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The Dispersal of the Collection as Public Spectacle: The Fonthill Abbey Sale of 1822-23 and the Strawberry Hill Sale of 1842 STEPHEN CLARKE	2
Big Spender: The Impact on William Beckford of the 1807 Abolition of the Slave Trade AMY FROST	19
William Beckford's Debt to Islam: An Orientalist Perspective on Beckford's <i>Vathek</i> SAMEH SHEHATA	27
<i>Dreams Revisited</i> RICHARD ALLEN	37
John Rutter's <i>A Description of Fonthill Abbey and Demesne, 1822</i> JON MILLINGTON	42
Beckford in Bath According to 'H' JERRY NOLAN	54
Eric Darton (1917–2006)	67
Horace Walpole on Alderman Beckford	69
Notes on Contributors	71

The Dispersal of the Collection as Public Spectacle: The Fonthill Abbey Sale of 1822-23 and the Strawberry Hill Sale of 1842

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There are a variety of striking parallels between Horace Walpole and William Beckford, almost all of them misleading. To take the most obvious, they were both rich men who built extraordinary and influential Gothic houses, they both wrote Gothic novels, they were both marginalised by their sexual orientation, and they were both collectors. But Beckford's Fonthill Abbey was vast and sublime where Walpole's Strawberry Hill was diminutive – a Gothic mousetrap, according to Beckford.¹ *The Castle of Otranto* is effectively unchallenged as the first Gothic novel, but to describe *Vathek* as Gothic is to deny its oriental setting and the tradition of the oriental tale from which it derives, though Kenneth Graham has recently and convincingly reminded us that the novel does contain elements of the instability, fragmentary nature and other of the trappings which we have come to associate with the Gothic novel.² Their sexual orientation was very differently expressed, Walpole complying with social modes and actively participating in the society that he so compellingly recorded in his letters and journals, while Beckford was socially isolated, though it was an isolation cushioned by his great wealth – a wealth that was infinitely greater than Walpole's. And also they were both collectors, but of very different kinds.

Walpole's collection at Strawberry Hill ranged from classical antiquities acquired from Conyers Middleton to an outstanding assemblage of portrait miniatures, with much ebony and other furniture intended to give the impression of great age, and a

particularly important series of historical portraits, some of uncertain attribution, that represented a novel development in the history of collecting – the combination of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English portraits, supplemented with items of association, from Queen Bertha's comb to the gloves of James I, that bridged the gap between wunderkammen and romantic interior. Beckford's collection was of a very different order. For one thing, it was acquired at much greater expense, but more than that it expressed a totally different aesthetic. The issues of provenance and association that so appealed to Walpole were, for Beckford, more marginal. What concerned Beckford was quality and finish. His book collection (compared to which Walpole's was little more than a working library) has been well described by Anthony Hobson for its fine bindings, French influence, unrivalled holdings in travel, and insistence on the very best impressions in its numerous plate books.³ The Old Master and other paintings he acquired were of transcendent quality – admired by so discriminating an art historian as Dr Waagen as the collection of a man 'with a general and refined love of art and a highly-cultivated taste,' the walls of whose dining room were 'adorned with cabinet pictures, the noblest productions of Italian art of the time of Raphael.'⁴ At least twenty of Beckford's paintings are now in the National Gallery.⁵ The Francophile nature of Beckford's taste, the Buhl and other decorative furniture, the endless array of agate and sardonyx and other semi-precious stones carved and elaborately mounted in gilt and silver, was stunning in its richness, and was a precursor of some of the greatest nineteenth-century collections.

There is, however, a parallel between Walpole and Beckford as collectors that I would like to explore in this paper, and this concerns the manner in which their collections were dispersed – by the great Fonthill Abbey sale of 1822-23, and by the Strawberry Hill Sale of 1842. There are of course immediate differences here: when Beckford decided to sell, his considerable

resources at last worn down by the insatiable demands of the Abbey he had built, there was no question of disposing of the entirety of his collection, and he continued to collect actively – not to say furiously – for virtually another quarter of a century. Walpole, however, had been dead for forty-five years when, despite his efforts to secure its survival, his entire collection, down to the carved Gothic fireplaces and stained glass in the windows, were put up for sale. But both sales were conducted amidst great publicity by prominent auctioneers of slightly uncertain reputation, and both not only became iconic sales of the early nineteenth century, but were also extraordinary social events, the auction views attended by thousands, the sales widely reported in the popular press, and memorialised by catalogues and descriptions. I would like to consider the way in which the sales were conducted, the contrast between the nature of the collections and the manner of their disposal, and the effect that those disposals had on the reputations as collectors of Walpole and Beckford.

Another similarity between the two collections prior to their dispersal was their inaccessibility, though it was inaccessibility of a very different order. The essence of Strawberry Hill during Walpole's lifetime was its availability to the public, the tickets issued to visitors, the Directions to Visitors printed off at the Strawberry Hill Press, Walpole's self-conscious laments for his invaded privacy – 'I am now as tired of it,' he complained to William Cole of the endless stream of visitors to the house, 'that I shudder when the bell rings at the gate. It is as bad as keeping an inn, and I am often tempted to deny its being shown, if it would not be ill-natured to those that come, and to my housekeeper.'⁶ The reputation of the collection was founded in its visibility; close to London and to Hampton Court and Windsor, the contents being usually shown by the housekeeper, the more privileged visitors being conducted by Walpole himself. But after Walpole's death in 1797, the house and collection fell into a deep slumber.

First occupied by the sculptress Mrs Damer, the daughter of his favourite cousin General Conway, and then by Lady Waldegrave, the house was difficult to visit and accounts of the collection are scarce. *The Athenaeum* described the house as ‘almost hermetically sealed,’ and noted that even the German art historians Passavant and the persistent Dr Waagen ‘found the little paper fabric impenetrable.’⁷ Accounts still appear in early nineteenth-century guidebooks, but these should be treated with some caution, as they are copied over and reprinted from edition to edition, and do not necessarily represent accurately the availability of the collection to inspection at the date of publication. The passage on Strawberry in Cooke’s *Thames*, 1809, is interesting, however, as reflecting a more equivocal attitude to Walpole’s standing than at the date of his death: the collection was described as ‘a picture of the master’s mind who formed it, in which there was nothing great; at the same time that it was plentifully stored with elegant knowledge, and gifted with the power of communicating it in a manner of superior polish and amusement.’⁸ J. N. Brewer in 1820 gave a very brief but not wholly unsympathetic account of the ‘truly interesting’ collection, though with an aside at Walpole’s lack of charity.⁹ And then in 1826 there is a detailed account of a visit to the house by Lady Morgan. She made a room-by-room tour of the collection, and described the closely packed mass of objects in the china closet, perceptively stressing how historical portraits were at the heart of the collection (pre-empting Morris Brownell), and emphasised the sense of claustrophobic superfluity, of clutter, of exhausting excess of objects.¹⁰

Fonthill, meanwhile, was always hermetically sealed. Isolated from society, Beckford built furiously and read furiously. When travelling through England in November 1807 Richard Fenton wrote revealingly, ‘We wished much to have seen the Abbey at Fonthill, whose proud and lofty tower attracts the notice of the traveller; but were told that no person was admitted unless the

professed of the order, and particularly known to the Abbot.’¹¹ This was itself in marked contrast to Fonthill Splendens, Beckford’s father’s mansion, which had been accessible to tourists between noon and four in the afternoon.¹² The visibility of the Abbey’s tower, rearing up some 276 feet above the surrounding landscape, only emphasised the Abbey’s seclusion, and encouraged the circulation of some of the wilder anecdotes as to what went on behind the great barrier wall.

Another parallel lies in the uncertain standing of the two properties prior to their auction sales. In Walpole’s case this was partly a function of changing perceptions of his literary reputation. The ingenious Mr Walpole had by 1842 become the frivolous Mr Walpole, excoriated by Macaulay in his *Edinburgh Review* article of October 1833. Macaulay claimed that the triviality he saw in Walpole’s collection was a reflection of the triviality of Walpole the man and Walpole the writer. ‘In his villa,’ says Macaulay, ‘every apartment is a museum, every piece of furniture is a curiosity; there is something strange in the form of the shovel; there is a long story belonging to the bell-rope. We wander among a profusion of rarities, of trifling intrinsic value, but so quaint in fashion, or connected with such remarkable names and events, that they may well detain our attention for a moment. A moment is enough. Some new relic, some new unique, some new carved work, some new enamel, is forthcoming in an instant. One cabinet of trinkets is no sooner closed than another is opened. It is the same with Walpole’s writings.’¹³

In addition, Walpole’s carefully contrived scheme for the preservation of the house had effectively collapsed. When John, the alcoholic son of Walpole’s great niece Lady Waldegrave, died in 1840 at the age of 26, his brother George Lord Waldegrave took over responsibility for the house and its wavering finances. The increasingly rackety household was brought to an end when, following his release from six months’ imprisonment for

assaulting a policeman at Kingston fair in 1841, George resolved to proceed with the sale of Walpole's collection.

Fonthill had had no such scandal immediately preceding Beckford's decision to sell many of its contents in 1822 – Beckford's scandal was far earlier and deeper rooted. If the falling price of the sugar on which Beckford's fortunes were founded, and the rising costs of building and repairing the Abbey, led Beckford to sell, the prospect of gaining access to the fabled treasure house of Fonthill created quite as much excitement in 1822 as did the opportunity twenty years later of unlocking the doors of Strawberry Hill. But for Fonthill there was the added distraction of the abortive Christie's auction of 1822. In October, after over 7,200 tickets had been sold at a guinea each and the general public had made full use of the opportunity to pass judgement on the Abbey's previously inaccessible treasures, Beckford cancelled the auction when he negotiated through the rival auctioneer Harry Phillips – formerly Christie's chief clerk – the sale of the Abbey and much of its contents to the financier, entrepreneur and gunpowder manufacturer John Farquhar.

Both auctions attracted huge publicity and huge crowds, and not a little notoriety, for different reasons, but both inextricably connected with their auctioneers. Beckford's auctioneer Harry Phillips had by 1822 traded independently in the West End for twenty-six years, but there was an obvious irony in his displacing his former employer when he brokered Beckford's negotiation with Farquhar, denying Christie the sale he had catalogued and which had attracted so much publicity. As Beckford's companion Gregorio Franchi, who was in charge of the Abbey after Beckford had retired to Bath, and who was kept in ignorance of Farquhar's interest, wrote to the Duke of Hamilton, 'if ever I see M. de Beckford on a path that is *not tortuous*, I shall be astonished: and still more so if I ever see him on what could be called a straight one.'¹⁴ The very next month, on 21 November, *The Times* announced that Farquhar was at Fonthill with Phillips's son,

making out the catalogue of the contents for a new sale, and in June of the following year the Abbey's gates re-opened for another public view, and the auction sale conducted by Phillips.

The accusation levelled at Phillips was that he 'salted' the 1823 sale for Farquhar – that is, filled it out with additional items that had never belonged to Beckford and had nothing to do with Fonthill. Among contemporary accounts, the *Literary Gazette* warned its readers of the need 'to save the public from wagon-loads of inferior editions scraped together out of all the old book shops of London, and carried to Wiltshire to be sold as Mr. Beckford's genuine library: we are adjured to prove our real love for the Arts by warning purchasers against a mass of trash, taken down in a similar way, to pass for old Masters and valuable pictures; and even in the fanciful rage for virtù, china, old pots, and unique follies, it is asserted that the metropolitan refuse of a dozen years' sales and expositions constitutes now the magnificent lumber of Fonthill Abbey.'¹⁵

The flood of visitors to Fonthill for the auction views of 1822 and 1823 was reflected in a rash of newspaper and journal articles, guidebooks, even ceramics. Thomas Dibdin described it as 'Fonthill Fever' in a series of six articles he wrote in *The Museum*. Charles Knight recalled years later how in 1822 'the world went mad about Mr Beckford's wonders. No profane eyes had ever looked upon his towers and pinnacles – his domes and galleries.'¹⁶ The crowds at Fonthill and in the country around were extraordinary. According to *The Times* of 30 September 1822 'He is fortunate who finds a vacant chair within twenty miles of Fonthill ... The beds throughout the county are literally doing double duty – people who came in from a distance during the night must wait to go to bed until others get up in the morning.' Accounts of the auction views and the ultimate sale are to be found in numerous journals, including the *Literary Gazette*, the *Adventurer of the Nineteenth Century*, *The Mirror*, the *New Monthly Magazine*, and of course the *Gentleman's Magazine*.

The theatricality of the Abbey's stylistically diverse, scenographic Gothic complemented the almost carnival atmosphere of the view. It was a cavalcade of connoisseurs, gentry and rustic beaux that came to pass judgement on Beckford's choicest objects – those attending ranged from Dukes of the realm to a hairdresser masquerading as an aristocrat, as reported by the *Morning Chronicle* on 24 September. As *The Times* suggested on 1 October, 'Perhaps there is not at this moment in England a spot so well calculated for lounge as Fonthill-Abbey.'

This in turn was to be replicated in 1842 at Strawberry, where one newspaper reported that 18,000 people attended the first fifteen days of the view. The *Morning Post* compared the level of public interest to 'the Fonthill Fever' that had raged at the time of the Fonthill sale.¹⁷ *The Times* had to report that the roads from Twickenham and Teddington were almost blocked up with carriages and that on one day of the view nearly 1,000 people attended, and there were repeated complaints that the crowds in some of the rooms were so great that it was very hard to see the lots.¹⁸ *The Times* adopted a highly critical tone throughout the sale, in contrast to the *Morning Chronicle*, the *Morning Post*, the *Gentleman's Magazine*, *The Athenaeum*, the *Illustrated London News*, the *Penny Magazine*, the *Magazine of Fine Arts* and the other journals that ran features. The *Illustrated London News* and the *Magazine of Fine Arts* were effusive; the *Morning Post* reflected on the malice and ignorance of *The Times* before 'the legacy, above all price, of this wonderfully gifted man'; *The Athenaeum* was generally approving of the wide range of the collection and appreciated how the sum of the whole was greater than the occasionally trifling items that made up the parts, and the *Gentleman's Magazine* was more detailed and detached in its six-part survey of the collection.¹⁹

The best account of the Strawberry Hill auctioneer George Robins has been provided by Robin Myers.²⁰ He had been an

auctioneer since the year of Walpole's death, and what he had learned in his forty-five years' experience was a twentieth-century appreciation of the importance of publicity. As the *Illustrated London News* was to explain in an article following Robins's death in 1847, 'The wonderful skill and tact with which every advantage connected with the property he had to describe was seized upon and turned to profit, in his glowing descriptions and his ready wit and repartee in the rostrum, are well known. His announcements were unlike those of any of his contemporaries ...'²¹ He recorded in a letter now at the Lewis Walpole Library how he was introduced to Lord Waldegrave by a friend and that he 'succeeded with the noble Earl in making him believe that he would arrive at a great result by placing this important sale to my care.' Robins acknowledged that 'the materials brought forward might have been very easily introduced in better taste had they been in more able hands – If there is one thing that I may claim to commend in myself, it is this. I gave to this Sale a degree of publicity that is without any parallel case – there is nothing upon record to approach it, and I allude to this with the more satisfaction because it enabled me to achieve a result as it regards the Amount of Sale that I may well be proud of.'²²

After an initial announcement and postponement in 1841, Robins resumed placing advertisements for the Sale in the press in February 1842, in his inimitable and extravagant style. Robins was 'honoured by having been selected by the Earl of Waldegrave to sell by public competition, the valuable contents of Strawberry Hill, which it may fearlessly be proclaimed will be the most distinguished gem that ever has ever adorned the annals of auctions.' It was promised to contain 'a repast for the lovers of literature and the fine arts of which bygone days furnish no previous example, and it would be vain to contemplate it in times to come.'²³ Tickets were printed for a private view commencing 28 March; the public was admitted on 4 April, the Sale was fixed

for 25 April and the twenty-three following days, and at the very end of March, Robins issued the *Sale Catalogue*.

