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Magick or mundane? Beckford and the experience of Grand Tour Rome in the 1780s

JONNY YARKER

This paper is based on an illustrated lecture given at
The Beckford Society's Twenty-second Annual Lecture,
delivered on Tuesday 28 November 2017 at the
Travellers Club, 106 Pall Mall, London SW1.

The title of this essay requires explanation. The somewhat rococo spelling of the word 'Magick' comes from a familiar response to Italy written by the painter Thomas Jones walking in the hills to the north east of Rome in December 1776. Having traversed the *galleria di sopra*, the elevated path which runs around the volcanic Lake Albano; passed through the towns of Castel Gandolfo and Ariccia, Jones had arrived in Gensano with its view over Lake Nemi:

> '[t]his walk considered with respect to its classic locality, the Awful marks of the most tremendous Convulsions of nature in the remotest Ages, the antient and modern Specimens of Art, and the various extensive & delightful prospects it commands is, to the Scholar, naturalist, Antiquarian and Artist, without doubt, the most pleasing and interesting in the Whole World – And here I can not help observing with what new and uncommon sensations I was filled on my first traversing this beautiful picturesque Country – Every scene seemed anticipated in some dream – It appeared Magick Land.'[1]

This passage comes from the journal Jones kept of his time in Italy; a journal which he refined and embellished on his return from the Continent; so pleased was he with this description it appears twice, both culminating in the same memorable phrase. It is a passage pregnant with all the expected responses of the young man to Rome. In talking of the 'classic locality', the 'awful marks … of nature', 'antient and modern Specimens of Art', 'delightful prospects' and even identifying the importance of anticipation as an ingredient in Continental travel, Jones's account typifies a certain idea of the Grand Tour as something virtuous, educational and transformative for those lucky enough to have undertaken one. The trope of the generative Continental experience is hard-wired into our ideas of artistic development and patronage in the eighteenth century. British artists who spent any period of time studying in Rome, instantly acquire, in later writing, a desirable Continental polish; young men are transformed into connoisseurs and collectors having been exposed to 'Magick Land.' Put simply, even in contemporary scholarship, we tend to see Italy as a positive and creative force and the Grand Tour as having been good for civilising Englishmen.

But there was a flip-side. Beyond the set-piece descriptions of antiquities and familiar landscapes, there was a frustration at the way the Grand Tour had developed by the 1780s into something ersatz, manufactured, even disappointing. Rome was crowded with sun-burnt Brits who made little attempt to integrate with Italian society and were conducted through a schedule of antique sculptures and ruins with little comprehension and less appreciation. A series of middle-men had emerged specifically to cater for this packaged Grand Tour, robbing it of any of the mysteries or excitements of real travel. Exposure to the cut-throat commercial world of Rome could have a deleterious effect on an artist's career and many of the great artistic 'purchases' made in the second half of the century demonstrate the power of these middle-men, rather than the creative impact of Rome on the collector.

It is this context – the 'mundane' of my title – which fascinates me more and more as I prepare a book on the resident British community in Rome and the infrastructures and mechanics of the Grand Tour, entitled: *Savage Pilgrims*. In this essay I want to sketch the Rome that William Beckford would have encountered on his arrival in October 1780, and by doing so, try and tease out some of the immediate contexts for his very particular reaction to the city.

By the middle of the eighteenth century the Grand Tour was considered an essential rite of passage for wealthy young Englishmen. Rome emerged as the primary focus of the tour; the city in which travellers spent the most time and by 1780 the centre of a formidable infrastructure designed to cater specifically for travellers' needs. With this emphasis on education, we can see Rome as a kind of 'invisible academy', a Continental classroom where young men – and despite a rise in female travelers, we are talking about a male-dominated phenomenon – could be educated in European art, music and taste, but also where they could take the first tentative steps into society, manage money and sow their wild oats.

It is worth asking what constituted a successful tour? In a satirical etching by the Grand Tourist Henry Bunbury depicting a young British traveller arriving in France he is shown clutching a copy of Chesterfield's *Letters to his Son*, which had been a publishing sensation when it had appeared following the fourth Earl's death in 1774, Figure 1. Chesterfield's text adumbrates an ideal course for the visitor to Rome. His long-suffering son was to spend his mornings diligently with his tutor 'acquiring weight' in the form of visiting monuments and palazzi and 'the evenings in the best companies at Rome, in acquiring lustre.'[2] It was a formula that was specifically designed to ready him for a political or diplomatic career. For Chesterfield, experiencing the manners and morals of other European nations, being exposed to courts and viewing the innovations and deficiencies of other lands was the ideal education for the embryonic statesman.

Fig. 1. Henry William Bunbury, *A Tour of Foreign Parts,* Etching, 43 x 53.9 cm. © The Lewis Walpole Library, Farmington.

In short, the successful Grand Tourist returned from 'Magick Land' with a command of French and Italian, encyclopedic knowledge of the ruins of Rome, a sexual conquest under his belt and ready to enter parliament, Figure 2. He is depicted by Bunbury in an etching published in 1778, no longer being led, but leading postillions and coachmen; he is dressed as the perfect Macoroni with outsized hat, collar and fur muff making an elegant gesture of condescension to the robust figure of his father.

At first glance Beckford fits neatly the profile of our young tourist. A ten-month tour of the Continent was planned to pass the last year of his minority before succeeding to his father's estates and embarking on a glittering political career. He was to be accompanied by the Rev. John Lettice, a 43-year-old fellow of

Fig. 2. Henry William Bunbury, *Return from the Grand Tour,* Etching, 28 x 44 cm. © The Lewis Walpole Library, Farmington.

Sydney Sussex College, Cambridge who was already an experienced tutor having been attached to the embassy of Sir Robert Gunning in Copenhagen.

But Beckford's education to date had been far from conventional. Tutored at home, rather than public school, and educated from 1777 in Switzerland rather than at Oxford or Cambridge, Beckford had already been exposed to Europe, having lived amongst 'the strange animals at Geneva'. His precocious literary talent had already resulted in two books – one in French, the other, the *Biographical Memoirs of Extraordinary Painters*, demonstrating an advanced knowledge of art history in the form of a series of satires on imaginary artists. He had had dancing lessons and was by now already a fastidious and self-conscious dresser. Italy may have appeared to offer comparatively little to the young Beckford.

Peter Beckford: travel in Italy

The Grand Tour of another Beckford, Peter, offers an instructive example for William's attitudes and behaviour. Peter was the son of Julines Beckford, he was therefore a nephew of the Alderman and cousin of William; he is remembered as a sportsman, following the publication of his *Thoughts on Hunting, in a Series of Familiar Letters to a Friend* of 1781 which is credited with first codifying the sport.

Peter is probably best known to you as the husband of Louisa Pitt, with whom William had a claustrophobic relationship. But Beckford was also a noteworthy traveller, who distilled his thoughts in an overlooked but unusual piece of travel literature published in 1805, his: '*Familiar Letters from Italy to a friend in England*' which must have existed in manuscript much earlier.[3] It is a fascinating compilation of notes made during time spent in Italy. Initially on a Grand Tour in 1765–6 and then with his wife, whose ill health forced them to remove to the Continent, living principally in Florence. Beckford's account shows him to have been an uncommonly observant traveller, but nonetheless, one fortified with the usual prejudices of British tourists of the period.

Like his younger cousin, Peter Beckford undertook his first trip to Italy following the death of his father, having inherited his estate, Stepleton in Dorset. This instantly put him into a very specific class of traveller: the independently wealthy. We forget that most young visitors to Italy were sons and heirs, constrained by travelling tutors and allowed only to spend what their fathers' sanctioned. Like William, Peter resided for three months in Geneva where he met both Voltaire and Rousseau.[4] He then travelled into Italy and was in Turin by the end of 1765.

It is important to point out that the whole character of Italian travel changed after the conclusion of the Seven Years War. Following the Treaty of Paris in 1763, the Papacy, out of economic expediency, opened up diplomatic relations with Britain. Peace also

encouraged mobility and as the number of travellers crossing the Alps increased, so the infrastructure established to cater for them became more rigid.

By the 1770s British visitors tended to stay in a number of established lodgings close to the Piazza di Spagna. It was here that the Café degli Inglesi was situated, the meeting point for the large community of Britons based in the city, and most of the principal British painters and dealers had their studios and *musei* in this small area of the Campo Marzio. Beckford laconically notes that as a result 'it is therefore considerably dearer in almost every article than any other part of Rome', suggesting an awareness of the exploitative nature of the commercial structures established to serve tourists.

Upon arrival, most travellers employed one of several powerful resident British agents, usually dealers or antiquaries, who offered an increasingly comprehensive package of services. In no other city in Europe could a visitor rely on a single professional to organise their finance, accommodation and even entertainment. The painter, Thomas Jones, identified the Scot James Byres as the principal 'antiquary' in competition with the English 'dealer' Thomas Jenkins, who 'for years had the guidance of the Taste and Expenditure of our English Cavaliers, and from [their] hands all bounties were to flow.'[5] Antiquaries, known in Italian as *cicerone*, were the tutors of the 'invisible academy' showing young men the sights of Rome. Most tourists employed one as a matter of course.

The Duke of Hamilton visited Rome in 1775 in the company of his tutor Dr John Moore who observed, in his account of their time in Rome, 'our mornings are usually spent in visiting the antiquities, and the paintings in the palaces. On these occasions we are accompanied by Mr Byres, a gentlemen of probity, knowledge and real taste.'[6] He went on to observe that 'what is called a regular Course with an antiquarian generally takes about 6 weeks; employing three hours a day, you may in the time visit all the churches, palaces, villas, and ruins worth seeing in or near Rome.' This was no idle tourism; in

his advice to Lord Exeter, William Patoun wrote in 1766 that: 'The best Method I can recommend to your Lordship to profit by the Antiquities, is to read over the Night before the Chapter in Venati's Book, that describes the quarter or particular Piece of Antiquity which you are to see with your Antiquarian the day following.'[7] Venati, was Ridolfino Venuti and the text he was referring to was the: *Accurata, e succinta descrizione topografica delle antichità di Roma* of 1763.

Beckford dutifully followed this course, employing James Byres, but he was critical in his letters:

> 'Antiquarians, *Ciceroni's*, as they are called, will now offer you their assistance, and it is usual to make a six-week's tour through the streets of Rome. – I did it once – no school-boy toiled harder, or at times more unwillingly; hurrying over pleasing objects to visit stones and rubbish of little importance, *for what*? – to say I had visited *all* the antiquities of Rome!'[8]

He continues in a rhetorical passage, to criticise the insularity of Grand Tour society.

> 'If you intend to pass your whole mornings in running from one palace to another; setting down the names of every Painter, without so much as looking at the picture; if at your return you prefer the society of your countrymen, to an inquiry into the manners and customs of the inhabitants; I foresee you will not leave the Piazza di Spagna: but should you wish to be well received in the best societies, forsake for a time the company of your countrymen, I mean such as continue to lead their London life in Rome.'[9]

The idea that there was a species of British traveller who were able to 'lead their London life in Rome' gives a sense of both the all-encompassing power of these resident agents and the convenient packaged tour they had created. The numbers of the British community fluctuated, but in March 1788 John Hawkins could

report that there were 'one hundred and seventeen English travellers of fashion' in Rome.

Beckford's letters encapsulate the prevailing, late Augustan view of Rome. Like so many men schooled in Britain – Westminster and New College, Oxford – he saw Italy through the filter of the antique. Surviving evidence suggests that three quarters of the time spent at a British public school was devoted to learning classical texts. As such, Rome existed as an ideal classical stage-set, against which he could superimpose the actions of his schoolboy heroes – the politicians, poets and generals of the Roman Empire. Beckford's reaction, like an increasing number of travellers during the century, was one of disappointment. Since antiquity, the city had contracted well within the Aurelian walls, its population was a fraction of the size of London and its physical remains were degraded and despoiled beyond recognition. As he lamented the Forum, 'where the ancient Romans met to decide causes, the sear of eloquence, the most frequented part of Rome, was become a market for cattle; the very Smithfield of her degenerated sons.'[10] This was the mundane reality of being 'on classic ground.'

It is tempting to think that Peter warned William from engaging a *cicerone*. One might go further and see his letters as having been addressed specifically to his younger cousin. If this is fanciful, bear in mind that Peter had been invited to stay at Fonthill by Beckford's mother shortly before William and Lettice departed for the Continent. In fact on finishing Beckford's two-volume account, one would be forgiven for deciding to stay at home; or at the very least spend as little time in the city as possible.

William had high expectations of his tour. As soon as he had crossed the channel he started diligently making notes for a travel book written in the form of a series of 'letters' to his drawing master, the painter Alexander Cozens. Such accounts were common, seen as a way of enforcing the educational benefits of travel. Hundreds of accounts of Europe penned by youthful travellers survive; most are unutterably dull, consisting of little more than digests of passages

from familiar guidebooks. Beckford compiled his observations into *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents*, *in a series of letters from various parts of Europe* completed in 1783 but suppressed at the insistence of his family. It only appeared in much revised form, as the first volume of *Italy, with Sketches of Spain and Portugal*, in 1834.

Considered a classic of Grand Tour literature, like so much of Beckford's early writing, it is a highly-wrought somewhat eclectic text mixing passages of lavish landscape description with *fantasias*. There is little indication of what Beckford thought of the city and resident British community. But we can infer it was not wholly enthusiastic, as he spent a total of three days in Rome. And in a passage reminiscent of Peter Beckford, he states:

> 'I absolutely will have no antiquary to go prating from fragment to fragment, and tell me, that were I to stay five years at Rome, I should not see half it contained.'[11]

This is a direct rejection of the tour as it had come to be conceptualized by the 1780s. From an educational point of view therefore – his Grand Tour was a failure. He had seen virtually nothing – neglecting the 'weight' – and by not socialising, completely foregone the 'lustre' advised by Chesterfield. But if William failed to engage with the 'invisible academy' he was surely tempted by collecting?

Beckford and the commercial structures of Rome

Chesterfield, in a letter to his son, had laid stress on the importance of acquiring suitable prints and books whilst in Rome and most parents felt a trip across the Alps was a rite of passage that demanded a celebratory portrait. Peter Beckford sat to Pompeo Batoni for a magnificent full-length portrait, now in the Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, Figure 3. In the painting Beckford is shown

Fig. 3. Pompeo Batoni, *Peter Beckford,* Oil on canvas, 239 x 163 cm. © Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen.

leaning against the statue of *Roma* from the Capitoline museums supported on the relief of the *Weeping Dacia* holding a letter, with an attentive dog at his feet.[12] James Byres, like other *ciceroni*, used his position as guide to advertise his own stock of antiquities and old master paintings, as well as steer his clients towards certain purchases and commissions. Countless travel diaries record visits to artists' studios as part of his tours; in return there was an expectation that artists would let Byres broker any commissions, and take a hefty cut. Despite his cynicism, Peter Beckford evidently fell for Byres's patter, an export license survives in his name.[13] He acquired at least three antique busts from Byres, as well as a spectacular chimney-piece by Lorenzo Cardelli and specimen marble topped table. In

addition, the license mentions: '*un Ritratto moderno*' which is probably the Batoni.

