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Brighton Pavilion

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Brighton Pavilion

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Contents

1 The Royal Pavilion

In this unit we shall be studying a quintessentially Romantic piece of architecture, the Royal Pavilion at Brighton, designed and redesigned over the course of some 30 years to the specifications of the Prince of Wales, afterwards Prince Regent and eventually King George IV (1762–1830; reigned 1820–30).

The Pavilion as we now know it in its final state was the result of a collaboration between the architect Sir John Nash (1752–1835), the firm of Crace (specialists in interior decoration) and their patron the Prince Regent. It makes a suggestive companion piece to the house of Sir John Soane.

Although both buildings are markedly personal in cast, Soane's house can be regarded as a Romantic ‘take’ on Enlightenment classicism, while the Pavilion could be called a Regency ‘take’ on the Romantic (what I mean by this distinction will become clearer as we progress). Whereas Soane's house celebrates the architect as sole creator, the Pavilion is much more typically the product of a collaboration between architect and client.

While Soane was and is the architect's architect, an intellectual and an academic, distinguished, original and serious, Nash was the darling of fashionable aristocratic society, careless, humorous and audacious in style, and was and is identified with the commercial and the opportunistic. Where Soane is essentially a purist, refining and romanticizing Neoclassicism, Nash is associated with eclecticism, which by contrast privileges asymmetry and recklessly mixes forms, motifs and details from different historical periods and styles.

The Pavilion itself has been called silly, charming, witty, light-hearted, extravagant, gloriously eccentric, decadent, childish, painfully vulgar, socially irresponsible, a piece of outrageous folly and a stylistic phantasmagoria. Whatever you decide about it, it has always been, beyond all dispute, an astonishing flight of the Romantic fancy, comparable in its impulse to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's famous poem ‘Kubla Khan’ (drafted 1798, published 1816, available to read in its entirety beneath the extract below. The poem begins:

> In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
>
> A stately pleasure-dome decree:
>
> Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
>
> Through caverns measureless to man
>
> Down to a sunless sea.

Click on 'View document' to see Coleridge's poem 'Kubla Kahn' in its entirety.

File attachments are not available in this format.

Coleridge's poem did not in itself influence the building of the Pavilion, but both ‘Kubla Khan’ and the Pavilion do recognizably grow out of a common stock of Romantic ideas and feelings about the Orient. Here we shall be trying to come to some understanding of how, why and to what effect the prince's ‘pleasure-dome’ translated some of the modes and ideas of Romanticism into the language of architecture.

As we do so, we'll be thinking about the Pavilion as what we might call a ‘cultural formation’. By this I mean that considering the apparent eccentricity of this building can give us an insight into many aspects of Regency culture, and, conversely, that an

enhanced knowledge of Regency culture can help us to decode the meanings of the building for its own time.

The Pavilion can be seen as the physical realization of the coming together of many aspects of Regency society: systems of patronage of the arts; ideas of health, leisure and pleasure; notions of technological progress, which drove the Industrial Revolution and were in turn reinforced by it; concepts of public and private and the proper relations between them; ideas of royal authority in the post-Napoleonic era of restoration of hereditary monarchies across Europe; the fashion for Oriental scholarship and the 'Oriental tale'; and powerfully interconnected ideas of trade, empire and the East. By the end of the unit, therefore, you will, I hope, have developed a sense of some of the (sometimes contradictory) values dramatized by Romantic exoticism.

Before we can talk about the meanings of the Pavilion in its own time, however, you will need to familiarize yourself with the building. On the video clips (below), *The Royal Pavilion, Brighton*, you will find a virtual tour of the Pavilion, inside and out. The video is structured as though you were a visitor to the Pavilion in the early 1820s. You will trace the route through the rooms that you would have followed if you were arriving as a guest at one of the prince's famous evening receptions, consisting of dinner followed by music. You will hear on the sound-track the music that the prince loved, together with some of the comments of his guests, and extracts from contemporary descriptions of the Pavilion's interior from a newspaper and a guidebook.

Exercise 1

Read the accompanying AV Notes (below) and then watch all three video clips carefully once through. Concentrate principally on the look of the exterior and of the interiors. Then I suggest you watch the videos again, following your route on the modern ground-floor plan provided below (Figure 1), and looking carefully at the contemporary watercolours of exteriors and interiors provided below (Plates 1–11).

Once you have done this, compile a list of adjectives that occur to you to describe your experience of the building, both exterior and interior. You might also like to add to your list some phrases describing those effects in which this building is conspicuously *not* interested.

Click on 'View document' to see plates 1-11, watercolours depicting the interior and exterior of the pavilion.

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Click on 'View document' to read the AV notes for the video below.

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Click below to view clip 1 of the video.

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Transcript

Click below to view clip 2 of the video.

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Click below to view clip 3 of the video.

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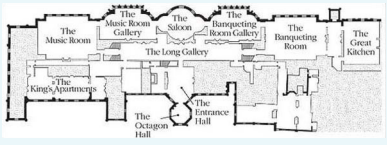

Figure 1 Modern ground-floor plan of the Royal Pavilion, Brighton. Adapted from Jessica M.F. Rutherford, The Royal Pavilion, 1995, courtesy of the Royal Pavilion, Libraries and Museums, Brighton and Hove.

Discussion

I don't expect that our lists will match exactly – but we might agree roughly on some of the effects that the building produces on us. What I've noted down is that the exterior strikes me as definitely 'Indian' – in fact, vaguely reminiscent of the Taj Mahal. The Entrance Hall, the Long Gallery and the Saloon are clearly 'Chinese', and so are the Banqueting Room and Music Room, although they are Chinese (with a dash of 'Indian'?) in a rather different and much more grandiose mode. (Don't worry if you found it hard to put your finger on the exact difference in style; we'll be unpicking these Indian and Chinese effects in more detail a little later.)

After that, I have a list of descriptive terms that runs something like this: conspicuously expensive; sumptuously detailed to the suffocating edge of over-kill; self-advertising; highly personal, fantastic and esoterically refined; spectacular, theatrical and faintly reminiscent of some of the pleasures of Disneyland's evocations of foreign parts; sensual to the point of overwhelming the senses; and, related to this, disorientating (all those mirrors and all that ***trompe l'oeil);*** an escapist pocket palace.

As for what this building is *not* trying to do or be – it is spectacularly not invested in neoclassical politeness, nor in antiquities or other sorts of collectables. The Pavilion is profoundly uninterested in the past, the nation or conventional domesticity, in respectability, or in social responsibility, or in work of any sort. Related to this last point, it is conspicuously not the centrepiece of landed wealth – it is not standing in a place of eminence, embedded within its own estate and associated farms which would be visibly providing the income for the upkeep of the house. Carrying this thought a little further suggests forcibly that the wealth this palace is designed to display is a wealth of ***taste*** and *imagination*. Above all, this building is *surprising*.

Actually, I'd go further than this – I think this building is astonishing, and its sheer improbability generates in me a curiosity about the circumstances that could conceivably have made it possible.

Exercise 2

Now I want you to try to formulate a set of questions that the Pavilion might prompt about the culture that produced it. To this set of questions, I should like you to add a list of the sorts of information you would need to collect about that culture so as to be able to answer them. (If you are feeling especially imaginative and adventurous, you might like to write yet another list of suggestions as to where you might start looking for this sort of information.)

Discussion

My list of initial questions looks like this (again, it won't match yours exactly or perhaps even at all, and you shouldn't worry about that):

1. Why was the Prince of Wales building a palace in Brighton at all?
2. For what was the Pavilion intended and used, and for how long?
3. When and why did he choose this style of exotic architecture and interior decor?
4. Why is the Pavilion 'Chinese' on the inside but 'Indian' on the outside?
5. What did everyone think about it at the time?

My second list, of information I would need to collect so as to begin to answer these questions, runs as follows:

1. Find out about the Prince of Wales – e.g. his other residences, his relations with his father's court in London, where his money was coming from, and where he got the idea for the Pavilion (try biographies, books on court history).
2. Find out about Brighton and why it had become fashionable at this juncture – at a guess, it must have been fashionable for the prince to have ended up there (start with histories of Brighton, and eighteenth- century, early nineteenth-century and modern guidebooks to the city).
3. Find out something about the history of the building of the Pavilion (again, try guidebooks old and new and see what leads come up; also see whether rival architects published sketches and ground-plans to support their bids for the work).
4. Find out whether there were any earlier or other contemporary buildings that were ‘exotic’ in this style. Perhaps there were architects/interior designers who specialized in this sort of work? Possibly as part of a long tradition in such designs? Or was this style a fashion that was echoed across the period in, say, literature and painting? (Try books about architecture, or studies of the Romantic exotic more generally.)

Find out who were the prince's visitors to the Pavilion, and see if they wrote letters or diaries describing their visits. The same might apply for prominent writers who were visitors to Brighton. Check, too, for political caricatures of the prince that might comment on his building of the Pavilion.

What I've just done, as you can see, is to write out a rough programme for research. In fact I followed this programme in order to write what follows, and I hope you will enjoy following me step by step through what I discovered – and deciding whether you agree with my judgements.

This unit is an adapted extract from the Open University course *From Enlightenment to Romanticism c.1780-1830* (A207).

2 A prince at the seaside

In this section we will take a closer look at the life of George IV and what brought him to Brighton.

The Prince of Wales (see Figure 2), known familiarly to his friends as ‘Prinny’, was born in 1762 and destined to become Prince Regent in 1811 following the onset of the madness of his father, George III. He finally became George IV in 1820, but reigned as such for only a decade, dying in 1830 at the age of 68. He is remembered as a great connoisseur and collector of art (setting a precedent for subsequent Princes of Wales to take an interest in architecture), most especially through his patronage of John Nash, who at his behest redesigned Buckingham Palace and created the elegant London developments still known as Regent Street and Regent's Park. Handsome, intelligent and accomplished, the prince was also highly emotional, duplicitous, painfully susceptible to flattery, wildly extravagant, greedy for excitement and personally theatrical. The Princess Lieven, wife of Tsar Alexander I's ambassador and a notable judge of character, described him as he was in the 1820s, as having ‘some wit, and great penetration’:

> he quickly summed up persons and things; he was educated and had much tact, easy, animated and varied conversation, not at all pedantic. He adorned the subjects he touched, he knew how to listen, he was very polished … also affectionate, sympathetic, and galant. But he was full of vanity, and could be flattered at will. Weary of all the joys of life, having only taste, not one true sentiment, he was hardly susceptible to attachment, and never I believe sincerely inspired anybody with it.
>
> (Temperley, 1930, p.119)

In early life the prince was also breathtakingly indiscreet, both in his youthful politics (he was a hard-core oppositional Whig rather than favouring the establishment party, the Tories, supported by his father) and in his youthful love affairs (which were many and various, culminating in the scandal of his private, unacknowledged, unconstitutional and therefore unlawful marriage to the Roman Catholic widow, Mrs Fitzherbert). As a result, and as so many heirs to the throne have done, during his twenties and thirties the prince enjoyed a strained relation with his father's court, which he found staid and stifling. His form of rebellion was to combine spendthrift dissoluteness (hence the anonymous print of 1787 depicting the prince as the Prodigal Son; see Figure 3) with the life of an aesthete, which found expression in the court he held at Carlton House. His set of associates included dandies such as Beau Brummell (who affected beautiful, consciously urban clothes and a pose of bored languor as he strolled up and down the Mall), sporting rakes like the Duke of Queensberry, and high-class courtesans such as Harriette Wilson. These were blended with society literati such as the playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan, the millionaire connoisseur William Beckford (author of the torrid Oriental fiction *Vathek: An Arabian Tale* (1786), who purchased the famous statue of Napoleon pulled down from the Vendome Column, and the best-selling poet Thomas Moore, shot to fame by the success of his long Oriental romance poem *Lalla Rookh* (1817).

Figure 2 Sir Thomas Lawrence, George IV as Prince Regent, c.1814, oil on canvas, 91.4 x 71.1 cm, National Portrait Gallery, London. Photo: courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London.

Figure 3 Anonymous (probably Henry Kingsbury), The Prodigal Son, 1787, drawing. Photo: courtesy of the Royal Pavilion, Libraries and Museums, Brighton and Hove. The Prodigal Son features in a parable related in the Bible as a delinquent son welcomed back by his father when he repents of his ways.

