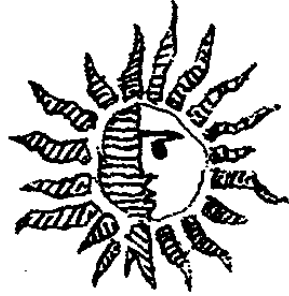




# BYRON'S MANFRED

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# Byron's Manfred



by  
Jerome McGann

Illustrations by  
Virgil Burnett

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

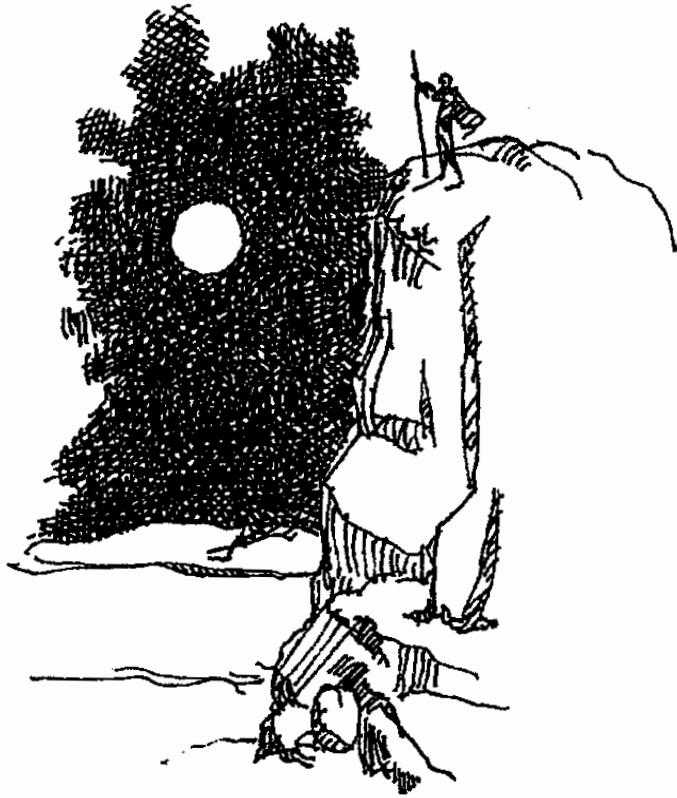
**SCENE. Prologue in Hell**

*MANFRED steps out of the Chorus to stage right, where he  
remains for the rest of the play.*

*Man.* The lamp must be replenish'd, but even then  
It will not burn so long as I must watch.  
My slumbers—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  
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 essay'd, 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 avail'd not: I have had my foes,  
And none have baffled, many fallen before me—

But this avail'd 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 fluttering throb, that beats with hopes or  
wishes,  
Or lurking love of something on the earth.  
Now to my task.—

## SCENE 1. Tod und Verklärung



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 subtler 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 condemn'd,  
The burning wreck of a demolish'd 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!

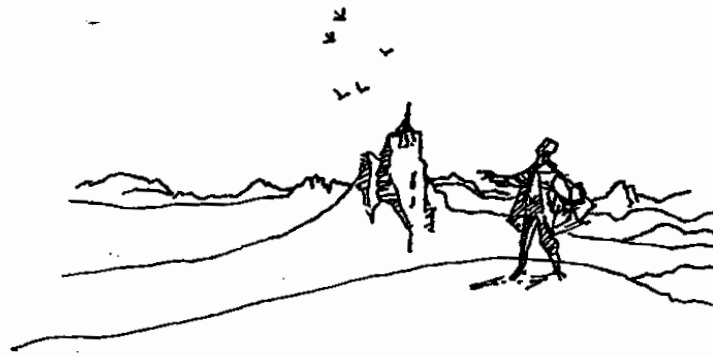
FIRST SPIRIT *steps out of the Chorus.*

Mortal! to thy bidding bow'd  
From my mansion in the cloud,  
Which the breath of twilight builds,  
And the summer's sunset gilds  
With the azure and vermilion  
Which is mix'd for my pavilion;  
Though thy quest may be forbidden,  
On a star-beam I have ridden,  
To thine adjuration bow'd;

Mortal—be thy wish avow'd!  
SECOND SPIRIT *steps out of the Chorus*  
Mont Blanc is the monarch of mountains;  
They crown'd 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 cavern'd base—  
And what with me wouldst Thou?  
THIRD SPIRIT *steps out of the Chorus*  
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 roll'd—

To the Spirit of Ocean  
Thy wishes unfold!  
FOURTH SPIRIT *steps out of the Chorus*  
Where the slumbering earthquake  
Lies pillow'd 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 bide—  
Thy spell hath subdued me,  
Thy will be my guide!  
FIFTH SPIRIT *steps out of the Chorus*  
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 sail'd well, and yet  
'Twill sink ere night be past  
SIXTH SPIRIT *steps out of the Chorus*  
My dwelling is the shadow of the night,  
Why doth thy magic torture me with light?  
SEVENTH SPIRIT *steps out of the Chorus*  
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 bosom'd not a lovelier star.  
 The hour arrived—and it became  
 A wandering mass of shapeless flame,  
 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—  
 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 *together*  
 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?



