The Death of Conrad Unger: Some Conjectures Regarding Parasitosis and Associated Suicide Behavior

Gary L. Shipley

Published by Punctum Books

L. Shipley, Gary.
The Death of Conrad Unger: Some Conjectures Regarding Parasitosis and Associated Suicide Behavior.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/76423

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=2650908

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.
A suicide note was discovered in his left trouser pocket: an adaptation of Father Time’s departing scrawl in Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure*, it read: “Done because I am too menny.”

His was not the early to bed of Pessoa’s Baron of Teive, his contagion torched in a fit of reason, but the full awakening of once fragmentary voices, their humble residue sliding down his inside leg, his day made black and white.

**IV(b). Conrad Unger: Excerpts and Synopses**

*Mirror-Blind* (Novella, 1992): a reworking of the vampire myth in which the protagonist, Adrienne, kills just so that she can view her reflection.

“It’s more than vanity: I have to be able to see the owner of all this. I have to witness that place of origin. Photographs do not only smile when I smile. And even though my reflection

---

28 All the page numbers listed in this section are to first editions.
may be wet with murder, it is, however briefly, mine. Without it all my animations seem . . . hollow.” (183)

In order to see himself, Unger exteriorized his internal states through writing. Adrienne, in order to see herself, is forced to ingest the interiors of others in repeated acts of destruction. For Adrienne, the blood of others is quite literally the idiolect of self.

_The Upturned Tree_ (Novel, 1996): a love story in which the jilted party commits suicide by planting himself in the ground head-first.  

“Staring down into the planting hollow, he caught sight of a worm he’d happened to bisect while digging. He watched as it quirked on the loose earth. Such is the violence of a nescient death, he thought, as he made root of his head, neck and upper torso, and waited for the soil to follow him down.” (203)

_The Lice Killers_ (Novel, 1999): this work features the braided stories of a collection of distinctly heterogeneous characters who all seek to alter the course of their lives in some way, but who

---

29 Conrad confided in me on more than one occasion that entering into his daily life was not too far removed from the slow agonizing death heaped on this character.
all eventually end up doing and being what they’d hoped to avoid.

“When Mark thought about his children, grown up now and lost to him, he thought of them as ghosts, ghosts of tiny strangers that he’d made up and who had come and gone without him, leaving nothing to phantomize but their imagined imaginings of him, absent father–ghost. But Laura, Laura was different. Even before the weight of her body stretched the hemp Laura regretted nothing. She too had not managed to evade, but unlike the others had managed to assimilate that failure into a cumulative rearrangement of herself, eventually coming to embody the very impossibility of evasion.” (161)

*Seven Tales of Zero* (Short Story Collection, 2005): A book of seven stories, only six of which were completed, unless you take the single sentence of the seventh as a tale in itself (which I do). As a story of a suicide’s life it requires no further embellishment.

“Accepting that I was alive got progressively more difficult, but in time I was able to construct my future from it.” (137)