Carlton House, sumptuously decorated in the height of fashionable Francophile taste in line with the prince's Whig sympathies by the important architect Henry Holland (1745–1806), was the setting for a series of the extravagant parties which the prince so loved to give, culminating in the famous Carlton House fete in 1811 on his appointment as Regent. The dazzled Thomas Moore wrote to his mother about this fete, detailing the delights of the indoor fountain and the artificial brook that ran down the centre of the table, and concluding, ‘Nothing was ever half so magnificent. It was in *reality* all that they try to imitate in the gorgeous scenery of the theatre’ (quoted in Hibbert, 1973, p.371). Byron's friend and fellow radical poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, by contrast, was predictably outraged by the cost (see Hibbert, 1973, p.374). In the event Carlton House, with its rival court, did not prove far enough removed from his father to suit the young heir. Instead he would lure

his raffish and brilliant society, with its love of extravagance and theatricality, out of the capital and down to the margins of the nation, to a place then called Brighthelmstone, some eight hours away by stage-coach (although in 1784 the prince achieved the journey in four and a half hours for a bet).

The Prince of Wales first visited Brighton (short for Brighthelmstone) in 1783, aged 21, staying with his uncle at Grove House on the Steine (or Steyne), a broad street that led from the seafront into the heart of town (see Figure 4). He was prompted partly by his ever-lively desire to escape the disapproving eyes of his father's court, and partly by the recommendation of his physicians, who suggested that sea water might ease the glandular swellings in his neck. This sea-water cure had been the original cause of the rise in the popularity of Brighton as a watering place, which had started around 1765, courtesy of a Dr Richard Russell of Lewes who had publicized the health-giving properties of bathing in, and drinking, sea water in his *A Dissertation: Concerning the Use of Sea Water in Diseases of the Glands, etc* . (1752). Sea water taken one way or another, according to Russell, would cure almost any disease, including ‘fluxions of redundant humours’, rheumatism, madness, consumption, impotence, rabies and childish ailments. Among the early visitors was Dr Johnson, but it was soon to become a resort for the fashionable as well. As one wag was to put it, high society ‘Rush'd coastward to be cur'd like tongues/By dipping into brine’ (unattributed, quoted in Roberts, 1939, p.3), or turned out to spy through telescopes on ‘mad Naiads in flannel smocks’ as they emerged briefly from their bathing machines (Pasquin, 1796, p.5).

Figure 4 Map of Brighthelmstone, frontispiece from H.R. Attree, Topography of Brighton: and, Picture of the Roads, from *Thence to the Metropolis*, London, 1809. Photo: Bodleian Library, University of Oxford (G.A. Sussex 8 22).

Click below to view a larger version of the Map of Brighthelmstone.

File attachments are not available in this format.

These health treatments, generally undertaken after the rigours of the London season which ran from March until June, were much sweetened by the other pleasures that Brighton had on offer besides the beauties of nature. They included a racecourse, hunting, circulating libraries, promenading and ogling along the Parade, donkey-rides on the beach, balls and assemblies at the Old Ship and the Castle Inn, and the theatre, where you might have seen the celebrated actresses Mrs Siddons and Mrs Jordan. (The new Theatre Royal at Brighton was soon able to attract such London celebrity performers not just during the summer, when the London theatres were closed, but over the Christmas season too.) This landscape came complete with figures – rakes, parvenus, the frail lovelies of the so-called ‘Cyprian corps’ (a Regency euphemism for prostitutes, derived ultimately from the classical myth that Venus was born naked from the waves at Cyprus) and officers from the nearby military camp. The army came under the prince's personal command in his capacity as commander-in-chief, and many officers were his intimates; the arrival of the military therefore sealed the glamorous image of the resort. As Jane Austen was to write in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813):

> In Lydia's imagination a visit to Brighton comprized every possibility of earthly happiness. She saw with the creative eye of fancy, the streets of that gay bathing-place covered with officers. She saw herself the object of attention to tens and scores of them at present unknown … she saw herself seated beneath a tent, tenderly flirting with at least six officers at once.
>
> (Austen, 1967, p.232)

This invasion of London raffishness prompted the occasional fierce satire. Anthony Pasquin's poetic *The New Brighton Guide* (1796) describes Brighton in a note as

> one of those numerous watering-places which beskirt this polluted island, and operate as apologies for idleness, sensuality, and nearly all the ramifications of social imposture … where the voluptuary [seeks] to wash the cobwebs from the interstices of his flaccid anatomy.
>
> (Pasquin, 1796, p.5)

The painter Constable sourly described Brighton as ‘Piccadilly or worse by the sea’ and ‘the receptacle of the fashion and off-scouring of London’ (quoted in Leslie, 1951, p.123). But the prevailing view of Brighton was that, unlike more established resorts, it offered a picturesque, even a virtuously Rousseauesque, rustic informality, allowing visitors to escape the constrictions and excesses of life in town to partake of ‘pure air, rational amusement, and sea-bathing’ (Fisher, 1800, p.viii). As Mary Lloyd put it in her *Brighton: A Poem*,

> it was a pleasing gay Retreat,
>
> Beauty, and fashion's ever favourite seat:
>
> Where splendour lays its cumbrous pomps aside,

Content in softer, simpler paths to glide.

(Lloyd, 1809, p.4)

This agreeable vision owed a good deal to the Prince of Wales himself, who both set the seal of fashionability upon Brighton (relegating its rivals, Bath and Tunbridge Wells, to middle-class dowdiness) and did much to exploit and reinforce this cult of Romantic love-in-a-cottage – to begin with, at least. Having rented a picturesque farmhouse on the Steine in 1784 for a couple of years, he determined in 1786 to reform, retrench and retire to Brighton, installing his new wife Mrs Fitzherbert just around the corner, there to live a life of simple, if self-dramatizing, poverty (see Figure 5). Strict economy notwithstanding, he commissioned his then favourite architect Henry Holland to convert the farmhouse into a gentleman's residence with good views of the sea and the Steine. Rebuilt in the early summer of 1787, it would come to be called the Marine Pavilion.

Figure 5 Anonymous, *Love's Last Shift*, published 1787 by S.W. Fores, London. Photo: courtesy of the Royal Pavilion, Libraries and Museums, Brighton and Hove.

Exercise 3

Look carefully at the two prints which show the Marine Pavilion in 1787 and 1796 (Figure 6 and Plate 12), at the ground-floor plan of Holland's Marine Pavilion (Figure 7), and at the watercolour which shows the interior decorative scheme of the Saloon c.1789 (Plate 13). I should like you to make some notes along the following lines:

1. Describe some of the architectural features (both exterior and interior) that strike you.
2. Make a stab at identifying the architectural styles that this building evokes.
3. Consider the house's relation to its setting.

4. Consider what your observations might tell you about the young prince's vision of his life in Brighton.
5. Speculate on what the prince may have been intending to suggest by calling his newly modelled house a ‘pavilion’. (Here you might find it illuminating to consult the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

Click below to view the four images refered to in the exercise.

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Discussion

1. Holland's Marine Pavilion is notably *symmetrical* in conception. The original farmhouse has vanished into the left-hand wing of the new structure, which is now mirrored by an identical right-hand wing with matching bays. The composition is centred on a domed **rotunda** fronted by slender Ionic columns. The building is whitish, unlike the surrounding brick buildings. The same symmetry is visible in Thomas Rowlandson's depiction of the interior of the Pavilion (Plate 13). Mirror is balanced by mirror, seat by seat and fireplace by console. The plasterwork is uniform, and repeated in panel after panel and in the **coffering** of the ceiling.
2. The rotunda (and its columns) make clear reference to classical civilization. It is Roman in its evocation of the Pantheon and Greek in its Ionic columns. This Neoclassicism is further underlined by Holland's decision to clad the whole building in cream-glazed Hampshire tiles, mimicking the paleness of marble. The symmetry visible in the interior of the rotunda is similarly neoclassical. This scheme is also derived – via the interior designer Robert Adam (1728–92) – from the coffered interior of the Pantheon.
3. The Pavilion is orientated very strongly towards the main street on which it is located (the Steine) and therefore to taking part in the social display that was such a feature of this area. The house combines both modesty and grandeur: it is almost aggressively modest in height in relation to the other buildings around it, but at the same time it makes no effort to blend in with them.
4. The building suggests that the prince saw himself while sojourning in Brighton as passing incognito, disguised as a commoner. But at the same time it also suggests that the prince's disguise was meant to be penetrated; he might have been living in virtuous poverty, but this was poverty in the most sophisticated taste, poverty as fashion statement, poverty as a holiday from inborn and inalienable royal importance.
5. There is much to be deduced from a name. By calling his house a ‘pavilion’ – a term, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which at this period (the 1780s) meant exclusively an Oriental tent, a temporary and moveable outdoor dwelling – the prince was invoking a striking series of connotations: of temporariness, of holiday and of fantasy escape. (In fact, the rotunda does have something of the appearance of a tent-like structure, and the architect Humphrey Repton (1752–1810) compared the interior effect to that of a marquee (see Dinkel, 1983, p.20).)

On the one hand, then, this building is thoroughly conventional. This sort of neoclassical architecture was an eighteenth-century Enlightenment shorthand for belonging to a well-heeled, cosmopolitan Whig landowner. The whole – dignified, sumptuous, but quite subdued in effect – is depicted by Thomas Rowlandson as populated with figures engaged in the polite and formalized conversation of good society (see Plate 13). On the other hand, the prince's retreat was founded in a fantasy of ‘dropping out’. The restless owner would not long remain content with this version of his Pavilion; but at its core through all its transformations lay a notion of self-dramatizing metamorphosis and of temporary, alternative and essentially irresponsible experience undertaken incognito. (An incident from the prince's early life is particularly telling here; in his twenties he fell for the beautiful actress Mary Robinson in the role of Perdita in Shakespeare's late romance *The Winter's Tale*. Perdita is apparently a shepherdess but is actually a lost princess; she meets and falls in love with Florizel, seemingly a shepherd but in fact a prince in disguise. Not for nothing were the couple promptly dubbed by London society and by the caricaturists ‘Florizel and Perdita’ – the prince clearly loved romantic slumming from very early on.)

3 From Enlightenment to Romantic?

In 1800, having divorced Mrs Fitzherbert and contracted a disastrous marriage with Princess Caroline of Brunswick, forced on him by the necessity of persuading the king to clear his vast debts, the Prince of Wales fled back to Brighton with his court. In 1801 he whiled away his time (and squandered Caroline's dowry) dreaming up extensions and changes to the interior decor of the Pavilion.

Of these, certainly the most interesting and prophetic was his development of the interior into a Chinese fantasy between 1802 and 1804, a development perhaps suggested by his fantasy of a ‘pavilion’ – a term that by now was being applied to small garden buildings of a Chinese style. He hung his newly decorated rooms with genuine Chinese wallpaper sent from that country's imperial court and crammed them with a collection of imported items supplied by the firm of Frederick Crace & Sons. These ranged in promiscuous profusion from model pagodas and carved ivory junks to birds’ nests, Chinese razors, silks and pieces of fine porcelain. Like Soane, he seems to have been taken with the idea of displaying a collection of curiosities, mounting the rare and the bizarre in witty and deliberately heterogeneous juxtaposition. Lady Bessborough wrote of the effect in 1805: ‘I did not think the strange Chinese shapes and columns could have looked so well. It is like Concetti in Poetry, in outre and false taste, but for the kind of thing as perfect as it can be’.

By ‘Concetti’ Lady Bessborough meant the elaborate ‘conceits’ (strained and conspicuously witty metaphors that yoke unlikely things together) of the sort characteristic of the lyrics of the seventeenth-century English poet John Donne.

