

# The Letters in the Litter

## Messy Boundaries and Other Conundrums in Editing Walt Whitman's Correspondence

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We got talking a little about Carlyle, whereat W. produced a Burroughs letter which he explained to me had “just turned up in the litter” and contained “some mighty good matter—just a little of it—anent Carlyle.”<sup>1</sup>

Editing the corpus of documents associated with Walt Whitman might be described as a series of compromises or as a quixotic task, depending on whether you are of a practical or a despairing inclination—a challenging effort to impose order on a notoriously unruly set of materials. An infamous picture of Whitman at the end of his life captures what appears to be chaos: the elderly poet, in a chair in his house on Mickle Street in Camden, surrounded by the debris of his writing life, a tossed sea of papers that were—loosely at best—organized into piles.<sup>2</sup>

[see Figure 1 at the end of the article]

The efforts of the *Walt Whitman Archive* over the course of its twenty-year history have been devoted to trying to make sense out of these piles and many others. Early editorial decisions that were aimed toward maximizing the intelligibility of the *Archive* led to the adoption of genre as a central organizing principle. One product of that framework is that in reproducing documents on the *Whitman Archive*, we also reproduce genre, in both text encoding and interface. Genre—defined broadly as a category or type of writing “characterized by a particular form, style, or purpose”—is one way of organizing the information in both physical and digital archives.<sup>3</sup> There are others. Chronology, for example, also informs the approach of the *Whitman Archive* and of many other collections, archives, and editions engaged in organizing archival materials.<sup>4</sup> *Whitman Archive*

staff members continually make decisions about boundaries between genres, documents, and texts in order to decipher the materials and to facilitate users' encounters with the *Archive*. But it is crucial as we impose orderliness to also honor messiness, not just because that is how Whitman left—and lived in—his personal archive, but also because his writings seem designed to make a mess of boundaries, smudging any clear lines we (or anyone else) might wish to impose by separating documents based on genre or era.<sup>5</sup>

Whitman's correspondence presents a useful opportunity for thinking about matters of genre and order. Living at a time of rapid development in the scope and uses of the postal system, Whitman offers one example of the range and intensity of letter writing in the nineteenth-century United States.<sup>6</sup> Over the course of his life, the poet communicated by post with correspondents worldwide about family, personal, and professional matters. His correspondence often has complex relations to published works. In some cases, Whitman would cut up incoming letters, paste them back together, and write notes toward poems or prose pieces on the backs of them. In other cases, letter and publication merge. Whitman's powerfully moving letter to the mother of corporal Frank Irvin following Irvin's death, for instance, is known only as it appears in *Memoranda During the War* and *Specimen Days*; no draft or original copy of the letter has been found. In this case, we encounter this letter as an integral part of larger, later prose works.<sup>7</sup> What is a letter from or to Walt Whitman? How should such documents be edited and presented to readers in a digital age? What is necessary to the understanding of Whitman's correspondence and its relationship to his published and unpublished poetry and prose, and what types of annotation and contextualization are necessary? These fundamental, simple-sounding questions have proven to be enormously complex for those of us working at the *Walt Whitman Archive*.

The question of "what is a letter" is a generic and editorial question, but it is also an ontological and interpretive one.<sup>8</sup> For editors of printed editions of correspondence, the classification often determined whether or not something made it into a published volume. For *Whitman Archive* editors working to digitize Whitman-related materials, classifications like genre can determine whether or not something gets published earlier rather than later; in what category it is grouped; and in which part of the *Archive* it appears. In both cases, classification

shapes how the letter is experienced, the limitations of its reach and relation, and the conventions of its representation.<sup>9</sup> In the digital environment of the *Whitman Archive*, classification also becomes a matter of what markup we use and which parts of the letter we choose to transcribe and encode.<sup>10</sup> In our treatment and representation of Whitman's correspondence, we have borrowed from the conventions of printed volumes (providing transcriptions that retain, as much as possible, the original spelling and punctuation of the letters; using brackets to mark illegible or unclear words; and adding footnotes as explanatory apparatus). But we expect to do more in future years to update our editorial policy and our display and search functionality to begin to account for the complexity of many of the archival objects associated with Whitman. This process has returned us to a long history of correspondence editing as well as the tension between classification or order and randomness or serendipity—letter or litter—as we consider what lies ahead for the *Whitman Archive* and its ongoing engagement with what Jerome McGann has called “the problem of knowledge representation.”<sup>11</sup>

In this essay, we focus on genre as an example of one seemingly coherent organizing principle that can actually disorient or needlessly limit the representative possibilities for an archival object. We discuss some of the edge cases of Whitman's correspondence—documents whose generic boundaries are difficult to determine—and explore their significance for editorial purposes and the ways that our thinking about these objects has affected how we have conceptualized and continue to conceptualize the structure of the *Whitman Archive* more generally. The epigraph to this essay represents one of several times over the course of Whitman's late-life conversations, transcribed immediately afterward by Horace Traubel and eventually published in nine volumes, when Whitman and Traubel joke about a letter or another document surfacing from the litter of papers in the poet's room in Camden, New Jersey. What is the relationship of the letter to the litter?<sup>12</sup> It is important not to make negative assumptions about litter, given Whitman's fondness for “compost,” “debris,” “leaves-droppings,” and the like. Whitman's room, like the *Whitman Archive*, was a broader context, an environment that impacted the material form of his papers and that structures the ways they can be interpreted.

As we work to reorder Whitman's piles and reproduce them in a digital environment, we revisit the question of the difference between letter and litter and

the usefulness and intelligibility of genre-based organization. The *Whitman Archive* is moving toward an editorial approach that embraces the potential for multiple forms of categorization and display, a structure that allows objects to be both letter and litter, and many other things besides. Documents that resist order point to things other than genre, such as the complexities of composition and the effects of Whitman's environment and his paralysis on the shape and substance as well as the subjects of his compositions in his later years. Reading Whitman's correspondence as woven into his prose and poetry illuminates both. Such complexities suggest that we may need to revisit editorial commonplaces in the digital era. Ultimately we see the future of the *Whitman Archive* as an effort to reach beyond the limitations of genre or temporality or any other single organizing principle by developing the framework to represent a document in multiple ways, within multiple sections, with options to navigate between one document and the next. In doing so we leverage new media capacities to represent process as well as product, document as well as text, and to attend to the history of an archival object in all its sometimes frustrating ambiguity and multitudes.

## What Makes a Letter?

The keys to a genre are the particulars of its form, style, or purpose—the characteristics or the protocols associated with it as a category of writing. We might take as our starting point the definition of a letter by Edward Vanhoutte and Ron Van den Branden as "a physical channel through which a communicative situation is established," defined by the distinctive features of time, receiver, and sender.<sup>13</sup> Certainly in the case of Whitman there are plenty of letters that fit such a basic definition. Still, Whitman's correspondence, like that of many literary figures, can sometimes be difficult to distinguish from other kinds of writing.<sup>14</sup> Though there are many documents that take the conventional form of a letter—date, salutation, body, signature—there are also fragments of letters, as well as iterations of letters in copies or drafts. On one end of the spectrum are jottings or loose notes that seem to be directed to a third party or that have some of the formal features of a letter.

[see Figure 2 at the end of the article]

The signature at the bottom in pencil, combined with the instructions to a third party—"Remember me to Coley, John Towers, Jim Sorrell, David Stevens & all the boys"—seem like unmistakable proof that this fragment represents a line toward a letter. And, interestingly, these words appear again, in a draft of a nearly complete letter from Whitman to Peter Doyle dated October 14.

[see Figure 3 at the end of the article]

In the draft, the line from the fragment appears, seemingly in a later iteration, but has been crossed out. We do not have a copy of the final letter, if one exists. The only evidence that this particular fragment ever made it into a letter that was sent is its presence in a printed transcription by Whitman's friend and executor Richard Maurice Bucke, who edited and published a collection of letters from Whitman to Peter Doyle in 1897.<sup>15</sup> This collection, one of several published after Whitman's death that focus on the letters between the poet and a single correspondent, is framed with an introductory mention of Whitman's "Calamus" poems, and what Bucke calls the "exceptional and remarkable" friendship between Whitman and Doyle.<sup>16</sup> In the introduction, Bucke notes Whitman's tendency in his letters to send his love to a group of friends and acquaintances known by Doyle.

