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The Walt Whitman brand: Leaves of grass and literary promotion, 1855-1892

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THE WALT WHITMAN BRAND:
LEAVES OF GRASS AND LITERARY PROMOTION, 1855-1892

by

Eric Christopher Conrad

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy
degree in English in the Graduate College of The University of Iowa

August 2013

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Ed Folsom

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Graduate College
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

PH.D. THESIS

This is to certify that the Ph. D. thesis of

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has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for
the Doctor of Philosophy degree in English at the August 2013 graduation.

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For Mom and Dad

You might as well think to go in pursuit of the rainbow, and embrace it on the next hill as to embrace the complete idea of poetry even in thought. The best book is only an advertisement of it, such as is sometimes sewed in with its cover.

—*Henry David Thoreau*

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INTRODUCTION

Quoting is like chewing, I fancy—the habit once acquired is indulged in unconsciously. So confirmed has it become upon me that I really am not happy unless I have a quid of a quotation in my mouth. It matters little what the brand. If the Solace of Whittier be not handy, Emerson’s Fine Cut will serve; failing that, Bryant’s Century, Longfellow’s smooth Cavendish, or Stedman’s Honey Leaf come to be rolled like sweet morsels between my lips; in default of other chews or choice I even essay to gnaw upon the plain plug of Walt Whitman. This habit must be amended—and I have made a note of it accordingly.

—“John Paul” [Charles H. Webb], 1876

Contrary to Charles Henry Webb’s playful remarks, Walt Whitman’s literary brand was anything but plain. The poet’s distinctive free verse line inaugurated in the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*—Webb’s last resort behind Emerson, Longfellow, and Bryant—was just one facet of a commercial identity built on personality and promotion as much as it was poetry. In 1910, Horace Traubel, Whitman’s close friend and one of his three literary executors, sent Frank and Mildred Bain an old advertisement for the poet’s work. Traubel and the Bains were in the early stages of a Whitman-inspired, sexual and spiritual love-triangle—the poster, which Whitman had given Traubel, was affectionately passed along as a relic imbued with the poet’s personality. Traubel labeled the simple piece of promotional ephemera “One of Walt Whitman’s early posters.” The advertisement is remarkably simple, composed of just three words: “WALT WHITMAN’S BOOKS.” It is difficult to determine precisely how “early” of a poster it is; presumably it dates back to the early 1870s when Whitman had published not only a number of editions of *Leaves of Grass*, but also *Drum-Taps*, *Passage to India*, and *Democratic Vistas*, that is, enough work to warrant the plural “BOOKS.” For the poster to have been relatively effective though, consumers needed to recognize Whitman’s name

even if they had never read or bought his work. By the time this poster appeared in bookstore windows, Whitman's celebrity—a fame that mixed notoriety and renown—was firmly established. People embraced, despised, and misunderstood him, but Americans knew Whitman and recognized his literary brand nonetheless. This dissertation examines the literary advertising behind “the plain plug of Walt Whitman” during the second half of the nineteenth century. As authors, editors, publishers, and printers were building the foundation of modern literary promotion, the Whitman brand emerged as a complex construction of poetry, personality, and publicity—an enduring commercial identity that has much to tell us about these formative years of American literary production.

When the Boston publisher Ticknor and Fields issued Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's wildly popular *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855)—the same year the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* was published—there were few effective ways to promote the sale of books. Beyond soliciting reviews, basic print advertisements, and the private chatter of small coteries, the world of American literary promotion was in its infancy. The professional American author had arrived by 1820—in fact, Longfellow himself, with his “smooth,” accessible, and recognizable style, was among a small group of poets popular enough to thrive on literary income alone—but it wouldn't be until after the Civil War that authors and publishers alike began to grasp the real impact mass production and the rise of a national market would have on the business of letters. Just as there were seismic shifts in the production, distribution, and marketing of textiles and dry goods, the book trade would find a new life in the postbellum United States.

But even into the 1870s, the role advertising would play in that life was still uncertain. Plagued by its early associations in the United States and Britain with patent medicine fraud, advertising was often considered more humbug than science. Publishers peddling cultural commodities were resistant to the promises of an emerging advertising trade even as producers of soap and cereal molded brand names and launched national marketing campaigns. No matter how popular they both were, Longfellow's *Hiawatha* and B.T. Babbitt's Toilet Soaps functioned differently in American homes and minds; those differences fueled the development of separate strategies for literary marketing. During the second half of the nineteenth century, authors and publishers would spend decades negotiating the cultural capital of literary expression with the financial reality of print markets. While it may have been easy enough for Henry Seymour to appropriate an image from an encyclopedia in 1878 and give birth to the Quaker Oats man, the creation and promotion of a literary brand was trickier business, but business nonetheless.

At the intersection of the professional author's ascent in the United States and the growing centralization and sophistication of the advertising trade, a new anxiety surfaces in the world of nineteenth-century American publishing: how best to sell the literary text and, in turn, market its author. Of course, by the 1920s the rules of the literary market would have become predictable enough that authors and distributors of modernist texts could borrow from—and buttress themselves against—established practices of popular publishing houses and the Hollywood publicity machine. But during the second half of the nineteenth century, the laws of modern literary promotion were being written by trial, error, and accident. This dissertation examines the promotion of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* from 1855 to 1892—a groundbreaking work of poetry whose multiple revisions,

expansions, and editions span a transformative era in the life of American cultural commodities. Intrepid authors like Whitman began to bridge the promotional gap between literature and mass market consumer goods. Through this generation's experiments in book design and print marketing, literary producers adapted nascent trends in advertising to the promotion of fiction and poetry, making the modern literary brand a reality by the 1890s.

Certainly, there is a tradition of scholarship examining the relationship between the literary text and the business of authorship and publishing; however, a study of how literature itself was advertised, an account of the trials and trends of late-nineteenth century literary promotion—especially the marketing of poets and poetry—has yet to be written. With his writing on Cooper, Hawthorne, and Longfellow, William Charvat inaugurated the study of professional authorship in *Publishing in America, 1790-1850* (1959) and the posthumous *The Profession of Authorship in America, 1800-1870* (1968). W.S. Tyron's *Parnassus Corner* (1963), a study of James T. Fields of Ticknor and Fields, complements Charvat's work on authorship by examining the role of the publisher within the same literary economy. Since these seminal works, many scholars have scrutinized the professional lives of American authors, especially the antebellum American Romantics and transatlantic modernists, members of movements whose supposed anti-materialist and anti-populist agendas created ambivalent relationships with the literary marketplace. Other important recent revisions to Charvat's model of professionalism include work on the role of female authors as well as “non-literary” writers for whom the artistic merits of fiction and poetry were a secondary concern. Discussions of all of these

authors—some of whom were professionals, some celebrities, some both—have had little to say directly about the role advertising played in the making of a literary success.

The reluctance to address literary advertising head-on may be one of the last vestiges of Charvat's critical model and its insistence that the role of the scholar is to interpret literature itself. Michael Winship and Leon Jackson have offered thoughtful responses to this critical mode—by emphasizing the collaborative nature of a text's authoring, a process that extends beyond the work of a single, intellectual laborer, and by exploding the restrictive binary of professional and amateur author—but, again, the realities of literary advertising have remained relatively overlooked. Surely, a degree of this hesitation on the part of scholars can also be attributed to the ephemeral nature of advertising, whose various fleeting forms all too easily escape preservation in libraries and personal archives. Yet fascinating cultural histories of the colorful and controversial conventions of soap, tobacco, and car advertisements have overcome these challenges. Jackson Lear's *Fables of Abundance* (1994) and James D. Norris's *Advertising and the Transformation of American Society, 1865-1920* (1990) serve as valuable introductory studies to the rise of advertising as a cultural force in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, yet neither work addresses the promotion of literature in any significant way. Surprisingly, the actual strategies developed during the nineteenth century to advertise fiction and poetry have received little critical attention despite widespread fascination with the professionalization of authorship and the publishing trade more broadly. Studies have shown how every product from shoe blacking to cereal has relied on poetry for advertising copy, but the nature of the *literary* advertisement—what conventions dictated the promotion of poetry—has remained unexamined.

The single most important literary study of advertising to date is Jennifer Wicke's *Advertising Fictions*, an examination of the novel that traces a dialectical relationship between literature and advertising in the United States and Great Britain from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century. Covering novelists Charles Dickens, Henry James, and James Joyce, Wicke argues that the novel developed into *the* major literary form thanks to the vast network of advertising it developed alongside. Most pertinent to my dissertation, Wicke constructs a genealogy of American advertising that links P.T. Barnum's paradigmatic mixture of the literary and the spectacular to the codification of these practices by advertising agents such as George Rowell. For Wicke, early American advertising feeds off of literature, eventually giving way to a specialized language developed in and through the discursive field of corporate-controlled publicity. But like Charvat before her, Wicke fails to engage meaningfully with verse, especially the advertising of poetry itself.

My dissertation examines the nineteenth-century American poet most closely associated with the excesses of advertising: Walt Whitman. Synonymous with self-promotion since the first appearance of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman serves as my focal point as I contextualize his marketing practices within broader trends in nineteenth-century literary advertising. Previous engagement with the promotional side of Whitman's career as a literary professional has been dominated by the poet's most audacious advertising stunts, such as the reviews of the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* that he wrote anonymously and continued to circulate well after his role in their creation was revealed. "The Walt Whitman Brand" reaches out beyond these sensational reviews to

consider the role a variety of print promotions played in establishing the expectations Whitman and his readers had for one another.

David Haven Blake's recent *Walt Whitman and the Culture of American Celebrity* is an important precursor to my project. Blake situates Whitman's obsessive manipulation of his own image within competing modes of celebrity available during the nineteenth century: a residual faith in a natural aristocracy and a growing Jacksonian populism. Blake's Whitman is a huckster and a romantic, a writer whose conception of celebrity was ultimately a political identity. Like Leo Braudy before him, Blake positions Whitman alongside P.T. Barnum, two New York personalities indicative of a proto-celebrity culture. Whitman and Barnum invite comparison to one another, not as curious caricatures of nineteenth-century hucksterism, but as professionals bent on establishing themselves as culturally enduring brands, individuals willing to manipulate their image again and again to maintain relevancy. For a showman like Barnum whose success relied on popular entertainment, the shifting and often conflicting personas that he adopted can easily be written off as disingenuous attempts to turn a profit. Such a dismissal would obscure the intricacy and fluidity of the Barnum brand. Likewise, I would caution against any reading of Whitman that reduced the poet to a set of calculated financial maneuvers. Like Barnum, the Whitman brand—a matrix of texts that includes the poetry *Leaves of Grass* as well as the poet's varied personas—contains multitudes.

My dissertation develops an important new dimension to the study of Whitman and the culture of literary celebrity: an in-depth examination of the promotional artifacts circulating in and around *Leaves of Grass*—the newspaper advertisements, circulars, print ornaments, promotional schemes, posters, broadsides, engravings, book covers, and

critical annexes that were as central to Whitman's brand as his poetry. This book-studies oriented methodology challenges us to consider the role "non-literary" elements have played in the reception and consumption of literary works, especially in establishing the iconic status of authors like Whitman. In this regard, I am deeply indebted to the scholarship of Ed Folsom whose continued work on Whitman's engagement with visual culture and the poet's experience as a bookmaker has invited a more nuanced consideration of *Leaves of Grass* as a series of distinct textual events, each of which is framed, promoted, and circulated in unique ways. This approach to *Leaves of Grass* is apparent throughout the invaluable and ever-expanding online database of Whitman's work, *The Walt Whitman Archive* (whitmanarchive.org), co-edited by Folsom and Kenneth M. Price, where each edition is transcribed and scanned for visitors to examine in an electronic format that still remains conscious of the text's materiality.

In many ways, the *Whitman Archive* already allows for an incredibly rich understanding of Whitman's promotional life. Every known review of Whitman's work is transcribed and encoded there and a searchable bibliography gives a full picture of Whitman's critical reception from 1838 to the present. The absence on the *Archive* of much of the advertising material I address in this project, however, is a testament to how slow even dedicated Whitman scholars have been to grapple earnestly with the realities of the poet's advertising practices. Only just recently have images of *Leaves of Grass Imprints*—a lengthy pamphlet that is by far Whitman's strangest and most ambitious promotional device—been made available; my dissertation provides the first sustained analysis of this fascinating text as well as of a number of Whitman's neglected promotions. Though *Imprints* was widely distributed by Whitman's 1860 publishers and

many libraries have preserved the fragile little booklet, trends in scholarship have shied away from such seemingly banal aspects of literary professionalism. My project gives these overlooked artifacts new life, painting a more complete picture of Whitman the literary promoter and the culture of advertising within which *Leaves of Grass* developed.

By the time the sixth edition of *Leaves of Grass* was published in 1881, readers in the United States and England were well acquainted with the markers of the Walt Whitman brand. On the surface, Whitman's sixth edition, a thick volume bound in yellow cloth and published in Boston by the respected and established firm of James Osgood, barely resembled the first *Leaves of Grass* self-published by the poet in Brooklyn in 1855. Both texts, however, bore the same title, a curious phrase (even Whitman acknowledged that most people preferred "Blades of Grass") that would become synonymous with Whitman and his endless poetic expansions and revisions. More than naming a single, printed object, the title "*Leaves of Grass*" signified a dynamic process: the evolution and promotion of a distinctively American poetics over the second half of the nineteenth century. And just as readers associated *Leaves of Grass* with Whitman, so too did they link the icon on the spine of Osgood's edition—a gently clasped hand with a butterfly perched on it—with the poet as well. After its earliest appearance in 1860, Whitman would revisit and reimagine this butterfly image, transforming it into a prominent symbol of his poetry and personality. With the title and butterfly occupying the spine, the front cover of the 1881 *Leaves of Grass* is filled by only a gold-stamped facsimile of Whitman's signature. Much to the frustration of his countless autograph seekers, Whitman was notoriously protective of his signature and the sanctifying potential it held. So when Whitman *did* provide his autograph, either written by hand or

reproduced mechanically, he was particularly conscious of its significance, ever mindful of the ways those eleven letters represented a web of associations with the Whitman brand. Finally, within the 1881 *Leaves of Grass* readers also encounter Whitman's famous Bowery boy frontispiece of 1855, an image that led those first readers of *Leaves of Grass* to question whether or not they were even looking at a picture of a poet, let alone the actual author. Of course, by 1881 there was no such confusion: though aged and confined to his small house in Camden, New Jersey, Whitman the "Good Gray Poet" was still, if only within the pages of *Leaves of Grass*, "thirty-seven years old in perfect health," "an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos," the product of over twenty-five years of branding, none more forceful than the creation and repeated distribution of the 1855 frontispiece.

Circulating around Whitman's poetry—itself a restless body of work where poems and clusters appeared, disappeared, were rearranged, and merged—these markers of the Whitman brand aimed to represent *Leaves of Grass* and its author to distinct and diverse communities of readers. Even as Whitman's poetic and promotional personas shifted over the six editions of *Leaves of Grass*, the central argument of his brand remained the same: Whitman and his poetry were an American force worthy of attention, posterity, and, at the very least, the price of a book. This dissertation examines the emergence and evolution of the Whitman brand in the context of broader developments in American literary promotion over the second half of the nineteenth century. Whitman's attempts to sell himself and *Leaves of Grass*—efforts that were sometimes prescient, occasionally ludicrous—focus this study of a period in literary advertising when professional authorship was a relatively new reality, poetry was widely read, and

the rise of the literary celebrity was in the making. The multiple publications of *Leaves of Grass* may not, in their time, have defined this moment of American literary history, but retrospectively they invite us to consider how poets and publishers distinguished their literary commodities and authorial personas in rapidly expanding and increasingly unpredictable literary markets.

Each of the following chapters is devoted to a marker of the Whitman brand—an image, symbol, or promotional strategy that served as a metaphoric trademark of the poet and his distinct textual product. For those invested in selling volumes of poetry in the second half of the nineteenth century, developing effective advertising strategies was a matter of concern. What relationship should publishers' promotions have to the literary text? How and when should advertisements be placed? How attentive were audiences to the clamor of publicity or notoriety? To begin to understand the ways authors and publishers answered these questions, my first chapter examines Whitman's promotional strategies for the first three editions of *Leaves of Grass*. During this formative five-year span between 1855 and 1860 three editions of *Leaves of Grass* were published. This relatively short period in Whitman's poetic career reveals much about his early plans for disseminating *Leaves of Grass* and the refinement of his arguments for cultural relevancy and recognition. The first edition of 1855 shows Whitman's earliest experiments incorporating promotional paratext alongside the poetry of *Leaves of Grass*. Excerpts from various newspaper pieces, self-reviews, and even Emerson's personal letter to Whitman were included in many copies of the 1855 edition. In 1856, Whitman added an entire paratexual appendix to *Leaves of Grass* entitled "Leaves Droppings," where he published his public response to Emerson's letter along with a number of reviews of the

first edition. For the 1860 edition, Whitman and his publishers issued a separate and expanded advertising pamphlet, *Leaves of Grass Imprints*, as a complex, though arguably ill-conceived, attempt to promote Whitman's poetry and celebrity. Situating Whitman's odd pairings of poetry and promotion alongside comparable practices in nineteenth-century literary advertising (such as publisher's circulars and appended paratextual catalogues), I demonstrate how Whitman's developing idea of a gymnastic reader—an ideal reader willing to struggle with a literary work—extended into the realm of the literary consumer. As the nation approached a civil war that would alter the Union and the publishing industry alike, Whitman's promotional personas demanded a sophisticated reading practice that ignored nineteenth-century advertising manuals' calls for simplicity, efficiency, and concision.

Though it is the much celebrated 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* that establishes the hallmarks of the Whitman brand most recognizable today, it is the 1860 *Leaves of Grass* that inaugurates the first abstract symbol of Whitman and his poetry: a simple image of a hand with a butterfly perched on it. This symbol appears five times in 1860 alone, but over the course of his career, Whitman would reenact and revise this butterfly icon, transforming it into a central marker of the Whitman brand. Chapter two analyzes the multiple incarnations of Whitman's butterfly logo alongside other contemporary attempts to produce visually recognizable literary brands. I outline multiple stages in the development of Whitman's logo: Whitman's own manuscript manicles (from the Latin *maniculum*, or "little hand"), the visual pun on the printer's fist in 1860 within *Leaves of Grass* and *Imprints*, the photographic staging of Whitman's butterfly portrait in 1877, the appearance of Whitman's first revised manicle in 1881, and the printing of Whitman's

butterfly portrait in 1882. Approached as a dynamic symbol that took on new meaning each time it was reproduced, Whitman's butterfly manicule provides an index of the poet's shifting promotional vision, a subtle indicator of his evolving conception of the American poet as well as his hopes for the reception and consumption of *Leaves of Grass*.

Chapter three focuses on another marker of the Whitman brand closely associated with the poet's hand: his signature. Whether it was reproduced mechanically in and/or on Whitman's books or written by the poet personally, Whitman's signature was frequently utilized by the poet and his publishers to endorse and authenticate Whitman's literary work. When questioned by Horace Traubel about his willingness to sign a skeptical reader's already autographed copy of *Complete Poems & Prose*, Whitman insisted that he would "do anything honest to sell books."¹ This chapter considers autograph collecting and its relationship to the circulation and management of authorial signatures as a promotional practice during the nineteenth century. Though Whitman rarely consented to autograph requests—he once told Emerson that he neither "hurt" autograph seekers nor "[spoiled] them with favors"—beginning with the expurgated British edition of his poetry, *Poems by Walt Whitman* (1868), and ending with the "death bed" edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1892), he included versions of his signature as proof and performance of his growing celebrity, a further suggestion of his presence within the pages of *Leaves of Grass*.² To the poet, those hunting his signature were dismissed as "autographites" and "autograph fiends," but the popular desire for his signature which he privately detested nevertheless informed his "honest" marketing technique. In this chapter I consider

¹ Horace Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden* (various publishers, 1906-1996), 4:396.

² Traubel, *WWWC*, 4:10.

Whitman's innovative use of his signature as a promotional device alongside the popular practice of autograph collecting, demonstrating how Whitman and other poets managed the circulation of their signatures, policing their new found celebrity through the autograph.

My fourth and final chapter builds on previous examinations of Whitman's most famous poses: Whitman the Bowery boy rough of the 1855 frontispiece and Whitman the Good Gray Poet. Of all the markers of the Whitman brand, these two personas are most recognizable to modern audiences, thanks in part to Whitman's careful circulation and management of his own image. By the time the so-called "deathbed" edition of *Leaves of Grass* was published in 1892, the Whitman brand worked to balance the health, sexuality, and bravado of the Bowery rough with the sagacious, yet supposedly neglected, Good Gray Poet. To reduce these often overlapping personas to mere marketing ploys would be a mistake, but, at times, Whitman's contemporaries critiqued them as such. This chapter concludes by examining a string of racialized reactions to Whitman's poetic and promotional personas during the 1860s. Drawing heavily on previously undocumented material from London's *Punch*, the New York *Day Book*, and the New Orleans *Daily Delta*—periodicals representing three cities with unique claims on Whitman—I demonstrate how the Whitman brand was appropriated, distorted, and parodied, turning the marks of Whitman's commercial presence into a brand of a different nature. While Whitman's complicated relationship to the African American literary tradition is well documented, this chapter enriches that body of criticism by considering how the rhetoric of race was mobilized to critique Whitman as an American poet *and* as a literary promoter.

CHAPTER I

“NO OTHER MATTER BUT POEMS”: PROMOTIONAL PARATEXTS AND WHITMAN’S GYMNASTIC READER

In the spring of 1891, Walt Whitman sat in his Camden home and discussed yet another autograph request with his friend Horace Traubel. Nearly each day letters from “autograph fiends” trickled into Whitman’s Mickle Street house, incessant reminders of the public’s appetite for tokens of celebrity like the Good Gray Poet’s distinctive signature.¹ When these letters were addressed to Whitman directly, he often ignored them outright or simply pocketed their return postage. This request, however, was routed through Traubel in hopes that Whitman’s close friend could ensure its sender, the English man-of-letters and early Whitman collector H. Buxton Forman, a more favorable reception. Forman had already cultivated a particularly strong fondness for Whitman’s handwriting. In an earlier letter to Traubel he describes the “electric flash of pleasure” he experiences when reading a Whitman manuscript. “The sight of his handwriting always goes straight to my heart,” Forman writes, “it so thoroughly expresses the personality that is so familiar a guest in my mind, and so loved and respected a guest too.”²

Since Forman was a “good fellow,” Whitman reluctantly consented to the autograph, though “hating like the devil to do so.” His hesitation was fueled, in part, by a

¹ Traubel, *WWWC*, 3:414.

² Letter from H. Buxton Forman to Horace Traubel, February 4, 1891, Charles E. Feinberg Collection of the Papers of Walt Whitman, Library of Congress, Washington, DC. Though the two never met, Whitman expressed an equally sexually charged reaction to Forman’s photograph: “‘And so this is Buxton! How good a face—everything so ample—sweet, too. What a noble head! And the clear eyes! And ears, nose, mouth—the splendid beard! What a feast he must be to know! This face tells me much that I have only been able to suspect from the letters. He is a thoroughly Americanized type—yes, just as you say, *Southern*. And I expect his hand is as good as his eye. I know he is a fellow I should delight to be with!’ After a pause, ‘But I am more and more secluding myself—am forced to—and to be with my friends, oh! that is past, gone, swept away, the current flowing on, on—God knows to what sea! But, Horace, the picture attracts me—puts blood into my old corpus!’” (Traubel, *WWWC*, 8:546-547).

general aversion to autograph collectors, but the main reason Whitman provided this particular signature “under protest” had more to do with the item Forman wanted him to sign: two neatly-folded pages from *Leaves of Grass Imprints*, a sixty-four page promotional pamphlet that publishers William Thayer and Charles Eldridge printed to advertise the 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass*.³ Whitman complied with Forman’s request, yet remained adamant his name had “no place” on *Imprints*, insisting it was “not my book.” “I have nothing to do with it,” he told Traubel, “the whole book was no affair of mine.”⁴

The poet’s signature, however, was enough to convince Forman otherwise. In a two-page note eventually bound into his autographed copy of *Imprints*, Forman writes: “Walt Whitman not only arranged this little book for Thayer & Eldridge, but actually wrote parts of it . . . His autograph on the title-page of this copy tends to authenticate it as his, for it was wholly contrary to his habit so to inscribe books in which he had no part or lot.”⁵ Forman was sure of Whitman’s role in the creation of *Imprints*, but Horace Traubel had reason to be less certain. Just three years prior to his spirited disavowal of *Imprints*, Whitman had taken sole credit for the pamphlet’s creation, calling it a “sort of barricade” he “set . . . up” to hold back the “desperate assaults” of his enemies: “When most everybody lied about me it seemed to me to be in point to tell the truth about myself.”⁶ As Traubel undoubtedly sensed, neither of Whitman’s characterizations of *Imprints* is particularly accurate. *Imprints* is hardly a barricade against assaults on his work (it

³ An electronic version of *Leaves of Grass Imprints* is available through the *Walt Whitman Archive*: <http://whitmanarchive.org/published/imprints/images/index.html>.

⁴ Traubel, *WWWC*, 8:223.

⁵ Forman’s autographed copy of *Imprints* is part of the New York Public Library’s Oscar Lion Collection.

⁶ Traubel, *WWWC*, 1:295.

contains some of the harshest attacks on Whitman and his poetry ever written), nor was it solely the brainchild of Whitman's young and enterprising publishers. The "truth" about *Imprints*—the reality of its relationship to Whitman and its place within the field of nineteenth-century literary advertising—is to be found somewhere between Whitman's two lies.

Despite the fact that Whitman's 1891 comments obviously misrepresent his involvement with Thayer & Eldridge's promotion, *Imprints* has (at best) been relegated to a brief footnote in Whitman scholarship and has been wholly ignored by broader studies of literary promotion. When the pamphlet *is* given cursory consideration, scholars tend to miscategorize its contents, relying on the same basic, yet somewhat misleading description of *Imprints* as a collection of reviews. For example, David S. Reynolds describes *Imprints* as containing "twenty-five reviews of the first two editions, some negative, some positive, including Emerson's letter and Whitman's self-reviews."⁷ For Jerome Loving, *Imprints* is simply "a separately published pamphlet with sixty-four pages of reviews."⁸ Jan Whitt acknowledges *Imprints* as a "unique promotion device," but describes it as filled with "twenty-five reviews of *Leaves of Grass* since its 1855 publication."⁹ Heather Morton even mistakenly reports that "Whitman published and sold a pamphlet of nothing but reviews of *Leaves of Grass*." It is hard to know where to start to demonstrate the web of fallacies in these descriptions. To begin, not only does

⁷ David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 386.

⁸ Jerome Loving, *Walt Whitman: The Song of Himself* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 239.

⁹ Jan Whitt, "Leaves of Grass *Imprints* (1860)," *Walt Whitman: An Encyclopedia*, ed. J. R. LeMaster and Donald D. Kummings (New York: Garland, 1998), 381.

Imprints contain more than just reviews, but it was given away for free.¹⁰ Beyond descriptions that reduce *Imprints* to a collection of reviews of the first two editions of *Leaves of Grass*, no one has provided a sustained analysis of *Imprints'* participation in the marketing of Whitman's poetry and celebrity in 1860 or its role in mythologizing the creation of *Leaves of Grass*. In this chapter I situate *Imprints* within dual contexts: Whitman's evolving promotional strategies for the three antebellum editions of *Leaves of Grass* and the nascent logic of nineteenth-century literary advertising. Examined within this framework, *Imprints* emerges as a unique event in the history of literary promotion and a pivotal moment in Whitman's conception of his readers and of his own celebrity.¹¹

Scholars have understandably been fascinated by Whitman's market-related poetic personas in *Leaves of Grass*, yet much of the actual promotional work done to advertise and sell *Leaves of Grass* and its author has remained unexamined.¹² This chapter is devoted to that promotional material, the kind of advertising texts circulating in and around the earliest iterations of *Leaves of Grass* and its contemporaries. Many of these texts—reviews, print advertisements, posters, broadsides, circulars, pamphlets, squibs, and blurbs—can accurately be described by Gerard Genette's term *paratext*, in that these promotional forms “are related to but not directly part of” the poetic text itself.

¹⁰ Heather Morton, “Democracy, Self-Reviews and the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*,” *Virginia Quarterly Review* (Spring 2005), 239.

¹¹ Whitman's promotional practices in *Imprints* have remained relatively unexplored, though I am indebted to Edward Whitley's article “Presenting Walt Whitman: ‘Leaves-Droppings’ as Paratext,” *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* (Summer 2001), 1-17, which offers an analysis of the 1856 *Leaves of Grass* through Gerard Genette's *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. Whitley's methodology invites further consideration of Whitman's odd incorporation of reviews, sales-notices, and letters alongside the poetry in *Leaves of Grass*.

¹² For examples see Sean Francis, "Outbidding at the Start the Old Cautious Hucksters": Promotional Discourse and Whitman's 'Free' Verse," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 57 (December 2002), 381-406; and David Dowling, “Transcending Capital: Whitman’s Poet Figure and the Marketing of *Leaves of Grass*,” in *Capital Letters: Authorship in the Antebellum Literary Market* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009), 82-105.

For Genette, the two most basic categories of paratext are *peritext*—things like prefaces, titles, and forewords that remain separate from the “text proper” but “fall within the material bounds” of a book like *Leaves of Grass*—and *epitext*—interviews, reviews, or letters, for example, items usually “not materially appended to the text within the same volume but circulating, as it were, freely, in a virtually limitless physical and social space.” According to Genette’s model, these paratextual elements “ensure the text’s presence in the world” by extending and promoting its “reception and consumption.”¹³ Of course, so much of advertising—indeed, much of textuality in general—falls outside the parameters of Genette’s model of paratext as a purely linguistic event. While this chapter draws heavily on Genette’s work, more robust theories of textuality, like those developed by Jerome McGann, are equally important to understanding the design and function of even the most basic promotional device. McGann’s notion of a text as “a laced network of linguistic and bibliographical codes” invites the consideration of those bibliographical elements ignored by the text/paratext distinction: typefaces, bindings, paper, and print ornaments, for example.¹⁴ Though much of this chapter will deal with the linguistic elements of Whitman’s promotional texts, in no way is this to suggest that the bibliographical text necessarily functions as subordinate to the linguistic text in these instances. As McGann reminds us, both “are symbolic and signifying mechanisms . . . [and] ‘meaning’ in literary works results from the exchanges these two great semiotic mechanisms work with each other.”¹⁵

¹³ Genette, *Paratexts*, 344.

¹⁴ Jerome McGann, *The Textual Condition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 13.

¹⁵ McGann, *Textual Condition*, 67. McGann’s notion of the literary text (as opposed to a text imagined to be primarily informational), especially his definition of poetry as “language that calls attention to itself, that takes its own textual activities as its ground subject” (10), becomes somewhat problematic when

Nineteenth-Century Promotional Paratexts

At sixty-four pages, *Imprints* is far different from the “traditional advertising supplement” it has been characterized as being.¹⁶ While most antebellum publishers, Thayer & Eldridge among them, distributed free circulars through the mail or bound them into the backs of books to advertise their publications, these pamphlets were hardly comprehensive guides to a given text’s reception. *Imprints*, however, has been described as containing “nearly every review [*Leaves of Grass*] had received since 1855—the positive, the negative, the congratulatory, and the belligerent.”¹⁷ With its lengthy mélange of periodical reprints, the sheer volume of criticism in *Imprints* distinguishes it from the crisp, concise advertising copy of traditional circulars.

The prevailing logic of mid-nineteenth-century advertisers—even at a time when, in the words of American advertising agency pioneer George Presbury Rowell, “the science of advertising [was] still a puzzle”—was to keep promotional notices simple, direct, and brisk, all of the things *Leaves of Grass Imprints* is not.¹⁸ “It is in vain to reason with your customers,” Rowell emphasizes in *The Men Who Advertise* (1870), a quasi-history of advertising packaged to promote Rowell’s *American Newspaper Directory*.¹⁹ “Customers do not reason, do not arrive at a purchase by the slow method of

considering *Imprints*. For McGann, “poetical texts—unlike propaganda and advertising texts, which are also highly self-conscious constructions—turn readers back upon themselves, make them attentive to what they are doing when they read” (11). As both a promotional device and a primer for the type of reading practice Whitman demands for *Leaves of Grass*, *Imprints* blurs McGann’s distinction between the literary and the informational, resting uncomfortably on the edge of each.

¹⁶ Whitley, “Presenting Walt Whitman,” 14.

¹⁷ David Haven Blake, *Walt Whitman and the Culture of American Celebrity*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 111-112.

¹⁸ George P. Rowell, *Forty Years an Advertising Agent, 1865-1905* (New York: Printer’s Ink, 1906), 32.

military ‘approaches,’ impelled by an elaborate ratiocination, but carry the coveted commodity by a sudden assault, pricked up to it by the indomitable bayonets of the artists in advertising.”²⁰ The simplicity of graphic and verbal design espoused by Rowell and others during the second half of the nineteenth century would become the universal doctrine of modern advertising by the 1920s. Frank LeRoy Blanchard, who for a time worked as the managing editor of Rowell’s *Printers’ Ink*, directed would-be advertisers to “let your sentences be brief and to the point . . . we must tell our story graphically, in a few words, and in such an eye-appealing way that it may be taken in at a glance.”²¹ By the end of the First World War, advertisers could agree that “long and involved sentences” were “tiresome and unattractive” to consumers. Blanchard even suggested emulating the “simplicity of style and directness of a statement” of the Bible, where the “entire story of the Creation is told in less than a thousand words.”²²

Brevity was “the soul of advertising,” but it was so out of necessity.²³

Manufacturers and publishers were acutely aware that their promotions were ephemeral,

¹⁹ *The Men Who Advertise; An Account of Successful Advertisers, Together with Hints on the Method of Advertising*. ed. George P. Rowell (New York: Nelson Chesman, 1870), 126. The entire *American Newspaper Directory* (1869) is reprinted in *The Men Who Advertise* alongside original prose pieces exploring the “art” of advertising and biographical sketches of figures like P.T. Barnum and Robert Bonner as well as publishing firms such as Harper & Brothers and J.B. Lippincott & Co. As he explains in his autobiography, Rowell’s *Directory* was the first serious effort to make public accurate circulation records of newspapers competing for advertising revenue. Both the *American Newspaper Directory* and *Printer’s Ink* (founded in 1888) were designed to empower the advertiser at a time when the ‘art’ and ‘science’ of promotion were still widely debated. Rowell’s *Directory*, much to the dismay of many periodical editors, made it possible for advertisers to leverage fair advertising rates against Rowell’s accurate newspaper circulation figures. In *Forty Years*, Rowell continually stresses the value of advertising in newspapers with large circulations. His attempts to quantify the value of advertising in a given newspaper sought to demystify and professionalize the advertising business.

²⁰ Rowell, *The Men Who Advertise*, 126.

²¹ Frank LeRoy Blanchard, *The Essentials of Advertising* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1921), 31.

²² Blanchard, *Essentials of Advertising*, 31.

²³ Nathaniel C. Fowler, *About Advertising and Printing* (Boston: L. Barta, 1889), 47.

that even the most elaborate print advertisement had limited time to deliver its pitch before it was passed over, discarded, or, even worse, forgotten. The very first words of *The Men Who Advertise* declare that “an advertisement is in its nature transitory and perishing,” only “preserved in archives and libraries . . . by accident” or “when so connected with news and literature that to dissever it is impossible.”²⁴ The afterlife *Imprints* enjoyed with Whitman and his disciples demonstrates that “to dissever” Thayer & Eldridge’s pamphlet from *Leaves of Grass* was, if not “impossible,” at least discouraged.²⁵ The bulk and complexity of *Imprints* alone suggests that Whitman and his publishers thought of the pamphlet as more than strictly “transitory and perishing.” The same, however, cannot be said of *Imprints’* contemporaries.

The condensed, sparse style of many literary publishers’ print promotions evinces an anxiety of ephemerality that *Imprints* seems to defy. In his introductory guide *About Advertising and Printing* (1889), Nathaniel C. Fowler, best remembered today as co-creator of Prudential Insurance’s rock of Gibraltar logo, outlines his theory for designing promotional pamphlets. “Circulars should tell the story in the fewest possible words,” Fowler insists: “A circular is not a work of literature, or a book, and nobody so considers it. If it does not strike the mind within a few seconds from the time the eye lights upon it, there is not one chance in a hundred of its being read except by those who read everything which is put into their hands, and that class of people is seldom profitable to any commercial house.”²⁶ Since an advertisement was not, for Fowler, a “work of

²⁴ Rowell, *The Men Who Advertise*, 3.

²⁵ For example, in 1872 *Imprints* is the first and earliest book listed in the appendix to *As a Strong Bird on Pinions Free* under the heading “Publications Critical and Personal Relating to Leaves of Grass and their Author” before William Douglas O’Connor’s *The Good Gray Poet*. Later, Richard Maurice Bucke reprints Whitman’s review of *Imprints* in his biography of Whitman in 1883.

literature,” he could comfortably advise that pamphlets be “as brief, as pointed, and as intelligible, as . . . a text-book” and that “the shorter the circular the better.”²⁷ It is to be assumed, Fowler instructs, “that half of the people who receive [a circular] think that they care nothing about its contents; consequently the whole affair should be so arranged, typographically and otherwise, that it will be sufficiently read to have the gist of its contents quickly absorbed, perhaps unconsciously” by consumers. The realities of printing costs and consumer attention spans demanded that advertisers use circulars to tell a “story briefly, immediately, and when through telling it, stop.”²⁸

Two promotional pamphlets distributed by the Boston publishing firm Ticknor and Fields are fair representatives of the kind of advertising material *Imprints* circulated among and defined itself against. The front cover of the catalog *Popular Books Published by Ticknor and Fields* (1855) has a simple, text-based design; the only embellishment is a quotation from eighteenth-century British bishop Joseph Butler: “There is a kind of physiognomy in the titles of books no less than in the faces of men, by which a skilful observer will as well know what to expect from the one as the other.” The readers of Ticknor and Fields publications, the circular implies, were precisely those “skilful” observers who, merely by examining the enclosed list of books for sale, could accurately judge their worth. Many publisher’s circulars operated under the same logic, sometimes literally only supplying potential customers with titles and prices. Ticknor and Fields, innovators in the art of literary promotion, advertised their books with slightly more flair, but still remained well within the bounds of decorum.

²⁶ Fowler, *About Advertising and Printing*, 76-77.

²⁷ Fowler, *About Advertising and Printing*, 77.

²⁸ Fowler, *About Advertising and Printing*, 77.

For example, the following page dedicated to advertising Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854) is as indulgent as a publisher of Ticknor and Fields' stature gets. Seven squibs, or short quotations—what we would now call *blurbs*—are reprinted alongside the requisite title, contents, and price. For a literary publisher operating in the 1850s and 1860s, this was a significant amount of advertising space to devote to a single book, though it is still compact enough to quote here in its entirety:

HENRY D. THOREAU.
WALDEN; OR, LIFE IN THE WOODS. CONTENTS: Economy – Where I Lived, and what I lived for – Reading – Sounds – Solitude – Visitors – The Bean-Field – The Village – The Ponds – Baker Farm – Higher Laws – Brute Neighbors – House Warming – Former Inhabitants – Winter Visitors – The Pond in Winter – Spring – Conclusion. 1 vol. 16mo. Price, \$1.00.

‘When I wrote the following pages, or rather the bulk of them, I lived alone in the woods, a mile from any neighbor, in a house which I had built myself, on the shore of Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts, and earned my living by the labor of my hands only.’ —*Author*.

This strikingly original and interesting book has been widely recommended by the press.

‘A remarkable book. There is nothing like it in literature. Strikingly original, singular, and most interesting.’ —*Salem Register*.

‘This book was written because the authors had something to say. “Walden” may be pronounced a live book – a sincere, hearty production.’ —*Philadelphia Register*.

‘Full of eloquent thought and interest from beginning to end.’ —*N. Y. Tribune*.

‘“Walden” is a prose poem. It is a book to be read, and re-read, and read again.’ —*Worcester Palladium*.

‘Thoreau writes almost as many thoughts as words. Indeed, his pages are more full of ideas than commas.’ —*Newark Advertiser*.

‘This is a remarkable history of remarkable experiences.’ —*New Bedford Mercury*.

‘This is one of the most singular, as well as one of the best of works.’
 – *Lowell Courier*.

Ticknor and Fields did not even lavish Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, soon to become their most popular antebellum author, with this much advertising space. Yet, even with the relative excess of this promotion, Ticknor and Fields keep their message clear and direct: *Walden* is a “singular” book, a sound one-dollar investment, a “prose poem” to “be read, and re-read, and read again.” The periodical excerpts—all which cater to a cultured, northeastern audience—require little thought of readers; the value of *Walden* can be “taken in at a glance.”

By 1861 the outward appearance of Ticknor and Fields’ circulars had become more sophisticated, updated with an engraving of William Ticknor on the front cover and a depiction of the Old Corner Bookstore on the back (Figure 1.1). As these images suggest, Ticknor and Fields continued to emphasize the character and respectability of their firm over the virtues of any given author or text. Inside, the promotional strategy remains consistent with that of the 1850s, though no February 1861 advertisement approaches the exuberance of the *Walden* notice above. Instead, authors like James Russell Lowell, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and Longfellow are represented simply by the titles and prices of their books and, at most, three brief periodical squibs. For instance, preparing the way for the publication of *Songs in Many Keys*, Holmes’s entire body of work is endorsed through two short quotations:

“As he is everybody’s favorite, there is no occasion for critics to meddle with him, either to censure or to praise. He can afford to laugh at the whole reviewing fraternity. His wit is all his own, so sly and tingling, but without a drop of ill-nature in it, and never leaving a sting behind. His humor is so grotesque and queer, that it reminds one of the frolics of Puck; and deep pathos mingles with it so naturally, that, when the reader’s eyes

are brimming with tears, he knows not whether they have their source in sorrow or in laughter.” – *North American Review*.

“For him we can find no living prototype: to track his footsteps we must travel back as far as Pope or Dryden; and to my mind it would be well if some of our own bards would take the same journey, provided always it produced the same result. Lofty, poignant, graceful, grand, high of thought and clear of word, we could fancy ourselves reading some pungent page of “Absalom and Achitophel,” or of the “Moral Epistles.” – *Miss Mitford*.

Holmes may have been able to laugh at “the whole reviewing fraternity,” but the culture of mid-nineteenth-century book reviewing still provided his publishers with the chief fodder for their advertisements. Similarly, six years removed from the wild success of Longfellow’s *Hiawatha*, Ticknor and Fields advertised Longfellow’s poetry in a comparable fashion, this time drawing on reviews by Rufus Griswold and E. P. Whipple—two names Whitman trades on at the beginning of his 1855 promotional paratext. By the 1850s, concise periodical reprints used in moderation were standard elements in literary advertisements as they continue to be today.

The playful characterization above of Holmes’s humor as “grotesque and queer” is as close as Ticknor and Fields come to appropriating unfavorable press in their promotional material. Periodical squibs were, as a rule, to be kept brief and unquestionably positive. *Leaves of Grass Imprints* not only reprints entire, lengthy articles on Whitman and his poetry, but many of them—like Griswold’s assessment of *Leaves of Grass* as “a mass of stupid filth”—are decidedly negative, requiring considerable effort by readers to sort through attacks on Whitman in order to form a rational opinion on his work. Not even P. T. Barnum, a figure synonymous with the excesses of self-promotion, dared to include potentially injurious periodical reprints in his official print advertisements. An 1869 salesman’s dummy of *Struggles and Triumphs*

reprints four pages of squibs—one hundred and thirty extracts in total—originally published in eighteen different states, ranging in length from three to seventy-five words, and not one phrase can be construed as negative.²⁹ It is safe to say that if the Great Showman himself avoided recirculating negative reviews of his book and character as a means of advertising, Whitman’s appropriation of unfavorable press is radically unorthodox.

Unlike the promotion of *Struggles and Triumphs*, no salesman’s dummies were used to sell the 1860 *Leaves of Grass*; instead, traveling agents sold Whitman’s poetry with actual samples of the book. Publishing houses like Thayer & Eldridge relied on agents armed with sample-copies of their products to move merchandise and expand business into rural areas. By the 1850s, these canvassers were much maligned. Already, in their first call for agents, Thayer & Eldridge were hard at work dispelling popular claims that canvassers “lose something of their respectability” by selling books, defensively lauding the trade as an occupation which “confers honor and dignity upon whoever engages in it.”³⁰ Such lofty rhetoric was intended to bolster a workforce on which Thayer & Eldridge were dependent. After all, agents were the long arms of the literary market, nodes in a network of distribution which promised to carry Whitman to readers beyond urban centers of commerce and culture. Individual agents were free to sell whichever titles in the Thayer & Eldridge catalog they preferred, but Whitman’s publishers strongly encouraged their salespeople to select “one work of a good character”

²⁹ P. T. Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs: or Forty Years’ Recollections of P. T. Barnum*, Hartford: J. B. Burr, 1869. Canvasser’s copy held by The American Antiquarian Society.

³⁰ A copy Thayer & Eldridge’s announcement to prospective agents is held by The American Antiquarian Society. The circular was reissued when Horace Wentworth regained ownership of the firm. See *New firm : New catalogue of books: Thayer & Eldridge, successors to Wentworth, Hewes & Co. : Circular to agents* (Boston: 1859).

that the agent had “a personal enthusiasm for” and to which he or she could devote the necessary “attention and energy.” Given Thayer & Eldridge’s advice, it is conceivable that an agent with a “personal enthusiasm” for Whitman could have canvassed solely for *Leaves of Grass*, but even if that was the case, agents were not likely toting *Imprints* around with them during their daily sales. Unlike canvassers’ books which remained tied to the agents that showcased them, *Imprints* circulated solely and freely through the mail, giving the pamphlet the potential for an even greater readership. Certainly not a traditional circular, and equally certainly not a canvasser’s dummy, yet containing elements of each, *Imprints* is difficult to define—an advertisement whose length, uncommon complexity, and free distribution distinguish it from related methods of literary publicity and make it an absolutely unique object in the history of literary advertising.

The simplicity and proven efficiency of traditional circulars and salesmen’s dummies made these forms of advertising immensely attractive to nineteenth-century publishers. *Imprints*, however, ignores the key principles that govern those time-tested promotions. One dramatic departure—precisely what gets ignored in most descriptions of the pamphlet—is the odd assortment of material reprinted within *Imprints*. Whitman’s circular contains twenty-six individual entries, most of which are previously published reviews of the first and second edition of *Leaves of Grass*. It is important, however, to recognize that not all of the texts assembled within *Imprints* fit this description. For example, the last ten pages of the pamphlet include eight pieces of paratext, none of which is a review of *Leaves of Grass*. The first of these is the *Cincinnati Commercial*’s hyperbolic attack on “A Child’s Reminiscence” (later titled “Out of Cradle Endlessly

Rocking”), Whitman’s 1859 “Christmas gift” to the readers of Henry Clapp Jr.’s New York *Saturday Press*. Within *Imprints*, “A Child’s Reminiscence” essentially brands Whitman’s new *Leaves of Grass*. Aside from a “Contents” page listing the titles included in the advertised volume, “Reminiscence” is the only poem new to the 1860 edition mentioned by name in the notices themselves. Yet, the *Commercial*’s critique, even of a text as prominent as “Reminiscence,” is only of a single poem, not of *Leaves of Grass* in its entirety. Likewise, articles in *Imprints* such as the Brooklyn *City News*’s “A Ballad of Long Island” (which Whitman’s wrote himself) and the *Saturday Press*’s “Waifs from Washington” both deal exclusively with “A Child’s Reminiscence.” When these three pieces are recognized as something other than “reviews” of the first and second edition of *Leaves of Grass*, “A Child’s Reminiscence” is transformed in the context of *Imprints* into a poem that argues for Whitman’s artistic productivity and cultural importance in the years following the 1856 *Leaves of Grass* while simultaneously representing the type of new poetry Thayer & Eldridge’s volume promised to include.

Published in the *Saturday Press* under the pseudonym “Saerasmid,” Charles Desmarais Gardette’s parody “Yourn, Mine, and Any-Day,” which targets Whitman’s “You and Me and To-Day” (a poem printed in Clapp’s paper three weeks after “Reminiscence”), is another non-review within *Imprints*. When it first appeared in the *Saturday Press*, Gardette’s parody catered to an audience intimately aware of Whitman and his work, readers who could easily understand “Yourn, Mine, and Any-Day” as the careful mockery of “You and Me and To-Day” that Gardette intended. By transforming Whitman’s poem, line-by-line, into a farce, “Yourn” is meticulously faithful to its referent. Whitman’s exclamations (“This year! Sending itself ahead countless years to

come.”) become Gardette’s punch-lines (“This Nonsense! Sending itself ahead of any sane comprehension this side of the Jordan.”). Within the *Saturday Press*, the true humor of “Yourn” is its specificity, its willingness to go beyond a general parody of Whitman’s poetic voice. Readers of the *Saturday Press* could hold consecutive issues of the paper in their hands and compare Gardette’s verse with Whitman’s from the week before for a full appreciation of the joke.³¹ When that parody is reprinted within *Imprints*, though, no such direct comparison is possible; the intimacy of the *Saturday Press* is lost. Yet, “Yourn” retains a trace of the reading community from which it emerged. By infusing *Imprints* with that hint of Whitman’s notoriety in the *Saturday Press*, the reprinted parody constructs a subtle argument for the poet’s celebrity. Not only does “Yourn” suggest that Whitman is prominent enough to be the butt of an elaborate joke, but the parody doubly reifies the existence of a public for Whitman’s poetry. Readers who recognized the original occasion for Gardette’s parody (especially within *Imprints*) could congratulate themselves on possessing cultural capital which included knowledge of Whitman’s poetry. Conversely, readers confused by “Yourn” are left with a distinct sense that they have missed a joke, that surely a community exists for whom the parody might make sense, let alone be funny. Whether a reader laughed or not, “Yourn, Mine, and Any-Day” implied the importance knowing Whitman.

Perhaps the most amusing of *Imprints*’ non-reviews are a pair of articles—one from the *New York Tribune*, the other from the *New York Constellation*—reporting that Whitman had given up poetry entirely to work as an omnibus driver. In these short

³¹ Walt Whitman, “You and Me and To-Day,” *New-York Saturday Press*, January 14, 1860, 2; Charles Desmarais Gardette [“Saerasmid”], “Yours and Mine, and Any-Day, A Yawp after Walt Whitman,” *New York Saturday Press*, January 21, 1860, 1.

pieces, *Leaves of Grass* is mentioned only once. Their emphasis is not on Whitman's literary work but on his manual labor, extending the poet's celebrity beyond his artistic production to include the quotidian aspects of his life and rumored occupations. As these articles demonstrate, *Imprints* concludes with a decidedly swift shift away from the poetic texts of 1855 and 1856 towards Whitman as a celebrity-text himself.

Whitmanian Paratexts

The common over-simplification of *Imprints* as a collection of reviews has helped to obscure the text as the anomaly it is; however, the pamphlet is anything but an oddity in Whitman's evolving use of promotional paratext surrounding the three antebellum editions of *Leaves of Grass*. Shortly after the publication of *Leaves of Grass* in 1855, Whitman began framing his poetry with selections of critical prose printed in the United States and Britain over an eleven-year span.³² Whitman's paratextual frame within the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* was crude at first. In the earliest copies that include the poet's additions, Whitman pasted a newspaper clipping of Emerson's letter inside the front cover. Later he tipped in an assortment of reviews (including self-reviews) of *Leaves of Grass* along with articles on the state of American and English poetry. At its most evolved, the 1855 paratext—six reviews (and extracts from two more) printed by Whitman from carefully worked-over proofs—was bound into the back of *Leaves of Grass*. In this form, Whitman's 1855 paratext clearly anticipates "Leaves-Droppings," essentially an appendix to the second edition containing Emerson's famous encomium greeting the poet "at the beginning of a great career," along with Whitman's open

³² E.P. Whipple's review of Rufus W. Griswold's "Poets and Poetry of America" was originally published in Boston's *North American Review*(1844); it is the oldest article that Whitman includes in his 1855 paratext. The only British periodical extract Whitman includes in 1855 is "Have Great Poets Become Impossible?," published in London's *Eclectic Review* (July 1850).

response to his “Master,” as well as nine previously published reviews of the first edition. Three elements of the late-1855 additions reappear in both “Droppings” and *Imprints*: Emerson’s letter to Whitman, a self-review entitled “An English and American Poet,” and Whitman’s phrenological chart. No doubt Whitman’s paratextual strategies and the motives behind them underwent significant changes throughout these antebellum editions, but as the three repeated paratextual units in 1855, 1856, and 1860 illustrate, Whitman remained fascinated by the potential to create and reflect a public for his poetry by positioning non-poetic material (mainly periodical reviews and short articles) as a complement to *Leaves of Grass*. Whether this material was being pasted into his book (as is the case with the earliest appearances of Emerson’s letter in 1855), included in a pre-planned appendix like “Droppings,” or circulated free of charge through the mail like *Imprints*, Whitman’s separate paratexts frame the first three editions of *Leaves of Grass* in unique ways.

Given the nature of Whitman’s 1855 paratextual additions, it is tempting to think of Whitman’s promotional strategies for the first edition as an afterthought. But before Whitman appended promotional material to the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*—maybe even before the volume was set in type—he was already tinkering with novel ways to introduce his poetry to American readers, crafting printed proofs for a series of advertisements grand enough to announce “America’s first distinctive poem.”³³ One brief notice that Whitman considered running in the paper was modest in size if not sentiment:

The New Poet.
America’s first distinctive poem—
“Leaves of Grass,” by Walt Whitman in one
volume, small quarto, green and gilt. \$1,50. Pub-

³³ Whitman’s unpublished advertisements for the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* are held in the Charles E. Feinberg Collection of the Papers of Walt Whitman, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

ished by
— — — st., N.Y.

A more subdued variation of this inexpensive announcement was actually printed to advertise *Leaves of Grass*, but, as would be true for all of Whitman's self-funded projects, his vision for the book's design and promotion was always larger than his budget.³⁴ Three unpublished advertisements for the 1855 edition that Whitman preserved until his death reveal a poet who quite early on envisioned a sophisticated reading public willing to consume lengthy print promotions, advertisements designed to familiarize readers with and prepare them for *Leaves of Grass*. These unpublished advertisements are truly the boldest of Whitman's early promotional paratexts, even more daring than what Whitman ended up appending to his book. We often think of Whitman's self-reviews as the most brazen of promotions, but in reality, as sensational as they seem, they are part of an established culture of nineteenth-century puffing that even a firm like Ticknor and Fields engaged in. Nothing printed in the mid-nineteenth century, however, comes close to Whitman's unpublished notices for the first edition. Since these advertisements have not been reprinted and are not currently available on the *Walt Whitman Archive*, I transcribe them here in their entirety for the first time.

Each of these three unpublished advertisements emphasizes a different aspect of Whitman's poetic accomplishments in *Leaves of Grass*. In the first notice reprinted below, Whitman underscores the "Idea of the Kosmos" in his work. As Matt Miller explains, Whitman used the word *kosmos* with "care and specificity" in 1855, working from a personal definition of the term as "a person who[se] scope of mind, or range in a

³⁴ For a discussion of Whitman's short advertisements in 1855 see Ezra Greenspan, *Walt Whitman and the American Reader* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 91-93.

particular science, includes all, the whole known universe.”³⁵ The American poet, as defined by Whitman in the advertisement, is a Kosmos poet, one capable of “enveloping all partial and sectional ideas”:

An American Poet at last!

WALT WHITMAN’S “Leaves of Grass” are the commencement for the literature of the world of a large fresh growth of an American School, in place of the romantic school, and of the classical and aristocratic schools. Enveloping all partial and sectional ideas these new poems are pervaded by the

Idea of the Kosmos,

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

“A northerner soon as a northerner—a planter nonchalant and hospitable,
 A Yankee bound his own way, ready for trade, with the limberest joints of
 man and the sternest joints of man,
 A boatman over Ontario, Erie, Michigan or Champlain—a Hoozier, or
 Badger, or Buckeye,
 A Louisianian or Georgian—a poke-easy from sandhills and pines,
 At home on Canadian snowshoes, or the fishbanks, or up in the bush,
 At home in the fleet of iceboats, sailing with the rest and tacking,
 At home on the hills of Vermont, or in the woods of Maine, or the Texan
 ranch,
 Comrade of Californians—comrade of free Northwesterners—loving their
 big proportions,
 Comrade of raftsmen—comrade of all who shake hands and welcome to
 drink and meat;
 A learner with the simplest, a teacher of the thoughtfulest,
 A novice beginning experient of myriads of seasons,
 Of every hue and trade and rank—of every caste and religion,
 Not merely of the New World, but of Africa, Europe or Asia,
 A farmer, mechanic or artist—a gentleman, sailor, lover, quaker, prisoner,
 fancyman, rowdy, lawyer, physician or priest.”³⁶

³⁵ Matt Miller, *Collage of Myself: Walt Whitman and the Making of Leaves of Grass* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), 145.

³⁶ These lines are an early draft of Section 16 from “Song of Myself”:

A southerner soon as a northerner, a planter nonchalant and hospitable,
 A Yankee bound my own way . . . ready for trade . . . my joints the limberest joints on earth and
 the sternest joints on earth,
 A Kentuckian walking the vale of the Elkhorn in my deerskin leggings,
 A boatman over the lakes or bays or along coasts . . . a Hoosier, a Badger, a Buckeye,

The “Leaves of Grass[”] bound in one volume small quarto, green and full
gilt, \$1,50.

— — — st., N.Y.

The included poetry excerpt is a section from an early version of the poem eventually titled “Song of Myself.” Differences between the poem as it appears in the advertisement above and the lines as they are printed in the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* indicate that Whitman likely composed these early print advertisements while he was still writing and revising the first edition, probably working from a manuscript version the poem. Noticeable typographical errors—like the unintentionally exclusive line “A northerner soon as a northerner”—suggest this was probably the first, if not the lone, proof Whitman had made. As this unpublished 1855 epitext demonstrates, Whitman’s promotional vision for *Leaves of Grass* was not an afterthought to the publication of his book; it was not a desperate attempt to stir up interest in his book when initial sales proved dismal—it developed alongside the poetry itself. Whitman was envisioning a sales pitch for his poetry (and getting that language set in type) before his first edition was actually in print.

