

VAGABONDAGE

Scene 47

[Setting:] Downstream, downwind, down town. A pleasant bog in the east.

Breathless, the madman drags himself from the spume and flops onto a muddy bank. The hours of tumult now over, he lies, supine, peering into the swarthy sky, which sways, grey upon grey, through the limbs of a willow.

A lone maggot in the quagmire.

Mucus hangs from his nose. Effluent lathers his body and clothes. Far off and the terrible shrieks of a violent assault rise from the cosmos and lash hither and thither with the sweeping leaves.

The flotsam hears these cries.

‘Those cries for help still ringing in my ears,’ he whimpers (Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 1965, p. 79). Clutching at his skull and tearing at his eardrums as if to disconnect himself from the wailing world beyond. And this seems to work. The years of conceptual battery begin to spill, then erupt, from deep within his skull, and pour, mercifully, out from his eardrums. A cleansing tide ridding itself of debris and scum. He feels warm. And giddy.

He imagines instead [*enter fantasy*] the supple thighs of Fanny Brawne, the blotches of pink and purple and white within her smoky skin, the gentle sighs of expectation, a tongue curling and fondling the upper lip – and drifts into a reverie of half sleep. Here the sewer gargles as if a brook and the tendrils of slime stuck to his feet and neck wave as if meadow grasses in a warm breeze. Lavender scents the otherwise putrid air. And he sighs with her, with Keats, for the dreamy but doomed life to come. Blood rises up his throat.

[Voice over:] *But behold, solitary knight, wrecked and mangled on the muddy banks: ‘The sedge has wither’d from the lake, and no birds*

Abjection:

Excrement and its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, corpse, etc) stand for the danger to identity that comes from without: the ego threatened by the non-ego, society threatened by its outside, life by death.

Vagabonds = impure & abject

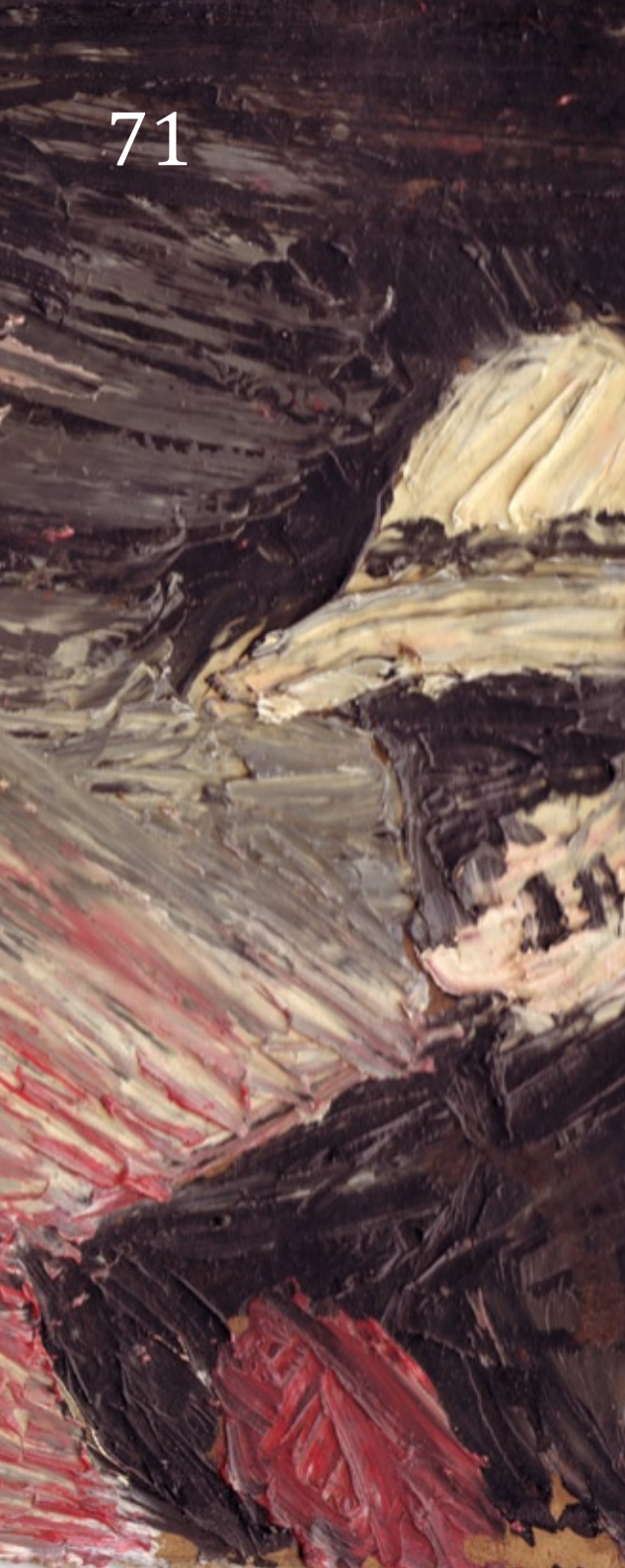
Wasteland = abjection incarnate

(Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, 1982, p. 71)

The Other

As soon as an *other* appears different from myself, it becomes alien, repelled, repugnant, abject – hated.

(Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, 1987, p. 222)



sing' (Keats, 'La Belle Dame sans Merci,' 1819).

 The madman wakes and screams, 'La belle dame sans merci,' and vomits blood.

Stunned, he sits up, a pale face in the gloom. And blinks. And perspires. And looks upon the world through bloodshot eyes. And smells the fetid brook that slurps at the muddy banks. And watches slicks of foam eddy around gnarled and probing roots. The noses of rats appear from the brown depths, then recede and dive into God only knows what places beneath. Used condoms swirl by before being plucked into the deep and sucked of their meat. The first star winks in the parting clouds. Chimney stacks elongate in the twilight beyond. The murmur of a restless world takes hold.

