

MANFRED and THOMAS TAYLOR

On June 7th 1820 Byron wrote to Murray:

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.¹

Commentators have spilt little ink over speculation as to why Byron starts by referring here to *Faust*, and ends by referring to *Faustus*, and much more over speculation as to what “and something else” may refer to: was it the influence of Shelley's idealism? of Shelley's *Alastor*? Byron's affair with Augusta, and / or his despair at his exile? I should like to offer another possibility: that “something else” refers to the passing influence on Byron of Thomas Taylor.

Byron to Hobhouse, from Brussels, May 1st 1816: ... Will you bring out *Παυσανίας* (Taylors ditto) when you come ...²

Byron to Hobhouse, from Evian, June 23rd 1816: ... Bring with you also for me some bottles of *Calcined Magnesia* – a new *Sword cane* – procured by Jackson – he alone knows the sort – (my last tumbled into this lake –) some of Waite's *red*³ tooth powder – & tooth brushes – a Taylor's *Pawrsanias* – and – I forget the other things.

The elaborate deception (or philosophical implication) whereby the need for Taylor's Pausanias gets thrown in at the end of a list which includes indigestion– and tooth– powder, is typically Byronic, and one can imagine Hobhouse raising an eyebrow. But he did bring the book to Switzerland, as well as the other items. In a letter from him to Byron dated July 9th⁴ he spells the name “Prafsanias”, and adds “pistol brushes, cundums” and “potash” to the list of requisites – probably decoding a previous phrase in Byron's letter: “all appliances and means to boot”.

Thomas Taylor was born in 1758 and died in 1835. Not an university man, he was one of the greatest classicists of his day, and a convinced Neo–Platonist: “Taylor the Pagan” was what Southey called him.⁵ His lack of belief in Christianity prevented him from becoming a university academic, and he lived for much of his life in poverty, but eventually found rich friends and patrons, who eased his circumstances. He translated, along with much else, all of Plato (published 1804: in fact his work consisted of revising the translations of Floyer Sydenham, and doing the rest himself) and all of Aristotle (1806–1812). He knew Peacock, the Smith brothers (of *Rejected Addresses*) and Barry Cornwall. William Blake knew him and his writings very well. Mary Wollstonecraft was once his lodger.⁶ True to his Platonism, he was no democrat:

... there are five habits of the soul with respect to all knowledge; viz. *two–fold ignorance*, *simple ignorance*, *desire*, *search*, and *invention* and the multitude are under the dominion of

1: BLJ VII 113.

2: BLJ V 74.

3: BLJ V 80.

4: *Byron's Bulldog: The Letters of John Cam Hobhouse to Lord Byron*, ed. Peter W. Graham (Ohio 1984) p. 228.

5: Letter to Mrs Southey, 15/5/99; *New Letters of Robert Southey*, ed. Kenneth Curry (Columbia 1965) I 188.

6: Raine and Harper, *Thomas Taylor the Platonist* (Routledge 1969) pp. 3–48 and 105–143.

the two first of these habits, as they are either even *ignorant of their ignorance*, or at most are sensible of it without any *desire* to become wise.⁷

It was probably this profound conservatism which enabled him to work freely in the way that he did. His translation of Pausanias, published in 1794, the only work of his with which we know Byron to have been acquainted,⁸ took ten months, and such was the exertion he put into it that he was deprived for ever afterwards of the use of his forefinger in writing.

Byron refers to one of his notes (which are designed “to prevent the knowledge of the ancient theology from being entirely lost”)⁹ in the deleted part of one of his own notes to the rough draft of *Manfred* (deleted words unemboldened, in pointed brackets):

+ the Philosopher Iamblichus – the story of the raising of Eros & Anteros may be found in his Life by Eunapius – <or quoted in the notes to Taylor’s Pausanias> –¹⁰

This refers to II ii 90–95 (Manfred addresses the Witch of the Alps):

I made
Mine eyes familiar with Eternity,
Such as before me did the Magi, and
He who from out their fountain dwellings raised
Eros and Anteros at Gadara,
As I do thee ...

