

# Whitman's Cane: Disability, Prosthesis, and Whitman's Leaning Poise



"Lean and loafer."<sup>[1]</sup>

Every time Patti Smith comes to Philadelphia—her hometown—she crosses the river to Camden and takes a tour of Walt Whitman's house. Someone told me about this habit of Smith's and I was agog. "Is the house really that great? What does she like about it so much?" My friend, also a nineteenth-century Americanist, shrugged. "No idea," she said.

We rarely go to authors' houses, we literature professors. We are well-trained in the non-worship of the author, in anti-nostalgic reading practices, superior in our sense of our work as being above fandom. But if I'm schooled against fandom as a literary critic, no one ever trained me not to geek out about musicians. So, when I heard about Patti Smith's regular pilgrimage, I decided I had to visit the house, too. What, I asked myself, if *she's* there? She wasn't. We toured the house with a family from Spain: father, mother, three sons; the father could quote Whitman at length in Spanish, and did so in the bedroom, beautifully. But what I wasn't prepared for: if *she* wasn't there, *he* was.

"What I loved about Whitman when I was young," Patti Smith told Dan DeLuca of *The Philadelphia Inquirer* in April of 2019, "was how he reached out to the young poets in the future. You know, Jesus says that at the end of Matthew. 'Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.' And with Whitman it's more specific. He's thinking of the poets 100 and 200 years into the future. And then when I became friends with Allen Ginsberg, Whitman was like his mentor. Like his spiritual great-grandfather or something. In fact, when Allen died, we sat with him, and over his bed was a photograph of Walt Whitman." It's interesting to me that Smith jumps to Jesus in this interview, and quotes the Gospel of Matthew rather than Whitman himself. She thereby connects Jesus to Whitman to Ginsberg via their three deathbeds. 'Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world' are the final lines, in the King James Version, of the chapter in which "Mary Magdalene and the other Mary"

(Matthew 28:1) find the stone rolled away from the tomb and are invited by the angel to come “see the place where the Lord lay” (Matthew 28:6). In other words, it’s a chapter about the drama of a deathbed. In the interview, Smith shuttles us between Ginsberg’s deathbed (Ginsberg met Whitman in a poem—“A Supermarket in California” —and believed he was connected to Whitman as a lover through a “gay succession” of partners) and Jesus’s deathbed (or at least the bed on which his dead body was laid). Whitman’s face hangs above Ginsberg’s bed, right where an image of Jesus might be expected to hang. Smith herself sits beside Ginsberg’s deathbed seeing that picture of Whitman and in the interview she cites the Jesus who might have hung there rather than the Whitman about whom she is speaking. Together, Smith’s words, Ginsberg’s bed, Jesus’s bed, and Whitman’s photo summon up another deathbed, the one in Whitman’s Camden house, which Smith visits regularly. The house is centered by the bed in which Walt Whitman died, and for which his final version of *Leaves of Grass* is named.

There are several places Smith may be thinking of in Whitman when she, instead, quotes the final lines of the Book of Matthew. But these, also final, lines of the poem-series “Calamus” must resonate somewhere for her—“Calamus,” which is, in so many ways, structured like the Gospel of Matthew:

FULL of life now, compact, visible,  
I, forty years old the eighty-third year of the States,  
To one a century hence or any number of centuries hence,  
To you yet unborn these, seeking you.

When you read these I that was visible am become invisible,  
Now it is you, compact, visible, realizing my poems, seeking me,  
Fancying how happy you were if I could be with you and become  
your comrade;  
Be it as if I were with you. (Be not too certain but I am now  
with you.)<sup>[21]</sup>

You’re reading this poem, Whitman claims. I’m dead—invisible—and you’re alive—visible. It’s your body that is “realizing” my poems. Wouldn’t it be great if, instead of realizing my poem, you were realizing me, myself? Wouldn’t it be great if realizing a poem were to realize the poet? Don’t you wish I were your lover? Go ahead. Pretend I am. Then the sly, flirtatious parenthesis: maybe I actually am your lover.

“Lo I am with you always.” “Be not too certain but I am now with you.” These immortals—Jesus and Whitman—step out of the past alongside us. “With you,” they both say. They are carried into the future by our next-to-them-ness. Jesus’s “with you” is a promise that “I’ll love you.” “I’ll get you off,” Whitman’s “with you” more playfully asserts. The two speakers from beyond the deathbed offer themselves as companions, accompaniments; lean on me. In fact, they lean on us. They step out of the past only with our help, leveraging themselves into being on the strength of our compact, visible substance. And

when we find ourselves side-by-side with the poet/prophet, who is to say which of us is which?

Who am I to deny myself to Whitman? Who am I to say I'm too anti-nostalgic? Who am I to refuse to let Walt Whitman leapfrog into being over and into my flesh? Who am I to put myself outside of gay succession? We don't have much to leave one another, certainly almost never estate. Well, friends, the pretty little house in Camden is free and open to the public. Patti Smith knows what's on offer there, what it means to see the deathbed in the artfully disarranged room, which is a careful mess. It's as if the poet's body has just been carried out. Who am I to say that I know better than Smith and Ginsberg and the Other Mary? I went to Camden, therefore, on my forty-seventh birthday. It was summer, so I took the seasonal ferry across the Delaware from Philadelphia, where I live. And it's in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" that Whitman really lets rip with his theory of poetic immortality, with his idea that he can reincarnate himself in the bodies of those who think of him from the future. Believe me, on that ferry, on my way to his house, I felt him laughing at me: "Who was to know what should come home to me? / Who knows but I am enjoying this? / Who knows, for all the distance, but I am as good as looking at you now, for all you cannot see me?"

The Camden house is the house Whitman died in, and although that is certainly an invitation to meditate on the meaning of life and death, it is the materiality of living and dying that confronts you first. The fact of his death in the house is mostly palpable because of the paraphernalia of his long illness and his dying that fills the space. Much of what you see in Whitman's house are the late nineteenth-century traces of how a group of friends manufactured a living space for a man increasingly disabled by strokes and, unknown to anyone until the epic autopsy of his body performed in his dining room, tuberculosis. When doctors cut into his body, they discovered the excruciating calcification of nearly the entirety of his lungs and their adhesion to his internal organs and muscles. The deathbed is a narrow, single bedframe that was moved in to replace the double bed made by Whitman's father, and this single bedframe supported a water mattress that Whitman's doctor had custom-made in an effort to help the dying poet find some comfort. Beneath the bed is a huge, low-sided, battered tin tub, bigger in diameter than the bed itself is wide, protruding a good foot or more out. This tub was also custom-made so that Whitman could stand in it from his bed and be bathed easily, thus maintaining his love of keeping, as he called it, "delicate."<sup>[31]</sup> The rest of the room, while not so obviously built around the needs of a disabled man, adds to the story of capacity and incapacity. The comfortable chair in which he sat, the (very big) shoes just where feet would rest, the piles of papers sloppily crowding close by, the pen—the exact sort of pen he wrote with, donated in the 1920s by the Camden company that still made them then—in his actual pen tray right there at the distance of an arm reaching up and over from the chair. These furnishings and their orientation attest to the writing habits of a lifetime, but also to the needs of the often half-recumbent, partially paralyzed body that moved about in and used this room. The sitting and dining

rooms downstairs, with photos of friends pasted up everywhere, images of Lincoln *en famille*, two identical thigh-high garden statues of President William Henry Harrison, and formal horsehair furniture standing around, speak to the social, the vocal, the witty, the campy, the political Whitman. The upstairs bedroom with its systems in place to maintain health, hygiene, comfort, labor, leisure, and rest, and also to support and make as beautiful as possible the long work of dying, speaks to the embodied Whitman who slept, wrote, bathed, sat, suffered, and ultimately passed on or glimmered out or who knows—who in any case left that once-electric body here, at 328 Mickle Street, on March 26, 1892, buoyed up on that rubber water bed.

