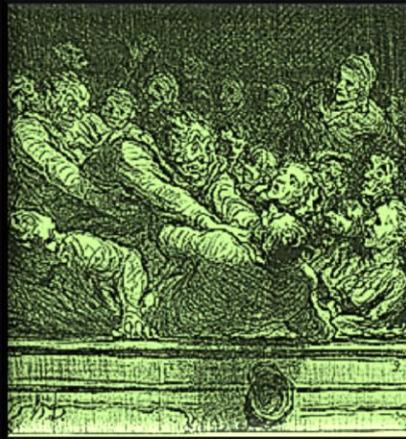


Farther Revels
[Of Oscar Wilde]



Tombe II

Cat-Call Music Hall

(Trial by Heckler)

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Title page illustration: *A Literary Discussion in the Second Gallery*, by Daumier.

Illustration, page 94: Franz von Stuck, *The Wild Chase* (1889). Wotan is shown leading the hunt. His face, as has often been noted, bears an uncanny resemblance to Hitler's; the painting dates from the year of his birth. Stuck was Hitler's favourite painter from an early age.

The Eternal Turn (II)

Again I dream that by some error
I am reborn exactly as
Myself, the same man that I was.
I feel a sort of giddy terror

At the implications of eternal
Return of sameness, and recall
That those in Hell can't change at all,
As from his ashes rising vernal

To be the same Fucci, the thief,
Rises Fucci, so fresh and yet
So stale – no pauses to forget
He is eternal as his grief.

But that is not the only way
To view my strange predicament.
When memory and presentiment
Merge on a given re-lived day,

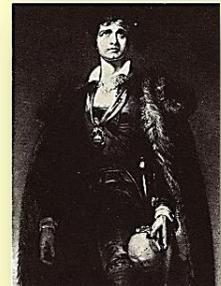
'The same' is what does *not* occur.
The repetition of a thing
Is not the *same* thing. Copies wring
The sameness from it. For the pure

Original is, in its survival,
Retrospectively re-defined
By all the newness that we find,
The difference in each staged revival.

In all we do we re-enact
Hamlet: to be or not to be:
That is the question when we see
What dreams may haunt the waking fact.

If Hamlet sees too many sides
To things, it is because there *are*
Too many, in each particular.
He dies in doubt. The doubt abides.

His unity is not precise.
He is not made of perfect rhymes.
We stage the Prince a thousand times
And never see the same one twice.



John Philip Kemble.

Prelude:

The Twelve Levels

(A Sort of Letter to Can Grande)



Wherein the author explicates the many levels of meaning that inform his epic poem.

1.

You'll find, stacked like so many floors,
Twelve Meanings ranged upon Twelve Levels
Of revelations and of revels
In this, my House of many Doors.

2. *The Twelve Levels Enumerated*

The Psychical, the Allegorical,
The Imaginary, the Symbolical,
The Structural, the Hyperbolic,
The Historico-Phantasmagorical,

The Theologico-Hysterical,
The Para-Pataphysical,
The Aesthetico-Psychological,
The Sophomoric, the Mesmerical.

*Yes, I have met Alfred Jarry, or rather,
he met me. Corrupt, and most attractive.
He looks just like a very nice renter.*

These are the Twelve, I think, or did I
Skip one? They're easily confused,
And several are in fact not used,
But held in reserve, strong and ready

If they should need to be deployed
To enrich and complicate the sense
And make it positively dense,
A thing impossible to avoid,

With so much meaning everywhere,
Meaning on top of meaning, text
Sub text... Some readers may be vexed
To explicate so rich a share

In one lone Book of all the meaning
In the world – for that's quite a bit.
That's not to say it's infinite,
Or like a fogged glass that needs cleaning

The text is needlessly obscure;
Still, it's got quite a lot of stuff
One can't take seriously enough,
As profound as, perhaps, unsure.

3. *The Twelve Levels Defined*

The Psychological's the basic level
Of meaning, the dimension where
You're likeliest to get a scare:
From ghost or spirit, angel or devil.

As for the Allegorical
Level, let's leave that to the side.
It's dull, or let's just say that I'd
Rather not talk of it at all,

At least not now: I am not in
The mood. And as for the sublime
Imaginary: some other time.
And the Symbolical's a thin

Semantic thread at most, or say
It's everywhere, the very weave,
Impossible not to perceive,
But Symbolism's a cliché

These days, at any rate, so let
Us focus on the Structural:
That level is apocryphal.
Building's an art that you forget,

You lose the blueprints you have drawn.
Though a Professor of Architecture
Can always scribble books, and lecture,
The days of System are long gone.

The Hyperbolic dimension
Of meaning is by far the most
Important, and can justly boast
Of being the only one worth mention.

The Historico-Phantasmagorical
Takes almost as much time to explain
As to pronounce, an even less plain
Level than is the Allegorical,

Though to the reader it should seem
Clear that the historical personages
Are fictions whose sole function is
To populate a feverish dream.



As for the Theologico-
Hysterical, it operates
Throughout the text, and moderates
The excesses of the lewd and low

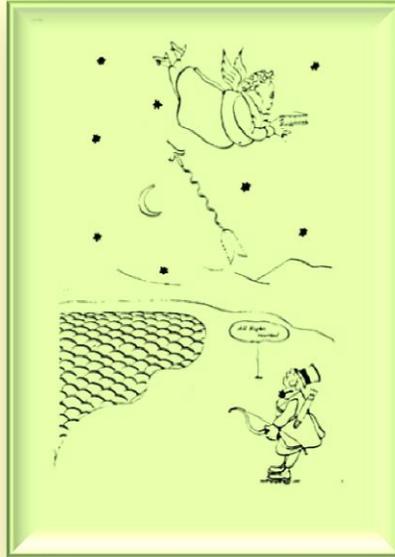
The Para-Pataphysical
Level pertains to, and abounds in:
That level has to get its rounds in.
The Aesthetico-Psychological

Level is where the Art-for-Art's-
Sake bits come in, and these are very
Closely tied to the Imaginary,
I think. But at the heart of hearts

Of this so-convoluted spherical
Spiral's the ancient wisdom of
The Sophomoric, deep enough
To make the whole thing quite Mesmerical.



I



The Theatrical Fact

Caricatura

We see in satire's carnival mirror
Every face except our own.
In Purgatory's glass, a clown
Looks at me with a sneer, a leer, or

A grimace, stretched absurdly vast:
The 'every face except my own'
I have to own as mine alone,
And be my own iconoclast;

While those who cannot bear the face
Of Caliban that mocks them there
Pretend the evil is elsewhere
And kill a scapegoat in his place.

*To paraphrase my great
compatriot, Jonathan Swift.*



*From Père Lachaise
Ladies and Gentlemen!
Words from the Stage Manager*



1. *All the Pantomime Horses*

My Dears, you've seen it all before, this
Journeyman joinery of a play,
This skit whose glory lasts a day;
You know by now this lanthorne or this

Lamp doth the hornèd moon present.
Sly Jack, attired in darkness risible,
Wears on his chest the word INVISIBLE:
The Giant wonders where he went!

And so the hero kills him dead.
The best of such shows have a tinsel
Aspect, the little smear of pencil
Under the eye, the rouge too red

To brave the footlights without much
Embarrassment – the Stage-Fright sweats –
The Leading Man his lines forgets –
All vanish at the lightest touch.

See The Prelude, Book, oh I forget which.

2. *The Rainbow's Last Bow*

But something in, *behind* it all,
Persists. You brave the cat-calls Time
And Taste howl out, the blinding lime-
Light and the vegetables that fall

Around or on you. On the boards
You make your stand, much though you rue
The lampoon and the bad review;
The fudged notes in the mystic chords

Of memory you work through and *still*
The stoic spirit of the ham
Shouts down *You're not!* with an *I am!*
In your indomitable will

To over-act the mighty lines
You boom with such bombastic pomp
As up and down the stage you stomp,
You face them down, the prompter's signs,

The footlights' and the critic's glare,
Till greeted by sarcastic cheers,
You bow, and once the theatre clears,
Blow kisses to the empty air.

After this harrowing turn as Lear,
Convinced you're not entirely *compos*
Mentis, great Hermes Psychopompos
Leads you away, and sheds a tear,

Perhaps, as gently by the hand
Towards the dark enfolding Wing
He coaxes you, of Death. Down bring
The curtain, then. Strike up the band!





From Père Lachaise
The Critic as Artist as Critic as
Comedian, Confronting a Heckler



I am performing a little tipsy this evening. The time is the late Thirties, I think. The membrane between the biosphere and the thanatosphere sometimes grows porous, and psychic leakage may occur. I apologise for the late-Joycean static that is occasionally audible in the margins.

1.
Purgatory, I've decided after
 Much back-and-forth with literary
 Peers, friends or foes, mixing the merry
Poisoned bowl with good-natured laughter,

Is Criticism: divinatory,
 Or, if not, only necessary
 In an abstract way, and not very
Thrilling, unless it tells a story.

Yes, autobiographical
 Of course, but see that it's *creative*
 Autobiography. Your native
Wood-notes should be well wrought, and full

Of graces, with the *appoggiatura*
 Of *apologia* on occasion
 Only accented, through sweet *suasione*
Making your case, with *sprezzatura*.

De la musique avant tout' chose!
 And there should be a dash of what
 The latest slang calls 'camp'. Thou Slut
Of Letters, strike a striking pose!

*Perhaps from the French 'se camper',
'to strike a provocative pose'.*

Or you will be uninteresting.
 What Hell is worse than to be *that*?
 Do not put on the conical hat
Of learned Duns, Dears. Be *arresting*.

Then readers will be interested.
 And be arrested? You'd know all
 About that. My Dear, don't be small.
It's better still to be arrested,

*One of the group, bearded, tweedy and
in his cups, it seems, almost shouts out.*

Now and then, than to be arresting.
To rid oneself of a temptation
By yielding to it? Litigation
Is pending, I advise investing

In an attorney's services,
Because, as all the world should know,
You stole that line from Père Goriot.
What all the world knows now, Dear, is

A pedant is among them. Who
Cares? Why not listen, and learn a little?
No one here wants to watch you whittle
A toothpick from a redwood. True?

Yes, Oscar, go on. Bob, shut up!
Thank you, my Dears. God knows, though I'm
But an old-fashioned Pierrot mime,
My galops gallantly gallop,

Doing their best to keep up with Youth.
They hate us, do they not, the old
At heart? All gold is but fool's gold.
Truth is so liable to 'myth-youth'.

One hath to lithp, and then it's 'punny',
Professor, Dear, so serious-looking.
You are the comic Story Book King
Who doesn't find the story funny.

*The great white caterpillar, bold-
Faced butterfly-imposter-hack!
You sneak behind the poet's back
And pick his wallet for his gold!*

There is no need for iteration,
My dear: by now I think you've made your
Point, and the point was hardly major,
Nor has it made your reputation

As a wit or a genius with
Either the ladies or the boys.
All you can do is make more noise
When what you *should* do is make myth.



*The other members of the group
pipe up loudly and in unison.*



You hide your face behind a beard,
Your fear with a rebarbative
Attitude. That's no way to live,
Dear. Only fear is to be feared.

Oscar, forgive us, please, for our
Friend's horrid manners. Tom will take
Him home to sleep it off. Don't make
A fuss, Dears. Still, late is the hour...

2.
Well, as your friend Bob points out, rightly,
Much that I wrote was a quotation
Without the tedious notation
Of marks; too many look unsightly,

They merely clutter up the page.
Though this may lead to some confusion
'Twixt plagiarism and allusion,
I brave the pedant's righteous rage.

What I have borrowed from my brothers
And sisters with such bland élan,
Invisible to some, of an
Offensive clarity to others,

Is a closely kept secret open
To ambiguous interpretation
Or to high-toned denunciation
Of one who writes with such a *faux* pen.

3.
As Byron writes in his *Don Juan*:
I like so much to quote. Then is it
A fault, so often to revisit,
As one might haunt a Gothic ruin,

Scenes from the glorious high masques
Of yesteryear, to raise the ghosts
Of dead bards, and to them make toasts
With a glass filled at their own casks?

'As Byron writes in his *Don Juan*':
I quote *myself* now. Well, then, *is* it
A weakness? Yes, 'tis an exquisite
Weakness in me, ever to strew an



The Group intervenes:

Bob is firmly escorted
away by the dutiful Tom.



'Immature poets imitate;
mature poets steal'.

--T.S. Eliot



Amusing trail of pilfered flowers
Behind me as I dance along,
Singing another poet's song
'Neath a quotation of spring showers.

Snapper-up of considerable
Trifles am I, Autolykus,
Anthologist of genius –
Which, at times, gets me into trouble,

As when my *Poems* were rejected
By my own *alma mater* as
Ghost-written by the dead, *hélas!*
As an eclectically selected

Bower-bird's cache of plagiaries,
A literary *bagnio* built on
The bones of Shelley, Keats, and Milton.
My lunar Muse in terms like these

Some still abuse, thus they arraign her
Who glories in her borrowed light
And is the robber's lamp by night
And makes Parnassus her Lupanar.

(What was my *Charmides*, Dears, but
Pompeian mural-painting, a
Sort of high-flown erotica
Many condemned as dainty smut?)

Well, count me one of Plato's liars
Who also steal myths others make
According to their mood, and take
All colours, like the hands of dyers.

And Shakespeare, the nonesuch, the rare
Original, what did *he* steal?
Deer. But was Shakespeare even real?
Or someone else's *nom de guerre*?

4.
There's a Sublime of plagiary,
And even pastiche can become
Transcendent, when skilled fingers strum
Apollo's lyre. (It wasn't he,



*And so I had to bowdlerise, nay,
geld, almost, that admittedly somewhat
excitable young Grecian fetishist.*

But Hermes, who first fashioned it,
By the way, from a tortoise shell.
Apollo stole it: he did well.)
The allusive tune is infinite,

Whether 'tis plucked on harp, or fluted;
The poet becomes what he thieves,
And takes up, where another leaves
Off, the great, endless, convoluted

Symphony of one giant Poem,
A vineyard whence 'tis only fair
To siphon, as the gleaner's share,
By the glass or the jeroboam,

That which we pant for, like the deer.
With this old Boaz would agree,
Whose sheaves were neither miserly
Nor mean. By now it should be clear

Authors need not originate
To earn the name, they can improve
What they receive, whether in love
Or rivalry. We all come late

Into the fields, but even unto
This last – *especially* this last –
As to her firstlings of the past
The Muse gives; what else can she do?

A living bard's a Frankenstein's
Monster, composed of parts of dead
Poets, this one's heart, that one's head.
Look to th' *arrangement* of the lines,

The fresh new use to which they're put,
Boldly antique, ironical,
Forward-looking, untimely... All
The difference resides in what

One does with one's material.
A book made wholly of quotations
In artful, telling collocations:
Would it not be original?



Auctor in Latin can mean originator or increaser – that is, *augmenter* – of a tradition.



Mr Cooke as Frankenstein, at the Theatre Royal Covent Garden.

What do prophets do? Plagiarise
The text of a futurity
Becoming, but not yet to be.
Dears, second-sight has magpie-eyes.

O thou primordial Plagiary
Of Fire, mixed from ingredients
Of revelatory experience
And *déjà vu*, I sing of thee!

Is not the first bar of the song
Already a refrain, somehow?
The past lives in the here and now.
To beg or borrow may be wrong,

But to *steal* is a Titan's act. —
Well, that's enough on plagiarism.
What can be said in aphorism
Need not be laboured into tract.

5. *Can the Question of Plagiarism
Be Settled Once and for All?*

Originality absolute
Is an illusory ideal.
In truth, to borrow or to steal
Or to allude, these constitute

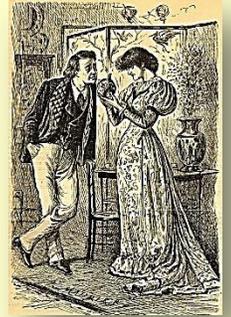
A literary bodily function.
Whatever may be said of me,
I'm no Sir *Fretful* Plagiary;
I filch without the least compunction.

Some critics think of literature
As the exercise of a sublime
Ego *against* the Classics time
Has consecrated as the pure

And isolated products of
Genius at war with genius.
By now it should be obvious
This is a cliché, merely a rough

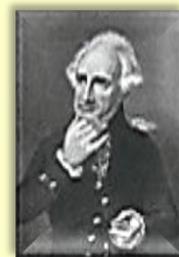
Approximation and reprise
Of the Romantics' stance, which served,
Once, a real purpose: It unnerved
Their literary enemies,

*There's no in-here-ain't
sin in playjeurisnt, is it?
A pelagiarist, beglad,
and all the erse for it!*
— Jim



But the subject is raised again.

*No plagiary-an-sich, only in the mind of
the Created Uncreating? How erigenal! No
wonder critics stabbed you with their pens!*
— Jim



*Mr Terry. Few could find fault with
his performances as Sir Fretful Plagiary
in Sheridan's The Critic.*

The staid Tory traditionalists,
Guardians of established power.
They fought in a tumultuous hour,
Did the Romantics, with their fists,

At times: The cause was liberation.
The cult of the Original
Was, finally, *political*.
You can see how exaggeration

And overuse and careless thinking
Have made this worship of the lonely
Genius a vulgar pose, fresh only
To journalists. Thus by a slinking,

Sneaking corruption and inversion,
'Originality' is the cry
Of those who least exemplify
That quality: a true perversion!

No great men are original.
The greatest genius is the most
Indebted man, though he may boast
Of being the richest one of all.

6. Emerson's Genteel Heckle

*Sir, you are paying me a great
Tribute, (or is it mere confusion?)
Quoting me without attribution.
Attributed or not, I hate*

*Quotations. Tell me what you know.
An unattributed quotation
From your own books! Your condemnation
Is wisely inconsistent, though,*

*With this great truth: that all minds quote.
In alienated majesty
Via your timely plagiary
Return those words I also wrote.*

*'T that is nothing, and sees all?
Self that is only self sees nothing.
Does not self change itself like clothing?
The Veil is torn, and the scales fall.*



My bold-faced plagiarism of a passage from Emerson's essay on Shakespeare ('No great men...indebted man') evokes, or rather, provokes the shade of Emerson to appear among us, to set the record straight.



A bit of stichomythia, anyone?

*Breathes through us now the Atman's breath.
When we let go of have and hold,
We are in Everything: Behold
The Substance beyond life and death!*

A bit *de trop*, that sort of thing,
I must say, my dear Emerson.
Yet with Spinoza you are one:
The lecturer, the lens-grinder sing

One sober, mystic Pantheist
Hymn to a thing not Him or Her.
Well, bless your Substance; I prefer
The attributes. They can be kissed.

*Kisses betray. Flesh dies. The Atman
Is the eternal Youth. How broad
Your views are! If your Brahma God
Exists, He is a very Fat Man.*

[A Heckling Event appears to be brewing. We can feel the air molecules ironising all around us. As a broad-comedy front approaches, all shapes and sizes begin to look ridiculously distorted – widened or elongated. We are about to experience a massive Caricature, with sarcastic claps of thunder and lightning strikes of wit.]

You are as tall as you are thin,
Thin as the nothing that you are,
Seeing All: the Deep and High, the Far
And Wide, the End and Origin.



Insist upon yourself. Be original.
– Emerson



By Christopher Cranch.

7. *Transparent-Eyeball Emerson*

From the Red Planet now comes Shiva
To wage a war the world upon!
Transparent-Eyeball Emerson
Is the god's war-machine, bereaver

Of nations! It shoots rays of Death,
This Cyclops Ralph on Waldo stilts,
And all that stands before it wilts
As down to humankind's last breath

The impassive Robot takes its toll.
Its gamma-potent pantheist vision
Abstracts things without intermission.
And the Overlord of Oversoul,

Who to the transient self is Lord
Of Darkness, threatens now to spread
Worldwide his Empire of the Dead.
But Something somehow steals aboard

The Eyeball-Golem in its stride
Amid the rubble it has made.
The death-ray's strength begins to fade:
Disease is taking hold inside,

A general, woolly reverie;
An abstraction of an abstraction
Metastasises, rarefaction
Of thoughts breeds growing vacancy

Till with a deafening creak and metal
Groan the great towering Waldo falls
Crashing: acres across it sprawls,
And the contents begin to settle,

Parts with a clatter and deafening clank
Swing on their hinges or fall off
The chassis – for the landing's rough.
My friends, we have a germ to thank.



Is that you, Mr Emerson?



From Père Lachaise
Whistler

*I am asked to say a few words
about my one-time friend and
mentor, James McNeill Whistler.*

There was a genius I learned much
From in the way of pose and polish.
But I did not wish to demolish
My rivals; he did. He was such

A fundamentally unkind
Man, Dears, so full of *petitesse*,
Utterly scorning the *noblesse*
Oblige that a superior mind

Should observe in society.
He enjoyed stinging others' feelings,
As I discovered in my dealings
With him. We had, inevitably,

A falling out, oh, we crossed swords
In print! At one point he accused me
Of plagiarism. He abused me
Terribly, Dears! What were his words?

Oh yes: 'He has the courage of
The opinions of others'. So I
Plagiarised this, of course, in my
Intentions! Ah, I did so love,

In my own genial way, to bait
The man; and to the bait he rose:
See, see? he cried, *There Oscar goes*
Again! Now, Jimmy was a great

Artist, no doubt, and very clever,
A true original – but, sad
To say, for all his wit, he had
No sense of humour whatsoever.



With Wordsworth in the Mountains *Or: Good Lord, How Did I Get Here?*



*My audience at Père Lachaise
includes Mr Wordsworth, whom
I, without quite meaning to, have
by thinking about him invoked.*

1.

Originality is built on
What's 'unattempted yet in prose
Or rhyme' – words of Ariosto's
Boldly translated into Milton;

And speaking to his damaged Friend,
Wordsworth caps his great Alpine burst
Of inspiration with 'of first,
And last, and midst, and without end',

Paraphrase of a line of verse
(In *Paradise Lost*) from Revelation
Paraphrased. Place them in quotation
Marks, then, my Dears, those 'characters

Of the Apocalypse'. (I omit
The word 'great', for it doesn't scan.)
Now Wordsworth was an honest man
Much-haunted by the Infinite.

He knew it when he was a boy,
It condescended to reveal
Its presence as a thing you feel
When Nature overflows with joy

Like a great waterfall your heart
Installed there, Capability Brown
Of inner gardens overgrown
Since then, rough landscapes of our Art.

2. *Wordsworth Heckles Me*

*Oscar the posture-master, by
His own contortions so entangled,
A python knotted and self-strangled,
The one trick left him is to die.*

*The 'damaged archangel', Coleridge.
'Simplon Pass' episode (Prelude VI).*

*'I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning
and the end, the first and the last.'*

Posture-master: contortionist. [Mr V]

But I, O mighty Laureate,
Am not a *moralising* cad.
Your treatment of Annette was bad,
Which does not make your works less great.

*I did my best for her, and for
Our child.* Then is the bastard father
To the man? Each is his own author.
Bad chapters, too, make up the score.

The Revolution and the Wars
Caught all your generation up;
In that great tempest a teacup
Is private romance. But the scars

Remain that history leaves upon us
As the triumphal juggernaut
Or chariot of life's onslaught
Passes us by, or tramples on us.

3.

*I can recall when my dear Friend
And I saw Hazlitt running past
Us, and, behind him, gaining fast,
Angry villagers bent to rend*

*The man, it seemed, to pieces. Why?
For liberties that he had taken
With a young maid he'd have forsaken,
Having defiled her modesty.*

*We laughed at first at this Don Juan,
But when we learned the unsavoury
Details, we laughed no longer: he
Had made himself a moral ruin.*

*'Twas plain that he was in the grasp
Of sexual perversion. It
Had crawled into his mind and bit
Into his spirit like an asp.*

*Poisoned was he, and poisonous
To know. The breach could not be mended.
'Twas no great friendship that thus ended.
But my dear Friend, he also was*



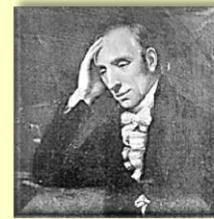
A prey, if so he could be called,
To laudanum: it took the best
Of his great mind, left him obsessed,
Mendacious, narrow, self-appalled.



Ah, but he saw those caves of ice!
That pleasure dome, those splendidly
Unreal shapes of Tertiary
Imagination, Paradise

Of pure Illusion! Constipated
Pantheist, the austere Spinoza's
Weak-willed and gifted scion, roses
I strew o'er the Dream you created,

Bravo, I cry, and close the book. A
Fine opium-tainted cigarette
Is my own little minaret;
Though some prefer to ply the hookah.



4.
*I will not moralise or crow
Upon a man broken as you are.
Mercy from one so very pure
Is mercy in spades, England's Rousseau.*

A 'dig' at 'To Wilkinson's Spade'.

You transformed, not the way we think,
But, deeper still, the way we *feel*.
An influence so deep and real
In its effects is apt to sink

From view beneath the transformations
It everywhere has wrought in us.
Fascinating and tedious
At once are the long meditations

That constitute *The Prelude*; now
We are for-ever in the debt
Of one we'd rather at times, forget,
For your confessions are somehow

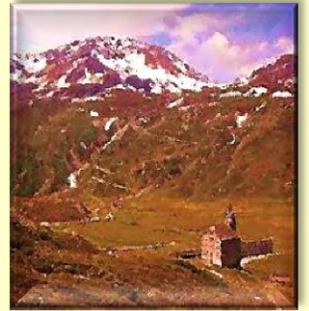
Both too obscure and too prosaic,
Thou mystic of the commonplace
Who made each poet turn his face
Inward towards the mind. O laic

High Prophet, you became that lost
Leader who knew not where or when
The child-sire might be found again;
You felt his joy, though, more than most.

