

25 Noel Road: a genius like us

Carlos Be

Translated by Berni Armstrong

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Caja España Theatre Award 2001

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For Fran

Elizondo suggests that pain converts our minds into a theatre convincing us that what seems a catastrophe is in fact a dance, a delicate construction of the sensibilities, a special form of music or mathematics, a rhythm, an enlightenment or a therapy, and, of course, a mystery that can only be cleared up with the help of a dictionary of the emotions. All of this can be applied to the presence of evil in contemporary literature, since the sickness is not catastrophe, but rather a dance from which new emotive constructions could already be emerging.

ENRIQUE VILA-MATAS, *Bartleby and Company*

First performed by The Zombie Company in the Sala Beckett (Barcelona, 2005), directed by Álex D. Capo with Fran Arráez and Ludovic Tattevin performing.

Characters

Ken
Joe

Setting

The bed-sit shared by Ken and Joe.

On the wall at the back can be seen a mural made up of a collage of cut out photographs: well-built naked men posing, making love; Renaissance paintings and sculptures; real and mythical animals; human organs ... In the middle of all of this chaos, certain compositions acquire greater significance due to their position and size: the acronym INRI dominates the central panel, from the initials descends, vertically, the following message: "I NOW REPRESENT IDIOTS"; a photograph of the British Museum with the roof on upside down. On the museum's façade (in words cut out from the newspaper) can be read "CULTURE MARKET"; Jesus Christ crucified on a Union Jack with a headband that reads "EGO SUM ERGO DEUS EST"; a cadaverous monk and a phantasmagorical nun sat on both sides of a small painting entitled "Was Rosencrantz Jesus CHRIST?"

On opposite sides of the bedsit are an old record player and a telephone. Next to the record player, there is a chair with various records piled on top of it any old how. Next to the telephone, a crumpled mat.

Scene One. Post-mortem

“Sometimes I feel like a Motherless Child” is on the record player.

Ken is in the middle of the flat. He is listening attentively to the song; his legs slightly apart; his head raised, in profile. He is dressed in a patterned dressing gown and slippers. Underneath the dressing gown he is wearing a white vest, long johns and dark socks. When he speaks, Ken betrays some nervous tics, such as touching his cheek only to slide his finger down towards his chin, or, for a few brief moments, letting his head drop onto his chest or onto his shoulders.

Joe is lying dead on the floor, wrapped in the mat. From the position of the body, we can guess he has suffered a violent death. His feet, wearing sports socks, stick out at one end.

The music comes to an end.

Ken.- They put us in the same urn. Joe. And me. We were just ashes mixed together. But not half and half. There was more of Joe. The funeral service made a balls up. Instead of putting one spoonful of him, then one of me, they lost count. Even in death he had to be more than me.

They scattered our ashes in the Golders Green Gardens, quite a dreary spot, truth be told. There were two separate funerals. Loads of people went to Joe's: writers, famous actors, the press ... They cried over him and recited poetry ... They even wrote him an elegy. And they played his favourite song, "A Day in the Life". Only four people went to my funeral. And no song was played. Because nobody knew my tastes. Nobody except Joe.

I suppose none of this should bother me. In fact, before we even got to the crematorium, Joe and I had long gone. We were in hell ... Yes, both of us. Me for the murder I'd committed. And he for the just rewards of a whole life.

My little hell ... I even had to share my little hell with someone who had hurt me so much in life; if you can call it a life, after what I suffered. It'd be better to describe it as a living death. The life of a zombie. The first thing Joe asked me when he got to hell was how he had died. I lied to him. I didn't tell him that it was me who bashed his head in with a hammer, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine times. I lied to him. But if he knew I was lying, he didn't say anything. He just waltzed off with his hands in his pockets, whistling his favourite song.

-Wait for me!

-You follow me.

Enough!

Yes, I followed him ... With my head hanging down, but knowing the truth, it was me who killed him. Yes, me, his lover, his murderer ... And his victim. Yes, I followed him with my head hanging low and with no tune to whistle because nobody had played my favourite song at the funeral, because nobody knew my tastes.

Nobody except Joe.

Ken goes to the mat and pulls at it to reveal Joe.

Joe stirs, stretching himself. Apart from the sports socks, he is only wearing a pair of red underpants.

Scene Two. Sodom

Joe still on the mat, lying on his side, his head supported by one hand. He completely ignores Ken.

At one point, Ken appears to try to speak, but does not manage to articulate a single word. Finally, he manages to say:

Ken.- Can't you see what I'm saying ...?

Joe.- Ken!

Ken.- Don't you understand?

Joe.- Please!

Joe slaps him.

Joe.- Enough of playing the victim for fuck's sake!

Ken.- I'm going to kill you!

Joe.- Think about what you're saying!

Ken.- What?

Joe.- How are you going to kill me?

Ken.- Er ... With ... With a hammer. I will batter you to death! Like a character from one of our plays!

Joe.- How original!

Ken.- I gave you that idea! I gave you all your ideas!

Joe ignores him.

Ken.- Or with sleeping tablets. I'll poison you. Although maybe that might look like suicide. No, the best thing is to smash your head in with a hammer. Splatter your grey matter all over the ceiling, yes. Then I'd kill myself; overdose on my valiums ...

He looks for the medicine bottle in the pockets of his dressing gown.

Joe.- Careful. Valium gives me a stiffy.

Ken.- Well, if I don't die, at least I'll make good use of your corpse!

Joe.- I'd have already lost my head. You could do with me what you wanted.

