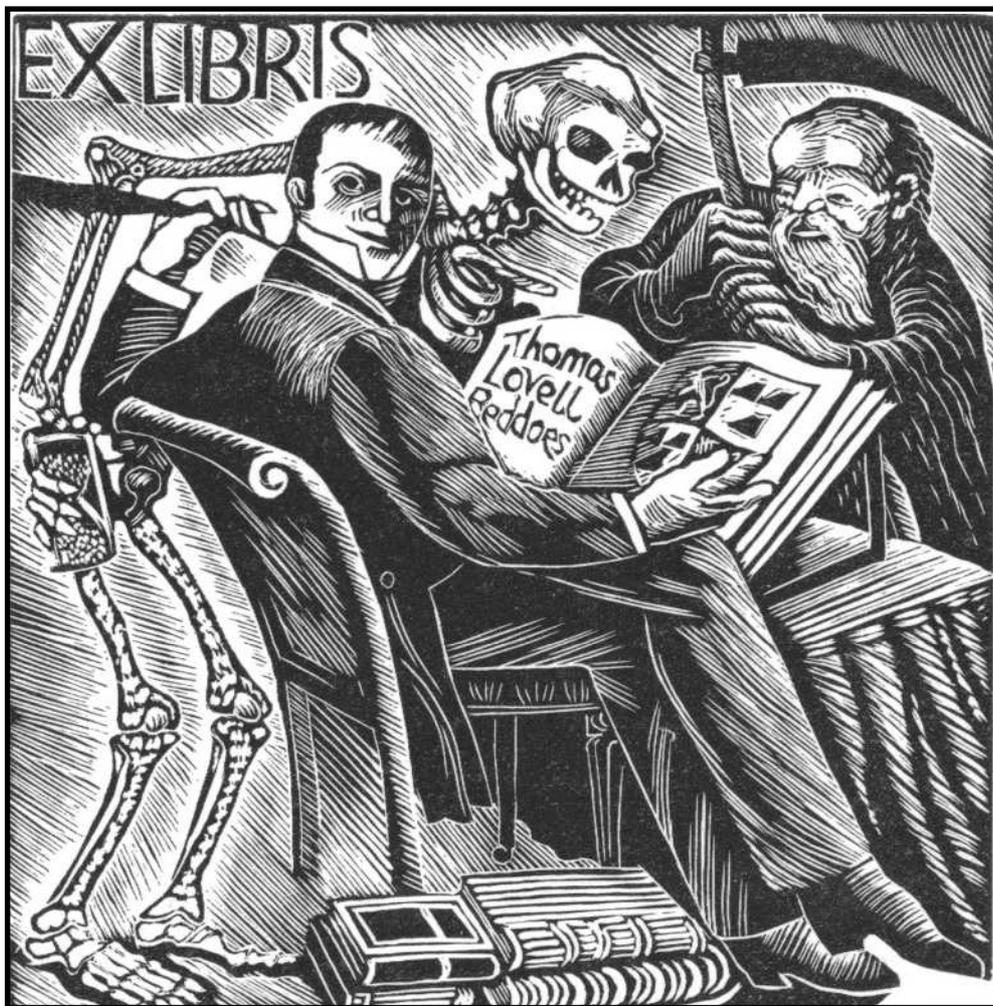


Thomas Lovell Beddoes Society

The Newsletter

or The Day Will Come



number thirteen / 2008

The Newsletter

(or *The Day Will Come*)

of the

Thomas Lovell Beddoes Society

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Information on '*Doomsday*' *The new
Society Journal*.

Dear Member,

Welcome to our new look newsletter which we
hope you will enjoy.

The Newsletter has come about because our *Journal*
has morphed into a peer-reviewed academic journal
published annually by us and the University of Science
and Arts of Oklahoma! Very respectable, and will
continue to be edited by Shelley Rees who has
accomplished this lofty transformation. Thank you
Shelley. It is to be called '**Doomsday**' and the first issue
is due in 2009, more info on back page.

This smaller organ, *The Newsletter (or The Day
Will Come)*, is a space for news, opinions, items and
writing which might not be appropriate or acceptable for
'*Doomsday*'. All Beddoesiana will be welcome. The
editors are not responsible for the views expressed, they
are your own. We would like to warmly thank our
contributors for their hard work and inspiration. Please
send us your contributions and ideas for future issues
and thanks for your support.

Best wishes

Christine Hankinson, John Beddoes

The cover illustration is from John's bookplate design by
Rosalind Bliss inspired by Rowlandson's *Dance of Death*
published in Bristol in 1808

Poetry

Laughter in the Charnel House

Jeff Holt

"We'll dance and laugh at the red-nosed gravedigger
Who dreams not that Death is so merry a fellow."

Thomas Lovell Beddoes, *Death's Jest Book*

The charnel house of words you left for us
Rings with the laughter of a man who's seen
His own picked skull and deemed it ludicrous.

Your dirges whisper that beneath the green
Blades that we trample, corpses putrefy.
Ghouls at our elbows long for us to die;
If we could see such horrors, we'd go mad.

You saw, but recreated every scene:
Your dead act foolishly, but seem serene
Next to the men who mourn the dreams they had,
Cursing their scepters, killing those they love.

Your Jest Book is a fitting epitaph,
Dismissed as morbid by the ones above
Too full of hopes to hear your spectral laugh.

Jeff is a Society member who grew up in Ft. Worth, Texas, and currently lives in Plano, Texas with his wife Sarena and their three cats. He became an ardent admirer of the works of Thomas Lovell Beddoes while working on a Master's in English at the University of North Texas. Currently, Jeff works as a clinical therapist. Jeff has won numerous awards for his poetry, including being a first prize winner in the Newbury Arts Association's annual poetry contest and the 3rd prize winner in the Robert Penn Warren poetry contest. He has published poems in William Baer's *Sonnets: 150 Contemporary Sonnets*, *Measure*, *The Evansville Review*, *Rattapallax*, *Iambs & Trochees*, *The Formalist*, *The Texas Review*, *Pivot*, *The NeoVictorian/Cochlea*, *Cumberland Poetry Review*, *Sparrow*, and other journals. Furthermore, Jeff has published poems online at www.thehypertexts.com, www.poemtree.com, and www.contemporaryrhyme.com.

