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# PATHS TO THE DISSOLUTION OF SELF: SOLIPSISM AND SPIRITUALITY IN BYRON'S MANFRED

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PATHS TO THE DISSOLUTION OF SELF: SOLIPSISM AND SPIRITUALITY IN  
BYRON'S *MANFRED*

An Essay Submitted to the  
Office of Graduate Studies  
College of Arts & Sciences of  
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in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

By  
Elizabeth V. Wells  
2015

Lord Byron's notorious egotism led not only to his scandalous reputation, but to questions about the importance and nature of the self in his poetry as well. Many of Byron's characters—especially those that have become known as Byronic heroes—struggle in some way with their identity and look for paths towards self-acceptance and peace of mind. One example is Byron's Manfred, who, broken from guilt and sin, attempts to regain power over himself and his existence by controlling the world around him. However, Manfred must always return to the self literally and metaphorically, especially in his encounters with the Spirits of Nature and Astarte. In these meetings *Manfred* emphasizes the title character's function as a Romantic "lamp" by insisting that Manfred projects characteristics similar to his own onto other beings. Regardless of his external or internal focus, Manfred wants to dissolve his identity to attain peace. In the first two acts he looks to the outside world, and in the third act, after he learns of his impending death, the focus changes to eliminating his identity in death. Throughout the play Manfred searches for oblivion, either in the dissolution of self in a spiritual realm or through the destruction of self in the material sense, but for the entirety of the play he remains too solipsistic to find any kind of peace in that dissolution.

The notion of the Romantic author, and Manfred himself, as a transformative "lamp" rather than purely a mimetic mirror is key to this reading of *Manfred* as well as to Romantic poetry as a whole. M.H. Abrams' foundational work *The Mirror and the Lamp* distinguishes Romantic poetry from the classicism that preceded it, noting that while neoclassical authors mirror the external realm by writing more straightforwardly about what they see in the outside world of fact, a Romantic author "reflects a world already bathed in an emotional light he himself has projected....What marks [Romantic poetry]

off from fact is, primarily, that it incorporates objects of sense which have already been acted on and transformed by the feelings of the poet” (52-3). Manfred’s solipsistic recognition of himself in others means that his view of the world as a whole is incomplete; he does not take in or respond to his surroundings at face value, but instead views the world through his own impact. The secondary characters in *Manfred* provide a perfect example of how an author, whether intentionally or unintentionally, can change the perception of the world around him by infusing descriptions of the world with his own feelings and ideas. In this case the “author” is Manfred himself, who projects traits onto the secondary characters that are similar to his own.

Critics of the poem debate both the nature and importance of the secondary characters; some say these characters reflect or mimic Manfred and even Byron, while others insist the minor characters are completely separate from both the character and any author, whether Manfred or Byron. William H. Marshall begins his discussion of *Manfred*, calling the work “a one-character drama” in which Manfred, whether part of the scene or not, controls all other characters (97). While the idea that the drama and its characters solely concern Manfred’s actions is similar to the argument of this essay, Marshall also notes that “only as psychological subordinates do these characters themselves achieve structural significance. The question of their origin, in other words, is not crucial and perhaps hardly meaningful—whether they are, within the play as an extended monologue, entirely figmental, or (the earthly beings at least) in part objectively real” (97). Michael Simpson agrees: “The dramatic function of this hero within the plot as a whole might be described as the authoritative conjuring of other characters to bear witness to their own contingency and to the corresponding necessity of Manfred” (135).

According to this view, though the ontology of the spirits as well as Manfred's reaction to them matters, the manner in which they take form, be it physical, supernatural, or neither, makes little difference to Manfred himself. The power of Manfred's mind to interact with the spirits on a psychological level matters more than whether or not he acknowledges the spirits as tangible "others." Manfred's "necessity" is due not only to his ability to command the spirits and other characters, but also to the extreme solipsism with which Manfred views these secondary players.

While Marshall and Simpson are correct about the focus on Manfred's character, and that character's weight in the drama whether present "on stage" or not, stating that "the question of their origin...is not crucial and perhaps hardly meaningful" overlooks and understates each character's connection to Manfred.<sup>1</sup> Marshall insists the secondary characters only exist to allow Manfred to react to them, but this view limits the potential of the secondary characters as a whole to have a meaningful impact on or to assist Manfred in his quest. Furthermore, the characters must have an objectively real being if Manfred hopes to obliterate and lose himself among those others, especially the spirits.

