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Manfred, A Dramatic Poem (composed September 1816–15, February 1817; published 1817)

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

Dramatis Personae

Manfred
Chamois Hunter
Abbot of St Maurice
Manuel
Herman
Witch of the Alps
Arimanes
Nemesis
The Destinies
Spirits, etc.

The scene of the drama is amongst the higher Alps – partly in the Castle of Manfred, and partly in the mountains.

ACT I, SCENE 1


MANFRED. The lamp must be replenished, but even then
It will not burn so long as I must watch;
My slumberers (if I slumber) are not sleep
But a continuance of enduring thought,
Which then I can resist not. In my heart
There is a vigil, and these eyes but close
To look within – and yet I live, and bear
The aspect and the form of breathing men.
But grief should be the instructor of the wise –
Sorrow is knowledge; they who know the most

Notes

Manfred, A Dramatic Poem

1 This verse drama is one of Byron's most explicit and earnest discussions of the concept of the overseer.
2 Hamlet I v 166-7. The epigraph underlines Byron's belief in the supernatural and metaphysical – of which he was, to put it mildly, highly sceptical by the time he published Don Juan, two years later.

Notes

1 The first scene of the play betrays its source in Goethe's Faust, which M. G. Lewis (author of The Monk (1796)) translated for Byron, abroad, in August 1816. Goethe recognized the debt, and when he read Manfred declared it 'a wonderful phenomenon'.
2 A Gothic gallery Byron means a covered balcony designed in the Gothic manner.
3 But grief, knowledge Ecclesiastes 11:18: 'For in much wisdom is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.'

ACT I, SCENE I

Must mourn the deepest o'er the fatal truth:
The tree of knowledge is not that of life.
Philosophy and science, and the springs
Of wonder, and the wisdom of the world
I have essayed; and in my mind there is
A power to make these subject to itself,
But they avail not. I have done men good,
And I have met with good even among men –
But this availed not. I have had my foes
And none have baffled; many fallen before me –
But this availed not. Good or evil, life,
Powers, passions, all I see in other beings
Have been to me as rain unto the sands
Since that all-nameless hour. I have no dread,
And feel the curse to have no natural fear,
Nor flattering throb that beats with hopes or wishes
Or lurking love of something on the earth.
Now to my task.

Mysterious agency?

Ye spirits of the unbounded universe
Whom I have sought in darkness and in light;
Ye who do compass earth about, and dwell
In subler essence; ye to whom the tops
Of mountains inaccessible are haunts,
And earth's and ocean's caves familiar things –
I call upon ye by the written charm
Which gives me power upon you: rise, appear!

(a pause)

They come not yet. Now by the voice of him
Who is the first among you; by this sign
Which makes you tremble; by the claims of him
Who is undying – rise, appear! Appear!

(a pause)

If it be so. Spirits of earth and air,
Ye shall not thus elude me: by a power
Deeper than all yet urged, a tyrant-spell
Which had its birthplace in a star condemned,
The burning wreck of a demolished world,
A wandering hell in the eternal space;
By the strong curse which is upon my soul,
The thought which is within me and around me,
I do compel ye to my will. Appear!
A star is seen at the darker end of the gallery. It is stationary, and a voice is heard singing.

First Spirit

Mortal, to thy bidding bowed
From my mansion in the cloud
Which the breath of twilight builds
And the summer’s sunset gilds
With the azure and vermillion
Which is mixed for my pavilion,
Though thy quest may be forbidden,
On a starbeam I have ridden,
To thine adoration bowed; Mortal – be thy wish avowed!

Voice of the Second Spirit

Mont Blanc is the monarch of mountains,
They crowned him long ago
On a throne of rocks, in a robe of clouds
With a diadem of snow.
Around his waist are forests braced,
The avalanche in his hand;
But ere it fall that thundering ball
Must pause for my command.
The glacier’s cold and restless mass
Moves onward day by day,
But I am he who bids it pass
Or with its ice delay.
I am the spirit of the place,
Could make the mountain bow
And quiver to his caverned base –
And what with me wouldst thou?

Voice of the Third Spirit

In the blue depth of the waters
Where the wave hath no strife,
Where the wind is a stranger
And the sea-snake hath life,
Where the mermaid is decking
Her green hair with shells,

Like the storm on the surface
Came the sound of thy spells;
O’er my calm hall of coral
The deep echo rolled –
To the spirit of ocean
Thy wishes unfold!

Fourth Spirit

Where the slumbering earthquake
Lies pillowed on fire,
And the lakes of bitumen
Rise boilingly higher;
Where the roots of the Andes
Strike deep in the earth,
As their summits to heaven
Shoot soaringly forth;
I have quitted my birthplace,
Thy bidding to hide –
Thy spell hath subdued me,
Thy will be my guide!

Fifth Spirit

I am the rider of the wind,
The stirrer of the storm;
The hurricane I left behind
Is yet with lightning warm;
To speed to thee, o’er shore and sea
I swept upon the blast;
The fleet I met sailed well and yet
’Twill sink ere night be passed.

Sixth Spirit

My dwelling is the shadow of the night,
Why dost thy magic torture me with light?

Seventh Spirit

The star which rules thy destiny
Was ruled, ere earth began, by me;
It was a world as fresh and fair
As e’er revolved round sun in air;
Its course was free and regular,
Space bosomed not a lovelier star.
The hour arrived, and it became
A wandering mass of shapeless flame,

Notes

1 The Spirit of the air.
2 Mortal The spirit puts Manfred in his place from the start.
3 adjuration appeal.
4 The Spirit of earth.
5 Byron visited Mont Blanc with Hobhouse in late August–September 1816.

" Thrice of rocks an image stemming back to Childe Harold III 914–4, and picked up by Shelley in Mont Blanc 15–17.
* that thundering ball i.e. the rock which starts the avalanche.
+ The glacier’s day by day an observation made by Shelley on his visit to Mont Blanc and Chamonix; see p. 113.
8 The Spirit of water.
9 decking adorning.
10 The Spirit of fire.
A pathless comet and a curse —
The menace of the universe.
Still rolling on with innate force,
Without a sphere, without a course,
A bright deformity on high,
The monster of the upper sky!
And thou beneath its influence born,
Thou worm whom I obey and scorn! 130
Forced by a power (which is not thine,
And lent thee but to make thee mine)
For this brief moment to descend,
Where these weak spirits round thee bend
And parley with a thing like thee —
What wouldst thou, child of clay, with me?

The Seven Spirits

Earth, ocean, air, night, mountains, winds, thy star,
Are at thy beck and bidding, child of clay!
Before thee at thy quest their spirits are —
What wouldst thou with us, son of mortals? Say!

MANFRED: Forgetfulness —

FIRST SPIRIT: Of what, of whom, and why?
MANFRED: Of that which is within me; read it there —
Ye know it, and I cannot utter it.

SPIRIT: We can but give thee that which we possess.
Ask of us subjects, sovereignty, the power
O'er earth, the whole or portion, or a sign
Which shall control the elements whereof
We are the dominators, each and all —
These shall be thine.

MANFRED: Oblivion, self-oblivion —
Can ye not wring from out the hidden realms
Ye offer so profusely what I ask?

SPIRIT: It is not in our essence, in our skill;
But — thou mayst die.

MANFRED: Will death bestow it on me?

SPIRIT: We are immortal and do not forget;
We are eternal and to us the past
Is, as the future, present. Art thou answered?

MANFRED: Ye mock me — but the power which brought ye here
Hath made you mine. Slaves, scoff not at my will!
The mind, the spirit, the Promethean spark,
The lightning of my being, is as bright,
Pervading, and far-darting as your own —
And shall not yield to yours, though cooped in clay!
Answer, or I will teach ye what I am.

SPIRIT. We answer as we answered; our reply
Is even in thine own words.

MANFRED. Why say ye so?

SPIRIT: If, as thou say'st, thine essence be as ours,
We have replied in telling thee, the thing
Mortals call death hath nought to do with us.

MANFRED: I then have called ye from your realms in vain;
Ye cannot, or ye will not, aid me.

SPIRIT: Say;

What we possess we offer, it is thine,
Bethink ere thou disman us, ask again;
Kingdom, and sway and strength, and length of days —

MANFRED: Accursed! What have I to do with days?
They are too long already. Hence! Begone!

SPIRIT: Yet pause. Being here, our will would do thee service;
Bethink thee, is there then no other gift
Which we can make not worthless in thine eyes?

MANFRED: No, none — yet stay one moment ere we part,
I would behold ye face to face. 175
Your voices, sweet and melancholy sounds,
As music on the waters, and I see
The steady aspect of a clear large star —
But nothing more. Approach me as ye are,
Or one, or all, in your accustomed forms.

