

THE BECKFORD
JOURNAL
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VOLUME 1

SPRING 1995

The Beckford Journal

Volume 1. Spring 1995

EDITED BY JON MILLINGTON

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Editorial

For the past fifteen years an annual Newsletter was published by the Beckford Tower Trust every Spring. In future the Beckford Society will produce newsletters from time to time, as well as publishing an annual *Journal* of which this is the first number. The Editor warmly thanks all those who contributed to this issue and invites articles or illustrations on any aspect of William Beckford. These should be sent to him at 13 Downfield Road, Bristol, BS8 2TJ, England.

Beckford's Tower, Bath

Structural monitoring of the Lantern continues in order to ascertain whether its tilt from the vertical has changed. Dehumidifiers have been installed, resulting in an improvement in the humidity levels. An incentive to visit the Tower

this season is an exhibition on Beckford's heraldry. This is a rich theme which the exhibition will explore by showing the use Beckford made of heraldic motifs on furniture, books, objets de vertu and elsewhere.

Beckford's 150th Anniversary

Some twenty paintings formerly owned by Beckford are now in the National Gallery which was persuaded to acknowledge the 150th anniversary of his death in their August 1994 *Newsletter*. Jon Millington wrote a short piece on the *Exhumation of Saint Hubert* from the workshop of Rogier van der Weyden for this issue.

***Souvenirs of Fonthill Abbey* Exhibition at Beckford's Tower, 1994**

Anyone who saw this exhibition might be interested to know that some additional souvenirs have come to light.

One is a 23 cm dia. blue and white plate with a 1 cm white border; this is a variant of P2 in the catalogue. On the back are the initials 'RS' instead of 'RSW' (Ralph Stevenson and Williams). Another discovery is a most attractive oval version of P4 measuring 26 x 33 cm. When preparing the exhibition, it proved impossible to locate the watercolour of the Abbey from the Great Western Avenue, D2 in the catalogue. This watercolour was an ex-catalogue addition to the 1976 *William Beckford Exhibition* and extensive enquiries revealed that it is now in the Salisbury Museum. The *Souvenirs* exhibition was reviewed by Jonathan Glancey in the *Independent* for 6 April and was mentioned in *Country Life* for 28 April 1994.

Publications

Malcolm Jack's *Vathek and Other Stories - A William Beckford Reader* has

just been published as a Penguin Classic and was the subject of Kenneth Baker's 'True Confessions' in the Arts and Books section of the *Daily Telegraph* for 16 April 1994. (Kenneth Baker was Secretary of State for Education 1986-9, Chairman of the Conservative Party 1989-90 and Home Secretary 1991-2.) A full review by Michael Hall appeared in *Country Life* for 29 September. The *Reader*, together with Malcolm Jack's new edition of *The Episodes of Vathek*, are also reviewed in this *Journal*.

A new book on Monserate, *Castles, Caliphs and Christians: a Landscape with Figures*, by the late Ida Kingsbury was published last year by the British Historical Society of Portugal. There is much to appeal to Beckfordians in this 68 page work which is illustrated with engravings and old photographs. Unfortunately, none of the

TRUE CONFESSIONS



KENNETH BAKER

I HAVE always intended to read Richardson's *Clarissa* because those who know about these things say it is one of the great classics of the early novel. However, two years ago the BBC produced a magnificent version — limbering up for *Middlemarch* no doubt — and so the pressure to read the book has abated.

Another 18th-century "classic" which remains unread by me is *Vathek* by William Beckford. The exotic title may well be the most memorable thing about it. All I know is that it is a sort of *Arabian Nights* adventure, which does not sound very promising.

It was first published in 1706 in a pirated version by an

enterprising clergyman who had translated Beckford's French original, and went into many editions over the next 50 years; so it had a popular following. The author, however, is possibly more interesting.

William Beckford was a sort of 18th-century Harold Acton. His father, Alderman Beckford, a great friend and supporter of John Wilkes, had made a fortune in Jamaica from sugar and slaves. Much of William's life was devoted to spending it. He built the first great house of the Gothic revival, Fonthill, which, 'alas, no longer exists. He filled the house with a priceless collection of books, furniture and paintings (20 of them, including a Raphael, are now in the National Gallery).

William married young and had two daughters, one of whom became a duchess, which gave him a good deal of snobbish delight. He was clearly bisexual and after he had been reported cavorting with a young Courtenay at Powderham Castle in 1784, he thought it wise to live on the Continent for 10 years. Then he returned and became an MP — bucking the recent trend.

I know only one person who has read *Vathek*: Malcolm Jack, a clerk in the House of Commons. He has edited a volume of Beckford's writings which Pickering & Chatto will publish later this year, and thinks that *Vathek* is a rattling good yarn, a once and for all burst of genius. When I have Mr Jack's book, I shall start *Vathek*, but whether I finish it or not is another matter. It seems unlikely that the BBC will come to my aid.

views of Monserrate are captioned although five of the engravings also appear in Francisco Costa's *Historia da Quinta e Palacio de Monserrate* (1985) where they are fully identified. *Castles, Caliphs and Christians* can be obtained from Associação Amigos de Monserrate, Rua Augusto dos Santos 2-4^o, 1000 Lisboa, Portugal. A former British Ambassador, Hugh Arbuthnott, had the idea of forming the Friends of Monserrate who were launched in January 1994 to help restore the palace and gardens.

Elinor Shaffer has contributed the chapter 'Milton's Hell: William Beckford and the Graphic and Literary Tradition' to *Milton, the Metaphysicals and the Romantics*, edited by Anthony Harding and Lisa Low and published by Cambridge University Press. Her chapter 'William Beckford: Mental Traveller

on the Grand Tour' will appear in *Transports: Travel, Pleasure and Imaginative Geography. 1600-1830*, edited by Helen Langdon, Chloe Chard and Brian Allen, to be published by Yale University Press and the Mellon Centre, New Haven and London.

On 22 October 1994 the Georgian Group held a symposium, *The Picturesque in late Georgian England*, and have published the proceedings under that title. Two papers of particular interest were 'Beckford, Fonthill Abbey and the Picturesque' by John Wilton-Ely and 'H.E. Goodridge in Bath: The End of the Terrace and the rise of the Villa' by Christopher Woodward. Information about this publication can be obtained from The Georgian Group, 37 Spital Square, London, E1 6DY.

Last year Phaidon published *The Gothic Revival*

by Megan Aldrich. This is a handsome addition to the literature of the subject, and Fonthill Abbey is discussed on pp. 82-89 in chapter 3, 'Romantic Gothic: Abbeys and Castles'.

Christopher Thacker has written an article on Alderman Beckford's tower on Stop Beacon for the *Journal* of the Georgian Group and will give a lecture on Beckford's gardens and landscape at the Linnean Society on 30 October.

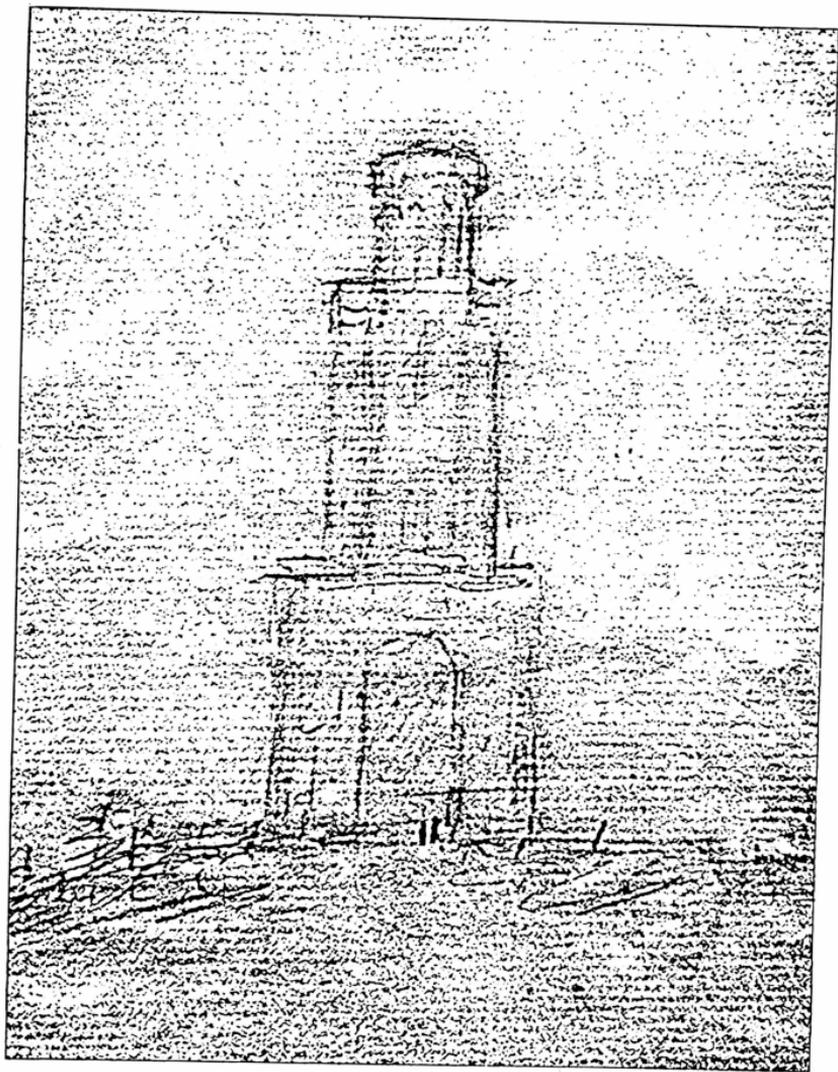
Next year José Corti of Paris hope to publish in one volume edited by Didier Girard the three French versions of *Vathek*, Lausanne (1787), Paris (1787) and London (1815), which were published in Beckford's lifetime. This has never been done before.

Beckford Sales

On 16 April 1994 Christie's New York sold a

set of four gilt-bronze candlesticks for \$155,000 (£107,640). They were of slim baluster form with flared foliate nozzles and circular bases supporting four winged lions applied to a band of trellis decorated with alternating cinquefoils and Latimer crosses. Although French in appearance, the candlesticks have been attributed to Benjamin Vulliamy; their pattern derives from a pair of 'gothic pattern' candelabra which Beckford commissioned from Henri Auguste during his stay in Paris from 1801 to 1803.

