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POETS IN BRIEF

THOMAS LOVELL BEDDOES

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THOMAS LOVELL BEDDOES
An Anthology

Chosen by

F. L. LUCAS

Fellow of King's College

Cambridge

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To

GEORGE BARNES

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PREFACE

It is my hope that this selection may introduce to a wider circle of readers a poet still too little known. With few writers is there a stronger case for an anthology. His letters are not easily accessible; his best poetry lies scattered through those chaotic plays which he found it so easy to begin, so hard to finish. Even when he did finish them, their value lies not in their dramatic qualities as wholes, but in their splendid moments; and many of his loveliest things appear as "Fragments" even in the collected edition. Yet at his best he can write with an intensity of imagination unsurpassed since Shakespeare.

I have included a little of his juvenile play, *The Brides' Tragedy*; a full selection from *Death's Jest-Book*, his main work, which contains, however, a good deal of "sad stuff"; most of the unfinished *Second Brother*; and every word that remains of the magnificent *Torrismond*, which Beddoes never carried beyond the first line of Act II. The rest of the book consists of a selection from the highly characteristic letters, other dramatic fragments, and a few lyrics.

I have to thank *Life and Letters* for permission to reprint as Introduction here an article on Beddoes published in October, 1930; and Dr Philip Gosse, Messrs J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., and Messrs Elkin Mathews & Marrot for permission to reprint copy-right material.

F. L. L.

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INTRODUCTION

“Alors s’assit sur un monde en ruines une jeunesse soucieuse. . . . Et ils parlèrent tant et si longtemps, que toutes les illusions humaines, comme des arbres en automne, tombaient feuille à feuille autour d’eux, et que ceux qui les écoutaient passaient leur main sur leur front, comme des fiévreux qui s’éveillent.” This is not a picture of post-war Europe; at least, not of our post-war Europe. The words are all but a century old. Thus wrote de Musset, middle-aged already in his twenties, just as Byron had been “a perfect Timon, not nineteen”. Even in his impudent little comedies, at moments, the same cry of anguish makes itself suddenly heard. “Ce que tu dis là,” exclaims Fantasio’s friend, “ferait rire bien des gens; moi, cela me fait frémir; c’est l’histoire du siècle entier. L’éternité est une grande aire, d’où tous les siècles, comme de jeunes aiglons, se sont envolés tour à tour pour traverser le ciel et disparaître; le nôtre est arrivé à son tour au bord du nid; mais on lui a coupé les ailes, et il attend la mort en regardant l’espace dans lequel il ne peut s’élancer.”

It was no mere affectation. No doubt youth is often affected; but youth is also often bitterly sincere. No doubt it was a mood; it passed, as moods do; but it is curious to find that the last century, which we tend to picture as populated by brisk business men with a blind confidence in God, themselves, and Progress, could be in its early twenties, as well as in its nineties, thus *fin-de-siècle*. Yet can we wonder? There are

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dawns, indeed, when to be young is “very heaven”; the morning after is apt to be less celestial. Then the young pass from excessive enthusiasm to excessive melancholy, feeling that they have been born out of due time and are making their first bow on a stage where all is over.

It was natural that the generation which came to birth with the nineteenth century should feel this disillusion. There seemed nothing but a puppet-show left in progress in the theatre of the world. It had been otherwise for their fathers. The Werthers had forgotten their own sorrows as they beheld the earth alight with Liberty, and the Rights of Man coming in glory on the clouds of Heaven. Like clouds, indeed, those Rights had vanished; in their place had risen in the same year, 1804, the pale stars of *René* and *Obermann*; but in their place also had ensued for twenty years, terrible and yet magnificently Titanic, a Battle of the Gods. Full disillusion was kept at bay. War was still romantic then, however misguided; a field for genius, not merely for the muddling mediocrities that floundered through the slime of our last conflict. Some may recall the vivid narrative of a Piedmontese private in the Grande Armée—how, at the mere sight of that short grey-coated figure riding down the line before Moscow, he found himself breathing as hard as if he had been running, and bathed in sweat amid the cold of a Russian winter’s day. It was not thus that we felt about the Generals of 1916. But after the romance, and then the epic, there followed now this poor farce of rejuvenated kings and reactionary governments. This

