

ZACHARY TURPIN AND MATT MILLER, EDs. *Every Hour, Every Atom: A Collection of Walt Whitman's Early Notebooks and Fragments*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2020. xxxiv + 376 pp. Iowa Whitman Series.

Zachary Turpin and Matt Miller fittingly allude to a scrap of famous text for the title of their edited book of transcribed Whitman notebooks and fragments newly published in the Iowa Whitman Series. For the book's epigram, they quote more expansively from their manuscript fragment source and include a strike-through edit by Whitman: "Every hour, every atom, every where is chock with ~~beautiful~~ miracles." Turpin and Miller's book of transcriptions of Whitman pre-Civil War notebooks is just that—chock full of beautiful miracles. Every hour, every atom—every comma and dash, every entry made in a mish mash of time, written by Whitman in small notebooks he carried with him and used to record everything under stars and sun, from the titles of books he was reading, to his framing and reframing (much as he did walls and doorways and stairways as a carpenter renovating a house) of ideas for his soon to be emergent publications.

Through their transcriptions Turpin and Miller provide the reader with nuances that can be detected from penciled half-words and smudges, interlineations, and texts written up or down a page, turned sideways, changing pen strokes and handwriting—all translated into readily readable type. We find in the transcribed pages from the 1850s Whitman's musings and formulation of future poems, often disguised in prose paragraphs or in experimental long prose-like lines or drafted in spurts and later crossed over.

Taken together, the notebook pages and fragments in *Every Hour, Every Atom* are dynamic, immediate, changing, evolving, and different in nature at different times. In them Whitman borrows, observes, and struggles with his material. We see crucially in the pages the hints and genesis of his published work to come—poems like "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," "Song of the Open Road," "Miracles," "The Sleepers," "Song of the Broad-Axe," "Salut au Monde!," "I Sing the Body Electric," "A Woman Waits for Me," "Starting from Paumanok," and of course "Song of Myself." We also see elements of his private self not necessarily revealed in the finished products and ideas for creative work that were never fully rendered.

The notebooks and fragments Turpin and Miller have selected and transcribed in *Every Hour, Every Atom* come from a variety of archival repositories, including special collections at the Boston Public Library, Duke University, the Library of Congress, the New York Public Library, Rutgers University, the

University of Tulsa, the University of Virginia, and Yale University. The edited book thus gives readers the gift of being able to compare unpublished notes and fragments from the pivotal years just proximate to the first 1855 publication of *Leaves of Grass* and further into the 1850s, as if they, too, were mining the various archives, and to have these disparate texts available in composite fashion for cross-study in terms of the inter-relation of their themes and elusions.

Unlike the earlier and in many ways evergreen six-volume edition of *Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts* edited by Edward F. Grier (New York: New York University Press, 1984), this one-volume edition offers us notebooks and fragments from the various repository sources transcribed to include deleted portions and fits and starts of partial words as integral to the texts, rather than as deleted changes relegated to subtext as if dropped to the waste paper basket or the print shop floor. *Every Hour, Every Atom* thus successfully conveys the semi-chaos of the original pages in dynamically integrated textual fashion, mirroring the texts as they were constructed and saved and modified by Whitman.

It is significant in respect to this project that Whitman was such an appreciator and master of the printed word and the printing process and that he spent a lifetime tackling the challenge of converting his handwritten poems into printed publications. It can be hard to transform handwritten documents like his notebooks into printed transcriptions that are easy to read and accessible, and also painstakingly rendered and accurate—and at the same time maintain and convey a sense of their original material manifestations and generative energy. Turpin and Miller have succeeded in doing so.

We see evidenced as a result in the content presented what Miller has described elsewhere as the “hot boil” of Whitman’s creative mind just before the first July 4, 1855, publication of *Leaves of Grass* with its untitled, later to be further reworked, poems; rakish working man frontispiece (the poet Whitman refers to with mud on his boots); and democratic opus of a prose introduction. Most importantly, in the literal transcription of notebooks that Whitman often constructed from recycled paper into tiny tomes, and stitched with thread or tied with laces, and written in with a stub of a pencil easily fitted into a pocket, we are provided close witness to the hard-working craftsmanship of Whitman as a wordsmith and writer.

This one-volume edition is divided into two parts. The largest features a set of nineteen transcribed notebooks, named for first lines, beginning with the undated “Poem incarnating the mind” (pre-1855, from the Thomas Harned collection of Walt Whitman Papers at the Library of Congress) and ending with

“excerpt from *Words*” (ca. 1856-1860, from the Charles E. Feinberg collection of Walt Whitman Papers at the Library of Congress). These are followed in part two by fifty-three transcribed fragments drawn from many different archival collections. The book concludes with brief source and content notes from the editors.

The first notebook pages greeting the reader read almost like a series of sketches of scenes for a novel. The opening scene imagines a “Poem incarnating the mind of an old man, whose life has been magnificently developed,” full of “the wildest and most exuberant joy . . . Joy Joy Joy, which underlines and overtops the whole effusion” (3). What an opening! The second scene is about “Crossing the Fulton ferry to-day” and encountering a former acquaintance, a fellow reporter and writer making his living as a lobbyist in Albany and Washington. The third scene is of merchants and tradesmen and the importance of prompt pay. One turns the page of the edition, and suddenly a fourth scene bursts forth with blood and gore and violence. It is about the plight and heroism of the fleeing “black sk[inned]” person or the red brown savage lashed to the stump (4). By page eight of the notebook, Whitman has moved tranquilly on to “the water lily of the Nile” and “the honey-lotus – honey-clover” (5). In the next, we find him launching his soul out into the universe with the nebula and to future ages. By page eighteen of the notebook, he has returned to the theme of the hunted, hounded, persecuted, and executed—the woman accused as a witch burned at the stake, the great queens walking serenely to the chopping block, the fugitive enslaved person who turns to stand and eye defiantly when he can run no longer (9). We can find this material reworked later into portions of “Song of Myself,” notably the “disdain and calmness of martyrs” passage in Section 33, where Whitman adds “All these I feel or am.”