SPIRIT: We have no forms beyond the elements
Of which we are the mind and principle.
But choose a form — in that we will appear.

MANFRED: I have no choice; there is no form on earth
Hiding or beautiful to me. Let him
Who is most powerful of ye, take such aspect
As unto him may seem most fitting. Come!

SEVENTH SPIRIT (appearing in the shape of a beautiful female figure): Behold!

MANFRED. Oh God! If it be thus, and thou
Art not a madness and a mockery,
I yet might be most happy. I will clasp thee,
And we again will be — (the figure vanishes)
My heart is crushed!

Manfred falls senseless. A voice is heard in the incantation which follows.

When the moon is on the wave
And the glow-worm in the grass,

Notes

38 face to face Exodus 33:11: ‘And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.’
39 The spirit appears in the form of Antaète, but, as M'Cormick observes, II. 232-51 were written with Lady Byron in mind.
40 The incantation (ll. 193-265) was one of the earliest parts of Manfred to be composed, certainly by 24 August 1816.
And the meteor on the grave
And the wisp on the morass,"
When the falling stars are shooting
And the answered owls are hooting,
And the silent leaves are still
In the shadow of the hill,
Shall my soul be upon thine
With a power and with a sign.

Though thy slumber may be deep
Yet thy spirit shall not sleep;
There are shades which will not vanish,
There are thoughts thou canst not banish;
By a power to thee unknown
Thou canst never be alone;
Thou art wrapped as with a shroud,
Thou art gathered in a cloud —
And forever shalt thou dwell
In the spirit of this spell.

Though thou seest me not pass by,
Thou shalt feel me with thine eye
As a thing that, though unseen,
Must be near thee, and hath been;
And when in that secret dread
Thou hast turned around thy head,
Thou shalt marvel I am not
As thy shadow on the spot,
And the power which thou dost feel
Shall be what thou must conceal.

And a magic voice and verse
Hath baptized thee with a curse;
And a spirit of the air
Hath begirt thee with a snare;
In the wind there is a voice
Shall forbid thee to rejoice;
And to thee shall night deny
All the quiet of her sky;
And the day shall have a sun
Which shall make thee wish it done.

From thy false tears I did distill
An essence which hath strength to kill;
From thy own heart I did wring
The black mood in its blackest spring;
From thy own smile I snatched the snake,
For there it coiled as in a brake;"a"

From thy own lip I drew the charm
Which gave all these their chiefest harm;
In proving every poison known,
I found the strongest was thine own.

By thy cold breast and serpent smile,
By thy unfathomed gulfs 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,"a"
I call upon thee, and compel
Thyself to be thy proper"b" hell!

And on thy head I pour the vial
Which doth devote"a" thee to this trial;
Nor to slumber, nor to die,
Shall be in thy destiny;
Though thy death shall still seem near
To thy wish, but as a fear;
Lo! the spell now works around thee
And the clancless chain hath bound thee;
O'er thy heart and brain together
Hath the word been passed: now wither!

ACT I, SCENE II

The mountain of the Jungfrau.1 Time: morning. Manfred alone upon the cliffs.

MANFRED. The spirits I have raised abandon me,
The spells which I have studied fail me,
The remedy I recked1 of tortured me;
I learn no more on superhuman aid,
It hath no power upon the past, and for
The future, till the past be gulped in darkness,
It is not of my search. My mother earth,
And thou fresh-breaking day, and you, ye mountains —
Why are ye beautiful? I cannot love ye.
And thou, the bright eye of the universe
That openest over all, and unto all

Notes
a" morass bog, marsh. The 'wisp' is a phosphorescent light seen hovering or flitting over marshy ground, supposed to be due to the spontaneous combustion of an inflammable gas (phosphoreted hydrogen) derived from decaying organic matter; popularly called Wille-the-wisp.

b" snake breaker.

p. 240. From thy own lip I drew the charm Which gave all these their chiefest harm;
In proving every poison known,
I found the strongest was thine own.

p. 245. By thy cold breast and serpent smile,
By thy unfathomed gulfs 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 compel
Thyself to be thy proper hell!

p. 250. And on thy head I pour the vial
Which doth devote thee to this trial;
Nor to slumber, nor to die,
Shall be in thy destiny;
Though thy death shall still seem near
To thy wish, but as a fear;
Lo! the spell now works around thee
And the clancless chain hath bound thee;
O'er thy heart and brain together
Hath the word been passed: now wither!

1 As McGann notes, this scene reworks that of Prometheus bound on the rock of the Caucause in Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound.
2 Byron first saw the mountain of the Jungfrau 23 September 1816 (Marchand v 201-2).
Art a delight – thou shin'st not on my heart
And you, ye crags upon whose extreme edge
I stand, and on the torrent's brink beneath
Behold the tall pines dwindled as to shrubs
In dizziness of distance, when a leap
A stir, a motion, even a breath would bring
My breast upon its rocky bosom's bed
To rest for ever – wherefore do I pause?
I feel the impulse, yet I do not plunge;
I see the peril, yet do not recede;
And my brain reels, and yet my foot is firm.
There is a power upon me which withholds
And makes it my fatality to live∗ –
If it be life to wear within myself
This barrenness of spirit, and to be
My own soul's sepulchre, for I have ceased
To justify my deeds unto myself
(The last infirmity of evil).∗ (an eagle passes) Aye,
Thou winged and cloud- cleaving minister,
Whose happy flight is highest into heaven,
Well may'st thou swoop so near me – I should be
Thy prey, and 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 its action and itself!
But we who name ourselves its sovereigns, we
Half-dust, half-daisy, alike unfit
'To sink or soar,' with our mixed essence make
A conflict of its elements, and breathe
The breath of degradation and of pride,
Contending with low wants and lofty will
Till our mortality predominates –
And men are what they name not to themselves,
And trust not to each other. (The shepherd's pipe in the distance is heard.)
Hark! the note,
The natural music of the mountain reed
(For here the patriarchal days are not
A pastoral fable) pipes in the liberal sixth air,
Mixed with the sweet bells of the sauntering herd!
My soul would drink those echoes. Oh that I were
The viewless spirit of a lovely sound,
A living voice, a breathing harmony,
A bodiless enjoyment, born and dying
With the blessed tone which made me!

Enter from below a Chamois Hunter

CHAMOIS HUNTER.

Even so

This way the chamois' leap. Her nimble feet
Have baffled me; my gains today will scarce
Repay my breakneck travail. What is here
Who seems not of my trade, and yet hath reached
A height which none even of our mountaineers,
Save our best hunters, may attain? His garb
Is goodly, his mien manly, and his air
Proud as a freeborn peasant's, at this distance
I will approach him nearer.

MANFRED (not perceiving the other). To be thus;

Grey-haired with anguish like these blasted pines,
Wrecks of a single winter, barkless, branchless,
A blighted trunk upon a cursed root,
Which but supplies a feeling to decay –
And to be thus, eternally but thus,
Having been otherwise! Now furrowed o'er
With wrinkles; ploughed by moments, not by years;
And hours all tortured into ages – hours
Which I outline! Ye toppling crags of ice,
Ye avalanches whom a breath draws down
In mountainous c'erwhelming, come and crush me!
I hear ye momently above, beneath,
Crash with a frequent conflict, but ye pass
And only fall on things which still would live –
On the young flourishing forest, or the hut
And hamlet of the harmless villager.

CHAMOIS HUNTER. The mists begin to rise from up the valley;
I'll warn him to descend, or he may chance
To lose at once his way and life together.

MANFRED. The mists boil up around the glaciers; clouds
Rise curling fast beneath me, white and sulphury
Like foam from the roused ocean of deep hell
Whose every wave breaks on a living shore,
Heaped with the damned like pebbles.∗ I am giddy.

CHAMOIS HUNTER. I must approach him cautiously; if near,
A sudden step will startle him, and he
Seems tottering already.

MANFRED. Mountain have fallen,
Leaving a gap in the clouds, and with the shock
Rocking their Alpine brethren, filling up
The ripe green valleys with destruction's splinters,
Damming the rivers with a sudden dash
Which crushed the waters into mist and made
Their fountains find another channel – thus,

Notes

∗ my fatality to live a clever paradox that echoes Hamlet, who mentions the 'calamity of so long life' (Hamlet III 168).

4 My own soul's sepulchre. Cf. Milton's Samson Agonistes 102: 'Myself, my sepulchre, a moving grave.'

5 The last infirmity of evil an echo of Lydias 31, in which fame is 'That last infirmity of noble mind'.

6 How beautiful sink or soar. There is a general recollection here of Hamlet's famous speech, Hamlet II ii 205-320.

7 liberal abundant.
Thus in its old age, did Mount Rosenberg:
Why stood I not beneath it?

