

Beddoes Raising Hell in Germany: a Tale of Student Mobility

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Controversy about the nature, value, and funding of universities is a constant in British public life. When economic utility is pitted against cultural education ‘for its own sake’, the subject of English literature can be relied upon as a source of motifs and stories to further inflame the debate:

Since John Henry Newman’s 1852 publication *The Idea of a University*, there have been continual writings against universities resembling foundries and treadmills. Cardinal Newman believed that education deserved a more exalted purpose. But as vice-chancellors look more and more like CEOs and students like debt-ridden consumers, the noble idea that a university is a place where one learns to think is increasingly painted as indulgent and old-fashioned. Swanning around with a copy of Keats in one’s back pocket, apparently picking up the civilising influence of learning as if by osmosis, is something one cannot reasonably expect the taxpayer to subsidise. Fair enough, but that hasn’t been an accurate characterisation of university life since *Brideshead Revisited*. These days, the greater danger is, as Newman warned, from Professor Gradgrind and from the assumption that thinking must have an immediately obvious cash value in terms of the contemporary market place. And who can blame young people, contemplating £9,000 a year in tuition fees alone, from thinking that the study of accountancy is a safer bet than classics or Keats? Little wonder the arts are now dominated by those from more prosperous backgrounds.¹

In an ambivalent intervention in the ongoing cultural debate on the value of universities in the UK, this *Guardian* leader writer presents alternative visions of privileged self-indulgence and grim utilitarianism, each shot through with ironic uncertainty. The image of self-obsessed youth ‘swanning around with a copy of Keats in [their] back pocket’ is calculated to grab the embarrassed attention of any middle-class, middle-aged academic who went to university to study arts or Humanities subjects in the 1980s or ’90s. This editorial is from 2015, but could be more recent; current agonising about university fees and finance seems to be a perpetual state. Possibly in an attempt to counteract its reputation as the paper favoured by metropolitan ‘snowflakes’, the *Guardian* sometimes publishes leading articles which are stridently critical on the theme, scolding the British university sector for its complacent aversion to change, its insistence on three short academic years, its determined unaccountability to the nation’s economic needs, and peddling – it’s hard not to feel this – a sort of ‘ivory tower’ line of anti-academic prejudice.

While attempting to express some moderation and sanity in an already febrile climate, the editorial quoted above is interesting for a number of reasons. The argument is an intertextual one: literary allusions include not only John Henry Newman, and Keats-as-Romantic-cliché, but also Evelyn Waugh, and a bit of Dickens. At one end of the opposition, Mr Gradgrind from *Hard Times* (1854) is the ultimate miserabilist utilitarian bean-counter. As for *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), the effete luxury of Sebastian Flyte’s Oxford of the 1920s may owe something to the Aesthetic and Decadent 1890s and post-Romantic decline; but when Anthony Blanche, the novel’s most flamboyant aesthete, provokes the hearty aristocratic thugs by declaiming poetry through a megaphone in the quad, it is not Wilde or Dowson that he reads, much less Keats, but Eliot’s *The Waste Land*. Waugh’s novel, long criticised – not least by himself – as an indulgent exercise in privilege and sensuous

escapism, is framed by brutal and banal episodes from World War II, and even the nostalgic Oxford idyll of the 1920s is coloured by decay.² The apprentice decadent Charles Ryder's ornamental skull is inscribed '*Et in Arcadia Ego*': death is lurking, even in (academic) paradise.

John Keats features regularly in this discourse: he is the Romantic poet of choice, a short-hand for the clichés of self-indulgent uselessness in Higher Education. English literature – especially that of the Romantic era – is a common point of reference in debates about the value of the nations' universities, the eternal jar between the innate values of culture, and opposing agenda such as skills, 'employability', 'graduate attributes', and economic contribution. Both sides are easily and frequently caricatured. This is my prelude for a reconsideration of Thomas Lovell Beddoes as an international university student in the late Romantic period. Beddoes, I argue, understood the performative quality of some of the emerging Romantic myths of recklessness and glamorous abandon, connecting Romantic culture and Higher Education, which are still with us today.