To call the content of the notebooks eclectic is an under-statement. Excitement, political insight, poignancy, empathy, and spiritual persuasion all exude from their pages, as does the amazing promise of future works. The poet who would announce he contained multitudes here claims “Tongue of a million voices” (6). Who could begin reading such pages, and put the book down? Each entry creates a new vision for the reader’s mind. The transcriptions make it all accessible.

In his famous letter to Whitman of July 21, 1855, written after first reading *Leaves of Grass*, Ralph Waldo Emerson referred to the happiness he felt reading the poems—the joy. Whitman refers to Emerson’s blessing upon him in his notebook pages (74). His “long foreground somewhere” as a journalist, editor, printer, and freelance writer come very much into play in the notebooks

and fragments, and sometimes pose challenges for rendering transcription in typographical form. Turpin and Miller show us, for example, Whitman's hand-drawn manicules—a printer's device of a hand with a pointing finger inserted to emphasize to the reader's eye certain sections of an ad or broadside. They note his asterisks, or triple underlining words for extra emphasis, and names or addresses of persons encountered or interviewed.

The fragments Turpin and Miller have selected include substantial pieces, such as *med Cophosis* (ca. 1852-1854) (also known as the "Women" notebook) (322-327), from the Feinberg collection, consisting of detached leaves from a notebook, the content of which resonates closely with fuller notebooks and published pieces. In the transcribed content of the fragments and notebooks, we see Whitman thinking aloud on the page about various things to write—a poem on libraries, on tools, on tears, on insects, on legacies, or, as in a fragment from the University of Tulsa, a perfect school "gymnastic, moral, mental and sentimental," large saloons, "manly exercises" and love and political economy—"the American idea in all its amplitude and comprehensives" (333). In a fragment from the Trent collection at Duke University Whitman speaks of Peruvians and Mexicans and Spanish navigators (332). We see him developing his cataloguing style, even in listing residences where his family has lived in a fragment from the Berg collection at the New York Public Library (336). In a Lion Collection fragment, he writes "The Poet says God and me / What do you want from us [?]" (339). A fragment on being the poet of materialism from Duke University is jotted, incredibly, on the back of a patch of wallpaper perhaps from a residence or job site at which the poet/builder was working (340-341). In the notes, Whitman sometimes gives himself a talking-to about his worth, the power of personality, or the nature of authenticity for a poem. He ponders slavery, caste, and the workings of government, and the relative equality of women and of men. He explores the mysteries of attraction and love and magnetism. He proclaims the importance of the body. He notes the sinner, the criminal, the prisoner in a cell. He turns to the sciences, and to animal, mineral, and vegetable—the very atoms and molecules and chloroform of which make up the elements of the Earth, and a leaf of grass. He ponders the collapse of time and space between individuals and generations. We see rich references to calamus and to moss growing upon the live oak in Louisiana.

In one notebook from the Charles E. Feinberg collection of Walt Whitman Papers at the Library of Congress (known as the "Dick Hunt" notebook, for the name written at the top of its opening, and transcribed by Turpin and Miller on 189-233), Whitman creates a litany of names of men he knew in New York,

sometimes noting their physical characteristics or how he knows them, or their places of employment or encounter, and the types of labor they engaged in, making of his notebook pages a catalog of persons and trades, a song of occupations, a social history roster of (primarily white-ethnic and masculine) working-class democracy. This is Whitman's city of robust love, his cities with their arms around each other's necks that he wrote about in his Calamus work and "For You O Democracy" that can be read in another Iowa Whitman Series publication, Betsy Erkkila's edited *Walt Whitman's Songs of Male Intimacy and Love* (2011).

Turpin and Miller's edition is as versatile in its potential for use as it is in subject matter and content. It makes for delightful and mesmerizing nightstand reading for the dedicated Whitmaniac or for newly intrigued persons previously uninitiated to Whitman. It serves undoubtedly as an important scholarly source and reference work to have on hand for use in combination with archival sources. It can be mined by teachers and scholars as a complement to the study of Whitman's other forms of writing—the draft poems, the correspondence, the various kinds of prose. It can be used by enthusiasts as a base to treasure hunt for echoes in published writings. It is a prime example for teachers to utilize when teaching the fine art of transcription of literary texts to their students.

And there is nothing like comparing transcriptions to images of original texts or creating your own. *Every Hour, Every Atom* includes some select page-image illustrations of original texts as tantalizing examples. As a whole the edition can be beautifully paired with digital humanities resources that depict scanned original notebook pages and fragments, be that through the *Walt Whitman Archive* portal or through dedicated digital presentations based on particular repository collections. The notebooks and fragments featured in *Every Hour, Every Atom* from the Feinberg-Whitman collection and Harned-Whitman collections, for example, are fully available online through the Library of Congress web portal. The Library of Congress *By the People* Walt Whitman crowdsourcing transcription project provides a chance for volunteers to try their hand in experiencing the intimacy that creating transcriptions brings to the study of Whitman's handwritten notebooks and other primary sources ([crowd.loc.gov/campaigns/walt-whitman/](https://crowd.loc.gov/campaigns/walt-whitman/)). As Whitman wrote in his opening lines of *Song of Myself*, "for every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you."