***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- Und der Geist denkte:

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 henow instantiates.

2.

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 *un*true,

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 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.

3.

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.

4.

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,

 Like a through-mist-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!

