

*Manfred*



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## An Edition of Byron's Manuscripts and a Collection of Essays

By

Peter Cochran

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**I am grateful, for the help he has given me in writing  
this book, to David McClay of the National Library  
of Scotland.**

**P.C.**



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## ABBREVIATIONS

To economize on space in the notes, the following abbreviations are used for the books referred to. See the Bibliography for further information.

- BJ: *The Byron Journal*  
BLJ: *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand (13 vols, John Murray, 1973-94)

When a citation from BLJ is headed "Text from", followed by a manuscript reference, it means that the text is not from BLJ but from the original manuscript. Codes are as follows: <Byron's erasures>; {Byron's interlineated corrections and second thoughts}; [editorial additions].

- Coleridge: *The Works of Lord Byron: A New, Revised and Enlarged Edition with illustrations. Poetry*, ed. E.H.Coleridge (7 vols, John Murray, 1898-1904)
- Chew: Chew, Samuel Claggett. *The Dramas of Lord Byron*. (Göttingen 1915, rpt. Russell and Russell, 1964)
- CHP: Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*
- CMP: *Lord Byron: The Complete Miscellaneous Prose*, ed. Andrew Nicholson (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991)
- CPW: *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann and Barry Weller, 7 vols (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1980-93)
- DJ: Byron, *Don Juan*
- Green / Lapinski: Matthew J.A. Green and Piya Pal-Lapinski (eds.) *Byron and the Politics of Freedom and Terror* (Palgrave Macmillan 2011)
- Howell: Howell, Margaret J. *Byron Tonight* (Springwood, 1982)
- HVSV: *His Very Self and Voice*, ed. Ernest J. Lovell jr., (1954)
- JMS: *Journals of Mary Shelley* ed. Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987)
- Jones: Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. Ed. Frederick L. Jones, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964)
- LBLI: Teresa Guiccioli, *Lord Byron's Life in Italy*, tr. Rees ed. Cochran (Delaware, 2005)

- LJ: *The Works of Lord Byron, Letters and Journals*, ed. R.E.Prothero (John Murray, 1898-1904)
- LJM: *The Letters of John Murray to Lord Byron*, ed. Andrew Nicholson (Liverpool University Press, 2007)
- Medwin: *Medwin's Conversations of Lord Byron*, ed. Lovell, (Princeton 1966)
- MSYR: *Manuscripts of the Younger Romantics Byron* vol I (Garland 1986)
- RR: *The Romantics Reviewed* (ed. Reiman, Garland 1972)
- SAHC: Fischer, Doucet Devin and Reiman, Donald, eds., *Shelley and his Circle* (Harvard 1961 2002)
- Taborski: Boleslav Taborski, *Byron and the Theatre* (Salzburg 1972)

## INTRODUCTION: *MANFRED* AND DRURY LANE

### **The writing of *Manfred***

There are two principal manuscripts of *Manfred*. The rough draft is in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York;<sup>1</sup> and the printer's fair copy is in the John Murray Archive (now at the National Library of Scotland).<sup>2</sup> However, according to Jerome McGann,<sup>3</sup> the first part of the work to be written was Ashtarothe's song (original III i 82-5), which is on paper acquired before Byron went east in 1809, but probably written-on after he returned. It's on an extra sheet in the Morgan manuscript.<sup>4</sup> The Incantation at the end of I i (192-261) was also composed in advance of the bulk of the play, was fair-copied by Claire Claremont, and published in 1816 in *The Prisoner of Chillon and Other Poems*, published on either November 23rd or December 5th 1816. The two most important manuscripts are not dated.

All these manuscripts are described in detail below.

### **The role of Douglas Kinnaird: *Manfred* as an intended theatre event**

Manfred is a most un-Promethean figure: rather he's conceived as an anti-Promethean figure. Prometheus feels benignly towards mankind: Manfred feels contempt for mankind, thinking himself of a different order – that is, feeling himself (arrogantly and incorrectly) to be what Prometheus really is. Prometheus steals (among other things) fire from heaven, and gives it to mankind at no small cost to himself; Manfred has discovered the secret of the universe (a dualistic concept cobbled together by Byron from the notes to Thomas Taylor's translation of Pausanias), but he doesn't give it to mankind – he does nothing with it at all. He doesn't tell it to anyone

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1: It is in MSYR I pp.23-144.

2: NLS Ms.43335.

3: CPW IV p.464.

4: MSYR I pp.131-2.

(except the Witch of the Alps); he doesn't write a book about it; he dies with it still a secret. The self-punishments he put himself through in order to discover it are wasted, and may (this is left vague) have occasioned the death of Astarte, she whom he loved most.

So far from being a Promethean Hero, Manfred seems like a man affected very badly with the Death-Wish. He experiences no exterior sources of oppression at all. He has no social superiors; he refuses to kneel to Arimanes; he defies both the Abbot and the Spirit who comes for him in the last scene – if anything, *he* oppresses *them*. As Southey wrote, Byron “met the Devil on the Jungfrau – and bullied him”.<sup>5</sup> The only being of whom Manfred is in awe is Astarte. His play cannot be made political. He may fight against paternal authority figures (perhaps in part by being “transgressive” with Astarte); but they all retreat before him, and none of them are political authorities anyway.

There are no politics in *Manfred*. Byron's own political posturing led nowhere. His anticlimactic “plunge” into Italian politics led nowhere; and when he “plunged” into “Greek politics”, he did so fully aware that western-style “politics” didn't exist in Greece – he went into Greece with a death-wish fully comparable to that displayed by Manfred himself. Both “plunges” were compensations for the fact that he thought, if he took part in English politics, that he would endanger his holdings in the government funds; and so he let his friends get political there.

