



Patricia Plummer. Foto: Vladimir Unkovic

The following article is about the context of our research project “Unveiling Orientalism: Ambiguity in British Discourse on Travel of the Long Eighteenth Century.” In it, we explore different facets of ambiguity and Orientalism in connection with Horace Walpole’s Strawberry Hill. While the house and garden reflect Walpole’s taste for the Gothic and the Oriental, respectively, the ‘curiosities’ and ‘uniquities’ collected, categorised, described and displayed in Walpole’s Gothic folly, reflect the author’s taste for ambiguity.

“A sleeping hermaphrodite with two satyrs”

The Description of Strawberry Hill (1784) and
Horace Walpole’s Taste for Ambiguity
By Patricia Plummer & Syed Kazim Ali Kazmi



North Front of Strawberry Hill.

(1) Strawberry Hill – North Front

Source: *A Description of the Villa of Mr Horace Walpole* (1784) <archive.org>

Horace Walpole (1717–1797), the author of *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and self-styled ‘Abbot of Strawberry Hill,’ and William Beckford (1760–1844), the author of the scandalous Oriental tale *Vathek* (1786), nicknamed the ‘Sultan of Lansdown Tower’ after one of his impressive estates, were fierce competitors: as authors of Gothic novels, as famous eccentrics, owners of vast country houses, and as collectors who cultivated a taste for the ‘exotic’ and the ‘Oriental.’ They belonged to a circle of upper-class writers who have recently been hailed as protagonists of the ‘queer’ eighteenth century. Today, Walpole is famous for a number of reasons: he is credited with having written the aforementioned Gothic novel, the first of its kind, with having coined the word “serendipity” and with

being the owner of Strawberry Hill, his ‘Gothic folly.’ Having leased it from wealthy toyshop-owner Elizabeth Chevenix in 1747 and bought it two years later, Walpole wrote: “The house (...) is so small, that I can send it you in a letter to look at: the prospect is as delightful as possible, commanding the river, the town and Richmond Park.”¹

Walpole spent years on the transformation of the house and garden, and thus turned Strawberry Hill into a work of art, an early *Gesamtkunstwerk*, representative of the ‘Gothic’ spirit of the age that entailed an appreciation of things ‘Oriental.’ Over the years, Walpole enlarged his ‘Otranto’ as he called it fondly, thus blurring the distinction between literary imagination and architectural ambition. A gallery contained his substantial collection of paintings, a

staircase was turned into a showcase for his collection of weaponry, niches and pedestals were added for the display of precious artefacts in a quasi-religious manner. A Gothic chapel adorned the park that reflected Walpole’s interest in landscape gardening and an appreciation of Chinese aesthetics, popularised in England by William Chambers’ *Dissertation on Oriental Gardening* (1772). This fusion of the Gothic, a style imitating England’s medieval past, with Chinoiserie, a decorative style influenced by (real or imaginary) cross-cultural encounters with China, is characteristic of Walpole’s stylistic experiments. In fact, it can be argued that the sole purpose of his ongoing exterior and interior revamping of the estate was to turn it into a receptacle for his growing collection of precious artefacts.

In 1842, long after Walpole's death, William Beckford was eagerly waiting for the arrival of a catalogue detailing precious items to be auctioned at Strawberry Hill. As Lewis Melville writes:

"Beckford hated Horace Walpole as only one collector can hate another, and his feelings towards him never underwent any change. Two score years after the great letter-writer had been buried, Beckford unburdened himself of his sentiments towards the owner of what he called 'the toyshop of Strawberry Hill' (...). 'Walpole hated me,' he said. 'I began Fonthill two or three years before his death. Mischief-making people annoyed him by saying I intended to buy up all his nic-nackery when he was dead. Some things I might have wished to possess – A good deal I would not have taken as a gift. The place was a miserable child's box – a species of gothic mousetrap – a reflection of Walpole's littleness. (...) My having his playthings he could not tolerate, even in idea, so he bequeathed them beyond my reach (...)." ²²

