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978-1-107-65244-6 - Thomas Lovell Beddoes: An Anthology

Chosen by F. L. Lucas

Excerpt

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LETTERS

To BRYAN WALLER PROCTER*Milan, June 8th [1824]*

* * *

And what else have I seen? A beautiful and far-famed insect—do not mistake, I mean neither the Emperor, nor the King of Sardinia, but a much finer specimen—the firefly. Their bright light is evanescent, and alternates with the darkness, as if the swift wheeling of the earth struck fire out of the black atmosphere; as if the winds were being set upon this planetary grindstone, and gave out such momentary sparks from their edges. Their silence is more striking than their flashes, for sudden phenomena are almost invariably attended with some noise, but these little jewels dart along the dark as softly as butterflies. For their light, it is not nearly so beautiful and poetical as our still companion of the dew—the glow-worm with his drop of moonlight. If you see or write to Kelsall, remember me to him; and excuse my neglect in not writing to him before I left England by the plea of hurry, which is true. To-night at twelve I leave Milan, and shall be at Florence on Saturday long before this letter tastes the atmosphere (*pardonnez*, I mean the smoke) of London.

There and here,

Yours truly,

T. L. BEDDOES

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If you see Mrs Shelley, ask her to remember me, and tell her that I am as anxious to change countries with her as she can be. If I could be of any use in bringing the portrait, etc., it would be a proud task, but most likely I only flash over Florence; entering on the flood of the stars, and departing with their ebb.

To THOMAS FORBES KELSALL

6 Devereux Ct Temple Bar. [Postmark Au: 25 1824]

* * *

The disappearance of Shelley from the world, seems, like the tropical setting of that luminary (*aside* I hate that word) to which his poetical genius can alone be compared with reference to the companions of his day, to have been followed by instant darkness and owl-season; whether the vociferous Darley is to be the comet, or tender fullfaced L. E. L. the milk-and-watery moon of our darkness, are questions for the astrologers: if I were the literary weather-guesser for 1825 I would safely prognosticate fog, rain, blight in due succession for it's dullard months—

* * *

P.S. Shelley's book—This is a ghost indeed, and one who will answer to our demand for hidden treasure. The Dirge for the Year—That Indian Fragment—The boat on the Serchio and the Letter—with Music are to me the best of the new things and perfectly worthy of the mind which produced them. The translation of Mercury's hymn too; though questionable as to the fidelity of it's tone, is delightfully easy—

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What would he not have done if ten years more, that will be wasted upon the lives of unprofitable knaves and fools, had been given to him. Was it that more of the beautiful and good, than Nature could spare to one, was incarnate in him, and that it was necessary to resume it for distribution through the external and internal worlds? How many springs will blossom with his thoughts—how many fair and glorious creations be born of his one extinction!

To THOMAS FORBES KELSALL

[*March the twenty fifth 1825*]

* * *

All that one hears of Schiller inclines one to admire him much more than his fat, leather-chopped, fish-eyed rival¹ with the mock star of Vponity on his padded coat. I have read that fellow's Tasso w^h is a disgraceful apology for the conduct of the Duke of Ferrara, & represents poor Torquato, who was no great wit I fear, as an absolute spoiled poetic madman, a sort of Italian Tom Campbell—as touchy as tinder and as valuable. This was bound in a volume with his Iphigenie in Tauris, a poem faultlessly delightful, unless it be a fault that instead of being an imitation of Euripides it is a victory over him. I never felt so much disgust or much more admiration for any poet than for this Goëthe, as I read thro' it—& I believe every one who reads all his works must have this double feeling of contempt

¹ Goethe.

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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.

The metrical translation I was rash enough to speak about stands thus—

Nibelungen-lied (German) 9965 lines.
Translated 120 ,,

you see why I don't send it. It is waiting to be finished—meantime I have abandoned my last new act—& begun the 3rd of that w^h I was writing at Southton. I believe I may make an end of one or two in this way—

Be so good as to read—(if you can or do intend it) with a pencil in your hand & scratch all that is more particularly detestable & bad than ye rest.

Yours

T. L. B.

* * *

I will do the last man¹ 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. Meantime let Tom Campbell rule his roast & mortify the ghost of Sternhold—it is a subject for Michael Angelo not for the painter of Admiral Granby on the sign-post. Did I tell ye, I had a very dull interview with that dealer

¹ *The Last Man*, one of the many plays planned by Beddoes.

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in broken English, Dr Spurzheim, the ambassador from Golgotha? he is a strange breeches-full of mankind & seems inclined to the asinine.

* * *

To THOMAS FORBES KELSALL

Pemb Coll Oxford Wednesday [Postmark 8 Ju: 1825]

* * *

I do not intend to finish that 2nd Brother you saw but am thinking of a very Gothic-styled tragedy for wh 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”. I wish him another son—

* * *

To THOMAS FORBES KELSALL

Hamburg Tuesday. 19. July 1825

My dear Kelsall,—und mein lieber herr Thomas,—If you will take the sails of the Harwich packet, walk across the German Ocean, trot up the Elbe, & turn into the Roman Emperor at Hamburg be so good as to enquire for mein Herr T. L. B. No. 12 up two pair of stairs, & you will find him sitting on a horsehair sofa, looking over the Elbe with his meerschaum at his side full of Grave & abundantly prosaic.

Tomorrow, according to the prophecies of the diligence he will set out for Hanovver (we Germans (here

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a puff.) always spell it with 2 v's) & by the end of this week mein Herr Thomas will probably be a Dr of the university of Göttingen. What his 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. I rather think however that he will return to England with a rather quaint and unintelligible tragedy, which will set all critical pens nib upwards, à la fretful porcupine.

