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# UNTUNING WALT WHITMAN'S PROPHETIC VOICE

YOSEFA RAZ



IN “LOVING WALT WHITMAN AND THE PROBLEM OF AMERICA,” Alicia Ostriker writes as both a poet and scholar on Whitman’s lasting influence, describing her excited discovery of “Song of Myself” as a teenager before moving more broadly to consider Whitman’s formative influence on the long American poem. Finally, Ostriker illuminates Whitman’s contribution to—and possible invention of—a public, political poetry, the “common language” of Adrienne Rich. “When we turn, as poets, to the state of the nation and of our common life” says Ostriker, “the ghost of Whitman turns with us.”<sup>1</sup> Yet in the last few pages of the essay, Ostriker interrupts her tribute, compelled by the urgency of the specific historical moment in which she writes—the first weeks of the Gulf War in 1991. Her tone shifts to a fierce condemnation of Whitman’s support of war in “Drum-Taps,” his poem-cycle written in response to the events of the Civil War.<sup>2</sup> “When I read ‘Drum-Taps’ today I cannot forgive Whitman’s representation of the Civil War as spectacle, as pageantry, as tragic necessity” (35). In the penultimate paragraph of the essay, Ostriker declares, “I wish, cruelly, that the men dying in Whitman’s arms could have driven him mad” (36).

What is it that allows Whitman to hold the dying in his arms and not go mad? An important aspect of Whitman’s spectacle of war—the one that Ostriker so vehemently resists—is his activation of a grand prophetic voice. In his 1865 *Drum-Taps*, the poet attends to the wounds and injuries of the soldiers, but he also sees them as part of a kind of pageant of past and future wars. For example, “The Centenarian’s Story” ties the grand war of the past, the American Revolution, with the present war: “the two, the past and present, have interchanged” (*DT*23). The ability to read the present through the past and connect it to the future is formulated as an optimistic

visionary enterprise; even amid the agonies of war, the speaker of the poem-cycle imagines himself “as connecter, as chansonnier of a great future.” Whitman’s chansonnier sings to the beat of the war drums, underlaid with the elegiac pathos of “taps,” what T.W. Higginson calls a “mystic curfew.”<sup>3</sup> Later in the cycle, Whitman summons a “prophetic” voice rising from the field of “carnage” (*DT* 49), seeming to mobilize an authority and strength in service of the war, panning out from the terrible details of battles to a great panorama of destruction and redemption.

In this essay, I explore the power and authority Whitman generates through the prophetic voice, especially in relation to war, but also to consider the fissures and weakness that underlie this use of prophecy. Through attending to the underlying anxieties of prophecy, this essay will emphasize prophecy as a destabilizing and unsettling figure, rather than focusing exclusively on prophecy as an authoritative force imposing apocalyptic symmetry on psychological and historical processes. In the second part of this essay, I wish to demonstrate these dialectics of prophetic power through reading an example of Whitman’s afterlife in contemporary American poetry. Like Ostriker, Rob Halpern condemns Whitman for his embrace of the pathos of war, and he echoes and critiques Whitman’s *Drum-Taps* in his 2012 *Music for Porn*. In a sense, it can be read as an extended meditation on Ostriker’s retroactive curse; the American soldiers who metaphorically die in Halpern’s arms are allowed to disfigure the poetic text, driving it into the kind of obsessive madness Whitman denied himself. Halpern’s poetry functions as an intervention in Whitman’s rhetoric, an “untuning” of Whitman’s prophetic voice, especially its role in reframing the Civil War after reconciliation, uncovering the anxiety latent in Whitman’s prophetic voice. At the same time, Halpern’s poetry opens up new possibilities for Whitman’s afterlife in American poetry based on the prophetic body, rather than the prophetic voice.

### *The Problem with Prophecy*

It is a commonplace to consider Walt Whitman’s poetry “prophetic”

and to read Whitman himself as an American prophet, or perhaps, *the* prophet of America. In making this identification, readers and critics undoubtedly point to an important element in his poetics: Whitman consciously ties his poetry directly back to the Bible itself through the notion that he is constructing a “New Bible,”<sup>4</sup> as well as situating himself in a more recent tradition of English Romantics. Yet a reference to prophecy can become abstract, hyperbolic, and all-encompassing, both in the speech of poets and in the speech of critics. As Shira Wolosky puts it, Whitman “persistently deploys religious terms for his poetic venture, with the further realization of American promise as including a religious dimension, alternately called moral, spiritual, prophetic, soul.”<sup>5</sup> At its worst, prophecy is taken by critics as a vague signifier for historical resonance, authority, and spirituality; it is abstracted into a kind of speech act, rather than read as part of a complex and multivalent biblical tradition, with its own particular use of metaphorical figures, including the reoccurring figure of an allegorical marriage as well the contrast of the prophetic body with empire. At the same time, critics sometimes isolate a single element of prophecy, an uncomplicated singular tone or message of the Hebrew prophets, or a “prophetic ethics,” and apply it to Whitman’s poetics. In Herbert J. Levine’s “‘Song of Myself’ as Whitman’s American Bible,” for example, Whitman’s prophetic mode is read exclusively in a tradition of prophetic rebuke, leaving no room for other functions, such as reconciliation. In “I Sing the Body Electric,” says Levine, “Whitman’s aim . . . is essentially that of the biblical prophets: to make a whole people confront its moral failings.”<sup>6</sup> In fact, Whitman himself writes, “We need somebody or something . . . like an old Hebrew prophet’s [sic] . . . crying aloud: Hear, O people! . . . Ye are in the midst of idols of clay, silver, and brass. I come to call you to the knowledge of the Living God, in writings.”<sup>7</sup>

However, as Ian Balfour remarks about English and German Romanticism, though it is equally true of Whitman, “prophecy is not a single thing, and one has to attend to the differences that are sometimes tenuously grouped together under a single word.”<sup>8</sup> Prophecy does not include only one theme or affect, nor does it exclusively refer to prediction or rebuke; it is also a way to invoke despair, reconciliation,

and restoration, and to reflect on questions of inspiration, nation-building, catastrophe, and empire. In many ways, biblical prophetic resonances do add a timbre of depth and wisdom to Whitman's assertions; like the Hebrew prophets, his claim to prophecy relies on an extraordinary sense of calling, stemming from an experience of mystical communion. This prophetic calling allows Whitman to speak for the soul of the crowd, the soul of the nation, the past and future of America. At the same time, though, the prophetic figure also has the potential to be a destabilizing force; the prophet exposes but also experiences—in his own self and body—social and affective ruptures, undoing what seems to be holding together the community and the nation, ventriloquizing and acting out the catastrophe of history. Thus, while an appeal to prophecy often seems to summon authority and power, in Whitman's work, as in the works of other great poet-prophets, the marshalling of prophetic strength, or the creation of a towering prophetic voice, is often a reaction to social and psychological anxieties, covering over instabilities, insecurities, stutters, and fissures – what we could call prophetic weakness.