While the secondary characters are real rather than figments of Manfred's imagination, it must be noted that Manfred reacts not only to others but also to different aspects of himself as he notices these aspects in those with whom he interacts. To prove that the characters in *Manfred* contain aspects of Manfred's identity and are not entities with little connection to the hero, the secondary characters will be explored individually to discover in what ways each represents Manfred or causes him to confront various

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Simpson also notes the Spirits invoked in 1.1 can "be understood...as fictional figures in a purely rhetorical apostrophe of Manfred's, so that they would be neither present nor absent in any meaningful sense" (130).

characteristics of his own identity. Manfred himself requires attention first, though, as readers need to see the character as tortured and seeking dissolution in others in order to find interest in the idea that the minor characters ultimately reflect his solipsism. The attention paid to those characters is overall a focus on the self or the aspects of the self that Manfred sees in others. Most, if not all, of Manfred's solipsistic attitude regarding others results from his egocentric belief that he can control beings in the spiritual realm in his quest for Astarte's forgiveness and, eventually, the dissolution of his identity in that outer, spiritual realm.<sup>2</sup>

From the very first lines readers understand that Manfred looks for a solution to his tortured state or "curse":

The lamp must be replenished, 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.... (1.1.1-7)

Though the exact problems, including the details of his relationship with Astarte, are not revealed at this time, Manfred does discuss his troubled mental state. In this monologue, Manfred makes his problems apparent with markers that highlight his internal torture.

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<sup>2</sup> According to Samuel C. Chew, Manfred "exhibits [power] in the ceaseless quest after knowledge. He trusts in the strength of mind to attain to a spiritual revelation of the mysteries of the universe" (79). The "strength of mind" mentioned by Chew no doubt points to Manfred's inherent powers over the physical and spiritual worlds, but this strength can also signal the extreme solipsism that overtakes all aspects of his desire for control.

Readers understand that Manfred believes his struggles are beyond those of others. His sleep is “not sleep/But a continuance of enduring thought,” highlighting Manfred's insomnia resulting from guilt and despair. Manfred resents his tortured conscience and inability to find peace, spiritual or otherwise; this existence he calls his “curse” (1.1.25). Later, readers discover the cause of the curse: Manfred’s relationship with his half-sister, Astarte, whose death seems mysteriously connected to their relationship.<sup>3</sup>

Following this opening, just as he calls the Spirits of Nature for assistance, Manfred states that his “task” is “Forgetfulness— / Of that which is within me” as well as “Oblivion, self-oblivion” (1.1.28, 36-7, 144). He wants to “forget” the guilt and torture he lives with as a result of his past actions, especially concerning his relationship with Astarte—Manfred wishes to see and speak with her in order to gain her forgiveness as part of the process of forgetting. The “forgetfulness” extends to the desire for “oblivion,” as obliterating his identity would result in the ultimate and most permanent form of forgetfulness. Manfred’s interactions with these spiritual beings, like his reactions to all the characters of the play, are shaped by the psychological idea that people seek in others, though perhaps not consciously, characteristics similar to their own. In this way, Manfred’s search for oblivion by dissolving himself in the spiritual realm fails, because instead of letting go of himself, he solipsistically responds to aspects of others that are similar to aspects of himself, and, therefore, embraces the very self he is trying to lose in death.

The curse makes Manfred desire oblivion through the dissolution of his self. He can approach this dissolution both through spirituality and through independence, but can

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<sup>3</sup> Critics have explored the probability that Manfred and Astarte were half-siblings and that this relationship marked the romantic feelings between the two as forbidden.

achieve neither. Astarte's death led to Manfred's tortured state, and now the guilt from the death makes Manfred question both the nature and the purpose of his existence while desiring an end to that existence. Manfred always returns to his thoughts both when looking at the outside world and turning to his own mind. The beginning monologue references Manfred's struggle, including the fact that the torture is, at least in part, a product of Manfred's own doing, and not the fault of an external, worldly force. His doomed quest for Astarte's forgiveness results in the desire to eliminate his identity completely.

Throughout the poem a double movement can be seen between Manfred's desire to dissolve himself in or with help from an outside spiritual force and his desire to obliterate the self in a material death without outside assistance. Manfred's encounter with characteristics similar to his own creates a cycle in which all characters relate back to Manfred and his quest for oblivion. Manfred solipsistically responds to the aspects of himself he sees in others, which results in the inability to dissolve his identity in others, and because of this focus on himself, it can be argued that Byron uses Manfred to explore the character's response to different characteristics of the self instead of events in the outside world.<sup>4</sup> The drama explores the paradoxes and complications within the attempted dissolution of Manfred's solipsistic identity into a spiritual outer realm, the most important of which are: how can Manfred desire dissolution in a spiritual realm if he ultimately dismisses the power of that spirituality? and how can Manfred's solipsism fit within a power outside the self?

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<sup>4</sup> Paul West explores Byron's biographical influences on the poems, including the interest in the self: "For Byron, a personal identity was both attractive and repulsive: something to obliterate as an earnest of limitation; something at once seductive to the creative man in him, and yet baulking to the pantheist" (105).

