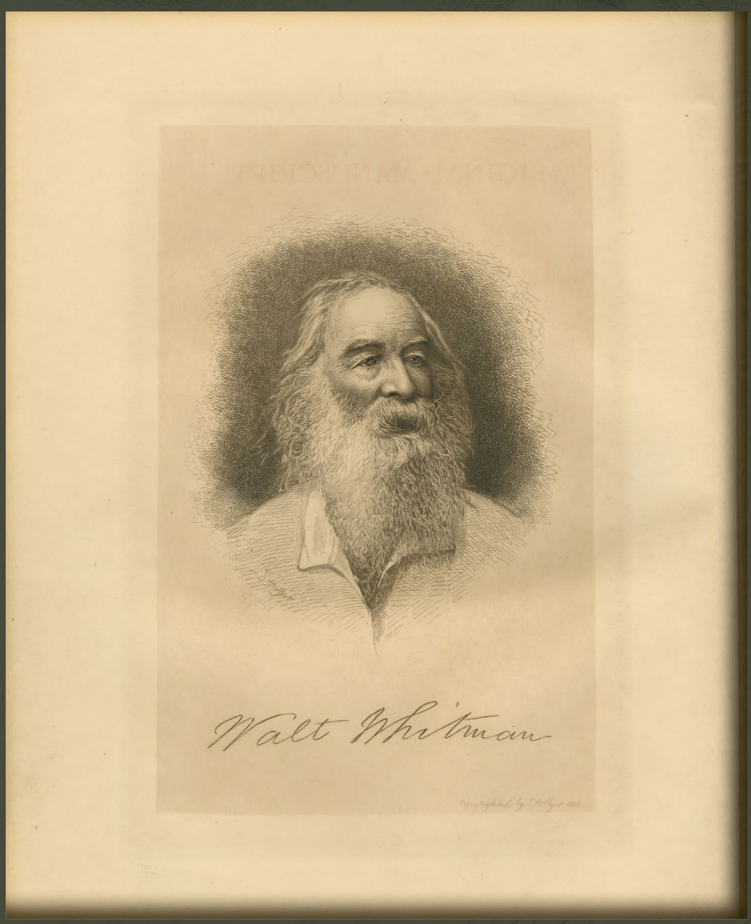
Divine Style

Walt Whitman and the King James Bible

F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp



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Cover image: Copy of an engraving of Walt Whitman from Codex Ms263. The codex contains the holograph original of Whitman's late essay, "The Bible as Poetry." Although the engraving is not credited in the manuscript, it appears to be a copy of one done by Samuel Hollyer in April 1888, based on a photograph of Whitman by Jacob Spieler at the Charles H. Spieler Studio, ca. 1876.

Background Image: "The Bible as Poetry," Codex Ms263. Both images courtesy of the Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago.
Cover design by Jeevanjot Kaur Nagpal

1. Whitman on the Bible

> No true bard will ever contravene the Bible. Coming steadily down from the past, like a ship, through all perturbations, all ebbs and flows, all time, it is to-day his art's chief reason for being
>
> — Walt Whitman, "The Bible as Poetry" (1883)

Most of what I want to say about aspects of Walt Whitman's evolving style and their debt to the King James Bible (KJB) will involve drawing inferences from Whitman's writings. Here I offer, in summary fashion, a preliminary brief for Whitman's familiarity with the Bible, on which there is a longstanding scholarly consensus. The survey features a look at Whitman's late but telling "The Bible as Poetry,"[1] the final sentences of which I use as the chapter's headnote. I conclude by spotlighting the coincidence of Whitman's breaking into free verse in 1850 while writing three biblically inflected poems.

Whitman on the Bible: A Retrospective

"Americans in the nineteenth century," writes P. Zweig, "were probably the most bookish people on earth,"[2] and therefore it is hard to imagine as avid a reader as Whitman having missed out on reading what, in his own terms, was the "Book of Books," the Bible, and in the translation that dominated the century until the 1880s, the King James version. And Whitman himself, not always the most trustworthy informant, tells

1 *The Critic* 3 (3 February 1883), 57; later collected in *November Boughs* ([Philadelphia: David McKay, 1888], 43–46) and in *CPW*, 379–82).

2 *Walt Whitman*: *The Making of the Poet* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 144. Cf. D. Daniell, *The Bible in English*: *Its History and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University, 2003), 580–81, 701, fig. 37.

 https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0357.02

us (albeit belatedly) in "A Backward Glance o'er Travel'd Roads"(*LG* 1891–92, 425–38) of his early reading of the Bible:

> Later, at intervals, summers and falls, I used to go off, sometimes for a week at a stretch, down in the country, or to Long Island's seashores—there, in the presence of outdoor influences, I went over thoroughly the Old and New Testaments, and absorb'd... Shakspere, Ossian, the best translated versions I could get of Homer, Eschylus, Sophocles, the old German Nibelungen, the ancient Hindoo poems, and one or two other masterpieces, Dante's among them.[3]

H. Traubel often mentions coming upon Whitman "reading the Bible," as on one evening (8 November 1888) not long after "A Backward Glance" was first published in *November Boughs*.[4] R. M. Bucke, Whitman's confidant, disciple, and first biographer (1883), reprints as an appendix W. D. O'Connor's (another Whitman disciple) *The Good Gray Poet*: *A Vindication*,[5] which includes the following characterization of Whitman: "He is deeply cultured by some of the best books, especially those of the Bible, which he prefers above all other great literature...."[6]—I cite this later version in particular because Whitman had a large hand in shaping the content and phrasing of this first biography about him, and thus O'Connor's characterization may be presumed to have met with Whitman's approval.[7] Whitman's high estimate of the Bible and its well-suitedness to American democratic values is apparent in a selection from *Democratic Vistas* (1871):

> While of the great poems of Asian antiquity, the Indian epics, the book of Job, the Ionian Iliad, the unsurpassedly simple, loving, perfect idyls of the life and death of Christ, in the New Testament, (indeed Homer and the Biblical utterances intertwine familiarly with us, in the main,) and along down, of most of the characteristic, imaginative or romantic relics of the continent, as the Cid, Cervantes' Don Quixote,

3 In *November Boughs*, 5–18, here 12–13; also included in *LG* 1891–92, 425–38. Cf. Whitman's late poem, "Old Chants" (*Truth* 10 [19 March 1891], 11, https://whitmanarchive.org/published/periodical/figures/per.00048.001.jpg; reprinted in *Good-Bye My Fancy* [1891]).

4 *WWWC*, 3:50; cf. 1:421; 2:351, 410; 3:80, 165, 332.

5 (New York: Bunch & Huntington, 1866).

6 *Walt Whitman* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1883), 103.

7 In a letter to O'Connor from 19 February 1883 Whitman expresses his deep satisfaction with the *Good Gray Poet* generally, https://whitmanarchive.org/biography/correspondence/tei/nyp.00475.html.

> &c., I should say they substantially adjust themselves to us, and, far off as they are, accord curiously with our bed and board to-day, in New York, Washington, Canada, Ohio, Texas, California—and with our notions, both of seriousness and of fun, and our standards of heroism, manliness, and even the democratic requirements—those requirements are not only not fulfilled in the Shaksperean productions, but are insulted on every page.[8]

From an earlier period, Whitman records his routine reading of Scripture to the sick and wounded he visited during the war.[9] Somewhat differently but no less telling is the fact that the 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass* (the third edition), in particular, was imagined by Whitman as a "New Bible,"[10] and, indeed, with its individually numbered poems and sections, is reminiscent of the English Bible's numbered chapters and verse divisions; it looks like a Bible (Fig. 1).[11] The initial leaf of

8 Walt Whitman, *Democratic Vistas* (Washington, D.C., 1871), 81. Cf. G. W. Allen, "Biblical Echoes in Whitman's Works," *American Literature* 6 (1934), 302–15, here at 312.

9 *PW*, I, 56, 73–74.

10 *NUPM* 1, 353. P. C. Gutjahr notes that "by the 1850s a wide variety of fiction was winning acceptance among Protestants as a viable means for people to become imaginative participants in the Bible's narrative" (*An American Bible*: *A History of the Good Book in the United States*, *1777–1880* [Stanford: Stanford University, 1999], 147)—a trend that aspects of *Leaves* would seem to answer well to. Bucke calls *Leaves of Grass* "the bible of Democracy" (*Walt Whitman*, 185). The American public's Bible buying frenzy was precisely at its height at mid-century, though the Bible market in America was bullish throughout the whole century (Daniell, *Bible in English*, esp. fig. 37; cf. chs. 31 and 38). And the appetite was not limited to bibles alone. This period also saw much interest in fictionalizations of the Bible, one of the most successful of which was Joseph Smith's *The Book of Mormon* (Gutjahr, *American Bible*, 143–78; Daniell, *Bible in English*,726–33; M. Robertson, "'New-Born Bard[s] of the Holy Ghost': The American Bibles of Walt Whitman and Joseph Smith" in *Above the American Renaissance* [eds. H. K. Bush and B. Yothers; Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2018], 140–60). Whitman's early short story "Shirval: A Tale of Jerusalem" (first published in *The Aristidean*, March, 1845, https://whitmanarchive.org/published/fiction/shortfiction/per.00337.html), which paraphrases and expands the plot of Luke 7:11-16, is an example of the latter and shows that Whitman's "biblicizing" impulse did not begin with the 1860 edition of *Leaves*. At any rate, the great publishing success of bibles throughout the nineteenth century would have been enough to catch the eye of the bookmaker in Whitman, especially one who wanted so much to be absorbed by the American public. For potential Romantic influence on Whitman's conception of the "New Bible," see E. S. Culler, "Romanticism" in *Walt Whitman in Context* (eds. J. Levin and E. Whitley; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2018), 654–71 esp. 663–65 (Google Play edition).

11 J. Stacy, Introduction to *Leaves of Grass*, *1860*: *The 150th Anniversary Facsimile Edition* (ed. J. Stacy; Iowa City: Iowa University, 2009), xx. William Blake was one

Whitman's personal copy of this edition of *Leaves* (known as the "Blue Book" because it was bound in blue paper wrappers) compares the number of words in that edition (150,500) to the number of words in the Bible (895,752, excluding the Apocrypha) and in the New Testament (212,000); he also tallies counts for the *Iliad*, *Aeneid*, Dante's *Inferno*, and *Paradise Lost*)—clearly indicating that the Bible even figures (as a measure) at a macro-level in Whitman's thinking about *Leaves*—though as E. Folsom observes, "an impressive amount of verbiage, but still quite a ways from overtaking his ancient rival."[12]

In one of the post-1856 notebooks ("made largely of end papers from the 1856 edition of Leaves of Grass"), entitled "Notebook Intended for an American Dictionary," there is a clipping (see Fig. 2) from a printed source which tells in brief the story of the KJB.[13] The clipping itself bears the title, "King James' Bible" and the account ends by noting (correctly) that the translation "was not immediately received with the unanimity for which James had hoped"—perhaps explaining, given the initial, mostly unfavorable reception of *Leaves*, (at least part of) Whitman's interest in the clipping. But regardless of the motivation, the clipping itself, and that it was clipped in the first place and then saved by Whitman, makes clear his conscious awareness of the KJB. Also, the notebook contains a page in Whitman's hand labeled, *Words of the Bible*:

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of the first poets to mimic the Bible in this way, e.g., *The Book of Urizen* (1794; cf. J. J. McGann, *Social Values and Poetic Acts*: *A Historical Judgment of Literary Work* [Cambridge: Harvard University, 1988], 153).

12 https://whitmanarchive.org/published/1860-Blue_book/images/leaf002v.html For discussion of these tallies, see E. Folsom and K. M. Price, *Re-Scripting Walt Whitman*: *An Introduction to his Life and Work* (Blackwell, 2005), ch. 2,; E. Folsom, *Whitman Making Books/Books Making Whitman*: *A Catalog and Commentary* (Obermann Center for Advanced Studies; Iowa City: University of Iowa, 2005), fig. 17 and discussion On the "Blue Book" in general, see A. Golden, "Walt Whitman's Blue Book" in *Walt Whitman*: *An Encyclopedia* (eds. J. R. LeMaster and D. D. Kummings; New York: Garland Publishing, 1998). K. Price, "Love, War, and Revision in Whitman's Blue Book," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 73/4 (2010), 679–92.

13 The notebook is a part of the Charles E. Feinberg Collection of the Papers of Walt Whitman in the Library of Congress (*DBN* III, 675). Many thanks to Alice L. Birney of the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress for directing me to this notebook, especially in reference to Whitman's entry about the *Words of the Bible* (email of 7 January 2011).

It, magnificent, beyond materials, with continuous
hands, sweeps and provides for all.

33. O I see the following poems are indeed to drop in the
earth the germs of a greater Religion.

34. My comrade!
For you, to share with me, two greatnesses — And a
third one, rising inclusive and more resplendent,
The greatness of Love and Democracy — and the
greatness of Religion.

35. Melange mine!
Mysterious ocean where the streams empty,
Prophetic spirit of materials shifting and flickering
around me,
Wondrous interplay between the seen and unseen,
Living beings, identities, now doubtless near us, in
the air, that we know not of,
Extasy everywhere touching and thrilling me,
Contact daily and hourly that will not release me,
These selecting — These, in hints, demanded of me.

36. Not he, adhesive, kissing me so long with his daily
kiss,
Has winded and twisted around me that which holds
me to him,
Any more than I am held to the heavens, to the
spiritual world,
And to the identities of the Gods, my unknown
lovers,
After what they have done to me, suggesting
such themes.

Fig. 1: P. 13 from the 1860 *Leaves of Grass* (Boston: Thayer and Eldridge, 1860–61, https://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/figures/ppp.01500.021.jpg). Public domain. Shows section numbers in "Proto-Leaf." Section 34 also mimes the "graded number sequence" of the Bible.

Words of the Bible

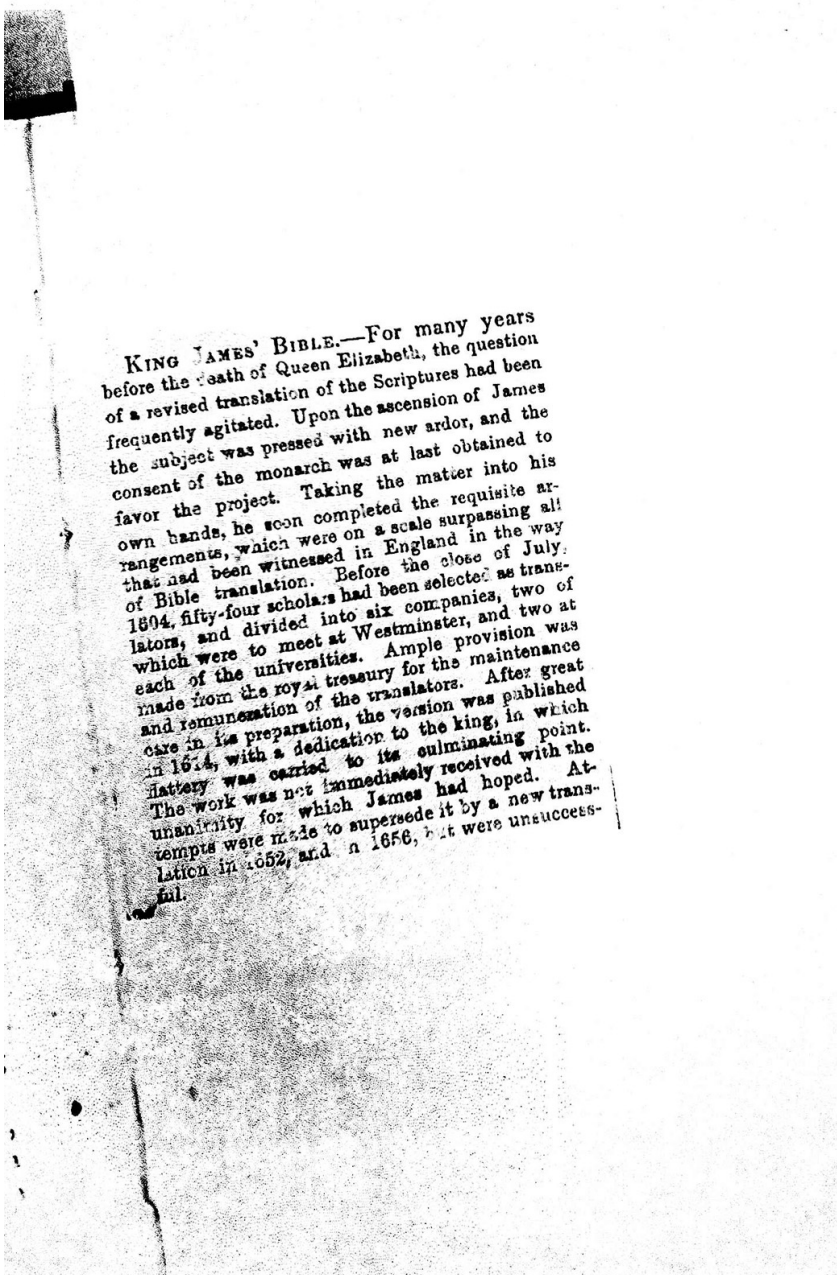
Bible Literature

What powerful and quite indefinable words have been contributed by the proper nouns of the Old Testament—the names of the Deity—of Hell, of Heaven—of the great persons—[14]

Whatever more may be made of this entry, it again provides eloquent testimony to the consciousness of the Bible in Whitman's thinking.

