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Alleviating Existential Despair:

The Journey from Divinity to Mortality in Byron's "Manfred"

Existentialist philosophy teaches us that subjective human experience is burdened with a crisis. Residing at the core of the human condition, this crisis is the unbearable weight of responsibility that comes with almost unrestricted choices and the consequences that result from those choices. It is freedom that the individual is burdened with—or rather the angst that comes from the burden of absolute autonomy. The metaphysically alienated individual struggles to obstinately exhibit his or her freedom while shouldering the overwhelming weight of choice and responsibility. With an array of almost unlimited choices at one's disposal, the most prominent display of one's true freedom is his or her ability to choose death over life, to make a choice to refuse life. Suicide, in this respect, is one's choice to put an end to his or her existential angst.

Though the existential individual may be metaphysically alienated—that is, he or she is his or her own phenomenological island—this same alienated individual is a culmination or a product of external objects, both people and things, around him or her; it is these external objects that comprise the individual's identity, as they are the deep builders of a personal identity and are detrimental to an individual's identity when threatened or taken away. With that said, not only then is the subjective human condition burdened with angst over limitless choices, but the individual is also burdened with despair when an object that has been firmly invested into the individual's identity is either lost or damaged. Just as angst is produced by one's sense of freedom, despair is produced by one's damaged sense of identity. Both can be alleviated by a definitive display of personal will: suicide.

It is with these existential ideas that we turn our attention to Lord Byron's metaphysical play "Manfred." In the play, a supernatural drama concerning a nobleman's attempt to use his mystical powers to relieve himself of

guilt over a vague past transgression, we see that both existential angst in the face of choice and the despair produced by the outcome of a particular choice are the key driving catalysts of the narrative. This analysis will thus detail how existential angst and despair are the motivating drives of Byron's "Manfred;" how after the destruction of an object invested in the play's protagonist, we see him, consumed with existential despair, attempt to alleviate this sensation through choosing mortality over divinity.

The drama's protagonist, Manfred, is a mortal human who through self-seclusion and intense mental discipline has mastered a great part of the mysteries of the universe. He is a superhuman on a quest to attain godlike status and transcend his mortal nature. However, at the commencement of the drama, the reader finds Manfred in an exceedingly mortal state of existential crisis, seeking to forget the memory of a past indiscretion. Evidence dispersed throughout the play leads the reader to the death of Manfred's other, Astarte, as the incendiary of Manfred's present predicament. While the reader is only privy to vague references of Manfred's past transgression, one can see that the initiation of Manfred's existential crisis begins with the killing of Astarte, Manfred's female companion and equal:

She was like me in lineaments—her eyes,  
Her hair, her features, all, to the very tone  
Even of her voice, they said were like to mine;  
But soften'd all, and temper'd into beauty;  
She had the same lone thoughts and wanderings,  
The quest of hidden knowledge, and a mind  
To comprehend the universe: nor these  
Alone, but with them gentler powers than mine,  
Pity, and smiles, and tears—which I had not;  
And tenderness—but that I had for her;  
Humility—and that I never had.  
Her faults were mine—her virtues were her own—  
I loved her, and destroy'd her! (2.2.106-17)

Aside from Astarte's femininity, Manfred and Astarte are equals; they are each other's doppelgangers and both each other's metaphysical other. However, although both are bonded by love, Manfred's insatiable drive to uncover and control the mysteries of the universe is too great for even love to assuage Manfred's quest for divinity:

From my youth upwards  
My spirit walk'd not with the souls of men,  
Nor look'd upon the earth with human eyes;  
The thirst of their ambition was not mine,  
The aim of their existence was not mine;  
My joys, my griefs, my passions, and my powers  
Made me a stranger; though I wore the form,  
I had no sympathy with breathing flesh,  
Nor midst the creatures of clay that girded me  
Was there but one who—but of her anon.  
I said, with men, and with the thoughts of men,  
I held but slight communion. (2.2.50-61)

Manfred's ravenous drive toward celestial supremacy forces him to cast aside all mortal weakness, love being one of them, as gods are in no need of love. However, not only is love viewed by Manfred as a trait held only by mortals, but the reader also finds another trait in Astarte that Manfred considers a quality that would arrest his ascension toward divinity. Manfred's quest is also hindered by Astarte's femininity. Manfred therefore must destroy that obstacle in order to continue forward on his path to transcendent preeminence. Astarte's destruction, though, has unintended existential ramifications for Manfred.

