

**Childe Harold's Pilgrimage** *Childe Harold* is a travelogue narrated by a melancholy, passionate, well-read, and very eloquent tourist. Byron wrote most of the first two cantos while on the tour through Spain, Portugal, Albania, and Greece that these cantos describe. When he published them, in 1812, they made him at one stroke the best-known and most talked about poet in England. Byron took up *Childe Harold* again in 1816, during the European tour he made after the breakup of his marriage. Canto 3, published in 1816, moves through Belgium, up the Rhine, then to Switzerland and the Alps. Canto 4, published in 1818, describes Italy's great cities, in particular their ruins and museums and the stories these tell of the bygone glories of the Roman Empire.

Byron chose for his poem the Spenserian stanza, and like James Thomson (in *The Castle of Indolence*) and other eighteenth-century predecessors, he attempted in the first canto to imitate, in a seriocomic fashion, the archaic language of his Elizabethan model. (*Childe* is the ancient term for a young noble awaiting knighthood.) But he soon dropped the archaisms, and in the last two cantos he confidently adapts Spenser's mellifluous stanza to his own autobiographical and polemical purposes. The virtuoso range of moods and subjects in *Childe Harold* was a quality on which contemporaries commented admiringly. Equally fascinating is the tension between the body of the poem and the long notes (for the most part omitted here) that Byron appended to its sometimes dashing and sometimes sorrowing chronicle of his pilgrimage in the countries of chivalry and romance—notes that feature cosmopolitan reflections on the contrasts among cultures as well as sardonic, hard-hitting critiques of the evolving political order of Europe.

In the preface to his first two cantos, Byron had insisted that the narrator, Childe Harold, was "a fictitious character," merely "the child of imagination." In the manuscript version of these cantos, however, he had called his hero "Childe Burun," the early form of his own family name. The world insisted on identifying the character as well as the travels of the protagonist with those of the author, and in the fourth canto Byron, abandoning the third-person *dramatis persona*, spoke out frankly in the first person. In the preface to that canto, he declares that there will be "less of the pilgrim" here than in any of the preceding cantos, "and that little slightly, if at all, separated from the author speaking in his own person. The fact is, that I had become weary of drawing a line which every one seemed determined not to perceive."

FROM CHILDE HAROLD'S PILGRIMAGE

A ROMAUNT<sup>1</sup>

From Canto 1

["SIN'S LONG LABYRINTH"]

I

Oh, thou! in Hellas<sup>0</sup> deem'd of heav'nly birth, Greece  
Muse! form'd or fabled at the minstrel's will!  
Since sham'd full oft by later lyres on earth,  
Mine dares not call thee from thy sacred hill:  
5 Yet there I've wander'd by thy vaunted rill;

1. A romance or narrative of adventure.

Yes! sigh'd o'er Delphi's long-deserted shrine,  
Where, save that feeble fountain, all is still;  
Nor mote° my shell awake the weary Nine<sup>2</sup> *may*  
To grace so plain a tale—this lowly lay° of mine. *song*

2

Whilome<sup>3</sup> in Albion's" isle there dwelt a youth, *England's*  
Who ne in virtue's ways did take delight;  
But spent his days in riot most uncouth,  
And vex'd with mirth the drowsy ear of Night.  
Ah, me! in sooth he was a shameless wight,<sup>0</sup> *creature*  
Sore given to revel and ungodly glee;  
Few earthly things found favour in his sight  
Save concubines and carnal companie,  
And flaunting wassailers<sup>4</sup> of high and low degree.

3

Childe Harold was he hight:° —but whence his name *called*  
And lineage long, it suits me not to say;  
Suffice it, that perchance they were of fame,  
And had been glorious in another day:  
But one sad losel<sup>5</sup> soils a name for aye,  
However mighty in the olden time;  
Nor all that heralds rake from coffin'd clay,  
Nor florid prose, nor honied lies of rhyme  
Can blazon evil deeds, or consecrate a crime.

4

Childe Harold bask'd him in the noon-tide sun,  
Disporting there like any other fly;  
Nor deem'd before his little day was done  
One blast might chill him into misery.  
But long ere scarce a third of his pass'd by,  
Worse than adversity the Childe befell;  
He felt the fulness of satiety:  
Then loath'd he in his native land to dwell,  
Which seem'd to him more lone than Eremite's<sup>6</sup> sad cell.

