

# Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism

**NCLC**

**154**

Volume 154

# Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism

Criticism of the  
Works of Novelists, Philosophers, and Other  
Creative Writers Who Died between 1800  
and 1899, from the First Published Critical  
Appraisals to Current Evaluations



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## Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism, Vol. 154

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## Preface

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- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose works have been translated into English, the list will focus primarily on twentieth-century translations, selecting



those works most commonly considered the best by critics. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication. Lists of **Representative Works** by different authors appear with topic entries.

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- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism.
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# Thomas Lovell Beddoes

## 1803-1849

English poet, playwright, and essayist. The following entry presents critical commentary on Beddoes's works through 2003. For further information on Beddoes's works, see *NCLC*, Volume 3.

### INTRODUCTION

A poet of great promise who failed to live up to the expectations of his literary peers, Beddoes is remembered today as an important figure in the Elizabethan literary revival of the nineteenth century, as an author of Gothic verse, and for his dark and troubled life, which ended in suicide when he was forty-five. Critics have asserted that Beddoes deserves to be better known and have regarded him as the literary heir to William Shakespeare and the best of the Romantic poets, including his idol Percy Bysshe Shelley. After publishing a volume of poetry and his acclaimed verse drama *The Brides' Tragedy* (1822) by age nineteen, Beddoes did not publish anything of consequence for the rest of his life. At twenty-three he exiled himself from England, studying and living in Europe and working intermittently at his ambitious verse drama *Death's Jest-Book* (1850), which he revised until his death. During his life he was regarded first as a prodigy and then as an eccentric. After Beddoes's death Victorian poets Robert Browning and Alfred, Lord Tennyson expressed admiration for his poetry. Scholarly interest in Beddoes began in the 1920s, and since then critics have examined in detail his interest in death, horror, and the Gothic; his treatment of themes such as marriage and the limits of art; his grim humor; his lyrical ear; and his fascination with words. He presents themes and ideas that are otherwise absent in the more conventional works of late-Romantic and early-Victorian England and is admired for his genuine—albeit dark and disturbing—vision.

### BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Beddoes was born on June 30, 1803 in Bristol, England. His father, Thomas Beddoes, was a celebrated and radical physician whose ultra-liberal views prevented him from becoming a professor at Oxford. The elder Beddoes is remembered for his pioneering of nitrous oxide. He also had considerable literary talents, counted among his friends the poets Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey, and instilled in his son

an interest in both poetry and science. Beddoes's mother, Anna Edgeworth, was the sister of the novelist Maria Edgeworth, who also encouraged her nephew to write. When Beddoes was five his father died, and he spent much of his childhood in the circle of his mother's family. He was a successful student who won prizes for essays in Latin and Greek, but he was also prone to bouts of depression. He was sent to school at Charterhouse in London, and while still a student there had his first poem published in *The Morning Post*. In 1820 he entered Pembroke College, Oxford. While at Oxford he wrote and published *The Improvisatore, in Three Fyttes, with Other Poems* (1821) and *The Brides' Tragedy*, the latter to considerable critical praise.

In 1824 Beddoes moved to London, where he became acquainted with former members of Shelley's artistic circle, notably William Godwin and the widowed Mary Shelley, as well as dramatist Bryan Waller Procter and lawyer Thomas Forbes Kelsall. Beddoes went back to Oxford and then to Italy after hearing that his mother, who had been touring the continent, was ill. She died before he arrived, and soon after returning to Oxford Beddoes moved to Germany to attend medical school at Göttingen University. Despite distinguishing himself academically, he was asked to leave the university because of drunkenness, disorderly behavior, and a suicide attempt. He then attended the University of Würzburg in Bavaria, where he studied anatomy and physiology. He received his medical degree in 1831 and for a time became involved in political issues, delivering political lectures and writing anti-establishment poems and essays for German newspapers. His political activities led to his banishment from Bavaria, and he moved to Basel, Switzerland, where he continued to advocate for liberal causes and met and fell in love with the aspiring actor Konrad Degen. Beddoes wandered around Europe, returning to England intermittently, but making Basel his home. When he visited England in 1846, most of his friends thought him mad because of his heavy drinking and bizarre behavior. In 1847 Beddoes and Degen moved to Frankfurt, but their relationship ended soon afterward, and Beddoes returned to Basel. His health was poor, and Beddoes again attempted suicide by severing a blood vessel in his leg. He survived the attempt, but his leg became gangrenous and was partially amputated in October 1848. In January 1849, Beddoes died after ingesting a lethal dose of poison. He left a note to Kelsall to print whatever literary works he thought worthwhile.