William Beckford's arrival in 1780 was certainly a matter of interest to the dealers and agents in the city. The peace and prosperity of the 1770s had given way to the war in America and its consequent economic uncertainty. From 1778 the French involvement had caused a temporary stall in the number of visitors to the Continent so that by Beckford's first visit there was a severe shortage of potential patrons. Beckford's visit promised much. In December 1780 James Irvine wrote to his patron George Cumberland about the shortage of potential patrons in Rome, rejoicing that:

> 'Young Beckford however seems to be an exception as he laid out a little money tho but a few days in town; and as he returns in the Holy week from Venice it is hoped he will scatter a little of his immense fortune amongst the artists.'[14]

It has not previously been noticed, but Beckford seems to have 'laid out' a little money with the leading dealer in the city, Thomas Jenkins. Whilst Byres promoted his stock in the capacity of a tour guide, Jenkins made a more decisive move; from 1773 he established himself as a financier, becoming the principal agent in Rome for most of the major British banking houses. This effectively gave Jenkins financial control of visitors to the city. Up until this point travellers had used Italian bankers. Most London banks corresponded with a network of Continental houses; thus with a letter of credit, a traveller could withdraw cash from any of their accredited partners; but travellers were frequently frustrated by the expenses charged to change pounds to Roman *sequins* and exorbitant commission. Jenkins offered a service in English and one specifically catered for the British traveller, by simply depositing a sum of money with Jenkins's bank in London – Robert Child & Co. – the traveller need only present the receipt to receive a line of credit.

As banker Jenkins would have known in advance when a traveller

was expected. Jenkins himself assembled an 'in-house' team from the Italian antiquary, Orazio Orlandi, ready to act as *cicerone* to sculptors, artists and even a resident draughtsman – an Alsatian artist called Niklaus Mosman – whose time was spent making record drawings of paintings and sculpture Jenkins had for sale. This was a vital component of Grand Tour dealing. A young patron may only be in Italy for a few months, but with accurate drawings and judicious letters, purchases could be made from London. Jenkins could organize all the practicalities: restoration, shipping, insurance and negotiate the notoriously complex export licensing process which had been established by the Papal States.

Beckford almost certainly arranged his finance through Jenkins and certainly made at least one purchase of an old master during his brief visit: a painting by Salvator Rosa depicting *Job*.[15] The painting recorded in a drawing by Niklaus Mosman appeared in Beckford's Christie's 1817 sale where it was described as 'formerly a distinguished ornament of the Santa Croce Palace at Rome'. The painting passed into the Stafford Collection and is now in the Uffizi. But this seems to have been his only major acquisition.

The British community that had emerged by the 1780s is astonishingly well documented. Letters pass backwards and forwards to London filled with the minutiae of arrivals and departures, every form of virtu news is discussed and examined and most artistic commissions documented. What is more, the world of the British in Rome has been carefully and systematically studied by generations of scholars. Brinsley Ford's archive cross-references many of the existing sources, thereby building up comprehensive bibliographies of travellers to Italy. Beckford remains stubbornly absent. We find only trace references.

Beckford had a second bite at the cherry. He returned to the Continent in 1782. This trip was rapid and magnificent. He was accompanied by: John Robert Cozens; his tutor and factotum the Rev. John Lettice; his physician Dr Projectus Errhardt; the harpsichordist John Burton, and a large retinue of servants. The

party arrived back in Rome on June 25th for the festival of SS. Peter and Paul.

Beckford watched the famous *girondala* – or firework display at the Castel San Angelo. In the week he spent in Rome he worked up and dispatched a number of much quoted letters to Archibald Hamilton: 'if you love sleep … keep away from Rome; for here is such a whizzing of Rockets, such a thundering of Cannon, and such a prating of prelates and Cardinals, that I am half distracted.'[16] We know he did a small amount of sight-seeing, visiting Raphael's painted loggia in the Vatican and the newly opened museum complex, the Museo Pio-Clementino. But, as he explained to Louisa Beckford: 'My steps were never bent to Casinos or Theatres; no, they were guided to desert Hills that lift themselves up above vast wastes with here and there a shepherd's hut or neglected Sepulchre. In such scenes I have mused away whole hours by the evening light, and the moss has often drank my tears.'[17] 'Whole hours' may be an exaggeration, he can hardly have had the time. By 6th July he was back in Naples and never returned to Rome.

The outstanding monument of Beckford's second Grand Tour are the 94 watercolours produced by John Robert Cozens of views in Italy. The surviving sheets from this group have long been regarded as constituting a singular record of a late eighteenth-century visitor in Italy. Visually powerful and technically innovative, they seem the perfect visual analogue to Beckford's writing; here finally we find 'Magick Land'?

The Beckford Cozens's are widely dispersed and have not been seen together in any appreciable number since Kim Sloan's 1986 exhibition, *The Poetry of Landscape*, at the V&A and Ottawa.[18] In fact Cozens has been poorly served by recent scholarship. Since Sloan's brilliant catalogue, no more comprehensive monograph has appeared and Bell and Girtin's 1934 catalogue is still the only published list we have.

Beckford has always assumed to have been heavily involved with the project. The information we have about the circumstances

of their execution comes from his letters, a resource that has traditionally been read in conjunction with Cozens's seven surviving Italian sketchbooks, now in the Whitworth Museum of Art, Manchester. The first of these opens on June 4th with a study of 'The Entrance to the Tyrol'; a drawing complimented by Beckford's own correspondence: 'Here, I ran delighted into the world of Boughs, while Cozens sat down to draw the huts which are scattered about for the shelter of herds and discover themselves amongst the groves in a picturesque manner.'

A week later Cozens and Beckford, having stopped at Venice and Padua, reach the Colli Euganei. Cozens produces four drawings of the hills including the famous view from villa Mirabella, the former home of the distinguished polymath, Count Francesco Algarotti. Five days later they reach Rome, despite passing through Ravenna, Rimini, Fano, Fossombrone, Foligno, Spoleto, Terni, Narni and Civita Castellana, Cozens produced only two slight sketches, neither of which he developed into watercolours. The relentless pace continued, taking the party south to Naples, reaching the city on July 6th. The exertions of the journey and climate had a fatal effect on at least one member of Beckford's suite: Burton the harpsichordist died of malaria. At Naples Beckford parts from Cozens leaving him, as Jones caustically noted: 'Once more a free Agent loosed from the Shakles of fantastic folly and Caprice.'[19]

Cozens returns to Rome in December 1782 and he stops using the Whitworth sketchbooks. There is a gap of nine months between Naples and his next drawing, dated September 17 1783, showing a view of Terni. Cozens may have felt he knew the city well enough to dispense with preliminary studies, he had resided there from November 1776 to April 1779. Some preliminary drawings for a few of the Beckford drawings do survive, but they do not seem to be particularly systematic. Whatever the reason, Cozens's Roman drawings represent, at first sight, a very extraordinary body of work. They are a record of Grand Tour Rome that almost completely ignores the city. With one or two exceptions, they are all taken from

Fig. 4. John Robert Cozens, *The Villa Madama,* Watercolour, 26.7 x 36.8 cm. © Private Collection, UK.

outside the Aurelian walls and recognisable monuments, when they feature, are distant or obliquely viewed.

To give you an idea of how odd this is as a souvenir, there are no views of the Pantheon, Forum, Coliseum, none of the monuments of modern Rome, the Baroque churches or palaces, in fact no views taken in the centre of the city itself. As with Beckford's rejection of the standard antiquary's tour, so Cozens dispenses with the normal conventions of Grand Tour record drawings. In those that do show a recognisable sight, precision of archaeological information is sacrificed to effect. In his view of Villa Madama on Monte Mario, for example, the glimpse of the Tiber seen through the trees is the only real concession to topography and Raphael's thermal windows the only suggestion of the splendours of the Renaissance interiors.

It is not as though Cozens was unfamiliar with the more touristic

views. During his first visit to Rome, Cozens composed a view of the city seen from the other side of Monte Mario looking towards St Peter's; this is the first glimpse of Rome a traveller coming from the north would have had and as such it was calculated to appeal to the average 20-something-year-old tourist. A commercially-minded young artist like Cozens was aware of the need to capitalise on views such as this, and versions survive at the Fitzwilliam; the British Museum and in a slightly swollen format at the Morgan Library.

What is the explanation? Scholars have long seen the guiding hand of Beckford in the drawings, detecting in the depopulated, brooding landscapes a sense of melancholy that accords with his writing. Equally Cozens's radical shift in palette – he replaces his usual monochrome with bright, sometimes gaudy colours and jewelled ornamental style – is I think rightly attributed to Beckford's influence. Beckford too is the reason for the rejection of so many of the canonical depictions of 'Magick Land'. Of the 11 watercolours Cozens made in the Castelli Romani there is not one of Castel Gandolfo, Albano or Nemi. This is a really surprising omission. Cozens had made the sweeping views of the two volcanic lakes his stock in trade, continually using the drawings he had made of Nemi in 1776 to produce repetitions of the same composition up until 1790. Whilst some are certainly mechanical, others are some of the most remarkable landscape essays of the eighteenth century. Perhaps we can see something analogous between Beckford rejecting a course with an antiquary and rejecting views of the obvious sites, even the actual site of 'Magick Land'?

In this sense Cozens and Beckford seem to be in sympathy. Perhaps we can go further and see them as fitting a spirit of dissatisfaction that the structures of the Grand Tour were engendering during the early 1780s and a desire amongst travellers and artists to seek out something new. Cozens's contemporary Francis Towne left a remarkable series of 75 views of Rome and its environs to the British Museum, the result of his ten-month stay in the city. Like Cozens he turned his back on the canonical monuments of the city and sought

out instead the shady, anonymous corners of the suburbs. Whilst Towne's linear style and planar washes are far from Cozens, there seems to me a similarity in intent.

Conclusion

In total Beckford spent fewer than ten days in Rome. He is perhaps the most famous Grand Tourist of the eighteenth century who, in one sense, had no Grand Tour. What are we to make of Beckford's apathy for the city? On the one hand, it can be viewed as an instinctive reaction against the controlling mechanisms which had emerged by 1780, on the other hand one could argue that as a collector, he missed a number of major opportunities by failing to engage with one of Europe's great entrepots.

Rome was in the midst of an archaeological boom. The newly formed Museo Pio-Clementino was driving the market for antiquities, and British dealers, such as Jenkins, opened multiple new speculative excavations each summer. Whilst a portion of the material went to the Vatican, the volume – and quality of sculpture – available for purchase was unprecedented. Established patrician collections were also up for sale; in 1785 Jenkins acquired the marbles from villa Montalto Negroni, an astonishing group of sculptures put together in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Great collectors were at work. Take John Campbell, later Lord Cawdor, only five year's Beckford's senior; he visited Rome in 1783 where he put together an exceptional collection of antiquities, old masters and contemporary sculpture. Exceptional because they pushed the boundaries of taste. Campbell was an early patron of Canova, employing as his agent to handle his Roman commission – including Canova's *Cupid and Psyche* – the Irish painter/dealer Henry Tresham, who would later sell Beckford the Altieri Claudes. Campbell was a pioneer collector of early Italian art and it was at the sale of his collection that Beckford acquired Bellini's portrait of Doge Leonardo Loredan now in the National Gallery.

But Beckford was both mercurial and capricious; he rarely followed convention and so his equivocal reaction to Rome is not entirely surprising, indeed he sold Cozens's drawings in 1805.

1 A. P. Oppé (ed.) 'Memoirs of Thomas Jones', *The Walpole Society*, vol. 32, London, 1948, 55.

2 Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield, *Letters written by the Late Right Honourable Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield, to his son* …, Dublin, 1774, vol. I, 527.

3 Peter Beckford has also been credited with another publication detailing a tour of Italy, composed in 26 letters between January and August 1785, *Letters and Observations written on a Short Trip through France and Italy by a Gentleman to a Friend in Italy*,' despite being produced by the same Salisbury publisher, E. Easton, who printed his *Thoughts on Hunting, In a Series of Familiar Letters to a Friend*, it is unlikely to be by Beckford.

4 Peter Beckford 1805, *Familiar Letters from Italy, to a friend in England*, Salisbury, vol. I, 33-5.

5 Oppé, op. cit., 94.

6 John Moore, *A View of Society and Manners in Italy: with Anecdotes relating to some Eminent Characters*, Dublin, 1781, vol. II, 22.

7 John Ingamells (ed.), *A Dictionary of British and Irish Travellers in Italy 1701-1800,* New Haven and London, 1997, xlv.

8 Peter Beckford, op. cit., vol. II, 112.

9 Peter Beckford, ibid., 110.

10 Peter Beckford, ibid., 127.

11 Elizabeth Mavor, *The Grand Tour of William Beckford: Europe Before the Revolution Seen through the Eyes of a Quizzical Young Man*, London, 1986, 113.

12 Edgar Peters Bowron, *Pompeo Batoni: A Complete Catalogue of his Paintings*, New Haven and London, 2016, vol. I, cat. no. 303, 367-369.

13 Ilaria Bignamini, Clare Hornsby, Irma della Giovampaola and Jonathan Yarker, *Digging and Dealing in Eighteenth-Century Rome*, New Haven and London, 2010, vol. I, 238-9.

