

THE BECKFORD JOURNAL



VOLUME 8

SPRING 2002

The Beckford Journal

Volume 8. Spring 2002

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Doris Elizabeth Hilliard (1903-2001) PHILIPPA BISHOP	2
<i>Dreams, Waking Thoughts, and Incidents: Beckford's Grand Tour as personal and cultural rite of passage.</i> MIRELLA BILLI	6
Enchanting Paths of Paradise ALEXANDER MARR	10
Creating a Beckford Exhibition PHILIP HEWAT-JABOOR	15
William Beckford 1760-1844: An Eye for the Magnificent JOHN WILTON-ELY	25
The William Beckford Exhibition at Dulwich ARNOLD WILSON	36
Deconstructing the Caliph MALCOLM JACK	41
Where Nelson went in Fonthill Abbey JON MILLINGTON	43
William Beckford and the Gothic Charivari DIDIER GIRARD	50
Brief Encounter of Beckford and Disraeli, or The Radical Pair of 'Oriental Voluptuaries' JERRY NOLAN	66
Notes on Contributors	79

Doris Elizabeth Hilliard (1903-2001)

PHILIPPA BISHOP

Elizabeth's was a long life, spanning nearly a century, and rich in experiences gathered from all the various projects she had been involved with: her career as a psychiatric doctor, the gardens she had enjoyed landscaping, the many travels undertaken with her husband Leslie, and not least the work they did together in establishing a number of museum collections.

She was born in Hong Kong on 19 October 1903, the only child of missionary parents. Her father, the Rev. George Alexander Bunbury, was principal of a seminary for the training of Christian priests, and her mother, Alice Jane Clayton, had been attached to a missionary organisation in Fukien Province before her marriage. Their house in Hong Kong overlooked the harbour. One of Elizabeth's earliest memories was of being woken by her father (this made her very cross) and carried to the window to see the Navy 'dressed overall' for the King's birthday. Another thing she could vividly recall from that time was having to keep her eyes tight shut in order to get her past the dreaded eagle's cage on their walks in the Botanic Garden.

When she was six the family returned to England, first settling at Thame and then to a series of livings where her father was appointed either as curate or vicar. The change in climate particularly affected her and the agony of her untreated chilblains at her grim boarding school in Ealing remained an acute memory. Such pains, however (added to the fact that she was the youngest pupil and therefore subject to bullying by the older girls), only helped to strengthen her powers of endurance and develop her character along determined lines. She showed precocious aptitude in all her studies, particularly music, but all along she had firmly fixed in her mind that she would become a doctor. In 1921 she began her training at the Royal Free Hospital Medical School as



Elizabeth Hilliard in 1988

Photo: courtesy of the *Bath Chronicle*

one of the women students inevitably nicknamed the 'Royal Freaks'. Once qualified, she decided to specialise in the field of mental illness, and went out on a two-year scholarship to work at the hospital in Denver, Colorado, on psychotic and neurotic cases. Some of the inmates there were men suffering from the advanced stages of syphilis; which had resulted from a lack of proper medical treatment during their wartime service. Twenty years later, in England, Elizabeth would try to rehabilitate patients who had been damaged in yet another war: torpedoed merchant seamen, and survivors from the Japanese prisoner-of-war camps.

Between the wars her career mainly took shape at the Maudsley Hospital, where she met Leslie Hilliard who was also engaged in psychiatric medicine. After their marriage in November 1936 they were to be allowed a span of sixty years together, enjoying a most harmonious pursuit of joint interests in both work and leisure. At the beginning of the Second World War the Maudsley was closed for fear of bombing. Part of it was evacuated to Sutton Training Centre, where Elizabeth helped to organise Sutton Emergency Hospital. It was expected that they would have to deal with the casualties resulting from an invasion, but in the event they received those wounded from the fighting abroad, as well as sailors rescued from drowning, and casualties from the air raids. After the war Elizabeth and Leslie became active members of the Socialist Medical Association, from whose efforts the National Health Service was to emerge eventually.

In the 1950s it was time for them to give up their busy professional careers, and they decided to move from London to Bath. Here in so-called retirement they appeared as committed and productive as ever. At their various homes – first in the Royal Crescent, then at Batheaston House and finally at Whyke House – Elizabeth used her encyclopaedic knowledge of plants and her talent for landscaping to develop some beautiful gardens. She also employed her considerable powers of organisation in

helping institutions like the Holburne Museum (at that time badly in need of funds and volunteer support). She was for several years a most dedicated Secretary of the Friends of the Holburne, responsible for initiating the series of lunchtime lectures which has flourished so well since.

Indeed, the fostering of museums in Bath became a primary concern for both Elizabeth and Leslie. Together they would buy a property and begin the task of installing a relevant collection within it, and Elizabeth would make a particular point of creating an appropriate garden round it. This was the genesis of the Hershel Museum at No. 19 New King Street, where they knew that the astronomer William Hershel had lived. Another notable success was their acquisition of the semi-ruinous Lansdown Tower, where they set about repairing the fabric and making a small museum to tell the story of the life and achievements of William Beckford, its original builder. The Tower had special associations for Elizabeth, since her father had loved the panoramic views from the summit of Lansdown; a tablet outside the entrance to the Tower records the initial work of restoration undertaken by Elizabeth and Leslie, in memory of her father. His ashes had been scattered on the hillside below the Tower, and eventually, after Leslie's death in 1997, his ashes too were scattered there (where she instructed her own should be as well).

Until almost the end Elizabeth, who died on 10 June 2001, preserved all her keenness of intellect, her relish for life, and a phenomenal memory for things seen and learnt in her youth. Although she might (rather disconcertingly) have forgotten that you had arranged to come and see her at a particular time, she would recognise and welcome you with surprise and delight. Then, looking out of the window of her room in the nursing home at the ravishing sight of the cherry tree in blossom – 'hung with snow' – she would recite Housman's poem *Eastertide* from beginning to end, with perfect accuracy, no sign of hesitation, and much feeling.

***Dreams, Waking Thoughts, and Incidents:* Beckford's Grand Tour as personal and cultural rite of passage.**

MIRELLA BILLI

From the very title *Dreams, Waking Thoughts, and Incidents*, Beckford's travel writing concerning his Grand Tour across Europe in 1780 when he was twenty-one, and suppressed, on family counsels, before its publication in 1783 (only five large quarto copies were left), reveals its difference, not only from the travel literature of the eighteenth century, or from the records left by the many young gentlemen touring France and Italy in order to improve their education, but also from the imaginative and romantic memoirs and correspondence of brilliant writers such as Walpole and Gray, though it seems to include both in a very special way.

Dreams, Waking Thoughts, and Incidents is not, and, what is more important, is not meant to be, a traditional or conventional travel book, (nothing in Beckford or nothing he did was ever conventional). Through the idiosyncratic exploration of places Beckford delineates his inner progress, constructs his own identity and image as an exceptional, unique character and artist, and writes about his own 'romantic' – in one of its extreme expressions – rite of passage, filtered through complex and interweaving personal and cultural experiences and elaborations in which the elements and the transformations of eighteenth-century taste and aesthetics seem to converge and to concentrate.

At the beginning of his book, in the intentionally programmatic *incipit*, Beckford emphasizes his 'visionary way of gazing' and stresses his identification with a typically romantic figure, lost in dreams and reveries, 'happy,' as he writes, 'in the arms of illusion', attracted, for melancholy meditation, by dark

recesses and 'dreary places', a solitary character indulging in the contemplation of nature either in its most picturesque aspects or dominated by uncontrollable forces, in deep admiration of ancient buildings, especially old cathedrals, of which he venerates 'the lofty pillars, dim aisles, and mysterious arches', looking for the solitude of secret places or the gloom of caves or tortuous paths, that inspire nightmares and terrors.

The opening itself is a sort of introduction to a 'romantic personality' and his perceptions, and is addressed to an intersubjective 'you' enclosing the writer and the imaginary and close recipient of the letters forming the book who should enjoy the former's 'visionary way of gazing':

Shall I tell you my dreams? ... a frequent mist hovers before my eyes, and, through its medium, I see objects so faint and hazy, that both their colours and forms are apt to delude me. This is a rare confession, say the wise, for a traveller to make: pretty accounts will such a one give of outlandish countries ...

The journey is intersubjective, and moves through the writer's inner landscape, this one changing and transforming itself, the outer world becoming and being one with that inner self.

All through the sensitive, imaginative, if perhaps often capricious narrative of *Dreams, Waking Thoughts, and Incidents*, the somewhat exasperated romantic note of personality already struck in the first lines is insistently stressed. Though travelling along a route not unlike that followed by the other young grand tourists, Beckford's exploration of places, filtered through his idiosyncratic readings and his ideal models, is rendered 'new' and indeed often re-created. Cities, monuments, natural scenes are transformed and transfigured by the perspective in which he sets them, by the evocations and echoes – literary and artistic – with which he reshapes them with his particular sensibility.

A new literary form and a new style emerge, along with an

intense process of self-discovery and self-construction, and a complex personal quest. A journal, a collection of letters, a memoir, a descriptive travelogue, a reverie, a fantasy, a confession, even an aesthetic document: *Dreams, Waking Thoughts, and Incidents* includes some of the qualities and characteristics of these genres, and is all of them together. The intertextual web of references reveals Beckford's extraordinarily original elaboration of classical and contemporary texts, literary and extraliterary, and the way he adapts and transforms them in order to convey his sensations, feelings and visions. Young Goethe's *Die Leiden des Junger Werthens* – with traces of *Italianische Reise* – Rousseau's *Reveries d'un promeneur solitaire*, the melancholy meditations of the greatly admired Gray, are made to overlap and merge with the echoes and suggestions derived from the readings of Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto, and with the daydream-inducing influences of oriental tales from China and Persia. Classic reminiscences are inseparable from gothic fantasies, with the attraction to gloomy settings and the tendency to indulge in daemonic terrors; picturesque and 'sublime' views – often in a progression of tableaux recalling the works of Beckford's favourite painters, such as Lorrain and Poussin – are the object of dreamy meditations; extreme spatial dimensions – vertiginous heights and unfathomable depths and chasms – become metaphors of Beckford's moods of unlimited freedom and power or deep gloom.

The progress from one place to the other accompanies Beckford's progress in his personal and artistic quest and the transformations in his visions, which can be retraced not only in the mixing up of generic modes, but through significant variations in his style.

At the beginning of his 'journey' Beckford's attitude is still 'conservative' (if such a term can be used as far as he is concerned); his readings in classical and oriental authors are not

yet reconciled in a unified vision; uncertainties and excesses, or, often, definite, though intriguing eccentricities, create perplexing effects. It is when Beckford reaches his 'long-desired Italy' (through an impressive pass, with the river Brenta foaming and thundering below) that he succeeds in reconciling and balancing his classicism – the recollection of the grandeur of the past ages and of the works of the great classic writers – with the imaginative force of his romantic visions, and with a new, comprehensive language.

Beckford's dreams and illusions become one with the reality of natural scenes and the remains of a glorious past; images and emotions coincide; the self lives a moment of sublime exaltation in the fullness and total liberation of feelings and passions and even of sexual fantasies, which belong all together to the 'sublime' exuberance of his aesthetic pleasures. The solitary 'traveller' of *Dreams, Waking Thoughts, and Incidents* fully becomes the dominating figure of an extraordinary and unique adventure, at the same time personal, artistic, aesthetic and cultural.

Such exaltation is evoked in the pages on Venice, Padua, Verona, Pisa, Florence and finds its highest expression in the passages on Rome. In the Eternal City, classical memories and recollections of the past are made the prime subject for the romantic imagination, a harmonious combination reflected in the flowing of Beckford's prose. Painting – which, together with music, of which Beckford is a passionate connoisseur, is one of the two romantic arts *par excellence* – is one with writing; descriptions are structured like paintings, with a strong visual effect, but, at the same time, they delineate inner landscapes evoking feelings and emotions.

In the extraordinary passage where the dome of St. Peter's, admired from above, is transfigured into a Chinese emperor's palace and into an artificial, surreal, incomparable world, whose sky will be vast arches glowing with golden ornaments 'so lofty

as to lose all glitter and gaudiness', Beckford expresses the power of subjective feeling, nourished by the forces of the unconscious, beyond all limitations, and affirms the absolute value of the imaginative and the visionary for the artistic creation, which is the essence of Romanticism. This moment of extreme tension and aspiration to the absolute, of romantic ecstasy, was never to be reached so fully and so completely in a single personality. With the conclusion of this extraordinary quest – and the end of its 'happiness', the conquest and total freedom of a full initiation – the season of youth was over, but a Romantic aesthetics – also in the original sense of the Greek term *aisthesis*, sensation – had also been indelibly expressed.

Enchanting Paths of Paradise

ALEXANDER MARR

In April 1781 William Beckford wrote from Paris to Lady Hamilton, wife of Sir William: 'I fear I shall never be half so sapient, nor good for anything in this world, but composing airs, building towers, forming gardens, collecting old Japan, and writing a journey to China or the moon.' As Dr Christopher Thacker duly notes in *Building Towers, Forming Gardens. Landscaping by Hamilton, Hoare and Beckford* (London: St Barnabas Press, 2002), this was to prove, in part, an accurate prediction. Landscaping and building were two of the activities which most consistently occupied Beckford throughout his life, whether in Wiltshire, Portugal or Bath, and as such provide a rich and varied field for study. In this book Christopher Thacker, one of the founding figures of Garden History as an academic discipline, sets out to unravel the 'complex connections' between the gardens of Beckford's neighbours, Charles Hamilton at Painshill and Henry Hoare at Stourhead, and the landscape at

Fonthill created by the Beckfords senior and junior. Such connections are not improbable given the proximity of these three landscapes to one another, not to mention the obvious familial relationship between Beckford and his great uncle, Hamilton.

The first two chapters present a brief and general outline of the landscaping efforts of Hamilton and Hoare. Great show is made of Hamilton (one of Walpole's 'patriarchs of modern gardening') having created his landscape from scratch – the formal gardens of Hamilton's predecessors at Painshill having been overlooked by Dr. Thacker. What follows is a basic and reasonably sound account of the development of the Painshill grounds. Hamilton's 'practical devices' such as the use of rope netting to enclose shrubberies, and the construction of a water pump to feed the park are duly noted, as are features such as Hamilton's innovations in planting, which may well have influenced Beckford's own advances in that area. The author provides us with the usual round of information regarding Hamilton's garden buildings – amongst them a rock-work cascade, a hermitage, a 'Turkish Tent' and a grotto. It is regrettable, however, that the account contains several minor and avoidable errors. Hamilton's wheel pump has not been 're-created', as the author asserts but is, rather, a later creation of the 1830s by Bramah. Furthermore, it is by no means certain that Keene designed the famous 'Turkish Tent'. Keene drew it, certainly, but conceivably after it had been erected. It is perhaps unfortunate that one of the only reference works on Painshill cited by the author is Norman and Beryl Kitz's *Pains Hill Park* (Cobham, 1984), a private publication of questionable scholarship.

Stourhead, Henry Hoare's landscape, fares a little better. The author cites Hoare's 'ample and continuing means' as providing for a more extensive creation than Hamilton's relatively meagre funds at Painshill allowed, whilst the character of the garden is taken to be a result of the improver's 'moral seriousness'. A letter of 30 January 1755, from Hoare to his nephew, is quoted,

explaining that the numerous architectural features of Stourhead: 'Temples, Grottos, Bridges, Rocks, Exotick Pines' etc., were the preserve of 'the industrious', to which 'the indolent' had little claim. The profound difference between this attitude and that of William Beckford is, surprisingly, not mentioned. Indeed, it seems that the fascinating questions of influence, rivalry and discourse between these three neighbours and their landscape creations will have to wait for another study, for they are not addressed in this publication. In a book purportedly examining the relationship between these landscaping enthusiasts, it is surprising to find that only a single page is given over to the relationship between Hamilton and Hoare. Hamilton, we are told, occupied a 'special place' amongst the possible influences upon Hoare's Stourhead landscape. However the 'firmness' of this link is not supported by the text, which provides only a few general comparisons between the architectural features of the two landscapes, neglecting any comparison between the plantings or layout of the grounds. In the case of William Beckford, the only connections made between Fonthill and the landscapes of his neighbours are superficial comparisons of, again, garden buildings. It is true that all three landscapes had towers constructed, or plans to do so; each boasted gothic structures and grottoes and each contained a water feature of some kind. However, the more profound questions of shared theoretical attitudes or ways of perceiving landscape are avoided.