Recent shifts in understanding English Romanticism may guide us through reading Whitman's various iterations of prophecy, which continue Emerson's American reformulations of English Romanticism. As M.H. Abrams puts it in *Natural Supernaturalism*—himself adopting a grand, if not prophetic tone — it was in the wake of the promise and failure of the French Revolution that a group of poets and philosophers “conceived themselves as elected spokesmen for the Western tradition at a time of profound cultural crisis. They represented themselves in the traditional persona of the philosopher-seer or the poet-prophet . . . and they set out, in various yet recognizably parallel ways, to reconstitute the grounds of hope and to announce with certainty, at least the possibility, of a rebirth in which a renewed mankind will inhabit a renovated earth where he will find himself thoroughly at home.”<sup>9</sup> According to Abrams, the English Romantic poets drew upon the authority of the biblical texts to establish moral certitude and a self-confident, heightened tone. The biblical prophets' appeal to divine authority was assimilated and reinterpreted as the authority of the autonomous and individual self.

Thus, in envisioning the future, Romantic poet-prophets were to imagine and call into action great symmetries and patterns of history: destruction and redemption, death and rebirth.<sup>10</sup> Yet, as Christopher Bundock points out, reading prophecy exclusively as the voice of authority limits its possibilities: for M.H. Abrams, Harold Bloom, and others, “under the Romantic drive for millennial restoration, prophecy seem[ed] to designate only a historical will to harmony, to stage a secular theodicy that promises a future.”<sup>11</sup>

The poet-prophet who emerges in some Romantic poetry is decidedly less grand and successful than the ideal articulated by mid-twentieth-century critics. In contrast to Abrams, Bundock reads figures like Wordsworth and Kant as “Romantic prophets longing for a predictive, totalizing concept of prophecy—something that would control the spectre of contingency—in the era of its impossibility.”<sup>12</sup> Using prophecy to shore up this defensive position involves an unacknowledged and willful blindness to the disappointments in “prophecy’s healing and unifying promise” (12). Bundock argues that literary criticism has undergone a profound shift in the way that it understands Romantic poetry, specifically poetry written in the prophetic tradition. For a new generation of scholars influenced by deconstruction and New Historicism, the prophetic mode does not create authority, but rather poses a set of problems and questions. Maurice Blanchot exemplifies this critical shift, which has been taken up in more detail by scholars like Bundock, Jon Mee, Ian Balfour, and Steven Goldsmith.<sup>13</sup> Blanchot speaks to the way that prophecy marks a loss of assurance and stability, rather than creating authoritative strength: “when speech becomes prophetic, it is not the future that is given, it is the present that is taken away, and with it any possibility of a firm, stable, lasting presence.”<sup>14</sup> Along the same lines, Bundock reads the prophecy of English Romanticism as ultimately destabilizing rather than authoritative: “prophecy works less to rebuild an edifice of legitimacy than to splay out history’s fragmentation” (21). In this essay, I wish to continue to critique the notion of the poet-prophet as towering genius of majestic authority by examining the prophetic voice in American poetry. I argue that the construction of a voice of authoritative prophecy, with foreknowledge of history’s

grand symmetries, often marks an anxious covering over of fragments and ambiguities, of the incoherencies and failures of the prophetic task and text.

### *The Power of Prophetic Joining*

What voice called to Whitman from a burning bush, and who placed a burning coal on his lips, transforming him forever? For Whitman, the call to prophecy may have first come, prosaically, at a lecture given by Ralph Waldo Emerson in 1842.<sup>15</sup> In a review for the New York *Aurora*, Whitman pokes fun at the literary types in attendance: ugly women, men in dandified Byron collars, abolitionists, and followers of the diets and lifestyle prescribed by Reverend Sylvester Graham, today of Graham cracker fame. Yet Whitman was also profoundly moved: “the lecture was one of the richest and most beautiful compositions, both for its matter and style, we have heard anywhere, at any time.”<sup>16</sup>

Emerson begins his essay by associating poetry with foreknowledge: “The sign and credentials of the poet are, that he announces that which no man foretold” (9). However, for Emerson, as for the English Romantics before him, prophecy is not simply oracular, a matter of future prediction: “Beside [the poet’s] privacy of power as an individual man, there is a great public power, on which he can draw, by unlocking, at all risks, his human doors, and suffering the ethereal tides to roll and circulate through him: then he is caught up into the life of the Universe, his speech is thunder, his thought is law, and his words are universally intelligible as the plants and animals” (29). While for Emerson, the “great public power” available to the poet-prophet involves a paradoxical loss of control, a potential loss of subjectivity, Whitman’s 1855 preface to *Leaves of Grass* emphasizes, in contrast, the poet-prophet’s strength and agency. For the poet, “Past and present and future are not disjoined but joined. The greatest poet forms the consistence of what is to be from what has been and is. He drags the dead out of their coffins and stands them again on their feet . . . he says to the past, Rise and walk before me that I may realize you. He learns the lesson . . . he places himself where the future becomes present.”<sup>17</sup>

In this formulation, Whitman includes himself in the Romantic and biblical tradition that imagines the poet as a prophet, since his poet places himself “where the future becomes present” (LG1855 vi). The poet-prophet forcefully and even brutally resurrects the dead, standing them on their feet like Ezekiel, who prophesizes over the dry bones of the dead until they grow flesh and sinew and are miraculously revived into a great army (Ezek. 37:10). More broadly, though, the poet-prophet functions as a master craftsman, forming the future from the material of the past, joining together temporalities (or dry bones) like fine pieces of wood. Yet in celebrating the poet-prophet’s power to join, Whitman’s prose preface also rhetorically acknowledges the possibility of “disjoining,” the problem of a fragmented reality, with the frequent ellipses in the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* reflecting this tension between joining and disjoining. The ellipses bind together Whitman’s lists and associations, while also marking a kind of gap, an open space between phrases that is unbounded by the strictures of more conventional punctuation, the site of disjoining.

