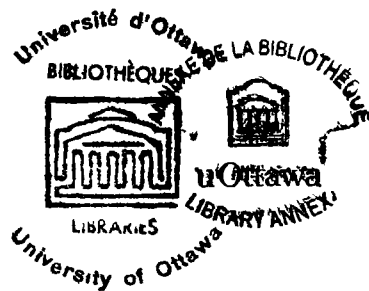


**A CRITICISM OF SNOW'S AND OF DONNER'S
INTERPRETATION AND APPRECIATION OF BEDDOES**

by
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**A Thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the University of Ottawa**

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A CRITICISM OF SNOW'S AND OF DONNER'S
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CHAPTER I

The Life of the Poet

But dead and living, which are which? A question
Not easy to be solved. Are you alone,
Men, as you're called, monopolists of life?
Death's Jest-Book V-iv 206-209

HAD it not been for the friendship and industrious
loyalty of Thomas Kelsall the world would have known little,
and that little soon forgotten, of Thomas Lovell Beddoes.

When the poet died there had been published only two slender
volumes of his work, a book of poetry, *The Improvisatore*,
and a play, *The Brides' Tragedy*, besides a few poems and
translations that had appeared separately in magazines and
newspapers. But Kelsall, over a period of twenty-five years
had assiduously preserved every scrap of poetry which Beddoes
flung his way and to him were bequeathed the writings which
Beddoes had by him at his death. By far the most important
of these was *Death's Jest-Book* or *The Fool's Tragedy*, to be
valued as much for its lyrics as for its drama.

Thomas Kelsall
1799-1872.

In 1850, a year after Beddoes' death, Kelsall publish-
ed anonymously *Death's Jest-Book* and, in the year following,
The Poems, posthumous and collected of Thomas Lovell Beddoes.
This two-volume edition contained a memoir by Kelsall and some
reminiscences of schoolboy associations by Charles Bevan. But

Editions of
Beddoes

Kelsall was no Boswell and his memoir deals only in a general fashion with the life and work of Beddoes. Half a dozen later editions of Beddoes either in whole or in selections drew their introductory material from the Kelsall memoir. In addition there have been several short magazine articles on Beddoes over the last three-quarters of a century.

The first full-length work on Beddoes to appear in English was that of Royall Henderson Snow who published Thomas Lovell Beddoes, Eccentric and Poet, in 1928. The second, and only other work in English, was brought out by H. W. Donner in 1935 under the title, Thomas Lovell Beddoes, The Making of a Poet. It is the purpose of the present thesis to present a criticism of the interpretation and appreciation found in these two studies.

Snow and
Donner

In planning the work there seemed to arise the alternative of giving only a criticism of Snow and Donner, leaving Beddoes a forlorn third to be called into consultation whenever the two critics failed to agree or neglected some worthwhile point, and the alternative of bringing Beddoes into the foreground, supported by his two worthy students. For obvious reasons the latter has been chosen. In the first place Beddoes, being the corpus dissecandum, should be allowed a Wolfram-life resurrection to speak for himself, and in the second place such a method of procedure seemed to offer more possibilities of making an interesting study. There was also the motive of presenting a complete picture of the whole situation, even at the risk of some repetition and objectionable extension of its treatment.

Plan of
this work

II

Thomas Lovell Beddoes was born of Welsh, English and Irish ancestry at 5 Rodney Place, Clifton, Shropshire on June 30, 1803; he died, a suicide, at Basel, on January 26, 1849. Into those intervening forty-six years were gathered some success, vast effort, and the bitterness of unavoidable failure. In Snow's work most of the biography is concentrated in chapters one and three but in Donner the biographical and critical material^s are woven together throughout his whole work. Yet the events in the life of an artist, must, of very necessity, be always secondary to his creations. The political leader and the warrior, express their personalities in deeds; the poet interprets in verse his conflict with the world. In the final analysis the comings and goings of the poet's life are matters for the entertainment of the curious and food only for those who naively maintain that the soul of man is not only developed but changed by the circumstances of his earthly progress. There is no intention here of setting down a Beddoes itinerary or speculating, when documentary evidence fails, where the poet might have been at this time or that. Snow gives little biographical material that is not found in Kelsall's memoirs. Donner, on the other hand, has gone to German and Swiss sources for some new and interesting sidelights upon Beddoes' continental years. As biography they are valuable but as criticism they add little to a deeper understanding or appreciation of the poet. Fortunate, in truth, is such as Shakespeare, whom it is possible to approach without forcing a path through an underbrush of biographical claptrap. Biographical details are mere incidents in the life of the

Biography and
critical
appreciation

great artist, who towers above time and place and for the understanding of whom the progress of his days is of little aid. Besides are not the events in Beddoes' life to be read in sufficient detail in the pages of Donner?

Yet a biographical background provides an easily constructed and substantial frame-work for the display of a poet's achievements. It links together and provides a kind of unified design for the assembling of work otherwise disconnected and chaotic. Furthermore, in addition to these aids in critical appreciation, if a poet is to become in the mind of his audience anything more than an abstraction, then at least a brief summary of his life must be provided. It is a way, too, of defining relationships, and identifying places and persons associated with the poet in a preliminary manner, without cluttering up the sections of criticism and interpretation with the impedimenta of explanatory references. Neither Snow nor Donner seeks to explain Beddoes by purely environmental forces, though Donner is somewhat more inclined to read into extraneous circumstances a motive for ^{and an} explanation of his work.

Value of
Biography

Only at infrequent and not long sustained intervals, did Beddoes transcend his immediate world and the influences that brought forth his poetry. What is trivial and commonplace in the life of a seer becomes in a lesser man a matter for at least some consideration.

Beddoes, as might be expected, came of a family having some claims to distinction and possessing to a certain extent literary abilities. Donner gives a lengthy account of the literary work of Beddoes' father and references to work of Maria Edgeworth, the sister of Beddoes' mother. Though our greatest writers have sprung

Ancestry

from stock not previously remarkable for literary fame—a fact yet unaccountable, for the genetics of literary ability are still not understood—authors of minor importance are frequently born of an ancestry of letters. His father, Dr. Thomas Beddoes, had studied at Pembroke College, Oxford, and had later taken up medicine in London and Edinburgh. A readership in chemistry at Oxford was lost by indiscreet meddling in politics. Having suffered the common fate of the servant who criticizes his master, Dr. Beddoes turned to the innocuous pursuit of romantic literature. The poem, *Alexander's Expedition*, and the prose *History of Isaac Jenkins*, entirely quixotic and based on an exaggerated belief in the modifiability of human nature—a doctor should have known better—were popular triumphs in their romantic day. It is to be doubted however whether either these or Maria Edgeworth's novels had the slightest influence on Beddoes. Both Donner and Snow fail to point out that in all Beddoes' poetry and letters there is not a single word in reference to either.

Dr. Thomas
Beddoes

III

The second child of the doctor's marriage to Anna Edgeworth was Thomas. There, too, was a literary strain for Anna's sister was Maria Edgeworth, no inconsiderable novelist, and next to Jane Austen the greatest English woman writer of her time. Their father, Richard Edgeworth, of Edgeworthstown, County Langford, Ireland, experimented practically but unsuccessfully with certain curious inventions and largely theoretically but somewhat more successfully with problems of education

Parentage

Snow thinks that,¹ "in this environment, too, every emphasis was upon the practicable, the reasonable, as opposed to the imaginative." He refers to Edgeworth's invention of a carriage that laid its own road and of a bicycle in the form of a huge cylinder that travelled five feet while the pedestrian in a barrel inside walked thirty inches. Surely Snow cannot be serious when he says; "Little Thomas Lovell was growing up in an atmosphere which lacked that useful solvent, a sense of the grotesque."²

Richard
Edgeworth

It was almost certain that at least one of the offspring of Dr. Beddoes and Anna Edgeworth would inherit at least in part some talent in literature. He, who did, was Thomas Lovell. The degree and nature of that inherited trait was fixed forever in 1803; within the next half century was unrolled the strange realization of that pathetically insufficient inheritance.

Thomas
Lovell Beddoes
born 1803

The death of his father in 1808 left the child Thomas with family reminiscences of the circle that had included Coleridge, Southey, Watt and Davies among Dr. Beddoes' friends, with an ailing mother, a brother, two sisters and guardians in the persons of his uncle and Sir Davies Gilbert.

The Clifton
Circle

At fourteen Beddoes was entered at Charterhouse School and remained there for the three years before he went up to his father's college, Pembroke.³ Snow reprints the Bevan addendum to Kelsall's memoir. In addition to the amusement it affords there is enough light thrown on the schoolboy character of Beddoes to make understandable his literary precocities.

Charterhouse

1 Snow, p.10.

2 Snow, p.10.

3 Snow, p.12-15.

The long vacations were spent in part north of Ludlow at Cheney Longville, the moated manor-house of his father's second cousin. His intelligence was revealed by his winning of Greek and Latin prizes, his interest in English literature by his wide reading in English poetry and drama. To this period belongs the writing of his prose tale, *Scaroni*; or the Mysterious Cave, first published by Donner, and *The Comet*, printed in the Morning Post in 1819. *The Improvisatore*, if indeed the product of Charterhouse days, would appear to have been written in his final year there. Both ¹ Snow and ² Donner attribute *The Improvisatore* to this period, but apparently on no other evidence than Kelsall's conjecture. Yet it is hard to think of it as a schoolboy production.

Scaroni

The Comet

The Improvisatore

His first year at Oxford saw the publication of his first and only book of poetry, *The Improvisatore*. The body of this book consists of three fyttes, three verse narratives related by one singer. There are also fourteen quaterzains, *The Comet*, and *To a Bunch of Grapes*. The published book attracted little notice; nor did the author himself cherish any high opinion of his work or of his friends' reception of it for in after years he destroyed every copy he could find in the libraries of his friends.

Oxford

First publication

The Brides' Tragedy, based on an eighteenth century murder committed at Oxford, occupied the poet's attention for the following year and that to the neglect of his regular studies. One of a small group of friendships was formed at this period, that with Henry Card. Twenty-five years Beddoes' senior, Card was a vicar at Great Malvern, something of an author, and to Beddoes a kindly critic. Snow is

Henry Card

1 Snow, p.17
2 Donner, p.65
3 Snow, pp.23-24

inclined to think that Beddoes and Card became intimate friends. At any rate, we hear no more of Card and the temporary nature of most of Beddoes' associations easily accounts for the lapse of friendship. The publication of *The Brides' Tragedy* in 1822 brought to an end the formative period in the poetic life of Beddoes. All his later work was foreshadowed here. He improved the quality of his work; he did not pass beyond its scope. The critics heaped praise on young Beddoes who now seemed to be safely launched on a voyage to enduring fame. Time looked on ironically.

Second
publication

IV

It was about this time that Beddoes came under the kindly attention of Bryan Procter, better known as Barry Cornwall. The young poet was obtaining friendships in high places. Romantically enough, thoughts of dull plodding in books paled before the call of the muse and Beddoes found himself far behind in his academic pursuits. In the summer of 1823 he went down to Southampton as a place for intensive study, carrying with him a letter of introduction from Barry Cornwall to Thomas Kelsall, a man of twenty-four, articled to a solicitor there. The summer proved of little value in study but it resulted in forming that close attachment to Kelsall, to whom we owe the preservation of most of Beddoes' poetry and considerable of our knowledge of the poet. Thereafter Beddoes carefully preserved the manuscripts which Beddoes left with him or sent from the Continent. Had it not been so we should have little of Beddoes for he himself is said to have destroyed many of his manuscripts except those of *Death's Jest-Book*, some prose tales, and a few lyrics.

Barry Cornwall
(Bryan Procter)

Southampton

Autumn saw him again at Oxford but the grey walls did not Oxford

claim his soul. What undergraduate who had broken triumphantly into print and who could claim familiarity with a Barry Cornwall could centre his attentions even there? And other matters were afoot. A second volume of verse was projected, of minor lyrics and scraps of verse that had not found their way into The Improvisatore, and some that had been written in the intervening years. But it came to nothing. With the abandonment of its publication, whether due to the coldness of the publishers or the disapproval of Milman, then a professor of poetry at Oxford, it is difficult to say, went Beddoes last serious attempt to present a book to the world.

Projected
publication
of verse

¹
According to Donner, "The likelihood is that the poems were not of a merit to encourage a publisher to risk the publication. Even an enthusiast for Beddoes like James Dyke Campbell did not take the trouble to copy them out when he had the chance, and his verdict was that they showed little or no talent."

Suppression
of a
second volume

²
He quite rightly brushes aside the suggestions that Beddoes' political radicalism had anything to do with their non-publication and points out that this was a family legend fabricated to conceal Beddoes' suicide. Snow is of the opinion that "Milman ³ may have had a hand in the suppression."

It is idle to speculate upon what happened at the time, for of more than passing reference not a syllable remains; we knew only the result. Was the real and staggering truth borne in upon him that he was not and never could be more than a poet of second rank? Hardly. He continued to write; his interest in

1 Donner, p. 116

2 Donner, p. 116 foot note

3 Snow, pp. 28-29

things literary flourished vigorously. Yet the morning of glorious promise never saw its noon. If we could know what went on in Beddoes' mind during that year it would be worth more to his students and admirers than any lengthy recital of his other days.

But Beddoes never spoke out. Neither Procter nor Kelsall who were closest to him has a word to say on this critical period in his life. For two years more, he lived in England, pursuing his work at Oxford sporadically and spending most of his time in London. There were trips to Southampton to visit Kelsall, to Clifton where he formed a mild sort of attachment to Zoë King, daughter of Dr. King, his "demi-uncle," and a journey to Florence where his mother had just died. Snow implies that Zoë was the chief attraction in the King household. Donner thinks otherwise for, "The sonnet that he wrote in Zoë's Album on February 26 is wholly impersonal and philosophical. And she on her part stood too much 'in awe of his reserve and of his talents' to presume on his company and conversation." The plain fact seems to be that Beddoes was incapable of forming or declaring a passion for any woman. In London he saw considerable of Procter, Hogg, Godwin and others. He enthusiastically assisted in bringing out a posthumous edition of Shelley, his idol. Otherwise his time was taken up with reading the Elizabethans and the romantics who had been lately his contemporaries. Yet he found time to spend a few weeks at Oxford and finally took his degree in 1825.

The two last
English years

Of his letters we possess mere of the 1822-25 period than of any other yet they throw little light on the real Beddoes. One cannot help gaining the impression that the letters of this period

1 Snow, p.29

2 Donner, p.137

are unreflective of the man's real self. ¹ Snow has remarked, "Over a long period of years his letters have a frankness and dash—and an extraordinary power of saying nothing of himself." The statement is not entirely true; numerous references to passages in his letters of after years, which will be made later, disprove it.

Writing to Kelsall in February 1824 he says:—"I have finished the first act of a play; oh! so stupid. Procter has the brass to tell me that he likes that fool The Last Man. I shall go on with neither; there are now three first acts in my drawer: when I have got two more I shall stitch them together, and stick the sign of a fellow tweedling a mask in his fingers, with 'good entertainment for man and ass' understood,-----." ²

The Last
Man

At the end of March of the same year he writes: ³

"I shall be wanting at Oxford for an examination for which I am absolutely unfit and the intervening time must be occupied in the very hardest reading.....The truth is, that, being a little shy & not a little proud perhaps, I have held back, & never made the first step towards discovering my residence or existence to any of my family friends—in consequence I have lived in a deserted state which I could hardly bear much longer without sinking into that despondency on the brink of which I have sat so long. Your cheerful presence at times (could we not mess together occasionally) wd set me up a good deal: but perhaps you had better not draw my heavy company on your head." This does not sound like poetic affectation; it does not agree with the conception of Beddoes as a coming young man thriving on a wave of enthusiasm in the London literary world. Yet he is not by any means done with poetry.

Social
Timidity

1 Snow. pp.23-24. London.

2 Letter to Kelsall, Feb. 1824.

3 Letter to Kelsall, 29/3/1824. London.

1
He concludes:

"I met an intelligent man who had.....seen Keats.....he complimented me on my similarity of countenance; he did not think much of K's genius, and therefore did not say it insincerely or sycophantically—the same was said by Procter and Taylor before." Resemblance to Keats
Deluded ambition has ever a way of finding comfort in fancied physical resemblances to the great.

2
"These three acts," he says in a letter of April, "which I cannot possibly show to any eye but that of Vulcan, are absolutely worthless; and you may imagine that I prize your good opinion too well to forfeit it knowingly. You may trust me that they are bad; if good, I sh^d say so and send them, being convinced that the affectation of modesty is the hardest brass of imprudence and self conceit. Be satisfied that they are damnable.....In 3 weeks time I shall set about a play, the plot of which is laid and hatched—if it is satisfactorily executed, w^h I do not expect, I shall go on; if not, 'farewell the Muse'" Flights of fancy that cannot endure the light of day and a second reading are not poetry, and that Beddoes was beginning to learn.

Back in London again, after being called to Italy by his mother's death, he writes ³ Kelsall;

"The' I depend very little on my poetical faculty, it is my intention to complete one more tragedy, on the comparative merits or demerits of which future determinations will depend. Six weeks later he has this to say: ⁴ "You'll not be surpris'd to hear that I have begun and nearly finished another, a new 1st Act—and am quite

- 1 Letter to Kelsall, London, 27/3/1824.
- 2 Letter to Kelsall, London, 17/4/1824
- 3 Letter to Kelsall, London, 25/8/1824
- 4 Letter to Kelsall, London, 4/10/1824

tired of it" He refers probably to Terrismond. From Clifton in December he again refers to his literary labours:¹ "A new tragic abortion of mine has absolutely extended its fetus to a quarter of the fourth act; when finished—if finished—I think it will satisfy you and myself of my poetical and dramatic impotence....."² There is evidently more here than harsh self-criticism based on lefty standards; it is almost complete misgiving of the illudon-dispelling order.

Torrismond

The Second Brother?

In March, 1824, Procter wrote;³ "Let him (Beddoes) speak for himself and say why he has not done anything lately. I can give no reason for it, unless it be that he idles over Greek and German and leaveth English Parnassus for the Transalpine and Transmarine places." And Beddoes in the same letter explains:³ "As usual I have begun a new tragedy w^h at present I think of completing."

Later in the year Beddoes sent Kelsall "not quite a quire of spoiled paper"⁴, The Second Brother, and mentioned the Last Man as something to be saved up for future labour.⁵ He asked for a criticism of "the 2nd Brother" but two months later wrote,⁶ "I do not intend to finish that 2nd Brother you saw but am thinking of a very Gothic-styled tragedy, for w^h I have a jewel of a name—

DEATH'S JESTBOOK--of course no one will ever read it—
Mr. Milman (our Poetry professor) has made me quite unfashionable here, by denouncing me, as one of a 'villainous school'."

Vacillation, dejection, hopelessness, ambition, the discounting of future success—in what a swirl of conflicting emotions lived Beddoes for those eighteen months! Donner makes only unimportant

London
1824-25

1 Letter to Kelsall, London, 4/10/1824

2 Letter of Procter and Beddoes to Kelsall, London, 28/3/1825

3 Ibid

4 Letter to Kelsall, London, April, 1825

5 Ibid

6 Letter to Kelsall, Oxford, 8/6/1825.

references to the life of Beddoes in this period but Snow seems to have an appreciation of its importance. "Defiantly in the months which followed Beddoes flung himself into the whirl of London literary life, met Mary Shelley, Godwin, Hogg, fraternised with Darley and the London Magazine group, got wittily drunk with Procter,-- and failed¹ what he sought,--spiritual ease."² These years were a decisive turning-point in Beddoes' life. There, so it would seem, lies the critical period in the development of Beddoes. Genius did not pass entirely out of him--he was yet to write some of his best poems, in those rare moments when inspiration rose unchecked and his mind was relieved of its burden of inconfidence and timidity. The gushing virility of adolescence, untroubled by self-consciousness, was gone. There was required some steady, controlling force to guide the less turbulent flood of his creative powers. Manifestly he was incapable of self-discipline of the spirit, of the sort achieved by a Wordsworth or a Tennyson. As far as can be gathered there were no impediments of a practical or personal nature--no dire poverty that leads men to sell their souls for bread, no serious ill-health, no unfortunate marriage. By most people who must perform daily labour Beddoes would be considered a moderately wealthy man. The income from his lands was sufficient for his needs. Here are two references to money matters: "I have most completely mastered the art of living in London & can hardly bring myself to leave it--it is so cheap."² I have a competence adequate to my philosophical desires."³ The external conditions for creative work were not unfavourable. There were required a light in the darkness, guidance in a bewildering maze of doubt and hesitancy, the consciousness of a supporting and powerful faith in

Literary
associations

Needs
for success

1 Snow, p.34.

2 Letter to Kelsall, London, April (?) 1825.

3 Letter to Kelsall, Göttingen, 4/12/1825.

himself, and entirely immovable convictions of the identification of his own being with the world of intellectual and emotional creativeness. To these Beddoes never succeeded. The fortuitous conjunction of genes from Dr. Beddoes and Anna Edgeworth lacked but that onecomponent of firm resolve and stubborn faith to raise Beddoes to the heights worthy of his genius.

Snow implies that a decadence of Beddoes' creative forces came about from the conflict of intellect and emotion in "this poetic son of rationalist forebears and rationalist upbringing."¹ Beddoes translation of Schiller's *Philosophic Letters* gives, according to Snow, the clue to the solving of this enigma. This is true but in a profounder and more fundamental sense. "This poetry had come to grips with another force and lost, temporarily, the battle,"² is not a sufficient explanation. In his introduction³ to the *Philosophic Letters* Beddoes said: "All men of intellect and imagination will feel, if they dare not avow it, that at some crisis of their earlier years, they were shaken by the same tempest, and haunted by similar passions." Other men, even the same Schiller, met the same crisis and triumphed over it; Beddoes lacked that tenaciousness of spirit and fortitude of soul which overcome crises and grasp triumph by the right of courage.

Intellect
and
emotion

Schiller's
*Philosophic
Letters*

Donner⁴ thinks that, "It was the youthful doubt and speculation, the disharmony of a mind at war with itself, that attracted him to Schiller's work." He sees in it not much more

1 Snow, p.35

2 Ibid

3 Translation of the *Philosophic Letters* of Schiller, Prefatory Note; Works, ed. by Donner, p.549. Reprinted from 'the Oxford Quarterly Magazine,' 1885.

4 Donner, pp.180-181.

than a literary interest prompted by a coincidence of mood. Yet this would not seem to be all. It is one thing to read these letters with interest, it is quite another to laboriously translate them.

Schiller and
Beddoes

The translation of Schiller's Letters was from Beddoes a cry of despair. There seems to be little in the matter of direct comparison between the two men; Beddoes had not lost his soul to reason. Yet there was a feeling of kinship here in the experience of loneliness and soul-weariness of the artist. Beddoes turned back in the quest for Poetry. But that search, to his disquietude, was never to be entirely over; for twenty more years there were to be fitful excursions, moments of elation, some rewards but never any coming into his kingdom. Snow, writing of this period says, "Certainly there was no conscious analysis of what ailed his spirit; but the romantic had ruled and been unhappy; the matter-of-fact usurped control." He implies that if there had been any "conscious analysis" Beddoes could have found a way out of his troubles but these questions are not solved by analysis, conscious or otherwise. And to reduce the problem to a contrast of the romantic and the matter-of-fact is an unwarranted simplification of the question.

A conviction of failure and inferiority is apt to urge one to abandon old ways and familiar scenes. So it was with Beddoes. He might have lived on in London, a verseless poet; he might have written for the magazines (which occupation he professed to abhor ; "they are vermin, I detest")¹ but for the romantic Beddoes this was impossible. In July he was in

Flight to
Germany

1 Letter to Procter, Göttingen, 7/3/1826.

Germany and for the rest of his life most of his years were to be spent there and in Switzerland. Over three months before the plan had already been in his mind¹ "I shall have to settle my sisters, settle my affairs, sell & pay & impoverish myself to the bone, & then set off for Germany; but be sure I do not leave England without seeing you, nor, if I can but finish, without dropping into the press some frail memorial of my existence." The "frail memorial" did not materialize.

It was Dr. King, or König, who had introduced him to the work of the new German generation. This "Nemi-uncle" of Beddoes had "been born in the town of Berne, bred in Germany", and had, after his removal to England, made "literary proposals" to English publishers, unsatisfactory in those pre-Carlylian days. To Kelsall, Procter and others of his circle Beddoes' removal to Göttingen was a matter of no special significance; to Beddoes it was a way of escape and a new beginning. Thereafter the poet was more and more eclipsed by the student of medicine. Donner very wisely remarks² "The satisfaction gained from working for a definite purpose was altogether new to him, and we can see how in his growing absorption in medicine heredity was claiming its own....But in Beddoes' attitude towards it there is the deeper quest for truth that characterized his father and that dictated every motion in the later life of the son." And Snow observes³ "Had this been the end there would have been no tragic history of Beddoes. Unfortunately it was not."

Four years were spent at Göttingen. His literary hopes

1 Letter to Kelsall, London, 25/3/1825.

2 Donner, p.186.

3 Snow, p.65.

"were fading pretty fast."¹ Still the affections of his youth bound him to an intermittent service of Poetry² "Two acts of an affair—Death's Jest Book"—he thinks, "if ever consummated will be tolerably decent." Later³ he speaks of its writing as "a horrible waste of time." In the same letter he continues:⁴ "I have lost much, if not all of my ambition to be poetically distinguished and I do not think with Wordsworth that a man may dedicate himself entirely, or even in great part, to the cultivation of that part of literature, unless he possesses far greater powers of imagination, etc. than even W. himself, and (I need not add) ergo than I do." Beddoes had little need of underestimating his powers, but to what lengths will one go in justifying to himself and his friends his courses of action! But there is more yet.⁵ "Again, even as a dramatist, I cannot help thinking that the study of anat^y, physiopsych, and anthropol-ogy.....is that which is most likely to assist one in producing correct and masterly delineations of the passions.....The studies then of the dramatist & physician are closely, almost inseparably allied; the application alone is two professions, in some degree at least? Death's Jest-Book goes on like the tortoise—slow and sure; I think it will be entertaining, very unamiable and utterly unpopular" Kelsall's anticipated criticism was right; 'this may be theoretically true but no such physician has ever yet appeared.' Beddoes had already abandoned the literary life; he was deceiving no one but himself.

Poetry

Dramatist
and
Physician

1 Letter to Kelsall, Cassel, 29/9/1825.

2 Ibid

3 Letter to Kelsall, Göttingen 4/12/1825.

4 Ibid

5 Letter to Kelsall, Göttingen, 4/12/1825.

Yet he seems to have deceived Donner.¹ "It is more than likely that the ambitious youth dreamt of finding, as Goethe had done before him, some hitherto unknown bone or organ, the function of which might explain the very phenomenon of life. Only the search for such an organ of immortality can completely explain Beddoes' attitude to medicine and the development he underwent in the course of his studies." In his note² at the end of Death's Jest-Book Beddoes refers very seriously to the bone Luz, the seat of immortality. But in writing to Kelsall at that time he says, "Luz is an excellent joke."³ One needs to see Beddoes from two sides, nor even then can one always be sure of what is in this quizzical mind.

The attraction
of medicine.

There is much mention in Beddoes' letters of Blumenbach, then a professor of Natural History at Göttingen, of long hours of serious study, of new ways of life assumed ^{with} outward appearances of inward content. But ever the muse creeps in. Writing to Kelsall in 1826, he says: ⁴"the never-ending Jest-book..... lies like a snow-ball and I give it a kick every now and then out of mere scorn and ill-humour.....it will come with its strangeness—it contains nothing else—like an electric shock among the small critics.....truly I begin to prefer Anatomy to poetry, I mean to my own, & practically; besides I never ^d have been the real thing as a writer."

Anatomy
versus
poetry

Over a year had passed at Göttingen and autumn had come again. Ties with England were becoming weaker. In 1825 he had written⁵ "I hope to remain here three years at least, I

Plans for
the future

1 Donner, p.187.

2 Beddoes' Works; Donner ed. p.487.

3 Letter to Kelsall, Göttingen 27/2/1829.

4 Letter to Kelsall, Göttingen 1/4/1826.

5 Letter to Kelsall, Göttingen 4/12/1825.

shall then probably visit Berlin, Leipzig, Vienna, some of the Italian universities, & finally Paris; for I intend to devote 8 or 10 years to these studies, combined with the languages necessary and a slender thread of practical literature."

And again,¹ in all probability this [return to England] will not happen for years (and if it does I shall be very much annoyed).² In particular the associations with Procter were fading with the days of Beddoes' literary youth. Who was the busy Procter to continue a friendship with an already forgotten poet who had abandoned the currently fashionable literary London? Of him Beddoes had humorously complained, ²"his dead-body has the impudence to pretend to live still and does not write even to me."³ "Ask me about poets etc.", he says, "talk of Anatomists and I'll tell you something: I have left off reading Parnassian foolery: I can bear a satire still tho' and write one, as Jest-book shall show."

The romance of the Oxford period had passed but not his urge to write. It was finding expression in verse of a new vein. In one of his last letters to Procter he says: ⁴"He you may safely regard as one banished from a service to which he was not adapted, but who has still a lingering affection for the land of dreams; as yet, at least, not far enough in the journey of science to have lost sight of the old two-topped hill." He is serious, too; further on he remarks ".....You are mistaken: if you think I wilfully affect any humour, even that of affecting nothing." And the letter concludes with a

Death's
Jest-book

- 1 Letter to Kelsall, Göttingen, 11/12/1825.
- 2 Letter to Kelsall, Göttingen, 1/4/1826.
- 3 Ibid
- 4 Letter to Procter, Göttingen, 9/10/1826.

promise to send a revised copy of Deaths's Jest-Book with the rather self-comforting thought that the rabble will find it quite indigestible.

With the golden days of his youth behind and with philosophical and religious questions crowding his mind—as they do the mind of every thoughtful student of medicine—and taking form in the conception and expression of the Jest-Book a new note of seriousness enters his letters. To Kelsall, more than to anyone else, did he reveal the stirrings of his soul. To him he says:¹ "I am now already so thoroughly penetrated with the conviction of the absurdity & unsatisfactory nature of human life that I search with avidity for every shadow of a proof or probability of an after-existence, both in the material & immaterial nature of man. Those people, perhaps they are few, are greatly to be envied who believe, honestly and from conviction in the Xtian doctrines: but really in the New T. it is difficult to scrape together hints for a doctrine of immortality. Man appears to have found out this secret for himself, & it is certainly the best part of all religion and philosophy, the only truth worth demonstrating: an anxious question full of hope & fear & promise, for w^h Nature appears to have appointed one solution—Death. In times of revolution & business, and even now, the man who can lay much value in the society, praise, or glory of his fellows, may forget, and he who is of a callous phlegmatic constitution may never find the dreadful importance of the doubt. I am haunted for ever by it; & what but an after life can satisfy the claims of the oppressed on nature, satiate endless & admirable love & humanity, & quench the greediness

Doubts of
immortality

1 Letter to Kelsall, Göttingen, 20/4/1827.

of the spirit for existence:"

According to Snow¹ "the significance of Beddoes' four years at Göttingen, from the summer of 1825 to that of 1829, lies in that paragraph. In London he had indulged his sanity: both had clearly failed him. Long before, in the translation of The Philosophic Letters, he had expressed the fear of the Neophyte of Reason lest reason should betray him. Now Beddoes himself was finding Reason not a false, but an inadequate master. He was too serious and too clear-sighted—too honest with himself—to be able to skim the surface of life. With the failure of the Rationalist experiment he had entered on the road to his end—it was a long road with some turnings, but it was definite." Here Snow seems to place undue emphasis upon the poet's wrestlings of spirit. There was unrest here, it is only too true, but the cause of collapse lay in his literary failure. Snow misses the point because he does not seem to have known the circumstances of the poet's departure from Göttingen.

Snow's
interpretation

Memories of that soul struggle of his in the last English year, and of which we know so little, were fading in Beddoes' mind: at least the sharpness of spiritual pain had passed away. At that time the conflict had taken on a new phase and had passed from the realm of pure poetry into that of religion and philosophy—ever to seek expression in Death's Jest-Book, for Beddoes possessed his own peculiar poetic view-point till the day of his death. But the struggle is over now; gone is the first agony and gone too, with respect to his writing, the later air of braggadocio, "It doesn't matter."

Conflict

Our young poet was not really perturbed over his loss of faith in God. In the usual sense, and as far as investigation

Loss of
faith in
himself

1 Snow, pp.68-69

shows, he never had much to lose. The alarming thing was that he was beginning to lose faith in Thomas Lovell Beddoes--had in fact lost it almost entirely and could see no possibility of its recovery.

It was a queer sort of projectional thinking but understandable, given Beddoes' eccentric personality--faith in God substituted for faith in himself.

Donner¹ thinks that the struggle was precipitated by the influence of the Jew, Bernard Reich, and explains thus Beddoes' statement that in the New Testament there is no hint for a doctrine of immortality. It seems more likely that "New" is just a slip for "Old". Beddoes was skeptical and romantic but he was not stupid or foolish.

Bernard Reich

In a calmer and clearer vein he writes:² "Yet let me assure you that your idea of my merits as a writer is extravagantly surpassing my real worth: I would really not give a shilling for anything I have written, nor sixpence for anything I am likely to write. I am essentially unpoetical in character, habits & ways of thinking: and nothing but the desperate hunger for distinction, so common to young Gentlemen at the Univ^y ever set me upon rhyming. If I had possessed the conviction that I could by any means become an important or just dramatic writer, I would never have swerved from the path to reputation: but seeing that others who had devoted their lives to literature, such as Coleridge and Wordsworth, men beyond a question of far higher originality and incomparably superior poetical feeling and Genius, had done so little, you must give me leave to persevere in my preference of Apollōs

Self-criticism

Settled
Convictions

1 Donner, p.200.

2 Letter to Kelsall, Göttingen 21/10/1827.

pill box to his lyre, & should congratulate me on having chosen Göttingen instead of Grub street for my abode."

From these convictions Beddoes never departed. True, the Death's Jest-Book was not banished from his thoughts. He speaks,¹ without much hope, of leaving its fate as to publishing in the hands of Procter. In April he received Procter's judgment; the work was considered unsuitable for publication. There came a resurgence of the old energy once more. The whole summer was to be spent in revision and improvement.² Passages and whole scenes are specified in the proposed reconstruction.³ The wheels are again set in motion but nothing definite comes of it all. By October of 1829 he had left Göttingen and established himself at Würzburg.

Procter's
reading of
Death's
Jest-Book

From the two letters,⁴ the only direct evidence we have of the period, both written in April 1829, one to Procter and the other to Kelsall, there is no hint of dejection or disappointment over the rather severe criticism of Death's Jest-Book. But that may mean nothing: the thought of Beddoes is to be found, at times unreservedly given, in his letters but of his emotions there is scarcely a trace. Consequently, to what extent the rejection of Death's Jest-Book unsettled Beddoes is difficult to say. It is well to remember the circumstances of its writing; Beddoes had fled from the scene of failure following upon success; he had begun scientific study at a new university and in a foreign land; his associates and associations were all German. Through it all the Jest-Book was a balm to

Effect of
rejection
on Beddoes

- 1 Letter to Kelsall, Göttingen 21/10/1827.
- 2 Letter to Procter, Göttingen, 19/4/1829.
- 3 Letter to Kelsall, Göttingen, 30/4/1829.
- 4 Letter to Kelsall, Göttingen, 30/4/1829.

the old wound, a refuge in a foreign world, and a quiet temple for the adoration of the muse whom Beddoes never completely renounced. The material air of London and the practical and worldly criticism of Procter dissolved the fabric of his romance. Death's 'est-Book should never have left Beddoes' side. It would have been better for his peace of mind had he never sent it out into the light of day. And Beddoes knew that.

Was this the real reason of his flight from Göttingen? Snow makes no mention of it but according to Donner¹ the occasion of his departure was a drunken brawl in August 1829. Dragged from the house of a professor by a whole patrol of police he was taken home and put to bed. Shortly afterward the police were brought back to find that Beddoes in a fit of madness (drunkenness according to Donner) had thrown his trunk and writing-table--the machinery of his art--into the courtyard below. One turkey perished in the assault from the poet's window. The University Court took a serious view of the fracas, but because of Beddoes' late violence and reports of attempted suicide, they feared that a greater evil might follow from the usual punishment by imprisonment. Judgment was given ten days later. Beddoes was given twenty-four hours in which to leave Göttingen. To England he wrote:² "I have already been here the time which it is allowed for any student to remain here."

Departure
from
Göttingen

Judgment of
University
Court

Events that rise from the agony of the soul are not to be mentioned or explained. Donner³ gives a five-page account of the incident which he draws from the compilation of Dr. C.A.

Donner's
account

1 Donner, pp.264-268.

2 Letter to Revell Phillips, Göttingen, 24/8/1829.

3 Donner, pp.265-269.

Weber.¹ The startling phrases are these, "three policemen", "additional patrol", "hit round with his stick so furiously that he cut off the neck of a bottle and sent it through the window-pane," "appeared to be dozing", "a few constables," "Beddoes' trunk, writing-table, lying in the courtyard where he had thrown them out of the window," "previously tried to commit suicide".

These are not the marks of drunkenness; the name for it appears in every line—insanity. Under the crushing weight of the adverse criticism of Death's Jest-Book, coming on top of his own serious misgivings, the schizoid personality had broken. The immediate occasion for it, is, of course, unknown—some apparently trifling incident in Professor Himly's house, perhaps. Fortunately the collapse was not serious; there had been drinking and the charge of drunkenness covered the situation nicely. But Beddoes left Göttingen a different man.

Insanity of
Beddoes

Snow evidently had not access to the sources which Donner used, and Donner accepts the account at its face-value.

V

In October Beddoes matriculated as a student of medicine in Würzburg. Later he was to write:² "a very clever prof. of Medicine, and capital Midwife brought me here, and a princely hospital." Death's Jest-Book came too. It had been restored to the inner places of his soul. Beddoes had his university work in which he was making brilliant progress principally

Matriculation
at Würzburg

1 Weber, C.A. 'Studien zur Englischen Philologie', Halle, 1935.
2 Letter to Kelsall, Würzburg, 19/7/1830.

under the direction of the illustrious Dr. Schönlein. He had, too, Death's Jest-Book, in some ways the complement of his daily Dr. Schönlein work but more especially the inner kingdom of that schizoid temperament.

To Kelsall the following year he writes: (2) "I will reply to, though perhaps not answer (your letter.) I feel not the least inclination to take any further trouble in the matter: however, perhaps I may try this season; it cannot be printed this summer, and in autumn perhaps something may be done." Thus was an embarrassing situation avoided. The theme and the writing of the drama were becoming more deeply involved in Beddoes' inner life. Even an old friend such as Kelsall is put off; one of Beddoes' temperament shrinks from speaking out. Did he himself ever realize just what was the significance of the never-ending drama for his intellect and personality? Did Beddoes the physician ever diagnose the mental ills of Beddoes the poet? Probably not.

Drama

In the same letter he says: (2) "If I were soberly and mathematically convinced of my own genuineness (inspiration as the ancients w^d say) I might possibly, tho' I won't promise, find spirit and stability enough to give up my time to the cultivation of literature." The interpretation of that sentence reveals the real Beddoes. In spite of abundant evidence of great ability he suffered at times from the delusion that he possessed but little genius; over his mind hovered ever the menace of the death-obsession; when clearer views returned

Delusions

1. Letter to Kelsall, Würzburg, 19/7/1830.
2. Letter to Kelsall, Würzburg, 19/7/1830.

he found his mind in conflict with the practical in his nature which demanded high performance attainable only by long serious apprenticeship and impossible for Beddoes. The new mental phase smiles at the ambition of the former and the great ^work is never grasped.

The dilemma

Almost with relief he looks forward to ridding his whole life of the thing - to print it and have it out of the way. (1) "I will try to write over again this last unhappy play, tho' I have no appetite to the task, and then I w^dish to have it printed, with any other little things that you may have and think worth printers ink, because a second edition is not to be thought of, and any consequent poetical publication of mine very improbably^e."

Six months pass. A long passage in a letter (2) to Kelsall proposes changes in his drama which would have meant its entire reconstruction. There is one pathetic little sentence, "I have really begun a little to alter the ill-fated play in question." Then follows a long and interesting discussion of the drama, with some fine satirical touches and acute criticism. Beddoes' critical powers had shown broad and sane development during the Göttingen and early Würzburg periods.

Proposed
revision of
Death's
Jest-Book

In speaking of this period Donner (3) says: "In the new crisis which followed the failure of Death's Jest-Book he had conquered his own self. The experience that made of him a true poet lay in the realization of the futility of his endeavours. He had not been able to animate the corpse to which he had given his soul, but his heart had bled in

Donner's
Interpretation
of the Götting-
gen crisis.

(2) Letter to Kelsall, Würzburg, 19/7/1830.
2. Letter to Kelsall, Würzburg, 19/7/1830.

the process, and he emerged from the struggle a greater and a better man. He saw now that the source of poetry is neither 'love of art' and 'fame,' nor the desire of 'continuing the noble stream of English minds,' as he had once believed, but the experience that so works on us that a wealth of indefinite or even contending emotions is suddenly released in one direction which in the poet's case is its spontaneous expression in a work of art. Only in this manner is the necessity of creation given and the inevitability of expression achieved. Beddoes had fought his way to this rare achievement, and henceforward he did not write except out of emotional necessity. The sense of failure had softened his heart and opened up his sensibility, and from this moment he remains a poet. It is no coincidence, but a necessary consequence that at the very moment when he became a poet, he ceased to be a professional poet." All of which is making a very fine case out of nothing. The blunt truth is that except for brief intervals Beddoes gave up writing poetry.

Beddoes ceases writing poetry.

During 1831 a new Beddoes appeared. Like Byron, Shelley, and many another romantic his abilities were drawn into the political unrest that succeeded the French Revolution and the Congress of Vienna. There is a hint of these new revolutionary interests in his letter (1) to Kelsall in January of that year.... "licenses, patents, theatrical censure & , "all of which he saw as noxious to the drama were probably not possible of removal "before the abolition of tithes, corn bill & " Europe was in turmoil from London

Würzburg politics

1 Letter to Kelsall, Würzburg, 10/1/1831.

and Paris to Warsaw. It was reflected even in the backwoods of Canada. In Germany there was a movement toward liberalism after the French fashion and toward the unification of the dozens of little duchies and principalities in one German Empire under Prussian hegemony. With these ends in view there had arisen at the German universities the Burschenschaft. At Würzburg the subversive movement was led by Burgemeister Behr with whom Professor Schönlein was in political sympathy. Würzburg had formerly been a grand-duchy under the Bishop of Würzburg and the city had not taken kindly to the institution of Bavarian rule in 1813. It was only to be expected that Beddoes would plunge into revolutionary activities.

The Burschenschaft.

He was a prominent member of the Würzburg Burschenschaft in 1831 as the records show. Snow¹ has the idea that Beddoes may have been intimately associated with the political disturbers of Göttingen but there is no evidence whatever as a basis for the assumption. The whole Würzburg period in Beddoes' life has been carefully investigated by Donner,² with the collaboration of Dr. Weber from whose Literarisches Bristol much of the factual material is drawn. It does not appear likely that much will be added to Donner's² very thorough treatment of this section. Interpretation is another matter.

Snow and Donner on Beddoes' political activities.

The passing of the English Reform Bill and its effects on continental politics brought the Englishman Beddoes to the fore. It was a position he must have enjoyed. His part in the political agitations were somewhat reminiscent of his boyish

1 Snow, pp. 228-300.

2 Donner, pp. 228-300.

pranks at Charterhouse. Articles by Beddoes in the Bayerisches Volksblatt¹ in 1832 extolled the English constitution and denounced the clergy and aristocracy. Calm reflection, a little knowledge of world history, and closer adherence to the teachings of his adopted mistress, science, would have led him to question the wisdom of the visionary liberals of that decade. Würzburg Revolutionary aims were of a rather practical and solidly progressive order. To these Beddoes was not attached; he added an emotional element and brought popular politics and education into the arena.

Beddoes' newspaper articles

After the crushing of the Polish rebellion in 1830 political and military refugees fled westward. At a banquet in honour of a Polish general Beddoes made a speech² on Freedom—Beddoes as a public orator is a rather amusing idea. A hundred years of similar speeches in various tongues and in various places has reduced the effect of appeals to emotion in the ^{cause} of liberty. We question whether the rebellious spirits are not merely attempting the impossible liberation of human life from the very basic principles of its own existence. But no poet is ever called upon to reduce his imagery to actuality and least of all was Beddoes.

Beddoes' political speeches

At Gaibach in 1832 Beddoes repeated the performance. There was enough of scholarship in his speech to appeal to the learned and enough of bombast to win the shouts of the rabble. Democracy was about to enter its last phase, a

1 Bayerisches Volksblatt, 24/12/1831 and 17/2/1832. Beddoes, Works, Donner ed. pp.563-568.

2 Reprinted from the Bayerisches Volksblatt, 29/3/1832; Works, Donner ed. p. 571-573.

political toy for the lower classes. The speech, though, won Beddoes membership in the radical club, Freie Reichstadt. This, however, along with other similar organizations was suppressed by order of the diet at Frankfort and the leaders arrested.

By order of the Bavarian government there was decreed the deportation of one:¹"Height 5'7", hair light-brown, forehead high, eyebrows fair, eyes dark, nose fairly long and pointed, mouth big, chin rather prominent, face oval, complexion pale, build slight, neglected clothing, light-grey coat, white breeches and either in English fashion or as a German herr of Hambach one boot black, the other red and on one of them a gold or gilt spur, speaks bad German, fair moustache, bad teeth." It was Beddoes, the amateur radical: the poet of Death's Jest-Book was far away.

Police
description
of Beddoes

An indignant appeal² by Beddoes to Lord Erskine, His Britannic Majesty's Minister Plenipotentiary at Munich, against the Bavarian decree was of no avail. Accompanied part way on his journey by his new political friends and to the laments and denunciations of the Volksblatt and Würtzburger Zeitung Beddoes set forth for Strasbourg.

In a study of the poetry of Beddoes the Würtzburg political activities do not seem to be worth the twelve pages which Donner³ devotes to them. From the standpoint of Bavarian history the whole affair, and particularly Beddoes' participation, were picayune matters. There was not much more

1 As quoted by Donner, p. 298.

2 Letter to Lord Erskine, Würzburg, 17/7/1832.

3 Donner, pp.288-300.

to it all than a present-day raid on some communist organization with appropriate police-court action. What is of vast importance--and what neither Snow nor Donner stresses sufficiently--is that Beddoes the death-obsessionist, the isolated romantic had come out of his shell. The performance was a little foolish but it was a step in the direction of a more healthful attitude to the world about him. There was no chance of him leading a crusade, for, though he had the right sort of temperament, he lacked the power of eliciting a popular following. There is no poetry from those months-- Beddoes' poetry grew in the darkness of his mental introversion. That is the illuminating thing for a critic of his work. Donner¹ in his edition of Beddoes' works reprints for the first time six articles and a speech of Beddoes taken from the Bayerisches Volksblatt. They scream considerably, are unjust to the Church, the aristocracy, and to Wellington. They are political curiosities of no value in estimating the literary worth of Beddoes.

Significance
of Beddoes'
political
activities

Literary
work of
this period

VI

A short stay in Strasbourg was followed by his removal to Zürich. Schönlein who had lost his professorship at Würzburg was also there. The expulsion of many German intellectuals, of whom many settled in Zürich, brought that place some considerable benefits and a measure of diplomatic troubles as well. Keller von Steinbock was supreme in the Canton of Zürich and his friendship and protection were enjoyed by scores of refugees including

Removal to
Zürich

Schönlein and
Keller von
Steinbock

1 Beddoes, Works, Donner ed. pp.560-573.

Beddoes and Schönlein. A proposal¹ to translate Schönlein's six-volume work on the Natural History of the Diseases of Europeans came to nothing. His wish "to render the literature of my country a service by translating the book" indicates how remote he was at this time from all creative efforts.

There was also in 1835 some thought of giving him a professorship² in comparative anatomy in the University. How different it would all have been had he come under the close influence of a Kelsall or a Procter! Just previously, Beddoes had spent some short weeks in England partly with Schönlein but the influences of old associations were not recaptured.

Proposed
professorship

In March, 1837, after a silence of six years there is a letter³ to Kelsall, like a cry from the past. Were it not for the date one could well believe it to have been written in the Göttingen period. "I am preparing for the press..... a volume of prosaic poetry and poetical prose. It will contain half a dozen Tales comic, tragic, and dithyrambic, satirical and semi-moral.....and the stillborn D.J.B."

Revival of
literary
interests

Kelsall was prompt in reply: his friendship was the one constant thing in Beddoes' human relationships. In May Beddoes wrote again and these lines from his letter⁴ are illuminating of his life at Zürich. "You must know that I am an M.D. of the U. of Würzburg.....that I narrowly escaped becoming professor of Anat^y in the U. of Zürich. Now, being independent,.....sometimes I dissect a beetle, sometimes an oyster, and very often trudge about the hills and lakes,

Life in
Zürich

- 1 Letter to Revell Phillips, Zürich, 18/12/1833.
- 2 Letter to Revell Phillips, Zürich, 4/3/1835..
- 3 Letter to Kelsall, Zürich, 9/3/1837.
- 4 Letter to Kelsall, 15/5/1837.

with a tin box on my back, and 'peep and totarize'.....
Sometimes I peep half a day through a microscope; some-
times I read Italian.....or what not, & not seldom drink
I & smoke like an Aetna."

Some writing and projects for new creations are now
a habit with him. There is little enthusiasm.

Meanwhile political troubles in Zürich were coming
to a head. The storm broke in 1838. The appointment of the
heterodox Dr. Strauss to the University roused the opposition
of the populace. They were directed by the Jesuits. The
government fell in the autumn before the forks and scythes
of the outraged peasantry and Keller and other liberals fled.
Beddoes had attacked the clergy in a number of bitterly sat-
irical poems. The clergy survived the attack.

Appointment
of Dr. Strauss

Beddoes
satirical
poems in
German

Although he at first thought¹ it was immediately
necessary to give up residence in Zürich he stayed on until
April 1840. Later he returned to England but in September
he was off again, this time to Berlin, where the great
Schönlein had gone after his dismissal from Zürich. During
that autumn and into the spring of the second year he attend-
ed lectures at the university. August 1842 saw him back
again in London. From then until his death in 1849 he was
never long in one place of residence. From the middle of
1843 to August 1844 he was again in Zürich. Literary work of
this period included anti-Jesuit poems printed in the Republik-
aner, a revision of Death's Jest-Book and Lines written in
Switzerland.

Return to
Zürich

1 Letter to Revell Phillips, Zürich, Se t. 1839.

To Kelsall, in November 1844, he writes:¹ "Sometimes to amuse myself I write you a German lyric or epigram right scurrilous, many of w^h have appeared in the Swiss and German papers & some day or other I shall have them collected and printed for fun. As for publishing in England I am not inclined that way: the old J.B. repeatedly touched up, is a strange conglomerate, and I have not since had time or inclination to begin a right tragedy.....I have looked at your letter again and am not convinced by it that it is my business to get anything printed." Beddoes was the most exasperating of authors but the faithful Kelsall continued to collect and cherish every scrap of his friend's writing that came his way.

Literary
efforts

For an appreciation of Beddoes' poetry the biographical material of the last ten years of his life is of little consequence for the little which he wrote then is not of much importance. Nevertheless Donner pursues him relentlessly into every nook and corner which fact, legend or surmise suggests as his whereabouts. Snow reduced the biographical material of this period to a few pages. The related facts give interest and completeness to this story of Beddoes' life but they do not provide anything in the way of criticism and neither author draws any conclusions or judgments about the poet's work from the happenings of these last years.

Negligibility
of later
biography

In 1845 he spent some time at Frankfort, moved on to Baden, returned again to Frankfort and in August of 1846 visited England. Until July of the next year he lived in England. It was a different Beddoes from him of twenty years

England
1846-47

1 Letter to Kelsall, Giessen, 13/11/1844.

before who now returned home. Change in appearance one would expect but here was a Beddoes, moody, morose, abrupt, given to drink and often pointlessly disagreeable. Even Kelsall could make little of him.

