

about all that, and to connect it to, or distinguish it from, Whitman's possible politics. But my gut sense in reading "Eidólons" after reading Schoolman is to associate Plato and Whitman as fellow infernal travelers, though Plato's "reconciliation image" is a *gennaion pseudos*, a giant falsehood, which probably doesn't bode well for our troubled times.

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NICOLE GRAY, ED. *Leaves of Grass (1855) Variorum*. *The Walt Whitman Archive*, whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1855/variorum/index.html: 2020.

The newest addition to *The Walt Whitman Archive* is a variorum edition of the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* that is both ambitious in its scope and transformative in its insights. The variorum recently received the 2021 Richard J. Finneran Award from the Society for Textual Scholarship, recognizing it as the best English-language critical edition from the previous two years. This is the first time that a digital edition has won this prestigious award, and the accolade is well deserved.

The 1855 *Leaves of Grass* Variorum was created under the leadership of Nicole Gray, a contributing editor at *The Whitman Archive*, along with archive directors Ed Folsom and Kenneth M. Price, associate editors Brett Barney, Stephanie M. Blalock, and Brandon James O'Neil, designers Karin Dalziel, Jessica Dussault, and Greg Tunink, and project contributors Matt Cohen, Caitlin Henry, and Kevin McMullen. As Gray explains in the excellent 13,000-word introductory essay that anchors the variorum, she and her collaborators have brought together "the text of the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*, including variants and insertions; the early manuscripts and notebooks; the reviews and extracts that were printed and bound into some copies; and a bibliography of known surviving copies." This wealth of additional materials expands the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* Variorum beyond the realm of a standard variorum edition, which typically includes a collation of all the known variants of a text. Such a variorum of the major print editions of *Leaves of Grass* has existed since 1980 as *Leaves of Grass: A Textual Variorum of the Printed Poems*, a three-volume set published by New York University Press as part of *The Collected Writings of Walt Whitman*. The NYU Press variorum, however, fails to account for the bibliographic irregularities that, we have learned over the past 20 years, are actually the defining

characteristics of the 1855 edition. As Ed Folsom wrote in his contribution to *Leaves of Grass: The Sesquicentennial Essays* (2007), “Today, we know about so many variations between copies [of the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*] that we didn’t know about a couple of years ago—and there are so many more that I’m convinced haven’t yet been found—that it’s safe to say that Whitman and Rome managed in 1855 to create a book that is bibliographically indescribable” (18).

Folsom was referring to the then-new revelation that the 795-1,000 copies of *Leaves of Grass* that Whitman produced with the Rome Brothers printing firm in 1855 were by no means textually identical. Beyond the expected differences in state and binding—which would be common for almost any nineteenth-century book—there were substantive differences in word choice, spelling, and punctuation from copy to copy. For example, Gary Schmidgall discovered in 2000 that Whitman stopped the print run on *Leaves of Grass* at some point early on in the process to alter the line “And the night is for you and me and all” by adding the phrase “day and” and changing the verb “is” to “are” to become “And the day and night are for you and me and all.” Whitman retained both printings, meaning that some copies of the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* contain the shorter line, while others contain the longer one. Ted Genoways made a similar discovery about modifications to the frontispiece engraving, and as a result of such revelations Folsom led the heroic effort to compile a census of the 200 known existing copies of *Leaves of Grass*, which is included in the variorum as “The 1855 *Leaves of Grass*: A Bibliography of Copies.” Again, it is common for a single edition of a text to exist in different states with different bindings, but one of the things that makes the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* such a unique challenge for bibliographers and textual scholars alike is the existence of these small-but-not-insignificant changes that took place at different points during the print run. For the first time, all of these known changes are accounted for in a single critical edition.

The variorum succeeds not only in identifying such changes, but also in fundamentally reframing how we think of the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* as a material (and, by extension, poetic) object. One of the core principles at the heart of the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* Variorum, Gray writes, is the desire “to create an edition that vividly reveals to readers what Ed Folsom concluded over a decade ago: that, materially speaking, there is *no such thing* as the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*.” The statement of editorial policy from the “About the *Archive*” section of *The Whitman Archive* explains the rationale behind the claim that, from the standpoint of descriptive bibliography, there is no such thing as the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*:

Because of the apparently random way in which the printed gatherings were assembled,

there is currently no way of identifying if there is such a thing as an “original” issue—that is, a single copy that contains the “first state” of everything before any of the type slipped, before Whitman or someone in the Rome office made corrections and changes, and that consists only of first state gatherings in the earliest stages of printing.