It is important to understand, however, that the prince's liking for things Chinese was not especially innovative. The rage for Chinese imports had gone in and out of fashion throughout the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as French and British traders had penetrated the huge Chinese empire. The rich and aristocratic, leaders of fashion, had typically amassed rare and beautiful objects from the Chinese export market, most especially porcelain and silks, which embodied superior technological skills that to date had baffled the West. So important did Europe become as a market for these wares that the Chinese invented a special export market, designing on vases and bowls painted scenes purportedly of European life but in a distinctively Chinese style. This English liking for Chinese products spilled over into a variant of Rococo style around the 1740s. Known as **chinoiserie**, this influenced the design of textiles, furniture and gardens in courts and great houses across Europe, including one belonging to the Russian empress, Catherine the Great (1729–96). The 1780s and 1790s saw in particular a fad for Chinese gardening in a ‘ **grotesque** ’ style. This resulted in the famous pagoda designed by Sir William Chambers (1726–92) for London's Kew Gardens, in Frederick the Great's Chinese-style tea-house at Sans-Souci in Germany, and in the similar Chinese tea-house in the grounds at Stowe in Buckinghamshire, all of which can still be seen if you care to visit them. Like the pleasures of the **Gothick** folly (exemplified in the building of Fonthill Abbey in Wiltshire by the prince's vastly rich friend, William Beckford), this sort of ‘Chineseness’ bore witness to a rebellious undercurrent that ran counter to, and in parallel with, established Neoclassicism, although for the most part safely located outside the house in the grounds. As John Dinkel puts it:

> Those essentially ornamental eye-stoppers, the innumerable sham Gothic ruins, pyramids, Turkish tents, pagodas, and Chinese teahouses that sprinkled gentlemen's estates, were all fashionable expressions of the impulse to break the established rules of classical taste.
>
> (Dinkel, 1983, p.7)

Yet escaping into Chinese fantasy was, to the eighteenth-century mind, not an escape into the barbaric. The Chinese appeared to an Enlightenment eye to offer an alluring model of imperial stability, of gracious ritual and strict hierarchy, of wit, charming illusion, and the pleasures of narratives in miniature. The Chinese were supposed to be eminently *civilized*. This was one reason why Oliver Goldsmith's novel satirizing the follies of British society, *The Citizen of the World* (1762), took as its central figure a Chinese philosophic gentleman residing in London writing home in some bewilderment at the habits of the natives, and why Voltaire took the view that China was a sophisticated land of admirable stability peopled by *philosophes*. The connotations of China in the prince's day were, in short, those of luxury, gaiety and the trappings of rank (Dinkel, 1983, p.33), although increasingly towards the end of the eighteenth century this view was tempered by a sense that Chinese civilization was stagnant by comparison with the vigour of Enlightenment Europe.

The prince himself was not new to the pleasures of connoisseurship in this area; by 1790 Carlton House already boasted the famous Yellow Drawing Room in the Chinese style (see Figure 8). At this time, Chinese taste was all the rage in ‘advanced’ circles. None the less, it was one thing to collect the occasional piece of beautiful china and the odd strip of hand-painted wallpaper, setting them in ‘exotic’ colour schemes, and quite another to collect pagodas, birds’ nests, razors and vast amounts of china. The one was an exercise in graceful allusion, the other a demonstration of a witty taste for the grotesque and the bizarre, increasingly characteristic of turn-of-the-century Romantic taste.

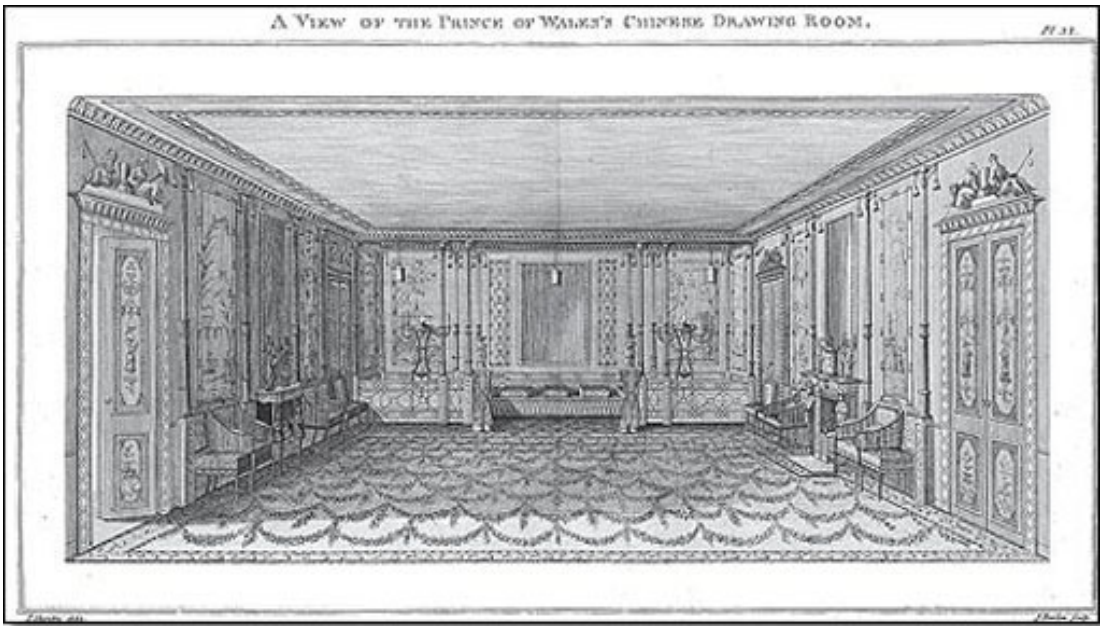

Figure 8 J. Barlow, after Thomas Sheraton, A View of the *Prince of Wales's Chinese Drawing Room*, 1792, engraving, from Thomas Sheraton, *Cabinet Maker & Upholsterer's Drawing Book*, British Library, London. Photo: by permission of the British Library, London (shelfmark 61.e.22).

Click below to a larger version of A View of the Prince of Wales's Chinese Drawing Room.

File attachments are not available in this format.

Exercise 4

I'd like you to look carefully at Figure 8 and compare it with:

- Rowlandson's sketch of the original interior of the Saloon in the Marine Pavilion (Plate 13) and;
- the illustration of the Long Gallery, which shows a rather later decorating scheme designed by Frederick Crace around 1815 (Plate 5).

What, if anything, does the Yellow Drawing Room have in common with each of these schemes?

Click on 'View document' to see plate 13, interior decorative scheme of the Saloon.

File attachments are not available in this format.

Click on 'View document' to see plate 5, illustration of the Long Gallery.

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Discussion

Clearly, all three designs do have in common an underlying concern with symmetry and balance, a thoroughly neoclassical and Enlightenment trait. But my own sense is that the Chineseness of the Yellow Drawing Room is more akin to the spirit of the sketch of the Saloon. It speaks of a cultivated taste, backed by plenty of money and leisure; it is decorative and witty, polite and, most important, formal, as befits a royal London residence. (The Saloon seems a little less formal in Rowlandson's conception – but then, it is part of a holiday house in a seaside resort.) By contrast, Crace's designs for the Long Gallery seem much more invested in alternative, exotic experience, perhaps straying outside the strictly polite. You may have noticed how the underlying neoclassical symmetries of the Long Gallery are broken, distorted and unsettled by the quite violent diagonals of the bamboo on the wallpaper, by the tiles that line the **coving**, mimicking a Chinese roof, and especially by the consciously ‘foreign’ lines of the cast-iron dragon columns that stand at each side of the passage. The colours are brilliant, and flamboyantly and unconventionally combined. The effect is akin to the idea of the picturesque: it privileges a roughness, a serpentine line, ‘variety’ and the power of a framed perspective. It is a theatrical experience – which perhaps is not so very surprising given that the Long

> Gallery (unlike the Saloon) was for looking down and walking through rather than sitting in.

What the differences between these interior schemes suggest to me is that by 1815 the prince's earlier ‘Enlightenment’ taste for chinoiserie had metamorphosed into something more ‘Romantic’, something less congruent with neoclassical order, balance and symmetry. That slight but definite tinge of the bizarre suggested by the collection of birds’ nests in 1802 would be much elaborated by the prince and his designers over the first two decades of the nineteenth century.

At the turn of the century, the governing idea of a ‘man of taste’ was changing. Whereas during the eighteenth century such a man would have been concerned to display his genealogy, his wealth and his classical education topped off with Grand Tour souvenirs in his house, he now invented himself by creating something strange and personal; hence the fantasy-world interiors of Beckford and Soane, ‘hungry for thrilling sensations evoked by ancient and Eastern artefacts’ (Dinkel, 1983, p.8). This intensely personal and sensational fantasy would become a hallmark of Regency, and Romantic, style. Dandyism in taste, and the ascendancy of the most famous dandy of them all, Beau Brummell, for several years the prince's boon-companion, was only just around the corner. The Pavilion's Chinese interiors, therefore, were to the prince an expression of Romantic subjectivity, a crystallization of his sense, shared by many contemporaries (including, for example, Soane), that he was a uniquely sensitive and involuted soul. As he was to write in 1808 to Isabella Pigot, Mrs Fitzherbert's companion:

> I am a different Animal from any other in the whole Creation … my feelings, my dispositions, … everything that is me, is in all respects different … to any other Being … that either is now … or in all probability that ever will exist in the whole Universe.
>
> (Quoted in Dinkel, 1983, p.9)

But although the prince's Chinese interiors clearly satisfied his desire for distinctiveness, the Chinese style was conspicuously unfashionable by comparison with the rage for the Egyptian or the Greek (mostly inspired by Nelson's victorious Nile campaign and the researches of Napoleon's invading archaeologists), or even the picturesque Gothic.

The Chinese was, frankly, vulgar at this juncture, associated with London's famous public pleasure-grounds, Vauxhall and Ranelagh. Although it promptly came back into fashion, that was because the prince had espoused it. Two explanations for this surprising choice can be advanced. One is personal: that the style satisfied George's nostalgia for ‘the forbidden masquerades and the festive amusements of his youth’ (Dinkel, 1983, p.30).

The other possible explanation is that the dream of enlightened despotism and secure hierarchy so encoded in eighteenth-century aristocratic views of the Chinese may have been peculiarly congenial to a prince now leaning towards Toryism in the troubled aftermath of the French Revolution. At the exact moment, then, that Napoleon was playing with images of authority in his efforts to invent himself as emperor, the prince was also playing with representations of his power.

A sharpened nostalgia for the endangered and perilous splendours of absolute monarchy could be played with and played out in games of defiantly extravagant style, sourced from accounts of Lord Macartney's embassy to the Emperor Ch'ien Lung in 1792, lavishly illustrated by William Alexander.

The effect seems, however, to have been ambiguous if we are to believe one of the prince's slightly puzzled visitors: ‘All is Chinese, quite overloaded with china of all sorts

and of all possible forms … the effect is more like a china shop baroquement arranged than the abode of a Prince' (Lewis, 1865, vol.II, p.490).

'Baroquement' signifies 'in a Baroque fashion': the commentator means that the china is piled up in an elaborate, ornate and rather overpowering arrangement, very different from neoclassical simplicity, symmetry or elegance.

In the next section we'll look in more detail at how the illusion of Chineseness is created in these interiors, and at the evolution of the prince's Chinese interiors from Enlightenment chinoiserie to a full-blown, stage-set, Romantic version of the East.

4 ‘Chinese’ on the inside

Our evidence for the evolution of the Pavilion's interiors is largely derived from Augustus Pugin's watercolours of the building's interiors and exteriors, executed for a picture-book commissioned around 1820 by the house-proud prince from his architect John Nash, entitled *Views of the Royal Pavilion*, completed in 1826. On the whole, the Pavilion today has been restored to congruence with the *Views*, to appear as it did in 1823 when the building was finished. Let's now look at the Pavilion room by room, starting with the Octagon Hall, the Entrance Hall and the Long Gallery.

Exercise 5

Return to the video viewed at the start of this unit and to plates 3-5 (below) and take a careful look at the details of these three rooms. I'd like you to make notes in answer to the following questions:

1. What elements of the decoration are specifically Chinese?
2. What other elements of the decoration suggest fantasy architecture?

Click on 'View document' to see plates 3-5.

File attachments are not available in this format.

Click below to view clip 2 of the video, which features the Octagon Hall, the Entrance Hall and the Long Gallery.

Video content is not available in this format.

File attachments are not available in this format.

Transcript

Discussion

The Octagon Hall. Fashionably restrained in its colour scheme, this octagonal room none the less boasts two Chinese features – the little bells hanging from the ceiling and the central pendant lantern. Less specific is the elaborate **reticulation** of the cove and ceiling, gently suggesting a tent-like structure, a garden pleasure-pavilion.

The Entrance Hall. Chineseness is suggested most strongly by the dragons painted on the back-lit **clerestory** windows (which are, incidentally, echoed by dragons painted discreetly on the panels) and the lanterns at each corner. But, again, this is a restrained room in terms of its colour scheme, and it is strongly neoclassical in its

insistence on certain symmetries, most notably in its provision of a false door to match the real door beside the fireplace.