Ken.- Huh! Even dead you'd be fucking me!

Joe.- Or rather you'd be fucking me. Well, you'd be getting more off me dead than alive, anyway.

Ken.- No ... I couldn't. I'd kill myself. I couldn't go on living ...

Joe.- After smashing my head in? How considerate of you!

Ken.- I'd burst it open! Can't you see that I love you?

Joe.- In other words, you want me to feel guilty ...

Ken.- What?

Joe.- ... Guilty about your suicide. That's the fucking limit! A victim to the end! You remind me of someone with that same shabby diva spirit of yours ...

He crosses his arms.

Ken.- I'd go to hell ... And on the third day, I wouldn't ascend anywhere.

Joe.- Nor me! I hope.

Ken.- We'd have a great time there too.

Joe.- Just thinking that even hell is Catholic churns my stomach over ...

Ken.- Us two, the new boys in hell ... rebels against ...

Joe.- Whatever they've got!

Ken.- Setting fire to hell. We would discover that there is another ethos beyond goodness and we would shake the foundations of that multinational ...

Joe.- Of course. Then we'd bring everything else crashing to the ground. You don't start with the roof when you're building a house ...

Ken.- What goes up, must come down!

Joe, with his arms crossed, lets himself fall forward, only breaking his fall with the palms of his hands at the very last moment.

He twists around on the floor and laughs.

Ken.- We'd create a new hell ... A new everything!

Joe.- What would we call it?

Ken.- We'd have a God almighty theme tune ... Er ... Devil almighty ... Every morning, at breakfast, Liszt's Funeral march for piano.

Joe.- "A Day in the Life"!

Ken.- "A Day in the Life" ...

Joe.- I read the news today, oh, boy,
about a lucky man who made the grade ...

Ken.- We should create a saviour figure for the sceptics ...

Joe.- Which would be those who had more ...

Ken.- And the less violent. It could be you. I would sit at your right hand and we would decree the death of ideas. No one need ever ponder again "to be or not be".

Joe.- The problem has always been whether to ponder or not.

Ken.- And the sky would be opaque and eyes would be useless and shrivel up like dried walnuts. In the firmament, a thousand doors will open, all of them trapdoors. The earth will be sown with embers to remember what before was ...

Joe.- History. People never pay it enough attention. We need something more dazzling ...

Ken.- Like what?

Joe.- A spectacular process of transition, a fucking brilliant spectacle! The public will be whores and rent boys ... and on stage, customers will have to show everyone the expression they have on their faces when they come; on pain of being stoned to death. You will be the master of ceremonies and I'll be the first to throw stones at Christ. Then we'll all strip him off ...

Ken.- And discover that he only had a tiny prick!

Joe.- We'll fuck him off alright!

Ken.- And no one will believe in shame. And people shall be counted, backwards. And the waves of the sea also.

Joe.- You'll stop smoking.

Ken.- Why?

Joe.- It will be difficult to get hold of tobacco. Only angels deal in vices.

Ken.- We'd recycle them as rent boys. With feathery pricks!

Joe.- That's out of order.

Ken.- And we'd wander together around the palace grounds in our Sunday best, hand in hand.

Joe.- Oh!

Ken.- And we'd remember our lives and you would lie to me whenever I asked you if you ever loved me.

Joe.- Would I say that I had or I hadn't?
The palace, I've thought what we could call it!
Sodom!

The telephone rings.

The two of them go to answer it.

Joe is the quicker of the two.

He picks up the phone.

Joe.- Hello, Achmed!
I called the number you gave me, but they said you'd split.
No, they gave me no idea ...
Already.
This afternoon? Fabulous.
Yes, yes, that'd be fine. See you soon.

He put down the phone.

Ken.- What did he want?

Joe gets dressed. White shirt, leather trousers and leather jacket, high boots.

Ken.- What did he want?

Joe.- I'm going out.

Joe goes out.

Ken begins to prowls around the bedsit.

He lights a cigarette.

He doesn't seem to know where to put himself, nor what to do with himself.

He goes over to the record player and puts on "Sometimes I feel like a motherless child" again.

The telephone rings.

He picks it up.

Ken.- Yes?

Disguising his voice:

Ken.- Okay, Achmed.
Yes, of course, it would be better for me too, if we met there!
See you soon, Achmed.

He put the phone down.

Ken, very still.

Slowly, he essays a smile on his lips.

Although his eyes remain sad.

Scene Three. The Dead Mother (I of II)

Joe arrives.

Joe.- Ken ...

Ken.- What?

Joe.- When did you say you were going to kill me?

Ken.- Today. Yesterday ... Is it dawn already?

Joe.- No, when are you going to do it? Which day?

Ken.- Are you in a hurry? When did you arrive? Hand us a fag, go on.

Joe.- The hammer's not in the toolbox.

Ken.- That's because it's somewhere else.

Joe.- Have you taken the hammer?

Ken.- Leave it out! I'm not going to kill you ... And get away from me. You stink like the gents! I'm scared of death.

Joe.- You leave me speechless.

Ken.- Without you, what would become of me?

Joe.- Coward ...

Ken.- Joe. You're famous ... I'm ...

Joe.- I don't know where you're going with this ...

Ken.- I made you famous. I've been behind every line you've written. And you've taken all the glory. You haven't even left me the crumbs.

Joe.- And if you kill me, you won't have any artwork left.

Ken.- Like a painter burning his retrospective exhibition.

Joe.- All the more reason to slash your wrists, mate. Without me, you're nobody.

Ken.- Son of a bitch!

