

## “Or almost, I seem” libretto

\* Part I is taken from Nietzsche, Woolf, and Sappho. Part II is by the composer. Part III is from Sappho.

### **PART I**

[2 sopranos, 1 alto, 1 baritone]

To not live consciously

To walk, eat, see things, deal with what has to be done...

To remember

many bright colors; many distinct sounds; some human beings; caricatures;  
comic; violent moments of being.

Surrounded by a vast space.

no speaking is left

Man ceases to exist

With an excess of history,

and without the unhistorical he would never have begun

or dared

to begin.

Consider the cattle, grazing as they pass you by:

they do not know what is meant by yesterday or today,

they leap about, eat, rest, digest, leap about again,

from morn till night and from day to day,

fettered to the moment and its pleasure or displeasure.

To live unhistorically.

The animal is contained in the present,

like a number without any awkward fraction left over;

it does not know how to dissimulate,

it conceals nothing and at every instant appears wholly as what it is.

Man

on the other hand, braces himself against the great and ever greater  
pressure of what is past

That he cannot learn to forget but clings relentlessly to the past:

however far and fast he may run,

this chain runs with him.

...even a moment, no speaking is left

A moment, now here and then gone, nothing before it came, again nothing after is has gone, nonetheless returns as a ghost and disturbs the peace of a later moment.

no: greener than grass

A leaf flutters from the scroll of time, floats away –  
and suddenly floats back again and falls into the man's lap.

Then the man says "I remember"

and envies the animal, who at once forgets

and for whom every moment really dies, sinks back into night and fog  
and is extinguished forever.

It affects him like a vision of a lost paradise to see the herds grazing or,  
a child which, having as yet nothing of the past to shake off,  
plays in blissful blindness between the hedges of past and future.

Yet its play must be disturbed;

all too soon it will be called out of its state of forgetfulness.

Then it will learn to understand the phrase 'it was':

that password which gives conflict, suffering and satiety access to man so as  
to remind him what his existence fundamentally is –  
an imperfect tense that can never become a perfect one.

No: tongue breaks and thin

fire is racing under skin

and

Only by thinking, reflecting, comparing, distinguishing,  
(employing the past for the purposes of life)

did man become man:

but with an excess of history man again ceases to exist,

and without that envelope of the unhistorical he would never have begun  
or dared to begin.

And in eyes no sight

And drumming fills ears

And cold sweat holds

And shaking grips all

**PART II** [baritone]

She is a symbol  
wiped  
from itself  
carrying that incomprehensible  
Fury  
negated  
She is a ghost,  
not quite alive, yet  
etched into  
the living

**PART III** [soprano 1]

...no speaking  
is left in me

.....

...greener than grass,  
I am and dead – or almost  
I seem to me