The Long Gallery. In contrast to the preceding rooms, which suggest a style without setting definite expectations, the Long Gallery establishes without equivocation the Chinese theme that will be played out in so many different varieties of scale and feeling elsewhere in the building (Dinkel, 1983, p.78). Chinese features you might have picked out include the hexagonal lanterns, the silk tassels, the motif of bamboo and birds on the wallpaper, the bells lining the **cornice**, the Chinese figures and porcelain, the dragons and the Chinese god of thunder painted on the skylight, and the *faux* bamboo trellises projecting from the walls and ceiling and forming the banister and rails of the cast-iron staircase leading to the first floor. More nebulously, the colour scheme and the level of decoration are emphatically not neoclassical: the effect is of a riot of daringly clashing colours (pink, blue and scarlet, for example) and intricate geometric multicoloured decoration.

Much less Chinese, but certainly conducing to a fantasy effect, is the startling multiplication of cleverly placed mirrors in **enfilade** to produce a series of special effects. At four points along the corridor large opposing glasses create transverse vistas; in each recess a mirrored niche reflects a tall china pagoda where the lines of sight from one of the drawing rooms and from the corridor meet; and at the ends, where the corridor leads into the Music and Banqueting Rooms, double-doors entirely faced in mirror glass give a perspective of infinite repetition (Dinkel, 1983, p.81). (Contemporaries invariably remarked on the dazzling effect of the mirrors, and further evidence for the effect of the enfiladed mirrors in the Long Gallery is provided indirectly by the account of Soane's use of such mirrors in his country house, Pitzhanger Manor: he too thought they gave ‘magical effects’, but one of his guests did indeed mistake them for a corridor and was injured so badly that Soane felt obliged to have some of them removed to reduce the illusion – see Batey, 1995, p.23.)

One feature by which you may have been puzzled is the decoration along the cornice in the Entrance Hall, and indeed in the Banqueting Room Gallery, which is related (in miniature) to **fan-vaulting.** This owes more to the other contemporary fantasy style of Gothick than to those associated with the East. Put very briefly, Gothick simply sought to evoke (not very conscientiously) medieval church architecture, pretty much that of the so-called **Perpendicular** period of the first half of the fourteenth century. **Strawberry Hill Gothick**, so named after the home of Horace Walpole (1717–97), is especially lacy and fanciful, as you can see from the example in Figure 9.

So far, then, our tour of the Pavilion has identified three styles in use: the neoclassical (which dictates the symmetries of the rooms and their arrangements), the Gothick (which surfaces from time to time) and the Chinese. As we move into the main rooms, however, you should notice another set of references creeping in. We'll start by exploring the rest of the Pavilion, walking into the Music Room Gallery, the Saloon and the Banqueting Room, all originally used as drawing rooms – that is to say, the rooms to which the ladies withdrew to leave the men to drink their port, for coffee and liqueurs, for playing cards after dinner, and for occasional dancing, small concerts and recitals.

Exercise 6

Return to clip 3 of the video and continue your virtual tour concentrating on the Music Room Gallery, the Saloon and the Banqueting Room Gallery. By now your eye will be familiar, I hope, with the neoclassical, the Gothick and the Chinese, and

you will have noted, for example, the Chinese **fretwork**, the neoclassical scheme of white and gilding characteristic of earlier interiors by the celebrated architect Robert Adam, and the cornice of tiny Gothick fan vaults. What other influence or influences might be at play here? (Clue: the decorative features that interest me here are principally the pillars in the Music and Banqueting Room Galleries and the tops of the mirrors in the Saloon.)

Click below to view clip 3 of the video.

Video content is not available in this format.

File attachments are not available in this format.

Transcript

Discussion

The pillars in the Banqueting Room Gallery are unmistakably meant to look like palm trees (which did not carry Chinese associations), and although the tops of the pillars in the Music Room Gallery look like the sort of Chinese umbrellas carried over high officials in imperial China, snakes rather than dragons curl round the columns. In the Saloon, the tops of the mirrors are unmistakably Mogul-inspired in their swelling forms. The mantelpiece and door-frames boast more snakes. There is, in short, a whiff of India about these three rooms, blended with the Chinese fantasy. (If you are especially sharp-eyed, you might also have noticed a faint flavour of the Egyptian in the furniture, especially in the shape of the river-boat couch with crocodile feet.)

Figure 9 Anonymous, *The Gallery at Strawberry Hill*, engraving, from Horace Walpole, A *Description of the Villa of Mr H. Walpole at Strawberry Hill* , 1784, British Library, London. Photo: by permission of the British Library, London (shelfmark 192.C.16).

The Saloon is, of course, where we started looking at the neoclassical Adamesque scheme portrayed in Rowlandson's sketch of c.1789; it is the inside of Holland's rotunda. By 1815 it had metamorphosed, courtesy of Crace, into a Chinese fantasy of a garden arbour, complete with a colourful trellis cornice hung with pendants, panels of Chinese wallpaper and Chinese lanterns. In 1823 Robert Jones swept all of this away in favour of sumptuous crimson, white and gold with an Indian edge. (In its present state it is not quite restored to the Jones scheme, so you should glance again at Plate 9 In evoking India, the Saloon spoke of empires, both Mogul and British, and as such is perhaps the key to the whole show.

Click on 'View document' to see plate 9, the Saloon.

File attachments are not available in this format.

What our investigation suggests is that the Pavilion increasingly displayed an eclectic confederation of styles: neoclassical, Gothick, Chinese and Indian. Some of the original furniture seems also to have had a distinctively Egyptian flavour. Contemporaries would not have been bothered or surprised by this.

Exercise 7

Click on 'View document' to open an extract from Maria Edgeworth's novel The Absentee.

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Turn to the extract from Maria Edgeworth's novel *The Absentee* (above). The first part of this passage depicts an interview between an interior designer, Mr Soho, and a prospective client, Lady Clonbrony, a would-be social climber over from Ireland. They are discussing new decorations for the gala party which Lady Clonbrony fondly hopes will launch her as a leader of London society. Make a list of some of the more exotic styles Mr Soho is trying to sell.

Discussion

I have noted down that Mr Soho recommends furniture and hangings apparently inspired by a fantasy of the Middle East: ‘Turkish tent drapery’, ‘seraglio ottomans’ and other ‘Oriental’ furniture, ‘Alhambra hangings’ (which feature a dome), and ‘Trebisond trellice’ wallpaper. He also recommends ‘Egyptian hieroglyphic [wall]-paper’ with an ‘ibis border’ which had at the time quite different connotations – of Napoleon's archaeological expeditions. He suggests too a ‘Chinese pagoda’. These recommendations, combined with the profusion of mythical and exotic animals and birds which he mentions as possible adornments (chimeras, griffins, cranes, sphinxes, phoenixes), make it clear that the Pavilion's fantasy world was more mainstream in temper than perhaps it looks nowadays – albeit much more expensive than Lady Clonbrony's temporary decor.

Edgeworth's Lady Clonbrony was destined for social mortification despite laying out her money on *both* the Turkish tent and the Chinese pagoda, but the association of these extreme styles with entertaining and with the display of a virtuoso and promiscuously exotic taste designed to secure social status is very much what the Pavilion was about.

We have now traversed the whole of Holland's Marine Pavilion, and before we turn our attention to Nash's extensions – the two extraordinary rooms that open from either end of the Long Gallery, the Banqueting Room (interior decoration by Robert Jones) and the Music Room (interior designed by Frederick Crace) – we need to catch up on the prince's projects for massive extension to his holiday home which began to gather speed in 1815.

5 ‘Indian’ on the outside

In 1801 and 1805, first Holland and then his assistant William Porden (1775–1822) had been commissioned to make sketches for altering the exterior to a Chinese style so as to match the extravagantly Chinese interiors, but these projects remained unfulfilled (Plate 14). Drawing on the pictorial records brought back by William Alexander from Lord Macartney's embassy in 1792, Holland and Porden had attempted to invent a Chinese taste in English domestic exteriors, but instead the prince was seized with a new enthusiasm for the Indian – or, to be more precise, the Mogul (rather than the Hindu).

Click on 'View document' to see plate 14, Design for a proposed Chinese exterior.

File attachments are not available in this format.

His first foray in this style concerned the stables, built between 1803 and 1808, which housed some 60 horses and dwarfed the Pavilion itself. Although Soane's master, George Dance, had designed the London Guildhall in 1788 in a subtle blend of Islamic and Gothick forms, with the Islamic deriving from illustrations of the Taj Mahal, the immediate inspiration for the prince's stables seems to have come, via Porden's acquaintance with a man called Samuel Pepys Cockerell, from the brothers William and Thomas Daniell, who in 1795 began publishing a series of volumes of sketches entitled *Oriental Scenery* (for an example, see Plate 15).

Click on 'View document' to see plate 15, Design for a proposed Chinese exterior.

File attachments are not available in this format.

This best-selling work included many aquatints of Delhi, and inspired Cockerell's designs for the new house that his brother, Sir Charles Cockerell, newly back from India and flush with what was slangily referred to as ‘nabob’ wealth, commissioned him to design at Sezincote in Gloucestershire.

Sezincote is near Moreton-in-Marsh. Although entirely neoclassical in its interior decor, its exterior and its garden are the products of a scholarly eyewitness interest in the civilization of India (see Dinkel, 1983, p.40). Contemporary European interest in India was quite different in kind from the eighteenth-century interest in things Chinese, for it was consciously scholarly and intellectual. In Germany, for example, Goethe read Sir Charles Wilkins's translation of the *Bhagavad-gita* (1795).

In Britain intellectuals as politically diverse as the Poet Laureate Robert Southey and the radical atheist Percy Bysshe Shelley were taking their cue from the scholar Sir William Jones's important and arcane translations of Hindu religious poetry, and the translations of Sanskrit literature and philosophy encouraged by the imperialist Warren Hastings. Southey's poem *The Curse of Kehama* (1810) and Shelley's *The Revolt of Islam* (1818), each complete with a vast apparatus of scholarly footnotes on Hindu and Muslim religious observances, respectively, were jostling each other on the shelves of the booksellers.

The ‘Indian’ style was therefore a *recherche*, even an austere, though noble and sublime, style to adopt. The style had other connotations too. It was inevitably and increasingly associated with Britain's rapidly growing military and trading empire. New British interest

in Indian culture came back with the nabob wealth of the East India Company and the many scholars and travellers associated with it.

The events of 1803, when the British finally occupied Delhi, prompted an explosion of interest in the imperial romance that the subcontinent promised.

Sezincote House drew very precisely from the styles of ‘Mogul’, as you can see if you compare the engravings of the Jami'Masjid and Sezincote House (Plate 15, above, and Figure 10, below).

As you can see in more detail from Plates 16 and Plate 17 (photographs of the house), Sezincote is still fundamentally a neoclassical building in its symmetrical facade of balancing windows and bays, and although you can't see this from these photographs, it is set in a conventionally eighteenth-century fashion so as to dominate its wide sweeping grounds.

Click on 'View document' to see plate 16, the facade of Sezincote.

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Click on 'View document' to see plate 17, another view of the acade of Sezincote.

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If the ground-plan is still neoclassical, however, the rotunda has metamorphosed into a Mogul dome; the **parapet** has sprouted mini- **minarets;** the arches of the windows, hooded and recessed, have broken out into scallops and flirt upwards into little bunches of plumes or palms; and the squared-off columns flanking the front door are rather definitely neither Roman nor Greek. The gardens, on the other hand, are conspicuously Hindu in inspiration.

Down the side of the house runs a small brook which has been converted into a picturesque garden originally designed by the leading landscape improver Humphrey Repton (Figure 11 and Plate 18). This landscape aesthetic privileges the irregular, the interrupted, the varied and the rough in texture; here, it is heightened by an admixture of the exotic.

Click on 'View document' to see plate 18, the fountain at Sezincote.

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At the head of the valley there is a carefully reconstructed Hindu temple occupied by a statue of the Hindu sun goddess Souriya, looking down over a lotus-shaped temple pool. The stream winds down, under a bridge complete with Brahmin sacred bulls, into the serpent pool which boasts a three-headed serpent spitting a fountain of water (along with the lotus, the serpent was a symbol of regeneration), strongly reminiscent of the serpents winding round the columns in the Music Room Gallery. The ‘Hindoo’ temple is

characteristically stepped and squared off, its silhouette very different from that of the Mogul dome and minarets. The garden has a definite flavour of a wish to be Coleridge's

> … deep romantic chasm which slanted
>
> Down the green hill a cedarn cover!
>
> A savage place! as holy and inchanted
>
> As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
>
> By woman wailing for her demon-lover!

Figure 10 John Martin, *Sezincote*, 1817, aquatint drawn and etched. Photo: courtesy of the Royal Pavilion, Libraries and Museums, Brighton and Hove.

