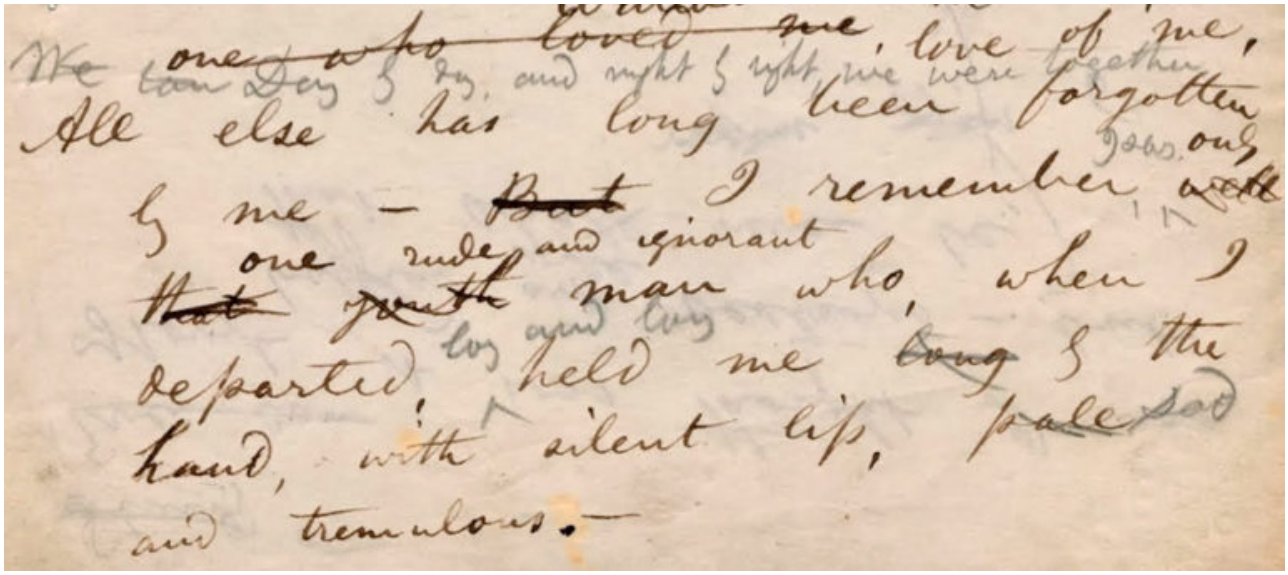
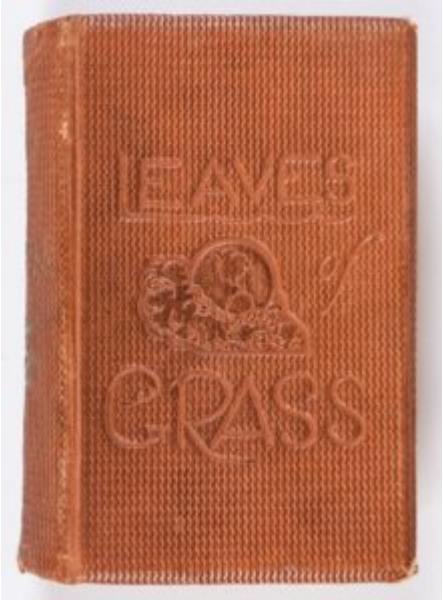
Whitman’s Wandering Mind





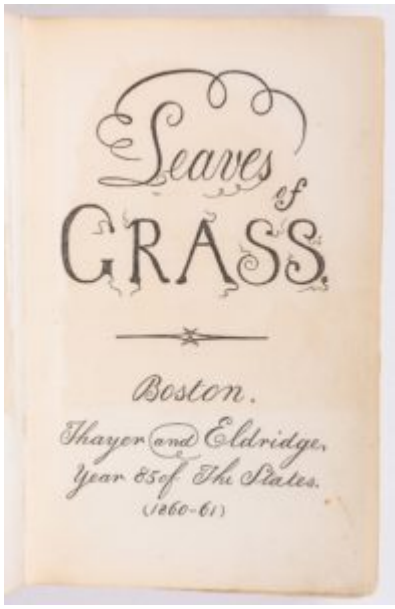
Front cover of the third edition of Leaves of Grass. As seen here, the third edition is known for its heavy embossing, including wandering, vertical, zigzagging stripes that span the cover from top to bottom and front to back. Original brass dies for the cover design are held at the Library of Congress. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.