## MAJOR WORKS

Beddoes's first published poem, "The Comet," appeared in *The Morning Post* in 1819, when he was barely sixteen years old. In 1821, while an undergraduate at Oxford, he published his first collection of verse, *The Improvisatore, in Three Fyttes, with Other Poems*, a macabre triptych of narrative poems that reflects the influence of Shelley and Shakespeare. Beddoes was later embarrassed by his poems and sought to destroy all copies of the volume. The best-known pieces in the collection are "Albert and Emily," about two betrothed lovers who fall asleep in a forest on the eve of their marriage and then suffer tragedy when Albert is struck by lightning and dies, and "Rodolph," about a pastoral shepherd who is lured to a cave by a beautiful woman, finds himself in a tomb where he goes insane, then wanders through the woods and dies. The poems express Beddoes' early interest in death and the macabre, and some of the images he uses have been noted as startlingly grotesque. For example, in "Rodolph," Beddoes depicts the title character playing with bones and decomposing flesh while he is in the tomb.

*The Brides' Tragedy*, published a year after the *Improvisatore*, is judged a far more mature and original work. The verse drama is based on a story Beddoes learned at Oxford, of a young man who marries in secret and then murders his bride when he falls in love with someone else. The play's hero, Hesperus, is obsessed with death, and Beddoes's exploration of his psychic disintegration has been assessed as realistic, vivid, and powerful. The play demonstrates the influence of Elizabethan revenge tragedy and contains monologues that echo works by Shakespeare. *The Brides' Tragedy* was well received by critics, and Beddoes soon began work on several new dramas, including *The Last Man*, *Love's Arrow Poisoned*, *Torrismond*, and *The Second Brother*. None of these dramas were completed, and exist now only as fragments.

Beddoes continued writing when he moved to Germany to attend medical school, beginning work in 1825 on *Death's Jest-Book*, a sprawling and complex drama about two warring brothers who seek to avenge the death of their father. The drama features many of Beddoes' favorite themes, including necromancy, occultism, the supernatural, and revenge, and evidences the influence of Beddoes's anatomical and scientific studies. The first version of *Death's Jest-Book* was completed at the end of 1828, but Beddoes continued to revise it periodically until his death twenty years later. The other major literary effort of Beddoes's later years was *The Ivory Gate* a collection of prose tales with lyrics and occasional verses interspersed throughout. This work also exists only in fragments. At his death, Beddoes left his body of work to Kelsall, his literary executor, instructing him to print what he thought fit. *Death's Jest-*

*Book* was published the year after Beddoes's death, and in 1851 Kelsall published *The Poems Posthumous and Collected of Thomas Lovell Beddoes*. In the late 1860s Kelsall sent samples of Beddoes manuscripts to Robert Browning, who had expressed an interest in Beddoes's work, in the hopes that Browning would publish a definitive edition of Beddoes's poetry. In 1873 Kelsall's widow sent Browning what is now known as the "Browning Box" of Beddoes's manuscripts. The box was apparently lost, but not before Browning's friend Edmund Gosse made a transcription of some of its contents. Gosse published volumes of Beddoes's verse and letters in the 1890s. A volume of Beddoes's complete works, collected and edited by H. W. Donner, was published in 1935.

## CRITICAL RECEPTION

In 1822 *The Brides' Tragedy* was praised by such prominent critics as Procter and George Darley, and established Beddoes as a writer of merit. Beddoes never completed further works, except *Death's Jest-Book*, which he continued to revise until his death. After he moved to Europe and cut himself off from the English literary establishment, Beddoes was viewed as an eccentric figure and little attention was paid to his work. He published satirical verse and pamphlets for political causes in Germany, but this did nothing to further his literary reputation. When it was published in 1850, *Death's Jest-Book* garnered little interest, although prominent Victorian poets such as Tennyson, George Meredith, and Walter Savage Landor praised Beddoes's lyrical style. In the twentieth century critics renewed interest in Beddoes's work, and many claimed that he was one of the most talented poets of the late Romantic era, rivaling John Keats and Shelley in terms of poetic gifts and vision. Beddoes's interest in death and the macabre and his apparent sabotage of his own poetic career have also been areas of keen interest to modern scholars. Commentators have explored the effects of Beddoes's depression on his work and his use of surreal imagery, as well as his treatment of the themes of marriage, the human body, loneliness, reason versus imagination, the conflict of science and poetry, and the limits of art. Most critics assess Beddoes as an interesting example of an unrealized genius whose witty, poignant, joyful, and often brilliant poetry reflects a complex, fractured person whose life was characterized by a painful struggle with the enormous burden of his talent.