The Strawberry Hill *Sale Catalogue* is one of the most familiar images of British nineteenth-century art auctions and as *The Times* put it on 11 April, ‘not among the least of the curiosities of the sale.’ It used extravagant typography in its title page and in its text – small and large capitals, bold, italics. It was so poorly prepared that that seven separate editions were printed, as Robins tried vainly to correct the text, and the particularly inadequately catalogued books of prints in the Round Tower listed for the seventh and eighth days sale were withdrawn at Lord Waldegrave’s insistence and re-catalogued for subsequent sale in London. Above all, Robins’s splendidly inflated style invited parody. His Prefatory Remarks (or Puffatory Remarks, as they became in the best known of the various imitations and satires that were spawned by the sale) opened by explaining how he was commissioned ‘to distribute to the world the unrivalled and wondrous Collection at Strawberry Hill ... and has thus had placed within his power the ability to enrich the royal and national collections of every civilized country,’ and that he approached ‘his present herculean undertaking with feelings such as he never experienced on any former occasion, fully sensible that the distribution of this precious museum ... far exceeding in interest and importance all that has preceded it in the chronicles of auctions.’ – this is merely a selection from the heroic opening sentence of sixteen lines, Robins’s sense of awe and excitement so engulfing him that he forgets that his sentence needs a closing verb.

If the Strawberry sale did not (despite suggestions in a couple of the parodies to the contrary) attract the criticism that extraneous lots had been introduced to bolster up the sale and clear dealers’ stock, it was attacked on two specific grounds – the number of items whose interest lay in their assumed historical associations rather than their aesthetic value (Van Tromp’s pipe

case, King William's spur from the Battle of the Boyne, Hampden's wife's wedding gloves, the hair of a variety of English kings) and the optimistic attributions of a number of the works of art.²⁴

All this addressed the concerns that many viewers of the Sale view may have felt for the items of association, where Walpole's collection seemed closer to the museums of natural curiosities of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. There is no doubt that these items, the prominence given them by Robins, and the great fun that journalists and reviewers of the day had with them, materially damaged Walpole's reputation – as did the second issue, Walpole's somewhat cavalier attitude to attribution, whether with Cardinal Wolsey's hat (discovered over a century and a half after Wolsey's death, and with no sustainable connection to him), or a number of the star items that Lord Waldegrave bought in. These included the Cellini bell (described by a visitor as having a bluish tint and a hardness more like a cast, while *The Athenaeum* suggested that the bell and its handle might be separate items), the psalter illuminated by Julio Clovio, a splendid item, but now known to be Venetian, and the sixteenth century missal in a jewelled binding attributed to Raphael, but 'as much by Raffael the painter as Raffael the archangel'.²⁵ There were also the early 'historical' portraits, such as the marriages of Henry VI and of Henry VII, and the family of Henry V, whose Walpolian attributions were easily demolished, both at the time and in the columns of *The Gentleman's Magazine* and elsewhere.²⁶

One important issue at both sales that was not lost on the correspondents of the journals covering them was the stark contrast between the fastidious, personal, and (even at Strawberry) essentially private accumulation of treasures by their discriminating collectors, and the defilement of that poised perfection that the bustle of the auction views represented. This was certainly true of Fonthill, of which the *New Monthly*

Magazine noted ‘That which would not hitherto have moved at the mandate of all the Sovereigns of Europe, the Holy Alliance included, now flies open of itself a hundred times a day, at the mere sight of a half-sovereign, presented by the, perchance, soiled fingers of a London cockney or a country boor!’²⁷ But it applied equally to Strawberry, where the contrast was just as complete between Walpole’s carefully controlled presentation of his collection through the watercolours and paintings he commissioned, through the *Description of Strawberry Hill* he had printed at his press, and in his correspondence, and the razzmatazz of publicity with which Robins conducted the sale. What, asked the *Court Journal*, would Walpole have thought to find his collection exposed ‘to the vulgar stare of the multitude ... dissected, analysed, catalogued and vulgarised as the theme of newspapers and topic of magazines! ... To be made a raree-show for Easter holiday-makers, and brought into competition, as a cake-house, with Greenwich Fair and the Epsom Races!’²⁸

No such concerns troubled Beckford, who at the age of 82, only two years before his death, was a passionately enthusiastic bidder at Strawberry Hill, employing three different agents (Bohn for books, Smith for prints and Hume for works of art), and deluging them with virtually daily instructions during the sale. This correspondence, much of which survives, gives us the most intimate account we have of the conduct of the sale, outside the columns of the newspapers that reported on the sale’s progress. It shows Bohn’s concerns at the high prices achieved for the books in the opening six days, it shows Beckford (despite his contempt for Walpole) buying Strawberry Hill press books annotated by Walpole, as well as books of prints, paintings, cameos and intaglios, old japan, porcelain, and other works of art. For Beckford, there was no danger that the reputation of the already despised Walpole - the pest of Strawberry - would be damaged by the sale, but his contempt for the collector did not impinge on his impassioned thirst for the choicest fruits of his collecting. Having

attended the view, Beckford retreated to Bath, from where he conducted his campaign and harassed his agents.

Beckford had twenty years earlier affected to be sublimely indifferent to the implications of the public response to Fonthill Abbey, though amused and flattered by the public's 'veritable Rage' for the Abbey, and ultimately delighted to have disposed of it. But the underlying issues of his social ostracism, the prospect of Harry Phillips snatching the sale from under his former employer's nose, the allegations of Phillips interleaving the sale the following year with substantial numbers of extraneous items from the London market, and the unappealing personality of the speculator purchaser John Farquhar were material factors in the changing public perception of the Abbey. Another factor was Hazlitt's famous attack in the *London Magazine* of November 1822, which dealt a serious blow to Beckford's reputation as a collector. As with the rather similar (and similarly effective) attack by Macaulay on Walpole, there is enough substance in the criticism to carry weight, and it is delivered in memorable prose that sunk the reputation of its subject for a generation and more. Fonthill was dismissed as 'a desert of magnificence, a glittering waste of laborious idleness, a cathedral turned into a toy-shop, an immense Museum of all that is most curious and costly, and, at the same time, most worthless, in the productions of art and nature.'²⁹ In 1822, the Abbey had appeared from behind the great barrier wall as a sublime architectural wonder, but when that year's sale was cancelled, the enigmatic Beckford was replaced by a prosaic miser, the unprepossessing Farquhar, 'Old Filthyman.' The Abbey was reduced to a bazaar where goods of uncertain provenance were to be disposed of for gain by an unappealing entrepreneur working with an auctioneer of uncertain principles. The ethereal image of the Abbey was hopelessly compromised. And then, two years later, on 21 December 1825, the Abbey's great tower collapsed, taking with it the Octagon, the Great Western Hall and much of the Galleries.

First stripped of its collections, and then denuded of its tower, the Abbey was reduced to a mere folly, with Beckford its eccentric progenitor.

In a not dissimilar way, at Strawberry Hill, the combination of the financial circumstances of the sale, the number of antiquarian curiosities of uncertain associations, the unravelling attributions of the early paintings, the tension between Walpole's layered excess of a wide variety of small objects and the more rigorous aspirations of the art market of the 1840s, the memorable if partial criticisms of *The Times*, and the showmanship with which Robins conducted the sale, all combined to give the Strawberry Hill sale a reputation for singularity rather than success. Contemporary reports almost universally describe prices as high (the total achieved was some £33,450), yet, as A. T. Hazen noted of the books at the sale, 'the impression has persisted for a hundred years that prices were low in the Walpole sale,' and George Redford, for many years art sales correspondent of *The Times*, curiously expresses surprise that so little was said of the sale at the time, when as we have seen hardly a newspaper or journal failed to carry reports of it.³⁰

All this was interwoven with the continuing decline of Walpole's reputation, which was compounded by the publication in 1845 and 1859 of the remainder of his political Memoirs, poisoning history at its source, as John Wilson Croker memorably complained.³¹ A review in the *Literary Gazette* in 1851 reviewing the publication of Walpole's letters to William Mason notes how Macaulay's view of Walpole was now the 'general opinion,' while as for the architecture of Strawberry Hill, to a generation who had read Britton and Pugin, and been stirred by the Cambridge Camden Society, the Gothic of Strawberry Hill, with its filigree and its disposable wooden battlements, was not merely insipid, it was contemptible, and unprincipled both in style and construction.³² In 1853, John Fisher Murray reflected popular taste by noting patronisingly how Walpole 'devoted the best part

of his life to the collection and arrangement of whatever was curiously worthless' – echoing the words 'curious' and 'worthless' used by Hazlitt at Fonthill – Walpole's collection being 'a museum of nick-nacks, rarities, and curiosities,' and as for the house itself, 'A place more paltry does not exist.'³³

And so the reputation of Beckford and Walpole both languished in mid century, the one denigrated into an image of isolated eccentricity, the other dismissed as an effete collector of trivialities whose own fatal lack of seriousness was reflected in the bijouteries to which he had devoted himself. There were a variety of factors at work here – issues of marginalisation, of changing styles of collecting, of changing perceptions of Gothic architecture – but prominent among them were the flamboyance and glare of public attention in which two very different but very distinguished and very personal collections were dispersed, and the auctions and auctioneers that scattered the treasures of Fonthill and Strawberry contributed to scatter also something of the standing of their two collectors.

1. Cyrus Redding, *New Monthly Magazine*, 71, p. 308.
2. Kenneth Graham, 'Perverse Interactions of the Gothic, Enlightened and Oriental: William Beckford's *Vathek* with *The Episodes of Vathek*', in Kenneth Graham and Kevin Berland (eds.), *Beckford and the New Millennium* (New York: AMS Press, 2004), 119-130.
3. Anthony Hobson, 'William Beckford's Library', *Connoisseur*, 151 (April 1976), 298-305.
4. G.F. Waagen, *Works of Art and Artists in England* (London, 1838), iii, 129 and 121.
5. James Lees-Milne, *William Beckford* (Tisbury: Compton Russell, 1976), 97.
6. Letter of 14 June 1769 in W. S. Lewis (ed.), *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1937-1983), i, 162.
7. *The Athenaeum*, 2 April 1842, 294.
8. William Bernard Cooke, *The Thames; or, Graphic Illustrations of Seats, Villas, Public Buildings, and Picturesque Scenery, on the Banks of that Noble River* (London, 1811), i.
9. J. N. Brewer, *The Picture of England* (London, 1820), ii, 22-23.

10. *New Monthly Magazine*, 17 (September 1826), 256-267. See also Morris Brownell, *The Prime Minister of Taste: A Portrait of Horace Walpole* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 98-106.
11. Richard Fenton, *A Tour in quest of Genealogy, through several parts of Wales, Somersetshire, and Wiltshire* (London, 1811), 225.
12. Rev. Richard Warner, *Excursions from Bath* (Bath, 1801), 127.
13. Peter Sabor (ed.), *Horace Walpole: The Critical Heritage* (London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), 323
14. Quoted in Boyd Alexander, *From Lisbon to Baker Street: the story of the Chevalier Franchi, Beckford's friend* (British Historical Society of Portugal, Lisbon, 1977), 18.
15. *Literary Gazette*, 30 August 1823, 555.
16. Both quoted in Robert J. Gemmett, *Beckford's Fonthill: The Rise of a Romantic Icon* (Norwich: Michael Russell, 2003), 119 and 121. Gemmett provides at pp. 117-143 a detailed and very helpful account of the sales of 1822 and 1823. The Knight quotation is from *Once upon a Time* (London, 1865), 506.
17. *Morning Post*, 16 April 1842.
18. *The Times*, 4 and 7 April 1842.
19. *Morning Post*, 13 April 1842; *The Athenaeum*, (1842): 2 April, 293-294; 9 April, 317-319; 16 April, 340-342; 23 April, 363-364; *Gentleman's Magazine*, 27 (1842): July, 16-24; August, 147-156; September, 257-265; October, 377-381; November, 474-480; December, 599-610.
20. Robin Myers, 'George Henry Robins (1778-1847): Strawberry Hill Auctioneer', and 'George Robins in Person: the Man and the Myth', in *The Printing Art*, 1973, nos. 1 and 2.
21. *Illustrated London News*, 20 February 1847.
22. Bound in after p. 162 of Volume 1 of Thomas Mackinley's extended and extra-illustrated copy of the Strawberry Hill Sale *Catalogue* at the Lewis Walpole Library, 485 842 C76 IV c3.
23. *The Times*, 31 May 1841 and 16 February 1842.
24. Suggestions that extraneous items were introduced to the Strawberry Hill sale are to be found in John Mills, *D'Horsay; or, the Follies of the Day* (London, 1844), 52, with Robins satirised as George Bobbins.
25. Note at p. 157 of J. Hughes Anderdon's copy of the Sale *Catalogue*, Lewis Walpole Library, 485 842 C76 I c4; *The Athenaeum*, 23 April 1842, 364; and 9 April 1842, 319.
26. *The Athenaeum*, 9 April 1842, 317-319; *Gentleman's Magazine*, 28 (July 1842), 16-24; and *Notes & Queries*, 28 July 1866, 61-62. See also Brownell, *The Prime Minister of Taste*.
27. *New Monthly Magazine*, July-December 1823, 369.

28. *Court Journal*, 2 April 1842.
 29. Hazlitt, *Complete Works*, ed. P. P. Howe (London: J. M. Dent, 1932), xviii, 173-180.
 30. A. T. Hazen, *A Catalogue of Horace Walpole's Library* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969), vol i, p. xxxiv; and George Redford, *Art Sales 1628-1887* (London, 1888), i, 131.
 31. *Croker Papers*, ed. Jennings (London, 1884), i, 270.
 32. *Literary Gazette*, 17 May 1851, 339.
 33. John Fisher Murray, *A Picturesque Tour of the River Thames in its Western Course* (London, 1853), 132-133.
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Horace Walpole to Richard Bentley
23 February 1755

‘ ... There have been two more great fires. Alderman Belchier’s house at Epsom, that belonged to the Prince, is burnt, and Beckford’s fine house in the country, with pictures and furniture to a great value. He says, “Oh! I have an odd fifty thousand pounds in a drawer: I will build it up again: it won’t be above a thousand pounds apiece difference to my thirty children.” Adieu!’