In her important study of Walt Whitman’s *Memoranda* as well as the war poems Whitman included in the 1867 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Lindsay Tuggle identifies Whitman’s experience with veteran amputees as a touchstone for his “attachment to the process of loss,” focusing especially upon his understanding of the ways in which a lost body part can manifest more acute sensations than still-living attachments.[1] Tuggle connects Whitman’s interest in the felt absence of phantom limbs with his awareness of another sort of lack—namely, that of the nonexistence of a language for designating same-sex desire. (The

word “homosexual,” as Tuggle reminds us, only appeared in print in English in Charles Gilbert Chaddock’s translation of Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis* in 1892, the year of Whitman’s death.) That missing lexis by which Whitman might otherwise name so much of his erotic experience, Tuggle argues, permeates another nostalgic process of Whitman’s that takes the form of a mental stroll at the end of “The Dresser,” included in *Drum-Taps* and then the 1867 edition:

> Thus in silence, in dream’s projections,
> Returning, resuming, I thread my way through the hospitals;
> The hurt and wounded I pacify with soothing hand,
> I sit by the restless all the dark night—some are so young;
> Some suffer so much—I recall the experience sweet and sad;
> (Many a soldier’s loving arms about this neck have cross’d and rested,
> Many a soldier’s kiss dwells on these bearded lips.)[2]

“Like the ghostly pains of the amputee,” Tuggle notes, “Whitman inevitably returns, ‘in dreams’ projections,’ to the hospital corridors.”[3] It is an exquisite reading. For Tuggle, Whitman’s sensitivity to the plight of soldiers who lived with the pain of phantom limbs speaks to the absences that perforate his own arrangements of desire. It is not simply that Whitman cannot “revivify” the absent kisses of the men he cared for; Whitman lacks a way properly to name all of what transacted between such men and himself. Even well after he nursed these men and their devastated bodies, his process of recollection became a way for Whitman to negotiate if not precisely signify his own experience of loss.



Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass (Boston: Thayer & Eldridge, 1860). Pictured are the frontispiece and title page for the third edition of Leaves of Grass. As Gregory Eiselein notes, there is no definitive record of how many copies of the

third edition Thayer and Eldridge printed (prior to their bankruptcy in 1861). Generally, scholars estimate that between 2,000 and 5,000 copies were printed. For more on importance of the third edition see: Gregory Eiselein, “Leaves of Grass, 1860 edition.” Eds. J.R. LeMaster and Donald D. Kummings, Walt Whitman: An Encyclopedia (New York, 1998), also available at whitmanarchive.org. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.

Which is to say that what is true of lost limbs can be true of lost others. Indeed, from the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* Whitman not only exults over his own conjoinings with other bodies; he mourns the departure of those bodies from his own. First appearing as the ninth canto of the “Children of Adam” cluster within the third, 1860-61 edition of *Leaves of Grass* (figs. 1-3), the poem Whitman would eventually title “Once I Pass’d Through A Populous City” mulls over the unfastening of an erotic connection even as it twins the activities of remembering and wandering:

> Once I passed through a populous city, imprinting my brain, for future use, with
> its shows, architecture, customs, and traditions;
> Yet now, of all that city, I remember only a woman I casually met there, who
> detained me for love of me,
> Day by day and night by night we were together,– All else has long been
> forgotten by me,
> I remember I say only that woman who passionately clung to me,
> Again we wander—we love—we separate again,
> Again she holds me by the hand—I must not go!
> I see her close beside me, with silent lips, sad and tremulous.[4]

A repetitive, invasive mental experience of the past—instanced in the passage’s mention of the woman who once held and in a way still holds Whitman’s hand, whose departure seems in that way primarily an interruption of tactile sensation—is thus for Whitman an experience of a touch now absent. Haunted by the memory of a lover’s departure, her vanishing leaves Whitman both bereft and tingling with the recollection of past experience. Indeed his way of imagining the objects of memory as if suddenly to hand produces Whitman’s shift to present tense in the passage, through which he moves from apprehending a temporally distant past to re-living that past as if it were always currently recurring. That temporal re-visitation also perpetuates Whitman’s break from the woman he describes, causing their moment of parting to loop again and again in his memory. The passionate lover now dominates his memory so fully as to make him experience the past as if it were a constant presence he might now transact differently—“I must not leave her!”—or more particularly to experience in permanent replay the moment of separation. It is a reversal of the related question Whitman put in the first, 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, which also shifts between present and past as it considers variously the sensation of contact and the resultant pang when contact ceases. “You villain touch!” he

exclaims there. “Did it make you ache so leaving me?”[5] A touch now absent but that yet aches is a phantom touch, like an amputated limb, or like a phantom lover. For like phantom limb syndrome, which tends to be taken as a condition following from physical amputation, sensations of interpersonal and physical loss are just as much a negotiation of memory.