The author's account of Fonthill occupies the last three chapters of the book. Thacker begins with the improvements of the 'plutocratic, impatient, good-hearted yet vulgar' Alderman. His account of the Alderman's landscaping is based around two accounts, by Richard Pococke in 1754 and John Parnell in 1769. Thacker is correct in stating that information on the Alderman's garden-making is slight, yet he does not appear to be aware of the recent important work on the grounds of Fonthill Splendens by Laurent Châtel. The landscaping which took place prior to the

Alderman's purchasing of Fonhill in 1745 is entirely absent from this discussion – alterations which are attested to by George Lambert's 1740 view of Fonhill, in which a pre-Alderman walled, formal garden and a lawn, as well as deliberate clearings amongst the woods, can easily be seen. Also notably absent is any mention of the Alderman's prize-winning planting of Scotch pines at Fonhill – doubtless the 'plantations' mentioned in Pococke's description. The author does, however, provide a fair account of the several buildings which featured in the Alderman's landscape, although the boathouse is confused with the 'cold bath'. The ever-pressing problem over the attribution of the grottoes and tunnel is also apparent. It is highly contestable whether these structures were the work of Lane senior and/or junior, and whether they date from the Alderman's improvements or those of his son. In his recent *Country Life* article Timothy Mowl attempted to solve this conundrum through the, by now standard, appeal to Beckford's literary works – a highly misleading approach given that these are unreliable sources for biography or historical scholarship at the best of times. The ambiguous and sometimes conflicting nature of contemporary references to the grottoes means that a sound chronology will remain elusive unless new archival sources come to light. A useful and feasible task would be the clear setting-out of current factual, rather than conjectural, knowledge about this remarkable suite of buildings.

Following on from the discussion of the Splendens landscape is a biographical sketch of William Beckford containing information which will be thoroughly familiar to anyone acquainted with the several extant biographies of Beckford. A few of Beckford's impressions of landscape during his Continental travels are noted, yet their vital importance in the development of his landscape aesthetic is not commented upon. Beckford's distaste for formal gardening is, however, correctly identified, as is the problematic nature of his landscaping at

Monserate. The familiar theme of 'privacy' at Fonthill is also discussed, although to suggest that Fonthill was simply 'no more than a gigantic hermitage' is perhaps taking the matter a little too far. The role of J. R. Cozens' watercolours is similarly overestimated, while the various 'country specific' components of Fonthill – the American and Alpine gardens, the Chinese plantings and the Swiss character of much of the scenery – are underemphasized.

While 'landscaping' is stated, in the book's title no less, to be the theme of this work, more attention is paid to architectural elements than actual landscaping. This is especially evident in the author's account of Fonthill. Doubtless, features such as the tower at Stops Beacon, and the relationship between the Abbey and grounds are important points to consider, yet these are focused upon at the expense of a thorough treatment of the landscape proper. Beckford's planting initiatives are mentioned only in passing, yet the variety of exotic and native trees, flowers and shrubs was one of the most remarked upon features of Fonthill during Beckford's lifetime. Furthermore, the quality of 'naturalness' is taken to be an essential component of the Fonthill grounds, even though the landscape was an exciting hybrid of art as well as nature, the picturesque and the sublime. Indeed, the rich theoretical dialectic fostered by gardens such as Painshill and Stourhead, and sustained by landscapes such as Fonthill, is entirely missing from this study.

Little reference is made to notions of the sublime, the picturesque and the beautiful – all of which were vital components in contemporary assessments of these gardens. We frequently find such terms being used to describe Fonthill in the works of Storer, Britton and Rutter, yet they are passed over in Thacker's assessment of the landscape. William Beckford himself owned and annotated the most influential treatises on landscape of the age. His library contained Gilpin's complete works, Payne Knight's *Enquiries into the Principles of Taste* and

works by J. C. Loudon and Humphry Repton, yet the themes developed by these authors and their importance for Beckford's ideas of landscape are entirely missing from this study.

It is difficult to imagine what audience Dr Thacker envisaged for this publication. Too general for the specialist and too specific for the casual, interested reader, this book promises much but delivers little. The 'Brief Bibliography' certainly lives up to its title. Brevity aside (only two reference works on Stourhead are listed) Thacker neglects to cite works essential for any study of this topic, such as Robert Gemmett's important 1972 article on the Fonthill grounds or the more recent work of Laurent Châtel. Missing too are any archival references – surprising given that the author mentions, and seems acquainted with, the Beckford material in the Bodleian Library more than once. Footnotes are non-existent, references being erratically provided in the main body of text, aggravatingly interrupting the narrative. This narrative is concluded wistfully, with the author conjecturing Beckford wandering gleefully throughout a 'shattered Fonthill', delighted that even now his landscape still has the power to induce reverie. Indeed it is the spirit of reverie with which this new addition to Beckford studies is most thoroughly infused.

Creating a Beckford Exhibition

PHILIP HEWAT-JABOOR

The exhibition, devoted to William Beckford as a collector, came about through my own desire to learn more of his collection and with my frustration at not being able to discover more about the fine and decorative art he acquired – with the notable exceptions, of course, being Clive Wainwright's pioneering work, Michael Snodin and Malcolm Baker's exhaustive research into his acquisition and commissioning of silver and two exhibitions of

1966 and 1976.

It seemed to me that the best way to expand our knowledge would be to mount an exhibition, coupled with a symposium, drawing together as much material as possible from the available sources.

I spend a great deal of time in America and it had always seemed to me that Beckford's collecting habits are those that ought to be echoed by the current group of American collectors (some of whom are my clients) who are building and furnishing houses. The combination of buying period works of art as well as commissioning new furniture and objects – of giving equal weight to works of art as well as to paintings – is very much what they ought to be encouraged to do. It is surely much more imaginative than simply collecting works of art from earlier periods. Beckford exemplified this doctrine.

I had been extremely impressed by the publications and exhibitions mounted by the Bard Graduate Center in New York. They have staged a fascinating range of exhibitions devoted to many different aspects of the decorative arts and importantly they also have an excellent relationship with Yale University Press. At an initial meeting with Susan Soros, the founder of the Bard Graduate Center, the project was greeted with immense enthusiasm.

Whilst the Bard has to raise the necessary funds to mount their exhibitions, unlike most others this is not seen as an obstacle and it was suggested that I started planning straight away. I had actually been hoping to get the idea up and running and then hand it over to someone else to take forward – but this was not to be the case and it has been almost six years of work from its inception to the opening of the exhibition. Bet McLeod, my co-curator, was of inestimable value in the success of this project. All the important technical and logistical support for mounting such an exhibition was dealt with by the Bard. Derek Ostergard, who edited the catalogue, possesses a depth of enthusiasm rarely

seen and he, Bet McLeod and myself assembled the team of contributors to the catalogue and we put the exhibition together without a large and unwieldy committee.

I was particularly anxious to ensure that we only included in the exhibition pieces that were of an indubitable Beckford background, and to eliminate those with only a reputed or unsubstantiated provenance. A combination of wishful thinking and legend has led to numerous completely unsupported attributions, one of the worst being a group of French eighteenth-century furniture which stems from Douglas Cooper's book, *Great Collections*. He assumed wrongly that almost everything of French eighteenth-century origin from the Duke of Hamilton's collection had belonged to Beckford. Not so; we therefore took a rigorous approach to what was included, making it much easier in the future to add to, rather to subtract from, the canon of works.

The major question was whether there was going to be enough material with which to mount an exhibition that would reflect the broad range of Beckford's collecting. This was a bit of a gamble, but it seems that we have reasonably well covered the enormous scope of his collection, with the exception of lacquer, and of books which we decided against including.

I had started compiling a database of known Beckford works of art and it was this that formed the basis of our selection process. With Bet McLeod working on this project we spent the best part of the initial two years researching, digging and delving. As with most things to do with Beckford there was a lot of wild-goose chasing but also many major excitements that have led to a number of works with Beckford provenances being rediscovered, both in museums and in private collections.

Much time was spent trawling through the documents at the Bodleian Library which had, slightly surprisingly, by no means been gone through exhaustively by earlier Beckford researchers into the decorative arts who seemed often to have cherry-picked the more obvious resources. The Hamilton archives in Scotland

and in particular those in the public library at Hamilton itself, were to prove immensely useful. The discovery and utilisation of the post mortem shipping lists itemising Beckford's property and the Hamilton Palace inventories have proved invaluable. These list the property not included in the Bath sales of 1845 and 1848, and which was sent to Hamilton Palace and to Easton, another Hamilton house. This inventory has enabled us to establish conclusively further Beckford pieces that were included in the Hamilton Palace sales of 1882 and 1919. In particular, this helped us track down and positively identify for example, two of the loans from the Metropolitan Museum in New York. Both the pair of astonishing Louis XV mounted celadon vases and the late sixteenth century Milanese engraved rock crystal bowl were illustrated in the Hamilton Palace sale catalogue but included no reference to their Beckford background. These lists, and in the case of the rock crystal, a letter from Franchi, enabled us to establish conclusive proof of their ownership. Jeannie Chapel's research into Beckford's old master picture collection met with a multitude of problems in positively identifying paintings – research is additionally hampered by changes in attribution. Nonetheless new and important discoveries were made and were to become potential loans.

My own knowledge of country house collections, and a great deal of help from colleagues in the auction world, allowed us to track down yet more Beckford pieces. Bet McLeod's research and work at the Victoria and Albert Museum has led to a further range of exciting discoveries, some of which she published in her recent article in the *Burlington Magazine*.

The scope of any exhibition is dictated by the works able to be borrowed. An exhibition of, say, impressionist paintings would be considerably easier to mount – their locations are known and the research is generally already published. It was evident from the start that we would have to track down many works of art from Beckford's collection ourselves as well as commission

much new research from others. Having assembled a photographic list of our possible choices the owners were approached either by myself or through friends who may have had a closer relationship. With only a small number of exceptions, we were fortunate in being able to borrow almost everything on our wish list. The so-called Rubens vase in Baltimore has hairline cracks and no amount of persuasion overcame their reluctance to agree to our requested loan. The relatively unseen Romney portrait of Kitty Courtenay, hidden away in Nemours, a du Pont house in Delaware, almost made it but at the last minute the trustees had a change of mind which was a little disappointing.

Of the more exciting loans, I had been very keen to re-unite the Indian nephrite hookah, mounted in silver-gilt by James Aldridge for Beckford, with the splendid marble-topped gilt-bronze dolphin table which were illustrated together by Rutter in the Grand Drawing Room at the Abbey. New research has led to further information on this table, which for the owner highlights one of the advantages of a loan to such an exhibition. I had known of the whereabouts of both pieces which had been discretely kept and it was with a certain amount of trepidation that I went to see the owners. Both were thrilled to have been asked and without pause allowed their loan – they both also most generously agreed to have the pieces restored at their own expense. We had no allowance for restoration in our budget and neither piece was in a suitable condition for exhibition display. In the case of the hookah this led to several days of worry, for when the photographs especially taken for the catalogue came back for review, we saw that the upper bowl of the hookah was not there. I rang the owner and it could not be found. Panic ensued. I knew that it went back complete to the owner after its restoration because I had seen it myself. Several anxious days passed. Coming from a proper old-fashioned and impeccably run house it transpired that the packing box in which it had been delivered

back to the owner fourteen months earlier was still in a box room, full of similarly empty packing cases, and the butler found the missing part still wrapped up and its box. Relief all around.

The exhibition is as rounded as possible for it to be without the inclusion of a number of pieces, furniture in particular, that we could not definitely prove to be Beckford's – they could be, they might be, quite possibly were, but had to remain on the sidelines until further evidence is uncovered. The major gap is that of Japanese lacquer. Beckford's hugely important collection of lacquer is represented in England by the Mazarin chest in the Victoria and Albert Museum, a casket on loan to the Fitzwilliam and the pair of secretaires made by Vulliamy from dismembering the notable seventeenth century lacquer box known as the Buys box, now at Elton Hall. I had particularly wanted to borrow one of the pair of these secretaires but the private owner was reluctant to let them go without conservation and we were unable to undertake that extra financial responsibility. In addition, the conservation problems that can be incurred by lacquer during transport and a change of climate sadly precluded these loans – not for the lack of persuasive effort on my part! The installation of the Beckford corner, as it were, in the new British Galleries at the Victoria and Albert Museum also thwarted any attempt at borrowing from them, although I do think we have adequately covered their pieces with similar loans.

There is a gap with French eighteenth-century furniture and sadly we were unable to track down with any certainty the numerous pieces by the cabinet-maker Riesener for example; the Comte d'Orsay's roll top desk now in the Wallace Collection was out of the question as that institution is not allowed to lend. This also ruled out the loan of their polychrome and gilded robe chests from the oratory at the Abbey – those that Beckford would have had us believe were made in the time of James I! The logistics of borrowing the great bouille cabinets from the Louvre were insurmountable. Both a hardstone cabinet and a neoclassical

coffer recently appeared on the art market, neither of which sadly can be conclusively proven to have come from Beckford's collection. In her catalogue essay however, Adrianna Turpin has done an excellent job of covering his elusive furniture collection as well as to throw new light on dealing practices in the early nineteenth century.

Books and manuscripts were felt to be outside the scope of this exhibition, really deserving one of their own – what a marvellous and valuable project for someone. We were, however, able to encourage the Morgan Library to display their small holding of Beckford manuscripts at the same time, although sadly without even a handlist. The painting collection posed another problem – the major paintings from the National Gallery not being available for loan – both because they are on panel which makes institutions reluctant to lend, but also because their value would have led to colossal insurance premiums, precluded in a privately funded exhibition. We lobbied hard to get them to put on a specific display of Beckford paintings from their collection or at least provide some sort of listing at the gallery – but this sadly has not happened. However, we have a reasonably representative group of paintings within the exhibition which does aim after all to concentrate on the so-called decorative arts.

The logistics of mounting a decorative arts exhibition are large. The Bard's exhibition space in New York is in what is effectively only a large town house which in itself posed problems of access – the size of the front door being a major obstacle. Also to be borne in mind was how the exhibition would be laid out and displayed, and to this end the Bard's in-house team, under the direction of Derek Ostergard, started planning the layout, after all the loans were agreed, about eighteen months before the opening. A model of the interiors of the building was made and all the loans were set out within the model. The production team then started to make the necessary display cases, the mounts for the display of individual objects, and to work on

the all-important lighting plan. The interior of the Bard was completely repainted. Han Vu, their IT expert, had all the images used in the catalogue on his computer and he generated not only the story boards and the information panels, but produced two illuminating video displays explaining the architectural story behind both the Abbey and the Tower. These have enormously helped the viewer to understand their complex building history. I think that these videos will now be incorporated in the display at Beckford's Tower when it reopens.

Apart from the difficulties of assembling a group of pieces that make coherent sense, persuading the owners to lend, the photography, packing, transport, application for export licences and insurance, all become an art in their own right and the registrar's role is one of enormous importance to the success of such an exhibition. It was severely tested in our case. The terrorist attacks in America took place at the same time as the bulk of the exhibition was about to be flown to New York. This led to immense problems: the rescheduling of flights, the huge backlog and delays in customs clearance as well as the uncertainties over insurance liabilities. Was this an act of war or was it classed as terrorism; it makes a substantial difference. All of this had to be immediately addressed as well as dealing with the real worries of anxious owners both private and institutional. This was handled superbly by Linda Stubbs, the indispensable registrar, at the Bard. There was never a thought of cancelling or even postponing the exhibition and the schedule was already extremely tight. Nervous owners were consoled; the National Trust were particularly concerned and for some days it seemed likely that they would withdraw their loans. Arrangements were put in place to display their loans photographically just in case. However, every single lender was totally supportive and they all came through in the end.

To give an instance of the planning that goes into receiving the objects at a museum, on arrival they have to be uncrated and

unpacked, subjected to a condition report and photographed. If you have a display case containing several objects belonging to different owners – particularly institutional ones – you must arrange for the couriers for each object to be there at the same time in order to place their loan in the case themselves; this requires much organisation and good timing and does not allow for changing of minds. Also, every institutional courier seems to want to place their object in last!

The exhibition opened in New York, on time, with an enthusiastic crowd of six hundred people or so who arrived on the ground floor as the installation team was finishing on the top floor – perfect timing. It received a good press there and attendance figures and catalogue sales are much higher than they have previously experienced at the Bard.

The decision to hold the exhibition at Dulwich Picture Gallery was taken because I felt there was not then another suitable venue in London. Five years ago the Victoria and Albert Museum was very much at a low point and not enthusiastic about mounting any exhibition, a position happily now reversed. The remaining central London museums did not really lend themselves to a decorative arts show.

It seemed to me that Dulwich was tailor-made: a building by John Soane whom Beckford had earlier employed, the more or less contemporaneous picture collection – parts of which reflect Beckford's taste – an excellent and newly-renovated space but above all the huge enthusiasm shown by Desmond Shawe-Taylor to my proposal. The success of its superb installation and the immense amount of interest they have generated in Beckford has, I think, proved one correct.