*Man.* Forgetfulness—  
*First Spirit.* Of what—of whom—and why?  
*Man.* 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.  
*Man.* 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.  
*Man.* 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 answer'd?



*Man.* 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 coop'd in clay!  
Answer, or I will teach you what I am.

*Spirit.* We answer as we answer'd; our reply  
Is even in thine own words.

*Man.* 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.

*Man.* I then have call'd 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 dismiss us, ask again—  
Kingdom, and sway, and strength, and length of  
days—

*Man.* 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?

*Man.* No, none: yet stay—one moment, ere we  
part—

I would behold ye face to face. I hear  
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 accustom'd 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.

*Man.* I have no choice; there is no form on earth  
Hideous 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*

Behold!

*Apparition of Astarte appears as a gigantic figure*

*Man.* 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 crush'd! *MANFRED falls to his knees*



*A Voice is heard in the Incantation which follows.*

When the moon is on the wave,  
And the glow-worm in the grass,  
And the meteor on the grave,  
And the wisp on the morass:  
When the falling stars are shooting,  
And the answer'd 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 wrapt as with a shroud,  
Thou art gather'd in a cloud;  
And for ever 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 turn'd 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 distil  
An essence which hath strength to kill;  
From thy own heart I then did wring  
The black blood in its blackest spring;  
From thy own smile I snatch'd the snake,  
For there it coil'd as in a brake;  
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 unfathom'd gulfs of guile,

By that most seeming virtuous eye,  
By thy shut soul's hypocrisy;  
By the perfection of thine art  
Which pass'd 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!

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 clankless chain hath bound thee,  
O'er thy heart and brain together  
Hath the word been pass'd—now wither!

## SCENE 2. Temptation In the Desert

*Man.* The spirits I have raised abandon me,  
The spells which I have studied baffle me,  
The remedy I reck'd of tortured me;  
I lean no more on superhuman aid,  
It hath no power upon the past, and for  
The future, till the past be gulf'd in darkness,  
It is not of my search.—My mother Earth!  
Behold the tall pines dwindled as to shrubs  
In dizziness of distance; wherefore do I pause?  
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. —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 deity, alike unfit  
To sink or soar, with our mix'd 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. Oh, that I were  
The viewless spirit of a lovely sound,  
A living voice, a breathing harmony,  
A bodiless enjoyment—



CHAMOIS HUNTER *steps out of the Chorus*  
*Chamois Hunter.* What is here?

I will approach him nearer.

*Man. (not perceiving the other).* To be thus—  
Grey-hair'd 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—

*C. Hun.* The mists begin to rise from up the valley;  
I'll warn him to descend.

*Man.* The mists boil up,  
The clouds rise curling white and sulphury,  
Like foam from the roused ocean of deep Hell,  
Whose every wave breaks on a living shore  
Heap'd with the damn'd like pebbles.

*C. Hun.* Friend! have a care,  
Your next step may be fatal!—for the love  
Of him who made you....

*Man. not hearing him* Farewell, ye opening heavens!  
Look not upon me thus reproachfully—  
Ye were not meant for me—Earth! take these atoms!

As MANFRED *turns to leave the stage the* CHAMOIS  
HUNTER *holds his arm out*  
*in a commanding gesture*

*C. Hun.* Hold, madman!—though aweary of thy life.

*Man.* I am most sick at heart—

*C. Hun.* Away with me!  
Come on, we'll quickly find a surer footing,  
And something like a pathway. —Follow me.  
Thy mind and body are alike unfit  
To trust each other.

*Man.* It imports not; I do know  
My route full well and need no further guidance.

*C. Hun.* 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—

*Man.* I am not of thine order.

*C. Hun.* Thanks to heaven!