A hitherto unknown drawing supposedly executed by Beckford was sold by Phillips of Bath on 27 February this year for £130. An inscription sold with the drawing reads 'This sketch of a Tower described in the late Mr Beckford's book 'Vathek' was drawn by the deceased in his 83rd year for, and in the presence of



Sketch of a Tower, possibly by William Beckford

Mr John T.C. Heaviside, who gave it to me August 20th 1891. Mr Beckford died in May 1844. Mr John Thomas Coates Heaviside from whom I received the drawing of the Tower by the late Mr Beckford, died on 7 May 1895 at 12 New King Street Bath 1895 Aged 85. (signed) Tho R. Kinglap or Kinglass or Tinglass.' This fanciful drawing suggests, in the lower part of the tower, the entrance gateway to Fonthill Splendens; possibly the middle stories evoke Alderman Beckford's unfinished tower on Stop Beacon, while the top resembles the lantern of Lansdown Tower.

In their February sale Dominic Winter Book Auctions of Swindon sold a copy of Willes Maddox's *Views of Lansdown Tower, Bath* for £1100, including the buyer's premium. Their estimate for this copy, bound in red half-morocco, was £500-£700.

Last Spring the chance arose to move to within a mile of Fonthill Abbey when the major part of Fonthill Gifford Rectory was offered for sale for £260 000 by Humberts. Their advertisement appeared in the 19 May issue of *Country Life*.

Errors in the first edition of *Vathek*

Gerlof Janzen has noticed an error in the pagination of the first edition of *Vathek* in 1786 where page number 48 is printed as 84. This occurs in all but one of the copies so far examined, and even in this copy other errors remain, such as the missing 'in' on page 17, line 9. It might be supposed that when Beckford reissued the sheets of the first edition in 1809 with a cancel title these errors would have been put right. It would be interesting to know how rare are those copies dated either 1786 or 1809 with the correct pagination.

Beckford Round Table: William Beckford and Avant-gardisme

**International Congress on the Enlightenment. Munster,
Germany, 23-29 July 1995**

PARTICIPANTS AND PAPERS, SUPPLIED BY KENNETH W. GRAHAM

Kevin Cope, Louisiana State University: 'Dusting the Crop Circle: Beckford, UFO-nauts, and Alien Housekeeping'. Explores potent Beckford juxtapositions: the trivial and personal against the fundamentally unnameable, unparseable, and unprovable; the balancing of the extraterritorial against the enclosed and domestic.

Elinor Shaffer, University of East Anglia: 'Northern Lights: William Beckford and the 'Gothic' avant-garde'. Discusses Beckford's participation in the earliest waves of British interest in Germany.

Laurent Chatel, Balliol College, Oxford: 'William Beckford as an Avant-Gardiste Collector'. After decades of seeing Beckford portrayed as an extravagant, eccentric and frivolous fellow, it is high time to compare his taste to contemporary taste and to see to what degree he was extravagant, eccentric and frivolous. Beckford was a collector of Watteau and Fragonard at a time when very few collected Watteau. The paper will explore what it meant to collect Watteau in 1790. Did Beckford feel they conveyed what his contemporaries called 'Vanity' or was he avant-gardiste enough to see something more than their apparent superficiality?

Malcolm Jack, House of Commons, Westminster: 'William Beckford: The Poor Arabian Storyteller'. Beckford intended his

Episodes to be read as sequels to his great Arabian tale, *Vathek*. Yet in mood and pace, these 'other' stories differ from *Vathek*. Less structured and less restrained, the *Episodes* sound a modern, more dissonant chord which results from a less inhibited treatment of 'forbidden themes' as well as a development of his technique as a teller of Arabian tales.

Sydney Conger, Western Illinois University: 'Maternal Negotiations with the Underworld: Origins and Ends in William Beckford's *Vathek* and Mary Shelley's *Proserpine*'. Both Beckford's tale and Shelley's drama meditate on maternal origins as well as paternal ends: both are about filial rebellion and posthumous punishment, and both forge clear links between earth-bound mothers and subterranean patriarchs. Yet both fashion remarkably distinct myths of the earthly maternal and the patriarchal infernal: the mother-child dyad varies its form considerably according to the generation and the gender of the author.

John Garrett, Sultan Qaboos University, Sultanate of Oman: 'Beckford's Amorality'. Uses Beckford's fiction and non-fiction to suggest that Beckford was avant-garde in divesting himself of Christian morality and offering readers a vertiginous sense of moral free fall. Argues that Beckford might be firmly placed among modern existentialists.

Readers might like to know that the Transactions of the Eighth International Congress on the Enlightenment were published in 1992 as Volumes 303-305 of *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*. Vol. 305 contains three of the papers delivered at the Beckford Round Table held in Bristol and Bath on 25 and 26 July 1991. These are 'Beckford and the emerging consciousness: projective collecting and the aesthetic dynamics of acquisition' by Kevin L. Cope, pp. 1815-1819, 'William

Beckford and the Romantic tradition of travel literature' by Thomas M. Curley, pp. 1819-1823 and 'William Beckford: traveller, artist, escapist' by Malcolm Jack, pp. 1823-1824.

Beckford's Tower Garden

GILLIAN SLADEN

'Who but a man of extraordinary genius would have thought of rearing in the desert such a structure as this, or creating such an oasis' - Henry Venn Lansdown.

During the last two months of 1994, a devoted team of gardeners and volunteers worked frenziedly through rain, gale force winds, sleet and hail in order to recreate this oasis before the end of the year, thereby qualifying for the substantial grant offered by the Countryside Commission. This work was successfully completed using plant material mentioned by William Beckford in his writings or known to him. Within a few years, when the shrubberies have grown, the result should be as pleasing to visitors as it was to Mr Beckford's visitors in his time.

Once again we were greatly assisted by the Leche Trust, and Bath City Council who, in the new year, made an unexpected grant which enabled us to plant a new holly hedge and so replace the rotted fencing separating the garden site from the water tower area. A personal approach to Wessex Water resulted in them spontaneously undertaking major clearing of the woodland area surrounding the water tower and a further promise to plant trees in the spring. Our thanks go to everyone who supported the Garden Committee of Bath Preservation Trust in this project.

Devendra Varma

KENNETH W. GRAHAM

Beckfordians will be saddened to learn of the death of Devendra Varma in late October 1994. His fascination with the bizarre kindled his interest in William Beckford and made him a contributor to two Beckford Round Tables - in Budapest in 1987 and in Bristol and Bath in 1991. He had been planning to give a paper at Munster in 1995, but death sadly prevented him.

In his *The Transient Gleam*, he edited the first collection of William Beckford's poems. He arranged to have it published to coincide with the 1991 Round Table, the first Beckford Round Table to be held under the auspices of the Beckford Tower Trust.

Many will recall the spell-binding address he offered in Budapest - perhaps under the influence of the Transylvanian muse. He offered an atmospheric contemplation of Vathek's damnation - a Dantesque and Miltonic tour de force.

His work on Beckford represents only a small part of his contribution to scholarship. Future scholars of the Gothic novel will rightly revere his name for his leadership in enterprises that resulted in the republishing of over one hundred Gothic novels of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Some had been literally read to pieces and were in danger of being lost forever.

As a colleague and companion Devendra was open and generous. His active and creative imagination is reflected in his multitudinous publishing projects. He enjoyed particularly fine publishing - aesthetically satisfying bindings, papers, and type - - and usually for the Folio Society.

Always a special pleasure were his long phone calls from Halifax in Canada and his detailed accounts of recent and forthcoming conferences, tours, and publications. This charming, gregarious colleague will be greatly missed.

Peter Summers

BRIAN NORTH LEE



Peter Summers' Bookplate

A distinguished antiquary and benefactor, albeit unduly modest about all he undertook, Peter Summers enriched many people's lives. Son of a clergyman and a descendant of John Moore, Archbishop of Canterbury, he spent his working life as a public school bursar. These bald facts afford no hint of his singular achievements.

Peter had the capacity to inspire youngsters with a love of natural history, heraldry, the arts and antiquities. Whilst at Clayesmore School in Dorset, for instance, he and some of the boys discovered one of the largest Mesolithic sites in the West Country, findings from which are now in the County Museum at Dorchester. Shyer, less sports-motivated pupils learnt from his guidance and enthusiasm that their contributions to life were equally valid and worthy. Several

distinguished heralds took their first steps in what the late Lord Clark saw as "that exasperating science" under his tutelage, and after moving in 1945 to Kingswood School at Bath Peter became a cofounder of the Bath Heraldic Society. Excluded on health grounds from service in the Second World War, he assisted locally by driving a fire engine.

He wrote articles on prehistory, William Beckford, and heraldry, but his monumental work was the national survey of hatchments (the lozenge-shaped painted armorials seen displayed in churches and elsewhere after the death of the armigerous) which resulted in the series of books *Hatchments in Britain* (1974-94), of which he was the general editor; he was assisted latterly by John Titterton, who edited the last volumes.

A keen but specialised collector of ex-libris, he ran the Bookplate Exchange Club and was later President of the Bookplate Society. Peter's interests were as specialised in his remarkable holdings of armorial porcelain, snuff bowls and antiquarian books.

Quality was always the keystone and it served him well when, having retired to North Stoke in Oxfordshire, he turned his attention to Tibetan refugees in India: over a period he sold his material possessions, devoting the money to educating more than 50 young Tibetans, assisting elsewhere wherever he could, notably in the matters of education and health. The Institute of Tibetan Medicine at Bylakuppe in south India is named after him.

Peter Gilbert Summers, school bursar: born Herne Bay 28 January 1910; FSA 1953; died Wallingford 19 October 1994.