CHAMOIS HUNTER.
Friend, have a care,
Your next step may be fatal! For the love
Of him who made me, stand not on that brink!

MANFRED (not hearing him). Such would have been for me a fitting tomb;
My bones had then been quiet in their depth;
They had then been strewn upon the rocks
For the wind's pastime, as thus - thus they shall be,
In this one plunge. Farewell, ye opening heavens!
Look not upon me thus reproachfully.
Ye were not meant for me. Earth, take these atoms!
As Manfred is in act to spring from the cliff, the Chamois Hunter seizes and retains him with a sudden grasp.

CHAMOIS HUNTER. Hold, madman! Though aweary of thy life,
Stain not our pure vales with thy guilty blood!
Away with me - I will not quit my hold.

MANFRED. I am most sick at heart - nay, grasp me not,
I am all feebleness; the mountains whirl
Spinning around me - I grow blind. What art thou?

CHAMOIS HUNTER. I'll answer that anon. Away with me;
The clouds grow thicker - there, now lean on me;
Place your foot here - here, take this staff, and cling
A moment to that shrub. Now give me your hand
And hold fast by my girdle - softly, well.

The chalet will be gained within an hour;
Come on, we'll quickly find a surer footing
And something like a pathway, which the torrent
Hath washed since winter. Come, 'tis bravely done -
You should have been a hunter! Follow me.

As they descend the rocks with difficulty, the scene closes.

ACT II, SCENE 1

A cottage amongst the Bernese Alps: Manfred and the Chamois Hunter.

CHAMOIS HUNTER. No, no - yet pause, thou must not yet go forth;
Thy mind and body are alike unfit
To trust each other for some hours, at least.
When thou art better, I will be thy guide -
But whither?

MANFRED. It imports not. I do know
My route full well, and need no further guidance.

CHAMOIS HUNTER. Thy garb and gait bespeak thee of high lineage -

One of the many chiefs, whose castled crags
Look o'er the lower valleys. Which of these
May call thee lord? I only know their portals; My way of life leads me but rarely down
To bask by the huge hearths of those old halls,
Carousing with the vassals; but the paths
Which step from out our mountains to their doors
I know from childhood - which of these is thine?

MANFRED. No matter.

CHAMOIS HUNTER. Will sir, pardon me the question,
And be of better cheer. Come taste my wine,
'Tis of an ancient vintage - many a day
'T has thawed my veins among our glacers; now
Let it do thus for thine. Come, pledge me fairly.

MANFRED. Away, away! There's blood upon the brim!
Will it then never, never sink in the earth?

CHAMOIS HUNTER. What dost thou mean? Thy senses wander from thee.

MANFRED. I say 'tis blood - my blood! The pure warm stream
Which ran in the veins of my fathers, and in ours
When we were in our youth, and had one heart,
And loved each other as we should not love,
And this was shed. But still it rises up,
Colouring the clouds that shut me out from heaven,
Where thou art not, and I shall never be.

CHAMOIS HUNTER. Man of strange words and some half-maddening sin
Which makes thee people vacancy, whate'er
Thy dread and sufferance be, there's comfort yet -
The aid of holy men, and heavenly patience -

MANFRED. Patience and patience hence! That word was made
For brutes of burden, not for birds of prey;
Preach it to mortals of a dust like thine,
I am not of thine order.

CHAMOIS HUNTER. Thanks to heaven!
I would not be of thine for the free fame
Of William Tell! But whate'er thine ill,

MANFRED. Do I not hear it? Look on me - I live.

CHAMOIS HUNTER. This is convulsion, and no healthful life.

MANFRED. I tell thee, man! I have lived many years,
Many long years, but they are nothing now
To those which I must number: ages, ages,
Space and eternity - and consciousness
With the fierce thirst of death - and still unsalted!

CHAMOIS HUNTER. Why, on thy brow the seal of middle age
Hath scarce been set; I am thine elder far.

MANFRED. Think'st thou existence doth depend on time?
It doth, but actions are our epochs. Mine

Notes

On 2 September 1816 part of Mt Roseberg fell and buried four villages.

"guilty" i.e. guilty of suicide; but there is an irony because
Manfred is guilty of other sins of which the Chamois Hunter
knows nothing.

Notes

1 portal gateway.
2 pledge trust.
3 The pure warm stream... Abel. The archetypal model of
Manfred's sins is again Cain, who killed his brother Abel.
Have made my days and nights imperishable,
Endless, and all alike as sands on the shore,
Innumerable atoms, and one desert,
Barren and cold, on which the wild waves break
But nothing rests save carcasses and wrecks,
Rocks, and salt-surf weeds of bitterness.

CHAMOIS HUNTER. Alas, he’s mad – but yet I must not leave him.

MANFRED. I would I were, for then the things I see
Would be but a destempered dream.

CHAMOIS HUNTER. What is it
That thou dost see, or think thou look’st upon?

MANFRED. Myself and thee, a peasant of the Alps;
Thy humble virtues, hospitable home
And spirit patient, pious, proud and free;
Thy self-respect, grafted on innocent thoughts;
Thy days of health and nights of sleep; thy toils
By danger dignified, yet guiltless; hopes
Of cheerful old age and a quiet grave
With cross and garland over its green turf,
And thy grandchildren’s love for epitaph –
This do I see, and then I look within –
It matters not; my soul was scorched already.

CHAMOIS HUNTER. And wouldst thou then exchange thy lot for mine?

MANFRED. No, friend! I would not wrong thee, nor exchange
My lot with living being. I can bear –
However wretchedly, ‘tis still to bear –
In life what others could not brook to dream,
But perish in their slumber.

CHAMOIS HUNTER. And with this,
This cautious feeling for another’s pain,
Canst thou be black with evil? Say not so.
Can one of gentle thoughts have wreaked revenge
Upon his enemies?

MANFRED. Oh no, no, no!
My injuries came down on those who loved me,
On those whom I best loved. I never quelled
An enemy, save in my just defence,
My wrongs were all on those I should have cherished,
But my embrace was fatal.

CHAMOIS HUNTER. Heaven give thee rest,
And penitence restore thee to thyself;
My prayers shall be for thee.

MANFRED. I need them not,
But can endure thy pity. I depart;
‘Tis time, farewell! Here’s gold, and thanks for thee –
No words, it is thy due. Follow me not.
I know my path, the mountain peril’s past –
And once again I charge thee, follow not!

Exit Manfred.

Notes

Act II, Scene II

A lower valley in the Alps. A cataract. Enter Manfred.

Act II, Scene II

A lower valley in the Alps. A cataract. Enter Manfred.
It is not noon. The sunbow’s rays still arch
The torrent with the many hues of heaven;
And roll the sheeted silver’s waving column
O’er the crag’s headlong perpendicular,
And fling its lines of foaming light along,
And to and fro, like the pale courser’s tail.
The giant steed to be bestrode by death,
As told in the Apocalypse. 1 No eyes
But mine now drink this sight of loveliness;
I should be sole in this sweet solitude,
And with the spirit of the place divide
The homage of these waters. I will call her.

Manfred takes some of the water into the palm of his hand, and flings it in the air, muttering the adjuration. After a pause, the Witch of the Alps rises beneath the arch of the sunbow of the torrent.

Beautiful spirit, with thy hair of light
And dazzling eyes of glory, in whose form
The charms of earth’s least mortal daughters grow
To an unearthly stature in an essence
Of purer elements, while the hues of youth –
Carnationed like a sleeping infant’s cheek,
Rocked by the beating of her mother’s heart,
Or the rose tints, which summer’s twilight leaves
Upon the lofty glacier’s virgin snow,
The blush of earth embracing with her heaven –
Tinge thy celestial aspect, and make tame
The beauties of the sunbow which bends o’er thee;
Beautiful spirit, in thy calm clear brow
Wherein is glazed 2 serenity of soul,
Which of itself shows immortality,
I read that thou wilt pardon to a son

Notes

1. the Apocalypse i.e. the Book of Revelation of St John the Divine 6:8. Lines 1–8 versify remarks made by Byron in the journal for Augusta Leigh, 22 September 1816: ‘the torrent is in shape curving over the rock – like the tail of a white horse streaming in the wind – such as it might be conceived would be that of the “pale horse” on which Death is mounted in the Apocalypse’ (Marchand v 101).

2. sole single, alone

3. her i.e. the spirit of the place, the Witch of the Alps.

4. glazed reflected.
Of earth, whom the abstruser's powers permit
At times to commune with them, if that he
Avail him of his spells, to call thee thus
And gaze on thee a moment.

Witch.
Son of earth!
I know thee and the powers which give thee power;
I know thee for a man of many thoughts
And deeds of good and ill (extreme in both).
Fatal and fated in thy sufferings.
I have expected this—what wouldst thou with me?

