

# The Gothic Byron



# The Gothic Byron

Edited by

Peter Cochran

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**P U B L I S H I N G**

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## PREFACE

Many of the papers in this book were given at a conference on *Byron and the Gothic* organised by the Newstead Byron Society and the Midland Romantic Seminar at Nottingham Trent University on May 3rd 2008.

I should like to thank Maureen Crisp, Matt Green, Ken Purslow, Alan Rawes and Carl Thompson, and everyone else who assisted in making the day a success.

P.C.

## ABBREVIATIONS

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

- BLJ: *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand, 13 vols, John Murray, 1973-94.
- BoA: Byron, *The Bride of Abydos*.
- Coleridge: *The Works of Lord Byron: A New, Revised and Enlarged Edition with illustrations. Poetry*, ed. E.H.Coleridge, seven vols, John Murray, 1898-1904.
- CHP: Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.
- CMP: *Lord Byron: The Complete Miscellaneous Prose*, ed. Andrew Nicholson, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991.
- CPW: *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann and Barry Weller, 7 Vols Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1980-93.
- DJ: Byron, *Don Juan*.
- HVSV: *His Very Self and Voice: Collected Conversations of Lord Byron* edited with An introduction and notes by Ernest J. Lovell, New York: MacMillan, 1954.
- LBLI: Teresa Guiccioli, *Lord Byron's Life in Italy*, trans. Rees, ed. Cochran, AUP Delaware, 2005.
- LJ: *The Works of Lord Byron, Letters and Journals*. Edited by R. E. Prothero, 6 vols. London: John Murray, 1898-1901.
- LJM: *The Letters of John Murray to Lord Byron*, ed. Andrew Nicholson, Liverpool University Press, 2007.
- Marchand: Marchand, Leslie A., *Byron: A Biography*, 3 vols Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1957.
- Medwin: *Medwin's Conversations of Lord Byron*, ed. Lovell, Princeton 1966.
- RR: *The Romantics Reviewed*, ed. Donald H. Reiman, Garland, 1972.
- SoC: Byron, *The Siege of Corinth*.
- Vail: Vail, Jeffery. *The Literary Relationship of Lord Byron and Thomas Moore*, Johns Hopkins, Baltimore and London, 2001.



# BYRON READS AND REWRITES GOTHIC

PETER COCHRAN

So-called “Gothic” is traditionally dismissed as a poor relation to so-called “Romanticism”. As Anne Williams writes:

... Romanticists have some times behaved like Victorian biographers intent on a fiction of family respectability—even if it means burning some letters or expurgating a diary or two. Any unfortunate “family resemblance” between Gothic prose and Romantic poetry is to be politely ignored.<sup>1</sup>

In fact the two are twins: take away “Gothic”, and you’d deprive “Romanticism” of *The Eve of St Agnes*, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, *Manfred*, *Christabel*, *The Cenci*, and the Norman Abbey cantos of *Don Juan*. Scott’s novels entertain “Gothic” ideas. Only Wordsworth keeps himself relatively unsullied by the “Gothic” taint.

Those who stress “Romanticism’s” preoccupation with introspection and transcendence ignore the way both those things are often filtered through a “Gothic” medium.

In his late adolescence (which continued for some time), Byron was fond of Gothic games:

“There had been found by the gardener, in digging, a skull that had probably belonged to some jolly friar or monk of the Abbey about the time it was demonastered.”

“I heard at the Countess Suwaloff’s the other evening,” said I, interrupting him, “that you drink out of a skull now”. He took no notice of my observation, but continued:

“Observing it to be of giant size, and in a perfect state of preservation, a strange fancy seized me of having it set and used and mounted as a drinking-cup. I accordingly sent it to town, and it returned with a very high polish, and of a mottled colour like tortoise-shell; (Colonel Wildman now has it.) I remember scribbling some lines about it; but that was not all; I afterwards established at the Abbey a new order. The members consisted

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1: Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness* (Chicago 1995), p.4.

of twelve, and I elected myself grand master, or Abbot of the Skull, a grand heraldic title. A set of black gowns, mine distinguished from the rest, was ordered, and from time to time, when a particular hard day was expected, a chapter was held; the *crane* was filled with claret, and, in imitation of the Goths of old, passed about to the gods of the Consistory, whilst many a grim joke was cut at its expense.”<sup>2</sup>

The Gothic literary tradition meant a lot to Byron in his writing as well as in his leisure activities. He derived from it a template for his more mysterious, alienated, sociopathic characters, and an encouragement for his preoccupation with ruins, and the inevitability of decay – decay civic, architectural, and human. He recorded his reading of Gothic novels so as to deceive us. He feigned distaste for *The Monk* and for *Zofloya*; barely mentioned *Frankenstein*; never mentioned *Caleb Williams*; made just veiled allusions to Mrs Radcliffe; and expressed respect only for *The Castle of Otranto*, *The Mysterious Mother*, and *Vathek*. It would seem that Gothic novels, whether “pure Gothic”, as in *The Monk*, “compromised, self-censoring” Gothic, as in Radcliffe, “mixed” or “jacobinical Gothic”, as in *Caleb Williams*, or “orientalist Gothic”, as in *Vathek*, meant very little to him. In fact, he read them all in great depth, recycled their concepts imaginatively (often by inversion, his favourite method of imitation), and derived three things from them, rarely if ever mentioned in criticism of them: first, a reinforcement of his already ambivalent attitude to the Catholic Church (for Bernard Beatty’s concept of *faux*-Catholicism, see below); second, an interest in the difference between genuine awe before genuine mystery and artificially-created awe before artificially-created mystery and the techniques by which the latter was achieved; and last, a reinforcement of his own instinctive feeling – very hard for him to articulate – that both sides of an issue could be true at the same time.

If there is when reading Byron a constant suspicion that he is moulding tacky material into a shape which will never lose touch with the tackiness of its source material, then his addiction to Gothic fiction may lie at the root of the problem.

