

SLUMALITY

Scene 30

[Setting:] An urban landscape. A bus.

Faces droop into windows and seats. The madman bobs back and forth like the other bodies, in his seat, on the bus, in unison, as it rumbles along the empty street, his body an interesting mass of moving parts, elastic tissues, and inward neuroses.

Empty windows pass by. *Signs, street posts, bodies, arms. Two sockets stare blankly at the pavement.*

The madman salutes the fallen: his thin arm rises and his hand emerges. A single flick and then it vanishes back into the folds of his coat, a brown coat, buttoned, with nylon patches on the elbows. Within the coat could be a body, but no-one would know. Even the protruding face resembles the landscape it passes through, a grey-brown fabric of folds and furrows, part shadow, part ridge, the faint glimmer of hope in an otherwise sunken eye.

Another body.

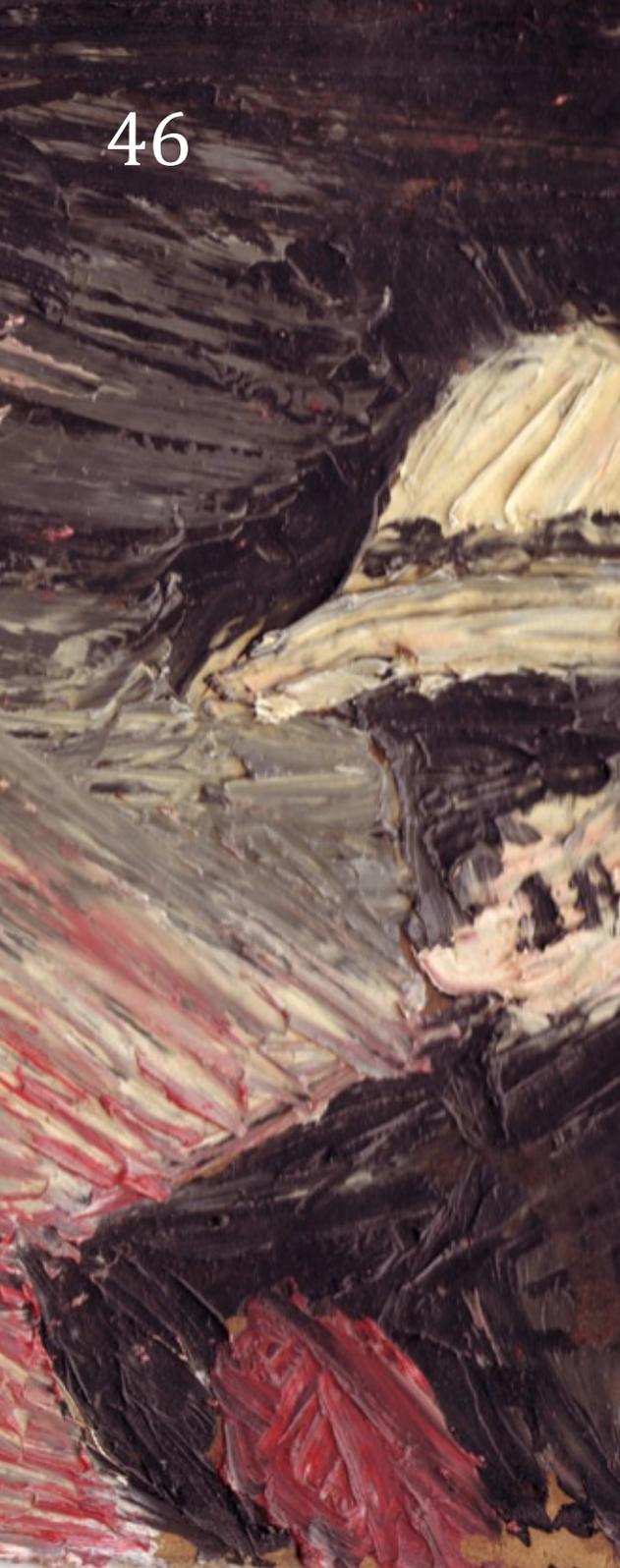
Another flick to the fallen: a mangled display of limbs wedged in a drain. Again the hand vanishes.

Bodies rock to and fro, the harmony of absence, eyes pitted against reruns of past lives, kisses from long unfelt lovers, punches from long still felt breakdowns, a patchwork of trauma and dislocation, image after image of empty and impenetrable windows and landscapes, a blurring of dreamscape and actuality, simulacra and simulation, all at once.

The madman arrives at a place and gets off. The doors suck shut behind him and the bus murmurs away.

He surveys the landscape, first left and then right, forward and then back, but in every direction it is almost entirely the same, shades of grey blurring into buildings and skies and factories and fences. Roads (that lead nowhere), street lamps (that illuminate no-thing), fences

Slumality: a derelict world view. The mentality of the vagabond, adrift on a whim and a prayer. A form of governmentality, of hegemony, and obedience to destitution. A wor(l)d-weary world view. Submission.



Economic Extinction:

In the economic sphere, free-market economic rationalists argue that the best interests of the society as a whole will be served by the individual and unrestrained pursuit of self-interest with an absolute minimum of governmental intervention.

In the case of free-market economic policies, as a recent United Nations report concluded, while it is clear these policies are capable of economic growth, 'it is far from clear they are capable of creating just, civilised and sustainable human societies'.

This is the result of 'insufficient account being taken of the effects [of these policies] on the poor, the vulnerable and on the environment.'

(Evan Willis,
The Sociological Quest,
1999, p. 53)

(that protect no-one), signs (that make no sense), his own feet, his own torn boots, against the pavement, each pebble in the tar so precisely the same, so entirely alike, yet different, when crouched, on closer examination, forced to lie uncomfortably side by side, compressed, flattened, infused with the whole, an endless carpet of pebbles, stretching from his toes to the street, the street to the lamp, the lamp to the building, this street to another street, this one to yet another, on and on, dividing, spreading, entangling and smothering the land that is his city, which represents his society, which somehow involves him, or dissolves him, or something.

The Wasteland of postmodern life. The camps for the **economically weak** and expendable. The useless.

A bus passes. White faces nod in the windows. Exhaust fumes billow.