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was what the generation that had heard through boyhood the guns of Austerlitz and Jena and Wagram, sat down to contemplate, as they and the century together came of age. And so there were other caged eaglets in these years besides the Duc de Reichstadt; other smouldering firebrands, lit too late, besides the heroes of Stendhal. The enormous energy of a Balzac, a Dumas, a Hugo might go trampling onward under that leaden sky, after the last baleful splendour of Byron had fallen from it like a final meteor; but others of the young, with less vitality, felt weighed down by this load of emotional, as well as political, reaction. Smaller writers, like Maxime du Camp, bear out de Musset's description; and though in England, so much less touched by the war and now at length victorious, we should not expect the same aftermath, it may be more than coincidence that so few writers are to-day remembered who were not either over twenty-five or under twelve—too old or too young to be vitally impressionable—when the year 1820 closed. In prose, between Carlyle (born in 1795) and Thackeray (born in 1811) the only names of any note are Macaulay (who would have been hard to damp in any age), Mill, Newman, and George Borrow. Similarly there is a gap in the lineage of English poets between the birth of Keats in 1795 and that of Tennyson in 1809. Such speculation about literary vintage-years must remain fanciful; yet there is one poet born between Keats and Tennyson who was certainly cramped by a despondency like de Musset's, due in part, no doubt, to his own temperament, but partly also, I believe, to his time.

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been his fag. Two of these details have been repeated by Sir Edmund Gosse and Mr Lytton Strachey—the boy’s habit of declaiming speeches from Elizabethan drama at the little Bevan (who was forcibly enlisted as accomplice, enemy, or mistress) with a rain of kicks or caresses as required; and his vengeance on a certain locksmith, whose bad work was repaid with a dramatic interlude composed and recited for his benefit, and depicting his death-bed of horror-stricken remorse, his funeral, and his consignment by a legion of devils to the Bottomless Pit. But there are other less-known anecdotes from the same source, too characteristic, I think, to be forgotten. The inborn oddity, the rebelliousness, the elderly humour, the Gothic grotesqueness, the love of Elizabethan poetry, the strange mastery of words—all these qualities of the poet we know, are already shadowed here at Charterhouse. Already he dominated his fellows; the nicknames he invented stuck like burs; his defiance, too, of authority had already begun. When the traditional liberty to play hockey in the cloisters was abolished, young Beddoes, who normally never played at all, appeared to lead one side in the now forbidden game, his head bedizened with feathers and his body adorned by a paste-board shield where shone emblazoned a clenched fist, with the motto: “Manus haec inimica tyrannis”. This demonstration proved too much for the gravity of the authorities and the prohibition was dissolved in laughter. But if Beddoes could uphold the oppressed, he could also do his share of oppression. Readers of *The Newcomes* will recall how the old pensioners at Charterhouse were called

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he had written poems on Alexander's Invasion of India in the manner of *The Loves of the Plants*, novels on the reform of drunken labourers, political pamphlets, designs for Rational Toys, *Considerations on the Medicinal Use and on the Production of Factitious Airs*, *A Guide for Self-Preservation and Parental Affection*, *Good Advice for the Husbandman in Harvest*, papers on basalt, on the abuses of the Bodleian Library, on the curl in potatoes. Like Browning, he had been one that "marched breast forward". True, it is not easy to march in any other way—a point which Browning seems not to have quite considered; but at all events Dr Beddoes marched; and discovered on the road many odd, and some useful, things.¹ But when we turn to his son, the author of *Death's Jest-Book*, the contrast is complete. In every apple of his Tree of Knowledge lay a little black wriggling worm of doubt. More gifted as an anatomist, said Blumenbach, than any pupil he had had for fifty years—as dazzling a poet, in his sudden flashes, as the whole century brought forth—he yet perished by his own hand at forty-five, leaving to Dr Ecklin a stomach-pump and to the world only a wild heap of poetic fragments, blood and sawdust mixed with diamonds.

