

George Gordon Byron

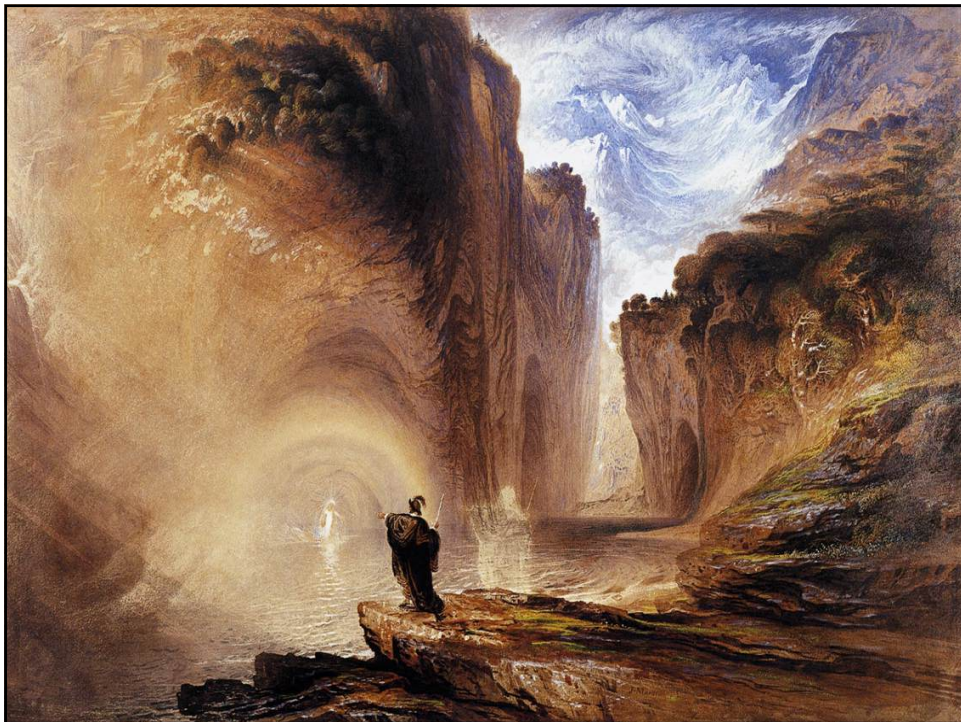
*Manfred (1817)*

*"a kind of drama"*

*"a sort of mad drama"*

Thomas Cole, *Scene from Manfred* (1833)







Ford Madox Brown, *Manfred on the Jungfrau* (1842)



## COMPOSITION

- Switzerland 1816 – Venice 1817
- Journey through the Alps with Hobhouse: from the Alp of Wengen he saw the Jungfrau
- Inspired by
  - Alpine landscape
  - Goethe's Faust
  - Supernatural tales heard in Lake Geneva (Villa Diodati) in 1816. Cf. p. 649

## ANTECEDENTS

- Goethe's *Faust* (not Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*) – M. G. Lewis read it in translation to him (e.g. I, 1, 13-5, p. 637)
- Aeschylus's *Prometheus Vincetus*
  - He stole the fire to create man's soul (III, 1, 107, p. 661)
  - Titanism / *Übermensch* / *hubris* (II, 2, 50-59, p. 649; II, 4, 50-63, pp. 655-56)
- Heir of Elizabethan supermen – *Tamburlaine the Great*
- Heir of Vico's human heroism in *Scienza Nuova*

- Goethe's *Die Leiden des Jungen Werther* (1774)
  - Love of solitude
  - Sadness & melancholia
- Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798) – guilt to purge
- Milton's Satan
- Gothic villain in theatre and fiction
  - Walpole's *The Mysterious Mother* (1786)
  - Radcliffe's Schedoni in *The Italian* (1797)

## ANALYSIS

- Story of a battle against fatality and to forget a crime only named in the end
- Two protagonists
  - Eponymous hero (the pivot of the poem)
  - Nature

## Hero

- Rebellious like Satan and Prometheus
- Guilty like Adam (in defying God)
- Double
  - Cfr. Martin's painting
  - Alienation body-soul (e.g. II, 2, 50-2, 56-7, p. 649)
  - Schizophrenia – he wishes oblivion but cannot annihilate himself (in the end all external help is rejected)



## Nature

- Manfred's objective correlative
  - Wild
  - Alps = high tops defying the divine
- Beautiful but no comforting refuge, rather a source of angst (sublime), e.g. I, 2, 7-45, p. 643

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PROJECTION

- Pride
  - Miltonic: e.g. III, 4, 129-141, p. 668
  - Byron towards Annabella after she refused him the first time
  - Byron shown as embodiment of pride in P. B. Shelley's Julian and Maddalo (1818)
  - Byron's sense of superiority on other men: e.g. II, 1, 35-39, p. 646; II, 2, 62-83, p. 649; III, 1, 116-123, p. 661

- Journey through the Alps in September 1816

- Titanism
- Sublime

*"I wrote a sort of mad Drama, for the sake of introducing the Alpine scenery in description"*

(Letter to T. Moore, Venice 1817)

- Guilt motif, "curse" / Theme of incest / Hinted but never revealed
- Relationship with his half-sister Augusta since 1813 (till then they corresponded regularly)
- They had a daughter in 1814, Medora
- He married Annabella Milbanke in 1815 to cover up his illegitimate liaison (yet: menage à trois)

e.g. II, 1, 24-31, p. 646; II, 2, 105-117, p. 650; III, 3, 41-47, p. 664

- *L'homme fatal* – Byronic hero

*"I loved her, and I destroy'd her!"*  
(cf. earlier II, 1, 83-88, p. 647)

- E. g. Affair with Lady Caroline Lamb  
(Glenarvon = vampire)
- Strong sense of fatality / fate as central  
force of life: both from outside (hereditary  
curse) and from inside (inherent to one's  
nature)