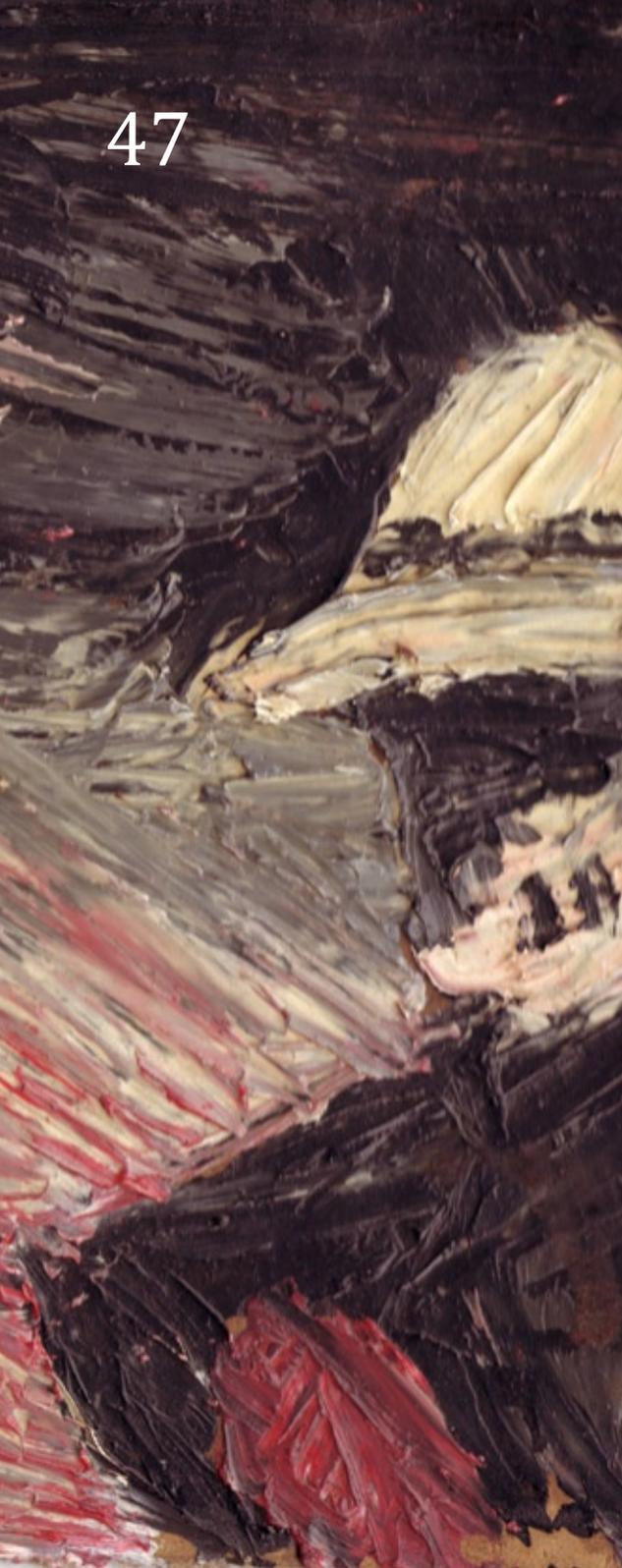
The madman, coughing, staggers down the empty street, right of his last vantage point and towards the east.

[Voice over:] *For he was slinking further away from the safety of the Author, deeper into the recesses of nothingness and abstraction, a stranger in his own strange land, wasteland upon wasteland, stretching from his toes to infinity and from infinity to beyond. For he, like those he so yearned to touch and embrace, like the girl, was lost. Dislocated. Lurching towards the Disputed Territories beyond the bogs.*

Eyes straining for a place beyond everything. Up ahead. Beyond hell.

Amassing the details of hatred as he went – the specifics of God's failure to himself and the world – to add to the weight of his condemnation. He was attempting to bring the whole damned ludicrous thing down upon his head, like Samson, whilst also keeping an eye out for a wormhole to escape the task altogether. The task of Everything. The task of God. The task of convicting the Almighty for crimes against Humanity. For fucking up.

Circe.



It begins to rain.

Scene 32

[Setting:] A club.

‘Looks like a cheery place,’ he says, staring down into the shadows of a stairwell at a dimly lit door. He pulls up his collar, tucks in his shirt, straightens his jacket, and descends. (*Smiling queerly*)

The door bitch scarcely notices.

Jack skips down the stairs, crosses the floor, shakes his coat, and pulls up a stool at the bar. ‘Wine list, please,’ he says, coughing. ‘I’m celebrating.’

The barman doesn’t respond. He continues towelling out a glass.

‘Humanity,’ he adds. ‘Its inception. From apes. And Wilberforce.’ Jack hesitates and merely exists within the pulsating rhythms of dance music. Smoke circles the beams of light that reach down from the ceiling above him, and spreads along the surface of the bar in waves. He raps his fingers playfully.

‘If you will,’ he says. ‘I’m celebrating.’

No response.

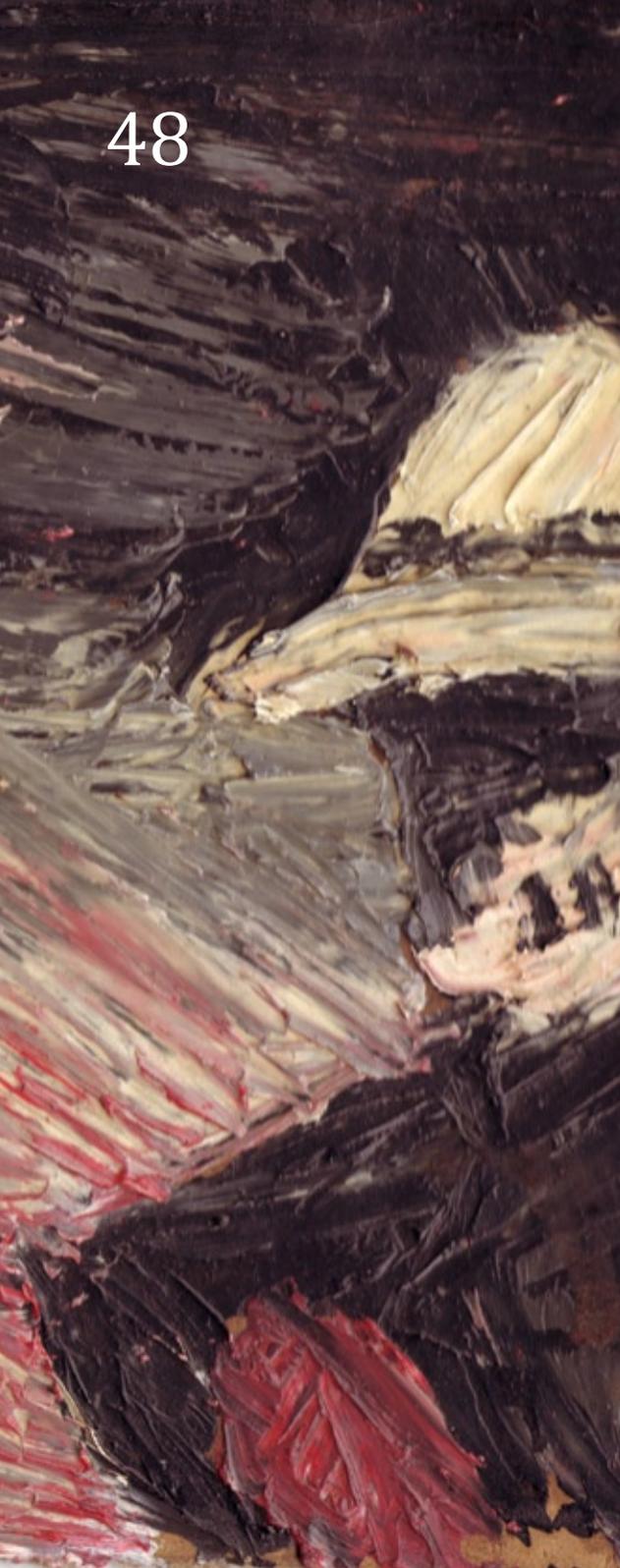
(*Louder*) ‘In your own time.’