And the madman rises on limbs of fatigue and grief, a shadow among shadows. Which sways, trips, and lurches into the oncoming night, muttering, 'Bethesda, Bethesda, Bethesda...' like a sapling buckling under the turning gale.

Night falls.

And with it the infernal wail of violation erupts as the lands are doused in semen and blood.

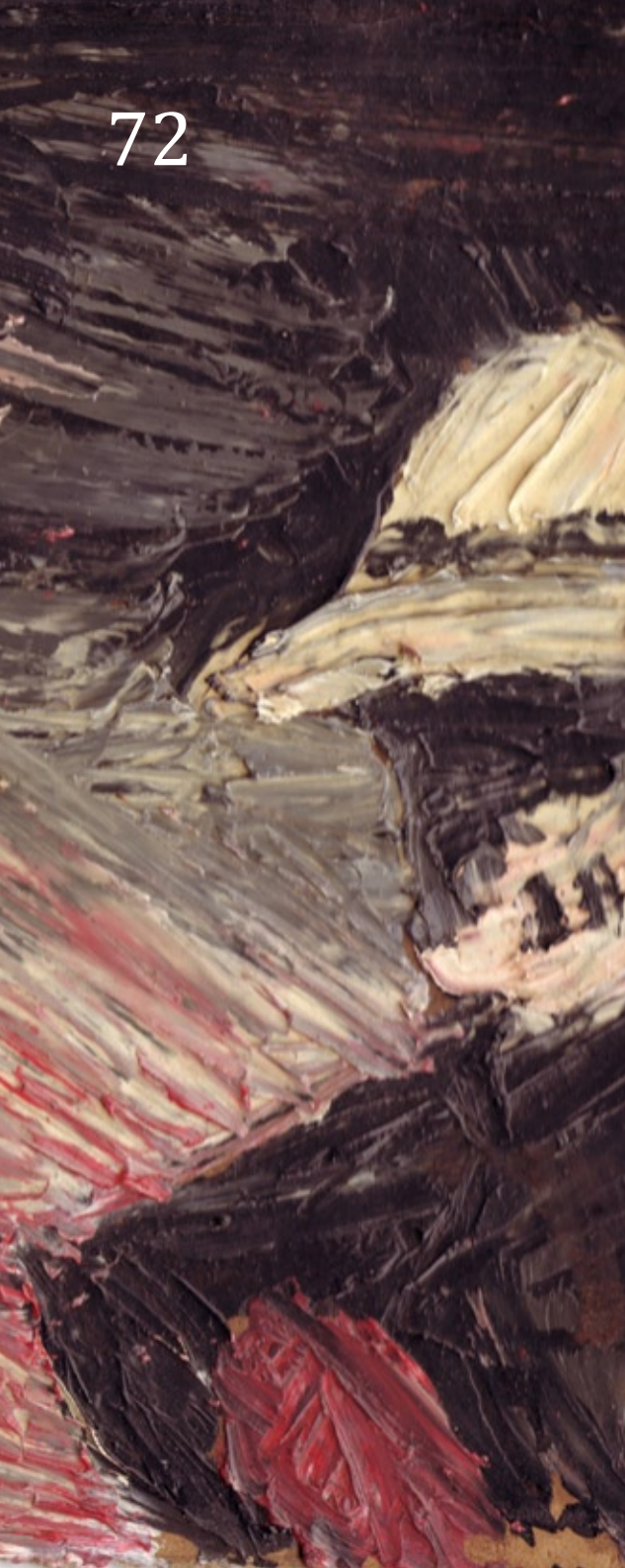
 [Voice over:] *Oh for a life of sensations rather than thoughts. Oh for Circe's breasts to have smothered his face. To die living his dreams. To die knowing it had all been worthwhile. That there was a place beyond suffering and hell. That each miserable step had not been trudged in vain. That there was one second in every life worth living. One perfect moment to savour.*

The Disputed Territories were somewhere ahead. Somewhere beyond the known world. Beyond the Author. Beyond God. Beyond every socially constructed reality he had ever known. Somewhere beyond Heaven and hell. Beyond the Shopping Mall and gutter. Beyond the Tourist and vagabond. Beyond Choice and coercion.

The madman hauled his load in this general direction. Leaving

Bethesda: noun Bible a pool in Jerusalem, believed to have healing powers. John 5:2-4.

(Macquarie, 2005)



furrows in his wake.

Circe.

Scene 52

[Setting:] A bar with two views: sewers and slums on one side and groves and golf courses the other. Perched atop a cliff in a disputed strip between worlds. *No-man's land. Purgatory.* Where the poor and rich mingle in war.

‘What do you make of that demented little twit?’ asks the mouth.

‘Quite, quite demented,’ says the other, twitching his large red nose.

‘Yes – *yeeess* – I thought as much.’ The man nods his head gravely and sips his gin. ‘Never seen a more ridiculous case.’ Then, as an afterthought, ‘Was that *blood* on his face and neck—or *shit*?’

Jack emerges from the toilet and resumes his position at the bar. ‘The great prophet foresaw it,’ he adds, with a rhetorical nod, taking up his last point and sipping on his wine.

An eyebrow is raised.

‘I see,’ says the mouth.

‘*What?*’ asks the nose. ‘What did the great fucking prophet fore-see?’

‘The discord,’ says Jack.

Another eyebrow lifts.

‘The undeniable – self-induced – denial!’ roars the madman.

‘Cracked,’ whispers the first man.

‘Can’t deny the undeniable,’ roars the other. A commotion follows as both men enjoy a jolly good guffaw. Backs are slapped, faces are stretched, mouths open to capacity, and tears well in the red man’s nose.

The madman becomes reticent. He watches the bubbles winking at the brow of his glass. How they came to be there he does not know. He thinks he may write a book about it. *Discordance*, he would

The Marriage of Heaven and Hell

All Bibles or sacred codes have been the causes of the following Errors:

1. That Man has two real existing principles Viz: a Body & a Soul.
2. That Energy, call'd Evil, is alone from the Body, & that Reason, call'd Good, is alone from the Soul.
3. That God will torment Man in Eternity for following his Energies.

