IV(c). Conrad Unger: Selected Under-scorings and Marginalia

Johan Nilsen Nagel (the hero of Knut Hamsun’s *Mysteries*) carried a vial of prussic acid in his waistcoat pocket: “all he had to do was swallow it without grimacing too much.” 30 (Text underlined in HB pencil.)

And later:

“The watch fell to the floor and he leaped out of bed. ‘Someone is calling,’ he whispered, and looked out the window with eyes bursting out of their sockets. […] He reached the docks, ran to the farthest pier, and leaped into the sea. Some bubbles came up to the surface.” 31 (Asterisks placed with HB pencil in the body of the text.)

The Horla, man’s invisible replacement, became something of an obsession of Unger’s; his numerous copies of both versions of Maupassant’s

story are littered with underlining and marginalia:

“16 May. I am ill: that’s certain! I have a fever, an atrocious fever, or rather a feverish weakness which afflicts my mind just as much as my body. All the time I have this terrible feeling of imminent danger, this apprehension of impending misfortune or approaching death, this presentiment which is doubtless the first sign of some disease, as yet unknown, germinating in my blood and my flesh.”

And later:

“. . . he who shall die only at his appointed day, hour and minute, because he has reached the limit of his existence.”

(Both sections of text circled in 2B pencil)

In the margin of Nerval’s “Aurélia” beside the following line, “every man has a double and that when he sees him, death is near.” Unger had written, “I have seen the double inside and I must die.” (Marginalia in HB pencil.)

---

33 Maupassant, Selected Short Stories, 344.
34 Nerval, from “Golden Sayings,” in Selected Writings, 270.
“a pure spirit buds beneath the husk of stones.”35 (Text circled in red biro.)

“‘A fuckin livin death, I tell you it’s not being near alive, by the end I was undead, not alive, and I tell you the idea of dyin was nothing compared to the idea of livin like that for another five or ten years and only then dyin.’”36 (Line ends struck through with yellow highlighter.) To the title, Infinite Jest, he’d added in black biro the words, “or coming to terms with suicide.”

“I felt the crushing weight of evil insect control forcing my thoughts and feelings into pre-arranged moulds, squeezing my spirit in a soft invisible vice”37 (Text struck though with yellow highlighter.)

“[…] death knows the way to my closet
he knows the way to my bedroom he knows how to get in my shoes
death knows how to tie knots in my fishing line
he unbuttons my shirts
he whets my knife death
like a rudder to the slaveship moon

35 Nerval, Selected Writings, 374.
with its sombre sarabandes like little footprints like tombs put to music
songs that cannot be sung
listen how it tangles my tongue
and see here the spectators of death”38
(Crosses placed at the end of each line with HB pencil.)

“Crossing the bridge at that moment was a simply endless stream of traffic.”39

And later:

“because I’ve never been able to find the kind of nourishment I like. If I had found it, believe you me, I’d not have made this fuss but would have eaten my fill the same as you and everyone else.”40 (Text underlined in HB pencil, and then for the most part erased.)

“He spoke with an accent; I think he’s a foreigner.

He is. He came to this country some years ago. But he’s here permanently now.”

(V. Conclusion)

That fine mesh dream of self (that mycelial human curse) expands in the brain, bloating it with plans and coordinates, pasts and futures, its seemingly eternal patterns of redemption floating purposeful in the skull air like tiny filaments brushed from the brain of God. And then somewhere down the line my friend’s uneven teeth clamped tight in the unseasonably hot sun. Back there in that park, his body hanging rigid in place, his brain finally devoured by the ravening dream, his ruptured skull eaten free of the rooted silos of concretized thought — the rope a tumoral stick cum fruiting alien limb cum stroma stretching its perverse destiny into the sweat air. With eyes filled with black smoke, and mouth seduced into an unholy seal of lipless teeth, he rained his dream on us.