

1.8. Oriental Gothic

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The Gothic is frequently identified with two obsessions: a concern with otherness and alterity, and a compulsion to explore socially aberrant desires and transgress boundaries. It is also a mode that disdains generic purity and embraces hybridity, hence the dismay it inspired in many eighteenth-century neo-classicist critics scornful of its mixing of genres, its stylistic excesses, its troubling popularity and its resolute illegitimacy. All these generic hallmarks of Gothic can be seen in its febrile intertwining with that other, older eighteenth-century and then Romantic mode, Orientalism. The Gothic and the Oriental manifest a shared concern with representing the alien and the other to European cultures, yet it is also a truism of Gothic and Orientalist criticism that both may be used as a means of representing the dark, irrational and monstrous at the heart of British society. The despotism and violence of Gothic and Orientalist narratives often reflect on the iniquities of eighteenth and nineteenth-century patriarchal and bourgeois ideologies, especially the power of men over women. Both Gothic and Oriental were crucial modes by which British nationality and subjectivity were constructed (Sage 1988; Schmitt 1997). They were also notable modes in which authors used exoticism and excess to explore alternative or unstable sexual identities and desires. Despite the frequently heavy, often unconvincing surface moralism common to both genres, such narratives were able vicariously to employ exoticism to represent non-heteronormative desires and practices, safely distanced from the reality of an often-savage eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century social and legal repression.

The Romantic period has sometimes been described as an 'Oriental Renaissance' as the growing European fascination with, and discovery of, Eastern

languages, literatures and commodities such as tea, silks and porcelain fuelled the imaginations of writers and readers with Eastern or Oriental subjects. Both Gothic and Romanticism developed from Orientalism. In particular, the translation of the collection of popular Arabian and Persian tales – *Alf layla wa layla*, known in English as *The Thousand and One Nights* or *The Arabian Nights* by Antoine Galland – into French (1704) and by others into English (1712 onwards) firmly established the British cultural fascination with the East (Schwab 1984; Leask 1992; Sardar 1999; Macfie 2002; Ballaster 2005; Hoeveler and Cass 2006; Makdisi and Nussbaum 2008; Cavaliero 2010; Garcia 2012). These tales were profoundly influential upon European writers. They established the idea of an Eastern world in which magic and the supernatural were prevalent. It was a world of cruel and despotic rulers, beautiful persecuted princesses, genies and djinns and paradisiacal gardens, the abiding symbol of which was the seraglio or harem, with its sensual indulgencies and voluptuous delights (Kabbani 1986). The *Nights* employed a framing narrative in which Scheherazade spins every night an unfinished tale to entrance the misogynistic and bloodthirsty Sultan Scharhriar, thus deferring and preventing her execution for the thousand and one nights of the collection's title. This, combined with the complex narrative embedding of tales within tales, was highly influential on the narrative structure of the Gothic tale. Such tales were numerous as the century wore on, penned by such notable writers as Samuel Johnson, John Hawkesworth, Frances Sheridan and many more (Ballaster 2005). Srinivas Aravamudan has even claimed that the Oriental tale should be regarded as *the* major fictional mode of the eighteenth century, though displaced by an unwarranted critical privileging of the rise of bourgeois domestic and realistic fiction (Aravamudan 2012). This fascination with the East was intensified with the increasing British involvement with India throughout

the century. Sir William Jones, the chief justice of the Supreme Court at Bengal, was responsible, with his fellow Orientalists in the Royal Asiatic Society (founded 1787), for a series of translations of Persian (the official language of the Mogul Court) and Sanscrit texts. Jones, who also produced his own Orientalist verse, regarded the East as a new source of imaginative and creative renewal, and his writings and translations profoundly influenced Romantic writers such as Coleridge and P. B. Shelley.

Contemporary post-colonial criticism, however, has eschewed a reading of Romantic Orientalism as either the sympathetic engagement with other cultures or as mere escapist exoticism. Edward Said and those who follow him argued that Europeans constructed the East as a negative stereotype against which to define their own self-image as rational, modern, scientific, enlightened and progressive, as a means of justifying to themselves their increasing military and colonial domination of those territories, especially Islamic Egypt, the Levant, Arabia and the Ottoman Empire (Said 1978; Sardar 1999). It is no accident, of course, that Oriental Gothic came of age just as Britain acquired more and more territory in India, and was increasingly involved in the global power politics of the East as the Ottoman Empire entered its long period of slow decline. Orientalism as a scholarly discipline – that is, the study of the languages, beliefs and cultures of Eastern peoples – was coterminous with this process, and informed the cultural products of the age in the form of substantial annotations derived from allegedly authoritative sources of travellers, historians and linguists.