But the following Contraries to these are True:

1. Man has no Body distinct from his Soul for that call'd Body is a portion of Soul discern'd by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age.
2. Energy is the only life and is from the Body and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy.
3. Energy is Eternal Delight.

(William Blake, 1790-93)

call it. Or *The Chronicles*. Or some such thing.

He laughs to himself.

The guffaw ceases with this outburst. Glances are exchanged. Menacing grins appear.

‘Something funny?’ says the first man, bearing his teeth. ‘Another flogging, perhaps?’

‘I was just thinking about my memoirs,’ says Jack, laughing.

‘*Memoirs*? About what? The great feats you have lived and experienced? The great advancements you’ve made to humanity? The great beatings you have suffered?’ (Pauses) ‘The great contributions you’ve made to madness and suffering? What, after all, have you contributed to the plight of lunacy per se? Have you advanced its cause, taken a step or two to advance its popularity and charm? Or have you simply sat idly by as it ransacked your mind?’

More racket between the two.

‘Straight from Dostoyevsky, this little fellow,’ says the nose, whose left eye suddenly spasms.

More laughter.

‘I was just thinking,’ Jack says loudly, ‘about discordance—’

‘You’ve said.’

‘—and how the great visionary advocated a balance—’

‘As exhibited in your good self.’

Roaring laughter.

‘—the marriage,’ the madman continues, ‘of the contraries.

Blake’s interdependent binaries. Innocence and experience. **Heaven and hell**. Love and hate. And,’ – a dismissive wave of the hand – ‘so on. It’s almost Derridean or Saussurean: language as differential rather than referential. A world suspended in text. Our lives plotted on a continuum between the perfect **tourist** at one end and the **vagabond** beyond redemption at the other, like Zygmunt Bauman says.’

‘And what would God think of that?’ says the mouth.

‘He’d say—’

‘What makes you so sure it’s a *he*?’ adds the nose.

Chronicles: ‘*Chronicles, the predecessors of modern histories, were written accounts, in prose or verse, of national or worldwide events over a considerable period of time. If the chronicles deal with events year by year, they are often called annals. Unlike the modern historian, most chroniclers tended to take their information as they found it, making little attempt to separate fact from legend*’ (M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 2005, p. 38).

Vagabonds & Tourists:

‘I suggest to you that the opposition between the tourists and the vagabonds is the major, principal division of the postmodern society. We are all plotted on a continuum stretched between the poles of the “perfect tourist” and the “vagabond beyond remedy” – and our respective places between the poles are plotted according to the degree of freedom we possess in choosing our life itineraries. Freedom of choice, I put to you, is in postmodern society by far the most seminal among the stratifying factors. The more freedom of

The Other:

As we are taught by the most secular of the social sciences, it is the other, his gaze, that defines us and determines us. Just as we couldn't live without eating or sleeping, we cannot understand who we are without the gaze and reaction of the other. Even those who kill, rape, rob, and violate do so in exceptional moments, and the rest of the time beg love, respect, praise from others. And even from those they humiliate, they ask recognition in the form of fear and submission. Without any such recognition, the newborn abandoned in the forest will not become a human (or else, like Tarzan, he will look for the other in the face of an ape). We might die or go insane if we lived in a community in which everyone had systematically decided never to look at us and to behave as if we didn't exist.

(Umberto Eco, as cited in Umberto Eco & Cardinal Martini, *Belief or Nonbelief: A Confrontation*, 2000, p. 90)

'Must've inherited the notion,' Jack mutters. Then sadly, 'Perhaps I'm a bigot. And a coward. After all, God should be genderless,' he says. 'Beyond gender. Beyond sexuality. Beyond construction. Like me.'

'Utterly cracked,' is the whisper.

'And tedious after a while. Even for a fop.'

Much laughter as the men swagger off. One suggests that Jack's eyes are far too big for his head, the other: *For a human*. Face too narrow. *Even for a pygmy*. And those nostrils! *Like bristly caverns*. Both make a point to never ever drink with Jack (or any vagabond) again: in case his deformity rubs off. Besides, it would be bad for their respective reputations to be seen dallying with a lunatic, no matter how much abuse they happily slung his way. Unless, of course – and now backs are slapped again – they get their friends in on the act. Much laughter. Perhaps, on second thoughts, they should *re-import* him (and other freaks like him) back into Paradise. He could be a regular sideshow! The proverbial big 'O' *Other* – a hobo from the wastelands, the village idiot, to service the tourist-classes and make them laugh. For those too busy to travel – too busy to hunt. Yes, a prepaid packaged tour to murder and rape. The perfect getaway.

Mouth: 'Like those things. What are they?'

Nose: 'Oompa Loompas.'

Mouth: 'That's it!'

(*Laughter*)

Nose: 'Where'd you pick him up?'

Mouth: 'Found the little cretin in the bogs, sobbing like a girl!'

(*Hysterical laughter*)

Mouth: 'Raped him there and then.'