After his return to Frankfort he suffered poisoning from the virus of a dead body he had been dissecting. It was during this period that he formed a friendship with a young baker, named Degen, and broke off relationships with Schönlein and Keller who were both then in Berlin. In July, 1848, he arrived at Basel. There followed an unsuccessful attempt at suicide. He was removed to the hospital suffering from a partially severed artery in his left leg. His illness lasted for several months, gangrene developed and an amputation became necessary. As the result of self-administered poison, according to his physician's testimony, Beddoes died in Basel hospital in the evening of January 28, 1849. He was buried in the hospital cemetery.

Basel

Suicide
1849

His last letter,¹ written on the day of his death, cries out from the depths; "I am food for what I am good for--worms.....Kelsall...I beg to look at my MSS--and print or not as he thinks fit. I ought to have been among other things a good poet; Life was too great a bore on one peg & that a bad one."

Last letter

1 Letter to Revell Phillips, Basel, 26/1/1849.

CHAPTER II

The Search for Sources

The mighty thoughts of an old world
Fan, like a dragon's wing unfurled,
The surface of my yearnings deep;
And solemn shadows then awake,
Like the fish-lizard in the lake,
Troubling a planet's morning sleep.
Song by Thanatos.

HOW far back in literary history should one go to trace the literary ancestry of Beddoes, or, should every table of genealogy begin with Adam? Snow's work, slighter in volume, Forerunners
of Beddoes takes Beddoes as he finds him, content to make reference in passing to his predecessors. Donner's is conceived on the lines of ambitious thoroughness and in the introductory chapter, at least, we lose sight of Beddoes in an essay on tragic drama. But the essay is good and is an example of what great part ^{sound} scholarship can play in giving shape to the historical and critical presentation of English literature—a presentation which has too often suffered from formlessness.

When Beddoes appeared on the literary scene the English language had already been the servant of literature for over six centuries. Out of this vast heritage of romance, drama, novel, poetry and other literary forms what part became significant for Beddoes?

As a culture quickens and ripens into a civilization the work of a man of letters becomes more and more literary in

its inspiration. Education, in the sense of learning from previous workers in a field, crowds out the inspiration that arises from close contact with the human issues that are being decided in the world of flesh and blood. Literature withdraws to the library. So it was with Beddoes. From one point of view it may be held that Beddoes was the heir of all the product of those mighty centuries which preceded him. His world was the result of the interaction of scores of thinkers and writers who had given, ^{by} that time, a special significance to the term English as applied to literature. But beyond the circle of writers who flourished during Beddoes' lifetime there were other writers who exerted a special influence upon the thought and expression of the poet. It was not altogether by chance that these forces were set in motion. Beddoes was a true child of his age—as all first-rate writers are—but that does not mean that only those modes of thought appear which are atune to the fashion of the moment. By pure laws of chance there must be born into the world at all times men of conflicting temperaments. But when romanticism, for example, is the fashion, then the realist finds it impossible to make his voice heard. He either does not write at all or piles up unread manuscripts. It is possible to conceive of a Pope or a Swift born in the early nineteenth century but silenced in his literary cradle. It was not so with Beddoes. He was not made a romantic by early association, though those influences developed the romance that was in him. So it was that he drew from the literature of the past those works which were cast in a mould similar to his own spiritual and

Literary
influences

Literature
of the past

mental entity. The intellectual brilliance of the eighteenth century seems never to have made an impression on his consciousness. He was whole worlds distant from the age of reason and common sense. What would Samuel Johnson have made of Beddoes?

Like other minds of his age Beddoes was drawn to that period which had most in common with his own ways of thought. With them all there was in the first place the natural curiosity to see how similar minds of an earlier period had given expression to a way of looking at life very much like their own. They looked back also for assistance and inspiration. Consequently they fell into the very human error of letting admiration and instruction pass into imitation. Only a great mind, brimming with originality, can look without detriment to his own genius upon the works of earlier masters in his own field. Like school-boys, the literary minors of the early nineteenth century were forever looking up the answers at the back of the book and working out the problem according to a set formula. To some degree this must be admitted of Beddoes.

The romantics
look backward

The well-spring of the minor writers from 1790 to 1835 was the strongly-flowing stream of romance. No age is exactly like any ^{preceding one} ~~predecessor~~ and it was not possible to find the perfect expression of their ideas by turning over the volumes of the past. What they sought was spiritual kinship and they found it in abundance. There are so many ways of defining that particular quality of mind which was theirs and of which they looked for the earlier expression but they all lead inevitably to the one word—Romance.

Spiritual
kinship

II

The province of Romance may be delimited by saying that there emotion holds sway as distinguished from the realm which is obedient to the intellect. Both are dedicated to the service of truth and, if it be agreed that truth can be reached as a result of emotional processes, each will work upon truths of different orders, or arrive at the same end by different paths and express itself in different media. Where the intellect is supreme, as it was in Greece, man looks upon his own being in his own time and place. There is little building upon the past; indeed the past soon merges into myth and legend. Nor is there much thought of the future; the Greeks were never troubled about the vagueness of their ideas upon a life to come. Their intellectual activities were centred upon an understanding of human life as it existed about and in them. Contemplation and philosophy were the occupations of their minds. The romantic looks upon life as a flowing stream of consciousness. The moment, the individual life, exists as the linking of past and future. Life to him is not concentric but presentric. Its significance is not to be measured now or in any one individual life but in eternity. Its highest expression is in linking the individual to the eternal; its immediate and paramount concern is religion. Not understanding the soul but saving the soul is man's chief duty.

Emotion and
intellect

Western man

The intellectual looks upon the world about him from the practical and material point of view. The world is full

of many things which are to be brought under his control and made to minister to his physical well-being. The romantic never quite gets over the wonder of the universe. He is a creature of emotions. Life is an adventure and full of great mysteries to him. It becomes a search for the beautiful which is vouchsafed to him in moments of inspiration when the magic windows of the soul are opened.

Intellectual
and romantic
purposes

The world of literature is commonly divided into two dominions, poetry and prose, as the Maitre de Philosophie explained to the wonderment of Monsieur Jourdain. The extremist would say that all poetry is romantic and argue negatively the old question "Was Pope a poet?". As verse forms break down and as prose acquires rhythmic qualities there might be made the more logically satisfying classification of romantic and intellectual but the accepted orders are heavy with tradition. Nevertheless the term romantic has a special significance in literature and this is to be discovered and defined. The word, of course, arose from the early works written in the romance languages which developed out of the colloquial language of the beginning of the middle ages. As these works had special literary qualities which distinguished them from the writings of the classicists the name came to be applied to all works of similar style and content. As used through the centuries the word has now acquired a fairly definite meaning with respect to the style and matter of a literary production.

The romanticⁱⁿ poetry is associated with verse forms which are characterized by their intricacy and variability. The genius of Pope and Dryden clothed itself naturally

Verse forms

in regular iambic verse of rhymed couplets and end-stopped lines. Theirs was the counterpart in English of classic hexameters. The iambic pentameter became, it is true, the standard verse form of English poetic drama but this was because of practical rather than artistic considerations and, of course, it must be remembered that the English poetic drama was broken by the insertion of songs in far different metre.

English lyric verse forms are adaptations and imper-
tations of French and Italian forms which in turn were de-
rived from Roman and Greek models during the renaissance
and later. Here, however, the comparison breaks down.
The basic difference between the English and classic verse
is one of prosody. The metre of classical poetry is
based on vowel quantity, of English, upon a regular
succession of accented and unaccented syllables. Thus
the effects of the two forms of verse are utterly differ-
ent. In classical verse the words are poured into a mould
already prepared for it: in English verse at its best the
phraseology works out its metre as the line proceeds. What
is restraint in the one case becomes freedom in the other.
There is nothing classical about the English anapaest or
dactyl but the name. The beginning of romantic forms of
verse in English is associated with the very period when
our literature was being most subjected in form and content
to European influences. The names themselves are foreign
and sounded strange to English ears. "Call you 'em
stanzas?" says Touchstone.

English and
classic verse

The content of romantic literature is drawn from a

quarry far different from that which supplies the subject matter of more purely intellectual writing. Romance may be based on fact, often no more substantial than an old legend, but it is so transformed by the lively imagination of the poet that it becomes a thing of new life with an independent existence. And this is entirely necessary, to be in keeping ^{with} ~~until~~ the romantic conception of things.

Content of
romantic
literature

Actual life according to that creed does not reveal truth: only the manifestation of phenomena insofar as they are attune to eternal principles achieve that end. This very attempt to escape from a present which has no meaning except as it becomes merged with the infinite leads the romantic writer to deal with events of the past, or occasionally, in a prophetic sense, of the future. It causes him to place his story in a remote land, in unusual situations or in a supernatural world. The foreign land or tongue is of special significance or instead a different stratum of society will suffice to effect an escape from the immediate.

In style the romantic deliberately attempts to create a pleasing world by building up an outer harmony of sound and phrase in tune with the inner harmony of his writing. Of quite a different order is the classic style with its periods, antitheses and ⁶ ~~simple~~ ⁶ ~~simple~~ designed to elucidate an idea or to make it more easily comprehensible. The romantic appeals to the emotions. It is not without significance that all our great stylists have been romantic; there are associated with them melody, imagery, sensuousness, harmony, pathos.

Romantic
style

The spirit, too, of romantic writing has a special

individuality. It lifts the reader into an ideal world where life is lived on a grander ~~xxx~~ and nobler plane than in any real existence. Here the appeal is all to the nobler qualities of mankind - heroism, courage, morality, loyalty and sacrifice. Its purpose is to delight the soul by a vision of the great and good, not to instruct it in a code of moral laws. Thus it was that the nineteenth century (one has Charles Lamb in mind) turned from the explicit moral qualities of eighteenth century literature.

Idealism

It is for this reason that the spirits of comedy and romance are incompatible. The best that romance can do is to create a pleasant feeling of comfortable satisfaction which is closely allied to humour but not of it. Comedy depends for its effect upon a quick change from the ideal to the real either in the actual physical sense or in the world of ideas. It raises a laugh by "bringing one down to earth," by ridiculing the follies and vices of mankind to a state of normality. Burlesque and satire have ever been the means of reducing the man, swollen with the idea of his own importance or living in a world out of touch with his fellows, to what is thought a proper sense of proportion.

Comedy and
romance

Carried to excess the romantic point of view is capable of being successfully burlesqued. In the drama romance extravagantly displayed merges into melodrama; in the novel it becomes sentimentality; and in poetry, puerility. It is thus a more difficult attitude of mind to maintain in authorship and to hold in restraint, than is the classic or intellectual mode which in failure sinks merely into an oblivion of pedantry or dullness.

Romance in
excess

III

The elements of romance are most lavishly shown in the literatures of western Europe and more particularly in the later literatures of England and Germany. It becomes a question therefore, of how far back one should go in tracing the literary sources of early nineteenth century English romance. One could go back, indeed, to the songs of the Anglo-Saxon gleemen who idealized the qualities which our forebearers thought most desirable in man. The sources might be traced to the romantic poems and prose tales of the Arthurian cycle, which drew heavily on continental sources for their material and style. The ^{prose} ~~literature~~ literature of the later middle ages is brimming with romance. It is ⁱⁿ this latter literature, not in its original form, but as it became transformed into the Elizabethan drama that the sources of the ^{poetic drama} ~~romantic~~ revival are to be found, both by observation and the testimony of the writers themselves.

The beginnings
of romance

In the first chapter of his book Donner discusses at considerable length tragedy in the nineteenth century. The thought is sound enough but he does not sufficiently emphasize the points which he makes nor does he bring out completely the great differences between the ages of Beddoes and Shakespeare.

There is not a great deal in common between the Elizabethan period and the romantic revival and what there is becomes of decreasing proportions as the two fields are surveyed and compared. To speak of the early nineteenth century as a revival of Elizabethan literature either reveals a lamentable lack of appreciation of the English drama at its

Poetic drama
not an
Elizabethan
revival.

zenith or a comparison based on outward resemblances or upon only certain aspects of the Elizabethan age.

That there is a spiritual affinity between the two periods is undeniable. The Reliques of English Poetry, discovered and edited by Thomas Percy in 1765, did much to prepare the way for the new poetry of the romanticists. Of this early verse, Sir Philip Sidney said: "I must confess mine own barbarousness; I never heard the old song of Percy and Douglas, that I found not my heart moved more than with a Trumpet." There is the indication there of a spiritual link that goes much deeper than outward form and that entirely surmounts the two intervening centuries.

Percy's
Reliques

²
"I have been turning over old plays in the Brit: Museum;" wrote Beddoes, "and verily think that another volume of specimens might be very well compiled: when I go^x up again, perhaps I shall do it for my private use." Others, too, were interested in this legacy from the past; Beddoes refers to publications of old plays, which were to be brought out.

Old plays

Of the Elizabethan age what part was inherited by Beddoes and his contemporaries? That they did not inherit everything Elizabethan is the first significant fact. They brought to the study of that literature their own characteristic temperament and point of view; they carried away what they could appreciate and were curiously unaffected by the remainder. In general terms they seized upon the romantic elements in the work of Shakespeare and his

Elizabethan
inheritance

1 Sir Philip Sidney, An Apology for Poetry

2. Letter to Kelsall, Clifton 8/11/1824

3 Letter to Kelsall, London 12/4/1824 and 17/4/1824.

contemporaries, adapted them to their own uses and missed entirely the very human qualities of the literature of that age. This seems to be what Donner¹ has in mind when he says: "It was their belief that in the medium of poetry lay the key to the restoration of dramatic art, and their efforts centred round the ~~reproduction~~ reproduction of the poetry and diction of the Elizabethans. The subject matter, on the other hand, remained that of their own age, and if it was too slight to fill the form that had once pulsed with the full-blooded life of the Elizabethans, this escaped contemporary notice." Their excursions took them into the realms of the drama and the lyric and because of the very constitution of their genius they came nearer to reproducing the spirit of the lyric than of the drama, for their genius was subjective rather than objective and sought truth in the experience of emotion rather than in the interplay of action and character..

Donner's belief

IV

From the Elizabethan drama the men of Beddoes' time took over the external form of five acts and a varying though usually large number of scenes. It was their first mistake. As Donner points out:² "The Romantic poets felt themselves bound to the canon, and five acts of poetry remained the criterion of dramatic perfection. Their error in attempting to reproduce a form the essence of which they had not grasped, at the same time prevented them from

Drama form

1 Donner, p. 4

2 Donner, p. 5

creating a new one more suitable for their purpose. Only their peculiar outlook on the world can explain the dramatic ineptitude apparent in their failure." Here Donner does not go far enough. The form of the drama does not determine the theatre; the theatre determines the outward architecture of the drama. It was so with Shakespeare and his contemporaries. They found an unroofed theatre, supplies with an inner and outer stage and an upper gallery, giving performances in the daylight. Their dramas were eminently practicable; they made use of pageantry and the intimate monologue and their plays moved along with scarcely an interruption. Beddoes complained of the tiresome and artistically detrimental delays between the scenes and acts of a drama. ^I "The pause between the acts—^h the Greeks and Sh., I believe, did not allow—is another dangerous innovation: the thread of events is interrupted, one talks to one's neighbor^u, hears news, and forgets the fictitious in the real events, the state of mind produced by the opening is altered, and as soon as we are with difficulty brought back to the track over w^h the poet w^d lead us, another interruption undoes all again." What more could be expected when an art form is forced into totally different and unsuitable situations? Think of the type of theatre of Beddoes' time; one stage, set off like a hole in the wall and demanding the use of large flats and many properties, all moved with difficulty and delay. But Beddoes may be excused for his lack of practical insight.

Beddoes on
the form of
Shakespearean
drama

1 Letter to Kelsall, Würzburg, 10/1/1831.

It took the English theatre another half century before the structure of the drama was altered to meet new situations.

Snow does not investigate the subject of sources and tendencies but even in Donner's lengthy discussion there is almost no reference to an outstanding characteristic of the men of the romantic revival - their ability to handle words. Yet it was one power they shared with the men of Shakespeare's day. Strangely enough, with the exception of Beddoes, they did not use it in their dramatic writing for there originality gave way to imitation and Donner is able to speak of ¹ "the Shakespearian diction of the early nineteenth-century drama."

Romantic
action

The language of the eighteenth century was overburdened with foreign, mostly Latin, derivatives. To appreciate the fact one has only to read a page of Johnson or Pope in comparison with a page of Marlowe or Shakespeare. Foreign derivatives are a sign of learning and intellectual discipline; they are suited to philosophical disquisition. The language of the heart comes from the homely expressions of the mother tongue. Whenever emotion, in Shakespeare, for example, is most tense and whenever the crises of a situation rises to expression in words, those words are purely Anglo-Saxon, the basic word-treasury of the race. It was this that Beddoes, among others, learned so well and used so effectively in lyric verse. But great drama must do more than merely employ a language that springs from the heart.

Simplicity
of language

1 Donner--p. 20

Besides presenting scenes visible to the eye and conveying thus ideas to the audience, great drama creates as well a world of the imagination. Individual words and phrases present situations which speak to us through our senses and at times the dramatist reconstructs through the lips of an actor a whole scene which powerfully affects the future course of the play and our appreciation of it. It is narrative in a special kind of pictorial form. This the men of the early nineteenth century seized upon. Their own minds were of the same order ~~as~~ - able to understand ideas conveyed in thought pictures and word pictures rather than in abstract terms. It is one of the chief glories of the Elizabethan drama and it was readily employed by Beddoes. The same can hardly be said of any other contemporary writer of poetic drama, unless one refers to Charles Wells whose *Joseph and His Brethren* was published in 1824. As Donner¹ says: "Even a cursory glance at style and diction will show how they are imitative of the Elizabethans rather than typical of the Romantics, as Romanticism had expressed itself in lyric and epic." All except Beddoes seemed to forget their own originality or command of words when they began to write drama.

Dramatic
imagery

Romantic
drama and
poetry

Basically the business of the theatre is the satisfaction of the emotions. There is more to it than that, of course; if the drama is of a high order it must satisfy as well the mind, but that very satisfaction will frequently come about by the expression of thought in emotional terms. The same is to be observed in the greater theatre of actual life. No war was ever fought or any political combat got

Emotional
elements in
the drama

1 Donner, p. 16

under way without the interjection of a strong emotional appeal. People do not kill one another for abstractions.

Denner seems to miss a good point here. True, he says,
§ 1

"It was the emotional thought in which ideas appear inseparably blended with subjective feeling, that the Romantics, under the name of imagination, elevated into an instrument of divine revelation. The pleasure they experienced in the pursuit of thought, was taken as a proof of the reality of what was imagined." But he passes on to discuss all this in its applications to lyric poetry and ignores its bearing on the poetic drama of the romantic revival. It was the emotional element in Elizabethan drama that appealed strongly to the revivers of poetic drama. Here was something they could understand; it was the very language of their own natures. Nor did they distinguish between the emotion of Shakespeare or Marlowe at his best, and the totally unrestrained exhibitions of passion in the work of Kyd and Webster. Sometimes, indeed, the emotion is drawn in merely for the sake of emotion; it does not arise naturally and of necessity from the course of action of the play but instead seizes control to the detriment of the dramatic construction. Yet good drama must always be primarily emotional. Beddoes was on solid ground here.

Appeal of
emotion to
the romantics

To the minds of the revivalists of romance the pointed dialogue and the straight-forward expression of the dramas of such as Congreve, Wycherly and Sheridan were no substitutes for the blank verse and poetic conception of

the age of Shakespeare. And with that criticism most students of the drama would agree. That, on the other hand, does not imply a condemnation of the eighteenth century manner but only the failure of the Restoration drama to reach heights of excellence in its chosen manner of writing. Beddoes and his contemporaries made just that error of judgment. Shakespeare had employed poetry; therefore for them the use of poetry became one of the canons of dramatic writing. Yet there was a vast difference in the popular consciousness of the two ages. Nineteenth century Englishmen thought in prose; widespread and deep familiarity with the ballads, on the one hand and the cultivation of poetry by knight and squire on the other made poetry a natural form of expression to the Elizabethans. In that age poetic drama arose out of a real situation. To quote from Donner again;¹ "They (the Romanticists) came to concentrate on the recovery of the incomparable poetry inherent in the tradition, while they neglected the possibilities of developing both the domestic and heroic themes which supplied Katsenue and his followers with material for an endless number of inferior plays." There was also the additional sanction of their own temperamental predisposition. Accepting poetry as a way of looking at life and determinative of the substance of the drama, quite apart from the technique of verbal expression, they could not very well have done anything else. They might, to be sure, have employed rhythmic prose but that path was still untravelled and there was no J. M. Synge to lead them.

¹ Donner, P. 4

V

The poetic conception of life leads straight into a dramatic pitfall which only the great avoid. If life is interpreted in terms of feeling and emotion then the plot becomes of less significance. Faith, not the deed, is the important thing. To be good at heart is the criterion of virtue. In the theatre the play of this breed proceeds through a series of emotional states without much progressive movement and without a carefully constructed plot. The whole work becomes something to pass in review in the mind's eye and to be emotional about with a vicarious emotion. That is to say, the plot of the drama becomes more and more tenuous. But the very word drama connotes action and its origin in both Greece and England and everywhere else in Europe was the movement of actors in a variety of connected situations. Pantomime^m is the very basis of good theatre; in fact, it is possible, as everyone knows, to have wordless drama. As less and less emphasis was placed on the plot two results, both disruptive of the traditional and basic meaning of drama, came to pass. In the first place what action there was lacked carefully prepared motivation. The audience was thrown into a succession of emotional scenes; the play had become in fact a series of long poems given a semblance of unity because of the identity of the dramatic personae but lacking the inner unity based upon the development of a carefully constructed plot. At its worst such a production is no more than mere melodrama.

Emotion
substituted
for plot and
action

First result
of neglect
of plot

After mentioning the melodrama Donner goes on to speak of ¹ "another kind of play to which the term may be applied

¹ Donner, pp. 15-16.

with equal justice, a kind of degraded drama where the dramatic qualities are sacrificed to the spectacular, where the nerves are played on rather than the feelings, and where movement and variety supply the element of action....in no other period has melodrama enjoyed the undisputed place of honour that it occupied during the first half ~~xx~~ of the nineteenth century." The observations are entirely true but it should be added that they apply less fittingly to Beddoes than to others of his day.

A second result of neglect of plot was the removal of the drama from the theatre. As the romantic drama progressed it was forced more and more into this anomalous position. The conception of drama as emotional expression requires a variety of ~~sans~~ scenes, unless the play is to grow dull from dwelling upon the same set of emotions. Whether they knew it or not the romantic revivalists were writing for the library not the theatre. They complained bitterly of the time and the theatre but the fault lay in themselves. Donner fails to explore the possibilities of this idea. There is a connection here with the dramatic monologue as evolved by Browning which Donner might very well have pointed out. As the drama is now divorced from the theatre the necessity of its conventional form no longer exists. In fact that becomes a serious restriction and another art form, already at hand, the novel, becomes its proper vehicle. The living drama passed into a long decline until the drama went once more to the theatre of its own age to learn lessons of construction. In the opposite direction the serious problem of how to present melodrama was solved by the cinema. Less

Second
result of
neglect of
plot

Decline of
the drama

Lest one be misunderstood it should be pointed out, at the risk of becoming tedious, that the nineteenth century novel was by no means entirely given to melodrama and that the motion picture does not always rise even to that level.

VI

When these pillars of the drama fell--the dramatic point of view, plot and action--there fell also the character creations which are the glory of the Shakespearian stage. Here again the failure is inherent in the romantic creed. The Romance of Chivalry had given literature the conception of the heroic individual which brought about the vigorous characterization in the Elizabethan drama. During the romantic revival, on the other hand, political and social movements were afoot which gave birth to the ideal of the free individual. Individualism was the watchword of the day, not the individualism of superiority but of equality, not of heroism but of freedom. This conception of individualism prevented the development of robust characterization in the drama of the romantic revival. And thus is the dramatic-social paradox explained. It is noteworthy too, that the rise of the age of romance saw a steady decline in English portrait painting and the movement toward the depicting of unindividualized nature scenes.

Decline in
character-
ization

An apparent exception is found in the work of Joanna Baillie. In writing of her work Donner says,¹ "They are all written from a preconceived theory, accounted for at some length in the introduction. In opposition to the writers of melodrama she lays special stress on the character-drawing, according only secondary importance to plot. Aristotle was of different opinion. Yet she was right in so far as character is fundamental to all drama, but she overlooked the fact that the action on the stage must be represented as the result of the clash of

Joanna
Baillie

1 Donner, p. 11

personalities or the issue of the decisions of one individual mind." Aristotle could not very well help being "of different opinion," for he wrote of classical drama. Yet the implication of Donner's words is true. Romantic drama is lamentably weak in character portrayal nor is Beddoes any exception.

From a purely technical point of view the removal of emphasis from character portrayal in the drama brings about other difficulties. The novelist can converse pleasantly and intimately with his reader, explaining this and stressing that but the dramatist has no such opportunity. His men and women must appear as flesh and blood, even as the actors upon the stage, and carry in and about them an individuality which is the key note of their role in the play. Lacking the emphasis upon action the conception of the character drama is not called into being and the two ^{conditions} ~~forces~~ work together to make the people of a romantic drama mere names and the beings associated with a mental and emotional state. In addition the failure to build up life-like characters removed romantic drama even further from the actual world of men and women for, be the spirit of the time classic or romantic, there will arise, as every page of history testifies, the strong leader who creates his age and is not created by it. The romantic revivalists had removed the drama from the theatre; they also removed literature from life.

As the drama became abstract and as meaning was conveyed by implications drawn from the scene rather than from the individual it began to lose its philosophical content. Here are those passages, to be found in Marlowe and or

Removal of
literature
from life

Decline of
philosophy
in drama

Shakespeare, when the embodied forces of great drama stepped down the stage and almost into the middle of the theatre, to declaim upon the human values that make the very fibre and tissue of life. It is a defect, and a very patent one, of Beddoes' dramas yet neither Snow nor Donner calls any attention to it. The reader of Romantic drama after the Beddoes' fashion will look in vain for the revealing lines that find accord in every mind. Nowhere can he find lines which make him exclaim "This is what life means to me." There are few or no memorizable passages; little of what they wrote has passed into the current of common speech. The human mind desires an overt expression of truth as an interpretation of life and it is here unsatisfied. The lack of this quality is somewhat made up by the songs interspersed through the plays but the Elizabethans too had the lyric and in addition the drama.

Donner's treatment of the influences of the Elizabethan drama upon the romantic revival is deficient in one very important respect. He makes only an indirect reference to the failure of the romantics to continue the comic tradition. ¹ "Hugo could teach the French how to blend tragic and comic matter in their plays, the classical tradition having scrupulously avoided it." Yet the lack of humour in the poetic drama of the early nineteenth century and the avoidance of comedy is a point which sharply differentiates them from the Elizabethans. But it was Beddoes who was eminently successful in the character of the humorous Mandrake in Death's Jest-Book.

The comic tradition

1 Donner, p. 33

VII

In writing of the decline of comedy Hazlitt ^{g 1} offers the explanation that the vices and follies of humans have been ridiculed to the ultimate degree and naïvely remarks that there is nothing left to pillory. The streams of literature flow on and yet is the spring never empty. But it is just such a remark as Hazlitt's that one would expect a romantic to make. The romantics failed to see the irony of life. They lacked that quality which enables a man to stand aside from the show of human life to recognize his follies and frailties, and to see himself as a creature of earth. From one point of view Beddoes' Jest-Book was misnamed; Death was not a jester who reduced all men to the common level of the tomb but the vanquished in a fight where life emerges triumphantly. Life was the jester who put Death in his place. Nor did Beddoes show a true sense of the ironic. Like all the romantics, in spite of frequent disavowal, he took himself too seriously.

Lack of
humour in
romance

In a strict sense comedy and romance are incompatible, for the comedy is frequently the obverse side of the romantic. How often does Shakespeare create comedy of the mind by ridiculing the lofty thoughts and false pretensions of those who have removed themselves from the main stream of life, as for example, in Twelfth Night or in As You Like It. He took an institution, the humour of the court-fool, which the times presented him, and lifted it to the plane of high art. The comedy of situation and character arose from the natural antipathy in the varied characters and situations of men. So of Malvolio. The elements of humour

Shakespearean
comedy.

1 William Hazlitt, The Round Table Papers, "On Modern Comedy," 1817

gave both pleasure and satisfaction to the audience. "I am not only witty in myself, but the cause that wit is in other men," says Falstaff.¹ Beddoes lost considerable of good drama in his strict adherence to the romantic.

VIII

Of the heritage of Elizabethan drama Beddoes accepted only the picturesque and the tragic. He did not reproduce the work of the men of Shakespeare's day and he did not succeed in creating any new or vital contribution to the English stage. Nor did any of his contemporaries in his own estimation.² "Is it not really a ridiculous fact, that of all our modern dramatists none, (for who can reckon Mr. Rowe now a days?) has approached in any degree to the form of play delivered to us by the founders of our stage?" Donner's remarks are very apt.³ "Thus it may seem that the whole attempt at an Elizabethan Revival was of but little avail: Its importance in the development of dramatic art may seem insignificant. It may even be doubted whether the term is justified, seeing that when the result was Elizabethan there was no revival, as in the case of Wells, and that where there was a revival of the drama, as in Browning, it was not Elizabethan." Beddoes imitated the outward form but missed the whole incomparable spirit of that literature. Nor was he below his age in that respect. The eighteenth century witnessed the rewriting of Shakespeare shorn of his poetic fancies and the nineteenth saw the emasculation of his work at the hands of the impossible

Romantic
drama lacking
in originality
of form

Elizabethan
drama in the
eighteenth
and nineteenth
centuries

1 Second Part of King Henry the Fourth, I, 11
2 Letter to Kelsall, Göttingen, 27/2/1829
3 Donner, p. 32,33

Mr. Bowdler. So little was the full-bodied work of the Elizabethan ~~work~~ dramatists appreciated that it was customary to "adapt" them for stage presentation by the omission of scenes and characters and the addition of new material. Professor Schelling has pointed out that ¹ "During the fifty years following the Restoration no less than twenty-six rewritings, alterations and makings over of dramas of Shakespeare were made and the large majority of them acted. This list disclosed some twenty different plays, the work of sixteen authors including three laureates, the actors Betterton, Lacy and Cibber, scholarly authors and critics such as Theobald, Dennis and Gildon, and hack writers like D'Urfey, Ravenscroft and Duffet....To the twenty-six here mentioned may be added nearly double that number up to the end of the eighteenth century." Beddoes was not of this infamous crowd but he seems never to have appreciated all sides of Elizabethan drama. Even if there had been evolved in Beddoes' day great drama in Elizabethan manner, an almost impossible thought, it is doubtful if the public would have appreciated it, though Beddoes thought differently. ² "The people are in this case wiser than the critics; instinct and habit a truer guide than the half & half learning & philosophy of Ramblers, Quarterly, and Magaziners." The love of pageantry and masque and show had passed away. The "Spectacles" of the stage were of a different sort. The form lingered on here and there in court functions but the interest that prevailed was of that in a good museum piece - another romantic tendency. In the reading and appreciation of Elizabethan drama there was abundant evidence of interest, shown by the

Survival of
form of
page ntry
and masque

1 E. Schelling, The English Drama, p. 272, London. J.M. Dent & Sons
2. Letter to Kelsall, Göttingen, 27/2/1829

many editions of those authors' works which appeared during the period. Donner makes much of this side of the revival of the poetic drama. One paragraph adequately sums up the matter ¹ "The beginning of the nineteenth century saw several new collections. Mrs. Isak Inchbald in her twenty-five volumes of The British Theatre, 1808, printed many plays of Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, Massinger, Lee, Dryden, Rowe, Otway and Congreve, all of which then held the stage. Somewhat more scholarly collections were Ancient British Drama, 3 vols., 1810; Modern British Drama, 5 vols., 1811; C. W. Dilke's Old English Plays, 6 vols., 1814-16; and Charles Baldwyn's reprints The Old English Drama, 1824. Separate collected editions appeared of many of the great Elizabethans: the works of Beaumont and Fletcher had been collected no less than three times in the course of the eighteenth century, and now appeared again in 1812, edited by H. Weber; the same editor had in the previous year for the first time collected the works of Ford, edited once more by Gifford in 1827; Gifford was also the editor of Massinger, 1813, and of Ben Jonson, 1816; Marlowe appeared in 1826; Webster was collected by Dyce in 1830, Greene by the same editor a year later;" Farther on Donner makes an acute observation, ² "It seems, however, as if Lamb's volume had a deeper significance, for it was in this form of scenes and extracts of fine poetry that the Romantics were best able to enjoy the Elizabethans, and it thus came to influence by its example not only the creative

Reprintings
of Elizabethan
dramas

Reading of
Elizabethan
drama

1 Donner, p. 18

2 Donner, p. 19

poets, but also the students and critics of the old drama." It was different in the master's own day. Then you saw Shakespeare, you did not read him. Elizabethan drama was no more a paying venture in the popular theatre than it is to-day, except in large centres and to literary audiences. When Donner states that,¹ "In 1815 we find that Shakespeare was more acted than any other dramatist both at Covent Garden and Drury Lane, heading the list at the latter with 86 nights out of a total 180," he overlooks several important facts. In the first place the two theatres he mentions were the only licensed ones. It was the custom to alter considerably the plays in question; in some cases they were not much more than adaptations. And in addition, as Hazlitt's criticisms show, the audience went not so much to hear Shakespeare as to see Mrs. Siddons, Kean, Macready or some other popular actor.

Shakespeare
on the
romantic
stage

Beddoes found in the Elizabethan drama what he wanted to find, the expression of his own romantic point of view. That part of it which he appreciated became his inspiration for work quite removed from the daily lives of the masses of the people, the portrayal and interpretation of which is the chief business of the drama.

Snow is not inclined to make much of the Elizabethan dramatic influence on Beddoes. He makes a clear distinction in the following paragraph.² "That Beddoes' whole manner of writing came from the Elizabethans is quickly obvious. The verve and crash of his style, his de d-set at rhetorical

Snow's
appraisal
of Elizabethan
dramatic
influence on
Beddoes

1 Donner, p. 19, 20

2 Snow, p. 169

hurdles belongs but to one period. At the same time he is no more imitative than Shakespeare is imitative of Kyd. He steeped himself in that literature, he was sufficiently contemptuous of his own period to pass it completely by, and the Elizabethans were more alive to him than the living. That is why his two hundred year old style was not artificial and emasculate, but as genuine as it was when Burbage first set his teeth in a fine speech." becoming more explicit he says; ¹ "Tournear's is come to be the name which is most frequently linked with Beddoes'. Such association is, I believe, essentially false and rather shallow criticism."

² And further on "But it is with Webster I think Beddoes should most properly be compared. There are no parallelisms of incident, but in spirit they are close. A sustained and intense macabre is the breath and soul of the work of each. Webster rises above the mere macabre, and fuses with it elements Beddoes could never achieve, but he is Beddoes' only superior in the field in which the latter worked."

³ Donner speaks in more or less the same vein: "However much he may have borrowed from the Elizabethans, Beddoes remained a Romantic, and however well he may have imitated the style of Shakespeare, Marlowe, Beaumont, Marston or Webster, we notice in his adaptations of their ideas and superstitions the apologetic attitude of one who does not himself believe what he says, but is trying to apply the experience of the past to the circumstances of the present. What claim, then, can be put for Beddoes as 'The Last Elizabethan?'" Donner ⁴ answers his question by a three page discourse on Beddoes'

Donner on
Beddoes'
debt to the
Elizabethans

¹ Snow, p. 170
² Snow, p. 171.
³ Donner, p. 111

⁴ Donner, p. 111-114

versification which he declares is essentially Elizabethan.

Now all this seems to me a serious understatement of the whole question. The whole conception, tone, feeling and construction of Beddoes' drama are essentially Elizabethan and to a large extent echoes of Shakespeare, even if seldom direct imitations. One cannot estimate Beddoes by brushing such things aside as Snow and Donner have done.

Understatement
of Snow and
Donner

By way of showing a difference between the Elizabethans and the Romantics Donner introduces the subject of lyric poetry.¹ "the lyric is in its nature subjective, but the epic and dramatic arts require an objectivist self-denial and detachment and a keen sense of reality which the Romantics lost in mistaking subjective emotion for objective evidence, and emotional thought for an instrument of truth. The supernatural— or the unreal— was given primary importance. The life and vitality of which they were vaguely conscious were referred to another existence, and things of this world could be of no more than secondary interest. But tragedy is a thing of this life, it is the strife of this life— the strife in vain— it is the jeopardy and failure of human effort, it is the breakdown of a strong will and the futility of high endeavour. It ends in the loss of life, but death to the Romantics meant the victory of the eternal over the temporal and the loss of life implied no tragic experience. Their task was the glorification of the imagination, but a mere apotheosis is far removed from tragedy." With all this one must agree but it goes not nearly far enough, nor

Romantic
lyric poetry

1 Donner, p. 8

does it show the historical evolution of the lyric as a form of poetry, a matter of some importance to the romantic revival.

IX

The lyric, as distinguished from the ballad, arose rather late among literary art forms. The one passes naturally by easy gradations into the other as the ballad singer interspersed his personal views and feeling into the more strictly narrative ballad. The lyric implies a reflective and philosophical state of mind in one who has drawn apart to weigh the values and importance of life forces as they affect his own welfare and spiritual being. This subjective quality of the lyric has frequently been commented upon but its musical quality is of no less importance. The ballad tune requires the steady onward flow of musical notes to carry the relation of incidents to a climax and ending. On the other hand lyric music must be of a halting cyclical nature to allow time for the creation of a mood and the building up of an appropriate atmosphere. The succession of events is readily grasped and followed but the creation of a mood requires a slower process. The difference is psychological. The ballad may be compared to the brisk straight-forward walk, the lyric to the ambulating movements of the dance. The distinction between the two art forms is most clearly comprehended by the singing of a ballad to a lyric measure or of a lyric to ballad music.

Nature of
lyric poetry

Lyric and
ballad

The effect, if one so treats a genuine ballad or lyric is thoroughly ludicrous. By the fifteenth century the medium of lyric verse had been developed in English; the sixteenth and seventeenth saw the English lyric attain its highest excellence.

Outside Shakespeare, the lyric of Elizabethan days best represents the romantic spirit of that literature and in a form distinct from the drama. The men of the romantic revival found satisfaction and inspiration in the sixteenth century lyric as well as in the drama. It would not have been difficult in the 1800's to predict which form of literature would be most perfectly developed by the moderns of that age. The drama is tied down to architecture, cost of production, acting, social movements and political conditions in such restricted ways that its cultivation is rarely pursued with abundant success. Donner, in a long paragraph, shows how the Elizabethan age fulfilled all the conditions essential to great drama. On the other hand the lyric has all the possible freedom of creation that an artist may require. In the sixteenth century in England the two forms reached simultaneously their greatest excellence. Beddoes and his contemporaries possessed lyric genius to a considerable degree; their dramatic genius was confined to the romantic.

Drama and lyric in the romantic revival

In Shakespeare the lyric and dramatic elements are united in a number of his plays. This applies more unreservedly to the comedies rather than the tragedies, for in Macbeth and Othello, for example, there are no lyrics at all. With

Union of lyric and dramatic elements in Shakespeare

perfect art the lyric was made by Shakespeare to grow out of the main body of the drama: it blossoms forth as the flower upon a stem. Some, however, are drawn evidently from a traditional minstrelsy; a few are used more than once by Shakespeare and some occur in the works of other dramatists as well. (The earliest poetical miscellany in English is "Songs and Sonettes by the Right Honourable Henry Howard, late Earl Surrey, and others," first printed in 1557.) Too frequently the lyric in drama is but an imposition to produce variety or to exhibit, in the lack of acting ability, the musical talent of an overpaid actor. As such it comes perilously close to causing a complete breakdown in the unity of the drama. Yet observe how naturally the lyric "Blow, blow, thou winter wind," in the second act of As You Like It, catches and intensifies the whole atmosphere of the forest of Arden as built up in the preceding scenes, or in Twelfth Night, how the love of Orsino is vivified and concentrated in the beautiful lyric, "Come away, come away, death." It was this very blending of the lyric with the dramatic which Beddoes, in Death's Jest-Book attempted to do; with what success it remains to be seen. It is all the above which Donner evidently has in mind when he says: ¹ "In Shakespeare, even if not in many of contemporaries, the very essence of the situation is ~~often~~ often crystallized into a song. In Dryden they are a loose ornament: they can be eliminated without the slightest damage to the whole."

Beddoes' use
of the lyric

1 Donner, p. 5.

X

What were the excellences of the Elizabethan lyric which were the inheritance of Beddoes? They are expressed in the word lyrical with all its associations. To attempt an expression of the peculiar qualities of a lyric, to describe emotion in intellectual terms is comparable almost to the painting of music or the versification of mathematics. But something can be done. Neither Snow nor Donner discuss the nature of lyric poetry nor do they refer to its principles in their criticism of Beddoes' work. Yet these basic elements would seem to require treatment for one cannot consider them as axiomatic. Nor are they eternally fixed for literature is a growing and changing art.

Lyric
poetry

The very nature of the lyric compels its shortness; there are no successful long lyrics. Similarly the best lyrics treat of the tender emotions of love or sorrow; rage and fear induce psychical states, or they are psychical states, whichever expression one may prefer, that are so overpowering in their intensity that verbal expression is chilled. They become overt in physical action. Because of the inducement of euphoria the lyric provokes a soothing or gay mood, the light-heartedness of abandon or even the pleasure of sadness, a mild-minded melancholy, never the tempestuousness of anguish.

Lyric
moods

The best lyrics do not win one by appeal to intellectual powers; their effect is not won by reasonable persuasion of even the gentlest order but by the charm

of atmosphere which calls forth a harmony in the feeling of the reader. The lyric is in a double sense subjective. Its effect creeps over one like "the moonlight on a bank of violets." The lyric has reached its fulfilment with the perfect coincidence of two psychical natures. This in turn is brought about by the rhythm of the lines; the predication of psychic vibrations may be fantastic but it is at any rate a poetic notion and describes the peculiar effect of lyrical poetry.

Subjectivity
of the
lyric

Speaking scientifically an emotion or mood is easily induced but they of the synthetic variety are not the best source of poetic inspiration. The genuine lyric rises spontaneously in the poet and comes forth unbidden. It was this quality in the Elizabethan lyric which must have most impressed such a romantic as Beddoes. That he did not always equal this quality in his own verse is but too apparent but it was an ideal of which he seems to have been always conscious.

Spontan-
eity

The diction of the lyric, as the language of emotion, is strikingly powerful in its own simplicity. That is a truth which the Elizabethans appreciated to the full. It is, however, a diction that is artfully achieved or that comes from one naturally accustomed to expression in emotional terms. Precision, the catching of the slightest nuance of meaning, was what the men of Shakespeare's day excelled in. It has never since been perfectly attained in lyrical poetry. But the diction of great poetry is much more than this. The art of the lyric is suggestion rather than expression and its words, for full affect, must carry with them an association which conveys a meaning beyond and above that given in

Diction
of lyric
verse

a printed word of so many letters. It may be compared to the bouquet of a fine wine or the tone of a musical instrument. It is the very thing^{which} Anatole France had in mind when he said that Esperanto would never supersede natural languages as a medium of literary expression. The Frenchman pointed out that the words of a national speech carry with them a flavour and meaning above and independent of the purely dictionary sense in which they may be used. From the pen of a literary master they speak with emotional associations that are racially inherent. It cannot be said that Beddoes, except upon rare occasions, ever attained this sublimity of style.

Anatole
France

XI

The romantic drama of Elizabethan days was to pass away and be lost utterly within half a century but the lyric put forth a second harvest under the tillage of the Caroline poets. Beddoes' inheritance from this quarter was not of the greatest worth. In referring to Beddoes' ¹critical theory of song writing Donner says, ²"for an illustration of it he refers to Shakespeare, Herrick and Suckling, exactly the poets to whom he had himself come nearest, because he had not only learned their craft, but because he had now an emotional life of his own wherewith to animate the form." There is some considerable difference between the lyrics of

Caroline
lyrics

1 Letter to Kelsall, 19/7/1830

2 Donner, p. 282-283

Shakespeare and those of the other two. The joyousness of first song had passed away and a note of insincerity is not infrequently to be detected in the others. There is, in them, the suggestion of the adopting of a pose, of the composition of the lyric as a poetical exercise. The words seem at times to come from the pen not the heart but at their best the lyrics of Herrick, Suckling (and Lovelace) fall little short of the Elizabethan.

The men of the Romantic revival passed over seventeenth century verse to find a more inspiring kinship in the poetry of the previous century; and here their poetic instincts were true. If they did not recapture the full dramatic spirit of more poetic days in its entirety they produced work not a little different from its more immediate successors. Beddoes used to the full whatever the Elizabethans offered in the way of Romance; he was unaffected by that strong element of realism which gives an enduring human and intellectual appeal to the work of the sixteenth century masters.

Elizabethan
inspiration

Donner's introduction stands apart from the rest of his book for he makes therein but occasional references to Beddoes. He becomes specific when he considers the dramas one by one but there the criticism given in detail lacks a broad background. Nevertheless the treatment is far from inadequate in the sense that Snow's criticism is, for he, in turn, dismisses the Elizabethan influence on Beddoes in a page or two.

Elizabethan
influence
considered
by Snow and
Donner

CHAPTER III

Exploration of Beddoes' World.

Though few might weep when the Aegean rose,
Deaf and tumultuous as human kind,
To overwhelm for ever in its close
The purest summits of an Alpine mind,
~~Shaksp~~ has sweet revenge: him crowning grows
Stanzas Written in Switzerland.

By common consent the period of the Romantic Revival in English Literature is considered to take its rise with the publication of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's Lyrical Ballads in 1798. The roots of the movements go much farther back, if indeed it can be said with strict accuracy that the romantic tendency even[^] did die out completely, in the preceding century. There are slight traces of the romantic attitude even in Swift at a time when the streams of romance are usually thought to have dried up. At least one is on safe ground in calling attention to the romantic tendencies in the work of Collins and Gray. In addition Fergusson was preparing the way for Burns, and Percy's Reliques, already referred to, opened up a new province in the kingdom of romance. All these men had broken with the literary canons respected in the first half of the eighteenth century and if they did not enter into the full possession of the coming era it was largely ~~and~~ because their energies were devoted to the creation of the new media of expression which made it possible for their successors to win new victories in the world of poetry.

Origin
of the
Romantic
Revival

All the master workers in the romantic movement were alive during Beddoes' youth and most of them had already done

their best work. Blake was Beddoes' senior by forty-six years; Coleridge was already thirty-one and Wordsworth thirty-three when Beddoes was born; Southey was twenty-nine. Of the younger men who form a distinctly different group both in point of time and in artistic qualities as well, Beddoes was to outlive every one. In this group were Byron, born in 1788, Shelley in 1792 and Keats in 1795. Thus the great poets of the romantic age were living forces throughout the formative period of Beddoes' life.

Beddoes' contemporaries

With Blake Beddoes had in some respects more in common than he had with any of the others. Both were drawn powerfully to a communion with the mystic, both showed an interest in alchemy, and the mental stability of both has been questioned! In speaking of Beddoes' poem, *Doomsday*, Donner says:

Similarities between Blake and Beddoes

¹ "It is prophetic like the poetry of Blake, and the concrete visualization is truer and more real. It is moreover achieved without the aid of the engraver's needle and the painter's brush: it is self-sufficing and complete. Without the mysticism of Jerusalem, it contains all the passion and imagination of Blake's poems. It is negative in its direction, whereas Blake is constructive." Donner might have chosen a better poem to illustrate the resemblance. But he is right in calling attention to the poets' similarities of verse form. ² Blake is somewhat more obscure than Beddoes and his work is more uniformly good. The prophetic nature of Blake's writing also

¹ Donner, p. 262

² Donner, p. 280

marks him as belonging to a world far removed from Beddoes' customary domain.

In his preface to the second edition of the lyrical ballads Wordsworth had presented an apology for his poetic practice. There he had defended his choice of subjects from common life, related in language really used by men and made interesting by the tracing in them of the primary laws of human nature. He had, as well, defined his poetry, and incidentally forecast the poetry of the immediate future, as the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; its origin, so he said, is emotion recollected in tranquillity. At a later date the creed of Wordsworth was, in the main, subscribed to by Coleridge.¹ There was a clarity and simplicity, indeed, a plainness about this poetic theory that Beddoes never fully appreciated, though he held a high opinion of Wordsworth and Coleridge as poets. It is a point which neither Snodgrass nor Donner touches upon. Beddoes had about him considerable of the gorgeous which did not well match Wordsworth's "bleak lucidity of soul."

Wordsworth's
preface to
Lyrical
Ballads

Southey was the epic writer of the period and there was nothing of the grand manner about Beddoes. Southey was too a sort of "domesticated" poet; his life ran the course of the professional man of letters; his laureateship removed him from any common ground of meeting with Beddoes. The influence of Southey upon our poet may be rated at exactly nothing,² although Donner gives to him the partial credit of forming

Southey

1 Coleridge, Biographia Literaria. Chapters XIII and XIV
2 Donner, p. 71

Beddoes' language.

Byron, in the opinion of many, was a capable versifier but no poet, and there is no denying the classic quality of his mind and verse. It scintillates with an apt glibness of phrase and the virility of one who considered himself a match for the world including even the critics. The genius of Beddoes was not of this order. He never walked the busy highways of literature and had no desire to shine as a citizen of the social and literary world. Beddoes, the introvert, yet impatient of others' opinions, shrank instinctively from the somewhat offensively, self-assertive and successful Byron. Beddoes was of the past, Byron of the fashionable present. Byron had nothing that Beddoes appreciated, though in his last years he paid him tribute in "Stanzas Written in Switzerland." There is, of course, the very evident influence of Byron upon Alfarabi but this was in Beddoes' early youth, as ¹Donner points out. He might also have added that the mature Beddoes had nothing but contempt for the worldly successful writers of his own day. It was partly merited contempt and partly pure jealousy.

Byron

Keats drew his inspiration from what he thought Greek but it was not the Greece of antiquity, but the classic world seen through romantic eyes. It is doubtful if Keats had any understanding at all of classic art but he was drawn to the world of myth and legend because of his love of sensuous beauty and his flair for the romantic even where it is not the most conspicuous quality. Beddoes had the classical

Keats

1 Donner, p. 77

knowledge which Keats lacked and probably appreciated the fact that the world was not romantic to Greek eyes whatever may be read into the Greek view of life by a romantic western man. But Keats had other qualities which were of the stuff of which Beddoes was made. He was at home in the warm colouring of mediaevalism; he felt drawn to tales of blood and horror; the supernatural was always within reach. In addition Keats possessed an ability to handle words and if his lyrical quality was not of the very highest, he was skilful in raising up out of the void a convincing world of the imagination.

In view of all this it is somewhat astonishing that Donner does not lay greater stress than he does upon Keats' influence on Beddoes' poetry. He mentions only the influence in the earlier poems, The Improvisatore,¹ The Brides' Tragedy,² and The Romance of the Lily,³ and in the last only because Kelsall has drawn attention to it. Nor do any of Donner's references go beyond drawing attention to minor points of resemblance. It is a pity that Donner did not go deeper into what has all the marks of an interesting and fruitful comparison. Nor is Snow any more satisfactory.

By his own admiration for Shelley and by the more direct method of comparative criticism, the influence of Shelley upon Beddoes is easily recognized. The work of both Keats and Shelley was complete by the time that Beddoes had emerged completely from his poetic chrysalis. Beddoes, at a critical period of development, felt the full impact of Shelley's

1 Donner, p. 72
2 Donner, p. 103 and 106
3 Donner, p. 175, 176

genius. His enthusiasm led him to take a leading part in the publication of the latter's posthumous poetry. Of the drama more will be said later but it was undoubtedly Shelley's supreme mastery of the lyric that aroused the worship of Beddoes. Here was a singer after his own heart, an apostle of beauty, sensitive soul, serious, exalted, one who "had gazed on nature's naked loveliness." In spirit and genius the two had not many qualities in common. One suspects that Shelley was the kind of poet Beddoes would have liked to be; it was the poet in Shelley that Beddoes worshipped, even more than the beloved Cenci. At twenty Beddoes had this to say¹ of Shelley's drama; "To my mind the only error of the Cenci is, that its splendid author seemed to have the Greeks instead of Shakespeare, as his model in his mind's eye: if he had followed the latter, I see no reason why he should not have been the second English dramatist." Yet, as² Denner points out, Shelley is perhaps even more influenced by the Elizabethans than by the Greeks.