From a still earlier period, one of the book notices Whitman placed in the *Daily Eagle* (21 October 1846) references what is at least one Bible that we can both identify and know for certain that Whitman read: "'Bible, The Holy,' Harper's Illuminated Edition. It is almost useless to say that no intelligent man can touch the Book of Books with an irreverent hand." And it is precisely the kind of publication that would appeal to Whitman's "printerly eye." P. C. Gutjahr describes the Harper and Brothers' *Illuminated Bible* (1846) as "a sort of urtext for the large family bibles of the nineteenth century" and one of the century's more spectacular publishing events (Fig. 3).[15] Weighing in at over thirteen pounds, it featured the finest quality paper, over sixteen hundred illustrations (where no previous American-made bible contained more than a hundred), and was the first volume in America printed with the new technology of electrotyping.[16] It was billed by the Harpers as "the most splendidly elegant edition of the Sacred Record ever issued."[17] Some 75,000 copies were printed, an unprecedented number for the time. The translation of the "Sacred Record," of course, was that of the KJB, set in its familiar bi-columnar page layout (Fig. 4). As noted, the KJB was the English Bible of the nineteenth century. Its primacy in America and Britain would not begin to be seriously challenged until the publication of the Revised Version in the 1880s. It was the KJV that Whitman would have read throughout his life, and in the *Illuminated Bible* we have one small but sure way of tying Whitman directly to the KJB—and as will be seen later, his many quotations and allusions to the Bible confirm this (see Chapter Two).

14 *DBN* III, 682.
15 *American Bible*, 70.
16 See Gutjahr, *American Bible*, 70–76; Daniell, *Bible in English*, 655–58. "Electroplating" appears in the 1856 *Leaves* and "electrotyping" then in the 1860 edition.
17 Gutjahr, *American Bible*, 70–76. esp. 70.



KING JAMES' BIBLE.—For many years before the death of Queen Elizabeth, the question of a revised translation of the Scriptures had been frequently agitated. Upon the ascension of James the subject was pressed with new ardor, and the consent of the monarch was at last obtained to favor the project. Taking the matter into his own hands, he soon completed the requisite arrangements, which were on a scale surpassing all that had been witnessed in England in the way of Bible translation. Before the close of July, 1604, fifty-four scholars had been selected as translators, and divided into six companies, two of which were to meet at Westminster, and two at each of the universities. Ample provision was made from the royal treasury for the maintenance and remuneration of the translators. After great care in its preparation, the version was published in 1614, with a dedication to the king, in which flattery was carried to its culminating point. The work was not immediately received with the unanimity for which James had hoped. Attempts were made to supersede it by a new translation in 1652, and in 1656, but were unsuccessful.

Fig. 2: Clipping entitled "King James' Bible" from the "Notebook Intended for an American Dictionary" (*DBN* III, 675). Courtesy of the Library of Congress. Photograph by F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp.

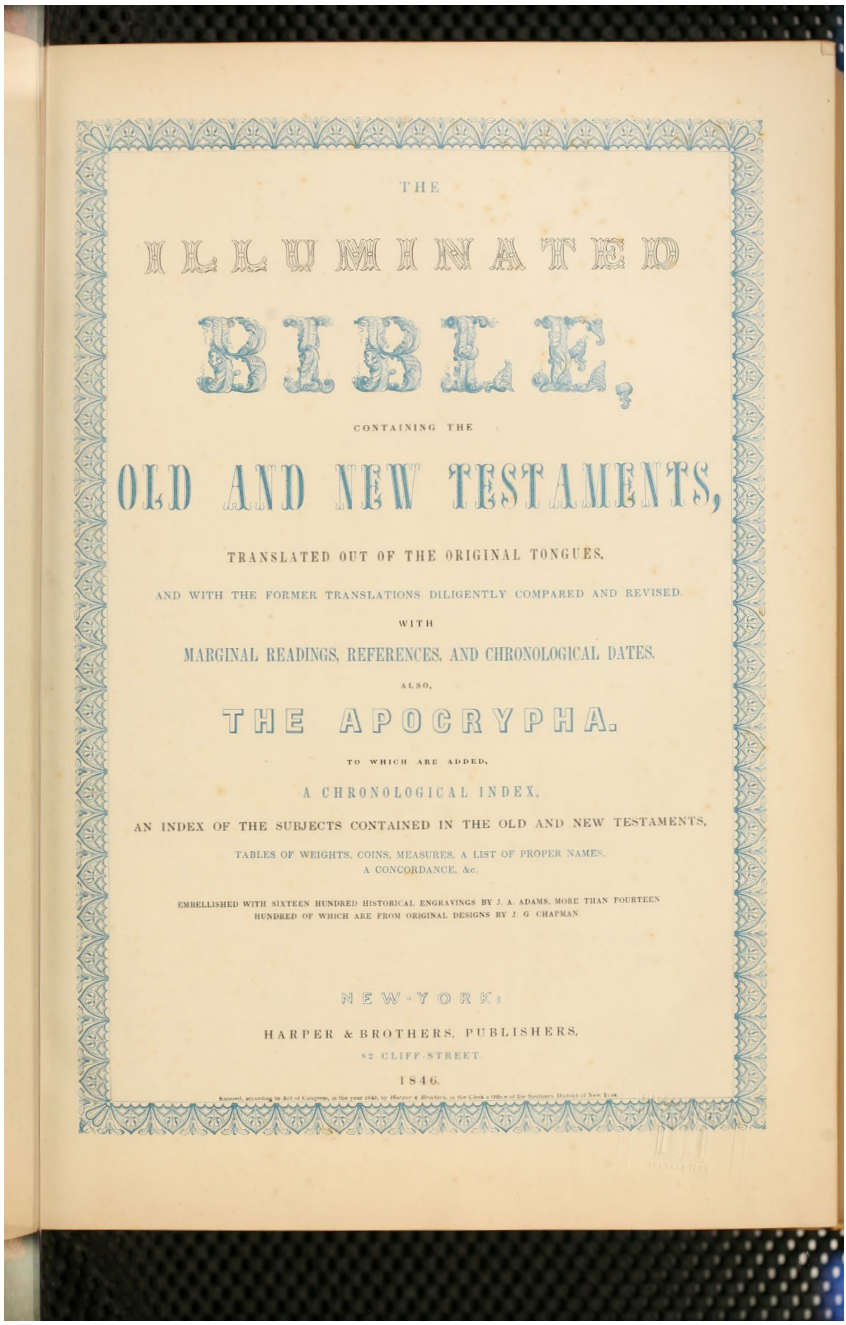
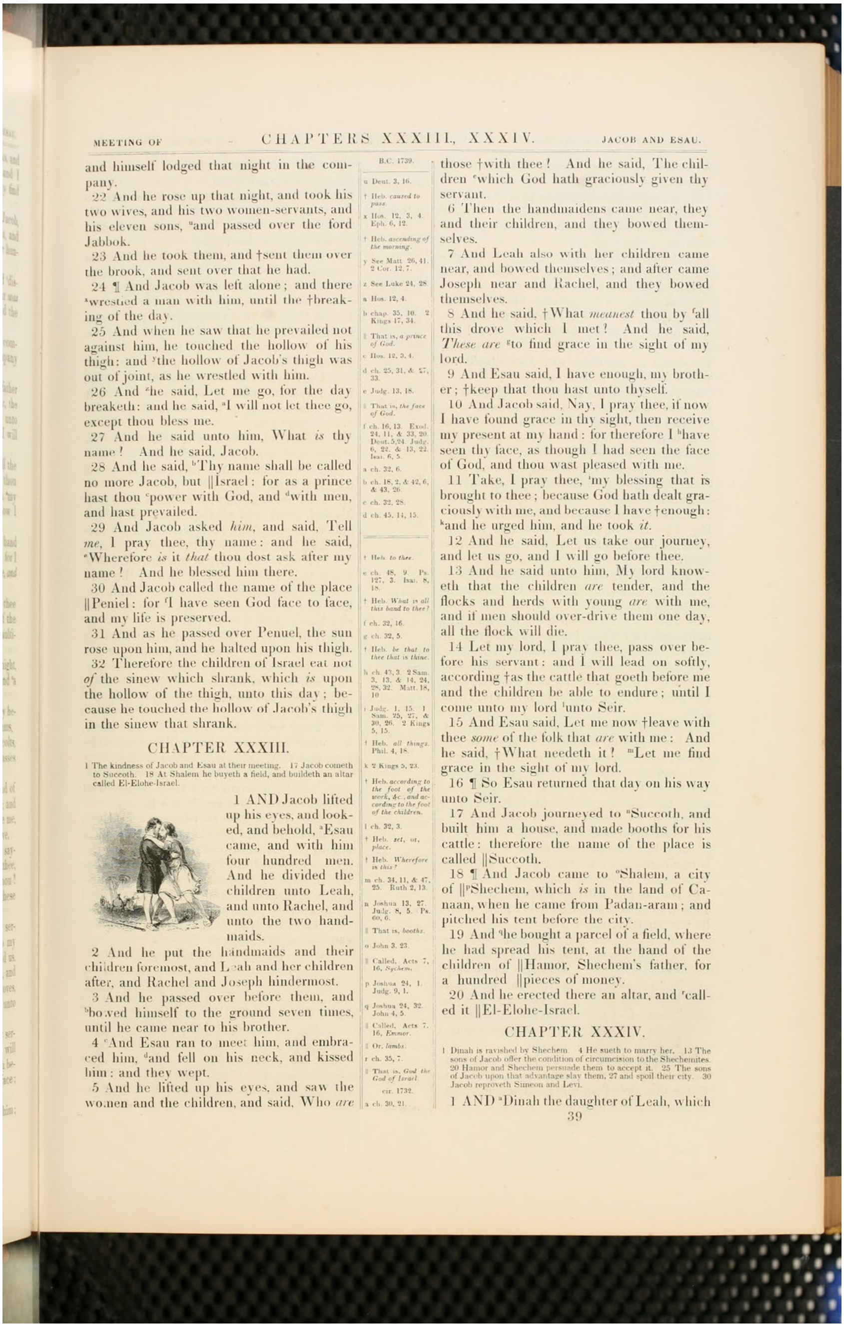


Fig. 3: Harper and Brothers *Illuminated Bible* (1846), title page. Public domain.



MEETING OF CHAPTERS XXXIII., XXXIV. JACOB AND ESAU.

and himself lodged that night in the com-
pany.
22 And he rose up that night, and took his
two wives, and his two women-servants, and
his eleven sons, [u]and passed over the ford
Jabbok.
23 And he took them, and †sent them over
the brook, and sent over that he had.
24 ¶ And Jacob was left alone; and there
[x]wrestled a man with him, until the †break-
ing of the day.
25 And when he saw that he prevailed not
against him, he touched the hollow of his
thigh: and [y]the hollow of Jacob's thigh was
out of joint, as he wrestled with him.
26 And [z]he said, Let me go, for the day
breaketh: and he said, [a]I will not let thee go,
except thou bless me.
27 And he said unto him, What *is* thy
name? And he said, Jacob.
28 And he said, [b]Thy name shall be called
no more Jacob, but ||Israel: for as a prince
hast thou [c]power with God, and [d]with men,
and hast prevailed.
29 And Jacob asked *him*, and said, Tell
me, I pray thee, thy name: and he said,
[e]Wherefore *is* it *that* thou dost ask after my
name? And he blessed him there.
30 And Jacob called the name of the place
||Peniel: for [f]I have seen God face to face,
and my life is preserved.
31 And as he passed over Penuel, the sun
rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh.
32 Therefore the children of Israel eat not
of the sinew which shrank, which *is* upon
the hollow of the thigh, unto this day; be-
cause he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh
in the sinew that shrank.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

1 The kindness of Jacob and Esau at their meeting. 17 Jacob cometh to Succoth. 18 At Shalem he buyeth a field, and buildeth an altar called El-Elohe-Israel.

1 AND Jacob lifted
up his eyes, and look-
ed, and behold, [a]Esau
came, and with him
four hundred men.
And he divided the
children unto Leah,
and unto Rachel, and
unto the two hand-
maids.
2 And he put the handmaids and their
children foremost, and Leah and her children
after, and Rachel and Joseph hindermost.
3 And he passed over before them, and
[b]bowed himself to the ground seven times,
until he came near to his brother.
4 [c]And Esau ran to meet him, and embra-
ced him, [d]and fell on his neck, and kissed
him: and they wept.
5 And he lifted up his eyes, and saw the
women and the children, and said, Who *are*
those †with thee? And he said, The chil-
dren [e]which God hath graciously given thy
servant.
6 Then the handmaidens came near, they
and their children, and they bowed them-
selves.
7 And Leah also with her children came
near, and bowed themselves; and after came
Joseph near and Rachel, and they bowed
themselves.
8 And he said, †What *meanest* thou by [f]all
this drove which I met? And he said,
These are [g]to find grace in the sight of my
lord.
9 And Esau said, I have enough, my broth-
er; †keep that thou hast unto thyself.
10 And Jacob said, Nay, I pray thee, if now
I have found grace in thy sight, then receive
my present at my hand: for therefore I [h]have
seen thy face, as though I had seen the face
of God, and thou wast pleased with me.
11 Take, I pray thee, [i]my blessing that is
brought to thee; because God hath dealt gra-
ciously with me, and because I have †enough:
[k]and he urged him, and he took *it*.
12 And he said, Let us take our journey,
and let us go, and I will go before thee.
13 And he said unto him, My lord know-
eth that the children *are* tender, and the
flocks and herds with young *are* with me,
and if men should over-drive them one day,
all the flock will die.
14 Let my lord, I pray thee, pass over be-
fore his servant: and I will lead on softly,
according †as the cattle that goeth before me
and the children be able to endure; until I
come unto my lord [l]unto Seir.
15 And Esau said, Let me now †leave with
thee *some* of the folk that *are* with me: And
he said, †What needeth it? [m]Let me find
grace in the sight of my lord.
16 ¶ So Esau returned that day on his way
unto Seir.
17 And Jacob journeyed to [n]Succoth, and
built him a house, and made booths for his
cattle: therefore the name of the place is
called ||Succoth.
18 ¶ And Jacob came to [o]Shalem, a city
of ||[p]Shechem, which *is* in the land of Ca-
naan, when he came from Padan-aram; and
pitched his tent before the city.
19 And [q]he bought a parcel of a field, where
he had spread his tent, at the hand of the
children of ||Hamor, Shechem's father, for
a hundred ||pieces of money.
20 And he erected there an altar, and [r]call-
ed it ||El-Elohe-Israel.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

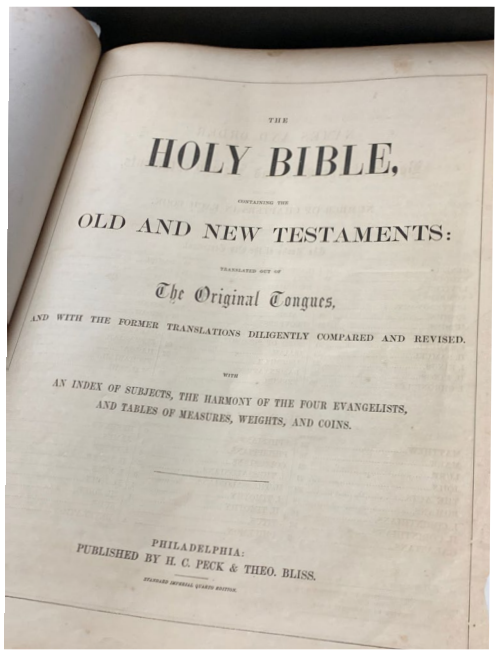
1 Dinah is ravished by Shechem. 4 He sueth to marry her. 13 The sons of Jacob offer the condition of circumcision to the Shechemites. 20 Hamor and Shechem persuade them to accept it. 25 The sons of Jacob upon that advantage slay them, 27 and spoil their city. 30 Jacob reproveth Simeon and Levi.

1 AND [a]Dinah the daughter of Leah, which

39

Fig. 4: Gen 32:21–34:1 from Harper's *Illuminated Bible*, showing bicolumnar page layout common to the KJB. Public domain.

There are a handful of other known bibles that may be connected directly to Whitman. K. Molinoff describes a Whitman family bible, which at the time of Molinoff's writing (1941) was in the possession of Whitman's grandniece, Mrs. Tuthill.[18] It has recently reappeared and was donated to the Walt Whitman Birthplace (Fig. 5).[19] This bible registered births, marriages, and deaths, which Whitman's sister, Mary Elizabeth Van Nostrand, had requested of Whitman in a letter ("copy our family record").[20] The bible is inscribed on a pasted-in white slip of paper in Whitman's hand and even contains a bit of verse.[21] The bible is large (measuring "about 14 and 5/8 ins. x 11 and 1/2 ins. x 4 and 3/4 ins.), typical for family bibles of the time, and is an edition of the KJB.


THE

HOLY BIBLE,

CONTAINING THE

OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS:

TRANSLATED OUT OF

The Original Tongues,

AND WITH THE FORMER TRANSLATIONS DILIGENTLY COMPARED AND REVISED.

WITH

AN INDEX OF SUBJECTS, THE HARMONY OF THE FOUR EVANGELISTS,
AND TABLES OF MEASURES, WEIGHTS, AND COINS.

PHILADELPHIA:
PUBLISHED BY H. C. PECK & THEO. BLISS.

