

**ORIENTALISM:-
COUNTERPART OF THE GOTHIC
IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY ARTISTIC INSPIRATION**

To appreciate how Orientalism can be seen as a fitting counterpart to the Gothic in the nineteenth century, it is necessary to examine some of the features of 'Oriental' artworks. It will also prove relevant to consider what the Orient represented to the Romantic mind, and, above all, its inspirational value. Both Gothic and Oriental artworks can be said to owe something to the overwhelming desire of creative artists to retreat from reality, and to plunge themselves and their audiences into artificial 'atmospheres'. The stimulus of archaeological discoveries and attitudes to 'history' during the nineteenth century have an important bearing on this discussion. In the following introduction to the 'Oriental' genre and how it might be said to complement the Gothic genre, some familiarity with the imagery and attributes of the Gothic in literature and art is assumed. The reader may well recognise a good many names as being just as intimately linked with the 'Gothic' as the 'Oriental'.

From the outset it must be appreciated that the nineteenth-century European conception of the 'Orient' was inclusive of the Iberian Peninsula, North Africa and Eastern Europe, besides the Near, Middle and Far East. Nevertheless, as Rana Kabbani has noted in Europe's Myths of the Orient, the 'Romantic's Orient was largely a sublimated location, with no connection with the real East'. As with 'Gothic' subject matter, the primary function of 'Oriental' material was to provide artists with a gripping scenic backdrop for weird and mysterious imaginative adventures. Many of these adventures began in daydreams.

Around 1797 Coleridge was reading a passage from an evocative, antiquated travelogue entitled Purchas his Pilgrimage, or Relations of the World and the Religions observed in all Ages (1613) 'about the Khan Kubla and his palace'. This particular 'Oriental' passage proved to be of vital inspirational significance, for it was the last thing that Coleridge read before he fell into his famous opium-induced 'torpor'. The poet subsequently woke from one of the most vividly gorgeous and exhilarating of all his dream experiences, at once desperate to pen what was 'recoverable' of the verses which still rang in his mind. These verses, finally published in 1816, described the now well-known 'Xanadu' with its 'stately pleasure-dome ... Where Alph, the sacred river, ran / Through caverns measureless to man / Down to a sunless sea.'

Clearly, such visions were not exclusively of splendidly coloured 'pleasure-domes', for even in the first few lines of Coleridge's poem darker aspects emerge. The 'Orient' could be a rather forbidding place:

A savage place! as holy and enchanted
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon-lover!

In the miraculous Orient it seems that opposites could co-exist, and thus we find 'A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!' That which the 'Orient' represented to the Romantic Western European imagination could even be embodied in a temptress like Carmen - at once attractive and repellent - or as an archetypal Salome, or the plotting murderess, Semiramide, or again Thais, inspirer of carnal delights, or the equally voluptuous Delilah: beauty and wickedness inseparably personified, the artist's Muse who yet serves the necessary purpose of eliciting a whole gamut of conflicting emotions - 'fantasy's spouse', as Kabbani has it. Théophile Gautier, one of the most famous of the arch-Romantics, claimed in La Presse on 25th May, 1852: 'the Orient is dangerous, above all the barbaric Orient; it causes vertigo we can well understand'.

Despite, or more likely because of these qualities, the ability of the Orient to fascinate the artist remained strong. In the blacker frames of the creative temperament, a fearful terror might well be imparted to the idea of the East. In this respect one need only peruse Thomas De Quincey's Confessions of an

English Opium Eater (1822; enlarged 1856) in order to find descriptions of this sort of scene:

I was stared at, hooted at, grinned at, by monkeys, by paroquets, by cockatoos. I ran into pagodas and was fixed, for centuries, at the summit, or in secret rooms. ... The cursed crocodile became to me an object of more horror than almost all the rest.

Indeed, literary examples of 'Oriental' inspiration abound, from Samuel Taylor Coleridge to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and beyond.