Beddoes' opinion of The Cenci

But Shelley lived in an upper world which Beddoes never reached. There was a philosophical and ethereal point of view in Shelley that was beyond Beddoes, a completeness of vision and a depth of personal passion that united him to the eternal. Of the two, only Shelley was capable of "The One remains, the many change and pass," or "I fall upon the thorns of life, I bleed."

¹ Letter to Procter, Oxford, 21/11/1823
² Denner, pp. 9,10

As with Keats so with Shelley Donner fails to get to the depth of the relationship between the work of that poet and Beddoes. He sees glimpses of Shelley in Beddoes' verse¹ and pays tribute to Beddoes' deep admiration for Shelley. But as to the relationship and influence there are in Donner only two significant lines,² "Beddoes remained true to the message of Plato and of Shelley, and it is love that achieves the union of all things;" a similar observation is made in connection with The Brides' Tragedy.³ One would have expected Donner to make much of the Shelleyan influence if not in Beddoes' thought at least in his versification. Nor does Snow do any more than mention Shelley.

Donner
and
Snow on
Shelley's
influence

In a lesser world Beddoes could follow the master. It was Shelley who introduced Beddoes into experimentation in intricate verse forms. Donner points out two or three resemblances⁴. Much of the earlier poetry of Beddoes is quite patently an imitation in that field. One is constrained to remark that it was not so successful as might have been hoped for. In the use of language Shelley had shown the way to make the most of figurative and concrete expressions; it was a new kind of emphasis in the writing of English and peculiarly adapted to the requirements of the lyric form. One recalls such expression of Shelley as, "the loftiest star...pinnacled dim," "purple even melts." "he has outsoared the shadow," "a cloud big with a May shower," or, "the light of thought."

Shelley's
use of
language

1 Donner, p. 72, 119
2 Donner, p. 172
3 Donner, p. 106
4 Donner, p. 177-179

Beddoes employs the same device in "song comes bubbling up," "some cost a passing bell," "the skull that roofed a human soul," "Power that strides across the muttering people" and "a chair that has a kingdom crouching under it."

Beddoes' meta-physical language

The minor poets of his age Beddoes held in outspoken contempt. He could not but realize that their gifts were much less than his own and it irritated him to witness their flood of second-rate poetry spewed upon the reading world. It is a characteristic of a romantic age that the underbrush of literary production is profuse and rank. In a classical ~~sexjournalistic~~ age the second-rate writer sloughs off his efforts in the direction of hackwork, in practical prose of political or journalistic nature or in ephemeral pamphlets upon contemporary life. There is unfortunately in a romantic age an opportunity for every poseur to make his voice heard; true romantic inspiration is so easily simulated as to deceive for a time even the elect. There is lacking, too, a sense of humour, which prevents the ambitious imitator from realizing his own dearth of poetic genius. A notable exception to this bizarre tendency was Scott. With admirable sanity he realized that he was not a poet and saved himself from literary oblivion by turning to the historical novel. Who, now, ever reads *Marmion* or *The Lady of the Lake*? Of others of less rank merely the names survive, or they enjoy an attenuated immortality by reason of some occasional poem which has persisted in the "popular memory. To this class belong Campbell, Rogers, Moore, Leigh Hunt, Landor, Hogg, Bowles, White, de Vere, Darley, Hume, Keed, Fraed and Procter. They retain places in a history of

Romantic literary under-growth

Minor poets of the romantic age

English literature as the background of a literary period and as material, however uninteresting, with which the historian feels he must deal. But from the distance of a hundred years their work assumes very small proportions. What is vastly more important is that Beddoes recognized the mediocrity of men such as these. It takes a poet to recognize a poet. The world might become enthusiastic about Moore or Rogers or any of their kind but the poet in Beddoes saw them at their own little worth.

Beddoes' critical judgment

II

Most significant criticism of the literary qualities of the nineteenth century acted drama is revealed in the history of the literature of that century by Professor Saintsbury.¹ That critic, one to be reckoned with, devotes but half a dozen pages of a sizeable volume to the drama. His treatment may be termed inadequate but it does reveal the comparative worthlessness of the theatrical productions of the first quarter of the century at least.

Saintsbury on nineteenth century drama

There were a number of reasons for this but the most important one is to be found in the social conditions of the period. The coarseness of much of the eighteenth century drama, as a continuation of the restoration period, had resulted in the licensing act of 1737, which was generally enforced until 1843 when freedom of production was allowed to the theatres. The evil effects of this legislation, like such similar legislation conceived with the best of intentions, was

Licensing Act, 1737

¹ Saintsbury, Sir George; A History of Nineteenth Century Literature. tenth edition; Macmillan and Co., London, pp. 437 -444

felt right down through the romantic period. As the production of drama was restricted to two licensed houses there grew up illegitimate drama in various forms; the burlesque, pantomime, ^mbaletta burletta and melodrama among others. Serious dramatic writing declined under the monopoly. The opera, on the other hand, enjoyed a period of growth.

Holcroft at Drury Lane and Colman at Covent Garden were the theatrical magnates of the time. Neither man was of the type to do much for the development of the acted drama along artistic lines. More and more the drama became a show to appeal to the theatre-goer by mechanical stage effects, spectacles, choruses, and music of a sort. In 1802 Holcroft introduced the melodrama, the frank French acceptance of a dramatic form that had always been inherent in true drama and ready to come to the surface with a decline in taste.

Holcroft
and
Colman

Beddoes, too, joined the hue and cry to lay low the villain of bad taste and cheap drama.¹ "There was a new intolerable opera the other night at Covent Garden, with Miss Tree in a nice new pair of white silk pantaloons. Cha^s. Kemble is to come out in Falstaff and they have under cover a new tragedy (Sheil, or Walker or some of those immortals, we conjecture) & credite posterⁱ, a new comedy^y with songs."

The most powerful force in the early part of this period was Kotzebue. In his preface to the lyrical ballads Wordsworth had railed against the "sickly and stupid German Tragedies and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse." But the English love of sentimentalism, always

A. von
Kotzebue

¹ Letter to Kelsall, London, February, 1824.

inherent in the national character, and the really good theatrical "business" in foreign translations and adaptations were overpowering. Kotzebue, to be sure, did not represent the best in the German dramatic literature of the period; he simply has no place beside Lessing, Schiller or Goethe. But he was popular and without popular appeal the stage obviously cannot exist. In brief the core of a Kotzebue romantic drama, for example *Menschenhass und Reue*, produced at Drury Lane in 1798 under the title of *The Stranger*, is a curious inversion of the tragic. The perpetration of evil is pitied and forgiven while the poor victim of the evil influences is left to get over his unenviable situation as best he may.

*Menschenhass
und Reue*

There were translations from the German in large numbers. Scott had translated *Götz von Berlichingen* in 1799 - neither Goethe nor Scott at his best. Even Sheridan had a hand in the production of Kotzebue's *Die Spanier in Peru*. Matthew Lewis, who had already achieved fame with his Gothic romances, was one of Kotzebue's ~~best~~ translators and himself the author of several dramas in the new German style. *The Castle Spectre* was produced at Drury Lane in 1797, *Adelman* in 1801. The picture of Early nineteenth century English tragedy is quite incomplete with full reference to Kotzebue. Such reference is necessary to show the wide divergence between the literary and acted drama of the period. He affected Beddoes in a purely negative way yet that would seem to have been no reason for his neglect by both Snow and Donner.

German
drama in
translations

The greatest native force in this period of the drama was Joanna Baillie (1762-1851). Her twenty-eight Plays of

the Passions that cover the years 1798 to 1812, each in turn, attempt to reduce drama to the elucidation of a single human passion. Here was a real attempt at a regeneration of the drama but failure was inescapable because of an artificiality of manner, lack of acquaintance with the practicabilities of the stage and the use of a kind of bastard Elizabethan language. Byron, Campbell and Scott accorded her praise that would never come from a modern.

Joanna
Baillie

In view of the sorry spectacle presented by the English theatre in the last decade of the eighteenth and the early years of the nineteenth century it is not surprising that men of first rate genius could find little place there. Wordsworth's *The Borderers* was rejected by both Drury Lane and Covent Garden. Coleridge had rather more success. His *Oserio* was rejected in 1798 but, rewritten under the title *Remorse*, it was first produced at Drury Lane in 1819. As literature, both plays were superior to those of the Kotzebue school; as theatre they were decidedly inferior, for although they drew their inspiration from Schiller they suffered from indirection and abstraction. Likewise Southey, Scott, Godwin and Lamb failed to turn their abilities to successful dramatic composition.

Dramas
of
Wordsworth
and
Coleridge

Byron's dramatic work was somewhat more extensive. Of several dramas which he wrote only *Werner* and *Marino Faliero* received stage presentation during his lifetime. They were received with the criticism of their too much talk and too little action. Never did Beddoes write more acute and truthful criticism than in his remarks on the old drama; "Say what

Byron's
Werner
and
Marino Faliero

Beddoes'
criticism
of dramatic
reproductions

1 Letter to Kelsall, Clifton, 11/1/1825

you will — I am convinced the man who is to awaken the drama must be a bold trampling fellow — no creeper into worm-holes — no reviser even — however good. These reanimations are vampire-cold. Such ghosts as Marlow, Webster &⁶ are better dramatists, better poets, I dare say, than any contemporary of ours — but they are ghosts — the worm is in their pages — & we want to see something that our great-grandfathers did not know. With the greatest reverence for all the antiquities of the drama, I still think that we had better beget than revive — of its own, & only raise a ghost to gaze on, not to live with — just now the drama is a haunted ruin.¹ The thought is continued. "And yet I believe that the destined man would break through all difficulties and re-establish what ought to be the most distinguished department of our poetic literature; but perhaps enough has already been done, and we ought to be content with what times past have laid up for us." Yet Beddoes forgot his wisdom when he wrote his own plays.

The attempts of early nineteenth century men of genius to revive the glories of the Elizabethan drama had failed. Had they been possessed of worldly wisdom they would not have nursed any vain hopes of getting stage production for romantic drama of even a high order. Had they been men of less genius and respect for art they would have turned out abundant material to rival the drama of the Kotzebue school. As it is one must turn to the unacted dramas of Byron and

Failure
of Elizabethan
revivals

¹ Letter to Procter, Göttingen, 9/10/1826

Shelley to discover anything, which belongs to the period, of permanent artistic value in that art form. The one ^{completed} attempt of Keats may be passed over for he wrote in ~~mere~~ merely what had been outlined by another after the fashion of a sampler.

Otho the
Great;
Keats and
Charles
Brown

Byron's Manfred, Cain, and the slighter Heaven and Earth were drama in the traditional poetic fashion. That they were far from the actual poetic drama of the past is revealed immediately by even a superficial comparison of the two. Such work as Byron's gains nothing by stage production; on the printed page and in the mind of the reader is all the life of which they are capable. Why endure the tedium of a theatre when the play may be read comfortably at home? In Cain and in Heaven and Earth Byron returned to the pre-Elizabethan mystery play to secure a form for his drama. Outward form and a name are about all he did secure. There is nothing new here. The life and thought of one generation cannot be clothed with the garments of an earlier age. The central thought of Cain, the defiance and rebellion of a turbulent and assertive spirit against the external world of form and convention is worth writing about and it did reveal one aspect of the romantic movement. Manfred, which Byron called a dramatic poem, is no more than an a novel in verse and as such vastly inferior to Mazeppa or The Bride of Abydos. What these untheatrical writers of drama never saw and never could see was that they were imposing shackles and limitations upon their expression resulting alike in the failure to produce either good drama or good reading.

Manfred,
Cain,
Heaven
and Earth

It was Shelley who wrote the greatest drama of his age.

And that drama was unactable in a public performance. The rejection of *The Cenci* by the Drury Lane theatre was the only possible answer which the age could give to a poet who revealed his own amusing naïveté in offering it. But it is good drama. It has definitelyactable qualities. There is movement, there is conflict, there is vivid contrast, and the play moves to a climax with the unfolding of character and the development of plot. Here again the artistic instinct of Beddoes was true. It is probably the one piece of literature which made an enduring impression upon him. The Prometheus subject was one that struck a responsive chord in the romantics; they all took themselves very seriously. The Prometheus Unbound of Shelley is the poetic expression of the triumph of man's ideal nature. In his preface to this lyrical drama Shelley had expressed the opinion that the great writers of his age were "the companions and forerunners of some unimagined change in our social condition." The social changes did come but the spirit of man did not change. "Caelum nonanimum mutant qui trans mare currant."

Shelley's
The Cenci

Prometheus
Unbound

In addition to these poetic and dramatic movements that were part of Beddoes' boyhood and youth and whose influence upon him is ignored by both Snow and Donner, there remained the novel as another form of literary art which was not quite beyond his world. While a schoolboy Beddoes had written several prose tales of which there remains only *Scaroni*, or *The Mysterious Cave*. The prose tales that were to have formed a part of *The Ivory Gate* were suppressed by Keisall and Browning. Even Dykes Campbell who laboriously made copies of almost

The novel
Scaroni

everything in the Browning Box transcribed only scraps of the prose narratives. Thus far the novel had little influence upon Beddoes' best work as far as the conception of literary medium was concerned. But it did have an effect on his thought and the subject matter of his work. His Death's Jest-Book is nearer, essentially, to the novel than it is to the drama. It received its form from tradition, for Beddoes like the other young romantics, was tied to the conception of five-act poetic drama in spite of their protestations of freedom. But to return to the novel.

Influence
on Beddoes

It was an age of feminine authorship. In no period, before or since, were there five women who held such a pre-eminent, even if not permanent, place in the literary world as did Burney, Austen, Radcliffe, Edgeworth and Baillie. The romantic in life and literature is definitely feminine. From the half-classic Burney, Beddoes learned nothing; of Austen he was probably not aware and one can hardly conceive of his aunt's everyday novels having much effect upon the aloofness of Beddoes romanticism. They were not joined by ties of poetry. Their lifelong connection was based on ties of blood not literary tastes impulses.

Women
writers

It was to Gregory Lewis and Mrs. Ann Radcliffe that Beddoes owed his freedom in handling mystery and horror for these two, following Horace Walpole's Castle of Otranto, had created the School of Terror in the English novel. Scaroni is nothing but an imitation; it, in fact, serves only to obscure the later greatness of the poet and would be better omitted from his works. It shows the sort of thing that was compatible

Gothic
novel

School
of Terror

to the boy of fifteen but which was to find better expression in the *Improvisatore*. To be sure, the purely physical horror and material mystery of the school of terror are necessarily of a lower order of appeal than when one applies the same media to the higher realm of mind and soul but the thrillers of that day gave utterance to a revolt against the humdrumness and pettiness of prose that represented the classic tradition of form without any of its intellectual content. On a popular level it was a manifestation of romance.

Popular
romance

¹ Donner points out the very obvious influence of the Terror School upon Scaroni. He follows it up with a comparison of Leopold, in *The Improvisatore*, to the fantastic beings² ³ that peopled the novels of horror. Donner thinks the peaceful death of Lenora, contrasted with the death-agony of Hesperus in *The Brides' Tragedy*, to be a reflection of Monk Lewis. Floribel in the same play⁴ is said to resemble one of Monk Lewis' female characters in her rustic innocence. On all these points Snow is silent.

Compari-
sons by
Donner

III

The influence of French romanticism in the person of Mme. de Staël and the more restrained Chateaubriand is imper-⁵ceptible in Eddoes. Donner thinks there may be a de Staël

French
romantic
influence

- 1 Donner, p. 60
- 2 Donner, p. 65
- 3 Donner, p. 92
- 4 Donner, p. 97
- 5 Donner, p. 61

influence in the effect of Corinne upon Beddoes' Scaroni. It is doubtful. Chateaubriand's writings on the Church might have done Beddoes some good, but he could only despise the man who held high political office under a monarch. They represented a conflict with closely held conventions of literary expression which had never been so religiously held in England. They wrote too with a background of the repression of the individual which was not so observable in Beddoes' generation. In addition they laid stress on human sympathies and democratic principles which, except during his political activities, did not mean much to Beddoes. During the important years Beddoes lived in the shadows; political and social freedom were then but abstractions to him, to be sympathetically recognized as desirable but not the main issues in life.

Chateaubriand

Mme.
de Staël

If France had any influence at all on Beddoes it was through Rousseau's doctrine interpreted and practised by his grandfather Edgeworth. And even that influence was but Rousseau in part for Edgeworth had come under the spell of Emile and not the Contrat Social. Emile was revolutionary enough in its thought and written with an air of logic and reason to appeal to such a man as Edgeworth. One is apt to lose sight of its absurdities in the apparent force of its argument and the novelty of its material. In writing to Kelsall about his Pygmalion, Beddoes ~~he~~ refers to Rousseau's work on the same subject and deprecates any comparison of his own with what he considers the better piece of writing. The two have in common

Rousseau

Edgeworth

Beddoes'
Pygmalion

1 Letter to Kelsall, London, 27/2/1829

1

nothing but the outline of the story. As Donner says "we must not look to Rousseau's jejune ballet text for an explanation of Pygmalion."

IV

The influence of German romanticism was evident at an early stage of Beddoes' career. Goethe he seems never to have fully appreciated.² "I never felt so much disgust or much more admiration for any poet than for this Goethe, as I read thro' it — & I believe everyone who reads all his works, must have this double feeling of contempt of & delight in him — both nearly measureless — but he has no principle; in thinking of Schiller, you have more to admire than the paper he has written on."³ "a nearer acquaintance with Goethe has inclined me to rate him much lower than I had anticipated; out of his works w^h fill pretty fatly some 80 vols — not like Mr. Colburns in capacity of page — 3 at most contain what is really good."

German
romanti-
cism

Goethe

⁴ "Goethe is preparing a new edition of his rhymed & prosy commission, XXX, vols for 10 dollars: who'll buy, who'll buy? They are as cheap as oysters if not so swallowable." The men whom he names as his mentors were Schiller, Tieck and Schelling. The Philosophic Letters of Schiller he had translated in his last year at Oxford; in them Beddoes found an expression of a soul conflict that bore somewhat of a resemblance to his own disquietude. To Tieck, according to Donner,

Schiller
on Tieck,
Schelling

1 Donner, P. 174

2 Letter to Kelsall, London, April (?) 1825

3 Letter to Kelsall, Cassel, 29/9/1825

4 Letter to Kelsall, Göttingen, 5/10/1826

he owed the lesson of Dramatic Irony and to Schelling a refinement of the romantic in the form of mysticism.

Snow sums up the influence of these men as follows:

¹ "Schiller and Goethe along with Tieck are the three German writers most frequently mentioned in Beddoes' correspondence. And that Beddoes should turn to Tieck was equally to be expected. It was Tieck's interest in the Elizabethans that first drew Beddoes to him, and he continued throughout his life to respect the man as a Shakespearian critic. But he promptly turned to Tieck's original work, delighting in him first for 'a vein of gentle tonic humour which never lets one sleep; he is never very strong or deep, but altogether displays more general power as a dramatist than any of the more celebrated Germans.' Three years later comes the significant admission. 'I have learned much from his writings, from him and Wieland more than (from) any German writer'." Snow also notes that Beddoes borrowed several episodes from Schiller's The Ghost-Seer for his Death's Jest-Book. The importance of this source is discounted by Donner who finds a close resemblance between the conjuring scene in Death's Jest-Book and Act 2, scene 1 of The Indian Emperor. Both sources were likely known to Beddoes.. Donner speaks of Schiller only in connection with Beddoes' translation of his Philosophische Briefe. To Schelling he shows that Beddoes owed his mysticism.

Snow's
criticism

¹ Snow, p. 164,165

² Snow, p. 167

³ Donner, footnote, 217

⁴ Donner, p. 180

⁵ Donner, P. 211,283,332

In Donner's estimation Tieck was a greater influence on Beddoes¹ than either of the others. He says: "He soon found Tieck congenial and came to prefer him to any other German author. The passages in Death's Jest-Book that betray his influence are by no means few or unimportant."² "His tendency to self-castigation had made Beddoes particularly responsive to the kind of wit practised by Tieck under the name of Romantic Irony. This wit strove to demonstrate the author's superiority even over his own work, and has its philosophical foundation in Fichte's doctrine of the ego....The passages^a of Romantic Irony are numerous, and it is significant that several were introduced only when he was transcribing the play in MS II....It is purely intellectual wit, which admirably served Beddoes as an instrument of laughter. There can be no doubt that he learned the dramatic use of it from Tieck, but curiously enough it does not introduce an entirely new note in English drama. In the inductions and epilogues to Elizabethan plays such wit was common, and there was not a little of it in the masques so frequently introduced into the works of the Elizabethan dramatists." Yet there is doubt and for the very reason which Donner mentions in his last sentence and besides Beddoes had made use of irony of the sort in his letters, if nowhere else, long before he became acquainted with Tieck.

Romantic
irony

Beddoes'
use of
irony

Though he was drawn to Germany by a feeling of spiritual kinship with the writers living there then, in addition to the more practical purpose of studying medicine, yet neither the country nor its authors did anything to change the main

Slight
influence
of Ger-
man liter-
ature

¹ Donner, p. 198

² Donner, p. 241, 242

trend of Beddoes' development. That had been laid down years before in the days of *The Brides' Tragedy* and in fact the significance of Beddoes' work derives from the English rather than the German period in his life. The literary atmosphere of early nineteenth century literature was congenial to him; he did not draw sustenance from it.

Snow sums up the whole question in an excellent paragraph with which one must feel eager to agree.¹ "But Beddoes had learned from Tieck and Wieland, or so he says, and that raises the whole question of what Beddoes the poet got out of Germany. An elaborate thesis may some day be made out for the influence of German Romanticism upon Beddoes, but one may well doubt if it will go much further than externalities. A maturing mind rather than a geographic location is responsible for the differences between *Death's Jest-Book* and *The Brides' Tragedy*. Preceding chapters should have made abundantly clear the processes which were going on in Beddoes' mind, and the migration to Germany, drastic as it was in its effect on his daily life, was a step rather than a revolution. ~~Several~~ Processes were completed in Germany which were begun earlier and it would be misleading to ascribe them to German influence." Here we may safely let the question rest.

Snow's
summary

V

Beddoes' life covered almost the whole romantic period. With the forces and movements that make up that extraordinary

1 Snow, p. 165, 166

period he was in essential harmony but he was not a constituent part of them. On the political plane the forces of romanticism brought about an assertion of the individual's rights and privileges as contrasted with control by the state, which was denied a separate existence and regarded as the sum total of the citizens of a country. There is much talk of liberty but little of duty. In England the political agitation culminated in one direction in the Reform Bill of 1832. The movement toward the abolition of monarchy was abortive.

Romantic
influence
on poli-
tics

There was a half-religious and half-scientific movement toward a recognition of the world of nature in addition to the world of social forces. It was not a return to nature; nature had always been a subject for consideration by writers of all ages. The nature poetry of Crabbe runs right into the period of romance. Rather was it a new conception of nature. Wordsworth led the way with his belief in the spiritual influence of natural objects; it was found also in the return to the classic conception of nature as personified deity by Keats and Shelley. Byron expressed the popular viewpoint of a mingling with the universe in his lines, "there is a pleasure in the pathless woods." Its practical influence was voiced by Rousseau in Emile. With the extended view of man's association with the universe beyond the momentary and the local there came about a new sort of interest in history and in distant lands.

The
Romantic
belief

Snow has noted an important trait in Beddoes in this

connection. He says ¹ "There is, also, little in Beddoes' work of nature description; he worked rather with the landscape of the soul. The letters, however, hold just enough of such passages to show his sensitiveness to the gracious world. But it took Italy to spur him to expression. Passing through Savoy up to Cranberry in the time of the spring flowers, and then over the Alps into Italy, he came upon the fire-fly — and upon an Italian evening." Snow then refers to a letter of Beddoes' written at this time — ² "Last night the clouds had unrolled from the mountains, which were themselves as visionary as clouds; the 'roof of the blue Italian weather' was here and there decorated by a tapestried vapour, silver or pale gold, gathered up among the stars and slowly toiling along the calm air. The sun fell quietly behind the Alps, and the moment he touched them, it appeared that all the snows took fire and burned with a scarrescent brilliancy." The lack of description of nature in Beddoes' poetry is something unexpected in a romantic. What little there is in it is deftly worked in by phrases or single lines.

Snow on
Beddoes'
interest
in nature

There grew up a distrust of the intellect as a guide to truth. What was felt and experienced rather than what was learned as logical deduction became the material of knowledge. True, there were embarrassing contradictions in the theory — the French Revolution had witnessed the deification of Reason, for example. As the new political and social theories ushered in the conception of bolshevism, the rule of the majority —

Distrust
of intel-
lect

Bolshevism

¹ Snow, p. 158

² Letter to Procter, Milan, 8/6/1824

whether the majority comprised the minimum of intellect did not matter--so the exaltation of perception and intuition brought about a strengthening of feminine influences. Formerly only the most masculine of women made any impression upon the world; now the feminine in man came into prominence.

Feminism

The change in the mode of outlook and thinking brought new subject matter into literature. ^{the} The hero conception rose on the shoulders of individualism; "the Byronic hero," the gentleman with a shady and mysterious past, not too deeply buried, a sigh on his lips, tearful in some degree, rather fiery in disposition, rebellious in temperament, much concerned with love and the other tender emotions--we meet him again and again in the literature of the romantics; his name has become a byword. He is a distinctly feminine hero. Donner has pointed out the Byroniclike nature of Beddoes' heroes in his earlier work.

The hero in
romantic
literature

Literature left the earth and if it did not always reach a heaven it achieved a pseudo-ethereal existence of fancy in a world of imaginative scenery. It was supposed to have banished "superstition" in religion yet it revelled in the display of the supernatural and mysterious. Human character was no longer to be judged on moral or ethical principles but upon exigency and sentiment.

Imaginative
qualities

Formlessness and inexactitude of thought were reflected in the breaking down of accepted canons of prosody and in prose a rhythmical element superseded the former stateliness of latinized periods. The new rhetoric gave grace and movement ^{to} of the written word but it abandoned

New rhetoric

accuracy of expression, lucidity, and orderly coherence.

These are the dominant features of early nineteenth century English romance but there is rather less of all this in Beddoes and rather more of other qualities than one would be inclined, at first, to believe. He did not stand apart from his age in the sense that Landor did, yet one cannot accept without reservation his inclusion in the age of the romantic revival. The reasons for Beddoes' little influence in his own day are obvious, those for the little influence of his immediate world upon himself are not so clear and yet an explanation, even if not wholly satisfactory, is desirable.

Beddoes
and the
romantic age

The easiest explanation that might suggest itself is that Beddoes was simply not in touch with the literary productions of the period. But an examination of both internal and external evidence shows this not to be the case. The numerous references in his letters to contemporary writers shows that he had read almost every author who was then writing, or at least kept himself informed of what was being published. After a twelve years' residence on the continent during which ^{he} had cut himself off almost entirely from English associations he wrote ¹"What is Cosmo dei Medici? Paracelsus? Strafford? and Sergeant Talfourd's Ion or John?" ² Browning, ironically enough, was years later, to play a strange role in the preservation of Beddoes' poetry. Horne and Talfourd were men of some consequence in their

Acquaintance
with
contemporary
literature

1 Letter to Kelsall, Zurich, 15/5/1837

2 R. H. Horne's Cosmo de Medici came out in 1837, Browning's Paracelsus in 1835 and Strafford in 1837, Talfourd's Ion in 1835.

day. True, the man of letters, unlike the man of science, does not need to keep abreast of what is new in his particular field but ordinarily he is affected either positively or negatively by what is being written around him. Nor does it destroy any but the weaker originality. The minors he despised but he speaks in praise of Coleridge, Wordsworth and, most of all, Shelley. But the fact remains that their influence upon him was inconsiderable.

It may be that he was too close to the writers of romance to be affected by them. Shelley and Keats had died during Beddoes' early period and Byron was soon to follow but the other romantics lived on for decades. Moreover the most difficult phase of literary appreciation is to attempt to appraise the age in which one lives. One sees only the event, is not always sure of its origin and cannot foretell what future development may take place. Beddoes in his best work is far from being a mere imitator. He could and did follow the broad outlines of a whole phase of literary production; he was not capable of walking in any one man's footsteps.

Beddoes not
an imitation

Beddoes possessed a poetic mind, high in intellectual range and power, and exhibited considerable individuality of character. In these respects he was the equal of the great men of his day and superior to such popular writers as Moore and Procter. One does not learn much from one's equals. The poetic drama of his time rose from the Elizabethan age; Beddoes and his contemporaries in dramatic writing of the poetic order had drunk from the same stream, and there,

Individuality

and not in mutual influences are to be found nearly all the qualities they had in common.

VI

In one respect Beddoes was vastly different from the other writers of his time. He early acquired, and continued to hold through all his days, a curious death complex. He seemed to be positively fascinated by the subject. It was not the obsession of melancholy; that was a strain that had come down through Burton, Browne, Young, and others. Beddoes was eternally considering death as the gateway of a new life, in a way not in accordance with Christian doctrine. It was the perplexing question in a letter to Kelsall in 1827, quoted on page 21. He was ready to begin life in another world before he had naturally finished with this. This enquiring attitude of mind caused him constant unrest. It was a tendency of romance, that, pushed to its uttermost limit, brings despair because of the insolubility of the problem without divine inspiration. It drove Beddoes to suicide.

Beddoes' death complex

The recognition of this obsession as a controlling force in the life of Beddoes is tantamount to a declaration of his narrowness of mental outlook. It is here that the weakness of Beddoes lies, both in artistic conception and expression. He was apart from his age in a special and unusual sense but it would be truer to say that he stood apart from life. There was always that impenetrable armour

Fatal weakness of Beddoes

Introversion

between Beddoes and the world. In turn all the interests and movements of the romantic revival exerted their pressure upon him but they never broke through to seize enthusiastically the heart and mind of the man. Only the romantic aspect of Elizabethan drama gave unconditioned stimulus to his genius.

Personal relationships were with Beddoes few. He never seems to have had anyone, unless it was Zoë King, to whom he could disclose his mind and his aspirations. The schizoid temperament, and such definitely was Beddoes', never allows the inner man to scale the wall of reserve that hides him from the world. On occasions of gaiety and light-heartedness the reserve seems to break down, the mind seems to engage in confidences, but actually the secret life is never exposed. Both Kelsall and Procter saw Beddoes on occasions when there was a song in his heart but they never saw the inner recesses of his mind. One comes closest to it in his letters and in a poem or two; there is just a hint there of the awful realization of mental illness, of the real significance of the death obsession. Always was Kelsall the loyal, industrious and worshipping servant to Beddoes. He collected his poetry, he importuned him to continue writing, he ventured an opinion on things literary, he praised his idol, sometimes to Beddoes' mild annoyance. He never knew the Beddoes who took his own life. And if Kelsall never reached that other Beddoes through the darkness of his mind certainly no one else ever did. His relations with Procter were of a different sort. Procter belonged to that successful period in Beddoes' life—successful from the point of view of

Personal
relationships

Reserve

worldly recognition. They met in London on the common footing of literary acclaim; the character of neither affected the work of the other. Procter's poetry had no effect on Beddoes' writing; certainly there is no trace of any influence in the contrary direction. Procter's criticism was sought and given on many occasions but his criticism went little further than references to the mechanics of Beddoes' art. It is not uncharitable to say that neither Kelsall nor Procter ever understood what Beddoes was trying to express.

Bryan
Procter

And substantially the same may be said of his few other personal acquaintances—friends, one can hardly call them. Dr. King, probably, turned his mind in the direction of Germany and reinforced his leaning to the study of medicine. The doctor's daughter, Zoë, seems to have enjoyed a relationship that was something more than a mere association with her father's guest. But any thought of love between them seems to have been entirely out of question. As far as we know there were no love passages of any sort in Beddoes' life. There was no one in his family capable of understanding the poet, not even his aunt, the novelist. Indeed, they had an aversion of a sort to whatever poetry Thomas might write. It was natural that they should so regard his efforts. Works of science, translations, these would have been acceptable and a cause for pride, but poetry, well, one could never just be sure what sort of poetry would come from that individual in the family whose mind, to say the least, was uncertain.

Zoë King

Beddoes'
family

The men with whom he was associated in Germany—

there seem to have been no women--affected only Beddoes the student, physician and amateur politician. He was a bit proud of his seclusion, too. Writing to Kelsall he said,¹ "You'd be quite delighted to see how I disguise myself here: no human being w^d imagine that I was anything but the most stoical, prosaic, dull anatomist! Unless one except the Russian Jew, Bernard Reich, with whom he lived at Göttingen and Würzburg, there is not even any mention of them in connection with his poetry. The two worlds were held distinct. The political leaders at Würzburg indirectly brought about the writing of some German prose and verse but they were no more the expression of the poet Beddoes than were his political speeches. It is significant that Beddoes' only clash with his contemporary world of action was a violent one. It is always so with the psychopath of a cycloid and isolated disposition.

Beddoes'
two worlds

VII

To recall Beddoes' connection with German and Swiss politics reminds one that the strongest single force upon English literature of the romantic revival was that of politics. The whole age lay in the shadow of the French revolution. It is curious that Beddoes was so little affected by the political forces of his English days, until one reflects upon Beddoes' absorption in Elizabethan studies and more particularly upon political events in England between 1820 when the poet was seventeen, and 1825, when he left England at the age of twenty-two. Those four years were

English
politics

1 Letter to Kelsall, Göttingen, 1/4/1826.

remarkable for the cessation of radical political agitation in England. All the tumult and disorder of the first nineteen years of the century came to an unexpected end in the Manchester riots of 1819. The mad Luddite smashing of machinery, the bitter disputes over the Corn Laws, the question of unemployment, the open talk of revolution, all these were transfused through the minds of political dabblers and emerged as hysterical cries for Freedom and Liberty. Byron was influenced by it but in him it took the direction of participation in the war for Greek independence. Shelley, with little credit to his genius and none to his art, had written his Peter Bell the Third, inveighing against the whole established order of England. His screaming satires of 1819, The Masque of Anarchy and two or three others, lack the humour by which satire is raised to the level of literature.

Political
quiet

The communists of the day were heavily repressed in 1819 by the Six Acts of Lord Liverpool's administration. The Tory government was fortified with the acquisition of Canning, Peel, and Huskisson and the gold standard was restored. All was quiet until the financial crisis of 1825-26 but by that time Beddoes was at Göttingen and immersed in study.

The age of Beddoes was glorious in fields other than literature. Architecture, it is true, had fallen on evil days; an age of warfare, military or social is not conducive to building and besides, coincident with the decline of Baroque and Rococo, the rise of the neo-classic or Empire style was not an original or vital development. But art in England was enriched by the landscape work of Constable and

Architecture

Art

Turner and the animal studies of Landseer, all thoroughly romantic impulses. On the continent, Beethoven, Chopi , Schumann, Schubert, Paganini, von Weber, Liszt and Wagner carried the romantic spirit into the world of music.

Music

All these distinctly new and excellent advances in arts allied to poetry were without any articulate effect on Beddoes. His poetry rose from the impulse of Elizabethan romanticism upon a mind that in its creative aspects was singularly apart from the interests of his generation.

CHAPTER IV

The Critics' Appreciation

But never hope to learn the alphabet
In which the hieroglyphic human soul
More changeably is painted than the rainbow
Upon the cloudy pages of a shower,
Whose thunderous hinges a wild wind doth turn.

Death's Jest-book, III, iii, 91-95.

I

"THERE ought to be a law" compelling the destruction by his literary executor, of the early poems and fragmentary work of a poet. What but depreciation has Shelley ever won from Queen Mab or the Posthumous fragments of Margaret Nicholson? It is so with Beddoes. By what right does an editor send into the world a volume of verse and drama trailing after it the chorion and placenta of its birth? Yet the latest edition¹ of Beddoes' works is swollen to include such trifling doggerel as St. Dunstan, Within a Bower of Eglantine, The New Born Star, and thirty pages of fragments. These are embarrassing to an admirer of the poet and not exactly sporting editorship. They reveal, it is true, the early bent of the poet's mind, the foreshadowings of lyrical

Beddoes'
early
work.

1 The Works of Thomas Lovell Beddoes, edited with an introduction by H. W. Donner, Oxford University Press, London 1935, lxiv, p. 834.

ability, the almost unbelievable tangle of metre and imagery, but one does not make calls either socially or poetically until the poet has breakfasted, so to speak.

The Hymn from Scaroné, or The Mysterious Cave, has survived by inclusion in that tale which is nothing more nor less than amusing. It shows only that Beddoes had read his Macbeth. Both the idea and metre of the Hymn, yelled out by the diabolical assembly to the accompaniment of "bloodred lightning", "claps of thunder", and "a shower of hot blood", are borrowed from the cauldron song of the witches in Act IV of Macbeth. There are faint, faint traces of Shelley and Shakespeare in these early rhymes; the influence of Byron is observable in the rhapsodical fragment, Alfarabi. Alfarabi, who thought this life something deeper than a jest, searched into its roots not by logic or metaphysics but by the light of his own mind. He stole Sleep's mount, a donkey with a pair of wings, and flew to the very boundary and brim of the whole universe, forgotten by the omnipotent. Then are called up "the dead and the swart powers,"

Hymn from
Scaroni

Alfarabi

That dealt the mallet when this world of ours
Lay quivering on the anvil in its ore.--¹

"Magician, Londs, and Co." set to work to fashion a new world. This done the world is spun off into the "abyssal blueness" and by a bearded sage is named Georgium Sidus. Here the poem ends abruptly. Beddoes hesitated before the gigantic task of satirizing a whole nation. The fragment is not entirely worthless. The general conception of the poem is

¹ Alfarabi, ll.140,141.

amusing; there is a dash and vigour about it: the imagination is good, but it suffers, not only from being a fragment, but from the excessive luxuriousness of the imagery. In the language of art it is a bit of a daub. The similes are ingenious and effective.

Donner¹ has a line or two in his criticism which are simply not understandable. "He is serious at heart and may have set out to write a deep metaphysical poem perhaps even to rival Cain." But the whole conception and execution of the fragment are utterly different from Cain. The very significance of the poem, and it has a value from a critical viewpoint, lies in its satirical attitude toward the world, which Alfarabi made. As a youth, with Alfarabi before him, Beddoes stood at the parting of the ways. Had he continued in the vein of this poem he might have followed in the path of Swift or Butler but he turned aside, never walking the road again except occasionally in his later verse. The satirical powers turned inward, the death obsession got hold of him and Beddoes wrote a Death's Jest-Book instead of a rhymed Gulliver's Travels or another Hudibras. One is astonished that Donner did not observe the critical place that Alfarabi held in Beddoes' life and art.

The meaning
of Alfarabi

The poem suffers from the failure of its metre. Rhyme seems almost indispensable for work of this sort as Donner points out and rhyme the poem lacks. However, the sprightliness of it is maintained by the carrying over of thought from line to line and the occasional unaccented

1 Donner, p.77.

extra syllables at the end of the lines. More remarkable are the parenthetic comments of the poet, in satiric or playful mood. One needs only to recall that Byron had published Beppo in 1818 to discover where Beddoes learned these tricks of versification. The subject is the perennial one evoked by the emergence of ^afirst-rate intellect into his world - How? and Why? There is no answer; there is no end to the poem. One does not expect youth to answer an unanswerable question but with Beppo before him it is surprising that his verses were no better. Seventeen years later Beddoes was to write, "what the devil is Alfarabi?"

Versification

The Improvisatore, in Three Fyttes, with Other Poems was Beddoes' first published work, if we omit the Comet which had been printed in a newspaper two years previously. "How I envy you the pleasure of dissecting & laughing at such a grotesque fish as the Improvisatore." So Beddoes wrote five years later. This volume of 1821, with its title both ambitious and apologetic took its motto from Webster's Appius and Virginia.

The Improvisatore

I have sung
With an unskillfull, but a willing voice.

Fytte is, of course, derived from the Angle-Saxon, "fitt", a song. The first fyttē relates the love story of Albert and Emily, not exactly romantic names, by the way. The Knight calls for a song

Albert
and
Emily

- 1 Letter to Kelsall, Zürich, 15/5/1837
- 2 Letter to Kelsall, Göttingen, 1/4/1826

Breathing the love of ladies bright
And virtue high and sorrow deep 1
Till music's self shall seem to weep:

The "songster wight" is obedient to the command and,

First tuned his lyre, then danged along
Amid the mazy paths of song. ²

And a mazy path it is indeed. ³ Snow finds that, "It is
worth noticing, nonetheless, how this ineffectual Impro-
visatore relates to Beddoes' later work."

"But, following the lurid physicalism of the battlefield scenes,
the return of Leopold after centuries, bringing death to the
mortal maiden he loved, is the spectre then of Beddoes'
best work - that fatal impingement of the other world upon
this. And "Albert and Emily" is but the reduction to the
maudlin of the theme of contrasted dirge and hymeneal which
he later used so often." But he does not notice "how this
ineffectual Improvisatore relates to Beddoes' later work."

Snow's
estimate

Nor does Donner do much better. He says ⁴ "The Impro-
visatore is only the immature and hurried performance of
a boy, full of love of poetry and impatient to try his
hand at it. It is sentimental, naïve, and sensational in
content, and careless, crude, and exaggerated in execution.
But it is the performance of a boy, gifted in no usual
degree with poetical powers, and we read it for the real
promise it contains of better things to come." There is
no appreciation whatever of the meaning of the poem but in

- 1 II, 40, 42
- 2 II, 53, 54
- 3 Snow, p. 22
- 4 Donner, p. 72

another passage Donner almost catches the thought that lies within it. It is a pity that he did not push to final completion his argument in the following,¹ "The reader may judge for himself whether the following lines do not plainly foreshadow the poetry that was to flow from Beddoes' pen in later years and whether it does not stand even nearer to that poetry than to Leopold.

Comparison
of Leopold
with Beddoes'
later work

What is this life, that spins so strangely on
That, ere we grasp and feel it, it is gone?
Is it a vision? Are we sleeping now
In the sweet sunshine of another world?
Is all that seems but a sleep-conjured ghost,
And are our blindfold senses closely curled,
Our powerful minds pent up in this frail brow
But by our tyrant fancy? Are we a groping host
Of sleepers gazing in this twilight gleam,
Unconscious dupes of some thought-peopled dream?

Such is the question, and the answer comes, metrically as in other respects, in a completeness which is hardly to be expected from so young a poet.

But I shall think no more, lest haply I,
If I err'd on in thought's dim wilderness,
And scared myself with shadows ne'er should die,
But my astounded soul might petrify
And freeze into time-scoffing stoniness.

These are the very problems of Pygmalion, the Second Brother, and Death's Jest-Book."

But it is perhaps idle to criticize either Snow or Donner and least of all, Beddoes, until we have examined in some detail the three fyttes. Is it² "as fantastic in its conception as in language and imagery?" Let us see. Albert and Emily are discovered lying on a daisy-chequered

1 Donner, p. 67

2 Donner, p. 64

turf in a motionless valley of flowers, streams and perfume. She has "beauteous, melting blue" eyes, a bosom "responsive to her lover's sighs," and a "music-winged voice." "Imperial thought sate on his lofty brow," and although Albert had a "feminine face" yet there is often-times "a proud swift flash of lightning in his lowering eye." The slumber of these two is disturbed by "the war-cry of the heavens." Frightened by the storm, Emily with some difficulty awakens Albert, who evidently was a sound sleeper not to be roused by the "dismal roar" and "the deafening ~~xxx~~ notes." However he is wakened and carries Emily - romantic ladies in such circumstances lose the power of self-locomotion - to the shelter of an oak. Then comes a flash of lightning, "a deep and roaring grave of fire," and poor Albert is killed. Not so Emily, although her head was "nestled in his vest." The next morning the bridesmaids found them. Emily met them, "gambolled back" and "with a roar of hideous laughter" points to the "shapeless, black, and incoherent mass" that was Albert, "--with vacant face that loathesome lump she hastened to embrace" and then "flew into the woods, with a discordant whoop," After "the wreck of Albert" is buried Emily lives on until in autumn she dies upon his grave. Even yet those who pass hear their "unearthly sighs."

It is of such stuff that poetry is made but with infinitely more restraint and taste. Here we have but a burlesque of love; the effect is ridiculous and at times revolting. Here there is no interpretation of experience

Summary
of the
narrative
Albert
and Emily

Crudity
of the
poem

either expressed or implied. Imagery skilfully handled quickens the imagination of the reader but here it is paralysed by the thumpings of a torrent of sights and sounds that come pell-mell from the poet's exuberance. The thought and sentiment of the poem are choked out by the extravagance and ludicrousness of description.

There is indeed some mastery of verse form. The stanzas are of eight iambic pentameter lines, the first four rhyming in couplets and the last four alternately. That is to say it is a variation of ballad metre with eight lines printed together to form one stanza, not in itself an inartistic creation. The rhythm, however, at times, breaks down into prose. The best part of the poem, best in comparison with the drivel of the narrative, is the lyric, Emily's Plaint. There, the ~~un~~ia union of the iambic and anapaest is not displeasing and there is some attempt to reach a simple and clear picture out of the welter of confused images. But of the whole poem it may be said that the poet dips his pen too deeply into the ink-pot of sensuous images. He treads unsuccessfully the tortuous path that separates sublimity from pathos.

Versification

The "songster wight", having entertained the feasting company with his lugubrious ballad wanders out into the night to find "solitary fair Agnes," who "becked him onward with a smile," But it is poetry that inspires her mood and to her request for poetic entertainment he "waved his head." (How does one wave his head?)

And she with eyelash downward cast 1
Caught his wild story from the blast.

The
second
fytte.
Rodolph

The story is of Rodolph, a levelorn wight, who sits at night on a couch of moss beside a silent lake and sings a madrigal. The song ended he hears a voice which bids him follow and rushing to the shore of the lake he sees a ball of fire, "whirling around the lake its lurid gleam." Out of this "a red canoe brustled fiercely up to Rodolph's feet." A fiery hand beckons the youth onward but he remains long enough to hear a song sung by some disembodied voices. But the waving hand is insistent and Rodolph follows an exhausting course over every species of wild landscape. Arriving at a cave, "He entered with expectant, glad, amaze." The cave is an interesting bit of imagery. According to psychologists cave-exploring is symbolic of rebirth, the cave representing the womb.¹ The similarity to the grotte scene in Keat's La Belle Dame Sans Merci is noteworthy. In the cave is a paradise of flowers, moonlight, and sweet odours; there he finds "toying maids."

Synopsis
of the
narrative

Some on curved arms and softly drooping head
Mused with closed lips and fringy curtained eyes
Among the upward flowers, as though they read 2
Some bee-graven song, or heard the blossoms' sighs

He "waded through a flood of harmony" to the mistress of this maiden band and at a motioned command from her "the mossy throne he pressed." The words of her lay of love were as drops of music, "folds of softness crept snakily round his soul." As Rodolph is about to kiss the mistress,

1 Menninger, Karl A., The Human Mind, p. 349
2 Il 253-256

the vision fled, whether from unexpected modesty or the perversity of dream spirits, we are not told. He now finds himself standing hip-deep "in bones of and dust of bodies dead." In this place of blood, bone-dust, skeletons and worms he meets Death itself:

And to his eyeless sockets fat worms crept, 1
Whose eyes peeped out like lurid meteor stars.

Days passed until the sexton, passing the charnel-house and hearing "grating laughter mixed with ribald song," opened the door to discover the pitiable Rodolph. Upon the immediate flight of the sexton, Rodolph

.....crawled out from his dungeon, and his days
. Lurked out amongst the woods and untrod ways.

2

He sate amongst the tombs and called the dead.

Finally this death-in-life existence is brought to an end when Rodolph returns to his boyhood village and falls dead on a "moss-cushioned seat," "under a dark knoll of elms."

The poem recalls the allegory in Keat's *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, published a year before *The Improvisatore*, but there the comparison ends. The poem, indeed, has shaken off some of the puerilities of *Albert and Emily*. There is little conflict between the world of reality and the world of imagination. Once the supernatural is suggested and accepted there is no tripping up of the probabilities of its unreal events. There is no violation of patent reality such as the utterly impossible escape of Emily from the

Improve-
ment upon
the first
fytte

1 11 325, 326
2 11 359-361

terrific thunderbolt that killed Albert. The thing is wildly fantastic but it is not altogether insane. The inspiration of the poem is not far to seek - the first half is adolescent sex manifestation, the second half, the morbidity always latent in Beddoes, and here made of intellectual consequence. In fact the second half is the only portion significant with respect to Beddoes' later development; in it there are the crude beginnings of the graveyard complex which were to expand into Death's Jest-Book. The first half is the isolated instance in Beddoes' of the sexually sensuous situation.

Inspiration
of the
poem

Of the two lyrics in the second fyfte, The Madrigal and The Song, the former is spoiled by an unsuccessful experiment in verse form. In fact never until his latest period did Beddoes completely learn the lesson of modulation in prosody. He failed to see that intricate forms of verse, when successful, are the result of particular thought forms that break through into the speech of consciousness. It is impossible to write great poetry by fitting it upon a wholly artificial metrical design. Yet it is a lesson which every romantic poet of the first rank has had to learn.

Lyrics in
Redolph

The narrative portions of the poem are written in a stanza form elaborated from that used in Albert and Emily. Three rhymed couplets instead of two precede four lines that rhyme alternately. The diction and phraseology are somewhat reminiscent of Shelley but far in excess of a

Versifi-
cation

similar effect in either Shelley or Keats, does the crowded canvas of his work cloy the senses of the reader. The pigment needs thinning out - it needs applying with freer and more delicate strokes. But all that was for the future.

Imagery

No sooner was the tale of physical horror related than Agnes "tripped to court a night's repose;" she must have been blessed with twentieth century nerves. But the minstrel's labours were not yet ended. Margaret, an old tottering crone led him to a small warm room, and plying him with wine and praise, pressed him to sing to her. The "lay of wildness" was Leopold. "The battle is over," so the epic poem begins, and the field is a "swamp of distorted faces." One struggled from beneath a pile of dead men only to die himself; another crept along, leaving a bloody trail, until a plunderer, "scattered his brains as hot food for the storm." An infant lay on its mother's dead breast,

Leopold

Synopsis

And with tiny fingers opened her eyes
Which spurted upon him a thick, gory clot
While he smiled and fingered the spreading blot.

1

A reverend hermit, Hubert, tore this prodigy of horror from his play with the gaping bloody wounds and carried him to his cell. But heredity prevailed; Leopold, the child of slaughter-field "skulked in corners, and shunned sulkily the good man's lessons;". He seemed to be the child of the storm and the whirlwind, of thunder and lightning. From

his "foam-bathed lips" came the question:

What is this life, that spins so strangely on
That ere we grasp and feel it, it is gone? 1

Impiously he asked whether we living are not really dead.

In a foot-note Beddoes hastens to disclaim any identity
of his own thoughts on immortality with those of the
human fiend, Leopold. One day "indistinct, word-shaping
sound" offered to slake his thirst for power and make him
ruler of lightning, tempest and thunder-bolt at the price
of Hubert's life. Entering the old man's cell, he drove
the dagger deep,

And felt the blood-stream bubbling warmly round
His fingers, and drop down with gushing sound. 2

After centuries of life among the elements he re-
turned to earth and one night, looking ~~thru~~ through the
window of a house, fell in love with "a beauteous daughter
of mankind," who, however, died beneath his look. "His
breath had checked her soul," "and the grasp of his cold
clammy fingers" had "mottled her beauty with damp mildewed
stains." Leopold flew off to the fatal cave but the
~~gloom~~ cloud of doom with his enemies he could not escape.
He disappeared with a "roar of horror."

Such is the story of Leopold. There is a note of
maturity here lacking in the first two fyttes, not in the
first five sections nor some of the others for there the
scene is outraged by the absurdly grotesque imagery, but
in section six. It is the first serious indication we have
of Beddoes' power to pass beyond the mere narrative and

1 11. 179-180

2 11. 279-280

descriptive elements of verse, and these not masterly done. The whole section, especially the last thirty lines, soar above mere incident. There are echoes of Shelley here in the lines

Comparison
with first
two fyttes

We vanish, as a thing that never was
And become drops of the huge ever - being.

.....

Is it a vision? Are we sleeping now
In the sweet sunshine of another world?

.....

Are we a groping host
Of sleepers, gazing in this twilight gleam, 1
Unconscious dupes of some thought-peopled dream?

Unexpectedly daring in thought and beautiful in phrasing, this is astonishingly mature verse. It is the philosophy that was to occupy many of Eddoes' creative moments for the next twenty-five years. He begins to glimpse the eternal beyond the temporal.