Features

We thought it would be interesting for those not online to see some of the excellent articles on our website.

The Poetry of Beddoes

Michael Bradshaw

*Thread the nerves through the right holes,
Get out of my bones, you wormy souls.
Shut up my stomach, the ribs are full:
Muscles be steady and ready to pull.
Heart and artery merrily shake
And eyelid go up, for we're going to wake.-
His eye must be brighter-one more rub!
And pull up the nostrils! his nose was snub*

This weird little poem is called *Resurrection Song*. Beddoes is often remembered as the poet of *Dream Pedlary*, which certainly makes an attractive anthology piece. But if we were to choose a single poem to represent his achievement, '*Resurrection Song*' would be more challenging and a better reflection of his style. This is an extraordinary poem - brief, brilliant, and brutally comic. Once read, impossible to forget. The fashionably macabre theme is rendered with an anatomical detachment which recalls the laboratory of Victor Frankenstein, and yet the business of resurrection is also treated as slapstick farce. Neither the corpse nor the surgeon seem to know what they're doing, and their incompetence is spun into a frivolous ditty which leaves the imagined reader helpless with laughter.

Beddoes wrote *Resurrection Song* in Germany between 1825 and 1828 for inclusion in his satirical tragedy *Death's Jest-Book*. The character Wolfram has been murdered in the first act, and here in Act III a necromantic spell is about to raise him from the dead. But by this point Beddoes had layered the complicated scene with so much irony that he seems to have felt the song was excessive, and ran the risk of dispelling all seriousness completely. So he cancelled it, and consigned it to the margins of *Death's Jest-Book* as a fragment. Its stranded status is now one of its fascinations; as postmodern readers, we are consistently drawn to 'illegitimate' material that has been suppressed, rejected or erased.

Beddoes's comic style is so effortless that it's easy to overlook just how extreme a statement the poem makes. To begin with, its placement in time: these lines dramatise in banal, everyday terms what is either a religious miracle or a story out of science fiction

(depending on your point of view) - the moment when a corpse is brought back to life. The speakers are at the very borderline between death and life. This raises all kinds of problems: for example, does the poem participate in any religious orthodoxy, and if so, why is it so harshly irreverent? Isn't resurrection supposed to happen at the end of time?-and in that case, this is a conversation we could never overhear. The song is all about the moment of transformation, and yet seems scornful of the miracle it describes. It is therefore both highly theatrical, and cynically destructive of the theatrical illusion. For all its charm, one begins to see why Beddoes may have considered it troublesome, and removed it from his already over-full drama.

Resurrection Song is also a good introduction to the intricacy of Beddoes's verse, with its relish of physical detail. For example, within the rattling rhythm of the couplets, there are internal rhymes and other sound effects; the echoing assonance of 'bones and 'souls' (l. 2), the rhymes of 'steady' and 'ready' (l. 4) and 'Heart and artery' (l. 5), the repetition of 'eye', parallel in adjacent lines. This accumulation of detail suggests the intricacy of mechanism, as the human body is patched up in readiness for its new life. A botched repair-job by rude mechanicals.

Resurrection Song therefore holds in miniature a wealth of Beddoes's eccentric gifts as the most criminally neglected writer of the British Romantic era. It has a provocative mixture of theological and anti-religious content. Despite its absurd burlesque tone, it speculates about human life, and searches for proof of an after-existence. Both the gross bodily detail, and the anatomist's love of precision come direct from the dissecting rooms and Beddoes's medical training at the University of Göttingen, where he boasted of his expertise with the scalpel. Its stranded status in the margins of that great dramatic shambles *Death's Jest-Book* is characteristic of Beddoes's habit of hitting upon his most intense images in fragments and miscellaneous pieces, free from the discipline of formal design, plot and characterisation. The poem is powerfully physical, but also undeniably metaphysical; a whole poem, but also a broken fragment of verse; tragic and farcical. It belongs in the pastiche sixteenth-century theatre, and equally in the operating theatre of nineteenth-century medicine. In all its tense contradictions, it is so much more powerfully true to Beddoes than the smooth and gorgeous lyric for which he is best remembered.

Michael Bradshaw 2003

Another one you might have missed, here is the typescript of Hugh's talk on Beddoes which he gave to us at our 2006 AGM and curious punters of 'The Dead Poet', a public house in Derbyshire in 2006.

Talk on TLB at 'The Dead Poets'

Hugh Parry

*Sweet are the thoughts that haunt the poet's brain
Like rainbow-fringed clouds,
through which some star
Peeps in bright glory on a shepherd swain;*

Thus trilled TLB in a juvenile sonnet entitled *Thoughts*. Mercifully, that's about the last nice thought you'll hear this evening. Here's a much more interesting thought: all it needs is a form to inhabit, so it's trying out a few possibilities:

*Squats on a toad-stool under a tree
A bodiless childfull of life in the gloom,
Crying with frog voice, "What shall I be?
Poor unborn ghost, for my mother killed me
Scarcely alive in her wicked womb.
What shall I be? shall I creep to the egg
That's cracking asunder yonder by Nile,
And with eighteen toes,
And a snuff-taking nose,
Make an Egyptian crocodile?
Sing, "Catch a mummy by the leg
And crunch him with an upper jaw,
Wagging tail and clenching claw;
Take a bill-full from my craw,
Neighbour raven, caw, O caw,
Grunt, my crocky, pretty maw!
And give a paw."*

*I'll not be a fool like the nightingale
Who sits up all midnight without any ale,
Making a noise with his nose;
Nor a camel, although 'tis a beautiful back;
Nor a duck, notwithstanding the music of quack,
And the webby, mud-patting toes.
I'll be a new bird with the head of an ass,
Two pigs' feet, two men's feet, and two of a hen;
Devil-winged; dragon-bellied; grave-jawed, because grass
Is a beard that's soon shaved, and grows seldom again
Before it is summer; so cow all the rest;
The new Dodo is finished. O! come to my nest.*

Welcome to the bizarre world of TLB, whose abruptly truncated life spanned most of the first half of the 19th century, but who would have contrived to be an uneasy

maverick any time, anywhere. Poet, physician, metaphysician, anatomist, revolutionary, linguist, drinker, sexual deviant, melancholic, joker, would-be arsonist, self-harmer, freak, failure, genius.