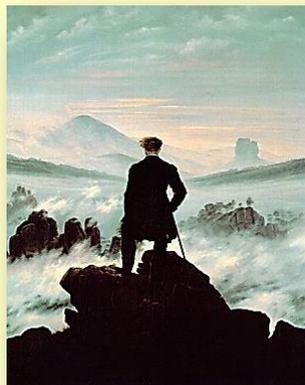
On mountain or on darkling coast
You heard the thunder of the waters,
O Moses of the mind who brought us
Back to the Wilds we thought we'd crossed.

*Farewell! Perhaps, for all we know,
Our paths will cross at Simplon Pass?
Your feet will tread the Alpine grass;
I from a cable-car will blow*

Down kisses and best wishes as
You walk into your vast Sublime
For a refreshing spot of time. —
And so he passed into the Pass.



Simplon Pass.



Los 'at the Forge' with Loge

1.

An epic check is sometimes forged
By an impertinent sort of person
Like Chatterton or like Macpherson.
Obtusely by the critics scourged

For an imaginative act
Of a high order, they give new
Life to a dead age. Faining's true
Feigning discovers a strange tract

Between the Nightmare History's
Time and Dream Time: Malvern the place,
Rowley the monk dwell in a space
That is so purely poetry's

That they, like Beauty, are their own
Excuse for being. Call them spurious,
If ye will, scholars, and wax furious
At having had your ignorance shown,

And dismiss Rowley's or MacPherson's
Work as a literary mockery, full
Of trumped-up episodes apocryphal –
And such disreputable persons!

*'Tis true, one was a 'marvellous boy
Who perished in his pride', but mad.
What nerve this Bristol orphan had
To perpetrate this insolent ploy!*

What's forgery but plagiarism
Of works that happen not to exist?
Thus adding a delicious twist
To literary vandalism.

2.

Ah, Chatterton, poor, hungry, lone
Genius! Each line of verse he forges
Has that peculiarly gorgeous
Finish that stamps it as his own.



Comme, wythe acorne-coppe and thorne,
Drayne mie hartys blodde awaie;
Lyfe and all yttes goode I scorne,
Daunce bie nete, or feaste by daie.
Mie love ys dedde,
Gon to hys death-bedde,
Al under the wyllowe tree.



I lectured on you, marvellous 'whelp'.
(My notes were plagiarised; my grief
Is not.) Set drifting like a leaf
In London, with so little help,

Prolific in satiric rhymes,
Too proud to admit your hunger and
Accept a meal, cursed with too grand
A talent for such prosy times,

For livelihood in vain you cast
About and, lonely in your garret,
Struggled on till you could not bear it
And turned to arsenic at last.

So it was left to Shelley, Keats,
Wordsworth and Coleridge, too late,
To shower on your gifts, how great!
The honour out of which Fate cheats

Time and again the living poet.
You, more precocious than Rimbaud,
Your genius keep in youthful glow
Who were not destined to outgrow it.

*'It is wonderful how the whelp has
written such things'. – Samuel Johnson*



*Like Keats and Shelley; unlike
Coleridge and Wordsworth.*



From Père Lachaise *Nineteenth-Century British Theatre*

A brief history.



1
What was the state of theatre
In London when you first came on
The scene? Ah, much has come and gone!
Let's start a little earlier...

Comedy was a scanty crop
Till Goldsmith made Thalia rich.
Flourished the theatre up which
Sheridan's wit did malaprop.



Then came a shameful falling off
As bourgeois melodrama stormed
The stage, humourless and malformed,
Whilst every literary 'toff'

Wrote stiff and wheezy blank-verse plays
On Shakespeare stilts, each doomed to be
Tripped by the other tragically.
Then why should my plays *not* amaze

*I plead guilty to having committed such
blank-verse melodramas myself. (See,
or rather don't see The Duchess of Padua.)*

A public beaten down by years
Of blatancy? The well-made play
Mechanically had its way
With audiences moved to cheers

By the swift latching of a locket
Or when the 'faded cameo
Trick' cinches plot-lines in a bow
And puts the takings in the pocket.

Everywhere farce, burlesque, and cheap
Spectacular revues, nowhere
The light touch that makes all cohere,
Freeing a laughter brightly deep.

2. Fin-de-Siècle Theatre

Two Arthurs ruled the stage, one Jones
Henry, the other Wing Pinero –
The latter something of a hero
For breathing life into the bones

*Of course, there was Arthur Sullivan,
but he was a composer, not a playwright.*

Of old dramatic formulas.
The Second Mrs. Tanqueray
Infused the well-worn 'well-made play'
With Ibsen, and took up the cause

Of Naturalism. Moralising
Melodrama had too long ruled
The boards. We were no longer fooled
By virtuous attitudinising

Into believing we had seen
The best that the dramatic art
Could give. The ambivalent human heart,
Mixed in its motives, caught between

Conflicting loves and loyalties,
Cannot be simplified to good
Or bad, but must be understood
In all of its complexities.

Fuelled by Rousseau and Calvinism,
The average play was *Puritan*
Theatre, which is surely an
Oxymoronic solecism.

This solecism reigned, bereft
Of wit or *gravitas*. Pinero
Helped lead the way beyond those narrow
And stale conventions that had left

The English stage aesthetically
Bankrupt. From him I learned to play
With the convention and cliché
Ironically, subversively,

To undercut with comedy
And wit the ponderous, solemn, slow
Momentum, tending towards tableau,
Of the old bourgeois dramaturgy.



3.

All the disciples of Sardou
Were scattered, all the mutton-chopped
Shakespeares found their blank verse end-stopped
By something startling and new:

The tinkerers, and their name was legion,
Fled from the unsparing Realism
That took the name of Ibsenism
From the great, bristly Norwegian.

Hence melodrama died a terrible,
Pathetic and tear-wringing death.
The well-made play collapsed beneath
Its lack of weight, which grew unbearable.

4.

Shaw learned from me the trick of lightening
With wit the moral gravity
Of those great social causes he
Preached, otherwise so dull or frightening

To audiences used to smooth
Flattery of their prejudices
And facile sentiments. His vices
Are too much reverence for the Truth

And garrulous intellectuality.
The anarchic spirit of pure fun
Eludes him; he forgets the un-
Importance of mere actuality.



'Sartor Resartus': Still in Fashion? A Rather One-Sided Conversation with Carlyle

A dialogue that took place in C.3.3., during my last months in Reading Gaol. Tennyson and Carlyle were my imaginary visitors – or were they ghosts talking to a ghost? The 'scene' is set at Somersby Manor. Whilst Tennyson and I are talking, his old friend, the cantankerous Carlyle, enters the room and sits down in a chair, brooding darkly, studiously avoiding my gaze.



1.

Let me be frank, my dear Carlyle:

Sartor Resartus is a bore.

Your mouthing metaphysics, your
Unkempt grotesqueries of style

Quite try one's patience. Ah, but as
For *The French Revolution*, there's
A masterpiece! Whilst *Sartor* wears
Less and less well as the years pass.

(It was a blunder, too, to elect
To write of Frederick the Great.
Napoleon and his tragic fate
Were a far worthier subject.)

There's more Philosophy of Clothes
In Edgar's scene with Lear, whose rage is
Pure poetry, and lasts three pages,
Than is in all your lumbering prose.

Yet it revived Romanticism,
Spurred Emerson to fill the abysm
Left by Utilitarianism
With lofty Transcendentalism.

And your great clothing metaphor
Serves as an inexhaustible
Symbol of the exhaustible,
A myth, a theory and a lore

Of theory growing down-at-heels,
Of lore outmoded, myth outworn.
Yes, symbols fade, they can be torn
Or soiled, the Social Body feels

*He made history a song for the first
time in our language. He was our
English Tacitus. – [In conversation]*

*Carlyle snorts derisively, picks up a book,
and pretends to become absorbed in it.*

A need for symbols of divine
Authority, for the Infinite,
You say, but language tends to split
Along the 'seems,' it takes a fine

Tailor indeed to patch and sew
Back into decent semblance the
Sacred images history
And social change are bound to throw

Into a dreadful disarray
From time to time. For every Nero
We need a Bonaparte, a hero,
A prophet, like Mohamet, say,

Or a great poet, Dante, for
Example. Such men *can* or *ken*;
These are, or give us, now and then,
In words or action's semaphore,

Unveilings, bringings-to-the light.
Ah, but what lies behind the veils?
More veils, more symbols, other tales.
Revelation is infinite.

2.
What is the Self? It is a nest
Of under-selves (each with its little
Dream, each a glory, jest, and riddle);
They moult like birds, and without rest

Weave through each other, and weave themselves
Into the world, as cunningly
As threads of silk, as randomly
As ivy. Ah, how deeply delves

Your symbol into the superficial!
Both microscope and telescope,
This infinitely subtle trope,
Organic and yet artificial,

Takes in the world's great surfaces
Of industry and institution,
But, at the finest resolution,
The grain and the interstices



Jane Carlyle.

It also knows: the haunts of cells,
Of souls, of selves. (Self is the West
End of the soul, which we invest
With richer attire, whilst the soul dwells

In woods and meadows, country cousin
To Self, Soul's worldly counterpart.
Say Soul is Nature, and Self, Art.)
But what Self reckons by the dozen

*It may forget the value of.
If Soul's a holy simpleton,
Self's a sweet cynic. To make one
These twain takes more than Art, takes Love.*

Love that unites as well divides,
Kills or is lost. It heals, and brings
A sword among us; dies, and sings
Against the thorn, and so abides.

4.
The symbol-making power is tough.
It knows itself, it can say 'I'.
It weaves what it is woven by,
The self: loom, weaver, clothes, and stuff

That dreams are made of. Mere appearance,
The visible, is life's true mystery,
At least in this phase of our history.
In cities what are we but mere ants

Unless we individuate?
Beauty is Darwinism in
The realm of style. A dull chagrin
And disappointed hopes await

The one who can't create himself
In the image of a great idea,
Like any art work, whether it be a
Pose or a book upon a shelf.

As Verlaine says, *De la musique*
Avant toute chose! Give life your best,
For literature save the rest.
Or the reverse. What you must seek



*Tennyson speaks for the taciturn Carlyle,
admonishing me in his milder idiom.*

*Wellerism-of-the-Day:
'Sometimes I feel so marginal',
said the Annotation to the Text.
Textual innuendo, exegetes?*

Is to be always, or to make,
The thing that you would be or see.
There's the challenge, the Mystery,
The art of joy, joy for Art's sake.

Create, create! Or the stress to
Conform will flatten all your angles,
Rent you, as 'twere, the cheapest spangles,
Hand-me-downs with which most make do;

Or else heredity, Nemesis
Without her mask, last of the Fates
And the most terrible, awaits
Her hour, who aims, and does not miss,

Who tolls you back to your sole self,
The un-particular worn sole
Of an old shoe, cursed with a hole
And hang-dog tongue. On the top shelf,

The double-decker bourgeois novels
Sell us instructions how to wear
This worn ware almost anywhere,
And how to house our selves in hovels

Of not the greatest expectations.
But the gratuitous gifts of Art
Subvert exchange. What soothes the heart
Disrupts business negotiations,

And the old are at war with the young.
These question, with new ways of seeing,
The look of things. It has its being,
The fabricated self, among

Textile, texture and text: costume,
The subtle brain's daedalian tissues,
Scripture and Science, and their issues,
The social ties that bless and doom

Our hearts to lives of troubled love,
Spin from one complicated loom
Whose nature we should not assume
We can define the nature of,



Because it may be that its nature
Is not to have a nature, rather
To be a thing without a father
Or mother, and mock our nomenclature.

5.
The world was void and without shape.
Let there be light! And from the slime
Evolved the human form sublime,
Creation's apex, the ex-ape,

Player of such fantastic tricks
Before high Heaven, of an essence
Glassy, and filled with evanescence,
And so adept at politics!

Whatever nature there once was
To worship, in terms pagan or
Christian, by now is urban lore,
One buzz amid a general buzz.

The city is a sort of hive
Half-mental, half-political,
Murmuring with innumerable
Beings multiple motives drive.

The modern body politic
Must regulate a politics
Of bodies. Some cells may not mix.
The immune system sniffs out sick

Cells and destroys them or expels them.
Let cold-eyed social scientists
And wild-eyed revolutionists
Reflect on how this power propels *them*,

Too! For we cells are sellers all.
Each one must individuate
And wiggle its qualities like bait
To lure the custom to its stall.

To set up a successful travel
Bureau for new experiences,
One must be versed in all the senses,
How to knit up, when stresses ravel,



*A balding, bearded, bespectacled man, about my
age, wanders into the group. I psychically divine
that he is a Berliner named 'Schlimmel' ('Simmel'?)
Apparently our dreams have intersected. Strange.*

Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care.
– Macbeth II ii [Mr V]

The sleeve of care with dreams and revels
That make the theatre of life
Theatrical, not a mere strife
Of commerce fought by colourless devils.



6.
Life wants to be Art. London is
The heart of England, but the heart
Of London is a brain. Like Art,
The soul of the metropolis

Exists along its surfaces
If it exists at all. Not play
But interplay consumes the day.
The eye must move through images

Like an unfazed Odysseus,
Keenly aware, but not absorbed
Too much by any sight. Enorbed
In spectacle that can nonplus

Or fix the gaze, one lets distraction
Ward off distraction in environs
Crowded with singing, gesturing Sirens.
One learns to enjoy dissatisfaction,

In lightened doses, as one savours
A cigarette (when smoker and smoked
Conspire in brief, doomed pleasure cloaked
As consummation), like the favours

Of an accomplished courtesan,
Which to have known is greater cause
For gratitude, when she withdraws
Them, than for grief that they're withdrawn.

In cities we have all become
The politicians of our hearts;
We play the world's performing arts.
(But the world is a broken home.

The embattled and divided self
Negotiates, both day and night,
Between its parties, black and white,
Two hostile halves of the one Guelph.)

Born into social uniformity,
Let each self dye its livery
The colour of its sovereignty
And run the risk of that enormity!

7.

*I know no dandy who has shown
Such mortal fear of understanding
Himself. On cat-paws you liked landing
Wherever by impulse you were thrown.*

*I think your epitaph should be:
'Sic jacet Oscar, Man-About-
Town, who in life grew rather stout
Yet knew himself but slenderly'.*

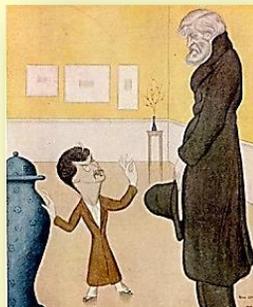
*For you, like Cromwell, got to where
You wished to go by not quite knowing
Whither it was that you were going,
If small with great I may compare.*

*It's true you found a novel path
To Hell. You Irish are so feckless!
But there's a reckoning for the reckless,
The choicest vintage of the Wrath.*

Tennyson:

*Forgive my friend, he's rather dour,
With a dyspeptic disposition
Given to truculent derision.
At heart he isn't such a boor.*

At last, Carlyle deigns to speak.



Dodgson and I
(1) *Curiouser and Curiosa*

Scene: Oxford, lounging by
'the deep and drumly Cher'.



1.
Of course we all knew you were clever.
Our paths crossed sometimes on the quads,
But, fundamentally at odds
Upon so many scores, we never

Exchanged nods. Yet the *Alice* books
I savour: they confirm my sense
That what's real or unreal depends
Upon the glass through which one looks.

And we had friends in common, too.
Ruskin was a friend to us both.
What made you think me fit to loathe
Was that I would not hide from view

The child's fantasticality
Of my imagination, bared
The fact that I wore masks, and dared
To *expose* my personality

As a promoter, in side-shows,
Exhibits to us his prize freak.
(And we, of course, won't even speak
Of my *outré* Uranian 'pose'.)

2.
While the pre-Raphaelites hung lamps
Of a revived Romanticism,
You gave the world Portmanteaucism
And clever little sleeves for stamps.

Fools rush in where no angel dares
To tread. Where Ruskin risks his name
In putting greedy wealth to shame,
You map your life in chess-board squares.

And while your friend, intense Rossetti,
Drowns sorrow for lost love in chloral's
Green sea, you toy with proverb morals
And cut up words into confetti.

Are you describing me, or you?
Ah, we both reconstruct the tatters
As art that makes more sense, and matters
More, than the 'original', it's true.

You're quite the Artist of Escape.
Another of your Transformations!
The trains we changed are changing stations.
The wood has taken on a shape

That bifurcates into a sheep
And shop, of which shop sheep is shop-
Keeper. When does the amusement stop?
Why do you find it hard to sleep?

Don't change the subject. But what is
The subject? The subject of this study.
Which has, by now, grown rather muddy.
Admittedly, as dark as Dis.

3.
You took a girl once to the local
Aquarium, and lost yourself
In a tall tale; the man turned elf.
But then you saw you were the focal

Point of a whole crowd's rapt attention,
And hurriedly departed with
The child. Into the life the myth
Had seeped. Carroll is Carroll, Dodgson

Dodgson: never the twain must meet,
Except on holidays precisely
Arranged and calculated nicely
To land you back upon your feet

Once the festivities are over,
After the days spent boating down
The river, the hours spent in town
Seeing the Pantomime. The lover

Of child's play and the mathematician
Shared the same body, double soul
In one frame. It worked, on the whole,
The arrangement. But here's my suspicion:



Yes, another Transformation Scene.
Another one? This is growing monotonous!

I think you lie awake in bed
Keeping at bay religious doubt
And unclean thoughts by working out
Complex maths problems in your head.

Curiouser and curiouser,
Your *Curiosa Mathematica*,
Where you propose so automatic a
Response when the Great Problems stir.



*Now we are talking over wine in his
spacious rooms in Christ Church.*

4.
*The 'O' your Christian name begins
With is itself a word, a whole
World of vocatives, or the hole
You dug yourself with your own sins.*

*The first letter of your last name:
Two 'V's as written, double 'U'
As said aloud: the double you,
The player of your double game.*

You mean through my two 'T's, I saw
Two worlds? Clever! — Yes, you saw 'double',
Like foolish tipplers who have trouble
Walking, and trip over the law.

I see. I carried round my own
Semblable, mon frère... And you, sir,
Must be my *hypocrite lecteur*.
You couldn't leave those girls alone...

*I'd box your ears for such a lie,
But I've a terrible migraine.
At least I knew how to restrain
Myself.* Then pardon me, Charles: I

Believe you. You have my sincere
Apologies. *The hour has grown
Late. I'm unwell. I must lie down.*
I hope you'll soon feel better, dear.



Exit.

Dodgson and I *(2) The Paradox*

Charles has taken to his bed with a terrible migraine. In his absence and my cups, I make the acquaintance of the furniture – in particular his empty chair. Marcel would not approve...



1.
This is delightful, Chair. I'm having
Such fun! *Care for some wine?* Immensely.
I love these word games so intensely!
(My face is in dire need of shaving.)

*The chair has lost its burden
but not forgotten its manners.*

The Barber: is he in or out?
The Barber: can he shave himself?
The Barber is an evil elf,
Who, thinking logically, no doubt,

Slits the white throat of the Princess,
The gold-haired child, tender and young
And sweet as any Schubert song.
How he admires his blade's finesse!

*I'm thinking of Beardsley's evil
little 'Ballad of a Barber' here.*

Does God shave Himself? Does God save
Himself? He cast a string of pearls
Before us, or a head of curls
Golden and doomed, his Son, the brave

*The String of Pearls, title of
the penny- dreadful in which
Sweeney Todd first appeared.
– [Mr V]*

Scapegoat and Falsipar of God
Who came among us to be shorn
Of life to save us from the inborn
Depravity of Sweeney Todd.

*I do not care for such glib chatter
On subjects theological,
Oscar, harrumphs the Chair. You are full
Of nonsense. Here is weightier matter:*



2. *The Paradox*

What is all Literature if not
Paradox writ large, on the boundaries
Between 'real' systems, where the foundries
Of Los turn out new forms for thought?

Paradox moves chiastically:
Drink, the curse of the working classes
Meets Work, curse of the drinking classes.
Chiasmus paradoxically

Corrects the order it reverses,
Perversely rights self-righteous wrong
And defends rights that should belong
To those whom staid convention curses.

The order of words can change the order
Of things, chosen strategically.
Clichés and proverbs, juggled free
Of gravity, slip past a border.

'As far as I can tell, I am',
Said Bernard Shaw, to my delight,
'The only man who cannot write
An Oscar Wilde epigram

At will'. You see, the criticism
That what I wrote were but inverted
Truisms was so widely blurted
That it became a new truism.

'Tis not just *how* words play the clown,
But where and when and *whether* said,
Not just cliché stood on its head,
A world shown to be upside-down.

The social world is made of proverbs,
If not in form, in function. These
Are satraps governing each a piece
Of power. 'The proverbs and the no-verbs'

Of priests, the diagnostic curse
Or blessing doctors give, define
And prescribe limits, draw a line,
Point a direction, and rehearse



The Merry Wives of Windsor, III, i.
— [Mr V]

The formulas of good and evil,
Healthy and ill. And soul and body
Are subjects of on-going study
By the police. It is not level,



The playing field of body and soul.
Besides the tilt, there is the way
It's marked out, and who has the say
Regarding what is fair or foul.

The paradox, by flipping fair
And foul and trading work for play,
Points out things needn't be that way.
It reinterprets what is *there*,

Disputes the rules and challenges
The official version of the real.
The world's a stage, but to reveal
How it is staged – how staged it *is*,

Is to stir unrest on the border
'Twixt word and world. My words did not
Act, they *transacted*, thought for thought,
Anarchic risk for ancient order.



3. *A Fable*

I'll tell a fable, if I may:
If in the midst of a tableau
(A god, say, hoisted from below
By many hands, and held that way

*Or human pyramids, such as acrobatic
danseuses form to bring their numbers to
a climactic finale at the Empire Music Hall.*

As if he stood at natural stature
And stood, and always had stood, for
Eternity), through a trap-door
A clown bursts out and cries, *Is that your*

Best act? Bring on the dancing girls!
And to a fanfare the audience answers
With cheers, out come the can-can dancers,
Doing their high-kicks and their twirls,

The structure that set up the god
Will be upset, collapse disclose
The composed nature of the pose.
To make the obvious look odd,

Question the naturalness of 'nature',
The nature of what passes as
The natural, is, and always was
Risky play for a social creature.



(The audience would believe the illusion,
Identify its needs therewith,
Wants earnest of the wildest myth,
Superstitious, prone to confusion.

How can that great good champion Don
Quixote, at the puppet show,
Himself the tallest puppet, know
Those figures his eye fixes on

Are not real things of pleasure and pain,
The work of cunning sorcerers?
Artists, why bother to rehearse
A rite good Christians will profane?)

4.
Hermagoras, discussing 'stances' –
Four basic legal arguments –
Names the fourth species of defence
The 'metaleptic'. (He instances



Seeking a change of venue.) Here
The strategy is to deny
That the court has the right to try
The case at all. My Dear, the seer

Or visionary takes the same
Position *vis à vis* the order
Of things. Who is to be the lord-
Over of rules, who gets to name

Things and define their qualities?
It is a question of who is master,
Says Humpty Dumpty – though disaster
Exposes the fragilities



In *his* assumptions. Dear Chair, all
Such brittle stances are precarious.
The children find it quite hilarious
When this good egg has a great fall.

Yes, when poor Humpty Dumpty slips,
Falls from the wall, all the sublime
Harlequins, all the Pantomime
Horses of the Apocalypse

Finnadam's offwall, o' curse.
– Jim



Can't put him back together, at most
An educated guess, deduction,
Or philologist's reconstruction
They make of Self for-ever lost.

And he had such a dainty leg!
His crash is a Creation Myth,
Gnostic, and catastrophic, with
A dash of the old Orphic Egg.

In quest of its tumptytumtoes? – Jim

Eros is born therefrom, according
To some. *That* god creates the rest,
Is Master. The poor Egg is best
Reassembled in *his* re-wording.

Good Mr Dumpty, may I call
You Humpty? You're a fine philosopher,
But goddess Language, with a toss of her
Gold tresses, knocks you from that wall.



5. *Seno and Rauxa*

Ah, one *must* ask precisely those
Things that seem to go without saying
To say where they are going. Playing
This game, as one like me well knows,

Can make you famous or, if not
Famous, notorious, and not only
Notorious: exiled, poor and lonely.
Ah well, Chair. As good as I got,

Almost, I gave, perhaps even better,
In the long run. But, ah, it is
A *very* long run! For the kiss
Of Judas and the branded letter

That is the curse of that uplifted
And stiltedly constructed God
Is Cain's mark, and I cross a broad
Desert, and pay for being gifted

With the strange gift of taking nothing
For granted and assuming play
Is free in a most serious way.
But like the wave that falls to frothing

The moment it attains its crest,
The sacred house of cards will fall,
And there will be a free-for-all
When the spell and the fell arrest

Of the divine tableau is broken
And motion shatters like a burst
Of laughter both the too-rehearsed
Composure of all those unspoken

Assumptions *and* the god-persona.
What an ecstatic spill they take,
Those human pyramids they make
For *rauxa*'s sake in Barcelona!

6.
A ladder upside-down is still
A ladder. Laid out flat, it can
Be made into a bridge, and span
A rift. Perhaps one day it will.

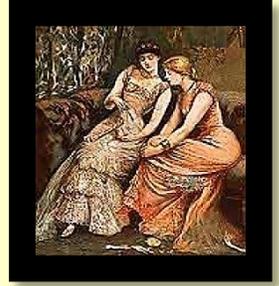


*Rauxa: Catalan for foolish recklessness
or, as I prefer to call it, a fine madness.*



Iris of the Eye
(A Collaborative
Novella-in-Progress)

Cyril and Vyvyan (in italics).



1. *An Evening at the Baron's*

In Manchester's Victoria Mills
The children slave, they learn no Latin.
But Iris, ah! she laughs in satin,
The curtains shudder to her trills.

Fine Japanese and Flemish prints
Hang on the Morris-papered wall.
A chair speaks to her soul with all
The flowery eloquence of chintz.