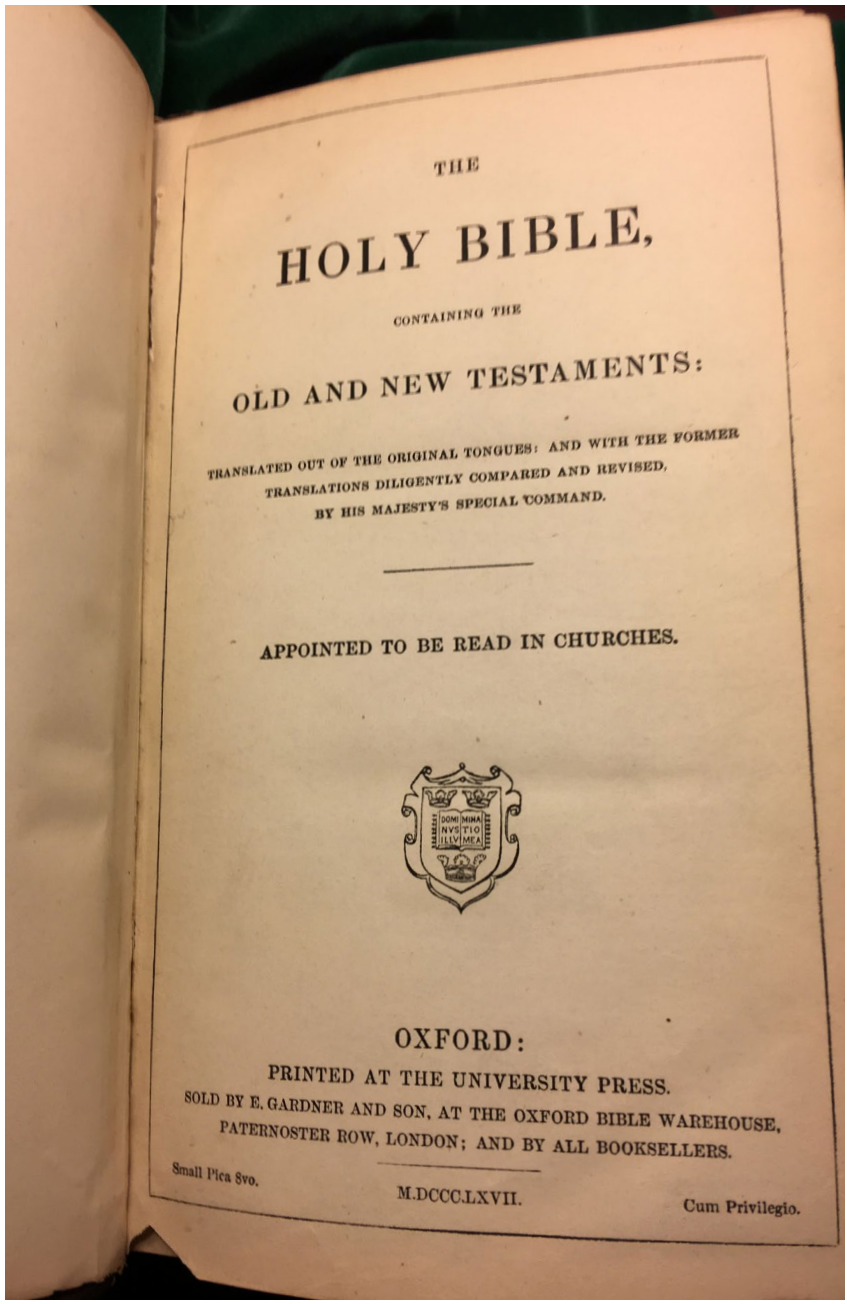
Fig. 5: Walt Whitman's Family Bible. Image courtesy of the Walt Whitman Birthplace.

18 *Some Notes on Whitman's Family* (Brooklyn: Comet, 1941), 6–8.

19 Margaret Guardi, the Curator at the Whitman Birthplace, confirmed the identity of the bible for me in an email (19 February 2021). An image of the bible appears in J. Loving's *Walt Whitman*: *A Song of Himself* ([Berkeley: University of California, 1999], illustration after p. 208).

20 Letter from 16 March 1878, https://whitmanarchive.org/biography/correspondence/tei/duk.00755.html.

21 From "Beyond," a popular poem by Mrs. J. E. Akers (according to Guardi).



THE

HOLY BIBLE,

CONTAINING THE

OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS:

TRANSLATED OUT OF THE ORIGINAL TONGUES: AND WITH THE FORMER TRANSLATIONS DILIGENTLY COMPARED AND REVISED, BY HIS MAJESTY'S SPECIAL COMMAND.

APPOINTED TO BE READ IN CHURCHES.

OXFORD:

PRINTED AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS.

SOLD BY E. GARDNER AND SON, AT THE OXFORD BIBLE WAREHOUSE, PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON; AND BY ALL BOOKSELLERS.

Small Pica 8vo. M.DCCC.LXVII. Cum Privilegio.

Fig. 6: Family Bible (published in 1867) that Whitman gave to William and Ellen O'Connor (January 1, 1871). Its translation is that of the KJB. Feinberg Collection of the Library of Congress. Photograph by Leslie Dobbs-Allsopp.

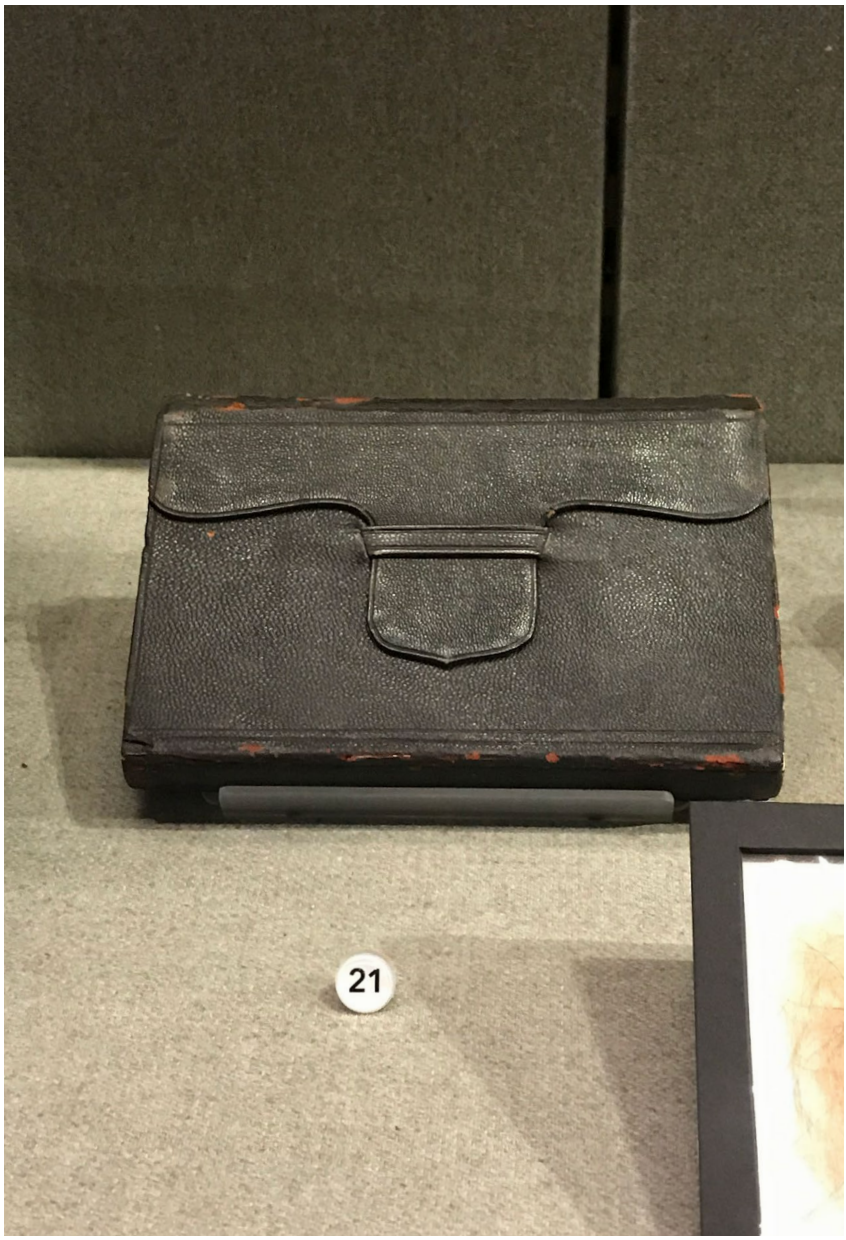


Fig. 7: A copy of the edition of *Leaves of Grass* published in celebration of Whitman's 70th birthday, modeled on a little "Oxford Bible" (with thin "Oxford Bible" paper, black leather cover, wraparound flap). On display at Grolier Club, "'Poet of the Body': New York's Walt Whitman" (May 15–July 27, 2019). Photograph by Leslie Dobbs-Allsopp.

The Library of Congress has in its collections another bible that Whitman had owned (Fig. 6), which he also inscribed as a gift: "To William and Ellen O'Connor and their daughter Jeannie. from Walt Whitman 1 January 1871."[22] Not surprisingly, like the Illuminated Bible and the family bible Whitman gave his sister, it is an edition of the KJB. There is also the little "Oxford Bible" on which Whitman modeled his 70th birthday edition of Leaves (Fig. 7)[23] and "a Bible" the poet lists in "More Books" among his books at 328 Mickle Street in 1885. Finally, in the Feinberg Collection there is a manuscript entitled "Books of WW" (date: "Between 1890 and 1892") which records in part: "Copies, evidently often read, of the Bible, Homer and Shakspere."[24] In total, then, at least six known bibles (some physically extant) may be associated directly with Whitman.

In sum, even on such a cursory review—of Whitman's published statements about the Bible, the opinions of close associates, actual bibles that can be connected to the poet—Whitman's familiarity with and high opinion of the Bible may be stipulated.

"The Bible as Poetry"

Whitman's most extensive meta-comment on the Bible is an essay entitled "The Bible as Poetry," first published in 1883. Critics have rarely paid attention to the short essay, except to note that it once more registers

22 References courtesy of Dr. Alice L. Birney, Cultural Manuscript Historian, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress; Clark Evan, RBSCD (email, 7 January 2011). Whitman references this bible ("the new year's Bible") in a letter to Ellen O'Connor (8 June 1871), https://whitmanarchive.org/biography/correspondence/tei/nyp.00297.html. Elmer E. Stafford, in a letter to Whitman (11 January 1878), https://whitmanarchive.org/biography/correspondence/figures/loc_jc.00373_large.jpg, writes that "I have received my bible," perhaps referencing another gift of a Bible from Whitman.

23 Several notices for March 1889 in WWWC 4 (295, 300, 328–29) mention a little "Oxford Bible" which Traubel shows Whitman as a model for the "pocket edition" of the 1881 Leaves of Grass (fourteenth printing) that would be printed in celebration of Whitman's 70th birthday. Whitman admires the narrow margins of the Oxford Bible and the high quality of the paper (especially its thinness) that is used. And indeed the resulting little volume with its "'Oxford Bible paper' and a fancy Biblical black leather cover" (the first batch even fitted out with a "wraparound tongued flap") very much has the look and feel of a Bible (see Folsom, Whitman Making Books, esp. Figs. 78–80).

24 https://whitmanarchive.org/manuscripts/marginalia/annotations/loc.03426.html. Image: https://whitmanarchive.org/manuscripts/marginalia/figures/loc_nhg.00170.jpg

Whitman's admiration of the Bible, much like his statements in both *Democratic Vistas* and "A Backward Glance."[25] But the admiration is worth underscoring: "it is to-day," says Whitman in the closing sentence that he eventually omitted in the version re-published in *November Boughs*, the bard's "chief reason for being."[26] Indeed, the opening sentence of that final paragraph, "No true bard will ever contravene the Bible," shares something of the same sentiment with the much earlier book notice quoted above, "It is almost useless to say that no intelligent man can touch the Book of Books with an irreverent hand." This I do not think is coincidental. What is remarkable about the late "The Bible as Poetry" is just how his description of the Bible—and especially the "Hebrew Bible"[27]—answers to the poetic theory Whitman was evolving in the early 1850s in particular. In summary fashion, Whitman's emerging new American poetics aspired to be simple—"a perfectly transparent plate-glassy style"; shorn of unnecessary "ornaments" and "the stock 'poetical' touches"; rhythmical but without "arbitrary or rhyming meter"; refusing to "go into criticism or arguments"—a "language of ecstasy," as Zweig says; and filled with ideas or notions that are democratic, that relate "to American character or interests."[28] In "The Bible as Poetry," the Bible is projected very much as the archetype of Whitman's new poetics, a paradigm of not only "what the office of poet was in primeval times," but also what it "is yet capable of being anew, adjusted entirely to the modern."[29] The Bible has "nothing at all, of the mere esthetic," and its "spinal supports" are "simple and meager." There is "nothing of argument or logic," but is surpassing in proverbial wisdom, "religious ecstasy," daring metaphors, and "the lawless soul" and "thick-studded with human emotions"—"nowhere else the simplest human emotions conquering the gods of heaven." Whitman notes, on the

25 One exception is T. E. Crawley, who does give some notice to the essay (*Structure*, 25–26).

26 *November Boughs*, 46.

27 Anne Gilchrist in a letter to Whitman (https://whitmanarchive.org/biography/correspondence/tei/loc.05697.html) from 6 May 1883 confirms that she had read and prized "the article on the Hebrew Scriptures," about which Whitman had inquired in an earlier letter (23 February 1883), https://whitmanarchive.org/biography/correspondence/tei/loc.02154.html.

28 Zweig, *Walt Whitman*, esp. 143–63; Miller, *Collage of Myself*, 41–42, 44.

29 All quotations are from the original 1883 rendition, unless otherwise noted. The holograph of Whitman's manuscript for the essay is in the Special Collections at the University of Chicago, https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/scrc/findingaids/view.php?eadid=ICU.SPCL.MS263

authority of Frederick de Sola Mendes, that "rhyming" and "meter" were not "characteristic of Hebrew poetry at all." For Whitman, the Bible is the very antipathy of the European and classical poetic traditions or "our Nineteenth Century business absorption": "no hairsplitting doubts, no sickly sulking and sniffling, no 'Hamlet' no, 'Adonais,' no 'Thanatopsis,' no 'In Memoriam.'" This riff is very much to the same end as this from the 1856 "George Walker" notebook: "Avoid all the 'intellectual subtleties,' and 'withering doubts' and 'blasted hopes' and 'unrequited loves,' and 'ennui,' and 'wretchedness' and the whole of the lurid and artistical and melo-dramatic effects."[30] Whitman recognizes in the Bible many of his own cherished themes—"the glow of love and friendship,"[31] "the fervent kiss," "suggestions of mortality and death, man's great equalizers," "the finest blending of individuality with universality," and "projecting cosmic brotherhood, the dream of all hope." He notices that it is "the *old man*," a favored Whitmanian persona (as in "The bodies of men and women engirth me"), who is the leading figure in the East, a cultural pattern, he implies, that is illustrated in the "oldest Biblical narratives." Indeed, without the Bible, writes Whitman, "this America of ours, with its polity and essentials, could not now be existing."

Unmistakably, "The Bible as Poetry" shows that by the early 1880s Whitman was able to frame his understanding of the Bible in terms of the poetic aesthetic that he had evolved over the course of his career and to see the Bible very much as a forerunner of that aesthetic. Whether or not this is a fair representation of Whitman's thinking about the Bible from earlier periods is harder to tease out positively. I am inclined to think that it is, however. His easy and knowing use of the Bible—especially evident in his many quotations of it and allusions to it at all periods of his life (see Chapter Two)—suggests, as B. L. Bergquist says, "a constantly used resource and stimulus to intellectual and spiritual growth" that was "returned to again and again."[32] His high esteem for the Bible is

30 See discussion in Miller, *Collage of Myself*, 43.

31 This is a theme Whitman had long associated with the Bible. Hearing the chanting of Hebrew during a synagogue service reminds Whitman of "the same tones which Jonathan and Saul used in their beautiful friendship" ("A Peep at the Israelites," *New York Aurora* (28 March 1842), 2. Reprinted in *Walt Whitman's Selected Journalism* (eds. D. A. Nover and J. Stacy; Iowa City: University of Iowa, 2014), 196–98, 197.

32 "Walt Whitman and the Bible," 77.

effectively registered early on in the "Book of Books" comment from the 1846 book notice, a comment, moreover, as noted, that anticipates the closing statement in the later "The Bible as Poetry." Indeed, this image of the "true bard" able to absorb the biblical traditions through himself and adjust them to the modern is also very much in the spirit of a passage Whitman clipped and underscored from a British literary magazine in 1849 (or early 1850):

> As a thousand rivulets are blended in one broad river, so the countless instincts, energies, and faculties, as well as associations, traditions, and other social influences which constitute national life, are reconciled in him whom future ages are to recognize as the poet of the nation.[33]

And everything about Whitman's use of the Bible is consistent with the poetics he starts articulating in his early notebooks. But, as Miller observes, "the notebooks don't offer much evidence either way about the Bible."[34] True enough. Though not "much," the notebooks (and unpublished prose manuscripts) do offer *some* evidence about the Bible. Explicit mention of the Bible is made in the "Notebook Intended for an American Dictionary," as noted above. A selection of other similar instances include:

> "O Bible!" say I "what nonsense and folly have been supported in thy name!"
>
> "Autobiographical Data" (1848–1855/56)[35]

> Hebrew [:] The ethereal and elevated Spirituality—this seems to be what subordinates all the rest—the Soul—the spirit—rising in vagueness—
>
> "Egyptian religion" (soon after 1855)[36]

> Verse was the first writing of all we know—Greeks—Old Testament.
>
> "Speaking of literary style" (1854/55)[37]

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33 Clipped from an article entitled "Modern Poetry and Poets" from *Blackwood's* (October 1849). As quoted in Allen, *The Solitary Singer*, 1967 [1955]), 132.

34 *Collage of Myself*, 26.

35 https://whitmanarchive.org/manuscripts/notebooks/loc.05935/images/leaf004r.html Cf. A. C. Higgins, "Wage Slavery and the Composition of *Leaves of Grass*: The 'Talbot Wilson' Notebook," *WWQR* 20/2 (2002), 76, n. 35.

36 https://whitmanarchive.org/manuscripts/marginalia/figures/duk.00198.001.jpg. *NUPM* VI, 2028, cf. p. 2025.

37 https://whitmanarchive.org/manuscripts/figures/nyp_jc.00019.jpg. *NUPM* I, 162; cf. p. 81.

The florid rich, first phases of poetry, as in the Oriental Poems—the Bible—.... The primitive poets, their subjects their style, all assimilate.—Very ancient poetry, of the Hebrew prophets, of Ossian, of the Hindu fathers [*illg.*] singers and extatics... all resemble each other

"The florid rich" (1855–60)[38]

Taking en-masse, what is called literature... with but here and there, as accident has had it, a little sample specimen put in record... —A few Hebrew canticles....

"Taking en-masses" (post 1856)[39]

Whatever Theological inferences once thought and orthodox may be demolished by the scientific and historical inquiries of our times, but the Bible collect of the Bible as a traditional poem so various in its sources and times, still remains at [illeg] to perhaps the most [illeg] instructive, suggestive, even artistic memorial of the past

"Theological inferences" (presumably early)[40]

Names. The Biblical poets—David, Isaiah, the Book of Job—etc. Also the New Testament writers....

