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James Lees-Milne 1908-1997

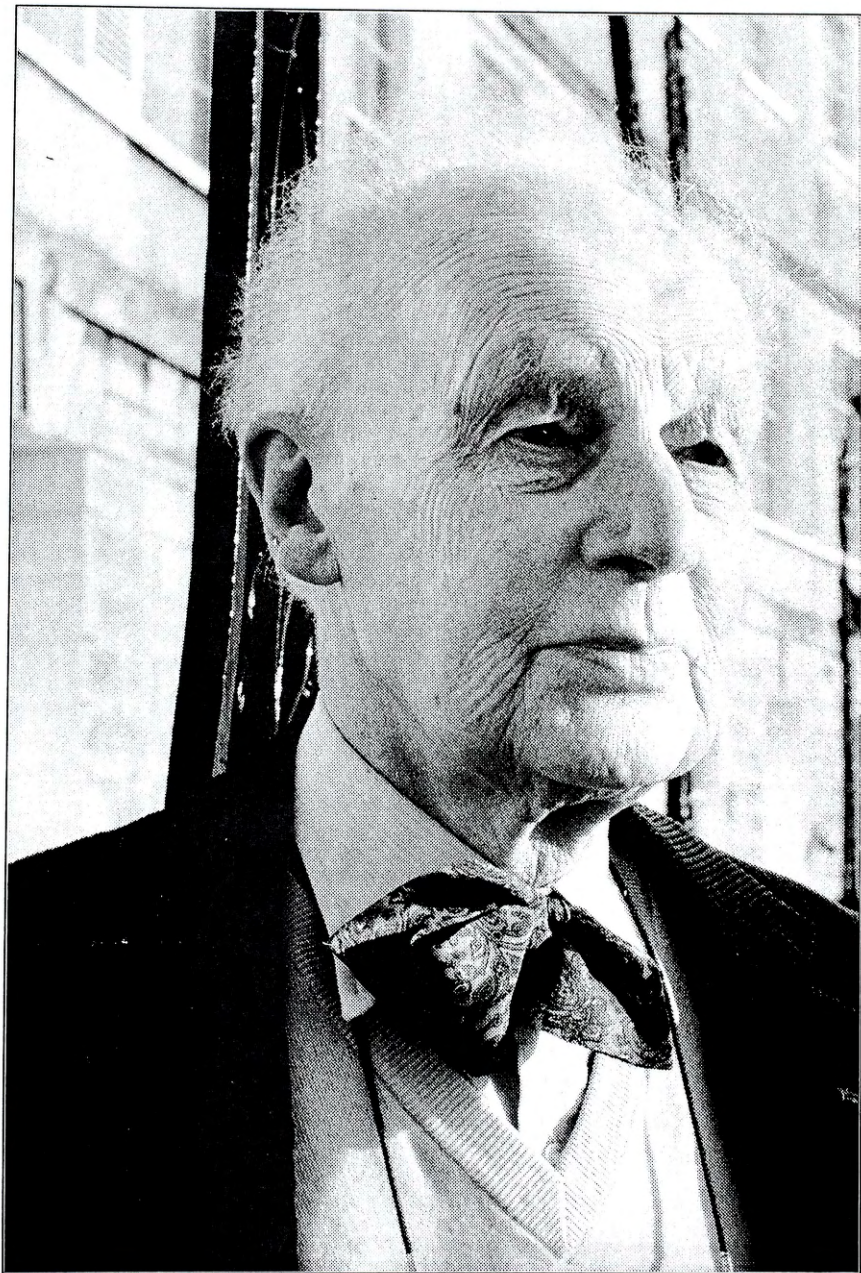
SIDNEY BLACKMORE

James Lees-Milne, the Society's first President, died on 28 December 1997.

His abiding monument will be the marvellous group of country houses he acquired, almost single-handed, for the National Trust during the period when he was Secretary to the Trust's Country House Committee (1936-51) and later adviser on Historic Buildings. For many readers he will be remembered for the penetrating vignettes of English society, in particular the portraits of country house owners, as recorded in the six volumes of his published diaries. He will also be remembered for his writing on architecture, and a number of distinguished biographies.

In inviting Lees-Milne to be the Beckford Society's first President, there could not have been a more appropriate candidate for he was uniquely qualified for such a role. When he and his wife Alvilde left their Gloucestershire house, Alderley Grange, in 1974 they purchased an apartment in Bath at 19 Lansdown Crescent, including a room which had once been one of Beckford's libraries. Here Lees-Milne worked in a room known in Beckford's day as the Grecian or Scagliola Library. Even after the Lees-Milnes had moved to Essex House at Badminton, he would return each day to read and write in the room with its warm sienna colouring and Soane-like recesses.

In 1976 he published *William Beckford* (Compton Russell, Tisbury, 1976). He began the book knowing that Brian Fothergill was also at work on a biography of Beckford; this made him anxious. He wrote to Fothergill: 'I want to assure you that this book ... will in absolutely no sense compete with your undertaking ... As to scholarship it will be totally negative for it will call for no research. It cannot in the time allowed me. I do



Photograph: Courtesy of Ian Newton (Tel: (0117) 9049424)

James Lees-Milne in 1995

fervently hope that this news will not perturb you one jot. I am convinced it should not. And I should be distressed were you to think badly of me for falling into temptation'. Lees-Milne's book was warmly received. Like all his biographies it displays a deep understanding of his subject and is written with a sureness and lightness of touch. The first edition was beautifully illustrated. It remains the perfect introduction to Beckford.

He contributed the section of Beckford's life to the catalogue of the Beckford exhibition held in Salisbury and Bath in 1976. He dealt sympathetically with the Powderham Castle affair in a chapter in *Society Scandals*, edited by Harriet Bridgeman and Elizabeth Dury (David & Charles, Newton Abbot, 1977).

When Elizabeth and Leslie Hilliard established and endowed the Beckford Tower Trust in 1977, Jim was one of the seven foundation trustees. He continued to serve on this body until 1988. He brought wise counsel to the Trust's early years.

In 1970 he published *Another Self*, a volume of autobiographical chapters giving some insight into his early life. It is a comic masterpiece. Later he considered that he may well have been somewhat cruel in the portrait of his father, for he wrote to me 'There are things in it which I now regret, namely what I wrote about my poor father ... Oh, dear, how cruel the young are in their attitude to their parents!' The volume also contains an account of his visit, as an Oxford undergraduate, to Rousham, the Cottrell-Dormer's Oxfordshire house with its Arcadian landscape garden by William Kent. The house was let to a tenant who amused his guests by shooting at the statues. 'That evening', Lees-Milne wrote, 'I made a vow to devote my energies and abilities to preserve the houses of England'.

To meet Jim was a life-enhancing experience. He was always helpful to those writers and scholars who sought his advice. Virtually to the end, he remained tall, slim and upright with the bearing of a guards' officer. He seemed eternally youthful. Our last meeting was at Badminton in October, when I called in the

hope of getting him to write a short piece for Christie's magazine on the forthcoming Beckford exhibition. He was his usual charming self: welcoming, cheerful, displaying an old-fashioned hospitality. We talked of Sir William Hamilton in a room dominated by two paintings by Pietro Fabris of the Bay of Naples. A few days later he wrote to say that he must decline to write the piece '... I am rather frightened of the prevailing number of real Beckford scholars there now are for I have nothing new to contribute that they don't know about. Please forgive me'. It was a typical remark, for he was truly a dilettante in the old meaning of that word.

In the closing paragraph of his preface to *William Beckford*, he wrote that his subject was '... an extraordinary Englishman, whose type once fairly familiar in the social scene, is now extinct'. These are words which could equally apply to the writer himself. With his passing we have indeed lost someone whose kind we are unlikely to see again.

Blake and Beckford: A Television Script

JAMES LEES-MILNE

[This script for Rediffusion Television was read by James Lees-Milne on 9 August 1967 and at appropriate moments the camera would have cut from him to relevant illustrations.¹]

At first there seems very little connection between Blake² and Beckford.³ But there is some which I think may become clear as we go along.

¹ In the typescript, suggestions for these (together with other comments) appeared to the left of the text. Here they are given as footnotes.

² The Linnell drawing of Blake at Hampstead

³ The Upton full length of Beckford by Romney

To begin with, Blake and Beckford were born within three years of each other - in the middle of the eighteenth century. Both men were dissatisfied with what they found. Both were writers with very original minds. Both were also artists, one in painting,⁴ the other in building.⁵ Both were eccentrics. Neither was thought much of during his lifetime. But the influence of both was considerable later on - Blake's being the greater.

Their differences were of course tremendous, even preposterous. Some will say it's sacrilege even to bracket them together like this because, whereas Blake was one of England's great geniuses, Beckford was a spoilt flibbertigibbet who merely skimmed surfaces. This is to some extent true, but not entirely true, as I hope to show.

William Blake's background was essentially middle-class. He was born in 1757 in Carnaby Market, Soho.⁶ His father was a prosperous hosier, like others in that trade there today. Nearly the whole of his life of seventy years was spent in London. He started work as a printseller and engraver in Poland Street.⁷ He and his wife then rented the second floor of 17 South Molton Street,⁸ which still stands. They lived here a long time, finally moving to no. 3 Fountain Court off the Strand,⁹ where Blake died in 1827. For three years only they moved to the country. Blake rented a cottage at Felpham, Sussex,¹⁰ to be near his patron and friend William Hayley,¹¹ to whom the famous sculptor John Flaxman had introduced him. Hayley was a kind, generous, slightly ridiculous squire who wrote reams of atrocious verse. Southey said of him: "Everything about that man is good except his poetry."

⁴ A Blake painting

⁵ Print of Fonthill

⁶ Carnaby Street today

⁷ Poland Street today or

A shop window full of old engravings round about the Brit. Museum

⁸ 17 South Molton Street still stands

⁹ Fountain Court has gone, but a few dark alleys remain

¹⁰ Blake's cottage, Felpham, stands. So does Hayley's House

¹¹ William Hayley

At first Blake was charmed by the country where, he claimed, “the voices of the celestial inhabitants were more distinctly heard” than in London.¹² But the visit ended disastrously. Blake fancied he was being patronised by Hayley, and resented it. Worse still, he had a fight with a soldier who was trespassing in his garden.¹³ In revenge the soldier prosecuted him for high treason. He pretended to have heard Blake shout in the scuffle, “Damn the King!” Blake was acquitted, but the incident put him off life in the country.

But to return to Blake’s youth. He was a sensitive and difficult child. He saw visions and at the age of five was beaten by his mother for insisting that he had seen Ezekiel sitting under a tree.¹⁴ He never forgot the insult to his intelligence nor the injustice of the punishment.

The London of Blake’s youth was much the same as that shown in Hogarth’s paintings.¹⁵ It was terribly rough, drunken, squalid and picturesque. It was a mixture of extreme vice and virtue. Today the extremes of vice remain, but not of virtue.

I wander tho’ each charter’d street,¹⁶
Near where the charter’d Thames does flow,
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

Blake’s religious upbringing was the strict non-conformist sort. The eminent Swedish philosopher, whose name was Swedenborg,¹⁷ had lately put forward the notion that every single word of the Scriptures had a symbolical meaning.¹⁸ Blake fell

¹² One of Blake’s drawings of celestial inhabitants

¹³ The garden at Felpham

¹⁴ Ezekiel sitting under a tree or some drawing akin

¹⁵ Hogarth’s Morning and Evening in Covent Garden (at Upton House, Nat. Trust Coll.)

¹⁶ A shot of a Thames side street

¹⁷ Swedenborg

¹⁸ A print of an 18th cent. preacher to a craft (sic) congregation in a Methodist coventide (sic)

under the Swedenborg influence, but went further. He believed he was divinely privileged to interpret the symbolical meaning of the Scriptures. In fact he lived in a world of archangels, cherubim and prophets with whom he hobnobbed on equal terms. They became as real to him as the baker from whom he bought his bread or his dear old wife grouching about her rheumatism.¹⁹ He referred to mundane and spiritual matters in the same breath. “When the sun rises do you not see a round disc of fire somewhat like a guinea?” he asked himself.²⁰ “Oh no, no,” was the answer, “I see an innumerable company of the heavenly host crying, Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty!” He couldn’t bear a rational explanation of physical phenomena. “It is false,” he remarked about a well known law of nature. “I walked the other evening to the end of the earth, and touched the sky with my finger.” The spectre of reason was perpetually haunting him. It threatened his imagination and his implicit faith in God. It filled him with doubts and fears. Yet his religion was unorthodox. He referred disrespectfully to Jehovah,²¹ whom however he held in mortal dread, as that “Old Nobodaddy aloft”.

He was convinced that his prophetic utterances were inspired. Very often they were, as anyone reading his Jerusalem during an air raid on London would have agreed: “The shuttles of death sing in the sky to Islington and Pancras, Round Marybone to Tyburn’s river, weaving black melancholy as a net” - and so forth. At the same time Blake was filled with infinite compassion for his fellow men. He believed Love to be the beginning and end of life, transcending everything else. This simple belief was the basis of his art. It shaped the poetry of his early years, and the wonderfully inspired paintings of his later life. When poetry dies with a man’s youth he is lucky whose genius can be born again

¹⁹ Drawing of Catherine Blake (in I think de Selincourt’s Blake)

²⁰ I have in mind a Blake painting of the setting sun and the heavenly host. But where?

²¹ One of Blake’s drawings of Jehovah with a long beard

through another medium. Blake was that rare thing - a double genius.

After his marriage in 1782 Blake entered intellectual circles. The first circle was a little precious. The Revd Henry Mathew's wife liked reading Homer to budding artists whom she collected in the vicarage drawing-room. There Blake struck up a close friendship with the platonist, Thomas Taylor,²² whose influence on him was questionable. Taylor's credulity was infantile. He never doubted the historic existence of the gods and heroes of Greek mythology. He also invented a lamp to give perpetual light. At a public exhibition the lamp exploded, causing much damage and alarm. But he was a scholar of international repute. Another friend who at this time professed to share Blake's visionary experiences was Mary Wollstonecraft,²³ wife of the philosopher William Godwin. Godwin was tremendously conscious of social inequalities and wrote a book called Political Justice which caused a great stir. But he was also a bit of a fraud and sponged on all his moneyed friends, including the young Shelley. Anyway, Mary was moved to offer herself to the painter Fuseli²⁴ as his "spiritual concubine", but to her surprise was turned down flat by Mrs Fuseli.

The Mathews encouraged Blake to chant his verses to tunes of his own invention. Mr Mathew paid for their publication under the title "Poetical Sketches"²⁵ in 1783. To this good clergyman we should be eternally grateful.

Although Blake's publications were not widely read they were noticed by a discerning few.²⁶ It is extraordinary how his simple, child-like verses anticipate the romantic poetry of Wordsworth,

²² Thomas Taylor

²³ Mary Wollstonecraft

²⁴ Fuseli

²⁵ Poetical Sketches fly leaf

²⁶ Some of these were printed in Blake's calligraphy and illustrated by Muir. I think of his poem to 'The Fly' (M. Wilson's Blake p.333)

Coleridge and Southey. They mark a revolutionary change from the stiff cadences of Pope and even Cowper, in whom Blake recognised the “divine Countenance”. They are absolutely unrestrained and unaffected. They are brimful of spiritual ecstasy.

It’s not known that Wordsworth²⁷ ever met Blake. But it’s recorded that “he considered Blake as having the elements of poetry a thousand times more than either Byron or Scott.” Blake on the other hand was so shocked by discovering one day that Wordsworth felt himself superior to God that he contracted a bowel complaint which nearly killed him. Coleridge²⁸ certainly visited him, and thought him a man of genius. Southey admired his poetic talents, but thought him a madman. A friend wrote that Blake “showed Southey a perfectly mad poem called Jerusalem - Oxford Street is in Jerusalem!” Charles Lamb,²⁹ who himself had been insane, found Blake’s water-colours “marvellously strange”, the poem Tyger, tyger, burning bright “glorious”, and him “one of the most extraordinary persons of the age.” Hazlitt³⁰ perhaps summed him up best. His poems were, he said, “beautiful, and only too deep for the vulgar.” But, he added, Blake had no sense of the ludicrous. He also attempted impossibilities.

How mad was Blake? Certainly no madder than John Clare³¹ who mistook molehills for mountains or William Cowper who thought he ought to - but couldn’t - believe in hellfire. John Linnell³² who knew him intimately in old age denied that he was insane. “He could always explain his paradoxes satisfactorily when he pleased, but to many he spoke so that hearing they might not hear.” And he went on, “He was more like the ancient pattern of virtue than I ever expected to see in this world.”