I'd like to forward a blasphemous counter-thesis to the idea that *Manfred* is a political play:<sup>6</sup> that it's not a thesis about freedom or terror: it's a play designed for Edmund Kean to act in at Drury Lane, written by Byron to a commission from Douglas Kinnaird, with a view to getting Byron's revenge on the England who – he asserted – had expelled him. Byron mentions none of this; but he rarely wrote with one-hundred-percent frankness, and sometimes wrote with no frankness at all.

The Chamois Hunter's glancing reference to William Tell (II i 40) reminds us what a real Swiss political hero is. Tell had a son, after all – no Byronic Hero ever breeds.

On July 9th 1816, Kinnaird (still on the Drury Lane Committee), wrote to Byron:

There is one other subject I implore you to satisfy me upon – when shall I receive a Tragedy from you – Never was there a moment when you could try it on the stage with such a certainty of the author being unknown – you

---

5: *Some Observations upon an Article in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, August 1819; CMP 90.

6: See Young-ok An at Green / Lapinski, pp.102-17.

will of course have read & heard how pertinaciously one half of the public believe you to be the conceal'd author of *Bertram* – I have ever treated the question mysteriously with a view to the power it w<sup>d</sup> afford you of producing a play with the certainty of your name being conceal'd – No one but myself need know the secret ...<sup>7</sup>

On July 20th, Byron responded:

Tragedy – I have none, – an act – a first act of one<sup>8</sup> – I had nearly finished some time before my departure from England – when events occurred which furnished me with so many real passions for time to come – that I had no attention for fictitious ones: – – The scenes I had scrawled are thrown with other papers & sketches into one of my trunks now in England – but into which I know not – nor care not – except that I should have been glad to have done anything you wished in my power, – but I have no power nor will to recommence – & surely – Maturin is your man – not I ...<sup>9</sup>

On February 3rd of the following year (Kinnaird having been forced to resign from Drury Lane), Byron wrote to him, with changed tone and much rephrasing:

I suppose & fear that your <row> {row} plagued you sufficiently – but what could be expected from the <scenes?> {Green=room?} – sooner or later you will have your revenge – & so shall I (in other matters) you on the stage <or off> & I <both on &> off & by Nemesis! – you shall build a new Drury – which shall pay one per Cent to the Subscribers – & I will write you a <play> {tragedy} which shall reduce your pounds to shillings – besides for my own particular injuries – (while this {play} is representing with much applause) <with> ordaining a proscription to which that of Sylla shall be a <comedy> comic Opera – & that of Collot d'Herbois at Lyons – a symphony. –<sup>10</sup>

Sulla's proscriptions in 82-1 BC involved the deaths of up to 9,000 Romans. Collot d'Herbois had 2,000 people executed in Lyons in 1793. Byron wants, with his proposed tragedy, to decimate the population of London.

By this time, he has, unknown to all, written most of *Manfred*. The manuscripts of *Manfred* are unusual in not being dated: but if I am correct

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7: Kinnaird to B., July 9th 1816: text from NLS Ms.43455.

8: The first act of *Werner*, written late in 1815.

9: B. to Kinnaird, July 20th 1816: text from Ms. NLS TD 3079 f.1; BLJ V 82-3.

10: B. to Kinnaird, February 3rd 1817: text from B.L.Add.Mss.42093 ff.21-2; BLJ V 167-8.

in saying that Taylor's Pausanias is a vital subtext to the play's demonology (see below), we can date its commencement roughly, for Byron asks Hobhouse to bring that book as early as May 1st 1816.<sup>11</sup>

On February 5th 1817 Byron wrote to Murray:

I forgot to mention to you – that a kind of poem in dialogue (in blank verse) or drama – from which “the Incantation” is an extract – begun last summer in Switzerland – is finished – it is in three acts – but of a very wild – metaphysical – and inexplicable kind. – Almost all the persons – but two or three – are Spirits of the earth & air – or the waters – the scene is in the Alps – the hero a kind of magician who is tormented by a species of remorse – <when> the cause of which is left half unexplained, – he wanders about invoking these spirits – which appear to him – & are of no use – he at last goes to the very abode of the Evil principle in propria persona – to evocate a ghost – which appears – & gives him an ambiguous & disagreeable answer – & in the 3<sup>d</sup>. act he <dies> is found by his attendants dying in a tower – where he studied his art. – You may perceive by this outline that I have no great opinion of this piece of phantasy – but I <figure on> have at least rendered it quite impossible for the stage – for which <I have> my intercourse with D. Lane had given me the greatest contempt. -----

I have not even copied it off – & feel too lazy at present to attempt the {whole – but} when I have I will send it you – & you may either throw it into the fire or not; – I would send you the rough copy as it is – but it would be illegible – & perhaps not less so when copied fair. – The “Incantation” was the conclusion – (a kind of Chorus) of the 1<sup>st</sup>. scene .. – – – Nobody has seen it. – – I send you an extract. – from out act 2<sup>d</sup>. –<sup>12</sup>

For the whole letter, see Appendix 1.

Notice that Byron makes no connection between the new work and Kinnaird's request for a tragedy, made the previous year (Murray and Kinnaird were not on good terms). But he's lying: he has *not* made it “quite impossible for the stage”: on the contrary, as Bernhard Reitz pointed out a long time ago,<sup>13</sup> *Manfred*, with its spectacular Alpine scenes and infernal settings (“Arimanes on a ball of fire”, and so on), would have

**11:** BLJ V 74.

**12:** B. to Murray, February 15th 1817: text from NLS Ms.43489; first sheet only BLJ V 169-70.

**13:** Bernhard Reitz, *Byron's Praise of Sheridan*, in Bridzun, Petra and Pointner, Frank Erik (eds.): *Byron as Reader*, Essen 1999. Yet Timothy Morton (phrasing with care) describes *Manfred* as “impossible meaningfully to embody on a stage” (*Byron's Manfred and Ecocriticism*, in Stabler (ed.), *Byron Studies* (Palgrave 2007), p.155.