From its inception Gothic was heavily imbricated in the Oriental. David Porter has argued that the Gothic style was virtually interchangeable in architecture, interior design and landscape gardening with that craze for all things Chinese, known as Chinoiserie or the ‘Chinese Taste’ (Porter 2011). Chinoiserie, with its irregularities

and studied wildness, was increasingly defined in opposition to the balance, order and harmony of neo-classicism and the Palladian style in architecture; it was also frequently identified and, as often, confused with the mid- to-late eighteenth-century revival of interest in the medieval that we now know as 'Gothic'. The irregularity and exoticism of Chinoiserie easily harmonised with the taste for the irrational and supernatural that became a hallmark of the Gothic aesthetic. As a contributor to *The World* in 1776 commented, 'how much of late we are improved by architecture; not merely by the adoption of what we call Chinese, nor by the restoration of what we call Gothic; but by a happy mixture of both. From Hyde Park to Shoreditch scarce a chandler's shop or an oyster-stall but has embellishments of this kind ... almost everywhere, all is Chinese or Gothic' (qtd. in Porter 2011: 125). Not only were Gothic and Chinoiserie defined by their sense of irrationality and whimsy, they were both illegitimate hybrid or mixed modes capable of being combined in monstrous and unusual forms and part of a dangerous and infectious cultural obsession with the exotic and unusual. Most of all, Chinoiserie was concerned with interior decoration, wallpaper, lacquerwork, furniture, silks and hangings, porcelain and tea services. This orientalist Gothic Chinoiserie would notably resurface in 1821 when Thomas De Quincey notoriously recounted his terrifying opium nightmares pursued by a cancerous crocodile amid Egyptian, Indian and generally Asiatic horrors in his *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*:

I was stared at, hooted at, grinned at, chattered at, by monkeys, by paroquets, by cockatoos. I ran into pagodas: and was fixed, for centuries at the summit, or in secret rooms; I was the idol; I was the priest; I was worshipped; I was sacrificed. I fled from the wrath of Brahma through all the forests of Asia: Vishnu hated

me: Seeva laid in wait for me. I came suddenly upon Isis and Osiris. I had done a deed, they said, which the ibis and the crocodile trembled at I was kissed with cancerous kisses, by crocodiles; and laid and confounded with all unutterable slimy things, amongst reeds and Nilotic mud. (De Quincey 2003 : 81-2)

For De Quincey, the East was not a real geographical locale so much as a place of contagion, infection and guilty and illicit desires, an imaginary space for the projection of his own curious guilt-ridden psychopathology (Barrell 1961; 1991; Leask 1992: 170-228). As the century wore on it seemed that the exotic and foreign were invading the very bourgeois domestic sphere itself and corrupting the British nation from within, a move that, in a later Gothic fiction such as Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), would become the familiar Gothic trope of 'reverse colonization' (Arata 1990).

The term 'Gothic' contains an amorphous and contradictory body of writing, but, as many critics, from Victor Sage onwards have argued, it is in essence a British, Protestant and middle-class genre the rise of which coincided with the forging of British identity in the early nineteenth century against the nation's developing colonial and imperial interests (Sage 1988; Colley 1992). The father of the Gothic novel, Horace Walpole, in his earlier years, was clearly obsessed with the East, a sinophile who wrote Chinese fictions and even considered designing his famous Gothic mansion, Strawberry Hill, in the Chinese style (Mowl 1966: 118, 121). Yet Walpole turned decisively against the style, in preference for a nativist, organic, North-European model of medieval Gothic for his literary and architectural creations. In *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) European medieval Gothic was defined against the

backdrop of the crusades to the Holy Land. It was there that Alfonso the Good was poisoned by his evil chamberlain Ricardo, who usurped his estate of Otranto, passing it to his grandson, Manfred. The plot of the novel is facilitated by the appearance of a ghostly monk, who reminds the crusader knight Frederic of his pledge to revenge Alfonso. Throughout the tale, the gigantic spectre of the crusader prince, Alfonso, is viewed in parts, slowly reassembling himself to fulfil the Gothic curse at the story's end. From the start, then, the alterity and otherness of the East were centrally present in the dominant European medievalism of Gothic.