Manfred. To look upon thy beauty, nothing further.
The face of the earth hath madden'd me, and I
Take refuge in her mysteries, and pierce
To the abodes of those who govern her,
But they can nothing aid me. I have sought
From them what they could not bestow, and now
I search no further.

Witch.
What could be the quest
Which is not in the power of the most powerful,
The rulers of the invisible?

Manfred. A boon—
But why should I repeat it? 'T were in vain.
Witch. I know not that; let thy lips utter it.

Manfred. Well, though it torture me, 'tis but the same;
My pang shall find a voice. From my youth upwards
My spirit walked not with the souls of men,
Nor looked upon the earth with human eyes;
The thirst of their ambition was not mine;
The aim of their existence was not mine;
My joys, my griefs, my passions and my powers
Made me a stranger; though I wore the form,
I had no sympathy with breathing flesh,
Nor midst the creatures of clay that girded me
Was there but one who—but of her anon.
I said, with men, and with the thoughts of men
I held but slight communion, but instead
My joy was in the wilderness—to breathe
The difficult air of the iced mountain's top
Where the birds dare not build, nor insect's wing
Flit o'er the herbage granite; or to plunge
Into the torrent, and to roll along
On the swift whirl of the new-breaking wave
Of river-stream or ocean in their flow.
In these my early strength exulted— or
To follow through the night the moving moon,*
The stars and their development; or catch

The dazzling lightnings till my eyes grew dim;
Or to look, list'ning, on the scattered leaves
While autumn winds were at their evening song.
These were my pastimes, and to be alone;
For if the beings of whom I was one
(Hating to be so) crossed me in my path,
I felt myself degraded back to them
And was all clay again. And then I dived
In my lone wanderings to the caves of death.
Searching its cause in its effect, and drew
From witheid bones and skulls and heaped-up dust
Conclusions most forbidden.* Then I passed
The nights of years in sciences untaught,
Save in the old time, and with time and toil
And terrible ordeal, and such penance
As in itself hath power upon the air,
And spirits that do compass air and earth,
Space and the peopled infinite. I made
Mine eyes familiar with eternity,
Such as, before me, did the Magi and
He* who from out their fountain dwellings raised
Eros and Acherus at Gadara,
As I do thee. And with my knowledge grew
The thirst of knowledge, and the power and joy
Of this most bright intelligence, until—

Witch. Proceed.

Manfred. Oh, I but thus prolonged my words,
Boasting these idle attributes,* because,
As I approach the core of my heart's grief—
But to my task. I have not named to thee
Father or mother, mistress, friend or being
With whom I wore the chain of human ties;
If I had such, they seemed not such to me.
Yet there was one—*

Witch. Spare not thyself; proceed.

Manfred. She was like me in lineaments—her eyes,
Her hair, her features, all, to the very tone
Even of her voice, they said were like to mine,
But softened all and tempered into beauty.
She had the same lone thoughts and wanderings,
The quest of hidden knowledge, and a mind

Notes
* abstruser, concealed; i.e. not perceptible to the senses.
* one i.e. Astarte, his sister.
* the moving moon borrowed from Coleridge, The Ancient Mariner (1817) 263: 'The moving moon went up the sky.'
* And then I died... forbidden Manfred's dabbling among corpses has much in common with the researches of Victor Frankenstein in Mary Godwin's novel, conceived at the same time as Byron's poem, summer 1816, though not published until 1817. Byron is probably thinking, however, of Shelley's Alastor, who 'made my bed / In channels and on coffins' (II. 45-46).
* the Magi the ancient Persian priestly caste.
* He: 'The philosopher lambicus. The story of the raising of Eros and Acherous may be found in his life, by Euphagius. It is well told' (Byron's note). Lambicus (died 710 CE) was summoned by magic Love and its opposite from fountains in Syria.
* attribuce achievements.
* one Astarte.
To comprehend the universe—nor these
Alone, but with them gentler powers than mine:
Pity and smiles and tears (which I had not)
And tenderness (but that I had for her),
Humility (and that I never had).
Her faults were mine; her virtues were her own—
I loved her, and destroyed her!

WITCH. With thy hand?
MANFRED. Not with my hand, but heart—which broke her heart:
It gazed on mine and withered. I have shed
Blood, but not hers, and yet her blood was shed—
I saw and could not staunch it.

WITCH. And for this,
A being of the race thou dost despise,
The order which thine own would rise above,
Mingling with us and ours, thou dost forego
The gifts of our great knowledge, and shrink’st back
To reenact mortality? Away!

MANFRED. Daughter of air, I tell thee, since that hour—
But words are breath; look on me in my sleep
Or watch my watchings—come and sit by me!
My solitude is solitude no more,
But peopled with the Furies;"I have gnashed
My teeth in darkness till returning morn,
Then cursed myself till sunset; I have prayed
For madness as a blessing—tis denied me;
I have affronted death, but in the war
Of elements the waters shrunk from me,
And fatal things passed harmless—the cold hand
Of an all-pitiless demon held me back,
Back by a single hair which would not break.
In fantasy, imagination, all
The affluence of my soul (which one day was
A Croesus in creation),"I plunged deep,
But like an ebbing wave, it dashed me back
Into the gulf of my unfathomed thought.
I plunged amidst mankind; forgetfulness
I sought in all save where ‘tis to be found,
And that I have to learn; my sciences,
My long-pursued and superhuman art
Is mortal here. I dwell in my despair
And live—and live for ever.

WITCH. It may be
That I can aid thee.
MANFRED. To do this thy power
Must wake the dead, or lay me low with them.
Do so, in any shape, in any hour.

With any torture—so it be the last.
WITCH. That is not in my province, but if thou
Will swear obedience to my will and do
My bidding, it may help thee to thy wishes.
MANFRED. I will not swear" Obey? And whom? The spirits
Whose presence I command—and be the slave
Of those who served me? Never!

WITCH. Is this all?
Hast thou no gentler answer? Yet bethink thee,
And pause ere thou rejectest.

MANFRED. I have said it.
WITCH. Enough! I may retire then—say!
MANFRED. Retire!

The Witch disappears.

MANFRED (alone). We are the fools of time and terror. Days
Steal on us and steal from us, yet we live,
Loathing our life, and dreading still to die.
In all the days of this detested yoke
(This heaving burden, this accursed breath,
This vital weight upon the struggling heart
Which sinks with sorrow or beats quick with pain,
Or joy that ends in agony or faintness);
In all the days of past and future—for
In life there is no present—we can number
How few, how less than few, wherein the soul
Forbears to pant for death and yet draws back
As from a stream in winter, though the chill
Be but a moment’s. I have one resource
Still in my science; I can call the dead
And ask them what it is we dread to be.
The sternest answer can but be the grave,
And that is nothing; if they answer not...
The buried prophet answered to the hag
Of Endor," and the Spartan monarch drew
From the Byzantine maid’s unsleeping spirit
An answer and his destiny—he slew
That which he loved, unknowing what he slew,
And died unpardoned, though he called in aid
The Physian Jove, and in Phigalia roused
The Arcadian evocators to compel
The indignant shadow to depose her wrath
Or fix her term of vengeance; she replied

Notes

" Furies avenging agents of the gods.
" A Croesus in creation i.e. endlessly creative. Croesus was the last king of Lydia, of fabulous wealth; Byron may be recalling the legend that when Croesus met Solon, Solon distinguished between the imagined happiness of being Croesus and the genuine happiness of being dead.
" Manfred’s defiance of the supernatural powers is a distinctively Byronic departure from the Faust legend.
" Samuel was raised from the dead by the Witch of Endor, i Samuel 28:7.
" Evocators those who invoke spirits.
" Shadow ghost.
" Depose lay aside.
In words of dubious import, but fulfilled."
If I had never lived, that which I love
Had still been living; had I never loved,
That which I loved would still be beautiful,
Happy and giving happiness. What is she,
What is she now? A sufferer for my sins,
A thing I dare not think upon – or nothing.
Within few hours I shall not call in vain,
Yet in this hour I dread the thing I dare.
Until this hour I never shrank to gaze
On spirit, good or evil; now I tremble
And feel a strange cold thaw upon my heart.
But I can act even what I most abhor
And champion human fears. The night approaches.

Exit

ACT II, SCENE III

The summit of the Jungfrau mountain. Enter First Destiny.
The moon is rising broad and round and bright,
And here on snows where never human foot
Of common mortal trod, yea nightly tread
And leave no traces. O'er the savage sea,
The glassy ocean of the mountain ice,
We skim its rugged breakers, which put on
The aspect of a tumbling tempest's foam,
Frozen in a moment – a dead whirlpool's image;
And this most steep fantastic pinnacle,
The fretwork\(^1\) of some earthquake where the clouds
Pause to repose themselves in passing by,
Is sacred to our revels or our vigils.
Here do I wait my sisters, on our way
To the Hall of Arimanes, for tonight
Is our great festival. 'Tis strange they come not.