"Names. The Biblical poets"[41]

—the Syrian canticles, the Book of Job and the other books & emerging from them the idylls of the life of C[42]

"Poets—Shakespeare" (1860s)[43]

38 https://whitmanarchive.org/manuscripts/marginalia/figures/duk.00673.001.jpg. *NUPM* IV, 1555.

39 *NUPM* IV, 1562; see also V, 1620 ("Literature [:] Iliad, Bible,....").

40 An undated manuscript note from the Trent Collection, Duke University (quarto 35). I have found notices to it in E. F. Frey, *Catalogue of the Walt Whitman Collection in the Duke Library* (Durham: Duke University Library, 1945), 28, no. 40; Crawley, *Structure*, 58 (he reads the last word erroneously as "East"); M. Moon, *Disseminating Whitman*: *Revision and Corporeality in Leaves of Grass* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1993), 236–37, n. 3. An image of the holograph may be viewed at: http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/scriptorium/findaids/images/whitmaniana/whitman2023/index.htm. The top of page has an asterisk with the following underscored: "To the ## poet, [illeg] surpasses all else."

41 *NUPM* IV, 1564. For Whitman, "Syria" was a modern geographical designation for the lands of the Bible, especially that of ancient Israel and Judah: "You Jew journeying in your old age through every risk to stand once on Syrian ground!" (*LG* 1856, 118).

42 *NUPM* IV, 1572, n. 10: "Presumably Christ."

43 *NUPM* IV, 1572.

> —Yet in religion & poetry the old Asiatic land dominates to this day until above the world shall arise peaks still higher than the Hebrew Bible, the Ionian Iliad, & the psalms & great epics of India.
>
> "—How different" (late 1860s)[44]

> The Bible Shakespere Homer....
>
> "The Bible Shakespere" (not earlier than 1873)[45]

> The Hebraic poems—(the Bible) with readings—the Book of Job dominating
>
> "On Poems" (1860s/70s)[46]

> The sense of Deity is indispensable in grand poems—this is what puts [inserted: the book of Job & much of] the Old Hebrew Bible with the Book of Job—and also the plays of Eschuylus ahead of all poetry we know.
>
> "Emerson uses the Deific" (1872)[47]

> The divine immortal Hebraic poems—Homer's, Virgil's, and Juvenal's compositions—Dante's, Shakspeare's and even Tennyson's—
>
> "Is Walt Whitman's Poetry Poetical?" (1874)[48]

Several observations may be offered in regard to these notices of the Bible in Whitman's notebooks and prose manuscripts. First, they date from the early 1850s through the 1870s, and thus show that Whitman's late statement in "The Bible as Poetry" has various points of contact with his earlier thinking. Second, there is considerably more here than Miller's not "much evidence either way" might suggest—and this is by no means an exhaustive listing and does not include passages with biblical characters, allusions, echoes, or the like (see Chapter Two). Third, the manner of the references is significant. The emphasis here, as in "The Bible as Poetry," is often explicitly on the "Hebrew Bible"—viz. "Old Testament," "Hebrew," "Oriental Poems," "Hebrew prophets," "Hebrew canticles," "Syrian canticles," "Hebrew poems." This squares with T. E. Crawley's broader finding that "the religious spirit of *Leaves of Grass* is basically Hebraic"[49]

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44 *NUPM* IV, 1574. Note here Whitman clearly articulates his aspiration to be one of these "peaks"; cf. *NUPM* I, 111; V, 1752–53.

45 *NUPM* IV, 1578.

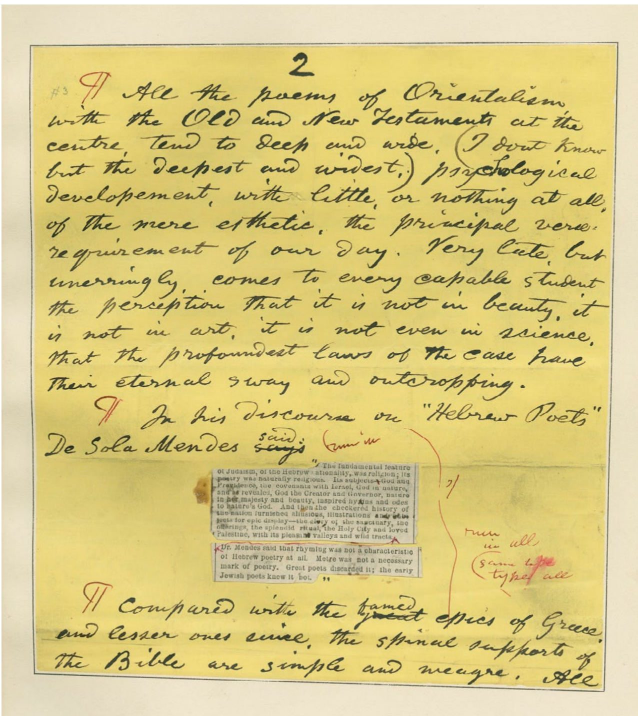
46 *NUPM* V, 1804.

47 E. Folsom, "Whitman's Notes on Emerson: An Unpublished Manuscript," *WWQR* 18/1 (2000), 60–62 (image on back cover).

48 *NUPM* IV, 1519.

49 *Structure*, 57, cf. 57–63—he points to over seventy references in Whitman's prose to support this contention (228).

and with Whitman's own explicit self-description in the never published "Introduction to the London Edition" cited earlier as a headnote to the Introduction—"the interior & foundation quality of the man is Hebraic, Biblical, mystic."[50] There is no doubting the deep impress that Christianity—and especially "the crucifixion scenes of the Christ-drama" in the Gospels—had on Whitman and his poetry, but G. W. Allen's early impression that Whitman "drew most of his biblical inspiration from the New Testament" requires modification.[51] The Hebrew Bible is every bit as influential on Whitman as the New Testament, and in some respects (as detailed below) it is far more influential.


2

¶ All the poems of Orientalism with the Old and New Testaments at the centre, tend to deep and wide, (I dont know but the deepest and widest,) psychological developement, with little, or nothing at all, of the mere esthetic, the principal verse-requirement of our day. Very late, but unerringly, comes to every capable student the perception that it is not in beauty, it is not in art, it is not even in science, that the profoundest laws of the case have their eternal sway and outcropping.

¶ In his discourse on "Hebrew Poets" De Sola Mendes said:

"The fundamental feature of Judaism, of the Hebrew nationality, was religion; its poetry was naturally religious. Its subjects—God and Providence, the covenants with Israel, God in nature, and as revealed, God the Creator and Governor, nature in her majesty and beauty, inspired hymns and odes to nature's God. And then the checkered history of the nation furnished allusions, illustrations and subjects for epic display—the glory of the sanctuary, the offerings, the splendid ritual, the Holy City and loved Palestine, with its pleasant valleys and wild tracts.

Dr. Mendes said that rhyming was not a characteristic of Hebrew poetry at all. Metre was not a necessary mark of poetry. Great poets discarded it; the early Jewish poets knew it not."

¶ Compared with the famed epics of Greece and lesser ones since, the spinal supports of the Bible are simple and meagre. All

Fig. 8: P. 2 (obv) of "The Bible as Poetry." Codex Ms263. Shows clipping containing ideas attributed to Frederick de Sola Mendes. Image courtesy of the Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago, https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/scrc/findingaids/view.php?eadid=ICU.SPCL.MS263

50 *NUPM* IV, 1501.

51 "Biblical Echoes," 302; cf. J. Loving, "The Political Roots of *Leaves of Grass*" in *A Historical Guide to Walt Whitman* (ed. D. S. Reynolds; New York/Oxford: Oxford University, 2000), 102.

The terminology is noteworthy also because it is not confessional in origin. Again this is in keeping with Whitman's late essay. More importantly, this suggests that Whitman's familiarity with the Bible is not solely dependent on personal or casual reading (however early and often) but derives in part from secondary discussions (of various sorts) of the Bible. This is not surprising since Whitman was a voracious reader and engaged in an intense period of self-directed reading during the late 1840s and early 1850s in particular.[52] A number of these sources can even be identified. Whitman often clipped articles from newspapers, magazines, and books and pasted them into his homemade notebooks. A number of these clippings are on the Bible, including several that were annotated or scored by Whitman: "Divisions of the Bible," "Books Mentioned in the Bible Now Lost or Unknown," "The Holy Land," "The Psalms," "The Unity of the Bible," "Errors in Printing Bible," "King James' Bible" (see above), and a clipping of a note on the underlying Hebrew and Greek of "woman" and "women" in the English Bible.[53] Whitman also explicitly references a number of authorities, including, for example, a "discourse on 'Hebrew Poets'" by De Sola Mendes,"[54] "William H. Seward" and "his travels in Turkey, Egypt, and Asia Minor,"[55] "Prof Wines' Commentary on the Hebrew Law,"[56] "'Ancient Hebrews,' by Abm. Mills A. S. Barnes & Co.,"[57]

52 See F. Stovall, "Notes on Whitman's Reading," *AL* 26/3 (1954), 337–62"; *The Foreground of Leaves of Grass* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1974), 140–51.

53 All except the final two clippings are listed by Bucke in *Notes & Fragments* IV (nos. 80, 103, 205, 337, 407, and 491), *CW* X, 69, 70, 76, 84, 88, 93. For the "King James' Bible" and the translation clippings, see *DBN* III, 675, 707.

54 "The Bible as Poetry." This, too, is actually from a clipping. The original manuscript of the essay (Codex Ms263), now in the Special Collections of the University of Chicago Library, shows two pasted-in clippings containing the language attributed to de Sola Mendes (Fig. 8). The second clipping (with slightly wider spacing between lines of text) is an indirect description of de Sola Mendes' views (viz. "Dr. Mendes said that....."), not a direct quotation as Whitman punctuates it in *The Critic* ("Dr. Mendes said 'that....'"). De Sola Mendes was a rabbi and founding faculty of the Jewish Theological Seminary.

55 "The Bible as Poetry." On the travels of William H. Seward and Edward John Trelawney to the Orient, see Gutjahr, *American Bible*, 60–69.

56 This from an early notebook (*DBN* III, 778), dated to 1856. On the flyleaf, there is a reference to E. C. Wines, *Commentaries on the Laws of the Ancient Hebrews* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1853), which is listed in the Astor Library's holdings from 1861 (*Catalogue or Alphabetical Index of the Astor Library in Two parts. Pt. 1, Authors and Books, Q-Z* [New York: R. Craighead, 1861], 2084).

57 In the same early notebook as the Wines' reference (*DBN* III, 778): Abraham Mills, *The Ancient Hebrews* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1856).

"De Vere's Comparative Philology 1853,"[58] "Bunsen,"[59] and "Volney."[60]

58 In a manuscript scrap entitled "Even now Jasmund", probably dating between 1856 and 1858 (see C. C. Hollis, "Whitman and William Swinton: A Co-operative Friendship," *AL* 30 [1959], 436), Whitman quotes from M. Schele de Vere's *Outlines of Comparative Philology: With a Sketch of the Languages of Europe, Arranged upon Philologic Principles, and A Brief History of the Art of Writing* (New York: Putnam, 1853): "—'Even now Jasmund, the people's poet, prefers to sing in Provencal'" (taken from p. 324, with the grammar slightly adjusted by Whitman). A copy which was owned originally by William Swinton was in Whitman's library at his death (C. E. Feinberg [ed], *Walt Whitman: A Selection of the Manuscripts, Books, and Association Items Gathered by Charles E. Feinberg. Catalogue of an Exhibition Held at the Detroit Public Library, Detroit, Michigan, 1955* [Detroit Public Library, 1955], 126, no. 377). The volume is also referenced in Swinton's *Rambles Among Words: History and Wisdom* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1859), which Whitman may have contributed to (see *NUPM* V, 1651). And some of Whitman's annotations in "Old theory started" (*NUPM* V, 1894) may come from de Vere as well. Indeed, Whitman's sense of how ancient history—especially ancient "Asian" history—informs and feeds the present is much the same as expressed by de Vere.

59 Whitman references C. K. J. Bunsen in four notations: "Resume—(from Bunsen)" (*NUPM* V, 1916—citing p. 231 from volume 1 of *Outlines of the Philosophy of Universal History Applied to Language and Religion* [London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1854]); "(Bunsen)" (*NUPM* V, 1917—notes made from the same volume, see Stovall, "Notes on Whitman's Reading," 338); "Lecture" "law" "lex" (*NUPM* VI, 2031—"(Bunsen) Abrahamic movement [:] 28th or 29th Century before Christ," which Stovall says could derive either from Bunsen's *Outlines* (I, 229) or from his *Egypt's Place in Universal History: An Historical Investigation in Five Books* ([London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1859], III, 351), which Whitman also knew, cf. Stovall, *Foreground*, 164, n.14; and "Religion—Gods" (*NUPM* VI, 2025). There is also a clipping entitled "Bunsen's Chronology" (Bucke, *Notes & Fragments* IV, no. 104 [*CW* X, 70]). Bunsen is also prominently mentioned in "Notebook Intended for an American Dictionary" (e.g., on Semitic languages, *DBN* III, 720).

60 Cited explicitly by Whitman in "Religions-Gods" (*NUPM* VI, 2026), referencing C.-F. Volney, *Ruins: Or, Meditation on the Revolutions of Empires* (Boston: C. Gaylord, 1835), see D. Goodale, "Some of Walt Whitman's Borrowings," *AL* 10/2 (1938), 202–13. Whitman "quotes" Volney (p. 163; Goodale does not catch this; Grier says, "Source not identified"): "Talmud (of Jerusalem) very old 'sybilline verses among the ancients' always looking for 'a great mediator, a judge, god, lover, legislator, friend of the poor and degraded, conqueror of powers." The words are clearly Volney's, but even with quotation marks Whitman is already massaging—or as E. Holloway and R. Adimari put it in their prefatory comments to Whitman's essay, "The Egyptian Museum," Whitman read history "creatively" (*New York Dissected* [New York: R. R. Wilson, 1936], 27). In Volney the "Talmud of Jerusalem" is mentioned in a footnote on p. 162. The "sybilline verses so celebrated among the ancients" comes from a footnote on p. 163, following the list in the body of p. 163: "a great mediator, a final judge, a future savior, a king, god, conqueror, and legislator"—this last in reference to the hope after the 586 destruction of Jerusalem for such a deliverer to restore the empire of David, which Volney characterizes as a sacred and mythological tradition that had "spread through all Asia." Importantly, Whitman is already weaving Volney's language to serve his own purpose, especially in his addition of "lover" to this list. Note also Whitman's play on Hab 2:2 ("Write the vision, and make it plain upon tablets, that he may run that

Most of Whitman's collaging from his reading goes uncredited, though scholars over the years have been able to identify many of the poet's sources. Whitman read fairly extensively in ancient history and religion (esp. that pertaining to ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, Persia, Greece, India),[61] many of the sources for which F. Stovall has illuminated.[62] Some of these sources (e.g., de Vere, Bunsen, Volney) could have furnished Whitman with some of the factual information about the Bible that he writes down (e.g., dates). A case in point is Whitman's notation, "Moses born in 1571 B.C.," which as Stovall remarks comes out of J. G. Wilkinson's *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians* ("Moses born, 1571"), a book Whitman was very familiar with.[63] More importantly, even when sources cannot be identified, factual information of this kind implicates more than a casual, readerly knowledge of the Bible. And there are quite a lot of these kinds of entries in Whitman's notebooks (and other manuscript scraps).

One striking example by way of illustration. It comes from an undated manuscript (Grier: "before 1885"), "(For words)": "The word Jehovah weaves the meaning of the past, present and future tenses—personalizes Time, as it was, is, and ever shall be."[64] This appears to reflect some of the speculation during the nineteenth century on the formation of the Tetragrammaton used throughout the Hebrew Bible as one name for the God of Israel—*YHWH*. Whitman (from an early period, Grier: "probably 1855") once instructed himself (after a brief description of the god Mithras): "Look at a theological dictionary [1855

readeath it") at the beginning of "The Egyptian Museum": "Some of these lessons are so plain that they who walk may read" (see Holloway and Adimari, *New York Dissected*, 204, n. 8).

61 Cf. *NUPM* V, 1915–29; VI, 2019–2107.

62 Esp. *Foreground*, 161–83.

63 (new ed.; London: J. Murray, 1878 [1837]), I, 34; cf. Stovall, "Notes on Whitman's Reading," 356. The references in this manuscript ("Moses of course was born," https://whitmanarchive.org/manuscripts/marginalia/annotations/duk.00066.html) and in "Immortality was realized," https://whitmanarchive.org/manuscripts/marginalia/annotations/mid.00018.html, supplied a lot of the information in the chronological synopsis in Whitman's "Egyptian Museum" essay (pp. 33–34), see Holloway and Adimari's note 11 on pp. 204–05; cf. Stovall, "Notes on Whitman's Reading," 347, 356. Cf. *DBN* III, 719–23 (where Bunsen is the source).

64 *NUPM* V, 1699.

Walt Whitman]."[65] Consulting the entries for "Jehovah" from five such dictionaries from the period reveals that all associate the deity's name with the Hebrew verbal root *hyh* "to be, exist," taking their cue above all from the play on that root in Exod 3:13–15, and most reference Rev 1:4, 8 as well. Samuel Green, in *A Biblical and Theological Dictionary*, says, in language very close to Whitman's: "That its grammatical form is a compound of the past, the present, and the future."[66] Richard Watson, whose *Biblical and Theological Dictionary* is listed among the Astor Library's holdings for 1851,[67] though more round-about gets at the same point: "...that is, always existing; whence the word eternal appears to express its import; or, as it is well rendered, 'He who is and also was, and who is to come,' Rev 1:4."[68] John Eadie in his *Biblical Cyclopaedia* is very similar, citing both Exod 3:14 and Rev 1:4 and also offers the gloss, "Him 'who was, and is, and is to come.'"[69] Patrick Fairbairn in *The Imperial Bible-Dictionary* is more sophisticated. He grounds his explanation explicitly in the imperfective (or "future") form of the verb, which the divine name resembles (the kind of folk etymology at play in Exod 3:14): "the so-called future in Hebrew differs widely from our future..., expressing as it does what has been wont to be in the past as well as what will be in the future—the ongoing of being or action (as opposed to its completion) in whatever sphere of time."[70] William Smith in his detailed discussion agrees that the basic etymology from the verb *hyh* "to be" is correct and that Exod 3:14 is "key to the whole mystery" (of the meaning of the Tetragrammaton), but the assertion that the name "embraces past, present, and future" based on Rev 4:8 and the

65 *NUPM* VI, 2030. In 1850, in a letter to the editor of the *National Era* ([21 November 1850], 187; reprinted in R. G. Silver, "Whitman in 1850: Three Uncollected Articles," *American Literature* 19/4 [1948], 314), Whitman also references "commentators on the Bible," showing he certainly knows of, and likely had read, some secondary literature about the Bible.