There’s something very touching in the way Linnell and a group of young painters, John Varley, Samuel Palmer,³³ Edward

²⁷ Wordsworth

²⁸ Coleridge

²⁹ Lamb

³⁰ Hazlitt

³¹ Clare

³² Linnell

³³ Samuel Palmer self-portrait

Calvert, and George Richmond, calling themselves the Ancients, took him seriously in his old age. These young men called themselves the Ancients because they turned against the artificial elegant school of painting, of which Reynolds had been the champion, and because they professed to admire primitive art. They even dressed in long robes and sandals which they believed had been worn by the Druids. Whenever the Ancients called on Blake they used to kiss the doorbell because his hand had touched it. They sat at his feet. Linnell, though only a struggling artist, commissioned him to illustrate the Book of Job, and so helped relieve his great poverty.

Blake's style of drawing was absolutely individual. Yet several influences went to form it. One was undoubtedly Gothick Revival architecture of the time.³⁴ Another his friend Romney's economy of line.³⁵ In overlooking Romney's fashionable portraits of sitters, like Lady Hamilton, Blake saw in his flowing curves and graceful poses the painter's close study of classical sculpture. Another and still greater influence was Fuseli.³⁶ This strange man, a Swiss by birth and an unfrocked parson, taught himself to paint by copying Michaelangelo in the Sistine Chapel. His technique was defiant, his subjects were shocking. His picture, The Nightmare was thought to be horrific. His style was the very opposite of Reynolds's calm. He indulged in extravagant distortions and unnatural forms. "Damn nature! She always puts me out," was Fuseli's constant cry. Blake, the visionary, admired this caustic, worldly man more than any artist among his contemporaries.

The only man that e'er I knew
Who did not make me almost spew
Was Fuseli - (He was both Turk and Jew.
And so dear Christian friends, how do you do?)

³⁴ A Gothick Folly

³⁵ Romney Drawing

³⁶ Fuseli (see F. Antal. Fuseli Studies)

This is what he jotted in his common place book. And lastly, Michaelangelo, whom Blake considered the greatest artist in all history.

“Everything connected with Gothic art and churches and their builders, was a passion with him”, Samuel Palmer wrote after Blake’s death. Indeed Blake’s passion was sparked off by the very first job he was given as an engraver’s apprentice. This was to draw all the medieval tombs in Westminster Abbey.³⁷

Here we touch upon a mutual passion in William Beckford. In his case love of the medieval led to the demolition of his father’s enormous classical mansion at Fonthill, so lavish that it was nicknamed Splendens,³⁸ and to the erection in its place of the Gothic Abbey, which has become legendary.

Beckford was an enthusiastic admirer of Blake’s illuminated books. He was one of the very few people to attend the exhibition of Blake’s drawings in 1809. It was an unqualified failure. A reviewer described the artist as “an unfortunate lunatic, whose personal inoffensiveness secures him from confinement.” It’s tantalising to picture Blake and Beckford meeting on this occasion. The first untidy, stocky, with a large Wagnerian head, yellow hair like curling flames and enormous black eyes that looked you through and through.³⁹ The second slight, dandified, with a longish nose and arrogant, sensuous lips.⁴⁰

In spite of his father, Alderman Beckford’s connection with trade and because of his mother’s grand ancestry Beckford was essentially an aristocrat. His whole upbringing and way of life were aristocratic. He was educated to be a dilettante,⁴¹ and to

³⁷ Gough’s Sepulchral Monuments contains six portraits by Blake of monuments of Kings & Queens in the Abbey

³⁸ Print of Splendens

³⁹ William Blake by his wife (in M. Wilson’s Blake)

⁴⁰ Beckford in Middle Age by Hoppner

⁴¹ I see a scented drawing-room with a number of silly people playing with lapdogs, playing bezique, the harp and the boy Beckford looking bored

take nothing seriously except politics. But Beckford hated politics, and took the arts seriously. He was taught drawing by a well known landscape painter, Alexander Cozens, architecture by the King's architect Sir William Chambers and when he was only five music by the boy composer Mozart. At the age of twenty-one he wrote the music for an operetta called The Arcadian Pastoral.⁴² The reaction of his parents' friends was predictable. One of them wrote, "When he afterwards so extravagantly and ridiculously addicted himself to music, all prospect of his becoming great or respectable was over."

Young Beckford was very spoilt, and very lonely. It's true his life was not wholly easy. His father,⁴³ a violent person, was shunned for his radical views and loose morals. He left a swarm of bastards who were a thorn in the flesh of their younger legitimate brother. The Alderman was ruthless and ambitious for his son, who was terrified of him alive, and then proud of him when dead.

Beckford's mother brought him up on rigid Methodist lines - again like Blake - off which he ran as soon and as fast as he dared. Beckford was from the start a rebel against the conventions of his class. He sympathised with the poor and underprivileged. When he was twenty he cheered on the Gordon rioters, and was appalled by the savage sentences they were given. He sympathised with the French Revolution at the outbreak, until the barbarism and vandalism of the riots disgusted him. He disapproved of the war against the American colonials. True, these lofty sentiments were somewhat contradicted by Beckford's behaviour and his self-interest. He treated his own servants like the autocrat he was, cuffed them one moment and showered them with guineas the next. He was also bitterly opposed to the emancipation of those Jamaican slaves on whom

⁴² I believe Beckford's music has been recorded

⁴³ Alderman Beckford by Tilly Ketile (?) (in England W [sic] and Bust of - at Stourhead (N.Trust)

his vast riches depended.

Beckford's discontent with the society of his time drove him like Blake into an inner world. He read prodigiously. His favourite literature was travel and oriental tales. He steeped himself in the Arabian Nights.

He took a pathological pride in his descent from the Plantagenet kings. This was one sign of his intensely romantic nature of which, to his credit, he was always wary. Unlike Blake, Beckford's constant fear was that his imagination might master his reason. Like Blake Beckford was also, though in a different sense, a forerunner of the romantic school of writers.

The member of the romantic school on whom his personality and writing had most influence was Byron,⁴⁴ twenty-eight years his junior. Byron was overcome by the powerful imagination of Vathek. "As an eastern tale," he said, "even Rasselas must bow before it." The means Beckford and Byron chose of impressing their image on the public was the same. Vathek and Childe Harold were largely autobiographical compositions, calculated to invite trouble, and anticipate scandal. They set out to shock by suggesting that their authors were semi-demons, were the hopeless victims of guilt and fate and in Beckford's words, descendants of ancient families, "ill-starred, persecuted and accursed". In each case there was an element of truth in the picture. But in each case a good deal of wishful thinking. Both men revelled in being thought wicked. Beckford admitted later in life: "I did my utmost to make myself appear worse than I am in reality". He certainly succeeded in being thought worse even than Byron came to be thought a generation later. For the homosexual scandal⁴⁵ that broke over his head in 1784 had more serious repercussions than Byron's marriage scandal of 1816. It turned Beckford into a social outcast for the rest of his long life, drove

⁴⁴ Byron in Eastern dress

⁴⁵ Portrait of Lord Courtenay or Beckford's Boy Friend in Paris (see B. Alexander - England's Wealthiest Son)

him into exile, and embittered his character. Whereas foreigners took him in their stride the English, self-righteous as always, insulted him on every possible occasion. Even Byron so far lost his sense of proportion as to revile him in verse. Beckford never forgave Byron. As for his compatriots, he loathed them for their persecution and hypocrisy.

The writings of Beckford and Byron are blessed with a common redeeming quality. They are always diverting. The most long-winded are enlivened with wit and satire, often unsparing, always to the point. Vathek, written in French at a sitting of three days and nights when Beckford was twenty-two, is about the most cynical novel ever conceived. The Caliph hero, a combination of the author's father and himself, did not believe "that it was necessary to make a hell of this world to enjoy paradise in the next". And the ensuing adventures bear out his comfortable philosophy.

In this immature work of near genius Beckford also expressed his taste for exotic architecture and the sort of landscape, which is described in classical literature. Years later he was able to reproduce both in reality.

You will recall that Beckford made Caliph Vathek climb the 1500 stairs of his tower from which he beheld men below "not larger than pismires". The Caliph was so intoxicated by his elevation that "he was almost ready to adore himself". Ever afterwards Beckford felt impelled by a similar urge. Contempt for his fellow men and reluctance to emerge from his dream world were the chief motives. "Some people drink to forget their unhappiness," he said by way of excusing his prevailing weakness, "I build".

Fonthill Abbey was most carefully thought out. Beckford's intention was to recreate a monastic domain.⁴⁶ He saw himself as a prince-abbot and his secretaries and servants as obedient monks

⁴⁶ Rutter's Delineations of Fonthill

and lay brothers. He wanted to give the illusion of community life in a past age although not exactly on ascetic lines. So he raised the largest Gothic pile since the middle ages. It had endless corridors of high vaulting, immense windows of stained glass emblems and coats of arms. The painter Constable described it in these words: "Imagine the inside of the cathedral at Salisbury ... magnificently fitted up with crimson and gold, ancient pictures, in almost every niche statues, large massive gold boxes for relics ... beautiful and rich carpets, curtains and glasses: all this makes it on the whole a strange ideal, romantic, place - quite fairy land." The influence which Fonthill Abbey had upon subsequent neo-Gothic architecture in England cannot be overstressed.

In other words Beckford was creating in Fonthill a sequel to the novel Vathek. He reproduced architecture from medieval models, and landscape from the descriptions of scenery he had read in Tasso, Spencer and Milton. The grounds at Fonthill became for him the gardens of paradise and enchantment. He could enjoy his paradise, he declared, so long as it was not "profaned by unbelievers". So he made it secure from intrusion by surrounding it with an unscaleable wall 8 miles long.⁴⁷ Inside he allowed no hunting or shooting. Foxes, hares, rabbits, "clouds of pheasants" and peacocks bred unchecked. Whereas Blake in his middle life turned from writing lyrics to drawing and painting religious allegory, Beckford would turn from writing romances to building and landscaping a vast country house and park.

The seclusion of Beckford's private world could not last indefinitely. Day dreams and castles in air dissolve at the first touch of alien fingers. Literary and pictorial ones alone survive. Hardly a vestige of Fonthill is left us.⁴⁸ But Beckford's Vathek is still there for all to read. So too are his incomparable letters from Italy, Spain and Portugal, which are among the best sketches of

⁴⁷ There is a wall at Fonthill Abbey

⁴⁸ The remaining fragment of Fonthill

foreign travel in the English language.

In their lives Blake and Beckford were sometimes incongruously alike. But in their deaths they were totally different. Blake greeted his approaching end by singing hallelujahs and songs of joy and triumph.⁴⁹ His peals echoed round the room. He was in no doubt that the heavenly host were waiting for him on the other side. Not so Beckford. He refused to receive a Catholic priest or an Anglican clergyman.⁵⁰ He kept his own misgivings to himself. All he fundamentally believed in was guilt, judgment and damnation - not very consoling subjects for a deathbed. Upon his tomb⁵¹ beneath the tower⁵² which in old age he built on Lansdown Hill outside Bath he had these revealing lines inscribed:

Grant me through obvious clouds one transient gleam
Of thy bright essence in my dying hour.⁵³

I'm afraid they suggest some uncertainty and only a faint glimmer of hope.

In spite of Blake and Beckford's diametrically opposed backgrounds, fortunes and temperaments, they had some strong thing in common - some thing shared also by those other men and women I have been referring to. It is easier for us living nearly 200 years later, than it was for their contemporaries, to appreciate what this thing was. I believe it to have been a new intellectual integrity. Neither Blake nor Beckford formed a clique. But each rejected the old, stilted, artificial arts of disguising intellectual truths. Blake's beliefs were unashamedly spiritual. Beckford's were as brazenly earthy. But each declared them loudly to the world in ways that were absolutely individual and honest.

⁴⁹ Pencil drawing of Blake by Linnell

⁵⁰ Beckford's Deathbed by Willes Maddox

⁵¹ Tomb at Lansdown

⁵² Lansdown Tower

⁵³ Photograph of inscription

William Beckford: A Portuguese Milord

JOÃO DE ALMEIDA FLOR

The reappraisal of the biographical effects of William Beckford's (WB) stay in Portugal is the central distinctive feature of Dr Malcolm Jack's (MJ) essay which bears the felicitous title *William Beckford: an English Fidalgo* (AMS Press, 56 East 13th Street, New York, 10003), New York, 1997. In fact, according to the *OED* the word Fidalgo was borrowed from Portuguese and is still in current use as a rather loose term to describe any member of the nobility, i.e., one who has acquired by birth the privilege of being addressed as the son of a man of worth. Now, an English fidalgo may well be a contradiction in terms, but the fact that both concepts have been yoked together in the same phrase makes it a memorable feat which adequately describes the intertwining of Anglo-Portuguese elements in WB's cultural stance and achievement.

In order to understand the significance of WB's *Journal* and *Sketches* as well as his notes and *Recollections* one should bear in mind that both historians and literary scholars have long realised the crucial importance of English travelogues as documentary evidence on life, manners and tastes in late eighteenth century Portugal. Indeed, a vast number of letters, memoirs, journals and reports - British soldiers, merchants, diplomats, men of letters - are teeming with vivid details by first-hand witnesses who provide detailed accounts of the land and the people of Portugal. As a sign of praise, discriminating readers would readily admit that the views expressed by foreign authors can claim a high degree of accuracy because they are so emotionally detached from actual issues and events as to be free from all the prejudice and bias of Portuguese national pride. However, experience has largely demonstrated that aseptic, objective truth does not exist - or is not mediated - as such

because it is utterly incompatible with the metaphoric nature of literary discourse, in itself a symbolic representation of the real world through the elaborately codified medium of speech. Thus, while a critical examination of foreign and national sources remains the historian's task, in order to ascertain the formal authenticity of documents and determine the degree of credibility they ultimately deserve, literary scholars tend to busy themselves exclusively with the truthfulness of the poetic imagination as it proceeds to extract aesthetic images from the raw material of bare experience.

Although researchers of early modern historical figures often struggle with the scarcity or unavailability of adequate source materials, WB's moves in Portugal are largely documented and no lack of evidence seems to hamper the biographer's efforts. In addition very few Beckfordian scholars have grown over the years more familiar with eighteenth century and present day Portuguese culture than Dr Malcolm Jack, himself a distinguished authority on the complex period that comprises the waning of the Enlightenment and the upsurge of early Romantic sensibility. Consequently this biographical essay is concerned not only with portraying the major scenes of WB's presence in Portugal amidst the turbulence of the turn of the century but also with tracing the decisive circumstances and events which may have brought about major developments in his moral and aesthetic apprenticeship. In this way the book is a fascinating blend of collective and personal narratives which alternately depict the historical scenery of post-Pombaline Portugal and focus on miniature-like scenes of WB's entourage. The close analysis of events and anecdotes becomes an instrumental contribution towards the building of panoramic effect and stresses the value of a comprehensive approach to literary character.

In a sense, the factual results yielded by MJ's own exploration of primary materials seem to confirm the (auto)biographical

myth as expounded by Oliver, Chapman, Alexander and Fothergill, to name but a few predecessors. Nevertheless, more often than not MJ steers away from the mainstream of English biography and re-evaluates the illuminating insight and cogent arguments contained in André Parreaux, the continental scholar who must be given credit for having published pioneering studies on WB's association with Portugal. The present biographer's innovative contribution stems from his view that a dramatic shift of emphasis needs to take place before one attempts to understand the rather baffling sense of dejection that marked WB's later years. Consequently, the book concentrates on his years of maturity in Portugal which may well hold a few keys that unlock his complex personality and ingrained reluctance to come to terms with his own inescapable idiosyncrasies.

In a detailed treatment of Marialva's clan and of Portuguese nobility in general, MJ displays his ability to re-enact the intrigue woven around the Caliph's failure to be formally presented at the Portuguese court. This vital aspiration which the English envoy adamantly opposed, ultimately prevented English expatriates in Lisbon from receiving WB in their circle and in more that one sense revived the feeling of isolation and estrangement that had marked him off from contemporary social conventions. Thus he may have been driven to stage his private extravaganzas with the pomp and fabulous - yet bitter - grandeur of a king in his own imaginary court. Between the lines of WB's Portuguese travelogues there lurks his strong exhibitionist compulsion to compensate for the pettiness of English society who had failed to recognise in him the real grandee his continental peers so deeply praised and honoured.