Left fatherless in his sixth year, the boy was sent at fourteen to Charterhouse. Long afterwards, when Beddoes was dead, his friend Kelsall extracted strange tales of his doings there from a certain C. D. Bevan who had

¹ For a fuller account of this eccentric and indefatigable figure I may refer the reader to an article in *Life and Letters* for January, 1930.

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“Codds”, and Colonel Newcome himself, “Codd Colonel”. Three of these old brethren the young Beddoes particularly loved to torment—“Codd Curio”, whom he called so because he collected curiosities; “Codd Frolicsome”, a Trafalgar veteran who had St Vitus’s dance; and “Codd Sine-breech” who was slightly crazed in the head. These old gentlemen, who were attended by the most Gampish of nurses, suffered such persecutions from their enemy that Codd Sine-breech was fain to hire a drummer of the Guards as reinforcement. Hostilities were not, however, continuous; every now and then both sides indulged in armistice feasts of oysters and lobsters, gin and porter, at which Beddoes would dance or give some of his dramatic recitations. Another prank of his was to purloin all the fire-irons from the kitchen of the preacher’s house, so that the infuriated cook went about cursing in a vain search for his pokers, tongs, and shovels; these were mysteriously restored at midnight, tied round the neck of Beddoes’s fag, who was himself tied to the door-knocker with a resulting din, as the little boy struggled there, like a dozen coal-scuttles falling downstairs.

The same familiar imp of insubordination attended Beddoes to Pembroke College, Oxford, where he treated his fellows with cold aloofness and the college authorities, by Bevan’s account, with “a course of studied impertinence”. On one occasion, we are told, a lecturer, tired of seeing him sitting and glowering in complete inattention, exclaimed: “I wish you would at least cut your book, Mr Beddoes”; at once the

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young man rose, walked out, and returned with the largest butcher's cleaver money could buy, with which he proceeded to do as requested. The ensuing uproar brought the lecture to an untimely end. Few, too, who have come upon it, will forget that deadly stab, that poisoned "jewel five words long", in one of his Oxford letters: "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*".

Such things are slight, no doubt. But only in such glimpses does Beddoes loom upon us for moments, like a lurid fog-bound sun, out of the mists which have engulfed for ever the secrets of his inner life. We catch sight of the young poet, with his strange physical resemblance to Keats, helping to print the posthumous verse of the still neglected Shelley, whose aery spirit had so strange an appeal for his own earthy one; or scribbling imitations of Elizabethan drama with a power that seems to spring from him full-grown; or stealthily hacking the pages of his first published volume from the bindings of the copies on his friends' shelves. Then there appears for a moment the young law-student, working at Southampton under that most poetic of solicitors, Kelsall, who was to struggle with heroic resistance to keep alive the memory of Beddoes's work for a generation after its author's death and up to the eve of his own; next, the young doctor, learning to prefer "Apollo's pillbox to his lyre" and Germany to England; growing into a stoic, prosaic, grim anatomist, and yet still turning at instants from skull and scalpel to retouch the everlasting *Death's*