66 (London: Elliot Stock, 1867).

67 *Alphabetical Index to the Astor Library* (New York: R. Craighead, 1851), 421 (compiled by J. Cogswell).

68 *A Biblical and Theological Dictionary* (rev. Am. ed; New York: Lane and Scott, 1851 [1832]), 505. Cf. *Calmet's Dictionary of the Holy Bible* (eds. C. Taylor; E. Robinson; Rev. American ed; Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1832), 549–50 (the 8th edition of the *Dictionary* [1841, in 5 volumes] is listed in the holdings of the Astor Library (*Catalogue or Alphabetical Index* [A-Z, 1857], 215).

69 (12th. ed; London: Charles Griffin and Company, 1870 [1848]), 354–55.

70 (London: Blackie and Sons, 1866), I, 855—he is referencing the fact that verbs in Hebrew are marked morphologically for aspect and not tense.

like (i.e., that the name "was compounded of the Present Participle, and the Future and the Praeterite tenses of the substantive verb") lacks solid grammatical warrants.[71]

Whitman need not have consulted any of these specific volumes. I cite them because they give a fair representation of the kind of thought that lies behind Whitman's jottings in "(For words)." That he could have come across such information on Jehovah would seem a good possibility in light of his reminder to check a "theological dictionary."[72] He then massages the image towards the "Father Time" ("personalizes Time") figure of the "Ancient of days" (Aram. ᶜ*attîq yômayyāᵓ*) of Daniel 7 (vv. 9, 13, 22). The image strongly resembles that of the "Father Time" figures in the opening section of "Chanting the Square Deific" (*Sequel*, 15):

> CHANTING the square deific, out of the One advancing, out of the sides;
>
> Out of the old and new—out of the square entirely divine,
>
> Solid, four-sided, (all the sides needed)...from this side JEHOVAH am I,
>
> Old Brahm I, and I Saturnius am;
>
> Not Time affects me—I am Time, modern as any;

It is hard not to see in Whitman's "JEHOVAH am I" an allusion to Exod 3:14, "I AM THAT I AM" (capitalized in the KJB) and "I AM hath sent me unto you" (a similar capitalization figures in several of the dictionary discussions as well)—and in fact in an 1842 article from the *Aurora* Whitman himself references the "great I AM upon the mountain of clouds" (Exodus 19–20).[73] Here Whitman adopts the

71 W. Smith, *A Dictionary of the Bible* (vol 1; Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1860), 952–59, quotations from p. 955. The volume is listed in the Astor Library's holdings from 1861 (*Catalogue or Alphabetical Index* [Q-Z, 1861], 1818).

72 There is an interesting mention of "Jah" in the early "Talbot Wilson" notebook ("If I walked with Jah in Heaven...," https://whitmanarchive.org/manuscripts/figures/loc.00141.062.jpg; cf. "myths of Jah" in "The genuine miracles of Christ," https://whitmanarchive.org/manuscripts/transcriptions/loc.01019.html), which is referenced in many of these dictionary entries (e.g., Watson, *Biblical and Theological Dictionary*, 500: "one of the names of God"; cf. *Calmet's Dictionary*, 543). Otherwise the shortened form only occurs once in Ps 68:4 (of the KJB)—with reference to "him that rideth upon the heavens." Regardless, no mistaking the ultimate source for this designation, the KJB.

73 "A Peep at the Israelites," 2, https://whitmanarchive.org/published/periodical/journalism/tei/per.00418.html. The article records Whitman's visit to Crosby Street synagogue.

KJB's capitalizations, as they mimic the Tetragrammaton of the Hebrew Bible—*YHWH* (Exod 6:3; Ps 83:18; Isa 12:2; 26:4).[74]

A final characteristic to note about Whitman's manner of phrasing in these manuscripts is his emphasis literally on the Bible *as poetry*. There is a generic sense in which the Bible as a whole often got characterized as "poetry" during the nineteenth century, and this can be glimpsed with Whitman at times, for example, when in "Names. The Biblical poets" he also includes "the New Testament writers"—there is very little actual poetry (verse) in the New Testament. By contrast, however, almost a third of the Hebrew Bible is verse. The KJB, of course, is a prose translation of the Bible, with no formatting distinction made for verse (a point I come back to in Chapter Three). Yet certainly by the time of "The Bible as Poetry" essay Whitman is well aware that the Hebrew Bible contains poetry (viz. his referencing of de Sola Mendes' opinion).[75] As the manuscript notations quoted above show, this awareness goes back into the 1850s at least, viz. "verse... Old Testament," "very ancient poetry, of the Hebrew prophets," "a few Hebrew canticles," "the Biblical poets—David, Isaiah, the Book of Job," "the Syrian canticles," "the Hebraic poems."[76] This reemphasizes Whitman's privileging of the Hebrew Bible (especially its poetic portions) and the strong

74 "Jehovah" results from a misunderstanding of the nature of the "perpetual *qere*" involving the Tetragrammaton in the Masoretic manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Gen 3:14 in B19a). Instead of reading the *qere* *ʾădōnāy* (lit. "my Lord") in place of the unpronounceable written form (the *ketib*) of the name of the deity, *yhwh* (cf. Jerome's translation of Exod 6:3, Adonai), it combines the consonants of the Tetragrammaton with the vowel points of *ʾădōnay*, yielding the non-existent"Jehovah." The *OED* credits P. Galatinus with the earliest such rendering, in Latin ("Iehoua," 1518 CE). Tyndale introduces the new coinage into English in 1530 (e.g., "Iehouah" in Gen 6:3; cf. Wycliffite: "Adonay" [after the Vulgate], *OED*), which then spreads into the English vernacular through succeeding Bible translations, especially that of the KJB.

75 From the same period comes Whitman's essay on Emerson ("Emerson's Books, (The Shadows of Them.)," *Boston Literary World* [22 May 1880] = *Specimen Days & Collect* [1882] [*CPW*, 319–21]), in which he writes: "At times it has been doubtful to me if Emerson really knows or feels what Poetry is at its highest, as in the Bible, for instance, or Homer or Shakspere"—a similar sentiment is contained in Whitman's notes for the essay, which date back to 1872 (see E. Folsom, "Whitman's Notes on Emerson: An Unpublished Manuscript," *WWQR* 18/1 [2000], 60–62).

76 Whitman reports attending his first synagogue service in "A Peep at the Israelites" (2, https://whitmanarchive.org/published/periodical/journalism/tei/per.00418.html). He is clearly aware of Hebrew as the original language of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament—"the tones and the native language of the holy Psalmist."

likelihood of his having benefited from outside sources for some of this awareness—that is, it is an awareness again that would not necessarily be obvious to a casual reader of the Bible in an English prose translation. Stovall even comments on the peculiarity of Whitman's language about the Bible *as poetry*: "As a boy in Sunday School and under the usual influences of a Protestant Christian home, he had absorbed much of the Old and New Testaments, but so far as I can discover, he never thought of the Hebrew Bible as poetry until 1850 or later."[77] Certainly, his early notebooks reveal him having already come to this new appreciation of poetry in the (Hebrew) Bible. One theme in particular, that all early writing was in verse, can be traced back into the early 1850s. It appears in both "The florid rich" (1855–60) and "Speaking of literary style" (1854/55), specifically associated with the Bible. And the same theme is also present in the best known of Whitman's early notebooks, the "Talbot Wilson" notebook (1854[78]), albeit without explicit connection to the Bible: "In the earliest times... everything written at all was poetry.... Therefore history, laws, religion, war [were] all in the keeping of the poet.— He was literature.— It was nothing but poems."[79] The theme is the same, and as I illustrate below, there are biblical connections with this notebook as well.

But what is possibly Whitman's earliest mention of "Biblical poetry" comes among comments annotating a clipping about Ossian from Margaret Fuller's "Things and Thoughts on Europe. No. V" (*New York Tribune*, 30 September 1846).[80] Grier dates the manuscript to the time of Fuller's article, 1846, "since it is reasonable to assume that WW made these notes at the time the clipping... was published."[81] Stovall, more cautious, says, "the clipping was doubtless made in 1846, but the note

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His later line from the "Poem of Salutation"—"I hear the Hebrew reading his records and psalms" (*LG* 1856, 106)—likely reflects such lived experiences.

77 *Foreground*, 184.

78 On the date, see esp. A. Birney, "Missing Whitman Notebooks Returned to Library of Congress," *WWQR* 12 (1995), 217–29; E. Shephard, "Possible Sources of Some of Whitman's Ideas in *Hermes Mercurius Trismegistus* and Other Works," *MLQ* 14 (1953), 67n; E. F. Grier, "Walt Whitman's Earliest Known Notebook," *PMLA* 83 (1968), 1453–1456; Higgins, "Wage Slavery," 53–77; Miller, *Collage of Myself*, 2–5.

79 https://whitmanarchive.org/manuscripts/figures/loc.00141.117.jpg

80 "An Ossianic paragraph," https://whitmanarchive.org/manuscripts/marginalia/figures/mid.00016.001.jpg

81 *NUPM* V, 1806.

seems to be of later date"[82]—though he does not speculate on how much "later." Either way "An Ossianic paragraph" is early. In the annotation Whitman queries the possible source of Ossian's poetry: "?Can it be a descendant of the Biblical poetry?—Is it not Isaiah, Job, the Psalms, and so forth, transferred to the Scotch Highlands? (or to Ireland?)." And then added in pencil (like the parenthetical query about Ireland): "? The tremendous figures and ideas of the Hebrew poems,—are they not *original*?—for they are certainly great—(Yes they are original." This is a fascinating quote for a variety of reasons (not least of which is that Whitman's instinct was correct, Ossian turned out to be the creation of poet James Macpherson who was indeed influenced by the Bible[83]). For the moment what is to be accentuated is Whitman's clear awareness of the fact of "Biblical poetry"—"Hebrew poems," "Isaiah, Job, the Psalms, and so forth," and at an early date—entirely consistent with the kind of reading and note-taking that typified his intense period of self-study from 1845–52.[84]

That Whitman would gravitate to the "poetry" of the Hebrew Bible during the very period when he was coming to his identity as a poet is perhaps natural enough (at least in hindsight). It is also worth stressing that the kind of poetry one finds in the Hebrew Bible is almost entirely nonnarrative in nature, mostly lyric and didactic, with a large block of prophetic verse that often combines a mix of genres and generally lacks strong fixed forms.[85] There is no true epic verse whatsoever in the Bible (doubtless Hebrew epics were performed in antiquity, but they did not get written down). Whitman, of course, is mainly a lyricist in the early *Leaves*. As Allen reminds readers about that first rendition of "Song of Myself," its "final effect… is lyrical, and it is as a lyric it should

82 Stovall, *Foreground*, 115.

83 Ibid., 117.

84 Whitman's quotations and allusions to the Bible in editorials and such from 1846–47 as editor of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, which on Bergquist's count amounts to 67 in total (Allen finds 25 specific allusions or quotes), alone show that he was certainly reading and referencing the Bible at the beginning of this period of self-study.

85 See F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, "The Idea of Lyric Poetry in the Bible" in *On Biblical Poetry* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University, 2015), 178–232. For the general resemblance between Whitman's verse and the free forms of biblical prophecy, see K. Renner, "Tradition for a Time of Crisis: Whitman's Prophetic Stance" in *Poetic Prophecy in Western Literature* (eds. J. Wojcik and R.-J. Frontain; Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University, 1984), 119–30, esp. 120–21.

be judged."[86] And then this further characterization, which is just as accurate a descriptor of biblical poetry as it is of "Song of Myself" (and *Leaves* more generally): "It has passages which present dramatic scenes, but it has no plot; such narration as it has is episodic, and this only in a few spots."[87] Whitman himself remarks specifically on the lack in *Leaves* of conventional "plots of love or war" and "no legend, or myth, or romance."[88] The latter is the stuff of "objective, epic" poetry—"of other persons"—which Whitman explicitly contrasts with the "subjective"—"out of the person himself"—"or lyric" nature of his own verse: "'Leaves of Grass,' must be called *not* objective, but altogether *subjective*."[89] The "great psalm of the republic," according to the 1855 Preface (*LG*, iv), is "to be indirect and not direct or descriptive or epic."[90] Direct address, as J. P. Warren notes, is an important feature of Whitman's style in the early *Leaves*.[91] An "I" addressing a "you" is the prototypical pronominal shape of lyric discourse generally and characteristic of much nonnarrative verse in the (Hebrew) Bible. And lyric's capacities to enfold multiple and even opposing voices, viewpoints or ideas turns out to be crucial to Whitman's politics of inclusion, what D. S. Reynolds describes as Whitman's "long-term strategy" of "resolving thorny political issues

86 *Solitary Singer*, 164; cf. Crawley, *Structure*, 79 ("it is fundamental... to remember that he [Whitman] was a lyric poet").

87 Allen, *Solitary Singer*, 164. K. M. Price identifies "A Child's Reminiscence" (1859; later, "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking") as Whitman's first poem "based on a narrative structure" (*Whitman and Tradition* [New Haven: Yale University, 1990], 63).

88 *CW*, III, 45.

89 The pastiche of quotations comes from *CW* IX, 228 and *NUPM* IV, 1432—the latter is from a manuscript scrap that Grier dates between 1856 and 1858.

90 T. J. Rountree explains one part of Whitman's "indirect expression" as his attempt "to make the reader become active by *reciprocating to his poems*" ("Walt Whitman's Indirect Expression and Its Application to 'Song of Myself,'" *PMLA* 73/5 [1958], 550–51; cf. B. Erkkila, (*Whitman the Political Poet* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University, 1989]), 90–91). In R. Greene's analysis this is lyric's ritual dimension in which the auditor turns collaborator, lyric's capacity "to superpose the subjectivity of the scripted speaker on the reader" (*Post-Petrarchism*: *Origins and Innovations of the Western Lyric Sequence* [Princeton: Princeton University, 1991], 5–6; for his analysis of Whitman, see pp. 133–52). It also seems possible that indirect as opposed to direct and epic should be glossed as subjective, i.e., not a direct statement of objective fact but an observation "out of the person" for consideration by other persons.

91 "Style" in *A Companion to Walt Whitman* (ed. D. D. Kummings; London: Blackwell, 2006), 377–91, esp. 382.

by linguistic fiat."[92] So famously, "Do I contradict myself?/ Very well then.... I contradict myself;/ I am large.... I contain multitudes" (*LG*, 55). And such capacities are well exploited by biblical poems (e.g., "We have transgressed and have rebelled: thou hast not pardoned," Lam 3:42).[93] The very genres that populate *Leaves of Grass*, then, are perhaps not happened upon entirely innocently, as they are also very much the kinds of poetry one finds in "Isaiah, Job, the Psalms"—and in another late essay Whitman even references "the Hebrew lyricists."[94] Indeed, as B. Perry remarks, in the English Bible Whitman found "precisely that natural stylistic variation between the 'terrific,' the 'gentle,' and the 'inferior' parts" that he so desired, and there, too, "were lyric fragments, of consummate beauty, embedded in narrative or argumentative passages."[95]

The period of the "New Bible" provides yet additional evidence for the influence of the Bible on Whitman's ever evolving conception of *Leaves of Grass*, especially of the 1860 edition.[96] An 1859 unpublished manuscript reads as follows:

> [~~illeg.~~] The greatest thing is to make a nation's poems.— The grand true making of the Poems of a nation would combine all ~~those~~ that ~~has~~ belongs to the Iliad of Homer and the ~~Jewish~~ Hebrew Canticles ~~called~~ the

92 "Politics and Poetry: *Leaves of Grass* and the Social Crisis of the 1850s" in *The Cambridge Companion to Walt Whitman* (ed. E. Greenspan; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1995), 70.

93 The second clause (the second line of the original Hebrew couplet) is strongly disjunctive (viz. "*but* thou...."). The conventional theology of the day presumed that once wrongs are confessed the deity should forgive (or "pardon"), and thus the second clause is uttered in complaint, critical of Yahweh's failure to grant such "pardon." For details, see F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations* (IBC; Louisville: Westminster-John Knox, 2002), 122–25. On lyric's congenial disposition to sponsoring contradictory voicings, see broadly Dobbs-Allsopp, "Idea of Lyric," esp. 178–214 (with references to other literature); "Poetic Discourse and Ethics" in *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* (eds. J. Green et al. Grand Rapids, Baker, 2011), 597–600; and on Lamentations specifically, Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 12–20, 24–27.

94 "Poetry To-day in America" in *PW* II, 486 (originally published as "The Poetry of the Future," *NAR* 132 [1881], 195–210).

95 *Walt Whitman*, 96. Earlier Perry reports that Whitman "frequently" noted "his interweaving of lyric with descriptive passages" (and compared this to the "alternating aria and the recitative of an oratorio," p. 86).

96 H. J. Levine offers a compelling reading of the 1855 "I celebrate myself" in light of Whitman's own articulated "New Bible" aspirations ("'Song of Myself' as Whitman's American Bible," *Modern Language Quarterly* 48/2 [1987], 145–61).

