***Poe Laureate***

*A reassessment.*

Ah, Poe! In French *il est poète*;

In English he is merely Poe,

Three-quarters poet merely; so

Baudelaire had to invent him, set

The man aloft as sire and saint

Of Symbolism. Poë-try:

Compound of Gothic gauchery,

Bad nerves and a dab of grease-paint.

Poetry’s sometimes what we gain

In mistranslation—of a word,

A phrase, a poem. (Pater preferred

Reading you in French.) Then again,

Bad poetry is sometimes *lost*

In the translation, into prose,

Or prose-poem, for these forms disclose

*The* *Raven*’s power, at the cost

Of only that annoying jingling *‘The jingle man,’ Emerson called you.*

Which you somewhat naively thought

Sophisticated and well-wrought.

In Baudelaire the uncanny tingling

Is *felt* untrammelled, there is mass

And shadow, pierced by a high flute,

And there is hush, for here fall mute

The tinkling, ornamental brass

Of a pinchbeck musicianship,

The note of terror is allowed

To spread into an inky cloud,

And claws take the heart in their grip.

None of that ponderous *Nevermore*-ing,

But *Jamais plus*, the Raven quoth,

A nasal reed-tone piped by Thoth

In a transparent, simple scoring;

Purer the dread in the refrain

For sounding homelier in the ear;

Uncanny are the echoes fear

Makes, pecking thus upon the brain.