It is unclear whether Bucke, whose collection of letters was based on a set given to him by Doyle, possessed a final version of this letter that included the line, or if he simply restored the line to the transcription in spite of its deletion in the draft.<sup>17</sup> The line is consistent with Bucke's expressed intention in his edition to emphasize and provide evidence of Whitman's "calamus" friendships, and so he may have had this reason to restore it if he was working from the draft. Conceivably, the line was crossed out later, though neighboring corrections in Whitman's hand in the same pencil as the overstrike would suggest that Whitman was responsible for the deletion. In any case, the collection of Doyle letters was republished by Whitman's executors in *The Complete Writings of Walt Whitman* in 1902, with the excised line still included in the October 14 letter.<sup>18</sup>

This document, beginning "More about William Blake," may represent a partial draft of a draft of a letter. Or it could be that Whitman copied the line onto this note when he crossed it out of the draft letter to Doyle, in order to save it for later. Or perhaps he wished to reproduce or remember the line in another epistolary context. Is "More about William Blake" a letter, a note, a deletion, or

all of the above? Presumably a draft of a letter doesn't establish a communicative situation—at least not until an editor comes along to read the draft! In the case of Whitman, who received at least one letter from an auctioneer about the prices for which his manuscripts had sold at auction, it is possible to speculate that, chaotic though the papers in his room may have seemed, his decisions to retain manuscripts or hand them to his friends were made with an eye to readers and editors to come.<sup>19</sup> On the *Whitman Archive*, we have not yet begun editing drafts of letters, unless they are the only remaining copy of a letter,<sup>20</sup> but in the future we plan to present all drafts, so that users can see iterations, mark the progression from draft to final copy, and sometimes better grasp nuances in his writing and his relationships.

At times the existence of a draft alone can be highly illuminating, as in the case of Whitman's 1890 response to John Addington Symonds's repeated inquiries about the meaning of the "Calamus" cluster of poems.<sup>21</sup> The final copy is no longer extant, but if it were, that final copy would almost certainly convey less about Whitman's response than does a mere image of the draft. This is the famous letter in which Whitman claimed: "Tho' always unmarried I have had six children." Equaling that whopper is his final sentence, described by Edwin Haviland Miller as "artfully deceptive": "I see I have written with haste & too great effusion—but let it stand."<sup>22</sup>

[see Figure 4 at the end of the article]

Painstakingly crafted and pasted together, bearing witness to numerous deletions and additions that led to the final version of the letter, this draft belies Whitman's description of writing "with haste."<sup>23</sup> The material composition of this draft letter, with its paste-ons and revisions, is as revelatory as the content, and the two are mutually explanatory even as they contradict each other. Here an image of the object, a link to Symonds's letter, and an explanation that this is a draft as well as a transcription of the text of the letter are necessary to understanding Whitman's response to Symonds's query about "Calamus."<sup>24</sup>

Other explanation is necessary, too. Many have discussed the front of this draft; few have mentioned the back of it.<sup>25</sup> The verso of the draft letter reveals that the draft has been pasted together out of various materials, both printed and handwritten.

[see Figure 5 at the end of the article]

One scrap is a printed poem titled “Address to the Veterans,” attributed to “William Errickson.” Another is a letter from Richard Maurice Bucke that can be dated between February 5 and 15, 1890, describing the death of Bucke’s sister-in-law Matilda Gurd. Still another is a partial envelope with the return address of Dora Warnecke, a resident of San Pablo, California.<sup>26</sup> A series of other letters and objects have been recycled into the draft of Whitman’s letter to Symonds. How are we to treat this new composite object? Typically, for publication on the *Whitman Archive*, we would separate out the various parts, publishing each letter individually and linking them in the annotations, providing images of both recto and verso. But a robust system of relation, created and implemented through both the annotations and the encoding, is needed to fully represent the complexity of this object, which singlehandedly muddies the distinctions between incoming and outgoing letter, as well as draft and final copy.

*Calamus*, the volume of letters from Whitman to Doyle edited by Bucke, itself begins with an item that may or may not be classified as a letter: Bucke reproduces a note written on the flyleaf of a copy of *Specimen Days* that Whitman sent to Doyle in 1883.

[see Figure 6 at the end of the article]

Does this inscription, headed “Pete” and signed “W.W.,” originally appearing at the front of a volume that traveled, as a letter would, through the mail, constitute a letter? The placement of the message in *Specimen Days* means the flyleaf inscription could be read as an enclosure or simply as an introduction or a paratext to *Specimen Days*. Thinking of this inscription as a letter is useful because it is clearly one in a series of communications with Doyle. As Ted Genoways observes in a footnote to his transcription of the flyleaf in volume 7 of *The Correspondence*, “this note is significant, because it constitutes the first correspondence from [Whitman] to Doyle since July 1880. It appears that writing *Specimen Days* stirred [Whitman]’s memories of the times he shared with Doyle in Washington” (69). Not thinking of the inscription as correspondence, within a history of correspondence, puts the reader at a disadvantage in interpreting the meaning of this inscription.

Perhaps the most famous letter associated with Whitman, extraordinary in content if traditional in form, was sent to the poet by Ralph Waldo Emerson after the publication of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* in 1855. To Emerson's dismay, Whitman reprinted the missive with his own extended reply in the "Leaves-Droppings" section of the 1856 edition of *Leaves*, going so far as to use part of Emerson's letter as a blurb on the spine of the book. Even before doing this, Whitman had the Emerson letter printed in a newspaper, turning a private communication into a public one. Cast out of the insular network of person-to-person correspondence and into the public role of endorsement, Emerson's letter changes in form and function, becoming both paratext and provocation to its sender (and its numerous unforeseen recipients).<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, however, the 1856 *Leaves of Grass* as a whole is framed in Whitman's response as part of a letter—an enclosure, as it were: "HERE are thirty-two Poems, which I send you, dear Friend and Master, not having found how I could satisfy myself with sending any usual acknowledgment of your letter."<sup>28</sup> The genre of Whitman's extensive response letter is anything but straightforward, with even the speech-act words that seem to perform gift-giving or presentation ("Here are thirty-two poems") coming *after* the poems in the volume. The document is labeled "Letter to Ralph Waldo Emerson" and contains the formal features of a letter—date, location, salutation, body, and signature—but the prose of the letter, despite its frequent address to "Master," is akin to an essay along the lines of the first preface to *Leaves of Grass*, and of course its appearance within a book (the letter was never sent as a manuscript to Emerson) takes it out of a context of personal correspondence.

These documents pose a challenge for the editor seeking to situate them within some kind of coherent system, whether that system is based on genre, chronology, or some other organizing principle. Each document can be interpreted as a letter or part of a letter that was composed or sent at a particular date or time. But this only tells one part of the story of the document. Each segment of a repurposed object or series of notes could be classified and dated differently. The publication and circulation of Emerson's letter after it was sent and received are central to the meaning of that letter. Representing these objects online without collapsing the range of interpretive possibilities they introduce requires both creativity and diligence. A digital environment offers new potential to represent single objects in multiple ways, but also to create more robust links among objects, allowing the



user to move, for instance, from the draft of a letter to the final version, or from a transcription of the letter as Emerson sent it to its position within the 1856 *Leaves of Grass*. Digital scans or facsimiles also help to clarify the material complexities of some of these documents, even as searchable transcriptions offer another way of navigating them tailored more specifically to user interests.

## Letters in Unexpected Places

In fact, the digital scans of the letters on the *Whitman Archive* might come as a surprise to readers familiar with the printed editions of Whitman's correspondence. A world quite apart from the neat typeface and standardized spacing of the printed letters, the manuscripts feature all manner of messiness, including multiple hands, smudges, deletions, markings of the holding repository, postmarks, and notes written by owners. Here the messiness reflects the history of the individual document and also the history of previous editors. Many of the letters include a note at the top written by Horace Traubel, locating the letter within his *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, where Traubel frequently includes complete transcriptions of letters Whitman hands to him in the course of their conversations.

[see Figure 7 at the end of the article]

In their interactions, Traubel often reads aloud a letter to or from Whitman, providing the occasion for reliving a historical moment and eliciting commentary from Whitman about the sender, the situation, or the letter itself, as the epigraph to this essay suggests.<sup>29</sup>

Just as Whitman preemptively shaped the critical conversation about his poetry through placement of his own anonymous reviews of *Leaves of Grass*, here again we find him beating us to the punch: in tandem with Traubel, he became the first to provide extended commentary on the correspondence of Walt Whitman. In fact, Traubel's extraordinary years-long interview, peppered by transcriptions of letters, might be said to render him one of the first editors of Whitman's correspondence.<sup>30</sup> It is worth noting in this context Traubel's process of editorial selection, which is guided by Whitman himself. Letters seemingly appear in *With Walt Whitman in Camden* organically, as they emerge from the litter, or as they

are given to Traubel by the poet. After one visit, for instance, Traubel writes, "W. handed me a stained letter which he wished me to read back to him."<sup>31</sup> Acting as axes of conversation, the letters provoke reflections on the past, on mutual acquaintances and friends of Whitman and Traubel, on the poet's work, and on many other topics. Set into the flow of the discussion, the letters help give rise to a rich context of day-to-day rituals, reminiscences, and interactions. This is no ordinary "edition" of letters, and yet in its very resistance to cordoning off the archive from daily life, its openness to the combination of factors that led to the unearthing of any given letter, and its careful representation of the social scene of the letter's second life and rearticulation as well as the text of the letter itself, it offers a provocative view of what might emerge out of an editorial approach that takes seriously the conjunction of letter and litter, or that resists the ready logic of genre- and chronology-based categorization.<sup>32</sup>

Whitman did more than read and comment on his correspondence. Particularly once he was less mobile, after his paralysis, he would cut some letters into pieces, paste the fragments back together, and use them as the scaffolding for poetry or prose manuscripts. One example, currently held at the Walt Whitman House in Camden, is a draft of the poem that would eventually be published as "You Tides With Ceaseless Swell."