> Bible and of ~~S~~khakespear's delineation of feudal heroism and personality and would carry all the influences ~~of both~~ and all that branches from them for thousands of years.—[97]

The aspiration articulated here, that Whitman's "Poems of a nation" should include all that belongs to the "Hebrew Canticles," correlates well with the opening sentiment of "The Bible as Poetry":

> If the time ever comes when Iconoclasm does its extremest in one direction against this Book, the collection must still survive in another, and dominate just as much as hitherto, or more than hitherto, through its divine and primal poetic structure. To me, that is the living and definitive element-principle of the work, evolving everything else. Then the continuity; the oldest and newest Asiatic utterance and character, and all between, holding together, like the apparition of the sky, and coming to us the same. Even to our Nineteenth Century here are the fountain heads of song.[98]

Here Whitman clearly articulates his sense of carrying on the biblical tradition through his own poetry, the kind of combining he writes about in the 1859 "Poems of a nation" manuscript—"Could there be any more opportune suggestion, to the current popular writer and reader of verse, what the office of poet was in primeval times—and is yet capable of being, anew, adjusted entirely to the modern?"[99] And then toward the end of "The Bible as Poetry," the image of "all that branches from them [the Bible, etc.] for thousands of years" gets "resolved into" a related image, that of "a collection of old poetic lore [the Bible], which, more than any one thing else, has been the axis of civilization and history through thousands of years—and except for which this America of ours, with its polity and essentials, could not now be existing."

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97 Entitled, "Poems of a nation," now in the Charles E. Feinberg Collection of the Papers of Walt Whitman, Library of Congress (Notes and Notebooks, 1847–1891 mss18630, box 40; reel 25, https://www.loc.gov/item/mss1863001283). Thanks to Amanda Zimmerman from the Rare Books and Special Collections Division of the Library of Congress for tracking down this manuscript fragment for me.

98 In a slightly edited form, this is shifted to the end of the essay in *November Boughs* (45–46).

99 This is also a sentiment that Whitman poeticizes in the late poem, "Old Chants" (*Truth* 10 [19 March 1891], 11), viz. "(Of many debts incalculable,/ Haply our New World's chiefest debt is to old poems.)" (lines 6–7).

Both the 1859 "Poems of a nation" manuscript and "The Bible as Poetry" also seem to have in common Whitman's resistance to the notion of originality, "at least in the superficial sense." Miller explicates Whitman's understanding with reference to a draft of what was perhaps a self-review of *Leaves of Grass*, though the manuscript apparently is now lost.[100] Whitman explains, in reference to his poems, that "there is nothing actually new only an accumulation or fruitage or carrying out these new occasions and requirements."[101] Miller even suggests that Whitman "seems to be thinking here of something like Ecclesiastes' claim that there is no new thing under the sun."[102] Miller is perhaps nearer the mark than he supposes. The language, as I assume Miller means to imply, is close to the KJB of Eccl 1:9 ("and there is no new thing under the sun"). But what is more, in *Specimen Days & Collect* (1882) Whitman entitles a paragraph-long section "Little or Nothing New, After All," again an apparent allusion to Eccl 1:9.[103] And the paragraph elaborates yet another rendition of Whitman's notion of originality:

> How small were the best thoughts, poems, conclusions, except for a certain invariable resemblance and uniform standard in the final thoughts, theology, poems, &c., of all nations, all civilizations, all centuries and times. Those precious legacies—accumulations! They come to us from the far-off—from all eras, and all lands—from Egypt, and India, and Greece, and Rome—and along through the middle and later ages, in the grand monarchies of Europe—born under far different institutes and conditions from ours—but out of the insight and inspiration of the same old humanity—the same old heart and brain—the same old countenance yearningly, pensively, looking forth. What we have to do to-day is to receive them cheerfully, and to give them ensemble, and a modern American and democratic physiognomy.[104]

The Bible is not mentioned explicitly here but it is surely implied, viz. "from all eras, and all lands." As Zweig observes, Whitman's famous catalogues in general are highly symbolic statements as well: "a random list is, by definition, merely a sample of an unspoken list

100 *Collage of Myself*, 87–88. The manuscript is cited by Miller as printed in *CW* 9:12.
101 Miller, *Collage of Myself*, 87. Cf. *LG*, 24: "These are the thoughts of all men in all ages and lands, they are not original with me."
102 Ibid., 88.
103 See Bergquist, "Walt Whitman and the Bible," 285.
104 *CPW*, 336.

containing everything."[105] And by way of confirmation, the paragraph itself is formed from parts of two paragraphs that were originally a part of a series of connected paragraphs in *Two Rivulets* (1876), gathered under the general heading, "Thoughts for the Centennial."[106] Not two paragraphs later in *Two Rivulets* "the holy Bible itself" is included in a long list of literary contributions from "foreign countries," ancient as well as contemporary, in which "each has contributed after its kind, directly or indirectly, at least one great undying Song, to help vitalize and increase the valor, wisdom, and elegance of Humanity, from the points of view attain'd by it up to date."[107] The emphasis here is slightly different but the underlying sensibility is the same as Whitman's other variations on his theme of originality.[108] And Miller himself shows that this take on originality can be traced back into the Preface to the 1855 *Leaves* (e.g., "The greatest poet forms the consistence of what is to be from what has been and is," *LG*, vi) and perhaps even earlier.[109] One of the chief bequests of nineteenth-century philology was a greatly increased appreciation for history and the present's ineluctable debt to the past, which Whitman's sense of "originality" (as Miller develops it) must grow out of and which Whitman will have absorbed from among other sources his reading of Bunsen, Schele de Vere, and the like.[110] And the notebooks show that his catalogues of literary and religious

105 *Walt Whitman*, 248–49.

106 (Camden, New Jersey: Author's Edition, 1876), 15–22.

107 *Two Rivulets*, 16. The two paragraphs relevant here are reprinted in a slightly reedited form in *Specimen Days* under the section title, "Lacks and Wants Yet" (*PW*, II, 533–34).

108 A similar list appears in the late poem "Old Chants," only with explicit mention of the Bible: "The Biblic books and prophets, and deep idyls of the Nazarene," (line 11). Note also the inclusion of "Syria's" in this rejected line from another late poem, "Death's Valley" (a response to a painting about Ps 23:4): "Syria's, India's, Egypt's, Greece's, Rome's" (from a manuscript entitled "Aye, well I know 'tis ghastly to descend," http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/ms004014.mss18630.00626. Here, too, there is no question of the Bible's (at least belated) inclusion in Whitman's mind among "the ancientest humanity."

109 *Collage of Myself*, 88–90.

110 For example, here is Schele de Vere: "With these great religions, Europe owes to Asia every one of those mighty impulses, that, from time to time, have given fresh life to sinking empires, or new hopes to despairing nations" (*Outlines of Comparative Philology*, 94). Cf. Whitman's reference to the "comparative method" in *NUPM* IV, 1519.

forebears routinely include the Bible. This outline for a "Poem of Wise Books" from the "Dick Hunt" notebook (1856/57) is typical:

Poem of Wise Books

Poem of the Library—(bring in all about the few leading books.

Literature of Egypt,

Assyria

Persia

Hindostan

Palestine

Greece—Pythagoras Plato—Socrates—Homer—Iliad Odyssey

Rome,—Virgil

Germany—Luther

Christ Bible Shakespeare Emerson Rousseau—("Social Contract")

So here is another place where there is confidence that the perspective of "The Bible as Poetry" is not (only) a late, retrospective (re)framing, but reflects a perception long held by Whitman.

The Bible and the Birth of (Whitman's) Free Verse

I close with some reflections on what may be Whitman's most startling revelation in "The Bible as Poetry," his awareness of the unmetered and unrhymed nature of biblical Hebrew poetry via de Sola Mendes, to whom he attributes the following: "rhyming was not a characteristic of Hebrew poetry at all. Metre was not a necessary mark of poetry. Great poets discarded it; the early Jewish poets knew it not."[111] I describe this awareness as "startling" because even though there were nineteenth-century biblical scholars (as also in previous eras) who thought of biblical poetry as unmetered, the question continued to be debated

111 Cf. Posey, "Whitman's Debt," 151, n. 24.

throughout the twentieth and now into the twenty-first century.[112] Robert Lowth in his field-founding *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* from the middle of the eighteenth century frankly admits his inability to reconstruct Hebrew meter, but he presumes its presence nonetheless since he could no more imagine poetry without meter than a world older than what the Bible represented.[113] He does end up stretching received notions of meter such that later scholars (e.g., J. G. Herder) can begin to imagine the idea of biblical poetry being nonmetrical. Allen's understated reminder (some fifty years after Whitman's own comment) with regard to the putative newness of Whitman's "free" rhythms (i.e., his free verse)—namely, that "the truth of the matter" is that these rhythms "are not new, since they are, to go no farther back, at least as old as Hebrew poetry"[114]—was a position on biblical poetry that would not

112 E.g., M. Stuart, *A Hebrew Chrestomathy* (Andover: Codman Press, 1829), 193–94 (Stuart's *Chrestomathy* was eventually included [minus the Hebrew text] at the end of his translation of the *Hebrew Grammar of Gesenius* (ed. Roediger; trans. M. Stuart; Andover: Allen, Morrill, and Wardwell, 1846], 352). George Wither (1588–1667 CE) is an outstanding example of a premodern who recognized the nonmetrical nature of biblical verse: "The *Hebrews* are full of variety in their *Numbers*, and take great liberty in their *Verses*. For as *Marianus Vićlorius* reports, they are not always measured out by the same Number or quality of Syllables, as the *Greeke* or *Latine Verses* are" (*A Preparation to the Psalter* [London: Nicholas Okes, 1619], 59). For a recent overview of the question of meter in biblical poetry, see D. R. Vance, *The Question of Meter in Biblical Hebrew Poetry* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 2001).

113 R. Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* (2 vols.; trans. G. Gregory; London: J. Johnson, 1787; reprinted in *Robert Lowth (1710–1787): The Major Works*, vols. 1–2 [London: Routledge, 1995]).

114 *American Prosody*, 220; cf. G. W. Allen, "Biblical Analogies for Walt Whitman's Prosody," *Revue Anglo-Americaine* 6 (1933), 490–507, at 491; Posey, "Whitman's Debt," 151, 168; Hartman, *Free Verse*, 90. The truth, of course, is that such "free" rhythms—nonmetrical verse—are attested even earlier than the Bible, as they are characteristic of ancient Levantine (e.g., Ugaritic), Mesopotamian, and Egyptian poetry as well (e.g., D. Wesling and E. Bollobaś, "Free Verse" in *NPEPP*, 425; G. B. Cooper, "Free Verse" in *PEPP*). Allen also stresses in his comments here that Whitman's verse (and by extension free verse more generally) is not entirely "free" either. Here it will suffice to direct readers to B. H. Smith's discussion of free verse in which she too emphasizes the common misapprehension of freedom when directed at nonmetrical verse (*Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End* [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1968], 84–95). As she observes, "the distinction between metrical verse and free verse is a relative, not an absolute, one" (p. 87).

be explicitly theorized by biblical scholars for another thirty years.[115] It is above all the conscious eschewing of rhyme and meter in a dominantly parallelistic type of verse that has most suggested to Whitman scholars over the years the poet's prosodic debt to the KJB, an English prose translation of the Bible that manifestly lacks rhyme and meter. The presumption is most conveniently tracked in the many biographies of Whitman, from Perry to Loving. Loving's statement is both summative and illustrative:

> Probably Bliss Perry, like Allen a biographer of Whitman, was right when he determined that Whitman's main model for his new prosody was the English Bible. "Here," Perry wrote, "was precisely the natural stylistic variation between the 'terrific,' the 'gentle,' and the 'inferior' parts, so desired by William Blake.... The parallelism which constituted the peculiar structural device of Hebrew poetry gave the English of the King James version a heightened rhythm without destroying the flexibility and freedom natural to prose. In this strong, rolling music, the intense feeling, these concrete words expressing primal emotions in daring terms of bodily sensations, Whitman found the charter for the book he wished to write."[116]

The earliest published reference linking Whitman's rhyme-less rhythm to the (English) Bible is made by R. Buchanan in 1867: "In about ten thousand lines of unrhymed verse, very Biblical in form, and showing indeed on every page the traces of Biblical influence, Walt Whitman professes to sow the first seeds of an indigenous literature...."[117] Around the same time W. M. Rossetti was in the process of putting together a volume of selections from Whitman's

115 B. Hrushovski [Harshav], "On Free Rhythms in Modern Poetry" in *Style in Language* (ed. T. Sebeok; 1960), 173–90; cf. "Prosody, Hebrew" in *Ecy Jud* (1971–72), 13: 1200–03. And now see in detail, F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, "The Free Rhythms of Biblical Hebrew Poetry" in *On Biblical Poetry*, 95–177 (note esp. the opening section entitled, "Through Whitman's Eyes," 95–99).

116 Loving, *Song of Himself*, 197. Loving is quoting B. Perry, *Walt Whitman*: *His Life and Work* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1906), 96. Posey surveys the earliest scholarship on this question, citing no less than eighteen different reviewers/scholars (including Perry) who call attention to the rhythmic kinship between Whitman and the Bible prior to Allen's first study ("Whitman's Debt," 142–47).

117 "Walt Whitman," *The Broadway* 1 (November 1867), 188—5, https://whitmanarchive.org/criticism/reviews/drum/anc.00065.html. Cf. R. Buchanan, *David Gray and Other Essays* (London, 1868), 207.

poems for a British audience.[118] In his "Prefatory Notice" to the volume, Rossetti observes that "a certain echo of the old Hebrew poetry may even be caught" in Whitman's *Leaves*.[119] W. D. O'Connor in an earlier review of the 1867 *Leaves* referenced "the poetic diction of the Hebraic muse."[120] And Whitman himself in a never-published manuscript he offered to Rossetti to use as the "Introduction" to the latter's volume—passing it off as O'Connor's work—immediately calls attention to the "the form of these verses, not only without rhyme, but wholly regardless of the customary verbal melody & regularity so much labored after by modern poets," and then some pages later also refers to himself as a "man" whose "interior & foundation quality... is Hebraic, Biblical, mystic."[121] Triangulating from these several observations, it seems likely that already by 1867 (well before "The Bible as Poetry" essay from 1883) Whitman was aware of biblical poetry's leading prosodic characteristics, namely, its lack of rhyme and meter.

In fact, Whitman was hyper-conscious of his decision to elaborate a rhythmical style free of "arbitrary and rhyming meter" and the break with the poetic norms of the day that this entailed. He argued repeatedly and explicitly throughout his life on behalf of his own unrhymed and unmeasured "new American poetry." This begins already in the immediate aftermath of his first trial experiments with such rhyme-less poetry. In an 1850 letter to the editor of the *National Era*, Whitman notes that "poetry exists independent of rhyme."[122] His

118 See letters 161, 167, and 169 collected in W. M. Rossetti, *Rossetti Papers*: *1862–1870* (London: Sands & Co., 1903); Allen, *Solitary Singer*, 382–87; *NUPM* IV, 1497. Rossetti's edition came out in 1868: Poems by Walt Whitman (London: John Camden Hotten, Piccadilly, 1868), https://whitmanarchive.org/published/books/other/rossetti.html.

119 Poems by Walt Whitman, 6.

120 "Walt Whitman," *The New York Times* (2 December 1866), 2., https://whitmanarchive.org/criticism/reviews/lg1867/anc.00064.html.

121 *NUPM* IV, 1498, 1501. The same ideas co-occur a few years later (February, 1874), though in closer proximity, on leaves 7 and 8 of an unpublished article Whitman wanted Burroughs to publish under his name ("Is Walt Whitman's Poetry Poetical?", *NUPM* IV, 1518, 1519): "discarding exact metre and rhyme, (not discarding rhythm rhythm at all" and "The divine immortal Hebraic poems."