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Jest-Book; and last of all the obscure revolutionary, hunted from Bavaria to Zürich, from Zürich back to Germany, then deported in turn from Hanover, from Prussia, and from Bavaria once more. He has by now almost forgotten his country; his rare visits only inflame his indifference into active irritation with “this dull, idle, pampered isle”. He has become more and more bizarre; his talk shows a morbid preoccupation with death’s-heads and skeletons; sisters and cousins object to his habits of lying in bed all day, drinking perhaps (or, as he called it, “having neuralgia”), and then prowling like a spectre about the house all night. He arrived at the residence of one relative at Cheney Longville in Shropshire mounted, it is said, upon an ass. Was he sane, this sombre recluse whom the Procters one evening found struggling with the attendants at Drury Lane Theatre, which he had been trying to set on fire by holding a lighted five-pound note under a chair? There must have been sighs of relief among the Beddoeses of Bristol and Birkenhead when this disreputable relative went back to cutting up dead Germans at Frankfurt. There he now lost his health, by pricking his hand during a dissection; and lost his heart in addition to a young baker called Degen, whom he was set on turning into an actor, hiring the theatre at Zürich for him to play Hotspur. The rest is well known. The inhabitants of Zürich looked coldly on the heroics of Herr Degen; Degen in his turn grew cold towards Beddoes and went back to his dough in Frankfurt. The poet, bearded now and looking “like Shakespeare”, removed in deep

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despondency to Basel, where he tried to kill himself, first by stabbing his leg, then by tearing off the bandages in hospital, until the limb gangrened and had to be amputated. He recovered, in body, and seemingly in mind as well; Degen, too, had been persuaded to return to him. Yet as soon as he was well enough to go out, he took the opportunity to procure poison, came back to the hospital, and died unconscious the same night (26th January 1849). In his bosom lay a pencilled bequest of a stomach-pump and a case of champagne: "I am food for what I am good for—worms... I ought to have been among other things a good poet. Life was too great a bore on one peg and that a bad one".

But though Death's Jester lay now quiet at last in the cypress-shade of the hospital-cemetery at Zürich, the jest was not ended. His works remained, to become in their turn the tennis-balls of chance. His family wanted them safely destroyed—all except those of a harmless medical nature. Only Zoe King, the cousin who is said to have felt for him an attachment he could not return, and the faithful Kelsall resisted this proposal; and, through Kelsall, *Death's Jest-Book* appeared in 1850, followed a year later by a volume of poems. But a new generation of writers had appeared by now; and the world of 1850, watching the birth in swift succession of works like *David Copperfield*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *In Memoriam*, had no eyes for this odd relic of the unknown dead. Only a few observers saw that something new had been added to English poetry; but among them were Tennyson

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and Browning. Years passed; Kelsall, devoted as ever, heard of Browning's admiration, met him (1867), begged him to write a preface for a new edition, sent him some of the manuscripts, offered to bequeath him all. Browning accepted; he contemplated, at a time when he seemed likely to be made Professor of Poetry at Oxford, giving his opening lecture on Beddoes. But nothing came of it, neither preface nor lecture; Browning had grown bored; and Kelsall, too, was growing old. In 1869 he made, with Zoe King, a pilgrimage to the scenes at Basel and Zürich where Beddoes's life had guttered out twenty years before; in July 1872 he contributed an article on the dead poet to the *Fortnightly*; three months after this "last stroke for Beddoes", as he called it, he too was dead.

The manuscripts duly passed to Browning, with a message from Mrs Kelsall revealing to him what had been hitherto kept dark—that Beddoes had died by his own hand. This grim addition made the poet of optimism more disposed than ever to play ostrich and forget the whole affair. The box of yellowing papers acquired in his eyes a sinister horror. Another decade went by; then he talked of it to his young neighbour, Edmund Gosse; and finally, one day in 1883, led him to the locked box, pressed the key into his hand, and fled. However, once Bluebeard's Cupboard was open, Browning's repugnance weakened sufficiently for him to read over the manuscripts with Gosse; who in consequence produced a new edition of the *Works* in 1890, followed by a volume of the poet's *Letters* in 1894. But, half a century after his death, misfortune

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still dogged Beddoes. The edition was perfunctorily carried out; and the manuscripts, returned to Browning's son in Italy, disappeared in the confusion that followed his death. What became of them remains to this day obscure; there seems no basis for the story once told, that "Pen" Browning's servants ransacked their dead master's house, and that no one knew what scented tresses of some dark Italian beauty, faded now in their turn, the papers of Beddoes might have perished at last to curl. Finally, three years ago (1928), Gosse produced a grandiose new edition of the Letters and Poetical Works, ornamented with decorations from Holbein's Dance of Death; but before its completion he too died; and with this new edition reappeared, alas, the errors and corruptions and mutilations of the old. Beddoes might well have laughed in his grave.