A VOICE WITHOUT, SINGING

'The captive usurper'\(^2\)
Hurl'd down from the throne,\(^4\)
Lay buried in torpor,
Forgotten and lone;
I broke through his slumber,

I shivered his chain,
I leagued him with numbers\(^6\) –
He's tyrant again!
With the blood of a million he'll answer my care,
With a nation's destruction, his flight and despair.

SECOND VOICE WITHOUT

The ship sailed on, the ship sailed fast,
But I left not a sail, and I left not a mast;
There is not a plank of the hull or the deck,
And there is not a rafter to lament o'er his wreck,
Save one whom I held, as he swam, by the hair.
And he was a subject well worthy my care –
A traitor on land and a pirate at sea –
But I saved him to wreak further havoc for me!

FIRST DESTINY (ANSWERING)

The city lies sleeping;
The morn, to deplore it,
May dawn on it weeping;
Sullenly, slowly,
The black plague flew o'er it –
Thousands lie lowly;
Tens of thousands shall perish;
The living shall fly from
The sick they should cherish,
But nothing can vanquish
The touch that they die from.
Sorrow and anguish
And evil and dread
Envelope a nation;
The blessed are the dead
Who see not the sight
Of their own desolation.
This work of a night,
This wreck of a realm, this deed of my doing –
For ages I've done and shall still be renewing!

Enter the Second and Third Destinies

THE THREE

Our hands contain the hearts of men,
Our footsteps are their graves;
We only give to take again
The spirits of our slaves!

FIRST DESTINY Welcome! Where's Nemesis?
SECOND DESTINY. At some great work.

Notes

\(^1\) The story of Pausanias, King of Sparta, who commanded the Greeks in the Battle of Plataea, and afterwards perished for an attempt to betray the Lacedaemonians, and Cleopatra, is told in Plutarch's Life of Camon, and in the Lucan of Pausanias the Sophist, in his description of Greece (Byron's note).

\(^2\) Act II, Scene III.

\(^3\) The Jungfrau had been scaled in 1811.

\(^4\) Fretwork figurative; usually refers to carved, decorative woodwork.

\(^5\) The captive usurper Napoleon Bonaparte, who, at the time of writing, was in exile on St Helena. These lines should be read in the light of Byron's meditation on Napoleon, Childe Harold the Stanzas 36-42.

\(^6\) Hurl'd down from the throne Napoleon crowned himself Emperor in 1804, and abdicated in 1814. He was 'hurl'd down' when the combined might of the allies defeated him at Waterloo, 1815.

\(^7\) The Spirit prophesies the return of Napoleon from St Helena. It was not to happen.

\(^8\) shivered - shattered.

\(^9\) numbers: i.e. of soldiers.
Enter the Destinies and Nemesis

FIRST DESTINY. 

Glory to Arimanes! On the earth
His power increaseth; both my sisters did
His bidding, nor did I neglect my duty.

SECOND DESTINY. 

Glory to Arimanes! We who bow
The necks of men, bow down before his throne.

THIRD DESTINY. 

Glory to Arimanes! We await
His nod.

NEMESIS. 

Sovereign of Sovereigns! We are thine.
And all that liveth, more or less, is ours,
And most things wholly so; still to increase
Our power increasing thine, demands our care,
And we are vigilant. Thy late commands
Have been fulfilled to the utmost.

Enter Manfred

A SPIRIT

What is here?

A mortal? Thou most rash and fatal wretch,
Bow down and worship!

SECOND SPIRIT.

I do know the man,
A Magian' of great power and fearful skill.

THIRD SPIRIT.

Bow down and worship, slave! What, know'st thou not
Thine and our sovereign? Tremble, and obey!

ALL THE SPIRITS.

Prostrate thyself and thy condemned clay,
Child of the earth, or dread the worst!

MANFRED.

I know it,
And yet ye see I kneel not.

FOURTH SPIRIT.

'Twill be taught thee.

MANFRED. 

'Tis taught already; many a night on the earth,
On the bare ground have I bowed down my face
And strewed my head with ashes. I have known
The fullness of humiliation, for
I sunk before my vain despair, and knelt
To my own desolation.

FIFTH SPIRIT.

Dost thou dare
Refuse to Arimanes on his throne
What the whole earth accords, beholding not
The terror of his glory? Crouch, I say!

MANFRED. 

Bid him bow down to that which is above him,
The overruling Infinite, the Maker
Who made him not for worship; let him kneel,
And we will kneel together.

THE SPIRITS. 

Crush the worm!

Tear him in pieces!

FIRST DESTINY. 

Hence! Avant! He's mine.

Prince of the powers invisible! This man
Is of no common order, as his port

Notes

1 Magian magician, wizard.

2 strewed my head with ashes an expression of grief and repentance.

ACT II, SCENE IV

* I was detained repairing shattered thrones in mind
the Treaty of Vienna in 1814, following the restoration to
power of the monarchical powers of Spain and France.

* Marrying fools perhaps a sardonic reference to Byron's
own marriage to Annabella Milbanke, which resulted in
acrimonious separation and Byron's exile from
tyrrant.

* made effective, prophets and priests, empowered to
utter the will of God. Byron may have been in mind Joanna
Southcott (1759–1844), who claimed to be pregnant by the
Holy Ghost, with Shiloh, the saviour of the world. After her
death the 'pregnancy' was diagnosed as dropy.

* waxing growing.

* To weigh kings in the balance Daniel 5:27: 'Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.'

* Nemesis is effectively an Anti-Revolutionary force.
And presence here denote. His sufferings
Have been of an immortal nature like
Our own; his knowledge and his powers and will,
As far as is compatible with clay
(Which clogs the ethereal essence), have been such
As clay hath seldom borne; his aspirations
Have been beyond the dwellers of the earth,
And they have only taught him what we know –
That knowledge is not happiness, and science
But an exchange of ignorance for that
Which is another kind of ignorance.
This is not all. The passions, attributes
Of earth and heaven, from which no power nor being
Nor breath from the worm upwards is exempt.
Have pierced his heart, and in their consequence
Made him a thing which I, who pity not,
Yet pardon those who pity. He is mine,
And thine, it may be; be it so or not,
No other spirit in this region hath
A soul like his – or power upon his soul.
NEMESIS. What doth he here then?
FIRST DESTINY. Let him answer that.
MANFRED. Ye know what I have known, and without power
I could not be amongst ye; but there are
Powers deeper still beyond, I come in quest
Of such, to answer unto what I seek.
NEMESIS. What wouldst thou?
MANFRED. Thou canst not reply to me.
Call up the dead – my question is for them.
NEMESIS. Great Arimanthes, doth thy will avouch
The wishes of this mortal?
ARIMANES. Yea.
NEMESIS. Whom wouldst thou
Uncharnel?*
MANFRED. One without a tomb. Call up
Astarte.
NEMESIS. Shadow or spirit.
Whatever thou art,
Which still doth inherit
The whole or a part
Of the form of thy birth,
Of the mould of thy clay
Which returned to the earth,
Reappear to the day!
Bear what thouorest,
The heart and the form,
And the aspect thou worst
Recede from the worm.
Appear! Appear! Appear!
Who sent thee there requires thee here!
The phantom of Astarte rises and stands in the midst.
MANFRED. Can this be death? There’s bloom upon her cheek,
But now I see it is no living hue
But a strange hectic,*’ like the unnatural red
Which autumn plants upon the perished leaf.
It is the same! Oh God, that I should dread
To look upon the same – Astarte! No,
I cannot speak to her; but bid her speak –
Forgive me or condemn me.
NEMESIS. By the power which hath broken
The grave which enthralled’ thee,
Speak to him who hath spoken,
Or those who have called thee!
MANFRED. She is silent,
And in that silence I am more than answered.
NEMESIS. My power extends no further. Prince of air!
It rests with thee alone; command her voice.
ARIMANES. Spirit – obey this sceptre!
NEMESIS. Silent still!
She is not of our order, but belongs
To the other powers. Mortal, thy quest is vain,
And we are baffled also.
MANFRED. Hear me, hear me –
Astarte, my beloved, speak to me!
I have so much endured, so much endure –
Look on me! The grave hath not changed thee more
Than I am changed for thee. Thou lovedst me
Too much, as I loved thee; we were not made
To torture thus each other, though it were
The deadliest sin to love as we have loved.
Say that thou loath’st me not, that I do bear
This punishment for both, that thou wilt be
One of the blessed, and that I shall die,
For hitherto all hateful things conspire
To bind me in existence, in a life
Which makes me shrink from immortality –
A future like the past. I cannot rest.
I know not what I ask nor what I seek;
I feel but what thou art and what I am,
And I would bear yet once before I perish
The voice which was my music: speak to me!
For I have called on thee in the still night,

Notes

* Uncharnel i.e. raise from the dead. A charnel is a cemetery.