At Dulwich the installation is somewhat different but every bit as good as that in New York. At the Bard, it was laid out over three floors and the objects were dramatically lit against rich dark colours. The longish galleries of Dulwich, decorated in colours inspired by Rutter, with the works displayed more closely

together than in New York do, I think, give more of a feel of the two long galleries at Fonthill Abbey.

Exhibition displays are ephemeral, although in this instance its longevity is secured as it will be possible to visit it on line. It is, however, the catalogue that remains. We were fortunate in being allowed the largest catalogue that Yale would publish and our aim was for it to be as scholarly as possible. Nowadays the trend is for catalogues to have a number of essays and no more than what really amounts to a handlist of works with no back-up material. Obviously this greatly reduces the production costs but substantially lowers the calibre of the catalogue. After a lot of negotiation we were allowed an old-fashioned catalogue complete with extensive entries, footnotes, provenance, and bibliography, although the index had to be made available on line as we overran our allocated space. The initial plan for a two-volume catalogue sadly proved impossible and we were therefore restricted to sixteen essays in addition to the 160 catalogue entries. I try hard to ensure that the whole period of Beckford's life was covered – often Fonthill House and Lansdown are treated as appendages. To that end there is my essay on Beckford's father's house and its alterations, as well as essays covering his years in Bath, admirably dealt with by Sidney Blackmore and Christopher Woodward. Further essays on his collection of old master paintings, furniture, silver and lacquer break new ground.

With the enormous amount of press coverage, and the number of visitors to the exhibition, both here and in America, I hope to have stimulated new and increased interest in Beckford, and in some way redressed the balance between the studies of his literature and his extraordinary collection. I sincerely hope that the catalogue will serve as a platform to encourage further studies into the collection of William Beckford. It has drawn together existing material in addition to much new research, as a result of which a number of unknown objects have come to light, and I hope more will follow.

William Beckford 1760-1844: An Eye for the Magnificent

JOHN WILTON-ELY

Since the autumn of last year, there can no longer be any doubt that William Beckford's stature and achievements in the visual arts are widely and fully recognised. Those of us involved in producing the second William Beckford exhibition, held at Salisbury and Bath in 1976 (successor to Philippa Bishop's pioneering show in Bath, ten years earlier), were extremely sad at the time that it had not been possible to find the finance and locations to make the multifaceted genius of our subject more available to a wider audience.

It would have been beyond our wildest dreams that twenty-five years later we would see a magnificent exhibition, both in New York and London, which would be accompanied by a monumental catalogue, distinguished by a wealth of scholarship and a generous quantity of coloured illustrations. Congratulations must go to the Bard Graduate Center for the Decorative Arts, Design and Culture under its Director, Susan Weber Soros, and Dean, Derek E. Ostergard (editor of the catalogue) for this timely initiative as well as, most importantly, to Philip Hewat-Jaboor, prime mover and dynamic spirit of the entire enterprise, with his redoubtable co-curator, Bet McLeod. In short, no Beckford aficionado's library will be complete without this landmark publication. It comes at a time when there has been a remarkable expansion of research in this particular area of Beckford's life and activities, and the only serious regret that one might have is that the late Clive Wainwright – a major and generous scholar in the field – did not live to take a leading role in the project. Both exhibition and book should surely be regarded as fitting memorials to him.

William Beckford, 1760-1844: An Eye for the Magnificent, published for the Bard Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design and Culture by Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2001, handsomely produced as is the custom of this publisher, consists of sixteen chapters, or essays, on the biographical background, social and aesthetic context and specialist fields of Beckford's activities in the visual arts, with a special concentration on the decorative arts. These are copiously illustrated largely by reproductions of certain objects or works of art which were unobtainable or too fragile to lend. Constituting over two-thirds of the volume, these contributions are followed by detailed catalogue entries for 160 exhibits, divided primarily into themes and arranged in an approximate chronological order. Here in virtually each area we are shown Beckford's remarkable contributions, as a collector as well as patron, and his clear interventions as a designer.

The editor and the two curators should be warmly commended for laying out a highly usable scholarly apparatus which is often lamentably omitted in comparable exhibition publications today, where the public's attention span is deemed to flag without a profusion of large illustrations at the expense of text. After an appendix with a key to abbreviated sources, there follow two invaluable sections. The first provides detailed source notes on the entries which, in themselves, constitute a phenomenal fund of information. The other provides extensive information on each work's provenance, exhibitions, literature, marks, signatures and inscriptions where they can be ascertained. Then follows an exceptionally useful bibliography, subdivided into categories, which was contributed by Jon Millington, doyen of Beckford bibliographers. This not only includes Beckford's own publications (including foreign language works) but an invaluable list of sale catalogues on which so much of the scholarship depends. While one regrets the lack of index to such a densely rich publication for those without access to the Bard Center

website, as an experienced organizer of international exhibitions the reviewer appreciates the immense problems posed by such catalogues, with deadlines where the uncertainty of securing exhibits and discoveries of critical information continue right up to the last minute.

As Derek Ostergard aptly observes by way of caution in his introduction, the 'reclusive aspect of William Beckford, and his desire to protect himself from the scrutiny of others ... has hampered the efforts of many scholars to understand this enigmatic individual' (p. 11). This secrecy of Beckford and his evident delight in laying false trails, constructing myths and living life as within a perpetual theatre of changing sensations, has been tackled with considerable aplomb in Timothy Mowl's biographical sketch. With telling quotations, he outlines the nature of Beckford's mercurial personality, both as the quintessential Romantic as well as forerunner of late nineteenth-century Aestheticism – 'the ice breaker in the frozen sea of eighteenth-century classicism'. He concentrates perhaps unduly on the kaleidoscope of emotional responses rather than that other side to Beckford which is the serious and scholarly connoisseur whose pioneering ideas in a multitude of art forms is the burden of this exhibition and its substantial scholarship. Passion there certainly was as the motivating force of collecting and creating works of beauty, but Beckford's keenly discriminating taste for high quality and the visually significant was exercised in deadly earnest. Sadly, it is not without significance that it is the former aspect of Beckford which has been most fastened upon in the more superficial press reviews of this exhibition. Modern opinion is inclined to be suspicious of the erudite when combined with the elite and also has an unhealthy obsession with the motive forces of sexual orientation.

The contemporary fashion for inclusion and accessibility had no part to play in Beckford's life and this interior world of devising unique interior settings for collections, physical and

psychological, is brilliantly examined by David Watkin in comparing Beckford with those two other great contemporary collectors, Soane and Hope. Similarly, an outstanding contribution in terms of providing a context for Beckford's later artistic activities has been provided by Philip Hewat-Jaboor's particularly impressive essay reconstructing the history of Alderman Beckford's Fonthill Splendens and its changing interiors and contents under his son. This has filled a large gap in our understanding of William's artistic roots, formative influences and reactions. Certainly, without the outstanding English tradition of collecting and connoisseurship of the eighteenth-century Grand Tour and its architectural heritage, the later era of romantic collecting would not have been possible despite the decisive mental and emotional changes encapsulated by the Romantic movement.

It is unnecessary to stress the profound significance of Beckford's travels and international horizons to readers of this journal. While the editor of the book has wisely selected three specific and very different areas of William's Continental European experience – Switzerland, Portugal and Paris – the equally fundamental role of Italy in Beckford's aesthetic education is covered more indirectly in essays and entries on relevant media and works of art. William Hauptman's perceptive essay, 'Clinging Fast "To My Tutelary Mountains": Beckford in Helvetia' throws considerable light on the psychological role of the Swiss terrain, particularly on William's early years, and a social milieu which possessed 'the liberal tradition of toleration' which he found increasingly congenial in his early years of social exclusion at home. As is frequently the case in this book, shadowy figures of considerable significance to Beckford, such as the artist Jean Huber, are fleshed out and added to a impressive cast of creators and designers with whom William found a particular affinity where prurience and moral judgements were of little account.

Malcolm Jack has already greatly enlarged our understanding of Beckford's affection for Portugal in his rewarding study, *William Beckford. An English Fidalgo* (1997). Setting the complexity of Beckford's social aspirations apart, here he concentrates on the profound attraction of a physical environment where William felt most at ease during his Continental travels and residence. While the monastery of Batalha was to have such a decisive impact on the architectural genesis of Fonthill, a particularly valuable part of this essay is the analysis of the significance of Beckford's rural upbringing in his affinity with the Portuguese landscape and patterns of cultivation.

Anne Eschapasse's chapter 'William Beckford in Paris, 1788-1814: "*Le Faste Solitaire*"' is one of the most intriguing contributions to the book. She has unravelled with much skill and tenacity one of the most intransigent areas, from a documentary point of view, in Beckford's Continental residence and collecting, much of it occurring in the heat of the Revolutionary era. If this part alone was all that was known of William's life abroad, it would make compelling reading but is all the more significant when placed within the context of Europe in turmoil as his tastes changed, aided by the Parisian bookseller Charles Chardin who continued to act as principal supplier, adviser and agent up to his death in 1826. Beckford's principal residences at the Hôtel d'Orsay in the 1780s and Hôtel Kinsky in the early 1800s, both of them in the highly exclusive Faubourg Saint-Germain, are explored for the first time to give the essential context for one who placed a high priority on an appropriate environment for acquisitions. Here we also learn of William's precocious patronage of the great Napoleonic silversmith Henri Auguste in 1788 and follow the collector's evolution in taste in one of the most exciting periods of the decorative arts. As the writer puts it: 'the pursuit of excellence in workmanship remained the sole impulse behind Beckford's long-lasting patronage of contemporary craftsmen, quite independently from the ebb and

flow of fashion' (p. 103).

The scene shifts to Fonthill in the following two essays devoted to the prime monument, and its landscape setting, of Beckford's immensely productive life. Megan Aldrich's study of the building and its interiors is invaluable as a skilful act of reconstruction in interior design and furnishings, although the current reviewer is puzzled that more use was not made (and cited) of his published analysis of the building's complex structural evolution, itself a phenomenon in taste that was exceptional for the close collaboration between patron and architect. For instance, while the surviving evidence establishes that the famous and unique visit by Nelson with the Hamiltons, Benjamin West and others, in December 1800, was largely confined to the southern portion of the incomplete Abbey, here it is stated that the distinguished party entered by the Western Hall, followed by the Octagon. In fact, the interior of the latter was still under construction in 1808 and the well-known account in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of April 1801 makes it clear that the visitors had first entered by the Postern Gate in the South Wing.

Strangely also, the role of the original architectural model, first published by the reviewer in 1970 as a key document in the design process, particularly after Wyatt's sudden death in 1813, while referred to obliquely in the catalogue (apparently, respecting the owner's wishes) is virtually passed over and is omitted from the illustrations. Moreover, the absence of an engraving of the Abbey's remarkable main floor plan, either from Britton or Rutter, among the illustrations anywhere in this book (although Fonthill Splendens is well served in this respect) puts the reader at a considerable disadvantage. This essay, nevertheless, is particularly illuminating through its fresh insights into Beckford's highly original manner of setting furniture and objects as well as the role of Wyatt as furniture designer. At this point in the sequence of essays, a contribution on Beckford's significance in the revival and extensive use of painted glass, as

explored in the researches of Sarah Baylis (featured in the special Beckford issue of *Country Life*, February 2002), would have been appropriate. One of the greatest legacies of Walpole's Strawberry Hill to Fonthill was the use both of historic and modern glass to convey theatrical and thematic effects.

The landscape setting of Fonthill has been excellently served in Alexander Marr's contribution which effectively traces the complex influences, sources and physical diversity of the terrain which offered such a diverse range of experiences for Beckford and his contemporaries. However, it is quite inaccurate to say that 'difficulties in understanding the Fonthill landscape may also partially be attributed to the neglect of landscape gardening as a subject in Beckford scholarship until relatively recently' (p. 138). In the note supporting this statement reference is made to Gemmett's doctoral dissertation of 1972 and Châtel's distinguished recent thesis, as well as comments in books by Jacques, Watkin and Mowl, while failing to mention Christopher Thacker's substantial essay ('England's Kubla Khan') and supporting entries in the 1976 Beckford catalogue, now considerably expanded in his new book, *Building Towers, Forming Gardens*, written some years ago but sadly delayed in publication.

At the heart of the book are four essays which, together, constitute a major revaluation of Beckford, both as collector and designer. The prodigious range of his collecting, particularly in the decorative arts and the diverse media represented – never static but forever encompassing new areas of expression – have long been acknowledged, but never before has such a formidable body of evidence been assembled to document these phenomena. In the process, despite the considerable myths that have proliferated, standards of provenance have been rigorously applied so that what is discussed and displayed provides a far clearer picture for analysis.

Bet McLeod's engrossing portrait of Beckford as collector, set

within a wider European context of the princely *Kunstkammern*, is a positive *tour de force* in tracing not only the complex patterns of acquisition, changing preferences and sales but explores the psychological forces that drove these obsessive activities. The endless quest for recognition and esteem, which generated so much of Beckford's artistic life, inevitably resulted in substantial myth-making that has to be stripped away in this careful assessment. The gamut of expression extends from his Francophile taste of his early collecting, through the Fonthill years of medieval and Renaissance synthesis to the abrupt change in favour of a bold Italianate vocabulary by the 1820s following his move to Bath. Special preferences for small-scale and highly wrought objects are examined in his taste for *pietre dure* and all forms of hardstones, notably demonstrated by the 'Rubens Vase' (sadly confined to Baltimore on account of a hair-line crack) as well as the spectacular German standing cup with cover, lent to the exhibition from the Thyssen-Bornemisza collection. Display was an essential element in this activity and Dr McLeod provides fascinating insights into the imaginative ways Beckford exploits space, colour and texture to bring out the peculiar merits of each object, such as the 'Fonthill Ewer' which, alas, was not allowed to cross Central Park from the Metropolitan Museum for the Bard showing.

Adriana Turpin's remarkable essay, 'Filling the Void: The Development of Beckford's Taste and the Market in Furniture', greatly enlarges our understanding of this major aspect of the story so closely allied to architectural interiors. Her wide knowledge and love of French seventeenth- and eighteenth-century furniture has made her the ideal choice to deepen an appreciation of this key aspect of Beckford's early taste, especially his relish for Boulle and admiration for Riesener. Her analysis of the workings of the art market and the intricate contacts with leading *marchands merciers*, such as Lignereux, are supported by a remarkable analysis of the market fluctuations,

demonstrated by graphs of financial differentials drawn up by Humphrey Morison. After examining the role of *pietre dure* and historicist furniture at Fonthill, she goes on to explore the fascinating dialogue between Beckford the collector and designer in the pieces created by him for his Lansdown interiors, in collaboration with the cabinet maker Robert Hume.

This creative exchange between collecting and designing is developed in an equally impressive essay by Michael Snodin on Beckford's metalwork where the role of Gregorio Franchi is given due prominence. Here the expertise of the writer in setting up the Gallery of Ornament at the Victoria and Albert Museum enables him to reveal the exceptional acts of empathy with past ornamental designs, particularly those of the late Northern Renaissance, by Beckford and Franchi in the settings of hardstones, and we are shown the revolutionary significance of this historicising process for the future.

An assessment of Beckford's internationally significant collection of Japanese lacquer by Oliver Impey and John Whitehead, which completes this group of essays, also reveals the same striking phenomenon of sympathetic adaptation of fine pieces of furniture for modern uses. As in so many instances in his collecting, the associational value of such works of lacquer, such as the 'Mazarin' chest or the 'van Diemen' box (formerly owned by Madame de Pompadour), also possessed for Beckford multiple layers of meaning as well as quality.

Given that Beckford was distinguished in his refusal to divide the decorative from the fine arts in a hierarchy of values, it was a wise decision to include an essay on his activities as collector of old master paintings, drawings and prints. (Would that it had also been possible to include contributions on his signal role as a patron of modern painting and sculpture, as well as a collector of finely-bound books and outstanding illuminated manuscripts.) In a skilful survey of a large area of remarkably diverse acquisitions, including a pioneering taste for the so-called Italian 'primitives'

and Flemish Renaissance art, Jeannie Chapel succeeds in enlarging our understanding of the role of dealers and advisers in the fluctuating pattern of Beckford's acquisitions. As elsewhere in the book, key figures behind William's multifarious activities, like Henry Tresham and Edward Foxhall, emerge from the shadows while new light is also thrown on his sensitive resistance to over-cleaning.

