

Copula

Joseph Compara

A gun peeks out of an umbrella

and the letter means nothing.

Now you're angry and

the bag is empty. Your teeth

pried from your empty mouth.

You're not a lady of leisure

anymore and any morning you

could wake up dead. Shut off

the power and empty your

drawers. Your life is your life and

your life isn't worth the paper.

And a gun peeks out, a gun peeks out of

an umbrella. The letter means nothing:

the letter means nothing. And your touch, and

your face: hooks to the spine.

A mirror under your nose, a pin in your hand,

and. And a stamp that sends you nowhere.

His, theirs, yours, ours, and

you feel: you feel like a lot of people.

The Book of Faces

Joseph Compara

The problem is the problem you enter: you enter a room from which your life has been stripped and catalogued, auctioned without your being present. The problem is to make anew: you still have far too much of yourself. As, for example,

a capacious bag designed for travel, filled with nonsequiturs, like the empty rooms of an apartment in which dust settles and settles. Your task is as yet unclear, though you've been to the embassy, rifled its guards and offices for a clue, for a number, for

a ticket to sail you afar or a photograph with pertinent reference, such as an agenda with a declaration of the right time and place, a recurring time and place, or a letter that says *you're an agent without assignment*. You've

been bluffed out of the elevator with a pair of deuces. Worse things yet may happen, as in the play you watched, like a child you watched your puppets shriek and die. The entertainment's you. Someone passes you an orange without the use of his hands. Someone sets off (in your lap) a book of matches. You take

this to be a clue. You're full-circle charade now, having long forgotten the face, at what moment you knew its sides, that there were sides at all, or where you fit in, or what role I would play in your glorious theatre with its treacherous alphabet, every

letter a trap door which is why you sneak into telephone booths underground and make calls or wait for calls or wait for someone to ask you for change or wait for the dead to drink your blood so they can cry out *you've stripped me of my sentences*. The phone rings and rings and rings but it's no one you know. If I

followed you too, it'd be like a parade, we all balanced on a ledge skipping from window to window to look at you. Somehow you manage to see in, to get the goods, which is itself a masterly accomplishment, for

I have peeked through your keyhole time and again. I see nothing at all. Still we are cut from the same cloth. *If I am to die for my country* (which is what everyone wants) *I might as well*, which has the air of an assignment

or an assignation or is that assassination, though you can't really tell the difference. Stealing the gold, running from Nazis, creeping into the underground in Paris, the underground with its clandestine motion and

flowers scattered by rapacious cars with ticking engines. But this is just the teaser, a titillating trailer that refers ultimately and only back to you, which is the only place any of us can go on the train. The trouble is the problem. As, for example, when I say *I believe you, which is what I don't believe*, meaning I might give up now. Like

a playhouse, like a proscenium of puppeteers, I pluck the strings of my own degradation, miming what gestures I can, if not, however, for example, *couldn't you pretend for just a moment I'm a woman*, though it does make sense but still I don't really want it: the assignment

still elusive, you run through a colonnade of competing interpretations and the voices all calling you something different and I the one saying *I'd name all my children after you (if I had any)*, though we all know what that really

is, which is the palest form of admiration, just as a clue is the ball of thread stretched through dissimulation, and all the while I follow I—the darkened beast at the heart of the underground, cramped in a shrinking telephone box with the stylish letters and numbers I am unable, as yet, to train my beastly hands

to work. I try to press the buttons, I try to ring you out. Always it is the wrong kind of pressure. But I have learned of you I have learned at your feet, crouched and curious. I know I can tell you what I know I am: I know your stamp as I know my own face.