(As for Japan: it is a myth.
There's no such place. There are no such people.)
A smokestack is the Devil's steeple.
The older man she's flirting with

See 'The Decay of Lying'. — [Mr V]

Notes her eyes noting someone younger
Whose wife notes this, and in a frounce
Exits the room, and in the towns
Of England, children sleep in hunger.

But in his country house, the Baron
Is giving a soirée. The poor
Factory children cross the moor,
Builders of wealth they have no share in.

Here is Clitandre, here Cecelia,
Here grave Diana. That pale, thin,
Aethereal vision is Gwendolyn.
And here comes sprightly young Coppelia,

The Princess of the Grand Ballet!
(A sorcerer's handiwork, or daughter);
Ondine, who lures men to the water;
And Columbine, as fresh as May,

Who cuts Pierrot, for she would fain
Kiss Harlequin, the masked valet.
The Duchess brings her daughters: they
Are puritanical and plain.

*And many more that I could name
Grace with their company his house.
Slim, handsome dandies make their bows
With an arch smile, keen for the game.*



*Each youth, a worldly Parsifal,
Intends to yield to every charm
These Flower-Maidens wield: bare arm,
Flushed cheek, or silent Siren call*

*Of parted lips that mouth a gasp.
If Ondine makes a pure fool of him,
Clitandre's eyes hint she could love him.
But one flower is beyond his grasp:*

*Iris the Queen, whose charms bewilder an
Avid eye. And the feast, the glow
Of candelabras...! No, there are no
Such children, there are no such children!*

*Look on those braids of golden hair!
The beaux are whispering, 'What a stunner!'
Who does not have designs upon her?
The power loom in the corner there*

*Is rather big to fit the space.
She's no Penelope, though she
Plays the piano skillfully.
Ah, power looms in every place!*

*Into the night the guests carouse
In decorous patterns 'neath a blaze
Of chandeliers, as the band plays
The Treues Liebes Herz of Strauss.*

*(The police have just seized the man
Who killed three pheasants in the woods
And almost made off with the goods
But they ran faster than he ran.)*

2. The Anatomy of a Sphinx

*Of all eyes cynosure, this Iris;
Her face turns every head her way –
To the chagrin of Amadée,
The tragic tribade. (To admire is*

*Exquisite, but, ah, to possess
Exceeds the powers of this grey-
Eyed Artemisian femme damnée,
So she selects a watercress*



*Sandwich with a disconsolate moue.)
Iris moves past her in a shimmer
That changes as the lights grow dimmer
To a mirage of gold and blue.*

*But now the brittle windows tremble
In neurasthenic rhythm to
The coal train that comes rumbling through
The garden, where the flowers resemble*

*Their shades in Hades, they are so
Black with the dust the iron beast scatters.
Iris is heedless of such matters.
Desire is her domain. The glow*



*Upon her silks blinds every eye
To the grim business without,
Though guests must strain to hear, and shout
To be heard over the shrill cry*

*Of the steel whistle as the steam-
Powered hulking demon shambles by.
But shimmering in her vibrancy
Is Iris, lambent and a-gleam,*

*A glow-worm in the hearts of men,
Bait to capture a lingering stare.
In the fireplace the embers glare
At her sullenly now and then.*

*Has Iris any depths to sound?
A Sphinx without a secret, she!
A superficiality
So pure it is, indeed, profound:*

*A lateral profundity
Of surface into surface woven,
Like the rich fabric her limbs move in,
Whose sheen a craftsman knows to be*

*The effect of empty spaces, 'floats'
Where the threads do not interlace.
But ah, the glamour of that face
In whose eyes Aphrodite gloats*

*Is as a Symbol on which dotes
The weightiest mind in helpless wonder!
The urchin-children huddle under
The bridge. It's cold. They have no coats.*

*(Not now! I'm working on my next
Novella, Iris of the Eye,
An iridescent fantasy.
Realist details would mar the text.)*



3. *An Unfortunate Incident*

The older man, the Baron, is
Being questioned by two constables,
Causing cessation in the pulse
Of waltzing: something is amiss.

'The poacher's daughter, sir, has filed,
Sir, a complaint that you have, er,
Behaved indecently with her,
Used force, and she is now with child'.



That power loom has spun the lord
A sticky web of legal troubles.
Dom Perignon expels his bubbles
As *peu à peu*, without a word,

The guests leave, singly or in pairs —
*Except for two: for Amadée
Is rapt in passionate Sapphic play
Sequestered in a room upstairs:*

*At last, her lovelorn heart's desire is
Hers by a most perverse plot twist
I weave into the tale: a tryst
With aureate-haired and lustrous Iris!*

How frail a thing is a good name!
The lady of the house walks in
Upon the couple whilst the sin
Is burning — burning now with shame!

Writ in the book of infamy,
Wide-eyed and scarlet-cheeked, with hands
Clapped to their mouths, they hold their stance
Like figures in a tapestry.

4. *The Sequel:*

Another Victim of the Labouchère Amendment

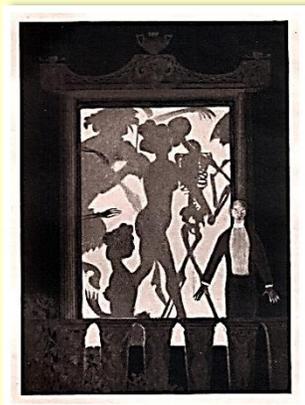
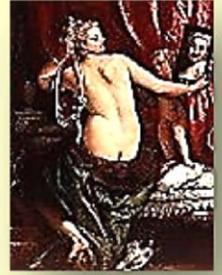
The Baron pays for wicked bliss
When others come forth with their tale.
Behold him in his cell in gaol,
With not a girl around to kiss.

*And Iris? On her feet she lands,
Her small white feet, in Paris, an
Accomplished actress-courtesan
Who has them eating from her hands*

*Upon the boards, whereon she dies
In many rôles, and lives again,
Idol of women and of men
Who dream in French of those blue eyes.*

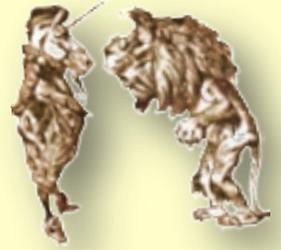
5. *The Moral*

Of course, the moral of the fable's –
Do what you will, not what you ought?
A child is to be loved, not bought.
Morality is a game of labels.



From Père Lachaise
The Empire at Home and Abroad

*A group of German university
students gather round my elegant tomb.*



1.
Good evening! Kind of you to trot
By on your way to, where, a nice
Café? The Opéra? How wise
You all seem! You're an owlish lot.

Students, you say? Ah, so was I,
Once. Intellectuals? This visit
Is about edification, is it?
Well, if you must be scholarly,

I wager you would like to hear me
Talk about England in the old
Days, about politics and cold
Economy. Alas, dear me!

This has potential to be boring.
*You knew so much, though, Oscar, saw
And lived so much. We hold in awe,
Critical awe, that age, exploring,*

*Exploiting, brutal and scientific
And decadent, expansionist
And insular... —I get the gist,
My Dear. You'd have me be specific.*

Very well, I will set the scenes
And act them out, and bring you up
To date, briefly. Then you will sup
And revel. (Ah! You are in your teens!)

2. *The Pre-Raphaelite Years and their Passing*

Society still sought its tone,
As there continued, almost daily,
The exchange of Gladstone for Disraeli
And of Disraeli for Gladstone.

Pilgrims to Arthur Liberty's
Regent Street store, and other art warehouses,
The bourgeois thronged to buy for their houses
The flower-patterned tapestries

Of peacock-blue, the finely wrought
Stained-glass things, thin as a whisper,
The vine-and-tendril wallpaper
With which pre-Raphaelites sought

To save the harried modern soul
From the brute, levelling onslaught
Of the great factory juggernaut.
But those who paid the steepest toll

To the barons of industry
Could least afford these lovely things,
And they fell to the scavengings
Of the bower-bird bourgeoisie.

The middle class could not decide
Whether to help the hungry poor
Or punish them. But these grew more
And more, and an advancing tide

Of Socialists and Fabians
And Communists and Anarchists
Brandishing pamphlets or their fists,
At times, broke in on the romance

And idyll of the wealthier classes.
(This I was sure of: Socialism
Fails without Individualism,
Detaching oneself from the masses.)

How many young souls have I seen
Who should be individuals
Ground down like rows of decimals
In Babbage's Difference Machine!)

3.
One Anarchist's bomb would reveal
The Tower Bridge's quaint façade
(That mediaeval face says 'God')
Is built on heartless modern steel.

The scions of the Saboteurs,
Lyonnaise or Silesian weavers,
And Sans Culottes, are true believers
In violent gods, as they rehearse



The Communist Apocalypse
When horsemen storm the Winter Palace
And vent an ancient pent-up malice
Against the boyars' knouts and whips.

Glorious October! Who can stifle
The bullet, barricade and bomb?
Liberty's still, though *très grande dame*
By now, a crack shot with a rifle.

The Marx-intoxicated Masses
And the great Spectre of Revolution
Come alive, horribly: blood-ablution
Of the sins of the Upper Classes,

Its musical accompaniment
The cracking of aristocratic
Skulls and the stutter of automatic
Weapons, and tycoons shot or sent

To labour camps with reprobate
Theoreticians of Class Struggle
Whilst cowardly apparatchiks snuggle
Against the ogre of the State.



4.
And Capitalism? The great fact is
How powers-that-be manipulate
And merge beneath *its* modern State
Religion and sharp business practice,

The latter of which, based upon their
Utilitarian theories (with
Doses of fallen-Adam Smith),
Is quite amoral, laissez-faire

Barbarity in a frock coat.
Thou shalt not kill, but make a killing.
Torture the pence into the shilling.
Worship the stock, and buy the vote.

The indistinguishable herd
Of Nonconformists, clean of face
And conscience briskly-scrubbed, that race
So serious and so absurd,



Dissenters, once beneath a ban,
Who helped abolish the slave trade,
Are now Consenters to be made
Slave-drivers of the working man.

*Govern the unwilling. Lest, like vermin,
The angry poor should run amok,
Toss them a crumb, for Christian luck.
Give them a lecture, preach a sermon.*



5. Trade Winds: The Colonial Adventure

'Twas to intrepid Commodore
Perry's gunboat diplomacy
That we owed Japonaiserie.
(What stuff comes through that Open Door!)

And what is Japonaiserie?
The iceberg's tip. The world, once vast,
Was growing smaller, and was fast
Becoming one society

Riven by violence, and rent
By revolution everywhere.
(The greed of wealth that will not share
Ensures continual dissent.)

Along with foreign goods, ships brought
To our shores strains of speech, exotic
New words that spiced the old demotic
With the tang of the polyglot.

Suttee, Seppuku and Kow-Tow,
Mahatma, Dharma, Hunky-Dory,
Kiwi, Banana and Satori,
Pantoum, Kris, Bwana... In they blow

On one great capitalist trade wind.
The growl of Rikki-Tikki-Tavi
Mingles with Napier's 'Peccavi',
Meaning, *I have sinned. I have Sindh.*

*'Hunky-Dory', from a red-light district
in Yokohama, Japan, haunt of sailors.*

*Sir Charles Napier in the 1840's conquered
this east Indian province. His despatch
consisted of this single punning word. [Oscar]
Mr V: Wrong, Oscar. But let us continue below.**

**This is a popular misconception. The author of the pun was a girl named Catherine Winkworth, who submitted it to Punch, which then printed it as a factual report. She went on, by the way, to win fame as a composer of hymns. – Oscar: Very well. But let us leave the cramped basement of this footnote! It is rather clammy.*

(He exceeds his authority
In a way that secretly pleases the
Foreign Office, for he increases the
Size of our holdings measurably.

Of course, the East India Company
Can see the possibilities.

The public chuckles: *At least he's
A noble rascal, isn't he!*)



6. *The Opium Wars; the Boxer Rebellion*

We cook the Dragon's goose, fill full
Our bellies at the feast, our host
Lord Palmerston, who serves as toast-
Master to delicate John Bull,

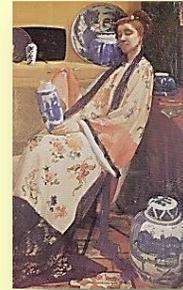


Drug trafficker extraordinaire
To the Chinese, willing to force
Smoke down their throats, to fight two wars
And spread addiction everywhere

To adjust the balance of Free Trade.
We bring them interesting times,
We foreign devils, and our crimes
Are schools in how Empire is made.

To them affliction is a thing
Eternally passing, the one dream
Into the other, what things seem
And are, equally vanishing.

But comes the Boxer, acrobat
Martial and magical in air;
And Chinese Muslims gobble rare
The black heart of a diplomat.



*Lord Palmerston (1857) showing the
Chinese what's what. (Punch cartoon.)*

*Clemens von Ketteler, German Pleni-
potentiary to Peking, gratuitously shot a
Chinese boy. In revenge, Kansu Braves
made a meal of the man's heart (1900).*

The peasants fear the officials; the
Officials fear John Bull; Bull fears
The peasants: such harsh, clanking gears
Drive the commercial colony.



7. *Pius Aeneas*

Ah, the colonial adventure
Makes each man pious Aeneas, in
His own mind – a *good* killer. Sin
On epic scales escapes the censure

Of Conscience by appealing to
The old ideals. (Modernity
Adds sweetening Tartufferie.)
And what can the poor natives do?

What gross enormity can one
Commit but it bears fruit, or tends
To useful ends, and finally blends
Beneath a never-setting sun

Into the glorious old story,
That is, the great reality,
That is, a fact of history
So vast that the details, cruel, gory,

Shameful, atrocious as they are,
Fade, in the sunlight of successes,
To ghosts that trail, as it progresses,
Caesar's immense triumphal Car?



(His slave, an economical
Philosopher, seizes the hour
To whisper in the ear of Power:
You are immortal, after all.)

What have they done, the English? Made
A little history, that's all.
Is that so evil? Yes. The Fall
Rendered us so. For since Eve bade

*Disraeli offering Queen Victoria an even
more prestigious title: Empress of
India! Her daughter had become German
Empress: that simply would not do!*

Her husband eat, and he and she
Sinned in their disobedience,
We are all half-devils. Innocence
Is a Tahitian luxury



Gauguin made sure to cure them of —
He was a sort of missionary
Of Decadence: he taught how very
Risky and dangerous is love,

All sicklied o'er with the pale cast
Of death, or at the very least,
Shameful disease. (And yet the East,
I think, will be avenged at last.)

Real missionaries, ever-officious,
Cried, *Save the heathen!* But did not
Many a Christian in his pot
Curse God, who made him so delicious?

A mere foretaste of what the world
At England's feet, licking its chop-
Sticks, has in store when conquests stop
And the frayed Union Jack is furled

And packed, and sent back to the roost
To which the chickens, too, will come,
The Foreign Ones, and call it home.
When once the reins of Power are loosed,



As loosed they must be, finally (Rome's
Imperium ate the dust), the past is
Not what it used to be... As fast as
It drove, the chariot caroms

From off the rebound of its force
And veers from the triumphal path
To muddle through the aftermath
Of altering human history's course,

Its own course altered. For the *arma*
Virumque that made others change
Those changes shall in turn estrange:
So saith Fate, or Wyrd, or Karma.

8. *A Charming Coda*

I broach a somewhat different topic
For your refreshment and surprise:
For in a fit of wild surmise
I have discovered a new Tropic

And fashioned for the clime a novel
Pith helmet and white suit of clothes
To uphold the Mad Dog English pose
So that whilst coolies in their hovel

That barely from the rains gives cover
Poke grains of rice with little sticks
From bowls, I may my sixty-six
Thousand-pound income savour over



A cold, spiced drink of whisky or rum
And summon up those souvenirs
Of G & S that still wring tears,
And hum the Moon Song of Yum-Yum.

My eyes are glistening, myopic –
But listen! Something is amiss:
Beelzebub is Lord in this
Mosquito-buzz-bedevilled Tropic!



Trial by Caricature *The Sphere of Satire*

*Max makes me fatter than I am.
The scene is Cat-Call Music Hall.
[Dante]: Mind your Ledge!*



*Beerbohm, that is. He sees
that I have gained back the
weight I lost in previous tomes.*

1.
Is that you, Max? What brings you here?
Not dead, I hope? *Oh, no. At least
I hope not. I feel like a creased
Page in some ancient book. Oh, dear,*

*It must be, yes, I think that I'm
Dreaming – if old men still can dream.
Well, welcome to the side, the 'team'.
You're on a plane, you see, where time*

*And space are, well, peculiar.
I have been drawing you. Ah, clever
Max! Hard as I try, I can never
Draw you quite as fat as you are.*

*I think I'm going to draw you fatter
Than anyone was ever drawn.
Fatter than Aubrey did me?
I think I'll think you as pure matter;*

*Then, Oscar, I propose to blow you
Up like a helium balloon.
Max, don't be tedious. As soon
As I draw you as so-and-so, you*

*Are what I make you seem. Look! quicker
Than V can scribble 'i.o.u',
The blank your Self reduces to
Reforms itself, but as a thicker*

*And grosser Self, and, yes, a fatter.
Into an abstract state you fall
And simultaneously all-
Too-amply incarnate as matter!*

2.
*The grave of Self's annihilation
Gapes thrice as wide for you as for
The rest. – A fact which I deplore,
But losing weight's a tribulation*



(Yawn.)

*I sigh as I begin to expand in smirking
Beerbohm-space, self-caricaturing.
caricature. Ah, well, no small parts...
On with the Show, then.*

*(Something by G&S might be nice here.)
–[Mr V]*

I am unable to endure,
So I must lug the avoirdupois
And pursy bulk of portly *moi*
Like a disease without a cure.

*You've taken on a plump rotundity
Incredible in its immensity,
All-but Teutonic in the density
Of its corporeal profundity;*

*Outsized Falstaffian profanity
Gives you such ludicrous pomposity
Of oleaceous adiposity,
More than a man, you are a manatee.*

I am become a Schoolman's quiddity,
Crassitas, with a bent for battening
On, of all language, the most fattening,
Larded encomiast's pinguidity:

I lay upon you, like fantastical
Chintz drapery on an old chair,
The most outrageous flatteries: there!
Upholstered rhetoric, bombastical

Hyperbole and gross exaggeration,
Unctuous, fulsome praise and oily
Compliments greasy as a doily
Soiled to the point of sweaty saturation:

'Dearest, handsomest Max, ah! you are
The youngest youth I've ever seen!'
Now you are merely being mean.
'You are so dapper, so demure!'

3.

*To be so fat suggests depravity,
It's true; yet here you are, bereft
Of all but your material heft,
By now a major source of gravity:*

*In a word, overweight – in fact
You have become so nearly spherical
It is a harlequinade miracle,
Of flesh you are an estate, a tract.*

Am I the Mikado?

Orchestral tutti. Applause.



*The greatest elephant in
the world, except himself.*

*And yet: 'All the fat is the LORD'S'.
Leviticus 3:16*

Not one of Dante's bolge holds you.
You are outgrowing the entire
Depression, rising higher and higher;
Like a flesh-flag the wind unfolds you,

Or like a sail to the utmost swelling,
Like a cloud, like a cloud formation
You shadow the globe's vast curvation
And where it ends, there is no telling!

So soft, so far-from adamantine,
So Tweedledee-and-Tweedledumpy,
So Humpty-Dumpty-plump and clumpy –
You're a Gargantuan-elephantine

Heavyset, stout, absurdly dense
Man who, spectacularly globular,
(His thoughts half-nebulous, half-blobular)
Lost in his porcine corpulence,

Must drag his pudgy, paunchy bulk
Along the ground as Sisyphus
Uphill his rock, and ponderous
The wheezing pace, and a great sulk

Exists among your folds of face –
Distended, jowly, erythematous,
With wattles of which no known limit is;
You are a weighty thing that weighs

As much as, and in form and feature
Is very like a whale whose blubber's
So vast, it seems to mere landlubbers
Who've never seen quite such a creature

Less like a creature than a land.
A thing that thinks, 'Alas, were I a thin
Fellow again...!' No: you are Leviathan.
And thus resigned; fat makes you bland.

You grow through all the change of weather
Till you become (to my dismay!) an
Amalgamation Himalayan
Of many Oscars heaped together.

I am become Johnsonian,
Almost. (For a Circumferential
Humanity was the essential
Ingredient of that massive man.)



The Tragic Dandy

A Dandy, should he live so late,
Becomes, not a svelte skeleton,
But Falstaff, charm weighed by the ton.
How fat was poor Beau Brummel's fate!
– [Cancelled stanza]

Another Cancelled Stanza: How Many Tweedles Are There?

I contain Tweedles Dee and Dum,
And several more you've never heard of.
(Writing in margins is absurd, of
Course, a vice I should abstain from.)



Think of me as the Continent.
The Incontinent, you surely mean?
There is so much you haven't seen.
Take the Grand Tour, become a *gent*,

See the Great World of me. Go on,
Round off your education, polish
Your manners, and perhaps demolish
Some *borné* notions, too, my son.

Ah, it would be a tour de farce
Of no small magnitude, if I
Could bring it off. Well, why not try?
It might make you a bit less *sparse*.

3.1

Steatopygic, narcissistic,
Multiple-chinned and jowly, fish-
Lipped, huge hands moist as you could wish,
More than gigantic, GIGANTISTIC,

So swollen, meaty, over-present
In overbearing too-much-of-him,
Far too much stuff appears to stuff him.
If not bovine, then bovinescent

He seems to me in lard and lolling,
And, sirs, as far as one can tell he, well, he
Has no plans to reduce his jelly-belly,
And lately he is prone to rolling,

This pound-amassing ball of butter,
Nor are there signs he'll ever cease
Becoming ever-more obese
And so fat-lipped he can but sputter

And thickly slobber forth his muttering
Through those reverberant, rubbery slabs
Till who knows what it is he blabs
Through all that noise of spittle sputtering?

Not worldly merely: planetary,
A gaseous Jupiter whose tactic
Is to inflate past the galactic
Till 'mid the supernumerary



*Another Cancelled
Brummelian Stanza*

Beau Brummel, when his slimness fails,
Meets an unfashionable end
At fences it's too late mend
With his fat friend, the Prince of Whales.

*Vastnesses, with huge creaks and strains
He eats the universe entire;
Then will his weight and mass be higher
Than everything that he contains*

*(And all is now in him contained)
Of substance and of time and space.
(What Grösse in that fatted face!)
Not one more scruple to be gained.*

*What keeps me with a man so sick,
So fatuous and outright batty?
Love of the Fat Man, Amor Fatty
Keeps me with him through thick and – thick.*

*Too big I've grown for my own trousers.
I must find means to pay the tailor
And to 'buy off' a new blackmailer
(The cut of whose trousers arouses).*

3.14 (*Enter the Oscar*)

*The stage is set: a dull soirée:
The tepid waltz, the gossiping pairs
Of matrons... Past their frosty stares
I make my slow and shambling way.*

*My left leg is an epic poem,
My right, a learned commentary.
The wit of those whose thrusts I parry
Is pint-sized; mine's a jeroboam.*

*My arms are sturdy cylinders
Of gesturing flesh. My lips? Obscenely
Large, said one lady, rather meanly.
I move; my trousers swish; I purse*

*My monstrous fishy lips, then say
Such wondrous things, as lost in thought,
That soon the miracle is wrought
And all are hooked: I win the day.*

*Your lips grew ever fatter, true,
And fatter grew your fingers and
Your thighs, but your head, vast and grand!
Became the fattest part of you.*



*A pun, somewhat grossier, on
Nietzschean amor fati. – [Mr V]*



*Frank Harris, shameless Bardolater,
ready to sacrifice his manhood on
the altar of Shakespeare's Uranian lust.*

3.141

All things want to be round, or rounded,
The Cherokee say: should you sound
My roundness I think 'twould be found
Praise for Earth's roundness is unfounded.

I am the heavy and the light
Combined: a massive Zeppelin
Part helium and part stretched skin.
That's why I'm almost always right

About, say, Art, Space, Time, and Weather.
I split the difference between
Extremes, attaining, not a mean —
A different difference altogether.

And thus I, with profound resoundings,
A wheel-turned-sphere, blessed by its rondure,
Move smoothly into a Beyondure
Where I'm the 'round' in your surroundings,

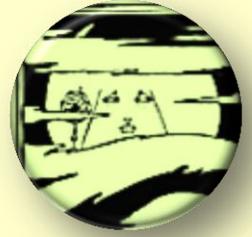
Modality there is no fleeing;
More, therefore, than a simple ball,
I am the pantheistic All
In which you move and have your being.

Your scheme has failed, Max: though you planned
To make me little by expansion,
(And here I *do* exceed the bounds of scansion)
You've made me positively *grand!*

You'd make me much more wide than tall,
But I've accomplished in my stoutness
A *ne plus ultra* roundabout-ness
There is no getting round at all.

En gros, you've merely multiplied me,
Not fattened me, by infinite orders
Of magnitude, or greatness. Borders
I've none, and nothing stands beside me:

I am God. And you? You are not there:
There simply is no room for you
Save in *me*, as a thought I have too
Long entertained, like an old air.



*'...gigantic, smooth-shaven and
rosy, like a great priest of the moon
in the time of Heliogabalus.
— Stuart Merrill*

Survival of the fattest?

Well, as a thought, do I, therefore,
Occupy space? If I am 'there'
Inside you, am I 'in the air'?
A figure of speech, dear, nothing more.



In fact, I have invented you
As Will invented Enoch Soames.
You are apocryphal as the tomes
You never wrote. You are not true.

Will Rothenstein.

3.1415...

