

Thirteen Ways of Looking at Blackbeard

by Ed Higgins

(with thanks to Wallace Stevens)

I

Across the placid sea
The only moving ship
Was eyed by Blackbeard

II

Blackbeard was of three minds,
Like a pursuing hammerhead shark
Which seemed as though three Blackbeards.

III

Blackbeard's beard whirled by sea spray.
It is a small part of the terror.

IV

Blackbeard and his buccaneers
One motherfucking terror.
Blackbeard and his buccaneers
Are a seafarer's fucking demon.

V

Blackbeard does not know which to prefer,
The beauty of eviscerations
Or the beauty of a rapier thrust to the liver.
Blackbeard's steaming blade
Coming clean after.

VI

Lit fuses sputter from his black tricorn hat
With barbaric gusto.
Visage of Satan's shadow, Blackbeard
Smoldering forward and aft on deck.
Tracing in fearsome shadow
His indecipherable rage.

VII

O trembling men being boarded
Who could imagine more incited fear?
Do you not see how Blackbeard
Will stroll your blood slick decks
Eying the women trembling behind you?

VIII

The women know ignoble assents
Heed illicit, inescapable cheek.
But all the captives know, too,
That Blackbeard is roused
In bloodlust rhythms.

IX

When Blackbeard's ship was out of sight
Over the horizon's edge
The target ship's crew danced on deck in circles.

X

At the sight of Blackbeard's ship
Flying Teach's skeleton-spearing-a-heart flag
Cries of terrible euphony
Rose up sharply.

XI

Blackbeard strode across his deck
Three brace of pistols hung in holsters.

Thick beard braided into pigtails
Tied with colored ribbons.
Always, fear pierced a pursued ship
Equipage unprepared for Blackbeard's speed.

XII

Closing for a starboard broadside.
Blackbeard's *Adventure*, horror flag flying.

XIII

By late afternoon miscalculating
His boarding party floundered into defeat.
Blackbeard's corpse tossed into the sea.
Head suspended from Lt. Maynard's bowsprit
Proof to collect a never paid Admiralty reward.