It is another man of letters, Victor Hugo, who provides us with our first helpful clues regarding early nineteenth-century manifestations of the 'movement' which became known in France as 'L'Orientalisme'. Following the fashion set by Byron, the most famous poet of his day, Hugo settled upon the contemporary Greco-Turkish conflict as a subject for his most brilliant early poetical works. The Greek proclamation of revolt in 1821 initiated a period of intense interest in the Near East. When the Turks invaded Greece in 1822, an horrific reign of terror began, by the end of which many Europeans had been won over to the Greek cause. Byron himself joined the Greek insurgents in their fight for freedom after four centuries of oppressive Ottoman rule, and the publicity generated by his death at Missolonghi in 1824 did more than any other single event 'to secure the independence and liberty of a nation that will always recall his memory with the greatest gratitude'. Intellectuals like Byron interpreted the war as symbolic of the struggle between the antique 'Classical Orient' - on which Western Christian civilization was founded - and the supposedly barbaric, heathen 'Muslim Orient'. By the 1870's, Nietzsche was interpreting the whole 'history of Europe as a dialogue between the Hellenic and the Oriental spirits'.

At a time when there was much enthusiasm for the independence of Greece, Victor Hugo imagined 'an Orient streaming with colour, voluptuous and savage'. This exaggerated but glowing picture of the Near East Hugo conveyed in poems such as 'La Captive' and 'Les Djinns'. Hugo acted as a significant catalyst in the 'Orientalization' of Western art, since he alone among French poets seemed able 'to make of an Orientale a living scene'. His vivid poems on 'Oriental' subjects were an overwhelming success. Each line was crammed with evocative imagery, and served to fuel the imaginations of countless painters, sculptors, musicians - and

of course, other writers. Hugo was acclaimed as the 'father of the Golden Age' for his rediscovery of the 'Orient', leading creative artists 'into the great garden of poetry where there is no forbidden fruit'. Through his art, Hugo showed how to discover the 'Orient' was tantamount to plunging into the most fertile realms of the imagination.

In the more extreme cases, devotees of 'Oriental' wisdom before and after the turn of the century, such as Joris-Karl Huysmans and the infamous 'magician', Aleister Crowley, immersed themselves in the occult mysteries of Eastern religions. It was their belief that only through such knowledge was ultimate spiritual freedom and enlightenment to be achieved in this period, thought by many artists and thinkers to be the last days of civilization, the culmination of history - the prelude to the apocalypse. But in the end, such extreme attachments to the 'cult of the Orient' only served to torment the spirits of such individuals - and perhaps their souls as well - during those final fashionable years when Orientalism reached its 'decadent' heights.



It was an interest both in geography and in the earlier days of human history, stemming from a host of new archaeological discoveries, that led artists to make fanciful speculations as to the exact nature of life in decayed past civilizations. Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, R.A., the Victorian painter famed for the detail and colour of his Egyptian, Greek and Roman canvases, wished his pictures to convey the feeling that ancient people, 'despite their strange dress, were just such people as one might know'. With a similar aim in mind, the German Egyptologist, Georg Moritz Ebers, who insisted 'that the proper study of the archaeologist is life', also published historical novels. These novels he viewed as the fitting outcome of his studies. In 1864, Ebers wrote An Egyptian Princess in his desire to make the most of his researches, to bring the 'past' to life, to draw his audience in and to imbue this 'past' with some sense of immediacy, thereby clothing 'the dry bones of learning with romance'. Even Sigmund Freud would seem to have adhered to Ebers' belief that the archaeologist must 'study life', for it was Freud's clearly stated intention to be, like his archaeologist hero, Heinrich Schliemann (who began to dig up the remains of Troy in 1870, through many layers of the Eastern past), an 'excavator' of the mind. Freud likened himself to Moses, leading his people out of those neuroses induced by

their 'Egyptian' bondage (whereby they were forced to live in a manner at variance with their basic natures) and into the Promised Land of freedom. Freud also thought of his associate, C. G. Jung, as a 'Joshua', since Freud hoped Jung would be his successor in the fledgling 'science' of psychoanalysis. Thus, while Ebers and Schliemann carried out excavations which stimulated much excitement in the 'external' world, Freud and Jung dug deep into the 'internal' world, uncovering memories which were, likewise, years, even ages old - and so provoking a more controversial interest.