Another signal merit of both book and exhibition is the correction of an imbalance brought about by the spectacular and notorious role of Fonthill in the Beckford story. The final three essays direct our attention to the extensive activities of William, both in London and Bath. Sidney Blackmore's essay on Beckford and London fills an important gap since, inevitably, the metropolitan city was the subject of a love-hate relationship, polarised to a degree by the eruption of the Powderham scandal in 1784. As never before we can follow the early social aspirations and progress of the youthful Beckford from his father's residence in Soho Square, to Wimpole Street and West End House in Hampstead, and on to Portman Square, before the long periods abroad, then in maturity and old-age through his houses in Upper Harley Street, Gloucester Place and Park Street which largely represent a series of bases for his business affairs and collecting expeditions. While we are reminded of the care taken even here with furnishings and artistic contents, we also get a greater feel for the practical day-to-day life where the setting is not in competition with its owner for attention.

The same author's chapter on the Bath years tells a remarkable story beautifully, not without considerable pathos, with tantalising glimpses of the surviving Grecian Library at 19 Lansdown Crescent, formerly occupied by our late President, James Lees-Milne. Beckford's architect for this room, Henry Edmund Goodridge, was to produce for his client a remarkable and final act of assertive taste in the Lansdown Tower, subject of the closing essay by Christopher Woodward whose professional

life continues to be closely involved in Bath's architectural heritage.

Had there been no Fonthill Abbey, the story of Beckford's tower on Lansdown and this final episode in his long and exceptional life would still make remarkable reading since, to the very end, his artistic discrimination and capacity to be ahead of his times never slackened. Book and exhibition do full justice to this truly amazing fact and provide an impressive symmetry with the comparable attention earlier devoted to Splendens which shares something of the same combination of classic restraint and sumptuous colours and textures. The evidence of Beckford's intervention in this remarkable architectural design of a Graeco-Italian structure in collaboration with Goodridge convinces us all the more of his equally significant role in collaboration with Wyatt at Fonthill. Moreover, his radical change of taste in the Tower's interiors (already dealt with in several of the earlier essays), are celebrated in the chromolithographs by Willes Maddox and still perceptible today, thanks to the sympathetic restoration by the Beckford Tower Trust.

While the exhibition is evaluated separately in this issue of the *Journal*, it would be appropriate in closing this review to give particular credit to the exceptional success of the organizers in achieving a balance of media and phases in taste, given the protean range of interests of one who had an extraordinary eye for the magnificent. The publishers have matched this achievement with an outstanding layout and book design in which the extensive catalogue entries, covering a third of the volume, are integrated with high quality colour illustrations of a sufficient scale to be enjoyed without displacing text. For a subject who himself was so fastidious in all things visual, not least in the production of fine books, this is a worthy tribute indeed.

The William Beckford Exhibition at Dulwich

ARNOLD WILSON

It is fortunate that those who were unable to visit the William Beckford exhibition, subtitled 'An Eye for the Magnificent', at the Bard Graduate Center in New York could have the opportunity of making the pilgrimage to the refurbished Dulwich Picture Gallery to enjoy the slightly reduced display. One hesitatingly feels that Beckford might have approved the choice of this venue. After all, Lansdown Tower, built partly to house some of his treasures, had also at one time been marked out as a burial site for him, just as Sir Francis Bourgeois and the Desenfans family rest at Dulwich in the decorated mausoleum. Sir John Soane, the architect, was also, of course, involved in Fonthill Splendens.

The size of the exhibition, 160 objects, many quite small, belies the amount of painstaking research devoted to the project. It has been about six years in preparation, and found its first venue very suitably at the Bard Center which has hosted distinguished exhibitions on Sèvres porcelain, Roman Baroque art and Pugin. Philip Hewat-Jaboor, who first approached the Bard Center, and his exhibition colleague, Bet McLeod, were the prime movers for the project and indefatigably pursued Beckfordiana round the world to bring to fruition this gleaming display. Pioneering work had been accomplished years ago by, for example, Clive Wainwright, Michael Snodin and Malcolm Baker, but a large number of treasures previously thought unconnected with Beckford have been diligently uncovered, and sometimes even had to be assembled from disparate pieces. The disaster in New York on 11 September threatened to end all hope of staging the exhibition and it seemed little short of a miracle that the display was ready by 6 October.

It must be said at once that the purpose of the exhibition is to

concentrate on the decorative arts as, indeed, befits the Bard Center, and it inevitably reveals, in the main, only one of the facets of Beckford's extraordinary life and achievements. Beckford is greater than the sum of his varied interests, but his overwhelming love for the richly ornate is given full evidence together with his impeccable eye for masterpieces and the wilful delight in embellishing the already embellished.

There are few examples of paintings from what was once a major collection. Twenty of his pictures are in London's National Gallery and others in, for example, the Metropolitan, the Frick and California. Books, which were perhaps Beckford's greatest love, and his chief claim to fame, can understandably only be represented by four editions of *Vathek* and examples of binding. It is important to note, however, that reasonable space is devoted to Fonthill Abbey and Lansdown Tower.

The informative video display and Michael Bishop's model of Fonthill help visitors to appreciate Beckford's most extravagant venture. Pictures also, such as the view of Batalha by Henri L'Eveque, flesh out these aspects and, more importantly, the great Turner watercolours of Fonthill. Although not of architectural significance, the atmospheric watercolours by John Robert Cozens form a thematic link. The younger Cozens accompanied Beckford on his second visit to the continent. The six watercolours on display range from the stormy 'Schloss Haderburg', full of mood and drama, to the calm and poetic 'View from Mirabella'.

The exhibition is contained in an enfilade of rooms, the case lighting making for glittering reflections from precious metals and bejewelled treasures. Even before we actually enter the exhibition a double-sided vitrine displays a teapot of solid gold. Who but Beckford would choose gold for a utilitarian object which his guests must have assumed was silver gilt? Likewise, across the room is the even more surprising, exquisitely-chased gold toasting fork. A monumental silver gilt basket by Paul Storr

of 1797-98 is, again, exceptional for its quality while the glorious pieces of Meissen introduce us to Beckford's porcelain which will be augmented later in the displays. The Meissen pieces belong to the Stadholder Service, a dinner and dessert service produced around 1772-74 for Willem V, Prince of Orange.

Romney's well-known full-length portrait of Beckford as a young man coming-of-age dominates this first room, and his imperious yet poetic gaze directs us, in the context of the exhibition, towards further treasures which are now set off by crimson walls. The Worcester factory during the Barr, Flight and Barr period supplied Beckford with plates, cups and saucers where his taste for heraldic devices has tended to run riot over the glittering surfaces. Beckford's obsession with heraldry and his lineage occurs frequently on objects of all description, particularly the ubiquitous crest of a heron head with a fish in its beak. The cup and cover by John Harris of 1826-27, bought in 1990 by the Fitzwilliam Museum, reveals also Beckford's favourite ploy of uniting metal with stone, the rich lapis lazuli set in silver gilt, each of the handles wrought as a serpent but finishing as Beckford's heron.

The casket by Henri Auguste, after a design by Moitte, has a fascinating history. In silver gilt and dated circa 1805, Beckford particularly admired the sleeping Morpheus lying lethargically on the cover of this cast box. 'You know my fondness for this drowsy personage', he remarked. The casket was sold by Beckford at auction in 1817 and bought by the Earl of Yarmouth acting on behalf of the Prince Regent. Thus it came into the possession of a person comparable to Beckford in the sphere of collecting. The casket was enjoyed for a few years by Lady Hertford, the King's mistress, until it was gifted to the Marchioness of Conyngham, her successor in the King's favours.

It is inappropriate to continue to single out many individual items from the exhibition, but two pieces which were displayed together in the Grand Drawing Room at Fonthill Abbey were a

superb table of gilt bronze, marble and oak by an unknown maker and an extraordinary water pipe – a hookah. A coloured copy by Margaret Zachert from Rutter's *Delineations of Fonthill* usefully recreates the effect of the blue damask in this room, and depicts the table in the centre with the hookah. As Charles Catar explains in his catalogue entry, it seems likely that Beckford acquired a pair of mirror-figured semi-circular tables mentioned in the posthumous inventory of the Empress Josephine. He then had them skilfully joined together for the table top, and had designed and made the fine gilt bronze base. The attendant hookah is the subject of an entry by Layla Diba who describes it as the ultimate Oriental fantasy object, an authentic Mughal carved nephrite ewer or water vase remounted as a water pipe bowl with a mount devised for it in 'India style'. This creation in nephrite, silver gilt, platinum and semi-precious stones is a supreme example of Beckfordiana. Its ownership at one time by the legendary Tipu Sultan adds to its fascination.

Extraordinarily informative exhibits are the three oil paintings by Willes Maddox (1813-1853), belonging to the Beckford Tower Trust and normally displayed in Lansdown Tower. They are pictures of considerable merit and intensity but, more importantly, they document outstanding items in Beckford's collection. Some of these are included in the exhibition, but the most important object of all was considered too frail and precious to make the journey from America to England. This is the thirteenth-century enamelled glass ewer, probably from Syria, which is described in the catalogue entry by Stefano Carboni as one of the most remarkable extant examples of its kind. It passed from the Duke of Hamilton to the barons de Rothschild and was sold at Christie's in 2000. Its inclusion in the Willes Maddox painting helped to confirm that it was of an early date and not a brilliant copy made in the nineteenth century.

The penultimate room of the exhibition continues the opulent roll call. Of the many smaller objects the five hardstone spoons

were particularly appealing. They were not designed for use, but their agate, gold and enamel would have been lovingly admired when drawn from a cabinet. An enamelled Limoges chasse is described by Barbara Drake Boehm as among the finest ever made. It was kept by Beckford in St Michael's Gallery at Fonthill where 'all was in monastic taste, with shrines, reliquaries, and religious sculptures ... illuminated with wax candles.' A jasper-mounted bowl by Paul Storr, belonging to the Barber Institute in Birmingham, is said to be part of the 1821 shipment of hardstones which Franchi sent from Paris. Many visitors will be unaware of the frenetic actions behind the scenes of Gregorio Franchi, Beckford's factotum and friend. Beyond the frozen beauty of the exhibition lies a welter of human emotions with even Beckford at times worried about the increasing volume of treasure. He wrote to Franchi in 1813, 'I see from the buying mania which dominates you that we are well on the way to ruin. Oh my God, so many things!' It is touching to think of Franchi anxiously asking a skilled craftsman if an object could be made even finer, or, when making his will, trying to remember, as if in a nightmare, the hundreds of objects stored in Paris, London or Rome.

Beckford's final years in Bath are partly represented by furniture used in Landsown Tower, although also included are a pair of cabinets inlaid with porphyry, jasper and cameos. They exemplify to the full Beckford's taste for inlay and highly-finished metalwork. Inevitably two of the final exhibits are the death portraits by Willes Maddox. The Duchess of Hamilton probably kept the interior scene deliberately sparse as we know that very many paintings, for example, hung in his bedroom. It is difficult to reconcile the nutcracker profile with the younger Beckford, but the Hoppner portrait of circa 1800 helps to elucidate the later physiognomy and as Beckford himself wondered why he had been spared so long, the final imprint stamped by time should not surprise.

Deconstructing The Caliph

MALCOLM JACK

The appearance of an edition of Beckford's work is always an occasion for celebration and joy to readers of this journal. When the work is produced to the highest scholarly standards, has a pleasing format and typeface and is sensibly priced, a feeling of pride of ownership is added. Kenneth Graham's new edition of *Vathek* and the *Episodes of Vathek* (Broadview Press) meets all the criteria for this value-added sense of pleasure. Nevertheless, purchasers of this handsome volume need to be warned that it is no ordinary compilation; indeed in significant ways it is a radical presentation of Beckford's texts and, as such, is bound to cause discussion, even controversy. That in itself is no bad thing for Beckford studies.

The first and most significant editorial decision Graham has taken has been to produce *Vathek* and the *Episodes* as one continuous text. He has two principal reasons for doing this – the first is that it was always Beckford's intention to publish the *Episodes* with *Vathek*, and secondly that the discovery of a new version of the first *Episode* (Alasi and Prince Firouz (Kah)) removes a clumsiness which was the principal obstacle to reading the texts as one. Let me consider this discovery first.

What Graham has uncovered (hitherto unknown to, or ignored by, other Beckford scholars including the present reviewer) is a version of the first *Episode* in which the ill-contrived cover-up of the tale's overtly homosexual theme (achieved by turning the Prince Firouz, the object of Alasi's passion, into Princess Firouzkah), is not present. Although remarkable in itself, the discovery does not affect previous readings of the tale as a homosexual one, albeit thinly disguised. Graham, reviewing an earlier discussion in these pages about the desirability of a combined edition of *Vathek* and the *Episodes*, concludes that the

discovery removes the objection to the publishing of the two as a single text, but it does not for reasons I will elucidate more explicitly than I have done in the past.

My principal reason for my not considering the two works as a continuous text is that by reading *Vathek* and the *Episodes* in a stream (which ironically can now be done in this volume) one is convinced of their complete difference in mood, tone and even subject matter. *Vathek*, while dabbling in horror and grotesquery, is in essence a high-spirited romp full of camp humour and histrionically exaggerated situations. It is a story written in the flush of vibrant youth, full of spark and *joie de vivre*, at a time when Beckford was 'magnificently unprepared for the long bitterness of life'. The *Episodes*, by contrast, really are stories of alienation and desecration. There is an unreality and electrifying mood of horror in them; whilst Beckford's quips of wit and humour have not gone, the overriding tone is grim and unrelenting. The *Episodes* are tales written by a man who has himself visited Eblis as Graham himself attests when considering the correspondence that Beckford had with Henley during their writing. There is therefore, in my view, no aesthetic unity in the works; Beckford's intentions at the early stage of the enterprise were overtaken by events. He needs to be deconstructed.

The second radical innovation in Graham's edition is to leave out Henley's notes (principally on the grounds they are out of date) and substitute revised notes of his own (which are up to date on the history and practice of Islam, the background 'costume' to *Vathek* and the *Episodes*). Graham's notes are indeed informative and highly useful but was it necessary to excise Henley's entirely? In the Penguin edition I produced with the enormous benefit of Graham's own text of *Vathek* (the same text based on the 1816 revised edition being used in this edition) Henley's notes only take up twenty-three pages. I think it would have been useful for those concerned with the complex matters of Beckford's orientalism, as well as with his relations with Henley,

to have had them in this edition for reference, albeit of an historical nature. Details in the original notes such as the one defining 'Caliph' give us interesting insights into the whole thinking behind the text.

I would not want to leave the reader of this review with a negative impression. This edition contains many gems not least of which is the inclusion of both versions of the *Alasi Episode*. It provides a full chronology, and as I have already said, detailed notes on historical matters and much reflective material about the meaning of orientalism. I urge readers of this journal to rush out and purchase the book at once if they have not already done so.

Where Nelson went in Fonthill Abbey

JON MILLINGTON

Most of what we know about the visit to Fonthill Abbey of Admiral Lord Nelson and his party on 23 December 1800 comes from the *Gentleman's Magazine*. In the second part of his letter to the *Magazine*,¹ the artist Henry Tresham (1756-1814) gave a detailed account of the night-time excursion from Fonthill Splendens to the unfinished Abbey. From this we can work out where the party entered the building and which rooms they saw. It is worth attempting, because some of Beckford's biographers give versions of the visit which stray from the truth. With the help of the room-by-room descriptions of the Abbey by Storer² in 1812 and Rutter³ in 1823 it is possible to discover where the party actually went, and we can follow their route by reading the relevant parts of Tresham's letter:

The parties, alighting in orderly succession from their carriages, entered a groined Gothic hall through a double line of soldiers.

They would have entered the Abbey by the Eastern Postern,

because this 'groined Gothic hall' is not the Great Western Hall but the Southern Entrance Hall (Rutter, 9-10) under St Michael's Gallery. Storer showed the Eastern Postern, with a gravel drive in front, in his engraving 'South East View of Fonthill Abbey'.

From thence they were received into the great saloon, called the Cardinal's parlour, furnished with rich tapestries, long curtains of purple damask before the arched windows ... At the moment of entrance they sat down at a long table, occupying nearly the whole length of the room (53 feet), to a superb dinner

Storer (9-10) called the Cardinal's parlour on the ground floor the Brown Parlour, while for Rutter (10-13) it was the Oak Parlour, measuring 52 feet 6 inches (16 metres).