Nothing.

(*Yelling now*) ‘You disgust me,’ – and then, as an afterthought – ‘you retarded pervert.’ (*Smiling oddly*) ‘When you’re fucking ready, useless!’ – and then – ‘Dog fucker.’ (*Laughs*)

No sooner has Jack contemplated this last remark and yelled it at the top of his lungs, than the music stops, and the barman, suddenly awakening from a trance, drops his glass. It shatters.

Jack turns away and begins rummaging through his coat pocket. ‘What’re the odds?’ he mutters. When he turns back, the barman is within inches of his face and stabbing a finger into his lower lip.



‘You wanna die tonight, frog face?’ – grabbing Jack’s neck – ‘Huh?’

Jack notices a blemish in the man’s left iris. And veins, tiny twisting red veins, in the whites of his eyes. He suddenly feels sympathetic.

‘Of course,’ he says, blinking this image of humanity away and smiling solemnly. Instead, he imagines [*enter fantasy*] Fanny Brawne bent over a bed and Keats lavishing kisses upon the nape of her neck, his soft white fingers tip-toeing up her golden thigh to the nape of her crotch... All the while Jack’s head slumps back as if conducting an orchestra or composing a symphony, or simply dreaming about death.

‘That’s your last warning, buddy,’ says the barman.

The madman is whipped across the face with a tea towel.

‘*Thou still unravished bride of quietness,*’ he mutters, imagining Keats bending Fanny still further back (Keats, ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn,’ 1820). A gasp escapes Fanny’s parting lips as she sighs and surrenders. Jack sucks the finger jabbing at his mouth.

Another whip.

The madman’s eyes open.

‘Last chance, fucker,’ the man yells, wiping his finger on the towel. ‘Damn weirdo.’

‘The wine list?’ Jack ventures. ‘If I may.’

The last whip leaves a red welt on the madman’s right cheek.

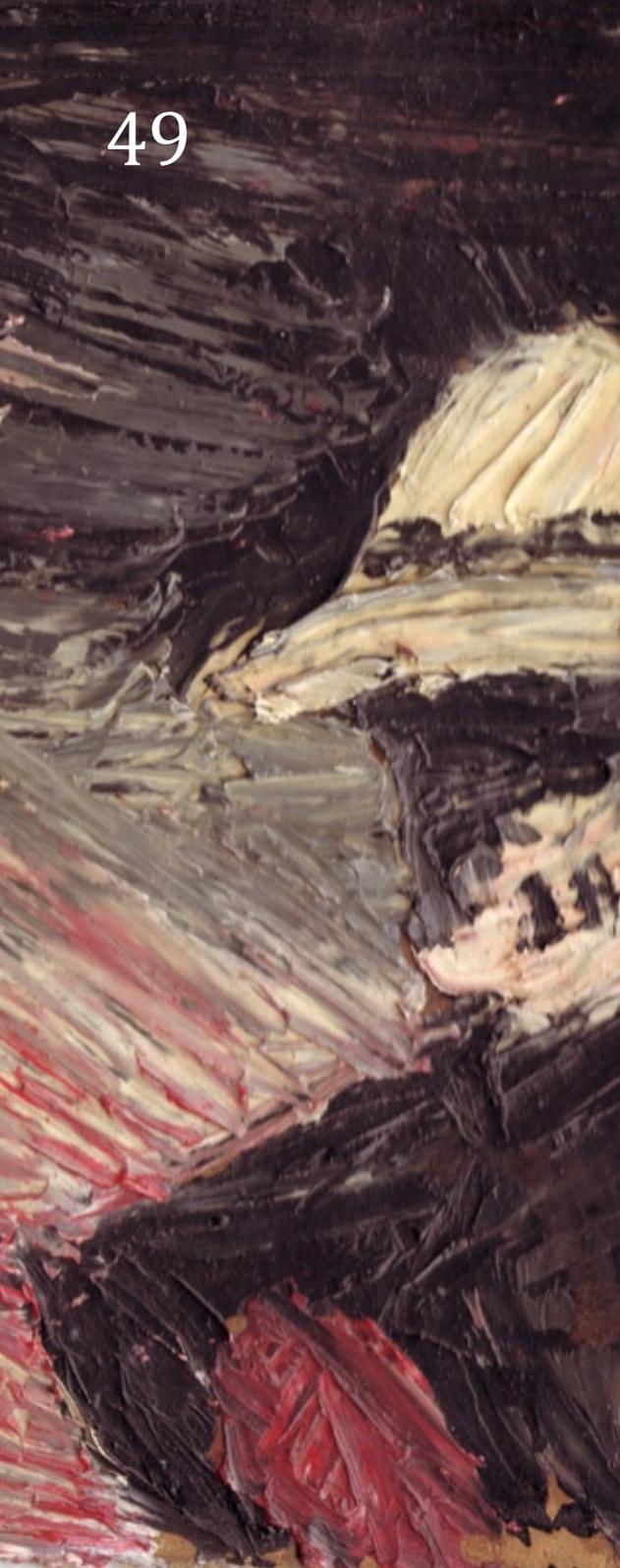
(*Gesturing as if to make another strike*) ‘Sober now?’

‘Completely,’ Jack says.

The barman walks away and returns with the wine list. ‘The ’96 cabernet’s splendid, I hear. Try sitting up.’

‘Splendid,’ says the madman, wiping a tear from his eye and raising himself. ‘That’ll be fine. Thanks.’

It is at this point that Jack notices a very odd thing. The barman, now facing away from him and crouching to put the wine list back on the shelf, has two slits cut into the back of his leather pants to expose his buttocks. Jack glances about the bar in dismay, but is met



with nothing more than vibrating smoke and encaged bodies, which convulse mechanically to the music. The shapes surrounding the cages remain fixated, although their eyes glow in the darkness beneath the fluorescent blue bars.

The barman presents Jack with a bottle. 'Your wine, sir, for your inspection.'

'What's that bird on your shoulder?' Jack says.

'Surprised you noticed.'

'Was it there before?'

'Yes.'

'Really?'

'Yes.'

'What is it?'

'A parrot.'

'Even when you were accosting me?'

'Yes.'

'Even when I got here?'

'Yes.'

'What's it for?'

