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# Dying with a Vengeance

## Dead Brides and the Death-Fetish in T.L. Beddoes

Diane Long Hoeveler

### I

*'Tis now the moment still and dread,  
When Sorcerers use their baleful power;  
When Graves give up their buried dead  
To profit by the sanctioned hour.*

M.G. Lewis, 'Midnight Hymn', *The Monk* (1794)

One cannot read for very long the poetry or dramas of Thomas Lovell Beddoes without the sense of sinking, of being immersed in a murky underground landscape, a nether world where the living mingle comfortably with the dead, a place, in short, in love with death. Beddoes was not, of course, alone in his fixation on the question of death or, to be more precise, on the eroticization of Thanatos. Like other gothicists and late romanticists, Beddoes mediated a myriad of social, political, cultural, and religious anxieties through his poetry and dramas, depicting a realm that enacted on a microcosmic scale the larger ideological issues of his era. Clearly, Beddoes was imaginatively drawn in his works to the possibilities of creating something of an alternative locus, a city of the dead, a place where the dead would continue to exist in a world not radically unlike the one they were accustomed to inhabiting while living. And so, in some ways his poetry and two major dramas circle that city of the dead, imagining it and fantasizing about various ways to inhabit it and to live there with or (preferably) without women. I would contend that Beddoes's city of the dead appears, in some of its manifestations at least, as a world of men, a utopia beyond the realities of the flesh while its existence stands as a rabid denunciation of female fertility. In order to support this claim, this essay will explore some of the overlooked sources for Beddoes's death-fetish, focusing on his presentation of dead cities, dead women, and finally dead religious beliefs.

In many ways Beddoes's fixation on the city of the dead reminds one of Percy Shelley's dream landscapes in *Alastor*. For instance, consider this description of a city of the dead:

*I found him in a buried city I went by torchlight through  
I followed once a fleet and mighty serpent  
Into a cavern in a mountain's side;*

*And, wading many lakes, descending gulphs,  
At last I reached the ruins of a city,  
Built not like ours but of another world,  
As if the aged earth had loved in youth  
The mightiest city of a perished planet,  
And kept the image of it in her heart,  
So dream-like, shadowy, and spectral was it.  
Nought seemed alive there, and the very dead  
Were of another world the skeletons.  
The mammoth, ribbed like to an arched cathedral,  
Lay there, and ruins of great creatures else  
More like a shipwrecked fleet, too great they seemed  
For all the life that is to animate:  
And vegetable rocks, tall sculptured palms,  
Pines grown, not hewn, in stone; and giant ferns,  
Whose earthquake-shaken leaves bore graves for nests.  
(Death's Jest-Book  $\gamma$  variant at III, i, 40)*

The reference here to torchlight is significant, given its identical use throughout the poetry of Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller (1759–1805), poetry Beddoes knew well. I would like to focus initially, however, on some material sources for Beddoes's monuments and underground tombs, namely the elaborate memorial built by Rigaud in memory of Vanbrugh, as well as the catacombs of Paris.<sup>1</sup> With those two locations in mind, let us consider this passage from Beddoes:

*Throw up your monuments, ye buried men  
That lie in ruined cities of the wastes! . . .  
An earthquake of the buried shake the domes  
Of arched cathedrals, and o'erturn the forests,  
Until the grassy mounds and sculptured floors,  
The monumental statues, hollow rocks,  
The paved churchyard, and the flowery mead,  
And ocean's billowy sarcophagi,  
Pass from the bosoms of the rising people  
Like clouds! Enough of stars and suns immortal  
Have risen in heaven: today in earth and sea  
Riseth mankind. And first yawn deep  
Ye marble palace-floors,  
And let the uncoffined bones, which ye conceal,*

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1 Illustrations of these monuments can be viewed as follows. The Rigaud pyramid in memory of Vanbrugh at: <[http://www.stowe.co.uk/history/gardens\\_park/egyptian\\_pyramid.html](http://www.stowe.co.uk/history/gardens_park/egyptian_pyramid.html)>; and the Paris catacombs at: <<http://triggur.org/cata/crypt.html>>.

*Ascend, and dig their purple murderers up,  
Out of their crowned death. Ye catacombs  
Open your gates, and overwhelm the sands  
With an eruption of the naked millions,  
Out of old centuries! . . . guilty forests  
Where bloody spades have dug 'mid nightly storms;  
The muddy drowning-places of the babes;  
The pyramids, and bony hiding-places—  
(‘Doomsday’, ll. 4–5; 10–26; 33–36)*

It is necessary to begin, then, by noting that it is no coincidence that scenes of burial and literal graveyards are lovingly described throughout Beddoes’s poetry and dramas. And although such an obsession may seem macabre to us, it is important to remember that from the 1780s and continuing through the 1830s, throughout the parishes of Paris, dead bodies began floating to the surface of the graveyards that encircled a number of city churches. In the marshy grounds along the Seine, bodies of the poor, who had been buried without coffins, simply appeared in spring as if in full bloom, like perennials that no one remembered having planted. In London, along the Thames, a similar problem occurred;<sup>2</sup> and it is the meaning of these dead but suddenly resurrected bodies, emerging and competing for space in the major urban capitals of Europe, that I think provides us with the first clue to Beddoes’s concern with ‘dead cities’. In particular, I want to interrogate what appears to be a strangely persistent leitmotif of dying brides or women clutching dead babies, or forms of blasted fertility in all their horrific manifestations, in selected works by Thomas Lovell Beddoes.

First of all, it is necessary to observe that the representation of the dead and living co-existing on one and the same plane, so to speak, was deeply disconcerting to the cultural and religious imagination of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century European population. As you will recall, the Western religious imagination had constructed a ‘great chain of being’, and all of us had a particular place on this chain and were to stay in our assigned spaces. The reappearance of the dead, as if they were living, as if they had the power to will their reappearance on the surface of the earth, was unacceptable to the European mind, whether Protestant or Catholic. And so literature steps in, as it is wont to do, and mediates this phenomenon by depicting the nauseating mixture of the living and the dead and then resolving the crisis by consigning each to its proper sphere by the conclusion of the text.

Critics have been puzzling over the meaning of the death-fetish in Beddoes’s works ever since he first entrusted his work for review to the ever-so-critical ‘Barry

2 For informative discussions of burial practices in England, France, and Germany during this period, see Vanessa Harding, *The Dead and the Living in Paris and London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Craig Koslofsky, *The Reformation of the Dead: Death and Ritual in Early Modern Germany* (New York: St Martin’s, 2000); and Richard A. Etlin, *The Architecture of Death: The Transformation of the Cemetery in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Boston: MIT, 1984).



