Beckett studies were greatly enriched by the publication in 1930 of Guy Chapman and John Hodgkin's Bibliography of William Beckford of Fonthill. It was a beautifully produced account of all known editions of Beckford's works published in his lifetime, with collotype facsimiles of the title pages. Since then the need to bring it up to date and extend its range has often been felt, in particular to track the many posthumous editions of Beckford's works, and to record the vast body of writing about him. It is for this reason that the present work has been prepared. Because of Beckford's contribution to a number of diverse fields apart from literature, such as architecture, landscape gardening and collecting, it seemed worthwhile to try to cover all these aspects in separate sections. In this way Beckford's influence from his lifetime onwards can begin to be appreciated.

Eight biographies, as well as a number of full-length studies, demonstrate the fascination that Beckford has exerted over the years. Perhaps the last half-century has seen the greatest expansion in academic and popular works, with a turning point being the bicentenary of his birth in 1960 which was marked by an exhibition at Yale and a smaller one at the British Museum. At the same time the Middle East's homage was a valuable collection of essays from the University of Cairo. Further exhibitions of ever-increasing size were to follow, beginning with a well-chosen group of objects at the Holburne Museum in Bath in 1966, enhanced by a finely printed and most informative catalogue that is prized by collectors today. Then, in 1976, came the wide-ranging William Beckford Exhibition which opened in Salisbury before transferring to Bath. Great attention was paid to creating suitable settings for the exhibits, including an inner sanctuary containing some wonderful objects. In the 1980s and 1990s smaller exhibitions attracted visitors to Beckford's Tower in the summer months.

After many years of planning and extensive research the third, and most recent, major exhibition was staged in New York at the Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design and Culture in the autumn of 2001. Early in the following year it came to the Dulwich Picture Gallery in London. Accompanying the exhibition was a monumental catalogue that provides a reminder of the works of art shown, and is also of permanent value as a source of reference for future scholars and enthusiasts, containing as it does sixteen well-illustrated essays on many aspects of
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Two other events stimulated a wide interest in Beckford. One was the formation of the Beckford Tower Trust by Dr and Mrs Hilliard in 1977. As a result the Tower became a focal point for those who were already interested in Beckford, or were prepared to be persuaded. Then, encouraged by the success of the Trust both under the Hilliards and, from 1995, under the more ample wing of Bath Preservation Trust, the Beckford Society was formed in 1995. Through lectures, visits and publications, the Society has sought to promote an understanding of the life and works of William Beckford. This aim is reflected in the present bibliography which is divided into two main sections: his life and his literature.

This bibliography covers works published up to the end of 2005 and concentrates on those printed in English and other European languages. For additional foreign sources, two studies are particularly valuable: André Parraux, William Beckford, Auteur de Vatbek (1960), and Maria Laura Bettencourt Pires, William Beckford e Portugal (1987). Several institutions hold manuscript material of the greatest interest and importance, and principal among these is the Bodleian Library, Oxford, where a vast archive of letters, literary drafts and other papers is held in the Department of Western Manuscripts. Another important collection is in the Beinecke Library at Yale University. Some information on these sources can be found on the Internet. Indeed there are many relevant websites offering information of varying degrees of reliability. Actual website addresses are not given in this work because they change or go out of date so rapidly.

Generally only the first edition of a work mentioning Beckford is cited, except when he does not appear until a later one. On the whole, reprints are not noted. Heights, where given, are to the nearest half centimetre and include the binding. For some early works the figure may be on the low side, depending on the binder’s plough.

Most entries are in alphabetical order although in places chronological order seemed more informative. Cross-references have been kept to a minimum, partly by repeating an entry, for example, John Britton’s two-volume Auto-biography, which is virtually two distinct works. In most cases an author’s name is spelt as in the work cited. For instance, Gavin de Beer also appears as Sir Gavin de Beer and Gavin R. de Beer.