Joe.- Well alright, you are somebody. You're a fucking coward!

Ken.- I don't want to be a nobody, not in life, nor in death!

Joe.- You will be remembered as the man who loved the great English playwright Joe ...

Ken.- That's a lie!

Joe.- Of course it is! I have never loved you!

Ken.- Tell me that what you just said is a lie ...

Joe.- Don't you always say that you made me what I am? Well, make me say that's a lie ...

Ken.- Tell me you haven't ever thought that ...

Joe.- Oh, how unconvincing! This is the power of my creator? You're nothing more than a sack of shit! You might have been behind every word I've ever written, but I'm the one who made them yours. For you it was all nothing more than another pathetic attempt, like so many others, to show off your lack of creative talent! Now, let's see if you can get this straight, the creative one here is me and for one simple reason, because I have the power, the power, in my plays, to make the public swallow every line from the first to the last; the power to make them listen when I want them to and applaud at the end

whether they liked it or not. And then they'll all talk about me. For good or ill. Like sheep. To be a creator, it's not enough to simply create. You've got to be able to demonstrate it. And the results of your action follow.

Ken.- You are my definitive work of art ...

Joe.- You're not listening to me ...

Ken.- Joe ...?

Joe.- Shut up! For fuck's sake!
Goodnight.

Ken.- Before, I let you believe you were free ... But Achmed didn't show up, did he? I made that happen. You're a puppet. My puppet ...

Joe.- Are you saying that ...

Ken.- I pretended to be jealous so that you could believe you are freer ... I created you; I control all your reactions. Nothing you do is spontaneous. It's all programmed ...

Joe.- Ken, I'm knackered. I've come twice tonight. I want to sleep. Goodnight.

Ken.- If it wasn't for me, you'd be a waster. Pure scum.

Joe.- I struggle to become, one day, pure one hundred percent social scum!

Ken.- You can't unlearn what you know, just as you can't work miracles ...

Joe.- Oh no? Let's see what you think of this.

Joe dresses as a woman.

He put his trousers on his head with the trouser legs hanging down over the shoulders as if they were long hair. He picks up two records placing them on his chest as if they were breasts, his index fingers simulating nipples that constantly move.

He adopts the pose of a jaded housewife, with very camp mannerisms.

As Joe gets deeper into his characterisation, Ken pales, terrified.

Joe.- Ken? Are you still awake, at this time? What's the matter? Weren't you expecting me, son? It's unbelievable that I'm here, isn't it? And so alive!

He makes a buzzing sound with his lips.

Joe.- Darling, don't put that face on ... Ah, perhaps you're shocked to hear me talking, after the accident ... It wasn't mortal, was it? The last thing I would have wanted is to snuff it right before your fucking eyes, you bastard! You deserved every one of those beatings your father gave you ...! And I can't only talk, I can sing too. Let me see, what can I sing? Ah! "Andrea Chénier", a fantastic opera! Ideal!

La mamma morta
m'hanno alla porta
della stanza mia ...
Moriva e mi salvava!

Oh, I'm all out of tune, aren't I? No? How good you are to me ...

Ken.- You disgust me.

Joe stops dead. He opens his mouth and puts his finger on his tongue. He lets the records fall then appears to faint.

Joe.- Did you also program that?
You underestimate me with your paternalism, Ken ... I made myself! I make and unmake everything that goes on inside here ...

Ken.- No ...
You're wrong ...

Joe.- I could even unmake the dislike I feel for you and love you.

Ken.- You can't.
No, that you can't do!
No way.

Joe.- Look!

Joe throws Ken on the floor and leaps on top of him. Rapidly, his head descends along his back and then disappears under his dressing gown. He kisses Ken's arse while wanking him with his hand.

Ken weeps in silence.

Ken comes, whimpering.

Joe gets up. He wipes his mouth on his fore arm.

Joe.- You see, my love? I am free!

Joe goes out.

Ken goes into the foetal Position.

Scene Four. First Time: Present

Ken still in foetal position.

Joe puts on his boots and white shirt. He put a record on the record player.

We hear "Brazil".

As the song progresses, Joe loses his lethargy and starts to dance to the rhythm of the music. His gestures become ever more obscene, but he completely ignores the presence of Ken: He mimes playing the maracas as if wanking two cocks at the same time, he runs his hands up and down the front and back of his legs and thighs; he attempts to caress his own nipples with his tongue ...

And dances and sings and sings and dances.

At the end of the song, he adopts a similar position to that of Ken.

Scene Five. Second Time: Past

Joe still in foetal position.

Ken sits up.

Ken.- He was 18.

I was 25.

We met at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts. Joe was like an innocent young kitten; he hadn't learned to sharpen his claws yet ... After six months we dropped out of RADA and started living together, as friends, in a small austere flat at number 25 Noel Road. We would never leave it.

We became lovers there. Our first amorous dabbling. Well, to tell you the truth, mine. He lost his virginity at 14 in a Cinema. "My Favourite Brunette" was on. I remember the first time we made love; it was the day of the Coronation. Like Queen Elizabeth, I spent the day with my legs open.

Joe sits up.

Joe.- The BBC was broadcasting the ceremony.

Ken.- We saw it together.

Joe.- Lying in bed.

Ken.- I couldn't stand it any longer!

Joe.- I looked at you out of the corner of my eye.

Ken.- You didn't move.

Joe.- No.

Ken.- I had wanked so many times ...

My fingers caressing your swallow tattoo ...

Joe.- You put your hand on my leg ...

