***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.