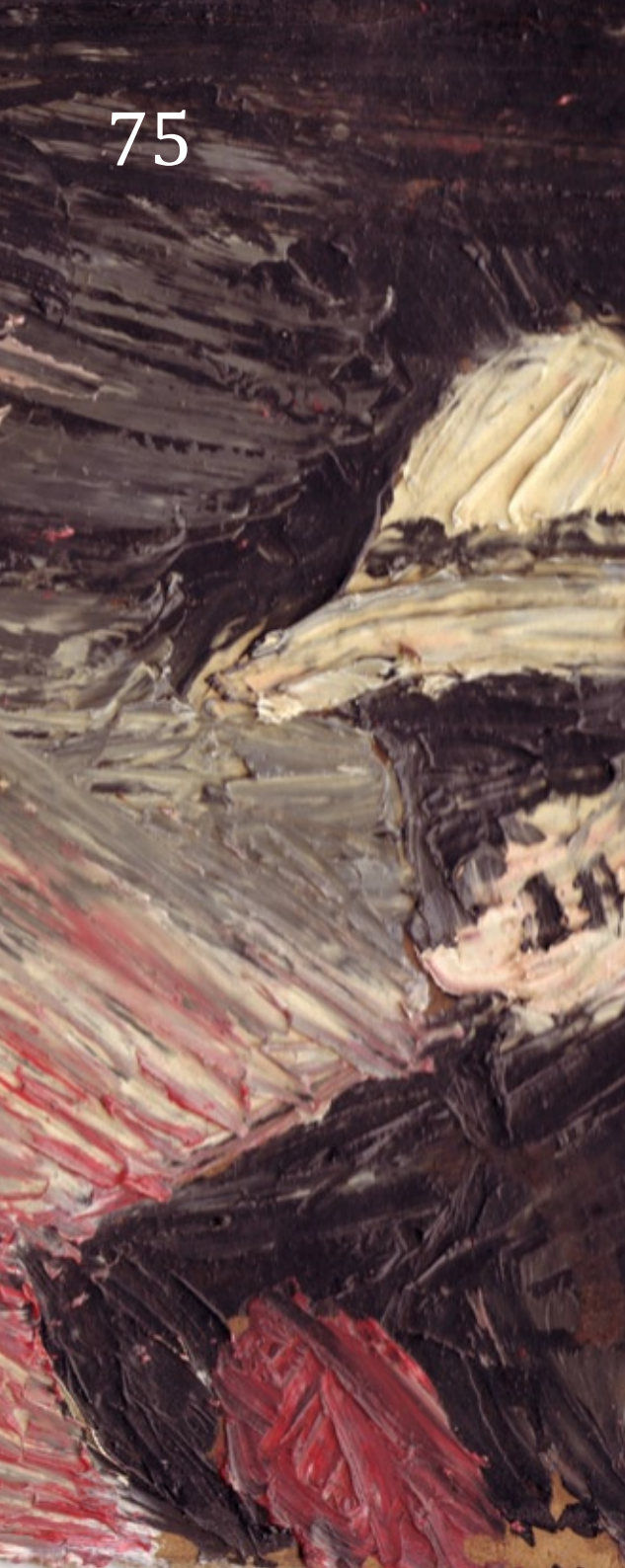
More laughter. Foot stamping. Back slapping.

Nose: 'Not much of a find really.'

Mouth: 'The sewers swept him in. Through the first border and all the way here.'

Nose: 'Is that how they return? Hardly comforting. Still, con-

choice one has, the higher is one's rank in the postmodern social hierarchy. Postmodern social differences are made of the width and narrowness of the range of realistic options' (Zygmunt Bauman, Postmodernity and its Discontents, 1997, p. 93).



Law: [I]t is the rich and powerful who benefit from the rule of law—especially as the cost of legal representation outstrips the ability of all but the most wealthy to afford it—and that most of the operation of the rule of law is directed at keeping the poor and the powerless in line.

(Evan Willis,
The Sociological Quest,
1999, p. 103)

sidering our trip over and everything, my turn next time – for good measure. *Come here, maggots. I'm gonna make you bleed.*'

Mouth: 'Then we'll castrate the wretch.'

Nose: 'Haven't laughed so hard in ages. And shit in his face.'

Like we did that slut from *Club X*.'

Mouth: 'What else are *Oompa Loompas* good for?'

More laughter.

Mouth: 'Not much.' (*Adds*) 'What's his name? The Chocolate man? *Wonka*? Willy Wonka had plenty of Willy Wonka with them midgets, I bet!'

Nose: 'Well, if you couldn't fuck them you have to kill them. Ugly trolls.' (*Laughs*) 'Anyway, it's worth a visit to the fringes to kill a maggot or two. Like the brochure says: jolly good sport.'

Mouth: 'That's the spirit.'

And laughter.

Nose: 'Did he scream?'

Mouth: 'Like a baby.'

(*Guffaw*)

Mouth: 'Kept muttering to God...'

Nose: 'They do that. Should've killed him there and then.'

Mouth: '*Thought I had*. I stuffed him in a bin out back. Little bugger just reappeared out of nowhere, sat down, and began rambling again. Like a stray dog. Disconcerting really. I thought they were all dumb and mute. Who taught them to speak? And why don't we rip out their tongues when we **deport** them?'

Silence.

Mouth: 'Indomitable savage! Who let him in the bar?'

Nose: 'Let's kill him.'

'No, let's get away. May start praying again...'

And so they scurry away.

Curious chaps, Jack thinks, draining his glass and asking for another.

Self-loathing:

Self-hatred, self-loathing, also sometimes autophobia refers to an extreme dislike of oneself, or being angry at oneself. The term is also used to designate a dislike or hatred of a group to which one belongs. For instance, 'ethnic self-hatred' is the extreme dislike of one's ethnic group. Accusations of self-hatred are often used as an ad hominem attack.

The term 'self-hatred' is used infrequently by psychologists and psychiatrists, who would usually describe people who hate themselves as 'persons with low self-esteem.' Some people think that self-hatred and shame are important factors in some or many mental disorders, especially disorders that involve a perceived defect of oneself (e.g. body dysmorphic disorder).

Wikipedia
(accessed 31 July 2008)

'Sorry, sir, uh,' – hesitates – 'you can't drink here,' says the barman, looking somewhere beyond Jack. At a fire-extinguisher. Then his watch. The floor. His boot. Humming all the while as if impervious to discourse. 'You're only here for the sport, sir. And your blood's rather scaring people,' he says.

Jack follows his glances with increased curiosity. *Watch, floor, boot.* 'I'd get that seen to,' Jack suggests.