Inspection of Taylor’s note reveals the following:

The demon Anteros.] Of this power, who avenges the injuries of lovers, the following remarkable story is told by Eunapius in his Life of Jamblichus: “This philosopher went with his disciples to Gadara in Syria, a place so famous for baths, that after Baiæ in Campania it is the second in the Roman empire. Here a dispute about baths arising while they were bathing, Jamblichus smiling said to them: ‘Though what I am to disclose is not pious, yet for your sakes it shall be undertaken;’ and at the same time he ordered his disciples to enquire of the natives, what appellations had been formerly given to two of the hot fountains, which were indeed less than the others, but more elegant. Upon enquiry, they found themselves unable to discover the cause of their nomination; but were informed that the one was called *Eros* or *Love*, and the other *Anteros*, or *the god who avenges the injuries of lovers*. Jamblichus immediately touching the water with his hand (for he sat, perhaps, on the margin of the fountain), and murmuring a few words, raised from the bottom of the fountain a fair boy, of a moderate stature, whose hair seemd to be tinged with gold, and the upper part of whose breast was of a luminous appearance. His companions being astonished at the novelty of the affair, Let us pass on, says he, to the next fountain; and at the same time he arose, fixed in thought, and, performing the same ceremonies as before, called forth the other Love, who was in all respects similar to the former, except that his hair scattered in his neck was blacker, and was like the sun in refulgence. At the same time, both boys eagerly embraced Jamblichus, as if he had been their natural parent: but he immediately restored them to their proper seats, and, when he had washed, departed from the place.” Let the reader, however, be careful to remember, that though *Eros* and *Anteros* are gods according to their first subsistence, yet these which are mentioned by Eunapius were of the dæmoniacal order; and were perhaps dæmons only *καλα σχεσιν*, according to habitude, and alliance.¹¹

7: *The Description of Greece by Pausanias*, 1794, henceforth “Taylor’s Pausanias”, III 358: *invention* should, in the light of Taylor’s subsequent phraseology, read *inspection*.

8: See CMP 168, and BLJ V 74 and 80, quoted above.

9: Taylor’s Pausanias I xii.

10: Byron, *Manfred*, rough draft, bottom of Sheet 11 sides 2 and 3, Pierpont Morgan Library New York. Printed at *Manuscripts of the Younger Romantics, Byron I* (Garland 1986) pp. 66–67.

11: Taylor’s Pausanias, III 251–252: *kala* should read *kata*.

Byron seems not to have wanted readers to know of his reliance on Taylor for the myth, and to have preferred them to think that he had read the original *Life* by Eunapius – which we may doubt: hence his erasure of the reference. He was sufficiently struck by the idea of the complementary boys to make use of them six years later, as the two pages Huon and Memnon, summoned by The Stranger at *The Deformed Transformed*, I i 518–532.

Iamblichus – evidently, from the ease and familiarity with which he summons demons, an alter ego for Manfred – was a Syrian philosopher who is thought to have died in 330. He developed the more purely intellectual neo-Platonism of Porphyry and Plotinus by systematising the view of the spirit world implicit in their work: in effect, creating a theology from it. The theo-demonology, if one may so style it, of much of *Manfred* Acts I and II, adheres closely to his, as this further note from Taylor's Pausanias shows:

The following Platonic dogma, which belongs to the greatest arcana of ancient Wisdom, solves all that appears to be so absurd and ridiculous to the atheistical and superficial in such-like historical relations as the present. Every deity beginning from on high, produces his own proper series to the last of things; and this series comprehends in itself many essences differing from each other. Thus, for instance, the Sun produces *Angelical, Dæmoniacal, Heroical, Nymphical, Panical*, and such-like powers, each of which subsists according to a solar characteristic: and the same reasoning must be applied to every other divinity. All these powers are the perpetual attendants of the Gods, but they have not all of them an essence *wholly* superior to man. For after *essential* Heroes an order of souls follows, who proximately govern the affairs of men, and are dæmoniacal *kata scesin*, according to *habitude or alliance*, but not essentially. Of this kind are the Nymphs that sympathize with waters, Pans with the feet of goats, and the like: and they differ from those powers that are essentially of a dæmoniacal characteristic, in this, that they assume a variety of shapes (each of the others immutably preserving one form), are subject to various passions, and are the causes of all-various deception to mankind.¹²