... Dinner being ended, the company removed up stairs to the other finished apartments of the abbey. The staircase was lighted by certain mysterious living figures at different intervals

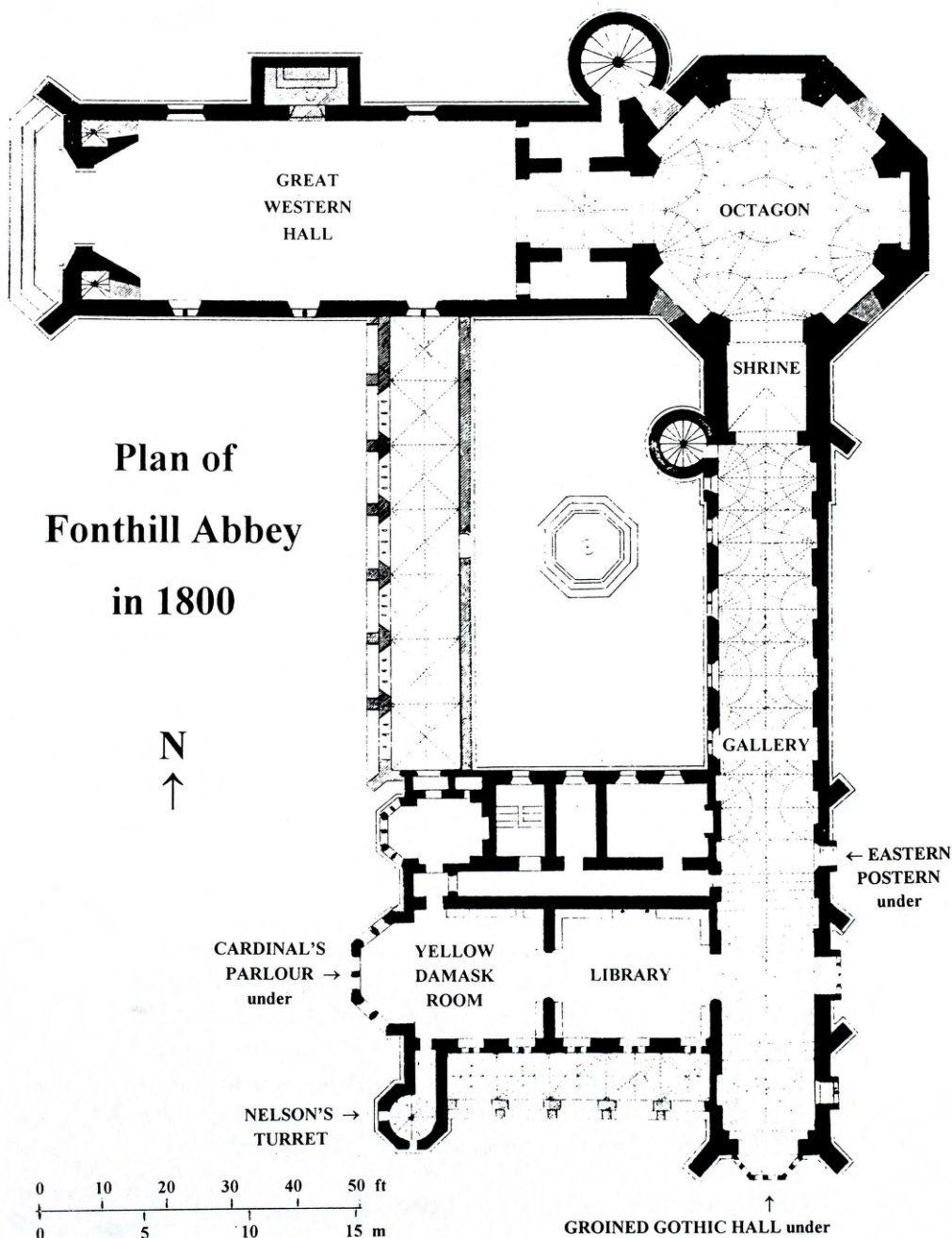
This 'staircase', the 'winding staircase' mentioned by Storer (10-11) was in the Nelson Turret, so called by Rutter (13), and was at the south western tip of the Abbey.

... A magnificent room hung with yellow damask, and decorated with cabinets of the most precious japan, received the assembly

Situated over the western half of the Oak Parlour, Storer (15) called this room the Yellow Damask Room while Rutter (51-52) gave it the grander title, Western Yellow Withdrawing Room.

... It was from this room they passed into the Library, fitted up with the same appropriate taste.

The Library was over the eastern half of the Oak Parlour. To Storer (15) the Library was the Japan Room and to Rutter (52) the Eastern Yellow Withdrawing Room. It is not to be confused with another library, the 'Board of Works', which was on the



floor above. Britton⁴ (10) combined the two Yellow Withdrawing Rooms as Yellow Drawingrooms.

The Library opens by a large Gothic screen into the gallery ... This room, which when finished will be more than 270 feet long, is to half that length completely fitted up, and furnished in the most impressively monastic style.

Storer (15-16) called the Gallery by that name, but by Rutter's time it had become St Michael's Gallery (59).

A superb shrine, with a beautiful statue of St. Anthony ... exhibited a scene at once strikingly splendid and awfully magnificent. The long series of lights on either side of the room, resting on stands of ebony enriched with gold, and those on the shrine all multiplied and reflected in the great oriel opposite ... produced a singular and magic effect. As the company entered the gallery a solemn music struck the ear from some invisible quarter, as if from behind the screen of scarlet curtains which backed the shrine

The shrine would have been at the north end of St Michael's Gallery with the musicians behind the curtains in the Octagon. At that time there was no North Wing. Indeed, in his authoritative study of the various building stages of Fonthill Abbey, John Wilton-Ely has made it clear that work on it might not have begun until as late as 1807, using stone from Fonthill Splendens which was mostly demolished in that year.⁵

... After the scenic representation a collation was presented in the library, consisting of various sorts of confectionary served in gold baskets, with spiced wines, &c. whilst rows of chairs were placed in the great room beyond, which had first received the company above stairs. A large vacant space was left in the front of the seats. The assembly no sooner occupied them than Lady Hamilton appeared in the character of Agrippina'.

We are now in a position to trace the party's route in the

Abbey. Having entered by the Eastern Postern on the ground floor, they turned left into the groined South Entrance Hall. They proceeded to the Oak Parlour on the right, where they had supper. After climbing the spiral staircase in Nelson's Turret to the principal floor, they went through the Western and Eastern Yellow Drawing Rooms and into St Michael's Gallery to admire the vista towards St Anthony's shrine in front of curtains at the entrance to the unfinished Octagon. Returning to the Eastern Yellow Drawing Room, they consumed the collation and went through to the Western one to enjoy Lady Hamilton's 'attitudes'. They would then have retraced their steps down Nelson's Turret to leave by the Eastern Postern.

In case there should still be any doubt about the perambulation and, in particular, which entrance was used, we only have to turn to Rutter: 'All attempts to warm the Great Hall sufficiently for its intended use as a Refectory, proving ineffectual, the apartment was finally devoted to the less important, though more effective purpose, of a State Entrance to the Chapel [in the Octagon] ... and the present flight of steps at the east end introduced; these alterations were completed about 1809-10.' (111) He also noted that preparations for the visit were 'necessarily hastened by the completion of the southern rooms, but all the fittings-up beyond the Library were temporary.' (110)

Clearly the Octagon would have been far from complete at the time of Nelson's visit. Writing to Franchi seven years later,⁶ Beckford said, 'I am planning all the reforms imaginable, seeing the desperate and despairing state of Jamaica. I am stopping all building little by little: I shall leave the Octagon half-finished and without most of the mouldings'. Limited progress appears to have been made in the subsequent months, and in September 1808 Beckford complained that he had been 'busy from morning to night shouting, supervising and singing out of tune in the cursed and interminable Octagon.' A few days later he was in a better mood and told Franchi,

All three of the Batalha windows are already in place and produce the most splendid effect. The men are in full swing on the fan tracery, and on Monday we begin the eight big columns, three men to each; so I am confident that at least the grand effects will be visible before the fatal day, the day when all the workmen with all their scaffolding and filth etc have to be sent away, to do whatever they like.

Interpretations of Nelson's visit to the Abbey by Beckford's biographers have varied widely. Redding (1859)⁷ simply rewrote Tresham's account in his own words, while Melville (1910)⁸ concentrated on 'the great library [where] Lady Hamilton struck one of her famous attitudes'. According to Oliver (1932),⁹ 'They were received in the great western entrance hall', and Chapman (1937),¹⁰ building on this mistake, went further; 'In the Great Hall [footnote: i.e the Western Transept] dinner was served ... then the whole party reassembled in the hall to witness Emma going through her much-admired postures'. Unfortunately Megan Aldrich's recent version of the visit¹¹ appears to have been based on a combination of these two erroneous accounts, but she cited only Britton (1823) who had simply reprinted Tresham's account in which the Great Western Hall is not even mentioned. Brockman (1956)¹² accurately yet colourfully paraphrased Tresham, as did Boyd Alexander (1962).¹³ Lees-Milne (1976)¹⁴ did not stray from Tresham, and neither did Fothergill (1979)¹⁵ nor Mowl (1998),¹⁶ who went so far as to point out that 'the party entered, not by the giant 35-foot doors [of the Great Western Hall] opened by a grotesquely leering dwarf but by the regular north-west [actually south-east] postern gate, a small door in the near-windowless east flank of St Michael's Gallery.'

Many other aspects of Nelson's four-day stay at Fonthill, including Joseph Farington's brief but fascinating record of who was present in the Abbey, were admirably investigated by Dick Claésson in 'Staging and adapting the Nelson visit', a chapter in his recently-published dissertation.¹⁷ Even though the Abbey was

far from complete and would remain in Beckford's possession for another twenty-one years, Nelson's visit was unquestionably the most important social occasion to have taken place there.

My grateful thanks to John Wilton-Ely for all his help.

¹ [Herny Tresham]. 'Letter from a Gentleman, present at the Festivities at Fonthill, to a Correspondent in Town.' *Gentleman's Magazine* 71 Part 1 (Apr 1801): 297-298. The letter, from Fonthill, was dated 28 December 1800.

² James Storer. *A Description of Fonthill Abbey, Wiltshire*. London: W. Clarke, etc., 1812.

³ John Rutter. *Delineations of Fonthill and its Abbey*. Shaftesbury: The Author, 1823.

⁴ John Britton. *Graphical and Literary Illustrations of Fonthill Abbey, Wiltshire*. London: The Author, 1823. 29-31.

⁵ John Wilton-Ely. 'The Genesis and Evolution of Fonthill Abbey.' *Architectural History* 23 (1980): 40-51 & pl. 28-36.

⁶ William Beckford. *Life at Fonthill 1807-1822*. London: Hart-Davis, 1957. Trans. & ed. by Boyd Alexander. 57, 78, 81. Letters of 11 Nov 1807, 14 & 18 Sept 1808.

⁷ Cyrus Redding. *Memoirs of William Beckford of Fonthill, Author of "Vathek"*. 2 vols. London: Charles J. Skeet, 1859. 2:121-127.

⁸ Lewis Melville. *The Life and Letters of William Beckford*. London: Heinemann, 1910. 235-236.

⁹ J. W. Oliver. *The Life of William Beckford*. London: O.U.P., 1932. 242-243.

¹⁰ Guy Chapman. *Beckford*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1937. 272-273.

¹¹ Megan Aldrich. 'Fonthill Abbey.' In *William Beckford 1760-1844. An Eye for the Magnificent*, 123-124. Ed. by Derek E. Ostergard. New Haven & London: Yale University Press for the Bard Graduate Center, 2001.

¹² H. A. N. Brockman. *The Caliph of Fonthill*. London: Werner Laurie, 1956. 124-128.

¹³ Boyd Alexander. *England's Wealthiest Son*. London: Centaur, 1962. 162-163.

¹⁴ James Lees-Milne. *William Beckford*. Tisbury, Wilts: Compton Russell, 1976. 46.

¹⁵ Brian Fothergill. *Beckford of Fonthill*. London: Faber, 1979. 262-263.

¹⁶ Timothy Mowl. *William Beckford: Composing for Mozart*. London: John Murray, 1998. 239-241.

¹⁷ Dick Claésson. *The narratives of the biographical legend. The early works of William Beckford*. Gothenburg: The Author, 2001. 34-76.

William Beckford and the Gothic Charivari

DIDIER GIRARD

The so-called gothic revival and more generally speaking the renewal of interest for anything gothic from the eighteenth century onwards is usually explained as a reaction against the rigours of classical tastes. But to be frank, this normative and highly intellectual view is hardly convincing. Indeed, two centuries ago as well as today, there is no moral or aesthetic law which prevents us from passing from passion to (classical) taste or vice-versa. Many gothic enthusiasts happened and still happen to revel – at times – in classical or neo-classical art. In academic circles, everyone seems to agree on the definition of the gothic novel as a literary genre, and art historians seem to take neo-gothicism for granted. Disputes and debates usually revolve upon some erudite references, attributions and influences from one building upon another, from one *recherché* ornament upon some piece of poetry or fiction but very few of them seem to challenge the neo-gothic style or notion as such, leading to such follies as ascribing the adjective ‘gothic’ to all sorts of artists, sensibilities, periods, forms of art and whatnot. Today in America ‘gothic’ even seems to have become a mere synonym for anything terrifying, gory, cryptic or even fantastic. These notions in literature and in the history of architecture, as both are so much interwoven, should be reconsidered before discussing what kind of gothicism Beckford’s less-known tales and fiction are made of.

Dreams Made of Stones

Art historians’ concepts can be very deceptive when applied as literary tools and as such can become a new form of intellectual snobbery and vacuum. Such terms as ‘post-modern strategies’, ‘mannerist discourse’ or ‘baroque deconstruction’, are often a lure, as usually the aesthetic perspective behind those big words

are not made clear but simply assumed and we know that epistemological *dérive* can be very harmful to the appreciation of old texts. Still, in the case of the gothic novel for instance, the role of the history of architecture is so closely associated with it that it is possibly necessary to reconsider a few facts in order to understand more clearly what the gothic meant to eighteenth-century aesthetes and artists.

The development of the neo-gothic after 1834, when the movement turned into something more academic and in a sense more *bourgeois* with the Oxford movement, the art of Pugin, the emblematic *Houses of Parliament* or what is usually called the ecclesiastical neo-gothic will be left aside in this study. We shall concentrate on what was variably known as gothik / gothick / modern gothick or gothic as understood by amateurs and individuals during the eighteenth century. As everybody knows, a great many books have come out on the subject but despite their scholarship and subtle aesthetic digressions, two points can never be too strongly emphasised.

To start with, gothic taste is first and foremost a poetical matter¹ and has long been established in a literary tradition: Pope's *Eloisa to Abelard* (1717), David Mallet's *Excursion* (1726), the Warton brothers, Arthur Young, and many others including Thomas Gray of course. Speaking about the Warton brothers, it is interesting to notice that Joseph Warton's *The Enthusiast or the Love of Nature*, published in 1740 and so typical of pre-romanticism, may lead us to think of Beckford's subtitle for his novel *Modern Novel Writing or the Elegant Enthusiast*, but this a topic which deserves further examination. All the poets mentioned above embody a *nostos*, an urge to a return which was headed towards nature, which is probably one of the most important characteristics of gothic. Indeed, Beckford was much influenced by Thomas Gray, filling *Vathek* with descriptions 'pregnant with poetry' and as well as many other writings such as those in *Prince Ahmed*, for instance:

J'étais entouré, d'un côté, de précipices au bas desquels roulait une eau rapide qui en tombant de rocher en rocher faisait retentir l'air d'un bruit sombre et terrifiant; d'un autre côté, des forêts se présentaient à ma vue, dont le noir et funeste ombrage répandait une fraîcheur mortelle et remplissait l'âme d'épouvante ... Ils se trouvèrent bientôt au bord de cette sombre vallée. Une vapeur en sortait comme d'un bain d'eau bouillante et ils crurent voir rassemblées dans cet abîme toutes les ombres effrayantes de la nuit. A mesure qu'ils descendaient, il leur semblait qu'ils pénétraient dans les ténèbres du séjour d'Eblis. Chaque pas leur portait le frisson au cœur.²

The pre-romantic sensibility and the surrender to all the manifestations of nature, including that of death (needless to say we are here quite a way from the Wordsworthian notion of 'Mother nature'), were later amplified into the picturesque, in other words a development of what can be called an architecture of suspense but also a suspended architecture, in short an architecture made of ruins. Whether one reads Kenneth Clark or contemporary historians such as Megan Aldrich, the picturesque is characterised by a mixture or rather a blend of tastes, whether unexpected or exotic, which first became most evident in landscape gardening,³ especially by William Kent as early as the 1720s. Besides, it is a well-known fact that gothic enthusiasts in the eighteenth century adapted this aesthetic evolution to the field of mental representation at large, Horace Walpole being an obvious example. Another way to understand this evolution is the totally fanciful allegory which was thought to be reliable until the end of the nineteenth century. William Warburton in his 1751 edition of Pope's *Works* invented this theory, according to which the Goths' places of worship were bushes, but when they became Christians they added to the architecture of their new religious buildings elements copied from forests and vegetation in general. There is of course no historical truth in this but the flight of imagination involved speaks volumes for this nostalgic urge to

the uncontrolled and anarchic forces of nature. In other words, the genesis of the gothic movement is not an archeologising quest. As for the relation between the architectural and the literary movements, Kenneth Clark has not yet been surpassed in his judgement: 'The gothic poets had sung a faint discordant undertone to the Augustan harmony; the Gothic novelists screamed – screamed in complete reaction to everything stuffy and probable. Reaction was their chief impulse, and reaction is almost their only connection with the architectural side of the Gothic Revival'.⁴

The second point which deserves a special emphasis is that the neo-gothic architecture, or rather the renewal of interest in 'gothic' buildings or ornaments, is not at all pure. In his book *Gothic Europe*, Saverio Sestini corrects our vision: 'The Romanesque grew imperceptibly into the Gothic probably at intimation of the pointed arches of the Fatimids or the Saracens ... The mosques of Cairo and Damascus ... Omit the sculpture which was forbidden to the Moslems and the kinship becomes more apparent.'⁵ In his conclusion entitled 'Charivari of the Gothic', the baroque specialist that he was leads us to see that the architectural gothic owes as much to the Northern as to the Arab traditions. This is not an eccentric's isolated point of view. If we consider a few commentators of the modern period, we find the same confusion in terms of influences from the Arabs, the Moors and the would-be Barbarians of the North. This is the case in John Evelyn's *Accounts of Architects and Architecture* (1697), J. F. Sobry's *De l'architecture* (1776) or even in Fénelon's *Lettre sur les occupations de l'académie française*. The so-called Gothic Revival or should we say the gothic Survival is the offspring of three complementary traditions: the medieval, the Arab and the Saracen.