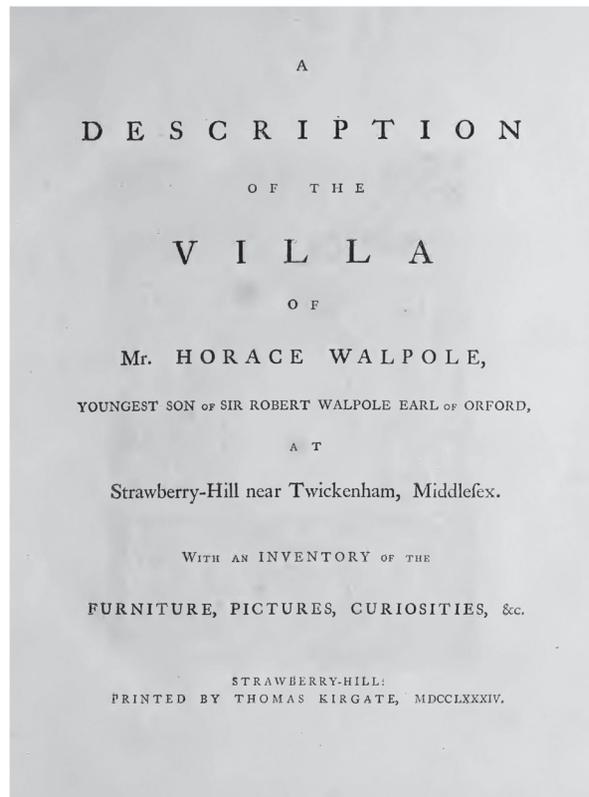
What Beckford condescendingly referred to as Walpole's "playthings" was in fact a large collection of precious artefacts testifying to Walpole's eclectic taste. The "miserable child's box" had been transformed into a vast estate, which contained weapons and coats of arms, porcelain and paintings, jewellery, sculptures and books. The whole estate spoke of the wealth and the taste of its owner, who had tirelessly collected things that to him seemed special, singular, strange, rare, odd, exotic – in short: unique. In the words of Walpole, "Monstrous births, hermaphrodites, petrifications, &c. are all true members of a collection." ²³

This enumeration of 'monstrosities' and oddities is reminiscent of the curiosity cabinets and *Wunderkammern* created by wealthy travelers, especially aristocrats returning from their Grand Tour, filled initially with 'curiosities' in an erratic manner, then increasingly with things taken systematically from

Indigenous peoples across the globe as the British Empire expanded. However strong Walpole's fascination with curiosities was, apart from his Grand Tour, which took him and his friend, the poet Thomas Gray, to France and Italy from 1739 to 1741, he was to remain an 'armchair traveler,' who acquired the objects of his desire at home in England. Walpole's interest in collections and collectors is well documented, among them Hans Sloane (1660–1753), who was nicknamed "the toyman" and whose collections included numerous Oriental artefacts, which would eventually become the foundation of the British Museum. Walpole wrote about his own ambition to create "an hospital for everything Singular" in a letter to the editor of the periodical *The Museum*. ⁴

George E. Haggerty has called Strawberry Hill "a treasure trove of eighteenth-century attitudes towards architecture, fashion, wealth and the past." ⁵ In our research project we investigate ambi-

guity and gender in eighteenth-century Orientalist discourse on travel; more recently we have, for instance, focused on perceptions of eunuchs in cross-cultural perspective. ⁶ For us, Strawberry Hill is indeed a treasure trove that enables us to study further aspects of ambiguity in the context of an eighteenth-century country house. We are specifically interested in Walpole's fascination with the Orient and its reflection in both the collection and his inventory. We are also interested in dynamics of ambiguity and distinction that may be detected in Walpole's eclectic collection, which was, as has been established, acquired and arranged, displayed and described with potential visitors in mind. Strawberry Hill House, a secluded private space and life-long project of its reclusive owner, was thus at times a museum, open not to the general public but to substantial numbers of pre-selected guests (with the notable exception of children). As such, the house was created as



(2) Title Page

Source: *A Description of the Villa of Mr Horace Walpole* (1784) <archive.org>

an ambiguous space, a cross-over of curiosity cabinet and museum, and both private and public. Strawberry Hill reflects Walpole's private obsessions while his desire to present his collection to the public eye creates numerous distinctions between 'us' and 'them' as he defines, classifies and thus appropriates things from 'other' cultures in his published inventory.

