The Kiss of Death

Thomas Lovell Beddoes' *Death's Jest-Book* and the Rosicrucian Quest

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ABSTRACT

Filled with abhorrence at the puny-hearted, mean-minded nature of the individual will and at the termination of human existence and striving under a great clod of dirt, Thomas Lovell Beddoes made it his mission to find an answer to the universal mystery of death - an answer he believed was to be found in nature. Beddoes was not alone in his quest. One group in particular who sought to free humanity from its ills was the Rosicrucians. Death's Jest-Book is a portrayal of the endeavour of the brothers of the Rosy Cross to unmask the secrets of death and become immortal as gods. By placing Beddoes' play in the specific context of Rosicrucianism, this thesis explores the philosophy of self-elevation and its sources, and attempts to refute the view that Beddoes succeeded in making a fool of Death.

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Thomas Lovell who? For most people, Beddoes doesn't even exist, let alone excite any particular reaction. Those who have heard of him may have some vague notion of a mad, morbid, necrophiliac homosexual, or perhaps even of one of Romanticism's great forgotten geniuses. But despite his relative obscurity in the annals of English Literature, I see him as a poet with a great deal in common with the general reader, as will become clear as this thesis unfolds.

Equally obscure may be the term "Rosicrucianism", but one only has to mention things like suffering, loss of hope, lack of meaning and fear of death, and emotions of varying degrees are evoked in us all. The Rosicrucians were one particular brotherhood which sought an answer to such problems. Their quest was to conquer death and unlock the secret of immortality so that Death would be robbed of the sting which he injected into life - a quest to which Beddoes devoted his life.

Of all Beddoes' works Death's Jest-Book portrays the Rosicrucian quest the most vividly. By using Rosicrucianism as a basis for this thesis, I hope to share some insight into how death is portrayed in the play, and to explain exactly why I believe the poet failed in his quest.

2. ROSICRUCIANISM

The Rosicrucian order was allegedly founded by the mythical figure Christian Rosencreutz, whose name is composed of the two Latin words "rosa" (rose) and "crux" (cross). It is believed, however, that the founder is more likely to have been a Lutheran theologian, Johann Valentin Andreae, whose family arms carried on them the symbols of the rose and cross (Roberts 2,3). The Rosicrucians announced themselves into the world by way of two manifestos. The first, The Fama Fraternitatis or a Discovery of the Fraternity of the Most Noble Order of the Rosy Cross, was published in 1614, and Confessio Fraternitatis or The Confession of the Laudable of the Most Honourable Order of the Rosy Cross, written to All the learned of Europe followed in 1615 (Roberts 3). J.G. Buhle, a German historian, believes Andreae to be the author of all the Rosicrucian manifestos (Yates 208). Although it remains a mystery as to whether the secret fraternity of the Rosy Cross actually existed or not, the idea of such a brotherhood led to the establishment of many Rosicrucian societies. De Quincey is certain that when Rosicrucianism was introduced to England it became Freemasonry: "'Freemasonry is neither more nor less than Rosicrucianism as modified by those who transplanted it to England' whence it was re-exported to the other countries of Europe" (Yates 208-9). Around 1750 a statement in a letter claimed that "'English Freemasons have copied some ceremonies from Rosicrucians and say they are derived from them and are the same with them'" (Yates 211). At about the same time, a new "grade" of Freemasonry in France was constituted called the Rose Cross grade (Yates 211-12). Today, evidence for the Rosicrucian association with Freemasonry can be found in a book co-written by a former 33rd-Degree mason called The Deadly Deception where the second of the four "bodies" of the Scottish Rite is called the "Chapter of Rose Croix" (Shaw/McKenny 59.) The Hebraic or Egyptian origins of Masonry which are integrally associated with the Renaissance idea of "Ancient Wisdom" reveal that Freemasonry is closely related, if not identical, to Rosicrucianism (Yates 212).

The manifestos laid down the precepts of the fraternity, proposed social and political reform, and gave the history of Rosencreutz. According to the Fama, Christian Rosencreutz was born in 1378 to a noble family that had suffered poverty in their later years. By the age of five, he was already destined to be educated in a monastery in the classics until the time came for him to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem with one of the monks. During the pilgrimage, the monk travelling with Rosencreutz died in Cyprus, leaving the young adept to complete the journey alone. As he continued on his way, Rosencreutz stopped over in Damascus. He inclined his ear to the teachings of wise men who welcomed him "'...as one whom they had long expected.'" In Rosencreutz's search for knowledge, he learned about physics, mathematics, and many secrets of the universe which he discovered from a book he translated from Arabic to Latin called Book M. According to the Fama Rosencreutz also learned many secrets of the "Elementary Inhabitants" at Fez. During the two years he spent there he studied the mysteries of the Cabala and other occult sciences. He then took this knowledge abroad to Spain with the ultimate goal of bringing reform to Europe. The learned of Europe, however, did not receive Rosencreutz's proposals as enthusiastically as the prophet had hoped (Roberts 3). One reason for this rejection may be found in the Rosicrucian manifestos which condemn long-standing authorities such as Aristotle and Galen as paradigms of archaic "rigidity of mind" (Yates 51). As a consequence of his great disappointment, Rosencreutz decided to form his own fraternity, beginning with eight brothers, which would bring about the transformation of the world he longed for. Their first mission was to write the Book of Nature, a book disclosing all knowledge. This book of mystery could not be written in the brothers' native tongue, therefore it was necessary to invent a magical language and script (Roberts 3). In the words of Yates, the Fama states that "God has revealed to us in these latter days a more perfect knowledge, both of his Son, Jesus Christ, and of Nature" (Yates 42).

The following are the laws of the fraternity of the Rosy Cross according to Roberts:

1. That none of them should profess any other thing than to cure the sick, and that gratis. None of the posterity should be constrained to wear one certain kind of habit, but therein to follow the custom of the country.

2. That every year upon the day C. they should meet together in the house S. Spiritus, or write the cause of his absence.

3. Every brother should look about for a worthy person, who, after his decease, might succeed him.

4. The word C.R. should be their seal, mark, and character.

5. The Fraternity should remain secret one hundred years (Roberts 4).

In 1604, after Christian Rosencreutz's death and ten years before the Fama was published, Rosencreutz's devotees opened his vault so that the prophet's mission could be made known to all the world. "Rosencreutz's life furnishes a prototype for the career of the Rosicrucian hero in the novel, who also bears a family resemblance to the philosophical magi associated with the occult traditions of the Rosy Cross" (Roberts 4). Three prominent figures associated with Rosicrucianism are Cornelius Agrippa (1486-1535), who is identified with the tradition of Renaissance Magia and Cabala (Yates 111); Paracelsus (1493-1541); and John Dee (1527-1608) (Roberts 4). Although Rosicrucian societies, such as Andreae's Christian Union and the Invisible College, developed from the Rosencreutz legend and the manifestos, the aforementioned pillars of Rosicrucianism weren't associated with any secret society in particular. Roberts refers to Yates's definition of Rosicrucianism to point out that a Rosicrucian is not someone who necessarily belongs to a secret society, but is one in virtue of his style of thinking (Roberts 4).

According to Yates, the Invisible College gave rise to the Royal Society (Roberts 5), which was always believed to have marked a new era of rational thinkers. As a result of this shift to a more rational philosophy, the distinction between science and magic was greatly accentuated. In contrast to the Invisible College which continued its search for the philosopher's stone and the elixir

vitae, the Royal Society concerned itself with orthodox science. The distinctions between the societies and the nature of their pursuits, however, are not as dissociated as they first may appear to be. The research of Charles Webster reveals that the transition from the age of Paracelsus to the Newtonian era did not mark as significant a move away from the occult sciences as many would like to believe. In fact, the so-called new mechanistic science was based on the ancient mysteries of scientific magic, and the transition between the eras itself is indebted to none other than the occult scientists, the Rosicrucians (Roberts 5).

The philosophy behind Rosicrucianism is based on the Hermetic-Cabalistic tradition. A little of the essence of Rosicrucianism can be seen in the title of a work by Joseph Stellatus called The Pegasus of the Firmament or a brief introduction to the Ancient Wisdom, formerly taught in the Magia of the Egyptians and Persians and now rightly called the Pansophia of the Venerable Society of the Rosy Cross, written in 1618 (Yates 95). Rosencreutz's disciples devoted their lives to bringing social, political and spiritual change to the world by spreading a message founded in the mythological beliefs surrounding the life of their master, the philosopher's stone, and the elixir of life.

The Confessio declares that nature's secrets can be disclosed to the world through God. Those who try to obtain the philosopher's stone or the elixir of life for selfish reasons, however, can expect defeat. Only those who have been chosen by God will find the brotherhood and share in their discoveries. The consequences of impious motives are clearly stated at the end of the Fama:

> ...let them think, that although there be a medicine to be had which might fully cure all diseases, nevertheless those whom God hath destined to plague with diseases, and to keep under the rod of correction, sure shall never obtain any such medicine ... it shall be so far from him whosoever thinks to get the benefit and be partaker of our riches and knowledge, without and against the will of God, that he shall sooner lose his life in seeking and searching for us, than to find us, and attain to come to the wished happiness of the Fraternity of the Rosy Cross (Yates 260).

Rosicrucian apologists claim that the name of the brotherhood has been tainted through the misrepresentation of Rosicrucian characters portrayed in novels (Roberts 7). While writers dramatise the retribution poured out on those who defy the sacred conditions of partaking in the fraternity, the power of the defiant is often ambiguously seen as heroic and enviable, thus shedding bad light on the brothers of the Rosy Cross who emphatically claim to be a Christian organisation (Yates 249). Robert Fludd, a Rosicrucian apologist of the seventeenth century, endeavours to alleviate the fears of those suspicious of the fraternity's association with magic. He assures the doubtful that Rosencreutz only used "white" magic which had to do with mathematics and mechanics, and Cabalistic magic which taught adepts to invoke the names of good angels. The Rosicrucians believed that such magic, far from being profane, was "scientific and holy" (Yates 76). The author of Rosa Florescens affirms the pious nature of the Rosicrucian practices by pointing out that the R.C. Brothers observed Holy Scripture by loving God and their neighbour, and did indeed believe in the Trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Their motives for seeking knowledge through nature were to exalt Christ's name and had nothing to do with the Kingdom of Darkness (Yates 97). Yates's explanation of what he believes the brotherhood is about gives another insight into what might be identified as the Rosicrucian mission:

> By the diffusion of a philosophy, or a theosophy, or a Pansophia, which they hoped might be accepted by all religious parties, the members of this movement perhaps hoped to establish a non-sectarian basis for a kind of freemasonry - I use this word here only for its general meaning and without necessarily implying a secret society - which would allow persons of differing religious views to live together peaceably. The common basis would be a common Christianity, interpreted mystically, and a philosophy of Nature which sought the divine meaning of the hieroglyphic characters written by God in the universe, and interpreted macrocosm and microcosm through mathematical-magical systems of universal harmony (Yates 98-9).

Justification for these observations can be found with John Dee who had a vision of religious unity, achieved, as in the angelic realms, through mystic and philosophic harmony (Yates 99). While

the Fama elevates the Bible, the prophet places Plato, Aristotle, Pythagoras and others on the same level as the sacred writings when he says that "All that same concurreth together, and makes a sphere or Globe, whose total parts are equidistant from the Centre..." (Yates 250); the "Centre" presumably being God. The mission of unifying the different world religions is also another feature Freemasonry shares with Rosicrucianism. G.A.O.T.U., which stands for the Great Architect of the Universe, is "an all-embracing religious conception which included, and encouraged, the scientific urge to explore the Architect's work" (Yates 219).

Although the religious thought of the Hermetic-Cabalist tradition was responsible for the revolution in scientific thought, neither Catholics nor Protestants had any objections to the advancement of knowledge except for one thing: no matter how Christian the Rosicrucians claimed to be, the orthodox Church condemned the occultic practices associated with the brotherhood (Yates 226). The reason for their objection can be found in the command God gave the Israelites on entering Canaan:

> There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD: and because of these abominations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee (Deut. 18:10-12).

Searching for the power to overcome mortality was especially blasphemous to the Church. When Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of Knowledge they entered the fallen world of disease, suffering, and death. In Genesis death was the punishment for disobedience to God, so to strive to prolong life or avoid death altogether was to fly in the face of divine judgement on the fall of the human race (Roberts 10).

Among those who considered the Rosicrucian practices a profanity was the anonymous author of the pamphlet Effroyables Pactions faites entre de Diable et les prétendues Invisibles. According to Roberts,

the writer claimed that

> ...members of the College of Rosicrucians had signed a pact in their blood with a necromancer called Raspuch. The transaction was allegedly witnessed by the demon Astaroth, who had taken the form of a beautiful youth. The Rosicrucians agreed to perform various blasphemous acts for Satan in return for a number of powers such as invisibility, dematerialisation and the ability to speak all languages fluently (Roberts 10).

It was important to the Rosicrucian to be fluent in every language because every nation had to be told of the necessity to conquer death (Roberts 10). In literature the alchemist in search of the philosopher's stone, or the elixir of life, is the paradigm of the Rosicrucian hero who represents the human race. The quest for the power over mortality, however, is not made without great cost. While he strives to discover nature's secret of immortality, he inadvertently sets himself up against nature in his desire to conquer it. Furthermore, because of the consuming mania in his heart for supernatural power, the sage becomes increasingly obsessed with himself which desensitizes him to the interests of others and gradually alienates him from the rest of his fellow human beings. The outcome of such spiritual devastation, along with the dissatisfaction found in the elixir, manifests itself in an increasingly debauched lifestyle. Those who seek immortality in effect rebel against God's judgement over humanity and try to gain salvation and regain paradise by alternative means. According to Scripture, the only alternative means is God's adversary, Satan. It was always imperative to sages who sought after forbidden knowledge to gain control over the spirit world (Roberts 11). The elixir is the secular equivalent of the Holy Grail and was believed to have come from the Devil. Its diabolical associations are partly due to the belief that the elixir released demonic forces and gave the receiver the power over life and death which legitimately belonged only to God. Those who sought after such powers often had to yield their souls over to Satan (Roberts 15).

Another problem in the search for the philosopher's stone and the elixir of life is that of the achievement of self-realization.

The Gothic Immortal was forever caught in a dilemma. He was torn between the desire to cheat the grave, and the belief that self-realization was only possible through death when his true self would be free from all physical limitations. As well as being the door to self-realisation, people believed that death was the only reality because of its permanence. Lukacs believes that one aspect of tragedy is that it is a "'...science of death-moments, of conscious last moments when the soul has already given up the broad richness of existence and clings only to what is most deeply and intimately its own'" (Roberts 12).

The age-old quest for the philosopher's stone, the thirst for the elixir vitae, and the concept of a Golden Age all represent the desire for the restoration of the broken relationship between humanity and the divine (Roberts 13). The Rosicrucians believed that reunification with God was possible if humanity found harmony with nature, since nature was a reflection of God's divine character: "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead..." (Rom.1:20). The Rosicrucian view of nature, however, differs from orthodox beliefs in that it doesn't make the distinction between the Creator and the created as the Bible does. Nature is considered to be more than a created product which bears the Creator's mark, and is personified as the giver of gifts, the one who has the power to endow mortals with understanding: "Nature" is the one who enlightens (Yates 259).

During the Enlightenment the Scientific Revolution cultivated the belief in a possible physical immortality as well as a spiritual one. Some revolutionaries believed that there was an immortal part of the body, but their hopes of any kind of discovery remained unfulfilled. Godwin differed in his theory of physical immortality and believed that as reason and truth improved the human intellect, we would achieve a prolonged life through the imperceptible process of evolution. Accompanying the theory of evolution, Godwin believed that a protracted existence could be obtained through faith by practising "mind over matter", now commonly known as "mind control"

(Roberts 27-8). By replacing belief in the Christian God with belief in self, Godwin sought to "...free all individuals from the statutory limits of life prescribed by Christianity" (Roberts 30). This revolutionary view of Godwin's would have pleased the unorthodox thinkers of the time who saw life-expansion as a natural development of Enlightenment idealism. Kant expressed the idea of immortality through the concept of liberty which he believed was the heart of enlightenment; and of course, immortality is liberty from mortality.

As well as being a metaphor for the human longing for a paradise lost, the philosopher's stone can also be seen as a threefold threat: moral, social, and political. The foundations of society and human behaviour have long been based on biblical teaching, and the elixir vitae/philosopher's stone was seen as a danger to the Christian doctrine, especially to the teachings concerned with the end of the world and the hope of new life. It was seen as a social threat because the regulating market forces of the economy would be thrown into an upheaval if the secrets of alchemical transmutation were available to everyone, and finally, it was seen as a political threat because the government saw "...the prospect of a race of immortals as a subversive menace" (Roberts 45).

One Romantic with Rosicrucian traits who was to make a deep impact on Beddoes was Percy Bysshe Shelley. Shelley was known for his occultic scientific pursuits and was even caught concocting ominous potions while chanting "'Double, double, toil and trouble; Fire burn and cauldron bubble'" (Roberts 58). During one dangerous-looking experiment Shelley's tutor Mr Bethel asked his student what he was doing; the reply was "'Please sir, I am raising the devil'." A record of one of his unsuccessful boyhood escapades in search of devils can be found in "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" (Roberts 58). Shelley's fascination for gothic elements led him to an investigation of secret societies which was mainly conducted through literature. His novel, St Irvyne or The Rosicrucian, explores the ultimate goal of revolution: namely, victory over death (Roberts 59). A popular Romantic theme which Shelley found

inspiring was the force of darkness working through secret societies to overthrow ruling nobilities, with the underlying belief that secret societies had the power to restore justice, peace and harmony. For example, the founder of the Bavarian Illuminati, Adam Weishaupt (1748-1830) was convinced that the human race had the potential to attain the moral perfection of a sinless Eden and to be able to guide itself (Roberts 60).

In Roberts' explanation of secret societies, a quotation from Benjamin Disraeli identifies two main characteristics of the brotherhoods:

> The two characteristics of these confederations, which now cover Europe like a network, are war against property and hatred of the Semitic revelation. These are the legacies of their founders; a propriety despoiled and the servants of altars that have been overthrown (Roberts 63).

One reason for their hatred towards the Jews is that the Jew was condemned as a blasphemer and object of God's wrath, someone powerless to initiate anything good (Roberts 77). The Jew is identified as a satanic figure, scorning the crown of thorns and the shame Christ endured on the cross (Roberts 80). Another very significant reason for hating Jews is the fact Scripture speaks of them as God's chosen people with whom God wants a relationship. In the Old Testament God sought after the Jews; He was the one who pursued the relationship in spite of the Israelites' disobedience and rebellion. The Rosicrucian had every reason to be jealous. While he slaved away doing good deeds and sought enlightenment in order to find union with God, the undeserving Jew enjoyed God's unconditional love and undivided attention.

In opposition to Shelley's use of the theme of secret societies in St Irvyne, Thomas Love Peacock in Nightmare Abbey (1818) satirized the Gothic novel and its obsession with the esoteric fraternities (Roberts 63). One might wonder whether a Rosicrucian writer was himself a brother of the Rosy Cross, but most writers who have been noted for their preoccupation with the Rosicrucian theme have emphatically denied any association with a secret society

or even having seen a member of the fraternity. As Yates remarks, it seems that another trait crucial for the brotherhood's survival is invisibility (Yates 99).

Some of the problems that arise in the Rosicrucian philosophy are outlined in Roberts' chapter entitled "The Problem of Immortality". The most eminent problem the immortal hero encounters in literature is that spiritual redemption is possible only through death. Having obtained the elixir of life, the Rosicrucian sage can only look forward to further pain and suffering (Roberts 208). Bernard Williams uses Elena Makropulos from Karel Capek's drama, The Makropulos Case, as an example of the boredom the immortal experiences. The reason for such a seemingly meaningless existence, as Williams sees it, is that the human race has lost all capacity to "recreate perpetual goals" (Roberts 208-09). This loss implies that death is necessary if humanity is to find any meaning in its existence at all. Religion, Christianity in particular, has always upheld the moral importance of death, and indeed, many of the Old Testament patriarchs such as Job welcomed it. Unfortunately for the immortal hero, it is his inability to accept the orthodox view of life that drives him towards the delusive elixir vitae (Roberts 209). The Rosicrucian can often be seen as a portrayal of the human need to give meaning to life and to regain what was lost in the Fall, namely an unbroken relationship with the Divine, which has thus far proved impossible through human effort (Roberts 209-10).