Gothic Novels and the Dark Sensibility

The circumstances under which Beckford and a few friends

started to read and translate some oriental manuscripts from the Montague collection are quite well-known. It might have started as early as 1781 but we know for sure that they were most productive and busy with these 'romantic translations' during the winter of 1782. It started as a game probably, a *jeu de salon* certainly, but developed into something quite different. The question which is still to be answered is why Beckford chose to write in French. One possible explanation is that he, as a teenager, had read the *Arabian Nights* in French editions (Galland, d'Herbelot, etc.) and felt more comfortable in this exotic language so as to enjoy the special atmosphere of the East. Another one is that French represented the language of subversion, the language in which he could express his innermost feelings and his sensual reveries. That is why the term 'romantic translation' was alluded to, as Beckford did not literally translate those texts; he and his friends probably did when they worked together but Beckford's imagination flared up. As in chivalric romances (*romans de chevalerie* to be more exact), creating or story-telling was not a matter of inventing fictional elements leading to original plots but of reorganising the fixed, sometimes stereotyped, episodes or tableaux of a legendary tale. In order to understand the author's method in such a peculiar form of literary creation, we just have to dig into the Beckford papers to find the clue to his arabesques:

Voici encore de l'arabesque que je fis sur des écrits dont l'original se trouve dans le même recueil où Jonathan Scott et plusieurs Orientalistes ont puisé. Savary aussi a paraphrasé ce petit conte à sa manière. J'avais commencé à le traduire littéralement. Mon maître d'arabe, un vieux musulman né natif de La Mecque, me l'avait recommandé comme exercice de langue. J'ai trouvé pourtant la narration si pompeusement ennuyeuse que je l'ai jetée de côté. Zémir voulu me brider, comme de raison, mais ayant pris le mors au dent, je me suis emporté à grand galop dans les régions de ma voyageuse

imagination. Voici le résultat.⁶

This quotation brings us back to the blend of different traditions already mentioned when considering the genesis of the gothic taste revival in architecture. Beckford's oriental tales are not exactly oriental because of the fiery and modern imagination that is stirring in them. But can they, as literary pieces, be considered as gothic? Can we believe Professor Maurice Lévy who wrote his doctoral thesis on the English gothic novel, which has now become a sort of reference book on those matters in France as well as in England? Such writings share three common denominators: the overwhelming presence of the abbey (or any place of seclusion), a pervading atmosphere of terror or anguish and manifestations of the world beyond in the diegesis. Most tales – not all of them – but most of them and all of Beckford's fictional letters (*The Vision*, 'The Transport of Pleasure', the Nouronihar fragments) correspond to this typology. So why does Lévy exclude *Vathek*, for instance, from the gothic literary genre? Many critics have shown that despite the erudition of the man behind the texts, the tales are not exactly Arabian tales. Some even suggested that they were rather caricatures or parodies of the gothic novel: 'Seine pseudo-orientalische Erzählung *Vathek* kann als groteskes Zerrbild der *gothic novel* gelesen werden', Elke Heinemann tells us in her recently published doctoral thesis. As for Lévy, his hypotheses concerning Beckford's two novels *Modern Novel Writing* and *Azemias* are very interesting and ambiguous; he reads them as two parodies of the genre but also discerns in them passages that could be considered as gothic. Moreover we know that Beckford did not like being associated with the gothic revival in architecture: 'No. I have enough sins to answer for without having that laid to my charge'. Both opinions are thus intellectually acceptable; his tales and early writings can and cannot be considered as gothic.

So we are left with a big question mark. Let us go back to

Horace Walpole and his *Castle of Otranto*, reputedly the first gothic novel. Walpole is also the author of the *Hieroglyphic Tales* and the play *The Mysterious Mother*. Aren't there passages in these two works that are somehow gothic? Is the gothic novel always a novel? Nothing is less certain than that. Besides if we read Lévy's *magnum opus* carefully, we may notice that although he rejects Mary Shelley as well as Beckford as gothic authors, he nonetheless gives counter arguments to his own judgement which tend to show how wrongly we assumed that something gothic has necessarily to be medieval gothic:

Malgré les rapports qui ont pu être établis entre la superstition gothique et la superstition orientale par certains esprits avertis du 18^{ème} siècle - en particulier en raison de l'origine sarrasine des romans de chevalerie -, nous croyons sages d'exclure de cette étude du roman 'gothique' anglais, les contes orientaux, dont l'esprit nous paraît tout à fait différent, même lorsqu'ils atteignent à la qualité du *Vathek* de Beckford.⁸

Things are gradually becoming less clear. If we re-read the essays and comments of precisely those contemporaries of the 'gothic revival', that is to say John Aikin for example and his *On The Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror* (1773) or Nathan Drake in *Literary Hours* (1800) we find again that the oriental, the gothic and the Saracen traditions intertwine and if we read Aikin in particular, the thing becomes even more obvious; the author does not dwell on a medieval archaeological gothic but on the dark novel and sensibility as a whole and most of the time at a poetical or philosophical level. We may find many other examples of books or writers who are usually forgotten in the gothic pantheon such as Tobias Smollett and his *Ferdinand Count Fathom* or Charles Brockden Brown's works, among many others, who partake of the same dark sensibility. As a conclusion to this reassessment of the gothic genre, I think once again it shows how deceptive categorising can be, leading as it can to a

general misunderstanding of such artistic gestures. So gothic has a very vague meaning today but maybe it is not such a big question after all since it has always been the case.⁹ Even within the group of unchallenged gothic authors, what remains is the individuality of each artist. And William Beckford is certainly one very good example of the English and French dark novelists, along with Sade, Diderot, Lewis and Sophie Lee.

In France, the rediscovery of such novels or writings is due to the insatiable curiosity of the surrealists. It might be interesting to remember that René Magritte did some illustrations for *Vathek*, still unpublished, and that the surrealists never spoke of a gothic taste or novel but rather of *romans noirs* just as Aikin or Drake did in their own times. In *Les vases communicants*, Breton dreams about a little gothic glass bookcase that one could hang on the wall with all the dark novels of the pre-romantic era. His taste for such books is based on the fact that he considered them as 'ultra-romanesques' and 'archi-sophistiqués'. Realism and identifications are not sought after; a new (shall I dare utter the word: modern?) mode of representation of mental perceptions was being born.

Beckford's Special Brand of Gothicism

In almost all dark novels, the focal point and the horizon are marked by a place or building which seems to represent metaphorically the darkest recesses of the human psyche. In Beckford's case, this place of subversion was first the 'Dome of the Setting Sun', in his early letters, then Eblis in *Vathek* and finally Fonthill Abbey in real life. The progression is quite revealing; the dome is a place of communion, Eblis the 'most atrocious Hell in literature' and Fonthill Abbey, as it is an abbey and not a cathedral, a place of expiation. Yet, in Beckford's tales, there is what Antoine Hatzenberger has called the aesthetics of the cathedral,¹⁰ which does not imply that there must be an actual cathedral playing a rôle in the diegesis.

First, verticality is the general movement in the progression.¹¹ The thing is quite obvious in Beckford, whether in *The Transport of Pleasure*, *The Vision*, or a famous episode in 'Histoire d'Elouard Felkanaman et d'Ansel Hougioud'.¹² Any time the protagonist is beset by doubt or any peripeteia is to occur, the pilgrimage is described on a vertical axis as opposed to the bucolic or picturesque descriptions which are horizontal. Secondly, as in *Histoire du Prince Ahmed*¹³ the cathedral is a sort of interface between the exterior and the interior. The sublime quality of indoors *locale* stands as an ornament to the picturesque surroundings as well as a reflection of it. Architecture is also a metaphorical space in the gothic sensibility and more especially it reveals passions and eroticism. The *locus* can be either a luxurious abbey or a tomb but always a secluded place where melancholy pervades. In his *Almanach des Muses* Choderlos de Laclos wrote in 1777: 'Ô! tombeau désirable! Ô! demeure tranquille! / Le malheur nous poursuit, prête-nous un asyle / A l'orage qui gronde, ô Mort!, dérobe nous.'¹⁴ And then we are not all that far from the atmosphere Beckford conjures up in the first pages of 'Histoire d'Al Raoui', in which the protagonist is shown, all alone and cut off from the rest of the world: 'Ennuyé de ma solitude, la mélancolie me gagna si terriblement que ma vie me devint insupportable et souvent je souhaitais la mort.'¹⁵ Melancholy in Beckford's tales can also be considered as another kind of transport, a travel within oneself towards something strange and foreign. Hence, the emblematic and literal spiral pattern which is quite obvious in *Histoire du Prince Ahmed* or 'Histoire d'Aladdin'.¹⁶ To use Hatzenberger's words 'Ce que la rosace et le labyrinthe signifient, n'est-ce pas alors l'exigence pour l'homme hors de lui et étranger à lui-même à force d'extraversion, affairé, dispersé et perdu dans le monde, d'être transparent à soi-même, et de rentrer en soi pour trouver son propre centre?'¹⁷ With Beckford, this spiral movement is inscribed within oriental settings clouded here and there by

Sadian motifs, giving birth to a very peculiar delight in languorous sighs and imperious desires. The author often mentions situations in which 'le cœur est condamné à des privations éternelles'.¹⁸ What is forbidden is not exactly what could be expected, that is to say certain objects of desire, but the moral question concerns the limits and essence of pleasure; in other words how to contemplate and enjoy the object of one's temptations without possessing it. That is maybe what the Beckfordian obscenity encapsulates. In 'Histoire des Fontaines de Merlin', the fountains of hatred are more important than the fountain of love, the passionate lover in 'Al Raoui' wants to be buried wrapped up in his beloved's shroud, Elouard Felkenaman and Ansel Hougioud are apparently much more in love when they are furiously searching for one another beyond the seas, which are always considered as doomed places in the Arab tradition.

Last of all, the role of architecture in Beckford's writing is to enhance a sense of infinitude which leads to a certain vertigo for the reader as the structure of the whole work is always interdependent with its meanings. In fact, the process is one of homology,¹⁹ everything becomes comparable to everything. In *Histoire du Prince Ahmed*, the protagonist passes from his cell to the nets of a fisherman;²⁰ in *The Vision*, the perspective is not created by a few columns but three thousand of them and their floral shapes and ornaments seem to multiply and develop as the reading progresses.²¹ In his *Essai sur le goût*, Montesquieu gives an original point of view on the tantalising visual impact of gothic architecture: 'L'architecture gothique paraît très variée; mais la confusion des ornements fatigue par leur petitesse; ce qui fait qu'il n'y en a aucun que nous puissions distinguer d'un autre, et leur nombre fait qu'il n'y en a aucun sur lequel l'œil puisse s'arrêter ... Un bâtiment d'ordre gothique est une espèce d'énigme pour l'œil qui le voit; et l'âme en est embarrassée comme quand on lui présente un poème obscur.'²² In Beckford the enigma boils down to the fact that the decor is not one really,

it fictionally develops as images abound: 'A chaque pas, il trouva quelque nouvel objet qui l'enchantait. Cent fontaines de marbre jetaient des eaux transparentes et fraîches sur des parterres remplis d'une quantité de fleurs qu'il n'avait jamais vues auparavant'.²³ As a matter of fact, Beckford's neo-gothic is based on the fractal technique²⁴:

De cette salle, il passa dans une infinité d'autres qui avaient toutes des meubles et une illumination semblables et qui n'étaient séparées que par des portières. Quand il croyait avoir tout vu, c'était à recommencer. Las, enfin, de parcourir ce vaste palais, il se coucha par terre, pour attendre que quelqu'un se présentât à lui.²⁵

Beckford's neo-gothicism also relies heavily on a special brand of historicising. In all his early writings, he manipulates historical references and rearranges them in – precisely – a gothic manner. There is a continuity in Beckford's artistic gesture along with the pre-romantics. In 1785, Thomas Gray wrote: 'The drift of my present studies is to know, wherever I am, what lies within my reach, that may be worth seeing whether it be Building, ruin, park, garden, prospect, picture or monument ... and what has been the charakteristik, and taste of different ages'.²⁶ If you take 'Histoire de Yao' for instance, there are numberless parallels and echoes in the Golden Age in China, the ninth and tenth centuries of the Arab world around Baghdad and ancient Greece (Yao, p. 46). Besides, oriental or more precisely Hindu divinities also abound in 'Histoire de Visapour' although some of the events take place in Araby and one of the embedded stories of 'Histoire d'Aladdin' is the story of Prince Mahmed who is King of India. Many times memory and erudition turn writing into a sort of psycho-active travel in time:

Toutes sortes de pensées défilèrent dans mon esprit. Je me rappelais les événements passés. Je prévoyais le futur. Je reniais mes prophéties. Tout m'apparaissait comme dans un

rêve et, l'instant d'après, tout me semblait réel.²⁷

The *Recollections of an Excursion to the Monasteries of Alcobaça and Batalha* are not exactly recollections but rather a retrospection in which memory is fictionalised by the imagination. The very architecture of the monasteries is responsible for a change of mood in the traveller's account. Alcobaça is half way between the romanesque and the gothic whereas Batalha is a more massive and theatrical kind of gothic artefact. Within the excursion, the narrator who is also an art historian all of a sudden exposes the reader to visionary episodes such as that of the thoroughbred at the end of the eighth letter, and that of the three pages taking part in the rites of Isis in the seventh letter. Kenneth Clark wrote that: 'Fonthill and Windsor spring from an impulse similar to that which produced Napoleonic classicism, the idealisation of a past way of life'²⁸, but maybe idealisation is not exactly what Beckford was after. In fact, like Prince Pückler-Muskau²⁹ visiting Warwick Castle in 1826, Beckford could have written: 'I fancied myself transported back into bygone ages as I entered the giant Baronial Hall'. Hence, Beckford gives free rein to what we could call his mythopea or mythography. Beckford revisits ancient if not primeval civilisations and infuses them with a timeless dimension; in 'Histoire de Yao' the protagonist is looking for the Fien (or original spirit), then 'êtres prestigieux ... demi-dieux de ces temps anciens, dont peu de nations ont encore un respectueux souvenir'.³⁰ In 'Histoire de Darianoc', a new unheard of religion is established without 'simulacres, ni idoles, ni culte établi, ni prêtres',³¹ celle du Cœur Grand'. In these tales or fictional letters, Beckford not only develops a world of his own but also accumulates past, present and future visions in a modern-gothic manner.

Other characteristics of Beckford's gothicism which are more technical than thematic³² could be explored, such as a very

strange enunciative strategy and character-types from medieval and Arab tales. Among many others, Beckford did invent the *sabih* type (a neologism derived from *sabih*, the handsome one and *saih*, the wanderer), giving birth to such characters as Ahmed, Darianoc and Chemnis. What is important here is to notice that character-types usually make the identification process extremely difficult and what really matters in the end is the lyrical and the mechanical, as the two modern forces at work in art. The story must proceed whatever the reader's expectations might be, and the lyricism of some tableaux must strike him like thunder. What must remain is not the empathy or sympathy of introspective narratives but the sublime terror and excitement of initiation novels:

Sans aucun doute, ces derniers moments passés, qui ont glissé comme la vision de la Nuit, n'effaceront pas le souvenir de ceux auxquels j'ai aspiré pendant mon initiation.³³

In other words this kind of literature works on a total disregard for the reader's expectations and that explains why dark novels are often read several times in a lifetime with totally different reactions from the same reader. The impact is nonetheless extremely romanesque, as what is to be found there is something between Burkian fear and rapture, as if fiction echoed the vacuum in oneself of the impossible ideal of fusing with the universe.

