

Palette

Names with no faces events out of the blue
neighborhoods once familiar simply gone
except for occasional mention in these long
explanations for excruciating choices
made with no consequences except
more letters stamped return to sender

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Dead. All dead.
She who danced a pink moth in the moonlight.
He a lynx who paced the ward.
The light gone from their eyes.
What was animate merely carnal.
Then nothing

*

And how so young and O so cocksure
first person singular plural possessive
propositions laced with quotes as if he were
answering essay questions or talking to himself
but love declared on page after page of manic characters
insisting on something and something more

*

Long silences
less tacit understanding
than unspoken presumptions

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I could of course claim I never intended any such thing
and all that nonsense of mytho-freudian significance
was simply a ruse to get you past the point of reference.
Bloody tower be damned. As I recall it was a half-full
ditch hosting various creatures with more or fewer limbs
passing along the only edge that mattered anymore
crumbling into that liquidity every time one of them
or one of us lowered itself head first down the bank
to try to quench the thirst all of us suffered

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Burnt-out tenements of the poetry wars
fought for reasons nobody knows
gap-toothed reminders of old stories
shadowed against remains of another day

*

A herd of introvert bookworms
calling themselves a community,
trying to get known for being
original in the tense present
while obsessed with past and future

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All that piss and vinegar
intellectual ecstasy
verbal flexibility
ex-lovers foregone illusions
ghosts of a chance
to what end?

*

Ambitious wings in hard shells
yellowing around the edges

*

Right-handed left-brained
eroticism a distinct hue
between altruism and ego

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I think now and then I may have glimpsed
the face behind all your other faces,
the one you wanted me to help you find

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That four-letter word we seldom heard at home
when we were kids, better known from church,
Hollywood and Tin Pan Alley
where bearing the weight of a prayer or curse
it was spoken in such hallowed tones
we never asked ourselves what we meant by it,
it went without saying it was what we were doing
and whatever it was, was impossible to define
so why bring it up except in stock greetings,
fare-thee-wells and figures of speech, much less
embarrass ourselves in polite company
where couples still kids themselves were said to have kids
to prove they hadn't just been having fun

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By the same token, we had no words
for what we were feeling or maybe just didn't know how
to begin admitting our misgivings;
no arguments or heart-to-hearts,
our silent duel going on even after
we started keeping secret diaries,
where we confessed we did somehow know
one another very well and knew
exactly what we were doing to ourselves
but kept on doing it anyway

*

How manic-depressive (or is it bipolar) we get
in between jags of catatonia
(or was that what you called neurasthenia
meaning dead or asleep down there)

sucking a thumb or sitting on it alone
in bed each morning with the same stranger

*

The absurdity of it all
The obscenity of the bathos
The self-pity of suffering
The pain we inflict on each other

*

Forever Growth Forever Young
our all together now anthem

nervous systems rewired as
electronic proving grounds

air and water contagious
food and drugs adulterated

What can love promise?
What can lovers propose?

carnage a twist in our DNA
peace of mind in a body bag

*

In my dream you asked
Where doesn't it hurt?

*

Broken hearts one thing,
bitter something else again
but part of the deal always is
whoever holds on longer
gets to watch the other go

*

Giving all we could give
ashamed not to give more

*

Stupid kid Normal adult Foolish old man
no longer as innocent but still ignorant

*

Categorically incompatible
(cause for divorce in the state we were in,
irreconcilable differences:
erotic attachment on the one hand
compassionate affection on the other)
so you decided to end it on a sour note.
Self-respect too a kind of love

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A bitches' brew of thumbnails, *trompes l'oeil*,
screenshots from the hip, selfies at arms length,
blacklight moonwalks of byte-size brainchildren
all the colors together as white as death

*

War babies making love

*

And the snake we meet on the walk
is not the one we would rather meet
but head square as a fist, eyes
cold as stars under the knuckle