The British author and politician, Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1st Baron Lytton) undertook as demanding a research task as did Ebers with the composition and publication of The Last Days of Pompeii. 'perhaps the most successful attempt by any novelist at using newly discovered archaeological evidence as material for a story'. While focussing on life in Pompeii, the choice of such a bustling centre of activity in the ancient world nevertheless allowed Lytton to introduce people from 'the remotest climes' - 'Oriental' regions such as Syria and Egypt - and make mention of their curious religions, especially worship connected with the Egyptian cult of Isis. (The Temple of Isis was one of the most important buildings in ancient Pompeii.) The choice of cosmopolitan city centres as focal points of action became a useful device in such historical novels, for they allowed for further heightening of the 'exotic' coloration. In his Preface to the First Edition (1834) of The Last Days of Pompeii, Lord Lytton stated that he had 'laboured, however unworthily, in the art to revive and to create', being possessed by 'a keen desire to people once more those deserted streets, to repair those graceful ruins', and 'to reanimate the bones' of Pompeii's long-dead inhabitants. Lytton emphasized that his century, the nineteenth century, was one in which the responsibility of 'the Poet (the creator)' was to raise 'scholarship to the creative', rather than 'bow the creative to the scholastic'.

In the view of Friedrich Nietzsche, the prodigious German thinker who also held that the value of any philosophical system lay in its practical application, the interpretation of history became 'a creative art'. One had to try to 'experience' the past. Thus, those artists motivated by a desire to 're-create' the past, took 'archaeology' one step further into the realms of individual experience and tried, by all possible means, to 're-imagine' and 're-experience'

this past as far as possible. This might entail dressing-up in 'authentic' historical costume, decorating in the 'antique' style, visiting those lands around which one's art was centred, even practising 'authentic' ancient customs (!)

In the final two paragraphs of Mircea Eliade's Myth and Reality, the author concludes that the romanticization of 'history' is a remnant of humankind's tendency to 'mythological behaviour' - and Eliade finds that literature holds the greatest responsibility for this phenomenon. Certainly many nineteenth-century painters and composers (besides writers themselves) took as a starting point for their own works tales of the Orient and of the Middle Ages. It is as well to bear in mind that 'Medievalism' was, for example, the driving force behind Gothic literature, the Pre-Raphaelite school of painting, the Gothic revival in architecture, the music-dramas of Wagner, and as such was the main 'rival' to 'Oriental' inspiration. Romain Rolland remarked that for him, Wagner's music 'held the wild poetry of the Middle Ages and old legends', while Joris-Karl Huysmans (1848-1907) went much further in his emotional response to the composer and claimed Wagner to be 'the archpriest of satanism'. Victor Hugo related in his Preface to Les Orientales how, in the Orient, 'all is vast, rich, fertile, as in the Middle Ages, that other sea of poetry'. In Germany, Wilhelm Wackenroder (1773-98) is recognized for his part in promoting the Gothic world which provided the Romantics with that style of medieval fiction they desired so much. In such an atmosphere, even Beethoven had wished to compose an opera in 1812 on 'a big historical subject, especially from the Dark Ages, for example about Attila'. For sheer monumentality, Havergal Brian's colossal 'Gothic' Symphony of 1919-27 might have been designed as the equivalent of a cathedral in stone - certainly it was inspired by Medieval architecture, and is probably the largest symphony ever composed. Both the fantastical worlds of the 'Middle Ages' ('temporally-initiated' inspiration) and of the 'Orient' ('geographically-initiated' inspiration) evoked similar types of images in the nineteenth-century mind, providing much scope for idealized settings which were 'picturesque' and potentially adventuresome.