In the critical histories you may find passing tributes to him, patronising or thin-lipped, as the uncrowned laureate of the ghoulish and the morbid.

*...thou know'st
Full many a tale of shrieking ghost,
And wandering fay, and gibing sprite,
That laugh away the hours of night.*

Indeed he does. But who wants to listen?

*Not in the popular playhouse, or full throng
Of opera-gazers longing for deceit;
Not on the velvet day-bed, novel-strewn,
Or in the interval of pot and pipe;
Not between sermon and scandalous paper,
May verse like this e'er hope an eye to feed on't.
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;
Such may perchance, with favourable mind,
Follow my thought along its mountainous path.*

The singer of that *new Dodo* lyric is asked: 'And what's your tune?' He replies:

*What is the night-bird's tune, wherewith she startles
The bee out of his dream and the true lover,
And both in the still moonshine turn and kiss
The flowery bosoms where they rest, and murmuring
Sleep smiling and more happily again?
What is the lobster's tune when he is boiled?
I hate your ballads that are made to come
Round like a squirrel's cage, and round again.
We nightingales sing boldly from our hearts:
So listen to us.*

Let's leave the boiling lobster for the moment. Can he do nightingales? The young TLB could indeed turn out Keats pastiches:

To a Bunch of Grapes, ripening in my window

*Cluster of pregnant berries, pressed
In luscious warmth together,
Like golden eggs in glassy nest,
Hatched by the zephyr's dewy breast
In sultry weather;
Bubbles of light, with sweetness swollen,
Balls of bright juice, by breezes rollen
And banded high
I watch with wondrous care each day*

*Your little spotted blushes,
Dyed by the sun's rude staring ray;
And soon I hope you'll ooze away
In sunny gushes.
Then shall ye, veiled in misty fume,
In polished urn be flowing
With blood of nectar, soul perfume,
Breathe on our cheeks a downy bloom
With pleasure glowing.*

It shows promise. Well, anyway, it shows an abundance of sticky adolescent sensibility and a woozy verbal relish. But later he'll learn to get drunk like a man:

Lord Alcohol

*Who tames the lion now?
Who smoothes Jove's wrinkles now?
Who is the reckless wight
That in the horrid middle
Of the deserted night
Doth play upon man's brain,
As on a wanton fiddle,
The mad and magic strain,
The reeling, tripping sound,
To which the world goes round?
Sing heigh! ho! diddle!
And then say -
Love, quotha, Love? Nay, nay!
It is a spirit fine
Of ale or ancient wine,
Lord Alcohol, the drunken fay,
Lord Alcohol away!*

*Who maketh pipe-clay man
Think all that nature can?
Who dares the gods to flout,
Lay fate beneath the table,
And maketh him stammer out
A thousand monstrous things,
For history a fable,
Dish-clouts for kings?
And sends the world along
Singing a ribald song
Of heigho! Babel?
Who, I pray -
Love, quotha, Love? Nay, nay!
It is a spirit fine
Of ale or ancient wine,
Lord Alcohol, the drunken fay,
Lord Alcohol away!*

Shall we drink to that? I give you Lord Alcohol.

Who else would be read by a fiery-eyed young misfit in the 1820's?

*A flooding summer burst on Poetry;
Of which the crowning sun, the night of beauty,
The dancing showers, the birds whose anthems wild
Note after note unbind the enchanted leaves
Of breaking buds, eve, and the flow of dawn,
Were centred and condensed in his one name
As in a providence - and that was SHELLEY*

In his more mature years, TLB didn't just talk the talk - he walked the walk in revolutionary politics in Germany and Switzerland dangerously enough to make places too hot to hold him. But you'll see little overt sign of this in his poetry. Shelley may have been his guru, but TLB wrote his political tracts in prose - and in German.

What of earlier writers? Whom does a trendy young poet read and imitate? The Jacobean dramatists - the role models for the New Theatre of fine frenzy and sardonic detachment.

Duchess: *Who am I?*
Bosola: *Thou art a box of worm-seed, at best,
but a salutary of green mummy: - what's this
flesh? a little crudded milk, fantastical puff-paste; our
bodies are weaker than those paper prisons boys
use to keep flies in; more contemptible, since ours is to
preserve earthworms. Didst thou ever see a lark in a
cage? such is the soul in the body: this world is like
her little turf of grass, and the heaven o'er our heads,
like her looking-glass, only gives us a miserable
knowledge of the small compass of our prison.*

(Duchess of Malfi Act IV Sc 2)

Here is TLB with a Jacobean put-down of his own from an early play called *The Second Brother*;

*- Now, my velvet fellow,
Let's measure limbs. Well, is your flesh to mine
As gold to lead, or but the common plaister
That wraps up bones? Your skin is not silk;
Your face not painted with an angel's feather
With tints from morning's lip, but the daubed clay;
These veiny pipes hold a dog's lap of blood.
Let us shake hands; I tell thee, brother skeleton,
We're but a pair of puddings for the dinner
Of Lady worm; you served in silks and gems,
I garnished with plain rags. Have I unlocked thee?*

Beddoes loved the fizzing energy of the Jacobean in their manic phases, too: slangily rhythmic, laden with far-fetched imagery and conceits - fast-frame pyrotechnic displays: Here's John Marston's *Malcontent* in 1604:

- dreams, dreams, visions, fantasies, chimeras,

*imagination, tricks, conceits! Sir Tristram Trimtram,
come aloft Jack-an-apes with a whim-wham: here's a
Knight of the land of Catito shall play at trap with
any page in Europe, do the sword-dance with any
morriss-dancer in Christendom, ride at the ring till
the fin of his eyes look as blue as the welkin, and run
the wild goose chase even with Pompey the Huge.*

TLB's play *Death's Jest Book* begins with the jester, Mandrake, telling his girlfriend that he's off on an expedition:

*Am I a man of gingerbread that you should mould me
to your liking, or hath my will a man's nose to
follow? To have my way, in spite of your tongue and
reason's teeth, tastes better than Hungary wine; and
my heart beats in a honey-pot now I reject you and
all sober sense: so, I prithee, go back to my master, the
Doctor, and tell him he may seek another zany for his
booth, a new wise merry Andrew. My jests are cracked,
my cox comb fallen, my bauble confiscated, my cap
mediatized. Toll the bell; for Jack Pudding is no more!
... There, Kate, in that Sphynx land they made the
roads with the philosopher's stone. There be wise croc
odiles whose daughters are more cunning than the
witches of Lapland, and fairer than the Lotus of the
Nile. There can one chat with mummies in a pyramid,
and breakfast on basilisk's eggs...*

And then there's Shakespeare. 'The King looks well', one character cheerily remarks. He is put firmly in his place:

*Yet men die suddenly:
One sits upon a strong and rocky life,
Watching a street of many opulent years,
And Hope's his mason. Well! today do this,
And so tomorrow; twenty hollow years
Are stuffed with action: - lo! upon his head
Drops a pin's point of time; tick! quoth the clock,
And the grave snaps him.*

This is a patchwork of echoes. The pin comes from *Richard II*:

*...within the hollow crown
That rounds the mortal temples of a king
Keeps death his court; and there the antic sits,
Scoffing his state and grinning at his pomp;
Allowing him a breath, a little scene,
To monarchize, be fear'd, and kill with looks;
Infusing him with self and vain conceit,
As if this flesh which walls about our life
Were brass impregnable; and, humour'd thus,
Comes at the last, and with a little pin
Bores through his castle wall, and farewell, king!*

This is such a quintessentially Beddoesian passage that one wonders if anticipatory plagiarism is possible. Here's the pin again, but, as usual, the theft has TLB's fingerprints on it:

*...Methinks
The look of the world's a lie, a face made up
O'er graves and fiery depths; and nothing's true
But what is horrible. - Luckless man
Avoids the miserable bodkin's point,
And, flinching from the insect's little sting,
In pitiful security keeps watch,
While 'twixt him and that hypocrite the sun,
To which he prays, comes windless pestilence,
Transparent as a glass of poisoned water
Through which the drinker sees his murderer smiling;
She stirs no dust, and makes no grass to nod,
Yet every footstep is a thousand graves,
And every breath of her's as full of ghosts
As a sunbeam with motes.*

Even the naive soul who thought the King seemed so perky has learnt better, and can now make an observation which is pure Beddoes, triple-distilled:

*Such things may have been;
The crevice 'twixt two after-dinner minutes,
The crack between a pair of syllables
May sometimes be a grave as deep as 'tis
From noon to midnight in the hoop of time.*

And TLB the anatomical researcher is typically seen in the image of the body as a Frankensteinian piece of botch-job tailoring:

*...Does thy soul
Not wear a fleshy shirt, a cloak of skin,
Art not sewn up with veins and pegged together
With bony sticks and hinges?*

Over-acquaintance with the raw materials might explain the skull-and-bones relish which accompanies his more jocular moods:

*I want a whistle, Sir; aye, and a comb
To keep my hair straight on my forehead; and
A porridge-spoon. Are your bones sound? I mean
To drink my punch out of your scull tonight.*

I hope the *man* is beginning to appear in and behind the *style*. TLB's first venture into print was with a collection called *The Improvisatore*. Later he tried to destroy every copy - an understandable act of criticism. The poems are rotten both in subject matter and quality, but hugely enjoyable as a romp through the under-ventilated brain of an adolescent steeped in too much Gothic decadence.

The protagonist of one of his creepy stories is a frightful young delinquent called Leopold, who murders his saintly foster-father at the promptings of a fiend in exchange for the power to ride the storm. In this passage we see the unpromising lad's childhood. Beneath the absurd melodrama is an unmistakable, if distorted, echo of Beddoes's alienation, his innate response to the grand and the grotesque, and his craving to be someone amazing and magnificent:

*He knew no playmates but the stormy blasts,
Which seemed to whisper some dark secret dread
As he would sleep among them, with his head
Swathed in lank dripping tresses, and cry out
With joy to his rude playmates, while his shout
(He thought) was written in the lightning red.
Oh! how he longed to bind his bronzed brows
With a bright snake of fire, wove from the flame
Of those swift glimpses; or to hear his name
Roared in the thunder which they gild: he raged
And bared his breast, wherein were cribbed and caged
The thoughts that seared it. Then with mops and
mows*

*He darted through the storm, like some wild bird:
He spurned the wind, and stretched his longing arms,
Hugging the tempest and its brood of harms
With horrible delight; his whooping yell
Struggled with the hoarse blast; its striving swell
Dwelt on the clouds, and in the vales was heard.*

But the realities of the pursuit of joy or success are pretty grim:

*I have been one that thought there was a sun,
A joyful heat-maker; and like a child
By a brook's side spooning the sparkles out,
I caught at his reflection in my soul,
And found 'twas water painted with a lie,
Cold, bitter water; I have cried it out.*

What can we expect or aspire to in a biosphere that's a blink of the cosmic eye:

*Why what's the world and time? a fleeting thought
In the great meditating universe,
A brief parenthesis in chaos.*

So what can a misfit do in a fraudulent world?