5

For he through Sin's long labyrinth had run,  
Nor made atonement when he did amiss,  
Had sigh'd to many though he lov'd but one,  
And that lov'd one, alas! could ne'er be his.  
Ah, happy she! to 'scape from him whose kiss  
Had been pollution unto aught so chaste;  
Who soon had left her charms for vulgar bliss,  
And spoil'd her goodly lands to gild his waste,  
Nor calm domestic peace had ever deign'd to taste.

2. The Muses, whose "vaunted rill" (line 5) was the Castalian spring. "Shell": lyre. Hermes isfahled to have invented the lyre by stretching strings over the hollow of a tortoise shell.

3. Once upon a time; one of the many archaisms that Byron borrowed from Spenser.

4. Noisy, insolent drinkers (Byron is thought to refer to his own youthful carousing with friends at Newstead Abbey).

5. Rascal. Byron's great-uncle, the fifth Lord Byron, had killed a kinsman in a drunken duel.

6. A religious hermit.

6

And now Childe Harold was sore sick at heart,  
And from his fellow bacchanals would flee;  
'Tis said, at times the sullen tear would start,  
But Pride congeal'd the drop within his ee:<sup>o</sup> *eye*  
so     Apart he stalk'd in joyless reverie,  
And from his native land resolv'd to go,  
And visit scorching climes beyond the sea;  
With pleasure drugg'd he almost long'd for woe,  
And e'en for change of scene would seek the shades below.

*From Canto 3*

["ONCE MORE UPON THE WATERS"]

1

Is thy face like thy mother's, my fair child!  
Ada! sole daughter of my house and heart?  
When last I saw thy young blue eyes they smiled,  
And then we parted, — not as now we part,  
But with a hope. —  
5     Awaking with a start,  
The waters heave around me; and on high  
The winds lift up their voices: I depart,  
Whither I know not; but the hour's gone by,  
When Albion's lessening shores could grieve or glad mine eye.

2

10    Once more upon the waters! yet once more!  
And the waves bound beneath me as a steed  
That knows his rider. Welcome, to their roar!  
Swift be their guidance, wheresoe'er it lead!  
Though the strain'd mast should quiver as a reed,  
15    And the rent canvas fluttering strew the gale,  
Still must I on; for I am as a weed,  
Flung from the rock, on Ocean's foam, to sail  
Where'er the surge may sweep, the tempest's breath prevail.

3

20    In my youth's summer<sup>2</sup> I did sing of One,  
The wandering outlaw of his own dark mind;  
Again I seize the theme then but begun,  
And bear it with me, as the rushing wind  
Bears the cloud onwards: in that Tale I find  
The furrows of long thought, and dried-up tears,  
25    Which, ebbing, leave a sterile track behind,  
O'er which all heavily the journeying years  
Plod the last sands of life, — where not a flower appears.

1. Byron's daughter Augusta Ada, born in December 1815, a month before her parents separated. Byron's "hope" (line 5) had been for a reconcilia-

tion, but he was never to see Ada again.  
2. Byron wrote canto 1 at age twenty-one; he is now twenty-eight.

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4

Since my young days of passion—joy, or pain,  
Perchance my heart and harp have lost a string,  
30 And both may jar:<sup>3</sup> it may be, that in vain  
I would essay as I have sung to sing.  
Yet, though a dreary strain, to this I cling;  
So that it wean me from the weary dream  
Of selfish grief or gladness—so it fling  
35 Forgetfulness around me—it shall seem  
To me, though to none else, a not ungrateful theme.

5

He, who grown aged in this world of woe,  
In deeds, not years, piercing the depths of life,  
So that no wonder waits him; nor below  
40 Can love, or sorrow, fame, ambition, strife,  
Cut to his heart again with the keen knife  
Of silent, sharp endurance: he can tell  
Why thought seeks refuge in lone caves, yet rife  
With airy images, and shapes which dwell  
45 Still unimpair'd, though old, in the soul's haunted cell.

6

'Tis to create, and in creating live  
A being more intense, that we endow  
With form our fancy, gaining as we give  
The life we image, even as I do now.  
so What am I? Nothing; but not so art thou,  
Soul of my thought!<sup>4</sup> with whom I traverse earth,  
Invisible but gazing, as I glow  
Mix'd with thy spirit, blended with thy birth,  
And feeling still with thee in my crush'd feelings' dearth.

7

Yet must I think less wildly:—I *have* thought  
Too long and darkly, till my brain became,  
In its own eddy boiling and o'erwrought,  
A whirling gulf of phantasy and flame:  
And thus, untaught in youth my heart to tame,  
60 My springs of life were poison'd. 'Tis too late!  
Yet am I chang'd; though still enough the same  
In strength to bear what time can not abate,  
And feed on bitter fruits without accusing Fate.