Why was Astarte such an obstacle, and why did her death inadvertently hurl Manfred into an existential crisis instead of projecting him closer to his end? The answer lies in the manner of relationship Manfred and Astarte maintained, one of incestual narcissism. Freud teaches that in primary narcissism, the ego sees itself outside of itself, in a similar fashion to Jacques Lacan's notion of the mirror stage in the Imaginary register, and so the external object of love and/or admiration is primarily one of a representation of the subject's very ego: "Freud's account of primary narcissism, like his theory of object-love, implies that we love others less for their uniqueness and separateness, and more for their ability to contract our own abundance, that is, to embody and reflect back that

part of ourselves we have invested in them” (Clewell 46). Love, therefore, is actually the love of the self: one loves the external as a representation of one’s self, and all love, according to Freud, is narcissistic. All love is thus self love; in loving an external object or person, the subject is in a sense loving him or herself. In the case of Manfred, through loving Astarte—a character who embodies Manfred himself—Manfred is loving himself. He is loving his own ego.

Not only does Astarte function as the external representation of Manfred’s ego, but also, in a sense, she *is* Manfred, thus making their relationship one of incest. A reader, using the vague references provided, comes to find Astarte as the idealized version of Manfred; she functions as a mirror in which Manfred projects all his ideality on to. However, as the quoted material above details, Astarte’s ideality and mirror representation of Manfred is damaged by her femininity, a representation of human finitude and in opposition to godliness: Manfred

in effect, creates his loved one as an author would a character; she has no existence apart from his narcissistic perception of her as an extension of himself. This is why her sexuality is so threatening; the Romantic hero, such as Manfred, wishes to deny his own physicality, to achieve the ideal. Thus, he is repulsed by female sexuality, and he must avoid contact with it at all costs in order to maintain his transcendent, superhuman

condition. For this reason, he wishes to render his lover inaccessible and thus permanently desirable. . . . (Stein 190) As her ideality must be maintained, Manfred must destroy Astarte in order to preserve this ideality, as her inferiorities are a direct representation of Manfred’s un-freedom and limitations and therefore must be omitted from Manfred’s ideal ego. These limitations are worldly, corporeal, and human and stand as obstacles in Manfred’s journey toward divinity. Furthermore, Astarte can remain ideal within Manfred’s mind, in the intellect of Manfred, only if she is absent and her femininity is omitted from Manfred’s mental representation of her.

Manfred can love only an idealized reflection of himself; he destroys Astarte rather than discover her flaws and mortal nature. In this way, he can avoid facing his own. Manfred seeks a mirror of his own best qualities and a vehicle for his search for transcendence. As a human being, Astarte cannot fill the roles Manfred wants her to, and he must destroy her to preserve her in her ideal state. Dead, she can be what he wants her to be, and he can freely imagine her to be the perfect reflection of himself that he desires without her own identity getting in the way. (Stein 200) Murdering Astarte represents Manfred’s attempt to shed himself of imperfections and impotency in his journey toward godlike supremacy. As Astarte is a direct representation of Manfred, is the screen on which Manfred

projects his superior nature, *is* Manfred, she must be destroyed if Manfred is going to transcend his present state between man and god and become only god.

Manfred expresses this discontent over his own mortality and understands that in order to achieve divinity, he must rid himself of all characteristics of man:

But we, who name ourselves its sovereigns, we,  
Half dust, half deity, alike unfit  
To sink or soar, with our mix'd essence make  
A conflict of its elements, and breathe  
The breath of degradation and of pride,  
Contending with low wants and lofty will,  
Till our mortality predominates,  
And men are—what they name not to themselves,  
And trust not to each other. (1.2.39-47)

Man, as Nietzsche also described, is something to be surpassed. As Manfred states in the passage above, man is already half a god in that he has the ability of perception, forethought, and the ability to create: man is dual in that he “is endowed with two souls, one sensual, of the body and fated, the other transcendent, immutable, and of the gods” (Twitchell 605). However, Manfred wishes not to maintain this dual nature and teeter between the realms of gods and humans, but to exceed his humanity and be all god. Unfortunately, Manfred has yet to achieve this holistic godly nature and is plagued not only by guilt, but also by fear, fear of domination by the other, a very un-godlike characteristic.