As a conclusion, why not conjure up an emblem, as any gothicism is a matter of ornament? Birds are overwhelmingly present in Beckford's early tales. His arabesques do not include doves or pigeons but rather Persian *simorgs*, Chinese *Phengs*, Hindu *garudas* and Arab *rocs* or *ankas*. All these different versions of a huge white bird could be the most characteristic *chimera* of Beckford's writings and this leads us to think again about the obscene, this time not as a moral notion supposed to represent anything that goes against conventions but etymologically speaking, as the offspring of the *oscene*, that bird

whose song is a sort of omen, a sort of revelator of an impending doom. Behind the extravaganza and the gothic richness of Beckford's many talents lies an ever present inner disruption which is not the result of an ontological fall but, in a more modern manner, of an imagination torn apart from reality:

J'étais devenu le jouet de mon imagination et ne discernais qu'à grand peine les zones d'ombre de celles de la réalité. Un effort violent fut nécessaire pour me tirer de mon emprisonnement momentané déchirant au passage mon habit que je quittai pour mieux continuer ma progression à travers la forêt dans une obscurité presque totale.³⁴

Definitely dark.

¹ See Kenneth Clark, *The Gothic Revival. A Chapter in the History of Taste*. Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 1964. See chapter 2, 17-33.

² *Histoire du Prince Ahmed*. Paris: José Corti, 1993. 49 & 110. 'I was surrounded on the one hand with precipices down which water cascaded from rock to rock with dark and terrifying rumbling sounds and on the other with forests offered to my view, the dark and foul shade of which gave off a deadly moistness in the air and filled the soul with terror.'

³ See Monique Moser, ed. *Histoire des jardins*. Paris: Flammarion, 1991.

⁴ Clark, 32-33.

⁵ Sitwell, *Gothic Europe*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, 1969. 86-87.

⁶ This is in fact the preface to 'Histoire d'Elouard Felkanaman et d'Ansel Hougioud' in *Suite de contes arabes*. Paris: José Corti, 1992. 23. Beckford mentions Claude Etienne Savary (1750-1788), a famous orientalist, traveller and grammar specialist. 23 note 2.

'Here again is the arabesque that was inspired by an original text to be found in the same collection on which Jonathan Scott and other orientlists have fed. Savary too dwelt on this little tale in his own way. I had begun a literal translation of it as my Arab teacher, an old Muslim born in Mecca, had recommended it to me as an exercise. Yet, I found the narrative so pompously boring that I put it aside. Zémir wanted to curb me, as Reason would have it, but champing at the bit, I galloped away in the realms of my wandering imagination.'

⁷ Elke Heinemann. *Babylonische Spiele: William Beckford und das Erwachen der modernen Imagination*. Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2000. 12.

⁸ Levy, Maurice, *Le roman gothique anglais 1764/1824* (doctoral thesis,

Toulouse, 1968). 167, note.116. 'Despite the links that have been established between the gothic and oriental superstitions by certain wits of the eighteenth century, especially on the basis of the Saracen origins of the chivalric romances, we find it wiser not to include oriental tales in this study of the English gothic novel, the spirit of which being entirely different, even when they reach such standards as Beckford's *Vathek* does.'

⁹ See Lovejoy, A. O. & Michel Baridon, *Le gothique des lumières - The First Gothic Revival and the Return to Nature*. Paris: G. Montfort, 1991 and Sitwell, *Gothic Europe*.

¹⁰ Hatzenberger, A., *Esthétique de la cathédrale*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999.

¹¹ See Hegel. In his lectures on aesthetics, he insists on the harmony between the architectonic shape of the cathedral and the true spirit of Christianity. Sitwell mentions the 'urge upward' in his *Gothic Europe*.

¹² *Suite de contes arabes*, 116.

¹³ *Suite de contes arabes*, 16.

¹⁴ 'Oh desirable Tomb / Oh peaceful Abode / Unhappiness is at us / Lend us some asylum / From the thunderous Storm / Oh Death / Takes us Away'

¹⁵ Histoire d'Al Raoui in *Suite de contes arabes*, 69.

¹⁶ In *Suite de contes arabes*.

¹⁷ Hatzenberger, 29. That we can sum up by 'What the rose-window and the labyrinth mean is not to find something without, in the outer world, but to become transparent and withdraw within so as to find one's own centre.'

¹⁸ 'Histoire d'Elouard Felkanaman et d'Ansel Hougioud' in *Suite de contes arabes*, 128.

¹⁹ See E. Panofsky, *Architecture gothique et pensée scolastique*, trans. Bourdieu. Paris: Minuit, 1967. 103-105.

²⁰ *Histoire du Prince Ahmed*, 22-23.

²¹ One can successfully compare a passage in *La Vision*, Paris: José Corti, 1990, 53-54, with the description of the ceilings by James Wyatt in Fonthill Abbey: 'There are several different types of fan ceiling, more than ever touched the imagination of James Wyatt, the delicate arachnid-elegant fan-patterns in the corners of whose stucco ceilings are so characteristic as to amount to his personal signature'. Sitwell, 59.

²² Quoted in Lovejoy & Baridon, 18-19. 'Gothic architecture looks diversified but the confusion of ornaments tires because of their minuteness ... A gothic building is a kind of enigma to the eye and the soul is embarrassed with it as when presented with an obscure poem.'

²³ 'At every step he found a new enchanting object. One hundred marble fountains spilled transparent fresh waters on plentiful flowerbeds that he had

never seen before.'

²⁴ Read for example the visit to Fonthill Abbey by Samuel Rogers in 1817: 'On Mr B's stamping and saying, "Open!" the Statue flew back and the Gallery was seen extending 350 feet long. At the end an open Arch with a massive balustrade opened to a vast Octagon Hall, from which a window shew'd a fine view of the Park. On approaching this, it proved to be the entrance to the famous tower – higher than Salisbury Cathedral; this is not finished, but a great part is done. The doors of which there are many, are violet velvet covered over with purple and Gold embroidery.' Quoted in Guy Chapman, *Beckford*. London: Cape, 1937. 284.

²⁵ *Histoire du Prince Ahmed*, 27. 'From this room, he passed on to a myriad of other rooms which all displayed the same furniture and lighting and they were only separated from one another by half doors. When he thought he had seen it all, he had to do it all again. Weary at last of wandering in this vast palace, he lay down on the pavement, waiting for someone to appear before his eyes.'

²⁶ Quoted in Clark, 24.

²⁷ *La Vision*, 24. 'All sorts of thoughts crossed my mind. I remembered past events. I foresaw the future. I denied my prophecies. Everything appeared to me as in a dream, everything seemed real to me.'

²⁸ Clark, 78.

²⁹ Beckford made many references to this German prince and traveller in his correspondence with his bookseller, George Clarke. See William Beckford. *The Consummate Collector: William Beckford's Letters to His Bookseller*. Wilby, Norfolk: Michael Russell, 2000.

³⁰ *Suite de contes arabes*, 44 & 53. 'looking for prestigious Beings from old times and whose memories so few nations still revere.'

³¹ Ibidem, 185. 'Histoire de la princesse Fikelah et du prince Chemnis', 170 or 'Histoire de Darianoc', 183-184. 'a religion without simulacres, idols, established worship, priest - the religion of the Big Heart.'

³² Developed in Didier Girard, 'L'univers obscène et para-gothique des arabesques de W. Beckford', Conference, University of Orléans, September 2000. To be published.

³³ *La Vision*, 130. 'There is little doubt that the moments which I have just undergone are now vanished as quickly as a night vision but they will not erase those I aspired to during my initiation.'

³⁴ *La Vision*, 37. 'I had become the toy of my fancy and I could hardly distinguish shadows from reality. A violent effort was necessary to free me from my momentary imprisonment, tearing apart my attire which I then left behind to carry on my progression through the forest in almost total darkness.'

Brief Encounter of Beckford and Disraeli, or The Radical Pair of 'Oriental Voluptuaries'

JERRY NOLAN

In what became for about eight years an 'interchange of courtesies', Disraeli and Beckford sent each other copies of recently published work.¹ The interchange seems to have been initiated by Disraeli when he forwarded a copy of *Contarini Fleming*. In a letter to his sister Sarah dated 26 May 1832, the thirty year old Disraeli confessed to having sent Beckford, forty years older, a copy 'as I like to do astonishing things' before recording that he had received an acknowledgement of the gift: 'His answer is short, but very courteous. It commences with four exclamations, "How wildly original! How full of intense thought! How awakening! How delightful!"' (BDL, 1:193) Beckford's fulsome words of approval greatly heartened the young author who was otherwise experiencing critical indifference and poor sales.² It must have been the sheer pleasure of approval from a man of Beckford's taste that prompted Disraeli to continue sending his new publications, and the enthusiastic Beckford continued to respond. There seem to have been more than 'courtesies' involved in the interchange.

Beckford was so overjoyed at the discovery of a kindred spirit when he read *The Psychological* that he appointed George Clarke, his confidential agent and bookseller, to investigate the astonishing author and to act as go-between. Disraeli's *Contarini Fleming* was a poetic autobiography, conceived in Cairo and written on the long voyage home during the weeks of quarantine in Malta.³ The novel demonstrated how travelling in the Orient could form an aesthete's appreciation of other cultures, and concluded with Fleming settling in southern Europe (in Italy) but contemplating reform from a measured distance in northern



Benjamin Disraeli in 1833 by Daniel Maclise

Europe (in England). The last words suggested that in Fleming's case politics ('the arch of the conqueror') would most likely triumph over literature ('the laurel of the poet') as Fleming/Disraeli concluded by proclaiming how this poet wanted, above all else, to be remembered: 'as one who devoted himself to the amelioration of his kind, by the destruction of error and the propagation of truth.'⁴

Beckford was enormously interested in his newly acquired young admirer, but remained determined to keep a certain distance. In March 1833, Disraeli sent a copy of *The Wondrous Tale of Alroy* to the expectant Beckford. The self-distanced admirer's feeling of rapture greatly intensified. Clarke was entrusted with another note and a large page copy of the 1815 French edition of *Vathek* of which only twenty-five had been printed. Beckford instructed Clarke to discover if Disraeli were sufficiently versed in French to be able to appreciate the *Episodes of Vathek* and other unpublished works from his own youth. When Clarke reported back that Disraeli was the most conceited person he had ever met, Beckford's desire was not to be diverted and he pointed out to Clarke that 'what appeared conceited in D. was only the irrepressible consciousness of superior power.' Clarke's instinctive dislike of Disraeli persisted in his account of the Disraelis in a fog of tobacco smoke and of BD's indifferent French accent which suggested that his French was not up to the task of reading Beckford's unpublished work in French. Immediately Clarke implied the probable reason why Beckford and Disraeli might well regard each other as kindred spirits in the sentence: 'He is an "Oriental Voluptuary" and concocts scenes with great effect.' While Beckford disapproved of the filthy habit of smoking and expressed scepticism about the state of Disraeli's French, he remained so captivated by *Alroy* that he told Clarke that Disraeli's English was so lovely and superior that it compensated for other failings. So overwhelmed did Beckford feel about *Alroy*, as a book of the most exquisite beauty, by a

superior and extraordinary genius, that he rashly announced to Clarke on 6 March 1833: 'I will appear to him the very first opportunity.' The plan was revised on the very next day: 'I should remain inaccessible. We are probably destined to meet, but where and when is doubtful.'⁵

Unlike his overall most sweeping impression of *Contarini Fleming*, Beckford became quite specific in explaining to Clarke why he so admired *Alroy*. In a letter dated 14 March 1833, Beckford wrote:

I have slowly and reluctantly finished the truly wondrous tale of *Alroy*, which I wish had been extended to 20 volumes. I did not hurry on, fearful of expending the treasure too fast, for a treasure I consider it to be, and of the richest kind.

Beckford rejoiced in the heroism of the youthful and lovely *Alroy*, the hyena-like fierceness and treachery of Schirene and the masterstroke of *Alroy*'s self-immolation. What most deeply affected Beckford were the signs of *Vathek* in *Alroy* – at last his beloved *Vathek* was beginning to produce progeny that he was happy to acknowledge.

Most proud I am to perceive that he is so strongly imbued with *Vathek* ... The halls of Eblis, the thrones of the Solimans are for ever present to his mind's eye, tinted with somewhat different hues from those of the original; but pertaining of the same awful and dire solemnity. (CC, 186)

Clarke was instructed to allow Disraeli to make copies in Mount Street of Beckford's favourable comments on *Alroy*. (BDL, 1:255) Beckford was alert to the uncertain course of Disraeli's ambitions to be elected as an independent radical M.P. in the wake of the 1832 Reform Act. On 12 April 1833, Beckford praised the 'grandeur of thought and power of expression' in Disraeli's address to the electors of Marylebone in London.

Disraeli was to withdraw from that election and Beckford commented on 14 April 1833: 'What can possess so bright a genius to dabble again and again in such a muddy horsepond!' (CC, 201) Beckford's interest in Disraeli's reforming political views revived when the political pamphlet *What is He?* appeared as a critique of the political impasse being created as a result of the battle between the House of Commons and the House of Lords, and as a dramatic plea for a National Government to respond to widespread popular discontent. Beckford even hoped that his son-in-law, the Duke of Hamilton, would read and take note of the pamphlet. (CC, 208) At this time Disraeli was being guided politically by Lord Chandos to work for a Tory-Radical alliance against the pseudo-democratic Whigs, a position which apparently won Beckford's approval.⁶

When a parody of Disraeli as a consummate dandy appeared in *Frazier's Magazine* in the series 'Gallery of Literary Characters', Beckford recalled the parody of *Vathek* in the short-lived *Knight's Magazine* at about the time of the sale of Fonthill Abbey. (CC, 205 & 209-210). When Beckford's *Italy; with Sketches of Spain and Portugal* was published in 1834, Disraeli offered to write a review of it in the October issue of *The Edinburgh Review* but the editor Macvey Napier declined the offer. (CC, 293-294) Beckford found Disraeli's *Revolutionary Epick* to be a poem with interesting lines but not satisfying as a whole; however, he instructed Clarke to convey only his words of praise. (CC, 292) Enthusiasm bubbled up again in a letter to Clarke about Disraeli's *The Infernal Marriage* which had first appeared across four issues of *The New Monthly Magazine* and which Beckford enjoyed for its sly dry humour and for further signs of the continuing influence of *Vathek*, all of which prompted a splendid recapitulation of the 'praise of *Alroy*' theme:

Though D is perpetually galoping over Vathek's manor of Hell
it is no trespass. The Caliph and Alroy were both co-lords of

that appalling region. Its gloom, its vastness, its undefined horrors are their own, and the dreadful game they may start from the events belongs to them by prescription as much as it did in his day to Dante. (CC, 290)

At this stage, Vathek-mania rose in Beckford to the point where he began suggesting that the time was right for the publication of *Episodes of Vathek*:

Now the propitious hour for sharpening the public appetite for more powerful episodes – which if they ever emerge from Hades into day light will reduce Byron's Corsair and Victor Hugo's monsters and scoundrels to insignificance. (CC, 290)

Then Beckford and Disraeli met face-to-face for the only time, at a variety benefit performance at the King's Theatre London, which included a one-act version of Rossini's opera *Semiramide* on 12 June 1834. (BDL, 1:337, note 8) The topic of the *Episodes of Vathek* was sure to have been broached during their few hours of conversation. Next day Disraeli wrote to Beckford:

I send you some tribute in the shape of a piece of marble which I myself brought from the Parthenon. It may be sculptured into a classical press for the episodes of Vathek which otherwise may fly away without the world reading them.