As the scene unfolds, Joe recites the speech of the Archbishop crowning Queen Elizabeth II.

Joe.- Sirs, I here present unto you Queen Elizabeth, your undoubted Queen. Wherefore all you who are come this day to do your homage and service, are you willing to do the same?

God save Queen Elizabeth!

Both adopt their ceremonial roles.

Ken, as Queen Elizabeth, does a 360° turn stopping every 90°. Then kneels before Joe and begins to fellate him.

Joe.- Madam, is your Majesty willing to take the Oath?

Ken.- I am willing.

Joe.- Will you solemnly promise and swear to govern the Peoples of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Union of South Africa, Pakistan and Ceylon, and of your Possessions and other Territories to any of them belonging or pertaining, according to their respective laws and customs?

Ken.- I solemnly promise so to do.

Joe.- Will you to your power cause Law and Justice, in Mercy, to be executed in all your judgements?

Ken.- I will.

Joe.- Will you to the utmost of your power maintain the Laws of God and the true profession of the Gospel? Will you to the utmost of your power maintain in the United Kingdom the Protestant Reformed Religion established by law? Will you maintain and preserve inviolably the settlement of the Church of England, and the doctrine, worship, discipline, and government thereof, as by law

established in England? And will you preserve unto the Bishops and Clergy of England, and to the Churches there committed to their charge, all such rights and privileges, as by law do or shall appertain to them or any of them?

Joe is at the climax of the fellatio.

Ken.- All this I promise to do. The things which I have here promised, I will perform, and keep. So help me ...

Ken has a coughing fit, and seems about to choke.

Joe.- Amen!

Scene Six. interview

Joe alone in the bedsit.

In the background, we can hear a radio broadcast. It is an interview that Joe recorded, full of lies. As the interview progresses, Joe realises the contradiction in which his life is shrouded, the dilemma between the image he projects and the reality. He slowly collapses.

Joe.- (Voice off) My father was a gardener. My mother a machinist. I had quite an ordinary schooling. I didn't get my eleven plus. I started studying accountancy, but I quit after a year.

I was sacked from all the jobs I had between sixteen and eighteen. I was never interested in any of them. I resented having to go to work in the morning. And very often I didn't bother.

I just looked in shop windows, or if it was a nice sunny morning I'd sit on a bench and have an ice-cream. At night, I belonged to an amateur dramatic society. In fact, I belonged to so many it got ridiculous. The rehearsals for the shows clashed.

I wanted to be an actor, but didn't know how to go about it. The careers office told me I'd have to go to some recognised dramatic academy. I actually got into RADA the first time. For the audition I did a piece from Peter Pan, a dialogue between Captain Hook, Smee and the crocodile. It was a schizophrenic act; I don't know how I did it, but I managed to impress the judges.

RADA? It was complete rubbish. I wasn't taught anything. At the end of the term, I realised I had known more about acting at the beginning of my first term than I did at the end of it. During the next two years there, I completely lost my confidence... And my virginity.

Then I left RADA and got married. That didn't work out. It just didn't work out. I mean, I was too young ... We just drifted apart. No rows, it just fizzled out. However one is liberal about modern marriage, there is this responsibility. I don't like possessions and a wife and children are possessions, they have to be possessed and supported.

After a year, I started writing. I never wanted to be a writer, I always wanted to be an actor, but then I did have a talent for writing, but I never got anything published at all, never.

I don't have a chip on my shoulder about having been sent to prison. No, I realise what I did was unforgivable, I'm just unrepentant. I objected to public money going on dull, badly written books. I used to write false blurbs on the flaps of certain library books, which the Magistrate described as "mildly obscene".

No, I liked prison. I was locked in my cell for twenty-three hours a day. I used to read a lot.

Well, obviously, you've got to have police; they're a necessary evil. I mean, I've no objection to them tracking down murderers and bank robbers, clearly you can't have people behaving in a completely anarchic way. I believe though, that they interfere far too much with private morals. People having it off in the backs of cars, or smoking marihuana ... Oh no, the law don't terrify me, because I know how to deal with them. For instance, you never tell them the truth. You tell the most convenient lie, but one which they'll believe. And, of course, you're awfully nice. I mean, it's no good standing on your rights once they've got you in their power. Cowardice? No. Survival.

People think I write fantasy. But I don't. Some things may be exaggerated or distorted in the way some painters distort and alter things, but they're realistic figures.

People always like to put you in compartments and I didn't like that. I think compartments of any kind are bad. They do it with sex. "He's a leather fetishist" or "He likes little girls in pink knickers". Well, I think one should like everything, or try everything in all spheres of life. I don't think one should reject any experience - although I don't really fancy being beaten or anything like that.

Joe.- Phony! Phony! Why is everything phony? Why do you make me lie?

Scene Seven. Doppelgänger

Ken.- I watch you.
I explore you.
I make you toll like a bell and I still can't find enough reason to ...
Kill you.
I'm scared of dying.
I've got too many memories ...

Joe.- I have no memories.
Or if I have, they're not mine.
They belong to others. That's what's important. That people remember you.
With death, you die and so do your memories.
But even the memory of others fades over time ...
To be remembered ...

Ken.- Does that tempt you?

Joe.- It interests me.

Ken.- Not me.

Joe.- Don't you want to be famous?
The most important thing is that you shouldn't have the chance to explain everything.
Let them speculate.
Look at Shakespeare.

Ken.- "Clandestine emotions"

Joe.- Like in my diary.

Ken.- Our diary. Our diary, which covered up for you, but where I am nothing more than a minor satellite orbiting around you.

