Love, War, and Revision
in Whitman's Blue Book

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ABSTRACT The Blue Book—a copy of the 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass* in blue paper covers that Whitman heavily annotated and used as the basis for a never-published future edition—was a locus for Whitman's substantive and stylistic changes. The Blue Book is one of the most dramatic manifestations of Whitman editing himself—recasting, rejecting, rearranging, repurposing *Leaves of Grass* on the basis of one of its earlier incarnations. The book vividly displays Whitman's compositional practices and evolving thinking, particularly as it changed during (and in response to) the Civil War. **KEYWORDS:** Whitman's annotation of *Leaves of Grass*; poetry and the Civil War; *pensive* in Whitman; Whitman's writing process; stylistic influence of Whitman's clerical and hospital work

❧ **HERE ARE A FEW** memorable Whitman lines:

Washes and razors for foofoos. . . . for me freckles and a bristling beard.

I was chilled with the cold types and cylinder and wet paper between us.

I pass so poorly with paper and types. . . . I must pass with the contact of
    bodies and souls.

Now Lucifer was not dead. . . . or if he was I am his sorrowful terrible heir;
    I have been wronged. . . . I am oppressed. . . . I hate him that oppresses
    me, I will either destroy him, or he shall release me.[1]

Interesting, powerful, and unconnected with each other, these lines share the same fate: all were excised from *Leaves of Grass*. It would be possible to create an impressive

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1. Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Brooklyn, 1855), 28, 57, and 74. Available at the *Walt Whitman Archive*, http://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1855/whole.html. Subsequent citations to *Leaves of Grass* will be abbreviated *LG* and followed by the date of the edition.

volume of poetry made solely of material Whitman excluded from *Leaves*—lines, passages, and entire poems that were printed and later rejected, and also material drafted but never incorporated in any edition the poet ever published. Such deletions and exclusions are notable in an enterprise marked in other respects for its remarkable inclusiveness: Whitman claimed to put a nineteenth-century personality fully on record.[2] Given such an encompassing ambition, what could possibly fail to count as part of the record or as an expression of his personality?—and when and under what circumstances? If we move beyond the categories of deletions and exclusions, we see a remarkable array of other modifications, sometimes significant enough to qualify as transformations: Whitman changed poetry into prose and prose into poetry; in one case, paragraphs from a letter reappeared in advertising copy; clusters of poems pop up only to be reconfigured, moved, or removed altogether. Even Whitman's anonymous self-reviews were reworked for later printings and, in one case, a paragraph from a review was refashioned to become lines in *Leaves* itself.

Although much is known about Whitman's revisions, the mystery of what motivated his alterations abides. Were they the result of changing personal circumstances, increasing prudishness, an evolving aesthetic sense? These and other explanations have been advanced, though critics still struggle to assess adequately the various, complex, and extensive changes found across the entirety of Whitman's career. One especially interesting document, the Blue Book—a copy of the 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass* in blue paper covers that Whitman heavily annotated and used as the basis for a never-published future edition—was a locus for Whitman's substantive and stylistic changes. The Blue Book illuminates Whitman's poetic practice, particularly as it changed during (and in response to) the Civil War.

Not published in Whitman's lifetime, the Blue Book nonetheless became notorious in 1865 when it was discovered at Whitman's desk by James Harlan, secretary of the interior, which led to Whitman's dismissal from his job in the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Harlan seems to have judged Whitman to be unfit for his position on moral grounds.[3] What Harlan saw as unsavory is now regarded as the single most valuable and informative copy of the 1860 *Leaves of Grass* in existence. On the sesquicentennial anniversary of the third edition, it is worthwhile to study this artifact anew. It is also a good time to reconsider the Blue Book as fundamentally shaped by Whitman's Washington years, a response not only to the political events of the war but also to his hands-on work as a clerk and as a devoted visitor to wounded soldiers in the hospitals.

2. He says in "A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads": "This was a feeling or ambition to articulate and faithfully express in literary or poetic form, and uncompromisingly, my own physical, emotional, moral, intellectual, and aesthetic Personality, in the midst of, and tallying, the momentous spirit and facts of its immediate days, and of current America—and to exploit that Personality, identified with place and date, in a far more candid and comprehensive sense than any hitherto poem or book" (*LG* 1891, 426–27).

3. This is the usual interpretation of these events, though Harlan later defended himself by saying he was merely downsizing the office. For a view of the events more favorable to Harlan, see Johnson Brigham, *James Harlan* (Iowa City, 1913), 208–10.