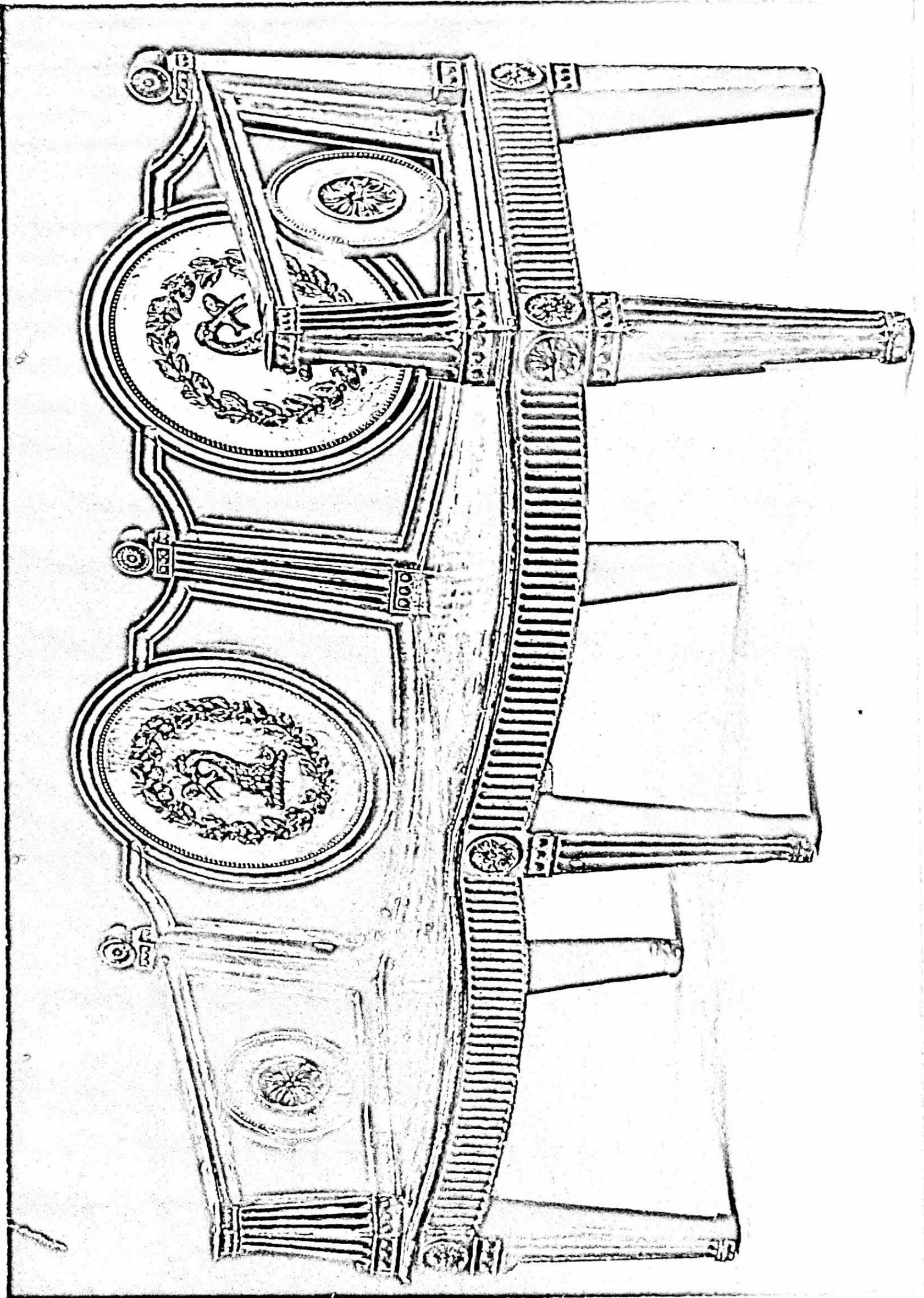
From *The Independent*, 2 December 1994

Settees from Fonthill Splendens

PHILIPPA BISHOP

A fine pair of late 18th century double chairback mahogany hall benches in the Neo-classical style came up for sale at Christie's on Thursday 17 November, 1994 (lot 107). Elements in their design, particularly the patera finials, appeared to relate to an altar-like stool illustrated in the architect Charles Heathcote Tatham's *Etchings of Ancient Ornamental Architecture Drawn in Rome* (1799). The very detailed description in Christie's catalogue mentioned the "two beaded channelled roundels carved in relief with an armorial device with a stork holding a fish in its beak ..." The colour illustration at once made clear to those familiar with the coat of arms of the Beckford family that the 'stork' was in fact the heron ('bee fort') of the Beckford crest.

Once the Beckford connection had been noted, an addition was made to the catalogue incorporating research done by Clive Wainwright. He suggested that the benches - or, more properly, settees - were likely to have formed part of the supplementary furnishings for Fonthill Splendens commissioned by William Beckford from the architect John Soane in the late 1780s. Patterns for related medallion-backed settees featured in Soane's *Designs in Architecture* (1778). Clive Wainwright considered that he had identified the provenance for this pair of settees, as one of three pairs listed in Messrs Phillips sale of contents of Fonthill in August 1801 (lots 47-49) under the description, "Two mahogany Settee's, with fluted legs and rails, carved backs and crimson serge cushions". On 21 August 1801 each of the three pairs realised seven guineas. On 17 November 1994 this pair was sold for £32,000 (hammer price) to a private buyer.



In a review, 'Around the Salerooms', which appeared subsequently in the issue of 16 February 1995 of *Country Life*, Huon Mallalieu put forward another suggestion: that the crest - although undoubtedly pointing to a Beckford connection - might not necessarily point to William Beckford of Fonthill, "whose heron should be gorged with a collar flory counterflory. The Beckford-Love branch of Basing Park would be another possibility".

Now that the field of speculation has been opened up in this way, might yet another possibility be the Peter Beckford branch? Or do we have to admit that here might simply be a case where the finer detail of the heraldry was omitted by an oversight? Further contributions to the debate may be expected from furniture historians and heraldry experts.

A Letter to Emma Hamilton from Beckford in 1805

We would like to thank Geoffrey Blum for letting us publish, possibly for the first time, this interesting letter. Perhaps it was Beckford's attempt to recreate the successful visit of Nelson and Emma Hamilton, together with her now dead husband Sir William, at Christmas 1800. It was written at a time when both Beckford's daughters were of marriageable age; he hoped to find suitors of rank and wealth who might be persuaded to help him obtain his much desired barony. This letter, which appears on the next four pages, probably had the same motive, but it was to be the last in this vein because Nelson died at the Battle of Trafalgar in October 1805. Emma, having been imprisoned for debt in 1813, died in obscurity in Calais in 1815.

Tombstone 30th Aug 22
1881

You may easily imagine, my dear Lady,
how anxiously I wish to catch
sight of our glorious friend,
~~and~~ benign & commanding Countenance.

To expect to meet immediately
at such a moment as this left up its
light as Tombstone is too much —

I conceive the profane in ten
thousand drops of these impressions
Time: but see Lord Nelson I

to wish — if it was not for wish
no Compliments when I appeared
his Lordship in my account of 10th
day, that morning but the appearance
of indignity upon any of those occasions
which would have de prised his Country
to get me back: — ~~to get me back~~
to get me back is what I wish
to get me back I wish to get me
for a few minutes I allow me to
ask him from the above after this
admission in credible exactions of A. T. T. T.

from again I again trust if it were
possible for him to follow a day or
two upon Toronto I should feel
the pleasure & interest of Bertha.

I am going to see, Wednesday
with Lyell who has been making
a week here of week Tuesday on
Wednesday on Friday I suppose
nothing but had parents on the
the Bertha game.

Dear my dear Lady Hamilton
I have the kind regards of your
affectionate friends & I am
glad to hear that you are
well & at what I hope

you believe me most constantly
your affectionate friend
& admirer

M.B.

A Transcript of the Letter to Emma Hamilton

Fonthill 30th Augst
1805

You may easily imagine, my dear Lady H, how anxiously I wish to catch sight of our glorious friend's benign and commanding countenance. To expect he could immediately at such a moment as this lift up its light at Fonthill is too much --

I conceive the pressure in ten thousand shapes of these imperious times, but see Lord Nelson I must - and it was not flourish or compliment when I assured his Lordship in my scrawl of t'oth day, that nothing but the apprehension of intruding upon any of those sacred, important hours he owes his Country kept me back: - however I am certain his goodness is such that he will excuse my breaking in upon him for a few minutes and allow me to ask him how he does after his almost incredible exertions and to tell him again and again that if it were possible for him to bestow a day or two upon Fonthill I should feel the proudest and happiest of Beings.

I am going to see Windsor with Wyatt who has been passing a week here and next Tuesday or Wednesday at furthest I propose reaching my old quarters at the Hotel Berkeley Square.

Will my dear Lady Hamilton have the kindness and graciousness to let me know where we can meet and at what hour --

Ever believe me most constantly
sincerely and affectionately yrs
WB

Vathek and *The Episodes of Vathek* -- separately, but not together

ELINOR SHAFFER

William Beckford, *Vathek and Other Stories - A William Beckford Reader*. Edited with an introduction by Malcolm Jack. London: Pickering, 1993. xxxviii + 314 pp. ISBN 1 85196 049 X. £39.95.

William Beckford, *The Episodes of Vathek*. Translated from the French by Sir Frank Marzials. Edited with an introduction by Malcolm Jack. Dedalus Ltd, 1994. Langford Lodge, St. Judith's Lane, Sawtry, Cambs PE17 5XE. 207pp. ISBN 1 873982 61 5. £6.99.

It is with immense pleasure that one receives these two volumes, which are another signal that Beckford is being delivered from the long, stifling entombment he has suffered from the forces of suppression and censorship in Britain over more than two hundred years. The trickle of released material set off by the acquisition of the Beckford papers by the Bodleian is rapidly becoming a broad river, if not yet a flood.

The first volume is a welcome anthology, in a handsome format, which should help to make the range of Beckford's writings more accessible to a broader audience. Most readers still know him simply as the author of *Vathek*, a minor classic in the manner of the eighteenth-century 'Oriental tale'; given that this is easily accessible in the very moderately priced Oxford 'World's Classics' series and well-edited by Roger Lonsdale, using the English text by Samuel Henley as corrected by Beckford for the third edition of 1816, the inclusion of the book here is at first

puzzling, as it devours so much of the available space. The text is in fact that established by Kenneth W. Graham in his unpublished 1971 Ph.D. thesis, after comparing the extant versions. As Lonsdale says, 'no one text of *Vathek* in either French or English can be absolutely definitive' (xxxv); so there is room for another version. Unfortunately, as those of Graham's notes that are included are at the level of 'Nimrod', 'Babylonian prince, see *Genesis* X:8-9', and 'in cases of end-of-line hyphenation the readings in the first, fourth and fifth editions are not applicable', they are unhelpful in themselves, and there is no way for the reader to see at a glance what the differences are between this and the Oxford text, nor how they arose, nor what their significance. No summary of their purport is offered; the interested reader must in any case return to Lonsdale's 'Note on the Text'. Moreover, as Henley's original notes are also included, the reader is fussed without being illuminated.

Especially welcome are the 'tastings' from Beckford's less familiar works, although the division into 'Oriental Tales', 'Satires' and 'Travel Diaries' may not be the most helpful for today's reader. All of the items included are available in copyright libraries, but it takes a considerable amount of persistent sleuthing to track them down, and few are in print. The fiction extends well beyond *Vathek*. The early *The Long Story* (first published by Guy Chapman in 1930 as *The Vision*) is joined by the two novels, *Azemia* and *Modern Novel Writing* both of which deserve republication as a whole (Virago indignantly turned them down on the grounds they were by a man masquerading under female pseudonyms); unfortunately, the selections from the novels are too limited to show the scintillating variety of Beckford's fictional styles.