The Description of Strawberry Hill

While Walpole was continuously transforming the house and garden, he felt the need to write an account of his expanding collection. First published in 1774, *A Description of the Villa of Horace Walpole at Strawberry Hill* is an inventory of Walpole's rareties. A revised edition was published in 1784. Necessitated by the growth of the collection, it contains a preface by the author as well as several illustrations. In his preface, Walpole adopts a tone that is boastful, amusing as well as self-reflexive. English antiquaries and virtuosos are his implied readers, who are also potential visitors and even prospective buyers, when he claims that his collection of miniatures and enamels is "by far the largest and finest in any country," superior even to that of King George III. (*Description*, Preface ii). Significantly, Walpole admits that "the mixture of modern portrait, and French porcelaine, and Greek and Roman sculpture, may seem heterogeneous," a notion that is further underlined by references to the make-believe of his Gothic style "affecting not only obsolete architecture, but pretending to an observance in *costume* even in the furniture" (Preface iii). This expression of delight in the artificiality of the house, which serves here as a stage for his curiosities, seems somewhat at odds with the purpose of the *Description*, which Walpole refers to variously as "catalogue", "history", "list" and "account." Like an exhibition catalogue or a

guide to a museum, the *Description* is intended to impose a sense of order and purpose on his collection. As a "genealogy of the objects of virtù" it supposedly documents the provenance of the objects in this unusual museum. Moreover, Walpole hints at the commercial value of the collection when he claims that the *Description* will provide future purchasers with "a history of their purchases" and virtuosos with "an authentic certificate of their curiosities" (*Description*, Preface ii). This latter claim is paradoxical, given that many of the assorted "curiosities" in Walpole's collection had been removed from their places of origin and then distributed across Britain. How would Walpole have been able to certify the provenance of these mobile objects?

Walpole's claim to authenticity seems even more dubious with regard to what is perhaps the most 'Gothic' of his collections, namely his armoury. On close inspection and with reference to the extant sources, among them his *Description* and further illustrations created by John Carter for Strawberry Hill Press, it seems that Walpole's manner of documentation was not only "surprisingly careless," as Stuart W. Phyrre observes,⁷ but deliberately unsystematic. One striking example is a precious dagger identified by Walpole as "Turkish" in his inventory, then as "Henry VIII.'s dagger" in one of Carter's extra-illustrations dated 1788, where it is displayed together with a prayer book and sceptre (neither of which bear any links to Henry VIII.), thus creating a Christian context for the dagger.⁸ Attribution was thus flexible rather than authentic. Like the house itself, the armoury, which seems to testify to Walpole's sustained interest in medieval history, is a Gothic fantasy, created in order to emphasize the "antiquity and nobility of his lineage."⁹ Walpole was thus anything but a dabbling amateur; he clearly acquired, arranged and displayed his items for

complex reasons. His desire to present his riches before the public eye is evident in the detailed lists supplied in his *Description*, even more so in the fact that the 1784 edition of the *Description* was illustrated.

The descriptions of objects included in what was essentially an inventory of Strawberry Hill carry a unique mix of the fantastic, exotic and familiar. At least this is the first impression the reader might gain. Among the familiar items, there are paintings of famous contemporaries by the popular artists of his time, as claimed by the text of the inventory. There are also less familiar, even obscure items that are described as if the owner wanted to Orientalise said objects. The description of these things specifies them as belonging to a culture quite foreign to possible readers or visitors of this collection. Plainly put, these objects are established as mysterious and 'exotic' due to Walpole's vague and sparse description. The 1784 preface, however, highlights a domestic context for "exhibiting specimens of Gothic architecture as collected from standards in cathedrals and chapel-tombs, and showing how they may be applied to chimney-pieces, cielings, windows, ballustrades, loggias" (*Description*, Preface i).

