

The Phenomenology of Spirits Hegel

1.
Psyche and Soul aren't quite the same.
Psyche is clear and dry, being Greek,
And conjures cooling breath, whilst bleak
And gnarled, the English *soul* is game-

Flavoured, and damp—can even be,
In places, positively muddy;
So much so that linguistic study
Finds no clear etymology,

Though some see a root-sense of 'bind',
As of the dead in graves, to keep
Their ghosts from troubling our sleep.—
German *Geist* has three meanings: mind,

Spirit and ghost. Reason dictates
That the late Hegel blend all three
In his *Phenomenology*
Of Ghost he now instantiates.

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



Und der Geist dachte:



When ploughing 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.

3.

*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,
Existence, and ruses. You try*

To stand things on their heads, like thick-
Skinned, elephantine acrobats.
(Quibbling with *thises* and with *thats*.)
But only Art can do 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.

4.

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



The contradictions of the Mind
Are dense and 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,
Like a through-mist-glimpsed, distant goal,
Reached only at the end-verb is,

And may, even then, remain in doubt,
So thick is the Black Forest fog
That hangs o'er the syntactic bog,
From which we somehow struggle out.



Being, on its vast detour, longs
Through its becomings and 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!