William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786; 1816) occupies a special, if transitional and uncertain place between eighteenth-century Orientalism, Romanticism and the Gothic (Sharafuddin 1996: xxi-xxxiv; Landry 2009; Watt 2009, Leask: 1998). *Vathek* struck a new note in the development of literary Orientalism, one that chimed with many characteristic Gothic concerns. The scion of a major West-Indian dynasty, Beckford inherited enormous wealth and privilege. Probably as a reaction to his father's pragmatic commercial and political career, he cultivated an early interest in the Oriental as a form of imaginative rebellion or escape. Scandal also surrounded the adult Beckford when it was rumoured that he had been discovered in a compromising position with the thirteen year-old, William Courtney, at Powderham Castle, a boy Beckford had been enamoured of for two years. As Jeffrey Cass argues, Beckford uses the novel's 'hyper-Orientalism to disguise, displace, and diffuse his scandalous life' (Cass 2006: 109). The novel was written by Beckford in French then published in an English translation, without his consent, by his editor, Samuel Henley, who added to the text a substantial body of scholarly notes derived from key authorities. Rather than presenting it as Beckford's own creation, Henley exploited the Gothic trope of the discovered manuscript, printing the fiction as an original Oriental tale collected in

the East by a man of letters.. Praised by Byron for its originality and ‘costume’, *Vathek* is a strange and bizarre text . It provided subsequent writers with a repertory of Oriental commodities, geographies and narratives. The story concerns the despotic, proud, sensuousness, cruel, greedy but also oddly child-like Caliph Vathek, grandson of the great Haroun Al-Raschid of *Arabian Nights* fame, who abandons Allah and his prophet Mohammed after being tempted by an Indian infidel, or ‘Giaour’, an agent of Eblis, the Islamic version of Satan. Vathek is another Faustian over-reacher, ‘of all men ... the most curious’ who, in a move that recalls Beckford’s own architectural hobbies, rebelliously builds a tower to investigate the secrets of the universe (Beckford 2013: 4). The tale is set in a recognisably *Arabian Nights*-milieu of tenth-century Arabia. It incorporates magic, genii (djinnns), ghouls, talking fishes and child sacrifice, as well as the standard elements of eighteenth-century Orientalism: eunuchs, the harem and the paradisiacal garden. Vathek is tempted by the arrival of a hideous stranger, the Giaour, to journey to the Halls of Eblis at the ruined city of Istakar, there to possess the treasures of the pre-Adamite sultans and obtain complete knowledge. Vathek’s domineering mother, Carathis, one of the demonic females so beloved by later Gothic writers, is an evil sorceress who is often so bored that she resorts to poisoning her subjects so she can try her cures on them. Carathis enthusiastically urges her son to seek the treasure, prompting him to perpetrate abominations so as to curry favour with the Giaour and his master, Eblis. She also employs her extraordinary malevolent camel, Alboufakir, one of Beckford’s most impressive creations, to facilitate this project, sniffing out ghouls from local cemeteries to ascertain crucial information for the project. Carathis has ‘mysterious recesses in which were deposited the mummies that had been wrested from the catacombs of the ancient pharaohs’. With the help of her ‘fifty female negroes mute and blind of the

right eye' she uses them to conduct demonic rituals to establish 'intercourse with the infernal powers' to who she is passionately attached and to whose tastes 'she was no stranger' (Beckford 2013: 26).