As Sara Ahmed invites us to understand in the long, beautiful, furniture-heavy preamble to her “Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology,”

Bodies hence acquire orientation by repeating some actions over others, as actions that have certain objects in view, whether they are the physical objects required to do the work (the writing table, the pen, the keyboard) or the ideal objects that one identifies with. The nearness of such objects, their availability within my bodily horizon, is not casual: it is not just that I find them there, like that. Bodies tend toward some objects more than others, given their tendencies. These tendencies are not originary; they are effects of the repetition of “tending toward.”<sup>[41]</sup>

From our inclinations, Ahmed draws orientations; “tending” leads, for her, to “tendencies.” How we live, how our bodies repeat themselves is, she calmly points out, formative. In Ahmed’s hands “tend” becomes a reflexive verb; you tend towards yourself.<sup>[51]</sup> Repetitions in space and with objects orient you to yourself. Some people (now myself included) find Whitman’s bedroom to be an orienting space, and return to it multiple times. The objects in the room, their orientations toward one another and toward the needs of the now missing body, summon some sense of tending toward, of wanting to touch and be touched. “Neither the object nor the body have integrity in the sense of being the same thing with and without each other. Bodies as well as objects take shape through being oriented toward each other, as an orientation that may be experienced as the cohabitation or sharing of space.”<sup>[61]</sup> In Whitman’s bedroom we are not allowed to touch. Still, one feels as if one could. Or should. Whitman wasn’t rich. The objects are all ordinary. All well-used, in the service of keeping going, keeping writing, keeping clean, keeping alive. All these objects.

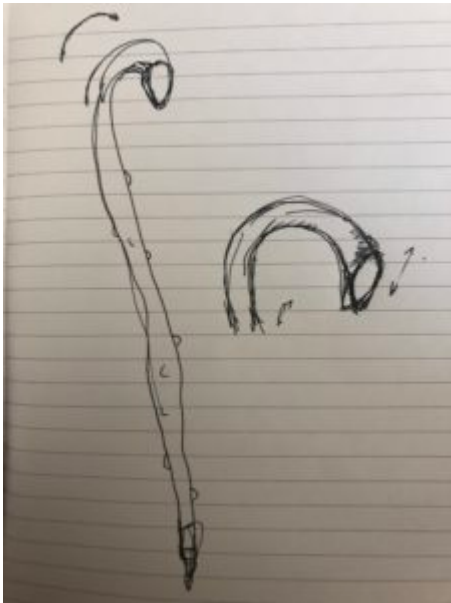
For me, it was the cane. Leaning in the corner. A simple, crooked cane. I desperately wanted to grasp it. I wanted to lean my weight on it. My hand itched. I yearned. I tended toward. I still do.

I don’t want to be obsessed with Whitman’s cane. It isn’t dignified. I’d rather not have these feelings, in spite of having read Whitman, and having recognized his direct addresses to me (to anyone) from out of his poetry. I never hoped to meet him, in a supermarket or elsewhere. But again—who am I to

refuse the way this room, and in particular this one object, prodded, poked, and knocked me over? Ahmed leads us through the problem of seeing only one side of a table; we conjure its other sides without seeing them. For Ahmed's queer phenomenological reading, "what is behind the object for me is not only its missing side, but also its historicity, the conditions of its arrival." There are many ways we could think about the conditions of arrival for this house and all that's in it. We know that Horace Traubel wanted the house to be a museum and planned for it before Whitman's death, but it took a few decades to come to fruition. We know which objects are original and which are not. We could talk about practices of curation. We could talk about the city of Camden and the house's meaning for that place. But "lesbihonest": for visitors to Whitman's House, or at least for me, a great deal of the queer "backside" of the objects in the house, a lot of the historicity, is some pleasurable sense of the presence of Whitman himself. He teased us that it might be so. When he was visible and we weren't born yet, he told us that when he was invisible (the shoes sit there, the body does not) and we were visible (there we are, in the mirror), he would be "with us." Why didn't—why don't—we believe him?

On my first visit, the cane and its particularities were easy to miss. Leaning in a heavily shadowed corner away from the bed and beside a dresser, it was nothing more than a simple, dark stroke of shadow against the wall, like an elongated comma. I could barely see it, but I couldn't look away. Reduced to a simple shape like that, its beauty held me in thrall. On my second visit, made just to see the cane, the docent had clearly propped the cane against the bed so I could get a better look at it. It is made from a sapling of some sort, probably hawthorn, with the nubbles where small branches grew still prominent on the long, tapering shaft. Those nubbles must make for a pleasing texture to a stroking hand. A beat-up brass ferule caps the almost-dainty point. On the bold curve of the crook the bumps are sanded away and the wood is smooth. On most canes with crooks, the parabola of the crook is tight, and continues until it makes a perfect and symmetrical rainbow arch, a half-circle, then it is sanded into a rounded-off end. On this cane, however, the crook curves outward in a broader arc, but then it is sliced through a good many inches before the half circle it implies would ever be complete. If the cane were standing upright with its shaft perfectly straight, the slice comes from directly above, perpendicular to the ground. Rather than a perfect circle, which would be the result were the cane sliced across the logic of the wood, the cut on Whitman's cane creates a bold, abrupt, upside-down teardrop. And that blunt, teardrop-shape is covered with a thin, flat cap of ivory. The curve of the cane with its bone cap looks, therefore, like a huge crooked finger with a white, pointed fingernail. It is both creepy and beautiful, both accusatory and beckoning. The wood is dark, and I was not allowed near enough to really see, but it seemed that the light shone differently where the crook had been much caressed by the pressure of a heavy hand, a sense that I found seconded by a description of what may have been this cane made during Whitman's lifetime: "He held in his hand an old cane like a shepherd's crook, from which the polish had been worn."<sup>[71]</sup> The second time I visited (only to see the cane) I was not allowed to touch or take pictures, but I sat cross-legged on the floor

of the bedroom and drew a picture of it. Here is my drawing (fig. 1). But since this cane features in many of the late-life photographs of Whitman, you have, in fact, already seen it.



1. Drawing of Whitman's cane at the Walt Whitman House in Camden, New Jersey, by Bethany Schneider, spring 2019. Two illustrations are provided, one of the full cane, the other of the worn crook. Both feature the ivory fingernail that hangs off the tip.