8

Something too much of this:—but now 'tis past,  
65 And the spell closes with its silent seal.<sup>5</sup>  
Long absent HAROLD re-appears at last;  
He of the breast which fain no more would feel,  
Wrung with the wounds which kill not, but ne'er heal;  
Yet Time, who changes all, had alter'd him

3. Sound discordant.

4. I.e., Childe Harold, his literary creation.

5. I.e., he sets the seal of silence on his personal tale ("spell").

-0 In soul and aspect as in age: years steal  
Fire from the mind as vigour from the limb;  
And life's enchanted cup but sparkles near the brim.

9

His had been quaff'd too quickly, and he found  
The dregs were wormwood; but he fill'd again,  
75 And from a purer fount, on holier ground,  
And deem'd its spring perpetual; but in vain!  
Still round him clung invisibly a chain  
Which gall'd for ever, fettering though unseen,  
And heavy though it clank'd not; worn with pain,  
80 Which pined although it spoke not, and grew keen,  
Entering with every step, he took, through many a scene.

10

Secure in guarded coldness, he had mix'd  
Again in fancied safety with his kind,  
And deem'd his spirit now so firmly fix'd  
85 And sheath'd with an invulnerable mind,  
That, if no joy, no sorrow lurk'd behind;  
And he, as one, might midst the many stand  
Unheeded, searching through the crowd to find  
Fit speculation! such as in strange land  
90 He found in wonder-works of God and Nature's hand.

11

But who can view the ripened rose, nor seek  
To wear it? who can curiously behold  
The smoothness and the sheen of beauty's cheek,  
Nor feel the heart can never all grow old?  
95 Who can contemplate Fame through clouds unfold  
The star which rises o'er her steep, nor climb?  
Harold, once more within the vortex, roll'd  
On with the giddy circle, chasing Time,  
Yet with a nobler aim than in his youth's fond<sup>o</sup> prime. *foolish*

12

100 But soon he knew himself the most unfit  
Of men to herd with Man; with whom he held  
Little in common; untaught to submit  
His thoughts to others, though his soul was quell'd  
In youth by his own thoughts; still uncompell'd,  
105 He would not yield dominion of his mind  
To spirits against whom his own rebell'd;  
Proud though in desolation; which could find  
A life within itself, to breathe without mankind.

13

110 Where rose the mountains, there to him were friends;  
Where roll'd the ocean, thereon was his home;  
Where a blue sky, and glowing clime, extends,  
He had the passion and the power to roam;  
The desert, forest, cavern, breaker's foam,

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115 Were unto him companionship; they spake  
A mutual language, clearer than the tome° *book*  
Of his land's tongue, which he would oft forsake  
For Nature's pages glass'd° by sunbeams on the lake. *made glassy*

14

120 Like the Chaldean,<sup>6</sup> he could watch the stars,  
Till he had peopled them with beings bright  
As their own beams; and earth, and earth-born jars,  
And human frailties, were forgotten quite:  
Could he have kept his spirit to that flight  
He had been happy; but this clay will sink  
Its spark immortal, envying it the light  
125 To which it mounts, as if to break the link  
That keeps us from yon heaven which woos us to its brink.

15

130 But in Man's dwellings he became a thing  
Restless and worn, and stern and wearisome,  
Droop'd as a wild-born falcon with dipt wing,  
To whom the boundless air alone were home:  
Then came his fit again, which to o'ercome,  
As eagerly the barr'd-up bird will beat  
His breast and beak against his wiry dome  
Till the blood tinge his plumage, so the heat  
135 Of his impeded soul would through his bosom eat.

16

140 Self-exiled Harold wanders forth again,  
With nought of hope left, but with less of gloom;  
The very knowledge that he lived in vain,  
That all was over on this side the tomb,  
Had made Despair a smilingness assume,  
Which, though 'twere wild,—as on the plundered wreck  
When mariners would madly meet their doom  
With draughts intemperate on the sinking deck,—  
Did yet inspire a cheer, which he forbore to check.

[WATERLOO]

17

145 Stop!—for thy tread is on an Empire's dust!  
An Earthquake's spoil is sepulchered below!  
Is the spot mark'd with no colossal bust?  
Nor column trophied for triumphal show?<sup>7</sup>  
None; but the moral's truth tells simpler so,  
150 As the ground was before, thus let it be;—  
How that red rain hath made the harvest grow!  
And is this all the world has gained by thee,  
Thou first and last of fields! king-making Victory?

6. A people of ancient Babylonia, expert in astronomy.

7. Referring to the triumphal arches erected in

ancient Rome to honor conquering generals, a custom Napoleon had revived.