Vathek's Orientalism is conspicuously displayed in its stereotypically luxurious Islamic Arabo-Persian setting, which offers a version of the East as demonic, irrational, sensual, cruel, infantile and despotic (Al-Alwan 2008). Normative British gender roles are reversed with *Vathek*'s hyper-masculinised mother set off against the weak and capricious males of the tale, exemplified by the comically mean-spirited chief eunuch Bababalouk and the feminised child, Gulchenrouz. Here the East is presented as an homogenised timeless fantasy world antithetical to the modern British, scientific, rational, progressive and Protestant self against which it is defined, tractable to future conquest and colonisation. Yet Gothic is also transgressive and subversive, and while it may frequently pay lip-service to a conventional moral framing, the mode is frequently used to explore alternative drives that are much closer to home: hence its notorious concern with desire, especially in its non-heteronormative manifestations such as homosexuality, sadism and incest. The fact of Beckford's scandalously complex and indeterminate sexual identity – bisexual, homosexual or pederast – as well as his well-known status as exile or pariah in Romantic period Britain has led numerous critics to speculate that the tale functions as an exploration or representation of his sexual identity and history. For George Haggerty, for instance, the novel is 'a testimony to the horror with which [Beckford] contemplated his own internal paradox of innocent love and damning desire or reacted to the social repulsion that greeted publication of his sexual self' (Haggerty 1986: 348). Yet the novel, with its yet notionally heterosexual hero, is not obviously a displacement of Beckford's own life and also contains a conventional romance

between the Caliph and the beautiful Nouronihar with her erotically described light-brown hair and ivory limbs.

Andrew Elfenbein has claimed that Vathek ‘tossed taste, judgment, and heterosexuality to the winds in favour of rampant consumerism, boy love, and necrophilia’ (Elfenbein 1999: 39). In particular, two episodes from the novel hint at a coded play on Beckford’s homosexuality and the ‘unspeakable’ crimes enshrined in Gothic fiction. The first involves the Giaour, a repulsive character whose monstrosity, like that of all gothic monsters, troubles the boundaries of class, race, gender and sexuality. He is described as a ‘man, or rather monster’ with an enormous paunch, ‘huge eyes, which glowed like firebrands’ and ‘long amber-coloured teeth, bestreaked with green’ (Beckford 2013: 7). After his first encounter with the Giaour and his enigmatic sabres and other gifts, Vathek is seized with an insatiable, feverish thirst, symbolic of his excessive sensual desires. On his return the Giaour cures him of this thirst. His health restored, the Caliph ‘leaped upon the neck of the frightful Indian, and kissed his horrid mouth and hollow cheeks, as though they had been the coral lips and the lilies and roses of his most beautiful wives (Beckford 2013: 13). The implication here is that this act is unnatural and monstrous in terms of race, gender and aesthetics alike, both frequent eighteenth-century locutions for otherwise ‘unspeakable’ homosexual activities. The Indian’s subsequent temptation of power and riches, if he will abjure Allah and the prophet Mohammed, requires that Vathek slake his unnatural and prodigious thirst with the blood of fifty of the most beautiful boys of Samarah. To expedite this promise Vathek tricks the ‘lovely innocents’ to journey to the ‘dreadful chasm’ inhabited by the Giaour under the pretence that they will compete in an archery contest. Standing on the edge of the chasm, Vathek offers precious jewelled items from his dress to each who comes forward, stripping himself

to his very slippers, while he surreptitiously pushes each of the children into the chasm for the Giaour to enjoy and consume as an unnaturally cannibalistic or vampiric act, or, perhaps, a coded reference to pederasty (Beckford 2103: 22-23). For Fincher, ‘the landscape of the “yawning” gulf and the boys being pushed into it is a metaphor for the act of sexual penetration between men’ and Elfenbein regards the encounter as ‘an especially bizarre version of the casual homoeroticism endemic to market relations ... in which men must attract other men to buy them’ (Fincher 2007: 73 Elfenbein 1997: 53, 68-73).

Vathek plays with conventional eighteenth-century British norms of gender, sowing confusion and ambiguity as it does so. As well as the hyper-masculine amazon Carathis, ‘whose presence of mind never forsook her’ and who abhors indolence (Beckford 2013:, 29, 32), the males of the novel are, as Said argued about males in Oriental fictions more generally, feminised and represented as sensual, sybaritic, passive, childish or even lazy, but also given to extremes of violent emotion, rage, passion and jealousy. The Caliph himself is six foot, inspiring terror with his dreadful arabesque penetrating gaze, and enamoured of the beautiful but scheming Nourinhar. But he is also passionate and easily dominated by both Carathis and the Giaour. In particular, his mother’s power over him renders his masculinity problematic. As Elfenbein points out, *Vathek*, like Beckford himself, resembles the more contemporary stereotypical gay male collector, connoisseur and shopper for beautiful and valuable things (Elfenbein 1997: 43-50). He is a capricious sybarite with ungoverned appetites who easily swoons, infatuated with the Giaour’s promises. The novel also includes other stereotypically feminised Oriental males, such as the comical, foolish, spiteful and effeminate chief eunuch Bababalouk, who is easily tricked by the wives of the harem, as well as a further series of riffs on non-normative