The teaching of the third Rosicrucian manifesto, The Chemical Wedding, exhorts progress towards harmony which is exemplified in the unification of oppositions such as the sun and moon, male and female. In relation to the reintegration of the human with the Divine, the manifestos instruct Rosicrucian disciples to work out their own salvation by promoting themselves to a godlike state of being, and to use the power of their will to conquer nature. The hope of achieving these goals was attributed to the evolutionary process whereby psychic forces were believed to have had the power to extend our life expectancy. In turn, our protracted existence would then enable us to elevate ourselves and evolve spiritually into higher beings. The purpose of the Rosicrucian quest for the

philosopher's stone or elixir vitae is to assist the evolutionary process in achieving speedy results. Although the immortal hero may have brought eternal damnation upon himself in his defiance of death, he remained victorious because he is said to represent "...the supreme triumph of the individual will" (Roberts 211). This defiant attitude of the Rosicrucian hero is best summed up in the words of Roberts: "The Rosicrucian's decision to mortgage or even forfeit his soul for prolonged existence must be among the greatest tributes ever paid to the value of life" (Roberts 211). In literature, however, regardless of the extent of Promethean defiance, death or Tithonus-like despair ensures that the egoistic hero remains incapable of triumphing over the moral code (Roberts 211).

One German poet who influenced Beddoes's philosophical thought was Novalis (1772-1801) (Harrex). In his book entitled Novalis, Frederick Hiebel also refers to the poet as a European Thinker and a Christian Mystic. Novalis shared the Rosicrucian quest for self-knowledge, and believed that people would eventually be able to identify their lower selves with their higher selves through magic idealism, or "romanticising the world". In other words, through acts of the imagination, human beings can discover the original meaning of the world and reach beyond themselves and interact with other beings, or open themselves up to being acted upon by outside influences in some way (Hiebel 50). The orthodox Church would identify this as the profanity of consulting with familiar spirits, which in twentieth-century terms is more commonly known as "channelling". This aspect of magic idealism reflects the darker side of nature that Novalis was destined to pursue (Hiebel 44) in his ventures to find his higher self.

Traditional Rosicrucians maintained the philosophy that spiritual enlightenment was attained through nature. Novalis's magic idealism is basically the same except that he taught the individual to seek the divine within themself for the answer. He believed that the conscience "'is the innate mediator of every man. It takes the place of God on earth'" (Hiebel 44). According to Novalis everyone should, figuratively speaking, be a "Bible". This meant that each

person would comprise a synthesis of knowledge, art and religion (Hiebel 51). At the heart of this "Bible" lies the understanding of human nature and self-knowledge (Hiebel 52).

The connection between the idea of the individual being a type of text and a self-realisation was a crucial one to Novalis. For him language is:

> '...the dynamic element of the spriritual realm ... language is Delphi' ... that means, it points the way toward sef-knowledge, toward the 'Know Thyself' graven into the porch of the Temple of Delphi. 'Inwards leads the mysterious way. Within us, or nowhere, lies eternity with its worlds, the past and the future. The outside world is a world of shadows - it casts the shadows into the realm of light' (Hiebel 43-4).

Rosicrucianism is more than just science, magic, and mysticism; it is also poetic. Novalis saw poetry as "'...the great art of constructing transcendental health. The poet, therefore, is the transcendental physician. Poetry ... mixes everything for its great purpose of all purposes - the exaltation of man above himself....'" (Hiebel 46). This purifying element elevating man to the realms of the gods is not exclusive to poetry, as Novalis regarded drama as "'a process of transmutation, purification, and reduction'..." (Hiebel 46). Some of the poetic and dramatic roots of Rosicrucianism can be seen in the English chivalric traditions along with the legends of St. George, the Red Cross knight. From the doctrine of the manifestos emerged material which captured the Romantic imagination and gave rise to the "Rosicrucian" novel (Roberts 2).

The Rosicrucian hero may appear an abstract, mythical figure, wholly unrelated to the tangible world, but his preoccupation with immortality deals with the very real, and timeless, universal issues of life and death. The Rosicrucian hero is identified with humanity in his trials, and in him every individual is represented in their own spiritual crisis (Roberts 213).

3. BEDDOES THE QUESTER

His father died before he reached the tender age of six. During his final B.A. examinations at Oxford at the age of 21, his mother died through ill health. Having been brought up with an illustrious physician for a father, he was all too familiar with the mortal human condition, and was confronted with the problem of the meaning of life in face of death at a very early age. His name was Thomas Lovell Beddoes, born June 30, 1803, at Clifton in Shropshire, and died in Basel Hospital, Switzerland, on January 26, 1849, through a final attempt at suicide (Thompson "Chronology").

Unlike his more prominent contemporaries, Beddoes was not a prolific writer. While still in his teenage years, he composed The Improvisatore and The Bride's Tragedy which reviews favoured very highly. A year after his mother's death, in 1825, Beddoes commenced what was to be his most significant, and probably his most unpopular, piece of work, Death's Jest-Book. Instead of looking to a future as a professional writer as most would have expected from such a gifted young man, Beddoes followed his father's footsteps and embarked on a medical career in Germany. His turning to the medical profession may be attributed to the death of Mrs. Beddoes: having been faced with mortality from a very young age, Beddoes was impelled by the death of his second parent to unmask and discover the significance of death once and for all (Thompson 3,4). Influenced by current beliefs, Beddoes hoped to find the answer by discovering the part of the body which was allegedly immortal, the legendary "bone of Luz" of the Hebrews. For Beddoes this was the equivalent of the philosopher's stone (Thompson 54).

As the following chapters proceed to demonstrate, Rosicrucianism, with its search for the philosopher's stone, is an occult religion founded on Ancient Wisdom. Beddoes was most fascinated with the occult and was very familiar with its beliefs and practices (Donner(A) 195). Central to the occult religions are all the gods, who are in effect aspects of one main nature god. Nature, for Beddoes, unites with love in death and becomes the "saviour from

all suffering". It is through nature and Jesus that Rosicrucians sought to find harmony, and for Beddoes, nature was, at least initially, the source of all his hope (Donner(A) 211).

A letter to his close friend Thomas Forbes Kelsall reveals that Beddoes was convinced that death was nature's solution to the problem of mortality, pain and suffering (Thompson 66). This conviction was also held by the Rosicrucians and was the driving force behind their mission of healing. His purpose was to rid death of all the terror that surrounded him and "'unmask all his secrets'" (Donner(A) 192). "Realising that the root of the evil lay, not in death itself, but in the fear of death, Beddoes thus tried to familiarize himself with the idea of death, and by constant occupation with the problem free himself from its terror" (Donner(A) 192). Death's Jest-Book demonstrates Beddoes' quest to prove the power of the will over death by making the dead rise and walk among the living (Donner(A) 213). The song Isbrand sings, "Squats on a Toadstool", was close to Beddoes' heart and epitomised his belief in the power of the will to recreate one's self (Donner(A) 229-30). The ultimate expression of the power of the will is demonstrated in the apocalyptic dance of the deaths, but Beddoes' concept of an apocalypse was heavily influenced by the occult and although it is full of energy, it remains void of love and hope of a meaningful existence.

Beddoes began his medical studies with great enthusiasm and hope, but on leaving the University, his words reflect nothing but frustration and defeat:

> He left, he said, 'already so thoroughly penetrated with the conviction of the absurdity and unsatisfactory nature of human life' that he could only 'search with avidity for every shadow of a proof or possibility of an after-existence, both in the material and immaterial nature of man' (Thompson 6).

As a writer, he was alienated by his move to Germany from his English contemporaries (Thompson 8) and his writings were practically doomed to oblivion. Although Beddoes believed he ought to have been a better poet and would have liked his work to be

more appreciated, he was not interested in pandering to popular taste. Doing and writing about what he felt to be most important was his ultimate concern (Thompson 9). In spite of all his endeavours to scientifically dispel the fear of death, his studies in medicine had not brought the enlightenment he had hoped for. This profound disappointment, coupled with being strongly advised by Procter and Bourne to revise his play, drove him into deep depression. As a result, Beddoes began to indulge in highly unsociable behaviour (Donner(A) 375), and soon made his first attempt at suicide (Donner(A) 194). As Robert Browning remarked in a letter to Procter: "'[Beddoes' intention] was to despoil Death of his horrors...he does exactly the reverse'" (Donner(A) 193).

In his quest for immortality, Beddoes alienated himself from the rest of humanity. He exchanged love and friendship for "'the pursuit of immaterial and unchanging good'" (Donner(A) 187). This was a peculiar exchange considering that love and friendship are the necessary elements of "unchanging good", and were the very things Beddoes saw as lacking in the world. Beddoes' view of love and friendship was heavily influenced by Spinoza who taught that a person's love for God is entitled to no return, a philosophy which Beddoes extended to human relationships (Donner(A) 273). In a letter to Kelsall, dated almost three months after the poet's death, Revell Phillips wrote that Kelsall, John Bourne and himself were the few that had been closest to Beddoes (Donner(B) 44-45, LII).

In his younger days at Charterhouse and Oxford, Beddoes was known for his "willful, perverse, independent, and precocious" personality, but in spite of his pranks, good sense of humour, and the relationships formed at school, Beddoes was already noted as a lonesome young man (Thompson 3). A description of Beddoes during his school years can be found in a letter written by his fag at Charterhouse, Charles Dacres Bevan, addressed to Revell Phillips in July, 1851. As a school boy, Bevan recalls Beddoes as a "persevering and ingenious tormentor" and "an unmitigated Despot" who often went out of bounds in "tormenting the officers and their servants, and the old pensioners..." He was invincibly self-assured and a law unto himself, able to reduce his masters

to laughter when he was called up for punishment for his many acts of defiance which were notoriously performed with a great sense of wit. One memorable act of rebellion involved Beddoes heading up a hockey team, a game he had never played in his life. The masters had forbidden hockey to be played in the cloisters where the game had always taken place, and so the students had determined to rebel. To make the point undoubtedly clear, Beddoes created and attired himself in a type of American Indian war dress which included a shield with "Manus haec inimica tyrannis" inscribed on it, and threateningly confronted the enemy. Once again, his superiors could not contain themselves, and as they laughed, Beddoes knew that he had won yet another victory. After Beddoes left Charterhouse and went to Pembroke College in Oxford, Bevan never heard from him until 1824, when his school acquaintance paid him a surprise visit. Except for having become an adult, Bevan didn't recall Beddoes having changed in the slightest. He was just as insolent and provoking in his manner towards authorities at Pembroke as he had been during his school days. Beddoes related one instance where he had deliberately attended a lecture with the leaves of his book uncut. In response to his tutor's disapproval Beddoes disappeared and returned with the most menacing looking butcher's knife and proceded to cut his books. The lecture came to an abrupt end and Beddoes was then banned from the class. For the one or two terms he stayed at Oxford while Bevan was there, Beddoes visited his fellow-student occasionally, but otherwise he avoided all social ties (Donner(B) 54-60, LXVII).

Other letters in a collection of correspondence to, from, and about Beddoes known as The Browning Box also portray him as a very reserved man with an unusual character, but with "fine qualities" (Donner(B) 46-7, LV). Procter praised "the writer [as] a man of great poetical powers" (Donner(B) 47-8, LVI), but he, too, commented on the poet's eccentricities which alienated the many friends he had made in Germany and Switzerland (Donner(B) 65-6, LXXX).

In another letter written to Kelsall, Phillips wrote that Blumenbach, the medical professor at Gottingen, believed that during

his 50 years at the University, there wasn't a student whose talent matched that of Beddoes. As well as bringing attention to himself in the academic arena, Beddoes was infamous in Wurzburg and Berlin, as well as Gottingen, for his active political involvement and democratic beliefs. Beddoes believed he was the instrument of a higher being and was extremely intolerant of other people's opinions, even to the point of violence (Donner(A) 345). The serious nature of Beddoes' political activity speaks for itself in his expulsion from those national territories by the Government authorities (Donner(B) 51-2, LXI).

On the subject of religion, no one will ever know exactly what Beddoes believed. Although this remains a mystery, various remarks made in letters written by a few of Beddoes' associates and close friends suggest that the poet was privately as unorthodox in his beliefs as he was vocal about his political opinions. Regarding the publication of Beddoes' works, as related in a letter from George Wightwick to Phillips, one Mr. Eagles expressed his concern that it was the publication of the author's life that was likely to cause offence rather than the writer's work itself. The concern was that some passages contained in the Life appeared to "indicate [religious] infidelity". Yet Mr. Eagles was convinced that regardless of any "unstable opinions" Beddoes may have had earlier on, "he died a believer" (Donner(B) 66-7, LXXVI). Reasons for this speculation are not given, but the point is that Mr. Eagles' comments reveal a certain radical element in Beddoes' beliefs, at least at some stage of his life. One who was present at Beddoes' death was a German called Huber. T. Moultrie Kelsall, T. F. Kelsall's nephew, went to visit Huber, who hadn't been close to Beddoes, but expressed his regret that he was not able to "'[bring] TLB to a more religious state of mind'" (Donner(B) 69-71, LXXX). Phillips echoes similar sentiments: "Mr. Huber's statement removes unpleasant suspicions of insanity & suicide - for [I] had thought suicide the cause of Capt^{n} B's [Beddoes' brother] mysterious reserve - now [I] see that it was irreligion of T.L.B...." (Donner(B) 71-2, LXXXI).

Beddoes' suicide may appear inconsequential to the modern mind,

but religious beliefs in the nineteenth century still considered taking one's own life a mortal sin. According to Zoë King, Beddoes had deliberately cut himself with a razor. While receiving treatment in hospital, the patient ripped the dressings off his wound and killed himself (Donner(B) 76-7, LXXXIII). This act of terminating his own life in itself would have been regarded as an act of "irreligion".

The man was marked by his society for his eccentricities, defiant behaviour, political involvement, homosexual tendencies, madness, and his grotesque literary style. Critics to date have uttered similar views, although recently a few Beddoes scholars have been more charitable in their outlook on the poet of death, which may be attributed to an increasingly liberal set of world views. Beddoes' best-known critic and devotee, H.W Donner, is convinced that the poet, in spite of his depressions and suicidal attempts, overcame the dilemmas he faced concerning life and death, and emerged victorious. The key to his success, so Donner believes, was due to the cathartic nature of writing, a concept religiously ingrained in every true Romantic artist. Thompson, however, provides evidence that Beddoes became disillusioned with this faith in art: "'man's puny words' and his 'grovelling thoughts' cannot save him from the 'huge, viewless ocean into which we cast/Our passing,' words that 'sink away' while only 'an echo bubbles up upon the blast'" (Thompson 22). No one will ever know exactly what Beddoes believed or even why he took his life, but as valuable as Donner's insights into the life and works of the poet are, I remain wholly unconvinced that Beddoes really was the conqueror Donner portrays him to be. As defiant as his acquaintances had known him to be, Beddoes was undoubtedly a very lonely and disillusioned man, and those who have portrayed such a man in their letters, such as Zoë King, cannot share Donner's exceptionally optimistic view: "[I] think the sufferings of B. in body & mind must have been terrible - and borne unshared with any one & in unbroken silence - to have induced so desperate an act" (Donner(B) 77, LXXXIV). In a previous letter, Zoë King wrote: "I can hardly think that any disappointment would have been the cause - <u>but the heart knoweth its own bitterness</u>..." (Donner(B) 76-7, LXXXIII).

The poet's life-long investigation of death narrowed down a potentially wider repertoire, but many critics agree that what Beddoes did leave his audience is evidence that the extent to which he pursued the subject of death surpassed that of the greatest names in Romanticism and left him master of his arena. Beddoes' studies included Hebrew, which not only enabled him to study some of the Bible in its original language, it also enabled him to study the Jewish mystic texts of the Cabala, a text indispensable to the magic arts, both black and "white". He did not spare any pain in seeking the knowledge bound up in the Ancient Mysteries which are the life-blood of the African and Egyptian religions, and the attention Beddoes paid to the smallest detail of the ancient rituals can be observed throughout Death's Jest-Book. Beddoes' search to make some sense out of the lamentable human condition was a quest that bloodied his hands, his heart, his soul, his life. His dedication, unrelenting intellectual honesty, and sense of humour repelled many, but those unafraid to investigate their worst fears concerning the grave and its impact on life on earth and beyond, will appreciate, as a select few already have, the challenges of the intellect and the heart that shriek from his turbulent pages of poignant desolation and unmitigated despair.

4. IN A NUTSHELL

The story of Death's Jest-Book surrounds two brothers, Wolfram and Isbrand, who disguise themselves as a knight and a jester respectively, and enter the court of Duke Melveric in order to avenge their father's death. Wolfram has a change of heart and decides that forgiveness and friendship with the Duke is better than taking eye for eye, but Isbrand continues to plot his revenge. While in Egypt the Duke is captured by some Arabs and Wolfram sets out to rescue him. Unbeknown to them they are both in love with the same woman, Sibylla. When Wolfram will not relinquish his love for her, the Duke slays him in a jealous rage. Isbrand now vows a double revenge. The Duke begins to long for his dead wife and calls his necromancer slave, Ziba, to conjure up her ghost. In the meantime Isbrand has swapped the Duchess's body with that of his brother. Ziba appears to fail to raise Melveric's wife, in the process arousing the comical magician Mandrake who has been sleeping in a vault, but once the slave has retreated, the Duke makes his own attempt at necromancy. Instead of raising his wife, however, he succeeds in resurrecting Wolfram.

Sibylla, in mourning for her lover, pleads with Wolfram to take her to the Other World to be with him. After some persuasion he concedes and she dies. Meanwhile two other brothers, Athulf and Adalmar, sons of Duke Melveric, who are much the Cain and Abel archetypes that Isbrand and Wolfram are, are in love with a woman called Amala. Although she is in love with the treacherous Athulf, she chooses to be betrothed to his noble brother, but promises to be united with Athulf in the next world, should they meet. Jealous of his brother's more immediate pleasure, Athulf murders Adalmar. All the while Isbrand conspires to usurp the Duke's power he becomes more hatefilled and power-hungry. Realising Isbrand's obsession and increasingly tyrannical behaviour, the courtiers conspire against him. The Duke, wanting to know where both his sons are, calls for them. When Athulf appears alone, Melveric asks after his other son, at which point Wolfram prompts Athulf to confess his wicked deed. Athulf then commits suicide. As a result

of her fiance's death, Amala, too, dies. Isbrand is then stabbed to death and the Duke is escorted alive down to the world of the dead by Wolfram. There are thus seven deaths in the course of the play, making Death, in a sense, the main character, as the title suggests.

5. ALL HAIL, BROTHER OF THE ROSY CROSS

The key that unlocks the idea of Death's Jest-Book being a Rosicrucian quest is the character in the play called Homunculus Mandrake who identifies himself as a brother of the Rosy Cross. The name "Mandrake" means "a Eurasian plant with purplish flowers and a forked root" which allegedly resembled the human form. Because of the plant's association with the dragon (drake), it was said to have had magical powers and a drug was made from the root.[1] The association of magical powers and the making of drugs with Mandrake's name fits his own description of himself very aptly. During the course of a conversation with Kate at the beginning of the play, Kate asks Mandrake whether he intends marrying her or not, to which he replies: "Child, my studies must first be ended. Thou knowest I hunger after wisdom, as the red sea after ghosts; therefore will I travel awhile" (I.i.14-16). The search for wisdom and knowledge lies at the heart of the Rosicrucian manifestos. The importance and purpose of discovering the secrets of the universe can be found in the Fama:

> God ... hath raised men, imbued with great wisdom, who might partly renew and reduce all arts ... to perfection; so that finally man might thereby understand his own nobleness and worth, and why he is called Microcosmus, and how far his knowledge extendeth into Nature (Yates 238).