18

And Harold stands upon this place of skulls,  
155 The grave of France, the deadly Waterloo!<sup>8</sup>  
How in an hour the power which gave annals  
Its gifts, transferring fame as fleeting too!  
In "pride of place" here last the eagle flew,<sup>9</sup>  
Then tore with bloody talon the rent plain,  
160 Pierced by the shaft of banded nations<sup>1</sup> through;  
Ambition's life and labours all were vain;  
He wears the shattered links of the world's broken chain.<sup>2</sup>

Fit retribution! Gaul<sup>3</sup> may champ the bit  
And foam in fetters; – but is Earth more free?  
165 Did nations combat to make *One* submit;  
Or league to teach all kings true sovereignty?  
What! shall reviving Thralldom again be  
The patched-up idol of enlightened days?  
Shall we, who struck the Lion down, shall we  
170 Pay the Wolf homage? proffering lowly gaze  
And servile knees to thrones? No; *prove*<sup>4</sup> before ye praise!

20

If not, o'er one fallen despot boast no more!  
In vain fair cheeks were furrowed with hot tears  
For Europe's flowers long rooted up before  
175 The trampler of her vineyards; in vain years  
Of death, depopulation, bondage, fears,  
Have all been borne, and broken by the accord  
Of roused-up millions: all that most endears  
Glory, is when the myrtle wreathes a sword  
180 Such as Harmodius drew on Athens' tyrant lord.<sup>5</sup>

21

There was a sound of revelry by night,<sup>6</sup>  
And Belgium's capital had gathered then  
Her Beauty and her Chivalry, and bright  
The lamps shone o'er fair women and brave men;  
185 A thousand hearts beat happily; and when  
Music arose with its voluptuous swell,  
Soft eyes look'd love to eyes which spake again,  
And all went merry as a marriage-bell;  
But hush! hark! a deep sound strikes like a rising knell!

8. Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, near Brussels, had occurred only the year before, on June 18, 1815. The battlefield, where almost fifty thousand English, Prussian, and French soldiers were killed in a single day, quickly became a gruesome tourist attraction.

9. "Pride of place," is a term of falconry, and means the highest pitch of flight [Byron's note, which continues by referring to the use of the term in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* 2.4]. The eagle was the symbol of Napoleon.

1. The Grand Alliance formed in opposition to Napoleon.

2. Napoleon was then a prisoner at St. Helena.

3. France. Byron, like other liberals, saw the defeat of the Napoleonic tyranny as a victory for tyrannical kings and the forces of reaction throughout Europe.

4. Await the test (proof) of experience.

5. In 514 B.C.E. Harmodius and Aristogeiton, hiding their daggers in myrtle (symbol of love), killed Hipparchus, tyrant of Athens.

6. A famous ball, given by the duchess of Richmond on the eve of the battle of Quatre Bras, which opened the conflict at Waterloo.

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22

190 Did ye not hear it?—No; 'twas but the wind,  
Or the car rattling o'er the stony street;  
On with the dance! let joy be unconfined;  
No sleep till morn, when Youth and Pleasure meet  
To chase the glowing Hours with flying feet—  
195 But, hark!—that heavy sound breaks in once more,  
As if the clouds its echo would repeat;  
And nearer, clearer, deadlier than before!  
Arm! Arm! and out—it is—the cannon's opening roar!

23

200 Within a windowed niche of that high hall  
Sate Brunswick's fated chieftain; he did hear  
That sound the first amidst the festival,  
And caught its tone with Death's prophetic ear;  
And when they smiled because he deem'd it near,  
His heart more truly knew that peal too well  
205 Which stretch'd his father on a bloody bier,  
And roused the vengeance blood alone could quell:  
He rush'd into the field, and, foremost fighting, fell.

24

Ah! then and there was hurrying to and fro,  
And gathering tears, and tremblings of distress,  
210 And cheeks all pale, which but an hour ago  
Blush'd at the praise of their own loveliness;  
And there were sudden partings, such as press  
The life from out young hearts, and choking sighs  
Which ne'er might be repeated; who could guess  
215 If ever more should meet those mutual eyes,  
Since upon nights so sweet such awful morn could rise?

25

And there was mounting in hot haste: the steed,  
The mustering squadron, and the clattering car,  
Went pouring forward in impetuous speed,  
220 And swiftly forming in the ranks of war;  
And the deep thunder peal on peal afar;  
And near, the beat of the alarming drum  
Roused up the soldier ere the morning star;  
While throng'd the citizens with terror dumb,  
225 Or whispering, with white lips—"The foe! They come! they come!"

