



Palmer, Thom

DESIRE

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A tour de force of erotic intellectualism.

After discovering that he is HIV positive at 83, Anton Lotus starts to write his memoir under the guise of “scriptotherapy,” an exercise recommended by his therapist May Love to cope with his diagnosis. Anton, however, refuses to dwell on his illness and instead opts to recount his romantic past, hoping that his prose will also seduce May. While Anton’s position is that “the world is pure and patternless; connectivity between people and events is wholly arbitrary,” the fragments of his life are pieced together through a series of interconnected narratives. We’re introduced to the “horribly narcissistic” Aimee, 20 years Anton’s senior and a lover of both he and his father; she is a focus of both his adolescent crush and his more mature carnal desires. Throughout his writing exercises, however, Anton discovers that although “the world is wild and blind and senseless,” order and reason does indeed exist to explain his life—and choice of lovers. Shadows of Joyce, Nabokov and Laurence Sterne, whose *Tristram Shandy* is evoked early in the novel, loom large throughout the story. Clearly in love with words and images, Palmer also delights in experiments in form. He constructs part of the novel through a pseudo-screenplay and imaginary dialogue between Anton and May; provides a series of events from Aimee’s viewpoint; and devotes 25 pages to a parody of Whitman with copious footnotes advancing the narrative of Anton’s love life. It may sound convoluted, but somehow Palmer pulls it all together, a life unfolded through the help of several masters.

A novel of brilliant turns.