No obvious answers to these questions appear in the play, and throughout the poem Manfred exists in a state of limbo concerning his spirituality or lack thereof, at least in an orthodox sense. His acknowledgment of and occasional deferral to a higher power, as seen in the first scene, is evidence that Manfred, as a character, believes not only in the power of self but in an unnamed and possibly undefinable spiritual power, both of which he relies on in his quest. However, while Manfred acknowledges a nameless higher power in invoking the Spirits of Nature, there is no evidence that he eventually settles on a system of belief.<sup>5</sup> *Manfred's* attempt to dissolve identity in the spiritual realm produces a strange result: instead of acknowledging and appealing to the divine, Manfred stresses solipsism and the “egotistical sublime” by seeing himself in the outside world, even as he attempts to reach to that outside world.

Manfred, looking for forgiveness from his beloved, commands the Spirits of Nature to join him with the hope that the Spirits will be able to call forth Astarte. Each Spirit of Nature responds to their summoning in a tone reminiscent of Manfred's tone. This similarity in tone, more than what the spirits actually say, is the focus of Manfred's response. First, Manfred commands: “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!” (1.1.47-9). This speech highlights Manfred's egotism, as he refers to himself and his powers throughout. The “strong curse” and his own thoughts are facets of his power, indicating that his abilities come from no other source than himself. Not only does he identify his cursed nature, he also mentions his thoughts as part of a larger system that he

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<sup>5</sup> According to Terrance Allan Hoagwood, *Manfred* contains “a dismissal of every transcendental possibility that the play has introduced,” including that “The hero dismisses the apparently supernatural machinery of spirits” as well as the evil symbolized by Arimanes and the orthodoxy represented by the abbot (38).

has some influence over. Manfred uses the thought “within...and around” him to make the spirits appear. These lines serve as important evidence of Manfred's belief that he can dissolve his identity in his surroundings. Though he brought the “curse” of tortured guilt and an inability to be at peace, spiritually or otherwise, on himself through his actions and Astarte's subsequent death, and in this way Manfred takes charge of his fate, he uses the thought within him as well as the thought *around* him in the quest for forgiveness and oblivion. The thought “around” Manfred indicates a spiritual nature that he can in some ways grasp and bend to his will, which accounts for the fact that he can summon the spirits on his own. It is also possible that the thought might be a continuation of the thought within him, or essentially Manfred's acknowledgement of his characteristics as he sees them in others. Though the purpose of this command is to obtain help from the Spirits of Nature and eventually dissolve the self in the outside world, Manfred remains focused on the self and his desire for power over the spiritual realm and the spirits.

The responses from the spirits echo the doubt regarding other being's powers and the general self-importance Manfred shows in this command. The First Spirit, the spirit of air, begins by acknowledging Manfred and his abilities:

Mortal, to thy bidding bowed  
...Though thy quest may be forbidden  
...To thine adjuration bowed;  
Mortal—be thy wish avowed! (1.1.50, 56-9)

Repetition of the words “mortal” and “bowed” create a sense of conflict in the spirit: it knows it must obey and “bow” to Manfred, but Manfred's mortality leads to the spirit's questioning the task which, admittedly, “may be forbidden” (Byron 1.1.56). Ordinarily,

one might think that the immortal spirits would have more control over their own actions, especially considering the demands they follow come from one who is not immortal. However, this question of authority and why the spirits answer Manfred at all can be explained through the unnatural power that resulted from Manfred's

... Wanderings to the caves of death,  
Searching its cause in its effect, and [drawing]  
From withered bones and skulls and heaped-up dust  
Conclusions most forbidden. (2.2.80-3)

Manfred wants the spirits to obey him, so they do indeed appear, but only after a few failing attempts in the introductory monologue. This initial failure indicates the spirits are at least as powerful as Manfred himself. The tone of this understanding can be heard within some of the spirits' speeches. For example, the second spirit, the Spirit of Earth, concludes its introduction with a question that Manfred might expect from any of these spirits: "And what with me wouldst *thou*?" (1.1.75). The third, fourth, fifth, and sixth spirits all remark on Manfred's power in a similar way: acknowledging his influence, they simultaneously mark the communication with some respect while critiquing Manfred's qualifications and emphasizing why this gathering is a bad idea. Most of the spirits question Manfred's authority and power—something that Manfred does with all of the spiritual beings in the drama. Each spirit acknowledges Manfred's summoning in some way, but with some amount of rebellion when it comes to obeying his power.

This rebellion is clearest in the seventh spirit, the spirit of the star or destiny, who implies the spirits' powers are superior. This spirit introduces itself with clear contempt, saying that before Manfred existed there was a guiding star that oversaw his birth, and

even with this life-giving and -preserving act the spirit must condescend to “descend” to Manfred's realm of existence:

And thou beneath its [this star's] influence born,  
Thou worm who I obey and scorn!  
Forced by a power (which is not thine,  
And lent thee but to make thee mine)... (1.1.124-27)

This speech contains many clues regarding Manfred's connection to the spirits as well as to the powers of the spirits and Manfred himself. As far as the spirits are concerned, Manfred is supposed to have been born under, and therefore protected and destined by, the seventh spirit's star. The spirit goes on to attack Manfred's authority by calling him a worm and stating that the only reason Manfred can manipulate these spirits is because of his earlier, forbidden research. Though the spirits cannot deny Manfred's power, they disapprove of the “forbidden” knowledge and the way Manfred obtained said knowledge. The spirits' attempt to control Manfred and assert their power over him by attacking his abilities and their origin echoes Manfred's attacks on the spirits' powers.