14 BL Add. MS.36493, f.68, James Irvine to George Cumberland, 16 December 1780.

15 Caterina Volpi, *Salvator Rosa (1615-1673): Pittore famoso*, Rome, 2014, cat. no. 167, 486.

16 Lewis Melville, *The Life and Letters of William Beckford of Fonthill*, London, 1910, 136.

17 Melville, op. cit., 158.

18 Kim Sloan, *Alexander and John Robert Cozens: The Poetry of Landscape*, New Haven and London, 1986.

19 Oppé, op. cit., 114.

William Beckford, *Biographical Memoirs of Extraordinary Painters*

New edition with Introduction and Notes by Robert J. Gemmett
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A Review by MALCOLM JACK

In his conversation with Stephen Clarke, Robert Gemmett revealed that his interest in Beckford's *Biographical Memoir of Extraordinary Painters* went back to his postgraduate days.[1] Not only was he fascinated by what was Beckford's first published work (written as a precocious teenager) but he considered that the book shed light on his ideas of "historiography, the dominance of Italian artists on his own day and the rise of Dutch and Flemish painting."[2]

The story of how Beckford came to write the book was recorded by both Cyrus Redding and H.V. Lansdown. The young heir to the estate of Fonthill Splendens is said to have overheard the housekeeper – who showed visitors around the house – talking imaginatively (i.e. inaccurately) about the paintings on the gallery walls. When asked for his help Beckford first jotted down a manuscript for her use which, in due course, was published in 1780. Although, as Gemmett goes onto show, the book had the serious purpose of examining Italian Renaissance art and paintings of the Dutch and Flemish school, we should not forget that young writer's inclination was to mock all that was held serious by his elders.[3]

The mocking tone is apparent from the very start of the work, though Beckford is also anxious to show off his familiarity with technical terms, learnt no doubt under Alexander Cozens's tuition. Thus Aldrovanus Magnus is an "illustrious artist"

especially venerated because of the "superior glow of his varnish" and his amazing knowledge of demi-tints which surpassed that of all his predecessors. But it is soon apparent that Beckford is mocking Aldrovanus for placing such importance on technique. Sucrewasser, on the other hand, is an artist who has given up all vigour of technique to pander to the sugary reproductions loved by his clients. Watersouchy (an old Dutch word for boiled fish) was the master of lifeless art – spending hours on producing images of perfect lace, hardly an inspiring subject.

Although recognising these characteristics of what is a lively *jeu d'espirit*, Gemmett is nevertheless intent in his 53 pages of introduction to set the artistic and literary background to Beckford's work. He shows that one of Beckford's targets was the commonly-held view of Renaissance painters that anatomical research was the key to portraying the human figure with exact precision. Both Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo insisted on anatomical dissection to "enhance the realism of their portraits of human figures."[4] Examination, often of corpses for that purpose, continued into the eighteenth century.

Turning to Beckford's treatment of Dutch painting, Gemmett observes that he finds its obsessive realism stifling especially as his own taste veered towards a more poetic and dramatic tone in art. Here our learned guide refers us to comments Beckford made in *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents* (which Gemmet edited in 2006) where Beckford has critical things to say about Rubens's paintings in Antwerp Cathedral which he visited in 1780. Two years later, when Beckford went on his Grand Tour to Italy, it is significant that he chose John Robert Cozens as his accompanying artist. Cozens's sketches, abounding in dramatic, natural scenery reflect his patron's move toward the sublime in taste.

In another interesting link Gemmett shows how Beckford was also parodying contemporary studies of painters dominated by biographical anecdotes. A prime example of that approach was Horace Walpole's *Anecdotes of Painting in England*, copies of which

were in the Fonthill library. Although Beckford had Walpole in mind when he wrote the *Biographical Memoirs*, Gemmett maintains that it was Jean-Baptiste Descamps' *Vies des peintres flamands, allemands, et hollandois* (published in segments between 1753 to 1764) that he chose to lampoon, purposely exaggerating its tone and language, especially when dealing with trivia.

Gemmett's *Introduction* is in fact a scholarly essay on the contemporary artistic and literary background to the *Biographical Memoirs*. His meticulous scholarship of Beckford over many years supremely qualifies him to produce what will surely be the definitive edition of that early work for a very long time.

1 *The Beckford Journal*, Vol. 22, 2016, 25.

2 Ibid.

3 Malcolm Jack, Introduction, *William Beckford Vathek and Other Stories, A Beckford Reader*, Penguin Classics, 1995, xxiii.

4 *Biographical Memoirs of Extraordinary Painters William Beckford* (New Edition with Introduction and Notes by Robert J. Gemmett), Hobnob Press, 2018, 9.

A Fonthill Miscellany

MICHAEL COUSINS

The following is not intended as a focused article, rather a miscellany of material relating to Fonthill and the Beckfords that I have come across over several years as a garden historian. My hope is that it will be of interest and of use to others and foster further research.

Jon Millington's *Bibliography* is a veritable treasure trove for those interested in the Beckfords and Fonthill,[1] yet it is light on visitors' accounts. During my numerous forays into libraries and record offices, both in this country and abroad, I have come across several travel journals that refer to the Beckfords' houses and park, and visits that the Alderman made. Whilst a number of accounts have been cited in recounting the history of Fonthill and its owners – notably those by the Reverend Richard Pococke, John Parnell, Sophia, Countess of Shelburne, and Caroline, Mrs Philip Lybbe Powys – these hitherto unnoticed descriptions provide new and valuable information. They were pivotal in establishing a clearer timeline when writing the chapter on Joseph and Josiah Lane in the recent publication *Fonthill Recovered*, wherein is recounted the history of the Old Park in the eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century.[2]

The 1776 account by Amabell Polwarth is of particular note as it is the earliest contemporary evidence – to date – of the entertaining accounts given by Beckford's housekeeper whilst guiding visitors around Fonthill house. On this occasion, when recounting to the guests details of the various artworks, she gave the artists such

names as 'Staymaker' and 'Baron Vander-Ten Frank', much to the amusement of Amabell. The product of the housekeeper's creative outpourings was to be Beckford's *Biographical Memoirs of Extraordinary Painters*.[3]

Before commencing our perigrinations proper, however, here are extracts from two letters that may also be of interest and promote further investigation.

The Other, Other Tutor

In the *Memoirs of William Beckford*, Redding relates how John Lettice came to be tutor of the young heir, and Lord Lyttelton's involvement in this affair. The original source for the account has not been located.[4] One letter in the Montagu Collection in the Huntington Library, however, yields an interesting story, one that shows that it was not the leaving of Robert Drysdale – Beckford's first tutor from October 1768 – that left an opening for Lettice, rather the departure of a second tutor.

> I called on her [Mrs Beckford] at Fonthill in my way to M.r Hoare's, and while I was with her she received an anonymous Letter, which appears by the Post Mark to have come from London, lamenting that in chusing a Tutor for her Son she had taken the Recommendation of a one whose Character was too vitious [*sic*] to be defended. The Writer added, that of this he could give her many Proofs, if it were necessary, but this notice was sufficient to putt her upon her guard, and induce her to enquire into the characters both of the Person recommended and the recommender. I should have told you before, that (if I did not in London) that M.rs Beckford, on M.r Foster's being force to leave her Son, applied to me to help her in the choice of another Tutor and that I talked on the Subject with M.r Clever, who is Tutor to M.r Grenville, on whose credit I recommended one M.r Lettice, and a better Security I could not have than M.r Clever's testimony of his moral and religious character, and desire to place him in this important Trust. M.rs Beckford, it seems, has

> used my name to justify her new Choice, without saying, much of M.r Cleever.[5]

So who was Mr Foster?

The Acquisition of Witham

Many questions still surround the estate at Witham when it comes to Alderman Beckford's purchase of it, and building of a new house there at a time when he was completing 'Splendens' at Fonthill. The destruction of the earlier house by fire in 1755 elicited the following comment from John Ivory Talbot (1687–1772), writing to the amateur architect, Sanderson Miller (1716–80):

> Beckfords Books, a Valuable Collection, were saved: The House a very Bad one, tho Ostentatiously Furnish'd. The Loss very considerable; – An Old Hypocritical Housekeeper suffer'd the Originals of the Rakes & Harlotts Progress to be Burnt because They were subjects not fitting a decent House.– I wish she had been in their Place![6]

Alderman Beckford was somewhat glib concerning his finances, and his ability to fund the building work, as reported by his neighbour Henry Hoare (1705–85): 'The day Lord & Lady Pembrooke dined here [Stourhead] they stop'd at M.r Beckford's & His Lordship told Them He wallow'd in money & therefore built 2 Houses to get rid of it.'[7] In fact it wasn't until 1766 that the mortgage on Witham was wrapped up. Amongst others, it involved George Grenville (1712–70), younger brother of Earl Temple (1711–79) of Stowe:

> Mr Grenville presents his Compts to Mr Beckford he came to Town last saturday in his way to Ld Thomonds for wch place he is this moment setting out but has desir'd that Mr Hamersley may prepare the transfer of the Mortgage on the Witham Estate & give notice to all the parties that it may be executed on Saturday morning at

> Mr Grenvilles House in Bolton street at a ¼ after eleven o clock for w^ch^ purpose Mr Grenville will be in Town at that time & ready to perform his part of the Trust
> Bolton street
> Monday June y^e^ 2^d^ 1766[8]

At this time, the Alderman had mortgages with the Fleet Street bank Hoare & Co, amounting to £56,000 (around £9.5 million today).[9]

Visits and Visitors

The visiting of country houses was a burgeoning pastime in the eighteenth century, and Fonthill was no exception. But visits made by Alderman Beckford to other properties are also of interest as they may have had a bearing on how aspects of the Old Park at Fonthill evolved. One of the earliest visitors to Fonthill, indeed before Beckford's purchase of the estate in 1745, was John Loveday (1711–1789) of Caversham, wherein he passed by the place in 1738 as part of a longer itinerary. It shows that Frances, 2nd Baron Cottington, was carrying out works of some sort there:

> Monday June 12 […] In a bottom Mr Cottington has a very large old Seat of Stone at Fonthill some distance before Tisbury; many Workmen are now employed about It; Sure this Gentleman has a considerable Estate at Blewberry in Berkshire.[10]

The Alderman's visit to Claremont in 1750 is significant in that he was clearly taken with what he saw. The belvedere, amphitheatre, and the island temple (Belisle) were well-established by then, and William Kent had given the 'Round Bason' an irregular form. His cascade, however, was being transformed into, or replaced by a grotto by Stephen Wright, which at that time of the visit was well under way.

> On Wednesday [20 June] Captain Beckford his Lady, Two M.r Beckfords that are Brothers to my Lady Effingham, & an other young Gentleman came to Claremont & dined with me at my House, one of them Married Lady Fanney Sherley the other has a Plantation in Jamaica, his Seat here is I think in Wiltshire where he is making fine Gardens &c. I never see a Man in Such Extacies as he was with Claremont, they were all prodigiously pleased with every thing.[11]

We next hear of the Alderman and his wife during the summer of 1758 when they called on Henry Grenville (1717–84) and Margaret ('Peggy') Banks (1723–1793). The couple had only married the previous October, and set up home at Shrub Hill House, Dorking.

> Fonthill June y.e 17.th 1758
> … I was in Surrey about a Week ago and had the Pleasure of seeing your Brother and Sister Well, and am quite delighted With their Place, it is a Charming little Spot, and really lade out with great Tast, as for M.r Beckford he was so pleased with it that for some Days he talk'd of Nothing Else.[12]

Interestingly, grottoes start to become a common aspect of the Alderman's visits, and the Grenville's was no exception. The grotto there was proving problematic, with pleas of help being sent to Sanderson Miller: 'Our Grotto remains in a very imperfect, unfinished State, the Water distils from it, by very plentiful droppings, in 6 or 8 different places, but how to collect these into one main Channel is a matter that puzzles all the Wit & Abilities that Shrubhill or Dorking can boast of, & is an Operation reserved for you …'[13] Two years later, Mrs Beckford paid a visit to Hester Pitt (1721–1803), the wife of William Pitt, Lord Chatham, at their residence in Kent, Hayes Place:

> I had a visit, as you will have Learnt, from M.rs Beckford with whom I walkd in the discretest manner, but at the same time contrived to

> Shew Her much the Largest part of Hayes Ground, with which I was not at all tired, and was perfectly Satisfied with her manner of seeing it and the Impression it made. She was extremely sorry for not having seen it Sooner, that the Swells at Fonthill might have Copied Those that enclose Bridge Lane and the Pond, Their Shape having Struck Her mightily as having much more Grace and Beauty with Less expence of Trees than Those she had at Home.'[14]

The foregoing account illustrates the planting at Fonthill that had been going on, and clearly at some expense. The Alderman's extensive shrubbery seems to have been part of this, as revealed in the somewhat staccato comments by Edward Knight junior (d.1812). The eldest son of a leading Midlands ironmaster, his visit dates to 3 or 4 July 1761. He starts by describing the grounds of Fonthill Park west of the river, making an anticlockwise circuit, noting, in some detail, features that are no longer extant:

> Fonthill – Beckford's Rustic Gateway — New-House 140 by 650 __ Coll.^{de} 10 pairs of P.^{s} join the house & offices. —— Ionic Port. 4 P.^{s} 16 In Diam^{r}__Int.^{n} 4..6–5..9 –4..6 behind a room 14 by 28 – View of the Water, Bridge &c. Shrubry ab 3 Miles round — Subterraneous passage – Umbrella Seat – Rockwork — Church –— Doric Rottond 8 P.^{s} 22 In. D.^{r} Interc.^{n} 5..3_3 mutules – view to the House, water, lawn &c __Boat_House & Rockwork _[15]

The umbrella seat may well have been inspired by that at Stourhead, or vice versa: neighbourly visits between the Alderman and Henry Hoare and are noted in the latter's correspondence, and that of society friends.[16]

It is clear that a combined visit by William Pitt (1708–78) (and his wife Hester), and Lord Temple (1711–79) to Fonthill was planned for the July of 1762. Paradoxically it was the Alderman coming to London that made Lord Temple abandon his intentions, and he was forced to defer his sojourn. The Pitts persisted with their journey, with only Mrs Beckford as their host; but whilst at Fonthill, both the

Pitts were laid up, almost certainly with gout.[17] In early August, after their return to Hayes, it seems that the Alderman passed a day there with them, possibly to see for himself what his wife had commented on two years previously. When Lord Temple eventually visited, from 17 August for a week, he passed some interesting comments regarding the new house:

> I cannot enough admire the whole of M.r Beckford's Place; the House had he finished it according to the original Plan 8 feet wider, & if, (as he has no stables) he would add two more offices with the same Colonnade, would be the finest & best understood House or Palace I Know …[18]

A visitor to Fonthill in the summer of 1766 provides a valuable commentary that builds on that of Edward Knight Jnr. As a combined dialogue they prove, once and for all, that the lengthy subterraneous tunnel, the once-shell-ornamented hermitage and the rusticated boathouse all derive from the Alderman's time:

> M.r Beckford's House was not finish'd, but appeared to be intended as magnificent as most in England… The Bed Chambers particularly grand … You ascend a Flight of steps to the House, which bring you under an Ionic Colonade _ the Offices are united with the House by a Piazza of the Doric Order …The Chimney Peices in [*sic*] the Work of Moore of London, cost 400£ each _ Caryatides support the entablature … There are two very fine Rooms, one intended for Music, in which there is an Alcove for the Organ, the other for a Picture Gallery … The Garden [*sic*] are pretty – there is a subterraneous Grot winding 30 yards. ___ The Hermitage adorn'd with Shells and Spars, is well imagined.[19]