Cornwall'. Contemporary critical studies have addressed the theme by resorting to biographical, psychological, and literary source analyses, all of which I think are valuable and which I will employ where relevant.<sup>3</sup> Clearly, however, there are also what I would designate as buried and gothic levels of political and religious anxiety that have not been addressed or even recognized in reading Beddoes's works. Consider, for instance, one of the more famous, or perhaps more infamous, scenes in the gothic canon. Agnes, the fallen and pregnant nun in Lewis's *The Monk*, gives birth alone in her underground cell, and the premature baby soon dies because the new mother is unable to feed him. Agnes is later found and rescued, but she is clasping her dead baby in her arms, desperately trying to awaken and feed the hideously rotting child. The scene reads like a grisly and perverted parody of a Raphaelesque Madonna and Child, absolute beauty transformed into absolute ugliness. This scene, horrific and compelling as it is, also spoke to the increasingly anxious mixture of the living and the dead that was occurring throughout London and Paris. The dead, who should by all rights stay below ground, were instead dragging the living down below ground with them. Or, even worse, the dead were refusing to stay underground; hence the appearance of vampires or white worms in all their sickening permutations on the streets of London and Paris or the even British countryside.

But consider now another scene from *The Monk*, the famous meditation of Ambrosio in front of a portrait of the Virgin Mother, recently sent to him by an admirer who shows up shortly as a young man/woman/demon with the name of 'Rosario', the rose, the Virgin Mary's iconic flower. And in addition to the name's loaded associations, the young man bears a striking resemblance to the Virgin's portrait.<sup>4</sup> The youthful acolyte transforms first into a wanton seductress and then

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3 For instance, one of the best of the early modern critics of TLB is, in my opinion, Northrop Frye, who observes about the death-fetish: 'The root of the conception of the grotesque [in TLB] is the sense of the simultaneous presence of life and death. Ghosts, for example, are at once alive and dead, and so inspire the kind of hysteria that is expressed equally by horror and by laughter. The grotesque is also the expression in literature of the nauseated vision, man's contemplating of himself as a moral body who returns to nature as "dung and death" . . . The most concentrated symbol of this aspect of the grotesque is perhaps the cannibal feast, the subject of two strategically placed lyrics in the play, one sung by Isbrand and the other by Wolfram, both in their character as fools.' On the question of ghosts in TLB, Frye observes: 'The question whether life drives to death or through it remains an unanswerable question. Beddoes answers, not that there is a life after death, but that life and death are different aspects of the same world, related as day is to night, summer to winter. Man, says Beddoes, is the seed of a ghost . . . so Beddoes presents us with a world in which a human life is a ghost's way of producing another ghost.' *A Study of English Romanticism* (New York: Random House, 1968), pp. 60–61 and 52–53. A more contemporary reading of the same theme can be found in Michael O'Neill, "'A Storm of Ghosts": Beddoes, Shelley, Death, and Reputation', *Cambridge Quarterly* 28 (1999), 102–15.

4 I am grateful to Fred Frank for his suggestions on *The Monk*. The most useful analyses of Lewis's use of Germanic ballad sources can be found in the work of Syndy M. Conger, *Matthew G. Lewis, Charles Robert Maturin and the Germans: An Interpretive*

finally into a demon, a curious line of anti-evolutionary descent suggesting that in the Protestant imagination the Virgin Mary should actually be understood as the Whore of Babylon. This demonization of the Virgin mother, as well as the almost uncanny obsession with her miraculous fertility, and then the need to blast this quality, repeats over and over again in Beddoes. Dying brides, thwarted fertility, dead babies, these representations permeate Beddoes's works, and the question for the literary critic is why?

First and most obviously, we could look at the medical trends and see a very clear pattern of male physicians infiltrating the obstetrical care of women, with nurse-midwives being removed from their traditional role of delivering babies. Although statistics show that deaths in childbirth actually declined very gradually throughout this period,<sup>5</sup> fictional literature would suggest otherwise. One could then examine attitudes toward sudden or lingering deaths, the anxiety about sewage, miasma, graveyards, and pollution, noting the increased outbreaks of cholera and influenza that swept across Europe and Britain during this period.<sup>6</sup> These medical or scientific explanations are tempting, but this essay will instead propose a religious explanation for the motif. In fact, in order to understand Beddoes, I would claim that we need to recognize the deeply anti-Catholic nature of much gothic literature, and understand that these texts served the blatantly ideological function of secularizing and reformulating the major tenets and representations of Christianity. Susan Griffin, as well as earlier critics such as Joel Porte and Sister Mary Muriel Tarr, of course, long ago recognized the virulent anti-Catholicism in gothic texts, and more recently Robert Miles has examined the theme in Charles Maturin's Irish tales, noting the nationalistic work that anti-Catholicism accomplishes for this Anglo-Irish writer, a descendant of Huguenots and a Protestant clergyman himself. Bostrom and Sage have also explored the theological and religious dimensions of gothic literature in direct retort to Montague Summers, who claimed 'it is folly to

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*Study of the Influence of German Literature on Two Gothic Novels* (Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, 1977); and 'Sensibility Restored: Radcliffe's Answer to Lewis's *The Monk*', *Gothic Fictions: Prohibition / Transgression*, ed. Kenneth W. Graham (New York: AMS Press, 1989), pp. 113–49. The only extended (but impressionistic) discussion of TLB and the gothic can be found in Horace Gregory, 'The Gothic Imagination and the Survival of Thomas Lovell Beddoes', *The Dying Gladiators and Other Essays* (New York: Grove, 1961), pp. 81–95.

- 5 Irvine Loudon has documented that the female British population experienced a drop in deaths from 280 deaths in childbirth per 10,000 births in 1670, to 100 by 1800, and to 60 by 1850: 'Pre-industrial English deaths in childbirth were only a relatively small proportion of deaths amongst women of childbearing age. Even for mothers in the age of maximum childbearing, 25–34, maternal deaths accounted for only one in every five deaths in that age group'. Irvine Loudon, *Death in Childbirth, 1800–1950* (London: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 159 and 162.
- 6 For attitudes toward death during the period, see Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Lane, 1981); also Christopher Daniell, *Death and Burial in Medieval England, 1066–1550* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 67 ff., for a discussion of anxieties about sudden death in the medieval period.

trace any 'anti-Roman [Catholic] feeling' in the Gothic novel'.<sup>7</sup> For Porte, gothic is a type of moral fable, with Protestant religious anxieties being displaced onto a Catholic setting. For him, figures such as Faust or Cain are 'guilt-haunted wanderers' inhabiting texts that are 'fable[s] of inexplicable guilt and unremitting punishment—in which [they] saw an image of their own condition and fate'.<sup>8</sup> And surely we can see throughout the works of Beddoes, particularly in his use of the doubled father-son configurations in *Death's Jest-Book*, just this sort of guilt-ridden angst and morbid religious dread. These specifically Calvinist fears are too narrow, however, to explain the eschatological fears that must have plagued members of all religious denominations during the nineteenth century. But rather than focusing on arcane theological disputes or issues of political legitimacy or nationality, which admittedly do appear in gothic texts, I want instead to examine one of the methods by which gothic literature spoke so effectively to the growing Protestant audiences of Germany and England. This essay will contend that Beddoes self-consciously used a variety of pre-Christian as well as Germanic literary sources in order to valorize the death-fetish, as well as to critique Catholicism and the female body. Much like earlier gothicists such as Matthew Lewis, Walter Scott, S.T. Coleridge, and Charles Maturin, Beddoes had a clear ideological agenda in presenting the lure and horror of death in his two major dramas. In order to understand his convoluted imagery, however, it is necessary to unpack the leitmotif of death eroticism by casting our eyes back to some of the earliest ballad forms, then their adaptation by Jacobean dramatists, and then finally to German poetry and *Märchen*.<sup>9</sup>