been no problem at all for the theatre which had put on Sheridan's *Pizarro*, with its settings in the Andes. *Manfred* is a real attempt at professional playwriting (unlike the later Venetian tragedies). At about an hour and a half in length, it gives plenty of evening-time for a farce beforehand and a ballet after; and its leading role is created for Edmund Kean, who specialised in angst-ridden parts, and whose distaste for rivals caused him to sack any good actors – or even mediocre actors – who he felt might upstage him. Thus the minor parts in *Manfred* act only as feeds for the protagonist's soliloquies and speeches. Kean disliked Maturin's *Bertram* because (a) the female lead was bigger than his own, and (b) because the actress who played it was – as many actresses were – taller than him.<sup>14</sup> No protagonist could be more angst-ridden than Manfred: and neither the Chamois Hunter, the Witch of the Alps, Arimanes, nor the Abbot, has any lines or moments with which to upstage him. Astarte does upstage him, but only for fifteen seconds.

Byron's assertion that *Manfred* is not designed for the stage is one with his assurance to Murray that neither *Marino Faliero*<sup>15</sup> nor *Sardanapalus*<sup>16</sup> are political plays, or his assurance to Moore that *Heaven and Earth* is "very pious".<sup>17</sup> In the same letter he asserts that *Werner* is not intended to be acted.

Of proletarian origin, Kean was a welcome guest at the dinner-tables of the great. If therefore we object to the play because of its "bourgeois ideology, which makes it complicit with hegemonic power",<sup>18</sup> we have to blame Edmund Kean, to whose personality it's perfectly tailored.

On March 25th Byron pretended to come clean, and wrote to Kinnaird himself:

I have no tragedy nor tragedies – but a sort of metaphysical drama which I sent to Murray the other day – which is the very Antipodes of the stage and is meant to be so – it is all in the Alps & the other world – and as mad as Bedlam – I do not know that it is even fit for publication – the persons are all magicians – ghosts – & the evil principle – with a mixed mythology of my own – which you may suppose is somewhat of the strangest. ----<sup>19</sup>

And only six days later, he added,

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14: See Jeffrey Kahan, *The Cult of Kean* (Ashgate 2006), pp.31–6.

15: B. to Murray, from Ravenna, September 28th–29th 1820: (BLJ VII 181-2).

16: B. to Murray, from Ravenna, July 14th 1821: (BLJ VIII 151-2).

17: B. to Moore, from Pisa, March 4th 1822: (BLJ IX 118-19).

18: See Young-ok An at Green / Lapinski, p.105.

19: B. to Kinnaird, from Venice, March 25th 1817: text from Ms. NLS TD 3079 f.3; BLJ V 194-5.

As to tragedy, I may try one day – but never for the stage – don't you {see} I have no luck there? – my two addresses were not liked – & my Committee=ship did but get me into scrapes – no – no – I shall not tempt the Fates that way – besides I should risk more than I could gain – I have no right to encroach on other men's ground – even <I> if I could maintain my own. – – –

You tell me {that} Maturin's second tragedy<sup>20</sup> has failed – is not this an additional warning to everybody as well as to me? – however – if the whim seized me I should not consider that nor anything else – but the fact is that success on the stage is not to me an object of ambition – & I am not sure that it would please me to triumph – although it would doubtless vex me to fail. – – For these reasons I never will put it to the test. – Unless I could beat them all – it would be nothing – & who could do that? nor I nor any man – the Drama is complete already – there can be nothing like what has been. –<sup>21</sup>

This self-defeating attitude, in the plain face of the evidence, represents a fishing for reassurance on Byron's part. He wants Kinnaird to praise the piece, to see at once what an excellent vehicle it would make for Kean, and to persuade Drury Lane to mount it. Unfortunately for the timing, Kinnaird was no longer in charge of Drury Lane, and Kean hated him anyway. On November 3rd 1817, Monk Lewis told Byron,

... they say, that the rapture of Drury Lane from Kean to the Scene-Shifters inclusive, when D. Kinnaird's expulsion was announced, was something quite ludicrous.<sup>22</sup>

Kinnaird never mentions *Manfred* in any surviving letter (though many of his letters are missing); and Byron's other close friend, Hobhouse (who was with Byron for most of the play's composition), mentions it in no document known to me. I imagine the incest-theme scared them.

Thus *Manfred*, which probably, because of the incest-theme, never stood a chance of being staged anywhere (Kean or no Kean), changes in its author's mind from a potential theatrical event to an act of revenge on England.

The tale illustrates Byron's antithetical, and self-defeating, attitude towards writing for the stage. In the introduction to *Marino Faliero* he sums it up:

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**20:** *Manuel*.

**21:** B. to Kinnaird, March 31st 1817: text from B.L.Add.Mss.42093 ff.34-5; BLJ V 195-7.

**22:** Matthew Gregory Lewis to B., November 3rd 1817; text from NLS Acc.12604 / 4247G.



I have had no view to the stage; in its present state it is, perhaps, not a very exalted object of ambition; besides I have been too much behind the scenes to have thought it so at any time. And I cannot conceive any man of irritable feeling putting himself at the mercies of an audience – the sneering reader, and the loud critic, and the tart review, are scattered and distant calamities; but the trampling of an intelligent or of an ignorant audience on a production which, be it good or bad, has been a mental labour to the writer, is a palpable and immediate grievance, heightened by a man's doubt of their competency to judge, and his certainty of his own imprudence in electing them his judges. Were I capable of writing a play which could be deemed stageworthy, success would give me no pleasure, and failure great pain. It is for this reason that even during the time of being one of the committee of one of the theatres, I never made the attempt, and never will.

“... even during the time of being one of the committee of one of the theatres” he never thought of writing for the stage? In fact he did – *Werner* was started in late 1815, when he was still on the committee. Once he's left, not only the committee, but the country, he writes a practical play. However, terrified not only of failure, but success at a place with so debauched a taste as Drury Lane, he makes sure of its paradoxical unstageability by inserting an obvious incest-*motiv* which will render it impossible to put on. Then Kinnaird's sacking deprives him in any case of the one champion he might have had.

