

MANFRED and DOCTOR FAUSTUS

When at I i 35-6 Manfred summons up his first spirits, he doesn't merely use a chant or a gesture:

I call upon you – by the written charm
Which gives me power upon you – Rise! – appear!

What the “written charm” is we are not told; but there is a precedent which may help us to guess. Here is Marlowe's *Faustus* at I iii 8-9:

Within this circle is Jehovah's name,
Forward and backward anagrammatised:
The abbreviated names of holy saints,
Figures of every adjunct to the heavens,
And characters of signs and evening stars,
By which the spirits are enforced to rise.

When each of the seven spirits who come to Manfred's call talks in an idiom peculiar to itself, we cannot but remember the Seven Deadly Sins at *Dr Faustus*, II i. When at I ii 74-6 Manfred cries

... ye toppling crags of Ice –
Ye Avalanches whom a breath draws down
In mountains o'erwhelming – come and crush me –

we again recall Faustus, at V ii 163-4:

Mountains and hills come, come, and fall on me,
And hide me from the heavy wrath of God!

And when at II i 28-30 Manfred says in his hysteria

And this was shed – but still it rises up
Colouring the clouds that shut me out from heaven –
Where thou art not – and I shall never be.

We may feel further at liberty to compare him with Faustus, this time at V ii 156-7:

See, see, where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!
One drop of it would save my soul – half a drop!

The echoes work via adaptation rather than imitation; but Byron was most concerned to deny knowledge of *Faustus*. Jeffrey's *Edinburgh Review* critique mentions the possible influence of Marlowe on *Manfred*, only to deny it:

... there is nothing to be found there of the pride, the abstraction, and the heartrooted misery in which that originality [Manfred's] consists.¹

On October 12th 1817 Byron wrote to Murray, having been sent Jeffrey's notice:

I never read – & do not know that I ever saw – the “Faustus of Marlow” and had & have no Dramatic works by me in English – except the recent things you sent me; – but I heard Mr.

1: *Edinburgh Review* XXVIII, August 1817, p. 431: RR BII 888.

Lewis translate verbally some scenes of *Goethe's Faust* (which were some good & some bad) last Summer – which is all I know of the history of that magical personage ...²

Eleven days later he repeated the protest:

An American who came the other day from Germany – told Mr. Hobhouse that Manfred was taken from *Goethe's Faust*. – The devil may take both the Faustus's, German and English – I have taken neither.³

Two and a half years later, on June 7th 1820, he returned to it, as we have seen:

His [Goethe's] *Faust* I never read – for I don't know German – but Matthew Monk Lewis in 1816 at Coligny translated most of it to me *viva voce* – & I was naturally much struck with it; – but it was the *Staubach* & the *Jungfrau* – and something else – much more than Faustus that made me write Manfred. – – The first Scene however & that of Faustus are very similar.⁴

The more splenetic the denials, the less convincing they become; until, in the 1820 letter, the way he makes the unacknowledged transition from *Faust* to *Faustus* appears to give the game away. However, though we may suspect a bluff, finding out whether or not Byron did have access to a copy of Marlowe's play is surprisingly hard.

Faustus had not survived in the theatrical repertory as had *Every Man In His Humour*, or *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*: its naive and horror-stricken depiction of Hell would have been equally embarrassing to rationalists and canters. Early in the eighteenth century it had been debased into a pantomime⁵ and was by Byron's day a museum piece, known to few: astonishingly, no stage performances of the text we should recognise are recorded between 1662 and 1896.⁶

William Gifford, Byron's "literary father"⁷ and leading editor of such plays in the period, knew it, and his suggestion for revising Manfred's third act – Murray sent his memo to Byron in Venice – includes the words "see how beautifully our old poet Marlow has wrought up the death of Faustus".⁸ But he never edited a Marlowe, which Byron could have reached out for to find what he was referring to: there was no Complete Works at all before 1826. The play appears in none of the play-sets we positively know Byron to have owned: these devote very little space to Elizabethan or Jacobean theatre. *Dr. Faustus* is neither in Mrs Inchbald's *British Theatre*⁹ nor in *Ancient British Drama*¹⁰ nor in *The British Drama*.¹¹

It is not in Dodsley's *Old Plays* (1744); but it does appear as the first item in a much better-edited and -printed anthology, *Old English Plays*, brought out between 1814 and 1815, by C.W.Dilke, friend of Keats, and future editor of *The Athenaeum*. Dilke conceived his work as a follow-up to Dodsley, and was encouraged in the labour by Gifford himself. We have no evidence that Byron owned this set, but as he and Gifford were close at the time, it is quite possible that he could have seen a copy at Murray's. However, as all three of the sets he did own were, along with so much else, sold in the

2: BLJ V 268.

3: BLJ V 270.

4: BLJ VII 113.

5: See Pope, 1728 *Dunciad* III 223-36 and 229n, quoted F.Boas, *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, Methuen 1923 p. 51.

6: See Bevington and Rasmussen, *Dr. Faustus*, Manchester University Press 1993, pp. 51-3.

7: BLJ XI 117, 123.

8: John Murray Archive.

9: CMP 239: this contains nothing by Marlowe.

10: CMP 232: this does contain *Edward II* and *The Jew of Malta*.

11: CMP 233: no Marlowe here either.

1816 auction of his library, the statement “[I] had & have no Dramatic works by me in English” seems true, at least as regards the few months between his leaving England and writing *Manfred*.

