

Lizzie

He made the grand geste, and took it back.
He Indian-gave his psyche to the grave,
fetching it out (by proxy) wet with rot,
matted with hair and ghostly wisps of Liz
and now, fumigated, page by page
dried, with only a decorous lock remaining
to muse upon in timely verse, he holds
his manuscript at last, an approach to the world.

But the melancholy damps, the plaintive wisps
curl around his heart in lingering reproach,
rotting his limbs and sucking at his eyes,
the yellow fumes balefully astare
within his breast (when he forgets, and looks),
ventriloquizing voices of denouncement
out of the gypsies setting up a fair
for his exposure on a bench, from birds
larking outside his studio, from rooms
adjoining a desperate insomniac bed:

"Your ghostly love transmuted me to ghost,
death-in-life mirrored to life-in-death.
I was your discovery, your pet.
I modelled, mused, was silent, tragic, strange,
caught cold floating in bathtubs for Ophelia.
You elevated me to the window of heaven,
yet couldn't decide to take the step and marry.

"A barren decade did I cling and fret,
raging and sickening, sinking to hollow-cheeked
wraith you could neither choose nor leave,
an image of your death that you must flee
by trips to Fanny and others with towerlike necks.

"Oh why did I not continue sewing hats
rather than being dreamy and remote,
guiltily doted on and throwing scenes,
and making little paintings like your own,
muse to a cult of dreamers with anecdotal
camp-following of biographers?

"My sunken pathos caught you into marriage
and the death of your domestic muse in rooms
empty as hell and smelling of laudanum,
while you were, panicked, flailing at the bars
after the animal warmth within large arms.