Not that it is much easier to know what the poet was really like, than what he really did. The letters are eccentric, cold, impersonal—all the more impersonal for being filled with a great deal of bitter badinage. His jests serve him, one feels, for shield as well as sword. That sardonic smile makes his face more than ever of a mask. Poetry, Anatomy, Liberty—he pursued each in turn, to disillusion at the last. There is little trace in his life of affection, apart from the mysterious Degen: "I fear I am a non-conductor of friendship, a not-very-likeable person, so that I must make sure of my own respect". And yet this coldness has an air of being studied rather than natural. There is a Byronic pose in his saturnine description of his behaviour on a voyage to Hamburg—how he "re-

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mained impenetrably proud and silent every wave of the way, dropping now and then a little venom into the mixture of conversation to make it effervesce"; and this impassivity is belied by passages in his poetry of a quivering tenderness:

Your love was much,
Your life but an inhabitant of his.

Cyrano, Cyrano,
I yearn, and thirst, and ache to be beloved,
As I could love,—through my eternal soul,
Immutably, immortally, intensely,
Immeasurably. Oh! I am not at home
In this December world, with men of ice,
Cold sirs and madams. That I had a heart,
By whose warm throbs of love to set my soul!
I tell thee I have not begun to live,
I'm not myself, till I've another self
To lock my dearest, and most secret thoughts in;
Change petty faults, and whispering pardons with;
Sweetly to rule, and Oh! most sweetly serve.

Surely, if the writer of that lived withdrawn into his shell, it was precisely because he was sensitive, and had suffered. He seems as if part of him had perished young: his very portrait as an undergraduate has a mummy-like air; he resembles his own Wolfram, a dead thing in a living world, gentle once but hardened now. Certainly the letters show him, if no lover, at all events a good hater. He has a particular dislike of British Philistinism, whether in individuals like "Mr Milman", or in the nation as a whole:

Drink, Britannia! Britannia, drink your tea,
For Britons, bores, and buttered toast, they all begins with B.

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O flattering likeness on a copper coin,
 Sit still upon your slave-raised cotton ball
 With upright toasting-fork and toothless cat.

But, for that matter, the whole world sickens him: "I am now so thoroughly penetrated with the conviction of the absurdity and 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 and immaterial nature of man". One may wonder that a mind which found this life so tedious, should so sigh for eternity; but in such matters the human temperament is seldom very logical. Gnawed by the worm on earth, it speculates hopefully about the worm that never dies.

Still, if the letters throw but a glimmer on the poet's heart, they reveal very clearly those two qualities of his brain which go to make his poetry at times so astonishing—imagination and wit. Even as a child, his first favourite poet had been Cowley. And to read these letters brings home with fresh force how hardy a plant real originality is. Such a mind, read what it may, imitate whom it will, imposes as invincibly as a distorting mirror its own queer quality on all its reflections. It was a gift Sterne had; it belongs in our own day to Mr E. M. Forster—who else but he would behold the United States, for example, with the most spontaneously innocent air in the world, as a brightly-coloured apron tied chastely round the buxom waist of the American Continent? So with Beddoes. He too was born with this gift of seeing in every square a fifth corner; no doubt he cultivated his oddity, finding