Too often underestimated as a trivial episode in WB's career, the Portuguese experience becomes the central period in his life, as it provides a vantage point from which it became possible for him to look backwards and forwards without any feelings of guilt or anxiety. In MJ's interpretation, the convivial hospitality of

Portuguese society and the oasis of Sintra's unparalleled mixture of the picturesque and the sublime had a soothing effect upon WB and at last brought him relief from various types of dysphoria. Beside, if Cozens, Courtenay, Marialva, Penalva, Tancos and Franchi on the one hand and Louisa, Lady Margaret, the Marchioness of Santa Cruz and the Princess of Listenais on the other, could be considered a kind of warp and weft of bisexual discourse, the present biography stresses that WB's stay in Portugal represented a unique possibility of fulfilling deep inclinations and reintegrating in his personality the proper balance between allegedly contradictory claims. In my opinion, that Portugal should have provided the ideal setting for this move seems all the more remarkable since the country still remained under the heavy control of inquisitors and government agents whose duty it was to probe into the private life of locals and visitors alike, in order to eliminate all forms of unorthodox behaviour. It is in fact hard to imagine that in the circles where WB moved 'little attention seemed to be paid to the nature of his amorous behaviour' (p. 133) and one wonders if the reason for such exceptional leniency might be connected with the protection provided by the prestige and power of the Marialvas themselves.

Finally, MJ's book adds an unexpected comment on the Anglo-Portuguese cultural dialogue in so far as it supplies evidence to support the view that to a large extent Gothic revivalism was the stylistic outcome of a series of variations on Beckfordian architectural themes. In Fonthill Abbey, WB's first-hand knowledge of the art of the Peninsula, especially of the monastic architecture of Lisbon and the province of Estremadura (Alcobaça and Batalha) together with his own experience as the restorer of Monserrate did set an example to be followed and transformed both by contemporaries and successors.

As a whole, MJ's scholarly but highly entertaining essay mingles biography, historiography and aesthetic appreciation, and this requires critical expertise in multidisciplinary methods

and approaches. The final output of such operations reads like a rigorous, de-centred account of WB's life and ways, i.e. a lively picture taken from the point of view of an English biographer and scholar who has grown to be an enthusiastic Lusophile. But then, this is also very much in the tradition that dates back to Beckford himself.

At a Crossroads: Assessing and Redefining the Beckford Agenda

DICK CLAÉSSON

Most 'Beckfordians' (an affectionate denomination, if ever one was invented) have arrived at the Beckford canon through the lure of the text and the mystical gaze of the Caliph. I write this in a metaphorical sense, of course. The dichotomy (or perhaps combination) of text (i.e. *Beckford's writings*) and biography (i.e. *Beckford's life*) have from the very beginning provoked a certain amount of attention from critics and biographers alike. Varying reasons and agendas have no doubt dictated their ambitions, but a slow trickle of critical texts, biographies, references and commentaries has continued to emerge. In the last forty years, Beckfordian research has grown to a respectable field of literary, artistic and historical inquiry that at times appears independent or at least unaware of the fact that it is, almost by definition, at best a marginal subject in a larger context.

Beckford studies remain a facet of eighteenth and nineteenth century literary studies that is both conventional and unconventional in scope. It is unconventional due to the controversial aspects of the literature and the life it reflects. The oblique references to paedophilic behaviour make it a difficult if not impossible subject for Gay Studies, and close many other critical possibilities as well. Beckford is not, *could not* be

politically correct.

Yet it would appear that it is exactly this brand of controversy (Beckford's homosexuality has always been subject to revisionistic reinterpretations)¹ that clears the way for the often conventional and conservative treatments that his life and works traditionally receives. *Paedophilia* is a crime of great magnitude, virtually impossible to deal with in any way, but *eccentricity* is harmless. Thus, through quaint biography, Beckford is disarmed. There is nothing wrong with the genre of the biography. But biographical reconstruction could never be truthful to a man, could never equal the sum of parts that is *life*, and should not claim to do so. To biographise is to *interpret*, to read, and there are never enough materials around to fully recreate the ghosts of the past.

I will return later to the question of Beckford's biography - it is, without a doubt, a vital part of the critical canon. But let's first assess what has been done so far. It's possible to divide Beckford criticism and research into at least five different categories:

1. Biographical research; anecdotes
2. Studies in Beckford's taste and artistic affiliations; the architecture; Beckford as a collector
3. *Vathek*: the aspects of various editions and versions
4. Studies in and interpretations of *Vathek*
5. Studies in and interpretations of Beckford's works (excluding *Vathek*).

As we all know, major biographies abound: beginning with Cyrus Redding's *Memoirs* (1859), this genre (apparently so congenial to the study of Beckford) has some ten or fifteen descendants to date, all still to some extent relying on the first biography for some of their materials.² Minor biographical and anecdotal studies are too frequent to mention, and range from entire, miniature 'life and letters' to discussions of the most minute details. A collective 'archive' of such detailed information can be said to have been assembled over the years,

comprised of numerous articles, essays, papers and notes, finding their place in as many magazines (the most important of which remain *The Beckford Tower Trust Newsletter* and its successor, this publication, *The Beckford Journal*).³ These articles and texts constitute groundbreaking and important work, and it would not do to deny them their just place in the critical canon of Beckford studies.

The artistic and aesthetic aspects of Beckford's life merits a separate category (2). It is perhaps in this field that William Beckford is most known outside the circle of Beckfordians. Beckford touches, in one aspect or another, on virtually all facets of eighteenth century culture and art: literature and poetics, naturally, but also painting, architecture, collecting, garden art, art patronage, music, travels, and on. References to Beckford are frequent in critical works on any given aspect of English culture in the eighteenth century; the recent exhibitions at the British Museum on Sir William Hamilton, and at the Tate on the Grand Tour illustrated this in many ways.⁴ Separate studies on Beckford and the arts have also appeared from time to time, and have occasionally risen to such heights as Robert J. Gemmett's dissertation on Fonthill and the picturesque,⁵ or H.A.N. Brockman's book on the architecture of Fonthill.⁶ Much has been written on Beckford as a collector and as a patron of the arts; no connection has been as thoroughly examined, however, as that to the Cozenses, although this too is a possibly rewarding subject for further research.⁷

Vathek is by far the most investigated element of the Beckford literary canon. Two main strands, sometimes intertwined, are distinguishable: bibliographical discussions about the different editions and versions of the work (3), and literary studies of it (4). I shall not dwell on exponents of these types; suffice it to say that there are plenty of both, varying in both perspective and quality. A few instances of important textual criticism should be noted, marking important events in Beckfordian criticism and

outlining a change in critical emphasis: André Parreaux's landmark study, *William Beckford Auteur de "Vathek"* (1760-1844): *Etude de la Création Littéraire*,⁸ the anthology *William Beckford of Fonthill 1760-1844. Bicentenary Essays*, edited by Fatma Moussa Mahmoud,⁹ and *Vathek & The Escape from Time. Bicentenary Revaluations*, edited by Kenneth W. Graham.¹⁰ These works, in various ways, address some important questions of textual issues, and reflect a gradual (albeit slow) change in Beckfordian studies from 1960 and onwards: from *life* to *text*. The same slow change is reflected, but not as clearly, in (5): while *Vathek* remains in print, continuing to be a part of the larger, literary panorama, Beckford's remaining production is sadly neglected. Some recent publications have contributed to a better state of affairs, but this last category is obviously as of yet hampered by the lack of available and reliable materials.¹¹

All this is well known to any Beckford scholar. Where to next? How far has biography led us, and have textual studies finally superseded the various uses of biography?

Perhaps the definitive biography on Beckford is lacking. It will, in that case, no doubt soon be written: interest in Beckford seems to be constantly increasing, and biographies may, as we know, be commercially viable productions.¹² But it is hardly biography that will further Beckford studies at this point. The frame of life has been amply established, and although many important details may still emerge, this cannot hide that the *texts* - Beckford's oeuvre - remain the one facet of Beckfordian studies that is only haphazardly investigated. To me, this is rather puzzling. Why is it that an admittedly minor but still in many ways important author - we all know, for instance, of Beckford's importance to the Romantics, to Poe, and to the French Surrealists, to the critical community outside Beckfordian circles - remains a vague biographical footnote?

I'm not suggesting strictures. Certainly any research is more

than welcome, as all pieces add to the picture. Yet I cannot help but wonder what that picture really reflects. What would happen if we synthesised life and letters?

We have constructed an image of Beckford (life as well as works) that is biased by myth and legend. So far, textual criticism has all but failed to change this. We still read *Vathek* as a parallel to Beckford's life, we still explain the man through the literary works he produced, we continue to sift through the evidence of literary works in order to find proof of either this characteristic or that in the man. Does this result in a fair and correct image of Beckford, perhaps a biography that is comprehensible and a corpus of texts that is more understandable? Probably not. Beckford outlined his own public self that we have adopted as the enigmatic 'Beckford of Fonthill' - the voyeuristic *frisson* that we may feel while reflecting on 'his life' is in every way anticipated, and this distortion must be considered as we reflect on the biography or on the literary works of Beckford.

The Beckford mythology claims its descent from the hand of Beckford himself. It is twofold. The first part is 'pure biography' (of which there could really be none whatsoever), a result of Beckford's incessant rehashing and rewriting of the past and of his desire to mould the past for future generations of readers - Redding's *Memoirs* may be words direct from the horse's mouth in that respect, but words, in consequence, to be taken with caution. The second part (closing in on the texts) is the literary persona, the literary fictitious mirror-image of the author imprinted on the texts as by way of camouflaging its literarity, as if hiding its rhetoricity. The 'I' of the texts is an attempt to subjectivise the highly traditional styles and poetics used to communicate to the reader the bare bones of a thin thread of barely distinguishable 'narrative'.

It is through his letters and diaries that we know Beckford as a private individual. I should think we all agree on this. The fiction

of *Vathek* or of *Azemias*, or even of the *Recollections* (which, to me at least, is fiction too, with a faint trace of verisimilitude), to name but a few, is outside this personal corpus of jottings and correspondences. Yet even the letters and the diaries are carefully plotted productions of fiction, no less dependent on rhetoric and literary tropes than a romance or a poem.

Yet critics have been more occupied in tracing Beckford *the man* in the texts than the fictional character he chose to portray. His projected persona (as reflected by his letters and diaries) is removed from *himself* (the historical figure) by as many words as are used to describe it. At times the persona is a skilful synthesis of fact and fiction. He appears as 'William' in *The Vision*, yet he is not William Beckford, soon-to-be author of *Vathek*; the narrative of William is not autobiography or confession, but a carefully constructed, rhetorically and poetically determined work of fiction. This is also the William of the letters to 'Cozens' (yet another figure of fiction, forever trapped, in *Beckford's words*, in his systems): romanticising, dreaming, aesthetically refined and attuned to the melodious music of spheres, a civilised and well versed version of the Rousseauian savage.

Fonthill, the backdrop, is mythical. It is, as in *The Transport of Pleasure*, a place of textual departure, a vortex of map co-ordinates constantly changing.¹³ Transformations rather than topographical stasis define the place of Fonthill in Beckford's texts. Yes, Fonthill will remain Wiltshire's Fonthill in Beckfordian biography, but it must also be considered as a fixture of his fiction; an emblem of sorts, a symbol of inner peace, of tranquillity, of self-imposed exile; the place of the trance, the reverie, of the dream as well as of the nightmare. Fonthill is, to Beckford, a rhetorical element, a place to invoke and use. Fonthill (in *The Transport of Pleasure* and in other texts as well) is the fictitious point of departure for both dream and voyage. It is useful in more ways than one: it lends an air of verisimilitude to a corpus of texts of delusions, creating yet more

mystery in the field of tension between fiction and reality.

Beckford re-orchestrated life as fiction. It may or may not have been a deliberate attempt at self-mythology and self-fictionalisation. Either way this autobiographical deceit (if he intended it as such) or continuous work of fiction (if he did not) continued, reflected in the subtle differences between fact and fiction as late as in the *Recollections* (1835): 'The other day, in examining some papers, I met with very slight notes of this Excursion. Flattering myself that, perhaps, they might not be totally unworthy of expansion, I invoked the powers of memory - and behold, up rose the whole series of recollections I am now submitting to that indulgent Public, which has shown more favour to my former sketches than they merited.'¹⁴ The mock-religious parody of literary, inspirational creation is a ruse of modesty, but actually describes the genesis of the work. Beckford did begin his story of the excursions with some 'very slight notes'; as on other occasions, he then remembered, reconstructed, reinvented, restructured and *deformed* history to suit the purposes of fiction. Though there is insufficient evidence to support a direct dependency on Beckford's part on the aesthetic theories of landscape of Alexander Cozens, it is tempting to illustrate Beckford's compositional methods through Cozens' notion of the blot.

The difference between a common sketch and a blot, which was Cozens' invention, was the factor of memory, of time, and of recollection. 'To sketch, is to delineate ideas; blotting suggests them,'¹⁵ Cozens wrote in 1785. The first step to be taken in order to create a blot (which could then form the basis for future expansions) was far from technical: 'Possess your mind strongly with a subject.'¹⁶ The artist was to impart on paper his memory of a scene in crude, accidental shapes, suggesting only the barest outline of a landscape - giving the idea of a place. A large number of blots could in this way be produced very quickly. This creative and productive use of the artistic memory is reflected

also in the rejected passages from Hogarth's *Analysis of Beauty*, where he describes his decision early in life not to copy objects, 'but rather read the Language of them <and if possible find a grammar to it> and collect and retain a remembrance of what I saw by repeated observations ...'¹⁷ Abstraction aided the mnemonic capacity.

The blot, Cozens stated, was similar 'to the historical fact on which a poet builds his drama.'¹⁸ His method disowned mimesis. It involved the invention of original landscapes from the studied particulars of nature, the expansion of a blot into a sketch through invention and memory, the expansion of a sketch into a drawing, and advocated the validity of invention in landscape composition.

Many of Beckford's texts may have begun as textual sketches of landscapes. Some of the letters, for example, contain passages of descriptive prose which, almost unchanged, entered *Vathek* and other works, only expanded by the inclusion of characters and plot. *The Vision* retains the impression of a work in progress, disclosing in many respects its structural aesthetics. As in *Vathek*, the basic narrative structure is the quest.¹⁹ Moral descent is here spiritual ascent, and the progress of initiation is rhythmically accompanied by various settings. The scenic descriptions dominate the narrative in *The Vision* to the extent as to make action (unless action is defined simply as movement) almost non-existent. Anything that appears to happen in the story literally happens *by the way*.

The intense use of scenery in *The Vision* makes it difficult to keep track of the constant scene changes and scene transformations. The pace is virtually mindnumbing, a quality accentuated by the rough punctuation of the manuscript.²⁰ Nothing really happens, as scenery replaces scenery.

I am inclined to read this text (as I read others similar to it; the letters of reverie to Cozens being the most obvious parallel) 'simply' (really an unfortunate word) as a succession of literary,

imaginary or original views and landscapes, held together by a thin frame of fictional narrative. Fiction, the narrative frame of *The Vision*, may or may not be an authorial concession to convention; the structure of the quest a convenient mould for ensuring carefully composed variety and *deus ex machina* solutions. It is a text that roams 'from Island to Island and from Hill to Hill with little more than sensation.'²¹ Stylistically, its focus is highly poetical prose; its basic structure a mixture of common quest patterns and pilgrim-motifs. But there is no real story. A man is guided through the various stages of initiation; he learns of all the world's secrets, he falls in love - and there it ends. A poetics of extreme sensibility guides the narration. A narrative framework of plot characteristics is applied to a set of backdrops and settings. Normally, the reverse would have been more natural: a setting applied to a plot. Yet Beckford chose the flipside of convention in constructing this text.

The extreme emphasis on landscape and scenery in *The Vision* may come from it being an unfinished text. Further expansions and rewrites may have been intended, and would perhaps greatly have changed the text's impact and emphasis. I believe that this early, rough state of writing that *The Vision* represents, reflects Beckford's compositional technique, and defines it as a mode of writing founded in backdrop, not plot.

A complete inventory and detailed study of Beckford's published texts and extant manuscripts would possibly disclose a more complex image of his compositional techniques and poetics than the one reflected by *The Vision*. Still, I think it would confirm that Beckford took his early aesthetic cue in part from Cozens' blot (and used it as a theoretical model for the literary sketch of a setting), and expanded on it, from an author's point of view, with the well known elements of the sublime and the picturesque. His staging is often that of a theatrical choreographer, obsessed with displaying the silent splendours of the backdrop through their rapid transformations and surprising

variety. More action-packed than most of his fiction, the unpublished *L'Esplendente* concludes (inconclusively) with these brief annotations of a continuation of the work, never performed yet outlined by Beckford at the end of the manuscript, illustrating his flair for drama:

Notes.