Big Spender: The Impact on William Beckford of the 1807 Abolition of the Slave Trade

AMY FROST

‘So I am growing rich, and mean to build towers’
(William Beckford, 1790)

This most famous and frequently repeated quote from William Beckford has long been used to illustrate his passion for towers and the huge wealth that allowed him to act on his every whim. It is rare for this quote to be repeated in its context, yet it is very revealing about the nature of Beckford’s riches, and his attitude towards it:

One of my new estates in Jamaica brought me home seven thousand pounds last year more than usual. So I am growing rich, and mean to build towers, and sing hymns to the power of Heaven on their summits ... ¹

The wealth amassed by the Beckford family through the plantations in Jamaica is legendary and the annual income from the plantations had great influence over Beckford’s collecting and the building of Fonthill Abbey. To fully understand the rate at which Beckford spent his money, and to introduce his response to the 1807 abolition of the slave trade, it is necessary to briefly illustrate the speed with which the Beckford family fortune from Jamaica was created.

Peter Beckford went to Jamaica in 1661 and was rumoured to have built up capital through the risky business of capturing and selling horses.² By 1675 he was a merchant in Port Royal, and he soon progressed from shipping and trading, to owning land and a mansion in the parish of St Catherine’s.



*Alderman William Beckford. John Francis Moore, 1767, Marble.
Courtesy of the Worshipful Company of Ironmongers of the City of London*

In 1675 Peter Beckford was elected to the House of Assembly in Jamaica. It was the start of an illustrious career in island politics, and he rapidly moved up to the post of Lieutenant Governor in 1702. A loud, brash and arrogant man, Peter Beckford introduced personality traits that would be passed on to his grandson and great-grandson. He used his position of power on the island to increase his wealth, and at his death was recorded as owning an estimated twenty estates on Jamaica with a huge £1.5 million in the bank, and 1200 slaves in his possession.

The second Peter Beckford, like his father, worked his way through most of the official posts on the island, and continued to add to the wealth his father accumulated. He was born on Jamaica and never left the island, but did send his six sons to England for their education. When he died in 1735 his personal property was huge and included ownership of 1737 slaves. On becoming head of the family in 1737, following the death of his elder brother (another Peter), William Beckford Sr. thus inherited a fortune that was well established and at the time guaranteed to bring him an impressive annual income. As with so many British families who had made immense wealth in the West Indies, the Beckfords needed status to go with their fortune, and the purchase of the Fonthill estate in 1744 was the first step in a campaign to raise the Beckford family through the ranks of polite society and British politics. Beckford's rise through the political world was quick; from 1754 until his death in 1770 he was an MP for the City of London, while through the Worshipful Company of Ironmongers he became an Alderman, then Sheriff of London in 1755 and Lord Mayor in 1762. As an absentee plantation owner, Alderman Beckford was able to protect his increasingly profitable business in Jamaica through tyrannical rule of the plantations on the island, at the expense of the increasingly brutal treatment of the slave labour. By surrounding himself with fellow planters, Beckford was able to ensure that a strong group in Parliament, all



*Sketch for the Statue ordered to be Erected to the
Memory of the late W.^m Beckford Esq.
by the Court of Common Council.*

*Detail of Sketch for the Statue ordered to be erected to the Memory of the late
William Beckford, Esquire. Engraver and Publication Date unknown.
Beckford Tower Trust*

with West Indian interests, influenced matters relating to the Caribbean colonies.

The great irony of the Alderman's place in history can be seen in a preliminary sketch for the commemorative statue to him in the Guildhall in London.³ His part in the 1770 Wilkes debate made him the hero of political reformers, and his speech to George III was heralded as an honourable assertion of the rights of the people. The sketch shows the Alderman in his robes of office brandishing his speech in one hand, while the other arm protects a figure of Britannia. He stands proud, one of the most powerful men in England, sole owner of thirteen Jamaican plantations, 22,021 acres of land and 3000 slaves, with his foot pressed down upon the back of a man in manacles.

When the Alderman died in 1770 the loss of his firm hand, and the fact that his heir was still a minor, saw the start of the gradual downfall of the family fortune. In the eleven years between his father's death and his coming of age William Beckford had very little interest in the running of the family business, an attitude that continued even after he gained control of his wealth.

Following the aborted voyage to Jamaica in 1787, Beckford never showed any signs of intending to visit the plantations again, and relaxed into the comfortable life of the absentee planter in England. By the time he was planning Fonthill Abbey, and writing the famous line on wealth and towers, the income from Jamaica was immense, and to Beckford, must have seemed unlimited. His neglect of his estates, and the passing of responsibility to others, soon saw his income fluctuate, but matters started to become more serious in 1807:

Everything is going from bad to worse, everything is going to ruin. Poor Jamaica is already emaciated – it is, alas, the planters and not the sugars which have consumption.⁴

The reason behind this was the Parliamentary abolition of the transatlantic slave trade.

The abolition of the slave trade coincided with Beckford's move to Fonthill Abbey and the destruction of Fonthill Splendens. With large amounts of money being spent on both the demolition of one house, and the continual building of the other, Beckford was relying heavily on the Jamaican income. It is interesting that what few references there are in Beckford's letters to the Jamaican plantations in 1807 and the impact of the abolitionist movement, relate to the effect it had upon the building of the Abbey. In a letter to Gregorio Franchi in November 1807, the impact of abolition on the future of the Abbey is clear:

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; as to the other buildings, I am not giving them any more thought. Only the kitchen must be finished, and if this is completed in fifteen days, not much else need be done, so that in a month's time I shall be completely free of this cancer which is destroying me.⁵

The full impact of the abolition of the slave trade on Beckford's fortune after 1807 can be traced through events at Fonthill Abbey. Matters were so bad in 1807 that Beckford was forced to begin the process of selling the Altieri Claudes, which were 'sacrificed' in 1808 for ten thousand guineas.⁶ In contrast, by 1814 the price of sugar had risen significantly, and Beckford embarked on a spending spree in Paris. It is possible to see similarities later in Bath as Beckford's redecorating of the Lansdown Tower interiors in the mid to late 1830s coincided with his receipt of compensation for slaves on his plantations following the abolition of Slavery.

The most revealing insight into the impact of 1807, both financially and psychologically, on Beckford comes from another

letter to Franchi written from Fonthill.⁷ Overshadowed by the knowledge that his father had had far greater command of the family business than he ever would, and that the Alderman would be cursing the power of the abolitionist in parliament from his grave, it is easy to imagine Beckford, stalking the empty half-built halls of Fonthill Abbey haunted by his father's image:

'Tis not possible to suffer more than I am suffering at the present: the wretched Doctor almost at death's door; the weather all deluge and storm; the solitude profound; a thousand important things to discuss and no one at hand to listen, to comfort or to help me...The sugar news is so terrible that Ruin stands nigh unto my door. Already I seem to hear her knock. None too sweet is the sound of such a visitor – worse even than the Commendatore's statue in the opera *Don Juan*: pale and white and smelling of Hell.⁸

1. Letter to Lady Craven, January 1790, quoted in Boyd Alexander, *England's Wealthiest Son* (Centaur Press, 1962), 156-157.
2. For the details of both Peter Beckford and his son, and sources of their lives in Jamaica, see Richard B. Sheridan, 'Beckford, Peter (*bap.* 1643, *d.* 1710)' and 'Beckford, Peter (1672/3-1735)' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004-2007). For a good discussion on the Beckford family plantations see Derrick Knight, *Gentlemen of Fortune* (Frederick Muller Limited, 1978).
3. This engraving was found in the archives of the Beckford Tower Trust. Its publication date is unknown.
4. Beckford to the Marquis of Douglas, 18th July 1807, quoted in Boyd Alexander (ed.) *Life at Fonthill 1807-1822* (Rupert Hart-Davis, 1957; repr. Nonsuch, 2006), 40.
5. 11th November 1807: *Life at Fonthill*, 49.
6. Letter, 12th June 1808: *Life at Fonthill*, 63.
7. For a discussion on Beckford's attitudes towards slavery see Stephanie Smith, 'Ill-favoured by the Sun: The Orientation of Slavery in William Beckford's Imagination' in *The Beckford Journal* 9 (2003), 62-69.
8. 10th November 1807: *Life at Fonthill*, 48.

The Exhibition 'Big Spenders: The Beckfords and Slavery' can be seen
at Beckford's Tower & Museum, Bath, from 7 April to 1 July, 2007



J. Chapman sculp.

WILLIAM BECKFORD ESQ^r

London published as the Act directs April 29. 1798 by J. Wilkes.

Alderman William Beckford. Published by Wilkes, 1798.

© Beckford Tower Trust

William Beckford's Debt to Islam: An Orientalist Perspective on Beckford's *Vathek*

SAMEH SHEHATA

Oriental references began to appear, from the Middle Ages onwards, in the works of European writers, travellers and scholars which created a literary tradition of interest in a detailed knowledge of the culture of a distant world, increasingly in demand for both metaphorical and literal exploration.¹ In the case of the novel *Vathek* (1786) by William Beckford (1760-1844), the Orient was the primary inspiration for forms of untrammelled experience which finally led Beckford to create an exquisitely shaped multi-layered world of memorable personal fantasies. In this early example of an English romantic novel, the young author drew on Islamic imagery to achieve an imaginative freedom from the excessive restrictions of his own English society. From the beginning, *Vathek* has often been seen as 'An Arabian Tale' which has somewhat distracted from the important fact that Beckford included a cornucopia of Koranic references which, if meticulously focused, may begin to deepen our knowledge of Beckford's reading and reflecting on the Koran, most probably in George Sale's translation of 1734. Other references were included and appeared to have been derived from Prophet Muhammad's Traditions which Beckford may have found in books or derived from conversations with his Arabic teachers.² I shall now review in chronological order the references to the Koran and to the Prophet's Traditions to be found in *Vathek*.

In *Vathek*, the Caliph enjoys a few hours of the company of troops of young females 'beautiful as the Houris, and not less seducing' who frequent 'the fifth palace, denominated *The Retreat of Mirth, or the Dangerous*'.³ For Muslims, the Houris'

beauty is unmatched because in the Koran Allah describes them as having wide, lovely eyes and as the virgins who will become the wives of the pious in Paradise.⁴ Beckford depicts Vathek as conjuring up with dangerous mirth the fantasy of already possessing the Houris. The dramatic suggestion being made very early on in the tale is that the Caliph Vathek is only too prepared to plunder pleasures reserved only for true followers of the Prophet.

The Caliph decides to build the tower ‘in imitation of Nimrod ... from the insolent curiosity of penetrating the secrets of heaven’ (*Vathek*, 4). In the Koran, when Nimrod, the King of Babylon, declares, ‘I give life and cause death’, the Prophet Abraham challenges him: ‘Allah causes the sun to rise in the east; can you cause it to rise in the west?’ When Nimrod fails in the challenge, he stands confounded (The Koran, II, 43). In *Vathek*, the Prophet Muhammad observes with indignation the irreligious conduct of Vathek and comments to the Genii: ‘Let us see to what lengths his folly and impiety will carry him: if he run into excess, we shall know how to chastise him ... he will not divine the fate that awaits him’ (*Vathek*, 4). Thus, Beckford imagines the Prophet as giving the rebellious Caliph, who should be his faithful vice-regent, the freedom to destroy himself without immediately realising that he is doing so.

The Caliph convalesces at a magnificent scene where there are ‘four fountains’ that make the scene resemble ‘the garden of Eden watered by four sacred rivers’ (*Vathek*, 13). According to the Koran, beneath the gardens of Paradise, there are four rivers: ‘rivers of water the smell and taste of which are not changed, rivers of milk of which the taste never changes, rivers of delicious wine and rivers of pure honey’ (The Koran, XLVII, 508). Beckford places the four fountains making the whole scene seem like the Garden of Eden, which according to the Koran, is the eternal abode of the pious. This scene being drawn, we can clearly see the lengths to which the Caliph has gone to regale his

voluptuous senses that prompt him to encroach on the heavenly abode of the devout followers of the Prophet. Although the Caliph exults in enjoying this picturesque scene, he still knows nothing about the luxuries that await the faithful in the Hereafter.

In a sacrilegious practice, the Caliph and Carathis, as two revellers, ‘gave a loose to their wit, at the expense of ... the dog of the seven sleepers, and the other animals admitted into the Paradise of Mahomet’ (*Vathek*, 36). The seven sleepers are the ‘young men who believed in Allah’ and took refuge in a Cave for fear of being persecuted by their idolatrous king. They were accompanied by a dog which was ‘lying with stretched forelegs outside the Cave’ to guard it (The Koran, XVIII, 295). Also, according to Prophet Muhammad, ‘animals will be resurrected to take reprisals from one another, and then they will be reduced to dust’ (PT). So, contrary to what Beckford suggests, animals will not be admitted to Paradise. Straying from the Islamic text, Beckford used his imagined Islamic reverence for certain animals to fan the flames of the revellers’ blasphemous conduct. At this point, Beckford seems to be ironically weighing the Caliph’s calibre in Islam against the animals; he suggests that even animals will be admitted to Paradise, but the Caliph has already gone far beyond salvation.

The two dwarfs say, ‘a small spring supplies us with water for the Abdest’ (*Vathek*, 51). Muslims begin the ablution process by saying, ‘In the name of Allah’ (PT), then, ‘wrists are washed thrice (beginning with the right wrist), then, the mouth is washed thrice, then sniffing some water into the nostrils thrice’ (PT). This done, ‘the whole face is washed thrice. Then, hands are washed to the elbows thrice (beginning with the right hand), then after stroking the hair with water (one time)’ (The Koran, V, 108), ‘and each ear (one time)’ (PT), ‘both feet are washed thrice to the ankles (beginning with the right foot)’ (The Koran, V, 108). After performing these acts, one can conclude with saying ‘I pray to You Allah to make me always-repentant, always-purified’ (PT).

Beckford exaggerates the Muslim custom of repeating certain words during the ablution and the need to repeat the ablution, should any Muslim sneeze or cough during the rite; but a common point highlighted by both the Koran and *Vathek* is the importance of ablution prior to prayer.

In the midst of their harangue, the two dwarfs say, ‘we concluded that the Deggial ... had sent forth his plagues on the earth’ (*Vathek*, 51). ‘The Deggial, who will claim to be God, will appear before the Judgement Day. The Prophet said that the Deggial has one eye and the word ‘kafer’ or ‘infidel’, which can be seen only by the faithful, is written on his forehead. He will ransack all the cities of the world except Mecca and Medina’ (PT). In *Vathek*, the dwarfs think that the turbulent scene portends the coming of the exterminating Deggial whom they mention in the Caliph’s presence; thus Beckford warns the voluptuous and supercilious Caliph.