I am convinced that Whitman’s style of remembering by wandering shares conceptual space with his tendency to experience memory as intensely embodied. Unlike Emerson, for example, who categorizes as “Not-Me” “my own body” in the 1836 *Nature*, Whitman regards his corporeal experience as integral to his experience of self.[6] We know that already, of course. But I want to explore the extent to which Whitman’s embodied subjectivity in “Children of Adam”—which fixates on bodies that are ambulatory as well as paragons of wellness or healthfulness, of which more shortly—situates those embodiments as a problem of memory for Whitman, who in the canto I quote above is so woebegone over his loss of the passionate lover. The poem’s heartsick conflation of erotic memory with the activity of wandering transacts a merger of past and present that conditions the trauma of separation, abandonment, disavowal. She once clung to him but has disappeared, and so re-treading their shared ground is an imaginative act freighted with such stakes that may cause us to consider whether there is also something in the nature of wandering to make it properly an activity of the detached. I mean detachment not in the sense that describes an aloofness or a lack of commitment or interest, but in the sense delineated by psychologists such as John Bowlby or Mary Ainsworth, who use the word to theorize what happens when people whose relations have been formative or re-formative disconnect. For such theorists, detachment attenuates particularly when the attachment (or “attunement,” when the connection has been transacted over mutual perception of a powerful term or event) has been transacted through the body, through an intersubjective process that transacts across tactile experience. And so it is important that Whitman remembers the lover he has abandoned through his remembered sensations of his body, the body she or he once clung to, as he tells us. It means that Whitman himself is real to the extent that his body recollects a touch now missing. Which means that his looping, fixated memory is not only mental, not simply brain-bound; it is a form of cognition that takes place upon his skin, within the somatic phenomena of his bodily sensation.[7]

I want to think about both these facets of Whitman’s process of recollection here: his interest in recurring memory as if analogous to wandering along with his focus on the moment of separation as something he undergoes not only through cognition but as a corporeal event. But first I’ll note that during the 1860s, such a preoccupied, wandering memory as Whitman relays in this portion of the third edition of *Leaves of Grass* might well have been thought of as a form of disablement. In his volume *Mental Maladies: A Treatise on Insanity* (translated from French and published in Philadelphia in 1845), Jean-Étienne Dominique Esquirol defined as “erotomania” “a mental affection, in which the amorous sentiments are fixed and dominant, like religious ideas in theomania, or in religious lypemania.”[8] “Like all monomaniacs,” Esquirol continues, “those

suffering from erotomania are pursued both night and day, by the same thoughts and affections, which are the more disordered as they are concentrated or exasperated by opposition."[9] Esquirol's descriptions of erotomania didn't achieve a longstanding purchase among nineteenth-century psychological researchers, but something approximate to his idea does seem articulated in the later principle of perseveration, which emerged after the turn of the century to describe the repetition of an individual's mental associations even in the absence of an originary stimulus. In his 1906 volume *Days With Walt Whitman*, Edward Carpenter took particular interest in Whitman's poem "Hours Continuing Long," which transmits this fixated, melancholic aspect of Whitman's sexual experience: "Hours discouraged, distracted—for the one I cannot content myself without, soon I saw him content himself without me; / Hours when I am forgotten, / […] Is there even one other like me—distracted—his friend, his lover, lost to him? / Is he too as I am now? Does he still rise in the morning, dejected, thinking who is lost to him? and at night, awaking, think who is lost?"[10]

In supposing that erotomania, or even melancholic fixation, could be considered a form of disability, I am mindful that I may seem to risk elevating a nineteenth-century pseudodiagnosis (like drapetomania, an alleged mental illness Samuel A. Cartwright applied in 1851 to runaway slaves, other wanderers[11]) to a form of neuroatypicality on par with those attended by personal, social, and institutional hardships to which disability theorists and activists draw our attention: bipolar disorder, autism, or Alzheimer's, for example. Or, I might be bringing a more mundane mental experience to the space of more particular idiosyncratic affliction. I take those items seriously, and yet I am thinking also of Margaret Price's astute critique of the rhetoric according to which mental or cognitive difference is always conceived as a departure from various fictions of normality rather than "in terms of variety and difference."[12] (I am particularly appreciative of Price's portrayal of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* [DSM] for the reading experience it offers leading any thoughtful student of the prolific DSM to conclude that we are all mentally ill.) Rejecting the mind/body split that goes back to Descartes, and the model of personhood that places rationality at the center since Aristotle, Price refers to her self at one point as her "bodymind."[13] In doing so she reminds us that none of us live as Aristotelian abstractions of rationality, free from the material constraints and effects of the body; and in doing so she unsettles the same way of distancing the mind from its corporealization that informed Esquirol. For the "thoughts and affections" Esquirol delineates as typical of erotomania comprise "a lesion of the imagination only," he explains. "In erotomania," he continues, "the sentiment which characterizes it, is in the head."[14]

Yet as a meditation on sexual experience and erotic memory, the 1860-61 edition of *Leaves of Grass* foregrounds Whitman's contrary supposition of a self whose perseverating consciousness is invested in corporeal experience. So much else of "Children of Adam" renders thematic Whitman's view that the self is in the body—not only the "brain in its folds inside the skull-frame," the "all-

baffling brain" "[i]n this head"—but in the limbs of the body, in its blood, within "the thin red jellies within you, or within me—the bones, and the marrow in the bones, / The exquisite realization of health." This last point of emphasis upon the healthfulness of the bodies over which Whitman lingers is just as thematic throughout "Children of Adam," reiterated through Whitman's many paeans to "a clean, strong, firm-fibred body"—what Whitman considers "beautiful as the most beautiful face." Of the organs, limbs, joints, sinews, musculatures, and various internal and external surfaces that constitute these bodies, Whitman finds avenues for ecstatic contact with something essential and universal, exclaiming "O I say these are the Soul!" "O my body!" he writes, "I dare not desert the likes of you in other men and women, nor the likes of the parts of you; / I believe the likes of you are to stand or fall with the likes of the Soul, (and that they are the Soul)." And again, Whitman adumbrates these "parts of you" as examples of an ideal corporeality, describing "[s]trong shoulders, manly beard, scapula […] [b]road breast-front, […] [h]ips, hip-sockets, hip-strength, inward and outward round, man-balls, man-root, / Strong set of thighs, well carrying the trunk above […]" "And who possesses a perfect and enamoured body?" he asks in Canto 15 of "Chants Democratic," in the same edition of 1860-61: "For I do not believe any one possesses a more perfect or enamoured body than mine."