Whitman’s prophetic power to join together what appears disjoined, or disjointed reverberates throughout his early poetry, starting with the first version of “Song of Myself.” The poem is full of images of joining and joints: the sun joins other suns; a “jointer” appears among a list of tools; there are “shipjoiner[s],” “disjointed friendship[s],” and many mentions of the “joints” of a human body (LG1855 61, 79, 31, 76).

He resolves all tongues into his own, and bestows it upon men . . . and any man translates . . . and any man translates himself also:  
One part does not counteract another part . . . . He is the joiner . . . he sees how they join. (LG1855 86)

In this beautiful image, the poet joins together languages like a shipwright, a carpenter, a mason. But he is not only a craftsman, but a witness: “he sees how they join.” On a formal level, Whitman’s poetry joins together (and witnesses the joining of) diverse images, contrary forces, high and low registers, the scriptural and the vernacular. Emerson comes to describe Whitman’s work as a “remarkable

mixture of the Bhagavat Gita and the NY Herald.”<sup>18</sup> Thematically, Whitman’s poetry joins together the body and soul, individuals into a great nation, the states and the union, the mystical and the political.

While the joining together of the self—the mystical union of body and soul—seems at times pleasurable and effortless, “joining” is also experienced as a more fraught experience. A short passage toward the end of “Song of Myself” begins with ecstatic praise of the endless capacities of language and speech: “With the twirl of my tongue I encompass worlds and volumes of worlds” (*LG* 1855 31). However, this exuberant celebration of the power of language is challenged by a more embodied, oblique experience, what Stephen John Mack calls a “romantic conception of subsensory intuitive knowledge.”<sup>19</sup>

Do you not know how the buds beneath are folded?  
Waiting in gloom protected by frost,  
The dirt receding before my prophetic screams,  
I underlying causes to balance them at last,  
My knowledge my live parts . . . it keeping tally with the meaning of things,  
Happiness . . . which whoever hears me let him or her set out in search of this  
day. (*LG*1855 31)

The poet-prophet’s task here is articulated as an imperative to balance “underlying causes,” to harmonize and join together various narratives, perhaps of the self, or of the nation. This balancing action, though, is postponed to an undefined future. In the present, the stylized “twirls of the tongue” yield to the harsher “prophetic screams.” While the screams may ultimately fulfill a more important role than pretty turns of phrases, aligning the poet with the forces of growth in the natural world, these disrupting screams also connote fear and pain, or perhaps an animal-like shriek.

How do the prophetic screams of the poet-self join the harmonious whole? If we were to read Whitman’s prophetic task primarily as rebuke, the screams could be meant to disrupt and unravel a sense of false harmony. However, these prophetic screams are only a part of the chorus of voices, catalogued in the lines to follow, from children’s babble, to fishmongers’ cries, to the convulsions of the soprano at the opera. The poet’s job is to join and tune together

moments of fear and desperation, and other negative affects—“the angry base of disjointed friendship . . . the faint tones of the sick” (31)—with more positive affects and to achieve a symphonic whole. However if the poet-as-joiner must integrate the prophetic screams with a great variety of human and natural sounds, what might be the price of this joining? What happens to the prophetic screams when they are tuned together into a great symphonic, operatic sound? Are these sounds—of suffering, fear, judgement—incorporated into the choir, or written over, repressed? For Emerson, “The painter, the sculptor, the composer, the epic rhapsodist, the orator, all partake one desire, namely, to express themselves symmetrically and abundantly, not dwarfishly and fragmentarily.”<sup>20</sup> Are prophetic screams dwarfish and fragmentary, or are they symmetrical and abundant? These screams get covered over in Whitman’s postwar prophecies, replaced by more grand and operatic tones, but we might still listen for their hidden echoes.

### *Over the Carnage*

Nearly a decade after this first formulation of poetry as prophecy, Whitman’s wartime poetry collection, *Drum-Taps*, revisits the notion of the poet-prophet as a craftsman-joiner, or as a tuner of many voices into a great symphonic whole. The overarching and organizing figure of *Drum-Taps* is also musical, though “soft opera-music changed, and the drum and fife were heard in their stead” (*DT* 5). The collection is organized around the stirring sound of drums summoning to war the Northern soldiers, specifically the boys and men of Manhattan and Brooklyn. The poems that follow form a complex and multifaceted song of war, from an enthusiastic embrace of Northern patriotism and the Union flag, to scenes of wartime loss, and a witnessing, through the persona of the “wound-dresser,” of the pathetic injuries and deaths of the soldiers.

One of the most explicitly prophetic poems that Whitman composed in his career appears in *Drum-Taps* as “Over the Carnage Rose Prophetic a Voice.” Unlike more direct descriptions of the battlefield and of the loss associated with the war, this short poem does

not linger on the details of the wounded and dead, but stirringly rises above them in a prophetic vision of reconciliation, a healing of the maimed union, a kind of blossoming of a “carnage rose,” as Ed Folsom has pointed out.<sup>21</sup> Though the first line is written in response to the war, many of the lines of the poem previously appeared in the Calamus poem sequence, included in the 1860 edition *Leaves of Grass*. While the prewar lines spoke exuberantly in the first person, in this reworked version, the prophetic voice, which echoes Whitman’s earlier declarations, has formally separated from the persona of Whitman’s “I”. The disembodied voice emerging from the battlefield declares an end to war. The fraternal violence of war, it announces, will be replaced by love and affection, as the “most dauntless and rude shall touch face to face lightly.”<sup>22</sup> In other words, it paints an allegorical vision of national reconciliation, based on the triumph of affection and love between men from the North and from the South, all depicted as the sons of Mother Columbia:

One from Massachusetts shall be a Missourian’s comrade,  
From Maine and from hot Carolina, and another an Oregonese,  
    shall be friends triune,  
More precious to each other than all the riches of the earth. (*DT* 49)

While the sense of “affection” or “manly affection” between the men of different states was already present in the 1860 “Calamus” poem, the 1865 version beautifully echoes the final words of Abraham Lincoln’s first inaugural address in 1861, where he cautions Americans: “though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection.”<sup>23</sup> If the war had tragically broken these bonds, against Lincoln’s (and Whitman’s) warning, Whitman’s poem now calls for their repair. These bonds of affection, posited as an alternative to male aggressiveness and competitiveness, echo the language of “adhesiveness” that Whitman adopted from the science of phrenology; as Folsom and Kenneth Price show, this language “provided Whitman with an early word for male-male affection at a time when such terms were not easy to find.”<sup>24</sup> In the Calamus sequence this is made more explicit: “There shall from me be a new friendship—it shall be called after my name” (*LG*1860 349). Through multiple layers of figuration,

the poem creates an erotic allegory for the nation, which at the same time alludes to the real friendships Whitman observed and developed with men of different states during the course of the war. The bands of love and affection that are to tie together the men of the republic, “stronger than hoops of iron,” are reminiscent of the prophetic joining we saw in the 1855 preface. Now, the careful craft of the poet-prophet in “Song of Myself” is transformed into a jubilant task: “I, ecstatic, O partners! O lands! with the love of lovers tie you” (line 19).