**[see Figure 8 at the end of the article]**

As he had with the Symonds draft, in order to create this manuscript, Whitman cut apart and pasted back together several other pieces of paper. In this case those pieces included four different letters: one from Whitelaw Reid, dated July 17, [1878]; another from Richard J. Hinton, dated September 10, 1871; yet another from William J. Sewell, dated January 8, 1884; and a final letter, undated, from an unidentified sender.

**[see Figure 9 at the end of the article]**

Scholars have described the importance of collaging to Whitman's poetic and composition practices, but at first glance this seems to be a pasting-together that functions at the level of conscious composition only depending on which side of the document one examines.<sup>33</sup> That is, the piecing together of the poetry lines seems highly purposeful, while the shards and remains of the fragmentary letters

are pasted together in apparently random fashion. The content of the letters may have contributed to the poetry manuscript, but if so, it is not immediately apparent. The letters were probably selected not because of any content but because of the available white space left on a leaf. Spanning over a decade, the letters also reflect Whitman's practice of keeping papers and letters for extended periods of time, even as he eventually used them for scratch paper.<sup>34</sup> What literary sense can be made of this practice? Certainly the letters constitute bibliographical evidence. Based on the letters, we can date Whitman's composition: if, as Geoffrey Sill argues, the title and opening two lines were written first on the back of the 1878 letter, the poetry draft was almost certainly composed between that date and the months after January 8, 1884, the latest date of one of the letters used in composition.<sup>35</sup> The 1871 Hinton letter seemingly acts only as the scaffolding for the bits as Whitman pasted them together.<sup>36</sup>

This manuscript is striking for many reasons, not least the problems it poses for editorial treatment on the *Whitman Archive*. As a material object, it is a study: in one part of the poem draft, Whitman appears to have used a piece of paper to overwrite previous lines with newly composed ones, but the bulk of the manuscript appears to have been written in one order, then cut to pieces, shuffled, and glued back in a different order. The manuscript in its current order reads<sup>37</sup>:

[see Figure 10 at the end of the article]

It is difficult to tell what the original order of the lines was, in part because additional pieces of paper have been pasted on top of the letter fragments used to form the bottom layer. In any event, it seems clear that the first two lines—beginning with “You”—have been added later, in pencil, pasted on top of the original first two lines, which like the rest of the manuscript were written in ink. Further corrections have been made in purple pencil. To form the foundation for the clipped lines, the letter from Hinton was cut into two pieces, and the letter from Sewell pasted in between.<sup>38</sup>

Sill has made a case for the interpretive importance of this reordering, which resituates the subject of the line beginning with the word “holding” and demonstrates Whitman's close attention to the structure and prosody of his lines. Another case could be made for the interpretive importance of the ostensibly unrelated base materials used in Whitman's late-life poetic “collage.” Reading this

poetry manuscript in relation to its material features highlights its multi-generic, multi-temporal, and multidimensional characteristics. Whitman had shuffled poetic lines as early as the very beginning of his work as a poet, putting clipped subjects or lines in an envelope or on a string and flipping them around until he was satisfied with the order.<sup>39</sup> In his later, less mobile years, this shuffling drew on the paper that surrounded him, and so letters sent to him became part of his poetic constructions, recycled but not thoroughly composted, visible still at least in part in the artifacts that are his poems, prose, and notes toward essays, letters, and lectures. His final product here reveals a temporal and material conjunction: decades-old letters are joined to pieces of recent letters to form the foundation for a new composition. In the case at hand, the poem has a striking resonance with its material manifestation. Like the tides with "ceaseless swell and ebb," the poet revises, acting as "unseen force, centripetal, centrifugal," pasting together a chain not in this case of "sun, moon, earth, and all the constellations," but rather of near-to-hand letters, creating a new archive out of the old one that surrounds him.

While the content of the letters does not inform the poetry in obvious ways, it does suggest the resonance of the letters as the base materials out of which the poetry is wrought. Brought together to form the physical foundation for Whitman's poetry manuscript, these letters represent an intriguing cross-section of nineteenth-century society. The partial letter from Sewell, a railroad official, former Union general, and U.S. senator from New Jersey, reads like a form letter, probably sending Whitman his annual pass to the West Jersey Railroad, of which Sewell was then vice president. The letter from Hinton, a journalist who met Whitman in the hospitals during the Civil War, alerts Whitman to an article about the poet published in the *Springfield Republican*. The letter from Reid, editor of the *New York Tribune*, who, like Hinton, first met Whitman in the hospitals during the Civil War, is difficult to decipher but seems to forward a check and to thank Whitman for sending him a volume. These letters are practical transactions that navigate major nineteenth-century industries—railroads, newspapers—speaking to the poet's transportation, publication, and distribution practices, all now quite literally constituent of his poetic composition practices. The world becomes the word. In pasting the letters together, the poet mimics the tides in acting as "boundless aggregate," with scissors and glue "holding the universe as one." He makes the written words and voices of his correspondents integral parts of his

poetic project—physically, of course, but also intellectually, serving as they do as evidence of the everyday concerns out of which he wove his poetry. Letters, litter, and verse are all but inseparable.

Again, it goes without saying that this practice of Whitman's, fascinating though it may be for contemplating his methods and materials of poetic composition, complicates the project of editing his correspondence. Here, as in the case of the Symonds draft, the letters used in the construction of the manuscript have been reduced to fragments. Sender, recipient, and date have been removed in one case. This object involves a total of five authors, writing in five different hands and at least two genres on multiple scraps of paper spanning almost fifteen years. In a number of provocative ways, this object contains multitudes. The challenge becomes how to represent this object as a number of different, mutually informing things—letters, litter, poetry—while facilitating the user's access to it through multiple channels and across multiple forms of display. At stake is the “subtle indirection and significance” of such documents—the ways in which seemingly disparate items, assembled through cutting, pasting, and repurposing, might speak to each other and to Whitman's composition practices more generally, and how we can leverage our own processes of representing them on the *Whitman Archive* so that such meanings become accessible or at least do not get lost in remediation.

## Letters and their Editors

In editing, as in letter writing, one engages a set of people as well as a set of conventions. In the case of letter writing, as Whitman's correspondence demonstrates, those people can be contemporaries, a larger public, or imagined audiences of the future. The engagement can take many forms, to which drafts and material characteristics sometimes offer clues: intimacy, adulation, studied nonchalance—even destruction and reconstruction, as Whitman's repurposing suggests. If the *Collected Writings of Walt Whitman* had dealt with Whitman's poetry manuscripts, as was the original intention, the letters on the back of this manuscript would have warranted a footnote; perhaps a facsimile image would even have been included, because the materiality of this document has interesting implications for Whitman's composition practices and the structure

of this poem. More challenging may have been the question of what would have happened had the *Collected Writings* included incoming in addition to outgoing correspondence. Would these incoming letters, partial, cut up, and repurposed, have been included in a printed collection of Whitman's correspondence? Every correspondence project makes decisions about what constitutes a letter, in the face of any number of ambiguities. That so few discussions of Whitman's draft of his 1890 letter to Symonds mention that it was pasted together out of other things partly results from previous editorial treatment: Edwin Haviland Miller, working within the constraints of a printed volume, did not provide a facsimile of the letter, nor did he mention the materials out of which it was made, and he limited his transcription of it to the text on the recto.<sup>40</sup>

In treating the correspondence, the *Whitman Archive* has benefited from editorial predecessors. The volumes of outgoing Whitman correspondence compiled by Miller and supplemented by Genoways have stood the test of time, representing largely accurate and editorially responsible collections, and they have been invaluable resources, saving *Whitman Archive* staff many of the headaches of identifying locations of particular letters. The most apparent shortcoming of those editions was something over which the editors had little control: the print medium. The drawbacks of print are some of the primary limitations lamented by twentieth-century editors of correspondence, and indeed there are extraordinary benefits to digital collections of correspondence. These include the ability to add newly discovered letters as they surface, and to put them in the desired order (chronological or by correspondent, for example) rather than including them in an appendix or a supplement. A digital environment also affords us the space to include both incoming and outgoing letters and to render enclosures in full, simplifying to some degree the process of selection by expanding the bounds of publication to items that simply wouldn't have been feasible to include from the perspective of a print publisher, for whom each extra page costs money.