Grotesque though the imagery is, yet there are sections where an improvement in this feature is discernible. True, there is not enough restraint and normality to redeem the flaming horrors of the battlefield and the cave, yet there are individual lines which speak out with some lucidity, such as these:

He was a man would make us love mankind,
.....
Oh it is sweet to watch o'er innocence
Asleep, and mark the calm breast fall and rise
And the veined veils that casket up the eyes

.....

By some sharp pang of intellectual pain

.....

1 11. 171-172; 181-182; 186-188.

One little casement in that humble tower
Pressed with its chequered lattice in the leaves
And kissed them into varied blushes. 1

Neither Keats nor Shelley need have been ashamed of lines such as these.

Yet the most remarkable thing about the poem is not this indication of control over riotous imagery but the very great advance in technique. As the metre of Rodolph shows skill above that in Albert and Emily, so that of Leopold marks an improvement over the metre of Rodolph. The first section stands apart with its four-footed anapaestic lines, rhyming in couplets. Anapaests are not easily written in English and Beddoes' are no models of excellence. The other thirteen sections revert to the more natural iambic measure but what he relinquishes in the way of rhythm experiment, he makes up in the rhyme. Young poets must ever be innovators. The sections are all of unequal length but the unit of his verse form is a sixain of iambic pentameters with a rhyme scheme, abbcca. The sections ordinarily conclude with couplets varying in numbers from two to seven. Yet occasionally in the couplets, and once in a sixain, an extra line is inserted either rhymed or unrhymed, evidently for the sake of emphasis. These were certainly not added later for they are clearly of the body of the verse. Sections VI and XII begin with rhymed couplets, the latter unfortunate in its rhyming of "rude" and "stood." With these exceptions, and that of section VI

Improve-
ment in
versifi-
cation

which will be mentioned later, the rhyme scheme and sixain are all perfectly regular. Too frequently the rhyme does not coincide with the balance of thought and the enjambment within the sixains is bad, between sixains almost invariably so. But the irregularities of the poem seem to be premeditated and not the result of a breakdown of his scheme. Certainly one cannot say with Saintsbury that the verse is like "blank verse accidentally tipped with irregular rhyme." In fact, the failure of the rhythm, if it be such, and one must admit it is not exactly melodious, is due to the very strict adherence to a rhyme scheme without fitting to it the flow of imagery and thought.

As the sixth section rises above the others by virtue of its philosophical content, so it is superior in prosody. The lines are regular in length except lines two, eleven, thirteen and fifteen, of four feet each, line fourteen of two feet, and line thirty-three which breaks down completely. Two feminine lines are particularly effective. The whole section then falls into eight divisions with the following rhymes: aa; bebee; dede; fgfgf; hihi; jklkj; mm; opqpoq; rr; stst. It will be seen that there are but four different lengths of division - two, four, five, and six lines. If sentence structure and enjambment are taken into consideration, then the poet evidently intended the poem to be considered as falling into five divisions of eleven, nine, eight, eight and five lines respectively. In either case the fact remains that the poet, for his most important

1 George Saintsbury. A History of English Prosody, Macmillan, 1923, vol. III, p. 149.

section, had attempted, and not altogether without success, an intricate metre. This section shows the culmination of Beddoes' early attempts at verse invention; later he was to find more security in simpler forms.

III

In *The Improvisatore* with its imagination run riot, Beddoes followed the fulsomeness of the Elizabethans but without their sane outlook on life. Just because he did not restrain his imagery and conceits and did not maintain the normal, healthy attitude toward his world, there is some justification in considering the work a parody of romance. The thought is fascinating but it is shown to be untenable, however, if we consider *The Improvisatore* in relation to his other writings and particularly if we observe the growth and development within the poem itself. And, of course, it lacks the conscious humour of burlesque.

Perhaps the clue to the work is to be found in the symbolism that runs through it. To appreciate this, it will be necessary to divest ourselves of the impression of crudity and incompleteness which the poem undoubtedly engenders and to think only of the narrative as it shadows the inner meaning and structure of its three fyttes.

Symbolism
of *The
Improvisa-
tore*

It is just this which both Snow and Donner have failed to do. Yet by such an analysis it is not difficult to know that the mind of Beddoes with its disturbing and conflicting problems was even at this early date taking on the characteristics which were to be both the glory

Neglect
of work
Snow and
Donner

and defeat of later years. For both good and ill the philosophy of Beddoes reached definitive shape in *The Improvisatore*. Say what one likes about the expression - call it crude beyond belief - the germ of everything Beddoes ever wrote lies here. Here was Beddoes made, not in the London years or in the period in Göttingen. In the dirge, "To-day is a thought, a fear is to-morrow," written in 1824 or 1825, Beddoes has given concentrated expression to one aspect of his thought. Yet even it shows no intellectual advance upon *The Improvisatore*, nor was any to follow.

Both Donner and Snow keep referring here and in other related passages to "Beddoes' youth," to "a boy of sixteen," to "a boy of seventeen," always offering immaturity as an explanation for the kind of poetry he then wrote. But they both overlook the very evident fact that at seventeen Beddoes was a man. Besides the facts that Beddoes possessed no ordinary mind and that men matured earlier a century ago, there is to be taken into consideration the quality of Beddoes' genius. The romantic powers, like eyesight and hearing, develop rapidly, however much they may later be affected by judgment, discrimination, restraint and taste. Your true romantic has his ideas complete at sixteen - what comes later is clarity of expression and artistic development. The kind of mind of a Beddoes, and, for example, of a Browning, are poles apart.

Maturity
of Beddoes

Albert and Emily exemplifies earthly human love. As

that is sensual so the poem is sensuous and moves in a very wilderness of voluptuousness. But in that there is no lasting gratification of the soul of man nor do the divine and eternal forces look with favour upon physical passion. That sensual love is blasted and made a thing of horror. The object of that love, Emily, survives for a time in a hopeless and meaningless world, but earth-bound, she must descend into the earth. Yet from the grave grow flowers which show the everlasting persistence of this lovely but futile expression of man's being. In earthly love there is no exploration of the universe.

First fytte
exemplifies
human love

Rodolph, the poet, disdains the loveliness of earth and hearkening to the cry of the spirit flees from the realm of mortal things to the cave of spiritual beauty. But for man there is no real escape from bodily senses and perceptions. Spiritual beauty for him has only a physical expression. The vision of loveliness vanishes when he attempts to possess it in a physical way. Thereafter he finds himself among the dead, yet living, he is not of them and returning to the world he is of it neither. As in the former fytte the poem ends in death, which completes the story but does not explain human existence.

Second
fytte:
spiritual
beauty of
the poet

Leopold, the incarnation of madness, is born of physical horror and passions irredeemably base that spring from the battlefield. Yet the love of God, in the person of the hermit Hubert, does attempt redemption. The destructive powers of tempest, thunder, and flood, the personification

Leopold,
incarnation
of evil, the
madman

of evil, attain complete mastery over him. His companions are the serpents of his own thoughts, which are blasphemy itself. The ^{evil} forces prevail and Leopold, having denied goodness raises his hands against God, as he is manifested in the saintly Hubert. Now has the murderer become the very soul of evil; he is one with the destructive natural forces and the very messenger of death. But he attempts too much. Having become utterly evil, the goodness of human life is not for him and the love with which he looks upon mankind, in the form of the maiden, brings death with it. Yet evil does not forever prevail and clouds of doom rise to overwhelm Leopold. He however disappears. No man knows where the forces of evil go when they are overcome.

The grandeur of conception of the whole work is obscured by technical blunders of expression and there is no satisfying answer given to the problems he raises. "The lunatic, the lover, and the poet,"¹ have none of them reached truth, yet they "Are of imagination all compact."¹ But the struggle did not end with The Improvisatore. It narrowed down to become a death-obsession with him. Maturity brought less violent intensity of thought but it did not reduce his earnestness. The symbolism of The Improvisatore kept shaping and re-shaping itself in all Beddoes' future work, never to take final form. Like his own Leopold he found it impossible to adhere to the resolution:

Importance
of The
Improvisa-
tore in
Beddoes'
work

1 A Midsummer-Night's Dream, V, i, 7 and 8

But I will think no more, lest haply I
If I erred on in thought's dim wilderness,
And scared myself with shadows, ne'er should die,
But my astounded soul might petrify 1
And freeze into time-scoffing stoniness.

The poem was no more understood in Beddoes' day than in our own. It is small wonder that the poet in later years destroyed every copy he could come across. It is reported that Beddoes always tore out the pages of the book and replaced the eviscerated binding and cover on the shelf. One hesitates to say that was Beddoes' symbolic fashion of condemning the expression while reasserting the meaning. The idea is a bit fantastical but it exactly expresses the truth of the whole matter. Later critics of the last century, like contemporary ones, seem to have been unable to pierce the gaudy absurdities and fantastic horrors of the work to reach its mysticism. This failure to sympathetically study the poem has led into another error. We do not know for certain the order of composition of the three fyttes but there is ~~improvement~~ improvement from one to another and a lyrical development based on their symbolism, to say nothing of the increased power of handling rhythm and the attempted attenuation of imagery. Thus it appears that the order of the poems as published by Beddoes was the order of composition. In fact there is no real reason for thinking otherwise. When Donner says, "The last fytte, Leopold, was probably the first to be written," and Rodolph the Wild "is mainly narrative and this may indeed be taken as a sign of earlier

Beddoes'
destruction
of
the book

Order of
composition
of the
three fyttes

1 11. 189-193
2 Donner, p. 64
3 Donner, p. 69

composition, for narrative poetry was not Beddoes' true element and he was not slow to find it out" he is simply forcing his argument to fit a preconceived idea. It may be ¹ "careless, crude and exaggerated in execution" but certainly it is not ² "sentimental, naïve and sensational in content," if by "content" is meant the subject theme of the poem.

IV

The Comet, though published in 1819, was included in Beddoes' first volume in 1821. It is merely a trite poem on an ordinary theme and opposed to later expression on similar subjects. It requires no further comment.

The
Comet

There were also included twelve poems of fourteen lines each. These quatorzains are on such subjects as; perfume, sound, night, silence and poesy, after the fashion of the seventeenth century poets. But they are more than imitations or mere poetic exercises, though they cannot be admitted to the company of great poetry. The only complete resemblance they bear to the sonnet is the number of their ³ lines. It may be as Donner suggests; "Perhaps Beddoes wanted to dissociate every idea of the Sonnet from his poems and so chose the name." The characteristic development of thought which makes the sonnet form unique is only once attempted. The stanza structure bears little and that

Quator-
zains

1 Donner, p. 72

2 Ibid.

3 Donner, p. 73

Versifi-
cation

only an accidental resemblance to the sonnet form. The lines are iambic pentameter but the majesty of that rhythm is broken by the too frequent and needless introduction of unstressed syllables which are forced to carry the weight of the rhythm. The rhyme scheme is identical in all the quatorzains, a b a b a b c d c d c d ee. Thus there is possible the extension or welling up of thought or emotion in the last two lines of each sixain and in addition the compact expression of the whole theme in the last couplet. Beddoes may not have appreciated the peculiar force of his stanza form; at any rate he did not realize its potentialities.

With reference to section XI of the Quatorzains
Snow thinks,¹ "There is more than the beginning of a manner in these lines, and there is the oppression, the immense weight of time and darkness and futility which presses upon Beddoes' great work. One may wisely discount the poetic despair of a schoolboy - if he chance to turn versifier, the rosier cheeked of them all is likely to be gloomier than Acheron - but in the case of Beddoes it is as well to read even his early work in the light of his grim later years." But this is just what Snow fails to do.

Insuffici-
ency of
Snow's
criticism

With one exception there is little movement in the stanzas; the thought lacks coherent direction and force. The exception is the fifth quatorzain, To Night. Here the

1 Snow, p. 23

thought of the first sixain passes by enjambment into the second and reaches more profound expression in the closing couplet. It might indeed pass for a sonnet. Unfortunately the choice of diction is not in keeping with the thought. The final couplet of number seven, A Fantastic Simile, stands off in its completeness from the confused expression of the first twelve lines. The last poem, section two of A clock Striking at Midnight, which Snow finds of some merit, ends in a good couplet but the thought of the first sixain is repeated without much amplification or modification in the second sixain.

The language of these poems is too frequently poetic verbiage but there are lines reminiscent of Shelley and the general tone of many has an Elizabethan flavour. "Zephyr," "adawn," "shepherd swain," "flizz," "pinions," and such spoil the effect but such lines as these are acceptable:

Poetic
language

1
"Eternity by whom swift Time is slain" 2
"Break through thy foam, like Venus, ocean sprung
"Where shackled melody, a bond-maid sleeps. 3

The last poem in Beddoes' first volume, To a Bunch of Grapes, is gayest of all in spirit. It shows what Beddoes the artist could do when he was not weighed down by the burden of ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ profundity. Here he forgets the unsolved problems of the universe, which are of such consequence to a youthful poet, and in thirty-five lines of sprightly verse sings of beauty. His choice of metre

To a Bunch
of Grapes

- 1 XI, 19
- 2 VIII, 13
- 3 IX, 8

was particularly fortunate, no strained experiment this time, but the adaptation of a form already successfully employed by others. Of the five lines of each stanza except one, the first, third and fourth are iambic tetrameter and rhyme together; the second and last lines also rhyme but in the one case there are three iambic feet with an extra unstressed syllable and in the other the line is one foot shorter. The rhymes, fairy and carry, treasury and high, perfume and bloom mar the beauty of the poem, as do also such expressions as "breezes rollen" and "downy bloom." Donner's comparison;¹ "it is an exquisite arabesque of playful imagination, where the central idea, like the variations on a theme in music, strays away only to return, and returns repentant only to stray again," does not do the poem justice. Rather is there possible a comparison to the method of treatment employed by Shelley in To a Skylark where the poet describes the bird by likening it to sights and sounds in the natural world. The imagery is blurred and the similes somewhat fantastic but the spirit and feeling run along the iambic feet, or occasionally substituted trochees, in dancing gaiety to the very end of the poem. This exquisite bit of daintiness has been overlooked by Snow.

V

The poems thought to have been written between 1821

1 Donner, p. 75

^{and}
~~of~~ 1825, together with those of whose compositions within that period there is no uncertainty have been gathered into one group in the Donner edition of Beddoes. After the success of *The Improvisatore* Beddoes was eager to publish a second volume of verse but nothing came of the proposal; the title *Outidana* has been retained for this collection though to what extent it coincides with the volume originally planned it is impossible to say. Donner thinks that ¹"The likelihood is that the poems were not of a merit to encourage a publisher to risk the publication. Even an enthusiast for Beddoes like James Dykes Campbell did not take the trouble to copy them out when he had the chance, and his verdict was that they showed little or no talent." It is just possible that the vanished poems of the proposed volume were but pot-scrapings of the brew of *The Improvisatore*. Beddoes had used the sub-title, *Effusions, Amorous, Pathetic and Fantastical* and it is fairly descriptive of most of the two dozen poems printed by Donner under the title *Outidana*. There are the songs from *The Bride's Tragedy*, *The Second Brother*, and *Torrismond* and as well three other songs which are unconnected with the dramas. Four dirges, one incomplete, make up the lyrical content of the selection. There are also two sonnets, the Lines upon Shelley, *The Romance of the Lily*, Lines written at Geneva, and *Pygmalion*. The themes are life, love, poetry

Outidana

Content
of the
selection

1 Donner, p. 116

and death, already dealt with by the poet and to recur again and again in his work. In the shorter poems and in *The Romance of the Lily* the poet is still experimenting with verse forms but with questionable success. Mostly in sombre mood the poems give expression to thought sentimental, fantastic or quaint yet there is humour too as in the *Drinking Song*, and genuine sentiment in some of the shorter pieces.

The Romance of the Lily was published in *The Album* in 1823. It is the most ambitious poem of Beddoes' 1821-25 period which has survived. The resemblance between it and *The Improvisatore* is striking in style, conception, and theme. In this poem, however, the framework of the narrative is borrowed; Meric Casaubon is the source. But the narrative as Beddoes found it was too unadorned and too humbly characterized to suit his romantic conception and he altered it freely.

Romance
of the
Lily

The poem opens with three rhapsodic movements in which the poet described the creation of the lily and tells how he loves it for the sake of Mary, who has died, and the circumstances of the poem's origin. The origin is romance itself. As the poet lay at night grieving by the lily that grew upon his love's grave an angel nightingale breathed the tale. King Balthasar of Libya, renowned for his opulence, is among the wisest of mortals. He has read heaven's thoughts in the sun and moon, comprehended time, wrung secrets from the ocean, and looked upon the future.

Synopsis
of the
poem

Yet though he talks to Jove his soul is a curse and a sin
with nothing human in it but love for Sabra his wife. To
them in their sleep comes Plague who presses a cup of
boiling misery to Balthasar's lips and he becomes lunatic.
However he lives on by virtue of Sabra's health which is
transferred mystically to him. Her sacrifice for love has
left her bowed and broken and Balthasar now loathing his
wife drowns her at midnight in the sea. Revenge brings
about the death of the villain, as decreed by Heaven, but
before his burial he comes to life long enough to confess
his crime and then dies again.

In two pages of criticism Donner does not find any-
thing more significant in the poem than an ¹"extravagant
narrative....fitted into a....Romantic frame." But Beddoes
never wrote narrative simply to tell a tale. The symbolism
and inner meaning are no better framed than in The Improvisa-
tors but they are nevertheless there for anyone who takes
the trouble to hunt them out. This, Donner does not attempt:
Snow refers to the theme as ²"the power, subtle and poison-
ously sweet, of the dead over the living."

Neglect
by Snow
and Donner

The poem expresses the mystic union of the unreal and
the mortal; its symbolism is of the order of The Improvisators.
The tale is inspired by the lily, love, and told by the
mystic warbler, the nightingale. Balthasar who represents
intellectual, occult, and sublime powers, is overcome by

¹ Donner, p. 119
² Snow, p. 134

evil forces in the form of the draught given him by Plague while he is asleep. Yet he is supported by Sabra, whose human love is consumed by him and whom he in consequence hates. Supramundane forces live upon, despise and slay earthly love but these in turn suffer death at Heaven's decree. It is an interesting speculation. The relation of intellectualism to emotionalism - science to poetry - was for Beddoes always a perplexing enigma. The conflict that he felt is revealed in his deep interest in Schiller's philosophical letters and Beddoes did not possess the consistent sanity of mind that can find peace in the compromise between ways of truth that are initially antithetical.

Symbolism
of The
Romance
of the
Lily

In a poem such as this where the interest is allegorical it is not a fault to make of the characters generalizations or abstractions. Indeed any individualization of character would weaken the interpretative possibilities of the poem. There are no signs given by which we could identify either of his characters in a multitude. Balthasar is mind and Sabra beauty, that is all. Indeed the very title of the poem is direct evidence of its meaning; The Romance of the Lily - how does love fit into the eternal scheme of things?

Character-
ization

There seems to be little purpose in making an exhaustive analysis of the prosody of the poem which is so irregular in construction. The poem is divided into a dozen rhapsodical movements of varying lengths. Within each section the recurring units of construction are sixain, quatrain and

couplet. It thus bears a strong resemblance to the form of Leepold. The movement of the lines, however, is less regular for cadences of sound arise from the varying length of line and irregularity of accent. Instead of attempting to classify the feet as iambic or trochaic one gets a better appreciation of the metre by considering only the stressed syllables of which there are generally three or four rising out of a varying number of unstressed syllables. The scheme is daring, considering the difficulties of English as a medium of poetry, yet there are not many passages where the effect is unpleasing. In two respects his technique shows an improvement over the verse of The Improvisatore; there is a closer union between sound and sense and the conjunction of rhyme and important word is more regularly obtained.

Prosody

Yet there are crudities which detract from a complete approval of the poem. There is a note of maudlin sentimentality in the introduction, where the poet is shown weeping at night beside the lily on the grave of his beloved. The resuscitation of Balthasar in the last lines is badly-handled melodrama. The comparison of the half-closed eyelids of the king and lady to the opening wings of a beetle is a trifle amusing in its childlikeness, however much it may disclose unusual observation. And there are good lines too, some as Donner points out which had greater appeal in Beddoes' day than in our own, as:

Defects

"Like a smothered regret in the breast of men
Or a sigh on the lips of chastity."
"Like a scented bloom on a madhouse wall"
"His lips curled meaning, yet unspoken." 1

or such genuine poetry as:

"Beneath whose precipice's motion
The folded dragons of the deep
Lie with lidless eyes asleep. 2

"As the song of a frozen rill 3
Which winter spreads his dark roof o'er

In Beddoes' letter to Thomas Kelsall written from
Oxford in April, 1825, the poet included "Pygmalion" and
remarked:

Pygmalion

4
"I wrote this Pig stuff this morn^g---what d'ya think
of it? Don't look at J. J. Rousseau - his is much better,
because prose. I have not hit what I aimed at - the beauti-
ful philosophy of the story - but have fallen as usual into
diffuseness and uninteresting delay."

One cannot agree completely with Beddoes' criticism
of his work. If ever a subject were peculiarly fitted to
poetry surely the Pygmalion myth is and as a work of art his
is definitely superior to the *scène lyrique*. The criticism
in the last sentence is more apposite - the first part of
the poem leading up to the climax in the last twenty lines
suffers from lack of fore-shortening. The truncation of the
final scene is an artistic blemish, nor is it the only indi-
cation of the poem's hurried composition.

Form

The metre of the poem is irregular; the rhymed couplets
contain either four or five accented syllables in each line

1 ll. 126, 127; 100; 222

2 ll. 240-242

3 ll. 146, 147

4 Letter to Kelsall, Oxford, 25/4/1825

but their position within the line is not fixed although the length of line is always the same except for an occasional feminine ending. It is something quite different from the effect produced by the substitution of an anapaest or trochee ~~pentameter~~ for an iambus - in sound, not in word-order, like poetic prose held together by rhyme at regular intervals.

Metre

There are fewer crudities of expression than in The Improvisatore and the imagery stands out clearer because of careful selection. The unevenness of Beddoes' work is here as everywhere in his poetry apparent. Mingled with what is mere versification and with what is not even that there are such delightful lines as;

Merits
of the
poem

"The chambered ladies silenced the half-song
And let the wheel unheeded whirl and skim" 1

"Whose patient lamp distilled a day of amber." 2

"And now, Pygmalion, that weak life of thine
Shakes like a dewdrop in a broken rose--" 3

"Immortal generations wrung from stone
Alike too beautiful for life and death
And bodies that a soul of mortal breath
Would be the dress of." 4

In one respect the poem is different from his earlier work except "To a Bunch of Grapes;" it has a note of gladness in bright contrast to the morbidness and despair of The Improvisatore. The traditional form of the myth supplied that quality but, in addition, its metaphysical content is the obverse of the philosophy of his early work

- 1 II. 50, 51
- 2 I 24
- 3 II 208, 209
- 4 II 26-29

which reaches a hopeless impasse. Pygmalion, the poet Beddoes himself, creates out of the material world, something of exquisite beauty and like a god gives it life. Yet that life is not given without a spiritual agony in the sculptor which almost deprives him of life. Indeed he has one foot in Charon's barge and is within the radiance of Elysium when the miracle happens and the stone lives and Pygmalion is discovered beside a fountain, ever symbolic of life, leaning upon the knee of the living maiden status, "Weeping the tears of his felicity." It is, in truth, "a sight of joy and placid wonder." Even so a mother descends to death to bring from the infinite a living soul and weeps tears of happiness.

¹
Donner says "in order to share the life of his own creation the artist himself must die. So entirely has he given himself in the creation of the work of art that henceforward he is able to live only in the world of ideas, and to the life of this world he is dead for ever." ² "All matter is destroyed but the idea lives in eternity." The notion is appealing and vastly complimentary to Beddoes but it seems to rest upon an imaginative and faulty interpretation of the last twenty lines of the poem. So in this instance is Beddoes made a greater poet than he really was.

Donner's
interpre-
tation

In this poem, where the thought is so patently subjective we get glimpses of the poet's artistic creed. It is Platonic idealism interpreted in terms of romanticism.

¹ Donner, p. 174

² Donner, p. 175

The material world can be reduced to the spiritual; ideas are the ultimate realities. There are no direct speeches in the poem: though Donner seems to think so:¹ the words addressed to Jove and Apollo are unvoiced prayers. But the way of the poet's creation is expressed in such lines as;

Beddoes'
artistic
creed

"His soul was bright and lonely as the sun
Like which he could create--and in the night
There lived another Spirit wild and bright
That came and went;"²

"The living form with which the stone he blest
Was the loved image stepping from his breast."³

The influence of nature upon the artist is a common theme with the Romantics from Wordsworth down. Beddoes expresses it in the lines:

"And fed on sight of summer--till the life
Was too abundant in him and so rife
With light creative he went in alone
And poured it warm upon the growing stone."⁴

There is a remarkable similarity in thought here with that in Schiller's poem, Die Ideale. Now Beddoes was occupied with the translation of Schiller's Philosophical Letters at the time Pygmalion was written.

Similarity
to
Schiller's
Die Ideale

Wie einst mit flehendem Verlangen
Pygmalion den Stein inschloss
Bis in des Marmors kalte Wangen
Empfindung glühend sich ergoss
So schlang ich mich mit Liebesarmen
Um die Natur, mit Jugendlust,
Bis sie zu atmen, zu erwärmen
Begann an meiner Dichterbrust,

1 Donner, p. 177.

2 ll. 62-65

3 ll. 151-152.

4 ll. 107-110.

Und teilend meine Flammentriebe
Die Stumme eine Sprache fand,
Mir wiedergab den Kuss der Liebe
Und meines Herzens Klang verstand;
Da lebte mir der Baum, die Rose,
Mir sang der Quellen Silberfall,
Es fühlte selbst das Seelenlied
Von meines Lebens Widerhall.¹

It is surprising that Donner did not seize upon this very patent resemblance.

The paraphrased versification of a legend is never great poetry unless it be refined and exalted by interpretation or achieve excellence of artistic treatment. Both of these Beddoes' Pygmalion lacks.

Beddoes was never at his best when writing from obligation or upon a given subject. Then the straining after effect gave his poetry a crowded involved quality; the music of his verse grates on lines of mere prose. In the sixteen lines, written in a copy of Prometheus Unbound ^{upon} to Shelley who had lately died, he assembles the material of a poem without writing it. Yet out of the jumbled mass there stands out one line;

Lines to
Shelley

"A flooding summer burst on Poetry."²

In the sonnet to Zoë King he departs from the traditional form by binding the octave to the sextette by rhyming line six with nine and line eight with ten. It is not an improvement upon Petrarch. Nor is the thought organized and developed in lucid expression. The main idea--that personality is extended to the infinite--is clarified and given popular expression in Tennyson's "Bugle Song." The other sonnet

1 Schiller, Die Ideale, 11.17-32

2 l. 10.

of this period, "To Tartar, a Terrier Beauty," is less ambitious in thought and more perfect in execution. "An excellent sonnet of mine to a terrier," ¹ wrote Beddoes.

Two sonnets

Beddoes' degree examinations at Oxford in May, 1824, were interrupted by the death of his mother at Florence and his consequent journey to Italy. Thoughts that must have been evoked by this bereavement found expression in the "Lines Written at Geneva", two months later. And they are unusual, morbid, and yet fascinating thoughts. Quietness has descended with night over Lac Leman; something should mark the place where sound was, for has it not a body and a spirit too, in its echo? "The earth is full of Chambers for the dead"; some, long dead, now have no bodies, only minds; others, but the last fragments of bodies; and some just buried behold their bodies in corruption. Again there are present thoughts for poetry but there is no more than an attempt made at the orderly arrangement of ideas. The lack of constructive effort is shown also in the unskillful rhymes, as well as in the occasional harshness of metre.

Lines written
at Geneva

By far the best work of this period is in his songs. Those from "The Second Brother," "Torrismond" and "The Brides' Tragedy" speak out with a clear confidence that springs from a mastery of metre and staunchness of form and intention that are supplied by the drama from whose fabric they are taken. The thought fittingly allied with the music rings through each strophe from first line to last. It is here that we meet with

¹ Letter to Kelsall, London, April (?) 1825.

the happier side of Beddoes' nature untrammelled with perplexing thoughts of the riddle of death. Again one must disagree with Denner when he says;¹"Beddoes felt the need for some flourish to his bacchanale, but his muse was too ethereal to provide the crew of Bacchus with a marching tune. Only the last three lines of the first hymn achieve something of the recklessness and defiance in rhythm and sense required by the situation." There is a triumphant, even jubilant note in such lines as:

Strike, you myrtle-crowned boys,
Ivied maidens, strike together:
Magic lutes are these, whose noise
Our fingers g ther. 2

or

The linnets seek the airy list,
And swallows too, small pets of spring,
Beat back the gale with swifter wing
And dart and wheel along. 3

Of the poem from which these last four lines are taken, A Ho! A Ho!, Snow has this to say; ⁴"It is a poetry of pretty ideas rather than feeling, of daintiness rather than sincerity. But, of its sort, the song is excellent work--the clearness of attack, the musical dexterity of the complicated stanza, the lightness of fancy all are as they should be." The criticism is just and strikes the centre of the target but it is criticism stultified by the next line ⁵"If Beddoes at nineteen showed no lyrical depth of soul, he

Songs from
the early
dramas

Snow's
comment

1 Denner--p. 165.

2 Song from the Second Brother, 11.1-4.

3 Song from the Brides' Tragedy, 11.17-20

4 Snow, p.133

5 Ibid.

at least showed his control of metrics." Surely one would not wish to see the poem spoiled by lyrical depth of soul, here altogether out of place.

There is a curious similarity of mood, if not of expression between ¹"How many times do I love thee, dear," and Elizabeth Browning's sonnet "How do I love thee? Let me count the ways." And Beddoes' poem is the richer in metaphor and suggestion, though lacking explicitness. "Perhaps the daintiest lyric Beddoes ever wrote," ² is Snow's estimate of it. All these songs recall the flavour of seventeenth century lyricism at its best--its pleasant conceit, its delight, its music, its sentiment. A note of triumphant confidence flows over from these songs even into the dirge "To-day is a thought, a fear is to-morrow," and the fragment "Hushed be sighing near the string."

To most of these poems--published by Donner, under the title *Outidana*--he gives little critical attention. Poor *Old Pilgrim Misery*, he says, ³ "has the concentration of form, the emotional content, and the playfulness that mark many of his later lyrics." It is regrettable that such an able and painstaking critic did not bring his powers to bear on these earlier poems.

Yet these lyrics, exquisite as they are, have not the original quality displayed in the "Drinking Song," nor do they give a comprehensive expression of the poet's nature. In this respect the "Drinking Song" is more typically Beddoesian, with

Drinking
Song

1 Song from *Torrismond*.

2 Snow, p.56.

3 Donner, p.117.

its union of the gay, the grim and the mournful. Technically Beddoes was never to improve on lines such as these:

Drink! for cold's the weather,
The scull that roofed a human soul,
Is it not my drinking bowl?
Let us quaff together
That wine the hebrew witch did brew
Of nightshade fruit and sap of yew
Melted in the forehead dew
Of a dead man on the heather.
Drink then and be merry!
The scull that held the life of man,
Is it not our liquor can?
Well bled, o thou berry! ¹

The two letters in verse of this period, both addressed to Procter, one from Oxford, the other from Göttingen, are not the best of Beddoes' creation. Here Beddoes dips his poet's pen in the ink of familiarity to confess his artistic sins and longings and to give a word of advice to Procter. The subject matter is interesting because of its subjective quality. Beddoes himself would hardly have called it poetry. Nor had he, probably, the slightest thought of its being preserved along with his professional work--these lines of prose that acquired poetic form because he chanced to write while the swing of rhymed pentameter couplets was in his mind. The relative unimportance of both poems is best attested by their neglect by Donner: he devotes less than one third of a page to each of them. The Göttingen letter, Snow ² refers to as doggerel.

Letters
in verse
to Procter

VI

What poetry of Beddoes remains from the 1825-1829

¹ Donner, p. 117. 11.1-12 (all)

² Snow, p. 112.

period is chiefly from "Death's Jest-Book". This poetic drama occupied most of the time filched from the study of anatomy during his year at Göttingen.

Songs from
Death's
Jest-Book

Isbrand's Song from the third scene of the third act of the play arises from the metempsychosis of Pythagoras. It has been a favourite fancy of romantic poets even to those of our own day. Here, however, the thought, as elaborated by the court fool, is turned to serve the ends of humour. Beddoes' study of embryology gave him a clever idea for the song. A child's soul has been disembodied by the mother's act of abortion at the amphibian stage of its embryonic development. Now it squats on a toadstool under a tree, "crying with frog voice." It considers the animal forms it might take on, for of course being separated from its human form, not yet completely developed, it cannot again enter the body of a child. Beddoes is not foolishly consistent in his science and the child-soul rejects the idea of becoming a crocodile, a swine, a snake or a bird preferring instead to be a monstrosity in the shape of a new Dodo. Scarcely anyone, except Beddoes, would consider the thought humorous but the verse rollicks along in alternate iambs and trochees in amusing fashion. The quaint whimsicalities of expression raise a smile; one forgets the rather horrible theme. Beddoes had got to the point where he was thinking of life in a detached and impersonal way.

Isbrand's
Song

Beddoes' opinion of his poem is given in a letter¹ to Kelsall. After saying that Procter had found it "absolutely

1 Letter to Kelsall, Göttingen, 30/4/1829.

objectionable", he continues: "If you say it is nonsense-- I and Isbrand reply that we meant it to be so: and what were a Fool's Trag. without a tolerable portion of nonsense? I thought it consistent with the character and scene, and, in its small way, and in comparison with the other minor merits of the play, a set off, like the nonsense of Wagner in Marlowe's, and the Monkeys (not monkey-cats as some translators say,) in Goethe's Faustus,--not to speak of higher nonsense in higher compositions." But let us see what Snow and Donner believe the song to mean; after all, Beddoes was only its author. "--nonsense on such a subject!" says Snow;¹ "Something was radically wrong with Isbrand's sense of values, and with those of Beddoes too. And in Isbrand's case the song must be coupled with his cynicism towards love, death, marriage, and liberty; to name only those general topics he touches upon explicitly," The song, according to Donner, "is a crystallization of the most fundamental idea of the play".² Just exactly what the fundamental idea is he does not say. But to continue.³ "The song is a mental experiment carried out with as much enthusiasm as the poet's father had ever lavished on the dissection of animals".....⁴"with true gusto Isbrand creates a new habitation for a human soul. The more repulsive the matter, it would seem, the greater the triumph of the mind".....⁵"It is a practical illustration of Beddoes' philosophy and as such it is worth hours of teaching." And all this over a boisterous bit of crude nonsense! Criticism, what crimes.....

Beddoes' opinion

Snow's and Donner's criticism

1 Snow, p.125,126.

2 Donner, p.241.

3 Donner, p.229.

4 Donner, p.230.

5 Ibid.

Really horrible is the ballad "The Median Supper," from act four, scene four. The theme is culled from Herodotus and the fiendish revenge of Astyages upon Harpagus is retold with revolting realism. In the drama it serves the artistic and dramatic purpose of preparing the scene for the revenge of Isbrand upon the Duke; for this purpose the application and variations are added at the end.

The Median
Supper

One cannot agree with Donner that it is "a work of genius" for the ballad is merely the skilful versification of an old legend but he shrewdly points out that...¹"the singing of it at that moment is illogical from the point of view of construction. Beddoes sees to have forgotten that Isbrand cannot yet know of the fratricide and that the Duke is still in disguise and unrecognized."

A third humorous poem of the period is "Old Adam, the carrion crow," which the Knight Wolfram heard sung by the mermaids in the river Phlegethon in Hell one May morning.² "A lyrical version of the old sermon on the inevitable dust," Snow calls it. It is sung by Wolfram in Act. v, scene iv of the Death's Jest-Book.. Lacking other evidence to the contrary it is probably a variant form of "Ho! Adam the carrion crow" the "famous" song which Beddoes, in a letter to Kelsall in 1825 says he³ "wrote in the coach w^h brought me from Southampton to London, 5 months since." Storm and wet weather are nothing to the raven of Cairo for he and his grey carrion wife,

Old
Adam

1 Donner, p. 221.

2 Snow, p.137.

3 Letter to Kelsall, no date or address but April, 1825, from internal evidence.

Eve, have dined well on the marrow of a king, nest in Cleopatra's battered skull, and need only drink to poetize their well-being; the devils that with a sound of wind play about the murderer's bones hanging from a gibbet are airily dismissed from their thoughts. Even so man flourishes upon the dead past nor listens to the insistent call of death. The amusing incongruity of the whole poem and the ancient and never-failing humorous device of placing human speech in animal bodies, coupled with the nonchalant music of the lines make it one of Beddoes' best humorous poems.

Meaning
of the
poem.

Donner appreciates the humour of it to the full.¹ "a human element, "he says, "gives pathos to the laughter. It is not so deep as to spoil the fun; only deep enough to remind us of our folly. The poet's facility for verse was an asset which was to make of him one of the great humorous poets in the language." There is a deal of exaggeration in that last line, The delightful refrain,

Humour

"Is that the wind dying? O no;
It's only two devils, that blow
Through murderer's bones, to and fro,
In the ghost's moonshine."²

he uses again, with slight modifications in the poem "The Ghost's Moonshine," Here is portrayed with terrible irony the murder of a woman by her ghostly lover whose heart's best wish for her is that she may be "bedded on the softest bier," and placed in what "children call a grave." The trembling and weeping of the woman, the ghostly sounds and mocking refrain

The Ghost's
Moonshine

1 Donner, p. 143.
2 11. 9-12.

raise up an atmosphere of horror that is imagined rather than expressed. It is psychological not realistic horror and vastly more effective than the material horror of the Lewis and Radcliffe order. Beddoes has learnt the compelling power of suggestion as opposed to expression.

The widest divergence between Snow and Donner is shown in their respective interpretations and appreciation of this poem. Says Snow (and the whole passage is worth quoting as a piece of effective writing)¹: "No poet but Beddoes could have found that adjective "warm" for the wild thunder gathering over a murder, nor have given to a spectre that soothing, "Tremble and weep not!" Herein is the fundamental difference between Beddoes and the other poets of death. There have been advocates of the grave as a place of quiet after tumult, or of death as the gateway to communion with the saints. No other has made the grave an earthly bridal bed, and given to the lips of spectres the music of lovers."

Snow's
fine
appreciation

"It is perversely beautiful poetry with its roots deep in the morbid, blending the iron chill of horror with the silken warmth of the sensuous. And such alien elements are fused perfectly, reinforcing one another. What is to be noted, is both Beddoes' economy of means and the complete lack of the physical in the effect of horror he achieves. There is not a superfluous stroke in the two poems which most perfectly represent this type of work in Beddoes. They are short. They are sharp in outline. And upon a sensitive reader they have a sharp impact. There is

¹ SNOW, p. 135-136.

nothing of the lavishness of physical detail which the young poet employed so unsuccessfully in *The Improvisatore*. Reticence is substituted, that he may obtain a shudder of the soul rather than gooseflesh of the skin." "It is upon this emotional test, even in an intellectual age, that the last judgment of poetry must be based."

It is almost impossible to believe that it is of the same that Donner writes the following; ¹"While it shares the external characteristics of Beddoes' lyrical poems--the similarity in the composition of the several strophes, the repetition of significant lines, the refrain, and the dramatic point--the tone is another. The sentences are short and straight to the point, the verse is jerky and unattractive, the story is allowed to speak for itself without any pleading on the part of the poet. He may have learned this style in the school of the Germans, but it reflects nevertheless his own bitterness of mood at the moment of its composition." It is about the only instance in which I found Donner so unappreciative of fine writing. What could be more perfect in its artistry than the lines?

Donner's
content

What dost thou strain above her
Lovely throat's whiteness?
A silken chain, to cover
Her bosom's whiteness? ²

Only when we know that the lover strangles and stabs her do we revert to them, suffering in ironical anguish the beautifully horrible imagery, to see the cruel muscle-tensed hand

Exquisite
imagery

¹ Donner, p. 196
² 11.27-30.

strained above her throat in the darkness. The delayed effect of the impression is perfect in its heightened intensity. The poetry of madness? Perhaps; but what exquisitely poetical madness!

Two dirges from Death's Jest-Book belong to this period, that sung for Wolfram in Act II, scene ii and that for Sibylla in Act V, scene iv. In both the poet's thought has passed from troubled contemplation to quiet assurance that is here emotionally expressed. Death is joy and the envy of the living. Sleep will ease the pangs of love in the heart for a time but only death brings lasting peace and a mystical fulfilment "amid the beaming of love's stars." They are sprung from the same inspiration that created the dirges of his earlier period but with infinitely more grace and charm. Here there are no harsh conjunctions of sound, no confused and troubled thought, no disordered array of crowded images. Technically, the effect is achieved by the perfectly natural enjambment in Sibylla's dirge and the flow of thought along the single sentence in each of the two strophes of the dirge for Wolfram. There are in addition other artistic touches which make these little masterpieces. What is not always true of Beddoes, not a single word obstructs the imagery and expression. In the third line of each strophe of Wolfram's dirge, the pauses before and after the epithet fill out a delightful harmony. There is not a trace of mechanical metre yet the accented syllables fall irregularly only to heighten the quiet melody and the almost perfect rhymes turn gently backward the shuttle of thought as it weaves its way along the fabric of his verse.

Dirges for
Wolfram and
Sibylla

But only quotation, in part at least, can convey the spiritual beauty of these dirges.

We do lie beneath the grass
In the moonlight, in the shade
Of the yew-tree. They that pass
Hear us not. We are afraid
They would envy our delight
In our graves by glow-worm night.¹

But wilt thou cure thy heart
Of love and all its smart,
Then die, dear, die;
'Tis deeper, sweeter,
Than on a rose bank to lie dreaming
With folded eye;²

Donner quotes Saintsbury³ as saying that the poem from which the second quotation is taken, *Dirge for Wolfram*, is prosodically perfect. The same might also be said of the other dirge. Snow, strange to say, does not mention either poem but Donner's appreciation is truly and ably expressed;⁴

"The emotion that filled his poems with a new content, gave to the verse also a new harmony. Diction and phrasing become one with the verse scheme, and even the latter is so harmonious that we are wholly unconscious of stressed and unstressed syllables. The line does not appear to be composed of feet; it is one rich flow."..."The feeling is subdued, but it is deep and warm. The tune is that of endless love, to which is held out the hope of eternity. An emotional experience now confirms his early Platonic doctrine, and once more he accepts love as the proof of immortality."

Donner's
Appreciat-
ion.

¹ Sibylla's Dirge, ll. 1-6

² Dirge for Wolfram, ll. 10-15

³ Saintsbury, George; History of English Prosody, P. 149.

⁴ Donner, p. 210.

From Act IV, scene 11 of the Death's Jest-Book comes the song sung under Amala's windows by male and female voices. As epithalamic poetry it is appealing because of its delicate sensuousness and the hushed restraint of its emotion, up to the end of the second strophe. The prosody of the poem reveals the new mastery of his art that Beddoes acquired during this period. Omitting the quatrain which forms a refrain at the end of each part the poem consists of two strophes with a rhyme scheme, a b c a b d c d, faulty however in two places. The metre is trochaic tetrameter except lines six and eight which are iambic and rhyme together. In each strophe there is but one sentence allowing almost complete enjambment. The musical flow of words is set free by simplification of thought and image. The chief beauty of the poem, however, does not lie in its excellence of prosody but in the choice of vowel quantities to accord with the singing of the strophes, alternately, by female and male voices - a beauty apparent only in its fullest degree when the words are sung. By actual count there are what may be generally considered three long deep-voiced vowels in the first strophe but nine in the second; so is the music of alto and soprano set over against tenor and bass. Consider for example the opposing tonal qualities of these lines:

Song at
Amala's
wedding

Prosody

Tonal
qualities
of the
verse

We have bathed where none have seen us,
In the lake and in the fountain 1

and

We have crowned thee queen of women
Since love's love, the rose, hath kept her
Court within thy lips and blushes. 2

2

Snow does not mention the poem. Donner dismisses it in half a dozen lines. This is the more remarkable for he is usually keenly alive to metrical perfection and music of verse.

The presence of both Death and Hymen in Athulf's song makes it of more than passing significance for the combination of the mortal life principle and its negation crops out frequently in Beddoes' work. Otherwise the poem is not of unusual merit.

In March and April of 1828 Beddoes was in England again and visited the Kings at Clifton. There he wrote seventy-nine lines in Zoë King's Album, unequalled for their dullness by anything else the poet ever wrote. In the first thirty-two lines he tells of his failure to write anything at all in the girl's book. (That much have most of us in common with Beddoes). The other forty-seven lines have been made
3
by Donner to yield deeply oracular meaning. The significant lines are these:

Lines in
Zoë King's
Album

Wee unto him whose fate hath thwarted him,
Whose life has been 'mongst such as were not born
To cherish in his bosom reverence,
And the calm awe that comforteth the heart
And lulls the yearnings of hope unfulfilled:

- 1 ll. 13-15
- 2 Donner, p. 202
- 3 Donner, p. 205-206

Such have I been. And woe again to him
Who in too late an hour presumptuously
O'erhears a wish confessing to his soul,
And must dismiss it to his discontent
With scorn and laughter. Woe again to me!
For now I hear even such an anxious voice
Crying in my soul's solitude and bemoaning
That I had never in my childhood known
The bud of this manifold beauteousness, 1

For then I might - oh vain and flattering wish!-
I might have stood, the last, among the friends
Where I am now the last among the strangers,
And not have passed away as now I must
Into forgetfulness, into the cold
Of the open homeless world without a hope,
Unless it be of pardon for these words: 2

What are the "yearnings of hope unfulfilled"? What
is the "bud of this manifold beauteousness"? If Love, as
called into being by Zola King then it is a mere abstraction,
lost in metaphysics, almost a still-born love in a psychical
sense. If poetry, then the allusions do not wholly agree
with the known facts of Beddoes' creative efforts. Rather
it is probably a vague longing toward something the poet
himself cannot identify, the experience of a mood rather
than the expression of a thought. And the poem is as
obscure as one might expect from ambiguities of allegory
and phrasing. Or one may take refuge in compromise and
think of it as a poem of despair that his genius was not
inspired and glorified by the love of Zola, and returned
again to him.

Obscurity
of the
poem

1

Snow quotes thirty-two lines of the poem but offers no interpretation or criticism - one way of answering a knotty question. Donner thinks the poem "as sincere as it is tragic."² The plain facts of the situation were these; Beddoes was not an amorous individual; he had funds enough to support himself but not enough for marriage, and he of all people would never work for a living. If the poem has anything at all in it, it is nothing more than a veiled display of self-pity, dear to all self-isolated mortals. Why will critics not be truthful, even if blunt?

Interpre-
tation

In similar vein are the Dedicatory Stanzas to Death's Jest-Book.³ The similarity is noted by Snow. Someone has been in his thoughts "the living glory" but as his bosom's pangs are "cupbearers to the bee in humbleness," so he asks only that the object of his affections may

Dedicatory
Stanzas

---bend hitherwards, and let thy mildness
Be glassed in fragments through this storm and
wildness. 4

He asks for pardon if mockery or thoughts of dreadest night spring between the charms of love in Death's Jest-Book.

"Death's darts are sometimes Love's."⁵ These are not dedicatory lines that many would envy. In spite of Donner's interpretation they remain dull.

- 1 Snow, p. 70-71
- 2 Donner, p. 206
- 3 Snow, p. 210-211
- 4 ll. 27,28
- 5 1 37

VII

Poems
1829-44
Doomsday

"Doomsday" is a cry of agonized despair from a soul tortured with doubt and finding no peace. Nor is there any peace in the grave; it is the waiting place until doomsday dawns. The poet raises ghostly doomsday and all the graves in sea and earth are opened. In thirty lines of heroic description he paints the titanic upheaval; battle-fields, pyramids, ruined cities, churchyards and the ocean give up their dead. The catacombs are opened; wrecked ships rise; cathedrals shake at this earthquake of judgment day. A voice comes from the grave of a murderer more dread than Cain, demanding that he be allowed to gaze into doomsday's morning star as into a loved eye. Then comes an old ghost whose ancient corpse has lain four thousand years or more beneath the sea. , Synopsis

None has wept upon its stone
And e'er a flower has grown
Out of its broken heart to prove
How in life it abounded with longings of sweet love. 1

He steps to a churchyard where lives a maiden who died in her youth. His is the agony that knows no relief: Not one little tear can he shed above her grave. Sighing he falls back into the sea as "the budding sun of blessed doomsday" rises. The thought is condensed into the four last lines of "The Old Ghost", evidently composed at a later date as the fruition of the inchoate "Doomsday," though, lacking the manuscript, it is not possible to be definite.

And he begged of the waves a tear.
But they shook upwards their moonlight glory,
And the shark looked on with a sneer
At his yearning desire and agony. 1

Here Beddoes relapses into his earlier pessimism of the days of "The Improvisatore." For good or for ill man fixes his doom while here on earth. In the grave there is "neither work, nor desire, nor knowledge, nor wisdom" and the resurrection brings no glory but only is a terrifying confirmation of the irrevocability of the past. The love that he had spurned in life is forever to be denied to him; he can find no tear to break what is inexorable. The poem is necessarily fragmentary as is "Leopold" and for the same reason. There is no answer vouchsafed to mortals.

Pessimism
of the
poem

²
"His first great poem," says Donner of "Doomsday". He thinks it must have been written when despair over the failure of Death's Jest-Book overwhelmed him. It may have been so. The draft of the song in the poem was written on the fly-leaf and end-board at the back of the manuscript of Death's Jest-Book retained by Beddoes. That dates ^{but} the song in one direction knowing Beddoes, the poem might have been written then or earlier or twenty years later. The whole poem was written, according to Dykes Campbell, on three scraps of paper, undated.

Date of
Composition

However, going on the assumption that it was written in 1829, Donner professes to see in it all the disappointment and despair that Beddoes must have felt upon the rejection of Death's Jest-Book. Some of the significant lines drawn

1 11, 15-18
2 Donner, p. 260

from four pages of eulogy are these: ¹"Now his soul is seeking something more than sorrow and grief, resignation and acceptance, rest and oblivion; his will to live asserted his claim on an eternal existence and united all his powers in the effort to achieve it." ²"The ghost.....is Beddoes himself yearning for love and sympathy and understanding."

³"The will to live is in conflict with the will to die. The poet is tired of life and longing for death, but the death for which he is longing must be the death of everything." ⁴"Such were the feelings that gave rise to this poem, the vision of death which is great like that of Michael Angelo."

Donner's
eulogy

⁵"The vision is tremendous as it is comprehensive." ⁶"The suggestive concentration of style has hardly been surpassed either in verse or prose, not even by Tacitus."

Donner does not seem to appreciate the very great difference between the blank verse and song portions of the poem. The crowded and confused imagery of the former and its unskilful metre seem to link it with Beddoes' earlier period; on the other hand the assurance of technique of the lyrical part marks it as belonging to the later Göttingen period, even as the draft copy shows. It is quite true that a personal note of personal agony pervades the poem but that alone does not make great poetry. In fact, the word great must be denied it for it lacks control of passion and

Demerits
of the
poem

- 1 Donner, pp. 260-263
- 2 Donner, p. 260
- 3 " p. 262
- 4 " p. 262
- 5 " p. 261
- 6 " p. 263

and it lacks completeness of expression. At a much later date must have been written "The Old Ghost," almost identical in subject matter with the ghost's song in "Doomsday," yet superior to it in finish and emotional appeal. The song of Siegfried to Amala dating from the Würzburg period, when compared to the earlier version, shows the improvement that Beddoes was achieving. Here Amala is no longer a staid maiden "crowned with flowers"¹ and "starrily clothed in a garment white,"² after the fashion of a mediaeval altarpiece but a creature of flesh and blood. The light deftness of touch by which the poet awakens music from his lines of varying length with their skilfully interwoven rhyme finds an echo in the delicately phrased thoughts and sweetly chiding words of Siegfried. One can scarcely believe that the same poet wrote both versions. The later poem is in the very spirit of the seventeenth century.