When Kate inquires as to where he plans to go, Mandrake answers with a rhetorical question: "Whither should a student in the black arts, an adept, a Rosicrucian? Where is our native land?" (i.18-20). He shortly reveals his native land as Egypt, the "...Sphynx land [where] they made the roads with the philosopher's stone" (i.26-7), therefore he will "...languish no more in the ignorance of these climes, but aboard with alembic and crucible, and weigh anchor for Egypt" (i.33-5). His mission is to "bottle eternity" (i.101), a mission that epitomises the Rosicrucian quest.

The first law of the brotherhood was to dedicate their lives to healing the sick. This ultimate vision of curing ailments was the

goal of discovering the antidote to human mortality. Through knowledge of nature, the Rosicrucians believed that they could be reunited with their higher selves, elevating themselves spiritually, which will eventually lead to physical immortality. The Rosicrucian belief that one has a higher self to reunite with is exemplified when Isbrand speaks of the souls at Amala's wedding banquet as ones that have "outlived a lower state of being" (IV.iv.28), and when the Duke sets out to visit his wife's tomb. His hope is for reunification with her and he believes that the union he had with her on earth has an immortal double which is the true identity of themselves. The unification of the lower-self with the higher-self is the result of the purification process which is achieved through the accumulation of knowledge. My first chapter has shown that only certain people whom God had chosen could share in the mystery of immortality. A few men were given wisdom by God in order that they might lead the rest of humanity to fulfilling its purpose and potential. Beddoes does not state whether Mandrake has been divinely endowed with special wisdom or not, but having just criticised his countrymen for their ignorance, Mandrake certainly considers himself to be above the average man, whether divinely appointed or not. According to the manifestos, the fraternity was devoutly Christian (Yates 249), and Mandrake sees himself as no exception. He joins the "christian folk" (I.i.21) who are invited to join Wolfram on his journey to Egypt, and in so doing, identifies himself as one of them. Both Rosencreutz and Mandrake claim to be Christians who practise magic. The subtle difference between the Rosicrucians, as portrayed in the manifestos, and Mandrake in their utilisation of magic is that Mandrake is an open adept of the black arts while the orthodox brothers of the Rosy Cross claim to use only "white" magic: magic that allegedly achieves good and heals the sick. In legitimising magic, however "white", the Rosicrucians jeopardise their reputation of being the devout Bible believers they claim to be (Yates 257). In the Christian context, in which the Rosicrucians categorise themselves, if God is not the source of magic, whatever colour it is, then the source is undoubtedly satanic (1 John,2:4). Satan is known to parade as the angel of light (2 Cor.11:14) and is an artist of making what is forbidden by God, in the Scriptures, look

beneficial to humanity (Gen.3:5,6). The apparent difference between Mandrake's and Rosencreutz's magic remains superficial and disappears completely on closer investigation.

Mandrake associates himself further with the Rosicrucian tradition by relating himself to a key figure in the history of Ancient Wisdom. He declares himself the "...son of the great Paracelsus" (i.33-4), a physician, alchemist and astrologer who was highly esteemed by the writer of the Rosicrucian manifestos for his knowledge and understanding of nature (Yates 241). Considering that Death's Jest-Book is set at the end of the thirteenth century and Paracelsus lived from 1493 to 1541, the reference to the occultist is an interesting time slip. Readers will never know whether this error in timing was deliberate or not, but we can at least be sure that Beddoes intended that Mandrake should be closely associated with the occult tradition to which Paracelsus belonged. One contribution Paracelsus made to the occult sciences, along with Agrippa, was the introduction of the Cabala and the Hermetic books into the Greek tradition. The indirect allusion to the Cabala (through Paracelsus), written in the sixth century A.D. and no doubt very familiar to Mandrake as a magician, is highly relevant because this book of Jewish mysticism was an integral part of Rosicrucian philosophy (Yates 222). A key figure linked with the occult sciences in Egyptian history, referred to further on in Death's Jest-Book, who fits more appropriately into the time-setting of the play is Pythagoras who lived in the sixth century B.C. Readers may wonder at Mandrake calling himself a Rosicrucian at all considering that the legendary founder, Christian Rosencreutz, was allegedly born in 1378. Again, this may be another error in timing on Beddoes' part, but Mandrake's familiarity with the roots of Rosicrucianism, which will continue to be demonstrated in this chapter, undoubtedly characterises him as a brother of the Rosy Cross even if he is rather premature for the official name. Furthermore, in identifying Egypt as the source of wisdom, Mandrake is referring to Ancient Wisdom on which Rosicrucianism is based.

Central to Ancient Wisdom in Egypt is the god Osiris. In order

to appreciate the integral part this god plays in ancient Egyptian religion, we need a brief outline of the story of Osiris at this point.

It is traditionally believed that Osiris was an African king of divine origin who ruled on earth in Egypt (Budge I:384). According to Budge, the god-man taught his subjects to abandon their barbarous customs, such as cannibalism, and to develop the skill of agriculture. Laws were instituted and the nation was exhorted to worship and serve the gods of the land. Osiris journeyed round the world imparting his wisdom to the rest of the peoples of the earth. In Osiris' absence Isis, his sister-wife, looked after the affairs of the kingdom with all diligence and wisdom. Osiris' brother, Typhon, made his sister-in-law's responsibility difficult by conspiring against her in order to enforce change. On his brother's return, Typhon determined to exterminate him, usurp the throne, and take Isis, with whom he was passionately in love, to be his wife. His first attempt at ridding himself of Osiris was at a banquet where Osiris was manipulated by Typhon and his accomplices into lying down in a chest which had been made especially to Osiris' measurements. Once Osiris was inside the box, the lid was rapidly nailed shut and lead was poured over it. The box was then hurled into the Nile. Unbeknown to Typhon, his brother's mourning widow went out in search of her husband and eventually found the box containing the dead body. On discovering that Isis had returned with Osiris' coffin, Typhon chopped the box up into fourteen pieces and discarded them throughout the country. Isis found all the parts of her husband's body except one. For each part she found, Isis put up a monument in his memory so that he would be worshipped throughout the land. The irretrievable phallus had been thrown in the Nile and eaten by fish, but Isis made a replica which was used in festivals celebrated in Osiris' honour thereafter (Budge I:2-7). On entering the Other World, Osiris took his place among the gods as god and judge of the dead (Budge I:384).

Mandrake's reference to "our native land" at the least gives him an affiliation with a worldwide brotherhood of scientific magi

even if not with any specific secret society. A more immediate associate of Mandrake's is Isbrand who openly acknowledges the Rosicrucian as a brother of the same order as himself. Both are court jesters, a profession Mandrake has decided to abandon, who consider themselves to be the initiated élite, separate from the rest of the common court. The order Isbrand refers to is the "order of the bell" which swears allegiance to Momus (i.41-2), the god of mockery and censure.[2] This reference to the bell is not void of magical associations, no matter how small, which are rooted in ancient Egyptian religion. In ancient Africa, bells often featured as part of the ornamentaion of the sacred bull. One of the various forms in which Osiris was worshipped was the bull. The purpose of the sacred bull was to ensure the fertility and prosperity of the herds (Budge I:403). Another use for bells in Egyptian culture was in the adornment of the witchdoctor in the ceremony of exposing the witch when a man of social standing in the community had died mysteriously. Here bells are associated with the witch-doctor in a situation where his magical powers are manifest to their fullest (Budge II:194). The association of bells with Osiris and magic provides another link between the brotherhood of Mandrake and Isbrand, and the foundations of Rosicruciansim. In Death's Jest-Book bells are also associated with funerals and death. On renouncing his role as court jester, Mandrake's words carry with them the tone of death and mourning: "Toll the bell; for Jack Pudding is no more!" (I.i.10-11). Later when Wolfram is about to drink the poisoned cup prepared by Duke Melveric, Ziba strikes the cup from Wolfram's hand onto the floor and says: "Ha! it rings well and lies not. 'Tis right metal/For funeral bells" (iii.61-2). Bells are also a significant feature of Rosencreutz's tomb. In the vault were some chests, and in one of them, among other things, were some little bells. The purpose of these treasures contained inside the vault was that they should be the means of restoring the brotherhood if, in a few hundred years' time, it should become lost (Yates 247).

As Mandrake boards the ship for Egypt he is asked to identify himself. Isbrand steps in on the magician's behalf and ceremoniously announces Mandrake as "a servant of the rosy cross, a correspondent

with the stars; the dead are his friends, and the secrets of the moon his knowledge. He will brew you a gallon of gold out of a shilling," and his wisdom mightily surpasses that of Solomon (I.i.87-9,93-4). These characteristics fit in perfectly with the Ancient Wisdom of the Egyptians. Stars had different categories, and while some were revered as divine spirits to whom the souls of the blessed paid homage (Budge II:250), others were believed to be the transfigured dead who had found "...immortality and peace by becoming part of one of the perennial cyclic rhythms of nature" (Frankfort 107). Osiris, in one of his phases, was a star-spirit and was worhipped as such by his people. Even the Fama places importance on the stars, and acknowledges their power and government (Yates 247).

The concept of being friends with the dead was a natural part of the life of an ancient Egyptian. It was a frequent custom to communicate with their dead and interact with them socially. Regular offerings were made to departed spirits in the hope that they would continue to deal favourably with the living and provide them with protection. Those who presented offerings believed that they were preparing themselves for their next life since they would reap the rewards of their gifts in the Other World (Budge I:262-3). Offerings to the dead allegedly brought their spirits back to earth so that they could commune with the living and take part in human affairs (Budge I:264). The Egyptians not only made offerings to their ancestral spirits, but also joined the spirits of the departed for celebrations. These celebrations included a shared meal supposedly attended by the deceased (Frankfort 93). By eating and drinking with them, the living believed that human nature was elevated and that their spirits were made divine. This kind of communion with the dead closed the psychological gap between life and death by familiarising the living with the Other World (Budge I:264). Early in the Dynastic Period Osiris became Egypt's "ancestor-god" which meant that invoking ancestral spirits became more significant (Budge I:290).

The belief that knowledge was obtainable from the secrets of the moon lies at the heart of Ancient Wisdom. The fact that the moon

is Mandrake's source of knowledge is extremely significant because the moon is identified with Osiris and his female counterpart, Isis, who was worshipped as "'She of many names'" (Budge II:276). Among these names were: "'The Great One who is from the beginning ... The greatest of the gods and goddesses ... Bestower of life ... Creatress of green things ... Mistress of spells'" (Budge II:277). Isis was the goddess of the crops, the harvest, and of all fertility (Budge II:278). Osiris was said to be the power of the moon, the driving force behind all Egypt's fertility, evidence for which can be found in the Book of Making the Spirit of Osiris where the god is declared as the

> '...great source (?) of things which bloom, sap of crops and herbs, Lord of millions of years, sustainer of wild animals, lord of cattle; the support of whatsoever is is in thee, what is in earth is thine, what is in the heavens is thine, what is in the waters is thine' (Budge I:385).

In view of the power that is attributed to Osiris, it is inevitable that a Rosicrucian sage should petition the divinity to impart his secrets to the seeker of wisdom.

Mandrake's alleged ability to transform a shilling into a gallon of gold is another distinct trait of the Rosicrucian. Christian Rosencreutz himself was well-known for his gift of transmuting metals (Yates 242). Three more traits of an Egyptian magician attributed to Mandrake as a witch (the word used in I.iv.5) are conjuring, concocting love potions, and the ability to make himself invisible (iv.4-8)(Budge II:181). The art of invisibility, according to Baluba magicians, lies in the following procedure as related by Budge: "The magician fills the body of the large Goliath beetle, or a small horn, with small human knuckle-bones, and scrapings of red camwood. He puts this in his mouth and becomes invisible" (Budge II:190). A very similar recipe is used by Mandrake (iv.1-3). Once invisible, the magician is said to "indulge in horrible 'ghoulish practices or in disgusting immoralities'" (Budge II:189-90). Mandrake confirms this by saying that the effects of the ointment are "dangerous and wicked" (iv.36).

In spreading the Rosicrucian message it was necessary to be able to communicate in the language of various nationalities. What would perhaps seem a formidable task to most was possible for the Rosicrucians who were believed to have had the gift of languages (Roberts 10). Both the Fama and the Confessio provide evidence that such a gift is important as a means of imparting the Rosicrucian message to all nations so that every man, no matter how simple, may have the chance to share the joy that belongs to the enlightened ones of the brotherhood (Yates 254). This gift of languages is found in Ziba, an African slave with supernatural powers. The Duke bought him in Egypt

> Under the shadow of a pyramid,
> . . . . . .
> He hath skill in language;
> And knowledge is in him root, flower, and fruit,
> A palm with winged imagination in it,
> Whose roots stretch even underneath the grave,
> And on them hangs a lamp of magic science
> In his soul's deepest mine, where folded thoughts
> Lie sleeping on the tombs of magi dead... (III.i.41-8).

From this account of Ziba, one can identify a number of Rosicrucian traits besides the gift of languages. The fact that he was found in the shadow of the pyramid places him within the whole context of Ancient Wisdom. The pyramid was the burial place for Egyptian royalty. Their bodies were mummified in order that they might be preserved for the coming resurrection. Egyptian kings were considered nothing less than gods (Osiris being a prime example), and their souls were believed to have found freedom by transmigrating up the pyramid and onward to heaven. The aim of every Egyptian was to be able to achieve immortality like their gods. This search for immortality was central to Rosicrucianism. Allusions to the Egyptian pyramids and the power contained within can be found in the Fama in the description of Rosencreutz's tomb. The vault had seven sides. On the ceiling, the seven sides were divided into triangles, as was the floor of the tomb. All the triangles on the ceiling pointed towards the centre where a light illuminated the tomb. Rosencreutz intended that his tomb should resemble the universe. The light in the middle of the upper part of the ceiling represented the sun (Yates 246). The sun as centre

is highly significant since Osiris was also worshipped in the form of the sun (Budge I:15). One of the things a soul could become when it transmigrated was a god of light. The Egyptians believed that when a soul became a Light-god, it was elevated to the status of the sun or the moon (Budge II:139), which were the source and power of all life.

The burning lamps which where contained within the vault can be seen as a further extension of the sun (Yates 247). Not only do they emit light for the bodily eye, but enlighten the eyes of the mind through knowledge. Another name for the sun was the Eye of Rā, because it was said to look down from the sky on all creation. One of the hieroglyphics for Osiris' name is the eye, because he looks down upon everything from his throne (Budge I:15). Considering Osiris was believed to be the power of life and fertility on earth, and was worshipped as a nature god, the spiritual connection between the bright light at the centre of Rosencreutz's tomb representing the sun and the Egyptian worship of the luminary becomes critical. The Rosicrucians sought for enlightenment through nature which they hoped would enable them to eventually become immortal.

Ziba is the only one in the play attributed with such a deep knowledge of nature. It is no coincidence that Beddoes uses nature imagery to convey the extent of the African's knowledge. Nature's secrets are discovered through magic science, which is what the Rosicrucians believed, and the lamp of such knowledge lies deep within Ziba's soul. In the same way that the burning lamps in Rosencreutz's tomb await to enlighten the world, Ziba's lamp of knowledge is a light for those who wish to discover nature's secrets.

Without vision, the Rosicrucian would be left powerless to elevate his spirituality beyond himself and to discover why he is called Microcosmus, the epitome of the universe. In my first chapter, we found that Novalis believed that in order for man to exalt himself he had to romanticise the world to discover its original meaning. Romanticising the world involved exercising the imagination. Without the imagination, Rosencreutz would never have

captured the vision of man being reunified with the Divine. A number of characters in the play demonstrate their imaginations at work, but Ziba is the one who is attributed with a "winged imagination": an indispensable gift to the Rosicrucian sage. Ziba's powerful imagination is demonstrated when he is asked whether he can see a rescue ship approaching or not, to which he replies:

> ...A dark speck sat on the sky's edge: as watching
> Upon the heaven-girt border of my mind
> The first faint thought of a great deed arise,
> With force and fascination I drew on
> The wished sight, and my hope seemed to stamp
> Its shape upon it (I.ii.51-56).

Ziba's wisdom reaches back into the long history of practising magicians. His imagination goes beyond the grave, implying that Ziba knows the secrets of life and death, secrets central to discovering the elixir of life or the philosopher's stone, the sole means to immortality.

Another Rosicrucian mark found in the African slave is his awareness of a world soul and its relationship to the soul of man. The manifestos make it quite clear that harmony with nature is a crucial key to gaining knowledge of God. It is Ziba's awareness of the world's soul that plays such an important part in the creative processes of his imagination: "And as my soul sighed unto the world's soul,/Far in the north a wind blackened the waters,/And after that creating breath was still,/A dark speck sat on the sky's edge..." (ii.48-50).

The idea that nature has wisdom to impart to humanity is confirmed by the Rosicrucian in the play himself. On boarding the ship bound for Egypt, Mandrake voices a lament over the world: "O world, world! The gods and fairies left/Thee, for thou wert too wise..." (I.i.50-1). Mandrake hopes to share in the wisdom of the world in the far land of Egypt. Sibylla is another character who appreciates the different facets of nature and the relationship that exists between nature and humanity. At one point Sibylla reflects on the divine qualities of nature as a source from which human beings could learn and on which they could model their

behaviour. She laments the cruelty of mankind, and finds communion with the birds, and friendship among the flowers:

> I wish not
> To leave this shady quiet way of life.
> Why should we seek cruel mankind again?
> Nature is kinder far: and every thing
> That lives around us, with its pious silence,
> Gives me delight: the insects, and the birds
> That come unto our table, seeking food,
> The flowers, upon whose petals Night tells down
> Her tremulous dews, these are my dearest playmates
> (I.ii.88-95).

Standing in opposition to nature's "pious" religion are the Pope and Mahomet who are particularly condemned by the Confessio (Yates 251). This condemnation of the latter prophet is evident within Beddoes' play when the Duke tells Ziba that his sword would have to be washed of Moslem blood (ii.27) and shortly after where he refers to Moslems as savages (ii.60). The religious distinction the Duke makes between his people as Christians and the Arab race is strong and marks yet another Rosicrucian characteristic within the play.

As well as priding themselves on their religion, the Rosicrucians, unlike the "savage" Moslems, profess to do nothing but cure the sick (Yates 243). The one character in Death's Jest-Book who stands out as a saviour figure is Wolfram, at least the Wolfram before his death and resurrection. The first we hear of Wolfram is through Mandrake who relates his mission to traverse the ocean to rescue Duke Melveric from the Arabs (I.i.21-5). On Wolfram's arrival in Egypt, the Duke hails his comrade with words that acknowledge him as a healer of the sick and giver of life: "Wolfram, thou comest to us like a god,/Giving life where thou touchest with thy hand" (ii.57-8). Even when the Duke plotted against Wolfram's life with the intention of poisoning him, Wolfram still had enough compassion in his heart to save his once bosom friend from the hand of the Arabs for the second time (iv.51).

The mission of healing, along with every other aspect of Rosicrucianism discussed so far, contributes to the overall

Rosicrucian vision of liberty from the mortal condition.

6. THE SILVER-PLATED EGG

Scorning sacrificial love and virtue, Athulf believes that perpetual youth is the answer to the mortal condition: "What is more worthy/Than the delight of youth, being so rare,/Precious, short lived, and irrecoverable?" (II.iii.206-8). While Athulf's brother, Adalmar, concerns himself with life, pride, security, holy rights of freedom, virtue, and dreams of being lifted up in devotion (iii.213-14), Athulf and the Duke are taken up with present pleasure and consider virtue a "phantom and a corpse" (iii.217). As far as the Duke is concerned "Piety's dead..."(iii.358) and the universe is in a state of rebellion.