The exercise of creating the inventory itself, which was a dynamic, ongoing project, performs at least two functions. One function, which is also stated in the preface, is that it "authenticates" objects by creating a taxonomy. Needless to say, that this model is established by an outsider, who classifies objects, many of which have already been removed from their original context, and are thus appropriated into the context of an English country house. The second function is to emphasize the 'exotic' nature of the objects for the purpose of creating a sort of enlarged 'curiosity cabinet.' The flexible manner in which Walpole handled these matters is also evident in the purpose stated in



THE GALLERY

(3) The Gallery

Source: *A Description of the Villa of Mr Horace Walpole* (1784) <archive.org>

the 1784 edition of his *Description*: “the following account of pictures and rarities is given with a view as to their future dispersal” (*Description*, Preface ii). Whether he meant to imply that his intention was to preserve his complete collection in print for posterity or whether he intended to whet the appetites of future buyers and potential owners, who would create their own collections, remains characteristically vague.

A Portrait of Lady Montagu: Orientalism, Gender and Ambiguity

Despite his desire to appeal to future collectors, Walpole’s collection was a source of envy and admiration among his contemporaries. So great was the interest in his amalgamated things that they attracted considerable public attention and up to

10,000 visitors. While the armoury was constructed to create a medieval fantasy, Walpole’s china collection as well as his temporary interest in Chinese gardens, can be linked to the trade empire England had been building since the founding of the East India Company in 1600. Vanessa Aleyrac-Fielding explores the gendered nature of porcelain, which would be transformed from a memento of male travels, evocative of “merchants’ dreams of exploration and wealth” to a fetish in ladies’ parlours “fulfilling women’s escapist dreams of travel and exploration.” Porcelain, she argues, “acquired a symbolic meaning, representing a distant nation worshipped in the form of material artefacts.”¹⁰ These various aspects point to a further dimension of eighteenth-century Orientalism, namely the appropri-

ation of distant nations shrunken metonymically to the size of delicate ornaments (from China) or selected weapons (from India and Turkey), befitting for Walpole’s “toyshop.” One of those items is a blue and white china fishtub in which once a kitten with the Arabic name of Selima had drowned, inspiring Thomas Gray to write an ode commemorating the fatal event. In Walpole’s *Description* the first stanza of Gray’s ode has been inserted in a footnote, along with references to a whole cluster of quasi-religious architectural elements surrounding the entrance to the house, including an oratory complete with altar, a patch of lawn called the abbot’s garden, and a cloyster with the large blue and white china goldfish tub placed on a pedestal. A plaque displaying the

first lines of Gray's ode completes this somewhat incongruous display (*Description 2*, note 3). The importance of this item for Walpole is further underlined by the fact that in 1788 John Carter created an extra-illustration of a "View from the Hall at Strawberry Hill" towards the porcelain goldfish tub, which looks somewhat out of place on its pedestal in this artificial cloyster, light falling through stained-glass Gothic windows.¹¹

Further items in Walpole's collection testify not only to the various settings of the contemporary European fascination with the East, including China, Persia, India and Turkey, but to specific protagonists of eighteenth-century Orientalism. One obvious reference is the painting of a turbaned man that may be detected in his Gallery. Another painting that the *Description* dwells upon is a portrait of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762) by Charles Jervas, or rather a copy of the same by the artist, that is displayed in the Cabinet. Lady Mary is depicted in the fashionable pastoral manner as a shepherdess, leaning on her staff, a lamb by her side in obvious allusion to the nursery rhyme "Mary had a little lamb." Years later, she would become one of the foremost women writers and intellectuals of her time. To this day, her fame rests upon the journey undertaken with her husband from 1716 to 1718, through Europe and to the Ottoman Empire, which she describes in her *Turkish Embassy Letters* (published posthumously in 1763). These letters detailing, inter alia, her thoughts on religion and the role of women across different societies as well as visits to the Turkish bath in Sofia and to various harems in Constantinople, together with a series of portraits of Lady Montagu in Turkish dress created the fashion of *Turquerie* that spread across Europe in the long eighteenth century. Although Walpole did not own any of those celebrated Orientalising portraits of Lady Montagu in which she assumed



(4) The Cabinet

Source: *A Description of the Villa of Mr Horace Walpole* (1784) <archive.org>

her imaginary role of the 'Sultana,' the inclusion of this youthful portrait creates a sense of kinship with England's most famous aristocratic woman traveller.