This is a big claim, to be sure. But Whitman scholars are used to making big claims about their objects of study: *Leaves of Grass* is the ur-text of free verse poetry; Whitman is a transformative figure both in American letters and in world culture as a whole; Whitman and his disciples helped to define modern notions of LGBTQ+ identity; and so on and so forth. Such claims are consistently—and productively—open for debate. But in arguing that, “materially speaking, there is *no such thing as the 1855 Leaves of Grass*,” both Folsom and Gray are on solid bibliographic ground.

It is this insight that I would like to underscore with as dark and as heavy a pen as I can find: the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* is not a single edition per se, but rather as a collection of documents that includes all 200 extant printed copies, relevant manuscripts and notebooks, reviews and extracts bound into some (but not all) of the printed copies, early drafts of advertisements (which include lines of poetry), and Whitman’s own annotated copy of his book (similar to his more well-known “blue book” copy of the 1860 *Leaves of Grass*). Those of us who use or create digital humanities projects have come to take for granted that digital archives—or “thematic research collections,” as they were once, perhaps more accurately, called—have a lot of stuff in them. We expect that digital resources will include a wide array of texts and other artifacts: the core text(s) in question, supporting documents, items drawn from the cultural context, analytic and introductory apparatuses, etc. But the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* Variorum doesn’t just have a lot of stuff in it simply because *that’s what we do with digital archives*. Rather, the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* Variorum includes the material that it does in order to make the case that *all* of those materials are what make up the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*—and also, that none of them are.

The best way for me to wrap my mind around the Schrödinger’s cat that is the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* (“It’s all of these texts, but also none of them!”) is not to appeal to poststructuralist notions like “absent presence” or “intertextuality,” but rather to be reminded of similarly transformative efforts to understand the textual history of another genre-defining book that may or may not actually exist either: the Bible. With the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* Variorum, Gray and her collaborators have created what we could call a documentary hypothesis of Whitman’s new American Bible. Like the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*, there isn’t really such a book as “the Bible” so much as there is an assemblage of documents that

have settled into place around the convenient fiction of a single book whose name in Greek (*biblia*) means “the books.” Like the documentary hypothesis for the Pentateuch, the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* Variorum has given us a collection of source documents which we could also categorize with the letters J, E, D, P, and R.

The P source consists of the Printed copies that came off the Rome Brothers’ presses. *The Whitman Archive* uses a copy from the University of Iowa as their base text, which they rightfully call a “necessarily arbitrary” choice given the apparently random manner with which printed gatherings were put together. From there, they note textual variants (including missing, altered, or additional text), differences in bindings and insertions, and changes that likely occurred due to the shifting of type during the printing process—such as when the period fell off the final line “I stop some where waiting for you” of the poem that would later be titled “Song of Myself.” One of the big takeaways from analyzing these print sources is the reminder that *Leaves of Grass* took shape through a confluence of both agency and serendipity. We can see this impulse to revise and rewrite that would define the next four decades of the book’s life when Whitman changes “And the night is for you and me and all” to “And the day and night are for you and me and all,” just as we can marvel at the happy little accident of the terminal period falling off of a 1,300-line poem that ends with the promise of the poet’s resurrection into the blades of grass at our feet.

The R (or Review) source provides further evidence of Whitman’s compulsive drive to revise and update his work. Whitman took some of the early reviews of *Leaves of Grass* that appeared in the press (including three he had anonymously written himself), arranged for them to be printed in an eight-page insert, and then had them either sewed or tipped into the front or back of the volume. He similarly pasted the now-famous letter from Ralph Waldo Emerson greeting him at the beginning of a great career into either the front or back endpapers. As with everything else about the production of the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*, this process was unsystematic and unevenly distributed across copies of the book. For this aspect of the variorum, *The Whitman Archive* has used a copy from the University of Virginia as their base text, noting variations as they occur across the corpus of existing copies. In these reviews we see Whitman already beginning to conceptualize the promotional apparatus that he would include in the 1856 *Leaves of Grass* as “Leaves-Droppings,” which included reviews, the letter from Emerson, and his own open-letter reply. (He would produce something similar yet again in 1860 with *Leaves of Grass Imprints*.) *The Whitman Archive* has made use of the open-source comparison and collation tool Juxta