In the banquet given by emir Fakreddin and ‘by the express order of *Vathek*’, ‘small plates of abominations were prepared’ (*Vathek*, 62). The Koran mentions some plates of abominations like ‘all kinds of swine meat, the meat of dead animals (that are not slaughtered), the blood, and the meat of the animal that is slaughtered as a sacrifice (to idols or anyone but Allah), the meat of the animal which has been killed by strangling, or by a violent blow, or by headlong fall, or by goring with horns, and that which was (partly) eaten by a wild animal (unless one is able to slaughter it before it dies), and those animals which are slaughtered on the altars and those animals on which the name of Allah was not mentioned while slaughtering’ (The Koran, V, 107). Then Beckford refers to ‘small herbs that grew on Mount Sinai’ (*Vathek*, 62), on which Allah talked to the Prophet Moses; when he went to the Mount, Allah called him: ‘Oh, Moses, I’m Allah, the Lord of all that exists’ (The Koran, XXVIII, 389). In the first reference, Beckford wants to show more sins committed by the Caliph who orders ‘small plates of abominations’ and by

so doing, is more distant than ever from the Paradise of the faithful. Moreover, Beckford satirizes the emir who allows, 'to the great scandal of the faithful', such plates of abominations to be served up in his presence. Furthermore, the other reference to Mount Sinai adds to the satirical tone when Beckford suggests 'for everything with the emir was excellent and pious' (*Vathek*, 62); and so, Beckford neatly exposes the inconsistent and hypocritical attitudes of the emir.

During a nocturnal, scary scene after coming round, Nouronihar thinks that 'the angel of death had opened the portal of some other world' (*Vathek*, 79). In the Koran, Allah says, 'The Angel of Death, who is set over you, will take your souls and you shall be brought to Allah' (The Koran, XXXII, 415). The Angel of Death says to the faithful, 'Oh, you peaceful, satisfied soul, go to the forgiveness of Allah', and to the disbeliever, 'Oh, you detestable soul, go to the wrath of Allah' (PT). The 'pale', death-like scene makes Nouronihar flinch at the thought of being transferred to another world. Thus, a shared point here is Beckford's portrayal of death as a passage to the 'other world'; a world in which Muslims fervently believe.

A number of lines later, Gulchenrouz asks Nouronihar about the apparitions he sees: 'Are they Monker and Nekir?' (*Vathek*, 79). According to the Prophet, when one dies, two angels (Monker and Nekir) come to his grave and ask the faithful: 'Who is your God?' He says: 'My God is Allah'. They say: 'What's your religion?' He replies: 'Islam'. They ask him again: 'Who is the man that Allah has sent to you?' He says: 'Prophet Muhammad'. After answering the questions, a gate from Heaven opens. The disbeliever is asked the same questions, but is unable to answer (PT). Under the influence of the powder, Gulchenrouz portrays the surrounding scene as a big grave. Thus, Beckford refers sequentially to the phase of the 'other world' through mentioning Monker and Nekir who are assigned to torture the disbeliever in his grave till the Day of Resurrection.

We approach the Judgement Day when Gulchenrouz wonders, 'Does the fatal bridge cross this lake ... [which] ... conceals from us an abyss' (*Vathek*, 79). In the Koran, Allah says, 'All of you will pass over it [Hell]' (The Koran, XIX, 310). People will pass over 'al sirat' which is 'narrower than a hair and sharper than a sword's edge' (PT). Remarkably, the quickness of passing this route depends on one's good deeds; 'There are some people who will pass in a twinkling of an eye, others will pass like streaks of lightning, others like the wind ... others will crawl' (PT). However, others 'will deviate from the Path and fall headlong into Hell' (The Koran, XXIII, 346). After the tomb-reckoning episode, Beckford compares *al sirat* to 'the fatal bridge' which crosses 'the singular lake' (*Vathek*, 79) that is likened to Hell. Hence, the dreadful surroundings suggest an end-of-the-world scene for the putative death of both Nouronihar and Gulchenrouz. The striking point here is that Beckford portrays the episodes of death and the afterlife in exactly the same sequence as in the Koran and the Prophet's Traditions, and also stresses an inborn instinct in human beings which they make strenuous efforts to forget; the instinct of experiencing awe at the remembrance of death or the Day of Reckoning.

Beckford refers to 'the bees, who were staunch Mussulmans' (*Vathek*, 101). Allah says, 'Bees produce the honey that heals people's ailments' (The Koran, XVI, 274). In *Vathek*, Beckford uses the bees as retaliatory weapons that want 'to revenge the insult offered to their dear masters, the santons' (*Vathek*, 101). Besides, he suggests that 'The bee is an insect held in high veneration amongst the Mahometans' (*Vathek*, 'Explanatory Notes', 153), but he does not embody in the text the reason for that 'veneration' which he mentions in the notes.

Driven by her 'impatience', Nouronihar 'fancied herself already more potent than Balkis' (*Vathek*, 106). Balkis, the Queen of Sheba, is mentioned in the Koran when one of Prophet Solomon's birds, his hoopoe, brings the intelligence that 'a

woman and her subjects are worshipping the sun' (The Koran, XXVII, 379). Prophet Solomon invited her to believe in Allah and, as she accepted his proposal, she said, 'I submit myself with Solomon to Allah' (The Koran, XXVII, 380). In *Vathek*, Nouronihar fails to clutch at the last straw of atonement offered by the shepherd, so she presses ahead with the infernal journey to Eblis whose promises make his followers, like Nouronihar, believe in being 'potent'. For a heightened dramatic effect, Beckford strays from the Koran when he depicts Balkis as a worshipper of fire, whereas the Koran portrays her as the worshipper of the sun.

On seeing the Caliph and Nouronihar, Eblis says, 'Creatures of clay ... insatiable as your curiosity may be' (*Vathek*, 111). In the Koran, Eblis or Satan is portrayed as 'a rebellious genii who disobeyed Allah' (The Koran, XVIII, 299). On refusing to prostrate himself to Adam, Eblis says to Allah, 'I'm better than him [Adam], You created me from fire and him You created from clay' (The Koran, VII, 152). In *Vathek*, Eblis carries out the oath he's taken upon himself in the Koran; he vowed to 'adorn the path of error for mankind and mislead them all' (The Koran, XV, 264). As a result of seeking the forbidden power, *Vathek*, Carathis and Nouronihar, as the 'creatures of clay' who are the offspring of 'the contemptible being', become the object of Satan's vengeance (*Vathek*, 111). In *Vathek*, the depiction of the punishment of Eblis suggests that he still has 'adorers', as Beckford says that Nouronihar 'could not help admiring the person of Eblis' (*Vathek*, 111), whereas in the Koran, only torture and curse await him in the Day of Resurrection. Beckford's aesthetic preference for Eblis seems to suggest common ground with the 'heretical' beliefs of some Sufis who regard Eblis as the best worshipper who refused to prostrate himself to any power but Allah. Beckford's affinity with Sufi interpretations of Eblis in the Koran is probably the central key to unlocking the fullest possible understanding of his debt to Islam.

Towards the end of the Caliph's infernal journey, he hears the groans of Prophet Solomon who says, 'I filled a magnificent throne ...' (*Vathek*, 113). According to the Koran, many things were under the control of Prophet Solomon, such as 'the wind, the jinn, men and birds' (The Koran, XXVII, 378). Also, in the Old Testament King Solomon was given 'immense wisdom and understanding'; his wisdom 'surpassed the wisdom of all the sons of the East'⁵. In *Vathek*, many references are made to Prophet Solomon's throne which the Caliph spares no effort to get. But Beckford puts an end to the Caliph's endeavours of seeking the 'forbidden power' by way of giving a living example of Prophet Solomon, the King who met his nemesis because he 'thought that the vengeance of Heaven was asleep' (*Vathek*, 113). Besides, Solomon says, 'I basely suffered myself to be seduced by the love of women' (*Vathek*, 113). In these two lines, Beckford seems to be echoing the Old Testament; 'King Solomon loved many foreign women ... he had seven hundred wives of royal rank and three hundred concubines ... when Solomon grew old, his wives swayed his heart to other gods' (1 Kgs. 11: 7, 375). In the novel, Solomon mentions that he 'listened to the counsels of ... the daughter of Pharaoh' (*Vathek*, 113). There is a mention in the Old Testament that Solomon 'married the Pharaoh's daughter' (1 Kgs. 2: 41, 364). The unforgiving tone in *Vathek* is to be found echoed in the Old Testament that says, 'Yahweh was angry with Solomon because his heart had turned from Yahweh' (1 Kgs. 11: 8, 376). Thus, both *Vathek* and the Old Testament are different from the Koran because in the latter all prophets are idealised. So when Beckford in *Vathek* invokes both Muslim and Christian texts, sometimes he finds them agreeing and at other times diverging; yet underlying his repeated use of religious texts and traditions, there seems to be a strong inner impulse to create from them a challenging view of human nature and the other world.

In this general review of Beckford's detailed uses of references to the Koran and the Prophet's Traditions in *Vathek*,

we can catch glimpses of the subtle relationship developing between the Islamic Orient and the imaginative stirrings of the young Englishman. Implied in the word 'relationship' are the possible political, social, religious and aesthetic dimensions of the work. In his book *Orientalism*, Edward Said suggests that such a relationship should be mostly viewed as a political relationship because, for the most part, western literature about the Orient has been used to serve the West's political ambitions in the Arab world. Beckford seems to have conducted his relationship with the Orient in a predominantly aesthetic way which gave him opportunities for an impressive display of literary craftsmanship on the part of a convinced aesthete. Said never stopped worrying about 'what other sorts of intellectual, aesthetic, scholarly and cultural energies went into the making of an imperialist tradition like the Orientalist one?' (*Orientalism*, 15). It is worth mentioning that some contemporary Muslim writers place *Vathek* firmly in Said's 'imperialist tradition', but other Muslim writers disagree with such a conclusion.

Lonsdale's main conclusion is that *Vathek* was 'a remarkable achievement for so youthful an author, a partial manifestation at least of powers which were never to be fully revealed in any of the preoccupations of his long and lonely life' (*Vathek*, xxx). My present conclusion is that Beckford's use of the Koran and the Prophet's Traditions in *Vathek* suggests a remarkable sensitivity, if occasionally unorthodox, on the part of a 'non-believer' to the aesthetic features of Islamic culture. Surely, further exploration of Beckford's metaphorical uses of his Islamic sources can lead only to a more subtle understanding of *Vathek* and perhaps even of Beckford's youth itself, at the end of which he composed this masterpiece.

1. See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient, with a new afterword* (Penguin Books, 1995) for a masterly overview of how 'Orientalism' began to influence the European imagination, p.63.

2. 'The Prophet's Traditions' (PT) refer to the Prophet's reflections and details of Koranic teachings, of his prophecies of the future and of his social standards, all of which are, for the most part, passed on orally from one generation to the next.
 3. *Vathek* (Oxford World Classics, 1980) edited with an introduction and notes by Roger Lonsdale, p.3.
 4. The Koran (The Medina Edition, Sura LVI, p.535). The Koran is divided into 30 chapters of equal length. The whole Book contains 114 Suras, but of unequal length. Professor A. J. Arberry's English translation of The Koran was first published in Oxford Classics series in 1964 and is still in print.
 5. The Jerusalem Bible, Popular Edition 1974, General Editor: Alexander Jones, I Kings 4:14, p366.
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Horace Walpole to Sir Horace Mann
19 April 1770

'The day so much apprehended of Wilkes's enlargement is passed without mischief. He was released late the night before last, and set out directly for the country. Last night several shops and private houses were illuminated, from affection or fear of their windows, but few of any distinction except the Duke of Portland's. Falling amid the drunkenness of Easter week, riots were the more to be expected; yet none happened. [...] The Lord Mayor had enjoined tranquillity – as Mayor. As Beckford, his own house in Soho Square was embroidered with *liberty* in white letters three feet high. Luckily the evening was very wet, and not a mouse stirred.'

Dreams Revisited

RICHARD ALLEN

Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents by William Beckford of Fonthill: New, Revised Edition, Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Robert J. Gemmett (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Nonsuch Press, 2006. ISBN 1-84588-161-3)

Professor Gemmett's previous edition of *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1971) was a landmark in Beckford publishing. A handsome book in white glossy dustwrapper, it was the first scholarly edition of Beckford's youthful masterpiece as a book in its own right. This new publication is more than just a re-issue. Not only has the text of *Dreams* itself been given an editorial going-over, but the Introduction has been rewritten, and the notes that Beckford himself wrote in his own copy have now been included. It is an important new edition.

The story of *Dreams* is one of the Beckfordian legends. When Beckford brought out his *Italy; with Sketches of Spain and Portugal* in 1834-5, he made no mention of *Dreams*, referring only to 'these Letters, which have remained dormant a great many years'. It was not until 1859, fifteen years after Beckford's death, that Cyrus Redding, in his *Memoirs of William Beckford of Fonthill*, told the story:

In 1783, Mr. Beckford was persuaded to print his travelling letters, and he had five hundred copies struck off in quarto ... One or two over-zealous friends persuaded him to destroy the whole edition, except half-a-dozen copies, for the very silly reason, that such a lively imagination and quickness of sensibility ... might prejudice him in the House of Commons.

Having quoted an extract, taken from the ‘Grande Chartreuse’ section, Redding commented:

It is remarkable that that the extract given here regarding St. Bruno, came from that suppressed volume, and is nearly verbatim with a portion of that fine description of the Chartreuse which Mr. Beckford published in 1834-5. This is a proof that he still possessed a copy of his printed but unpublished quarto, from which he had extracted portions for his use in the later work.

As Gemmett points out, *Dreams* was known, at least by reputation, to a ‘select group of writers’, including Byron and Samuel Rogers, but now the public had its legend too: a tantalising glimpse of a previously unknown work from which the highly regarded *Italy* had been quarried; and those half-a-dozen copies, of which at least one (but perhaps only one) had survived. Yet still there was no fully published edition, and there were no copies in the sale-rooms.

At last, in 1891 – over a century after the original had been suppressed – *Dreams* finally appeared, edited by G. T. Bettany from a single copy that was by then in the British Museum. It formed just a part of a compendium of Beckford’s writings, *The History of the Caliph Vathek; and European Travels*, published by Ward, Lock and Co., and was not even mentioned on the general title-page, so its first full appearance was unfortunately low-key.

In 1928 it appeared again, edited by Guy Chapman in *The Travel-Diaries of William Beckford of Fonthill*, published by Constable. Here, too, it was with other writings, and rather oddly (though perhaps thought-provokingly) classed as a diary. By this time Chapman was able to account for five copies, including two in the Hamilton Papers. He also included as an Appendix a listing

by Hamish Miles of ‘the chief alterations made by Beckford when he produced *Dreams* as the first volume of *Italy*’.