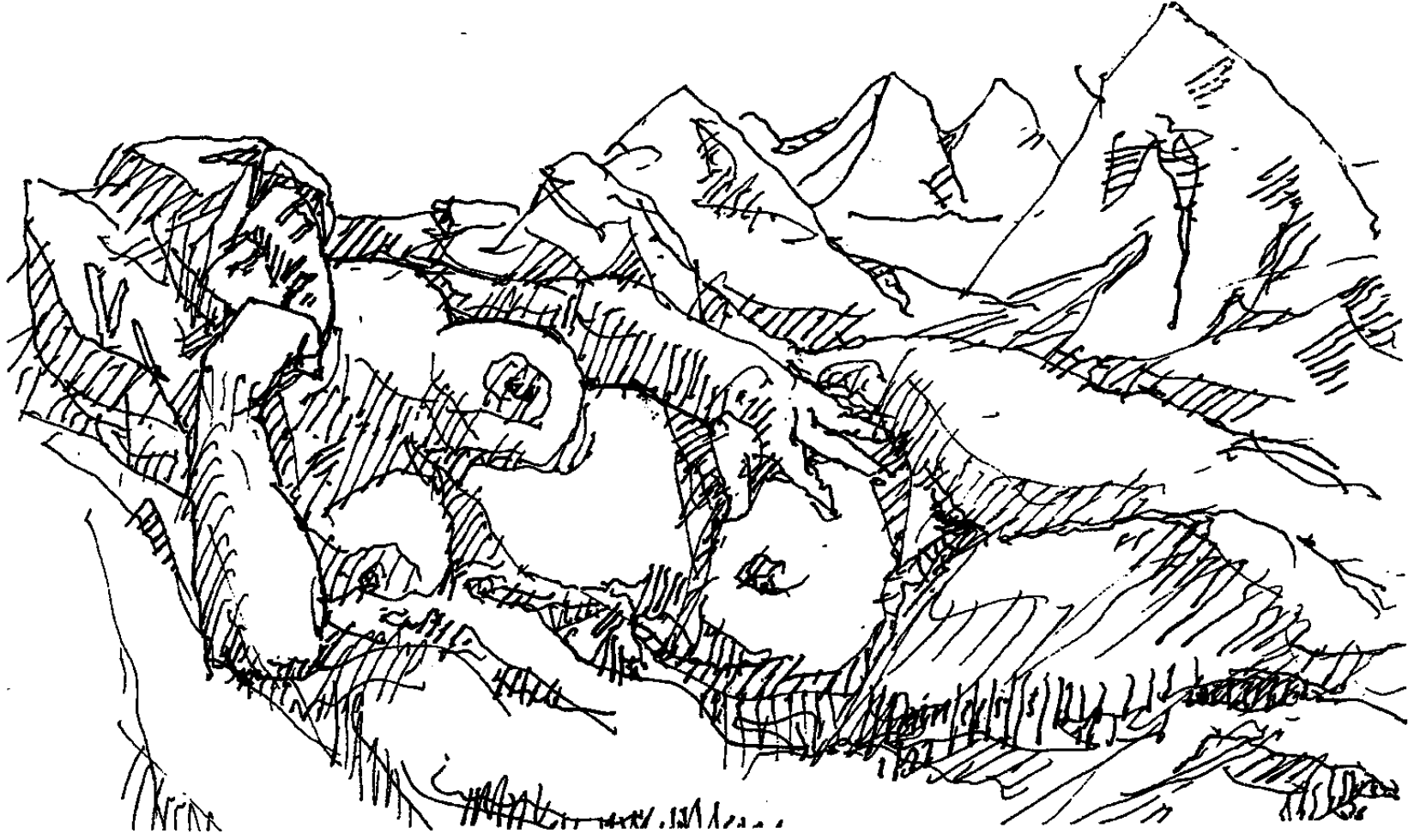
*Man.* I tell thee, man! I have lived many years  
With the fierce thirst of death—and still unslaked!  
Think'st thou existence doth depend on time?  
It doth; but actions are our epochs: mine  
Have made my days and nights imperishable,  
Endless, and all alike, as sands on the shore,  
Innumerable atoms; and one desert,  
Barren and cold, on which the wild waves break,  
But nothing rests, save carcasses and wrecks,  
Rocks, and the salt-surf weeds of bitterness.

*C. Hun.* Canst thou be black with evil?—say  
not so.

*Man.* My injuries came down on those who loved  
me—

On those whom I best loved: I never quell'd  
An enemy, save in my just defence—  
But my embrace was fatal. Follow me not;  
I know my path—the mountain peril's past:  
And once again, I charge thee, follow not!

*The Chamois Hunter returns to the Chorus. MANFRED*  
*alone, takes water into the palm of his hand, and flings*  
*it in the air, muttering the adjuration. After a pause, the*  
WITCH OF THE ALPS *appears out of the Chorus.*



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  
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 glass'd serenity of soul,  
Which of itself shows immortality,  
I read that thou wilt pardon to a Son  
Of Earth, whom the abstruser powers permit  
At times to call thee thus.

*Witch.* Son of Earth!

I know thee for a man of many thoughts,  
And deeds of good and ill, extreme in both.  
I have expected this—what wouldst thou with me?

*Man.* A boon. But 'twere in vain.

*Witch.* Let thy lips speak.

*Man.* My pang shall find a voice. From my youth  
upwards  
My spirit walk'd not with the souls of men,  
Nor look'd 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,  
Yet there was one—

*Witch.* Spare not thyself—proceed.