In what sense is this voice “prophetic”? Its power derives, in part, from the way it alludes to some specific biblical prophecies. First, the miraculous message of hope in the face of desolation and ruin suggests Ezekiel’s vision of the Valley of Bones, which, as we saw, also functioned as an intertext to the 1855 preface. When Ezekiel prophesizes over the dry bones, they acquire skin, flesh, sinews, and breath, forming a great army. In Whitman’s poem, the valley described in the Book of Ezekiel, filled with dry bones – the remnants of a terrible battle or massacre – is figured as an unspecified battlefield of “carnage.” The somewhat abstract image of carnage may be based on a more specific image, recorded by Whitman in an 1862 journal entry. Outside a mansion converted into a field hospital, Whitman encountered a “heap of amputated feet, legs, arms, &c., a full load for a one-horse cart.”<sup>25</sup> In another journal, he describes “human fragments, cut, bloody, black and blue, swelled and sickening.”<sup>26</sup> As Folsom and Price argue, the heap of body parts were to haunt Whitman as an image for the fragmented union, for the terrible “disjoining” that war inflicted. Read together with Ezekiel, these human fragments seem to cohere together in Whitman’s poem, resurrecting the men from different states that populate the prophetic vision, forming them into a great “invincible” army of comrades.

In envisioning the end of war, Whitman employs a rhetoric of dramatic, if not miraculous, reversals. Enemies are now loving friends. Dangers to the reconstituted republic will inspire laughter rather than fear. Whitman’s exultant vision of houses and streets teeming with love and affection may also echo a set of oracles from Jeremiah that employ images of miraculous reversals to dramatize prophetic hope: lament and sorrow will be transformed into songs of joy, chil-

dren and flocks will multiply in places of desolation (Jer. 33:1-19). In Jeremiah, the image of a wedding is used as a dramatic contrast to the devastation of war: “Again shall be heard in this place . . . even in the cities of Judah, and the streets of Jerusalem . . . the voice of joy, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride” (Jer. 33:11).<sup>27</sup> Whitman’s poem also envisions the new, hopeful, reality as a kind of marriage, enacting a ritual in which the men of the different states are tied together, with the speaker’s exclamation, “I tie you” , recalling a wedding ceremony.

Specifically, the reconciliation between Northerners and Southerners in “Over the Carnage” evokes the marital re-union described in the last chapters of the book of Isaiah, echoing a particular wedding that the Hebrew prophets imagine again and again: the wedding of God to his bride Zion, in what Abrams describes as “the apocalyptic marriage.” The metaphor of the land or the nation as a woman is central to the prophetic corpus, and in many prophetic texts, Zion is figured not only as God’s young and lovely bride, but also as his betraying adulterous spouse, his barren wife, and even his widow. In the second part of the Book of Isaiah, the prophet imagines a *remarriage* between God and Zion. Zion, who has been abandoned by God and left without her children as a punishment for her sins, is re-espoused, and her children are returned to her. In Isaiah 40:2, the prophetic voice comforts Zion, because “her warfare is accomplished . . . her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD’s hand double for all her sins.” In passages like these, the figure of a remarriage functions as a theodicy that justifies the suffering of the nation in exile: the children who went missing will now be returned, the land will return to be cultivated, and God will once more love his nation-wife.

As Folsom points out, in the years after the war many novels and stories portrayed the marriage of a male Northerner to a female Southerner: “By figuring a marriage between two people from opposite sides of the Civil War, these writers created an imaginary space that helped readers think their way toward the possibilities of a Re-United States.”<sup>28</sup> However, in “Over the Carnage,” the marriage between God and Zion is recast as male friendship between equals, a

democratic and erotic vision. For Betsy Erkkila, the poem expresses “the centrality of the Civil War in testing and affirming not only the American union but a range of physical and emotional bonds of affection and intimacy among men as the foundation of the future American republic.”<sup>29</sup> The figure of remarriage in the background of the poem adds a great deal of pathos to Whitman’s vision of reconciliation, an added power to his prophetic-poetic “joining.” Furthermore, in introducing the image of a betrothal/marriage ceremony, Whitman may be creating a nineteenth-century theodicy, suggesting that the union is now stronger for having suffered.

However, as Whitman adopts prophetic rhetoric, he also adopts some of its structural flaws or instabilities. In fact, the erasure of cultural memory is built into the very structure of prophetic consolation. Consider for example, Isaiah 54:4, in which Zion, here figured as a “barren woman” or “widow,” is told that she will not fear or be ashamed, because she will forget her youthful indiscretion and the “reproach of [her] widowhood.” In other words, for the remarriage to take place and affection to miraculously take the place of violence and aggression, it seems that Zion must forget her sin of faithless betrayal as well as her terrible punishment. More broadly, the passage from Isaiah dramatizes the complexity of forgetting if you have to remember what you’ve forgotten, or perhaps, as Ron Hendel puts it, the way “national, ethnic, and religious identities are founded on this dialectic of remembering and forgetting.”<sup>30</sup> In the case of Whitman, in order to mourn the equally divine dead and to announce the dawn of a new era, the ideological differences that tore North and South apart, as well as the institution of slavery itself and the dangerous lives of the freed slaves, must be actively forgotten, or at least allowed to gently recede into the past.

### *Prophecy as Repression*

On a first encounter, “Over the Carnage Rose Prophetic a Voice” seems to announce a new reality, and its ability to summon an optimistic vision of the future despite present circumstances seems to demonstrate the imaginative prowess of the poet, if not his force-

ful will. Whitman's vision joins together former enemies as loving comrades, thereby miraculously joining and resurrecting the injured union. In considering the poem in relation to Whitman's earlier versions of prophecy, though, and against its later revisions—within a dialectic of remembering and forgetting—Whitman's prophetic task is on much less stable ground. It is strained, anxious, betraying the effort of prophetic reconciliation; as critics have pointed out, its grand tones can come off as bombastic, overly idealistic, falsely conceived, repressive of postwar realities. While acknowledging many of these critiques, I would like to argue that an anxious reading of Whitman's prophetic rhetoric can also lead to a richer, more complex reading of his prophetic position. In his wartime and postwar poetry, in trying to join together the past, present, and future, Whitman begins, perhaps inadvertently, to expose the impossibilities of joining, or the price this joining exacts.