The short ads Whitman ran to announce the 1855 edition do not exhibit the same rhetorical and typographical flourishes of his longer unpublished notices, but the brief announcements offered one major advantage: they allowed Whitman, who financed the

A Louisianian or Georgian, a poke-easy from sandhills and pines,
At home on Canadian snowshoes or up in the bush, or with fishermen off Newfoundland,
At home in the fleet of iceboats, sailing with the rest and tacking,
At home on the hills of Vermont or in the woods of Maine or the Texan ranch,
Comrade of Californians comrade of free northwesterners, loving their big proportions,
Comrade of raftsmen and coalmen—comrade of all who shake hands and welcome to drink and meat;
A learner with the simplest, a teacher of the thoughtfulest,
A novice beginning experient of myriads of seasons,
Of every hue and trade and rank, of every caste and religion,
Not merely of the New World but of Africa Europe or Asia a wandering savage,
A farmer, mechanic, or artist a gentleman, sailor, lover or quaker,
A prisoner, fancy-man, rowdy, lawyer, physician or priest. (*LG* 1855, 23-24)

printing of the first edition, to advertise his work cheaply.³⁷ The dense copy of Whitman's extended advertisements would have been considerably more expensive to publish on a meaningful scale. This alone likely explains why Whitman never circulated these long notices throughout the press in this form. He did, however, return to them when composing at least two of three anonymous self-reviews of the 1855 edition, yet another inexpensive means of promotion. Writing for the *United States Review*, Whitman revisits and revises the heading of the above advertisement—"An American Poet at Last!"—substituting "bard" for "Poet" in his opening line. Lines from other unpublished advertisements crop up in the *United States Review* article as well as in "An English and an American Poet," published in the *American Phrenological Journal*, both of which self-written pieces Whitman eventually reprinted in his 1855 paratext (and in *Imprints*). Whitman's self-reviews have been described as "material that Whitman put around his poetry . . . in order to prepare readers to understand [*Leaves of Grass*] on his own terms."³⁸ That Whitman would borrow so heavily from his unpublished print advertisements in those self-reviews reminds us that Whitman's lengthy promotions were conceived of in a similar vein: they were to provide prospective buyers with the "terms" to understand Whitman and his poetry. Even though these advertisements never ran, Whitman appropriated their language as late as 1860, when he was finally backed by a publisher willing to invest in his poetry. In fact, the description of *Leaves of Grass* as

³⁷ The print advertisements for the self-financed, second edition of *Leaves of Grass* in 1856 were likewise brief: "A small, thick, \$1 Vol., green and gold, 400 pp., 24mo., handy / for pocket, table or shelf: Walt WHITMAN'S "LEAVES OF GRASS." / New Vol. (Thirty-two Poems.) / Dealers, send in your order. This book will always be in / demand. Fowler & Wells, No. 308 Broadway, N. Y." See the *New York Tribune*, September 15, 1856, 1.

³⁸ Morton, "Democracy, Self-Reviews," 231.

“America’s first distinctive poem” in print advertisements for the Thayer & Eldridge edition is lifted directly from Whitman’s 1855 promotional prose.

The second unpublished advertisement focuses on Whitman as “the New Poet”—his family history, character traits, and relationship to the future of American literature. Again, in this notice Whitman’s language is far afield from that of contemporary literary advertisers whose every word attempted to establish the credibility of an author or publisher. The supposed appeal of Whitman as a poet delineated in the ad below is precisely his distance from those norms of nineteenth-century authorship. Whitman claims to have “less of the writer [in him] than any one else,” insisting that readers will “not follow [*Leaves of Grass*] like one reading a book.” *Leaves of Grass* is promoted as a book that is unlike a book, written by an author who is unlike an author:

The New Poet.

WALT WHITMAN dashes full grown into literature, the “poet of the body and the poet of the soul,” the token of America in its broadest and most original life,—the bard of the masses, and of freedom and friendship and woman and immortality. His too, is the new muse of the exact sciences and of whatever is really a fact. He seems to enclose the transcendentalist and sentimentalists while his style has no transcendentalism. Of the simplicity which is the flawless triumph of art, sprout up these

Leaves of Grass

indicating the eternal perfume and cheapness of nature, and planting nutriment for a school of versification and philosophy that would outshine and outlive all the rest.

Who then is WALT WHITMAN ? Who is this man, indifferent to old landmarks, and passing with such nonchalance through the midst of standard reputation, and challenging the best of them ancient or new? Who is this preacher of egotism, exemplifying it in himself, and provoking and demanding it in everybody? this universal lover and truster of all men and women, without separating the learned from the unlearned, the black from the white, the northerner from the southerner, or the native from the immigrant just landed on the wharf? this workman that perpetually builds with materials out of himself and surrounds his work with every character in nature, agriculture, art, books, household-life, or the life of the city

streets and wharves, and of the country and distant interior and west, for its ornaments and balances?

The verses of the man will always answer for him; otherwise there is not much answer. As data and so forth these: of the untamed Saxon blood, vital and red, channeled through many generations here, he is of pure American breed, born on the last day of May 1819 on Long Island about thirty miles from New-York city: growing up in Brooklyn and New-York—and always happiest when surrounded by the music and stir of that great neighborhood, or on its rapid and crowded river, or walking its streets or sailing over its bays, or in talk or company with the people anywhere.

He has less of the writer than any one else. The confessions and emanations in the "LEAVES OF GRASS," merge the observer imperceptibly; you do not follow them like one reading a book, but as a willing and normal movement of you the reader. The pages have no singularity: the style is not the richness of stained glass or grounding or tinting, but is as plate glass or air. You get the unchecked exposure of himself, always sustained by selfesteem and a sense of the equality of others. This is the sign over the entrance:

"I celebrate myself,
And what I assume, you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you."

In these poems the United States have certainly come to their poetic voice, and taken measure and form; and yet they are but the beginning. Walt Whitman himself disclaims originality in his work, and announces the coming after him of a great breed of poets, and that his is but the lifting of the baton to give the signal.

These LEAVES are especially to be commended to the young men, and to women, and all who doubt humanity or fear death, and all who are discontented with today or the present age.

One volume, richly bound in green, full gilt, \$1,50.

— — — st., N.Y.,
Publishers.

The final unpublished print advertisement for the 1855 edition reads most like a literal description of the contents of Whitman's book, providing "hints" intended "to introduce the twelve poems to the reader." Unlike Ticknor and Fields' advertisement for *Walden* which lists actual chapter headings, Whitman's description of "his own

numberless characters" are more evocative, showcasing the "rush of events" and "spread of scenery" *Leaves of Grass* contains:

Walt Whitman.

COMMONSENSE has at last found its poet. Everyday-life, and every class of development, and the trades and mechanics and farmers have found their poet. Women have found a poet who treats the equality of the sexes as an insuperable truth of the universe. The great facts of physiology and phrenology have found their poet. The demonstrations and theories of modern science have found a poet who takes them as a basis of all sublimity and all beauty, and proceeds as if they were so selfsufficient that no word of attack is needed for the myths and prettinesses and morbifics and whimperings which have carried the day so long.

Starting from the simplest premises—the reflections that voluntarily arise out of a man's mind—the sights he sees by one glance of his eyes, or listening to the noises of the street, or observing the commonest operations of nature, the **Leaves of Grass** usher a growth of the most enlarged and vital thoughts, and of the grandest and clearest conclusions. This is above all other the poem of the Immortality of substance and soul. This too is the poem of sympathy—

The Poem of Men and Women.

Of what other works make their final plot and subject this constructs its continual doorways, and its embellishments of higher themes. There is unbounded richness of incident, personality, excitement and rush of events, and spread of scenery; yet they are only the retinue and surroundings of something interior and beyond. By powerful throes of his will the poet becomes himself what is indicated. One after another he becomes each of his own numberless characters—the child uttering fancies about the grass—the curious mediator reclining on a bank of a summer forenoon, and holding a long colloquy of love with his own soul—the friendly mate and companion of people—now riding from the fields atop of the load of hay on its way to the barn—or in the most crowded rush of a great city—or hunting alone over the mountains of far in the wilds—sailing in the Yankee clipper under her three skysails—one of the chowder-party with boatmen or clam-diggers—giving shelter to the runaway slave—beholding the marriage of the trapper to a red girl in the far west—or bathing with bathers by the seaside—absorbing all pleasures and all pains—learning lessons of animals and birds—merged in any incident or person—in the carpenter dressing his plank—the pilot who seizes the the [sic] kingpin of the wheel—the driver that drives the dray of the stone-yard—the spinning-girl advancing forward and retreating backward—the canal-boy on the tow-path—the pavior with his wooden beetle—the drover singing out to his drove—the Wolverine setting traps by the Huron—the Missourian crossing the plains with his wares and his

cattle—the flatboatman making fast at night near the shores of cottonwood and pecan-trees—the hunter and trapper resting after their day's sport in the hut of adobe—the mourning widow looking out on the winter midnight—the Yankee or the Texian—the Georgian, the lumberer of Maine, the Kentuckian, Ohian, Louisianian, or Californian—mechanic, author, artist or schoolboy—thinker of the thoughts of all men in all ages and lands—appreciator of the nearest and readiest, and traveler from the most distant and diverse—and so bringing all to light up the study of that great fond central puzzle **one's self**. Such are the fingerings of the prelude of these harmonies—the preparations and launch of the main course and argument which follow—the above foreshadowing hints, serving merely to introduce the twelve poems to the reader.

As I discuss in Chapter 2, Whitman begins to characterize the “New Poet” of 1855 as an indicator, one whose sprawling, all-inclusive vision allows him to point in verse to the multitudes America contains, a poetic performance which indicates America’s literary future. In the advertisement above, Whitman’s shifts in poetic perspective, the “powerful throes of . . . will” that define the first edition stylistically, are offered as proof that the “the poet becomes himself what is indicated” by his poetry. The “unbounded richness” of Whitman’s poetics—its fluidity of perspective, its “continual doorways” and “numberless characters”—is set in contrast to the fixed “plot and subject” of other American literary works, works that fail to contain the variety of experiences captured by Whitman’s sweeping lines, such as “giving shelter to the runaway slave—beholding the marriage of the trapper to a red girl in the far west—or bathing with bathers by the seaside.” Through the act of pointing readers to these moments via his poetry, Whitman’s advertisement argues, the poet becomes “what is indicated”; he performs his place in “the coming . . . of a great breed of poets.”

The paratextual additions to the 1855 edition are likewise devoted to establishing Whitman’s dual function as one who indicates the “great breed of poets” to come and one who is himself an indication that the “New Poet” has already arrived. Emerson, in his

letter to Whitman reprinted in the first edition, makes clear that *Leaves of Grass* “meets the demand” he is “always making” of a distinct American literature. Ironically, Whitman’s poetry failed to convince Emerson that “the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed” was a reality; it wasn’t until he saw “the book advertised in a newspaper” that Emerson was sure Whitman was “real and available for a post-office.” Beginning with Emerson’s letter, much of the book’s earliest paratextual frame testifies to America’s “demand” for a national literature. Whitman’s excerpt from E. P. Whipple’s 1844 review of Griswold’s *Poets and Poetry of America* begins with the observation that: “We can hardly conceive that a reasonable being should look with coolness or dislike upon any efforts to establish a national literature, of which poetry is such an important element.” Whipple’s commentary not only reiterates Emerson’s call, but his assessment that a “reasonable being” would not meet any such an attempt “with coolness” establishes a critical lens through which Whitman’s readers could choose to approach the one decidedly negative review reprinted in the 1855 paratext, a review written by Griswold himself. Whitman provides readers, then, not only with material to read about *Leaves of Grass* but with material to help readers analyze and assess the reviews of his book.

Conventional nineteenth-century advertising wisdom would advise against trusting potential consumers to be “reasonable being[s],” yet Whitman constructs his antebellum promotional paratexts around precisely this assumption. Buried toward the end of his 1855 additions, Whitman reprints an 1850 article from the London *Eclectic Review*, “Have Great Poets Become Impossible?” The essay’s answer to its headline is, in short, no—at least as long as poets are willing to “catch the spirit of their age in verse”

and provide “fit utterance” for the “elements of poetical excitement” abundant in the nineteenth century. For the *Eclectic Review*—and, presumably, for Whitman—much of the future of “great poets” depends on the fitness and independence of their readers. Where contemporary advertisers saw a herd of irrational consumers, the *Eclectic Review* contends that poets never had a “fairer field” or a better “prospect of a wider favor” than with the self-reliant readers of the nineteenth century. Faced with a variety of competing periodicals offering conflicting opinions on poets and their books, the public has been conditioned by the modern press to rely on itself, to form personal opinions that move beyond the bias and blindness of one newspaper or magazine. “The reviews and literary journals are still, indeed, comparatively an unfair medium,” the *Eclectic Review* concedes, “but their multitude and their contradictions, have neutralized each other’s power, and rendered the public less willing and less apt to be bullied or blackguarded out of its senses.” By framing *Leaves of Grass* with a number of dense periodicals extracts, Whitman creates a microcosm of the press which, like the poet himself, contains multitudes and contradictions that the reader must negotiate.

Whitman’s continued and expanded use of promotional paratext in “Leaves-Droppings,” the appendix to the 1856 edition, testifies to his faith that American readers would not be “bullied or blackguarded” when it came to evaluating his work. Ed Whitley defines “Leaves-Droppings” as a paratextual “appendage to the text proper of *Leaves of Grass*,” a “promotional effort focused on improving the public and critical reception of *Leaves of Grass*.³⁹ Approaching “Leaves-Droppings” as an argument or a “narrative” that Whitman constructs to “influence the reading” of his poetry, Whitley’s own narrative

³⁹ Whitley, “Presenting Walt Whitman,” 2.

of the 1856 paratext is a tale of containment.⁴⁰ He frames “Leaves-Droppings” as Whitman’s attempt to control the diffusion of a potentially harmful epitext (freely-circulating negative reviews, etc.) within the limits of Whitman’s restrictive peritext.⁴¹ An approach like this places considerable weight on the interpretive influence Whitman supposedly exercises simply by including negative reviews within his book. Whitley’s model suggests that, at least inside the covers of *Leaves of Grass*, readers couldn’t help but read negative reviews ironically. The second edition of *Leaves of Grass* concludes with four notices dismissing Whitman’s work as “the expression of a *beast*,” “lunacy,” “strange, grotesque, and bewildering,” and “disjointed babbling.”⁴² For Whitley, in their original contexts “these words could spell disaster” for Whitman, but, when printed within the second edition, they are tamed, beneficial even: “no kinder words could be spoken.”⁴³ Such a conclusion, however, not only ignores the wrestling match Whitman expected his readers to enter into with *Leaves of Grass*—the kind of struggle Whitman’s promotional paratexts demanded beginning in 1855—but it too quickly dismisses the disruptive potential of unfavorable criticism. It is too simplistic to assume that all who read “Leaves-Droppings” sided with the celebratory reviews of Whitman’s work. More importantly, Whitman’s strategy in recirculating negative reviews was not just to have

⁴⁰ Whitley, “Presenting Walt Whitman,” 8.

⁴¹ The foundation of Whitley’s argument relies on the perceived opposition between “the diffuse epitext” and the “bounds of the peritext” as they function in the 1856 *Leaves*. If we consider Whitman’s 1888 characterization of *Imprints* (problematic as it may be) as a “sort of barricade,” it is tempting to extend Whitley’s reading of the 1856 “Leaves-Droppings” (figured as a means of defense and control) to the later *Imprints*. However, even Whitley, in the two sentences that he devotes to *Imprints*, cautions against conflating the roles of paratext for Whitman in 1856 and 1860. As a separate advertising supplement “removed from the bounds of the text proper,” Whitley writes, *Imprints* must be acknowledged as a “separate entity” within the “open realm of the epitext” (14).

⁴² Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Brooklyn: n.p., 1856), 375, 379, 383, 384.

⁴³ Whitley, “Presenting Walt Whitman,” 10.

readers laugh them off—though, for twenty-first-century audiences many of the articles are undoubtedly comical. “Leaves-Droppings” was crafted to simulate the growing international conversation concerning Whitman, a conversation that was remarkably vicious at times. If readers were to eavesdrop on that discussion in earnest, they would have to decide for themselves the merits and demerits of America’s new poet.

The paratextual frames of *Leaves of Grass* in 1855 and 1856 were fueled by an innovative concept, but Whitman quickly grew uncomfortable with the effect they had on his book’s “argument.” Even prior to Thayer & Eldridge’s February 10, 1860, letter soliciting the poet’s work, Whitman imagined that the yet-to-be-published, third edition of *Leaves of Grass* would eclipse his previous volumes to become the truly “complete” edition. Two years before these radical Boston publishers promised to put *Leaves of Grass* “into good form, and style attractive to the eye,” Whitman described his emerging plans for the third edition to his friend, Philadelphia abolitionist Sarah Tyndale. In the letter to Tyndale, Whitman expresses his growing dissatisfaction with Fowler and Wells, who distributed the 1855 and 1856 editions. Whitman writes on June 20, 1857:

Fowler & Wells are bad persons for me. They retard my book very much. It is worse than ever. I wish now to bring out a third edition—I have now a hundred poems ready (the last edition had thirty-two)—and shall endeavor to make an arrangement with some publisher here to take the plates from F. & W. and make the additions needed, and so bring out the third edition. F. & W. are very willing to give up the plates—they want the thing off their hands. In the forthcoming Vol. I shall have, as I said, a hundred poems, and no other matter but poems—(no letters to or from Emerson—no notices, or anything of that sort.) I know well enough, that *that* must be the *true* Leaves of Grass—I think it (the new Vol.) has an aspect of completeness, and makes its case clearer. The old poems are all retained. The difference is in the new character given to the mass, by the additions.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Walt Whitman, *The Correspondence*, ed. Edwin Haviland Miller (New York: New York University Press, 1969), 1:44.

Typically, this correspondence with Tyndale is read as evidence of Whitman's productivity immediately following the 1856 *Leaves of Grass*. As Ezra Greenspan has noted, "had the circumstances permitted, a third edition of [Whitman's] poetry consisting of one-hundred poems, two-thirds new, would have appeared in 1857."⁴⁵ The letter to Tyndale emphasizes these "additions" to *Leaves of Grass* (such as the first appearance of important clusters like "Calamus" and "Enfans d'Adam") and the "new character" they promised.

If, however, Whitman's letter is read with the often neglected *Imprints* in mind, the poet's insistence on what will be left out of *Leaves of Grass* takes on an importance equal to his "a hundred" additions. Unlike the editions of late-1855 (which include Emerson's letter and an assortment of reviews) and 1856 (whose paratextual apparatus "Leaves-Droppings" anticipates *Imprints*), this new, third edition is to include "no other matter but poems—(no letters to or from Emerson—no notices, or anything of that sort.)" The paratextual deletions of 1860, the majority of which are absorbed by *Imprints*, are as essential to achieving "the *true* Leaves of Grass" as are the poetic additions.

It is in 1860 that Whitman makes literal the "Leaves-Droppings" pun organizing his 1856 appendix—in the third edition, the reviews, notices, and letters that were a part of the 1855 and 1856 books are in fact dropped from *Leaves of Grass*. As his letter to Tyndale suggests, the exclusion of promotional notices from the 1860 edition is theorized by Whitman as an attempt to focus the argument of his poetry, to "[make] its case clearer," by eliminating distracting, non-poetic material. And while Whitman was intent on focusing his work by expunging non-poetry (even before Thayer & Eldridge

⁴⁵ Greenspan, *Walt Whitman and the American Reader*, 175.

contacted him), he was also concerned with broadening his work's reception. In an anonymous article entitled "All about a Mocking-Bird," published in the *Saturday Press*, Whitman continued to promote the "true" *Leaves of Grass* that would "soon crop out"—"the fuller grown work of which the former two issues were the inchoates."⁴⁶ For the anonymous Whitman, those "former issues, published by the author himself in little pittance editions" are said to have "just dropped the book enough to ripple the inner first-circles of literary agitation, in immediate contact with it." Larger exposure to Whitman's poetry—the kind that was taking place in the *Saturday Press* and that "Leaves-Droppings" and, eventually, *Imprints* would try to document—depended on the popular dissemination of *Leaves of Grass*. Disappointed with his first two attempts, Whitman writes that the "outer, vast extending, and ever-widening circles, of the general supply, perusal, and discussion of [*Leaves of Grass*], have still to come." He saw the solution to his neglect in the literary "market" which needed "to be supplied . . . with copious thousands of copies." The book Whitman envisioned was published by Thayer & Eldridge later in the year with an initial run of a thousand copies.

Leaves of Grass Imprints addresses Whitman's dual concerns after the first two editions of his poetry: to fill *Leaves of Grass* with "no other matter but poems" and to enhance the book's presence in the literary marketplace. The only extant record of Whitman's thoughts on *Imprints* at the time of its printing is a letter to his brother Jeff discussing the 1860 edition. In it Whitman writes:

[Thayer & Eldridge] have printed a very neat little brochure, (pamphlet,) of 64 pages, called 'Leaves of Grass Imprints,' containing a very readable collection of criticisms on the former issues—This is given away gratis, as an advertisement and circular. Altogether, Jeff, I am very, very satisfied and relieved that the thing [the 1860 *Leaves of Grass*], in the permanent

⁴⁶ "All about a Mocking-Bird," *Saturday Press*, January 7, 1860, 3.

form it now is, looks as well and reads as well (to my own notion) as I anticipated—because a good deal, after all, was an experiment—and now I am satisfied.⁴⁷

Even in this short description, we can see Whitman’s promotional strategy: freely distribute *Imprints* to advertise and enhance *Leaves of Grass* in its “permanent form.” The fact that *Imprints* was “given away gratis” is crucial to understanding the pamphlet as a piece of advertising ephemera that positions itself in contrast to the “permanent” *Leaves of Grass*.

An examination of how *Imprints* may have affected Thayer & Eldridge’s marketing of the third edition will demonstrate the importance of the pamphlet’s free distribution. In late April and early May of 1860, Thayer & Eldridge ran a series of newspaper advertisements for *Leaves of Grass*.⁴⁸ The promotional pamphlet *Imprints* is not mentioned throughout the earliest notices for “America’s First Distinctive Poem. Walt Whitman’s Leaves of Grass. (Now Complete).” Later advertisements for the 1860 edition (which started appearing mid-May) begin listing the availability of *Leaves of Grass Imprints* “To the Public.” Once *Imprints*—“a small brochure, collecting American and European criticisms on the First, (1855) and Second, (1857) [sic] Issues of the ‘Leaves’”—appears, “Walt Whitman’s Leaves of Grass” is no longer listed as “(Now Complete)” but instead becomes “Complete.” The shift is subtle but significant. Whereas “now complete” signifies an end to the printing process (i.e., Thayer & Eldridge have finished printing the book), the simpler adjective “complete” carries the significance of the earlier advertisement while also situating *Leaves of Grass* within an evolutionary

⁴⁷ Whitman, *Correspondence*, 1:53.

⁴⁸ These same advertisements are discussed by Amanda Gailey in “Walt Whitman and the King of Bohemia: The Poet in the *Saturday Press*,” *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* (Spring 2008), 143-166.

narrative invited by *Imprints*. The “Public” is addressed through the following statement: “The strong and electric writings of Walt Whitman are here presented to you by us, in complete form, for the first time. We invite you to read for yourselves, irrespective of the conflicting judgments of the critics.” By collecting criticism leading up to the “complete” edition of 1860, *Imprints* allows for a mythology to emerge surrounding the “previous and partial” issues of Whitman’s poems. By sustaining this narrative, *Imprints* urges readers to purchase *Leaves of Grass* “irrespective of the conflicting judgments” regarding its precursors, while reassuring consumers that the 1860 edition represents Whitman’s poetry “in complete form.”

For Whitman and his publishers, *Leaves of Grass Imprints* records a history of *Leaves of Grass*’ fragmented past while offering a promise of poetic fulfillment. The free circulation of the pamphlet is a testament to *Imprints*’ (and the 1855 and 1856 editions’) implied insufficiency. It is the “complete” work, Thayer & Eldridge’s new *Leaves of Grass*, that must be purchased, and *Imprints* narrates the necessity of that transaction. One of the unique challenges Whitman faces in *Imprints* is assembling a collection of criticism that (predominantly) describes his “previous and partial” books in order to sell his current “complete” volume. It’s a difficultly that is addressed on the front cover of *Imprints*:

To the Public—In putting before you our new and superbly printed electrotype edition of America’s first distinctive poetry, the “Leaves of Grass,” we offer the accompanying brochure as a circular to all persons disposed to commence the study of the Poems. We supply it gratuitously. The notices refer to the previous and partial issues of the Poems. See the 2d page of Imprints within. But all the pieces of previous issues are comprehended in our New Volume, with much additional matter.

And the back cover continues the argument:

We wish it distinctly understood that the inferior style of print, typography, &c., spoken of in the notices in the foregoing circular, refer altogether to the previous, temporary and partial issues of the poems, and not at all to the superb edition we now present to the public.

The second page of *Imprints* (to which the front cover directs readers) produces a timeline of *Leaves of Grass*' creation—complemented by a full transcription of Emerson's letter—that culminates in the May 1860 publication of Thayer & Eldridge's edition. Just as the front cover contrasts the “new and superbly printed” *Leaves of Grass* to the “previous and partial issues of the Poems,” this minimalist poetic genealogy emphasizes the book's evolution from “twelve Poems, 96 pages, small quarto” to “a finely printed 12mo. Volume, 456 pages.” Indeed, with the aid of *Imprints*, “the pieces of previous issues” become “comprehended” in the 1860 edition; the pamphlet constructs a history of *Leaves of Grass* where 1855 and 1856 are mere “pieces” which reach their completion, their full comprehension, in 1860.

Just how successful *Imprints* was in convincing readers to purchase the “complete” *Leaves of Grass* is difficult to determine thanks in part to Thayer & Eldridge’s unconventional marketing strategies. Whitman’s radical publishers had a history of outlandish promotions, what Ted Genoways calls “marketing schemes [which] ranged from the ill-conceived to the absurd.” One pre-*Leaves of Grass* advertisement promised readers that “a gift valued from two dollars to one hundred dollars [would be] given with every Book sold at retail prices.” “For a publisher whose books all sold for \$1.50 or less,” Genoways writes, “it’s difficult to see how giving away expensive premiums would have turned a profit.”⁴⁹ While *Imprints* is mentioned in most ads for the 1860 edition, Thayer & Eldridge—true to the spirit of their past promotions—also ran a

⁴⁹ Ted Genoways, *Walt Whitman and the Civil War: America’s Poet during the Lost Years of 1860-1862* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 59.

separate series of cryptic, anonymous notices to increase the demand for *Imprints*. In a letter to Whitman, Thayer & Eldridge inform the poet that they have “concocted a plan” to give *Imprints* a “very wide and telling circulation,” one which they had “put into action immediately.”⁵⁰ Without Whitman’s foreknowledge, Thayer & Eldridge placed an ad in *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* under the enticing title “A Good Book Free.” The advertisement reads as follows:

One of the most interesting and spicy Books ever published, containing 64 pages of excellent reading matter, will be sent FREE to any address, on application to box 3263, Boston Post Office. This is no advertisement of a patent medicine or other humbug. All you have to do is send your address as above, and you will receive by return of mail, without expense, a handsome and well-printed book, which will both amuse and instruct you.⁵¹

Of course, the “handsome and well-printed book” Thayer & Eldridge were promising was not *Leaves of Grass*, but *Leaves of Grass Imprints*: they were publishing an anonymous advertisement for an advertisement. With their characteristically grandiose hopes to stimulate mail orders for *Leaves of Grass*, Thayer & Eldridge planned to run the same notice in “nearly every paper in the Country, and keep it certainly in.”⁵² Unlike those who responded to these anonymous advertisements, readers attracted by Thayer & Eldridge’s various conventional print notices knew exactly what they were requesting. These more traditional ads clearly define *Imprints* as a small brochure of earlier Whitman-related criticism. Having actively and consciously sought out *Imprints*, these potential consumers were more likely to fit the pamphlet’s ideal audience: “persons

⁵⁰ Thayer & Eldridge to Walt Whitman, June 14, 1860, Charles E. Feinberg Collection of the Papers of Walt Whitman, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

⁵¹ *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, June 23, 1860, 80.

⁵² Thayer & Eldridge to Walt Whitman, June 14, 1860, Charles E. Feinberg Collection of the Papers of Walt Whitman, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

disposed to commence the study of" *Leaves of Grass*. However, as a result of Thayer & Eldridge's anonymous ad, far more copies of *Imprints* undoubtedly landed in the hands of those simply interested in a free book, what Nathaniel Fowler would call a "class of people . . . seldom profitable to any commercial house."

According to Thayer & Eldridge's correspondence with Whitman, *Imprints* was indeed highly sought after in the wake of the anonymous *Frank Leslie's* campaign. "We are now receiving 300 applications a day for *Imprints*," Thayer & Eldridge write Whitman, "but the orders by mail [for *Leaves of Grass*] do not seem to come in much yet."⁵³ Even if Whitman's publishers received a third of the pamphlet requests that they claimed, *Imprints* would have certainly been in demand. The impending civil war surely influenced the sluggish sales of *Leaves of Grass*, but the pamphlet's failure to boost mail orders can largely be blamed on a combination of its uncommon complexity and Thayer & Eldridge's ill-fated plans to smuggle its "interesting and spicy" book into the hands of unsuspecting and likely unsympathetic readers.

This is not to deny *Imprints'* potential to sell books. Though the pamphlet was relatively unsuccessful in drumming up sales in 1860, when Thayer & Eldridge's creditor and former boss, Horace Wentworth, took control of the plates to *Leaves of Grass* in the winter of 1861 (after Whitman's publishers went bankrupt), he actually considered the prospect of reissuing *Imprints*. In his 1866 offer to sell Whitman the plates of the 1860 edition, Wentworth proposes including "the stereotype plates of the pamphlet notices" to sweeten his deal.⁵⁴ Even under these supposedly favorable terms, Wentworth reserves his

⁵³ Thayer & Eldridge to Walt Whitman, July 27, 1860, Charles E. Feinberg Collection of the Papers of Walt Whitman, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

right to the “very few [copies] of the Imprints” that remained, copies he wished to keep in case he re-published the 1860 edition and “need[ed] them.” As this continued interest in *Imprints* suggests, at least two publishers—Thayer & Eldridge and their “bitter and relentless enemy” Horace Wentworth—agreed that, in the right hands, *Leaves of Grass* *Imprints*, for all of its eccentricity as an advertising tool, had the potential to generate considerable publicity for Whitman and his poetry.

Whitman’s Gymnastic Reader

The most often repeated claim throughout *Imprints* is that *Leaves of Grass* demands several readings. The lone extant review of *Imprints*, probably written by Whitman himself for the *Brooklyn City News* and later reprinted in the appendix to Richard Maurice Bucke’s biography of the poet, claims that *Leaves of Grass* cannot “ever be judged by the intellect—nor suffice to be read merely once or so, for amusement.”⁵⁵ In order for the book to be “absorbed by the soul”:

[i]t is to be dwelt upon—returned to, again and again. It wants a broad space to turn in, like a big ship. Many readers, ~~perhaps the majority~~, will be perplexed and baffled by it at first; but in frequent cases those who liked the book least at first will take it closest to their hearts upon a second or third perusal.

This evaluation of *Leaves of Grass* perpetuates two of *Imprints*’ major arguments: first, the fit reader of the book must repeatedly consume the text, and second, any distaste for Whitman’s poetry can be attributed to a lack of proper, prolonged exposure. In either case, both claims endow the poetry with a value that is not simply undiminished by time,

⁵⁴ Horace Wentworth to Walt Whitman, November 16, 1866, Charles E. Feinberg Collection of the Papers of Walt Whitman, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

⁵⁵ “A Brooklynite Criticised,” n.p. A facsimile of Whitman’s copy of the article, which the poet has edited for inclusion in Bucke’s book, is available in Stephen Railton’s *Walt Whitman’s Autograph Revision of the Analysis of Leaves of Grass* (New York: New York University Press, 1974), 144. The crossed-out phrase in the quoted excerpt was deleted by Whitman.

but enriched by it. They assert that, as a humorously paradoxical line Whitman deleted from Bucke's appendix states, "permanency is written all over the poem, so far."

Appraisals within *Imprints* that testify to the "permanency . . . written all over" *Leaves of Grass* are too numerous to be cited here in their entirety. However, it is worth considering several examples to illustrate one of the most important ways *Imprints* argues for the "completeness" of the 1860 edition and the enduring value of Whitman's poetry. For instance, in a *Daily Times* article that exposes Whitman as a self-reviewing sham, the author reluctantly admits that "with all this muck of abomination soiling the pages, there is a wondrous unaccountable fascination about the *Leaves of Grass*."⁵⁶ Confessing that the *Daily Times* reviewer has "returned to [*Leaves of Grass*] often" to "read it again and again," the article claims that over time, "a singular order seems to arise" out of Whitman's "chaotic verses." To be sure, the *Times* expresses a marked ambivalence towards *Leaves of Grass*—"a wonderful amalgamation of beauty and indecency"—but despite this tension, the article narrates the effect that the necessary time and attention have on an appreciation of Whitman. The *Times* notes:

Since the greater portion of this review was written, we confess to having been attracted again and again to *Leaves of Grass*. It has a singular electric attraction. Its manly vigor, its brawny health, seem to incite and satisfy. We look forward with curious anticipation to Mr. Walt Whitman's future works.⁵⁷

If even Whitman's "previous and partial" issues have convinced the *Times'* critical eyes, *Imprints* implies, then the third and "complete" edition will certainly "contribute something to American literature which shall awaken wonder."

⁵⁶ *Leaves of Grass Imprints* (Boston: Thayer & Eldridge, 1860), 24.

⁵⁷ *Imprints*, 27.

More than a decade after *Imprints*, in *Democratic Vistas*, Whitman articulates his own position on a text's ability or responsibility to "awaken" its readers. Here, for Whitman, it is not "the book [that] needs so much to be the complete thing, but the reader of the book."⁵⁸ Even the "complete" *Leaves of Grass* merely "[furnishes] the hints, the clue, the start, or the frame-work," but it is the reader that "must be on the alert, must himself or herself construct indeed the poem." The Whitman of 1871 asserts (and surely the Whitman of 1855-1860 would agree): "Books are to be call'd for, and supplied, on the assumption that the process of reading is not a half sleep, but, in the highest sense, an exercise, a gymnast's struggle. . . . That were to make a nation of supple and athletic minds, well-train'd, intuitive, used to depend on themselves, and not on a few coteries of writers." Though it was written eleven years after the first Boston *Leaves of Grass*, *Democratic Vistas* illuminates the twisted logic of *Imprints*, an advertisement that gives tremendous voice to Whitman's detractors. Just as the reader must engage in a "gymnast's struggle" to complete the "complete" *Leaves of Grass*, the reader of *Imprints* must negotiate the conflicting opinions of "a few coteries of writers" even to arrive at the decision to purchase Whitman's poetry. Faced with the vitriol of writers like Rufus W. Griswold and the self-interested enthusiasm of Whitman's self-reviews, readers of *Imprints* must "depend on themselves" and their own minds to navigate the pamphlet's conflicting views and then, or so the publishers hope, decide that they need to evaluate the worth of *Leaves of Grass* on their own. Such a strategy was as idealistic as it was poorly executed (especially considering Thayer & Eldridge's oddly ineffectual appeal to the readers of *Frank Leslie's*), yet it seems the only plausible explanation for the pamphlet's internal contradictions.

⁵⁸ Walt Whitman, *Poetry and Prose* (New York: Library of America, 1982), 1016-1017.

As we see in *Democratic Vistas* and throughout *Imprints*, it is not only *Leaves of Grass'* status as a “complete” object that supposedly makes the book desirable, but it is the poetry’s demand of an “gymnast’s struggle” on the part of the reader, the book’s insistence on multiple readings, that ensures the value of Whitman’s work. As the cover to *Imprints* makes clear, *Leaves of Grass* isn’t so much a book to read so much as to “study.” Likewise, the ideal readers of *Imprints* are not those hoping to consume the pamphlet passively in “a half sleep”—exactly what most advertisers wanted their audience to be able to do—but “all persons disposed to commence the study of the Poems.” Reading *Imprints* is presented as intellectual and spiritual work, the perfect apprenticeship for reading *Leaves of Grass* in complete form. The text is a study guide which offers ways to view Whitman’s work in surprisingly contradictory terms—as a huge success, or an unmitigated failure, as great poetry or simply trash. *Imprints'* unorthodox marketing strategy can be seen as an effort to demand and to train the type of self-reliant readers Whitman demanded.

Even more so than its predecessors in 1855 and 1856, part of what makes *Imprints* such an odd advertisement for readers, a true “gymnast’s struggle,” is the difficulty of comprehending Whitman’s use of negative publicity. How could Whitman expect attacks on his poetic prowess and moral character to sell *Leaves of Grass*, especially when those assaults were removed from the material bounds of Whitman’s book? The best illustration of this paradox is a cluster of articles surrounding one of Whitman’s well-documented self-promotions. Included in the late-1855 paratext is Whitman’s *United States Review* self-review entitled “Walt Whitman and His Poems”—one of three self-reviews in some first editions. A year later this puff is left out of

“Leaves-Droppings.” Though two self-reviews do appear in 1856, it would be reasonable to assume that Whitman may have felt chastised by a New York *Daily Times* article that took his puffery to task in their description of reading the 1855 edition:

Then returning to the fore-part of the book, we found proof slips of certain review articles about the *Leaves of Grass*. One of these purported to be extracted from a periodical entitled the United States Review . . . we discovered unmistakable internal evidence that Mr. Walt Whitman, true to his character, of a Kosmos, was not content with writing a book, but was also determined to review it [...] this rough-and-ready scorner of dishonesty, this rowdy knight-errant who tilts against all lies and shams, himself perpetrates a lie and a sham at the very outset of his career. It is a lie to write a review of one’s own book, then extract it from the work in which it appeared and send it out to the world as an impartial editorial utterance. It is an act that the most degraded helot of literature might blush to commit.

But if such criticism made Whitman uneasy in 1856, he had recovered his nerve by 1860.

Not only does “Walt Whitman and His Poems” re-appear in *Imprints*, but so does the *Daily Times* article exposing Whitman as a “sham.”⁵⁹ This self-review is the only article to appear in 1855, be excluded in 1856, and reappear in 1860. Whitman now obviously saw his status as “the most degraded helot of literature” as generative both for his literary celebrity and for sales of *Leaves of Grass*.

When we account for the multiple negative reviews included in *Imprints*, the pamphlet’s overarching promotional strategy seems less concerned with quickly and directly advertising *Leaves of Grass* (for example, by taking the traditional approach and focusing only on brief, positive responses) than with courting a rare type of reader, one who is willing to navigate the contradictory opinions that *Imprints* presents, a reader able to apply the same model of self-reliant readership to Whitman’s poetry. For all its praise of the 1860 edition as “distinctive,” *Imprints*’ larger preoccupation is arguably its demand

⁵⁹ *Imprints*, 7-13 (*United States Review*); 20-27 (*New York Daily Times*).

for a “supple and athletic” readership. One of the advertising hooks in *Imprints*, then, is to convince readers that their participation in this “gymnast’s struggle” is necessary.

Imprints grants considerable power to its audience: it is the reader who must decide the worth of *Leaves of Grass*; it is the reader who is challenged to comprehend the “wonderful amalgamation of beauty and indecency” found in the poems. In a self-review comparing the 1855 edition and Tennyson’s *Maud*, Whitman presents this challenge in the form of a dilemma, posing the question of whether his poetry “is to prove either the most lamentable of failures or the most glorious of triumphs, in the known history of literature.”⁶⁰ Either extreme, of course, would make the book notable; what Whitman does not allow himself to say is that his poetry might simply be forgotten. Instead, the anonymous Whitman remarks that “after all we have written we confess our brain-felt and heart-felt inability to decide which we think it is likely to be.” A review of the 1856 edition originally published in the *Brooklyn Daily Times* suggests what should by now be the familiar remedy for this indecision: “the poems improve upon a second reading, and they may commonly require a repetition in order to [gain] a deserved appreciation, like a strange piece of music with subtle harmonies.”⁶¹ A *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* review of 1855 makes nearly the identical argument:

We have said that the work defies criticism; we pronounce no judgment upon it; it is a work that will satisfy few upon first perusal; it must be read again and again, and then it will be to many unaccountable. All who read it will agree that it is an extraordinary book, full of beauties and blemishes, such as nature is to those who have only a half formed acquaintance with her mysteries.⁶²

⁶⁰ *Imprints*, 41.

⁶¹ *Imprints*, 50.

⁶² *Imprints*, 54.

Just as *Imprints* is designed to guarantee its own insufficiency by creating the awareness of a void only *Leaves of Grass* can fill, the insistence on multiple readings insures that indecisive conclusions about the worth of Whitman's poetry will likewise seem insufficient. Only the person who buys, reads, and re-reads the 1860 edition will "himself or herself construct indeed the poem."

* * * * *

The reviews of the 1855 and 1856 editions included in *Imprints* sustain the pamphlet's marketing claim that the 1860 edition is the only complete issue of Whitman's poetry, and the reader's continued "struggle" with the text is necessary to complete it. As we have seen, despite the centrality of these reviews, it is still inaccurate to describe *Imprints* as merely a collection of notices about the previous editions of *Leaves of Grass*. In fact, the periodical pieces that do not directly evaluate the quality of either the first or the second edition attribute a notoriety to Whitman that, like *Imprints* itself, extends beyond the bound volumes of his poetry.

As John Rietz notes, the pun evident in 1856's "Leaves-Droppings" suggests to the reader that he or she is listening in on a private conversation between Emerson and Whitman.⁶³ More so, "Leaves-Droppings" would have readers believe they are eavesdropping on the beginning of an international conversation, a discussion displaying Whitman's growing cultural relevance. *Leaves of Grass Imprints* intensifies the punning of "Droppings." Within the pamphlet, Whitman demonstrates the "imprint" he has made on America through his own writing, itself a type of imprint. The pamphlet moves beyond the tentative "listening-in" quality of "Droppings" and makes a stronger

⁶³ John Rietz, "Leaves-Droppings' (1856)," *Walt Whitman: An Encyclopedia*, ed. J. R. LeMaster and Donald D. Kummings (New York: Garland, 1998), 383.

declaration of Whitman's mark on America. You no longer had to strain your ear to hear Whitman's name; by 1860 you could now easily see the imprint of his poetry on the culture. *Imprints* offers itself as evidence that Whitman was beginning to achieve part of the "proof of a poet" he first articulated in the 1855 preface: his country was absorbing him, even if not yet as "affectionately as he [had] absorbed it."⁶⁴

Imprints' inter-textuality is its most convincing proof of Whitman's cultural absorption. Reviews often contain cross-references to other periodicals—the New York *Daily Times'* complaint over the *United States Review* article discussed earlier is a perfect example. While "Leaves-Droppings" is dominated by the correspondence between Whitman and Emerson, *Imprints* shows how Whitman is already part of an existing national conversation within the press, a conversation that transcends his personal one with Emerson. The same promotional strategy is evident in an article from the London *Examiner* that takes exception to *Putnam Monthly*'s characterization of Whitman as "a compound of the New England transcendentalist and the New York rowdy," a "fireman or omnibus driver, who had intelligence enough to absorb the speculations of that school . . . and resources of expression to put them forth again in a form of his own."⁶⁵ The *Putnam's/Examiner* exchange adds a transnational element to Whitman's assertion of cultural relevance, an intercontinental celebrity implied by *Imprints'* full title: "American and European Criticisms."

It is a rumor claiming that Whitman has given up poetry entirely that most dramatically illustrates the public's fascination with the poet. In the *City News* review of *Imprints*, the author comments:

⁶⁴ Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Brooklyn: n.p., 1855), xii.

⁶⁵ *Imprints*, 37.

Those who really know Walt Whitman will be amused beyond measure at the personal statements put forth about him in some of these criticisms. We believe it was Dr. Dictionary Johnson who said that persons of any celebrity may calculate how much truth there is in histories and written lives by weighing the amount of that article in the stuff that is printed about themselves.

A portion of the “stuff” this review refers to is no doubt the rumor that Whitman was now driving an omnibus in New York City. Two of the last four articles in *Imprints* are dedicated solely to this omnibus hearsay as reported by two New York newspapers, the *Tribune* and the *Constellation*. The notice appearing in the *Tribune* cites the *Boston Courier*’s report that “Whitman was mounted upon a Brooklyn omnibus, his legs hanging over the side, and his body resting comfortably upon his elbow.” The *Constellation* not only dismisses this rumor—“whether [Whitman] has ever done so or not, we neither know nor care”—but also admonishes any report that would mock the “writer of ‘Leaves of Grass,’ one of the most remarkable and original contributions to our literature for many years.”⁶⁶

The omnibus segments of *Imprints* indicate the pamphlet’s ability to harness non-literary hype to attribute a larger cultural significance to Whitman. This is what is missed when *Imprints* is misclassified as merely a collection of 1855 and 1856 reviews—the degree to which the pamphlet extends and reflects Whitman’s celebrity beyond his poetry. If recent Whitman scholarship has overlooked this tendency in *Imprints*, Whitman’s contemporaries did not. As John Hollingshead writes in a recently recovered review originally published in the *Irish Literary Gazette*, “there is a certain philosophy in all [of Whitman’s] muscular poetry,—the philosophy of making money by creating a

⁶⁶ *Imprints*, 64.

sensation.”⁶⁷ The greatest sensation to date for Hollingshead in this 1861 review is Whitman’s supposed omnibus jaunt:

The science of advertising is in its infancy, and America, so it seems, can give the mother country a “few wrinkles” on this subject. When Walt Whitman, as the story goes, drove an omnibus along Broadway to oblige the regular driver, who was laid up with a fever, we have no doubt that his charity proved a remarkably good investment. We have no means of overhauling his publishing accounts, to see what effect the public excitement had upon his “editions,” but we have no doubt that many people never bought his book until after they found him driving an omnibus.

An accurate depiction of *Imprints* must account for this type of non-literary hype, acknowledging that the pamphlet is as interested in asserting *Leaves of Grass*’s cultural relevance as it is in constructing the author’s.

Faced with self-financing the fourth and fifth editions of *Leaves of Grass* after the Civil War, Whitman’s marketing strategies to create “public excitement” for his poetry became dramatically less ambitious. It wasn’t until another Boston publisher, the prestigious house of James R. Osgood & Co., contacted Whitman to publish a sixth edition of *Leaves of Grass* that the poet saw anything comparable to the money and energy Thayer & Eldridge poured into advertising the 1860 edition. One notable similarity between Whitman’s two Boston editions of *Leaves of Grass* is the prominent display of an image Whitman created to represent the “New Poet”: a little hand—what nineteenth-century audiences would have recognized as the common print ornament known as a manicule or printer’s fist—with a butterfly perched on it. As I discuss in Chapter Two, Whitman’s 1860 manicule points emphatically, just as the tiny hands

⁶⁷ John Hollingshead. “A Wild Poet of the Woods.” *Irish Literary Gazette and Register of Facts and Occurrences Relating to Literature, the Sciences, and the Arts* 4 (February 1861), 126.

advertising all types of products in newspapers, magazines, handbills, and posters did during the nineteenth century. Whitman's assertive manicule was an appropriate symbol for his vocal and experimental market presence on the eve of the Civil War. The conditions surrounding the third edition of *Leaves of Grass*—young, enthusiastic publishers with money to spend and a history of bizarre promotions teaming up with Whitman at the height of his desire to extend a theory of gymnastic reading into the realm of literary consumption—were fertile ground for the publication of *Imprints*. But, by 1881, the aggressive posture that *Imprints* represents had been tempered by a couple more decades of selling books and the backing of a fairly conservative publisher. During the 1850s and 1860s, when the “science of advertising [was] in its infancy,” *Imprints* may have seemed like a worthwhile risk, but twenty years later cautious publishers were even less willing to gamble on promotions that so blatantly eschewed the conventional wisdom of literary advertising. Even the softened gesture of the Osgood manicule, which looks more like a gently clasped fist than an indicative hand, is commensurate with the more restrained approach to promoting Whitman that the firm adopted with the poet's consent.

The advertising circular issued to hype the sixth edition of *Leaves of Grass* is a hybrid that blends Whitman's more adventurous antebellum promotions with the staid presentation of Osgood's predecessor and former employer, Ticknor and Fields (Figure 1.2). The pamphlet is eight pages long, still a fairly lengthy, though not entirely uncommon, advertisement for a single book, but nothing compared to the sixty-four page *Imprints*. The front cover features nine endorsements of Whitman's poetry spanning twenty-five years. Unlike their paratextual predecessors, these blurbs are short, concise, and thoroughly positive—even the dozen words taken from Emerson's response to the

first edition are slightly condensed. Reprinted notices on Whitman from France, Italy, Germany, England, and Canada frame *Leaves of Grass* as the international sensation it had been claiming to be, offering convincing evidence of Whitman's imprint abroad. Most strikingly, the impact of the Civil War on Whitman and his poetry runs throughout the Osgood circular. Three front cover squibs emphasize Whitman's poetic embrace of democracy, the American South, and the spirit of the Civil War respectively. An interview with Whitman originally published in the *Boston Globe* reprinted inside the front cover further underscores that the "whole book turns on the Secession War." A short, unattributed notice—one of only two longer periodical reprints in the circular—documents the toll of the war on Whitman's body: "After the close of the Secession War (up to that time the perfection of physical health and soundness—fifty-four years without a sick day) [Whitman] was prostrated with paralysis, laid up four or five years physically disabled (speech, mentality, etc., not affected; of late measurably recovered)." Osgood's pamphlet still trades on Whitman's non-literary labors, but it is the poet's years as a Civil War nurse and the impact of that service on his health, not his omnibus jaunts, that takes main stage. The formula for non-literary publicity Whitman had established by 1860 still lingers in the 1881 promotional circular, but it is significantly adapted to Whitman's visibility as the "Good Gray Poet."

No advertisement for *Leaves of Grass* would be complete without reference to Emerson's 1855 letter, but the toned-down appropriation of Emerson in Osgood's promotion is yet another conservative revision of Whitman's previously daring publicity stunts. It is Emerson's name—not his words of praise—that appears in larger print on the circular's cover. Even the excerpt itself is a departure from the self-congratulatory "I

greet you are the beginning of a great career” that Whitman emblazoned on the second edition’s spine; instead, Osgood prints a passage that positions *Leaves of Grass* as an American literary accomplishment, not a personal one: “The most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom America has yet contributed.” Responding to years of attacks criticizing Whitman for his use of Emerson’s private letter to endorse post-1855 poems, Osgood’s circular qualifies Emerson’s praise, making it clear to readers that Emerson’s encouragement pertains to “the main poems” of *Leaves of Grass* only, not the current volume in its entirety. Whitman’s publisher had reason to be vigilant on this point. The same year Osgood published *Leaves of Grass*, he also issued a new biography of Emerson by George Willis Cooke. In a section devoted to Emerson’s “literary judgments,” Cooke takes Whitman to task for exploiting Emerson’s generosity for financial gain. “Doubtless Emerson’s praise was sincere,” Cooke writes, but Whitman’s “parading of his own praise . . . undoubtedly abated Emerson’s admiration.”⁶⁸ Emerson still takes top-billing in 1881—the endorsement was too valuable *not* to be paraded around—but Whitman and his publisher presented the private correspondence as tactfully as they could while still capitalizing on Emerson’s name.

Osgood’s circular for the sixth edition of *Leaves of Grass* requires none of the gymnastic reading Whitman’s previous promotional paratexts demanded. Its tight copy and restrained tone adhere to conservative literary advertising standards that were only beginning to erode. The youthful exuberance of Whitman’s early print promotions was reined in, though, as I discuss in the following chapters, Whitman continued to develop other equally interesting strategies to brand himself and his poetry in the literary market.

⁶⁸ George Willis Cooke, *Ralph Waldo Emerson: His Life, Writings, and Philosophy* (Boston: Osgood, 1881), 234.

The stark contrast between Whitman's promotional profile in 1860 and 1881 reinforces the value of studying the advertising of *Leaves of Grass* as a historically-rooted and evolving process. Whitman is best known as the audacious self-promoter of 1855, but as the bravado of the Bowery rough began to mingle with the wisdom of the Good Gray Poet, the promotional face of *Leaves of Grass* shifted and adapted as well. As Whitman emphasized to his readers in Osgood's pamphlet, each edition of *Leaves of Grass* built on its predecessor:

The whole affair is like one of those old architectural edifices, some of which have been hundreds of years building, and the designer of which has the whole idea in his mind from the first. His plans are pretty ambitious, and, as means or time permits, he adds part after part, perhaps at quite wide intervals. To a casual observer it looks in the course of its construction odd enough. Only after the whole is completed, one catches the idea which inspired the designer, in whose mind the relation of each part to the whole had existed all along. That is the way it has been with my book. It has been twenty-five years building. There have been seven different hitches at it. Seven different times have parts of the edifice been constructed,—sometimes in Brooklyn, sometimes in Washington, sometimes in Boston, and at other places. The book has been built partially in every part of the United States; and this Osgood edition is the completed edifice.

It follows that each of Whitman's "hitches" would be advertised differently, especially depending on who was paying for their construction. *Leaves of Grass Imprints* and its astounding faith in a gymnastic reader indicates Whitman's complex vision for announcing the first "complete" edition of *Leaves of Grass* to the public in 1860, an astounding confidence in self-reliant American literary consumers that was untenable for contemporary advertising professionals.

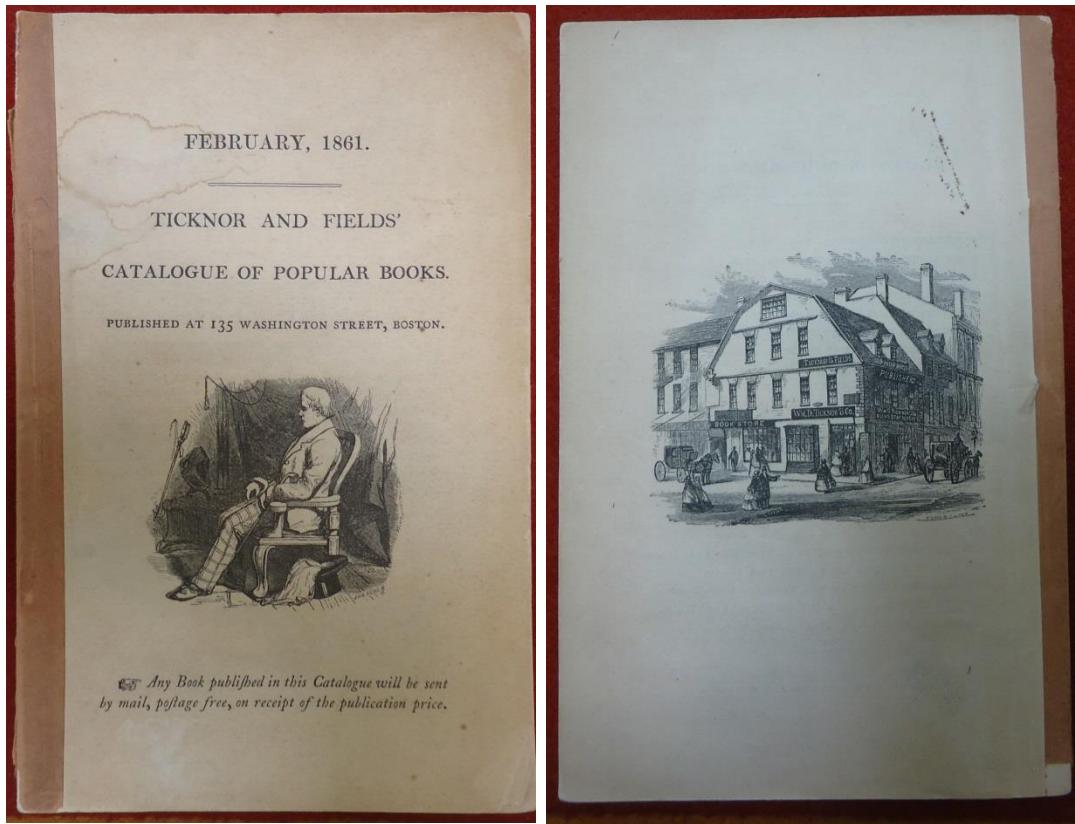
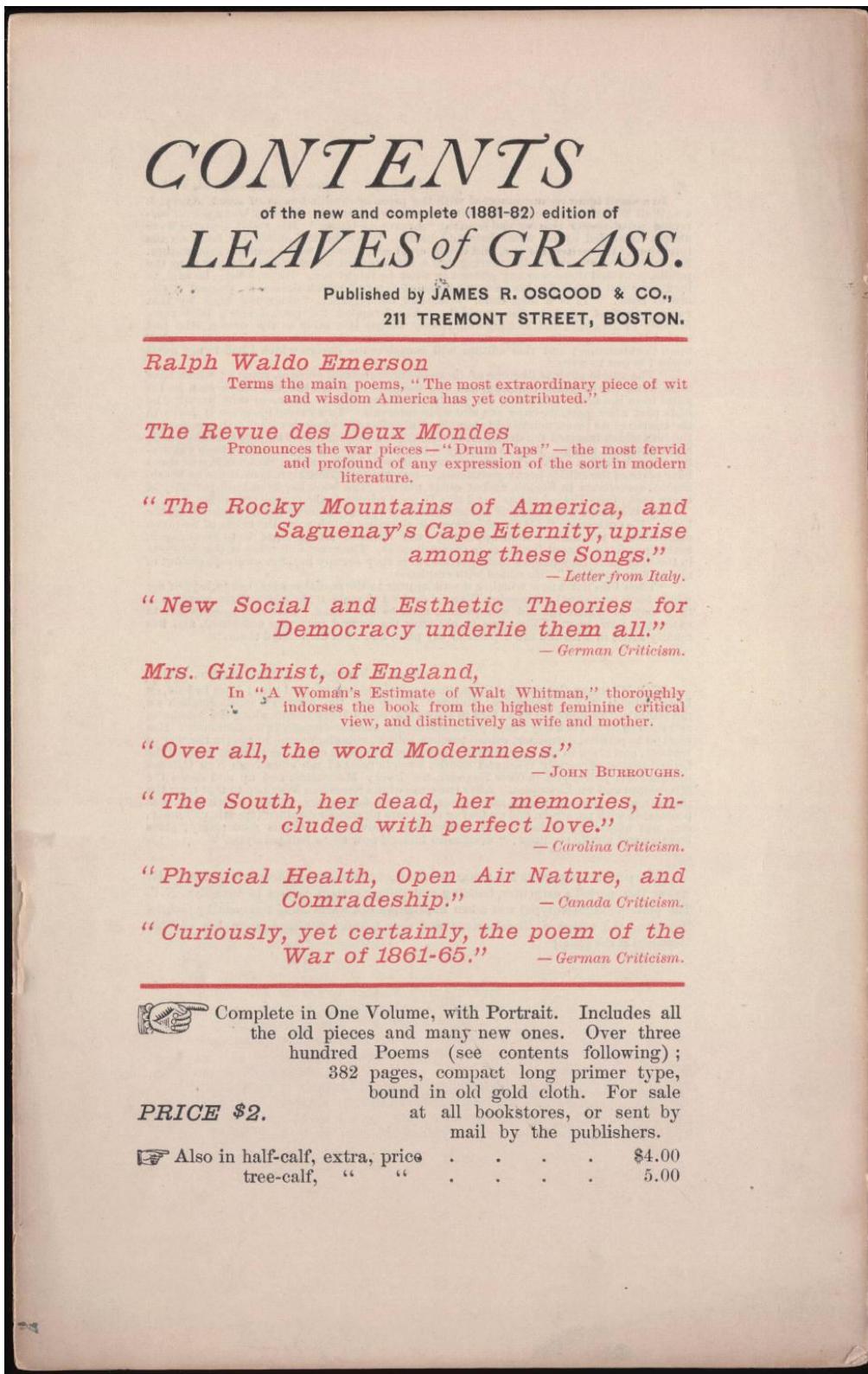


Figure 1.1. Front and back covers of *Ticknor and Fields' Catalog of Popular Books* (1861)

Figure 1. 2. Promotional circular for 1881 *Leaves of Grass*

CHAPTER II

“I ANNOUNCE A MAN OR WOMAN COMING”: THE POET AS PRINTER’S FIST

On the morning of January 1, 1876, brewers Michael Bass, John Ratcliff, and John Gretton legally registered the first trademark in history. The clarity and simplicity of their design—a solid red triangle accompanied by the “Bass” signature—has persisted for over a century. Angus Hyland and Steven Batemen in their mammoth study *Symbol* cite this “seemingly innocuous event” as proof the “commercial power of the symbol was dawning” in the late-nineteenth century.¹ In 1884, the J. P. Tolman Company of Boston followed suit, registering the first trademark in the United States: an image of Samson fighting a lion. With the emergence of legal protection for trademarks like these in Britain and the United States, we see “an important formal distinction” established “between the use of makers’ marks as symbols of product value and as mere conveyors of information.”² The practice of marking goods is as old as the market, but the recognition that a brand’s symbol possesses value in and of itself is a thoroughly modern invention.

