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The Integrated Catalog of Walt Whitman's Literary Manuscripts

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NEW ON THE *WALT WHITMAN ARCHIVE*THE INTEGRATED CATALOG OF WALT WHITMAN'S
LITERARY MANUSCRIPTS

NEARLY TEN YEARS ago the *Whitman Archive* created the “Integrated Guide to Walt Whitman’s Poetry Manuscripts,” a resource that provided access to nearly all of these items, pulling together manuscripts spread across more than thirty repositories and offering item-level descriptions and scanned images of each. Using EAD (Encoded Archival Description), the nonproprietary de facto standard for the encoding of finding aids, the *Archive* project created individual catalogs for all of these repositories, describing the Whitman poetry manuscripts held in each. The individual manuscript descriptions were also combined to form the Integrated Guide, a resource that for the first time provided access to all of Whitman’s poetry manuscripts in one virtual collection. This guide was organized around the concept of Whitman’s “works,” allowing users to see all of the known manuscripts that contributed to a given poem.¹ For this project, the *Walt Whitman Archive* was awarded the Society of American Archivists’ C.F.W. Coker Award, for setting national standards in archival description, in 2006.

Now, the *Whitman Archive* is proud to unveil a greatly expanded version of this resource: the “Integrated Catalog of Walt Whitman’s Literary Manuscripts.” This new iteration, funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, has added descriptions and images of more than 500 prose manuscripts, providing unprecedented access to early versions of Whitman’s writings and shedding light on the creative process behind Whitman’s prose. These additions bring the total number of manuscripts described in the Integrated Catalog to nearly 1,500. Each item-level entry provides a title, composition date, genre, repository location information, physical characteristics, and a description of the textual content of the item. Access to images of the original manuscript is provided whenever possible.

As an initial stage of the prose project, *Whitman Archive* staff

members compiled a list of all of Whitman's known prose manuscripts. A given manuscript can be associated with any number of works, and thus may appear multiple times in the Integrated Catalog, listed separately under each work to which it contributed. We compiled the list by consulting Edward F. Grier's six-volume *Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts* and William White's *Daybooks and Notebooks* (both published by New York University Press as part of *The Collected Writings of Walt Whitman*). To this we added those prose manuscripts, several hundred of which were unaccounted for in these print volumes, for which the *Whitman Archive* had acquired images and records during the past two decades. Finally, using ArchiveGrid, an online database that aggregates the records of more than 1,000 archival institutions, we sought out any remaining Whitman prose manuscripts. Totalling close to 2,000 items, this list represents the first attempt to document the scale of Whitman's extant prose output in manuscript form.

The project's initial goal was to then write item-level EAD descriptions for all of Whitman's prose manuscripts, as we had done for the poetry. However, it soon became clear that such a goal was unrealistic given the sheer volume of prose manuscripts, their overall complexity, and the amount of time required first to determine a given manuscript's relationship to Whitman's larger body of published work and then to write the EAD description itself. We thus decided to confine our item-level descriptions only to those items that could, with reasonable confidence, be identified as having contributed to a piece of published prose. Of course, we hope to someday have the resources to include item-level descriptions for all 2,000 prose manuscripts. The addition of the prose material also necessitated the creation of individual manuscript catalogs for approximately twenty new repositories, meaning that the *Archive's* Integrated Catalog now brings together manuscripts that are spread across more than fifty repositories around the world.

In the process of establishing standards for the research and description of the prose material we began noticing small but significant shortcomings in our earlier work with Whitman's poetry—brief or ambiguous descriptions, missing image links, overly-broad or missing composition dates, or missing information about the first publication of a given work. Thus, this prose project also offered an opportunity to

return to the earlier poetry EAD entries, expanding shorter descriptions, supplying missing information, and highlighting connections to published work that were missed in the project's first instantiation.

The *Archive's* new Integrated Catalog contains manuscripts from as early as the 1840s right up until the final year of Whitman's life, and, like the earlier Integrated Guide, is organized by work, with all of the drafts that contributed to that work grouped together. A given manuscript can be associated with any number of works (and thus may appear multiple times in the Integrated Catalog, listed separately under each work to which it contributed). This method has at least two advantages: it organizes the material under titles that users are most likely to know, and it allows us to represent the complex nature of Whitman's composition and revision methods, in which a single manuscript may contain bits of text that eventually found their way into several different publications.

For example, the Thomas Biggs Harned Collection at the Library of Congress holds a Civil-War-era notebook that Whitman used in 1862 and 1863 in both New York and Washington, D.C. Alongside draft material for the poems "A Noiseless, Patient Spider," "The City Dead House," and "The Artilleryman's Vision" are prose jottings that later appeared in various newspaper articles published over a two-year period, some of which were still later incorporated into *Memoranda During the War* and *Specimen Days*. Our method allows us to represent this notebook's complexity in the Integrated Catalog by having it appear in the sections devoted to each of the ten published pieces to which it contributed.

While our efforts thus far with these manuscripts have focused mainly on access and contextualization rather than interpretation and analysis, we nevertheless made several minor new discoveries about Whitman's prose during the course of the project. For example, two manuscripts held at the Huntington Library contain Whitman's handwritten notes about his family's Dutch heritage. Large chunks of the text from these manuscripts were used nearly verbatim in an article entitled "Dutch Traits of Walt Whitman," which was published under William Sloane Kennedy's name in *In Re Walt Whitman* (1893), a volume of articles by and about Whitman published posthumously

by the poet's literary executors. Whitman seems to have written the lines, referring to himself in the third person, and then sent them to Kennedy around 1886, to help Kennedy with a book project on which he was working at the time. Kennedy held on to the manuscripts for several years and then tried to pass the text off as his own after Whitman's death. Additionally, our research uncovered twenty-six individual manuscripts that fed into Whitman's essay "Notes (such as they are) founded on Elias Hicks," first published in *November Boughs* in 1888. So much material all contributing to a single work allows for an interesting examination of Whitman's composition process. One manuscript, in particular, consisting mainly of names, dates, and short, jotted descriptions, some of which later appeared in "Elias Hicks," highlights the seamless way that Whitman's reading and note-taking developed into literary productions. While these are but two relatively minor examples, we are confident that access to this rich trove of manuscript material will facilitate countless new discoveries and research opportunities.

The changing of the resource's name from the "Integrated Guide" (as it has been known since 2006) to the "Integrated Catalog" stemmed from our desire to more accurately describe the function of the resource as we see it. While a "Guide" implies that there is a proper direction from which to approach the materials, and perhaps even a proper destination at which to eventually arrive, a "Catalog" suggests a more inclusive, less directed listing of materials. "Catalog" has the additional benefit of its Whitmanian connotation, suggesting the poet's famous poetic catalogs of people, sights, sounds, and events. And while the Integrated Catalog exists now only in a static state organized by work, we hope soon to make the Catalog fully sortable and searchable, allowing users to arrange their viewing of manuscripts based on a number of factors, such as a particular genre or a desired timespan. We also plan to link to transcriptions of the manuscripts when we have them available, making the Integrated Catalog the main entry point on the *Walt Whitman Archive* for those seeking to explore Whitman's manuscripts.

NOTES

1 We define a “work” as the abstract idea of an individual piece of writing (poem, essay, newspaper article, etc.), and derive the title for each work from the final published title used by Whitman during his lifetime.