The interplay between national remembering and forgetting can be traced though Whitman's acts of textual revision, as various lines are recast and transformed, omitted and returned, forgotten and remembered. If the notion of fraternal affection was offered in the 1860 Calamus poems as a homoerotic vision of a united society and idealistic attempt to avert bloodshed through love, the 1865 recasting of these images in "Over the Carnage Rose Prophetic a Voice" echoes this failed attempt. Read together against its earlier version, the prophetic voice, rising so powerfully over the battlefield, is also the voice of a failed utopia, covering over Whitman's inability to prevent the war. Whitman's revisions of the collection as a whole also help us identify instances of cultural forgetting. Through a close reading of the stand-alone 1865 version of *Drum-Taps* and its integration into the 1871 *Leaves of Grass*, Cristanne Miller shows how Whitman became increasingly committed to a vision of reconciliation between the North and South based on repression of difficult realities.<sup>31</sup> For example, he omits direct statements about the cause of the war in the 1871 version and ignores the problem of the freed slaves in the South. As opposed to the erotic and embodied speaker of the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*, the speaker of the 1871 "Drum-Taps," Miller observes, is bodiless, and "identifies primarily with the dead or with men's souls"

(185). Also, in contrast to the speaker of the 1855 “Song of Myself,” the speaker of the 1871 “Drum-Taps” makes “no reference to international revolution, to a national merging or solidarity of races,” and does not depict African Americans (184). In fact, neither the 1865 version nor the 1871 version of “Drum-Taps” describes the slaves or includes African-Americans among its fraternal figures. Only in the 1881 “Drum-Taps” do we get one glancing depiction of slavery itself: in “Ethiopia Saluting the Colors,” the speaker turns to an old black woman, “so ancient hardly human,” and imagines her witnessing the events of the war as strange and marvelous. This quasi-inhuman figure cannot participate in the vision of redemptive fraternal affection, nor in fact can any other black person. Miller’s critique ultimately castigates Whitman’s postwar prophecy as dangerously wishful; by 1871, his prophetic vision, as Miller puts it, had “no resonance with a realistically viewed present” (189).

Whitman’s tendency to repress—or perhaps more generously, *resolve*—difficulty through prophetic rhetoric has been pointed out in relation to other texts in addition to *Drum-Taps* and subsequent reworkings of “Drum-Taps.” By reading prophecy as essentially repressive and covering over anxiety, Miller joins other critics of Whitman’s prophetic rhetoric, especially of the poetry and prose written after the war. Arthur Golden discusses Whitman’s use of prophetic rhetoric in two of the poet’s prose essays, the unpublished “The Eighteenth Presidency!” written before the war in 1856, and “Democratic Vistas,” published in 1871. Golden traces how Whitman resorts to what he calls “soothing visionary cadences” when confronted with political problems.<sup>32</sup> For example, faced with his disenchantment with the democratic process, Whitman imagines the appearance of a new, better race manifesting itself at an unspecified future date, “soon to confront Presidents, Congresses and parties, to look them sternly in the face, to stand no nonsense” (91). For Golden, Whitman’s vision of democratic redemption of the masses “lies in a rhetorically safe shelter, the vague but comforting future” (96). For M. Wynn Thomas, Whitman exploits prophetic ambiguity to reconcile impossible political positions, specifically his idealization of white labor and his complex position on slavery.

Thomas analyzes an 1860 notebook which contains an early draft of the poem “Proto-Leaf,” later to become “Starting from Paumanok.” He argues that “in ‘Proto-Leaf’ Whitman defuses the bitter sectional conflicts of his time by imagining an indeterminate future when, by natural processes antithetical in spirit to the violent events of actual recent history, an America shall have emerged in which differences are honored but harmonized [;] . . . his poetic discourse is a medium in which the various, sometimes conflicting opinions Whitman had on the southern slavery question can be held in fluid suspension.”<sup>33</sup> For Thomas, Whitman’s idealization of workers, i.e. his dream of labor, and his postwar disappointment in America are impossible to reconcile—and his later poems are interesting “only when the full social and political pathos of their weakness is recognized” (143). As Miller, Golden, and Thomas demonstrated, readers of Whitman must also attend to the flip side of grand prophetic pronouncements, their hidden “pathos of weakness,” in addition to recognizing the towering grandeur generated by the prophetic voice.

Paradoxically, though, even as Whitman’s vision turns “weak,” it is sustained by greater efforts, more forceful acts of joining. The “tuning together” of a plurality of voices and figures becomes more strained, more fraught with risk. Speaking of Whitman’s weakness need not necessarily be a critique—it can be a recognition of the generative possibilities of weak prophecy. While Miller reads Whitman’s majestic prophetic voice of reconciliation as repression, Wolosky’s body of work on Whitman consistently reads his poetry as making “prophetic efforts,” straining to join contraries—particularly the self and the common good—and always at the risk of failure (414). In “Over the Carnage Rose Prophetic a Voice,” argues Wolosky, “Whitman calls to his readers, his country: ‘affection shall solve the problems of freedom yet.’ But, like America itself, Whitman neither finally accomplishes this risk-laden task, nor finally resolves the potential contradiction of a society whose commitment to individuality always carries the potential for defeat of community, even as it also forms the basis of community” (421).

Wolosky notes a deep ongoing skepticism throughout Whitman’s prophetic corpus: “the America of Whitman’s poem is not an actual

America already realized, but no more (and no less) than a promise of America, an America not yet attained but which the poem attempts to guard from despair” (363). What seemed, then, to be the summoning of the voice of majestic authority is often the sign of a great effort to join contraries, even at the expense of covering over the unresolvable contradiction of history—and this effort is undertaken to guard the poem, or the reader, from despair. While at first glance Whitman may be falling short of the rhetorical strength of biblical prophets like Isaiah and Ezekiel, this effortful, strained joining also reflects an important element of the biblical text. In fact, it is fitting to call these strained efforts “prophetic,” since the great symmetries of the Hebrew prophets are often themselves transcriptions of the efforts of the redactors of the prophetic tradition to guard the communities living with those texts from the unremitting despair of catastrophic oracles. For example, the consoling remarriage described in Isaiah reframes and contextualizes earlier, terrible visions of divine punishment for a community that has already survived the catastrophe of national destruction and exile. Without a balance of destruction and redemption, metaphors of Jerusalem as a humiliated, punished prostitute cannot provide the doctrinal assurance necessary to hold together a community.<sup>34</sup>