In the first section of this essay, we raised the question of what constitutes a Whitman letter. From the standpoint of reading and editing in the digital era, we might ask why it matters. Restrictions of space, paper, and ink no longer lend the same kind of urgency to the process of classifying and selecting by genre as they did when a limited number of printed volumes could be produced. On the web, given enough server space and an existing, functional architecture, the number

of letters to be treated can multiply quickly, and anything that seems at all like a letter associated with an author could conceivably be included. There are several factors that render classification and selection still relevant in a digital era, however. One is the coherence and navigability of the interface. Another is the structure of grant applications for the letters (organized in the case of the *Whitman Archive*, for instance, by era), which can determine publication insofar as which letters appear first, and which (like undated letters) seem likely to wait until the end of the project. And it is perhaps worth considering that, where space is no object, time begins to loom large: waiting until the end of a complete edition of Whitman's incoming and outgoing correspondence is wait enough; waiting until the end of an edition of *all* Whitman's writings, including the correspondence, may well be an endless proposition.<sup>41</sup>

In keeping with the loosely genre-based editorial practice we have developed for the *Whitman Archive*, the documents published on the *Archive* have been sorted into categories, including "Books by Whitman," "Manuscripts," "Notebooks," and "Letters." Genre lends one form of coherence to a project, offering limitations, direction, and selection criteria for work designed to meet a particular goal or to specify the obligations associated with grant funding. As a result, *Whitman Archive* grant proposals have also often been organized by genre or chronology (or both). Early grant applications submitted by the *Archive* focused on poetry manuscripts. More recently, the *Archive* has been awarded grants devoted to digitizing, cataloging, and editing prose manuscripts, fiction, journalism, marginalia, and correspondence. But the examples discussed in this essay, and many other such cases, have continuously presented a challenge, because genre distinctions are themselves sometimes fuzzy, and individual documents may be multi-generic in nature. Preserving the "subtle indirection" of the documents, the messiness as well as the order, may require thinking differently about genre, and instating documents within their longer and sometimes whimsical histories.

The archival objects discussed in this essay fit into a category of correspondence, but many of them also fit comfortably into other categories—poetry manuscript, published book, printed poetry, note. These documents resist efforts to sort and silo by genre. Correspondence draws attention to the centrality of sociability, intimacy, and connection, even as it also points to publicity and mediation. Without the image of Whitman's room in Camden, it is more difficult

to understand objects like the Symonds letter and the "You Tides" manuscript, constructed by the poet out of the papers that surrounded and at times seemed to engulf him. Without Traubel's careful accounts of his conversations with Whitman in *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, most of Whitman's commentary about the letters he sent and received would be lacking. An advantage and a challenge of working on the *Whitman Archive* is that, whatever limited intentions we may have had when we set out to edit a set of documents like Whitman's correspondence, we have ended up thinking much more broadly about the range of documents that comprise an author-centered digital archive, and that test its boundaries and coherence.

As the *Archive* expands, it becomes increasingly clear how difficult much of Whitman's archive is to categorize definitively. One way we plan to respond to this challenge is to move toward an interface or user experience that is predicated on users' questions or searches and that allows for a single object to appear in multiple sections or categories. Another way forward is to think about ways to create and optimize a system of relations, representing the fact that a letter can also be a poetry manuscript, as well as several other letters, or to represent the publication and revision history of a document, showing, for instance, that a fragment that seems like a letter could point both to a draft letter, from which it has been excised, and to one of the earliest edited collections of Whitman's correspondence. Editors of the past have often focused on specific items or collections of items, or on specific authors; objects like the ones discussed here encourage us to think instead about ongoing, transformative connections between items and authors, between authors and their friends and family, and between authors and editors. Such links remind us that any given item did not exist in isolation, and that a long history of editing continues to affect how documents are read and re-edited in different media.

Editions of correspondence are themselves a genre of sorts, with their own conventions, forms, purposes, and expectations. Whitman's correspondence on the *Whitman Archive* is, ultimately, an editorial palimpsest. It, too, is an act of reconstruction. We draw heavily on and update the notes and the transcriptions produced by Miller and Genoways, but we also derive transcriptions from nearly all the many editions of letters to and from Whitman that have been published since the nineteenth century. Like Whitman, we have recycled and remediated, and like him we hope to push back against the apparent rigidity of category and



transform how users experience these objects by creating new pathways for them to quickly shift contexts, locating items in different parts of the *Archive* by clicking from one letter to another, pulling up the digital images or our encoding, accessing encyclopedia entries about particular correspondents, or navigating to the version of a letter that appears in *With Walt Whitman in Camden*. But we also intend with our reproductions of these materials to extend into the future the many forms of sociability enacted by the letters, inviting others to reproduce our transcriptions and the interpretations to which they give rise, using the TEI encoding and other data we have created to pursue still more pathways, continuing to compost and participate in the centripetal and centrifugal force that is historical research and discovery.

## The Whitman Archive of the Future

In 1888 Whitman said to Traubel, “I suppose I have done a lot less general letter-writing than most men—I was not a voluminous letter writer—when I wrote at all it was mainly with a very definite notion of something very practical that needed to be said. . . . nothing ever came to me in a hurry: even my storms came taking their time.”<sup>42</sup> Later he would remark that he was “not ‘a correspondent by nature.’”<sup>43</sup> While Whitman was a less “voluminous” correspondent than some writers, this comment does not account for those who wrote to him; we have identified over 3,000 incoming and outgoing letters from 1860 to 1887 alone, ranging from postal cards to sixteen-page effusions, and we expect to add many more as we embark on editing Whitman’s early and late-life correspondence.

McGann has called editing a creative act, and so it is—but it is also a political act, with its own long history. One important feature of our work on Whitman’s correspondence is that, despite the continued exertion of a gravitational pull by Whitman, the incoming letters introduce a range of new voices and hands to the *Whitman Archive*. Readers now can experience the volubility and intensity of William D. O’Connor, bent on identifying and reckoning with those who would attack or censor Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*. They can read the thoughtful and engaging letters of Whitman’s close friend and English admirer Anne Gilchrist. They can peruse the reflections of Alabama farmer and philosopher John Newton

Johnson, who had a lengthy correspondence with Whitman and came to visit him in Camden in 1887, or they can explore the connection between Whitman and various friends, acquaintances, and admirers from all over the world.

Editing Whitman's correspondence for publication on the *Whitman Archive* turns us back to our working definition of correspondence, but it also, perhaps more importantly, prompts us to consider what digitization allows and requires of editors of archival materials. In one vision of the future, the *Whitman Archive* would represent the overlap between nineteenth-century (composition, revision, and archival) practices and twenty-first century (editorial) practices as part of the editorial product, that is, the documents that appear on the *Whitman Archive*. These practices might be represented in how such objects are defined and explained, how they are related to other documents on the *Archive*, and how they are navigated within the broader structure of the site. The evolution in the treatment of documents by the *Whitman Archive* over time is moving toward an emphasis on the extent to which many of these objects defy the apparent order of categories of genre and question the neat hierarchy of TEI/XML tags that helps to enforce that order by marking distinctions between handwriting and print, poetic line and paragraph. As the digital humanities continues to work on the forms of insight that can result from interpreting documents as data, the acts of qualifying the apparent order of the machine-readable text and emphasizing the messiness—and unpredictability, complexity, and creativity—of writing and editing (and being human) become ever more pressing.

As we confront the piles that were once in Whitman's room in Camden and reorder them in digital space, one way of honoring the messiness in the new medium is by multiplying the representations. We have begun to move in this direction by offering multiple views of a document, including facsimile images, searchable transcriptions, and a view of the XML encoding. Another way is by encouraging an understanding of documents and texts in relation to other documents, texts, and conversations, as Traubel's *With Walt Whitman in Camden* insisted on doing. It may be that the seemingly marginal conjunctions of editorial phenomena and oral and documentary history represented by Traubel's notes on Whitman's letters, signaling the replication of the archive in more than one place, offer a productive model for thinking about how to edit Whitman documents in digital space. In the end, the *Whitman Archive* hopes to create a richer environment

for scholars, balancing the project of making sense of Whitman's archive and of thinking about our own desires to make sense of the digital archive, and looking for opportunities to further expand access to Whitman-related documents by creating multiple avenues for users to explore the transforming and transformative relationships between letters, litter, and literature.