26

And wild and high the "Cameron's gathering" rose!  
The war-note of Lochiel,<sup>7</sup> which Albyn's<sup>o</sup> hills  
Have heard, and heard, too, have her Saxon foes:—  
How in the noon of night that pibroch<sup>9</sup> thrills,

*Scotland's*

7. The duke of Brunswick, nephew of George III of England, was killed in the battle of Quatre Bras. His father, commanding the Prussian army against Napoleon, had been killed at Auerstedt in 1806 (line 205).

8. "Cameron's gathering" is the clan song of the Camerons, whose chief was called "Lochiel," after his estate.

9. Bagpipe music, usually warlike in character.



230 Savage and shrill! But with the breath which fills  
Their mountain-pipe, so fill the mountaineers  
With the fierce native daring which instils  
The stirring memory of a thousand years,  
And Evan's, Donald's<sup>1</sup> fame rings in each clansman's ears!

27

235 And Ardennes<sup>2</sup> waves above them her green leaves,  
Dewy with nature's tear-drops, as they pass,  
Grieving, if aught inanimate e'er grieves,  
Over the unreturning brave,—alas!  
Ere evening to be trodden like the grass  
240 Which now beneath them, but above shall grow  
In its next verdure, when this fiery mass  
Of living valour, rolling on the foe  
And burning with high hope, shall moulder cold and low.

28

Last noon beheld them full of lusty life,  
245 Last eve in Beauty's circle proudly gay,  
The midnight brought the signal-sound of strife,  
The morn the marshalling in arms,—the day  
Battle's magnificently-stern array!  
The thunder-clouds close o'er it, which when rent  
250 The earth is covered thick with other clay,  
Which her own clay shall cover, heaped and pent,  
Rider and horse,—friend, foe,—in one red burial blent!

s . >

[NAPOLEON]

36

There sunk the greatest, nor the worst of men,<sup>3</sup>  
Whose spirit antithetically mixt  
One moment of the mightiest, and again  
On little objects with like firmness fixt,  
320 Extreme in all things! hadst thou been betwixt,  
Thy throne had still been thine, or never been;  
For daring made thy rise as fall: thou seek'st  
Even now to re-assume the imperial mien,<sup>o</sup>  
And shake again the world, the Thunderer of the scene!

*character*

37

325 Conqueror and captive of the earth art thou!  
She trembles at thee still, and thy wild name  
Was ne'er more bruited in men's minds than now  
That thou art nothing, save the jest of Fame,

1. Sir Evan and Donald Cameron, famous warriors in the Stuart cause in the Jacobite risings of 1689 and 1745.

2. The wood of Soignes is supposed to be a remnant of the "forest of Ardennes" famous in Boiardo's *Orlando*, and immortal in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. It is also celebrated in Tacitus as being the spot of successful defence by the Ger-

mans against the Roman encroachments—I have ventured to adopt the name connected with nobler associations than those of mere slaughter [Byron's note], *Orlando Innamorato* is a 15th-century Italian epic of love and adventure.

3. Napoleon, here portrayed with many characteristics of the Byronic hero.

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Who wooed thee once, thy vassal, and became  
330 The flatterer of thy fierceness, till thou wert  
A god unto thyself; nor less the same  
To the astounded kingdoms all inert,  
Who deem'd thee for a time whate'er thou didst assert.

38

Oh, more or less than man—in high or low,  
335 Battling with nations, flying from the field;  
Now making monarchs' necks thy footstool, now  
More than thy meanest" soldier taught to yield; *lowest*  
An empire thou couldst crush, command, rebuild,  
But govern not thy pettiest passion, nor,  
340 However deeply in men's spirits skill'd,  
Look through thine own, nor curb the lust of war,  
Nor learn that tempted Fate will leave the loftiest star.

39

Yet well thy soul hath brook'd the turning tide  
With that untaught innate philosophy,  
345 Which, be it wisdom, coldness, or deep pride,  
Is gall and wormwood to an enemy.  
When the whole host of hatred stood hard by,  
To watch and mock thee shrinking, thou hast smiled  
With a sedate and all-enduring eye;—  
350 When Fortune fled her spoil'd and favourite child,  
He stood unbowed beneath the ills upon him piled.