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it succeed; but it always seems a natural part of him, as if he had had a mandrake for a comforter in the cradle and made it his youthful hobby “to chat with mummies in a pyramid, and breakfast on basilisk’s eggs”. “There is nothing of interest in town”, he will write, “except a pair of live crocodiles in St Martin’s Lane.” “I will sacrifice my raven to you”, he answers, when Kelsall recoils from the sinister menagerie of *Death’s Jest-Book*, “but my crocky is really very dear to me.” This is, indeed, one of the few expressions of affection in his whole correspondence. Or again: “Such verses as these and their brethren, will never be preserved to be pasted on the inside of the coffin of our planet”. Such excessive preoccupation with the macabre may seem affected; yet the reader who looks back at that cadaverous portrait, and forward to the last scene at Zürich, must surely admit that the affectation, if such it was, went deep. But his fancy does not always glimmer thus coldly like a glow-worm on a grave: its flames can dance gaily enough, if still perhaps with a slight breath of sulphur: “Dear Kelsall. I have been in the native land of the unicorn about a week... I had no time to visit Procter... but am told that he is appointed to a high office in the government of the kingdom of ye moon”; such is Beddoes’s way of conveying his own arrival in England and Procter’s new Commissionership of Lunacy. Or he will write home of a castle at Göttingen: “The date of the tower is said to be 963: if this be true, it may have earned a citizenship among the semi-eternal stony populace of the planet; at all events it will be older than some hills

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which pretend to be natural and carry trees and houses". Just so might another metaphysical physician have brooded two centuries before; we should feel how typical was the thought in a letter written home by Sir Thomas Browne to Norwich. But there is a more flashing fancy than Browne's at work in Beddoes's vivid description of fireflies at Milan: "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". It might be a description of his own poetry. How many poets one might search from cover to cover without finding anything as brilliant as this round grindstone of a world!

Those, then, who know the poetry of Beddoes will have no difficulty in recognizing the fainter shadow of his genius that lies across the pages of the letters; but there is one more disillusion here than even the poems show—disillusion about his poetry itself. He early expresses a sense of failure; he feels that he is trying to animate a corpse, that he is but the ghost of an Elizabethan dramatist, squeaking and gibbering plays fit only for audiences long lapped in their winding-sheets. "The man who is to awaken the drama", he writes of a *remaniement* of Massinger's *Fatal Dowry*, "must be a bold trampling fellow—no creeper in worm-holes—no reviser even, however good. These reanimations are vampire-cold—we want to see something that our great-grandsires did not know." He must have felt the relevance of that judgment to himself; and if he is severe on his contemporaries, pro-

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phesying after Shelley's death "nothing but fog, rain, blight in due succession", he is still harder on his own work: "I am essentially unpoetical in character, habits, and ways of thinking: and nothing but the desperate hunger for distinction so common to young gentlemen at the University ever set me upon rhyming" (rather in the same way, it may be remembered, he denied himself a heart). *Death's Jest-Book* he dismisses as "unentertaining, unamiable, and utterly unpopular". He finds himself wanting in the two indispensable qualities of a dramatist, "power of drawing character, and humour"; indeed at moments he feels "doubt of my aptitude for any higher literary or commercial occupation"; he cannot even finish his plays—"as usual I have begun a new tragedy"; "a new tragic abortion of mine has absolutely extended its foetus to a quarter of the fourth act"; "those three acts, which I cannot possibly show to any eye but that of Vulcan, are absolutely worthless". What wonder if this hesitating Prince of Denmark begot no second *Hamlet*, but only dramatic fragments and brilliant incoherences?

And yet I know no poet whose poetic moments are more crammed with poetry. How much one values this sort of spasmodic writer depends on temperament—whether one is "classical" and asks for ordered beauty of form, or "romantic" and cares for flashes of dazzling colour. But, after all, why not love both? Beddoes can only give the second kind of pleasure; but he gives it so intensely, that I feel he is undervalued still. What he needs is a good selection of short passages, often of single lines. The anthologists have

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merely concentrated on a few of his lyrics, which have the sort of prettiness dear to their pussy-cat mentalities; just as they persist in representing, or misrepresenting, the author of *The City of Dreadful Night* by the cockney amenities of "Sunday up the River". As a lyric poet Beddoes can be lovely; but it is in his verse dialogue that he shows his strength—not only that power of phrase and image with which his letters vibrate, but something also that they could not reveal—his mastery, even rarer, perhaps, of that Proteus among metrical forms, so simple-seeming, so mockingly elusive in a hundred poets' hands—dramatic blank verse.