When challenged by the spirits, Manfred defends his authority and his powers, though gained by human means:

The mind, the spirit, the Promethean spark,  
The lightning of my being, is as bright,  
Pervading, and far-darting as your own—  
And shall not yield to yours, though cooped in clay! (1.1.154-7)

Manfred attacks the spirits' power by justifying his own, making clear the fact that the spirits would not be there were it not for Manfred's call. The spirits' attempt to control

Manfred sparks Manfred's desire for control. Manfred angrily answers that he has power over the spirits and they need to obey him, even if the power was obtained in questionable ways. Furthermore, Manfred's insistence on the power of his own mind, and his strong reaction to the spirits' questions regarding his power and authority, reinforces the idea that Manfred's self-centeredness allows him to see only the aspects of his own personality in the spirits instead of the reality of the spirits' separate existence.

The Spirits of Nature represent Manfred's idea of himself in relation to authority, and this is seen in the tone of the spirits' speech. The central issue of the scene regards the spirits' inability to speak with Astarte because this request is not in the spirits' domain. Manfred encounters the limits of the spiritual realm, which are similar to his own limits: neither can summon Astarte. Manfred's connection to the spirits, along with his attempt and ultimate failure to control and benefit from them, shows that Manfred is conflicted about his role in, and potential manipulation of, the outside world. Responding to the spirits' doubts regarding his power rather than to the spirits' inability to help him see Astarte shows that Manfred's solipsism interferes with his desire to dissolve his identity in the outside world. Manfred cannot succeed in finding solace through an "other," because the "other" results, in the end, to a return to the self.

While the nature of the higher power referred to in this scene is uncertain, it is important to note that both the spirits and Manfred comment on its power to bring about Manfred's oblivion in a spiritual realm. Moments of reliance on a spiritual power can be seen in Manfred's opening monologue, as he calls out to an unnamed force to help him call the spirits. Later in the drama this pattern will be reversed and Manfred will believe in his own mind above and in opposition to a higher power, but the spirits of the first

scene are consistent with Manfred's beliefs at this point in the drama.

After the encounter with the Spirits of Nature, Manfred wanders the mountainside on which his castle is situated. After a brief scene with another mortal, the Chamois Hunter, Manfred pauses to admire his surroundings. Manfred wishes to “be sole in this sweet solitude / And with the spirit of the place divide / The homage of these waters” (2.2.10-12). He then calls forth the “spirit of the place,” the Witch of the Alps; the Witch, however, proves to be manipulative and power-hungry, much like Manfred. The Witch’s attempt at manipulation comes when she encourages Manfred to speak of his past. Though Manfred states to the Witch that his intention is “To look upon thy beauty, nothing further,” the Witch asks Manfred about his troubles and, after some hesitation, he recounts his past, beginning with differences between himself and others at an early age to his love for and eventual destruction of Astarte (2.2.38, 45-149). Though he mentions hopelessness and speaks with an air of dejection, throughout the scene Manfred remains calm and willing to speak, showing an ability to connect with forces outside of himself and providing evidence that he might be able to find oblivion successfully by dissolving his identity in the spiritual realm. The Witch, however, sees an opportunity for power. Though calling forth Astarte “is not in [the Witch’s] province,” she claims “if thou / Wilt swear obedience to my will and do / My bidding, it may help thee to thy wishes” (2.2.155-7). In this move for power, the Witch attempts to gain control of Manfred after his upsetting recollection of the past even though she cannot directly help him.

The Witch, an intended source of inspiration and relief, asks more of Manfred than he wants to give, and his answer to her clearly conveys his independence: “I will not swear! Obey? And whom? The spirits / Whose presence I command—and be the slave /

Of those who served me? Never!” (2.2.157-9). The Witch leaves Manfred, who remains onstage alone reflecting on life and planning to “call the dead” to find answers to his questions (Byron 2.2.179). Until Manfred’s rejection of the Witch’s offer, the scene highlights his ability to reach out to a being or force other than himself in order to divide his pain—a skill necessary if he intends to dissolve into the oblivion the spiritual realm affords. However, when Manfred realizes that the Witch wants to control him instead of sharing his grief, and that he will need to sacrifice some aspect of himself in order to reach his goal, he commands her to leave. His anger at her desire for power is reminiscent of the spirits’ resistance to Manfred’s power in Act I Scene I. Manfred calls the Spirits of Nature by referencing his power; the spirits echo his tone by insisting on their own abilities and Manfred responds defensively, not to their inability to help but to their desire for control. Similarly, Manfred calls the Witch, who encourages him to discuss his past and attempts, in the wake of his emotional recollection, to make Manfred swear obedience. Forgetting his initial goal of admiring nature with the Witch, Manfred responds to her desire for power by insisting on his own abilities and independence. Manfred may not consciously understand the similarities in these encounters, but in each his desire to annihilate the self sparks a strong reaction against his own power-hungry trait in another. According to Leslie Brisman, “the supernatural personae had been appealed to; but if they could not dispel the past, Manfred learns that he can dispel them. His was the spell that conjured them, and his is the power to deny their primacy. One’s past belongs to one’s self, not to any other powers” (99). Though Manfred shares his past with the Witch, he will not allow the Witch to use his own history against him. Instead he dismisses the Witch, whom he had “conjured,” and continues his quest independently.