## Notes

1. Horace Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, 9 vols. (various publishers, 1906–96), 1:42–43. Subsequent references will be abbreviated *WWWC*.
2. Whitman first moved to Camden, NJ, to live with his brother George in 1873 after suffering a stroke that left him partially disabled on his left side. When George retired and moved outside Camden in 1884, Whitman elected to stay and purchase his own house on Mickle Street, where he lived until his death in 1892.
3. “Genre,” def. 1b, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., 1989. Catalogs and finding aids of physical archives often divide materials by genre, separating, for instance, correspondence from manuscript material, and often including cross-reference sheets in cases of documents that fit both categories.
4. On the *Whitman Archive* we generally offer the user an option to sort by date within a section organized by genre.
5. As Ed Folsom has written, Whitman “had an ongoing battle with genre,” asserting in titles and elsewhere that the units of text in *Leaves of Grass* were poems, but pushing the boundaries of that designation. “Database as Genre: The Epic Transformation of Archives,” *PMLA* 122, no. 5 (October 2007): 1572. Whitman also experimented in books like *Two Rivulets* with the juxtaposition of prose and verse and the provocation to the reader produced by the structural and semantic relationships between the two.
6. For a discussion of the development and increasingly widespread use of the post in nineteenth-century America, as well as what he refers to as “a diffuse culture of the post,” see David Henkin, *The Postal Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 5.
7. Whitman misspelled Irvin's name as “Irwin.” These larger prose works were republished as part of *The Complete Writings of Walt Whitman* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1902), 10 vols. The letter about Irwin/Irvin was extracted from *The Complete Writings* and treated as a letter by Edwin Haviland Miller in his editing of Walt Whitman, *The Correspondence*, six vols. (New York: New York University Press, 1961–77).

8. It is also an old question, frequently asked: for an entire volume of essays devoted in one way or another to this topic and many others related to editing correspondence, see *Editing Correspondence: Papers Given at the Fourteenth Annual Conference on Editorial Problems, University of Toronto, 3–4 November 1978*, ed. J. A. Dainard (New York: Garland, 1979).
9. The timing of publication has largely to do with grant funding. Many *Whitman Archive* grant applications have been organized around genre, typically in conjunction with chronology (we intend to edit a particular set of documents from a specific time period). In the case of the correspondence, for instance, support from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission has allowed us to publish Whitman's Civil War, Reconstruction, and post-Reconstruction correspondence in a series of grant-funded projects over the past seven years. Different grant projects have been completed at different times, at different stages of technical development—we are currently in the process of converting the files that constitute many individual sections of the *Whitman Archive* to the most recent P5 version of the TEI encoding guidelines—so genre becomes one determining factor for where on the *Archive* a document is found, how it is encoded, and how it is displayed.
10. Our editorial policy for the letters states that we, in this first publication pass, are not transcribing and encoding deletions, although we do often include scans of the original documents so that users have access to revisions, deletions, and other features that are not represented in the encoding or transcription. We intend to go back and transcribe and encode revisions once all the letters are published. Our current treatment of correspondence has differed from the way we have treated Whitman's notebooks and poetry manuscripts, for instance, for which we have been transcribing, encoding, and displaying additions and deletions.
11. "Database, Interface, and Archival Fever," *PMLA* 122, no. 5 (October 2007): 1589.
12. One is reminded by this pairing of Mark Twain's banquet speech on "littery" men, a burlesque of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Oliver Wendell Holmes, detailed in Richard S. Lowry's *"Littery Man": Mark Twain and Modern Authorship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 24–33.
13. Edward Vanhoutte and Ron Van den Branden, "Describing, Transcribing, Encoding, and Editing Modern Correspondence Material: A Textbase Approach," *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 24, no. 1 (2009): 84; written in 2002 and as qtd. in "Presentational and Representational Issues in Correspondence Reconstruction and Sorting," *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 19, no. 1 (2004): 45–54.
14. See for instance Mark Twain, whose "Ashcroft-Lyon Manuscript" has prompted Amanda Gagel's meditation on editing and the definition of correspondence in a recent issue of *Scholarly Editing*. The Ashcroft-Lyon Manuscript, ostensibly a letter to William Dean Howells consisting of several hundred pages, was unsent

- and unpublished. The Mark Twain Project is currently editing the manuscript. See "Letters as Critical Texts," *Scholarly Editing* 36 (2015): 1–20.
15. See *Calamus: A Series of Letters Written During the Years 1868–1880 by Walt Whitman to a Young Friend (Peter Doyle)*, ed. Richard Maurice Bucke (Boston: Small, Maynard, 1897).
  16. Bucke, *Calamus*, 18. For other examples of such collections, see Thomas B. Harned's *The Letters of Anne Gilchrist and Walt Whitman* (1918); Clara Barrus's *Whitman and Burroughs: Comrades* (1931); Horst Frenz's *Whitman and Rolleston: A Correspondence* (1951); Artem Lozynsky's *The Letters of Dr. Richard Maurice Bucke to Walt Whitman* (1977); and Wesley Raabe's "walter dear": *The Letters from Louisa Van Velsor Whitman to Her Son Walt*, published on the *Whitman Archive* (2014). Thomas Donaldson's *Walt Whitman the Man* (1896) also features a number of transcriptions and facsimiles of letters, as well as other manuscripts.
  17. The draft letter matches Bucke's transcription in most other particulars. There is no indication in the volume of whether the letter is a draft.
  18. See *The Complete Writings of Walt Whitman*, 5:31.
  19. See the letter from W. I. Whiting to Walt Whitman of June 14, 1886, which Whitman forwarded to the *Critic* on June 17 for publication as an "item" in that magazine. In the letter, Whiting wrote that "at a sale of Autographs & Books a few days ago" an autograph letter from Whitman had sold for eighty dollars and a first edition *Leaves of Grass* for ten dollars, which Whiting noted was "the highest paid for any similar lots." Charles E. Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC. Whitman also destroyed letters, particularly after his stroke, when he was concerned about his health and fearful that death might be imminent. Miller, *The Correspondence*, 2:7.
  20. This is frequently the case: Whitman, after years as a copyist, seems to have adopted the habit of writing drafts of letters and then copying them and sending the final copy but retaining the draft, so we often only have Whitman's draft of a letter.
  21. Symonds, an English biographer, critic, and poet, was "a writer of homoerotic poetry and a pioneer in the study of homosexuality." Andrew C. Higgins, "Symonds, John Addington (1840–1893)," in *Walt Whitman: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 701–2. Symonds, who later published a biography of Whitman, had asked the poet directly about homosexuality in the "Calamus" poems in an August 1890 letter: "In your conception of Comradeship, do you contemplate the possible intrusion of those semi-sexual emotions & actions which no doubt do occur between men? . . . I should much like to know whether *you are prepared to leave them to the inclinations & the conscience of the individuals concerned?* . . . I agree with the objections I have mentioned that, human nature being what it is, & some men having a strong natural bias toward persons of their own sex, the enthusiasm of 'Calamus' is calculated to encourage ardent & *physical* intimacies. But I do not agree with them in thinking that such a result would absolutely be prejudicial to

- social interests." Qtd. in Miller, *The Correspondence*, 5:72. Because we have not yet systematically published letters after 1887, these letters are not yet available on the *Whitman Archive*.
22. Miller, *The Correspondence*, 5:73n18. Of course it is impossible to prove conclusively that Whitman had no children, but scholars have agreed that his claims in this letter were more likely defensive than factual. David Reynolds, for instance, calls the statement about fathering six children "an obvious prevarication" in *Walt Whitman's America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 28.
  23. Whitman often expressed doubts about carefully crafted and refined literary letters—in his view, these suffered from a lack of vitality and even a deceptiveness. He much preferred unpretentious messages such as those "from sailors—stumbling, tumbling: yet full to the full of expression and force" (*WWWC*, 6:184). Yet Whitman's reliance on drafts and intensive revision in his own letters points to the (understandable) gap between his professed values and his working practice. As Miller notes in his introduction to the *Correspondence*, Whitman "was not so impulsive or spontaneous in his correspondence as he implied" (1:3).
  24. M. Jimmie Killingsworth notes some of the probable differences between this draft and the letter that was sent to Symonds, drawing on Symonds's quotation of Whitman in a later letter to Edward Carpenter, in which Symonds writes: "He rambles on about being less 'restrained' by temperament & theory than I (J. A. S.) am—I at moments let the spirit impulse (female) rage its utmost wildest damnedest (I feel I do sometimes in L. of G. & I do so)." *Whitman's Poetry of the Body: Sexuality, Politics, and the Text* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 172. In the draft, Whitman wrote: "I know that while I have a horror of ranting & bawling, I at certain moments let the spirit, impulse, (? demon) rage its utmost, its wildest, damnedest—I feel to do so in my L of G, & I do so)."
  25. Traubel does not include a transcription of the letter from Symonds inquiring about "Calamus" in his notes in *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, a significant omission. He does include the following description of Whitman reading the letter, however: "Then W. started to read the letter again, and suddenly his face paled in the strangest way and he laid the letter down and said, 'I talked with him [a visiting census taker] too long: it has tired me out.' I stayed till he had recovered himself somewhat—told him he could speak of it again—then left" (*WWWC*, 7:67).
  26. The letter that arrived in this envelope has not been located, nor is it listed among the "incoming letters" in the seventh volume of Walt Whitman, *The Correspondence*, ed. Ted Genoways (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2004).
  27. For a discussion of Whitman's response letter, which she interprets as an expression of dissatisfaction with the genre of letter writing as a mode of intimacy that (in its exclusivity) imposes hierarchy and resists a more universal connection, see Elizabeth Hewitt, *Correspondence and American Literature, 1770–1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 179–81. Ed Folsom also discusses Whitman's publication of this letter in conjunction with his own "epistolary poetry" in an article titled "Co-