The image of the university student as aesthete and revolutionary hell-raiser emerges in the Romantic period through a series of gestures and performances. In 1794, Walter Savage Landor, a known 'Jacobin' among students, was rusticated from Oxford University after firing a gun out of his window to intimidate a Tory neighbour.³ Lord Byron attended Cambridge University from 1805, and was known to keep a pet bear in his rooms in Nevile's Court at Trinity College. In 1811, Percy Bysshe Shelley was sent down from Oxford after refusing to retract and apologise for his publication of *The Necessity of Atheism*. The young Thomas Lovell Beddoes already had a series of schoolboy rebellions to his name from his time at Charterhouse;⁴ as a student at Oxford, he drew on this increasing stock of anecdotal lore, in self-performances of the flamboyant young scholar with revolutionary sympathies. Rebuked once by a don for not having cut the pages of his book and therefore not having

made even the slightest attempt to read it, Beddoes went out and bought a vicious meat-cleaver and returned to slash the pages of his book while glaring fiercely at his bemused tutor.⁵ At Pembroke College, Beddoes based his plot for *The Brides' Tragedy* (1822), the second and final major publication of his life, on an Oxford ballad in which a privileged student murders his secret lower-class bride in order to marry an heiress. Beddoes's attendance at Oxford was interrupted and sporadic, but he did manage to complete his degree in 1825.

After an unsettled period seeking fame as a dramatist, Beddoes took a life-changing decision and left England for the German states in the summer of 1825, initially to study medicine at the University of Göttingen under Friedrich Blumenbach. In relocating his medical studies to Göttingen, Beddoes followed in the footsteps of Coleridge, who had studied briefly at the institution in 1799; Coleridge was taught by Professors Blumenbach and Eichhorn, on aspects of German philosophy. When Beddoes arrived at the University a quarter of a century later, Blumenbach was still teaching theories of organic life and physical anthropology, and Eichhorn was still teaching Biblical criticism and oriental languages, both not far from retirement, and enjoying legendary status among the students.

Founded relatively recently in 1734, by George II of Britain, who was also the Elector of Hanover, Georg-August Universität Göttingen (or 'Georgia Augusta') had quickly become established as a cosmopolitan destination for European students. Johanna Oehler's comprehensive documentation of British students' and scholars' activity at Göttingen throughout the long eighteenth century provides evidence of a continuous dialogue between English- and German-speaking educational cultures from this central hub in Hanover.⁶ Among the many non-German speakers at the University, the British far outnumbered the Swedes, Russians, and Dutch; Johanna Oehler records a typical complaint as early as the 1770s that there were 'too many' British students resident at the University.⁷

Beddoes, however, was there not to enjoy life in an expatriate enclave, but for intensive scientific study and to absorb European languages and cultures; the political dimension was also present from the outset. Oehler explains Beddoes's choice of Göttingen for his medical education in relation to his father's political conflicts with Oxford University, from where he resigned a chair in Chemistry under ideological pressure for his overt Jacobin sympathies.⁸ The connection between Blumenbach's biological theories and Thomas Beddoes Sr was earlier established by Max Neuberger, who includes the elder Beddoes in a number of European scientists influenced by Blumenbach's widely admired work on cellular reproduction.⁹ Although the medical faculty at Göttingen hosted some eminent scholars, it was still becoming established in the early nineteenth century, and there was a certain amount of sharing of resources between Göttingen and Oxford.¹⁰ Ute Berns observes, 'When Beddoes arrived in Göttingen, the university had already gathered a reputation for its liberal attitude to scientific research.'¹¹

Matriculating at Göttingen in July 1825, Beddoes's primary commitment to medical science was combined with energetic studies in German literature, and in ancient and modern languages.¹² Beddoes's frenzy of academic concentration during his early years at Göttingen is captured in his much-quoted letter to Thomas Forbes Kelsall from December 1825:

Up at 5, Anatomical reading till 6—Translation from English into German till 7—prepare for Blumenbach's lecture till 9—Stromeyer's lecture on Chemistry till 10. 10 to ½ p. 12, Practical Zootomy—½ p. 12 to 1 English into German or German literary reading with a pipe—1 to 2 Anatomical lecture, 2 to 3 anatomical reading. 3 to 4 Osteology, 4 to 5 Lecture in German language, 5 to 6 dinner and *light* reading in Zootomy, Chem. or Anat^y. 6 to 7, this hour often wasted in a visit, sometimes Anatomical reading till 8. Then coffee and read

Greek till 10. 10 to 11, write a little Death's Jest Book w^h is a horrible waste of time, but one must now & then throw away the dregs of the day; read Latin sometimes or even continue the Anatomy—and at 11 go to bed.¹³

Aside from the frankly intimidating work-rate of which Beddoes boasts to his friend, the letter is also instructive on the intellectual environment which he created for himself. Although his demanding programme of study strikes a modern reader as 'interdisciplinary', Beddoes's generation were still comfortable with the borderless traditions of eighteenth-century scholarship. Examples had been close at hand in Beddoes's early life: Thomas Beddoes Sr and his protégé Humphry Davy achieved renown as scientists, and were also practising poets.¹⁴ The student's working day is built around scientific instruction, with linguistic study filling in the gaps, and relaxation, such as it is, taking the form of literary reading and composition; all these activities are mutually complementary, and Beddoes is drawing on the full cultural and social resources of Göttingen, not only its academic institutions.