We now reach 1769, when a noble gathering took place at Fonthill, lasting five days, with excursions to Stourhead, Longleat and Wardour Castle being organised by the Alderman. The guests included Lord and Lady Shelburne, Lord Lyttelton (1709–73),

Alderman Townsend, Colonel Barry, Mr Cornwall amongst others. Partial extracts concerning the house from Lady Shelburne's 'unpublished' diary have already been printed,[20] but it is Lord Lyttelton's account that informs us that the Alderman had ventured north to Hagley the previous year:

> I am now at L.[d] Shelburn's upon my way to Boconnock; but he and his Lady are gone to M.[r] Beckford's; so I have a night to myself […] To morrow I propose to follow L.[d] Shelburn to the Great Beckford's, in return for a Visit the Alderman made me last year at Hagley.[21]

Lyttelton's park was already celebrated for both its setting and garden ornaments, attracting many notable visitors. The Alderman would have seen a multitude of scenes and buildings: a sham ruined castle, grottoes, a hermitage, a root cave, a rotunda, a Palladian bridge, a seat to the poet James Thomson, commemorative urns to Alexander Pope and William Shenstone, an obelisk, and the architecturally-important Temple of Theseus. These may have had a bearing on, or borne fruit with the Alderman's lesser works at Fonthill, such as the temple dedicated to Hercules built on a small eminence, and the temple of the naiad, in a secret cavern ornamented in the Etruscan taste on the banks of the river.[22] Lyttelton returned to Fonthill in 1772, one of his last expeditions before his death the following year.[23]

After the death of the Alderman in 1770, there seems to be a degree of restraint applied by his mother and guardians to the young Beckford, and it wasn't until his coming of age in 1781 that the next steps in the evolution of Fonthill were to commence. Not all accounts were as rich in their descriptions as others; that by Frances Bridger (1734–1807) is a succinct one-liner: 'Fonthill M[r] Beckfords, a very large modern House, & very finely Furnished.'[24] That by Caroline, Mrs Philip Lybbe Powys (1738–1817), is often cited from the published version, yet the original source with its idiosyncratic spelling is more enjoyable and worth reproducing verbatim for the first time:

[7 August 1776]
From Lord Pembrokes we went to Fonthill y^e^ seat of M^r^ Beckford now a minor, y^e^ old house was burnt down about 20 years ago, and this just finish'd as this young Gentlemans Father (the Great Beckford as he is usually stiled) died. Tis a large Stone House 8 rooms on the principal floor, but, as a contrast to Lord Radnors which we had that morning admired for being so near the Garden, the Grand apartments at Fonthill, by a. most Tremendous flight of Steps are I believe more distant from the Terrace on which the house Stands, than y^e^ Attic Story of Longford Castle. and the Housekeeper seems to show it to a disadvantage I think taking us under these steps through a dark & Gloomy Egyptian Hall, from which she mounted us to y^e^ second story of Bedchambers first y^e^ State Bed & Furniture Crimson Velvet Gold Frames to y^e^ Chairs Tables & cornice to y^e^ bed, M^rs^ Beckfords dressing room, has in it numbers of Superb & elegant Nicnacks, from hence we descended to y^e^ principal Floor, where is display'd y^e^ utmost profusion of magnificence with the appearance of immense riches almost too Tawdrily exhibited. there are many good Pictures and many very Indifferent. Cassaulis I never admire, the best at Fonthill are of the small kind fit only for Ladys Cabinets of these there are many Capital ones. The Chimney peices all over y^e^ House are elegant to a degree, even those in the attics must have cost an immense sum, all of Statuary or Siana [*sic*] marble but hurts the eye most exceedingly is, that ~~every~~ every hearth, even the best appartments are common black and white, which seems such a saving of expence in the very Article where profusion has been so lavish'd, that tis perfectly amazing. a fine Grove of Oaks with clumps of evergreens on y^e^ left of the House is very picturesque, and there is a fine peice of water otherwise the situation is disagreeable.[25]

Almost coincident with the above visit was that by Amabell Polwarth (1751–1833), who, like her mother, Jemima, Marchioness Grey, was an observant traveller. As part of a tour from Portsmouth across the south of England, she had just seen Stonehenge …

… From hence we drove to M.r Beckfords at Font-hill [Fonthill], a Place we had heard so often mention'd that I was curious about it, & it certainly is one of the most magnificent modern Houses, built before the Introduction of the very minute Taste, which pretty as it is, I am more convinc'd will bring us back into the Gothic, soon or late. __ The Saloon & Picture Gallery are very large & fine Rooms; L.d P. thinks the Cielings in general too high, which I own did not strike me. A good deal of Gilding, but judiciously dispos'd, the Cieling, Chimney-Pieces, whatever good Artists could regulate, are in an elegant Taste, but M.r Beckford's own Taste does not so much shine in that part which depended solely on him. For the House is stuff'd full of the Handy-Works of the Chevalier Casali, several Copies, & a great many ~~old~~ Pictures of Dutch Masters, some pretty enough, but the strangest Names! at least as deliver'd by the House-keeper, you would have thought she was running over the Dramatis Personae of an English Farce. Staymaker, Baron Vander-Ten Frank, with all his Disciples, & something very like Insignificante, were among the principal. I wish you would look for them in the Abcedario, for I question whether even M.r Cambridge has the Honour of their Acquaintance. __ I must not be too long on these Heads, for I am not yet arriv'd at my Journey's End …[26]

The Reverend John Swete (1752–1821) of Oxton in Devon, a prolific traveller of the late eighteenth century, left the following account of his visit, which took place in October 1783. His observations coincide with the time when William Beckford, now of age, was making significant changes to the water in the park, indicating it had been drained or certainly lowered to effect these.

very soon after, all at once burst on my right, the house, and grounds of Fonthill and leaving the road, I ascended the summit of a hill on my left, where is a circular plantation of firs- from whence I had a fine View of the whole Scenery beneath which was in itself very attractive – descending to the road it pas't through a small ragged Village, and entering a fine rustic arch with a lodge on each side, I reach'd the lawn before the house, which is in front a handsome

> Structure of white stone, with two wings projecting, and joind to the house by a Colonnade – the mount on the right is most delightfully wooded, though its effect is partly lost by being so near to the house – the back grounds are charming but the stream that runs through is so small, that at this time, what little water was in the bed, appear'd in a state of Stagnation.[27]

Just before the close of the eighteenth-century, the Abbey and its grounds had become the key focus of Beckford's attention, as testified by Maria Ley (1780–1844) of Treyhill, Devon, writing to her brother William:

> …We now got to Deptford Inn took fresh Horses and about eight mile from that Place is Fonthill, nothing can exceed the splendour, and magnificence of the House and every thing belonging to it the only Fault is that your eye is fatigued with the quantity of Gold that is about the House, There are some fine Pictures two beautiful Landscapes by Claud he has ~~fitted~~ furnished one Room in the Turkish style, but it is impossible to describe the extravagance of all we saw, his whole time and thoughts are taken up about the Abbey which is not to be a Church but in Rooms as any other House, but to exceed any thing in the Country, The Gardens are very bad, the Grounds are very extensive but hardly to be called beautifull there is a fine Peice of artificial water & some Good Trees, he is continually planting and improving …[28]

The comments of our final visitor, Frances Smith (1758–1840), wife of the abolitionist MP William Smith, are of note as she made two visits to Fonthill. The first on 2 October 1781 was part of a honeymoon tour (they had married 12 September), and at the time when Beckford had recently turned twenty-one, but already hinting at a lack of interest in some of his father's possessions:

> from Stourton ten miles to Font Hill, M^r^ Beckford's magnificent abode: the rooms are loaded with gilding and the chimney=pieces,

the richest imaginable. the pictures are very much out of condition_ we were shewn five bed-chambers, and the state-chamber. we understood there were many more_ a costly toilette said to be worth £3000 here.[29]

Her second visit was made exactly nineteen years later, on 2 October 1800, having been refused admission the previous day 'as the house is only shewn between 12 & 3'. She managed to glimpse the Abbey under construction, and confirms the state of its progress; and at least we know what time Beckford had dinner!

Between 2 & 3, we returned to M^r^ Beckford's costly mansion. The libraries & Turkish room in the basement story are charming. The whole of the principal floor in profusely adorned with gilding, & yet very elegant. But the Altieri Claudes are the chief treasures. "The sacrifice" is not to be surpassed for beauty. "The landing of Æneas" is very inferior. Two Salvators, two Gaspars, Queen Mab, by Romney, M^r^ West's sketch of the Knights of the Garter, & Turner's Moses invoking the plague of hail are all very fine. We were obliged unwillingly to take our leave, as the housekeeper informed us that no strangers were permitted to remain after M^r^ B's dinner-hour, ½ past 3. During our rides today we had fine views of the Abbey which M^r^ B. is now building. One wing is finished & furnished, & the tower is already run up 120 feet, & is to be carried as much higher as it safely can. The chapel is intended to be 120 feet within: there is to be a second wing built.[30]

FINIS

1 Jon Millington, *William Beckford A Bibliography*, Beckford Society, 2008.

2 Michael Cousins, 'The landscape at Fonthill: An assessment of the grottoes and their builders', Caroline Dakers (ed.), *Fonthill Recovered: A Cultural History*, London: UCL Press, 2018, 247–75.

3 *Biographical Memoirs of Extraordinary Painters by William Beckford*, Robert J. Gemmett (ed.), Hobnob Press, 2018, 1–7. I am grateful to Sidney Blackmore for making me aware of this new edition.

4 It is not in any of the Lyttelton correspondence formerly at Hagley Hall, the British Library, The National Archive, or the Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

5 Huntington Library, Montagu Papers, MO 1369, Lyttelton to Elizabeth Montagu, Hagley, 11 July 1772. Further in the letter, Lord Lyttelton queried 'Whether it be a revival of the old Scandal about M.rs Abden and me, from some person to whom it is not know that my Brother was the Father of the Children supposed to have been mine, or a new Calumny'.

6 Warwickshire County Record Office, CR 125/404, Lacock, 15 March 1755.

7 Wiltshire History Centre, 9/35/165, letter 14, Henry Hoare to Lord Bruce, Stourhead, 29 August 1763.

8 BL Add MS 57826, ff. 71–72v.

9 Hoare and Co., Money Lent ledger M/L 1743-1773, f. 111.

10 Private Collection, Tour No.76 Stonehenge, Boyton, Longleat, Wardour Castle, Eastbury Park, Salisbury,Wilton House, Winchester, St Cross 30 May 1738 with John Audley.

11 BL Add MS 33066, ff. 136–37v, letter from James Pelham to the Duke of Newcastle, Claremont, 22 June 1750.

12 PRO 30/8/19, ff. 117–19v, Maria Beckford to Lady Chatham, Fonthill, 17 June 1758.

13 For Miller's involvement at Shrub Hill, see Warwickshire County Record Office, CR 125B/594 & 597.

14 PRO 30/8/7, ff. 169–71v, Hester Pitt to William Pitt, Hayes, the letter is undated, but Vere Birdwood gives 1760 as the year (see *So Dearly Loved, So Much Admired. Letters to Hester Pitt, Lady Chatham from her relations and friends 1744–1801,* London: HMSO, 1994, 226.

15 Worcester Record Office, The Hive, Ref: 899:310, BA 10470/2 (KPL 294). The accompanying cash book (KPL 283) provides the dating.

16 For example, Wiltshire History Centre 9/35/165, letter 2, Stourhead, 20 October 1761; letter 4, 26 June 1762. There were probably numerous other visits that went unrecorded.

17 The turn of events is detailed in the following sequence of correspondence: William James Smith (ed.), *The Grenville Papers: being the Correspondence of Richard Grenville Earl Temple, K.G., and the Right Hon: George Grenville, their Friends and Contemporaries*, 4 vols, London: John Murray, 1852–53, Vol. 1, 461, Earl Temple to John Wilkes, Stowe, June 27 1762 [It appears that the original letter is in the Lewis Walpole Library]; PRO 30/8/61, ff. 65–66v, Earl Temple to Mr Pitt, Stowe, 29 June 1762; ff. 67–68v, Earl Temple to Mr Pitt, Stowe, 1 July 1762; PRO 30/8/62, ff. 44–46v, Earl Temple to Lady Chatham, Stowe, 22 July 1762; ff. 47–48v, Earl Temple to Lady Chatham, Stowe, 1 August 1762; PRO 30/8/26, ff. 65–66v, Lady Jean Cathcart to Lady Chatham, Dorking, 7 August 1762; PRO 30/8/19, ff. 125–26v, Mrs Beckford to Lady Chatham, Witham, 9 August [1762]; PRO 30/8/62, ff. 49–50v, Lord Temple to Lady Chatham, Stowe, 15 August 1762; ff. 51–52v, Lord Temple to Lady Chatham, Hungerford, 17 August 1762.

18 PRO 30/8/61, ff. 71–73v, Earl Temple to Mr Pitt, Stowe, 7 September 1762.

19 BL Add MS 6767, ff. 38v–37v. The account is written in the rear of 'Antiquities of Cambridge' by James Essex (1722–84), and whilst often considered anonymous, the writing corresponds with that of Essex's less-polished manuscripts, plus there are other indications in the work to suggest that both sections of the book were contemporaneous.

20 Philip Hewat-Jaboor, 'Fonthill House: One of the Most Princely Edifices in the Kingdom',

in *William Beckford 1760–1844: An Eye for the Magnificent*, Derek E. Ostergard (ed.), New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001, 51–72, notes 25, 31, 51, 52, 56, 59, 69, 71, 75, 79 & 83.

21 BL Add MS 42087, ff. 45-46^{v} Lord Lyttelton to George Grenville, Bowood 25 July 1769. That Lyttelton spent two days at Fonthill, is noted in a following letter to Earl Temple written from Boconnoc later on his tour , BL Add MS 42087, ff. 52-53^{v}, 13 August 1769.

22 Henry Meister, *Letters written during a Residence in England translated from the French of Henry Meister,* London: T.N. Longman and O. Rees, 1799, 305 [*Souvenirs de mes Voyages en Angleterre*, 2 vols., Zurich: Orell, Gessner, Fussli & Comp., 1795, vol. II, 248.

