**Portrait** (for a screenplay) of Beth Harmon.
A project by Sean Edwards

**Portrait**: Noun. 1, an artistic representation of a person, especially one depicting only the face or head and shoulders. 2, a written or filmed description. 3, a format of printed matter which is higher than it is wide. (Oxford English Dictionary)

**Screenplay**: Noun. The script of a film, including acting instructions and scene directions. (Oxford English Dictionary)

**Beth Harmon**: Eight year old Beth Harmon is quiet, sullen, and by all appearances unremarkable. That is until she plays her first game of chess. Her senses grow sharper, her thinking clearer, and for the first time in her life she feels herself fully in control. By the age of sixteen, she’s competing for the U.S. open championship. But as Beth hones her skills on the professional circuit, the stakes get higher, her isolation grows more frightening and the thought of escape becomes all the more tempting. (Blurb from The Queens Gambit, Vintage Books edition)

**Gambit**: A chess opening in which one player offers to give up material, usually a pawn, sometimes a piece or more, in the expectation of gaining a positional advantage... The word is derived from the Italian Gambetta, a wrestling term for tripping up the heels. (David Hooper and Kenneth Whyld, The Oxford Companion to Chess)
BETH LEARNED OF HER MOTHER'S DEATH FROM A WOMAN WITH A clipboard. The next day her picture appeared in the Herald-Leader. The photograph, taken on the porch of the gray house on Maplewood Drive, showed Beth in a simple cotton frock. Even then, she was clearly plain. A legend under the picture read: "Orphaned by yesterday's pile-up on New Circle Road, Elizabeth Harmon surveys a troubled future. Elizabeth, eight, was left without family by the crash, which killed two and injured others. At home alone at the time, Elizabeth learned of the accident shortly before the photo was taken. She will be well looked after, authorities say."

In the Methuen Home in Mount Sterling, Kentucky, Beth was given a tranquilizer twice a day. So were all the other children, to "even their dispositions." Beth's disposition was all right, as far as anyone could see, but she was glad to get the little pill. It loosened something deep in her stomach and helped her doze away the tense hours in the orphanage.

Mr. Fergusson gave them the pills in a little paper cup. Along with the green one that evened the disposition, there were orange and brown ones for building a strong body. The children had to line up to get them.

The tallest girl was the black one, Jolene. She was twelve. On her
That the topless towers be burnt
And men recall that face,
Move most gently if move you must
In this lonely place.
She thinks, part woman, three parts a child,
That nobody looks; her feet
Practise a tinker shuffle
Picked up on a street.
(Like a long-legged fly upon the stream
Her mind moves upon silence.)
-from W.B Yeats ‘Long-Legged Fly’
It started as the idea for a work that became a project. 'The Queens Gambit' was written when Tevis’ previous books were already made into films. The book is structured as a series of scenes, each described visually in detail. The central character, Beth Harmon, is written in third person though her thoughts and decisions are laid out the readers. The novel is built chronologically around her actions and her life; it is a biography, a portrait of an obsessive, driven and vulnerable outsider. Its success depends as much on our empathy with Harmon as it does on Tevis' ability to create a believable character.

The novel follows the life of Beth Harmon, an orphaned child who is discovered to be a chess prodigy, from the age of 8 through to adulthood. The book was praised for the accuracy of its portrayals of the professional chess circuit and the internal workings of the mind of a chess player. Harmon has a lucid and almost visual sense of the powers the pieces exude over the board as she moves them into place. The screenplay of the book has had a troubled past, with Tevis himself writing a synopsis and script in 1984.Most recently Heath Ledger had been working on it as his directorial debut at the time of his death in 2008.

'Portrait (for a screenplay) of Beth Harmon' is an ongoing project inviting artists, curators, writers, musicians and actors to read the book and is a way of expanding the character of Beth. Beth Harmon was fascinating, but she only existed on those 243 pages of the novel. The works in this exhibition are an evocation of Beth Harmon. They are not in themselves portraits, but studies, notes in the margins, dog eared pages and collected Post-it notes towards the idea of a portrait.
QUEEN'S GAMBIT

A Motion Picture Treatment

By Walter Tevis

Center this.

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