### **John Murray, William Gifford, and payment**

On February 16th 1817 Byron announces *Manfred*, and gives Murray several passages from the play as specimens (see Appendix 1).<sup>23</sup> He encloses the first act on March 3rd, and the third act on March 9th (he doesn't mention sending the second act until April 2nd). Murray acknowledges receipt of the first act on March 18th (at first he calls the play “Manuel”, confusing it with the recent failure by Charles Maturin). William Gifford, his reader, and Byron's “Literary Father”, finds fault with the third act:

My dear Sir,

I found your parcel here at 4 – so that it is hardly possible to do any thing by Post time – nor indeed can I say much more. I have marked a

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**23:** Not all this letter is in BLJ. See Cochran, “*Nobody has seen it*” - *Byron's First Letter Announcing Manfred*, *Byron Journal*, 1996, pp.68-76.

passage or two which might be omitted with advantage: but the Act<sup>24</sup> requires strengthening. There is nothing to bear it out but one speech. The Friar is despicable, & the servants uninteresting. The scene with the Friar ought to be imposing, & for that purpose the Friar should be a real good man – not an idiot. More dignity should be lent to the catastrophe. See how beautifully our old poet Marlow has wrought up the death of Faustus – Several of our old plays have scenes of this kind – but they strove to make them impressive. *Manfred* should not end in this feeble way – after beginning with such magnificence & promise – & the demons should have something to do with the scene.

Do not send my words to Lord B. but you may take a hint from them – Say too that the last Act bears no proportion in length to the two previous.<sup>25</sup>

... and on March 28th Murray sends Byron Gifford's criticisms:

My Lord

I received the last Act with yr favour of the 9<sup>th</sup> yesterday & now I inclose a proof both of the Second and Third Acts – with the Title Dram Pers – &c – all for correction & emendation – by the way there are several errors wch may affront you as not existing in the Original – wch are owing to the haste with wch my family transcribed them – as I am anxious to preserve the original with wch I had not time to compare it – & having at first, after transcribing sent it to M<sup>r</sup> G –

For the Drama Do me the favour to draw upon me for 300 Gs when + you please – & I hope to make a living profit upon it –

<No> I told you in my last letter that M<sup>r</sup> G was very much pleased with Act 2 – & as you know he takes a paternal interest in your literary well being – he does not by any Means like the Conclusion – now I am venturing upon the confidence with wch your Lordship has ever honoured me in sending the inclosed<sup>26</sup> – I fear I am not doing right – I am not satisfied – but I venture – & I entreat that you will make a point of returning them. I have told him that I have made a Letter from them – but there is so much friendly good sense in them that I can not refrain – I am sure you can – & I am almost sure that you will improve what begins & continues so beautifully in <J> a Drama of any Kind – the last Act is the Difficulty & this you must surmount –<sup>27</sup>

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**24:** Act III of *Manfred*, which Gifford has just read in its first, comic version.

**25:** Note from William Gifford to John Murray, late March 1817: source: NLS Acc.12604.

**26:** Murray has enclosed Gifford's note on the need to re-write *Manfred's* third act (see previous item).

**27:** John Murray to B., from 50, Albemarle Street, London, March 28th 1817; text from NLS Ms.43495; LJM 218-19.

Byron receives this on April 17th, and at once promises a re-write:

The third {act} is certainly d—d bad – & like the Archbishop of Grenada's homily (which savoured of the palsy)<sup>28</sup> has the dregs of my fever – during which it was written. – It must on no account be published in its present state; – I will try & reform it – or re write it altogether – but the impulse is gone – & I have no chance of making anything out of it. – I would not have it published as it is on any account. – The speech of Manfred to the Sun is the only part of <it> {this act} I thought good myself – the rest is certainly as bad as bad can be – & I wonder what the devil possessed me – I am very glad indeed that you <told> {sent} me M<sup>r</sup>. Gifford's opinion without deduction – do you suppose me such a Sotheby as not to be very much obliged to him? – or that in fact I was not & am not convinced <of the> & convicted in my conscience of the absurdity of this same overt act of nonsense? – I shall try at it again – in the mean time lay it upon the Shelf (the whole drama, I mean) but pray correct your copies of the 1<sup>st</sup>. & 2<sup>d</sup>. acts by the original MS. – – – –<sup>29</sup>

The possibility that he's tried consciously for an anti-climactic, comical ending to *Manfred*, and has been shamed by Gifford's reaction, should be entertained. He sends his "improved" third act on May 5th. In a letter which we lack, Murray offers 600 guineas for *Manfred* plus *The Lament of Tasso* – less than a third of what he offered for *Childe Harold* III. Strangely, the Murray ledger records no payment for either poem (later Byron says he only got 300 pounds for *Manfred*).<sup>30</sup>

In the semi-comical finale, the materialist Abbot who comes to save Manfred's soul (on condition that he makes a donation of all his worldly goods to the monastery), is dismissed thus, when Manfred summons the demon Ashtaroth:

**Abbot:** I fear thee not – hence – hence –  
Avaunt thee, evil One! help – ho – without there!  
**Manfred:** Carry this man to the Shreckhorn – to it's peak –  
To it's extremest peak – watch with him there  
From now till Sunrise – let him gaze & know  
He neer again will be so near to Heaven –  
But harm him not – & when the Morrow breaks  
Set him down safe in his cell – Away with him! –

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**28:** See Le Sage, *Gil Blas*, VII 4.