We cannot be certain when Whitman began work on the Blue Book.[4] What is known is that the Blue Book was one of several advance copies prepared for reviewers—and probably also for Whitman's final proofreading—in May 1860, just before the third edition was published. (At least two other pre-publication copies of this edition still exist, bound in brown paper, and one of these was clearly meant to be a review copy.[5]) Since the Blue Book has a frontispiece, one of the last parts of the book to be prepared, this advance copy probably did not reach Whitman until the month of publication, May 1860.[6] Arguably, then, Whitman could have begun his annotations on the Blue Book even before the publication of the 1860 edition, though it seems more likely that he began annotating the book in the latter part of 1860 or early 1861.

We do know that Whitman, still at a high creative pitch in July 1860, proposed to Thayer and Eldridge a new, cheaper edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Soon, however, Whitman's writing and publishing plans evolved into the idea for *The Banner at Day-Break*, which was advertised in October 1860. However, because Thayer and Eldridge failed in December, that book never came to fruition. Reorienting his creative efforts after the demise of his publisher, Whitman made considerable progress toward a new edition of *Leaves of Grass*. He drafted an introduction the following year that begins: "I commenced Leaves of Grass my thirty-sixth year, by publishing their first issue.— Twice I have issued them since, with increased matter—the present one making the fourth issue, with the latest increase. I am to-day, (May 31, 1861,) just forty-two years old—for I write this introduction on my birthday—after having looked over what I have accomplished."[7]

Certainly by December 1862, before Whitman left Brooklyn to go to the Virginia front in search of his wounded brother George, he had made significant annotations on *Leaves of Grass* as he worked toward the publication of the next edition. In March 1863, having recognized that he might remain in Washington to care for wounded soldiers, he wrote to his mother expressing concern "*especially* [about] the copy of Leaves of Grass covered in blue paper, and the little MS book 'Drum Taps.' . . . I want them all carefully kept." Interestingly, he pairs these concurrent literary efforts. By this time, then, Whitman had inscribed enough changes in the Blue Book for him to value it highly. Many more changes would be added through the remaining years of the war—and some even after the war, as dated passages indicate.[8]

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4. Interestingly, in the volume of textual commentary accompanying the facsimile edition of the Blue Book published in 1968, Arthur Golden says nothing about when he thought Whitman began work on the Blue Book; *Walt Whitman's Blue Book*, ed. Arthur Golden, 2 vols. (New York, 1968), vol. 2.

5. Scrawled on one copy at the University of Virginia are the words "Sunday Currier."

6. I base this statement on an email from Ted Genoways to Ken Price, July 17, 2010.

7. "I commenced Leaves of Grass" in Walt Whitman, *The Collected Writings of Walt Whitman: Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts*, ed. Edward F. Grier, 6 vols. (New York, 1984), 4:1484.

8. The only explicitly dated revisions in the Blue Book are between December 1864 and July 1865. However, it seems to me highly likely—in part because of Whitman's letter to his mother of March 1863—that many of the annotations are from a much earlier date.

For Whitman, to write a text was to want to rewrite it; to compose a poem was merely to begin an ongoing process. His changes are recurrent, seemingly compulsive. Some critics are distinctly negative about Whitman's approach, arguing that it conflicts with his stated Romantic ethos. For example, Mark Bauerlein argues: "In his attempt to improve and update [*Leaves of Grass*], Whitman violates the supposedly universal, irrefutable, and immutable language of his heart, and commits the pure emotive idiom to calculated editorial emendation. By performing this self-revision, Whitman positions his creations squarely within the semiotic sequence of translations, quotations, displacements, and reinterpretations that he intended his language to halt."[9] Bauerlein seems to have a Benjaminian belief in "aura" and to be unwilling to have artists—or at least Romantic artists—modify their writings as their views and circumstances evolve. The chain of ideas underlying Bauerlein's criticism—authoring is vital; revising is not authoring but editing; editing is sterile—flies in the face of what is known about Whitman's habitual compositional practices, and such ideas have contributed to the marginal place of the Blue Book in Whitman studies.