And so to 1971 and Robert Gemmett’s earlier edition. Gemmett restored *Dreams* to its 1783 status as a book in its own right, and was thus able to give it full editorial treatment, including a long and informative Introduction, a newly edited text, explanatory footnotes, an expanded and corrected version of Miles’s Appendix, and a Bibliography.

Gemmett is particularly interesting on the question of which to prefer, *Dreams* or *Italy*. He describes Beckford’s working method:

He revised heavily as he read through one of the few surviving copies [of *Dreams*] ... In the end most of the changes were omissions ... He cut away the personal allusions and the anecdotes that might in any way make the persistent rumours about his homosexual nature more credible; he slashed passages brimming with sentimentality; he eliminated the dream machinery along with the excessive flights of imagination; the art criticism ... he qualified and made less rhapsodic.

The result, says Gemmett, was that the 1834 volume became cooler, more classical, more restrained, while the 1783 work was freer, more spontaneous, more passionate. Certainly, Gemmett’s account whets the appetite for *Dreams*, but preferences are personal – and Gemmett himself cites André Parreaux on the side of *Dreams* as the ‘chef-d’œuvre de la jeunesse’, with H. B. Grimsditch preferring the ‘precision’ of *Italy*, while Geoffrey Bullough considered *Italy* the better work but also saw *Dreams* as ‘a striking example of Rousseauan romanticism’.

It has to be said that the Appendix, with its textual variants between *Dreams* and *Italy* – important reference tool though it be – is not the easiest way to compare the texts. Much better to have the two volumes, and read a passage from both. For example, in

Letter XXII of *Dreams* (Rome, October 30th), in describing his visit to St. Peter's, Beckford writes of how he wished his Holiness would allow him to erect 'a little tabernacle' under the dome:

The doors should be closed, and not a mortal admitted. No priests, no cardinals; God forbid! We should have all the space to ourselves, and to such creatures too as resemble us. The windows I should shade with transparent curtains of yellow silk, to admit the glow of perpetual summer. Lanterns, as many as you please, of all forms and sizes; they would remind us of China ... [and several lines more in similar vein]

In 1834 this became:

The doors should be closed, and not a mortal admitted. No priests, no cardinals; God forbid! We would have all the space to ourselves, and to beings of our own visionary persuasion. [and no more]

The 'beings of our own visionary persuasion' are certainly more sonorous than 'such creatures too as resemble us', but this reviewer at least regrets the loss of those 'transparent curtains of yellow silk'.

For this new edition, Gemmett has updated everything from the Illustrations to the Bibliography. He has extensively revised the Introduction. Sometimes a small detail is refined; Beckford's mother, who in 1873 was 'an autocratic woman' is now one who 'tended to be autocratic'. Sometimes he beefs up a story with new material; on page 13 Beckford's struggle against a 'criminal passion' in Venice is underlined by a note on an unpublished letter on the incident from Countess Rosenberg – a letter unknown before a Sotheby's sale in 1977.

Of particular note is Gemmett's response to recent scholarship. There are several examples, but the most extensive is his use, properly acknowledged, of Kim Sloan's work on Beckford and John Robert Cozens, who accompanied Beckford on the tour described in *Dreams*. Sloan has helped Gemmett develop ideas already put forward in the 1971 edition into a more profound understanding of the pictorial and the picturesque in Beckford's writing. It is worth pointing out here that the Illustrations now include Cozens's *Storm over Padua*. Gemmett also gives a new emphasis to the influence of Piranesi, especially in its 'psychological dimension that must have had a catalytic effect on Beckford's own introspective art.'

Perhaps the most important new material, albeit not large in quantity, comes from Beckford's own copy of *Dreams*, which Gemmett has now examined at the Bodleian Library. Beckford had made marginal notes in it as he prepared the 1834 *Italy*, but some of them were never used, and Gemmett has given us these as extra footnotes here. One example will have to suffice. On page 70 there is the following sentence: 'All were asleep, except a female figure in white, with glow-worms in her hair.' Beckford had added this note to his copy: 'Twiss mentions that the Ladies at Cadix decorated themselves in the same manner when they take their Evening walks on the Alameda. I have observed this custom in various parts of Spain & Portugal.' It is fascinating to see the romantic writing of *Dreams* given such a solid basis in reality.

The volume itself has an attractive new dustwrapper, appropriately reproducing J. R. Cozens's *Lake Nemi*. It is a pity that the Appendix is now in such small type (perhaps to keep the book to a convenient 256 pages), and that the running titles do not give the numbers of the Letters, but these are small quibbles. This is a worthy successor to Professor Gemmett's earlier edition, and even those who have a copy of that volume will find that the new material makes this an edition worth having in its own right.

John Rutter's ***A Description of Fonthill Abbey*** ***and Demesne, 1822***

JON MILLINGTON

When Christie's announced that viewing for their sale at Fonthill Abbey would begin in July 1822, John Rutter, perhaps prompted by Beckford, must have realised that there would be a demand for a guide book to accompany visitors as they walked round. *A Description of Fonthill Abbey and Demesne* met this need, and was so successful that it went through six editions in a few weeks. The *Salisbury and Winchester Journal* heralded the work on 15 July 1822 with a 52-line extract about the 'present possessor of Fonthill', and advertisements in that newspaper tell us that on 22 July the first edition was 'Just published', with the second edition following on 26 August and the third on 9 September. All measured 20½ by 13½ cm, were edge-stitched and issued in buff paper wrappers at a price of 3/6d. The title on the upper cover appeared within an attractive oval typographic border, except for the sixth edition where a simplified version of the title page was used.

Abbé Denis Macquin, once Beckford's Librarian, included an epigram, 'De Æde Fonthilliana', in his 'Visit to Fonthill [Third Paper.]' for the *Literary Gazette* of 31 August 1822, and it appeared on the title page of the last four editions of Rutter's *Description*:

Splendida frondosis surgit de montibus Ædes,
Tangit et augusta fronte superba polum:
Scilicet attonitus dubitat quid conspicit hospes,
An cœlum in terris, an super astra domos.

After the first edition the number of pages was increased from sixty-six to seventy-four, with more prelims and a revised order in which the Abbey was toured. The extra pages contained a poem by the Rev. William Lisle Bowles, 'On a First View of Fonthill Abbey, August 21st. 1822' and fuller descriptions of some of the rooms. From the second to the sixth editions only very minor changes or additions were made to the text and engraved frontispiece.

For the first three editions Rutter wrote 'advertisements' (prefaces), and reprinted the one for the first edition in the second, with both reappearing in the third. He reprinted these three prefaces in each of the last three editions without adding any new ones. In his original 'Advertisement to Second Edition' he wrote:

It may be regarded as no indecisive Test of the surprising effect which the genius of Wyatt, directed by the classical taste of Mr. Beckford, has thus produced, that in the judgment of many, who have again and again visited this magnificent Gothic Pile, it possesses a character of sublimity, which the more it is contemplated, the more it is sure to communicate new and vivid impressions of wonder and delight.

When Rutter reprinted this preface in the four subsequent editions he changed the passage 'directed by the classical taste of Mr. Beckford' to 'under the ascendancy of a genius superior to his own', thus removing the direct reference to Beckford.

Rutter's *Description* was divided into four sections, the first being a 'Historical Sketch of Fonthill Gifford and its Possessors'. Next came 'A Descriptive guide through the Abbey Grounds', and this was followed by a 'General Description of Fonthill Abbey, with its collection of Paintings, Cabinets and other curiosities in the apartments successively shewn'. The last section was 'A brief Notice of the outer Grounds and of the former

A
DESCRIPTION
OF
FONTHILL ABBEY,
AND
DEMESNE,
WILTS;
SEAT OF WILLIAM BECKFORD, Esq.
INCLUDING A LIST OF ITS
NUMEROUS AND VALUABLE
PAINTINGS, CABINETS,
AND OTHER
CURIOSITIES.

Intended as a Guide to the Visitor, and to convey Information to the more distant Enquirer.

BY JOHN RUTTER.

SHAFTESBURY:
PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY J. RUTTER;
To be had of Longman, Hurst and Co. London; and of all other Book
sellers in England; also of Hitchcock, on the Single, at Amsterdam;
Nieuwenhuys's, Brussels: and at Galignani's Office, Paris.

1822.

First Edition: Title Page

A
DESCRIPTION
OF
FONTHILL ABBEY
AND
DEMESNE,
IN THE COUNTY OF WILTS:
INCLUDING A LIST OF ITS
PAINTINGS, CABINETS, &c.

BY JOHN RUTTER.

DE ÆDE FONTHILLIANA.

- “ Splendida frondosis surgit de montibus Ædes,
“ Tangit et augusta fronte superba polum :
“ Scilicet attonitus dubitat quid conspicit hospes,
“ An cœlum in terris, an super astra domos.”

SIXTH EDITION.

SHAFTESBURY:

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY J. RUTTER;
To be had of Longman, Hurst, and Co. London; and of all Booksellers.

—
1822.

Sixth Edition: Title Page

Mansion'. The first, second and fourth sections remained virtually unchanged in all six editions

In the third section, 'General Description of Fonthill Abbey', Rutter suggested a route for visitors to follow when touring the Abbey. Begin at the Western Entrance and go into the Hall, passing under the Music Gallery. Up the stairs to the Great Octagon, with the Open Gallery running round at first floor level. Crossing straight over the Octagon and under the Organ Gallery to the Cabinet Room (Great Dining Room) in the Eastern Transept. Through to the New Room (Crimson Drawing Room), but not to the room beyond, the unfinished Grand Drawing Room shown in plate 5 of Rutter's *Delineations* (1823). [After the first edition the rooms in italics below were visited next.] On to Edward the Third's Gallery, the Vaulted Gallery (called the Sanctuary after the first edition), the Oratory, St. Michael's Gallery, Yellow Rooms, Green Cabinet Room (Gothic Cabinet) in the adjoining turret to the north west, down to the Brown Parlour (Oak Parlour) and the Drawing Room with Purbeck marble chimneypiece, then up to the principal floor. *On to the China Closet (Porcelain Room), then upstairs to the Dutchess' Room, up again to the northern Tribune Room off the Octagon. Along the Lancaster Gallery above Edward the Third's Gallery to the Lancaster or State Bed Room.* Lastly, up to the Nunneries, four rooms perched high up in the Octagonal Tower, followed by a climb up the stairs to the summit of the Tower. The names of the rooms in brackets were used in Rutter's *New Descriptive Guide to Fonthill Abbey* (similar in format to the *Description*) and then in *Delineations of Fonthill*, both published in 1823. The other three sections remained virtually unchanged in all six editions.

Altogether there are four states of the engraved frontispiece, 'South West View of Fonthill Abbey, Wilts', each being more highly finished than the one before. This suggests that the same steel (or copper) plate was used throughout, and just reworked for

successive versions. All are lettered the same: 'Drawn by J. Rutter' and 'Engraved by T. Higham' with 'Pub^d July 15, 1822 by J. Rutter, Shaftesbury'. In the first state, which appeared only in the first edition, there are no basement windows on the left of the Western Entrance and the Eastern Transept towers are not much taller than the roof. A conical turret depicted on the far side of the Eastern Transept was removed in the subsequent states. (A copy of this engraving accompanied the *Literary Gazette*'s second article on the Abbey on 24 August 1822, and on the same day another copy appeared in the *Gazette of Fashion*.)

In the second state, used for the second and third editions and a great improvement on the first state, a corbelled parapet was added to the Lancaster Tower, together with an oriel window on the first floor. The Lancaster Turret was much reduced in size, a staircase shaft topped by a spire appears on the right of the central octagonal tower and the Eastern Transept towers are much taller, rising to meet the crest of the hill behind them. The south front was reduced from three storeys to two, with a square tower added on the extreme right. In the third state, which appeared in the fourth edition, there are people in the foreground, and the Eastern Transept walls were raised to hide most of roof. Grey smoke emerges from the Lancaster Turret. Architraves are more pronounced, especially to the left of the octagonal tower. In the fourth state, for the fifth and sixth editions, a small tree was added on the left of the Western Entrance, and the smoke from the Lancaster Turret is now white. In whatever state, this delightful engraving shows the Abbey from the viewpoint of which Beckford most approved, distantly from the south west. Copies of the engraving can be seen on some of the many contemporary souvenirs of the Abbey, such as vases and plates.

John Bowyer Nichols briefly reviewed Rutter's *Description* in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for September 1822:

A Description of Fonthill Abbey and Demesne, by Mr. John Rutter, of Shaftesbury, is well calculated as a Guide

to the Visitor of that princely mansion. It gives an historical sketch of Fonthill Gifford and its possessors; a description of the Abbey Grounds (selected in a great measure from Mr. Storer's Work, but without mentioning its source); and an account of the Paintings, Cabinets, and other curiosities; concluding with a brief notice of the outer Grounds, and of the former Mansion. It is embellished with a very good S.W. view of the Abbey.

As well as plagiarising the account of the Abbey grounds in Storer's *A Description of Fonthill Abbey* (1812), where pages 2–8 were largely copied in pages 19–26, Rutter also plundered his account of the Brown Parlour on pages 9–10, which reappeared on page 52 in the first edition and pages 65–66 in the other five. Elsewhere there is plenty of evidence that Rutter, perhaps because he may not have had much time in which to compile his work, made use of Storer's.

What prompted the Rev. William Bowles (1762–1850) to write his eighteen-line poem in appreciation of Fonthill Abbey for the second edition of Rutter's *Description*? To find a possible answer we have to go back thirty-four years, when Bowles was ordained deacon to the curacy of Knoyle (as East Knoyle was known in those days). This was not far from Shaftesbury where his widowed mother was then living and was, of course, even nearer to Fonthill. So Bowles would have been well aware of Fonthill Splendens and its exotic inhabitant. His interest was probably further kindled by the fact that the Rector of Knoyle, the Rev. Dr. Charles Wake was then married to Barbara Beckford, his second wife. She was the daughter of one of Alderman Beckford's illegitimate children, also named Barbara.