Much less well known is Beddoes's description of a theatrical episode from the turbulent student life of the city of Göttingen, which he writes for the entertainment of his friend Kelsall in April 1826:¹⁵

On the 26th Feb^y we had the Burschen in all their glory: Blumenbach & Eichhorn—that is to say the stream of flowers & the Squirrel—celebrated the 50th anniversary of their professorships. As soon as it was dark between 5 or 600 of us, horse & foot, assembled each with a torch & formed a two & two procession thro' the town to the house where they were feasting, drew round the square, and on Blumenbach's appearance at the window a short speech was made by the leader followed by several tremendous 'vivats!' And he made his

speech. We departed & threw our torches into a bonfire. This however was only the halo, the pale outskirts, now comes the thick dazzling centre of the promised Burschen glory—and that was the *commerz*, i.e. a general assemblage of all the different Landsmannschaften, to drink and of course smoke together. I went with the Russians; for we few English don't agree well enough to form a separate club & altogether decline to risk the character of the country by pushing forward as its representatives in this holy alliance. The great ceremony consisted in a long anthem during which half-a-dozen men with swords took the cap of every one present in rotation off his head and singing the solemn words thrust it on the sword—when the weapons were sheathed to their hilt in the crowns, they were again returned as solemnly to the possessor in [a] state of perforation & replaced on his head as he chanted on oath 'bald ein wahrer Bursch zu seyn'. In the end we came to a general attack upon tables, benches, windows & heads and about 3 o'clock in the morning the flower of the German youth was as drunk as a fiddler: intending to hear a lecture at 8.¹⁶

In this extraordinary passage, Beddoes captures an exhilarating blend of intellectual aristocracy, institutional pride, youthful flamboyance, alcohol, and implicitly violent nationalist ritual.¹⁷ It is striking how closely the carousing of the international student body is bound up with their apparent militancy, especially in the form of that oath of brotherhood, with its imagery of fire and sword. The theatricality of the scene was not wasted on Beddoes, who shifts gradually throughout the passage, from touristic observer to committed participant, swept up in the spectacle. About two years later, the first draft of *Death's Jest-Book* was completed, and contained a lengthy scene of revolutionary plotting that takes place during an all-night drinking session in a ruined Gothic cathedral, attended by a disguised infiltrator, and

featuring blood oaths and necromantic spells (III, iii). The revelling *Burschen* provide a possible prototype for this central scene of Beddoes's signature work.

Originally a federation of the (entirely male) university student associations in the German states, the *Burschenschaft* became a powerful and at times volatile voice for political change, promoting the cause of a unified German state independent of the Austrian empire, and yet espousing values that were reactionary as well as reforming from a modern perspective; their stance might be described as 'radical nationalist'. Ute Berns has further examined the presence of *Burschenschaft* political activity at Göttingen, and how this affected Beddoes and his writing, and observes that the movement's nationalist consciousness drew on a constructed vision of medieval culture:

The *Burschenschaften* [...] contributed to a massive popularization of an idealized Middle Ages. Beddoes's scathing remarks about Friedrich Schlegel 'writ[ing] puffs for the Holy Alliance in Vienna', on the one hand, and his early involvement with the *Burschenschaften* in Göttingen, in addition to his sharp eye for the formal rituals and theatricality of their organized events, on the other, amply prove that his own medievalism represented anything but 'ideological apathy.'¹⁸

Early encounters with *Burschenschaft* students and first-hand experience of gatherings like the one described above deepened Beddoes's instincts for performative subversion as a student, introducing him to the idea of the collective political power of university communities.