Emerging in the nineteenth century, the brand symbol, or trademark, offered producers an opportunity to weave a web of associations with their product that moved beyond simply identifying its origin. Paul Rand, a twentieth-century graphic designer whose work includes trademarks for IBM, UPS, and ABC, describes the signifying potential of the trademark as follows:

A trademark is not merely a device to adorn a letterhead, to stamp on a product, or to insert at the base of an advertisement; nor one whose sole prerogative is to imprint itself by dint of constant repetition on the mind of the consumer public. The trademark is a potential illustrative feature of

¹ Angus Hyland and Steven Bateman, *Symbol*. London: Laurence King, 2011.

² Hyland and Bateman, *Symbol*, 8.

unappreciated vigour and efficacy; and when used as such escapes its customary fate of being a boring restatement of the identity of the product's maker.³

Hyland and Bateman gather hundreds of examples of recent trademarks that reach for the “vigour and efficacy” Rand envisions (Figure 2.1). By the mid-nineteenth century, producers of all sorts of products—from textiles to textbooks—were beginning to explore the inchoate promotional potential of the symbol.

Sixteen years before Bass made commerical history with its trademark, Walt Whitman introduced a striking visual symbol signifying his own literary brand: a playful depiction of a pointing hand with butterfly perched on it (Figure 2.2). Whitman’s pointing hand confronted readers repeatedly in 1860. The image appears once on the cover of the promotional pamphlet *Leaves of Grass Imprints*, three times within the third edition of *Leaves of Grass*, and once on the volume’s spine. Scholars have read the icon variously as a symbol of rebirth, the union of man and nature, and the joining of spirit and flesh. But despite the image’s prominent association with *Leaves of Grass*, a full study of Whitman’s evolving symbol and its place within a nineteenth-century literary market increasingly aware of brand visibility is yet to be undertaken.

In one of the only sustained analyses of Whitman’s butterfly icon, Ed Folsom identifies the similarity between the printed hands within the 1860 *Leaves of Grass* and Whitman’s own rough illustrations of hands scattered throughout his manuscripts and marginalia. Folsom notes the basic correspondence between the function of Whitman’s hand-drawn notations and the engraved fingers “pointing the reader” into the 1860 *Leaves of Grass*. Symbolically, Whitman’s 1860 hands “hook his readers around the waist and take them into the poems, only to tell them finally that they must depart on

³ Hyland and Bateman, *Symbol*, 9.

their own, freeing themselves not only *with* the poems but *from* the poems as well.”⁴

Whitman’s butterfly icon is, for Folsom, “a visual representation” of the poet guiding his readers—the “butterfly on the finger seems to lift, as much as rest on, the disembodied hand; the emblem suggests a joining of humans and nature, as well as a marriage of body and soul, each supporting and guiding the other.”⁵

The hands drawn in Whitman’s manuscripts and marginalia and those printed in and on various editions of *Leaves of Grass* are, in fact, deeply related. Nineteenth-century readers would have instantly recognized Whitman’s butterfly icon as a variation on the more banal hands they themselves drew in the margins of books or confronted in countless advertisements. Digit, fist, index, indicator, bishop’s fist, mutton fist —these hands have various names, but manuscript specialists like William H. Sherman prefer the more general term “manicule,” from the Latin *maniculum*, meaning “a little hand” (in any posture).⁶ No matter their size or shape, the function of the manicule—even Whitman’s—remains relatively consistent: it is a hand which points. “Their most important feature,” Sherman writes, “(from a functional perspective at least) is the index finger that extends from the hand toward the text, calling our attention to a particular section of the page.”⁷ The *American Dictionary of Printing and Bookmaking* (1894) defines the function of a “Fist” (the most common name for a manicule produced by a printing press) as “[serving]

⁴ Ed Folsom, “Appearing in Print: Illustrations of the Self in *Leaves of Grass*,” *The Cambridge Companion to Walt Whitman*, ed. Ezra Greenspan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 135-165.

⁵ Folsom, “Illustrations,” 150.

⁶ William H. Sherman, *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 34.

⁷ Sherman, *Used Books*, 30.

to call attention to the words following.”⁸ Whitman, as Folsom reminds us, knew the symbol well; the poet’s notebooks and page-proofs are littered with tiny hand-drawn mancules commanding his attention to a line or directing printers to make necessary changes.

It is tempting to view Whitman, “the poet of the body,” as somehow unique in his use of the manicule. For example, Matt Miller, in his insightful study of Whitman’s early notebooks and revolutionary compositional practice, suggests that Whitman’s particular use of the manicule “was derived from newspaper conventions at the time, which used them primarily for emphasis in advertisements.”⁹ While Miller is accurate in arguing that “even the conventions of advertisements were fair game to omnivorously demotic Whitman,” it is misleading to assume the pointing hands in Whitman’s manuscripts were ripped from the popular press or that they are in any way idiosyncratic.¹⁰ As Sherman has shown, “between at least the twelfth and eighteenth centuries, [the manicule] may have been the most common symbol produced both for and by readers in the margins of manuscripts and printed books.”¹¹ The practice was far less popular during Whitman’s lifetime, but it nevertheless continued well into the nineteenth century, where the poet’s contemporaries, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, employed the symbol in their journals regularly. The prominence of the printer’s fist in the realm of nineteenth-century promotion is undeniable and, as I will demonstrate, surely influenced Whitman’s

⁸ Wesley Washington Pasko, *American Dictionary of Printing and Bookmaking* (New York: H. Lockwood, 1894), 195.

⁹ Miller, *Collage of Myself*, 114.

¹⁰ Miller, *Collage of Myself*, 114.

¹¹ Sherman, *Used Books*, 29.

attachment to the symbol, but the icon also carried important associations with the private reading and writing practices of the age as well.

The manicule persisted as a popular manuscript notation for Whitman throughout his life; however, as Paul McPharlin has shown, by the late-nineteenth century, printed fists had become so popular they “went out of style.”¹² Assaulted with manicules in periodicals, posters, hand-bills, and books, readers’ attention was no longer grabbed by the little hands. A brief notice for the third edition of *Leaves of Grass* in the *Kalamazoo Gazette* illustrates the plight of the printer’s fist (Figure 2.3). Flanked to the right by advertisements for “White’s Patent Lever Truss and Supporter” and “A. & G. Wilson’s Boots and Shoes,” a Bartlett’s Gift Store notice for *Leaves of Grass* is lost amidst a column of manicules.¹³ Whitman’s book is described as “an oddity in Literature . . . a nut for critics” and the “strangest book of the season,” but the advertisement’s numbingly conventional display gives no hint of the volume’s singularity. Manicules such as these ceased to provide publishers and advertisers with the emphasis they desired; the fist “had grown dull from over-use.”¹⁴

Even as producers rightly began to doubt the manicule’s marketing potential, the system of advertising to which the tired little hands belonged remained enticing to Whitman. As Johanna Drucker describes, nineteenth-century advertising was infused with “poetic and cultural suggestivity,” an animus that clearly appealed to Whitman.¹⁵

¹² Paul McPharlin, *Typographic Leaves and Pointing Hands: Some Notes on Their Origin, History, and Contemporary Use* (New York: Typophiles, 1942), 61.

¹³ *Kalamazoo Gazette*, July 20, 1860.

¹⁴ McPharlin, *Typographic Leaves*, 61.

¹⁵ Johanna Drucker, *The Alphabetic Labyrinth: The Letters in History and Imagination* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 243.

The poet refused to see *Leaves of Grass* (and himself) in opposition to the qualities of a burgeoning advertising market, an expansion Drucker characterizes as permeating public and private spaces alike:

Visual language overflowed the limits of intimate space, from the page of the book to the poster placard, and the engagement of public space and public readership through the seductive dynamics of display typography played a significant role in transforming the experience of language from that of a literary, legal or business transaction to one of overblown commercial persuasion succeeding through tactics of rhetorical inflation.¹⁶

The promiscuity of the manicule—its joint ties to private reading/writing practices and the clamor of the market—defied “the limits of intimate space,” epitomizing Whitman’s hopes for his poetry. Manicules were everywhere readers looked, everywhere they moved. Whitman’s simple addition of a butterfly poised for flight (or perhaps having just landed) heightens the manicule’s already strong association with mobility, refreshing the tired print icon and re-infusing the image with some mystery and beauty. Subtly and playfully revising the advertising manicule to which readers had become so accustomed, Whitman creates the poet’s fist, a representation of the holy trinity behind *Leaves of Grass* and its author: body, soul, and promotion.

When we begin to consider how and why Whitman selected the manicule as a central visual emblem of his literary brand, a rich foreground to the symbol’s first appearance in 1860 begins to surface. Not only is the function of the printer’s fist deeply enmeshed with Whitman’s vision of America’s poetic future, but the adoption of the symbol itself shows Whitman thoroughly engaged with his literary present, a period when authors and publishers were just beginning to experiment with making their work visually recognizable. To understand the import of Whitman’s printer’s fist fully, we

¹⁶ Drucker, *The Alphabetic Labyrinth*, 243.

must situate the symbol within dual contexts: the evolution of the icon's significance within *Leaves of Grass* and broader developments in literary branding during the second half of the nineteenth century.

Indicative Words

It wasn't until the third edition of *Leaves of Grass* that Whitman's new manicule made its way into print, but as early as 1855 Whitman was toying with the idea of including multiple images—which, given their rarity and freshness, can be viewed as branding mechanisms—alongside his poetry. Whitman eventually only printed one image within the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*: the now famous frontispiece of the poet's defiant Bowery boy pose. That engraving, which I address in more detail in my final chapter, made an immediate impression on Whitman's readers. One reviewer compared it to the likenesses of "half a dozen celebrated criminals" printed in popular pictorial papers.¹⁷ The London *Critic* deemed Whitman, with his "damaged hat," "rough beard," "naked throat," and "shirt exposed to the waist," the "true impersonation of his book—rough, uncouth, vulgar."¹⁸ The *Critic*'s sentiment is echoed in numerous contemporary reviews: through the frontispiece, Whitman offers a visual representation of himself as the physical embodiment of his poetics. The frontispiece is "Whitman's first gesture at creating the organizing metonymy of *Leaves of Grass*: the book as man, the pages and the ink as identical to the poet himself."¹⁹ It is a theme Whitman would revisit

¹⁷ *The Washington Daily National Intelligencer*, February 18, 1856, 2.

¹⁸ *The Critic*, April 1, 1856, 170-171.

¹⁹ Ed Folsom, *Walt Whitman's Native Representations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 147.

throughout his career, an early iteration of his claim in 1860 that *Leaves of Grass* is “no book, / Who touches this, touches a man.”²⁰

Whitman’s “uncouth” visual representation as a rough and a loafer may have offended the conservative sensibility of the United States literary establishment, but the poet’s detractors were at least quick to pick up on the book/man metonymy pulsing through *Leaves of Grass*. The force of this metonymic effect which critics found so bothersome is maintained, in part, through the absence of Whitman’s name on the title page. Unable to attribute the poetry to any author listed, readers are instead forced to credit the creation *Leaves of Grass* to a body springing forth from the pages of the book itself. Allowing an image of himself as “one of the roughs” to serve as his main form of identification, Whitman actually exercises considerable formal restraint regarding the conceptual unity of his book. The author’s name, what readers had come to accept as the most obligatory component of a modern literary work, is eliminated, thereby heightening the intensity of the volume’s central metonymy. For a poet who boasted of containing multitudes, leaving ‘Walt Whitman’ off the title page was a powerful omission.

Whether due to limited finances or a more focused conceptual design, when the frontispiece appeared it was the only image included within the first edition. Shortly before *Leaves of Grass* was published, Whitman scrapped late plans to incorporate at least one other “figure,” what he describes in a manuscript jotting as a “large ship under her full power of steady forward motion.” Unlike the frontispiece which plays an integral role in *Leaves*’ book/man metonymy, how Whitman thought a figure of a “large ship” would complement the 1855 poems is less certain. Ships—both as a means of public transportation and as a metaphor for the nation —become more prominent in subsequent

²⁰ Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Boston: Thayer & Eldridge, 1860), 455.

editions of *Leaves of Grass*. For example, in a passage that first appears in the 1871 edition, Whitman makes his most direct comparison between *Leaves of Grass* and a ship when he writes: “Speed on, my Book! Spread your white sails, my little bark, athwart the imperious waves! / Chant on—sail on—bear o’er the boundless blue, from me, to every shore.”²¹ However, there are only a few notable ship and sea passages in the first edition. Examining why Whitman may have considered including a figure of a ship as his first symbolic, non-figurative representation of his poetry, a surprising continuity emerges between the “steady forward motion” of Whitman’s abandoned symbol and the function of the printer’s fist, a function Whitman already associates with the role of the poet in 1855.

Whitman’s short description of the ship figure, scribbled and circled on a crowded piece of paper, gives no details regarding how the image would be produced or precisely what kind of vessel (commercial, military, mass transit) he had in mind. The ship is defined only through its size, power, and forward motion—all qualities Whitman aligns with the poet, both in his lengthy prose preface to the first edition and in the volume’s first poem, later entitled “Song of Myself.” In a passage from this poem that closely precedes Whitman’s transformation into the “hounded slave” and the “mashed fireman,” the Whitmanian speaker describes “Speeding through space . . . speeding through heaven and the stars,” spending day and night “Storming enjoying planning loving cautioning, / Backing and filling, appearing and disappearing.”²² This string of present tense verbs—the movement between each not even slowed by punctuation in 1855—propels readers through the physical space of the line at a speed comparable to the poet’s

²¹ Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (New York: n.p., 1871), 9.

²² Whitman, *LG* 1855, 37.

shifting personas and activities. Here we have the essence of Whitman's inclusive and omniscient vision condensed into speed and motion. In one of his several self-reviews of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman characterizes this "movement of his verses" as an ocean of modernity, the "sweeping movement of the great current of living people."²³ Soaring along this "great current" in the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* are a number of ships, vehicles—in a double sense here, as metaphor and transportation—epitomizing "sweeping movement."

Arguably, any appearance of a ship or sea travel in the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* may shed light on why Whitman considered including the image, but I would like to focus on one particularly illuminating example. Whitman begins what would become Section 33 of "Song of Myself" with nautically inflected language, declaring: "My ties and ballasts leave me . . . I travel . . . I sail . . . my elbows rest in the sea-gaps."²⁴ The speaker's boundless movement—which proceeds to launch readers over oceans "Where the she-whale swims with her calves and never forsakes them, / Where the steamship trails hindways its long pennant of smoke, / Where the ground-shark's fin cuts like a black chip out of the water, / Where the half-burned brig is riding on unknown currents"—equates "travel" with "steady forward motion" over the sea and through the air.²⁵ After a long catalogue enumerating the people, animals, and landscapes of Whitman's vision, the poet concludes:

I fly the flight of the fluid and swallowing soul,
My course runs below the soundings of plummets.

²³ Walt Whitman, "Walt Whitman and His Poems." *The United States Review*, September 1855, 205-212.

²⁴ Whitman, *LG* 1855, 35.

²⁵ Whitman, *LG* 1855, 36.

I help myself to material and immaterial,
No guard can shut me off, no law can prevent me.

I anchor my ship for a little while only,
My messengers continually cruise away or bring their returns to me.²⁶

When we isolate these lines an important aspect of Whitman's "ship" metaphor becomes more apparent. The second stanza in this series acts as a bridge between "material and immaterial" elements: the "fluid and swallowing soul" and the "ship" whose "anchor" remains dropped "for a little while only." In these six lines, the motion of the Whitman's poetic vision and the movement of the soul itself are combined in one image, the figure of a ship. As I will demonstrate later, some of these same characteristics, especially Whitman's emphasis on forward motion, are reprised in the printer's fist.

Whitman ultimately elected not to include an illustration of a ship within his first edition, and it wasn't until the 1860 edition that any images, aside from a frontispiece, would appear in *Leaves of Grass*. It is difficult to move beyond conjecture when it comes to the projected 1855 ship image, but the scant manuscript evidence we have of Whitman's plan suggests, at the very least, that the poet saw room to improve his text's visual arrangement. The frontispiece alone, iconic as it has become, did not seem to satisfy Whitman fully. However, the question remains how Whitman came to adopt the printer's fist as an enduring visual symbol of his poetics. True, no manicles appear in the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*, but the icon's function—its role as an index, indicator, and means of announcement—is already closely associated with the role of the poet throughout the first edition. By classifying Whitman's symbol as a manicle, we are able

²⁶ Whitman, *LG* 1855, 38.

to attend to previously overlooked aspects of Whitman's pre-1860 writing that anticipate the poet's adoption of the printer's fist as a key marker of his brand.

Whitman's life-long love of dictionaries is well-documented, and the thought of the young poet feverishly consulting his 1847 copy of Noah Webster's *An American Dictionary of the English Language* as he composed *Leaves of Grass* has continued to tantalize scholars. For Whitman, dictionaries were "the compost heap of all English-language literature," storehouses of language packed with individual entries each with their own fascinating etymology and history.²⁷ Given Whitman's attentiveness to the weight of a word, it is difficult to imagine him *not* turning to the dictionary to carefully harvest the language necessary to define the American poet. It is in that language where we find the earliest suggestion of the printer's fist as a fitting emblem for Whitman's poetry, a visual symbol of both the book/man metonymy and the poet's role in announcing a new race of bards. In the preface to the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* Whitman writes: "The land and sea, the animals fishes and birds, the sky of heaven and the orbs, the forests mountains and rivers, are not small themes . . . but folks expect of the poet to indicate more than the beauty and dignity which always attach to dumb real objects . . . they expect him to indicate the path between reality and their souls."²⁸ Should he have turned to his Webster's *American Dictionary*, Whitman would have found the verb *indicate* defined primarily as "to show; to point out; to discover; to direct the mind to a knowledge of something not seen, or something that will probably occur in the future." On the most literal level, *to indicate* was *to point*, in this case pointing his readers via

²⁷ Folsom, *Native Representations*, 15.

²⁸ Whitman, *LG* 1855, v.

Leaves of Grass. Five years before he would adopt the printer's fist as a symbol of his poetry, Whitman is already defining the poet as *one who indicates*.

Writing about himself for the *United States Review*, Whitman makes explicit the connection between the function of the poet he outlines in the preface and the image of a pointing finger. In the review, Whitman characterizes the preface itself as a sort of verbal manicule, through which, with "light and rapid touch," the poet "first indicates in prose the principles of the foundation of a race of poets so deeply to spring from the American people, and become ingrained through them, that their Presidents shall not be the common referees so much as that great race of poets shall." The notion of temporality invoked in Webster's definition—indicating as pointing to "something that will probably occur in the future"—is never far from Whitman's use of the term, especially in his various descriptions of the new "race of poets" that will succeed him. "If in this poem the United States have found their poetic voice," Whitman writes of *Leaves of Grass*, "is it any more than a beginning? Walt Whitman himself disclaims singularity in his work, and announces the coming after him of great succession of poets, and that he but lifts his finger to give the signal." Though Whitman elides the term *indicate* in this passage, substituting it instead with "announce" (a word even more closely associated with the manicule's commercial function), he literalizes the absent verb through his image of a lifted "finger." That pointing finger does not appear in an earlier version of Whitman's promotional paratext. In one of several unpublished broadsides arranged to advertise the 1855 edition, the poet instead "announces the coming after him of a great breed of poets" by lifting a "baton to give the signal."²⁹ Whitman's self-review, itself a revision of

²⁹ Whitman's unpublished advertisements for the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* are held in the Charles E. Feinberg Collection of the Papers of Walt Whitman, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

previously arranged advertising copy, makes the poet's role as indicator more immediate, replacing a tool (the "baton") with the hand that originally carried it.

With his second edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman continued to project an intimate relationship with a future readership destined to fulfill America's poetic potential. It is in 1856 where "Sun-Down Poem" (later "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry") first appears, celebrating the "similitudes of the past and those of the future," as well as "Poem of You, Whoever You Are" (later "To You") where Whitman confesses to his anonymous, collective reader that "I have loved many women and men, but I love none better than you."³⁰ Again it is through the figure of hands that Whitman insists on intimacy with an unseen, unknown future: "Whoever you are, now I place my hand upon you, that you be my poem."³¹ Of all of Whitman's poems to appear for the first time in the second edition of *Leaves of Grass*, none more than "Poem of Many In One" (later "By Blue Ontario's Shore") so directly engages with the indicative qualities of the American bard that Whitman outlines in 1855. Through a series of questions to an imagined audience, Whitman contrasts a complacent readership imprisoned by a European literary tradition with his ideal reader, a future member of "the great race of poets":

Who are you, that wanted only to be told what you knew before?
 Who are you, that wanted only a book to join you in your nonsense?
 Are you, or would you be, better than all that has ever been before?
 If you would be better than all that has ever been before, come listen to me, and I
 will to you.³²

³⁰ Whitman, *LG* 1856, 211, 207.

³¹ Whitman, *LG* 1856, 206.

³² Whitman, *LG* 1856, 181-182.

The speaker concedes that the “Mighty bards” who have preceded *Leaves of Grass* “have done their work, and passed to other spheres,” but “One work forever remains, the work of surpassing all they have done.”³³ It is Whitman, represented in the poem by his “friendly hand,” that promises to guide readers in this mission:

Others take finish, but the republic is ever constructive, and ever keeps vista;
 Others adorn the past—but you, O, days of the present, I adorn you!
 O days of the future, I believe in you!
 O America, because you build for mankind, I build for you!
 O well-beloved stone-cutter! I lead them who plan with decision and science,
 I lead the present with friendly hand toward the future.
 Bravas to states whose semitic impulses send wholesome children to the next
 age!³⁴

The phallic quality of an “ever constructive” republic that refuses to “take finish” is echoed in Whitman’s outstretched hand, underscored even further by the “semitic impulses” of the states whose “wholesome children” seem to populate “Sun-Down Poem” and “Poem of You, Whoever You Are.” Whitman revised “By Blue Ontario’s Shore” in 1871 to further emphasize his hand’s role in the nation’s ability to “send wholesome children to the next age.” Alluding to his service in Washington, D.C.’s Civil War hospitals, Whitman adds parenthetically: “(Upon this breast has many a dying soldier lean’d to breathe his last, / This arm, this hand, this voice, have nourished, rais’d, restored, / To life recalling many a prostrate form;).”³⁵ After seeing two editions of *Leaves of Grass* through print, Whitman had formulated a vision of America’s so-far deferred literary and democratic prosperity: “The Poetry of other lands lies in the past—what they have been. The Poetry of America lies in the future—what These States and

³³ Whitman, *LG* 1856, 182.

³⁴ Whitman, *LG* 1856, 187-188.

³⁵ Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass: A Textual Variorum of the Printed Poems*, ed. Sculley Bradley, Harold W. Blodgett, Arthur Golden, and William White (New York: New York University Press, 1980), 1:205.

their coming men and women are certainly to be.”³⁶ In his next edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman would literally point the way.

The first two iterations of *Leaves of Grass* show Whitman establishing the hand of the poet as a creative force, a hand that both builds and leads. For Whitman, especially in poems like “Poem of Many In One,” the hand embodies both of those functions. It is the hand that is the part of the body that writes, and thus it is an *indicator* in a double sense: it points at things *and* it writes the words of things. Whenever the “hand” appears in Whitman’s poetry, it carries this resonance—the textual hands within *Leaves of Grass* not only point to the future but they are responsible for writing what Whitman would call “indicative words” towards that future. This terminology—what Whitman had relied on to define the American bard and his poetic progeny in the first two editions of *Leaves of Grass*—is given form visually in the 1860 butterfly manicule.

It is no coincidence that this potent symbol—the first coherent representation of Whitman’s literary brand to appear on the cover of *Leaves of Grass*—was ushered into print by a Boston publisher in 1860. Thayer & Eldridge were well-acquainted with the culture of literary branding that was developing around them; while Whitman’s symbol is quite unique in its design and execution, the poet and his publishers were attuned to the innovations in print promotion coming out of Boston. In their first letter to Whitman after offering to publish the third edition of *Leaves of Grass* sight unseen, Thayer & Eldridge were already concerned with how the new volume would look. Promising Whitman that they were “ready to commence on [his] work *at once* and have it got up with all possible speed,” the young publishers emphasized that the “most important point to be settled”

³⁶ Walt Whitman, *Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts*, ed. Edward F. Grier (New York: New York University Press, 1984), 4:1435.

was “the form in which the Poems shall appear.” How large did Whitman want the new *Leaves of Grass* to be? Should it be printed in one volume or two? Thayer & Eldridge were especially curious if Whitman was interested in having *Leaves of Grass* printed in the “*blue & gold* style inaugurated by Ticknor and Fields,” the most respected publishing house in the United States.³⁷ Whitman’s publishers and the highly regarded firm were virtually neighbors on Boston’s Washington St.—Thayer & Eldridge would have been acutely aware of the cultural cachet attached to the Ticknor and Fields imprint, especially the popularity of their often imitated “*blue & gold*” editions. Before they instructed Whitman to run wild with the design of *Leaves of Grass*—the experimentation which produced the butterfly manicule—Thayer & Eldridge gauged the poet’s interest in molding the third edition of his poetry after one of the most visually recognizable brands in the nineteenth-century literary marketplace.

As enterprising publishers with an eye for promotional flair, it makes sense that Thayer & Eldridge might want to model their first volume of poetry on Ticknor & Field’s popular format. Thanks in part to Ticknor and Fields, “by 1860 binding and literary promotion were dynamically linked.”³⁸ Sarah Wadsworth credits Ticknor and Fields, especially the activities of James T. Fields, with pioneering “the nascent art of book promotion.”³⁹ Fields’s biographer, W.S. Tryon, characterizes the publisher as a ceaseless promoter of his own literary and commercial interests. Fields may not have had the stomach for Whitman’s more indelicate variety of publicity, but “when all was said and

³⁷ Letter from Thayer & Eldridge to Walt Whitman, February 27, 1860.

³⁸ Jeffrey D. Groves, “Judging Literary Books by Their Covers: House Styles, Ticknor and Fields, and Literary Promotion,” *Reading Books: Essays on the Material Text and Literature in America*, ed. Michele Moylan and Lane Stiles (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 93.

³⁹ Sarah Wadsworth, *In the Company of Books: Literature and Its “Classes” in Nineteenth-Century America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 173.

done the final test of success [for Fields] was the degree to which he persuaded purchasers to buy his books.”⁴⁰ To accomplish this, Fields waged “a campaign of unceasing publicity” which included newspaper advertisements, “shew bills” (large signs posted in store windows to announce new publications), book reviews, and “favorable word-of-mouth opinion exchanged among an articulate set of mutually admiring literati.” Working behind the scenes, Fields employed every trick at his disposal. This included pouring considerable amounts of money into advertising. In 1844 Ticknor and Fields spent roughly \$10 a month on advertising; a decade later in 1854 they were spending over \$200 a month. During a sixteen-month span between 1855 and 1856 that figure spiked to \$300 a month.⁴¹ Sometimes Fields’s efforts backfired—as when he was accused of coercing the press after pulling his advertising in response to an unfavorable review of Longfellow’s *Hiawatha*—but, at the very least, “Fields’s art of promotion . . . demonstrated that literary values and critical acclaim did not arise with entire spontaneity.”⁴²

For all of the attention Ticknor and Fields authors like Longfellow garnered, the publishers were as well known for the appearance of their books as they were for the work printed within them. The development of distinctive Ticknor and Fields “house styles,” such as the Blue and Gold editions, proved that “the physical book could itself be used as a medium for advertising and marketing,” alleviating “the difficulty many contemporary publishers faced in establishing a recognizable ‘brand.’”⁴³ As Jeffrey D.

⁴⁰ W.S. Tryon, *Parnassus Corner: A Life of James T. Fields Publisher to the Victorians* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963), 178.

⁴¹ Tryon, *Parnassus Corner*, 179.

⁴² Tryon, *Parnassus Corner*, 184.

Groves has shown, many different publishers, Ticknor and Fields among them, were “utilizing recently developed binding techniques to create . . . uniform bindings that, rather than being associated only with particular titles or editions, were used for many books published by a single house.”⁴⁴ Thayer & Eldridge toyed with developing their own house style; several of their publications feature a large “T&E” blind-stamped on the cover, but the unified design was quickly abandoned, giving individual authors like Whitman more control over the appearance of their books. Though Thayer & Eldridge elected not to pursue a house style, the promotional potential of that approach, Groves explains, was phenomenal:

Such bindings became signs—even advertisements—for the publisher: the repeated design alerted customers, almost surely as the publisher’s name on the spine or the title page, about who had produced a particular book. Given sufficient publisher reputation and prestige, a house style also communicated a message of literary quality: if some books brought out by a publisher achieved canonical status, and the external design of most of the publisher’s books looked identical, then the intended message from producer to consumer seems to have been that, like their appearance, the quality of the publisher’s books was consistent. Moreover, the development of house styles as texts for communicating such value judgments was historically concurrent with publishers’ increasing sophistication in literary promotion, and the synthesis of book design and promotion encouraged consumers to read bindings as guarantors that literary quality awaited within.⁴⁵

As his printer’s fist illustrates, Whitman, like Fields, embraced the promise of synthesizing “book design and promotion.” Moving from publisher to publisher, Whitman had to develop a personal set of visual markers for his literary brand that he adapted from one edition to the next. But the iconography circulating around Whitman’s

⁴³ Wadsworth, *In the Company of Books*, 173.

⁴⁴ Groves, “Judging Literary Books,” 76.

⁴⁵ Groves, “Judging Literary Books,” 76.

work, however recognizable, could never saturate the market in the same way the house styles of a prestigious publisher like Ticknor and Fields could.

Before the introduction of the Blue and Gold format in 1856, Ticknor and Fields published most of their general trade books in brown cloth, the firm's first signature binding. Michael Winship describes this style as a "dark brown ribbed T grain cloth, decorated with an elaborate four-lobed arabesque design blind-stamped at the center of the sides and sober gold-stamped lettering on the spine in panels of blind-stamped double rules."⁴⁶ In contrast to some of the age's more elaborate bindings, the understated brown covers—what one reviewer called the firm's "russet robes"—projected an air of refinement.⁴⁷ Ticknor and Fields modeled this binding on the kind used by British publishers like Moxon, Murray, and Pickering. Ironically, Ticknor & Field's binding style, a look so many American publishers would attempt to copy, was itself an imitation.

When Ticknor and Fields published the first volume in what would come to be known as the "Blue and Gold series," *The Poetical Works of Alfred Tennyson*, they were also imitating a style inaugurated by the British. The binding was most likely "inspired by the 1853 pocket edition of John Greenleaf Whittier's poems published by the London firm of Routledge."⁴⁸ This second house style was, as Winship notes, "another great success by Ticknor and Fields in designing a recognizable package for its publications."⁴⁹ These pocket-sized volumes were the perfect venue for poetry; in fact, the format became

⁴⁶ Michael Winship, *American Literary Publishing in the Mid-Nineteenth Century: The Business of Ticknor and Fields* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1995), 123.

⁴⁷ "Poetry and Fiction," *Christian Examiner*, 1858, 302.

⁴⁸ Wadsworth, *In the Company of Books*, 166.

⁴⁹ Winship, *American Literary Publishing*, 123.

so popular that many other firms produced their own knock-off editions (just as Thayer & Eldridge contemplated doing). The practice was widespread enough that “blue and gold” became a generic term for any pocket-sized volume printed by a publisher in this style. Though certainly more ostentatious than their standard brown binding, Ticknor and Fields Blue and Gold editions were quite attractive: “all edges of the leaves were trimmed and gilt, and the book was bound in bright blue cloth with large, blind-stamped, wreathlike ornaments on the sides and a gold-stamped spine with the title and author’s name placed within an arabesque ornament.”⁵⁰ In giving their volumes a uniform appearance, Ticknor and Fields had established a coherent and recognizable brand identity; “buyers of literary texts could identify a Ticknor and Fields book at a glance, which was certainly a factor contributing to the firm’s celebrity.”⁵¹

The staid house styles of Ticknor and Fields set the standard for a literary work’s appearance during the nineteenth century and proved the promotional power of uniformity. The 1860 *Leaves of Grass*, however, pushed the potential of literary promotion in the opposite direction: Thayer & Eldridge’s edition celebrates idiosyncrasy and typographical excess. Whitman utilized that excess to eagerly embrace the interplay between his poetry and his newly inaugurated symbol. Later in this chapter I will examine the evolution of Whitman’s manicule—from its origins in the poet’s manuscripts to the appearance of what we might call “the poet’s fist” in 1881—but for now I would like to consider how the symbol shapes readings of two of the 1860 poems it is coupled with, “Proto-Leaf” and “So long!” The first manicule within the 1860 *Leaves of Grass* appears at the bottom of the table of contents page (Figure 2.4). Unlike the other

⁵⁰ Winship, *American Literary Publishing*, 123.

⁵¹ Groves, “Judging Literary Books,” 78.

three manicles in and on the Thayer & Eldridge edition (as well as those in *Leaves of Grass Imprints*), this manicle, reproduced on the verso facing “Proto-Leaf,” is tilted upward at forty-five degrees. The angled printer’s fist directs the reader’s eyes to the first word of the first poem of the 1860 edition, “FREE.” Here, right at the beginning of *Leaves of Grass*—in the same poem that offers “endless announcements”—Whitman pairs the most familiar symbol in nineteenth-century advertising with the most welcome word to would-be consumers.

Like the butterfly manicle that points to it, the commercial language that begins the 1860 *Leaves of Grass* is employed in a way that seeks to elevate the text beyond its obvious ties to the market. Whitman’s butterfly icon is not simply a printer’s fist; the new manicle is a visual promise of transformation—Whitman’s body and his book, captured in the image of a pointing hand, signaling America’s emergence from its cultural cocoon, guiding America’s flight as a nation of poets. By itself, the butterfly is a clichéd representation of rebirth, yet the symbol’s juxtaposition with the printer’s fist manages to give new life to two otherwise stale images—the pointing hand suddenly becomes not just a nagging print advertisement, but a friend and guide; the butterfly still promises spiritual rebirth, but through an immersion in the radical poetics of *Leaves of Grass*. Whitman performs similar work in the beginning of the 1860 edition, where the first word, “FREE,” quickly morphs into another consumer desire, “fresh”; the phonic unity of these two standard promotional appeals is disrupted at last by the line’s final word, “savage.” Bit by bit the poet turns advertising words into qualities of his own expanding selfhood, distributed from his birthplace across the continent, like some force of interstate commerce. As one contemporary author remarked, symbolically, butterflies are

“strikingly emblematical of that delicacy which shrinks from communion with all that is rude or base.”⁵² The butterfly’s presence on Whitman’s aggressively outstretched finger thus displayed for readers the purity of the poet and his promotion of a distinct American poetics.

Spurred on by its opening pun on the verbal and visual language of promotion, “Proto-Leaf” sells readers on their part in Whitman’s vision for America’s future. As he gazes “through time,” Whitman sees a procession of poets: “With firm and regular step they wend—they never stop, / Successions of men, Americanos, a hundred millions, / One generation playing its part and passing on in its turn, / With faces turned sideways or backward toward me to listen, / With eyes retrospective toward me.”⁵³ Having just begun what David S. Reynolds calls the “thesis poem” of Whitman’s book, no new reader could yet turn “retrospective toward” *Leaves of Grass*, but the poet’s persistent acts of self-promotion within the poem—such as his guarantee that “the following poems are indeed to drop in the earth the germs of a greater Religion”—urge readers forward through the text.⁵⁴ The “firm and regular step” of a new generation of poets is marshaled by Whitman’s “flowing mouth and indicative hand,” all while Whitman insists that he cannot eliminate the “painful” elements of such progress. “Of all the men of the earth,” Whitman writes, “I only can unloose you and toughen you.” As my discussion of *Leaves of Grass Imprints* in Chapter 1 has shown, that Whitman in “Proto-Leaf” would appeal to readers through a promise to “toughen” them via a struggle with his text should come as no surprise. In an unpublished introduction to the fourth edition of *Leaves of Grass*

⁵² Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The Poetry of Life, Volume 1* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1835), 138.

⁵³ Whitman, *LG* 1860, 7.

⁵⁴ Reynolds, *Walt Whitman’s America*, 388; Whitman, *LG* 1860, 13.

(which borrows heavily from “Proto-Leaf” and “So long!”), Whitman articulates in prose the argument made at the beginning of the 1860 edition:

For from this book Yourself before unknown shall now rise up and be revealed. Out of the things around us, naught made by me for you, but only hinted to be made by yourself. Indeed I have not done the work, and cannot do it. But you must do the work to really make what is within the following song—which, if you do, I promise you more satisfaction, earned by yourself far more than ever book before has given you.⁵⁵

The labor of constructing a new race of poets, the “work” that will enable the reader to “rise up and be revealed” is not performed by Whitman. The poet’s hand remains “indicative” only: “Indeed I have not done the work, and cannot do it.” Advertising his poetry as a hint to the reader’s “unknown” potential, Whitman merges his verse with the indicative finger of the printer’s fist. In “A Font of Type,” Whitman would call the letters housed in a case of type a “latent mine” of “unlaunch’d voices” and “passionate powers,” capable of “Wrath, argument, of praise”; drawn from that very same printer’s case, Whitman’s manicule similarly indicates America’s literary future “slumbering” within the “pallid slivers” of type.⁵⁶

The Thayer & Eldridge edition concludes with a companion piece to “Proto-Leaf” entitled “So long!” Whitman’s valediction and his “thesis poem” express a similar theme, but, as Ezra Greenspan observes, “So long!” strikes a note of decidedly “greater intimacy” with the reader, “employing . . . one of the most daring, not to mention presumptuous, figurations of author and reader to be found in literature.”⁵⁷ The poem, whose final words are immediately followed by a butterfly manicule, is a paean to an

⁵⁵ Whitman, *NUPM*, 4:1470-1471.

⁵⁶ Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1892), 386.

⁵⁷ Greenspan, *Walt Whitman and the American Reader*, 210.

America inhabited by Whitman's unknown "offspring," those who would succeed *Leaves of Grass* and prove its vision, "a man or woman coming—perhaps you are the one."⁵⁸ This particular juxtaposition of text and image aligns Whitman's role as a poet with the fleeting importance of the pointing-hand. Positioning "So long!" and its accompanying manicule at the end of his book, Whitman finishes the 1860 *Leaves of Grass* by emphasizing the ephemeral nature of his poetic project. Here Whitman admits that all he knows "at any time suffices for that time only—not subsequent time."⁵⁹ The value of *Leaves of Grass*, like the value of the manicule, is transferred onto what it announces: the uncertain future to which Whitman and his printer's fist point. "Let none be content with me," Whitman writes, "I myself seek a man better than I am, or a woman better than I am."⁶⁰ The hand at the end of the 1860 edition, which gestures towards a blank recto, invites readers to exit Whitman's book in search of the "better" man or woman that *Leaves of Grass* predicts. Even more clearly than at the beginning of the volume, this final printer's fist acts as an advertisement for "what comes after" Whitman's poetry, a finger pointing to "a hundred millions of superb persons" yet to exist.

By directing readers towards a blank-page and out of *Leaves of Grass* entirely, "So long!" and its manicule do much to lessen the grip of Whitman's poetry, yet the poem and the printer's fist establish the strongest sense of Whitman's physical presence in his book. It is in "So long!" where Whitman most succinctly articulates the author/book metonymy that had organized *Leaves of Grass* since 1855. Here Whitman insists: "This is no book, / Who touches this, touches a man." The poet's revelation is

⁵⁸ Whitman, *LG* 1860, 454.

⁵⁹ Whitman, *LG* 1860, 451.

⁶⁰ Whitman, *LG* 1860, 452.

preceded by a series of prophetic announcements—“I announce natural persons to arise, / I announce justice triumphant, / I announce uncompromising liberty and equality”—that serve as verbal manicules pointing to Whitman’s ultimate merger with *Leaves of Grass*, a union of flesh/text, author/reader, and spirit/promotion symbolized by the printer’s fist itself.⁶¹ As Brady Earnhart has demonstrated, by “investing *Leaves of Grass* with a human identity, [Whitman] offered the act of reading the mass-produced book as a corrective to the social disintegration that mass production itself had helped bring about.”⁶² What scholars have ignored is the extent to which Whitman’s appropriation of the manicule underscores the book’s equation of man and text. Whitman’s butterfly manicule is a symbolic marriage of the print market and the poet; the butterfly perched on (not crushed by) the index finger enacts the impossible balance of spirituality and materiality that *Leaves of Grass* had supposedly achieved. Despite Whitman’s claim in “So long!” to have “[departed] from materials,” part of what the hands in, on, and circulating around Thayer & Eldridge’s volume were pointing to was the poet himself. The manicule—the first image readers saw on the cover of *Imprints* and the last image they encountered in *Leaves of Grass*—promised the masses a chance to touch Whitman, the self-proclaimed indicator of a new American epoch, if they just bought *Leaves of Grass*.

⁶¹ Whitman, *LG* 1860, 453; Sean Francis describes Whitman’s “reiterated imperative[s]” in “Proto-Leaf” as being “remarkably similar to a verbal equivalent of the ‘pointing hand’ sign ubiquitous in the advertising of the day.” Though Francis cites both the 1860 *Leaves* and *Imprints* in his essay, he makes no reference to Whitman’s actual manicule symbol inaugurated in those books. See “Outbidding at the Start the Old Cautious Hucksters’: Promotional Discourse and Whitman’s ‘Free’ Verse,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 57 (December 2002), 395.

⁶² Brady Earnhart, “The Good Gray Poet and the Quaker Oats Man: Speaker as Spokescharacter in *Leaves of Grass*,” *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* (Spring 2007), 181.

The symbolization of *Leaves of Grass* as a physical gesture, the raising of a finger, is a telling one. Indeed, the poet's embrace of indication as a natural and embodied form of signification within his poetry has received considerable attention, but scholars have yet to explore fully the ways this mode of address resonates with Whitman's printer's fist. Mark Bauerlein, in his semiotic reading of the first three editions of *Leaves of Grass*, argues that, by 1860, Whitman had grown disillusioned with his attempt to indicate, that is, "to restore language to its natural, physical, emotive beginnings."⁶³ For Bauerlein, the poems of the third edition demonstrate Whitman's loss of faith in indication, "a deictic semiotic gesture founded upon concrete, physical action."⁶⁴ In the expansion, revision, and reordering of poems for the Thayer & Eldridge edition, Bauerlein sees Whitman facing the problem of representation itself, the realization that

"Indication" . . . is prone to become skewed like any other form of expression, to waver from its destination as it is given up to desire and interpretation. In other words, putatively natural gestures such as "indication," which seemingly achieve unmediated status by virtue of their independence from the spoken and written sign, are in fact also liable to the hazards of reading. No matter how transparent or organic or symbolic the sign may be, its success still must necessarily rest upon interest, ideology, prejudice, upon the interpretive virtues and vices of willful, desirous readers.⁶⁵

This epiphany would be nothing short of a semiotic nightmare for a poet bent on restoring language to its natural origins. Thus, Bauerlein reads Whitman post-1856 as

⁶³ Mark Bauerlein, *Whitman and the American Idiom* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), 5.

⁶⁴ Bauerlein, *Whitman and the American Idiom*, 117.

⁶⁵ Bauerlein, *Whitman and the American Idiom*, 117.

“grimly conscious of the pitfalls of being read,” suspicious of “words’ power to bring about an unmediated experience.”⁶⁶

But it is curious that in the same volume Bauerlein finds Whitman confronting the impotence of his own language, poems like “Proto-Leaf” and “So long!” with their accompanying manicules appear, reaffirming the virtues of indication, even if only as a mediated form of expression “liable to the hazards of reading.” If Whitman had abandoned a belief that the poetry of *Leaves of Grass* could “spring off the printed page and point readers directly back to *his* here and now,” then Bauerlein’s characterization of “So long!” as a poem where Whitman “renounce[s] his earlier poetry” might be justified.⁶⁷ But such a reading ignores the materiality of the 1860 edition, a book whose typographical exuberance suggests an even stronger faith in the poet’s ability to transcend the limitations of the printed word. Whitman’s decision in the 1860 edition to go beyond words to include numerous visual signs in his book—sperm on the title page, a globe with clouds, a sunrise/sunset, the butterfly maniple—reveal his increasing desperation to *Maintain* indication. After all, he places the unmistakable visual sign of indication, a sign nearly incapable of being misread, the pointing hand, at the conceptual center of his book. Further, in his narrative of Whitman’s semiotic crisis, Bauerlein posits a poet whose faith in natural language was once absolute; however, as we have seen, Whitman’s vision of a new breed of poets was always contingent on the “hazards of reading,” always conscious that a word or gesture (or a word as gesture) could “waver from its destination.” Whitman does not abandon his role as an indicator in 1860, far from it. If anything, the maniple launching readers out of the third edition simultaneously

⁶⁶ Bauerlein, *Whitman and the American Idiom*, 119.

⁶⁷ Bauerlein, *Whitman and the American Idiom*, 124.

acknowledges the “pitfalls of being read” while celebrating the poet’s faith in future readers’ ability to “do the work to really make what is within” *Leaves of Grass*.

Michael J. O’Driscoll addresses the key omission in Bauerlein’s appraisal of the 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass*: the actual presence of Whitman’s butterfly icon. Rehearsing elements of Bauerlein’s thesis, O’Driscoll claims that “Whitman begins his poetic career with a celebration of book culture and print technology, but he moves gradually away from that position with the recognition that the materiality of the text opposes his own transcendental efforts.”⁶⁸ More pertinent to our discussion, O’Driscoll argues that “the hieroglyphs and catalogues of Whitman find their authority in the master trope of the pointing finger.” The trope of “indexical textuality” provides Whitman “with recourse to a primal language of gesture that promises unmediated access to the material world while accounting for the materiality of the sign itself.”⁶⁹ This appraisal of Whitman’s poetic project in 1860 is less dire, and O’Driscoll’s reading of the butterfly icon opposite “Proto-Leaf”—the only manicule he addresses—is accordingly more optimistic. Though O’Driscoll does not consider the manicule’s association with either manuscript culture or nineteenth-century promotion, I quote his work at length here as an example of a semiotic reading of Whitman’s verse that also accounts for material elements of *Leaves of Grass*:

Given Whitman’s insistence, then, that he assume a place within the greater archive or world culture—an archive with which we know he becomes increasingly uneasy—he must also describe a poetics that must either exceed the material confines of the text, or fall short of its transcendent program. He does so by positing a poetics of indication that gives way to an expressive anterior to the poetic act. In part, this provides

⁶⁸ Michael J. O’Driscoll, “Whitman in the Archive: *Leaves of Grass* and the Culture of the Book,” *English Studies in Canada* 25(1999), 298.

⁶⁹ O’Driscoll, “Whitman in the Archive,” 296.

an explication of the mysterious—but entirely appropriate—figure that follows the table of contents in the 1860 edition: a hand, with a pointing finger, mounted by a butterfly . . . This figure could be interpreted quite simply as an indicative gesture pointing the reader to the pages beyond (it points, indeed, to the right); it could also, however, be regarded in much more complex terms. The indicative hand not only embodies the controlling figure of *Leaves of Grass* as a whole—the poem’s primary mode of signification, the form of its catalogues, its theories of linguistic origin—it also suggests the chrysalid-like transformation of the indicative into the expressive, the movement from reference to meaning, the surmounting of human convention by natural beauty.⁷⁰

Whitman’s supposed crisis of representation is considerably less severe to O’Driscoll, who identifies the “indicative hand” as the “primary mode of signification” within all of the first three editions of *Leaves of Grass*.

The butterfly icon itself embodies this continuity among editions, capturing in one image properties of what Whitman first contemplated representing in two within the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*. Cued at times by the poetry to view the indicative hand as Whitman’s own, readers encounter both the book/man metonymy of the original frontispiece engraving and, thrust ahead by the pointing index finger, the distinctive “steady forward motion” of the abandoned ship figure. That Whitman saw the printer’s fist and the poems it accompanied at the beginning and end of the 1860 edition as performing a similar function to the 1855 frontispiece is evinced by Whitman’s manuscript plans for a prose introduction to the fourth edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Scattered over several drafts, Whitman maintains that the real work of his poetry has yet to be completed: “The paths to the house are made—but where is the house itself? At most, only indicated or touched.”⁷¹ In notes towards this unpublished preface, Whitman condenses the indicative

⁷⁰ O’Driscoll, “Whitman in the Archive,” 313.

⁷¹ Whitman, *NUPM*, 4:1486.

function of the printer's fist icon with his poetic claim to be physically present in his book:

O friend, whoe'er you are, at last arriving hither, accept from me, as one in waiting for you at this entrance, welcome and hospitality. This is no book—but I myself, in loving flesh and blood. I feel at every leaf, the pressure of your hand, which I return; and thus throughout upon the journey, linked together will we go.

I almost feel the curving hold and pressure of your hand, which I return, and thus throughout upon the journey linked together will we go. Indeed this is no book, but more a man, within whose breast the common heart is throbbing;—no leaves of print are these, but lips for your sake freely speaking.⁷²

After the third edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman's next two frugally produced editions exclude all typographical ornaments. But, as these manuscripts demonstrate, the associations Whitman made between the pointing finger and the function of *Leaves of Grass* persisted in the twenty-year absence of the butterfly manicule.

The passages quoted above, where the hands of the *reader* are the first to be mentioned, remind us that Whitman's manicule not only carries an association with the scene of inscription but with the scene of reading as well. Looking back to the 1860 edition, we can see the pointing finger not only as the poet gesturing towards the words his hand has written (and the type his hand has set or has had set for him), but also the reader's own pointing hand, used to guide his or her eyes over those words, to skim through those lines. Indeed, the symbolic significance of the hand and the butterfly as discrete units is remarkably fluid. The hand is both reader and writer; both can attach the disembodied manicule to themselves as an extension of their own writer/reader impulse. Hands are the organ of touch between the scene of writing and the scene of reading: the

⁷² Whitman, NUPM, 4:1465; 4:1467.

poet's hands take the words from the writer's imagination and put the words on the page, the reader's hand guides those words into the eyes and imagination. The butterfly too invites multiple readings, embodying both a transformation of Whitman's text in the hands of the reader as well as the reader's transformation as guided by the poet. In this regard, the butterfly manicule is an incredibly complex symbol signifying a number of intimate relationships fostered by *Leaves of Grass*.

The 1871 *Leaves of Grass*, like the 1867 edition before it, does not reprint Whitman's manicule. Just as he had done with the first edition, Whitman financed the fourth and fifth editions of *Leaves of Grass* himself. With no commercial publisher to foot the bill, extra expenses, such as ornaments like the butterfly manicule, were out of the question. But even without the means to represent visually the poet's indicative hand, Whitman still continued to write-out that image within his verse. The 1871 edition juxtaposes two poems—"The Indications" and "Poets to Come"—which, even in the absence of Whitman's printer's fist, further equate the poet with a hand guiding future generations. Neither poem, paired together for the first time in the four-poem cluster *The Answerer*, is entirely new to the 1871 edition, but Whitman's poetic re-ordering—a revision that seems to compensate for the absence of the poet's visual symbol by making its presence in verse more immediate—breaks down the anatomy of his pointing hand icon into its two essential parts: Whitman the *indicator* of a new race of *poets to come*. The argument of "Indications" is similar to that of "Poem of Many In One" and "So long!":

The words of the true poems give you more than poems,
They give you to form for yourself, poems, religions, politics, war, peace,
behavior, histories, essays, romances, and everything else,
They balance ranks, colors, races, creeds, and the sexes,

They do not seek beauty—they are sought,
Forever touching them, or close upon them, follows beauty, longing, fain, lovesick.

They prepare for death—yet are they not the finish, but rather the outset,
They bring none to his or her terminus, or to be content and full;
Whom they take, they take into space, to behold the birth of stars, to learn one of
the meanings,
To launch off with absolute faith—to sweep through the ceaseless rings, and
never be quiet again.⁷³

The work Whitman requires of his readers—that they “form” their own poems—again emphasizes the poet’s ephemeral nature, that he and *Leaves of Grass* are not “the finish, but rather the outset.” This theme extends through “Poets to Come,” which is reproduced here in its entirety:

POETS to come! Orators, singers, musicians to come!
Not to-day is to justify me, and answer what I am for;
But you, a new brood, native, athletic, continental, greater than before known,
Arouse! Arouse—for you must justify me—you must answer.

I myself but write one or two indicative words for the future,
I but advance a moment, only to wheel and hurry back into darkness.

I am a man who, sauntering along, without fully stopping, turns a casual look
upon you, and then averts his face,
Leaving it to you to prove and define it,
Expecting the main things from you.⁷⁴

Whitman’s “indicative words,” the figuration of *Leaves of Grass* as a pointing finger, precede the appearance of the butterfly manicule in 1860 and persist in its twenty-one year absence. Just as this symbol of Whitman and his work develops within the poetry of *Leaves of Grass*, the visual icon undergoes its own evolution from a crudely drawn hand to a print representation of a photographic index of the poet.

Manicule, Printer’s Fist, Poet’s Fist

⁷³ Whitman, *LG* 1871, 205-206.

⁷⁴ Whitman, *LG* 1871, 206.

A proper history of Whitman's printer's fist begins with the poet's notebooks and marginalia. The proto-collage writing process behind the creation of *Leaves of Grass* is nothing short of revolutionary, but as a nineteenth-century reader, Whitman is quite typical, especially in his use of the manicule. Matt Miller's work on Whitman's early poetry manuscripts tracks Whitman's relentless packing and unpacking of trial words, lines, and phrases—an almost obsessive system of writing, rewriting, revising, rearranging, and literal copying and pasting. Not only did Whitman cannibalize his own work, but his philosophy of language enabled him to see the writing of others as ripe "to be stolen, appropriated, composted, and transformed" within new contexts.⁷⁵ Whitman utilized the manicule throughout this complex collage process; the hand-drawn symbol appears next to key poetic lines and ideas in Whitman's various notebooks as well as in the margins of printed material, marking passages to return to, extract, or remember.

The hands in Whitman's manuscripts are almost always simply constructed. Often they are not more than a squiggly, vertical line crudely approximating fingers; occasionally, when Whitman has taken more care, they have shirt cuffs, yet never more than that. But even when marked in a rush, the manicule signals a moment during composition—sometimes before a word, line, or phrase has yet to be written—when Whitman anoints text as especially important or relevant. Hand-drawn manicules do appear in Whitman's notes to printers, but, more often than not, the person Whitman is communicating to through these pointing hands is himself. Of course, on some level, the manicule and a symbol like the asterisk function similarly in Whitman's manuscripts; as indexing notations, they both draw the eye to key passages. However, mancules, as representations of the human body—specifically the hand, the part of the author

⁷⁵ Miller, *Collage of Myself*, 93.

mechanically responsible for the creation of the manicule itself—take on a synecdochical relationship to their creator in a way the asterisk does not. All private manuscripts are a form of communication with the self, but adding a manicule to such a document is a doubly reflexive act.

It would be difficult to select a particularly meaningful manicule in Whitman's manuscripts, but what is worth acknowledging is that the symbol is present from the very beginning of the poet's extant notes. In the example below, two manicules appear in close proximity to the probable trial phrase for Whitman's volume, "a leaf of grass":

☞Good subject Poem} —Variety of characters, each one of whom forth every day—things appearing, transfers and promotions every day.