The selection from the brilliant and neglected sketches of the lives of imaginary painters, his first published work, *Biographical*

Memoirs of Extraordinary Painters (1780), well edited by Robert J. Gemmett in 1969, republished in the U.S. (1977) and in this country by the Oleander Press, Cambridge, with a very misleading introduction by Philip Ward, unfortunately excludes the most interesting life, that of 'Og of Basan', which provides an essential link with the vogue for landscape painting that Beckford as writer, patron and collector was to forward throughout his life.

A little less than a third of the book is devoted to extracts from his travel diaries, including that classic of English travel writing, *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents* (1783), suppressed after publication by his own family, leaving only four extant copies; the excellent American edition by R.J. Gemmett (1971) being now out of print, *Dreams* is currently available in this country only in selections with linking commentary edited by Elizabeth Mavor in the Penguin Travel Library (1986), unsatisfactory but preferable to the selection in this volume, which offers only thirty pages and leaps unaccountably from the Low Countries (Beckford's least favourite part of the journey) to Posillipo, his destination. His *Journal in Portugal and Spain 1787-88*, recovered only in the twentieth century and published for the first time by Boyd Alexander in 1954, is given twenty-five pages, re-edited from the MSS. Then come selections from *Italy; with Sketches of Spain and Portugal*, taken from Beckford's own careful revision of the suppressed *Dreams*, which was finally a popular success in 1834, and throughout the nineteenth century was held to be his best work; but here we are given only the section that represents his reworking of the then unpublished Portuguese journal. The book concludes with the First, Sixth and Twelfth Days, and part of the Seventh from, his last work, the exquisite *Recollections of an Excursion to the Monasteries of Alcobaca and Batalha* (1835). If Malcolm Jack has tipped the scales a little in favour of his own special interest, Beckford's relations with Portugal, at the expense of the main

routes of the Grand Tour in Switzerland and Italy (the brilliant evocations of the Grande Chartreuse and of Vallombrosa, for example, are omitted), that is perhaps justified by a wish to draw attention to the relatively unknown 'find' of the *Journal*, and to Alexander's shrewd comparison of it with the finished *Sketches* and *Recollections*. Cavilling about the selection is in any case futile; there can be no substitute for a proper edition of Beckford's works, now cruelly overdue.

The real publishing event here is the appearance of *The Episodes* in a reasonably priced English edition. The publishers are much to be congratulated on their courage and enterprise in making available a work that has in effect been suppressed in Great Britain since Beckford's lifetime. Beckford wrote the *Episodes* -- that is, the tales of the damned in Eblis, the companions-to-be of the damned Vathek and Nouronihar -- intending to include them in *Vathek*. His intention was circumvented only by his English translator's piratical publication of the volume without his consent. He continued to hope for their publication, though evidently fearing the consequences. What a pity, then, that there has never been and even now there is no English edition that brings *Vathek* together with its *Episodes*. In French there have been four editions uniting *Vathek* with the *Episodes* since Mallarmé's championship of Beckford in 1876, and Maurice Lévy's in Flammarion is still in print. In America, R.J. Gemmett, that doughty worker in the Beckfordian fields, published the *Episodes* with a very good introduction; but it is not even listed in Jack's bibliography.

In our own benighted realm, by contrast, the first translation into English was published in book form only in 1912 by Frank T. Marzials (the text used in this edition), and in Chapman's 1922 Abbey Classics edition both *Vathek* and *The Episodes of Vathek* were published -- but only in separate volumes, and when they

were indeed published together by Chapman in 1929 it was only in French, the language of the illicit! The *Episodes* have continued to live a surreptitious, underground life, excluded from the parent book that now enjoys a quiet life as a 'classic' not to be disturbed by the introjection of the stories of the damned in the Hell of Eblis. The notes of Graham and Jack in the *Vathek* of this *Anthology* crucially fail even to indicate the place at which the *Episodes* were to have been inserted, whereas Lonsdale duly marks it, supplying a long note of explanation. Unfortunately, powerful critical voices in this country, and that of Kenneth Graham in Canada, have been raised in favour of maintaining the separation. It is, therefore, not merely an accident of publishing that this worthy but desultory *Anthology* with its bowdlerised *Vathek* is published by a well-known firm, while the rare *Episodes* are published by an adventurous small firm one of whose lines is in Continental literary 'pornography' or, as they style it, 'decadence' (e.g., Octave Mirbeau's *Torture Garden*). This dichotomy once again confirms and extends the censorship that Beckford has been subjected to in British society and letters.

The *Episodes* originally included the following French titles (as listed in the Lausanne *Vathek* of 1787); the English titles are of the present edition:

Histoire des deux princes amis, Alasi & Jironz, enfermés dans le palais souterrain: *The story of Prince Alasi and the Princess Firouzkah.*

Histoire du prince Kalilah & de la princess Zulkäis, sa soeur, enfermés dans le palais souterrain: *The Story of the Princess Zulkäis and the Prince Kalilah.*

Histoire du prince Berkiarekh enfermé dans le palais souterrain: *The Story of the Prince Barkiarokh*

Histoire du prince... enfermé dans le palais souterrain.

In several editions between 1787 and 1816 only three stories are mentioned. The fourth story has been variously identified, for example as the *Histoire de Motassem* which Beckford did not finish until 1815, when he still hoped to publish *Vathek* together with the *Episodes*: but it and others may have been suppressed by Beckford or his heirs.

The first story is told by a prince, Alasi, seduced by a younger boy (Firouz), age thirteen, who is irresistible but cannot refrain from using his power to the full, arbitrarily and maliciously, in order to subjugate the prince permanently to his love. Great tension is built up as the disastrous personal, political, and spiritual consequences unfold. In the version given here, the boy turns out to be a girl (Firouzkah), which palliates but cannot disguise the homosexual motif.

The Story of Prince Barkiarokh was announced in the 1787 Lausanne edition as the third history to be recited; it becomes the second in the Paris edition; Chapman suggested it was the first to be written after *Vathek*, for it mirrors Beckford's scheme of forming an ensemble of interlocking tales. Such interlocking tales were a favourite form of Oriental *conte*. Here it is given as the second tale. Into it are interwoven three other secondary stories in different tones: 'The Story of the Peri Homaïfouna', 'The Story of Barkiarokh's Younger Sister-in-Law' and 'The Story of Leilah, Barkiarokh's Daughter'.

In *The Story of the Princess Zuikaïs and the Prince Kalilah*, told by the princess, she and her brother are inseparable, and love one another dearly, the intensity of their attachment being attributed to their father the Emir's preference for false Egyptian arts, until the Emir wishing his son to take up manly pursuits, forcibly separates them; taking great risks they come together again. This story as printed is unfinished, but earlier notes made

by John Mitford on the MSS refer to a tale in which a prince 'had carnal connection with his sister in the centre of the great Pyramid.' This consummation is clearly the end in view in this story; and their incestuous coupling will locate them with the rest of the damned in Eblis. Unfortunately, Malcolm Jack allows the story simply to break off without any explanation. (No notes are supplied.) There can surely be no point now in veiling the incest motif so widely explored by the Romantics.

All these stories have great power, which resides in the irresistible intensity of feeling that drives the characters, the delicate but insatiate erotic sensibility, and the sense of innocence betrayed by the strength of passion to the point of undermining an authentic love. The casting of the stories within an alien mode -- in which Islam is the dominant viewpoint, but where there are rival spiritual authorities -- has the effect of undermining certainties and casting doubt on claims to moral righteousness generally. In our own era of everyday violence, explicit sex, and exploding conventions, there is nothing obviously 'shocking': yet the deep conflicts and reversals of value presented with consummate artistry in Beckford's tales of the damned have an unsettling power bordering on the tragic. As Gemmett put it, in his Introduction to the *Episodes*, 'the Vathekian character... inevitably loses his soul in a struggle to realise a fundamental self.' (XLV)

Thus Beckfordians can be grateful to Malcolm Jack for his labours, yet finally these two books represent a grand opportunity lost once more: the opportunity to bring together in English *Vathek* and the *Episodes* intended for it, and so to initiate a new discussion of this text on the scale and at the depth it deserves.

For those who wish to procure their copies of the *Episodes* without delay, I have given the address of Dedalus above.

William Beckford's Most Popular Literary Work: *Vathek*

ERIC DARTON

In January 1782 William Beckford returned to London after the Christmas festivities at Fonthill, his mind full of the scenes in the Egyptian Hall, the vaulted apartments and the necromantic atmosphere that Loutherboung had created. He wrote to the Revd. Samuel Henley on the 21st January, 'The spirit has moved me this eve; and shut up in my apartment...I have given way to fancies and inspirations'. A week later he wrote of 'work upon a story so horrid that I tremble whilst relating it'. He had begun the composition, in French, of *The History of the Caliph Vathek*, which was completed at the end of April. He then went on to compose the *Episodes*, further stories to be included in the main work.¹

The arrangement that Beckford made with Henley for the translation, annotation and publication of *Vathek* is well documented, as is Henley's treachery in publishing the work anonymously in 1786, against Beckford's express instructions to suspend publication. Henley subsequently claimed the work as his own, and in the Bibliothèque Nationale there is a copy inscribed in Henley's hand, 'From the author, Rev. Samuel Henley'.²

With Beckford's acknowledged linguistic ability and his knowledge of writings of the East, it seems questionable whether he needed Henley's assistance. There is evidence of Beckford's familiarity with the works 'of the well-known Oriental scholars of his day, Herbelot, Chardin, Le Brun, Scott, Galland's *Mille et*

une Nuits, Cardonne's *Amours de Meignoun et Leila*.³ His knowledge in this regard may well have been more comprehensive than Henley's, as witness Beckford's letter to Henley of the 13th April 1786, in which Beckford explains references in *Vathek* than Henley had not understood.⁴

In *Vathek* the colourful East and the extravagant life of the Caliph are described with great brilliance and wit. We see the splendour of the palaces of the five senses and the absurdity of the effect of frustration and agitation on the Caliph's appetite, 'of the three hundred dishes...placed before him, he could taste of no more than thirty-two.' When his thirst for knowledge becomes a physical thirst, 'his mouth, like a funnel, was always open to receive the various liquors that might be poured into it'.⁵

Vathek has been described as 'one of the profoundly moral books of the world.'⁶ It tells of the struggle between the forces of good and evil for possession of the Caliph, who desires 'to know every thing; even sciences that did not exist' and is warned, 'Woe to the rash mortal who seeks to know that of which he should remain ignorant; and to undertake that which surpasseth his power!'⁷ With his mother Carathis, who is even more practiced in the black arts, urging him on, *Vathek*'s fate is already determined.