**29:** B. to John Murray, from Venice, April 14th 1817 (i): text from NLS Ms.43489; BLJ V 213-4.

**30:** Alice Levine at MSYR I p.23 says £315.

**Ashtaroeth:** Had I not better bring his brethren too  
Convent & all to bear him company?

**Manfred:** No, this will serve for the present. Take him up. –

**Ashtaroeth:** Come Friar! Now an Exorcism or two  
And we shall fly the lighter. –

(Ashtaroeth disappears with the Abbot, singing as follows)

A prodigal son – and a maid undone –

And a widow re-wedded within the year –

And a worldly Monk – and a pregnant Nun –

Are things which every day appear. – (original III i 69-85)

It is hard to judge whether this conclusion was a result of Byron's calculation, or his carelessness, confusion, and eagerness to finish. Whatever the case, Gifford objected to its profanity, and Byron, cowed, substituted the third act as printed, which is profounder and more dignified, but less well-aimed at the low tastes of Drury Lane.

It could be that when Byron says “quite impossible for the stage” he is referring not to the play's scenic demands, but to its action – of which there is virtually none before the last scene. Ninety percent of the script is exposition either implicit or explicit, and when the exposition finishes, Manfred dies (see Appendix). Even the exposition is incomplete in that we never know exactly who Manfred's beloved Astarte was, or in what manner she died. Byron, as was his habit, tantalises us with hints of damnable transgression, but never comes clean as to its nature.

Kean never played the part of Manfred.

### **The Incantation, and Byron's “nightmare of my own delinquencies”<sup>31</sup>**

Stanzas 5, 6 and 7 of this controversial passage (I i 192-261) seem, firstly to bring in a note of accusation against (perhaps) Manfred (though that's disputed), a note which is not supported by the first five stanzas.<sup>32</sup> Whether the last three are to be directed at Manfred, or at the audience, whether they are biographical reflections on Annabella or are self-flagellations by Byron directed at himself (my own preferred interpretation), is disputed;

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**31:** B. to Moore, from Venice, January 28th 1817; BLJ V 164-7.

**32:** See Chew, p.59n. In the Morgan manuscript stanzas 5 and 6 follow stanza 7 (MSYR I pp.43-4): though this may indicate that B. started on the wrong side of the sheet: the final stage-direction is correctly placed, after stanza 7.

what no-one has pointed out is that they imitate, in their address to hypocrisy and false seeming, Coleridge's *Christabel*, a work which we know Byron admired.<sup>33</sup>

And Geraldine in maiden wise  
Casting down her large bright eyes,  
With blushing cheek and courtesy fine  
She turned her from Sir Leoline;  
Softly gathering up her train,  
That o'er her right arm fell again;  
And folded her arms across her chest,  
And couched her head upon her breast,  
And looked askance at Christabel –  
Jesu, Maria, shield her well!  
A snake's small eye blinks dull and shy,  
And the lady's eyes they shrunk in her head,  
Each shrunk up to a serpent's eye,  
And with somewhat of malice, and more of dread,  
At Christabel she looked askance! –  
One moment – and the sight was fled!  
But Christabel in dizzy trance  
Stumbling on the unsteady ground  
Shuddered aloud, with a hissing sound;  
And Geraldine again turned round,  
And like a thing that sought relief,  
Full of wonder and full of grief,  
She rolled her large bright eyes divine  
Wildly on Sir Leoline. (*Christabel*, ll.573-96)

Byron's marriage had broken up largely because of his own insensible brutality. Doubtless his facetiousness and Annabella's lack of humour were incompatible (though she could and did joke), but firing pistols at the ceiling as she lay confined, making his preference for his half-sister obvious, and asking, on the birth of their daughter, if the baby was a monster, were not the acts of a normally disaffected husband. His method of throwing her out, by telling her she could take the carriage ("When you are disposed to leave London it would be convenient that a day should be fixed, & (if possible) not a very remote one for that purpose")<sup>34</sup> even though she had expressed neither desire nor intention to leave, was cunning. Voluntarily – for she was in fear of her life – she did what he

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**33:** "Christabel" – I won't have you sneer at Christabel – it is a fine wild poem': B. to Murray, from Diodati, September 30th 1816; BLJ II 107-9; also BLJ IV 331.  
**34:** BLJ V 15.

wanted her to do, even though it went against her conscience as a Christian wife.

Her great offence was that she had, in the shape of their daughter, presented Byron with irrefutable evidence that he was no longer a child himself.<sup>35</sup>

Byron's elaborate pretence – which he sustained for the rest of his life – that he had no idea why she left him, is transparent hypocrisy: his request to Lord Holland, Rogers and Kinnaird, to provide evidence that he had never criticised her (as if that proved anything) shows him to be in a weird state of denial. His extraordinary attack on his wife's companion Mrs Clermont, in *A Sketch from Private Life*, is self-chastisement, displaced, re-sexed, and exhibited publicly:

If like a snake she steals within your walls,  
Till the black slime betray her as she crawls;  
If like a viper to the heart she wind,  
And leave the venom there she did not find; –  
What marvel that this hag of hatred works  
Eternal evil latent as she lurks  
To make a Pandemonium where she dwells,  
And reign the Hecate of domestic Hells?

(*Sketch*, 47-54)

But a “domestic Hell” is what he, not Mrs Clermont, had created.

Such virulence changes, in the Incantation, into a tone more measured but no less powerful:

By thy cold breast – and serpent smile,  
By thy unfathomed gulphs of Guile,  
By that most seeming virtuous eye,  
By thy shut soul's Hypocrisy,  
By the perfection of thine art  
Which passed for human – thine own heart,  
By thy delight in others' pain,  
And by thy brotherhood of Cain,  
I call upon thee! – and compell  
Thyself to be thy proper Hell! (I i 242-51)

Looked at in a broader perspective, Manfred's despair is Byron's own despair at his own failure as a man: Astarte is neither Annabella nor

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**35:** See CHP III 72, 4-7: “I can see / Nothing to loathe in Nature, save to be / A link reluctant in a fleshly chain, / Classed among creatures ...”