The Old
Ghost

Song by
Siegfried

Excellence
of the
song

Lady, was it fair of thee
To seem so passing fair to me?
Not every star to every eye
Is fair; and why
Art thou another's share? 3

Denner is keenly appreciative of its excellences and has summed up a page of praise in the sentence,⁴ "All the elements of poetry were here forged together and remain inseparable; meaning, words and metre, all the constituents of poetry, are united into one whole which is the poem itself." Snow passes over the poem although he mentions others far inferior. Denner connects the theme of the song with Spinoza's

- 1 Siegfried's Song, l. 2
- 2 Siegfried's Song, l. 2
- 3 Song by Siegfried, ll. 1 - 5
- 4 Denner, pl 274

doctrine of man's love of God as applied to human relationships - rather ponderous criticism.

Of other poems of the 1829-44 period, excluding those belonging to the Ivory Gate, three deserve passing mention. "The Song from the Ship," associates it self in one's mind with Kingsley and is memorable, if only for these two lines with haunting melody:

And unseen Mermaids' pearly song 1
Comes bubbling up the weeds among.

Donner declares this song to be a pearl of lyrical beauty, not unworthy of the greatest Elizabethans. One can readily agree.

²
In Beddoes' own words "The New Cecilia" is "a very objectionable piece of foolery, enough to ruin the reputation of any one, who wishes to introduce his writings into good society.....It's a sparkling piece of anecdote, filed out of the golden Legend, and extracted from Chap. V of the Ivory Gate -- or lesser Dionysiaca....." The humour of the poem, if one admits that the human excretory functions are proper subjects of humour, arises more from the incongruity of the poem in a body of work so totally different rather than from humour in the pseudo-Rabelaisian manner.

³
"There is nothing offensive in the language," says Donner who praises the poem as "extremely comic." He continues ⁴ "The humour is superb, and it is at the same time as subtle a parody on the lives of saints as was ever devised by the ironic wit of Anatole France or Max Beerbohm.

Other
Poems
1829-44

The Song
from the
Ship

The New
Cecilia

1 ll. 5,6

2 Letter to Kelsall, Zürich, 19/5/1837

3 Donner, p. 335

4 Ibid

The verse is one of sustained excellence." This is not parody but blasphemy; I fail to see anything humorous in filth: the verse is doggerel. "The Oviparous Tailor" is an amusing trifle concerning a tailor who turned into a creature half duck and half hen and laid a hundred eggs a day! -----¹ "the best of all the comical poems in Beddoes' production, and one of the best in a language not quite poverty-stricken in the genre," is the verdict of Donner.² One may excuse that enthusiasm but he continues "The phrasing is superb and natural throughout, and the verse with its repetitions and rhyme-play is as excellent as the contents are comical. In humorous verse Beddoes was a great master of rhyme, and as daring as ever Lord Byron or Browning. The hardships of life had marked the poet of Death's Jest-Book deeply, and the cynical young man and biting satirist had become a great humorist." The phrasing of the poem is uneven and awkward in several places; in its forty-five lines there are seven faulty rhymes. The poem³ is grotesque and amusing yet Donner thinks the "comedy is intense and the fun irresistible." So far does criticism go to build up in an author a quality which he does not possess. But neither this poetry nor Donner's criticism will ever make Beddoes a humorous poet. Snow offers much more honest criticism;⁴ "The Oviparous Tailor is scarcely comic at all."

The Oviparous Tailor

Opposition of Donner's and of Snow's views

1 Donner, p. 335

2 Donner, p. 336

3 ~~Reynolds~~, p. 336 Snow, p. 148

4 ~~Snow~~, p. 148 Snow, p. 145

There are given to every man some supreme days or years in his earthly progress when he walks with firm feet and, rejoicing in the triumph of his mind, feels that he has come in touch with the infinite. If he is a poet then the glorification of his experience is poetry. It was so with Beddoes. Out of long years of dejection, despair, and anguish that had been his at Oxford, later at London and then at Öttingen, where he foolishly had hoped to escape his own inner self, out of the maddening quest for some meaning of Death had come at last a measure of comfort and an answer. It was the answer that made the writing of Death's Jest-Book an occupation never to be ended - to have no purpose in the ending. Beddoes had got to the place in his spiritual life where his attempts at literary expression had become to himself of little consequence. The Becoming was not to be found in either art or life but in that other life which men call death. Yet Beddoes, erratic soul, was never to hold fast for long to his conquest. New interests at Würzburg brought him back to earthly affairs again, politics drove out poetry, death became an obsession and the end was suicide. The Church might have saved his reason; but Beddoes' battles were more of the mind than the spirit and in any case he could not have endured the discipline of form which cherishes the mystery of faith.

Triumph
of Bed-
does' lyric
powers

Develop-
ment of
Beddoes'
thought

Yet there were those months of calm triumph in his early Würzburg period and out of them came "Dream-Pedlary." One little poem, or a score of little poems, be they perfect,

Dream-
Pedlary

are not enough to secure a commanding place on Parnassus but the mount is not so crowded that the writer of such may not secure some room there. Materially, "Dream-Pedlary" is small but poetically it is supreme. For once, if only once, Beddoes became the equal of the greatest.

Forty-six lines of poetry, one stanza of ten lines and four of nine, give this exquisite expression of romantic thought. "Cryptic in phraseology," it is, according to Snow but the phrases may be unlocked with a little patient effort. As one may go down into the market place to buy a little bread, so one may buy dreams, the idealization of desires. But they cost much. Only by death or tribulation may one reach that way of life. Yet if the pedlar of dreams were to cry his wares what would one buy? The poet, to heal his ill, longs for comfort and a great peace after torment of mind and anguish of spirit. But in the past he did buy, and foolishly; the way of life he chose was a false way. Life itself is unreal, like a dream, so they say, and waking out of that dream is death. Dreaming to prize a dream, or in this world of unreality to apprehend a way of life, is recalling those who have reached life in death. One might raise the ghost of the past, bring boyhood back again to lead the man to joys that have fled. The answer is relentless:

"There are no ghosts to raise;
Out of death lead no ways;
Vain is the call." 1

There is nothing so final as death. But he continues. Do

Synopsis
of the
poem and
its inter-
pretation

you, reader, know of no ghosts to sue? No? Then you have no love, no urge of your whole being toward the future, no ghosts. If you had, then you would lie down and die as I will; you would fall like a rose-leaf out of Life's fresh crown. Thus are ghosts wooed, and a way of life found forever. "Out of death lead no ways." We call to them but they do not answer; they do not come back to us but we go to them.

Life is realized in death

The construction of the poem is as perfect as art can achieve without becoming mechanical. ¹Donner has given three pages to the prosody and construction of the poem and lavished praise whose only fault is its prosaicism. Each of the five stanzas is an integral part of the thought that calmly unfolds phrase by phrase to the triumphant conclusion of the last line. In words of beautiful metaphor the question is asked and in the second stanza an answer is given. But it is not enough. The inconsistency is shown and the metaphor changed to express the question in clearer and acuter form. It is now not a question of buying a dream but of raising a ghost - not of choosing a way of life but of raising death which alone lives. Here at the very centre of the poem one metaphor is abandoned and the other taken up in the lines:

Masterly construction of Dream-Pedlary

Metaphor

Dreaming a dream to prize,
Is wishing ghosts to rise; 2

In the third stanza this evolved question is asked and in the fourth the answer is given and rejected. This brilliant

1 Donner, p. 274-281
2 ll. 24, 25

arrangement of thought, in strophe and antistrophe, strophe and antistrophe, is fascinating in its sheer beauty. There is an answer to the question, an answer so satisfying both artistically and spiritually, that the last nine lines seem to unite all the poetry and truth of the lyric in living words that carry the reader into the infinite.

Climax
of the
thought

There is here a distinct feeling of vast power held in delicate suspension that arouses confidence and belief in every word of the poem. For a lyric the movement of the verse is slow, yet it never wavers in its sure advance. Artistically the effect is achieved in at least three ways.

Movement
of the
verse

There is a profusion of long open vowels that demand slow and careful enunciation. The rhyming of the fourth and last lines bind together two rhymed couplets to the unusually large number of twenty-four syllables: not till we get to the last line is the expression complete and the voice relaxes. But the magic is mostly due to the masterly handling of the familiar iambic foot. There is no suggestion of following the metre in slavishly mechanical fashion;

Open
vowels

Sustained
expression

Iambic
feet

occasionally^{ally} - not nearly so often as one thinks on a first reading - a trochee replaces an iambus and, what is artistically superb, only to give required emphasis to a phrase. Donner has adequately summed up the meaning and appeal of the poem, though it is to be regretted that he did not more fully dilate on its beauties, of which he seems to be thrillingly conscious. ¹"The philosophical ideas which Beddoes

¹ Donner, p. 276-7

had laboured in vain to give an adequate expression in Death's Jest-Book, now melt into the perfect harmony of his song. Deep and true emotion has dissolved the disharmony of contending passions and turned the speculations of the intellect into the reality of experience."

The simplicity of the language is the perfect phrasing of its emotion. There is not one word too many, not one too few, and almost every one is pure Anglo-Saxon which for an Englishman is the living language of the heart. To find an affinity in English for this richness of emotion in simple words, combined with mysticism and colourful imagery one has to go far back in the centuries. It is not found in the seventeenth century for, there, there is always the suggestion of the dilettante attitude, nor even in Elizabethan lyrics for there a boisterous note is frequent. One must return to the mediaeval lyrics and in particular to the religious poems of the fourteenth century.

Diction

Similar
English
verse
qualities
of imagery
and mysti-
cism

VIII

In May, 1837, in a second letter to Kelsall after a silence of six years, Beddoes refers to the ¹"Ivory Gate -- or lesser Dionysiads -- (my new work --)." As an alternative to "The Ivory Gate" the title-page which Beddoes prepared has, at the bottom, "gate of horn." Evidently Beddoes

Poems
1830-39

The Ivory
Gate

1 Letter to Kelsall, Zürich, 19/5/1837

Had in mind the lines of Vergil,

Suggestion
of Vergil

Sunt geminae sonni portae, quarum altera fertur
cornea qua veris facilis datur exitus umbris
altera candenti perfecta nitens elephanto
sed falsa ad caelum mittunt insomnia Manes. 1

The book was to be a collection of prose tales embodying lyrics of which he wished to be "prodigal." The prose tales vanished with the Browning Box - neither Kelsall nor Browning had thought highly of them anyway - and of the lyrics only a dozen or so have survived, if indeed more ever did exist. All the poems of the whole period, some doubtfully dated, number little over twenty.

Prose tales
and lyrics

The chief interest of the Ivory Gate centres about four love poems: "Love-in-Idleness," "The Reason Why;" and the "Songs" by Edward and Kenelm. But in none of them did he reach the heights of "Dream Pedlary" or "Lady, was it fair of thee" or "The Ghost's Moonshine."

Love-in-Idleness is referred to by Donner only because of the complexity of emotion revealed by the last line. The poem consists of six strophes, alternately spoken by a boy and his love. First comes man's natural demand to be the only possessor of his beloved; in that, he says, will be complete love. To his words she replies that when this is brought to pass, she will hold him close by her nor will he be able to leave. The thought of such subjection is not permanently congenial to the masculine mind; he thinks it would be better to be her second love. Then man's craving for contest and opposition

Love-in-
Idleness

Synopsis
and inter-
pretation

could be satisfied; with daring he would creep into her chamber and possess her by stealth. To this she agrees sensing the delight of an importance worth the striving by two men instead of mutual love with one. Yet this in turn he rejects, and demands to be her third love, exulting in his will to struggle and conquer. He will seize her in naked loveliness and have her by force. But to this the lady replies:

'Then thou shalt not be my first love, boy, nor my second,
nor my third;
If thou'rt the first, I'll laugh at thee and pierce thy
flesh with thorns;
If the second, from my chamber pelt with jeering laugh
and scorns;
And if thou darest be the third, I'll draw my dirk unheard
And cut thy heart in two,-
And then die, weeping you.' 1

Nowhere else in Beddoes is there such true and penetrating understanding of the feminine mind. Not even Byron who professed to understand womanhood, ever saw so deeply into the love of woman. That cold calculating quality which professes to give so much and gives so little - love on a purely physical and material plane - Beddoes saw, and recognized its devouring power. It slays and weeps; the feminine which consumes man and rules the world. And Beddoes was wise enough to give his words a carefree, half-amusing tone; otherwise he would have been branded as an unchivalrous cynic. Surely Kelsall could never have understood the poem or he would never have entitled it "Love-in-Idleness."

Beddoes'
analysis
of the
feminine
mind

The poem has the technical perfection expected of

Beddoes in his mature period. The lines carry metre; they are not formed of it. The prosody refuses analytical treatment; we are presented with a five-fold succession of similar movements that are each more than the mere additive totals of syllables. The effect of the poem is heightened because of the association of delight built up from the short rhymed couplets at the end of each stanza which at the end of the poem is utterly shattered. Attention is given to minor details as well. The introductory words of each of the boy's stanzas are varied to show the increased desire and emotion:

Technical
perfection
of the
poem

Shall I be your first love, lady, shall I be your first?¹

But let me be your second love, but let me be your second.²

No, I will be thy third love, lady, aye I will be the³
third.

The whole poem is illustrative of Beddoes' great power when his genius was not overmastered by a forced eagerness to be effective. Its realistic note joins it to the humorous poems and passages in his dramas.

"The Reason Why" pursues the theme of "Love-in-Idleness" in lighter and most^{re} amusing fashion. Swayed by feelings of loving and not loving his maid, the lover attempts to analyse his feelings. She has no more personal charms than others, and in perplexity he concludes that to understand

The
Reason
Why

1 1. 1
2 1. 13
3 1. 25

the reason for love would kill it. Similarly, could he find it within him to turn from her, his disenchanted love would die. And therein lies the reason of his love's permanence; he is enslaved by combat and endeavour.

The metre of the poem matches its revolving feeling. Not only do the three stanzas end in four lines with rhymes identical for all three but the rest of the stanzas have a rhyme scheme, abbdadd, which keeps the thought from reaching a natural resting place. Yet the poem is somewhat more than a poetical exercise; it recalls some of the more fanciful love lyrics of the Jacobean and Caroline poets. Donner has also noted that it "is more of a pastiche¹ in the manner of Herrick and Suckling."

"Edward's Song," or "Dial-Thoughts," to give the poem Kelsall's title, was to be an epilogue to chapter one of "The Ivory Gate," but is difficult for one, lacking the prose tale, to fully interpret the poem. The prosody of the poem calls for no special mention; it is written in Beddoes' later technique but it is not one of his brilliant successes. He thinks of his love at daybreak, noon, evening and midnight, each of which times is identified with a corresponding period in the life of his love. The thought of the poem is commonplace with the exception of the last stanza. The idea of spiritual love, identified with death in its fulfilment, is familiar in Beddoes' poetry. "To hear thy grave-worm hiss," is not the most felicitous

Edward's
Song

1 Donner, p. 329

phraseology, nor is the puerility in the last line of stanza one, but the concluding lines of the poem present a pleasing antithesis and a powerful indirect expression:

But looking on thy lips is cheer
They closed in love, pronouncing love;
And then I tremble, not for fear,
But in thy breath from heaven above. 1

The Epilogue to Human Woe ("Ballad of Human Life" - Keats) parallels the thought of the previous poem in three irregular stanzas of ten lines each. But the attempted ingenuity of verse construction miscarries. The last lines are the best part of the poem. Love persists and cheats "fate and the darkling grave." As long as life is interpreted in terms of emotion - which for Beddoes is forever - then he and his love are one in the necessarily complementary relationship of the sexes.

Epilogue
to Human
Woe

The "Alpine Spirit's Song" gives the joy which Beddoes felt in the majestic mountain scenery about the Vierwaldstättersee during his years at neighbouring Luzern. Snow, mountain streams and flowers fill his lines with delightful word pictures; he wishes to sail, like a dragon from Mt. Pilatus over lake and valley till he reaches Mt. Titli which there dominates the southern skyline with its vast perpendicular summit. It is magnificent description, but nature unlike human life requires more than description, however emotionalized, to make the loftiest poetic appeal. That, Wordsworth, of all the romantics, best understood.

Alpine
Spirit's
Song

Swiss
scenery

Marriage and death, are, as Snow points out, a favourite contrast with Beddoes. In "Dirge and Hymeneal" two maidens meet at a church door but marriage awaits one and a grave has been prepared for the other. Sebald's fool and the Duke's jester sing alternately but the fool, whose song is wee, has the last word; Death triumphs. "The Two Archers" tells of a young maiden in May who gaily chose Love's arrow instead of that of the withered bowman, Death. But Love fled and in December she sought out the old bowman and begged that his dart "steadfast Death" cure her woes. Not love but death is the constant element in life and,

Dirge and
Hymeneal

The Two
Archers

Its point is but for those who'd fly
Winged and all soul into the sky. 1

"Silenus in Proteus" and the Songs named by Gosse and Kelsall "Lord Alcohol" and the "Stygian Naiades" are amusing in their humour which ranges from facetiousness to full-voiced merriment. The two former are written in laughter rollicking verse that carries along a gay mood to dissolve in laughter. Snow thinks "Lord Alcohol is a drinking song not quite rollicking enough for its avowed purpose, nor quite sober enough for any other," Maybe. "Silenus" looks in retrospect at a life that has not been worldly successful but one full of good cheer and bodily pleasures as becomes one whose lot it has been

Humorous
poems

3
To suck the goatskin oftener than the goat.

1 ll. 51, 52
2 Snow, p. 148
3 1, 21

There is a leisurely and composed air about the poems in "The Ivory Gate" which is in marked contrast to the feverish or serious atmosphere in much of Beddoes' earlier work. Though gloom and moroseness settled down over his life, except when he plied the bottle to his flagging spirits, the struggle of mind with thoughts of life and death is over. Poetry is not any more a thing to be lived every day; it can be taken up or put down at will. The command he achieved over the mechanics of versification is still his but the serious purpose is not so keenly felt. One cannot help feeling of many of Beddoes' later poems that he wrote them because he always had written. Donner fails to appreciate this change in Beddoes. He becomes so lost in his attention to individual poems and so anxious for the reputation of Beddoes that he does not realize that his subject is fading away from him in clouds of indolent meditation and morbid seclusion. Beddoes talked airily of fresh efforts and new schemes of publication but they came to nothing. Life had lost its zest; it was so much easier to spend days in the paradise of mountain scenery or nights in the simulated paradise of alcohol. There is a distinct falling-off in the intensity of his verse which is far different from the sense of assurance with which a master plies his craft. There is also a distinct decline in the amount of work he produced. It is supposed by Donner and others that Beddoes destroyed much of his later work, but in the absence of any positive proof and even depending solely for judgment

Changed
pped of
1830-39
poems

Fewness of
poems

on the probabilities of human nature it is an unreasonable supposition. If these poems survived, which are not comparable in thought or execution with the poems of the early Würzburg days, why were others destroyed? And if any others ever did exist, is it likely they were any better?

Last
poems
1844-48

Yet there were flashes of the old genius - boldness of conception and daringness of imagery. "The Last Fragment" opens with these lines:

The Last
Fragment

Dim shone the pallid torches trembling ray
And the last gush of voices died away.
As bleeds the sunshine of a stormswept day
Upon a panting sea. 1

There is power, too, in the third of the "Stanzas written in Switzerland" revived by thought of his poetic idol;

Stanzas
written
in Switzer-
land

Though few might weep when the Aegean rose,
Deaf and tumultuous as human kind,
To overwhelm for ever in its close
The purest summits of an Alpine mind,
Shelley has sweet revenge. 2

The metre bears a striking resemblance to that of "Adonais."

The supposition by Donner, that "The Phantom Wooer" was written in the Adye note-book, then in Kelsall's keeping, while Beddoes was in England in 1847 is based on the resemblance of the handwriting with that of Beddoes' later penmanship in the corrections to Death's Jest-Book. Yet that does not prove it was composed then. In fact, the thought, style and mood of the poem mark it as belonging to a distinctly earlier period, probably the later Göttingen years. Another explanation of its appearance there, and

The
Phantom
Wooer

less specious, is that, at Kelsall's request, Beddoes transcribed into the notebook a poem which till then had had existed on a loose sheet of paper.

CHAPTER V

THE BRIDES' TRAGEDY AND UNFINISHED DRAMAS

Passion's hieroglyphics;
Painted upon the minutes by mad thoughts,
Dungeoned in misery.

Death's Jest-Book, 11, iv. 139-141.

I

THERE is a sense in which romanticism is of the very heart and soul of drama for this case of personality seeks to present its estimation of human life by giving significant scenes and pictures from which the reader by inferential induction and the persuasive powers of emotion will gather what was in the author's mind. It is an art which depends for its expression upon the careful selection of meaningful material out of the whole situation. It will be subjective - for what great work is not? - but not subjective in the sense that the author will intrude his personal observation and feelings into the body of the work, tagged with his name. "That a dramatic character speaks for his creator, and that young Shakespeare woos Ann Hathaway with Romeo, is an illusion so silly it scarcely deserves comment." ¹ With all this in mind the romantics essayed the drama. Elizabethan literature took dramatic form because the theatre was already a popular institution, growing out of the old moralities, mysteries and miracle plays. The romantics, on the other hand, put the form first and poured their thought and feeling into it. The result was not great drama, nor was it even structurally great art.

Romantic
and sub-
jective
qualities
of drama

Form of
Elizabethan
and
Romantic
drama

¹ Snodgrass, p. 113

The key to this paradox is the vast distinction between drama and scene. There is thus between the Elizabethan and romantic drama the same structural difference as between, for example, a novel of Hardy and Lodge's Rosalind. Individual scenes, even though written with the insight of a Marlowe or Shakespeare, ^{and} ~~which~~ romantic dramatic scenes were not, do not suffice to make a great play either for reading or for acting. Romantic writers were scenic not dramatic in their technique. Romance, and not always of the popular variety either, has thrown an atmosphere of splendour about the theatre which it simply does not possess. Donner has pointed this out in the case of Beddoes;¹ "The glorious world of the theatre had fascinated Beddoes, and the visions of the stage, whether actually seen or conjured up from printed pages, gave his thoughts their dramatic shape."

Elizabethan
and
Romantic
drama

Your romantic simply cannot conceive of William Shakespeare as a London business man putting on a good show for material awards and retiring from business to enjoy life. For the romantic there is a compelling lure about the theatre; if he cannot put himself upon the stage as author or actor, he takes the drama to his study or becomes an incurable amateur. Beddoes did both the latter.

Appeal
of the
theatre

"The Brides' Tragedy" followed the laudatory criticism that attended the publication of "The Improvisatore" in March 1821. It has been pointed out by Snow that by a

The Brides'
Tragedy

¹ Donner, p. 86

² Snow, p. 42

curious coincidence the same issue of the Oxford University and City Herald which announced the publication of Beddoes' first volume of verse contained also the raw material of "The Brides' Tragedy" in the form of a prose narrative embodying events which were supposed to have happened at Oxford almost a century before. A ballad of some thirty-five stanzas based upon the narrative also received simultaneous publication. This was the poem "Lucy", later included by the author, Thomas Gillet, in "The Midland Minstrel", published in February 1822. The poem follows rather carefully the prose narrative, but Beddoes' tragedy departs from it in several ways which are important as showing what constituted for him the proper setting and scheme of romantic drama.

Source

An abstract of the tale printed in the Oxford Herald gives the source material Beddoes used.

¹"A servant of a large College.....had an only child, on whom he doated. A young man of rank.....who belonged to the College,.....an excellent poet, elegant in dress.....succeeded in gaining the heart of Lucy. It happened during a long vacation, when at the mansion of his family, he was introduced to the daughter of a peer, and he soon found that he might without difficulty succeed in gaining her affections.....success crowned his endeavours.....He again saw his Lucy.....and at length contracted a private marriage wit her, unknown to the father.....he again saw the titled lady.....and it was settled that the marriage should shortly take place. He returned to Oxford.....soon after Lucy was missing.....after the death Of

Abstract
of
narrative

1 Abstract of narrative from Oxford University and City Herald of March 24, 1821; reprinted in Works of Thomas Lovell Beddoes, ed. by Donner, pp. 710,711.

the father the body of a young and delicate female was found buried.....in the Divinity Walk. 'Poor Lucy! I heard the death-bed confession of (the murderer). May God have forgiven him! - Memoirs ofWritten by himself."

Here are the materials of drama, which Beddoes was quick to recognize, and which contained the elements of love, pathos, crime and mystery dearly loved by the romantics. Whole scenes would have to be created and other characters added; the tale would have to be brought within the limits of the conventional drama and clearly the ending would have to be altered to make nemesis fall quickly upon the murderer. The setting of the story was well enough in the ballad where all the trappings of romance contrived to throw an air of unreality about the events but Oxford in tragedy would look bald and crude; the setting would have to be removed to a remote and different place.

Changes
made by
Beddoes

Beddoes' creative instincts were sure; these changes he proceeded to make. But he went further. In order to balance the social positions of the man and his love and to provide a complication to the plot in the person of a rival lover from his own class, he raised the social status of the girl and made her the daughter of one who has lost his wealth but not his rank which was the equal of the lover's. It thus became possible to have the girl's mother play the part in the drama which she does but it necessitated a change of motive for the crime. The ambition of the narrative and ballad is replaced by jealousy.

The source was fundamentally a social theme but, as Donner points out,¹ "the Romantics had turned their backs on the

1 Donner p 85.

social aspects of Tragedy." Beddoes refashioned the plot to fill an Elizabethan mould.

The narrative and atmosphere of the sources are transformed into the action of the drama by the construction of a plot which brings out the desired elements of romance. Hesperus and Floribel, the student and Lucy of the narrative, are introduced in a background of natural beauty of flower and forest, a "deliberately pretty scene", as Snow¹ has described it. Beddoes shows his sense of dramatic proportion by having them already secretly married. Thus dispensing with preliminaries the problem of the play is directly presented. Orlando, in love with Floribel, plans to have the father of Hesperus arrested for debt and will release him if Hesperus marries Orlando's sister, Olivia, thus leaving Floribel, unmarried as he thinks, for himself. Hesperus visits his father in prison and though maddened by the proposal of Orlando, tentatively agrees to marry Olivia. When Hesperus next meets Floribel he hints that disaster is impending but leaves in haste to ponder over the perplexing situation. Returning suddenly, he finds Floribel kissing the page-boy by whom Orlando had sent a love-message to Floribel. Enraged by what he magnifies into infidelity, he abuses her with wounding words and departs. He then falls in love with Olivia and plans the murder of Floribel. That night he meets her in the forest and drives a dagger through her heart. Almost immediately the crime is discovered and two huntsmen unearth the newly-buried body which they carry to Mordred's cottage. The Duke's guards arrest Hesperus in the banqueting-hall where a company of lords and ladies have assembled to celebrate the betrothal of Olivia and Hesperus.

Synopsis
of
plot

1 Snow p. 38.

An instance of Beddoes' instinct for the cruelly dramatic, thinks Snow.¹ After the sentence of death has been pronounced by the judge and as the execution is about to take place, Floribel's mother visits Hesperus in prison. She has a bouquet of flowers, steeped in poison, which both of them inhale; they die together.

II

It will be seen that Beddoes has left the main plot substantially as he found it. The motive for the crime has been changed and with it the role of Hesperus' father. The work thus becomes a tragedy of revenge built upon the same plot that made the newspaper narrative and poem a social tragedy. The change is significant as showing the quite different points of view of Beddoes and his contemporary. As a good Elizabethan, Beddoes complicated his drama, not by adding new threads of action to the main plot but by the addition of an ante-plot in the person of Orlando. It reinforces the motive of the main plot making its development depend upon the hidden designs of Orlando, which appear in Hesperus as filial obedience as well as the primary motive of jealousy, and the later motive of love.

Tragedy
of
revenge

This complicated motive, or to be more exact, the addition of a second and third motive which almost supplant the first, led the author into confusion when he began to select the scenes which were to be built into the whole work. In the absence of any knowledge as to how the play developed in the author's mind, it is perhaps idle to speculate but it would seem, at least, that the play was conceived with the original

Motives

¹ Snow, p. 41.

motive of filial obedience, brought forward by the machinations of Olivia, that in the second act the new motives of jealousy and love swept the play into a new form, not originally intended. With the subject and theme fixed and the lines of action within the plot rather definitely laid down, the next problem was one of choice of the scenes to be presented. The architect, who has decided upon the type of his building, determined its size and selected its materials, must next pass on to problems of internal design and the choice of room units, weighing their relative importance and juxtaposition. Similarly, what scenes to present and what to omit, what are demanded because of the exigencies of art and what are matters of taste and effect, are the most difficult problems that a dramatist has to decide. It is just here that the weakness of "The Brides' Tragedy" is most obvious. Its construction, though far from perfect is not its weak point--there are few such blunders as having Orlando left alone, meditating before an empty prison cell while his father marches away to freedom; the fault is much deeper and more elemental than that. It lies with the lack of judgment of an inexperienced dramatist. The scenes for portrayal are chosen for reasons of romantic appeal and not for the quite different and proper purpose of dramatic effect. Snow declares it to be ¹"a play unfit for the stage, with a higher percentage of effective stage scenes than many which have succeeded on the boards-". But he does not state which are these supposedly effective scenes.

Choice
of
Scenes

Construction

Romantic
appeal

Still continuing to consider the play from the conventionally dramatic point of view, one should criticize the

1 Snow, p. 46.

choice of scenes which Beddoes put together to make up his dramatic structure. It cannot be said that a wider choice was ruled out because the play was already lengthy; as it stands its acting time would be only from seventy-five to ninety minutes. In fact the choice is, if anything, too comprehensive; it includes twenty-two scenes which almost verges upon impracticability, keeping in mind the staging facilities of either Beddoes' or our own theatre. Othello, in contrast, has fifteen scenes which for acting purposes can be reduced to seven or eight; Beddoes' twenty-two scenes might be reduced by one or two in the fourth act. His choice might receive presentation only in the cinema were that not debauched by artistic atrocities committed by the mob-minded.

Excessive
number of
scenes

The reader or observer demands two things: he wants to witness the crime or at least come close to it, and he wants to be present at the retribution which falls upon the murderer. Beyond that, the choice of scenes, leading up to the climax and away from it, rests with the dramatist. In the Brides' Tragedy the choice is so varied and the settings are so unlike that a continuous presentation is almost impossible. It is just a question whether the prison scenes should not be removed to the third act to serve as the final compelling force to drive Hesperus on to crime. More certainly should punishment fall upon the head of Orlando. But leaving these aside there is the very serious fault of presenting scenes purely for their picturesque appeal rather than their practical value. Such are the suicide's grave scene--Beddoes could not resist a graveyard--the forest-setting for the murder, and the cottage scene in the fifth act. By omitting these and consolidating the action of several of

Arrangement
of
scenes

Possible
improvements

the scenes into common settings, the play would gain in force and directness; it would lose some of the romantic appeal which Beddoes would never think of sacrificing.

The scenes leading up to the crime, whatever may be chosen, must be convincing and present an inescapable consequence if the play is to be more than a disjointed mass--and disjointed not because of faulty workmanship but because of incongruity. The prison scene lacks the presence of Orlando to charge it with conflict and tense emotion. The jealousy scene, full of great possibilities, is hurried and lacks entirely any motivation. We are even less prepared for the innocently treacherous kiss than is either Fleribel or the page or the astonished Hesperus. Scene two, act two, must have been as puzzling to Fleribel as it is to the reader; yet because of the tangle of plot into which the author has got himself, the perplexity of Hesperus cannot be clarified. In these and other scenes the play lacks body; the situations are merely sketched in broad outline. In addition to the lack of emphasis from which they suffer, there is an almost total lack of all the careful leading up to and elaboration of focal points of interest which make a play stand out in three dimensional proportions. The play loses in psychological intensity.

Faults
of the
scenes

Lack of
intensity

The construction of the play is not its weakest point. Nor is this too unexpected when it is considered that Beddoes had before him the scenes of Elizabethan plays as models. Outwardly the play has balance; the five acts are approximately the same length and the twenty-two scenes are rather evenly apportioned among them. Not all the exits and entrances

Construction
of the
play

are as stupidly awkward as the exit of Olivia at the end of Act II, scene iii. The beginnings of scenes are almost invariably good and show skilful foreshortening. The dialogue is distributed somewhat evenly among the characters and since Beddoes has seldom more than two or three active persons on the stage at any one time, this is the more easily accomplished. There are contrast too and suspense and motivation, not handled very ably, but nevertheless contributing to the total general effect. The business of the moth in Act II, scene iv is "good theatre", as Snow¹ has pointed out.

General
effect

(Blindfold moth,
Thou shalt not burn thy life; there, I have saved thee,
If thou art grateful, mingle with the air
That feeds the lips of her I thought of once,
Choak her, moth, choak her. I could be content,
If she were safe in heaven.)²

III

The characterization which we expect to find in romantic drama originated in the very nature of western art, as the evolving of the future from the past and the upward and outward growth of the individual. A character of Euripides remains substantially the same at the end of the drama as he was at the beginning for we must not confuse circumstance and action with the qualities of soul and personality. The Lear of act five, on the other hand, is a vastly different man from the imperious and misunderstanding King of the first act of Shakespeare's play. Action and reaction and the cruelty of

Character-
ization in
western and
in classical
drama

¹ Snow, p.44.

² II, iv, 42-47.

humans have wrung his soul in torment until at the end the struggle dies away and peace comes--the peace of death. To western, romantic drama belongs "The Brides' Tragedy" and though it would be unjust to compare this youthful work with the maturity of genius yet it is well to keep in mind the kind of drama that Beddoes set out to write. We expect his characters to be, not static, but consciously developed. Yet the fault is not Beddoes' alone. ¹"The character-drawing, as in most Romantic plays, is wholly negligible. Its place was supplied by melodramatic incident and by the hysterical dialogue which in the days of Romanticism went under the name of tragic passion." So writes Donner. But he states the fact; he does not explain it. Though it is true that western art centres about individualism and also that the romantic age tended to emphasize the individual with his claims to freedom and rights, yet there is here another current of mass action flowing in the contrary direction and toward a consciousness of democratic political power later to bear fruit in the Reform Bill of 1832. It was these two opposing forces which Rousseau had attempted to reconcile in Du Contrat Social. Literature, particularly dramatic literature, turned away from individualism. It is noteworthy that at the same time there was a turning away from portrait painting and a movement toward orchestration in music. It is regrettable that neither Snow nor Donner seized upon this aspect of decline in drama characterization for they, no doubt, would have made much of it.

Lack of
expected
characteris-
ation in The
Brides' Tragedy

Contrary
currents in
political
thought

Decline in
portrait
painting

Of the fourteen men and women of the dramatis personae

1 Donner, p.95.

six are active: Hesperus, Floribel, Lord Ernest, Orlando, Olivia and Lenora. It is not altogether by choice that they are equally divided between the sexes; the result is a mechanical balance of character in keeping with the outer balance of form. The number of appearances upon the stage and the speeches of the characters are nicely apportioned according to the importance of the characters. All that could be done in the way of mechanical construction to give the play proportion has been accomplished. But all this is merely the beginning of art.

Dramatis
personae

Hesperus is the main character in the play; from first to last his presence or action dominates every scene. At first we see him as the gentle lover swaying the affection and moods of his Floribel, lightly putting aside the forebodings which have arisen in her dreams. Next, in the prison scene, he appears as the obstinate, dejected and reluctant saviour of his father's freedom; but, characteristically of Beddoes, he makes Hesperus turn for solution, not to the outward world of struggle and intrigue to outwit his oppressor, but to the inner world of wretched passiveness and despair that contemplates annihilation. His last speech in act one shows how much he is a creature of moods in the romantic sense:

Hesperus

I'll be a ghost and play about the graves,
For ghosts can never wed.
There, there, they go; my hopes, my youthful hopes,
Like ingrate flatterers. What have I to do
With life?.....¹

He meets Floribel again but the presence of her and the contrast with his father makes his plan of confession fade in irresolution. The man Hesperus as we know him up to this point is not the sort

Floribel
and
Hesperus

¹ I, 111, 115-119.

of person to react as he does when he surprises Floribel kissing the page, even although Floribel has told us, "He has too much of human passion in him,". But her opinion is not infallible; in Act II, scene ii she had described him thus;

He is the glass of all good qualities
And what's a little virtue in all others
Looks into him and sees itself a giant;
He is a nosegay of the sweets of man,
A dictionary of superlatives;
He walks about, a music among discords,
A star in night, a prayer 'midst madmen's curses;
And if mankind, as I do think, were made
To bear the fruit of him, and him alone,
It was a glorious destiny. ¹

He rages as a madman, in words that are as effective as sword thrusts and in speeches that are studied irony; in five minutes the tender submissive love is changed to jealousy and implacable hate. It is the extravagance of romanticism; not even the moody and suspicious Moor lost so hastily his love for Desdemona.

Extravagance
of
romanticism

In the very next scene he is in love with Olivia. Realizing the incongruity of the situation Beddoes offers an explanation rather than take pains to build up a new Hesperus out of the old. The very media for which drama exists are supplanted by poetry:

you'll not believe me,
But doubt and say 'tis sudden. Do not minute
The movements of the soul, for some there are
Of pinion unimpeded, thrice word-swift,
Outsoar the sluggish flesh; and these, Olivia,
Anticipating their death-given powers, can grasp
A century of feeling and of thought;
Outlive the old world's age, and be at once
In the present, past, and future; while the body
Lives half a pulse's stroke. To see and love thee
Was but one soul's step. ²

Melodrama

1 II,ii, 13-22.

2 II,iii, 39-49

An ingenious⁰ method of getting around a difficulty but
damaging to a convincing character portrait!

Like Beddoes himself, Hesperus has a death obsession.
Surely his is the strangest sort of love making ever witnessed this side sanity.

Then thou shalt be mine own; but not till death.
We'll let this life burn out no matter how;
Though every sand be moistened with our tears,
And every day be rain-wet in our eyes;
Though thou shouldst wed some hateful avarice,
And I grow hoary with a daubed deceit,
A smiling treachery in woman's form.
Sad to the soul, heart-cankered and forlorn;
No matter, all no matter.
Though madness rule our thoughts, despair our hearts,
And misery live with us, and misery talk,
Our guest all day, our bed-fellow all night;
No matter, all no matter.
For when our souls are born then will we wed;
Our dust shall mix and grow into one stalk,
Our breaths shall make one perfume in one bud,
Our blushes meet each other in a rose,
Our sweeter voices swell some sky-bird's throat
With the same warbling, dwell in some soft pipe,
Or bubble up along some sainted spring's
Musical course, and in the mountain trees
Slumber our deeper tones, by tempests waked:
We will be music, spring, and all fair things
The while our spirits make a sweeter union
Than melody and perfume in the air.
Wait then, if thou dost love me. 1

Romantic
idea of
death

Olivia, not understanding the sort of marriage to be consummated upon a death-bed, proposes:

Can we not love
In secret, and be happy in our thoughts. 2

His is not the sort of love that leads man to commit murder. It is the old problem of mixed motives again which leads Beddoes into an artistic cul-de-sac. Had he slain

1 11, 111, 63-88

2 11, 111, 13, 14

Floribel at the moment of her indiscretion ^{the} and murder could have been attributed to uncontrollable rage and jealousy. Now, however, a new love has suddenly developed which is represented as genuine and presumably jealousy flickers out, if the normal reactions of mortals are any guide. Yet Floribel is to be murdered, not because of his uncontrollable passion for Olivia, and not for jealousy and, lacking another motive, we must think of filial obedience in which light Floribel is an obstacle to Hesperus' marriage of necessity. All these shifting of motive and purpose make the character of Hesperus confused and contradictory. The spirit of "red-handed Murther" haunts his sleep and by the suicide's grave his thoughts take on^a murderous design. There is a slight reference, it is true, to his love for Olivia:

Mixed motives

Olivia calls me forward and to reach her
What if we tread upon a world of hearts? 1

But the chief motive for the murder seems to be dramatic necessity as required by Beddoes.

It is hard to reconcile the tempestuous Hesperus of the jealousy scene with the moody creature who sits from sunrise to evening motionless and speechless. A summer day is so long! Evening comes and, as a bell strikes, he rises to his deed. In this connection it is hard to agree with Snow who says,² "Beddoes had also a sense of the true dramatic - which is a fusion of situation with character, as striking as the merely theatrical and far more deeply moving."

Confusion in character and plot

Hesperus a romantic hero

1 ll, vi, 96, 97.
2 Snow, p. 45, 46.

Character and situation are not in accord here at this crisis of the play. The action, too, does not seem to rise out of his character; his threat of death is as inexplicable to Floribel as to us. It is understood only in her words;

 some wild and poisonous creature
Hath wounded him and with contagious fang
Planted this fury in his veins. 1

This has been ably interpreted by Donner who here calls ^{upon} you his very wide and appreciative knowledge of the Elizabethan and romantic drama. ² "The Romantic villain was a 'noble' villain who could not commit murder except by some seemingly inexplicable aberration, and the crude story that had satisfied the author of Arden of Faversham was dramatically impossible to the Romantic mind. Beddoes had to make a special effort to make the murder credible, and this was only possible if it appeared to be against the natural inclination of the murderer. The upper-class villain of the domestic drama was consequently turned into a sentimental hero, no less to be pitied than his victims. Every effort was made to exonerate him of his crime, and, according to Romantic practice, Hesperus was made the victim of a constitutional defect, which has its own literary history." He might also have added that the need for it was a concession to sentimentalism.

Donner's
explanation
of
the inconsistency
of
character

There is nothing in the familiar entrance of his servant to rouse such wild and dreadful fancies as Hesperus

1 III, 111, ll. 119-121

2 Donner, p. 87

gives way to in the first scene of act four. Here again is the failure to unite action with character and character with action. There is no dramatic reason for this scene as there is for the similar scene in Macbeth. The banquet scene is better done, the scene which Snow admires so much; there courage and audacity give a touch of admiration to the man in his words:

Action
and
character
not united

Turn out that fellow;
I know him for a crazy marvel-monger,
A long-faced gossip with his batch of wonders:
And now he'll tell you the most terrible news,
How many owls and ravens screeched last night,
Or how some ghost has left his marble tomb
To blab a drunken lie. 1

2

Donner thinks "fate must overtake Hesperus at his own wedding, because the banquets of Kyd, Marston, Tournemr, and Shirley tend to turn into carnage." The criticism does not seem quite fair; there is more in Beddoes' practise than mere imitation. This same defiant mood of Hesperus' words in the above passage is well maintained into the next scene in the lines,

Sustain-
ing a
mood

Well, gaping idiots; have ye stared enough;
Have ye yet satisfied your pious minds
By thanking your most bounteous stars ye're not
A prodigy like this? 3

and in the words to his father:

Who's this greybeard driveller?
Go, find your wits, old fellow, that bald skull
Is full of leaks; hence! look in last night's bowl;
Search all your money-bags: Hen't come abroad
Again without them; 'tis amiss. 4

- 1 IV, iii, ll, 86-92
- 2 Donner, p. 91
- 3 IVp iv, ll. 72-75
- 4 IV, iv, ll. 80-84

Donner is too severe when he says that Hesperus' passion became "a hysteria which led Hesperus to such outrages as his speeches.....to his father after the trial.....There is no life in it and no truth, only literary reminiscences." One may be excused some hysteria with a noose hanging over one's head. The Hesperus of the last act is uninteresting. We expect something more than the meek penitent piously mouthing line after line of blank verse, to his quiet listeners. Toward the end of the scene he calls upon Floribel for comfort; his new love, Olivia, has been temporarily displaced in his thoughts.

Lack of integration and convincing realism of character

I feel an airy kiss upon my cheek;
It is her breath; she hears me; she descends;
Her spirit is around me. Now I'll die. 1

Here we have no hero going to his doom dogged by inescapable fate and powerless to have avoided his end, nor have we a creature of human frailties, whose crime is mortal weakness, unredeemed by the love of God, going to a just punishment yet arousing our pity because of other nobler qualities of character. His passing leaves us cold. It may be argued that Beddoes' original was a consummate villain to whom Hesperus appears passing respectable, but if art is to rise to the heights of tragedy it must do more than merely show scenes from the life of a murderer.

Orlando is the light-hearted and scheming villain of the play. His diabolical plan to break off the love affair between Hesperus and Floribel is grimly successful. Though he appears infrequently in the latter part of the play it is his evil nature which has started the action toward doom

Orlando

and his influence is felt to the end. Knowing his own guilt it is hardly in keeping to have him address Hesperus as,

Prodigious wretch!
Rebel to man and heaven! On thee shall fall
The cureless torture of the soul, the woe
Hell nurses for the deepest damned. ¹

There is an unwarrantable neglect of this character in the last two acts which weakens the whole play. He appears once more, in the final scene, to grant in one short speech Hesperus' plea for forgiveness:

Neglect
of this
character

And we rejoice to grant it, and if prayers
In meek sincerity outpoured, avail
You have them from our hearts. ²

Surely there was a place here for a scene of recrimination between the two men. Hesperus learning of the original piece of villainy that set off his downfall might have settled the score with a sword thrust. Or if Beddoes intended Orlando to expiate his offence by a lifetime of regret he might at least have dismissed him in lines of comfortless remorse.

Lord Ernest is shown as resolute and courageous in the presence of his gaolers but once they are gone his broken spirit cries out and he begs his son pitifully to rescue him from prison. It is a scene not without some power and the controlling force is the character of Lord Ernest. Donner has put his finger on the weakness of both father and son and also upon a fundamental weakness of the plot. ³ "their failure to understand each other causes the whole tragedy. In their decisive meeting (I,iii) it never

Lord
Ernest

¹ IV, iv, 11. 118-12
² V, iv, 11, 12-14
³ Donner, p. 96

human of all the characters in the play. One cannot agree with Donner that he ¹ "is quite as hysterical and unreasonable as Hesperus."

Lenora, the mother of Floribel, is a sort of counter-Lenora
balance to Lord Ernest. Unlike Lord Ernest's love for his son, Lenora's love does not demand any sacrifice of her daughter. Her deep, almost sentimental, affection for Floribel is shown in her very first speech:

Dear and gentle soul,
You ne'er offended me, but when you said
You had offended, ²

³
Up to the middle of the third act Lenora, as Donner also observes, acts as well the role of confidante to her daughter, which she can well do for she alone knows of her daughter's marriage. After the murder scene she becomes as it were the soul of Floribel continuing upon earth. There is exhibited magnificent control in this woman crushed with the death of her daughter and then of her husband. Yet, the serenity of sadness falls too immediately upon her: as is the case with the presentation of Hesperus' character, we are not shown the transitional stages of character evolution. The poignancy of emotion prevents her concluding lines in Act III from sounding maudlin:

Lenora
as
confidante

I have not eyes enough to weep for both,
But I'll go steal the sleeping world's, and beg
A little dew from every sipping worm
To wet my cheeks with. ⁴

1 Donner, p. 96

2 II, II, 6-8

3 Donner, p. 93

4 III, v, ll. 92-95

In this and ^{the} first scene of act five sorrow reaches heights of poetic dignity. Life, as portrayed in this broken woman, takes on a nobility that is never shown elsewhere by any other character in the play. This is genuine pathos. It is like the heart pang of one, who rising to begin another day, remembers that Death is in the house and feels the resurgence of wretchedness. She has reached through love and sorrow a spiritual plane that precludes any idea of human passions. She opens her lips to curse Hesperus but only words of forgiveness are spoken. And now for love of him who once loved Floribel she brings poison in a bouquet of flowers which liberates both of them from life. To her, dying, is given a vision of her daughter.

Beddoes' control of the pathetic

With his other two women characters, drawn on more ambitious plans, Beddoes is less successful. At the same time one cannot, as Donner does, ¹ dismiss them by saying "the women are mere copies of the devoted heroines of certain Elizabethan plays"....."in all her main features Floribel, like Olivia, belongs to the class of women without self which had been made popular by Montemayor and Sir Phillip Sidney, Green, Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher, Massinger, and Shirley." It is so easy to generalize.

Floribel and Olivia

Floribel is the incarnation of trusting affection. Yet she has a mind of her own too; she begs him to make known their marriage, to throw away, "The blank and ugly ² vizor of concealment." She chides him for his tardiness

Weakness of characterization of Floribel

¹ Donner, p. 97

² II, II, II. 101-104

in a petulance that dissolves in love. But she is not blind to his impetuous nature. It is because of her deeply affectionate nature and dependence upon Hesperus that she is no match for him in his cruel denunciation of her. She cannot even shield herself from the poison of his words. She but carries out her intended role expressed in the lines,

.....if again
My wicked senses grow so cruel quick
As to suspect his kindness, I'll be sure
My eyes have got false sight, my ears false hearing
And my whole mind's become a rebel traitress. 1

It is only this which can explain her tenderness to him on their next meeting and her eager defence of him to her mother, though her heart is breaking. The murder scene is not convincing and Floribel acts like a bewildered child. She dies, speaking perfectly coherent blank verse to her last breath. Floribel is little more than a piece of stage machinery. After her death in the middle of the play her place is filled by Olivia who has already become betrothed to Hesperus. She is represented as forward, offering herself to Hesperus - most unbecoming in a romantic young lady!, though it does assist Beddoes in speeding up the action of the play. Her healthy skepticism of the pleasures of death are in agreeable contrast to the ravings of Hesperus. After her husband has been dragged away to prison, the same maid and attendants who have measured her worth by their devotion comfort her in death. Olivia has fallen into a pleasant melancholy

Olivia
replaces
Floribel

which enjoys the prospect of early death. Her companion, Violetta, is to sit on her grave in the evenings and the spirit of Olivia will visit her. Violetta does not think it will be nearly so pleasant as does Olivia. Romance here becomes sheer silliness.

One longs to hear the voice of sanity or the humorous satire of Shakespeare; "Men have died from time to time and worms have eaten them, but not for love."

Throughout the whole play the characters lack sanity and a convincing humanness. Even at their best they are little more than creatures of the stage, each coming on in turn to speak his lines and to depart. This is partly due to the way in which Beddoes has presented his scenes as separate entities, unified only by their common subject. There is a total lack of transitional action and a lack of blending of one phase of character into another. It is also due to the fault of fitting the characters to a preconceived course of action. Still more does the unreality of characterization rise from the strained atmosphere of gloom which envelops every scene.

Failure
to create
life-like
characters

To say that, ¹"The fundamental weakness of characters as well as plot lies in the dialogue which fails to make them probable or even credible," betrays a curious lack of appreciation of how a drama is conceived and written. One would have thought that Donner would entertain no other idea but that drama is sprung from the conflict of character

Weakness
of charac-
ters not
because of
dialogue

¹ Donner, p. 98

in action and that the last stage in the process is the writing of dialogue. It is the same wrong notion which led Beddoes away from drama and into poetry and to that extent must one discount all Denner's criticism of dramatic structure and action.

The disquietening sense of impending disaster falls upon the very first scene in Floribel's account of her dream. It comes again and again in Hesperus' speeches to Floribel and Olivia and charges the banquet hall with gloom. Hesperus' preoccupation with death casts a funereal atmosphere over the whole play which is little relieved by his preachment of metempsychosis in such lines as these:

funereal
atmosphere

No matter, all no matter.
For when our souls are born then will we wed;
Our dust shall mix and grow ~~summe~~ into one stalk.
Our breaths shall make one perfume in one bud,
Our blushes meet each other in a rose.
Our sweeter voices swell some sky-bird's throat
With the same warbling, dwell in some soft pipe,
Or bubble up along some sainted spring's
Musical course, and in the mountain trees
Slumber our deeper tones, by tempests waked:
We will be music, spring, and all fair things
The while our spirits make a sweeter union
Than melody and perfume in the air. 1

It is the sickly doctrine of diseased romance.

IV

Though the atmosphere is one of uneasy gloom unrelieved by any touch of humour as a contrast which would heighten its reality and intensify rather than deaden its

appeal yet the work has certain excellences which lie in other directions. The assembly of a certain number of scenes in more or less chronological order upon the same subject is not adequate for the purpose of drama yet, as individual passages, several scenes are worthy of admiration. It must be this meaning which Snow has in mind when he speaks of the effective scenes in the play. Such a one is scene II of Act I where Orlando unfolds to Claudio his scheme to entrap Hesperus and win Floribel for himself.

Effective-
ness of
individual
scenes

Here the subject is simple enough to receive full and direct treatment within fifty lines. The speeches are balanced, the flow of dialogue is natural and each character in turn takes up and continues the thought expressed by the other. Orlando is easily the stronger of the two; the whole scheme is to be little more than an excellent practical joke. Claudio who is full of the comic spirit - it is ^a pity we see no more of it - sees the humour but is blind to the danger in the situation. Orlando does not relish Claudio's bantering ridicule; his entire lack of humour rises from the same dullness of mind which prevents him from appreciating the real dangers of the plan he has under way. Here the contrast of character enlivens the whole ~~the~~ scene and the humour relieves momentarily the meanness of the scheme.