'It's the club icon, Binky,' the man replies. 'Hence,' and he shrugs his shoulders, '*Binky's Club X*. Like the name says.'

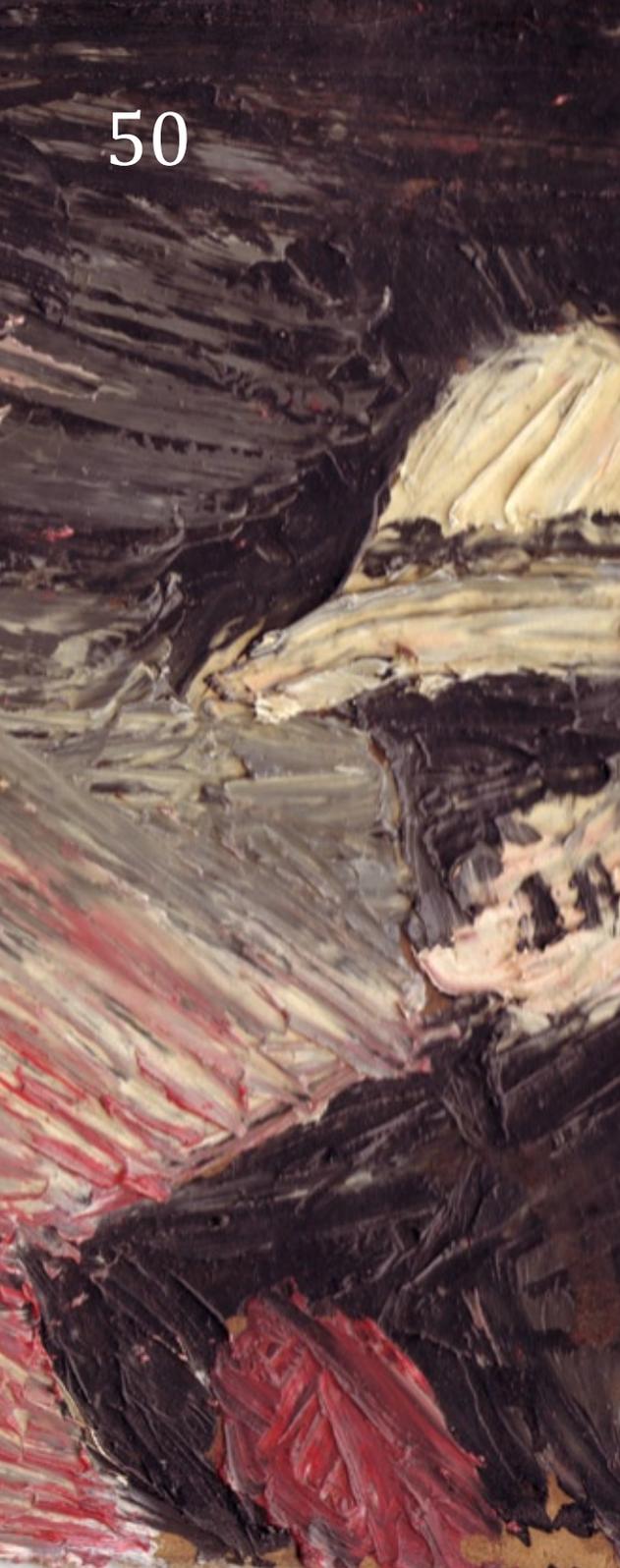
'Unusual name for a nightingale,' Jack adds. 'Binky?'

'If you say so,' says the man, pouring Jack a glass.

'That's fine,' Jack says. 'Tell me,' and he leans toward the man, 'does that parakeet ever, you know?'

'No. Except when it eats olives.' (*Smiling queasily*) 'Then it gets rather messy. By the way, it's a parrot.'

The madman clears his throat. '*The voice I hear this passing night was heard in ancient days by emperor and clown,*' he says, with a knowing nod towards the barman (Keats, 'Ode to a Nightingale,' 1819). 'Tell me,' and again he thrusts forward with a profound and smug smile, one finger poised at his temple as if to telecast his mind. 'What language does it speak? Eh?' (*Winking queerly*)



Sign of the Cross:

The Sign of the Cross or *Signum crucis* in Latin is a ritual hand motion made by members of many but not all branches of Christianity. For Christians the motion symbolises the Cross on Calvary by tracing the shape of the cross in the air or on one's own body. There are two principal forms, one followed by Eastern Orthodox Churches, and the other by the Western Churches (Anglicanism, Lutheranism, and Roman Catholicism) and Oriental Orthodoxy. The sign is rarely used by non-liturgical or evangelical Protestants.

The open right hand is used in the Churches of the West. The five open fingers represent The Five Wounds of Christ. Though this is the most common method of crossing by Western Christians, other forms are sometimes used. The West also employs the 'Small Sign of the Cross' in which a small cross is traced with the thumb over the forehead, lips, and breast of the individual while whispering the words 'May Christ's words be in my mind, on my

'What medication you on?'

But Jack's question is answered all the same. For the parrot suddenly lifts its wings and defecates down the barman's back, and sings 'F-T-W' in a raspy yet melodic voice.

'In code!' Jack yells with a clap of his hands. 'Should have known.' He laughs. 'What's it mean?'

The barman shrugs and shakes his head; but the bird, with a ruffle of its feathers and an almost exaggerated and knowledgeable nod of its beak, answers emphatically: '*Fuck the world—FTW—Fuck the world—FTW—Fuck the world,*' in a rap sequence.

Jack is spellbound.

'Screaming is believing,' yells the parrot, turning in circles and stepping backwards and forwards from one foot to the next. 'Screaming is believing – believing is screaming.'

'Take no notice,' says the barman.

The bird continues its peculiar dance, each movement of which Jack watches with greater and greater delight. Until, finally, the chain from the bird's left leg to the barman's studded collar has completely entangled its legs, and the bird, swaying and stumbling sideways, suddenly leaps, like a bungee-jumper, straight up, then down, and finally comes to dangle upside-down over the barman's stomach, with the chain miraculously wrapped around its broken neck. Here it continues with even more rigour than before: '*FTW—Fuck the world—*' And dies.

'More wine, sir?' says the barman, pouring a glass and offering it to Jack.

'Your parakeet seems to be... Yes, thank you,' Jack says. 'It seems to have hung itself. You might consider freeing it. Seems depressed.' He **crosses** himself (incorrectly, but nonetheless).

'One moment, sir.' And with this the barman vanishes into the back room and Jack never sees he or Binky again – his last image being one of a white shirt and a stream of bird shit, and another of a buttock streaked by the same deathly emission.

lips, and in my heart'. This is used at the Proclamation of the Gospel at Holy Mass and also is commonly used when blessing oneself with holy water when leaving or entering a church. In the Eastern Catholic and Orthodox Churches, the thumb, index, and middle finger are brought to a point, symbolising the Trinity (the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit/Ghost, three persons sharing a single essence), the remaining two fingers (kept pressed together and touching the palm) representing the human and divine natures of Jesus Christ.