There was a child went forth every day—and the first things that he ~~saw~~
looked at with fixed love, that thing he became for the day.—

*Bring in whole races, or castes, or generations, to express themselves—
personify the general objects of the creative and give them voice—every
thing on the most august scale—a leaf of grass, with its equal voice.—

☞ — voice of the generations of slaves—of those who have suffered—
voice of Lovers—of Night—Day—Space—the stars—the countless ages
of the Past—the countless ages of the future—⁷⁶

Judging by its placement on the page, the first of these two manicules ("☞Good subject Poem}") was probably written before Whitman jotted down his actual idea for a poem; the second manicule ("☞ — voice of the generations of slaves"), squeezed as it is into the left margin, was almost certainly added after the phrase to its right was completed. Such reconstructions of Whitman's writing process will always be tentative, but manicules can provide hints to the order of inscription. At the very least, Whitman's

⁷⁶ Charles E. Feinberg Collection of the Papers of Walt Whitman, 1839-1919, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

pointing hands indicate passages worth special attention, if only in their author's estimation.

When they appear alongside printed matter, Whitman's manicules vary more widely in shape and definition. For example, this manicule, which points to a March 1870 article on the curmudgeonly antics of Thomas Carlyle, is as large and well-formed as one will find among Whitman's papers (Figure 2.5). The hand points down as if to admonish a child, taking on the spirit of Whitman's accompanying note which describes Carlyle's increasingly antisocial behavior as "A warning to Literary men philosophers thinkers & poets."⁷⁷ Manicules as marginalia remind us that reading is an embodied and interactive experience. Marking a text with one's hand—either by writing words, drawing a manicule, or both, as in the example above—subtly disrupts any tacit author/reader hierarchy, opening space for the language of both agents to coexist on one page. Thus, when Whitman prints a manicule in the 1860 *Leaves* he takes the readers' hand in a literal way. Since manicules were normally drawn by readers to indicate passages of writing they wanted to recall, when Whitman inserts his own manicule into *Leaves* he usurps the indexing role of the reader in this regard, allowing the printed manicule to shift imperceptibly between writer and reader, as it serves to indicate importance *to* and *for* the reader.

Another effect of the marginal manicule as a representation of the body is that it points to us the printed text's proximity to its readers' flesh, a usually unspoken intimacy—except within *Leaves of Grass*—documented via the manicule's simple imprint. All of this aligns so nicely with the overarching themes of *Leaves of Grass* that we might suspect Whitman's private use of the manicule is somehow exceptional.

⁷⁷ Thomas Biggs Harned Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

However, perhaps what makes the manicule an even more appropriate symbol for Whitman to adopt in print is the icon's extremely broad application. As an experienced journalist, Whitman worked closely with the symbol, but usage and understanding of the manicule required no knowledge of the printing trade; the pointing finger was nearly universally recognizable to readers and nonreaders alike.

Making the jump from marginalia to print, the manicule takes on even more complex cultural significance. As I discussed earlier, printer's fists were a staple of advertisements during the nineteenth century, but they became so popular that they quickly ceased to command the attention their manuscript predecessors had maintained for centuries when controlled by readers. Whether or not the symbol was actually effective, the pointing finger was *the* representative icon of nineteenth-century advertising. That Whitman was aware of the commercial connotations undergirding his butterfly symbol is most apparent on the cover of *Leaves of Grass Imprints*, where the image is surrounded by three other printer's fists (Figure 2.6). Representative of the typography to be found in the 1860 *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman's butterfly manicule advertises his attractive new volume of poetry. And while the basic purpose of *Imprints* is to persuade readers to purchase *Leaves of Grass*, the large butterfly manicule more immediately directs readers into *Imprints* itself. As I discuss in Chapter 1, the lengthy pamphlet is a promotion and primer for those "disposed to commence the study" of *Leaves of Grass*. On the cover of *Imprints*, the printer's fist signals the beginning of that gymnastic struggle with Whitman's poetry and celebrity.

Each hand on the cover of *Imprints* is a subtle indication of the financial exchange necessary to participate directly in Whitman's poetic project. Whitman would imagine

Leaves of Grass facilitating more “satisfaction” than any book before had given readers, but even the poet’s lofty spiritual, political, and social objectives carry with them an insistence on a financial transaction. That Whitman wanted people to exchange money for his book should not trivialize the intensity of his poetic vision. Whitman’s butterfly manicule—where a symbol of rebirth balances on an icon of commerce—captures a tension that troubled literary promoters during the nineteenth century. Evert Augustus Duyckinck voiced a segment of the literary world’s opposition to advertising when he declared that the “true author is a proud, humble man, who does not bray his affairs constantly before the world. While the quack sends his noisy nostrums through the street with trumpet and placard at all hours, he is the invisible angel who appears only seldom, but then in great beauty.”⁷⁸ Even Thayer & Eldridge were mindful of how “noisy” a promotion *Leaves of Grass Imprints* and the printer’s fists that adorned its cover were. In the anonymous advertisement for *Imprints* that they placed in *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, Thayer & Eldridge assure potential readers that they are not peddling “a patent medicine or other humbug.”⁷⁹ Clearly Whitman and his publishers knew they were selling more than a “nostrum” to the public, even if their strategies in 1860 were some of the most outrageous literary promotions of the nineteenth century. Still, they were attempting what, for Duyckinck, was the impossible: balancing the “great beauty” of the “true author” with the “trumpet and placard” of the “quack.”

The artistic merit of Whitman’s poetry was the subject of great debate in 1860, but few could deny how attractive the third edition of *Leaves of Grass* was to the eye.

⁷⁸ Evert Augustus Duyckinck, “Literary Prospectus of 1845,” *The American Whig Review* (February 1845), 1.

⁷⁹ *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, June 23, 1860, 80.

Thayer & Eldridge's edition was a singular, if not beautiful, printed object.

Commentators on both sides of the Atlantic emphasized the fine craftsmanship of the new *Leaves of Grass*. The *Boston Banner of Light* praised the “bold and tasteful publishers” of Whitman’s “stout volume” for giving *Leaves* “a dress altogether striking, unique and original.”⁸⁰ George Searle Philips, one of Whitman’s early champions whose “Letter Impromptu” appears in *Imprints*, described the volume as “perhaps, the most magnificent specimen of typography ever issued by the American Press.”⁸¹ Even critics of Whitman’s poetry managed to praise the handsome book that contained it. “The volume itself is splendid,” London’s *Saturday Review* wrote; “The type is magnificent, the paper is as thick as cardboard, and the covers, ornamented with an intaglio of the earth moving through space and displaying only the American hemisphere, are almost as massive as . . . house-tiles.” If anything, *Leaves* was too precious for the *Saturday Review* who chided Thayer & Eldridge for printing a book “evidently intended to lie on the tables of the wealthy” because no “poor man could afford it” and it was “too bulky for its possessor to get it into his pocket or to hide it away in a corner.”⁸² It was the *Westminster Review*, though, that drew the starker contrast between the elegance of Thayer & Eldridge’s book and the perversity of Whitman’s verse, marveling at how poetry “containing more obscenity and profanity than is perhaps elsewhere to be found within the same compass” could appear amidst “all the glories of hot-pressed paper, costly binding, and stereotype printing.”⁸³

⁸⁰ *Boston Banner of Light*, June 2, 1860, 4.

⁸¹ George Searle Phillips, “Walt Whitman,” *The New-York Illustrated News*, June 2, 1860, 60.

⁸² “Leaves Of Grass,” *The Saturday Review*, July 7, 1860, 19-21.

⁸³ *The Westminster Review*, October 1, 1860, 590.

The typographical eccentricity of the 1860 *Leaves of Grass* stems from Whitman's obsessive control over the materiality of his text. Given carte blanche by Thayer & Eldridge, the poet hand-picked most of the fonts and flourishes for the third edition from Philadelphia printer L. Johnson's over-sized *Specimens of Printing Types* (1840). On the specimen page I have included here, Johnson advertises thirteen different varieties of printer's fists (Figure 2.7). Two rows above these little hands are nine crude renditions of the human form, popular engravings of black bodies often used to depict fugitive slaves. As Marcus Wood observes, the "seamless integration of the slave into the day-to-day economic transactions of North and South is represented with a terrible graphic finality in the sheets of trade icons which concluded Northern printer's stock books [like Johnson's]."⁸⁴ This "seamless integration" of black bodies into the columns of antebellum periodical announcements exposes the dystopic possibilities of blurring the boundary between man and text. Though they point to the body in different ways, printer's fists and slave engravings belong to the same nineteenth-century commercial discourse which saw promotional potential in the human form.

Like manicles, these fugitive slave icons were a staple of many antebellum newspapers. Using a whole body, not just a hand, these images often drew readers' attention to descriptions of runaways and announced sizable cash rewards for their return. Even by the most well-intentioned, it was easy to overlook that the runaway icon as an indexing symbol had real promotional potential which could impact actual men and women. In *The Thrilling Narrative of Dr. John Doy, of Kansas; or, Slavery As It Is, Inside and Out*, Thayer & Eldridge reprint two fugitive slave icons alongside an

⁸⁴ Marcus Wood *Blind Memory: Visual Representation of Slavery in England and America 1780-1865*. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 88.

advertisement for a \$600 reward for the return the two runaways. The reprinted notice is meant to give readers an understanding of how intelligent slaves could be—Allen and Jeff, the escapees described in the ad, were both bilingual engineers who can read and write—but even circulating these ads for abolitionist purposes was risky business. Just two years before, none other than Harriet Beecher Stowe inadvertently led to the arrest of a fugitive slave whose runaway advertisement she reprinted in *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* to demonstrate the plausibility of the characters depicted in her best-selling romance.⁸⁵

This is not to indict Whitman’s butterfly manicule, but surely the poet who combed through Johnson’s *Specimens of Printing Types* was aware of the more troubling sides of advertising’s visual vocabulary, especially its potentially vexed relationship to the human body. The indexical mode of Whitman’s catalogues often led critics to deride his verse as merely an “auctioneer’s inventory.” It is precisely Whitman’s awareness of how the language of promotion could impact the body that allows his poetic persona to take the helm from a quite different auctioneer—the leader of a slave auction—in the poem eventually titled “I Sing the Body Electric.” Indexing the wonders of the human body, Whitman as slave auctioneer calls on his audience to “look on this wonder”:

In this head the all-baffling brain,
In it and below it the makings of heroes.

Examine these limbs, red, black, or white, they are cunning in
tendon and nerve,
They shall be stript that you may see them.
Exquisite senses, life-lit eyes, pluck, volition,
Flakes of breast-muscle, pliant backbone and neck, flesh not
flabby, good-sized arms and legs,
And wonders within there yet.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Slave owner George Ragland recovered his missing slave “Wash” (who was passing in the North as a bricklayer named George Washington) after a man recognized Wash from *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* and captured the fugitive as he was traveling in Missouri. See *The Daily Missouri Republican*, July 30, 1858.

As a representation of the hand, the printer's fist is first and foremost an index of the human form. Through its own index of the body, "I Sing the Body Electric" illustrates the dangers of allowing that body to be consumed by promotional discourse, the discourse to which the manicule and the fugitive icon both belonged. Whitman's butterfly manicule performs a feat similar to that of the speaker in "I Sing the Body Electric." Adopting the treacherous signs of promotion, both auctioneer and index enumerate the "wonder within" Whitman's readers, staving off the process of objectification whose specter haunts Johnson's *Specimens of Printing Types*.

After the third edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman's tight printing budget required that he retire the printer's fist; thus, the symbol does not appear in the fourth and fifth editions of his work. However, in 1877, the poet sat in the Philadelphia studio of Philips and Taylor and posed for a photograph inspired by the print icon. The photo depicts Whitman seated, dressed in a thick cardigan with a butterfly perched on his outstretched hand (Figure 2.8). When the photograph was published in *Specimen Days and Collect* it caused a minor controversy. As Folsom and others have discussed, "the butterfly is not real and is merely a prop [now held by the Library of Congress], though Whitman at times asserted (perhaps jokingly) that it was real."⁸⁷ A new version of Whitman's 1860 butterfly image, one that more closely approximates the 1877 photograph, appears gold-stamped on the spine of *Specimen Days* in 1882 as well as on the sixth edition of *Leaves of Grass*, which appeared just a year earlier (Figure 9). The

⁸⁶ Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1892), 87.

⁸⁷ Ed Folsom, *Whitman Making Books / Books Making Whitman* (Iowa City: Obermann Center for Advanced Studies, 2005), 55-56.

1881 butterfly icon is “a nod back to the 1860 Boston edition,” a “[reprise of] the symbol of the hand with the butterfly on it.”⁸⁸ Indeed, the images are reminiscent of one another, but Whitman’s 1877 butterfly portrait introduces a subtle change: the butterfly is not (discernibly) perched on an outstretched finger. The image’s origin in the printer’s fist is now barely legible.

Granted, the shift from a pointed finger to a gently clasped hand is a minor one. Both are manicules, both are (in one sense or another) ‘fists,’ but the movement away from the more recognizable printer’s fist of 1860 suggests a shift in Whitman’s conception of his own literary celebrity. David Haven Blake cites the poet’s butterfly portrait as “a testament to Whitman’s remarkable merger of poetry and publicity.” For Blake, the portrait is “one of Whitman’s many attempts to whack the public’s thick-skinned hide, to let it know that he was there.” Either a “petty artifice or ingenious advertisement,” Whitman’s 1877 portrait “was one of a series of attempts to raise the public’s awareness of *Leaves of Grass* and its author.”⁸⁹ It is productive to think of Whitman’s various butterfly images as themselves a “series” of attempts to advertise his book and celebrity. However, we must not completely conflate Whitman’s post-1877 butterfly imagery with its earlier forms; Whitman’s hand points to a different object in 1881 or, perhaps more precisely, it doesn’t point at all.

Whereas the third edition of *Leaves of Grass* appropriated a generic print ornament, played on its associations with manuscript culture and advertising, and transformed the manicule into an emblem of Whitman’s unique promise to his readers, later incarnations of the butterfly icon are not derived directly from the typical printer’s

⁸⁸ Folsom, *Whitman Making Books*, 50.

⁸⁹ Blake, *Culture of American Celebrity*, 4-5.

fist. Instead, all hands gold-stamped on the spine of *Leaves of Grass* after 1877 mimic the poet's Philadelphia photograph. What Whitman and his publishers had created was the poet's fist. By obscuring the image's origins in a stock print icon, the poet's fist offers itself as a more accurate index of the author, an even stronger declaration of the book/man metonymy. Though he softened the commercial origins of his butterfly manicule, substituting them instead with the staged magnetism of the Philips and Taylor portrait, Whitman remained dedicated to the symbol as a representation of his poetry late into his life.

The nature of Whitman's self-advertisements evolves most dramatically over the first three editions of *Leaves of Grass*. The reviews that Whitman hurriedly pasted and bound into the 1855 edition outline the call for a national literature that he claimed to answer. A year later, the pun of the second edition's appendix, "Leaves-Droppings," implied that Whitman had become the subject of a broad national discussion which readers were invited to listen in on. Finally, *Leaves of Grass Imprints*, subtitled "American and European Criticisms," boldly asserted Whitman's international 'imprint' on culture. Whitman's 1860 butterfly image was an apt emblem for what he (briefly, if ever) thought was his completed poetic project; the pointing hands scattered throughout the volume represented the author and his disappearance into his text, his announcement of coming "ripeness and conclusion." In their refusal to point, Whitman's post-1877 butterfly-manicules are considerably quieter—Whitman indicates a more confident assertion of his place in American literary history, a subtle, yet more insistent pronouncement of his merger with his book and his personal transformation into a full-blown literary celebrity, a print icon in his own right.

“The poetic Psyche, in its process to full development,” Samuel Taylor Coleridge writes in *Biographia Literaria*, “undergoes as many changes as its Greek name-sake, the butterfly.”⁹⁰ In Whitman’s late-butterfly manicule we observe the development of a poet, the metamorphosis of a symbol of metamorphosis—both Whitman and his reader, each reflected in the manicule and the butterfly, undergo significant changes since their first appearance in the 1860 *Leaves of Grass*. As the fingers of the printer’s fist bend, effacing the symbol’s overt connection to the common promotional icon, the hand gently proclaims an end to its boisterous play for readers’ attention and stands quietly as an indication of America’s poetic future poised to take flight. For the first time, the beginning line of Whitman’s valedictory poem, “So long!”—“To conclude, I announce what comes after me”—is given its own stanza in 1881; the sense of conclusion and impending separation is echoed in the poet’s butterfly manicule whose indicative finger has ceased to point.⁹¹ The symbol’s emphasis shifts from the direction of the manicule’s finger to the butterfly ready to leave the hand.

By 1881, the butterfly in Whitman’s symbol has crawled further up the manicule’s finger. From its vantage point on the edge of the poet, the butterfly can peer off the hand, extending its fully developed antenna—now the appendages which indicate most forcefully—to perceive and anticipate the next step in its evolution, flight. As Whitman neared death, the symbol takes on the added weight of his soul’s approaching separation from the body. But, more importantly, as Whitman prepares his readers for his departure “from materials,” he underscores, again, the acceptance of his book as a body,

⁹⁰ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria: Or, Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions* (New York: Leavitt, Lord, & Co., 1834), 53.

⁹¹ Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1881), 380.

which readers must touch, absorb, and likewise depart from. In their contemporary *Introduction of Entomology*, William Kirby and William Spence address the correspondence between body and soul symbolized by the butterfly:

first [the butterfly] appears in his frail body—a child of the earth, a crawling worm, his soul being in a course of training and preparation for a more perfect and glorious existence. Its course being finished, it casts off the earthly body . . . [and] comes forth clothed with a glorious body, not like its former, though germinating from it . . . endowed with augmented powers, faculties, and privileges commensurate to its new and happy state.⁹²

In Whitman's 1881 butterfly manicule, the poet indicates that the "course of training and preparation" for himself and his readers is complete; the poet's fist no longer directs our gaze towards a distant future—America's "augmented powers, faculties, and privileges" are ready to be embraced.

* * * * *

When the final printing of *Leaves of Grass* was published in 1892—some of which included the poet's butterfly symbol on the spine—readers were given one final manicule within the pages of Whitman's book. Underneath a list of Whitman's various editions and copyrights, the poet instructs future readers and publishers:

☞ As there are now several edition of L. of G., different texts and dates, I wish to say that I prefer and recommend this present one, complete, for future printing, if there should be any; a copy and fac-simile, indeed, of the text of these 438 pages. The subsequent adjusting interval which is so important to form'd and launch'd works, books especially, has pass'd; and waiting till fully after that, I have given (pages 423-438) my concluding words.

W.W.⁹³

⁹² William Kirby and William Spence, *An Introduction to Entomology: Or Elements of the Natural History of Insects* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, & Roberts, 1857), 33.

⁹³ Whitman, *LG* 1892, 2.

Whitman's restrictive advice—to circulate his poems in facsimile—had little impact on the varied forms future editions of his work would take, but the conventional manicule that accompanies it, ironically, still strives to direct future readers of *Leaves of Grass*.

This plain typographical ornament and the advice it appeared alongside may have been easily ignored, but in the poet's "concluding words" he still maintains an association with the preparatory and indicative qualities that made the printer's fist such an appropriate emblem of his poetics. The term Whitman offers to describe this quality of his work is "Suggestiveness." "I round and finish little," Whitman tells readers at the end of the deathbed edition; "the reader will always have his or her part to do, just as much as I have had mine."⁹⁴ There is no doubt that Whitman earnestly hoped, even if only for financial reasons, that future editions of *Leaves of Grass* be generated from the 1892 printing. Yet, it is fitting that Whitman ends the volume not by attempting to control his poetry's form, but by indicating those that will form and launch their own work to eclipse his. In his very last words to readers, Whitman once again points to America's future, where "the strongest and sweetest songs yet remain to be sung."⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Whitman, *LG* 1892, 434.

⁹⁵ Whitman, *LG* 1892, 438.

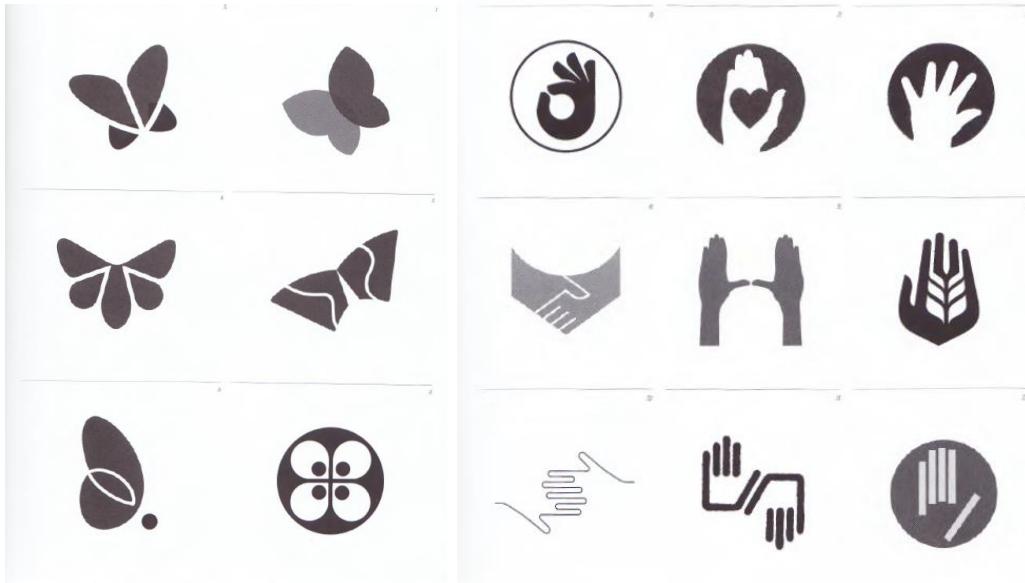


Figure 2.1. Sample logos from Angus Hyland and Steven Bateman's *Symbol*

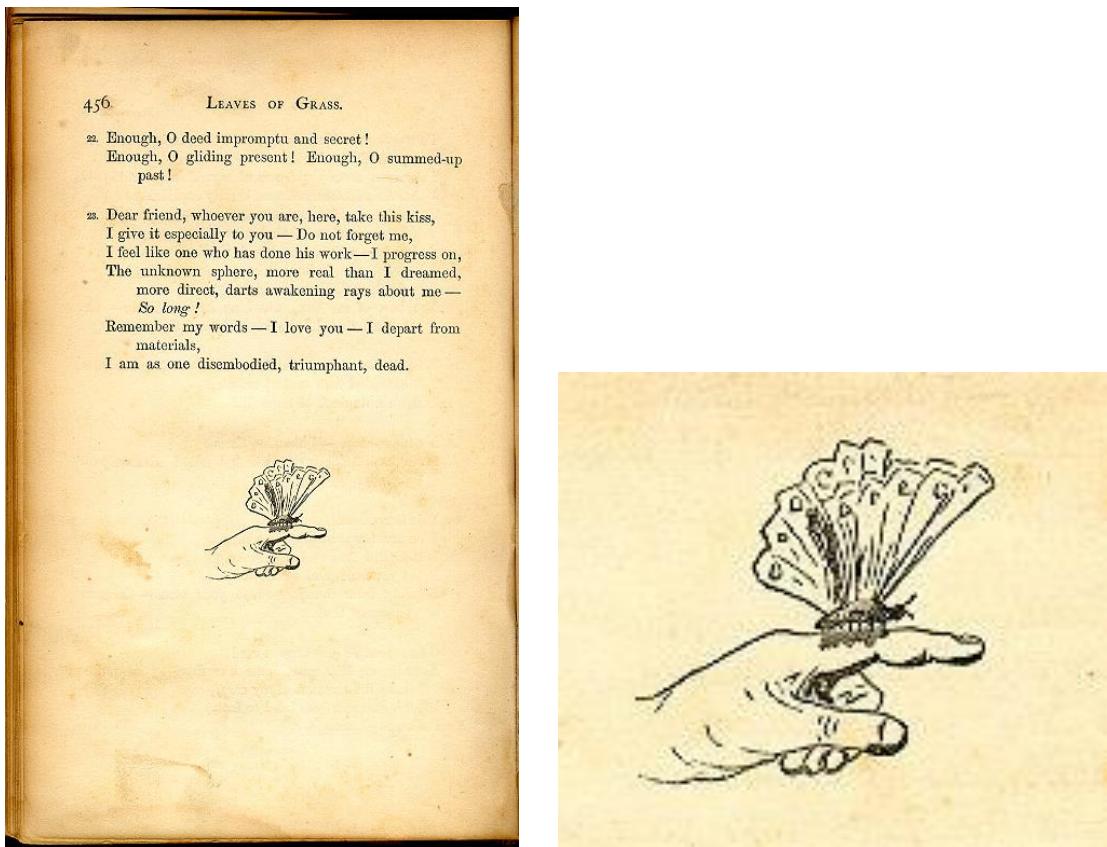


Figure 2.2. Manicule within 1860 *Leaves of Grass* (with detail)

	ed in pumps.
the nay of apo it a ake ing t. " "	The Park House, at the National Horse Park, took fire early on Monday morning, but fortunately after a pretty good fight with the element by the inmates, it was subdued with but little damage to the building. The escape from a destructive fire was a most fortunate one.
ns- l. ex- nd mo- tee i of L- nit- the ad- on reh smal this D. feel ake priu Our nay pur- our all ies, the in and ted, ent pel- for insta- Ma- l to al- da, ne- for Hil- for the t. "	Bills are in circulation from the "Savings and Exchange Bank." Stand from under. Advertisements from Grand Rapids say they are worthless.
	Leaves of Grass, (an oddity in Literature, and a nut for critics,) by Walt Whitman. The strangest book of the season. Just received at Bartlett's Gift Book Store.
	Dr. J. Adams Allen will give our Democracy a Douglas speech soon. This will be a gratifying announcement to his hosts of friends here.
	The pleasure party, consisting of Rev. E. Taylor, L. Hull and others, have returned from their St. Paul pleasure excursion.
	It gives us great pleasure to learn that Mrs. Stone is to accompany the Doctor to Europe. This will make the improvement anticipated from the voyage more certain to her husband.
	Drop in at Bartlett's Gift Book Store and look over the new stock of Books and Presents. A Gift worth from 50c to \$75.00 given with each book at the time of sale.
	REMOVED.—The office of the American Express Company has been removed to the Hat Store of H. S. Parker.
	The Democratic Club have leased Humphrey Hall for a Club Room during the present campaign.
	Wyllis C. Ransom, Esq., is in town on a visit of a few days. He is staying with his father-in-law, Dr. Mottram.
	Sand's Circus is en route for this place.

Figure 2.3. Advertisement for 1860 *Leaves of Grass* in *Kalamazoo Gazette*

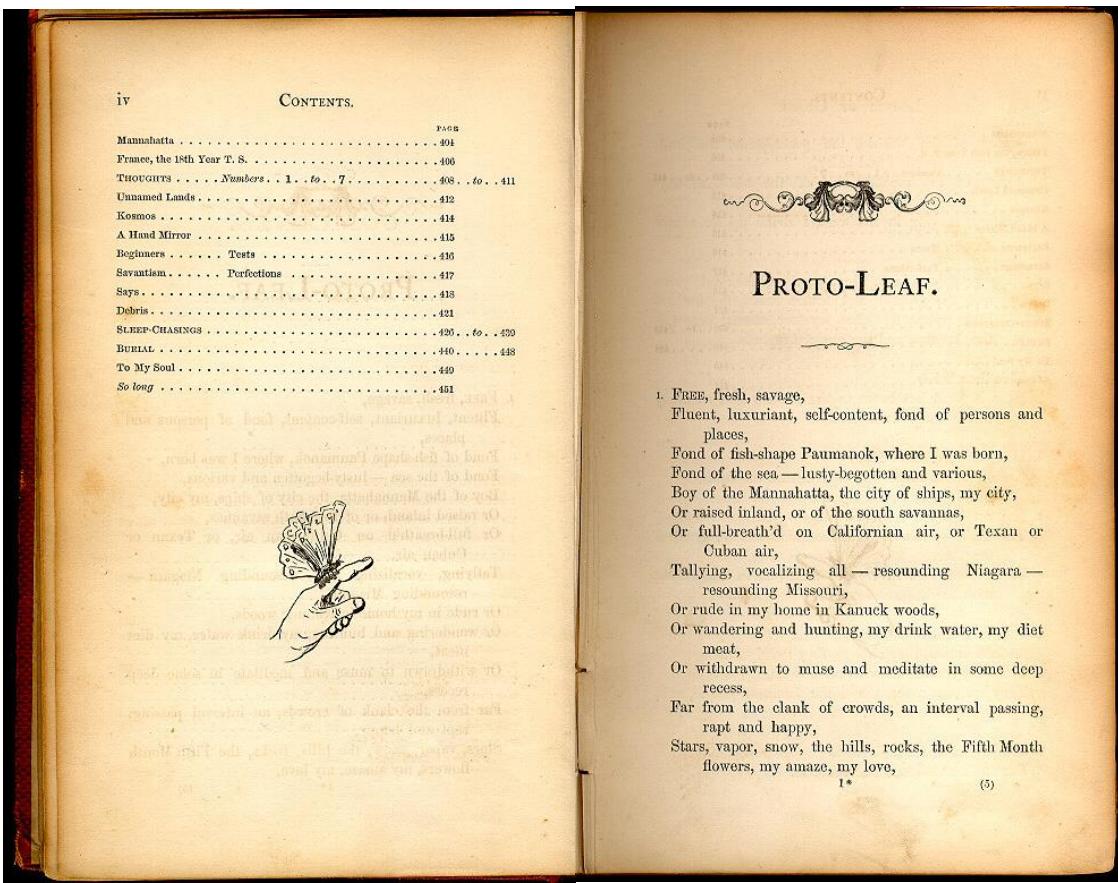


Figure 2.4. Manicule following Table of Contents of 1860 *Leaves of Grass*

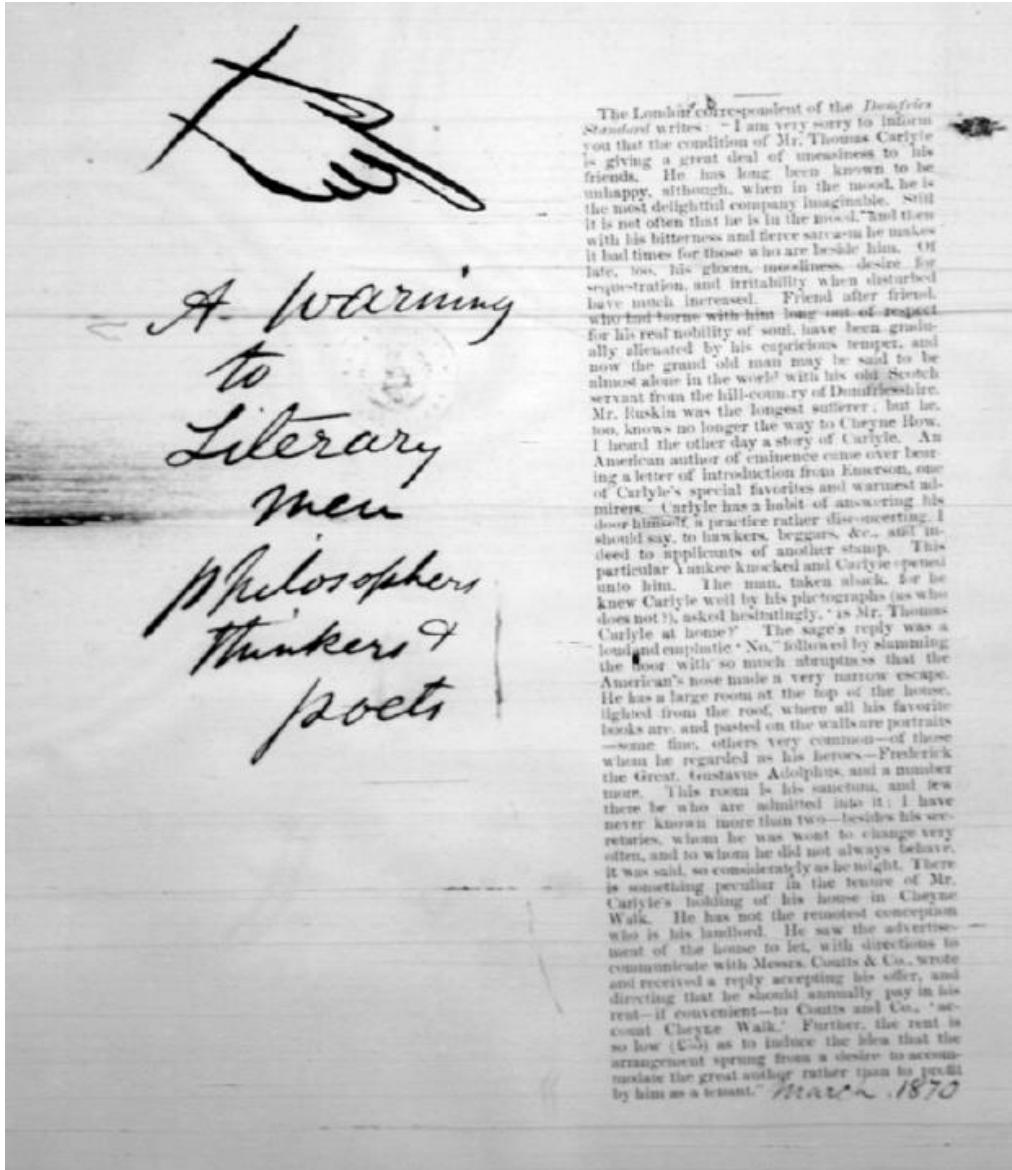


Figure 2.5. Walt Whitman's marginal manicule

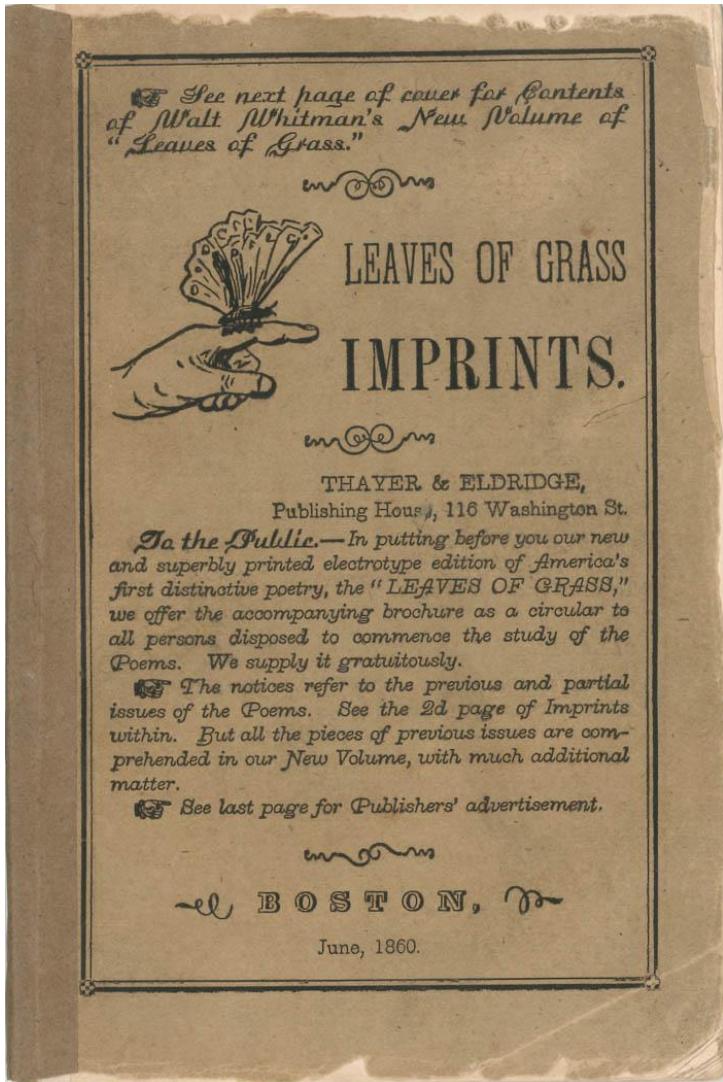


Figure 2.6. Front cover of *Leaves of Grass Imprints*

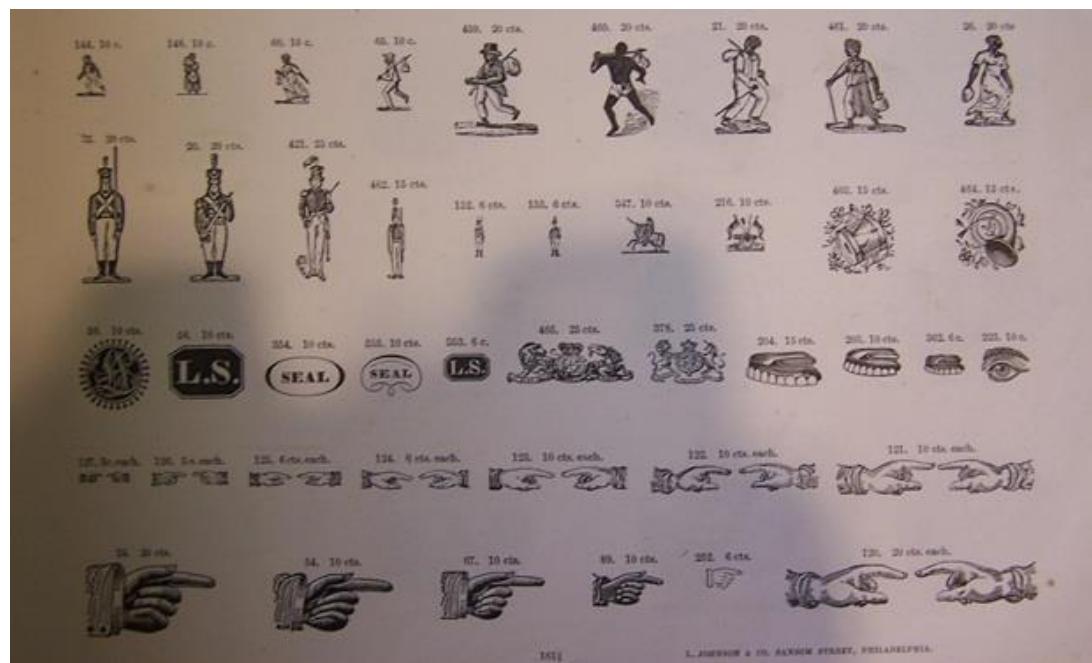


Figure 2.7. Sample manicules and fugitive slave icons in L. Johnson's *Specimens of Printing Types*



Figure 2.8. Walt Whitman's butterfly portrait (Philadelphia: W. Curtis Taylor of Broadbent & Taylor)



Figure 2.9. Spine of the 1881 *Leaves of Grass* (with detail)

CHAPTER III

“ANYTHING HONEST TO SELL BOOKS”: AUTOGRAPH-HUNTING AND THE WHITMANIAN IMPRIMATUR

Walt Whitman is no stranger to modern American advertising—he has been used to sell everything from cigars to coffee. Though it was in a supermarket in California where Allen Ginsberg famously imagined Whitman “eyeing the grocery boys” and “poking among the meats,” it was actually in New Jersey stores during the 1930s where shoppers could find the “neon fruit” of Walt Whitman Fruit Cocktail on shelves alongside Poet Brand Tomatoes (Figure 3.1). Both products were distributed by Camden Grocers Exchange in Camden, New Jersey, where the poet’s association with the city made his name a popular marketing device indiscriminately appropriated by hotels, flower shops, heating companies, and pharmacies. Given Whitman’s versatility in the hands of American entrepreneurs, it isn’t surprising that during the 1950s a company like John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance would incorporate Whitman’s image into its advertising.

Unlike the poet’s loose affiliation with all things Camden, John Hancock Mutual Life, founded in Boston in 1862, has no overt claims to Whitman. Instead of capitalizing on concrete geographic ties, the advertisement—a full-page notice in *Life* magazine composed of a striking portrait of a hatless, striding Whitman coupled with lengthy, free verse copy—weaves together a general celebration of Whitman with a subtle, yet persistent invitation to provide for future Americans, presumably by taking out a plan with John Hancock (Figure 3.2).¹ Aside from the conspicuous logo at the bottom of the page, however, life insurance is never directly mentioned. Instead, readers are

¹ “A dream marched to the swing of his words,” *Life*, October 22, 1951, 122.

asked, “What’s a poet good for? What does he do for people?” The answer, we are told, is that “every good man eventually gives back to the world what has been given to him”; for Whitman, this meant taking the “great pulse of hope and excitement that America had put in his heart, and . . . [making] a book of it.” John Hancock’s description of *Leaves of Grass* focuses on Whitman’s embrace of working Americans: “stevedores, herdsmen, preachers, Congressmen; the bellowing auctioneer and the gentle healer of wounds; the teamster sweating horses and the farmer with his whistling scythe; all stirring, building, buying, selling—a nation of brothers and equals, happy to be going somewhere together.” Ironically, while Whitman’s characteristic catalogs were often criticized for resembling the “bellowing” of an auctioneer, the only auctioneer within *Leaves of Grass* is at the center of the slave trade. For readers more familiar with Whitman’s work, John Hancock’s misreading here is potentially jarring, introducing a variety of buying and selling at odds with the egalitarianism the ad otherwise evokes.

However tainted by its inadvertent allusion to human bondage, the advertisement concludes by identifying Whitman’s greatest gift: “[showing] us that America itself is the great poem to be written and each of us is its poet, adding our verse to the big book that never ends.” For an insurance advertisement, the sales pitch and its relation to Whitman is remarkably subdued. The commercial undertones of ensuring “our verse” is added to “the big book that never ends” are relegated to promotional subtext. In fact, the loudest feature of the ad is the John Hancock logo itself, a simple facsimile signature of the first person to sign the United States Declaration of Independence. Just like the original signature it is based on, the relative size and flourish of the brand symbol is meant to be both easily deciphered and instantly recognizable. As Josh Lauer remarks, a “signature on

the Declaration was tantamount to treason and, in the event that the colonists lost their bid for independence, a crime punishable by death.”² Hancock, “keenly aware” of the personal risk he was taking, was the first to sign; he “steeled himself with the exaggerated bravado of his large autograph.” “There!” he reportedly shouted, “John Bull can read my name without spectacles and may now double his reward . . . for my head.”³ This defiant inscription would eventually make Hancock’s name synonymous with signatures in American culture. By linking their corporation to a revolutionary and to Whitman, John Hancock Mutual sought to define its brand as both daring and representatively American.

The essence of that brand image is captured by the flair of the Hancock signature, a famous imprimatur which reached a peculiar degree of popularity during Whitman’s lifetime. For many nineteenth-century collectors, Hancock’s autograph was fiercely coveted. Migrating from Europe where the “cult of the autograph letter” dates back to the sixteenth century, the autograph craze (or “autographomania”) exploded in the United States during the 1830s and continued until the turn of the century.⁴ The highest achievement for many collectors was to assemble a full set of autographs representing all fifty-six signers of the Declaration. As the first and most prominent signature, Hancock’s autograph took on an especially rarified allure. However, the Cult of the Signers, as these specialized collectors came to be known, was just one vocal faction among a growing legion of voracious autograph hunters. For the majority of collectors, the obvious historical relevance of the Signers—whose autographs were becoming harder to procure

² Josh Lauer, “Traces of the Real: Autographmania and the Cult of the Signers in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Text and Performance Quarterly* (April 2007), 152.

³ Lauer, “Traces of the Real,” 152.

⁴ Lauer, “Traces of the Real,” 143.

as the century progressed—was eclipsed by the growing popularity of and ease of access to American literary celebrities. Men and women begged, borrowed, and stole their way to signatures from the nation’s leading poets and novelists. In the age of mechanical reproduction, the autograph became a potent symbol of authorial presence, a “bridge between body and text,” a tangible sign of America’s growing appetite for collecting and consuming celebrity personalities.⁵

By the end of his career, Whitman was well acquainted with the autograph fiend. “I have no mail today except an autograph mail,” Whitman tells Horace Traubel: “an autograph mail, yes, and that I get every day. They all write me—hundreds write—strangers—they all beg autographs—tell funny tales about it, give funny reasons (some of them are pitiful—some of them are almost piteous)—I practically never answer them anymore. It takes about all the strength I have nowadays to keep the flies off.”⁶ Though Whitman’s autograph would never become as revered as Hancock’s for nineteenth-century collectors, the poet’s canny management of his signature would earn him a unique place among literary professionals. Whitman’s relationship with autograph hunters was markedly ambivalent, and, as I will argue, that ambivalence had a tremendous impact on the design and marketing of his final books. Like John Hancock Mutual, Whitman would place a signature—his signature, written by hand or reproduced mechanically—at the center of his brand. Spanning from the 1868 British edition of *Poems by Walt Whitman*, the first Whitman-book to include a facsimile of the poet’s autograph, to the 1892 “deathbed” edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman’s signature—

⁵ Lauer, “Traces of the Real,” 146.

⁶ Traubel, *WWWC*, 1:366.

produced in and on his books and requested every day through the mail—became an increasingly prominent marker of the Whitman brand.

This chapter traces Whitman’s relationship to the culture of autograph collecting during the nineteenth century. I begin by examining the emergence of the autograph hunter in America, focusing especially on the cultural significance of the celebrity signature after the Civil War and the relationships collectors developed with well-known writers like Longfellow, Whittier, Lowell, Howells, and Holmes. Whitman was far more protective of his autograph than his poetic peers; that guarded stance came to influence the way Whitman circulated his signature within the covers of *Leaves of Grass*, where he included it several times as part of a preconceived promotional scheme. Whitman’s signature would become a central emblem of his literary brand; it appears in and/or on nearly every volume the poet published from 1881 until his death in 1892. Whitman’s efforts to join his autograph with his poetry tapped into the emergence of what Tamara Plakins Thornton calls the “handwriting romantics”—autograph collectors and handwriting analysts—subcultures with a taste for celebrity manuscripts that some believed to reveal the character of their inscriber.⁷ For Whitman, the autograph was not only a new and foolproof way to drum up sales, it was yet another strategy to emphasize the author’s presence within *Leaves of Grass* through the signature’s “transcendental form of presentness.”⁸

⁷ Thornton’s third chapter, “Romance and the Science of Individuality,” provides a superb introduction to the multivalent functions of the signature during the nineteenth century. Though Thornton only briefly discusses autograph collecting, she does engage the emergence of handwriting analysis at length. See Tamara Plakins Thornton, *Handwriting in America: A Cultural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 73-107.

⁸ Jacques Derrida, “Signature Event Context,” translated by Samuel Weber and Jefferey Mehlman, *Limited Inc.* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 20.

It is unclear whether Whitman actually believed his signature was truly unique. William Douglas O'Connor, Whitman's trusted abolitionist friend and author of *The Good Gray Poet*, once took the poet's autograph to a clerk in Washington, D.C. to have it copied. The Treasury Department employee "so cleverly duplicated" the signature that Whitman later admitted, "I could not myself tell the two apart."⁹ But, on a separate occasion, Whitman describes an incident involving a similar "expert" in Washington who insisted the poet's autograph was "one of the hardest he knew to imitate." The unnamed man, whom Whitman describes as having "a distinct genius," including an uncanny ability to "imitate pretty near any signature at will," could very well be the same Treasury employee that O'Connor knew, yet here Whitman reaches a completely different conclusion about the inimitability of his autograph. Whitman boasts of the master copyist's inability to convincingly recreate his hand. "It must be as the expert said," Whitman tells Traubel, "[my signature's] very simplicity protects it . . . just as simplicity, truth, can never be imitated."¹⁰

Even if Whitman was uncertain whether his autograph could be forged, for American literary consumers during the nineteenth century, Whitman's signature was indeed singular: it signified a unique and recognizable literary brand. Walter Whitman could not legally protect the signature of "Walt Whitman" as a trademark, yet his autograph nonetheless acted as the "mark of a distinct textual product."¹¹ In his insightful

⁹ Traubel, *WWWC*, 1:201.

¹⁰ Traubel, *WWWC*, 8:276. As Lauer notes, Derrida "dismisses the notion of the signature as a unique marker of identity and intention, a proposition that he claims is undone by the fact that the actual variability of one's signature never matches the idealized, iterable version that serves as its model. Indeed, it is precisely such variation, such deviation from the model, that makes forgery possible" (146).

¹¹ Loren Glass, *Authors Inc.: Literary Celebrity in the Modern United States, 1880-1980* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 81.

analysis of Mark Twain's failed attempt to trademark his pen name, Loren Glass offers an appraisal of late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century literary celebrity that undergirds this project. "Twain's attempts to trademark his pen name," Glass writes, "[signal] a new model of U.S. authorship—one that legitimates literary property less as a mark of intellectual labor than as an index of cultural recognition."¹² Approaching the "authorial signature and name as a trademark" provides us with a "conceptual register for understanding the cultural meanings of celebrity authorship more generally in the United States."¹³ Provoked by the incessant demand for his autograph, Whitman transformed his signature into a "metaphoric form of trademark," a symbol of his "cultural recognition," and a central image of his commercial presence.¹⁴

The Autograph Monster

The daily rhythms of Whitman's last years in Camden were fairly predictable. In an October 15, 1889, letter to Richard Maurice Bucke, Whitman reconstructs the monotony of his day: "I am sitting here alone & pretty dull & heavy—fairly, though, I guess—bowel movement—rainy, raw, dark weather—oak wood fire . . . a few visitors lately—a steady shower of autograph applications by mail."¹⁵ A month later, the poet penned essentially the same letter: "Rainy & dark all day—moderate temperature—ab't as usual with me—bowel action this mn'g—stew'd oyster, Graham bread, apple sauce & coffee for my 4½ supper. . . . I am sitting here as usual—no letter mail yesterday & this forenoon, (except my usual daily stranger's autograph application)—pretty dull with me

¹² Glass, *Authors Inc.*, 59.

¹³ Glass, *Authors Inc.*, 82.

¹⁴ Glass, *Authors Inc.*, 81.

¹⁵ Whitman, *Correspondence*, 3:383.

these days.”¹⁶ Three years before his death, a “steady shower” of daily autograph requests was as commonplace for Whitman as discussing the weather and going to the bathroom. Other writers may have been more demure in their personal correspondence, but Whitman was not alone in his experience with autograph hunters.

By the time the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* was published in 1855, autograph mania was in full-force across the United States. As the British painter William Powell Frith noted, by mid-century, it was inevitable that “all painters, poets, literary men, Church-men—in short, all men who have attained to more or less celebrity” would “become the prey of the autograph-hunter, either in the form of a boy at school, a young lady whose life is made continuous sunshine by the contemplation of your pictures or the study of your delightful poems, or an elderly gentleman who has watched your career with intense interest from its beginning.”¹⁷ For Frith, the passion for autographs was an odd one, but no less intense for ardent collectors. “Each of these applicants, strange to say, avers that he or she will be made happier by the possession of your name on a card or a piece of paper which is enclosed for your signature.”¹⁸ The American autograph fiend even gained the reputation of being “more aggressive than his English *confrére19 While most domestic press coverage of autograph hunting’s popularity supported this characterization, the hobby still had its defenders. *Appleton’s Journal*, for instance, recognized that the quest for autographs was one of the most “curious manias” to have “taken entire possession of men . . . during the nineteenth century,” but nonetheless found*

¹⁶ Whitman, *Correspondence*, 3:398.

¹⁷ William Powell Frith, *John Leech, His Life and Work* (London: Richard Bentley, 1891), 229.

¹⁸ Frith, *John Leech*, 229.

¹⁹ A.M. Broadly, *Chats on Autographs* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1910), 40.

intrinsic value in the pursuit of celebrity signatures.²⁰ “The original writing of a great man’s pen—read from the same paper on which the writer’s hand rested—is an aid to the imagination, whereby the beholder is enabled to call before his mind’s eye the countenance of the illustrious scribe, is assuredly a legitimate object of interest to all intelligent persons.”²¹

For some, the zealous pursuit of signatures resembled an “epidemic” more than a hobby. “Perhaps, in accordance with the larger charity of this age,” one commentator writes, “it might be best to treat autograph-hunting as a disease. Once the mania has bitten a collector, he is no longer responsible.”²² Tennyson was quoted as suggesting “every crime and every vice in the world was connected with the passion for autographs and anecdotes.” In his private correspondence, the famed biologist Thomas Henry Huxley, popularly referred to as “Darwin’s Bulldog,” concurred: “I look upon autograph-hunters as the progeny of Cain, and treat their letters accordingly.” “Heaven forgive you,” Huxley cautioned his correspondent, “if you are only an unusually ingenuous specimen of the same race.” The entry for “Autographs and Autograph-Hunters” in William Walsh’s *Handy Book of Literary Curiosities* reported that the letter containing Huxley’s warning was recently for sale in London, “a bit of audacity that might have made Cain blush for his progeny.”²³ Advertising Huxley’s letter for sale was especially brazen, but the garden variety collector met similar contempt. “I hate and despise the mere common autograph-hunter,” a writer for *The American Magazine* asserts, “the noxious being who

²⁰ “About Autographs, or Autograph Mania,” *Appleton’s Journal of Literature, Science and Art*, February 19, 1870, 213.

²¹ “About Autographs,” *Appleton’s*, 213.

²² William S. Walsh, *Handy Book of Literary Curiosities* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1892), 71.

²³ Walsh, *Handy Book*, 71.

pesters busy men with a stamped envelope and a request that they will write their name, parrot-like, six times over on a piece of paper for him to exchange with other equally feeble and futile collectors.”²⁴ In his characteristically droll manner, humorist Horace Mayhew urged readers to “beware of your Autograph Hunter, above all, play not at cards with him, for you cannot tell what that man will turn up who looketh over everybody’s hand.”²⁵

Taken individually, the average autograph collector was more of a nuisance than anything else, but, if the backlash the practice received seems too harsh, it is worth considering some of the less honorable methods autograph hunters employed to solicit signatures. As one ashamed collector exclaimed: “To what sin will not an autograph-hunter of the genuine neck-or-nothing type descend!”²⁶ Possessed with the “inane ambition to get as many names as possible,” collectors resorted to a number of outlandish ploys. The *Atlantic Monthly* describes a common ruse involving a correspondent pretending to be interested in replenishing his library; the stranger first requests “a detailed list of your works, with the respective dates of their publication, prices, etc.” Taken at face value, “this has an air of business,” the implication being “that the correspondent, who writes in a brisk, commercial manner, wishes to fill out his collection of your books, or possibly purchase a complete set in crushed Levant morocco.” But, the *Atlantic* pleads otherwise: “Lay not that flattering inference to thy soul, thou too

²⁴ Paul Pastnor, “Longfellow’s Method,” *The American Magazine* (October 1887), 721.

²⁵ Horace Mayhew, “Autograph Hunters,” *George Cruikshank’s Table-Book*, edited by Gilbert Abbott À Beckett (London: George Bell & Sons, 1878), 274.

²⁶ “The Autograph-Hunter and His Prey,” *The Speaker*, January 21, 1893, 71.

unworldly dreamer!”²⁷ Literary celebrities, especially those “unworldly dreamer[s]” who wrote poetry, were considered easy marks. The sensibility of poets was thought to make them particularly susceptible to the autograph hunter’s “diabolical ingenuity” for “getting at the human weaknesses of the famous.”²⁸ Once the poet wrote back, the autograph collector had won.

One of the more widely circulated anecdotes of deception came from the novelist and self-proclaimed autograph fiend, William Black. The following “deadly stratagem” for preying on celebrity victims was attributed to Black’s friend, who would write a letter

to each of the persons whose autograph he coveted, describing himself as a ship-owner and asking permission to be allowed to name his next vessel after the particular celebrity he was addressing. It was a fatal trap. Nearly every one fell into it. Even poor old Carlyle had no suspicion, and, in replying to the bogus ship-owner, expressed the hope that the vessel to be named after him might sail into a happier haven than he had ever reached.²⁹

“Fatal trap[s]” like this made for sensational news; as a result, a survey of late-nineteenth-century periodicals turns up countless examples of autograph hunters going to remarkable lengths—publishing poems under the desired celebrity’s name, for example, and writing that poet under the auspices of verifying their authorship—to generate a signature. Such deceptions evince a shift in the nature of many autograph requests as the century progressed; the disparity between early letters that convey a reader’s fascination with a beloved author and those that simply display a collector’s zeal for obtaining a celebrity token can be quite glaring.

²⁷ “The Contributors’ Club,” *Atlantic Monthly* (April 1884), 581-582.

²⁸ “The Autograph-Hunter and His Prey,” *The Speaker*, 71.

²⁹ Walsh, *Handy Book*, 73.

Though Whitman had “no rigid rule” for dealing with autograph requests, tricks like those described above were enough to make the poet question even seemingly innocuous inquiries.³⁰ “Not a day but the autograph hunter is on my trail—chases me, dogs me! . . . Their subterfuges, deception, hypocrisies, are curious, nasty, yes damnable,” Whitman complained. Even a “letter from a young child—a young reader—this is her first book” is met with skepticism: “she should be encouraged in her fine ambitions—would I not &c &c—and I would not, of course—why should I? I can see the grin of an old deceiver in such letters.”³¹ The incongruity between Whitman’s poetic characterization of anonymous affection—“Passing stranger! you do not know how longingly I look upon you, / You must be he I was seeking, or she I was seeking”—and his brisk dismissal of the strangers who wrote to him, especially young women, can be quite comical.³² Looking over his mail, Whitman read the following autograph request aloud to Traubel:

“I am a little girl and would so value your autograph.” He laughed. “Do you believe it?” “It is very doubtful—an old subterfuge.” He took the letter, reaching forward: saying as he dropped it in the wood box: “Here she goes”—then was about to cut the stamp from the corner of the return envelope enclosed—“oh a good card”—taking a card out of the envelope, laying it on the table carefully—removing the stamp also.³³

When you imagine Whitman lovingly embracing a child, as he is pictured doing in various photographs, the image of the Good Gray Poet dropping a self-professed “little” girl’s letter into the wood box underscores how wary he had become of such requests

³⁰ Traubel, *WWWC*, 3:55.

³¹ Traubel, *WWWC*, 2:82-83.

³² Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (New York: n.p., 1867), 135.

