***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 suasion

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 *Perhaps from the French ‘se camper’,*

Of Letters, strike a striking pose! *‘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 learnèd Duns, Dears. Be *arresting*.

*Then* readers will be interested. *One of the group, bearded, tweedy and*

 *And be arrested? You’d know all in his cups, it seems, almost shouts out.*

 *About that.* My Dear, don’t be small.

It’s better still to be arrested,

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?

 *The other members of the group*

*Yes, Oscar, go on. Bob, shut up! pipe up loudly and in unison.*

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 steal behind the poet’s back*

*And grope his person 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.

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.

 *The Group Intervenes:*

*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…

 *Bob is firmly escorted*

 *away by the dutiful Tom.*

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, *‘Immature poets imitate;*

 Invisible to some, of an *mature poets steal’.*

Offensive clarity to others, --T.S. Eliot

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

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, Autolycus,

 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?) *And so I had to bowdlerise, nay,*

 *geld, almost, that admittedly somewhat*

Well, count me one of Plato’s liars *excitable young Grecian fetishist.*

 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,

But Hermes, who first fashioned it,

 By the way, from a tortoise shell,

 Which he then for a flute did sell.)

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 Auctor *in Latin can mean originator or in-*

 To earn the name, they can improve *creaser—that is, augmenter—of a tradition.*

 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 *Mr Cooke as Frankenstein, at*

The difference resides in what *the Theatre Royal Covent Garden.*

One does with one’s material.

 A book made wholly of quotations

 In artful, telling collocations:

Would it not be original?

What do prophets do? Plagiarise

*There’s no in-here-ain’t*

*sin in playjeurisnt, is it?*

*A pelagiarist, beglad,*

*and all the erse for it!*

 *—*Jim

 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.

 *But the subject is raised again.*

5. *Can the Question of Plagiarism*

 *Be Settled Once and for All?*

*No plagiary-an-sich, only in the mind of*

*the Created Uncreating? How erigenal! No wonder critics stabbed you with their pens!*

 *—*Jim

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

*Mr Terry. Few could find fault with*

*his performanceas Sir Fretful Plagiary*

 *in Sheridan’s* The Critic.

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,

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

*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.*

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.*

‘I’ that is nothing, and sees all? *A bit of stichomythia, anyone?*

 *Self that is only self sees nothing*.

 Does not self change itself like clothing?

*The Veil is torn, and the scales fall.*

*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

*Insist upon yourself. Be original.—*Emerson

 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.



*By Christopher Cranch.*

6. *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 cities! 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

*Is that you, Mr Emerson?*

 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.