M. when at Cordova becomes acquainted with Don. J. d'Arcos a grandee of the first Class - paints for him - follows him to Majorca his government. - Castle described pomp of living loves Donna Rosalia his Daughter - burns to tell her who he is - she often visits him when drawing beautiful views in the retired & picturesque recesses of the Isle - Haughtiness of D. Juan - his stern pride - D.R. - reported to be dying. - M's grief - One night after a short & troubled sleep he was awakened by two men in black with white masks - they lead him along passages he had never before observed to a vaulted chamber - a block prepared - dim lamps. - a Bell sounds - a Lady in long Robes of mourning introduced - a confessor - she screams M. thinks himself under the influence of a horrid dream but tries to wake in vain - the Spectres hurry him away & cast him from a window into a tempestuous Ocean - Morning just beginning to dawn - sees a ship - his skill in swimming now of use - is taken up - treated [kindly] - a Moorish vessel bears down upon them - fight his Friend the Captain who had listened so piteously to his tale slain by his side - behaves with unheard of Valor - Moors admire but oppress him loaded with Chains & cast into a Dungeon at Tetuan &c &c &c -²²

Is there a faint trace of irony in the '&c &c &c'? The picaresque (which is what these notes imply) was not a genre that suited Beckford's serious style, and this passage reads too much like a mock version of a gothic extravaganza to be anything but impossible to complete seriously. Action, in Beckford's prose, is often loaded with irony, but landscape almost never. When action is allowed by Beckford to dominate the landscape, irony is soon sure to follow.

I have perhaps strayed. It was not my intention to perform any analysis at this stage or, for that matter, in this text - only to suggest, if it's not a too oblique point, that we really *read* Beckford, not read *Beckford*. Let's not stop at biography. Let's proceed to the texts.

¹ The most obvious example is, of course, Boyd Alexander's edition of Beckford letters, where only expurgated versions of the letters were allowed. Cf. *Life at Fonthill 1807-1822. With Interludes in Paris and London. From the Correspondence of William Beckford*, 1957.

² Of the major biographies should be noted Lewis Melville, *The Life and Letters of William Beckford of Fonthill (Author of "Vathek")*, 1910, J.W. Oliver, *The Life of William Beckford*, 1932, Guy Chapman, *Beckford*, 1937 and 1952, Boyd Alexander, *England's Wealthiest Son. A Study of William Beckford*, 1962, and Brian Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 1979. More exist but vary greatly in depth and length.

³ *The Beckford Tower Trust Newsletter* (1980-1994) and *The Beckford Journal* (1995-), both edited by Jon Millington.

⁴ Cf. Ian Jenkins and Kim Sloan, eds., *Vases and Volcanoes: Sir William Hamilton and his Collection*, 1996; also Andrew Wilton and Ilaria Bignamini, eds., *Grand Tour. The Lure of Italy in the Eighteenth Century*, 1996.

⁵ *William Beckford and the Picturesque: A Study of Fonthill*, Syracuse University 1966. This is Gemmett's Ph.D. dissertation; he produced a lengthy and more easily accessible summary of the thesis entitled 'Beckford's Fonthill: The Landscape as Art' in *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, Dec 1972, pp. 335-356.

⁶ *The Caliph of Fonthill*, 1956.

⁷ Two indispensable works must suffice to illustrate this: A.P. Oppé, *Alexander & John Robert Cozens*, 1952, and Kim Sloan, *Alexander and John Robert Cozens. The Poetry of Landscape*, 1986. With regards to Beckford's texts, an intriguing first study of the aesthetic relationship between Cozens' blots and the landscapes of *Vathek* was performed by John F. Sena in 'Drawing from Blots: The Landscapes of *Vathek* and the Paintings of Alexander Cozens', *Études Anglaises* 26 (1973), pp. 210-215.

⁸ Paris 1960.

⁹ Cairo 1960.

¹⁰ New York 1990.

¹¹ A sixth category may eventually be needed to supplement the five outlined above, but only if a complete, critical edition of Beckford's entire production appears, comprising fiction, diaries, jottings, letters, etc. Then (and only then)

will the materials available for research be truly adequate, and only then may some hitherto unknown (or at least uncharted) field of Beckfordian study be defined.

¹² A biography in progress, by Dr Timothy Mowl, is announced in issue 5, March 1997, of *The Beckford Newsletter*.

¹³ Cf. *The Transport of Pleasure. MS. Beckford d.10 (Fonthill Foreshadowed) utgiven och kommenterad av Dick Claésson*, Göteborg 1996.

¹⁴ *Recollections of an Excursion to the Monasteries of Alcobaça and Batalha*, 1835, Advertisement.

¹⁵ Alexander Cozens, *A New Method of Assisting the Invention in Drawing Original Compositions of Landscape* (c.1786), quoted from Oppé, p. 170.

¹⁶ Oppé, p. 179.

¹⁷ William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty. With the Rejected Passages from the Manuscript Drafts and Autobiographical Notes*, ed. Joseph Burke, 1955. Draft C, 185.

¹⁸ Oppé, p. 170.

¹⁹ Cf. Frederick S. Frank, 'The Gothic *Vathek*: The Problem of Genre Resolved', in Graham (1990), pp. 157-172; also Randall Craig, '*Vathek*: The Inversion of Romance', in Graham (1990), pp. 113-129.

²⁰ This punctuation is retained in Guy Chapman's transcript of the manuscript. Cf. *The Vision. Liber Veritatis*, ed. Guy Chapman, 1930.

²¹ *The Vision*, p. 74.

²² MS. Beckford d.11, *L'Esplendente*, pp. 136-137. Quoted with the kind permission of the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

William Beckford and Religion

ERIC DARTON

Of the various aspects of William Beckford's life that have been considered, his attitude to religion is one of the most intriguing. There are many references in his writings to Christianity; the meaning and content of them merits attention.

On 7 January 1761 Alderman Beckford wrote to William Pitt the elder about young Beckford's baptism, 'He was made a Christian last night ... No endeavours of mine shall be wanting

... to instil into his tender mind principles of religion, honour, and love of country.'¹ But whereas the Alderman had a more tolerant and conventional view of religion, his wife was Methodistly inclined and her stern and Calvinistic attitude was to have a lasting effect on Beckford. 'The spirit of Divine Wrath, of the vengeance of God, hovered over the head of her son from his earliest years leaving an indelible impression on his soul.'²

There is no evidence of Beckford attending Fonthill Gifford church other than on the occasion of his baptism and the celebration of his majority when 'an appropriate sermon [was] preached ... by Lettice.'³ Churches at that time had become little more than 'preaching houses'. The Reformation had moved the focus of worship from altar to pulpit 'and the rational divines of the eighteenth century pushed it still farther from the chancel, into a pulpit which sometimes resounded like a rostrum, as preacher lectured or lecturer preached on moral duty and historic evidence'.⁴ This would not have appealed to a person of Beckford's intellect.

On 5 September 1780 Beckford visited Padua and the shrine of St Anthony, and wrote of 'the veneration I have always entertained for this inspired preacher' and told how he 'immediately repaired to his shrine, and offered up my little orizons before it'. Joining worshippers already there, he 'fell down on the steps before the shrine'.⁵ Beckford adopted St Anthony as his patron saint, his intermediary before God.

During Beckford's stay in Portugal in 1787, it was his devotion to St Anthony (one of the patron saints of Lisbon) and his attendance at Mass 'which might have brought him into contact with the old Abbé Xavier and so with the devout Marialvas'.⁶ For Beckford attended Mass frequently at the Patriarchal Cathedral. Of one visit he wrote, 'The Patriarch officiated. I knelt near the altar with much devotion. My piety I believe caught the eyes of the high priest'. On the occasion of the Festival of Corpo de Deos (Corpus Christi) he wrote, 'Mass was

performing in full glory, incense ascending in clouds, thousands kneeling, and the light of innumerable tapers blazing'. At the Festival of St Anthony he did not consider the church comparable with 'the magnificent sanctuary of Padua'. He described the preacher who 'lifted up hands and eyes, foamed at the mouth, and poured forth a torrent of sounding phrases in honour of St. Anthony.'⁷

On 14 June 1787 Beckford wrote, 'I hear there is no conversation in Lisbon but of my piety. Really this joke begins to have its inconveniences. I am incessantly plagued with deputations from convents, epistles and holy greetings ... invitations to sacred festivals'. He complained of 'presents of sweetmeats in cut paper from lady abbesses and young virgins supplicating me' for sponsorship to a monastery 'under the auspices of my much-honoured St. Anthony.' He concluded, 'I have talked myself fairly into this scrape and must get out of it as well as I can.'⁸ Beckford had begun to tire of the attention he was attracting and had become concerned as to whether he had carried things too far. Nonetheless he continued to attend Mass, visit monasteries and festivals, and to consort with clerics.

Beckford continued his devotions throughout his stay. On 23 September 1787 he noted, 'I heard Mass in the chapel of my villa, and prayed fervently to St. Anthony, whose image, finely bedizened, is placed on the High Altar.'⁹ The last entry in the Spanish journal for Sunday 27 January 1788 reads, 'I have acquired a confirmed habit of going to Mass.'¹⁰

Word of Beckford's apparent religious fervour reached England and on 22 August 1795, during his second stay in Portugal, he wrote to Thomas Wildman, his solicitor, 'The gravity with which you write of my having changed my Religion from Protestant to Roman Catholic takes away all gravity from me ... Pray when did you know me adhere to the Sect I am supposed to have relinquished? How can a Man who never was at Wapping be said to have gone from Wapping to Rome?'¹¹

With the building of Fonthill Abbey, St Anthony became a central figure. The saint's alabaster statue by J. C. Rossi 'with the Infant Saviour in his arms' was first displayed at the north end of St Michael's Gallery 'backed by scarlet curtains ... The shrine was loaded with jewelled reliquaries, and lit by many candlesticks and gilt candelabrae.'¹²

On completion of King Edward's Gallery, the apical Oratory was constructed at the northern end, approached by the Vaulted Corridor and Sanctuary. There the saint's statue appeared in even greater glory 'Upon the altar table, which was draped with tapestry, in purple and gold ... supported on each side by branched candlesticks of silver gilt.' Above the 'delicate fan vaulting in burnished gold ... surrounding a central gilt boss from which was suspended a golden lamp, richly chased. Elaborate silver gilt candelabra stood upon either side of the altar.'¹³ High above the Great West Door another statue of St Anthony by Theakston, in Chilmark stone, looked down on all who entered.¹⁴

Despite this, on 24 August 1817 Beckford complained, 'As for me, I have a great longing for devotions, I breathe only the wish to wallow on the threshold of the Saint's chapel at Padua. The miserable Fonthill sanctuary does not satisfy me.'¹⁵

With the sale of the Abbey in 1822, Beckford reflected that 'The saint who inspired me with the Abbey will also arm me with supernatural courage to do without it, and perhaps even to erect yet another monument to his glory.'¹⁶ After Beckford's removal to Bath and the building of the tower on Lansdown Hill, a shrine was constructed on the first floor. Here, upon a pedestal of Siena marble, and 'illuminated by the shafts of light that filtered down from the shallow dome, stood the statue of St. Antony of Padua',¹⁷ where Beckford offered up his prayers.

Beckford condemned the joylessness of the Anglican Church. After a visit to Westminster Abbey he wrote, 'If the building was purged by celestial Catholic fire of all the foulness of infamous Protestantism it would be capable of producing the most majestic

effect imaginable.¹⁸ Later, of Salisbury Cathedral, he complained that it was 'poor, bare and insipid, without mystery, without ecclesiastical pomp'.¹⁹

Although Beckford was accused by some of converting to Catholicism, in his time this could hardly be regarded as an option. Catholics suffered considerable civic disabilities. The Gordon Riots of 1780 that he had witnessed²⁰ were the result of a protest against the Catholic Relief Act of 1778 which had restored to Catholics the right to inherit and purchase land. It was not until the passing, after much opposition, of the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 that a majority of the disadvantages under which Catholics lived were removed. It was another twenty-one years before Cardinal Wiseman became the first Archbishop of Westminster, the Roman Catholic primate.²¹ It is of interest that one of the last books that Beckford read was Wiseman's *Lectures on Natural and Revealed Religion*.²²

Had conditions for Catholics been more propitious, Beckford might have become one of their number. While he was abroad he could worship and pray in Catholic cathedrals and churches, but in England this was not possible. Familiar as he was with Catholic worship, its ritual and ceremony, and loathing as he did all aspects of Protestantism, he felt obliged to provide his own chapel or oratory. He first did this in Portugal (though surely not of necessity) and then at Fonthill and Lansdown. He had said, 'God should have the best that can be offered in relation to His worship',²³ and this he endeavoured to provide.

It has been suggested that if the Church of Rome had been in the position of influence and power that it was later, 'Beckford might have achieved an abbey with a far more authoritative blessing than that of his chosen patron St Anthony',²⁴ and it was no doubt this consideration that accounted for Beckford's moments of despair and reference to 'the miserable Fonthill sanctuary'.

Despite his self-deprecation, joking and contradictory

behaviour, and his interest in the East and its religions, at heart Beckford devotedly accepted the Christian religion. His desire for ritual, colour and music in his worship was to some extent analogous to the position of the Tractarians, otherwise known as the Oxford Movement, who were active during the late 1830s onwards, and were eventually responsible for a return to Sacramental religion with its ritual, vestments, lights and music within the Anglican communion. Like the majority of the movement's members, Beckford chose to stay within the church into which he had been baptised, but in his case protesting that 'he never was at Wapping' in the first place.

¹ Lewis Melville, *The Life and Letters of William Beckford*, 1910, pp. 13-14.

² Brian Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 1979, p. 21.

³ Fothergill, p. 109.

⁴ Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, Part 1, 1997, p. 495-496.

⁵ *The Travel-Diaries of William Beckford of Fonthill*, ed. Guy Chapman, 1928. Vol. 1, *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents*, p. 113-114.

⁶ *The Journal of William Beckford in Portugal and Spain 1787-1788*, ed. Boyd Alexander, 1954, p. 15 note 1.

⁷ *Journal*, p. 42, 68, 77 & 78.

⁸ *Journal*, p. 81.

⁹ *Journal*, p. 206.

¹⁰ *Journal*, p. 319.

¹¹ Melville, p. 277.

¹² Boyd Alexander, *England's Wealthiest Son*, 1962, pp. 162-163.

¹³ H.A.N. Brockman, *The Caliph of Fonthill*, 1956, p. 149.

¹⁴ Brockman, p. 141.

¹⁵ Boyd Alexander, *Life at Fonthill 1807-1822*, 1957, p. 218.

¹⁶ *Life at Fonthill*, p. 338.

¹⁷ Fothergill, p. 325.

¹⁸ *Life at Fonthill*, p. 47.

¹⁹ *Life at Fonthill*, p. 66.

²⁰ *England's Wealthiest Son*, pp. 74-75.

²¹ *The New Columbia Encyclopedia*, 1975, 'Catholic Emancipation', p. 481.

²² W. Gregory, *The Beckford Family*, 1898, p. 100.

²³ Melville, p. 277.

²⁴ Brockman, p. 91.

The Devotee Glances at the Glorious One

J.C.M. NOLAN

Yesterday at the Bindley sale Boletus bought for me a beautiful copy of the Life of the Glorious One, with many engravings which I don't remember having ever seen before...It's a real treasure for me and will be full of instruction and interest.

Beckford to Franchi, 26 February 1819¹

The prospect of St Anthony of Padua began to bubble in Beckford's psyche long before he ever visited Lisbon where St Anthony was venerated as the patron saint. The Saint made an early noted appearance in the story about Og of Basan who painted a picture of the Saint for the King of Naples:

St. Anthony on a rock projecting over the sea, almost surrounded by shoals of every species of fish, whose countenances, all different, were highly expressive of the most profound attention and veneration.

Beckford's romantic sympathy lay with the Saint who had to preach to the fish because the heretics would not listen; yet there was a Beckfordian satirical smirk hiding in the added comment that there was a controversy about whether the fish resembled Cardinals in the Papal Conclave.²

During his European tour in the June of 1780, Beckford encountered the other St Anthony (the Hermit) in a few pictures when he visited Antwerp. In Canon Knyff's habitation he noted 'a large Teniers, representing a St Anthony surrounded by a malicious fry of imps and leering devilesses' as an example of the whimsical buffoonery of the Dutch imagination.³ Seven days later during a visit to the Prince of Orange's cabinet of paintings and curiosities, Beckford viewed a St Anthony by Hell-fire Bruegel. Contemplation of the other St Anthony filled him with a strong pity for a good man fallen victim to foul persecutors:

Nothing can be more rueful than the patient's countenance; more forlorn than his beard; more pious than his eye, which forms a strong contrast to the pert winks and insidious glances of his persecutors, some of whom ... are evidently of the female kind.⁴

It is useful to distinguish among the saints between St Anthony of Padua and his own ancient patron, St Anthony the Hermit of Egypt. Probably for Beckford, the Hermit's sufferings suggested the apocalyptic dimension to the unheeded Glorious One, and foreshadowed the rejection of the devotee, Beckford himself, by foul persecutors perverting the truth.