Act I
Scene 11

A second memorable scene is scene 1 of Act II where Hesperus rises from his sleep to battle a demon of his dreams.

The exciting emotions of fear and terror are well maintained, falling into a lull upon the exit of the

attendant only to rise again at the end to heights of greater horror. In addition there is a full substratum of pantomime which is called into being by the speeches of Hesperus and unites with the spoken words to give the basic appeal of drama - thought in action. It is a quality that is lacking elsewhere in the play. In the latter part of the scene, where his evil thoughts rise as "red-handed Murder" and take on a visible form, the tense emotion is drawn to a climax by the dashing of the torch to the ground. The scene recalls, of course, the dagger-scene in act two of Macbeth.

These two scenes, Act I, scene ii, and Act II, scene iv, are chosen as illustrating Beddoes at his best, the former in his handling of easy progressive dialogue and the latter in his creation of a life-like scene charged with emotion. Act V, scene i gives Beddoes' command of imagery concentrated in fifty lines. Other passages might be chosen to show more effective or pleasing pictures but at this stage of his development Beddoes was inclined to crowd his expression with images almost as thickly as he had done in The Improvisatore. The variety of the imagery and the close observation which is implied in its portrayal mark the beginning of great powers that promised so much for mature work of future years. Yet the abilities revealed here, vitiated, it is true, by crude expression and some sentimentalism but nevertheless revealed, were actually to produce but little poetry of surpassing greatness.

Act V
scene i

The language of Beddoes is best in passages of conflict or tense emotion; whenever he falls into a pensive or sentimental mood then the lines become cluttered up with words.

Diction

Time and again he passes from the forceful direct speech of action into what he evidently considered the poetic beauties of language.¹ "He was a child of his age, and he speaks its language," to quote Donner once again. This is quite true but it does not give Beddoes credit for rising at times to greater heights of simple and forceful expression. These meretricious touches are the common fault of youth and Beddoes' art was to grow away from them. Such lines as these can readily be pardoned in the work of one who is learning his craft;

Weaknesses

Now Eve has strown the sun's wide billowy couch
With rosered feathers moulted from her wing
Still scanty-sprinkled clouds, like lagging sheep
Some golden-fleeced, some streaked with delicate pink,
Are creeping up the welkin 2

(Love)

That flutters on melodious wings and strikes
The mute and viewless lyres of sunny strings 3

And even persuade myself this intercourse
Of disembodied minds is no conjecture
No fiction of romance. 4

and see thy rosy fingers
Dimpling the brooks. 5.....

They are more than made up for in such as the following;

Better be mad than treacherous. Aye, 'twas well
To tear the letters; there might be a husband;
No, he shall be no more. 6

1 Donner, p. 106

2 I, i, ll. 1-5

3 II, ii, ll. 66, 67

4 V, iii, ll. 81-83

5 V, iii, ll. 90-91

6 II, ii, ll. 145-147

May, Girl, 1
Wet not thy cheeks: I've seen a player weep.

 I lay upon my bed,
And something in the air, out-jetting night,
Converting feeling to intenser vision,
Featured its ghastly self upon my soul
Deeper than night. 2

The versification of "The Brides' Tragedy" deserves
 3
more than passing interest. Donner, whose analysis of pro-
sody and understanding of metrical effects is always good,
discusses it at considerable length. It is a distinct im-
provement upon "The Improvisatore," although in that the
verse was aided by rhyme. In fact one could there with jus-
tice apply the dictum of Milton upon rhyme; "the Invention
of a barbarous Age, to set off wretched matter and lame
Meeter." In The Brides' Tragedy, Beddoes' verse, set free
from the necessity of rhyme, flows with steady and strong
rhythm. No longer are circumlocutions and inversions re-
quired to bring a rhyming word to the end of the line, nor
do suggested rhyme words force the thought of the poem. The
lines are direct and natural even where the thought and senti-
ment are weak or in poor taste. Only about one-third of the
lines are end-stopped and the enjambment carries over the
melody to find a pause at about the middle of the succeed-
ing line; very seldom does he fall into the artistic error
of closing a period at the end of a first foot. Primary
emphasis is worked out to its effective position at either
the beginning or ending of a line or at a caesural pause.

Versification

Rhyme
and
rhythm

1 II, ii, ll. 184, 185

2 II, iv, ll. 10-14

3 Donner, p. 111-114

The substitution of a trochee for an iambus is sometimes effectively made in an initial foot. His feminine lines, of which there is a considerable percentage, fail to add any artistic quality to his metre. What is less serious is the needless lengthening of seven or eight lines into hexameters, and the shortening of a dozen lines (in the middle not at the end of speeches) to three or four feet; they are not dictated by the exigencies of thought.

V

It has been the practice in critical studies of Beddoes to point out the obvious similarities between him and such men of the Elizabethan age as Tourneur, Webster, Marston, Beaumont and Marlowe. There is no denial of this but the comparison does not fully state the case. Every one of these men stood in debt to Shakespeare, the sun of the age. Beddoes is almost hysterical as upon the subject.

Beddoes on
Shakespeare

1 "About Shakespeare you don't say enough. He was an incarnation of nature, and you might just as well attempt to remodel the seasons, and the laws of life and death, as to alter 'one jot or tittle' of his eternal thoughts. 'A star' you call him: if he was a star, all the other stage-scribblers can hardly be considered a constellation of brass buttons. I say he was the universe, and all material existence with its excellences and defects was reflected in shadowy thought upon the crystal waters of his

1 Letter to Procter, Bristol, 3/3/1824

imagination, ever-glorified as they were by the sleepless sun of his golden intellect. And this imaginary universe had its seasons and changes, its harmonies and its discords, as well as the dirty reality; on the snow-maned necks of its winter hurricanes rode madness, despair and 'empty death, with the winds whistling through the white grating of his sides'; its summer of poetry, glistening through the drops of pity; and its solemn and melancholy autumn, breathing deep melody among the 'sere and yellow leaves' of thunder-stricken life, &^c &^c." Beddoes was a belated Elizabethan and what wonder is there that the shadow he casts resembles the shadows of those others who also stood in Shakespeare's glory? Similarity there is but it springs from a common source; it is not causal but circumstantial. Beddoes was somewhat more than an imitation of a secondary movement. Snow has stated it fairly when he says ¹ "Beddoes is not an imitator in the sense that he takes a model and follows a pattern. He has simply exercised the right of every artist to absorb what is congenial to him in the work of his predecessors - without in any way ceasing to be himself." There are scenes which recall Shakespeare definitely, such as the dagger-scene, already mentioned, and the scene of Orlando and the sleeping Boy, so like those of Brutus and Lucius in acts two and four of Julius Caesar; there are also others which remind one of Shakespeare in a less forceful way such as the chiding of

Beddoes
not an
imitator

1 Snow, p. 46

Hesperus by Floribel for his tardiness, and the ridiculing by Claudius of Orlando in the role of lover. The reminiscences are mainly of Shakespeare as Donner admits, but he might have gone further. When one places the scenes side by side their similarities seem to evaporate; they are not nearly so close in phrase and imagery as one had imagined. The secret of the similarity - and it is a real thing - lies in the atmosphere which Beddoes has been able to recreate; it is Shakespearian mood and point of view that he reproduces. The words and phrases which have such an Elizabethan ring are not transferred from whatever parallel scene may be in question but they are with few exceptions part of the sixteenth century dramatists' vocabulary and occur in every play of Shakespeare. One might as well be honest in criticism. The general conception, tone and spirit of "The Brides' Tragedy" is not original.

Shakespeare
parallels

Snow has a good passage on the debt of Beddoes to the lesser Elizabethans. He says ¹ "Much has been made by commentators of his kinship to Tournour: why has so little been said of his similarity to Beaumont and Fletcher in this - a single play, but yet half his completed dramatic work? It is a matter of tone entirely, a suffused lyricism and gentle sentimentality clothing in soft silk the harshness of the action. Hesperus is surely the romantic hero of so many of Beaumont and Fletcher's plays, a Philaster strayed into tragedy."

Snow's
opinion of
Beddoes'
Elizabethan
tone

1 Snow, p. 46

The execution of his so-called tragedy has one great fault which runs through every scene of it. Snow remarks¹ that "The Brides' Tragedy has the distinction of being the only play he ever brought to real completeness." But it is of a different sort of completeness of which I speak. Even taking into account the long soliloquys and descriptive passages there is action enough but the action proceeds by leaps and bounds. That is its lack of completeness. The fault exists in two forms. First the poet does not allow himself scope or actual space enough to work out the design which he has imagined. It is the fault, too, of "The Improvisatore". Thought and image are jammed together to produce confusion: the human mind does not appreciate following a maze. The play needed to be doubled in length without the addition of any more scenes or there should have been a simplification of design such as he was to employ years later in his best lyrics. The thoughts cannot reach satisfactory completion in such a restricted field.

Incompleteness of
The Brides'
Tragedy

Cramped
Movement

Crowded
imagery

This lack of completeness is evident in another form. The play lacks body and depth, all the delicate art of chiar-
oscuro by which genius subtly reveals the implications and suggestions of ideas. Beddoes' is the art of the mediaeval fresco. To be sure a three dimensional treatment of his material would be incompatible with its profusion but the more reasonable explanation of the whole deficiency is that Beddoes, as yet, had not developed that poise and power of

Lack of
three
dimensional
treatment

¹ Snow, p. 48

sustained, concentrated effort which alone creates masterpieces. In fact he was never to reach that creative discipline except in his lyrics. Beddoes' tragedy is like the picking out of a complicated and florid tune upon a keyboard; it lacks all that is the counterpart of tonality and modulation in polyphonic music.

If tragedy to Beddoes meant any more than a dramatic work upon a serious subject ending in the death of the principal characters then the questions arise as to the sense in which the play may be regarded a tragedy and who are the tragic figures. The title, "The Brides' Tragedy", implies that Floribel and Olivia are the protagonists of the drama. Even though they appear only in parts of the play it may receive its title from them as the play "Julius Caesar" is so named for a similar reason; the spirit and driving-power of the play emanates from them. But leaving that aside, neither of the figures is tragic. Both are caught up into the whirlpool of action and come to death, neither because of fate ordained by the gods nor because of essential weakness or degradation of character. One cannot make the whole weight of the drama rest upon one innocent, if indiscreet, kiss, or upon love whose only apparent fault is its forwardness. They are tragic only in the sense that a street accident with fatal consequences is described as tragic by a semi-illiterate newspaper reporter. Beddoes accurately describes the role of Floribel in the words of Hesperus:

Is the
play a
Tragedy?

Oh, Floribel! fair martyr of my fury,¹

Nor is Hesperus, the only other choice for the chief tragic role, able to gather the tragic spirit in and about his being. He, it is plain, is damned at first sight, socially and morally. There is no tragedy in pure villainy. Even Othello was granted some loftiness and grandeur of character. But the motive of filial obedience is not sufficiently stressed to redeem the evil of Hesperus' nature.

The play has another artistic fault in common with the tragedies of the romantic school. For the dramatists of the early nineteenth century, and for Beddoes, too, tragedy meant pathos verging upon sentimentalism. This is the² "mawkishness" and "over-emphasis" of which Snow complains. Feeling was set loose from its logical basis in Sentimentalism character and situation to harass the minds of the readers and spectators. It was romance run riot.

These lines from Beddoes' dedicatory letter to Card may be appropriately quoted here.

³ "(There are instances) sufficient to attest the flourishing condition of dramatic literature, but alas! we must seek them in the closet, not in their proper home, the populous theatre, for there we shall meet with a sight, sufficient to deter the boldest adventurer from hazarding the representation of his best and most vaunted piece, our countrymen barely enduring the poetry of Shakespeare as the

Dedication to
Rev. H. Card

1 V, iv, ll. 70

2 Snow, p. 44

3 Dedicatory letter to the Rev. H. Card

vehicle of a fashionable song or a gaudy pageant. Even the theatre itself however may appear 'not yet enslaved, not wholly vile', as long as the classic taste of Milman, the plaintive sweetness of Barry Cornwall, and the frank nature of Knowles, linger, like flowers upon the Muse's grave. But they have almost deserted the public haunt, and England can hardly boast anything that deserves to be called a national stage. The following scenes were written, as you well know, exclusively for the closet,"

Beddoes was entirely straightforward in his devotion to this bastard art. He seemed never to have realized its limitations nor to have seen that either narrative poetry or the novel is the only acceptable vehicle for the expression of dramatic thought that cannot find dramatic form or that happens to be born in an age when the theatre is artistically dead, as it was in Beddoes' day. Yet seven years later in a letter to Kelsall Beddoes wrote: "You are, I think, disinclined to the stage: now I confess that I think this is the highest aim of the dramatist, & I should be very desirous to get on it. To look down on it is a piece of impertinence as long as one chooses to write in the form of a play, and is generally the result of a consciousness of one's own inability to produce anything striking & affecting in that way. Shakspeare wrote only for it."

Literary
drama

The stage

1 Letter to Kelsall, Göttingen, 27/2/1829

Such was the romantic impracticality of his mind that he never dreamed that if Shakespeare had been born into the romantic revival he would have turned his mighty creative powers into poetry and prose fiction. Nor did Beddoes ever free himself entirely from his delusion. There were several reasons why Death's Jest-Book never reached satisfactory completion and not the least of them was its entirely unsuitable medium.

Yet when all the blemishes of the work have been pointed out, or passed over in sympathetic silence, there yet remains an appeal in The Brides' Tragedy which does not perish even upon subsequent reading. It has a richness of colouring, a mediaeval flavour and the enticing air of romance which make the whole much greater than the sum of its parts.

Lasting
merits of
The Brides'
Tragedy

VI

The period between the publication of The Brides' Tragedy and his departure for Germany was a critical one in Beddoes' literary life - those years between the autumn of 1822 and the summer of 1825. What happened to Beddoes within that time it is impossible to say with any exactness. It is easy to follow his comings and goings from Oxford to Cheney Longville, or Southampton or London and back to Oxford again but that tells us exactly nothing of why within less than three years Beddoes had parted from his family, had abandoned a literary career on its very

1822-25
period in
Beddoes'
life

threshold, and had gone off to Göttingen to study medicine. With the exception of the lyrics Beddoes never finished anything he ever began, once *The Brides' Tragedy* was in print. He came nearest to finishing *Death's Jest-Book* but that finished him, as a writer of drama. To Kelsall, at this period he wrote,¹ "What his [Beddoes speaks of himself] intentions further may be I cannot say precisely, as you & I, between ourselves, recollect that he is not altogether endued with the polar virtue of perseverance, & that the needle with w^h he embroiders his cloth of life has not been rubbed with the magnet of steady determination."

There is little of interest to be attached to his four unfinished dramas, "*The Last Man*," "*Love's Arrow Poisoned*," "*Torrismond*," and "*The Second Brother*." Of the first he wrote;² "I will do the *Last Man* before I die, but it is a subject I save up for a time when I have more knowledge, a freer pencil, a little *menschen-lehre*, a command of harmony, & an accumulation of picturesque ideas & dramatic characters fit for the theme."

Unfinished
dramas

"*The Last Man*," in Denner's edition of Beddoes, attains a sort of problematical existence by association with some three score scraps of blank verse, four of which were intended for this play, one or two for *Torrismond* and as for the rest - one man's guess is as good as another's. The answer was known only to God and Beddoes and probably

The Last
Man

1 Letter to Kelsall, Hamburgh, 19/7/1825
2 Letter to Kelsall, London, April (?) 1825
3

Beddoes was not so sure for they seem to have been written with the idea of fitting them into whatever work would take them least incongruously. Kelsall and Gosse wisely refrained from printing more than half of them.

It is altogether wrong to assume, as Donner does,¹ that the play was ever written. In a letter to Kelsall, Beddoes² says, "I have finished the first act of a play; oh! as stupid. Procter has the brass to tell me that he likes that fool The Last Man. I shall go on with neither; there are now three first acts in my drawer."

An unwritten
play

Procter probably saw a draft of the play or Beddoes told him of it; the most one can surmise is the first act.

When, however, a critic says of Beddoes, as Donner does,³ "His power shows itself to its greatest advantage in the short fragments which he has left us in such abundance," criticism has passed entirely beyond its proper function of pointing out relationships and making appraising comparisons and has entered a realm of formless fancy. That his art is Baroque is true to some extent but these are but fragments. Even in these days one hardly expects to be told that there is art in a scrap-book.

Art in
fragments

A prose draft of "Love's Arrow Poisoned or The Usurper of Naples," an hysterical play with^a lurid title, appears to have been made in 1823. It is altogether likely that the play was never written. Of it there are preserved

Love's Arrow
poisoned

1 Donner, p. 125

2 Letter to Kelsall, London, February, (1824)

3 Donner, p. 127

the fragments transcribed by Dykes Campbell from the notebook which had been in Kelsall's possession and which was lost after the death of Browning's son. Neither the draft nor the fragments are such that the loss of the play, if it ever existed, can be much regretted. The part, entitled *Erminia Abbandonata*, has some scores of lines of bombastic rant, better, from a purely technical point of view than anything similar in his earlier verse but designated poetry more from courtesy than anything else.¹ "A characteristic scene of Beddoes rhodomontade," says Snow.

VII

Torrismond was written in 1824. In the form in which it has come down to us it consists of four scenes making up a first act. If any prose draft of the whole play was ever made it has not survived so that we have no knowledge of the author's intentions as to its development and conclusion.

Torrismond

The chief characters are *Torrismond* and his father, the Duke of Ferrara. In scene one we learn from the Duke's fierce tirade and the conversation of the servants that *Torrismond*, infamous for his disobedience and profligacy, is significantly absent at a time when some crime more serious than usual has been discovered. In scene two the friends of *Torrismond* are enjoying a drinking bout but *Torrismond* is unusually morose. They depart shortly and

Synopsis
of the
play

¹ Snow, p. 54

leave^{ing} Torrismond and Cyreno. Torrismond who complains of not being understood sets off to find a girl whom he had met at a feast the night before. In scene three Veronica and her female attendants are in a garden at night; (yes, the moon is shining). In a few moments the attendants, seeing that Veronica has fallen asleep, quit the scene and Veronica presumably is to spend the night out of doors. Torrismond, however, arrives almost immediately and Veronica, waking from a dream associated with Torrismond, beholds her lover in the flesh. They pledge their love but, thinking someone is approaching, "exunt severally." In scene four we are told by Melchior that the public treasury has been robbed and learn that this is the immediate cause of the Duke's rage. Torrismond returns from his love conquest to find the palace in an uproar. Taken quite aback by his father's unusual manner, he makes no defence of himself against the vague charges brought against him. The Duke disowns his son and wishes death for him. Torrismond, left with Melchior, says that they shall die.

The plot has at least three weak points. The characterization and action stand so far apart that the events in the play are quite incredible. The sleeping scene in the garden is utterly unnatural. The Duke's four words, "you have robbed me," are totally inadequate as a basis for the scene that follows; any normal person would have asked for enlightenment yet no explanation is asked and none is given.

Three
weaknesses

The Duke, we are led to believe, has always been of

a meek and forgiving nature; ten years of wrongdoing by his son have called from him reproof and favour, threats and forgiveness. He says, ¹ "I bore upon me this world of wrongs and smiles." Never before has the duke been so sad and angry as now when Melchior charges his son with theft. He flays about him in all directions; the courtiers are worms feeding upon his wealth, aides and abettors of his son. Gaudenzio, he threatens to kill; Torrismond and Melchior, he consigns to a speedy death. The portrait is wildly disproportionate and, what is worse, based upon reactions from the flimsiest of charges made by Melchior.

The Duke

There are two Torrismonds, the one of reputation as described by others and the whom we see in the act. He is said to be "all red and hot with wine," a man of "oily subterfuges," one

Torrismond

Whose veins are stretched by passion's hottest wine
Tied to no law except his lawless will ²
rages and riots headlong through the world.

³ Torrismond, according to Snow, is "a quite insoluble problem in dramatics." He finds the problem in the faulty conception of the character of Torrismond. ⁴ "It was love Beddoes had chosen as the force to convert his young hero, and he arranged a very charming and ingenuous love affair - with the result that Torrismond had to be either a quite innocuous sinner or altogether too hardened and blasé for the idyl. He ends, as we are glad such a high-spirited youth should do, by acquitting himself much better as a lover than a sinner." But more of Snow's ^{penetrating} criticism later.

Snow's
able
criticism

1 I, iv, ll. 19, 20

2 I, i, ll. 70-72

3 Snow, p. 56

4 Ibid

According to the Duke, young Torrismond was the cause of,

Blood spilt in every street by his wild sword;
The reverend citizens pelted with wrongs,
Their rights and toil-won honours blown aside,
Torn off, and trampled 'neath his drunken foot;
The very daughters of the awful church
Smear'd in their whiteness by his rude attempts;
The law thus made a lie even in my mouth;
Myself a jest for beer-pot orators;
My state dishonoured;--1

In the drinking scene he confides to Syrene that he who appeared "vain, futile, frivolous" is really aching for love and human companionship and understanding. Before Veronica he appears stainless and unspotted, the injured innocent against whom every lie-monger has raised his tongue. She, precociously wise, has guessed at the reality of the true gentleman "underneath this troubled scum of follies." When he confronts his father he raves madly upon his father's anger, his dead mother, his children he may some day have, his own death, upon everything except the point in question, the theft ~~and~~ from the treasury. Torrismond

The two Torrismonds do not meet anywhere in the action; he whom we see is just as unconvincing as he whom we know by report.

One naturally wonders what Beddoes would have written in the way of the four other expected acts, how he would have complicated his action and in what manner it would have been resolved. Romantic it would of necessity have been but there was the possibility of a tragic as well as of a happy ending. In a fancied expansion of the first act one is brought to realize that he has already included

Completion
of the
play

1 See, p. 23
I, iv, ll. 2-10

too much of the material which would find a logical place in later acts. And in that very fact--the inclusion of material which belongs elsewhere--lies the greatest defect of the portion given to us. It is exactly similar to the defect already noted in "The Brides' Tragedy"; the author has not given himself enough room to work out his theme. The plant is too large for the flower-pot. But we must judge the act as it is. Its contradictions, unexpected situations, and absurdities of character mark it as not the most successful of Beddoes' creations.

It has been suggested by Donner that¹ "the tragedy was complete with the first act;" "the catastrophe was final and irremediable"; "the whole life of the hero and of his father is comprised in this one act"; "he had in fact created a powerful drama in a form that was new and unknown to him." There are within the first act two possible lines of development foreshadowed; either the villainous Torrismond might be redeemed by the love of Veronica and united again to his father or the play might continue the tragedy of their lives to the death of one or both. But how may it be said that the catastrophe has arrived at the destiny implied by character or action? One might as well say that Lear ends with the division of the kingdom and the banishment of Cordelia. Beddoes made a take-off in a somewhat over-loaded machine (if they had not aeroplanes in those days, they had balloons) and the flight is under way; he did not make a landing. And Beddoes was quite aware that his play was unfinished. As a one-act play Torrismond is utterly inconceivable--as far as that goes, drama is not a question of one act or ten but whether within a given compass a play has beginning, body, and end. Yet it is stated that this is a form of

Donner's
criticism
of
Torrismond

1 Donner, p.144-145.

art "new and unknown" to Beddoes; to Beddoes, without a doubt, for if he never wrote a first-rate play, there is at least abundant proof that he knew what one should be like, and it is most certainly "new and unknown" to everybody else. Snow's criticism is nearer the truth--¹"a quite insoluble problem in dramatics"; the play was never finished and never could be finished. Donner praises in *Torrismond* what he considers Greek elements. ²"Like a Greek tragedy this act is concentrated round the catastrophe.as it stands it conforms with the Aristotelian canon, and at no single point has it been compelled by external force." The criticism is only partly true and that part has a wider application than to Greek drama.

Greek
drama

Of classical drama Beddoes has this to say: ³".....the quotation from *Bilderdijk*, w^h I prize highly as the historical vindication of the Shakespearian form, and therefore a decisive refutation of all application of Aristotelian maxims to our drama, for those who require an authority besides that of the feelings of the people."

As poetry, *Torrismond* is superior to anything earlier that Beddoes wrote, with the exception of some of his lyrics. The characters speak in a more natural and mature fashion than in "*The Brides' Tragedy*"; the excessive length of some speeches Beddoes was never to overcome. The Duke tears his passion to tatters and strews the parts about in heroic fashion but the verse moves along with balance and a sense of sure command. None of the speeches are quotable entire but parts of them

Poetic
expression
of
Torrismond

¹ Snow, p.56

² Donner p. 145.

³ Letter to Kelsall, Würzburg, 19/7/1830.

and individual lines show Beddoes' increase in the power of expressing himself poetically in direct and forceful fashion;

Is there not breath, or tongue, or mouth among you,
Enough to crack a curse? 1

Some other night we will like Bacchanals
Shiver the air with laughter and rough songs,
And be most jovial madmen. 2

Oh! I am not at home
In this December world, with men of ice,
Cold sirs and madams. 3

Get to your bed
Or I'll decant thy pretext of a soul
And lay thee, worm, where thou shalt multiply. 4

But we'll drive in a chariot to our graves,
Wheel'd with big thunder, o'er the heads of men. 5

This is enough to show that Beddoes was moving in the direction of powerful expression in poetic drama. There were still in his work some of the faults of Elizabethan poetry, far-fetched conceits, bombast, classical allusions, and all the other works of euphuism but an impartial critic looking at this work of a beginner in verse could not but have prophesied the achievement of a poetic medium of new strength and originality. The play fails because of its patent absurdities but the central idea is attractive. There were possibilities of drama of a high order in *Torriamond*; it needed breaking up and expansion to three or five acts but the loftiness of conception and the sense of drama are impressively conspicuous. Yet he turned aside to *Death's Jest-Book*, which was to become the grave of most of his later literary efforts.

Possibilities
of the
play

- 1 I, i, 11, 10, 11.
- 2 I, ii, 11. 49-51.
- 3 I, ii, 11. 81-83.
- 4 I, iv, 11. 132-134.
- 5 I, iv, 11. 16, 17.

VIII

Of the two brothers of the Duke of Ferrara, one, Orazio, has ruined his fortunes and become estranged from his wife by his debauchery. The other, Marcello, the second brother, has not been seen or heard of for a dozen years. In the first scene of the first act of "The Second Brother", Marcello, in beggar's rags, meets Orazio who with a crowd of his friends is making carnival in the streets of Ferrara. Marcello, denied money and spurned by Orazio, is greeted by the Jew, Ezril, who tells him that the Duke is dying and has bequeathed the duchy to him, Marcello. In the next scene Orazio professes to have grown tired of his wild life. His wife Valeria enters, disguised as a nun, and after some moments he recognizes her. As they are reunited, Varini, the father of Valeria, comes in to take possession of Orazio's mansion which he has bought from the creditors. A messenger enters to announce the death of the Duke and the accession of the second brother, Marcello. In the second act Orazio is driven away from the entrance to the palace. Then the disappearance of Valeria is announced and as Varini sits alone, the ghost of his daughter passes by him. Then servants enter to announce the suicide of Valeria by drowning and the finding of her body. In act four, Marcello rebuffs the nobles and Isbrand-like declares he will become a god. To Orazio, in the dungeon, he declares he will raise Valeria from the dead. Of Act four only a part of scene one was written. Here the expression is so ambiguous that it is difficult to interpret the scene in agreement with the rest of the play. Valeria was plainly dead in the second act but here

The
Second
Brother

Synopsis
of the
play

she appears to be really alive. Nevertheless the scene can be read to show her as resurrected and, knowing the humanness of Beddoes' ghosts, it is not an impossible interpretation. An explanation of the disagreement is found in Donner's statement that ¹ "After the third act the composition seems to have been interrupted and a new start made on the same leaf of manuscript, after which Act IV scene 1 followed immediately".

It is little wonder that Beddoes gave up the attempt to fashion a play from the materials he had brought together. There was the possibility of working out something upon the theme of redemption by love, but the killing-off of Valeria in the second act seems to preclude that, unless Beddoes had in mind an anticipation of the Wolfram motif. As it is, the play is so confused and contradictory that the only solution was to tear it up and begin it again. And Beddoes never did that sort of thing.

The play
unfinished

As in *Torriamond* so in *The Second Brother*, Snow points out that Beddoes has tackled an insoluble problem. He says, ² "The plot of profligacy at the crossroads unravelled off into that of the overweening ambition of a beggar become duke and yearning to be a god. Beddoes tried to interweave the two stories, but the themes were each too powerful to fuse."

A foot-note to Dr. Donner's criticism of the play must be mentioned, not in captious disagreement but to correct an obvious misinterpretation. ³ "The passage (II.ii, 11.156-5) has been subject to amusing comment by a German critic who believes that Valeria has committed suicide and compliments Beddoes on

Donner's
misinter-
pretation

¹ Beddoes, *Works*, ed. Donner, Intro. p. xxx.

² Snow, p.58.

³ Donner, p. 161, foot-note.

his originality in presenting her ghost on the stage before it has dawned on her that she is dead (Grete Moldauer, Thomas Lovell Beddoes, Wiener Beiträge zur englischen Philologie, 1924, p.137). The credit for this originality rests entirely with Fräulein Moldauer. In D.J.B. however, Beddoes was actually to do it."

Several careful rereadings of the act and scene in question confirm Dr. Moldauer's understanding of the role of Valeria. Yet the appearance of Valeria's ghost before we have been informed of her death is a trifle disconcerting; it can hardly be considered an artistic merit. And where in Dent's Jest-Book does Beddoes have the ghost of one walk who is unaware of his own death? Presumably Handrake is referred to. But Handrake is not even dead; the whole humour of that situation lies in the fact, as Beddoes plainly shows, that he is very much alive.¹ That is the fault of ponderous criticism--one is apt to miss the obvious interpretation in the anxiety to invent profundities where none exist.

It would be not ing short of pedantry to make a close analysis of the play for it so closely resembles the three other unfinished works of the period in prosody, style and theme that nothing new can be said. Like them it is cast in an Elizabethan romantic mould; there are echoes rather than imitations of the sixteenth century drama in its scenes and poetry. In conception it falls short of the sublimity of Torrismond but in execution it does not scream so much. The characterization is, as in the others, disjointed and unreal. The settings for a Beddoes' play were becoming standard conventions--lofty Gothic architecture,

Analysis

¹ For an explanation of this disputed interpretation see the foot-note, pp. 234, 235.

bancueting-hall or ducal apartment, churchyard or garden,
moonlight or star-light. Most of the scenery and not a little
of the characterization he carried over into Death's Jest-Book.

In his own criticism of the play Beddoes was characteristically severe. ¹ "I wish, if you read the 2nd Brother again, you w^d write down all y^r criticism--mark the MSS. in pencil & send me a critical epistle. I really think it is very bad." Beddoes' opinion

Kelsall was as usual reticent; the critical epistle was never written, or if written, it has not been preserved.

1 Letter to Kelsall, London, 25/4/1825.

CHAPTER VI

DEATH'S JEST-BOOK

Voices were heard, most loud, which no man owned
There were more shadows too than there were men;
And all the air more dark and thick than night
Was heavy, as 'twere made of something more
Than living breaths.

The Second Brother, I, ii. ll. 27-31.

Here speaks again your passion: what know we
Of Death's commandments to his subject-spirits,
Who are as yet the body's citizens?
What seas unnavigable, what wild forests,
What castles, and what ramparts there may hedge
His icy frontier?

Tower and roll what way,
There have been goblins bold who have stolen passports,
Or sailed the sea, or leaped the wall, or flung
The drawbridge down, and travelled back again.

Death's Jest-Book, II, iv, ll. 62-70.

I

If the composition of "The Brides' Tragedy" was too hurried and its physical bulk too compressed to permit of an adequate treatment of its subject then one would expect greater things of Death's Jest-Book for its revision was leisurely spread over a period of twenty years and in its length it is over twice that of the earlier play; it runs to well over one hundred quarto pages. Yet the play cannot be considered a masterpiece and for reasons not dissimilar to those for which is condemned "The

Death's
Jest-Book
no
Masterpiece

Brides' Tragedy". The diffuseness of the whole work and the unsatisfying treatment of its theme are not, however, blemishes which arise from the original conception of the play or its plot or characterization or even from the selection of scenes put together to build up the whole. These all leave something to be desired, it is true, but they do not account for the lack of straightforward and vivid impressions which one expects from the drama. As Snow saw it the play¹ "is something that comes from the fringes, at least, of delirium and despair". Always one views the action through a haze of metaphysics; its reality is not convincing. Like the ghost of Wolfram it takes a natural form before our eyes but it continues its existence as something not of this world and is obedient only to laws of its own making.

This most unusual, almost unique, effect is brought about partly by the character of the author and partly by his artistic misconception. Upon a story of revenge he builds a drama in Elizabethan style but out of the drama there arise philosophical speculations to which the poet finds it necessary to give verbal expression and so the action of the play lags from time to time while the author runs off to chase and round up his beliefs upon the nature of life and death. Beddoes the dramatist is forever being elbowed out of the way by Beddoes the poet. Great dramatic art relies upon the presentation of significant action accompanied by words that clarify its meaning in order to convey thought and emotion. But there are in Death's Jest-Book two art forms, a revenge play and speculative philosophy. The play was to all intents and purposes finished in Beddoes' Göttingen period; the

Two art
forms

1 Snow, p.99

spiritual meditations were continually evolving and changing for two decades. Nevertheless these were not transformed into radical changes in the play itself although Beddoes was forever adding or planning to add lyrics to the finished drama.

Snow makes some pointless comments on the history of the play. After citing dates of composition and revision, he says ¹ "So much of the history of the play is definite, and I think it belies the common assumption that Death's Jest-Book belongs mainly to the Göttingen period. Not only does the play reappear persistently in his correspondence up to 1844 but also over the famous three texts there were alterations and additions "freely written"--additions whose date we can only guess. And the texts themselves I am inclined to assign to a much later date than is usual, placing the third text not earlier than 1837, eight years after he had left Göttingen. Everything points to the play's having been of much wider significance than if it had belonged to the early period alone." Everyone knows he kept the play by him for the rest of his life; it is also known that the revisions except for this first act are not of much importance--at least we can criticise only what we have. Snow himself, in an appendix, says substantially the same thing ² "...the text as we have it is mainly the earliest (1829) version, except for the first act".

Snow's error
about the
composition
of the play

From Pembroke College, Oxford, Beddoes wrote to Kelsall in June 1825, ³ "I do not intend to finish that 2nd Brother you saw but am thinking of a very Gothic-styled tragedy, for w^h I have a

¹ Snow, p.109-110.

² Snow, p.190.

³ Letter to Kelsall, Oxford, 8/6/1825.

jewel of a name--DEATH'S JEST-BOOK." July saw his departure for Göttingen and there amid his anatomical studies the play began to take shape. But the writing of it must have been a confused and tangled process. A month later he refers to ¹"a somewhat quaint and unintelligible tragedy, which will set all critical pens nib upwards, à la fretful porcupine." In October, 1826, he wrote to Kelsall: ²"I wish you would come & see me.... that you might look over my unhappy devil of a tragedy, which is done and done for: its limbs being as scattered and unconnected as those of the old gentlemen whom Medea mired & boiled young. I have tried 20 times at least to copy it fair, but have given it up with disgust....." As this first manuscript has disappeared or been destroyed, we cannot know to what extent its limbs were articulated before a copy was sent to England in 1829. Kelsall indeed made a transcript of small portions of the first draft, probably while Beddoes had the play with him in England in 1828. But as the extracts comprise altogether less than two hundred lines, which agree substantially with the text of the first manuscript, there is little by which to judge the earlier form of the play. Of verbal changes and expansions of thought there were probably many, for ^{these are} ~~these are~~ the nature of later changes in the play but the plot and arrangement of scenes probably received final form in 1826. Two copies of the original manuscript have survived; manuscript one was evidently retained by Beddoes and manuscript two sent to Procter in England, for publication, where it probably remained for some time.

1 Letter to Kelsall, Hamburg, 19/7/1825.

2 Letter to Kelsall, Göttingen, 5/10/1826.

The criticism of Procter,¹ evidently received early in April, 1829, brought to a halt the ambitious hopes of Beddoes for his play. There was a brave resolve to take up the task of revision² "I will then do my best for the Play this summer", he wrote to Procter in answer to the latter's criticism.³ "Am I right in supposing that you would denounce, and order to be rewritten, all the prose scenes and passages?--almost all the 1st and 2nd, great part of the 3rd act, much of the two principal scenes of y^e 4th, and the 5th to be strengthened, and its opportunities better worked out?", "He continues and added with a note of dismay;⁴ "But you see this is no trifle, though I believe it ought to be done." Ten days later, he wrote to Kelsall,⁵ "the play is to be revised & improved. The whole summer therefore will be occupied in this business." But Beddoes' plans had a way of falling short of realisation and the revision of 1829 probably never advanced beyond the two fragments written on scraps of paper transcribed by Dykes Campbell. Before autumn had come Beddoes had gone through that amazing episode which speaks more of his insanity than his drunkenness, and had left Göttingen for Würzburg.

Procter's
severe
criticism

In January 1831 he wrote to Kelsall⁶ "I have some idea of raising my ghost (in the never ending D's J.b..) at the end of the 5th act....." Then follows a long list of projected changes and the words,⁷ "I have really begun a little to alter the ill-fated play in question." That sentence tells most of the story. How

Plans
for
revision

- 1 Letter to Procter, Göttingen, 19/4/1829.
- 2 Letter to Procter, Göttingen, 19/4/1829.
- 3 Letter to Procter, Göttingen, 19/4/1829.
- 4 Ibid
- 5 Letter to Kelsall, Göttingen, 30/4/1829.
- 6 Letter to Kelsall, Würzburg, 10/1/1831.
- 7 Ibid

many of the additions and changes in the two manuscripts were made at Würzburg it is difficult to say; they may belong to a later date. In 1837 the whole project was revived and its publication was contemplated in "The Ivory Gate," a volume also to include prose narratives. Between 1838 and 1845, according to Donner,¹ the poet completely rewrote act one. It was in truth the "never-ending Death's Jest-Book." But, judged in relationship to the whole play, the changes which we know of, made in the play over a period of twenty years, were not of tremendous consequence.

Thus Snow is utterly wrong when he says² "In this history [of its composition] in fact, and in the changes which the nature of the poet underwent in the long period of its composition, perhaps lies the explanation of its structural weakness, its tendency to an overgrowth of rhetoric, and to wandering into bye-paths of action." And it is nothing less than pure invention to say³ "it is in this long period of obscure transition (1825-1847) that his play took shape." What on earth does the critic mean? The play before us, except for act one and some verbal changes, was written between June 1825 and February 1829, may in fact have been finished except for revision by October 1826. A sentence from a letter to Procter written then seems to indicate as much;⁴ "D's Jest Book is finished in the rough, and I will endeavour to write it out and send it to you before Easter:"

Snow's
error

Date of
Composition
1825-26
1829?

- 1 Beddoes, Works, ed. Donner, Intro. p.xi
- 2 Snow, p. 105
- 3 Snow, p. 110
- 4 Letter to Procter, Göttingen, 9/10/1826

II

1

Donner gives the impression, in his eight page enquiry into the changes made in act one, that they were extensive and important. But the changes are purely of expression not drama; the number and nature of the scenes and the plot remain the same. The dialogue was lengthened by over two hundred lines, from seven hundred and eight to nine hundred and thirty-five, to the exact. Lyrics to the extent of two hundred and twenty-seven lines were added. The revised act one is to its original as one photographic study of a subject is to another. It is essentially the same act.

Extent
of the
changes

The plot of Death's Jest-Book is conceived on a heroic scale. Beddoes alludes to his source in a letter to Kelsall,² "the Jest book -- or the Fool's Tragedy-- the historical nucleus of which is an isolated and rather disputed fact, that Duke Boleslaus of Münsterberg in Silesia was killed by his court fool A.D. 1377, but that is the least important part of the whole fable." The account is to be found in "Geschichte der Hofnarren" by Karl Friedrich Flögel, Liegnitz, 1789, but it gave Beddoes merely the suggestion for his play.

In addition to the main theme, the play has a number of side-issues, more or less coherent with the fates of Isbrand and the Duke. There is thus brought about some

1 Donner, p. 359-367

2 Letter to Kelsall, Göttingen, 29/10/1827

unity of action although it is the person of Isbrand which holds together the various elements of the drama.

Before the play begins the Duke of Münsterberg had been dispossessed of his duchy by Melveric and his daughter had been dishonoured. The Duke's two sons, Wolfram and Isbrand, disguised as knight and fool, had come to the court, ¹ "stiff-limbed with murderous intent," to avenge these crimes but Wolfram's hate had changed to love. ² "My heart, and not my dagger," he tells Isbrand, "found the heart for which my weapon hungered!" When Wolfram proposed to lead an expedition to Egypt to rescue Duke Melveric, there beleaguered by the Saracens while on a crusading expedition, the anger of Isbrand flares up at his brother's apostasy. ³ "Do it," he cries, "and I will laugh so loud, the dead shall shake their coffins!" But Isbrand's remonstrances have no effect and Wolfram sets sail for Egypt to bring back Melveric to be reinstated as duke of what should be his own inheritance. Isbrand remains as court-fool with Thorwald who has been regent in Melveric's absence. With Wolfram sails Mandrake, a Rosicrucian astrologer and quacksalver who leaves his wife, Kate, to follow the study of mystic and occult sciences in Egypt. When Wolfram reaches the African coast, he finds that Melveric has fallen in love with Sibylla to whom he himself had previously made vows of love. Melveric demands that Wolfram

Synopsis
of the
play

Act I

1 I, I, II. 226, 227

2 I, I, II, 230, 231

3 I, I, II, 198, 199

give up Sibylla to him and upon his refusal plans to poison him, sending his servant, Ziba, to make Wolfram a present of poisoned wine. Meanwhile, Melveric encountering a company of robbers, has been made prisoner and sends to Wolfram for assistance. The messenger arrives and Wolfram is persuaded to go to the Duke's rescue. He is about to drink the poisoned wine when Ziba dashes it to the ground. But the discovery of Melveric's intended crime makes little difference to Wolfram; though he despises the savage Duke, yet he will rescue him. This is quickly accomplished but when they are left alone, Melveric deals Wolfram a mortal blow. Wolfram refuses to tell who attacked him, and dies commending Sibylla to Melveric's care.

The entry of Mandrake and his boy into a tavern at Ancona heralds the return of Duke Melveric. Mandrake, in Egypt, had concocted an ointment which rendered its user invisible and on the return voyage the jar had accidentally fallen and discharged its contents over him. It is a poor magician who does not believe his own hocus-pocus; Mandrake must pretend to be invisible. There follows an amusing scene in the tavern at Mandrake's expense.

Act II

The body of Wolfram is to be buried but when Duke Melveric, disguised as a pilgrim, and Sibylla leave the church, Isbrand and Siegfried, his friend, substitute the protesting Mandrake for the body. Isbrand then declares

¹ Donner is here guilty of an amusing blunder. On page 216 he says, "on the way back his own (Mandrake's) pot of balsam falls down and kills him. He is now dead and

he will bury his brother at Grüssau and "fetch the Duke and his sons to Hell." The sons, Adalmar and Athulf, are both in love with Amala, daughter to Thorwald. The Duke, who removes his disguise to Thorwald, is told that Adalmar is plotting rebellion. Isbrand is already deep in the rebellious plot and looks with satisfaction upon Athulf's intended murder of his brother.

The conspirators are to meet by night in the ruins of a Gothic Cathedral and with them is the Duke himself, still in disguise. The spirit of Mario (Marius) joins the rebellious crew. After the conspirators leave, Ziba attempts to raise the soul of the Duke's wife, long dead and buried in the Cathedral. In an amusing scene, he

Act III

invisible, and wherever he goes he is taken for a speck until dudgeoning brings him to his senses and he takes his place among the living. He is buried instead of Welfram at Ancona and rises before him at Grüssau." Let us look at the text, act two, scene one, lines 70-75; "last night in the storm, the waves rolled, and the ship rolled in them, and in the middle of dreams, fell the pot of balsam on the man's skull who made it, broke it to pieces, and bathed him from head to foot, and so ran he about dripping with the oil of invisibility and tears for his lost body - but here he comes: see him not." The error upon which Denner builds his wrong interpretation of the role of Mandrake, evidently arose from the two "its" in line seventy-two. It is quite plain from what follows that one should read the line to mean: "fell the pot of balsam.....broke it (the pot of balsam) to pieces." The pot of balsam must have been broken in order to bathe Mandrake from head to foot with the "bewitching butter." Besides the "see him not" shows that Mandrake is to be ridiculed with his own silly notion. Nor is he "buried at Ancona;" The text says, act two, scene two, line 148, "Mandrake runs across the stage." With what glee would Mandrake have chuckled over this faulty reading of his role!

succeeds only in reusing Mandrake who having escaped being buried alive in Ancona has taken refuge among the tombs at Grüssau. Left alone, the Duke calls upon his wife to rise but the sepulchre gates fly open to discover Wolfram who had been buried by Isbrand in the duchess' tomb. The two depart together for the Governor's palace.

In the fourth act the Duke reveals himself to Adalmar, Wolfram appears to Sibylla, and Athulf declares his hopeless love to Amala. Just as Athulf, standing below his love's window drinks a vial of poison, Adalmar enters and finding out the state of affairs runs off to bring Ziba to supply an antidote. It turns out that the vial of poison was but a powerful soporific. Before Athulf falls asleep however, he kills Adalmar with a dagger thrust, and then the dead and living are left lying beneath Amala's window. The conspirators meet at a banquet and news is brought that the rebellion is on the point of successful realization. Act IV

The triumphant Isbrand is deserted by his followers, even the faithful Siegfried. Sibylla, with her ladies, gathering flowers in a meadow, foretells her approaching death. The last scene is in the ruined Cathedral. Wolfram ~~appears to~~ saves Isbrand from the poisoned wine served him by Siegfried. Ladies enter bearing the dead Sibylla; Mario stabs Isbrand in the name of Liberty. As Isbrand dies, Wolfram sets a fool's cap on his brother's head. As the Duke inquires for his sons, Amala enters with the bier of Adalmar. Then Athulf comes in and stabs himself. Immediately Amala falls in a death swoon. The Duke resigns his Act V

crown to Thorwald and is carried off by Wolfram "still alive, into the world o' th' dead."

III

Such is the plot of "Death's Jest-Book" - "lurid stuff" as Snow calls it. Surely there was never anything quite like it before or since. A revenger turns friend, the living long for death, the graves open to send the dead back to life, a living man is murdered by a spirit, ghosts take up the life of mortals, a man is carried off to the land of death by a ghost. Is the play a burlesque? Did Beddoes here seek to expose the silliness of ghost plays and the downright romantic drivel that passed for drama? The wooing of Sibylla by the ghost of Wolfram, the love scene between Athulf and Amala, the taking of the Duke into the spirit world and the similar scenes are uproariously funny. One might, at first reading or knowing nothing of Beddoes, easily ascribe the travesty purpose to its composition. The beautiful lyrics, some of the serious passages and Beddoes' well-known theories of life and death easily prevent this interpretation of the play. The author sought to break down^{wn} the barriers between this world and the next, to show that death is but an incident in the progress of life and that entry into the world to come is to be welcomed not dreaded.

A
grotesque
play

These are serious thoughts yet, as presented in the play, the effect is humorous, and that, I am sure, was not

Beddoes' intention. Nor is the world of the 1930's so much different from that of the 1830's that we see as ridiculous what our great-grandfathers may have thought profoundly consequential. This is no explanation of the atmosphere of amusement that hovers about the whole work. There are of course, the Mandrake scenes which are irresistibly humorous - Beddoes was at his best whenever he rid himself of the death complex and the serious manner. But the Mandrake scenes are deliberately developed as a comic sub-plot, in plain imitation of the Elizabethan convention, and they reach an effect which artistically leaves little to be desired. Here Beddoes had an excellent subject; he conceived a suitable character and he invented humorous situations. The intentional humour of Death's Jest-Book is quite the equal of what is similar in the Elizabethan drama.

Humour
unintentional
and
intentional

The introduction of a spirit or ghost into a play is not in itself amusing. The ghosts of Hamlet's father or of Banquo have in fact a quite contrary effect. An explanation of the undesired and unexpected humorous effect of the ghosts of Beddoes' creation is probably to be found in the way in which our author worked. Beddoes had thought so long and so intensely upon the subject of death that the dead were as real, or more so, to him than were the living. He had got to the place in his thinking where he conceived of humans passing back and forth across the barrier of death without great tribulation or apparently much inconvenience. The terror and horror of death are entirely removed.

Incongruity
of the
supernatural

Now this easy and familiar attitude toward death is not common to men; too often we are so busy with living that death is not given a thought. The presentation then of death in familiar terms and the introduction of ghosts who make love and take part in a revolution is so utterly incongruous that the comic instead of the serious is evoked by the author. What is commonplace in Beddoes' world is dreaded and avoided in ours; Beddoes never realized how far he had departed from the normal life of humans. His ghosts are as amusing as falling down a stairway even though the victim perish.

If Beddoes' ghosts are bizarre and grotesque, not fitting harmoniously into the scheme of the play, no less disturbing are the inconsistencies and weaknesses of his plot; and both faults, though so different in nature, spring from a common cause. Beddoes was so immersed in his theme that he forgot the practical exigencies of his art. One is able to accept the device of disguise even although ^{one} he must believe that not a soul recognized Melveric after less than four years' absence, for it is of the nature of a convention and not much different from the ordinarily accepted stage situation in the representation of any drama. But surely it is absurd to see Mandrake, carried off a moment before as substitute for a corpse, return without the development of any complication in the plot by the astonished ~~mourners~~ mourners. Donner fails to appreciate the fact of Mandrake's very real existence. The very comic

Inconsist-
encies of
the plot

effect of Ziba's efforts at ghost-raising, resulting in the appearance of Mandrake, removes utterly any possibility of Wolfram's appearance being taken seriously. The dramatist has put us in a humorous mood: laugh at a hoax and laugh at what is supposedly genuine. Donner says, ¹"The only danger of Homunculus Mandrake is that he makes the other characters look not a little absurd, and the very purpose of his introduction in the conjuring scene may thus be defeated, for there can be little doubt that Beddoes made us laugh at Mandrake lest we should laugh at Wolfram, and that would not do." But we do laugh at Wolfram, and that is just the weakness of the dramatic construction. Nor is it likely that Amala would be deceived by the voice of Athulf below her window. The singing of the Harpagus ballad in the fourth scene of the fourth act falls completely flat. Either Beddoes had forgotten that Melveric was ^{and also was ignorant of his son's death} unrecognized by all the company, or he took this way of letting it be known that Isbrand had penetrated the disguise of pilgrim worn by the Duke. In either case it is a plain blunder or faulty technique.

IV

The substructure of the play is conceived on a broad and noble basis that places it far beyond the old revenge plays in its philosophical implications and the grandeur of its thought.

Snow rejects the interpretation of Death's Jest-Book

1 Donner. p. 237

as a revenge play, or tragedy of nemesis. But let Snow¹ speak for himself. "Beddoes himself conceived of the play as a tragedy of Nemesis. There is no mistaking the intent of the final speech of the Spectre to Duke Melveric with its

Death's
Jest-Book
as a revenge
drama

The spirit of retribution called me hither.
Thy sons have perished for like cause, as that²
For which thou did'st assassinate thy friend.

But equally without mistake it is clear this intent was not carried out.³ He continues, "Theoretically one might assume Wolfram, living or spectral, to be the central figure and Isbrand the tool of fate, but to make such an assumption is to make a serious mistake in emphasis." But one doesn't need to make the assumption. Wolfram and Isbrand are co-equals, a dual representation of revenge. In at least one statement it is possible to agree with Snow:⁴ "To classify him then as a subsidiary - the tool of fate - in a tragedy revolving around Wolfram or Melveric would be grotesque." More sensible is his assertion:⁵ "Death's Jest-Book does, indeed, have much in common with the old revenge play. The basic pattern is the same." But to say that

⁶ "It is this conflict between the nemesis or Elizabethan revenge drama, and the Play of the Wild Fool, with its obscure symbolic connection with Beddoes' own nature, which causes the dramatic action to waver," is simply not to understand the play. The "Play of the Wild Fool," as Snow designates the part of Isbrand, is part of the revenge drama.