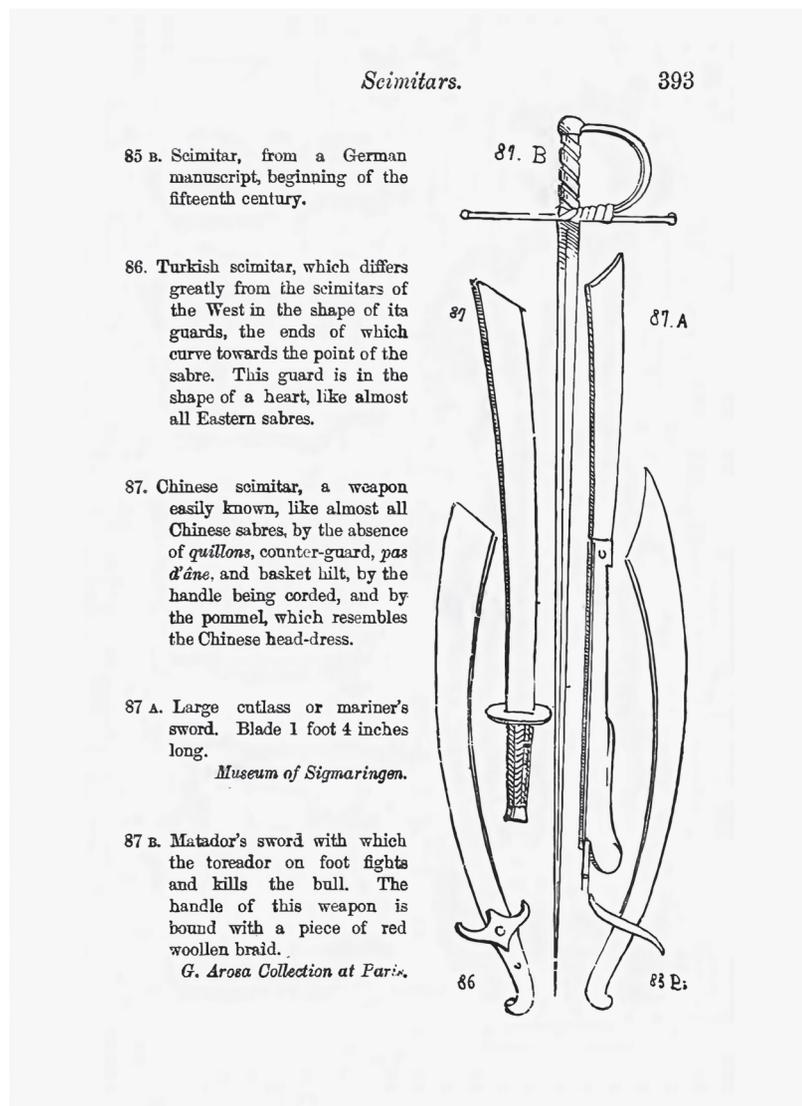
Walpole also owned a miniature of "Liotard the painter, in his Turkish dress, in enamel, by himself," (*Description 60*). Jean-Etienne Liotard (1702–1789) was a French-Swiss artist whose portraits of British aristocrats, men as well as women, in ethnic masquerade popularised the East. Liotard as well as his contemporary, the Flemish artist Jean-Baptiste Van Mour (1671–1737) spent years in Constantinople and adopted Turkish dress; they painted portraits of those who had travelled to the

Ottoman Empire, and thus introduced harem scenes into British interiors.¹² The display of portraits, Orientalised or not, of England's aristocratic travellers and painters, such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, the Earl of Sandwich and Jean-Etienne Liotard, is another clear indication of Walpole's familiarity with and appreciation of Orient and Orientalism. These selected items suggest a strong connection with the rise of British travels to and investment in the East since the late seventeenth century that extends far beyond the decorative and commemorative function of Walpole's favourite china fish tub. Here we may detect a series of programmatic gestures akin to the fabri-

cated history of Walpole's armoury. As pointed out by Amy Lim, recent literary criticism has helped shed new light on Walpole's mixing of historical and imaginary detail in literature and architecture "that would create an emotional connection with the past."¹³ The instances of *Turquerie* among Walpole's paintings and decorative memorabilia create a strong connection with European Orientalism, implying the collector's sense of kinship with Montagu, Sandwich, Liotard et al.