After dismissing the Witch, Manfred travels to the Hall of Arimanes and finally gets his wish of seeing Astarte, who appears in phantom form. Upon seeing this phantom, Manfred cries out his wish for Astarte to “forgive...or condemn” him, signifying his reliance on an outside force (Byron 2.4.105). Astarte's refusal or inability to answer is more than a sign of her unwillingness to forgive Manfred; because Manfred views the world solipsistically, it can be said that Astarte's phantom represents not only Astarte but also Manfred's attitude towards her death as a whole, including the part he played in that death. Chew notes that “in *Manfred* Astarte is more than the heroine of a tragic love tale; she is the formal embodiment, the concrete presentation, of the abstract mood” (67). The “abstract mood” is that of Manfred; he can see Astarte only through his overpowering love and guilt, both abstract ideas symbolized by the woman he loved and lost. Not only is Astarte the “embodiment” of this mood in the eyes of the audience, she is also the “concrete presentation” of this feeling for Manfred—a feeling Manfred must address in order to neutralize the torture he experiences due to losing her.

The romantic love and self-love seen with Astarte drive the plot through most of the drama. Many critics comment on the connection between Manfred and Astarte, with a focus on the romantic relationship that grows out of their sibling bond. It should be added that Astarte has become a symbol for Manfred's own solipsistic identity. After Astarte's continued silence in the face of commands from Nemesis and Arimanes, Manfred comments on Astarte's changed appearance as well as his own trials: “I have so much endured, so much endure— / Look on me! The grave hath not changed thee more / Than I am changed for thee” (2.4.119-21). In addressing Astarte, Manfred not only gestures towards the effect her death had on his identity, but also prioritizes his troubles

over hers. However much death “changed” Astarte (according to the speech, the change is primarily physical), it affected Manfred more.

Along the same lines, in typical Manfred style, he begins his plea by saying he “endures” much, without saying exactly what he endures—Astarte may be dead, but Manfred feels his troubles are greater. This focus on the self shows Manfred’s egotism, even in the presence of his beloved. This self-centeredness is underscored by the physical similarities between the two. Commenting on these similarities, Philip Cox claims, “Astarte...appears as a feminised version of her brother and, moreover, as a feminised version of him which only has an existence in the past and the innocence of which is lost and lamented in the present” (117). Manfred's ego accounts for his love of a woman so like himself as well as his inability to perceive her as a separate being. However, as Cox notes, Astarte is forever in the past, and Manfred continuously regrets his participation in her loss of innocence and, ultimately, her death. Manfred finds difficulty in confronting her phantom because she is the closest to him, in traits and identity, among all the other spirits or characters in the play.

When Manfred says, “I feel but what thou art and what I am,” as well as “I have wandered o’er the earth / And never found thy likeness,” he in a way admits their singular relationship as siblings and lovers (Byron 2.4.133, 144-5). He loves Astarte in part because he loves himself, and he can “feel” her “being” in addition to his own because they are similar in traits, feelings, and genetics; these strong similarities are also why he cannot find her “likeness”—the only one similar to her is Manfred himself. Throughout the drama Manfred looks outside of himself for answers without understanding that his solipsism prevents the discovery of any answers. In approaching Astarte with the same

solipsism that makes him perceive others as aspects of himself, Manfred unconsciously approaches himself in a whole (female) form, whereas the spirits contain only certain parts of his identity. Instead of speaking to his beloved, Manfred's understanding of Astarte as an extension and mirror image of himself means Manfred ultimately speaks to himself.

Manfred continues his speech to Astarte by mentioning his place between self-reliance and the possibility of spiritual oblivion:

...All hateful things conspire  
To bind me in existence, in a life  
Which makes me shrink from immortality—  
A future like the past.... (2.4.128-31)

Though he strives for dissolution of the self in the spiritual realm seemingly from before the events of the play, Manfred's experience with life after Astarte's death transforms the idea of a prolonged life, of any length, into a curse. Manfred painfully cries out to Astarte's phantom,

Speak to me!...  
I...feel for thee alone—  
Speak to me, though it be in wrath, but say—  
I reckon not what—but let me hear the once—  
This once—once more! (2.4.144, 147-50)