7 See Susan Griffin, *Anti-Catholicism and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Joel Porte, 'In the Hands of an Angry God: Religious Terror in Gothic Fiction', *The Gothic Imagination*, ed. G.R. Thompson (Spokane: Washington State University Press, 1974), pp. 42–64; and Sister M.M. Tarr, *Catholicism in Gothic Fiction* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1946). See also Robert Miles, 'Europhobia: The Catholic Other in Horace Walpole and Charles Maturin', *European Gothic*, ed. Avril Horner (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 84–103. Irene Bostrom has noted that the number of Catholics in Britain had declined under the penal laws to less than 70,000, therefore, 'many English readers would have had only the slightest acquaintance with actual Catholics'. Irene Bostrom, 'The Novel and Catholic Emancipation', *Studies in Romanticism* 2 (1962), 155–76 (p. 159). More recently, Fred Botting sees 'the production of Gothic novels in northern European Protestant countries [as having] an anti-Catholic subtext'. Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 5. In a similar vein, Victor Sage sees the Gothic genre as a caustic response to 'the campaign for Catholic Emancipation from the 1770s onward until . . . the Emancipation Act of 1829': see his *Horror Fiction in the Protestant Tradition* (London: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 28–29. See also Montagu Summers, *The Gothic Quest: A History of the Gothic Novel* (1928; New York: Russell, 1964).

8 Porte, p. 50.

9 The most extended treatment of Germanic sources for the works of TLB can be found in Anne Harrex, 'Death's Jest-Book and the German Contribution', *Studia Neophilologica* 34 (1967), 15–37 and 301–18. She summarizes the earlier studies of Germanic influence on TLB and sees Novalis's theory of Magic Idealism and Tieck and the Schlegel

## II

*Cruelty is above all lucid, a kind of rigid control and submission to necessity. There is no cruelty without consciousness and without the application of consciousness. It is consciousness that gives to the exercise of every act of life its blood-red color, its cruel nuance, since it is understood that life is always someone's death.*

Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*<sup>10</sup>

In thinking about the gothic tradition of the eroticization of death or the dying bride herself, one could focus on Lewis's *Monk* or his poetic tale *The Dying Bride*, or the truncated bridal celebrations that abruptly conclude all of Ann Radcliffe's major gothic novels, or the murder of Elizabeth in *Frankenstein*, or Lucy in *Dracula*, or Lilla in *The Lair of the White Worm*. We could also have examined the theme in Wordsworth's 'The Thorn', Coleridge's *Christabel*, or Scott's *The Bride of Lammermoor*, whose heroine, Lucy Ashton, attempts to murder her bridegroom as he meets her in the bridal chamber and who then promptly sinks into insanity and death, a dead bride who takes her true love, the Master of Ravenswood, with her to the tomb as he sinks into quicksand, a particularly apt image of the soggy earth, part land, part water, unable to hold its dead permanently. Instead, this essay will ask why the motif of dying brides revives with such a vengeance in some selected poetry and dramas of Beddoes, whose *The Brides' Tragedy* (1822) and *Death's Jest-Book* (1825–49; pub. 1850) are filled with dying brides, rotting fertility, and a loathing of the flesh that verges on the pathological.

For instance, it is not simply the bride-figures like Sibylla, Floribel, or Olivia who die in the dramas of Beddoes; it is also the mother or her substitute who die in particularly sadistic manners. In his unfinished drama *Torrismond*, the eponymous hero addresses his father:

*Tear all my life out of the universe,  
Take off my youth, unwrap me of my years,  
And hunt me up the dark and broken past  
Into my mother's womb: there unbeget me;  
For 'till I'm in thy veins and unbegun,  
Or to the food returned which made the blood  
That did make me, no possible lie can ever  
Unroot my feet of thee (I, iv, 185–92)*

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brothers' concept of Romantic irony inconsistently employed throughout TLB's works (p. 37). See also Fred Burwick, 'Death's Fool: Beddoes and Büchner', *The Haunted Eye: Perception and the Grotesque in English and German Romanticism* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1987), pp. 274–300.

10 Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove, 1958), p. 102



A strange notion indeed, this intense nausea toward the physical body, this almost pathological desire to move behind the primal scene to the very origins of the parents' bodies and blood as a way of denying one's existence, of blocking one's conception. For Beddoes, life would appear to be the after-effects of a longed-for but botched abortion. In reverse fashion, however, the Duke as father presents his son Torrismond's life as an abjection:

*Hear me, young man, in whom I did express  
The venom of my nature, thus the son,  
.....  
Not of my soul, but growing from my body,  
Life thorns or poison on a wholesome tree,  
The rank excrescence of my tumid sins, —  
And so I tear thee off (I, iv, 92–93, 96–99)*

In a similar vein, we can recall the words of the poetic speaker who hates life so intensely that he thinks the happiest people are they,

*Who have no body but the beauteous air,  
No body but their minds. Some wretches are  
Now lying with the last and only bone  
Of their old selves, and that one worm alone  
That ate their heart ('Lines Written at Geneva, 1824', ll. 26–30).*

*The Brides' Tragedy* builds on this nausea toward the flesh and was supposedly motivated by an historical event that was then popularized in ballad-form. Beddoes's version, however, contains a very curious addition by way of explaining Hesperus's murder of his bride Floribel. Like a pre-Freudian, Beddoes very conveniently provides us with a childhood trauma to account for Hesperus's bouts of madness, explaining that as a small boy he had witnessed the sudden violent death of his wet nurse-mother substitute as he lay on her breast. We are told that suddenly, out of nowhere, a huge bolt fell on her and crushed her head just inches from his face. This strange episode reads as almost a parody of the nursing virgin with the male infant on her lap, except in Beddoes's version, she dies a sadistic, horrific, and undeserved death that will continue to haunt Hesperus throughout his life. For Beddoes, the only permanent way to control a woman's fertility is to kill her, and women die all too frequently throughout his works. This is not to claim, however, that men do not also die with a vengeance in Beddoes, but in some way their deaths are less disturbing because they are described as welcome escapes from betrayal, treachery, and angst. Witness the poem 'A Dirge (To-day is a thought)':

*And life is a death,  
Where the body's the tomb,  
And the pale sweet breath*

*Is buried alive in its hideous gloom.  
Then waste no tear,  
For we are the dead; the living are here.  
In the stealing earth, and the heavy bier. (ll. 3–9)*

Clearly, for Beddoes, life is a prolonged and torturous form of trying to live between two realms, the physical and the immaterial, while death is a return to our true unicellular essence, an embrace of the authentic material condition of dust.