'The great prophet, Mahomet, whose vicars the caliphs are' is troubled by *Vathek*'s irreligious behaviour. He tells his Genii, 'let us see to what lengths his folly and impiety will carry him'. He instructs the Genii to assist in the construction of a tower, which *Vathek* is building 'from the insolent curiosity of penetrating the secrets of heaven'. The prophet concludes that 'he will not divine the fate that awaits him.'⁸

When a Giaour arrives and creates chaos in the court, Vathek is prepared to follow him. The Giaour asks, 'Wouldest thou devote thyself to me? adore the terrestrial influences, and abjure Mahomet? On these conditions I will bring thee to the Palace of Subterranean Fire...it is there that Soliman Ben Daoud reposes, surrounded by the talismans that control the world.' The Caliph accedes to the Giaour's demands, but the Giaour requires a down payment, 'the blood of fifty children...the most beautiful sons of thy vizirs and great men; or, neither can my thirst nor thy curiosity be satisfied'.⁹

By means of a combined beauty contest and sports meeting, Vathek supplies the Giaour's wants. Carathis makes an offering consisting of various hideous objects together with the bodies of a number of their subjects, which is burnt at the summit of the tower. The Caliph then receives his instructions. At the full moon he is to set out with a magnificent company, in all its grandeur, to Istakhar to receive 'the diadem of Gian Ben Gian; the talisman of Soliman; and the treasures of the pre-adamite sultans'. No dwelling must be entered en route.¹⁰

After three days of travel, storm and wild animals break up the caravanseri. Goods and equipment are destroyed, there is complete disorder and the party is lost. 'Vathek, though well versed in the course of the heavens, no longer knew his situation on earth.'¹¹ They are rescued by the Emir Fakreddin, who offers hospitality at his palace. Vathek, who by this time is uttering imprecations against the Giaour, accepts, arguing 'I forsooth, must not enter any one's habitation! Be it so: but, what can I enter, that is not my own!'¹²

Entertained royally, the Caliph falls in love with the Emir's daughter Nouronihar. She too has visions of the 'subterranean

palace' and the 'carbuncle of Giamschid', but Vathek is in no hurry to complete his journey. He tells Nouronihar, 'Your lovely little person...is far more precious than all the treasures of the pre-adamite sultans; and I wish to possess it at pleasure...before I go to burrow under ground, like a mole.'¹³

Encamped in an enclosed valley, their idyll is rudely interrupted by an enraged Carathis, who berates the Caliph, 'Thou double-headed and four-legged monster! what means all this winding and writhing?...Is this the fruit of the knowledge I have taught thee! Is this the end of thy journey?'¹⁴ Vathek and the company continue their travels. In the valley of Rocnabad, welcomed by santons with food, honey and prayers, they destroy their hives, desecrate their oratories and assault the holy men. The Genii makes one last attempt to save Vathek from 'the snare, which his enemies, the dives, have prepared to destroy him', but Vathek is defiant, 'I have traversed a sea of blood, to acquire a power, which will make thy equals tremble: deem not that I shall retire, when in view of the port'.¹⁵

Vathek and Nouronihar arrive at Istakhar with its terrace of marble and its numberless gloomy watch-towers. A staircase of polished marble is revealed, illuminated by torches, and they descend, feeling 'their steps accelerated to such a degree, that they seemed not walking but falling from a precipice.' At 'a vast portal of ebony' the Giaour makes them welcome and they enter a considerable space, 'with a vaulted ceiling' and 'rows of columns and arcades', 'an infinity of censers...continually burning', tables with a 'profusion of viands; and wines...A throng of Genii...danced lasciviously.'¹⁶

The Caliph and Nouronihar are terrified at the sight of the multitude 'who severally kept their right hands on their hearts'.

They have 'the livid paleness of death...Some stalked slowly on...some shrieking with agony, ran furiously about...whilst others...foamed along more frantic than the wildest maniac.' Despite their number they behave as if alone. Vathek and his companion ask for an explanation, but the Giaour tells them, 'you will soon be acquainted with all: let us haste and present you to Eblis.'¹⁷

Eblis, seated on a globe of fire, is a young man of noble but tarnished features and proud but despairing eyes. He tells them, 'enjoy whatever this palace affords...insatiable as your curiosity may be, shall you find sufficient objects to gratify it.'¹⁸ They view the vast halls and see countless treasures. Under a lofty dome, where a funereal gloom prevails, the great king Soliman Den Daoud tells of his downfall, and his sufferings. When he moves his right hand, the Caliph discerns 'his heart enveloped in flames.'¹⁹

In despair, Vathek calls on Mahomet for mercy, but the Giaour tells him there is none, and that their hearts too will be kindled. They have a few days allotted 'previous to this fatal period'. The Caliph and Nouronihar in a state of 'the most abject affliction', explore their surroundings. Portals open, dives prostrate themselves, but they no longer have any enthusiasm or interest. The chambers, halls and galleries are 'all distinguishable by the same luring gloom...(and) awful grandeur'.²⁰

In 'a small square chamber...four young men, of goodly figure, and a lovely female' are 'holding a melancholy conversation'. They also, are in the allotted interval before their final punishment. Vathek and the strangers, in turn, tell of the circumstances that have brought them to his pass.²¹ This exchange of confidences is abruptly halted by the reappearance

of Carathis. Vathek upbraids her, 'Execrable woman!...cursed be the day thou gavest me birth!...thou wilt learn to what these palaces are destined, and how much I ought to abhor the impious knowledge thou hast taught me.'²² Carathis, unabashed, recites with pride the completion of her destruction of all opposition in Samarah and proudly proceeds to seek her reward.

A voice proclaims, 'All is accomplished!' and Carathis becomes a 'receptacle of eternal fire'. With a 'tremendous yell' and her right hand on her heart she 'glanced off in a rapid whirl...and continued to revolve without intermission.' The same voice announces to the occupants of the square chamber 'the awful, and irrevocable decree. Their hearts immediately took fire, and they, at once, lost the most precious gift of heaven: -- HOPE.' 'Vathek beheld in the eyes of Nouronihar nothing but rage and vengeance; nor could she discern aught in his, but aversion and despair.' So it was with the others, and all join the accursed multitude, there to wander in an eternity of unabating anguish.'²³

It is known that Beckford possessed a copy of Gueullette's *Mogul Tales* (1736) and it is from this work he, no doubt, derived the idea of the flaming heart.²⁴ None the less, *Vathek* is an amazing tour de force. As the participants in the drama become aware of their ultimate destiny, the mood of the story, from a gay and satirical beginning, comes to a truly horrifying conclusion. The representation of the damned gives a terrifying picture of hell.

There are parallels to be found in *Vathek* with Beckford's story of five years earlier, *The Vision*. Nouronihar, although she bears the same name, is not the wise counsellor and companion of the earlier work, but a much darker and more malign

character. The rapid descent in the Halls of Eblis mirrors the descent into the cavern in *The Vision*.²⁵ The warning to Vathek has the same ring as that uttered earlier by Moissasour, 'Repress do daring a curiosity. The last initiation is Death.'²⁶ These are both stories of a journey; *The Vision* in search of true knowledge and purification and *Vathek* in search of forbidden knowledge and damnation.

The scene in the 'small square chamber' should have included the tales known as *The Episodes of Vathek*. Beckford wished publication of *Vathek* to be postponed so that these stories could be included, and for the French and English editions to be published simultaneously. Various delays, Beckford's travels, his marriage, the Powderham affair, and the death of Lady Margaret all conspired to defeat his intentions. The English edition of *Vathek*, having been published against his wished, he hastily arranged for the French editions to follow.

The Episodes of Vathek, comprising two complete stories and one unfinished, (a fourth story was destroyed by Beckford as being 'too wild')²⁷ were not published until 1912, in a translation from the French by Sir Frank T. Marzials. In 1929 a two volume limited edition of *Vathek* in the original French and edited by Guy Chapman was published, with the *Episodes* included in the complete work as Beckford had originally intended. It is an ironic thought that, but for Henley's unwarranted action, *Vathek*, like the *Episodes*, might not have been published in Beckford's lifetime.

1. Guy Chapman, *Beckford* (1952), pp. 105 & 107.

2. *ibid.* pp. 202-3.

3. *ibid.* p. 108.

4. Lewis Melville, *The Life and Letters of William Beckford* (1910), pp. 135-6.

5. William Beckford, *Vathek*, O.U.P., 1970, pp. 7 & 12.

6. Hilaire Belloc, *A Conversation with an Angel and Other Essays* (1928), p.92.
7. *Vathek*, pp. 3 & 11. 8. *ibid.* pp. 3 & 4. 9. *ibid.* pp. 22 & 23.
10. *ibid.* p. 36. 11. *ibid.* p. 45. 12. *ibid.* p. 53.
13. *ibid.* p. 84. 14. *ibid.* p. 93. 15. *ibid.* pp. 103 & 105.
16. *ibid.* pp. 108 & 109. 17. *ibid.* pp. 109-10. 18. *ibid.* p. 111.
19. *ibid.* p. 114. 20. *ibid.* pp. 114 & 115. 21. *ibid.* pp. 115-6.
22. *ibid.* p. 117. 23. *ibid.* pp. 119 & 120.
24. Brian Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill* (1979), p. 362, note 12.
25. William Beckford, *The Vision and Liber Veritatis* edited by Guy Chapman (1930), p. 24. 26. *ibid.* p. 67.
27. Chapman, *Beckford*, p. 198, note 3.