The Blue Book is one of the most dramatic manifestations of Whitman editing himself—recasting, rejecting, rearranging, repurposing *Leaves of Grass* on the basis of one of its earlier incarnations, the 1860 edition. When Whitman gave the book to Horace Traubel on May 23, 1890, he remarked: "This will help you to see how the book grew. . . . The book is a milepost. . . . This gives you a glimpse into the workshop."[10] The book vividly displays Whitman's compositional practices and evolving thinking. Recognizing its value, Traubel tried to make available a facsimile copy of Whitman's extensively annotated text as long ago as 1902. Those initial efforts foundered, but his goal was finally achieved in 1968 when textual editor Arthur Golden, working with financial support from Oscar Lion and the cooperation of the New York Public Library, reproduced the volume in facsimile, accompanied with a volume of commentary.[11] For more than forty years, however, Golden's two-volume study has been insufficiently integrated into the ongoing critical discussion, in part because it was always expensive and is now out of print. As of earlier this year, the *Walt Whitman Archive*, with cooperation from the New York Public Library, has provided free access to high-quality facsimile page images of the Blue Book to anyone worldwide with an Internet connection. Within the next eighteen months, the *Archive* will also provide a searchable transcription of the Blue Book. The *Archive* regards revisions as essential to Whitman's creativity and does not view them as mistakes or insignificant alterations reducible to a record of variants.[12] The wider availability of this document should lead to renewed interest

9. Mark Bauerlein, *Walt Whitman and the American Idiom* (Baton Rouge, La., 1991), 15.

10. This comment, in Horace Traubel's handwriting, is part of the front matter of the Blue Book. Images of the pages in question are available at the *Whitman Archive*: http://www.whitmanarchive .org /manuscripts/figures/nyp.00015.005.jpg and http://www.whitmanarchive.org/manuscripts /figures/nyp.00015.006.jpg.

11. Oscar Lion contributed $30,000 to help offset the publication costs.

12. Because Whitman left such a vast mass of material, the *Walt Whitman Archive* has so far barely considered the crucial matter of how best to display and analyze change in the texts over time. Once we

in Whitman's revisions and enable a reconsideration of the manifold ways the war shaped his writing.

The Blue Book deserves more intensive study because it is an intrinsically fascinating artifact and because it illuminates Whitman's artistic response to the war. Differing significantly from the 1867 edition of *Leaves of Grass* because many of its revisions were never implemented, the Blue Book is a unique document, a shadow edition. It is neither the 1860 nor the 1867 *Leaves* but something else, related to yet independent of both, and very much a product of its own time and circumstances. Despite having a distinct identity, it is oddly misunderstood or even invisible in the critical literature where one might most expect to find it clearly treated.

One of the key commentators on the Blue Book, Jimmie Killingsworth, discusses Golden's two-volume work within *Whitman's Poetry of the Body*, but the Blue Book itself is nowhere to be found in Killingsworth's index. It is not clear whether this absence results from a moment of sloppiness on the part of the indexer or from a view that, as an unpublished work, the Blue Book is not fully real. Similarly, Luke Mancuso contributes a chapter on Whitman and the Civil War to *A Companion to Walt Whitman* without mentioning this vital undertaking of Whitman's war years. Just as we think of *Drum-Taps* as a volume of war poetry, we should consider the Blue Book as a volume of war-inflected poetry. The former treats war directly; the latter is everywhere shaped by the war. These and other oddities in the critical tradition result from a preference for product over process, for finished writing over the doing of writing—though "finished" of course is a chancy word for Whitman, at least until death stopped his quest for better expression. Yet new advances in electronic technology and a shifting emphasis in textual studies—especially increased interest in textual fluidity and the stages of composition (genetic editing)—should encourage us to reorient our angle of vision.

Other comments on the Blue Book are also perplexing. Although Arthur Golden is explicit that the Blue Book does *not* serve as the copy-text for the 1867 edition of *Leaves*, Mike Feehan nonetheless claims (in a chapter citing Golden) that "Whitman prepared the fourth *Leaves* by working through a copy of the third version, penciling revisions in the margins and between the lines, pasting in slips of paper containing new lines or even whole new poems."[13] Golden himself, despite being the most serious student of this volume thus far, curiously decides to treat the Blue Book as if it were only an aborted edition of *Leaves of Grass*, without giving adequate credit to its own separate integrity, as something that began as a printed text but evolved into a highly complex poetry manuscript. Golden's volume of textual commentary begins where the poetry of the underlying 1860 text starts—that is, on page 5—entirely omitting the fascinating front matter in which Whitman compares his text to the *Aeneid*, *Paradise Lost*, the Bible, and other classic works. Despite Golden's meticulous attention to detail

take up that challenge, a key goal will be to find an intuitive way for users to interact with the enormously complex sea of documents that constitute Whitman's textual fluidity.