Throughout the Bible, God had to deal with human rebellion, treason, and parricidal daggers. The Israelites' rebellion is a perfect illustration of the way the human race continually attempts to dethrone the Christian God in order to replace him with other objects of devotion. The welcome the Duke receives on his homecoming is similar to the coming of Christ who "came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:11). In Acts Peter said to those who chose Barabas over Jesus: "...ye denied the Holy One and the Just ... And killed the Prince [Author] of life..." (3:14-15a). Humans became Christ's death sentence. As far as Christ was concerned, rejection of the Son equated with rejection of the Father: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me" (John 13:20). In crucifying Christ humanity attempted to murder the "heart that loved and nourished" in a way similar to that in which the Duke's sons conspired against their father (II.iii.352-7). (The parallels I am drawing between the Duke and God/Christ are not concerned with character, but serve to illustrate the rebellion of the child against the parent.) Although the Bible does not teach that Piety's dead, it does say that the world is under the rule of the Prince of the Air (Eph.2:2, cf.John 14:30) which the Duke echoes in the words: "Be merry, ye rich fiends! Piety's dead,/And left the world a legacy to you" (iii.358-9).

The influence of the Prince of the Air on the fall of man also affects nature: "For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now" (Rom. 8:22). The same concept is portrayed in Death's Jest-Book: "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..." (II.iii.364-7). This epitomises the human condition as well as that of the rest of creation. At this point Beddoes' voice of dissatisfaction with humanity and corruption cries its loudest and bitterest: "I wish that thou woulds't die, or could'st be slain,/Hell-hearted bastard of the sun" (iii.368-9). The significance of the heart being hellish rather than the mind or the soul echoes the words of Jeremiah: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (17:9). Human wickedness permeates nature to the core: "The day's come/When scarce a lover, for his maiden's hair,/Can pluck a stalk whose rose draws not its hue/Out of a hate-killed heart" (iii.361-4).

Torwald calls the plot against the Duke "Dragon Rebellion" (iii.336), which is shortly echoed by Isbrand (iv.1). Considering how well acquainted Beddoes was with the Bible, the term "Dragon Rebellion" clearly rings with apocalyptic overtones. Revelation refers to the uprising of the Dragon a number of times: "And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years..." (20:2). According to Scripture, rebellion to God "is as the sin of witchcraft..." (1Sam.15:23a). The seriousness of the human condition portrayed in the Duke's soliloquy is intensified when "hate-killed heart" is preceded by "Dragon Rebellion", due to the biblical symbolism and the inevitable judgement that finally awaits the Devil and his adepts.

The Rosicrucians vowed silence for 100 years. Since they claimed to observe the Bible religiously, one might like to question the ethics of such secrecy since Christ never taught anything in secret. The reason for secrecy soon becomes obvious when one realises that it is necessary for any hope of success in rebellion. The plot against the Duke which Isbrand describes as a dragon egg is similar

to Satan's plot against God before Christ's return and Satan's reign, as prophesied in the New Testament, in that both plots are developed behind the walls of secrecy. The world is like a dragon egg, incubating. Though rebellion develops, it stays hidden until it has fully grown. The shell of restraint hides the rebellion that lies in the heart of those who seek to rebel against the Hebrew God. Rosicrucianism looks like a smooth shell from the outside with its teachings of healing and spiritual elevation, but the underlying principles, such as the use of magic and self-elevation, stand in direct opposition to the Bible which the Rosicrucians claim to follow to the letter. These false teachings of the brotherhood are the "horny jaws scraping away" (II.iv.4) the Christian mask they use to hide themselves with.

Isbrand calls conspirators to meet in the ruinous churchyard by moonrise. We have previously considered the significance of the moon in Ancient Wisdom and here the moon's importance is demonstrated by Isbrand making it a central part of the meeting. The moon also reflects secrecy - the secrecy that is imperative to a rebellious plot. The only difference between Isbrand and the writer of the Rosicrucian manifestos is that Isbrand makes no pretence about his rebellion. The manifestos with their noble claims are like the shell and Isbrand is a demonstration of what lurks within: he is an expression of the manifestos put into practice. Any joy or satisfaction Isbrand claims to have is neither joy nor satisfaction at all, because of the destructive effect his rebellion has on him: "Ha!/Never since Hell laughed at the church, blood-drunken/From rack and wheel, has there been joy so mad/As that which stings my marrow now" (iv.15-18). In essence Isbrand's laugh is satanic and parallels Satan's laugh when he achieved Christ's death on the cross - the worst form of torture (rack and wheel) - and caused him to shed his blood. It is also a satanic delight of seeing the Church literally put on the torture rack and wheel. Isbrand's mad joy stings his marrow, and leads to his eventual destruction.

Siegfried paints a picture for Isbrand of his future coronation, and the crown which will be Isbrand's, with its source in the sun.

In Rosencreutz's alleged tomb the sun was the source and centre, the light and giver of knowledge, the source of spiritual elevation. The sun, equated with life in Ancient Wisdom, links the father of Rosicrucianism with Isbrand and is given prime importance. The sun in Rosicrucianism is elevated, but the poisonous effect of seeking elevation or a crown from nature/sun manifests itself in Isbrand's "fermenting brain" (iv.21). The Rosicrucians made a lot of claims to virtue, but claims remain empty until put into action: the Bible states that people will be known by their fruit and that a bad tree cannot bear good fruit and vice versa (Luke 6:43). The fruit of Rosicrucianism is rebellion which is seen in Isbrand who openly (at least to Siegfried) reveals that his heart is a snake - a snake clearly associated with Hell itself. He drinks poison and states that the snake in his heart is fattened on bitter hate and that his very life is one of hatred towards the Duke (iv.28-30). The irony is that hate destroys and does not encourage growth.

In Genesis, when Eve ate the apple, she discovered that the serpent deceived her - causing her to fall beneath her full potential as a human being. Isbrand, in his efforts to be a god, becomes less than human and loses all sympathy with the rest of the human race. The Rosicrucians, according to the manifestos, would condemn Isbrand for his selfish motives in his search for immortality, convinced that the fiend he becomes and the consequences that follow are his deserved lot. What the Rosicrucians fail to realise is that there are no pure motives for seeking immortality on their own efforts no matter how much they use the name of God, Jesus, Trinity, or Christianity to legitimise their mission. According to the Hebrew conception of God, God does not make distinctions between people who use magic to kill their mother with and people who endeavour to use magic to cure the world's ills.

The Bible teaches God is love. The Rosicrucians' inadvertent rebellion against God means that they, like Isbrand, live a life of hate. Jesus said that there is no middle ground with God: "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad" (Matt.12:30). The Rosicrucian manifestos

emphasise knowledge and healing, but nothing of love. Jesus himself said that there will be some who will come to him and say they performed many good works and cast out demons in his name and he will say to them: "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt.7:22-3).

The Rosicrucians claimed to be Christian, but God, as portrayed by the Hebrews, is a jealous God (Ex.20:5), a God who will not tolerate false gods such as knowledge or nature. Jesus did not say I am a way, but "the way" (John 14:6, my emphasis). Humanity can certainly learn from nature, eg. the industrious ant (Prov.6:6), and see the majesty of God in his creation (Rom.1:20), but the God of the Hebrew Scriptures condemns those who look for guidance or salvation in nature rather than himself: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth..." (Ex.20:3,4).

Ziba claims to have the powers of raising the dead: "But, sure as men have died, strong necromancy/Hath set the clock of time and nature back..." (III.iii.263-4). The Duke threatens to kill Ziba if he is lying, but Ziba replies: "Then thou murder'st truth" (iii.283). As we have previously discovered, Ziba has a number of Rosicrucian characteristics, so when he claims not only to have the truth, but to be truth, the message that emerges is that the Rosicrucians, too, claim to be the truth. Considering that Christ referred to himself as "the truth" (John 14:6), the Rosicrucians make a blasphemous claim indeed. The Rosicrucians and Ziba claim the knowledge of life and death and the power to reverse death: nothing less than divine knowledge.

According to Scripture, hatred towards God caused the fall of Adam and Eve and has stained the rest of humanity since. It is God's judgement that the Rosicrucians, unwittingly, have been rebelling against in their search for paradise lost. In searching for spiritual elevation and immortality, as Roberts points out, the brothers of the Rosy Cross endeavour to reverse the effects of

the Fall (Roberts 10). But instead of desiring to be humble creatures in paradise, the Rosicrucians want, like Eve, to be gods themselves, to usurp the place of the Christian God. Far from restoring the original relationship between God and humanity, they inadvertently seek their own destruction, which is clearly demonstrated by the end of the play.

The theme of brotherhood appears time and again throughout Death's Jest-Book and is integrally related with secrecy and rebellion. Wolfram and the Duke are the most self-evident example of brotherhood. They swore secrecy and wrote a pact in their own blood, promising that whoever died first would return and visit the one still alive. We don't know whether the Rosicrucians made blood oaths or not, but they did make a pact and swore to secrecy for at least the first hundred years. However, it is known that Masonry, which Yates believes to be a descendant of Rosicruciansm, swears to secrecy by oaths of blood even to this day (Shaw/McKenney 138-9). Jesus said that the oath of the one who doesn't let their yes be yes and their no be no, but swears by their blood, or anything else, is evil (Matt. 5:34-7). As we have seen in the first chapter, one critic believed that the Rosicrucians did write an oath in blood. It is an interesting speculation and useful in this discussion because ultimately we have no proof of what went on among the Rosicrucians, either good or bad, but the fact that the Bible condemns a lot of what the Rosicrucians justified as Christian leads us to conclude that the brotherhood was not what it claimed to be.

Another bond of brotherhood that unfolds during the course of the play, a bond more sinister in nature than the previous one, is that between Isbrand and Athulf. Isbrand is portrayed by Athulf as a type of magician or, in modern terms, a channeller, through whom a person can communicate with the dead. The seductive nature of darkness is seen in the juxtaposition of the questions Athulf asks Isbrand. He first asks Isbrand if the power within him leads to "bliss", but then asks him if it leads to a "dark cavern" (II.iv.132-5). Isbrand is quick to recognise that what Athulf's talking about has its origin in Ancient Wisdom: "You put questions

to me/In an Egyptian or old magic tongue,/Which I can ill interpret" (iv.137-8). Isbrand knows exactly what Athulf's talking about, but like a true brother of a secret society he pretends to know nothing until it is clear that the enquirer is of the same fold as himself. This is exactly what happens in Masonry, according to previous adepts. Athulf soon makes it clear how sinful he is willing to be in order to gain Isbrand's help (iv.146-9). This may be compared to giving the secret handshake or word before sharing the secrets of the brotherhood. Once Isbrand is sure that Athulf is in earnest, he tells Athulf plainly what he must do about his lost love. Since Athulf has just sold his soul to the Devil to be a saint in Hell and we already know where Isbrand's allegiance lies, these two are now part of the same brotherhood which is clearly secret and based on occultic practices. This brotherhood is no different to the Rosicrucian brotherhood who practise magic under the facade of Christianity: the heart of both brotherhoods is one of dragon rebellion. In keeping with Ancient Wisdom, both Athulf and Isbrand are interested in raising the devil himself. "Bold deeds and thoughts,/What men call crimes, are his love litany..." (iv.156-7). The Fama states that the aim of man is to become the microcosmos through elevating himself to divinity! This is a bold thought and deed indeed, and is certainly considered a crime as far as the Hebrew conception of God is concerned - it was for such a crime that Lucifer was expelled from heaven, and that the relationship between Adam and Eve and God was broken.

Isbrand recognises the broken relationship between humanity and the divine: "Methinks that earth and heaven are grown bad neighbours,/And have blocked up the common door between them./Five hundred years ago had we sat here/So late and lonely, many a jolly ghost/Would have joined company" (III.iii.389-94). The whole mission of the Rosicrucians is to unlock the door that joins heaven and earth. By unlocking the door, they can enable the dead to revisit the living and enlighten them into the secrets which death holds. Because death is an inseparable part of nature, unmasking death is the same as discovering the secrets of nature and immortality.

Isbrand sings a song called "Squats on a Toads-stool", and in doing

so he rejects all respectable traditional ballads: "We nightingales sing boldly from our hearts:/So listen to us" (iii.326-7). The concept of defiance and boldheartedness epitomises Isbrand and the Rosicrucian's heart of rebellion. The song is sung by an aborted foetus, who is searching for a new identity. Isbrand's hellish nature is confirmed in his song where he says "Serpent Lucifer, how do you do?/Of your worms and snakes I'd be one or two..." (iii.353-4). Since snakes are directly related to "Serpent Lucifer", the snake Isbrand previously referred as being his heart is now seen in its most blackened state. The rhetorical question "What shall I be?" (iii.330) implies that the voice has control of its destiny and can choose what form it will take. Some critics have viewed Isbrand's song as being about evolution or reincarnation. Reincarnation is an evolutionary process over which a person has control: what a person is reincarnated as totally depends on how good they have been in their last life. Doing many good works ensures elevation to a higher form in the next life.

The closest resemblance to reincarnation in Death's Jest-Book is Fate and the wheel of fortune. Fate uses Isbrand to shape men's lives. "Isbrand is the handle of the chisels/Which Fate, the turner of men's lives, doth use/Upon the wheeling world" (II.iv.97-99). The wheel is also a symbol of reincarnation. The whole idea is to get off the wheel and reunite with the divine principle by elevating one's spirituality in this life or in successive lives. The Rosicrucians believe in self-elevation, but do not state how many lives it will take to achieve it. Reincarnation in itself is a form of rebellion against death and judgement. Its purpose, spiritual evolution, is central to Rosicrucianism and Death's Jest-Book and is rooted in the Ancient Wisdom of which spiritual evolution is a key concept (Budge II:141,145).

Siegfried describes the Other World as having once been cold and underpopulated which caused the dead to revisit the land of the living, but now, he says, "great cities are transplanted thither" (III.iii.399). Among these "great cities", Siegfried names Babylon (iii.400). Considering that Babylon is a city of the Other World - the Ancient Egyptians' and Rosicrucians' source of wisdom and

enlightenment - it is a wonder that any adept could hope for anything good at all. The city of Babylon was condemned in Scripture by God for all her witchcraft and false gods: "And he [the angel] cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit..." (Rev.18:2). The wine imagery so prevalent throughout Death's Jest-Book is strongly associated with Babylon, who holds

> ...a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus... (Rev.17:4-6).

The image of Babylon being drunk on the blood of the saints echoes Isbrand when he spoke of Hell laughing at the Church blood drunk earlier on. Babylon epitomises Ancient Wisdom: "MYSTERY" is her name, and all her abominations are the very characteristics of Ancient Egyptian magicians, witchdoctors and all Ancient Wisdom adepts. Debauchery marked all ancient rulers who were worshipped as gods. Babylon's power was great, but in Scripture her condemnation is sure. No nation escaped her influence: "...by thy sorceries were all nations deceived" (Rev. 18:23e). Babylon's greatest crime was her bold claim to be God. According to Isaiah God's judgement on Babylon is as follows:

> For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness: thou hast said, None seeth me. Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee; and thou hast said in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me [cf.Ex.3:14]. Therefore shall evil come upon thee; thou shalt not know from whence it riseth: and mischief shall fall upon thee; thou shalt not be able to put it off: and desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, which thou shalt not know. Stand now with thine enchantments, and with the multitude of thy sorceries, wherein thou hast laboured from thy youth; if so be thou shalt be able to profit, if so be thou mayest prevail. Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels. Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee. Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame:

> there shall not be a coal to warm at, nor fire to sit before it (Isaiah 47:10-14).

Ancient Wisdom deceives the heart, causing people worldwide to believe they can achieve spiritual elevation and godhead by their own power. Siegfried hails the great cities, but in hailing Babylon as a great city in the other world and saying that "The dead are most and merriest..." (III.iii.402), he too is deceived because of the judgement over Babylon. Far from such wisdom bringing spiritual enlightenment and immortality, it brings spiritual and physical death, which is exactly what the God of the Scriptures said would happen to Adam and Eve if they ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen.2:17).

The significance of wine in Death's Jest-Book as a source of debauchery and mockery deepens with the connection between one of the most important gods of Ancient Egyptian religion, Osiris, and Bacchus, also known as Dionysus, the god of wine. According to Diodorus, an historian who was born during the later years of the first century B.C. at Agyrium in Sicily, there were some who believed that Zeus and Hera became the next rulers of Egypt after Hephaistos. Born to them were the gods Osiris, Isis, Typhon, Apollo, and Aphrodite. Based on this account, Osiris is identified with Bacchus (Budge I:9). Osiris was the great god of agriculture (Budge I:19), and it was in a town called Nysa, in Arabia Felix, that Osiris first discovered the use of the vine. "He was the first to drink wine, and he taught men to plant the vine, and how to make and preserve wine" (Budge I:10). In the Papyrus of Nebseni, one of the oldest papyri of the Book of the Dead, written about 1550 B.C., there is a picture of Osiris which decorates the beginning. What is left of the figure shows Osiris on his throne. The most important feature of the picture to this discussion is the numerous bunches of grapes which hang from the roof of the canopy that covers Osiris. Budge views this as evidence in favour of Diodorus' account of Osiris' association with the vine (Budge I:39). There are further connections between Osiris and the vine in the Papyrus of Nekht. Osiris is seated on his throne with the mountain of Ámenti behind him. Two arms extend from the top of the mountain to receive the solar disk. A lake is situated

between Osiris, his wife, and the deceased, and in the corner there is a vine, with its abundant growth of leaves and clusters of grapes directed at the face of the god. In the papyrus of Lady Ànhai, Lady Ànhai stands in Osiris' presence with vine branches about her (Budge I:45), which is yet further evidence that Osiris was revered as the god of wine.

In A Smaller Classical Dictionary, the story of Dionysus has a remarkable resemblance to Osiris' story. After Dionysus was born, he was brought up by some nymphs on Mt. Nysa. When he reached adulthood, Hera caused him to go mad. In his madness he wandered the earth, first to Egypt then Syria, and finally Asia. During his travels in the countries of Asia, Dionysus taught the people how to cultivate the vine, and introduced them to civilization, which is just what Osiris did. Another important connection between Osiris and Dionysus is that both were revered for being lawgivers, upholders of justice, and lovers of peace.

So far, Osiris has been portrayed as a good god and a sustainer of life, but it is not long before his identification with Dionysus reveals him to be the exact opposite. When Dionysus returned to Thebes he forced the women to leave their homes and celebrate Bacchic festivals on Mt. Cithaeron.[2] The king of Thebes at the time, Pentheus, tried to prevent the worship of the god, who then punished him by driving him mad and destroying the king's palace. Pentheus' mother and her sisters, Ino and Autonoë, were wildly influenced by their Bacchic worship and tore Pentheus to pieces in their madness, mistaking him for a wild beast.[2] In Argos, the people refused to worship him at first, but after punishing the women severely, he was finally acknowledged as a god.

"Dionysus may be taken as the representative of the productive and intoxicating power of nature". "The expression of the countenance is languid and his attitude is easy, like that of a man who is absorbed in sweet thoughts, or slightly intoxicated." Another significant feature of Dionysus is his youth and beauty[2] which embody the Rosicrucian vision of godlike immortality.

Osiris was worshipped in a place that shared its name with the Babylon of the Bible (Budge II:58). The chapter in Budge's book called "The Book of Making The Spirit of Osiris, or the Spirit Burial" quotes the reverential phrase: "The city of Ker-āha is full of joy at the sight of thee." A footnote indicates that Kher-āha was sometimes known as the Babylon of Egypt. Although Kher-āha is not the same Babylon of the Bible geographically, there are certainly ideological connections.

Isbrand is constantly preoccupied with wine which he believes is the source of man's elevation: "A man of meat and water's a thin beast,/But he who sails upon such waves as these/Begins to be a fellow. The old gods/Were only men and wine" (III.iii.382-5). This revelation lowers rather than elevates the status of divinity, for "Wine <u>is</u> a mocker, strong drink <u>is</u> raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise" (Prov.20:1). Neither is Isbrand's attitude towards women any better than Dionysus' which is evident in lust for Sibylla. Isbrand has no consideration for her as a human being, but treats her as an object which can be made his own simply by a decision of his will. The association of sensual indulgence, debauchery and drunkenness with Isbrand, Babylon and the ancient gods demonstrates the kind of behaviour that results from believing in one's own infallibility. Their cup mocks the cup which Christ drank on behalf of the human race. Christ's cup is mocked because those such as Isbrand, Babylon and the Rosicrucians believe that they can do better through their own efforts than through a restored relationship with God. By unlocking the secrets of immortality they believe that they can elevate themselves to godhead.