Sequence:
Pope Innocent III (1198–1216) gave the following instruction:
‘The sign of the cross is made with three fingers, because the signing is done together with the invocation of the Trinity. ... This is how it is done: from above to below, and from the right to the left, because Christ descended from the heavens to the earth, and from the Jews (right) He passed to the Gentiles (left).

‘Others, however, make the sign of the cross from the

‘Well I’ll be,’ Jack says, raising his glass and attempting to rinse this thought from his mind. It’s no use. The bird’s wise song and its leap of faith replay themselves over and over again in his mind. Leap after leap, line after line, snap after snap, until even an avian suicide is a banal reality.

Jack staggers into the smoky depths and vanishes from sight.

[Voice over:] *Raking the depths of hell if only to scratch the surface of things. For who knows what might be found festering beneath the grubby streets, deep within the catacombs of smoke and noise. Perhaps a portal to another world. Perhaps a dagger from the shadows to end it all.*

Perhaps nothing.

Perhaps Circe.

The first cage the madman passes has already been infiltrated, and two large men, first one and then the other, beat the face of a man equally intent on leaving his face stuck to the genitals of the girl within. She smiles at Jack all the same. Then screams. The beaten man waves.

Jack passes on, deeper and deeper into the unknown. No-one else turns to acknowledge his existence. The cages and the shadows surrounding them come and go at such regular intervals that it soon occurs to Jack that this bar and its entertainment might go on indefinitely, until he has circled the **globe**. He passes several other barmen, several other exotic animals, several other perverts, several other dancers, several other fights, until he is so indifferent to the recurring image of **homogenisation** that he wishes he were at the other end of the bar and pouring another wine.

Stops.

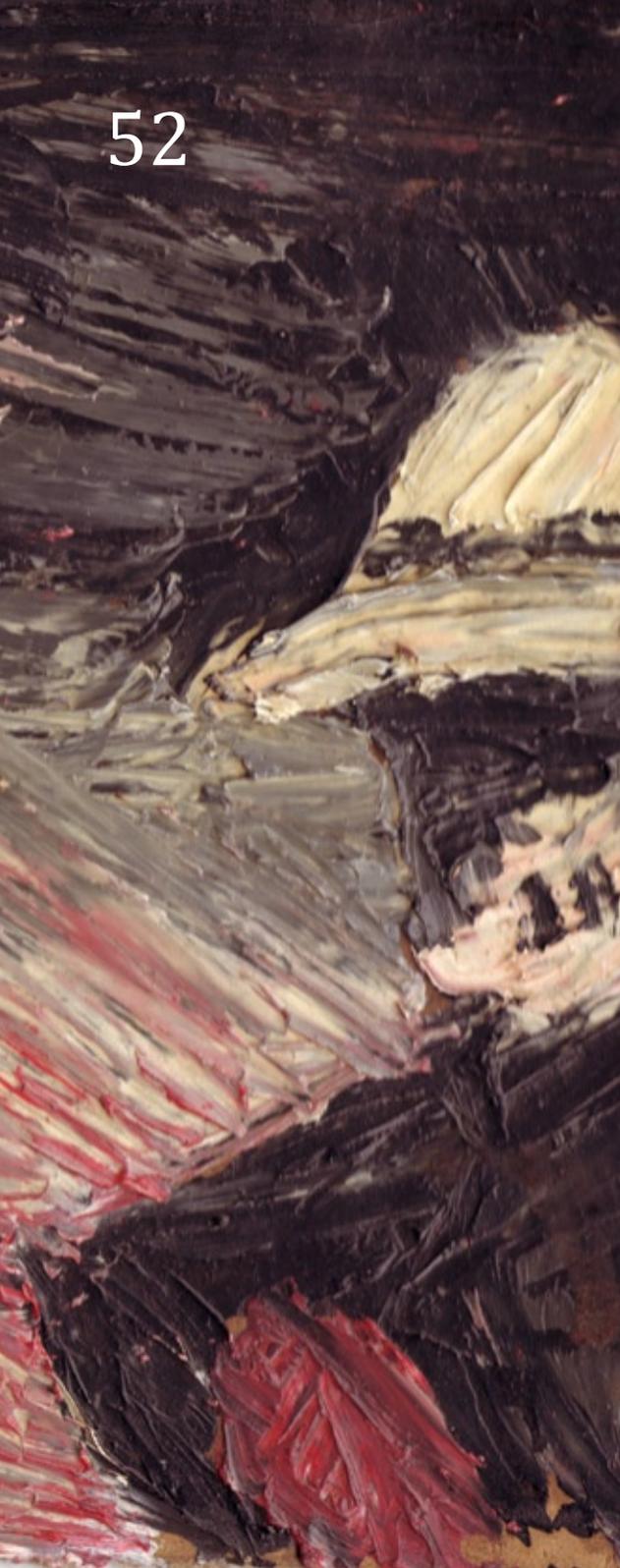
‘Binky?’ he says for no particular reason. But nothing comes of it.

He finds a cage unattended by shadows and sits down at the

Globalisation: *in its literal sense is the process of ... transformation of local or regional things or phenomena into global ones. It can also be used to describe a process by which the people of the world are unified into a single society and function together. This process is a combination of economic, technological, sociocultural and political forces. Globalisation is often used to refer to economic globalisation, that is, integration of national economies into the international economy through trade, foreign direct investment, capital flows, migration, and the spread of technology.*

*Wikipedia
(accessed 23 July 2008)*

Homogenisation: *a form of cultural imperialism whereby different cultures are swallowed by one culture (i.e. the Americanisation of everything through consumer capitalism and free markets).*



left to the right, because from misery (left) we must cross over to glory (right), just as Christ crossed over from death to life, and from Hades to Paradise. [Some priests] do it this way so that they and the people will be signing themselves in the same way...

Wikipedia
(accessed 23 July 2008)

table beneath it. Sipping on his wine, he glances up at the figure unfurling itself before him: the calf and thigh, the stomach and chest, the neck. Here he stops, alarmed and embarrassed, and stares at the tiny face above.

‘Christ!’ he says. ‘What’re the odds?’

For there, staring vacantly down at him, her body strangely foreshortened because of his vantage point below her, genitals stretched and elongated to appear twice the size of her head, is a girl of no more than perhaps twenty-something years of age. A familiar girl.

The only girl.

Jack clutches his head against the bout of giddiness that suddenly overcomes him. (*Laughs pathetically*) ‘Oh for a life of sensations rather than of thoughts,’ he says, quoting Keats. ‘How be ye Circee?’ Now waving a hand as if an idiot preacher.

The body above gyrates on, unaffected by the large glowing eyes blinking beneath it. Jack circles the cage. Again. And again. Until even the figure above breaks free of its trance and begins discerning something of the bent creature circling below it. A look of recognition appears in her eyes, and she stops and merely stares at Jack, who is grovelling on the floor and yelling ‘Sort of thing sort of thing’ over and over again.