Manfred’s transgression—in murdering the feminine inferior aspects of himself within his other—also highlights a particular aspect of his personal disposition. As found in the drama, Manfred is a character who fears domination, seeing that domination is a quality of low mortals and not gods. Wishing to reach a divine status, he refuses to allow any being or spirit to hold a superior position above him: “I will not swear—Obey! and whom? the spirits / Whose presence I command, and be the slave / Of those who served me—Never! (2.2.157-59). This kind of fear of domination plays into Astarte’s destruction as well, as Manfred fears that his ideal self, his projection represented in Astarte, might rise above and exceed him. Manfred’s projected self might be beyond his own grasp. With that fear of his reach exceeding his grasp, Astarte must die in order to preserve that ideality through the

removal of Manfred's inferior characteristics and also to arrest that ideality in a permanent state. In such a preserved state, Manfred is now able to work past his own stationary ideal projected ego instead of continually working toward an unobtainable ideal state.

Manfred, like all existential characters, is doomed to freedom. He is faced with insurmountable possibilities and the consequences that follow the choices he makes. In angst, he makes a choice to end the life of Astarte in order to move closer to his celestial objective. He becomes free from the burden of limitations symbolized in Astarte; however, this freedom comes at a cost. Manfred, violently projecting his life toward a future project of transcendent supremacy, comes to understand his angst and realizes the damaging consequences of his independent actions.

Manfred is a character already in an isolated state, not only due to his own self-seclusion but also due to his superior intellect and capabilities.

I could not tame my nature down; for he  
Must serve who fain would sway—and soothe, and sue,  
And watch all time, and pry into all place,  
And be a living lie, who would become  
A mighty thing amongst the mean, and such  
The mass are; I disdain'd to mingle with  
A herd, though to be leader—and of wolves.  
The lion is alone, and so am I. (3.3.117-24)

In destroying Astarte, Manfred is completely alone. Though in a considerably secluded state before, Astarte was Manfred's only companion in his isolated state—the only other person who was almost equivalent to Manfred, so with her death, the incestual narcissism is broken, and the perception of identity-equilibrium is thrown out of balance. With this upset in identity, with the removal of Astarte as Manfred's invested identity object, Manfred's journey toward divinity is hindered and even abated as he becomes consumed with existential despair over the loss of an aspect of himself.

Astarte functions on two primary levels: that of an object Manfred has invested a part of his identity in and also as a means of self-validation—an other. Both of these levels complement one another, as they are both external objects that threaten Manfred's being in their absence and propel Manfred into a state of existential despair:

But to my task. I have not named to thee  
Father or mother, mistress, friend, or being,  
With whom I wore the chain of human ties;  
If I had such, they seem'd not such to me—  
Yet there was one. (2.2.100-04)

First, as mentioned in the introduction, the subject naturally invests a part of him or herself in external objects. These external objects, be them things or persons, become both the representative of and the support for the subject's internal psyche, the subject's identity. We saw this same form of identity investment in Freud's view of narcissism, as the external object becomes a direct mirrored reflection of the subject's own ego and object of love. If this object is damaged or destroyed, the subject's very identity is threatened. Astarte is thus this object for Manfred. Her absence injures Manfred's identity, throwing him off his determined course and forcing him into a state of melancholia over the lost aspect of his identity.

Secondly, Astarte, due to Manfred's extreme isolation, both intellectually and socially, was Manfred's only means of self validation. Just as Hegel teaches that both the master and slave need one another for self-validation, with only Manfred alone and with no other means of authenticating his own existence through external representation, Manfred is unable to assess his own self-awareness. In Byron's drama, nature seems to mirror the internal existential angst and despair within Manfred. Without Astarte, Manfred is unable to appraise any sense of otherness; without an external other to base his own perception of reality and identity on, Manfred's own external reference has been destroyed by his own hands.

His inability to discover himself in erotic or natural experience is at least partially the consequence of a transgressive act that separates him from the human community, but it also coincides with the terrible thought that his encounter with another person was merely a delusion. The disruption of his relationship with Astarte collapses the distinction between self and other, just as it largely forecloses the possibility of future encounters (Melaney 469). Consequently, with the absence of Astarte, functioning as both Manfred's external ideal ego-object and his object reference to base reality on, Manfred is forced on to a new journey, from seeking divinity to seeking the assuagement of his existential despair.