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## PRINCIPAL WORKS

"The Comet" (poem) 1819; published in the journal *The Morning Post*

- The Improvisatore, in Three Fyttes, with Other Poems* (poetry) 1821  
*The Brides' Tragedy* (play) 1822  
 "The Romance of the Lily" (poem) 1823  
 "Philosophic Letters" [translator; of a work by Friedrich Schiller] (essay) 1825  
*Death's Jest-Book, or the Fool's Tragedy* (play) 1850  
*The Poems Posthumous and Collected of Thomas Lovell Beddoes*. 2 vols. [edited by Thomas Forbes Kelsall] (poetry and play) 1851  
*The Poetical Works of Thomas Lovell Beddoes*. 2 vols. [edited by Edmund Gosse] (poetry and play) 1890  
*The Letters of Thomas Lovell Beddoes* [edited by Gosse] (letters) 1894  
*The Poems of Thomas Lovell Beddoes* [edited by Ramsay Colles] (poetry) 1907  
*The Works of Thomas Lovell Beddoes* [edited by H. W. Donner] (poetry and play) 1935

## CRITICISM

### Frederick E. Pierce (essay date 1927)

SOURCE: Pierce, Frederick E. "Beddoes and Continental Romanticists." *Philological Quarterly* 6 (1927): 123-32.

[In the following essay, Pierce examines the influence of German Romantic literature on *Death's Jest-Book*.]

In 1825 T. L. Beddoes, then hardly twenty-two years of age, left England. The remaining half of his life, ending with his death in 1849, was spent almost wholly on the continent, chiefly in Germany or among the German-speaking Swiss. It was during this residence abroad that he wrote, and from time to time revised, his gloomy masterpiece *Death's Jest-book*, which was first published, after his death, in 1850. The question naturally arises whether that somber production was not influenced in its growth by continental literature which we know that the author was reading at the time. It seems probably that there was such a debt, and especially one to the authors of the German Romantic School.

The first step in solving that question is to trace Beddoes' knowledge of German authors through the different stages of his literary career. Perhaps this can be done most clearly in tabulated form.

#### I. 1803-1824.

During this period Beddoes published his beautiful, though immature *Brides' Tragedy*, and other boyish verse of much less value. Up to the fall of 1824 he

could not read German, and presumably knew little about literature in that language. Hardly any authors of the German Romantic School had yet been translated. There were numerous English renderings of German plays and tales from the late eighteenth century (the *Sturm und Drang* period); but there is no reason to suppose that they had much to do with molding the boy poet. They had been widely popular just before his birth, but had fallen into neglect during his formative years. In the autumn of 1824 he began his study of the German language, and indicates an additional source of Teutonic inspiration in a letter:

I ensconce myself in the hospitality of my Clifton demi-uncle. . . . Born in the town of Berne, bred in Germany, a fugitive from his relations and theology, he left behind him a fair Swiss fortune. . . . To the dead he adds a radical acquaintance with the living tongues of Europe, an intimacy with the practice and theory of the pictorial art, and an inexhaustible fund of literary knowledge, German and English being both his native tongues.<sup>1</sup>

#### II. 1825.

In March of this year a friend says of him that "he idles over Greek and German, and leave[s] the English Parnassus for the Transalpine and submarine places."<sup>2</sup> A little later he is "expert in reading German"<sup>3</sup> and deep in Goethe and Schiller,<sup>4</sup> also names Wieland<sup>5</sup> and A. W. Schlegel.<sup>6</sup> Some four months after that, in July, he first mentions the title of his future masterpiece, but apparently speaks of it as a mere germinating idea, not yet reduced to any shape: "Am thinking of a very Gothic styled tragedy for which I have a jewel of a name—*DEATH'S JEST-BOOK*."<sup>7</sup> It was only a few days later that he sailed to Germany, and thereafter saw England only at rare intervals. Probably the title of the play was the one part of it produced on English ground. In September, he mentions Ludwig Tieck,<sup>8</sup> the second of the German *romantiker* to be spoken of by him, Schlegel having been the first. By December we find him definitely at work on his tragedy: "Write a little *Death's Jestbook*, which is a horrible waste of time."<sup>9</sup> In the same letter he speaks of his "reduction in the crucible of German philosophy" and seems to promise anecdotes and news about German literature and professors in his next letter.<sup>10</sup>