The literary games Byron plays with the main concepts of Gothic become, as we would expect, increasingly sophisticated as his poetry develops and his sensibility matures. However, he never loses sight of one of Gothic’s main themes – the tug between the readers’ Need to Believe, and their Urge to Doubt. As E.J.Clery shows,<sup>3</sup> this had been a fundamental

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2: Medwin pp.64-5; see also BLJ VII 231 (letter to Murray, November 19th 1820).

3: E.J.Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800* (Cambridge 1995), p.57.

literary conflict through Britain in the eighteenth century: two famous texts – MacPherson’s Ossian forgeries, and Chatterton’s Rowley forgeries – were the objects of both faith and scepticism, strong enough to make Dr Johnson himself spend time and energy investigating both, so divided did he feel himself between the need to have faith in them, and doubts as to their authenticity (doubts proved correct, of course, in both cases). This dialectic echoed an important conflict within Byron’s own mind.

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Several scenes from Shakespeare – principally the Witches’ scenes from *Macbeth* and the Ghost’s scenes from *Hamlet* – were revered as originary by Gothic writers. However, Shakespeare invented nearly all the Gothic conventions of the 1790s in a single speech from another scene, while keeping them within bounds, and giving them a cunning dramatic context:

JULIET: Farewell! God knows when we shall meet again.  
 I have a faint cold fear thrills through my veins,  
 That almost freezes up the heat of life:  
 I’ll call them back again to comfort me:  
 Nurse! What should she do here?  
 My dismal scene I needs must act alone.  
 Come, vial.  
 What if this mixture do not work at all?  
 Shall I be married then tomorrow morning?  
 No, no: this shall forbid it: lie thou there.

*Laying down her dagger.*

What if it be a poison, which the friar  
 Subtly hath ministered to have me dead,  
 Lest in this marriage he should be dishonoured,  
 Because he married me before to Romeo?  
 I fear it is: and yet, methinks, it should not,  
 For he hath still been tried a holy man.  
 How if, when I am laid into the tomb,  
 I wake before the time that Romeo  
 Come to redeem me? there’s a fearful point!  
 Shall I not, then, be stifled in the vault,  
 To whose foul mouth no healthsome air breathes in,  
 And there die strangled ere my Romeo comes?  
 Or, if I live, is it not very like,  
 The horrible conceit of death and night,  
 Together with the terror of the place,

As in a vault, an ancient receptacle,  
 Where, for these many hundred years, the bones  
 Of all my buried ancestors are packed:  
 Where bloody Tybalt, yet but green in earth,  
 Lies festering in his shroud; where, as they say,  
 At some hours in the night spirits resort;  
 Alack, alack, is it not like that I,  
 So early waking, what with loathsome smells,  
 And shrieks like mandrakes' torn out of the earth,  
 That living mortals, hearing them, run mad –  
 O, if I wake, shall I not be distraught,  
 Environed with all these hideous fears?  
 And madly play with my forefather's joints?  
 And pluck the mangled Tybalt from his shroud?  
 And, in this rage, with some great kinsman's bone,  
 As with a club, dash out my desperate brains?  
 O, look! methinks I see my cousin's ghost  
 Seeking out Romeo, that did spit his body  
 Upon a rapier's point: stay, Tybalt, stay!  
 Romeo, I come! this do I drink to thee.<sup>4</sup>

The integrity of the Roman Church is on trial here. A teenage Catholic girl, instructed by her confessor to take a draught which he says will knock her out, will naturally be nervous – should she have faith in him, or not? After all, he shouldn't have married her to Romeo without asking any of their parents – should he? How guilty does he feel about his wrongdoing? *Does* he feel guilty? Will his draught send her to sleep, or kill her? Torn between the need to believe in him and the instinct to doubt him, she can't make the decision to obey him and drink in cold blood, but has to work herself up to the act of drinking by a frightening Gothic vision of green corpses, mandrakes, festering, death, bones, terror, playing games with her forefather's joints, and dashing her own brains out in insanity. The speech anticipates Gothic fiction by two centuries – not only in every detail, but in its illogicality: she wants to be reunited with Romeo, but the only method by which she can do so is to imagine him being killed by her cousin Tybalt's ghost.

Which books has Juliet been reading, at the age of thirteen, to put such ideas into her head?

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4: Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, IV iii, 14-58.

## **Ann Radcliffe, and *Udolpho* inverted<sup>5</sup>**

Catherine Morland, the heroine of Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, is a fan of the Gothic novels of Ann Radcliffe (as perhaps Juliet would have been, had they been available to her):

“But, my dearest Catherine, what have you been doing with yourself all this morning? Have you gone on with Udolpho?”

“Yes, I have been reading it ever since I woke; and I am got to the black veil.”

“Are you, indeed? How delightful! Oh! I would not tell you what is behind the black veil for the world! Are not you wild to know?”

“Oh! Yes, quite; what can it be? But do not tell me – I would not be told upon any account. I know it must be a skeleton, I am sure it is Laurentina's skeleton. Oh! I am delighted with the book! I should like to spend my whole life in reading it. I assure you, if it had not been to meet you, I would not have come away from it for all the world.”<sup>6</sup>

It is a serious failing on her part. By the end of Austen's novel, she has woven a web of such Udolphian fantasy and self-deceit around the figure of her host, General Tilney, that she supposes him to have murdered his wife. The hero, his son, admonishes her, in patriotic terms which eventually become a bit alarming:

“If I understand you rightly, you had formed a surmise of such horror as I have hardly words to – Dear Miss Morland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you. Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? Could they be perpetrated without being known, in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing, where every man is surrounded by a neighbourhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay everything open? Dearest Miss Morland, what ideas have you been admitting?”

They had reached the end of the gallery, and with tears of shame she ran off to her own room.

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**5:** The edition of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* used here is by Bonamy Dobrée and Terry Castle (Oxford World's Classics, 1998).