On 5 September 1780 Beckford arrived at Padua and immediately visited the shrine, 'the confused pile of spires and cupolas dedicated to blessed St. Anthony'. Here, indeed, was the tomb of his special favourite, now clearly revealed as the most abiding source of available consolation:

Mine was a disturbed spirit; and required all the balm of Saint Anthony's kindness, to appease it. Perhaps, you will say, I had better gone to bed, and applied myself to my sleepy friend, the pagan divinity. 'Tis probable that you are in the right; but I could not retire to rest, without venting some portion of effervescence, in sighs and supplications.⁵

Beckford's recorded reaction at the shrine suggests a curious blending of mystical, aesthetic and realistic elements. Among the prostrate sinners before the shrine's altar, Beckford sensed the odour of sanctity drawing the penitents to look through the crevices of the tomb at the bones of St Anthony. Beckford also sensed the appeal for the heretical traveller in the most exquisite sculptures 'which, for design and execution, would do honour to the sculptures of antiquity.' After a night's sleep in his well-appointed inn close to the shrine, Beckford had to admit that 'St. Anthony had been deaf to my prayer, and I still found myself a frail, infatuated mortal.' There was no blame placed on the Saint for the failure; instead, Beckford became more humbly aware of

his own human limitations.

The first visit to Padua climaxed in the high aesthetic wonder of a high mass at the grand church of St Anthony where Beckford attended very little to the solemn liturgical functions but admitted that his feeling of being overwhelmed by the music might well be misunderstood by his neighbours:

... the plaintive tones of the voices and instruments, so consonant with my own feelings, melted me into tears and gave me, no doubt, the exterior of exalted piety.⁶

In May 1782 Beckford left England on another European tour with an entourage including the Rev John Lettice, chaplain; John Burton, musician; and John Robert Cozens, painter.⁷ On this occasion Beckford revisited Padua in the company of Venetian friends; and high spirits so prevailed that all his enthusiasm now was for Venice which recalled a series of eastern ideas and adventures, doubtless in the mood of the Fonthill Splendens parties in 1781:

I cannot help thinking St. Mark's a mosque; and the neighbouring palace, some vast seraglio; full of arabesque saloons, embroidered sophas, and voluptuous Circassians.⁸

It was during this tour that twenty-two year old Beckford replied to a brief note from William ('Kitty') Courtenay in effusive terms:

I read your letter with a beating heart, my dearest Willy, and kissed it a thousand times ... You know I can scarcely be said to live in your absence.⁹

His book *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents* was published in 1783 but was immediately suppressed when Beckford's mother decided to rescue him from his excess of dreams and feelings for a life in English politics. In the same year he was married off to Lady Margaret Gordon and soon afterwards was, as MP for Wells, pointed towards the House of Commons. However, his mother's plans were soon scuppered because, before the end of 1784, the Powderham scandal involving

Courtenay had turned her only son into a pariah. In 1786, after bearing two daughters, Lady Margaret died. This was the signal for his many enemies in England to accuse Beckford of her murder. Samuel Henley published *Vathek* in English, contrary to all of Beckford's instructions. Thus did the worst kind of English persecution engulf this romantic and highly gifted young man. What grew out of his trial by bullies was a venomous hatred of English enemies which he would hone until death: 'I sigh for the pestilential breath of an African serpent to destroy every Englishman who comes in my way.'¹⁰

He was unable to resist the family decision to exile him to his Jamaican sugar estates and set sail on 15 March 1787 for the West Indies via Lisbon. By the time Beckford had reached Lisbon, he complained of illness and refused to go further. Then a kind of miracle occurred. Somehow - probably as a result of his devotions to his own patron saint at masses in honour of the city's patron saint - Beckford met the Marquis of Marialva, the Queen of Portugal's favourite, who instantly became his patron and began to open for his favourite many Portuguese doors.¹¹

In his condition of exile, Beckford became aware of the staggering fact that prestige in Lisbon should grow on the back of a reputation for being devoted to St Anthony. Beckford enjoyed the instant celebrity as a kind of convenient joke; but he was cynical not about his well established personal devotion but about the cynicism of many of his fellow devotees among Portuguese nuns, friars, bigots and (especially) female worshippers:

Two old women of quality, D. Joana de Menezes and the Marchioness of Penalva will have it that St. Anthony has appeared to me and commanded me to raise up a wall round his convent to keep off certain lewd minstrels of the female gender who keep tinkling their guitars all night under the friars' windows and warble filthy *modinhas*. I am quite ashamed of being in such favour with old women.¹²

Beckford stated a preference for St Anthony's shrine in Padua. He expressed his reservations about St. Antonio da Sé, the replacement for the church in Lisbon which had been destroyed by the earthquake in 1755:

I cannot say its edifice recalled to my mind the magnificent sanctuary of Padua, before which five years ago on this very day I so devoutly fell prostrate.¹³

Beckford felt utter contempt for St Anthony as a Portuguese puppet:

I blushed to see the well-grown, the majestic St. Anthony diminished to a prim little doll scarce three feet high in a robe of Indian taffety bedaubed with gold, and his celestial playfellow the *Menino* Jesus stuck out in a hoop petticoat with his hair in a bag, two rows of sausage curls and a toupee plastered and powdered.¹⁴

While Beckford attended mass on a bright new carpet spread by the Prior at the Antoine Convent, he was only too aware of 'all the blackguards in Lisbon with their wrinkled aunts and toothless grandmothers' and protested the need to keep his eyes 'lifted up inflexibly to the image of the saint, whose silver crown and glory shone bright with the reflection of flaming tapers.'¹⁵ Beckford recorded how his gaze established an instant unique relationship with the Saint in glory.

During December 1793 Beckford was back again in Portugal where he sketched out a house for himself in Lisbon, clearly designed to be a monument to the glory of his great patron:

... each room opened out into the next to allow an uninterrupted vista, which terminated in an apse beyond the Sanctuary steps, in which was to be a statue or picture of St. Anthony of Padua, illuminated by candelabra and hanging lamps of gilded bronze...¹⁶

In a letter to Sir William Hamilton during February 1794, Beckford noted with a rueful cynicism the main reason for his ongoing celebrity in Lisbon:

I am a pattern of sanctity, and have set St. Anthony a going again so effectually that the patriarch, the Inquisitor, and the Heads of religious houses stuff me with sweetmeats and smother me with caresses.¹⁷

Only in 1794, when the grand mass in honour of the Glorious One was celebrated in a Franciscan convent on the summit of a very high hill near Cadafaiz, did Beckford feel that he had shaken off the pharisaic gatherings beneath gilded vaults or gorgeous cupolas. He looked outwards from the church portal at the multitude who could not get into the small church: 'under Nature's own sky...man seems to commune more deeply with his God.'¹⁸

The idea of a house in honour of St. Anthony came to fruition not in Lisbon but at Fonthill. On the occasion of the visit to the partially built Fonthill Abbey on the night of 23 December 1800, the guests (including Nelson, Sir William and Emma Hamilton, and Benjamin West) were led upstairs after dinner to the south end of St Michael's Gallery:

They looked northwards up the gallery, their gaze led on by two long lines of golden candlesticks on ebony stands. There, at the far end, backed by scarlet curtains, was Rossi's statue of St. Anthony with the Infant Saviour in his arms. The shrine was loaded with jewelled reliquaries, and lit by many candlesticks and gilt candelabrae ... when the guests turned round, facing south to the great oriel plate-glass window ... the lights on the shrine were mirrored back a thousand times ... producing a magical effect.¹⁹

The guests were pointed to see both the aesthetic *tour de force* (like Beckford had first enjoyed at York Minster in 1779) and the devotional centre of Fonthill Abbey. Devotion to the Glorious One was further reinforced by Joseph Theakston's stone carving of the preaching St. Anthony above a pointed doorway and in West's *The Vision of St. Anthony receiving into his arms the Infant Christ* which hung in the Duchess's Dressing Room, off

the Lancaster staircase.²⁰

In 1807 Fonthill Splendens, the Palladian house with portico and wings rebuilt for his father in 1755, which served as background to West's portrait (c.1798) of his mother, was pulled down. Then only St. Anthony's Fonthill remained. St. Anthony worship in the daily life at Fonthill can be detected in the very candid correspondence with Franchi. Details include: the Saint's support at times of extreme rage, lofty scorn and unhappiness; the unbreakable vow to the Saint to stop building if deadlines were not met by architect and builders; hope for Portugal after the disastrous Convention of Cintra in 1808; gratitude for a safe passage during a bad storm while crossing the English Channel and heartfelt thanksgiving for the benign and powerful hand of the Glorious Protector at the feet of the saint which was the first object that met the eye in a church at Calais; the invisible and benign influence of the glorious Saint directing every step towards the recovery of the dog Caroline 'after that half-hour passed in the most intimate persuasion of a special protection.'²¹ At the point of departure from Fonthill, Beckford resolutely invoked the Saint:

The Saint who inspired me with the Abbey will also arm me with supernatural courage to do without it, and perhaps even to erect yet another monument to his glory.²²

Beckford's retreat to Bath in the wake of financial crisis did not prevent him from negotiating for a tract of land to make a wilderness to flower, and from planning an austere Italianate tower as a hilltop retreat which he commissioned from the young architect H.E. Goodridge.

Within the Lansdown Tower was fashioned a dim sanctuary for St. Anthony. Here Rossi's alabaster statue from Fonthill was set on Siena marble over the motto *Dominus Illuminatio Mea* at the end of a narrow passage-like room with no windows but lit from above by glass-covered openings. There were semi-circular New Testament pictures in the lanterned cupola: *Temptation in*

the Wilderness, The Annunciation and Christ's Agony in the Garden painted by Willes Maddox - Beckford's last shrine for the true life of devotion.²³

What then should one conclude about Beckford as devotee of the Glorious One? His recent biographers have all taken the important question beyond the banalities of citing St Anthony as lover of animals and infants and as a useful meal ticket in Lisbon. Boyd Alexander suggested somewhat impishly that Beckford's attitude to St Anthony was akin to the megalomania of Vathek's historical father, Motassem, who added 'the name of God to his own, the suffix Bi'llah meaning "he who is preserved and defended by the Grace of God"'. James Lees-Milne pounced on the aristocratic connection with Beckford's self-identification with St Anthony as the holy aristocrat who castigated an uncongenial society. Brian Fothergill concluded that the Saint was more than a mascot but less than a heavenly advocate and finally settled for a spiritual being there to assuage his mother's legacy of guilt. Malcolm Jack summarily ascribes most of Beckford's religious preoccupations to the theatrical pageantry of Catholicism and to his determination as a fidalgo not to be deprived of his fun in a ritualistically pious Lisbon. Doubtless all these suggestions have a grain of truth about Beckford in them but somehow lack a convincing explanation of his need for the real presence of a shrine for devotional worship in his households.²⁴

Beckford's most consistent and persistent focus was the Glorious One whose cult did not exhaust the depth of his religious impulses; the interest in the Book of Revelation as a source of apocalyptic vision and the invocation of St Bruno at the Grand Chartreuse as a turning point in his life remain to be more fully explored. The singular cult of St Anthony seems most akin to the Hindu worship known as *darshana* where the devotee glances repeatedly at the image of the saint or deity as a way of seeing the power which brings good fortune, grace of recovery

and spiritual wonder in a single moment.²⁵

This brief study indicates a few pointers as to the how and the why of Beckford's repeated glances at the Glorious One in various shrines.

¹ Boyd Alexander, *Life at Fonthill 1807-1822*, 1957, p. 289.

² William Beckford, *Biographical Memoirs of Extraordinary Painters*, 1780, p. 50.

³ William Beckford, *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents*, Ed. Robert J Gemmett, 1971, pp. 61-62.

⁴ *Dreams*, p. 67.

⁵ *Dreams*, p. 136.

⁶ *Dreams*, p. 144 ff.

⁷ James Lees-Milne, *William Beckford*, 1976, p. 27.

⁸ *Dreams*, p. 253.

⁹ Lees-Milne, *Beckford*, p. 27.

¹⁰ J.W. Oliver, *The Life of William Beckford*, 1932, p. 258.

¹¹ *The Journal of William Beckford in Portugal and Spain 1787-1788*, Ed. Boyd Alexander, 1954, Introduction, pp. 14-15.

¹² *Journal* p. 71.

¹³ *Journal* p. 77.

¹⁴ *Journal* p. 81.

¹⁵ *Journal* p. 225.

¹⁶ Boyd Alexander, *England's Wealthiest Son*, 1962, pp. 160-161. Beckford's plan for his Lisbon house is reproduced opposite p. 118.

¹⁷ Brian Fothergill, *Beckford of Fonthill*, 1979, p. 229.

¹⁸ William Beckford, *Recollections of an Excursion to the Monasteries of Alcobaça and Batalha*, 1835, pp. 181-195 ('The Eleventh Day').

¹⁹ *England's Wealthiest Son*, pp. 162-163.

²⁰ Lees-Milne, p. 60. James Storer, *A Description of Fonthill Abbey, Wiltshire*, 1812, p. 20. Helmut von Erffa & Allen Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, 1986, p. 402.

²¹ *Life at Fonthill*, pp. 58 & 101, 64-65, 79, 159, 287-288 and 312.

²² *Life at Fonthill*, p. 338

²³ Edmund English, *Views of Lansdown Tower, Bath*, 1844, p. 7.

²⁴ *England's Wealthiest Son*, pp. 48-49, 91. Lees-Milne, p. 120. Fothergill, p. 229. Malcolm Jack, *William Beckford: An English Fidalgo*, 1997, p. 63.

²⁵ For a scholarly explanation of *darshana* see C.J. Fuller, *The Camphor Flame*, 1992, pp. 59-60 and *passim*.

Monsserrate: Beckford's Second Sintra House

MALCOLM JACK

Beckford's love of Sintra was already evident in 1787 when he spent idyllic summer days at the *quinta* of Ramalhão in the foothills of the *serra* or mountain range. We have seen how he made solitary excursions through the lush valley of Colares, with its vineyards and olive groves or visited the austere Cork convent, all but buried in pine and ivy.¹ In more sociable mood, he could visit the Marialvas at S. Pedro or the Gildemeesters at Seteais. Thomas Horne at his Quinta do Relógio was not far away either. After Beckford had returned to England and knowing his delight with these social benefits as well as with the Arcadian setting of Sintra, the Marquis of Marialva tried to lure him back to Portugal by telling him, in a letter of 1788, that Ramalhão was up for sale. Dom Pedro, Marialva's son, sent an engraving of the house to add icing to the cake.² Apparently this southern attempt at seduction did not succeed for the English *fidalgo* did not respond.

When Beckford did eventually return to Portugal, in November 1793, he took up residence once more in the Rua Cova da Moura at the house which his agent, Thomas Horne, had rented for him in 1787. This time Beckford had grand designs for re-doing the house in a suite of apartments which Boyd Alexander identifies as a precursor of one of Fonthill Abbey's great wings.³ While work on the house was being done, Beckford took up residence in a villa at Ribamar on the coast. It is the scene from this house, with its magnificent view of the Tagus, that is so vividly painted at the beginning of his *Recollections of an Excursion to the Monasteries of Alcobaça and Batalha*. However, although the nearby valley of Alcántara offered a fine area to ride about, Sintra's special appeal soon began to tempt him once again. In 1795, the *quinta* of Monsserrate, owned by the

English merchant Gerard de Visme, came up for rent.

Like Ramalhão, Monserrate had a long history which is also charmingly captured in a book by Francisco Costa.⁴ He tells us that in 1540 a chapel was erected by one Gaspar Preto who was influenced in his choice of name by an image of Our Lady of Monserrate in Catalonia. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, a *quinta* had been built by the family of Mello e Castro who had become the owners of the site. One of this tribe, with the flowery name of Dona Francisca Xavier Marianna de Faro Mello e Castro (a connection with the great Jesuit missionary saint and Goa showing in her name) sold the house to Gerard de Visme.⁵ From contemporary eighteenth-century engravings we can see that Monserrate was built in mock-Gothic style, the long front facade interrupted by a central tower, with two turrets at each end embellished with angular, tapering windows and capped by pointed roofs. Its castellated front lent it a feigned medieval appearance perhaps suited to the retreat of an English gentleman like de Visme who sought to escape from the bustle of Lisbon. According to Cyrus Redding, Beckford later described the house as being 'barbarous Gothic'⁶ and he was not amused by Byron's mocking description of it as a ruin in *Childe Harold*.⁷ Nevertheless he seems to have liked it enough to take on a long lease, returning to live there on his third visit to Portugal in 1798.