masculinity, including dwarves (whom Beckford employed as house servants). Vathek archly informs Nouronihar that Bababalouk ‘is fond of children; and never goes without sweetmeats and comfits’, the implication here being that he is a predatory paedophile and abuser (Beckford 2013: 58). Most notably, the boy Gulchenrouz, promised to his cousin Nouronihar, invokes a cross-fertilisation of Orientalist tropes within Beckford’s own psychobiography and his problematic relationship with William Courtenay. Gulchenrouz is thirteen years old and ‘the most delicate and lovely creature in the world’. He spends his time in the harem enchanting the wives of the emir. He is ‘more feminine’ and ‘more womanish’ than his cousin. Carathis, another child predator, seeks the boy as a gift for the Giaour, as there is nothing ‘as delicious, in his estimation, as the heart of a delicate boy palpitating with the first tumults of love’. Gulchenrouz, like the fifty boys destined to be sacrificed to the Giaour, is saved by a ‘good old genius, whose fondness for the company of children, had made it his sole occupation to protect them’. In the Genius’s strange inviolable asylum in the sky, ‘remote from the inquietudes of the world; the impertinence of harems, the brutality of eunuchs, and the inconstancy of women’, Gulchnrouz and the other boys have ‘conferred upon them the boon of perpetual childhood’. While Vathek ends the novel ‘a prey to grief without end’, his heart encompassed by an agonising, eternally burning fire, Gulchenrouz is described as ‘pass[ing] whole ages in undisturbed tranquillity, and in the pure happiness of childhood’ (Beckford 2013: 58, 75, 76-7, 94). Critics have puzzled over whether this apparent paean to child-like innocence is as truly innocent as it appears, and question how the fictions plays with notions of effeminacy and asexuality. For Potkay, ‘the moral of *Vathek* is finally neither Faustian lesson nor simple misogynist topos. It involves the more surprising notion that growing up at all-acquiring any kind of

knowledge –is inherently damning’ (Potkay 1993: 74). Alan Liu has also questioned whether ‘childish ignorance is really bliss or itself a species of damnation’ (Liu 1984: 196). One might also question whether the apparently ‘good old genius’ is himself not another version of that predatory pederast, Bababalouk, with his tempting sweets, in this troubling fiction of Orientalist excess and transgressive desire made all the more disconcerting by the cool sardonic style and coldly humorous mixture of comic absurdity and tragic denouement.

Vathek did not exhaust the allure of the east for the Romantics; rather it marked the beginnings of a substantial engagement. In 1796 Walter Savage Landor published an oriental narrative, *Gebir*, in which his Iberian hero sails Eastwards to Egypt to battle a tyrannical court empowered by witchcraft and magic. In 1801, influenced by both Beckford’s and Landor’s fables, Robert Southey published his oriental narrative about Arabia and Islam, *Thalaba the Destroyer*, a work which paid tribute to the very serious Romantic fascination with Islam (Sharafuddin 1994: 1-33; Garcia 2012: 201, 15-88; Boulton 2007: 000-000). Like *Vathek*, the literary element of the work was accompanied by substantial and extremely erudite annotations of scholarly work on the East (Simpson 2013: 109-43). The orphaned Thalaba is fated to destroy a nest of evil sorcerers who inhabit an underwater cave, the Domdaniel (reminiscent of Beckford’s Hall of Eblis), which he does in an act of heroic self-sacrifice at the close of the poem. The narrative is replete with Orientalist flourishes, drawing heavily upon the mythology of the *Nights*, its parodic continuations and accounts of Islam, a religion that, to the consternation of its early reviewers, is taken seriously within the poem though not its notes. Thalaba, though a devout Muslim, can be viewed as a displaced iconoclastic Protestant hero, destroying the idolatrous demons of establishment corruption, a displacement Eastwards of Southey’s and