**6:** Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (ed. A.H.Ehrenpreis, Penguin, 1974), pp.60-1.

The visions of romance were over ...<sup>7</sup>

In fact, Catherine has mis-read *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, or rather, has only remembered and taken to heart those parts of it which appeal to her Juliet-like appetite for sensation. For Ann Radcliffe's final solution is to make it clear that there are no real mysteries in the Castle of Udolpho ("in the territory of Venice": p.655). All its "mysteries" have rational explanations. It is true that the villain does kill his wife (aunt to the heroine, Emily): but that "mystery" is explained within a few chapters. The "apparition of a human countenance" which Emily and Dorothée the servant see (p.536), is that of a pirate playing tricks (pp.634-5). We also learn in IV, 14 that it is pirates who kidnap Ludovico, whose disappearance so terrifies everyone in IV, 7. The sweet supernatural music which frightens everyone at intervals is being made "by "Richard, our neighbour's son, playing on the oboe" (p. 623). The mystery intruder reported shot by Jean the gardener in IV, 10 is in fact the heroine's lover (IV, 13). And what is "behind the black veil" – first seen by the heroine in II, 6 (pp.248-9), and left undescribed until the last chapter but two (p.662) – is not a corpse, of which "the face appeared partly decayed and disfigured by worms" (as we think at first, even at this late date), but the waxwork replica of a corpse, of which "the face appeared partly decayed and disfigured by worms".

The middle-class, Protestant Radcliffe has been playing games with us throughout, and the middle-class, Protestant Catherine Morland has fallen for them, much to the disgust of the still more middle-class, Protestant Henry Tilney: though in Catherine's case her illusory horror is replaced by a more mundane version of the same, when it's brought home to her how nasty, albeit in dull, horrible, worldly terms, the General really is. Gothic, implies Austen, is a palliative for the boring bad things we're forced to live with all the time because we can't get rid of them. Gothic gives us a world of horror which we can enjoy, as an escape from the world of horror in which we have to live.

Walter Scott made a point, in the introduction to his very first novel, of mocking Gothic conventions:

Had I, for example, announced in my frontispiece, 'Waverley, a Tale of other Days,' must not every novel-reader have anticipated a castle scarce less than that of Udolpho, of which the eastern wing had been long uninhabited, and the keys either lost or consigned to the care of some aged butler or housekeeper, whose trembling steps, about the middle of the

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7: Ibid., pp.199-201.

second volume, were doomed to guide the hero, or heroine, to the ruinous precincts? Would not the owl have shrieked and the cricket cried in my very title-page? and could it have been possible for me, with a moderate attention to decorum, to introduce any scene more lively than might be produced by the jocularity of a clownish but faithful valet, or the garrulous narrative of the heroine's fille-de-chambre, when rehearsing the stories of blood and horror which she had heard in the servants' hall? Again, had my title borne, 'Waverley, a Romance from the German,' what head so obtuse as not to image forth a profligate abbot, an oppressive duke, a secret and mysterious association of Rosycrucians and illuminati, with all their properties of black crows, caverns, daggers, electrical machines, trap-doors, and dark lanterns?<sup>8</sup>

Byron was as familiar with the novels of Mrs Radcliffe as were Austen and Scott. *The Italian* appears as number 164 in his abortive July 1813 sale catalogue;<sup>9</sup> and there is just one telling reference to Radcliffe in all his letters, one to Augusta from Venice, December 19th 1816:

I am going out this evening – in my *cloak & Gondola* – there are two nice Mrs. Radcliffe words for you – and then there is the place of St Mark – and conversaciones – and various fooleries – besides many *nau*[ghty]. indeed every body is *nau*. so much so that a lady with only *one lover* is not reckoned to have overstepped the modesty of marriage – that being a regular thing; – some have two – three – and so on to twenty beyond which they don't account – but they generally begin by one. – – The husbands of course belong to any body's wives – but their own.<sup>10</sup>

To show familiarity with Radcliffe is, it seems, only appropriate when writing, from Venice, to one's silly sister. He wouldn't mention Radcliffe when writing to Hobhouse, Moore, or Murray: writing to them he'd stress all the things about Venice which Radcliffe omits.

Later, however, he "comes out", and pays a great compliment to Radcliffe. Here's a passage everyone knows:

I stood in Venice, on the Bridge of Sighs;  
A Palace and a Prison on each hand;  
I saw from out the wave her structures rise  
As from the stroke of the Enchanter's wand ...<sup>11</sup>

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8: Walter Scott, *Waverley*, ed. Andrew Hook (Penguin 1972), pp.33-4.

9: LJM 512.

10: BLJ V 145.

11: CHP IV st.1 ll.1-4.

It's often been pointed out that the opening of *Childe Harold IV* owes something to *The Mysteries of Udolpho*:

Nothing could exceed Emily's admiration on her first view of Venice, with its islets, palaces, and towers rising out of the sea, whose clear surface reflected the tremulous picture in all its colours. The sun, sinking in the west, tinted the waves and the lofty mountains of Friuli, which skirt the northern shores of the Adriatic, with a saffron glow, while on the marble porticos and colonnades of St. Mark were thrown the rich lights and shades of evening. As they glided on, the grander features of this city appeared more distinctly: its terraces, crowned with airy yet majestic fabrics, touched, as they now were, with the splendour of the setting sun, appeared as if they had been called up from the ocean by the wand of an enchanter, rather than reared by mortal hands. (II, 2)

Slightly later in *Childe Harold IV*, he's franker still, both in verse and prose annotation:

I loved her from my boyhood; She to me  
Was as a fairy city of the heart,  
Rising like Water-columns from the sea,  
Of joy the sojourn, and of wealth the Mart;  
And Otway, Radcliffe, Schiller, Shakespeare's Art,\*  
Had stamped her image in me, and even so,  
Although I found her thus, we did not part;  
Perchance even dearer in her day of Woe,  
Than when She was a boast, a marvel, and a show.

\* Venice Preserved. – *Mysteries of Udolpho*. – the Geister-Seer, or Armenian. – *The Merchant of Venice*. Othello.<sup>12</sup>

Radcliffe's version of Venice was, *he seems to imply*, a suitable one for his boyhood.

My suggestion is that Byron knew what he was doing when he employed this method of both covert and overt acknowledgement, in one of his most famous poems. The passage in Stanza 1 is not a lift, but a homage. He'd been using Ann Radcliffe's novels, and playing inversion-games with her deceptive but reassuring methods, for years.