#### III. 1826-1829.

During these years Beddoes completed the *first version* of *Death's Jest-book*. In April [1826]<sup>11</sup> he speaks of having read Kant on anthropology,<sup>12</sup> and in October, besides another reference to Tieck, he mentions Schelling.<sup>13</sup> In the same month he says that he has read a little, but not much of Jean Paul Richter,<sup>14</sup> and refers to Bürger.<sup>15</sup> He ends this letter with the statement that "*Death's Jest-book* is finished in the rough" and with a



reference to both the Schlegels.<sup>16</sup> By 1827 he is growing enthusiastic about Tieck, and states for the first time that the historical nucleus of *Death's Jest-book* is "an isolated and rather disputed fact, that Duke Boleslaus of Münsterberg in Silesia was killed by his court fool A.D. 1377."<sup>17</sup> Presumably this German tradition was made the groundwork of the play after Beddoes had become more or less familiar with German literature. In February, 1829, he refers to Chateaubriand among the French, Goethe, Schiller, Kotzebue, and Friedrich Schlegel among the Germans, and Holberg and Ingemann among the Danes.<sup>18</sup> His words show that he had been reading most, if not all, of these authors. In the spring of 1829 he sent the completed first version of his tragedy to his English friend Procter, who criticized it with such severity that the poet kept it in manuscript for future revision. In the letter in which he answers Procter, Beddoes speaks of the Danish romanticist Oehlenschläger, and of the German authors Müller, Grillparzer, Raupach, and Immermann, as writers with whose works he has some familiarity.<sup>19</sup>

#### IV. 1830-1849.

During these years Beddoes kept his tragedy by him in manuscript, and from time to time retouched it, just how much nobody knows. In 1830 he read with enthusiasm Kleist's *Kätchen von Heilbronn*, and in commenting on this play made a statement which showed how wide by this time his knowledge of continental literature had become: "I really believed a week ago that I was acquainted with everything worth reading in German belles lettres from the Niebelingenlied [*sic*] down to Tieck's last novel."<sup>20</sup> In 1837 he writes to Kelsall: "I am preparing for the press . . . the still-born *D. J. B.* with critical and cacochemical remarks on the European literature, in specie the hapless dramas of our day."<sup>21</sup> In 1848, shortly before his death, he found "dear Mr. Schopenhauer" "dreary and dull," felt that "Henrik Steffens tells as little truth as possible,"<sup>22</sup> and that "Uhland's poetry is nothing but language well colored, phraseology drearily deserted by ideas."<sup>23</sup>

In short, *Death's Jest-book* was conceived by a man with a dawning enthusiasm for German literature, written in the original draft by a man well read in that literature, and retouched at leisure for years by a man whose mind was permeated by Teutonic poetry and fiction.

How far does *Death's Jest-book* show the influence of that continental world of thought in which it grew? This is a debatable question. All careful students of Beddoes' early verse, including the present writer, feel in his final masterpiece the logical maturing of tendencies latent in boyhood. It would not be true to say that his German residence revolutionized his style of writing. But it is unquestionably true that the work of the Ger-

man Romantic School had in it something congenial to Beddoes' mind. It influenced his literary manner, not by revolutionizing that, but by intensifying in it traits that already were there. So our problem is not primarily to find characteristics common to Beddoes and the Germans and utterly unknown in English, or unknown in the poet before 1825. We are looking for characteristics in German works which might naturally have affected an author who unquestionably read them, even if these traits simply accentuated something already dormant in his mind, even if they simply reawakened or intensified memories of English models. Also we have a right to assume that he had read many foreign authors not mentioned by him. He was a poor correspondent, and his few scattering letters are in no way an adequate record of his whole mental life. If he at twenty-seven really believed that he was acquainted with everything worth reading in German belles lettres, we may reasonably believe that before he was forty he knew a great deal.