Joe.- Did you read the section on Tangier?

Ken.- What a string of lies. No one has ever seen me happy.

Joe.- But only you and I know that.

Ken.- Do you think anyone will believe what you wrote? Our orgies with Arab boys around the hookah ... Come off it! The first one who came near us almost finished us ... And those pompous sentences: "The countryside was green and gold under a resplendent sun". Please! What crap!

Joe.- I had a ball writing it!

Ken.- As I did curing your gonorrhoea ... as if ... When your lesbian agent reads it ...

The telephone rings.

Joe.- I've told you hundreds of times, don't call her that!

He waits for a response from Ken, but doesn't get one.

He picks up the telephone.

Joe.- Hi, Peggy!
We were just talking about you ...
With Ken, of course.
The interview was a success? Fabulous!

To Ken:

Joe.- Her phone hasn't stopped ringing ... press and ...

On the telephone:

Joe.- Ah, about that ... Ken says the diary you asked me to write is too truthful and might scandalise more people than ...

Yes.

Of course.

That goes without saying.

No, don't worry, I'll take no notice. I'll carry on then. We're going to take London by storm again!

A big hug, darling.

Bye.

He puts the phone down.

Ken.- Everything around you is phony! You've built up this image of yourself, a made to measure world! You're ... you're ... a pariah who believes he no longer is one because that's what he's fooled himself into thinking! Pariah! Nothing more than a pariah!

Joe.- I like that word.

Pariah.

I'll use that in my next play.

Ken.- Huh, another thing you'll have stolen off me. You've never left me anything! From the very first day we met! You only asked me if I wanted to come with you to that bookshop because I had a car! And when we got there, you didn't even know what you wanted to buy.

Remember the book I gave you as a present there?

Joe.- No.

Ken.- In prison your mask was perfect. You passed yourself off as straight, when you've never been straight in your whole life, though you like to boast that you swing both ways ...

Joe.- Wasn't it you that caught me at that RADA party with ...?

Ken.- Because you were conditioned by society! Like you still are now; no matter how much you think you run rings round everyone! You hide it all so well. You've become as hypocritical and inconsistent as the rest of them! What was that mask you put on in prison all about, eh? And besides claiming to be straight, you invented a family that, by pure chance, coincided, in every detail, with mine. You claimed to be an orphan, like me ... It was all a defence mechanism. Pathetic! Can't you see the lengths your survival instinct will go to? Soon be nothing left of you ... Joe, they stuck us in prison for defacing library books. Destroying books!

We didn't want to be like them.

Joe.- I am not like them.

Ken.- You weren't! Then on, you never want to be alone ...!

Joe.- Like you.

Ken.- I thought that ...

Perhaps ...

At your side ...

Joe.- I've never changed sides, Ken.

I've always been on my side.

Ken.- And you just kept stealing from me and stealing from me ... More and more.

Joe.- Results, Ken.

Results.

Ken.- You falsify my art.

Joe.- Your art doesn't exist!

Ken.- My life!

Joe.- I am your life.

Ken.- Then I have every right to put an end to you whenever I want.

Joe.- Right?

Ken.- What?

Joe.- Don't turn all moral on me.

Ken.- I'm not a moralist. I'm anti-moralist.

Joe.- Then you will anti-kill me ...

Ken.- Yes. I'll kill you to commit suicide ... But before that, you're going to live in my world. Let's see if you can hide in that as well as you can in their world.

Joe.- Are you daring me? What will you do? Take me with you through the looking glass?

Ken.- No.

I will string you up like the puppet you are.

Scene Eight. Bondage

Joe, at Ken's feet, moving like a feline.

Ken has Joe on a lead.

Ken.- Speak.

He tugs on the lead.

Joe.- Power is the feeling that comes closest to orgasm.

Ken.- I don't understand you.

Joe.- Because you can't differentiate between love and sex.

Ken.- You can.

Joe.- I've trained myself to do it.

Ken.- Wouldn't you say that was a case of survival instinct?
Do you know what I get out of abusing power?

Joe.- Power is always an abuse.

Ken.- I become desire.
They all desire me.
Even I desire me.
I am desire itself.

Joe.- I don't desire you.

Ken.- Nevertheless, you desire to be at my level, to give as good as you get.

Joe.- And, as the desire you are, what do you desire?

Ken.- Nothing you can give me.

Joe.- I've never offered you my arse.

Ken.- Let yourself go and keep on my good side.

Joe.- Never.

Ken.- Liberty is nothing more than another prison.

Joe.- Above all for those with power, eh? And desire is what's left for everyone else.
You are solitude crowned Queen.
If I were free, I'd enjoy myself like no one ever has.
I would have everything.
Everything.

Ken.- Life and death.

Joe.- Memories, Ken.
Memories.

Ken.- You want me to humiliate myself, don't you?
Don't you?

Joe.- You want *me* to humiliate myself.

Ken.- Before that I would have to humiliate you.

Joe.- No need! I can do that just fine by myself ...

Ken.- You are my work of art ... Almost a god ...

Joe.- I can feel everything! There are no obstacles for me!

Ken.- Love me!

Joe.- That's it, humiliate me!

Ken.- No! I want you to love me!

Joe.- Oh no, please! Look, my hairs are standing on end. My prick's shrivelling up ...

Ken.- I'll kill you ...

I'll kill you and I'll write in your diary everything you've put me through these last few days ...

Joe.- And when the police arrive ...

Ken.- Because one of the neighbours has phoned them ...

