

Ahren Warner
Hello London

Just as – shifting the Double-Gauss a notch – the clarity attained is not
what appears, but how what appears does,

so *l'étranger* is not this man in the window just off the Euston Road,
but rather a shifting in this me that is.

And, what held for Louis holds true for me. In my teens, you were
'foreign names over winking doors';

marred, perhaps, but only by the Thames' mean gust, slate-stolid *réveil*,
that bite I came to need.

Still, it's been years since I came to you, a little less since you began
to nibble, then gnaw, then masticate.

I don't know if I got out or was spat. But, somehow, I'm back: transient,
for now, a fleeting whiff,

amuse-gueule, faint stirring of your parotid. Soon, I promise to be
here – at your leisure, to lick and lap –

your spittle shiver now blain, now numb dread.

IX. Between

the *barre* and the *grand battement en cloche*,
the *en dedans*
and the *en dehors* of last night's night-off
fuckathon –

her room at the Grand Hotel, the *première*
danseuse
and me (mere *sujet*) grinding through first
to fifth

and on to two positions in which she led,
never
myself having studied – under or on top of –
J.G. Noverre.

XVIII. Before

Soutine had left Smilovitch, had left Minsk, had left Vilnius.
Long
before Soutine had left Paris, left Céret, had left Paris
again,

before he had left Champigny, slept rough in the forest:
a Jew,
and Slav; trying to avoid his *billet simple* to Auschwitz.
And,

therefore, even longer before his hematemeses,
the blood
chucked up, the ulcer that ruptured, the peritonitis,
the covert

agony of a night-time drive, northwards, towards Paris;
the success
of avoiding the Gestapo. Thus, long before Soutine's
exsanguination:

the *bobo* idyll of *Le Bateau-Lavoir*, its half-starved artists.
Et après?
Matisse, radiance of crepe, cancer smarting like a bitch.