Despite the intensity of his studies, Beddoes's career at Göttingen ended in expulsion in August 1829, the culmination of a series of conflicts with the University authorities due to drunkenness and riotous behaviour. Beddoes had made his first suicide attempt that same

year, and his departure from Göttingen marks the beginning of a long, unsettled phase of his life, drifting between academic establishments and gaining a reputation for unfulfilled brilliance and irascibility. Beddoes resumed his study of anatomy and physiology at the University of Würzburg in Bavaria, where he graduated MD in 1831. In Würzburg, Beddoes's general sympathy for liberal causes grew into committed activism. He became a prominent member of the *Germania Burschenschaft*, addressed public meetings to some acclaim (despite being said to speak poor and heavily accented German), and wrote a series of polemical articles for the nationalist newspaper *Bayerisches Volksblatt* on themes such as the Polish revolt against Russian rule, the passage of the British Reform Bill, Wellington, Brougham, and the state of France following the 1830 revolution.¹⁹ After coming into conflict with the authorities in Würzburg once too often, Beddoes was not only expelled from the University, but deported from the state of Bavaria in 1832. Beddoes's travels next took him to Zürich in Switzerland, at that time a centre for expatriates and political refugees. Once again, his political campaigning was based around the University; his talent and seniority as a physician is apparent in his being proposed for a chair of Anatomy (which he never took up). Next came Berlin, Frankfurt, and finally Basel, the eventual site of his death by suicide in 1849.

There is a marked continuity between all the various sites of Beddoes's scholarly life – Charterhouse, Oxford, Göttingen, Würzburg, Zürich – in the coincidence of certain key themes, such as academic pursuits, struggles with tyrannical authority (or authority perceived as tyrannical), internationalism, and hell-raising of either the occult or the alcoholic variety. Beddoes's experience of clashing with state political authority in his career as a student / academic activist reflect what may be called the 'campus politics' of German university towns in the early nineteenth century. The migrant communities of international students, some known to be political refugees likely to transmit French influence and revolutionary doctrine,

were viewed with suspicion by the establishment, and active measures were taken to limit or remove subversive elements, and to hold universities accountable.

The politicisation of German universities was made explicit by policies introduced from the Austrian higher state by the imperial Chancellor, Klemens von Metternich, who boasted of his intention to crush ‘the German revolution’, just as he had defeated Napoleon.²⁰ The initial provocation was the assassination of the dramatist August von Kotzebue in 1819, a sometime informant for the Russian Tsar; the assassin was Karl Sand, a German student of theology and known *Burschenschafter*, who denounced Kotzebue as an enemy of the German people for his reactionary views on the state. An informal assembly of the Federal Diet was organised in Karlsbad in Bohemia, with imperial security on the agenda. Metternich proposed that if the regional German governments were unable or unwilling to act, central intervention would be necessary; the argument gained force from a further attempted assassination, this time of Carl Ibell, the conservative chief minister of Nassau. The resulting security laws, known as the Karlsbad Decrees, were ratified by the Federal Diet in Frankfurt. Under the Decrees, German universities became subject to political surveillance and intervention, with the specific purpose of counteracting the influence of migrant French students and revolutionary sympathisers. Political activism among international students was perceived as a real and present threat to state security in the German confederation and in the Empire; Metternich’s commissioner of police Count Josef Sedlitzsky acted accordingly. The mobility of university students was defined as a political and security issue: existing populations were monitored for subversive activity, and visa restrictions affected the arrival of new foreign students. The Decrees required a government-appointed supervisor to be resident in every university city, to monitor teaching staff as well as students, and authorised to remove staff from their posts if the content or style of their teaching were deemed inappropriate. Students who had been expelled from a university for political reasons, or who

withdrew in order to avoid expulsion, were forbidden to enrol in any other university in the confederation. State security under the Karlsbad Decrees reflected the theory that elements in a number of German universities including Göttingen actively strived to spread French revolutionary doctrine in the Austrian Empire. The Emperor Francis was said to have subscribed to the theory, and lent his personal authority to measures to keep Austrian and German students separate. The Karlsbad Decrees, renewed in 1824, were in full force when Beddoes arrived in Göttingen in summer 1825.²¹

Beddoes's extant letters to Kelsall and Bryan Waller Procter ('Barry Cornwall') from Göttingen show insight into the political situation of the university city as a focus for tensions between the confederation of German states and the Empire. Beddoes discusses a popular professor named Friedrich Saalfeld, who lectured on modern history. Saalfeld had written a four-volume history of the French Revolution and a biography of Napoleon: his harsh opposition to Napoleon's legacy in Europe had influenced the widespread anti-Napoleonic sentiment among the *Burschen* of Göttingen. In the 1820s, Saalfeld's career at the University was in question because of his political sympathies; he was eventually forced to resign his chair at Göttingen after supporting the uprising of 1831. Beddoes alludes to Saalfeld's case in a letter to Kelsall, reflecting that his professor's career was directly affected by the authorities' interpretation of his ideological position, and that he might well be ejected from his office:

This man is a real historian, & no bad orator; but the government people do not much patronize him, as he is extremely free, and if he does not hesitate to condemn Napoleon, has still less remorse in laying bare the infamy of the Polish transaction: he is indeed one of those people who are dreadful to the old continental discipline for his talents and moderation; if he had less of the one, he

would no longer be venerated at the university; if less of the other he would be removed from his *catheder* by the paw of the police.²²

Writing to Procter later the same year, Beddoes alludes to political restrictions on international student mobility that were a direct consequence of the Karlsbad Decrees: ‘No Austrian is allowed to study here, Göttingen is so infamous for liberality.’²³

This uneasy climate in 1820s Hanover resonates with some of the contemporary anxieties about the part that British universities play in debates about political disaffection, radicalisation and terrorism, state security, and free speech in the twenty-first century. In the UK, the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 explicitly makes provision for freedom of expression at universities: ‘[The Secretary of State] must have particular regard to the duty to ensure freedom of speech, in the case of authorities that are subject to that duty [and] to the importance of academic freedom, in the case of authorities that are proprietors or governing bodies of qualifying institutions.’²⁴ Yet it also holds educational institutions responsible for monitoring political behaviours on campus, and for early intervention when signs of risk emerge: current guidance requires institutions such as schools and universities to have a ‘Prevent’ coordinator to oversee risk assessment. Although the government-sponsored ‘Prevent’ training used in UK universities is scrupulously neutral in its definition and illustration of radicalisation, using examples from white nationalist as well as Islamist extremism, it is still widely perceived by students and academics as implicitly discriminatory and punitive.²⁵ Central to both security policy and adverse political responses to it, is the case of international students: universities are required to monitor students’ presence and active engagement with their registered programmes of study, in order to justify ‘Tier 4’ visas on a rolling basis. Although contemporary policy acknowledges ethical implications, and is remote from the draconian powers discussed above, there may be some continuity of discourse

between them. Whereas international students assert their rights and independent political agency, state institutions tend to construct them as young and impressionable, and susceptible to influence: if they are dangerous, it is because they are vulnerable to radicalisation, rather than its primary instigators. The Karlsbad Decrees stated that action would be taken against teachers who were ‘seen to deviate from their duty or abuse their profession in inappropriately influencing the youthful minds of their students’.²⁶ The protective discourse removes agency even as it justifies intervention.

These are some of the contexts for Beddoes’s career as an international student in the 1820s. But how did he represent the performance of student identity in his imaginative writing? To conclude this discussion, I would like to revisit a neglected narrative poem in which Beddoes reflects and elaborates on the transcendent life of a scholar. The poem is called ‘Alfarabi the World-Maker, a rhapsodical fragment’, often regarded as juvenilia, its composition undated, and persistently neglected even by Beddoes’s standards. ‘Alfarabi’ is a fantastical parodic tale, which connects scholarship, sorcery, and world-building. The first section of the poem is at pains to declare its own artificial nature in Romantic-ironic style. The narrator states that he is an Englishman (l. 16) and therefore well acquainted with bad weather, and describes Alfarabi’s time as ‘days / That never were’ (ll. 1-2) except as constructions of ink, paper, and imagination.

The poem then presents its protagonist as an orientalist version of a very British student, who dabbles in literary journalism, indulges in recreational drug use, and affects a Byronic lifestyle at university:

’twas in those days that Alfarabi lived;

A man renowned in the newspapers:

He wrote in two reviews; raw pork at night
He ate, and opium; kept a bear at college:
A most extraordinary man was he.
But he was one not satisfied with man,
As man has made himself: he thought this life
Was something deeper than a jest, sought
Into its roots: himself was his best science,
He touched the springs, the unheeded hieroglyphics
Deciphered: (ll. 30-40)²⁷

Although he cuts a dash at university, Alfarabi is affected by ennui and yearns for a momentous achievement that will be worthy of his talent. His search for philosophical meaning quickly leads him, Faustus-like, to the study of magic:

He called unto the dead and the swart powers,
That wander unconfined beyond the sight
Or thought of mortals; and, from the abyss
Of cavernous deep night, came forth the hands,
That dealt the mallet when this world of ours
Lay quivering on the anvil in its ore,—
Hands of eternal stone, which would enmesh
And fray this starry company of orbs,
As a young infant on a dewy morn
Rends into nought the tear-hung gossamer
—To work they went, magician, hands, and Co.,