Later in life, Théophile Gautier blamed 'the ugliness of civilization' for 'the fact that artists abandon modern times to the craftsmen and stubbornly seek

their ideal in the past'. He thought it impossible for the artist ever to record this ugly 'modern' era. Gustave Flaubert even claimed that Gautier, the linchpin of French Romanticism, 'died of disgust with modern life'. He did not see how one could extract from such times any kind of beauty, or follow the method of idealization when applied to the present. Like Gautier, Charles Lamb saw mystery lurking only in 'retroversion', and never in the 'flat, jejune, modern'. Lamb believed it was natural for people to 'idolize' the past, even to indulge in 'blind veneration' of it: 'the past is every thing,' he declared of a paradox, 'being nothing!' Lamb lived in an age of multifarious complexity, and this complexity came to be expressed artistically in genres best suited to capturing the many anomalies and incoherent contradictions of the times.

Tennyson spoke of the 'glorious gains' of a civilization which was at the same time too often 'claustrophobic'; Gautier despised the 'ugliness' of his era, but in almost the same breath praised the opportunities it afforded for the fashioning of artistic creations of outstanding beauty. It may be best to rationalize these contradictions by designating it both the best of times and the worst of times, a time of extremes, a time of exploration to all points of the compass, from West to East, dark to light. 'Is it not because the modern imagination does not fear to picture the ghastly forms of vampires, ogres, ghouls, snake-charmers and jinns prowling about the graveyards,' Victor Hugo asked in his 1827 manifesto which laid down the main principles of Romanticism, 'that it can give to its fairies that incorporeal shape, that purity of essence, of which the heathen nymphs fall so far short?' According to Hugo, the 'mystery of modern art' lies in the juxtaposition of Beauty and the Beast, the qualities of the one brought out by virtue of the contrast to the other, so that Romantic art becomes 'full of profundity and full of relief, philosophical and picturesque'.



Anything that did not promote an imaginative preoccupation with lush, fictional imagery was banished from the mind, or the immediate vicinity of the artist. William Beckford (1759-1844), M.P., writer and collector, claimed to have discovered on one of his Continental wanderings a real-life 'paradise' near Cintra in Portugal (which Byron celebrates in Childe Harold) - the perfect 'Moorish' paradise designed to suit the imagination of the day. Beckford was an

extremely wealthy man. and on his return to England from this his 'East' in 1796. he spent enormous sums creating and decorating Fonthill Abbey, a 'Gothic extravaganza' in which he lived for some years. Like Walpole and Sir Walter Scott, Beckford believed that an artist worked best in an atmosphere created by rich, ornate interiors, preferably those suggestive of another place and time.

The creation of some of the most extraordinary artificial environments denying external 'reality' came to fruition in the nineteenth century thanks to Richard Wagner's eccentric and indulgent patron, Ludwig II. who ascended the throne in 1864. King Ludwig erected in the Bavarian Alps perhaps the most inspiring fairytale castle ever built, the Royal Castle Neuschwanstein. This was begun in 1869, with the intention that every room should portray a scene from one of Wagner's operas, thus enveloping 'art within art'. Among many other such extravagant projects, one is especially worthy of note. In 1867, King Ludwig ordered a second winter garden to be attached to his Residenz in Munich - this one to be constructed on a roof which could barely support it. The whole scene was supposed to represent 'a magic valley in Kashmir':

On the lake floated a Swan Knight in a gilded boat, and there were bridges, a grotto, a murmuring waterfall, winding paths, a well, and the peaks of the Himalayas painted on the west wall in perfect perspective. The garden was planted with giant palms and lush tropical vegetation. Across the 'valley' drifted music, played by invisible musicians hidden in a shrubbery.