*Man.* 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 soften'd all, and tempered into beauty.  
Her faults were mine—her virtues were her own—  
I loved her, and destroyed her!

*Witch.* With thy hand?

*Man.* Not with my hand, but heart—which broke  
her heart;  
It gazed on mine, and wither'd.

*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 recreant mortality—Away!

*Man.* 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;— Forgetfulness  
I sought in all, save where 't is 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.

*Man.* To do this thy power  
Must wake the dead, or lay me low with them.

*Witch.* That is not in my province; but if thou  
Wilt swear obedience to my will, and do  
My bidding, it may help thee to thy wishes.

*Man.* 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?—

*Man.* I have said it

*Witch.* Enough!—I may retire then—say!  
The WITCH *disappears in the Chorus.*

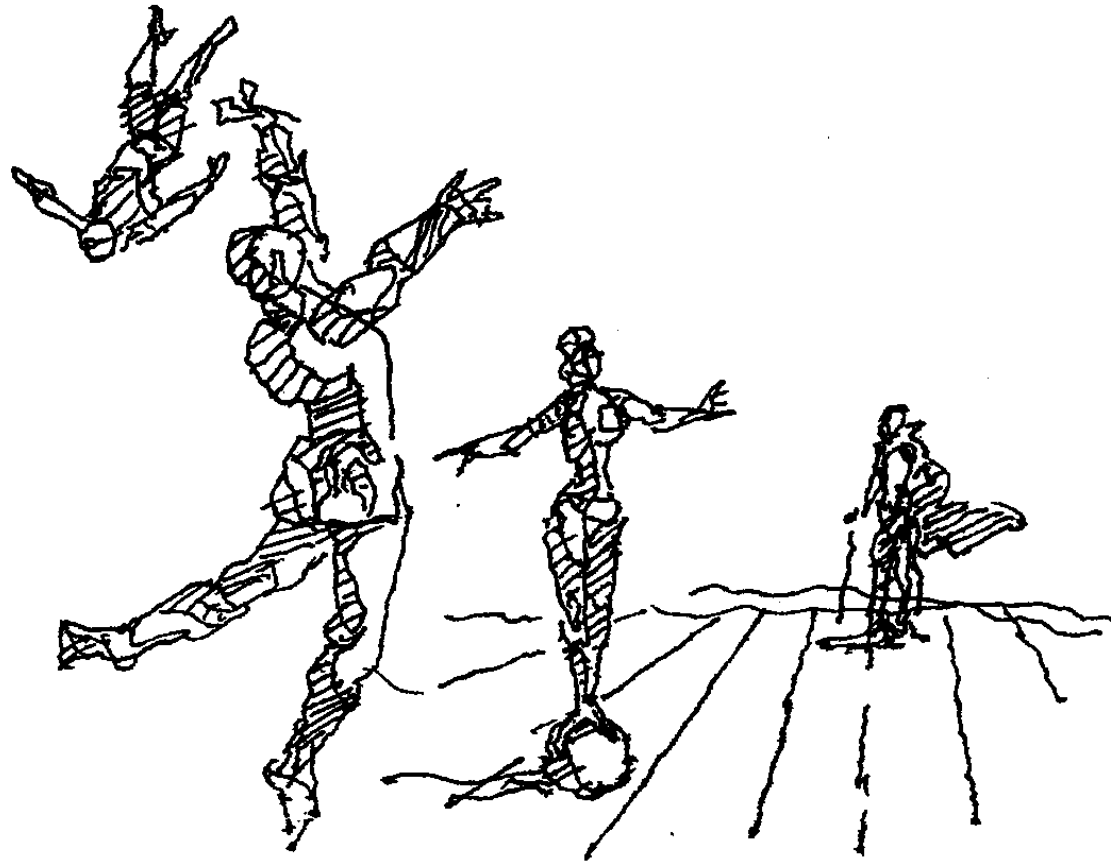
*Man. (alone).* We are all the fools of time and terror:

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 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;—had I never lived,  
That which I love 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 shrunk 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.





### SCENE 3. Harrowing

FIRST DESTINY *steps forward from the Chorus*

*First Des.* The moon is rising broad, and round, and bright;  
And here on snows, where never human foot  
Of common mortal trod, we nightly tread.  
Here do I wait my sisters, on our way

To the Hall of Arimanes, for to-night  
Is our great festival—'t is strange they come not.

*A Voice from the Chorus, singing*  
The Captive Usurper,  
Hurl'd down from the throne,  
Lay buried in torpor,  
Forgotten and lone;  
I broke through his slumbers,

I shivered his chain,  
I leagued him with numbers—  
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 from the Chorus.*

The ship sail'd on, the ship sail'd 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 wretch 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 blest 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!