In his *Turkish Tales* and allied works, the mysteries are not explained. Bored with Radcliffe's desire to reassure, Byron leaves things in the air, and the reader wondering. Why, for example, does the Giaour have to go into a monastery? He's nothing about which to repent – to kill the man

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12: CHP IV st.18, and Byron's note.



who has killed your woman is not usually a cause to feel guilty – what else does he have to feel guilty about? Is it guilt that he feels? Why does he bribe his way into a religious refuge, when he will have no truck with the religious consolation offered him there? Why, for example, does Conrad the Corsair infiltrate the headquarters of Seyd the Pacha prior to attacking it, when it's been reconnoitred already? What are the "thousand crimes" which counterbalance his "one virtue"? (in fact the phrase is stolen from the last paragraph of *Vathek* – for which, see below). Who is Ezzelin, and why does he gatecrash Otho's party, and accuse Lara? What happens to Ezzelin – is it he whose body is dumped from a bridge, near the end of the tale? Is Kaled from *Lara* also Gulnare from *The Corsair*?

Above all, what is it that Manfred and Astarte have done, to kill Astarte and ruin Manfred's life? Are they brother and sister? Does he keep her corpse in the "chamber where none enter" referred to at III ii, 8 – just as Norman Bates keeps his mum downstairs: is that why Astarte is "without a tomb"?

Ann Radcliffe, anxious to keep her readers' minds pure and rational, would have answered these questions. Byron, having no such intention with regards to his readers' minds, doesn't. The effect is annoying in the opposite perspective. Neither writer can win. We are annoyed with Radcliffe because we like mystery – it both leaves us with a frisson, and gives us something to talk about: but we're annoyed with Byron because we need to know the "whys" and the "what exactly happened", and because not explaining so many mysteries leads us to suspect that he doesn't know the answers, wrote too quickly and sloppily, and was only pandering to our Catherine Morland / Juliet appetites for sensation.

Among the Precursors to the Byronic Hero, Montoni, the villain of *Udolpho*, is always a prime contender:

... his soul was little susceptible of light pleasures. He delighted in the energies of the passions; the difficulties and tempests of life, which wreck the happiness of others, roused and strengthened all the powers of his mind, and afforded him the highest enjoyments, of which his nature was capable. Without some object of strong interest, life was to him little more than a sleep; and, when pursuits of real interest failed, he substituted artificial ones, till habit changed their nature, and they ceased to be unreal. Of this kind was the habit of gaming, which he had adopted, first, for the purpose of relieving him from the languor of inaction, but had since pursued with the ardour of passion. In this occupation he had passed the night with Cavigni and a party of young men, who had more money than rank, and more vice than either. Montoni despised the greater part of these for the inferiority of their talents, rather than for their vicious inclinations, and associated with them only to make them the instruments of his

purposes. Among these, however, were some of superior abilities, and a few whom Montoni admitted to his intimacy, but even towards these he still preserved a decisive and haughty air, which, while it imposed submission on weak and timid minds, roused the fierce hatred of strong ones. He had, of course, many and bitter enemies; but the rancour of their hatred proved the degree of his power; and, as power was his chief aim, he gloried more in such hatred, than it was possible he could in being esteemed. A feeling so tempered as that of esteem, he despised, and would have despised himself also had he thought himself capable of being flattered by it. (II, 3)

The need to live dangerously as a leader of fellows whom one despises, are both prime traits of the Byronic Hero. But the Byronic Hero must be sexy too, and Montoni isn't. We must feel that the Byronic Hero *could* be redeemed by the love of a good woman – Medora, or “Kaled”, or Francesca (had she lived) – and Montoni could never inspire the love of a good woman. As the plot develops, he is revealed as duplicitous, greedy, power-obsessed, brutal, murderous, and perhaps (though the careful Radcliffe stops just short of it) sadistic. None of these vices must sully the Byronic Hero. Although we may suspect him capable of them – relating to him must involve the risk that he *may* be wicked – Byron knows that to give the reader any evidence that he is (evidence of the kind that Radcliffe provides in abundance) will lower the tone. Most of the capacities of the Byronic Hero must remain latent, untested.

### *The Italian*<sup>13</sup>

We know that while writing *Don Juan*, Byron often seems to have his prose source open by him, and to be versifying it: Dalyell's *Shipwrecks and Disasters at Sea*, “Tully's Tripoli”, Castelnau's *Histoire de la Nouvelle Russie*, Ude's *The French Cook*. Usually, he inverts the ideology of his source, while adhering to its detail. There's evidence, however, that it was a habit he was already used to: here is an early section from Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian*:

There lived in the Dominican convent of the Spirito Santo, at Naples, a man called father Schedoni; an Italian, as his name imported, but whose family was unknown, and from some circumstances, it appeared, that he wished to throw an impenetrable veil over his origin. For whatever reason, he was never heard to mention a relative, or the place of his nativity, and he had artfully eluded every enquiry that approached the subject, which the

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**13:** The edition of *The Italian* used here is by F.Garber (Oxford World's Classics, 1998).

curiosity of his associates had occasionally prompted. There were circumstances, however, which appeared to indicate him to be a man of birth, and of fallen fortune; his spirit, as it had sometimes looked forth from under the disguise of his manners, seemed lofty; it shewed not, however, the aspirings of a generous mind, but rather the gloomy pride of a disappointed one. Some few persons in the convent, who had been interested by his appearance, believed that the peculiarities of his manners, his severe reserve and unconquerable silence, his solitary habits and frequent penances, were the effect of misfortunes preying upon a haughty and disordered spirit; while others conjectured them the consequence of some hideous crime gnawing upon an awakened conscience.

He would sometimes abstract himself from the society for whole days together, or when with such a disposition he was compelled to mingle with it, he seemed unconscious where he was, and continued shrouded in meditation and silence till he was again alone. There were times when it was unknown whither he had retired, notwithstanding that his steps had been watched, and his customary haunts examined. No one ever heard him complain. The elder brothers of the convent said that he had talents, but denied him learning; they applauded him for the profound subtlety which he occasionally discovered in argument, but observed that he seldom perceived truth when it lay on the surface; he could follow it through all the labyrinths of disquisition, but overlooked it when it was undisguised before him. In fact he cared not for truth, nor sought it by bold and broad argument, but loved to exert the wily cunning of his nature in hunting it through artificial perplexities. At length, from a habit of intricacy and suspicion, his vitiated mind could receive nothing for truth, which was simple and easily comprehended.