Figure 11 John Martin, *Sezincote, Gloucestershire: The Temple Pool*, 1817, print, British Museum, London. Photo: by courtesy of The Trustees of the British Museum.

But Coleridge's poem was known at this time only to a few intimates. After visiting Sezincote, the prince, as alive as his niece Queen Victoria would be half a century later to the romance of empire, with himself at the centre of the dramatic spectacular, summoned Repton to design something in the same style. Repton's enthusiasm had only been whetted by his designs for the Sezincote gardens; he had become persuaded that architecture and gardening were ‘on the eve of some great future change … in consequence of our having lately become acquainted with the scenery and buildings of India’ (quoted in Summerson, 1980, p.103). Again in the Mogul style, Repton's designs were ready in 1806 and published in 1808, but were never executed because the prince's finances were at breaking point. The actual building of the exterior of the Pavilion as we see it today was left in the event to John Nash, who would work in part from Repton's designs. Nash began work on the designs in 1815, and the Pavilion was completed in 1823.

Before we look in some detail at Nash's designs, we need to pause to consider the question of what Mogul architecture might have meant to the prince and his contemporaries, as opposed to Hindu styles. The happy congruence of Mogul and Hindu at Sezincote, which found itself reflected in the indiscriminate way that contemporaries would occasionally refer to the architecture of the Pavilion as ‘Hindoo’, was not uncontested.

This was for a variety of reasons – aesthetic, religious and political. Aesthetically, Mogul architecture was more congenial to Regency fantastic architecture because it had definite affinities with the other main fantasy mode we've already touched upon, the Gothick. You can see this from Plate 19, a photograph of the Regency wing added in Gothick style to Lacock Abbey in Wiltshire.

Click on 'View document' to see plate 19, Lacock Abbey in Wiltshire.

File attachments are not available in this format.

The lacy effect here could just as well be given another twist to become Indian, while the medieval pinnacles could easily metamorphose into minarets, given a little more latitude. As for the religious perspective, Islam, unlike Hinduism, was monotheistic rather than polytheistic, and this seems to have sat better with western cultural expectations at the time. Besides, Hinduism was increasingly being associated in Britain with the practice of *suttee*, the self-immolation of a widow on her dead husband's funeral pyre, dramatized for example in the opening of Southey's poem *The Curse of Kehama*.

So much outrage did this provoke in Britain that it would eventually become a moral impetus for the outright take-over of political power in India. Politically, the Moguls (unlike the Hindus) were also associated with fabulously successful empire-building of the sort that the British now aspired to, and with a model of government that contemporaries typically referred to (generally critically) as ‘Oriental despotism’.

Now Regent as a result of his father's incapacitating illness, the prince seems to have wished to dramatize his increased importance – indeed, it seems to be true that he felt it was part of his role to dramatize national and imperial glory and status both in his person and in his palaces. Certainly, when he became king he was to commission Nash to build him a series of buildings in London that were conspicuously national and imperial in flavour, including Marble Arch.

In these years as Regent, his native extravagance was now licensed by his status as monarch in all but name, and he promptly began to play out his own vision of himself as an absolutist *ancien regime* prince in architectural terms. The Pavilion, newly conceived by Nash, was in effect to give him the character of an Oriental potentate; in this context ‘Eastern magnificence … stood for the assertion of monarchical privileges … in a time of revolution, political, intellectual, and economic’ (Dinkel, 1983, p.48).

Turning to Nash's designs, let's compare the Pavilion's facades with those of Sezincote.

Exercise 8

Look again at the illustrations of Sezincote (Figures 10–11 and Plates 16–17, above) and then at those of Nash's designs for the exterior of the Royal Pavilion (Plates 1–2, below). You may also want to revisit the video for the detail of the Pavilion's exteriors. Make a list of similarities and differences.

Click below to view images referred to in exercise.

File attachments are not available in this format.

Click below to view clip 1 of the video, featuring detail of the Pavilion's exteriors.

Video content is not available in this format.

File attachments are not available in this format.

Transcript

Discussion

Similarities. Clearly, Sezincote and the Pavilion both make use of the form of the onion dome topped with a spike. They also share an interest in the style of a minaret, with its mini-dome and smaller spike as accenting features. The same battlemented effect along the edge of the roof (a variant on the standard Georgian parapet) is apparent too. Moreover, a significant number of the windows of both the Pavilion and Sezincote are arched and decorated with scalloping. The lacy effect of the railings at Sezincote also finds an echo in the stone lace-work shading the veranda of the Pavilion's east front. Finally, the squared-off columns of Sezincote are reworked in the many squared-off columns of the Pavilion.

Differences. The overall effect, however, is very different, isn't it? Of course, the Pavilion is larger, which makes some difference, but the real aesthetic contrast is that the design of the Pavilion values profusion. In place of one dome we have ten of varying but much larger sizes; in place of four modest minarets we have ten, much taller and more prominent. Where Sezincote lies quite squat and four-square, evidently a neoclassical design with the Mogul superimposed, the Pavilion, thrusting upwards with strong verticals, is conceived as upwardly mobile (you may also wish to refer to Plate 20 (below) a cross-section through the Pavilion). The Pavilion has also broken out into two tent-like structures, which don't seem to have anything to do with Mogul architecture, although they hint at desert romance. Thus, if one building advertises solid wealth (and admits where it came from), the other breathes fantasy; if one displays a fastidiously scholarly taste indulged among conventional landed proprieties, the other is a wild set of variations upon a theme. One is arguably ‘Indian’, but the other is visibly invested in a fantasy of ‘the Orient’. Indeed, Nash's unpublished preface to his *Views of the Royal Pavilion* remarks that the primary aim of prince and architect was to achieve an effect ‘not pedantic but picturesque’ (quoted in Batey, 1995, p.68).

Click on 'View document' to see plate 20 a cross section through Brighton pavilion.

File attachments are not available in this format.

6 The Pavilion and the picturesque

Nash's evocation of the picturesque as an aesthetic to describe the projected exterior for the Pavilion is striking. If neoclassical Palladian houses had stood four-square in the landscape, rising up out of extensive lawns and commanding an elaborately naturalistic landscape of grazing sheep and cattle to the horizon diversified by an ornamental lake, the picturesque house was instead enfolded within and extended by its garden.

Repton and Nash, in partnership from 1796 to 1802, were two of the most important exponents of picturesque garden design, deriving their practice from their personal association with the two theorists of the picturesque, Uvedale Price and his friend Richard Payne Knight.

The picturesque garden was characterized by sinuous shrubberies, flowerbeds, trellis-work and ornate garden seats, conservatories, flower corridors and trellised verandas (see Batey, 1995, p.5). The informality of serpentine winding paths and asymmetrical beds was typically punctuated by small buildings in various fantasy architectural styles ranging through the classical, the Gothick, the rustic, the Chinese and so on. (The house and grounds of Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire provide an excellent example of an early eighteenth-century landscape ‘improved’ by Capability Brown; Luscombe Castle in Devon, by contrast, is an excellent example of the picturesque style.)

The charming connotations of dream, escape and fantasy that had characterized the garden follies which dotted the Rococo garden earlier in the eighteenth century had grown to magnificent size in the Pavilion itself.

Nor was this picturesque aesthetic confined to the exterior of the Pavilion and its setting; it also conditioned some of the feel of its interiors. In Repton's and Nash's time, the immediate garden became thought of as an extension to the house. Interiors broke out into trellised and flowered wallpaper, and flowed out into conservatories; Edgeworth's *The Absentee* describes Lady Clonbrony's supper-room decorated with trellised paper.

Sir John Soane himself decorated Pitzhanger Manor with trellis-work and flower sprays. London-based party entrepreneurs would undertake to expand this aesthetic, tenting and illuminating their clients’ gardens, and filling such marquees with draped muslin, vast mirrors and huge flower arrangements (Batey, 1995, p.23).

In particular, four elements of the Pavilion's interior might point the way towards thinking of it as an exercise in translating garden aesthetics into an interior:

1. *The characteristic confusion of inside/outside*. It could, after all, be said that the Pavilion both was inspired by the idea of the sort of temporary party structure in the garden erected by Nash himself for the prince's Carlton House fete in honour of Waterloo, and took the place of such a structure. It was a permanent marquee created especially for parties. The prevalence of ceilings painted to look like skies – as in the Saloon and later the Banqueting Room – and of wallpaper designed to look like trellised veranda or garden pavilion underscores this.
2. *The strong element of fantasy*. While there were fantasy interiors (perhaps most notably in the Strawberry Hill Gothick mode), this sort of fantasy has a much more robust history in garden design, including a proliferation of Chinese garden temples and pavilions in the gardens of the wealthy across the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.
3. *Its investment in restless, sauntering admiration*. This interior is designed as a form of entertainment in itself, and is to be appreciated by walking around the house (rather than, say, sitting down in one place).
4. *Its interest in how the figures of guests interacted with the ‘landscape’* . In the Rococo garden and the great landscape gardens, the guests were expected both to

> delight in and admire the landscape, and to figure in it to give it scale and to inhabit its scenario. Thus Horace Walpole on visiting the great landscape garden of Stourhead in Wiltshire, embellished with classical temples, rustic hermitage and grotto complete with river god, found himself rather to his disgust embarking in a boat upon the lake for a thoroughly damp English picnic, really because the genre of the garden demanded it. Equally, one of the more notable effects of exotic architecture and furniture was the way they demanded certain stock responses of astonishment, admiration and delight, at the same time incorporating guests into their own fantasy.
>
> These reactions are gratifyingly expressed by one of Lady Clonbrony's guests at her gala:
>
> The opening of her gala, the display of her splendid reception rooms, the Turkish tent, the Alhambra, the pagoda, formed a proud moment to lady Clonbrony. Much did she enjoy, and much too naturally … did she show her enjoyment of the surprise excited in some and affected by others on their first entrance.
>
> One young, very young lady expressed her astonishment so audibly as to attract the notice of all the bystanders. Lady Clonbrony, delighted, seized both her hands, shook them, and laughed heartily; then, as the young lady with her party passed on, her ladyship recovered herself, drew up her head, and said to the company near her, 'Poor thing! I hope I covered her little *naivete* properly. How new she must be!'

Edgeworth's account of the party goes on to describe the ways in which guests are transformed into props within the overall fantasy provided by the decor:

> Then, with well practised dignity, and half subdued self-complacency of aspect, her ladyship went gliding about – most importantly busy, introducing my lady *this* to the sphynx candelabra, and my lady *that* to the Trebisond trellice; placing some delightfully for the perspective of the Alhambra; establishing others quite to her satisfaction on seraglio ottomans; and honouring others with a seat under the statira canopy.

The guests themselves are to be picturesque, 'dispersed in happy groups, or reposing on seraglio ottomans, drinking lemonade and sherbet – beautiful Fatimas admiring, or being admired'. The Pavilion furniture similarly insisted upon picturesque Oriental poses. The witty and sophisticated Princess Lieven wrote:

> I do not believe that since the days of Heliogabulus there has been such magnificence and luxury. There is something effeminate in it which is disgusting. One spends the evening half-lying on cushions; the lights are dazzling; there are perfumes, music, liqueurs.
>
> [*Heliogabulus is discussed further in section 9 of this unit.*]
>
> (Quoted in Roberts, 1939, p. 110)

As such the Pavilion was itself a sort of extended party game: a stage-set for private theatricals, for a masquerade, for *tableaux vivants*, with a faintly naughty edge. It was an aristocratically exclusive re-creation of the public delights of Vauxhall Gardens, a place haunted by the prince in his wild youth.

7 Experiencing the exotic

So far we have looked in some detail at the interiors of Nash's Pavilion, with the important exception of the Banqueting Room (decorated by Robert Jones) and the Music Room (decorated by Frederick Crace). Both were designed as *coups de theatre* and it is this aspect of these rooms that I'd like you to focus upon now.

Exercise 9

Return to clip 3 of the video and look again at the Banqueting Room and the Music Room. You may also wish to look at the contemporary depictions of these two rooms in Plates 8 and 11 (see below), and to look at the contemporary guidebook descriptions of the rooms given in the AV Notes. Spend a little time practising picking out the Chinese, Indian, Gothick and neoclassical elements which go to making up this Romantic decor, and then make some notes about what effects the rooms achieve and how this is done. Be especially alert to the possibility of 'special effects', such as *trompe l'oeil* and games with perspective.

Click below to view clip 3 of the video, featuring the Banqueting Room and the Music Room.

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Transcript

Click 'view document' to see plate 8.