Joe.- Mrs. Boynes. She's always borrowing things off us.

Ken.- Called in by Mrs Boynes, they'll kick the door down and find you with your brains splattered all over the bed. All over the wall. All over the ceiling.

Joe.- And you'll be lying on the floor with twenty-two Nembutals in your stomach ...

Ken.- Naked ...

Joe.- My death takes longer than yours. I watch you die.

Ken.- In just a few minutes, I am dead ...

Joe.- I enjoy your death ...

Ken.- I'll always remember you in life ...

Joe.- The police will find a note in my diary. It says ...
What have you written?

Ken.- "If you read his diary all will be explained." Signed with my initials. And a dramatic postscript:
"Especially the latter part."

Joe.- And who do they get to recognise the bodies?

Ken.- Peggy. She'd love that ...

Joe.- Warned of the shocking sight she is about to see, she hesitates at the door, turns and enters backwards ...!

Ken.- Steadying herself with her hand against the wall ...

Joe.- Her fingers sliding through the blood splattered on the walls ...

Ken.- Then she turns around and sees me ...

Joe.- Powerful.
Like a Roman emperor.

Ken.- In love with a life he never managed to enjoy ...

Joe.- You wanted me.

Joe breaks free.

Ken.- Yes ...

Joe.- At last! See! About time! It's me who is in charge!

Scene Nine. The Dead Mother (II of II)

Joe at Ken's feet, curled up in a ball.

Joe has Ken on a lead.

Ken.- If there's one thing that fascinates me about you, it's your feet ... You only ever show them to me, you always hide them from everybody else. Your feet belong to me. It is the only part of your life that you reserve exclusively for me.

Joe.- Do you like it when I wank you with my foot?

Ken.- Yes ...

Joe.- I don't like people seeing my feet. I think I look sexier in socks. Naked, but with my socks on ...

Ken.- Liar. That's what you put in your diary. Nothing about your feet being malformed ...

Joe.- Take my socks off!

Ken takes his socks off.

Joe.- Kiss my feet.

Ken kisses his feet.

Joe.- Bite them.

Ken hesitates for a moment. Then carefully nibbles at them.

Joe.- Bite them, you great poof! Tear off some skin! Bite them!

Ken.- I don't want to hurt you ...

Joe.- And you say you want to kill me! Bite them, for fuck's sake! Bugger! You fucking bugger! You stop me feeling pleasure or pain! You only want to subjugate me to your will, for yourself alone!

Ken.- No ...! You don't know how much I suffer ...

Joe.- Do you think you're the only one with the right to suffer?

Ken.- I ...

Joe.- Let's see, where are your scars then? Show me your scars!

Ken.- I was an only child! After me ...

Joe.- After you there is nothing!

Ken.- That's true.

My mother couldn't have any more kids. I was a caesarean. It left her barren. Contrary to what you might expect, that brought me closer to my mother. We shared everything. We shared everything for eleven years ... Far too little time for a kid. My mother was like all mothers ... They straighten your collar, before letting you out on the street. They wipe your face with their fingers dipped in spit to remove any marks you'd got playing. They comb your hair, adding a parting on one side, very slowly. Like this. Very slowly. They plaster you with cheap perfume that stinks. They shout right in your face when you won't eat. They shout with their mouth wide open. So close to your face that you nearly burst out crying. That mouth so open you could see the uvula. And all her fillings. So open that a wasp flew in there. And stung her tongue. She choked. She writhed around. She was dying. On the floor. And. She continued screaming. The wasp buzzing around her teeth. And. She died right in front of her son's eyes. He was only eleven. She died crying. Screaming. Knowing that the last image her son would have of her was of her dying.

He was eleven. I don't know if my father still wanted me after that. He wandered round the house keeping himself to himself. I skulked around the walls. I curled up in various nooks and crannies. Nested in the spaces of ... I was terrified of the corners. I never knew if I was going to bump into my

dad behind one of them. Sometimes he just came up on me ... Didn't give me a chance to hide ... I held my breath. My tears froze. Whimpering. Sharp pains in my diaphragm. My father closing in on me ... Crossing past me. Saying nothing. And disappearing round the next corner. I need a fag ...

Joe.- Years later ...

Ken.- What ...?

Joe.- Your father. You came down to make the tea ...

Ken.- And found him with his head in the gas oven. I turned off the gas, filled the kettle, and put it on the ring to boil. Drank my tea. Had a shave. Then I went to tell the neighbours. My dad has died. And you ask me where my scars are?

Joe.- Where are your scars?

Ken.- Haven't you had enough?

Joe.- Where are your scars? Where are your scars? Show me them! Where are they?

Ken.- I don't know, I don't know!

Joe.- You're off your rocker! Look at you! Where are they? How dare you ask me to love you! The only thing you know how to do is give orders because you can't feel! No sir! No!
I want to feel!

Joe leaves.

Scene Ten. Respect

Joe arrives.

Ken.- You still stink of sex. Have you washed your feet well?

Joe.- Yes.

Ken.- Where have you been?

Joe.- Do you really want to know?

In the Gents on Holloway Road.

This couple came in: a man and a woman.

Ken.- Go on.

Joe.- She hid in one of the cubicles. He was a bit of alright: the bait. We exchanged glances and he leads me towards the cubicle. There, I gave his Mrs one, while he took me from behind.

Ken.- In your diary you said we had an open relationship. Well, open on your part anyway. I just put up with it. Why was that?

Joe.- That's easy. You didn't have any other choice. For three reasons. One, you love me. Two, I don't love you. And three, my indifference to you only makes me a better love object.