Among his associates no one loved him, many disliked him, and more feared him. His figure was striking, but not so from grace; it was tall, and, though extremely thin, his limbs were large and uncouth, and as he stalked along, wrapt in the black garments of his order, there was something terrible in its air; something almost super-human. His cowl, too, as it threw a shade over the livid paleness of his face, encreased its severe character, and gave an effect to his large melancholy eye, which approached to horror ... and so on (pp.34-5)

If Byron did not have Radcliffe's *The Italian* with him when he wrote the following lines for *The Giaour*, he retained a strong memory of them, as well as of Lewis's *The Monk* – see below (my italics in the following):

Dark and unearthly is the scowl  
That glares beneath his dusky cowl –  
The flash of that dilating eye  
Reveals too much of times gone by –  
Though varying – indistinct its hue,  
Oft will his glance the gazer rue –

For in it lurks that nameless spell,  
 Which speaks, itself unspeakable,  
 A spirit yet unquelled and high,  
 That claims and keeps ascendancy;  
 And like the bird whose pinions quake –  
 But cannot fly the gazing snake –  
 Will others quail beneath his look,  
 Nor 'scape the glance they scarce can brook.  
 From him the half-affrighted Friar,  
 When met alone, would fain retire –  
 As if that eye and bitter smile  
 Transferred to others fear and guile –  
 Not oft to smile descendeth he,  
 And when he doth 'tis sad to see  
 That he but mocks at Misery.  
 How that pale lip will curl and quiver!  
 Then fix once more as if for ever –  
 As if his sorrow or disdain  
 Forbade him e'er to smile again.  
 Well were it so – such ghastly mirth  
 From joyaunce ne'er derived its birth. –  
 But sadder still it were to trace  
 What once were feelings in that face –  
 Time hath not yet the features fixed,  
 But brighter traits with evil mixed –  
     And there are hues not always faded,  
     Which speak a mind not all degraded  
     Even by the crimes through which it waded –  
 The common crowd but see the gloom  
 Of wayward deeds, and fitting doom –  
 The close observer can espy  
 A noble soul, and lineage high;  
 Alas! though both bestowed in vain,  
 Which Grief could change – and Guilt could stain –  
*It was no vulgar tenement*  
*To which such lofty gifts were lent,*  
*And still with little less than dread*  
*On such the sight is riveted. –*  
*The roofless cot, decayed and rent,*  
     *Will scarce delay the passer-by –*  
*The tower by war or tempest bent,*  
*While yet may frown one battlement,*  
     *Demands and daunts the stranger's eye –*  
*Each ivied arch – and pillar lone,*  
*Pleads haughtily for glories gone!*  
 (*The Giaour*, 832-82)

Note that in the italicised lines the Giaour is actually compared to a Gothic ruin. The protagonist *is* his own setting, and vice versa.

These lines (and several which follow) were written between September and December 1813, and added to *The Giaour's* seventh edition, published in December – Byron having tried to put his copy of *The Italian* on sale in July 1813, but the sale having been called off.<sup>14</sup> The Radcliffe title does not recur in the 1816 Sale Catalogue – evidence either that Byron lost it, lent it, gave it away ... or that he couldn't bear to part with it. There are no monks or references to them at any point earlier than this in *The Giaour*.

As with the nobleman Montoni, so with the monk Schedoni: he bequeaths some of his qualities to the Byronic Hero, but not all. His sociopathic mystery, yes; his air of superiority, yes; his piercing eye, yes; the suspicion of a guilty secret behind his hauteur, yes – but no Byronic Hero could ever reason theologically, well or otherwise; and whereas Schedoni seems (in his idiom) to be a true Christian, the Giaour refuses to pray, and will not become a monk (whereupon we of course wonder, “Why do the monks tolerate him – is it just for his money?”). Piety, and the ability to reason, are not Byronic attributes. Of the Byronic Heroes, only Manfred is an intellectual – and not a mainstream Christian one.

Behind *The Italian* (a strangely titled book, for none of its characters are not Italian), lies a major Gothic agenda which Byron does not yet take over: the need to have it both ways about the Roman Catholic church (the community in *The Giaour* is one of “caloyers” – Greek Orthodox). In Radcliffe, a few holy individuals, emaciated but kindly anchorites and mournful but charitable nuns, are set against a Hierarchy of Seeming Evil, of which they are as much the victims as the two secular innocents the church persecutes throughout the tale. That Schedoni embodies this bipolar approach to perfection becomes clear when, about to murder the heroine, he sees his own youthful portrait on a pendant about her neck, and thinks that she is his long-lost daughter (in fact she's his niece). If Shakespeare did such a thing, we would weep even as we chortled with derision: Radcliffe is no Shakespeare, and *The Italian* forfeits some credibility for a few chapters at this point.

It was a lesson Byron noted silently. Byronic Heroes are never parents, so such a reversal as happens to Schedoni could never happen to them: but they cannot undergo a redemptive conversion anyway, because, unlike Schedoni, they aren't major sinners. The Giaour has merely

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14: LJM 512.

completed a successful vendetta against the man who killed his girl: Selim's revolt ends before it gets underway: we have (see above) to take Conrad's "thousand crimes" on trust, for none of them are named: we don't even know what Lara has done, good or bad; and Hugo's transgression is of the erotic kind with which we can all empathise (but then, being unambiguously hetero, Hugo is not really a Byronic Hero). Only Alp, in reneging on his religion and country, has gone too far – and his annihilation is the price he pays for refusing to re-convert.<sup>15</sup> It's part of the game of mystification which Byron learned by reaction from *Udolpho* – suggest a depth of sin without going into so much detail about that it gets squalid: it's sexier.

