

OF BEING NUMEROUS

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OF BEING NUMEROUS

1

There are things
We live among and to see them
Is to know ourselves.

Occurrence, a part
Of an infinite series.

The sad marvels;

Of this was told
A tale of our wickedness.
It is not our wickedness.

You remember that old town we went to, and we sat in the
ruined window, and we tried to imagine that we belonged to
those times—it is dead and it is not dead, and you cannot
imagine either its life or its death; the earth speaks and the sal-
mander speaks, the Spring comes and only obscures it—

2

So spoke of the existence of things.
An unmanageable pantheon

Absolute, but they say
Arid.

A city of the corporations

Glassed
In dreams

And images—

And the pure joy
Of the mineral fact

Tho it is impenetrable

As the world, if it is matter,
Is impenetrable.

3

The emotions are engaged
Entering the city
As entering any city.

We are not coeval
With a locality
But we imagine others are,

We encounter them. Actually
A populace flows
Thru the city.

This is a language, therefore, of New York

4

For the people of that flow
Are new, the old

New to age as the young
To youth

And to their dwelling
For which the tarred roofs

And the stoops and doors—
A world of stoops—
Are petty alibi and satirical wit
Will not serve.

5

The great stone
Above the river
In the pylon of the bridge

'1875'

Frozen in the moonlight
In the frozen air over the footpath, consciousness

Which has nothing to gain, which awaits nothing,
Which loves itself

6

We are pressed, pressed on each other,
We will be told at once
Of anything that happens

And the discovery of fact bursts
In a paroxysm of emotion
Now as always. Crusoe

We say was
'Rescued'.
So we have chosen.

7

Obsessed, bewildered

By the shipwreck
Of the singular

We have chosen the meaning
Of being numerous.

8

Amor fati
The love of fate

For which the city alone
Is audience

Perhaps blasphemous.

Slowly over islands, destinies
Moving steadily pass
And change

In the thin sky
Over islands

Among days

Having only the force
Of days

Most simple
Most difficult

9

'Whether, as the intensity of seeing increases, one's distance
from Them, the people, does not also increase'
I know, of course I know, I can enter no other place

Yet I am one of those who from nothing but man's way of
thought and one of his dialects and what has happened
to me
Have made poetry

To dream of that beach
For the sake of an instant in the eyes,

The absolute singular

The unearthly bonds
Of the singular

Which is the bright light of shipwreck

10

Or, in that light, New arts! Dithyrambic, audience-as-artists!
But I will listen to a man, I will listen to a man, and when I

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Speak I will speak, tho he will fail and I will fail. But I will listen to him speak. The shuffling of a crowd is nothing—well, nothing but the many that we are, but nothing.

Urban art, art of the cities, art of the young in the cities—
The isolated man is dead, his world around him exhausted

And he fails! He fails, that meditative man! And indeed they cannot 'bear' it.

11

it is *that* light
Seeps anywhere, a light for the times

In which the buildings
Stand on low ground, their pediments
Just above the harbor

Absolutely immobile,

Hollow, available, you could enter any building,
You could look from any window
One might wave to himself
From the top of the Empire State Building—

Speak

If you can

Speak

Phyllis—not neo-classic,
The girl's name is Phyllis—

Coming home from her first job
On the bus in the bare civic interior
Among those people, the small doors
Opening on the night at the curb
Her heart, she told me, suddenly tight with happiness—

So small a picture,
A spot of light on the curb, it cannot demean us

I too am in love down there with the streets
And the square slabs of pavement—

To talk of the house and the neighborhood and the docks

And it is not 'art'

12

'In these explanations it is presumed that an experiencing subject is one occasion of a sensitive reaction to an actual world.'

the rain falls
that had not been falling
and it is the same world

They made small objects
Of wood and the bones of fish
And of stone. They talked,

Families talked.
They gathered in council
And spoke, carrying objects.
They were credulous,
Their things shone in the forest.

They were patient
With the world.
This will never return, never,
Unless having reached their limits

They will begin over, that is,
Over and over

13

unable to begin
At the beginning, the fortunate
Find everything already here. They are shoppers,
Choosers, judges; . . . And here the brutal
is without issue, a dead end.

They develop
Argument in order to speak, they become
unreal, unreal, life loses
solidity, loses extent, baseball's their game
because baseball is not a game
but an argument and difference of opinion
makes the horse races. They are ghosts that endanger

One's soul. There is change
In an air
That smells stale, they will come to the end
Of an era
First of all peoples
And one may honorably keep

His distance
If he can.