*Death's Jest-Book* is filled with so many scenes of macabre death that one hardly knows where to begin. Suffice it to say that the drama's eroticization of death becomes manifest when a literal dance of death is performed as dead figures on a wall come alive and perform for the living and Isbrand sings in the persona of an aborted fetus: 'What shall I be? / Poor unborn ghost, for my mother killed me / Scarcely alive in her wicked womb' (γ: III, iii, 323–25). It appears that Beddoes would have known that the Dance of Death was first developed during the medieval period by German friars, probably growing out of their preaching tradition: during homilies on death the Dance may have been mimed or performed as a species of *tableaux vivants*, a sort of ecclesiastical dramatic performance in dumb show. It spread to France and England, but never was as popular in England as it was on the Continent. The most famous visual depiction of the dance was on the wall of the church of the Holy Innocents in Paris, but there are other depictions in England, including on the wall of Salisbury Cathedral.<sup>11</sup>

The medieval and faux-Elizabethan ambience that suffuses *Death's Jest-Book* conceals, however, a highly personal agenda that is biographical as well as anti-Catholic. For instance, one of the most curious incidents occurs when Wolfram is resurrected from the dead in place of Melveric's dead wife (a curious homosocial arrangement suggesting more than a hint of Beddoes's own sexual orientation).<sup>12</sup> Another occurs when Wolfram leads Melveric to the kingdom of the dead with him at the conclusion of the play, as if they were going out for a brief stroll:

*Blessing and Peace to all who are departed!  
But thee, who daredst to call up into life,*

- 11 Leonard P. Kurtz, *The Dance of Death and the Macabre Spirit in European Literature* (1934; New York: Gordon, 1975) includes a discussion of TLB's use of the trope; while Geoffrey Wagner discusses the 'baroque' quality of death in TLB: '*Death's Jest-Book* satirizes a baroque world, a world fetid with the bourgeois illusion, disgraced by capitalist luxury'. Geoffrey Wagner, 'Beddoes: Centennial of a Suicide', in *The Golden Horizon*, ed. Cyril Connolly (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1953), pp. 543–61 (p. 560).
- 12 See Shelley Rees, 'Milveric and Wolfram: A Love Story', *The Thomas Lovell Beddoes Society Journal*, 8 (2002), 14–25, for a reading of the play that recognizes TLB's homosexuality; while Stephen Guy-Bray, 'Beddoes, Pygmalion, and the Art of Onanism', *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 52 (1998), 446–70, recognizes the masturbatory quality of his 'Pygmalion.'



*And the unholy world's forbidden sunlight,  
Out of his grave him who reposed softly,  
One of the ghosts doth summon, in like manner,  
Thee, still alive, into the world o' th' dead. (V, iv, 352–57)*

Both incidents suggest that death is entered and exited through a revolving door, and that life, rather than being a blissful utopia, differs little from the underground vaults of death. For instance, Duke Melveric, in despair over his sons' defection, expresses the play's general attitude toward earthly existence:

*Nature's polluted,  
There's man in every secret corner of her,  
Doing damned wicked deeds. 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. (β: II, iii at 366; Works, p. 413, n.)*

Certainly there is no escaping the feminization of the earth's body here, existing like some old mother-whore whose 'corners' (wombs) have been rooted around in by 'wicked' boys.

In an era that was negotiating political reform, gender relations, print culture and nationalism, colonialism and imperialist expansion, and all manner of issues connected with modernization, religion and secularization were highly contested and ambivalent, anxiety-ridden topics that were being fought out, literally, over the dead bodies that began emerging on the surfaces of Paris and London. If, as Protestantism asserted, there was no purgatory, then there was only either heaven or hell, not some murky purgatorial place (like quicksand) where the dead went to wait until the living prayed them into heaven. Anxieties about the rituals connected with Christian burial and the need to clearly define who could and could not be buried in a Christian church and the attached cemetery began to be played out, first in Germany, then in England, after the Protestant Reformation. In the absence of purgatory, it became crucial to determine where someone's soul was going to reside, and with the rise in population and the premium placed on space in urban centres, not everyone could be buried in a parish cemetery in the middle of a city. Competition, so to speak, for real estate in the afterlife (with a berth in a parish church or graveyard) was fierce. Proving that one deserved such a spot actually became an issue of great importance to all classes who did not own their own mausoleums. More importantly, however, if there was no purgatory, then the living no longer had any connection with the dead, except to fondly remember them.<sup>13</sup>

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13 Changing attitudes toward purgatory are discussed throughout Christopher Daniell, *Death and Burial in Medieval England, 1066–1550* (London: Routledge, 1997). Daniel P. Watkins sees *The Brides' Tragedy* as enacting 'the conflict between a dying feudalism and an emergent industrial capitalism', an argument that, if extended into the

The new Chantries Act of 1547 not only closed chantry colleges, hospitals and free colleges, but it aggressively attacked Roman Catholic doctrines, particularly imposing a ban on the belief that anyone could be prayed out of purgatory. Theologically, it denounced the existence of purgatory and effectively ended one of the church's largest money-making schemes.<sup>14</sup>

Purchasing indulgences or buying masses for the dead in order to buy them out of purgatory became just so much nonsense, but if one no longer had a way of continuing to worry about and care for one's dead, then by necessity the living were cut off from their ancestors in an abrupt manner that the popular religious imagination could not easily accept. Such a sentiment is evident in Beddoes's 'Dream Pedlary':

If there are ghosts to raise,  
                     What shall I call,  
 Out of hell's murky haze,  
                     Heaven's blue hall?  
 Raise my loved longlost boy  
 To lead me to his joy.  
                     There are no ghosts to raise;  
                     Out of death lead no ways;  
                     Vain is the call. (ll. 38–46)

The poignant tone here, the defeated effort and grudging acceptance of being unable to bring back the dead, suffuses Beddoes's works. Gothic literature—and Beddoes's works are no exception—insists by the conclusion of its texts on a clear demarcation between the living and the dead, but the real work of ideology exists in those moments of slippage when the two realms reconnect and the dead and living speak to one another—negotiate—as in days of old.

It is necessary by way of further introduction, however, to point to a few representative examples of ballads, dramas, *Märchen*, and then the line of inheritance we see towards Beddoes in order to claim that the dying bride with an infant in her arms became a powerful way of reversing and secularizing traditional Christian iconography. Let me explain: if Christianity is predicated on salvation through the miracle of a mother who gives birth to a son whose conception is spiritual, and then both mother and son ascend bodily to heaven, where they have the power to intercede at the hour of death for their believers, then that constellation of representations—maternity, virginity, anti-body, eternal life—is of central importance in the understanding of the belief system. For Protestantism to effectively remove the mystique and power of a clergy who had set themselves up

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religious realm, would see purgatory as a last vestige of a feudal world-view that had to be eliminated before Protestantism and industrialization could triumph: Daniel P. Watkins, 'Thomas Lovell Beddoes's *The Brides' Tragedy* and the Situation of Romantic Drama', *Studies in English Literature*, 29 (1989), 699–714 (p. 700).