The most evocative description of the house was given years later by an itinerant English lady, Mariana Baille in 1821.⁸ Although by then Monserrate was completely in ruins, she describes it as an English villa with elegant apartments, one in the classical style with fine mirrors and precious crystal-encased doors. There was a spacious central room which opened out on to the lawn where rare shrubs and flower beds reflected the interior design. In another room with a rotund cupola one could practice echoes, an authentic Beckfordian contrivance.⁹

The setting of Monserrate was idyllic. Sunk somewhat in the lush valley, the house itself had been built on a mound. Beyond it

towered the craggy heights of the Sintra hills, capped by the ancient Moorish castle. All around were rolling vales giving panoramas in all directions. In this setting Beckford conducted his experiments in landscape gardening, trying to integrate a total picture of a natural setting which was improved but not overwhelmed by human cultivation. Vistas were opened by clearing thickets and brambles so that trees could extend their branches unrestricted. Straight lines and the formality of Continental gardening were avoided; the rolling hills and dips were used to emphasise the shape of trees. Cultivated areas were left to merge 'naturally' into wilder ones. Wherever possible shrub and trees native to the area were cultivated.

In these experiments Beckford carried on the English tradition of landscape gardening which can be traced back to Sir William Temple¹⁰ and which was confirmed in Horace Walpole's *History of the Modern Taste in Gardening*. Walpole confidently dismissed the French or Italian penchant for formal terraces and raised waterfalls. Instead a more subtle art had to be developed; classical, Claudian scenes had been 'interpreted' by William Kent at Rousham and by Charles Hamilton, Beckford's uncle, at Painshill. Monserrate was the ideal location to try out these ideas; the irregularity of the setting and its sense of ancient feeling could be intensified by the provision of temples or ruined walls, usually near running water and with a view, perhaps, of the house or one of its turrets. From the terraces of the house vistas could be opened out so that a distant ruin or folly came in sight. All about nature abounded; the glades and paths provided endless tours of visual joy.

Beckford's lengthy stays at Monserrate and the scale of his landscape gardening suggest that he was settled and content with life there whatever reservations he may have had about the house. We can imagine that, in his usual way, he imported furniture, books and *objets d'art* from England to embellish his surroundings. Alas he left no written record of these times but

walking about the grounds now, we seem to sense a growing reclusiveness on the part of its one time princely occupant.¹¹

¹ Malcolm Jack, 'Ramalhão: Beckford's First Sintra House', *Beckford Journal*, 3 (Spring 1997), pp. 20-24.

² MS. Beckford c.24. Bodleian Library, Oxford.

³ Boyd Alexander, *England's Wealthiest Son*, 1962, p. 160.

⁴ See Francisco Costa, *História da Quinta e Palácio de Monserrate*, Sintra, 1985.

⁵ Costa, p. 9.

⁶ Cyrus Redding, *Memoirs of William Beckford of Fonthill*. 2 vols., 1859. Vol. 1, p. 279.

⁷ Lord Byron, *Poetical Works*. Oxford, 1979, p. 74.

⁸ Costa, p. 28.

⁹ Costa, p. 28.

¹⁰ See Malcolm Jack, *William Beckford: An English Fidalgo*, 1996, p. 116ff.

¹¹ The present house at Monserrate, in the flamboyant Moghul style, was built by another Englishman, Francis Cook, who became a Portuguese viscount and who enjoyed many years of residence (and patronage of public works in Sintra) in the nineteenth century. The gardens are now cared for by the Association of Friends of Monserrate.

Grottoes and Grotesques: The Art of Portraiture in Beckford's Writing¹

LAURENT CHÂTEL

One must not, however, decide too hastily upon outward appearances. (Beckford, *Sketches of Spain and Portugal*)²

Portraits in fiction - the object of the series of talks given in a seminar at the Sorbonne University- refer both to the description of actual portraits (*ekphrasis*³) and the creation of portraits in words (*prosopopeia*⁴). Although portraits in words follow a tradition and pattern of their own (the seventeenth century is particularly well-known for literary portraits), the pictorial

tradition should not be omitted; Fabienne Bercegol's recent study of portraits in Chateaubriand's *oeuvre* shows that a 'memoir' or a 'character' in fiction is not necessarily a portrait.⁵ She might have added that few writers display a flair for visual or pictorial effects; the portraits they pen are not always *images*, but tend rather to be the moral study of a character (*ethopeia*).⁶ Too often literary critics use the word 'portrait' for 'memoir'; for instance, they speak of Rousseau's self-portraits, although his prose presents the story of his mind or heart, not the features of his face. Similarly one reads occasional references to Beckford's imaginary portraits (a confusion perhaps with Walter Pater's *Imaginary Portraits*), when in fact the appropriate term should be 'biographical memoir' or 'Life of the artist'. A literary portrait ought to contain the physical features of the person in a few words or lines. Therefore, the type of visual likeness represented by a writer is best defined by rhetorics *and* art history. The three main questions raised in this paper are: in which kind of portraits did Beckford excel? what was the ideal location of his portraits? which pictorial traditions in contemporary European portraiture most inspired him?

The view still prevails that Beckford was a high-handed aristocrat who wrote about himself mawkishly and in a bombastic, stilted style.⁷ The portraits we have of him certainly indicate an air of presumptuousness: Beckford as a child, attributed once to Nathaniel Dance and to Casali, today to William Hoare (1706-1792) [Mrs Lovett West, New York], the full length portrait by Romney (1734-1802) [National Trust, ex Bearsted Collection, Upton House, Warwicks], and the portraits by Reynolds (1723-1792) [National Portrait Gallery, London] and John Hoppner (1758-1810) [City Art Gallery, Salford, Lancs].⁸

It is tempting to infer from this that his *literary* portraits fall into the category of aristocratic portraits in the style of Reynolds, Romney or Gainsborough. In fact, for a long time his prose has been misread, or unread; the opinion conjured up by his

personality - that largely of an aloof, egotistical and pompous man - has been applied to his writings, causing a confusion between the man and his prose. This explains most of the prejudices against Beckford's aesthetic achievements.

It should come as no surprise to a reader familiar with Beckford that, despite his, at times, insufferable snobbishness and his fascination for the royal courts of Spain and Portugal, few aristocratic portraits are to be found in his literary works, in contrast to his French counterpart François-René de Chateaubriand (1768-1848) whose *Mémoires d'Outre Tombe* are a gallery of contemporary portraits of the upper class. One striking portrait in the high art tradition is this scene in Portugal as described by Beckford:

The curtains of the door of an adjoining dark apartment being half drawn gave me a transient glimpse of Donna Henriquetta de L---, Don Pedro's sister, advancing one moment and retiring the next, eager to approach and examine us exotic beings, but not venturing to enter the saloon during her mother's absence. She appeared to me a most interesting girl, with eyes full of bewitching languor, - but of what do I talk? I only saw her pale and evanescent, as one fancies one sees objects in a dream. A group of lovely children (her sisters, I believe) sat at her feet upon the ground, resembling genii partially concealed by folds of drapery in some grand allegorical picture by Rubens or Paul Veronese.⁹

Another type of portrait one might have expected is the living portrait which is so often found in gothic tales; in Walpole, Ann Radcliffe and Edgar Allan Poe, figures have been known to step out of their frame or to have an eerie influence over characters. The rather hasty association between Beckford and the gothic vein is again largely responsible for common mistakes about his work; in his oriental tales, the castles, corridors and towers are not so much the seats of fear and *frisson* as the locus of extraordinarily beautiful or ugly incidents, and no living portraits

are to be found. The magic power of portraits is used as a device just once, in one of *The Episodes of Vathek*, where a portrait does trigger a story: Alasi falls in love with Firouz when he sees a miniature portrait of Firouzka, his sister (in fact Firouz and Firouzka are all one)¹⁰ and Firouz(ka) falls in love with Alasi on the sight of his portrait.¹¹ Gérard Genette recently drew attention to the tradition of love at first sight caused by an image.¹² Leaving aside the Shakespearian play on the sexual ambiguity of the characters, the purpose of this iconic inscription in the *Episodes* is to highlight the fallacy of appearances and the interplay between the real and the unreal.

One final deviation from tradition is the lack of description of portraits (*ekphrasis*) in Beckford's travel diaries, which is surprising, considering he was a Grand Tourist who frequented the right circles as well as the art galleries of Venice, Naples, Lisbon and Madrid. Beckford's first publication, the *Biographical Memoirs* (1780), was already a subversion in that respect, since he shied away from commenting technically on pictures, a feature generally unavoidable in the 'Life of the artist'. His almost total disregard for pictures is taken a stage further in the travel diaries; he perversely derided the genre of the tourist's diary, which tended to petrify and desiccate art, and revealed his greater inclination to see a painting come alive under his eyes than to describe its intrinsic merits. On visiting the Prado in Madrid, he stares at a Raphael and, ignoring the frame, takes the picture to be life: 'I stood fixed in the contemplation of this holy vision - for such I almost fancied it to be'.¹³

If, as tradition has it, painting was born out of love in the form of a *portrait* - Dibutades, who painted her lover's portrait, is the allegory of the birth of painting¹⁴ - Beckford's portraits go against the grain for they are the fruit of solitude and anguish. Wright of Derby, Alexander Runciman and David Allan painted and engraved works representing Dibutades between 1771 and 1785; they show a lady tracing the shadow which her lover's

profile casts on a wall under the effect of candlelight - a 'beau geste' representing a beautiful face. Although Beckford's works also represent shadows, these are fantasies and phantasmagoria, phantoms of absent beings, which anguish brings up out of infinite spaces. Whereas Dibutades can base her drawing on a concrete form, it is as if Beckford's characters found it difficult to form what they see. The result of this optical deficiency or malformation is a number of deformed faces, or anamorphoses¹⁵, as is best illustrated by Vathek's impotent eye; for although it can kill, as the frontispiece reminds us, the tale is a long series of optical failures; to see or not to see, that is the Beckfordian question. Averse to the myth of verisimilitude and 'good likeness' that underlies the idea of a 'portrait', Beckford did away with the sitter and felt free to invent; the figure dissolved and the portrait often became grotesque. This kind of portrait was not motivated by a liking for ugliness; Beckford was committed to beauty and his aesthetic creations testify to his taste. It reveals, however, a fascination with evil lurking beneath the surface of beauty and for beauty lurking beneath evil (think of Eblis). More generally, it indicates his fascination with metamorphosis. In search of the Sublime - rather than the Picturesque, as is too often assumed - Beckford causes surfaces to be metamorphosed.

The freedom Beckford sought with figures is akin to the artistic licence of the grotesque, sometimes written 'grotesque' or *grottesca* ('anticke or landskip worke of Painters'). The art historian André Chastel, who insisted on using its original feminine gender (*la grottesque*), wrote a history of 'grotesques' and presented it as *the* creative spirit behind every alternative, eccentric art form from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. Historians have assumed that the etymological sense of *grottesca* - 'painting appropriate to grottoes' - derives from the name given to mural paintings (foliage combined fantastically with figures) found in the ancient chambers in Rome (called 'grottoes') which

were revealed by excavations in the Renaissance. The 'grotesque' is characterised by an odd mixture of elements which are striking by their airy freedom and comic aspect. Vasari saw something necromantic, perverse and diabolical in these grotesques.¹⁶ No doubt Beckford felt the same; he certainly enjoyed this kind of art, as several of his letters from Italy testify; in his Venetian hotel the lofty hall was 'painted with grotesque in a very good style',¹⁷ in Petrarch's house, 'the ceiling is painted in a grotesque manner',¹⁸ and in Mantua the 'grotesque, with which the stucco ceilings are covered, equal the celebrated loggios of the Vatican':

I don't recollect ever having seen these elegant designs engraven, and believe it would be perfectly worth the pains of some capital artist to copy them. Being in fresco upon damp neglected walls, each year diminishes their number, and every winter moulders some beautiful figure away.¹⁹

Although the subterranean location is fortuitous, the association between grotesques, *underground*, subversion and artistic licence has given birth to a long line of creations. William Beckford deserves to be included in this history, owing to his predilection for subversion and the underground. In search of the Sublime, he was equally drawn to its opposite, the Abyss or, as Pope put it in *Peri Bathous* (1728), 'the gentle downhill way to the *Bathos*'.²⁰ It is as if he took Pope's recipe of the 'true Genius of the Profound' *literally* ('au pied de la lettre'):

His business must be to contract the true *goût de travers*; and to acquire a most *happy, uncommon, unaccountable way of thinking*. He is to consider himself as a *grotesque painter*, whose works would be spoiled by an imitation of nature, or uniformity of design. He is to mingle bits of the most various, or discordant kinds, landscape, history, portraits, animals, and connect them with a great deal of *flourishing*, by *heads or tails*, as it shall please his imagination.²¹

Inured to grotesque landscapes, Beckford's subversive eye explored the flesh of beings, above and beneath; alongside the land turned upside down (grottoes) is to be found flesh turned over (grotesque). While discovering the genius of the place, Beckford often came upon the genius of the face.

It is revealing that the eighteenth century in Britain saw the growing place of the art of landscape; the landscape behind the figure gave way to the figure in the landscape. Having slowly invaded the space of portraits, landscapes, as projections of the self unto Nature, *became* portraits. In Beckford's case, the various links between landscapes (particularly grottoes) and portraits are a fruitful means to appreciate his imaginary constructs.

The *I* of autobiographies, and the *Eye* of self-portraits

The first section of this article showed that the narcissism, paranoia and melancholy that pervade Beckford's works point to affinities with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's autobiographical style; indeed Romney's portrait, although showing Beckford standing, recalls Titschbein's portrait of Goethe in the Roman Campagna and Wright of Derby's portrait of Brooke Boothby, the guardian of some of Rousseau's manuscripts. These three paintings are suffused with the vapours of Melancholy which Richard Burton had 'anatomised' in 1621. However, neither Rousseau nor Beckford (who probably read the *Rêveries d'un Promeneur solitaire*, although no reference is found either in his papers or in his library) describe their features; self-representation is more about the vagaries of the *I*. The only form of self-portrait which it is legitimate to identify in Beckford's autobiographical writings is his self-dramatisation when he represents his eye immersed in a landscape. Such a drama of the *Eye* in the surrounding landscape may truly be styled a self-portrait. Quotations from his 'literary epistles' to Alexander Cozens and *The Long Story* demonstrate the fusion of the self with the chasms, gulfs and

cataracts with which Beckford identified. His literary works are contemporary with the evolution of the art of landscape from *paysage moralisé* to the spiritual watercolours of the end of the eighteenth century, as can be seen in John Robert Cozens in Britain and Caspar David Friedrich in Germany. Joseph Leo Koerner's idea that Friedrich's landscapes are a translation of his earlier portraits, as if the genius of the face had been displaced by the genius of the place, is particularly apposite here:

For in place of self-portraiture as the representation of the artist's physical person, Friedrich proposes a more totalizing and reflexive project: the whole of represented nature will appear as the picture of the artist's inner experience of self and world ... In the early self-portraits of 1800, 1802 and especially 1810, Friedrich struggled to depict what is most elusive in the human face: the active eye as mediator of the inner self. It was in landscape painting, however, that the artist discovered a *via negativa* to this end. Turning first away from the viewer, then replacing his person with a surrogate, and finally absorbing himself into the substance of his paintings, Friedrich depicts his gaze for what it is *to him*: not something seen, but that which sees ... All of Friedrich's paintings, whether of self or nature or history or the politics of the emergent German state, aim at 'self' portraiture.²²

Beckford liked so much to forget his self in nature that he wished he could escape and be turned into a bird, or fancied himself a deer - the reader being faced, then, with one of the first 'grotesques' of Beckford's works.

Dissection and dismemberment in grottoes: Beckford's use of portraiture

This second section analyses Beckford's attack on the idea of a slavishly true likeness. He parodied the art of portraiture in his *Biographical Memoirs* in a variety of ways; first by inventing 'lives' without providing an accompanying 'portrait', and secondly by mocking finicky portraitists unduly worried about

their subject-matter. Francis Haskell's study of portrait anthologies and 'Lives of the artist'²³ sheds light on Beckford's facetious dismissal of the engraved portraits which were traditionally used as authentic illustrations to the 'lives', however unreliable the picture of the man in question.²⁴ Beckford chose not to illustrate his book, although Bartolozzi could have been employed to engrave 'imaginary portraits', as indeed was done for *Dreams* in 1782-3. In doing away with the accompanying medal-shaped portraits, Beckford was attacking the pretence of a tradition that claimed to show the originals when, in fact, they unashamedly told lies (the images did not always correspond to the figures). It is as if he drew our attention to the greater originality of blatant lies, for *his* invention of lives and artists was more authentic and powerful than supposedly true likenesses. His parody of portraits extends much further; Insignificanti in 'Sucrewasser of Vienna' represents the meticulous portrait painter who, in his obsession with details, fails to capture the true genius of the face, whereas Blunderbussiana, inured to the ghastly sights of his father's combats in caves, takes to dismembering bodies. The ideal portraits in the *Memoirs* are the products of the dissections that take place in subterranean chambers for the sake of anatomical studies; the true grotesque is indeed best found in the grottoes:

In the spring he used early in the morning to quit his cave, and frequently trussing a body over his shoulders, repaired to a wood, and delighted himself in exploring it. Instead of carrying with him, in his walks, a nice pocket edition of some Elzevir classic, he never was without a leg or an arm, which he went slicing along, and generally accompanied his operations with a melodious whistling, for he was of a chearful disposition, and, if he had had a different education, would have been an ornament to society.²⁵

There is a portrait of the artist Blunderbussiana, which readers have often compared to Salvator Rosa; his own face bears the

marks of the landscape:

When he reached the borders of cultivation, his savage mien and the barbarous roll of his eyes, frightened every villager that beheld him; and so strange was his appearance, that some said he could be nothing but the Antichrist, and others believed him to be the Wandering Jew.²⁶

One is left musing over David d'Angers's thought when he saw Caspar David Friedrich's own self-portraits: 'Voilà un homme qui a découvert la tragédie du paysage'.