An even more enchanting description of the Oriental splendours of this garden was provided by the Spanish Infanta, whom King Ludwig had invited to dine with him in 1882. She later wrote:

We went on a simple wooden bridge over a floodlit lake and saw between chestnut trees an Indian city in front of us ... We came to a blue silk tent covered with roses. In it was a chair supported by two carved elephants, and in front of it lay a lionskin ... The dinner had been laid out in an attached round pavilion behind a Moorish arch. The king showed me to the place of honour and gently rang a bell. Out of the hidden recess there immediately appeared a lackey, bowing deeply. This man was to be seen only when serving and removing the food, and when the king summoned him. From my seat I saw beyond the arch splendid plants lit by different-coloured lights while invisible choirs sang softly. Suddenly a rainbow appeared. 'My God,' I exclaimed involuntarily, 'This is indeed a dream ...'

Many nineteenth-century artists were at one time or other during their lives preoccupied with the (then) loosely-defined categories of 'Orientalism' or 'Medievalism', and sometimes employed confused mixtures of the two. Indeed, 'Chinese-Gothic' architecture had been all the rage about the middle of the eighteenth century. Artists chose to decorate their chambers with highly unusual articles selected for their evocative qualities. In the same way, all sorts of people with the gift of imagination filled the interiors of their minds with exotic images, which in William Beckford's case entailed immersion in travel books about China, Japan, and other Oriental regions. Claude Debussy, that most famous, but ultimately elusive of French musicians, whose art came to be influenced by both the Gothic world of Poe and his own particularly vivid impressions of the 'Orient', believed that one could 'never spend too much time constructing that special atmosphere in which a work of art should move'.

David Roberts, R.A. (1796-1864), a painter of Middle-Eastern landscapes (who anticipated Edward Lear by his journeys to Spain and Morocco in 1832-3 and to Egypt and Palestine in 1838-9), developed a taste for furniture in the Jacobean and Renaissance styles. This taste evolved about the beginning of Queen Victoria's reign (1837-1901), that fabulous era unprecedented for its stylistic pluralism, as artists and craftsmen sought to outdo each other by drawing inspiration from the strangest and least well-known of all available historical and geographical sources. But among the profusion of his curios, bric-à-brac, antiques, pseudo-antiques and hangings, Roberts kept many items which he had acquired during his travels to the East. These added the requisite 'exotic touch' to his working environment. Within the informal clutter of the nineteenth-century studio - the spiritual centre of the artist's house which was so 'often at the forefront of fashionable taste' - one might find a variety of items of exotic interest 'casually' strewn around the room, just waiting to be 'happened upon': each with its own story, or capable of producing a story. The Journal of Decorative Art for 1889 was to describe

the studio of the travelled artist, who brings his heart and soul to his work, and surrounds himself with beautiful things, who feels that his studio is the place in which he lives the best part of his life, and who makes it his home, worthy of his labours and his hopes ...
[a] fitting scene for the development of his highest creations.

When the French Symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé was permitted to see the exotic interior décor of a Parisian house belonging to the eccentric aristocrat, Robert, Comte de Montesquiou-Ferenzac, he was overjoyed to find himself in what seemed to be an 'Ali-Baba's Cave'.