23 Huntington Library, Montagu Papers, MO 1369, Lord Lyttelton to Elizabeth Montagu, Hagley, 11 July 1772.

24 East Sussex Record Office (The Keep), SHR/1/2/8/2/1928, 24. Western Tour, 21 September 1775.

25 BL Add MS 42168, ff. 12–14, Vol. IX, 'Five Days Tour', 1776.

26 Bedfordshire Archives and Records Service, L 30/9/60/84. Amabell Polwarth to Marchioness Grey, Bath, 27 August 1776.

27 Special Collections, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds, MS Trv q 4 SWE. Rev. John Swete, *Tour through England & Scotland*, vol. V, 71–72. The accompanying description infers that the tour ran from 1783 to 1874; in fact it started 1 May 1783 and completed that year. His visit to Fonthill occurred around mid-October based on dating evidence available.

28 Devon Heritage Centre, 2741M/FC16/2a–2b fols 2^{v}–3. Although undated, other commentary in the letter indicates it was written c. 4 June 1799.

29 Cambridge University Library, Add. MS. 7621/6, 45–46.

30 Cambridge University Library, Add. MS. 7621/7, 288–91.

Fonthill and the Colonial Imagination

ERIC RATCLIFF

The Midlands of Tasmania, lightly wooded savannah country that has supported a fine wool industry for almost two centuries, presented to its early European settlers a park-like appearance that they took to be primeval, but we now know to have been the result of æons of Aboriginal 'fire-stick farming', regular cool-season burning to inhibit the growth of an understorey of shrubs and to encourage the grasses that would feed the marsupial game.

At first exploited by the incomers like common grazing land, although there were ambitious claimants who sought ownership of extensive parts of it, the region eventually became the subject of freehold grants made to individuals by the Colonial government, and these continued until the late 1830s. Naturally, the best land with ready communication with the main settlements was taken up first, and marginal blocks in hillier country more remote from the axis of settlement somewhat later. That axis was the chain of villages along the highway between the only two towns in the Colony, Hobart Town, founded in 1804, and Launceston, a site first inhabited by settlers in 1805. From it, settled lands extended westwards and to the north and south of the Central Plateau and towards lower wooded hills to the east. It was in that direction that the later freehold grants were located.

One of these, in a district known as the Eastern Marshes, was awarded in 1830 to a former Royal Navy purser, Francis Gerard Tabart (1789–1856), and for reasons that we can only speculate about, he called his property 'Fonthill'. The earliest use of the

name that has been found is at the head of a letter from Tabart dated October 1832.[1] There are other reminders of Wiltshire in the vicinity; the Eastern Marshes railway station was renamed Andover in about 1908, and whether by design or coincidence, a property even more remote than Fonthill was named Stonehenge by 1883. Beyond it is an extensive unsettled region restricted to military use, like much of the Salisbury Plain in England.

Whether because of the impact on a youthful imagination of the knowledge of William Beckford's Fonthill, or a later encounter with the remoteness of Tabart's Fonthill and the strangeness of the houses he eventually built there, the antipodean Fonthill has for me curious echoes of its famous namesake.[2]

Tabart had served in the Navy under the patronage and command of Francis Beaufort, the deviser of the Beaufort scale of wind velocity, during the Napoleonic wars. Contrary to family legend, his ship was elsewhere at the time of Trafalgar. The defeat of Napoleon left him, like many other naval officers, surplus to requirements, and on half-pay he found employment in the woollen industry in Gloucestershire, managing a weaving mill at Uley on the edge of the Southern Cotswolds.[3] A depression in the industry led to his decision to emigrate to Van Diemen's Land, and on the basis of his Naval service he was able to apply for a grant of land in the colony.

Colonial settlers often named their properties after estates in the home countries with which they had some connexion. Few were of a class able to relate their choice of name to a family estate; a scion of the Talbot family named his holding Malahide after their Malahide Castle in County Dublin, but that is exceptional. Mostly the names reflected aspiration; the Archer family were extremely prominent in the colony, holding a cluster of large estates, but the founding brothers who emigrated from Hertfordshire were sons of a miller, not even yeoman stock! Another Naval officer to settle in the colony after the end of the wars was William Langdon, who called his property Montacute, but he was the son of the vicar of Montacute, and had been born in the Somerset vicarage.

So what was Tabart's connexion with Fonthill? He was the son of a London bookseller, and probably the 'Young Naval Officer' who was the author of *The True History of A Little Boy who Cheated Himself*, published by his father in 1809.[4] His biographer, Jane Evans, has speculated that he was one of the visitors to Beckford's Fonthill Abbey when it was opened for public inspection in 1822 or 1823, and makes tenuous connexions through his undoubted enthusiasm for the Navy, his inferred admiration of Beckford's celebrated guest, Horatio Nelson, and his mother's sometime acquaintance with the Wyatts as neighbours.[5]

We are forced to content ourselves with such explanations, but what is of interest is the continuing effect of the name of Beckford's property on an exiled imagination. Although Tabart's ultimate house has no resemblances whatever to Fonthill Abbey, its peculiarities undoubtedly owe something to its namesake.

Tabart's earlier dwelling on his grant, completed in 1832, was a capacious hip-roofed building with log walls enclosing five downstairs rooms and an entrance hall, and a high shingled roof containing three more rooms. The building is best imagined, if that is possible, as a large log cabin in the form of a Regency bungalow! It still stands, restored to within an inch of its life after half a century of dereliction, and now provides tourist accommodation.

Jane Evans has suggested that the design of Tabart's ultimate Fonthill came from his compounded memories of two notable Cotswold stone houses in the vicinity of Uley.[6] Stouts Hill, a Gothick house of 1743, possibly designed by the Bristol architect William Halfpenny, with ogee-pointed openings filled with window tracery of the kind advocated by Batty Langley, a symmetrical façade with polygonal bays and a castellated parapet. Owlpen Manor is a house of fifteenth century origin, much modified in the eighteenth century but retaining three large gables on the principal façade, as well as smaller ones on other sides. Tabart's house has three gables on the front, projecting from a great hipped roof, and ogee-pointed openings, albeit filled with infelicitous joinery and provided with

Fig. 1. Fonthill House, gabled front and entrance front. © Author.

Fig. 2. Fonthill House, entrance front. The paler stonework was sheltered by an added verandah for almost a century. © Author.

plain projecting margins in the Scottish fashion, FIGURE 1. The front door combines its ogee arch with attenuated anta-like piers, confounding the faintly Gothick with the distantly Classical, FIGURE 2. Evans's suggestion has some cogency, but there is another possible influence.

Family legend, supported by the provenance of a card table, some chairs and a settee once owned by Tabart, has it that the Lieutenant-Governor, the Arctic explorer Sir John Franklin, maintained a friendship with the former naval purser, and on his departure from the colony in 1843 gave some items of furniture to him. Jane Evans was not able to confirm this from documentary sources.[7] A piece of imported furniture that may possibly have been part of Franklin's gift probably contributed to the unusual design of Tabart's house. The major feature of the dining room is a built-in sideboard containing a revolving dumb waiter supplied from the passage behind, so that kitchen staff had no need to enter the room, FIGURE 3. An inherently unlikely suggestion has been made that it is the work of a colonial cabinet-maker, using a supply of oak that somehow appeared in the colony.[8] The piece is of English oak and not of colonial wood, a Regency concoction, although far from Beckfordian elaboration, with astylar architectural features, massive scrolls after Thomas Hope, and ogee-headed panels. Contemporaneous churches, chapels and a very few houses in the colony were given Gothick features, but only Tabart's Fonthill, and less conspicuously Talbot's Malahide, essayed openings headed with the ogee form, and the latter were an allusion to the eighteenth-century alterations to the family castle in County Dublin.

The majority of early free-standing colonial houses built in Van Diemen's Land were Late Georgian or Regency in style, hip-roofed, with fronts symmetrical around the main doorway and a 'front-to-back' plan, the principal rooms opening off a hallway and passage in the middle of the house. The smaller pre-Victorian yeoman farmhouses of southern England are the nearest equivalents. A minority of colonial villas were built to a 'transverse' plan, with

Fig. 3. The oak sideboard and dumb-waiter in the dining room at Fonthill. Photograph © Dr. E. Graeme Robertson.

the main rooms enfiladed across the front, the entrance hall and passage placed behind it, so that the formal entrance was on one end of the building. Tabart's Fonthill is of this kind. A number of houses built to such a plan made use of the freedom to add a rounded or polygonal projecting bay in the middle of the main façade, but Tabart's choice of a gabled Gothick style dictated that the projecting bay must be rectilinear in plan.

The house was very well built, and is in an excellent state of preservation. It stands on a hillside facing east, one and a half storeys above a semi-basement. The walls and gables are of local sandstone, resembling Bath stone in colour, and of bastard ashlar construction, and the roof, originally shingled, is now covered with the usual Tasmanian vernacular, corrugated iron, painted slate grey in the fashion pioneered by the local branch of the National Trust

of Australia to avoid the harsh effect of the oxide red that was once ubiquitous here.

The design of Tabart's Fonthill has not been attributed to any architect, and the character of the house is unique in the colony, displaying some sophistication combined with gaucheries that might be attributed particularly to the joiner. The interior is plastered throughout and fitted with joinery in New South Wales cedar that strongly resembles Honduras mahogany.[9] Work commenced in 1841 and continued throughout most of the following year. The Scotticism of the window margins and the excellent choice of stone have led to the suggestion that the house was built, and probably designed, by a notable Scottish stonemason, Andrew Bell who, between bouts of inebriation, was responsible for a number of the finest houses in the colony, but these are in a variety of styles and none resemble Fonthill.[10]

Tabart was clearly aware of William Beckford and his Fonthill Abbey, and some fascination might be presumed from his choice of name for his property, but there is no certain evidence that he ever visited the Abbey. Evans, and following her, Tierney and Casey, somewhat anachronistically presume a proximity between western Gloucestershire and the southern part of Wiltshire, but in fact the journey in 1822 or 1823 would have been considerable, although certainly not improbable. It was not a visit that would be made on a normal journey between London and Uley, but there is a specific reason why Tabart may have made it, other than joining the curious when the Abbey was opened to the public. As noted previously, Tabart was manager of a woollen cloth mill from 1819 until 1825, when his appointment came to an end with the sale of the mill at Uley.[11] From 1824 to 1826, George Mortimer, a nephew of John Farquhar, the purchaser of Fonthill Abbey and its owner at the time of the final fall of the great tower, was building a woollen cloth mill near the Fonthill Lake.[12] Could it be that Mortimer sought advice from Tabart when setting up his mill, or that Tabart, suddenly out of work, was hoping to be engaged by Mortimer? As no employment

resulted, we must imagine some more positive association with the name Fonthill.

Apart from that of Tabart, more general awareness of William Beckford in the colony may be judged from the fact that his death in May 1844 was noticed in the Hobart Town press four months later, amongst snippets of news from recently-arrived English papers that included such momentous events as a vice-regal appointment, some aristocratic and parliamentary deaths, a proposed visit of Louis Philippe to Britain, and the nomination of a new bishop of Newfoundland:

Mr Beckford, the author of Vathek, died in May last. He was the father of the Duchess of Hamilton'.[13]

Tabart's Fonthill is a minor building in the great world, but it would be a striking presence in many settings. Jean-Luc Nancy's comment on the resurgence of religion or ideology applies equally to architectural allusion and imitation: 'Among the phenomena of repetition, resurgence, revival, or haunting, it is not the identical but the different that invariably counts the most'.[14] Tabart's Fonthill and Beckford and Wyatt's Fonthill Abbey have both powerfully exemplified this.

1 Tabart to one of his daughters, *Fonthill, Sunday 21 Oct^r^ 1832.* Reproduced in facsimile and transcribed in K. Jane Evans, *Tabart of Fonthill: From England to Van Diemen's Land,* Weston super-Mare, 1991, 91. Original letter then in the possession of the Cascade Brewery, Hobart.

2 Eric Ratcliff, 'Beckford, Batsford, and the View from Afar: The Twentieth-Century Rediscovery of Fonthill Abbey and Lansdown Tower', *The Beckford Journal,* Vol. 18, 2012.

3 Evans, op. cit., 48-54.

4 *The True History of A Little Boy Who Cheated Himself / Founded on Fact / By a Young Naval Officer,* London: Tabart & Co., Juvenile and School Library, New Bond Street, 1809.

5 Evans, op. cit., 65.

6 Evans, ibid. 58, 126. *See also* Judy Tierney and Bob Casey, *Fonthill: A true story of love, luck, murder and scandal,* The Harvey Family, Hobart, 2015, 53-4.

7 Evans, ibid., 107, 158.

8 The absence of the piece from the authoritative work by Clifford Craig, Kevin Fahy and E. Graeme Robertson, *Early Colonial Furniture in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land,*

Melbourne: Georgian House, 1972, and subsequent editions, strongly indicates that it was not regarded as colonial.

9 *Toona ciliata* and closely related species provided most of the wood used by colonial joiners and cabinet-makers up to the 1850s.

10 Andrew Bell, arrived in Van Diemen's Land 1822, *fl.*1842. *See* P. L. Brown (ed.), Clyde Company Papers, vol. III, 1841-1845, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1958, 63.

11 Evans, op. cit., 51, 60-61.

12 Jon Millington, *William Beckford: A bibliography,* The Beckford Society 2008, 134: entries under the heading of 'Woollen Mill'.

13 *The Courier,* Hobart Town, 7 September 1844. We are indebted to Tierney and Casey for this reference, but otherwise their brief account of Beckford's life contains what must be a near-record number of inaccuracies in a single paragraph.

14 Jean-Luc Nancy, *La déclosion: Déconstruction de christianisme,* Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2005, translation, New York 2008, 1.

"A Bull-Pit Where The Slaughter Is Secondary To The Brilliant Display Of The Critic's Mastery Of Invective"

Robert Metzdorf's Review of the Yale Beckford Bicentenary Exhibition Catalogue

STEPHEN CLARKE

In 1960, Yale University celebrated the bicentenary of William Beckford's birth in some style. It was particularly well-placed to do so, having received the Beckford collection of Ray Livingston Murphy (1923–1953) after his early death, and having as its Librarian James T. Babb (1899–1968), whose own Beckford collection was probably the most substantial in private hands. To these riches were added some items from the collection of Rowland Burdon Muller of Camden, Maine. The exhibition that resulted consisted of 257 items, under six heads: Beckford's father the Alderman; Beckford's own life and works; books attributed to him; Beckford as the Caliph of Fonthill Abbey; Beckford the Collector; and books about him.