### *Music against Consolation*

If Whitman’s prophetic effort is to guard against despair, as Wolosky would have it, Rob Halpern’s *Music for Porn* suggests what an unguarded despair might look like. By “talking back” to Whitman, Halpern’s work asks how a poet might generate a sense of hope, consolation, or even redemption, in our era of no-future, and without the certainties and complacencies of what Bundock calls the “historical will to harmony.”<sup>35</sup> At the same time, however, Halpern’s critique of Whitman, what he calls an “undoing,” or an “untuning,”<sup>36</sup> is itself prophetic, exposing and deepening the fissures in Whitman’s grand prophetic voice. While Halpern’s work at first glance untunes Whitman by going flatly against his grand prophetic project, it also continues to unravel what was already unraveling, and more generally, as part

of a secret tradition of weak prophecy that unravels or untunes itself. Halpern suggests the possibility of a prophetic voice raised against consolation, against authority; he poses a weak prophecy, reconfiguring the prophetic tradition in Anglo-American poetry through rewriting Whitman's prophetic voice. This distorted echo of Whitman's prophetic voice enables Halpern to imagine a kind of wounded, flawed redemption.

In *Music for Porn*, Halpern places his own poetry consciously in Whitman's lineage. Like *Drum-Taps*, the book is focused on the nation in wartime, and particularly on the bodies of soldiers; the book's central preoccupation is the body of the American soldier returned from the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. As the object of homoerotic desire expressed in the speaker's pornographic fantasies, the soldier epitomizes America's fascination with a heroic, glossy version of war, though he is also made to embody the price of war's violence through his suffering and wounds, which constantly intrude into the erotic fantasy. Halpern writes, "I want to undo Whitman's militarized vision *democracy fulfilled* by betraying its perversity" (MP 56). At times, Halpern's poetry reads as a disturbing parody of *Drum-Taps*, such as when Whitman's image of a delicate flag in "Bathed in War's Perfume" becomes Halpern's "Delicate Rag" in a poem about the failure to truly see the soldier. In another example, Halpern seems to return to Whitman's "The Dresser," which describes an intimate act of nursing that crosses over, uncomfortably, perversely, into an erotic gaze. Whitman writes:

From the stump of the arm, the amputated hand,  
I undo the clotted lint, remove the slough, wash off the matter and blood,  
Back on his pillow the soldier bends with curv'd neck and side-falling head.  
(DT 33)

While the explicit focus of the stanza is the soldier's fear of confronting his stump, Halpern's poetry redirects us to its implicit eroticization of soldiers' bodies in war. A short poem takes up the image of the soldier's stump: "Soldiers bodies gorgeous the / Thighs I want to gaze at them / What stumps old carbines be"" (MP 87). The opening tone of erotic praise, reminiscent of the most celebratory passages of

“Song of Myself,” is here juxtaposed with the image of “stumps of carbines,” suggesting violence, injury, dismemberment. The perverse eroticization of the soldier’s amputated limb is made explicit in an earlier poem: “The situation’s pretty unstable / Said my soldier with no hands / And I imagine his prosthetic // Up my ass” (MP 75). The obsessive identification with the image of the stump is self-consciously flagged in the opening section of the book: “Taking note of repetitions, I find myself treading the same terrain. Here comes that stump again, this time sutured to my elbow” (MP 7).

*Music for Porn* is a hybrid work, a mix of poetry and prose, consciously building on Miller’s critique of Whitman’s postwar poetry--Halpern acknowledges Miller’s article in the idiosyncratic notes to the poem (MP 60). He writes against consolation, against the closure of Whitman’s strong prophecy, especially as expressed in *Drum-Taps*. Whitman’s vision, claims Halpern, is made possible by a sense that the war is over, that we are living after the carnage, but he critiques Whitman’s poetics of closure, returning to what he calls Whitman’s “unmastered remains” (MP 54). He imagines these remains as the “*emotive waste of a carnage that ought to be finished but is still beginning again and again and again*” (MP 54). In some sense, Whitman’s wartime poetry is read as a kind of primal sin of American poetry: the emergent sound of Whitman’s war is “a sound figure perhaps only fully realized in our own present” (MP 48). For Halpern, Americans, as the consumers of late-capitalism, are still under the sway and spell of Whitman’s call to war which continues to haunt America, and continues to haunt Halpern: “this tuning has naturalized my ears, so I can’t hear the noise any longer, a silence we might now call a completed sound, converging with its own suppression” (MP 49). In Halpern’s view, Whitman’s poetry of war is founded on an insidious kind of “tuning” of emotions into the music that justifies and gives meaning to war, at the same time suppressing protest. To return to Ostriker’s terms, Whitman’s poem becomes the soundtrack of war transformed as “spectacle, as pageantry, as tragic necessity.” Though Whitman attends to the clash and tremor of the sounds of war, as well as to the complex emotions aroused by war, he is also “tuning” these sounds together into a harmonious whole; the

prophetic voice that rises over the carnage seems almost symphonic. *Drum-Taps* in particular marshals the affects of sympathy and homoerotic desire—"a certain unsingable tenderness for a dead soldier's body"—into abstract values, "*love of nation, fervor for democracy*" (MP 49). If Ostriker cannot forgive Whitman for holding dying soldiers in his arms and not going mad, Halpern cannot forgive Whitman for using "All my queer affections, like those aroused in Whitman's poems . . . *like sap like cum* to bind our national interests, even as I refuse them" (MP 52).

Halpern fashions his own voice and body against Whitman's in *Drum-Taps*, in what he calls an *undoing*, an *untuning*. Opposing himself to Whitman's symphonic voice, Halpern wants to make a sound of untuning, one that can expose the suppressions necessary to produce the voice of strong, redemptive prophecy. His method of "untuning" prophetic rhetoric includes close, pornographic attention to the male body of the U.S. soldier. The shock value of the material functions as an attempt to jolt readers out of the amnesiac lull of Whitman's "national mourning," as well as to awaken them from the more current amnesias of contemporary America's wars, which occur far from its territorial boundaries. Rather than celebrating the bodies of strong warriors, Halpern emphasizes the vulnerability of their bodies: "*what might it mean to give the body up to insecurity, vulnerability, risk?*" (MP 50).