- Responding with Whitman,” in *Companion to Nineteenth-Century American Letters and Letter-Writing*, ed. Celeste-Marie Bernier, Judith Newman, and Matthew Pethers (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming).
28. Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Brooklyn, NY: n.p., 1856), 346. Wordsworth, interestingly, also invoked the genre of the letter in *The Prelude*, which Gary Schmidgall notes was addressed to Coleridge “as if it were one massive epistle: ‘O Friend! O Poet! brother of my soul.’” *Containing Multitudes: Walt Whitman and the British Literary Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 243.
  29. See, for example, this passage from *With Walt Whitman in Camden*: “There were two [Bram] Stoker letters and the draft of a letter from W. acknowledging them. ‘It’s a rather long story,’ I said: ‘there are several chapters to it.’ I also asked him: ‘Did you read them over today when you found them?’ He said: ‘No: I left that job for you: I haven’t read them since they came in ’76: when I sit here, when you read to me, when I have nothing to do but listen, I feel composed, at peace, more than usually impressionable: I take things in without any effort, then—moreover, retain them.’ I said: ‘I am willing enough to read.’ W.: ‘You see—there’s method in my laziness: I’m doing the best I can in the littlest ways as well as the biggest to conserve the few dribbles of vitality that are left to me’” (*WWWC*, 4:179).
  30. As Miller points out in his preface to *The Correspondence* (1:vii), Whitman’s literary executors (Traubel, Bucke, and Thomas Harned) were the first to publish selections of his correspondence in volumes like *In Re Walt Whitman* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1893), *The Wound Dresser* (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1898), and *Calamus*.
  31. *WWWC*, 4:42.
  32. Miller praises the executors for their efforts but also gently notes in passing some of the shortcomings of Traubel’s transcriptions, which, like many of the early publications of Whitman’s correspondence, was a “labor of love” that suffered from “the absence of a consistent editorial procedure, the occasionally careless transcription, the omission of a postscript or a sentence, the unindicated deletion of remarks which they considered unworthy of the man they venerated” (1:viii).
  33. See Matt Miller, *Collage of Myself: Walt Whitman and the Making of Leaves of Grass* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010). Miller discusses this manuscript briefly on pages 124–26. See also Kirsten Gruesz, *Ambassadors of Culture: The Transamerican Origins of Latino Writing* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 128.
  34. For a discussion of Whitman’s reuse of letters from autograph seekers, in particular for poetry manuscripts, see Eric Conrad, “‘Anything Honest to Sell Books’: Walt Whitman and the Autograph Monster,” *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 32, no. 4 (2015), 192–93. Conrad notes Whitman’s comment to Traubel about autograph seekers: “those fellows have one virtue—they always use good paper: and on that I manage to do a good deal of my writing” (*WWWC*, 2:45). He also points out that

Whitman's repurposing is likely, in some cases, the only reason the letter survived. For several points about the ways that individual collections can misrepresent the phenomenon of letter writing at a given time, in that letters that are preserved may not be representative of letters as a whole, see Roger Chartier, "Introduction: An Ordinary Kind of Writing: Model letters and letter-writing in ancient régime France," in *Correspondence: Models of Letter-writing from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 18–21. Whitman's early reuse of paper like extra wrappers from *Leaves of Grass* for notes and drafts likely had to do with economy. Late in his life, Whitman's repurposing may have been more a product of his lack of mobility—the stacks of papers in his room seem to have provided ready-to-hand material for (re)composition.

35. "You Tides with Ceaseless Swell": A Reading of the Manuscript," *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 6 (Spring 1989): 190. Sill contends that this manuscript and several others related to the "Fancies at Navesink" series illustrate that Whitman was as much if not more of a poetic craftsman late in his life. Three of the letters in this manuscript were used for composition, in the sense that poetry lines were drafted directly on them; the fourth, the 1871 letter from Hinton, seems to have been added later as a way of joining the clipped lines in a different order.
36. "You Tides With Ceaseless Swell" first appeared in print as part of the "Fancies at Navesink" sequence in the "Annex" to the 1884 reprinting of the 1881 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, and in August 1885 the sequence was published in *Nineteenth Century*.
37. This is also the order in which the lines appeared when they were published in the Annex, the *Nineteenth Century*, and later in November Boughs (1888) and the deathbed (1891–92) edition of *Leaves of Grass*.
38. Sill writes that a "peek beneath the pasted-on fragment" reveals the original two lines.
39. For one description of this practice, see William Sloane Kennedy's relation of Whitman's account to Harrison S. Morris in Kennedy's *Reminiscences of Walt Whitman* (London: Alexander Gardner, 1896), 24.
40. Miller states in his editorial policy that he does not attempt a diplomatic text, making some adjustments for the sake of comprehensibility and omitting deletions unless they are substantive, in which case they are presented in a note. The first iteration of our treatment of correspondence on the *Whitman Archive* has been modeled in many ways after Miller's collection: like Miller, we provide transcriptions that silently incorporate additions, exclude deletions, and maintain original spellings. Unlike Miller, we are also able in many cases to provide corresponding images of the original letters, thus welcoming users to improve or question our transcriptions. Miller does not mention the standards he used to determine what constituted a letter, other than to say that he includes "all known (and available) letters, post cards, and notes" (1:15).



41. The New York University Press's *Collected Writings* may be taken as an example of this: even without getting to the poetry manuscripts, the set spans nearly fifty years, and countless new manuscripts have emerged since the final volume was published, another supplement to the correspondence, in 2004.
42. *WWWC*, 1:318–19.
43. *WWWC*, 6:479.

## Figures



Figure 1: Walt Whitman in his upstairs bedroom in Camden in 1891. Photograph by Dr. William Reeder, Philadelphia. Library of Congress, Washington, DC. This and other images from the Library of Congress are reproduced with permission.

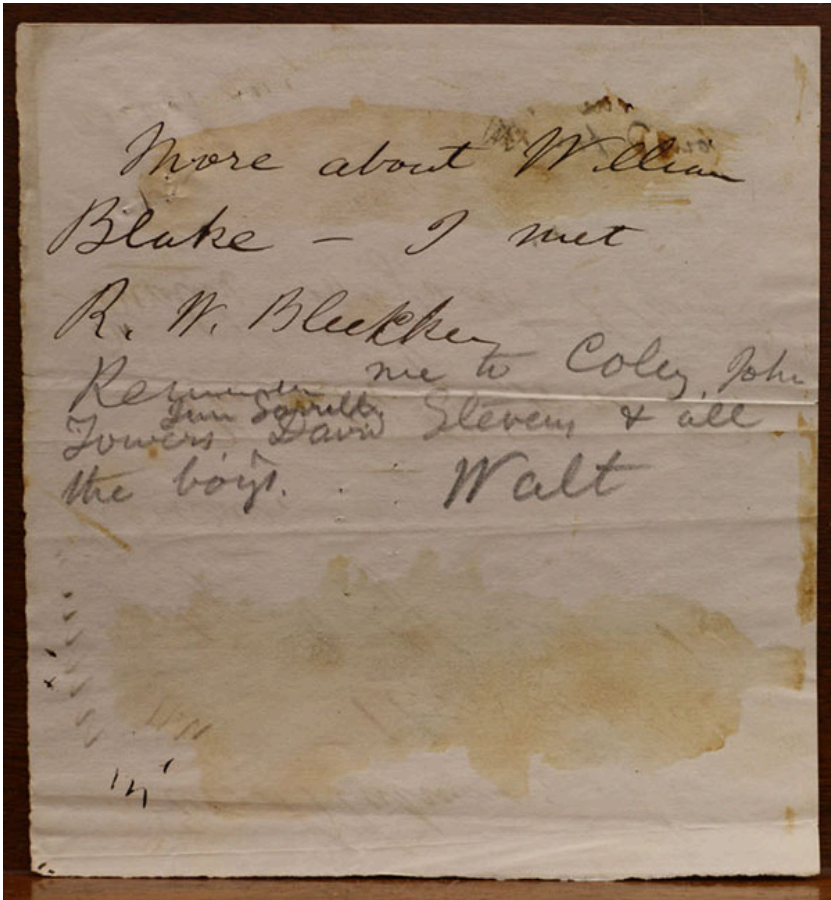


Figure 2: Fragment of a Whitman letter, written on the verso of an undated letter to Whitman from Joseph B. Marvin. Charles E. Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

World, said "Walt Whitman was in town yesterday, carrying the blue cotton umbrella of the future." (~~It was~~ <sup>had been</sup> a drizzly forenoon) —  
~~So you see~~ <sup>So they</sup> go it. ~~If it is a~~ <sup>When they</sup> good spirit, ~~they get off~~ <sup>however</sup> I can laugh at it, just as ~~well~~ <sup>much</sup> as any one.