13. Mike Feehan, "Multiple Editorial Horizons of *Leaves of Grass*," in *Texts and Textuality: Textual Instability, Theory, and Interpretation*, ed. Philip Cohen (New York, 1997), 161–82 at 165.

elsewhere, he does not explain this decision, so readers are left to assume that he re-garded the opening pages, including Traubel's own handwritten comment, as para-textual rather than textual in nature. This editorial practice is oriented toward Whitman's presumed "intent" rather than focused on what is actually inscribed on the document. More precisely, Golden's publication reflects two different types of editorial practice—the facsimile honors the totality of the document, within certain practical limits;[14] and the textual commentary restricts itself to what is judged to be the textual content. Some features of the text—the typography, for example—that are demonstra-bly part of Whitman's intention are captured extremely well by the facsimile yet utterly ignored in the textual commentary. But why not consider the front matter, an inte-gral part of the Blue Book yet not of earlier or later versions of *Leaves of Grass*, part of the "text"?

We need more comprehensive studies of textuality that appreciate all features of a text, including pencil and pen markings in more than one hand, typography, orna-mentation, word choice—in short, the entire range of features that contribute to tex-tual meaning. In this case, we need to read the Blue Book as it stands as an artifact, and that of course includes the spermatoid typeface and design features inherited from the underlying 1860 edition. As Ed Folsom notes regarding the 1860 *Leaves*, "the letters of the . . . title page work figuratively to evoke sperm," and this highly suggestive typogra-phy is reinforced by the ornamentation of the book, particularly in the "Calamus" clus-ter of poems.[15] Readers attentive to both the linguistic and the bibliographic codes of the Blue Book will experience an artifact that is arguably at odds with itself: the typog-raphy highlights sexuality, even as the later manuscript annotations—including Whit-man's decision to mark eleven of the Calamus poems for deletion—serve to curtail that sexuality. An interesting fact about the Blue Book is the absence of any response by Whitman to the spermatoid design features of his own book (he annotated seemingly everything else, marking all but thirty-four of 456 pages), perhaps suggesting that de-sign decisions for him were separate from content decisions. He makes no comment about typography in the Blue Book, so it is unclear if he means to reinforce, maintain, or abandon his sexually suggestive typeface and ornamentation.[16]

Wary of biographical interpretations, Golden says little about Whitman's writ-ing circumstances. But it can be useful to think of the Blue Book as developing prima-rily out of the writing and emotional conditions of two distinct environments: the workaday world of a Washington, D.C., copyist (and later clerk) and the world of the

14. No attempt to reproduce the equivalent of nineteenth-century paper stock, ink, or stitching techniques was attempted, for example.

15. See Ed Folsom, "'A spirt of my own seminal wet': Spermatoid Design in Walt Whitman's 1860 *Leaves of Grass*," in this volume.

16. As indicated, there is no one-to-one relationship between the Blue Book and the 1867 *Leaves of Grass*. Hence conclusions drawn about the Blue Book based on the 1867 *Leaves* are open to question. Nonetheless, the 1867 edition did abandon the spermatoid typography. It is possible that Whitman made a firm decision, shortly after publishing the 1860 edition and reading the largely negative re-views of its sexual content, not to return to this design, a decision so fully internalized he did not need to note it.

hospitals. Elsewhere in this issue, David Haven Blake observes: "It is hard to imagine a less auspicious time to emphasize oneself as a hyperbolic, self-involved poet than in the years after the Civil War."[17] The same of course could be said about the war years themselves. We have not thought much about Whitman's life as a clerk in part because of an unexamined assumption that low-level office work could not have influenced his poetry and because Whitman himself rarely discussed this aspect of his writing life. We know he regarded the prospect of becoming a clerk with ambivalence. He told a soldier friend in April 1863: "When I stopped here, last January, on my return from Falmouth, I thought I would stop only a few days, before returning to New York, and see if I could not get some berth, clerkship or something—but I have not pushed strong enough—have not got anything—and I don't know as I could be satisfied with the life of a clerk in the departments anyhow."[18] But even if Whitman's role as a clerk was not necessarily beneficial to his poetry, it had effects that we are only beginning to consider. I am convinced—after discovering approximately 3,000 scribal documents now being prepared for publication by the *Walt Whitman Archive*—that his government work was a much more significant part of his writing life than we have realized.