The Runaway

*Has no one seen my heart of you?
My heart has run away;
And, if you catch him, ladies, do
Return him me, I pray.
On earth he is no more, I hear,
Upon the land or sea;
For the women found the rogue so queer,*

*They sent him back to me.
 In heaven there is no purchaser
 For such strange ends and odds,
 Says a Jew, who goes to Jupiter
 To buy and sell old gods.
 So there's but one more place to search,
 That's not genteel to tell,
 Where demonesses go to church:
 So Christians fair, farewell.*

The poetry he finds in his quest certainly has a whiff of sulphur clinging to it. Is it actually worth reading? 'I ought to have been among other things a good poet',

he wrote in his suicide note. "Poor bird", he said wryly of himself:

*Poor bird, that cannot ever
 Dwell high in tower of song:
 Whose heart-breaking endeavour
 But palls the lazy throng.*

But is that lack of talent or lack of encouragement? Either way, he was a man with limits to his stamina for both poetry and life. But sentimentality would incur the fury of Beddoes's ghost, and that is not an entity it would be wise to get the wrong side of. You've heard some of his work, and you'll hear more. You decide.

Hugh Parry 2006



Anna Maria Edgeworth

On a recent visit to The National Portrait Gallery in London to see their *Bluestocking Exhibition* I was overjoyed to find myself gazing at TLB's mother! (to be). There she is, on the right. The artist has placed a screen behind her to contrast her dark hair at a time when powdered hair and wigs were the fashion.

Her sister Maria is seen discussing plans with her father Richard Lovell Edgeworth, probably Emmeline by her side and his third wife and Anna looking on. The watercolour is dated 1787 when Maria was about 20, Emmeline (TLB's favourite aunt and mother to Zoe King) is 17 and Anna 15.

Christine Hankinson

The Edgeworth Family by Adam Buck by permission Michael Butler; photograph © National Portrait Gallery, London

Thanks to Rachel Eley fro sending me the print

Reviews

Romanticism, Medicine, and the Poet's Body by James Robert Allard Ashgate 2007, 174pp. ISBN 978-0-7546-5891-7. £50

The Debt to Anatomy Alan Halsey

The title of James Robert Allard's book intrigued me at once. Being a non-specialist I have little knowledge of the work done to link its three components. Much of the intrigue came from the expression 'the Poet's Body' and I looked forward to the detection of poets' bodies in their writings. As it turns out there are very few disinterments in Allard's study until he comes to Thomas Lovell Beddoes. His gaze is generally more abstract. Rather than poets' bodies his subject is, in his own words, 'the interpenetration of poetry and medicine' in the Romantic period. This is a sufficiently engaging subject for me not to grumble too much about any missing bodies, even while I wish that Allard used the word 'interpenetration' more sparingly. It sometimes appears several times in one paragraph and I do wonder how much interpenetration the world can bear.

The opening chapter is a deft survey of the development of medicine during the 'Romantic Century' (1750-1850) and of the 'changing fortunes' of what had been its 'three hierarchically arranged groups': physicians, surgeons and apothecaries. He stresses the importance and influence of 'direct empirical knowledge of the body unmediated by text' as advocated by William and John Hunter, and the significance of the arguments for and against anatomy in the context of the philosophical question of mind/body duality as well as medical speculations for and against the 'vital principle' and 'sensibility' which underlie the variant practices of William Cullen and John Brown. As a proponent of the 'union of the different branches of medical practice' Dr Thomas Beddoes is seen as the reformer who 'serves as a sort of bridge between the surgeon-anatomists like the Hunters and the physicians like Cullen and Brown'. Allard argues that by stripping medical practice of its quack reputation these advances, reforms and controversies drove towards establishing 'medicine's rhetoric of legitimacy', 'focused on asserting medical control over the body', to the point that the 1858 Medical Act made 'the medical establishment ... one of the most dominant institutions of the cultural landscape.' We might expect this phenomenon to express itself in the poetry of the period and this is Allard's subject, although he rightly alludes to the broad-

er social implications. In our own world medical authority is paramount. Medicine has assumed the mantle of morality and you're more likely to be collared for smoking in a public place than for credit card fraud, at the same time as medical research rapidly advances into realms no ethic has yet embraced.

Allard's initial approach to the 'interpenetration of poetry and medicine' is to look at William Wordsworth's preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* and Joanna Baillie's 'Introductory Discourse' to *A Series of Plays: In Which It Is Attempted to Delineate the Stronger Passions of the Mind*. He reveals how Wordsworth draws on medical discourse to underscore his notion of the poet as 'a man speaking to men'. When Wordsworth writes that 'The end of Poetry is to produce excitement in coexistence with an overbalance of pleasure' Allard shows us that he is using apparently commonplace words in senses which owe much to Brown's *Elements of Medicine*. 'Excitement' was a central concept in Brown's theory: 'Excitement, the effect of the exciting powers, the true cause of life, is, within certain boundaries produced in a degree proportioned to the degree of the stimulus.' I feel less convinced about Allard's claim that Baillie's emphasis on 'physical manifestation' in the theatre derives directly from newly-established views of the body. Perhaps the argument is simply underdeveloped. It is certain that Baillie was objecting to contemporary 'closet drama' but we need to be told more about the difference between her notion of 'physicality' in the theatre and that of dramatists who wrote in the medical dark ages.

The main focus of Allard's book is his study of three 'Poet-Physicians': John Thelwall, John Keats and Thomas Lovell Beddoes. He grants that there is something problematic in designating Thelwall and Keats as 'Poet-Physicians' in that neither progressed from the study to the practice of medicine: 'only Beddoes can properly be called a physician.' It is true that Beddoes is the only one of the trio whose medical studies were lifelong but as Allard concedes 'there is some debate as to whether he actually practiced medicine.' This does not, I think, affect Allard's thesis since his concern is with poets trained to look at the body from a medical perspective. Why the Romantics' (and in particular Beddoes') interest in medicine failed to carry into therapeutic practice is a separate and more speculative question.