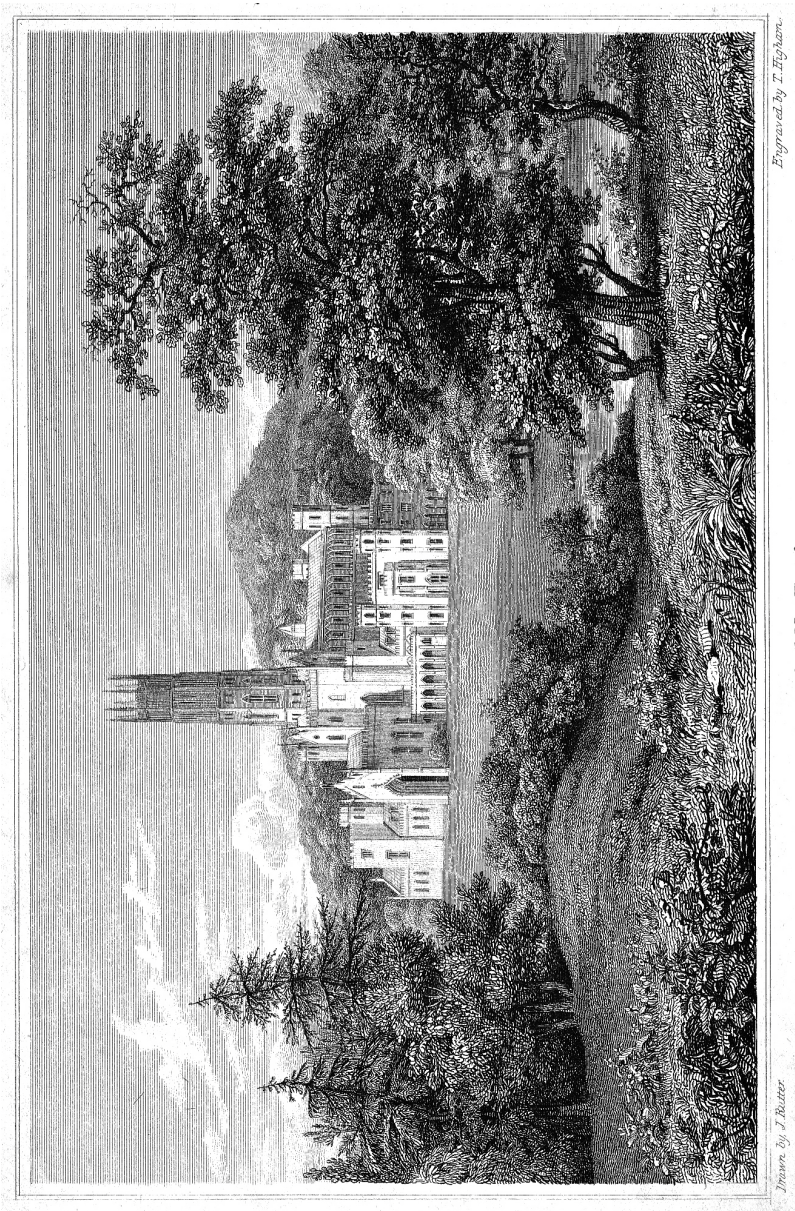
Moreover, the bond between Wake and Bowles was considerably more than that which would normally exist between a rector and his curate, because in 1792 Bowles became engaged to one of his daughters, Harriett. This was after Bowles had been forced to break off, just before his ordination, his engagement to

a lady whose family opposed the match. An even greater misfortune was the death of Harriett a year after his engagement to her, a fact which was poignantly recorded in the *Gentlemen's Magazine* for April 1793: 'In her 25th year, Miss Wake, daughter of the Rev. Dr. W. of Knoyle, in Wilts. This amiable and beautiful young lady was on the eve of marriage, but a putrid fever put a period to her life in a very few days.' Four years later he married her sister, Magdalene, a union which, although childless, lasted almost fifty years. Today Bowles is remembered as a poet whose first appearance in print was a eulogy on the death of a university friend, 'Verses to the Memory of Henry Headley, of Norwich', in the *Gentlemen's Magazine* for December 1788. In 1806 he published a ten-volume edition of Pope's works in which comments on his life verged on the severe, prompting a long controversy involving Byron, among others.

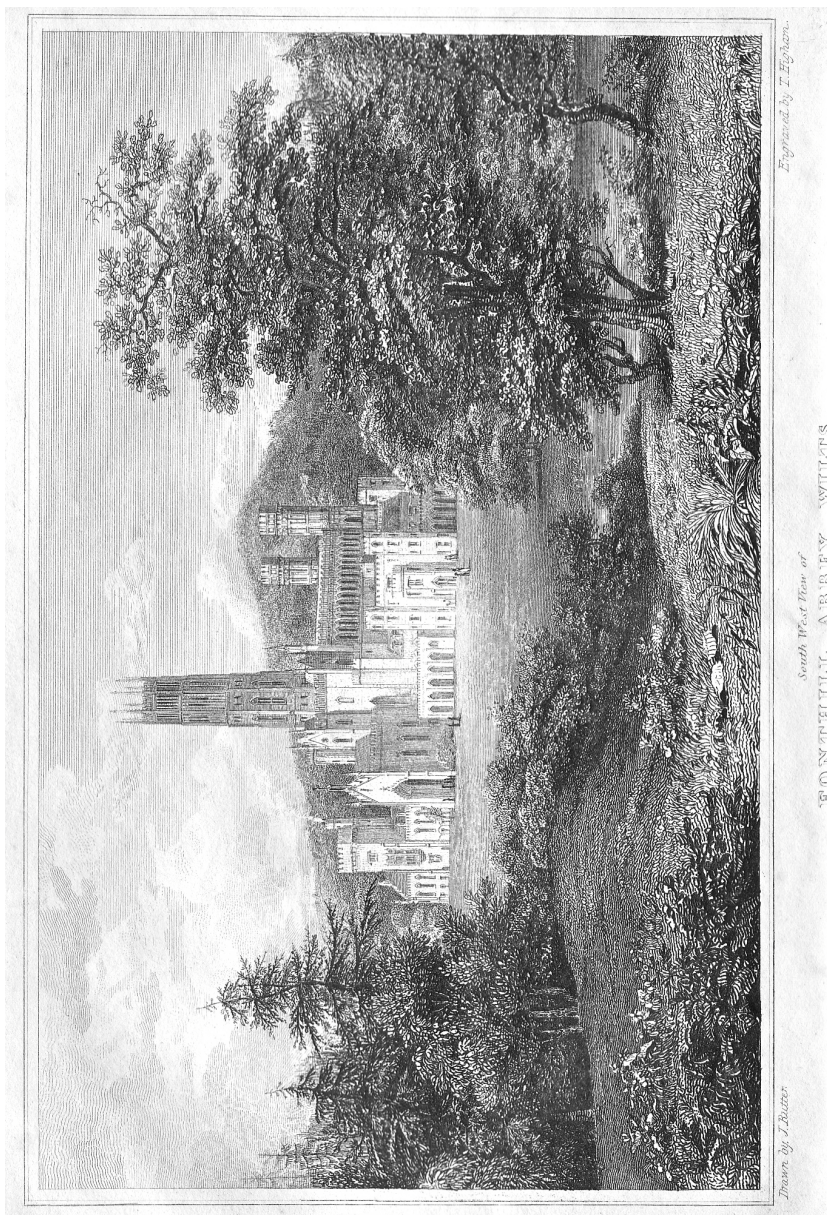
While viewing for Christie's sale was taking place, Rutter's *Description* had the field to itself. Then, very late in the day, Whittaker's *A New Guide to Fonthill Abbey* appeared. It was mostly culled from Rutter's guide and did not impress the *Gentleman's Magazine* which noted in October that:

The "New Guide to Fonthill" differs from Mr. Rutter's "Description" chiefly in its arrangement, and in the introduction of a few scraps of prose and verse from the periodical prints. Indeed, both these professed Guides are hasty compilations, consisting chiefly of extracts from Storer's "Description of Fonthill Abbey," and from Mr. Christie's Sale Catalogue, which was admirably compiled by the accomplished Auctioneer. The "New Guide," however, has a very faithful engraving of the Abbey.

This engraving, a fine view from the west drawn by Thomas Higham, is dated 'Oct. 8, 1822'. Since this was two days after the



Engraved Frontispiece: First State



Engraved Frontispiece: Fourth State

announcement that Christie's sale had been cancelled, it suggests that few people would have bought Whittaker's guide.

Collations of Rutter's *Description*

1st ed.

Cover: 'Rutter's / Description / of / Fonthill Abbey / and / Demesne.' in oval above; 'To be had of J. Rutter, Shaftesbury; Longman, Hurst, & Co. London; and of all other Booksellers in England; also of Hitchcock, on the Single, at Amsterdam; Nieuwenhuys's, Brussels; and at Galignani's Office, Paris.'

Advert for Rutter's *Wardour Castle* inside front cover.

Signatures. [A], 3 leaves; B–I, in fours; K, 1 leaf.

Pagination. [i], title; [ii], '[Entered at Stationer's Hall]'; [iii], 'Advertisement'; [iv], blank; [v], 'Arrangement'; [vi], blank; [1]–66, text.

2nd ed.

Cover: 'Rutter's / Description / of / Fonthill Abbey / and / Demesne. / Price, 3s. 6d.' in oval. 'Second edition.' 'Sold by J. Rutter, Shaftesbury; – Longman, Hurst & Co. London; and every other Bookseller. – also to be had at the Abbey.'

Advert for Rutter's *Wardour Castle* on lower cover.

Signatures. [A], 5 leaves; B–E, in eights; F, 4 leaves, G, 2 leaves.

Pagination. [i], title; [ii], '[Entered at Stationer's Hall]'; [iii], 'Advertisement to First Edition'; [iv], blank; [v], 'Advertisement to Second Edition'; [vi], blank; [vii], 'On a First View of Fonthill Abbey'; [viii], blank; [ix], 'Arrangement'; [x], blank; [1]–74, text; two blanks.

3rd ed.

Cover: 'Rutter's / Description / of / Fonthill Abbey / and / Demesne. / Price, 3s. 6d.' in oval. 'Third Edition.' 'Sold J. Rutter, Shaftesbury; – Longman, Hurst & Co. London; and

every other Bookseller. – also to be had at the Abbey.’
Advert for Rutter’s *Wardour Castle* on lower cover:
Signatures. [A], 6 leaves; B–E, in eights; F, 4 leaves; G, 2 leaves.

Pagination. [i], title; [ii], ‘[Entered at Stationer’s Hall]’; [iii], ‘Advertisement to First Edition’; [iv], blank; [v], ‘Advertisement to Second Edition’; [vi], blank; [vii]–viii, ‘Advertisement to Third Edition’; [ix], ‘On a First View of Fonthill Abbey’; [x], blank; [xi], ‘Arrangement’; [xii], blank; [1]–74, text; two pages: 3rd ed., advert for Britton’s *Fonthill*; 5th & 6th eds., blanks.

4th ed.

The only copy seen had 4th ed. on the cover, but it contained the 3rd ed.

5th ed.

Cover: ‘Rutter’s / Description / of / Fonthill Abbey / and / Demesne. / Price, 3s 6d.’ in oval. ‘Fifth Edition.’ ‘Sold J. Rutter, Shaftesbury; – Longman, Hurst & Co. London; and every other Bookseller. – also to be had at the Abbey.’

Adverts for Rutter’s *History & Description [Delineations] of Fonthill Abbey* inside front cover, continued on front free endpaper, and another on lower cover.

Signatures & pagination as for 3rd ed., but G, 1 leaf.

6th ed.

Cover: ‘Rutter’s / Description / of / Fonthill Abbey / and / Demesne.’ in oval. ‘Sixth Edition.’ ‘Shaftesbury: Printed and Published by J. Rutter: Sold by Longman, Hurst & Co. London; and every other Bookseller. – Also, to be had at the Abbey. Price, 3s. 6d.’

Adverts for Rutter’s *History & Description [Delineations] of Fonthill Abbey* front free endpaper, continued on verso, and another on lower cover.

Signatures & pagination as for 3rd ed. but G, 1 leaf.

Beckford in Bath According to ‘H’

JERRY NOLAN

‘It is a striking proof of the extraordinary conversational powers of the late Mr. Beckford, that everybody who came in contact with him, seems to have made notes of what he said.’

(Editor of the *New Monthly Magazine*, 1844)

The subject of Beckford in Bath has led hostile critics to view the ‘Fool of Fonthill’ as a refugee entrapped into a life of solitude, loneliness and frustration – all of his own making. The historical reality was that when a buoyant Beckford moved to Bath, he felt that he was not only in the best financial position for twenty years as a result of the successful sale of Fonthill Abbey (‘The Holy Sepulchre’) to John Farquhar at the top price of three hundred thousand pounds, but that he had reached a stage of life where he could open his worlds to visitors – admittedly to very carefully chosen persons either whose ability in the arts he could support or who had a genuine enthusiasm for his collections, his writings and his views of the world. Cyrus Redding’s *Memoirs of William Beckford* has existed as a published work in two volumes since 1859, and when read closely can help dispel the negative view of the Bath years. In addition to the revelations to a younger Redding, Beckford began to develop a considerable interest in making contact with an even younger generation.¹ While Beckford was to keep at a certain distance his fellow-orientalist Disraeli during the 1830s, he seemed determined from the beginning to meet young people in Bath. The best remembered of that younger generation was Henry Edmund Goodridge who was born in Bath in 1797, recently married and set up at the age of 26 in an architectural practice at 7 Henrietta Street. The trial run with Goodridge was the design of a connecting link between

Beckford's two newly acquired properties - a bridge at first floor level over a narrow lane between 20 Lansdown Crescent, bought from Sir William James, and 1 Lansdown Place West (then known as West Wing), bought from Ann Lowder. Working with Goodridge on the bridge seems to have gone rather well. Within ten years, Beckford had decided on an unusual use of Goodridge's bridge structure because after he sold on 1 West Wing, Beckford installed a great mirror from floor to ceiling in the far recess of what then became known as the apartment over the arch.²

There was further work for Goodridge after Beckford had purchased land on Lansdown Hill, to the rear of his Crescent residence. Beckford, by now approaching his mid-sixties, imagined a retreat on a hilltop for himself as reclusive scholar and discriminating collector to include living quarters, a range of rooms for treasures and a view of Fonthill Abbey, some thirty-five miles away. Architects in London and Bath were alerted to the challenge of designing such a hill-top edifice. Again Beckford selected Goodridge whose first design of a neo-Norman keep was rejected by Beckford. The young man's second design was still a neo-Norman keep with added Italian Romanesque decorations, which was again rejected by the demanding patron. The last design, which showed marked affinities with William Atkinson's neo-Grecian designs for Thomas Hope's country house at Deepdene, was accepted by Beckford. The original drawing of Lansdown Tower was inscribed c.1825 as follows: 'To Wm. Beckford, Esq. whose Talents and Fortune have been dedicated to the promotion of the Fine Arts in his Country, this view is most respectfully inscribed by His obedt. And humble servant, H.E. Goodridge.' Much later, Goodridge's son Alfred recorded that the Lansdown Tower was constructed at very great speed with Beckford urging the tower to rise higher and higher on the hill, which was some 800 feet above sea level, until its top reached a height of over 150 feet. Was it the patron or the patron's young

architect who first proposed the architectural combination of the Choragic Monument of Lysicrates at Athens and the Tower of the Winds as the final model of Lansdown Tower? Who knows? The high belvedere near the top with its spectacular views of countryside for his guests was one of the patron's priorities. Goodridge was the young Beckford protégé from Bath who fulfilled much of his artistic promise and who was to treasure his association with his, at times admittedly fearsome, patron.

