

EXTRACT: KIMBERLEY O'NEILL

*To dream?*

To dream, yes, to engage in reverie. This is not to remove them from the real, or to establish a fictional hermitage, above or away from the world but to allow them to recoup, regroup, reequip their unconsciousness, the place that must be populated afresh with imagery of their choosing.

*Where are we now? My notes are becoming a bit random.*

I think we have been following the same woman all this time. And tracing her thoughts somehow...

*Back to the painting?*

Yes. In her memory, the painting contained two opened-mouthed figures almost life-sized, on a tightly cropped dark grey background. She visualises mostly muted colours and some areas of distressed white cloth as part of their clothes, leaving her with the impression that the two bodies have had their passions all but drained from them.

*Where did she first see it?*

In Berlin. The Gemäldegalerie again. Probably empty again, so the memory of it was dream like.

*Only her and it.*

And so, it lodged there, in her head, just as it was. When she arrived at the flat she was rooting around in her kitchen drawer trying to find a postcard of the painting,

which she had sent to herself from that trip. She turned it over; *Essendes Bauernpaar* um 1620, Georges De La Tour. The painting was commissioned to hang over the doorway of some holy house. It had the right admixture of sentiment for the job; inspiriting charity coupled with moral foreboding. *Soupe-maigre* and a dead-eyed stare. Dried peas from small bowls carried by shrunken make-shift spoons. The female figure, mouth agape spoon in midair, caught indisposed, dispossessed forever. The couple were not so drained when she inspected the postcard, there is a lot of red in the frame, the male peasant wears red. He looks down with a flicker of anger. The woman looks eaten by her own hunger. She had to admit herself to the painting's strangeness's. The figures floating in a non-space, spectrally illuminated against the dark. Mid-thought, looking closer, she was disrupted by the realisation of only one open mouth in the painting, where she had always imagined two. She continually returns to the gaping orifice, she senses the mouth as black and single eye, looking back at her somehow.

She squints closer. She felt energized when she first saw the painting in the museum, now she thinks she was naïve. Sees the contradiction to her own hungry eyes. After seeing so many acres of wealthy, pious faces, smirking down on her from the museum's walls, she had been refreshed by this painting of nameless people. But the open mouth serves only as a warning to the well-fed, a fearful incitement to self-preserve within a swampy status-quo. (Now the image has taken on a damp quality for her).

She watches a video on youtube; *Madelbrot Deep Zoom*, a digital animation with the repeated motion of zooming-in through infinite fractal patterns. She imagines being repeatedly sucked through the gaping mouth into a void behind the canvas, only to reappear again in front of the female peasant with her blank stare and open mouth. Trapped in a perpetual cycle of stuckness, sensation eternally impoverished.