More so than thus imbuing these bodies' contingent parts, he locates human life in the motor activities that animate them, as in the last line above where the roving and desirous gaze of *Leaves of Grass* moves from shoulders past chest, hips, and genitals to the thighs that are in motion carrying the trunk. So here again, a self realized through his striding, meandering, or wandering. In "Children of Adam," after the ninth canto depicting the woman who clung passionately to Whitman as once they wandered together, Whitman begins the eleventh by bringing that recollection into a present wherein he now wanders alone: "In cities now, modern, I wander." And earlier, in the third canto, he imagines that "the expression of a well made man appears not only in his face, / It is in his limbs and joints also, it is curiously in the joints of his hips and wrists, / It is in his walk, the carriage of his neck, the flex of his waist and knees." Indeed, "[t]o see him pass conveys as much as the best poem, perhaps more," which is why a page later Whitman considers "[t]he march of firemen in their own costumes, the play of masculine muscle through clean-setting trousers and waist-straps" even as he resolves to "[s]wim with the swimmers, wrestle with wrestlers, march in line with the firemen, and pause, listen, and count."

Constitutional and pedestrian in multiple senses, these acts of ambulation tousle Whitman's desires, which is why he also places their movements along a continuum with physical expressions of longing. In the second canto he imagines "the soft sliding of hands over me, and thrusting of fingers through my hair and beard, / […] the long-sustained kiss upon the mouth or bosom, / […] the close pressure that makes me or any man drunk, fainting with excess." The motor activities of desire—kissing, caressing, thrusting—like the wandering to which he devotes so much other language in "Children of Adam," are under the control

of what cognitive neuroscientists now refer to as the somatic nervous system, corridors of neuromuscular activity within an individual's conscious control. But other forms of corporeal activity augment Whitman's catalogues of arousing embodiments by presenting sensory corporeal experience—especially sexual corporeal experience—along a range of embodied subjectivities. Whitman repeatedly twins descriptions of somatic motor activity with those of what neurologists designate as the autonomic nervous system, corporeal functions not under an individual's conscious control—for example, in the male experience of arousal and erection. "The female form approaching," he writes in the second canto: "I, pensive, love-flesh tremulous, aching." As it would happen, later, in the fifth canto, Whitman depicts such autonomic activity as another form of wandering or roaming:

> The curious roamer, the hand, roaming all over the body—the bashful
> withdrawing of flesh where the fingers soothingly pause and edge
> themselves,
> The limpid liquid within the young man,
> The vexed corrosion, so pensive and so painful,
> The torment—the irritable tide that will not be at rest,
> The like of the same I feel—the like of the same in others,
> The young woman that flushes and flushes, and the young man that flushes and
> flushes,
> The young man that wakes, deep at night, the hot hand seeking to repress
> what
> would master him—the strange half-welcome pangs, visions,
> sweats,
> The pulse pounding through palms and trembling encircling fingers—the young
> man all colored, red, ashamed, angry […]

The roaming, wandering hand, experienced both by the one giving touch and the one taking, gives rise to "flushes"—autonomic responses and therefore corporeal experiences beyond the individual's cognitive control. Whitman also stages a tension in this sequence between both neural/corporeal experiences in masturbation, the young man who awakens at night "seeking to repress what would master him," undergoing "pangs" even as the autonomic "pulse" throbs through somatically directed "palms" and "fingers" that are nevertheless autonomically "trembling." This is what it means to edge in Whitman, who transforms the noun into a verb: the passage locates a place "where the fingers soothing pause and edge themselves" and that constitutes a borderland of autonomic and somatic, mental prepossession and involuntary spasm. "Ebb stung by the flow, and flow stung by the ebb," he writes in Canto 3, as he again describes the autonomic/somatic nature of arousal.