No response.

Sink, fridge, table, television...

Jack follows these glances with even greater relish. To see the sights of others, he thinks, now there's a treat. But what to make of these random glances? And, more interestingly, these random and otherwise commonplace objects? Is the man driven by unseen insights into the ordinary? A bizarre fascination with the banal? X-ray vision? Another dimension?

'I really would have that seen to,' Jack says.

To no avail.

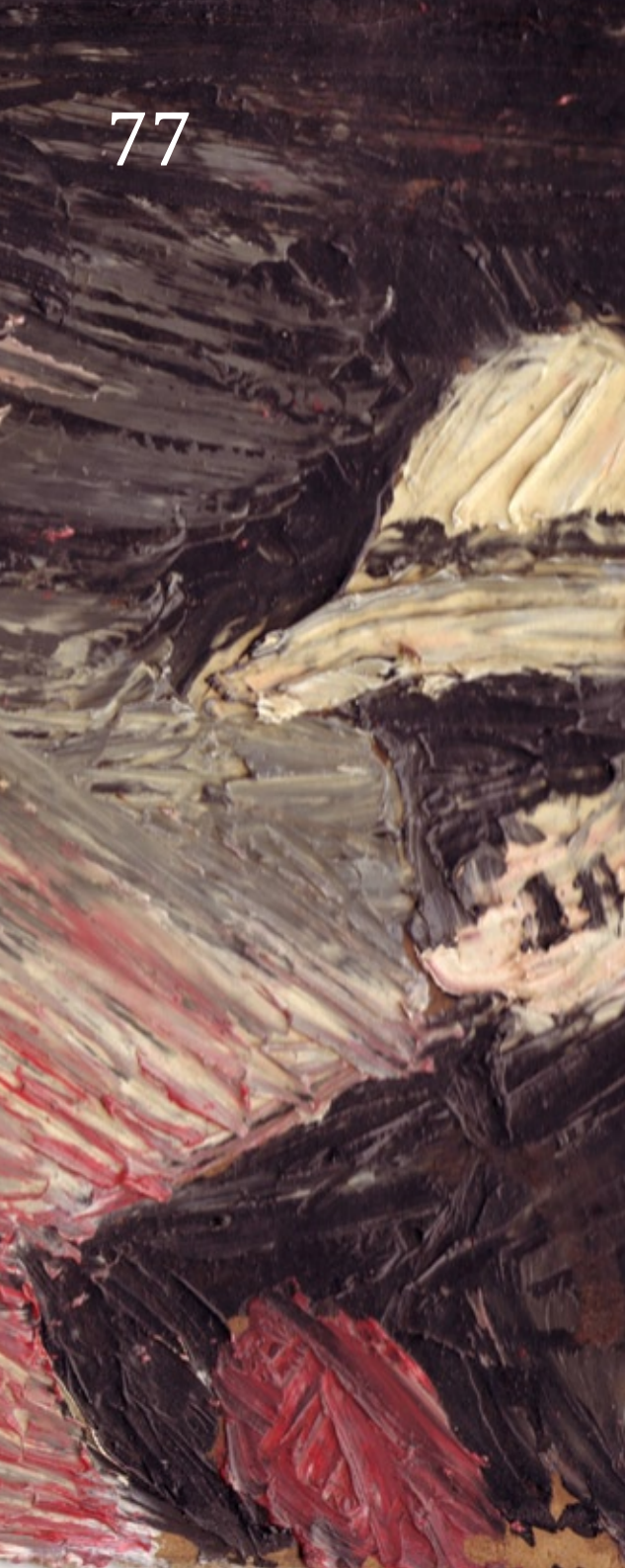
'The third-eye can be a devastating burden,' he adds. 'When opened.'

Fingertip, knuckle, ceiling, cleavage...

Even Jack pauses on the latter. 'I agree,' he says, turning back to the barman and shaking his head. 'An impeccable display of nature. No wonder the child returns as a ravaged, bristled, grimacing pervert, to feast and to drool. No other place to call home really.' He sighs. 'The soft rise and fall of utopia.' – Getting elevated – 'The dipping ravines and gentle slopes of the homeland.' – Down right ecstatic – '*The clutching noose of birth.*' His fist comes down on the bar. 'Damnation! **I HATE MYSELF.**'

The barman no longer glances about, merely forward, at the wall.

'Switched off,' Jack says, clicking his fingers, 'just like that.' And then, after some thought, 'Blast! Can't follow a man intravenously.'



Disciple of Satan:

The sociology of deviance has taught us that while exemplars of goodness (the saintly figure) may model the virtues we profess to aspire to, it is the figure of evil that serves to consolidate collective commitment to these beliefs and values. Evil prowls, outside, in the company of chaos, the enemy, the 'other', just beyond the boundary that marks the limit of order, the same, 'our kind of people'.

The opposition of goodness to evil has a history too long and rich to develop ... Mainstream Christianity reserves a special place for evil. It helps to explain why a God who is 'good' allows people to suffer and feel pain. This is set to the account of Lucifer, the vain and fallen angel, and to the 'free will' of human beings, their ability to choose how they will live their lives and hence to be vulnerable to temptation.

(Wadham, Pudsey, & Boyd, *Culture & Education*, 2007, p. 160)

He sighs and stands up. A curious expression comes to his face, almost one of excitement and speculation. He picks up his glass and hurls it at the man's head. (*Hits*)

'Got him in one,' he yells, and laughs.

The barman stumbles back with a shard of glass embedded in his forehead. Blood spits merrily about, fountain-like, and sprays over the sink and bench, the glass-rack and till, the fridge and Jack—in fact, over almost every last thing in sight.

Jack glances about. He hears the rattle of coins in a poker machine yonder. Movement in the corner.

A thud – a gargle – as the barman crashes to the floor in a pool of blood.

So flees.