14

I cannot even now
Altogether disengage myself
From those men

With whom I stood in emplacements, in mess tents,
In hospitals and sheds and hid in the gullies
Of blasted roads in a ruined country,

Among them many men
More capable than I—

Muykut and a sergeant
Named Healy,
That lieutenant also—

How forget that? How talk
Distantly of 'The People'

Who are that force
Within the walls
Of cities

Wherein their cars

Echo like history
Down walled avenues
In which one cannot speak.

15

Chorus (androgynous): 'Find me
So that I will exist, find my navel
So that it will exist, find my nipples
So that they will exist, find every hair
Of my belly, I am good (or I am bad),
Find me.'

16

'... he who will not work shall not eat,
and only he who was troubled shall find rest,
and only he who descends into the nether world shall
rescue his beloved,
and only he who unsheathes his knife shall be given
Isaac again. He who will not work shall not eat ...
but he who will work shall give birth to his own father.'

17

The roots of words
Dim in the subways

There is madness in the number
Of the living
'A state of matter'

There is nobody here but us chickens

Anti-ontology—

He wants to say
His life is real,
No one can say why

It is not easy to speak

A ferocious mumbling, in public
Of rootless speech

18

It is the air of atrocity,
An event as ordinary
As a President.

A plume of smoke, visible at a distance
In which people burn.

19

Now in the helicopters the casual will
Is atrocious

Insanity in high places,
If it is true we must do these things
We must cut our throats

The fly in the bottle

Insane, the insane fly

Which, over the city
Is the bright light of shipwreck

—They await

War, and the news
Is war

As always

That the juices may flow in them
Tho the juices lie.

Great things have happened
On the earth and given it history, armies
And the ragged hordes moving and the passions
Of that death. But who escapes
Death

Among these riders
Of the subway,

They know
By now as I know

Failure and the guilt
Of failure.
As in Hardy's poem of Christmas

We might half-hope to find the animals
In the sheds of a nation
Kneeling at midnight,

Farm animals,
Draft animals, beasts for slaughter
Because it would mean they have forgiven us,

Or which is the same thing,
That we do not altogether matter.

21

There can be a brick
In a brick wall
The eye picks

So quiet of a Sunday
Here is the brick, it was waiting
Here when you were born

Mary-Anne.

22

Clarity

In the sense of *transparence*,
I don't mean that much can be explained.

Clarity in the sense of silence.

23

'Half free
And half mad'
And the jet set is in.
The vocabularies of the forties
Gave way to the JetStream
And the media, the Mustang

And the deals
And the people will change again.

Under the soil
In the blind pressure
The lump,
Entity
Of substance
Changes also.

In two dozen rooms,
Two dozen apartments
After the party
The girls
Stare at the ceilings
Blindly as they are filled
And then they sleep.

24

In this nation
Which is in some sense
Our home. Covenant!

The covenant is
There shall be peoples.

25

Strange that the youngest people I know
Live in the oldest buildings

Scattered about the city
In the dark rooms
Of the past—and the immigrants,

The black
Rectangular buildings
Of the immigrants.

They are the children of the middle class.

'The pure products of America—'

Investing
The ancient buildings
Jostle each other

In the half-forgotten, that ponderous business.
This Chinese Wall.

26

They carry nativeness
To a conclusion
In suicide.

We want to defend
Limitation
And do not know how.

Stupid to say merely
That poets should not lead their lives
Among poets,

They have lost the metaphysical sense
Of the future, they feel themselves
The end of a chain

Of lives, single lives
And we know that lives
Are single

And cannot defend
The metaphysic
On which rest

The boundaries
Of our distances.
We want to say

'Common sense'
And cannot. We stand on

That denial
Of death that paved the cities,
Paved the cities

Generation
For generation and the pavement

Is filthy as the corridors
Of the police.

How shall one know a generation, a new generation?
Not by the dew on them! Where the earth is most torn
And the wounds untended and the voices confused,
There is the head of the moving column

Who if they cannot find
Their generation
Wither in the infirmaries

And the supply depots, supplying
Irrelevant objects.

Street lamps shine on the parked cars
Steadily in the clear night

It is true the great mineral silence
Vibrates, hums, a process
Completing itself

In which the windshield wipers
Of the cars are visible.

The power of the mind, the
Power and weight
Of the mind which
Is not enough, it is nothing
And does nothing

Against the natural world,
Behemoth, white whale, beast
They will say and less than beast,
The fatal rock

Which is the world—

O if the streets
Seem bright enough,
Fold within fold
Of residence . . .