³³ Traubel, *WWWC*, 3:410-411.

from strangers.³⁴ Whitman, of course, could be equally suspicious of male correspondents. Once he received a letter from a man who had recently been mailed a copy of *Drum-Taps* asking whether or not it was the poet who sent the book; Whitman sensed it was a ploy for an autograph, but couldn't be sure. "I was half-tempted to answer it: but I won't write a word," he tells Traubel.³⁵ Thinking back on the "Drum Taps fellow" days later, Whitman concludes the request was almost certainly a fraud: "I am not to be taken in: I am too old a bird at that: I have experienced all sizes and styles of the autograph monster."³⁶

The collectors most offensive to Whitman didn't rely on tricks at all—they mailed pre-printed requests instead. An 1883 article in *The Literary World* reports an author receiving a fill-in-the-blank form that included the following simple, printed message: "Your autograph is respectfully solicited."³⁷ The standardized form reduced collecting "to a science." There was no "beating about the bush," no "hems and haws, and circumlocutions; no tentative approaches, compliments, apologies, but a straightforward matter-of-fact demand."³⁸ Traubel records Whitman's reaction to a similar form letter from William L. DeLacey of Poughkeepsie, New York. Whitman calls DeLacey's note "the most impudent autograph request yet"; "Why the fellow

³⁴ Traubel describes similar incident involving an autograph request from a young girl: "Some Boston girl writes me a long letter for W.'s autograph—almost pathetic in its exhortation. I gave it to W., with the return stamped envelope. He addressed it mock-seriously—'Mr. Stamp—I am very much afraid I shall confiscate you and consign the rest of you to the fire.' I said—'I'm afraid you will, too.' W. then—'How well—how good a hand—Miss Lady writes! It is a relief to look at the like'—and carefully put the stamp away" (WWWC, 6:47-48).

³⁵ Traubel, WWWC, 3:486.

³⁶ Traubel, WWWC, 3:496.

³⁷ "Autograph Collecting as a Business," *The Literary World*, June 30, 1883, 208.

³⁸ "Autograph Collecting as a Business," *Literary World*, 208.

absolutely makes a business of it—probably gets the sheets printed by the hundreds.”³⁹

Whitman, of course, ignored DeLacey’s letter—but, had DeLacey been more tactful, he actually stood a good chance of getting the poet’s attention. Perhaps if Whitman knew DeLacey was a decorated Civil War veteran who fought in several famous engagements including Battle of the Wilderness and Antietam, or that he later worked as the editor and publisher of the *Amenia Times* in upstate New York, he may have consented to a modest autograph request as he had done in the past.⁴⁰

Whitman denied DeLacey, but cheaply pre-printed requests also deprived Whitman of the average autograph request’s saving grace: high-quality, reusable paper. Opening an autograph letter and running his pen across the written page, Whitman jokes to Traubel, “those fellows have one virtue—they always use good paper: and on that I manage to do a good deal of my writing.”⁴¹ Whitman’s comment wasn’t completely in jest; many of his surviving manuscripts are written on the back of autograph requests. It’s tempting to revisit these poems taking into account their manuscript’s proximity to such an obvious marker of literary celebrity. Minnie Vincent’s December 11, 1873, note to Whitman, for example, provided the paper for one of the earliest drafts of the poem “Out from Behind This Mask” (Figure 3.3). Whitman crosses out Vincent’s letter with one stroke. “I have . . . letters and poems by Bryant, Longfellow, Whittier, S. W. Scott . . .

³⁹ Traubel, *WWWC*, 8:297-298.

⁴⁰ *Records of Members of the Grand Army of the Republic with a Complete Account of the Twentieth National Encampment*, William H. Ward ed. (San Francisco: H.S. Crocker, 1887), 173. When DeLacey committed suicide in 1908 by “inhaling illuminating gas,” the *New York Times* published his suicide note; even his last message to the world conveys a hint of Whitman holding “creeds and schools in abeyance” (*LG* 1881, 29): “Theories count naught with me. I neither believe in transmigration, transubstantiation, nor transfiguration . . . I believe in creation and a creator.” See “Col. De Lacey a Suicide,” *New York Times*, April 10, 1908.

⁴¹ Traubel, *WWWC*, 2:44-45.

Campbell, Montgomery, Bulwer Lytton . . . and many, many more written and signed by their own hands,” Vincent writes, “but I have nothing in the autograph of that author whose name is written Walt Whitman—Is it asking too much, if you are sufficiently recovered from illness, to request a few lines with your signature to be placed in such good company?”⁴²

It was indeed asking too much, but that didn’t stop Whitman from flipping over Vincent’s lined paper and drafting “a few lines” for a poem he was tentatively titling “Behind this mask,” conceived of at the time as “The poem of the head the face.” Of course, “Out from Behind This Mask” (subtitled “To Confront a Portrait”) is most commonly read in correspondence with William J. Linton’s engraving of the poet included in the Centennial edition of *Leaves of Grass*, but Vincent’s letter offers another piece for comparison, the writing literally *behind* Whitman’s poetry manuscript. On the back of Vincent’s letter there is no mention of the “burin’d eyes” of Linton’s engraving or its depiction of Whitman’s face, his “heart’s geography’s map.”⁴³ In its published form, the poem would ask readers to consider what lay behind the poet’s “rough-cut mask,” but, in manuscript—without the accompanying engraving as a visual referent—“this mask—this curtain,” “This map + chart—this surface” not only describes Whitman’s unseen face but also calls attention to the scene of inscription, the “surface” of the paper itself. Whitman’s fame—the celebrity created by and reflected in the autograph request—emerges as yet another mask behind which the poet’s “real book” is hidden. To argue for a strictly determined relationship between Whitman’s manuscripts and the autograph

⁴² The Charles E. Feinberg Collection of the Papers of Walt Whitman, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

⁴³ Whitman, *LG* 1881, 296.

requests many of them are written on would be to go too far, but the possibility of correspondence exists. Regardless, it is worth remembering that, at the very least, the autograph hunter played a passive role in the composition of many of Whitman's postbellum poems.

Just as Whitman transformed annoying letters into useful scrap paper, beginning in the late 1870s, the poet developed a strategy for dealing with autograph hunters that attempted to turn the burdensome requests into charitable donations. When he was feeling, in the words of Traubel, "terribly persecuted for autographs," Whitman would sometimes be "driven to an old trick." "I used to put portraits containing my autograph with the folks out at the Children's Home," he tells Traubel, "turning all applications over to the Home, which asked a dollar apiece for the pictures, and, often, got it."⁴⁴ Coverage of Whitman's stunt crops up in papers across the country. The *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, for example, reports that "Walt Whitman satisfies the importunate autograph-hunters by informing them that his photograph, with signature attached, can be obtained on sending \$1 to the Matron of the Orphans' Home at Camden. The proceeds are entirely for the benefit of the orphans."⁴⁵

Not only did Whitman intermittently forward his autograph mail to the Orphan's Home, but he would also occasionally request a donation on their behalf when autograph collectors visited his Camden home. In *Ivory Apes and Peacocks*, James Huneker, the famed music critic, details how he obtained Whitman's signature, "written in large, clumsy" letters, on those terms during the summer of 1877. Huneker, who kept the autograph pasted inside a copy of the 1867 *Leaves of Grass*, writes: "I value this

⁴⁴ Traubel, WWWC, 2:95.

⁴⁵ *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, November 26, 1876, 12.

autograph, because Walt gave it to me; rather I paid him for it, the proceeds, two dollars (I think that was the amount), going to some asylum in Camden.”⁴⁶ Huneker’s account strains to project a sense of intimacy with Whitman—referring to the poet as “Walt,” for instance—and stumbles when confronting the reality that the coveted signature was the result of a financial transaction. “I begged for an autograph,” Huneker admits. “He told me of his interest in a certain asylum or hospital, whose name has gone clean out of my mind, and I paid my few dollars for the treasured signature.”⁴⁷ All the money Whitman raised through these autographed portraits went to charity, but he would also embrace the signature as a way to boost sales of his own books. The donations Whitman’s celebrity inspired did not provide direct financial relief to the poet, but his well-publicized attempts to keep autograph hunters at bay had the added benefit of perpetuating an image of Whitman as a sought after commodity.

No doubt aided by the attention his charitable donations received, Whitman’s attitude toward the nation’s legions of autograph hunters became common knowledge. In a parody titled “His Warning to Autograph-Hunters,” Henry Cuyler Bunner—the long-time editor of the popular American humor journal *Puck*, operating under the pseudonym V. Hugo Dusenbury—captured Whitman’s public disgust with “the autograph monster.” Following parodies of Longfellow, Swinburne, and Sidney Lanier that burlesqued each poet’s style via fictionalized warnings to collectors, Bunner concludes with Whitman’s reply to a “polite request for an autograph”:

I like you. I like your impudence. I like your cold, hard gall, your nerve,
the cheek of you.

You come cavorting about me as if you were my side-partner, as if you

⁴⁶ James Huneker, *Ivory Apes and Peacocks* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1917), 22.

⁴⁷ Huneker, *Ivory Apes*, 24.

had slept under the same blanket with me, as if you had bitten off
the same plug.
You ask me for my autograph, for my sentiments.
This is my autograph. These are my sentiments.
You are a lop-ear'd, cross-ey'd, blue-nod's son of impudence, Americano,
indecent, refrigerative of cheek, daisy-like, fresh.
That is my autograph. Those are my sentiments. Take them. Go to blazes
with them.⁴⁸

Couched in Whitmanian verse, Bunner manages to capture the irony of Whitman's dismissal of his anonymous admirers. By appropriating the poetic persona of "Walt Whitman," Bunner lampoons both the presumed familiarity autograph hunters convey through their correspondence and the strains in *Leaves of Grass*—such as Whitman's celebration of anonymous urban affection and the intimate physical relationship between author and reader his text enacts—that seem to provoke such behavior. Where the poetry of *Leaves of Grass* might welcome the thought of "cavorting" with "Walt Whitman" as if you were his "side-partner," the poet worked to separate for autograph-hunters the intimate invitations his poetry constructed from the reality of his private life.

Bunner's parody is accompanied by an illustration of an autograph hunter hovering above a male author (Figure 3.4). The overt gendering of the autograph fiend throughout *Puck*'s parody emphasizes the threat of emasculation posed by the (female) collector. In relegating the hobby to the feminized domestic sphere, Bunner establishes an opposition between the frivolous female collector and the intellectual male artist that she haunts. The illustration further emphasizes this dynamic. Floating above (or jumping down onto) the male author, the pictured collector has assumed a dominant position unbecoming of her sex—it is she who holds the paper and pen, the proper tools of the writer. Her appearance, however, is monstrous; her face is wrinkled and deflated,

⁴⁸ [Henry Cuyler Bunner] V. Hugo Dusenbury, "His Warning to Autograph-Hunters," *Puck*, November 10, 1880, 156.

rendering her youthful dress grotesque. “I share with you the feelings of horror with which you view the growing craze for autograph-hunting,” Bunner prefaces his parody. “It is a bold, bad, unprincipled mania which is seizing frail and susceptible womanhood in its deadly grasp, and transforming the sweetest and subtlest work of nature; the light and perfume of creation, into a ravening monster.” The monster’s ideal prey is the “professional poet.” While Bunner allows that there “are other classes [of celebrities] who may be approached with safety,” a man “who has to sling inspiration for his living has no time to waste in writing memorials for posterity, to be confided to the care of monomaniac young females.”

To be sure, there were many female autograph hunters—Whitman was approached by a number of them at home and through the mail for his signature “and a sentiment”—but Bunner’s parody oversimplifies the presumed demographics of the American collector, relying heavily on deeply embedded cultural associations linking women and madness.⁴⁹ Such culturally hard-wired assumptions would dictate that the “sweetest and subtlest work of nature” was more likely to fall victim to the “unprincipled mania” of autograph hunting. Bunner genders the commercial role of the writer male, feminizing the force that threatens to destabilize that professional identity by imposing the demands of the domestic sphere, the only proper realm for such an impractical hobby. *Puck* creates an exaggerated “ravening monster” for comedic effect, but the fear that autograph hunters could dramatically impact a writer’s productivity was common.

⁴⁹ Horace Traubel describes one such incident on August 3, 1888: “Today a woman came in whose husband had been one of W.’s fellow clerks in Washington. She asked for an autograph, which W. gave her on a slip of paper. ‘And a sentiment,’ she added, offering to pass the slip back. W. took no notice of the slip but quietly said: ‘That is all.’ She withdrew” (*WWWC*, 2:83).

Authors who were reluctant to deny signature requests become points of reference for critics wary of the collector's impact on American literary production. In his journals, Longfellow "plaintively mentions the necessity of complying with thirty or forty requests" on an average day; according to the poet's personal records, on January 9, 1857, that number doubled: "Today I wrote, sealed, and dictated seventy autographs."⁵⁰ Publicly, Longfellow maintained that he enjoyed performing "this little favor," telling one visitor: "It is so little to do, to write your name on a card; and if I didn't do it some boy or girl might be looking, day by day, for the postman and be disappointed. I only wish I could write my name better for them."⁵¹ Whittier met the demand for his signature with comparable generosity and stoicism. In June 1891, Whitman was sent an elaborate, leather-bound autograph album by Samuel B. Foster, a lawyer and amateur poet from Chicago.⁵² The book was filled with celebrity autographs, including Whittier's. The thought of "the gentle Whittier" being hounded for his signature incensed Whitman: "It is a horrible practice—a pest—yes, pestilential—I hate to think of it: days and days, nothing but applications, applications! Think of the gentle Whittier! He must be the most pestered of all—yet never a word—a public word!" With no stamp or paper to pilfer, Whitman provided "a few lines" for Foster, "but all under protest," exclaiming "damn the crowd! I have to return the book . . . might as well put in a word."⁵³ Whittier had seen more aggressive collectors than Foster, though. He was once mailed over eighty cards from an

⁵⁰ A.M. Broadly, *Chats on Autographs* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1910), 40.

⁵¹ Edward W. Bok, *The Americanization of Edward Bok* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), 43.

⁵² In a published family history, Foster is credited as having "a refined literary taste," producing "many beautiful poems and short stories [that] found their way from his pen into eastern newspapers and magazines." See Frederick Clifton Pierce, *Foster Genealogy, Being the Record of Posterity of Reginald Foster, Volume 2* (Chicago: W.B. Conkey, 1899), 861.

⁵³ Traubel, *WWWC*, 8:267.

“enterprising young woman” soliciting his signature for herself and friends—it is one of the few times on record that Whittier declined to respond.⁵⁴

With authors like Longfellow and Whittier otherwise willing to comply with autograph requests so faithfully, collectors were emboldened to view the practice as the duty of celebrated writers. The *Atlantic* ventriloquized this popular attitude in 1884: “It seems such an easy thing for an author to give his autograph! He must be a cross-grained, unaccommodating person, indeed, who refuses to scratch his name on a bit of cardboard or a slip of paper, when it would give somebody so much pleasure!” However, the *Atlantic* concludes, the autograph hunter “has made it heavy work for the author who is unfortunate enough . . . to be popular.” In this earlier and more subtle variation of Bunner’s anxiety, the threat to the American male artist is again reiterated: “Every mail adds up to his reproachful pile of unanswered letters. If he is not cautious, he will find himself in correspondence with so *exigeant* a crowd of persons that he will have no leisure left to attend to his proper profession.”⁵⁵ Through anxious commentary like this, we witness concerns regarding the nature of literary celebrity rise to the surface. As modern forms of publicity and promotion develop, the author becomes further removed from a renown based on intellectual labor and moves closer to a celebrity constructed entirely of cultural recognition, a fame built on the repeated circulation, not of a writer’s literary works, but of their name and personality.

Fears of this emerging form of modern renown become projected onto the autograph hunter, who is characterized as the harbinger of a production of fame that

⁵⁴ Edward W. Bok, “How I Made My Autograph Album,” *Lippincott’s Monthly Magazine* (May 1889), 745.

⁵⁵ “The Contributor’s Club,” *Atlantic Monthly*, 581.

relegates the creation of literary texts to an avocation. Critics regularly suggest authors should begin charging for their autographs, imagining promotional scenarios which anticipate twenty-first-century networks of celebrity. As Loren Glass remarks, the “collectability of autographs encouraged a sense that authorial identities could literally be bought and sold.”⁵⁶ One writer playfully predicts that “by the end of the twentieth century, when the full business possibilities of autograph writing are realized, all . . . authors will be millionaires.” A budget is proposed to subsist entirely on autograph revenue:

If an author would work up a regular business of two hundred cash-down signatures a week he would, as the world goes, be doing very well for himself. That would bring in \$500 a week, or \$25,000 a year, allowing him two weeks vacation. An author without extravagant habits ought to be able to lay aside something for a rainy day on such an income. What he received from his ordinary, every-day literary writing he could use for pin-money and to buy ink with for his autograph writing.⁵⁷

Whitman’s efforts to promote his books by including his autograph don’t fulfill the scenario outlined above; yet, as I will demonstrate, without entirely divorcing his signature from his literary work, Whitman still capitalizes on the autograph’s “business possibilities.”

Autograph hunters, looking to combat their image as “the mosquitoes of literature,” offered two main defenses of their pursuit: one based on the historical and cultural significance of handwritten documents, the other on pseudo-scientific readings of penmanship. The first approach attempted to emphasize the educational value of signatures and autograph manuscripts.⁵⁸ An article in *The Brooklyn Magazine*

⁵⁶ Glass, *Authors Inc.*, 42.

⁵⁷ Clifton Johnson, “The Autograph Hunter’s Treadmill,” *The Bookman* (April 1895), 170.

acknowledges that autograph hunting “has been classed among modern nuisances” and that the collector “has had all manner of anathemas poured upon his head,” but raises the question whether “the practice is to be entirely condemned.”⁵⁹ The “intelligent collector,” one who uses autograph hunting to educate themselves about the lives and accomplishments of the famous, is offered as the foil to the popular perception of the autograph fiend. Through the model of this ideal collector, the hobby is passed off as “a valuable education.”⁶⁰

Perhaps the most vocal proponent of autograph hunting as an educational pursuit during the late-nineteenth century was Edward Bok, an up-and-coming author, editor, and avid collector who repeatedly wrote to Whitman. Bok’s history as a collector is well-documented, especially by Bok himself. His third-person autobiography, *The Americanization of Edward Bok*, is essentially his famed autograph collection “in narrative form”—it includes one of the most fascinating autograph anecdotes ever published, in which an aged Emerson struggles to sign his name, actually copying (and mis-transcribing) it from Bok’s own model, only to correct his mistake during a brief moment of lucidity.⁶¹ Whitman, however, is conspicuously absent from *The Americanization*; as a result, Bok’s pursuit of his signature and the poet’s attitude toward

⁵⁸ This sentiment, of course, persists into the twenty-first century. Covering the 2013 Professional Autograph Dealers Show for the *New York Times*, Allan Kozinn suggests “autographs have something like souls,” acting as “the molecules of history, vibrant links in important chains of events.” See Allan Kozinn, “Lincoln Scribbled Here: Strokes That Fascinate,” *New York Times*, April 11, 2013.

⁵⁹ “Collecting Autographs,” *The Brooklyn Magazine* (October, 1886), 43.

⁶⁰ “Collecting Autographs,” *Brooklyn Magazine*, 43- 44.

⁶¹ Regarding *The Americanization* as an autograph collection “in narrative form,” Glass writes: “[Bok] reproduces many of his autographs in all their apparent authenticity in *The Americanization*, and goes to considerable trouble to narrate their acquisition and its consequences. In essence, then, Bok builds his own subjectivity out of the metonymic traces of these other, more illustrious authors” (43). Bok includes facsimiles of both Emerson’s signatures.

Bok has received little attention. Yet, the dynamic between the two demonstrates how even the seemingly well-intentioned collector often failed to win Whitman's sympathies.

In a description of his collecting philosophy and methods published in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, Bok outlines a defense of autograph hunting rooted in an ethos of self-improvement. "Let a young man intelligently compile a collection of the handwritings of the illustrious men and women of the time in which he lives," Bok writes, "and it becomes to him an education in itself. From the pursuit of a mere hobby he acquires in a pleasing manner a knowledge of persons and events that cannot fail to prove of the utmost value."⁶² Faced with the criticism of skeptical friends who mocked his "useless expenditure of time," Bok reiterates that he has no regrets concerning his autograph hunting, and justifiably so. Not only did he view his extensive collection as "a source of intellectual benefit" and "a treasure-house of literary information and intellectual pleasure," but the network of celebrity acquaintances it represented helped to launch his career.⁶³

Longfellow, Holmes, Whittier, and Lowell would all eventually send Bok transcribed poems and personalized letters, yet Whitman remained elusive. According to Whitman's notes, the poet may have sent Bok a signature in 1881, when Edward was eighteen. Whitman records mailing an autograph to "Mr Bok, NY. for son"; Bok's father died later that year and this may be the only signature Whitman ever willingly gave to Edward.⁶⁴ Whether or not Bok was motivated by a personalized program of self-

⁶² Bok, "How I Made My Autograph Album," 745.

⁶³ Bok, "How I Made My Autograph Album," 745.

⁶⁴ Walt Whitman, *Daybooks and Notebooks*, edited by William White (New York: New York University Press, 1978), 1:244.

improvement or not, his multiple letters to Whitman fell on deaf ears. With mail from Bok open on the table, Whitman complains to Traubel about his “curious questioners” and their “silly” inquiries.⁶⁵ Bok simply grated on Whitman, who colorfully dismissed the collector and journalist as “a sort of chief-cook-and-bottle-washer in literature,” a “sweeper of the literary floorboards.” “America is still very young, and yet seems able to support quite a number of such fellows,” Whitman observes; “They are called *literary*, but God help literariness if they are literary!”⁶⁶

Bok’s public spin on autograph hunting was not enough to win Whitman’s approval. Stating the matter rather bluntly, he admitted that Bok “never excited my respect.”⁶⁷ For the general public, however, arguments for the historical importance and educational potential of manuscript collecting were more convincing than the other popular rationale used to legitimize the practice: the belief that a signature was an unconscious yet legible manifestation of its scribe’s personality. Known as handwriting analysis or, later in the century, graphology, this approach to the autograph, as Thornton explains, “embodies two basic postulates, uniqueness and correspondence”: “Taken together, these propositions commented as much on the nature of the self as on the nature of handwriting, for they asserted not only that each person’s handwriting is different and reflects his or her character but also that each person is characterologically unique.”⁶⁸ As David Haven Blake notes, handwriting analysis was an extension of the pseudoscientific crazes of the time; “like the phrenologist studying the keys to behavior in head bumps,

⁶⁵ Traubel, *WWWC*, 8:196.

⁶⁶ Traubel, *WWWC*, 6:309.

⁶⁷ Traubel, *WWWC*, 8:296.

⁶⁸ Thornton, *Handwriting in America*, 73.

romantic-era collectors took particular delight in the autograph, viewing it as a revealing symbol of the inner life of the renowned.⁶⁹ “Of all the performances of man,” one contemporary commentator writes, “there is not any which identifies the individual more strongly than his manner of writing.”⁷⁰ Proponents of handwriting analysis were quick to distance themselves from even less reputable fads; graphology, they insisted, was not “some new mesmeric outrage on commonsense,” it was billed as a gateway to the “moral” and “mental” character of any and all writers.⁷¹

Much was made of the growing hoard of American autograph hunters, but most readers were content to encounter celebrity signatures in facsimile form, either through the customary autograph often appearing underneath a frontispiece portrait or through one of the era’s many periodical articles on the subject. The facsimile autograph “created [an] illusion of cult-like aura in an age of mechanical reproduction,” that appealed to a diverse population of nineteenth-century readers.⁷² For example, Edgar Allan Poe wrote several famous articles on celebrity autographs for the *Southern Literary Messenger* and *Graham’s Magazine*—though the earliest iteration of these essays was intended to be humorous, Poe maintained that only the “unreflecting” would deny “that a strong analogy does generally and naturally exist between every man’s chirography and character”—and

⁶⁹ Blake, *Culture of American Celebrity*, 42.

⁷⁰ *The Art of Judging the Character of Individuals from Their Handwriting and Style*, edited by Edward Lumley (London: John Russell Smith, 1875), 18.

⁷¹ *The Art of Judging*, 68. Glass notes that by the end of the nineteenth century “articles on autographs began to discuss both celebrities and the average person. As signatures lost their auratic resistance to commodification, they came to represent the peculiar fungibility of celebrity itself in a democratic age” (42-43).

⁷² Blake, *Culture of American Celebrity*, 42.

Gleason's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion ran an entire series of facsimiles entitled “Types of Mind,” devoting the ninth installment to poets (including Poe).⁷³

Poe’s enthusiasm for graphology inspired a new generation of handwriting experts, among them his own biographer. Working under the pseudonym Don Felix de Salamanca, Poe scholar John H. Ingram published a book-length study of celebrity signatures several years after his 1874 critical rehabilitation of Poe. *The Philosophy of Handwriting* reproduces and analyzes the autographs of a number of American poets, including Bryant, Harte, Longfellow, Lowell, Holmes, and Whitman. Ingram’s introduction argues for the singular importance of the autograph above all other manuscripts; from “the extra care, deliberateness, and frequency of its use,” the signature is said to “[acquire] a settled form that better portrays its author’s idiosyncrasies than could any quantity of his other writing.”⁷⁴ To access these characteristics required a specialized knowledge of handwriting that Ingram promised to make available to novices and uninitiated curiosity seekers, though his pseudonym belies an unwillingness to be publicly linked to graphology’s questionable science.⁷⁵

As one might expect, Ingram’s handwriting analysis appears to be influenced more by an appraisal of his subject’s literary worth than by the autograph itself. As Thornton notes, “what these readings consisted of was less an analysis of handwriting

⁷³ Edgar Allan Poe, “A Chapter on Autography (Part One),” *Graham’s Magazine* (November 1841), 225; Ben Perley Poore, “Types of Mind; or Fac-similes of the Handwriting of Eminent Persons, No. 9: POETS,” *Gleason’s Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion*, March 5, 1853, 156.

⁷⁴ [John H. Ingram] Don Felix de Salamanca, *The Philosophy of Handwriting* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1879), 2.

⁷⁵ Ingram writes, “One has only to ponder over the strength of those fluctuating feelings which pass from the heart or brain into the fingers—impelling them to reveal or conceal the thoughts of the scribe—to feel that it is not claiming too much to claim for them the power of imprinting some ‘touch of nature’ on the page—some touch by which the adept may be more or less guided to a comprehension of the writer’s character” (3).

than an intuitive apprehension of the essence of another human being.”⁷⁶ Bryant and Longfellow receive the harshest treatment. “For a young clerk seeking a situation,” Ingram writes, “Bryant’s handwriting might prove a recommendation, but for a poet . . . it is most disappointing . . . All these calligraphical fanfaronades in a literary man are heartrending, and cast grave doubts on his genius.”⁷⁷ The “evident artificiality” of Longfellow’s hand is said to be “simply preposterous for a man of genius.”⁷⁸ Harte’s “microscopically minute calligraphy” and Lowell’s “simple, yet graceful” penmanship fare slightly better, but Holmes stands out among his peers:

The writing of no American poet is so pleasing to us as that of Oliver Wendell Holmes. It is somewhat old-fashioned, like his verse, and like that has the polish of a man accustomed to good society; is, indeed, that of a gentleman. There are no needless flourishes on the one hand, nor unsightly contractions on the other, but there is a very determined kind of finish to nearly every word, as much as to say, “I am Dr. Holmes, and Dr. Holmes, as you are aware, is somebody.” There is just that amount of independence to be looked for in this writer as would preserve him from doing a shabby act, without any trace of those flourishes which betoken offensive egotism.⁷⁹

Whitman’s script isn’t as “pleasing” as Holmes’s, but Ingram nonetheless locates within it all of the key characteristics of the Whitman brand (Figure 3.5):

‘Walt’ Whitman never writes decently when he uses that modern abomination, a steel pen. No one may hope to write a really good hand whilst using a metal stylus, for it emasculates every virile trait and completely obliterates its user’s idiosyncrasies. Surely ‘The Good Gray Poet’ can have no antipathy to a good grey goose quill, which brings us so much nearer mother Nature than does the forged metallic imitation. Whitman’s chirography is not a pleasing nor an intellectual one as a rule, although at intervals, when indited by a flexible pen, it is not without a certain grandeur. His letters are frequently left unfinished; he discards the

⁷⁶ Thornton, *Handwriting in America*, 81.

⁷⁷ Ingram, *The Philosophy of Handwriting*, 27.

⁷⁸ Ingram, *The Philosophy of Handwriting*, 82-83.

⁷⁹ Ingram, *The Philosophy of Handwriting*, 62, 84, 64.

loops below the line; words are contracted; a twist does service for the conjunction ‘and;’ erasures occasionally occur, and his manuscript is often hasty and heedless looking in the extreme. Then his ‘d’ is a rough unfinished kind of *delta* with a wild tailpiece, that, from its size, gives his writing the appearance of flourish, from which abomination it is, however, perfectly free. Lord Bacon tells us ‘there is no beauty but hath strangeness in its proportions,’ and, certainly, there is as much strangeness in the proportions of some of Walt’s words as there is in some of his verse. Yet, for all these strictures, it must be confessed that far more vigour, real unaffected originality, and even masculine beauty, is discoverable in one short hasty note of Whitman’s than in fifty folio pages of Bryant’s or Whittier’s conventional manuscript. Few of the chirographist’s minor morals are neglected by the author of ‘Leaves of Grass.’ He is particular in his punctuation, careful to cross his ‘t’ and dot his ‘i,’ and is quite *comme il faut* in his correspondence; in fact, shows that there is much method in his (presumed) madness. His signature is generally better executed than the body of his letters, and at times the Christian name of it is shortened to ‘W.’⁸⁰

Compiling in one book what took determined collectors like Bok years to accumulate, *The Philosophy of Handwriting* and other publications like it had the potential, in theory, to satiate the hunger of Bunner’s “ravening monster” while protecting its celebrity subjects from the unwanted advances of the autograph fiend. As Ingram observes, the “celebrated are justly tenacious of their handwriting, and even professional autograph-mongers often find them as difficult to ‘draw out’ as a fox that has run to ground”; *The Philosophy of Handwriting* did the fox hunting for readers.⁸¹ Whitman—more “tenacious” with his handwriting than most of his contemporaries—engineered his own strategies to cater to the impulses of the collector while discouraging intrusions on his

⁸⁰ Ingram, *The Philosophy of Handwriting*, 149-150. Todd Richardson has located one other contemporary reproduction and analysis of Whitman’s signature by William T. Call in *Remarkable Autographs with Notes on Indication of Character in Handwriting* (New York: B.W. Dinmore, 1887). Call dismisses Whitman’s autograph as “entirely ordinary” and “useless to the character reader.” See Todd Richardson, “The Uniform Hieroglyphic: A Contemporary Graphological Study of Whitman’s Signature,” *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* (Summer 2006): 34-36.

⁸¹ Ingram, *The Philosophy of Handwriting*, 4.

private life. The design features and promotional devices that emerged in response to the autograph hunter placed the poet's signature at the center of the Whitman brand.

The Whitmanian Imprimatur

The manner in which professional authors managed the circulation of their autographs could have a dramatic effect on a manuscript's value to collectors. When considering the commercial weight of a given signature, collectors evaluated both the writer's "relative . . . celebrity" and "the question of rarity."⁸² If an author had been "a willing victim to the insatiate autograph hunter," too "liberal of epistolary favors with those who offer his chirographic confidences in the public mart," the basic principles of supply and demand dictated a lower price. Longfellow's seventy signatures in a day were legendary, but that kind of generosity created "a serious depression in the value of his pen-productions by 'flooding the market.'"⁸³ Whitman never took an active interest in how much his autograph sold for, but the tight control he exerted over his signature certainly made it more valuable. "To the autograph collector Walt Whitman is a well-known terror," the *Philadelphia Times* writes, "and his persistent refusals of his signature make such few letters as he writes the more valuable in the open market."⁸⁴ In a response to the rise of the autograph hunter, Whitman began to limit his handwritten correspondence with strangers considerably, unless, that is, they purchased one of his books. Authors struggled to strike the right chord with collectors seeking their signature; after all, autograph hunters, bothersome as they were, were also potential literary

⁸² "A Commercial View of Autographs," *The Literary World*, September 5, 1885, 304.

⁸³ "A Commercial View of Autographs," *Literary World*, 304.

⁸⁴ Traubel, *WWWC*, 4:164.

consumers. The question remained how to satisfy simultaneously the needs of the author and the desire of the collector.

Reluctant to ignore autograph hunters outright, but unwilling to fall victim to any of their infamous tricks, authors like Twain and Howells introduced the use of printed responses to requests for their signature. These documents offered no coveted signature, no precious trace of authorial presence—their emphasis was on protecting the livelihood of the literary professional which depended on, first and foremost, selling books. Twain's response to autograph hunters does not overtly demand cash in exchange for his signature; instead, through a series of humorous analogies, he defines the author's autograph as a “specimen of his trade,” a valuable commodity not to be surrendered free of charge:

I hope I shall not offend you; I shall certainly say nothing with the intention to offend you. I must explain myself, however, and I will do it as kindly as I can. What you ask me to do I am asked to do as often as one-half dozen times a week. Three hundred letters a year! One's impulse is to freely consent, but one's time and necessary occupation will not permit it. There is no way but to decline in all cases, making no exception; and I wish to call your attention to a thing which has probably not occurred to you, and that is this: that no man takes pleasure in exercising his trade as a pastime. Writing is my trade, and I exercise it only when I am obliged to. You might make your request of a doctor, or a builder, or a sculptor, and there would be no impropriety in it, but if you asked either for a specimen of his trade, his handiwork, he would be justified in rising to a point of order. It would never be fair to ask a doctor for one of his corpses to remember him by.⁸⁵

Twain's sarcasm might have been disarming enough to assuage a disgruntled collector, but he leaves no doubt that time and money “will not permit” him to comply with such requests.

⁸⁵ Walsh, *Handy Book*, 73. Bok reprints Twain's typed response in *The Americanization* but does not mention the fact it was typewritten. Instead, Twain's letter is described as a “personality letter,” not simply an autograph, but a letter which demonstrates the writer's character or personality.

Howells's printed response takes a different approach. Whereas Twain positions the free autograph as a direct threat to his trade, Howells introduces a new strategy, one which embraces the autograph in the hope of creating a closer correlation between book sales and signatures in circulation. Plagued by a reputation of being "very gentle and yielding" to autograph hunters, Howells proposes a "sharp change" to his behavior.⁸⁶ In an interview originally published in the *New York Sun*, Howells unveils his plan which would soon be outlined in a printed circular and mailed out in reply to autograph requests:

The requests for my autograph have of late become so burdensome that I am obliged either to refuse all or to make some sort of limitation. Every author must have an uneasy fear that his signature is "collected" at times like postage stamps, and at times "traded" among the collectors for other signatures. That would not matter so much if the applicants were always able to spell his name, or were apparently acquainted with his work or interested in it. . . . I propose, therefore, to give my name hereafter only to such askers as can furnish me proof by intelligent comment upon it that they have read some book of mine. If they can inclose a bookseller's certificate that they have bought the book, their case will be very strengthened; but I do not insist upon this. In all instances a card and stamped and directed envelope must be inclosed. I will never "add a sentiment" except in the case of applicants who can give me proof that they have read all my books, now some thirty or forty in number.⁸⁷

Collectors are presented with several tiers of acceptable requests, each predicated on a familiarity with Howells's literary work—proof of purchase being the strongest evidence thereof—and the inclusion of a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Only on the rarest occasion would Howells provide the dreaded personalized "sentiment." "If the scheme works well and increases sales," *The Bookman* predicts, "other authors will naturally adopt a similar course, and the autograph hunter will be regarded in a new light by our

⁸⁶ Johnson, "The Autograph Hunter's Treadmill," 169.

⁸⁷ Johnson, "The Autograph Hunter's Treadmill," 170.

men of letters.”⁸⁸ Implemented three years after Whitman’s death, Howells’s cautious embrace of the autograph’s promotional potential did indeed foreshadow an even greater modernization in literary advertising—with its soon to be obligatory book tours and public signings—during the upcoming decades.

Once Whitman started selling signed editions of his poetry—a practice that, as I will examine, started with the 1876 Centennial edition of *Leaves of Grass* and continued until the 1889 reprinting of the Osgood edition—he too began to take advantage of printed advertisements to translate the demands of autograph hunters directly into the sale of books. This was the case when J.W. Bartlett wrote to Whitman in June of 1884 asking for his signature. What Bartlett received in reply was a small printed card advertising the 1882 Author’s Edition of *Leaves of Grass*, a three-dollar book which Whitman was willing to sign. Had Bartlett solely been interested in Whitman’s signature, the poet’s promotional card would have been thoroughly disappointing. Bartlett, however, was not merely an “autograph monster”—he was willing to purchase a copy of *Leaves of Grass* and promptly mailed Whitman a check. In return he received not only an autographed edition, but also a signed, handwritten note from Whitman thanking him and asking Bartlett to write the poet again to notify him of the book’s receipt.⁸⁹

The full story of Whitman’s use of his signature as a promotional device dates back even earlier than this to 1868 when the poet’s autograph appeared in print for the first time as a facsimile in the British edition of *Poems by Walt Whitman* edited by William Michael Rossetti and published by John Camden Hotten. Rossetti was an avid collector of autograph manuscripts and signatures—he later carried on an extended

⁸⁸ Johnson, “The Autograph Hunter’s Treadmill,” 170.

⁸⁹ Whitman, *Correspondence*, 3:372.

correspondence on the subject with Charles Aldrich, a former member of the Iowa House of Representative and dedicated Whitman collector—so it's fitting that he would be linked to the first published version of Whitman's signature.⁹⁰ In fact, the facsimile included in *Poems by Walt Whitman* still carries a trace of its origin in correspondence (perhaps reproduced from one of Whitman's many letters to Rossetti himself)—a small comma after the 'n' is retained, the only instance of Whitman's signature appearing this way in his books (Figure 3.6). The autograph is printed underneath a truncated version of the 1855 steel engraving, a revision of Whitman's famous frontispiece that, as Ted Genoways notes, "serves to chasten and neuter Whitman, just as Rossetti's editing of the 1855 preface had removed all mention of sex."⁹¹

Hotten advertised the volume widely, billing it as a companion piece "uniform with" Algernon Charles Swinburne's controversial *Poems and Ballads*. Before Whitman had even seen a copy of the book, Rossetti mailed him an early advertisement published in *The Athenaeum* which prominently mentions (as all of Hotten's notices would) the "Portrait and Autograph" to be included.⁹² One reviewer called the book "an excellent index to the writings of a man who cannot be overlooked," but Whitman's signature and the accompanying portrait functioned as their own index of the poet.⁹³ In one of his essays on autography, Poe places portraiture and signature side-by-side as indexical

⁹⁰ See Ed Folsom, "The Mystical Ornithologist and the Iowa Tufthunter: Two Unpublished Whitman Letters and Some Identifications," *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* (Summer 1983): 18-29.

⁹¹ Ted Genoways, "'One goodshaped and wellhung man': Accentuated Sexuality and the Uncertain Authorship of the Frontispiece to the 1855 Edition of *Leaves of Grass*," in *Leaves of Grass: The Sesquicentennial Essays*, edited by Susan Belasco, Ed Folsom, and Kenneth M. Price (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 102.

⁹² The advertisement Rossetti mailed along with his December 16th letter appears in *The Athenaeum*, December 14, 1867, 819.

⁹³ "Walt Whitman." *Chambers's Journal of Popular Literature, Science, and Art* 45 (July 4, 1868): 420-425.

models of their subject's personality: "Next to the person of a distinguished man-of-letters, we desire to see his portrait—next to his portrait, his autograph," Poe writes; "In the latter, especially, there is something which seems to bring him before us in his true idiosyncrasy—in his character of scribe."⁹⁴ In *The Philosophy of Handwriting*, Ingram goes further to declare the autograph's superiority as an index of celebrity personality, claiming "an autograph has this advantage over a portrait, *it must be faithful*, which a portrait rarely is."⁹⁵ By providing readers with two indexes of Whitman alongside one another for the first time, Hotten helped create for English readers the illusion of personal contact with America's unruly bard.⁹⁶

Whitman had virtually no say in the material design of the Rossetti edition—there is no record of whether or not he even knew Hotten would include his autograph in the volume—but the prominently displayed and promoted facsimile signature may have inspired Whitman's truly original experiment celebrating the United States Centennial in 1876. The so-called Centennial (or Author's) edition of 1876—a reprinting of the fifth

⁹⁴ Poe, "A Chapter on Autography," 224.

⁹⁵ Ingram, *The Philosophy of Handwriting*, 3.

⁹⁶ Scholarly discussion of facsimile signatures often vaguely evokes the aura's fate in the age of mechanical reproduction, but it is worth considering the specific photomechanical process used to create facsimile signatures. Line etching not only involved tracing the signature in mirror image during the preparation of the die, but the actual "writing" of the facsimile took place in relief. Cathleen A. Baker describes the process in detail in *From the Hand to the Machine: Nineteenth-century American Paper and Mediums* (Ann Arbor: The Legacy Press, 2010): "This photomechanical technique, which utilized full hardening and a warm water wash, was used primarily to reproduce original line drawings. First, the printing plate—usually zinc—was coated with photosensitized gelatin. Coating was done by spinning the plate as the solution was carefully poured on in the center; this resulted in a thin, even layer with no brush or roller marks. The plate was dried and stored in the dark until ready for use. . . . In the darkroom, the photographic negative was laid on the plate, wrong-reading side up, and exposed to strong light. In the clear areas of the negative, the light was absorbed by the gelatin and hardened it; the unexposed gelatin remained soft. The plate was washed in warm water to dissolve the soft gelatin, revealing bare areas of metal. The plate was then placed in an acid bath, and the bare metal was etched; these areas were non-printing. After the remaining gelatin was removed, large non-printing areas were routed out to deepen them. The finished plate was then tacked onto a wood block to make it type-high and printed on the relief press, often along with type" (194-195).

edition of *Leaves of Grass* that now included two portraits and some other minor additions—was the first volume in which Whitman systematically included his actual autograph (Figure 3.7). “It may interest some to know,” one reviewer writes, “that the volumes in this 1876 edition . . . have each the author’s physical touch and magnetism . . . [each] has been handled by him, contains his signature, and the photograph and pictures put in by his own hands.”⁹⁷ With the Centennial edition, Whitman capitalized on the nation’s hunger for autographs in a way no author had done before.

Signing a book, in and of itself, wasn’t a novel concept during the nineteenth century. Inscribed presentation copies and gifts were, as Leon Jackson has recently argued, fundamental components in a set of fluid “authorial economies”—circuits of exchange dealing in economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital.⁹⁸ Where Whitman fundamentally differs from his contemporaries, however, is in his use of the autograph not only as an authenticating gesture—an imprimatur—but also, and more importantly, as a preconceived marketing device. Whitman continued to inscribe books for friends and families his entire life—this activity becomes especially labored closer to the poet’s death—but only on a few distinct occasions did he plan and promote volumes that included his signature no matter who was purchasing them or receiving them as a gift. In this regard, the Centennial edition of *Leaves of Grass* and its companion volume, *Two Rivulets*, are landmarks in the development of literary promotion; for perhaps the first time, an author’s autograph was utilized as an integrated component in the design and advertisement of a literary work. The 1876 printing of *Leaves of Grass* and *Two Rivulets*

⁹⁷ “Walt Whitman’s Works, 1876 Edition,” *The New Republic*, March 11, 1876, 2.

⁹⁸ See Leon Jackson, *The Business of Letters: Authorial Economies in Antebellum America*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008.

was promoted as the “Autograph and Portrait Edition of Walt Whitman’s Complete Works”—a manicule at the bottom of one advertisement once again reminded potential consumers “[☞] Author’s Autograph in every Volume above.”⁹⁹

What is most striking about Whitman’s signature in this edition and the title-page as a whole—a basic format he would reuse in *Complete Poems & Prose* (1888) and with a facsimile for the deathbed edition (1892)—is the consciously designed interplay of text and script. “Ever and ever yet the verses owning—as, first, I here and now, / Signing for Soul and Body, set to them my name,”—the concluding comma announces the arrival of Whitman’s autograph, a marker of ownership, witness, and transcendent presence. In that comma—an open punctuation mark, not the full-stop of a period—is the print indication of Whitman’s preplanned marketing scheme; the design of the book and the punctuation of the prefatory poem expect and invite Whitman’s name—the autograph was in mind when the type was set. Others have noted the relationship between Whitman’s participial verbs (owning, signing) and the performance of presentness his autograph inscribes, but what is most innovative in Whitman’s title-page is the way the print reveals itself as a prior act which anticipates its author’s signature. That is the truly new promotional device: the *planned* and fully *integrated* autograph.

Complete Poems & Prose is the second of Whitman’s books to include his signature as a promotional feature. Its title-page virtually replicates the Centennial edition: Whitman’s prefatory poem “Come, said my Soul,” followed by the poet’s

⁹⁹ This advertisement is reprinted in Joel Myerson, *Walt Whitman: A Descriptive Bibliography* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993) 72. The same year the Centennial edition appeared, Whitman published *Memoranda During the War* which was designed and advertised as a “Remembrance Copy,” a pre-planned presentation copy of Whitman’s prose inscribed to (but not autographed for) the buyer or recipient.

autograph (Figure 3.8). In his introduction to the volume, Whitman conceptualizes his signature not as a marketing device, but as the endorsement of a will, with his readers to inherit the literary work it authenticates. “I wanted to leave something markedly personal,” Whitman writes: “I have put my name with pen and ink with my own hand in the present volume. And from engraved or photographed portraits, taken from life, I have selected some, of different stages, which please me best, (or at any rate displease me least), and bequeath them at a venture to you, reader, with my love.” Whitman’s autograph in the 1889 birthday edition of *Leaves of Grass* is positioned in a similar way, following the poet’s assertion that the “volume is more A PERSON than a book,” he concludes: “for testimony to all, (and good measure,) I here with pen and ink append my name:” (Figure 3.9). Whitman’s now familiar signature impressed one reviewer of *Complete Poems & Prose* who called it “strikingly firm and bold,” noting that “the paralysis that afflicts the author has not affected his firm hand.”¹⁰⁰

Not everyone was convinced that Whitman’s “firm hand” produced the signature in each volume. In a conversation with Traubel about an exceptionally skeptical book buyer, we find one of the only times Whitman directly refers to his autograph as a promotional device. The method Whitman used for integrating his signature with the Centennial edition, *Complete Poems & Prose*, and eventually the 1889 birthday edition of *Leaves of Grass* involves a pre-planned play between text and script most apparent in the punctuation preceding his signature—a comma in 1876 and 1888 and a colon in 1889. Unlike any of his other books—many of which he autographed for friends—had Whitman not signed these title-pages, it would be obvious a signature was missing. By including his signature as, essentially, part of the printed text, Whitman subdues an

¹⁰⁰ Sylvester Baxter, “Whitman’s Complete Works,” *The Boston Herald*, January 3, 1889, 4.

incredibly strong and original promotional gesture by transforming his signed name into part of a poetic work. In other words, Whitman did a nice job of hiding that fact that the main reason he was signing his books was to sell those books. As Traubel describes, for one stubborn customer, Whitman's clever marketing device was not enough:

McKay yesterday had a customer for the big book. He looked at the signature. "It's not genuine," he said. McKay assured him it was, but the man was not convinced. "Get him to sign his name on some other page, then I'll buy the book," he said. Would W. do it? I asked him this yesterday. He laughed a little: "I don't know whether I want to or not: I want to sell the book: that's a temptation: I'd do anything honest to sell books." He finally said: "Bring the book over." I did so today. He had a good laugh over it. "I wonder whether I should get a notary to affirm the second signature?" Then: "Tell Dave we'll do this this time but can't consent to make a practice of it: we are anxious to sell the books, God knows, but only to those who will accept the authenticity of the signature as it stands: this fellow must be one of the skeptical sort: a confirmed semi-petrified business man: one of the doubters of everybody: one who throws cold water on people—is always expecting to be swindled, always being ready himself to swindle. It's a hell of a habit to get into.¹⁰¹

Whitman's willingness to sign the book for a second time underscores both just how "anxious" he was to make a sale and just how new the poet's "honest" marketing device was for literary consumers, even after the Centennial edition. This twice-autographed copy of *Complete Poems & Prose* represents an author and his readers cautiously entering new promotional territory, unmarked terrain on which Whitman was writing his name.

The 1889 edition of *Leaves of Grass* issued in honor of the poet's seventieth birthday—what was actually the fourteenth printing of the 1881 edition, now given, as Ed Folsom notes, "the look and feel of a Bible"—was the last of Whitman's publications to include an autograph in each volume.¹⁰² Even with the book's relatively limited print run,

¹⁰¹ Traubel, WWWC, 4:396.

Whitman struggled through his signatures. After a long debate with his publisher David McKay, Whitman opted not to include his actual autograph as a planned element within any of the 1892 copies of *Leaves of Grass*. As late as 1891, however, he was still smitten with the promotional potential of his autograph, suggesting to Traubel and McKay that two versions of his final *Leaves of Grass* should be published: a cheap edition to include a facsimile signature and a more expensive version with his real autograph.¹⁰³ As McKay resisted and refused the idea of a one-dollar edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman became less interested in including his signature, telling Traubel, "I do not insist upon *actual* autograph: perhaps the facsimile would serve for all."¹⁰⁴ And so, the deathbed edition of *Leaves of Grass* features a facsimile of Whitman's signature on the title-page (Figure 3.10). Though he liked the idea of a slightly higher priced, autographed edition, Whitman didn't put up much of a struggle and ultimately retreated into a feigned lack of interest. "About the actual and facsimile autographs," he tells Traubel, "I don't care much or anything."¹⁰⁵

Whitman's signature—either as a facsimile or written by hand—appears inside the poet's books far fewer times than it does printed on the cover. James R. Osgood's design for the 1881 *Leaves of Grass* marks the first appearance of Whitman's signature on the exterior of a book (Figure 3.11). While the spine of the Osgood edition features a playful revision of Whitman's butterfly manicule, the front cover is staid and minimalist. The simple presentation is remarkably similar to a number of books Osgood published

¹⁰² Folsom, *Whitman Making Books*, 62. Folsom's beautifully illustrated catalog and commentary gives a full and swift history of Whitman as a bookmaker.

¹⁰³ Traubel, *WWWC*, 8:547.

¹⁰⁴ Traubel, *WWWC*, 9:10.

¹⁰⁵ Traubel, *WWWC*, 9:58.

during the 1870s; the rectangular rule and facsimile autograph—though used by other publishers—was a particular favorite of Osgood's. Whitman would return to the gold-stamped signature as a prominent component of his cover designs after 1881, but its first appearance resulted from a combination of his desire to create a book without “sensationalism or luxury” and his publisher's apparent fondness for that style.¹⁰⁶ For example, Bret Harte, one of the firm's highest paid authors, published two volumes of poetry with Osgood in 1871—*Poems* and *East and West Poems*—which share a design that is nearly identical with one another and that clearly anticipates Whitman's volume a decade later (Figure 3.12). Harte's “microscopically minute” signature appears stamped in gold on the front cover and blind-stamped on the back. The poet John Hay, a good friend of Whitman's, likewise published two volumes with Osgood in 1871—*Castilian Days* and *Pike County Ballads*—which share the exact same conservative design. These sorts of gold-stamped signatures emphasize the celebrity status of the authors they represent, often replacing the title of a book with the author's autograph instead. The distinctive style becomes a material representation of literary celebrity in that the author's identity “as a person” supersedes his or her literary work.¹⁰⁷ For a poet like Hay, whose literary reputation declined sharply after his death, the stature signified by his facsimile signature was short-lived.¹⁰⁸ Harte, who entered into a contract with Osgood for ten thousand dollars at the height of his career in 1871, enjoyed a more sustained fame despite the fact his literary production faltered during the 1880s. But, for contemporary

¹⁰⁶ Whitman, *Correspondence*, 3:226.

¹⁰⁷ John G. Cawelti, “The Writer as Celebrity: Some Aspects of American Literature as Popular Culture,” *Studies in American Fiction* 5 (1977), 164.

¹⁰⁸ Lauer notes how, from a modern reader's standpoint, the “fluctuating reputations” of nineteenth-century literary celebrities render some of their names “hopelessly obscure,” a “testament to the selectivity of historical memory” especially apparent in periodical reprinting of autographs (144).

readers, both authors—like Whitman—were marketable names; the material design of their books, though understated, mirrored their celebrity status.

Whitman's conservative appearance in the Osgood edition and thereafter is even more astounding when we consider the “creativity and excesses” of contemporary cloth covers.¹⁰⁹ As Richard Minsky observes, in the 1870s “book cover art in the United States entered a Golden Age that lasted more than fifty years”—some publishers went as far as commissioning “painters, architects, and stained glass designers to create covers that would grab the eye of bookstore browsers.”¹¹⁰ Spurred on by non-literary works—how-to manuals, parlor books, etc.—publishers were “sweeping away the niceties of taste and propriety, transforming the subject matter of the cover stamp,” which was often “pictorial, specific, [and] expressive of the nature of the book.”¹¹¹ Even Osgood was capable of more whimsical covers for literary texts. The translation of Jules Verne’s *Doctor Ox* (1874), for example, continues to feature the gold-stamped facsimile signature but captures some of its subject’s innovative spirit with a pictorial design (Figure 3.13). In this regard, the designs of Whitman’s postbellum books are quite cautious—the 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass* remained the pinnacle of Whitman’s typographical experimentation. What Whitman gained through a conservative, yet more focused design, however, was true brand unity: he could place his autograph on the cover of every book he published and book buyers would recognize it immediately. His name and his commercial image became one and the same.

¹⁰⁹ Julia Miller, *Books Will Speak Plain: A Handbook for Identifying and Describing Historical Bindings* (Ann Arbor: The Legacy Press, 2010), 150.

¹¹⁰ Richard Minsky, *The Art of American Book Covers, 1875-1930* (New York: George Braziller, 2010), 9.

¹¹¹ Sue Allen and Charles Gullans, *Decorated Cloth in America: Publisher’s Bindings, 1840-1910* (UCLA Center for 17th- and 18th-Century Studies, 1994), 14.

Whitman's innovations in branding through the 1870s were substantial, and his innovations with his autograph signature were groundbreaking. However, by the Osgood edition, the use of facsimile signatures on the cover of literary works—one of the few branding mechanisms publishers willingly borrowed from other commercial industries where signatures regularly functioned as central trademark symbols—had become commonplace. The design of the 1881 *Leaves of Grass* blends in with the volumes of Harte, Hay, and countless other established authors. But, for Whitman at this time, that was precisely the point. Early in his career, he relied on brash branding techniques that made him stand out, got his book talked about, caused a stir. At the end of his life though, he was happy to see his brand blending in with those of other well-known writers. With the Osgood imprimatur, Whitman had made it—he could bask in the idea that his brand, now represented through his signature, was one with other successful authors. Even though Whitman's association with Osgood's mainstream reputation was short-lived—by the spring of 1882 Osgood had cut ties with Whitman following the New England Society for the Suppression of Vice's campaign against *Leaves of Grass*—the poet retained Osgood's cover design and continued to make his book look “respectable” with his new publisher, Rees Welsh & Co., while sales of his poetry took off because of the obscenity controversy.

When David McKay took over for Welsh later in 1882, he and Whitman continued to utilize the Osgood-inspired conservative design throughout the poet's final books. Whitman's facsimile autograph appears gold-stamped on *November Boughs* (1888), the 1889 birthday edition of *Leaves of Grass*, *Gems from Walt Whitman* (1889), *Good-Bye My Fancy* (1891), and the 1892 deathbed edition of *Leaves of Grass*.

Whitman's signature had evolved from a facsimile tucked inside a foreign edition of the poet's work to *the* central visual marker of the Whitman brand. Nowhere is this clearer than with the design of the 1889 birthday edition of *Leaves* (Figure 3.14). Whitman's signature appears in or on that volume three times; in addition to the author's actual autograph on the title-page, the signature is gold-stamped on both the front cover and spine.

Beginning in 1856 when he printed Emerson's praise on the second edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman had embraced the marketing potential of a book's spine. In 1860 and 1881 he designed a promotional symbol of his poetry and positioned this butterfly manicule on the spine of *Leaves of Grass*. That new printer's fist advertised *Leaves of Grass* as a book and a man, both announcing a new race of poets. In 1889 and 1892, Whitman places his signature on the spine of *Leaves of Grass*, allowing his autograph to replace his previous promotional devices (Figure 3.15). The introduction of cloth bindings early in the nineteenth century ushered in changes to the way books were sold that transformed the spine of a book into a prime promotional space. As Henry Petroski explains, once booksellers no longer needed to stock loose sheets of books to bind on demand, "shelving requirements changed to resemble more those of a library, where books had for some time been shelved vertically, with their lettered spines out."¹¹² This shift hadn't fully taken place until the 1830s, so Whitman's Emerson blurb is an early attempt to take advantage of the spine as a new advertising space. The placement of Whitman's autograph on the spine of the 1889 and 1892 *Leaves of Grass* illustrates how far the poet had come in his experimentation. By the end of his career, all that was needed to point to the Whitman brand was the poet's signature itself, made all the more

¹¹² Henry Petroski, *The Book on the Bookshelf* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 160.

valuable by his decades of resisting autograph hunters' entreaties, so that even the facsimile version of his signature looked bold and fresh.

Elizabeth Porter Gould's oblong anthology of Whitmanian "gems" published by McKay in 1889, *Gems from Walt Whitman*, is the only Whitman book that uses the poet's signature as part of the title printed on the cover (Figure 3.16). As Folsom points out, the color, typeface, facsimile signature, and decorative elements of *Gems* are all reminiscent of the cover of *November Boughs*, yet, with one important distinction (Figure 3.17). On the cover of *November Boughs* Whitman's signature identifies his authorship; with Gould's volume, the autograph is absorbed into the title of the book. Whitman's familiar signature appears, but there is no other indication of the book's creator. Of course, another "Walt Whitman" on the cover may have simply seemed redundant, but the presence of Whitman's name—though not as a separate signature claiming ownership—is an apt representation of the poet's attitude towards the collection. Whitman had maintained that "any volume of extracts must misrepresent" *Leaves of Grass* and that he didn't "shine in bits."¹¹³ "These gems, specimens, tid-bits, brilliants, sparkles, chippings," he tells Traubel, "oh, they are all wearisome: they might go with some books . . . but Leaves of Grass is different."¹¹⁴ As for supporting Gould's collection, Whitman was at best indifferent, claiming, "the only thing I really promised was that I would not raise a hell of an objection to it."¹¹⁵ The cover of *Gems* shows Whitman's name being put to use without the poet's spirited endorsement. In its odd way—by separating the facsimile

¹¹³ Traubel, WWWC, 1:282, 2:88.