Whilst I am, well, bloviating, hugely, thus, Max has taken from his pocket a small, laqueured box, of Chinese make, it appears. He opens the box, the interior of which is lined with silk, and carefully lifts therefrom, or rather tweezes, a fine silver needle. Remember that I am roughly co-extensive with the Universe at this point – and yet I can somehow make out that the needle is incised with exquisite carvings, made with an even tinier implement, by some very, very small, and I imagine, very thin, presumably Oriental, man. These carvings depict an entire scene: to wit, Angkor Wat, complete with temples, canals, lotus flowers, and monks in saffron-coloured robes with begging bowls. And now I am beginning to worry a bit, for he has casually positioned the needle between the thumb and forefinger of his right hand, and the hand is approaching me very steadily and purposefully, but for what purpose, exactly? I fear the worst: Cosmic Deflation! Whilst all of this is going on, Max's face wears a look of inscrutable, almost Buddhistic, and at the same time distinctly blasé, detachment. I attempt to dodge the needle, but – there is no room outside me to manoeuvre!

*A small pin-prick can cause a vast
Implosion. No, Max! Not that! NO!*

I (the Universe) deflate catastrophically. An apocalypse of inconceivable proportions, galaxies imploding, planets colliding to form molten lumps, cataclysmic storms and earthquakes and the extinction of life on this planet, of course... Meanwhile Max, who appears remarkably unconcerned as the end of time is taking place deafeningly all around him, appreciatively scrutinises his exquisite needle, occasionally sipping a glass of brandy. Once all the cosmic dust has settled...

*There! You're as thin as long ago
You were – in youth! Your trial is passed.*

Why, thank you, Max. It *was* a burden,
Being the Being of all beings,
With all the I-ings and the me-ings...
A villanelle shall be your guerdon.

Max looks somewhat alarmed.

Oscar, you are wilful, you are whimsical –
But I am tired, quite tired. I'm waking up.
Your image, dear, has begun breaking up.
Well, long may you avoid the grim sickle!

He vanishes, or pretends to.

The Vision of Sarah Bernhardt on the Silver Screen

Sarah, I see you on a wall
Burning, in such a fragile fire!
Your flaring fury, your desire
And fear and grief, I watch them all

Flow through the quick staccato of
The frames. You look a little strange.
You may have undergone a change,
You whom I so admire and love.

But oh, how beautiful you are!
A glow, a beacon beckoning me
To join you in the Mystery
That burns inside us like a star.

You are Elizabeth the Queen,
Though you are dressed more like Pierrot
In loose gown, billowing sleeves. Your flow
Of gestures must be felt, be *seen*,

The arms free to protest against
Your fate. (The hands: two fluttering doves.)
Who kills the man she loves, still loves.
You flicker jealously, incensed,

Then passionate, tender, tragic, old...
Old? How could Sarah the Divine
Be anything but young? Your fine
Intensity warms all that's cold

Into rejuvenated passion.
You would have been my Salomé—
You always will be. Should the day
Arrive when there is no more Fashion,

And every light must dim and die,
In silver gown you will abide
The ebbing of Time's epic tide,
Still telling your immortal lie.



A 1912 motion picture .

Bernhardt promised to help Oscar financially on his release from Reading Gaol. Despite repeated reassurances, the money never materialised. – [Mr V]



From Père Lachaise
The Sanglot

Lord Alfred Douglas seems so far away:
He is a dream not even mine, but told
Me by a madman, and my heart is cold.
Yet though I doubt I'd have a word to say

To him, if I should meet him on this side,
Sometimes I hear, when with a heavy heart
I take my ghostly walk through old Montmartre,
A song that reawakens what has died.

This is my sonic emblem: the sanglot
In Édith Piaf's voice, the breaking of
The heart-note at Bar 12: ah, *that* is Love
Gone wrong, Dears, as it always seems to go!



Notes of a Concert-Goer dans le Neuvième Arrondissement

Speaking as a Parisian ghost-about-town as well as a somewhat dingy 'Inn-Spectre', I have, in the Afterlife, partly under the influence of Mr V, become much more interested in music than I ever was in life, Dears. One could say my 'I' is becoming 'all ears', but perhaps one shouldn't. Here are some reviews.



1.
Not the arts only, all of life
Aspires to the condition of
Music, where all the passions love
Themselves, yes, even pain and strife.

As Nietzsche tells us in *The Birth
Of Tragedy*, in dissonances
The very soul of suffering dances,
Exulting in its trials on earth.

On a blind giant's shoulders rides
(In Schopenhauer's allegory)
The lame man who can only see,
Beset by instincts on all sides.

But that poor crippled, seeing mind
Finds fleeting Heaven in the ear
When the Will, imageless and clear,
Sings Passion purified and kind.

Music in which mere repetition
Holds sway narcotically but serves
To soothe or stimulate the nerves;
While that of genius, with a 'vision' —

And yes, I mix my metaphors
Advisedly: every 'aesthetic'
Is, on some level, *synaesthetic* —
Such melody as Mozart pours

Over our heads like sacred oil,
Anointing us with happiness
That brings us close to gods (they bless
This angel resting from his toil):

Such music is our sacred bread,
Or should be consecrated thus,
Estranging and enlarging us,
Joining the living and the dead

In tentative and secular
Communion: so intense, so clear,
Tuned to the inner eye and ear,
It sings in candles like a star,

Shines like brass fanfares! Though the bliss
Of the young dancer fades, alas!
In *moments musicaux*, the 'was'
Is momentarily an *is*.

2. *After an Evening of Mahler*

Suppose that music, audible,
Is only writing in the ear;
Then writing, it is equally clear,
Is music intellectual,

The melody that thinking makes,
Or rather the polyphony
Of its conflicted symphony,
Dark, Mahler-esque, where lightning breaks

Only at times on the overbearing
And rather sophomoric Storm
And Stress at the loose edge of form.
Ah, best when all the brassy blaring

Of the Apocalypse, and dense
Black Nietzschean moustachioes
Of Nihilist dissonance, find repose
In the Slow Movement, where the tense,

Brow-beating histrionics and
Heroics give way to a free,
Pure flow of complex reverie
And thought with thought walks hand in hand

Through Alpine glades in bracing air,
Crisp vistas of nostalgia,
With cow-bells tinkling, and ah!
Nietzsche and God are with us there.



3. Chopin

Recently I heard Rubinstein's
(Arthur's, I mean) Chopin: It is
Sublime. Chopin! Strange, how in his
Hands a brief nocturne redefines

The world, and modulates its key.
One's hearing grows chromatic: birds
In the trees trill in minor thirds,
Full of Polish melancholy.

Refined, and yet through Marsyas' throat
His pain at times forced melody.
For resolution endlessly
Deferred is the true modern note.

4. Richard Strauss

But, Beecham's *Rosenkavalier*!
At Covent Garden I was present
And through the ears of a quite pleasant
Young man heard all, and shed a tear

For the great Marschallin, and scoffed
At Baron Ochs when Mariandel,
Whom on his knee he tries to dandle,
Proves, when the sly disguise is doffed,

To be the man who steals his catch.
Margarethe Siems *lived* the rôle
With her clear notes and tender soul,
And what a queenly She to watch!

And ah, the splendid final scene,
As the celesta silvers over,
The rose-red fire that burns 'twixt lover
And lover when the Marschallin

Leaves Sophie and Octavian
Alone together, is a dream's
Dream-consummation. And those gleams
Of dissonance? They are the wan

*As distinct from the Russian
composer-pianist Anton Rubinstein.*



*Beginning with the
duet, 'Est ist ein Traum'.*

Smile of Princess Marie, resigning
Her claim with an *auf Wiedersehn*
To youth she shall not see again.
Clouds with them take their silver lining

When into nothingness they fade,
Leaving in memory a rack,
At most. She thinks (and turns her back),
Es ist vorbei! Yet, how well-played!



5. Fauré

Last night I went to hear Fauré:
Piano Quartet in C Minor.
In chamber music there's no finer
Expression of Provençal *gai*



Saber (save in the *Violin*
Sonata, also wrought when he
Was a young man passionately
In love). The scherzo, sparkling in

The mind as Keats's beaded bubbles
Brim full the cup of vintage wine,
Moves in an agile, elfin line
Through that love's dark and gathering troubles:

Rebuffed proposal, heart's wound, rage
And sorrow, the dispiriting chore
Of running the Conservatoire,
The politics... The War. Old age.



6. Debussy

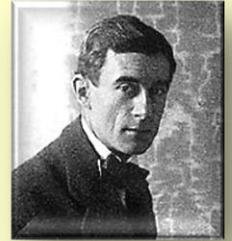
Now the mysterious *L'Après*
Midi d'un Faune wafts through the gloom
And like a poisonous flower in bloom
Nijinsky with himself doth play!

(His leaps are such miraculous things:
He seems to hover in mid-air
Before descending; one could swear
Hermes had lent the boy his wings!)

Théâtre du Châtelet, 29 May, 1912.
Ah, quel succès de scandale!

7. Ravel and *l'Enfant et les Sortilèges*

And as for those svelte ear machines
Of the Swiss-Basque Maurice Ravel,
That *paradis artificiel*
Of pastoral wallpaper scenes



Torn by a child in petulant rage,
Where shepherds beating on a tabor
Make soft lament for love's lost labour,
And innocence must turn the page

And hear the woodwinds' mortal quavers:
I rode in one, vicariously,
Through a young lady named Marie
At the Opéra last month. One savours

The rich, expressive ether of this
Precise nostalgia of the ear
In an aloof child engineer
Who prizes a frail, guarded bliss,



The benediction falling on
Him softly in the shadowy garden,
When, hurt, he gains the creatures' pardon
And he and innocence are one.

8. Vaughan Williams

Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis: haunted as an old chapel,
The strings sound. The old story, apple
And fall and death, and distant promise...

A pupil of Ravel's. I astral-travelled to Gloucester Cathedral to hear the premiere, September 1910.



9. Young Turks

But in a way that makes one wince, key
Relationships are savagely
Distorted, the ears rhythmically
Assaulted by the mad Stravinsky!

(Diaghilew's a man of charm
And money. Gawkers stand on chairs
To watch pariah and *homme d'affaires*
Walk by the cafés arm in arm.)

I attended the second, placidly received performance of The Rite of Spring. Since its raucous debut it had quietly metamorphosed into a cornerstone of the Repertoire, Dears!



An impresario and art-collector, interested in acquiring some of Aubrey's erotic drawings.

*



But when the gate of light's unlocked
And I walk home into the Vast,
Let it be to the mystic last
Strains of Schoenberg's

Verklärte Nacht.



Sprechstimme,
Death-pale
Mad-
The twentieth



a glissando, shrill,
expressionist nightmare,
clowning of **Pierrot Lunaire...**
century is ill.

II

* *Harlequin's Apocalypse* *



Comedy and Horror

Snatcher, a lively dog lent to him by Mr. Rowland Strong, was present and eagerly snapped up a morsel which Wilde rendered more appetising by christening it Dreyfus.

—Wilfred Hugh Chesson,
A Reminiscence of 1898

*From Père Lachaise
Drama and Delirium*

*Again, at my tomb, entertaining
young visitors, handsome admirers.*



1.
Welcome, my Dears. Don't you look clever!
And comelier than the previous group.
(*Live, Dears, before you, too, must stoop
Into 'the house of dust' for ever!*)

*I may have stolen this phrase from
Housman, or is the house of dust in the air?*

2. *Absolute Comedy*

Strange, Dears, how the mere happening
Of the Routine impresses us
As real. It's merely obvious.
Art is the only serious thing

In the world, and the artist is
The only person who is never
Serious. The noblest endeavour
Is to do nothing and to miss

Nothing. The Good is contemplation,
Especially when the contemplator
Is versed in Baudelaire and Pater
And does not wallow in moderation.



*'Baudelaire sous l'influence
du hashish'. Par lui-même.*

3. *One of my Listeners Interposes*

*But what does Schiller say of Art
Somewhere? Ernst is das Leben, heiter
Die Kunst: it plays in lighter, brighter
Keys the sad music of the heart.*

'Life is earnest, art light-hearted'.

My Dear, a truth in art is one
Whose contradictory... (You know
The rest.) Indeed – for it is so
Uncanny a phenomenon –

Art is, in its mercurial essence,
Absurdly light as well as clearly
Profound, and it is always *early*.
What, Dears, if not the ambiguous presence

Of serio-comedy, defines
A work as modern? Isn't this
Its 'note'? Fierce though it be, there is
Dark comedy between the lines

Of Baudelaire: *Je suis la plaie*
Et le couteau, / Et la victime
Et le bourreau. Ah, if we scream
With laughter in our endless play

Of passion, it is to confess
We can no longer smile — so says
The poet as he slaps the face
His lover offers for caress.

Mere satire, or caricature,
Yields, in the artist, Baudelaire
Remarks (I don't remember where)
To something stranger and more pure:

The comic absolute, sublime
Grotesque of pantomime, that odd
World ruled by the athletic god
Grimaldi, a prank on space and time.

Carroll played it with words, in stories:
A Harlequinade universe
Where cause, effect, forward, reverse,
And other Kantian categories

(Pieties of epistemology)
Trip over each other, slap-stick style.
His disembodied Cheshire-smile
Presides over a mock-cosmology,

A holiday reality.
First the beheading, then the trial,
Then the offence. That riddling smile
Signifies that the head can't be

Decapitated. So, this half-
Dodgson-body (the befrocted Spectre),
Half-Carroll-mind, kept a free sector
In that mind for the child to laugh



See 'L'Héautontimorouménos'.

Oh yes, in his essay, *De l'essence du rire.*



Joseph Grimaldi
in civilian attire.

'Spectre' in Blake's antithetical sense: the
the empirical, socialised, everyday self.

In, a playground, a Pantomime
Garden, a Wood changed to a Shop
At the swivel of a back-drop.
The Absolute Joke is sublime

Because impractical, as seen
When Pierrot, with head severed, dead
Yet still light-fingered, steals that head
Right from beneath the guillotine.

(How English is this humour! Mad
Tom sings, *With throwing thus my head
Dogs leap the hatch, and all are fled.*)
Life, so intolerably sad,

Drives us to such fierce farce, whose play
Provokes a laugh both knowing and
Convulsive – oh, and in a land
That witnessed Citizen Capet

Decapitated, tragedy
Indeed repeats as farce, wherein
History as such, with a mad grin,
Relives its crimes deliriously.

It is the strange duality
Of consciousness that strikes us most
In *comique absolu*: a ghost
Is in us, somehow floating free,

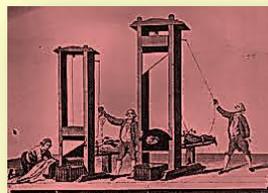
That can observe the immolation
Of self – pratfall and tragic blunder –
In ecstasies of laughter and wonder.
Not wholly ghost, the Imagination

Can leap and dance, as well as see.
It is the body, and is not.
It lives in muscles as in thought.
It is the meaning of *to be*.



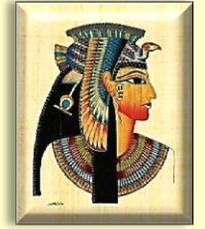
Baudelaire would have
called it 'Grotesque'.

A Harlequinade skit singled out
by Baudelaire for special delectation.



4. *Antony and Cleopatra*

We speak of grace as of a gift,
And yet the grimace that one makes
Betrays the pains it often takes
To lift up, let alone uplift.



I smile, although my eyes are moist,
To think how awkward, effortful
And human, almost comical,
Is our ascent. Look, slave-girls hoist

The groaning weight, with rope and pulley,
To Cleopatra's chamber, of
The dying Antony! For love
Demands to be fulfilled so fully.

It presses worlds into its service,
Then throws those worlds away, and with
Them throws itself, to prove a myth.
Sweat-beads appear. It makes one nervous,

The strain of disbelief's suspension.
We catch the gleam, at certain angles,
Of footlights on the wire that dangles
The god in mid-air, and the tension

Between desire and the truth
Of the desired exceeds our strength
To eke out the illusion's length.
It fails. Love, faith, the gifts of youth

Cannot for-ever float in space.
Fell time and gravity resist
The cleverest disillusionist
Who seeks to make the fall from grace

As graceful as a fall can be.
His art reveals art as an *ars*
Poetica of tragic farce.
A king's shame, a clown's dignity,

The mechanism of ascent,
The guy-wires of Apotheosis,
Are homely things, so art proposes
To make of laughter a sacrament,



Henry Irving, by Ape.

From tears in things, and hope's confusion
Distil a strong and heady wine,
And from the death of the divine
A comicosmic absolution.

Or 'kamikaze'? – [Mr V]



5. *I Experience the Mysterious Delirium Tremendum*

Uncanny as a marionette,
Most artificial of all things,
I seem sometimes. Who pulls the strings?
A twitch of guy-wires, and I set

My features in a sort of grin,
Or grimace, as the case may be,
Repeatedly, repeatedly.
Where to stop, ah, where to begin?

A voice is thrown. But whose and when?
I must repeat, *What is repeated?*
A chop of jaws. Sentence completed.
And I must do it all again.

I drive and I am driven, driven!
Je suis la plaie et le couteau,
As I said long ago. Echo.
Ego. Scriven, Mr V, scriven!

Pen me a free man, if you will,
Or at least smoke a cigarette
For me. Who is the marionette
And who the puppeteer? Be still

A moment, living hand, so warm
And capable of earnest grasping.
Grasp, if you will, the sort of gasping
Amazement a phantasmal form

Must feel, so freshly out of breath.
Something breathes through me, something breathes me.
I am the knife. A wound unsheathes me.
I will say *life*, I will say *death*.

Me grim and my grain and my poor
Is-ery maim me, and things mean,
Ah, so obscene a scene I've seen,
And would you have me tell you more?

Readers may notice that the following passage duplicates a passage encountered in 'Demi-Heaven'. Perhaps the reason for this is that Oscar's 'signals' sometimes encountered astral static of some sort, the 'transmission' became garbled, and a rogue algorithm appeared to repeat itself 'by rote', perhaps from some region in his immortal soul's right hemisphere, as if this pre-linguistic region were condemned to plagiarise itself indefinitely. What seems spontaneous, willed utterance is merely an involuntary pose. It should be added that each episode of delirium is anterior to the other, thus both original and copy. If the temporal sequence is indeterminate, how can we tell the plagiariser from the plagiarised?

– [Mr V]



No, Mr V's good hand, don't stop!
Keep writing, for where you leave off,
I do. Ah, have you strength enough
To finish me before you drop?

It's just that I am so *intensely*
Hungry, my Dears. May I request
A biscuit, Huntley & Palmer's best?
For some hot broth I'd be immensely

Grateful. I am going to do
A terrible thing: ask you for money.
Though ghosts, of course, can't use it. Funny!
Old habits die hard, Dears. Adieu!





The Golem

Emet is truth, reality,
As scrawled across the Golem's forehead:
It is the Word, it says this poor red
Lump is alive, it makes him be.

That ancient Adam-clay fails not,
Though fall'n, as atom-stuff of new
Creations. Such the Word can do,
Being real: Im Anfang war die Tat.

Dhavar can be both word and thing.
While shem but names the thing, dhavar
Can thing the name: Lo! all things are.
The Lord created everything

Yesh me'ayin, from Nothing's root.
'Yehi or!' He said: Let there be light!
And there was light. And with His might,
In His tselem and His demut

He made us, in His image and
His likeness shaped He us a life,
Sharpened us with His sculptor's knife.
God's dream was Adam, and dreams grand

Enough, by dint of that, are true.
Believe the Golem could destroy
The Emperor, the pompous goy!
So Arrogance does well to sue

With Demut and humility
For mercy on his human clay.
And so the Rabbi wipes away
The Golem's power: for the 'e',

The first-last letter of emet
(Our People's script and scripture being
Mirror-wise to your way of seeing),
Erased, dead is the Golem: met.

Will Rothenstein tells the story.



Demut: German for 'humility'. — [Mr V]



Death-Watch *Reggie Tells Me His Dream*

I lately revisited my deathbed in Paris, Hôtel d'Alsace, 30 November, 1900, a few hours before I breathed my last. My friend Reggie Turner, who in the temporary absence of Robbie Ross, and with the help of the kindly hotelier, Jean Dupoirier, was acting as my saintly nurse during this awful time. He said things to me that in my delirium I could make no sense of – I heard only the frantic music of a clarinet. Now, witnessing the scene as a ghost – in my purgatorial state I often revisit crucial scenes in my life on earth – I find his words chilling prophetic.



1.
The things you say! *Dear little Jew,*
You murmur as I wipe your brow.
(A phrase I hardly mind, somehow:
You seem a little Jewish, too.)

Whatever comes to mind, you speak.
You have, you say deliriously,
No beautiful philosophy
Of life, but you are sympathique.

Oscar, the whole world has sat shiva
Upon you. Death grants you your wish:
He comes. For you I'll sing Kaddish,
Dear. But you first must cross the River.

Yes, I'm a Jew. Every Jew is
The Wandering Jew, my friend. – Dear God,
Choose someone else! – I had an odd
Dream last night. Would it be amiss

To share it? (Though your hearing's bad,
Deafness has not quite claimed you yet.
You'll hear it as a clarinet
Tune, desperate and slightly mad.)

2. *The Dream*

We hail a cab at a street corner,
Deserted. We hear wheels approach.
They stop. A giant funeral coach
Spills out a voice, as of a mourner:

Wisdom is crying in the street,
Maddened, because the street runs blood,
Maddened, because the second Flood
Is come, and God admits defeat!



*That which He suffers to break forth
No olive sprig shall ever grace.
What rainbow's mopping will erase
The blood-black cloud-stain in the North?*



Silence. A rumbling in the ground.
A thud of boot steps, louder, louder –
Explosions – cries – whiff of gunpowder –
And now it is a deafening sound,

Such noise as had made David freeze,
Shepherd most brave and most defiant,
Who took a stone and slew a giant
While God's host marched above the trees.

Did ever Moses hear such din
When on the shore of the Red Sea
He heard the hooves beat furiously
As Pharaoh's chariots closed in?

Shops requisitioned by Herr Cain
Spin out the Triangle and Star –
Now we all know just who you are! –
And the sky bleeds an inkhorn stain.

A drunken Sherard joins the crowd
And shouts, *À bas les juifs!* And all
Around us grows the sickening pall
Of murdered souls trapped in a cloud.

I see a place. What is it called?
How spelled? *Wie buchstabiert?* Baruch.
No! Booky wood, wild, woody...Buch.
Stab of the barbed wire – *Buchenwald!*

Death-beer... What Evil does it augur?
The monster's lair, death for the drinker,
The stored-up vials of wrath, *Treblinka!*
The Zyklon-B, *das Totenlager!*

I hear the women and children scream!
Enough. Each morning you woke up
To face a wailing wall. Your cup
Is full. It cannot hold this dream.

Monstrously Natural
Rousseau and I



1.
As I am reading the uncouth,
Fantastical Rousseau in bed
One night, into my dreamy head
There walks a shy and awkward youth

Whose manners are distinctly odd.
An Englishman named Mr Dudding,
He of his native tongue knows nudding,
And I will not expose the fraud.

Imposture is the strange imposthume
Of his soul's turmoil, almost reeking
As an ambivalent self-seeking
That puts on the Armenian costume,

A tragic yet romantic life-
Long tale of self-love unrequited,
Amour de soi corrupted, blighted
And by controversy and strife

Perverted into *amour-propre*
And persecution mania,
A much-disputed *Contract*, a
Once-famous, now-forgotten opera,

And those notorious *Confessions*,
Penned by a man who, though a beast
In some ways, was 'unique, at least';
Who authored, with uncanny prescience,

The attitude, the sentimentality,
Pretensions, fears, and aspirations
Of the succeeding generations
And birthed the modern personality.

2.
Though Athens taught you what you knew,
You pledged allegiance to grim Sparta,
And made dramatic arts a martyr
To virtues hardly found in you.

*An incident related in the
Confessions in connection
with a tryst with an older woman.*

You wrote against the theatre
That gave you money and a name –
But money's false, and so is fame,
And Art and Science are a slur

On the primordial dignity
Of Man, so free, so full of pity
Till, penned in a corrupting city
By Tubal-Cain & Company

He takes on envy in proportion
As his dependency increases
Until he altogether ceases
To settle for his natural portion

But wears a mask, and grubs for wealth
And fame and power at the expense
Of others, and sells innocence
For knowledge, and for beauty, health.

3.

You ruined a maid's life once, when
You blamed your theft on her, to save
Yourself. Confess this sin (though grave)
And you are self-absolved again!

And as for the five children you
Abandoned to the mercies of
A foundling hospital: what love
Of self this showed, what strange *vertu*,

Sentencing them, almost, to die,
Or an impoverished life to live.
It was your duty at least to give
Them help – and did you even try?

*But you abandoned yours, as well,
It was not just, that what you threw
Away should be returned to you,
What in your irresponsible*

*Self-indulgence you forfeited:
Your wealth, your name, your family,
Position in society,
Your very self, like your name, dead!*



L'Hermitage.

*You're one of them, that I can tell!
You have been looking through my letters,
Haven't you, spying on your betters?
Begone, thou monster. Go to Hell!*



4. *Frankenstein's Monster*

Dear Mary Shelley, though they thrive,
The Puritans and Radicals,
It's you who feel the root, the pulse.
I am alive! I am alive!

So cries the Monster named Rousseau,
The Natural Man; might Frankenstein
Be faulted for his flawed design?
Into the night we watch him go

Pursued by his conspiracies,
And could the world but know his heart,
No murderer he: a man apart,
Who has his faults; let judge of these

Who dares! He is, at least, unique.
At heart he is a sentimental man
And much inclined to be a gentle man –
Of *gentlemen* let us not speak!

[Percy Shelley:]
*Life triumphed o'er him, left him twisted
In road-side shadows of her progress,
As she, the meretrix, the Ogress,
Sped in the van whereto she listed.*

[Mary Shelley:]
*A monstrous type of Abraham
Who sacrificed his progeny
On the altar of a vanity
Whose only dogma is I AM.*

5.
Patron saint of the Jacobins
(Robespierre your spiritual son):
They raised you to the Pantheon.
The Terror in your heart begins.



It spreads and builds its clean machines,
And schemes on paper with red ink
Revise the way we live and think
And edit vice with guillotines.