Allard's account of Thelwall's use of the concept of a material 'vital principle' in the attempt to heal the 'body politic' is entertaining and enlightening. He does however concentrate on Thelwall's prose and the reader looking for a body in a poem will again be disappointed. Keats' poems offer a much likelier bone house. Allard's

chosen texts are *Hyperion: A Fragment* and *The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream*. The degree to which Keats' medical training is legible in his poems has been much discussed and is a crux in the reading of both his life and work, resulting perhaps in a pre- if not over-determination of any interpretation of a poem or passage. Consider one of Allard's citations, from 'the first extended description of the Titans' in 'Hyperion':

*Dungeon'd in opaque element, to keep
Their clenched teeth still clench'd, and all their limbs
Lock'd up like veins of metal, cramp'd and screw'd;
Without a motion, save of their big hearts
Heaving in pain, and horribly convuls'd
With sanguine feverous boiling gurge of pulse.*

Allard comments that 'the careful descriptions of bodies in pain, the use of [...] medical terminology [...] and even the framing of a sort of clinical tableau, all indicate that medicine has a literal presence in the text.' Perhaps. On the other hand you can find comparable passages in Blake's prophecies and we know that Blake had no medical background, owing his knowledge of anatomy to his training as an artist. The presiding influence on both poets (as Allard acknowledges in the case of Keats) is Milton, one of whose misfortunes was to live long before the medical enlightenment. I must remark that Allard's analysis of the infamous attack on Keats by 'Z' (Lockhart and Wilson) is engaging, for he sees it as also a reactionary response to medicine's newfound legitimacy following the Apothecaries Act of 1815: 'Z not only attacks Keats as a bad poet, but he also suggests that Keats, as a "starved apothecary", is little more than a quack.'

Beddoes, who spent his life studying bodies and whose poetry offers so many specimens, is the ideal subject for Allard's thesis and the chapter "The Body's Laws": Flesh, Souls, and Transgression in Thomas Lovell Beddoes's *Death's Jest-Book*' is his best. By way of contextualising the writing of the earlier draft of the play Allard gives a careful account of the progression of Beddoes' anatomical studies and also of the uncertainties which led to his 'conviction of the absurdity & unsatisfactory nature of human life' causing him to 'search with avidity for every shadow of a proof or probability of an after-existence, both in the material & immaterial nature of man' (letter to Kelsall, 1827). This does seem the soundest approach, as I believe is Allard's view that the play is structured around a hierarchy of fools - Mandrake, Wolfram and Isbrand - who in distinct ways wilfully attempt to overcome the dichotomies of mind/body and life/death. Allard refers to them as 'Beddoes's curious, tripled version of the Poet-Physician, which he calls

"Death's Fool" and remarks that 'the figure of "Death's Fool" ... embodies both doctor and patient, operator and operated-on.' The details of Allard's analysis deserve more consideration than a brief review permits and I confine myself to two general remarks. Allard's approach to the play allows him to sidestep the facile notion that *Death's Jest-Book* expresses no more than Beddoes' 'obsession with death' and to emphasise Beddoes' belief that the understanding of death will provide insights into both the origin and maintenance of life. In this respect Beddoes participated in the mainstream medical studies of his time, even if his contribution is in a wilder key than any textbook. The consequence is that Allard comes to the welcome and uncommon view that: '*Death's Jest-Book* appears to have succeeded': 'As a fragmented textual body, lacking "edges" and "closure", the play embodies the contradictions of an age and poet that sought to reconcile old metaphysical problems in the light of new physical "certainties" foregrounded by the emergence of scientific medicine as one of the most dominant discourses of power. And in "failing" to effect successfully a reconciliation, in allowing the contradictions to remain unresolved, *Death's Jest-Book* succeeds in walking the space between.'

Alan Halsey

Our second review is of the scholarly volume of current Beddoes' criticism: *The Ashgate Research Companion To Thomas Lovell Beddoes* edited by Ute Burns and Michael Bradshaw, Ashgate Publishing Limited, £60

The Ashgate Research Companion to TLB Hugh Parry

To begin, as the Introduction does, with some canon-fire. In the Cathedral of Worthy Eng Lit, the likes of Keats and Shelley are strolling up and down the aisles in full canonicals with proprietary confidence. Question: can we find a place for Beddoes amongst the minor canons? Someone could usefully be i/c tombs, for example, but we don't want too rigid a job description: he needs to be 'situated', without being 'subsumed into a canonical agenda'. The time is right to sneak him in, though. His works are 'finding their way onto undergraduate literature curricula, a crucial condition of lasting canonical status'.

Now, if you live in the rarefied air of Academia, the proof that your specialised niche is not going to crumble away and drop you into a black hole of irrelevance is that your pet author or subject has infiltrated the booklist which agile undergraduates find ways to avoid actually reading. If some of them do read Beddoes, then

let us rejoice. I don't mean this to sound snide: a twenty-year-old who likes words and isn't frightened off by a literary format which looks rather un-user-friendly should love *Death's Jest Book*.

Cathedrals need more than staff. Charging an entry fee shrinks the visitor numbers - not a bad thing, apparently, because too many oiks dissipate the numinous ambience. Hardback books of critical essays costing sixty quid should certainly slow the turnstile. (Of course, when you're a member of the chapter, paperback critical interpretations of your oeuvre can be published for undergraduate pockets, although surely they all get their plagiarism on-line these days.) Are the only people coming in those with a guide to ecclesiastical architecture under their arm?

Defining 'the canon' as the writing considered important enough to put on an undergraduate syllabus is an admission of defeat. Why are the paperback editions and selections of writers of the past in not-obviously-esoteric imprints, even Penguins, often now prepared by academics who use the introduction to offload the paper they delivered at some symposium? Apparently, because the notion of a General Reader has been jettisoned in despair. Only professionals and apprentices are going to read the stuff, so there is no need to transmit enthusiasm or tickle the curiosity or reassure the reader that poets never wrote for curricula. In passing, shall I say that only two contributors to this book express any warmth and appreciation for their subject, Michael O'Neill and Alan Halsey, or treat Beddoes as a poet. Only Alan Halsey dares to hint that Beddoes just might be capable of writing rather badly as well (as opposed to castigating him for unacceptable opinions).