In some sense, Halpern's focus on the physical details of wartime suffering follows in Whitman's footsteps. As Miller puts it, "the greatest strength of *Drum-Taps* in all versions is that even in his nearly compulsive efforts to celebrate a still-unified nation, Whitman represents powerfully the cause of war and the not altogether successfully repressed 'dripping and red' memories it leaves" (Miller 191). In addition to his poetry, Whitman's wartime nursing and the letters he writes to soldiers' families attempt to personalize the mass scale of the war and imbue it with empathy. By contrast, readers of *Music for Porn* remain in the dark about the correspondence between Halpern's language and any kind of embodied reality. Unlike Whitman's personalizing empathy, Halpern's vision fails to redeem the soldier's body and restore it to humanity. Rather than performing a visionary Ezekiel-

like resurrection of the fragments of soldier's bodies, binding them together into a whole, the speaker of *Music for Porn* single-mindedly focuses on fetishized body parts. His gaze remains alienated from the soldier: "he's my sick muse and deserves more compassion than I appear to offer, but he's already hardened into allegory" (*MP* 7). In the same section, he also writes: "I couldn't even tell you his name, tho a string of phonemes I can't pronounce fills my mouth like his dirty ejaculate, or glue" (*MP* 4). Throughout Halpern's book, Whitman's prophetic joining, his multivalent sense of "adhesiveness," is transformed into images of stickiness, congealment, abjection. As Sianne Ngai points out, "at every moment where we might expect *Music for Porn* to rescue this repeatedly abstracted and occulted body by insisting on its concreteness as object of the poet's lust, the description flips back into a testimony to its abstractness."<sup>37</sup> For Ngai, the book's power lies precisely in the way "this abstract allegorical body is incongruously presented as the visceral object of the poet's lust" (36).

### *Prophecy in Music for Porn*

While *Music for Porn* explicitly marks its ties to Whitman, its ties to prophecy are buried deeper beneath the surface, less explicitly acknowledged by this highly self-reflexive text. The speaker seems far from visionary, stating, "my poems don't make more than the dimmest light, certainly not enough to see by" (*MP* 3). This dim light is contrasted with a consoling darkness that also helps constitute the pornographic world, "the dark theatre" of alienated erotic encounters with the allegorical soldier. (*MP* 12). Yet at the same time, there is a stubborn insistence, throughout Halpern's work, on the persistence of prophecy. "Darkness consoles . . . but it can't undo what conditions my vision" (*MP* 3). The future offered by Halpern's work is a kind of dark bricolage of utopias, a prophecy in the era of *Mad Max*: "I've assembled the following discreditable models, jerry-rigged mock ups of liquidated tense, negations of abandoned futures, making use of what I can" (8). Halpern's task is to generate prophetic vision from the failed utopias imagined in the past, "the world we've failed to make."<sup>38</sup> Like Whitman, Halpern also indirectly invokes Ezekiel's call

to prophecy. Despite the emptiness at the heart of the speaker's erotic fantasies of the soldier, what Ngai calls the "visceral abstraction" of the text, Halpern's "dark theatre" of pornographic allegory generates a certain qualified achievement:

But I get off on knowing I can at least relate to invisible suffering, lend it some semblance of voice, and then eat the thing of which I sing, filling my depth, feeling common notions stirring, lost in this vessel of exchangeable options. (*MP* 6)

Woven together with the alienated language of porn, Halpern's prose here introduces prophetic intertextuality: namely, to Ezekiel's call narrative, in which the prophet is presented with a scroll, covered with words of "lamentations, and mourning, and woe" and is commanded by God to "eat this scroll . . . cause [his] belly to eat, and fill [his] bowels with this scroll," essentially to be penetrated by text (Ezek. 2:10–3:3). Like Ezekiel, Halpern's speaker eats text, consuming his own allegory, "eating the thing of which he sings" (*MP* 6). This eating "fills his depths," as opposed to the superficial penetration offered by the porn world, and the speaker is able to experience "common notions" (echoing Rich's "common language"), perhaps even the compassion that the suffering soldier deserves. This intertext from Ezekiel speaks to a radically embodied prophetic tradition. For the poet-prophet, Halpern seems to be saying, it is not enough to tune the instruments and sing a prophetic song: prophecy must penetrate the body. In fact, for Halpern, penetrability, especially via the queering of the masculine body, is a key element in what he calls (in reference to George Oppen) "the poetics of patency"—a poetics founded on "receptivity, vulnerability, penetrability."<sup>39</sup> As Halpern puts it, "patency is agency's inverse and complement: to actively become a patient of history is paradoxically, to will a suspension of an agency that has already been historically suspended" (*MP* 56). Halpern's poetry may be read as a recovery of a countertradition of embodied prophecy that has shadowed the construction of Western subjectivity, activating a rich storehouse of texts which use the weak body to address and resist hegemonies of state and empire.

*Untuning the Notion of Prophecy*

For Christopher Bundock, the prophecy of English Romanticism “works less to rebuild an edifice of legitimacy than to splay out history’s fragmentation.”<sup>40</sup> This paper has tried to show how parallel instabilities lie at the heart of the American prophetic tradition. Halpern’s work helps to expose the fissures in Whitman’s strong prophetic voice, posing an alternate model of poetry in the prophetic tradition, one that is destabilizing, unsettling, untuning—and that gives a redemptive value to patience, vulnerability, passivity, and weakness. Rather than imagining prophecy as a force that imposes an apocalyptic symmetry on psychological and historical processes, Halpern helps us emphasize prophecy as essentially destabilizing.

At first glance, Halpern’s untuning of Whitman’s war poetry can be read as a break from the Anglo-American prophetic tradition, an attempt to destabilize the authoritative voice constructed by the evocation of biblical prophecy, as well the comforting symmetries offered by the religious structures grafted onto American political life. In other words, Halpern seems to reject the prophetic tradition—its certainties, its bombast, its ties to patriotic nationalism. However through the development of an intimate, passionate conversation with Whitman’s wartime poetry, Halpern exposes the instabilities, repressions, and fissures inherent in Whitman’s project. Reading Whitman’s prophetic imagery and revisions more closely, as Halpern’s critique invites us to, reveals that Whitman’s prophecy itself can no longer summon a voice of assurance, of authority, but rather expresses a dialectic of strength and weakness, certainty and despair. Furthermore, through this intimacy with Whitman, Halpern also comes to inherit the prophetic tradition, as a kind of prophetic countertradition, a potential carried through the Romantic poetry like a virus, or a kernel. Though Romantic tradition has tended to emphasize the prophet as a singular, towering genius, it also carries within it a radically embodied prophetic potential into Anglo-American poetry, and a voice fraught with fissures and stutters, shaped by anxiety and repression. Despite attempts to fix and define the prophetic role, whether as artistic genius or national emblem, it is the prophets’ failures and weaknesses, their

inability to measure up to the prophetic ideal, that lie at the heart of both Whitman's and Halpern's visionary power.