The display was spectacular in its range of Beckford rarities. There was one of the five known copies of *Dreams, Waking Thoughts, and Incidents* (1783), the "Chavannes" copy of the 1787 Lausanne edition of *Vathek*, Beckford's letter of 9 February 1786 to Samuel Henley forbidding publication of *Vathek*, Beckford's own copies, bound by Kalthoeber, of *Azemia* and *Modern Novel Writing*, the latter inscribed by Beckford to himself as a presentation copy "from the divine authoress", an extensive range of his published

books and books annotated by him, and innumerable autograph letters.[1]

The exhibition opened on 13 October 1960 with a lecture by Boyd Alexander, and was accompanied by a handsomely-produced catalogue to which Alexander contributed.[2] The title of the catalogue is *William Beckford of Fonthill: Writer, Traveller, Collector, Caliph 1760–1844 A brief narrative and catalogue of an Exhibition to mark the two hundredth anniversary of Beckford's birth*. It was compiled by Howard B. Gotlieb (1926–2005), and included two Appendices by Alexander, one arguing for Beckford's authorship of *The Story of Al Raoui, a tale from the Arabic*, and the other the previously unpublished journal kept by Beckford in 1794. The catalogue text followed the six sections of the exhibition, describing all 257 exhibits, and quoting at length from the manuscript letters in the display cases. The book was designed by John McCrillis and elegantly printed at the Yale University Printing Office with ten illustrations, produced in octavo format and bound in red buckram with a profile of the youthful Beckford in gilt on the upper cover. It was priced at $6, a not inconsiderable sum for the time. Many Beckfordians may have it on their shelves, but they may be unaware of the story surrounding its reception.

Reviews of the catalogue could be described as mixed. John Hayward in *The Book Collector* considered that "The catalogue's handsome appearance belies its contents which fall confusedly and confusingly between the stools of inadequate and not always accurate bibliographical description, perfunctory biography, and, so to say, exhibitionism." He regretted that what should have been designed as a permanent record should have been compromised by following the arrangement and the contents of the various display cases, and described the lack of an index as "a tiresome inconvenience." Fatma Moussa Mahmoud in *William Beckford of Fonthill 1760–1844 Bicentenary Essays* was more positive, noting that "Brief but fairly adequate exposition of the importance of particular items, together with ample quotations from autograph

letters qualify this *Catalogue* to stand on the reference shelf next to Guy Chapman's *Bibliography of William Beckford*, for which purpose it should seem the *Catalogue* was partly designed." She praised the "Beckford the Collector" section of the catalogue, but criticised the final "Books about William Beckford" section as incomplete. In a more detailed review in *The Times Literary Supplement*, John Carter questioned the book's claims to a place on the reference shelf. He objected that "the random ordering of the profuse manuscript material, attributed (surely rather feebly) to its visual appearance in the showcases, is a serious inconvenience." He commented on the lack of information as to ownership of the exhibits described, and lamented that there were no references to Chapman's bibliography. But he was impressed by Alexander's two Appendices, and concluded that "Yale, in short, has done William Beckford proud".[3] The fourth review was very different, and it is this review that forms the subject matter of this article.

The review appeared in *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* (*PBSA*) in 1962, and was signed with the initials of the Editor and the Book Review Editor of that journal, Robert F. Metzdorf (1912–75) and Lawrence S. Thompson (1916–86), respectively.[4] To describe it as hostile does not begin to do it justice. It is relentlessly venomous. Its opening paragraph heralds the gathering storm:

> When expert after expert smilingly but firmly refuses to review a book, one may begin to suspect that something is seriously wrong with the production. That is why the editor and the Book Review editor are forced to notice the catalogue of the Beckford exhibition held at Yale: no one else will undertake the task. Since numerous copies have been sold at a rather steep price and are presumed, by virtue of the imprint, to contain trustworthy statements, necessary corrections should be made in copies which are apt to be used for reference purposes.

There follow nearly two pages listing 54 corrections, giving the location, defective text, and required amendment. They include errors of identity (misprinting Nelson's daughter's name as Horatio), spelling errors, errors of capitalisation, repeated absence of a comma before quotations, and repeated errors in transcriptions from letters exhibited, ending with a passage of a letter from John Lettice to Samuel Henley, item 48 in the exhibition, with "seven errors in capitalization, two in punctuation, one in paragraphing, and two in transcription." The review then proceeds:

> The performance continues – omissions, errors, substitutions, confusions, misspellings, faulty transcriptions, and *bêtises* of all types. From this point forward only the most blatant mistakes will be noted: but it should be borne in mind that in addition to the following faults more than 265 other errors have been noted in style, grammar, spelling, punctuation, and transcription.

Then comes a further list of 41 examples, and one can sense the reviewer's glee as he exposes error after error. Some of his corrections of style may be matters of opinion, but there were unquestionably repeated and serious errors of transcription and spelling. There were also mistakes that displayed the cataloguer's ignorance of Beckford studies (Rutter's *Description of Fonthill Abbey* is described as published in London rather than Shaftesbury, and J. Buckler appears as F. Buckler) and of bibliographical description (original cloth appears as original boards, and where item 71 is attributed to two different binders, as in "The crushed blue morocco binding is by Canape-Belz … Bound by P. Bozerian" the reviewer adds the sardonic comment "Presumably a dos-à-dos collaboration? Also, correct to Bozérian"). Predictably, an error in Latin is seized on, "O Astra" "O Coelum" being corrected to "O Astra. O Cœlum." with the mordant aside (referring to the famous Yale dining club) "O tempora! O Mory's!"

The review lamented the lack of an index or any list of books

consulted, or of any references to Chapman's bibliography or location credits, and added the warning that the copious notes of transcription errors in the manuscript material was limited to those sections of the manuscripts that were visible in the exhibition display cases. It then gives some examples of infelicities in the cataloguer's prose style, before insisting that "If the points made in the list of deficiencies presented here are considered petty, overdrawn, unimportant, and even impolite, they have been made in the name of bibliographical accuracy." The concluding paragraph rounds off with the dull thud of an old score being settled as it turns on James Babb, Yale's Head Librarian and the major lender to the exhibition:

> The entire blame does not rest with the compiler, Mr. Gotlieb (although he has much to answer for). The ultimate responsibility for any program or policy of a research library lies with the head librarian, and in this case the head librarian has written [in a preface to the Catalogue] of the compiler: "I thank him for his devotion to a work far afield from his regular duties. I think he enjoyed it." The degree of enjoyment which the compiler experienced is not a factor which should determine publication of a catalogue by a major library; the degree of pleasure and the amount of confidence the user of a book can feel are much more important. The least that could have been done by the older and wiser heads at Yale would be to have proof-read the book and eliminated some of the more egregious errors.

Clearly there are ample grounds for legitimate criticism of the catalogue, as had been noted by the three other reviews mentioned above, but this review has a distinctive and unremittingly caustic, carping tone. There is an insistent listing of error after error, mixing minor matters of style with major errors of fact and transcription so that more than half of the review's text consists of the columns of location, defective text and required correction. The only remotely positive comments in Metzdorf's review were on Boyd Alexander's Appendices (in contrast to Gotlieb's work) and on the

rather handsome style of the letterpress (but that is mentioned only to claim that the appearance of the book potentially misleads its unsuspecting purchasers into thinking that they are spending their six dollars on a reliable work of reference). As a review it is more than damning of the book, it is implacable in its condemnation of the compiler, and dismissive of Yale and of its Head Librarian. So what could have provoked such an assault?

Although the initials of both Editor and Book Editor of *PBSA* appear under the review, it was essentially the work of the Editor, Robert Metzdorf, who had become Editor of *PBSA* in 1959, Figure 1. The correspondence files of the Bibliographical Society of America, now deposited at the Grolier Club, New York, include Metzdorf's letter of 5 March 1962 to Thompson, enclosing the review as drafted by Metzdorf. He states:

Fig. 1. Robert Metzdorf.
Courtesy of Rush Rhees Library,
University of Rochester.

> It seems the time has come to fish or cut bait on the Beckford catalogue. As time allowed, I've compiled and written the enclosed review. Will you be willing to put your initials on it, with mine? It seems to me that if we don't print a notice, we have been faked out on the thing; the people who trustingly bought the book deserve to know how unreliable it is, and Babb needs to be shown in print what a shocking performance it has been. I have no doubt that he will be mortally affronted, and vindictive: but so far as I am concerned, there is nothing that he can do or say which will hurt me any more than he's already done, so I have a clear road ahead, and regard the writing and printing of the review as a duty.

Thompson replied on 8 March that "The review of the Beckford can stand, and with my initials trailing respectfully behind yours of you wish." He made a couple of minor suggestions, but his major proposal – which Metzdorf accepted – was to re-write and tone down Metzdorf's two concluding paragraphs. For example the sentence in the final paragraph of the review as published ("The ultimate responsibility for any program or policy of a research library lies with the head librarian") was in Metzdorf's draft the far more pointed "The real responsibility lies with the Librarian, Mr. James T. Babb, a former president of [the Bibliographical Society of America, in whose proceedings the review appeared], who was so unwise as to choose a person for this job who was unqualified in knowledge, training, and experience to do the task set before him."[5]

Metzdorf had been educated at the University of Rochester, and was in 1939 awarded their first PhD. in English. He stayed on to work in the University's Rush Rhees Library, and become an instructor in the English department, and Curator of the Samuel Johnson collection of R.B. Adam, and Curator of Rare Books. In 1949, following the sale of the Adam collection to Donald and Mary Hyde, he left to become a rare book cataloguer at Harvard, and then three years later moved on to Yale as Curator of Manuscripts, also becoming Secretary to the Editorial Committee for the Boswell

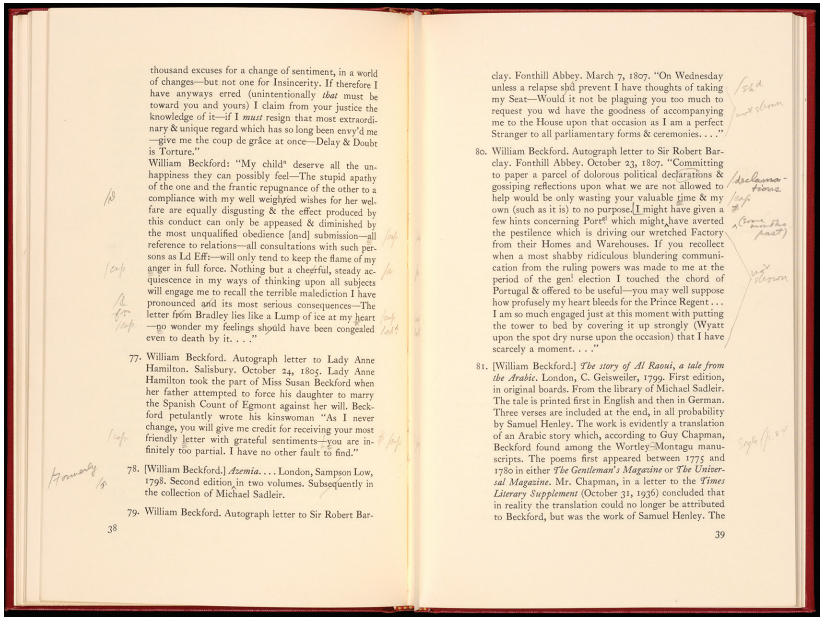
Papers. In 1958 he was given the newly-created post of University Archivist, but then in 1961 left Yale and academia to take charge of the sale of literary property at the auctioneers Parke-Bernet Galleries in New York; there he became Vice-President and Director, but resigned in 1964 on the day that Parke-Bernet was taken over by Sotheby's. He then worked as an appraiser of rare books and manuscripts, moving out to Connecticut in 1968, seven years before his death.

Metzdorf was a dedicated bookman, a member of numerous library and bibliographical associations, a collector of Thackeray and other nineteenth-century authors, and a bibliographer. He edited *The Tinker Library* (1959), the catalogue of the collection of Chauncey Brewster Tinker, a legendary figure in early- and mid-twentieth-century Yale as teacher, librarian, and donor. In sharp contrast to the Beckford exhibition catalogue, this was reviewed as "having erred on the side of fullness", but with "a superlative index", in which "One can only admire the diligent industry of Dr. Metzdorf, and his careful proof-reading".[6] But he was also a man of many friends, a regular visitor to the Johnson collectors Donald and Mary Hyde at Four Oaks Farm in New Jersey, and an early member of The Johnsonians, the dining club they established in 1946. In a tribute at his memorial service at Rochester after his death, Herman Liebert (1911–1994), who had worked with Metzdorf in the Sterling Memorial Library before becoming Beinecke Librarian at Yale, described his personality as follows:

> there was nothing of the monk about him except his tonsure. In one sense, that was true: he was the most gregarious of men, fond of good food and drink, and more especially the social happiness that accompanied them. He had a host of friends, and gave himself unreservedly to his friendships with them. A company that included him was bound to be one of convivial hilarity enlightened by his warmth and wit … And yet, in a deeper sense, he was something of a monk, as ascetic, but as one who recognized a kind of divinity in

> books and manuscripts and dedicated his life, with almost ferocious intensity, to their study, description, and greater understanding … He was stubborn, laudably so in pursuit of facts, but sometimes exasperating in the firmness with which he clung to his convictions … He was house-proud, and justifiably, for he always surrounded himself with possessions of all sorts that manifested his unerring taste. The many and distinctly different collections he assembled are another enduring achievement.

Metzdorf left some of his collections to the University of Rochester, together with his papers. One item there is his own review copy of the Yale exhibition catalogue, and this is nothing if not revealing.[7] It is copiously annotated in pencil – with the exception of Boyd Alexander's Appendices, which are scarcely marked, there are only two pages of text that are not annotated. The margins have neatly written notes and editorial symbols, averaging perhaps five or six to a page, including corrections to the catalogue's printed text of the manuscripts displayed – Metzdorf must have painstakingly worked his way around all the cases with this copy in hand, proofing the printed extracts in the book against the originals on display. The opening illustrated, showing pages 38 and 39, is typical, Figure 2. In the transcription of the text of Beckford's letter to his daughter Susan Euphemia of 16 April 1805 (item 76 on page 38), Metzdorf records eight errors, mostly of contractions and capitalisation. The correction to item 78 is a matter of style, it being common practice in describing the provenance of an item to describe it as formerly in a particular collection, rather than subsequently. Metzdorf notes the sections of Beckford's letters exhibited as items 79 and 80 that were not visible in the exhibition display case ("not shown") so he could not check the accuracy of the transcriptions, but still finds four errors in the two sentences of item 80 that he could see, including a misreading ("declarations" for "declamations") and words omitted. He also picks up inconsistencies, as where the surname Wortley Montagu appears in item 81 with a hyphen, but without one in a



thousand excuses for a change of sentiment, in a world of changes—but not one for Insincerity. If therefore I have anyways erred (unintentionally *that* must be toward you and yours) I claim from your justice the knowledge of it—if I *must* resign that most extraordinary & unique regard which has so long been envy'd me —give me the coup de grâce at once—Delay & Doubt is Torture."