The theme of death was a favorite one with the German romanticists. Their famous collection of folk-ballads, *The Boy's Magic Trumpet* (1806 ff), printed an old folk-song beginning, "There is a reaper, his name is Death," and some of the German editions accompanied this by a picture representing the spectral reaper mowing a swath through grain and flowers with human heads. In Uhland's *Black Knight*, Death, as the central figure of the poem, appears in armor and unhorses a prince in a tourney. In Fouqué's novel, *Sintram and His Companions*, Death personified, is one of the leading characters. The romanticists themselves at times had borrowed from earlier art. The germ of Fouqué's novel was a painting by Dürer representing a knight, Death, and a fiend. The "dance of Deaths" in Beddoes' play was very probably suggested by Holbein's famous series of paintings.<sup>24</sup> Certainly such an origin is implied by the lines:

The emperor and empress, the king and the queen,  
The knight and the abbot, friar fat, friar thin.

(V. iv)

But a handling of death that in mood is especially like that of Beddoes is found in Novalis. In the sixth of his famous *Nights*, the one entitled "Longing for Death," he says: "Down to the lap of earth, away from the realm of light! The rage and the wild shock of suffering is sign of our glad departure. We will come in the narrow boat swiftly to the shore of Heaven. . . . Down to the sweet bride [the grave], to Jesus the Belovéd! Take comfort! the twilight gathers gray for the loving and the sad." A mood like this runs all through *Death's Jest-book*:

Leave me the truth of love, and death is lovely.

(I. i)

A kiss, Sibylla! I ne'er yet have kissed thee,

And my new bride, death's lips are cold, they say.

(V. iii)

Because a bridal with the grave is near.

(V. iii)

The word was Comfort:

A name by which the master, whose I am,  
Is named by many wise and many wretched.  
Will with me to the place where sighs are not;  
A shore of blessing, which disease doth beat  
Sea-like, and dashes those whom he would wreck  
Into the arms of Peace?<sup>25</sup>

(Iv. ii)

These words were spoken by a lover to his sweetheart, and fuse together, as the German romanticists loved to fuse them, the ideas of wedlock and the sepulchre. In his first "Night" Novalis waxes rapturous alternately over night, love, and death, as related themes. He says (section 4): "Now I know when the last morning will be: when light no longer shall frighten away night and love, when our slumber shall be eternal and only one inexhaustible dream. I feel heavenly weariness within me. Long and exhausting for me was the pilgrimage to the holy grave." And Beddoes' heroine Sibylla says:

O Death, I am thy friend,

I struggle not with thee, I love thy state:  
Thou canst be sweet and gentle, be so now;  
And let me pass praying away into thee,  
As twilight still does into starry night.

(IV. ii)

In section 1 Novalis says: "Dost thou take pleasure in us, dark Night? What dost thou hold under thy mantel, that strong and invisible pierces right to my soul? Costly balsam drips from thy hand, from thy poppy sheaf." In similar vein Sibylla declares:

The flowers upon whose petals Night lays down  
Her dewey necklace, are my dearest playmates.

(I. i)

Beddoes' *L'Envoi to Death's Jest-book* shows repeatedly, if not borrowings, at least mental kinship with the *Hymns to the Night*.

Novalis, who died shortly before Beddoes was born, had his followers among later romanticists. An attitude toward death even more neurotic and erotic than his occurs in the dramatist Werner: "O brother! the time is surely drawing nigh when all men, truly understanding death, will welcome him with glad embrace, will feel that life is but the anticipation of love, that death is the bridal kiss, and dissolution, which with a bridegroom's ardor disrobes us in the bridal chamber, the hottest fire of love."<sup>26</sup> More wholesome, but with the same idealization of death, and longing for it, is the attitude of Eichendorff in a song from *The Marble Statue*:

And in the midst of the feast, I see,—how gentle in manner!—the stillest of guests. Whence come you, lonely figure? He appears garlanded with blossoming poppies that glisten dreamily, and a crown of lilies. His lips are pouted for kissing, lovely and pale, as if he brought a greeting from the realm of heaven. He carries a torch, which gleams with marvelous splendor. 'Where is there one,' he asks, 'who longs to go homeward?' . . . Oh youth from heaven, how beautiful you are! I will leave this wild mob, I will go with you!

Is it not the same world-weary, esthetic, erotic conception of death that is found in Beddoes?