Bringing the vague history of Manfred's past transgression to the forefront, the beginning of drama, where Manfred, found in a state of utter despair, is seeking forgetfulness, makes clear his existential crisis:

The lamp must be replenish'd, but even then  
It will not burn so long as I must watch.  
My slumbers—If I slumber—are not sleep,  
But a continuance of enduring thought,  
Which then I can resist not: in my heart  
There is a vigil, and these eyes but close  
To look within; and yet I live, and bear  
The aspect and the form of breathing men.  
But grief should be the instructor of the wise;  
Sorrow is knowledge: they who know the most  
Must mourn the deepest o'er the fatal truth,  
The Tree of Knowledge is not that of Life. (1.1.1-12)

Thrown off of his course toward divinity, Manfred must first find atonement for the loss of his other. As this other was Manfred's ideal ego and perhaps the greatest part of his psyche, he must find a new other to grant him this atonement and regain his sense of full-self. It is on this journey that Manfred's drama begins.

Manfred wishes to forget the destruction of his other by the powers of his own superhuman wisdom. Plagued by guilt, Manfred calls upon the spirits of the earth to aid him in forgetting. Freud teaches that guilt is the product of the super-ego, disappointing or dissatisfying the residual voices of the subject's most prominent external agents. In the psychological universe of the child, these external agents are the child's parents. For an adult, this agent moves from being the subject's parents to the internal voice of social pressures. In the case of Manfred, his guilt, as has been shown, is produced by destroying his equal:

Think'st thou existence doth depend on time?  
It doth; but actions are our epochs: mine  
Have made my days and nights imperishable,  
Endless, and all alike, as sands on the shore,  
Innumerable atoms; and one desert,  
Barren and cold, on which the wild waves break,



But nothing rests, save carcasses and wrecks,  
Rocks, and the salt—surf weeds of bitterness. (2.1.51-8)

His personal super-ego, the residual voice of Manfred's own humanity, deprives him of progressing toward divinity. Manfred can never reach a godlike status while maintaining such a human quality as guilt, as he is striving to surpass humanity and its pressures. Guilt, like Astarte's femininity, is un-godlike, is a sign of humanity, mortality, finitude. In order to alleviate Manfred of this existential despair, this mortal guilt seen as a threat to his identity and his goal, Manfred seeks forgetfulness and the subsequent destruction of his super-ego.

Manfred, using his supreme powers over the elements, begins to conjure the spirits of the earth. He wishes to use his influence over them in order to force them into magically making him forget his past transgression and the product produced by that transgression, his guilt. However, the spirits of the earth are unable to grant Manfred that which they don't possess:

We can but give thee that which we possess:  
Ask of us subjects, sovereignty, the power  
O'er earth, the whole, or portion, or a sign  
Which shall control the elements, whereof  
We are the dominators,—each and all,  
These shall be thine. (1.1.139-44)

The spirits of the earth are powerless to fulfill Manfred's request. According to Christopher Strathman, "He is able to summon things well enough, but it is of no consequence in relieving the anxiety of the human condition" (374). What Manfred is requesting of the spirits is beyond their power. These spirits are of a lower order on the chain of being and, therefore, do not possess the capabilities to do such a task and interfere with the workings of a being in time.

Unable to forget his past transgressions, Manfred attempts to commit suicide on the mountains of Jungfrau. However, it is apparent that Manfred hasn't come to understand the full degree of his existential angst, his independence to choose out of an endless spectrum of choices. About to leap off of a cliff, Manfred is suddenly halted by the passing Chamois Hunter:

Friend! have a care,  
Your next step may be fatal!—for the love

Of him who made you, stand not on that brink!...

Hold, madman!—though aweary of thy life,

Stain not our pure vales with thy guilty blood!

Away with me—I will not quit my hold. (1.2.100-03;110-12)

Manfred is easily swayed from ending his life here in this scene, thus revealing his feeling of limitations among his own choices. Manfred is still a captive of his humanity and is thus predisposed to his remaining human qualities: “Manfred is recalled from the brink of the Jungfrau by the voice of the Chamois Hunter, a figure that appeals to him in friendship and common humanity” (Sperry 195). The hunter leads Manfred to his abode, and there we become aware of how time and knowledge weigh heavily on Manfred.