Augusta, but an embodiment of his *anima*, the Significant Female Other whom his inner demons had caused him to reject – as it seemed to him in the summer of 1816 – for good.

However, the problem with the Incantation remains: not just, to whom is it directed? not just, does it all relate to a single addressee? But most important – does Manfred even hear it, for has he not collapsed straight after the speeches of the Spirits? Does he hear it in a vision, while unconscious?

Chew sums up the problem:

I am not sure that *The Incantation* was originally part of any drama at all; certainly it fits but imperfectly into the context of *Manfred*.<sup>36</sup>

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In European terms, *Manfred* was the most celebrated and influential of all Byron's works. It was translated into German, for instance, eighteen times during the nineteenth century – once by Wagner's uncle (I believe Manfred metamorphoses into Wotan). Byron had little idea, at first, what he had written, until his anger at the way Murray and Gifford interfered with his text forced him to realise how proprietorial he felt about it.

Some mystery surrounds the play's writing. Its draft manuscript is – unusually for Byron – undated, and Hobhouse, who may be supposed to have been with Byron for much of the time of its composition, appears never to register that it is in progress.<sup>37</sup> If I am right, and the notes to Thomas Taylor's translation of Pausanias are a major influence on the way Byron creates its demon-hierarchy, then he is already thinking about it between May 1st (when he is at Brussels) and June 23rd 1816 (when he is at Evian) for he asks, as I've said, Hobhouse for Taylor's book on those dates;<sup>38</sup> and as Hobhouse arrives at Diodati on August 26th (with Taylor's Pausanias, we must assume: he promises on July 9th to bring it)<sup>39</sup> it's unlikely that anything beyond the very first scene was written before late August. The Alpine scenes in Act I and II bear a close relationship with Byron's Alpine Journal (September 17th-29th), as the notes below will show; but, as Jerome McGann writes,<sup>40</sup> stanzas 5 and 6 of the Incantation

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**36:** Chew p.59.

**37:** See Cochran, "*Nobody has seen it*" – *Byron's First Letter Announcing Manfred*, *Byron Journal*, 1996, pp.68–76.

**38:** BLJ V 74 and 80.

**39:** Hobhouse to B., July 9th 1816 (NLS Ms.43442; BB 228-9).

**40:** CPW III 464.

in the first scene is on paper with a *fleur-de-lys* watermark of a kind Byron used in 1813 and 1814. The Incantation was fair-copied, in July 1816, by Claire Claremont, in the notebook which also contains her version of *Childe Harold III*, and had already been published in late November or early December 1816, in *The Prisoner of Chillon, and Other Poems*. See my comments and notes for the suspicion of a link between the Incantation and Coleridge's *Christabel*.

The revised and received Third Act seems to have been drafted at Rome by May 5th 1817,<sup>41</sup> Byron having arrived in that city on April 29th.

Manfred is a much deeper fellow than any of Byron's previous protagonists; Childe Harold makes no pretence to being a philosopher, or a theologian of dualism, still less a sun-worshipper, and The Giaour, Conrad, Selim and Alp appear not to bother with the questions which have obsessed Manfred; though his indifference and hostility to Christianity is shared by The Giaour, at least.

The play borrows from so many mythologies that even Byron was self-conscious about it: "... a mixed mythology of my own – which you may suppose is somewhat of the strangest" was the way he alerted Kinnaird, on March 25th 1817:<sup>42</sup> an "Olla Podrida" was what his concoction was called in an early review, by William Roberts.<sup>43</sup> Peacock, always on the alert for absurdities in Byron, gives a note to *Nightmare Abbey*:

According to Mr. Toobad, the present period would be the reign of Ahrimanes. Lord Byron seems to be of the same opinion, by the use he has made of Ahrimanes in "Manfred"; where the great Alastor, or Καρχος Δαίμων, of Persia, is hailed king of the world by the Nemesis of Greece, in concert with three of the Scandinavian Valkyræ, under the name of the Destinies; the astrological spirits of the alchemists of the middle ages; an elemental witch, transplanted from Denmark to the Alps; and a chorus of Dr. Faustus's devils, who come in the last act for a soul. It is difficult to conceive where this heterogeneous mythological company could have originally met, except at a table d'hôte, like the six kings in "Candide".<sup>44</sup>

**41:** See Cochran, "A higher and more extended comprehension": B.'s three weeks in Rome, *Keats-Shelley Review* 2001, pp.49-63. See also *Byron and Italy* (CSP 2012), pp.99-118.

**42:** BLJ V 195.

**43:** *The British Critic*, 2nd series, VIII, July 1817, RR BI 275.

**44:** Peacock, *Nightmare Abbey*, note to Chapter IV.



Peacock omits the Neo-Platonist Thomas Taylor, from whom Byron derived the revolutionary idea that Man could damn himself without help from any Evil Principle. As George Sand wrote, Manfred is "... Faust délivré de l'odieuse compagnie de Méphistophélès".<sup>45</sup> It is the superiority Manfred displays to all the transcendental powers he encounters which makes him worrying. He is equally indifferent to the persuasions of Chamois-hunters, witches, demons and abbots, and is self-destructive purely on his own terms – not at all like Faust, or Faustus, who need and receive help in their self-destruction (and redemption, in the case of Faust). Manfred has no-one to blame for his own doom but himself; he is *cunning* in [his] overthrow, / *The careful pilot of [his] proper woe*.