944

945

Notes

* hectic a flush or heightened colour on the cheek, often a symptom of fever.

* enthralled imprisoned.

* baffled defeated.
Starled the slumbering birds from the hushed boughs,
And woke the mountain wolves, and made the caves
Acquainted with thy vainly-echoed name,
Which answered me – many things answered me,
Spirits and men, but thou wert silent all.
Yet speak to me! I have outwatched the stars
And gazed o’er heaven in vain in search of thee.
Speak to me! I have wandered o’er the earth
And never found thy likeness – speak to me!
Look on the flowers round, they feel for thee.
I fear them not, and feel for thee alone –
Speak to me, though it be in wrath, but say –
I reck not what – but let me hear thee once –
This once – once more!

**PHANTOM OF ASTARTE.**  Manfred!”

**MANFRED.**  Say on, say on;
  I live but in the sound – it is thy voice!
**PHANTOM OF ASTARTE.**  Manfred! Tomorrow ends thine earthly ills.
Farewell!
**MANFRED.**  Yet one word more: am I forgiven?
**PHANTOM OF ASTARTE.**  Farewell!
**MANFRED.**  Say, shall we meet again?
**PHANTOM OF ASTARTE.**  Farewell!
**MANFRED.**  One word for mercy; say thou lovest me.
**PHANTOM OF ASTARTE.**  Manfred!
  The spirit of Astarte disappears.

**NEMESIS.**  She’s gone and will not be recalled;
  Her words will be fulfilled. Return to the earth.

**A SPIRIT.**  He is convulsed; this is to be a mortal
  And seek the things beyond mortality.

**ANOTHER SPIRIT.**  Yet see, he mastereth himself and makes
  His torture tributary to his will;
  Had he been one of us, he would have made
  An awful spirit.

**NEMESIS.**  Hast thou further question
  Of our great sovereign or his worshippers?
**MANFRED.**  None.
**NEMESIS.**  Then for a time farewell.
**MANFRED.**  We meet then –
Where? On the earth?

**NEMESIS.**  That will be seen hereafter.
**MANFRED.**  Even as thou wilt; and for the grace accorded
  I now depart a debtor. Fare ye well!
Exit Manfred.

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Exit Manfred.

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**ACT III, SCENE 1**

*A hall in the castle of Manfred. Manfred and Herman.*

**MANFRED.**  What is the hour?
**HERMAN.**  It wants but one till sunset,
  And promises a lovely twilight.
**MANFRED.**  Say,
  Are all things so disposed of in the tower
  As I directed?  
**HERMAN.**  All, my lord, are ready;
  Here is the key and casket.
**MANFRED.**  It is well;
  Thou mayst retire.
Exit Herman.

**MANFRED (alone).**  There is a calm upon me –
Inexplicable stillness, which till now
Did not belong to what I knew of life.
If that I did not know philosophy
To be of all our vanities the mostest,?
The merest word that ever fooled the ear
From out the schoolman’s jargon, I should deem
The golden secret, the sought kalon,* found
And seated in my soul. It will not last,
But it is well to have known it, though but once;
It hath enlarged my thoughts with a new sense,
And I within my tablets would note down
That there is such a feeling. Who is there?

**Re-enter Herman.**

**HERMAN.**  My lord, the Abbot of St Maurice craves
  To greet your presence.
  *Enter the Abbot of St. Maurice.*

**ABBOT.**  Peace be with Count Manfred!*  
**MANFRED.**  Thanks, holy father; welcome to these walls!
  Thy presence honours them, and blesseth those
  Who dwell within them.
**ABBOT.**  Would it were so, Count;
  But I would fain confer with thee alone.
**MANFRED.**  Herman, retire. (Exit Herman.) What would my reverend guest?
**ABBOT.**  Thus, without prelude. Age and zeal, my office.

---

**NOTES**

1. This scene reworks Faust’s meeting with an Old Man in *Faust* (V).
2. *disposal of arranged, prepared.
3. *kalon* the ideal good, morally beautiful.
4. *mostest most foolish.
5. *merest most insignificant.

---

* *nick care.

*schoolman’s scholar’s

*tablet research documents.

*An ironic greeting, given the circumstances.
And good intent, must plead my privilege;
Our near, though not acquainted neighbourhood
May also be my herald. Rumours strange
And of unholy nature are abroad
And busy with thy name – a noble name
For centuries. May he who bears it now
Transmit it unimpaired!

MANFRED. Proceed, I listen.
AABBOT. 'Tis said thou holdest converse with the things
Which are forbidden to the search of man;
That with the dwellers of the dark* abides,
The many evil and unheavenly spirits
Which walk the valley of the shade of death;*
Thou communest. I know that with mankind,
Thy fellows in creation, thou dost rarely
Exchange thy thoughts, and that thy solitude
Is as an anchorite's, were it but holy.

MANFRED. And what are they who do avouch these things?
AABBOT. My pious brethren, the scared peasantry –
Even thy own vassals, who do look on thee
With most unquiet eyes. Thy life's in peril.

MANFRED. Take it.
AABBOT. I come to save, and not destroy;" I
Would not pry into thy secret soul,
But if these things be sooth, there still is time
For penitence and pity: reconcile thee
With the true church, and through the church to heaven.

MANFRED. I hear thee. This is my reply: what's er
I may have been, or am, doth rest between
Heaven and myself. I shall not choose a mortal
To be my mediator. Have I sinned
Against your ordinances?" Prove and punish!
AABBOT. My son, I did not speak of punishment,
But penitence and pardon, with thyself
The choice of such remains. And for the last,
Our institutions and our strong belief
Have given me power to smooth the path from sin
To higher hope and better thoughts: the first
I leave to heaven – Vengeance is mine alone!"*
So saith the Lord, and with all humbleness
His servant echoes back the awful word.

MANFRED. Old man! There is no power in holy men,
Nor charm in prayer, nor purifying form
Of penitence, nor outward look, nor fast,

Notes
* he who bears it now i.e. Manfred himself.
* dark means both 'lacking in light' and 'evil'.
* the valley of the shade of death Psalm 23:4: 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.'

Nerone – nor, greater than all these,
The innate tortures of that deep despair
Which is remorse without the fear of hell
But all in all sufficient to itself
Would make a hell of heaven, can exorcise
From out the unbounded spirit the quick* sense
Of its own sins, wrongs, sufferance, and revenge
Upon itself. There is no future pang
Can deal the justice on the self-condemned
He deals on his own soul.

AABBOT. All this is well –
For this will pass away, and be succeeded
By an auspicious hope which shall look up
With calm assurance to that blessed place;
Which all who seek may win, whatever be
Their earthly errors, so they be atoned;*
And the commencement of atonement is
The sense of its necessity. Say on,
And all our church can teach thee shall be taught,
And all we can absolve thee shall be pardoned.

MANFRED. When Rome's sixth Emperor was near his last,
The victim of a self-inflicted wound,
To shun the trumperies of a public death
From senates once his slaves, a certain soldier,
With show of loyal pity, would have staunch'd
The gushing throat with his officious* robe;
The dying Roman thrust him back and said
(Some empire* still in his expiring glance),
'It is too late – is this fidelity?'

AABBOT. And what of this?
AABBOT. I answer with the Roman,
'It is too late!'
AABBOT. It never can be so,
To reconcile thyself with thy own soul,
And thy own soul with heaven. Hast thou no hope?
'Tis strange; even those who do despair above
Yet shape themselves some fantasy on earth
To which frail twig they cling like drowning men.

MANFRED. Aye, father! I have had those earthly visions
And noble aspirations in my youth –
To make my own the mind of other men,
The enlightener* of nations, and to rise
I knew not whither, it might be to fall,
But fall even as the mountain-catac永不
Which, having leaped from its more dazzling height,

Notes
* quick living; vital.
* that blessed place i.e. heaven.
* atoned reconciled (with God).
* According to Suetonius, the sixth Roman emperor was Nero. Manfred's use of his words is ironic because Nero's deeds (the burning of Rome and the first major persecution
* of Christians) overshadow the circumstances of his death.
* officious-dutiful.
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* dark means both 'lacking in light' and 'evil'.

* the valley of the shade of death Psalm 23:3. 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.'

* I come to save, and not destroy cf. Christ's words at Matthew 11:5. Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.'

* seek true.

* ordinances laws.