Time was when death was young and pitiful,  
Though callous now by use: and then there dwelt,  
In the thin world above, a beauteous Arab,  
Unmated yet and boyish. To his couch  
At night, which shone so starry through the boughs,  
A pale flower-breathed nymph with dewy hair  
Would often come, but all her love was silent;  
And ne'er by daylight could he gaze upon her,  
For ray by ray, as morning came, she paled,  
And like a snow of air dissolv'd i' th' light,  
Leaving behind a stalk with lilies hung,  
Round which her womanish graces had assembled.  
So did the early love-time of his youth  
Pass with delight: but when, compelled at length,  
He left the wilds and woods for riotous camps  
And cities full of men, he saw no more,  
Tho' prayed and wept for, his old bed-time vision,  
The pale dissolving maiden. He would wander  
Sleepless about the waste, benighted fields,  
Asking the speechless shadows of his thoughts  
'Who shared my couch? Who was my love? Where is she?'

Thus passing through a grassy burial ground,  
Wherein a new-dug grave gaped wide for food,  
'Who was she?' cried he, and the earthy mouth  
Did move its nettle-bearded lips together,  
And said "'Twas I—I, Death: behold our child!'  
The wanderer looked, and on the lap of the pit  
A young child slept as at a mother's breast.

(III, iii)

In this passage, as in the Teuton romanticists, death is not only a person, but a bride or bridegroom. A reader can find Deaths in English literature, gruesome, skeleton figures; but how rarely they mix the soft lure of sex with the shadow of the grave!<sup>27</sup>

There are many passages in *Death's Jest-book* which bear a more or less suspicious likeness to something in German authors. The sentence "Thither, then, Homunculus Mandrake, son of the great Paracelsus" (I, i) sounds like a reminiscence of Goethe, whom Beddoes had certainly read. Von Arnim's "Isabella of Egypt" is a fantastic story of a gipsy princess who by enchantment makes a man out of a mandrake, and eventually leads her people back to their home land of Egypt. Some memory of such a story might have colored the following passage in Beddoes, in which Isbrand speaks of the

character Mandrake: "Yesterday he was a fellow of my color and served a quacksalver, but now he lusts after the mummy country, whither you are bound. 'Tis a servant of the rosy cross, a correspondent of the stars; the dead are his boon companions, and the secrets of the moon his knowledge. . . . We fools send him as our ambassador to Africa" (I, i). In von Arnim's novel, *The Guardians of the Crown*, two men undergo blood transfusion, and one of them afterward imagines that the personality of the other has been imparted to him. Beddoes' characters, Melveric and Wolfram, have also exchanged blood, and Isbrand says to Wolfram: "O fie on't! Thou my brother? Say when hast thou undergone transfusion, and whose hostile blood now turns thy life's wheels?" (I, i). Duke Melveric accuses Wolfram of having won Sibylla's love by enchantment:

For thou hast even subdued her to thy arms,  
Against her will and reason, wickedly  
Torturing her soul with spells and adjurations.

(I, ii)

This is the very charge which the father of Kleist's Kätchen of Heilbronn makes against her lover.<sup>28</sup>

Of all the doctrines or dogmas that colored the German romantic literature no one was more important than Fichte's doctrine of the Ego. Rightly or wrongly, the romanticists interpreted it as meaning that the individual molded his external universe by the power of his personality. The literary excesses which resulted from the perversion of Fichte's teaching were ridiculed by Goethe in *Faust*, where the Baccalaureus speaks in the Second Part:

The world was not ere I created it;  
The sun I drew from out the orient sea;  
The moon began her changeful course with me.<sup>29</sup>

Beddoes, who specifically refers in his letters to Kant and Schelling, must have known their teammate Fichte, and had presumably read the above passage in *Faust*. So it is distinctly probable that we catch an echo from the German in Isbrand's words:

I have a bit of FIAT in my soul,  
And can myself create my little world.

(V, i)

In one of his dramatic fragments, of uncertain date, Beddoes also says:

All hail! I too am an eternity;  
I am a universe. My soul is bent  
Into a girdling circle full of days;  
And my fears rise through the deep sky of it,  
Blossoming into palpitating stars;  
And suns are launched, and planets wake within me.<sup>30</sup>

Many German *romantiker* were obsessed with the theme of *Doppelgängerei*, the idea of the split personality; and a touch of this attitude might be suspected in Wolfram's speech:

As I was newly dead, and sat beside  
My corpse, looking on it as one who muses  
Gazing upon a house he was burnt out of.

(V, iv)

This is just such a division of one personality into two as delighted the soul of Hoffmann.