122 The letter appeared on 21 November 1850 (reprinted in Silver, "Whitman in 1850," 314).

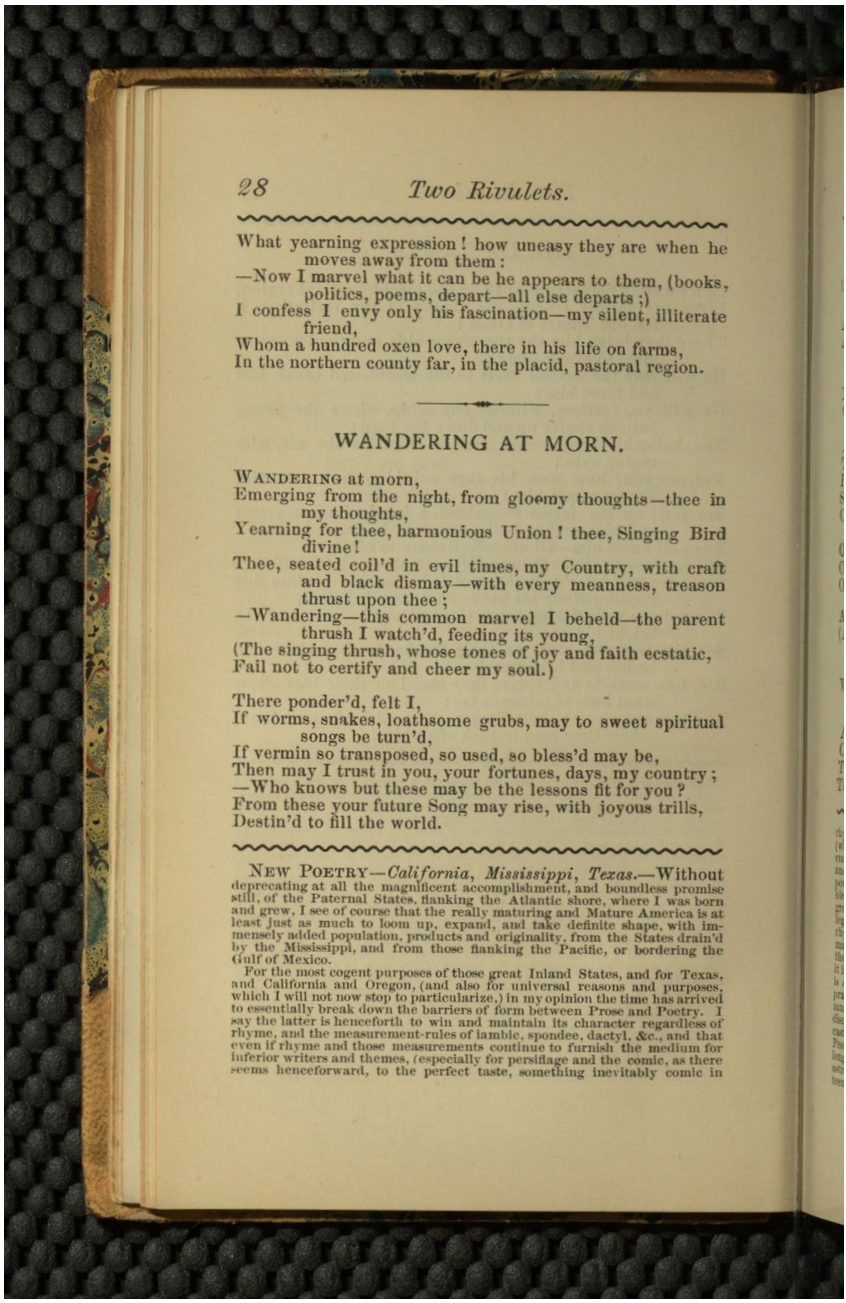
early notebooks contain similar notices (e.g., "a perfectly transparent plate-glassy style, artless, with no ornaments"[123]), and this aspiration for a non-rhyming kind of verse is made explicit in the following lines from "I celebrate myself":

> Loafe with me on the grass.... loose the stop from your throat,
>
> Not words, not music or rhyme I want.... not custom or lecture, not even the best,
>
> Only the lull I like, the hum of your valved voice. (*LG*, 15)

It is also articulated in the 1855 Preface ("poetic quality is not marshaled in rhyme or uniformity or abstract addresses to things," *LG*, v; cf. iii, vi) and its later poeticized versions (e.g., "Rhymes and rhymers pass away," *LG* 1856, 194), for example. One of Whitman's most explicit statements on the topic comes in *Two Rivulets* (1876): "the truest and greatest poetry, (while subtly and necessarily always rhythmic, and distinguishable easily enough,) can never again, in the English language, be expressed in arbitrary and rhyming meter, any more than the greatest eloquence, or the truest power and passion."[124] The page layout in *Two Rivulets* features poems on the top half of the page and prose on the bottom half, the two being separated by a wavy horizontal line. In this instance the two poems, "Wandering at Morn" and "An Old Man's Thought of School" (presented on the top halves of pp. 28 and 29; see Fig. 9), exemplify the kind of "always rhythmic" but nonmetrical verse for which Whitman is advocating.

123 From "Rules for Composition", https://whitmanarchive.org/published/books/other/rossetti.html; cf. *NUPM* I,132–33 (from "I know a rich capitalist," https://whitmanarchive.org/manuscripts/notebooks/transcriptions/nyp.00129.html). This aesthetic is consistent with Whitman's art (e.g., Silver, "Whitman in 1850," 305–06) and music (e.g., Silver, "Whitman in 1850," esp. 304–05, 314–16) theory from the early 1850s.

124 (Camden, New Jersey, 1876), 29.



28 *Two Rivulets.*

What yearning expression! how uneasy they are when he moves away from them:
—Now I marvel what it can be he appears to them, (books, politics, poems, depart—all else departs;)
I confess I envy only his fascination—my silent, illiterate friend,
Whom a hundred oxen love, there in his life on farms,
In the northern county far, in the placid, pastoral region.

WANDERING AT MORN.

WANDERING at morn,
Emerging from the night, from gloomy thoughts—thee in my thoughts,
Yearning for thee, harmonious Union! thee, Singing Bird divine!
Thee, seated coil'd in evil times, my Country, with craft and black dismay—with every meanness, treason thrust upon thee;
—Wandering—this common marvel I beheld—the parent thrush I watch'd, feeding its young,
(The singing thrush, whose tones of joy and faith ecstatic,
Fail not to certify and cheer my soul.)

There ponder'd, felt I,
If worms, snakes, loathsome grubs, may to sweet spiritual songs be turn'd,
If vermin so transposed, so used, so bless'd may be,
Then may I trust in you, your fortunes, days, my country;
—Who knows but these may be the lessons fit for you?
From these your future Song may rise, with joyous trills,
Destin'd to fill the world.

NEW POETRY—*California, Mississippi, Texas.*—Without deprecating at all the magnificent accomplishment, and boundless promise still, of the Paternal States, flanking the Atlantic shore, where I was born and grew, I see of course that the really maturing and Mature America is at least just as much to loom up, expand, and take definite shape, with immensely added population, products and originality, from the States drain'd by the Mississippi, and from those flanking the Pacific, or bordering the Gulf of Mexico.

For the most cogent purposes of those great Inland States, and for Texas, and California and Oregon, (and also for universal reasons and purposes, which I will not now stop to particularize,) in my opinion the time has arrived to essentially break down the barriers of form between Prose and Poetry. I say the latter is henceforth to win and maintain its character regardless of rhyme, and the measurement-rules of iambic, spondee, dactyl, &c., and that even if rhyme and those measurements continue to furnish the medium for inferior writers and themes, (especially for persiflage and the comic, as there seems henceforward, to the perfect taste, something inevitably comic in

Fig. 9: P. 28 from *Two Rivulets* (Camden, New Jersey, 1876). Showing poetry and prose divided by a wavy line running across the middle of the page. Public domain.

The statement in "The Bible as Poetry," then, is of a piece with Whitman's thinking about his free verse since the early 1850s. In emphasizing the kindred nature of biblical poetic prosody in that essay, Whitman's chief aim was to lend authority to his own prosodic practice and not so much to identify the Bible as a source for that practice. That the latter is also probable, as noted, has been widely observed from early on, with parallelism and the reiterative play that parallelism sponsors and stages being among the readiest signs of this rhythmic debt.[125] Stovall ties Whitman's ideas about "the free growth of metrical laws" (*LG*, v; and one might add, the very form of his free verse itself) to Emerson's contention in "The Poet" that "it is not metres, but a metre-making argument that makes a poem."[126] Emerson read Lowth as an undergraduate and does not find his way to unclogging the "free step" of unrhymed and unmetered verse without having encountered Lowth.[127] And thus whatever the Emersonian influence on Whitman's prosodic theory and practice, this, too, ultimately derives (in part) from Lowth and the Bible. And in the case of the Bible's lack of rhyme, more specifically, there is no question that Whitman also knew this, and knew it fairly early. In a marginal note to a clipping about John Milton from "the summer of 1849" (or later), there is the following: "What is in the Bible had better not be paraphrased. The Bible is indescribably perfect—putting it in

125 Even for a scholar like B. Erkkila, who (rightly in my view) thinks there is more to Whitman's prosody than biblically-based parallelism and repetition (*Political Poet*, 332, n. 26), nevertheless recognizes the important role of parallelism and repetition in Whitman's free-verse prosody (*Political Poet*, esp. 87–91). For a general characterization of the place of iteration and recurrence—parallelism is essentially a trope of iteration—in free-verse prosodies more broadly, see Dobbs-Allsopp, *On Biblical Poetry*, esp. 109–10 (with bibliography).

126 Stovall, *Foreground*, 298. R. W. Emerson, "The Poet" in *The Complete Essays and Other Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (ed. B. Atkinson; New York: Modern Library, 1950), 319–41, at 323.

127 See R. D. Richardson, *Emerson*: *The Mind on Fire* (Berkeley: University of California, 1995), 11–14; J. Engell, "Robert Lowth, Unacknowledged Legislator" in *The Committed Word*: *Literature and Public Values* [University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1999], 119–40, at 124–25. Another likely source of inspiration was Wordsworth, also influenced by Lowth (Engell, "Robert Lowth," 124, 131–32, 135), who famously pushed against the idea of a hard and fast difference between verse and prose, see esp. G. Schmidgall, "Wordsworth and Whitman" in *Containing Multitudes*: *Walt Whitman and the British Literary Tradition* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University, 2014), 200–51—Wordsworth also speaks prominently about "the Poet" in his famous Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*.

rhyme, would that improve it or not?"[128] The presumption here must be that the Bible is unrhymed in Whitman's view.[129]

The timing of Whitman's break with the metrical tradition can be identified precisely. It happens on 22 March 1850 when he published "Blood-Money" in a supplemental issue of the *New York Daily Tribune*.[130] This is one of four poems Whitman writes in the spring and early summer of 1850. All are political poems (as is so much of Whitman's mature poetry), giving vent to his ire over the Compromise of 1850 that included passage of a Fugitive Slave law, permitted slavery into portions of the newly acquired western territories, and generally left the slavery issue itself unsettled. Whitman's resort to poetry is curious. No doubt the impetus is multifaceted. Klammer, for example, notices that Whitman lacked ready access to an editorial venue at the time, and thus could not fallback on his familiar journalistic mode of discourse (apparently he was not freelancing either).[131] Many see Emerson's ideas throughout the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, especially in the form of his essay, "The Poet."[132] Loving points out that Emerson's second visit

128 The clipping is from: "Christopher under Canvas," *Edinburgh Magazine* 65 (1849), 763–66, https://whitmanarchive.org/manuscripts/marginalia/transcriptions/duk.00015.html; image: https://whitmanarchive.org/manuscripts/marginalia/figures/duk.00015.002.jpg. Whitman emphasizes his perspective in another comment: "The difference between perfect originality and second-hand originality is the difference between the Bible and Paradise Lost," https://whitmanarchive.org/manuscripts/marginalia/figures/duk.00015.004.jpg. Stovall discusses the clipping and note in *Foreground*, 127–28. He concludes that Whitman's annotations are from that summer or "probably later."

129 Many of the early reviews connected Whitman's long, unmetered and unrhymed line with that of Martin Farquhar Tupper (see M. Cohen, "Martin Tupper, Walt Whitman, and the Early Reviews of Leaves of Grass," *WWQR* 16/1 [1998], 23–31)." That Tupper modeled his line on the Bible is and was widely acknowledged, and as a consequence an early awareness on Whitman's part of the unmetered nature of biblical verse may be posited on the basis of the association with Tupper's poetry. One early reviewer explicitly likens Whitman's "wild, irregular, unrhymed, almost unmetrical" lines to those of Tupper's "or some of the Oriental writings" (George Eliot, "Transatlantic Latter-Day Poetry," *The Leader* 7 [7 June 1856], 547–48, https://whitmanarchive.org/criticism/reviews/lg1855/anc.00027.html). Whitman reprinted this review in the second issue of the 1855 *Leaves* and again in the 1856 edition (381-83) (Stovall, *Foreground*, 256).

130 P. 1, https://whitmanarchive.org/published/periodical/poems/per.00089.

131 *Emergence*, 75.

132 Esp. Stovall, *Foreground*, 296–303. Whitman could have heard Emerson's lecture on "The Poet" as early as 5 March 1842 (in New York City; see Stovall, *Foreground*, 284–85; Loving, *Song of Himself*, 59–60. And he had certainly encountered the essay by the time (1854) he penned the passage entitled "The Poet" in the "Poem

to lecture in the New York City area coincided with the publication of Whitman's two March 1850 poems.[133] And certainly Emerson featured among the readings perused during Whitman's intense period of self-study (1845–52 in particular), as did other materials from leading British literary magazines and journals (especially focused on poetry), and even some modest bits of biblical scholarship.[134] It also has become more apparent that in the early 1850s Whitman (however consciously) was experimenting with various forms and genres of written discourse. As the early notebooks make clear, the form that *Leaves* would eventually take (poetry) was not decided on until relatively late. Those same notebooks include, for example, notes towards lectures of various sorts, one of Emerson's favored modes of discourse.[135] Whitman's brother, George, remembered that in the early 1850s Whitman "had an idea he could lecture" and wrote what Whitman's mother called "'barrels' of lectures."[136] If so, most have not survived—though there is his lecture, "Art and Artists," given on 31 March 1851 before the Brooklyn Art Union.[137] He also takes up again his occasional freelancing in 1851 (e.g., the several "Letters from Paumanok"). Loving reports on Whitman's efforts, in 1850, to sell a serialized novel ("The Sleeptalker"), which evidently was rejected,[138] and now Z. Turpin has recovered the serialized novella, "Life and Adventures of Jack Engle," which was published anonymously by Whitman in six installments from 14 March to 18 April

incarnating the mind" notebook, https://whitmanarchive.org/manuscripts/figures/loc_jc.01674.jpg.

133 Loving, *Song of Himself*, 156–60; and more broadly, J. Loving, *Emerson, Whitman, and the American Muse* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1982).

134 Stovall, *Foreground*, esp. 184–88, 265–81; 282–305. Whitman himself remembered this general period (1847–54) as the expanded run-up to the 1855 *Leaves* (*CPW*, 278).

135 C. C. Hollis emphasizes the "oratorical impulse" in *Leaves* in his study, *Language and Style in Leaves of Grass* (Baton Rouge/London: Louisiana State University, 1983).

136 H. L. Traubel et al (eds.), *In Re Walt Whitman* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1893), 35.

137 Printed afterwards in the *Brooklyn Daily Advertiser* (3 April 1851). *UPP* I, 241–47.

138 Loving, *Song of Himself*, 162–64; cf. Z. Turpin, "Introduction to Walt Whitman's 'Life and Adventures of Jack Engle,'" *WWQR* 39/3 (2017), 225, 227–28. Whitman's letter to the editors of the *New York Sun* is dated to a time (17 June 1850) between the appearances of the summer poems from 1850, "The House of Friends" and "Resurgemus," which emphasizes, among other things, the variability of Whitman's writing projects at the time.

1852 in the Manhattan newspaper, the *Sunday Dispatch*.[139] And, of course, Whitman had published poetry before, as recently as the spring of 1848.[140]

The first of the four 1850 poems, "Song for Certain Congressmen" (2 March 1850),[141] like all of his other "juvenile" verse,[142] is entirely conventional—metered and apportioned in (twelve) rhymed stanzas:

> Beyond all such we know a term
>
> Charming to ears and eyes,
>
> With it we'll stab young Freedom,
>
> And do it in disguise;
>
> Speak soft, ye wily Dough-Faces—
>
> That term is "compromise."

Then just twenty days later appears "Blood-Money":

> Of olden time, when it came to pass
>
> That the Beautiful God, Jesus, should finish his work on earth,
>
> Then went Judas, and sold the Divine youth,
>
> And took pay for his body.

The break from conventional metered poetry—and with all of Whitman's previous verse—could not be plainer. There is no meter or rhyme—this, as Loving notices, "is probably Whitman's first free-verse poem."[143] And

139 "Life and Adventures of Jack Engle: An Auto-Biography," *WWQR* 34/3 (2017), 262–357, https://whitmanarchive.org/criticism/wwqr/; cf. Turpin, "Introduction," 225–61. Whitman's notes for the story contained in a red notebook ("A schoolmaster," https://whitmanarchive.org/manuscripts/notebooks/transcriptions/loc.04588.html; *NUPM* I, 97–99; Grier dates the notebook to "as late as 1852" based on a clipping from the "Tribune" from March 1852) establish his authorship, see Turpin, "Introduction," 228–30.

140 "Mississippi at Midnight," *New Orleans Daily Crescent* (6 March 1848), 2, hive.org/published/periodical/poems/per.00063. Revised as "Sailing the Mississippi at Midnight," *CPW*, 374; *EPF*, 42–43.

141 *New York Evening Post* (2 March 1850), 2, https://whitmanarchive.org/published/periodical/poems/per.00004.

142 Cf. *UPP* I, 1–25, 30–31; *EPF*, 3–35, 42–43, 49–53.

143 Loving, *Song of Himself*, 153. The equivocation ("probably") is perhaps no longer required since the chronology of most of the early notebooks is now better understood, see Chapter Three.

the resulting *mise-en-page* is completely different (see Fig. 10)—the sixfold use of indentation to continue the longer, nonmetrical lines not only is contrary to conventional poetic practice but anticipates the "hanging indentation" that signals verse in the holographs of Whitman's notebooks and poetry manuscripts.[144] The poem is thematized around a biblical passage, Matthew 26–27, and is even provided with a close version of 1 Cor 11:27 ("Guilty of the Body and Blood of Christ") as an epigraph, as if to underscore the biblical turn taken in the poem—and here again strikingly different from the epigraph from *Webster's Dictionary* used in "Song for Certain Congressmen." And the poem is signed "Walter Whitman" (and not "Paumanok" or some other pseudonym), the same name the poet used in the copyright notice for the 1855 *Leaves* (*LG*, ii) and belatedly unveiled later in the volumes first poem ("Walt Whitman, an American," *LG*, 29).[145] The two poems that follow in the early summer of 1850, "The House of Friends" (14 June)[146] and "Resurgemus" (21 June),[147] are of a kind with "Blood-Money." The style of the three poems is still not that of the more mature "Walt" (*LG*, 29) Whitman of the 1855 *Leaves*. For example, the lines, though not metrical, remain mostly confined in length (though occasionally stretching beyond eight words),[148] enjambment is prevalent, and the rhythmic exploitation of parallelism is still nascent

144 This would seem to be a practice that emerges out of the mechanics of fitting type to the columns of newspapers. When the poem is reprinted in the *New York Evening Dispatch* ([30 April 1850], 1, http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/lccn/sn83030390/1850-04-30/ed-1/seq-1/—even though the width of the column is essentially the same as initially, several new indentations are needed (lines 10, 13), and in one more words are included in the indented line (line 24). Zweig remarks that in these 1850 poems "Whitman is still a voice from the press" (*Walt Whitman*, 120). It is certainly true that part of the poet he becomes, down to the mechanics of setting type, owes something to his printerly sensibility.