Behind Manfred's need for oblivion at all costs may be Byron's self-horror at the way, late in 1815 and early in 1816, he had wilfully destroyed the happiness of a wife who loved him, whom he despised because she loved him, and whom he had forced to leave their home, shortly after she had born him their child. His behaviour had, as explained, been so extreme that many about him were convinced that he was either ill or insane. Astarte – all that *Manfred* offers by way of heroine – is often taken, by those intent on creating sensation at all costs, to be a version of his half-sister Augusta; but I'd argue that in her remoteness and verbal economy Astarte is closer to Annabella. Annabella could be a very effective rhetorician (on paper, in private), but in public she said as little as possible. Even her statements about Byron's cruelty – made to convince her family and legal advisers that she had a good case – are understated. He married the woman to whom, even in 1812, he was comparing to Emma in Maria Edgeworth's *The Modern Griselda*,<sup>46</sup> knowing her to be, in her infinite patience, his perfect victim. The manipulative hypocrisy whereby, knowing that the outcome would be cruel and disastrous, he made her his wife, and his affectation of not understanding what, when she left the house, all the fuss was about, seem gross even after two centuries, and deserve the implicit critique he made of them himself in *Manfred*:

By thy cold breast – and serpent smile  
By thy unfathomed gulphs of Guile,  
By that most seeming virtuous eye –  
By thy shut soul's Hypocrisy,  
By the perfection of thine art

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45: *Essai sur le drame fantastique: Gæthe, Byron, Mickiewicz: Revue des Deux Mondes*, December 1st 1839, p.612.

46: BLJ II 199; Emma is the gentle, charitable heroine, contrasting with the eponymous one.

Which passed for human thine own heart  
 By thy delight in others' pain  
 And by thy brotherhood of Cain –  
 I call upon thee! and compell  
 Thyself to be thy proper hell. – (I i 242-51)

In so far as he knows himself to have placed himself beyond the pale of human tolerance, Manfred *is* Byron.

### The play's pattern

A *possible* reason for Byron's assertion that he made *Manfred* quite impossible for the stage is that it contains no external conflict, and thus no action. Manfred has no antagonist that he cannot defeat with contemptuous ease: he's Hamlet with no uncle, Macbeth with no Macduff, Lear with no daughters – and, as we've seen, Faust with no Mephistopheles. His conflict is all inward. Two movements run counter to one another in him: his stressful approach to death, and the paradoxical way in which, the nearer he comes to dying, the more serene he becomes. He has two major crises: his collapse before the Incantation in I i, and his seeming rejection by the spirit of Astarte in II iv, which his huge stoicism now enables him to survive – for this time he doesn't collapse. But, after his address to the Sun in III ii, and his meditation on the Coliseum in III iv, we must understand him to have gained (or regained) a spiritual calm, for he has forgotten both the Incantation and Astarte, and has no trouble in summoning-up the confidence and energy which enables him to repel the Spirits which Come For Him in the last scene.

Whether this progress is convincing in terms of dramatic or psychological consistency is a question to be asked. Samuel Claggett Chew<sup>47</sup> ignores the problem; Akiko Yamada<sup>48</sup> finds the clue in Manfred's own visions of the eagle, the waterfall, the sun, and the Coliseum, which enable him to break out of his previous "solipsistic purgatory".<sup>49</sup> Manfred, she argues, "is being gradually *humanized* through a series of interviews with mostly *non-human* beings."<sup>50</sup> Timothy Morton<sup>51</sup> enlarges Yamada

**47:** Chew, pp.59-86. Moore writes of "Those verses, too, entitled "The Incantation," which he introduced afterwards, without any connection with the subject, into Manfred ..." (Moore's Life, p.288).

**48:** *Two Landscapes from Manfred – A Process of Byron's Healing*, in Bachinger (ed.) *Byronic Negotiations* (Peter Lang 2002), pp.117-33.

**49:** *Ibid.*, p.122.

**50:** *Ibid.*, p.124.

**51:** *Byron's Manfred and Ecocriticism*, in Stabler (ed.), *Byron Studies* (Palgrave 2007), pp.155-70.

with an ecological analysis, which he lards with things like

Jerome McGann and Jane Stabler have elucidated the extent to which Byron's irony involves a perilous, Kirkegaardian dance on the volcano of nothingness.<sup>52</sup>

Gordon Spence<sup>53</sup> has a negative answer: Manfred wins by defiance, not acceptance. Spence argues that the Spirits are presented, like those in *The Ancient Mariner* and *Tam O'Shanter*, as part subjective projections of Manfred, part as possessing objective reality. The "psychological progress that he [*Manfred*] makes in the course of the poem"<sup>54</sup> lies in the way that by the end "Manfred has freed himself not only from the creatures of the Abbot's imagination but also from his own"<sup>55</sup> Andrew Stauffer<sup>56</sup> also concentrates on the Spirits as externalisations of Manfred's inner state: whether that state alters, ripens or matures, he doesn't discuss.

If by "Sublime" we mean a quality in the thing observed which creates a not unpleasant sense of our own insignificance, then we could develop the argument of Akiko Yamada by saying that Manfred learns lessons from Sublimity. Here he contemplates the eagle:

Aye

Thou winged & cloud=cleaving Minister!  
Whose happy flight is highest into heaven  
Well mayst thou swoop so near me – I should be  
Thy prey & gorge thine Eaglets; thou art gone  
Where the eye cannot follow thee but thine  
Yet pierces downward – onward – or above  
With a pervading vision: – beautiful –  
How beautiful is all this visible World!  
How glorious in it's action & itself,  
But we, who name ourselves it's sovereigns – we  
Half dust, half deity, alike unfit  
To sink or soar, with our mixed essence make  
A conflict of it's elements – & breathe  
The breath of degradation & of pride  
Contending with low wants & lofty will  
Till our Mortality predominates,

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52: *Ibid.*, p.167.

53: *The Supernatural in Manfred*, 2004 BJ, pp.1-8.

54: *Ibid.*, p.4.

55: *Ibid.*, p.7.

56: *Manfred and his Problems*, in Vigouroux, Christiane (ed.) *Lord Byron: Correspondence(s)* (2008), pp.135-43.

