

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

*

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

*

Burnt-out tenements of the poetry wars
fought for reasons nobody knows
gap-toothed reminders of old stories

shadowed against remains of another day

*

All that piss and vinegar
intellectual ecstasy
verbal flexibility
ex-lovers foregone illusions

ghosts of a chance
to what end?

*

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

*

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

*

How to reconcile what we were feeling
with what we knew of love from Hollywood,
top forty singles and Sunday school

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Right-handed left-brained
eroticism a piquant hue
between altruism and ego
a fool for a pretty face and a sucker
for sweet talk walk into a Star Wars bar

*

Might as well have been tongue-tied
for all we were able to be frank with each other,
about our most secret fears and wishes,
except in the grip of intense emotion.
And in our unwritten diaries
where we confessed we did in fact know
one another very well
and exactly what we were doing to ourselves

but kept doing it anyway

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How manic-depressive (or is it bipolar)
in between jags of catatonia
(or was that what you called neurasthenia,
meaning dead or asleep down there
where lips and tongue weren't allowed to be)
sucking a thumb or sitting on it in bed
alone each morning with the same stranger

*

Forever Growth Forever Young
our all together now anthem

nervous systems rewired as
electronic proving grounds

air and water contagious
food and drugs adulterated

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

What can love promise?
What can lovers propose?

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

*

Summing up on your way out
how little was left, you said, surprised,
I can do that with anyone

*

The absurdity of it all
The obscenity of the bathos

The self-pity of suffering
The pain we cause one another

*

Categorically incompatible
(cause for divorce in the state we were in)
irreconcilable differences:
erotic attachment on the one hand
compassionate affection on the other

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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.
Self-respect too a kind of love

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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