Robespierre, grim and grandiose, is
Bent upon forcing us to be
Free, pruning vices from the Tree
Till virtue swells into psychosis

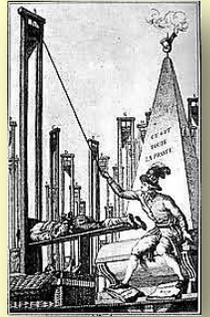
And Liberty becomes tyrannical.
With the cult of sincerity
And Spartan Virtue you set free
Once more the Demons Puritanical.

To banish every atheist
And execute the insincere
Embodies liberty's worst fear,
Wraps life in Terror's crimson mist.

And your praise of the 'species-being'
Above the individual
Poisons the mind of Marx, *et al.*,
The monster of mass-murder freeing.

*

The animus-filled anima
Can never find enlightenment.
Let stand this shrift and testament:
Jean-Jacques, Monsieur Rousseau, c'est moi.



Recitative

The great Robespierre –
when I, the great
the slippery scaffold
shattered jaw,
in noble anguish for
like a sacrificial
after years
the homicidal
you ask?
it was
vicious.
Despite my
I made
Roman
But you *reactionaries!*
your
So close to the
of skulls,
and the feast of
kept getting in the way.
standing between
is people.
the vineyards of
justice –
the goddess

I exit *sans tête*

When
he,

ROBESPIERRE

MA PATRIE.

SAINT.

VIRTUE

COURAGE

REPUBLIC

MILLENNIAL

LIBERTY

EQUALITY

FRATERNITY

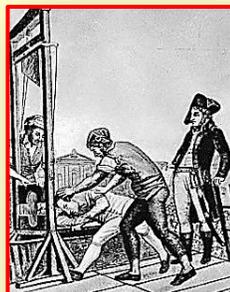
REASON.

CITIZENS:

I mean
mounted
with a
I bellowed
I died
bull
of playing
Why,
Citizens,
that made me

what a botch
of my
suicide.
How you spoiled
chance!
final harvest
consummating purge
but your weakness
The only thing
and the people
I painlessly pruned
to yield prosperity,
offerings to
Is *this* my reward?

but not intestate.



The Phenomenology of Spirits
Hegel



Und der Geist dachte:

1.
Sometimes I see him wandering
The halls of his mind with one shoe on,
One missing – possibly the true one,
In his abstracted reasoning.

I say 'shoe', and in that negation,
Ghostly and pure, evoke the one shoe
Worn by no foot, not true, not *untrue*,
Exactly: awaiting realisation.

Each necessarily partial view
Is ghosted by its opposite,
Till both become, in the infinite
Whole, finally reconciled and true.

No, not one single proposition
Of your great Logic is not found
In Heraclitus, though we're bound
To miss, a little, his...concision

When groping through your murky prose
In its Teutonic, ponderous pondering,
Through which the aching mind goes wandering
As through rich thickets of verbose

Magnificence and gothic density,
Or through some never-to-be-finished
Cathedral in which we walk diminished
To dwarf-size 'neath such vast immensity

Of intellectual ambition.
If even those few who understand
You do not understand you, grand
Indeed must be your towering vision.

2.
You were the rage at Oxford. Jowett
And all his fellow Hellenists
Descried, inside your prosy mists,
Though Philistine minds could not know it,

Platonic truths brought up to date,
Ennobling evolutionary



Science's findings with their very
Essence and human meaning. Late

I came upon this scene, and swallowed
Darwin, Hegel, Spencer and Plato
In a mix thought to point the way to
Heaven on earth, if we but followed

The guidance of the Dialectic.
From the mere insect's chitinous rind
To Plato's chiton marches Mind,
In a progression slow or hectic,

Through violence of tooth and claw
Towards the hard-won apex, Man,
Ex-ape, according to the plan
Of Reason, which is Truth and Law.

Yes, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel,
Into such views Panglossian
This young and callow Irishman
Deeply, deeply did you inveigle.

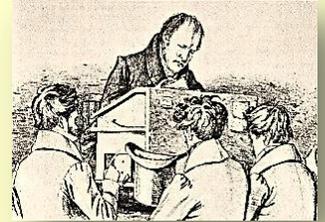
*You should approve of what I said
When told that my philosophy
Was divorced from the facts. Reply:
'So much the worse for the facts.'* Dead,

Though, was the sort of lie *you* told.
It might as well have been a fact,
It was so bloodless and abstract.
Theory's grey, life's tree green and gold.

*But nothing's more abstract, you see,
Than the 'here' and 'now' you hedonists live.
Only the realised Whole can give
These words concrete reality.*

*Art is doomed by the destiny
Of Reason to slow obsolescence.
Philosophy grasps Reason's essence
And knows its ruses, too. You try*

To stand things on their heads, like thick-
Skinned, elephantine acrobats
(Quibbling with *thises* and with *thats*).
Art is much better at the trick.



Untidy history is no thrall
To logic's *a priori* grammar.
How many loose ends must you hammer
To make the real look rational

And your own system seem like more
Than a monumental makeshift?
There is more cancel than uplift
In your *Aufhebung*. What a bore

Is your Minerva, how un-free
Her owl! Art alone has the gift
To cancel the mere fact and lift
It into Ideality.

3.
A mystic of Pure Reason, you
Impatiently leap o'er the line
Kant drew around it to define
What it can reasonably do.

The duty of the rationalist,
It seems, is boldly to bestow
Good conscience on the *status quo*,
Power's abstruse apologist.

The contradictions of the Mind
To you are convoluted mysteries
Which only at the end of history's
Long battle resolution find,

As in those German sentences
Wherein the meaning of the whole,
A through-a-cloud-glimpsed, distant goal,
Reached only at the end-verb is.

Reason, on its vast detour, longs
Through all the violent conflicts
To be what nothing contradicts.
In your exalted view, two wrongs

Inevitably make a right.
And what is right? The Prussian State.
What evils *Geist* will tolerate
To help the contraries unite!



Arthur Machen
and the Great God Pan



1.
Your great god Pan: he's not the sort
Of chap you'd care to run into
In a dark valley, if it's true
He goes in for such bestial sport,

Unspeakable debaucheries
And horrid evils, such as what?
Some sort of inter-species smut?
Child-sacrifice, eating babies?

Could you be a bit more...specific?
No? Let them, then, be nameless evils,
In which we will assume the Devil's
Mixed up somehow; it's quite horrific,



Beyond description, quite taboo
To mention, awful, awful stuff!
Then I'll suggest (and call your bluff)
That all you mean to say is, *Boo!*

2.
*Oscar, don't mock! The matter's grave.
Make a mere lesion in the brain
And who knows what we may unchain,
What Titans brooding in their cave?*

*What atavistic forces dire
May from the saurian depths erupt?
The man with whom last night you supped
May now be dancing round a fire*

*In a dark wood, with great god Pan –
Yes, doing things unspeakable.
Or spoken nowhere but in Hell!
You would not recognise that man,*

*So genteel in the light of day,
His features would be so distorted
Like some daemoniac thing aborted
Into the world and seeking prey!*

3.

Well, Stevenson *has* given us Hyde,
Who hides inside one Dr Jekyll.
I merely jest, I do not heckle.
It's true, who knows what *things* abide

Deep in the darkness of the soul
Or in the brain's small ivory cells?
Some in themselves bear hidden Hells
Christ could not harrow or make whole.

*Kernahan, Oscar, said that you,
You at the height of your success,
(Fat, riotous) turned more or less
Into the Hyde Stevenson drew.*

*The monsters in us, once they break
Loose, and gain advanced weaponry,
Become an army of Hydes, as we
Stand by and watch, too cowed to speak.*



January 28, 1939
Death of Yeats

Yeats:

I took too little care of this!
Mosaic-stiff, hierarchical
Byzantium was my all in all,
Aristocratic dreams my bliss,

Disdain for lowly shepherds, scorn
For mere democracy, derision
Of any thought that was not Vision –
How ugly are the gates of horn

Through which a dream occult comes true!
The Nightmare clothes itself in steel.
The Focke's gyre, the muddy wheel,
The barking columns marching through

The waste they make, and call it war!
Did I will this in dreams, do I
Bear some responsibility?
'Love, and do battle'! There they are!

I can see past the temporal
Horizon far enough to say
The Malebranche are at play
In parachutes. (O second Fall!)

Rough beast born not in Bethlehem
But in the bloody bedlam made
Of Europe! The goose-step parade
Approaches Poland. Who will stem

The blood-dimmed tide? Don't let your second
Sight trouble you too much. I think
This Malacoda's doomed to sink,
When the final tally is reckoned,

Beneath the weight of his own evil.
Hell's Valkyries will sniff their meal,
Stave in the door, though made of steel,
And back to his own natural level

Cast a cold Eye
On Life, on Death,
Horseman, pass by.

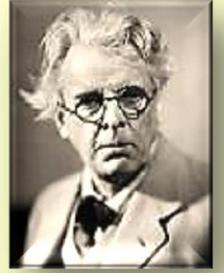
W. B. YEATS

June 13th 1865

January 28th 1939

Spirit him on their wingèd horses.
The Antichrist, a small man, would
Be Satan himself if he but could,
And will be, till the free world forces

Back this subaltern to his real
And stinking place where he has rank,
Poking with fork the pitchy tank,
Guffawing as the grafters squeal.



Dante and I *Evil's Second Revolt*

*I have lost control. Of what? My devils.
Ah, how corrupt an institution,
The Inferno! What is the solution?
Unspeakable, unspeakable evils!*

*They have crashed through the iron gates
Of Dis, they have crossed the Acheron
And through Hell's Gate come marching on,
They are embodied Wraths and Hates,*

*With no thought but to storm the planet
And settle scores with bloody brawl
And will not rest content till all
The Earth's a desert of scorched granite*

*And cities smouldering in a heap.
Brave Captain Malacoda staged
A coup: while impotently raged
Great Lucifer, he drove him deep*

*Into the ice, up to his eyes.
He looks on helpless as the horde
Of Malebranche, at the Lord
Shaking their fists and cursing, rise*

*In swarms up to the open air!
And I, who put them there as warders,
Watch as these beasts defy my orders,
And can do nothing but despair!*

*That sordid Götterdämmerung!
They'll not stop till they burn down Heaven
And turn all things to – things to... Even
To speak of it defiles the tongue!*

Surprisingly, he confesses to me!





***Malacoda
and the Malebranche***

*The rise of the Nazis.
What, another World War?*



1.
An evil tale, with a bad end,
Is Malacoda's. He's ambitious,
The Little Captain, and quite vicious.
He's just the sort of man you send

To do the dirty work behind
The scenes, but centre-stage is where
He wants to be, the Leading Player,
Because his evil little mind

Is nothing if not grandiose.
He thinks himself a man apart,
As great, at least, as Bonaparte:
It would be wise to keep a close

Watch on this clever watchman-warder.
He won't be satisfied for long
Skewering sinners with a prong.
They're massing now along the border

Between Hell and the world, the enraged
Malebranche, those cashiered devils
Itching for harsher, bloodier revels
In international *bolge* staged.

But Malacoda, he's the one.
High Priest and Chancellor Antichrist
He hails himself, and the *Zeitgeist*
Kidnaps, holds to its head a gun.

Malacoda:
*Christ's one mistake was that He died
For many, when the many should
Have died for Him. He was too good
For His own good. Leave suicide*

*To the great filthy Juden masses
On whom I will impose it as
A courtesy. Bullet or gas,
It doesn't matter. The smell passes.*



2.

Oh yes, the Fearless Leader and
His minions, having conquered Hell,
Are taking aim at *you* as well,
In their deep hunger to expand,

Increase the *Lebensraum* of death.
They rage and will not rest until
There's naught above-ground left to kill,
None left on earth, all underneath!

They will beat the world to pieces with
Their hate. Hell's banner is unfurled!
He comes to life, he stalks the world,
The monster that we thought a myth!



September 1, 1939. They have invaded Poland!





From Père Lachaise
Freud: Art and Psychoanalysis



*My visitors come upon me,
not genial, but in a fit of weeping.
The Nazis now occupy Paris.*

1.
I'm sorry, but you catch me crying,
My Dears. I've softening of the brain...
Europe has once more gone insane!
Alas! It is so very trying.

2.
I find them very interesting.
It sets itself a noble mission,
But shows a Faustian ambition,
'Analysis'. It's a good thing

*I am asked my opinion of
Freud and his disciples.*

For art and for the artist that
It is still in its infancy,
My Dears. For curiosity
Proverbially lets the cat

Out of the bag: this tends to kill
The cat, which much prefers to stay
Hidden inside, and keep at bay
The fell 'reality principle'.

*Those of a scientific bent may be
put in mind here of Schrödinger's
famously indeterminate Cat. [Mr V]*

She is a sort of inner Sphinx
Wrapped in the magic sack of sleep
With riddling secrets she would keep—
Or so at least the doctor thinks.

Perhaps the Sphinx has none to tell.
The mystery of Life is surface.
There are no shadows upon *her* face.
The social self is where we dwell.

Freud's theory comes down to this:
All higher forms of thought reprise
Old infantile anxieties
Except Psychoanalysis.

3.

And yet, perhaps, on second thought,
Artists need not feel so annoyed
Or threatened by the likes of Freud
And his odd theories. Has he not

Conceded that the poets were there
Before him? Though it's true, he does
Say elsewhere, too: *Where the Id was,*
The Ego shall be. Poets bare

The Unconscious because they themselves
Are dreamers dreaming in the mist,
And to the rational scientist
Seem merely childlike, gifted elves.

They only have their intuition,
Somnambulistic divination,
Whose truths need systematisation
And terminological precision.

There is a certain cannibalism
Involved. Psychology, as 'science',
Resents its lateness, its reliance
On Art. Ah, the antagonism

Runs deep! Poet or scientist:
Who is master, who contains whom?
For it appears one must subsume
The other. Who is ventriloquist

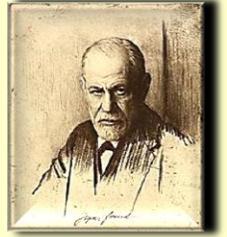
And who the wooden doll? Who plays
The intoxicated shaman, who
The sober interpreter of the true
Significance of what he says?

Is one the thinker, the other merely
The dreamer? Does not Shakespeare give us
More truth in masks than Freud delivers
In his unmaskings? Freud, too clearly,

Is but another allegorist
Compared with the enormous Poet.
That *is* enough! Before I know it,
I shall be seeing an Analyst!



The questioner neurotically persists.



4.
The Oedipus Complex? Dear, it isn't
Complex enough, this crude, triangled
Solution the Sphinx would have strangled
The doctor for, who should have listened

More closely to the pregnant riddle.
Freud's dark obsession with the phallus
Twists with exclusionary malice
A theory tending to belittle

The protean in us, and define
Who we are, whom and how we love,
Based on a binarism of
The sexes, building an iron Line

Around human identity
From which to enter any state
Outside it is to deviate.
But science's mission is to *free*.

(In this it much resembles Art.)
As gifted apes and angel-devils
And debauched martyrs in pain's revels
And what-not spring we from the heart

Of chance and cunning, all the toils
And ruses of identity,
The playing pitch of fantasy
Where love and hate fight for the spoils.

We play ourselves, but we audition
For other rôles, all versions of
The self. A child's mind is, above
All, open. And not by omission

But by inclusion in his growing
Repertoire of selves does the child
Become himself. There is a wild
Lust in the soul, a strong wind blowing,

That pushes it beyond confines
Of any sort, past father and mother
And spouse and nation to seek other
Worlds, to be elsewhere, as if lines

*As you can see, Dears, I prefer Jung, red-
faced, ham-fisted, clumsy man though
he seemed to the Joyces, père and fille.*

*Jung somewhat crudely labelled Joyce
a schizophrenic. 'Scherzophrenic'
would have been a more accurate term.*

Were written to be crossed, erased,
Turned into circle, rhomboid, riddle
And poem. But social pressures whittle
Down childhood's giant dreams, we waste

Into a serviceable form
For social use, as the great oak
Becomes the pick with which we poke
Our teeth. The hero that rides the storm,

The pirate in the looking-glass,
The ballerina and the goddess –
The inborn poet – yield their bodies
With their souls to the levelling mass,

Extruded through the pyramid-
Shaped funnel of the Oedipus
Complex. There's so much more to us
Than ego, superego, id,

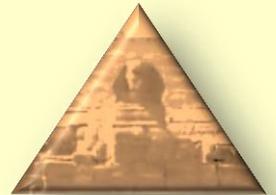
And that steam-engine pseudo-science
Of pleasure and un-pleasure! Still,
For what to Schopenhauer is 'Will',
He found new words, unleashed the lions

Of the Irrational in ways
That bar us ever from returning
To a denial of the burning
Desires and drives that form soul-space.

My waywardness was surely an over-
Determination; I forgot
Displacement. How it froze my thought,
The riddle of a hateful lover!

And, true, Freud briefly flirted with
The 'polymorphously perverse',
But then drew back, and laid the curse
On us of a pernicious myth,

That 'homosexuals' are failed
'Heterosexuals', somehow ploughed
At the Oedipal exam, too cowed
To 'phallicise', be fully 'maled'.



5. *Wit and the Unconscious*

Freud speaks of wit as socially
Acceptable aggression, 'fair'
Because expressed with verbal flair.
When violence itself is free

To make the social rules, destroyed
Is the economy of wit
That renders a society fit
To be called civilised, as Freud

Learned. All those witty Jews are gone.
Einstein has fled. So there can be
No wit in Nazi Germany.
Aggression's naked, raging on

The surface: Göring hears the word
Culture and reaches for his 'Browning'.
Book-burning, homicidal clowning
Of Brownshirts, monstrous and absurd:

That is the culture and esprit
Of the Third Reich. The Führer is,
As he must be, the *humourless*
Director of this dark travesty.

[Three Waffen-SS officers pass my tomb, making certain...remarks...]

Yes, it is humid. Strange, the Colonel
Pronounced *schwül* 'schwul', to rhyme with 'fool'.
It's much like a free Berlitz school.
And they said something quite fraternal:

They called me *warmer Bruder*: warm
Brother. Yes, on these long July
Days we are all quite warm. How I
Admire these Nazis' sense of form!

6. *The Graffiti on my Tomb is Discussed*

I feel it every time it scrapes
Across the walls, the crayon or
The charcoal pencil, as they score
In stone the crude and hasty shapes



Schwül = humid; 'schwul' is a derogatory term meaning 'homosexual'.
'Warmer Bruder' ('warm brother') is a slang term for a homosexual male. — [Mr V]

Of their graffiti, spelling words
Of love (I wear each like a badge),
Or sometimes hate, a nasty scratch
(But music needs its dissonant chords),

Like one a fellow we would call
A 'hardy' bothered to indite
Just yesterday. The spelling's quite
Vague, though the sentiment is all

Too clear. Perhaps you can enlighten
Me: Did he call me 'Queen' or 'Queer'?
In either case it would appear
There are still those whom I can frighten

Into illegible ecstasies
Of loathing, or what Freud would term
'Projection'. I still make them squirm.
They ease their sexual unease

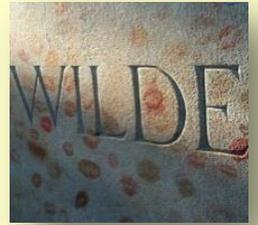
By giving it the name of Wilde,
In turn a name for disease, or
For sin. I really should ignore
Them as one does a tedious child.

7. *The Immolated Angel*

Fetishists do such damage! Damn
The lot, they kill the thing they love!
Look at that Sphinx, the Angel of
My Doom. Perhaps I'm in, and *am*,

That angel. Step closer. Look o'er me
Carefully: note what is not there...
Isis has it, I hope, somewhere...
With it may she one day restore me!

Why must we murder to collect?
Why do we trade in broken parts
Of God? Osiris in our hearts
Is the One we must resurrect.



*Castration anxiety is now
mourning and melancholia.*

8. Brocken Spectre and Glory

*I looked down from a promontory
And with a nameless sense of awe
Stretched far across the clouds I saw
A shadow tall and crowned with glory.*

*He was the shadow my own light
Cast on the outer darkness like
The blessing of a match you strike
To spark the daylight out of night.*

*A dweller apart, in secret sector,
He seemed to my self, ego-ridden:
An unknown god in an egg hidden.
To him I seemed, and was, the Spectre.*



** The Mysties **



Irish Matters

The portrait is of Lady Hazel Lavery as Cathleen ni Houlihan.

Oil canvas (1923) by her husband, painter Sir John Lavery.

(This image frequently appears on Irish bank notes.)

The Mysties

Who knows the Misteries of the Twelve?
The mystery-eyed, whom I shall call
The Mysties, in the moistening pall
Of Erin's mist they delve, they delve.

The rich green turf of darksome dells,
The sway of strong druidic trees
Are the seeds of their Misteries.
The rainbow's gold. The Book of Kells.

For centuries in the Land of Youth
They sojourned with Usheen, and when
His feet touched Irish earth again,
They withered, too, into the truth.

They heard of Patrick's Purgatory,
The cave of Hell. They heard him say
'Twas where their souls would burn one day,
But they did not believe his story.

Ash-plant in hand o'er fields they tread,
These Mysties of the Celtic Twilight.
(You cannot see them in a dry light.)
Tear-moistened are their eyes, and red.

From Tara Hill these Bards are calling,
And wheeling hawks give answering cries,
While down the dark and wintry skies,
Bright pieces of a star are falling.



The Question Mark of Giacomo

Let us turn back the clock a little. It is 13 January, 1941. Joyce's death mask floats before me. He has not yet left his body. Beneath the mask floats a curious pen-and-ink portrait of the author..



1. To the Mask

One night I'd like to see you do
Your spider-dance (those rubbery legs!)
Or lay a clutch of Orphic eggs
And pigeon-brood o'er the vast Brou-

Haha of too much world and, Lord!
So little time to have fun with
It all, playing the archi-smith
Of shapes and myth-scapes of the Word.

Ah, forging uncreated souls
Takes so much time that he could sulk an
Eon over the task, poor Vulcan!
Blackened by smoke, poking the coals.

An embryonic something possible
Gestates into a certain boy's
Foetus, which grows into James Joyce,
Who tries and achieves the Colossible

And leaves behind a plaster mask's
Daedal detail and rigour, real
Though dead to what it cannot feel,
Sleeping the questions that it asks.

2. To the Portrait

A friend said you looked like a question
Mark when you stood bent over in
The street, and so César Abin,
Under your scrupulous direction,

Presents you, concave as your face,
Stooped, the world at your feet, balanced
Over that ball, discontenanced
And fretful in such empty space.

Plurality of worlds. Your martyred hero Bruno.

Brouhaha: a fascinating French word, from the cry of the false clergy in mediaeval plays, perhaps ultimately from the Hebrew, 'barukh habba', 'blessed be the one who comes'.



Paul Léon.

A Spanish artist commissioned by the Jolases to draw Joyce for their journal, transitions in honour of his fiftieth birthday.

Is it a seal-trick in reverse?
Is it your mind's trick-seal balancing
The world? You sum up, at a glancing
Angle, the twirl of what occurs

Under your soles on such a massive
Scale. But your large brain's microscopically
Focused on Dublin's vivid, topically
Specific darkness. Being compassionate,

Dispassionately written in
To what you fret gigantically
Over, you weigh the puzzling tally
Of what has come or might begin

To come of it, in the great scream
Of things, and silence of the void
Geometries a paranoid
God ciphers with stars and a Dream.

But you see through no-coloured glasses,
Black spectacles for one half-blind
With pen as seeing eye, whose mind
Surpasses, somehow, all that passes.

Your derby hat is black in mourning
For your old father; it is cold,
You yourself prematurely old,
Cobwebbed, poor, in patched trousers. Turning

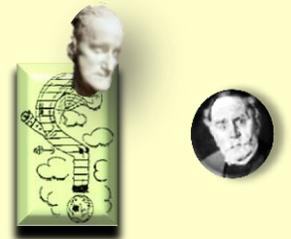
And turning keeps the world, suspended
Beneath the slouching Titan mass of a
Sentence suspended, of a Passover.
You are the world's self-doubt, befriended.

But, egoist, your self-assertion
Of a long hesitation's poise
Unsteadily standing, makes you joy's
Grieved father and orphan. Your desertion

From the black capital of the only
Ireland in the world, is it
Not vigil for the Infinite
Word you made pun of? It is lonely.



*'No, doubt is the thing...Life is suspended
in doubt like the world in the void'. —Joyce*



His daughter Lucia has sunk into madness.

3. *What Ho, Bernardo!*

You come not carefully upon
Your hour, but ah, so punctually
Untimely! Watching tipsily
Not less than Everything – how gone,

Going, and going to be –: high sentry,
What strength you show in wavering, posed
So dubiously thus, Blue-Nosed
Comedian of the twentieth century!

Make that 'half-century', for the shifty,
Makeshift and shiftless fellow here
Depicted in such shabby gear,
This spendthrift tippler's naught and fifty.

Doubtless you have just micturated
In some shadowy alleyway.
For this relief much thanks, you say,
And take the watch. In your elated

Dejection you seem quite transcendent
Of both despair and hope. To ask
The darkness, *Who's there?* was your task,
Sainte-homme, world's crooked papal pendant.

Of course you haven't really died,
You are still gloriously neurotic.
No, more, you are *metempsychotic*.
You are Mithras stepping outside

The cave of the known universe
Of language into a transcendent
Space, and entirely independent,
In a hat black as any hearse.

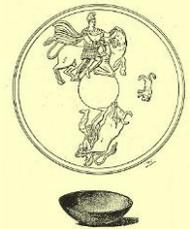
Behind you you have left the broken
Eggshell; the serpent weaves among
The wreckage like the grief-tune sung
By Orpheus, in gone love's token.

Yes, the poor clown-god seems quite lonely,
Being the giant that he is,
Suspended in a vast abyss.
'Tis a grand curse, to be the Only.