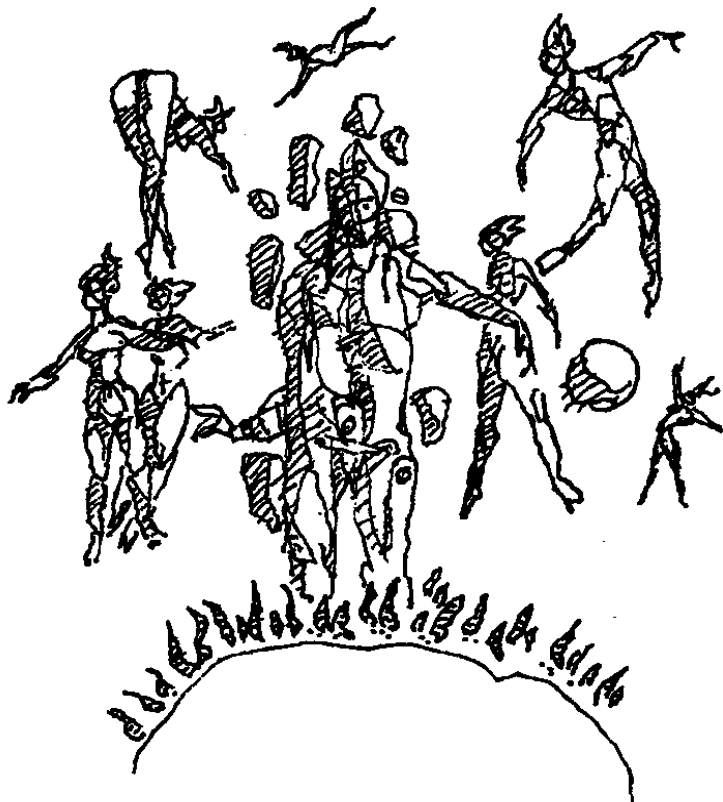
SECOND and THIRD DESTINIES *step out from  
the Chorus*

*The Three Destinies*

Our hands contain the hearts of men,  
Our footsteps are their graves;  
We only give to take again  
The spirits of our slaves!  
*First Des.* Welcome! Where's Nemesis?  
*Second Des.* At some great work;  
But what I know not, for my hands were full.  
*Third Des.* Behold she cometh.  
NEMESIS *steps out from the Chorus*  
*First Des.* Say, where hast thou been?  
My sisters and myself are slow to-night.  
*Nem.* I was detain'd repairing shattered thrones,  
Marrying fools, restoring dynasties,  
Avenging men upon their enemies,  
And making them repent their own revenge;  
Goading the wise to madness; from the dull  
Shaping out oracles to rule the world  
Afresh, for they were waxing out of date,  
And mortals dared to ponder for themselves,  
To weigh kings in the balance, and to speak

Of freedom, the forbidden fruit.—Away!  
We have outstayed the hour—mount we our clouds!

*Stage darkens, then slowly the lights come up on  
The Hall of ARIMANES.—ARIMANES on his  
Throne, a Globe of Fire, surrounded by  
the SPIRITS, NEMESIS and The DESTINIES who  
sing the following hymn to  
ARIMANES.*



Hail to our Master!—Prince of Earth and Air!  
Who walks the clouds and waters—in his hand  
The sceptre of the elements which tear  
Themselves to chaos at His high command!  
He breatheth—and a tempest shakes the sea;  
He speaketh—and the clouds reply in thunder;  
He gazeth—from his glance the sunbeams flee;  
He moveth—earthquakes rend the world asunder.  
Beneath his footsteps the volcanoes rise;  
His shadow is the Pestilence; his path  
The comets herald through the crackling skies;  
And planets turn to ashes at his wrath.  
To him War offers daily sacrifice;  
To him Death pays his tribute; Life is his,  
With all its infinite of agonies—  
And his the spirit of whatever is!  
*A Spirit (turning to Manfred).* What is here? Most rash  
and fatal wretch,  
Bow down and worship!  
*Man.* Many a night on the earth,  
On the bare ground, have I bow'd down my face,  
And strew'd 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.* Crouch! I say.  
*Man.* Bid him bow down to that which is above him,  
And we will kneel together.  
*The Spirits.* Crush the worm!

Tear him in pieces!—

*First Des.* Hence! Avaunt!—he's mine,  
Prince of the Powers invisible! This man  
Is of no common order, as his port  
And presence here denote. 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.

*Nem.* What doth he here then?

*First Des.* Let him answer that.

*Man.* Call up the dead—my question is for them.

*Nem.* Great Arimanes, doth thy will avouch  
The wishes of this mortal?

*Ari.* Yea.

*Nem.* Whom wouldst thou  
Uncharnel?

*Man.* One without a tomb—call up Astarte.