File attachments are not available in this format.

Click 'view document' to see plate 11.

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Click on 'View document' to read the AV notes for the video clips.

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Discussion

Both rooms, stripped of their decor, turn out to be not at all unlike Soane's neoclassical halls at the Bank of England. Architecturally, they are both domed square spaces with two lateral extensions, classical in spirit and in principle. That said, however, where Soane's rooms are constructed of real arches and real domes, Nash's arches are not actually supporting anything but are mere wall ornaments in relief. And this tricksy quality is perhaps above all what distinguishes the Romantically improbable style of these rooms from Soane's weightiness and insistence on functionality.

The Banqueting Room. The Oriental magnificence of this room deliberately confounds both chinoiserie (e.g. in the dragons, the wall-paintings, the mini-pagodas sheltering the doors and painted on them) and the Indian (expressed most strongly in the ceiling conceit of the *trompe l'oeil* plantain tree and the lotus glass shades of the huge and dazzling central chandelier). The mixing of the two styles provokes a dramatic conflict between the glamorized violence of the writhing monsters and the sentimental and delicate domesticity of the panels depicting Chinese life.

Jones here achieves a distinctively Regency effect compounded of massive scale and overpowering detail. Entering the Banqueting Room from the Chinese gallery – low-ceilinged and bewilderingly and disorientatingly mirrored – is an astonishing experience. Dreamlike, the scale suddenly expands from the human to the enormous, and the effect is heightened by the apparent glimpse of sky at the apex of the dome. These games of scale also on occasion included miniaturization. The prince briefly brought in the extraordinary talents of Marie-Antoine Careme, the greatest cook of his day, tempted over from France to act as royal chef in the Pavilion's extraordinarily technically advanced kitchens. The confectionery set-pieces for which he was famous were characteristically fantasy buildings in miniature. They included *La ruine de la mosquee turque* (ruin of a Turkish mosque) and *L'hermitage chinois* (Chinese hermitage), made in icing-sugar and set under that astonishing dome. Generally, much of the effect of this room results from the repetition of the same images but on multiple scales: notice, for example, how the lotus and the dragon are repeated.

The Music Room. Again, the scheme for this is late chinoiserie – and as it is designed by Crace it is lighter in feel. Some of the same tricks of scale are also in evidence here in order to astonish guests. These too are centred on the ceiling, which as you will have seen is built up of gilded cockleshells. An effect of greater height was achieved by diminishing the size of the cockleshells towards the apex of the dome, and by changing the tones of the gilding towards the apex. Less obviously, the wall-paintings evoked for contemporaries paintings on Chinese lacquer boxes: the effect was therefore to shrink the spectator within a Chinese miniature grown gigantic. Again, too, the room repeats the same motifs: of serpents, lotus and dragon, varying in scale and prominence, but providing a unifying feeling. The painstaking detailing has a faintly dreamlike effect – fix your eyes on the wallpaper, and sooner or later you are aware that you are looking at a dog-headed serpent, for example. Like the Banqueting Room, the Music Room also intermingles

images of extreme violence (manifested in the writhing serpents and dragons) with the domestic or rural idyll, often featuring children. The juxtaposition is more than merely piquant; it introduces a characteristically Romantic tension that we'll come back to below.

We might also remark on some other ‘special effects’ built into the Pavilion which don't necessarily strike us with the force with which they certainly would have struck contemporaries. The Pavilion was very efficiently and invisibly heated via underfloor heating, an innovation which visitors then found rather stifling.

The oil-fired lighting was startlingly profuse, intense and brilliant in an era of candlelight; the thick fitted carpets deadened sound to an unusual extent; the daring and extreme colour harmonies, the many and varied *faux* surfaces, and the use of gas-fired backlighting behind stained-glass panels all heightened the experience, said by one contemporary observer, Mrs Creevey, to be like being inside the Arabian Nights (see the AV Notes).

Together with the use of interrupted vista and perspective, of dreamlike repetition and multiplication, of mirrors, of *trompe l'oeil* and of wildly inflated and metamorphic scale, the effect must have been phantasmagoric. With the addition of perfumes and music, the atmosphere was famously heady.

So far I have been concentrating upon the differences between the various rooms in the Pavilion, and upon the differences between the interiors and the exteriors. But although this has been useful for the sake of argument, it is not the whole story. For all that the Comtesse de Boigne was right in her disdainful identification of the styles of the Pavilion as ‘heterogeneous’, John Evans's remark that the Pavilion's details echoed each other from the smallest to the grandest is equally true (see the AV Notes). Looked at carefully, it becomes clear that all the different room interiors have been designed to echo each other, and to repeat shapes from the exterior too.

Exercise 10

Look once more at all three video clips. Watch them right through and, as you do so, make a list of recurrent motifs and try to sketch repeated shapes. Don't forget that the overall shape may be the same, even if it is reduced, enlarged, inverted, or pretending to be something else (e.g. a bell and a tassel may actually be the same shape, and serve the same function within the decorative scheme, while having different connotations).

Click below to view clip 1 of the video.

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Transcript

Click below to view clip 2 of the video.

Video content is not available in this format.

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Transcript

Click below to view clip 3 of the video.

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Transcript

Discussion

The easiest thing to do is to make a list of motifs that recur: these include dragons, serpents, bamboo, sunflowers, stars, bells and tassels. It is more difficult to identify the shapes. My list includes:

1. what I shall inelegantly call ‘bobbles’ (which line the parapet on the exterior and the chandeliers in the Music Room, to take two examples);
2. bell shapes which, when inverted, turn into flower shapes, or, when multiplied, become pagodas;
3. curves flouncing round the Moorish windows and repeated on the cornice of the Entrance Hall and round the mirrors in the Saloon;
4. fretwork of every sort;
5. leaves growing both up and down (compare the base of the columns on the exterior, the leaves crowning the **cupolas** and the leaves on the plantain tree in the Banqueting Room, for example);
6. spiky star shapes;
7. reiterated scallops – as in the Saloon wallpaper and the Music Room dome.

The effect of this ‘reiteration with variation’ is undoubtedly to amplify the dreamlike sense of impending metamorphosis that the Pavilion achieves – you might note, for

example, the effect of the way that acanthus leaves turn into dragon manes in the Banqueting Room.

This repetition of shapes and motifs produces a remarkably unified architectural ‘vocabulary’ throughout the building, despite the different overall effects that the rooms achieve. You might also have noticed the way that the costumes worn by our actors in the video echo and are at home among those apparently *outre* Regency shapes, combining the upward thrust of feathers (compare the flirting tufts at the top of the exterior windows on Sezincote House, for example), the long slender drag of the trains flowing away like serpents’ tails, and the horizontal lines of the bodices that double the severities of the Chinese-style fretwork.

The costumes look so at home because, idiosyncratic though the Pavilion certainly is and aspired to be, it is grounded within a definite and recognizable Regency aesthetic. George Cruikshank's satiric print *The Beauties of Brighton* (see Plate 21 makes this point too, though the clothes are from a slightly later year, 1826.

Click on 'View document' to see plate 21 George Cruikshank's The Beauties of Brighton.

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Indeed, the artist has a lot of fun with pointing up parallels such as the tails of the gentleman's coat which reiterate the tent-like structure on the Pavilion, the top hats echoed in the minarets, and the puffy skirts and sleeves that suggest the domes. The Pavilion, this suggests, was paradoxically both exotic *and* mainstream in its aesthetic.

8 How ‘Romantic’ is the Pavilion?

At first glance the Pavilion's exoticism might seem to have a good deal to do with contemporary Romantic writers’ fascination with the Oriental and exotic. A widespread public interest in these modes put Byron's ‘Oriental tales’ and Thomas Moore's romance *Lalla Rookh* at the top of the bestseller lists. Coleridge's ‘Kubla Khan’, after all, is often regarded as the paradigmatic Romantic short poem. So, flouting the conventions of historians of architecture, who designate this period simply as ‘Regency’, in this section we're going to pursue the relations between the Romantic exotic as expressed in literature and the Pavilion in its final state.

Our investigation so far of the building's effects might already suggest some points of comparison.

Exercise 11

Make a list of some ideas and aesthetic effects that you would consider to be Romantic. (This is a way of looking back across your study to date, and should take you some time – it is *not* easy!) Then see if you can identify any of those ideas and aesthetic effects realized in the Pavilion.

Discussion

Some of the principal tendencies that your study has identified as being Romantic include:

- The abandonment of Enlightenment ideals of knowability and reason, politeness and social responsibility, typically expressed in the neoclassical aesthetic.
- The increasing emphasis put on the unknowable and irrational, and, associated with that, an interest in dreams and fantasies, the development of certain stylistic features (notably the grotesque, the ruined and the fragmentary), and an interest in the sublime.
- An assertion of the primacy of individual imagination and autobiography, and, connected with that, the cult of the strong individual (e.g. Napoleon as well as the Napoleonic-style celebrity of Byron), often associated with Romantic alienation and melancholy.

Some of these tendencies can, I think, be identified within the Pavilion. Its decor is quite strongly interested in producing dreamlike illusions. Just to remind you, these include jolts in scale and proportion, disorientating self-replicating corridors, unnerving shifts between place, obsessive repetition of motifs, the proliferation of the grotesque and the monstrous, and a general ambition to achieve the sensory overload typical of the sublime. These effects are ultimately designed as the intensely personal theatre of an individual imagination.

With this in mind, let's turn to Thomas Moore's *Lalla Rookh*. Moore, as you will remember, was a member of the prince's circle and an enthusiastic admirer of the decorative illusions at the Carlton House ball. He was an Irishman, the friend and biographer of Byron, and *Lalla Rookh* was his first long poem to make a hit.

Expensively printed and (supposedly) intensively researched, it was extremely successful both as a poem and in the shape of numerous adaptations, including a lyrical, an

equestrian and a spectacular drama, an opera, and a series of lavishly costumed *tableaux vivants* in the Royal Palace of Berlin in 1822 staged to celebrate the visit of the Russian Grand Duke Nicholas (later Tsar Nicholas I).

The frame narrative concerns the journey of an Indian princess to meet her future husband in Shalimar, beguiled by tales told by the handsome young poet Feramorz, in the fashion of the Arabian Nights. Deeply in love with the ineligible poet, the princess seems to be heading for tragedy. All ends happily, however, as the poet casts off his disguise and appears as the caliph himself.

There are four inset tales in all: ‘The Veiled Prophet of Korassan’, ‘Paradise and the Peri’, ‘The Fire-Worshippers’ and ‘The Light of the Haram’. Passion, sin, forbidden secret loves, suffering and yearning, mystery and disguise, vengeance, romantic death, fabulous feasts and Oriental interiors and exteriors combine to produce charmingly picturesque entertainments, themselves occasions for witty conversations between princess and poet.

Given Moore's connections with the prince (of whom he was a frequent guest), it perhaps isn't surprising that *Lalla Rookh* should belong to the same exotic fantasy world embodied in the Pavilion itself. In particular, Moore's poetry is studded with depictions of ‘vast illuminated halls’, ‘glittering Saloons’, ‘enamell'd cupolas’, vistas ‘sparkling with the play of countless lamps’, minarets, pagodas, grottoes, hermitages and voluptuous enchanted palaces, eclectically set in the Far East and the Middle East.

The spirit of Moore's best-seller seems very like the Pavilion: both are unashamedly and explicitly invested in aristocratic entertainment and sexual gratification enjoyed in fabulous and artificial settings. Here, for example, is part of the prose frame narrative describing the wedding party's arrival in camp:

> On their arrival, next night, at the place of encampment, they were surprised and delighted to find the groves all round illuminated; some artists of Yamtchem having been sent on previously for the purpose. On each side of the green alley, which led to the Royal Pavilion, artificial sceneries of bamboo-work were erected, representing arches, minarets, and towers, from which hung thousands of silken lanterns, painted by the most delicate pencils of Canton. – Nothing could be more beautiful than the leaves of the mango-trees and acacias, shining in the light of the bamboo scenery, which shed a light round as soft as that of the nights of Peristan.
>
> (Moore, 1879, p.229)

Like the poem, the Pavilion too could be said to be structured as a series of inset narratives – each room a different elaboration upon a theme, and each, like each story, designed as a form of seduction. And, like the Pavilion, the poem is consciously ‘heterodox’, ‘frivolous’, ‘inharmonious’ and ‘nonsensical’, as the disapproving comic Vizier Fadladeen remarks in his capacity as self-appointed literary critic (Moore, 1879, p.301). Above all, this is a pleasure-palace of a poem, dedicated to the endless renewal of delight and love:

> Come hither, come hither – by night and by day,
>
> We linger in pleasures that never are gone;
>
> Like the waves of the summer, as one dies away,
>
> Another as sweet and as shining comes on.
>
> And the love that is o'er, in expiring, gives birth
>
> To a new one as warm, as unequall'd in bliss;
>
> And oh! if there is an elysium on earth

It is this, it is this.