7. TO BE A GOD

The arrogance of the Rosicrucian claim that man is the microcosmos is exhibited in the equally arrogant claims Isbrand makes. Isbrand boasts that he intimately knows the heart of each citizen whom he has called to the meeting. His boast of his knowledge of the human heart is astounding: "'Neath Grüssau's tiles sleep none whose deepest bosom/My fathom hath not measured; none, whose thoughts I have not made a map of" (III.iii.82-4) ... "All of each heart I know" (iii.93). The Duke's reply is nothing less than a rebuke: "O perilous boast" (iii.93). When one takes into account that the play is set at a time when practically everyone revered the Christian God, it is not surprising that the Duke thinks Isbrand's boast perilous since it is outright blasphemy. Jeremiah 17:9-10 says: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins..." In Psalm 139 David begins by saying: "O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me" (vs.1). He then goes into great detail about how God knows every intricate thing about him and ends again by acknowledging God as the searcher of his heart, the One who knows his every thought and motive (vs.23-4). Isbrand claims knowledge that only God has. The Duke responds to Isbrand in a similar way God speaks to Job at the end of his trial and afflictions:

> Fathom the wavy caverns of all stars,
> Know every side of every sand in earth,
> And hold in little all the lore of man,
> As a dew's drop doth miniature the sun:
> But never hope to learn the alphabet,
> In which the hieroglyphic human soul
> More changeably is painted than the rainbow
> Upon the cloudy pages of a shower,
> Whose thunderous hinges a wild wind doth turn.
> Know all of each! when each doth shift his thought
> More often in a minute, than the air
> Dust on a summer path (iii.94-104).

In Job God says: "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding ... Have the gates of death been opened unto thee? or hast thou seen the doors of

the shadow of death? Hast thou perceived the breadth of the earth? declare if thou knowest it all" (Job 38:4,17,18). Isbrand does claim to know it all and the Rosicrucians eventually hoped to know it all: to know the secrets of life and death which would enable them to find immortality and be as gods.

Mario, a Roman, claims to have "...breathed the ghost of [the] great ancient world" (III.iii.124) and learnt the "love of Freedom" (iii.127) from the dead in the tombs (iii.126). He informs the conspirators that he was guided to Isbrand "By one in white, garlanded like a bride,/Divinely beautiful ... /Bidding [him] guard her honour amongst men ... For she is Liberty" (iii.151-7). Adalmar welcomes Mario as a brother: "In her name we take thee;/And for her sake welcome thee brotherly" (iii.157-8). Liberty is the bond that unites Isbrand, Mario, the Duke, Adalmar, and Siegfied as part of a brotherhood. Liberty and death are closely allied. Mario, like the Ancient Egyptians, communicated with the dead who imparted their knowledge to him. This is what the Rosicrucian, Mandrake, hopes to do: to discover the secrets of the dead and proclaim immortality. Like the Rosicrucians, this brotherhood of Liberty is devoted to the philosophy of immortality. Mario has sworn to guard Liberty to the extent of killing anyone who tries to harm her (iii.156). The Rosicrucians, through their philosophy of self-elevation to immortality, have sought to put to death the very Gospel they claim to believe, because it is a threat to the liberty they seek. The belief that death is judgement on humanity's sin and that it is only Jesus Christ who can restore a person's relationship with God through his death and resurrection directly opposes the Rosicrucian message of self-elevation. By permeating every kind of knowledge in the academic arena with the Rosicrucian message, the brotherhood, in effect, seeks to eradicate orthodox Christianity. In preaching salvation through Jesus and Nature, the Rosicrucians in fact are not presenting the historical Jesus of Nazareth at all, but what in modern terms is called the cosmic Jesus (Brooke 115-29) - a Jesus who embraces all religions and condones self-elevation through enlightenment.

Adalmar describes Mario as "an eventful unexpected night,/Which

finishes a row of plotting days,/Fulfilling their designs" (III.iii.162). The guardian of Liberty, by his association with her, implies that Liberty has some kind of dark plot. It is not long before Torwald confirms Liberty's sinister nature when the Duke seeks to free his wife from the grave. Because the Rosicrucians legitimise the forbidden use of magic, they do not see themselves as God's enemies. Similarly, the Duke convinces himself that tampering with the dead will not invoke God's wrath: "I am not Heaven's rebel; think 't not of me..." (III.iii.199). Although nothing appears to be wrong, Torwald shows apprehension at breaking into the tomb: "There is no ill here:/And yet this breaking through the walls, that sever/The quick and cold, led never yet to good" (iii.204-6). Torwald's ominous words contradict Mandrake's and Mario's belief that the secrets of the dead will reveal knowledge leading to immortality and reunification with the divine. The concept of Liberty being an ominous plot is consistent with the idea that in order for Liberty's message to become universal, other beliefs will have to be altered or eradicated to make way for her.

In their search for Liberty, men used nature's provisions as means of obtaining godhead. One such provision was women. Before Amala's wedding Siegfried's band of musicians and singers pay homage to her praising her for her divine qualities (IV.iii.194-207). The women sing of bathing "Underneath the charmed statue/Of the timid, bending Venus (iii.167-8) and of Amala's "beauty's spell" (iii.176). Both Venus and Amala are revered as queens and worshipped for their bewitching beauty. The religious veneration given to Amala is indirectly worship of the goddess herself, and like a goddess, Amala is acknowledged as a giver of blessings. The identification of Amala with Venus, while appearing flattering on the surface, is not the honour it appears to be: Venus, through her identification with Isis as a goddess of nature and fertility, is none other than Osiris in another form (Budge II:287). Along with the Fall was the loss of the meaning of love in its divine purity, but Adalmar seeks to regain it through finding harmony with woman: "But one has taught me,/It is a heaven wandering among men,/The spirit of gone Eden haunting earth" (II.iii.162-4). It is knowledge of a harmonious, Edenic love that elevates a man

to his fuller potential and brings him into her divine realm: "I feel and know/Of woman's dignity: how it doth merit/Our total being, has all mine this moment:/ But they should share with us our level lives ... /When you've earned/This knowledge, tell me: I will say, you love/As a man should" (II.iii.227-39). Adalmar believes, as the Rosicrucian does, that virtue elevates a man to the level of the gods.

Athulf also believes that divinity can be found through the medium of women, but not because of any faith in virtue or love. In the Garden, Satan offered Eve godhead by tempting her with forbidden pleasure. Indulgence in forbidden pleasure is a mark of Ancient Wisdom. One example in ancient history was when devotees of Diana were encouraged to harmonise with the divine by indulging in sexual gratification with the temple prostitutes. Athulf too gives himself over to sensual indulgence and worships Amala as one with the power to make him divine: "Thou hast slain/The love of thee, that lived in my soul's palace/And made it holy..." (II.iv.110-12). "For thy rare sake I would have been a man/One story under God" (iv.116-17). Athulf admits that his life has been "wild and heartless" (IV.iii.3), but scorns repentance vowing that weeping and remorse will not be his virtues (iii.9). His heart has already chosen its allegiance in his earlier invocation to the infernal king:

> Great and voluptuous Sin now seize upon me,
> Thou paramour of Hell's fire-crowned king,
> That showedst the tremulous fairness of thy bosom
> In heaven, and so didst ravish the best angels.
> Come, pour thy spirit all about my soul,
> And let a glory of thy bright desires
> Play round about my temples. So may I
> Be thy knight and Hell's saint for evermore.
> Kiss me with fire: I'm thine (II.iv.118-26).

He confesses to being "Devil-inspired" (IV.iii.19), and shamelessly declares: "I was born for sin and love it" (iii.24), but before Amala gets married, Athulf pays her a visit and appeals to her for forgiveness and makes excuses for his bad behaviour:

> O Amala,
> Had I been in my young days taught the truth,

> And brought up with the kindness and affection
> Of a good man! I was not myself evil,
> But out of youth and ignorance did much wrong.
> Had I received lessons in thought and nature,
> We might have been together, but not thus (iii.56-62).

He beseeches his priestess for absolution: "Wilt pardon me for that my earlier deeds/Have caused to thee of sorrow? Amala,/Pity me, pardon me, bless me in this hour ... Forgive!" (iii.80-2,84). Amala grants his request: "With all my soul. God bless thee, my dear/Athulf" (iii.85).

The doctrine of elevation through worship of a woman is undermined when Athulf confesses that he is "A thousand-fold fool, dying ridiculously/Because [he] could not have the girl [he] fancied" (iii.218-9). In his failure to achieve divinity through Amala, Athulf became a fool and a murderer, characteristics one would expect from a worshipper of Osiris. It appears as though Athulf's worship of Amala was indeed holy and stands in contrast to his worship of Hell's paramour, but the search for godhead inevitably results in deprivation no matter how worthy the object of worship may appear to be.

The Duke sought divinity through his love for Sibylla, but it only led to jealousy, murder, and eventually, guilt. The Duke is tortured by his murderous deed, but tries to suppress it. "But hence! thou torturing weakness of remorse,/'Tis time when I am dead to think on that:/Yet my sun shines; so courage, heart, cheer up:/Who should be merrier than a secret villain?"(III.i.59-62). The "bliss" of divinity is not as sweet as such a person might hope, and time and again their wicked actions will haunt them no matter how justified they think they are.

Once Adalmar has been murdered, Athulf feels as though his life has vanished (IV.iii.339-40). Similarly the Duke, after murdering Wolfram, said of himself: "Methinks I'm of the dead..." (I.iv.109). Both Athulf and the Duke sought divinity, and both forfeited their souls. Athulf becomes aware of the profound nature of the change that takes place within him:

> But what's this,
> That chills my blood and darkens so my eyes?
> What's going on in my heart and in my brain,
> My bones, my life, all over me, all through me?
> . . . . . .
> Oh! I am changing, changing,
> Dreadfully changing! Even here and now
> A transformation will o'ertake and seize me.
> It is God's sentence whispered over me.
> I am unsouled, dishumanised, uncreated...(IV.iii.354-63).

Rather than becoming enlightened, his eyes are darkened, along with his heart and whole being.

Athulf, like the Rosicrucians, thought that he had pure motives. By calling his brother Cain, Athulf implies that he is the innocent Abel (II.iv.174), but in the next breath he betrays himself by saying: "I could not wish [Adalmar] in my rage to die/Sooner: one night I'd give him to dream hells" (iv.176-7). His heart of rage is one with Isbrand's snaky heart, but he doesn't realise it.

Isbrand is well aware that Athulf and himself serve the same master: the master of hatred and revenge. Athulf is blind to this, and in the same way the Rosicrucians were appalled at the thought of people believing them blasphemous, Athulf is shocked when Isbrand implies that his intentions are hellish at heart (iv.194-8) and accuses Isbrand of trying to get him to damn himself. Far from succumbing to Isbrand, Athulf deceives himself into thinking that he can make Isbrand and his master, "That sooty beast the devil", be his "dogs" (iv.198-9). "I will have a god/To serve my purpose; Hatred be his name;/But 'tis a god, divine in wickedness,/Whom I will worship" (iv.202-5). Athulf makes the mistake of thinking that he is his own master when he contradicts himself by saying that he will be both the master and the servant of Hatred. By saying that he worships the god of wickedness he implies that Athulf is subservient to his god. The Rosicrucian in worshipping man as the centre of the universe becomes a slave to himself and all the diabolical self-centredness he is capable of.

Because Athulf has lost all hope, he cannot bear the thought of anyone else enjoying what is withheld from him, and so he seeks

to destroy the joy of others and damn them along with himself: "Let me then wander/Amid their banquets, funerals, and weddings,/Like one whose living spirit is Death's Angel" (II.iv.159-72). Influenced by the same hate-filled spirit, Isbrand seeks to damn the Duke and his sons; both desire to damn - a desire after Satan's own heart.

Isbrand assures Athulf that even though they may not be able to blot out Adalmar's and Amala's moment of joy, they could still deform it (iv.180-2). Isbrand lures Athulf to his destruction by enticing him with promises: "Trust but to me:/I'll get you bliss" (iv.184-5). This is the kind of false promise the serpent made to Eve, and the Rosicrucians make to adepts and potential converts. Isbrand thinks just like Lucifer: "If you would wound your foe,/Get swords that pierce the mind: a bodily slice/Is cured by surgeon's butter: let true hate/Leap the flesh wall, or fling his fiery deeds/Into the soul" (II.iv.189-93). Lucifer saw no point in attempting to destroy Adam or Eve physically because what he wanted was their allegiance. The angel himself was thrown out of heaven, not because of any fleshly sin, but because of sin that originated in the mind: the proud thought of being God (Brooke 236). That is exactly the way the serpent caused Adam and Eve to fall - through a proud thought which destroyed their souls. In the same way, the Rosicrucians aim for the human mind by encouraging people to believe that knowledge leads to godhead.

According to Scripture, Satan, unable to create, has been bent on spoiling the joys of humanity since the garden of Eden, and everything good has become stained with evil. Similarly, the Rosicrucians have planted seeds of destruction in every area of learning, by placing undue importance on knowledge, even forbidden knowledge, and teaching that it will lead the human race to godhead. By seeking godhead, self inevitably becomes the centre of worship and causes people's motives to be selfish. The Rosicrucians were no exception. Their desire was to revolutionise the world the way they saw fit, using the Bible to back up their mission. They sought to impart their knowledge to the élite first, knowing how much influence the intelligentsia had over society to make it conform.

It was through the influence of the academic élite that Adalmar learnt about spiritual evolution:

> ...I have remembered in my childhood
> My teachers told me that I was immortal,
> And had within me something like a god;
> Now, by believing firmly in that promise,
> I do enjoy a part of its fulfillment,
> And, antedating my eternity,
> Act as I were immortal (IV.i.145-51).

Along with Wolfram, Adalmar is portrayed as a virtuous Rosicrucian in comparison to Isbrand and Athulf, but the fact that the noble Wolfram did not end up in paradise undermines the faith Adalmar has placed in himself.

Isbrand saw each stage of his conspiracy against the Duke as a step up the evolutionary ladder: "They're rungs to Jacob's ladder to scale heaven with" (iv.141-2). Isbrand's aspiration to reach the gods is rooted in his conviction that he has been cheated by nature: "O stingy nature,/To make me but one man! Had I but body/For every several measure of thought and will,/This night should see me world-crowned" (IV.iv.143-6). The philosophy of finding divinity in wine, women and power is epitomised in Isbrand's soliloquy:

> There are sometimes,
> Even here, the means of being more than men:
> And I by wine, and women and the sceptre,
> Will be, my own way, heavenly in my clay.
> O you small star-mob, had I been one of you,
> I would have seized the sky some moonless night,
> And made myself the sun: whose morrow rising
> Shall see me new-created by myself (iv.185-92).

The kind of god Isbrand seeks to become is a bacchanal, womanising, drunk tyrant. The Rosicrucian philosophy of raising one's spirituality through the knowledge of nature is the soul of Isbrand's speech, and he believes, as the Rosicrucians do, that physical evolution leads to spiritual evolution:

> How I despise
> All you mere men of muscle! It was ever
> My study to find out a way to godhead,
> And on reflection soon I found that first

> I was but half created; that a power
> Was wanting in my soul to be its soul,
> And this was mine to make. Therefore I fashioned
> A will above my will... (V.i.46-53)

Isbrand continues to explain the evolutionary process of how animal became man, and how he will soon discover how man can elevate himself to even higher realms (i.53-71). Isbrand expresses his disdain of "men of muscle", an attitude of contempt Milton's Satan held. In the same way Eve became discontent with her form when the serpent told her that God had made her less than her full potential, Isbrand displays the same discontentment with his humanity. The discovery Isbrand expects to make is based on his knowledge of nature: "Thus I, owing nought to books, but being read/In the odd nature of much fish and fowl,/And cabbages and beasts, have I raised myself,/By this comparative philosophy..." (i.65-8). Siegfried, noticing the effect Isbrand's aspirations have on him, soberly remarks:

> He is no more Isbrand of yesterday;
> But looks and talks as one, who in the night
> Hath made a bloody compact with some fiend.
> His being is grown greater than it was,
> And must make room, by cutting off men's lives,
> For its shadowy increase (ii.2-7),

an observation echoed by the Duke: "...his soul was in a dark deep well,/And must draw down all other to encrease it..." (ii.22-3). The motives of the Rosicrucians, Lucifer, and the characters of Death's Jest-Book, are all based on elevation of self. In contrast, Jesus of the Scriptures, whom the Rosicrucians swore they followed, left all his glory and majesty and made himself nothing in order to give each human being life and hope - to the extent of even submitting himself to death (Phil.2:6-8).

During Amala's wedding banquet Isbrand recites a ballad called "The Median Supper" which challenges the time-honoured belief that revenge leads to satisfaction: "All kingdomless is thy old head,/In which began the tyrannous fun;/Thou'rt slave to him, who should be dead:/There's kid for child, and who has won?" (IV.iv.116-19). Earlier on in his plot against the Duke, Isbrand revelled in "joy

so mad/As that which [stung his] marrow" (II.iv.18), but now his refrain is "There's Duke for Brother; who has won?" (V.iv.277). Rebellion does not deliver the satisfaction Isbrand hoped for; and indeed, throughout Death's Jest-Book, all rebellious conspirators fail in finding satisfaction either in usurping an earthly throne, or realizing immortality as they envisioned it.

When considering Mandrake's speech on death it is easy to dismiss him as as a deluded fool since he is not really dead, but only thinks he is. We would be more inclined to take Wolfram's perspective on death more seriously because of his death and resurrection, but the essence of Mandrake's perspective on death is just as important and worthy of attention as Wolfram's no matter how ridiculous the amateur witch appears to be.

Mandrake, the Rosicrucian himself, conveys a message not unlike the one that emerges from the Rosicrucian manifestos. The first thing Mandrake tells us about death is that it is "not so uncomfortable" (III.iii.1-2). He then appeals to the mind by saying that after intellectually analysing death, he has come to the conclusion that death is not what it seems:

> And yet I begin shrewdly to suspect that death's all a take-in: as soon as gentlemen have gained some 70 years of experience they begin to be weary of the common drudgery of the world, lay themselves down, hold their breath, close their eyes and are announced as having entered into the fictitious condition by means of epitaphs and effigies. But, good living people, don't you be deceived any more... (III.iii.4-12).

Mandrake makes the step between life and death seem so minute that death becomes only a matter of closing the eyes and holding the breath when a man wills it so. The message is that death is just an illusion which we have power over, an invention which can be reversed (iii.27-9), or just a game: death "...is at best only a ridiculous game at hide-and-seek" (iii.18-19). The idea that death is dark and grim is defied: "[The dead live] all jollily underground" (iii.14). Mandrake jokes about the dead sneaking about spying on their descendants (iii.14-16), but this is exactly what

the Ancient Egyptians believed. Mandrake belittles death by masking it with humour, joking about the dead not having to pay taxes (iii.3), and implies that it is only ignorant living people who get so uptight about death while the dead have a good laugh at their stupidity (iii.29-30). Mandrake boasts that once he has discovered the secrets of death, he will become more famous than Columbus, implying that once death's secrets are revealed, people will realise that death really is nothing but an illusion, and that as gods, they are in control (iii.23-6). Tal Brooke, who studied the occult for 20 years and was the top western disciple of India's super-guru, Sai Baba, wrote a book called When the World Will Be as One. In his chapter "The Great Lie", Brooke points out that it was Satan who first convinced humanity that death was just an illusion (Brooke 234-5): "And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Gen.3:4-5). Brooke specifically lists the Rosicrucians as one of the offspring of The Great Lie (Brooke 233). "The Great Lie is quite simply the belief that man is God, that his true identity is the immortal self that is ageless and eternal, and that as God he will never die! Death is merely a veil through which we pass - it is not real" (Brooke 233-4). This is the essence of Mandrake's speech and the message of the Rosicrucians. By teaching that people can elevate their own spirituality through knowledge and become one with the divine principle, the Rosicrucians imply that death is merely a door to the next step of elevation. This philosophy is highlighted again later in the play by Athulf who looks upon death as a sacrament, the door leading to eternity and immortality (IV.iii.92,104). He drinks a cup of poison and announces that he has drunk himself immortal (iii.104). It is ironic that "The cup" (iii.104), having strong associations with Christ's cup of life, as expressed in communion, does not bring him life, but death; for he has already sworn allegiance to hellfire's king.