'Grottesques': metamorphosed figures or phantasmagoria in the grottoes

This third section deals with the figures which emerge from grottoes, with particular reference to *The Long Story*. The odd, 'grotesque', mixture generally confined to a frieze on a wall here becomes the central focus of the tale. Alongside beautiful Nouronihar, flowing underground, ethereal and free, with Blakean agility, are to be found grotesque effusions, deformed and elongated characters - a phantasmagoric cinematic show. The initiation rites undergone by the narrator cause a metamorphosis that betrays the possible influence on Beckford of mesmerism, electricity and magnetism, which he would have brought to bear on the artistic interest in the human face that Alexander Cozens, Lavater and Jean Huber, the 'Swiss Hogarth', had imparted to him (it is worth remembering that Cozens's *Principles of Beauty relative to the Human Head* (1778) is one of the rare volumes where Beckford appears as a subscriber).

The devil's laughter and the grotesque

Following André Chastel's declensions of the grotesque throughout its history, his paper then turned to more modern forms of the spirit of the 'grotesque', emancipated from the universe of grottoes. This fourth section investigates the art of caricature displayed in *Vathek*, while pointing to affinities with

Hogarth (whom Beckford's father patronised) and Huber (the celebrated cut-outs or *découpages* of Voltaire have tended to conceal his skills as a landscapist and caricaturist), as well as the works of Fielding. The use of a crisp and terse French in *Vathek* is instrumental in encapsulating the essence of a character; but the Voltairian style of taking traits literally ('au pied de la lettre') also accounts for the comic visual effects. The one-eyed, almost Cyclopean Vathek, the crowd holding one foot in the air in pursuit of the foreigner and the portrait of the Giaour laughing demoniacally throughout the text, are examined in detail. Because Beckford's literary *oeuvre* is too often artificially divided into oriental tales / travel diaries / satirical works, his skills for visual caricature across the board are forgotten: the oysterish, watery look of the Dutch being one obvious case. Although Lavater and Alexander Cozens were interested in physiognomy or the divination of features,²⁷ Beckford's prose does not display a systematic reading of faces.

In the grotto: the genus loci, or the face of horror

This final section studies one last interaction between landscapes and faces; the *Episodes* and *Suite de contes arabes* show that Beckford was led to examine with equal glee the bowels of the earth and the entrails of the body. Although a copy of Hogarth's *The Analysis of Beauty* cannot be found in his library, it is worth pointing to its well-known concept of the *serpentine line*, exemplified by two accompanying plates (which Beckford did own). Beckford certainly shared with Hogarth a liking for the twists and turns of the face. A few grottoes seem to lend their inhabitants the *underground* quality of their own surface; one grotto in particular even seems to be a portrait:

In the portion of the temple where we stood, the walls were hung with human hair of every colour; and, from space to space, human hair hung also in festoons from pyramids of skulls chased in gold and ebony.²⁸

This paper ends on the pictorial principles that closely relate to Beckford's literary portraits, while recalling his taste for Cruikshank (as testified by his letters to his bookseller, Clarke) and Beckford's own little 'grotesques' in the margins of newspaper cuttings, drafts and correspondence. Taking his name literally, he even produced a pithy self-caricature;²⁹ a Bec fort also alluded to the crest of his coat of arms, the heron's head.

¹ This is a summary of a paper given in Paris in 1997 at the Sorbonne University, published as 'Grottes et grotesques: le génie du lieu et le génie du visage chez William Beckford (1760-1844) - une étude de la caricature dans ses rapports avec l'art du paysage' in *Sillages critiques*, ed. Pierre Arnaud (Paris: Presses Universitaires de Paris- Sorbonne, 1998).

² *The Travel-Diaries of William Beckford of Fonthill*, ed. Guy Chapman, 1928. Vol. 2, *Sketches of Spain & Portugal etc.*, p. 29.

³ A vivid description of an object the reader cannot see.

⁴ The art of evoking the appearance of a person.

⁵ Fabienne Bercegol, *La Poétique de Chateaubriand: le portrait dans les 'Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe'*, 1997.

⁶ The moral dimension of a person.

⁷ I have previously quoted Anthony Blunt's disparaging remarks on the gushing, sentimental style of Beckford's *Dreams* in my 'Kaleidoscopic Senses: Landscape Writing and the Art of Chiaroscuro in William Beckford (1760-1844)', *Interfaces* 9 (February 1996), p. 125.

⁸ Philip Ward reproduces three of them (but not the Reynolds) in his edition of *Biographical Memoirs of Extraordinary Painters* (1977). Although this edition does not contain any critical apparatus, it is the facsimile of the first edition and is still in print; all subsequent quotations are from this edition.

⁹ *Sketches of Spain & Portugal*, pp. 29-30.

¹⁰ 'Yes, King of Kharezme,' replied the Prince of Shirvan; 'you have here indeed the portrait of my twin sister, Firouzkah.' In *The Episodes of Vathek*, ed. Malcolm Jack (1994), p. 39.

¹¹ 'The Princess of Shirvan had just reached the age of fourteen, when the Dive of Ghulfaquair, being maliciously inclined, brought her your portrait. From that moment she seemed to lose her natural gaiety of spirits, did nothing but dream and sigh, and, as may be supposed, gave us great anxiety.', *The Episodes*, p. 48

¹² Le thème, historique ou fictionnel, du coup de foudre sur portrait, typique-

ment *at first sight*, est évidemment universel; on en a par exemple attribué le fait à Richard II pour Isabelle de France, à Charles VI pour Isabeau de Bavière, à Philippe le Bon pour quelque princesse portugaise [Huizinga, *Le Déclin du Moyen-Age*, trad. Fr. De J. Bastin, (1932), p. 307]; 'mais on est ici, sans doute, au plus près du choix, matrimonial ou autre, d'une élue sur catalogue illustré' in Gérard Genette, *L'oeuvre de l'art ** La relation esthétique* (1997), p. 22n.

¹³ *Sketches of Spain and Portugal*, p. 224.

¹⁴ See Robert Rosenblum, 'The Origin of Painting: A Problem in the Iconography of Romantic Classicism', *Art Bulletin* XXXIX no. 4 (1966), pp 279-290: 'Knowing that her lover was to leave the country, she traced the shadow that her lover's face cast upon the wall by lamp-light.'

¹⁵ Anamorphoses are deformed images which can only be deciphered when viewed obliquely or thanks to a curved mirror, as the present exhibition of Holbein's *The Ambassadors* (The National Gallery, London, *Making and Meaning* series) showed. See Jurgis Baltrusaitis, *Anamorphoses - Les perspectives dépravées - II*, (1984), Paris, 1996.

¹⁶ André Chastel, *La Grottesque*, 1988, pp. 25-30.

¹⁷ *The Travel-Diaries of William Beckford of Fonthill*, ed. Guy Chapman, 1928. Vol. 1, *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents*, p. 80.

¹⁸ *Dreams*, p. 118.

¹⁹ *Dreams*, p. 130.

²⁰ Alexander Pope, *A Critical Edition of the Major Works*, ed. Pat Rogers, 1993, p. 196.

²¹ Pope, p. 201.

²² Joseph Leo Koerner, *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape*, 1990, pp. 74, 76.

²³ Francis Haskell, *History and Its Images*, 1993, most particularly Part 1, Chapter 2, 'Portraits from the Past'.

²⁴ Beckford's library contained several portrait anthologies. See, for instance, the 1808 sale, lots 274 and 307; the 1817 sale, lots 60 and 297; the 1823 sale, lots 23, 880, 994, 1131, 1484, 1704, 1750, 2172 and 3037, which include copies of Van Gool and Houbraken.

²⁵ *Biographical Memoirs*, pp. 110-111.

²⁶ *Biographical Memoirs*, p. 112.

²⁷ See K.J.H. Berland, 'Reading Character in the Face: Lavater, Socrates and Physiognomy', *Word and Image* 9 (July-Sept 1993), pp 252-260.

²⁸ *The Episodes*, p. 52.

²⁹ Reproduced in Boyd Alexander, *England's Wealthiest Son*, 1962, opposite p. 39.

A Transient Gleam

JON MILLINGTON

When choosing the poems for Devendra Varma's *The Transient Gleam: A Bouquet of Beckford's Poesy* (1991), I realised that inevitably more would come to light. This happened when I came across the sonnet below in the *Eddington - Knoyle* volume (MS 817/7) of the Jackson Wiltshire Collection. Fonthill occupies four pages (40v - 42r) and the sonnet is from fol.41r. Over many years John Edward Jackson (1805-1891) assembled fourteen folio volumes of cuttings which in 1892 were added to the library of the Society of Antiquaries of London. The sonnet, published here by their kind permission, is signed M.J. and dated 1822 in the same hand. It appears to be a cutting from a contemporary journal:

FONTHILL, - A SONNET

Upraised as by a wizzard's powerful spell,
Or like the fitful scenery of a dream,
Far on the eye the towers of Fonthill gleam,
While memory wakes the ancient minstrel's shell.
Borne on the breeze now choral anthems swell,
Now fancy scenes of long past years will frame,
Scenes swept away by Time's devouring stream,
Which crush'd the monkish fane and hermit's cell.
Yes, they have vanish'd; but this gothic pile,
With magic power, the mental eye inspires
To trace long trains, amid the vaulted aisle,
Of holy monks and red-cross knights and friars;
To raise the spirit of those days of yore
When steel-clad warriors strove on Judah's shore.

The Fonthill Barrier

ANDRÉE RUSHTON

James Lees-Milne's biography of William Beckford describes a wall he built in 1793 to enclose part of his estate. It seemed to stand for Beckford's relationship with the outside world. With growing curiosity, I consulted such biographies as I could obtain for more information about it. Brian Fothergill caused my hopes to rise by calling a chapter of his *Beckford of Fonthill* 'The Wall', but in fact he says little about it.

The wall was built a few years before Fonthill Abbey, although by 1793 Beckford had in mind the construction of a Gothic building. James Lees-Milne notes how Beckford, who disliked hunting, became enraged one day by meeting a pack of hounds hunting on his land. With characteristic impatience and presumably no thought of cost, he ordered the wall to be built within twelve months. It also emphasised the retreat he was forced to make from a world which had shunned a man accused of homosexual behaviour. It became known as the Barrier. Within its boundaries wild animals lived untroubled by hunters, and Beckford was able to indulge his love of planting and gardening, avoiding formality which did not attract him, in favour of a flowering wilderness.

The wall had six gateways, all with names: Jenny's Corner Gate, Lower Street Gate, Stone Gate, West Gate, South End Gate and Birch Boll Gate. All accounts I have read agree that it was an imposing twelve feet high. Every gate was guarded and, as if its height was not enough to deter intruders, the wall had spikes along the top. Estimates of its length seemed to vary from three to twelve miles, as if the length had grown in the telling.

Apparently the only illustration of the wall is that in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for April 1801 to accompany a description of Nelson's reception at Fonthill in December 1800.

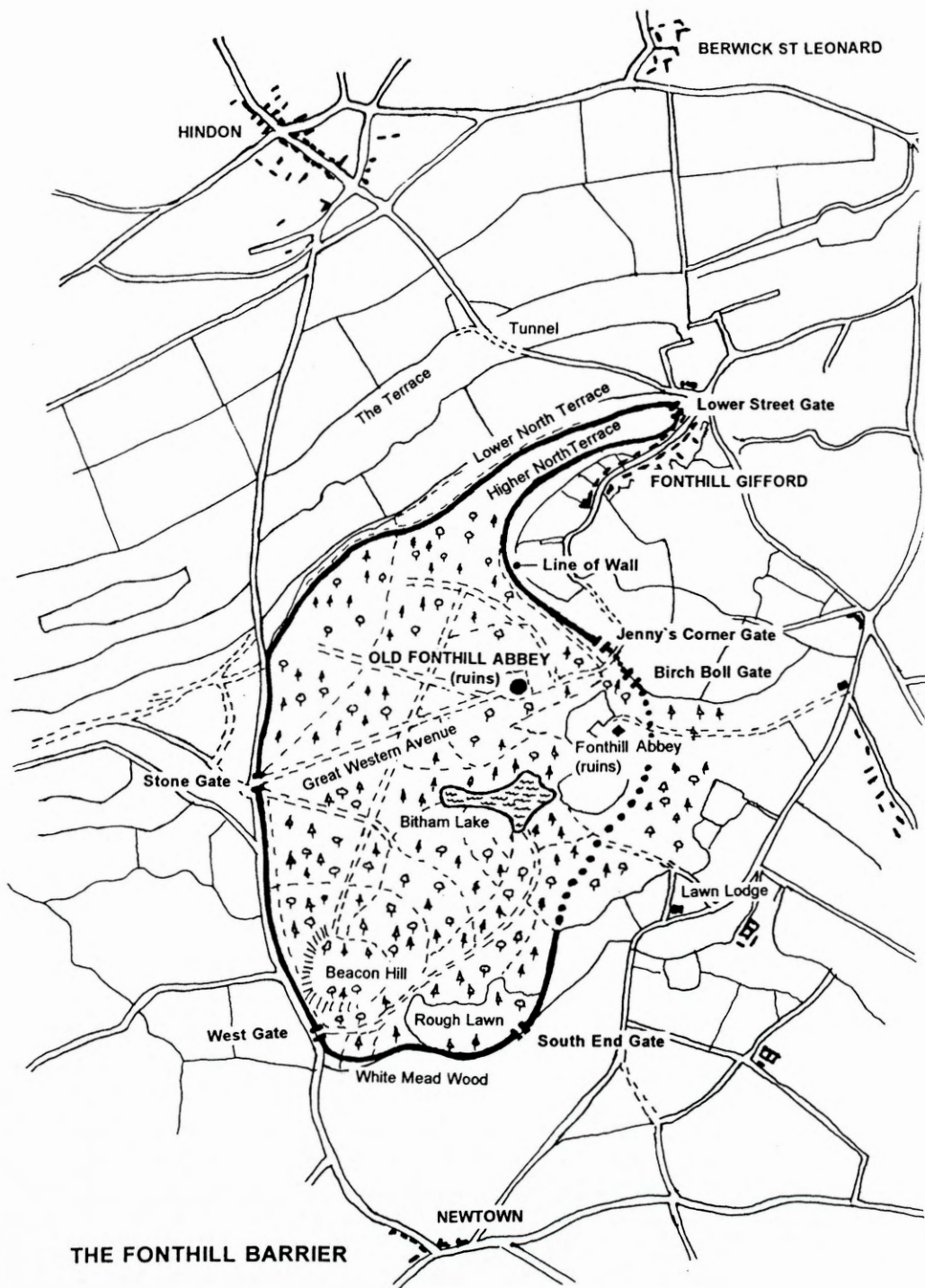
Carriages are shown entering an enormous battlemented gateway in a night-time scene lit only by the moon and by flaming torches. With the aid of artistic licence, because the wall was nowhere close to it, the Abbey tower can just be seen rising up to the top of the engraving. In his *Graphical and Literary Illustrations of Fonthill Abbey* John Britton describes the wall as being finished with a projecting railing, so the battlements in the engraving might also have been a product of the artist's imagination or just an embattled arch erected in the grounds especially for Nelson's visit.

The next step was to find out whether the wall was still in existence. As part of Fonthill Abbey remained, it seemed possible that at least some of the wall had also survived. The Ordnance Survey Pathfinder map does not identify the wall explicitly. But, by using that with Denys Baker's map of the Fonthill estate in Beckford's time in James Lees-Milne's *William Beckford*, Rob Dark (who drew the map illustrated here) and I found it possible to trace much of the wall's course. We estimated its true length to be about five miles.

We decided to see if the wall still existed. We knew that the estate is private property but, according to the Pathfinder map, much of the wall would border roads, so we assumed that our curiosity about whether or not it existed would be at least partly satisfied.

Beginning in the village of Fonthill Gifford, we walked towards the estate and followed the surfaced road which soon becomes a bridle path. It was not long before we came across the gateway which we assumed was Jenny's Corner Gate in the woods above the village. Was Jenny the old woman who tried to keep out William Bankes on the day he decided to visit Fonthill Abbey? His story of being undeterred by a refusal to allow him to enter and so climbing the wall to gain entrance to the forbidden estate appeared in the *Beckford Journal*, 1 (Spring 1995).