¹¹⁴ Traubel, WWWC, 3:395-396.

¹¹⁵ Traubel, WWWC, 4:72.

autograph from its function as a discrete attribution of authorship—Gould’s book is the most explicit use of Whitman’s signature as a pliable brand symbol.

Once the last edition of *Leaves of Grass* was published, Whitman placed several copies aside for his close friends, including Horace Traubel and Richard Maurice Bucke. The poet saw Traubel nearly each day, but could not bring himself to sign the book which already featured his gold-stamped autograph. “I have been so broke up—indeed, I am so lame—my right arm is lame, lame,” Whitman confides to Traubel, “I *can’t* write.”¹¹⁶ When Whitman received an order for books including his signature, he was forced to admit he was unable to offer the same “honest” marketing device he introduced in 1876. “I *can’t* autograph,” the poet tells Traubel on March 24, 1892.¹¹⁷ Two days later, Whitman was dead.

Even as age and sickness threatened Whitman’s signature, his autograph’s continued presence on the cover of *Leaves of Grass* maintained the poet’s association with the “vigour, real unaffected originality, and even masculine beauty” that Ingram had located in his script.¹¹⁸ With Whitman’s hand becoming less his own, the poet’s autograph took on an even more vital role in identifying *Leaves of Grass* and its author for literary consumers. With this bold symbol of his literary brand, Whitman gave back to the world what was given to him: his name.

¹¹⁶ Traubel, WWWC, 9:505.

¹¹⁷ Traubel, WWWC, 9:590.

¹¹⁸ Ingram, *The Philosophy of Handwriting*, 149.



Figure 3.1. Walt Whitman Fruit Cocktail label



A dream marched to the swing of his words

What's a poet good for? What does he do for people?
Let's take Walt Whitman.

Walt was a carpenter's son, a handy boy with axe and saw,
used to plain ways and hard work, pleased with
everybody and everything. In Long Island, where he
grew up, the many-sided life of America swirled
around him—the farms with their growing, the sea with
its commerce, the cities noisy with making and building.
Walt's quick eyes saw it all, and the stir and bustle of it
got into his blood.

Every good man eventually gives back to the world
what has been given to him. So Walt in time took the
great pulse of hope and excitement that America had
put in his heart, and began to make a book of it.

"Leaves of Grass" he called it—a book as boundless and
free-growing as an uncult field, blossoming with every fresh,
green thought that ever grew inside
Walt Whitman, American.

He wrote of the lovely body of his country,
its mountains, rivers, prairies, seacoasts.

the wet smell of its woods, the cool breath of its winds.

He wrote of his countrymen at work: stevedores,
herdsmen, preachers, Congregational; the bellowing
auctioneer and the gentle healer of wounds; the timber
with his sweating horses and the farmer with his
whistling scythe; all stirring, building, buying, selling—
a nation of brothers and equals, happy to be
going somewhere together.

What's a poet good for? To give us words for the
moods in ourselves. To give us words to live by; great,
swinging words for our dreams to march to. For just as it
takes a child to remind us of the joy in simple things, so it
takes a poet to show us the wonder of what is
before our eyes.

Walt did this for me and one thing more. He showed us that
America itself is the great poem to be written and
each of us is its poet, adding our verse to
the big book that never ends.

John Hancock

MUTUAL LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Figure 3.2. John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance advertisement.

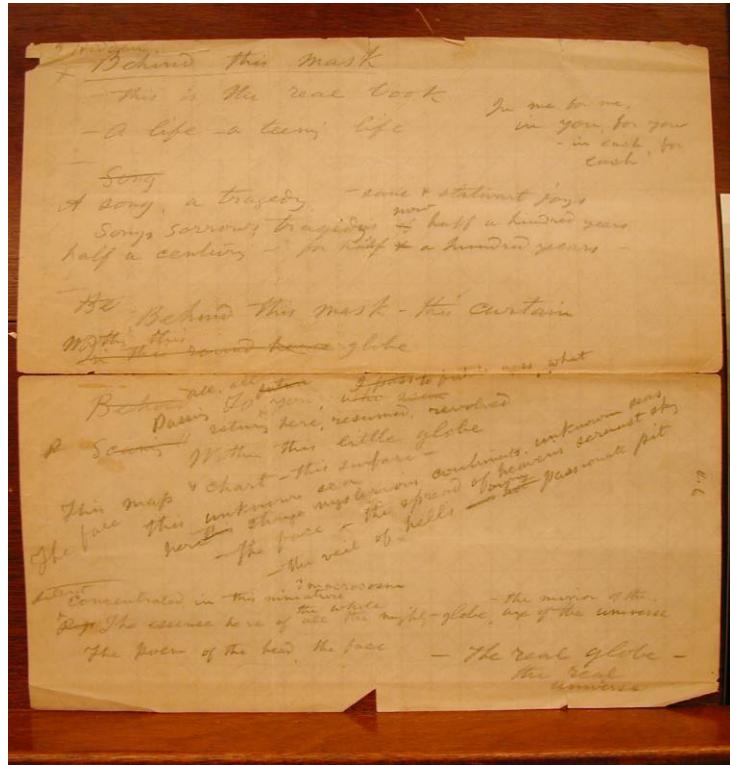
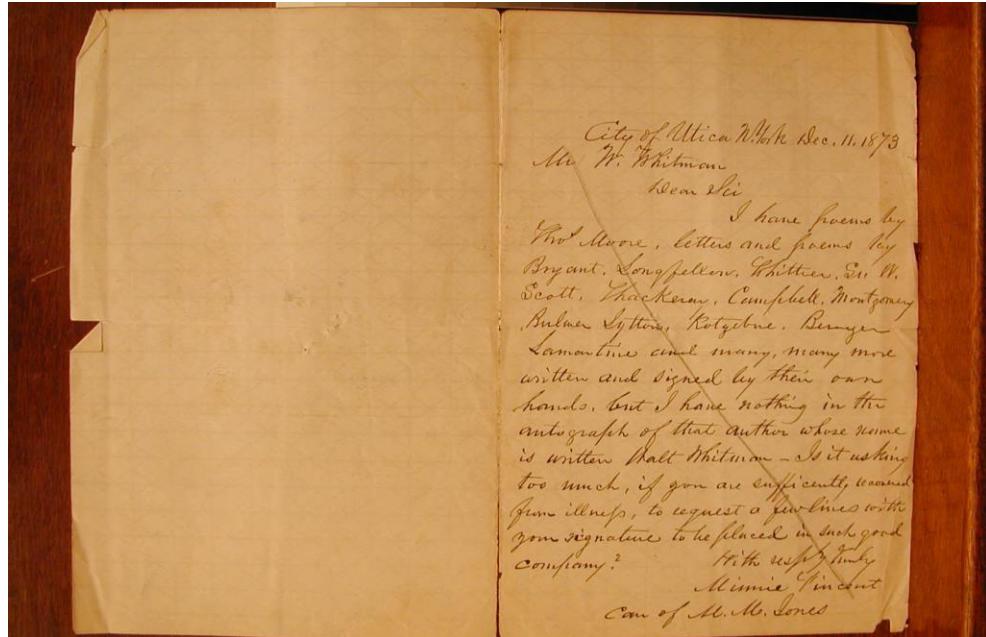


Figure 3.3. Letter from Minnie Vincent to Walt Whitman, December 11, 1873

V. HUGO DUSENBURY.



HIS WARNING TO AUTOGRAPH - HUNTERS.

Figure 3.4. Illustration, "His Warning to Autograph-Hunters"

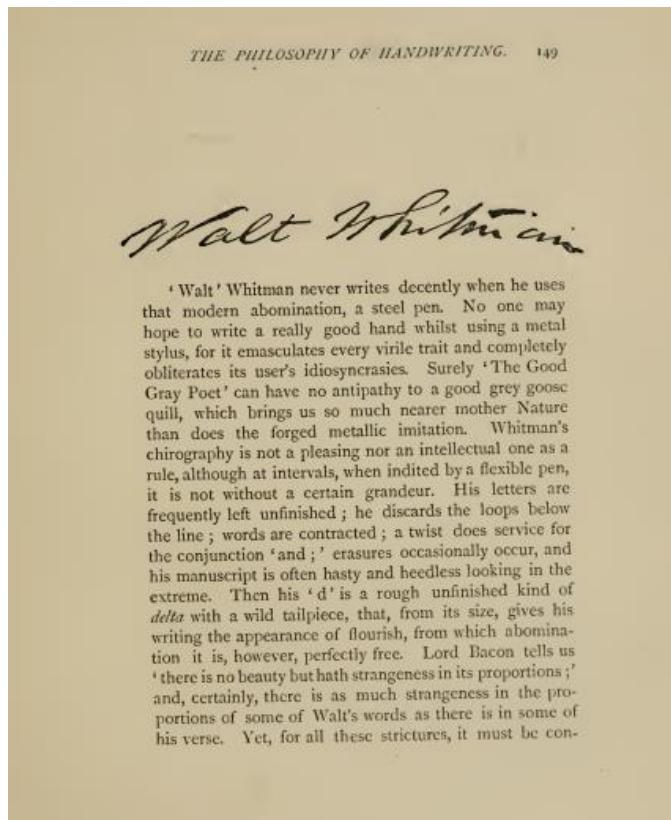


Figure 3.5. Whitman's facsimile signature in *The Philosophy of Handwriting* (1879)

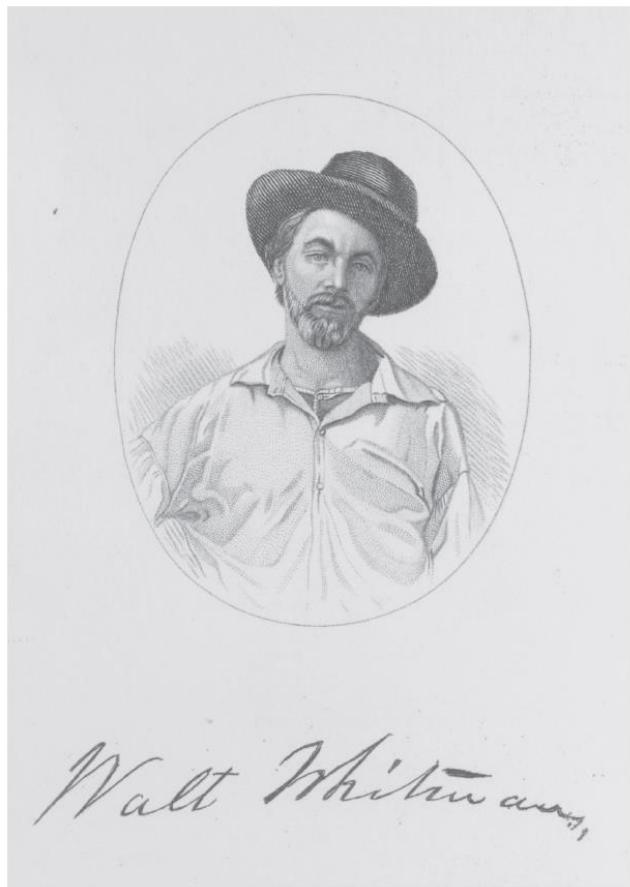


Figure 3.6. Frontispiece and facsimile signature from *Poems by Walt Whitman* (1868)

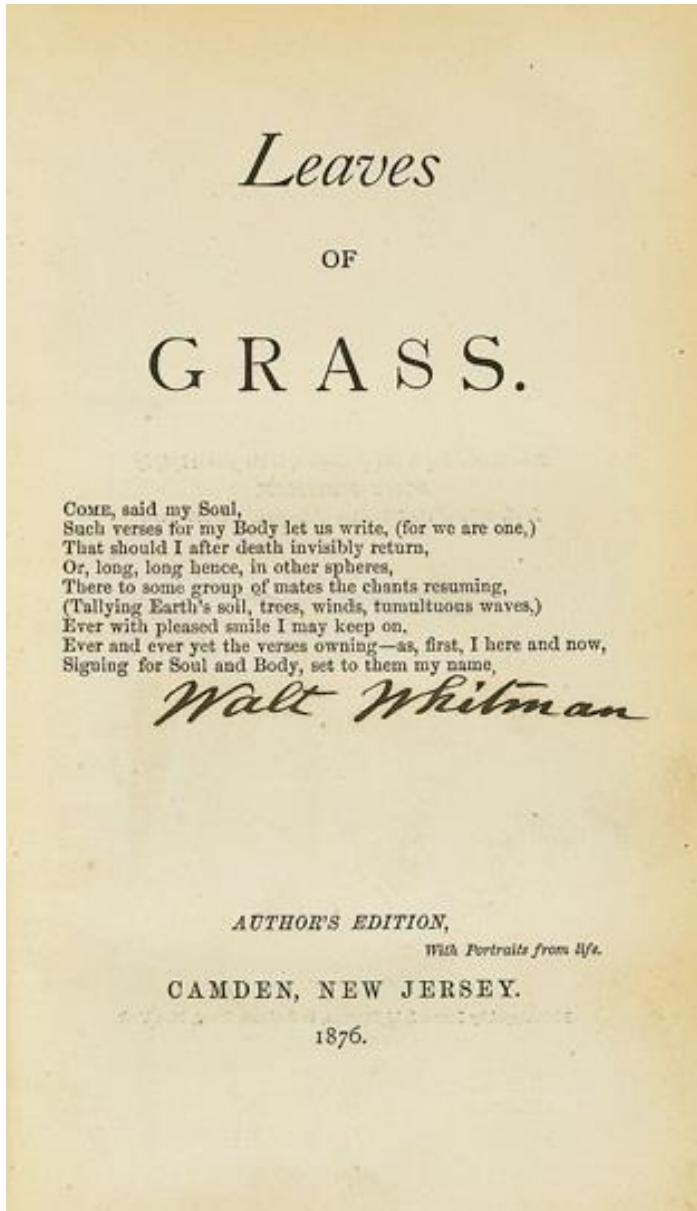


Figure 3.7. Autographed title-page of the third printing of the fifth edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1876)

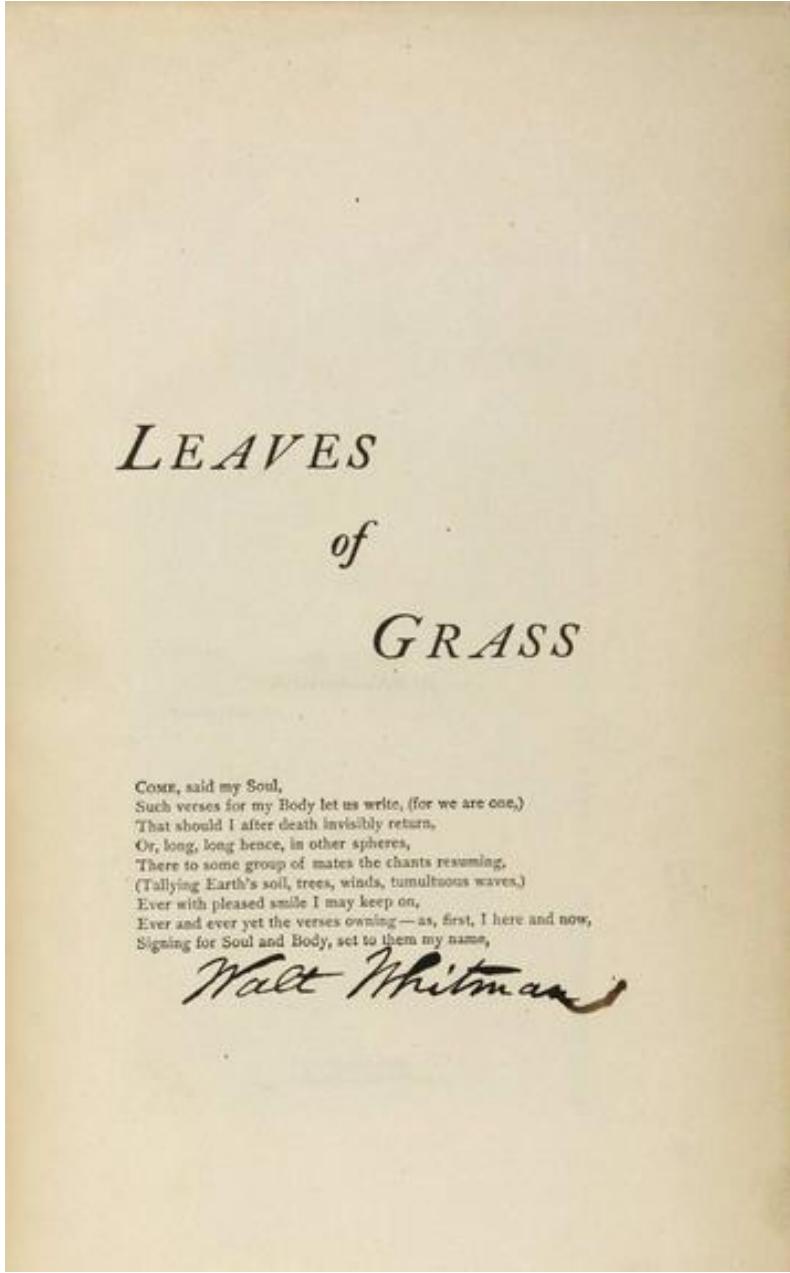


Figure 3.8. Autographed title-page of *Complete Poems & Prose* (1888)

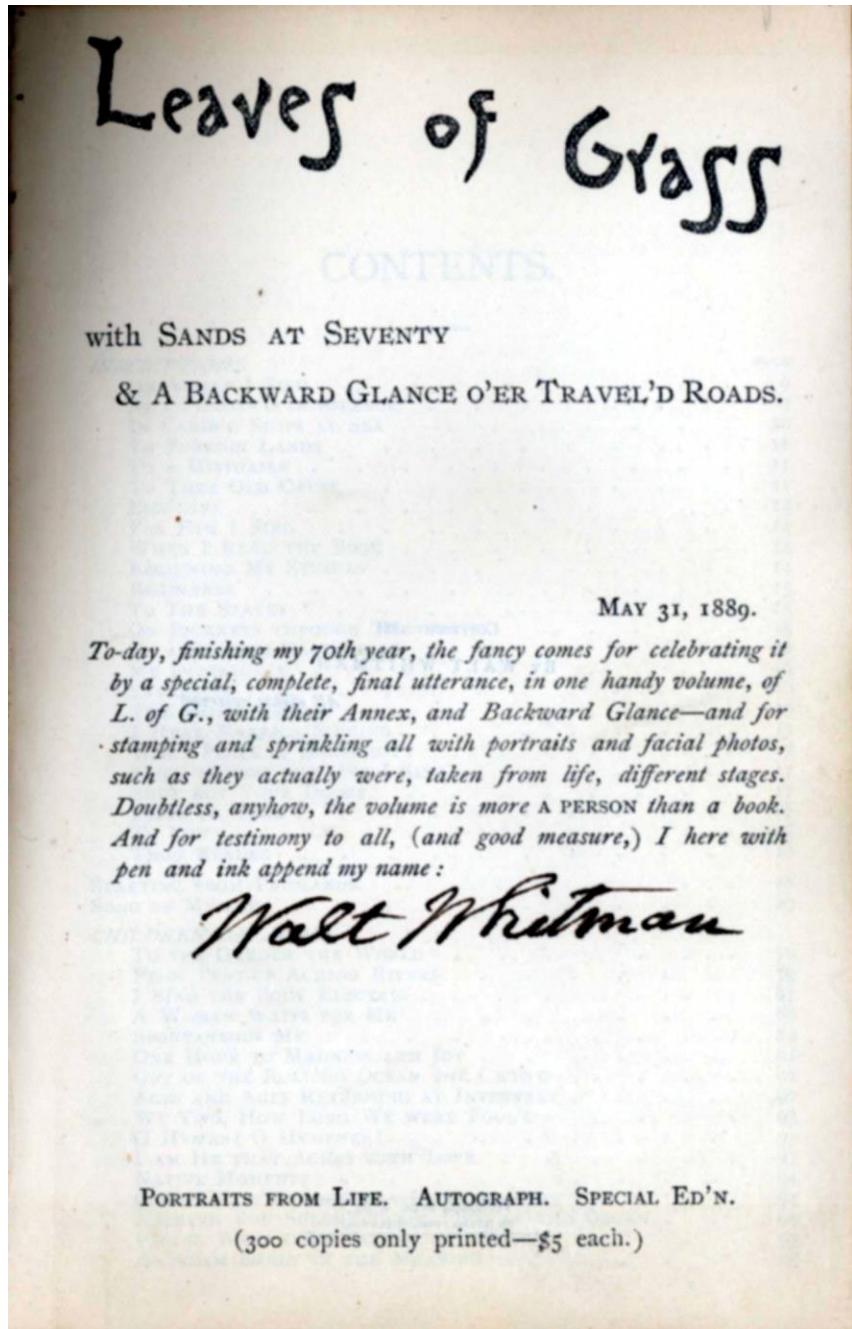


Figure 3.9. Autographed title-page of the 1889 “birthday” reprinting of the 1881 *Leaves of Grass*

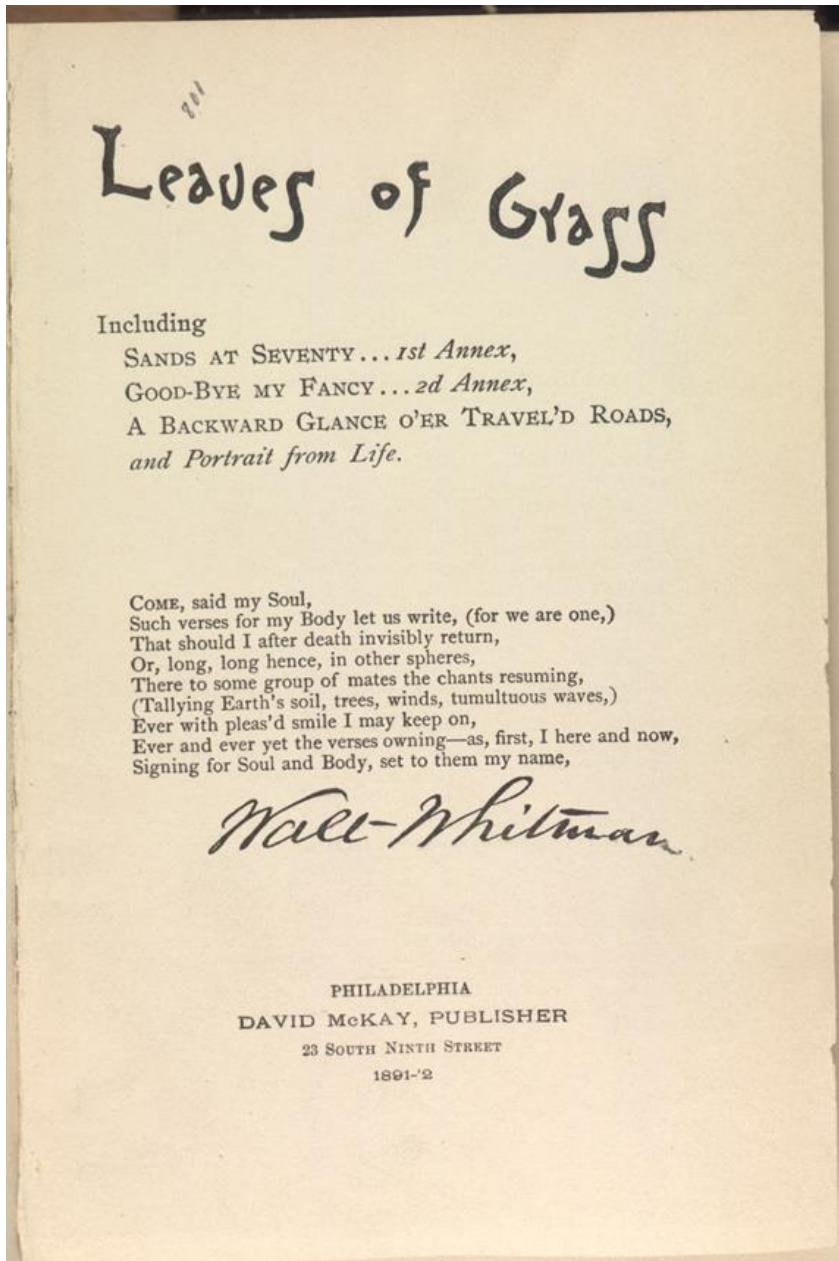


Figure 3.10. Facsimile signature on the title-page of the 1892 *Leaves of Grass*

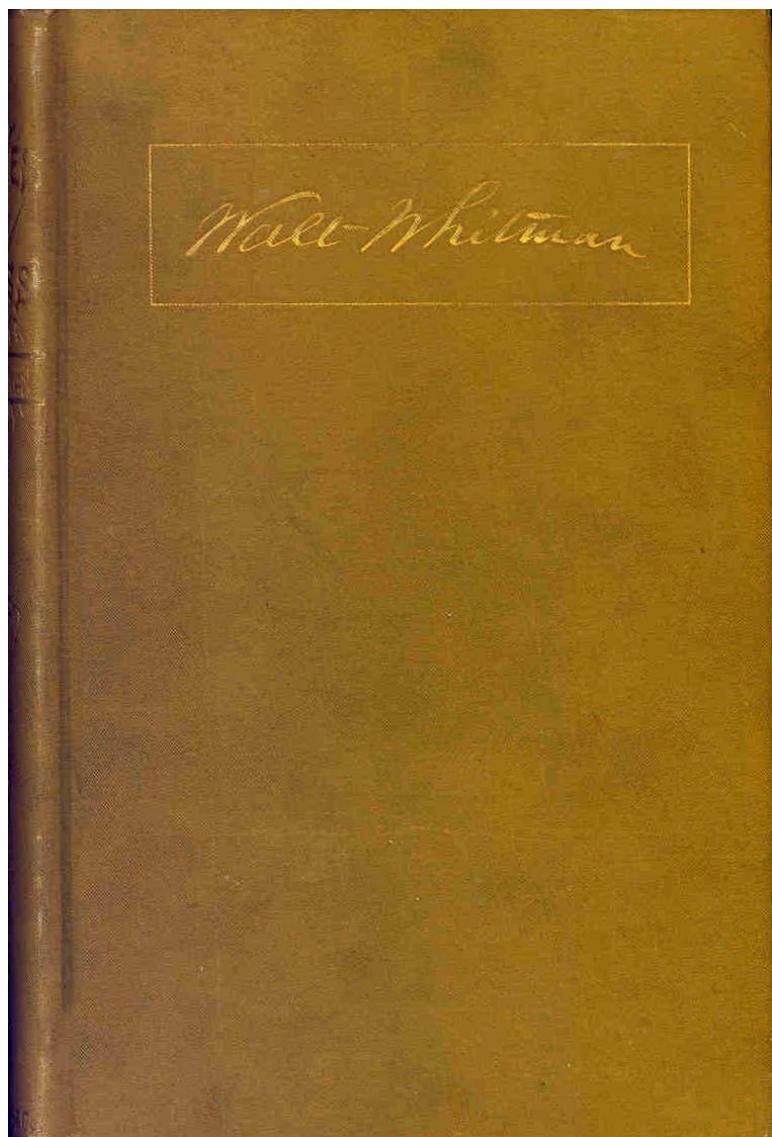


Figure 3.11. Front cover of the 1881 *Leaves of Grass*

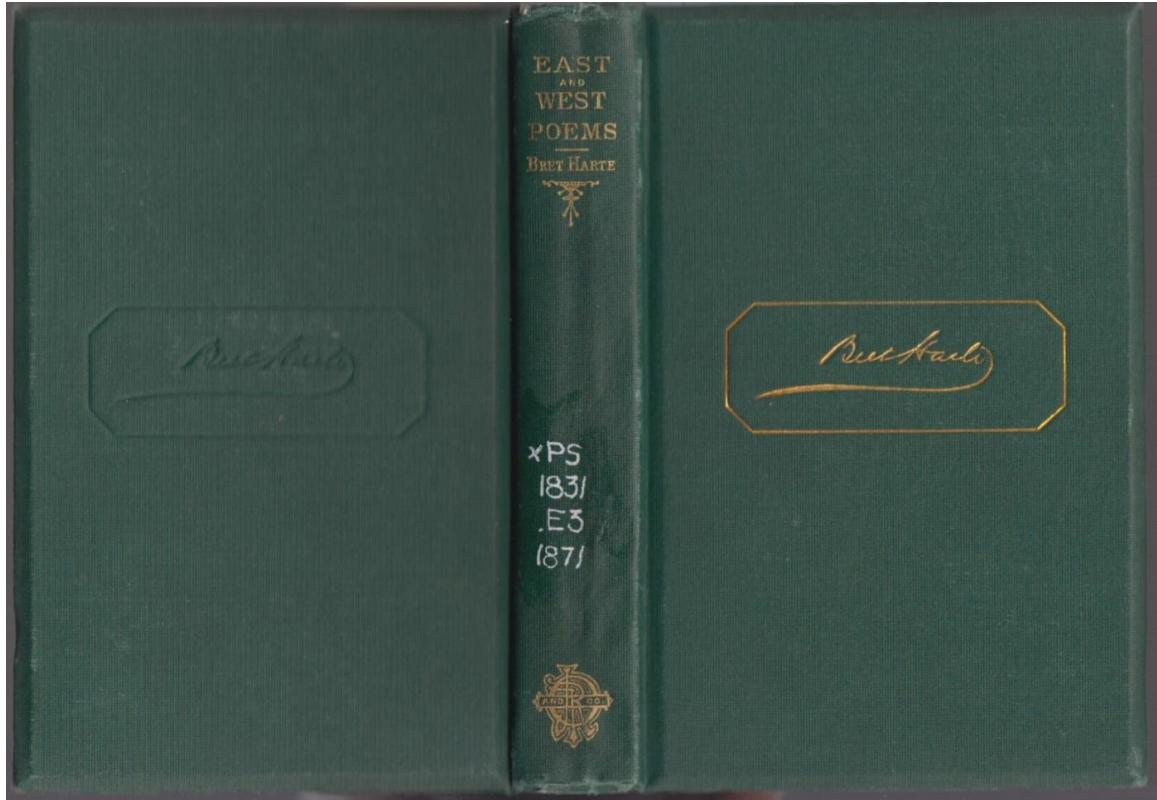


Figure 3.12. Binding of Bret Harte's *East and West Poems* (1871)

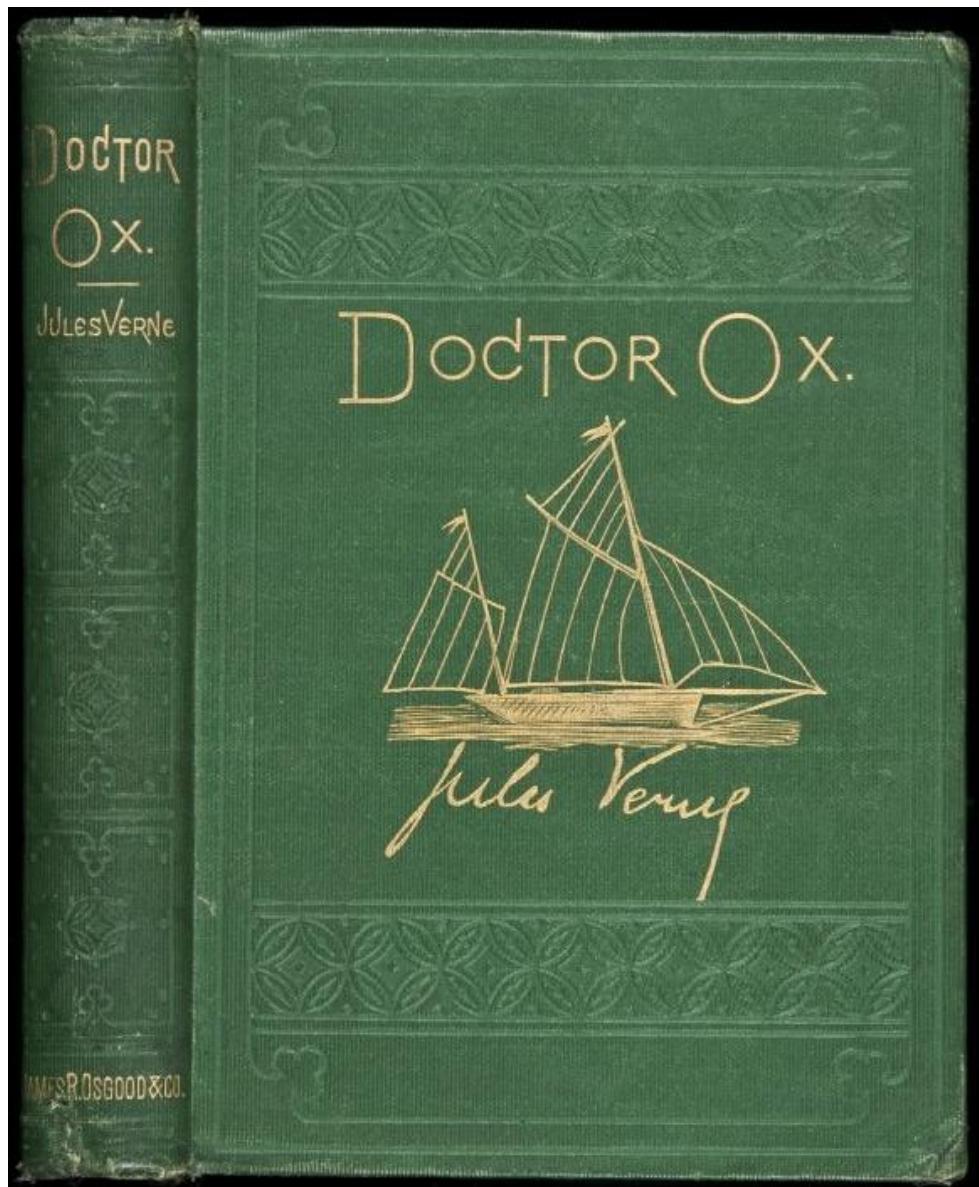


Figure 3.13. Front cover of Jules Verne's *Doctor Ox* (1873)

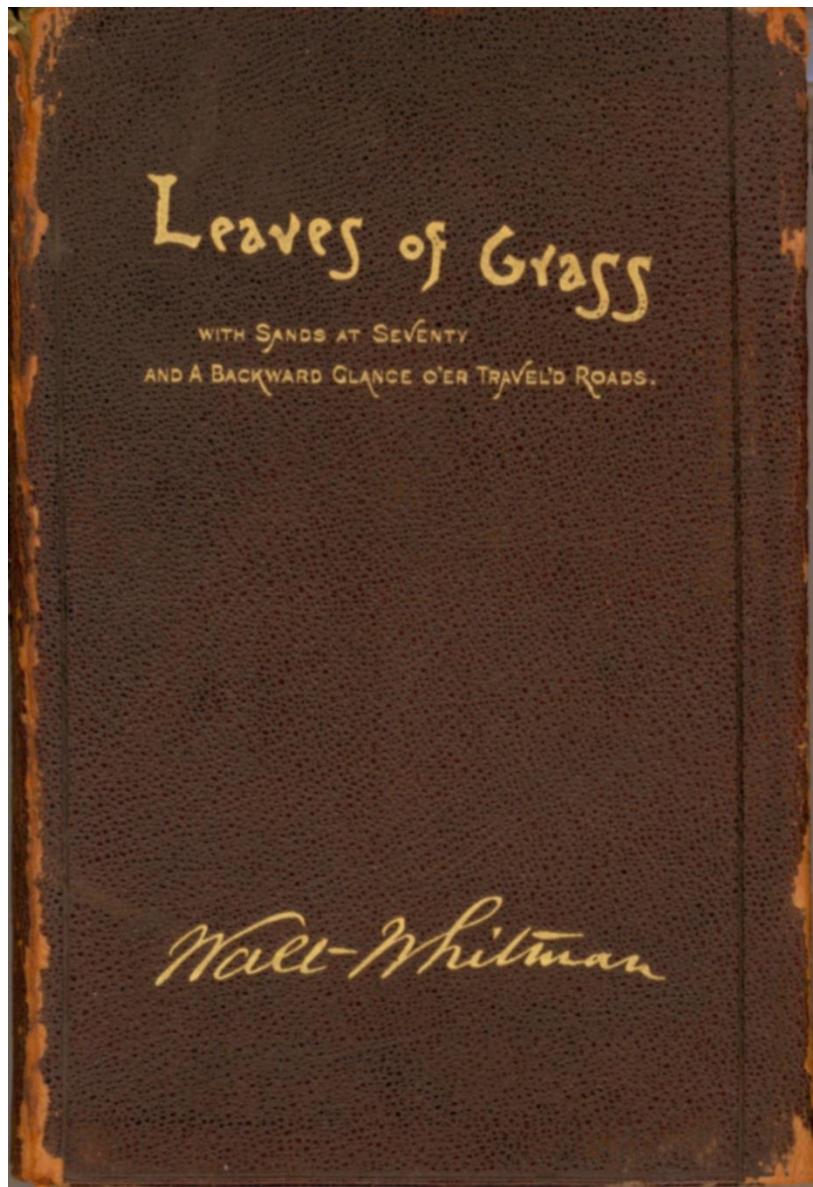


Figure 3.14. Front cover of the 1889 “birthday” reprinting of the 1881 *Leaves of Grass*

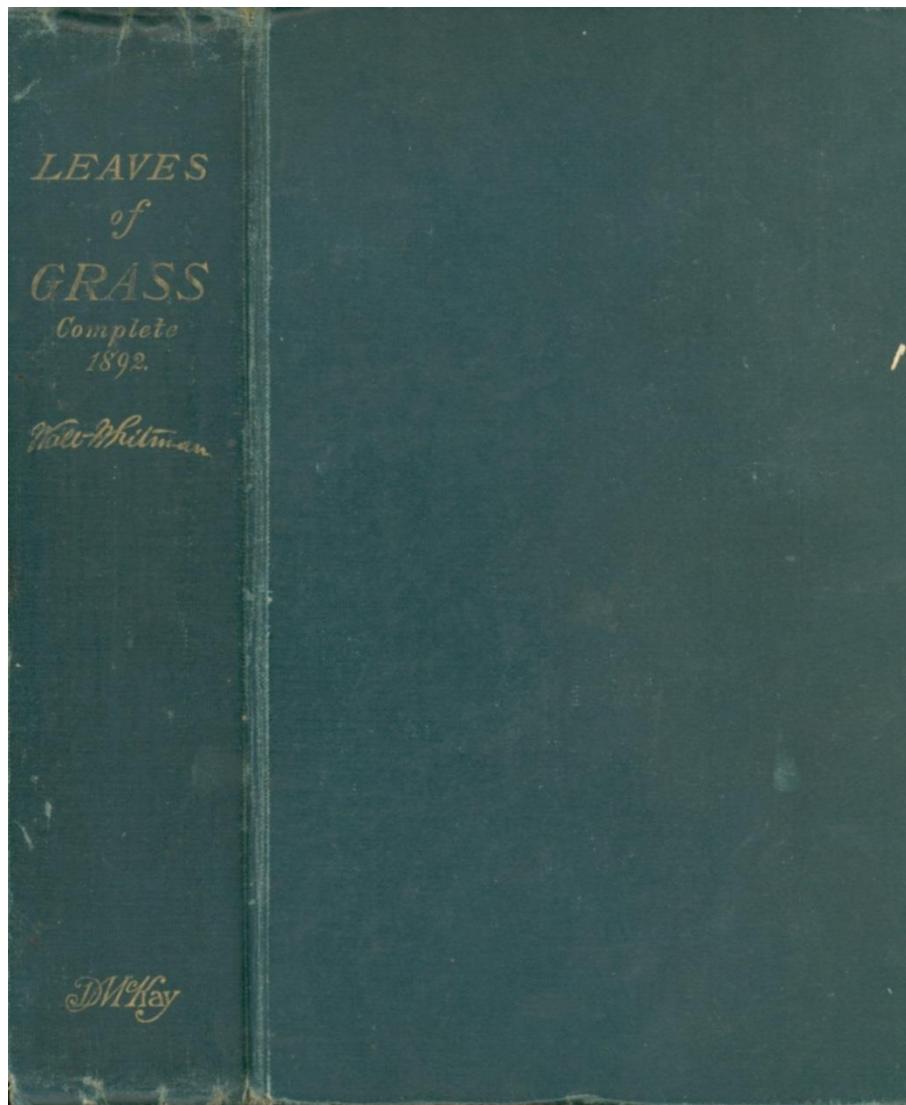


Figure 3.15. Front cover of 1892 *Leaves of Grass*

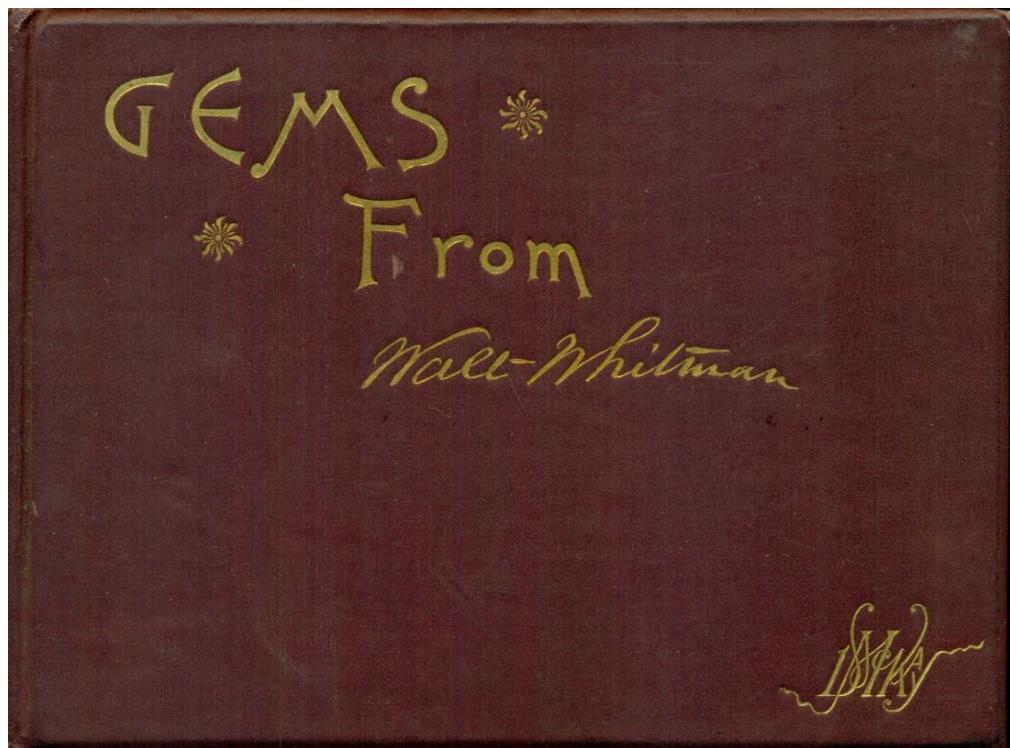


Figure 3.16. Front cover of *Gems from Walt Whitman* (1889)

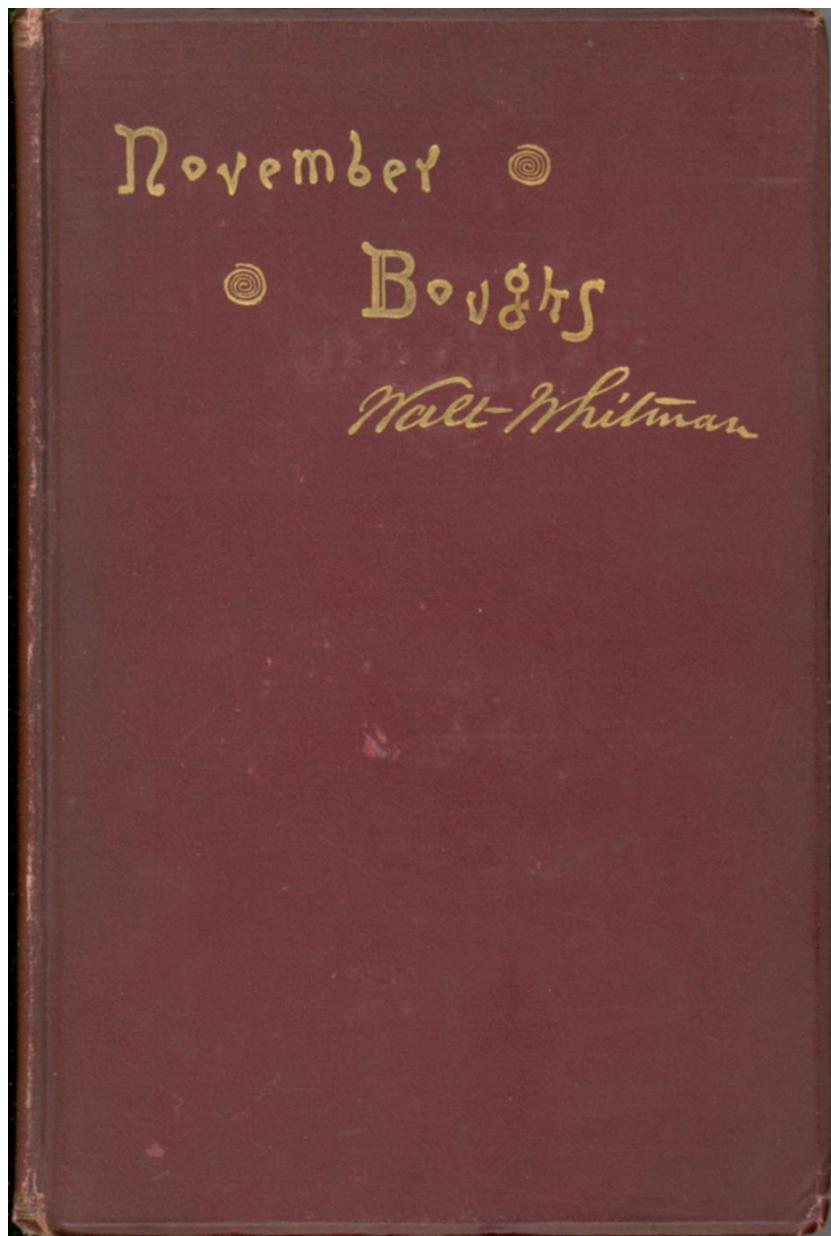


Figure 3.17. Front cover of *November Boughs* (1888)

CHAPTER IV

AM I NOT A MAN AND A POET?: BRANDING WALT WHITMAN

Spending another Sunday with Walt Whitman in 1888, Horace Traubel once again took the measured steps necessary to navigate the cluttered floor of Whitman's Mickle Street house. Even Traubel—carefully attuned to the literary treasures surely buried under the chaos of papers, periodical clippings, books, and letters haphazardly strewn about the floor—couldn't avoid disturbing Whitman's mess when he walked. Lifting his foot, Traubel reached down to examine the item he had just stepped on: a carte-de-visite of William Cullen Bryant that had been lying face down (Figure 4.1). "That ought to be put where it will be safe," Traubel cautioned Whitman, handing over the Napoleon Sarony photo. "Maybe you have some place at home where you can keep it safe," Whitman responded curtly, handing the image right back.

Had Whitman allowed his room to be kept tidier, Traubel's conversations with the poet may have assumed a dramatically different form. But, thanks in part to the disorder Whitman surrounded himself with, Traubel's nine-volume account of these visits, *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, takes on the eclectic character of Whitman's paper-covered floor. During those final years, Whitman's body was slowly failing him; short bouts of silence belied a mind that was, at times, clouded and distant. The relics pulled from Whitman's clutter, however, often provoked the poet's most lucid meditations. Prompted by the Sarony photograph Traubel had unearthed, Whitman elaborated: "Some one who was in here and saw that picture said: 'That's you, Walt, when you're finished.' He thought that if a gold beater got at me, hammered me down some, I might get a polish that would turn me into a real man. There's no use talking: I won't do but Bryant will do."

Don't you like the picture? It is every way like the old man—every way: it has a sort of Thanatopsis look." Offering Traubel a "soiled old photograph of himself" in contrast, Whitman continues: "Take this now—this picture . . . Do you think this could ever be tinkered into that?—that this loafer, this lubber, could ever be transmuted into that gentleman? All I've got to say is, that I wouldn't like to undertake the contract."¹

For readers encountering *Leaves of Grass* for the first time in 1855, it must have been difficult to fathom the amount of tinkering necessary to transform the haughty defiance of the "loafer" pictured in the frontispiece into the serene and stately countenance of a Fireside Poet (Figure 4.2). And yet, in the years following the Civil War, Whitman's image—both his physical appearance and his carefully crafted public persona—grew closer and closer to the polished look of the "old man" whose picture he had tossed on the floor. As Traubel stood there with photos of Bryant and Whitman in his hands, he must have grasped the irony of Whitman's effort to distance himself from the physical appearance of his contemporary. At least one commentator had compared Whitman's "shagginess" to Bryant's "ancient and bard-like appearance" which resembled "the conventional ideal of Time, or Santa Claus."² Of course, the tenor and form of their poetry differed wildly, but the Sarony photograph of Bryant bears more than a mild resemblance to an aged Whitman. Sarony was at the forefront of a burgeoning celebrity photograph industry in the United States. Often paying his famous subjects large sums, he would retain the rights to the images he produced and sell them to popular audiences eager to display the faces of well-known literary and theatrical stars. Both Bryant and Whitman had been photographed by Sarony in New York during the 1870s;

¹ Traubel, WWWC, 2:2.

² Jeannette Gilder, "Walt Whitman on Lincoln," *The Critic*, April 23, 1887, 206.

placed side by side, you can see the extent of Whitman's postbellum transmutation from Bowery rough into "the Good Gray Poet" (Figure 4.3). Upon close inspection, Whitman's "lubber"-like qualities in this 1878 image maintain a muted persistence: unlike Bryant, he wears no tie, leaving his crisp white shirt to drape over the lapel of his coarsely knit suit. Though Whitman's hair is longer and slightly thicker, both poets are distinguished by their stark white beards. Set against a jet black jacket and stern eyes, Bryant's snowy beard seems stiffer and broader than Whitman's. Even still, despite these minor differences, time had tinkered away at Whitman, taking up the hammer he refused: to the casual eye, Whitman's softer and more paternal exterior was a far cry from the defiance and virility of the 1855 loafer. To paraphrase the *New York Daily News*, the "Mose" of the Bowery stage looked more like the prophet Moses.³

Even as he sat half-paralytic and more or less confined to his modest house, Whitman continued to identify, in part, with the image of "Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs" that he inaugurated within the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Whitman made sure that image—and its relation to the poem eventually titled "Song of Myself"—remained a cornerstone of the Whitman brand from its appearance in 1855 until his death in 1892. The exact origin of the 1855 steel engraving still confounds scholars, but versions of the "street . . . figure," as Whitman referred to it, crop up multiple times in publications that Whitman sanctioned during his lifetime.⁴ Circulated and recirculated in British and American editions of Whitman's poetry, the image maintained an especially close association with Whitman's literary celebrity. After the Civil War and a fabled run-in with a former Iowa senator, though, Whitman's brand

³ "Our Book Table," *The New York Daily News*, February 27, 1856, 1.

⁴ Traubel, *WWWC*, 2:412.

image would evolve significantly; his persona as “one of the roughs” would become tempered by an equally powerful representation of himself as “the Good Gray Poet.”

As I will discuss, unlike Whitman’s Bowery rough persona and its ties to a single image (reprinted over time with multiple, small variations), the innumerable references to Whitman as “the Good Gray Poet” stem from a lone prose defense of the poet, *The Good Gray Poet: A Vindication*, published by William Douglas O’Connor in 1865. Its characterization of a patriotic and angelic Whitman would become so popular that the “Good Gray” nickname was frequently used as shorthand by Whitman’s friends and the press to describe the poet’s physical appearance after the Civil War, a more conservative exterior that was often linked to the increasingly orthodox material presentation of Whitman’s poetry. As David S. Reynolds has argued, Whitman’s postbellum efforts to “continually reshape and repack his oeuvre” with “new, businesslike fervor” reflect a shift in Whitman’s persona “from rebellious individualist to Good Gray Poet.”⁵ O’Connor, by landing Whitman a job at the Interior Department’s Bureau of Indian affairs and by writing *The Good Gray Poet* once Whitman was fired from that job, “contributed greatly to America’s acceptance of Whitman.”⁶ Reynolds characterizes the shift in Whitman’s public persona that O’Connor helped steward as the beginning of “the Whitman Myth.” “In fashioning Whitman for a middle-class readership,” Reynolds argues, “[O’Connor] was helping create what might be called the Whitman Myth: the image of the poet as a neglected genius who was thoroughly patriotic, personally exemplary, and almost spotless in his writings. . . . O’Connor’s greatest contribution to the Myth was the phrase ‘the Good Gray Poet,’ a sobriquet that

⁵ Reynolds, *Walt Whitman’s America*, 450.

⁶ Reynolds, *Walt Whitman’s America*, 454.

would be echoed in newspaper headlines and interviews until Whitman's death.”⁷

Reynolds's narrative of Whitman's postbellum persona, while acknowledging the continued presence of the 1855 steel engraving in the 1881 *Leaves of Grass*, argues for a poet steadily retreating from his image as a rough and loafer. To an extent, this is true: starting with the low-budget, fourth edition of *Leaves of Grass* in 1867, Whitman allowed his image to evolve beyond the yawp-centric brand he built up before the Civil War. But, as I will demonstrate, the postbellum Whitman brand was more than the “Whitman Myth”; Whitman the “rebellious individualist” was not simply abandoned in favor of the Good Gray Poet. Just as Traubel stood in Whitman's Camden home and confronted both the Good Gray Poet and a picture of the young “loafer,” the public would likewise be asked to balance those promotional, poetic, and celebrity personas. It was not the “Whitman Myth” alone, but the contradictory balance of rough and sage that encapsulated the postbellum Whitman brand. This chapter concludes with a look at some of the surprising and sometimes racially coded ways the public reacted to these two faces of the Whitman brand during the 1860s when their complementary presence was freshest and most vulnerable to attack and parody.

A Proper and Enduring Brand

Our modern usage of the word *brand* (n.) emerged contemporaneously with the first appearance of *Leaves of Grass*. The Oxford English Dictionary cites an 1854 example as the earliest use of *brand* to mean “a particular sort of class of goods, as indicated by the trade-marks on them.” The etymology of *brand* shows how the word shifted from a general reference to “burning” or “fire,” to an object on fire (such as a torch), to a mark made by a burning object—sometimes literally marking the flesh (as in

⁷ Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America*, 457.

branding [v.] a criminal), but more often a figurative mark of infamy or disgrace. Trademarks—burned or otherwise marked on alcohol, wood, and metal—begin to be conceived as *brands* during the early nineteenth century, while the marks of ownership on cattle had been known as *brands* for several centuries prior to this.

When *Leaves of Grass* sprang onto the literary scene in 1855, the poet's brand image—part the product of happenstance, as in the over-sized pages of the first edition, part orchestrated by design—was unmistakable.⁸ In the words of one reviewer, “Walt Whitman” was the “true impersonation of his book—rough, uncouth, vulgar.”⁹ Without a doubt, the heart of Whitman’s earliest market identity is the 1855 steel engraving used as the frontispiece to the first edition. As I discuss in Chapter 2, the book/man metonymy that this picture introduced to the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* was developed and expanded over various editions, eventually finding form on the spine of the book in Whitman’s butterfly manicule. The first appearance of the engraving has been evaluated ad nauseam by scholars, but the occasional fresh reading still emerges, including some vibrant recent work by Ted Genoways and Ed Folsom.¹⁰ For the purpose of this project, I will limit my discussion of the 1855 engraving to public discussion of Whitman’s first visual appearance within *Leaves of Grass*. Since the reactions of average contemporary readers are difficult to ascertain, attention to the reception of *Leaves of Grass* is one of the most revealing ways to track the public’s evolving perception of Whitman and popular understanding of the poet’s brand.

⁸ For examples of some of the idiosyncratic design features of the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*, see Ed Folsom, “What We’re Still Learning about the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* 150 Years Later,” in *Leaves of Grass: The Sesquicentennial Essays* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 1-32.

⁹ *The Critic* (April 1, 1856), 170-171.

¹⁰ For in-depth readings of the 1855 frontispiece see Genoways, “Accented Sexuality,” 87-123; Folsom, “Illustrations,” 135-145.

The significance of the 1855 engraving within the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* is relatively familiar to modern readers. Folsom succinctly summarizes the first visual representation of “Walt Whitman, an American”:

The first edition of *Leaves of Grass* appeared with no author name on the title page, so readers had only [the 1855 steel engraving] by which to identify the author. For its era, it was shocking. Readers were used to formal portraits of authors, usually in frock coats and ties. Very often they were posed at reading tables with books spread open before them or holding a thick volume in their hands. The rebellious, open-collared pose presented [in the 1855 edition] was designed to stand in stark contrast.¹¹

The “stark contrast” that the nameless bard offered through his revolutionary frontispiece permeates periodical coverage of the first edition.¹² Whitman was received as “a drunken Hercules amid . . . dainty dancers,” “the picture of a *perfect loafer*,” and a “genuine ‘rough’—a male muse in a horse-blanket and boots.”¹³ Again and again, it is the frontispiece that grounds readings of Whitman’s unorthodox poetic style. From its inception, *Leaves of Grass* was inseparable from the hyper-stylized, visual representation of its author’s persona. The image, as Folsom reminds us, “advertises its constructedness.”¹⁴ Folsom’s word choice here is illuminating, extending even beyond the way the engraving’s composition invites readings of the portrait’s and author’s artifice. Despite the fact that during 1855 the actual image wasn’t circulated outside the material context of the first edition, the steel engraving—once taken up by contemporary reviewers—became one of the most important *advertisements* for Whitman and *Leaves of*

¹¹ Ed Folsom, “The 1855 Frontispiece,” *Virginia Quarterly Review* (Spring 2005), 15.