When he embarked from Harwich & observed that his only companions were two Oxford men, professors of *genteel larking*, without the depth, vivacity or heartiness w^h is necessary to render such people tolerable, he instantly drew his shell over him, & remained impenetrably proud & silent every wave of the way, dropping now and then a little venom into the mixture of conversation to make it effervesce.

Hamburg, where he now is, poor young man, is a new brick-built town, a fit place to embellish the ugly genius of the broad flat-sided muddy Elbe—The very churches of brick & emetical unto the eye—The people honest and civil, & God fill their purse for it, no custom house no passport required—but then the women are of a coarse quality—there are no pictures no sculpture & if one meets more upright & manly forms in life, than in Italy, yet you seek in vain paintings superior to signs or sculpture beyond a tobacco-stopper.

Herr Procter, the Boet as George the Second says,

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will tell you what a confusion was caused by your
hoaxing letter to a B.A. of Pemb. Coll. Oxon—what
a scrawl it elicited (*sic*) from his drowsy quill & how
underlined was the reply. Now leb wohl—for the post
leaves us soon.

Fahrend oder reitend

sein

DER GENIUS VON T. L. B.

To THOMAS FORBES KELSALL

Cassel. Sept^r 29 [1825]

* * *

Blumenbach who is my best friend among the pro-
fessors, is I fancy of the first rank as mineralogist,
phisologian, geologist, botanist, natural historian &
physician, over and above which he possesses an
exuberant fancy & a flow of wit w^h is anything but
German; indeed I suspect that he is the first living
writer in Deutschland, for 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 30 vols—not like Mr Colburn's in capacity of
page—3 at most contain what is really good. As a
poet is he inferior to his late lordship[†] and in the novel
line somewhere about Mackenzie. The hasty Germans
have betrayed their literature & delivered it to the
enemy by exalting him to the supreme godship thereof
—but ere his bones are cool probably they will pull
down his statue from it's high pinnacle on the poetic

† Byron.

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temple and make it a step to the high altar of some new
pen-deity—

* * *

To THOMAS FORBES KELSALL

[*Postmark Göttingen Dec^r 4 1825*] Sunday

My dear Kelsall,

Up at 5 Anatomical reading till 6—translation from English into German till 7—Prepare for Blumenbach's lecture on comp. Anat^y & breakfast till 8—Blumenbach's lecture till 9—Stromeyer's lecture on Chemistry till 10. 10 to $\frac{1}{2}$ p. 12 Practical Zootomy— $\frac{1}{2}$ p. 12 to 1 English into German or German literary reading with a pipe—1 to 2 Anatomical lecture. 2 to 3 anatomical reading. 3 to 4 Osteology. 4 to 5 Lecture in German language. 5 to 6 dinner and *light* reading in Zootomy Chem. or Anat^y. 6 to 7—this hour is very often wasted in a visit sometimes Anatomical reading till 8. Then coffee and read Greek till 10. 10 to 11. write a little Death's Jest book w^h is a horrible waste of time, but one must now & then throw away the dregs of the day; read Latin sometimes or even continue the Anatomy—and at 11 go to bed.

I give you this account of my week-day occupations that you may collect from it how small a portion of time I can save for correspondence &c. A few words in answer to your last letter. I will frankly confess to you that I have lost much if not all of my ambition to become poetically distinguished: & I do NOT think with Wordsworth that a man may dedicate himself entirely or even in great part to the cultivation of that

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part of literature, unless he possesses far greater powers of imagination &^c than even W. himself, and, (I need not add;) ergo, than I do; or bodily ill-health or mental weak^s prevents him from pursuing to any good purpose studies in useful sciences.

At the same time I think you will not fear that I shall become at any time a bare & barren man of science, such as are so abundant & so appallingly ignorant on this side of Chemistry or Anatomy. Again, even as a dramatist, I cannot help thinking that the study of anat^y, phisol-psych: & anthropology applied to and illustrated by history, biography and works of imagination is that w^h is most likely to assist one in producing correct and masterly delineations of the passions: great light w^d be thrown on Shakespeare by the commentaries of a person so educated. The studies then of the dramatist & physician are closely, almost inseparably, allied; the application alone is different; but is it impossible for the same man to combine these two professions in some degree at least?

* * *

And now I will end this unnecessary subject, by telling you that Death's Jest-book goes on like the tortoise slow & sure; I think it will be entertaining, very unamiable, & utterly unpopular. Very likely it may be finished in the spring or summer;

* * *

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

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not-very-likeable person so that I must make sure of
 my own respect & occupy that part of the brain wh^h
 should be employed in imaginative attachments in the
 pursuit of immaterial & unchanging good.

* * *

To BRYAN WALLER PROCTER

[*Postmarks "Göttingen 7 Mar" "F.P.O. Mr 13 1826"*]
*"Direct An Herrn Beddoes bey Eysel
 77 Weender Strasse Göttingen Hannover"*

TO-DAY a truant from the odd old bones
 And winds of flesh, which, as tamed rocks and stones
 Piled cavernously make his body's dwelling,
 Have housed man's soul: there, where time's billows
 swelling
 Make a deep ghostly and invisible sea
 Of melted worlds, antediluvially
 Upon the sand of ever-crumbling hours
 God-founded, stands the castle, all it's towers
 With veiny tendrils ivied: this bright day
 I leave its chambers, and with oars away
 Seek some enchanted island where to play.
 And what do you, that in the enchantment dwell
 And should be raving ever, a wild swell
 Of passionate life rolling about the world
 Now sunsucked to the clouds, dashed on the curled
 Leafhidden daisies; an incarnate storm
 Letting the sun through on the meadows yellow;
 Or anything except that earthy fellow,