Logorrhoea. Glossolalia. Echolalia. Purging the head of words, thoughts, voices, memories, and anguish.

The girl looks confused for a moment and then resumes her performance.

Jack writhes unnoticed in the shadows of the floor, safely camouflaged by a film of smoke, which rises in a dense band from a foot above his face to the ceiling many metres above again.

The cleaner air and perspective-change soon rejuvenate and calm Jack, and very shortly after he is simply lying there, outstretched, staring vacantly up at Circe dancing in the clouds above. From here, fortunately, her genitals aren’t nearly so large, and the various dimples, nodules, and lumps that populate this region aren’t nearly so exagger-

Logorrhoea: an excessive and often uncontrollable flow of words. Excessive talkativeness. Verbal diarrhoea.

Wiktionary

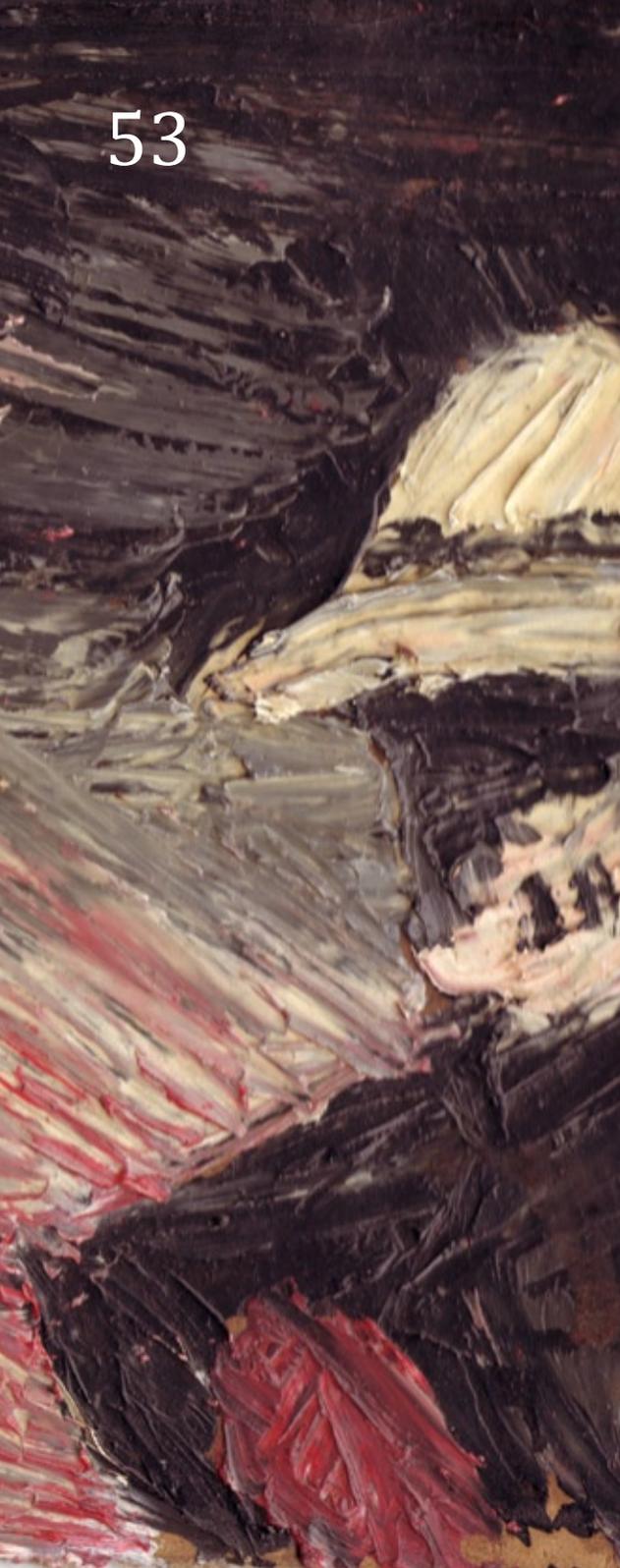
Glossolalia: speaking in tongues; speaking a language one does not know, or speaking elaborate but apparently meaningless speech, while in a trance-like state. Xenoglosy.

Wiktionary

Echolalia: the immediate, involuntary, and repetitive echoing of words or phrases spoken by another.

Wiktionary

(accessed 23 July 2008)



Hyperreal/Simulacra:

‘Simulation ... is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyper-real. ... It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real...’ (pp. 1-2).

‘We are in the era of events without consequences (and of theories without consequences).

There is no more hope for meaning. And without a doubt this is a good thing: meaning is mortal’ (p. 164).

(Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 1981/2006)

ated and pronounced. He sees faces in the clouds [*enter fantasy*].

Sees Fanny Brawne unfurling herself for Keats. And in the face of Keats he sees a man mesmerised by the physicality of his dream, the tactility of something otherwise only explored via the arcane impulses of nerve-ends and synapses. Something real. **Hyperreal**. And haptic.

‘Ah,’ he sighs, now aroused by the warped and transmuted performance going on above him, and tapping a toe. A strange smile comes and goes from his face. His tongue emerges from the corner of his mouth. His eyes expand. Strange creases cross his brow. Saliva dribbles down his hollow cheeks. Syllables are uttered and lost within his mouth. He sighs. ‘Ugh – unnh.’

And tugs.

Masturbating furiously. Auto-affecting. Tabooing. Habit-shattering. De-contextualising. *Escaping*.

A bouncer descends over him and picks him up by the scruff of the neck. ‘Who lets you *resies* in?’ A single blow to Jack’s stomach is enough to call back the wine within; it spills down his front in much the same way Binky’s emission had the barman’s back. ‘Fuckin’ freak, fuckers,’ the man adds. ‘No more wanking for you tonight, fucknut.’ He begins pushing Jack in the direction of the door.

Enter Circe. She emerges from the cage like a naked apparition. ‘I’ve got him,’ she says, nodding at the bouncer and slumping Jack into a chair. She pulls up Jack’s fly and tucks him in.