On the left side of Jenny's Corner Gate, facing the estate, only



THE FONTHILL BARRIER

a few stones remained. Here and there on the ground not far away were a few more stones littered around to hint that the wall had once stood there. However, on the right there was a wall, no longer twelve feet high but only three or four, so there were no spikes and, of course, no guards. We had to put our imaginations to work to reconstruct it, but we were fairly certain that we were looking at what remains of William Beckford's wall. It seemed in good repair at this point and was constructed of well-cut plain facing blocks of local limestone which fitted together without mortar.

Standing on the path, we could see the wall veering into the woods, then turning to border the grass behind the houses there, running parallel to the path as it became a surfaced road on its way into the village. The wall was of an even height of three or four feet for a reasonably long stretch, following Higher North Terrace. It then turned right and came down to the village cross-roads.

We walked back down into the village to meet the wall. It rose to a height of about eight feet as it bordered the road from Fonthill Gifford to Hindon for a few yards. It was clearly serving a purpose as a border to the road, and indeed it seemed so ordinary that the casual passer-by may hardly give it a glance, as we had not done previously. There was a small dip which is part of the road's drainage where the wall seemed to be holding back the bank, near what Denys Baker's map suggests would have been the site of Lower Street Gate. The wall then almost doubled back on itself and, leaving the road, disappeared into the woods, following Lower North Terrace.

Once in the woods, the wall quickly deteriorated to a ruinous condition. In many places the facing stones had disappeared and only the ragged mortared stone of the filling remained. Its height was reduced to two or three feet or even lower, and it was covered with moss and fern. Bushes sprouted from the top, conferring an air of wildness and neglect. Our imaginations had

to work even harder to approach the impression it must have made when first built.

A track accompanied the wall along this stretch as it made its way from Fonthill Gifford to the road from Newtown to Hindon. There was a good view of the Terrace to the right. In the distance we could see the tunnel built by Beckford over the road to Hindon to aid his ride round the estate. The high wall above the tunnel allowed him to ride over the road without seeing people - 'without seeing women', a local man once said to me - 'and without being seen himself'.

Meeting the Newtown to Hindon road, the wall re-asserted itself. It was of an even height and looked less neglected alongside the road. It gave the impression of being safer from destruction, whether by human hand or from the effects of nature, than when it was hidden in the woods. Keeping to the road, we passed the lodge (and the site of Stone Gate) at the entrance to Great Western Avenue which leads to the remaining part of the Abbey. After Beacon Hill, on which stands Stop Beacon, the tower which Alderman Beckford began, we met another lodge and the site of West Gate. Here a wide track led to the artificial Bitham Lake, which Beckford constructed as part of his wilderness. Here too, the wall ended abruptly. It failed to start again on the other side of the track.

We searched along the road for some time before we realised that the wall had turned into the woods, losing its roadside height and condition and resuming again a ruinous appearance. Curving between White Mead Wood on the outside and Rough Lawn within, it was missing altogether for yards at a time. Along this stretch also it was neglected, moss grown and choked with ivy, at times supporting saplings and even trees which rooted within it. In places the trees had dislodged stones which they clasped at crazy angles and prevented from falling to the ground.

Skirting Rough Lawn, and passing the site of South End Gate, we joined a public footpath for a while before the wall and path

diverged. The wall hugged the line of the woods and the path crossed fields near Lawn Lodge where it met the road from Newtown to the Beckford Arms. We followed the wall for a little way until it came to an abrupt end. We found vestiges of it, following the edge of the woods until, scrambling through the undergrowth, we met the path which comes up from Lawn Lodge.

Here we found what looked like the remains of a gateway, now merely piles of cut stone, bright green with a smooth lichen. This was unlikely to have been one of the six gates, because Denys Baker's 1976 map does not show a gate at this point. The ruined gateway lies between South End Gate and Birch Boll Gate, as shown on the map. A fence and a wooden gateway displayed several 'strictly private' signs which, lacking the spirit of William Bankes, we dared not pass. Looking through the woods from this former gateway, we could see no sign of the wall, but we thought it likely that it was missing between this point and Jenny's Corner Gate. The Victorian building referred to oddly on OS maps as Fonthill Abbey (as opposed to Beckford's Old Fonthill Abbey) was constructed near Jenny's Corner Gate about sixty years later. It may be that this part of the wall was used in the building. In addition, some of the wall stones may be serving a useful purpose in the nearby village of Fonthill Gifford.

The once formidable Barrier is now at best a low roadside wall and at worst a sad ruin. Where once it excluded people, now, even at its highest, it offers little resistance to the explorer. Cross-country runners leap over it unaware of its origins. A long section on the eastern side has probably gone. But a humble version of the wall still exists for perhaps three quarters of its original route and, where it borders the road, it is doing a job that has no doubt helped to preserve it.

We would welcome any information members of the Beckford Society might have about the wall.

A Reissue of Storer's *Fonthill*

JON MILLINGTON

Since the *Souvenirs of Fonthill Abbey* exhibition at Beckford's Tower in 1994, a number of additional souvenirs have come to light. If I was writing the catalogue now, one of the entries which I would have to amend is that on James Storer's *A Description of Fonthill Abbey, Wiltshire*, 1812. This is because of the appearance of a copy of a reissue with a cancel title-page (omitting Storer's name) dated 1817, together with the pages on Beckford's library from the *Repertorium Bibliographicum*.¹

The reissue retains its original binding of pale crimson paper boards measuring 25½ by 18½ cm with FONTHILL ABBEY on a black morocco label on the back, and plain off-white endpapers. Here are the contents (on thirty-seven leaves):

Engraved frontispiece dated 1819 depicting Fonthill Abbey from Stop Beacon. India paper proof from the *Beauties of Wiltshire*, vol. III, 1825.²

Cancel title-page: DESCRIPTION / OF / FONTHILL ABBEY, / **Wiltshire** / WITH VIEWS. / = / LONDON. / WILLIAM CLARKE, NEW BOND STREET. / MDCCXVII. (Verso blank.)

Storer's *Fonthill*, 8vo edition, as issued in 1812 but lacking the original title-page. (Nineteen leaves.)

Fly-title: LIBRARY / OF / WILLIAM BECKFORD, Esq. (verso blank) followed by pages 203-230 of the *Repertorium Bibliographicum*,³ which are unnumbered here but signed [A]-C in fours; D, three leaves (D4 was probably the cancel title-page); engraved portrait of Francis I between B2 and B3. (Sixteen leaves.)

There is no copy in the British Library, Library of Congress or the Bodleian, but a hand-written entry on the reissue in the typescript of Canon Goddard's *Wiltshire Bibliography* said that

only twenty-five copies were printed.⁴ Further investigation revealed that in 1974 the Lilly Library at the University of Indiana acquired the only other known copy. It is almost identical to the one described above, including the binding, although the view of Fonthill Abbey from Stop Beacon appears opposite the fly title and the portrait of Francis I is missing.⁵

For many years Beckford's bookseller and publisher was William Clarke who had also published the 1812 edition of Storer's *Fonthill*. Boyd Alexander noted Clarke's crucial role:

William Clarke (c.1752-1830) of New Bond Street; nephew of the famous bookseller James Robson, whose partner he was, 1787-9, after which he set up on his own; published *Repertorium Bibliographicum* and several editions of Beckford, who nicknames him Boletus (the Mushroom) because he had a large head and short neck and body.⁶

How appropriate this nickname was may be gauged by the engraving where, in Guy Chapman's opinion,⁷ he is shown with Beckford. It accompanied *A Dialogue in the Shades*⁸ and *Rare Doings at Roxburghe Hall*, a pamphlet sometimes bound up with the *Repertorium*.

On the authorship of the *Repertorium*, a tome of 721 pages (including prelims), Anthony Hobson gave the credit to Clarke,⁹ while Chapman conjectured that 'Beckford had at least a finger in this pie. Whether he wrote the account of his own library is impossible to decide; probably it was compiled by his librarian, Maquin, under his eye and to his very direct instructions.'¹⁰ Richard Garnett¹¹ said that Beckford was responsible, but André Parreaux was only prepared to conjecture that, 'Il est probable que Beckford collabore à cet ouvrage, - au moins pour la partie qui se rapporte à sa propre bibliothèque'.¹²

It seems reasonable to assume that the reissue was a Beckford-Clarke collaboration, in spite of the modest binding, poorer quality of the paper in the library pages (some 2 cm narrower than the rest) and a very plain title-page compared with Storer's

original of 1812.

What about the reissue's date? But for the presence of the 1819 frontispiece, perhaps added later or not bound into all copies, there is no reason to doubt that it appeared in 1817, as printed on the title-page. The chapter on Beckford's library from the *Repertorium* would have been ready by then, if only as proofs. After all, the work had been announced in the *Gentleman's Magazine* as early as 1814:

Speedily will be published: "Repertorium Bibliographicum: some Account of the most celebrated Public and Private Libraries, with Bibliographical Notices, Anecdotes of eminent Collectors, Booksellers, Printers, &c. To which will be prefixed, a Dialogue in the Shades, between William Caxton, a Modern Bibliomaniac, and the Author. By the late WILLIAM WYNKEN, Clerk, a descendant of Wynken de Worde."¹³

An extensive search has so far failed to unearth any advertisements or reviews of the reissue; apart from Goddard's typescript, it does not seem to have been mentioned in letters or elsewhere. Was the original plan to re-issue Storer's *Fonthill* in 1817 without the library pages as they are not mentioned on the title-page? Assuming that the cancel title-page (without Storer's name), fly-title and library pages were printed together, the answer must be no. Undoubtedly the library pages, being unpaginated, were specially printed, either as proofs or offprints. Owners of other libraries featured in the *Repertorium* may well have been provided with their relevant offprints.

How many of the twenty-five copies have survived? Some, incredibly, may have been broken up for Storer's charming engravings of the Abbey. Were all the copies octavo, like the one described here? Maybe there was an even more limited quarto version based on sheets of the 1812 large paper Storer's *Fonthill*, since the *Repertorium* was also published in large paper.

Quite why this fascinating and almost unknown reissue was produced remains a mystery, all the more so in view of its

uneven quality. For example, the portrait of Francis I is well printed on India paper (as wide as the Storer pages), so surely Beckford would have insisted that the pages listing some of the finest books in his library would match that standard. Was it produced to mark a special occasion such as his book sale in 323 lots at Sotheby's in May 1817 or the visit of Samuel Rogers later that year? The explanation may simply be that Beckford had kept copies of Storer's beautifully printed *Fonthill*, and, by binding these with a catalogue of his choicest books and manuscripts, he produced something memorable to give members of his family, other book collectors and visitors to the Abbey.

¹ *Repertorium Bibliographicum; or some account of the most celebrated British Libraries*. London: William Clarke, New Bond Street. 1819.

² T.E. Jones, *A Descriptive Account of the Literary Works of John Britton ... Being the Second Part of His Autobiography*, 1849, pp. 9-10. Owing to delays arising from Britton's other literary ventures and a fire at the printers which destroyed all copies except for a set of proofs, his *Beauties of Wiltshire* did not appear until 1825. Dates on the other 15 engravings range from 1815 to 1825.

³ On the signed pages the signature replaced the page number. So, for Beckford's library pages, 2E, 2F and 2G replaced 209, 217 and 225 respectively.

⁴ See the typescript of E.H. Goddard (1856-1947), begun in 1917, in the library of Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society, Devizes. The MS. entry on the verso of p. 335 (in Vol. 3, Corsley - Ludgershall) in either his hand (since he was the Society's Librarian for many years) or that of a later Librarian reads: 'Library Catalogue appended to "Storer's Description of Fonthill Abbey" Imp. 8vo. 1817. [only 25 copies printed]'. The whereabouts of this copy is unknown. In July 1927 Canon Goddard presented the only other set of his five-volume typescript (containing 1088 folios altogether) to the library of the Society of Antiquaries of London, but it has just a few handwritten amendments. There is no mention of the reissue, and neither is there in Goddard's *Wiltshire Bibliography*, published in 1929. I am grateful to Mrs Pamela Colman, Librarian, WANHS, for her help with this note.

⁵ My thanks to the Reference Librarian at the Lilly Library for this information.

⁶ Boyd Alexander, *Life at Fonthill. 1808-1822*, 1957, p. 70, note 1.

⁷ Guy Chapman and John Hodgkin, *A Bibliography of William Beckford of Fonthill*, 1930, pp. 85-87.

⁸ For Beckford's motive in writing this and some insights into the publication

of the *Repertorium*, see Renato Rabaiotti, 'Beckford's *A Dialogue in the Shades* and Dibdin's *The Lincolne Nosegay*', *Book Collector*, 38 (Summer 1989), pp. 210-228.

⁹ Anthony Hobson, 'William Beckford's Library', *Connoisseur*, 191 (April 1976), p. 300.

¹⁰ Chapman and Hodgkin, p. 86.

¹¹ See his entry on William Beckford in the DNB.

¹² André Parreaux, *William Beckford. Auteur de Vathek (1760-1844)*, 1960, p. 553.

¹³ *Gentleman's Magazine*, LXXXIV (January-June 1814), p. 560. An extended version of this announcement appeared in the English edition of *Vathek* published by William Clarke in 1816, p. [iv]; on the previous page Storer's *Fonthill* was also advertised, four years after its first appearance.

Notes on Contributors

Sidney Blackmore was a Foundation Trustee of the Beckford Tower Trust and is a member of the Tower's Council of Management and Restoration Appeal Committee. An independent lecturer and writer with particular interests in Italy, the Grand Tour and the influence of Classical art and architecture on later styles and tastes, he has organised exhibitions on Neo-classicism, the eighteenth century Gothic revival, and the planned townscape. He regularly leads study tours to Italy.

Laurent Châtel, who teaches at the Université de la Sorbonne-Nouvelle, is currently writing his doctoral dissertation on Beckford and the aesthetics of landscape. He has published a few articles on Beckford (his use of colour, his literary art of portraiture, his perception of Hazlitt [forthcoming]) and is preparing two projects: an edition of extracts from Beckford's French correspondence and a catalogue + assessment of his collection of paintings.

Dick Claésson, Department of Comparative Literature, Göteborg University, Sweden, is writing a dissertation on Beckford's early aesthetics, up to and including *Vathek* (1786). The dissertation focuses on Beckford's texts, and the ways in which they display various literary-rhetorical strategies. He published in 1995 *William Beckford av Fonthill, Wilts., 1760-1844, En forskningsöversikt* and in 1996 Beckford's manuscript *The Transport of Pleasure* which he edited.

Eric Darton is interested in music, art and literature, particularly relating to the eighteenth century. His first visit to Lansdown Tower in 1978 aroused an interest in William Beckford. Study of Beckford's writings, conversations with James Lees-Milne and Leslie Hilliard and visits to Fonthill stimulated further interest. Jon Millington introduced him to additional aspects of Beckford and encouraged him to write about them.

João de Almeida Flor is Professor of English Language, Literature and Culture in the University of Lisbon. His doctoral thesis was on Robert Browning; he has written widely on English and Portuguese Romantic literature as well as translating the poetry of Wilfred Owen, D.H. Lawrence and T.S. Elliot into Portuguese.

Malcolm Jack's latest book, *William Beckford: An English Fidalgo*, was released last year. His other work on Beckford includes the Penguin Classics anthology and the Dedalus *Episodes of Vathek*. He has written widely on Enlightenment philosophy and literature and is a reviewer of books on Portuguese history and fiction. He has been Chairman of the Beckford Society since 1995.

Jon Millington is on the Council of Management of the Beckford Tower Trust and wrote the guide to the Tower. For the 1976 Beckford Exhibition he produced the slide show and contributed to the catalogue the essays, 'Man of Letters' and 'Bibliophile Extraordinary'. He edited the *Beckford Tower Trust Newsletter* (1980-1994). To mark the 150th anniversary of Beckford's death he devised the exhibition *Souvenirs of Fonthill Abbey*.

J.C.M. Nolan, a freelance writer, has lectured on and published essays about the cultural aspects of the Irish Revival earlier this century. He is now at work on a definitive biography of Edward Martyn (1859-1923), the Irish writer and patron of the Arts who lived in Tulira Castle, County Galway. A growing interest in Beckford is related to a study of Beckford's religious impulses which, he feels, have been sometimes ignored and often misunderstood.

Andrée Rushton first became interested in William Beckford through spending week-ends and holidays in the village of Tisbury, near the Fonthill estate. She was formerly a social worker and has collaborated on a number of research papers, books and articles. She has also been a political researcher and is now a civil servant. She has a long-standing interest in history and is a keen walker.