Dear Pete I hope this will find you well & in good spirits. I hope ~~you~~ <sup>you</sup> ~~scattered~~ <sup>debating</sup> whether to get my leave extended, & stay till election day & vote ~~or~~ <sup>or</sup> whether to pair off with a Democrat, <sup>& return</sup> (which will amount to the same thing.) Most likely I shall ~~& I~~ <sup>to</sup> ~~adopt~~ <sup>decide</sup> on the latter, but don't know for certain.) Remember me to Coley, John Towers, Jim Farrell, Dave ~~St~~ <sup>St</sup> Stevens, & all the boys. \* (Dear Pete, I send you my love. It will not be long now before I shall be back ~~in~~ <sup>in</sup> ~~at~~ <sup>at</sup> ~~my~~ <sup>my</sup> ~~home~~ <sup>home</sup>.) So long, Pete.)

Walt

\* — Not only that it is <sup>a</sup> great <sup>mess</sup> ~~mess~~ of ~~mess~~ <sup>mess</sup> talk & ~~quite~~ <sup>hard</sup> words, ~~all~~ <sup>all</sup> tangled up, without sense or meaning, (which <sup>is</sup> I believe, your judgment ~~on~~ <sup>about</sup> it) — but other <sup>think</sup> ~~think~~ that it is a bad book, improper, & ought to be put down, & its author <sup>alone</sup> ~~with~~ <sup>with</sup> it.

Figure 3: The second leaf of a draft letter from Whitman to Peter Doyle, October 14, [1868]. Charles E. Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.



Aug 19 90 - sent to Symonds  
 copy of Aug 3<sup>rd</sup> read & glad to  
 hear from you as always. About the  
 little portrait I cheerfully endorse  
 the manner reproduction of any of them  
 you propose or any thing of the sort you  
 may choose - (I may send you some other  
 portraits of self) - (I am - I am) -  
 Suppose you have read papers & 50 p  
 sent of late. - At the questions on  
 Calamus paper. - They write, dare me  
 My L of G, only to be <sup>so</sup> construed  
 as a whole and in its own times  
 more and essential character all of its  
 pages & pieces coming under that  
 - that the Calamus part has been <sup>as much</sup>  
 the possibility of such construction is terrible  
 I am far from hoping the paper themselves  
 are not to be <sup>as much</sup> ~~construed~~ for such a <sup>as much</sup> ~~restraining~~  
 and quite at the time entirely <sup>as much</sup> ~~unrestrained~~  
 & wreck of possibilities <sup>as much</sup> ~~inferences~~  
 at <sup>as much</sup> ~~last~~ <sup>as much</sup> ~~seem~~ <sup>as much</sup> ~~damnable~~ <sup>as much</sup> ~~phases~~ <sup>as much</sup> ~~discovered~~ by me &  
<sup>as much</sup> ~~consequence~~ <sup>as much</sup> ~~difference~~ between you and me  
 temperament & theory, is restraint - I know  
 that I have a horror of ranting & bawling  
 but let the spirit <sup>as much</sup> ~~repose~~ (? demon) rage its  
 interest, its <sup>as much</sup> ~~innocent~~ - I feel to do so in my  
 L of G, & I do so. - I end the matter by saying  
 I wholly stand by L of G, as it is, & as it <sup>as much</sup> ~~is~~  
 all parts & phases combined as I <sup>as much</sup> ~~say~~  
 to the <sup>as much</sup> ~~over~~ <sup>as much</sup> ~~world~~ that I <sup>as much</sup> ~~think~~  
 I live <sup>as much</sup> ~~here~~ <sup>as much</sup> ~~fold~~ & <sup>as much</sup> ~~constitute~~  
 paralyzed - right arm, at least as ever  
 - right & hearing half gone - <sup>as much</sup> ~~lost~~  
 & spirit <sup>as much</sup> ~~here~~ - locomotive power & will  
 almost <sup>as much</sup> ~~gone~~ - am <sup>as much</sup> ~~prospect~~ outdoors  
<sup>as much</sup> ~~every~~ day - get down to the river  
 side near the Delaware, at sunset  
 & the <sup>as much</sup> ~~rounding~~ of L of G, has  
 been the <sup>as much</sup> ~~my~~ reason for being, & for comfort.  
 My life, my young manhood, my <sup>as much</sup> ~~young~~  
 south <sup>as much</sup> ~~be~~ have all been jolly, <sup>as much</sup> ~~solid~~, and <sup>as much</sup> ~~probable~~  
 open to <sup>as much</sup> ~~entire~~  
 I have <sup>as much</sup> ~~had~~ <sup>as much</sup> ~~lost~~ children - two  
 are dead - One <sup>as much</sup> ~~southern~~ grandchild, fine  
 boy, who <sup>as much</sup> ~~was~~ <sup>as much</sup> ~~lost~~ <sup>as much</sup> ~~to~~ <sup>as much</sup> ~~me~~  
 & <sup>as much</sup> ~~lost~~ <sup>as much</sup> ~~to~~ <sup>as much</sup> ~~me~~  
 from <sup>as much</sup> ~~intimate~~ relations. <sup>as much</sup> ~~from~~ <sup>as much</sup> ~~me~~  
 I see I have written this  
 with haste & <sup>as much</sup> ~~to~~ <sup>as much</sup> ~~me~~  
 at it stand,

Figure 4: Recto of a draft letter from Whitman to John Addington Symonds, dated August 19, 1890. Charles E. Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

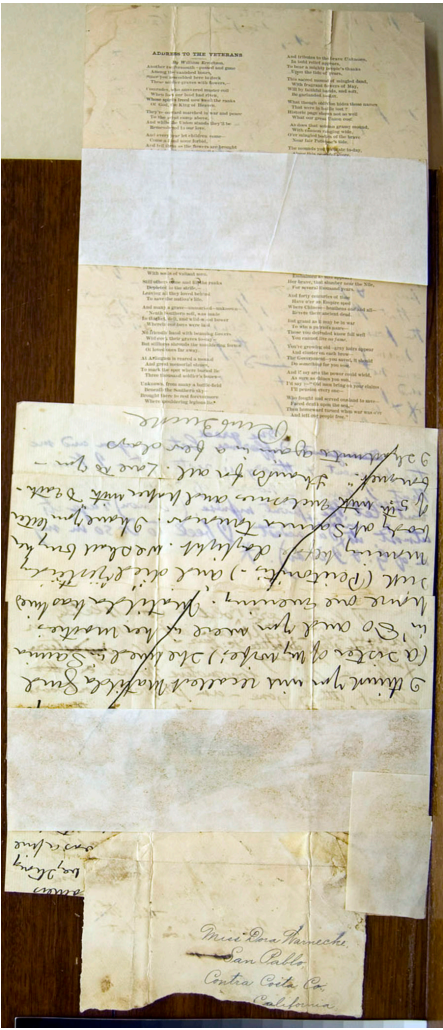


Figure 5: Verso of a draft letter from Whitman to John Addington Symonds, dated August 19, 1890. Charles E. Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

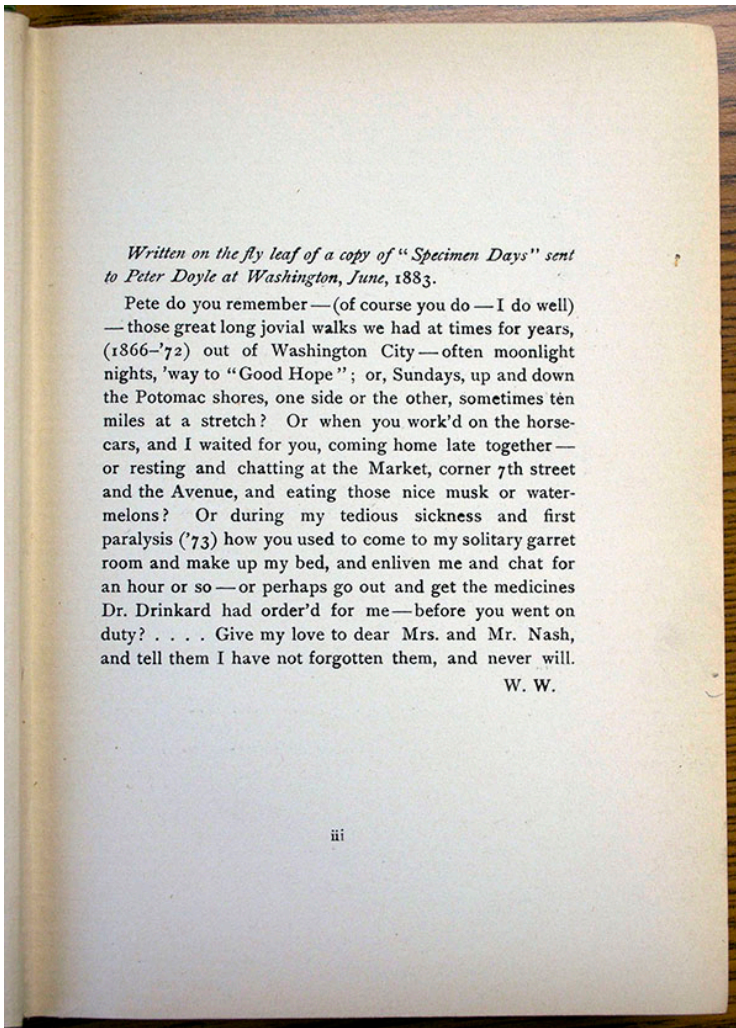


Figure 6: Walt Whitman, *Calamus: A Series of Letters Written During the Years 1868–1880 by Walt Whitman to a Young Friend (Peter Doyle)*, ed. Richard Maurice Bucke (Boston: Laurens Maynard, 1897), iii. The copy of *Specimen Days* with the original inscription to Doyle is at the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin (shelfmark PS 3220 A1 1882, copy 1).