- 1 Snow, p. 114
- 2 V, iv, ll. 348-350
- 3 Snow, p. 114
- 4 Snow, p. 115
- 5 Snow, p. 115
- 6 Ibid

The conflict, and there is a serious one, rises not from within the body of the play itself but from the excrescences of metaphysics and mysticism as opposed to the drama proper. The interpretation as given in section five below will, I hope, make clear that neither Snow nor Donner extracted the meaning from the play.

Snow's and
Donner's
faulty inter-
pretation

Donner, indeed, speaks of ¹"a great tragedy of revenge in Elizabethan style." But he misses the main point of the revenge motif. He says, ²"In order to make his here credible to a sceptical age, Beddoes proves Wolfram in the wrong, in order to show Isbrand in the right. Thus the death of Wolfram affords Isbrand a new cause of hatred." Wolfram forgives, true enough, but he punishes too, which is quite in keeping with Christian ethics. In act one he exclaims he will have his revenge, ³"I will avenge me, Duke, as never man" and in act five, he declares, ⁴"The spirit of retribution called me hither." Missing this point Donner's argument runs off on a tangent. What Beddoes proves - if Donner had persevered to the end of the play he would have seen it - is that Isbrand is wrong and Wolfram right. Isbrand's new cause of hatred is a perfectly legitimate use of motives; it shows Isbrand's changing nature. It changes once more, too, when Isbrand's hatred turns to contempt for the whole human race and he aspires to godly powers.

¹ Donner, p. 214

² Donner, p. 220

³ Death's Jest-Book, I, iv, l. 203

⁴ Death's Jest-Book, V, iv, l. 348

The play suffers, and suffers badly, from the excrescences that have grown out of the fissures of the main body. Beddoes with all his keenly developed sense of humour, did not see that his treatment of the theme created absurdities of action and character. He needed someone to bring ^{back} his abnormal fancy to touch the normal world; only Beddoes could appreciate the play as he wrote it. But there was no one to point the way. Kelsall was either lost in blind adoration or afraid to speak out; Prester could not understand it. Yet the basic ideas of the play are sound.

Excrescences
of the play

It is wrong to judge the play from the surface appearance of its plot and action. To do so is to get no farther than Snow when he says it is ¹ "a play which is chaotic and ineffectual;" ² "The action is erratic and confused." ³ "Death's Jest-Book is the symbol of that emotional ferment and disillusion which was going on (in him)." ⁴ "It is a mad play." All these comments may be applied with some justice to the play but they say nothing of the framework underneath. And that framework let us now examine.

Superficial
criticism

V

Life has been swept from its normally peaceful and ordered movement by the usurpation of the crown on the part of Melveric. His is a treacherous and base disloy-

1 Snow, p. 101

2 Ibid

3 Ibid

4 Ibid

alty. Of the two sons of the deposed Duke, one, Isbrand, plans revenge after the normally human fashion. He is wise in the ways of this world and scorns the lofty idealism of Wolfram. The latter, disdaining revenge, seeks to work out his relationship to his father's usurper on levels of sublime friendship attested in a blood bond. But the powers of good, humanly directed, cannot cope with what is intrinsically evil. Melveric triumphs over Wolfram as he had triumphed over Wolfram's father. He usurps his kingship in love and, murdering Wolfram, seizes the maiden Sibylla for himself. Yet Melveric's triumph is not complete: he holds his duchy only by ^{virtue} ~~virtue~~ of the loyalty of Theoderic, and Sibylla's heart he never possesses, for it was given long before to Wolfram. Isbrand sees in the death of Wolfram but another reason for revenge. This man to gain his ends makes use of the disloyalty of son to father. He succeeds but in the moment of his success he is betrayed by his friend, Siegfried, who, foiled in his attempt to murder Isbrand by poison, is led away a prisoner. Yet Isbrand, in a way that precludes any extension of this drama of human revenge, is struck down by the spirit of Marius, the Roman Consul. Thus the man who attempted by force alone to strain the lines of life back into their proper channel, is murdered by one whose very name typifies violence and bloodshed. And the deed is done in the name of liberty! Neither ^{nor} ~~Snower~~ Donner sees anything particularly unusual in Marius ¹ masquerading in the garb of Liberty. Donner says, only,

Examination
of the plot
and action
in the light
of Beddoes'
philosophy of
life and
death

that it must be a pseudo-heroic tradition. Surely Beddoes did not admire Marius, the blood-thirsty demagogue! Or is he here bitterly satirical of red-handed Revolution - the Bolshevism of the day - committing crime in the name of Liberty? One brother slays the other secretly and at his father's demand for revenge, he kills himself. Donner says,

¹ "The Duke's sons at the same time murder each other in rivalry for a woman's love." When? Where? Not in Death's Jest-Book. Human forces and passions, humanly directed toward revenge, have failed to restore Nature's order and balance. Yet Melveric is not allowed to continue his unnatural course. At the very end he sees retribution in the spiritual being of Wolfram and resigns his throne to Thorwald. Wolfram removes Melveric from the scene of his evil deeds. Thorwald the loyal and just inherits the duchy for which evil men have committed crime. Yet even Thorwald does not wholly escape; he has countenanced forces of evil in the person of Melveric and suffers the death of his daughter, Amala, from the result of a disloyalty. Wolfram triumphs ultimately: the earthly portion of his family is entrusted to clean and honest hands; Sibylla, his love, joins him in the afterworld. Thus material and spiritual forces are satisfied and life can flow on unbrokenly.

Triumph of
spiritual
forces

Re-establish-
ment of
equilibrium

Beddoes had an idea here which touches the sublime. Would that Beddoes, the metaphysician and ~~not~~ death-obsessionist, had permitted Beddoes, the dramatist and mystic, to work out his theme untrammelled! ² "The poetry

¹ Donner, p. 230

² Snow, p. 103

he couldn't get out of him," says Snow. Yet the play, utterly unsuited to stage presentation, before an audience of philistines, can be enjoyed by any who take the trouble to gain first Beddoes' unusual and difficult belief in the strange relationship of the next world to this.

Sublimity
of Beddoes'
theme

VI

Of the persons represented in the drama, the men have more individuality and reality than have the women. Of the men, the Duke, Welfram, and Isbrand alone have sufficient character to enable them to stand alone and apart from the scenes of the play. Beddoes was quite conscious of his weakness in character portrayal. ¹"The charge of monotony in character is well grounded, but I can hardly ~~happily~~ do anything in this case, for the power of drawing character and humour - two things absolutely indispensable for a good dramatist - are the two first articles in my deficiencies."

Character
portrayal

²Donner says, (Isbrand) "is a more complex and a more consistent character," implying that the other characters are not consistent. And what does he mean by consistent? If he means unchanging, or static, or identical in act five with the man represented in act one, then he is paying Beddoes no compliment. So is a block of wood consistent. "Consistent" characters are found in Greek drama;

What is
Donner's
meaning of
consistent?

1 Letter to Kelsall, Göttingen, 30/4/1829
2 Donner, p. 226

in western drama the characters live and grow and change as the play proceeds. Is Lear of act five consistent with the Lear of act one? Beddoes' characters are far from perfectly drawn but no one should mistake what he was trying to do. Kelsall thought that the characters¹ "are all self-consistent and in good keeping with the deep note to which all the work is pitched."

Besides the sublime goodness of Wolfram, the Duke, ~~the Duke~~ Melferic, appears without a single redeeming quality. His utterly selfish mind scarcely thinks of the prior claim of Wolfram, his deliverer, to the love of Sibylla. To such a man as Wolfram, a benefactor becomes an enemy because he has unintentionally proven the other's fallibility and human insufficiency. Such a friend is to be slain that vanity may be preserved. To Wolfram the Duke throws out the challenge:

Duke
Melferic

Pool, would thy virtue shame and crush me down;
And make a grateful blushing bonds-lave of me?
O no! I dare be wicked still; and murderer
My thought has christened me, such I must remain.
O curse thy meek, forgiving, idiot heart,
That thus will take its womanish revenge,
And with the loathliest poison, pardon, kill me;
Twice-sentenced, die! 2

Thus the materialistic Melferic, blind to virtuous idealism, thinks forgiveness a weapon raised to slay him. After the murder he is completely in control of himself and will be able to rub his cares smooth in the bustle of the world. The sly and crafty Melferic now shows his cunning. When

1 Kelsall in a letter to his sister. 27/7/1850, as quoted by Donner, footnote, p. 226

2 I, iv, ll. 182-189

Thorwald reminds him of his former underhand battles against treason, he replies:

He is wary still,
And has a snake's eye under every leaf.¹

The sight of his sons, neck-deep in treasonous plots, forces him to summon all his powers of duplicity and cunning. Athulf and Adalmar shall be removed by affairs of love from the stormy political world; the other leaders he will spy upon. The woman Sibylla he is impatient with for her grief. But it too must yield before his imperious will. "I will look to't Hereafter." Yet, alone, the crime of murder which rises up between them threatens remorse. But there is still courage and determination in Melveric's mind and he strikes on with the thought:

Melveric's
schemes

Who should be merrier than a secret villain?²

With admirable daring he allays suspicion by suggesting that he and Isbrand have formerly met; Isbrand has been completely fooled and the wily Melveric is safe. Isbrand is too sure of his own security. His perilous boast is childlike to Melveric, so wise in the ways of human kind, so low in his estimate of human nature. The transition from the Duke of Münsterburg to the husband who wishes he were with his dead wife is an uncertain and contradictory portrayal of character. We are not prepared for the lines:

I will abandon this ungrateful country,
And leave my dukedom's earth behind me; all,
Save the small urn that holds my dead beloved;
That relic will I save from my wrecked principedom;
Beside it live and die.³

1 II, iii, ll.286,287.

2 III, i, l.62

3 III, iii, ll.173-177.

Yet, for what is to follow, this other side of the Duke's nature must be revealed. It can only be complained that it is clumsily and hurriedly done. There is a genuinely realistic touch about Melveric's credulity, quite in keeping with his worldly character. Your materialist is ever the most superstitious of mortals. After the resurrection of Wolfram, the role of the Duke is less fully displayed, for with the ghost's appearance, the future lines of action of the play are clearly determined. After the first scene of act four in which he offers reconciliation to his son, Adalmar, he does not appear again until the second scene of act five except for a few moments in act four, scene four, when he utters but one speech, deeply ironical. Quick to seize upon the slightest wavering of the conspirators' allegiance to Isbrand, he turns their purposes to Isbrand's destruction and his own gain. In the last scene, there is a decided falling off in the importance of Melveric. Beddoes did not make the most of the final situation; the Duke is suddenly reduced to the status of marionette and meekly speaks the lines that are given him.

Complexity of character

Failure of portrayal at end of play

The character of Isbrand is the most continuously developed of all, and the interest in him is maintained throughout. "My Friend Isbrand I recommended to your attention: he's a nice fellow,"¹ was Beddoes' comment. Nevertheless Snow seems only to be striving for critical effect when he says he is the "one consistently living figure among a group of gesticulating marionettes."² The characterization is not really quite so bad as that. In the beginning Isbrand is the very antithesis of

Isbrand

1 Letter to Kelsall, Göttingen, 27/2/1829.

2 Snow, p. 115.

Wolfram and cries "Hate! Hate! Revenge and blood!"¹ But time and circumstances are opposed to carrying out his designs and he must for a time wear

a face
As innocent and lamblike as the wool
That brings a plague.²

There is a simplicity about Isbrand and a singleness of purpose in his action which give him an appearance of strength which he really does not possess. His assumption of the role of fool serves the practical purpose of allowing him to further his schemes unsuspected besides providing a reason for the display of his wit and humour. He gives a just description of himself in his words to Siegfried:

Original
singleness
of purpose

I am patient and still and laborious, a good contented man; peaceable as an ass chewing a thistle, and my thistle is revenge. I do but whisper it now; but hereafter I will thunder the word, and I shall shoot up gigantic out of this pismire shape, and hurl the bolt of that revenge.³

Isbrand is too sure of himself; he does not realize the real politic ability of his foes nor is he shrewd enough to suspect the poor pilgrim. His intellect is greater and more philosophic than Melveric's but distinctly inferior in native cunning. Too glibly he boasts:

Isbrand
and
Milveric
compared

Tomorrow, Siegfried, shalt thou see me sitting
One of the drivers of this racing earth,⁴
With Grasseau's reins between my fingers.

The weakness of Isbrand is his intense hatred of the Duke as his

1 I, i, 1.234.

2 I, i, 11.274-276.

3 II, ii, 11.97-101

4 II, iv, 11.13-15

guiding force; a greater man would have made it secondary to the recovery of the family estates. Snow sees about him "a species of perverse grandeur which springs from the largeness of his contempt for any and all supposedly great things."¹ When Bolingbroke, a contemporary of Beddoes' characters, returned to England, it was, so he said, to claim his rightful inheritance, not to wreak vengeance upon Richard Plantagenet. But Isbrand is cast in a lesser mould. With unusual candour he describes himself to Siegfried:

Hatred
of the
Duke

But the heart I have
Is a strange little snake. He drinks not wine
When he'd be drunk, but poison: he doth fatten
On bitter hate, not love. And oh, that duke!
My life is hate of him; and when I tread
His neck into the grave, I shall, methinks,
Fall into ashes with the mighty joy,
Or be transferred into a winged star:
That will be all eternal heaven distilled
Down to one thick rich minute. This sounds madly,
But I am mad when I remember him.²

Yet there is imagination in him and a refinement of revenge for he has buried his brother in the tomb of Melverie's wife so that the Duke after death shall lie thinking on eternity beside the man he murdered and thus embrace his own damnation. It is Isbrand's self-conceit which makes him think of himself as an instrument used by Fate. His part in the play belies his own thought,

Isbrand
not
altogether
an instr-
ument of
fate

For Isbrand is the handle of the chisels
Which Fate, the turner of men's lives, doth use
Upon the wheeling world.³

These were evidently the lines which made Snow fear that a misinterpretation of Isbrand might be made.⁴

- 1 Snow, p. 125.
- 2 II, iv, ll. 26-36
- 3 II, iv, ll. 97-99.
- 4 Snow, p. 114.

In his advice to Athulf, Isbrand reaches levels of diabolical revenge which far exceed his own brute purposes:

If you would wound your foe,
Get swords that pierce the mind: a bodily slice
Is cured by surgeon's butter: let true hate
Leap the flesh, wall, or fling his fiery deeds
Into the soul.¹

In a neatly ironical passage Isbrand declares his complete mastery of the situation in Grüssau; the Duke can afford to let the fool prate of his cunning. The setting for the presentation of the Harpagus ballad is well planned; Isbrand really reaches fine dramatic effect here but the point is lost because of a structural error in the play. The duel with Ziba in which the latter's life is spared by ^{Isbrand} ~~Isbrand~~, after the Egyptian has been disarmed, gives us a glimpse of a chivalrous and courageous ^{Isbrand} ~~Isbrand~~ we had probably not thought of before. It prepares us too for the Isbrand of act five who despises common men and common ways. He says:

Beddoes' use of dramatic irony

I have a bit of FIAT in my soul,
And can myself create my little world.

.....
It was ever
My study to find out a way to godhead,
And on reflection soon I found that first
I was but half created;

.....
What shall we add to man
To bring him higher? I begin to think
That's a discovery I soon shall make.

.....
I raised myself
By this comparative philosophy,
Above your shoulders, my sage gentlemen.
Have patience but a little and keep still,
I'll find means, bye and bye, of flying higher.²

Development of his character

Isbrand succeeds in a world of action. When necessity for action

1 II, iv, ll. 189-193.

2 IV, ii, ll. 38, 39; 47-50; 62-64; 67-71.

is over, he flies off at a tangent, lost in philosophical speculation and the search for the philosopher's stone. This is a new Isbrand. Whatever justification there was in his planning of revenge is eclipsed by this altogether unwarranted reaching up for godlike powers. Death comes to restore him to his normal level--death, the grim jester. Very appropriately Wolfram sets the fool's cap on the head of the dying Isbrand and says:

Isbrand
fails
when
necessity
for action
ceases

Meantime Death sends you back this cap of office
At his court you're elected to the post:¹

In early life Isbrand the fool had attempted to make a fool of death and up to a point he succeeded: now he is to be court fool to Death to make a fool of life. "For now Death makes indeed a fool of me." ² So passes Isbrand, "the only dramatic figure created by Beddoes which does approach greatness."³

The key to Wolfram's character is to be found in these lines which he addresses to Isbrand as the ship Baris is waiting, ready to sail to the rescue of Duke Melverie:

Wolfram

O think not, brother, that our father's spirit
Breathes earthly passion more: he is with us
And guides us to the danger of his foe
Bringing from heaven his help, pity and pardon.
But should his blood need bloody expiation
Then let me perish.....
.....
Leave me the truth of love, and death is lovely.⁴

Wolfram is the lonely figure in the play for his idealistic philosophy of resignation and love have entirely separated him

¹ IV, iv, ll. 271, 272.

² IV, iv, l. 285.

³ Snow, p. 122.

⁴ I, i, ll. 256-263; 267.

from the Isbrands of this world, and they are legion. So to Isbrand, Wolfram's way of life is "lion-heartedness right asinine!"¹ There is one thing needed to complete the earthly life of the perfect knight--love. And love he finds in the person of Sibylla. But earthly bliss is not attained without a struggle, rarely is it obtained at all. Between Wolfram and the perfection of his mortal life comes Melveric the hard and brutal egoist. If there is a question of right in such matters, then Wolfram's prior claim to Sibylla's love should take precedence. But Beddoes, with rare insight into the ways of men, allows the innocent Wolfram to be misjudged and makes the Duke consider himself the injured party. The self-abnegation of Wolfram reaches its highest level when, looking upon the poisoned goblet, which Melveric had prepared for him, he goes out to save his life. So seized is Melveric with the idea of possessing Sibylla--and having got her, he paid little more attention to her--that he pays his "thanks in steel." In dying, Wolfram refuses to tell who was his murderer. There is no trace of bitterness in the words:

His isolation

Struggle between Wolfram and Melveric

I will avenge me, Duke, as never man.²

Wolfram like Beddoes

He has in mind the natural working out of divine law. Wolfram like Beddoes, has thought long upon death and life and he has an answer:

Yet, can man die? Ay, as the sun doth set:
The earth it is that falls away from day;
Fixed in the heavens, although unseen by us,
The immortal life and light remains triumphant.³

1 I, i, l. 268.

2 I, iv, l. 203.

3 I, iv, ll. 251-254.

The resurrection of Wolfram, in Act III, scene iii, is a dramatic device that can never be generally accepted for, over a period of centuries, literature has built up a number of conventions about the appearance of ghosts which the author cannot violate without appearing ridiculous to most people. A Wolfram who rises from the grave, not a conventional ghost, but a creature of flesh and blood, instead of being convincingly real is less than actual. He explains his appearance and mission to Helveric:

Resurrection
of
Wolfram

Flesh, bones, and soul, and blood that thou stol'st from me,
Upon thy summons, bound by bloody signs,
Here Wolfram stands:

.....
I will stay awhile
To see how the world goes, feast and be merry,
.....

.....
Thou, old man,
Art helpless against me. I shall not harm thee;
So lead me home.¹

It was Beddoes' idea to break down utterly the conception of death as a wall separating the next world from this and to think of it as merely a transition. It is at this point among others, that Beddoes' philosophy comes into conflict with his dramatic purpose and in that conflict the characterization of Wolfram suffers blows nearly as fatal as those dealt by Helveric's sword. To all appearances a man like other men, Wolfram now plays the part of a disembodied spirit. To prove his point, Beddoes has got himself entangled in an artistic incongruity. There is no need whatever to expatiate upon the nature of Wolfram; it is well known from the first act of the play--yet the author does little

Damage to
Character
portrayal

1 III, iii, ll. 662-665; 671, 672; 685-687.

else in the scene between Sibylla and Wolfram the resurrected.
Consider such lines as these:

I am a ghost. Tremble not; fear not me.
The dead are ever good and innocent,
And love the living. They are cheerful creatures,
And quiet as the sunbeams, and most like,
In grace and patient love, and spotless beauty,
The new-born of mankind.¹

They add nothing to the action. It is simply Beddoes speaking through the lips of Wolfram with whom he has identified himself, as thinker and philosopher, throughout the whole play. Unfortunately for the action of the play and the development of its theme, the speeches in this vein are too long and too obviously grafted to the main stem of the play, not sprung from its roots of character and action. The growth of the love between Wolfram and Sibylla seems dictated more by logical necessity than by development of personality. Wolfram's life in the next world has to be made complete and Sibylla cannot be left on earth languishing forever. In the last scene of the play Wolfram assumes a more active role. Still clinging to his thesis that the dead and living are one, Beddoes presents Wolfram as a reistering companion of the conspirators. And in this case we can forgive him for does not Wolfram sing that humorous and quaint ballad, "Old Adam, the carrion crew"? Yet Wolfram is more than human and his greater than mortal powers are revealed when he forbids Isbrand to drink the wine in which Wolfram alone knows that Siegfried has placed poison. Beddoes set himself a most difficult task; this business of trying to make Wolfram appear both man and spirit, of trying to present life as a continuum in gradations from earth to the

Beddoes'
impossible
task

¹ IV, 11, ll. 111-116.

infinite, involved dramatic difficulties for which neither he nor anybody else ever created a perfect technique. The difficulty is certainly not solved by making Wolfram speak, Beddoes-like, the fifteen lines in Act V, scene iv, in which he raises the question,¹ "But dead and living, which are which?" In the last hundred lines of the play, Wolfram becomes a sort of master of ceremonies to order the behaviour of the characters. It is a stepping off the stage which Beddoes would probably have explained by saying that Wolfram, about to enter again the spirit world, removes himself a little in order to bring the action of the play to its close.

Removal of
Wolfram to
new role

The female characters, Amala and Sibylla, are carried forward by the action of the play but they do not direct it. Both are pathetic figures and each is the counterpart of the other for as Sibylla ceases to have any significant earthly existence because of the strife between Melveric and Wolfram so Amala perishes in the conflict between Athulf and Adalmar. As Isbrand says of Amala:

Amala and
Sibylla

Poor Amala!
A thorny rose thy life is, plucked in the dew,
And pitilessly woven with these snakes
Into a garland for the King of the grave.²

So might one lament the painful life of Sibylla until she is united again with Wolfram. There is admiration for the constant love she bears Wolfram, keeping it as a cherished secret in her heart. There is pathos too in her repetition of her lover's words;

¹ V, iv, ll. 206-220.

² II, iv, ll. 215-218.

Can a man die? Ay, as the sun doth set:
It is the earth that falls away from light;
Fixed in the heavens, although unseen by us,
The immortal life and light remains triumphant.¹

Beddoes' women are never living creatures; he did not succeed in giving reality to either Olivia or Floribel in "The Brides' Tragedy." It is hardly to be expected of one who all his life had so little to do with women; besides he wrote in an age when women had little active part in the world of men and affairs.

Thinness of
Characterization

Athulf and Adalmar seem to be introduced into the play largely because their antagonism forms a parallel to the contest between Melveric and Wolfram. But there the comparison stops. In the words of Athulf, his brother, Adalmar is a man,

Athulf and
Adalmar

Whose sword's his pleasure. A more savage man
Made for the monstrous times, but left out then,
Born by mistake with us.²

Amala, who should have known them well, admires the bravery and honour of Adalmar, thinks him a little cold and admits an interest in the other:

If his wild brother
Had but more constancy and less insolence
In love, he were a man much to my heart.

To Amala, Athulf pours out a whining tale:

Had I been in my young days taught the truth,
And brought up with the kindness and affection
Of a good man! I was not myself evil,
But out of youth and ignorance did much wrong.⁴

1 II, ii, ll. 39-42.

2 II, ii, ll. 39-42.

3 III, ii, ll. 19-21.

4 IV, iii, ll. 57-59

It is the common cry of the criminal and echoed in the words of every coward who seeks to blame environment and not himself for his failures. It is appropriate for the niceties of dramatic action that Adalmar the warlike, should perish by the hand of the profligate and that the latter should expiate the crime by suicide.

Contrast in
character

Of Siegfried and Ziba it is sufficient to say that they are pushed on and off the stage whenever the mechanics of the play require their assistance. They are stage machinery, even as Mario, the ghost of the Roman twenty centuries dead. Thorwald is the devoted regent, a greater and better Melveric, but until the end only a place-holder. Mandrake, of all these lesser characters, is the most human and blest with the most individuality. At times, he threatens to carry away into his role most of the interest and much of the action of the play. His pretence of invisibility, his flashes of wit and humour, his living embodiment of the satire of esoteric mumbo-jumbo reveal the Beddoes of Charterhouse days with all the buffoonery and merry fun that went with them. He is the very Don Quixote of pseudo-mysticism. Every one of his scenes is priceless--obscured, alas, in Death's Jest-Book which still awaits general acclaim.

Minor
characters

The humour
of
Mandrake

VII

The selection of scenes from all the possible ones that suggest themselves from the material of the plot, is ample for the dramatic portrayal of the narrative. They exhibit that neatness of arrangement which is characteristic of all Beddoes' completed work. Of the five acts all have four scenes except the third which has three. The first act (in the 1829 version) and the

Dramatic
construction

last act are both shorter than the other three which are all approximately of the same length. With the exception of the last act, the architecture of the play is created on sound principles. The beginning of each scene is effective and the author brings each to a natural close. In no case does he carry the dialogue beyond that point where the curtain would fall most effectively. The last act, on the other hand, has every appearance of having been put together hurriedly as a tentative completion of the work. The climax of the play may be considered as falling within the last scene of act three, with the resurrection of Wolfram. As far as the main plot is concerned, no new element is introduced after that point and the rest of the play is given over to a solution of the problem that has been presented in the first three acts. Beddoes thus follows the Elizabethan tradition of a drawn-out denouement. Each scene, excepting again act five, duplicates the construction of each act; the climax occurs between the mathematical centre of each scene and the end.

Hurried
construction
of
act five

As noted by Donner, the development of the plot corresponds to Beddoes' dramatic theory expressed in a letter to Kelsall where he says,¹ "In the first (act) the deed must be committed, the consequences of w^h employ the following: in the second, a reaction attempted, and a second seed sown for ripening in the after time: in the third, which needs not to be the most powerful as I once thought, the storm gathers, doubts arise, or the termination w^h appears to be at hand, is intercepted by some bold and unexpected invention; a new event, the development of a character,

Beddoes'
theory of
dramatic
construction

1 Letter to Kelsall, Würzburg, 10/1/1831.

hitherto obscure, a new resolve &c gives a new turn to the aspect of the future: in the fourth all is consummated, the truth is cleared up, the final determination taken, the step of Nemesis is heard: and in the fifth the atonement follows. The first, fourth, and fifth, must be most attractive and interesting, from the confliction of passions and the events occasioned by them: the 2 is a pause for retrospection, anticipation; in the third is rather the struggle between the will of man and the moral law of necessity, w^h awaits inevitably his past action--the pivot of all tragedy."

But from the standpoint of interest, the coherence of the play is faulty. Each act tends to centre about itself and there is little of that projection of interest from each act to the succeeding one which is necessary if the play is to move forward as an organic whole. As it is, the machinery runs down at intervals of twenty-five pages or so and has to be wound up again before the next act is got under way. As each act stands by itself, so each scene, with two or three exceptions, partakes of the nature of a separate unit. ~~The play has thus the nature of a separate unit.~~ The play has thus the nature of a group of scenes strung on the same theme and made coherent by their chronological order and relationship of subject matter. The play reads much better than it would act.

Incoherence

Thus Beddoes has arranged the material of his drama. For the sake of economy and ease of stage production ^{it is} ~~it is~~ regrettable that he and the others who tried to bring about an Elizabethan revival did not better understand the sixteenth century stage. Nor did they seem to appreciate the fact that the division

of a play into scenes was imposed by tradition upon playwrights and that Shakespeare's plays, for example, were so written that they might be played with little interruption. Yet Beddoes seems to have been fully aware of the artistic atrocities of improper staging as the quotation from the letter on page 49 shows. There are at least three solutions to the practical difficulties of the production of such drama; the use of the tripartite Elizabethan stage, or some similar structure; the employment of easily changed scenery and lighting; or, the structural means of unity of place. The rebirth of the drama in the generation succeeding Beddoes saw the employment of the latter means. Yet it was not beyond Beddoes' reach. It would have meant, of course, an entirely different conception of dramatic art; it would have required the elaboration of scenes and the reconstruction of settings to make them fit a common background. As Donner points out,¹ "Several scenes appear totally unnecessary." Yet not much in the nature of variety would have had to be sacrificed. The trouble was that the early nineteenth century theatre demanded scenic display and the spectacle which, after all, is not drama.

Failure of
romantic
drama to
develop a
satisfactory
form

The working out of the plot in a large number of different scenes had to recommend it the ease with which action could be brought into the drama, though it is not impossible, if more difficult, to achieve it in the three or five scene drama. And the instinct for action ^{is} truly dramatic even if it does involve a tendency toward melodrama. In this

Action

1 Donner, p. 218

respect, "Death's Jest-Book" is superior to "The Brides' Tragedy." The introduction of a sub-plot and the use of parallel situations also assist in providing sufficient movement. In fact the action of the drama rises almost entirely out of the plot and its complications for the characterization is not incisive enough to take control of the situation. This relative weakness of character portrayal would make it necessary to report action rather than to stage it, were it not for the fact, already mentioned, that the play is drawn through a variety of scenes. As it is, only one important event takes place off-stage - the taking of the city by the forces of the conspirators. That we can easily ^{the}forge; Beddoes can be given credit of consciously avoiding that type of scene which ordinarily misses fire in a most lamentable fashion.

Weakness of
characteriz-
ation

Variety of
scenes

VIII

The design of Death's Jest-Book is based on interesting symmetries grouped about the central idea of the plot. The central idea may be generalized as loyalty and the forces, that move about that focal point, are treachery, revenge, love, and constancy.

Design of
Death's
Jest-Book

In the first place, there is the three-sided relationship of Wolfram, Isbrand and Melveric. The Duke is the person upon whom the actions of the others are centred, each in his characteristic way, and it is in the person of the Duke that the personalities and interests of the two

Dramatic
symmetries

brothers meet and come into conflict. Congruous with this design is the relationship of Athulf and Adalmar to Melveric. Each is opposed to his father and each in a different way, yet in that opposition is one of their interests made common. The Wolfram, Sibylla, Melveric relationship is paralleled by the Adalmar, Amala, Athulf relationship. Thorwald occupies the central position in the conflict between Isbrand and Melveric, opposed to the former and loyal to the latter. In addition there are here linked up two other characters, Ziba, who is loyal to Melveric and Siegfried who faithfully supports Isbrand until the last scene.

This analysis of the design units which fit into the general outline of the play illustrates beautifully the thoughtful care which Beddoes gave to the building up of the structure of the drama. It is exactly the same operation of mind which reveals itself in the intricate verse forms which he evolved for his lyrics. The symmetries observed, and there are also minor ones, have not mathematical precision of application nor indeed should that be expected in artistic work. But they do reveal that the romantic Beddoes paid more attention to form than is generally the case with one who is not of the classical temperament.

**Dramatic
structure**

IX

One essential of drama is conflict, whether of man against fate, or destiny, or society, or man, or some other antagonist. Besides the human conflicts of Death's Jest-Book there is the conflict of man against the natural order of human and universal relationships upon which is imposed Beddoes' creed that death is a swinging door, opening both ways, between the earthly life and the grave life. Neither the creed nor the cosmic conflict need concern us here for though they do take part in the play, or intrude upon it, it is to the narrower struggle of man with man that attention is here directed.

Dramatic
conflict

The nature of the conflicts in Death's Jest-Book is complicated but this complication arose not from the author's failure to recognize the superior advantage of simple clear-cut lines of action but from the nature of his subject. (There was also as a contributing cause, the romantic creative impulse which demands intricacy, subtlety, and a mysterious air of indirection and vagueness in the working out of its themes.) There is no personification of universal forces in his play - this is implied in the plot and evolves in the denouement - but we step beyond the human world when we enter a realm in which the dead live and act as humans. Manifestly, if we are able to have a play based on a dualism, in this case the material and spiritual aspects of life in conflict with disharmony, then

Complication
of conflict
in Death's
Jest-Book

it becomes necessary to divide, as it were, our character, representing that duality, into two parts. Thus, in opposition to Melveric, Beddoes placed the two brothers, Wolfram and Isbrand. This alone was sufficient to raise almost unsolvable technical problems but when one of them, Wolfram, is slain and returns in a spiritual body to the stage then the action as far as he is concerned is out of gear with the rest of the play. It is a knotty problem, but given the theme, there does not seem to be any way of avoiding it.

Dualism of
revenge charac-
terization

Its diffi-
culties

The conflict between evil and goodness manifested in the flesh must always end in ^{the} triumph of evil until that goodness loses the dross of the mortal body and becomes manifested as a reflection of divine spirit. So Wolfram, being Wolfram, must perish before the incarnation of evil in Melveric. The conflict, excellent as it may be as an exhibition of a Christlike character crucified by the powers of darkness, is distressingly insufficient as material for drama. It does not satisfy our sense of the dramatic for it is not a struggle fought on even ground; unlike qualities are opposed. It was logically necessary to continue the conflict on a spiritual plane and for this purpose our author resurrects Wolfram. But the idea which appeared perfectly natural to Beddoes strikes the average person as bizarre. Yet this is not so because of unbelief, for the Christian faith teaches the resurrection of the dead, but because of the exceptional nature of his reappearance and because it is not within the bounds of dramatic convention.

Conflict
of good
and evil

Dramatic
insuffici-
ency

Artistic
difficulties

But Wolfram is resurrected and play goes on, not, however, with any solution of Beddoes' problem. He did not find any dramatic way of showing the conflict between the spiritualized Wolfram, and the mortal Melveric. Wolfram retreats to the side of the stage until the last scene when the author by an almost unwarrantable tour de force puts the direction of affairs into his hands. It, at least, was a method of concluding the play.

Unsolved
problem

If the play loses dramatic intensity because of the abstract representation of the conflict between Wolfram and Melveric, it certainly does not gain by the portrayal of the conflict between Isbrand and Melveric. Here there was no difficulty problem of pitting one plane of existence against the other nor was there even anything in the nature of a total opposition of personalities. Yet the protagonists never come to a clash in the open. The reason, of course, is that Melveric retains his disguise until the end. For this, there is no ^{justification} ~~reason~~ tenable on purely dramatic grounds. There is a reference to past action but no justification for the present course in Thorwald's lines:

Conflict
between
Isbrand
and Melveric

I remember oft

.....
How he would cloud his majesty of form
With priestly hangings or the tattered garb
Of the ste-seated beggar, and go round
To catch the tavern talk and the street ballad
Until he knew the very nick of time,
When his heart's arrow would be on the string;
And, seizing Treason by the arm, would pour
Death back upon him.

1 II, iii, ll. 276 and 279-286

It is just this clouding of his majesty of form which robs the play of force and intensity. In a novel or narrative poem it might acquire secondary interest because of underhand intrigue described and commented upon by the author but in the drama this sort of conflict simply fails to materialize. The struggle of war is ever more dramatic than the secret negotiations of the conference chamber. It should have been possible to bring the conflict out into the open and with the loss of a little mystery and irony (which nearly misses fire) to turn the action into a more thoroughly dramatic form. "The very nick of time," which Thorwald refers to, comes too late to retrieve the opportunity for directness; it is only within the last hundred lines that the pilgrim is acclaimed as Duke Melverie and that Isbrand is even aware of his presence in Münsterburg.

Indirect
representation
of
conflict

The conflict of Athulf with Adalmar is beyond the main action of the play and had necessarily to be subdued in tone and scope but this restriction did not need to be applied to the conflict of Athulf and Adalmar with their father. Isbrand, it is true, uses this struggle for his own purposes and conceals his own plans and motives behind this screen until the moment comes for their revelation. Yet there is no practical reason for this; as the son of the wrongfully deposed Duke he had a legal and moral claim to the dukedom in which he might easily have raised a considerable following. Even if this were not a reasonable supposition to be acted upon in constructing the play, the conflict of

Conflict
between
Athulf and
Adalmar and
with Melverie

Isbrand's
use of these
conflicts

the sons with their father and Isbrand's conspiracy are totally insufficient in their portrayal of dramatic forces. We overhear the conferences of conspirators; we get reports of what is taking place but in visible conflict of purpose and character, an essential of drama, the play is deficient.

X

The contrasts in the Death's Jest-Book are numerous and illuminating. They spring from what individualism of character there is and are added to by action. Altogether they show something of Beddoes' method of work. Besides the contrast between Wolfram and Isbrand which, as has been shown, rose from the theme of Beddoes' play there are also the contrasts of Wolfram and Isbrand to Melveric. In addition there are the contrasts of Athulf with Adalmar, Amala with Sibylla, Siegfried with Ziba. In all these cases, in the latter ones more so, the weaknesses of characterization prevent the contrasts being shown in sharp relief. Yet, whatever life and interest the play may be held to possess, when considered purely as drama and not poetry, is due in some considerable measure to the way in which the author has set one of several pairs of characters over against his counterpart. There is also a way of looking at this technique as a means of character portrayal, not essentially dramatic, to be sure, and partaking more of romantic stylistic qualities. With the aid of imagination the reader may see by contrast the presence of characteristics

Dramatic
contrast

Beddoes'
use of
contrasts

in one individual which are suggested by opposing characteristics in his opposite. Thus what is not made clear by the author is extended and amplified by the activity of the reader. But such dependence upon reading into the characters of the play does not exemplify dramatic writing at its best.

XI

The nature of spoken drama is such that the fullness of its effect is dependent upon the incorporation of physical stage properties and scenery into the body of its expression. This is to be distinguished from the use of mere scenic background or the employment of properties for the carrying out of action. There are times when a piece of stage property, or an accessory object, acquires a special significance arising from an expression of its own, quite apart from any material utility. An example of such "theatre", as the term is so used, comes in the dagger scene in *The Brides' Tragedy* when Hesperus saves a meth from his flaming torch and bids it go to "cheek" Floribel.

The place
of stage
properties

This "theatre" or symbolical action taken up into the body of verbal expression is not an artificial device of the stage. It occurs naturally when under the stress of emotion surroundings acquire a new importance and the mind is sharpened to an edge of greater appreciation and metaphor becomes the language of strong feeling. When, act-

Symbolical
action

ing under a writ of quo warranto, the commissioners of Edward I came to demand of the Earl Warenne by what right he held his estates, that noble earl brandished the rusty weapons that would defend his lands as well as they had seized them.

Or consider another example. A year and a day after the Great War when the heir of a noble English house was still among the "missing" his aged father, without a word, lifted his son's sword from the table in the great hall and hung it among the weapons of his ancestors who had fought at Crecy and Poitiers.

It is of such stuff as this that drama is made. It is in this material that Beddoes' drama is lacking. In fact in the Death's Jest-Book there is nothing at all which so speaks with the language of imagination. There are approaches to it, accidental probably, rather than unsuccessful attempts. In Act II, scene iii, Adalmar sends Isbrand for a battle-lance but by the time he returns with it the author has almost forgotten the matter. The device of the poisoned wine in the first and last acts is of ^adifferent nature: so also is the opening ~~in~~ of the sepulchre doors in Act III. His nearest approaches to symbolic action are the dance of death in Act V, and the giving of the flower by Sibylla to Amala in Act III. The pretence of invisibility by Mandrake in act one leading to his pommelling is the humorous counterpart of the serious "theatre."

Beddoes' failure to use symbolic action

This failure to make more use of a means of effect so dear to the hearts of theatre-goers is disappointing in

Beddoes. Yet he had the keenness of poetic appreciation to feel the power of such symbolic expression. The truth seems to be that Beddoes' mind was lacking in a sense of the true dramatic. Death's Jest-Book existed only as words in his mind and on the written page. He probably never visualized the whole drama from beginning to end. There is nothing here to approach the casket-scenes in The Merchant of Venice or the incomparable, "Is this a dagger which I see before me," in Macbeth, which has been so magnificently interpreted by Gordon Craig in "The Art of the Theatre."

Beddoes'
sense of
the dramatic

Beddoes reaches greater excellence in the mechanics of expression in his ^{dramatic} prose than he does in his ^{dramatic} poetry. Act one, which contains more prose than any other, had the benefit of rewriting. After the collapse of 1829, he never had the courage and confidence to undertake a complete revision of his work. The changes which he made in the prose portion of act one between 1838-44 are numerous but slight; none are changes for a worse, and most are changes for a better expression. An example or two will suffice: "Have reverence, I pray thee,"¹ becomes "Respect the grave and sober, I pray thee;"² "our noble faculty is in decay"³ becomes is changed to "our noble faculty is in its last leaf."⁴ "Thus be our fair purpose shipwrecked,"⁵ is rewritten, "Thus perish our good Revenge."⁶ The changes are mostly of

Alterations
in the play

- 1 I, i, l. 36. (1829)
- 2 I, i, l. 45. (1838-1844)
- 3 I, i, l. 37. (1829)
- 4 I, i, ll. 46, 47, (1838-1844)
- 5 I, i, ll. 118 (1829)
- 6 I, i, l. 207. (1838-1844)

this order,- a movement towards a more dynamic, concrete and colourful speech. But the changes are not in the direction of simplicity and his prose continues to suffer from bombast. So in the lines; "Revenge, Revenge! lend me your torch, that I may by its bloody light spell the lines of this man's face, and note how pitiful an ass the philtres of charity and friendship have made of our poor brother."¹ changed to "Revenge, Revenge lend me your torch, that I may by its bloody fire see the furrows of this man's countenance, which once were iron, like the bars of Hall gate, and devilish thoughts peeped through them."² the wildness and ranting of the outburst spoil the effect.

Verbal
changes

The prose of the central parts of the play - there is none in acts four and five - is more moderate in tone and acquires a harmony and balance which make it a perfect vehicle for the expression of Mandrake's quixotic notions.

"They live all jollily underground and sneak about a little in the night air to hear the news and laugh at their poor innocent great grandchildren, who take them for goblins, and tremble for fear of death, which is at best only a ridiculous game at hide-and-seek. That is my conviction, and I am quite impartial being in the secret, but I will only keep away from the living till I have met with a few of these gentle would-be dead, who are shy enough, and am become initiated into their secrets, and then I will write to the newspapers, turn King's evidence and discover the whole import and secret, become more renowned than Columbus, though sure to be opposed by the doctors and undertakers whose invention the whole most extravagant idea seems to be." ³

- 1 I, 1, ll. 130-133
- 2 I, 1, ll. 220-223
- 3 III, 111, ll. 11-22

XII

In form the poetry of Death's Jest-Book resembles closely that of "The Brides' Tragedy". The iambic pentameter, the standard line of English dramatic verse, is modified in the same way as in the earlier drama, by feminine endings, shifts of accent within the feet and the addition of unaccented syllables. Enjambment carries over the sound and sense from line to line, and the sentence endings occur more frequently within the lines than at the ends. The breaking of a line between successive speakers is common. One improvement, worthy of note, is the greater proportion of short to long speeches as the play progresses, but the excessive length of some of the speeches is still a defect. It was a fault of the masters whom he followed. They had gradually eliminated the fault; Gorboduc¹ contains many speeches which run from sixty to eighty lines!

Proseody

As long before as his Oxford days when he was busy with the dramas, The Last Man, Love's Arrow Poisoned, Torrismond and The Second Brother, Beddoes had anticipated this very criticism in a letter to Procter.² "I was at 'Much ado' the other night and observed the good effect of the snip-snap system of dialogue, in the scene between Benedick and Beatrice after Hero's repudiation, (IV.1.) but it is only as a relief; and I really cannot like a

Poetic
diction

1 Gorboduc; Norton and Sackville, 1560-61: "The first English tragedy."

2 Letter to Procter, London, (February, 1824)

plan which will go far to exclude poetry, all the tenderer passions, (which are proverbially garrulous,) and almost every thing like eloquence....." Other times, other modes! Few even in his own day would have disagreed with Beddoes.

The diction of the drama, and the arrangement of words within the lines vary considerably from speaker to speaker and with the situation to produce a curious uneven effect from reading of the whole play. When the action progresses smoothly and emotion is leashed then such lines as these, spoken by Isbrand record the thought:

Excellent. You're a fellow of my humour.
I never sleep o'nights; the black sky likes me,
And the ~~man's~~ soul's solitude, while half mankind
Lies quiet in earth's shade rehearsing death.
Come, let's be merry: I have sent for wine,
And here it comes. These mossy stones about us
Will serve for stools, although they have been turrets
Which scarce aught touched but sunlight, or the claw
Of the strong-winged eagles, who lived here
And fed on battle-bones. Come sit, sir stranger;
Sit too, my devil-coloured one; here's room
Upon my rock. 1

There is better prosody in the play and there is also worse, but the passage is typical of Beddoes' calmer style and simpler diction. When, however, the pressure of emotion or the hurry of action is applied, the words are cumbersome and the heavy diction plunges and rears from line to line. Thus speaks the Duke to Thorwald;

Is this the silence
That I commanded? Fool, thou say'st a lesson
Out of some philosophic pedant's book.
I loved no desolate soul: she was a woman,
Whose spirit I knew only through those limbs,
Those tender members thou dost dare despise;

By whose exhaustless beauty, infinite love,
Trackless expression only, I did learn
That there was aught yet viewless and eternal;
Since they could come from such alone. Where is she?
Where shall I ever see her as she was?
With the sweet smile, she smiled only on me;
With those eyes full of thoughts, none else could see?
Where shall I meet that brow and lip with mine?
Henced, with thy shadows! But her warm fair body,
Where's that? There, mouldered to the dust. Old man
If thou dost dare to mock my ears again
With thy ridiculous, ghostly consolation, 1
I'll send thee to the blessings thou dost speak of.

One misses the limpid strength of the lyrics which for
purity of diction stand out in vivid contrast to his blank
verse. His genius was lyrical, as so frequently^{has} been said,
but the songs date from a later period when the years of
his apprenticeship were past. Beddoes never got beyond
the blank verse of the "Death's Jest-Book." The juvenile
quality of his lines, apparent so frequently in "The
Brides' Tragedy," has almost disappeared; there is a ten-
dency in the direction of simplicity. But there came no
later drama to carry his craftsmanship to masterly expres-
sion. The prosody and diction of "The Brides' Tragedy" were
good imitations, skilfully modified, of Elizabethan models.
"Death's Jest-Book" in these respects represents a transit-
ion period. The adornment and lushness of the earlier
blank verse have been eliminated but the author has not
achieved chaste and powerful expression. What might have
come later is interesting, even if fruitless, speculation.

Blank
verse of
Death's
Jest-Book

It is unfortunate that Prechter's criticism of "Death's
Jest-Book" was destroyed (it was in Beddoes' possession
in 1837, according to his letter to Kelsall) but from

1 III, 111, ll. 224-242

2 Letter to Kelsall, Zürich, 15/5/1837

Beddoes' letter to him written in April, 1829, we have¹ what was probably a summary of his remarks: "For of the three classes of defects which you mention - obscurity, conceits, and mysticism - I am afraid I am blind to the first and the last, as I may be supposed to have associated a certain train of ideas to a certain mode of expressing them, and my four German years may have a little impaired my English style; and to the second I am, alas! a little partial, for Cowley was the first poetical writer whom I learned to understand."

Procter's
criticism
of Death's
Jest-Book

The criticism and the reply are just what one would expect. Procter was probably the last critic and literary man of his day to be expected to see any great worth in Death's Jest-Book and for Beddoes to have recast the work ^{beliefs and practices would have utterly changed its whole} according to Procter's ² conception and atmosphere and robbed it of any appeal that it does possess. One must take the bad with the good. In truth, the faults which Procter objected to are part and parcel of that euphuism which was the curse of Elizabethan style and infected even Shakespeare. It is interesting to read Beddoes' reflections on that criticism after a lapse of eight years: "I hear and read not a jot about B. Cornwall. Two years ago when I visited your Island I left a horridly scribbled dirty old card at his chambers which, as far as I know, was never returned. Now no one has behaved so frankly, kindly and encouragingly to me as he did. He overrated my twopenny poetical talent as much as yourself, but exerted himself most

Beddoes'
reflections

¹ Letter to Procter, Göttingen, 19/4/1829

² Letter to Kelsall, Zürich, 15/6/1837

disinterestedly: were it another cause I would say, nobly, in my favour. I will some day or other show you his letter to me (1829) about the wretched fool's Tragedy, which is as candid, as goodnatured and wellwishing as man ever wrote."

The satirical element in Beddoes' own character found a natural place in his revivification of the poetic drama. The references to contemporary life and events are realistic touches that bring the play out from the pages of a book.

Beddoes'
satire

"But is not this ointment called the fat of the land, with which those who are smeared do hide the hideousness of their souls so often?" 1

"opposed by the doctors and undertakers whose² invention the whole most extravagant idea seems to be."

"the Fates are no more humorous, they have been converted by the Knowledge Society Fracts." 3

"These (the cap and balls)^{you} should send to England, for the bad poets and the critics who praise them." 4

This is the sort of thing that Shakespeare had done again and again, for example in act two, scene two of The Tempest. It is in the dramatic tradition and appears in drama even to-day.

The same sort of humour finds expression in another and broader way. Shakespeare, for example, had satirized the love theme of "As You Like It" and of "Twelfth Night" in the sub-plot characters of Ganymede and Malvolio. So Beddoes ridicules the burial and resurrection themes in the persons of Mandrake.

1 II, i, ll. 65-67

2 III, iii, ll. 21, 22

3 I, i, ll. 78-79

4 II, iii, ll. 107, 108

Twice in the play, in Act III, scene iii, and Act V scene iv, the action takes place amid cathedral ruins.

¹"The ruins of a spacious Gothic Cathedral and churchyard. On the cloister wall the Dance of Death is painted. The sepulchre of the Duke with massy carved folding doors, &c., by moonlight." So run the stage directions. The spirit of romance is there in the imaginative appeal of the highest expression of western architecture and in the mystic beams of the moon. The sentimentalism of decadent romance is there too, for the cathedral is a ruin, by some strange perversion of artistic sense supposed more beautiful than the entire structure. England was yet to live through the day when money and energy were actually spent on building ruins to satisfy the cravings of diseased romanticism.

The
Romantic
Spirit in
the drama

XIII

There never could be any ending to Death's Jest-Book. The theme is capable of endless speculation and can be as varied as the fancies of an imaginative mind. It is not limited by a set creed or a body of accepted fact or legend; it could never become a religion. Furthermore, the work was not understood. The obscurity and mysticism of which Procter complained concealed from ^{him} the meaning of the drama. It kept wandering forever in that misty region between the heaven of ^{Beddoes'} his invention and the earth of man's understanding. The many beautiful lyrics that were added from

Failure of
Beddoes to
complete the
play to his
own satis-
faction.

1 III, iii, Stage direction.

time to time concentrated the meaning of the work and gave us Beddoes' richest poetry but they stand quite apart from dramatic construction. As the years passed he had less and less intention of publishing his work; the flashes of 1833 and 1838 are little bursts of enthusiasm, not to be taken seriously. Death's Jest-Book became a symbol to Beddoes of his own failure, and the longer he clung to it the more difficult it was to shake himself free to get on with other work. He had for it the same pathetic devotion that a parent has for a weakling child.

The philosophy which Beddoes evolved out of the problems of life and death is neither pessimistic nor morbid. To the uninitiated or careless reader it may appear so, but "The Brides' Tragedy" was in the proper sense not a tragedy at all and Death keeps a jest-book for those who think death a tragedy. Only those who will not or cannot follow Beddoes to the end of his argument get the idea that ^{is} his graveyard poetry. His drama is not a ghost play. Ghosts and graveyard scenes are the most spectacular elements in his drama but they are far from being the most important. It never occurred to Beddoes that the reader would be so impressed with the ghost that he would fail to see anything else. So the child at the zoo sees only the wild animals and learns nothing of natural science. Not many of us are on such familiar terms with death and ghosts as was Beddoes.

Beddoes' play not graveyard poetry

Strange to say Beddoes never appreciated or felt

sympathetic to the Church. Yet her transcendentalism is something akin to his own, and he of all men should have engendered into the mysticism of Christianity. It seems to have been with him a question of prejudice and Protestant revolt against discipline, that is wrongly judged as imposed solely by a priesthood and not as arising from inner convictions. Nor did he see that spiritual truths, whether religious, political, or moral must be enmeshed in form and order, if they are not to perish among men.