The defiant message of the serpent in the Garden of Eden, of Mandrake and others in Death's Jest-Book, and of the Rosicrucians is one and the same: death is a fiction, unreal, an invention of God to stop us from gaining higher knowledge, and nothing as

terrible as we've supposed it to be. The serpent elevated Eve in her own eyes, making God out to be a liar and a fool. Mandrake flatters readers by addressing them as "good living people" (III.iii.11), and attempts to persuade them that they are above the foolish beliefs about death which have been passed down to them.

Ziba illustrates the idea of fear of death being quelled through knowledge of nature in a story he tells about a girl from Mecca who mourned the death of the flower her lover had thrown to her before being slain in battle. A passing magician saw the girl and told her to stop crying. He commanded a bird to "...select a grain/Out of the gloom deathbed of the blossom"(iii.433). The bird then planted the seed in the grave of the flower, and the magician caused the flower to be rejuvenated:

> ...the floral necromant brought forth
> A wheel of amber, (such may Clotho use
> When she spins lives,) and as he turned and sung,
> The mould was cracked and shouldered up: there came
> A curved stalk, and then two leaves unfurled,
> And slow and straight between them there arose,
> Ghostily still, again the crowned flower (iii.438-44).

Ziba asks: "Is it not easier to raise a man,/Whose soul strives upward ever, than a plant,/Whose very life stands halfway on death's road,/Asleep and buried half?" (III.iii.445-8). Ziba's philosophy conveys an immortality that not only gives humanity a second chance at life, but crowns the human race, thus fulfilling the Rosicrucian dream of Man's elevation to microcosmos by making him the epitome of the universe.[1] Ziba also points out that, unlike the plant, it is natural for the human soul to strive upwards. He goes on to explain that as the plant has a seed of rejuvenation within, so too has the human body. This is the part of the body, the Hebrews' Luz (iii.457), which Beddoes spent his life searching for, but never found. According to the Arab necromancer, the seed takes 3000 years to renew the body. Perhaps this time-span accounts for some type of evolution theory, which would be in keeping with the Rosicrucian philosophy of spiritual evolution. If the Rosicrucians were as familiar with the Bible as they like to think

they are, then they would realise that little difference is made between plants and humanity when it comes to any kind of permanent existence: "All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass" (Isaiah 40:6b-7).

After being commanded to conjure up the ghost of the Duke's dead wife, Ziba asks the Duke: "Wilt thou submit unmurmuring to all evils,/Which this recall to a forgotten being/May cause to thee and thine?" (iii.533-4), to which the Duke replies: "With all my soul..." (iii.535). Both Ziba and the Duke recognise the potential sacrificial cost of forbidden knowledge: a cost which testifies against man's illusion of having control over death. In Scripture Christ said: "He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt.10:39); "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, A-men; and have the keys of hell and death" (Rev. 1:18). The Rosicrucian adept seeks a key which is not rightfully his, and in doing so, forfeits his soul.

Ziba sets out to destroy death's kingdom (III.iii.571) on the Duke's behalf by uttering a powerful spell. The necromantic call is answered. Ziba recognises the origin of the ghostly footsteps, and out of the Duke's hearing discloses his knowledge: "Serpentine Hell! That is thy staircase echo,/And thy jaws' groaning" (iii.583-4). This dark revelation foreshadows Wolfram's resurrection and tells us from whence he came. Following Mandrake's mocking appearance, the Duke cries out in frustration: "Deceived and confounded vain desires!" (iii.650). It is a cry that Beddoes, the Rosicrucians, and the characters of Death's Jest-Book can all empathise with in their search for immortality.

Wolfram is the only tangible evidence for any hope of immortality in the whole play. He appears to the Duke in "Flesh, bones and soul, and blood..." (iii.697). The pact of brotherhood Melveric signed with the deceased in blood caused Hell to raise Wolfram from the dead (iii.698-701), revealing the hellish origins of their

bloody oath. In keeping with Ancient beliefs about the dead, Wolfram revisits the world and interacts with the living before he returns to the Other World: "I will stay awhile/To see how the world goes, feast and be merry,/And then to work again" (iii.705-7). It doesn't matter how much the Duke defies, questions and derides Wolfram (iii.709), Wolfram will not disappear, which reinforces the Duke's powerlessness over death. After being commanded by the Duke to go back to Hell to his torture (1.704), Wolfram replies: "Thou returnest with me" (iii.704), confirming the Duke's helplessness against him (iii.719-20). The Duke accuses Wolfram of rebelling against death and calls him a "murderer of Nature" (iii.727). This is an alarmingly serious accusation as far as the adept of Rosicrucianism is concerned, because what the Duke is implying is that those who seek immortality through nature, destroy the very source they hope to learn from.

8. THE KISS OF DEATH

Once Wolfram is resurrected, the biggest question is whether he can now offer the hope and harmony seekers of the Philosopher's Stone have longed for. Sibylla had "...long been calling comfort from the grave", seeing death as merely passing through a veil into bliss (IV.ii.29). Wolfram answers her call for comfort, saying that comfort is the name of the master he serves. He beckons Sibylla "...to the place where sighs are not;/A shore of blessing, which disease doth beat/Sea-like, and dashes those whom he would wreck/Into the arms of Peace..." (ii.30-6). Since Ziba has already discerned Wolfram's origin as Hell, and the gods of peace, Osiris/Dionysus, have proven to be violent in their ways - especially towards women - Wolfram's seductive words become more of a dark omen rather than a ticket to bliss. Wolfram's black humour about Sibylla having lovers to betray her (ii.38) is intended to make Sibylla consider the miserable world she lives in so that the Other World will appear more inviting; and he succeeds. Sibylla asks him to speak the comforting words of mystery and music as he did at first which caused her to think of "...an isle,/Whose flowers cast tremulous shadows in the day/Of an immortal sun, and crowd the banks/Whereon immortal human kind doth couch" (ii.52-5). His speech reminds Sibylla of her dream of immortality in heavenly bliss (ii.56). But Sibylla is a prime example of "innocence" dreaming of immortality who will eventually discover that immortality was not what it seemed. Wolfram confirms the dark overtones of Ziba's words concerning the ghost's hellish origin in the words he speaks out of Sibylla's hearing:

> Snake Death,
> Sweet as the cowslip's honey is thy whisper:
> O let this dove escape thee! I'll not plead,
> I will not be thy suitor to this innocent:
> Open thy craggy jaws; speak, coffin-tongued,
> Persuasions through the dancing of the yew-bough
> And the crow's nest upon it (ii.57-63).

Wolfram, once a saviour figure and life-giver, now belongs to "Snake Death". When Wolfram first rose from the grave he told the Duke

that he would return to his work after spending time with the living and enjoying some merriment. We now discover that Wolfram's work is to seduce people, including the most "innocent", into the clutches of Snake Death. His task is identical to that of the Ancient Serpent. Wolfram warns Sibylla of the "fascination in [his] words" (IV.ii.65) and the "...magnet in [his] look, which only drags [her] downwards,/From hope and life" (ii.66-7), and exhorts her not to be deceived:

> You set your eyes upon me,
> And think I stand upon this earth beside you:
> Alas! I am upon a jutting stone,
> Which crumbles down the steeps of an abyss;
> And you, above me far, grow wild and giddy:
> Leave me, or you must fall into the deep (ii.67-72).

The effect of dreaming of immortality is intoxicating as wine and those who seek it become more like the intoxicated Dionysus. The words "must fall" are the pronounced sentence passed on those who seek immortality. Sibylla, under Wolfram's spell, begs him to take her with him, but Wolfram replies: "You're moved to wildness, maiden. Beg not of me./I can grant nothing good: quiet thyself,/And seek heaven's help" (ii.84-6). Sibylla's wildness is not unlike the mad state of the women who worshipped Dionysus. In spite of Wolfram's foreboding warning, Sibylla continues to walk towards her destruction. The fact that he exhorts Sibylla to seek heaven's help implies that the "help" he offers comes from Hell. Wolfram tells the already bewitched Sibylla the story of how some mortal women have made lovers of dark spirits who have "Wooed, wedded, and brought home their moonstruck brides/Unto the world-sanded eternity" (ii.104-06). The wildness of the brides can be attributed to a moon identified with an intoxicated Dionysus. Although Wolfram appears to regret having agreed to woo Sibylla on behalf of Snake Death and warns her against seeking him, he does not love her enough to leave her. Rather, he gives in to her plea, resuming his smooth talk, contradicting all the dark secrets he has just revealed: "I am a ghost. Tremble not; fear not me./The dead are ever good and innocent,/And love the living ... and most like,/In grace and patient love and spotless beauty,/The new-born of mankind

(IV.ii.111-16). He elevates youth and beauty, encouraging her that "'Tis better too/To die, as thou art, young, in the first grace/ And full of beauty, and so be remembered/As one chosen from the earth to be an angel..." (ii.116-19).

Completely under her lover's spell, Sibylla entreats death: "...Thou canst be sweet and gentle, be so now..."(ii.127). Her words appealing to death's more beneficent nature imply that death is usually inclined to mercilessness and destruction. This duality of death's character was not unfamiliar to the Ancient Egyptians who believed that the Devil was not always necessarily evil. According to Budge: "[The Devil] is sometimes the servant of God, but at other times is His opponent; and he is assumed to pass his existence in subverting His plans, and in working destruction and in overthrowing the powers of Nature" (Budge 1:378). Set, Osiris' evil twin brother and the Devil's counterpart, assisted Osiris in his ascension to heaven! The text of Pepi from The Book of the Dead says: "'Stand up, Ladder of the god, stand up, Ladder of Set, stand up, Ladder of Horus, whereby Osiris made his way into heaven'" (Budge I:75-6). Osiris, judge of the dead, is also known by the name "'Lord of the Air'" (Budge I:345), which is practically identical to one of Satan's names found in the Bible: "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph.2:2). Another link between Osiris and Lucifer is Osiris' close association with the serpent. In the Papyrus of Nesi-ta-neb-Ȧshru, there is a goddess with a serpent's head and a knife in each hand, who, according to Budge, "...appears to be a personification of the huge serpent which lies, with its head upraised, before [Osiris'] throne". It also appears that Osiris "was guarded by a monster serpent" (Budge I:43). In a papyrus of the XXIInd dynasty

> ...Osiris is seen lying on the slope of a mound of earth, with his right arm extended to the top of it. His hand nearly touches the head of a huge serpent, the body of which passes down the back of the heap, and emerging from under the front of it continues in deep undulations (Budge I:44).

Osiris was revered as the god of wisdom (Budge I:112) and the Ancient Egyptians believed that a serpent lived within the breast

of the deceased as his guide in the Other World (Budge I:120). What becomes alarmingly clear is that Sibylla is addressing none other than the green-eyed snake of Isbrand's heart.

In the face of death, both Athulf and Sibylla fancy that they hear sweet sounds and waves on a rocky shore with a boat waiting for them (IV.ii.51-2,iii.107-12). In Egyptian religion one way to cross to the Other World is by a boat which is guided by a spiritual or mythical being. Sibylla envisages a swan-drawn boat and Athulf hears the call of a mermaid pilot (Grof 70). Considering that Athulf knows he's damned himself (iii.124), the sweet sounds and rollicking waves are pure deception, causing him to think that paradise awaits him.

In a conversation Sibylla and her Lady have on the subject of nature, Sibylla observes that although humanity looks up to nature to make up for what the human race lacks, nature seems to only respond by reflecting back human characteristics. Instead of seeing nature as the source of knowledge leading to elevated spirituality, Sibylla sees it as merely reflecting humanity. Sibylla's companion looks upon nature as being refined symbols of humanity which are innocent and graceful (V.iii.22-5), and believes that nature is there to impart moral instruction (iii.4-7), but Sibylla replies that how people interpret nature depends on how they view themselves and what stage of life they're at. As Sibylla grows older she sees nature as "signs inviting us to heaven" rather than a reflection of humanity (iii.29-33). Sibylla is portrayed as a pure and innocent woman, therefore she sees nature in a positive light. For her, flowers are visitors from the dead who come "To show us how far fairer and more lovely/Their world is..." (iii.35-8), and as Sibylla dies, she describes the Other World as heaven which is "serene and light with joy" (iii.57-9). Because Sibylla hasn't quite passed into the Other World, and has just admitted that how we see nature is entirely subjective, one cannot take too seriously her belief that nature is heaven's ambassador here to comfort the aged and give us hope of a paradisal existence in the next life.

Sibylla envisions herself becoming a heavenly element and the joy

she expresses over the rising evening star demonstrates her eager anticipation for the Other World:

> Yonder behold the evening star arising,
> Appearing bright over the mountain-tops;
> He has just died out of another region,
> Perhaps a cloudy one; and so die I;
> And the high heaven, serene and light with joy
> Which I pass into, will be my love's soul,
> That will encompass me; and I shall tremble
> A brilliant star of never-dying delight,
> 'Mid the ethereal depth of his eternity (V.iii.54-62).

The evening star is Sibylla's ideal of what she wants to be in her next life, without realising what the evening star actually represents. The one she has been paying homage to is Venus, who has already been identified with Isis/Osiris. Furthermore, the planet Venus also goes under the names of Hesperus and Lucifer[2]. By portraying the bright star Venus as male, Sibylla is making a connection between the planet and the biblical Lucifer, the angel of light. Considering that the goddess is associated with the two luminary gods, Osiris and Isis, and that Venus's name is identified with the biblical Lucifer, we have to conclude that Venus as a form of reincarnation is not the ideal Sibylla supposes it to be. Following her death, Sibylla's wish is that her attendants should "...strew me o'er/With these flowers fresh out of the ghosts' abodes,/And they will lead me softly down to them" (iii.64-6). Her being led "softly down" depicts a moonstruck Sibylla being wooed by her demon lover down to an Abyss in answer to her cry for comfort.

In contrast to Sibylla's vision of paradise, the Other World for Isbrand and Athulf is most obviously hell. From this we might deduce that wicked people such as Athulf and Isbrand get what they deserve while pure, innocent characters such as Sibylla are rewarded for their virtue, but Wolfram defies any such belief. While alive, Wolfram was a saviour figure, always going the extra proverbial mile even for those who had done him harm, but from what was discovered earlier, Wolfram's destination is not the place of peace and harmony one would expect it to be.

The philosophy of immortality is brought to a climax in the Dance of the Deaths. The dance takes place at midnight in a ruined cathedral under the moonlight, a setting overshadowed with sinister associations. The infernal atmosphere is substantiated in "A Song in the Air": "The moon doth mock and make me crazy,/And midnight tolls her horrid claim/On ghostly homage" (V.iv.1-3). The song exhorts the painted deaths on the wall to "Come out, and hold a midnight riot..." (iv.7). The call is answered, and while some of the deaths dance to rattling music and sing, others sit at the table and drink mockingly. People who may happen to wander by the scene of festivity are not permitted to see the gathering for what it is. While the deaths "...dance and laugh at the red-nosed gravedigger,/Who dreams not that Death is so merry a fellow" (iv.25-6), onlookers will "think 'tis the nightingale" (iv.10). The main features that characterise the feast are elements which have already appeared in the play and have proven destructive in nature. The combination of moonlight, wine, mockery and rebellion epitomises the character of the nature god from whom Rosicrucians so earnestly seek knowledge. Although the ghostly creatures boast of Death's good humour, his merriment does not convey the rest, serenity, and innocence people like Sibylla envision. Rather, Death is on the warpath of rebellion, full of mockery, causing madness, and without compassion, taking human beings for mere fools (iv.8). Wolfram admonished Sibylla for her wildness in asking to die, but her ear remained deaf to the warning, and like the wanderer, Sibylla only heard the enticing music of a nightingale.

The closer Isbrand comes to usurping the Duke's power the more Isbrand proves to be like the gods of old who were nothing but men and wine:

> My goblet's golden lips are dry,
> And, as the vase doth pine
> For dew, so doth for wine
> My goblet's cup;
> Rain, O! rain, or it will die;
> Rain, fill it up!
>
> Arise, and get thee wings to-night,
> Etna! and let run o'er
> Thy wines, a hill no more,

But darkly frown
A cloud, where eagles dare not soar,
Dropping rain down (iv.65-76).

Following a song Siegfried sings in Isbrand's honour, Wolfram tells of a "...Bacchanal night,/O'er wine, red, black, or purple-bubbling wine,/That takes a man by the brain and whirls him round,/By Bacchus' lip!" (iv.86-9). Isbrand's love for wine and ambition for godhead are directly identified with Bacchus, an immortal who only had the power to destroy. Wolfram then sings a song he claims he heard "...the snaky mermaids sing/In Phlegethon, that hydrophobic river,/One May-morning in Hell" (iv.92-4). By speaking of what he heard as his own experience, Wolfram, wittingly or not, reveals that the abyss he mentioned earlier was in actual fact, Hell. When Athulf was about to die of poisoning, he fancied that a "fair mermaid" was to guide him to the Other World, but Wolfram's words disclose the awful reality that the mermaids, far from being fair, were most likely to have been the servants of Snake Death. Athulf, deceived by Death, mistook his rattling song for the enchanting music of the nightingale.

In the course of all the merrymaking, Ziba offers Isbrand more wine:

Here's wine of Egypt,
Found in a Memphian cellar, and perchance
Pressed from its fruit to wash Sesostris' throat,
Or sweeten the hot palate of Cambyses.
See how it pours, thick, clear, and odorous (V.iv.126-30).

Cambyses was the second king of Persia and reigned from 529 to 522 B.C. He conquered Egypt in 525 B.C. and was known as a cruel tyrant, even towards his own family. It is clear that Ziba and those conspiring against Isbrand identify him with the infamous tyrant, and that the wine that has made men gods is nothing but an "odorous" poison. Far from the wine representing the cup of life, it symbolises death, both physical and spiritual. Underlying the historical link between Cambyses and Isbrand and their love for wine is the philosophical significance that is symbolised in the connection of wine with Egypt. From the beginning of Death's Jest-Book Egypt has been the established holy land of adepts of

the black arts, such as the Rosicrucians. Egypt is the place to which the Rosicrucian, Mandrake, makes his pilgrimage in search of the elixir of life. It has already been established that Osiris is the Egyptian god of nature, and in the form of Bacchus/Dionysus[2], represents the "productive and intoxicating power of nature." Wine is the symbol of this power; therefore, in saying that the wine of Egypt is odorous, Ziba implies that nature is just as odorous as the person who seeks its knowledge, and that the very source of Ancient Wisdom, which the Rosicrucians passionately seek, leads not to spiritual enlightenment, but death. Isbrand ironically refers to Bacchus as a "clever travelling God and an arch-Tosspot" (II.i.19-20). Kate warned him that wine is a "sweet seducer" (i.10), but Isbrand, taking no heed of her words, becomes all the more like Bacchus as he pursues his desire for wine, worship, and power. In response to Kate's warning, Isbrand pointed out the number of academic fields of learning that had been under the influence of wine, such as history, religion, law, and poetry. Isbrand's insight concerning the influence of wine on knowledge, and Ziba's comment about the odorous nature of Egypt's wine, serve to strip Ancient Wisdom - the religion of self-elevation, on which Rosicrucians base their faith - of all its appalling pretentiousness and expose it for the empty sham that it is.

At the beginning of Act II when Kate tried to discourage Isbrand from having another drink Isbrand shared with her what he believed to be the mystery of humanity:

> This is the mystery of humanity, drank I not wine I were a tailor tomorrow; next day a dog, and in a week I should have less life than a witch's broomstick. Drinking hath been my education and my path of life (II.i.26-30).

Isbrand believes that wine, the symbol of the power of nature, is the key to education and self-elevation in the journey of life. Isbrand's philosophy works in reverse of what he expected: far from wine increasing his quality of life and leading to elevation, it leads to his final destruction.

