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Walker Evans, *Many Are Called.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press in association with the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. 2004. 208pp.

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"Stare. It is the way to educate your eye, and more. Stare, pry, listen, eavesdrop. Die knowing something. You are not here long." This oft-repeated quotation by Walker Evans could hardly be better illustrated than by this new edition of a book that was first published in 1966—twenty-five years after the photographs in it were taken.

Before reading a book, I usually try to explore the writer. Knowing something about an author's life can help throw light on his work. In this case, we have a photographer rather than a writer, or perhaps a writer who expresses himself through photography. In fact, it was because he was frustrated in his attempts to become a professional writer that Walker Evans turned to photography in the first place. He first began to photograph in the late 1920s on a trip to Paris. On his return to New York, he published his first images. Then, during the Great Depression, he began to photograph for the Resettlement Administration, which later became the Farm Security Administration (FSA), documenting workers and vernacular architecture in the southeastern United States. In 1936 he traveled the South with writer James Agee, shooting pictures to illustrate an article on tenant farmers and their families for *Fortune* magazine. This collaboration was the project out of which grew the landmark book, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941).

Those who remember the portraits in that book may nod in agreement with Luc Santé's remarks that "Evans regarded his subjects in much the same way he looked upon signboards and assemblages or folk architecture." Santé goes on to say, in a foreword to this edition of *Many Are Called*, that Evans "liked types, departures from type, sui generis examples, archaisms, sullen ruins; he could savor presumption, classical pathos, self-taught avidity, entropic improvisation, extravagant wrong-headedness, prosaic solemnity. Such qualities can be found in faces and in styles of self-presentation as much as vernacular public displays, although you seldom saw them in the work of the major photographic portraitists

. . . and even less in the output of ordinary studio photographers, who endlessly issued interchangeable portraits of wooden middle-class propriety" (13).

A good place to find and photograph subjects with such qualities might be a place where they were enclosed in a normal context, yet free of self-consciousness, perhaps even seated (for the photographer's convenience) against a dark background under impersonal lighting—in short, a subway car, where, by convention, one does not stare at one's fellow passengers.

Between 1938 and 1941 Evans descended into New York City's subway system three times in pursuit of images—of faces unmasked, of images that would reveal beneath their surfaces the gritty reality of the modern moment. Deep underground, Evans shot hundreds of pictures of people who had no idea they were the objects of a photographic stare. He managed this by hiding his camera (a 35mm Contax) beneath his winter coat, its lens peeking out between the buttons, and a shutter-release cable running down his sleeve to a bulb in his hand. The results were, in his mind, what a portrait ought to be: "anonymous and documentary and a straightforward picture of mankind" (198). From more than six hundred exposures he chose eighty-nine for publication—hence the title, from Matthew 22: "Many are called, but few are chosen."

It was 1966, however, before the book was published, even though Evans's friend Agee had already drafted an introductory essay in 1940. It is the 1966 edition (dedicated to Agee) that is reprinted here. It includes Agee's introduction, the foreword by Santé, and an afterword by Jeff Rosenheim. Interestingly, all the photographs but two have been reproduced by digital scanning of the original negatives; those two, like the reproductions in the first edition, were made from Evans's gelatin silver prints. No difference in quality is discernible.

On first seeing the photographs, we realize that most of them are slightly out of focus and the composition is far from ideal. This is owing to the above-mentioned hidden-camera trick, which enabled Evans to reach his goal: his subjects are completely unaware of the photography session. Yet there seems to be a few exceptions. One could swear that the man in Plate 66 is posing for the camera, or that the workingman in Plate 4 is more than suspicious. There are other examples in which subjects appear to be staring at us with, if not suspicion, at least curiosity.

This book is like a novel without words. We could even free-associate from "novel" to "novelty." In fact you could make a board game out of the book, named possibly "Guess the Mood." Throw the dice and move your token; land on, say, Plate 54 and guess at the man's mood. Is he engrossed in the subway

advertisements or is he working out a mathematics calculation? How about the couple in Plate 68? Are they on the verge of a kiss or an argument? There's another couple in Plate 81: the man appears to be reading a magazine; but is he really, or is he just trying to avoid contact with his unhappy wife?

From a photographer's point of view, my favorite prints are Plates 49, 83, and 89. Plate 49 shows a well-dressed, even dapper, black man staring off into space; it makes me think of Charlie Chaplin in disguise. Plate 83 is remarkable for the interplay between the sailor's profile and the pin-up girl in a Chesterfield ad behind him. Plate 89 is a work of perspective. In it an accordion player stands between rows of passengers, singing his song in transit although nobody else seems to listen or to care. It represents Evans at his story-telling best.

In eighty-nine plates Evans created a new chapter in documentary photography by taking the ordinary and common and raising it to the remarkable and interesting. Agee compares Evans's accomplishment here to that of Charlie Chaplin's in *City Lights:* perceiving and revealing the naked, unguarded human soul through the signature of its precise and unique time and place in the world.

In 1965 Evans left *Fortune,* where he had been a staff photographer for 20 years, to become a professor of photography at Yale University. He taught there until 1974, a year before his death. Evans never became a popular photographer. Popular photographs are for decorating big houses; by comparison, Evans's work lives in the homes of ordinary people.



Walker Evans, Untitled, 1941. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



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Walker Evans, Untitled, 1941. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Walker Evans, Untitled, 1941. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Walker Evans, Untitled, 1938. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Walker Evans, Untitled, 1989. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.