With tongs and trowels, needles, scissors, paste,
Solder and glue, to make another world:
And, as a tinker, 'neath a highway hedge,
Turns, taps, and batters, rattles, bangs, and scrapes
A stew-pan ruinous,—or as, again,
The sibylline dame Gurton, ere she lost
Th' immortal bodkin, staunch'd the gaping wound
In Hodge's small-clothes famed,—so those great hands
Whisk'd round their monstrous loom, here stitching in
An island of green valleys, fitting there
A mountain extra with a hook and eye,
Caulking the sea, hemming the continents,
And lacing all behind to keep it tight.
'Tis done,—'tis finished; and between the thumb
Depends and the forefinger,—like a toy,
Button with pin impaled, in winter games
That dances on the board,—and now it flies
Into the abyssal blueness, spinning and bright,
Just at old Saturn's tail. The necromancer
Puffed from his pipe a British climate round,
And stars and moon, and angels beamed upon it.
Just as it joined the midnight choir of worlds,
It chanced a bearded sage espied it's sweep,
And named it GEORGIUM SIDUS. Centuries
Danc'd o'er it, but (ll. 136-71)

A reader who is familiar with Beddoes will recognise in Alfarabi's botching and cobbling together of the new planet a pointed similarity to 'Resurrection Song', where the object under incompetent construction is a human body.²⁸ The poem and the drama have in common the ironic theme of attempted new-creation which is simultaneously threadbare and miraculous. 'Alfarabi' has received a rare recent interpretation in Rodney Stenning Edgecombe's *Reader's Guide*. Edgecombe departs from the consensus originating in Kelsall's memoir (1851) that 'Alfarabi' dates from Beddoes's schoolboy days, and decisively re-dates it from c. 1819 to 1827.²⁹ In a freely speculative re-reading, Edgecombe moves the poem away from youthful fantasy and proposes a biographical key: Alfarabi is a fictionalised version of Benjamin Bernhard Reich, a scholar whom Beddoes met at Göttingen, and the poem a tribute to their intimate friendship, drawing on Reich's knowledge of Islamic and Jewish culture. Edgecombe writes of the historical Al-Farabi, 'This philosopher, born in Turkestan in the ninth century CE, attempted to syncretize Islamic thought with that of Plato and Aristotle', citing a treatise which proposes ideal city, nation, and world states.³⁰ This reading attributes to the poem both extempore levity and erudite allusion: 'Beddoes's "official" dating of the new world [...] is 1781—the year in which Herschel discovered Uranus. This is a joke, of course, a nonce inspiration like so much else in this impulse-driven poem.'³¹ Edgecombe's speculative theory about Reich as the protagonist of the poem – and the exact stage of their relationship at which Beddoes wrote it – is unnecessarily specific. However, his proposed re-dating of the poem has merit. If 'Alfarabi' had really been written in 1819, that would place it just one year after the truly juvenile tale 'Scaroni; or, the Mysterious Cave' (written at Charterhouse School), and two years before the journeyman-work of *The Improvisatore* (1821), both gruesome Gothic shockers conspicuously lacking in the parodic humour and ironic distancing of 'Alfarabi', which has more in common with Beddoes's later experimental

revisions of the *Jest-Book*.³² If Edgecombe is correct that ‘Alfarabi’ dates from the late 1820s, the main significance may not be an erotic biographical key, or knowledge of middle-eastern history, but more generally Beddoes’s experience of university life. By 1827, Beddoes had studied at two celebrated European institutions – Oxford and Göttingen – and had confidently performed the role of academic hell-raiser, drawing on anecdotes about flamboyant forebears and contributing to a template for posthumous myth.

Alfarabi is Byronic in his bear-keeping student days; he is Faustian in his use of necromantic charms to command infernal powers; and he resembles both Milton’s God and Satan, dangling the new world like a bauble or a toy, before spinning it off into its new life in the heavens. The appearance of the ‘sage’ (William Herschel) is surely sardonic. The astronomer is a monarchist stooge; seeing the radiant new planet created by transgressive guile and magic, he quickly appropriates it in the king’s name. Whether this was to be a significant political polemic, or merely a piece of digressive levity, remains unknown, since of course the poem is unfinished.

Beddoes drops heavy hints – ‘himself was his best science’ (l. 38) – that the sorcerer Alfarabi is to be understood as a fantastical version of himself. Talented but reckless, self-mocking but also a little over-confident, the wayward scholar Alfarabi is the very image of the student hell-raiser of Romantic lore. With a love of freedom, a burning will to create and discover, and a Byronic intolerance of cant, he seeks to make a new world in his own image. He may be an endangered species in the 2020s, but enough of his presence still lingers to irritate the establishment.