William Beckford: "My child[a] deserve all the unhappiness they can possibly feel—The stupid apathy of the one and the frantic repugnance of the other to a compliance with my well weighed wishes for her welfare are equally disgusting & the effect produced by this conduct can only be appeased & diminished by the most unqualified obedience [and] submission—all reference to relations—all consultations with such persons as Ld Eff:—will only tend to keep the flame of my anger in full force. Nothing but a cheerful, steady acquiescence in my ways of thinking upon all subjects will engage me to recall the terrible malediction I have pronounced and its most serious consequences—The letter from Bradley lies like a Lump of ice at my heart —no wonder my feelings should have been congealed even to death by it. . . ."

77. William Beckford. Autograph letter to Lady Anne Hamilton. Salisbury. October 24, 1805. Lady Anne Hamilton took the part of Miss Susan Beckford when her father attempted to force his daughter to marry the Spanish Count of Egmont against her will. Beckford petulantly wrote his kinswoman "As I never change, you will give me credit for receiving your most friendly letter with grateful sentiments—you are infinitely too partial. I have no other fault to find."

78. [William Beckford.] *Azemia. . . .* London, Sampson Low, 1798. Second edition in two volumes. Subsequently in the collection of Michael Sadleir.

79. William Beckford. Autograph letter to Sir Robert Barclay. Fonthill Abbey. March 7, 1807. "On Wednesday unless a relapse shd prevent I have thoughts of taking my Seat—Would it not be plaguing you too much to request you wd have the goodness of accompanying me to the House upon that occasion as I am a perfect Stranger to all parliamentary forms & ceremonies. . . ."

80. William Beckford. Autograph letter to Sir Robert Barclay. Fonthill Abbey. October 23, 1807. "Committing to paper a parcel of dolorous political declarations & gossiping reflections upon what we are not allowed to help would be only wasting your valuable time & my own (such as it is) to no purpose. I might have given a few hints concerning Port[l] which might have averted the pestilence which is driving our wretched Factory from their Homes and Warehouses. If you recollect when a most shabby ridiculous blundering communication from the ruling powers was made to me at the period of the gen[l] election I touched the chord of Portugal & offered to be useful—you may well suppose how profusely my heart bleeds for the Prince Regent . . . I am so much engaged just at this moment with putting the tower to bed by covering it up strongly (Wyatt upon the spot dry nurse upon the occasion) that I have scarcely a moment. . . ."

81. [William Beckford.] *The story of Al Raoui, a tale from the Arabic.* London, C. Geisweiler, 1799. First edition, in original boards. From the library of Michael Sadleir. The tale is printed first in English and then in German. Three verses are included at the end, in all probability by Samuel Henley. The work is evidently a translation of an Arabic story which, according to Guy Chapman, Beckford found among the Wortley-Montagu manuscripts. The poems first appeared between 1775 and 1780 in either *The Gentleman's Magazine* or *The Universal Magazine*. Mr. Chapman, in a letter to the *Times Literary Supplement* (October 31, 1936) concluded that in reality the translation could no longer be attributed to Beckford, but was the work of Samuel Henley. The

Fig. 2. *William Beckford of Fonthill: Writer, Traveller, Collector, Caliph 1760–1844 A brief narrative and catalogue of an Exhibition to mark the two hundredth anniversary of Beckford's birth* (Yale University Press, 1960). Pages 38 and 39 of Robert Metzdorf's annotated review copy. Courtesy of Rush Rhees Library, University of Rochester.

separate entry on page 84. Every one of the six exhibits described on the opening has at least one correction. These notes were then incorporated into the lists of errors in his review.

The files of Metzdorf's correspondence at Rochester University bear out Liebert's tribute to a wide circle of friends, and also hint at the stubbornness that Liebert mentions.[8] In a letter of 8 July 1962 to his friends Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Lack of Southport, Connecticut, Metzdorf described his decision to leave Yale as on balance wise: "the Yale situation had become pretty static, and there were several things about it which made me most unhappy." There is a playful

account of the opening of the Beckford exhibition in a letter to Metzdorf of 13 October 1960 from Charles Ryskamp (1925–2010), later Director of the Pierpont Morgan Library and then of the Frick Collection, which he signs off with a flourish "Ever thine, Louisa M. Alcott". It describes the opening event as follows:

> Yesterday was Beckford Day at the Sterling Memorial Library. We had a speech by a rather epicene English lecturer [Boyd Alexander], and the cases are gorgeous with relics of the richest English pederast. All very edifying and chi-chi. I always knew Beckford had more money than brains, but until I read the lush catalogue which has been published for this memorable occasion I hadn't realized that that was a requirement for collecting him and writing about him. Come up and join in the celebrations – so long as you keep in respectable company!

But most relevant to our enquiry is Metzdorf's annual report in June 1958, at the time of his move from curator at Sterling to Yale University Archivist. It was prepared for submission to his superior at Yale, James Babb. He clearly agonised over it, and the surviving third draft shows him as a dedicated member of the Yale libraries staff, but sensitive and easily offended – and offended by no less than the young Howard Gotlieb, who had joined the Historical MSS. section on the retirement of Mrs. Zara Jones Powers, since when Metzdorf complained of a number of irregularities arising from lack of supervision. He noted that Gotlieb had only received three months' training followed by a year on his own, "during which he has not come to me for advice of any kind … He does not take guidance easily, and too-rapid advancement is bad food for over-confidence". Metzdorf then quoted from and challenged twelve points in Gotlieb's own annual report of two weeks earlier, mostly complaining about lack of consultation, inaccuracies in a check-list that Gotlieb had prepared of the manuscript collections, and of policy decisions taken without his involvement. He claimed to

feel unfairly treated, and accused Gotlieb of "what appears to have been a program of studied insubordination and deliberate secrecy". In his summary, he urged that the Historical MSS. section should concentrate on organising and cataloguing their material, rather than popularising the collection and encouraging undergraduate use; "Time should not be wasted on preparation of footling exhibits in a third-floor case not adapted for MS display … the librarian of the room [i.e. Gotlieb] is not a curator."

The Beckford exhibition followed two years later. Given Babb's interest in Beckford and contributions to the exhibition from his own collection, it may well have been something of a favourite project, and Gotlieb was clearly in effect promoted to the role of curator. Babb's preface to the catalogue acknowledges that "The exhibition and catalogue are the work of my associate, Howard B. Gotlieb, working evenings and many a week-end." It may be entirely coincidental, but earlier in the same year, from 2 May to 1 June, there was another, far more modest exhibition at Sterling, but with no opening lecture and no celebratory catalogue; a display of Victorian Book Decorations, mounted by Metzdorf. Its existence was noted simply by the exhibition title and dates in *The Yale University Library Gazette*, but I have been unable to trace any reviews.[9]

Metzdorf's Beckford exhibition review was published in the first of the quarterly issues for 1962 of the *PBSA*. He sent an offprint to James Osborn, the scholar, collector of manuscripts, and founder of the Osborn collection at Yale, with an undated covering note concluding "Mediocrity marches on – in New Haven!"[10] There was also an exchange of correspondence with Liebert, to whom he had sent a proof of the review. Liebert's comment was:

> I am sorry that you have handled this the way you have – not because the book deserves better, for you know my opinion of the editor's scholarship – but because I fear the sally will react against you.
>
> You have used a cannon to destroy a caterpillar, and while, to be

sure, the beastie is blasted off the map, what remains is the reader's doubt of the wisdom of the choice of weapon.

To this Metzdorf replied:

> I'm sorry you didn't like the treatment given in the review … it seems to me your figure of cannon and caterpillar isn't in line with my feelings about the book. I'd use the figure of a DDT cloud [a pesticide spay] to wipe out a plague, for plague there is at Yale if things like this can be published over the Library's imprint. Only by listing as we did can the full ineptness be shown; and it is past time, long past, when someone has to say that the emperor isn't wearing any clothes.

He also wrote to Richard Archer, Custodian of the Chapin Library at Williams College, to explain his position;

> The Beckford review was a difficult problem. Larry tried and tried to get a reviewer, but no one would touch the thing. When he and I began to be asked whether the book would be spared because of the Yale connection, we decided to give a straightforward account of what was wrong with the volume. I compiled the list of errors, wrote some surrounding material, and then Larry re-wrote the review, including the last two paragraphs [to have said that Thompson simply re-wrote the last two paragraphs would have been more accurate]. I'm sure I'm very unpopular in New Haven because of it, but the line of duty seemed clear.[11]

At the end of July that year, he received two letters from Indiana University. David Randall, the Librarian of the Lilly Library, expressed concern at the savagery of a review in the year's second issue by the Sterne scholar J.C.T. Oates of Don Cleveland Norman's *The 500th Anniversary Pictorial Census of the Gutenberg Bible*, and his comment is quoted in the title of this article: "I trust the Review section of the BSA papers is not going to turn into a bull-

pit where the slaughter is secondary to the brilliant display of the critic's mastery of invective after the brutal English fashion."[12] Quite separately, Rowland L. Collins, Assistant Professor in the Department of English, responded to the brutality of Metzdorf's own review:

> Doubtless, you should be congratulated on the thoroughness, if not on the charity, of your recent review of William Beckford of Fonthill, compiled by Mr. Howard B. Gotlieb (LVI [First Quarter, 1962], 131-135). The exacting standards you apply to this catalogue are a bit undercut, however, by a grammatical error in your own prose. On page 134, subject and verb do not agree in your sentence: "The last seventeen pages of the book are edited by Mr. Boyd Alexander (whose name appears in small type on the title-page), and is of high quality." Furthermore, the comma in this quoted sentence seems to be superfluous. The praise for Mr. Alexander's work is a pleasant respite in your militant review, but your error is an ironic sequel to the immediately preceding sentence: "There are six more pages complied by the same hand [Mr. Gotlieb's], but patience will not extend to listing their faults."

Metzdorf's papers do not contain a copy of any response to this letter.[13]

There were also repercussions in England. Through the kindness of Jon Millington I have been provided with a copy of a note from John Sparrow, the Warden of All Soul's, to John Carter, who had reviewed the Catalogue in the *Times Literary Supplement* – Metzdorf's review, said Sparrow, "reeked of malice". Carter picked up that phrase in a trenchant letter of 1 June 1962 to the BSA President which merits quoting in full:

> The review on pp. 131–135 of the First Quarter issue of B.S.A. Papers reeks of malice even (as I have evidence) to those who do not know its background. To those that do, it stinks.
>
> The Beckford catalogue was, indeed, a very poor piece of work,

unworthy of Yale; and was castigated as such elsewhere (e.g. T.L.S., The Book Collector). But surely the pages of a learned journal are no place for settling scores or displaying such patent animus as is seen in the first and last paragraphs of "R.F.M. and L.S.T.'s" review?

I for one am not disposed to continue subscribing to a journal whose administration thinks otherwise; and I hope you can assure me that B.S.A. Papers will not again be defaced by a similar exhibition of spiteful bad manners.

I am, Mr. President, yours rather melancholically

But what, meanwhile, of Howard Gotlieb? His *New York Times* obituary (5 December 2005) noted that as a young man he had discovered archival work in the Army Signals Corps in post-war Germany. He took a degree in history at George Washington University, a master's in history at Columbia, and a doctorate in International Relations at Oxford; he then worked for a few years in Europe as a foreign correspondent before being hired by Yale as a teaching associate in history and an archivist in Historical Manuscripts – which is where he crossed paths with Metzdorf. And we do know something of his response to the review in which Metzdorf laid bare his frustrations with the exhibition catalogue, and the cataloguer.

On 1 October 1960, twelve days before the opening of the exhibition, Gotlieb presented an inscribed copy of the newly-published catalogue "To Lee and Marion Ash With my best wishes". Lee Ash was a colleague of Gotlieb's in Sterling who ironically had been mentioned in a letter from Thompson to Metzdorf the previous year, in which he was described as "a personable fellow, but superficial".[14] Beneath the inscription on the front free endpaper Ash has added the following note:

'8 May 1962 / For the culmination of five years / (according to HG) of antagonism. See overleaf re review in Papers of the BSA, 56: 1: 131-35, 1962. / LA'

Onto the following opening is stapled a faded photocopy of a handwritten letter dated 8 May 1962 from Ash to Gotlieb on Yale University Library headed paper. It reads as follows:

> Dear Howard
> I have been very much disturbed by the Metzdorf item in the BSA Papers – not for the content of the criticism (which I'm not qualified to evaluate without further study) – but because of the disgusting display of personal animosity and the advantage he has taken of his position as editor.
>
> Do be smart and ignore the whole thing. The vitriol shows through (but I should say I don't for a moment believe that Larry Thompson [the review editor] did more than the technical, comparative lists); the review condemns itself.
> Lee

At the foot of the page beneath that photocopy Ash has added the note "HG came to office same day to say 'Thanks'", and on the facing page Ash has added a further note, also dated 8 May 1962:

> LST[hompson] was probably dragged into this. He probably didn't have a thing to do w[ith] the review itself except, at Metzdorf's connivance, allow his initials as Book Review Editor of the *Papers*. The carping quality of some of the "errors" is reminiscent of RFM[etzdorf]'s review, last year, of the Hamer volume on archives and MSS collec[tio]ns, also in the BSA Papers.