Today canes are almost exclusively used as support for people who need to rely on them for stability and mobility. Canes with this use can also be fashionable, self-fashioning and multi-valenced. But in the past canes served many additional purposes. It has been a century since a cane was a necessary fashion accessory for a man wishing to signal wealth, power, and high style. The cane as an adjunct to gentlemanly attire developed in Europe from the carrying of a stick or a sword as a weapon. Across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there was an extended craze for canes that could double as other manly things. Canes concealed weapons, snuffboxes, compasses, alcohol. They served as hiding places for maps, messages, pornography. They sported carved or otherwise molded handles in the shape of various symbols of power or desire. Lion's heads, snakes, naked ladies, racist carvings of the heads of enslaved people.<sup>[81]</sup> The cane's serviceability as both a weapon and as a means of support was expressive of a man's leisure (I can lean, and fill my hands with something that supports my most basic movements) and his aggression (I can carry a weapon through the streets). As an item that could quickly become extraordinarily expensive through materials and artistry, it was an expression of wealth. So, at the same time that canes served as literal prop for the body, they also marked the way in which wealth produces leisure that is propped up on the labor of others, the way that it is bludgeoning and priapic and imperious. The cane was a scepter. But scepters change hands; the cane also became (and remains) a staple in African American and derivative American



dance traditions that mimic and mock class and race pretensions, such as tap dance. A 1903 film in the Library of Congress records a Cakewalk performed by a single African American man with exceptional cane-twirling skills leading two African American couples, the men each holding a cane and the women holding the men by the elbow. They dance-walk in a circle, gracefully inhabiting the trappings of white power and privilege through stately dance, while simultaneously scoffing at those trappings.<sup>[9]</sup> In this film, as in many photographs and paintings of the use of fashionable canes in everyday life as well as dance, men escort the women in promenade, reminding us that the gentleman who carries a cane is *supportive* of a woman on one side, who leans on his arm, while needing or mimicking needing the *support* of a cane on the other. The man is the woman's prop. What is the cane to the man, with its blunt, round head fitting into the palm, or its thick shaft, about which he wraps his hand, thumb to middle finger?

We know that Whitman carried a high-fashion cane for a brief period of time as a young man, during a few months in 1842 when he was the editor of *The Aurora* and felt he had to dress the part: "*The Aurora* targeted a more sophisticated demographic than Whitman would address for papers he later edited, and he adopted the appropriate accessories—a top hat, boutonniere, and walking cane."<sup>[10]</sup> But we can tell, from a particularly charming editorial, that Whitman felt the cane and other accoutrements of the company of gentlemen got in the way of the sorts of masculine fraternity he actually enjoyed. Whitman describes himself, in the plural, going on a walk in his fancy duds including cane (and a picture of him from this time features just such a heavy, dark crook cane as he describes [fig. 2]). Although he is dressed to the nines, Whitman fails to be recognized by anyone as a gentleman:

Then, finding it impossible to do any thing either in the way of "heavy business," or humor, we took our cane, (a heavy, dark, beautifully polished, hook ended one,) and our hat, (a plain, neat, fashionable black one, from Banta's, 130 Chatham street, which we got gratis, on the strength of giving him this puff,) and sauntered forth to have a stroll down Broadway to the Battery. Strangely enough, nobody stared at us with admiration—nobody said "there goes *the* Whitman, of *Aurora*!"—nobody ran after us to take a better, and a second better look—no ladies turned their beautiful necks and smiled at us—no apple women became pale with awe—no news boys stopped, and trembled, and took off their hats, and cried "behold the man what uses up the great Bamboozle!"—no person wheeled out of our path deferentially—but on we went, swinging our stick, (the before mentioned dark and polished one,) in our right hand—and with our left hand tastily thrust in its appropriate pocket, in our frock coat, (a grey one.)



2. Photograph of Whitman, 1848-1854. Photographer unknown, possibly John Plumbe Jr. Daguerreotype of a young Whitman holding a smooth, dark cane between his two hands. He has a black cap on his head and his eyes are slightly closed. He is wearing a dark jacket, vest, boutonniere, and light shirt. He shows a slight smile.

It isn't until Whitman meets a group of children that he is recognized, and despised, by one of them as a "gentleman." He is grateful to be redeemed by the appraisal of a second ("handsome," not "peevish") teenage boy who sees past the clothing and finds that Whitman doesn't expect inferiors to step aside for him, but is, rather, the possessor of a "manful . . . disposition" who can make way for the greater claim of the multitudes. Clothes (and canes) for young Whitman do not make the man:

"Ah!" said one, with a peevish air, to a companion, "we shall have to break the line. There comes a gentleman."

The boy spoken to was a fine, handsome fellow, of twelve or thirteen years. He turned and looked at us for a moment; then the expression changed, and his face greeted ours with an arch confiding smile, as much as to say "I know, my dear sir, you are too good natured to disturb us, merely to save the trouble of turning out a step!" It is needless to add, we *did* turn out. What wonderful powers children have of discriminating who is possessed of a courteous, kindly, manful and creditable disposition!<sup>[111]</sup>

Elsewhere in his early writings, Whitman is suspicious of fashionable canes as signifying "the trouble of great wealth. . . . What wise man thinks of cumbering up this journey with an immense mass of luggage? Who, that makes pretensions to common sense, will carry with him a dozen trunks, and bandboxes, hatboxes, valises, chests, umbrellas, and canes innumerable, besides two dirty shirts in the crown of his hat, and a heavy brass watch that won't keep time, in his waistcoat pocket?"<sup>[121]</sup> And in the infamous early story "Death in the School-Room. A Fact" (1841), a cane—rattan, made specifically for punishment—features as an instrument of grisly post-mortem torture. The evil



schoolteacher Lugare chooses “a long and heavy ratan,” which later in the story becomes his “longest and stoutest ratan” cane, and uses it to threaten sickly young Tim Barker: “I’ll thrash you till you beg like a dog.”<sup>[131]</sup> Eventually he does beat the child, whom he thinks is sleeping, only to discover that the child has been dead for quite for some time, and “Lugare had been flogging A CORPSE.” The blows that fall are grotesque, but stripped of their sting.<sup>[141]</sup>

These early uses of a cane—the fashionable one he carried down Broadway, the canes innumerable, and the cruel rattan weapon—prop Whitman’s explorations of the problems of social hierarchy and the violence of social discipline. These early canes are prosthetics in the sense of being, as Katherine Ott puts it in her entry in *Keywords for Disability Studies*, “assistive devices that people use to support what they want to do,”<sup>[151]</sup> to the extent that a sword or cudgel—the fashionable cane’s grandparents—extend one’s capacity to claim power. But in 1855, with the publication of *Leaves of Grass*, we see the cane reappear as a more complex prosthetic object, employed now as a prop or crutch to a body in need of its support, a disabled body: “Agonies are one of my changes of garments; / 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.”<sup>[161]</sup>

The first, 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* was written before the Civil War and therefore before Whitman spent his years in the military hospitals where he witnessed innumerable amputations (“Out doors, at the foot of a tree, within ten yards of the front of the house, I notice a heap of amputated feet, legs, arms, hands, &c., a full load for a one-horse cart”<sup>[171]</sup>). It was written before, as Ott puts it, the United States’ understanding of “the integrity of the human body” was profoundly affected by “war and its aftermath of injured soldiers [. . .] As a result of the Civil War, federal, state, and local governments entered the business of providing limbs, made by contractors, for the thirty-five thousand amputee soldiers who survived.”<sup>[181]</sup> The 1855 edition was also written before the 1873 stroke that would partially paralyze Whitman and make him dependent on a cane for the rest of his life. These national and personal crises, which would change forever Whitman’s understanding of the wounded and disabled body, are still in the future. Whitman’s pre-war, pre-stroke mid-century voice emerges here as demonstrative of the mid-century moment Ellen Samuels has described, when “a crisis began to emerge within modern nations regarding the identifiability and governability of the individual bodies making up their bodies politic.” Samuels reminds us that the proliferation of state institutions of control, as well as the codification of languages of categorization around race, gender, and disability, began to organize bodies into identities, a shift away from what Sari Altschuler and Cristobal Silva have described, in early America, as an “idea of disability—that is, a set of stigmatized physical and cognitive impairments around which certain exclusionary practices [were] organized . . . but *disability* was not yet the singular word used to describe it.”<sup>[191]</sup> The coalescence of disability from idea to identification made the mid-nineteenth century a moment when not only “disability,” “race,” “gender” etc., but also “normalcy” became powerfully

embedded in what Samuels calls (negatively) “fantasies of identification.” In other words, at the moment of the publication of *Leaves of Grass*, bodies identifiable as “disabled” were becoming useful to state and cultural systems of categorization, repression, and violent control, a use that was twinned with the importance of bodies newly categorizable as “normal.” Samuels teaches us that, of all the relatively new categories of identification, disability serves as a sort of limit case and therefore is always present (“haunting”) the rest, often invisibly.