¹ ‘The Guardian view on higher education: Beyond the Bean-counters’, editorial in *The Guardian* newspaper, 27 February 2015: <<https://theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/feb/guardian-view-on-higher-education-beyond-bean-counters>> [accessed 15 October 2019]. The Conservative-led Coalition government effectively tripled the standard annual tuition fee to a new maximum of £9,000 from the academic year 2011-12, after New Labour had introduced ‘top-up’ fees in 2002. At the time of writing, the standard (maximum) annual fee is £9,250.

² ‘The book is infused with a kind of gluttony, for food and wine, for the splendours of the recent past, and for rhetorical and ornamental language, which now with a full stomach I find distasteful,’ Evelyn Waugh, Preface, *Brideshead Revisited: The Sacred and Profane Memories of Captain Charles Ryder* (1945) (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 7.

³ Beddoes was an avid admirer of Landor, and met him in 1824 while in Florence to make arrangements following the death of his mother: H.W Donner, *Thomas Lovell Beddoes: The Making of a Poet* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1935), p. 140.

⁴ See e.g. Royall H. Snow, *Thomas Lovell Beddoes: Eccentric and Poet* (New York: Covici-Friede, 1928), pp. 11-15.

⁵ The story is recounted in Snow, p. 18. Other biographical information about Beddoes will be drawn largely from Donner, *The Making of a Poet*. Both Snow’s and Donner’s main source material is Thomas Forbes Kelsall’s ‘Memoir’ in *The Poems Posthumous and Collected of Thomas Lovell Beddoes*, 2 vols (London: Pickering, 1851).

⁶ Johanna Oehler, ‘Abroad at Göttingen’: *Britische Studenten als Akteure des Kultur- und Wissenstransfers 1735 bis 1806* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2016).

⁷ Oehler, p. 11.

⁸ Thomas Beddoes’s career as Reader in Chemistry at Oxford is recounted in Dorothy A. Stansfield, *Thomas Beddoes MD, 1760-1808: Chemist, Physician, Democrat* (Dordrecht, Boston, and Lancaster: D. Reidel,), pp. 31-59.

⁹ Max Neuberger, ‘British Medicine and the Göttingen Medical School in the Eighteenth Century’, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 14, 4 (1943), 449-66 (p. 462)

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¹⁰ Der schärfster kritiker des Bibliothek Oxfords Thomas Beddoes (1760-1808), der ab 1788 an der medizinischen Fakultät in Oxford tätig war, verließ diese bezeichnenderweise bereits 1792 wieder und schickte seinen Sohn Thomas Lovell Beddoes (1803-1849) zum Medizinstudium nach Göttingen. Die 1771 gegründete *Radcliffe Infirmary* in Oxford konnte die Defizite der Medizinischen Fakultät zu einem gewissen Grad kompensieren, war allerdings auch nicht institutionell mit ihr verbunden' (Oehler, p. 82). (Oehler describes Thomas Beddoes Sr as 'the sharpest critic of the Oxford library', and explains that the Radcliffe Infirmary in Oxford was to an extent able to compensate for the some of the shortcomings of the medical faculty at Göttingen, although the institutions were not formally affiliated.)

¹¹ Ute Berns, *Science, Politics, and Friendship in the Works of Thomas Lovell Beddoes* (Newark MD: University of Delaware Press, 2012), p. 33.

¹² Oehler, p. 82.

¹³ Letter to Thomas Forbes Kelsall from Göttingen, 4 December 1825. *The Works of Thomas Lovell Beddoes*, ed. by H.W. Donner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935; repr. New York: AMS Press, 1978), pp. 608-9. All quotations from Beddoes's writings will be from Donner's edition.

¹⁴ The scientific influences on Beddoes's drama have been extensively interpreted. In addition to Berns (2012), cited above, see: Michael Bradshaw, *Resurrection Songs: The Poetry of Thomas Lovell Beddoes* (Aldershot and Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2001); Ute Berns and Michael Bradshaw, eds, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Thomas Lovell Beddoes* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2007), esp. Frederick Burwick, 'Death's Jest-Book and the Pathological Imagination' (pp. 97-121); Christopher Moylan, 'T.L. Beddoes, Romantic Medicine, and the Advent of Therapeutic Theater', *Studia Neophilologica*, 69 (1991), 181-88; and Moylan, 'In the Air: T.L. Beddoes and Pneumatic Medicine', *Studia Neophilologica*, 73 (2001), 48-54.