Astarte finally responds to this plea, but in a very limited fashion—she frames her speech by saying Manfred's name; it is the first and last thing she says, reinforcing Manfred's solipsism because her love, life, and death all revolve around him. Her words do not go

much further; she warns Manfred of his impending death and finishes with “Farewell!” along with the repetition of his name (2.4.154, 156). Astarte's eventual response instead of endless silence serves as another mark of Manfred's solipsism—he may not forgive himself, but he believes Astarte loved him so much, too much perhaps, and would not be able to maintain that silence especially with his emotional appeal. Astarte's answer still lacks the forgiveness Manfred desires and can neither find nor grant to himself. He leaves the Hall of Arimanes in a numb state, knowing now that he cannot forget his guilt in a spiritual sense. After realizing that reaching outward, especially to Astarte, does not result in absolution or peace, Manfred switches his focus from seeing Astarte and dissolving himself in the spiritual realm to embracing the death in a material sense (and hopefully, for Manfred, oblivion) that Astarte's phantom predicts.

Stephen Cheeke insists that, instead of embracing the spirit world, with which he connects in the first scene, Manfred rejects that world after the above scene: “the vision and condition he embraces is that of the mind as its own place, or a world in which place has no spirit and in which solitude cannot be shared with anything” (88). While it might be said that Manfred tries to “share solitude” with the spirits in the first scene, he does not so much “share,” which implies a give-and-take, but he demands a solution to his torture. The scene in the Hall of Arimanes is a continuation of Manfred's interactions with those who have similar characteristics, but after speaking with Astarte's phantom Manfred gives up the search for an outside factor or interaction that would bring peace by allowing the dissolution of his identity. Astarte does not forgive him, so there is no reason to search outside the self, and Manfred takes this to an extreme by retreating to his own mind and preparing for physical oblivion in death.

After the experience in the Hall of Arimanes, the driving force of the play's plot switches to material self-obliteration. It is possible that Arimanes symbolizes the spiritual higher power Manfred appealed to in the beginning to gain control of the spirits, and Arimanes' eventual fulfillment of Manfred's wish to see Astarte is a sign of Arimanes' power. Manfred sees his idea of the higher power in Arimanes; Arimanes is stern but does eventually help. After Astarte leaves, however, Manfred sees the higher power differently. This is seen immediately in Manfred's indifference towards Arimanes, even though Arimanes is the reason Astarte appeared. Arimanes, with all of his power, loses his position as the personification of a higher power because Manfred had an unsatisfactory interaction with Astarte's phantom. This leads Manfred to retreat further into himself, and having a personified higher power with whom to interact and in whom to dissolve himself seems impossible to Manfred now. After his disappointment, Manfred thinks even more of his own mind and physical self, and refuses to search outside that self for dissolution.

Paul D. Barton echoes the idea that the higher power is no longer approachable by Manfred, as its personification in Arimanes suggests, because Manfred

directly indicat[es] a belief that he can no longer trust or depend upon any agency—including the 'super-human' power of God—but himself. But Manfred realizes that in making such an admission he must also acknowledge that he is doomed: doomed because he has only himself to rely upon and that self does not have sufficient power to redeem him. As much as Manfred desires to be an equal of the gods, he knows that he is not. He recognizes...that he lives a terrible existence; he must abide by the

laws, no matter how inequitable they may be, of a higher power. (98)

Whatever this “higher power” may be, it is not on Manfred's side—Manfred chooses not to find oblivion in this power, but in spite of it. Though Manfred uses this higher power to summon the spirits, calling on that power to serve his own purpose is a rebellious act. Manfred may rebel out of anger and frustration resulting from the higher power’s being unknown and unreachable. However, as rebellious as Manfred seems in the beginning, after seeing Astarte Manfred loses hope and, therefore, the nerve required to test the higher power. In the end, Manfred's individuality, which he has sought to combine seamlessly with the spirits and Astarte, cannot have a spiritual side because his mind is in opposition to the higher power. The power did not help him, so Manfred decides to rely on his own mind instead of the processes of an external force.

The higher power mentioned in the first two acts is likely that of a pantheistic spiritual force, taking shape in nature as well as spirits and humans. Though Manfred demonstrates his ability to control and command various spirits, he is not a deity. Manfred’s power allows him to command Nemesis to bring Astarte’s phantom forward and to persuade Arimanes to make said phantom speak, but no spirit, no matter how great, can change the delayed, distant, and vague response Astarte gives to Manfred’s pleas. His attempt to control the world around him crumbles when he sees that what he most desires—Astarte’s forgiveness—cannot be won on earth or in the realm of spirits. Manfred now knows she has not and will never forgive him; failing to gain forgiveness from Astarte herself (or, at least, her phantom) means Manfred’s initial quest for dissolution in the outside world comes to a close. While it may be argued that Manfred might move on to a different goal, perhaps further dominion of the earth and the spirits, it

is unlikely that he hopes for anything beyond a tortured, cursed existence, and he now waits only for the death that his beloved prophesied. While waiting for his end, Manfred rejects the spiritual realm and retreats into his own mind.