In fact, coming to *The Italian* from *Udolpho*, we know that the tension is phoney even before Schedoni's moment of recognition. Both hero and heroine suspect from time to time that they're going to be either incarcerated or tortured or assassinated or all three, but we rather think that none of it will happen – because this is a novel by Ann Radcliffe. The Byronic Hero must end up dead: marriage is for him unthinkable.

### Horace Walpole and the previous Manfred<sup>16</sup>

One approving reference apart (it is in the Preface to *Marino Faliero*), Byron never mentions *The Castle of Otranto*, the Gothic novel published by Horace Walpole in 1764, thirty years before Radcliffe published *Udolpho*. But the relative blank need not signify ignorance, in the cases of two such famous books.

*Otranto* was, in its first edition, published as the translation of an ancient original; but Walpole changed his mind for the second edition, and put his name to it. He thus pandered to both halves of his audience: the credulous, and the sceptical.

His novel ("an atrociously silly and poorly written tale", as Malcolm Kelsall calls it – see below), resembles *Udolpho* in centring on a wicked male aristocrat in a castle (actually only part of *Udolpho* has this essential

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**15:** Alp, in his repudiation of one racial-religious allegiance and his failure to be accepted by another – his refutation of cultural category, without any compensatory re-birth or synthesis – is a whole-heartedly Gothic figure, and the ruined temple by which the ghost of Francesca appeals to him, a whole-hearted Gothic setting.

**16:** Quotations are from the edition of *Otranto* by W.S.Lewis, (OUP 1982). The earliest Manfred is in Dante's *Purgatorio* (III 121-4): see Graham, Peter W. *From the Alps to Otranto*, in Raizis, M. *Byron. Byron: A Poet for All Seasons*, Athens 2000, p.171.

Gothic feature, but at least it's a crumbling castle, which Otranto isn't). *Otranto* differs from *Udolpho* in containing (like Lewis's *The Monk*), supernatural phenomena which are not open to Radcliffean rationality, but remain, to the end of the tale, explicable only in supernatural terms. Its protagonist, however, shows a hardihood in the face of the otherworldly with which we are, as Byronists, familiar:

He turned, and beheld the plumes of the enchanted helmet agitated in the same extraordinary manner as before. It required intrepidity like Manfred's not to sink under a concurrence of circumstances that seemed to announce his fate. Yet scorning in the presence of strangers to betray the courage he had always manifested, he said boldly, Sir Knight, whoever thou art, I bid thee welcome. If thou art of mortal mould, thy valour shall meet its equal: and if thou art a true Knight, thou wilt scorn to employ sorcery to carry thy point ...” (p.62)

As they made the circuit of the court to return towards the gate, the gigantic sword burst from the supporters, and falling to the ground opposite to the helmet, remained immovable. Manfred, almost hardened to preternatural appearances, surmounted the shock of this new prodigy; and returning to the hall, where by this time the feast was ready, he invited his silent guests to take their places. (p.63)

He may be evil, but nothing scares him; or rather, he is evil, and so nothing scares him. Byron, brazenly retaining his name, borrows the concept too:

*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 above Mortality. –	
Another Spirit:	Yet see – he mastereth himself – and make His nature tributary to his will – Had he been one of us he would have made An awful Spirit. – (II iv, 156-63)	160

Walpole's Manfred seeks a forbidden union, but for dynastic ends; Byron's Manfred *seems* (though we're not positive) to have enjoyed a forbidden union, experienced only in private terms. Both are chidden by holy men:

“The will of heaven be done!” said the Friar. “I am but its worthless instrument. It makes use of my tongue to tell thee, Prince, of thy unwarrantable designs. The injuries of the virtuous Hippolita have mounted to the throne of pity. By me thou art reprimanded for thy adulterous intention of repudiating her: by me thou art warned not to pursue the incestuous design on thy contracted daughter.<sup>17</sup> Heaven that delivered her from thy fury, when the judgments so recently fallen on thy house ought to have inspired thee with other thoughts, will continue to watch over her. Even I, a poor and despised Friar, am able to protect her from thy violence – I, sinner as I am, and uncharitably reviled by your Highness as an accomplice of I know not what amours, scorn the allurements with which it has pleased thee to tempt mine honesty.” (p.48)

Byron’s holy man, not being so clear about what his distinguished parishioner has done, is a bit less specific:

Abbot: My Son! I did not speak of punishment,  
 But patience 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. – (III ii, 57-65)

Byron, in this play as elsewhere, inverts the sexual politics of his source. If one of the main themes of Gothic is the repression of an unruly female principle, then Byron is, at least in 1816/17, on its side. Walpole’s Manfred is faced with a whole regiment of women: his injured wife Hippolita, his newly-bereaved daughter-in-law-to-be Isabella, his innocent daughter Matilda, and several garrulous servants (Shakespearean servants, who don’t know when to shut up, like Mrs. Quickly or Juliet’s Nurse, are vital in Gothic). Byron does not relish the multiple confrontations such a scenario would involve for his Manfred, and goes to the opposite extreme. Here is the dialogue he writes as an alternative, in its entirety:

Manfred: Speak to me, though it be in wrath – but say –  
 I reck not what – but let me hear thee once –  
 This once – once more –

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**17:** Compare, REGINALD: Osmond, she is your niece! OSMOND: I have influence at Rome – That obstacle will be none to me (Lewis, *The Castle Spectre*, V iii).



The Phantom of Astarte:     Manfred!  
 Manfred:                                 Say on – Say on –  
   I live but in the sound – it is thy voice!  
 Phantom:             Manfred – tomorrow ends thine earthly ills.  
   Farewell!  
 Manfred:                     Yet one word more – am I forgiven?  
 Phantom:             Farewell!  
 Manfred:                     Say – shall we meet again?  
 Phantom:             Farewell!  
 Manfred:                     One word, for mercy! Say thou lov'st me.  
 Phantom:             Manfred!

*The Spirit of Astarte disappears.* (II iv, 148-56)

Astarte is the only character in the play who can affect the emotions of Byron's Manfred: and she does so by ignoring his appeals, saying her very short piece, and disappearing.