Similarly, work in hospitals, even before the carnage produced by the Civil War, was anything but glamorous. In antebellum America, hospitals were where the indigent went to die. It is no wonder, then, that Whitman's role as a visitor and volunteer caregiver in the hospitals was mocked in the papers. On June 7, 1863, the New Orleans *Daily Picayune* picked up and modified the story: "Walt Whitman is now in Washington making gruel for the wounded soldiers. The Saturday Evening Gazette says: 'We dare say his gruel is better than his poetry;' and we may add that if it is 'warmer' than 'Leaves of Grass,' there must be some scalded throats in the Washington hospitals."[19] The attempt here is to degrade Whitman via the association with gruel, an easily digested pap for invalids, while the emphasis on the physical—wounds, throats, scalding heat—further reinforces the association of Whitman and his poetry with the low. Likewise, the *Springfield Republican* quoted a famous letter of Thoreau, in which he compliments Whitman, as a springboard for class-based mockery of the poet: "This about Walt Whitman is funny, when we think of Walt as a Washington clerk: 'He is apparently the greatest democrat the world has seen. Kings and aristocrats go by the board at once, as they have long deserved to.'"[20] Thoreau's image of the democratic poet is transformed into that of a government bureaucrat; Whitman's association with the mundane and routine rather than the lofty world of singularity and originality degrades him. These newspapers and perhaps their readership did not accept Whitman's conception of American greatness as lying in the physical and commonplace, or of the American poet as a voice for that sphere.

17. David Haven Blake, "Whitman's Ecclesiastes: The 1860 'Leaves of Grass' Cluster."

18. Walt Whitman to Thomas P. Sawyer, April 21, 1863. Available at the *Walt Whitman Archive* at: http://whitmanarchive.org/biography/correspondence/cw/tei/nyp.00180.html.

19. *Daily Picayune*, June 7, 1863, 2.

20. *Springfield Weekly Republican*, July 29, 1865, 4.

The papers might have belittled his clerical and hospital work, but Whitman regarded at least the latter as vital. In a letter describing his work in 1863, he wrote:

> I adapt myself to each case . . . some need to be humored, some are rather out of their head—some merely want me to sit down [near] them, & hold them by the hand—one will want a letter written to mother or father, (yesterd[ay] I wrote over a dozen letters)—some like to have me feed them (wounded perhaps in shoulder or wrist) perhaps a few bits of my peaches—some want a cooling drink, (I have some very nice syrups from raspberries &c.)—others want writing paper, envelopes, a stamp, &c.— . . . —I like to go just before supper, carrying a pot or jar of something good & go around with a spoon distributing a little here and there. Yet after all this succoring of the stomach (which is of course most welcome & indispensable) I should say that I believe my profoundest help to these sick & dying men is probably the soothing invigoration I steadily bear in mind, to infuse in them through affection, cheering love, & the like. . . . It has saved more than one life. There is a strange influence here. I have formed attachments here in hospital, that I shall keep to my dying day, & they will the same, without doubt.[21]

A common thread joins Whitman's roles during this time: he served as a scribe, drafting letters home for soldiers, drafting routine reports and correspondence in governmental offices, drafting poetry of the conflict in *Drum-Taps*, and redrafting *Leaves of Grass* to take that conflict into account. He gained life experience as a ventriloquist of sorts—throwing his voice to become soldiers themselves as he wrote as and through them to their friends and loved ones, just as he regularly assumed the identity of others as he conducted his work as a government scribe. These experiences of inhabiting another's view—always part of Whitman's poetry, of course, but now acted out quite literally in life—accelerated his developing tendency to write from the perspective of various personae. These personae, especially notable in the latter part of his career, are more thoroughgoing and more sustained alterations of identity than the rapid but typically brief shape-changing of the speaker in "Walt Whitman" (the poem later known as "Song of Myself"). We see such personae in a variety of late poems, including "Ethiopia Saluting the Colors," "Prayer of Columbus," and "Osceola."

The annotations in the Blue Book, produced primarily in, and shaped by, the Civil War hospitals and the clerk's office, have uncommon interest. Golden notes that though Whitman "continued to make revisions in the Blue Book after the end of the war, the bulk of them were made before it ended and sharply reflect his total response to this calamity."[22] The poet considered the Civil War to be "the very centre, circumfer-

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21. Walt Whitman to Nicholas Wyckoff or Daniel L. Northrup, May 14, 1863. Available at the *Walt Whitman Archive*, http://whitmanarchive.org/biography/correspondence/cw/tei/loc.00885.html.
22. Golden, *Walt Whitman's Blue Book*, 2:xxxvi.