Manfred does not speak immediately after Astarte's disappearance in the Hall of Arimanes; rather, Nemesis and other spirits look on at him, discussing the scene and Manfred's aspirations regarding the spirit world. Instead of the passionate and often lengthy words Manfred uses in Act I and most of Act II, at the end of Act II Manfred speaks but briefly, and with a distant, though civil, tone. While it should be noted that Manfred returns to longer, despondent soliloquies in Act III, his immediate reaction (or lack thereof) to Astarte's disappearance and what he says before leaving the Hall show his altered state of mind. He no longer sees aspects of himself in others, because he is too focused on himself. Before seeing Astarte, Manfred speaks to the spirits in a tone of authority; for example, he tells Nemesis to "Call up the dead" (2.4.79). This type of direct order, with no second thought about whether or not his speech is appropriate for the situation, is Manfred's manner of speaking right until the moment he sees Astarte's phantom and aligns with his views of power and authority. After the phantom disappears, there is a marked change in the tone and, in Act III, the subject matter of Manfred's words.

The immediate change of tone is seen when Nemesis asks Manfred if he has any more questions. In the first and second acts Manfred probably would have asked several questions about why Astarte did not speak, and might have gone so far as to demand to see her again. This is not the case, however, and Manfred simply responds, "None" (2.4.165). The brevity and apparent lack of emotion stand in stark contrast to Manfred's

style of speaking to the Spirits of Nature and the Witch of the Alps. With those characters, Manfred assumes a tone of superiority and often speaks of his remarkable and unmatched misery along with his unusual powers to control the immortal world. Instead of commands and frustrated curses, Manfred says goodbye to those in the Hall with a distant though cordial message:

We meet then

—Where? On the earth?...

Even as thou wilt; and for the grace accorded

I now depart a debtor. Fare ye well! (2.4.165-68)

Instead of demanding that Nemesis tell him the details of that future meeting, including the location, Manfred simply accepts that answer and acknowledges not only Nemesis and Arimanes' superior statuses, but the fact that he is in their debt.

Referring to the debt as well as “meeting” the spirits again (whether “on the earth” or in a supernatural state) is the only instance of Manfred’s attempting a conventional, formal, and disinterested farewell in the poem. Some may argue that Manfred’s parting exchange with the Chamois Hunter in Act I is similarly conventional, and though Manfred’s words there do follow a typical pattern for a farewell, that particular goodbye begins with Manfred looking down on the Hunter’s religion (“I need [your prayers] not”) and his interest is still in ordering the Hunter to “follow not” (Byron 1.1.90, 95). In the Hall of Arimanes, Manfred’s parting words contain no derision or disrespect and do not include any kind of command, in contrast not only to Manfred’s farewell to the Hunter, but to Manfred’s parting words to the Spirits of Nature and the Witch of the Alps as well. This civility is best understood as Manfred’s truest approach to an “other” who has no

connection to himself—he forgets and no longer acknowledges how the spirits such as Nemesis are similar to him; instead, he knows his oblivion will come through a physical demise rather than dissolution in the spiritual world, which would require interaction with that outside world. Manfred's decision to turn inward in his search for oblivion coincides with the knowledge of his impending death—specifically, he will die the day after his experience in the Hall of Arimanes.

While Manfred's change in speech shows that he has shifted his search for answers from an external to an internal world, the change is further supported by the secondary characters who appear in Act III and by both the purpose the characters serve and the way Manfred views them. The servants Herman and Manuel, apart from a brief (fifty lines total) discussion of their master's habits and both his personal and family history, have no function but to inform Manfred of the visitor, the Abbot's, presence. Manfred speaks to them each in brief and disinterested tones, unlike the passionate exclamations, accusations, and commands common in Manfred's speech to almost every character in Acts I and II.

Manfred's neutral tone with the servants and the Abbot should not be mistaken for a lapse of or recovery from solipsism, but the discontinuation of Manfred's seeking himself in others. All the universe, in Manfred's view, continues to relate back to himself, but instead of searching for himself by seeing his own characteristics in others he reflects on his inner thoughts and feelings. The outside world, including his servants, several spirits, and the Abbot, all engage with Manfred, supporting his solipsistic world view, but Manfred does not put much, if any, importance in those conversations because he is no longer relying on the perceptions and actions of others as he did with the Spirits of

Nature, Witch, Hunter, and even Arimanes. Manfred's central role in the play would be reason enough for the other characters to interact with him, but this centrality does not necessarily need to lead to solipsism. In other words, Manfred's solipsism results from his self-centeredness not only in seeing aspects of himself in those around him, but eventually, having abandoned the outside world to look inward, in his confidence that he controls his own fate and refuses to acknowledge others.