* See Romans 12:19

Nor agony — nor, greater than all these,  
The innate torture of that deep despair  
Which is remorse without the fear of hell  
But all in all sufficient to itself  
Would make a hell of heaven, can exercise  
From out the unbounded spirit the quick* sense  
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Notes

* spirit living, vital.

* that blessed place i.e. heaven.

* atoned reconciled (with God).

** According to Suetonius, the sixth Roman emperor was Nero. Manfred's use of his words is ironic because Nero's deeds (the burning of Rome and the first major persecution

of Christians) overshadow the circumstances of his death. The line quoted here was spoken to a former soldier who had turned against him.

*** enlightener guide, teacher.

* efficient dutiful.

** empyr i.e. some sense of his emperorship.
Even in the foaming strength of its abyss
(Which casts up misty columns that become
Clouds raining from the reassembled skies)
Lies low but mighty still. But this is passed;
My thoughts mistook themselves.

ABBOT. And wherefore so?
MANFRED. I could not tame my nature down; for he
Must serve who fain would sway, and sooth; and sue, &
And watch all time, and pry into all place –
And be a living lie, who would become
A mighty thing amongst the mean (and such
The mass are). I disdained to mingle with
A herd, though to be leader – and of wolves.
The lion is alone, and so am I.

ABBOT. And why not live and act with other men?
MANFRED. Because my nature was averse from life,
And yet not cruel – for I would not make,
But find a desolation. Like the wind,
The red-hot breath of the most lone simoom,**
Which dwells but in the desert, and sweeps o’er
The barren sands which bear no shrubs to blast,
And revels o’er their wild and arid waves
And seeketh not, so that it is not sought,
But being met is deadly; such hath been
The course of my existence. But there came
Things in my path which are no more.

ABBOT. Alas,
I’gin to fear that thou art past all aid
From me and from my calling; yet so young,
I still would –

MANFRED. Look on me! There is an order
Of mortals on the earth, who do become
Old in their youth, and die ere middle age
Without the violence of warlike death –
Some perishing of pleasure, some of study,
Some worn with toil, some of mere weariness,
Some of disease, and some insanity,
And some of withered or of broken hearts;
For this last is a malady which slays
More than are numbered in the lists of fate,
Taking all shapes, and bearing many names.
Look upon me! For even of all these things
Have I partaken, and of all these things
One was enough; then wonder not that I
Am what I am, but that I was ever
Or, having been, that I am still on earth.

ABBOT. Yet hear me still –
MANFRED. Old man! I do respect
Thine order, and reverence thine years; I deem
Thy purpose pious, but it is vain.
Think me not churlish:** I would spare thyself
Far more than me, in shunning at this time
All further colloquy*** – and so farewell.

Exit Manfred

ABBOT. This should have been a noble creature; he
I hate all the energy which would have made
A goodly frame of glorious elements;”
Had they been wisely mingled. As it is,
It is an awful* chaos – light and darkness,
And mind and dust, and passions and pure thoughts,
Mixed and contending without end or order,
All dormant or destructive: he will perish,
And yet he must not. I will try once more,
For such are worth redemption, and my duty
Is to dare all things for a righteous end.
I’ll follow him – but cautiously, though surely.

Exit Abbot

ACT III, SCENE II

Another chamber. Manfred and Herman.

HERMAN. My Lord, you bade me wait on you at sunset:
He* sinks behind the mountain.

MANFRED. Doth he so?
I will look on him.

Manfred advances to the window of the hall.

Glorious orb!* The idol
Of early nature, and the vigorous race
Of undiseased mankind, the giant sons
Of the embrace of angels, with a sex
More beautiful than they, which did draw down
The erring spirits who can ne’er return,;
Most glorious orb, that wert a worship ere
The mystery of thy making was revealed!
Thou earliest minister of the Almighty.
Which gladdened on their mountain-tops the hearts
Of the Chaldean shepherds;** till they poured
Themselves in orisons! Thou material god

Notes

* churlish ungracious.
* colloquy conversation.
* A goodly frame of glorious elements: The Abbot echoes
Hamlet’s description of the earth as ‘this goodly frame’ (
II ii. p. 44), and there is a general recollection of Hamlet’s
comments on man’s innate nobility, II ii. 93–100.
* awful awesome.

** simoom a hot, dry, suffocating sand wind which sweeps across
the African deserts at intervals during the spring and summer.

** the Chaldean shepherds renowned astronomers; see Childre
Harold iii. 188.
* Compare Childre Harold’s Psalms, iii stanza 91, above.
* orisons prayers.

1 He the sun.
2 This is a pagan address to the sun.
3 See Genesis 6:1–4.
4 the Chaldean shepherds renowned astronomers; see Childre
Harold iii. 188.
5 Compare Childre Harold’s Psalms, iii stanza 91, above.
6 orisons prayers.
And representative of the unknown,
Who chose thee for his shadow? Thou chief star,
Centre of many stars, which mak'st our earth
Endurable, and temperest the hues
And hearts of all who walk within thy rays!
Sire of the seasons! Monarch of the climates
And those who dwell in them (for near or far,
Our inborn spirits have a tint of thee,
Even as our outward aspects), thou dost rise
And shine and set in glory — fare thee well,
I ne'er shall see thee more! As my first glance
Of love and wonder was for thee, then take
My latest look: thou wilt not beam on one
To whom the gifts of life and warmth have been
Of a more fatal nature. He is gone;
I follow.

Exit Manfred

ACT III, SCENE III

The mountains. The castle of Manfred at some distance. A terrace before a tower. Time: twilight. Herman, Manuel, and other dependants of Manfred.

HERMAN. 'Tis strange enough: night after night for years
He hath pursued long vigils in this tower
Without a witness. I have been within it –
So have we all been oft-times; but from it,
Or its contents, it were impossible
To draw conclusions absolute of aught
His studies tend to. To be sure, there is
One chamber where none enter; I would give
The fee of what I have to come these three years'
To pore upon its mysteries.

MANUEL. 'Twere dangerous:
Content thyself with what thou knowest already.
HERMAN. Ah, Manuel! Thou art elderly and wise,
And could'st say much; thou hast dwelt within the castle –
How many years is it?

MANUEL. Ere Count Manfred's birth
I served his father, whom he sought resembles.
HERMAN. There be more sons in like predicament.
But wherein do they differ?

MANUEL. I speak not
Of features or of form, but mind and habits:
Count Sigismund was proud, but gay and free,
A warrior and a reveller; he dwelt not
With books and solitude, nor made the night

A gloomy vigil, but a festal time,
Merrier than day; he did not walk the rocks
And forests like a wolf, nor turn aside
From men: and their delights.

HERMAN. Beshrew the hour,
But those were jocund times! I would that such
Would visit the old walls again; they look
As if they had forgotten them.

MANUEL. These walls
Must change their chieftain first — oh, I have seen
Some strange things in them, Herman!
HERMAN. Come, be friendly,
Relate me some to while away our watch;
I've heard thee darkly speak of an event
Which happened hereabouts, by this same tower.

MANUEL. That was a night indeed. I do remember
'Twas twilight, as it may be now, and such
Another evening; yon red cloud, which rests
On Eiger's pinnacle,¹ so rested then,
So like that it might be the same; the wind
Was faint and gusty, and the mountain snows
Began to glitter with the climbing moon.
Count Manfred was, as now, within his tower,
How occupied we knew not, but with him
The sole companion of his wanderings
And watchings — her, whom of all earthly things
That lived, the only thing he seemed to love,
As he indeed by blood was bound to do,
The lady Astarte, his¹ —

Hush! Who comes here?

Enter the Abbot

ABBOT. Where is your master?
HERMAN. Yonder, in the tower.
ABBOT. I must speak with him.

MANUEL. 'Tis impossible.
He is most private, and must not be thus
Intruded on.

ABBOT. Upon myself I take
The forfeit of my fault, if fault there be;
But I must see him.

HERMAN. Thou hast seen him once
This eve already.

ABBOT. Sirrah, I command thee
Knock and apprise the Count of my approach!

HERMAN. We dare not.

Notes

¹ Eiger's pinnacle: The Eiger is a mountain, east of the
Jungfrau, which Byron first saw on 22 September 1816.

¹ Astarte: This is the closest anyone in the play gets to saying
that Astarte is Manfred's sister.
ABBOT. Then it seems I must be herald
Of my own purpose.
MANUEL. Reverend father, stop,
I pray you pause.
ABBOT. Why so?
MANUEL. But step this way,
And I will tell you further.
Exeunt

ACT III, SCENE IV

Interior of the tower. Manfred alone.

