Upon writing the dramatic poem Manfred in 1817, Lord Byron not only incapsulated aspects of the unprecedentedly popular Romantic genre, but also delved deep into unconventional themes that he personally described as “wild, metaphysical, and inexplicable”. During the extract, we witness the eponymous Byronic hero recount a visit to the colosseum with a stark sense of reverence. As the soliloquy progresses, it becomes apparent that Manfred’s veneration of the ancient Roman civilisation is more unusual than first perceived: the character appears to associate strongly with the empire’s disintegration, which appears metaphorical for his own past. The audience sees Manfred reconcile and evaluate his own history in a way that suggests his character is an autobiographical representation of Byron himself. Due to the scandal surrounding Byron’s affair with his half-sister, Augusta, it is arguable that he wrote this scene as a reflection of his own fall from grace. Thematically, Byron’s *Manfred* explores isolation, memory, and the contrast between greatness and ruin; although it is suitably famous for holding a myriad of meanings. Despite the elements of tragedy discussed, the prevailing narrative tone is one of explicit awe; a sentiment that could infer Byron’s idolisation of his own previous prosperity.

The flowing nature of the stanza reflects the ceaselessness of time. Largely following an iambic rhythm, the poem adopts a lamenting tempo to reflect Manfred’s exultation and reminiscence. This is mirrored by the use of long, complex sentences conjoined via enjambment, with Byron employing a plethora of semi-colons; which both implies that Manfred’s thought process is convoluted and immerses the reader in the description. Furthermore, parenthesized phrases such as “within a bowshot – where the Caesar’s dwelt” increase the reverent tone. Byron’s choice to forego a rhyme scheme aptly presents a more natural depiction of his protagonist’s thought progression, as it adds to the spontaneously erratic nature of the poem. The effect of this is an overawed tone, as the enumeration of colourful descriptions of “broken arches” and “rents of ruin” creates the impression that Manfred is so overwhelmed by the beauty of the sights that he simply cannot cease verbalising his veneration. As a result, it becomes apparent that he sees wonder in the wreckage with a typically Romantic childlike awe; hence Byron asserts the impression of the greatness of the ruins.

Imagery is used to immerse the reader in Manfred’s memory. Auditory descriptions like “the watchdog bay’d”, “the owl’s long cry”, “the fitful song” and “the gentle wind” conjoin to achieve a tone of lamentation. Here, the contrast between adjectives ‘fitful’ and ‘gentle’ adds a sense of depth to the imagery, suggesting the multitudinous emotions felt by Manfred towards the ruins: ‘fitful’ is jarring, implying distress, while ‘gentle’ is far more soothing. Additionally, a most prominent theme amongst the imagery is the description of nature. The ‘stars’, ‘cypresses’, ‘birds’, and ‘laurel’ accompany a plethora of other natural references to create a distinctly Romantic poem. A celebrity of the genre, Byron chooses to show his interest in the primitive arts through this extract; however, in this extract he avoids the typical reference to ancient mythology to instead draw upon history through the description of architecture. Thus, the Colosseum is an apt but unusual metaphor upon which to focus his discussion of the remnants of glory amidst dilapidation.

Byron’s use of epithets starkly represents Manfred’s awe. His description of “almighty Rome” helps to create a jubilant narrative tone, while the “bloody gladiatorum” similarly possesses an overawed quality. Today, the use of the adjective “bloody” to achieve a positive tone is highly unusual and seems extremely antithetical to the following noun “perfection”. However, this could be intentional, since Byron similarly includes oxymorons “noble wreck” and “ruinous perfection” to conclude the poem. Due to this, the lasting impression of the extract is of contrasts, namely the juxtaposition between power and the loss of it. This could be seen as Byron coming to terms with his own downfall and choosing to see beauty in destruction.

The juxtaposition between past and present tense adds to the idea of the shift of power over time. The initial reference to ‘youth’ foreshadows this, as Manfred’s own story is of a fall from grace. The polyptoton of “where the Caesars dwelt, and dwell the tuneless birds of night” uses the transition between tenses to enhance the idea of change with time, and also contemplates a Romantic impression of the consistency of nature: while empires rise and fall, nature remains. This is epitomised by the description of the ‘time-worn breach’, inferring the dilapidation of a once-impenetrable structure. However, Byron likely took reassurance from this image: if a power so great as the Roman Empire could succumb to ruination over time, then Byron’s personal downfall was less significant. Hence, this correlation is a happy one.

Overall, Byron’s *Manfred* is an ode to his former life, of which the Colosseum is a metaphor, and a glimpse into the depths of his reminiscence. His final exclamatory, ‘a noble wreck in ruinous perfection’, could be seen as defiant; a message to his critics that despite the destruction of his status, pride and glory remain in the wreckage. In today’s world, we, too, can take heed from his superficial message: that with time, we will inevitably witness change, and great power will undeniably fall. In an era of Brexit and profound nationalist isolationism, it is important to remember that clinging to former glory is a folly; and with the current refugee crisis it is crucial to recall that fortunes shift as times change. Ultimately, the idea of the nonpermanence of the material world can be taken as a warning to hold onto the natural qualities of humanity: to unify and adapt to change rather than to ‘put our great country first’.