

AT THE AMERICAN ANTHROPOMETRIC SOCIETY,
WALT WHITMAN'S BRAIN IS DROPPED ON THE FLOOR
ACCIDENTALLY AND DESTROYED

This head is more than churches or bibles or creeds.

He came apart on impact, irretrievable,
the poet shattering at the technician's feet,
the crystal pitcher of democracy
splintering on Tammany's sawdust floor
of graft and greed, an uncivil war.
The explosion was so great that,
for all our literary horses and men,
we'll never put Whitman together again:

enemy of slavery and the slave,
boy-chaser and chaste comrade of common men,
pursued by an army of aroused widows,
virgins, friends' wives; political hack
and seer of deathless sex, singer, shouter,
mute, swaggering bully of imperial America
and delicate flower quivering from the weight
of butterfly; prim, strapping mother-man.

There on the floor all currents mingled:
urge to enter lover and come apart, hermitage
and crowded ferry, the aching swell
of generation and decay. Alive, he stood for
everything, upright in the rigid posture
of prophet or priest, but inclined
to lean and loaf for love. After the fall
he broke into relics, shreds and threads

of spirit. Like us, fully common and unique.