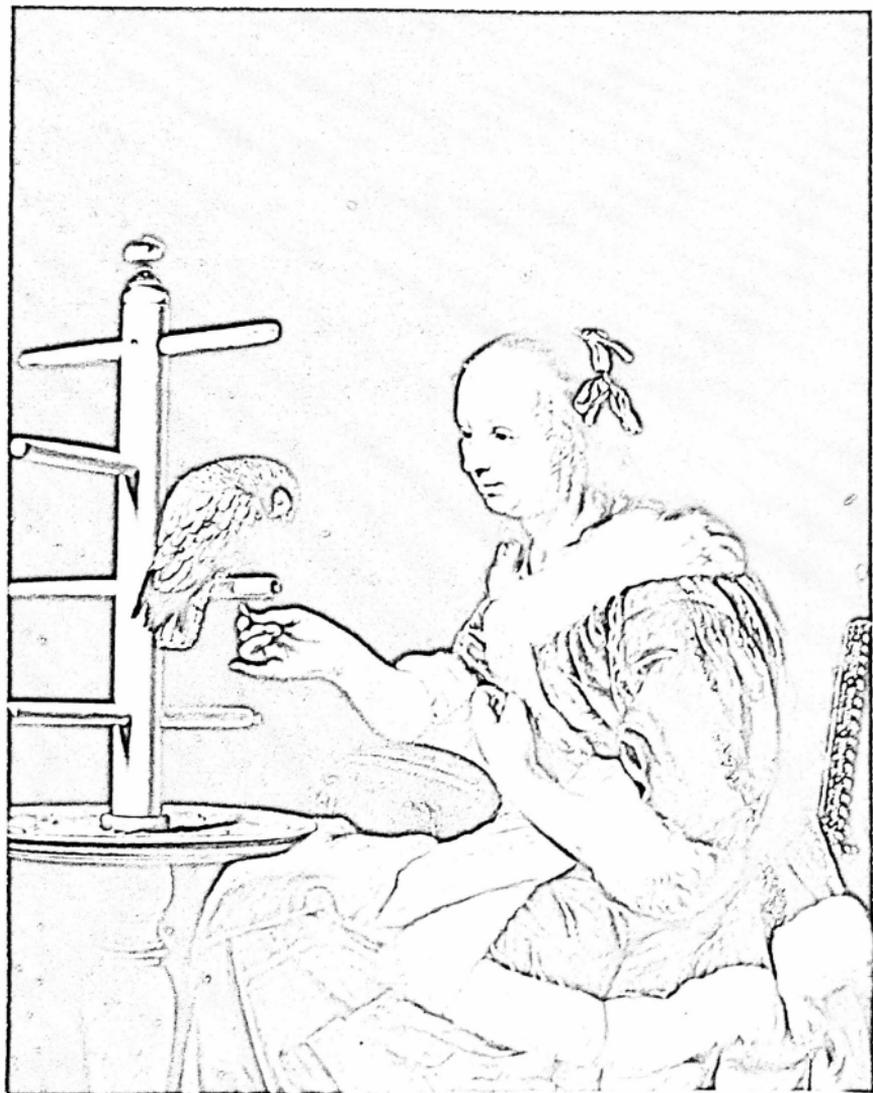
Beckford's Pictures now in the National Gallery

JON MILLINGTON

Research for the 1976 William Beckford Exhibition held in Salisbury and Bath disclosed the remarkable fact that nineteen paintings formerly owned by Beckford are now in the National Gallery. The provenance of one or two is a little dubious, but most are well documented. Other paintings already in the collection, or new acquisitions may prove to have been Beckford's. Since the Exhibition I have had several requests for the list which follows.

Giovanni BELLINI, active c.1459, died 1516, *The Doge Leonardo Loredan*. No. 189, poplar, 616 × 451 mm. Dates from 1501 or soon after. Rutter 44, Christie 65, Waagen 117-8(?). Bought from Beckford in 1844.

Giovanni BELLINI, *The Agony in the Garden*. No. 726, wood, 813 × 1270 mm. Dates from c.1465. Storer 20, Rutter 45 & 52, Christie 77, Phillips 77. Bought 1863.



Frans van MIERIS the elder, *A Woman feeding a Parrot.*

Giovanni Battista CIMA do Conegliano, 1459/60(?) - 1517/8, *S. Jerome in a Landscape*. No. 1120, wood, 321 × 254 mm. Rutter 46, Christie 35, Waagen 118. Bought at Hamilton Palace Sale, 1882, lot 26.

Gerrit DOU, 1613 - 1675, *A Poulterer's Shop*. No. 825, oak, 580 × 460 mm. Bought by Beckford in 1814. Rutter 45, Christie 111, Phillips 248. In Peel collection by 1829. Bought 1871.

Adam ELSHEIMER, 1578 - 1610, *Tobias and the Archangel Raphael*. No. 1424, copper, 193 × 276 mm. Probably a late work. Owned by Alderman Beckford. Sold by William Beckford at Christie's on 27 Feb 1802, lot 26. Sandars Bequest 1894. (At the time of his death, Beckford owned another smaller version, 111 × 182 mm, presumably lot 64 in the 1882 Hamilton Palace Sale and G13 in the 1976 William Beckford Exhibition.)

GAROFALO, 1481(?) - 1559, *The Holy Family with SS. John the Baptist, Elizabeth, Zacharias and (?) Francis*. No. 170, canvas, 603 × 478 mm. Rutter 44, Christie 108, Phillips 189, Waagen 123. Bought from Beckford in 1839.

Filippino LIPPI, 1457(?) - 1504, *The Adoration of the Kings*. No. 1124, wood, 575 × 857 mm. An early work, painted under Botticelli's influence. Waagen 124. Bought at Hamilton Palace Sale, 1882, lot 397.

Lodovico MAZZOLINO, active 1504 - 1524, *The Trinity with the Madonna, SS. Joseph and Nicholas of Tolentino and Angels*. No. 169, panel, 806 × 622 mm. Bought from Beckford in 1839.

Lodovico MAZZOLINO, *Christ and the Woman taken in Adultery*. No. 641, panel, 460 × 308 mm. Rutter 46, Christie 71, Phillips 178. Bought 1860.

Frans van MIERIS the elder, 1635 - 1681, *A Woman feeding a Parrot*. No. 840, oil on copper, 225 × 178 mm. Rutter 43, Christie 105, Phillips 200. In Peel collection by 1829. Bought 1871.

Nicolas de NEUFCHATEL, active 1561-7, *Portrait of a Young Lady*. No. 184, canvas, 806 × 654 mm. Storer 19, Christie 38, Phillips 160. Bought 1858.

Style of ORCAGNA, active c.1343, died 1368-69, *Small Altarpiece: The Crucifixion*. No. 1468, wood, 1080 × 838 mm. Rutter 52, Phillips 34. Bequeathed in 1896 by Rev. Jarvis Holland Ash.

Pietro PERUGINO, living 1469, died 1523, *The Virgin and Child with S. John*. No. 181, wood, 686 × 445 mm. Bought by Beckford c.1820. Rutter 49, Christie 78, Waagen 117. Bought from Beckford in 1841.

RAPHAEL, 1483 - 1520, *S. Catherine of Alexandria*. No. 168, wood, 715 × 557 mm. Probably dates from just before 1509. In Beckford's collection by 1824. Waagen 122. Bought from Beckford in 1839.

Hendrick van STEENWYCK II, active by 1604, died 1649, *A Courtyard of a Renaissance Palace*. No. 141, copper, 402 × 698 mm. Rutter 51, Christie 39, Phillips 66. Bequeathed 1837 by Lt-Col. J.H. Ollney.

Imitator of Hendrick van STEENWYCK II, *Interior of a Church at Night*. No. 2205, wood, 471 × 657 mm. Rutter 49(?), Christie 10(?), Phillips 342(?). Bequeathed 1907 by Henry Calcott Brunning.

Diego VELAZQUEZ, 1599 - 1660, *Philip IV of Spain in Brown and Silver*. No. 1129, canvas, 1995 × 1130 mm. Begun in 1631 and completed mid 1630s. In Beckford's 1844 inventory. Bought at Hamilton Palace Sale, 1882, lot 1142.

Workshop of Rogier van der WEYDEN, c.1399 - 1464, *The Exhumation of S. Hubert*. No. 783, wood, 879 × 806 mm. Probably dates from soon after 1437. Bought by Beckford 1801. Storer 11, Rutter 49, Christie 80, Phillips 80. Eastlake collection. Bought 1868.

Emanuel de WITTE, 1615/17 - 1691 or 1692, *The Interior of the Oude Kirk, Amsterdam, during a Sermon*. No. 1053, canvas, 511 × 562 mm. Dates from soon after 1658-9. Lot 337 in Beckford sale, 1845. Bequeathed in 1879 by Miss Sarah Solly.

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Beckford and Byron

JON MILLINGTON

It would be interesting to know how many people realised that Byron's *To Dives*, first published in 1833 by his friend Thomas Moore,¹ referred to Beckford and was written in November 1809 as one of the first thirty-five stanzas of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. Perhaps the most obvious clue is that 'dives' is Latin for rich and was sometimes used, as here, to denote a rich man. However, no one would have been in any doubt but for the fact that, among other changes to the stanza, in the first line 'Dives' originally appeared as 'Vathek':

Unhappy Vathek! in an evil hour
Gainst Nature' voice seduced to deed accurst,
Once Fortune's minion, now thou feelst her Power!
Wrath's vials on thy lofty head have burst,
In wit, in genius, as in wealth the first
How wondrous bright thy blooming morn arose
But thou wert smitten with unhallowed thirst
Of nameless crime, and thy sad day must close
To scorn, and Solitude unsought - the worst of woes.²

Before Canto 1 of *Childe Harold* appeared in 1812, Byron had second thoughts about *To Dives* because he crossed it out on his manuscript, adding the note, 'If ever published I shall have this stanza omitted. Byron. February 1st, 1811. I would not have this about Beckford.'³ Robert Charles Dallas, Byron's literary adviser, revealed that 'There were several stanzas in which allusions were made of a personal nature, and which I prevailed upon Lord Byron to omit. The reasons which induced their suppression continue still to have equal force, as at the time of

the first publication of the poem.’⁴ *To Dives* would have come between stanzas 22 and 23 lamenting the decay of Beckford’s ‘Paradise’ at Sintra.⁵

On sloping mounds, or in the vale beneath,
Are domes where whilome kings did make repair;
But now the wild flowers round them only breathe;
Yet ruin’d splendour still is lingering there.
And yonder towers the Prince’s palace fair:
There thou too, Vathek! England’s wealthiest son,
Once form’d thy Paradise, as not aware
When wanton Wealth her mightiest deeds hath done,
Meek Peace voluptuous lures was ever wont to shun.

Here didst thou dwell, here schemes of pleasure plan,
Beneath yon mountain’s ever beauteous brow:
But now, as if a thing unblest by Man,
Thy fairy dwelling is as lone as thou!
Here giant weeds a passage scarce allow
To halls deserted, portals gaping wide:
Fresh lessons to the thinking bosom, how
Vain are the pleasaunces on earth supplied,
Swept into wrecks anon by Time’s ungentle tide!⁶

Even after deleting *To Dives*, Byron was still worried that Beckford might be offended by what remained, as is clear from a letter to Dallas on 26 September 1811, ‘Pray do you think any alteration should be made in the Stanzas on “*Vathek*”? I should be sorry to make any improper allusion, as I merely wish to adduce an example of wasted wealth, & the reflection which arose in surveying the most desolate mansion in the most beautiful spot I ever beheld’.⁷

As for Harold himself, Byron wrote to Dallas a month later, 'I by no means intend to identify myself with *Harold*, but to *deny* all connexion with him. If in parts I may be thought to have drawn from myself, believe me it is but in parts, and I shall not even own to that.'⁸ Byron confirmed this in his Preface to *Childe Harold* by stating that Harold was a 'fictitious character'.