MANFRED. The stars are forth, the moon above the tops
Of the snow-shining mountains – beautiful!
I linger yet with nature, for the night
Hath been to me a more familiar face
Than that of man, and in her starry shade
Of dim and solitary loneliness
I learned the language of another world.
I do remember me that in my youth
When I was wandering, upon such a night
I stood within the Colosseum’s wall
Midst the chief relics of almighty Rome;*
The trees which grew along the broken arches
Waved dark in the blue midnight, and the stars
Shone through the rents of ruin; from afar
The watchdog bayed beyond the Tiber; and
More near from out the Caesars’ palace came
The owl’s long cry; and, interruptedly,
Of distant sentinel the fitful song
Begun and died upon the gentle wind.
Some cypress beyond the time-worn breach
Appeared to skirt the horizon, yet they stood
Within a bowshot,* where the Caesars dwelt,
And dwell the tuneless birds of night; amidst
A grove which springs through levelled battlements,
And twines its roots with the imperial hearths,
Ivy usurps the laurel’s place of growth;†
But the gladiators’ bloody circus’ stands,
A noble wreck in ruinous perfection;‡

While Caesar’s chariots and the Augustan halls
Grovel on earth in indistinct decay.
And thou didst shine, thou rolling moon, upon
All this, and cast a wide and tender light
Which softened down the hoar austerity
Of rugged desolation, and filled up
As ’twere, anew, the gaps of centuries,
Leaving that beautiful which still was so,
And making that which was not, till the place
Became religion, and the heart run o’er
With silent worship of the great of old –
The dead but sceptred sovereigns who still rule
Our spirits from their urns.
’Twas such a night!
’Tis strange that I recall it at this time,
But I have found our thoughts take wildest flight
Even at the moment when they should array
Themselves in pensive* order.

Enter the Abbot

ABBOT. My good Lord!
I crave a second grace for this approach,
But yet let not my humble zeal offend
By its abruptness; all it hath of ill
Recoils on me. Its good in the effect
May light upon your head – could I say heart,
Could I touch that, with words or prayers. I should
Recall a noble spirit which hath wandered
But is not yet all lost.

MANFRED. Thou know’st me not;
My days are numbered and my deeds recorded.
Retire, or ‘twill be dangerous – away!

ABBOT. Thou dost not mean to menace me?

MANFRED. Not I;
I simply tell thee petil is at hand
And would preserve thee.

ABBOT. What dost mean?
MANFRED. Look there –
What doest thou see?

ABBOT. Nothing.
MANFRED. Look there, I say,
And steadfastly; now tell me what thou seest?
ABBOT. That which should shake me, but I fear it not;
I see a dusky and awful figure rise

Notes

Act III, Scene IV
1. Upon such a night. There is a general recollection, through-out this speech, of the exchange between Jessica and Lorenzo, Merchant of Venice V 1113-23, which uses the repeated tag ‘In such a night…’.
2. Byron first visited Rome in April 1817. This passage may have been inspired partly by Gibbon’s Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire; Gibbon is celebrated as a freethinker at the conclusion of Childe Harold iii.

Notes

* till the place…great of old. These lines prove that, even at this late stage, Manfred might still be redeemed to the cause of orthodox religion.
* array arrange.
* pensive meditative, reflective.
Like an infernal god from out the earth, 
His face wrapped in a mantle, and his form 
Robed as with angry clouds. He stands between 
Thyself and me, but I do fear him not.

MANFRED. Thou hast no cause; he shall not harm thee, but 
His sight may shock thee; old limbs into palsy."
I say to thee, retire!

ABBOT. And I reply 
Never, till I have battled with this fiend.

What doth he here?

MANFRED. Why, ye, what doth he here?
I did not send for him, he is unbidden.

ABBOT. Alas, lost mortal! What with guests like these 
Hast thou to do? I tremble for thy sake; 
Why doth he gaze on thee, and thou on him? 
Ah! he unveils his aspect; on his brow 
The thunder-scar is graven; from his eye 
Glares forth the immortality of hell.

Avant!

MANFRED. Pronounce — what is thy mission?

SPIRIT. Come!

ABBOT. What art thou, unknown being? Answer! Speak!

SPIRIT. The genius of this mortal. Come, 'tis time!

MANFRED. I am prepared for all things, but deny 
The power which summons me. Who sent thee here?

SPIRIT. Thou must know anon; come, come!

MANFRED. I have commanded 
Things of an essence greater than thine, 
And striven with thy masters. Get thee hence!

SPIRIT. Mortal, thine hour is come. Away, I say!

MANFRED. I know, and know my hour is come, but not 
To render up my soul to such as thee; 
Away! I'll die as I have lived — alone.

SPIRIT. Then I must summon up my brethren. Rise!

Other spirits rise up

ABBOT. Avant, ye evil ones! Avant I say!
Ye have no power where piety hath power, 
And I do charge ye in the name —

SPIRIT. Old man! 
We know ourselves, our mission, and thine order; 
Waste not thy holy words on idle use, 
It were in vain — this man is forfeited.

Once more I summon him; away, away!

MANFRED. I do defy ye, though I feel my soul 
Is ebbing from me, yet I do defy ye;

Nor will I hence, while I have earthly breath 
To breathe my scorn upon ye, earthly strength 
To wrestle (though with spirits); what ye take 
Shall be ta'en limb by limb.

SPIRIT. Reluctant mortal! 
Is this the Magian who would so pervade 
The world invisible, and make himself 
Almost our equal? Can it be that thou 
Art thus in love with life — the very life 
Which made thee wretched?

MANFRED. Thou false fiend, thou liest!
My life is in its last hour — that I know, 
Nor would redeem a moment of that hour; 
I do not combat against death, but thee 
And thy surrounding angels; my past power 
Was purchased by no compact with thy crew, 
But by superior science, penance, daring, 
And length of watching, strength of mind, and skill 
In knowledge of our fathers — when the earth 
Saw men and spirits walking side by side, 
And gave ye no supremacy. I stand 
Upon my strength; I do defy, deny, 
Spurn back, and scorn ye!

SPIRIT. But thy many crimes

MANFRED. What are they to such as thee? 
Must crimes be punished but by other crimes 
And greater criminals? Back to thy hell! 
Thou hast no power upon me, that I feel; 
Thou never shalt possess me, that I know. 
What I have done is done; I bear within 
A torture which could nothing gain from thine. 
The mind which is immortal makes itself 
Requital for its good or evil thoughts."
Is its own origin of ill and end, 
And its own place and time; its innate sense, 
When stripped of this mortality, derives 
No colour from the fleeting things without, 
But is absorbed in suffering or in joy. 
Bom from the knowledge of its own desert. 
Thou didst not tempt me, and thou couldst not tempt me, 
I have not been thy dupe nor am thy prey — 
But was my own destroyer, and will be 
My own hereafter. Back, ye baffled fiends, 
The hand of death is on me — but not yours!

The demons disappear

Notes

2 The mind — thought of Paradise Lost: i 254-5: 'The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.'
ABBOT: Alas, how pale thou art! Thy lips are white
And thy breast heaves, and in thy gasping throat
The accents rattle; give thy prayers to heaven;
Pray, albeit in thought — but die not thus.

MANFRED: 'Tis over; my dull eyes can fix thee not,
But all things swim around me, and the earth
Heaves as it were beneath me. Fare thee well;
Give me thy hand.

ABBOT: Cold, cold, even to the heart;
But yet one prayer — alas, how fares it with thee?

MANFRED: Old man! 'Tis not so difficult to die.

ABBOT: He's gone; his soul hath ta'en its earthless flight —
Whither, I dread to think — but he is gone.

Letter from Lord Byron to Thomas Moore,
28 February 1817 (extract) (including
'So we'll go no more a-roving')

I feel anxious to hear from you, even more than usual, because your last indicated that you were unwell. At present, I am on the invalid regimen myself. The Carnival — that is, the latter part of it — and sitting up late o’ nights, had knocked me up a little. But it is over, and it is now Lent, with all its abstinence and Sacred Music.

The mumming' closed with a masked ball at the Fenice,¹ where I went, as also to most of the ridottos, etc., etc. And, though I did not dissipate much upon the whole, yet I find 'the sword wearing out the scabbard', though I have but just turned the corner of twenty-nine.

So we'll go no more a-roving
So late into the night,
Though the heart be still as loving,
And the moon be still as bright.

For the sword outwears its sheath,
And the soul wears out the breast,
And the heart must pause to breathe,
And love itself have rest.

Though the night was made for loving,
And the day returns too soon,
Yet we'll go no more a-roving
By the light of the moon.

Notes

³ the Fenice Venetian opera theatre, principal venue for the carnival, which closed on the evening of 18 February. It was destroyed by fire in summer 1806.

⁴ the Festa, entertainment or social assembly consisting of music and dancing.