Another member of the young generation who attracted Beckford's attention was Willes Maddox (born in Bath, 1813) who was commissioned to paint New Testament scenes for the lunettes of St. Anthony's Sanctuary in the Tower, and who was later to paint the interiors of the Tower, which formed the inspiration for the colour lithographs of C. J. Richardson in the beautiful volume entitled *Views of Lansdown Tower* (1844) which had a commentary by Edmund English.³ It was Maddox, at the age of thirty, who painted Beckford on his deathbed, a portrait which showed a deeply sympathetic understanding of Beckford in Bath. Doubtless the circumstances of Maddox's own sudden death of a fever in 1853 at Pera, near Constantinople, where he had been painting several portraits of the Sultan, would have much moved his first patron.

A third member of the young generation, who had been brought up from an early age in Bath, was Henry Venn Lansdown. At the age of 34, on 21 August 1838, he first visited Beckford in the company of Goodridge, who had arranged the visit to Lansdown Crescent. As a youth, Lansdown had studied landscape painting in Bath and afterwards spent some time in Paris, Malta and Sicily before settling back in Bath in 1830 where he practised as a drawing master, topographical artist and copyist. In 1838 Lansdown not only had his first meeting with Beckford but exhibited three paintings at The Bath Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts which depicted a castle on Lake Geneva, an Egyptian Turk in morning dress and a bridge near

Avignon. Lansdown left an indispensable inventory of Beckford's collections in the form of long letters which were written at the time to his sister Charlotte, and which were eventually published by his daughter Charlotte in a limited edition of 100 copies, some thirty-three years after her father's death.⁴

There was a fourth member of the youngish generation in Bath who has left a published record of conversations with Beckford. This primary source has been used over the years intermittently by commentators in search of Beckford quotations about his contemporaries.⁵ Perhaps after one quick glance, Guy Chapman concluded that all these conversations were 'redundant' with each visitor standing in 'terror' before Beckford.⁶ Thus no sustained attempt has been made to understand the relationship which developed between Beckford and his friend 'H' who was about forty-five years younger. The man is known to posterity as 'H' because that was how he signed the first instalment of his recollections, but his identity and mature achievements have never been established.⁷ Here then is a brief sequence of vignettes selected from the account by 'H' for the light they throw on Beckford in Bath.

In 'Conversations: III', 'H' was a young man just down from Cambridge in 1831 whose promise of artistic ability attracted Beckford's attention after an introduction by Goodridge, who seems to have been Beckford's go-between in these meetings. The description of Beckford's first visit to his family house suggests that 'H' was from a wealthy Bath family with servants, and that Beckford seems to have been very happy to meet his father. The prospect of a Beckford visit to the family home stirred up a sense of feverish excitement among the family and the servants which climaxed one afternoon, as the clocks struck two, with the arrival of 'mysterious' Beckford in a chariot and postilion preceded by an outrider, and dressed as was his wont in top-boots, knee-breeches, green frill and white neck-cloth. The

author of *Vathek* bowed to 'H' courteously and elegantly but what immediately struck the young man was the visitor's peculiarly convex yet small piercing grey eyes and a countenance which suddenly suggested a 'startling mixture of the divine Dante, Lorenzo de Medici and the Mephistophiles of Faust'. Beckford's genius as a conversationalist quickly impressed 'H' for the way in which he engaged his hearers with a powerful stream of knowledge, persuasion, sublime images and ready sarcasms. The conversationalist moved about like a consummate actor: 'He usually kept one of his hands over his mouth in repose, or when looking at anything; they were well shaped though thickly freckled. He scarcely ever sat down, but kept moving about, suiting his position to the persons he addressed, so as to watch and study them. He adapted his conversation to your powers, and led you imperceptibly to the subjects you were most master of, or on which you were most enthusiastic. To those who gained his esteem he was ever gracious and affable, but where his displeasure was caused it fell like a dead blight.' After a microscopic scrutiny of the copies made by 'H' of pictures in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Beckford reacted like an enthusiastic teacher by pronouncing on the drawings: 'Well, well, they are good – vastly good – I like them much', and then 'with a power of memory almost inconceivable, he commenced pointing out wherein they were successful in imitating the master, and in what they were deficient.' An unexpected invitation to 'H' to see the interior of his house in Lansdown Crescent on the following day at ten o'clock was eagerly accepted by 'H' who found himself already full of admiration of his future host for the original mixture of all that was 'haunting, affable and kind' in his personality.

Shortly after 'H' arrived in Lansdown Crescent, Beckford spoke in an unearthly voice about his porter, Piero the Dwarf, - 'He's a Giaour and feeds upon toadstools' - then immediately proceeded to conduct an art lesson in front of Raphael's *St.*

Catherine. After describing the many beauties of the picture, Beckford opened the glass before the picture so that 'H' could examine closely Raphael's method of pencilling. During his examination, 'H' became aware of a sort of spicy perfume issuing from the picture so that it seemed to him that the breath of St. Catherine herself seemed like sweet herbs and cinnamon. Watching H's reactions closely, Beckford commented: 'Ah – ah – good – so you might – I see you appreciate these sort of things.'⁸ Then Beckford interestingly responded to a range of his pictures. There was an eruption before Benjamin West's *Lear*: 'See, see his nostril is inflated, like an Arab in a thunderstorm. I solemnly declare the figure of Lear is as fine as the Laocoon.' A sober lesson was delivered with an engraving chosen from his vast collection of engravings in his hand by Mark Antonio of the *Witch* by Michelangelo, and concluded with the strong recommendation for a close study of all engravings by Mark Antonio. On hearing that 'H' was currently engaged in copying a portrait of Lady Hamilton, Beckford hurried away and came back with a small letter partly written by Lord Nelson about annihilating French fleets, and partly written by Lady Hamilton who was looking forward to meeting Beckford. When Beckford finally said, 'Come when you like – the oftener the better', 'H' realised that he had spent five hours at Lansdown Crescent, throughout the greater part of which the seventy-one-year-old had been nimbly moving about on his feet and talking.

In 'Conversations: IV', 'H' described his next meeting with Beckford which occurred when he was returning from a sketching walk and met Beckford out riding, with his gardener Vincent riding behind him carrying his umbrella and great coat. Beckford was delighted by the chance meeting and called out: 'Oh – oh - what you're looking at the horse – odd creature – Egyptian breed – look, what strange hoofs. Ah, one might suppose it was a descendant from Alborac.' As the couple rode off, Beckford cried out to 'H', 'Well, come soon, you have not

seen half the things.’ The following morning at ten o’clock, ‘H’ went back to Lansdown Crescent. Immediately Beckford led ‘H’ to view a full-length portrait of his father by Hudson, and a portrait of the Marquis of Douglas by Thomas Barker, before which Beckford remarked, ‘Ah! There’s my grandson, hasn’t he a fine head?’ There followed declamations of praise for Kemble as Coriolanus and for Mrs. Siddons whose postures, voice, perception, pathos and passion amounted to the ‘perfection of acting’.⁹ Gradually ‘H’ detected that at the slightest opportunity Beckford’s conversation would travel to places like Guatemala, Egypt, Italy or Persia as the viewing of pictures and objects continued, with the black-and-tan dog Tiny languorously in pursuit. When this very short procession of art lovers reached two pictures by Giacomo da Ponte, Beckford loudly insisted that the reluctant ‘H’ must stand on one of the damask chairs to peer closely at the picture about the manna in the desert, and gave him a helping hand to get up. Next a nervous ‘H’ was handed an ivory by Framingo and told to take it to the window for a well-lit viewing: ‘Don’t walk as if you were on a tight-rope. If you trip, it can’t be helped. Everything will be destroyed one day.’ Then ‘H’ was encouraged to marvel at the MSS, beautifully illumined, which once belonged to the Emperor Shah Aulum. As Beckford guided the young man through his many treasures, he made a habit of rushing off at the slightest opportunity to take down a book from which he quoted to support his opinions. When a very impressed ‘H’ suggested that Beckford should bring the powers of his mind to bear upon politics, Beckford replied: ‘The politics of today are a sort of Fair Rosamond’s labyrinth. I would rather be buried alive in solitude than stung to death by political mosquitoes in parliament.’ Before Stothard’s *Tam O’Shanter*, Beckford produced a splurge of mimicry by beating his feet alternately on the floor and quoting lines of poetry before the representation of Tam galloping with staring eyes and open mouth before the warlocks and witches pursuing in a dance:

‘Well mounted on his grey mare, Meg, A better never lifted leg’, after which a chuckling Beckford added: ‘Oh, is it not deliciously comical, and how it’s painted. He must have the spirit of Burns, whispering to his mind as he executed it – it’s vastly good, I like it, and so do you.’¹⁰ Back in the front parlour, Beckford rushed off and reappeared with an original sketch of a lion by Rembrandt and then told a story to ‘H’, while glancing off and on at Tiny on a sofa, about his meeting with a tigress at the Jardin des Plantes in Paris: ‘No sooner was I in the den, than she threw herself at my feet, gave a most agreeable growl, opened her mouth with a yawn and commenced licking my hands whilst I scratched her back. Oh! Gracious goodness, she was a very beautiful animal.’ Beckford followed this story by singing a few songs to his own accompaniment on a piano. In answer to a question, the autograph letter from Byron soliciting a meeting was fetched, and its display prompted Beckford to voice an opinion of Byron which concluded: ‘A splendid bouquet of intellectual voluptuousness – a genius – a great genius – but an irregular one, his poetic flight is like that of a fire-fly, alternate flashes of light and dark.’ In a discussion about his own future as an artist in training, ‘H’ expressed doubts about the wisdom of training at the Royal Academy and some anxiety that his father would not permit him to study in Paris whereupon Beckford exclaimed: ‘Bring him to me, I will manage him.’ ‘H’ was asked to attend a forthcoming recital in Bath by Pasta, and was instructed to occupy Beckford’s preferred seat a few hours before the doors were opened to the public. During the concert ‘H’ sat behind Beckford and Farrett, his ‘half-steward and half-secretary’. After commenting bitchily to ‘H’ about the number of old women and caps – ‘tinsel looks best at night’ – Beckford became utterly absorbed by the heroic singing of the diva.¹¹ Just before making an early departure for bed, Beckford remarked, ‘It was in this room that I first beheld Lady Margaret Gordon, who afterwards

became my wife,' and then added, 'I shall send my carriage for you and your father tomorrow at two o'clock to see the tower.'

In 'Conversations: V', Beckford's carriage transported 'H' and his father to visit Lansdown Tower, and during their uphill journey Beckford and his gardener rode ostentatiously past them at full gallop and waited on the steps of the Tower to welcome them. Beckford first took them into the oratory during which the father asked the host to give his opinion about the differences between the Roman Catholic and Protestant religions. 'The one is opera and the other the dress rehearsal. Gracious God! The Roman Catholic religion is filled with fine stage effects, glittering crosses, censers, mitres, crosiers, dresses, candles, pictures, banners, processions, perfumes, dolls and music from the deep tones of the organ to the delightful squeakings of the pope's eunuchs.' From that moment onwards in the tour of Tower and gardens, 'H' explored the collections and marvelled at the views, while his father, 'simmering with politics', persisted in trying to draw out Beckford's opinions on the political figures of the day. These queries drew only a parade of sarcasms from the host—some examples of which were: O'Connell's oratory was 'an excellent imitation arrow-root made out of potato scrapings'; the Duke of Buckingham was 'the prize donkey paraded about at all the agricultural shows, and upon which the farmer is seen riding to the Jerusalem of monopoly'; Lord Palmerston was running 'after the humming-bird of political chimeras as a Cupid does after a butterfly'; Lord John Russell was a hobbler, always limping after the rest of his party. One of the few figures of whom Beckford spoke highly was the eminent dissenting clergyman in Bath, Mr. Jay — 'a man possessing a very superior class of abilities'.¹² Meanwhile, Beckford was keeping his sharp eyes on the reactions of 'H' and occasionally went over to him on occasions such as when they shared great praise for Murillo's picture of St. John, unappreciated by so many; when Beckford produced out of an oaken cabinet a Chinese carving, inside a cup,

of a wooden figure with a laughing expression whom the host introduced as 'Mumpsimus'; when Beckford explained why the wooden seats near the tombs in the garden were painted to look like Brobdignagian ones - 'They are to tempt Shakespeare's delightful imaginary spirits to come and watch by my side'. Leaving the two old gentlemen to discuss the subject of his going abroad to further his art education, 'H' continued to ramble about in the company of Vincent to seek out further beauties in the garden. When he finally rejoined the elders, Beckford exclaimed: 'Well, you must come and see me before you go to Paris.' Two weeks later 'H' visited Lansdown Crescent to take his leave of Beckford who gave him friendly advice and a letter of recommendation to Lord Granville, the English ambassador then in Paris, from his daughter the Duchess of Hamilton.

There are suggestions that Beckford and he continued to see each other after his return from Paris. In 'Conversations: III', 'H' remembered many hours spent at Lansdown Crescent, 'listening to his conversation, historical and family anecdotes, or to his reading autograph letters, correspondences with his daughter, the Duchess of Hamilton, works as yet unpublished, such as his "Liber Veritatis", "Episodes of Vathek" &c.' In 'Conversations: V', 'H' referred to an episode some few years later during a visit with his sister when he had 'the most joyous laugh I ever experienced in my life'. The laughter, in which Beckford himself eventually joined, began from a confrontation between Beckford and the 'intelligent-looking' dog Helena, the successor to the deceased Tiny, whose nickname was 'Mrs Fry'.¹³ The trouble began when a furious Beckford found Helena chewing part of a dead rabbit, and started stamping, storming and imploring: 'Oh, spit it out; filth, filth, spit it out, you nasty dog, Helena, I say, spit it out.' 'H' started laughing when 'Helena growled – the gardener was afraid to take extreme measures, and Mr. Beckford was obliged to see his favourite dog bolt down this dainty mouthful, to his infinite horror.' This episode gave rise to a running joke

when Beckford continued to demand of ‘Mrs. Fry’ whether she had really swallowed the filth!¹³ What ‘H’ failed to record was any occasion when he and Beckford looked back on his artistic sojourn in Paris and discussed the subsequent course of the promise in drawing and sketching which Beckford had noted with expectation at an early stage. In spite of these omissions, ‘H’ doubtless saw himself as an evangelist for the old man and, gifted with a graphic memory, he succeeded in assembling the shreds and patches which were pieced together to make rough sketches of Beckford in Bath: Beady-eyed Teacher, Smitten Theatre-devotee, Driven Equestrian, Performing Scholar, Faux-politician, Ruminative Author, Sentimental Animal-lover, Pert Music-buff, Tall Storyteller, Aspiring Family Man, Spicy Art-lover, Witty Mimic, Mature Counsellor, Paternal Friend, &c. ‘Well, well, they are good – vastly good – I like them much!’ Surely the elusive ‘H’ ought to be remembered at last in the company of those other younger men from Bath whose company Beckford enjoyed during his long retirement in that city?