Coleridge's 1790s radical dissenting Unitarianism. Thalaba's moral authority derives from his service in an austere morality, here derived from Islam. The supernatural is intimately interwoven with the action of the poem. The chief sorcerer of Southey's poem is the demonic female, Khawla, a Gothic creation to match Lewis's Bleeding Nun from *The Monk* (1796) and Coleridge's vampiric Geraldine in 'Christabel' (1816). Southey's Khawla stands in for an evil, feminised, corrupt and despotic Orient, itself a displacement of the corruption of British domestic politics. As well as the sorcerers, the poem contains magical cities, false paradisiacal gardens, fabulous mythological creatures, a journey to the underworld and all sorts of Gothic paraphernalia, including severed heads and hands. Coleridge's famous romantic orientalist dream poem, 'Kubla Khan', composed in 1798-99 and published alongside 'Christabel' in 1816, was intimately connected to Southey's *Thalaba* and the two poets' brief but shared interest in Islam (Southey 2004: xiii-xx; Garcia 2012: 157-88). The Gothic nightmare images of the 'deep Romantic chasm' and the 'woman wailing for her demon lover' in the poem are intimately related to Southey's new Oriental Gothic style.

Book VIII of *Thalaba* is especially notable for one of the first literary representations of the vampire in English literature. Oneiza, the doomed love of Thalaba, returns from the grave to torment him and her father:

The Cryer from the Minaret

Proclaimed the midnight hour;

'Now, now! Cried Thalaba,

And o'er the chamber of the tomb

There spread a lurid gleam

Like the reflection of a sulphur fire,

And in the hideous light
 Oneiza stood before them. It was She,
 Her very lineament, and such as death
 Had changed them, livid cheeks, and lips of blue.

But in her eyes there dwelt
 Brightness more terrible
 Than all the loathsomeness of death.

‘Still art thou living, wretch?’
 In hollow tones she cried to Thalaba,
 ‘And must I nightly leave my grave
 To tell thee, still in vain,
 God has abandoned thee? (Southey 2004: 119)

Thalaba quickly dispatches Oneiza to her grave with a lance through the heart, but the literary vampire that originates from the East would not so easily be vanquished. Southey’s resonantly ambiguous depiction of Oneiza’s unearthly beauty, ‘brightness more terrible / Than all the loathsomeness of death’, would prove extremely influential in a series of powerful female vampires, from Coleridge’s Geraldine, to Le Fanu’s Carmilla Karnstein and Bram Stoker’s Lucy Westenra.

Indeed, the vampire is the most important gift bequeathed by Orientalism to the Gothic mainstream. The folk superstition of the creature has an Eastern origin, located in the domains of the Ottoman Empire and the orthodox Christian states bordering upon it, notably Hungary and Greece. Southey’s *Thalaba* supplied copious notes from eighteenth-century travel accounts, especially Joseph Pitton de Tournefort’s *A Voyage into the Levant* (1741), which recounts the traveller’s encounters with the vampire superstition (Southey 2004: 265). In many ways the

vampire was the ultimate other for nineteenth-century Britons: exotic, Eastern and supernatural, a demonic inversion of Protestant modernity, with its seductive mixture of forbidden desires and sinful excess. Byron, the literary heir of Beckford's and Southey's Gothic Orientalism, would exploit the creature in his narrative *The Giaour* of 1813, a tale of a renegade Christian caught up in an Eastern love triangle.

Enamoured of the beautiful Leila, who belongs to the harem of Hassan, an Islamic chief, the nameless Giaour conducts an affair with her that leads to her gruesome murder as she is callously drowned in a sack for adultery. The Giaour has his revenge upon Hassan, but only at the cost of his social and mental alienation, ending his days in a monastery, haunted by the apparition of a 'bloody hand / Fresh sever'd from its parent limb' which beckons him to suicide from the cliff edge on which he stands.