14 Daniell, p. 198.

as celibate servants to such a powerful virgin mother, that representation had to be not simply dethroned but actually demonized for the process of secularization to continue to make the sort of progress that it needed to make. Besides removing statues and windows of Mary and the infant Jesus from churches, literature—like ballads, popular dramas, fairy tales, and gothic works—assisted in blasting that representation of its sacred associations. The defeat and desecration of the mother became vital steps in moving the population away from the earlier deification of such a woman and child.

It is worth remembering that, even at this late date, the mid-nineteenth century, the Roman Catholic Church understood what was at stake in the assault on the Virgin. After centuries of silence on her status, in 1854 Pope Pius IX declared the Virgin Mary to have been the only woman born without original sin, as the result of an 'immaculate conception'. Effectively elevating Mary to the status of a goddess, Pius IX knew that the Church's investment in Mary was crucial to holding its popular, lower-class base, and he was proved correct only four years later when the Virgin appeared at Lourdes to introduce herself to an illiterate peasant girl as 'the Immaculate Conception'.<sup>15</sup> As I have argued elsewhere, the gothic/Romantic aesthetic is a distinctly masculinist enterprise, Protestant, secularizing, capitalistic, and nationalistic. This new ideology is concerned with removing all traces of an earlier Catholic, feudal, communal, and ultimately matriarchal system in order to replace it with the liberal, sincere, secular humanist in full possession of a mind that combined the best of both sexes, although clearly this new androgynous psyche contained the feminine only as a colonized and subordinate category.<sup>16</sup>

### III

*Without an element of cruelty at the root of every spectacle, the theater is not possible. In our present state of degeneration it is through the skin that metaphysics must be made to re-enter our minds.*

Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*<sup>17</sup>

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15 See Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976), ch. 16, for an historical overview of the history of the Virgin Mary's construction, as well as for a detailed discussion of the historical evolution of the notion of the 'Immaculate Conception'.

16 I have argued that the Romantic movement is, among many other things, a manifestation of what Paul de Man has called *dédoublement*, a self-duplicating system in which the canonical Romantic poets 'came face to face with the limitations of language, images, tropes, symbols, and all literary devices. They sought to use the imagination's capacity to transcend ontology, or 'being-ness', but they found themselves reduced to ironic postures, or non-being-ness': see my *Romantic Androgyny* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990), p. 22. This generalization holds true for TLB as well.

17 Artaud, p. 99.

Beddoes was keenly interested in the ballad form and used songs and snatches of ballads throughout his works; in fact, his revision of *Death's Jest-Book* consisted of adding nine new lyrics for the first act. As he wrote to Kelsall, 'songwriting . . . is almost the only kind of poetry of which I have attained a decided and clear critical Theory' (p. 649). *The Brides' Tragedy* is itself partially based on a ballad by Thomas Gillet that Beddoes read eighteen months before writing his first complete drama. More interesting than the specific Gillet ballad, however, is the larger ballad-cycle to which it belongs, beginning with the ironic, dark tone as well as the fetishization of the dead in the traditional ballad 'The Unquiet Grave':

'Tis I, my love, sits on your grave,  
And will not let you sleep;  
For I crave one kiss of your clay-cold lips,  
And that is all I seek.

'O lily lily are my lips;  
My breath comes earthy strong;  
If you have one kiss of my clay-cold lips,  
Your time will not be long.'<sup>18</sup>

Atkinson refers to 'The Unquiet Grave' as an example of a 'wit-combat' ballad in which woman's wit is tried in contest with various male figures in a ballad that joins sex and death. And surely the struggle between the living and dead that occurs in this ballad recalls the central situation in *The Brides' Tragedy*, as well as Floribel's doomed attempts to plead for her life before her murderous husband Hesperus kills her. The similarities between the Hesperus/Floribel relationship and those in the Grismond ballad-sequence are blatant.

The ballad 'The Downfall of William Grismond' recounts the tale of a young man who murders a neighbour's daughter in March 1650 in Herefordshire. The ballad is sung in the voice of William, who confesses that he promised marriage in order to have sex with the poverty-stricken, young woman. When she tells him later that she is pregnant and that he must fulfil his promises to her, he muses that he would rather marry 'another with Gold and Silver store'. He lures her to field, has sex yet again with her, and stabs her with a knife. After her body's discovery and his own attempt at escape, he eventually faces the gallows for his crime. Very similar in theme is the Scottish ballad 'William Guiseman',<sup>19</sup> as well as 'The Oxfordshire Tragedy; or, The Virgin's Advice or Rosanna's Overthrow', printed several times as a broadside ballad in England and Scotland during the eighteenth and nineteenth

18 'The Unquiet Grave' is quoted in Robert Graves, *The English Ballad: A Short Critical Survey* (London: Benn, 1927), p. 96; for a useful, contemporary discussion of this particular ballad tradition, see David. Atkinson, *The English Traditional Ballad: Theory, Method, and Practice* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p. 68.

19 Atkinson, pp. 186–88.

centuries,<sup>20</sup> and the version that we know Beddoes was to read before he wrote *The Brides' Tragedy*.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to *The Brides' Tragedy*, however, Beddoes also penned 'The Ghosts' Moonshine', a ballad that depicts another young man luring a woman out into a graveyard in order to murder her:

What dost thou strain above her  
Lovely throat's whiteness?  
A silken chain, to cover  
Her bosom's brightness?  
Tremble and weep not: what dost thou fear?  
—My blood is spilt like wine  
Thou hast strangled and slain me, lover,  
Thou hast stabbed me dear,  
In the ghosts' moonshine' (ll. 27–35)

Both examples conform to what Anne B. Cohen has identified as the 'murdered girl' and 'criminal-brought-to-justice' formula-ballad:

*The events of the murdered-girl formula are the following: wooing of trustful girl by artful man; luring of girl to lonely spot; murder of girl, who offers little resistance; abandonment of girl's body. Occasionally a fifth element—regret—is added, in which the murderer is sorry for his deed. The elements of the criminal-brought-to-justice formula are the following: youth, upbringing, or past deeds of criminal; crucial crime and events leading to it; pursuit, capture, and trial; execution.*<sup>22</sup>

Ballads stand as one of the earliest works of the oral literary tradition, and certainly in their original forms—sung poems on the topics of domestic violence as well as epic, dynastic themes—they precede Christianity. A dominant theme in the earliest ballads was the conflict of filial duty with ties of friendship, and certainly we see this theme in *Torrismond* (1824), a dramatic fragment about conflict between a father and son, *The Brides' Tragedy*, and later *Death's Jest-Book*, with the fratricide of

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20 Atkinson, p. 195.