On the highest level of this Pantheon is the Demiurgus, Zeus, the Creator, “the over-ruling Infinite – the Maker”, as Manfred calls him at II iv 47: he is Intellect, above earthly things, and incorporeal (one of the “Powers deeper still beyond” to which Manfred refers at II iv 76). He may be confused with the Sun, to whom Manfred addresses his speech in III ii. Taylor also translated and published an *Oration to the Sun* of the Emperor Julian, who admired Iamblichus.

Next comes a kind of trinity of mixed supra-mundane and mundane deities – “Angelical Powers” – represented in the play by Arimanes, Nemesis and the three Destinies. Byron does not want to be thought of as too whole-hearted a neo-Platonist (“I am no Platonist, I am nothing at all” he had written to Francis Hodgson in 1811).¹³ so, to confuse, he gives them names and titles from Zoroastrian dualism and classical European myth. They are Soul, but may interfere materially in earthly matters – see their speeches in II iii.

Lastly is a hierarchy of demons – not automatically to be understood as malign – “Nymphical, Panical, and such-like powers”: the Seven Spirits in I i, the Voices in the Incantation (perhaps those of the Seven) and the Witch of the Alps in I ii, who implies at II ii 45–46 that the Seven Spirits have more power than she. Given that Manfred converses with these as their equal, if not master, he may be said to be one of them: “... they have not all of them an essence wholly superior to man”. So may Astarte, who has to answer the call of Nemesis at II iv 84–97, although Nemesis cannot force her to speak.

12: Taylor's Pausanias, III 235.

13: BLJ II 89.

The name “Astarte” adds still more confusion to the multiplicity of creeds from which Byron is borrowing, for it comes not from Zoroastrianism (despite the evidence of Montesquieu, *Lettre Persane*, 67) nor from the Greek classics, still less from neo-Platonism, but, via Milton, *Paradise Lost* I 439, from near-Eastern fertility myth. Here she is not at all remote, as in the play, but is a fertility goddess (“the divine mistress of Adonis”)¹⁴ along with Semiramis (*Don Juan* V 60, 8) and Pasiphae (*Don Juan* II 155, 7). Astarte and Manfred may be of the race of “essential Heroes” to whom Taylor refers, overlapping with demons in the neo-Platonic hierarchy.

The question is, what or who, suddenly, in Brussels – within a week of his embarking for the continent – well before he met Shelley – awakened Byron’s interest in Taylor, Pausanias, and Neo-Platonism? – and the unexpected answer may be, Polidori. An essay by Polidori, called *On the Punishment of Death*, appeared early in 1816 in Number VIII of *The Pamphleteer*. It is a rationally-argued piece against the English death penalty: one can readily imagine Polidori showing it to Byron with pride, and Byron, out of politeness, reading it. However, the periodical also contains the first half of a monograph by Taylor, called *A Dissertation on the Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries*. This had first appeared as a book in 1790, and is conceived in part as a criticism of Warburton’s attempt, in *The Divine Legation of Moses*, to prove that pre-Christian polytheism, in supposing an afterlife of punishment or reward, foreshadowed, however inadequately, the real Christian thing. Byron, who subsequently wrote of Warburton that he was “as fit to edite Poetry as Pope to preach in Gloucester Cathedral”¹⁵ would have read with pleasure Taylor’s words:

... from hence the reader will easily perceive the extreme ridiculousness of Dr. Warburton’s system, that the grand secret of the mysteries consisted in exposing the errors of Polytheism, and in teaching the doctrine of the unity, or the existence of one deity alone. For he might as well have said, that the great secret consisted in teaching a man how, by writing notes on the works of a poet, he might become a *bishop*! But it is by no means wonderful that men who have not the smallest conception of the true nature of the gods; who have persuaded themselves that they were only dead men deified; and who measure the understanding of the ancients by their own, should be led to fabricate a system so improbable and absurd.¹⁶

