

Defense Mechanism

The knock of pale
death at the front door no longer sets
the heart pounding. Carpe diem
has become a poor alibi
for reckless behavior. Shouldn't he
consider investing for retirement,
stocks and bonds
with those he loves?

The modernist imperative
that poetry be impersonal and make
classical allusion had been
a defense mechanism
against the story, relentlessly
rammed home, where the hero
dies. Notice no "I"
in that sentence, not, or no longer,
a death sentence. Would that the self
blissfully
not reappear.

The poet with HIV
might have resisted confessing
the purple details ad nauseam,
collecting notices he couldn't pay,
when not well enough to work,
the men on the streets noticing
the bruises on his shins
as he sauntered by.

He might have suspected
turning the dead men
he had once fucked into the heroes
of stories that he would roll out,
would be to unfurl phallic
monuments to himself, would be
to betray them (whose breath
heats the back
of his neck as he writes).