Enough said; too much, perhaps. But when a wave of critical modishness ebbs, another will replace it. If the General Reader becomes extinct, what kind of monkeying about with DNA is going to resurrect or recreate that new Dodo? Berns and Bradshaw talk of a 'team' of critics, which sounds jolly and reassuring, all pulling together to do Beddoes belated justice. There is certainly a great deal of cross-referencing, and some back-scratching which I suppose is more appealing than back-stabbing, although Fred Burwick is juxtaposed with a slightly foaming piece on Beddoes's 'revolutionary discourse' that takes several pot-shots at him, which is the professional hazard of being an 'eminent scholar' having to rub shoulders with 'emerging critics'. However much these contributors see themselves as team players, though, is the important game taking place on a different field?

It is unreasonable, I know, to ask for proselytising

vivacity from a series 'designed to offer scholars and graduate students a comprehensive and authoritative state-of-the-art review of current research'. The target audience is welcome therefore to respond in its own terms. If there is anything for the amateurs amongst us, however, then we want to know. So let's explore - have you noticed how regularly academics 'explore' topics, issues etc.? It sounds fun at first. Marjean Purinton would like us to do something more in the ghoulish family line: the fragments of plays Beddoes gestated and aborted are 'teaching materials upon which readers can practise literary/medico dissection' (sic). Let us dissect the dissecters, albeit with much cruder tools.

This is a tough assignment. You scent trouble on the breeze when you find that 'foreground' and 'critique' are viewed as verbs; a lurch of queasiness hints at worse to come when you watch words bob by like 'irremissible', 'processual' and 'performative' (yes, Chambers has heard of them - oh, you knew?); you realise there is stormy weather to negotiate as 'paradigm' rears its sinister head, 'signifiers' have to be steered round, and there's the occasional sighting of a 'reify', too; and when Lacan, Foucault and Derrida join the crew, then 'Mercy on us! We split, we split!' The banshee wail of the storm rises: 'By denying that the signifying surface can be used to read a deeper truth, Beddoes suggests that neither the theatrical body nor the closeted mind can be claimed as the pure site of the play's meaning. For Beddoes, the mental is the theatrical, insofar as consciousness is by definition a consciousness of a performance of signifiers that conceal the radical alterity of the body and its death.' Abandon ship. As Nat Leach also says, but referring to something different, it's 'an unreadable materiality resistant to the anatomizing gaze'.

Beddoes is partly to blame, not being averse in his correspondence to weaving theories round his dizzy victims which relate questionably to his practice but have provided rich nourishment for those who are sometimes at heart more interested and at home in the theory than the practice. I happen to know (but I won't tell you how) that Beddoes had discovered a chink in the armour of Time that tempted him to leave a gift for future researchers which his supernaturally-achieved prescience enabled him to wrap up just to their taste: that gleeful phrase-making, held admiringly to the light by contributor after contributor, about tragedy as 'the sum of his experience in mental pathology & therapeutics' and (who could resist such plump, wriggling bait?) 'a living semiotic display'.

At times, though, brows that are quite unfurrowed by the pursuit of arcane analogies and 'inter-

cultural' interweavings crease a bit as they hit brute simplicity. Christopher Moylan is brave to quote John Ashbery, even in order to differ politely: 'Somewhere, somehow, Beddoes in all his work is trying to make a point about death, but he never succeeds in doing so... one can end up feeling that he just likes to talk about death, that the sound of the word is comforting' - and all those clothes so carefully tailored to fit the Emperor from rolls of philosophy, psychiatry and physiology, buttoned with myth and laced with politics, seem to turn to dust like Dracula caught in the sunrise.

Pull at one thread, and other cherished topics may start to unravel, too. Take sex and politics (if we must). There is much beavered away to prove the existence in DJB of coded allusions and comments relating to contemporary radical unrest, as one would expect from Beddoes's career. There is of course a revolution and a counter-revolution in the play. It is not at all clear how to interpret the 'message' of these events. Michael Bradshaw looks cynically at Torwald resuming the Governorship, this time permanently, since Melveric is otherwise engaged for the rest of Eternity, and shrugs: '*Death's Jest Book* develops a model of the persecuting and alienating state that seems to survive the supernatural upheavals of the plot: business as usual.' Raphael Hörmann will have none of this defeatism: the play, with its elimination of an effete, outmoded feudalism represented by Melveric, 'offers a hopeful scenario for the bourgeois revolution' - not to say that such encouragement was deserved or accurately prophetic.

What one might ask is, why should there be any doubt about the political content? Allegories may be written because writers are afraid to be openly subversive, but who was Beddoes afraid of? The Lord Chamberlain censoring the play and scuppering its production at Drury Lane? Hardly. He could have published a version of the play that was far more pointed, either privately or abroad. I suggest the difficulty exists simply because Beddoes either wasn't bothered about the coherence of his plot, or didn't know what to do with it. If he'd been interested in Torwald as a political being, he would have shown him in action and speech providing us with material by which to judge him. Who cares what happens in Munsterberg in Act Six? I see no sign that Beddoes does. The one clear judgment he makes is that revolutions may be instigated by cunning solipsists who have an even more autocratic and unjust regime to introduce. What is wrong with Melveric's rule, though, apart from the fact that he isn't around to do much ruling? What on earth are his sons playing at, politically as opposed to hormonally? We don't know, because motiva-

tion is as nugatory as character-drawing in the play.