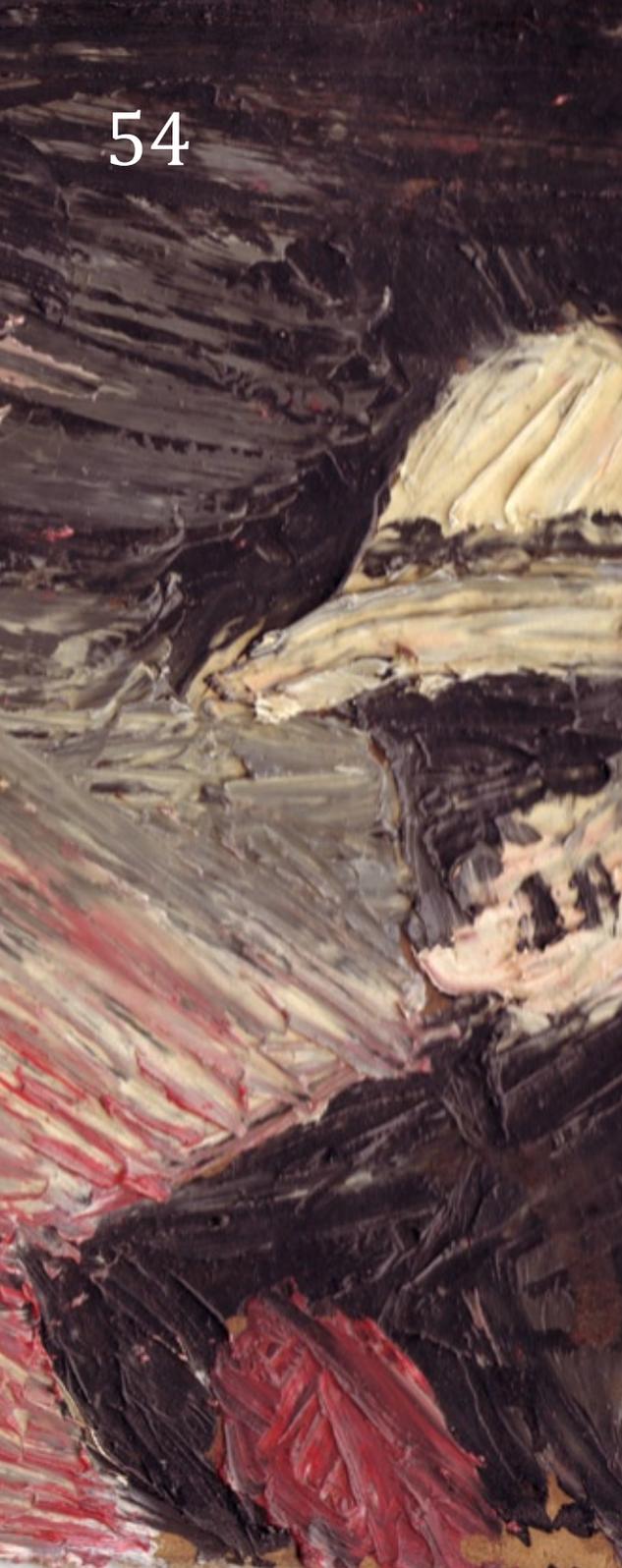
‘All yours, pet,’ says the bouncer. He adds, ‘Wash your muck holes tonight, I’m hungry,’ and growls. ‘Remember: 3 pm. Don’t be late.’

Her demure smile isn’t lost on the three shadows blinking in the gloom.

The madman dreams of Keats.

And death.

HYPERREAL



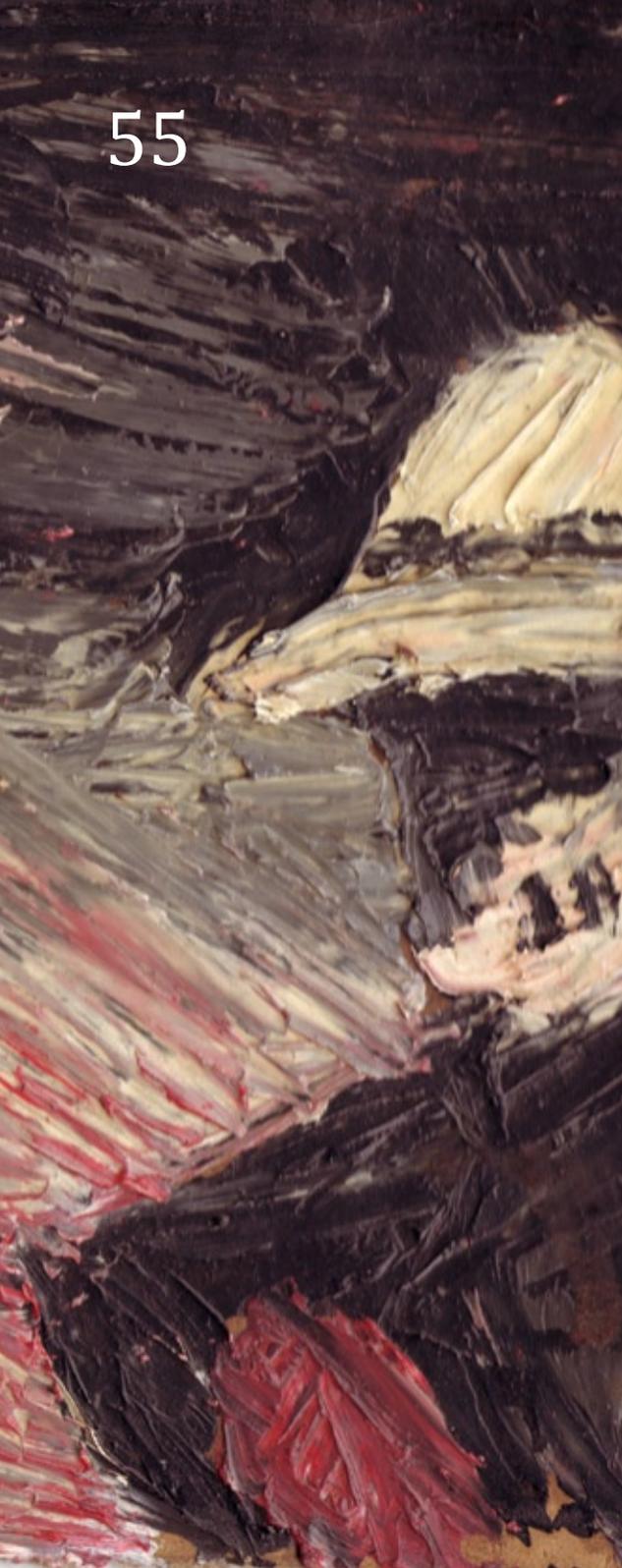
Hap

If but some vengeful god would call to me
From up the sky, and laugh: 'Thou suffering thing,
Know that thy sorrow is my ecstasy,
That thy love's loss is my hate's profiting!'

Then could I bear it, clench myself, and die,
Steeled by the sense of ire unmerited;
Half-eased in that a Powerfuller than I
Had willed and meted me the tears I shed.

But not so. How arrives it joy lies slain,
And why unblooms the best hope ever sown?
—Crass Casualty obstructs the sun and rain,
And dicing Time for gladness casts a moan. . . .
These purblind Doomsters had as readily strown
Blisses about my pilgrimage as pain.