And men are – what they name not to themselves  
And trust not to each other. (I ii 29-47)

The beauty of the visible world isn't something which, in his search for infinite wisdom, Manfred ever noticed – thus bringing the validity of that wisdom into question. This is not a doubt which he articulates at the time, partly because he knows it in advance, albeit in an abstract sense: “The Tree of Knowledge is not that of Life” (I i 12). The sound of the Shepherd's pipe, which follows at once, has the same humbling effect, as do the sights of the rainbow, the Witch herself, the Sun, and, in its different way, the Coliseum: all of them aspects of “Life”. The success of Manfred's conscious, agonised search for meaning (described via exposition), is revealed as flawed by the realisations which (in the present action of the play), occur to him – without his looking for them. The world tries to teach Manfred a lesson in humility, which he only partly learns: as the late-added epigraph says, “There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in [*his*] philosophy”.

Byron's own experience in the Alps had suggested the possibility of such an experience faced with Sublimity, although he had been unable to attain it:

I was disposed to be pleased – I am a lover of Nature – and an Admirer of Beauty – I can bear fatigue – & welcome privation – and have seen some of the noblest views in the world. – But in all this – the recollections of bitterness – & more especially of recent & more home desolation – which must accompany me through life – have preyed upon me here – and neither the music of the Shepherd – the crashing of the Avalanche – nor the torrent – the mountain – the Glacier – the Forest – nor the Cloud – have for one moment – lightened the weight upon my heart – nor enabled me to lose my own wretched identity in the majesty & the power and the Glory – around – above – & beneath me. – I am past reproaches – and there is a time for all things – I am past the wish of vengeance – and I know of none like for what I have suffered – but the hour will come – when what I feel must be felt – & the – – but enough. – – (*Alpine Journal*, September 29th [28th?] 1816)

In this context, we may read Manfred's experiences of Sublimity as compensations for his creator's failures.

## **Manfred and Cain**

Manfred stands at the end of the path to infinite knowledge at the start of which Cain stands, thus making Byron's 1821 play what we should call a

“prequel” to his 1816 / 17 one. That *Manfred* has no need of divine guidance – or indeed any guidance – on his path to understanding, where Cain couldn’t achieve it without Lucifer, makes *Cain* more, not less conservative, than its predecessor. In *Manfred*, divinity, in as far as it is implied at all, is variously depicted, as Peacock jestingly wrote: in *Cain* it is clearly present, and would appear, from the evidence, malign – as in *Prometheus Bound*.

Both protagonists finish unhappily – *Manfred* ends in defiance, Cain in wretchedness.

### Contemporary Reactions

Many reviewers were too polite to say in what way they felt Byron had gone too far with *Manfred*, but inferring what they meant wasn’t hard:

This drama is interesting, yet there are in it domestic allusions, from which works of a dramatic nature should ever be free.<sup>57</sup>

*Manfred* has exiled himself from society; and what is to be the ground of our compassion for the exile? Simply the commission of one of the most revolting of crimes. He has committed incest!<sup>58</sup>

We hope, for the sake of manhood and morality, that the rumour is incorrect which has identified his inmost feelings with the subject before us ...<sup>59</sup>

The same reviewer even implied the play should be banned, on the grounds that it makes incest attractive:

We sincerely recommend Lord Byron to reflect upon the dangers that may accrue to youth and inexperience from a collision with his popular pages, if crime is again to be invested with a garment that moral truth should tear in abhorrence from her polluted shoulders. This book must either be suppressed, or we shall proscribe it altogether.<sup>60</sup>

Many also objected to what they saw as its slipshod qualities, in versification and linguistic precision:

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**57:** *La Belle Assemblée* 1817; at *The Romantics Reviewed*, ed. Reiman, Garland 1972 (“RR”), 107.

**58:** *Gentleman’s Magazine* July 1817; RR 1107.

**59:** *Theatrical Inquisitor* August 1817; RR 2266.

**60:** *Ibid.*, RR 2269.

Though generally flowing, vigorous and sonorous, it is too often slovenly and careless to a great degree; and there are in the very finest passages, so many violations of the plainest rules of blank verse, that we suspect Lord Byron has a very imperfect knowledge of that finest of all music, and has yet much to learn before his language can be well adapted to dramatic compositions.<sup>61</sup>

In the invocation [*I i 28 et seq: Mysterious Agency!*] our readers will clearly perceive, that Lord Byron had the Prospero of Shakespeare in his view, but we cannot complement him on the success of his imitation. How can a “spirit dwell in subtler essence?” The essence of a spirit may perhaps be called subtle; but how a spirit, or any thing else, can dwell in essence (except it be of anchovies), we are at a loss to comprehend.<sup>62</sup>

Others objected to Byron’s plagiarism:

Now the whole of this idea [*II iv, opening: The Hymn of the Spirits to Arimanes*] is taken almost word for word from a very silly and disgusting tale, entitled VATHEK, which for various reasons we have omitted to notice ...<sup>63</sup>

The play was questioned from the point of view of incident, character, and theological consistency:

Upon this non-descript species of drama our observations will be but few. Of incident it has but little, of plot it has none. There is nothing to interest attention, nothing to raise expectation. Of the hero we know nothing, we are taught nothing, and therefore we care nothing. In the characters there is nothing remarkable, except a strange jumble of all the mythologies which ever existed. The fire worship of the Persians, the Nemesis of the Greeks, the fairy tales of our nursery, are brought into action, and what is worst of all, are combined with the appearance of Christianity. The least that can be said of this Olla Podrida is, that in taste it is execrable, in execution absurd.<sup>64</sup>

Byron’s qualifications as a playwright were called into question:

It would be an idle parade of criticism to enter into the merits of this performance, as a specimen of dramatic composition. It has none of the

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**61:** John Wilson in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Monthly Magazine* June 1817; RR 124.

**62:** *British Critic* July 1817; RR 271.

**63:** *Ibid*; RR 273.

**64:** *Ibid*; RR 275.