As we have seen from Metzdorf's review copy of the catalogue and his correspondence, Ash's note was more accurate than his letter of condolence – the review was almost entirely Metzdorf's work. The review that Ash mentions Metzdorf's having written in the previous year's *PBSA* is of two guides to manuscripts and archives in the United States, one of which he welcomes and praises, while the other is criticised as incomplete, poorly and cheaply designed,

badly edited, and containing far too many mistakes: but the article is restrained when compared to the Beckford review.[15]

The following year Gotlieb left Yale for Boston University. The resources available to him as Archivist there were modest, but the outward-looking publicist and exhibitor in him that had offended Metzdorf then flowered in an unexpected and most flamboyant way, Figure 3. His obituary in *The Economist* (8 December 2005) described his passions as the movies, literature, journalism, and the stage, and arriving at Boston he saw that combining his archival training with his (and America's) love of celebrity and celebrities could achieve extraordinary results: he realised the value of preserving the artefacts of popular culture. He was prescient in spotting potential stars in the performing arts, literature, or public

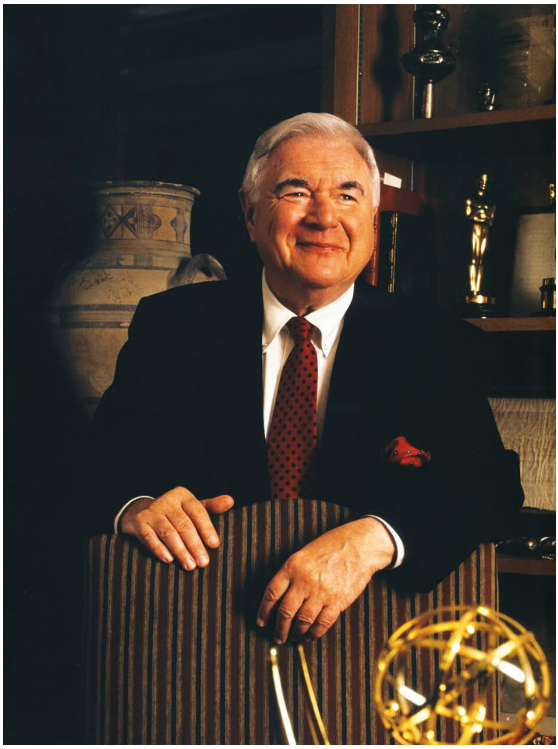


Fig. 3. Howard Gotlieb. Courtesy of Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, University of Boston.

life – he secured Martin Luther King's papers as early as 1964, and these were followed by archives of Isaac Asimov, Douglas Fairbanks Jr., Dame Alicia Markova, Somerset Maugham, and a host of others. But he acquired not just documents; there were Fred Astaire's dancing shoes, Gene Kelly's Oscar, even Bette Davis' recipe books. His exuberant courting of these celebrities, and the relentless charm and copious flattery he dispensed, were summarised by *The Economist*:

> First would come a letter on Crane bond, luscious to the touch, inviting them to donate their papers and ephemera to Boston University, where he was the archivist of special collections. Then would come tasteful accolades, of copies of Mr. Gotlieb's rebuttals of critics who had been unkind. Telephone calls would follow and, if the target was female, flowers. Potential donors were gently reminded of tax breaks, and the financial advantages of getting BU to look after their papers. Each year would bring a party, at the Plaza in New York or The Breakers in Palm Beach or Claridge's in London, at which potential stars would mingle with real ones "to adore and to be adored", as the *Boston Globe's* man put it.

Not all Gotlieb's ducklings turned into swans, and not all his targets succumbed to his advances, but many did. He lived in an apartment in the Back Bay, without immediate family but surrounded by his collection of modern art and first editions, and died from complications of surgery at the age of 79. In his time at Boston he had gathered for the University material from over two thousand people, stored on seven miles of shelves in Special Collections – which in 2003 was re-named the Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center in his honour. He had become one of his own celebrities.

Metzdorf had died thirty years earlier, and shortly afterwards the Annual Metzdorf Lecture had been instituted in his memory. But attendance declined, and the annual lecture was in 1993 replaced by an award for contributions and meritorious service to the University's libraries.

I wish to thank Basie Gitlin, whose gift of Lee Ash's copy of the Beckford Exhibition catalogue started this enquiry; Andrea Reithmayr, Special Collections Librarian at River Campus Libraries, University of Rochester, and Meghan Constantinou, Librarian at the Grolier Club, for their help in making material from Metzdorf's papers available; Jon Millington, for allowing me to quote from two letters in his collection; and Peter Sabor, who read a draft of this article.

1 Events at Yale overshadowed the more muted exhibition in the Prints and Drawings department of the British Museum, consisting of 67 items with a typed four-page handlist: see Jon Millington, *William Beckford: A Bibliography* (Crockerton, The Beckford Society, 2008), 235-6.

2 The lecture, "William Beckford of Fonthill", was printed in *The Yale University Library Gazette*, Vol. 35, No. 4, April 1961, 161-69.

3 *The Book Collector*, Vol. 10, No. 1, Spring 1961, 109-10; Fatma Moussa Mahmoud ed., *William Beckford of Fonthill 1760–1844 Bicentenary Essays*, Supplement to Cairo Studies in English (Cairo, 1960), 151-57; *The Times Literary Supplement*, 28 October 1960, 699. Information from Millington, op. cit., 235.

4 *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, Vol. 56, First Quarter (1962), 131-35.

5 Grolier Club, New York, Bibliographical Society of America papers, Box 40, folder 29, for the exchange of letters of 5 and 8 March 1962 and Metzdorf's original draft of the review.

6 Frederick B. Adams Jr., review in *The Book Collector*, Vol. 9, No. 2, Summer 1960, 223-28; John Carter, review in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 28 October 1960.

7 Rush Rhees Library, University of Rochester, call no. PR4092. A2Y2w.

8 Rush Rhees Library, Robert Frederic Metzdorf papers, D. 362. The correspondence relevant to this article is in Box 8.

9 *The Yale University Library Gazette*, Vol. 35, No. 2, October 1960, 99.

10 Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, Osborn Collection, OSB MSS 7, Box 2, folder 1092.

11 Grolier Club, Bibliographical Society of America papers, Box 40, folder 29, letters of 9 and 14 April 1962 between Metzdorf and Liebert, and letter of 19 June 1962 from Metzdorf to Archer.

12 For the Oates review, which is brief and wholly damning, see *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, Vol. 56, Second Quarter (1962), 273-74.

13 Both letters are in the Rush Rhees Library, Metzdorf papers, D. 362, Box 8.

14 Grolier Club, Bibliographical Society of America papers, Box 76, folder 22, letter of 11 May 1961 from Thompson to Metzdorf. Thompson mentions in the letter that he had written a critical review of a book by Ash on special collections in academic libraries, by which Ash had been "quite upset".

15 *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, Vol. 55, Second Quarter (1961), 156-60. The book criticised was *A Guide to Archives and Manuscripts in the United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961).

Caroline Dakers (ed.), *Fonthill Recovered. A Cultural History*

UCL Press, 2018, pp. 402

A Review by JOHN WILTON-ELY

In the Summer of 1970 I first penetrated the gloomy woodland seclusion of the inner Fonthill Estate to seek permission for publishing James Wyatt's recently discovered *pâpier-maché* model of the iconic Abbey. This fragile object, now exhibited in Lansdown Tower, Bath, was then in the surviving portion of the Abbey in the possession of Neil Rimington, a descendant of the 1st Marquess of Westminster, one of many former owners of the estate. While I had had already spent many hours talking with the doyen of Beckford scholars, the late Boyd Alexander, I would have greatly benefitted from this outstanding collection of papers on such a complex and fascinating site, its origins, physical character and many owners and buildings.

Edited by Caroline Dakers with essays by herself and 14 other contributors, this publication represents a sheer *tour de force* of careful research and rewarding insights. To read this book and to study its wealth of illustrations, including excellent site maps, is to begin to understand more fully the broader social and physical contexts of the first Abbey, its predecessors and successors from earliest times. No Beckfordian should be without this remarkable and enthralling tome.

At the start David Roberts explores the geological character of the estate and its earliest established origins through prehistory and the Roman and Saxon evidence, while Neil Burton covers the

ownership from the Middle Ages to 1744, including the surviving evidence of the first significant Fonthill House owners between 1470 and 1740, the Mervyns, the Touchets and Cottingtons. Among the various owners Lord Francis Cottingham at Fonthill was a highly significant figure in the Stuart court and in the reversal of history during the Civil War the property was owned briefly by John Bradshaw, Lord President of the court appointed to try Charles I. While there are pictures of Fonthill House and its formal gardens from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, it is with the purchase of the estate by Alderman Beckford in 1744/5 that a new and highly ambitious phase in the estate is marked by the creation of the palatial Fonthill House, "Splendens", invaluably documented in two topographical paintings by Antonio Joli, commissioned some 9 years later. These reveal the extent to which the landscape was to be radically altered with an extensive lake and related buildings, of which some substantial elements remain.

The chapter by Amy Frost devoted to the Beckford Era, while covering more familiar ground, provides a fascinating and exceptionally perceptive account of the dramatic changes effected by William Beckford in reaction to his "Alpha Plus" father, both in landscape and architecture from his early life at Splendens. As she writes: "During the nearly 80 years of the Beckford reign, from 1744 to 1822, Fonthill became one of the premier house estates in Wiltshire and was renowned across England both for the fame of its owners and the magnificence of the buildings they created." As visual commentary her illustrations include portraits, architectural drawings, engravings, detailed plans, interior views and sculpture. The only missing image, perhaps, is the spectacular 1798 watercolour perspective by Wyatt of the Abbey with vertiginous spire, exhibited in 1798 at the Royal Academy and now in the Yale Center for British Art at Newhaven.

As a prologue to the complex building history of houses and mansions which follow the departure of William Beckford for Bath, the sale lasting 37 days and the dramatic fall of the Abbey in 1825,

Caroline Dakers provides a transitional essay, 'The break-up of the Fonthill estate'. She includes a fascinating Caliban-like caricature of the new owner, John Farquhar, a man who, ironically, was already associated with destruction as a manufacturer of gunpowder for the east India Company in Bengal. This chapter also examines the great sale of effects in 1823 lasting 37 days and realising £43,868. The sensational fall of the Abbey a couple of years later changed the situation. Meanwhile Farquhar set about enlarging the estate and adapting existing buildings before his death in 1826.

The ruined presence and memories of two such diverse monumental statements as the Alderman's Splendens and his son's Abbey were bound to affect the range of architectural responses which are discussed by Dakers in three successive chapters devoted to Fonthill in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Confronted by such a varied series of responses, both in the Classical and Classical styles over two hundred years, the present reviewer would almost favour the ultimate contrast presented by the austere minimalist weekend residence represented by the New Brutalist 1960s designers Peter and Alison Smithson's Upper Lawn Pavilion where the dramatic landscape views provide the dominant expression of the design. A further detailed discussion by Amy Frost on this iconic design statement appears at the end of the book.

The last 150 pages of this remarkable feast consist of a collection of 12 essays devoted to the greatest range of topics imaginable from 'The geophysical survey west of Fonthill Lake' by David Roberts to 'Fonthill Abbey, terror and videogames at the British Library' by Greg Buzwell. Among the diversity of other topics are 'The Landscape of Fonthill' by Min Wood, covering contributions to the scenic richness of the estate by a range of owners, 'The Early Paintings of Fonthill' by Jeannie Chapel, 'The Cottington and Bradshaw burials in Westminster Abbey' by Susan Jenkins, 'The Wealth of the Beckfords' by Sidney Blackmore, 'The Landscape at Fonthill: An assessment of the grottoes and their builders' by Michael Cousins, 'William Thomas Beckford: between dalliance

and duty by Lawrence Klein, 'Reading 'Vathek' and Fonthill Abbey: Willliam Beckford's architectural imagination' by Peter N Lindfield and Dale Townshend; and the enthralling story 'Fonthill and its *Mysenae*: Works of Art Lost and Found' by Martin P. Levy.

Notes on Contributors

STEPHEN CLARKE is Chairman of the Beckford Society and also of Dr. Johnson's House Trust. He is a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries and an Honorary Research Fellow of the University of Liverpool. He is also a trustee of the Lewis Walpole Library at Yale University, and was from 2005 to 2018 a trustee of Strawberry Hill. His research interests centre on Horace Walpole, William Beckford, antiquarianism, book history, and the history of collecting. His most recent book is *The Selected Letters of Horace Walpole* (2017), which he edited for Everyman's Library.

MICHAEL COUSINS is a garden historian with a special interest in garden buildings and features of the eighteenth century. He has reassessed our understanding of several important sites including Shugborough, and Ditchley Park, which together with his foundation monograph on Hagley Park, have appeared in *Garden History*. He has recently contributed a chapter in the recent publication *Fonthill Recovered* and has written extensively for other journals on extant and lost features; including many articles in *Follies*, as well as lecturing at home and abroad on contemporary Parks, Chinese buildings, Grottoes, and Pattern-books.

MALCOLM JACK is President of the Beckford Society. His books include *William Beckford: An English Fidalgo* (1996). He has edited *The Episodes of Vathek* (1994); his anthology, *William Beckford, Vathek and Other Stories* was published in Penguin Classics (1995). He has written histories of Sintra and Lisbon. He was appointed visiting Professor of Enlightenment Studies at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore in 2015. His book on travellers to the Cape of Good Hope,

To the Fairest Cape: European Encounters in the Cape of Good Hope has recently been published by Bucknell University Press. He is a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries and a Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society. He was appointed KCB in 2011.

ERIC RATCLIFF practices as a consultant psychiatrist in Launceston, Tasmania. He is also a recognised architectural historian, with a particular interest in the extended nineteenth century, and a long fascination with the influence of William Beckford and his contemporaries. He has lectured and published on the Egyptianate style, the coming of Italianate to the colonies, a French Second Empire fountain found around the world, colonial Nonconformist chapels, various architects who have worked in Tasmania, and some peculiarities of *fin-de-siècle* architecture. He has been honoured with the Medal of the Order of Australia for services to the profession of psychiatry and architectural conservation. His major work, *A Far Microcosm: Building and Architecture in Van Diemen's Land and Tasmania 1803-1914* was published in four volumes in March 2015. The book examines the effects of metropolitan stylistic fashions, transplanted craft and trade practices, vernacular traditions, nostalgia, conservatism, innovation, available materials, climate, and social and economic circumstances in an island where a remote penal colony evolved into a self-governing part of the British Empire before becoming a state in the Australian federation. As the title implies, most aspects of stylistic and technical change from Late Georgian, through Regency, Williamane, Victorian and Edwardian to the delayed dawn of Modernism have been reflected there, rarely unchanged, enriched and complicated by interactions between incomers from all parts of the former British world and beyond.

JOHN WILTON-ELY is Professor Emeritus in the History of Art, University of Hull; a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries and of the Royal Society of Arts. He was a member of the Executive Committee of the Georgian Group for 27 years and has also served on the Executive

Committees of the Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain and of the Society of 18th Century Studies. He laid the foundations of research on the design and building history of the original Fonthill Abbey and contributed the introduction 'Beckford the Builder' and 65 entries to the architectural section of the pioneering exhibition catalogue, *William Beckford Exhibition,* Salisbury and Bath, 1976. This material has been substantially revised in his article 'The Genesis and Evolution of Fonthill Abbey' *Architectural History,* vol 23 (1980), 40-51.

JONNY YARKER is a scholar of British Art and the Grand Tour. He has published widely, contributing to a number of publications on the Grand Tour including: *Digging and Dealing in Eighteenth Century Rome* (Yale, 2010); *The English Prize, the capture of the Westmorland, an incident of the Grand Tour* (Yale, 2012) and the recent exhibition: *Richard Wilson (1713–82): A European Master* (Yale 2014). His current research projects include work on the Thomas Gainsborough catalogue raisonné which is to be published by the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art in 2019, as well as a book-length study of the British artistic community in Rome in the second half of the eighteenth century entitled *Savage Pilgrims: Rome and the Grand Tour 1750–1798.*