### ***The Mysterious Mother***<sup>18</sup>

Also in the *Faliero* preface, Byron praises another work by Walpole:

It is the fashion to underrate Horace Walpole; firstly, because he was a nobleman, and secondly, because he was a gentleman; but to say nothing of the composition of his incomparable letters, and of the Castle of Otranto, he is the “Ultimus Romanorum”, the author of the Mysterious Mother, a tragedy of the highest order, and not a puling love-play. He is the father of the first romance, and of the last tragedy in our language, and surely worthy of a higher place than any living writer, be he who he may.

“Ultimus Romanorum” was Pope's phrase for Congreve: it was hyperbolic in that context. Why Byron should, in the preface to so chaste a play as *Faliero*, praise a text which its author condemns in his own preface as “disgusting”,<sup>19</sup> is a point to discuss.

“Our Bard, whose head is filled with Gothic fancies” is Walpole's self-description in his epilogue.<sup>20</sup> Apart from its Gothic trappings – the supposedly haunted castle, the chanting monks, the malign Jesuits, and

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**18:** Page-references from *The Mysterious Mother* are from the 2000 O.U.P. *World's Classics* edition, by Paul Baines and Edward Burns.

**19:** *The Mysterious Mother*, p.2.

**20:** *Ibid.*, p.63.

the mysterious guilt of the leading character – the play contains a number of themes for which Byron’s imagination would find an affinity. First, the Countess’s refusal to accept relief from her burden via confession and imposed penance: second, the idea of a son whom his mother might fail to recognise, which is a familiar Byronic trope;<sup>21</sup> and third but not least, incest – mother / son incest committed, and sibling incest averted.

Walpole is ambivalent about the play. Conceding its “horrid” qualities, he’s proud of the way it observes the unities.<sup>22</sup> Byron, in praising both him and his drama, is making one point about social class, another about Aristotle’s rules, and a gesture, typically covert but defiant, in favour of a playwright who dared to tread in an area which, in *Manfred*, he had himself only skirted.

### *de Monfort*<sup>23</sup>

“I have been *vainly* – since my connection with it [*Drury Lane*] – endeavouring to obtain a trial of the revival of ‘*De Monfort*’”, wrote Byron to Charles Maturin.<sup>24</sup> But Siddons was committed to Edinburgh, and Kean wasn’t interested.

In 1800, when Joanna Baillie’s tragedy was premiered at Covent Garden, with Kemble and Siddons in the leads, much money was spent on the elaborate Gothic scenery which all assumed – perhaps on hearing the plot described – that it called for. Hatred festering among the aristocracy – loyal feudal retainers – an intense sibling relationship – murder – it would have sounded Gothic enough. But one reason why *de Monfort* never really caught on, despite the respect everyone expressed for it, is that it isn’t Gothic at all. “These old apartments are too light and cheerful” complains the protagonist at one point:<sup>25</sup> “Come, let us move,” he says at another, “This chamber is confined and airless grown”.<sup>26</sup> It’s clear that he’s confident of finding a cooling breeze in the next room. If it were a Gothic play, *de Monfort*’s introspective gloom would find external correlatives in the claustrophobia, crumbling architecture and deathly

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**21:** See *SoC* 1003-4; *DJ* II 102, 1-4; and *Island*, I 181-2. In *The Mysterious Mother*, Edmund (p.17) anticipates not being recognised by his own mother: in fact she recognises him at once (p.35) and collapses.

**22:** *The Mysterious Mother*, pp.65-6.

**23:** Page-references from *de Monfort* are from the 2000 O.U.P. *World’s Classics* edition, by Paul Baines and Edward Burns.

**24:** BLJ IV 336-7; letter of December 1st 1815.

**25:** *de Monfort*, p.115.

**26:** *Ibid.*, p.119.

fixtures of his domicile – but they don't. Baillie, perhaps from conservative distaste for things "Gothic", perhaps because she hasn't really thought about it, doesn't provide them.

When the gloomy fourth act arrives, she does feel obliged to throw in a screech-owl, nuns, and a dirge. But the owl is unheard after two pages, and both the nuns and the dirge are of exemplary piety.

The unsatisfactory motivation of the hero's passion is thus only one reason for *de Monfort's* lack of success. Baillie was too determined *not* to use the commonplaces of Gothic to make it succeed.

### *Vathek*<sup>27</sup>

William Beckford's famous serio-comic novella is either "orientalist" or "Gothic", depending on your predilection. It certainly has its fair share of Gothic horror, especially when Carathis, Vathek's mother, is involved:

By secret stairs, known only to herself and to her son, she first repaired to the mysterious recesses in which were deposited the mummies that had been brought from the catacombs of the ancient Pharaohs; of these she ordered several to be taken. From thence she resorted to a gallery where, under the guard of fifty female negroes, mute and blind of the right eye, were preserved the oil of the most venomous serpents, rhinoceros' horns, and woods of a subtle and penetrating odour procured from the interior of the Indies, together with a thousand other horrible rarities. This collection had been formed for a purpose like the present by Carathis herself, from a presentment that she might one day enjoy some intercourse with the infernal powers to whom she had ever been passionately attached, and to whose taste she was no stranger. (pp.30-1)

But it poses as the story of a transgressor who is judged by what Beckford asserts are strict Islamic ethics:

The good Genii, who had not totally relinquished the superintendence of Vathek, repairing to Mahomet in the seventh heaven, said: "Merciful Prophet! stretch forth thy propitious arms towards thy Vicegerent, who is ready to fall irretrievably into the snare which his enemies, the Dives, have prepared to destroy him; the Giaour is awaiting his arrival in the abominable palace of fire, where, if he once set his foot, his perdition will be inevitable." Mahomet answered with an air of indignation: "He hath too

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**27:** Page-references from *Vathek* are from the 1983 O.U.P. *World's Classics* edition, by Roger Lonsdale.

well deserved to be resigned to himself, but I permit you to try if one effort more will be effectual to divert him from pursuing his ruin.” (p.103)

To Byron, however, *Vathek* was neither “Gothic” nor “oriental”, but

... a work ... which ... I never recur to, or read, without a renewal of gratification.<sup>28</sup>

Earlier he had written, in a note to *The Giaour*, line 1334, of:

... that most eastern, and ... “sublime tale”, the “Caliph Vathek”. I do not know from what source the author of that singular volume may have drawn his materials; some of his incidents are to be found in the “Bibliothèque Orientale”; but for correctness of costume, beauty of description, and power of imagination, it far surpasses all European imitations; and bears such marks of originality, that those who have visited the East will have difficulty in believing it to be more than a translation. As an Eastern tale, even Rasselas must bow before it; his “Happy Valley” will not bear a comparison with the “Hall of Eblis”.