Ken.- It's not fair.

Joe.- How perceptive of you! But that's how it is. It's not fair. Don't try and understand me. I need to steer clear.

Ken.- Of what?

Joe.- Of all this, of this reality that ...

Ken.- I escape from myself through you.
You are my fiction.

Joe.- There are other fictions!

Ken.- None that I am attracted to ...

Joe.- How do you know? I am the writer. Who creates the fictions. Who works the miracles.

Ken.- I can only feel through you.

Joe.- Then I'll explain to you what I feel.
I was in the Gents on Holloway Road.
This couple came in: a man and a woman.
She hid in one of the cubicles.

Ken.- She was dressed as a man ...

Joe.- So they wouldn't catch her ...

Ken.- Maybe she was a man ... A boy ...

Joe.- A minor ...

Ken.- Blond. With curly hair.

Joe.- And an enormous tool.

Ken.- The man stayed outside.

Joe.- He really was a bit of alright, the bait.

Ken.- Just because he was older, it doesn't mean he was the brains of the outfit.

Joe.- It was the boy who convinced him to go to the bogs ...

Ken.- Fed up of always having the same prick ...

Joe.- Wrinkled. Full of white hairs ...

Ken.- Despite that, he was a bit of alright ...

Joe.- For a change, yes. I came in behind him. I looked at him in the mirror. He saw me. We were in front of the cubicles. He took my hand ...

Ken.- He kissed you ...

Joe.- He pushed me against the door ...

Ken.- Which opens and there was the boy, with his trousers down ...

Joe.- His back to me.

Ken.- No. Facing you. With his cock in his hand. Good and stiff. He wants you to suck it.

Joe.- The man, touching me up from behind ...

Ken.- Squatting, I want all of it in my mouth ...

Joe.- The boy preferred to suck mine ...

Ken.- All yours.

Joe.- The man unbuttoned his pants.

Ken.- You went down on him.

Joe.- He fondled my buttocks ...

Ken.- What lips the fucker had ...

Joe.- A slap on the arse ...

Ken.- Go on ...

Joe.- And inside!

It's ...

It's like ...

Ken.- What?

What?

Joe.- Getting on the number nineteen bus and suddenly finding yourself travelling at light speed!

Ken.- And ...?

Joe.- What?

Ken.- What else?

Joe.- Well, the three of us come and then we all go our separate ways.

Ken.- But ...

What if you liked the boy? Or the guy?

Joe.- You would probably have liked the guy more. Holes are in great demand.

Ken.- And if he wanted to see me again?

Joe.- He'd ask for your phone number.

Ken.- I can't give him that, I live with you.

Joe.- Well, you haven't got a boyfriend.

Ken.- Maybe he'd give me his phone number. And suggest that I came home with him tonight.

Joe.- And you find out that he lives in this huge mansion near Hyde Park ...

Ken.- With a butler and everything.

Joe.- And once you are in his bedroom, he asks you ...

Ken.- To read Baudelaire aloud to him. Or Wilde ...

Joe.- Apollinaire, Sade ... See how you can't differentiate between love and sex? Sex for the sake of it! There's nothing else like it! It's you lot, those who are obsessed with justice, that spend the most time tipping her scales!

Ken.- I know what you're trying to say ... But I don't understand it ...

Joe.- Life is unfair. And wanting to make it fair just means you don't know how to live.

Ken.- Well, at least tonight's bonk was alright, eh?

Joe.- In fact, it was with a dwarf and a syphilitic!

Ken pretends not to have heard Joe's last, unfair, remark

Joe, disconcerted by Ken's reaction, has his head in his hands.

Ken stands in front of Joe, imitating him. Imperceptibly, he becomes a mirror image of Joe.

Joe.- It's like trying to fill a hole from inside a mirror ...

Ken.- Just what I wanted to hear: You in the mirror! Nothing more than my reflection! You are also unfair to me, Joe. In your own way. With your idealism.

Joe.- What?

Ken.- You're an idealist! Yes you are! Does it make you mad to hear me say it? Idealist! Idealist!

Joe spits in his face.

Ken raises an arm as if to hit him.

Joe stops his arm in full flight and they begin to fight.

Joe is giving out the blows. Ken receiving them.

The beating goes on and on.

Scene Eleven. Depressive moods

Ken.- Peace.

We've never talked about that.

Joe.- Because that's even further beyond happiness.

Ken.- But I want to feel at peace.

Joe.- Without being happy?

Ken.- Is it possible?

Joe.- I hope so. I prefer people to value me, rather than love me, but it looks like before they can value you they must love you, at least a little.

Ken.- I went to see the doctor again this afternoon.

Joe.- Fuck, what did he tell you?

Ken.- Above all, I've got to stop smoking, tobacco is slowly killing me. I told him I was in no hurry to die.

And that you're not bothered.

It won't be tobacco that finishes you off.

Joe.- You told him that I'm not bothered?

Ken.- Yes.

Joe.- You know I don't like smoke.

Ken.- The main reason you haven't kissed me in two years.

Joe.- Don't start ...

Ken.- Do you remember when we first met? The mutual attraction was obvious ... You looked at me in a way that ... Sounding me out with your eyes ...

Joe.- What else did he tell you?

Ken.- That while you exteriorise your creativity, I interiorise it.

Joe.- And?

Ken.- He thinks I'm a very deep person. And better than you.

Joe.- He said that?

Ken.- Yes.

Joe.- Does he know who I am?