Musicians were, by temperament, no less susceptible than artists and men of letters to the desire to furnish their lodgings and working environments in styles suggestive of the more 'exotic' regions of the earth. When, after the Great War, Maurice Ravel took 'a house of his own, which he was able to furnish after his own heart', he escorted the writer and critic M. D. Calvocoressi on a tour of this new home. Calvocoressi later recalled how, when he showed his guest one room, Ravel would gleefully exclaim 'Look: here, nothing but fake Greek ... And here, nothing but fake Chinese!' Elsewhere in the house could be found a profusion of Japanese prints and mechanical birds. Ravel became noted for 'that curious trait of his of seeking out fake curios and antiques'. The composer soon came to embrace 'artificiality' completely, preferring imitations to the original objects from which such items were copied. His prizing of 'reproductions above the genuine thing' might be seen as the extreme outcome, the reductio ad absurdum of the nineteenth-century obsession with historical reconstruction. Furthermore, it would seem to be indicative of that final stage of nineteenth-century artistic awakening, wherein the 'Aesthetes' acknowledged that anything that had once belonged to the 'real' world must, ultimately, prove imaginatively unsatisfying, and eventually engender that morbid condition of ennui which artists of the period often mention in their writings. Thus A. J. Krailsheimer can speak of 'Flaubert's lifelong obsession with ennui, cosmic tedium' which 'lies heavy' in his bizarre, bloodthirsty Oriental epic narrative, Salammbô. The artists who suffered most acutely from this sense of ennui were precisely those who most felt the need to free their imaginations from all earthly constraints and associations. Perhaps that is why the aesthetic ideals of the nineteenth century can often seem so absurd when viewed in the rather cool, clear, yet deadening and matter-of-fact world of today. Huysmans' decadent hero, Des Esseintes, considered artifice 'to be the distinctive mark of human genius', nature having 'had her day' by the late nineteenth century, such that there was no longer anything which could not be 'counterfeited' in the modern age.

Ironically, a supporter of the 'Middle Ages' might well have directed a similar tirade against the 'Orientalists'. The now-forgotten French composer, Benjamin Louis Paul Godard (1849-95), managed to keep a foot in both camps by writing a 'Gothic' Symphony (first performed in Mainz in 1883) and an 'Oriental' Symphony (performed the next year in Berlin). Alexander Glazounov (1865-1936) followed suit with his Idylle et Rêverie Orientale (1886-7), Oriental Rhapsody (1889), Oriental Suite (1895), and then a suite for orchestra entitled, From the Middle Ages (1902).



Although William Beckford wrote 'Gothic' novels in his 'Gothic' abode, he is best remembered for his authorship of the early Oriental work, Vathek (Paris 1782; translated into English in 1786), 'an Arabian Tale', inspired by the Thousand and One Nights. In this novel, one finds united the atmosphere of a 'Gothic' horror story with the resplendent décor but disquieting images of the East - a precursor of Edgar Allan Poe's Tales of the Grotesque and the Arabesque (1839). (Poe, in his turn, had considerable influence on Claude Debussy and the Symbolist poets, and published early in his career the volume, El Aaraaf, Tamerlane and Minor Poems [1829], and later on, the short story, The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scheherazade. Recognizing his importance, Constant Lambert went so far as to refer to Poe as 'the patron saint of French decadence'.) But no matter how forbidding the imagery, Kabbani explains that poverty and all other types of social realism were 'conspicuously absent from this particular mythic Orient'. Indeed, sometimes even native inhabitants were removed when the intention was to present the 'Orient' in its 'original', idyllic, fruitful, Eden-like condition. In a letter addressed to his sister, Mrs. Hervey, Beckford speaks of the 'Orient' as if it were a single 'country' occupying a huge tract of land:

Don't fancy, my Dear Sister, I am enraptured with the orientals themselves. It is the country they inhabit which claims all the admiration I bestow on that quarter of the Globe. It is their woods of spice trees, their strange animals, their vast rivers which I delight in.

In their quest to find an appropriate mould into which to pour the creations of their fevered imaginations, Romantic artists readily embraced such alien and foreign, yet strangely enticing and 'picturesque' environments.

Orientalism might be said to be the 'obverse' of the Gothic in nineteenth-century artistic inspiration, and a natural complement to it. Many artists, from Beckford onwards, tried their hand at both genres. Several, including Poe, Hugo and Southey, succeeded in integrating Oriental and Gothic characteristics into their literary works. Indeed, the return of the long narrative poem to the English language after an absence of nearly half a century was heralded by a remarkable work, Thalaba the Destroyer (1801), by Robert Southey (1774-1843), in which the poet united a highly personal and extremely bizarre view of the East with horrifying supernatural forces. In his next and more popular 'Oriental' epic, The Curse of Kehama (1810), Southey wrote of the drowned city of Baly where lurk a dragon-like guardian beast, shoals of fish swimming around empty halls, and mummified kings in their undersea catacombs.