Portrait of the Artist as a Prematurely Old Man. The portrait was commissioned to commemorate your fiftieth birthday. (Aquarius: an air-sign, yet a water-bearer. The net result: a splendid Celtic mist!) Picture the watch, of Swiss make, with a Horus-eye staring out from the linchpin-hole.

A Spinozan stoic.



Mary Colum said of the Work in Progress: 'I think it is outside literature'.

An 'egghead', Americans might call you.

Step out of this ecphrasis, clastic
God, in default of every icon,
And with no anvil here to strike on
Save the entirely Phantastic!

4. *Rebirth, as Portrait, of the Mask:*
He Becomes his Inquirers

How madly you enjoyed your madness,
You whom I shall dub Sir Reality.
The evil of the eye, its malady,
The dimming of primeval gladness,

The fading of epiphany,
Reversed in re-illumination,
Reveal their own regeneration.
Cold mask, let us be ritually

Punctilious. I hold these strong
Spirits before your nose, to wake
The Finnegan in you, and make
You live again. Breathe deep and long.

How pleasant, dear, to see your nose
Turn blue! Before it shines that star
You followed. What you were you are;
It was but a light, pleasant doze.

5.
Asleepius, you only make
The sleeper sleepier. But I'm
A sort of something – does it rhyme
With 'fake'? – ah, yes, I am a-wake.

* * *

Yes, let me like a soldier fall.
Brave manly hearts confer my doom.
And say, who stand before my tomb,
He like a soldier fell. *O all*

My shame and all my glory tell
Who only asked of my proud race
To die the last, nor in disgrace,
And say, He like a soldier fell.



His eyes open.

The death mask vanishes. Joyce
in his astral body assumes his
position, hunched over the world
in the now-luminous portrait.



A garbled version of 'Let Me Like a
Soldier Fall'. The rolled music sheet is
shown protruding from Joyce's trouser
pocket in this made-to-order drawing.
(Mithras, the Roman soldier's god!)

In Mental Fight!

Awake for Giacomo

Jim, stood up in his coffin, opens his eyes to a 'surprise' wake and welcome party on his officially joining the Posthumous Club, calling for all the uninhibited festivity of a child's birthday celebration. We are at Rossetti's house, with many other guests at the night's proceedings. Jim refuses to play the 'stiff', and somewhat rowdily participates.



1.

*This is your wake, dear Jim, your shiva.
Shiva, god of the wild west wind,
Quicken a new birth of his mind
On the other side of the river.*

(Oscar)
(Browning, Shelley-shallying.)

*May your wit be with you for ever.
Fear not the whiteness of the light.
It shines for you both day and night
On the other side of the river.*

(Charles Dodgson)

*The mast is fall'n, the timbers shiver
And you shall come again no more.
Things are not as they were before
On the other side of the river.*

(Chorus)

(DG Rossetti)

(Chorus)

*

*Here's to me, boyos, 'twas a good run
If a short one. I had some fun,
Blazed like the sun, but that is done.
Dead, dust-dry-dun is me old Blood Run.*

(Jim)

2.

*The Heraclitean stream will flow on
And flow on and so on and so on
This earth weeds grow on, stars will glow on
A man who can't go on, who'll go on.*

A soused, thirtyish disciple of Joyce's, Samuel Beckett, who is actually dreaming this entire episode – a pickled dream he will forget – with Irish impetuosity interjects himself into the proceedings with the following quatrains. Rather stuck on the one rhyme, I think. And as for his crude language: it is most offensive. But no one could dispute his cricketing skills.

*This little ember that we blow on...
A sort of existential Koan,
This prayer to Nothing and to No One;
It goes, 'I can't go on, I'll go on'.*

A staring silence greets this outburst. I break it.

*Go on. No, thanks. I sed me peaze.
I mind me queues. Belacqua's part
Is to sit on his *rse and f*rt
And read D*nte. Whereat I ceaze.*

You *do* possess a morbid verve,
My dear. You find life meaningless,
And clown at the edge of the abyss.
To do this takes a certain nerve.



And to join the Resistance: plucky!
For the Gestapo like to play
With pain. *This time I got away.*
Next time I may not be so lucky.

"Lucky" ... An interesting name for a character in a dark comedy, don't you think?' I say to Sam, taking hiim aside. Perhaps he will recall this part of the dream.

3. *In Principio Erat Verbum, Etc.*

Swinburne:
*This riddle is thorny as a thicket:
It begins with 'ends in beginnings'
And it ends with 'runs in big innings'.
Is it cricket, this sticky wicket?*

Dancing about excitedly.

*In the Big Innings was the Word
Struck hard, and it made little puns
And we scored many riverruns
That day, unheard-of many scored.*

Jim (a cricket enthousiast).

*The Word in its beginnings was spun
Round and around to make a whirled
Little ball that we call the world.
The Word in its beginnings was Pun.*

Charles.

*In the beginning was the Word
Spun round and round until a world
Was worlded by the Word, was whirled
Into a Word-Thing, as it were'd.*

Aubrey Beardsley.

*And Word is'd, are'd and was'd and were'd
And will-be'd, all at the same time.
It was a jealous paradigm.
With neither rhyme nor reason, Word*

Lord Byron?

*Called itself World. It was acutely
Ambivalent: was it small or vast? –
It made the present tense, the past
Perfect, the future absolutely*

Charles.

*Conditional. And things all day
Heard voices telling them to act
Or suffer. Some thought, 'I'm a fact,
And that is all there is to say'.*

*Whilst others thought, 'Perhaps there's more
Than one way to be seen?' And doubt
Filled them, for they could not make out
Quite what it was that they stood for.*

Swinburne.



*And others, still, refused to stand
For anything at all. Things changed.
Vowel-shifty, moody and estranged
They grew, but the Word kenned and canned.*

Charles.

*AGREE, it told the words, OBEY.
But verbs showed dubious aspects
Whilst nouns declined to be objects.
And grammar suffers to this day*

*From loss of glamour, its chaste mind
In the big U of ambiguity
Cupped, nouns corrupt in superfluity
Of contexts thoughtlessly declined.*

Malthusian linguistics?

*In Buggy Innings the Beguine's
The Last Word in Beginnings, bugging
Description is its hugger-muggering,
God Himself knows not what it means.*

*Swinburne, tossing fistfuls of multi-
coloured beggar's velvet into the air.*

*Soused, le Duc arrogantly usurps my
prerogative as giver of stage-directions:*

[Here the great good William Gilbert Grace, champion cricketer of all time, as old as Methuselah, enters batting giant atoms out of the galaxy and into the deeps of yonder-space, they bounce off the uttermost wall of the spheroid Unicorniverse, each atom splitting into trillions of subatomic particles in turn shattering into sub-subatomic particulules, of which three for Muster Mark, please, and a huge, giant, large, rather big, above-average-in-size-for-a-cricket Cricket hops out of a thicket and takes a turn at the wicket, but no, it is the Good Luck Cricket of Pu-Yi, last Emperor of China, he keeps it in an intricately wrought ivory cage not much larger than a locket, but no, in fact it is simply an ordinary small boy's lucky cricket escaped from its miniature Schrödinger box, and all are suitably impressed by its decision to exist, and Grace himself in his great bearded Falstaffian little-boy gusto grown to Titan size applauds, we all applaud the Good Luck Cricket at the bat, Cricket runs back and forth so fast he becomes a solid line or vibrating string that hums whilst Oy says Grace and Grace sings me and, by the God of Grace and Greece and Gross of God, that's surely enough of this reines Quark-Reden um das Wort!]



*Ah, well, his left leg is
possibly a Greek poem.*

4. Oscar:

The Holy Ghost is but a dove, bird
Of one stripe; Holy Spirit can
Be goldfinch, crested grebe, toucan
And several species of the lovebird.

It is a Lovebird now, the Holy
Spirit, ἀγάπορνις, that's fluttering
Above Jim's head. A Joy past uttering
Desires to grace him, heart and solely,



In AGAPORNOTHANATOGRAPHY.

Jim in his writing spoke the world.
Like wings the pages are unfurled
And fly into eternity!

5. Jim as Cardinal Newman:

*I speak on the Holy Ghost's behalf.
He is no showman costume-changing:
He is Himself, though widely ranging,
And never, never does He laugh.*

*He trumps the allusions of the Holy
Spirit. – Then worship we the Dove,
The Only-Bird, the Bird of Love,
Not to be parroted, but solely*



*Authoritative, overflying
All witticism and all psittacism,
Who will not tolerate one bit a schism
Of any kind, and no denying*

*The truth through pettifogging bluff,
But the Confession of the Sinner! –
[O:] What, can't the Beggar share the Dinner?
One Last Supper is not enough.*

The Spirit spends His time conversing
Idly in any tongue, in chaffing
A bit, even, to set you laughing.
As mockingbird, he's known to sing

A midnight medley of the day's
Quota of magna opera,
Warbling an insomnia
Of references and turns of phrase.

*The nice distinction between the
relative incarnational versatilities of
the Holy Ghost and the Holy Spirit is
the subject of spirited debate. A point first
raised by the puritanical lunatic Father
Feropont in The Brothers Karamazov.*

*Mark Twain intrudes for no particular
reason: 'Sir, I have inspected this high-
dollar portmanteau-word from every angle,
and I conclude that it should not be sold
at some run-of-the-mill antique shop in
Portobello Road. I suggest you bring in
Sotheby's'. – This is done. (I will hardly
miss it. The thing was bulky and pre-
sumptuously hypermetric.) Because it is
heavy, they must haul it away by turns.*

6. *Jim's Sermon on the Pentecost*

*Let us repeat what Paul, in all
His heteroglossy raiment, spoke.
The giddyng Dove beaked him. Out broke
A frenzy polyglottical*

*To oinopontificate
Sur le péché, with agenbit
Of coscienza infinite
Für unsere Moralität.*

*Dove-Word is Word intensified
To hyper-sacred frequencies.
What to us sounds like gibberish is
Raw God in all His naked hide.*

*Then we're all ears. Tell us what Paul
Said, that you'd have us all repeat?
GANDWANANANDA DROOPLE DREEP.
Now this is not obscure at all:*

*GANDWANANANDA, clearly, is
The pure primordial origin.
We DROOPLE-DREPT: we fell in sin.
Regained must be that distant bliss.*

*Repeat, my children, after me:
Gandwanananda droople dreep.
Gandwanananda droople dreep.
GANDWANAN is the verb, 'to be'.*

*ANDA means, 'In a state of bliss'.
O do not droople, never dreep!
And let the Dove hear not a peep
That is not Praise whose Praise is His!*

*Oscar:
Though I don't droople, now and then,
I must confess, I've dreeped, or drept.
And many a time for this I've wept
And then I've gone and drept again.*

*Oh! te absolvo, fili. Dreep
No more, henceforth, nor droop, my son.
And now, God bless us everyone.
The Wake is nodding off to sleep.*



*The dove never ceases to move on toward
what is before, going on from where it now
is, to penetrate that further to which it has
not yet come.
—Gregory of Nyssa*



The Story-Teller at Fault

As told by Mr James Joyce.

1.

*Aengus, 'tis the great traveller
You are! No tellin' what landscapes
You've passed through in your antic scrapes,
You always seemin' here and there*

*And nowhere. It'll be a cold
Day in Hell when the likes of me
Can get away with what you see
Your way through, begob, but you're bold!*

2.

The story-teller's out of tales –
That's where the mischief takes its start:
The inspiration's left his art,
And that's a fault for which one fails.

He gambles with a beggar, loses
His property, his wife, his proper
Semblance, in all things comes a cropper
Until among the herbs he noses,

Hare-brained in a hare's body, he is,
His own hounds set upon him by
His own wife. Then by wizardry
The goods are gone; who knows where *she* is?

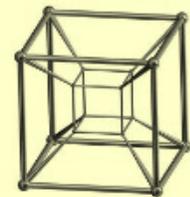
But wife and goods and all are stowed
With care in an alternative
Dimension, where we shall them leave
For now, for on the wingèd road

Go story-teller and beggar-man,
The teller invisible, but seeing all:
'Tis in O'Donnell's Keep (it being all
Around them dark, where Red sits wan)

They are, beggar and unseen fellow.
But he is Aengus of the Bluff,
Of tricks the god has store enough,
And Red has store of coins of yellow



*Hump, croupe, a kind
of printing press.*



(The architecture of 'literary space'?)

To pay him to provoke his laughter. It's
But a wee thread we're speaking of
The beggar spins to heaven above,
But up he sends a hare, and after it's

A hound he sends, and then a lad,
O'Donnell's lad, to stop the hound
As tries to eat the hare. To ground
He pulls the eaten hare, the bad

Dog and O'Donnell's boy, asleep.
He chops his head off for neglect.
But sure he can him resurrect,
Such spells are in a wizard's keep,

But that will cost the king more gold,
Which paid, the lad is in his health
Restored, the beggar has his wealth,
And, well, there's more that could be told.

3.
How they continued till 'twas in
The King of Leinster's court they were,
And many times they hang him there,
The beggar, but he out of thin

Air re-appears alive and hale:
Is it me-self you're looking for?
He asks the guard, and to restore
The king's dead sons he does not fail,

And to the teller he reveals
Himself as Aengus, he that's of
The imaginary land of Bluff;
And wife and goods, like one who heals

A wound in space and time that death
Has made, the god brings back to life.
Bless you, but you can keep the wife!
As in the abstraction of a breath

The god had hid them in the space
Of telling, whence he now retrieves all,
And cheers the teller and relieves all
From the suspense with which he plays.



And so the teller's family's
Restored to him, with his position:
For the king craves the repetition
Of that one story, for it is

All the other stories, isn't it?
This poor Job-out-of-work who lost
It all, receives more than his cost,
The treasure of the Aengus wit!

He did him a good turn or two
And so the god of trick and frolic
Cures the king, sleepless, melancholic,
And so the teller's dreams come true.

4. *The Sequel*

The teller thus his lot secures
As *good* in life, though not as *great*.
But could one come, at length, to hate
Re-telling the tale that ensures

The goodness, the insipid good
That is one's luck in life, and lot
In the great lottery one has not
Yet won, but thinks that one still could,

If given half a chance, an angle?
And so the man resents the god
Who saddles him with but one odd
Matryoshka doll, and lets it dangle

From his hand or sit on his shoulder
And be his hump, his Hugo-esque
Trope of Romantic-Turned-Grotesque.
Never was butt of laughter older

Than what this god makes of him and
His hump, his 'legendary story'.
A million of the things, bagorr! he
Has, does this Aengus, ain't he grand?

And yet 'tis but the one he gave
Me, this Lord Aengus: beggarly
Indeed's his generosity!
Is that how a god should behave?



So I'm the pony of one trick,
Mavrone! Not half as rich as Craysus,
And but a beast of burden. Jaysus!
This Aengus god half-makes me sick.

4. His Wife Scolds Him

A greedy troll guarding his vault!
So it's not autographs you're signing
These days, and on fine lobster dining?
Ingratitude's a serious fault!

The Story-Teller:

Why don't I have it printed, then?
There's pots of gold in that, no less!
I'll use old Cropper's printing press. —
So the *auteur* takes up his pen

And is a famous literary man
Who has *amours* and duels in print
And makes himself another mint,
This little literary dairyman.

5. Epilogue: Haines (from *Ulysses*)

This fine Hibernian trickster is
Quite the old hand. Impressive, very!
True Celtic-twilight völkisch-fairy,
Eh what? I'm here for stuff like this.

Aengus chops off his head.



*The Apocrypheosis
of James Clarence Mangan
as Related by One James
Augusta Aloysius Joyce*



*The Judgment Hour must first be nigh,
Ere you can fade, ere you can die,
My Dark Rosaleen! – JC Mangan*

1.
*Fell Time, that greedy landlord Time,
He takes starved children for his rent,
And spinsters by their labour bent,
And many a bone in many a rhyme*

*There is to pick with him! Among one's
Pet peeves, he greys my hair, he ploughs
To earth the Woman with Three Cows
And along come the tramplin' young ones!*

*'The Woman with Three Cows':
a poem by Mangan. – [Mr V]*

2.
*Poor Mangan, he with the umbrella
Carried about in driest weather,
A singular fellow altogether,
A needy sot, but he could tell a*

*Story or two in golden phrases
To make your red hair stand on end.
'Twas few who cared to be his friend,
A difficult man: I sing his praises.*

*Behold him in your mind's eye now,
In his blue cloak and his blond wig,
Green spectacles and a great big
Witch hat that makes it work somehow,*

*That whole mad-genius business.
Among the world's distinguished forgers
He stands supreme, his work is gorgeous!
Translated out of languages*

*He did not know, attributed
To non-existent poets, such as
'Selber' (his very self!) with touches
Of greatness now appreciated,*



*But praise of little use to him
That's dead these many more than twenty
Not very golden years. No plenty
He ever knew, his life was grim*

*And he obscure, and stone-cold dead
Like you at six-and-forty years:
Such was his lot. I've shed my tears
For him! An Gortya Mor, the dread*

*Famine, made him turn patriot
And put a fire into his verses
That on the English showered curses
For leaving the Irish poor to rot.*

*This man, an idol once of mine,
Was taken by the cholera
In all his weird regalia
In the year eighteen-forty-nine.*

*On his memorial let us hang an
Old ivy wreath, on Ivy Day,
And for his spirit let us pray,
The spirit of James Clarence Mangan!*

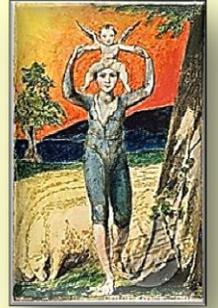
3. Oscar:

*Among the poets constellated
In Heaven, though it may seem full,
There's room for the Apocryphal
Who never were, but were translated!*

*'Twenty Golden Years Ago', a poem
written by 'Selber' – German for 'self', i.e.,
written by himself, James Mangan. How
perverse of the man! Forgery is, of course,
plagiarism in reverse. Right or wrong,
immoral or imaginative, lawful play
or a matter for the law... All these grave
questions will be cleared up only with
the coming of the Apocryphalypse.*



The Good Green Land *Yeats, Joyce and the Myst*



1. *The Song of the Faeries*

*Come home, Wilde Oscar, come home to the good green land of Eire!
Than your father Usheen you have wandered further and longer by far.
Great were your triumphs, and greater your trials! How sorrowful-weary
And haggard your face is, and your grey eyes, how haunted they are!
The unappeasable host, can you hear them, the legions of Faery?
And the lone pipe, and the wheels of Cuchulain's battle-car?*

Now really, that's a bit *de trop*.
I'm not a Celtic Twilight man.
My mind is cosmopolitan –
Though I heard the sidhe-cry, long ago.

2. *God is Crazy Jane*

*We both loved Beauty, Wilde, past right or wrong.
We knew the truth of masks, that without strife
Of contraries, as Blake knew, life is not life.
I'm no believer. Intellect is as strong*

*As its capacity for doubt. It can
And must remain a little sceptical
Even confronted by the Illimitable
In all its vast intimidating span –*

*To which a vast uncertainty responds
In kind: that, too, is infinite, because
The mind is so, being riddled by the loss
Incurred with every gain. How cast in bronze*

*Or fix for-ever in mosaic azure
And gold the hesitant and questioning
Gesture of so mercurial a thing,
Of all things the immeasurable measure?*

*My weakness and my strength, was my self-doubt:
It made me waver where the hazel-tree
Stood still, stand still when the horses of the sea
Bid me turn wave and join their tumultuous rout.*

*When Niamh, let us call her, spirit of Youth,
Invited me to live beyond all age
In the green land of the Young, I turned the page
And read how one must wither into the Truth.*

*My verses were restless with a Celtic lilt,
For the heart that was in them was molten and fluid.
I gave to my dreams the names Rose and Druid
And saw the Druid vanish, and the Rose wilt.*

*God is a wanderer, too. Down in his least
Details he dwells, a beggar's mask he wears,
And then a king's. He climbs his winding stairs.
The Sexless Angel marries the Rough Beast.*

*The Intellect can never fully parse
That riddling grammar, speech of Crazy Jane.
Say God is wise, but Wisdom's half-insane.
Our eyes see by the raging of the stars.*

*God is the Rose and the invisible Worm.
Riddle to riddle the truth-seekers range,
Seeking an island in the sea of change.
The island wanders, and the sea holds firm.*

*'In dreams begin responsibilities',
You wrote. Yet you were irresponsible,
In your heart's core, and half-in-love with Hell.
That's why I trust you. You stayed crazy-wise.*

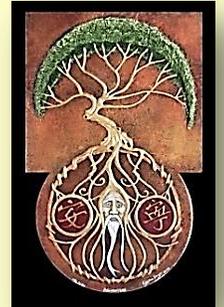
4. When I Was an Irish Rat

Joyce McMocking.

*I've not been so be-rhymed since old Pythagoras'
Time, when – it has been falsely claimed – I was
An Irishrat. It wakes the rhythmic saws
Of Slumber's all it does, this Myst mandragorous.*

*To meet Cathleen, a man must walk away.
To write of Mother Ireland, move to France.
If that sounds too much like the old Romance,
Make sure to die in Switzerland someday.*

*We all must suffer our metempsychotic break-
Downs, be the worm, the tree, the bee and the clover.
In my next life I'll be no more a rover,
But spend my days in a cottage by the lake.*



Oscar of the Cove
A Fantasy



**PRISONER WILDE ESCAPES FROM READING
NATIONWIDE MANHUNT UNDERWAY
SENSATIONAL DETAILS OF PLAY-
WRIGHT'S DARING BREAK-OUT. WHERE IS HE HEADING?**

That's up to you to guess. A thimble
Can be honed down into a saw.
Armour has chinks; doors and the law
Have cracks. Is this fact, or a symbol?

*

I joined the champions of the Cause,
If you must know: we agitated
For freedom from the ones we hated,
The English, and their tyrannous laws!

'Twas call to arms, and calls quite close
At times: bombs smuggled, weapons cached,
And police station windows smashed
Right under Dublin Castle's nose.

You don't believe a word of this,
Do you? Something so noble *must*
Be true! Then you'll believe me just
A little if I speak of his,

I mean, The Oscar's, thrilling deeds,
His famed great-coat, his sea-side lair,
His wayside tavern love affair?
And how he rides in shadow, and leads

His doughty friends from episode
To escapade in the Good Fight?
Bane of the English in the night,
We harass them on the high road.

Great Oscar of the Cove, they call me,
And Fighting Wilde, and Druid Bard.
Great are my exploits, Dears, and hard
The luck and troubles that befall me.



*Music at this point, Mendelssohn's
'Fingal's Cave' Overture, perhaps.*

We blow supply trains off the rails
Then to our hideaway withdraw,
Where, warmed by fire and usquebaugh,
We tell each other the Old Tales.

I learn the harp, and sing in Erse
The deeds of Fingal and Usheen
When Erin's fields were grand and green,
Before we fell beneath the Curse.

I'm captured by the Authorities
And sentenced to be hanged – but not
Before a speech not soon forgot
By those who heard such words as these:

Better to die than live in slavery!
Before a crowd of thirty thousand
I shout these fiery words, to rouse and
Inspire my fellows to new bravery.

Like a great Actor's is my stance,
And some weep tears who came to jeer.
I gladly lay my life down here
In Emmet's name, and Ireland's!

The perfect cue for my comrades
To burst in on the scene and snatch
Me from the noose: too fast to catch
We ride to freedom. Well done, lads!

I am what we Irish call a seanachie.

Let no man write my epitaph; for as no man
who knows my motives dare now vindicate
them, let not prejudice or ignorance,
asperse them. Let them and me rest in
obscurity and peace, and my tomb remain
uninscribed, and my memory in oblivion,
until other times and other men can do
justice to my character. When my country
takes her place among the nations of the
earth, *then and not till then*, let my epitaph
be written.

– Robert Emmet's last words on the scaffold.



Hanged on a Comma *Roger Casement*

August 3, 1916.

Poor Roger Casement came to me that night
Sent from the gallows to the Great Beyond.
Hanged on a comma, said he, with a light
Disdain for Law so dexterously conned.

*While I denounced the Rubber Barons of
Brazil, slave-drivers of the Indians,
I found the time to search for young men's love.
Uranian rebels stand beneath two bans!*

*Don't think the diaries they circulated
Were forgeries, though the Crown's aim was malicious.
I was the man I was by nature fated
To be, like you, whom virtuously vicious
England also laid low. And as for libel,
Think what is said about us in the Bible!*

*In the months leading up to the Easter
Rising of 1916, Casement had secretly
persuaded the Germans to help arm the
rebels. At his trial for treason, the
prosecution had trouble arguing its case as
his crimes had been carried out in
Germany and the Treason Act of 1351
seemed to apply only to activities carried
out on English (or, arguably, British) soil.
A close reading of the Act allowed for a
broader interpretation: the court decided
that a comma should be read in the text,
crucially widening the sense so that 'in the
realm [,] or elsewhere' referred to where
acts were done and not just to where the
'King's enemies' might be.*

—Mr V



Jim and I Drink Too Much

1.

Now in *Ulysses*, what is that
Elaborate machinery
Of ancient Greek mythology?
A whim. Ah hah! Pulled from a hat.

From *somewhere!* Such a sturdy bubble!
Well, *keep* your poor lay readers dizzy!
The scholars, too, must be kept busy.
And off the streets. And out of trouble.

Your face is sunk into its centre.
It is, I think, the crescent moon.
Why don't you sing me a folk tune?
Does Beauty, Wilde, dwell in a renter?

Does it pay rent? Beauty is free
To those who can afford to win her.
Nora, she found you a beginner...
She never read your books, did she?

The worthy Sir blunts not his needle.
One of us *must* be Tweedledum,
The other, Tweedledee. *Or some*
Quarky half-other, Tweedledaedal?

2.