The Giaour, too, is subject to a fearsome curse for his crimes:

But first, o earth as Vampire sent,
Thy corse shall from its tomb be rent;
Then ghastly haunt thy native place,
And suck the blood of all they race. (Richardson 2002:: 204-6)

Byron visited the Levant in 1811, and having done so, he was the only Romantic poet to reach Asia. His experiences in Albania provided a correctness of costume for his sensational Oriental verse tales such as *The Giaour*, which sold in their thousands on publication, making them much more popular than anything written by Southey. The tales engaged with, and exploited, the Gothic elements of Orientalist discourse.

Byron's own charismatic persona of the cynical, troubled and dangerous aristocratic, projected onto the various heroes of his Oriental tales, was combined with the peasant superstition of the vampire by his estranged, erstwhile physician, Dr John William

Polidori in the misattributed novella, *The Vampyre* of 1819. Polidori's tale, originally marketed as authored by Byron, was set in London and Greece under the Ottoman Empire, between the two worlds of which the deadly, handsome and charismatic vampire, Lord Ruthven, moves, destroying female virtue and innocence as he proceeds. Polidori's short tale was extremely influential, transforming the folkloric creature of Eastern Europe into a literary and cultural phenomenon. The charismatic, aristocratic vampire featured prominently on stage and in popular culture, later manifesting itself most notably as James Malcolm Rymer's Sir Francis Varney in his *Varney the Vampire: or, The Feast of Blood* (1845-7; 1847) and Bram Stoker's iconic Count Dracula in 1897, another Eastern visitor to London (Frayling 1991).

Orientalism was deeply imbricated in mainstream Gothic writing. Polidori was notable as one of those who participated in the often discussed ghost-story-telling competition held at the Villa Diodati in Switzerland in 1816, an occasion also involving Byron and Percy and Mary Shelley. As Jerrold E. Hogle's essay in this collection elaborates, the event gave birth to possibly the most famous Gothic novel of all time, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). Shelley's novel contains strong Orientalist elements. Victor Frankenstein's closest friend, Henry Clerval, is a student of Oriental languages, and is bound for the East before Frankenstein's Creature murders him. At the very heart of the novel is an Orientalist romance between Felix De Lacey and Safie, the daughter of an Islamic merchant. Felix teaches Safie English, using Constantin Volney's *Ruins of Empire* (1792) as a text. Volney's *Ruins* is a powerful radical Enlightenment polemic on the decay of ancient empires and the religious beliefs that sustained them, an important element of contemporary Orientalist credo. From these lessons, the Creature hears of 'the slothful Asiatics' and

the ‘stupendous genius and mental activity of the Grecians’. This Orientalist historical education is crucial for the Creature’s sensibility and understanding. Safie’s mother, it turns out, was a Christian Arab enslaved by the Turks who taught her to ‘aspire to higher powers of intellect, and an independence of spirit, forbidden to the female followers of Mahomet’ (Shelley 1996: 89, 92). She accompanies her father, a merchant, to Paris where he is imprisoned by the French because of his wealth and religion. The idealistic Felix falls in love with Safie while altruistically aiding her father to escape, an act rewarded with stereotypically base ingratitude by the prejudiced Turk, and resulting in the exile of himself and his entire family to a cottage in rural Germany where the Creature happens upon them. The Creature itself has been located in an Orientalist context by contemporary postcolonial critics. Joseph Lew, for example, notes that the Creature’s ‘yellow skin’ and ‘lustrous, black hair’ identifies him with the Bengalis of India who, by 1818, had suffered many years of East Indian Company misrule (Lew 1991). Other critics have seen the Creature in a racialised context as, variously, the Gothicised ‘half-breed’ (Malchow: 1996), or a Euro-Asian or Mongolian ‘Yellow Peril’ that would later be personified in the form of the insidious Dr Fu Manchu in the heavily racialised Oriental Gothic romances of Sax Rohmer (Neff 1997; Mellor 2003; Kitson 2007: 51-88). Notably, it is possible to locate both of the Gothic’s most celebrated monsters – Frankenstein’s Creature and Stoker’s Count Dracula, the latter racially a ‘Hun’ or Mongolian deriving from the East – in the context of an Oriental Gothic tradition in which the East is radically othered and demonised.