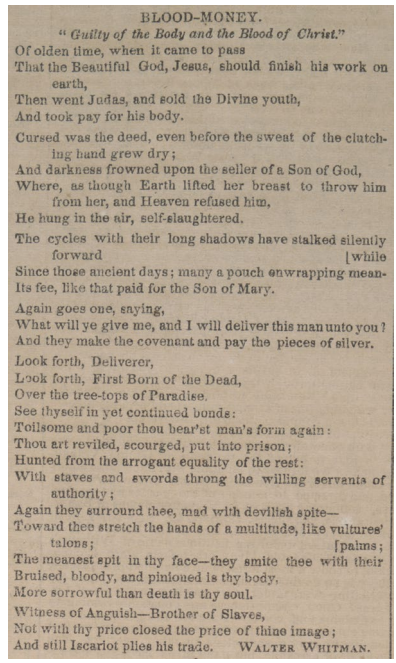
145 Interestingly, when Whitman reprints the poem in *Specimen Days* he (intentionally?) misdates it (April, 1843) and signs it "Paumanok" (*CPW*, 372–73). And he needs no indentations since the wider page layout can comfortably accommodate the length of the lines, i.e., transposed from the narrow columns of a newspaper layout.

146 *New York Daily Tribune* (14 June 1850), 3, https://whitmanarchive.org/published/periodical/poems/per.00442.

147 *New York Daily Tribune* (21 June 1850), 3, https://whitmanarchive.org/published/periodical/poems/per.00088.

148 For example, the three lines in "Resurgemus" that contain more than eight words are taken into the 1855 *Leaves* without being combined with other material (*UPP* I, 27–30; lines 1, 38, 46). In the 1855 *Leaves*, the sweet spot in terms of line-length is from eight to sixteen words per line (lines of these lengths each occur more than a *hundred* times, see Fig. 21 and discussion in Chapter Three).

(e.g., "Look forth, Deliverer,/ Look forth, First Born of the Dead,/ Over the tree-tops of Paradise," "Blood-Money," lines 15–17). And yet that these poems are the beginning that anticipates that style of a few years later nevertheless would seem to be equally obvious, especially now that the chronology of the early notebooks containing trial lines for the 1855 *Leaves* is better understood. The prominence in these poems of biblical themes, imagery, language, tropes, and characters has been well observed.[149] And yet perhaps what still needs emphasizing is the coincidence of Whitman's breaking into free verse while writing such highly biblicized poems and what this may imply about the impetus for such an "auspicious change."[150]



BLOOD-MONEY.

"*Guilty of the Body and the Blood of Christ.*"

Of olden time, when it came to pass
That the Beautiful God, Jesus, should finish his work on earth,
Then went Judas, and sold the Divine youth,
And took pay for his body.

Cursed was the deed, even before the sweat of the clutching hand grew dry;
And darkness frowned upon the seller of a Son of God,
Where, as though Earth lifted her breast to throw him from her, and Heaven refused him,
He hung in the air, self-slaughtered.

The cycles with their long shadows have stalked silently forward [while
Since those ancient days; many a pouch enwrapping mean-
Its fee, like that paid for the Son of Mary.

Again goes one, saying,
What will ye give me, and I will deliver this man unto you?
And they make the covenant and pay the pieces of silver.

Look forth, Deliverer,
Look forth, First Born of the Dead,
Over the tree-tops of Paradise.
See thyself in yet continued bonds:
Toilsome and poor thou bear'st man's form again:
Thou art reviled, scourged, put into prison;
Hunted from the arrogant equality of the rest:
With staves and swords throng the willing servants of authority;
Again they surround thee, mad with devilish spite—
Toward thee stretch the hands of a multitude, like vultures' talons; [palms;
The meanest spit in thy face—they smite thee with their
Bruised, bloody, and pinioned is thy body,
More sorrowful than death is thy soul.

Witness of Anguish—Brother of Slaves,
Not with thy price closed the price of thine image;
And still Iscariot plies his trade. WALTER WHITMAN.

Fig. 10: "Blood-Money," the *New York Daily Tribune* (March 22, 1850), p. 1, https://whitmanarchive.org/published/periodical/poems/per.00089. Whitman's first nonmetrical poem. Cropped image courtesy of The Walt Whitman Archive, https://whitmanarchive.org/

149 E.g., Zweig, *Walt Whitman*, 117–21, 150–51; Erkkila, *Political Poet*, 54–59; Klammer, *Emergence*, esp. 77-83; Loving, *Song of Himself*, 152–60.

150 Loving, *Song of Himself*, 153.

Not unexpectedly, Allen comes closest to the diagnosis I have in mind, albeit offered in the name of parallelism and still confounded by the early (1847) (mis)dating of the "Talbot Wilson" notebook. He says of "Blood-Money" that Whitman "was already fumbling" for his "technique" of parallelism, the "basic verse structure" of *Leaves*, "but here [i.e. in 'Blood-Money'] he was paraphrasing both the thought and the prose rhythm of the New Testament (Matthew 26–27)."[151] Indeed, a close version of Matt 26:15 is distributed across lines 12–14 of the poem. Parallelism *per se* is at best embryonic in "Blood-Money," as Allen's follow-up comment clarifies: "He [Whitman] is experimenting with phrasal or clausal units; not yet 'thought rhythm' [i.e., parallelism]. But his arrangement of the verse is a step in that direction."[152] What I find acutely perceptive in Allen's comment here is his awareness that Whitman is "fumbling" after his style (broader than just his use of parallelism) as he collages language from the Bible, viz. "paraphrasing both the thought and the prose rhythm of the New Testament," and then massages it into the language of his poem, viz. "Again goes one, saying,/ What will ye give me...." That is, the "fumbling" consists of the adoption and adaptation of biblical language, style, and rhythm.

In fact, Allen's analysis may be sharpened by recalling the political dimension of this poem, as it is the combustible mixture of Bible and politics (in this specific instance) that join to ignite Whitman's fumbling toward a new rhymeless and meterless style of verse. "Blood-Money" is an angry poem. It is a direct response to Daniel Webster's famous "Seventh of March" address in the Senate in which the senator spoke against legislation prohibiting the extension of slavery into the western territories and in favor of a fugitive slave act.[153] The poem works in two movements (lines 1–8, 9–30). The first is shorter and dedicated to Whitman's poeticized (and much abbreviated) rendition of the story of Judas' betrayal of Jesus (Matthew 26–27). Time shifts to the present at the beginning of the second movement (lines 9–11) and another "Iscariot" (see line 30) looks to betray another man, a

151 *The New Walt Whitman Handbook* (New York: New York University, 1986), 219; cf. Loving, *Song of Himself*, 153.

152 Allen, *New Walt Whitman Handbook*, 219.

153 See Erkkila, *Political Poet*, 54–55; Klammer, *Emergence*, 76–79.

"Brother of Slaves" (line 28).[154] Whitman uses a close rendition of Matt 26:15 (lines 12–14) to emphasize the biblical paradigm as he redeploys it. Jesus, as "a Son of God" (line 6) and "First Born of the Dead" (line 16), is evoked as "Deliverer" (line 15) and "Witness" (line 28), on the one hand, and, on the other, is imagined as incarnate—the literal second coming so much proclaimed in the New Testament (e.g., John 14:3)—in a "hunted" fugitive slave: "thou bare'st man's form again" (line 19). This anticipates the poet's more famous embodiment of the "hounded slave" ("I am the hounded slave," *LG*, 39) and ventriloquism of black "Lucifer" in the 1855 *Leaves* (*LG*, 74).[155] The Christ-slave is hunted, imprisoned, and beaten (lines 20–27), leveraging imagery and language from the biblical story. The new "Iscariot" who "still... plies his trade" (line 30) in the last line of Whitman's political allegory is above all Webster, but also anyone who thinks and acts like Webster.

The reading of Matthew 26–27 elaborated in "Blood-Money" is avowedly political, informed by the politics of the Gospel story itself—"Not with thy price closed the price of thine image" (line 29). The break with conventional rhyme and meter is of a piece with this biblically inflamed politics. It comes literally out of the Bible—no rhyme, no meter there—and at the same time follows from the poet's biblically inspired political commitments. The connection between Whitman's poetics and politics has been astutely observed by B. Erkkila. Of "Whitman's free verse," she writes generally, it "originated from a similar desire to release humanity from the fetters

154 In the Hebrew Bible kinship language (e.g., son, father) often gets used with extended senses, e.g., "I am a brother to dragons," Job 30:29. Whitman plays on the Hebrew name Ahimoth (1 Chron 6:25) in "Resurgemus," where he glosses it as "brother of Death" (line 4). He may also have Phil 2:7 in mind here: "and [Jesus] took upon him the form of a servant [Greek. δούλου], and was made in the likeness of men."

155 "How he informs against my brother and sister and takes pay for their blood" (*LG*, 74) even echoes the language ("brother") and larger theme of "Blood-Money." Also note the similarity between "they smite thee with their palms" and "they beat me violently over the head with their whip-stocks" (*LG*, 39). Whitman makes his poetic logic explicit a few lines later: "I do not ask the wounded person how he feels.... I myself become the wounded person,/ My hurt turns livid upon me as I lean on a cane and observe" (*LG*, 39). And there are many allusions to the Passion narratives of the Gospels (e.g., *LG*, 43).

of external form, political or artistic."[156] Whitman himself in the 1855 Preface makes explicit the potent "defiance" that might advance from "new free forms": "Of the traits of the brotherhood of writers savants musicians inventors and artists nothing is finer than silent defiance advancing from new free forms" (*LG*, vii). This is specifically true of "Blood-Money." Whitman's unmetered and unrhymed lines, as they break with convention, perform poetic acts of liberation that Webster's politics sought to foreclose. They are the poem's most tangible tokens of freedom. The breaking free from "yet continued bonds," whether those that bind the "hunted" (fugitive) slave or his "Brother," is enacted time and again across the surface of the poem in Whitman's free(d) verse(s).

Another outstanding example of this kind of biblical collage comes roughly a year later in Whitman's "Art and Artists" lecture, only this time the language is a paraphrastic riff on the creation narrative from Genesis 1:

> When God, according to the myth, finished Heaven and Earth — when the lustre of His effulgent light pierced the cold and terrible darkness that had for cycles of ages covered the face of the deep — when the waters gathered themselves together into one place and made the sea — and the dry land appeared with its mountains and its infinite variety of valley, shore and plain — when in the sweetness of that primal time the unspeakable splendor of the sunrise first glowed on the bosom of the earth — when the stars hung at night afar off in this most excellent canopy, the air, pure, solemn, eternal — when the waters and the earth obeyed the command to bring forth abundantly, the beasts of the field, the birds of the air and the fishes of the sea — and when, at last, the superb perfection, Man, appeared, epitome of all the rest, fashioned after the Father and Creator of all — then God looked forth and saw everything that he had made, and pronounced it good. Good because ever reproductive of its first beauty, finish and freshness. For just as the Lord left it remains yet the beauty of His work.[157]

This is prose, of course. Yet as Loving observes it is also "almost a free-verse poem."[158] To ramify just how much this "looks and sounds like

156 Erkkila, *Political Poet*, 86; cf. Loving, *Song of Himself*, 196.
157 *UPP* I, 242; cf. Allen, "Biblical Echoes," 306; Posey, "Whitman's Debt," 208; Bergquist, "Whitman and the Bible," 288.
158 Loving, *Song of Himself*, 171.

something belonging to the first *Leaves of Grass*" Loving even lineates a portion of the paragraph, taking his cues from Whitman's dashes.[159] Loving's last lined version of Whitman's phrasing is an incredibly close rendition of Gen 1:31:

> Then God looked forth and saw everything that he had made, and pronounced it good. (Loving lineating Whitman)
>
> And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. (Gen 1:31)

This is not an overly fanciful exercise on Loving's part. Whitman collaged just as much (if not more) language material for his poems from the prose of his early notebooks as from the trial verse lines they also contained.[160] In fact, many prose sources were mined in this fashion. And quite famously Whitman reworks the similarly rhythmic and highly parallelistic prose of the 1855 Preface into verse starting already with the 1856 "Poem of Many In One" (*LG* 1856, 181–201; later "By Blue Ontario's Shore"). In fact, Allen in his assessment of Whitman's "evolving" prosodic style specifically calls attention to the 1855 Preface. Despite being "arranged as prose," Allen notes, "the thought-units"—"often separated by periods"—and their "rhythmical effect" are patent.[161] He cites the following passage as emblematic:

> He sees eternity less like a play with a prologue and a denouement... he sees eternity in men and women... he does not see men and women as dreams or dots. Faith is the antiseptic of the soul... it pervades the common people and preserves them... they never give up believing and expecting and trusting. (*LG*, v)

Though a small slice, its kinship to the paragraph from the "Art and Artists" lecture (absent the latter's biblical theme and using suspension points instead of long dashes) is obvious. And some of this prose Whitman does eventually turn into verse:

159 Ibid.
160 See esp. Miller, *Collage of Myself*, and Chapter Three below.
161 Allen, *New Walt Whitman Handbook*, 219–20.

> He sees eternity less like a play with a prologue and denouement,
>
> He sees eternity in men and women—he does not see men and women as dreams or dots. (*LG* 1856, 189)

Interestingly, Whitman ends his "Art and Artists" lecture by quoting a selection of lines from "Resurgemus," the maturest of the three nonmetrical 1850 poems and the only one which (after revision) he includes in the 1855 *Leaves* ("Suddenly out of its stale and drowsy lair," *LG*, 87). The poem in general well evidences Whitman's incipient use of a biblical-styled parallelism. From the quoted lines alone several sets of parallel lines stand out, all eventually get combined and recast into longer, internally parallel lines of the kind that come to typify the 1855 *Leaves*:

"Resurgemus":	Those martyrs that hang from the gibbets,
	Those hearts pierced by the grey lead
=> *LG* (88):	Those martyrs that hang from the gibbets.... those hearts pierced by the gray lead
"Resurgemus":	They were purified by death, They were taught and exalted
=> *LG* (88):	They were purified by death.... They were taught and exalted[162]
"Resurgemus":	Not a grave of those slaughtered ones,
	But is growing its seed of freedom
=> *LG* (88):	Not a grave of the murdered for freedom but grows seed for freedom

In these instances, the language is not biblical (though plenty of biblicisms abound in the poem, see Chapter Two), but the trope—parallelism—is (see Chapter Four). The first two examples are

162 Notice that Whitman even retains the capitalization from the 1850 version, which by the 1881 edition is normalized (p. 212).

of the synonymous variety of parallelism ubiquitous in *Leaves*, as Allen observed early on—"no one can doubt the parallelism of the synonymous form."[163] More significant, perhaps, because it is comparatively rarer in *Leaves*, is the final example, which exemplifies the antithetic "species" of parallelism, what Lowth originally described as obtaining "when a thing is illustrated by its contrary being opposed to it."[164] Such parallelism is especially prominent in the Bible's wisdom poetry, e.g., "The wise shall inherit glory: but shame shall be the promotion of fools" (Prov 3:35).

The coincidence of Whitman's breaking into free verse and "fumbling" (in prose and poetry) towards a prominently parallelistic and iterative rhythm while collaging and massaging biblical language and tropes is noteworthy and suggestive of the importance of the Bible—and no doubt also of Whitman's (secondary) reading about the Bible (recall Stovall dates Whitman's use of language specifically about "Hebrew poetry" to 1850 or thereabouts)—in this development. This is not to ignore, undervalue, or dismiss other significant contributing factors to the evolution of Walt Whitman as the poet of *Leaves of Grass*, whether it is his imbibing of Emerson (and other thinkers and artists), his ever hyper-political sensibility, especially focalized in 1850 on the issue of slavery, his writerly temperament, or the visual orientation of his printerly eye. To the contrary, such other factors were always impactful for Whitman's holistic sensibility. But the place of the Bible, at least in this one respect, his turn to a form of verse free of meter and rhyme—that is, to free verse, seems paramount. Or to put it more provocatively, it is difficult to imagine the specifically unrhymed, free-verse poetry of the 1855 *Leaves* evolving absent some kind of originary, mediating (and maybe also mediated) encounter with the Bible—"Blood-Money," after all, is "a sustained use of biblical allusion and line."[165] Like preference for the lyric, Whitman's evolution of a nonmetrical form of verse is among "those autochthonic bequests of Asia" that the poet seizes upon and

163 "Biblical analogies," 493.
164 *Lectures*, II, 45.
165 Erkkila, *Political Poet*, 55.

adjusts "entirely to the modern."[166] The chapters that follow attempt to flesh out still further dimensions of Whitman's poetic style that appear to bear the imprint of the Bible, especially in the build-up to the 1855 *Leaves*.[167]

166 Whitman, "The Bible as Poetry," 57.

167 Interestingly, the German free verse tradition also is indebted to biblical poetry's meter-less prosody. The German term *freie Rhythmen* (lit. "free rhythms") was coined to describe the poetry of Friederich Gottlieb Klopstock from the 1750s, which was very much influenced by the Bible, and especially the Psalms (see. K. M. Kohl, *Rhetoric, the Bible, and the Origins of Free Verse: The Early "Hymns" of Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock* [Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1990]). And in France, *vers libre* first emerges at the end of the nineteenth century with a direct assist from Whitman. The birth date of *vers libre* is quite specific, 1886, when in a quick succession of issues of *La Vogue* edited by Gustave Khan are published Arthur Rimbaud's *Illuminations*, Jules Laforgue's translations from *Leaves* (e.g., from "Inscriptions," "O Star of France," and "A Woman Waits for Me") and ten of Laforgue's own free-verse poems (including "L'Hiver qui vient"), and Kahn's series "Intermède" (C. Scott, "Vers Libre" in *NPEPP*, 1344; B. Erkkila, *Whitman Among the French: Poet and Myth* [Princeton: Princeton University, 1980], 49–94). Indeed, Rimbaud's two earliest *vers-libre* poems, "Marine" and "Mouvement," likely date to 1874 and were directly influenced by the translated selections of Whitman's verse published in two critical essays on Whitman from 1872 by E. Blémont ("La Poésie en Angleterre et aux Etats-Unis, III, Walt Whitman," *Renaissance Artistique et Littéraire* 7 [June 1872], 54–56; 11 [July 1872], 86–87; 12 [July l872], 90–9l) and T. Bentzon ("Un Poète américain, Walt Whitman; 'Muscle and Pluck Forever,'" *Revue des Deux Mondes* [1 June l872], 565–82).