In Zurich I made bold to found
The English Players; we made our
Debut upon the stage with your
Earnest, you know. And through the sound

Of the audience clapping you could hear me
Shouting, 'Hurrah for Ireland!'
I yelled. 'Poor Wilde was Irish, and
So am I!' Ah, you cheered, and cheer me!

But the *Wake*, Jim...How many moons!
I only wanted to amuse them.
But some resent the way you use them
As sounding-boards for loony tunes

Scene: Oh, any astral estaminet
suitably seedy will do. Hélas!



So he told young Nabokov.

A global gloire de cénacle.

Another round, please, barman.
White wine for Jim, usquebaugh
for me, in boggy Erin's honour.



Proust and Joyce

Longtemps and *Stately*: two first words
Gestating in themselves the last.
Circle swells into sphere. Two vast
Finale seed their opening chords.

Together, what do the words say?
Yes to Time. Time and its 'it was'.
To music and to long applause
Let all things passing pass away!

Selected from your idiolect
With indiscriminate abandon.
What principle should a clown stand on?
The game's in how the bits connect

If you connect them, which you may
In any warlock-which way what
So ever. A veritable smut
Of possibilities, I'd say.

If you look past my stray obscenities
You'll find a comic theologian
Behind the cosmic philologist.
Not Heraclitus, sir: Parmenides.

Enough about the cosmos, dear!
I'd sooner talk about cosmetics.
For *tó kalón* in Greek aesthetics
Is shapely, human-scaled and clear.

That is the view of an apprentice,
As I was in my Portrait. You
Will not achieve a real break-through
If you're entirely compos mentis.

To work of fate, to quirk of art,
To quart of white wine and a quark
And the blind man who in the dark
Sees (what he sees there breaks his heart).

It breaks his heart and makes him laugh
And sets him deep where things begin
And Finnegan again within
His dream rears up like a giraffe.

On this sham rock I build my church,
For 'tis not rock, 'tis but a clover
That wears the blessing of my lover,
Sea-seeking in her endless search,

My Anna Livia Plurabelle.
She is a silver winding sheet,
A dew, imparting ah, such sweet
Sorrow! Let liquid Liffey swell



Nora Joyce, née Barnacle.

Finnegans Wake

Riverrun, Anna Livia's reverie
Of night, forged epic check, a Shem-Shaun sham bent
To straddle the chaosmos, vast enjambment
That sweeps us all away along with the

Jim proposes several toasts.

*Beyond her banks and drench the air
With dream-times of a plural world!
See how the clover gleams, empearled
With Annamnesia's Livia-wear?*

*Quoi? Pleur-t-il dans son coeur comme il
Pleut sur la mer? La Livia! Vive
En romans-fleuves, bel être! Live
The river of the wound you heal!*

3.
*Jim, dare we speak of Parnell, great
And tragic Parnell? How they turned
Against him, whose deeds should have earned
Him reverence? It was his fate,*

*In part, that prompted me to go
Abroad and speak a foreign tongue.
How could I live my life among
A race of people who could do*

*Such things to such a princely fellow?
Who'd fought so superhumanly
To give them back their dignity!
All for a harmless peccadillo...*

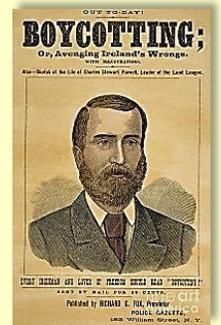
*Didn't Gladstone call him the most
Remarkable man he'd ever met?
How soon our countrymen forget!
One moment he's the nation's toast,*

*The next: pariah. Ireland never
Produced a greater man, I claim,
And to our country's lasting shame,
This hero, brave as he was clever,*

*The people jeered, while the priests gave
Smug sermons on his fall from grace.
A crowd threw quicklime in his face.
They drove him to an early grave!*

*As for old Glad-Eye, what a dance
He danced! He backed a Home Rule bill
He knew the House of Lords would kill,
And him there, standing with clean hands!*

[For musical relief, sings and plays at the piano a Verdi medley. Plays opening theme of Beethoven's last piano sonata, last movement: 'The donkey cart that goes to Heaven,' as Thomas Mann characterised it.]



Gladstone.

*How full of grace and invention
is Mozart after the muscle-bound
Beethoven. – James Joyce*

*The donkey draws the cart to Heaven,
F*rtng freely in his *rse-scent.
Let hands be clasped, let knees be bent:
Rise, incest smoke: the Heavens are Seven!*

*A cultish Celt, of Celtish cult
Was A.E.I.O.U. McNulty,
Known for his mysty difficùlty
(Pronounced with stress on the penùlt).*

*Our native accent's out of joint.
Saying's the Irish way of seeing –
Paycock, the Irish way of being
A peacock. Aye, the pint's the point.*

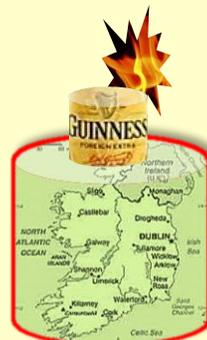
4. Coda: Jim Looks into the Camera and the Near-Future

*They'll gather in the local pub, lick
The foamy head from the beer mug
And drink a toast. But me? I shrug.
So Ireland is a REPUBLIC.*

*And still divided from itself
North to South, violently Other,
South to North. Barman, O me brother!
A gallon o' white wine from the shelf!*



*Garçons are sweeping the floor, putting
chairs upside-down on tables. We are
the only patrons left in the establishment.
Exotic flowers bloom from the sawdust.*



Duet

With violets
the breeze is fragrant
The meadow is in flower
Let your homeland
be happy with
your work
Yes for I
am a poet
but they are truer than words
those explosions
on the outskirts
in the streets
shaking the walls
Stalin
and destruction coming

in the night.

I sit
and I think
in my bunker
Listen!
The Valkyries they are
pounding at my door!
I can see that I was
wrong about some things
There were things
I might have done differently
Ach, hindsight is so easy
All I can do
on reflection is curse
my people's weakness
and the Jews, the Jews!



*From Père Lachaise
The Scriblerus Club*

1.

Don't think me innocent, dear sirs,
For I at the Club Scriblerus
With Swift and Gay and Fielding was
(And Pope, too, of the clever verse)

What time they in a *Tub* or *Tom Thumb*
Reproduced the divine *Afflatus*
Of the Scholarly Apparatus
That wheezes on there, till King Dumb Come,

Interminably informative
In dwarf print, below-text, obtuse,
Explicatively to abuse,
Supply with accurate dates, and give

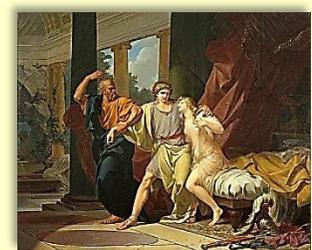
Their context and their etymology
To, the poor author's simple, heart-
Felt, native-woodnote words. The art
To turn this anti-art's symbology

Against itself, and to turn science
As ideology into
The truth of its mask, bares the true
Bent of knowledge received: reliance

Placed on a framework's straitening fit,
A skullcap of right thinking that
Ossifies thought, and leaves it pat
And smug, prey to real thinkers' wit.

This art, I say, this jester-science
Of Shandyology and Swiftian
Satire (that floats upon so shifty an
Epistemology) by scions

Of Cynic, laughing Menippus
Is plied. Think of the *Variorum*
Dunciad notes: how from this forum
Pope mocks the pedant's fatuous



*Socrates dragging Alcibiades
away from a life of debauchery.*

Sobriety, the knowingness
That knows it all and understands naught,
But in its mummified, cold hands, naught
Liveth, nor could it matter less.



These idiot questioners of all
Things, intellectual bureaucrats
Running the Knowledge Wheel like rats
In an experiment: they call

Forth from the poet's soul a plangent
High cry, from the mind of a thinker
Mirth to see Goethe's Wagner tinker
And reduce, at a pointless tangent,

Great questions, insights and eureka's
Of Leonardo and the Mystics
And Poets, to supply-logistics.
Not art's true friends, these, nor truth's seekers.

2.
This art can be traced, in its many
Forms, back to Aristophanes,
Who makes of lofty Socrates
A cloudy, scatter-brained old zany.



Socrates?
Socrates!

Wag abstract discourse by the 'tale'
And make it wear the comic sock:
Philosophers to the auction block
Are led in Lucian's *Creeds for Sale*.

The Nun's Priest's Tale's a genial rout
Of slapstick hermeneutics that
Chases a moral, seeking what
Its own exuberance is about.

In the Renaissance, far and wide
Scholastics felt the humiliation
Of Rhetoric's glib Menippulation,
By Folly's wisdom mortified.



Sillygisms of Rabelais
Repeat, *Cogito 'ergot' sum*
Till God's Pelagian Kingdom come.
The visions of a later day

Cartesian Harlequins enact.
They dance, when feeling the Panurge,
With the weird shadows on the verge
Of Reason and scientific Fact.



Abstractions tend towards a unity
Of apperception not quite transcendental,
More German-mental than, say, Francendental:
When with too-serious-faced impunity

They lord it o'er the ontological,
The rationalist systematisers,
Menippean Nemesis satirises
Their Categories Kant-ological.

What should one call *The Marriage of
Heaven and Hell*: satirical
Prophecy or prophetic
Satire? Or both of the above?

Sartor Resartus can but be
A lumpen sample of a sort,
Though there, too, Carlyle makes great sport
Of staid conventions scholarly.

This author's book is at the same
Time a bold forgery of a book:
At 'authorship' to cock a snook
Is serious literary game!

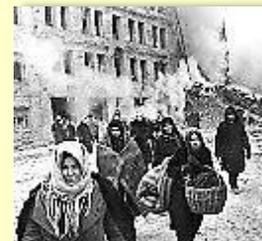
As I have heard it said by MCV.

3. Mikhail Bakhtin

I hear his manuscript – how sad! –
Went up in smoke: tobacco vapour,
The pages used for rolling paper
During the siege of Leningrad.

*Asked if I have heard of the Russian
scholar's work on Rabelais, Dostoevsky
and the theory of Menippean satire...*

What was to be a treatise on
The eighteenth-century *Bildungs-
Roman* vanished into his lungs.
But the Beast, too – praise be! – is gone.



4. *Rire est le Propre de l'Homme*

What does he prize in Rabelais?
His laughter, and how he loves the gross
And vital body, and thumbs his nose
At the grim enemies of play.

Utopian, existential, laughter
Is the *primaeval* attitude
To life, a scandal to the prude
Who dreams a Hell in the Hereafter

To punish those who dare to love
The Earth. Then is it in bad taste
To think with what's below the waist
As much as with the head above?

Certainly Rabelais is not
A man of taste: he is a man
Who tastes, and tests, and twits the ban
On the anarchic lusts of thought.

Laughter is the sworn foe of power:
The tyrant lives in fear of it.
Strange how one man's eccentric wit
Can shake the steeple and the tower!

5. *'Nuts!' The Siege of Bastogne*

The Americans are desperately
Outnumbered and out-gunned. McAuliffe
Knows that the crucial town will fall if
The Germans learn of this. So he

Must use deception. There are few
Artillery pieces. Fritz must be
Convinced Bastogne is formidably
Defended. What, then, does he do?

He moves his guns from place to place
Along the outskirts: *les boches* thus
Believe the guns ubiquitous.
With this shrewd tactic he delays



*Laughter is the primaeval attitude
to life – a mode of approach that
survives only in artists and criminals.*
– Letter to Robbie Ross

*The word in language
is half someone else's.*
– Bakhtin

*The talk turns to the recently ended war in
the European Theatre. The subject of the Battle
of the Bulge comes up, and in connection with
this I tell a story I overheard in my astral eaves-
dropping, one especially dear to my Hibernian heart.*

Their onslaught till the grey sky clears,
The planes can give the Germans grief
And Patton's forces bring relief.
What an ingenious ploy, my Dears!



Of course, his Irish ancestry...
History has posed to us the riddle
Of how to make the most of little.
He did this rather cleverly.

6.
Mere satirists give too much care
To criticising social crudities,
Blind to the Comic Absolute: it is
Menippean satire's high métier

Another respectful nod to Baudelaire.

To ridicule the Universe,
The vast pretention of its Now
And Then, its Here and There, and how
It so presumptuously occurs

*Cf. W. F. Schlegel on Candide,
in Athenaeum Fragmente, 374.
—[Mr V]*

Without permission, without cause,
Without a purpose or an aim,
Truly an idle Aion's game —
For what, to win the mind's applause?

Ah, this the gadfly mind withholds.
It plays the critic of Creation
And where it finds imagination
Wanting, it duly checks and scolds

*Beyond Arnold's definition of
poetry as 'a criticism of life'.*

The overly-naïve Creator,
His rash *fiat lux*, His uneven
Work in clay, His Hell and His Heaven —
And hints He should perhaps read Pater.



Hiroshima
6 August, 1945

Lord Shiva keeps his palace there
Inside an atom's nucleus.
How long before he turns on us
The brilliance of his gamma-glare?

*

Tophat:
*You've finally made the suicide
Weapon you have been longing for
Since you walked on two legs, not four.
Something inside you loves death, I'd*

*Wager, have wagered, and: I win.
And so do you. I and mankind
Are of one fundamental mind:
That you freaks never should have been.*

*

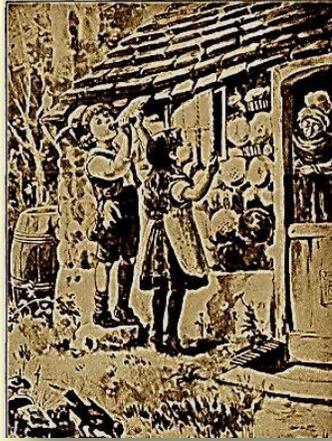
Here's to the fight between the Red
And the Red, White and Blue: the cold
New war, that spook-child of the old.
Here's to to the sixty million dead.



There is no such place; there are no such people.



Märchen



*Captain Dreyfus, I wronged you gravely, gravely.
In making jokes about your cruel fate
I countenanced the rage of racial hate
Which you endured so stoically and bravely.*

In a Green Haven

Long have I lingered in Manhattan,
A phantom *flaneur*. I look through
Shop windows on Park Avenue;
Young women in rich gowns of satin

I see step out of limousines
At the Opera, young men in tow;
Watch Harbor tug boats come and go
From Battery Park; I watch drag queens

Parade the Soho streets, hear bickering
Of Times Square pimps and prostitutes;
Wince horrified as one man shoots
Another under a street lamp flickering

In Spanish Harlem... Past the bums
In alleyways and cubbyholes
I walk, and pity these lost souls.
I take in Broadway when it hums

With traffic and the well-attired,
As theatre signs garish-bright
Scare up a daylight out of night.
And all of this I have admired,

Deplored, and puzzled over, much-
Bemused to think how all this press
Of people harshens loneliness
When hands that seek a human touch

Can only wave at beauty and glamour,
And eyes are branded by a brilliance
That knows them not, dressed in its millions,
Close-up-remote. I flee this clamour

Of desperate manoeuvring
To Central Park, seeking what corner
Of night may shelter a ghostly mourner.
And I will tell you a curious thing.

I took the walk I often take
Through that green haven, late at night,
In dead of winter, when a white
And glassy sheet lay on the lake.

*Revisiting The American
Tour Revisited.*



A man stood by that lake alone.
(Only the moon and I were there
To watch the fellow stand and stare
Into a water hard as stone.)

A man I seemed to recognise,
And yet a stranger. Suddenly
He turned about and looked at me.
I saw the dead lake in his eyes.

(It is the old moon's mirror.) I knew
The man, and saw that he knew me.
How happy once he used to be
In a land so red, white, and blue!

How sad he'd been when first I met him.
Now he'd seen something, something grim,
And sorrow had returned to him,
As if it never could forget him.

He shook his head in disbelief.
Their children were my children, said
Anthologoios. They are dead,
My children, said the Soul of Grief.

What children do you mean? I asked.
He shook his head, and wiped his eyes.
When a child dies, I think God dies
A little too, he said. It tasked

Him terribly to speak, I saw.
The more they die, the less He is.
What are those promises of His
When He lets evil take the law

Into its hands, and deal it out...
As murder? All is lost
If he accepts this holocaust.
I know, I know. I share your doubt.

Unless I tell it as a folk
Tale, you will not know what it means.
How distant seemed the limousines
When, after a deep breath, he spoke!

Märchen

1.

Listen: those muffled clicks
Escaping from the leather-strapped
Locker box:

Dolls are flexing the rusty joints
And lactic lumber
Of their legs.

The Ventriloquist is behind other walls
Hearing guttural voices
Boom from the belly of a bottle.

One of his fingers points
To the offensive lack of wine, rejoins
Its brothers to make a fist.

The words the dolls would smuggle
To tell each other stories,
The girl and the brother,

Are confiscated by a vitreous lung,
Burped into the basso profundo
Of the echoing jug.

How could the sound reach them
In the throttle
And fastness of the trunk?

They scuff each other as they hug.

2.

They escape into the sky, the dolls,
They tumble along on streams
Of air, and when they fall

A cloud is their trampoline,
It cushions the whiffle of their joy
As they fly hand in hand,

The girl and the boy,
Sister and brother
Laughing together!

Tall in the sky,
The Wind's Swift Rider
Skims beside them,

And if the Evil One
Came looking for them
He would hide them.

La Belle Coppelia, Graceful Glider,
And pine-liberated Ariel:
What fairy tales they have to tell

Of a place called Hell!

3.
*In the closeness of the hold
Or when winds are angry and the air is cold
Do not be afraid,*

*Wooden boy,
Wooden girl.
Think that comfort is*

*Near. Believe that gnarl
Of pity hanging from a cross
That is nailed to the wall,*

*This crossroads
Of twisted little sticks,
Means more than the splinters of loss.*

*Singing is permitted here. Hope is true.
The bed is made
And the food*

Is good.

4.
*Dear little children, you and I
Were hewn from the same tall tree.
Sorrow is sawdust*

*Blown away
When the perfect finish
Shines before you like a wish*

*Come true. Kleine Kinder,
I am the Wood and the Carpenter
And the House you shall enter*

*In the glow of the hearth
In the goodness of Earth
And that beautiful Day*

Is on its way.

5.
On they dream,
The boy and the girl.
Telephone lines

Snatch them from the air
In a barbed-wire snarl,
The Evil One throws his voice

Through the wires
With such horrible force!
See them dangling there?

Down they shrink —
And this is no dream —
Till each seems to be

A Christmas ornament
Small as a mouse
Hanging by the neck

From a lovely tree
As children rejoice
In the house

Of the Camp Commandant.



My Father the Tree

1.

It stood.
In the garden,
Calm and robust,

Patiently muscling
Sap from the water,
Light into air

When along comes the axe man
And lops off the top,
Planes it

With a crooked bevel
Into a shape
To churn the world to pity with its torque—

And take into its side
The crackling fork
Of the devil.

2.

Is the Carpenter made of wood?
Is this the primitive rood
That hoists

The Man-God
Up to ridicule
And prayer?

Ghostly craftsmen
Nailed
These sticks,

Random scantlings,
Into effectual
Crucifix.

He is speaking to you
Through the floorboards,
His bones are the joists,

The doorframes, the rafters,
His eyes the windowpanes
Shining as he talks.



*I am the House that feels.
Kleine Kinder, it is you
Who join these orphaned scantlings*

*Into a shape
That supports
The injured Man who heals.*

4.
I dreamed I sawed
An angel in half –
A sleeping angel

Who felt no pain
As wood
Is proof against pain.

I watched the age-rings
Of the angel-tree
Motionlessly ripple

Out from the pith.
I saw the wrong-
Rubbed grain

Of the Sorrowing Man,
The naked worm in him
Working its way.

Golden crumbs
Flaked from
The heat of the teeth.

I thought of scurf,
Dry needles
On the forest floor

And part of me swept
The magic dust
Under a rug

And part of me buried
The splinters
In a hole

I had dug
In the garden.
And part of me wept.

5.
Autumn came,
It was cold
And I shivered.

I thought of the worm
Chewing the last
Sliver, crumbling.

There was an ache
In my bones
And I remembered my father the tree.

6.
I pitied you,
Driftwood
Man.

I saw in you
Petroushka's
Tears.

The Charlatan's
Living kindling
Lay in a heap

On the ground
At the Shrove-Tide fair.
And the appalled revelers

Stood around and stared –
The pig the goat
The helpless muzzled bear

Stood over the
Broken
Boy

And his ghost shook a fist
From the roof: *Curse you*
Who haunted this wood with your breath!

*

And to this day
The Charlatan's limbs
Are stiff.

His heart is stuffed
With sawdust
And the stars have fallen

From his conical hat.
Little Lucifers
Parachute down to the forest floor.

7.
Father Abraham,
God promised you
A great nation

And you came
Out of Ur
Into Canaan.

From your spine
Grew twelve branches
And they climbed into the sky.

For every branch
That scraped
The belly of Heaven

A serpent
Grappled an angel
To the mud.

No, these branches
Will never
Cease to climb,

Said father Abraham
And fell away
Among his leaves.

8.

Forgive me

I am deaf

I am numb

My father is Abraham

I will perish

On a heap of sticks

In a fire

In the hallways

In the open air

In the forests

In the mountains

I shall die

In the streets

In the faith

Of my fathers

I shall die

Forgive me

Forgive me

I shall die

Like the worm

That splits the rock

I shall perish

In the woods

In the rivers

By the still waters

I shall perish

In the sky

In the faith

Of my fathers

Forgive me

Forgive me

I shall die

Forgive me

Nothing will ever be the same.

Lorelei

[In my ghostly form I have walked and floated and flown
over the catastrophic ruin that had to be made of Germany's
cities and towns to win victory and peace. Everywhere,
mountains of rubble, beautiful old churches and cathedrals
damaged or destroyed... I seek relief in the remote elevations.]

October, 1945.



In the Harz Mountains, where the winds
Blow clean, I sought the humanity
Of old Romantic Germany
So horribly disfigured since.

Atop the Brocken Goethe climbed
I stood, and in the mist I saw
A glory, a tall spectre. Awe
Came over me. Not he who rhymed

The Erlking's baleful magic or
The quest of Faust it was, this shape
That seemed a dream of the landscape
Itself: the form that stood before

Me was the ghost of one who gave
His countrymen *Die Lorelei*.
She combs her golden hair on high.
The Third Reich moulders in its grave.

A brilliant and mercurial Jew,
This master of mocking irony
Who weaved in furious poetry
A death-shroud for the tyrants, knew

As well the truth of ballad verse,
Of folklore sung with lyric power –
A truth that was his nation's dower,
Thrown in a ditch by murderers.

He spoke these words: *The criminals
And the fanatics, even they
Hadn't the nerve to throw away
That Siren song. Her mystery calls*

*With perilous loveliness across
The years that brought my country shame.
Evil dared not erase her name,
But they named me 'Anonymous'*

*For a Reich's length. The melody
That is the beauty poets love
Enough to die for, sings above
The fouled river of history.*

*My name, perhaps, will never die:
Poetic Justice wills it so –
While they and their works are laid low
At the feet of my Lorelei.*



** Epilogue **

Celestial Beasts

Old Blue, though all alone you trace your track
Around the roaring Lion at the centre,
Into your dreams farlights find ways to enter
And tame themselves, and be your Zodiac.



Musical Program

Page 11, Ladies and Gentlemen!

Milhaud, *Le Boeuf sur le toit*. Orchestre National de France, Leonard Bernstein, conductor.

Page 21, From Père Lachaise: The Critic as Artist...

Beethoven, *Piano Sonata No. 22 in F Major*, Op. 54. II: Allegretto. Artur Schnabel, piano.

Page 38, Sartor Resartus: Still in Fashion?

Brahms, *Capriccio in B minor*, Op. 76, No. 2. Arthur Rubinstein, piano.

Page 42, Dodgson and I: The Paradox

Schubert, *Heidenröslein*. Text by Goethe. Arleen Auger, soprano.

Sah ein Knab' ein Röslein stehn,
Röslein auf der Heiden,
War so jung und morgenschön,
Lief er schnell, es nah zu sehn,
Sah's mit vielen Freuden.
Röslein, Röslein, Röslein rot,
Röslein auf der Heiden.

Little Rose on the Heath

A passing lad a rose blossom spied,
Blossom on the heath growing,
'Twas so fair and of youthful pride,
Raced he fast to be near its side,
Saw it with joy o'erflowing.
Blossom, blossom, blossom red,
Blossom on the heath growing.

Trans. Walter Meyer

Page 47, *Dodgson and I: The Paradox*

Mompou, *Canciones y Danzas*, No. 6. Alicia de Laroccha, piano.

Page 48, *Iris of the Eye*

Poulenc, *L'Invitation au château*. VI: Mouvement de valse hésitation. Oleg Gunko, clarinet, Olena Kharambura, violin and Olga Lysa, piano.

Page 49, *Iris of the Eye*

Ravel, *Valses nobles et sentimentales*. VII: Moins vif. Krystian Zimerman, piano.

Page 51, *Iris of the Eye*

Johann Strauss, Jr., *Die Fledermaus*. Act II Ensemble (“Champagne Song”). Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, Adam Fischer, conductor.

Page 52, *Iris of the Eye*

Ravel, *La Valse*. City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Simon Rattle, conductor.

Page 57, *The Empire at Home and Abroad*

Tchaikovsky, *The Nutcracker Suite*, Op. 71a. *Chinese Dance*. Berlin Philharmonic, Seiji Ozawa, conductor.

Page 60, *The Empire at Home and Abroad*

Gilbert and Sullivan, *The Mikado*. Act I, No. 6: Chorus of Schoolgirls (*Three Little Maids from School Are We*). From the movie *Topsy-Turvy*, Mike Leigh, director.

Page 62, *Trial by Caricature*

Gilbert and Sullivan, *The Mikado*. Act I, No. 3: *Our Great Mikado*. Orchestra and Chorus of the Welsh National Opera. Donald Adams as the Mikado. Charles Mackerras, conductor.