That a book was not – or was no longer – in Byron’s library certainly does not mean that he didn’t know it, or remember it; in addition to the possibility of Gifford showing him a copy of Dilke, the library of the Drury Lane Theatre, on the committee of which he served from May 1815 till he left the country a year later, could very well have held volumes which he lacked. After all, at *Don Juan* I Stanza 217, he quotes, of all unexpected things, Greene’s *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, a play not printed in any of the anthologies mentioned above (although he may in fact have got the idea of the “Brazen Head” from an opera called the *Capello Parlante*, which he saw at Milan on October 13th 1816).

Another possible source for his knowing some lines from *Faustus* may have been Charles Lamb’s *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets who lived About the Time of Shakespeare* (1813) which includes a few sections of the play, between pages 32 and 40. There is part of the Prologue; most of Faustus’ opening soliloquy, to which Byron seems to refer in his 1820 letter (excluding, however, the lines about Jehovah’s name anagrammatized, printed above); sections from the closing scene (including the lines about Christ’s blood, and the address to the mountains and hills); and the Epilogue. The address to Helen is a startling omission. To Medwin, Byron denied having known Lamb’s anthology before 1821:¹² but he denied it over a year after writing, in the 1820 letter to Murray, “The first Scene however & that of Faustus are very similar”. Lamb’s final note on *Faustus* (which is quoted by Dilke: *Old English Plays*, I p. 4) would certainly have whetted his appetite for more, and planted some ideas in his head:

Marlowe is said to have been tainted with atheistical positions, to have denied God and the Trinity. To such a genius the History of Faustus must have been delectable food: to wander in fields where curiosity is forbidden to go, to approach the dark gulf near enough to look in, to be busied in speculations which are the rottenest part of the core of the fruit that fell from the Tree of Knowledge. Barabas the Jew, and Faustus the Conjuror, are offsprings of a mind which at least delighted to dally with interdicted subjects. They both talk a language which a believer would have been tender of putting into the mouth of a character though but in fiction.¹³

To have read just those parts of *Faustus* which Lamb printed would leave Byron free to claim disingenuously, as he did in his 1820 letter,

I never read – & do not know that I ever saw – the “Faustus of Marlow” ...

But, as with Goethe’s play, he would probably have known enough about it before writing *Manfred* – or sensed enough – to have enabled a spark to cross the gap between Marlowe’s mind and his. In 1818 the actor William Oxberry printed an edition of *Faustus*, the only one devoted solely to the play in Byron’s lifetime: and it may be suspected that part of his motive was to cash in on the current controversy linking it with *Manfred*, published the previous year. In his introduction Oxberry writes:

The words of FAUSTUS are as dark as are his pursuits, yet there is none of that overcharged and offensive colouring that we find in Lord Byron’s “Manfred,” which has by some critics been compared to it; Manfred, has feelings which no human being ever had, and his expressions are like his feelings, monstrous and overcharged. The shadow of mystery is thrown around him; he is perpetually hinting at something dark and terrible, and thus curiosity rather

12: See *Medwin’s Conversations*, ed. Lovell, pp. 139-40

13: Lamb, *Specimens*, p. 40

than sympathy is excited [sic]. He always seems to mean a something more than he says or does; he is neither of earth nor of hell, nor of heaven, and just so much and such kind of attention is excited towards him as would be excited by any other monster. FAUSTUS, on the contrary, is brought forward into the light; we are suffered to see him, to become acquainted with him; we feel him a human being superior to the rest of his kind by industry and genius; we find him like Alexander, thinking to enlarge his boundaries; but his means are such as were, in his time, believed unearthly, and his death is perfectly in keeping with his life.¹⁴

Faustus may indeed be – not just in his appetite for knowledge, but in his vulnerability – a more immediately–acceptable Everyman figure than Manfred, whose arrogance, and whose intuitive feelings of guilt, of sheer satiety with the fact of being alive at all, are perhaps hard to identify with: he exists, too, in a relative social vacuum, with no friendly and admiring colleagues, nostalgic for the days when he “was wont to make our schools ring with *sic probo*” (*Faustus*, I ii 1-2). But his freakish isolation and angst were the very qualities Byron was interested in dramatising. As with Goethe’s example, Byron took what he wanted from *Faustus*, and ignored the rest.

Evidence that Byron knew Marlowe’s play, in fact, much more thoroughly than he admitted, may lie in another important line, which is said not by the protagonist, but by Mephistopheles. At I i 251, the Spirits condemn Manfred “Thyself to be thy proper hell”; this would not have been a strange idea to Faustus’ tempter, who, at I iii 76, asked by his victim,

How comes it then that thou art out of hell?

answers, devastatingly,

Why this is hell, nor am I out of it.

To fuel our suspicion, Byron uses this idea in his later plays, too: see *Marino Faliero*, III ii 519, or *The Two Foscari*, II i 365. Whether or not he knew Marlowe’s play well – and I think it likely that he did – both he and his hero Manfred would have found the idea of Hell’s omnipresence a sentiment all too familiar.¹⁵

14: *Doctor Faustus a Tragedy by Christopher Marlowe* ed. Oxenberry, London 1818 pp. iv-v

15: Barry Weller, at CPW VI 739-40, mentions also the flight through the air taken by Arnold and Caesar at *The Deformed Transformed*, I i 546-68, which echoes that of Faustus and Mephistopheles, as reported in Marlowe’s Act III Prologue.