Conscious experience such as that which we undergo when remembering, in other

words, is not only a neural event in “Children of Adam.” In this sense Whitman wanders in the 1860-61 edition toward more recent contentions in cognitive neuroscientific research locating consciousness both within and beyond the cortex. Evan Thompson and Francisco J. Varela, for example, describe “processes crucial for consciousness” that “cut across the brain-body-world divisions” that have stratified a “causal-explanatory relationship [that] is one-way, from internal neural events to conscious experience.”[15] Writing in 2001 and challenging then-prevailing consensus in the field that “a scientific theory of consciousness is to discover the ‘neural coordinates of consciousness,’” Thompson and Varela offered a contrary account describing consciousness as a form of “radical embodiment” that enmeshes organic processes of the body with somatic activity through which individuals interact with the environment and with others.[16] “The relationship between neural dynamics and conscious situated agents,” they explain, “can be described in the ‘cycles of operation’ that constitute the agent’s life,” cycles that include autonomic “homeostatic processes of the internal organs and viscera,” “the sensorimotor pathways of the body,” and the “recognition of the intentional meaning of actions in others.”[17]

The embodied account scientists like Thompson and Varela adduce should be of interest to disability activists who seek similarly to supplant models of personhood that abstract selves from embodied circumstance, for an effect of their work is to unsettle what they call the “brain in a vat” paradigm of conscious experience. One such model of consciousness as brain-bound event extends from a theory known among cognitive neuroscientists as “symbolic description.” According to this model, interior mental life comes about as a result of a mental transcription of input from the external world accessed through perceptual faculties. That transcription concocts a sort of internal cinema within which self-awareness occurs. But embodied subjectivity maintains that, as Lotte Meteyard, Sara Rodriguez Cuadrado, Bahador Bahrami, and Gabriella Vigliocco put it, “there is only limited modeling of the external world and cognition is about real-world action rather than symbolic representation.”[18] Meteyard and her colleagues go on to ask, “How can a system which is intimately tied to real-world action and dynamic, on-line, processes have stable representations?” Working from the findings of computational and neural researcher Matthew Wilson, who suggests that “the function of these sensory-motor resources is to run a simulation of some aspect of the physical world, as a means of representing information or drawing inferences,” they describe not an elaborate and internal flickering theater of consciousness but rather a constant somatic processing of internal and external environments that relies upon both sensory and motor activity:

> On experiencing a thing, like a cup of coffee, we have various sensory (taste, smell, touch) and motor (drinking) experiences. When we hear the words, “cup of coffee,” embodiment states that we re-construct in some form that sensory and motor information. Embodiment focuses on the *content* of cognitive representations and from that derives organizational principles. So, the environment has to be internalised somehow, but instead of

> transducing the signal into a symbolic format, the signal is recreated. This claim is the most relevant for our purposes, since it directly links to semantic representation and it translates into a simple statement:
>
> The content of semantic representation is sensory and motor information.[19]

"The signal is recreated," repeatedly, at the level of "sensory and motor information." Has there ever been a more apt description of the process Whitman puts to work through his many catalogues of sensory corporeal experience, those present-participle sense-impressions that make up so much of *Leaves of Grass* since the first edition, but which in "Children of Adam" locate what Whitman calls "the life of bodies […] meaning and being […] My limbs, and the quivering fire that ever plays through them"? "Is this then a touch?" he asks in the 1855 edition, before that touch leaves him: "Quivering me to a new identity." This and other moments of *Leaves of Grass* present visual, tactile, aural, and other phenomena that Meteyard and other cognitive neuroscientists would identify as sensory inputs, imbuing them with that "fire" Whitman also calls, in the third edition, "Soul": "And if the body were not the Soul, what is the Soul?"

And his recollection of the lover from the populous city is just as dispersed across such iterations of somatic and autonomic experience as Meteyard, Rodriguez Cuadrado, Bahrami, and Vigliocco describe as the "recreation" of sensory "signals" that constitutes a self. Well before the more complete episodic recollection that comprises Canto 9, Canto 2 mentions "the faithful one, the prostitute, who detained me when I went to the city." He may well be referring to her when in the same canto he regards "The oath of the inseparableness of two together—of the woman that loves me, and whom I love more than my life—That oath swearing"; he is almost certainly doing so when a page later he describes "the one so unwilling to have me leave—and me just as unwilling to leave, / (Yet a moment, O tender waiter, and I return,)." Much later, in Canto 8, he seems to gather variously gendered identities—the woman named as a prostitute in the first mention of Canto 2 and now someone else—as he explains, "I take for my love some prostitute—I pick out some low person for my dearest friend, / He shall be lawless, rude, illiterate […]" Seemingly determined to undergo his pangs over and over, Whitman may well refer to her again in Canto 2: "From sex—From the warp and the woof, / (To talk to the perfect girl who understands me—the girl of The States, / To waft to her these from my own lips—to effuse them from my own body;)." And for that matter, the central metaphor of "Once I Pass'd Through a Populous City" may have wandered into "Children of Adam" from the sequence of the 1855 edition that would eventually become "The Sleepers," which begins, "I wander all night in my vision."