21 See H. W. Donner, *The Making of a Poet*, p. 84.

22 Anne B. Cohen, *Poor Pearl, Poor Girl! The Murdered Girl Stereotype in Ballad and Newspaper* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973), pp. 102–03. A twentieth-century Spanish adaptation of the ballad can be found in *Bodas de Sangre* (*Blood Wedding*), by Federico Garcia Lorca. Its refrain bears certain similarities to the tone of TLB's work: 'His hooves are hurt. / His mane is frozen. / And in his eye / A dagger of silver. / Down by the river, / Down by the river, / Blood is pouring / Stronger than water'. Federico Garcia Lorca, *Blood Wedding*, trans. Ted Hughes (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), p. 15.



Adalmar. Earlier, in Beddoes's dramatic fragment *The Second Brother* (1824–25), the brothers Orazio and Marcello stand as emblems of two different approaches to life, continually contending with each other until both sink into death. As Marcello, in the guise of a pauper, says to Orazio:

*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* (I, i, 137–40)

One can also see direct connections between such ballads as *The Cruel Brother* or *The Two Brothers*, and Coleridge's *Remorse*, or Beddoes's *Death's Jest-Book* with its two pairs of feuding brothers.

Another dominant ballad theme is the tragedy brought about by the false mistress, the false wife, or the false servant. Lewis's 'The Water King: A Danish Ballad' in *The Monk* tells the story of a water-fiend who, assisted by his all-powerful witch mother, leads a young woman out of the church and to her death in 'yellow sand'. In his ballad 'Alonzo the Brave and Fair Imogene', the bride is taken from her wedding feast by a mysterious stranger, who lifts his visor to reveal a skeleton's head: 'The worms, They crept in, and the worms, They crept out, / And sported his eyes and his temples about'. This ballad, a version of the demon lover tale used as well in *The Monk* in the Raymond/Agnes/Bleeding nun episode and reversed in Lewis's poem 'The Dying Bride', neatly connects the fear of dead rotting bodies suddenly emerging on the surface of the earth with blasted brides, in this case Imogene, who is forced four times a year (note the ancient reference to seasonal fertility) to dance with her Skeleton-Knight as they drink blood 'out of skulls newly torn from the grave'.<sup>23</sup> All of these motifs, of course, appear in Beddoes and in reversed fashion, for instance, with Hesperus killing Floribel in *The Brides' Tragedy* or Melveric, the false father-figure, betraying and murdering the son figure Wolfram in *Death's Jest-Book*.

The second large category of ballads—epics—concerns family and clan complications, one of which was the practice of bride-stealing. The ballad *Fair Annie* sings of the theft of fair Annie, who bears seven sons for her knight but then is replaced by her sister when he decides that he wants a legal bride. Along with 'Child Maurice', upon which Home based his drama *Douglas* and Scott based his *Douglas Tragedy*, the epic ballad relied heavily on the recognition plot, as well as the flight, pursuit, and fight to the death to save the bride, all of which are again reversed in Beddoes's play.

Finally, the funeral ballad with its supernatural or ghostly themes is pertinent to an examination of the thanatopic impulse in Beddoes. 'Sir Patrick Spens', 'Sweet William's Ghost', and 'The Wife of Usher's Well' are the most famous examples of this genre, but in addition to the understated, dignified, and pathetic tone of these

23 See Matthew Lewis, 'The Dying Bride', in *Romantic Tales*, 4 vols (London: Longman, 1808), II, 117–20; and *The Monk* (1796; London: Oxford University Press, 1992).



works, the theme of physical transformation can also be found most noticeably in yet another group of these funeral ballads about lost sailors who have commerce with mermaids or seals, or silkies in the sea ('Kemp Owyne', 'Allison Gross', and 'The Laily Worm' are all early examples of such ballads, while many of Anne Bannerman's gothic ballads are adaptations of these earlier works). Beddoes blatantly plays on these funereal ballad tropes in the dirge for Wolfram in *Death's Jest-Book* (II, ii, 1–18), considered by Frye and others to be the most beautiful poetry he ever wrote, while transformations of the dead who refuse to stay below ground recur throughout his works.

#### IV

*Such ghosts as Marloe, Webster &c are better dramatists, better poets,  
I dare say, than any contemporary of ours—but they are ghosts—the  
worm is in their pages—& we want to see something that our great-  
grandsires did not know.*

*Beddoes to Kelsall, January 1825*

Popular and folk ballads are generally believed to have provided the content as well as stylistic devices for the earliest European romances; for instance, 'King Orpheo', 'Sir Hugh', 'Hind Horn', 'Sir Cawline', and 'King Estmere' are all very close to the earliest Arthurian romances, as well as to *Tristan and Isolde*. It was but a short step from these romances to Elizabethan and Jacobean dramas, or the drama of blood as it has frequently been called, which in its own turn played out and exploited the ballad themes of revenge, incest, familial rivalry, kin and clan conflicts, and ghostly transformations and reappearances in order to tap into its audience's recognition of ballad tropes and expectations. In many ways, *Hamlet* is the embodiment of the ballad mentality brought to the stage. Beddoes, of course, self-consciously styled himself as a late Elizabethan or Jacobean, and certainly it has been traditional to see the influence of Webster and Cyril Tourneur, Beaumont, and Fletcher, as well as Shakespeare and Marlowe, on his two major dramas. William Congreve's *Mourning Bride* (1697) also comes to mind as a possible source, with its sixteenth-century Spanish setting and its heavy emphasis on prisons and tombs as the sites of most of the action. In this tragedy Manuel, king of Granada and a vicious and jealous father, is decapitated by his mistress by mistake, after he disguises himself as his enemy Alphonso in order to find out if his daughter has secretly married Alphonso (hints of incest and familial dysfunction permeate the play). The Moorish Queen Zara discovers his headless corpse in a cell and, believing mistakenly that the body is that of her lover's, promptly poisons herself. We have in this work a merging of the stolen bride motif along with the revenge gone wrong ballad, and other Jacobean dramas certainly play on the same themes that are then reworked and almost toyed with by Beddoes. In this vein it is interesting to recall the observation made by George Steiner, that drama is a central component of the romantic aesthetic, a 'dramatization' of their dialectical experiences:

*In fact, romanticism began as a critique of the failure of the eighteenth century to carry on the great traditions of the Elizabethan and baroque theatre. It was in the name of drama that the romantics assailed neoclassicism. Not only did they see in the dramatic the supreme literary form, they were convinced that the absence of serious drama arose from some specific failure of understanding or some particular material contingency.<sup>24</sup>*

For Beddoes, I would argue, that material contingency was an understanding and appreciation of the secularizing effects of science on what had been a primarily religious understanding of the world. If human life and reproduction can be dissected and reduced to chemical properties, then there can be no place in the modern world for the mystifications of religion: the divine mother cradling her immortal son in her arms. Beddoes's dramas are curiously dialectical in that they both mourn and at the same time mock the passing of such a world-view.