Jack scampers down the street, his large eyes bulging. Faces turn and gasp in horror. Unbeknownst to Jack, his face and chest are splattered in blood, the natural conclusion of which, to those in the street, to the tourist-classes, is that this man, this spectre, this monster, this escaped convict from the badlands, has just engaged in a bit of friendly butchery, and not just once or twice, but on several occasions. Add to this impression his awkward gait, knees and toes splayed outward, his bent and hunched figure, his glowing white eyes in a sea of red, his hands gripped into claws, and his mouth, a comic mixture of grief and laughter. And so the faces turn, howling and weeping in anticipation of the hatchet. And then joy. When it doesn't come, joy, every moment from that day forward a borrowed one, a gift from Jack, the homicidal killer, the derelict ripper, who spared no-one but their good selves. A man of unbridled blood lust. Of unspeakable bodily obsessions. **Disciple of Satan.** A vision of hell. A vagabond out-of-control.

Descriptions so embellished that Jack tops the most wanted list.

Confirming the view that scumbags can't be trusted. That hobos must be incarcerated. That for \$5,000 a day you can hunt the madman

Deportation

The new 'dangerous classes' ... are those recognized as *unfit* for reintegration and proclaimed to be unassimilable, since no useful function can be conceived for them to perform after 'rehabilitation'. They are not just excessive, but *redundant*.

They are excluded *permanently* – one of the few cases of 'permanence' which liquid modernity not only allows, but actively promotes.

(Zygmunt Bauman,
Liquid Times,
2007, p. 69)

in hell, cut off his head and mount it on a wall. Or have his torso and thighs stuffed and preserved: a trophy of the bums and cunts speared on safari, the boys and girls caught and conquered in the back streets of hell. Mementoes from beyond.

[Voice over:] *But what day was it? What day did he join the violence of the human race? Yesterday may have been his fifth day in hell, or possibly the fifteenth. But how would he know? Was there any evidence to prove one way or the other how many days had elapsed in his life? Since his last life? Since being discarded from one world and claimed by another.*

*Since his rebirth, since the metamorphosis, since being **deported** from the 'real' world and dumped in the 'non-world,' he had taken to counting the days in much the same way he used to count drinks, just to count when he might slip into a coma or complete a stint. And when he used to count drinks he inevitably lost count, somewhere around fifteen, but often as few as one, usually through choice but not always, before simply beginning again, if it occurred to him to begin again at all. And by the end of a bender he could safely say he hadn't drunk too much; so perhaps it is safe to conclude that his current existence, his current sentence, is about one day old, if any.*

But was it customary to count the days of one's life? To count drinks? To count cigarettes? To count blisters? To count diseases, resentments, rejections, deaths, suicide attempts, and days like other people counted money? Whatever the case, he wasn't sure where he was in his current incarnation, his current sentence, his current guise, which he more-or-less picked up like a crust from a bin.

Scavenging for an identity like a tycoon shopping for a girl in the backstreets of hell: a prod here, a jab there, squeeze this, smell that, a quick slap, turn back the ear (no muck), keep looking, stand back, assess, score, and then, for good measure, condemn it, brand it, and fuck it like a whore. This saddened him.

But also excited him.

The Pain Body:

As long as you are unable to access the power of the Now, every emotional pain that you experience leaves behind a residue of pain that lives on in you. It merges with the pain from the past, which was already there, and becomes lodged in your mind and body. This, of course, includes the pain you suffered as a child, caused by the unconsciousness of the world into which you were born.

This accumulated pain is a negative energy field that occupies your body and mind. If you look on it as an invisible entity in its own right, you are getting close to the truth. It's the emotional pain-body. It has two modes of being: dormant and active. ... Some people live almost entirely through their pain-body, while others may experience it only in certain situations...

(Eckhart Tolle, *The Power of Now*, 2004, pp. 29-30)

And this—this duality, this duplicity—terrified him.

Who or what made him like this? Both tourist and vagabond? Both lover and hater? Both angel and devil?

He suspected there may have been a lost year or two in his current count of days. For reasons unknown even to him, seven was a good number, lucky even. So this is where he took up the count. Day seven, he concluded, was beyond him, and by day fifteen he would know the success or failure of his current incarnation. His current sentence.

If he could live that long, that is. For he, like Keats, was half in love with easeful death. To simply be done with it.

To eat cement, as they say in hell.

Circe.

So through the fringes of the Wasteland he runs, wide-eyed and bewildered, fleeing the scene of a crime, a possible murder, dripping with blood, with nowhere yet to rest his head, with arms outstretched and grasping for safety, feet shuffling beneath him as if assured of their destination, head full of noise and chaos, eyes straining for a place to hide and retreat. And in so doing he becomes his agony and calls himself AgonyJack (one word). Where life is identified with pain.

And terror.

For his life has no context. No rhyme nor reason. No meaning. Without meaning it lacks purpose, the stuff of life and hope, the stuff it both craves and deplures, the stuff, in the end, that may just heal it. But those in the Wasteland are different from those from Paradise, those with money and choice. Because those from hell have no choice. They are plucked from consumer society by the invisible hand of the market and dumped in *slum-ality*, a physical and conceptual 'non-place' fortified against escape. An Alcatraz of body and mind.

A game reserve for tourists: to hunt and fuck vagabonds for fun. To suck out—and swallow—their eyeballs when the game is done and won.

Govern/mentality:

Ever larger chunks of human conduct have been released from explicitly social ... patterning, supervision and policing, relegating an ever larger set of previously socialized responsibilities back to the responsibility of individual men and women. In a deregulated and privatized setting which is focused on consumer concerns and pursuits, the responsibility for choices, the actions that follow the choices and the consequences of such actions rests fully on the shoulders of individual actors.

(Zygmunt Bauman, *Consuming Life*, 2007, p. 89).

Because those in hell are mad—and bad—for not abiding by the rationality of the market. Irrational and irresponsible = worthless and redundant. A *non*-human in a *non*-place with *non*-laws can't be murdered. Because they don't exist.