1. On the subject of Beckford in Bath, the biographer Brian Fothergill commented: ‘These encounters with the younger generation relieved some of the solitude of Beckford’s latter years. He remained, all the same, an isolated figure, still shunned by his contemporaries.’ See *Beckford of Fonthill* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 346. Yet Beckford seemed content enough in his ‘isolation’, endeavouring to influence younger generations for their own good!
2. See Phillipa Bishop, ‘Beckford in Bath’, in *Bath History Volume II*, (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1988), 85-112; and Sidney Blackmore, ‘The Bath Years: 1822-44’, in Derek E. Ostergard (ed.) *William Beckford 1760-1844: An Eye for the Magnificent* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 263-277, for most informative accounts of Beckford’s lively retirement in Bath. See Neil Jackson, *Nineteenth Century Bath Architects & Architecture* (Bath: Ashgrove Press, 1991), 53-59, for an overview of Goodridge’s architecture.
3. See Amy Frost, ‘Continuing the Art of Collecting at Beckford’s Tower, Bath’, *Beckford Journal*, 11 (2005), 30-36, for a view of Beckford as patron of Maddox’s work and information about the recent acquisition of Maddox’s work for a place in the restored Beckford Tower.

4. In 1969 Kingsmead Reprints, Bath, produced in a limited facsimile edition of 750 copies H. V. Lansdown's *Recollections of the Late William Beckford* (1893). For an informative article about H.V.L., see Jon Millington, 'Henry Venn Lansdown, 1804-1860', *Beckford Journal*, 11 (2005), 20-29. For a skewed interpretation of the significance of the encounter between Lansdown and Beckford, see the first chapter of Timothy Mowl, *William Beckford: Composing for Mozart*, (London: John Murray, 1998), 7-24, which includes Mowl's editorial transmutation of Lansdown's 'preciously pompous narrative'.
5. For a specific reference to 'H', see Jon Millington, 'Beckford and Byron', *Beckford Journal*, 11 (1995), 41-46: 'An artist, prompted to read *Vathek* because Byron admired it, asked Beckford about this on a visit to Lansdown Crescent, and has left us an account of their conversation'. Beckford's reaction to the prospect of ever meeting Byron face-to-face, expressed to 'H', is quoted including the following: 'We should have met in full drill – both talked at the same time – both endeavoured to have been delighted – a correspondence would have been established, the most insufferable and laborious that can be imagined.'
6. *The Travel Diaries of William Beckford*, ed. Guy Chapman (London: Constable, 1928), vol. i, p. lv, note 1.
7. See Henry Colburn's *New Monthly Magazine and Humorist* for 1844 (Part 3: September-December), for the three articles by 'H' under the general title: 'Conversations with the late W. Beckford, Esq. Contributed by Various Friends': No. III, 18-24; No. IV, 212-221; No. V, 418-427. Nos. I & II in the series had been written by Cyrus Redding in Part 2: June & July 1844. The series concluded with No. VI, 516-522, which was mainly an account by W.W.H. of meetings with a voluble Beckford in the shop of a publisher in the city. Beckford's parting words to W.W.H. described Lansdown Tower as 'a famous landmark for the drunken farmers on their return from market'. See Jon Millington, 'Cyrus Redding: Beckford's First Biographer', *Beckford Journal*, 2 (1996), 28-29, for positive identification of W.W.H.
8. When Beckford guided Cyrus Redding before Raphael's *St. Catherine*, Redding remarked that it was an inspiring theme for a poem, to which Beckford instantly replied; 'Try it.' Redding took up the gauntlet. See Redding's *Memoirs of William Beckford* (London: C. J. Skeet, 1859), ii, 313 & 394-5 for the text of 'Lines on the Picture of St. Katherine, by Raphael, at Lansdown, now in the National Gallery' (1835).
9. John Kemble opened in *Coriolanus* at Drury Lane on 7 February 1789. Kemble's sister Sarah Siddons was painted by Reynolds as *The Tragic*

- Muse* in 1783-4 and was most acclaimed for her performance as Lady Macbeth at the rebuilt Covent Garden in 1809.
10. Thomas Stothard, the London painter and illustrator, visited Scotland in the summer of 1809 to research his illustrations of Burns's *Poetical Works*.
 11. Giuditta Pasta was the great Romantic Italian diva of the period, for whom Donizetti created the role of Anna Bolena, and Bellini created the roles of Amina, in *La Sonnambula*, and of Norma. Pasta retired at the height of her singing powers in 1835.
 12. William Jay was born in Tisbury in Wiltshire, worked alongside his father as a stonemason at Fonthill, and was ordained in 1791 as pastor of Argyle Chapel in Bath where he remained for sixty-two years. Beckford showed 'H' the volume of Jay's sermons which he had much annotated.
 13. The choice of the intelligent-looking dog's nickname may well refer to Caroline Fry who was a close observer of the millenarian debates in the 1820s and was the author of *Christ Our Example*. She married a rich merchant, William Wilson, in 1831.
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Horace Walpole to Sir Horace Mann
26 May 1762

'Beckford is a patriot, because he will clamour if Guadaloupe or Martinico is given up, and the price of sugars falls. I am a bad Englishman, because I think the advantages of commerce are dearly bought for some, by the lives of many more.'

Eric Darton (1917–2006)

Eric Darton, who died last year, was one of the most prolific and long-standing of contributors to the *Beckford Journal*, and to its predecessor, the *Beckford Tower Trust Newsletter*. From his article ‘Franchi’s Last Days’ in the third issue of the *Newsletter*, in 1982, to the appropriately if poignantly titled ‘William Beckford’s Last Work: Recollections of an Excursion’, in the *Journal* of 2006, he hardly missed an issue, producing a total of twenty-two articles on Beckford and Beckfordian themes until well into his 80s. (A listing of his articles is given below).

He was born in London on the 8th May, 1917, moving to Devon at the start of World War II and eventually becoming a designer/salesman for a milking-machine firm. The job took him to farms all over the south-west, and this enabled him to meet people and to travel in the countryside, both of which he greatly enjoyed. After early retirement in 1976, he found he was not ready to stop completely, and worked in the office of publishers David and Charles, in Newton Abbot, for two years, before settling down to to enjoy a proper retirement with his wife, Stella.

Eric had many interests, including music. He was a keen concert-goer and had an extensive knowledge of classical music – nine of his articles on Beckford were in a series on ‘Beckford and Music’. He was also a great lover of jazz, and was closely involved with the Exeter & District Jazz Society (later The Exeter Jazz and Blues Society), where his knowledge of the pre-war British jazz scene was particularly valued. He read widely, and kept a written record of the books he read, which was still being kept up to the day of his death. His six articles on Beckford’s writings are proof both of the extent of his reading and of his close attention to what he read. Typically, Eric pursued his interests with enthusiasm, as with the brisk walking he took up for a heart condition (he was told that you had to walk briskly or it didn’t do any good).

He died on the 14th December, 2006, aged 89, survived by his wife, Stella. Both he and his articles for the *Beckford Journal* will be sadly missed.

Beckford Tower Trust Newsletter

- 1982: Franchi's Last Days
- 1983: William Beckford and Music
- 1984: William Beckford and Music. 2. His Teachers
- 1985: William Beckford and Music. 3. The Organ
- 1986: John Farquhar, Eccentric
- 1987: Fonthill: John Farquhar and After
- 1988: William Beckford and Music. 4. The Harpsichord and Piano
- 1989: William Beckford's Cousin [on Peter Beckford]
- 1990: The Satirical Novels of William Beckford: 1. Modern Novel Writing
- 1991: The Satirical Novels of William Beckford: 2. Azemia
- 1992: William Beckford's First Literary Work – The Vision
- 1993: The Enigma of Chevalier Gregorio Franchi
- 1994: William Beckford's First Published Work: Biographical Memoirs of Extraordinary Painters

Beckford Journal

- 1995: William Beckford's Most Popular Literary Work: Vathek
- 1996: William Beckford and Music: 5. The Fonthill Abbey Organ?
- 1997: William Beckford and Music: 6. Beckford and Mozart
- 1998: William Beckford and Religion
- 1999: William Beckford and Music: 7. The Singers
- 2000: William Beckford and Music: 8. Publication and Performance of His Own Works
- 2001: 'William Beckford: Composing for Mozart' by Timothy Mowl
- 2003: William Beckford and Music. 9. Music in Portugal – 1787
- 2006: William Beckford's Last Literary Work: Recollections of an Excursion

Horace Walpole on Alderman Beckford

[from *Memoirs of the Reign of King George the Third*
edited by Sir Denis le Marchant, Bentley, 1845]

1770

The King had scarce time to enjoy the favourable conclusion of the session, before a new attack was made on him. A remonstrance had been sent from Newcastle, and, on May the 23rd the second remonstrance from the City of London was presented by the Lord Mayor and Common Council. It had been drawn up by Lord Chatham, or formed on one of his speeches. The King made a short and firm answer, referring to his former. He had no sooner spoken it, than, to the astonishment of the whole court, Beckford, the Lord Mayor, desired leave to say a few words. This was totally unprecedented. Copies of all intended harangues to the Sovereign are first transmitted privately to Court, that the King may be prepared with his answer. On this occasion, the King was totally at a loss how to act. He was sitting in ceremony on his throne, and had no means of consult, no time to consider what to do. Remaining silent and confounded, Beckford proceeded, with great expressions of loyalty, and of assurances of the respect and attachment borne to his Majesty by the citizens, and he besought his Sovereign not to listen to secret and malevolent insinuations against them, and humbly solicited some favourable syllable of reply. The King, however, made none, but suffered them to kiss his hand, notwithstanding the murmurs of the courtiers who surrounded him, and who were scandalized at the innovation.

The citizens assembling three days afterwards to consider of an address on the birth of a young Princess, the Aldermen Harley and Rossiter loudly censured the Lord Mayor for his novel address to the King, uncommissioned by the City. [...] Beckford appealed to the Common Council, who applauded his behaviour. Wilkes [...] objected to pay much compliment to the King on the birth of his daughter, at a time when his Majesty would lend no ear to the complaints of the City. To the Queen, Wilkes said he had no objection to their saying what they pleased. On the 30th, the address was carried; but at Temple Bar

the gates were shut against the Aldermen by the people, who concurred with Beckford and Wilkes in resenting the King's behaviour, and Harley was dragged out of his chariot and escaped with difficulty: but by order of the Lord Mayor the gates were opened, and they proceeded to St. James's, where before their admission to the King, the Lord Chamberlain notified to Beckford that his late behaviour having been unprecedented, his Majesty desired no such thing might happen again: to which Beckford, bowing, replied, "To be sure not." They were then admitted to the presence; and though the address was colder than usual, the King told them that while their addresses were so loyal, the City should be sure of his protection.

This was the last public incident in the life of William Beckford, Lord Mayor of London, he dying three weeks afterwards of a violent fever, contracted, as supposed, from the agitation into which his violence had thrown his blood, and from sudden cold caught in the country, whither he had retired for a little repose. He died on the 21st of June, aged sixty-two. He had boldness, promptness, spirit, a heap of confused knowledge, displayed with the usual ostentation of his temper, and so uncorrected by judgment, that his absurdities were made but more conspicuous by his vanity. Under a jovial style of good humour, he was tyrannic in Jamaica his native country, and under an appearance of prodigality, interested. On the other side, the excesses of his factious behaviour were founded neither on principle nor on rancour. Vain glory seemed to be the real motive of all his actions. His death was one of the heaviest blows Lord Chatham could receive, cutting off all his influence in the City; and it was another cause of the Opposition's ensuing humiliation, the turbulence of Beckford, his imposing noise, and his great wealth, concurring to his authority. His successors in the party were utterly contemptible, except Trecothick, who was a decent man. This last was chosen Mayor for the rest of the year. A statue was voted to Beckford's memory, and ordered to be placed in Guildhall, with the words he had ventured to speak to the King engraven on the pedestal, - so strong was the party as yet in the City. Lord Chatham, the day before Beckford's death, forced himself into his house, and got away with all the letters he had written to that demagogue.

Notes on Contributors

Richard Allen has been a member of the International Beckford Society since its inception. Now retired, he spent over thirty years teaching 'A' Level English Literature, and his interest in Beckford was kindled by the appearance of the Penguin edition of *Three Gothic Novels* on the syllabus in the 1970s.

Stephen Clarke is a London lawyer and the joint author of a bibliography of R. W. Ketton-Cremer, the historian and literary biographer. He has published papers on Beckford, Walpole, Sterne and on architecture and landscape gardening issues in the novels of Jane Austen, and has a particular interest in the early Gothic revival. He is a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries.

Amy Frost has been the Administrator of Beckford's Tower & Museum in Bath since 2002. Her interest in Beckford began while studying for an M.Phil. in Architectural History that specialised in the Gothic Revival. She has recently curated the exhibition 'Big Spenders: The Beckfords and Slavery' at Beckford's Tower, and is currently researching for her Ph.D. on the life and work of Henry Edmund Goodridge, the architect of Beckford's Tower.

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'. To mark the 150th anniversary of Beckford's death he devised the exhibition 'Souvenirs of Fonthill Abbey'. He edited the *Beckford Tower Trust Newsletter* (1980–1994) and the *Beckford Journal* from 1995 to 2005. He is also the author of the forthcoming *William Beckford: A Bibliography*.

Jerry Nolan is a freelance writer who has lectured and published many articles on aspects of Irish Cultural Nationalism during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. At present he is researching the work of

Thomas Moore, Ireland's minstrel and Byron's biographer; and the relevance in the twenty-first century of Thomas Hope's neglected novel *Anastasius* (1819). A play for two actors about the dramatic exchanges between William Beckford and Cyrus Redding is in draft form with the provisional title *Extraordinary Conversations at Lansdown Tower*. Further information can be found at www.jerrynolanwriter.com.

Sameh Shehata is a young Muslim scholar who received his B.A. from the Faculty of Arts, Department of English Language and Literature, Ain-Shams University, Cairo, Egypt. He is currently working as a translator in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, and is still pursuing his research work into the Orientalism of Western writers. He is also a short story writer and is presently writing a big novel.

Horace Walpole to Sir Horace Mann
8 July 1784

'Pray tell me if you know anything of a very thin book lately printed at Florence called *The Arno Miscellany* ... It consists of some pretended translations and odes by (pretended) initials, though I suppose all by the same hand ... The last ode seems to be meant to ridicule Gray's magnificent odes, and in truth is better than the serious pieces, for a thousand persons can mimic an actor, who cannot act themselves. I imagine the whole to be the work of young Beckford the alderman's son, who has just parts enough to lead him astray from common sense. He is just returned from Italy.'

[Unfortunately, it was not by Beckford!]

THE BECKFORD SOCIETY

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The Society, founded in 1995, has the following aims:

1. To promote an interest in the life and works of William Beckford and his circle.
2. To encourage Beckford studies and scholarship through exhibitions and publications, including an annual Journal and occasional Newsletters.
3. To hold an annual Beckford lecture or symposium.
4. To support the preservation of Beckford's Tower, Bath, and other buildings, gardens, landscapes and objects associated with William Beckford and his circle.

Membership of the Society is open to anyone interested in William Beckford who wishes to further its objectives. There is a minimum annual subscription of twenty pounds. Applications for membership should be sent to:

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