Dramas such as Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Maid's Tragedy*, John Marston's *The Malcontent*, or Tourneur's *The Atheist's Tragedy*, as well as *The Revenger's Tragedy*, along with John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (with its yew tree, which is clearly echoed in the tree under which Hesperus buries Floribel in *Brides' Tragedy*), as well as *The White Devil*, all reveal the mark of their origins in ballad motifs, particularly those dealing with the need for kin to avenge the father's murder in order to put his wandering soul to rest with his body. Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* is also worth mentioning as a possible source for *The Brides' Tragedy*, with its almost pathological suspicion about Floribel's supposed flirtation with a ten-year-old messenger boy employed by Orlando, Hesperus's rival. But in the wandering ghost theme we can see, I think, religious anxiety about the existence of an afterlife and the role that powerful men can play in ensuring that afterlife for their male forbears. Note that when women play a role in the ballads or Jacobean dramas, they are not virginal mothers with sacramental power to redeem a civilization. They are instead stolen brides, pawns, weak vessels in need of rescue by dominant and powerful men. The first step in desacralizing the Virgin Mary occurred when hymns to Mary were transformed into chivalric odes addressed to the singer-knight's out-of-reach queen, but the second step occurred when ballad materials were secularized into romances and, eventually, dramas and novels about women in jeopardy.

It is also necessary to recognize the overlooked link between Jacobean dramas and the German folk tradition, the *Märchen* or fairy tales and their influence on Beddoes. One of the most famous sources for much German fantasy writing was Schiller's *The Ghost-Seer* (1788; first English translation 1795), a fragmentary prose romance in which a mysterious, handsome stranger turns out to be an associate of the Holy Inquisition, a conspiratorial secret society engaged in trying to force important people to convert to the cause of Roman Catholicism. Set in Venice and written in fragmented letter and journal entries between two noblemen, *The*

24 George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1961), p. 108.

*Ghost-Seer* recounts the attempted conversion of an unnamed Protestant Prince to Catholicism. Part a seduction narrative and part hocus-pocus, the mysterious stranger (disguised as an Armenian with supposedly supernatural powers) uses all his wiles to persuade the Prince to join the 'cabal', which also includes a beautiful young woman with whom the Prince falls in love. Once converted, the Prince attempts to murder a man who stands in his way of gaining the throne, fails, and then is poisoned himself by the Armenian. In this blatantly anti-Catholic novel, the Prince dies 'in the bitterest agonies of contrition and remorse'.<sup>25</sup> Schiller's themes of betrayal, homosocial political maneuvering, secret cabals, and underground meetings can all be heard as echoes in Beddoes's two dramas, while clearly his anti-Catholic sentiments would become more and more blatant throughout his life.

In addition to Schiller, a figure like Ludwig Tieck is particularly important for Beddoes, who spent most of his adult life in Germany, knew and admired Tieck, and at one point thought he was forgetting his native language in favour of German. Tieck's tale 'The Blond Eckbert' (1797) presents the very strange history of the knight Eckbert, a ghost who actually haunts himself in the form of both his own wife and a visitor to the house where he currently appears to live. But Eckbert, we learn during the course of the story, married his sister only to watch her die of guilt. It may be faint, but strains of Beddoes's fragment 'Doubt' can be detected in his hero's similarities to Eckbert:

Once I saw  
One who had dug for treasure in a corner,  
Where he by torchlight saw a trembling man  
burying a chest at night. Just so he stood  
With open striving lips and shaking hair;  
Alive but in his eyes, and they were fixed  
On a smeared, earthy, bleeding corpse—his sister,  
There by her murderer crushed into the earth' (ll. 5–12)

Another Tieck tale, 'The Runenberg', concerns a hunter who pulls a root from the earth and suddenly is aware of 'a horrid universe of putrefaction' just below the surface. Like some obsessed Swedenborgian, he is sickened by the existence of this other world below us, but he is nevertheless forced to return to it again and again. The hunter appears to be in thrall to the world of Nature as a destructive organism because he is seduced by a mysterious, shape-shifting Wood-woman, who lures him below ground through an old mine shaft. Never able to forget this hidden world just below ground, the hunter goes mad and finally disappears altogether with the Wood-woman. Like E.T.A. Hoffmann's hero Ellis Froeböhm, in 'The Mines of Falun', who dies wrapped in an underground root that bears an uncanny

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25 Schiller, *The Ghost Seer or, Apparitionist: an interesting fragment, found among the papers of Count O\*\*\*\**. From the German of Schiller (New-York: Printed by T. and J. Swords, 1796), p. 242.

resemblance to an umbilical cord, the German Romantic tradition displayed a ballad, blood, and folk loathing of fertility and women; or rather, perhaps it is more accurate to say that the fairy and folk tales advise their audiences of the uncanny and slippery slope between the world of the spirit (troped as male) and the world of the body (female). The recognition of such a gulf, horrific and purgatorial, leads directly to the sensibilities of Beddoes, whose works present the walking dead as inhabitants of an almost postmodern parody of purgatory.

V

*I am now already so thoroughly penetrated with the conviction of the absurdity & unsatisfactory nature of human life that I search with avidity for every shadow of a proof or probability of an after-existence, both in the material & immaterial nature of man. Those people . . . are greatly to be envied who believe, honestly and from conviction, in the Xtian doctrines: but really in the New T. it is difficult to scrape together hints for a doctrine of immortality. Man appears to have found out this secret for himself, & it is certainly the best part of all religion and philosophy, the only truth worth demonstrating: an anxious question full of hope & fear & promise, for w<sup>h</sup> Nature appears to have appointed one solution — Death.*

Beddoes to Kelsall, April 1827

If we are to credit his best biographer, H.W. Donner, Beddoes suffered all his life from what Donner calls a 'skeleton complex',<sup>26</sup> and never psychologically recovered from watching his physician-father perform dissections on animals as well as humans, even going so far as to force his five-year-old son to pull out egg sacks from fertile fish. Further, Donner suspects that the father encouraged Beddoes to play with animal bones and dissected cadavers. Certainly we can see hints at such a traumatic memory in his poem 'Dream of Dying':

*. . . then I was dead  
And in my grave beside my corpse I sat  
In vain attempting to return: meantime  
There came the untimely spectres of two babes,  
And played in my abandoned body's ruins (ll. 5–9)*

repeated almost verbatim by Wolfram, dressed as a fool, speaking to Isbrand and the rebels at the conclusion of *Death's Jest-Book* (V, iv, 197–202). Although it is not currently fashionable to speculate about the state of an author's psyche or his literary characters as psychological manifestations of his own unresolved traumas,

26 *The Making of a Poet*, p. 48 and passim.