Byron’s joke about Warburton parallels Taylor’s. Taylor counters Warburton’s dogmatism with his own brand of the same thing, albeit from a more embattled standpoint; but the substance of his argument would have interested Byron, and, I think, a version of it gets at least into Acts I and II of *Manfred*. The thesis is (roughly) that Aeneas’ descent into Hades in Book VI of the *Aeneid* is a metaphor for the Soul entering the prison-house of the Flesh, and that the mysteries, glimpses of which are afforded by Plato, Pausanias, Virgil himself, Apuleius in the Cupid and Psyche sections of *The Golden Ass*, and Lucian in *Kataplous*, are ceremonies designed to release the Soul (“The Mind, the Spirit, the Promethean Spark” – *Manfred*, I i 154) from the Body’s restraint, from the “clay” in which it is “cooped” (*Manfred*, I i 157). When Manfred refers to himself as “My own Soul’s Sepulchre” (I ii 27) he is quoting Plato via Taylor’s essay:

Plato, too, it is well known, considered the body as the sepulchre of the soul ...¹⁷

Taylor’s introduction reads in part:

14: Fraser, *The Golden Bough* (Macmillan 1987) p. 346.

15: BLJ VIII 201.

16: *The Pamphleteer*, VIII, p. 57: printed Raine and Harper, op. cit., p. 374.

17: *On the Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries* (*The Pamphleteer*, VIII 1816 p. 37: printed Raine and Harper, op. cit., p. 348).

... I now proceed to prove that the shews of the lesser mysteries were designed by the ancient theologians, their founders, to signify occultly the condition of the impure soul invested with a terrene body, and merged in a material nature: or, in other words, to signify that such a soul in the present life might be said to die, as far as it is possible for soul to die; and that on the dissolution of the present body, while in a state of impurity, it would experience a death still more durable and profound.¹⁸

Manfred's soul, being radically impure, may perhaps anticipate a similar fate. We may imagine the motives of the ideal initiates of the Bacchic and Eleusinian mysteries to have been humble and spiritual, and to have led to their wishing to pass on the lessons of Dionysos, or of Platonism, to others. But Manfred's motives – though stemming from his boyhood delight in the elements (II ii 61–75) now appear self-centred, arrogant, and concerned with his own superior status over other humans, and over spirits. They never involve his becoming a Magus or Promethean teacher – unlike Iamblichus, his self-comparison with whom is thus contextualised as blasphemous. Here, whatever Byron's protestations, the influence of Goethe's *Faust* seem clear, for there the protagonist's search for wisdom is also motivated impurely. Neither Manfred nor Faust possess academic humility, or the religious awe which ought to stem from it. That Manfred can still experience awe and humility is a major point in his favour; but he experiences them only before the things over which his studies have given him no power – the eagle at I i 30, the waterfall at the start of II i, or the sun at the start of III ii.

Two further points in the action of *Manfred* appear to derive from Byron's reading of Taylor's Pausanias: when Manfred "falls senseless" at the sight of the "beautiful female figure" which the Spirits conjure for him at the end of I i, he may be reacting, not to a vision of Astarte, as commentators often suspect, but as any mortal would – according to Taylor's notes – upon seeing a divine vision:

The gods when they appear, diffuse a light of so subtle a nature, that the corporeal eyes are not able to bear it; but are affected in the same manner as fishes when they are drawn out of turbid and thick water into attenuated and diaphanous air. For men who behold a divine fire, as soon as they perceive it are scarcely able to breathe, and their connate spirit becomes inclosed in the fire.¹⁹

Manfred's ritual action in adjuring the Witch of the Alps at the start of II ii, by taking some water in the palm of his hand and flinging it into the air, may have been suggested by the following note:

... the oracle in Colophon gives its answers through the medium of water: for there is a fountain in a subterranean dwelling, from which the prophetess drinks; and on certain established nights, after many sacred rites have been previously performed, and she has drunk of the fountain, she delivers oracles, but is not visible to those that are present ... the water itself ... prepares us, and purifies our luciform spirit, so that we may be able to receive the divinity; while in the mean time there is a presence of divinity prior to this, and illuminating from on high –²⁰

When the Witch of the Alps "rises beneath the arch of the Sun-bow of the torrent", and is addressed by Manfred as

Beautiful Spirit! with thy hair of light –
And dazzling eyes of Glory ... (II ii 13–14)

18: *The Pamphleteer*, VIII p. 36: printed Raine and Harper, op. cit., p. 347.

19: Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis*, p. 70, quoted Taylor's Pausanias, III 361–362.

20: *Ibid*, p. 72ff, quoted Taylor's Pausanias, III 353.

Byron is cross-fertilising his own experience at the Staubbach falls²¹ with the following complacent note from Taylor:

In my Dissertation on the Eleusinian Mysteries, I have demonstratively shown that the most sublime part of *epopleia*, or *inspection*, in these mysteries consisted in beholding the gods themselves invested with a resplendent light.²²

Two other alter egos Manfred mentions, details of whose careers Byron would also have learned from Taylor's Pausanias, are Nero, and the Spartan general who is also confusingly named Pausanias. Manfred's reference to the death of Nero (styled inaccurately "Rome's sixth Emperor" – III i 88) is derived, rather muddily, from Suetonius; but Pausanias also refers to him:

... Nero acted very impiously towards his mother, and behaved with a like cruelty towards his wives, which shewed that he was entirely destitute of Love.²³

He also portrays Nero as a sacrilegious investigator of the very mysteries about which Taylor, centuries later, writes:

I have seen ... the Alcyonian lake, through which ... Bacchus descended to Hades, in order to lead back Semele ... The depth of this lake is immense; nor do I know any man who has been able by any artifice whatever to reach its bottom: for even Nero, who joined ropes together of many stadia in length, and fastened lead at the end, with whatever else might be useful for this purpose, could never find the bottom ... It is however by no means lawful for me to divulge to all men the nocturnal ceremonies, which are performed every year by the side of this lake, to Bacchus.²⁴

Manfred is certainly destitute of all human love except the forbidden sort, and his motives for investigating mysteries are, in their self-centredness and power-fixation, not far from those of Nero. Manfred, as Nero did, misses the main point about mysteries, which is not blasphemously to try and master them, but to serve at them. Few critics have pointed out the irony whereby, in II iv, Manfred's self-denial and -mastery in the interests of plumbing the mysteries are praised by a host of nihilistic and destructive demons.

It is in his lines on the guilt of Pausanias the Spartan over the death of Cleonice (Manfred's soliloquy, II ii 185–192) that Byron lets slip in another phrase his indebtedness to Taylor:

the Spartan Monarch drew
From the Byzantine Maid's unsleeping Spirit
An answer and his destiny – he slew
That which he loved, unknowing what he slew,
And died unpardoned – though he called in aid
The Phyxian Jove, and in Phigalia roused
The Arcadian Evocators to compel
The indignant Shadow to depose her wrath,
Or fix her term of vengeance – she replied
In words of dubious import, but fulfilled. –

21: See BLJ V 101.

22: Taylor's Pausanias, III 327.

23: Taylor's Pausanias, III 60.

24: Taylor's Pausanias, I 246.

The pedantic style in which Manfred momentarily speaks here betrays the borrowing:

This was the deed, from the guilt of which Pausanias could never fly, though he employed all-various purifications, received the deprecations of Jupiter Phyxius, and went to Phigalea to the Arcadian evocators of souls. He therefore suffered a just punishment for his behaviour towards Cleonice, and divinity itself.²⁵

Taylor's scholarship was characterised by a frank distaste for Christianity,²⁶ astonishing for the time, and, I would suspect, attractive to Byron, although he would not find much sympathy with Taylor's alternative dogmatism:

Before the extinction of the genuine religion of mankind, indeed, and the introduction of *gigantic impiety*, it must have been highly improper to unfold these [the Eleusinian] mysteries to all men: but when *delusive faith* succeeded to *scientific theology*, and *divine* mystery was no more, it then became necessary to reveal this most holy and august institution. This appears to have been done by the latter Platonists: and from some important passages which fortunately yet remain in the manuscript Commentaries of these great men on Plato, I have been enabled to unfold the leading particulars of this interesting affair. These particulars the reader may find in my *Dissertation on the Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries*.²⁷

One of the last works Byron read before embarking on the composition of *Manfred* may indeed have been Taylor's *Dissertation*. He may have been contemplating writing a work about the relationship between humanity and the spirit world as early as May 1st 1816 – his first letter requesting a copy of Taylor's Pausanias is dated then, less than a week after he left England for ever on April 25th. This would put the genesis of the main dramatic part of *Manfred* close to that of the third Canto of *Childe Harold*, the early sketches of which also date from then.²⁸ Byron would have been impressed by a writer who asserted as boldly as Taylor did that the relationship was often on a much more equal and intimate footing than established Christianity would have it be. In giving his protagonist a blasphemous arrogance of which Taylor would never have approved, he went his own way, as ever: and by the time he wrote, and then, under the influence of established Christians, re-wrote the third act, in 1817,²⁹ it seems that the influence of Taylor had been forgotten.

The story may not end there. Two letters of Shelley to Charles Ollier, written in 1817, perhaps indicate a sequel to Byron's indebtedness to Taylor:

25: Taylor's Pausanias, I 304–305. This allusion is picked up by E.H. Coleridge in the notes to his edition of *Manfred* (see *The Works of Lord Byron: Poetry*, IV 109n).

26: See this passage, which is in the 1790 printing of Taylor's *Eleusinian Mysteries* but not in *The Pamphleteer*, and thus not available to Byron: "... the sophistry throughout his [Warburton's] whole treatise is perpetual, and every where exhibits to our view the leading features of a Christian priest in complete perfection; I mean consummate arrogance united with a profound ignorance of antient wisdom and blended with matchless hypocrisy and fraud. For, indeed, from the earliest of the fathers down to the most modern and vile plebeian teacher among the Methodists, the same character displays itself and is alike productive of the same deplorable mischief to the real welfare of mankind. But it is necessary that impiety should sometimes prevail upon the earth; though at the same time, it is no less necessary that its consequent maladies should be lamented and strenuously resisted by every genuine lover of virtue and truth." (*A Dissertation on the Bacchic and Eleusinian Mysteries*, 1790, p. 64: printed Raine and Harper, op. cit., p. 374.)

27: Taylor's Pausanias, III 226–227.

28: See CPW II 297. The Incantation in I i may date from two years earlier: see Jerome McGann's analysis of the manuscript papers at CPW IV 464.

29: See Cochran, John Murray, William Gifford and the Third Act of *Manfred*, Notes and Queries September 1991, pp. 308–310.

Be so good as to send me “Tasso’s Lament” a Poem just published; & Taylors Translation of Pausanias. You will oblige me by sending them without delay, as I have immediate need for them. –³⁰

Do you know is Taylors Pausanias to be procured & at what price. –³¹

It has been suggested³¹ that Taylor’s work on the later neo-Platonist Proclus may form one subtext to *Prometheus Unbound*, which Shelley did not start until September 1818, but which contains several lines corresponding to, and answering ideas from, *Manfred*.³² This is apt, for it seems clear that *Manfred* had been, in addition to everything else, a creative riposte to Alastor – but that is the subject for another essay.

30: Letter of July 24th 1817, *Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Jones, Oxford 1964, I 548. 31: P.S. to a letter of August 3rd 1817, Jones. op.cit., I 549.

31: Carl Grabo, *“Prometheus Unbound”: an Interpretation*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1935, quoted Robinson, *The Snake and the Eagle Wreathed In Flight*, Johns Hopkins 1976, p. 258 n15.

32: See Robinson, op. cit., pp. 125–134 and nn.