(Moore, 1879, p.299)

For another, very different literary sidelight to illuminate the ‘feel’ of the Pavilion in its final state, we're going to turn to a friend and sometime protege of William Wordsworth, Thomas De Quincey (1785–1859), whose fame for us rests principally on a remarkable prose work entitled *The Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821–2). In part, this is a diary recording dreams had under the influence of opium ‘in a solid and a liquid shape, both boiled and unboiled, both East India and Turkey’ (Lindop, 2000, p.58). It is at one dream in particular that we're going to look, a dream about the Orient which provided the literal source of De Quincey's narcotics.

Exercise 12

Turn to the extract from De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (below) It is written as a diary entry for May 1818. Compare and contrast De Quincey's vision of the Orient with Moore's.

Click on 'View document' to read an extract from De Quincey's The Confessions of an English Opium-Eater.

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Discussion

If Moore's vision of the East is of endlessly picturesque, even Rococo, aristocratic pleasures, De Quincey views Asia with horror. In fact, he describes that continent in ways that you might recognize from your study of the sublime in Block 4, Unit 16: he uses the words ‘fearful’, ‘mad’, ‘horror’, ‘awful’ (in the sense of ‘filling us with awe’), ‘impressive’, ‘overpowers’, ‘sublimity’ and ‘terror’. He analyses his dream experience in part in terms of a Romantic theory of aesthetics.

This dream-sublime seems to flow largely from an anxiety about *scale*. First, Asia is frighteningly old (as ‘the cradle of the human race’ it has a superfluity of history). Such age gives rise to elaboration (the religions especially are ‘ancient, monumental, cruel, and elaborate’ – and, it might be remarked, many), and to the privileging of ‘race and name’ and *caste* over individual identity. Second, Asia is too large and too full of people, ‘swarming with human life’. Added to these problems of scale are those of unnegotiable *difference* and unrecognizability from a European standpoint.

Like Edgeworth's social satire, like Moore's poem and like the Pavilion itself, De Quincey's evocation of a dream experience productively confounds one part of the East with another: a dream China slides into the ‘tropical heat and vertical sun-lights’ of India, swallowing up Egypt for good measure.

Setting aside for a moment the evocation of guilt, punishment, flight and incarceration that De Quincey's prose achieves, I am struck by how elaborately architectural and thoroughly

furnished this dream is with its confederation of styles: both Lady Clonbrony's party decorations and the Pavilion seem to lie like shadows behind this fantasy. Here are the pagodas, the sphinxes, the crocodiles, the ibises, the snakes, the Chinese houses with cane tables, and the fantasy animal feet so characteristic of Regency furniture.

These nightmare experiences of the exotic are explicitly counterposed to the properly domestic, responsible and filial, in the contrast between the dream and De Quincey's awakening to see his children ‘come to show me their coloured shoes, or new frocks, or to let me see them dressed for going out’. This might well remind us of the contrast between the monstrous and the domestic played out in the Banqueting and Music Rooms, but for De Quincey it carries a moral weight quite absent from the Pavilion.

Thinking of the East as a dream of power and powerlessness, De Quincey unknowingly reflects Napoleon's meditations upon the East during his Egyptian campaign:

> In Egypt … I dreamed all sorts of things, and I saw how all I dreamed might be realized. I created a religion: I pictured myself on the road to Asia, mounted on an elephant, with a turban on my head, and in my hand a new Koran, which I should compose.
>
> (Quoted in Remusat, 1880, vol.I, p.149)

If Napoleon's fantasy of expanding empire finds an eerie, far-off echo in the prince's interior decor, as a discourse De Quincey's dream also has some similarities with the Pavilion, perhaps especially in its interest in physical disorientation, eclectic profusion and the unexpected expansion and contraction of scale.

But where the Pavilion suggests that these games are euphoric – with connotations of escape, holiday and the dreamlike – De Quincey rethinks them as nightmarish and grotesque. The Pavilion's effects are controlled and calculated, where De Quincey's dream reels away out of measure.

What the Pavilion lacks (understandably!) is what we might call, bathetically, the sheer discomfort of the Romantic as characteristically expressed in literature and painting. Though the prince ambushed his guests with dragons and serpents that seemed to grow out of the wallpaper, the Pavilion was inescapably and necessarily concerned with the provision of comfort. Holiday houses and evening parties, however sumptuous and however picturesque, are never, if successful, really sublime.

The Pavilion's deficiency in the ‘Romantic’ was directly addressed by two important essayists, William Hazlitt (1778–1830) and Charles Lamb (1775–1834). Hazlitt begins an essay in 1821 by explicitly counterposing the Romantic to the aesthetic of the Pavilion. He challenges an imaginary writer to ‘take … the Pavilion at Brighton, and make a poetical description of it in prose or verse. We defy him’.

Exercise 13

Read the extract from Hazlitt's essay, ‘Pope, Lord Byron, and Mr Bowles’ (1821). Identify Hazlitt's main reasons for insisting that the Pavilion is not poetical in itself, nor a suitable poetic subject.

Click on 'View document' to read an extract from William Hazlitt's essay ‘Pope, Lord Byron, and Mr Bowles’ (1821).

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Discussion

The problem with the Pavilion is to do in part with the relation between ‘art’ and ‘nature’. ‘Art’, unless ruined, is overly complete and, in the case of the Pavilion, is new, successful, self-sufficient, over-blown, deeply vain. As property, the palace is imbued with the ‘practical prosaic idea’ of the haves and have-nots; because aristocratic exclusivity is built into it, it excludes ‘cordial sympathy’ of the sort that builds a community. Hazlitt seems to suggest that by contrast nature (and poetry) acts as something which can be had and enjoyed by all, even those who are not property owners. Poetry, too, can provide that which a building, according to Hazlitt, cannot: emotion, sentiment, and associations of melancholy, dread and decay.

This counterposing of art and nature, and of art and the sublime, is also addressed by Charles Lamb in an essay of 1833 entitled ‘On the barrenness of the imaginative faculty in the productions of modern art’.

Lamb amplifies his discussion of contemporary painting with a revealing (and possibly apocryphal) anecdote, sometimes dated to around 1806, about the Pavilion:

> The court historians of the day record, that at the first dinner given by the late King (then Prince Regent) at the Pavilion, the following characteristic frolic was played off. The guests were select and admiring; the banquet profuse and admirable; the lights lustrous and oriental; the eye was perfectly dazzled with the display of plate, among which the great gold salt-cellar, brought from the regalia in the Tower for this especial purpose, itself a tower! stood conspicuous for its magnitude. And now the Rev. * * * * the then admired court Chaplain, was proceeding with the grace, when, at a signal given, the lights were suddenly overcast, and a huge transparency was discovered, in which glittered in golden letters -
>
> ‘BRIGHTON – EARTHQUAKE – SWALLOW-UP-ALIVE!’
>
> Imagine the confusion of the guests; the Georges and garters, jewels, bracelets, moulted upon the occasion! The fans dropt, and picked up the next morning by the sly court pages! Mrs. Fitz-what's-her-name fainting, and the Countess of * * * * holding the smelling-bottle, till the good-humoured Prince caused harmony to be restored by calling in fresh candles, and declaring that the whole was nothing but a pantomime *hoax*, got up by the ingenious Mr. Farley, of Covent Garden, from hints which his Royal Highness himself had furnished! Then imagine the infinite applause that followed, the mutual rallyings, the declarations that ‘they were not much frightened,’ of the assembled galaxy.
>
> (Lamb, 1912, p.259)

What interests me about this anecdote is that the ‘pantomime *hoax’* (which reworks the biblical episode of Belshazzar's feast in which a tyrannous Persian king sees a hand writing on the wall a divine prophecy of his own utter downfall) provides in a comedic mode that Romantic drama which Hazlitt has described as being outside the range of the

building itself. Here are the terrors of the sublime earthquake, here is the fearful disruption to the gay scene which might perhaps remind you of Byron's evocation of the premature end to the ball at Brussels on the eve of Waterloo (see Block 6, Units 29–30). Sublime nature in the shape of the earthquake, however, turns out to be merely elaborate artifice – a party piece.

If we turn once again, and for the last time, to Coleridge's poem ‘Kubla Khan’, we can see that Hazlitt's privileging of nature and poetry over architecture and wealth is echoed in it. Without giving a comprehensive reading of this poem, which must be one of the most famous, mystifying and intensively argued-over in the English language, it is possible to say that it takes as its protagonist a man whose name was for contemporaries a byword for oppression and cruelty, whose empire-building was associated by Coleridge with Napoleon's devastation of Europe. Within this poem about the nature of Romantic creativity, the chief preoccupation is the delicate balance of the Khan's astonishing architectural *tour deforce* with the forces of nature:

> The shadow of the dome of pleasure
>
> Floated midway on the waves;
>
> Where was heard the mingled measure
>
> From the fountain and the caves.
>
> It was a miracle of rare device,
>
> A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!

The whole is a precariously stable confection of art and nature, of the solid dome shadowed on the shifting water, of domed roof and founding caves, of pleasure and privation. This pleasure-palace is, like the Prince Regent's, threatened by ominous rumours and echoes – ‘Ancestral voices prophesying war’ (‘Kubla Khan’, l.30). If we focus on the final section of the poem, however, it turns out that the Romantic poet challenges the power of the Khan himself, claiming to have the same power of creativeness through the wonderful and tyrannical power of song to capture the imagination of his audience and to strike them with sublime horror:

> … with music loud and long,
>
> I would build that dome in air,
>
> That sunny dome! those caves of ice!
>
> And all who heard should see them there,
>
> And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
>
> His flashing eyes, his floating hair!

The power of the Romantic artist challenges and replicates the absolute power of the imperial tyrant. The poet faces off the prince, and this, parenthetically, returns us to our discussion in Block 6 of newly emerging Romantic notions of art and the artist.

9 What the world said – or, the politics of the exotic

So far we have mostly been concerned with the making of the Pavilion, treating it as a product of the confluence between the prince's virtuoso taste, his fluctuating reserves of cash and his patronage of the talents of a series of architects and designers, especially John Nash. We have also remarked in passing that the flamboyant idiosyncrasy of the Pavilion seems to be attributable in large part to the prince's nostalgia for absolutism, expressed in an era of constitutional monarchy and seemingly ever-impending revolution.

'Oriental despotism' had had very negative connotations of barbarism and arbitrariness throughout the eighteenth century, but here George seems to have been revaluing it in relation to his own power. Indeed, across Europe the Oriental exotic seems to have been an aesthetic linked by supporters as well as critics to the restoration of hereditary monarchies (this, at any rate, is one possible reading of the court theatricals designed around the dramatization of *Lalla Rookh* in Berlin in 1822).

The prince's fantasy of his role as monarch, as we have also remarked, must have been much strengthened by the financial realities of Britain's growing empire in the East. Although we have taken a look at Hazlitt's and Lamb's passing comments, we have not yet extensively considered what everyone else at the time thought about it. To do this is to think about the Pavilion principally as a cultural and political fact within early nineteenth-century British culture.

From very early on the Pavilion was itself an attraction, and by 1809 it appears that it was intermittently open to the polite and paying public. Certainly its interiors were of considerable interest to the public, if we can judge by the blow-by-blow descriptions of them given over many pages in Attree's *Topography of Brighton* (1809). In January 1820 came ticketed admission to the state apartments.

Exercise 14

Turn to the selection of contemporary verdicts upon the Pavilion, organized chronologically, made by insiders and outsiders (below). You will also find some pictorial comments in Plates 22 – 23 (also below). Study them carefully, and then make some notes about what you can deduce from this evidence about contemporary views of the monarchy.

Click on 'View document' to read some contemporary opinions of the pavilion in Brighton.

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Click on 'View document' to see plates 22 and 23, pictorial comments on the pavilion.

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Discussion

The comments begin to be more disapproving the more *outre* and extravagant the Pavilion becomes both inside and outside. Although John Evans makes a spirited attempt to constitute the prince's whim into something that redounds to the nation's credit, the more general tone is one of moral disapproval of frivolity and self-indulgence, a strong tendency to refuse to admire princely dignity and instead to regard the Pavilion as bizarre and downright unBritish. This is the effect of those insistent comparisons of the domes to turnips, the minarets to extinguishers and the like: they point up how thoroughly non-indigenous and aggressively useless the building was.