What, then, was Byron's attitude to Beckford, and indeed his purpose in writing *To Dives* in the first place? A few months earlier, in a letter from Falmouth to Francis Hodgson on 25 June 1809, he commented harshly on Beckford's proclivities and observed that although they were both staying the night at the same inn, 'we tried in vain to see the Martyr of prejudice, but could not'.⁹ By 1813 Byron had mellowed, however, lavishing fulsome praise on Beckford in a footnote to *The Giaour*: "For the contents of some of the notes I am indebted partly to D'Herbelot, and partly to that most eastern, and, as Mr. Weber justly entitles it, 'sublime tale', the 'Caliph Vathek'. I do not know from what source the author of that singular volume may have drawn his materials; some of his incidents are to be found in the 'Bibliothèque Orientale'; but for correctness of costume, beauty of description, and power of imagination, it far surpasses all European imitations; and bears such marks of originality, that those who have visited the East will find some difficulty in believing it to be more than a translation. As an Eastern tale, even *Rasselas* must bow before it; his 'Happy Valley' will not bear a comparison with the 'Hall of Eblis'." ¹⁰

Further praise came three years later in another footnote, this time to *The Siege of Corinth* (1816), "I have been told that the idea expressed from lines 597 to 603 has been admired by those whose approbation is valuable. I am glad of it: but it is not original - at least not mine; it may be found much better

expressed in pages 182-3-4 of the English version of 'Vathek' (I forget the precise page of the French), a work to which I have before referred; and never recur to, or read, without a renewal of gratification." ¹¹

So great was the impression *Vathek* made on Byron that when he wrote to Samuel Rogers on 3 March 1818, he tried to persuade him to obtain a copy of the *Episodes of Vathek*: 'Your account of your visit to F[onthill] is very striking. - Could you beg of *him* for *me* a copy in M.S.S. of the remaining *tales*? I think I deserve them as a strenuous & public admirer of the first one; - I will return it - when read - & make no ill use of the copy if granted - Murray would send me out any thing safely; - if ever I return to England I should like very much to see the author, with his permission; - in the mean time you could not oblige me more than by obtaining me the perusal I request - in French or English - all's one for that - though I prefer Italian to either. - I have a french Copy of Vathek which I bought at Lausanne'. ¹² After waiting for nearly three years, Rogers finally had to admit defeat.

When Beckford came across this letter in his own copy of Thomas Moore's *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron*, he added some scathing remarks: 'Rather cool after all - considering the red hot partiality he professed for Vathek - a book, I know, he used to carry about in his pocket, & which lay sometimes, I have been told, under his very pillow - happy for him that he never saw these episodes - they would have roused him to frenzy - & have shortened the little rest he ever enjoyed - the most original of the set as full as it could glare of Hell & the Devil, I have since thrown into the fire - the two which remain are quite sufficiently satanic - Your Corsairs & Don Juans are milk & water Puritans compared with Barkiarokh, whose atrocities

shamelessly worked up & rhymingly paraphrased in the style of the passage about the moon & the cloud in his *Seige of Corinth*, might have furnished the material of half a dozen poems & extracted as many thousands from the coffers of absolute John [Murray]. W.B.’¹³

Some of Byron’s borrowings from Beckford were unacknowledged and even, perhaps, unconscious. Elizabeth Longford has pointed out the similarity between the ends of *The Corsair* (1814), ‘He left a Corsair’s name to other times, / Link’d with one virtue, and a thousand crimes.’ and *Vathek*, ‘Thus, the Caliph Vathek, who for the sake of empty pomp and forbidden power, had sullied himself with a thousand crimes, became a prey to grief without end, and remorse without mitigation’.¹⁴ So remorse was Vathek’s one virtue, too.

Did Beckford ever meet Byron, who was almost thirty years his junior? An artist, prompted to read *Vathek* because Byron admired it, asked Beckford about this on a visit to Lansdown Crescent, and has left us an account of their conversation: ‘Mr. Beckford then went and brought me the autograph letter from Lord Byron, soliciting a meeting with the author of “Vathek.” “Did you not go?” was naturally the question I was compelled to ask. “No,” was the reply; but Mr. Beckford’s countenance gave signs of an inward regret. “How,” I asked, “could you resist such a flattering proposal?” “Oh! to what good could it possibly have led! We should have met in full drill - both talked at the same time - both endeavoured to have been delighted - a correspondence would have been established, the most insufferable and laborious that can be imagined, because the most artificial. Oh, gracious goodness, I have the opportunity of enjoying the best qualities of his mind in his works, what more do I require?”’¹⁵

Probably Beckford was unwilling to meet Byron and refused to let him see the *Episodes* because of *Dives*, which may well have been in circulation before it was published. This did not prevent Beckford from admiring his poetry which was well represented in his library,¹⁶ together with books about him. On hearing of his death, Beckford said, 'So, Byron is gone! He cared about the world, affected not to care, defied it, and was unsuccessful. I have defied it and succeeded. I have resources if I should live centuries!'¹⁷

1. Thomas Moore, Ed., *The Works of Lord Byron*. Vol. XVII (1833), 241.
2. Jerome J. McGann, Ed., *Lord Byron. The Complete Poetical Works*. Vol. II. 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage.' (1980), 18.
3. *ibid*, 276.
4. R.C. Dallas, *Recollections of the Life of Lord Byron* (1824), 185.
5. McGann, 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage I - II', *Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin* XVII (1966), 41.
6. McGann, *Lord Byron*, *ibid*, 18-19.
7. Leslie A. Marchand, Ed., *Byron's Letters & Journals*. Vol. 2. 1810-1812 (1976), 107.
8. *ibid*, 112. (Letter dated 31 October 1811.)
9. Marchand. *ibid*. Vol. 1. 1798-1810 (1973), 210.
10. McGann. *ibid*. Vol. III (1981), 423.
11. McGann. *Lord Byron*. *ibid*. 486.
12. Marchand. *ibid*. Vol. 6. 1818-1819 (1976), 17.
13. Quoted from Robert J. Gemmett, *The Episodes of Vathek by William Beckford*, (1975), XXVII. I am grateful to Sidney Blackmore for drawing this reference to my attention.
14. Elizabeth Longford, *Byron*, Vol.1 (1976), 59.
15. 'Conversations with the late Mr. Beckford. No. IV', *New Monthly Magazine* 82 (1844), 219.
16. Sotheby's, *Catalogue of the First Portion of the Beckford Library removed from Hamilton Palace* (1882), Lots 1445-1462.
17. George Redford & John Angell James, *The Autobiography of The Rev. William Jay* (1854), 28.

William Bankes' Account of his Surreptitious Visit to Fonthill

Kingston Hall

Dec 23 1811

My dear Grandmother

An invitation from L^d. Arundell to Wardour Castle tempted me to make a little ramble from home in spite of the unfitness of the time of year & shortness of the days. It is a fine showy place even in winter, and the owners seem to live comfortably & hospitably; the present Lady Arundell (who is a second wife) is not a Catholic & from the general appearance of his household and habits of life I should not suppose her Lord to be at all a bigot, his income is still greatly straitened by the enormous debts contracted by his predecessor (principally in building a House quite disproportion to his fortunes and feeding a train of thankless Emigrants) though not at all an old man he is a great sufferer by the Gout. I had the greatest curiosity to see Fonthill Abbey but could not learn from any of the neighbours that there was any possible means of compassing it, it stands so very high & has a tower so prodigiously tall that it is visible at a vast distance & is a principal object to all the country round; but it is not to be approached, a wall ten feet high with spiked palisades sloping outwards from the top, covered with nails & tenterhooks, incloses it on all sides, about four miles in circumference; to this there is but one outlet & that by gates as well secured as the rest of the fence & watched by a trusty old woman. I tried artifice & intreaty & disguises, nothing would do, no person whatever is admitted with whose face she is not perfectly familiar; no stranger has been within them for five years. I was very obstinately bent upon my project so I changed clothes with a poor labourer & put on a smock frock, & a ragged hat &

trowsers, & in this masquerade climbed the wall & pales; my hands were so much torn & bloody with clinging upon the hooks that I thought I might have been taken up for M^r. Marr's murder.¹ When I was once in, I walked all over the places & took the Abbey in every point of view, I was questioned & spoken to over & over again by Servants & Workmen; I always asked for Work & offered my services in ditching or banking or something of that sort & were as often advised to go about my business; M^r. Beckford I found was out driving about the grounds so I ventured to come nearer & nearer & at last observing a quiet moment, resolved to go into the House. There is neither Bell nor knocker so I opened one leaf of the great door very gently (which are at least 25 or 30 feet high) & found myself in the great Hall which is very much like those of some large Colleges, with windows on both sides & a rich Oak roof very much gilt. (A tomb to Alderman Beckford is one side of it). Fronting me as I came in at the further end, is a long flight of stone steps with stone Balustrade (as I went up them I could very plainly hear the Servants below). They brought me up to that part which is under the tower which is an octagon & runs up the whole height, near 200 feet. This forms the centre to the grand gallery or rather suite for there is a power of parting it off into three, it is 300 foot long & proportionally high & wide with windows on both sides & which had crimson blinds & all the other furniture crimson to correspond; beyond this at one end is the Chapel which I did not see, at the other the living apartments. I saw his dinner laid in a low moderate room to the South, a profusion of gilt plate but only one knife & fork. When I had seen all that I could hope with any safety, I walked out again after not having encountered a single Servant although he keeps so many. In addition to what I saw I learned from his own people that the chambers upstairs are very indifferent, that there is not a single Bell in the whole house but that a dwarf lies on the Rug in the Room, where he sits

to answer the purpose, that the Cook always brings up the first dish dressed in Scarlet, that he has a Servant whose office it is to snuff his Candles & another who rides before him wherever he goes, but is not a groom, & the same sort of unmeaning State proportionally in everything; His chariot drove up to the door & he got out just as I was coming away. I thought the grounds quite beautiful & the drives all kept swept & mowed in the finest order imaginable. I took advantage of the workman coming away to get out in the crowd at the Gate, & could not resist afterwards dancing and shouting round the old woman who was so determined I should not come in. I afterwards gave her half a crown for being so trusty to her Master. I am afraid I must have tired you but I thought this adventure might amuse you.

I afterwards went to Longleat with which I was much delighted & was much pressed to make some stay by Lord Bath. I thought highly too of M^r Methane's pictures at Crossbeam. I returned hither for the Corporation meeting at Wimborne on the 21st which I could not forget is Sir W^m's birthday. I was sorry to find that we are likely to lose our neighbour M^r Willett, he has had a paralytic seizure of which it is not likely that he should recover, we shall miss him much as a very friendly neighbour, & the more as his place is to be supplied by his unfortunate son. In addition to the family party which I left I find W^m Woodley amongst us, not much grown & with something of a tendency to a Wen upon his Cheek but otherwise looking well. We shall be sorry to lose the Falmouths & their little one on Saturday next which is the day they have fixed for their visit to the Dutchess of Beaufort, tho' I think they will not perform the journey so expeditiously as they expect. Now for a commission.

