George Gordon, Lord Byron, Manfred (Ontario: Broadview, 2017). 138 pp. (Pbk. £14.50, ISBN. 9781554813681)

This Broadview edition of Manfred (1817) has something for anyone interested in Byron’s troubled mental drama, although it is mainly directed at undergraduate students who want a clean uncluttered text to add notes to, with useful supplementary material appended. The ‘Literary Contexts’ section has relevant extracts from: Paradise Lost; Gothic influences such as Horace Walpole’s The Mysterious Mother (1768); William Beckford’s Vathek (1786); Anne Radcliffe’s The Italian (1797); the first scene from Goethe’s Faust (1808); Caroline Lamb’s Glenarvon (1816); Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein (1818) and Percy Shelley’s Prometheus Unbound (1820). The section on ‘Byron’s Life, Writing and Work’ has parts of The Corsair (1814); Childe Harold (1816); ‘Prometheus’ (1816); and two letters (1816 and 1819) to his half-sister Augusta Leigh. There are black and white reproductions of portraits of Byron by Westall (1813) and Meyer (1819). These are followed by some contemporary reactions to Manfred from The British Critic; Jeffrey in The Edinburgh Review; The Gentleman’s Magazine; The Lady’s Monthly; The Literary Gazette and Goethe in Über Kunst und Althertum (1820).

No editor is credited with the organisation of this edition, which consists of a fairly recent version of the text with some, but not many footnotes. However, in the small print of the page detailing the ISBN there is a credit to ‘Contributing Writer: Alexander Reszitnyk.’ Additionally, the acknowledgements state that ‘Broadview Press is grateful to the many academics who have offered comments and feedback on this edition’, and ‘particularly […] acknowledge’: D.F. Felluga, Harriet Kramer Linkin, Omar F. Miranda, Meg Russett-Sari and Daniel White. Whoever wrote the introduction has provided one that is lucid and interesting. It credits both Jerome McGann’s Oxford edition of Byron: The Complete Poetical Works (1980-93) and also ‘Peter Cochran’s edition with accompanying essays [which] has also been invaluable in the preparation of this edition.’ (16) This is apt as McGann’s seven volume edition is the standard for referencing Byron’s poetry, and Cochran’s 2015 online and in-print edition provides the go-to text for scholars who want to have access to a wide range of opinions on the drama. Glancing over Cochran’s print edition again, it is obvious just how much this Broadview owes to Cochran’s nose for texts that are related to Manfred, as many of the choices are the same.

The ‘In Context’ part of the Broadview contains excerpts of the manuscript version of Act 3, showing how much Byron changed the ending. In 1817 William Gifford read Byron’s manuscript and reported that the play needed ‘more dignity’ and ‘the Friar should be a real good man—not an idiot’ (p. 63). Byron responded by agreeing that it was ‘certainly d---d bad’, and re-wrote the ending with the Friar transformed into ‘a good man’. Byron liked his next version better, stating that there was ‘some good poetry in this new act here and there--& if so print it—without sending me further proofs—under Mr. G[iffor]d’s correction—if he will have the goodness to overlook it.’ (Letter to John Murray 5 May 1817). Neither McGann’s, Cochran’s, nor this Broadview edition of Manfred are entirely up-to-date though. The McGann edition is thirty years old and Cochran’s is from 2015. Despite two versions of Act III being given in the Broadview, this edition contains an error that Jane Stabler has identified. It occurs in Act III, scene i, where the printer ‘has misread line 68: Byron actually wrote “[…] nor outward lash”, rather than “nor outward look”’.[1] Perhaps owing to the timing of publication, or no single editor, this 2017 Broadview edition retains the 200-year-old error (p.51) that Stabler detected in 2016.

Manfred made the stage in 1834 at Covent Garden theatre, and there is a review of that performance from The London Literary Gazette from November of that year included with the supplementary material. As with Cochran’s edition, part of Gilbert Abbot ´a Beckett’s satire of the Covent Garden production, Man-Fred, is included here. In this play Man-Fred is a chimney sweep. This Broadview edition ends with the artistic influence of Manfred being acknowledged, displaying both of John Martin’s Manfred paintings (1837), another by Ford Maddox Brown (1842), and finally Nietzsche’s Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and Nobody (1883-91) is extracted.

Broadview provides a busy but small book. The footnotes are infrequent, light, and varied, moving from ‘imports not [:] Does not matter.’ (p.30), which might suit a reader whose first language is not English, to the kind of note that might suit an academic: ‘My Wrongs … cherished [:] This line was erroneously omitted from the first edition of Manfred’ (p.32). This edition is clearly organised and cleanly printed, making it ideal for anyone who wants an unfussy version of the drama along with helpful pointers towards corresponding texts and contexts. Broadview have produced an edition that has much to recommend it.

John Gardner, Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, UK

[1] Jane Stabler, ‘A Note on the Text of Manfred, The Byron Journal, Vol 44, 2, (2016), pp. 163-165. P. 163.