Ken.- Yes, and he says that writing what you write, it would be better if you interiorise a little.

Joe.- What a shithead! What else did he say?

Ken.- You should be faithful to me.

Joe.- I can't. I don't feel guilt.

Ken.- And love me more.

Joe.- Love you? Doesn't that shit know that because we're queers our love is a little skew whiff?

Ken.- No. I don't believe he does.

Joe.- You are a bit odd today, Ken.

Ken.- This is not going to have a happy ending, is it?
The doctor prescribed antidepressants for me. And amphetamines.
I've only taken the antidepressants.

Joe.- Why?

Ken.- You can't even imagine how I feel, how a marginalised child who has never received any affection feels! And I need it! I don't know if that's good or bad! I only know that I need it!
Kiss me!

Joe.- No.

Ken wanders around the bedsit.

Ken.- Where is it ...? Where is it ...?

Joe.- What are you looking for?

Ken.- Where is the ...?

Joe.- Ken! What are you looking for?

Ken! Where did you put the hammer?

The telephone rings.

The two of them go to answer it.

Joe is the quicker of the two.

Joe.- Ah ...! Good evening, Doctor.
Yes, speaking ...

Ken finds the bottle of amphetamines.

Ken.- Here!

He opens it and takes two. He hits himself on the chest to help swallow them.

Joe.- Yes, much better, thank you. The antidepressants you gave me have left me a little groggy, but the amphetamines have got my body buzzing round the room. Yes, just now I was with Joe, on the carpet, taking a sidereal journey around the Milky Way.

Ken.- Are you passing yourself off as me?

Joe.- You have done it to me, loads of times!

On the telephone:

Joe.- It is Joe, he says we're about to land on the moon, I should return to my seat.
Yes, I'll try and see a psychiatrist as soon as possible ...
Whenever you want. Got to go! Ciao!

He puts the phone down.

Joe.- Give me one of those.

Ken.- No.
How difficult it is trying to make things work out!

Joe.- What could be more beautiful, as an end, than an arid lunar landscape with the blackness of space as a backdrop?

Ken.- A kiss?

Joe.- What are you saying? Society has got to you, Ken. You're losing your own awareness.

Ken.- You're superior to them ... And when they realise it and ask for your forgiveness, what will you do?

Joe.- I'll humiliate them even more.

Ken.- You're too proud ... That's where you lose it. Christ wasn't ...

Joe.- Are you holding him up to me, as an example?

Ken.- No, not to you. To me. I feel ... childless ...

The telephone rings.

Once again it is Joe who picks it up

Joe.- Ah, it's you again, Doctor!

How are we? Well, Joe is on the summit of Golgotha, if you get my meaning, and I'm sending him my celestial angels, not via express delivery, of course! Let's leave him to enjoy his spell in hell a little ...

Ah, you've arranged an appointment for me the day after tomorrow ... Fabulous.

Yes, yes, I'm taking note of it as we speak.

Yes ...

Yes ...

At eleven o'clock ...

Fabulous.

Ciao, handsome!

He puts the phone down.

Ken.- It would be awful if you were left an orphan ...

Joe.- Would you like to be famous?

Ken.- Yes.

Joe.- It's like having a wank. Fleeting. Try it.

Ken.- Fleeting?

Joe.- Yes.

Ken.- How long is it since ... How long have you been famous?

Joe.- Too bloody long.

Ken.- You must be about to ... take a dive in popularity.

Joe.- Yes.

A plunge.

Have you only just realised?

Ken.- Yes.

We've got so little time left.

Joe nods in silence.

Ken goes to look for the hammer.

He stands behind Joe

He raises it with both hands.

Ken kills Joe.

Scene Twelve. Requiem

Ken is in the middle of the flat. He is clearly upset. His tics are worse: he twists the cord on his dressing gown around and around, his eyes darting here and there ...

Joe is lying dead on the floor, wrapped in the mat. From the position of the body, we can guess he has suffered a violent death. His feet, wearing sports socks, stick out at one end.

Ken.- What a smell, Joe! Is that what fresh corpses smell like? Before they've been interfered with. No alcohol. No essential oils. No wreaths of flowers. Simply dead. Dead. At last. Lifeless. No role to play. No ideas left. None of my ideas left. Barely dead. Only dead. Dead at last! Was that what you wanted? You preferred to die, rather than love me? I had enough love for the both of us ... Was that the only way out?

I loved you. I loved you in life ... And ...

I'll go on loving you in death.

Yes.

No need to doubt it.

Yes.

I feel it here inside, yes, here ...

You don't know how much I feel ...

I can't go on without you ...

Don't leave me alone.

I didn't kill you, honest?

It was all a joke.

None of this is real.

None of this is true.

Do you hear me?

Do you hear me?

Answer me!

Don't leave me here.

In this silence ...

Don't leave me ...

You smell lovely.

Will I smell like that, too?

What's that you say ...?

I can't hear you ...

Speak a little louder ...

Your voice seems to be coming from so far away ...

Where did you say you are?

Will you take me with you?

I don't want you to be alone, you've never known how to be alone, it makes you so anxious and you start walking the floor in circles ... Are you alright there? Tell me ...

Take me with you, don't leave me here ... I love you, you know?

Yes, there too I will love you.

Yes, I promise not to bother you.

We'll be together again.

Take my hand ...

Hold my hand ...

Just for a bit ...

Help me follow you.

Yes, that's it, a little stronger.

Don't be afraid.

You won't hurt me.

No.

Happy?

Yes.

Happy.

You'll make me so happy ...