(which I'm cheating and calling the J source for the purposes of my analogy) to display the changes between the original periodical reviews and the reprinted versions that Whitman included in his book. Whitman the self-promoter—as well as Whitman the creature of print—fully emerges in the R source, as he does in the E source of Early Draft Advertisements. At some point in the publishing process, Whitman wrote and printed the drafts of four different advertisements proclaiming himself to be “The New Poet” and his book “America’s first distinctive poem.” We have known for decades that Whitman was completely immersed in the culture of nineteenth-century print; the variorum allows us to see his movement through those waters with even greater clarity.

Finally, with the D (or Document) source, *The Whitman Archive* takes manuscript and notebook drafts and lines them up with their corresponding locations in the printed text. It is likely that much of the new scholarship that will emerge from work with the variorum will come from insights gained by studying these manuscripts and their relationship to the poems and preface of the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*. The team at *The Whitman Archive* has already begun to generate powerful insights about Whitman’s process as a writer by getting up close and personal with these manuscripts and notebook drafts. As Gray writes in her introduction, “These manuscripts demonstrate how frequently Whitman revised across genre. Jotted notes, sometimes taken from external sources, sometimes become poetry, sometimes prose; prose becomes poetry; even, in a couple of cases, what look in manuscript versions like lines of poetry become segments of the prose preface.” If the first major argument of the variorum is that the most honest bibliographic description of the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* needs to include a range of different texts and documents, its second argument emerges from this insight about the fungibility of Whitman’s lines. From a practical standpoint, as declared in the statement of editorial policies, “The poetic line is the fundamental unit of the variorum for the purpose of describing relations between manuscripts and notebooks and the printed text.” From the perspective of how the variorum invites us to understand Whitman’s poetic process, Gray quotes Folsom and Ken Price to argue that, “for Whitman the line was the basic unit of his poetry.”

This is a non-trivial argument to make. We could argue, instead, that Whitman’s basic poetic unit is the word, the stanza, the poem, the cluster, or even the book. But, as Gray writes, the variorum “makes it clear how often Whitman moved lines around, sometimes between poems.” This is where the variorum has so much to offer not only for thinking about the material conditions of the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*, but its aesthetic conditions as well. How do we

read Whitman's lines given these new insights? Are they discrete and fungible? Infinitely cut-and-pasteable like Raymond Queneau's "One Hundred Thousand Million Poems"? How did Whitman think of his poetic lines? How should we? The variorum doesn't offer the answers, but that's not its job. Instead, Gray and company have invited us to ask the right questions about this consistently surprising, endlessly wonderful work.

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CATERINA BERNARDINI. *Transnational Modernity and the Italian Reinvention of Walt Whitman, 1870-1945*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2021. xii + 281 pp.

Translators know intuitively that the meaning of an utterance never depends only on the meanings of the words uttered: context is everything, and context depends on situations and on people, i.e., on where and when a particular combination of words appears in the world, and on who the individuals involved are, what they know about each other, and why they have brought these words to this place at this time. This principle remained with me throughout my reading of Caterina Bernardini's *Transnational Memory*, which provides a rich and nuanced exploration of the reception and resonance of the poetry of Walt Whitman in Italy from the latter half of the nineteenth century to the end of the second world war. Bernardini's account elucidates not only what Whitman's poetry meant to people but how it did so, both in the limited context announced in its title and in the broader context of the poet's European reception and dissemination.

Bernardini achieves a remarkable synthesis of historical, political, and cultural context with analyses of the work of the individual literary and public figures who made sense of Whitman's poetry—interpreting it, translating it, and finding parallels between it and the Italy of their day. It balances an approach to the interpretation of Whitman in a European context with an attempt to measure the longer-term inspiration that Whitman provided to Italian (and not just Italian) poets, fiction writers, and cultural figures. A major part of this inspiration, Bernardini makes clear, is conditioned upon the degree to which Whitman's searching attempts to define and describe an "American" identity resonated within the contemporaneous search for a modern Italian one, a