Manfred discusses his solitary state with the Abbot who visits the castle. Manfred insists there is no potential for reconciliation with the Abbot's version of God. The impossibility for orthodox salvation is a result of Manfred's past, which is filled with "pleasure... study... toil...weariness...disease ...[and] insanity" along with "withered or...broken hearts" (3.1.142-5). The Abbot, who interrupts this speech attempting to discuss the matter with Manfred, is left alone after Manfred insists the purpose is of no use. The Abbot, however, remains on the stage and reflects. Instead of finding an aspect or characteristic of the Abbot that is similar to one of his own traits and concerns, as he does with the Spirits and Astarte, and grappling with that unsettled self-understanding by approaching and even attacking the characteristics he singles out, Manfred dismisses the Abbot quickly and leaves the scene. Though Manfred discusses his past, in very vague terms, with the Abbot, he makes sure to move away from the conversation as soon as he can. Manfred realizes that neither he nor the Abbot will change perspectives, and as the Abbot cannot provide the exact forgiveness Manfred craves, Manfred wants to isolate himself and wait for his end. Religion, especially in an orthodox form, strongly resists solipsism, and thus it is unsurprising that Manfred coolly and briskly dismisses the Abbot, who comes to the castle multiple times in order to discuss religion and penance.

The Abbot's final visit takes place the night Manfred dies. The Abbot speaks to Manfred about redemption again, but the two are soon visited by unnamed spirits, described as "demons" in the stage directions, who want to escort Manfred to death (Byron 3.4.45-90). Manfred refuses to go with the spirits, and one exclaims, "Can it be that thou / Art thus in love with life—the very life / Which made thee wretched?" (107-10). Manfred responds to this accusation:

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...  
*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! (3.4.112-17, 137-41)

The spirit's suggestion that Manfred "loves" life results in Manfred's direct and final dismissal of the spiritual realm in favor of being his own "destroyer." Caroline Franklin notes that "Although Manfred rejects the comforts of orthodox religion, as offered by the Abbot, neither does he give himself over to the powers of evil. Either of these would relieve him of moral responsibility in his actions. He dies heroically independent in mind, affirming, even in the face of the extinction of his individuality, the 'mix'd essence'

which constitutes his humanity, and refusing to minimize either his dust or his deity” (232). This passage marks the end of Manfred’s interaction with the spiritual realm because he dies soon after rejecting that realm and asserting his independence.

The final scene of the play highlights Manfred’s solipsism even at the moment of his death. Manfred addresses the Abbot:

‘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...  
Old man! ‘Tis not so difficult to die. (3.4.145-51)

In this speech, Manfred’s list of signs that his life and struggle are “over” begins with not being able to see the Abbot, and continues “all things swim around me, and the earth / Heaves as it were beneath me,” indicating Manfred’s view that the earth and everything in it is literally and figuratively moving around him. Manfred’s last words are a glimpse of the death experience, but instead of finding his place within a larger whole, as the Abbot wishes Manfred would do by acknowledging God, Manfred sees the world in terms of his experience until the last.

Some might insist that Manfred makes a small motion towards a more realistic, less self-centered world view simply by acknowledging that the Abbot is there. Asking for the Abbot’s hand, then, can be seen as an attempt, on Manfred’s part, to give the Abbot some peace of mind. If this reading is true, then readers may assume that Manfred either realizes how harsh he has been with the Abbot and attempts to make peace, or wants to acknowledge (even if he does not fully appreciate the gesture due to his strong

feelings against the church) the Abbot's attempts to help or "save" him. While Manfred certainly reaches out literally for the Abbot here, reading the request for the Abbot's hand as an empathetic gesture is contradicted by Manfred's exclamation, "Old man! 'Tis not so difficult to die" (3.4.151). Once again Manfred addresses the Abbot in a rude manner (this time as "old man") but takes his strong reaction against the Abbot's beliefs to another level by insisting, in spite of what the Abbot fights to tell Manfred from their first meeting, that dying is "easy." After spending so much time appealing to a spiritual world (even through a self-centered lens), Manfred finds an end to his curse in death, but a death that is, if not on his own terms as far as time, in a manner he sees fitting for his independence.

Manfred's search for forgiveness is, at its core, part of the attempt to dissolve his identity and end the curse of existing. However, Manfred's attempt at dissolution is torn between absolute spirituality and absolute independence. Communication with the outside world, if obtained, can never be complete or satisfactory, though, because Manfred's attempts to lose himself in the outside world lead him to return to independence. William J. Calvert claims that "Manfred was at bottom Byron. His sufferings, his regrets, his doubts, and his questionings are those, in the main, of his creator, though their poetical expression may be the work of his creator's imagination" (143). If this statement is true, it allows for the idea that Byron writes about spirituality as well as solipsism in the drama in order to explore his own feelings. On this view, Byron writes *Manfred* resulting in the revelation, through recognition and confrontation, of different aspects of Manfred's own identity. Though he appeals to spiritual beings in his quest for Astarte's forgiveness, Manfred's responses to these other characters show his

solipsism. Instead of dissolving his identity in the spiritual realm, as he sets out to do, Manfred can only escape his tortured and guilt-ridden existence through death in the material realm.

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