An account of some College fees &c amounting to ten pounds sixteen shillings has been sent to me by M^r Favel who having

given up his concerns in that line is anxious to have all such matters paid as soon as may be; as I cannot send the odd money in a Letter I cannot think of any other means of doing it but by troubling you. You will oblige me therefore if you can send the above sum of £10.^s16 to Stephenson the Banker 63 Lombard Street to be placed to the Rev^d. G. F. Favel's Account & a receipt to be taken

With kindest love
believe me
My dear Grandmother
Your most affectionate
W^m. John Bankes

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I. T. Marr, a silk merchant from the East End of London, was brutally murdered together with his wife, fourteen week-old son and apprentice on 8 December 1811. See the *Gentleman's Magazine* vol. 81 part 29, pp. 582-4 for a long account.

An Early Beckford Story: *The State of Innosense*

Our great progenitors are here represented in that perfect state of happiness in which Sin and Shame were equally unknown. They were surrounded by a numerous race of animals which are universally suspected for their gall. Neither the Lion, nor the Tyger were formidable. The same harmony prevailed amongst the inferior ranks of Nature. They, which for the punishment of Man('s) disobedience were rendered predacious and blood thirsty, now herded peaceably with animals which Nature had

made their inferiors in strength and instinct. The temperature of the air and the admirable mildness of the seasons rendered useless the refinements of drops which afterwards became necessary. Thus the blessed Couple thankfully enjoyed the happiness prepared for them by their beneficent Maker.

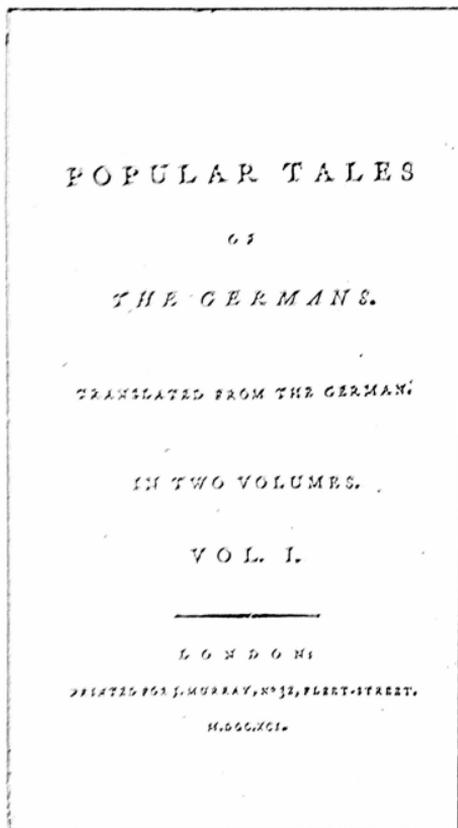
Their horns glided on with undiminished serenity whilst the pleasing reflection of their innocense enhanced the composts they enjoyed. The kind Earth continually spread before them her choicest productions and unasked ministered to their Wishes Every Object on which they turned their Eyes presented itself flourishing in primeaval excellence. No Tree, no Shrub, no flower, but seemed to display the perfection of him that had formed them and to elicit their warmest expressions of praise and sublimest hymns of gratitude. The mind of Man was then truly excellent and worthy of the ruler of the Earth. The internal purity of his soul was such as rendered him capable of comprehending the wonderful majesty of his Maker in a degree far superior to any of his degenerate Posterity. There were moments when Adam condescended to contemplate the (brute beasts) and probably gave them names expressive of their peculiar properties and instincts. In the same manner his comprehensive eye ranged over the fair prospect of vegetable nature and having distinguished its various tribes by specific appellations added them to the treasures of his knowledge.

Such were the occupations which employed delighted the attention of our first Parents as yet free from Solicitudes and (suspicions) harrass and mislead their descendents.

This interesting example of Beckford's juvenilia, written c.1774, was transcribed by Didier Girard from MS. Beckford e.3 and is published by kind permission of the Bodleian Library.

Popular Tales of the Germans

ION MILLINGTON



In 1826 the *Literary Gazette* disclosed that Beckford was probably the translator of *Popular Tales of the Germans*, published in 1791 in two volumes. This was in a review of *German Studies*, selected by R.P. Gillies, which ended: 'Since 1791, when Mr. Beckford (we believe) published, anonymously, his Tales from the Germans, we have not seen any publication of the kind equal to this of Mr. Gillies.'¹ Boyd Alexander thought the reviewer, William Jerdan, who was also editor of the *Literary Gazette*, might have

obtained his information from his friend, the Abbé Macquin, Beckford's librarian at Fonthill Abbey.² Another clue to Beckford's involvement is the copy of *Popular Tales*, bound by Kalthoerber, one of Beckford's favourite binders, which appeared

in the sale of his library removed from Hamilton Palace in 1883.³

Further evidence is to be found in one of the annuals which flourished between 1820 and 1840. This was *The Talisman* for 1831 which reprinted 'Richilda' under the title 'The Magic Mirror'.⁴ In her preface the editor, Zillah Watts, wrote, "The Magic Mirror" is extracted from a series of tales professing to be translations from the German; but forming in reality a collection of pleasant satires on the style of tale-telling, which appears to have been in request in this country at the period (1791) at which they were written. A considerable degree of curiosity has attached to these volumes in consequence of their having been attributed, pretty confidently, to the pen of the author of "Memoirs of the Caliph Vathek."⁵ Zillah Watts was wrong to imply that Beckford actually wrote the tales because they had already been published by J.C.A. Musaeus in 1787 as *Volksmarchen der Deutschen*.

Boyd Alexander was convinced of Beckford's involvement in *Popular Tales* 'on grounds of style, phraseology, and content. Its prefatory dialogue between Reviewer and Publisher is typically Beckfordian.'⁶ He also felt Beckford's free translation was 'full of his own interpolations and fancies' and was 'the earliest collection of German stories in translation.'⁷ *Popular Tales* was favourably reviewed in the *European Magazine* while the *Gentleman's Magazine* considered that the 'story of "Richilda" possesses a great degree of originality, together with a strong cast of satirical humour. The observations are laughably novel and well-turned.'⁸

1. *Literary Gazette*, 11 November 1826, p. 710.

2. Boyd Alexander, *England's Wealthiest Son*, London 1962, p. 269, note 26.

3. Sotheby's, *Catalogue of the Third Portion of the Beckford Library*, 1883, lot 926.
4. *The Talisman*, 1831, pp. 251-288.
5. *Ibid*, pp.viii-ix.
6. Howard Gotlieb, *William Beckford of Fonthill*, Yale, 1960, p. 48.
7. Boyd Alexander, *op. cit.*, 1962, pp. 22-23
8. *Gentleman's Magazine* LXI pt. 2, (December 1791), p. 1126.

The following summary of 'The Nymph of the Fountain' may give some idea of the flavour of these fairy tales. This story, from the end of volume 2 of *Popular Tales of the Germans*, appeared in *Great British Tales of Terror - Gothic stories of horror and romance 1765-1840* (1972), edited by Peter Haining, reprinted in 1983 by Penguin Books. Beckford's English version of 'The Nymph of the Fountain' was also translated into Italian in 1984 with the title *La ninfa della sorgente*, published in Rome and Naples by Edizioni Theoria.

The Nymph of the Fountain

Wackerman was a highway robber who lived in a castle in Swabia. His wife had simple tastes and disapproved of living off his stolen booty. After bearing two daughters she met a nymph by a fountain at the foot of the castle mound. The nymph told her she would die after the birth of her third daughter who would be rejected by the rest of the family. However, the nymph promised to look after the daughter, Matilda, if she could be one of her godmothers and agreed not to tell her husband who she was. As a christening present the Nymph gave the mother a magic musk ball.

When the mother died as predicted, Wackerman remarried. His new bride was avaricious and, in her search for jewellery

belonging to his first wife which she intended to sell, she hurled the seemingly insignificant musk ball out of the window. It landed at the feet of Matilda who was playing on the grass below, and she kept it as a toy. One day she threw it into the fountain, whereupon the nymph appeared and explained that she was Matilda's godmother and that the musk ball would grant her three wishes which she must not squander.

Soon afterwards the castle was burnt to the ground. Everyone inside perished except for Matilda who used her first wish to escape from her garret. After roaming the countryside she was eventually taken on as a kitchen maid in the household of Count Conrad of Augsburg. She used her second wish to ask for a fine dress so that she could attend a ball given by the Count with whom, unknown to him, she had fallen in love. At the ball he was equally captivated, and resolved to hold another ball in order to see her again.

When she failed to appear he became mortally ill, only to make a miraculous recovery after drinking a bowl of soup she made into which she had dropped a diamond ring he had given her at the ball. They married and had two sons who, so she maintained, mysteriously vanished while she slept. Her nurse maliciously blamed her for their disappearance, prompting the Count to confine Matilda in a superheated Turkish bath to suffocate. She managed to escape with her third and last wish, to learn that the nurse was in league with the Count's mother who thought he had married beneath him. Now it was the nurse's turn in the Turkish bath while the Count and his Countess, Matilda, lived happily ever after.

Beckford's Lighting

JON MILLINGTON

Jonathan Bourne and Vanessa Brett, *Lighting and the Domestic Interior*. London: Sotheby's, 1991. £49.50

It might be thought that a book mainly about candlesticks would not be very appealing, but their sheer variety and, in many cases, beauty, soon banishes any such idea. Lighting from the Renaissance to Art Nouveau is illustrated, mainly by examples which have passed through Sotheby's, Christie's or Phillips' salerooms, including three pieces made for Beckford.

Earliest of these are a pair of silver-gilt and gilded bronze candelabra, Paris, 1798-1809, by Henri Auguste, decorated in the style of the now lost lamp for the Oratory at Fonthill Abbey. Next is a silver-gilt candlestick, London, 1800, by Paul Storr and inscribed 'Made for the Abbey at Fonthill by Vulliamy & Son, 1800'. Lastly, another silver candlestick by E.E.J and W.

Barnard made in London in 1844, but probably never delivered as Beckford died in May that year.



Spill Vase

One of only two spill vases to appear in the book is virtually identical to that catalogued as C3 in the *Souvenirs of Fonthill Abbey* Exhibition at Beckford's Tower last year. Dating from the early 19th century, it is probably by Ridgway and depicts Fonthill Abbey. This view, hand-painted in colour, was copied from Rutter's *A Description of Fonthill Abbey*, 1822.