After Isbrand has Siegfied arrested for conspiring against him,

Wolfram begins to tell the company the story of his death. At one point he becomes disorientated and forgets that he is among the living. He contemplates the problem concerning life and death: "But dead and living, which are which? ... is all being, living?" (V.iv.206-9). Wolfram observes the deaths painted on the wall and says: "...perhaps you are the dead yourselves:/And these ridiculous figures on the wall/Laugh, in their safe existence, at the prejudice,/That you are anything like living beings" (iv.217-20). In some ways Wolfram seems to be an instrument to further confuse the traditional concept of death to make it look as though it is nothing to fear and even something that is highly desirable, but energy and laughter are not necessarily the hallmarks of life: Milton's Satan, full of vitality and delight at the fall of humanity, lived in jealousy of Adam's and Eve's relationship with God. Satan is imprisoned in spiritual death. It seems that Wolfram is implying that there is no distinction between life and death. The Dirge that follows Wolfram's story reinforces his sentiments about the dead being by far the merriest, and exhorts the living to follow the singers to their "happy graves" (iv.222-32). Dissolving the traditional distinctions between life and death subtly conditions a person's mind to throw out old phobias surrounding death, judgement, and hell. Once traditional beliefs have made way for alternative philosophies, a person is more open to the concept that perhaps death is merely the veil through which one passes to immortality and a superior state of being. While it is true that not all being is living and that there are times when the quality of a person's life may be so poor that death seems preferable, this is not proof that death is intrinsically good. Just because a person may feel that their state of existence is more like death than life does not mean that the boundaries between life and death are nonexistent. The question concerning the quality of life Wolfram addresses is one every individual is sure to reflect upon during their earthly existence, but when Wolfram begins proposing the possibility of death being the ideal state, one has to remember that he has been commissioned by Snake Death to seduce people into the grave by his silky words of comfort and assurance. It is interesting to note that Osiris, the god of nature, and life-giver, in latter days was identified as the god

of death (Budge II:306).

When the funeral procession for Sibylla arrives the Duke immediately holds Wolfram responsible for her death: "Darest thou do this, thou grave-begotten man,/Thou son of Death?" (V.iv.234) The Duke's words not only concern Sibylla's death, they are also prophetic of the events that follow. Without warning Mario stabs Isbrand to death. Wolfram calls upon the painted deaths to come out and "celebrate Death's Harvest-Home" (iv.291) to provide some entertainment in order to lift the heavy atmosphere, but Wolfram acknowledges that it is not a real celebration at all, but a satire. Once again Wolfram discloses the dark side of death which lurks under the surface of what appears to be death triumphant. In the midst of the dance, Amala enters followed by Adalmar's bier. When the Duke demands to know who killed his son, Wolfram commands Athulf to "answer the call" (iv.303). Guilt-stricken, Athulf immediately stabs himself to death. Amala, filled with grief, challenges the Duke to "Suspect and kill me too: but there's no need;/For such a one, as I, God never let/Live more than a few hours" (iv.335-7). After these final prophetic words, Amala falls into the arms of her attendants. The Duke asks Wolfram when his vengeance will be over, to which the ghost replies: "Melveric, all is finished, which to witness/The spirit of retribution called me hither" (iv.339-41).

Earlier when Wolfram first rose from the dead the Duke spoke of his death and resurrection in similar terms that Christ did when he prophesied his own death and resurrection. Christ said: "...Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19), which the Duke echoes thus: "This castle that fell down, and was rebuilt/With the same stones, is the same castle still;/And so with him" (IV,i,ll.34-6). It appears that Wolfram's resurrection has been identified with the resurrection of Christ, but there are some major differences between them. Wolfram rose in response to a person who consulted one familiar with the world of the dead, whereas Christ rose in response to a living Father God who raised him from the dead. Christ's death and resurrection had a mission to accomplish: to conquer death (1Cor.15:26) and destroy the works of the Devil (1John 3:8), so that although people

die physically, they have the opportunity to become alive spiritually so as not to suffer an eternal spiritual death. The source of Christ's immortality is God the Father; the source of Wolfram's resurrection is Snake Death, and his mission is to damn.

It is strange that Wolfram should say to the Duke: "Sibylla is before us gone to rest./Blessing and Peace to all who are departed!" (V.iv.344-5). Wolfram's words imply that he and the corrupt Duke are destined to share the same place as Sibylla in the Other World. Considering that Wolfram has already acknowledged his servitude to Snake Death and has said that it was the spirit of retribution that called him back to earth, it is surprising that he calls the Other World a place of rest. In saying that he was commissioned by the spirit of revenge, Wolfram reveals a close bond with Isbrand who previously invoked revenge to aid him in his conspiracy against the Duke. It is ironic that Wolfram should say that Athulf and Isbrand are blessed and enjoy rest in the Other World considering that the two of them have sworn allegiance to Hell, and Isbrand even in his dying moment swore to dethrone Pluto, king of the underworld (iv.256). The final task of Wolfram's mission is to take the Duke down into the world of the dead.

It is Death, represented by Wolfram, who enjoys the last word at the conclusion of Death's Jest-Book. Of all those in the play who aspired to immortality, it is Isbrand who puts up the most persistent fight in the face of death. Even as he dies, the rebel cries out in fierce defiance:

> But think you I will die? No: should I groan,
> And close my eyes, be fearful of me still.
> 'Tis a good jest: I but pretend to die,
> That you may speak about me bold and loudly;
> Then I come back and punish: or I go
> To dethrone Pluto. It is wine I spilt,
> Not blood, that trickles down (V.iv.251-7).

As a true Rosicrucian, Isbrand remains under the illusion that death is not real, but is simply a veil through which he will pass and be elevated to godhead. Yet the god he aspires to is Hades[2] - not the kind of god a Rosicrucian aspires to in his search for

immortality. Isbrand, as Mandrake did, treats death with contempt, but as he takes his last breath, Death, represented by Wolfram, passes to him the fool's cap given to him by the Duke: "Meantime Death sends you back this cap of office./At his court you're elected to the post:/Go, and enjoy it" (iv.268-9). From the lips of the arch-rebel comes the forced confession: "Now Death doth make indeed a fool of me" (iv.287).

9. THE CRITICAL DEBATE

In his book Nineteenth Century Literature, George Saintsbury praises Beddoes' work, but not for any philosophical insight the poet might have intended to impart to the rest of the human race. He classifies Beddoes with those poets who have elevated themselves above more notable and prolific authors by virtue of a few, incomparable artistic fragments, in spite of being "...shockingly lacking in bulk, in organisation, in proper choice of subject, in intelligent criticism of life" (Saintsbury 115). Neither does Saintsbury have anything good to say about Beddoes as a person and states that "in his later days at any rate he would appear to have been a good deal less than sane" (Saintsbury 115). Considering that Death's Jest-Book was still being rewritten until the poet's death, the idea that Beddoes was mad towards the end of his life does not establish much credibility as far as his play is concerned.

For Lytton Strachey, the central theme of Death's Jest-Book, namely Wolfram's resurrection, was a failure (Strachey 210). In effect, what Strachey appears to be saying is that because Beddoes embodied his vision of immortality in Wolfram, he failed in his quest for immortality. Strachey, much like Saintsbury, does not compliment Beddoes on any philosophic contribution he may have had to offer: "If a poet must be a critic of life, Beddoes was certainly no poet" (Strachey 211).

What concerns Donner, Beddoes' major critic, about the play is that "Too much of Death's Jest-Book had been written before Beddoes' faith began to totter to its fall, and too little of it was composed after its confirmation and purification" (Donner(A) 238). Donner acknowledges the state of frustration and despair Beddoes suffered in not being able to find the immortal seed of the body, but still believes that Beddoes finally emerged victorious:

> The discontent of his youth, the self-consciousness, and the disharmony disappeared, and he got 'at length

> beyond his tedious self.' The strength of his emotion sought a spontaneous expression in artistic creation, and here he discovered at last the philosopher's stone which he had rashly endeavoured to find in the mechanism of the human body. His sacrifice had been great, but it was not in vain, for liberated from all obsessions he could now truly express himself in writing (Donner(A) 282).

Donner's belief that Beddoes found Liberty through writing is a Rosicrucian belief in itself as we discovered in the first chapter, a belief which I have endeavoured to prove erroneous. To support his belief that Beddoes won the victory, Donner cites a poem called "Doomsday", which he believes was meant to be included in Death's Jest-Book, as well as referring to later versions of the play. The essence of "Doomsday" is much the same as the dance of the deaths and the "Dirge" which is sung for Sibylla's funeral. The poem is apocalyptic and full of energy and merriment, but the feeling is one of emptiness masked by a lot of movement. One passage Donner refers to in demonstrating that Beddoes believed that death was a mere veil through which humanity passed into a "more powerful existence" is found in a revised edition of Death's Jest-Book at the end of Act II: "So burst the portals of sepulchral night/Before th' immortal rising of the sun" (Donner(A) 365). I find that these words perfectly echo the Rosicrucian Confessio: "...the World shall awake out of her heavy and drowsy sleep, and with an open heart, bare-head, and bare-foot, shall merrily and joyfully meet the new arising Sun" (Yates 257). It has already been demonstrated that the sun, symbolising Osiris who was indeed resurrected immortal, was not the god of life he appeared to be. Donner focuses on immortality and the unstoppable energy which springs forth from the resurrected in "Doomsday" and presents this as evidence for Beddoes's victory without seeming to consider that immortality, festivity and energy are not things to be envied in themselves: take Dionysus as our most immediate example. Another reason that one might disregard the hope Beddoes appears to portray in later versions of Death's Jest-Book is that Beddoes did not volunteer to rewrite his play, but was forced to, something which Donner was aware of. The play was severely criticised even by his closest friends who would not allow it to be published without extensive alteration (Donner(A) 256-7).

In relation to the concept of art being a source of liberty is Donner's idea that the dance of the deaths was meant to ridicule mortals who could not appreciate immortal ideas. The painted deaths who appear more alive than humans demonstrate the superiority of art (Donner(A) 241). The Romantics believed not only that death was superior to life but that life itself was punishment (Donner(A) 323). According to Donner, Beddoes followed this philosophy and intentionally painted a morbid picture of life and humanity so that death would look more appealing (Donner(A) 239). In criticizing and undermining human values Donner believes that Beddoes' purpose was to show us superior values which lie beyond the grave. Although this may appear so to a certain extent, Beddoes' portrayal of human virtue echoes the words of the great prophet Isaiah who proclaimed: "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags..." (Isaiah 64:6). Beddoes wasn't necessarily exaggerating human iniquity to make death look superior at all. At times when death is portrayed to be preferable, we must remember the words of Wolfram concerning Snake Death and the abyss. In spite of these points, Donner still maintains that "In Beddoes' philosophy death was the union with the well of life and the highest bliss" (Donner(A) 323). One minute Donner says that Beddoes "...could not help writing, for that was his only means of liberation", then the next he contradicts himself by asserting that Beddoes "...commanded now the demon of poetry, because he had conquered his own self, and in the struggle for life he had conquered even the Elizabethans" (Donner(A) 324). The fact that Beddoes could not help writing because it was his only source of salvation implies that the poet was forced to write by some influence outside himself. Since Donner identifies the muse of poetry as a demon, Beddoes is then seen to be driven by the demon Donner claims the poet has conquered! Far from having conquered his self, let alone the Elizabethans, Beddoes in his life and death appears to me no more victorious than Isbrand. Donner would disagree that Isbrand was a loser, because he views the rebel as the epitome of victory over death, but in making his statements about Isbrand's victory, Donner again refers to the questionable later versions of the play: "Asunder, burst asunder Chains or Heart,/And let my ghost go shrieking through the night,/Like a Death-angel lighted on the

spire/Of Capitol asleep, bellowing woe". In Isbrand's last outcry defying death, Donner sees a character who "becomes greater than ever in his dying wrath" (Donner(A) 368). It is Donner's conviction that Beddoes believed that his final version of Death's Jest-Book was a greater poem than ever before. Considering that Donner is Beddoes' champion and is so familiar with the poet and his work, one respects the observations he makes about him. There are, however, a couple of points Donner appears to have overlooked. One, which I have briefly mentioned, is that the first draft of Death's Jest-Book was rejected. It was condemned for its black humour, sacrilege, and deeply depressive nature which meant that Beddoes was forced to make his play more hopeful and victorious. The other point is that although Donner acknowledges that the play is satirical and heavily influenced by Romantic Irony (Donner(A) 283), he seems to overlook the possibility that as Beddoes increased the triumphant tone in his play, he also increased the irony, thus making man look even more ridiculous for trying to make a fool of death. Donner associates Isbrand very closely with Beddoes because of the character's rebellious nature which the poet believed to be "the divine spark in man" (Donner(A) 360). But just because Beddoes held this belief, either initially or until his death, this does not make him victorious. Isbrand was the paragon of rebellion, but all he had to boast of in the end was a hatefilled heart, totally bereft of love and friendship. In his own life, Beddoes experienced little love and companionship - not something he appears to have found satisfaction in. According to Donner, Beddoes came to a point where poetry was no longer an end in itself but a part of his life which was devoted to a higher purpose (Donner(A) 327). It seems strange, though, that a person who had supposedly become a "whole and harmonious being" (Donner(A) 282) armed with a renewed vision, should be driven to self-mutilation and suicide.

Leigh Wyatt Clark, who wrote a dissertation on Beddoes in 1983, does not see the portrayal of death in Beddoes' play in such a triumphant light as Donner, but still believes that death is presented as preferable to life. Wolfram's words of comfort to Sibylla concerning the dead, who are described as good, innocent,

beautiful, gracious, cheerful, quiet, and full of love for the living, are seen as the true essence of what Beddoes believed the dead to be like. Clark distinguishes between the world of these harmonious creatures and the dark forces that drive Isbrand to his destruction. It is only to the wicked that ghosts appear to be full of terror. To those such as Sibylla, ghosts are full of love for the living. The love Wolfram has for Sibylla is symbolised as the positive disposition of death towards the living. It is love that makes death the ideal state of existence (Clark 229-30). The sinister words Wolfram speaks out of Sibylla's hearing which precede this sweet-sounding invitation are seen only as a wish not to send her to an early grave just to satisfy his own desire for her. Clark interprets this as true love on Wolfram's part, but if it was true love he wouldn't give in to Sibylla's plea for comfort and continue to seduce her. The ugliness of death seems to be interpreted as referring only to the physical rather than the spiritual side, but if life is so vile and death nothing but a door to love, peace, and harmony, surely death would not be portrayed as such a barrier of horror where there is hope of a paradisal existence. Wolfram uses powerful images such as "Snake Death" and the innocent dove. Beddoes was well versed in the Bible and his play is full of biblical undertones and this passage is no exception. The image of the serpent and its identification with Satan immediately associates death with deception and evil. In stark contrast is Sibylla, portrayed as an innocent victim about to be sacrificed. What we have here is the confrontation of the ultimate forces of good and evil. With all the underlying connotations of these images, it is unconvincing to suppose that Beddoes was saying that the physical aspect was the only horrible side of death.

Concerning the idea that death is preferable to life, I would only agree if I knew for sure what was on the other side. Wolfram's little soliloquy portrays a far more sinister side of death than Clark supposes. In view of this, I would argue that no matter how bad life might be, an existence with a satanic figure such as Snake Death in the abyss would never be preferable.

When it comes to evil and the terror of death, Clark puts these things down as a projection of one's self and imagination. He uses Isbrand as an example which makes his hypothesis appear quite convincing, but Wolfram, who is opposite in character to his brother and full of virtue, with comparatively little evil within him, finds himself the servant of Snake Death down in the Abyss rather than in paradise. Although he talks quite a bit about the virtues of the dead, what Wolfram says in his aside undermines it. A paradise with the slightest bit of evil in it is not a perfect paradise at all. The love that Wolfram has for Sibylla, which Clark believes is what makes death a positive force, is not pure love, but full of selfish motives. If he cared so much about her, he wouldn't have kept trying to seduce her. This kind of love does not make death a positive force, but reveals how deceptive and hungry it really is.

The thrust of Clark's dissertation is to show that Beddoes saw death as "neither the biological dissolution of materialism nor the spiritual transcendence of conventional Christianity. Death, in Beddoes, constantly interacts with life, not by destroying it, but by enhancing it" (Clark 251). Death is "life's permanent reality, the final form of human existence that reveals its ultimate truth" (Clark 251). The truth that is found in death is that "illusions like hatred and envy disappear because we see through them for the deceptions they are" (Clark 252). Clark quotes from Shelley's poem Prometheus Unbound to the effect that in the death of the body, everything is purified of evil. One has to remember, however, that when Lucifer sinned in heaven, he did not have a physical body to blame for carrying out his defiant deed (Brooke 236), so it is rather unconvincing to argue that our bodies are responsible for the amount of evil that is in the world. To say that evil is an illusion is to say that it isn't real and doesn't really exist, and to say that our bodies are to blame for evil is to further belittle the seriousness of the consequences of hatred and envy in the world. A thought of envy does not originate in physical matter, because purely physical matter cannot make a decision to do anything. If a person such as Isbrand is full of hate and envy in this world, his nature is not going to be that

of an angel in the next. Beddoes was acutely aware of the injustice in the world and the type of philosophy such as I have just described does not deal with the problem even in the next world. Although fear of judgement is not the only reason to live a life of love on earth, Clark's line of argument would mean that people like Isbrand need not be concerned about their behaviour on earth because they can still enjoy the other side.

It also seems to me that Clark contradicts himself somewhat by saying that the Duke, also full of hatred and envy, will not be able to enjoy the goodness of the Other World because he is taken down to a world where the living have no place. Clark sees Melveric as being "our representative of the 'unholy world' of the living", and because his evil nature will not be put off through death, he will not be able to appreciate the love and beauty in the world of the dead. For the Duke, his going down to the world of the dead is nothing but a "descent into hell" (Clark 242). What appears to be contradictory is that Wolfram, although dead, is portrayed as a sinister character when wooing Sibylla, making him seem worse than what he was when he was alive. The Duke, who is alive, and Wolfram, who should be pure now that he's dead, are more united in nature in the world of the dead than they were on earth. Clark argues that death interacts positively with the land of the living (Clark 251), but when this is applied to Death's Jest-Book, it can be seen that death does not enhance the quality of life of those on earth, but destroys it. Death's ambassador, Wolfram, is responsible (directly or indirectly) for the deaths of four people including the Duke who is taken alive down to the Abyss without the opportunity of dying so that his evil nature may be exchanged for virtue on the other side. Sibylla, Amala, and Adalmar were relatively innocent characters and Wolram didn't offer them any good thing, which confirms his words to Sibylla when he said he could offer nothing good. Far from enhancing the lives of these characters on earth, he destroyed them all and sent them to a place where nothing good could be offered them. Considering that it was Wolfram who said he could offer nothing good from the world of the dead, it is rather dispiriting when the critic states that "Beddoes' world of the dead forms the real foundation of what we

call life" (Clark 253). Since a relatively virtuous character appears to have found himself in a world somewhat akin to hell, perhaps Beddoes is saying that no amount of virtue and goodwill can elevate a person to a higher state of being at all. As a good Rosicrucian, Wolfram selflessly sought the good of others and brought healing even to the lives of his enemies, but it gained him nothing.

In his dissertation of 1974, Leslie E. Angell points out the four preoccupations which he believes are at the heart of Beddoes' work: "the haunting problem of death and immortality; the insensitivity and brutishness of the natural world; the falsehood, heartlessness, and evil in society and man; and the absurdity of man's ephemeral life in a world of pain and betrayal, with no hope of temporal or eternal justice" (Angell 160). Angell believes that Death's Jest-Book is an honest portrayal of how Beddoes saw the world he lived in, and that the poet was never one who tried to please the crowd. Beddoes spoke harshly in his letters of those poets who pandered to popular taste, including his close friend Procter (Angell 163). Angell does not offer a conclusive view about death in Beddoes' works, but leaves various interpretations open. He suggests that perhaps death uses reality and the spirit world to deceive man that death is preferable to his painful existence only "...to make him the butt of some vast practical joke, and thus a doubly pitiable and gullible fool" because he cannot find harmony with a "greater Absolute" or escape the stain of the world (Angell 158). Sibylla is one such fool who believed that Wolfram was offering her "Christian comfort", but Angell believes that Wolfram, as an embodiment of "heavenly Love", deceived Sibylla, who represents humanity, the same way a snake would seduce a dove to her death (Angell 244-5).