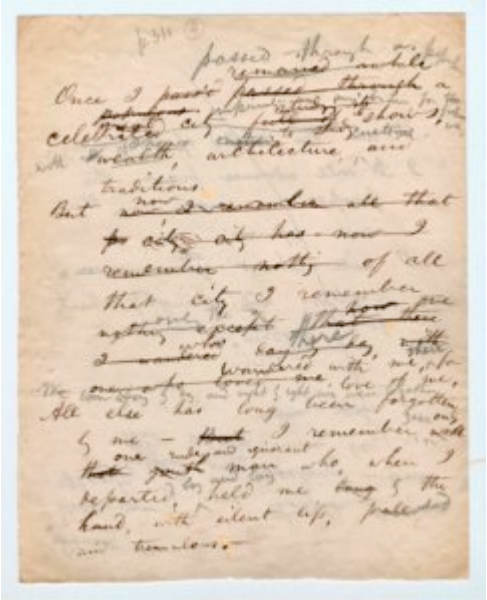
These repetitions do not salve the experience of loss at the center of "Children of Adam"—on the contrary, they seem to accentuate it. Whitman's repetitions place the third edition on footing that is distinct, for instance, from Wordsworth, who constantly understood his own experience in terms of the memories it would become, in terms of an eventual retrospective worth that

overwrites what could otherwise become a fixedly bereft state. Most famously, Wordsworth's "I wander'd lonely as a cloud" describes its speaker's vivid sensory experience—his discovery of "a host, of golden daffodils"—and registers such bemusement over his own failure at the tingling moment of apprehension to have foreseen "What wealth the show to me had brought." The instant of sensory experience occurs for Wordsworth within a future-anterior experience of time. There is pleasure in the moment of apprehension, but more still in the anticipation of a future "wealth" invested in memory, a value that supplants the prior experience. It's that future anteriority that also conditions Wordsworth's "Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey," where the "forms of beauty" surrounding the poet reclining in nature are less edifying in themselves than for the "sensations sweet" they will surely provide during "hours of weariness." And so even as Wordsworth gazes at the picturesque River Wye he does so "not only with the sense / Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts / That in this moment there is life and food / For future years." His perception is conditioned by his envisioning of a future remembering self who will be thus nourished by the as-yet unformed memory of this present.[20]

If for both poets, wandering—whether lonely as a cloud or within a populous city—is the locutionary act and the feckless intransitive verb that articulates memory itself, the variance between Wordsworth and Whitman pits future edification against present-tense experience. The touch Whitman describes in the 1855 edition is both unbearable for having ceased and overwhelming to him while underway—Whitman's language conditions it as if something like an assault, but also a formative event that Whitman imagines as if "quivering me to a new identity." The touch he writes about in 1855 is constitutional even as it is unmindful, disregarding of its own traumatic effects, "[i]mmodestly sliding the fellow-senses away, / […] No consideration, no regard for my draining strength or my anger […]" In other words, Whitman does not like Wordsworth experience memory as unproblematically nourishing. His spiraling, infatuated memory would be akin to the erotomania Dominique Esquirol describes in its tendency to flood the consciousness of the afflicted "both night and day, by the same thoughts and affections" were it not for the shifts Whitman introduces into each iteration of the memory. For even as she instills the loss over which Whitman wants to ponder—and to fix in time as he brings his past with her into present tense—the passionate lover also transforms in small ways as she re-appears over the course of "The Children of Adam." This is because her appearance in the poem already deflects a more massive loss than she can quite carry on her own.

In this light a final aspect I want to point up about "Once I Pass'd Through a Populous City" is the way in which the loss it narrates surreptitiously forecloses another fallen object—not the feminine other Whitman opines. For the lover Whitman describes in the passage, the woman "with silent lips, sad and tremulous" with whom he wanders the city, is already the phantom of another loss whose identity Whitman withholds. This is to say that as he recalls this nameless woman Whitman also falsifies her: for one thing, he reassigns her sex.

In manuscript, the poem remains in present tense as Whitman remembers the “one” who “wandered with me, for love of me” and with whom he lingered “day by day, and night by night,” “together.” But there in his own hand, Whitman also indicates that while “All else has long been forgotten by me ~~But~~ I remember ~~well~~ only ~~that youth~~ one rude and ignorant man who, when I departed, long and long held me ~~long~~ by the hand, with silent lip, ~~pale~~ sad and tremulous” (fig. 1).

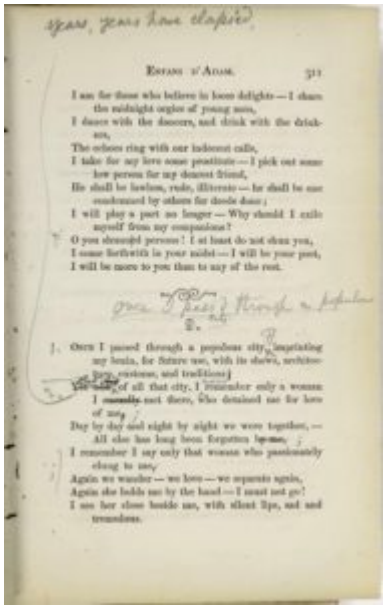


1. Manuscript for Canto 9, “Children of Adam” (1 leaf 20×16 cm, handwritten, 1857-1859), University of Virginia: Papers of Walt Whitman, Clifton Waller Barrett Library of American Literature, Albert H. Small Special Collections Library; Folder: 50-51, Collection No. MSS 3829, 5604.