Orientalist stereotypes created in the context of English travel writing in connection with the harem as the object of intense speculation and desire, include, but are not limited to, polygamy, the exploitation of women and, variously, the hypermasculinity or the effeminacy of men. The harem is thus a 'transgressive' space that hinges upon the binary of men and women (with the notable exception of the ambiguous figure of the eunuch), and the notion of heterosexual desire.

This agenda is complemented by a series of objects suggesting a taste for ambiguity in connection with gender and sexuality. It is reflected in Walpole's above-mentioned reference to hermaphrodites being "true members" of his collection. His *Description* lists a "bronze cast of the hermaphrodite" on display in the Yellow Bedchamber or Beauty Room (*Description* 16) and "a sleeping hermaphrodite with two satyrs" on the Tribune (*Description* 57). These artefacts represent the sustained reception of Greek art and mythology in eighteenth-century neoclassicism. The chosen topic, though, is significant; Hermaphroditus, the offspring of Aphrodite and Hermes in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, is male and female. 'Hermaphrodite' was a term used to refer to persons who were non-binary or intersexual. They came to be regarded as an anomaly, a 'monstrosity' in eighteenth-century medical discourse. In another sense, the ambiguity of a hermaphrodite could also be read



(5) Scimitars

Source: Auguste Demmin. *An Illustrated History of Arms and Armor from the Earliest Period to the Present Time*. London: George Bell and Sons, 1894.

as a reference to male homosexuality. According to the inventory, the "sleeping hermaphrodite with two satyrs" is included in a cabinet filled with miniatures. It is surrounded by likenesses of Horace Walpole and his parents, and two precious heart-shaped lockets containing locks of hair from his aunt and uncle. The reference to the enamel of the hermaphrodite is followed by a miniature portrait of Sir Anthony Shirley (1565–1635), who travelled through Turkey and Persia and eventually returned to England as the Shah of Persia's ambassador; accordingly Walpole notes: "dress, half English, half Persian." Here we can indeed

detect a theme of intimacy and ambiguity that illustrates Stephen Clarke's observation: "for all their mixed styles, the collections at Strawberry Hill were carefully assembled thematically to tell particular stories (...). The themes were combined with sophisticated planning, use of decoration and handling of light to manipulate atmosphere and moods."¹⁴

"An Indian Scimitar": The Ambiguity of Things

The descriptions of artefacts included in the inventory of the Strawberry Hill thus create a unique mix of history and fantasy. However, the inventory

also lists numerous less familiar items, some of which can be linked to notions of the Orient as they are variously identified as ‘Indian,’ ‘Turkish’ or ‘Oriental.’ One of these artefacts is an “Indian scimitar, the handles and ornaments of silver, in a green velvet case” (*Description* 32). A scimitar is often depicted with a curved blade, which was widely used in the Middle East and Central Asia. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word “scimitar” is a borrowed word existing in various languages, e.g., Italian *scimitarra*, French *cimeterre*, derived from Persian *šamsīr* (*shamsheer*) through Turkish mediation. It refers to a weapon used in the past by Arabs and Turks as noted by Auguste Demmin: “The scimitar (in Persian *chimchir* or *chimichir*, in German *Scymitar*) was the *acinace* of the Romans, and most probably gave rise to the sabre. It was used only by Oriental nations in ancient times, and afterwards by the Moors in Spain, by Saracens, and by the Turks. The handle of this sword has no guard, the blade is single-edged, short, and curved; it is slightly wider towards the end.”¹⁵ The word *shamsheer* literally means lion’s claw; it refers to a kind of sword that existed on the Indian subcontinent. Classical Indian miniature paintings depict Mughal rulers carrying a curved sword with a blade of the same width all along and narrowing at the end into a pointed tip. Without further context, Walpole’s reference to an “Indian scimitar” thus remains ambiguous. Even the word *Indian* itself is ambiguous. Several items in Walpole’s collection are identified as “Indian” and yet their provenance remains obscure – are they from what was then British India or from an Indigenous American context?