Another facet of death Angell presents, which is similar to Clark's, is the one concerning the subjective experience. An example taken from the play is Ziba who holds the philosophy that death is purely relative and that it is inviting or fearful depending on the virtue of the person (IV.iii.306-15). Because Beddoes appears to have merged the worlds of objectivity and subjectivity, Angell suggests

that perhaps everything, such as good and evil, only exists in people's minds, and that meaning cannot be found in nature because nature will only reflect back to us what we project on to it - a view expressed by Sibylla. Angell also thinks that Death's Jest-Book could be interpreted as expressing a belief in an external reality, even if that reality was a malevolent force such as nature (Angell 262). He presents the outcome of Beddoes' quest in an even dimmer light than Clark. There is barely a hint of hope of death's being the ideal or a positive force except to suggest that a good person might find comfort in death because of their virtue, but even then the standard by which something is measured in terms of its goodness remains questionable. One thing that Angell makes clear is the need of absolutes and ideals to give "...some much-needed significance to man's absurd unsatisfactory life" (Angell 262) and since Beddoes doesn't portray death as an ideal, his quest, as Angell sees it, proves to be the failure Clark and Donner wish to deny. As further evidence for Beddoes' failure, Angell also points out that Beddoes envied those who believed "honestly and from conviction" the Christian doctrine as presented in the New Testament (Angell 151). This envy is expressed in his play through Wolfram's extraordinary bodily resurrection which is undeniably an imitation of Christ's (Angell 221). Christ was the ideal which Beddoes could never bring himself to believe in.

Margaret J. Klett Mirarchi's interpretation of how death is portrayed in Death's Jest-Book is very similar to Donner's in that she is as strongly convinced as he is that Beddoes succeeded in stripping death of its horror and winning the conquest (Mirarchi 130). This ultimate victory is demonstrated in Wolfram's resurrection - undeniable proof as far as Mirarchi is concerned: "Wolfram's death proves not a tragic catastrophe but instead a rebirth into real life. It signifies the success of his quest for immortality and for the realization of his ideals" (Mirarchi 137). Because the revengeful Isbrand scorns his brother for not haunting Melveric, Mirarchi believes that Wolfram is just as saintly after death as he was in life. It seems strange that she would use this as evidence for proving Wolfram's persistently virtuous behaviour, because by the end of the play Wolfram has caused more sorrow to

Melveric in revenge than most would wish on their worst enemies. As for being saintly, it seems that Mirarchi has made light of Wolfram's dark speech regarding death in his seduction of Sibylla. Although she sees Wolfram here looking upon death "as a satanic power that uses him to lure Sibylla to her destruction", Mirarchi dismisses this negative view by suggesting that it may just be a reflection of Beddoes' skepticism of the immortality he attempted to embody in Wolfram, and that this negativity is "counterbalanced" by the serene description of death he reverts to (Mirarchi 142). If Beddoes was being skeptical about the very thing he quested for then this should be taken seriously since it would undermine the whole idea that death is not the terror it appears to be, by implying that it is! Just because Wolfram reverts to soothing words it doesn't mean that his black portrayal of death is counterbalanced at all. Sibylla had begged Wolfram to speak the words she wanted to hear, so he did. Either death is peaceful and innocent or it's not. Any hint of death having the character of a snake instantly taints any notion of its purity and innocence. Just because Wolfram speaks of peace it does not mean that there is peace. In Eden, the serpent promised enlightenment and godhead to Eve, but he lied, so when Wolfram speaks of Snake Death, as I have previously emphasised, one should be wary of his silky promises. Instead, Mirarchi interprets his words of hope as meaning that Wolfram sees death as "fulfillment" and a "blessing" (Mirarchi 141). Mirarchi differentiates between Wolfram and Isbrand by saying that in death Wolfram transcended himself while Isbrand was destroyed (Mirarchi 164). But considering the dark stains on Wolfram's character and his negative view of death, I would propose that both brothers failed in their quests.

Donald Good, far from idealising death, is convinced that Beddoes saw death as the greatest jester of all, and the one "...who, at the beginning of time, began his cruel joke on human-kind. This is by far the strongest sustained statement we find in Beddoes regarding the weakness, the meanness, the servileness of human-kind and all offered up as a Fool's humour" (Good 130). In a hopeless world of hate and despair, Good does not blame a person who would want to find release in death (Good 177). The only question is

that if death is our jester what kind of relief would he be likely to offer us on the other side? Good observes that in Death's Jest-Book, as in life, Death comes in "various guises" (Good 177), but he does not shed much light as to his true identity.

Rather than making a distinction between life and death, Northrop Frye sees Beddoes as not divorcing death from life but as expressing the belief that death is "the momentum of life itself" (Frye 52). Love, as a representative of life's most intense experiences, is part of the driving force towards death. Although Frye acknowledges that most people would not be able to answer the question as to whether "life drives to death or through death", he believes that for Beddoes, life and death were different facets of the same world (Frye 52). Frye defines Beddoes' concept of death as being anything outside the experience of love, which is the "focus and climax" of life (Frye 53). Death is portrayed as unreal, and those who believe in death only succeed in arresting their development as human beings. In response to Beddoes' idealism Frye expresses his doubt that any serious poet could maintain such an optimistic view. He acknowledges that in Death's Jest-Book, Death is portrayed as "the undisputed victor of the play's action" (Frye 57), but in spite of the sanguine view of death Beddoes appears to portray, Frye speculates that the poet would have eventually been led to treat death in a more ambiguous light (Frye 57). What Frye believes Beddoes achieved by making death a jester and ultimate victor was to make himself the forerunner of the theatre of the absurd (Frye 63). Rather than Beddoes cultivating the belief that death is unreal, Frye explains that it is Beddoes' intention to challenge our traditional views of life and death (Frye 62) and the notion that "real reality" can be anything other than a mystery (Frye 84-5).

John Heath-Stubbs is also one who appreciates the element of mystery and does not interpret death in Beddoes' work as being any one particular thing, but as one minute a shadow, a skeleton, something grotesque, a force of dark mystery and evil power, and the next minute an elevated state in harmony with the universe, or a wooing lover (Heath-Stubbs 39). No matter what Beddoes portrayed death

as, in saying that the poet longed for "extinction" (Heath-Stubbs 40), Heath-Stubbs implies that, in the end, the poet saw death as extinction rather than another form of existence.

Ian Jack views Death's Jest-Book as one of those works which leave one wondering whether the author was a "madman or a visionary", and believes that Beddoes used the Gothic elements in it to explore death, and the meaning of life, if indeed there was one (Jack 142). The extent of Beddoes' obsession with death is a feature which Jack is impressed by, and the fact that he points out that the poet confessed to being "haunted for ever" by the problem of death suggests that Jack believes that Beddoes was not as successful in his quest as others might like to believe (Jack 143).

Harold Bloom believes that although it was Beddoes' intention to unmask death and ridicule him through the writing of Death's Jest-Book, Beddoes "scarcely fools himself here in his boast that he will rob death of its mystery" (Bloom 441). Bloom draws attention to the "Dedicatory Stanzas" which were intended to be included in the play, and reminds us that even though the poet seeks release from the world's ills in the stars, the stars remain silent:

> Yet they, since to be beautiful and bless
> Is but their way of life, will still remain
> Cupbearers to the bee in humbleness,
> Or look, untouched down through the moony rain,
> Living and being worlds in bright content,
> Ignorant, not in scorn, of his affection's bent
> (Bloom 441).

The resurrection of the body as described by Ziba is glossed by Bloom as having "lost all its spiritual force ... and is only another oddity of an obscure natural world" (Bloom 442): immortality, even if found, is not necessarily something to look forward to. Bloom perceives the force behind this kind of resurrection as the reflection of the "grotesque power of its cabbalistic source" (Bloom 442). Because the theme of death completely eluded Beddoes' imagination, Bloom believes that the poet wasted his genius. While other poets sought transcendence

through the imagination, Beddoes sought it through death, thus Bloom interprets the poet as having made death and the imagination one (Bloom 444).

For Thompson, Beddoes' poetry was a continual exploration where the poet was ever discovering, but never offering any conclusions. He sees death for Beddoes as reflecting an emotional rather than a philosophic position (Thompson 84). While Donner believes that Death's Jest-Book led to a victorious Beddoes, Thompson states that "the driving force behind his work is his prior need to express - despite, or even perhaps because of, his failure to achieve some meaningful closure" (Thompson 62). Those episodes in Beddoes' work where victory appears to prevail are interpreted as "desperate bravado" which never offer the hope they allude to (Thompson 64). Thompson also points out Beddoes' envy of those who honestly believed in the Christian doctrine as evidence that the poet was at a continual loss for hope. While Donner interprets death's supremacy in Death's Jest-Book as proof that Beddoes believed death to be the ideal, Thompson looks upon death's victory as "a painful reminder of the discoveries Beddoes was forced to make, and poetically acknowledge" (Thompson 68). Thompson believes that Beddoes' world was not based on any "real 'moral law of necessity'" and that those who identify Isbrand's nihilism with evil read "...a far more specific and conventionally Christian mythology than the play actually possesses" (Thompson 73).

The extent to which Beddoes' play is influenced by Christian beliefs is critical to the way a reader will interpret it. While I agree that the play demonstrates Beddoes' failure to find immortality and loss of hope, I am convinced that Death's Jest-Book is infiltrated with biblical images and undertones to a far greater degree than Thompson would concede. Beddoes' interest in the Bible went to the extent of learning Hebrew in order to be able to read some of the Scriptures in their original language; he lived in an era and set his play in an era when Christian beliefs still predominated - beliefs which Beddoes greatly envied. With these things in mind, along with the number of very specific Christian images of good and evil in Beddoes' play such as the serpent of

death and the innocent dove, I feel that Beddoes does more than simply not offer any hope, but alludes very strongly to damnation. In Gothic Immortals Roberts explains that the hero remains victorious in the end and even redeems himself through his ultimately defiant spirit. Thompson asserts that Isbrand does the exact opposite and "represents power wasted, the will perverted", and that "there is no cartharsis in Isbrand's fall" (Thompson 78). In his final words about Death's Jest-Book, Thompson ends on a heavy note: "Death's Jest-Book, for all its unfinished quality, has the power to move its readers, but it could not express a saving vision for Beddoes where none existed" (Thompson 89).

Douglas Bush's comments on Beddoes in Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry are brief, but he makes a vital observation concerning the poet's outlook on life and death. He quotes from the letter Beddoes wrote to Kelsall on 20 April 1827, which confides Beddoes' disillusionment and despair over life. Beddoes expresses his belief that the only thing that could provide hope, love and contentment in the face of such an unsatisfactory life on earth is the "'proof or probablility of an after-existence, both in the material & immaterial nature of man'" (Bush 195). Bush portrays a man who was left without any light in his heart, unable to find the proof he so painstakingly searched for.

In "Death's Jest-Book and the German Contribution", Anne Harrex expounds on two important philosophic influences on Death's Jest-Book: Novalis' Magic Idealism, and Romantic Irony. The vital difference between the two is that Magic Idealism is the epitome of self-elevation and creation while Romantic Irony is its negation. Harrex sees the influence of Magic Idealism as relatively weak in Death's Jest-Book compared to that of Romantic Irony and asserts that: "Unquestionably Beddoes lacked the deep religious faith behind Novalis' conception, and this temperamental difference precludes any possibility of more integral influence" (Harrex 34-5). This final pronouncement over Beddoes' work tends to suggest that if the poet had devoutly believed in Novalis's Magic Idealism Death's Jest-Book would have succeeded in its purpose of divesting death of all its terror. My argument is that Magic Idealism is ironic

in itself and that Beddoes knew it. The fact that Beddoes intended to disarm death shows that he didn't necessarily set out to ironize Magic Idealism, but during the progress of his play became aware of the false promises of the seductive philosophy. This is not to imply that the will is not important or powerful, but that it is not supreme and doesn't have the power to grant redemption as many Romantics believed.

Although Horace Gregory acknowledges the respect Donner's biography of Beddoes has earned, he does not share his belief that the poet succeeded in his quest as Donner does (Gregory 40). Evidence for Beddoes' everlasting despair is revealed in his last words: "I am food for what I am good for - worms" (Gregory 47). Many critics have referred to Beddoes as the last Elizabethan, but I have been dissatisfied with the lack of depth which writers have gone into concerning the occultic elements of the Elizabethan influence on the poet. Gregory has also noticed the absence and has brought out the influence of Satanism in the poet's work, which he relates to Pieter Brueghel's works of art The Triumph of Death and The Fall of the Rebel Angels. A glance at these paintings will enable one to appreciate the following remark of Gregory's: "it is that aspect of reality which is perceived and brought to life beneath the surface of the modern world ... and in Poe's words, the death that looks gigantically down, stares with peculiar intensity upon the map of twentieth century Europe." This is the death which Gregory sees as prevailing in Death's Jest-Book, which reinforces rather than relieves human terror (Gregory 60-1).

John Agar is yet another critic who highlights Beddoes' letter of 20 April 1827 to Kelsall as evidence of the poet's dissatisfaction with life, and regards Beddoes' suicide as final proof that the poet never found what he was looking for (Agar 373). The increasing power Isbrand seems to acquire in his aspiration to godhead, which some critics interpret as proof of Beddoes' victory, is seen by Agar as having been gained at the cost of the rebel's humanity and his soul, only to be snatched away: "...since Death itself is always a bitter jester - [Isbrand's] power can be only temporary" (Agar 376). Agar views the product of Isbrand's

willpower in "Squats on a toadstool" as nothing but a "monster, a thing created by an abortion" (Agar 382). Agar also notes that the wine imagery, so frequently associated with Isbrand, is usually identified with physical and moral debauchery (Agar 389). Isbrand's aspirations, rather than lead him upwards, cause him not only to kill, but place a need within him to damn his victims (Agar 379). Not even Wolfram escapes Agar's severe criticism. Like Isbrand, Wolfram's ghost is also seen as a hellish spirit. When Ziba conjures up Wolfram's ghost, the slave recognises the hellish origin of the ghost's footsteps, and even Melveric is aware of their foreboding nature (Agar 381).

Similarly, Louis Coxe identifies Isbrand as a "satanic jester" (Coxe 253), who sets out to defy the universe, but dies, acknowledging the power death has over him (Coxe 255). Coxe views "Squats on a toadstool" as a "parody of a cosmology of a scientific generation that will commit any sin in the name of science" (Coxe 259), and believes that the reason Death's Jest-Book is a failure is the spiritual sickness and depression we feel with Beddoes (Coxe 265). While some critics are convinced that Death's Jest-Book led to Beddoes' victory, Coxe believes that Beddoes was ever aware that the purpose of art is to unmask human "folly, smallness and mortality" and expose it for what it is (Coxe 259). More than just challenging subjective human values, Coxe sees Beddoes as using Isbrand as an example of the anarchic and evil behaviour that comes as a result of renouncing all values and laws, and making the individual will supreme (Coxe 261).

In his article "Did Thomas Lovell Beddoes Believe in the Evolution of the Species?", Potter uses Isbrand as an example of the quest for immortality (Potter 97-8), but concludes that although the poet was moving towards evolution, his published writing doesn't offer any evidence that Beddoes reached such a belief (Potter 100). If Beddoes had reached the conviction that evolution was true, then the poet would have believed that he had found the answers to life's suffering and to the problem concerning an afterlife. He found neither.

10. THE FAILED QUEST

Beddoes may have challenged his audience to question traditional beliefs concerning life and death, but I am convinced that the poet did not believe that death was the ideal state of existence no matter how preferable he made it appear to be. Most of the critics agree that Beddoes remained unsuccessful in his quest to disarm death of all its terror. Some have even proposed that Death is a satanic jester, laughing as humanity falls foolishly into the pit of hell to share his misery. In Death's Jest-Book, Death not only laughs at those who seek his comfort, but specifically scorns those, such as the Rosicrucians, who spend their lives striving to elevate themselves in order to defy him. As I have endeavoured to demonstrate, both Isbrand and Wolfram find themselves in the clutches of Snake Death regardless of any virtue, or lack of it.

The purpose of discussing Rosicrucian elements in this play, besides their being an aspect hardly touched upon in the past in relation to Death's Jest-Book, has been to demonstrate the spiritual darkness of Beddoes' view of death by unmasking the seductive myth of "spiritual evolution" that teaches self-redemption. Many critics have spoken of the occultic influence on Beddoes, but have not adequately explained what the occult teaches and the implications of it when put into practice. This has not been dealt with seriously enough, considering the profound impact the occult made on Death's Jest-Book in the play's portrayal of "spiritual evolution", and death.

It is disturbing that critics such as Donner and Mirarchi can be aware of the occultic elements throughout Death's Jest-Book and yet be convinced that death was the ideal state for Beddoes. Beddoes stated quite clearly that he envied the assurance of those who genuinely believed in Christianity, a statement which fatally undermines any notion of Beddoes emerging from Death's Jest-Book victorious, because a person does not envy what they already have. Donner notes that among the books surrounding Beddoes at his death

were the Koran, both in Arabic and in German, an Arabic-Latin dictionary, and Tarafa's Moallakat. Beddoes had obviously done much research, and in great depth, in various religions. As can be seen from this discussion of Death's Jest-Book, Beddoes knew a great deal about the Ancient Wisdom religions such as the Egyptian religion and Rosicrucianism. He was also deeply familiar with the Koran and the Bible. Ancient Wisdom, the Koran, and the Bible between them cover a very wide range of beliefs. The fact that he singles out Christianity after a lifetime of study in other religions should be taken seriously, because he obviously thought that Christianity had the answer to his deepest longings.

The most self-evident reasons for envying Christians can be found in his letter to Kelsall in which he expresses his desire to find proof of an afterlife and immortality which Christians believe in. Initially it seems incredible that Beddoes cannot find any evidence for the doctrine of immortality in the New Testament, considering the number of passages which talk about it, even if one excludes Revelation. To quote but one passage:

> In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1Cor.15:52-7).

From this, one would think it clear that proof exists for the doctrine of immortality in the New Testament, but when one takes into account the Cabbalistic belief that those who take the Bible literally and read its teachings at face value are mere simpletons, then it is not surprising that Beddoes missed the message he so longed to believe in. Since practically every religion offers a doctrine of immortality, it must now be asked why Beddoes saw the Christian doctrine as being something special. The kind of

immortality and godhead Isbrand aspired to was hardly an ambition after Beddoes' heart. The difference between the Christian concept of immortality and others is Jesus who identified himself as the Christ (John 4:25-6,14:6). Christ not only offered immortality in terms of quantity of years, but a quality of life that could begin on earth and continue beyond the grave: "The thief [Satan] cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). Because the faith of a person is put in the price Christ paid for human wickedness, those who believe in him are completely forgiven. Christ accepted punishment on each person's behalf so that their relationship with God could be restored (John 3:16;17:3). Christians place such importance on Jesus because he claimed that he was God (John 8:58). The key is life through Christ's death and resurrection, not ours, nor by any effort of our own: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph.2:8-9).

Christ came to address the problem of evil, suffering and injustice in the world (1John 3:8b), which is precisely what Beddoes longed for. This does not mean to say that there is no more pain or wickedness left in the world: obviously there is, but it means that those who believe in Christ are slaves of goodness and love rather than self. The God of the Scriptures does not always take away suffering, nor does He tell us why we suffer. Rather than giving a reason for suffering, He joined humanity in it and gave it a purpose (Rom.5:3-5,Heb.12:2). Love, justice, meaning, reconciliation, and freedom are found in the person of Christ, and these were the desiderata of Beddoes' quest for immortality - things which he greatly envied Christians for, and never found.

NOTES

[1] "mandrake," "microcosmos." The New Collins Concise English Dictionary. 1986 ed.

[2] "Dionysus," "Lucifer," "Momus," "Pentheus," "Pluto." A Smaller Classical Dictionary. 1928 ed.

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