Certainly, by the time of her writing of the novel, Mary Shelley was immersed in reading numerous Orientalist fictions by her husband and others, including Southey’s Hindu Gothic romance, *The Curse of Kehama* (1811) (Neff 1997; Bohls

2013: 171-72). This reading did not just influence *Frankenstein* but stuck with her long after. As well as a place of excess and sensuality, eliciting desire in British readers, the East was also, in Gothic writing, a place of contagion and disease. Eastern vampires, like Lord Ruthven and Dracula, came to the West to infect and pollute British womanhood, transforming the ‘angel in the house’ of nineteenth-century fiction into a bestial and sexualised being. With its promise of sensual luxury, things Oriental also infected and effeminised British masculinity.. In her later apocalyptic Gothic fiction, *The Last Man* (1826), Mary Shelley played on this fear. The novel describes how the world in the twenty-first century becomes ravaged by a virulent plague which destroys all human life. The source of the pestilence is the East, from whence the plague is brought back to England when Lord Raymond, having liberated Greece in a projection of Byronic ambition, leads an Anglo-Greek military force against the despotic and reactionary Turk in Constantinople, long regarded as the city that marked the very boundary of Christian Europe and the Islamic East (Lew 1998). The novel’s narrator is eventually infected while tending a dying ‘negro’, possibly a metaphor for Britain’s colonial guilt as participant in the slave trade (Shelley 1994: 245; Lew 1998).

One of the most exotic of Oriental Gothic creations is Charlotte Dacre’s *Zofloya: or, The Moor* (1806). Zofloya is a noble figure who, after the defeat of the Moors of Grenada, becomes the manservant and companion of a Spanish aristocrat. Zofloya is culturally and linguistically affiliated to the Arab world of the Orient from whence he derives. Zofloya actually first appears in a dream of the heroine of the tale, Victoria di Loredani, a dark, passionate and sexually assertive young woman led into a life of vice by her faulty education and a series of male libertines. In this dream,

both fantasy and prophecy, Zofloya's masculine beauty and Oriental glamour merge with her unconscious sexual desires:

She beheld advancing a Moor of a noble and majestic form. He was clad in a habit of white and gold; and his head he wore a white turban, which sparkled with emeralds and was surmounted by a waving feather of green; his arms and legs, which were bare, were encircled with the finest oriental pearl; he wore a collar of gold round his throat, and his ear were decorated with gold rings of enormous size. (Dacre 1997: 136).

Zofloya becomes Victoria's confidante, then her tempter and accomplice, and finally her lover, before murdering her by dashing her from the edge of a cliff. In the final pages of the novel, and through one of the narrative's many reworkings of Lewis's *The Monk*, it is revealed that the real Zofloya had been killed and subsequently impersonated by Satan. In this fiction the Oriental Moor is presented as a charismatic and attractive figure, one for whom Victoria harbours physical longings and desires (Mellor 2002). As Makdisi argues, Satan takes the form of the murdered Arab servant when he manifests himself to Victoria because 'that cluster of tendencies she associates within her own mind with Zofloya (violence, raw sexuality, desire, and so on –the essences of the East) are projected onto an image that takes the shape of those desires' (Makdisi 2014: 168-9, 171). Here, the hyper-Orientalized body of the Arab male, rather than that of the female, is viewed as a site of both desire and danger in Dacre's extraordinary re-writing of Oriental Gothic from a feminised perspective.

As this essay has demonstrated, Orientalism is an important theme in the discourse of the Gothic, from its inception to the present day. Common to those aesthetic modes that we have come to designate as either 'Gothic' or 'Romantic', a concern with the dangerous pleasures and desires of the East has characterised the

writings of Beckford, De Quincey, Southey, Dacre, Mary Shelley and others since the inception of the Gothic in the late eighteenth century. This cultural sense of the East as the site of the other, of contagion, of fears and desires would persist throughout the nineteenth century in notable fictions by Charles Robert Maturin, Wilkie Collins, Bram Stoker, J. Milton Hayes, Rudyard Kipling, H. Rider Haggard, Arthur Conan-Doyle, Richard Marsh and many others. Increasingly fuelled by Britain's expanding colonial encounters and developing imperial possessions, Gothic Orientalism metamorphosed into the colonial uncanny and its attendant nightmares of reverse colonisation, functioning as what Patrick Brantlinger has referred to as the 'dark mirror' of Victorian culture, and through which which colonial crimes committed abroad would return inevitably to disturb the homeland (Brantlinger 1988).

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