The influence of the novel on the poems he wrote immediately prior to *Manfred* is often pointed out.<sup>29</sup> His unacknowledged borrowings from its notes, by Samuel Henley, to give authenticity to *his* notes to *The Giaour* and *The Bride of Abydos*, seem a trifle unscrupulous.

But at one point he is – unusually – open about his reliance on *Vathek*. At the climax of *The Siege of Corinth* – the most Gothic of his “Turkish Tales” – the ghost of Francesca appears to Alp, the Adrian renegade, in a passage swamped with Gothic imagery:

The rose was yet upon her cheek,  
But mellowed with a tenderer streak:  
Where was the play of her soft lips fled?  
Gone was the smile that enlivened their red.  
The ocean’s calm within their view,  
Beside her eye had less of blue;  
But like that cold wave it stood still,  
And its glance, though clear, was chill.  
Around her form a thin robe twining,  
Nought concealed her bosom shining;  
Through the parting of her hair,  
Floating darkly downward there,

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28: *SoC*, l.598, Byron’s note.

29: See Cochran (ed.) *Byron and Orientalism* (CSP 2006), pp.61-3.

Her rounded arm shewed white and bare –  
 And ere yet she made reply,  
 Once she raised her hand on high;  
 It was so wan and transparent of hue,  
 You might have seen the moon shine through.<sup>30</sup>

The spook – for such, from its translucency, we guess it to be – appeals to the hard-hearted renegado / protagonist to abjure Islam and to return to the Christian fold. Lines 598-605 run,

There is a light cloud by the moon – \*  
 'Tis passing, and will pass full soon –  
 If, by the time its vapoury sail  
 Hath ceased her shaded orb to veil,  
 Thy heart within thee is not changed,  
 Then God and man are both avenged;  
 Dark will thy doom be, darker still  
 Thine immortality of ill.”

Byron annotates them:

\* I have been told that the idea expressed in this and the five following lines has been admired by those whose approbation is valuable. I am glad of it: but it is not original – at least not mine; it may be found much better expressed in pages 182-184 of the English version of “*Vathek*” (I forget the precise page of the French), a work to which I have before referred; and never recur to, or read, without a renewal of gratification.

The *Vathek* passage to which he refers is this (in English):

The music paused; and the Genius, addressing the Caliph, said: ‘Deluded Prince! to whom Providence hath confided the care of innumerable subjects; is it thus that thou fulfillest thy mission? Thy crimes are already completed; and, art thou now hastening towards thy punishment? Thou knowest that, beyond these mountains, Eblis and his accursed dives hold their infernal empire; and seduced by a malignant phantom, thou art proceeding to surrender thyself to them! This moment is the last of grace allowed thee: abandon thy atrocious purpose: return: give back Nouronihar to her father, who still retains a few sparks of life: destroy thy tower, with all its abominations: drive Carathis from thy councils: be just to thy subjects: respect the ministers of the Prophet; compensate for thy impieties, by an exemplary life; and, instead of squandering thy days in voluptuous indulgence, lament thy crimes on the sepulchres of thy

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30: *SoC*, ll.501-17.

ancestors. Thou beholdest the clouds that obscure the sun: at the instant he recovers his splendour, if thy heart be not changed, the time of mercy assigned thee will be past for ever.' (pp.104-5)

Byron, though he may have borrowed the idea, adds a major erotic factor to the ghost's appeal ("Around her form a thin robe twining, / Nought concealed her bosom shining"). He also turns its ideology around: the religion the Genius wishes Vathek to abjure is devil-worship, not Islam: and the one it wishes him to reconcile himself with is Islam, not Christianity. It is a method of assimilation-by-inversion which we see again in *Don Juan* VIII, where the Old Moslem Tartar Khan and his sons, killed by the Russians at Ismail, are mirror-images of the Old Christian Latinus and his sons, killed by the Moslems in *Jerusalemme Liberata* IX.

This honest avowal of indebtedness to one prior Gothic text comes immediately after a disclaimer of indebtedness to another fine Gothic text – Coleridge's *Christabel*, to which Byron refers in a prose note to *Siege*, 476. He claims the writing of *Siege* came before he first heard *Christabel*. Whether the second coming-clean is a smokescreen to disguise the disingenuousness of the first, we can't tell.

The standard point of reference when relating *Manfred* itself to *Vathek* is the opening stage direction of II iv, giving "Arimanes on his Throne, a Globe of Fire, surrounded by the Spirits", which echoes unambiguously the following passage from Beckford's book:

An infinity of elders with streaming beards, and afrits in complete armour, had prostrated themselves before the ascent of a lofty eminence; on the top of which, upon a globe of fire, sat the formidable Eblis. His person was that of a young man, whose noble and regular features seemed to have been tarnished by malignant vapours. In his large eyes appeared both pride and despair: his flowing hair retained some resemblance to that of an angel of light. In his hand, which thunder had blasted, he swayed the iron sceptre, that causes the monster Ouranbad, the afrits, and all the powers of the abyss to tremble.<sup>31</sup>

"Aherman" is mentioned by Beckford immediately after this, as a spirit subsidiary to Eblis; by substituting the Zoroastrian Evil One for the Moslem, Byron effects another gesture of creative respect.

Manfred, the protagonist, is as like and unlike Vathek, the protagonist, as the similarities and dissimilarities between Beckford's book and Byron's would lead one to expect. Instead of depicting blasphemy simply against one monotheism (*faux*-Islam, in the case of *Vathek*) *Manfred*

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31: *Vathek*, pp.110-11.