Or see thru water
Clearly the pebbles
Of the beach
Thru the water, flowing
From the ripple, clear
As ever they have been

It is difficult now to speak of poetry—

about those who have recognized the range of choice or those who have lived within the life they were born to—. It is not precisely a question of profundity but a different order of experience. One would have to tell what happens in a life, what choices present themselves, what the world is for us, what happens in time, what thought is in the course of a life and therefore what art is, and the isolation of the actual

I would want to talk of rooms and of what they look out on and of basements, the rough walls bearing the marks of the forms, the old marks of wood in the concrete, such solitude as we know—

and the swept floors. Someone, a workman bearing about him, feeling about him that peculiar word like a dishonored fatherhood has swept this solitary floor, this profoundly hidden floor—such solitude as we know.

One must not come to feel that he has a thousand threads
in his hands,

He must somehow see the one thing;
This is the level of art
There are other levels
But there is no other level of art

28

The light
Of the closed pages, tightly closed, packed against each other
Exposes the new day,

The narrow, frightening light
Before a sunrise.

29

My daughter, my daughter, what can I say
Of living?

I cannot judge it.

We seem caught
In reality together my lovely
Daughter,

I have a daughter
But no child

And it was not precisely
Happiness we promised
Ourselves;

We say happiness, happiness and are not
Satisfied.

Tho the house on the low land
Of the city

Catches the dawn light

I can tell myself, and I tell myself
Only what we all believe
True

And in the sudden vacuum
Of time . . .

... is it not
In fear the roots grip

Downward
And beget

The baffling hierarchies
Of father and child

As of leaves on their high
Thin twigs to shield us

From time, from open
Time

30

Behind their house, behind the back porch
Are the little woods.
She walks into them sometimes
And awaits the birds and the deer.

Looking up she sees the blue bright sky
Above the branches.
If one had been born here
How could one believe it?

31

Because the known and the unknown
Touch,

One witnesses—
It is ennobling
If one thinks so.

If to know is noble

It is ennobling.

32

Only that it should be beautiful,
Only that it should be beautiful,

O, beautiful

Red green blue—the wet lips
Laughing

Or the curl of the white shell

And the beauty of women, the perfect tendons
Under the skin, the perfect life

That can twist in a flood
Of desire

Not truth but each other

The bright, bright skin, her hands wavering
In her incredible need

33

Which is ours, which is ourselves,
This is our jubilation

Exalted and as old as that truthfulness
Which illumines speech.

34

Like the wind in the trees and the bells
Of the procession—

How light the air is
And the earth,

Children and the grass
In the wind and the voices of men and women

To be carried about the sun forever

Among the beautiful particulars of the breezes
The papers blown about the sidewalks

' a Female Will to hide the most evident God
Under a covert . . . '

Surely infiniteness is the most evident thing in the world

Is it the courage of women
To assume every burden of blindness themselves

Intruders
Carrying life, the young women

Carrying life
Unaided in their arms

In the streets, weakened by too much need
Of too little

And life seeming to depend on women, burdened and
desperate
As they are

35

. . . or define
Man beyond rescue
of the impoverished, solve
whole cities

before we can face
again
forests and prairies . . .

36

Tho the world
Is the obvious, the seen
And unforeseeable,
That which one cannot
Not see

Which the first eyes
Saw—

For us
Also each
Man or woman
Near is
Knowledge

Tho it may be of the noon's
Own vacuity

—and the mad, too, speak only of conspiracy
and people talking—

And if those paths
Of the mind
Cannot break

It is not the wild glare
Of the world even that one dies in.

37

'... approached the window as if to see ...'

The boredom which disclosed
Everything—

I should have written, not the rain
Of a nineteenth century day, but the motes
In the air, the dust

Here still.

What have we argued about? what have we done?

Thickening the air?

Air so thick with myth the words *unlucky*
And *good luck*

Float in it ...

To 'see' them?

No.

Or sees motes, an iron mesh, links

Of consequence

Still, at the mind's end
Relevant

38

You are the last
Who will know him
Nurse.

Not know him,
He is an old man,
A patient,
How could one know him?

You are the last
Who will see him
Or touch him,
Nurse.

39

Occurring 'neither for self
Nor for truth'

The sad marvels

In the least credible circumstance,
Storm or bombardment

Or the room of a very old man

40

Whitman: 'April 19, 1864

The capitol grows upon one in time, especially as they have got
the great figure on top of it now, and you can see it very well. It
is a great bronze figure, the Genius of Liberty I suppose. It looks
wonderful toward sundown. I love to go and look at it. The sun
when it is nearly down shines on the headpiece and it dazzles
and glistens like a big star: it looks quite

curious ...

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