¹⁵ The passage is briefly discussed in relation to the panoptic politics of Beddoes's drama *Death's Jest-Book* in Michael Bradshaw, 'The *Jest-Book*, the Body and the State', in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Thomas Lovell Beddoes*, pp. 67-80.

¹⁶ Letter to Thomas Forbes Kelsall from Göttingen, 1 April 1826. *Works* p. 617. *Burschen* roughly translates as 'lads', or 'brothers', and *Burschenschaft* as 'brotherhood'. *Landsmannschaften*: teams or associations from around the country. *Bald ein wahrer Bursch zu seyn*: [approx.] 'Soon to be truly one of the lads / one of the brotherhood'.

¹⁷ Cf. Berns considers the incident basically festive: 'Beddoes's letters offer an account of a *Burschenschaften* event in Göttingen which appears to have been celebratory rather than subversive' (Berns, p. 71).

¹⁸ Berns, p. 55.

¹⁹ These writings are reproduced in both original German and English translation in Donner's *Works*, pp. 560-73 and 733-42.

²⁰ Cited in Arthur J. May, *The Age of Metternich, 1814-1848* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), p. 43.

²¹ Robert D. Billinger, *Metternich and the German Question: States' Rights and Federal Duties, 1820-1834* (Newark MD: University of Delaware Press, 1991), pp. 17-36; Donald E Emerson, *Metternich and the Political Police: Security and Subversion in the Hapsburg Monarchy, 1815-1830* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968), pp. 100-35; Hsi-Huey Liang, *The Rise of the Modern Police and the European State System from Metternich to the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 18-34; May, pp. 39-45.

²² Letter to Thomas Forbes Kelsall, 1826. *Works*, p. 612.

²³ Letter to Bryan Waller Procter, 9 October 1826. *Works*, p. 626.

²⁴ Part 5, Chapter 1 of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015: section 31: 3, a-b, <<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/6/contents/enacted>> [accessed 01/11/2019].

²⁵ For example: 'Many academics and students are dismayed by UCL's excessive compliance efforts, with some feeling that the university is contributing to the government's hostile environment policy, This is the accepted version of an article due to be published by Cardiff University Press in *Romantic Textualities*, available online at <https://www.romtext.org.uk/>. It is not the copy of record. Copyright © 2024, The Author.

and effectively becoming a “second border” which overseas students must cross.’ *Weronika Strzyżyńska*, ‘Inside the Panopticon: UCL surveillance creates a hostile environment for Tier 4 students’, *The Cheese-grater* (the Students’ Union magazine of University College London), 62 (2018), <<https://cheesegratermagazine.org/2018/09/29/surveillance-tier-4/>> [accessed 20/10/2020].

²⁶ Roughly translated from: ‘die durch erweisliche Abweichung von ihrer Pflicht oder Ueberschreitung der Grenzen ihres Berufes, durch Mißbrauch ihres rechtmäßigen Einflusses auf die Gemüther der Jugend’). *Karlsbader Beschlüsse, Universitätsgesetz, vom 20. September 1819*, <<http://www.heinrich-heine-denkmal.de/dokumente/karlsbad1.shtml>> [accessed 05/01/2020].

²⁷ ‘this life / Was something deeper than a jest’ (ll. 36-37): cf. ‘For Death is more “a jest” than Life: you see / Contempt grows quick from familiarity. / I owe this wisdom to Anatomy’ (verse letter to Bryan Waller Procter from Göttingen, 7 March 1826, *Works*, p. 615). The verse letter is Beddoes’s celebrated prospectus for *Death’s Jest-Book*, in which he sets out his ambition to satirise death based on scientific knowledge.

²⁸ ‘Resurrection Song’ is a grotesque lyric apparently sung by spirits engaged in the process of stitching a human cadaver together in preparation for the afterlife; it was deleted from a revised draft of *Death’s Jest-Book* (at III, iii, 563), and survives as aborted marginalia.

²⁹ Rodney Stenning Edgecombe, *A Reader’s Guide to the Narrative and Lyric Poetry of Thomas Lovell Beddoes* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), pp. 18-40.

³⁰ Edgecombe, p. 18.

³¹ Edgecombe, p. 37.

³² For Beddoes’s embarrassed attempts to track down and destroy all copies of *The Improvisatore*, see: Kelsall, p. xiii; Donner, p. 64; Bradshaw (2001), p. 10.