*Nem.*  
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 return'd to the earth,  
Re-appear to the day!  
Bear what thou borest,

The heart and the form,  
And the aspect thou worest  
Redeem from the worm.

Appear!—Appear!—Appear!  
Who sent thee there requires thee here!

*The phantom of ASTARTE rises and stands in the midst.*

*Man.* 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 perish'd  
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.

*Nem.*

By the power which hath broken  
The grave which enthrall'd thee,  
Speak to him who hath spoken,  
Or those who have call'd thee!

*Man.* She is silent.

*Nem.* My power extends no further, Prince  
of Air!

It rests with thee alone—command her  
voice.

*Ari.* Spirit—obey this sceptre!







SCENE 4. War in Heaven.

HERMAN and MANUEL, *Dependants of*  
MANFRED, *step out from the Chorus.*

*Her.* '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 pore upon its mysteries.

*Manuel* 'Twere dangerous;  
Content thyself with what thou knowest already.

*Her.* Ah, Manuel! thou art elderly and wise,  
And couldst say much; thou hast dwelt within the  
castle—

How many years is 't?

*Manuel* Ere Count Manfred's birth,  
I served his father, whom he nought resembles.  
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.

*Her.* Beshrew the hour,  
But those were jocund times! I would that such  
Would visit the old walls again.

*Manuel.* I've seen  
Some strange things in them, Herman.

*Her.* I've heard thee darkly speak of an event  
Which happen'd hereabouts, by this same tower.

*Manuel.* Count Manfred was, as now, within his  
tower,—  
With him the sole companion of his wanderings,  
*Her,* the only thing he seem'd to love,—  
The Lady Astarte, his—

*Man. (addressing Manuel).* Are all things so disposed  
of in the tower  
As I directed?

*Her:* All, my lord, are ready:  
Here is the key and casket.

*Man.* It is well:  
Thou may'st retire.

*Man. (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 motliest,  
The merest word that ever fool'd 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.  
The stars are forth, the moon above the tops

Of the snow-shining mountains. Beautiful!  
 I do remember me, that in my youth,  
 When I was wandering,—upon such a night  
 I stood within the Coliseum's wall  
 Midst the chief relics of almighty Rome.  
 And thou didst shine, thou rolling moon, upon  
 All this, and cast a wide and tender light,  
 Which soften'd down the hoar austerity  
 Of rugged desolation, and fill'd up,  
 As 'twere anew, the gaps of centuries;  
 Leaving that beautiful which still was so,  
 And making that which was not, for the night  
 Hath been to me a more familiar face  
 Than that of man; and in her starry shade  
 Of dim and solitary loveliness,  
 I learn'd the language of another world,  
 The dead, but sceptred sovereigns, who still rule  
 Our spirits from their urns.—

*The ABBOT OF ST. MAURICE steps out of  
 the Chorus*

*Abbot* Peace, Count Manfred!

*Man.* Thanks, holy father—What  
 would my reverend guest?

*Abbot* Rumours of unholy nature, are  
 abroad,  
 And busy with thy name; a noble  
 name

For centuries: may he who bears it now  
 -Transmit it unimpaired! Thy life's in peril.

*Man.* Take it.

*Abbot.* I come to save, and not destroy.

*Man.* When Rome's sixth emperor was near his last  
 The victim of a self-inflicted wound,  
 To shun the torments of a public death  
 From senates once his slaves, a certain soldier,  
 With show of loyal pity, would have stanch'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?"

*Abbot* And what of this?

*Man.* I answer with the Roman,  
 "It is too late!"

*Abbot* It never can be so.

*Man.* Ay—father! I have had those earthly  
 visions.

My thoughts mistook themselves. 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 wither'd or of





broken hearts.

Look upon me! for even of all these things  
Have I partaken; and of all these things,  
One were enough; then wonder not that I  
Am what I am, but that I ever was,  
Or having been, that I am still on earth.

*Abbot.* Then, hear and tremble! For the headstrong  
wretch

Who in the mail of Innate hardihood  
Would shield himself, and battle for his sins,  
There is the stake on earth—and beyond earth  
Eternal—

*Man.* Charity, most reverend father,  
Becomes thy lips so much more than this menace,  
That I would call thee back to it: but say,  
What would'st thou with me?

*Abbot.* It may be there are  
Things that would shake thee—but I keep them back,  
And give thee till to-morrow to repent.  
Expect no mercy, I have warned thee.

*Man. opening the casket* Stop—  
There is a gift for thee within this casket.  
*MANFRED opens the casket and commands*  
Ho! Ashtaroth!