The strange thing is that his most living poetry is a pastiche of dead work. As a contemporary of Keats, writing in the manner of 1820, he is usually unreadable; it is as a contemporary of Webster, risen from the dust of two centuries, that he quickens into a quivering vitality. His Muse is a Witch of Endor, her magic a necromantic gift of waking to utterance a tongue long buried. Yet this becomes a little less strange when we remember how Chatterton too, hopeless when he writes in the poetic style of 1770, found himself only by escaping back to an England older still than Beddoes ever revisited. And think, too, of the whole Renaissance with its aping of the classics. There are poets who can write vitally of, and in the style of, their own age; there remain others for whom it is equally essential to escape from it. Generations of critics have lost their heads and tempers squabbling which is right. Surely both are. Surely it is under-

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standable that a poet may wish to break away to some magic islet of his own, where he can feel himself monarch of all he surveys, because he shares it only with the dead. For they do not cramp our style as the living can; we can learn from them without fearing to become too imitatively like them; and the older the dead, the easier they are to elbow aside when we turn to write ourselves, as if their ghosts wore thinner and more shadowy with the years. Distance can lend enchantment also to the voice.

At all events it is on borrowed plumes that Beddoes soars his highest, and when masquerading as a Jacobean that he seems most himself. No one else since Dryden has so recaptured the splendour of blank verse as a medium for dialogue, escaping that marmoreal stiffness which Milton brought. For it is, indeed, almost as if the author of *Paradise Lost* had turned the verse of *Hamlet* into stone; to be carved and built by him and others after him into shapes of monumental nobility, but never again to seem like living flesh and blood, as once in Elizabethan hands. Milton's "organ-voice" has no *vox humana*; and musical as a Wordsworth or a Tennyson may be, Shakespeare's Cleopatra speaks what has since become, rhythmically, a dead language.

Beddoes alone seems to me to have rediscovered the full secret of varied stress and fingering, feminine ending and resolved foot in all their elasticity. His lines run rippling like wind along the corn: his Muse moves like his own Valeria—

She goes with her light feet, still as the sparrow
 Over the air, or through the grass its shade.

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All the stranger is the contrast which combines with this perfect grace of rhythm such a grimness of ideas; until his verse recalls that tragic conception of the Greek—the Gorgon Medusa, “the beautiful horror”, the lovely lips twisted with eternal pain:

I have seen the mottled tigress
 Sport with her cubs as tenderly and gay
 As Lady Venus with her kitten Cupids.

So, too, the Muse of Beddoes, dagger and poison-cup in hand, goes gliding on her way with the light feet and swaying grace of Herrick’s loves in their wild civility:

The snake that loves the twilight is come out,
 Beautiful, still, and deadly.

But now some lamp awakes,
 And with the venom of a basilisk’s wink
 Burns the dark winds.

O that the twenty coming years were over!
 Then should I be at rest, where ruined arches
 Shut out the troublesome, unghostly day,
 And idlers might be sitting on my tomb,
 Telling how I did die.

You’re young and must be merry in the world,
 Have friends to envy, lovers to betray you,
 And feed young children with the blood of your heart,
 Till they have sucked up strength enough to break it.

I will go search about for Comfort,
 Him that enrobed in mouldering cerements sits
 At the grey tombstone’s head, beneath the yew;
 Men call him Death, but Comfort is his name.

The poison is given with a caress: the dagger tickles before it plunges home. It is interesting to compare the