There is a heartfelt plea for more direct contact: 'I think it very unfair that I should hear of the great Beckford only from my friends, and that I am not permitted personally to express to him how very much he has obliged.' (BDL, 1:327)

A few days later, Disraeli wrote to his sister Sarah about Beckford's enthusiasm for their father's novels:⁷

"Despotism" is capital, full of the real stuff. I said it wanted developemt. He sd. *damn development* – I can develope if a

man gives me ideas – *Meinoun* and *Leyla*, as he called it, capital. He has all his works in his tower at Landsdowne ... Beckford's feeling for the fine arts is beyond all conception. (BDL, 1:329)

In the physical presence of Beckford, perhaps Disraeli felt overawed and settled for the role of the young man bowing low before the older man of the greatest taste. This hero-worship was not quite enough for Beckford to lessen the distance between them. He did not offer the *Episodes of Vathek*. 'The interchange of courtesies' was continued for a few more years, even after Disraeli had become M.P. for Maidstone in 1837, an event which ended his long years of revolutionary dandyism on the political margins. In his last recorded letter to Beckford on 6 January 1840, Disraeli was complimentary about Beckford's *Excursion to the Monasteries of Alcobaca and Batalha* but also suggested that his days of poetical enthusiasm were becoming a thing of the past: 'It is a charming volume, deeply imbued with the genius of the subject, and with those youthful feelings of poetical enthusiasm which, with me, are now a dream. My father was delighted with it.' (BDL, 3:1026)

At the very heart of the colloquy which took place between Beckford and Disraeli was Beckford's jubilant certainty that *Alroy* was the legitimate offspring of *Vathek*. The enthusiastic Beckford's drooling over the progeny has not been shared by many other readers. A biographer of Disraeli has dismissed *Alroy* as 'a strange farrago of oriental romance, biblical bombast and dreamy aspiration ... full of the absurd extravagances of the sort already made familiar by Beckford's *Vathek*'.⁸ A Beckfordian scholar has spurned *Alroy* as the work of 'a young foppish admirer of Beckford, just back from a tour of the Near East ... in which he drew largely on *Vathek*. Benjamin Disraeli's romance is fantastically inferior when compared to the original model.'⁹ This kind of instant incineration of *Alroy* tends to ignore the

fundamental critical task of focusing on Beckford and Disraeli as a remarkable pair of 'oriental voluptuaries'. My contention here is that it was precisely because they shared a form of cultural orientalism, largely for deeply personal reasons, that they were drawn for a short time into an oasis of strange harmony, at once close and distant.

The oriental tale as an eighteenth-century European literary genre began in France with the publication of Antoine Galland's translation from a Syrian manuscript of *The Arabian Nights* between 1704 and 1717. This greatly helped to establish a western market for tales about Orientals, Persians, Tartars and Indians, which would include every class of person from the sovereigns to the destitute.¹⁰ Oriental writing in English was often presented as translations of fabulous Oriental storytellers, a device which was most amusingly satirised in Horace Walpole's preface to *Hieroglyphic Tales* (1785). An adolescent fascination with reading and writing oriental stories prepared Beckford to embark on writing *Vathek* in French, after the 1781 Christmas festivities at Fonthill Splendens, with the help of Rev. Samuel Henley who was on hand to provide scholarly notes and an English translation. The twenty-one year old Beckford's fascination with the Caliph Vathek, an actual historical character mentioned in d'Herbelot's *Bibliothèque Orientale* (1697), did not arise from any quest for historical scholarship (although he may have known enough Arabic to have been able to translate *The Arabian Nights*), but from his ideal ambition to adopt a mask which would enable him to explore forbidden experience beyond the stultifying limits of his mother's morally restrictive world. The tragic trauma in Beckford's life allowed Henley to publish *Vathek* without reference to the author.¹¹ What most impressed the first reviewers were two features: the authenticity of the oriental detail and the stinging moral in the story's tail about the just fate of the Caliph who had pursued unlawful and immoral pleasures.¹² Later *Vathek* came to be seen as a *roman à clef* of the

author's own life.¹³ Later still critics glimpsed, beneath the gothic-style rendering of sensational events in a dangerous world, the lurking presence of a Voltaire-like burlesque: 'Potential melodrama and horror are almost invariably deflated by Beckford's detached, urbane, and often comic tone.'¹⁴ No surprise, then, that *Vathek* has often been described by critics and editors alike as 'difficult to classify'.

The key question is – what was it in *Alroy* that linked it to *Vathek*?¹⁵ Beckford must have been impressed by Disraeli's descriptions of the oriental world: the palace of the Caliph in Baghdad (*Alroy*, 26), the great bazaar of Baghdad which had all the rare costly products of the world and people of all nations, creeds and climes (*Alroy*, 49f), the grand marriage of the King of the Hebrews and the Princess of Baghdad (*Alroy*, 158-167). The characters of *Vathek* and *Alroy* were loosely based on historical characters associated with the region of Baghdad: *Vathek* had been Caliph al-Wathik Bi'lah, son of the great potentate Al-Mu'tasim Bi'llah in the ninth century; *Alroy* had been Menahem ben Solomon al-Ruhi, a twelfth-century hero who led the mountain Jews of Azenbaigan against their Muslim rulers. The historical *Vathek* had a short and undistinguished reign and was mainly remembered as a man of letters with a terrible eye.¹⁶ Beckford transformed the historical figure into the portrait of a relentless explorer of the forbidden areas of sensual and intellectual experience and as the occasionally majestic lover of Nouronihar. In Disraeli's version, *Alroy* emerged clearly as a champion of the scattered Jewish people when he defeats the Caliph of Baghdad and marries the Caliph's daughter Schirene, but then only to discover that she is happy to betray him and see him destroyed.

Vathek's final condemnation in the Hall of Eblis after 'a thousand crimes' in the pursuit of excess involves a meeting with his mother Carathis whom he denounces 'Execrable woman ... cursed be the day thou gavest me birth ... how much I ought to

abhor the impious knowledge thou hast taught me.' (*Vathek*, 117) Alroy's trial 'as a child of Eblis' takes place in the Square of the Great Mosque before His Highness Alp Arslan, the mighty sovereign of Karasme, where Alroy escapes death by agonising torture, by proclaiming that he will miraculously survive death, whereupon an angered King beheads him on the spot. (*Alroy*, 244-252) The moment of supreme truth in *Vathek* occurs when Vathek and Nouronihar lose the most precious gift of heaven:—HOPE: 'Vathek beheld in the eyes of Nouronihar nothing but rage and vengeance; nor could she discern aught in his, but aversion and despair.' (*Vathek*, 119) The glory of Alroy's self-immolation is emblazoned on the severed head: 'It fell, and as it fell, a smile of triumphant derision seemed to play upon the dying features of the hero, and to ask of his enemies, "Where now are your torturers?"' In contrast to the sombre power and intensity of the triumphant sneer on Alroy's severed head, Beckford's vision is unexpectedly modulated into the final approval of the figure of the despised Gulchenrouz who 'passed whole ages in undisturbed tranquillity, and in the pure happiness of childhood.' (*Vathek*, 120) As urbane irony was absent throughout *Alroy*, no shift of tone in its final coda could be expected.

As lord of an appalling region, Alroy achieves a gorgeous moment in Jewish history;¹⁷ but even more crucially, his self-immolation is charged with an apocalyptic sense of ruin and liberation which shines forth as the sublime source of future inspiration. The symbolism of Alroy's bold and arrogant heart transfigures his story into one of an outsider who can still forge his way to power in a hostile society – a radical theme which simultaneously appealed to Disraeli at thirty, given his ambitions, and to Beckford at seventy remembering his own aspirations as a young man.¹⁸ It was due to the presence of such a degree of cultural idealism in *Alroy* that Beckford was happy to recognise Alroy as son of Vathek.

The paths of Beckford and Disraeli were destined to diverge.

For Disraeli, the Alroy metaphor was to inspire him to forge his way as a Jew in England along a path leading to the role of Queen Victoria's Prime Minister. For Beckford, the Alroy metaphor may have suggested momentarily a glimpse of what might have been thrust upon Lord Chatham's godson. He treasured his own Vathek metaphor as a memento of the oriental nights of his youth. In a note dated 9 December 1838, attached to a youthful letter to Louisa Beckford, he remembered the night of his twenty-first birthday in Fonthill Splendens, simultaneously reconstructing the memory as an image of creative disorientation/orientation:

I still feel warm and irradiated by the recollections of that strange, necromantic light which Loutherbouurg had thrown over what absolutely appeared a realm of Fairy, or rather, perhaps, a Demon Temple deep beneath the earth set apart for tremendous mysteries ... The glowing haze investing every object, the mystic look, the vastness, the intricacy of this vaulted labyrinth occasioned so bewildering an effect that it became impossible for any one to define – at the moment – where he stood, where he had been, or to whither he was wandering.¹⁹

The great oriental image of the Hall of Eblis, shared with Beckford, was evoked by Disraeli the socialite in a letter to his Sister Sarah on 16 January 1843 after a visit to a masqued ball at the Paris Opera:

A thorough Carnival; the *salle* of the Grand Opera formed into one immense Belshazzar's hall with a hundred streaming lustres. The grand galoppe, five hundred figures whirling like a witches' sabbath, truly infernal...the boxes filled with ladies in black dominoes and masks, very striking, and made the scene altogether Eblisian (*BDL, Vol. 4, letter 1272*)

The absence of apocalyptic gleam and satirical bite from this brotherly gossip points to Disraeli's relentless, albeit slow,

shedding of former dreams. Beckford continued to work during his closing years to rescue the texts of his youthful genius. The interchange between the radical pair of 'Oriental Voluptuaries' has rarely been given close scrutiny. *Alroy* led Beckford towards a mature understanding of *Vathek*, the masterpiece of his youth. Disraeli's *Alroy* has been allowed to pale into almost total insignificance if viewed in the blaze of his later political fame. Yet if *Vathek* and *Alroy* are set down side by side, the novels suggest the subtleties and intricacies, in forms of Western orientalism, when the genre was coloured in apocalyptic hues by two remarkable English storytellers at times of personal and national crises.

¹ The phrase is used in a letter to Beckford dated 6 January 1840 concerning the unforwarded copy of his *Alarcos*. Letter 1026 in *Benjamin Disraeli Letters (1815-1847)* ed. J. A. W. Gunn et al. in 6 volumes (Toronto, 1982-1989). Other references to letters in these volumes will be indicated in the text as *BDL*, vol. no.: letter no.

² In a draft of the letter, Beckford had written 'how startling' instead of 'how awakening'. (Bodleian Library, MS. Beckford c.14. fols. 69-70)

³ See *Contarini Fleming* with new preface (London, 1845), v-vii.

⁴ *Contarini Fleming*, 373. See Jane Ridley, *The Young Disraeli* (London, 1995): 'The novel is portrait of both the artist and the prime minister as a young man', 107.

⁵ William Beckford. *The Consummate Collector: William Beckford's Letters to His Bookseller*. Edited with introduction by R. J. Gemmett (Norwich, 2000), 182. Other references to letters in this volume will be indicated in the text as *CC*, page no.

⁶ See Jane Ridley, *The Young Disraeli* (London, 1995) for further background on Disraeli's 'High Tory radicalism', 131, 183-184 & 340. Also *BDL*, Vol. 1, Introduction, xiii-xxvi.

⁷ Isaac D'Israeli's novels were *Romances* which included 'The Loves of Mejnoun and Lelia: the Arabian Petrarch and Laura' (London, 1797). In his notes Isaac refers to the notes in *Vathek* without mentioning Beckford. On 18 March 1833, Beckford showed a preference for the spelling used by father Isaac when he wrote to Clarke: 'Mr. Disraeli and not D'Israeli - he writes himself, though for my part I think D'Israeli in better taste.' (*CC*, 188)

⁸ Robert Blake, *Disraeli's Grand Tour 1830-1* (London, 1982), 113-114.

⁹ Fatma Moussa Mahmoud's essay 'Beckford, *Vathek* and the Oriental Tale' in *William Beckford of Fonthill: Bicentenary Essays* (Cairo, 1960), 121.

¹⁰ See E. W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conception of the Orient* (London, 1978) for a comprehensive overview of the intellectual genealogy of Orientalism in the early nineteenth century. 92f.

¹¹ See J. W. Oliver, *The Life of William Beckford* (London, 1932) for Chapter V about the composition of *Vathek*, 93f.

¹² As Roger Lonsdale pointed out in his introduction to *Vathek* (Oxford Classics, 1983), the first edition of *Vathek* was widely reviewed before Beckford's authorship had been revealed, xviii-xx.

¹³ *William Beckford of Fonthill: Bicentenary Essays*, 84-87.

¹⁴ Lonsdale's Introduction in *Vathek* (Oxford Classics, 1983), xxv. Quotations from *Vathek* will be referred to in the text as *Vathek*, page no.

¹⁵ See *Alroy* (London, 1845). Quotations will be referred to in the text as *Alroy*, page no. In the 1845 edition, Disraeli added eighty-two notes on pp. 253-266, after the manner of *Vathek*. There is an interesting note on the Mosque of Omar ('The Dome of the Rock') built by Moslem conquerors in Jerusalem after Alroy's time. See Donald Sultana, *Benjamin Disraeli in Spain, Malta and Albania 1830-32* (London, 1976) where Sultana claims that it was his visit to the Alhambra in Granada which inspired Disraeli's description of the Caliph Palace, 26-28.

¹⁶ See Boyd Alexander, *England's Wealthiest Son* (London, 1962) for background detail, 91f.

¹⁷ Disraeli referred to Alroy's death in a preface to his *Revolutionary Epick* (London, 1834) as 'the celebration of a gorgeous incident in that sacred and romantic people from whom I derive my blood and name.'

¹⁸ See Blake, *Disraeli's Grand Tour* for his conclusion about Disraeli's self identification with Alroy's struggles: 'This was to climb to the summit in spite of being an outsider and an adventurer', 113.

¹⁹ Quoted in Oliver, *Life of William Beckford*, 90-91.



Notes on Contributors

Mirella Billi was educated in Florence, where she graduated in Modern Languages. She is Full Professor of English Literature at the University of Viterbo, Italy. She has written extensively on the eighteenth century, focusing on the narrative of Henry Fielding, on the Gothic Novel, on Jane Austen, on the culture of sensibility, on the Grand Tour, and on Beckford. Some essays are dedicated to *Vathek*, to Beckford's 'Visionary Landscapes' and to his Grand Tour, particularly in Italy. She has translated Beckford's *Biographical Memoirs of Extraordinary Painters* and is at present completing and revising the translation of *Dreams, Waking Thoughts, and Incidents*.

Philippa Bishop is a former museum curator, and writer and lecturer on art history. For many years she was the Curator of the Holburne Museum of Art in Bath. She contributed the article 'Beckford in Bath' to *Bath History* II (1988). After her retirement she took on the honorary post of Administrator at Beckford's Tower.

Didier Girard, author of *William Beckford: Terroriste au Palais de la Raison* (1995), has worked on Beckford's literary manuscripts since 1989 for a complete edition of his works. He will publish the first edition of the earliest French text of *Vathek and its Episodes* in its entirety (with annotations and comparisons with the later versions) and a last volume of Beckford's tales in relation to art and pictorial representation in particular (Paris: José Corti, January 2003). Born in Lorraine in the mid-sixties, Didier Girard lives in North Catalonia and teaches English and American literature (eighteenth & twentieth centuries) at the University of Perpignan.

Philip Hewat-Jaboor works as an advisor to private individuals and museums on their acquisitions of furniture and works of art. His longstanding interest in the collection of William Beckford inspired the recent exhibition 'William Beckford, 1760-1844: An Eye for the Magnificent' for which he was the co-curator. He is currently working on an exhibition devoted to the collection of Thomas Hope.

Malcolm Jack's books on William Beckford include *Vathek and Other Stories* (1993), *The Episodes of Vathek* (1994) and *William Beckford: An English Fidalgo* (1997). He has written widely on Enlightenment subjects and reviews books on Portuguese history and fiction. His book *Sintra: A Glorious*

Eden will be published by Carcanet Press in the autumn. Chairman of the Beckford Society since 1995, he is now also Secretary of the Johnson Club.

Alexander Marr is engaged in doctoral research at New College, Oxford. He contributed the essay on Beckford and landscape to the recent Bard/Dulwich exhibition catalogue and is currently occupied with a project on 'curiosity and wonder' in the early modern period. He is curator of New College's Hayter Gallery of Twentieth-century British art.

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*.

Jerry Nolan, a freelance writer, lectures on and continues to publish scholarly essays on the cultural aspects of the Irish Revival which took place about one hundred years ago. He is on the National Council of the British Association of Irish Studies, as well as being editor of the Association's quarterly newsletter. He is the Secretary of the Irish Literary Society London which was originally founded by, among others, W.B. Yeats in 1892. His continuing interest in Beckford remains centred on exploring the religious, apocalyptic and radical dimensions in Beckford's life and works.

Arnold Wilson was formerly Director of Bristol City Art Gallery (1967-1987). He has published in *Apollo*, *Connoisseur*, *Burlington Magazine* and other journals, and in two Dictionaries of Marine and Military Painters. He served as Chairman of Trustees of the Holburne Museum, Bath, and the Beckford Tower Trust. He is a Fellow of the Museums Association and of the Society of Antiquaries of London.

John Wilton-Ely, Emeritus Professor of the History of Art in the University of Hull, has been a committee member of the Beckford Society since 1996. He has published definitive papers on the architectural history of Fonthill Abbey and helped organise the 1976 Beckford Exhibition as well as contributing to its catalogue. The works and impact of Piranesi provide another area of study and earlier this year he published the book *Piranesi, Paestum and Soane* for Sir John Soane's Museum.