Critics had a point. Despite that interesting remark of the prince's to the effect that he chose the Chinese style over traditionally Whiggish Neoclassicism for fear of being thought ‘Jacobinical’ (i.e. sympathizing with the French revolutionaries), and despite his shock conversion to his father's political allegiance to Toryism (both actual and imaginative) on taking power in 1811, the Pavilion was very evidently a fancy-dress holiday from those responsible and ‘official’ styles associated historically either with the aristocracy or with the monarchy.

From being a fantasy of escape from his father's authority, it had become an escape from the circumscribed realities of constitutional monarchy. In the teeth of the scandal of George's treatment of his estranged queen, culminating in the (ultimately aborted) divorce proceedings against her in 1820, and more generally in the context of severe agricultural depression, of the post-war slump, and of the great hardship and widespread agitation produced by the Industrial Revolution and the urbanization that came with it, the Pavilion was inflammatory.

As ‘Humphrey Hedgehog’ (the pseudonym of John Agg) was to write in *The Pavilion; or, A Month in Brighton* (1817) not long before the Peterloo riots in Manchester:

> In the midst of the most aggravated public distress, when penury and woe walk the streets hand in hand, and thousands are actually starving, the prodigalities of those great ones of the earth … present a fair field for satire … the dazzling and cleansing fire of patriotism has dwindled into the impure and unwholesome flame of self-interest, and every better feeling and principle appear to be entirely merged and lost in the giddy and intoxicating vortex of sensuality.
>
> (Hedgehog, 1817, vol.I, pp.10–11)

‘Hedgehog’ does his best to convert his prince through his experiences as ‘a Caliph in disguise’, bringing him to admit that he ‘had in too many instances, preferred private enjoyment to the welfare of the state’ and to resolve to do some ‘patriotic good’ (Hedgehog, 1817, vol.II, pp.174–5, 177).

But the Pavilion's insouciance and arrogance, its utter lack of restraint, its dubious flavour, viewed in the context of similar Romantic fantasy narratives invested in the East and its

not entirely respectable pleasures, seemed to need a catastrophic ending to provide a properly moral outcome.

The Princess Lieven's remarks likening the prince to Heliogabulus, which we've already noted, are equally a stinging critique of the outlandishness of his taste and of the questionable morality of power thus imagined. Heliogabulus, as the educated would have known, was a Roman emperor who, during his brief four-year reign, became notorious for ‘inexpressible infamy’ including transvestism and homosexuality. In the magisterial words of the historian Edward Gibbon, ‘Rome was at length humbled beneath the effeminate luxury of Oriental despotism’ (Gibbon, 1998, pp.130, 128).

Before he was assassinated, his career as portrayed by Gibbon has a whiff of the Prince Regent's, at least as described by his many critics:

> A capricious prodigality supplied the want of taste and elegance; and, whilst Elagabulus *[sic]* lavished away the treasures of his people in the wildest extravagance, his own voice and that of his flatterers applauded a spirit and a magnificence unknown to the tameness of his predecessors.
>
> (Gibbon, 1998, p.130)

If judgement overtook both Belshazzar and Heliogabulus in the midst of their sensual excesses, so too did it overcome the villain caliphs of many important contemporary Romantic fantasy narratives. Two will do to make the point – Beckford's novel *Vathek* and Southey's poem *The Curse of Kehama*. In *Vathek*, for example, the cruel sensualist caliph finally makes his way to the subterranean halls of Eblis, where he discovers the worthlessness of the riches and luxuries he has lusted and searched after, and is punished for his sins when his own heart and the hearts of all the damned burst into flames in their living bodies.

Southey's equally cruel and part-supernatural Rajah Kehama eventually finds himself under the dominion of the lord of hell. In flat contradiction therefore to the princely complacency of the Pavilion, Orientalist tales, poems and paintings of the period are typically and variously critical of despotism, whether enlightened, Napoleonic or Bourbon. Such is one reading of Delacroix's vast and controversial canvas *The Death of Sardanapalus* (1827–8), derived in part from Byron's drama critical of tyranny, *Sardanapalus* (1821).

Just before you move on in your studies, however, you should pause to consider what key points you might take away from this unit. Here are some questions for you to chew on to help you do this.

How has your study of the Pavilion changed or elaborated the picture of the period that you have been building up? Does it, for example, suggest that Romanticism was not monolithic, that there were lots of *different* kinds and understandings of what was Romantic, and that some of them might even have been mutually contradictory? Does it suggest that not everyone was living in a ‘Romantic’ fashion in the so-called Romantic age? Or does it suggest that everyone and everything was subtly altered by what Hazlitt was to call so memorably ‘the spirit of the age’ so that even the monarchy, that relic of an older age, could fall victim to a Romantically alienated individualism?

If these questions baffle you at this stage, then you are welcome to set them aside, but if they prompt you to look back over this unit before moving on, that will be all to the good!

Next steps

After completing this unit you may wish to study another OpenLearn Study Unit or find out more about this topic. Here are some suggestions:

- French Revolution (A207_5)
- Napoleonic paintings (A207_11)
- History and the Arts

If you wish to study formally at The Open University, you may wish to explore the courses we offer in this curriculum area:

- The Arts Past and Present (AA100)
- Arts and Humanities

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Plate 11 The Music Room (designed by Frederick Crace), from John Nash's "views of the Royal Pavilion, Brighton, 1826, aquatint. Photo: RIBA Library Photographs Collection

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Plate 13 Thomas Rowlandson, "The Saloon, Marine Pavilion", c. 1789, watercolour, 22 x 29.4 cm. Photo: courtesy of the Royal Pavilion, Libraries and Museums, Brighton and Hove

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Plate 19 Lacock Abbey, Wiltshire.Photo: reproduced by kind permission of Provincial Pictures, Bath. Photographer: Philip Pierce.

Plate 20 Cross-section of the Royal Pavilion, from John Nash's "View's of the Royal Pavilion, Brighton", 1826, aquatint. Photo: RIBA Library Photographs Collection.

Plate 21 George Cruikshank after Alfred Forrester, "The Beauties of Brighton", 1826, hand-coloured engraving. Photo: courtesy of the Royal Pavilion, Libraries and Museums, Brighton and Hove

Plate 22 George Cruikshank, "The Court at Brighton a la Chinese!!", 186, hand-coloured engraving, British Library, London. Photo: Bridgeman Art Library

Plate 23 Artist uncertain, possibly W. Heath, "New Baubles for the Chinese Temple", 1820, hand-coloured engraving. Photo: courtesy of the Royal Pavilion, Libraries and Museums, Brighton and Hove

Figure 1 Modern ground-floor plan of the Royal Pavilion, Brighton. Adapted from Jessica M.F. Rutherford, "The Royal Pavilion", 1995, courtesy of the Royal Pavilion, Libraries and Museums, Brighton and Hove

Figure 2 Sir Thomas Lawrence, "George IV as Prince Regent", c.1814, oil on canvas, 91.4 x 71.1 cm, National Portrait Galery, London. Photo © National Portrait Gallery, London, www.npg.org.uk

Figure 3 Anonymous (probably Henry Kingsbury), "The Prodigal Son", 1787, drawing. Photo: courtesy of the Royal Pavilion, Libraries and Museums, Brighton and Hove

Figure 4 Map of Brightelmstone, frontispiece from H.R.Attree, "Topography of Brighton: and Picture of the Roads, from Thence to the Metropolis", London, 1809. Photo: Bodleian Library, University of Oxford (G.A.Sussex 8 22)

Figure 5 Anonymous, "Love's Last Shift", published 1787 by S.W.Fores, London. Photo: courtesy of the Royal Pavilion, Libraries and Museum, Brighton and Hove

Figure 6 Samuel H.Grimm, "The Prince of Wales' Pavilion at Brighthelmstone, from the Steyne", 1787, British Library, London. Photo: The British Library, London

Figure 7 Plan of the ground floor of the Marine Pavilion, as built by Henry Holland, 1796, engraved and published by G.Richardson and Son. Photo: courtesy of the Royal pavilion, Libraries and Museums, Brighton and Hove

Figure 8 J.Barlow, after Thomas Sheraton, "A View of the Prince of Wales's Chinese Drawing Room", 1792, engraving from Thomas Sheraton, "Cabinet Maker & Upholsterer's Drawing Book", British Library, London. Photo: The British Library, London (shelfmark 61.e.22)

Figure 9 Anonymous, "The Gallery at Strawberry Hill", engraving from Horace Walpole, "A Description of the Villa of Mr H. Walpole at Strawberry Hill", 1784, British Library, London. Photo: The British Library, London (shelfmark 192.c.16)

Figure 10 John Martin, "Sezincote", 1817, aquatint drawn and etched. Photo: courtesy of the Royal Pavilion, Libraries and Museums, Brighton and Hove

Figure 11 John Martin, "Sezincote, Gloucestershire: The Temple Pool", 1817, print, British Museum, London. Photo: by courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

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Glossary

Chinoiserie:

the deployment of ‘Chinese’ motifs within interior decor, popular from the early eighteenth century onwards. The most widespread example of this is the so-called ‘willow pattern’ used on domestic china which persists to this day.

Clerestory:

an upper part of a wall carried on arcades, and pierced with windows to allow light to penetrate.

Coffering:

deep panels sunk into a domed ceiling.

Cornice:

a crowning moulding projecting horizontally at the junction of a wall and ceiling.

Cove/Coving:

a surface of concave form linking wall and ceiling. Cupola: a diminutive domed form, visible above a roof.

Enfilade:

a French term, signifying the alignment of all the doorways in a suite of rooms so as to create a vista when the doors are open, thus avoiding corridors. The word is also used to denote the alignment of mirrors in such a way as to create a similar set of vistas.

Fan-vaulting:

inverted half-cones or funnel shapes with concave sides. The style was originally designed to form a vaulted roof in late Perpendicular church architecture, but by the late eighteenth century it was used for decoration only.

Fretwork:

the practice of piercing thin sheets of wood with cut-out patterns. In the Royal Pavilion, much of this is actually executed in trompe l'oeil style painting and is ‘Chinese’ in its straight-sided shapes.

Gothick:

(spelled with a ‘k’ to distinguish it from true Gothic, a medieval style of church architecture, and from the Victorian Gothic Revival) an eighteenth-century English style based only vaguely on archaeologically correct Gothic, with a pronounced taste for the exotic, especially chinoiserie, and so connected with Rococo frivolity and, latterly, with the picturesque.

Grotesque:

derived from the ornamentation in ancient Roman grottoes discovered during the Renaissance, in the eighteenth century this term came to be applied to decorative motifs of all kinds of Roman origin, including those used in elegant, neoclassical interiors. In the Romantic era the term acquired darker meanings and was used by Victor Hugo to suggest strange and disturbing mixtures of the comic and the tragic, the satanic and the farcical. Generally, the ‘grotesque’ satisfied a Romantic thirst for intense sensory and emotional stimulation.

Minaret:

a tall slender tower (circular, rectangular or, as in the Brighton Pavilion, polygonal) associated with mosques.

Mog(h)ul:

a term used by contemporaries to refer to Indian Muslim culture.

Parapet:

a low wall at the edge of a roof, which may be ornamented, pierced with holes or left plain.

Perpendicular:

a term used to identify church architecture from the beginning of the fourteenth century. It is characterized by particularly elongated forms, e.g. spires.

Reticulation:

arranged to look like a net, with the same figure repeated all over the surface.

Rotunda:

a building or part of a building shaped like a cylinder both inside and outside, especially one covered with a dome.

Spandrel:

a triangular plane between two arches.

Strawberry Hill Gothick:

this term, derived from Horace Walpole's fantasy home at Strawberry Hill, signifies a violently exaggerated and delicate mock Gothick style.

Taste:

a key eighteenth-century term, on which whole books have been written. Broadly speaking, however, to possess a correct taste and the financial means of deploying and displaying it denoted high social status. This was usually, although not always, associated with landed or ‘old’ wealth rather than with ‘new’ wealth.

Trompe l'oeil:

from the French, meaning literally ‘to trick the eye’ – i.e. to trick it into seeing something that is not there. The term is used of a painting technique which deceives the eye into thinking that a two-dimensional image of something (for example, a tassel or a vase) is the thing itself.