And so Jack runs like a madman, a ridiculous kind of madman, through the wastelands of neo-liberal life. While at a distance two tourists take potshots and laugh.

And the sewers hear his cries and echo back his sighs.

But the shots continue. *Bang. Bang. Bang-bang. Bang.*

Nose: 'Aim lower, you missed.'

Mouth: 'That's because I'm aiming for his nose.'

Nose: 'Don't aim for his nose. Aim for his balls!'

(Laughter)

 [Voice over:] *But did he inherit the Wasteland or did he create it? If not his doing, whose? The rich for rigging the game? Or the poor for playing it? Blaming the victims – not the system – for the cruelties of life. Leaving the weak to rot, tooth and nail, back into the mud of history, back into the junkyards of a post-industrial world. Lives wasted by market forces and economic rationalism. By the greed of the few.*

Govern/mentality.

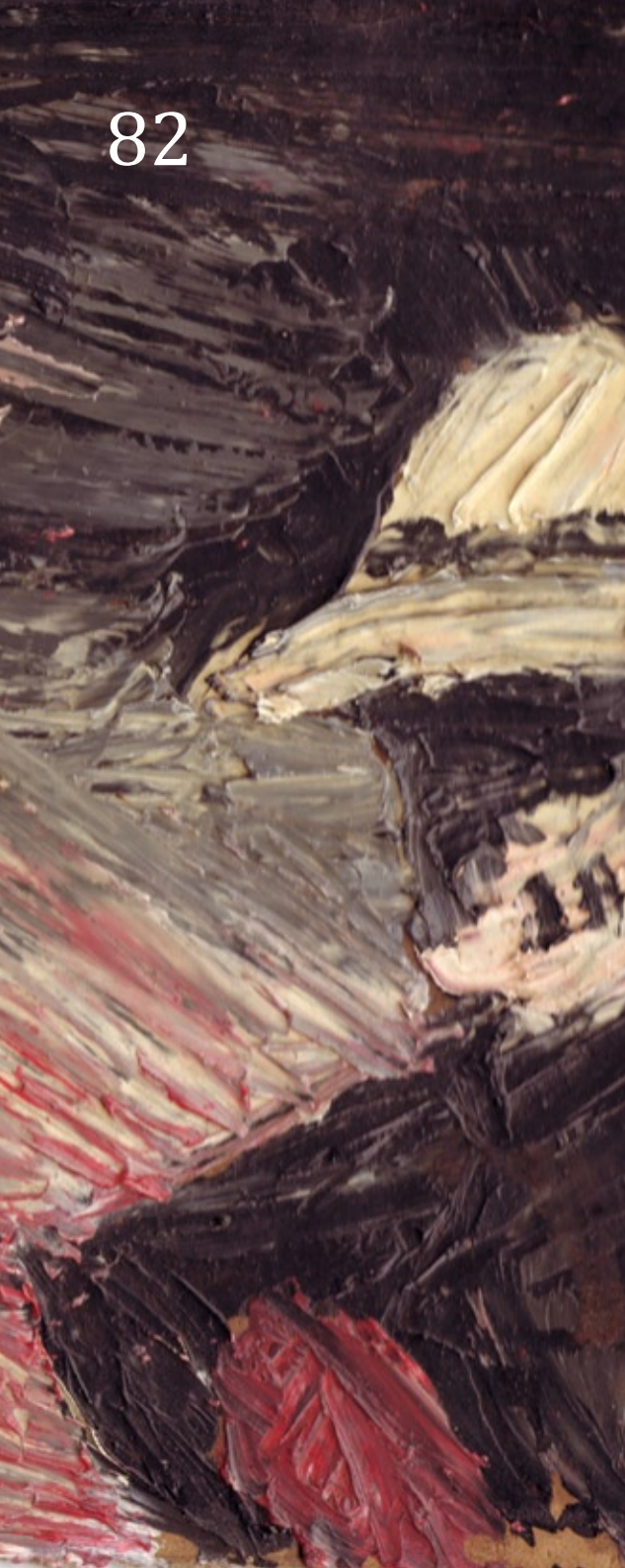
When the self surveils the self.

Circe.



The poor of today are first and foremost *flawed consumers*, unable to take advantage of the treasures displayed tantalisingly within their reach, frustrated before the act, disqualified before even trying. ... It is this quality which makes them, potentially, a constituency from which fundamentalist movements ... may draw [their] reserves.

Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodernity and its Discontents*, 1997, p. 183



La Belle Dame sans Merci

O what can ail thee, knight at arms,
Alone and palely loitering?
The sedge has wither'd from the lake,
And no birds sing. ...

I met a lady in the meads,
Full beautiful, a fairy's child;
Her hair was long, her foot was light,
And her eyes were wild. ...