¹² Charles A. Dana, *The New York Daily Tribune*, July 23, 1855, 3.

¹³ *The Christian Spiritualist*, (1856); *Life Illustrated*, July 28, 1855; “Our Book Table,” *The New York Daily News*, February 27, 1856, 1.

¹⁴ Folsom, “Illustrations,” 141.

Grass, second only to the poet's scandalous reprinting of Emerson's private correspondence.

To demonstrate just how frequently contemporary readings of the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* take up the steel engraving, I extract two notable reviews here, though there are many others. While these reviews have been reprinted before, I want to draw our attention to the immediacy of Whitman's association with a multidimensional brand image—something beyond merely a distinctive poetic style—a reciprocal relationship between text and image that evoked a familiar social performance (the rough or loafer) to define a key facet of the poet's antebellum market persona. William Charvat, in his discussion of the characteristics of a successful “professional” poet, argues that a popular public poet during the nineteenth century must “have a ‘manner’ that is his own and is as readily recognizable as a brand name, and a ‘matter’ or ‘matters’ that can be exploited without seeming repetitious over a long period of time.”¹⁵ Whitman's brand performance in the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* does more than establish a “readily recognizable” manner or poetic style; his text is a layered, material performance—one that actively utilizes multiple aspects of the printed book object.

Just as Whitman helped redefine the formal and thematic possibilities of modern American poetry, his 1855 steel engraving reconceptualizes the promotional potential of the frontispiece. Consider the earliest known notice of the first edition, Charles Dana's review in *The New York Daily Tribune*. Dana writes:

From the unique effigies of the anonymous author of this volume which graces the frontispiece, we may infer that he belongs to the exemplary class of society sometimes irreverently styled “loafers.” He is therein

¹⁵ William Charvat, *Profession of Authorship in America, 1800-1870: The Papers of William Charvat*, ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1968; rpt. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 105.

represented in a garb, half sailor's, half workman's, with no superfluous appendage of coat or waistcoat, a "wide-awake" perched jauntily on his head, one hand in his pocket and the other on his hip, with a certain air of mild defiance, and an expression of pensive insolence in his face which seems to betoken a consciousness of his mission as the "coming man."

Dana's ekphrastic turn dramatizes the disruptive, non-textual elements of Whitman's 1855 brand performance. The Bowery boy portrait and the critical viewing necessary to read it welcome a visceral response to Whitman's book; readers interpret recognizable social markers—the poet's "workman's" garb, for instance—within a non-verbal text, a text designed, on some level, to construct an affective relationship with the author, whether it be lust, disgust, or something in between. In reviewers' fascination with the 1855 steel engraving, we not only see evidence of just how clearly Whitman was departing from the conventions of his peers, we get a sense of the essential non-linguistic properties of Whitman's antebellum brand, the non-poetic elements of "Walt Whitman," the intangible qualities that inspired both discipleship and bitter hatred.

That Whitman's 1855 frontispiece had tremendous promotional power was not lost on contemporary readers. For the British journal *The Critic*, for example, it was precisely Whitman's commercial flair—epitomized by the steel engraving—that made him distinctly American, worthy of a biting comparison to the Great Showman himself, P.T. Barnum:

We had ceased, we imagined, to be surprised at anything that America could produce. We had become stoically indifferent to her Woolly Horses, her Mermaids, her Sea Serpents, her Barnums, and her Fanny Ferns; but the last monstrous importation from Brooklyn, New York, has scattered our indifference to the winds. Here is a thin quarto volume without an author's name on the title-page; but to atone for which we have a portrait engraved on steel of the notorious individual who is the poet presumptive. This portrait expresses all the features of the hard democrat, and none of the flexible delicacy of the civilized poet. The damaged hat, the rough beard, the naked throat, the shirt exposed to the waist, are each and all

presented to show that the man whom those articles belong scorns the delicate arts of civilization. The man is the true impersonation of his book—rough, uncouth, vulgar.¹⁶

With Barnum and Whitman offered as representative Americans, *The Critic* undermines the literary merit of *Leaves of Grass* in equating the book with such infamous humbugs as the “Woolly Horse,” an animal advertised as being the last of a species that mixed “Elephant, Deer, Horse, Buffalo, Camel, and Sheep.”¹⁷ Albeit a “monstrous importation,” the promotional novelty of Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, especially its frontispiece, is recognized as powerful enough to “[scatter] . . . indifference.” Whether reviewers embraced Whitman as the “coming man” or dismissed him as lacking the “delicacy of [a] civilized poet,” Whitman’s 1855 steel engraving was a forceful performance.

Perception of Whitman as “one of the roughs”—whether by detractors or disciples—more or less monopolized the poet’s commercial image until the end of the Civil War, when Whitman was fatefully dismissed from a government job, prompting what would unexpectedly become a significant shift in America’s outlook on the poet. Many accounts of Whitman’s dismissal from his position with the Bureau of Indian Affairs are colored by William Douglas O’Connor’s less than objective account in *The Good Gray Poet*, but the reality of Whitman’s firing is considerably less sensational. With the help of his friend O’Connor, Whitman secured a position as a first-class clerk in the Bureau of Indian Affairs on January 24, 1865. The poet worked in the government office diligently enough during his six months on the job, but often left in the afternoon to visit Washington, D.C.’s many hospitals. On May 13, 1865, James Harlan, a

¹⁶ *The Critic*, April 1, 1856, 170-171.

¹⁷ P.T. Barnum, *The Life of P.T. Barnum, Written by Himself* (London: Sampson, Low, Son, & Co., 1855), 350.

conservative former senator from the state of Iowa, took office as the new Secretary of Interior; two months later on June 30th, Whitman was dismissed from his job. What Harlan's motives for dismissal were depend on the sources we consult. As Jerome Loving points out, Whitman's staunch defenders, O'Connor loudest among them, pointed to the firing "as one of the most dramatic examples of the suppression of *Leaves of Grass* and encroachment on the freedom of American letters in general."¹⁸ Whitman himself claimed that Harlan found the poet's personal copy of the 1860 *Leaves of Grass*—known as the "blue book," which included Whitman's many revisions to his work—in his office desk and deemed it and its author obscene. Loving points out that Harlan, "in a defense of his actions twenty-nine years after the fact, . . . stated that Whitman was dismissed solely 'on the grounds that his services were not needed.'"¹⁹ Harlan insisted that when he took over as Secretary his office included "a considerable number of useless incumbents who were seldom at their respective desks."²⁰ The notion Harlan had a personal vendetta against Whitman is somewhat misleading. Though you would never know from *The Good Gray Poet*, Whitman was not the only employee Harlan dismissed. A number of workers were let go, including all females in the department (about a hundred) on the grounds that "their presence there might be injurious to . . . the 'morals' of the men."²¹

Treating Whitman as Harlan's lone and unjustified victim, O'Connor's pamphlet seeks to rehabilitate Whitman's literary reputation from claims the poet was a "Free-

¹⁸ Jerome Loving, *Walt Whitman's Champion: William Douglas O'Connor* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1978), 56.

¹⁹ Jerome Loving, *Walt Whitman: The Song of Himself*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 291.

²⁰ Loving, *Song of Himself*, 291.

²¹ Loving, *Walt Whitman's Champion*, 57.

Lover," "a very bad man," and, worst of all, the author of "the book of poetry entitled *Leaves of Grass*."²² Several excellent, in-depth examinations of O'Connor's life and his Whitmanian discipleship already exist; for the purposes of this chapter, I will focus on two specific aspects of O'Connor's 1865 pamphlet: its conception of the Whitman *brand* and the image of the "Good Gray Poet" it conjured. As Michael Robertson point outs, O'Connor's verbose prose style probably limited the actual readership of his pamphlet, but "his title entered the popular consciousness, and Whitman, previously considered to be a licentious, disreputable author, became widely regarded as a virtuous, benign figure."²³

As I will demonstrate, *The Good Gray Poet* is a recovery and redefinition of Whitman's public persona that is quite consciously concerned with the act of branding, both in the sense of restoring a favorable perception of Whitman and defining the commercial image of the poet after the Civil War. From its very first sentence, *The Good Gray Poet* announces itself as just such an act: "Nine weeks have elapsed since the commission of an outrage, to which I have not till now been able to give my attention, but which, in the interest of the sacred cause of free letters, and in that alone, I never meant should pass without its proper and enduring brand."²⁴ O'Connor's use of *brand* here is consistent with his usage throughout the pamphlet: Harlan's actions have branded Whitman as illicit and obscene, but O'Connor will in turn cast the "proper and enduring brand," a deserved mark of infamy, upon Harlan himself. In this sense, *The Good Gray*

²² Loving, *Walt Whitman's Champion*, 160.

²³ Michael Robertson, *Worshipping Walt: The Whitman Disciples* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 33.

²⁴ Loving, *Walt Whitman's Champion*, 157.

Poet is a double act of *rebranding*. Of course, corporate use of the term *rebranding*—“to apply a new brand identity, name, logo, etc., to (a product, service, or company)” —didn’t emerge until the turn of the twentieth century, but during the nineteenth century it was used to refer to the second branding of cattle, “often denoting a (fraudulent) change of ownership.” For O’Connor, Harlan’s dismissal of Whitman threatened to taint public perception of the poet’s character and *Leaves of Grass*—in creating the idealized figure of the “Good Gray Poet,” O’Connor introduces a new name and identity for Whitman and his barbaric yawp. In a way that would make sense to nineteenth-century readers, O’Connor *rebrands* Whitman by restoring his reputation, reclaiming ownership of Whitman’s celebrity persona.

Twice O’Connor turns to *branding* to describe the defamation of Whitman’s character. In both instances, *brand* refers to the real or imagined stigma attached to Whitman’s name, not his commercial presence:

But Mr. Harlan, passing the limits of opinion, inauguates punishment. He joins the band of hostile verdict; he incarnates their judgment; then, detaching himself, he proceeds to a solitary and signal vengeance. As far as he can have it so, this author, for having written his book shall starve. He shall starve, and his name shall receive a brand.

Tell me who can—what poet of the first grade escapes this brand, “immoral,” or this spittle, “indecent”! If the great books are not, in the point under consideration, in the same moral category as *Leaves of Grass*, then why, either in translation or in originals, either by a bold softening which dissolves the author’s meaning, or by absolute excision, are they nearly all expurgated?²⁵

Though O’Connor never employs *brand* here in precisely the same sense as I do in this project, he is nonetheless aware in *The Good Gray Poet* of Whitman’s antebellum poetic and promotional persona, especially the ways Whitman established expectations for his

²⁵ Loving, *Walt Whitman’s Champion*, 168; 179.

poetry and celebrity and how those expectations allowed for, perhaps even encouraged, both fanatical approval and moralizing backlash. Anticipating critiques of Whitman that reached beyond the Harlan incident, O'Connor addresses not only petty rumors—such as the “miserable” lie that Whitman “[dishonored] an invitation to dine with Emerson, by appearing at the table of the Astor House in a red shirt”—but also aspects of Whitman’s persona that were central to the success of the third edition of *Leaves of Grass*. “I know, too,” O’Connor writes, “the inferences drawn by wretched fools, who, because they have seen [Whitman] riding upon the top of an omnibus; or at Pfaff’s restaurant; or dressed in rough clothes suitable for his purposes . . . or mixing freely and lovingly . . . with low and equivocal and dissolute persons, as well as with those of a different character, must needs set him down as a brute, a scalawag, and a criminal.”²⁶ Two of the examples O’Connor cites above played an integral role in establishing Whitman’s literary celebrity before the Civil War. As I discuss in Chapter 1, Whitman’s ties to the bohemian haunt Pfaff’s and Henry Clapp Jr.’s *Saturday Press* during the late-1850s were instrumental in circulating the poet’s work between the publication of the second and third editions of *Leaves of Grass*. Likewise, in 1860 Whitman and his publishers embraced Whitman’s association with the omnibus by including newspaper coverage of the poet’s supposed stint as a driver in their official advertising for *Leaves of Grass*. Whitman’s ties to New York’s bohemian subculture and the city’s working class helped crystalize the poet’s iconoclastic image, but, as O’Connor is aware, they also exposed Whitman to criticism from more conservative branches of the press and the American literary establishment. Points like this in O’Connor’s pamphlet illuminate how easily Whitman’s antebellum persona, his

²⁶ Loving, *Walt Whitman’s Champion*, 162.

carefully constructed poetic and promotional identity, could become a *brand* on multiple levels: a recognizable commercial image as well as a mark of infamy.

O'Connor himself, at least in *The Good Gray Poet*, seems to confuse Whitman's poetic and promotional persona with the factual realities of Whitman's life. O'Connor was an ardent abolitionist—he met Whitman in 1860 as both were preparing work for the radical Boston publishers Thayer & Eldridge—yet he and Whitman differed greatly on issues of slavery and civil rights. In the 1870s O'Connor and Whitman got into such a heated argument on the subject of race that they didn't speak to one another for a decade. Whitman, as Robertson observes, was "always more egalitarian in his poetry than in his personal life," and O'Connor "detested Walt's social conservatism."²⁷ In *The Good Gray Poet*, however, O'Connor blurs the distinctions between Whitman's actual political views and the poetic personas that inhabit *Leaves of Grass*, especially the "Walt Whitman" of the poem eventually titled "Song of Myself." In a passage defending Whitman's character that borrows heavily from imagery in *Leaves of Grass* and *Drum-Taps*, O'Connor includes a telling distortion: "[Whitman] has been a visitor of prisons; protector of fugitive slaves; a constant voluntary nurse, night and day, at the hospitals, from the beginning of the war to the present time; a brother and friend through life to the neglected and forgotten, the poor, the degraded, the criminal, the outcast; turning away from no man for his guilt, nor woman for her vileness."²⁸ O'Connor's description ends on vague terms, playing into his more general picture of Whitman as a Christ-like lover of humanity, but his specific reference to "fugitive slaves" is clearly lifted from *Leaves of Grass*: "The runaway slave came to my house and stopped outside, . . . [I] gave him a

²⁷ Robertson, *Worshipping Walt*, 36.

²⁸ Loving, *Walt Whitman's Champion*, 163.

room that entered from my own, and gave him some coarse clean clothes, . . . He staid with me a week before he was recuperated and passed north.”²⁹ This inconsistency has been previously noted by scholars, but I draw our attention to it again here as an example of how Whitman’s brand, his recognizable and constructed poetic and promotional persona, could be appropriated in ways not necessarily indicative of the poet’s actual political or social beliefs. As the conclusion to this chapter will demonstrate, the Whitman brand was especially susceptible to racialized critiques, not the least because of the poet’s ties to prominent abolitionists like O’Connor.

All of Whitman’s male disciples—O’Connor, John Burroughs, R.M. Bucke, John Addington Symonds—include a detailed physical description of the poet in their writings, but the title of “Good Gray Poet,” introduced by O’Connor, a title which evokes Whitman’s pre-maturely aged appearance as much as it does his supposedly spotless virtue, became so popular it was used to refer to just about any of Whitman’s postbellum images and his late-literary celebrity more broadly.³⁰ While O’Connor occasionally gestures towards the humility and egalitarianism of Whitman’s Bowery rough persona, the focal point of his pamphlet is the new figure of the “Good Gray Poet,” a distinct intervention with Whitman’s public image. Physically, the Good Gray Poet personifies cleanliness and simplicity:

the flowing hair and fleecy beard, both very gray, . . . with a look of age the youthful aspect of one who is but forty-five; the simplicity and purity of his dress, cheap and plain, but spotless, from snowy falling collar to burnished boot, and exhaling faint fragrance; the whole form surrounded with manliness, as with a nimbus, and breathing, in its perfect health and vigor, the august charm of the strong.³¹

²⁹ Whitman, *LG* 1855, 19.

³⁰ Robertson, *Worshipping Walt*, 25.

This picture of “health and vigor” extends to the poet’s unofficial service as a nurse during the Civil War, and even further to Whitman’s healing touch towards the entire nation where “the men and women of America will love to gaze upon the stalwart form of the good gray poet, bending to heal the hurts of their wounded and soothe the souls of their dying.”³² O’Connor concludes with an allusion to President Lincoln’s rumored appraisal of Whitman; just by observing the Good Gray Poet in action, readers are told they will make “the deep and simple words of the last great martyr . . . theirs—‘Well, he looks like a Man!’”³³ I discuss the long afterlife of Lincoln’s words further below, but for now, let us recognize that they play a significant role in O’Connor’s portrayal of the Good Gray Poet. Lincoln, “the last great martyr,” acknowledged the innate purity and masculine magnetism of Whitman—what further proof of the poet’s virtue could America, still reeling from the President’s assassination, need?

From 1865 until his death, the “Good Gray” sobriquet would stick with Whitman. Horace Traubel’s description of a Frederick Gutekunst photograph given to him by the poet exemplifies of how freely and frequently Whitman’s friends and the press incorporated the nickname O’Connor popularized and its implied appraisal of Whitman’s character into their writing (Figure 4.4). The image, as Traubel describes it:

shows ‘the good gray’ seated in an armchair, his head bared, his left hand thrust into a pocket of his familiar gray coat, and the right loosely grasping a large walking stick. The wide, turned-down linen collar, and the loose cuffs rolled back over the sleeves, are edged with a narrow border of lace. From its framework of thin white hair and flowing beard, the face of the

³¹ Loving, *Walt Whitman’s Champion*, 158.

³² Loving, *Walt Whitman’s Champion*, 201.

³³ Loving, *Walt Whitman’s Champion*, 201.

venerable bard peers out, not with the vigorous serenity of his prime, but a look rather of inquiry and expectation.³⁴

In his old age, a “look of inquiry and expectation” had replaced the “vigorous serenity” of Whitman’s prime. Though Whitman the rough dwelled almost exclusively in versions of the 1855 steel engraving and the various printings of “Song of Myself,” Whitman “the good gray” was even more ubiquitous, circulating in print and through the countless photographs of Whitman taken after the war.

Those with only casual exposure to Whitman in the press were far more likely to read of the Good Gray poet than they were to see his 1855 frontispiece, but Whitman’s books did much to preserve the “vigorous serenity” of the “street figure” alongside Whitman’s softened pose as the nation’s neglected wound-dresser. These competing personas, two equally important sides of Whitman’s postbellum brand, are delicately and uniquely balanced in Whitman’s late publications. Whitman’s persistent use of the 1855 steel engraving—even as that image shifts position within *Leaves of Grass*—shows the poet working to maintain a degree of the “disorderly, fleshly, and sensual” play between the “street figure” and “Song of Myself,” while embracing the postbellum persona of the Good Gray Poet. Some have argued that Whitman relegates this “defiant persona [to] the past” and separates himself from “his bygone bohemian self” in later publications of *Leaves of Grass*, but this is a difficult position to defend when we seriously consider the material presentation of Whitman’s poetry.³⁵ To be sure, the 1855 steel engraving takes on a less conventional, arguably less prominent—yet also more peculiar—position after the second edition of *Leaves of Grass*, but its reappearance in volumes like the 1876

³⁴ Traubel, WWWC, 6:63.

³⁵ Reynolds, *Walt Whitman’s America*, 535.

“Centennial” edition and 1881 Osgood edition, both of which I will discuss in detail below, underscores Whitman’s preservation of the poetic and commercial value of his “bygone bohemian self” within the same books that emphasized his more conservative and mature Good Gray Poet persona.

The 1876 printing of the fifth edition of *Leaves of Grass*—advertised as the “Centennial Edition”—is the first printing of *Leaves* after 1860 to include an image of Whitman. As Ed Folsom notes, Whitman initially conceived of this issue as an “illustrated edition.”³⁶ It’s a concept Whitman tinkered with for the rest of his career—he saw room for the interplay between text and image, even for the signifying potential of a picture in and of itself within *Leaves of Grass*. As he would tell Traubel, all the images in his book “have a significance which gives them their own justification . . . whether the fortunate (or unfortunate) reader sees it or fails to see it.”³⁷ The poet made an effort in the mid-1870s to contact his previous engravers John C. McRae, who was most likely responsible for the 1855 portrait, and Stephen Alonzo Schoff, who created the frontispiece for the 1860 edition. But, since Thayer & Eldridge had gone bankrupt and no longer owned the plates to their stereotype edition of *Leaves of Grass*, the Schoff engraving—with what Whitman called its “fat pudgy head”—was not available to reprint.³⁸ The Centennial edition does, however, include two images of Whitman: the 1855 steel engraving, making its first appearance in twenty years, and a new wood engraving by the British artist William James Linton loosely based on an 1871

³⁶ Folsom, *Whitman Making Books*, 40-42.

³⁷ Traubel, *WWWC*, 2:536.

³⁸ Traubel, *WWWC*, 9:342.

photograph by G.C. Potter (Figure 4.5).³⁹ Though not a full-fledged illustrated edition, the copies of *Leaves of Grass* that Whitman printed and autographed in 1876—marked with what the *New Republic* called “the author’s physical touch and magnetism”—contain a concise visual representation of the two faces of the Whitman brand. The text denotes “an important chapter in Whitman’s dual concerns with identity and the creative reciprocity between verbal and visual modes of representation.”⁴⁰

The positioning of these engravings in the Centennial edition emphasizes each image’s ties to one of Whitman’s dual personas. For Ruth Bohan, the strategic placement of these engravings “establish[es] physical and conceptual intimacy with an individual poem.” Though I would broaden the scope of the images’ intimacy—both engravings interact as much with the poems they face as they do with the interrogative verse and blank rectos that precede them—the Bowery rough and the Good Gray Poet emerge alongside one another in the Centennial edition in companion visual and verbal texts. As he would do again in the 1881 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman, for the first time, places his 1855 portrait directly alongside “Walt Whitman” (later titled “Song of Myself”), making the correlation between his poetic text and this familiar image even more apparent for readers than it was in 1855. The Linton engraving takes on a similar relationship to “The Wound-Dresser,” which Whitman had specifically retitled for the Centennial edition.⁴¹ Judging by reviews of the first and second edition, readers had already been making the connection between the poetic persona “Walt Whitman, an

³⁹ Folsom, *Whitman Making Books*, 41.

⁴⁰ Ruth Bohan, *Looking into Walt Whitman: American Art, 1850-1920* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 47.

⁴¹ Whitman also wrote a poem about the Linton portrait entitled “Out from Behind This Mask.” For a discussion of the engraving’s relationship to the poem see Folsom, “Illustrations,” 146-149.

American" and the anonymous figure in the 1855 steel engraving, but the Centennial edition is the first time that a comparable text/image relationship is established for Whitman's persona as the Good Gray Poet. The Linton engraving and the "old man bending" at the beginning of "The Wound-Dresser" become conceptually intertwined, complementing the verbal and visual symmetry achieved earlier in the text.

The Linton engraving does not appear in the 1881 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, but multiple reviewers read the understated presentation of the Osgood edition as a reflection of Whitman's evolution into the Good Gray Poet, a critical conflation of book and author that Whitman seemingly encouraged. As early as the 1871 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, some were willing to interpret the more conventional display of Whitman's poetry as a reflection of his physical and artistic maturation, a reading that O'Connor's *Good Gray Poet* begged for. George Saintsbury, writing for the British journal *The Academy*, tentatively suggests that Whitman's book had abandoned, "at least in externals, its former air of youthful and exuberant provocation . . . to demand, more soberly if not less confidently, the mature consideration of the student of letters."⁴² This kind of reading only intensifies with the 1881 edition, which Whitman conceptualized as a sturdy, no-frills reader's edition of *Leaves of Grass*. In correspondence with his Boston publisher James R. Osgood, Whitman emphasizes achieving a utilitarian design for *Leaves of Grass*, a departure from the distinctive flamboyance of Whitman's previous Boston edition. "I want as fine a (plain) specimen in type, paper, ink, binding, &c. as bookmaking can produce," Whitman writes, "not for luxury however, but solid wear, use, reading, (to carry in the pocket, valise &c)"⁴³ Whitman insists the book should be a

⁴² George Saintsbury, *The Academy*, October 10, 1874, 398-400.

“handy size,” while maintaining the refinement of Osgood’s previous publications; “first class . . . in paper, print, binding,” yet also “markedly plain & simple even to Quakerness . . . no sensationalism or luxury—a well made book for honest wear & use & carrying with you.”⁴⁴ As a model for his “handsome, stately, *plain book*,” Whitman suggests “Houghton & Mifflin’s 1880 edition of *Owen Meredith’s Poems*,” which was published in both green and red binding with gold lettering on the cover and spine.⁴⁵ The lone flourish Whitman demands is the inclusion of the 1855 steel engraving facing opposite “Song of Myself,” arguing “it is required in the book . . . in fact is involved as part of the poem.”⁴⁶

Whitman’s decision to reprint the 1855 steel engraving and recreate the text/image effect he achieved in the Centennial edition made an impact on readers. Though, as I will discuss, most were struck by Whitman’s more conventional presentation, the 1855 steel engraving—the only image in the 1881 edition—maintained the poet’s ties to the “barbaric yawp” that initially established his celebrity. David S. Reynolds has argued that in retitling the poem “Walt Whitman” to “Song of Myself” and by placing the 1855 engraving “well inside” the Osgood edition, Whitman was “[distancing] himself from his main poem . . . as though the poem and the picture were . . . relics of another era.”⁴⁷ Contemporary reviews suggest readers thought otherwise. The *Boston Globe*, for example, considered the 1855 engraving (and its placement) to be

⁴³ Whitman, *Correspondence*, 3:224.

⁴⁴ Whitman, *Correspondence*, 3:226.

⁴⁵ Whitman, *Correspondence*, 3:228.

⁴⁶ Whitman, *Correspondence*, 3:242.

⁴⁷ Reynolds, *Walt Whitman’s America*, 535.

“one of the most interesting features of the book”: “It was not by mere whim or caprice—much less by accident or any publisher’s device—that the unique portrait of the author . . . is not in the usual place, fronting the title-page, but incorporated in the verse.”⁴⁸

Though it lacks the novelty of its initial appearance in the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, the 1855 engraving still disrupts readers’ expectations by no longer “fronting the title-page,” fusing with the poetry instead. For Clarence Cook writing in the *International Review*, Whitman’s retention of the 1855 engraving was the saving grace of the Osgood edition, which he found to be otherwise marred by convention. Had the “Walter Whitman” of 1855 been in control of the 1881 edition, Cook writes, “he would have never permitted Mr. Osgood to belittle the title-page with its very uncomfortable trade-monogram, which always makes us think of a *trichina*, though we have no precise notion of how a trichina looks.”⁴⁹ Cook’s curious reference to a *trichina*—a minute parasitic worm that can inhabit the intestinal tract and migrate to muscular tissue causing lameness—underscores how much of a threat he saw an established publishing house like Osgood to be to the iconoclastic spirit of Whitman’s antebellum brand. If the 1881 *Leaves of Grass* was infected by conventionality, the inclusion of the 1855 steel engraving proved there was more to Whitman than just the Good Gray Poet.

When the Osgood edition of *Leaves of Grass* appeared in print, critical reception was predictably split. Some wondered whether it contained sufficiently new material and wasn’t just a shallow attempt to capitalize on Whitman’s growing celebrity. “The motive for the publication,” writes one reviewer, “seems to be to take advantage of that wider popularity which is coming somewhat late in life to him whom his admirers like to call

⁴⁸ “Leaves of Grass,” *The Boston Globe*, November 13, 1881, 8.

⁴⁹ Clarence Cook, “Some Recent Poetry,” *The International Review* (February 1882), 222-224.

‘the good gray poet.’”⁵⁰ Others were more generous; the *Philadelphia Press* recognized Whitman’s rise in popularity—“Several magazines and newspapers, which either received the words of ‘the Good Gray Poet’ with abuse, or refused to allow their pages to be sullied with a notice of his ‘monstrosities,’ now welcome his life-work with little short of unstinted praise”—and attributed that newfound success not merely to “the fact that a great publishing house gives its imprint to the title page,” but “something deeper,” a promising shift in the opinions of literary America. “While upon some natures [Whitman’s] name still has the effect of the traditional red rag upon the angry bull,” the *Press* writes, “the majority of cultivated minds begin to see that Walt Whitman is the most American of poets and one of the brightest lights of American literature.”⁵¹

It’s fair to say that part of this favorable turn stems from the balance Whitman had struck between his two promotional and poetic personas. The Boston *Liberty* praised Whitman for maintaining his poetry’s “original native simplicity, freshness, and vigor” all while “being more carefully arranged and placed in a more artistic, though it may be a more conventional vase.”⁵² One Philadelphia paper went further, personifying the “quieter” *Leaves of Grass* through its “more mature” author:

Walt and his work are older, whiter, more mature; not wiser, but quieter; the mad turbulence hushed a little and some pruning done; yet the same sight, undimmed, immortal; *Leaves of Grass*, still green and vital as ever, but now growing close about many a solid rock of fame; the man and his work, among the oddest, if not the most beautiful, things of the present century.⁵³

⁵⁰ “Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*,” *The Critic*, November 5, 1881, 302-303.

⁵¹ *The Philadelphia Press*, December 23, 1881.

⁵² “*Leaves of Grass*,” *Liberty*, November 26, 1881, 3.

⁵³ *The Philadelphia Times*, December 3, 1881, 6.

Surely, some resented Whitman's softened public image, dismissing it and the poet's mainstream publisher as mere sales ploys; a few staunch critics would not be swayed by a "conventional vase" and a bit of "pruning." For those who found Whitman to be a "noisy madman, or a disturber of the poetic peace, or a bawler of platitudes," writes *The New York Sun*, "the 'good gray business' disgusts them."⁵⁴ But even the most emphatic dismissals of the Osgood edition had to address Whitman's supposed departure from his 1855 persona. For instance, in their announcement of Whitman's new "slop-bucket," the *New-York Tribune* bemoans having to review another edition of *Leaves of Grass* and the reconsideration of Whitman the book demanded:

Some have valued [*Leaves of Grass*] for the 'barbaric yawp,' which seems to them the note of a new, vigorous, democratic, American school of literature; some for the fragments of real poetry floating in the turbid mass; some for the nastiness and animal insensibility to shame which entitle a great many of the poems to a dubious reputation as curiosities. Now that they are thrust into our faces at the book stalls there must be a reexamination of the myth of the Good Gray Poet.⁵⁵

Whitman would never convince papers like the *Tribune* that his poetry had evolved, but even in this decidedly negative review, the two faces of the Whitman brand surface, begging for a "reexamination" of *Leaves of Grass*.

Am I Not a Man and a Poet?

By the late-1870s Bret Harte's name was well known by American readers for poems and stories like "Plain Language from Truthful James" and "The Luck of Roaring Camp," but the author's finances were in surprisingly terrible shape. After signing a massive contract with James R. Osgood, Harte entered a significant lull in his career that

⁵⁴ Edward P. Mitchell, "Walt Whitman and the Poetry of the Future," *The New York Sun*, November 19, 1881, 2.

⁵⁵ "New Publications," *New-York Tribune*, November 19, 1881, 4.

would last until the mid-1880s. Around the same time, the New York-based company Enoch Morgan and Sons was booming. They were in the process of developing an ambitious marketing plan for a small gray cake of soap known as “Sapolio.” The product’s name was reportedly created by the Morgan family’s physician, who, when “asked for an impressively Latin-sounding name for the product” coined the word on the spot.⁵⁶ Name-brand household goods like Sapolio have had a tremendous impact on today’s advertising industry—they are pioneers of promotion, the products behind America’s first national advertising campaigns. In 1877 Harte and Morgan crossed paths. For fifty dollars, Harte agreed to write a promotional poem for Sapolio—a parody of Longfellow’s “Excelsior”—which the company featured in an elaborately illustrated brochure distributed to retailers.

The Harte/Morgan promotional collaboration is often cited in discussions of poetry’s intersection with popular culture. Most recently, Cary Nelson and Mike Chasar have noted the way, that, “in keeping with the transformative ethos of soap advertising more broadly, Harte’s poem enacts its own literary transformation in service of Sapolio by taking the major conceit of Longfellow’s verse . . . and recasting it in the context of an advertising agent furtively painting ‘Sapolio’ on fences and cliffs under the cover of darkness.”⁵⁷ Harte’s advertising copy appropriates one of the most recognizable literary brands of the era, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and adapts his poem’s familiar style to an overtly commercial purpose. In the hands of a cash-strapped Harte, Longfellow’s

⁵⁶ Stephen R. Fox, *The Mirror Makers: A History of American Advertising and Its Creators* (New York: William Morrow, 1984) 23. The production of Sapolio’s name anticipates the emergence of twenty-first-century companies like Lexicon, a California firm devoted entirely to inventing product names; see John Colapinto, “Famous Names” *The New Yorker*, October 3, 2011, 38-43.

⁵⁷ Cary Nelson and Mike Chasar, “American Advertising: A Poem for Every Product,” in *The Oxford History of Popular Culture, Volume Six: US Popular Print Culture, 1860-1920*, Christine Bold ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 156-157.

brand could be twisted and teased, all for a promotional punch-line and a fifty-dollar payday.

What scholars have neglected to observe in Harte's poem and the images that accompany it is the degree to which Morgan playfully acknowledges its own appropriation of another popular nineteenth-century brand: Robert Warren's shoe blacking. When Sapolio's fictional advertising agent paints his product's name on "household fences," readers see the advertisements for "Gargling Oil" and "Bixby's Blacking" that came before him. Morgan's mass marketing predecessors were, in fact, shoe blacking companies, namely British brands like Robert Warren and Robert Martin, who developed sophisticated promotional campaigns that relied heavily on original poetry. As a brand, Warren's shoe blacking was instantly recognizable to contemporary consumers thanks to what John Strachan calls "the single most famous advertising image of the Romantic period": George Cruikshank's "The Cat and the Boot" illustration which features a black cat frightened by its reflection in a freshly blackened boot (Figure 4.6).⁵⁸ On a page of the Harte brochure urging consumers to "Polish milk cans & pans / and all kinds of tin ware / with SAPOLIO," a domestic scene alludes to Warren's famous logo by depicting a white cat startled by its reflection in a recently polished pan (Figure 4.7). This brief appropriation of Warren's brand reveals just how indebted Morgan was to the generation of promoters before him. In fact, Morgan's own logo, an illustration of a man using a clean pan as a mirror, re-imagines Warren's symbol as the basis for its own brand—the cat/boot becomes a man/pan (Figure 4.8). Morgan's derivative logo is a testament to Warren's success in constructing a stable and desirable brand identity; the

⁵⁸ John Strachan, *Advertising and Satirical Culture in the Romantic Period* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 127.

“Cat and the Boot” illustration was associated with a degree of sophistication and professionalism that Morgan sought to align itself with it. The Warren/Morgan relationship dramatizes a key lesson advertisers were beginning to learn in the nineteenth century: once a brand established a recognizable market presence, that image was vulnerable to play, parody, and piracy.

With the commercial success of Warren’s black cat firmly in place, Morgan was free to turn it white for his own advantage. In the 1880s, the N. K. Fairbank Company of Chicago went even further. To create a distinct promotional face for Gold Dust washing powder, Fairbank hired the famous cartoonist E.W. Kemble. Inspired by an image he saw in London’s *Punch* magazine, Kemble illustrated a series of advertisements featuring “the Gold Dust twins,” two young black children doing household chores (Figure 4.9). As Juliann Sivulka notes, “the campaign was an immediate success,” and the slogan—“Let the Gold Dust twins do your work”—“became one of the best-known phrases in America.”⁵⁹ Like many soap advertisements of the era, the Gold Dust campaign employs racist caricature as a comedic foil to boasts of its product’s cleaning power. Several of Kemble’s ads clearly play on the Warren/Morgan lineage—such as when the Gold Dust Twins’ marvel at their reflection—heightening the racial connotations that minstrelsy had attached to Warren’s blacking over the course of the nineteenth century. In the advertisement reprinted here, Warren’s cat morphs into the crude racial stereotype it had become associated with in American and British culture. Warren’s immensely popular brand image had been appropriated and twisted yet again.

⁵⁹ Juliann Sivulka, *Soap, Sex, and Cigarettes: A Cultural History of American Advertising* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1998), 100.

Whitman's brand was likewise susceptible to the pokes and prods of critics and competitors. For the remainder of this chapter, I will examine several responses to the Whitman brand during the 1860s that appear to be quite unusual at first. At this time, Whitman becomes the target of a number of racialized critiques of his poetry and personality. Warren's cat could be turned white by Morgan with relative ease, but Whitman's detractors labored to cast the poet in blackface. Nowhere is this more apparent than in a recently recovered caricature of a black Whitman published by the British comic journal *Punch*. Like Warren's cat, Whitman's image—defined so boldly in 1855 and revised with equal force—was open to any number of attacks, parodies, and appropriations that traded on or distorted the recognizable personas the poet constructed for himself. Behind *Punch*'s crude illustration is not only a reference to boisterous advertisers like Warren, but a complex network of associations regarding the emergence of modern branding during the nineteenth century—a network that encompasses the branding of commercial products, literary personalities, political causes, and popular entertainers. By considering the implications of *Punch*'s racialized response to Whitman, we can begin to understand the era's clashing field of brands and logos to which Whitman's own image belonged.

Punch's caricature appeared on February 27, 1869, where it was accompanied by an article on Whitman entitled "He is a Man." In it *Punch* reprints and comments on periodical coverage of Whitman following the February 1869 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly* where the poet's "Proud Music of the Sea-Storm" (later titled "Proud Music of the Storm") first appeared as well as Eugene Benson's essay on Charles Baudelaire wherein Whitman is compared to the French author. More notable than *Punch*'s print

commentary, of course, is the caricature alongside it: an illustration by Linley Sambourne, one of *Punch*'s premier artists, depicting a black figure reclining in the street as his face is blacked or shined (Figure 4.10). *Punch*'s article and Sambourne's illustration are the first postbellum remarks on Whitman to appear in London's most popular comic paper, and they indicate, as I will discuss, how widespread the association between the Whitman brand and black America had become in wake of the third edition of *Leaves of Grass* and its abolitionist publishers.

When Henry Mayhew, Ebenezer Landells, and Mark Lemon founded *Punch*, they concocted a unique comic formula, a merger of "cheeky, Cockney irreverence" and "sanctified British tradition" whose print format would be imitated by journals like *Judy* and *Vanity Fair*.⁶⁰ In 1855 *Punch* had dismissed *Leaves of Grass* as proof that the "fields of American literature" needed "weeding dreadfully."⁶¹ Published thirteen years after this initial critique, "He is a Man" marks *Punch*'s return to transatlantic Whitman-bashing.⁶² *Punch*'s 1869 coverage of Whitman is characteristic of the culture of reprinting that governed much of nineteenth-century periodical publishing. The basic premise of *Punch*'s article is to contradict painter and *Atlantic Monthly* art critic Eugene Benson,

⁶⁰ Martha Banta, *Barbaric Intercourse: Caricature and the Culture of Conduct, 1841-1936* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 64.

⁶¹ "A Strange Blade," *Punch*, April 26, 1856, 169.

⁶² The August 22, 1868 *Punch* does make notice of one "Mr. Watt [sic] Whitman, who scorns the vulgar trammels of rhyme and rhythm to which his predecessor is a slave, and also those of decency, which ignobly bind the majority of mankind" (86). Whitman himself was at least a reluctant admirer of *Punch*'s cutting humor, once observing "There is some dry wit yet in London *Punch*" (*NUPM*, 1:137). In another notebook entry, Whitman alludes to *Punch* to describe the "English Masses": "The large mass (nine tenths) of the English people, the peasantry, laborers, factory-operatives, miners, workers in the docks, on shipping, the poor, the old, the criminals, the numberless flunkies of one sort and another, have some of the bull-dog attributes but are generally minus the best attributes of humanity. They are not a race of fine physique, or any spirituality, or manly audacity,--have no clarified faces, candor, freedom, agility, and quick wit.—They are short, have mean physiognomies,) such as are in the caricatures in "Punch")" (*NUPM*, 5:1986).

who claimed that, “whenever [Whitman] speaks, you hear the voice of a *man* in his agony, in his gladness, in his transports.”⁶³ *Punch* reprints reactions to Benson’s comments on Whitman in the *Atlantic* from two other periodicals—Theodore Hagen’s New York *Weekly Review* and Britain’s preeminent music journal, *Musical World*, then edited by James William Davis. *Punch* begins its 1869 attack on Whitman by thanking *Musical World* for the opportunity to lampoon “such trash” and then reprints the *Weekly Review*’s original comments on Whitman:

In another part of [the *Atlantic*], the reader is told that whenever Mr. Walt Whitman speaks, “you hear the voice of a *man*.” The fact that Mr. Whitman is “a man,” ought to be pretty well understood by this time, considering the strenuous emphasis and minute particularity with which Mr. Whitman himself has described his physical attributes, to say nothing of the stress which his critical admirers have laid upon his virility. In truth, many readers of current magazine literature are getting a little tired of hearing about Mr. Whitman’s physique, especially as associated with the new doctrine that muscle is genius. Could it not be agreed, all round, once for all, that Mr. Whitman is “a man,” and a very large and heavy one, so that the topic may be set at rest? Its disappearance from the field of literary discussion would be a great relief. The statement that Mr. Whitman is a poet, would still remain for controversy, and surely that is sufficiently exasperating, in view of the copious catalogues, suggestive of nothing so much as a crazy auctioneer, which Mr. Whitman continues to publish under the name of poetry.

Following this extract, *Punch* concludes that it hopes the *Musical World* “will occasionally lend the good service due from all educational journals towards demolishing Shams, whereof there is no greater than MR. WHITMAN—we say it, even at the risk of bringing on an American War.”

The article itself makes no overt connection to Sambourne’s accompanying illustration. As a result, there is some ambiguity about whether or not the reclining black figure is intended to represent Whitman. If we do perform a provisional reading of the

⁶³ Eugene Benson, “Charles Baudelaire, Poet of the Malign,” *Atlantic Monthly* (February 1869), 172.

black male in *Punch*'s caricature as Whitman, as some contemporary readers were surely encouraged to do, one of Sambourne's most absurd comic suggestions seems to be that the poet is the greatest "Sham," in part, because he has falsely represented himself as a white man. Though I will complicate and expand this reading later on, through similarities in costuming and posture, *Punch*'s caricature plays off Whitman's famous Bowery b'hoy pose in the 1855 frontispiece, and, to this end, Sambourne's image echoes Whitman's cultivated brand image as a rough and a loafer. Portraying Whitman as black plays into stereotypes the underscore those qualities. *Punch*'s odd juxtaposition of image and text ironically recalls the confusion many readers reportedly experienced when encountering Whitman's 1855 frontispiece for the first time. In fact, *Punch*'s 1856 critique of Whitman was used to preface an attack on the poet in the *Christian Examiner* detailing precisely that issue. In a review that Whitman reprints in *Leaves of Grass Imprints*, the *Christian Examiner* references *Punch*'s "sarcastic allusion" to Whitman in "A Strange Blade" and adds its own appraisal of *Leaves of Grass*, calling it one of American literature's "worst disgraces." The reliability of Whitman's print identity is scrutinized by the *Christian Examiner*:

Whether or not the author really bears the name he assumes,—whether or not the strange figure opposite the title-page resembles him, or is even intended for his likeness—whether or not he is considered among his friends to be of sane mind,—whether he is in earnest, or playing off some disgusting burlesque,—we are hardly sure yet.⁶⁴

Punch's own "strange figure" feeds off of the uncertainty of Whitman's print and promotional personas. In contrast to the iconic frontispiece image, Sambourne has removed the poet's characteristic hat and placed it casually by the side of the reclining

⁶⁴ *Imprints*, 6.

figure. This subtle alteration enacts the process of exposure described in “He is a Man” by fully disclosing the figure’s face to the reader’s gaze: he is not the virile white man depicted in the 1855 frontispiece (an image which became more widely circulated in Britain when its truncated incarnation appeared in the 1868 English edition of Whitman’s work), but a slothful, racial stereotype instead.⁶⁵ Both Whitman and the caricatured black male, *Punch* suggests, inadvertently expose themselves as shams through the transparency of their inept performances. In his naïve attempt to mimic middle-class respectability, Sambourne’s figure has his head polished, not his shoes; Whitman, hoping to pass off *Leaves of Grass* “under the name of poetry,” merely produces “copious catalogues.”

Yet, this brief introduction barely scratches the surface of the caricature’s implications. To begin to understand the image more fully, we can start by examining *Punch* itself. During the first thirty years of its publication, *Punch* often turned to the shoe-black’s street trade as a set comic piece designed to expose fumbling class performances, tried and true jokework which catered to prejudices at the heart of a loyal middleclass readership. A survey of the first three decades of *Punch* turns up dozens of shoe-black illustrations, ranging from small, free-floating woodcuts to full-page political satires. The favorite targets of *Punch*’s shoe-black cartoons are London’s working-class whites, striving for the appearance of wealth and refinement. The 1858 cartoon “Extravagance,” for example, depicts a white male with his pants rolled up, straddling the stools of two shoe-blacks (Figure 4.11). As the young boys each shine an individual shoe, the man stands tall with his hands in his pockets and pipe in his mouth: “Now, young uns,

⁶⁵ For a discussion of the sexual undertones in the 1855 frontispiece (and their suppression in the English edition of Whitman’s poetry edited by William Michael Rossetti and published by John Camden Hotten), see Genoways, “Accented Sexuality,” 88-123.

cut away—blow the expense!” The man’s attempt at extravagance, *Punch* implies, is as ludicrous and precarious as his shoe-shine balancing act; his syllable-swallowing, cockney dialect and buffoonish posturing have already knocked him off the pedestal he has placed himself on. Similarly, in “Opera for the Million,” a shoe-black attends to a working-class patron as he prepares for an evening out. Both Henry and his friend are humorously exposed as benighted members of “the Million,” despite their efforts to mimic middleclass fashion and patterns of cultural consumption. *Punch* skewers the two, channeling contemporary anxieties concerning the democratization of high art: “*One of the Million.* ‘Now, then ‘Enery, Come along! We shall lose the hoverture!’ *Another ditto.* ‘Why, wot a precious ‘urry you’re in. Can’t yer wait till a cove’s dressed?’” Again and again *Punch* would turn to the shoe-black to mock “the Million” and their attempts to smooth over class markers under a veneer of Warren’s blacking.

Surrounded by genteel poets of the parlor, Walt Whitman’s coarse American persona made an attractive candidate for *Punch*’s shoe-black cartoons. Since the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, the journal made it clear that the poet’s performance as a self-proclaimed American bard was less than convincing. *Punch* took multiple opportunities to publicize the perceived dissonance between Whitman’s pretensions and his literary productions. Two years before the poet’s death, for instance, with Whitman well-established as the Good Gray Poet, *Punch* again turns a suspicious eye towards Whitman’s posturing, warning readers not to “be taken in and accept W.W. at his own poetic valuation as a poet, simply because he is wrinkled, old, white-haired and wears a venerable look, which, after all, may be only a hypocritical mask.”⁶⁶ In Sambourne’s illustration, *Punch*’s earlier iteration of Whitman’s “hypocritical mask” is unmistakable:

⁶⁶ “Give it to the Bard!” *Punch*, November 1, 1890, 215.

the poet's physical blackness, whether it be natural or applied by a shoe-shine boy contradicts the visual identity Whitman constructs at the beginning of the first American and English edition of his poetry. *Punch*'s critiques of Whitman take aim at the recognizable faces of the Whitman brand. Both the Bowery rough and the Good Gray Poet are cultivated performances on Whitman's part—the pains he went to in selecting photographs for his books or emending the 1855 steel engraving only further illustrate this fact—but, in approaching these postures as commercially motivated, *Punch* dismisses them both as shams, masks that can be pulled off to reveal Whitman's true depravity.

Though Whitman's frontispiece helped him establish at least a tenuous physical (and Caucasian) persona as "Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos," the identities Whitman forged in print were far more protean than this single iconic image of the Whitman brand might suggest. As Kenneth M. Price has demonstrated, much of Whitman's textual persona is built on racial crossings, some of which are direct (as when Whitman embodies "the hounded slave"), others indirect, latent in Whitman's persistent challenge to a white, male, middleclass and Boston-centered American literary identity.⁶⁷ For a bourgeois journal like *Punch*, the inspiration to cast Whitman in blackface is already present in Whitman's repeated exploration of "cross-racial identification."⁶⁸ But, as exemplified by *Punch*, reviews often turned these frequent transformations in Whitman's poetic persona, a technique so central to the experimental poetics of *Leaves of Grass*, against him. Sambourne's caricature is one of several critical attempts to

⁶⁷ See Kenneth M. Price's chapter "Whitman in Blackface" in *To Walt Whitman, America* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 9-36.

⁶⁸ Price, *To Walt Whitman*, 11.

undermine Whitman's status as a poet through racially charged depictions of him as "a sexual, religious, and even subhuman outsider."⁶⁹ And *Punch* is not alone—not even in the history of Whitman's reception in England. In fact, another English journal, the London *Critic*, went so far as to characterize Whitman as the half-human slave Caliban "flinging down his logs, and setting himself to write a poem."⁷⁰ While *Punch* may be the first periodical to illustrate a black Whitman, there was precedent for employing racial stereotypes to dismiss Whitman as a "poet."

Trading on these stereotypes, Sambourne's caricature locates in the black body two traits central to Whitman's earliest brand identity, traits for which he was often criticized: his tendency to lean and loaf and his unabashed sexuality. Sambourne's image marries the stereotype of the lazy and lustful black male with Whitman's own self-styled persona. Benson's comments from the *Atlantic* are shortened over a series of periodical reprintings before they reach the pages of *Punch*, but his original claim that, "whenever [Whitman] speaks, you hear the voice of a *man* in his agony, in his gladness, in his transports," also carries distinct sexual connotations. Whitman "in his agony" not only embodies the "hounded slave's" physical sufferings, but he is also the poet in the throes of orgasm, the voice of "libidinous prongs."

That *Punch* turned to an image evocative of blackface performance to deride Whitman and his claims to poetic originality makes even more sense when we consider the most common consumers of minstrelsy in New York City and the relationship those performances had to the perception of American culture at home and abroad by mid-century. In his expansive study of the American minstrel show, Eric Lott demonstrates

⁶⁹ Price, *To Walt Whitman*, 10.

⁷⁰ *The Critic*, April 1, 1856, 171.

how, for a time in the 1840s, “minstrelsy came to seem the most representative national art.”⁷¹ Channeling the era’s familiar language of American literary nationalism—the same rhetoric Whitman utilizes in his 1855 preface and continued to mobilize throughout his career—the *Knickerbocker* proclaimed in 1845 that the “Jim Crows, the Zip Coons, and the Dandy Jims, who have electrified the world, from them proceed our ONLY TRUE NATIONAL POETS.”⁷² Though “eclectic in origin, primitive in execution, and raucous in effect,” the minstrel show, Lott argues, “virtually announced itself as one of [America’s] first popular institutions”—it was a truly American brand of entertainment.⁷³ Theaters in New York’s Bowery became synonymous with blackface performance, and their audiences—muscular crowds Whitman occasionally found himself among—contained precisely the recognizable, working class types Whitman positioned himself alongside. The *Sporting Times* offers a condensed taxonomy of minstrel show patrons that could easily double as a description of Whitman’s ideal readers and companions: “Firemen, butcher-boys, cab and omnibus drivers, ‘fancy’ men, and b’hoys, generally.”⁷⁴ By mid-century, the “the signifying chain linking workingmen to Bowery amusements and through these to blackface was little more than a cliché of social observation,” and, thus, prime material for the pages of *Punch*.⁷⁵ As a distinctively American art form with incredibly strong ties to the Bowery, blackface performance provided a convenient visual reference for *Punch*’s attack on Whitman.

⁷¹ Eric Lott, *Love & Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 8.

⁷² Lott, *Love & Theft*, 99.

⁷³ Lott, *Love & Theft*, 64.

⁷⁴ Lott, *Love & Theft*, 69.

⁷⁵ Lott, *Love & Theft*, 74.

Of course, shoe blacking has obvious ties to minstrelsy—where it and other substances were used to blacken the faces of white performers—but the product’s ties to poetry were equally strong for *Punch*’s readers. Robert Warren’s shoe blacking and its frightened black cat—famously headquartered at 30 Strand—were inextricably linked to poetry and promotion. The competition between blacking companies in Britain led to the emergence of some of the most innovative advertising of the nineteenth century. And, like Harte’s brief association with Sapolio, poetry played a central role in blacking’s commercial presence. For instance, Robert Martin, another famous purveyor of blacking, was rumored to keep “a regular bard” on call “to write poetical puffs.”⁷⁶ Though the “Cat and the Boot” illustration was often disconnected from the subject of the verse underneath it, Warren’s advertisements almost always employed polished poetic jingles. The success of companies like Warren, Strachan insists, “was heavily dependent upon astute advertising campaigns,” which involved a “sophisticated array of commercial puffery: newspaper columns, both text-only and display, handbills, . . . wall-painting, [and] advertising carts.”⁷⁷ In his history of advertising, E.S. Turner credits Warren with marketing “the first nationally advertised product,” an incredibly successful brand “launched on a sea of poetry.”⁷⁸ Brand name blacking pioneered the commercial use of verse in England—even literary luminaries like Dickens and Bryon penned advertising copy. Before he helped found *Punch*, where numerous shoe-black cartoons appeared under his editorial direction, Mark Lemon addressed the literary value of such

⁷⁶ Strachan, *Advertising and Satirical Culture*, 117.

⁷⁷ Strachan, *Advertising and Satirical Culture*, 124.

⁷⁸ Strachan, *Advertising and Satirical Culture*, 126.

promotional verse in a musical comedy entitled *The P.L.: or 30 Strand!*, a play about Stamper Jingle, the Poet Laureate of blacking advertising.⁷⁹

The pervasiveness of blacking's dual association with minstrel show entertainment and modern advertising is apparent in this 1841 cartoon from *Punch*, an image which precedes Sambourne's caricature by over two decades (Figure 4.12). Grooming himself in a broken mirror, the black male pictured applies a conspicuously marked container of blacking to his face, a scene captioned by Warren's ubiquitous slogan: "The real black reviver." Like this earlier cartoon, Sambourne's caricature incorporates shoe blacking to racialize and, in the logic of *Punch*, to degrade its subject overtly; Whitman's ties to advertising—whose modern methods were inseparable from names like Warren for British audiences—were likewise used to tarnish the poet and the lasting literary value of his work.

In a lengthy parody printed in *Judy*, a London comic journal closely modeled on *Punch*'s print format, Whitman is chided for the commercial taint of his poetry, while the poet himself is characterized as a commodity, the "greatest and most glorious product" of the United States.⁸⁰ *Judy*'s "Office Boy's Mother" series appeared on and off during the magazine's run, but only twice did the eponymous speaker address American poetics. A

⁷⁹ Strachan's discussion of J. R. Planché's *The Drama at Home; or, And Evening with Puff* further illustrates how quickly connected the worlds of blackface performance and advertising could become for contemporary audiences. In Planché's play, a Shakespearean troupe is put out of work by the public's hunger for musical comedy and other popular drama. Mr. Puff, a "vendor of contemporary reviews at a price," attempts to find the actors work in advertising. "Othello, played by the actor Ennis (his face blacked up, presumably with Warren's blacking) becomes a sandwich man for Robert Warren, thereby facilitating the inevitable jests about the blackness of his face in relation to Warren's brilliant jet. In the modern age, according to Planché, the exemplary contemporary representation of the black man is Jim Crow of the minstrel shows rather than Othello" (142). Thus, Planché writes: "Poor Othello, done quite brown, / Driven off the boards by Fortune's frown, / Between a pair is glad to get / And prove he's not as black as 'Warren's brilliant jet'. / Jim Crows and fiddlers' bows / Have quite put out of joint his poor black nose" (Strachan, 142-143).

⁸⁰ "The Office Boy's Mother in America," *Judy*, December 10, 1884, 277.

later parody of Edgar Allan Poe's "Bells" by the Office Boy's Mother critiques the United States' emphasis on commercial enterprise through a catalogue of business-related bells: the "ding, dong" of the railway train, the "tinkle" of a milkman, the "ting-a-ring" of a vegetable vendor, and steamboat bells "summoning the nation to its doom."⁸¹ Where the Poe parody relies on an industrial soundscape to mock American culture, the parody of Whitman printed below shows how easily the free verse characteristics of *Leaves of Grass* could be adapted to the commercial purposes of the United States, the "teeming producer of all things":

THE OFFICE BOY'S MOTHER IN AMERICA.

Who am I?
 Yesterday I believed myself the Office Boy's Mother,
 To-day I have been reading WALT WHITMAN, and know not whether he
 be me, or me he;—
 Or otherwise!
 Oh, blue skies! oh, rugged mountains! ah, mighty, rolling Niagara!
 Oh, chaos and everlasting bosh!
 I am a poet; I swear it! If you do not believe it you are a dolt, a fool, an
 idiot!
 MILTON, SHAKESPERE, DANTE, TOMMY MOORE, POPE, never,
 but BYRON, too, perhaps, and last, not least, ME, and the POET
 CLOSE,
We send out resonance echoing down the adamantine canons of the future!
We live for ever! The worms who had us, criticise (asses!) laugh, scoff,
jeer and babble—die!
 Serve them right.
 What is the difference between the Office Boy's Mother, the pride of Fleet
 Street, the glory of Shoe Lane, and WALT WHITMAN?
 Start not! 'Tis no end man of a minstrel show who perpends this query;
 'Tis no brain-racking puzzle from an inner page of the *Family Herald*;
 No charade, acrostic (double or single), conundrum, riddle, rebus,
 anagram or other guess-work.
 I answer thus: We both write truths—great, stern, solemn, unquenchable
 truths—couched in more or less ridiculous language.
 I as a rule use rhyme, he does not; therefore, I am his Superior (which is
 also a lake in this great and glorious country).
 I scorn, with the unutterable scorn of the despiser of pettiness, to take a
 mean advantage of him.

⁸¹ "The Office Boy's Mother in America," *Judy*, January 14, 1885.

He writes, he sells, he is read (more or less); why then should I rack my brains and my rhyming dictionary? I will see the public hanged first!

I sing of America, of the United States, of the stars and stripes, of Oskosh, of Kalamazoo, and of Salt Lake City.