ence, umbilicus, of [his] whole career."[23] The Blue Book bears numerous traces of being a wartime document, and this context illuminates many of Whitman's revisions. John Ciardi notes that in 1856 and 1860 Whitman was primarily expanding *Leaves of Grass*, but in the Blue Book he profoundly revised it.[24] In fact, the Blue Book can be regarded as the hinge on which Whitman turns toward his late style. We can see this in many ways, including such a seemingly small matter as a change in his use of parentheses.[25] In 1855, the poem now known as "Song of Myself" included only a single set of parentheses:

> The prostitute draggles her shawl, her bonnet bobs on her tipsy and
>   pimpled neck,
> The crowd laugh at her blackguard oaths, the men jeer and wink to each
>   other,
> (Miserable! I do not laugh at your oaths nor jeer you,).
>
> <div align="right">(LG 1855, 22)</div>

The 1856 edition replicates the first edition in using a single set of parentheses in this poem, and the 1860 edition increases that number slightly to five. In contrast, in the Blue Book Whitman adds at least thirty-nine new sets of parentheses. If parentheses are ordinarily used to indicate that the enclosed material is of marginal importance, something that could be excluded and is not fundamental to meaning or grammar, for Whitman the parenthetical remark often conveys the essence of what is at stake in a poem, a re-articulation of its issues in another register, tone, or voice. Rather than conveying the least important information, the parentheses often convey the most important meaning. Whitman may have relied heavily on parentheses at this time because he regarded the Civil War itself as a parenthetical moment—a break from normalcy in the national history—and a clarifying realization of American purpose and ideals.

The impact of the war on the Blue Book has been effectively analyzed by Golden, but the impact of Whitman's government work on his poetry has been ignored. On another occasion, I hope to develop a full analysis of Whitman's roles in Washington as clerk and *kosmos* (or visionary poet). For now, I would claim only that one probable result of his steady work as a government employee was his absorption of a governmental propriety, a gradually internalized sense of what suited the moment and situation. More than prudishness, the sheer orderliness of the documents he created for the government—so different from the fairly chaotic nature of his private manuscripts—helps explain some of the taming of Whitman's language in the Blue Book. A new restraint linked to this orderliness and propriety is likely behind his cutting of "suck and a sell" and "cock" from the same page (Blue Book, 48), and "Thruster holding me tight" a few

23. Horace Traubel, *November 1, 1888–January 20, 1889*, vol. 3 of *With Walt Whitman in Camden* (New York, 1914), 3:95.

24. John Ciardi, "Whitman's 'Blue Book,'" *Saturday Review*, May 18, 1968, 59.

25. For a discussion of Whitman's use of parentheses, see C. Carroll Hollis, *Language and Style in Leaves of Grass* (Baton Rouge, La., 1983), 57.

pages later (51). In 1860 Whitman had boldly asserted: "Outbidding at the start the old cautious hucksters, / The most they offer for mankind and eternity less than a spirt of my own seminal wet" (*LG* 1860, 86). In the Blue Book, he dropped the second line but retained the earlier "hucksters," so that the passage retained something of its original meaning. Whitman does not abandon sexual expression in the Blue Book and in the postwar *Leaves*, but he does recalibrate it. Both Gay Wilson Allen and Arthur Golden argue that Whitman's revisions in the Blue Book were for stylistic improvements and were not a form of self-censorship. More recently, Jimmie Killingsworth has effectively challenged their interpretation.[26] I would like to build on Killingsworth's study through close attention to a single word in Whitman's lexicon: *pensive*.

To the best of my knowledge, *pensive* has not received any consideration in Whitman criticism, and yet the poet's use of the word can be a useful barometer of his outlook. The word gains in significance as Whitman's career progresses. He used the word not at all in the 1855 *Leaves*, only once in 1856, and ten times in 1860. (The overall word count for the 1860 edition did not even double that of 1856, so the tenfold increase in the use of the word is striking.) Even as he was relying on this word heavily in 1860, he expressed misgivings about what it might suggest about his overall meaning: "I must change the strain—these are not to be pensive leaves, but leaves of joy" (*LG* 1860, 359). A similar attraction and repulsion is, if anything, even more apparent in the Blue Book, where the word *pensive* was added once as an annotation only to be deleted. Moreover, another three uses of *pensive* in the underlying 1860 edition were marked for deletion in the Blue Book. *Pensive* thus stands out as a word that fascinated and troubled Whitman, especially in the 1860–65 years. The word resonates broadly in Whitman's work and has importance both within and beyond the realm of sexuality. The word *pensive* is defined in the 1848 Webster's dictionary as "*Literally*, thoughtful; employed in serious study or reflection; but it often implies some degree of sorrow, anxiety, depression, or gloom of mind; thoughtful and sad, or sorrowful." The word did not match the buoyant tone Whitman often achieved in his poetry, but it came to be increasingly relevant as his anxiety increased about the future, for both himself and the nation.