40

Sager than in thy fortunes; for in them  
Ambition steel'd thee on too far to show  
That just habitual scorn which could contemn  
355 Men and their thoughts; 'twas wise to feel, not so  
To wear it ever on thy lip and brow,  
And spurn the instruments thou wert to use  
Till they were turn'd unto thine overthrow:  
'Tis but a worthless world to win or lose;  
360 So hath it proved to thee, and all such lot who choose.<sup>4</sup>

41

If, like a tower upon a headlong rock,  
Thou hadst been made to stand or fall alone,  
Such scorn of man had help'd to brave the shock;  
But men's thoughts were the steps which paved thy throne,  
365 *Their* admiration thy best weapon shone;  
The part of Philip's son<sup>5</sup> was thine, not then  
(Unless aside thy purple had been thrown)  
Like stern Diogenes<sup>6</sup> to mock at men;  
For sceptred cynics earth were far too wide a den.

4. An inversion: "all who choose such lot" (i.e., who choose to play such a game of chance).

5. Alexander the Great, son of Philip of Macedon.

6. The Greek philosopher of Cynicism, contem-

porary of Alexander. It is related that Alexander was so struck by his independence of mind that he said, "If I were not Alexander, I should wish to be Diogenes."

42

370 But quiet to quick bosoms is a hell,  
And *there* hath been thy bane; there is a fire  
And motion of the soul which will not dwell  
In its own narrow being, but aspire  
Beyond the fitting medium of desire;  
375 And, but once kindled, quenchless evermore,  
Preys upon high adventure, nor can tire  
Of aught but rest; a fever at the core,  
Fatal to him who bears, to all who ever bore.

43

380 This makes the madmen who have made men mad  
By their contagion; Conquerors and Kings,  
Founders of sects and systems, to whom add  
Sophists,<sup>7</sup> Bards, Statesmen, all unquiet things  
Which stir too strongly the soul's secret springs,  
And are themselves the fools to those they fool;  
385 Envied, yet how unenviable! what stings  
Are theirs! One breast laid open were a school  
Which would unteach mankind the lust to shine or rule:

44

390 Their breath is agitation, and their life  
A storm whereon they ride, to sink at last,  
And yet so nurs'd and bigotted to strife,  
That should their days, surviving perils past,  
Melt to calm twilight, they feel overcast  
With sorrow and supineness, and so die;  
Even as a flame unfed, which runs to waste  
395 With its own flickering, or a sword laid by  
Which eats into itself, and rusts ingloriously.

45

400 He who ascends to mountain-tops, shall find  
The loftiest peaks most wrapt in clouds and snow;  
He who surpasses or subdues mankind,  
Must look down on the hate of those below.  
Though high *above* the sun of glory glow,  
And far *beneath* the earth and ocean spread,  
*Round* him are icy rocks, and loudly blow  
Contending tempests on his naked head,  
405 And thus reward the toils which to those summits led.<sup>8</sup>

s . s

52

460 Thus Harold inly said, and pass'd along,  
Yet not insensibly to all which here

7. Learned men. But the term often carries a derogatory sense—thinkers with a penchant for tricky reasoning.

8. In the stanzas here omitted, Harold is sent sailing up the Rhine, meditating on the "thousand battles" that "have assailed thy banks."

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Awoke the jocund birds to early song  
In glens which might have made even exile dear:  
Though on his brow were graven lines austere,  
465 And tranquil sternness which had ta'en the place  
Of feelings fierier far but less severe,  
Joy was not always absent from his face,  
But o'er it in such scenes would steal with transient trace.

53

470 Nor was all love shut from him, though his days  
Of passion had consumed themselves to dust.  
It is in vain that we would coldly gaze  
On such as smile upon us; the heart must  
Leap kindly back to kindness, though disgust  
Hath wean'd it from all worldlings: thus he felt,  
475 For there was soft remembrance, and sweet trust  
In one fond breast,<sup>9</sup> to which his own would melt,  
And in its tenderer hour on that his bosom dwelt.

54

480 And he had learn'd to love, — I know not why,  
For this in such as him seems strange of mood, —  
The helpless looks of blooming infancy,  
Even in its earliest nurture; what subdued,  
To change like this, a mind so far imbued  
With scorn of man, it little boots to know;  
But thus it was; and though in solitude  
485 Small power the nipp'd affections have to grow,  
In him this glowed when all beside had ceased to glow.

55

490 And there was one soft breast, as hath been said,  
Which unto his was bound by stronger ties  
Than the church links withal; and, though unwed,  
*That* love was pure, and, far above disguise,  
Had stood the test of mortal enmities  
Still undivided, and cemented more  
By peril, dreaded most in female eyes;  
But this was firm, and from a foreign shore  
495 Well to that heart might his these absent greetings pour!

. . .