When a periodical article subsequently appeared in book form it is only entered under ‘articles’, although this is followed by the title of the book, if known. However, any slight revisions are not noted. Volume numbers are given in Arabic numerals throughout, even if they are in Roman numerals in the original. Sometimes publishers confused matters by alternating between the two forms. No volume numbers have been given for some common periodicals such as Country Life and the Times Literary Supplement, while The Athenaeum is one of the few not to have used volume numbers at all. The title of a review is not mentioned if it is the same as the work under review. Where possible the page numbers relevant to Beckford are given, as well as those for the whole chapter or article.

Whilst this bibliography is the most comprehensive listing of Beckford’s works and references to him so far produced, there will inevitably be many omissions, especially of articles scattered in newspapers and elsewhere; in any case there are so many that it would be almost impossible to include all of them. Moreover, contemporary newspapers and periodicals copied widely from one another. Articles in most general encyclopedias tend to cover the same ground and are omitted for this reason.

On the whole entries have been put where you would expect to find them, but there are instances where the title is misleading. For example, ‘Fonthill Abbey’ in Burke’s Anecdotes of the Aristocracy (1850) is a general account of Beckford’s life; on the other hand Peach, in his Historic Houses in Bath (1883), wrote primarily about Fonthill. A few references are incomplete and so might possibly appear in the wrong section if I had only a title to guide me; this seemed better than leaving them out.

Some entries involved a surprising amount of detection. For example, Ida Kingsbury, in her Castles, Caliphs and Christians . . . Monserrate (Lisbon, 1994), quoted Francis Thompson’s remark that Beckford was ‘that Atlas among enchanters’. I searched in vain through Thompson’s collected poems, but then came across it in André Parraux’s William Beckford [Paris, 1960]; luckily he had noted the source, Francis Thompson’s Shelley. That was sufficient for me to trace the quotation to the Dublin Review, after reading the article in book form published the following year, 1909.

Similarly, in November 1844 an article on Beckford by a writer who claimed to be ‘almost a daily observer of the deceased for years’ appeared in the Bath and Cheltenham Gazette. At the end was the source, Sam Sly’s African Journal, and a few e-mails to the central library in Cape Town elicited the information that there was indeed such a journal. Following this, they kindly sent me a copy of the original article.

In compiling this bibliography I broadly followed the Chicago Manual of Style (15th ed., 2003) with two main deviations. One is that inclusive page numbers are given in full, so 104–107, not 104–7. The other is that single quotes are used in preference to double ones. There were times when the word processor I was using, Word 2000, thought it knew better. One was when it changed ‘secretaries’ to ‘secretaries’, but fortunately I noticed. There may well be other occasions when I have missed a well-meaning correction.

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Chronology

1764 Later claimed to have been pupil of Mozart during his London visit.
1765 Portrait painted by Andrea Casali. (Now in Lennoxlove, Scotland.)
1768 October. Robert Drysdale appointed his first tutor, until 1771.
1771 Alexander Cozens appointed his drawing master.
1777 June. First visit abroad, to Geneva with his tutor, Rev. John Lettice.
1778 Met Voltaire at Ferney early in the year. Returned November. 
December. Wrote The Long Story, published as The Vision in 1782.
1779 June. Met William 'Kit' Courtenay at Powderham Castle, Devon, 
during English tour with John Lettice.
1780 Winter. Met Louisa, wife of his first cousin Peter Beckford, at Fonthill. 
June. Embarked with John Lettice on the Grand Tour until April 
1781. 
1781 February. In Paris for two months on his way back from Italy. 
June. Portrait painted by George Romney. (Now in Upton House, 
Banbury.) 
Coming-of-age and Christmas parties at Fonthill Splendens. 
Or 1782. His overture to the ballet Phaeton published in Paris. 
1782 January-August. Wrote Vathek in French. 
February-May. Portrait painted by Joshua Reynolds. (Now in 
National Portrait Gallery.) 
April. Performance of his score for Lady Craven's operetta Arcadian 
Pastoral. 
May-November. Second tour to Italy, with retinue including John 
Robert Cozens and John Lettice. 
August. Death of the first Lady Hamilton. 
1783 April. Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents suppressed on publication. 
May 5. Married Lady Margaret Gordon in London. Honeymoon in 
Switzerland. 
April. MP for Wells until June 1790.