It is interesting to note that the inventory does point to the provenance by indicating that the scimitar and a dagger were “given by a nabob to George Morton Pitt, governor of Fort St. George, and by his widow to Mr. Walpole” (*Description* 32). While the former owner

is identified by name, the original owner is merely a nameless “nabob.” It turns out that George Morton Pitt (1693–1756) himself had sustained connections with the Subcontinent. He was born in Madras, India, and later served as governor in Fort St. George. When Pitt resigned from this position in 1735 he returned to England and bought Orleans House, an estate at Twickenham, situated close to Strawberry Hill. Walpole’s scimitar and dagger are thus tangible links to British rule in India that was enabled by the East India Company. Moreover, the term “nabob” testifies to British influence in India but is strangely ambiguous as well; “nabob” is derived from the word *nawab* (نابون)(نواب), which exists in Persian as well as in Urdu and Hindi. Originally, a nabob was the governor or administrator of a particular area during the Mughal Empire. He was usually a wealthy local land-owning aristocrat but the term could also refer to a powerful person leading a luxurious lifestyle. Considering these possible contexts, the connection of said scimitar with the Indian subcontinent can only be established if a nabob is imagined as a Muslim ruler. Further possibilities may arise from the fact that East India Company officials who returned from India after amassing great wealth were also called nabobs.

This new position and amassed wealth enabled returnees to gain powerful positions and even hold seats in the British Parliament. Walpole noted condescendingly in one of his letters that “West Indians, conquerors, nabobs, and admirals” had started participating in politics.¹⁶ Therefore, one could argue that Indian-born George Morton Pitt himself might have been called a nabob on account of the wealth he had accumulated in India. “Nabob” may thus be regarded as an ambiguous term, different from and yet comparable with the term “Creole” that emerged in the Caribbean context. Even though the personal relationship between Walpole and his neighbour

Pitt is unclear, one could argue that the colloquial use of the word nabob in Walpole’s inventory speaks of the anxiety in British society surrounding this new kind of Englishman who “had the ability to inhabit multiple and contradictory spaces. For example, though he was British, venturing to India made him Anglo-Indian. Returning home somehow meant he was invading Britain.”¹⁷ Since Walpole received the scimitar as a gift from Pitt’s widow, the possible route the artefact had taken before reaching Walpole’s collection is further obscured. It is this lack of clear-cut provenance that renders it ambiguous.

The ambiguity surrounding the scimitar is no exception. Further items from the inventory are also identified as *Indian*, among them “an Indian pouch made of beads and hair” (*Description* 33). While the nabob’s scimitar speaks of the building of the merchant Empire on the Subcontinent, and the subsequent flow of goods and people back to the metropolis, the beaded pouch points to the North American context. It can be linked to the colonisation of the Americas that involved the exploitation and dispersal of an Indigenous population significantly decreased on the American East Coast during Walpole’s lifetime. The pouch, along with other Native American artefacts, may thus be regarded as a trophy; in the implied hierarchy of the collection it appears subordinate to artefacts representing the Orient.

Conclusion

“Who would have thought that the Caliph Vathek would have dwindled down into an Emperor of China and King of Japan?”, wrote William Hazlitt in 1824.¹⁸ The aforementioned references to Sultans and Caliphs, China and Japan suggest that both Walpole and Beckford had become synonymous with their literary and architectural achievements on the threshold to the Victorian Age. William Beckford’s

rivalry with and appetite for Horace Walpole's collection had become a source of mockery, indicative of a period in which the Orientalist obsessions of collectors who built private empires of china and other precious items and thus symbolically appropriated the Orient, had themselves become a curiosity.