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## NOTES

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1 Alicia Ostriker, *Dancing at the Devil's Party: Essays on Poetry, Politics, and the Erotic* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 25. Thanks to Dara Barnat for calling my attention to this essay.

2 Whitman's *Drum-Taps* (New-York, 1865), a collection of poems composed primarily in response to the Civil War, was first published as a stand-alone book. Together with *Sequel to Drum-Taps*, Whitman sewed the reissued book into some issues of the 1867 *Leaves of Grass*. He subsequently revised the poem-cycle, with considerable omissions and changes in poem order, integrating it into the 1871 *Leaves of Grass*; Whitman included a reworked version of "Drum-Taps" in the 1881 edition of *Leaves of Grass*. The 1865 text is available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* ([www.whitmanarchive.org](http://www.whitmanarchive.org)), hereafter referred to as *DT*.

3 T. W. Higginson, *Army Life in a Black Regiment* (Boston: Fields, Osgood, & Co., 1870), 34.

4 At one point, Whitman framed his poetic venture as the creation of a "New Bible." In a note from June 1857, he writes of "*The Construction of the New Bible. / Not to be diverted from the principal object – the main life work – the Three Hundred & Sixty five*" (*Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts*, 6 vols., ed. Edward F. Grier [New York: New York University Press, 1984] 1:353).

5 Shira Wolosky, "Poetry and Public Discourse, 1820–1910," in Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Cambridge History of American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 4:413.

6 Herbert J. Levine, "'Song of Myself' as Whitman's American Bible," *Modern Language Quarterly* 48 (June 1987), 160.

7 Quoted in Clifton Joseph Furness, ed., *Walt Whitman's Workshop: A Collection of Unpublished Manuscripts* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), 67.

8 Ian Balfour, *The Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 4.

9 M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1971), 12.

- 10 Abrams focuses, for example, on the secular recasting of what he calls “the apocalyptic marriage,” described in the book of Revelation, itself a version of the sacred marriage celebrated in the end of the Book of Isaiah.
- 11 Christopher Bundock, “‘And Thence from Jerusalem’s Ruins’: Romantic Prophecy and the End(s) of History,” *Literature Compass* 10 (2013), 3.
- 12 Bundock, *Romantic Prophecy and the Resistance to Historicism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 21.
- 13 See Jon Mee’s *Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the Culture of Radicalism in the 1790s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) and *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); as well as Steven Goldsmith’s *Unbuilding Jerusalem: Apocalypse and Romantic Representation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).
- 14 Maurice Blanchot, *The Book to Come*, translated by Charlotte Mandell (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 79.
- 15 The lecture, given in March of 1842, was later to be published in 1844 as “The Poet” in Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays: Second Series* (Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1844).
- 16 Whitman, *Walt Whitman’s Selected Journalism*, ed. Douglas A. Noverr and Jason Stacy (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2015), 109.
- 17 Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Brooklyn, New York, 1855), vi. Available on the *Whitman Archive*. Hereafter: LG1855.
- 18 Quoted in Franklin Benjamin Sanbon, “Reminiscent of Whitman,” in *Whitman in His Own Time*, ed. Joel Myerson (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000), 144.
- 19 Stephen John Mack, *The Pragmatic Whitman: Reimagining American Democracy* (Iowa City: Iowa University Press, 2002), 7.
- 20 Emerson, “The Poet,” 42.
- 21 Ed Folsom, “Week 19, Whitman and the Civil War,” *WhitmanWeb*, [iwp.uiowa.edu/whitmanweb/en](http://iwp.uiowa.edu/whitmanweb/en).
- 22 Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Boston: Thayer and Eldridge, 1860), 351. Hereafter: LG1860.
- 23 Lincoln, Abraham, “The First Inaugural Address,” *Speeches and Letters of Abraham Lincoln, 1832-1865* (London, New York: J.M. Dent, E. P. Dutton, 1894), 165-174.
- 24 Folsom and Kenneth M. Price, *Re-Scripting Walt Whitman: An Introduction to His Life and Work* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), 15. Available on the *Whitman Archive*.

- 25 Whitman, *Prose Works 1892*, 2 vols., ed. Floyd Stovall (New York: New York University Press, 1963-1964), cited on p. 32 in Folsom and Price, *Re-Scripting Walt Whitman*, 80.
- 26 Whitman, *Notebooks and Unpublished Manuscripts*, 2:504.
- 27 All biblical translations are from the King James Version.
- 28 Folsom, "Week 19."
- 29 Betsy Erkkila, *Mixed Bloods and Other Crosses: Rethinking American Literature from the Revolution to the Culture Wars* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 144.
- 30 Ronald S. Hendel, *Remembering Abraham: Culture, Memory, and History in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), x.
- 31 Cristanne Miller, "Drum-Taps: Revisions and Reconciliation," *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 26 (Spring 2009), 171-196.
- 32 Golden, Arthur. "The Obfuscations of Rhetoric: Whitman and the Visionary Experience," in *Walt Whitman: The Centennial Essays*, ed. Ed Folsom (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1994), 91.
- 33 M. Wynn. Thomas, "Whitman and the Dreams of Labor" in *Walt Whitman: The Centennial Essays*, 138.
- 34 Most scholars now acknowledge that the pseudepigraphical texts of Deutero-Isaiah (chapters 40-55) and Trito-Isaiah (55-66) were joined to the prophecies of Isaiah of Jerusalem centuries later. By collecting together texts from a span of at least two centuries, the redactors of Isaiah restructured the early dark prophecies of rebuke and punishment into a cycle of punishment and redemption. As Ronald Clements puts it, "the scribes who have preserved and ordered the various prophetic collections . . . sought to ensure that divine threats be followed and counterbalanced by divine promises" (*Old Testament Prophecy: From Oracles to Canon* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996], 102.)
- 35 Bundock, "And Thence," 3.
- 36 Rob Halpern, *Music for Porn* (Callicoon, NY; Lebanon, NH: Nightboat, 2012), 49. Hereafter: *MP*.
- 37 Sianne Ngai, "Visceral Abstractions," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 21 (2015), 45.
- 38 Halpern, *Common Place* (Brooklyn, NY: Ugly Duckling Press, 2015), 31.
- 39 Halpern, "Becoming a Patient of History: George Oppen's Domesticity and the Relocation of Politics," *Chicago Review* 58 (Summer 2013), 55.
- 40 Bundock, *Romantic Prophecy*, 19.