Manfred’s journey toward divinity is immobilized as he becomes consumed with guilt over Astarte’s death by his own hands. In order to continue toward divinity, Manfred must shed himself of this guilt, as guilt is a weak quality of humans and not of gods. Unlike weak mortals, Gods do not forget: “We are immortal, and do not forget; / We are eternal; and to us the past / Is as the future, present. Art thou answer’d? (1.1.148-51). Manfred seeks forgetfulness, as guilt is the product of the super-ego’s voice raging against a past occurrence. “In having the strength of will to choose forgetfulness...the high spirit creates itself anew without guilt, debt, mourning or pity” (Soderholm 54). But this journey too becomes disrupted by Manfred’s realization that despite his superior status, he is still a being in time. As gods are outside of time, transcendent of all of time’s framing powers, Manfred’s true human condition begins to surface and eclipse his superhuman qualities. We find that Manfred is a human and is, therefore, a being subjected to time. As a being in time, he is susceptible to the perception of time’s passing:

We are all the fools of time and terror: Days

Steal on us and steal from us; yet we live,

Loathing our life, and dreading still to die.

In all the days of this detested yoke—

This vital weight upon the struggling heart,

Which sinks with sorrow, or beats quick with pain,

Or joy that ends in agony or faintness—

In all the days of past and future, for

In life there is no present, we can number  
How few, how less than few, wherein the soul  
Forbears to pant for death, and yet draws back  
As from a stream in winter, though the chill  
Be but a moment's. (2.2.164-77)

Gods reside outside the realm of time while still maintaining memory. Not vulnerable to guilt, as they have no parental agents or order to submit to, gods do not function in the same way as mortals. As Manfred begins to realize this, he understands that he will always be unable to forget the knowledge of his past and free himself of mortal guilt. He therefore must lower himself to a mortal action and seek forgiveness from an external agent, the spirit of Astarte.

Manfred goes to the throne of Arimanes, a superhuman mortal, much like Manfred, who appears to be the sovereign over the spirits, a "Prince of Earth and Air" (2.4.1). Again, unwilling to submit to the authority of anyone or anything else and establishing his supremacy among Arimanes and his subjects, Manfred forces the spirit Nemesis to raise the spirit of Astarte so that he may inquire about the afterlife and implore her to forgive him. Speaking to the Spirit of Astarte, Manfred states the following:

Astarte! my beloved! speak to me:  
I have so much endured, so much endure—  
Look on me! the grave hath not changed thee more  
Than I am changed for thee. Thou lovedst me  
Too much, as I loved thee: we were not made  
To torture thus each other, though it were  
The deadliest sin to love as we have loved.  
Say that thou loath'st me not, that I do bear  
This punishment for both, that thou wilt be  
One of the blessèd, and that I shall die;  
For hitherto all hateful things conspire  
To bind me in existence—in a life  
Which makes me shrink from immortality— (2.4.118-130)

Manfred seeks forgiveness from an external object, from the lost object of his identity in order to cure him of his existential despair and continue forward on his path to divinity. However, the spirit of Astarte gives Manfred no consolation, only prophesizes his death the next day and, through his death, his freedom from his own personal “ills.” Interestingly, Astarte does not provide Manfred with the gift of forgiveness and only acknowledges Manfred’s present existential state. She gives no evidence of having a memory of the past events that took place in her life, that of her death and her resentment at Manfred for his injustice against her. Though she doesn’t provide Manfred with some sort of conciliatory clemency, a reader may speculate that death might lead to the erasure of memory, and with it, the elimination of guilt and existential fragility that comes with the living human condition. Manfred seems to have picked up on this idea that memory, guilt, angst, and despair are not a quality maintained by the spirits of the dead. As Manfred comes to realize that his existential crisis will always hold dominion over him in life, his only means of conquering such a crisis is to regain his sense of personal supremacy and exercise his autonomy in rejecting life.

Manfred has now come to terms with his existential crisis, and understands that to truly become sovereign over himself and master over his guilt and despair, he must commit suicide and die triumphantly. High in one of his towers, Manfred’s journey toward his own death is tested twice, first by a goodly abbot and second by an abominable demon. Here, a reader sees Manfred’s ego doing battle against the forces of his super-ego, represented by the Abbot, and his id, represented by the demon. Both are representatives of Manfred’s psyche and his life’s fight for survival, as both seek to hinder Manfred’s autonomy and exhibit their power over him. Their battle anticipates Manfred’s eventual mastery of himself as an autonomous being (Macdonald 31). As a representative of the super-ego, the Abbot wishes Manfred to submit to the phallic laws of the holy institution, and through Manfred’s submission to a higher order, Manfred’s humility will free him from his existential despair. Manfred refuses:

Old man! there is no power in holy men,  
Nor charm in prayer, nor purifying form  
Of penitence, nor outward look, nor fast,  
Nor agony, nor, greater than all these,  
The innate tortures of that deep despair,  
Which is remorse without the fear of hell

But all in all sufficient to itself  
Would make a hell of heaven,—can exorcise  
From out the unbounded spirit the quick sense  
Of its own sins, wrongs, sufferance, and revenge  
Upon itself; there is no future pang  
Can deal that justice on the self—condemn'd  
He deals on his own soul. (3.1.66-77)

Manfred refuses to submit to the authority of the church. There is no power in prayer or in the men of the church. Manfred, again in understanding the value of his personal autonomy, cannot submit to any authority but himself. He is moving toward an understanding of his own mortality, knowing that true freedom will only come with his death. Any other power could never free Manfred from his existential crisis. By relying on the super-egoic institutions of God, Manfred would be weighted with more guilt not only due to the loss of his ideal-ego Astarte, but also at this loss of his autonomy in giving over his self-rule to the institutions of laws, limitations, and phallic submission.

While the Abbot is pleading with Manfred to submit to God and His Church, a demon manifests and claims that Manfred, through his past transgressions, is subjected to damnation.

Speaking with the Abbot, Manfred's

last speech is briefly interrupted by a spirit who has come to claim him for the underworld. The spirit breaks into remind Manfred of unspecific crimes which he has committed, crimes which apparently make him subject to the spirit's world and will.... Manfred shifts the focus [to] his own defense. Before the spirit interrupts, Manfred stresses...his powers...emphasizing the autonomy of his mind, which "Is it's own origin of ill and end...". (Glass 211)

The demon reminds Manfred of his past transgressions; he serves as a representative of Manfred's will to power, his insatiable drive toward godlike perfection. However, in this stage in alleviating his existential despair, Manfred has come too far only to be suppressed by the primal urges of his former "lion" self. Like the Abbot and both the psychic and institutional things he represents, Manfred must conquer the demon of his psyche through his own egoic autonomy.

My life is in its last hour,—that I know,

Nor would redeem a moment of that hour.  
I do not combat against death, but thee  
And thy surrounding angels; my past power  
Was purchased by no compact with thy crew,  
But by superior science, penance, daring,  
And length of watching, strength of mind, and skill  
In knowledge of our fathers when the earth  
Saw men and spirits walking side by side  
And gave ye no supremacy: I stand  
Upon my strength—I do defy—deny—  
Spurn back, and scorn ye!— (3.4.110-21)

Though the demon attempts to deceive Manfred in declaring his power over Manfred, now fully aware of his existential autonomy, is the victor over his past transgressions. Just as both the Abbot and the demon attempt to sway Manfred in the direction of the worldly institutions or the fixed past with all the faults Manfred committed, both are unable to sway Manfred from attaining his new found objective in fully ridding himself of angst and despair.

Manfred began his journey with the goal of attaining divinity by uncovering the mysteries of the universe. On this journey, Manfred rebuked humanity for the peace of solitude needed for such intense study. Along the way, he found a companion, almost an equal, but in order for that companion to remain ideal and pure in Manfred's imagination, she needed to be destroyed. Manfred is a character doomed to freedom, and for that freedom, he is susceptible to the existential consequences of his choices. Unaware of what such a horrific choice might have on Manfred, killing his other plunges him into a state of existential despair at the loss of a part of his own identity. Unable to gain forgetfulness, unable to erase the power of an appalling past memory and the guilt that burdens all beings in time, Manfred is forced on a new journey, leaving his goal of supreme divinity for mortal death, and the ending of angst and despair that comes with death.

Manfred's existential crisis comes to an end on the precipice of one of his towers. In order to alleviate his inner turmoil, Manfred must accept his humanity and display his ultimate act of freewill. In order to reveal his full autonomy over himself, to express himself as the only authority of himself, Manfred commits suicide. Like

Manfred's past transgressions, the details are vague and left to the reader's imagination, but Manfred's act is clear in his final speech to 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. 144-148; 151)

Manfred dies a silent and dignified death, declaring this authority over his senses and the authority of the elements around him. Death offered Manfred peace from angst and despair, peace from the drive toward divinity and toward the assuagement of his personal guilt. Manfred is triumphant and conquers his existential crisis through his ultimate act of freewill, reigning supreme over himself by choosing mortality over divinity and the death that comes with it—the silent peace that comes with it.

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