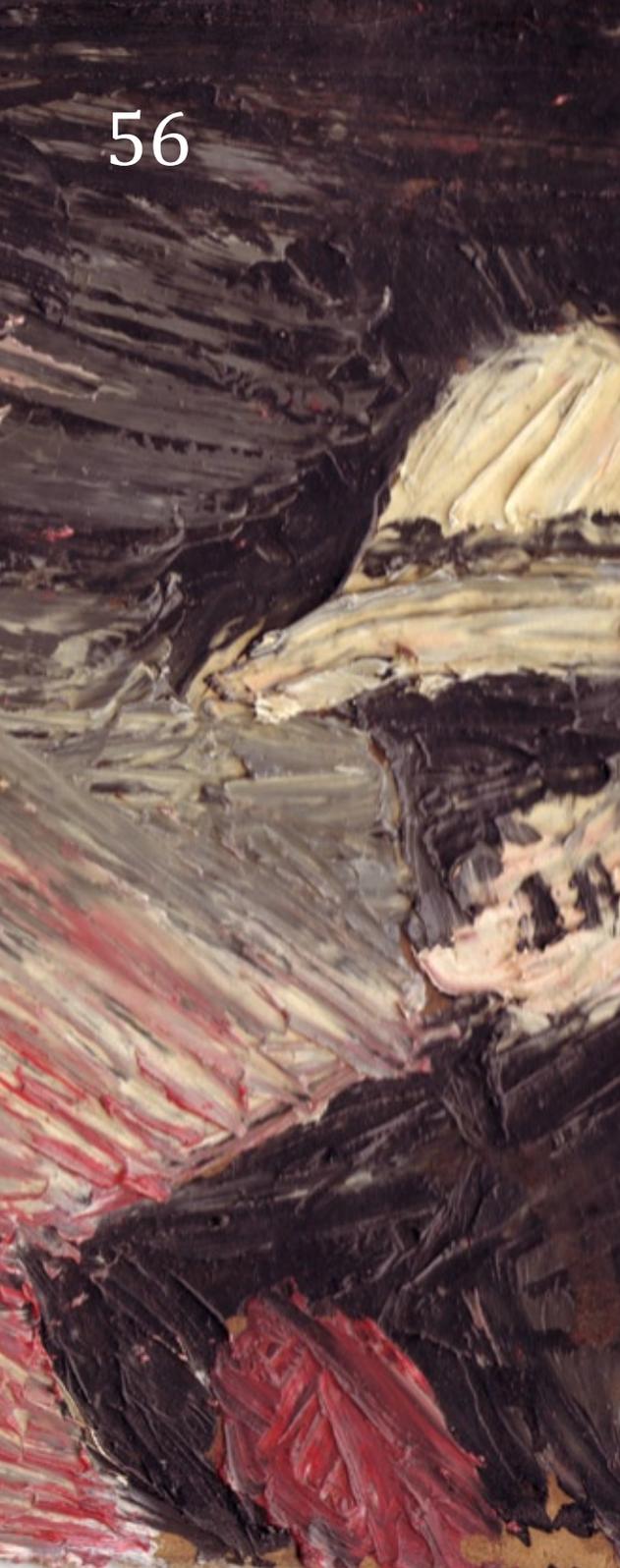
Thomas Hardy, 1866/1898



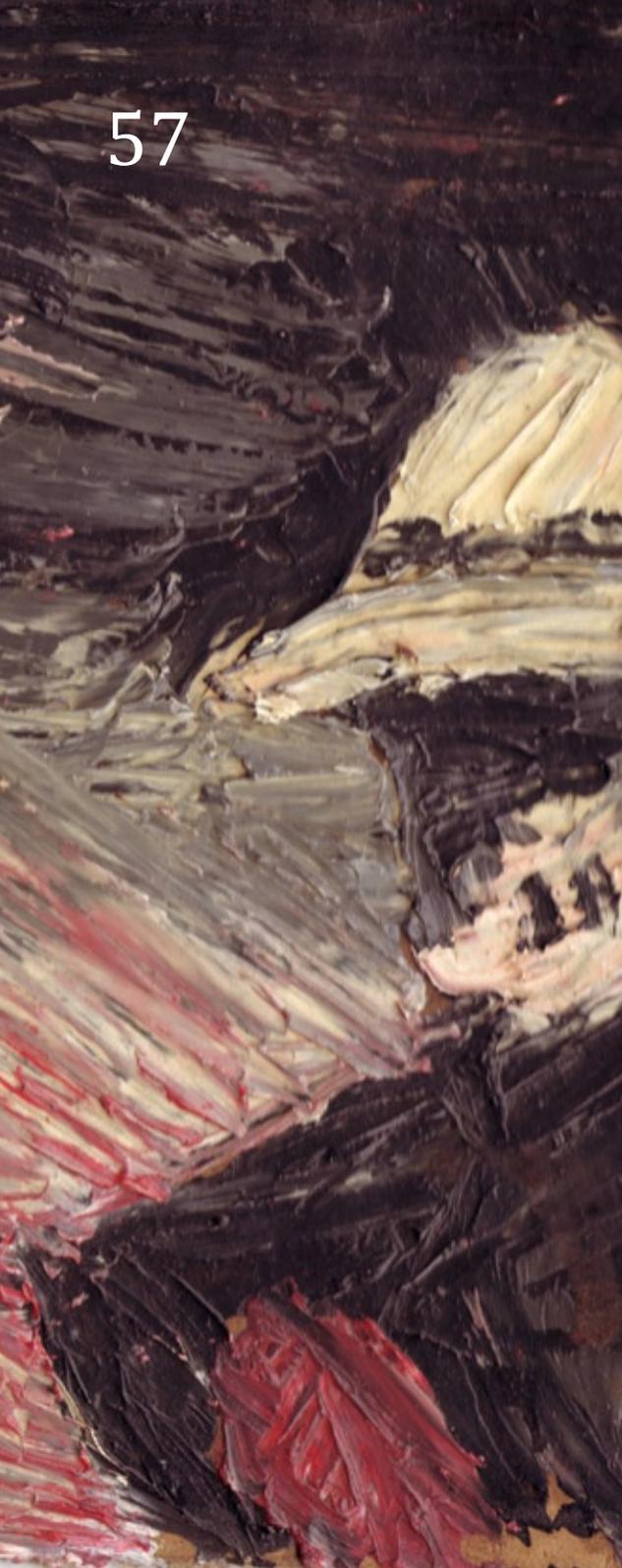
When the farthest corner of the globe has been conquered technically and can be exploited economically; when any incident you like, in any place you like, at any time you like, becomes accessible as fast as you like; when, through the TV ‘live coverage,’ you can simultaneously ‘experience’ a battle in Iraqi desert and an opera performance in Beijing; when, in a global digital network, time is nothing but speed, instantaneity, and simultaneity; when a winner in reality TV-show counts as the great man of a people; then, yes, there still looms like a spectre over all this uproar the question: what for? – where to? – and what then?

Slavoj Žižek, *Against the Populist Temptation*, *Critical Inquiry*, 2005, p. 25

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La Belle Dame Sans Merci