I sing of railroad cars, of the hotels, of the breakfasts, the lunches, the dinners, and the suppers;

Of the soup, the fish, the entrées, the joints, the game, the puddings and the ice-cream.

I sing all—I eat all—I sing in turn of DR. BLUFFEM'S Antibilious Pills.

No subject is too small, too insignificant, for Nature's poet.

I sing of the cocktail, a new song for every cocktail, hundreds of songs, hundreds of cocktails.

It is a great and glorious land! The Mississippi, the Missouri, and the million other torrents roll their waters to the ocean.

It is a great and a glorious land! The Alleghanies, the Catskills, the Rockies (see atlas for other mountain ranges too numerous to mention) pierce the clouds!

And the greatest and most glorious product of this great and glorious land is WALT WHITMAN;

This must be so, for he says it himself.

There is but one greater than he between the rising and the setting sun,

There is but one before whom he meekly bows his humbled head.

Oh, great and glorious land, teeming producer of all things, creator of Niagara, and inventor of WALT WHITMAN,

Erase your national advertisements of liver pads and cures for rheumatism from your public monuments, and inscribe thereon in letters of gold the name of THE OFFICE BOY'S MOTHER.

Writing in a style meant to mimic Whitman's own, the Office Boy's Mother cautions readers not to confuse her for an "end man of a minstrel show," as she probes the value of unrhymed poetic language, and thus Whitman himself. Despite his verse style, Whitman "writes," "sells," and "is read (more or less)," leading the speaker to question why she should "rack [her] brains and [her] rhyming dictionary" to achieve commercial success. While "no subject is too small" for Whitman's poetic style—it easily morphs into a patent medicine advertisement: "I sing all—I eat all—I sing in turn of DR. BLUFFEM'S Antibilious Pills"—*Judy*'s parody concludes with a turn towards Whitman's poetic persona as a commodity itself. America, a land whose "public monuments" are covered

with “national advertisements of liver pads and cures for rheumatism”; America, the “teeming producer of all things,” is both the “creator of Niagara” and the “inventor of WALT WHITMAN,” the “the greatest and most glorious product of this great and glorious land.” Ventriloquizing Whitman, the parody’s speaker produces only a hackneyed and repetitive puff of the United States whose commercially driven culture makes Whitman’s promotional poses seem as natural and formidable as the “Alleghanies, the Catskills, [and] the Rockies.”

One of the greatest influences on perception of Whitman during the 1860s—one of the “creators” of Walt Whitman that *Punch and Judy* are reacting to—were the abolitionist publishers of the third edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Thayer & Eldridge. The zeal with which Whitman “thrust” *Leaves of Grass* into the faces of literary consumers often drew the ire of contemporary reviewers. Especially during the 1860s—a decade that saw the first publication of *Leaves of Grass* by a major publisher (one with a propensity for outlandish advertising), the carnage of the Civil War, and the emergence of the “Good Gray Poet”—the Whitman brand, new to balancing the poet’s dual personas, was especially susceptible to attacks by those who saw cracks in Whitman’s poetic and promotional facades. Even before William Douglas O’Connor would have the opportunity to immortalize Whitman’s post-war persona, the poet’s ties to Thayer & Eldridge drew racialized critiques of the Whitman brand that, ironically, tied the author of *Leaves of Grass* to political and social views he never held. Previously undocumented coverage of Whitman during the 1860s reveals the surprising, often racially inflected ways the Whitman brand was twisted and reinterpreted, attacks that paved the way for Sambourne’s depiction.

In Whitman's backyard, New York City's vocal Copperhead press was indicative of the contradictions the North's most prosperous city contained. Billed as the "White Man's Paper," the *New York Day Book* began promoting the proslavery cause when Nathaniel R. Stimson founded the journal in 1848, the same year Whitman briefly left Brooklyn to work for the New Orleans *Daily Crescent*. The *Day Book* fared better in the North than Whitman did in the South. While Whitman lasted roughly three months in New Orleans, the *Day Book* persisted for thirty years in the Empire City. Though its univocal platform of white supremacy kept it out of step with mainstream Democrats, the *Day Book* garnered considerable notoriety, if not financial success, under the helm of John H. Van Evrie and Rushmore G. Horton.⁸²

As Thayer & Eldridge were promoting the third edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Van Evrie was preparing and advertising his most popular book, *Negroes and Negro Slavery: The First an Inferior Race: The Latter its Normal Condition* (1861), which championed the notion of "subgenation," a term Van Evrie coined for the "natural or normal relation of an inferior to a superior race."⁸³ As Martin Klammer notes, Van Evrie's writings appealed "to part of the same audience that Whitman was always hoping to reach: socially insecure whites in search of a sense of identity that could help make the existing social and economic systems more tolerable."⁸⁴ When Whitman's radical abolitionist publishers turned to Van Evrie's Copperhead newspaper for a review of the 1860 *Leaves*

⁸² Forrest G. Wood, *Black Scare: The Racist Response to Emancipation and Reconstruction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 35.

⁸³ Jennifer L. Weber, *Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln's Opponents in the North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 162.

⁸⁴ Martin Klammer, *Whitman, Slavery, and the Emergence of Leaves of Grass* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press), 94.

of Grass, they knew a warm reception was unlikely, despite the fact that Whitman and the *Day Book* targeted some of the same readers.

How the third edition of *Leaves of Grass* made its way to the office of the *Day Book* illustrates the workings of the most popular method of literary advertising during the nineteenth century: the book review. In a May 24, 1860, letter to Whitman, Thayer & Eldridge notified the poet that they had distributed review copies of *Leaves of Grass* (via Henry Clapp Jr.) to New York's "Editorial Fraternity," a politically diverse group of periodicals which included Clapp's *Saturday Press*, Van Evrie's *Day Book*, James Gordon Bennett's *New York Herald*, Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune*, and J. Warner Campbell's *New York Illustrated News*.⁸⁵ Earlier in March, Clapp had suggested exactly this plan: distribute *Leaves of Grass* to New York's most popular newspapers regardless of their likely responses.⁸⁶ Thayer & Eldridge eventually took Clapp's advice, expressing their hopes to Whitman that *Leaves of Grass* would have a "strong effect" upon the editors of these periodicals, "readers who command the Press."

The "effect" on the *Day Book* was indeed "strong"—*Leaves of Grass* was denounced as the "maddest folly and the merest balderdash that ever was written." Van Evrie's disgust in the *Day Book* over Thayer & Eldridge's new volume would have been fairly predictable considering both parties' respective political allegiances. The *Day Book*'s attack on Whitman channels these acute political differences, incorporating proslavery rhetoric aimed at abolitionists like Thayer & Eldridge who defended what Van Evrie argued was a degraded and animalistic Negro population. Thus, Van Evrie's

⁸⁵ Thayer & Eldridge to Walt Whitman, May 24, 1860, Charles E. Feinberg Collection of the Papers of Walt Whitman, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

⁸⁶ Henry Clapp Jr.'s May 14, 1860, letter to Whitman is quoted in Traubel, *WWWC*, 2:375.

Whitman is a poet “disfigured by the most disgusting beastiality [sic],” a “great strong, filthy bull, delighting alike in his size and his strength, and his filth.” If Van Evrie’s appraisal of *Leaves of Grass* fails to astonish, Thayer & Eldridge’s attempt to drum up controversy for Whitman by soliciting hostile critics like the *Day Book* should likewise come as no surprise given the publishers’ unorthodox promotional strategies. As I have discussed previously, it was also in 1860 when Thayer & Eldridge published *Leaves of Grass Imprints*, the publisher’s ambitious 64-page pamphlet advertising the third edition, which reprints several vitriolic reviews of Whitman and his poetry, the same kind of material an appeal to the *Day Book* was apt to produce.

Here is the recently recovered review in its entirety:

LEAVES OF GRASS. Boston: Thayer & Eldridge. Year 85 of the States—(1860-61)

This is a new edition of the work of Walt Whitman, which some years ago created so great a sensation both in this country and abroad, and it seems now destined to renew the former effect. It is very much discussed and criticized, and is indeed a singular production.

Distinguished by power of a certain sort, by bursts of originality, by occasional undoubted cleverness, it is also disfigured by the most disgusting beastiality we remember ever to have seen in print; a beastiality which is the most prominent feature of the book, which is utterly animal, and so marked that it not only gives tone to the work, but indicates the character of the writer. Vigorous, coarse, vulgar, indecent, powerful, like a great strong, filthy bull, delighting alike in his size and his strength, and his filth; full of egotism, rampant, but not insufferable, fully believing himself to be a representative man and poet of the American people; persuaded that he is the great poet whose advent the world is waiting for, and that his errand is to sing his own individuality, his own peculiarities, whether physical or spiritual, but particularly physical; his own idiosyncracies [sic], whether little or great; his own characteristics, whether noble or mean; and all these not so much because they are his individualities and characteristics and idiosyncracies, as because he thinks they typify those of other Americans—this is Walt Whitman’s character and notions, as they seem to be developed in his *Leaves of Grass*. The measure in which he writes is his own, and is often no measure at all, but a sort of alliteratives [sic] style, with a certain rough music in it; his style is outside of all rules, transgresses, grammar and rhetoric, it jumbles up slang

and vulgarity with choice language, huddles together English and scraps of French and Latin and Spanish in the absurdest fashion, and yet at times has a certain terseness that is telling. The book is, in many respects, abominable; in many respects the maddest folly and the merest balderdash that ever was written; but it unfortunately possesses these streaks of talent, these grains of originality, which will probably preserve the author from oblivion. We should advise nobody to read it unless he were curious in literary monstrosities, and had a stomach capable of digesting the coarsest stuff ever offered by caterers for the reading public, and yet those who are catholic enough to appreciate two grains of wheat hid in two bushels of chaff, will not be uninterested in the volume.

The *Day Book*'s coverage of Whitman extended beyond a single review. On June 25, 1860, Whitman's name reappears in the *Day Book* in an excerpt from the New Orleans *Daily Delta*, a newspaper that paid considerable attention to Whitman in the summer of 1860. As we have seen, Thayer & Eldridge made sure copies of *Leaves of Grass* penetrated the offices of New York's most prominent papers—even Van Evrie's *Day Book*—but Whitman's publishers were reluctant (perhaps even unable) to engage a Southern readership in the same way. Ted Genoways has shown how Thayer & Eldridge—constricted by laws banning anti-slavery literature and suspected in Alabama of disseminating abolitionist propaganda through their book agents—were plagued by a “near-total inability to sell books in the South.”⁸⁷ With no review copy to consult, the *Daily Delta* took to criticizing Whitman and his publishers for refusing to introduce *Leaves of Grass* to the South, assaulting the poet with thinly veiled racist invective:

There is an unkempt, uncouth poet of New York, or rather of Brooklyn, whose name on earth, in secular parlance, is Walt Whitman. The Cincinnati Commercial calls him the “Yahoo of American literature.” Judging from specimens of his jargonic poetry, which we have seen, (his publishers have not sent the lately published volume of his “Leaves of Grass” to the South;) we think the Commercial scarcely does justice to his peculiar merits in calling him a Yahoo. We think rather that he can claim a comparison with the gorilla, one of the peculiarities of which is to pile up chunks of wood, in rude imitation of the house-building of his Ethiopian

⁸⁷ Genoways, *Walt Whitman and the Civil War*, 61.

neighbors, but without having the slightest idea of making a house or any other rational object in view. Just so does Walt Whitman seem to pile up words. If they mean nothing, it is all the same. Something and nothing are one, according to the Brahmic theory which this nondescript poet appears to have borrowed from the mystic sage of Concord, Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emerson says that *Leaves of Grass* gave him “great and unspeakable inward joy.” We can almost envy the sage’s vegetarian appetite, and can find no limit to our admiration for his powers of digestion. We don’t object to salad, indeed, rather affect it, when served up according to true gastronomic art. But we confess that we can’t readily take to grass, literal or metaphorical, when pulled up by the roots and tossed to us with a pitchfork as if we were a hungry herbivorous beast.

Walt Whitman has evidently fallen into the mistake of many strong-natured, egotistical and unbalanced men, of supposing that to despise the graces, amenities, and conventions of art is the more fully to place themselves in sympathy with nature. They forget that there is only a verbal, not an unverbal distinction between nature and art, and that the grandest and the most trivial things done by man in the way of art are as natural as falling dew or blooming flowers.

The connections the *Daily Delta* draws among the “Ethiopian,” “the gorilla,” and Whitman would have appealed to readers of the *Day Book*, especially those sympathetic with Van Evrie’s pseudo-scientific theories of race. Though Van Evrie would insist that God created “the Negro” and “the Caucasian” separately, the *Delta*’s racist parody shares with the author of *Negroes and Negro Slavery* a discourse that placed the Ethiopian—what Van Evrie calls “the isolated negro of Africa”—at the base of humanity, the “last and least, the lowest in the scale but possibly the first in order of Creation.”⁸⁸ For crude comedic effect, the *Delta*’s lampoon of Whitman ostensibly allows Van Evrie’s “lowest” to occupy the most sophisticated position in the brief prose sketch, though the African’s proximity to the gorilla insures that readers will not confuse the Ethiopian for a more “civilized” species. Whereas the Ethiopian can build a house with a “rational object in view,” the gorilla can only perform a “rude imitation” of his neighbor. Whitman and his “jargonic poetry,” in imitating the gorilla (whose base instincts mimic the Ethiopian), rest

⁸⁸ John H. Van Evrie, *Negroes and Negro Slavery* (New York: Van Evrie, Horton & Co., 1861) 136; 148.

at the bottom of the *Delta*'s evolutionary scale. The *Day Book* racializes Whitman through repeated references to his "beastiality," but the *Delta* makes literal Van Evrie's implication, subordinating Whitman to both the Ethiopian and the gorilla, coloring all three with a culturally legible black-face.⁸⁹

While racial depictions of Whitman began as early as 1855 with a reference to Shakespeare's Caliban in a review of the first edition, Whitman's abolitionist publishers only increased his association with African Americans. For example, the poet's ties to Thayer & Eldridge were enough to turn at least one of Whitman's allies in the press, the *New York Daily News*, sour on *Leaves of Grass*. Within months of one another in 1856, the *Daily News* published two favorable reviews of Whitman's first two editions. In February of 1856 the *Daily News* dubbed the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* "the strangest, most extraordinary production" ever reviewed in its pages. In November of the same year, the *Daily News* continued its praise of Whitman's verse, characterizing the second edition of *Leaves of Grass* as "universally admired by men whose authority is unquestionable." This lofty appraisal of the second edition is no doubt influenced by two distinctive characteristics of the 1856 *Leaves of Grass* itself: Whitman's controversial decision to gold-stamp Ralph Waldo Emerson's personal praise of the poet in 1855 on the spine of the volume, and the lengthy appendix "Leaves-Droppings," which reprinted, among other items, Emerson's letter in full along with Whitman's response to his "Master." Though not "universally admired," the design of the 1856 edition suggested that at least one man of "unquestionable" authority stood behind Whitman's poetry.

⁸⁹ For more on the *Delta*'s coverage of Whitman in 1860 see Eric Conrad, "Whitman and the Proslavery Press: Newly Recovered 1860 Reviews," *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* (Spring 2010), 228-233.

Many commentators on the 1856 edition were incensed by Whitman's unauthorized use of Emerson's endorsement on the cover, but this *Daily News* review is a reminder that some found the material presentation of the 1856 *Leaves of Grass* refreshing, shameless blurb and all. Much like the *Brooklyn Daily Times*, which lauded the improved typography of Whitman's second edition, the *Daily News* describes the compact, cramped, yet "neatly printed" pages of the 1856 *Leaves of Grass* as a "decided improvement" on the 1855 edition. Even with the uproar over Whitman's appropriation of Emerson, the *New York Daily News* was an early champion of *Leaves of Grass*. When the third edition appeared in 1860, however, the paper's proslavery sympathies were out of step with Thayer & Eldridge. An article on the September 1860 New York Trade Sale of Books demonstrates how the radical politics of Whitman's Boston publishers had tainted *Leaves of Grass* for the *Daily News*. A list of Thayer & Eldridge's publications—"Life of the Savior . . . the Life of Lincoln, Capt. John Brown, Wm. H. Seward, Echoes of Harper's Ferry, Sumner's Speech"—concludes by mentioning "Whitman's Leaves of Grass, and other Black Republican documents."⁹⁰ Other than its link to Thayer & Eldridge, just exactly how *Leaves of Grass* functioned as a "Black Republican" document is unclear, but Whitman's association with an active abolitionist publishing house was enough incentive for the *Daily News* to ignore the poet's newest volume except for this brief (and, in context, damning) mention.

Thayer & Eldridge created a link between Whitman and black America, but Sambourne's caricature draws on more than just the political affiliation of the poet's one-time publisher. When *Punch* recontextualizes Eugene Benson's appraisal of Whitman's masculine voice as the heading of its racist caricature, it ironically echoes two phrases

⁹⁰ "The Trade Sale," *New York Daily News*, August 17, 1860, 4.

circulating in Britain by the late 1860's, both with ties to African Americans: Abraham Lincoln's rumored reaction to seeing Whitman in 1864 ("Well, *he* looks like a man!") and the slogan popularized during the British abolition movement, "Am I Not a Man and a Brother?" Lincoln's supposed remark dates back to a July 30, 1865, letter to Whitman from A. Van Rensallaer, in which he recalls a conversation with the President. According to Van Rensallaer, Lincoln made the comment about Whitman after watching the poet stroll past a White House window. The anecdote made its way into several reviews of Whitman's work on both sides of the Atlantic; it is mentioned twice in O'Connor's *The Good Gray Poet* and William Michael Rossetti even includes it in the preface to the first English edition of Whitman's poetry.⁹¹ By 1869, England was familiar with Lincoln's thoughts on slaves and on Whitman—to the Great Emancipator both were indeed *men*. Sambourne's caricature may allude to Lincoln, then, undercutting the President's vision and suggesting neither Whitman nor the black male are truly men.

Punch also satirizes the abolitionist cause more broadly, offering Sambourne's caricature as its own response to the question "Am I Not a Man and a Brother?" The phrase was made famous by Josiah Wedgwood, who, as a member of the *Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, created a seal depicting a kneeling African in chains under which the appeal for humane treatment was inscribed (Figure 4.13). The figure's position "changed the focus from submission to supplication"—the slave was "neither crushed by the weight of oppression, nor driven by it to defiance, the Wedgwood

⁹¹ Rossetti's preface praises Whitman, Lincoln, and "When Lilacs Last in the Door-yard Bloom'd" (15). For other references to Lincoln's comment on Whitman, see Robert Buchanan, "Walt Whitman," *The Broadway*, November 1867, 188-195; "Walt Whitman's Poems," *The London Sun*, April 17, 1868, 314.

figure was calculated to inspire benevolent sympathy.”⁹² As Adam Hochschild has shown, “Am I Not a Man and a Brother” was “probably the first widespread use of a logo designed for a political cause.”⁹³ Wedgwood’s design—essentially a symbol for the abolitionist brand—was ubiquitous; it appeared “everywhere from books and leaflets to snuffboxes and cufflinks,” cropping up in *Punch*, where it was repurposed often to biting satiric effect, as frequently as shoe-black illustrations did. “The function of the image in its various domestic uses and settings,” Kirk Savage remarks, “was to force the slave’s plight into constant view, so that it would never be forgotten even where slavery had long since disappeared.”⁹⁴ Eventually, the image also became popular in America—in 1787 Wedgwood sent Benjamin Franklin, then the president of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, a number of the emblems to distribute to Philadelphia antislavery advocates. Franklin later wrote to Wedgwood praising his design’s effect: “I have seen in their countenances such a Mark of being affected by contemplating the Figure of the Suppliant (which is admirably executed) that I am persuaded it may have an Effect equal to that of the best written Pamphlet in procuring favour to those oppressed People.”⁹⁵ In 1835 it was printed on the same broadside as John Greenleaf Whittier’s poem, “My Countrymen in Chains!”

As a satiric appropriation of the abolitionist brand, Sambourne’s caricature intentionally undermines the values that inform Wedgwood’s seal. Wedgwood’s figure is

⁹² Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 21.

⁹³ Adam Hochschild, *Bury the Chains: Prophets and Rebels in the Fight to Free and Empire’s Slaves* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), 128.

⁹⁴ Savage, *Standing Soldiers*, 23.

⁹⁵ Julia A. Stern, *The Plight of Feeling: Sympathy and Dissent in the Early American Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 218-219.

suppliant, spiritual, and desexualized; viewers are denied access to the crotch that Whitman's frontispiece and Sambourne's image make so central to their compositions. Indeed, the slave's impassioned plea in Wedgwood is transformed in Sambourne to grinning complacency. Given that Britain had outlawed slavery in 1833, the fact that a black man was both a man and a brother "ought to [have been] pretty well understood" by 1869. However, *Punch*'s caricature is undoubtedly a challenge to such assertions of equality. Whatever we take *Punch* to imply about the status of the black subject's manhood, the image and caption absolutely deny the possibility of his brotherhood. "Even at the risk of bringing on an American War," Sambourne's caricature delivers this ignominious punch-line: Whitman's status as a 'poet' is as laughable as the black man's pretension to humanity and equality.

Minus the jab at Whitman, *Punch* commonly made versions of the same joke both through shoe-black cartoons and allusions to Wedgwood's slogan. In this untitled cartoon from an early issue of *Punch*, a black man has his shoes shined by a white as the two form the first letter, "N," of a brief article (Figure 4.14). The clear disparity in size between the two figures—the white is twice the size of the black and has to fold his body in half to perform the menial task—perpetuates a code of naturalized racial hierarchy that runs counter to the performance of class portrayed. As if to conjure the infamous racial epithet beginning with the letter these two bodies form, *Punch*'s tiny cartoon suggests whites will always retain an innate superiority to blacks. As Michael A. Chaney has noted, black American abolitionists had an especially ambivalent relationship to *Punch*'s portrayals of slavery and blacks in general.

Despite the prevalence of images like the one discussed above, during the 1840s and 1850s black abolitionism embraced satirical British cartoons, especially those found in *Punch*, as a “visceral expression of the grotesquerie of slavery,” and, at least for a short time, *Punch*’s “visual economy of moral outrage and cynical humor” directed towards the peculiar institution was often recirculated in the United States. By the 1860s, however, the “political leaning of *Punch* shifted from depreciation of slavocratic hubris . . . to distrust of Yankee tyranny,” making the comic journal less and less likely to be cited by editors like Frederick Douglass.⁹⁶ The nature of *Punch*’s cartoons—even those ostensibly critiquing slavery—ensured that the relationship between the journal and American abolitionists was a tenuous one, something the tired racial stereotypes recycled in “He Is a Man” make clear. *Punch*’s persistent use of racist caricature well into the late-nineteenth century suggests that its visual attacks on American slavery were motivated more by an opportunity to revel in United States hypocrisy than by any progressive notions of racial equality. To be sure, when *Punch* saw fit, the abolitionist ethos found itself on the receiving end of the journal’s acerbic satire. The 1859 poem “Monkeyana,” for example, which weighs the implications of Darwin’s *Origin of the Species*, is accompanied by an illustration of a gorilla wearing a sandwich board featuring a version of Wedgwood’s slogan (Figure 4.15). Like the *Daily Delta* does in its coverage of the 1860 *Leaves of Grass*, here *Punch* draws on convenient stereotypes positioning blacks as subhuman primitives for a cheap laugh, a joke that depends on readers’ awareness of an incredibly recognizable brand. As we see in Sambourne’s caricature, *Punch* could all too

⁹⁶ Michael A. Chaney, “Heartfelt Thanks to *Punch* for the Picture: Frederick Douglass and the Transnational Jokework of Slave Caricature,” *American Literature* (March 2010), 57-58.

easily adapt these stock punch lines for the purpose of ridiculing Whitman's brand of American poetry and masculinity.

Out of context, it is difficult to imagine *Punch* transforming Whitman into the black male depicted alongside "He Is a Man." Yet, when we take into account the complex web of interwoven brands that the image engages with—*Punch*'s distinct satirical humor, Wedgwood's ubiquitous symbol, Thayer & Eldridge's abolitionist press, shoe blacking's innovative advertising—the capacity for Whitman's own brand to be appropriated by his critics and positioned within a diverse field of promotional practices, symbols, and logos circulating during the 1860s seems almost inevitable. As vigorously as Whitman worked to construct his multifaceted image as the founder of a democratic poetics, his critics worked with equal strength to expose and undercut the Whitman brand.

* * * * *

The dual personas Whitman balanced after the Civil War had strong ties to the poetry of *Leaves of Grass*, but, even more importantly, they functioned independently of the act of reading; they were complementary forces in a sophisticated commercial identity, a presence in the literary market that, by the end of the nineteenth century, was catering to loyal lovers of Whitman the rough and newly minted admirers of the Good Gray Poet—all while the poet's detractors bent and distorted those personas. For all of his self-aggrandizing posturing as the first truly American bard, American readers consistently lifted the veil of Whitman's romantic myth to reveal the literary professional at work. Writing for the majority of his career at a time when the success of American authors was in the hands of a slowly evolving system of modern publicity, Whitman

worked tirelessly to keep himself in the public's eye. Many readers, especially Whitman's critics, saw through to the poet's promotional efforts. As the *Springfield Sunday Republican* writes in their review of the 1881 *Leaves of Grass*:

When in 1855 [Whitman] printed with his own hands his odd and sprawling lines of his "Leaves of Grass" . . . he announced himself to the world as a poet, and he has never since taken down his sign. He still carries on business at the old stand; still "sounds his barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world." But now instead of six readers he has six thousand, or perhaps six hundred thousand and the back countries have not all been heard from yet.⁹⁷

Whitman's methods for announcing himself to the world shifted subtly throughout the poet's career. While he was still carrying on "business at the old stand," recycling the familiar title of his work alongside its earlier authorial persona, Whitman's signs grew more sophisticated in their understanding of American readers and the methods necessary to court the public's attention. Balancing the bravado of the Bowery rough with the quiet patriotism of the Good Gray Poet, Whitman continued to attract new disciples and critics, both of which expanded familiarity with the Whitman Brand.

⁹⁷ "Walt Whitman, a Kosmos," *The Springfield Sunday Republican*, November 13, 1881, 4.

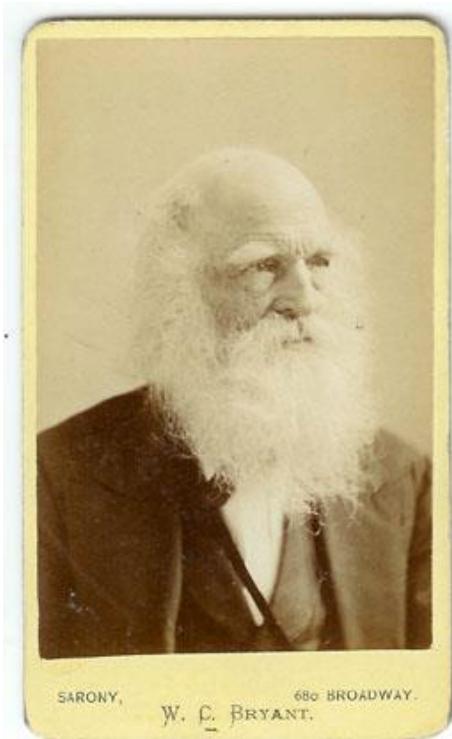


Figure 4.1. Photograph of William Cullen Bryant by Napoleon Sarony.



Figure 4.2. Frontispiece to the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*

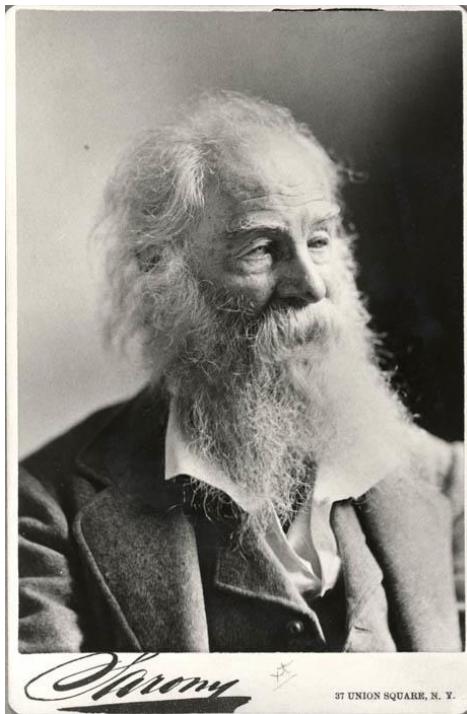


Figure 4.3. Photograph of Walt Whitman by Napoleon Sarony.

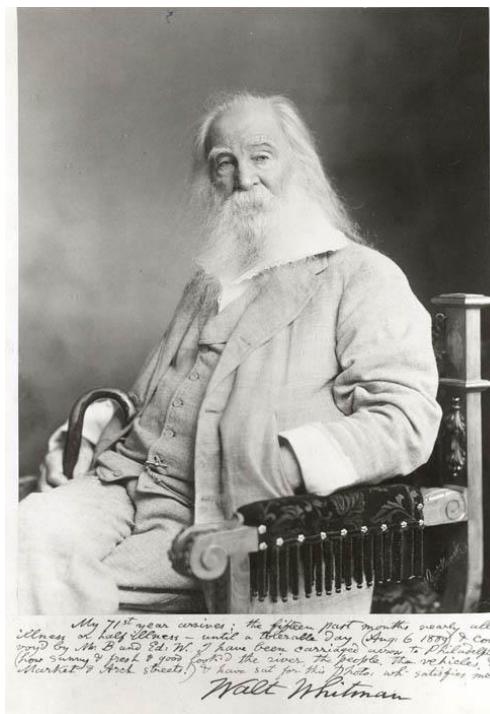


Figure 4.4. Photograph of Walt Whitman by Frederick Gutekunst

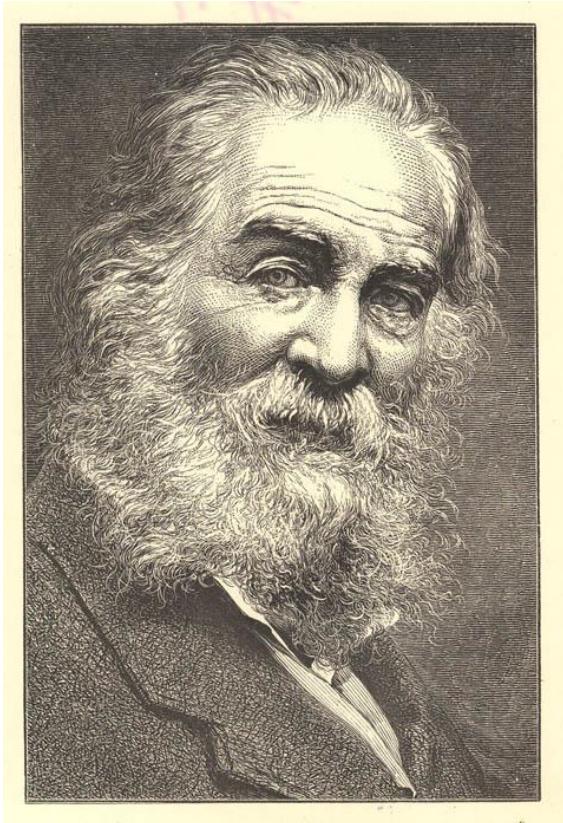


Figure 4.5. William J. Linton engraving of Walt Whitman



Figure 4.6. Page from Bret Harte's Sapolio brochure



Figure 4.7. Robert Warren's blacking advertisement



Figure 4.8. Sapolio's logo (included in Bret Harte's brochure)



Figure 4.9. Gold Dust twins advertisement (1880s)

FEBRUARY 27, 1869.]

PUNCH, OR THE LONDON CHARIVARI.

79

"HE IS A MAN."



MR. WALT WHITMAN speaks, "you hear the voice of a *saw*." Mr. WHITMAN is 'a man,' ought to be pretty well understood by this time, considering the strenuous emphasis and minute particularity with which MR. WHITMAN himself has described his physical attributes, to say nothing of the stress which his critical admirers have laid upon his virility. Could it not be agreed, all round, once for all, that Mr. WHITMAN is 'a man,' and a very large and heavy one, so that the topic may be set at rest? Its disappearance from the field of literary discussion would be a great relief. The statement that Mr. WHITMAN is a poet, would still remain for controversy, and surely that is sufficiently exasperating, in view of the curious catalogues, suggestive of nothing so much as a crazy auctioneer, which Mr. WHITMAN continues to publish under the name of poetry."

If the *M.W.* seen any more such good bits, we shall be glad to read them in its pages, which we observe have lately become replete with a sneerer wisdom than of yore. Perhaps RAHELIS is a little over the heads of the majority of musical folk. Still, *Punch* hopes it will occasionally lead the good service due from all educational journals towards demolishing Shams, whereof there is no greater than Mr. WHITMAN—we say it, even at the risk of bringing on an American War.

TAR TAR.

A very pretty story of tarring and feathering comes by a recent Melbourne letter. A person of the name of BLACK went to survey some mining property, and was laid hold of by a gang of ruffians, who tarred him, and then coated him with "fragments of wool, straw, or whatever rubbish came to hand." But BLACK is evidently a very long-headed man, and instead of divesting himself of his uncomfortable attire he had it "taken off" by a photographer. With this negative argument in his favour he goes into court claiming two thousand pounds damages. We heartily hope he will obtain a verdict.

"Cheer, Boys, Cheer!"

ONE of the first things the House of Commons did, was to appoint a Committee to control the arrangements of the kitchen and refreshment rooms, and, very wisely too, to place an Alderman upon it. As another prominent member is FRENCH, and VIVIAN has a convivial sound about it, the prospects of the Parliamentary *cuisine* may altogether be considered good cheerful.

A FINE OPENING.

HERE's a chance! The Strand Union is prepared to give twenty pounds a year and part rations to a night nurse. Her hours are to be from seven in the evening till seven in the morning. What munificence! Almost as much as the wages of an errand boy.

THE HAIR AND MANY FRIENDS.

VICTORY! Victory! Glorious news, my *Punch*. Only look at this:—
"The great ladies of Paris have determined to abolish chignons. False hair is to be repudiated, and women are to appear as if they dressed their own hair. In the daytime the hair is to be simply plaited and confined in a net. In the evening it will only be needful to put on the head a crown, or a wreath of roses or ivy, or some other creeping plant."

A bas les chignons! be our battle-cry in England, now that Common Sense has won the fight in France. What great ladies do the less are sure to imitate. No more wigs for women! No more borrowed plumes to bedizen silly jackdaws! No more piling up of Pelion on Ossa, or, as wags would say, on 'Oss hair!' Ladies, for the future, or at any rate for the present, are to dress their heads *au naturel*, and only wear a crown, or else a wreath of roses, or some trifle of that sort. As they are to have the option, I would advise their wearing roses rather than a crown, for "uneasy lies the head that wears a crown," and only queens of fashion can be the sitting wearers of one. As for ladies wearing creepers in their hair, I see no harm in this, so long as they are only of a vegetable species. From creepers, such as grecianines and other little insects, ladies' heads will now be free, and this is more than could be said of them while chignons were in vogue. So long as these excessivites are worn, if I were a young man I should think twice before I asked a girl to give me a lock of her hair, lest I might discover it was here by purchase only, when a microscope might show me certain little specimens of animated nature, imported possibly from Russia, and these would not increase my admiration or my love,

SIMPLE CYMON.

BALLET OF THE PERIOD.

SCENE—*A Theatre.* TIME—*Rehearsal.*

Manager. Here, where's the fairy for the car? Who is it?
Prompter. Miss MONTMORENCY, Sir, is the fairy. (*To Calliope.*) Call MISS MONTMORENCY. (*Pause.* Boy returns, and whispers Prompter.)

Manager. Now then, where's Miss—
Prompter. She left about half an hour ago. She said she had waited long enough, and her brougham was there to fetch her.

Manager (*groans faintly, then inquires*). Well then, DELAMERE—where's DELA—

Prompter (*apologetically*). Miss DELAMERE told me, Sir, to tell you—when—that her Mother was very ill, and she was obliged to go away in a hurry.

Manager. And in a brougham, too. (*Groans, but remembers the value of Stalls and Private Boxes.*) Well, go on: this sort of thing won't do.

No it won't, and here's poor honest hard-working and pretty Miss SMITH at fifteen or twenty shillings a week, with shoes and tights to find, has had to stop here all the morning, dinnerless, and she can't leave on any account, or if she did, she'd be fined. But you can't fine Stalls and Private Boxes, you know. An old story, perhaps, but one that doesn't come in badly now *ye Gentlemen of England* who sit in your stalls at EASE, and look at SHES.

KINGS AND OTHER THINGS OF SPAIN.

SO FRANCISCO is to be King of Spain. What? The late titular king, F. DE ASSIS? No, M'm, he sporteth on the Boulevards, and may sport. Don't you know that his name is FRANCISCO—if women would only be accurate? It is Field Marshal DON FRANCISCO SERRANO Y DOMINGUEZ, Duke de la Torre, born at Cadiz, 1810. What, King? Well, as soon as the Cortes shall have verified themselves, he is to be head of all things, and to form a new Cabinet. That is uncommonly like Kingship, M'm. The Directory seems to be laid on the shelf—a new nation cannot produce a good one, like KELLY's, or THOM'S. KING SERRANO would sound very well. SERRANO, in Spanish, means Montagnard in French, and Highlander in English. So we may say of him, with the Princess in *Lose's Labour's Lost*—

"Who e'er he be, he shows a mountain mind."

It is possible, of course, that this mountain may bring forth a mouse in the shape of an insignificant king, of royal blood; but if we were SERRANO, and PRIM don't mind, and the army were affable, we should put it to the Spanish nation whether a native nobleman were not better than a foreign prince. And probably Echo would (as a great writer said) answer in the affirmative.

Goody Four Shoes.

By the more humane farriery which "The British Goodenough Horseshoe Company" wish to introduce, it appears that the horse is likely to be the gainer. On this account alone, therefore, the object of the company is good enough for us to wish it success.

Figure 4.10. "He is a Man," *Punch*, February 27, 1869



Figure 4.11. "Extravagance," *Punch*, April 3, 1858



Figure 4.12. "The Real Black Reviver," *Punch*, August 7, 1841



Figure 4.13. Josiah Wedgwood's seal



Figure 4.14. Untitled shoe-black cartoon, *Punch*, September 16, 1843



Figure 4.15. "Monkeyana," *Punch*, May 18, 1861

CONCLUSION

GREAT AUDIENCES: LITERARY PROMOTION AFTER *LEAVES OF GRASS*

In one of his notebooks most likely pre-dating the 1856 *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman rewrites, yet again, Ralph Waldo Emerson's once private encomium: "I greet you at the beginning of a great career." When Emerson sent his letter from Concord, it would have been difficult to imagine just how far his words would travel. Whitman carried the note around with him in New York folded neatly in his pocket, taking it out occasionally to read again, and again. He made a careful copy of the original in his own hand for safe keeping. And, of course, he began circulating the letter in public—first, convincing Charles Dana to publish it in the *New York Tribune*, then including it in copies of the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*, and, eventually, quoting it on the spine of the 1856 edition. Whitman, in an effort simultaneously to drum-up sales and to validate his literary work, took ownership of Emerson's words and paraded them in the marketplace right up until the last edition of *Leaves of Grass*.

Perhaps Whitman's zealous control of Emerson's letter helps explain a telling error he made when attributing the quotation in his notebook. Looking to sign "R. W. Emerson," Whitman conflates the Concord sage's name with his own, writing instead "W. W. Emerson." Whitman corrected the mistake, but, if you examine the notebook entry, you can still make-out the *W* lurking behind the *R*. As much as he tried to cover them, Whitman's initials were still legible. Something similar could be said of nearly all the promotional devices that helped create and sustain the Whitman brand, of which Emerson's letter no doubt ranks high on the list: if you looked hard enough, there were

clear and distinctive traces of Whitman's hand throughout his efforts to build a great audience.

By the 1890s, however, it was becoming rare for an author working under a major publisher to have anywhere near that level of control over the promotion of his or her work. Promotional gestures generated by the author were becoming a thing of the past, taken out of the hands of the writer and placed under the control of advertising agents and in-house publicity experts. It was an "age of specialisation," as one critic put it, where publishers widely recognized that, with some "brilliant exceptions," the "literary man is seldom a good business man."¹ The deathbed edition of *Leaves of Grass* appears at the end of an era when authors could still significantly impact the commercial face of their work in this regard. The evolution was decades in the making, but the advertising of literary wares was slowly becoming more centralized and sophisticated. Many authors benefitted from no longer having to front the costs of printing their work, but, at the same time, their once prominent influence on advertising and book design was diminishing. Even with the 1881 Osgood edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman could feel the approaching sea change in the world of literary promotion. "Before putting in any thing in adv't'mt or circular advertising L. of G.," Whitman directs Osgood, "let me be consulted—Show me first."² The resulting pamphlet, discussed in the conclusion to Chapter 1, was a subdued version of Whitman's previous paratextual experiments, a muted promotional yawn with only a slight hint of the poet's former flair. When Whitman died in 1892, cries for the book trade to abandon its conservative advertising practices were getting louder. By 1910 those shouts were deafening; Whitman's early

¹ "Advertising Books," *The Publishers' Circular*, May 6, 1905, 487.

² Whitman, *Correspondence*, 3:242.

trailblazing advertising schemes had pointed in this direction for years, but now the rise of modern literary promotion was inevitable.

During the last years of Whitman's life and for a decade or so after, the battle lines between publishers eager to embrace more aggressive advertising strategies and those desperately clinging to a genteel model of literary production were regularly being drawn in trade journals and popular periodicals. "There is much to be learned yet in the manner of advertising books, no doubt," a writer for *The Critic* admitted, citing the "concise and temperate" synopses and "dignified type" of Houghton, Mifflin & Co.'s advertisements as leaders in the industry.³ "Publishers as a rule are conservatives," *The Critic* continues:

They do not think that books should be advertised in such sensational ways, for example, as are patent soaps, and they are right. How, say, would Prof. Drummond feel should he take up a paper and read in its boldest type: 'GOOD MORNING! HAVE YOU READ "PAX VOBISCUM"? Or what would be the sensations of Mr. Howells on seeing a placard bearing the legend: "'A HAZARD OF NEW FORTUNES'! YOU BUY THE BOOK—HOWELLS DOES THE REST!'"⁴

For staunch conservatives and more cautious publishers, comparisons to the overblown rhetoric of patent medicine advertisements were common throughout critiques of the shifting conventions of literary promotion. George Haven and John Bishop Putnam summed up such opposition when they remarked, "it is very seldom indeed that a book can be crammed down the throat of the public like *Winslow's Soothing Syrup*."⁵

³ "The Lounger," *The Critic*, June 13, 1891, 314.

⁴ "The Lounger," *The Critic*, June 13, 1891, 314.

⁵ George Haven Putnam and John Bishop Putnam, *Authors and Publishers: A Manual of Suggestions for Beginners in Literature* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1883), 53.

The modernization of book advertising was especially difficult for the publisher Henry Holt to swallow. Holt's lengthy response in the *Atlantic Monthly* to Walter Hines Page's *A Publisher's Confession* lamented the "commercialization of literature," and ignited an impassioned national debate over the merits of literary promotion as excerpts from the essay were reprinted in countless periodicals.⁶ "Books are not bricks," Holt insists; "the more they tend to become like bricks,—the more authors seek publishers solely with reference to what they will pay in the day's market, the more publishers bid against one another as stock brokers do, and the more they market their wares as the soulless articles of ordinary commerce are marketed, the more books tend to become soulless things."⁷ Whitman's butterfly manicule may have offered itself as the ideal balance of the market and the soul, but Holt was far more pessimistic about the destructive potential and "vulgarity" of aggressive literary promotion. For Holt, nothing was "more alien" to the "coarser features" of advertising than literature; the very fact that a book was "much advertised" was enough to make "many discriminating people discriminate against" it, especially when "the broadside page, the loudest type, the showiest pictures, the street-car sign, even the circus form of poster, [had] all been dragged into the advertising of books."⁸

Despite the vocal protests of figures like Holt, significant changes in the way books were promoted could be seen on the horizon, even if publishers and advertisers were unsure what form those changes would take. Book promotion was "passing through a critical state"—the "old style of advertising" that "merely announced the name of the

⁶ Henry Holt, "The Commercialization of Literature," *The Atlantic Monthly* (November 1905), 578.

⁷ Holt, "The Commercialization," 578.

⁸ Holt, "The Commercialization," 596.

book, the writer and the price, together with one or two stereotyped book reviews" was "not sufficient."⁹ Not the least of publishers' concerns was the fact that the true profit potential of American literary consumers had yet to be reached. "The sooner publishers realize that the small, exclusive literary 'push' are not their public," one trade journal writes, "the sooner they will find a wider market for really good books."¹⁰ Whitman's friend, the journalist Talcott Williams, echoed this sentiment. "Book advertising was once a decorous semi-annual display in certain papers assumed to reach the 'reading public,'" Williams notes; "To-day the reading public is everybody, as much as it is for a patent medicine. At least eight patent medicine firms yearly spend about \$500,000 each in advertising. Book publicity has not reached this level, but it is moving along this line."¹¹ For William Dean Howells, who insisted publishing needed to be "commercialized at a vital point," things weren't progressing quickly enough—the industry was still "ridiculously naïve."¹²

Proponents of fresh advertising techniques that appealed to a greater audience grew increasingly frustrated as the century progressed, but suggestions for reform within the publishing industry remained abstract. Part of the problem, as Walter Hines Page argued, was that no one really knew what methods were effective. "The most that can be said is that some publishers are making very interesting experiments," Page asserts, "but nobody has yet worked out a single general principle that is of great value."¹³ *Publishers'*

⁹ "In the Magazines," *Current Advertising* (August 1900), 4.

¹⁰ "In the Magazines," *Current Advertising* (August 1900), 4.

¹¹ Talcott Williams, "Fiction Read and Written in 1901," *The American Monthly Review of Reviews* (November 1901), 587.

¹² "Book Advertising," *Ad Sense* (March 1905), 226.

Weekly agreed, stating that “while perhaps no other element in the publishing business plays so important a part in the yearly balance-sheet,” advertising surprisingly lacked any “fixed or exact laws.”¹⁴ In “frank moments,” Page confessed, publishers would admit their ignorance: “An advertisement for a shoe published to-day will help to sell that shoe next year. The shoemaker gets a cumulative effect. But your novel advertised to-day will be dead next year. You get no cumulative effect. When I say, therefore, that no publisher has mastered the art of advertising books, I tell the literal truth. They all run against a dead wall; and they will all tell you so.”¹⁵ The separate conservative strategies that the publishing industry had developed for promoting its wares—the norms Whitman positioned himself against before the Civil War—paled in comparison to the practices of other industries and the profits they reaped through advertising. This “inefficiency,” as one commentator suggests, did not stem from “the choice of mediums so much as in the methods employed in preparing advertising.”¹⁶ Publishers needed to reconceive how advertisements appealed to consumers:

The great bulk of book advertising appeals only to such resolute buyers as are determined to seek out books to minister to their developed and acknowledged literary appetites. It is not calculated either to create a literary taste or to arouse a dormant literary appetite. And, after all, the object of book advertising is to promote the sale of books, not merely to notify book-lovers where they can obtain satisfaction.¹⁷

¹³ Walter Hines Page, *A Publisher's Confession* (New York: Doubleday, Page, & Co., 1905), 115.

¹⁴ “Book Advertising,” *The Publishers’ Weekly*, September 22, 1906, 624.

¹⁵ Page, *Publisher’s Confession*, 119.

¹⁶ George French, “The Principles of Book Advertising,” *The Publishers’ Circular*, April 14, 1906, 458.

¹⁷ French, “Principles,” 458.

If there were any publishers who thought they *had* conceived and executed a successful and innovative technique, *The American Printer* wanted proof. The journal issued the following ultimatum:

If there is any publisher in this country who has an announcement of a book or magazine which he is proud of, and which he thinks is worthy of being reproduced in a department like this, I wish he would send it to me, because I must admit that I have not been able to find anything of that kind myself. A copy of this number of *The American Printer* with this paragraph marked is being mailed to the advertising department of every important publishing house in the country. If I do not receive before the end of the month a really attractive and effective piece of book advertising you may infer that such a thing is not to be had.¹⁸

Would either *Leaves of Grass Imprints* or a pre-planned, autographed edition of *Leaves of Grass* qualify as “a really attractive and effective piece of book advertising”? Perhaps not; but Whitman’s attempts to promote his poetry and personality undoubtedly anticipate what would become common demands for innovative advertising during the early twentieth century.

Effective book promotion acknowledged the fact that publishing was a business, yet a business capable of balancing a dedication to literary excellence and innovative marketing. Perception of literary worth and commercial success as conflicting values threatened to keep book advertising in the past. As Walter Barrett Brown remarked in 1905, the “prosaic announcements of thirty years ago may have satisfied the readers of thirty years ago . . . [but] those who are complaining of present methods, those who hesitate to depart from their cherished traditions . . . [forget] that the world has moved onward.”¹⁹ Industry progressives like Brown maintained that “the old conservative publishing houses that long tried to subsist on tradition” would go bankrupt if they didn’t

¹⁸ “Announcements,” *The American Printer* (March 1901), 61.

¹⁹ Walter Barrett Brown, “Book-Advertising, From the Inside,” *Gunton’s Magazine* (May 1904), 439.

“adopt new methods.”²⁰ “Is there any more reason why advertising as applied to books, should remain where it was half a century ago,” Brown asked, “than that the horse car should not have been displaced by the trolley car?”²¹

Once publishers were willing to shed the romantic delusion that the book trade was not a for-profit industry, literary advertising could begin to play catch-up. “A number of hypersensitive folk who profess to be the bearers of the sacred torch of literary tradition are certain that far, far too many books are being published nowadays; that authorship has become commercialized; that books are advertised like soap, etc., etc.,” J. George Frederick explains in *Printer’s Ink*, “[but] to be perfectly candid, the book publishing business never has, nor never can, primarily be anything else but a commercial proposition.”²² Traditionalists resisted this assertion, but more publishing insiders began to support the premise, arguing that “a book is a commodity as much as flour or furniture, and while a sensational method hardly adapts itself to book advertising, there is no reason why this class of publicity should always follow conventional lines.”²³

Frederick’s 1910 article in *Printer’s Ink* is a fair indication of the new philosophy many publishers would adopt moving forward. “The ills and drawbacks of book publishing, from both author’s and publisher’s standpoint,” Frederick argues, “have all

²⁰ “Advertising Books,” *The Publishers’ Circular*, May 6, 1905, 487.

²¹ Brown, “Book-Advertising,” 435.

²² J. George Frederick, “How Books Might Be Advertised,” *Printer’s Ink*, June 30, 1910, 10.

²³ *Fowlers Publicity Encyclopedia*, edited by Edward T. Page (New York: Publicity Publishing Company, 1904) n.p.

arisen from a *deviation from* strict and intelligently aggressive commercial methods.”²⁴

Once again, it is publishing’s crippling sense of exceptionalism that is critiqued:

Book publishers (like so many other classes of business men) vow that their business is absolutely unlike any other known. Each book makes us start all over again, they say; whereas, if only we were selling *soap*, we could advertise a trade-mark name and pyramid a great heap of profitable sales and prestige in time. Alas and alack! however, we sell ephemeral books, and authors are the most touchy, unreasonable creatures on this muddled sphere.²⁵

Authors, as Howells had gone on record to complain, likewise wanted it both ways. They “never think that their publishers have pushed their books quite far enough,” they “affect a polite goose-flesh at the shameless advertisement of their productions,” and they “wish the odium of it to fall altogether upon their publishers,” Howells writes, “but they wish the disgrace to keep on, and to increase in space and frequency.”²⁶ This kind of finger pointing between authors and publishers was enough to “make any modern merchandising and advertising man feel sick.”²⁷ By the 1920s, however, the charade was finally over. Promotional budgets, especially for novels, grew significantly and print advertisements in newspapers and periodicals evinced a more lively approach to typography, illustration, and photography—commonly including images of the author used “to sculpture or mold a writer’s public persona.”²⁸ As Catherine Turner has demonstrated, even publishers of modernist texts like Random House and Alfred A.

²⁴ Frederick, “How Books Might,” 10.

²⁵ Frederick, “How Books Might,” 10.

²⁶ “Book Advertising,” *Ad Sense* (March 1905), 226.

²⁷ Frederick, “How Books Might,” 10.

²⁸ Dwight Garner, *Read Me: A Century of American Book Advertisements* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 13.

Knopf engaged the popular marketplace through innovative advertisements by the end of the First World War.²⁹

In 1912 the Whitman brand found itself at the center of a debate concerning modernist poetry's relationship to literary advertising and the popular marketplace. Whitman's own promotions demonstrate how the poet juggled a revolutionary poetics and the rigorous readership it recruited with expansive and experimental forms of popular literary advertising. The avant-garde poetry movements of the early twentieth century were faced with a similar challenge, with the added difficulty of reconciling modernist verse's relationship to a full-fledged advertising industry. When Harriet Monroe founded the Chicago-based little magazine *Poetry* in 1912, she aligned the journal, its readers, and the future of American poetics with Whitman's legacy. John Timberman Newcomb describes *Poetry* as "a crucial pioneer in the rhetorical self-fashioning of a twentieth-century American avant-garde" that "sought to create a publishing format for verse that combined the aesthetic refinement and emotional complexity of 'high art,' the modernized marketing practices of mass culture, and the targeted audience and professionalized demeanor of the disciplinary journal."³⁰ Beginning with *Poetry*'s first issue, Whitman was evoked and incorporated into the little magazine's design, establishing continuity between his vision for American poetry and Monroe's pioneering journal.

²⁹ See Catherine Turner, *Marketing Modernism Between the Two World Wars*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003.

³⁰ John Timberman Newcomb, *How Did Poetry Survive?: The Making of Modern American Verse* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 26.

Whitman's name first appears within *Poetry* towards the back of the inaugural issue on a page soliciting subscriptions. Twice Whitman is used as part of the journal's closing sales pitch:

To have great poets there must be great audiences, too.—Whitman.

HELP us to give the art of poetry an organ in America. Help us to give the poets a chance to be heard in their own place, to offer us their best and most serious work instead of page-end poems squeezed in between miscellaneous articles and stories.

If you love good poetry, subscribe.

If you believe that this art, like painting, sculpture, music and architecture, requires and deserves public recognition and support, subscribe.

If you believe with Whitman that “the topmost proof of a race is its own born poetry,” subscribe.³¹

Eventually Monroe repositioned the italicized quotation—taken from a section of Whitman's prose titled “New Poetry”—and gave it a more prominent place as the only writing on the back cover of the magazine. It wasn't until 1916 that a list of editors and advisors was included on the back cover as well, creating the effect that Whitman—the first name listed—served as a kind of supreme editorial force behind *Poetry*.

In the context of “New Poetry,” Whitman's call for “great audiences” is part of his larger argument that “the truest and greatest *Poetry* . . . can never again, in the English language, be express'd in arbitrary and rhyming metre.”³² As Newcomb observes, “*Poetry*'s motto became an object of derision, especially from [Ezra] Pound, who claimed that its primary message was one of capitulation to popular taste (audiences ‘great’ in number) rather than, as Monroe conceived it, an admonition of the poet's and

³¹ *Poetry* (October 1912), 33.

³² Walt Whitman, *Complete Prose Works* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1892), 323.

reader's responsibilities to one another.”³³ Monroe and Pound debated the relevance of the Whitman quotation in a two-part editorial “The Audience.” “I have protested in private, and I now protest more openly,” Pound writes, “against the motto upon the cover of Poetry. The artist is *not* dependent upon his audience. This sentence is Whitman tired.”³⁴ Pound’s reading of *Poetry*’s motto emphasizes the gulf between the inspired poet and the “rabble” he leads through his work:

It is true that the great artist has in the end, always, his audience, for the Lord of the universe sends into this world in each generation a few intelligent spirits, and these ultimately manage the rest. But this rest—this rabble, this multitude—does *not* create the great artist. They are aimless and drifting without him. They dare not inspect their own souls.³⁵

Monroe’s response offers a stark contrast to Pound’s poet as manager of the masses, arguing instead that a “great audience” authorizes and amplifies the poet’s work:

No small group today can suffice for the poet’s immediate audience, as such groups did in the stay-at-home aristocratic ages; and the greatest danger which besets modern art is that of slighting the “great audience” whose response alone can give it authority and volume, and of magnifying the importance of a coterie.³⁶

As the motto’s original position on a subscription form asking for “help” underscores, Monroe’s use of Whitman tapped into the poet’s conception of an ideal author/audience relationship, his desire to reach gymnastic readers among the masses, those willing to wrestle with his poetry and “complete” it—an act that simultaneously proved the greatness of the poet *and* the audience.

³³ Newcomb, *How Did Poetry Survive?*, 50.

³⁴ Ezra Pound and Harriet Monroe, “The Audience,” *Poetry* (October 1914), 29.

³⁵ Pound and Monroe, “The Audience,” 30.

³⁶ Pound and Monroe, “The Audience,” 31.

Confronted with finding and expanding a market for *Poetry*, Monroe turned to Whitman to distinguish her journal and its embrace of “great audiences.” That Whitman’s words became a branding device on the back cover of a little magazine is an indication of his avant-garde successors’ willingness—or, at least, Monroe’s willingness—to engage the public through bold literary advertising. After all, Whitman’s poetic theory and his promotional practices were deeply entwined. For Whitman, as Monroe argues in her justification of *Poetry*’s motto, “art [was] not an isolated phenomenon of genius, but the expression of a reciprocal relation between the artist and his public,” a relationship that often began with advertising.³⁷ As the sum of Whitman’s writings and the set of signs, symbols, images, and advertising devices circulating within and around it, the Whitman brand fused a democratic poetics with the persuasive force of modern literary promotion, encouraging a “reciprocal relation” between *Leaves of Grass* and its readers. By marking Whitman’s personality and poetry as distinct textual products, the Whitman brand offered itself for American literary consumers to affectionately absorb. Behind Whitman’s experimental merger of poetry and publicity was a simple realization, something he had known since Emerson first greeted him: to have great poets there must be great audiences, too.

³⁷ Pound and Monroe, “The Audience,” 32.

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