Once embedded in the cultural realm, fantasies of identification stubbornly persist, despite being disproved, undermined, or contradicted . . .

Finally, fantasies of identification are haunted by disability even when disability bodies are not their immediate focus, for disability functions as the trope and embodiment of true physical difference.

Whitman introduces the cane in the midst of what we might see as the poet’s long “fantasy of identification,” when he claims the ability to be just about everyone. But Whitman’s is decidedly *not* a fantasy of identification in Samuels’s sense of the term. Whitman ranges across huge numbers of identifications, inhabiting them all, kicking against the rigidity of these newly crystalizing identities as he expansively and seemingly endlessly takes on the embodiment of others. But although Whitman’s fantasy of identification works, through excess, to critique the cultural obsessions Samuels describes, the entrance of the cane-leaning, disabled poetic voice functions exactly as Samuels says it will. The cane-leaning poetic voice is not just another “type” Whitman inhabits, but is rather a limit. The cane signals a retreat from the intensity of his poetic inhabitation of multiple embodiments, and “functions as the trope and embodiment of true physical difference.” What is that true physical difference for Walt “Every Atom Belonging to me as Good Belongs to You” Whitman? It is one that arrives with deathly violence, at the limits of the ability of the poetic voice to o’erleap the tortures of gendered and racialized oppression.

A cane only appears once in *Leaves of Grass*, but it turns up in conjunction with another word that appears again and again in the poem: *lean*. “Lean” is a word (much like its cousin “bent”) that I believe expresses a queer relation.<sup>[20]</sup> The term “adhesiveness,” which Whitman borrows from phrenology and uses to describe the love of men for men, what would come to be called homosexual love, does not appear in this first edition, but arrives a year later in the 1856 edition.<sup>[21]</sup> The overabundant *leaning* of the 1855 edition (and all following editions) is, I would argue, the physical stance of adhesiveness appearing in the poem even before Whitman puts a word to it. Historian of photography David Deitcher points out that phrenologists believed that the “organs” of adhesiveness and amateness were located in the temples. At mid-century, photographs of men together reveal “one frequently recurring pose as proof that in the United States highly developed organs of Adhesiveness were virtually epidemic. Many photographs survive that attest to the popularity of this charming pose, in which men are seen in tight close-ups with their heads

inclined so that they touch above, and often a little behind, the ear. This 'adhesive' pose dates back to the second half of the 1850s, to the period of the earliest tintypes." In the photos, men tilt sharply toward one another, shoulders cantilevered so that their heads touch, gently but certainly, right at the spot on the temple behind which they believed their love dwelt. Deitcher goes on to quote phrenologist George Combe (1784-1858), who believed this was a natural, inherent gesture, claiming that loving children were drawn to "put their arms around each other's necks, and place their heads together, bringing the organ of Adhesiveness in each into contact with the same organ in the other."<sup>[221]</sup>

*Leaves of Grass* begins with the energetic and seemingly sufficient celebration of self that immediately becomes a universal interpenetration of self with all others. This overwhelming and energetic self-togetherness gives way in the second stanza to a more contemplative mood and stance: "I loafe and invite my soul, / I lean and loafe at my ease . . . observing a spear of summer grass." This leaning, observant, adhesive pose appears again and again in the stanzas that follow, as male bodies lean, seeking support sometimes in pleasure and rest, sometimes in peril and suffering. The poet leans in to plant a "family kiss" on the cheek of a privy-emptier. Even when objects lean ("My firelock leaned in the corner"), they lean in the service of facilitating masculine togetherness. The firelock leans because the speaker has welcomed an escaping enslaved man, and the two are busy living and eating together in harmony; the gun is unneeded. Leaning is an invitation, an inclination, to "my soul" and to others, a breaking down of social and racial hierarchy, a cantilevering of men who lean toward love. Without one another, without being able to rest their temples together in an "adhesive" pose, these men are not fully whole.

Michael Moon's reading of "Song of the Broad-Axe" (which first appears in the 1856 edition and much more forcibly carries on the leaning motif of 1855), suggests exactly this adhesive completion in the mutually leaning pose, though his argument tends in a different direction. For Moon, the leaning of the priapic father on his son/axe is the completion of an oedipal connection between men. The "European headsman [who] . . . leans on a ponderous axe" demonstrates a paternity in which "the broad-axe is a fully phallic 'offspring'—'born standing,' one might say—not only 'to be leaned' as ordinary babies are, but also 'to lean on.'"<sup>[231]</sup> The axe is birthed of a human mother ("head from the mother's bowels drawn!") it emerges as "Wooded flesh and metal bone! Limb only one and lip only one! . . . To be leaned, and to lean on." This axe-baby is both a prosthetic limb (wood and metal flesh and bone) and a disabled baby (it has "only" one limb and lip, the "only" serving to mark it as incomplete). Thus, bringing disability studies to bear here, we can see that the oedipal relation that Moon pursues is also, for Whitman, the relation between a disabled body and its prosthesis. As I will show, the personification of the son/lover in the object of the prosthesis, seen here so clearly, remains essential for Whitman, from this moment until his death.

But these leanings of men against one another and against axes and other sturdy props give way to an actually disabled body leaning on an actual cane only after Whitman enters the body and subjectivity first of a woman burned alive in front of her children, and then of the "hounded slave that flags in the race and leans by the fence, blowing and covered with sweat." The speaker is now interior to the enslaved, no longer helping him, no longer possessed of a firelock. Now it is the enslaved body that leans, exhausted, against a barrier fence. The description continues, becoming extremely bloody and violent; the man is bitten by dogs, shot at, possibly trampled (by horses absolved of crime), and beaten. It seems as if this, like the burning at the stake that precedes it, is a scene of murder and will end in death.

I am the hounded slave, I wince at the bite of the dogs,  
Hell and despair are upon me, crack and again crack the marksmen,  
I clutch the rails of the fence, my gore dribs, thinn'd with the ooze of my  
skin,  
I fall on the weeds and stones,  
The riders spur their unwilling horses, haul close,  
Taunt my dizzy ears and beat me violently over the head with whip-stocks.

Immediately after this grimmest of scenes the poet steps back from his list of embodiments and speaks to us in an aside. "Agonies are one of my changes of garments; / I do not ask the wounded person how he feels . . . . I myself become the wounded person." Something about these last changes of costume, these journeys into murders done legally in the service of preserving white patriarchal supremacy, has bumped the speaker out of his otherwise flowing list of embodiments. Having delivered his aside, he dives back into embodiment immediately, in a peculiarly aggressive, possessive way that seems to both invoke settler colonial violence and wave aside empathy and sentiment—"I do not ask the wounded person how he feels . . . . I myself become the wounded person." But in inhabiting the wounded person and taking on their hurt without asking, the stance of the poetic voice is changed. He used to "lean and loafe at my ease . . . . observing a spear of summer grass." Now, ease is gone. "My hurt turns livid upon me as I lean on a cane and observe." The elements are the same, but the orientation of the objects and therefore the valence of the action they enable—observation—has changed. The spear of grass has become a cane. The speaker is now so injured that he needs that spear, that staff, to lean upon in order to pursue observation. With the spear turned to a cane, and the speaker now disabled, it is no longer clear what the speaker is observing. Here, perhaps, is Samuels's limit.

