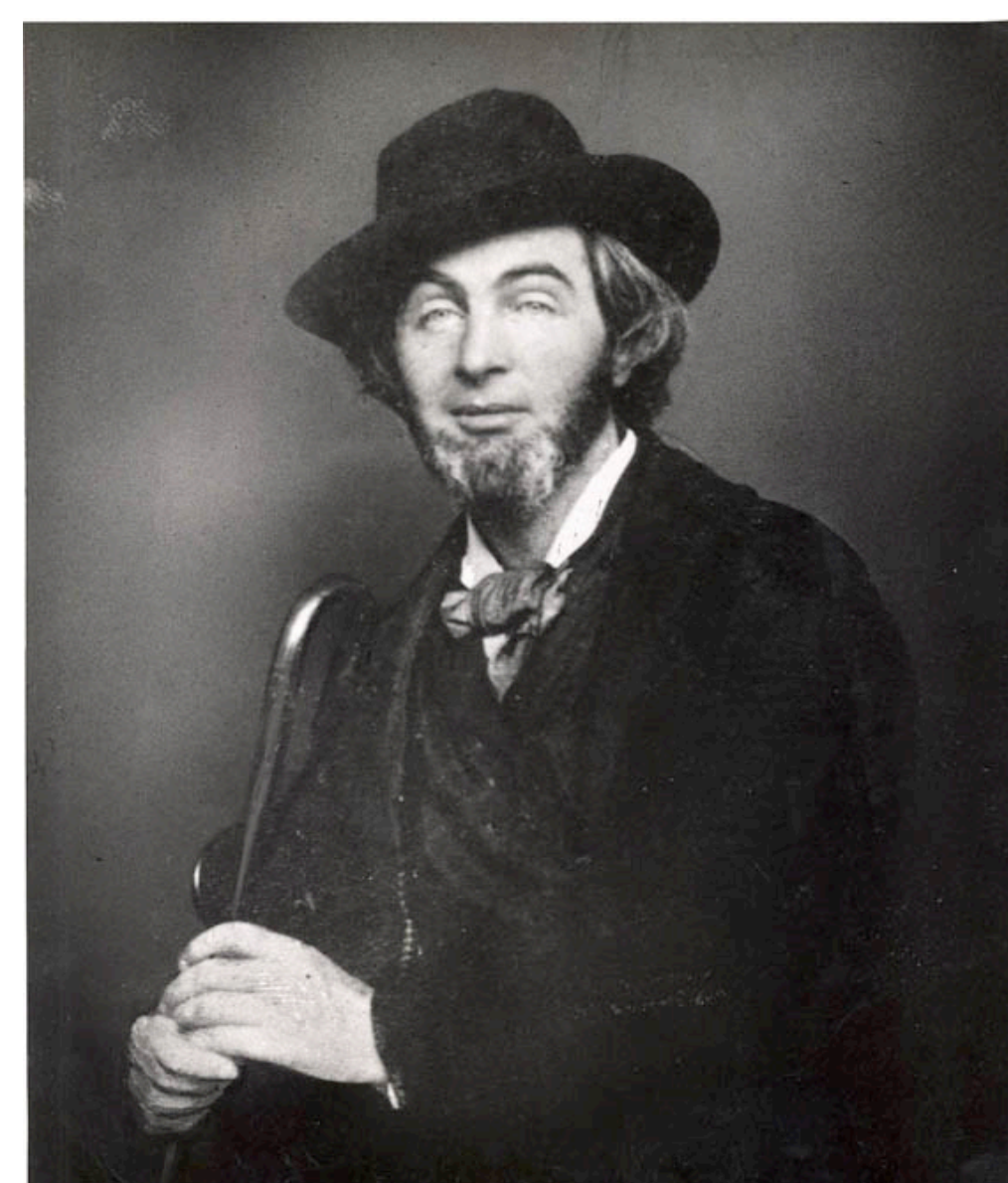


Figure 5: Walter Whitman, c. 1848-1854. Image from *The Walt Whitman Archive*