Then tug at the gender thread. Demonstrating the clumsiness and silliness of Beddoes's patently reluctant engagement with women in the plays is a piece of cake. His 'eroticisation of death' is his most distinctive trademark, and you may suspect that it is sadism stimulated by misogyny. Wolfram and Melveric certainly act out a parody of a switchback passionate affair, or a toxic marriage like that of Albee's George and Martha tearing each other apart yet bound by symbiosis. Still, Beddoes is hardly unique in creating what Moylan calls 'wan' women, or in finding male relationships more interesting than heterosexual love, nor is either feature ipso facto the mark of a homosexual writer. To say, as Diane Long Hoeveler does, that Beddoes's imagination of the afterlife constitutes 'a rabid denunciation of female fertility' is to take a sledgehammer to a nut and not even then to break the thing. This essay is particularly frustrating: interesting parallels are drawn, yet others seem to be raised to punish him for not being likeable. I suppose everyone but me knew that Beddoes wrote anti-Jesuit poems in 1844; I still can't see that any case has been made for her contention that Beddoes was expressing prejudice against Catholicism and women in a warped form of the Protestant desanctification of the Virgin. Women writers don't need the windy generalities of feminist rhetoric or the conspiracy theories of the sex war to point out that Beddoes's art was retarded by his unease about women; and his homosexuality can be inferred from his work without coded messages being seen everywhere as clues in a treasure-hunt - his 'exploration of homoerotic desire', according to Burwick, co-opting the poet into that merry band of explorers.

If I am suggesting that the essays chronically overelaborate on the themes of death, politics and sex, and are by and large indifferent to Beddoes as a poet rather than a cultural artefact, this seems to leave little possibility of illumination from them, but not so. I am indebted to O'Neill for telling me to read 'Squats on a toadstool' as a description of Beddoes's own lyrical voice (oh all right, you knew that a long time ago); to Ute Berns for the likely influence of London's 'illegitimate theatre' on Beddoes's staging devices (tell us more), and for the image of Isbrand perhaps seen as a vehicle for Edmund Kean; to Alan Halsey for the plausible theory that Beddoes's burial of the 1829 version had nothing really to do with the timorous carping of his friends; to A.J. Johnston for showing some fascinating recurrences

of characteristic metaphors, to splendid rhetorical effect, in his German polemics; with ill grace, to Marjean Purinton for mining Beddoes senior's *Hygeia* for some suggestive parallels (but I have well and truly had my fill of 'Techno-Gothic'); to the editors for the critical sound-bites through the generations at the beginning of the book, some of which were new to me, such as Blunden's wonderful 'he confused the alphabet of imagery', which he didn't mean as a compliment but which would surely have delighted Beddoes, or Ashbery's wise words, again, about the value of a dramatic context, however incoherent, for the anthologisable plum passages (and all the lyrics).

Sometimes the contributors did some good quite unconsciously. I was glumly wading through David Baulch's exegesis of Isbrand's presentation of the rebellion as an act of creation and as 'the first drops of Noah's world-washing shower': 'The biblical inflection of Isbrand's description of revolution identifies the ideological return to the ahistorical void of the Real as both history's essence and its antithesis in its invocation of the Christian myth of the world's creation ex nihilo and then its destruction and re-founding after the great flood.' While thinking to myself that I wouldn't have put it quite like that but, at the fifth reading or so, that you might be discerning a good point struggling through the verbiage, I turned to the original: (111/3/68-70)

*...We fall as gently on them,
As the first drops of Noah's world-washing shower
Upon the birds' wings and the leaves.*

There are times when you might think, 'Make Beddoes the Dean, and send Shelley and Keats off to take the Sunday School and scrub the chancel steps.' What a magnificently characteristic off-centre visualisation, of the Flood ('the Christian myth'? Up to a point, Lord Copper) as it started, with a little pattering on the trees, like the first glance across a crowded room that will inevitably, in Beddoes, lead to sinister shenanigans at the grave. The long liquid lines are as exquisite as the music that George Saintsbury famously extolled in 'Dream Pedlary', but all the more effective for *not* being part of a selfconsciously jewelled lyric but dropped into rugged blank verse spoken by a gloating psychopath. For all that has been said about an inability to adapt speaking style to character (O'Neill tactfully, though not euphoniously, says that the cast 'compose a complexly choric voice'), this speech has gruesome aptness for Isbrand. Enjoy the euphemism of 'world-washing shower', which reminds us that the Flood was a cleansing of evil but that it swept away all distinc-

tions, as a revolution invariably accompanies targeted revenge or punishment with vast 'collateral damage'. Relish the verb 'fall on', with its primary sense, in this context, of 'ferociously assail', puzzlingly turned into an apparent oxymoron with the insertion of 'gently', and then explained as an unaggressive, even colourless verb when applied to raindrops - leaving cynically unexplained how you fall gently on your opponents in a coup made possible by 'a thousand swordsmen' awaiting the signal to attack. Gasp at the bland displacement of the vengeful agent, God, by the innocent beneficiary, Noah, who nevertheless, as an almost *sole* beneficiary, is ironically analogous to Isbrand, who regards the new world as created for him to disport himself in.

I think, I hope, that, under the carapace of judicial critical detachment and stiff, unlovely, matted prose, the contributors to the Ashgate Research Companion first met, and still read, Beddoes with the joy that such idiosyncratic felicities provoke. If so, perhaps Beddoesians are a team, after all. Before reading the essays, I read, for the first time, Michael Bradshaw's and Alan Halsey's editions of the β and γ texts back to back. That is the real debt I owe.

Hugh Parry 2008

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before you go - Quiz: Who do you think said this ?

'For genuine incoherence and atrophy of the fatherhood, we must go to such an example as the huge, helpless collection of disconnected beauties that make up the scattered corpus of Beddoes' Dramas. Here, everything is lovely, everything is powerful in fragments; but the power and beauty of the work as a whole scarcely exist. It is a scrap-heap of discarded beginnings, cancelled endings, episodes without connection, connecting passages that link nothing, actions without motive, scenes that lead up to situations which never occur, speeches that contradict the character of the speakers, characters whose aspect is only a looming bulk of form without feature.'

Answer next issue. Send answers and quizzes to Christine or John.

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