A woman is burned alive, an enslaved man is beaten, probably to death, the poet does not ask how a wounded person feels, he goes ahead and feels the wound himself. What, then, is the wound? On one level, Whitman is simply making the typical gesture of abolitionist sentimentality. This is the wound that the white observer receives from identification (I become the wounded person) with the oppressed other. The white reader, wounded by identification with the oppressed, is moved from that place of pain and anger (lividity) to take action

against oppression on behalf of the powerless. Under this reading, and on a metaphorical level, the speaker has so fully taken on the wound of identification with the other that he now needs a prosthetic cane in order to continue in his desired action of observing. But continuing to observe violence further wounds him. The injury that is “upon” him takes on a blue-gray hue and grows worse.

But I think this fragment is more complex. “My wound turns livid upon me as I lean on a cane and observe.” If we take the “turnings” and “leanings” here as simile, if we read them as spatial and bodily-choreographic—rather than temporal and emotional, we can access a more complex understanding. My hurt turns upon me *in the same way that* I lean upon a cane. Now the poet’s self—“me”—is the prosthesis rather than the cane. “Me” supports the pivoting action of the livid hurt. Remembering that the speaker essentially invaded this hurt—“I do not ask . . . I become”—the active lividity of the hurt, its increasing pain and rage, may well be turning in rage not only against the injustice of slavery and gendered violence, but against the intruding, inhabiting self of the poet. This choreographic reading produces a much more ambiguous portrait of the identifications of abolitionist sentimentality. The hurt of racial and gender violence is made worse by the hurt of possessive identification. And the hurt cannot be controlled. It uses the self as a prosthetic to enable its own ambiguous actions, and its lividity, its worsening, deepening rage, may as well turn to face the supposedly sympathetic, all-feeling “me” as the violent perpetrators of injustice.

In *Narrative Prosthesis* (2001), Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell argue that “literary narratives revisit disabled bodies as a reminder of the ‘real’ physical limits that ‘weigh down’ transcendent ideals of the mind and knowledge-producing disciplines. In this sense, disability serves as the hard kernel or recalcitrant corporeal matter that cannot be deconstructed away by the textual operations of even the most canny narratives or philosophical idealisms.”<sup>[24]</sup> Certainly Whitman, however complex his acrobatics, introduces disability at the moment of intense violence in just the way Snyder and Mitchell describe. I think it is interesting, however, that hurt and disability enter here in the poem along with the cane, but the leaning stance, the need and longing for support, have long preceded these things. Sara Grossman writes evocatively of how “I found love in Whitman for parts of my body that others could not.”<sup>[25]</sup> For Grossman, the lean can be deployed defensively—“Hiding part of your body is all about angles”<sup>[26]</sup>—but she also leans toward Whitman’s care. The angles, the queer (aslant) tendencies (leanings), the tilted poise of Whitman in *Leaves of Grass* ultimately give way to disability—and how different are they? Much thinking has been done in disability studies about why and how the queer and the disabled are so often theorized together, with arguments on all sides for whether or not that pairing is helpful or harmful, and to what extent.<sup>[27]</sup> Here we see Whitman, writing at the moment Samuels pinpoints as the coalescence of disability as an “identification.” We see him leaning toward his own identifications of something he will call, among other things, “adhesiveness.” But we catch him

in this moment—before the war and his own ultimate dependence on a cane—apprehending something in a stance that seems to make what-will-come-to-be-called disability and what-will-come-to-be-called homosexuality rhyme, if only in prosthesis for and propped up against one another.

And yet they are different, and in this example, it is gendered and then racialized violence that produces the difference between the “gay” and the “disabled” stance; before an encounter with and inhabitation of the torture of a burned woman and an enslaved man, “I lean . . . at my ease.” After, “I lean on a cane.” In 1989 Karen Sanchez-Eppler notices that, in the draft material leading up to the 1855 publication of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman puts the enslaver and the enslaved right at the heart of his definition of his poetic voice. In the end, he cuts them from the manuscript, leaving only the body and soul behind. Slaver and enslaved appear elsewhere in the poem, but Sanchez-Eppler’s excavation of them from their original place in the draft is useful.

I am the poet of the body  
And I am the poet of the soul  
I go with the slaves of the earth equally with the masters  
And I will stand between the masters and the slaves  
Entering into both so that both shall understand me alike

Sanchez-Eppler’s reading of this draft segment reaches, before the full development of the language of disability studies, for the work disability studies could help her do: “The ‘I’ who ‘will stand between’ gains the ability to be ‘understood,’ and so takes the name of poet, by occupying the place of linkage between the opposing but interdependent roles of master and slave. That the desire to be understood punningly recapitulates the hierarchic standing of master and slave, suggests the precariousness, if not the impossibility, of Whitman’s poetic goal.”<sup>[28]</sup> I want to amplify her argument, and extend it, lifting out the imagery of leaning—“linking . . . opposing but interdependent”—and of walking and standing, as more than simply punning. Whitman understands his position, “going” between enslaved and enslaver, as a physical journey involving motion, pivot, poise—standing and some sort of penetration—whether of mind or body or both. That he cuts this claim may attest to his understanding that these are not puns, but dangerous, embodied stances. But elsewhere Whitman is not afraid of that danger. The “precarity” of the poetic voice that can “enter into both” is not, for Whitman, to be avoided. The elegant leaning poise of *Leaves of Grass*’s opening, in which the healthy young poet leans because he is at leisure—“I lean and loafe at my ease . . . observing”—is changed by the poet’s encounter with the deep historical divides of history (the burning alive and the torture and enslavement of human beings). Now gravely, perhaps mortally, wounded by “standing between,” the poet’s poise and his activity remain the same as it was in the poem’s second stanza—“I lean” . . . “on a cane” now takes the place of “and loafe at my ease” . . . “and observe.”

Written four years after the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, the poem cycle



"Calamus" is also sprinkled with propping, embracing, and otherwise mutually supportive entwinement of men by men, but the word "lean" appears only once ("leaning my face in my hands"), then disappears completely in later revisions. I argue that this is because "leaning" was a euphemism for homosexual love for Whitman, and in "Calamus" he uses "adhesive" and other words instead. In this poem he tells us that he is trying—for the first time—to say it, to, perhaps, identify it—not embody it: <sup>[29]</sup>

Here, by myself, away from the clank of the world,  
Tallying and talked to here by tongues aromatic,  
No longer abashed—for in this secluded spot I can  
respond as I would not dare elsewhere,  
Strong upon me the life that does not exhibit itself,  
yet contains all the rest,  
Resolved to sing no songs to-day but those of manly  
attachment . . .



3-4. Two photographs of "Calamus cane," gift of John Burroughs to Walt Whitman. Walt Whitman Papers in the Charles E. Feinberg Collection. Library of Congress. Oversize, 1844-1952; Memorabilia, undated (Container 200). The first colored photograph shows the top of Whitman's cane, which contains the following inscription: "TO / WALT WHITMAN / 'A CALAMUS' / FROM JOHN BURROUGHS."