'Les Djinns', a poem from Hugo's influential early collection of verse, Les Orientales (1829), takes for its subject matter those djinns (sometimes referred to as jinnees or genii) - the evils spirits of Arab mythology - who frequently introduce the magical element into Oriental tales (as in Vathek, for instance). Among the many creative artists inspired by Hugo's supernatural word-painting were the composers Ernest Reyer and César Franck. Reyer included a wild, howling scene depicting the exorcism of djinns in Le Sélam (1850), while Franck wrote an even more striking symphonic poem which took its title directly from Hugo's poem. Hugo was well aware of the part that djinns played in Muslim theology: 'crafty-spirited beings, who refused to worship man as Allah had ordered, and with their chief, Eblis, were cursed, but some of whom will be saved because they believed in Mahomet'. As a corollary of such religious beliefs, it often occurs in Arabian tales that an act of disobedience is the reason behind the imprisonment of a djinn or genie in some talisman. Nevertheless, Hugo's djinns have more in common with the sprites and goblins of Nordic and Anglo-French folklore than the djinns of the Koran or the Thousand and One Nights. Hugo's poem is, in fact, a work of almost pure imagination, mixing elements of both Eastern and Western mythology, the Oriental and the Gothic. Thus Hugo felt no scruple at the inconsistency of introducing a Witches' Sabbath into his 'Oriental' poem in order to heighten the atmosphere of supernatural horror. In Franck's Les Djinns (1884), the composer set himself the extraordinary task of depicting in musical terms

the approach, presence, and disappearance of the horrible swarm of Djinns, the hideous army of vampires and dragons, driven by the north

wind, that fill the air with infernal cries, howls, and groans, and pass whirling, and whistling, shivering the yew-trees, and all but overthrowing the strongest dwellings.

Certain fundamental characteristics were shared by those two nebulous worlds of 'otherness': the Gothic and the Oriental. Both were largely concerned with inducing notions of weirdness, danger, fear, barbarity, cruelty and bloodlust. Gothic and Oriental tales were often impossible to grasp from a rational point of view, and frequently involved digging into the mental and/or physical past, and uprooting the 'ghosts' that lurked there. A common occurrence in 'Oriental' horror stories is the appearance of djinns and mummies, the latter having derived from the Western enthusiasm for Egyptian relics. And like the Gothic, such supernatural devices could at times be treated in a manner more light-hearted than ghoulish, as in Gautier's delightful The Mummy's Romance of 1857 (see Plate 1).

Above all, however, the special forte of the Romantics - whether Orientalists, Gothicists or both, was their ability to create the most unusual atmospheres ever yet imagined. In this eclectic age of unprecedented imaginative escapism, the stranger the 'aesthetic' atmosphere that could be invented, the better the effect was held to be. As artists vied with each other in fashioning works of unutterable weirdness and horror, an increasing stock of remarkable creations was produced. A fine selection of the sinister ingredients which parallel, yet always remain distinct from those of the Gothic genre, can be found in Flaubert's Salammbô of 1862 - the quintessential, albeit a unique example of the bizarre 'Oriental' tale.

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Plate 1. Félix Bonfils, photograph of mummies removed from Thebes (after 1867).

When faced with such grisly scenes as these, it is easy to understand why 'Orientals' were said to live amid the ruins of the past. While Alexander Kinglake spoke in *Eöthen, or Traces of Travel brought Home from the East* (1844) of 'a mere oriental, who, for creative purposes, is a thing dead and dry--a mental mummy', Westerners saw themselves, by contrast, as using what remained of the once glorious East as the raw material for an extraordinary new kind of creative endeavour. Countless mummies and other artefacts were peddled to curious Westerners throughout the nineteenth century, some to become the starting point for memorable imaginative exploits, as in the case of another of Gautier's fabulous stories, *The Mummy's Foot* (1840).

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