I’m mindful here of the lessons Peter Coviello offers concerning how Whitman and others wrote in a space that permitted them to rethink possibilities for sexual being that existed prior to the point at which sexual identity became more codified.[21] Without assuming a more rigidly defined account of gender than Whitman may have experienced or in which he may have been interested, I’ll still suggest that his transformation of his remembered companion from male to female is important for the questions it raises concerning his willingness to abide a compulsory heterosexuality that permeated many mid-nineteenth-century American publics.[22] Especially appearing as it does within a cluster that seems so unregarding of the interpellations of straight culture, Whitman’s revision seems out of keeping with the forthright polyamity of the larger “Children of Adam” sequence. But more importantly, I want to suggest that the transformation also points to Whitman’s way of transacting detachment in “Children of Adam.” For even before he verses the loss of his feminine other of Canto 9, she already hides a more massive dimension of loss—she is in a way constructed in order to keep that other loss at bay, crafted so as to form the façade behind which Whitman might push that other, more difficult to name, loss. As he wanders toward her so repetitively, he wanders away from the “rude and ignorant

man," the figure of the poem in manuscript—although that figure does make some fleeting appearances. I've already mentioned one, in Canto 8, where Whitman juxtaposes the two figures, declaring that "I take for my love some prostitute—I pick out some low person for my dearest friend, / He shall be lawless, rude, illiterate […]" Elsewhere, in Canto 2, he may address that youth as he asks, "O you and I—what is it to us what the rest do or think?" just as afterward he again brings the temporally distant separation once again into the present, where perhaps some resolution or restoration might become immanent: "From the one so unwilling to have me leave—and me just as unwilling to leave, / (Yet a moment, tender waiter, and I return)."

This is to say that the lover with whom Whitman claims to have wandered is also a construction whose purpose is to maintain access to a third figure of loss while also keeping that third and the loss he represents at remove. Earlier in "The Dresser," from which Tuggle draws such intriguing insights about Whitman's understanding of the implications of phantom limbs for his own erotic lexis, Whitman describes his own ministrations of an amputee as well as that amputee's gaze averted from the site of his wound. "From the stump of the arm, the amputated hand, / I undo the clotted lint, remove the slough, wash off the matter and the blood," he reports. His own unstinting gaze upon the wound, his watchfulness over the soldiers themselves, juxtaposes with the inability of the wounded to look upon their own injuries. "His eyes are closed, his face is pale, he dares not look on the bloody stump, / And has not yet looked on it," he explains.[23] A refusal to take in visually one's own amputation, as Tuggle points out, is one of the most certain ways of ensuring the continuation of phantom sensations.



Eotan o' Adam. 311

I am for those who believe in loose delights — I share
the midnight orgies of young men,
I dance with the dancers, and drink with the drink-
ers,
The echoes ring with our indecent calls,
I take for my love some prostitute — I pick out some
low person for my dearest friend,
He shall be lawless, rude, illiterate — he shall be sac-
rificed by others for deeds done;
I will play a part no longer — Why should I exile
myself from my companions?
O you stranger persons! I at least do not shun you,
I come forthwith in your midst — I will be your poet,
I will be more to you than to any of the rest.

2. Page 311, "I am for those who believe in loose delights…" from Whitman's "Blue Book" copy of Leaves of Grass(1860-1861 edition). From the Oscar Lion Collection of Walt Whitman manuscripts, The New York Public Library. Call No. *R-MRR PS3201 1860c. Research Call No. D-18 1064.

Wandering too is a technique of not looking, a practice of studied indirection. In that way it's like revising—whether a poem or an entire collection—which is also a way of denying one's loss of a past through an attempt to re-experience the sensations that accompany originary composition. The pleasure of revision owes to its technique of bringing prior writerly experience forward into the present moment, freshly alive. Over his lifelong process of revising *Leaves of Grass,* Whitman also pondered shifts in the phrasing that makes up "Once I Pass'd Through a Populous City" (for example, in the so-called "Blue Book" copy of the 1860-61 edition in which Whitman recorded hundreds of possible emendations, he added the line, "years, years have elaps'ed" to the reminiscence as if to memorialize the extent of his own process of perseveration [fig. 2]), but in the end he changed little about this poem except some of its punctuation and the added title through to the final, 1891-92 "deathbed" edition. With its particular way of embodying memory, the encounter this poem records and concocts seems to have become settled for him. Which is to say it became still; it did not continue to evolve or live along with so much else of *Leaves of Grass*. Isn't that the way of these things? One day, we're determinedly attached, fixated, yearningly retrospective, connected by invisible ligatures all the more taut by the pretenses under which once they formed and most of all the power of what they permit us to avoid. Then, one day—at a moment equal parts painful, beautiful, and necessary—we let go.

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[1] Lindsay Tuggle, *The Afterlives of Specimens: Science, Mourning, and Whitman's Civil War* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2017), 117.

[2] Walt Whitman, *Drum-Taps* (New York, 1865), 33-34.

[3] Tuggle, 117.

[4] Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Boston: Thayer & Eldridge, 1860). Except for where I have specified otherwise, all quotes from *Leaves of Grass* in this essay are taken from the 1860-1 edition.

[5] Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Brooklyn, 1855), 32. Further reference to this edition made parenthetically in the text.

