

Libretto (assembled by Martin Bresnick) Self Portraits 1964, Unfinished

I. His Own Identity

No man can feel
His own identity aright,
Except his eyes be closed,

As if darkness were indeed
The proper element
Of our essences.

—Herman Melville (1819-1891), *Moby Dick*, Chapter 11, “Nightgown” (1851)

II. I Wake

I wake and feel
The fell of dark, not day.
What hours, O what black hours
We have spent this night!

What sights you, heart, saw;
Ways you went! And more ~~must~~,
In yet longer light's delay.
With witness I speak this.

Bitter would have me taste:
My taste was me;
Bones built in me,
Flesh filled, blood brimmed
The curse. Selfyeast of spirit
A dull dough sours.

I see the lost are like this,
And their scourge to be
As I am mine,
Their sweating selves;
but worse.

—Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889), “I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day” (c. 1886)

III. Where Lies The Final Harbor

Where lies the final
Harbor where we unmoor
No more? In what rapt
Ether sails the world,

Of which the weariest
Will never weary?
Where is the foundling's
Father hidden?

Our souls are like
Those orphans whose
Unwedded mothers
Die in bearing them:

The secret of
Our paternity
Lies in their grave, and
And we must there to learn it.

—Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*, Chapter 114, “The Gilder”

IV. The Darkling Thrush

I leant upon a woodland gate
When frost was spectre-grey.
And winter's dregs made desolate
The weakening eye of day.

The Tangled bine-stems scored the sky
Like strings of broken lyres.
And all mankind that haunted nigh
Had sought their household fires.

The ancient pulse of germ and birth
Was shrunken hard and dry.
And every spirit on the earth
Seemed fervourless as I.

The land's sharp features seemed to be
The century's corpse outleant
His crypt the cloudy canopy
The wind his death lament.

At once a voice arose among
The bleak trees overhead
In a full-hearted evensong
Of joy illimited;

An aged thrush, frail gaunt and small
In blast-beruffled plume,
Had chosen thus to fling his soul
Upon the growing gloom.

So little cause for carolings
Of such ecstatic sound
Was written on terrestrial things
Afar or near around,

That I could think there trembled through
His happy good-night air
Some blessed hope, whereof he knew
And I was unaware.

—Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), "The Darkling Thrush" (*Poems of the Past and Present*, London MacMillan, 1901)

V. Of Mortal Beauty

He was alone. He was unheeded, happy,
And near to the wild heart of life.
He was alone and will-full and wild hearted.

She was alone and still, gazing out to sea.
She stood before him alone and still in midstream, gazing out to sea
She seemed like one whom magic had changed
Into the likeness of a strange and beautiful seabird.
Her long slender legs were delicate as a crane's
And pure save where an emerald trail of seaweed
Had fashioned itself as a sign upon the flesh.
Her thighs, fuller and soft hued as ivory,
Were bared almost to the hips,
Where the white fringes of her drawers
Were like the feathering of soft white down.
Her slateblue skirts were kilted boldly about her waist
And dovetailed behind her.
Her bosom was as a bird's,
Soft and slight, slight and soft
As the breast of some darkplumaged dove.
But her long fair hair was girlish:
And girlish, and touched
With the wonder of mortal beauty, her face.

Long, long she suffered his gaze
And the worship of his eyes
And then quietly withdrew her eyes from his
And bent them towards the stream,
Gently stirring the water with her foot
Here and there, here and there.
And a faint flame trembled on her cheek.

—James Joyce (1882-1941), *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Chapter 4 (1916)

VI. To Fling Out Broad Its Name

As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies dráw fláme;
As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells
Selves goes itself, myself it speaks and spells
Crying - what I do is me:
For that I came.

—Gerard Manley Hopkins