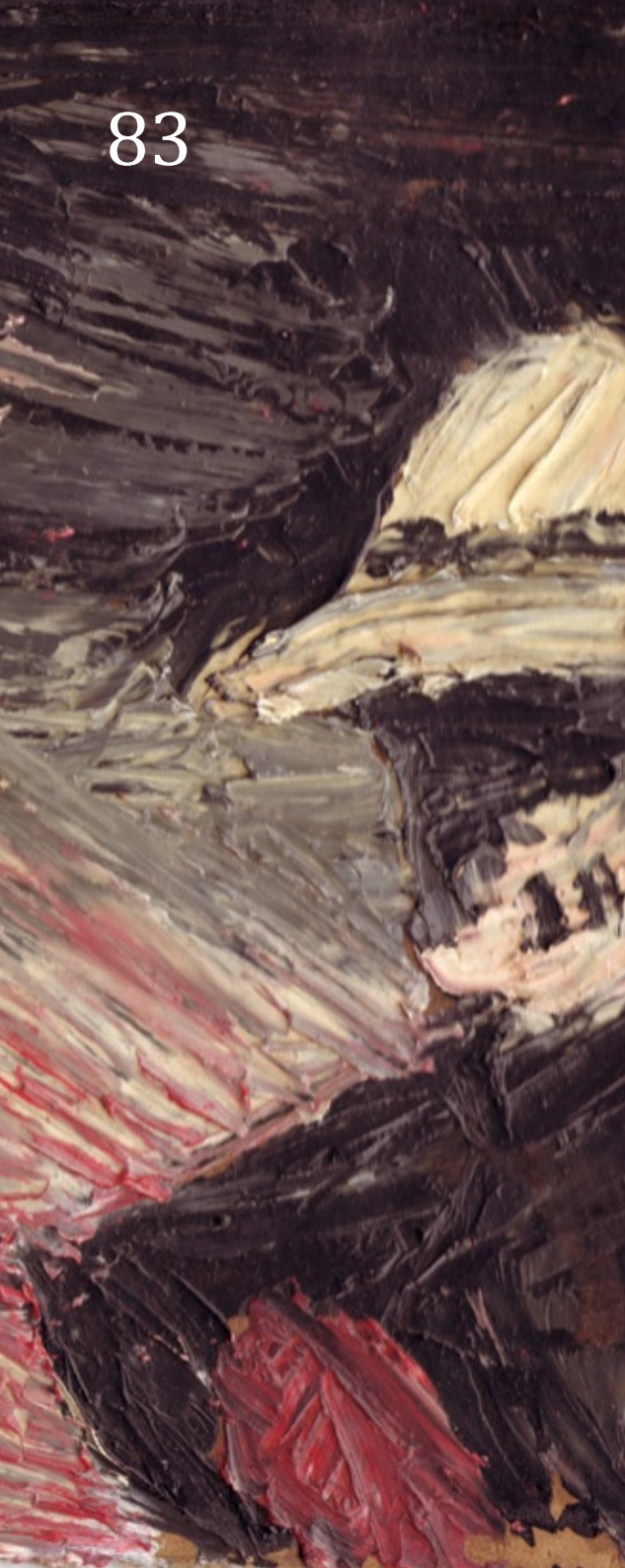
She took me to her elfin grot,
And there she wept, and sigh'd full sore,
And there I shut her wild wild eyes
With kisses four.

And there she lulled me asleep,
And there I dream'd—Ah! woe betide!
The latest dream I ever dream'd
On the cold hill's side.

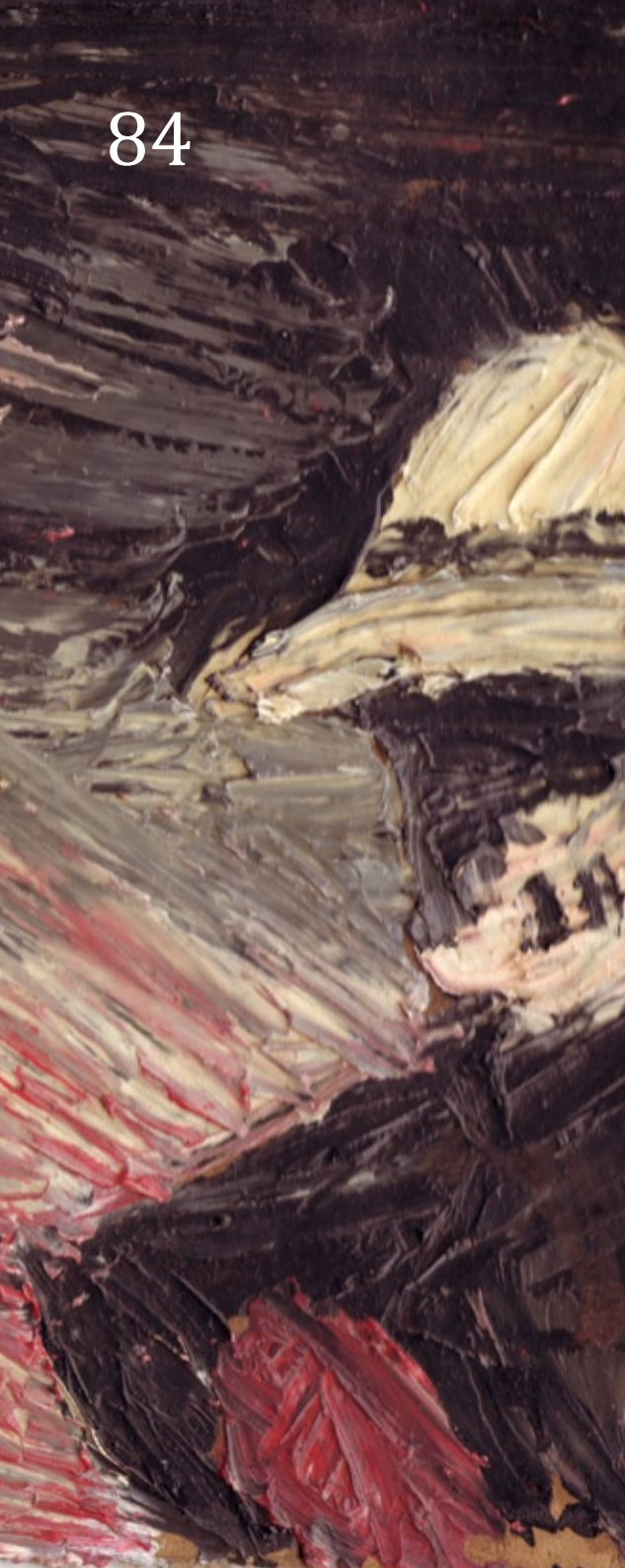
I saw pale kings, and princes too,
Pale warriors, death pale were they all;
They cried—'La belle dame sans merci
Hath thee in thrall!' ...

John Keats, 1819

83



84



Separating Suburb from Slum