With the absence of leaning, there is also an absence of canes. There's no cane in these "Calamus" poems. Or is there? "Calamus" is mostly understood to refer to the wetland plant "sweet flag," which has a flower that looks like an erect phallus. Sweet flag is *Acorus Calamus*; "Calamus" is, in fact, not only sweet flag but an entire genus and it refers to many different varieties of palm, plants that are also often called "cane." Plants of the Calamus genus make cane seats, and light walking canes, and the rattan cane used by Lugare to beat a corpse. So, you could say, somewhat jokingly, that the entire poem cycle about men leaning upon one another is actually entitled "Cane."

Whitman's friends and readers were in on the joke, and canes were passed between them as gifts. We know of four gifts of canes that were exchanged. The first makes the joke most explicit. Naturalist John Burroughs gave Whitman an exuberant cane, carved into a spiral and tipped with a silver button that reads "To Walt Whitman, 'A Calamus'" (figs. 3-4). Whether this is simply a naturalist making a pun about genus names, or whether Burroughs found a clever way of using a plant genus to categorize his friend as *genus homosexualus*, we cannot know for sure—but the cane is very fancy, with the wood carved into a

dramatic corkscrew-like helix. The second cane Whitman himself gave to his friend, A. E. Johnson. This blackthorn cane, tipped with a silver button, reading "A.E.J. from Walt Whitman," sold at auction at Sotheby's on June 19, 2015, for an astounding \$43,750 (figs. 5-6). The third cane doesn't exist anymore as far as I know. Traubel says that in May of 1889, Whitman said to him:



The second colored photograph reveals the full cane, which is positioned in a red velvet box. While the top and bottom portions of the cane contain metal pieces, the majority consists of two parts of maplewood joined together. The center of the cane is thickest and contains four curves.

"I had a peculiar visit last night after you had gone. Three Hindu fellows came in—the fellows I spoke to you about: they could scarcely speak a word of English. They brought me this bamboo cane, here on the floor." I picked it up and handed it to Tom to inspect. "And I have used it a good deal today—it is very nice—strong; Warren is going to have a ferrule put on it for me. They brought me also that gay handkerchief you see there on the chair—pull it out." It was a gay dotted red and blue silk affair, over which W. laughed goodhumoredly.



5-6. Two photographs of Whitman's silver-tipped cane, gift to A.E.J. Sotheby's New York Sale N09359, Lot 149 (19 June, 2015). This colored photograph shows the top of Whitman's cane, which is engraved with the following: "A.E.J. / from / Walt Whitman."

The Hindu travelers' gift of a cane reaches across a linguistic divide, and travels in this passage from hand to hand (from the visitors to Whitman to Traubel to Tom to Warren). Did the visitors truly speak no English? If not, were they visiting Whitman on the strength of a translation into Hindi? I

can't find any record of a Hindi translation that early. Was the gift of a cane a translation of a translation of a joke denoting gayness? If so, does Traubel's mention of the "gay handkerchief" that makes Whitman laugh a key to the joke?<sup>[30]</sup> Or is Whitman chuckling in xenophobic/racist condescension? We don't know. The cane is lost, and I, at least, am unable to decipher who the visitors were and why they brought it with them as a gift.



The second colored photograph shows the top two thirds of the cane, which is composed of wood. One piece of wood juts out on its left hand side and is lighter in color than the thicker part of the stick. The cane's texture is fairly rough and uneven, and lighter portions of wood occupy the third closest to its top.

But the fourth cane, of course, is my cane. The nobbled, ivory-fingernailed, crook-ended cane that is now in the Whitman House in Camden. Although I was able to go back and visit the cane by myself, and sit beside it on the floor and draw it, and although I had a long, very informative conversation about it with Leo Blake, the curator of the Walt Whitman House, I was never actually able to get my hands on their accession records for the cane, so I don't know how the house came to possess it or what they know about it. It seems, however, to be the cane in the late photographs of Walt Whitman. The cane in the photos has that cut-off end, and in some photos you can make out the ivory cap and even the nubbles. Horace Traubel, Whitman's friend who chronicled his final years in a journal that ultimately filled nine thick volumes, mentions this cane many times in his lengthy, tender descriptions of Whitman's declining health, and of the rhythm of Whitman's negotiation of his living space. Whitman uses the cane for support, as you would expect; "Leaning the one side on the cane, the other on my arm."<sup>[31]</sup> But the cane's meaning deepens as Traubel's references to its presence grow more numerous. The cane is described

as a "constant companion," and Whitman is repeatedly described sleeping with it; "I found him on his bed fast asleep—on his right side—curled together—looked like a babe—hand under his cheek—a steady breath—light low—cane at his side."<sup>[32]</sup> The cane is "indispensable,"<sup>[33]</sup> even magical—Traubel twice calls it a "wand" when describing Whitman asleep: "Face to the south—one hand out of cover, grasping the cane—his wand;"<sup>[34]</sup> and again from a particularly beautiful description of Whitman asleep; "He slept peaceably, lying on his back, his face half-turned away from the window, the light only falling on the left cheek and forehead and the straggling beard. The throat is much gone—has lost the strength and set which made it worthy and able companion of that massive head. Hands out on the cover, holding easily the cane (the wand of his need, the call to watchful ears)."<sup>[35]</sup> But wakeful Whitman also uses the "wand of his need" constantly and energetically as a tool: "Now rose—went to his chair—giving the stove door a pull with his cane by the way,"<sup>[36]</sup> knocking over the many piles of things that surround his chair as he searches for missing bits of paper; "Would take his cane, give a pile of books, &c., a knock— 'make matters worse, as he said. 'To-morrow, I'm sure to hit upon it somewhere.'"<sup>[37]</sup> And, again and again, using it to knock on the floor to call for his helpers to come upstairs. When Traubel imitates the trick, Whitman is amused; "I took his cane from the bed and knocked on the floor. He laughed, 'Pretty good—but not *quite* my knock.'"<sup>[38]</sup> This prosthetic, in other words, is no inanimate instrument, but is instead animated and expressive of the body that uses it. As R. Olkin says of canes and crutches; "When I use crutches I feel connected to them as if they are one of my limbs [. . .] I don't want anyone to move my crutches without my permission, or to lean on the arm of the wheelchair or rest their hand on the back of it unless it is someone I feel comfortable touching me."<sup>[39]</sup> We can see something of this understanding of cane-and-bodily self-sameness in Whitman's rejection of Traubel's knock, and his claim that only he can call forth the cane's distinctive voice. At last, fourteen days before his death, Whitman loses the ability to manipulate the cane, and, in his final mention of the cane in the diaries, Traubel understands this as a terrible turn: "The other night while Warrie was absent the bell became detached from the wire. Mrs. Davis was unable to reconstruct the line, so W. asked for his cane, which she gave him. But after he had got his cane he could not use it—could not comfortably lift it—and so he had to call her when she was wished. This is significant of the subtle loss that is day by day preparing him for the end."<sup>[40]</sup>

But most importantly, this cane, this calamus—if it is the one mentioned so often in the journals and pictures in the photographs—was also a gift to Whitman, and a most important gift. Its provenance is mentioned three times in Traubel's journals.

Monday, June 18, 1888.

Pete Doyle was in yesterday and brought some flowers. "It was Pete who gave me the cane," explained W., "the cane with a crook in it. I always use Pete's cane: I like to think of it as having come from Pete—as being so

useful to me in my lame aftermath. You have never met Pete? We must arrange it some way some time.”