Beddoes's work is difficult to assess without taking such recourse. The fact that Beddoes mutilated himself so severely that he had to have his leg amputated, and that he finally committed suicide by drinking poison (much like Hesperus) suggests an unresolved loathing of his own flesh, a desperate attempt to be his own dissector in a futile move to root out something diseased from his own body. His dramas are confused and at points odd and difficult, while the sense of nausea that Beddoes feels toward the human is never very far out of sight. His *Death's Jest-Book* finally has nothing but sneers for 'The bloody, soul-possessed weed called man' (III, iii, 454).

But also consider that Beddoes occupied himself in 1844 with writing a series of anti-Jesuit poems that were published in the Swiss newspaper the *Republikaner*. Vehemently anti-Catholic, his last political crusade was to work for the abolition of the Jesuit order in Switzerland. And to be fair, the Jesuits were not exactly innocent victims of persecution during the early and mid-nineteenth century. Perhaps one of the most dangerously political of all Jesuits was the Abbé Augustin Barruel, whose works proffered to expose Masonic, Rosicrucian, and Illuminati activities in France, tracing 'the origins of the French Revolution from the Illuminati in Ingoldstadt to the Freemasons, philosophers, and Jacobins, and then to the mobs on the street'. His *Mémoires* (first translated into English in 1798) depicted secret societies as 'precipitators of the French Revolution based on an anti-monarchical and anti-ecclesiastical conspiracy'. One can also recall that *The Wandering Jew* (1844–45) by Eugene Sue (1804–57) contains a long attack on the Jesuits, comparing them to the Thuggee Society in the East. In one incident, the Indian thug says to the Jesuit Rodin: 'you [Jesuits] kill the soul, and we the body. Give me your hand, brother, for you are also hunters of men . . . And what are bodies deprived of soul, will, thought, but mere corpses? Come—Come, brother; the dead we make by the cord are not more icy and inanimate than those you make by your discipline. Take my hand, brother, Rome and Bowanee are sisters.'<sup>27</sup>

Why would Beddoes choose the Jesuits, however, as his last target? I would suggest that his venom toward the religious order was simply a convenient scapegoat for his frustration at the death of God in his own lifetime.<sup>28</sup> Attacking the Jesuits, supposedly a politically reactionary force in European society, became a screen, a mask that concealed his long-standing anger at the decline of religious faith or tropes to provide him with the sort of final eschatological answers he demanded from life. And also there is the unacknowledged attraction to the Jesuits

27 Marie Mulvey Roberts, *Gothic Immortals: The Fiction of the Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 60; Eugene Sue, *The Wandering Jew* (New York: Burt, 1900), p. 370.

28 Michael Bradshaw has published the best full-length study of the relation between the body and existential anxiety in TLB's poetry as it explores 'the infinitesimal borderline between dead meat and living flesh' (p. viii). Seeing the issue of immortality as 'a secularized obsession' in TLB's poems (p. 16), Bradshaw eschews psychological readings of the problem and the poet in favour of historical, theological, medical, and political approaches. See his *Resurrection Songs: The Poetry of Thomas Lovell Beddoes* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2001).

as a secret and closed society, an all-male bonding unit, a group of men living together in legitimate isolation from all women except, of course, an oxymoronic virgin mother. Beddoes, however, ultimately worked in a secret society of one. Alone, isolated, and increasingly desperate, he compulsively wrote himself into and out of *Death's Jest-Book* until he was truly at the end of his tether by the time of his suicide in 1849. A drama that figures his anger, grief, melancholy, and mourning, it reads like a long scream of anguish and, finally, impotence. The ideological work of his plays was confused, I think, because his existential dread—manifested in a barely contained hysterical anger toward women, the body, and Catholicism—could never separate itself from his own self-hatred.

To be fair, there are critics who would differ, and for evidence point to Duke Melveric's celebration of his dead wife's body as the only avenue through which he knew and loved her:

*she was a woman,  
Whose spirit I knew only through those limbs,  
Those tender members thou dost dare despise;  
By whose exhaustless beauty, infinite love,  
Trackless expression only, did I learn  
That there was aught yet viewless and eternal;  
Since they could come from such alone. (III, iii, 227–33)*

As Bradshaw notes about this speech, 'the human body is not being represented in Melveric's outburst as part of an internal-external dichotomy, but as the only means of human contact, the only comprehensible and reachable site of existence, and therefore the necessary locus of the most urgent investigation.'<sup>29</sup> But I would claim that this passage is the exception that in fact proves the rule in Beddoes. It is an example of 'protesting too much' and rings hollow or even shrill when placed alongside the preponderance of other passages that have nothing but contempt for the body. At times a dualist and at other times a monist, Beddoes is finally muddled as a gothic poet with theological interests.<sup>30</sup> Desiring immortality, escaping into a

29 *Resurrection Songs*, p. 139.

30 Frances Wilson notes that 'Beddoes oscillated between seeing the self as the affliction to be got rid of and writing as the impurity. Writing for Beddoes was a self-destructive and high-risk activity, staging a fight to the death between artist and art. This is why he chose to exile himself as soon as he had achieved poetic success—he turned to medicine to cure him of words and as protection from their powers'. Frances Wilson, "'Strange Sun': Melancholia in the Writings of Thomas Lovell Beddoes', in *Untrodden Regions of the Mind: Romanticism and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Ghislaine McDayter (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2002), pp. 127–42 (p. 128). Bradshaw argues that what TLB does in *DJ-B* 'is a de-theologized borrowing of the idea of resurrection—not an entirely secular version, but one wilfully torn from its inalienable doctrinal roots. Beddoes's frequent recourse to the concept of the immortal soul makes certain pagan Greek models interesting and valuable points of reference; but his combination of this



realm of bodiless mind and spirit, these impulses have haunted humanity, and they certainly haunted Beddoes's life and works. To celebrate the woman's body as the means of resurrection or redemption is as old a gesture as Genesis, while to blame the woman for not ushering in the Promised Land is equally as tired.

And so to return to those floating bodies in Parisian cemeteries, it is safe to say that the Parisian population wanted them buried once and for all. The old catacombs that the Romans had constructed close to two thousand years earlier were now used as convenient dumping grounds, and the dead were assembled parish by parish in artfully constructed cities of the dead. One can wander through these catacombs today, and to do so is to realize that they are all just directly below us, a foot fall away, living in a vast 'subterranean city of the dead', where the walls are inscribed with the words, 'Silence, mortal beings! Nothingness'. This macabre dance of death, this levelling of all of us by the material world, can also be understood as the defeat of the miraculous virgin and her divine child. When the Protestant imagination triumphed over Catholicism in England and Germany, it ensured that there no longer would be any virgin mother, no longer a powerful eschatological figure who would intercede for you with her son or who had the power to save you herself. The works of Beddoes perform this dialectical and ideological function: they both demonize the mother-bride, fertility, and the promise of new life, while at the same time they nostalgically mourn the demise of such a system of belief.

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with Biblical and Talmudic bodily resurrection is not identifiably Judaeo-Christian, and creates a fraught doctrinal problematic all of its own'. Bradshaw, *Resurrection Songs*, pp. 36–37.