



## Introduction: Whitman as a Bookmaker

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## SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE: WHITMAN AS A BOOKMAKER

“WHITMAN MAKING BOOKS / BOOKS MAKING WHITMAN,” the 2005 Obermann Humanities Seminar sponsored by the Obermann Center for Advanced Studies, with support from the Arts and Humanities Initiative at The University of Iowa, was held on November 10-12, 2005, at the University of Iowa Museum of Art. This symposium, the first ever to address Whitman as a bookmaker, brought together Whitman scholars and book history scholars to discuss a range of topics having to do with Whitman’s training as a printer and his involvement with the material aspects of making his books (from designing covers, to selecting typeface, to arranging his poems in order to conserve paper). Trained as a printer while in his early teens, Whitman developed his printing skills while working as a typesetter on numerous New York-area newspapers. As an editor of several newspapers, Whitman honed his layout skills and carried that knowledge and interest into his bookmaking when he designed the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, the first few pages of which he set in type while overseeing the project at the small Brooklyn printing establishment of his friend Andrew Rome. The first edition set the pattern for all of his subsequent books, and he was intimately involved in choosing typeface, paper size, binding design, and layout for each one. Even when commercial presses published his work, Whitman sat down with the typesetters to oversee the production. “I sometimes find myself more interested in book making than in book writing,” Whitman told Horace Traubel toward the end of his life; “the way books are made—that always excites my curiosity: the way books are written—that only attracts me once in a great while.” The group of scholars at the symposium offered an innovative new look into Whitman’s work by focusing on his bookmaking skills, his relationships to his publishers, and the material qualities of his books. We are pleased to present in this special double issue of *WWQR* essays that grew out of some of the talks at the symposium.

The symposium began with a keynote address by Ezra Greenspan (Southern Methodist University), who offered an overview of “Walt Whitman and American Print Culture.” In addition to the scholars whose work appears in this issue, presenters at the symposium included Cathleen A. Baker (Legacy Press, Ann Arbor), who analyzed the papers used in the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*; Karen Karbiener (New York

University), who discussed the working origins of Whitman's poetry in his printing experience; Betsy Erkkila (Northwestern University), who spoke on insurrection and the Paris Commune in relation to the 1871 edition of *Leaves*; Amy Hezel (University of Iowa) who reported on the census of the 1855 edition; and Kenneth M. Price and Brett Barney (University of Nebraska, Lincoln), who offered an illustrated talk about "Rethinking Whitman Books in the Digital Age."

The symposium concluded with a panel on Whitman as a bookmaker, moderated by Alan Trachtenberg (Yale University), and including all the presenters, along with Gary Frost (University of Iowa), head of book conservation at the University of Iowa Libraries, and David Schoonover (University of Iowa Special Collections), co-curator of the "Whitman Making Books" exhibition at the Museum of Art, which ran from November 5, 2005, to February 12, 2006. Ed Folsom co-curated the exhibit with Schoonover and also directed the symposium. The exhibit was the largest gathering ever of the various issues of each edition of Whitman's books. It brought together books from the University of Iowa Special Collections, from the Salisbury House in Des Moines, Iowa, and from the remarkable private collection of Dr. Kendall Reed.

Ed Folsom wrote a catalog/commentary to accompany the symposium and exhibition. Entitled *Whitman Making Books / Books Making Whitman*, the eighty-page book contains a narrative history of all of Whitman's books and also contains over 100 color images. It is now available from *WWQR* for \$15.00 (includes shipping); address orders to *WWQR*, 308 EPB, The University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA 52242-1492. Also, a broadside created for the symposium by Sara Sauers for the University of Iowa Center for the Book—a beautiful handset printing of Whitman's "A Font of Type," with a facsimile Whitman signature, on handmade paper—is available for \$10 from *WWQR*.

Special thanks go to Dr. Kendall Reed for making his collection available and for being so generous with his time and advice; to Dr. Jay Semel, Director of the Obermann Center for Advanced Studies and Associate Vice President for Research at The University of Iowa, and to his staff—Karla Tonella, Jennifer New, and Caroline Frisbie—for unflinching support; to Meredith Hay, Vice President for Research at The University of Iowa, and to the Arts and Humanities Initiative, for financial support that made the symposium and exhibition possible; and to Sara Sauers for her imagination, dedication, and skill in designing the catalog/commentary and designing and printing the broadside.