[6] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. 12 vols. Eds. Joseph Slater et al. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971-2004), 8. This view of Whitman (and Emerson) goes back at least to F. O. Matthiessen, who describes Whitman's corporeality and sexuality as a part of his strategy of bridging what Toqueville thought of as a "void" between the material and the ideal. For Matthiessen, the distinction between Emerson and Whitman can be discerned in Whitman's language: his love of slang, of onomatopoeia, his tendency toward coinage: "Whitman's language is more earthy," he writes, "because he was aware, in a way that distinguished him not merely from Emerson but from every other writer of his day, of the power of sex." See F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of*

Emerson and Whitman (London, Toronto, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), 523.

[7] Peter Coviello has considered Whitman as "a poet of attachment" who conceives of the nation—and the poetry he addresses to it—as a welter of abidingly affectionate and erotic ties: between individual Americans; between Whitman and his reader, though in some sense unbeknownst to each other; between Whitman and generations that survive him. Coviello explains that "For Whitman, nationality consists not in legal compulsion or geographical happenstance but in the specifically affective attachments that somehow tie together people who have never seen one another […]" See Peter Coviello, "Anonymity and Attachment in Whitman," *American Literature* 73: 1 (March 2001): 87. But Whitman is also plainly interested in attachments that form at the locus of people who have shared intimate bodily contact, along with the sensations that attend the end of that contact, just as he is often preoccupied with the severing of such relations.

[8] Jean-Étienne Dominique Esquirol, *Mental Maladies: A Treatise on Insanity.* Trans. E.K. Hunt. (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1845), 335.

[9] Esquirol, 336.

[10] Edward Carpenter, *Days With Walt Whitman: With Some Notes on his Life and Work* (London: George Allen, Ruskin House, 1906), 56-57. The poem appeared in the third, 1860-61 edition though Whitman removed it in further editions, "perhaps as being too personal," Carpenter hypothesizes (56).

[11] Samuel A. Cartwright, "Diseases and Peculiarities of the Negro Race," *DeBow's Review* 11: 3 (September 1851): 331-36.

[12] Margaret Price, *Mad at School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability and Academic Life* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 4.

[13] Price 3, 11.

[14] Esquirol, *Mental Maladies,* 335.

[15] Evan Thompson and Francisco J. Varela, "Radical embodiment: neural dynamics and consciousness." *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 5: 10 (October 2001): 422, 418. Further references made parenthetically.

[16] Thompson and Varela, 418.

[17] Thompson and Varela, 424.

[18] Lotte Meteyard, Sara Rodriguez Cuadrado, Bahador Bahrami, and Gabriella Vigliocco, "Coming of age: A review of embodiment and the neuroscience of semantics." *Cortex* 48 (2012): 789. Further references made parenthetically.

[19] Meteyard et. al., 790.

[20] Picturesque thinkers such as Wordsworth and other late-eighteenth-century aesthetes thought of intense sensory experience precisely in view of such prospects for future edification through memory. William Gilpin, foremost eighteenth-century theorist of the picturesque aesthetic, suggested that his readers compose visual or written renditions of nature all the better to remember later on. "There may be more pleasure in recollecting, and recording from a few transient lines, the scenes we have admired than in the present enjoyment of them," he supposed. See William Gilpin, "On Picturesque Travel," *Three Essays on Picturesque Beauty; on Picturesque Travel; and on Sketching Landscape*. 2nd edition (London: Blamires, 1794), 51. For Wordsworth that prospective dimension of memory offers the promise of respite from what he calls "the fretful stir / Unprofitable, and the fever of the world / [that] Have hung upon the beatings of my heart." There is something in the recollection of natural beauty that for Wordsworth transcends the "aching joys" of first-person, present-tense experience with all its "dizzy raptures." Not so for Whitman—not exactly, anyway—who as he recalls sexual experience also laments. His revisitations through his memory of the departed lover are calibrated to suspend the loss, to hold it, to refuse to relinquish loss.

[21] See Coviello, *Tomorrow's Parties: Sex and the Untimely in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York and London: New York UP, 2013), 4. Ed Folsom has recently pointed out that Whitman's postbellum reputation sometimes formed around the notion that while in New Orleans in 1848, he had a romance with a Creole woman that served "multiple purposes": "it kept Whitman safely straight, while also radicalizing him in that the slippery term *Creole* allowed for the possibility that he had sexual relations with one of New Orleans's famous and exotic mixed-race young women." See Ed Folsom, "A Yet More Terrible and More Deeply Complicated Problem: Walt Whitman, Race, Reconstruction, and American Democracy," *American Literary History* 30: 3 (Summer 2018): 535.

[22] In his *Crip Theory*, Robert McRuer points out that "[c]ompulsory heterosexuality is intertwined with compulsory ablebodiedness," and it may be that something in Whitman's straightening of his connection with the "rude and ignorant man," occurring along the trajectory of his wandering ambulations, enacts a connection between some notion of spectacular corporeal and sexual typicality. See Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2006), 31.

[23] Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (New York: William E. Chapin, 1867), 33-34.

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