*The DEMON ASHTAROTH appears, singing as  
follows:—*

The raven sits  
On the Raven-stone,  
And his black wing flits

O'er the milk-white bone  
To and fro, as the night-winds blow,  
The carcass of the assassin swings;  
And there alone, on the Raven-stone,  
The raven flaps his dusky wings.  
The fetters creak—and his ebon beak  
Croaks to the close of the hollow sound  
And this is the tune, by the light of the Moon,  
To which the Witches dance their round—  
Merrily—merrily—cheerily—cheerily—  
Merrily—merrily—speeds the ball:  
The dead in their shrouds, and the Demons  
in clouds,  
Flock to the Witches' Carnival

*Abbot.* I fear thee not—hence—hence—  
Avaunt thee, evil One!—help, ho! without there.

*Man. (to ASHTAROTH).* Convey this man to the  
Shreckhorn—to its peak—  
To its extremest peak—watch with him there  
From now till sunrise, let him gaze, and know  
He ne'er again will be so near to Heaven.

But harm him not; and, when the morrow breaks  
Set him down safe in his cell—away with him!

*Astaroth.* Had I not better bring his brethren too,  
Convent and all, to bear him company?

*Man.* No this will serve for the present; Take him up,  
*Ashtaroth.* Come, Friar! now an exorcism or two

And we shall fly the lighter.

ASHTAROTH *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.

SCENE 5. New Man

HERMAN and MANUEL step out from the Chorus



*Man.* Why would this fool break in on me, and force  
My art to pranks fantastical?—no matter,  
It was not of my seeking. My heart sickens,  
And weighs a fixed foreboding on my soul  
But it is calm—calm as a sullen sea  
After the hurricane; the winds are still,

But the cold waves swell high and heavily,  
And there is danger in them. Such a rest  
Is no repose. My life hath been a combat,  
And every thought a wound, till I am scarred  
In the immortal part of me.—What now?

*Manuel.* Look there!

*Herman.* What dost thou see?

*Manuel* Look there, I say!

I see a dusk and awful figure rise,  
Like an infernal god, from out the earth;  
His face wrapt in a mantle, and his form  
Robed as with angry clouds. Ah! He unveils  
His aspect: on his brow the thunder-scars  
Are graven.

*Man.* Pronounce—what is thy mission?  
I am prepared for all things, but deny  
The power which summons me. Who sent thee  
here?

*Spirit.* Thou'lt know anon—Come! Come!

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

*Spirit* Mortal! thine hour is come—Away! I say.

*Man* I knew, 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!

*SPIRITS attempt to move from the Chorus but cannot*

*Man.* 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 strength  
To breathe my scorn upon ye—earthly breath  
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!

*Man.*

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

Have made thee—

*Man.*

What are they to such as thee?

Must crimes be punish'd 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 stripp'd of this mortality, derives  
No colour from the fleeting things without,  
But is absorb'd in sufferance or in joy,  
Born 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.*

*Manuel.* 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 but in thought,—but die not thus.

*Man.* '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.

*Manuel.* Cold—cold—even to the heart—  
But yet one prayer—Alas! how fares it with thee?

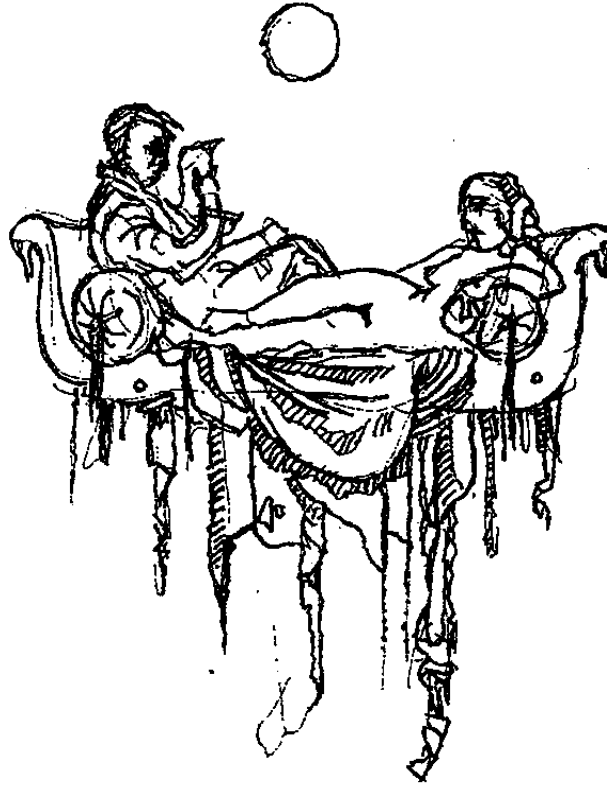
*Man.* Old man! 'tis not so difficult to die.

*MANFRED expires.*

*Manuel.* He's gone, his soul hath ta'en its earthless  
flight;

*Herman.* Whither?

*Manuel.* I dread to think; but he is gone.