Peter Doyle was Whitman’s friend and lover. They met in 1865 when Doyle was twenty-two and Whitman forty-six years old. When Whitman had his stroke in 1873, Doyle cared for him closely, and perhaps made the gift of the cane to him then, for we know that Whitman always carried a cane after that. Doyle and Whitman’s passionate and sometimes troubled connection somewhat dimmed after Whitman’s move to Camden. This flower-bringing visit in June of 1888 is the last documented time we know that Doyle saw Whitman.

The second mention of Doyle in connection to the cane comes five weeks later, and expands upon the importance of the cane to Whitman, making it clear that Whitman thinks of his lover and the cane as very nearly the same thing.

Tuesday, July 3, 1888.

Hobbled about the room. “This cane was given me by Pete Doyle,” he reminded me: “Pete was always a good stay and support.”<sup>[41]</sup>

The final mention comes a year later, and yet more poignantly compares Peter Doyle to a support, a thing to be leaned upon, a cane.

Sunday, May 26, 1889

Happening to touch his cane, W. said: “You know all about that cane, don’t you? You know who gave it to me?” Then spoke tenderly of Peter Doyle. “I wonder where he is now? He must have got another lay. How faithful he was in those sick times—coming every day in his spare hours to my room—doing chores—going for medicine, making bed, something like that—and never growling!”<sup>[42]</sup>



7. Photograph of Walt Whitman with Harry Stafford, taken by Augustus Morand, February 11, 1878. Edward Carpenter Collection. This photograph features Harry Stafford and an older Whitman, seated in the right side of the image in a wooden chair. He holds a cane in his right hand. Stafford is positioned in the left of the image. His left hand rests on Whitman's shoulder. Both men are wearing dark clothing and jackets. They are positioned in front of a wall. Neither man is smiling.

"Another lay" could be another lover in today's terminology, but it could also mean another job. In early nineteenth-century slang, "lay" is a job, a perhaps somewhat-less-than-legal "gig." But either way Whitman remembers Doyle most for his faithfulness, his support, his constancy "in those sick times," as if they had passed. The cane is clearly not only an extension of Whitman's body, but also of Doyle's. We see this in the photo of Whitman and his lover Harry Stafford, whose association with "Hickory Saplings" Don James McLaughlin has discussed in a recent paper. "Whitman's references to hickory saplings in correspondence from this moment suggests further that he used coded language around the letters 'H.S.,' as a means of alluding to the initials of Harry Stafford, a young man with whom Whitman became romantically involved at the same time he began drafting the segments based in Camden for *Specimen Days*, and *Collect*."<sup>[43]</sup> In the portrait of Whitman and Stafford, the young man stands behind the seated Whitman, his hand loosely propped on the older man's shoulder (fig. 7). Whitman sits, his hands loosely grasping the cane. Look closely, and you can see the nobbles on the shaft and the ivory cap. The cane is (in all likelihood) a *Hickory Stick*, made from a *Hickory Sapling*. The joke of the photo could be that Whitman is grasping a "staff" that quite quickly can be decoded as H.S., a prosthetic stand-in for Harry Stafford himself. But also, Whitman allows his shoulder to be leaned upon by the young man, happy to support him; Whitman, however, is supported by his other lover. "You know all about that cane, don't you? You know who gave it to me?"



Peter Doyle.

I will close with Peter Doyle's words, written after Whitman's death.

I know he wondered why I saw so little of him the three or four years before he died, but when I explained it to him he understood...It was only this: In the old days I had always open doors to Walt—going, coming, staying, as I chose. Now, I had to run the gauntlet of Mrs. Davis and a nurse and what not. Somehow, I could not do it. It seemed as if things were not as they should have been. Then I had a mad impulse to go over and nurse him. I was his proper nurse—he understood me—I understood him. We loved each other deeply. But there were things preventing that, too. I saw them. I should have gone to see him, at least, in spite of everything. I know it now. I did not know it then, but it is all right. Walt realized I never swerved from him—he knows it now—that is enough.<sup>[44]</sup>

Words about knowledge appear over and over again in this short, desperate paragraph. "Know . . . wondered . . . explained . . . understood . . . seemed . . . understood . . . understood . . . saw . . . know . . . know . . . realized . . . knows." The word "understood" appears three times, and each iteration brings a moment of rest amidst the other, much more anxious words. The idea of mutual understanding between himself and his lover is a balm to Doyle's suffering over what Whitman may or may not have known, seen, wondered, realized. "When I explained it to him he understood . . . I was his proper nurse—he understood me—I understood him." The word *understand* is very old. The *Oxford English Dictionary* lists its first English usage, meaning "to comprehend," from 888. But English took it from Old Frisian via other Nordic and Germanic languages. If you clear your mind of its present meaning, the word steps clearly forth as the development of an intellectual act—comprehension—from a physical one—standing under.<sup>[45]</sup> It kept its physical meaning in the stage directions of passion plays until the fifteenth century: "St. John hir body under stude,"<sup>[46]</sup> instructing St. John to stand beneath the body of Christ on the cross. These stage directions were directly linked to the later meaning of understanding: comprehension. According to Jamie Taylor, "in passion plays understanding was conceptualized as positionality – standing beneath, witnessing the suffering body of Christ, and since these plays involved entire communities, it was also a positional and performative way of comprehending that mutual support and community occur when people physically *under stand* the crucifixion."<sup>[47]</sup> When we remember that "understand" develops from a physical and spatial relationship of interdependence and meaning- and community-making, we can see why it comforts Doyle in the midst of the many other, more anxious seekings after emotional and intellectual rest in this grief-stricken paragraph. The "understanding" that Doyle so desperately wanted to feel that he had with Whitman is, at its core, a simple description of mutual physical relation and dependence. The adhesive pose. Leaning. "I was his proper nurse—he understood me—I understood him." Hear the word "prop" in "proper." Think about the tilt and poise of mutual understanding. "Pete was always a good stay and support." And like a good stay and support, Doyle

is steady, strong. His final self-comfort is a description of that steadiness, of being that staff upon which Whitman could lean. "I never swerved from him—he knows it now—that is enough."

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[1] For Heather

[2] This version of the poem is taken from the 1881-2 edition of *Leaves of Grass*. That Smith leans on the end of the Book of Matthew when thinking (I believe) about the end of "Calamus" is fascinating. The Book of Matthew begins with a huge series of "begats," in which fathers breed sons in a male-only lineage from Abraham to Jesus. It references, many times, the Kingdom of Heaven as a place only the initiated can reach or truly inhabit. It moves through a few circumscribed engagements with various women named Mary, all of which turn again to male fraternity. It is interested in discipleship and explores how misunderstood Jesus is by his followers. It ends with Jesus's post-resurrection claim, made only to his eleven remaining male followers, to immortal togetherness. "Calamus" similarly carves out notions of male fraternity and lineage, ties it through tests of understanding to belonging in a future-perfect version of the "States," struggles with the question of followers and disciples, glances off of women in order to shore up male camaraderie, and ends with a promise of immortality.

[3] *Leaves of Grass* (1855).

[4] Sarah Ahmed, "Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Volume 12, Number 4, 2006, pp. 543-574.

[5] A reflexive verb is one in which the verb has the same "agent" and "patient," or subject and direct object.

[6] "Orientations," 552. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick also writes of spatial cohabitation when she describes the intellectual potential of the preposition *beside*: "*Beside* comprises a wide range of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivaling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations." *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2003), 8.