The
Church

The author of *Death's Jest-Book* had advanced far beyond the university student who wrote "*The Brides' Tragedy*". It is too much to say that he was a forerunner of Darwinian evolution, yet he did view life as a development from lower to higher forms. He seems to have recognized four planes of existence; first, the animal soul stage, after the notions of Pythagoras, then the normal earthly existence, followed by either its higher development on earth or its transitory transposition to another world.

Influence of
scientific
thought on
Beddoes

The first phase is amusingly referred to in Isbrand's song, "Squats on a toad-stool under a tree," to which Siegfried replies;

A noble hymn to the belly gods indeed;
Would that Pythagoras heard thee, boy! 1

Four stages
of existence

Again Isbrand refers to life's lowly stage when he questions

Are there not
Those that fall down out of humanity
Into the story where the four-legged dwell? 2

1 III, iii, ll. 368, 369
2 V, i, ll. 42-44

.....
To pig add foresight, reason, and such stuff,
Then you have a man. 1

Earthly life is compounded of many pursuits and vicissitudes:

You're young and must be merry in the world;
Have friends^{to}, enny, lovers to betray you;
And feed young children with the blood of your heart,
Till they have sucked up strength enough to break it. 2

Isbrand says,

while men are here,
They should heap close and warm and thick together,
Many abreast! Our middle life is broad;
(But birth and death, the turnstiles that admit us
On earth and off it, send us, one by one,
A solitary walk. 3

But there is a longing born of human ambitions to be something more than man. Isbrand voices it in his determination to transcend temporal power.

And man is tired of being no more than human;
And I'll be something better:- not by tearing
This chrysalis of psyche ere its hour,
Will I break through Elysium. There are sometimes,
Even here, the means of being more than men:
And I by wine, and women, and the sceptre,
Will be, my own way, heavenly in my clay.
O you small star-mob, had I been with one of you,
I would have seized the sky some moonless night,
And made myself the sun; whose morrow rising
Shall see me new-created by myself. 4

What shall we add to man,
To bring him higher? I begin to think
That's a discovery I soon shall make.
Thus I, owing nought to books, but being read
In the odd nature of much fish and fowl,
And sabbages and beasts, have I raised myself,
By this comparative philosophy,
Above your shoulders, my sage gentlemen. 5

Of the nature of the highest form of existence which lies
beyond the grave Beddoes has little to say: he is content

- 1 V, i, ll. 61,62
- 2 IV, ii, ll. 37-40
- 3 IV, iv, ll. 34-39
- 4 IV, iv, ll. 189-199
- 5 V, i, ll. 62-69

to speak of it in terms of conventional allegory.

The word was Comfort
A name by which the master, whose I am,
Is named by many wise and many wretched.
Will ye with me to the place where sighs are not;
A shore of blessing, which disease doth beat
Sea-like, and dashes those whom he would wreck
Into the arms of Peace? 1

The more one reads Death's Jest-Book the more one is led to see that as an art ^{or} form it bears little relation to the stage play. Its production in a theatre as a serious venture is not open to consideration. The play is not too long; it is, in fact, considerably shorter than Strange Interlude, and O'Neill's play was a success. Nor are there technical difficulties of production which could not be easily solved by the use of the resources of lighting and apparatus at the disposal of the modern stage manager. ² The difficulty is more elemental than these. The power and appeal of the play do not lie in the unfolding of visual scenes, with all their other sensuous associations but in the emotional and intellectual implications of the dialogue. The stage production of Death's Jest-Book would show only the rather ordinary action of a revenge drama, excepting always the humorous Mandrake scenes and the resurrection of Wolfram. As to portray on the stage this drama of the mind one might as well try to see the warmth of the ~~shank~~ south wind or feel the perfume of a flower.

Difficul-
ties of
stage pro-
duction

1 IV, ii, ll. 30-36

2 Donner, p. 254, speaks of the invisible existence of Mandrake as an obstacle to practical production. But Mandrake's invisible existence exists only in the presence of the other characters. An odd error! (see pp. 234, 235 for an explanation of Donner's blunder.)

CHAPTER VII

THE CRITIC'S VERDICT

Not in the popular playhouse, or full throng
Of opera-gazers longing for deceit;
Not on the velvet day-bed, novel screen,
Or in the interval of pot and pipe;
Not between sermon and the scandalous paper,
May verse like this e'er hope an eye to feed on't.
Lines written in Switzerland, ll. 57-62

I

There is scarcely a single piece of Beddoes' work which is not connected either overtly or implicitly with the subject of death. It is not enough to say, with Snow and Donner that his later poems are free from the "skeleton complex." That sort of criticism arises from the confusion of form with substance. Skeletens or not, skeletens the point# of view and meaning of his poetry in the last ten years of his life are substantially what they were in his youth. The artistic development of his poetry is another matter. It is as though on a tapestry of human events and passions Beddoes continually saw the obverse side and caught but an occasional glimpse of the beauty and joyousness of life.

Death in
Beddoes'
poetry

Or is all being, living? and what is,
With less of toil and trouble, more alive,
Than they, who cannot, half a day, exist
Without repairing their flesh mechanism?
Or do you owe your life, not to this body,
But to the sparks of spirit that fly off,
Each instant disengaged and hurrying
From little particles of flesh that die? 1

These are Beddoes' questions, remarkable in their anticipation of modern scientific thought and theory. Life is a continuous readjustment to environment, productive of energy? Living is dying? Yet his poetry is not gloomy: the reading of it is not depressive. Familiarity with his subject brought him disinterestedness which is accepted by the reader and the emblems of mortality after repeated observation lose their horror. Other poets and authors have written on death - a good deal of dying has gone on in the world; Burton, Young, Gray and Browne are representative of the school of melancholy. But to these, and to other writers of the first order, death is regarded in the nature of a tragedy. The romantics were the first to see any other but the tragic nature of death. There is no other than Beddoes to whom death is a jest, and to whom a worm-eaten corpse is the subject and occasion of sardonic humour.

Beddoes'
attitude
towards
death

The complete futility of his thinking is annoying in such a mind, quite apart, of course, from the beauty of the poetry which was thrown off in the process. Beddoes gets no farther in the lifetime pursuit of his subject than most people do in early manhood or in casual thinking as the years pass. Procter, Kelsall, and other of

Futility

Beddoes' friends must have realized this. But a century ago, even more than to-day, what could one do with a mind that works as a squirrel in a rotary cage?

The difficulty that Beddoes got into and which he found unsolvable was much greater than the graveyard problem of mortality. By an inner spiritual necessity Beddoes did resolve his death complex but the solution he arrived at was not permanent or final. He succeeded only in transferring the question of man's spiritual destiny from this world of humans to the world of the dead. Death, the Comforter, is to him only death, the deliverer from mortal troubles. Sibylla calls comfort from the grave and Wolfram appearing, replies in the lines of quotation ~~xxx~~ one, page, 283.

II

Sometimes, as in the case of Amala, Athulf, and Adalmar, love is treated as a conventional literary subject; it is part of the stock in trade of the poet. In more significant parts of Beddoes' work, as in the case of Sibylla and Wolfram, love is represented as an eternal principle of completion and consummation. Yet, as far as can be ascertained, Beddoes had no affairs with women, nor even one love passage in his life, unless it was with Zoë King. Yet love for him was not surely an academic question involving only other people in other places. There is the distinct possibility that the human love

The subject
of love

which speaks out in his writing is the real love which, because of his isolated temperament, he could never come to the point of uttering in real human associations.

Other poets sing of the grass or flowers that bloom over the dead or the mounds of earth that mark the burial place of those who have gone away, but Beddoes disinters the decaying body and impatiently declares that this thing of decay and frightfulness is life. Death is the only reality. In Rodolph, the second fyfte of the youthful Improvisatore, the revolting scenes of tomb-horrors are most disgustingly presented but the subject never is absent from his poetry though it is treated with more restraint in Death's Jest-Book.

Death the
only reality

In that work Siegfried says:

In the old times Death was a feverish sleep,
In which men walked. The other world was cold
And thinly-peopled, so life's emigrants
Came back to mingle with the crowds of earth:
But now great cities are transplanted thither,
Memphis, and Babylon, and either Thebes,
And Priam's towery town with its one beech.
The dead are most and merriest: so be sure
There will be no more haunting, till their towns
Are full to the garret; then they'll shut their gates.
To keep the living out, and perhaps leave
A dead or two between both kingdoms. 1

The dead in Beddoes' poetry came back to walk the earth again with spiritual bodies, not as apparitions or wraiths. So intense is the reality of this conception that the poet seems to forget that Wolfram of the third and succeeding acts of Death's Jest-Book is a being from the other world. He lives and moves among mortals as one of themselves so naturally that whenever when he makes a display of powers greater than human the reader experiences a distant shock

of unexpectedness and unreality.

The scenic background of Beddoes's work became more and more standardized as he pursued his authorship. Some duplication of background arises of necessity from the subjects which the poet chose; there are such duplications in the work of the greatest writers who are at all prolific. But in Beddoes the repetition goes farther than this. In presenting his scenes he continually seizes upon the same nodal points in the narrative and action. In Death's Jest-Book the situations are pretty well narrowed down to gardens, graveyards, the Gothic architecture of banquet-rooms, lofty dual halls and the ruined Cathedral. One can hardly say that the sameness of the situation arose from the intensification of an idea; it is rather to be admitted that his lack of variety betrays a narrowness of viewpoint and a failure to explore all the possible ways of presenting a narrative in scenic form by careful discrimination and selection.

Scenic
background

Because of his subject matter and more particularly his ignoring of the Christian teaching which is the prerequisite of any interpretation, satisfactory to western art and life, of the problem Beddoes had set himself, his poetry is utterly un-English in spirit. What Snow says¹ of Death's Jest-Book applies equally to all his work: "In the orderly sequence of the history of literature the play has no place; it belongs to no school and no period." One

Beddoes'
un-English
spirit

1 Snow, p. 100

must not be led astray by accidental resemblances in outward form and his use of the Elizabethan idiom. These are but superficial things which, in unfortunately, have little, and can have little, to do with Beddoes' death complex. Nor will any complete similarity to Beddoes' work be found in the East for there the solution of his problem, lacking anything better, is found in fatalism or spiritualism that mean little to the western mind. The spirit which directed his efforts can hardly be called active revolt as in the case of Shelley, for Beddoes seems always to have passively been "on the outs" with orthodox thought. His radical political leanings of the Oxford and Würzburg days are but the social counterpart of the contrary position he maintained with accepted religious beliefs.

As a poet, and more particularly as a romantic, Beddoes' ideas are reached by a process of feeling and imagination rather than logic. He is even less concerned than other romantics with demonstrable truth, for his forms and ideas arise in a world glimpsed only by the visionary. Yet in spite of the emotional foundation of his work there are few passages in it of genuine pathos. Pathos arises from mental and spiritual sympathy with some suffering mortal. But those in Beddoes' work who suffer most, and they are all women, Floribel, Lenora, Sibylla, and Anala, are shadowy creatures whom one always sees as apart from the range of one's intenser feelings. Nor does pathos arise from revolting scenes of physical horror; even the disgust and terror which they generate pass away with

Lack of
genuine
pathos

frequent repetition. There is here no suffering of the mind.

The humour of Beddoes which found its outlet in satire, arose naturally from his temperament. That lack of harmony which all great minds feel between themselves and a contemporary world was prevented in Beddoes' case from becoming immediately destructive because of the very recognition of it and because of its outlet in his work. ^{The remedy} It is allied to Tieck's doctrine of Romantic Irony but it is really much deeper than this and was developed years before Beddoes ever came under Tieckian influence. There was a strain of vulgarity in his humour which finds but isolated expression in his work. It has been called Rabelaisian but it is really on a much lower level, if indeed one can use the term humour at all in describing it. There is a distinction between the humour that has its basis in sexual activity and the humour that springs from human excretory processes. It is a question of filth. There is a strain of genuine Rabelaisian humour in English literature from Chaucer through Shakespeare, Swift, Fielding, and others down to Butler (Erewhon) and John Pears. It is restricted because of the puritanical slant of English public opinion, in contrast, for example, to the French but it is there nevertheless, and is a counterweight of human sanity to the sanctimonious hypocrisy inherent in the English mind. It prevents romanticism from becoming mere drivel. But this particular brand of humour is entirely absent in Beddoes. It could flourish in Byron but is hardly to be expected in Beddoes in whom sexual timidity was uppermost.

Humour

All Beddoes' best work is lyrical; even in the blank

verse of his dramas, those are the best portions in which the subjective element is strongest. It was here that Beddoes felt most sure of his powers; ¹"I do not know whether I have written to you about song-writing; it is almost the only kind of poetry of w^h I have attained a decided and clear critical theory."

Beddoes
best work
is lyrical

Five hundred years of versification in English have shown that the language is not suited to intricate verse forms. Nor does the poetry of Beddoes disprove the statement. When the poet ventures beyond the range of five or six rhymes and varies his line lengths from two to five or more feet and extends the length of his stanza beyond ten or twelve lines then he succeeds only in arousing the reader's curiosity in a metrical experiment. The thought and feeling of the poem become purely secondary; we are interested in how long the poet can sustain his feat of verse-jugglery. Most of the romantics had their fling at devising new metres in their days of early apprenticeship but Beddoes persisted in his fruitless attempts somewhat longer than the rest. Exception must be made of the indefatigable Dr. Sayers though, in a serious sense, one can hardly call him a poet.

Verse
form

III

Beddoes presents in his life and work an interesting case for a psychologist. Though most of the evidence is buried forever in the past yet enough remains in letters, observations of others, and in his work to put an analysis of his personality

¹ Letter to Kelsall, Würzburg, 19/7/1830.

upon something more than an inferential basis. All men vary in their perceptual, intellectual, emotional and volitional powers, It would be a sad, monotonous world did they not. If there is anything in the human race more productive of a paralysis of human effort than the idealization of the "average man" and mediocrity, it would hard to name it. There is the normal or average individual, very uninteresting and largely hypothetical. There are those who are deficient in one or more of; perception, intellect, emotion and volition; likewise there are some who enjoy or suffer an excess of these powers. That Beddoes possessed more than usual intellectual powers is absolutely proven by his ^{at Oxford} success, and Würzburg in addition to his literary work. One cannot be so sure of his emotional powers; strength of emotion is not synonymous with its aberrations and in sexual emotion he appears to have been deficient. Of perception and volition there is no direct evidence to point either one way or the other.

Variations
in
personality

But if this were all there would be nothing in Beddoes to mark him as different from millions of fellow mortals. There is another way in which the individual may vary from the ordinary run of humanity. His personality may be distorted to a degree that sets him distinctly apart from the race. Thereby, failure in life is not implied, though it commonly follows; the best and greatest of men have exceptional personalities. Beddoes was no ordinary man, and his more than ordinary poetry came partly from a distortion of his nature.

Distortion

Friends and human companionships never meant very much to Beddoes. At rare intervals in his letters he grows confidential;

¹"The truth is, that being a little shy & not a little proud perhaps, I have held back, & never made the first step towards Isolation discovering my residence or existence to any of my family friends-- in consequence I have lived in a deserted state which I could hardly bear much longer without sinking into that despondency on the brink of which I have sat so long. Your cheerful presence at times (could we not meet together occasionally) w^d set me up a good deal: but perhaps you had better not draw my heavy company on your head." ²"I feel myself in a measure alone in the world & likely to remain so, for from the experiments I have made, I fear I am a non-conductor of friendship, a not-very-likeable person;" And even more significant is the following: ³"As for myself, the world which I have carefully kept at arms length has only made me somewhat more indifferent and prosaic than before." There were the associations with Kelsall, Bourne, Phillips, Procter and others, it is true, but one can hardly live for forty years without making some human attachments. The point is that these were few and far from being on an intimate footing. For the greater part of his life they were nothing more than correspondents with whom he could be pleasantly confidential without the bother of personal visits. He saw little of his family; on his last visit to Cheney Longville he spent most of the time shut up in his room. In Switzerland he walked the mountain paths alone. Beddoes was not isolated in the sense that he was a cringing recluse, wistfully looking into a world in which there was for him no part. His isolation was brought about by preoccupation with

Friendships

- 1 Letter to Kelsall, London, 29/3/1824.
- 2 Letter to Kelsall, Osttingen, 4/12/1825.
- 3 Letter to Kelsall, Shiffnal, 11/8/1846.

with ideas and interests which ordinary men may think about frequently but do not dwell upon. Beddoes never got on well with people. Of the few who came into contact with him in person rather than in letters only Kelsall remained his uncomplaining friend and admirer. There are glimpses in his letters of this irascible trait in Beddoes: ¹"I am obliged to you for patching up my manners to Harrison." ²"being a great wretch, a horrid radical & a person entirely unfitted for good society, I never wonder at my acquaintances disavowing & cutting me, as the Arabs & the English say." Even Denner has this to say of Beddoes' irascibility: ³"Schönlein ceased to be Beddoes' friend, just as Keller was to do on removing to Berlin three years later. These two, who had been his best friends, 'exchanged,' as Revell Phillips put it, 'the friendship of T.L.B. for the smiles and patronage of Berlin'. Admiration and friendship, may, however, of the Court, blinded Phillips' eyes, and if there was a rupture between Beddoes and his German friends, it may not have been entirely unprovoked on Beddoes' part." And it is probable too that Kelsall suffered and forgave much. The schizoid is cold and aloof, offers gratuitous insults and is put out when the poor victim shows resentment. The exclusive Beddoes was artistic. When he felt in the mood, and that was not always for he had contempt for the race of walking dead men, he opened the doors into his world of dreams and fancies. But they were his dreams and his fancies. It is little wonder that he took no special care for their preservation for mankind which meant almost nothing to him. The desire for

Beddoes
"difficult
person"

1 Letter to Kelsall, London, 1/4/1834.

2 Letter to Kelsall, Zürich, 15/5/1837.

3 Denner, p. 370.

seclusion increased as he grew older; it had received its first great impetus with the rejection of Death's Jest-Book.

Those incidents in Beddoes' life reported by his biographers during which he exhibited gay spirits and ^{enjoyed} jovial social intercourse, far from disproving what has just been said of Beddoes' isolated and schizoid temperament, carry us into another side of his nature. He was moody. His letters are records of the alternations between the extremes of optimism and an unwarrantable dejection with respect to his labours. The point to be noted is that the contradictory moods were not occasioned by environmental influences of any special nature. At the time of Procter's damning criticism of Death's Jest-Book, beddoes could write with some confidence of its early revision; the crash came later. The melancholy and despairing aspects of his cycloid nature predisposed Beddoes to suicide.

Moodiness

The doubts and obsessions of psychasthenia clung like a cloud to Beddoes. They never completely enveloped him for the collapse of the Göttingen period and his suicide seem to have been occasioned by disturbances of another variety. Yet they were more persistent and more serious than the psychasthenic tendencies of most of us mortals.

Mental
ills

If we are to appreciate Beddoes and get any satisfactory interpretation of his work it is thus that we must regard him. His powers were more than ordinary and to more than an ordinary degree were distorted. Eccentric he undoubtedly was, though certainly not continuously insane. His personality was markedly schizoid; it became more and more isolated and pursued its cycloid way through doubts and obsessions.

There are no records that Beddoes suffered more than the mild perceptual distortions of most people. Yet it is a pity that we have not Beddoes' personal account of all he experienced on that eventful night in Göttingen when his mind definitely broke. With what imaginary demons or tormentors did he struggle? Or did Beddoes ever see the ghosts he wrote about? Did Wolfram ever visit him in his room and hold familiar conversation as he did with Sibylla or Duke Melveric? They are, unfortunately, useless questions.

The inappropriate emotional response of Beddoes to the stimulus of decaying human bodies is an indication of the way in which his mind was internally disharmonious. Familiarity with the real situation or with the idea might bring about a lack of violent reaction but in a normal person it would never induce pleasure. Beddoes fairly revels in his description of rotting flesh and crawling worms. This schizothymic reaction is found clearly marked in Beddoes' early work; it appears in the last words he ever wrote.

Disharmony
of mind

Mrs. Procter told Sir Edmund Gosse that on one occasion Beddoes failed to appear for a dinner engagement. It turned out that he had been apprehended by the police in the act of attempting to set fire to Drury Lane Theatre with a five pound note for a torch. It was just the action to be expected from one who had a deep aversion to the theatre of his day and who had for a brief spell lost control of judgment.

Beddoes does not seem to have had more than the usual share of phobias and anxieties but as to perversions of affection and interest there is some rather slight evidence. The Jew,

"Queer"
friendships

Bernard Reich, in his early years and the baker, Konrad Degen, within the last three or four years of his life are friends hardly to be brought into the circle of his intimate associates. There is something more here than the usual kind of friendship between men. And that does not mean criminality.

The delusion of inferiority pursued Beddoes all his days. Letter after letter reiterates the same cry. ¹"Yet let me assure you that your idea of my merits as a writer are extravagantly surpassing my real worth: I w^d really not give a shilling for anything I have written, nor six-pence for anything I am likely to write. I am essentially unpoetical in character, habits & ways of thinking: and nothing but the desperate hunger for distinction, so common to young gentlemen at the Univ^y, ever set me upon rhyming."

Delusions

²"What would have been my confusion & dismay, if I had set up as a poet, and later in my career anything real and great had star^d(ed) up amongst us & like a real devil in a play frightened into despair & fatuity the miserable masked wretches who mocked his majesty. These are the real and good reasons for having at last rendered myself up to the study of a reputable profession in which the desire of being useful may at least excuse me, altho^t I may be unequal to the attempt to become a master in it; & I assure you that the approbation which you have pleased to bestow upon a very sad boyish affair, that same Brides Tr. which I w^d not now be condemned to read through for any consideration, appears to me a remarkable & incomprehensible solecism

1 Letter to Kelsall, Göttingen, 21/10/1827.

2 Letter to Kelsall, Göttingen, 21/10/1827.

of your otherwise sound literary judgment."¹ "I often very shrewdly suspect that I have no real ^opetical call."

Snow is strangely unappreciative of the significance of these outbursts. He says:² "There was in him a blatant philistinism which could declare poetry a proper occupation only for one whom ill-health or mental weakness prevented ³from pursuing to any good purpose studies in useful sciences!' And five years later he speaks of his ⁴'somewhat contemptuous respect for the profession of a mere poet in our inky age'. "Philistinism?"

Snow's
comment

Nothing of the kind. Beddoes remarks are the projectional thinking of one who at other times directly censures himself. Judging the insignificant poets of his day, he judges Beddoes. It was useless ^ofor Kelsall to argue with him about the matter. Delusions are not just false notions to be laughed away or lightly conquered; they are intensely real to the victim. It is no wonder that the retort of the deluded is occasionally petulant.

The graveyard obsession of Beddoes was the most consistent distortion of his mind. Even if he had succeeded in getting Death's Jest-Book into publication it is doubtful if he could ever have overcome or wanted to overcome the complex about which his mind revolved. Life, the grave, and death occur as subjects or references again and again in everything from The Improvisatore to his last work. In fact the healthiest period of his life from a mental standpoint, from 1831 to 1837, is almost barren of literary production. It coincides exactly with

Graveyard
obsession

- 1 Letter to Procter, Göttingen, 19/4/1829.
- 2 Snow, p. 129.
- 3 Letter to Kelsall, Göttingen, 4/12/1825.
- 4 Letter to Kelsall, Würzburg, 19/7/1830.

with the break in his correspondence with Kelsall; their enduring tie was Beddoes' poetry and in those years there was nothing to write of.

To venture an opinion as to why Beddoes was obsessed with the idea of death is to venture into the uncertain world of psychoanalysis and with little chance of a satisfactory explanation of the cause of the obsession for the subject has almost for a century lain in the grave that he thought and wrote so much about. Possible explanation There is a possibility--it is no more than such--that the death obsession with its attendant schizo-thymic reactions came about from some maladjustment or prevented development of his sexual instincts. Failure of the sexual impulse to reach normal growth and expression might in one of Beddoes' disposition lead to a denial of the life principle and a transference of interest to thoughts about death which culminated at last in suicide. Whatever the cause the obsession was real enough and pointed clearly to intellectual distortion of a non-violent variety.

Donner, in chapter seven of his book, makes much of Beddoes' search for the Philosopher's Stone. It is nothing more nor less than a persistent fantasy and found in such themes as the magic wand, the golden bough and the goldheaded physician's cane.¹ Fantasy thinking replaces real thinking. That does not mean that Beddoes was insane but it does indicate the trend of his mind--a substitution of the false for the actual.

It now becomes clear why his family objected to the printing of his manuscripts bequeathed to Kelsall, why he and

1 William Macmichael, in 1837, published a book on a goldheaded cane that had passed through several generations of a family of physicians.

they were on distant terms, why Zhe King was deferentially considered when the question of making public the knowledge of Beddoes' suicide arose. We get a glimmering of what restrained Browning from opening the Kelsall box and of why certain manuscripts were quietly disposed of. They thought Beddoes was insane and feared that revelation worse than the revelation of suicide which is not always a sign of mental weakness. Whether his suicide was a gratification of the death instinct or an act of hatred vicariously directed toward himself it is not possible to say. The important thing is that although the distortion of his intellect was the prime occasion and condition of his literary work it was not so violent that one could call him of unsound mind. Nor was there any evidence of dissociation of ideas which would have made his writings pathetically incoherent. Happily there was no need of the hushed reticence of his family and friends: Beddoes was insane only in the sense that all great minds are unusual and eccentric though in his case to an exaggerated degree. In Beddoes the distortions took the form of a death complex but, except rarely, he had full control of his mental powers.

The question
of Beddoes'
sanity

Probably the greatest single weakness in Donner's study of Beddoes is his failure to deal with the question of Beddoes' sanity. He would probably reply that there was no question, yet it has been shown that in Beddoes' mind there was a distinct distortion from the normal. There are three references in Donner¹ to Beddoes' attempts at suicide and the suicide itself. But of

¹ Donner, pp. 264, 267, 378, 379.

course suicide is not always an evidence of insanity though frequently a result of it. Evidently, thought Donner, ignoring the question of possible insanity was the stoutest form of denial. Snow, on the other hand, faces the question squarely. When he says, ¹"The end was taken out of his hands, and he did not die a suicide," he chose to ignore the physician's testimony that poison had been self-administered² and Snow knew nothing of Beddoes' mental collapse at Göttingen which Donner passes off as intoxication. Of the attempts to burn Drury Lane Theatre, Snow says ³"The legend of insanity dates obviously from his visit to England in 1846, but on this occasion the most spectacular of his acts, the attempt to burn Drury Lane, is traceable to nothing more abstruse than an overly good dinner." And Donner accords with the view in the words: ⁴"This, no doubt, was his protest against the popular success of the 'hapless drama of our day', inspired by his old friend Lord Alabhol." At least Snow and Donner have proven conclusively that they know little of insanity and less of alcoholism. But Snow continues: ⁵"Beddoes suffered from what might be called spiritual paralysis." What on earth is spiritual paralysis? He mentions "bitterness of mind", "sense of futility" and ends up by saying ⁶"Beyond this it is not safe to go in the measuring of his abnormality. " Safe? Safe for whom? But Snow does treat the question with an open mind even if he

Snow and
Donner on
Beddoes'
sanity

1 Snow, p. 97.

2 Snow, Appendix A, pp. 181-188.

3 Snow, pp. 90, 98.

4 Donner, p. 376.

5 Snow, p. 98.

6 Snow, p. 98.

fails to explore the question thoroughly. Probably he best sums up his own view in a reference to an article in The Athenaeum, for December 27, 1890. He says,¹ "This reviewer had on one occasion challenged Mrs. Procter "whether she could, as an honest woman deny the claim of Beddoes to the kingship of the sane insane. She made no attempt to deny it--which indicates that behind her loyalty there was considerable doubt and alarm about her strange friend."

The sane
insane

IV

Beddoes, more than is common, a man of moods, wrote by the flickering and uncertain light of his strange inspiration. There was genius there but of an intermittent sort which made composition difficult. ² "It is good to be tolerable, or intolerable, in any other line, but Apollo defend us from brewing all our lives at a quintessential pot of the smallest ale Parnassian; such hope or memory is little soothing for any one, whose mind is not quite as narrow as a column of eights and sixes. I sometimes wish to devote myself exclusively to the study of anatomy & physiology in science, of languages, and dramatic poetry, and have nothing to hinder me, except--unsteadiness and indolence; which renders it extremely probable, if not absolutely certain, that I shall never be anything above a very moderate dabbler in many waters: if another very different spirit does not come over me very, very soon, you will do well to give me up. Indifference grows upon us and that renders my case very desperate." So wrote

¹ Snow, p.90.

² Letter to Kelsall, Würzburg, 19/7/1830.

Beddoes in 1830. In early manhood, according to Kelsall, he wrote with eager facility but the efforts Kelsall looked worshippingly upon lasted only a few weeks and in later life there were periods of years when he wrote scarcely at all. He was never continuously sure of himself. The constant if unimportant revision of *Death's Jest-Book* over a period of twenty years shows how difficult it was for him to make up his mind. Many of the merely verbal alterations are no better than the originals for which they were substituted. There are some improvements, however, but no more than one might expect. The rest of his work escaped further revision for it was safely in Kelsall's hands. Even the poetry that was in him got a chance neither to thrive in his moody and rebellious soul nor to find copious expression on the written page. Not only is his work uneven in quality but it lacks the range and variety which one associates with the productions of a master. The same subject is endlessly repeated--the living and the dead, the dead and the living. This is what Beddoes had in mind when he wrote: ¹"even the imaginative poetry I think you will find, in all my verse, always harping on the same two or three principles: for which plain and satisfactory reasons I have no business to expect any great distinction as a writer, being allowed to be better than what is absolutely bad, & not quite an imitator, is not enough for any lasting celebrity." But there are repetitions of another variety; simple ideas and images occur again and again. Metempsychosis, flowers, moonlight, bridal and funeral, the drinking of wine, human corpses, ghosts, all these

Indecision

Repetition

1 Letter to Kelsall, Göttingen, 30/4/1829.

and many others turn up on page after page. One does not expect infinite variety from a mortal mind and among the Elizabethans, of whom in style he made himself one, the greatest had their paraphernalia of literary art. But we are always conscious of Beddoes' literary properties; we forget that of the others in their vast flood of intellectual and emotional grandeur.

The creative inspiration of Beddoes came wholly from within him. The initial impulse came from his conflict with the outer world, a battle which he never fought hand to hand but from which he retreated to find protection in inner solitude. The inspiration which he drew from the Elizabethans was purely literary and artistic but so great was his attachment to the works of these predecessors and so great were his powers of assimilation that it became one with his own originality. It seems not too much to say that Beddoes never consciously imitated Shakespeare, Webster, Tourneur or any of the rest of the Elizabethans. He must have lived, in his inner mind, more in the sixteenth century than in his own. So it comes about that the poetry of Beddoes is intensely subjective. Even in his dramas when an array of characters speak it is Beddoes who speaks through the masks--and the men of his plays are more lifelike than the women. Therein lies one of the greatest reasons for his failure as a dramatist; the most objective of all literary forms was in the final analysis foreign to his nature. Would Beddoes have attempted the drama if the Elizabethans had written in some other form, or if he had been drawn to an age of the epic? Probably not. There is a passage in Deussen which is worth quoting as showing how that critic

Inspiration

Subjectivism

seizing upon a less praiseworthy trait of Beddoes and uniting it to some discussion of artistic styles and principles, attempts to give the poet qualities he does not possess. The result is an absurdly exaggerated picture of the real man and his work. Donner's greatest effort in this direction is this: ¹"Beddoes' talent consisted neither in the construction of plot or the drawing of character, nor in the consistent depicting of a situation or the logical development of an emotional theme; what gives his poetry both intensity and charm are the flashes of genius that enlighten the details of almost everything he wrote. Thus it happens that his power shows itself to its greatest advantage in the short fragments which he has left us in such abundance. The picturesque imagery and vigorous language render these highly poetical. His art is Baroque in this sense that his poems form themselves into strings of ornament where each detail is wrought for its own sake instead of giving relief to the whole, and it was only later on that he learned to subordinate them to the general structure. Vivid as was his imagination it worked on visualizations juxtaposed rather than co-ordinated. It is a method of artistic creation which has become popular in our own day, although it has perhaps not yet received its measure of critical and aesthetic analysis. It directs its appeal to the intellect rather than to the emotions by clever combinations of widely different or even contradictory ideas and by unexpected comparisons between dissimilar things. This makes reading difficult and laborious, for so far from being coated into a load

Donner's
praise of
Beddoes'
faults

1 Donner, pp. 127, 128.

that naturally gives us the associations intended by the poet, we have to think hard for ourselves and figure out the meaning of each phrase and simile. The unity which we are used to regard as the very essence of art, thus threatens to be lost unless the vigilant attention of the reader can keep together all the suggestions scattered abroad by the poet's erratic imagination.

Art in fragments is rather a contradiction of terms. It is true that Beddoes' poems are in some cases strings of ornament but that is not Baroque art. Baroque art implies "the grand manner", vast groupings of ornament and detail on a colossal design--but there is design. Think of Versailles, or The Prinz-Bischof's Residenz in Würzburg, or Salzburg Cathedral. What Donner probably means is Rococo, not Baroque. But Rococo implies the bringing together of meaningless ornament--meaningless as far as the general design is concerned, and Beddoes' art is never that bad. But when Donner speaks of the tendency of modern artistic creation toward "combinations of widely different and contradictory ideas and by unexpected comparisons between dissimilar things" and says that this is the method of Beddoes, he is entering the domain of the ludicrous. Psychologists have a name for thinking of the sort to which Donner draws attention. They call it "dissociation of ideas". Its ultimate expression is found in the mad-house. And the greatest weakness of modern poetry is its incoherence, as might be expected of a decadent and emotionally unstable age. To say that the reader's attention is expected to keep together the suggestions of the poet's erratic imagination is to demand too much. But Beddoes' poetry was never so weak. Donner in his attempt to praise the poet has rendered him a disservice.

Baroque
art

modern
tendencies

Both Snow and Donner are on safer ground and moving in the right direction when they point out the later tendency of Beddoes to simplicity and coherent clarity of expression. Snow finds that ¹"The characteristic of Beddoes' lyrical style is its restraint. Once past his very early work, he is sparing of figures of speech and exceedingly sparing of the striking, unexpected epithet which distinguishes his dramatic style." Donner finds in his later lyrics ²"the full bloom of a poetical genius that employed a style almost Spartan in brevity but full of meaning." This seems to be incongruent with what he praises as the Baroque element in Beddoes. His early work he now decries as it ³"is unequal in execution as in inspiration, and consequently fails to reproduce even the limited experience that dictated the poet's act of creation. Only on rare occasions did he attain perfection in more than single lines or the shortest lyric."

Beddoes'
lyric
verse

Originality can be claimed in a large measure for Beddoes. No other poet ever revealed just the same sort of nature to his world. And even if it is insisted that his work was an Elizabethan imitation it must be admitted that in his lyrics he created verse forms highly original and beautiful. Dream Pedlary, Siegfried's Song, the Dirges for Sibylla and for Wolfram, among others are masterpieces of workmanship. But Beddoes did not stand wholly apart from his own generation. Romance is the literature of escape, a refuge for them who are afraid of life and instead build another world to their heart's

Beddoes'
originality

1 Snow, pp. 172, 173.

2 Donner, p. 382.

3 Donner, p. 386.

desire. In this Beddoes was a typical romantic. But Beddoes never got to his other world. The struggle to free himself from the bonds of earth found exquisite expression in Dream Pedlary, a cry of despair and no answer satisfactory to a patiently suffering world. His progress was blocked by the death complex. He did, in truth, work through the death situation to a life beyond but he was intrigued by the dead body. He turned away from the contemplation of the spiritual to look upon the tomb and the charnel-house--the stinking body, not life, not the soul. Death is the only reality for him and the painted skeletons upon the ruined cathedral walls step down to dance satirically before them who, too, will shortly be dead. Thus Death is a romantic concept and in Beddoes, death and romance were one.

Death
and the
romantic
spirit

V

The romantic viewpoint is based on a contradiction--the opposition of the actual to the imagined--but that caused no immediate distress to the Romantics; it never does, for they have not logical minds. To some extent Beddoes was an exception and the recognition of this incongruity broke out in satire. But for the most part the airy vision does not collapse; it dissolves and fades in the long years of middle life and old age. There is no new heaven and no new earth. Life is not the simple thing they would have us believe; nor does it cease to exist because we run away from it. And with all Beddoes' striving and troubled contemplation he never came to grips with life. The battlefield of mortal woes lies in the world not in the mind. Was it by divine grace that Keats and Shelley were spared the conflict and

The
romantic
world

the inevitable catastrophe of the perishing vision? Lesser men grind out the disillusionment of fading days but the struggle of a rather different sort was too much for Beddoes: his final escape was suicide.

It is easy to sum up the failure of Beddoes' philosophy as Snow has, as an irreconcilable opposition of mind and matter. But the trouble lay deeper than that. Snow says,¹ "The flaw of his character was his inability to harmonize the elements in his own nature. Incurable romantic and immaterialist that he was at heart, the neatly-jointed and mechanical world which his scientific brain presented to him left him starved and unsatisfied--he could add nothing to it simply because his precise mind would accept nothing but a theoretical proof of that for which there exists only proof spiritual. By consequence his world collapsed about him. A conviction of the evil absurdity of human life pressed upon him heavily and yet more heavily." There existed, no doubt, this superficial conflict--common to most thinking people. But Beddoes was far from seeking a materialistic explanation for the spiritual. Beddoes' world collapsed because, having acquired and developed a belief in the immaterial, he could make nothing of the life of the spirit for to him this had no religious foundation. Beddoes' ghosts keep coming back to this world, implying that the other world is a vast emptiness. The spiritualist of to-day runs into the very same cul-de-sac ^{but} he backs out of it by supposing the next world to be a continuation of the labours and occupations and interests of this. The conception is totally false and unwarranted but it

Beddoes'
philosophy

1 Snow, pp. 112, 113.

gives a certain logic to an illogical belief. Beddoes became tangled in a death complex and for him, death was its only solution.

CHAPTER VIII

BEDDOES AND HIS CRITICS

But if there be, who, having laid the loved
Where they may drop a tear in roses' cups,
With half their hearts inhabit other worlds;
If there be any--ah! were there but few--
Who watching the slow lighting up of stars,
Lonely at eve, like seamen sailing near
Some island city where their dearest dwell,
Cannot but guess in sweet imagining--
Alas! too sweet, doubtful, and melancholy--
Which light is glittering from their loved one's home;
Such may perchance, with favourable mind,
Follow my thought along its mountainous path.
Lines written in Switzerland, 11. 63-74.

I

Beddoes published "The Improvisatore" in 1821, "The Brides' Tragedy" in 1822. Keats died in 1821, Shelley in 1822 and Byron in 1824. Thus Beddoes made his literary appearance when the reign of the great triumvirate was drawing to a close. Yet it was a reign in a kingdom removed from the public ways, for England never accepted her literary rebels until they were safely dead. Of the little company of faithful admirers of Shelley, Beddoes was one who saw to the publication of his last poems. Both Keats and Byron influenced somewhat his art. Thus it might be expected that Beddoes would carry on their literary tradition, or, failing that, occupy a place in the period of transition to the greater men who might in time arrive. Yet

Beddoes
and his
contemporaries

Beddoes did neither. He was born into the second generation of romantics but not of it. He owed no more to Keats and Shelley than did either of these to the other; for by temperament and disposition he was an altogether different type of man. Beddoes remained the student to the end of his days; the other two sought to speak directly to the men of their own age. Beddoes is of the Romantic genus but of a different species. Of the greater poets of the Victorian era, Tennyson published "Poems, Chiefly Lyrical" in 1830, Browning his "Pauline" in the same year; Arnold's first work appeared in 1849. Thus the gap between the last great romantics and the Victorians is not great in terms of years, nor is it great in terms of artistic form or purpose. There is here no period of long and changing transition as there was between the neo-classic age and the romantic revival. Within these few years Campbell, Procter, Landor, Praed and Hood occupied the field and to them if to any, must go the credit for maintaining the tradition established by their vastly greater forerunners.

The
Transition

If there is little kinship between Beddoes and the other writers of his time it does not follow that he has no place there. He, too, as much as they, but in a different fashion, revived romance. Other writers appreciated the Elizabethan age as much as he but it was left for Beddoes to make that age particularly his own. His romance springs directly from the age of Shakespeare. Indeed, if one were able to write Thomas Lowell Beddoes, 1603-1649, instead of 1803-1849, it would be more in accord with his genius. Yet it would not be strictly true. Beddoes belongs directly to the romantic revival and if one is tempted to classify him with the men of two centuries previous it is only an indication

Beddoes,
romantic
and
Elizabethan

of how thoroughly he was able to make the romance of Elizabethan days live again.

II

It is the way of the world that a man's efforts are judged by the magnitude of the task he essays and the amount of work he accomplishes. Thus Thomas Burton and Katherine Mansfield, to cite such utterly different authors, fall out of the first ranks because of their limited production and the narrowness of their respective fields of labour. So it is with Beddoes. In Donner's edition, his poems and dramas run to almost five hundred pages--not altogether an inconsiderable piece of work. Nor is it slight if, omitting the fragments and reprintings, the bulk is reduced to half its size. But examination shows that much of his published work adds nothing to Beddoes' serious effort and not a little positively detracts from it. The slim handful of poetry of the highest order that remains is not sufficient, by usual criteria, to permit his classification with the great. The fact of the narrowness of his appeal does not need elaboration to show that it shuts him out of any claim to the company of the major poets.

Narrowness
of
Beddoes'
appeal

There is no evidence to show that Beddoes ever had any influence upon the thought of his generation or upon succeeding generations of writers. Such an influence must always be the mark of real greatness. In fact one can hardly imagine his work ever having any great literary effect. There are poems and passages which we admire and accept but they could hardly

Beddoes'
influence

be the inspiration of younger men. Beddoes' personality was unique in a way that few personalities are. The chances that one would be born with literary gifts and of the same mind and soul as Beddoes are infinitely few. There is no broad structure upon which a young poet could attach his mind as a taking-off place for the flight of his genius. His poetry remains isolated as did the man himself. Certainly one cannot think of an ambitious youth following or imitating Beddoes, as, for instance, Browning in his early work consciously followed Shelley.

The unequal quality of Beddoes' work makes it difficult for a critic to preserve a balance between giving to it too much praise or too much condemnation. It is easy to become enthusiastic about Beddoes, seeing only his merits or easy to condemn him seeing only his faults. What can one do with a poet who presents great poetry on one page and "just poetry" on the next? It is a question of motives, largely; Kelsall edited the work of a friend, Denner the work of his poetic hero.

Beddoes'
unequal
work

Beddoes' acceptance in the world of letters is limited by his subject-matter. Great poetry is that which is reckoned such by the consensus of the great minds of the race over a period of generations, and one can only with difficulty think of Beddoes being universally acclaimed. The spirit and idea of his work find no echo in the racial consciousness, however much his poetic technique may be admired. He just does not belong. There is no foot-rule by which one can measure literary greatness but it must be broad enough to impinge upon a variety of man's interests and deep enough to stimulate his thought or feeling. There will always be little coteries of the neurotic and aesthetically feeble

Subject
matter

to make a cult of the obscure but that is damning praise. Nor is it enough to point out that Browning and Tennyson admired the work of Beddoes, for they spoke only of a portion of it or of his versification and spoke too under circumstances which could elicit only praise. Writing to Kelsall on the subject of Beddoes' poetry, Browning had this to say; ¹"he was to despoil Death of his terrors, strip him of his dart, & so on,-- make him the "fool of the feast"; he does exactly the reverse, materializes and intensifies the horror, and frightens one to death at dying...Now, as to the extracts which might be made: why, you might pick out scenes, passages, lyrics, fine as fine can be: the power of the man is immense & irresistible." Yet Browning declined to act as literary executor of Beddoes' work, nor has any completely satisfactory explanation ever been given. Did Browning, in his private opinion, really rate Beddoes very high?

Coleridge and Wordsworth, and Shelley and Keats too, revived the past but they transformed the revival of an earlier mode of thought to meet a new age and expressed new ideas. So far was Beddoes apart from the main stream of national thought that his work appears to most as a rejuvenation of Elizabethan romance. His work is not life--not literature. Even if he had succeeded in writing a drama as great as Shakespeare's, the world would have looked but coldly upon it. The human mind demands of a reproduction something new and vital in advance of the old. This Beddoes did attempt and failed.

Beddoes
apart
from his
age

1 Browning's letter to Kelsall, 22/5/1868. Quoted in part in Kelsall's article in the Fortnightly Review, July 1872. vol. 18, pp. 51-75.

III

Though both Snow and Donner give Beddoes a high measure of praise yet there are several interesting contradictions in their criticism as well as opposing views and different methods of treatment. In the first place, Snow is more moderate in the claims he puts forth for Beddoes and more seriously follows the traditional estimate of him as a poet of lesser importance.

Snow
and
Donner on
Beddoes'
place in
literature

¹"Beddoes", he says, "is unquestionably a minor poet"; ²"he wrote great poems and passages and remained a secondary poet." Snow speaks of Beddoes as having ³"that tentative fame a self-assured and normal world concedes to an explorer of the uncharted and a companion of spectres". ⁴"He is a coterie poet." A reviewer in The Nation remarks that, ⁵"Professor Snow very wisely attempts no radical revaluation of Beddoes' place in English verse; he is content to accord him a high place among the minor poets." Donner positively affirms his greatness in his declaration, ⁶"This Beddoes is not a minor who has mastered the technical side of art, but a poet who has learned in the hard school of life what it is not given to all to understand." Even more eulogistic is his final estimate of the poet. ⁷"It may, therefore, be seriously questioned whether Beddoes does not deserve a place among the great Romantics, side by side with Blake,

1 Snow, p. 2.

2 Ibid

3 Snow, p. 99.

4 Snow, p. 178.

5 The Nation, 128:88. Jan. 16, 1929.

6 Donner, p. 381.

7 Donner, p. 389.

Wordsworth, Coleridge, Lord Byron, Shelley and Keats, different from all, but at his best an equal of the greatest". And between the two where does the truth lie? From the arguments advanced in the previous pages I am inclined to think that Snow is closer to a true appraisal of the poet's worth nor does he do Beddoes the injustice of overpraise.

The two critics have not precisely the same purpose in their criticism. Snow has always in mind the enjoyment and appreciation of the poet. His is the more human of the two studies. Donner, on the other hand, rests his case on an interpretation of the poet's thought and feeling. His is the abstract manner of the laboratory. It is true that Snow worked under a handicap in that he did not have access to primary sources--at least he nowhere mentions Dykes Campbell's transcripts and one presumes that he did not examine them. This Donner has done and in addition, he has searched the public archives in Germany and Switzerland, looked up newspaper files and other sources of information from which he has extracted some new and interesting material. He has been able also to publish some of Beddoes' work hitherto unprinted. Yet the material is not of vital importance from a critical standpoint and Snow's work did not suffer much by its lack.

Purposes
in
criticism

Of the two works, Donner's is the more intense and exhaustive. In his pages the analysis of the poet proceeds to a comprehensive degree but in that lies a shortcoming. One gets the impression that Donner's work exists and was inspired for the purpose of criticism alone. It is masterly work but it ends there. Donner becomes a bit tedious at times. A case in

The poet
and his work
.

point is his detailed analysis of prosody. Snow, never so detailed or minute in his inquiry, stimulates one to read, and, if possible, to enjoy Beddoes. With him, the poet always occupies a primary position; the criticism follows after as an attendant means to that enjoyment.

Another way of expressing the difference between Snow's relatively short and Donner's long work is by saying that Snow is literary, Donner scholarly. From the standpoint of expression and style Snow gains an advantage in that his book is more readable. There are no passages in Donner which in themselves, have much literary excellence. All is serious, weighty and even overpacked with material.

Literary
qualities
of
criticism

One reviewer, considering The Browning Box and The Works of Beddoes, thinks that ¹"They supersede all previous editions and lives and invalidate almost all former critical opinion". Another, writing of Donner's book on Beddoes mentions his ²"avalanche of scholarship" but disagrees with Donner in ranking Beddoes' lyrics above his dramas. A third picturesquely writes; ³"All that research into externals can do he (Donner) has done, but he gives a policeman's account of the route to the grave. Turnings and viewpoints are marked and starred, the driving tested by precedent and photograph; but the postmortem does not reveal the driver's strange formation, nor the coroner finally decide whether he was drunk at the time of the accident".

1 The Nation, 143:527, Oct. 31, 1936.

2 The New Statesman and Nation, 10:852. Dec. 7, 1935.

David Garnett.

3 The Spectator, 155:1076. Dec. 27, 1935. Humphrey House

There are several points in which both studies fall short of excellence in criticism. Generalization, it is true, is fraught with the dangers of over-simplification and distortion yet a total general impression of an author is desirable if one is to carry away a usable estimate of his work. This, both Snow and Donner fail to give. There is no summing up, no conclusion, no philosophic interpretation of Beddoes. And the educated mind desires the setting up of a logical nexus of related parts in literary criticism or in any other field of learning.

Lack of
generaliz-
ation

This failure to make the study of Beddoes much more than a seriatim perusal of his works arises in part from the lack of emphasis upon the nodal points in Beddoes' life and work. Of these there are distinctly three of major importance; the publication of *The Brides' Tragedy*; the rejection of *Death's Jest-Book*; and the flight to Zürich. About these three peaks in his career, 1822, 1829, 1833, are grouped all that Beddoes ever was. But the studies of both Snow and Donner lack this or some other such arrangement by which the work of Beddoes can be grasped and understood. They lack arrangement: they lack art. Good and bad, important and unimportant all receive nearly the same attention.

Three
important
periods

One reviewer writing of Snow's work found that, ¹"His book is informative but bloodless; the curious figure of the violently morbid Beddoes deserves a warmer resurrection." But he praises Snow for "virtue of scholarship, exactitude and the critical faculty."

It is no longer the fashion to speak of canons or standards of literary judgment yet at the same time it is difficult

1 New York Times, p.4, July 14, 1929.

to see how a critical appreciation can be of much worth without some consideration of a sense of values. There can be no precise measurements of artistic performance, it is true, but there can be comparisons and generalizations and an appreciation of a work of art on first principles and in relation to the media it employs. It is here that the studies of both Snow and Donner fall short of the expected. They fail to establish satisfactory points of relationship between Beddoes' work and drama and poetry in general. Mere citation of resemblances to other authors is not enough nor is much beyond curiosity satisfied, in digging out sources of scenes and passages. In the manner of^a scientific research-worker Donner gives a score of references to previous writings where Beddoes may (or may not) have got ideas for his plays or poetry. But these tell us not one whit about the importance or value of the poet's work.

First
principles

Snow says that Beddoes has no place in an ordered history of English literature: Donner would place him beside Blake, Shelley, Keats, and other romantic poets. There is, of course no point in placing a poet after a card-index system of classification but there is real value in associating poets who have traits and tendencies in common for each fortifies the other and rounds out a phase of thought or helps complete a picture of an era. And only as knowledge and critical estimates are organized and co-ordinated can they be understood and made permanent.

Finally both Snow and Donner refuse to pass from a consideration of particular poems and plays to a study of the nature of Beddoes' mind. There are occasional references and some

Beddoes'
mental
outlook

abortive attempts but we get no study of the way in which the mind of Beddoes looked out upon his world. These little fragmentary glimpses give no consistent notion of his processes of thought or of the purposes that lay behind his mental activity. That need not lead into the vexed question of Beddoes' sanity nor is it altogether desirable that it should. But a study of his personality and some investigation of the ways in which his mind varied from that of an ordinary mortal would give a deep insight into the meaning of his work and its artistic significance.

Yet, in spite of what has been said, the studies of both Snow and Donner are not to be brushed aside as trivial. They have their excellences which speak for themselves; keen admiration of Beddoes, able analysis of his writings, and sympathy for the man and his work.

Though Beddoes must forever remain somewhat of a curiosity in literature, never coming home to men's hearts and bosoms yet he misses much who ignores him. What fame he has rests and will continue to grow not on the dramas which he strove to write but on a few lyrics which rose spontaneously from the depths of his soul. To both Snow and Donner should we be grateful that they have done not a little to keep articulate the voice whose quiet questioning of our longings whispers across a whole century,

Debt to
Snow
and
Donner

"If there were dreams to sell
What would you buy?"

oooooooooooooooooooo
oooooooooooooooooooo

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