FINIS



# Afterword

Manfred is the pivot upon which Byron's poetical works turn. It is a critical assessment of the meanings – which is to say, the illusions – that shaped his first tormented poems, dominated as they are by that epochal invention The Byronic Hero. It is also a forecast of the final seven years when his serio-comic masterpiece *Don Juan* unfolded its glories.

Manfred is not the last of the Byronic Heroes – Lambro, Christian, Marino Faliero, Cain, and especially Sardanapalus: all five are still to come. And among these I set Byron's Assyrian king apart because he is the redeemer promised in the prophecy of *Manfred*.

The Byronic Hero is born with – gives cultural birth to – what Unamuno called The Tragic Sense of Life. Redemption comes to this hero when his tragic sense calls him to don a comic mask. This theatrical move informs the entirety of *Don Juan*, whose comical adventures are shadowed by a finale Byron did not live to complete: the death of Juan on the guillotine in the Reign of Terror. The life and death of Byron's Sardanapalus suggest how that scene would have played out in Byron's poem. Perhaps not *exactly* like the end of Monty Python's *Life of Brian*, but something along those lines.

A wonderful tale written immediately after *Manfred* – *Beppo*, the trial run for *Don Juan* – helps to explain Byron's purpose with his dramatic poem. *Beppo* turns the ethos of The Byronic Hero inside out. In *Beppo*, the apparatus of the dark Oriental Tales – *The Giaour*, *The Corsair*, and *Lara* in particular – is comically dismantled. Love in *Beppo* is not the cause of those forces – revenge, murder, guilt – that dominate Byron's famous early poems. Love in *Beppo* is as light and civilized as *Così fan Tutte* – an erotic fantasy raised up precisely to gain a living respite from the darkness.

Byron wrote *Manfred* in two versions. In the first, all of the play's comic inflections are exposed at the climax of the action. This was the original Act III where Byron, very like Mozart in *Die Zauberflöte*, expels all the forces of darkness by aesthetic fiat. When the demons of the Faust legend come to assert their ancient claim on Manfred's soul, he simply tells them to fuck off. The Abbot then bursts on the scene in a last desperate attempt to save Manfred from the death and damnation the Abbot believes in. Manfred opens a little box to release his attendant spirit Astaroth (that's to say, Astarte in her comic mode). She seizes the Abbot and flies off to dump

him at the top of the Schreckhorn, singing as she goes her irreverent ditty “A prodigal son – and a maid undone”. The play ends when Manfred tells his old servant Manuel, who is mystified by these spectacular events: “Old man! ‘tis not so difficult to die.”

For the Byronic Hero, living, not dying, is the difficulty. As a careful reading of *Sardanapalus* and *Don Juan* might show, that difficulty is removed with Manfred’s last words and the experience that drew them forth. Virgil Burnett’s witty final illustration for the present work explains how the Afterlife might appear if the desire of the poem, Manfred’s desire, were achieved.

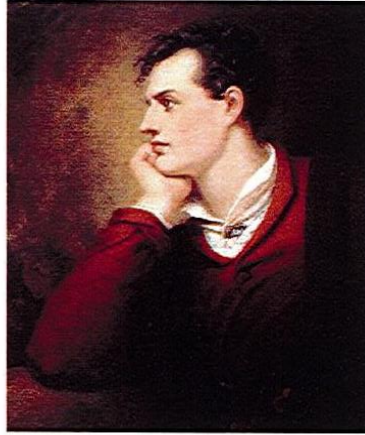
Byron’s literary monitors back in London were not happy with the third act as originally conceived so they pressured him to rewrite it. Unfortunately he did. The work was therefore published in the revised version, which has been the official version ever since. It is a version that all but completely suppresses The Comic Sense of Life working for its realization in the world of The Byronic Hero.

This text restores the original ending in order to regain a clear view of the work’s comical features. Without these perverse elements, the true greatness of Byron’s play can scarcely be appreciated. In addition to that change, I have carried out a series of other editorial revisions that reduce the text of the work by nearly half. I have also removed the divisioning by those Acts and Scenes that Byron

adopted by historical convention. I have instead partitioned the work according to the poetic argument it develops, and I have given headings to the sections to underscore the shape of the argument. I do not regard these alterations as improvements on Byron’s work. Rather, they are undertaken in a scholarly spirit. They are critical devices to help readers understand a work that might otherwise, for various reasons of historical accident, escape attention. They are also, I confess, invitations to theatre persons to consider that staging Byron’s *Manfred* might be an interesting adventure.

This work is therefore not a text of Byron’s *Manfred*. It is the text of *Byron’s Manfred* – a work fashioned by a critical reflection on Byron’s play. Branagh’s *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein* and Coppola’s *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* seem to me works that were pursued in a similar spirit.

*Jerome McGann*  
*Charlottesville VA*



Portrait of Lord Byron  
by Richard Westall, 1813