[SWITZERLAND]<sup>1</sup>

68

645 Lake Leman<sup>o</sup> woos me with its crystal face,  
The mirror where the stars and mountains view

*Geneva*

9. Commentators agree that the reference is to Byron's half-sister, Augusta Leigh.

1. Byron with his traveling companion and physician, John Polidori, spent the gloomy summer of 1816 near Geneva, in a villa rented for its proximity to the household that Percy Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin (who would marry Shelley at the end of the year), and her half-sister Claire Clairmont had set up there. The famous ghost-

story-telling contest in which these five participated, and which saw the genesis of both *Frankenstein* and Polidori's "The Vampyre," took place that June. The Shelley household's involvement in *Childe Harold* is extensive. The fair copy of this canto was in fact written out by Claire, and Percy would eventually deliver it to Byron's publisher in London.

The stillness of their aspect in each trace  
Its clear depth yields of their far height and hue:  
There is too much of man here, to look through  
With a fit mind the might which I behold;  
650 But soon in me shall Loneliness renew  
Thoughts hid, but not less cherish'd than of old,  
Ere mingling with the herd had penn'd me in their fold.

69

To fly from, need not be to hate, mankind;  
All are not fit with them to stir and toil,  
655 Nor is it discontent to keep the mind  
Deep in its fountain, lest it overboil  
In the hot throng, where we become the spoil  
Of our infection, till too late and long  
We may deplore and struggle with the coil,<sup>0</sup> *tumult*  
660 In wretched interchange of wrong for wrong  
'Midst a contentious world, striving where none are strong.

70

There, in a moment, we may plunge our years  
In fatal penitence, and in the blight  
Of our own soul, turn all our blood to tears,  
665 And colour things to come with hues of Night;  
The race of life becomes a hopeless flight  
To those that walk in darkness: on the sea,  
The boldest steer but where their ports invite,  
But there are wanderers o'er Eternity  
670 Whose bark drives on and on, and anchored ne'er shall be.

71

Is it not better, then, to be alone,  
And love Earth only for its earthly sake?  
By the blue rushing of the arrowy Rhone,<sup>2</sup>  
Or the pure bosom of its nursing lake,  
675 Which feeds it as a mother who doth make  
A fair but froward infant her own care,  
Kissing its cries away as these awake;—  
Is it not better thus our lives to wear,  
Than join the crushing crowd, doom'd to inflict or bear?

72

680 I live not in myself, but I become  
Portion of that around me; and to me,  
High mountains are a feeling, but the hum  
Of human cities torture: I can see  
Nothing to loathe in nature, save to be  
685 A link reluctant in a fleshly chain,  
Class'd among creatures, when the soul can flee,  
And with the sky, the peak, the heaving plain  
Of ocean, or the stars, mingle, and not in vain.<sup>3</sup>

2. River rising in Switzerland and flowing through France into the Mediterranean.

3. During the tour around Lake Geneva that they took in late June 1816, Percy Shelley introduced

Byron to the poetry of Wordsworth and Wordsworth's concepts of nature. Those ideas are reflected in canto 3, but the voice is Byron's own. For his comment on being "half mad" while writing

630 / GEORGE GORDON, LORD BYRON. -->"

73

And thus I am absorb'd, and this is life:  
690 I look upon the peopled desert past,  
As on a place of agony and strife,  
Where, for some sin, to Sorrow I was cast,  
To act and suffer, but remount at last  
With a fresh pinion; which I feel to spring,  
695 Though young, yet waxing vigorous, as the blast  
Which it would cope with, on delighted wing,  
Spurning the clay-cold bonds which round our being cling.

74

And when, at length, the mind shall be all free  
From what it hates in this degraded form,  
700 Reft of its carnal life, save what shall be  
Existent happier in the fly and worm, —  
When elements to elements conform,  
And dust is as it should be, shall I not  
Feel all I see, less dazzling, but more warm?  
705 The bodiless thought? the Spirit of each spot?  
Of which, even now, I share at times the immortal lot?

75

Are not the mountains, waves, and skies, a part  
Of me and of my soul, as I of them?  
Is not the love of these deep in my heart  
710 With a pure passion? should I not contemn  
All objects, if compared with these? and stem  
A tide of suffering, rather than forego  
Such feelings for the hard and worldly phlegm  
Of those whose eyes are only turn'd below,  
715 Gazing upon the ground, with thoughts which dare not glow?

76

But this is not my theme; and I return  
To that which is immediate, and require  
Those who find contemplation in the urn,<sup>4</sup>  
To look on One,<sup>5</sup> whose dust was once all fire,  
720 A native of the land where I respire  
The clear air for a while — a passing guest,  
Where he became a being, — whose desire  
Was to be glorious; 'twas a foolish quest,  
The which to gain and keep, he sacrificed all rest.