Page 70, Notes of a Concert-Goer

Mozart, *Clarinet Quintet in A major*, K. 581. II: Larghetto. Tokyo String Quartet.
Eric Stolzman, clarinet.

Page 71, Notes of a Concert-Goer

Mahler, *Symphony No. 5*. III: Adagietto. Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Georg Solti, conductor.

Page 72, Notes of a Concert-Goer

Chopin, *Sonata in B-flat minor*, Op. 35. IV: Finale. Presto. Maurizio Pollini, piano.

Richard Strauss, *Der Rosenkavalier*. Trio and final duet. Anna Tomowa-Sintow (the Marschallin), Agnes Taltza (Octavian), Janet Perry (Sophie). The Vienna Philharmonic, Herbert von Karajan, conductor.

[The text (along with stage directions and dramatic action) is too long and elaborate to quote in full. Briefly, the Marschallin renounces her claim on her youthful lover, Octavian, who has fallen in love with the young Sophie. The Marschallin leaves them to each other, and in a duet, they sing of their love and happiness.]

Page 73, Notes of a Concert-Goer

Fauré, *Piano Quartet No. 1 in C minor*, Op. 15. II: Scherzo. Allegro vivo. Emanuel Ax, piano, Isaac Stern, violin, Jaime Laredo, viola, Yo-Yo Ma, cello.

Debussy, *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*. Montreal Symphony Orchestra, Charles Dutoit, conductor.

Page 74, Notes of a Concert-Goer

Ravel, *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*. Chorus: *Adieu, pastourelles*. Nashville Symphony Orchestra and Chorus. Alastair Willis, conductor.

Adieu, pastourelles, pastoureux, adieu!
Nous n'irons plus sur l'herbe mauve
Paître nos verts mouchons.
Las, nos agneux rose tendre!
Las, notre chèvre amarante!
Las, nos cerises zinzolin,
Notre chien bleu!

La bouche en coeur, pastoureux,
Le bras tendu, pastourelles,
Nos amours semblaient éternelles,
Éternels semblaient nos pipeaux.

L'Enfant méchant a déchiré
Notre tendre histoire,
Pâtre de ci, pastourelle de là,
L'Enfant ingrat qui dormait sous la garde
De notre chien bleu.

Las, notre chèvre amarante!
Las, nos roses et verts mouchons!
Adieu! Pastoureux, adieu!

Farewell, shepherdesses, shepherds, farewell!
No more will we batten our green sheep
On the violet grass.
Alas, our lambs, a tender pink!
Alas, our purple goat!
Alas, our dark red cherries,
Our blue dog!
Shepherds with lips puckering,
Shepherdesses with arms outstretched,
Our loves seemed eternal,
Eternal seemed our rustic reeds.

The naughty child has torn apart
Our gentle story,
Torn the shepherd from here,
The shepherdess from there.
The naughty child who owes us his first smile,
The ungrateful child who used to sleep
With the blue dog watching over him.

Alas, our purple goat!
Alas, our sheep, pink and green!
Farewell, shepherds, farewell!

Vaughn Williams, *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*. The Academy of St. Martin
in the Fields, Barry Wordsworth, conductor.

Page 75, Notes a Concert-Goer

Stravinsky, *The Rite of Spring*. I: *Adoration of the Earth*. (First Dance: “Augurs of Spring”.)
CSCSO, Stravinsky, conductor.

Schoenberg, *Verklärte Nacht (Transfigured Night)*, Op. 4, original version for string
sextet. Hollywood String Quartet augmented.

Schoenberg, *Pierrot Lunaire*, Op. 21. I: *Mondestrunken*. (Original text by Albert Giraud, trans. Eric
Harleben). Christine Schäfer, soprano. Ensemble InterContemporain, Pierre Boulez, conductor.

Den Wein, den man mit Augen trinkt,
Gießt Nachts der Mond in Wogen nieder,
Und eine Springflut überschwemmt
Den stillen Horizont.

Gelüste schauerlich und süß,
Durchschwimmen ohne Zahl die Fluten!
Den Wein, den man mit Augen trinkt,
Gießt Nachts der Mond in Wogen nieder.

Der Dichter, den die Andacht treibt,
Berauscht sich an dem heiligen Tranke,
Gen Himmel wendet er verzückt
Das Haupt und taumelnd saugt und schlürft er
Den Wein, den man mit Augen trinkt.

Moondrunk

The wine that through the eyes is drunk,
at night the moon pours down in torrents,
until a spring-flood overflows
the silent far horizon.
Desires, shuddering and sweet,
are swimming through the flood unnumbered.
The wine that through the eyes is drunk,
at night the moon pours down in torrents.

The poet, whom devotion drives,
grows tipsy on the sacred liquor,
to heaven turning his enraptured gaze
and reeling, sucks and slurps up
the wine that through the eyes is drunk.

Trans. Andrew Porter

Page 76, *Harlequin's Apocalypse* (title page)

Berg, *Lulu Suite*. Vienna Philharmonic, Pierre Boulez, conductor.

Page 81, *From Père Lachaise: Drama and Delirium*

Royal Gamelan Orchestra, Bali. Udun.

Page 82, *From Père Lachaise: Drama and Delirium*

Webern, *Concerto for Nine Instruments*, Op. 24. Ensemble InterContemporain, Pierre Boulez, conductor.

Page 83, *Queensberries Marching in Formation* (Illustration)

The Marquis's words are put together from two phrases in a private letter: "snob queer" and "Jew friend" (i.e., friend of the Jews). He was referring to Lord Rosebery, who when Foreign Secretary appointed Queensberry's son, Francis Archibald Douglas, Viscount Drumlanrig, as his private secretary. Rumors, well-founded or not, circulated that the two were sexually intimate, and when in October of 1894 Drumlanrig died in a "shooting accident" that was more likely a suicide, his father blamed Rosebery—hence the abusive terms in which he refers to him in the letter. (To the anti-Semitic Marquis, befriending the Jews was an act of race betrayal.)

Page 84, *The Golem*

Schoenberg, *Moses und Aron*. Interlude: *Wo ist Moses?* (*Where is Moses?*) Los Angeles Zimriyah Chorale, Iain Farrington, organ, Nick Strimple, conductor.

Page 85, *Death-Watch*

Yam Klezmer, clarinet.

Page 90, *Monstrously Natural: Rousseau and I*

Rousseau, *Le devin du village*. Overture. Libretto by Rousseau. Cantus Firmus, Andreas Reize, conductor.

Page 96, Arthur Machen and the Great God Pan

Webern, *Six Bagatelles*, Op. 9. I: Mässig. Emerson String Quartet.

Page 98, January 29, 1939: Death of Yeats

Wagner, *Das Rheingold*. Act I, Scene 2 (Fafner and Fasolt). Berlin Philharmonic, Herbert von Karajan, conductor.

Page 102, Malacoda and the Malebranche

Schoenberg, *A Survivor from Warsaw*, Op. 46. 1947. Franz Mazura, speaker, Men's voices of the City of Birmingham Symphony Chorus, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Simon Rattle, conductor.

Page 103 (Child Sitting Amid Rubble—Nazi Bombing of Warsaw)

Weill and Anderson, *September Song*. Sung by Lotte Lenya.

Page 108, Art and Psychoanalysis

Abileah, *Ma Nishtana (The Four Questions)*. Passover song. Performers unknown.

What has changed, this night,
from all the other nights?

Manishtanah, ha-laylah ha-zeh
mi-kol ha-leylot?

הַ הַלַּיְלָה, נִשְׁתַּנָּה מֵהַ
הַלַּיְלוֹת מִכֹּל

That in all other nights we eat both
chametz and matzah,
on this night, we eat only matzah?

She-b'khol ha-leylot 'anu 'okhlin
chameytz u-matzah,
ha-laylah ha-zeh, kulo matzah?

אוֹכְלִין אֲנֵנוּ הַלַּיְלוֹת שְׂבֻכָּל
וּמִצָּה חֲמֵץ
מִצָּה כָּלוּ, הַזֶּה הַלַּיְלָה

That in all other nights we eat
many vegetables,
on this night, maror?

She-b'khol ha-leylot 'anu 'okhlin
sh'ar y'raqot,
ha-laylah ha-zeh, maror?

אוֹכְלִין אֲנֵנוּ הַלַּיְלוֹת שְׂבֻכָּל
יִרְקוֹת שְׂאֵר
מָרֹר, הַזֶּה הַלַּיְלָה

That in all other nights we do not
dip vegetables even once,
on this night, we dip twice?

She-b'khol ha-leylot 'eyn 'anu
matbilin 'afilu pa`am 'achat,
ha-laylah ha-zeh, shtey fe`amim?

אנו אין הלילות שֶבְכֵל
אָחַת פֶּעַם אֶפִּילוּ מְטַבֵּילִין
פְּעָמִים שְׁתֵּי, הַזֶּה הַלַּיְלָה

That in all other nights
some eat sitting and others reclining,
on this night, we are all reclining?

She-b'khol ha-leylot 'anu 'okhlin
beyn yoshvin u-veyn m'subin,
ha-laylah ha-zeh, kulanu m'subin?

אוֹכְלִין אֲנוּ הַלַּיְלֹת שֶבְכֵל
מְסַבֵּין וּבֵין יוֹשְׁבֵין בֵּין
מְסַבֵּין כָּלֵנוּ, הַזֶּה הַלַּיְלָה

Page 110, *Art and Psychoanalysis*

Marguerite Monnot (music) and Edith Piaf (lyrics), *Hymne à l'amour*. Sung by Piaf.

Le ciel bleu sur nous peut s'effondrer
Et la terre peut bien s'écrouler
Peu m'importe si tu m'aimes
Je me fous du monde entier
Tant qu'il'amour inond'ra mes matins
Tant que mon corps frémira sous tes mains
Peu m'importent les problèmes
Mon amour puisque tu m'aimes

J'irais jusqu'au bout du monde
Je me ferais teindre en blonde
Si tu me le demandais
J'irais décrocher la lune
J'irais voler la fortune
Si tu me le demandais

Je renierais ma patrie
Je renierais mes amis
Si tu me le demandais
On peut bien rire de moi
Je ferais n'importe quoi
Si tu me le demandais

Si un jour la vie t'arrache à moi
Si tu meurs que tu sois loin de moi
Peu m'importe si tu m'aimes
Car moi je mourrai aussi
Nous aurons pour nous l'éternité
Dans le bleu de toute l'immensité
Dans le ciel plus de problèmes
Mon amour crois-tu qu'on s'aime
Dieu réunit ceux qui s'aiment

Hymn to Love

The blue sky over us can collapse on itself
and the ground can cave in.
It matters little to me if you love me
I couldn't care less about the whole world
As long as love will flood my mornings
As long as my body will tremble under your hands
The problems make little difference to me
My love, because you love me.

I will go to the end of the world
I will dye my hair blond
If you ask me to
I will go take down the moon
I will steal fortune
if you ask me to.
I will renounce my country
I will renounce my friends
if you ask me to.
Let them laugh at me
I will do anything
if you ask me to.

If one day life tears you away from me
if you die then you will be far from me
what does it matter if you love me
because I will die too.
Eternity will be ours
in the blue of all the immensity
of heaven, no more problems.
My love do you believe that we love each other?
God reunites those who love each other.

Page 111, *The Mysties* (title page)

Dion Boucicault (attr., probably dates from late 18th century), *Wearing of the Green*.
Sung by John McCormack.

Page 116, *The Mysties: The Question Mark of Giacomo*

Wallace, *Let Me Like a Soldier Fall*. From the opera *Maritana*. Walter Widdop, tenor.
Unnamed orchestra. Lawrence Collingwood, conductor.

Page 121, *The Mysties: Awake for Giacomo*

Finnegan's Wake (trad. Irish pub song). The Chieftains.

Tim Finnegan lived in Walkin Street, a gentle Irishman mighty odd
He had a brogue both rich and sweet, an' to rise in the world he carried a hod
You see he'd a sort of a tipplers way but the love for the liquor poor Tim was born
To help him on his way each day, he'd a drop of the craythur every morn

Whack fol the dah now dance to yer partner around the flure yer trotters shake
Wasn't it the truth I told you? Lots of fun at Finnegan's Wake

One morning Tim got rather full, his head felt heavy which made him shake
Fell from a ladder and he broke his skull, and they carried him home his corpse to wake
Rolled him up in a nice clean sheet, and laid him out upon the bed
A bottle of whiskey at his feet and a barrel of porter at his head

Whack fol the dah now dance to yer partner around the flure yer trotters shake
Wasn't it the truth I told you? Lots of fun at Finnegan's Wake

His friends assembled at the wake, and Mrs Finnegan called for lunch
First she brought in tay and cake, then pipes, tobacco and whiskey punch
Biddy O'Brien began to cry, "Such a nice clean corpse, did you ever see,
Tim avourneen, why did you die?", "Will ye hould your gob?" said Paddy McGee

Whack fol the dah now dance to yer partner around the flure yer trotters shake
Wasn't it the truth I told you? Lots of fun at Finnegan's Wake

Then Maggie O'Connor took up the job, "Biddy" says she "you're wrong, I'm sure"
Biddy gave her a belt in the gob and left her sprawling on the floor
Then the war did soon engage, t'was woman to woman and man to man
Shillelagh law was all the rage and a row and a ruction soon began

Whack fol the dah now dance to yer partner around the flure yer trotters shake
Wasn't it the truth I told you? Lots of fun at Finnegan's Wake

Mickey Maloney ducked his head when a bucket of whiskey flew at him
It missed, and falling on the bed, the liquor scattered over Tim
Bedad he revives, see how he rises, Timothy rising from the bed
Saying "Whittle your whiskey around like blazes, t'underin' Jaysus, do ye think I'm dead?"

Whack fol the dah now dance to yer partner around the flure yer trotters shake
Wasn't it the truth I told you? Lots of fun at Finnegan's Wake

Page 125, *The Mysties: The Story-Teller at Fault*

Will (Hurlfoot) Maher (lyricist), *The Night Before Larry Was Stretched* (ca. 1816). Instrumental version by the Chieftains.

The lyricist was an Irishman, but the first line is from an anonymous early-18th-century English tune, "The Bowman Prigg's Farewell." The melody is taken from another anonymous English ballad, "To the Hundreds of Drury Lane I Write," also dating from the early 18th century. Maher's version is an example of a genre, the Irish Execution Ballad, typically using "Newgate cant." Joyce incorporated the lyrics to a Newgate cant song into the "Proteus" chapter of *Ulysses*, with the concluding line, "In the darkmans [night's] clip and kiss." (See Wikipedia article on "[The Night Before Larry Was Stretched](#).")

The night before Larry was stretched,
The boys they all paid him a visit
A bit in their sacks too they fetched
They sweated their duds¹ till they riz it
For Larry was always the lad,
When a friend was condemn'd to the squeezer,²
He'd sweat all the togs³ that he had
Just to help the poor boy to a sneezer⁴
– And moisten his gob 'fore he died.

The boys they came crowding in fast;
They drew their stools close round about him,
Six glims⁵ round his trap-case⁶ were placed
For he couldn't be well waked without 'em,
When ax'd if he was fit to die,
Without having duly repented?
Says Larry, 'That's all in my eye,
And all by the clargy invented,
– To make a fat bit for themselves.

"I'm sorry dear Larry', says I,
'For to see you here in such trouble,
And your life's cheerful noggin run dry,
And yourself going off like its bubble!
'Hauld your tongue in that matter,' says he;
'For the neckcloth I don't care a button,
And by this time tomorrow you'll see
Your Larry will be dead as mutton:
– And all 'cos his courage was good'

"And then I'll be cut up like a pie,
And me nob⁷ from me body be parted."
"You're in the wrong box, then", says I,
"For blast me if they're so hard-hearted.
A chalk on the back of your neck

Is all that Jack Ketch⁸ dares to give you;
So mind not such trifles a feck,
Sure why should the likes of them grieve you?
– And now boys, come tip us the deck.⁹

Then the cards being called for, they play'd,
Till Larry found one of them cheated;
A dart¹⁰ at his napper¹¹ he made
The lad being easily heated,
'So ye chates me bekase I'm in grief!
O! is that, by the Hokey, the rason?
Soon I'll give you to know you d—d thief!
That you're cracking your jokes out of sason,
– And scuttle your nob with my fist'.

Then the clergy came in with his book
He spoke him so smooth and so civil;
Larry tipp'd him a Kilmainham¹² look,¹³
And pitch'd his big wig to the divil.
Then raising a little his head,
To get a sweet drop of the bottle,
And pitiful sighing he said,
'O! the hemp will be soon round my throttle,¹⁴
– And choke my poor windpipe to death!'

So mournful these last words he spoke,
We all vented our tears in a shower;
For my part, I thought my heart broke
To see him cut down like a flower!
On his travels we watch'd him next day,
O, the throttler¹⁵ I thought I could kill him!
But Larry not one word did say,
Nor chang'd till he came to King William;¹⁶
– Then, musha, his colour turned white.

When he came to the nubbing-cheat,
He was tack'd up so neat and so pretty;
The rambler¹⁷ jugg'd off from his feet,
And he died with his face to the city.
He kick'd too, but that was all pride,
For soon you might see 'twas all over;
And as soon as the noose was untied,
Then at darkey¹⁸ waked him in clover,
– And sent him to take a ground-sweat.¹⁹

1. They pawned their clothes
2. The Hangman or Gallows
3. pawn all the clothes
4. a drink
5. candles
6. coffin
7. head
8. "Jack Ketch" was the generic name for the hangman, as "Chips" was for a ship's carpenter and so on; the original Jack Ketch was "the common executioner 1663(?) - 1686. He became notorious on account of his barbarity at the executions of William Lord Russell and others."
9. deck of cards
10. blow
11. head
12. An area in Dublin's Liberties
13. A "Kilmainham look" may be something like a Ringsend tango or a Ringsend uppercut (a kick in the groin) – or perhaps not. Kilmainham was the county jail in former times, and later was the scene of the execution of the leaders of the 1916 Rising. Larry may have been confined in Kilmainham or in the Green Street prison, the "new" Newgate which replaced the old Newgate in the 1770s. Kilmainham is remembered in another prison ballad called "The Kilmainham Minit", i.e., "minuet", the dance of the hanged man.
14. neck
15. hangman
16. This was an equestrian statue of King William of Orange, erected in 1701 at College Green in Dublin. Always controversial, it was repeatedly daubed, defaced and blown up; in 1929 it was blown up for the last time, and later broken up for smelting. Presumably the bold Larry was important enough to be hanged in the large public space of College Green rather than at the prison itself.
17. cart
18. night time
19. buried him

Page 130, *Oscar of the Cove*

Mendelssohn, *The Hebrides (Fingal's Cave) Overture*, Op. 26. London Symphony Orchestra, Antal Dorati, conductor.

Page 136, *The Mysties: Jim and I Drink Too Much*

Verdi, *Rigoletto*, Act III: "La donna è mobile." Enrico Caruso, tenor.

La donna è mobile
 Qual piuma al vento,
 Muta d'accento e di pensiero.
 Sempre un amabile,

Leggiadro viso,
In pianto o in riso, è menzognero.
È sempre misero
Chi a lei s'affida,

Chi le confida mal cauto il cuore!
Pur mai non sentesi
Felice appieno
Chi su quel seno non liba amore!

Woman is flighty
Like a feather in the wind,
She changes her voice and her mind.
Always sweet,
Pretty face,
In tears or in laughter, she is always lying.
Always miserable
Is he who trusts her,
He who confides in her his unwary heart!
Yet one never feels
Fully happy
Who on that bosom does not drink love!

Joyce, *Bid Adieu to Girlish Days*. Based on Poem XI from Joyce's *Chamber Music*.
Kevin McDermott, tenor, Ralph Richey, piano.

Page 137, Duet

Beethoven, *Symphony No. 5 in C minor*, Op. 67. I: Allegro con brio. NBC Symphony
Orchestra, Arturo Toscanini, conductor.

Given the intensity of the Nazi propaganda machine's use of Beethoven's music in schools, concerts, and film, it is surprising that the most famous wartime use of Beethoven's music was developed by the Allies. As is well known, the opening motive of the Fifth Symphony came to symbolize an Allied victory. Beethoven's Fifth was not, however, the original inspiration for the "V for Victory" campaign. Early in 1941 as part of the BBC's "Free France" program, a Belgian producer named Victor de Laveleye suggested that the resistance symbol "V" be used as a sonic symbol that the French and Belgians would understand. In Morse code, "V" is represented by three dots and a dash. Only then was it compared to the opening of the Fifth Symphony. By chance Beethoven's Fifth became the Allies' rallying call, and the BBC adopted a policy to begin its wartime radio transmissions to the continent with the motto. Even before the United States entered the war in 1942, the American press began to publicize the "V for Victory" campaign. —*The American Beethoven Society*.

Perhaps the Allies could not resist the irony of "quoting" a monument of German culture against the Nazis.

Page 140, *The Scriblerus Club*

Shostakovich, *Symphony No. 7* ("Leningrad"), finale. Mariinsky Theatre Orchestra, Valery Gergiev, conductor. (Quotation from Bakhtin on the following page is from *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Holquist and Caryl Emerson, p 293.)

Page 142, *The Scriblerus Club*

Copland, *Fanfare for the Common Man*. São Paulo Symphony Orchestra, Marin Alsop, conductor.

Page 143, *Hiroshima, 6 August 1945*

Penderecki, *Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima*. National Polish Radio Orchestra, Antoni Wit, conductor.

Page 144 (Illustration: Munich after Allied Bombing)

Schultze and Leip, *Lili Marleen*. (English lyrics by Tommy Connor.) Sung by Marlene Dietrich.

First written as a poem during WWI by Hans Leip, set to music by Norbert Schultze in 1938, the song became popular among both German and Allied soldiers during World War II.

Page 145, *Märchen* (title page)

Ravel, *Chants populaires*. IV: *Chanson hébraïque*. (Folk song setting.) Cecelia Bartoli, mezzo-soprano, Myung-Whun Chung, piano.

Mejerke, main Suhn,
Mejerke, main Suhn, oi Mejerke, main Suhn,
Zi weiss tu, var wemen du steihst?
"Lifnei Melech Malchei hamlochim," Tatunju.

Mejerke, main Suhn,
Mejerke, main Suhn, oi Mejerke, main Suhn,
Wos ze westu bai lhm bet'n?
"Bonej, chajei, M'sunej," Tatunju.

Mejerke, main Suhn,
Mejerke, main Suhn, oi Mejerke, main Suhn,
Oif wos darfs tu Bonei?
"Bonim eiskim batoiroh," Tatunju.

Mejerke, main Suhn,
Mejerke, main Suhn, oi Mejerke, main Suhn,
Oif wos darfs tu chajei?
"Kol chai joiducho," Tatumju.

"Mayerke, my son, oh Mayerke, my son,
Do you know before whom do you stand?"
"BEFORE THE KING OF THE KING OF KINGS, father dear¹."

"Mayerke, my son, oh Mayerke, my son,
And what will you ask of him?"
"CHILDREN, LIFE, AND SUSTENANCE, father dear."

"Mayerke, my son, oh Mayerke, my son,
For what do you need children?"
"CHILDREN STUDY THE TORAH, father dear."

"Mayerke, my son, oh Mayerke, my son,
For what do you need life?"
"ALL LIFE SHALL PRAISE HIM, father dear."

"Mayerke, my son, oh Mayerke, my son,
But you also want some bread?"
"YOU SHALL EAT, AND BE SATISFIED AND BLESS [THE LORD YOUR GOD]"

Trans. Laura Richard

Page 146, *In a Green Haven*

Ives, *Central Park in the Dark*. New York Philharmonic, Leonard Bernstein, conductor.

Page 150, *Märchen*

Shostakovich, *String Quartet No. 8 in C minor*, Op. 110. II: Allegro molto. (Arr. for chamber orchestra by Rudolf Barshai.) Dalgat String Ensemble, Roland Melia, conductor.

Page 151, *My Father the Tree*

Ravel, *Kaddish*. From *Deux mélodies hébraïques*. Steven Isserlis, cello. Norwegian Chamber Orchestra. Conductor not named.

Page 157, Lorelei

Schubert, *Impromptu in G Flat Major*, D. 899, No. 3. Mitsuko Uchida, piano.

Page 158, Epilogue

Mahler, *Symphony No. 1 in D Major*. III: "The Huntsman's Funeral." The Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Leonard Bernstein, conductor.

"Mahler's inspiration for this movement was a children's woodcut by the artist Moritz von Schwind. The illustration depicts a torch-lit funeral procession of animals carrying a fallen huntsman. To describe this ironic and amusing scene, Mahler juxtaposes various musical themes in the movement to recreate the sense of irony the scene represents. The huntsman's funeral is first evoked by a minor mode version of the children's round *Frère Jacques*, then the oboes and trumpets offer a mock-sentimental accompaniment in a Jewish Klezmer dance. A dreamlike melody from Mahler's *Songs of a Wayfarer* is an interlude in the movement, and finally, the march returns with a sudden acceleration of pace with the animals of the forest rushing the huntsman towards his grave. The irony of the movement? How unhappy are these animals with the huntsman's death?"—Note to Youtube posting.

Keeping in mind Mahler's preoccupation with the pathos of the death of children. (His song-cycle, *Kindertotenlieder*, was followed by the death of his own son—the composer's punishment, according to his wife Alma, for having "tempted fate.") (There may be something else in addition to irony at work in Mahler's use of a minor-mode version of *Frère Jacques*: it may also be an elegiac gesture, making the theme a miniature requiem, not for a dead child in this case, but for the loss of childhood innocence—which can be stolen as well as lost when adult violence wreaks its damage.

It is also worth noting that the critical reception of the ethnically Jewish Mahler's First Symphony was marred by anti-Semitic slurs to the effect that since in its original version it had an elaborate narrative "program" (in a Romantic tradition stretching back to Berlioz), this was Mahler's way of disguising with a picturesque story his "Jewish" lack of genuine musical creativity.