The word *pensive* registers a sad thoughtfulness when Whitman feels separated from something he needs and expresses a lack of bonding or unity. This feeling of being separated operates in both sexual and political contexts. During the war he watched the nation suffer from separation and strove to redress it, and he saw innumerable limbs separated from soldiers' bodies via amputation. Whitman, as a vehicle of pensiveness himself, strove to overcome the separation between soldier and family, comrade and fellow comrade, North and South. It is hardly surprising that he felt strongly yet ambivalently toward *pensive* in his Blue Book revisions. For Whitman, the war years highlighted separation and the hope for unity.

26. See Golden, *Blue Book*, 2:lvi–lvii; Gay Wilson Allen, *The Solitary Singer* (1955; rev. ed., New York, 1967), 349; Jimmie Killingsworth, *Whitman's Poetry of the Body* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1989), 144–49.
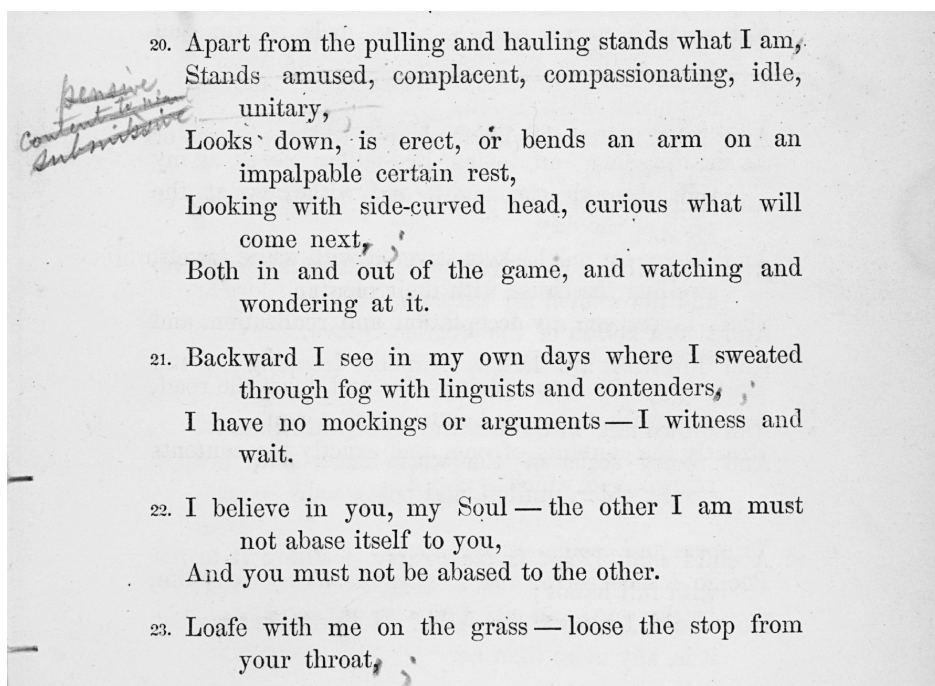
FIGURE 1. Detail of page 27 of the Blue Book. Reproduced with the permission of the New York Public Library.

In the Blue Book, Whitman contemplated revising a key moment of self-definition in "Walt Whitman" (later, "Song of Myself"), as shown above (fig. 1). As the very faint pencil strikethrough indicates, Whitman considered deleting the line "Stands amused, complacent, compassionating, idle, unitary." In many ways it is not surprising that he considered cutting "unitary." He had made "Walt Whitman" and "America" interchangeable terms, and the poet now faced the profound and painful self-division of Civil War. This famous passage immediately follows a section that stresses the difference between the "me" and the "Me myself." For the poet as an individual in the prewar years, a "unitary" identity was a hope and a potential only occasionally realized, as in the magical moment of lovemaking joining the "I" and the "Soul." Whitman's contemplated pencil revision, "Pensive, content to wait submissive," invites a sexual reading even as it relates to a broad philosophical outlook. Whitman's contemplated revision deserves careful attention because the passage is so patently autobiographical and because it sheds light on how the war influenced his thinking and poetry. After revising this passage, he then thought better of it, presumably because the revised passage did not adequately fit his persona. Sad thoughtfulness was also risky for a poet who had embarked on an effort to give voice to same-sex love: it is one thing to

suggest that love in general often leads to unhappiness, but it is another thing to register this about a type of love that has been criticized as morbid or depraved.