Eichendorff's story *The Marble Statue* centers around a marble image of Venus beside a lake; and songs in it mention nymphs and sirens emerging from the waves. We may possibly have an echo of that in Beddoes' song:

We have bathed, where none have seen us,  
In the lake and in the fountain,  
Underneath the charmed statue  
Of the timid, bending Venus,  
When the water-nymphs were counting  
In the waves the stars of night.

(IV, iii)

Later in the same scene of *Death's Jest-book* occurs the passage:

By her the bridegroom fair,  
In youthful power and force;  
By him the grizard bare,  
Pale knight on a pale horse  
To woo him to a corpse.  
Death and Hymen both are here.

One of the songs in *The Marble Statue* as we have said, introduces the figure of Death; and he appears with much of the grim pageantry of Beddoes in Uhland's *Black Knight*:

To the barrier of the fight  
Rode at last a sable knight. . . .  
Spake the grim Guest,  
From his hollow, cavernous breast;  
'Roses in the Spring I gather!'<sup>31</sup>

Obviously the common use of such a time-worn idea as this would not inevitably mean borrowing; but there is a likeness of atmosphere as well as detail between the English poet and Germans whom he had read. Furthermore the German romanticists (Hoffmann for example), showed frequent interest in the transmigration of souls; and Beddoes makes Isbrand say:

Had I been born a four-legged child, methinks  
I might have found the steps from dog to man,  
And crept into his nature. Are there not  
Those that fall down out of humanity,  
Into the story where the four-legged dwell?

(V, i)

Beddoes' chief debt was obviously to the Germans; but his letters indicate that he had read other European authors too. While he was finishing the first draft of his tragedy, Victor Hugo published a poem called *The Fire of Heaven*, which represented God's avenging cloud hovering over the doomed cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. If Beddoes read this, it may have suggested the lines in Melveric's speech:

I move since this resolve, about the place,  
Like a murder-charged thunder cloud  
Lurking about the starry streets of night,  
Breathless and masked,  
O'er a still city sleeping by the sea.

(I, ii)

Leopardi came so late that Beddoes could not possibly have taken more from him than hints for a few lines in revision; but anyone who has read the Italian's *Dialogue Between a Goblin and a Gnome* will be reminded of it by Beddoes' lines:

Thou art old, world,  
A hoary atheistic murderous star:  
I wish that thou would'st die, or could'st be  
slain,  
Hell-hearted bastard of the sun.

(II, ii)

Beddoes could not have read Schopenhauer until his tragedy was practically completed; but it is highly possible that the same conditions in central Europe may have encouraged the pessimism of both the philosopher and the poet.

Before drawing conclusions from the above material, we must lay to heart certain cautions. We must remember how many of Beddoes' later tendencies can be traced in his early verse, before he knew German. We must remember how much the experience of half a century has qualified our faith in parallels and *Quellenforschungen*. We must remember that Beddoes heired a startling inheritance of the ghastly and somber from his beloved Elizabethans and from the English romantics. But, after all allowances have been made, it seems probable that certain morbid and yet highly poetical tendencies, which had been latent in the poet from boyhood, were decidedly encouraged and intensified by his reading of foreign authors. That he had read most of them we know; that he could have read them without responding in some way seems almost impossible; the passages in which he appears to echo them are numerous, and the likenesses, in some cases at least, impressive.

#### Notes

1. *The Letters of Thomas Lovell Beddoes*, ed. by Edmund Gosse, London, Elkin Mathews & John Lane, 1894, pp. 45-46.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
11. Date given by Gosse in brackets.
12. *Letters*, p. 105.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 121.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 123.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 125-126.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 150.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 161-163.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 170.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 183-184.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 210.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 254.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 260.
24. Beddoes late in life lived in the Holbein country and in 1844 writes: "Basel has retained a good collection of Holbeins, who was a native of the town" (*Letters*, p. 238). But apparently the Deaths were in the play as early as 1829 (*Letters*, p. 161).  
[Note: The last statement makes one wonder whether the "dance of Deaths" in Beddoes' play may not rather have been suggested by the series of paintings "The Dance of Death" adorning the quaint old bridge which crosses the river Reuss. Having spent part of his life among the German-speaking Swiss, Beddoes could hardly have failed to visit the attractive city of Lucerne.—C. H. IBER-SHOFF.]
25. A somewhat similar passage occurs in *The Brides' Tragedy*, written before Beddoes could read German.
26. Brandes' translation from a play of Werner *Die Kreuzesbrüder*, which I have not read. G. Brandes, *The Romantic School in Germany*, The Macmillan Co., 1906, p. 190.