While Beckford's country houses Fonthill Abbey and Lansdown Tower have long collapsed, Walpole's Strawberry Hill is today a protected site that has been turned into a major tourist attraction. Strangely, Strawberry Hill House is now an empty space. The celebrated collections, catalogued by Walpole himself in two substantial editions of his *Description*, that attracted many visitors during Walpole's lifetime, the precious artefacts that caused excitement among his peers on hearing of Walpole's death were dispersed in a series of auctions. Today, some items remain in private collections while a substantial number ended up in museums, including the Victorian & Albert Museum and the Yale Center for British Art. In fact, an attempt at reconstructing and displaying Walpole's vast collection was initiated by Yale University's Lewis Walpole Library, a research library specialising in Walpole and Strawberry Hill, which disseminates knowledge to the public via an extensive website.¹⁹ A major exhibition was displayed at the Yale Center for British Art and the Victoria & Albert Museum in 2009 and 2010, respectively, and the substantial catalogue edited by Michael Snodin brings together diverse items from Strawberry Hill, seeking to illuminate "the complex relationships Walpole established among space, history, text and objects while also adding to our understanding of the traditions of collecting and display."²⁰

As has been indicated, Horace Walpole was not much concerned with established traditions; he played by his own rules, his creative projects enabled by inherited fortune. We have detected different facets of Orientalism in Walpole's collection,



(6) Goldfish Tub – China Tub, c. 1730, Chinese
Source: <https://libsvcs-1.its.yale.edu/strawberryhill/>

including the ambiguity of gender and sexuality that is entangled within. We have also indicated how Walpole created new narratives and lineages through the careful display of artefacts in his treasure trove of Strawberry Hill. The 'unique' things in Walpole's collection thus owe their singularity to the collector, and even their ambiguity is largely created in the eye of the beholder. When we seek to recontextualise selected items, seemingly obscure things lose their ambiguity. The overarching discourse of Orientalism that we have detected within the fantasy world of Walpole's Gothic estate is not merely aesthetic; it reflects historical, cultural, economic and political contexts. Walpole's collections speak of their owner's taste for ambiguity; they have been preserved in the two editions of his *Description of Mr Horace Walpole* as well as in contemporary illustrations, letters and catalogues. Through recent exhibitions and respective websites and publications,

his collection has been transported into the 21st century via literary and virtual spaces strangely akin to Walpole's Strawberry Hill.

Zusammenfassung

Der Beitrag stellt den Forschungskontext des Teilprojektes „Unveiling Orientalism: Ambiguität im britischen Reisediskurs des langen 18. Jahrhunderts“ vor. Wir untersuchen unterschiedliche Facetten von Ambiguität und Orientalismus am Beispiel von Horace Walpoles Landsitz Strawberry Hill. Während das weitläufige Haus und der Garten von der Vorliebe des britischen Schriftstellers für Schauerromantik und Orient geprägt sind, zeugen die vielfältigen ‚Kuriositäten‘ und ‚Unikate‘, die Walpole sammelte, kategorisierte, beschrieb und zur Schau stellte, von seinem Sinn für Ambiguität.

Annotations

- 1) Lewis (1980), 45–51, 46.
- 2) Melville (1910), 299.
- 3) Lilley (2013), 93–124, 95.
- 4) Lilley 94.
- 5) Snodin (2009), 75.
- 6) Plummer and Kazmi (2021).
- 7) Snodin (2009), 225.
- 8) Snodin (2009), 226.
- 9) Snodin (2009), 221.
- 10) Aleyrac-Fielding (2012), 8.
- 11) Snodin (2009), 32f.
- 12) Plummer (2009), 47ff.
- 13) Lim (n.d.).
- 14) Snodin (2009), 28.
- 15) Demmin (1894), 370.
- 16) Lawson and Phillips (1984), 225.
- 17) Smylitopoulos (2012), 13.
- 18) Melville (1910), 320.
- 19) <https://libsvcs-1.its.yale.edu/strawberryhill/>
- 20) Snodin (2009), ix–x.

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