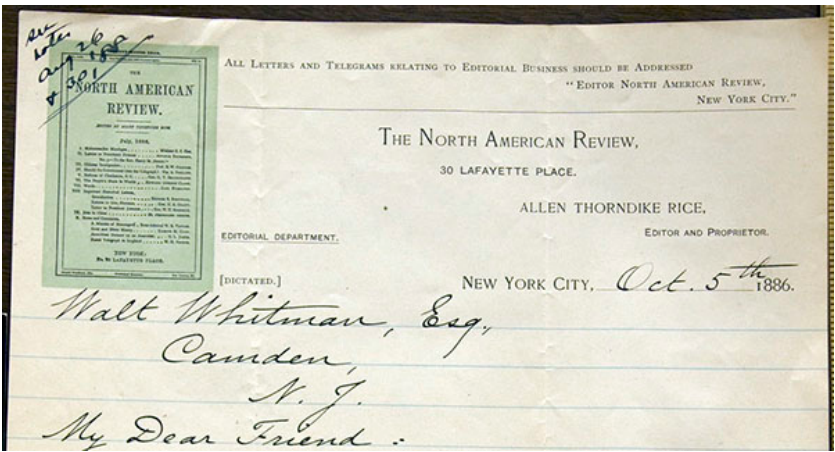
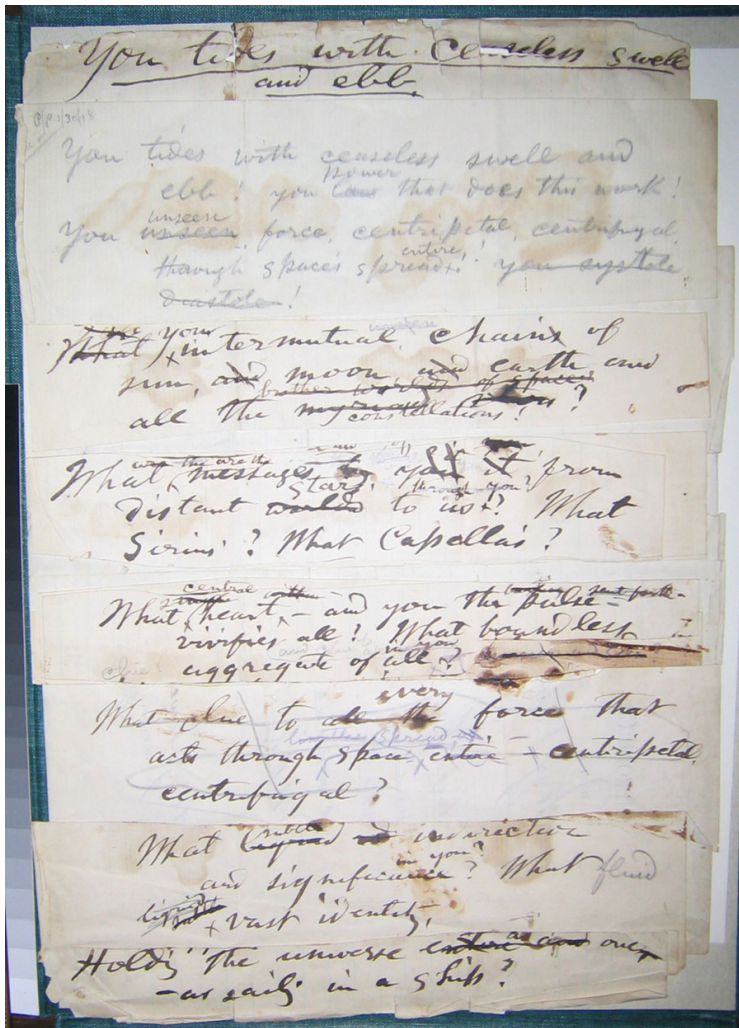


Figure 7: Traubel's note at the top of a letter from James Redpath to Whitman (October 5, 1886), "see notes Aug 26 & 30, '88," points to entries in *With Walt Whitman in Camden* dated August 26, 1888, and August 30, 1888. The latter includes a transcription of the letter, with Whitman's commentary. Charles E. Feinberg Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.





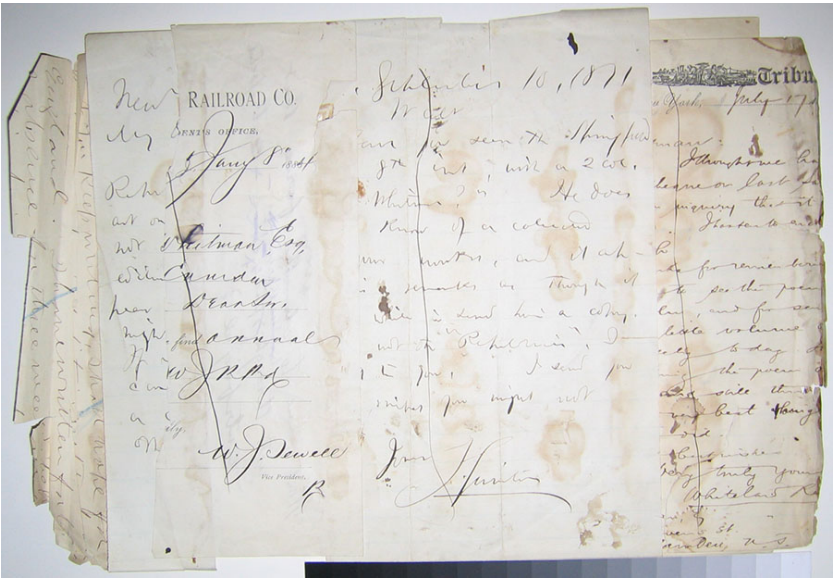


Figure 9: Verso image, manuscript draft of “You Tides With Ceaseless Swell,” constructed out of a series of letters sent to Whitman. Courtesy of Walt Whitman House, Camden, NJ.

You tides with ceaseless swell  
 and ebb.  
 You tides with ceaseless swell and  
 ebb! you <sup>power</sup> law that does this work!  
 You unseen <sup>unseen</sup> force, centripetal, centrifugal,  
 through space's spread <sup>entire!</sup> ! you <sup>systole</sup>  
 diastole!  
 What Take <sup>^</sup> your intermutual <sup>unseen</sup> chains of  
 sun, and moon, and earth, and  
 all the <sup>brother-worlds-of-space?</sup> myriad-stars? constellations?  
 What <sup>^</sup> are the are the messages by <sup>[law?]</sup> of you <sup>2-it you</sup> it, from  
 distant worlds stars, to us <sup>^</sup> through you? ? What  
 Sirius'? What Capella's?  
 What <sup>strong</sup> central heart <sup>^</sup> within— and you the <sup>beating</sup> pulse <sup>sent-forth—</sup> —  
 vivifies all? What boundless  
 clue? aggregate of <sup>^</sup> and clue to all <sup>all ^</sup> in you ? <sup>[illegible]</sup> and seen?  
 What clue to all the <sup>every</sup> force that  
 acts through <sup>^</sup> limitless space <sup>^</sup> spread of— <sup>entire—centripetal,</sup>  
 centrifugal?  
 What liquid <sup>subtle</sup> <sup>[illegible]</sup> indirection  
 and significance in you? ? What fluid  
 liquid <sup>subtle</sup> <sup>^</sup> vast identity,  
 Holding the universe <sup>entire</sup> <sup>as</sup> and one  
 —as sailing in a ship?

Figure 10: Transcription of manuscript draft of “You Tides With Ceaseless Swell.” At the top left corner of the pasted-down piece of paper that includes the first line under the title and the next one, there is a partial note and a series of numbers written in pencil by someone other than Whitman. We have presented the line starting “What clue” with a gray background because it has been crossed out with two vertical lines in the original manuscript.