

Philip Dacey

HOPKINS TO WHITMAN:
FROM THE LOST CORRESPONDENCE

"I always knew in my heart Walt Whitman's mind to
be more like my own than any other man's living."
GMH, 1882

So at ease, so American, so at home in the world
In that portrait you look out from. At me?
You say so. "I am with you. I am as good
As looking at you." I would like
To believe you. Would like to think that pose
Is addressed to me, the collar unbuttoned,
The hand on the hip (the other democratically deep
In a pocket), and the soft hat tilted carelessly
O so carefully that I, looking and wondering, might
hear,
"Comrade."

Comrade. I am lonely. (You see,
I shall never send this and therefore can tell
The most outrageous lies. For I have my Christ,
My only lover, for whose sake I left behind
Your book, touching I did indeed touch a man,
at Bridges'.
That's Robert. You'd like him. Athletic. Rowed
for Eton.
Until last year a physician but now devotes
All his time to poetry. Destined for great things.
Like yourself, Walt.)

I like to say your name:
Walt. Walt. Walt. Walt.
You would have less love of mine. I do.
And less love of my garb than I feel for your
Open dress, roomy and airy, a type
Of the American land itself. I am a black-robe.
Worse. A Jesuit. I know what you say of priests.
I am your reversed image, as you are mine.
I still remember the shock when my Uncle George,
Who took up photography immediately it crossed
from France,

First showed me my other self: all my shadows
Blazed white, all my sunniness gone black.
That same shock again, when I encountered you,
Though this time gradual, reviews in The Academy,
Athenaeum,
Rosetti's edition, then everything, in Bridges'
library--
The difference between Paul's conversion, at a
flash
On the road to Damascus, and Austin's, sweet a-
building.
You so robust, manly, a prophet of good cheer;
I but animated dust, Manley, mere. And I, too,
Write poetry. But write it in a dark corner
And leave it there. For the God of Dark Corners.
You take yours out-of-doors and it expands
Ever rarer, ancient aether, to the stars.
Your gab a gas; my words a web. And I wait.
For prey. Pray to catch Christ. Fast. To eat.
How could any two be so different?
We each must be the other's Hyde.
(Do you know Stevenson over there? The book,
No doubt too heavily shadowed for such as
You and your countrymen, has caught on here.)
I mounting a cross, you laughing at loss:
The counter-colored squares of a harlequin.

Yet. Yet. The point of the horrible fable
Is they are one. Bridges tells me someone
Wrote of you as a modern Christ. Years
In the hospitals. The sick lifted
To your breast. Not that I myself
Am fixed at any cross-point. No, my Self
Is too much indulged. I am one of your
Naked swimmers. I splash and roll.
My belly, for all its thinness, glints.
Or perhaps I am the twenty-ninth. Perhaps I am
The lady herself, behind the curtain, careful,
Indulging herself in restraint. In touching them
Nowhere, she touches them everywhere.
The sun is so hot upon the water.
I must give it up. I write to tell you
I shall not, will not, touch you anymore.
The sun is too hot upon the water.

I must kill my Hyde, lest he kill me.
He wants love, and he is not my Lord.
But how kill him, and miss my own heart?
Walt, who does not hear me now,
Help me. May your brotherly love,
Be it earth- or heaven-begot,
Enfold one hard upon his dark way.
Yours, and not,

Gerard M. Hopkins, S. J.