The poet regularly invokes pensiveness at moments of conflict or opposition. Contradiction and discord can at times be neutralized by extended thought that leads to a more encompassing outlook. Yet to seek for a mystical, metaphysical reconciliation can seem indecisive, uncertain. In the midst of the Civil War, does Whitman want to strive for the now-seemingly-hopeless "unity" of the original passage or to position himself as pensive, contemplative, and submissive? Which is more convincing and ultimately powerful—to suggest he is fundamentally unaffected by events, or to say he is considering them, allowing them to affect him?

By the 1860 edition, *pensive* had become a much more prominent word for Whitman, especially in contexts treating love and sexuality. More important than the frequency of its use is its association with love and its psychological accompaniments. Whitman's breakthrough work in treating same-sex love did not appear without psychological stress. In the 1860 edition, the word *pensive* is invoked as early as "Proto-Leaf":

> What do you seek, so pensive and silent?
> What do you need, comrade?
> Mon cher! do you think it is love?

Even as he used *pensive* in the 1860 edition and in the Blue Book, Whitman sometimes felt uneasy about it, resisted it, and at times tried to shun the word. Whitman is not characterizing same-sex love itself as a cause of pensiveness but indicating that the lack of such love causes melancholic musing. To the extent that pensiveness requires a remedy, it is to be found in comradeship.

As is well known, Whitman held that adhesiveness was a unifying power capable of saving the union, but there was a sad wistfulness about it too for him, just as there was about the union. Even as late as "Poetry To-Day in America—Shakspere—the Future," first published in 1881, Whitman would say: "Lately, I have wonder'd whether the last meaning of this cluster of thirty-eight States is not only practical fraternity among themselves—the only real *union* . . . but for fraternity over the whole globe— that dazzling, pensive dream of ages!"[27] Ultimately, Whitman comes to accept, even embrace, *pensive*. In his late prose the word is regularly linked to one of two poles of existence that he describes in (nuanced and fascinating) dualisms: poetry and prose, day and night, or joy and melancholy.[28] Whitman's dualistic descriptions may have been shaped by his reading during the war of John Milton's "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso," poems that balance and harmonize joyousness and melancholic thoughtfulness. (The 1844 Webster's dictionary includes the Italian *pensieroso* when tracing the etymology of *pensive*.) Both "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" were included in a volume he consulted regularly during the war titled *Milton, Young, Gray, Beattie, and Collins*. His

27. *Complete Prose Works* (Philadelphia, 1892), 296.
28. *Complete Prose*, 282, 101, and 158.

I used to read this Vol; to pass away long "waits" &c, at Washington at the army Hospitals, or waiting for the boats bringing loads of wounded &c — dipp'd it into those years 1862, '3, '4 & '5 there — & since in Camden N J 1874 to 1888 —

Walt Whitman

have had it with me over thirty years — scribbled this in Mickle street Sept: 20 '88 Camden New Jersey have dwelt a good deal on Gray — read George Eliots roasting of Dr Young as poet & person (in one of her essays)

FIGURE 2. Whitman's comment on the flyleaf of his copy of *Milton, Young, Gray, Beattie, and Collins* (Philadelphia, 1841). This particular volume is now held in the Bryn Mawr College Special Collections Library. The image of the flyleaf is reproduced with permission.

comment on the flyleaf is illuminating: "I used to read this Vol: to pass away long 'waits' &c, at Washington at the army Hospitals, or waiting for the boats bringing loads of wounded &c—dipped it into those years 1862, '3, '4, and '5" (see fig. 2). Intriguingly, where we expect to read that Whitman "dipped into it" during the war years, he says instead that he "dipped it into" the war years, as if he tried the poetry in the fire of the times, just as he tested and altered his own poetry in the crucible of the Civil War.

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If we give attention to all features of the Blue Book—from the front matter, to typography, to contemplated and then rejected revisions, to individual word choices— we can better understand a writer with a living work in hand, always ready to revise, ever responsive to historical crisis and local circumstances. And we can hear, in the growing pensiveness that comes to pervade this book, a dialing down of faith in the future, a hesitancy that works its way into his poetry through the hundreds of rethinkings he records in the Blue Book, where the slowing down of thought itself is registered in the increasing number of parenthetical statements, pauses in his lines as he gazes more and more pensively on his life, his nation, and the nation's dead.

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