



T.E. Brown's Fo'c's'le Yarns
 "BETSY LEE", told by DOLLIN KELLY
 Music by Steven Dallimore
 Production by Charles Guard
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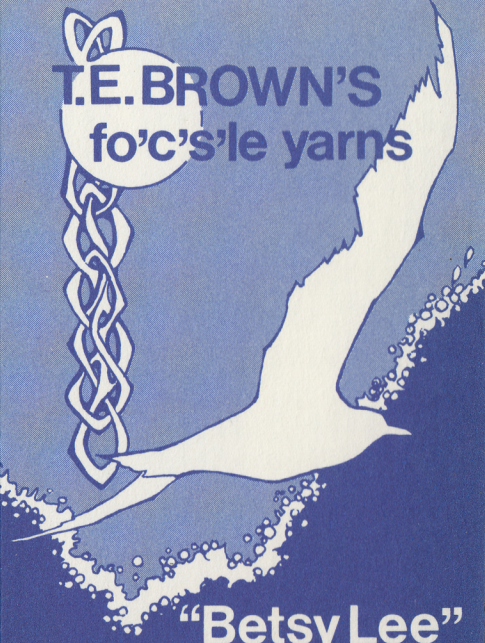


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 BETSY
 LEE

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 fo'c's'le yarns

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**T.E. BROWN
 TOM BAYNES AND THE "FO'C'S'LE YARNS"**

T.E. Brown - the Man and Poet

T.E. Brown is the Manx National poet. He stands above all others who have tried to portray "Manxness" and, according to the noted Victorian critic, W.E. Henley, as well as many more modern men of letters, he stands above most English poets as well.

Because the majority of his work was written in Manx dialect, much of it was neglected by Victorian readers and this lessened Brown's chances of wider fame both then and now but he said,

*"Nathless, for mine own people do I sing,
 And use the old familiar speech;
 Happy if I shall reach
 Their inmost consciousness."*

and *"May say, 'Twas thus and thus They lived"*

Amongst those who really know his works, there is no doubt about his place in English literature. His name belongs with the major poets. He loved life, he loved language, he loved humanity and, in common with so many humourists, he pitied the human condition. His lyricism and imagery stand comparison with any of the better known English writers and the intense humanity of the man is revealed in everything he ever wrote.

The "Fo'c's'le Yarns

The tape of "Betsy Lee" begins with the sounds of creaking yards as a gentle breeze tugs at rigging and the music leads our thoughts into the fo'c's'le of a 19th century square-rigged ship.

"Betsy Lee" is the first of T.E. Brown's "Fo'c's'le Yarns" – long, narrative poems in the Manx dialect. They are all related by Tom Baynes who we can imagine regaling an entranced audience of hardened seamen in the cramped and smokey confines of the crews' quarters as the vessel ploughs through the nocturnal seas in foreign climes.

The Yarns, repeatedly wandering off into "arias" tangential to the main subject, have been described as "operas without music". They are written in *asynartete octosyllables*. This simply means that there are four stresses in each line and an irregular number of unstressed syllables balancing them; a style which is so common in Manx dialect poems that it could be dubbed "Manx Ballad" form.

Tom Baynes

Tom Baynes is Tom Brown's alter ego; the man he would like to have been had he not been a Fellow of Oriel, an ordained clergyman and a schoolmaster. The character is based on Bob Lucas, a quick tempered but sentimental old Manx salt from Peel in the Isle of Man. Brown said of the character he created, "Tom Baynes simply is I" and the clue to his place in Brown's soul is well explained in this letter giving advice to a prospective schoolmaster:

"My plan always was to recognize two lives as necessary – the one the outer kapelistic life of drudgery, the other the inner and cherished life of the spirit. It is true the one has the tendency to kill the other, but it must not, and you must see that it does not."

"BETSY LEE"

It is an eternal triangle story. Tom is the first party and he informs us right at the beginning that "the devil of devils is the lawyer's clerk"; such a character, *Mister Richard Taylor Esq.*, is the second party and Betsy Lee is the girl both are in love with.

The Baynes and Lee cottages stand next to each other "on the open beach, with a nice bit of garden at the back of them each" and young Tom who is a "roughish sort of a chap" has little Betsy as one of his playmates as they grow up. One day, on the beach, another teenager pulls off Betsy's hair-ribbon and Tom hits him and knocks him down because he suddenly realizes that Betsy, with her hair "rip-rip-rippling down to her knees", is now a woman and he is in love with her; but we no sooner learn that Tom loved Betsy than the information is also disclosed that Betsy, at the time the story is being told, is already dead.

As Tom unfolds the tale to his messmates, we become aware that there is a child on board. "Little Sim" is asleep and Tom breaks from his narrative every so often to move to one of the bunks and check that all is well with the dreaming boy.

Betsy's father inherits sufficient money to "do what he always wanted to do" – take on the tenancy of a farm. This is where Richard Taylor makes his entrance to meet both Tom and Betsy for the first time, as it is he who arrives in a pony and trap to break the news of the good fortune.

There is growing friction between Tom Baynes and Richard Taylor though it is Tom whom Betsy loves. One night Tom antagonizes Taylor and later "grips him and sends him flyin' over a gate". Taylor vows revenge and succeeds but the consequences are far-reaching and tragic.

To drown his sorrows, Tom Baynes becomes a typical hard-drinking, spendthrift seaman, staying in lodging houses when first ashore at the end of a voyage and sailing foreign as soon as his money runs out. Spending his last few coppers one day in a Liverpool alehouse, he hears a disturbance upstairs but this event leads to his becoming more responsible and the story is eventually resolved calmly through his own better nature.

DOLLIN KELLY

Dollin Kelly was given his first "Collected Poems of T.E. Brown" when he was 11 years old. He has been reciting them ever since and is a noted performer of Brown's and others' works, in his native Isle of Man. His recital of "Betsy Lee from memory at the Manannan International Festival in 1992, was the first public performance of the complete poem for more than 60 years.

THE MUSIC

The musical excerpts by the young Manx composer, Steven Dallimore, are from the "Betsy Lee Suite", a work in four movements, written as introductory and interval music for the Manannan Festival performance.