[7] From an account titled "An Old Poet's Reception: How the Majestic Walt Whitman Received His Friends" in *The Evening Sun* (New York), April 15, 1887. Collected in: *Walt Whitman, Daybooks and Notebooks*. Volume II: *Daybooks*, December 1881-1891. Edited by William White. (New York: New York University Press, 1978), 417.

[8] For an expansive compendium of such cane designs, see Catherine Dike, *Cane*

*Curiosa: From Gun to Gadget* Cane Curiosa Press, 1983, and, by the same author, *Canes in the United States: Illustrated Mementoes of American History, 1607-1953*, Cane Curiosa Press, 1994.

[9] American Mutoscope And Biograph Company, and Paper Print Collection. *Cake Walk*. United States: American Mutoscope and Biograph Company, 1903. Video. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <[www.loc.gov/item/96520361/](http://www.loc.gov/item/96520361/)>. "Certain derisive meanings were encoded in the dance, but it was read differently by whites who viewed the cakewalk as an amusing attempt at sophistication on the parts of their slaves rather than as a mockery of the matters of their masters." Thomas F. Defrantz, *Dancing Many Drums : Excavations in African American Dance*, University of Wisconsin Press, 2002. 71

[10] J.R. LeMaster and Donald D. Kummings, eds., *Walt Whitman: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 458

[11] *New York Aurora* 6 April 1842. Collected in *Walt Whitman's Selected Journalism*, eds. Douglas A. Noverr and Jason Stacy (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014), 200.

[12] "Sun-Down Papers.—[No.7] 1840 From the Desk of a Schoolmaster." *Long-Island Democrat* September 29, 1840. Collected in *Walt Whitman's Selected Journalism*, 173.

[13] "Death in the School-Room," *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review Volume IX* (New York: J. & H. G. Langley, 1841), 178, 180 and 178.

[14] In "Death in the School-room," Whitman describes the child's helplessness: "the stripling stood before that place of judgment." A "stripling" is one who is thin as a strip—according to the OED, "the etymological notion seems to be one who is slender as a strip." And a strip, again according to the OED, is from the Old German and is cognate with strop and strap—in other words, the thong of a whip. We acknowledge this in the phrase, "thin as a whip." The boy, then, is a slender version of the man's "thick ratan." The erotic potential is obvious. But the development of this essay will theorize why and how boy and man are figured as both embodying the cane, both, together, oriented toward "the place of judgment." In this instance, the cane punishes, in later instances, it solaces.

[15] Katherine Ott, "Prosthetics" in *Keywords for Disability Studies* Eds. Rachel Adams, Benjamin Reiss and David Serlin (New York and London: New York University Press, 2015), 140-5, 140.

[16] *Leaves of Grass* (1855).

[17] *Specimen Days, and Collect* (Philadelphia: Rees Welsh & Co., 1882-83), 26.

[18] *Artificial Parts, Practical Lives: Modern Histories of Prosthetics*. Eds. Katherine Ott, David Serlin, Stephen Mihm (New York and London: New York

University Press, 2002), 26.

[19] Sari Altschuler and Cristobal Silva, "Early American Disability Studies." *Early American Literature*, vol. 52 no. 1, 2017, pp. 1-27. *Project MUSE*, [doi:10.1353/eal.2017.0000](https://doi.org/10.1353/eal.2017.0000)

[20] Bending, leaning, tending; earlier I engaged Sara Ahmed's reflections on the queerness of tending/bending/leaning, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick recognized it too; the cover art for *Tendencies* (1993) makes the kinship between *tending* and *leaning* graphic.

[21] See Michael Lynch, "'Here Is Adhesiveness': From Friendship to Homosexuality," *Victorian Studies* 29: 1 (Autumn, 1985), 67-96.

[22] David Deitcher, *Dear Friends: American Photographs of Men Together 1840-1918*, (New York: Harry M. Abrams, 2001), 139.

[23] Michael Moon, *Disseminating Whitman: Revision and Corporeality in Leaves of Grass* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 98

[24] David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder eds., *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2000), 49.

[25] Sara Grossman, "Ordinary Bodies," *MQR Summer 2015*, 371-376, 373.

[26] Grossman, 373.

[27] See Carrie Sandahl, "Queering the Crip or Crippling the Queer? Intersections of Queer and Crip Identities in Solo Autobiographical Performance." *GLQ* 9 (2003): 25-56; Robert McRuer *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*. (New York: NYU Press, 2006); Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2013); Kim Q. Hall, "Feminist and Queer Intersections with Disability Studies," in *The Routledge Companion to Feminist Philosophy*, eds. Ann Garry, Serene Khader, and Alison Stone (Routledge, 2017).

[28] Karen Sanchez-Eppler, "To Stand Between: A Political Perspective on Whitman's Poetics of Merger and Embodiment," *English Literary History* 56:4 (Winter, 1989) 923-49, 925.

[29] With the introduction of a nascent understanding of identity and the concomitant absence of the embodied lean and the embodied, violent "limits" of that stance—the complex relationship between leaning and cantilevered "identifications" across race, sexuality, gender, so important in "Song of Myself," also vanish.

[30] A handkerchief is, of course, an object signaling romantic love. For more on adhesiveness and handkerchiefs, see Lynch, 73-4.

[31] Friday, November 16, 1888, Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden* vol. 3 (1914), 108.

[32] Thursday, May 21, 1891, Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden* vol. 8 (1996), 215.

[33] Friday, November 16, 1888, Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden* vol. 3 (1914), 108.

[34] Sunday, February 7, 1892, Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden* vol. 9 (1996), 431.

[35] Thursday, February 4, 1892, Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden* vol. 9 (1996), 431.

[36] Tuesday, May 19, 1891, Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden* vol. 8 (1996), 211.

[37] Monday, September 23, 1889, Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden* vol. 6 (1982), 15.

[38] Thursday, June 25, 1891, Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden* vol. 6 (1982), 15.

[39] Rhoda Olkin, "Women with physical disabilities who want to leave their partners: A feminist and disability-affirmative perspective." Berkeley, CA: California School of Professional Psychology/Through the Looking Glass, Co. (2009), 23.

[40] Saturday, March 12, 1892, Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden* vol. 9 (1996), 532.

[41] Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden* vol. 1 (1906), 415.

[42] Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden* vol. 5 (1964), 228.

[43] Citing the work of Edwin Miller and Gary Schmidgall on the significance of the initials "H.S.," Don James McLaughlin discusses the relationship between this correspondence and Whitman's erotics of disability in a paper titled "Whitman's Aesthetics of Paralysis: Embodied Penmanship, the Herbert Gilchrist Depictions, and an Early Manuscript Concept for *Specimen Days*" delivered at "Whitman at 200: Looking Back, Looking Forward (A Symposium)," University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA. March 29-30, 2019. Charley Shively was the first to make this discovery in his chapter on Harry Stafford in the book *Calamus Lovers: Walt Whitman's Working Class Camerados*. (San Francisco: Gay Sunshine Press, 1987).

[44] "Interview with Peter Doyle." *Calamus: A Series of Letters Written during the Years 1868-1880 by Walt Whitman to a Young Friend (Peter Doyle)*. Ed. Richard Maurice Bucke. (Boston: L. Maynard, 1897): 32-33.

[45] *Oxford English Dictionary*. (Oxford: 2019).

[46] *The Northern Passion Play* (ca. 1450), Ed. F.A. Foster, vol 1; (London: Early English Text Series old series 145, 1913)

[47] Personal correspondence with Jamie Taylor

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