77

Here the self-torturing sophist, wild Rousseau,  
The apostle of affliction, he who threw  
Enchantment over passion, and from woe  
Wrung overwhelming eloquence, first drew  
The breath which made him wretched; yet he knew  
730 How to make madness beautiful, and cast

canto 3, see his letter to Thomas Moore, January 28, 1817 (p. 736).

4. I.e., those who find matter for meditation in an urn containing the ashes of the dead.

5. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who had been born in Geneva in 1712. Byron's characterization is based on Rousseau's novel *La Nouvelle Heloise* and autobiographical *Confessions*.

O'er erring deeds and thoughts, a heavenly hue  
Of words, like sunbeams, dazzling as they past  
The eyes, which o'er them shed tears feelingly and fast.

78

735 His love was passion's essence—as a tree  
On fire by lightning; with ethereal flame  
Kindled he was, and blasted; for to be  
Thus, and enamoured, were in him the same.  
But his was not the love of living dame,  
Nor of the dead who rise upon our dreams,  
740 But of ideal beauty, which became  
In him existence, and o'erflowing teems  
Along his burning page, distempered though it seems.

3 5

85

800 Clear, placid Leman! thy contrasted lake,  
With the wild world I dwelt in, is a thing  
Which warns me, with its stillness, to forsake  
Earth's troubled waters for a purer spring.  
This quiet sail is as a noiseless wing  
To waft me from distraction; once I loved  
Torn ocean's roar, but thy soft murmuring  
Sounds sweet as if a sister's voice reproved,  
so: That I with stern delights should e'er have been so moved.

86

810 It is the hush of night, and all between  
Thy margin and the mountains, dusk, yet clear,  
Mellowed and mingling, yet distinctly seen,  
Save darken'd Jura,<sup>6</sup> whose capt heights appear  
Precipitously steep; and drawing near,  
There breathes a living fragrance from the shore,  
Of flowers yet fresh with childhood; on the ear  
Drops the light drip of the suspended oar,  
Or chirps the grasshopper one good-night carol more;

87

820 He is an evening reveller, who makes  
His life an infancy, and sings his fill;  
At intervals, some bird from out the brakes," *thickets*  
Starts into voice a moment, then is still.  
There seems a floating whisper on the hill,  
But that is fancy, for the starlight dews  
All silently their tears of love instil,  
Weeping themselves away, till they infuse  
Deep into Nature's breast the spirit of her hues.

88

825 Ye stars! which are the poetry of heaven!  
If in your bright leaves we would read the fate

6. The mountain range between Switzerland and France, visible from Lake Geneva.

632 / GEORGE GORDON, LORD BYRON. -->"

Of men and empires, — 'tis to be forgiven,  
That in our aspirations to be great,  
Our destinies o'erleap their mortal state,  
And claim a kindred with you; for ye are  
830 A beauty and a mystery, and create  
In us such love and reverence from afar,  
That fortune, fame, power, life, have named themselves a star.

89

All heaven and earth are still — though not in sleep,  
But breathless, as we grow when feeling most;  
835 And silent, as we stand in thoughts too deep: —  
All heaven and earth are still: From the high host  
Of stars, to the lull'd lake and mountain-coast,  
All is centered in a life intense,  
Where not a beam, nor air, nor leaf is lost,  
840 But hath a part of being, and a sense  
Of that which is of all Creator and defence.

90

Then stirs the feeling infinite, so felt  
In solitude, where we are *least* alone;  
A truth, which through our being then doth melt  
845 And purifies from self: it is a tone,  
The soul and source of music, which makes known  
Eternal harmony, and sheds a charm,  
Like to the fabled Cytherea's zone,<sup>7</sup>  
Binding all things with beauty; — 'twould disarm  
850 The spectre Death, had he substantial power to harm.

91

Not vainly did the early Persian make  
His altar the high places and the peak  
Of earth-o'ergazing mountains, and thus take<sup>8</sup>  
A fit and unwall'd temple, there to seek  
855 The Spirit, in whose honour shrines are weak,  
Uprear'd of human hands. Come, and compare  
Columns and idol-dwellings, Goth or Greek,  
With Nature's realms of worship, earth and air,  
Nor fix on fond abodes to circumscribe thy prayer!

92

860 The sky is changed! — and such a change! Oh night,  
And storm, and darkness, ye are wondrous strong,  
Yet lovely in your strength, as is the fight  
Of a dark eye in woman! Far along,  
From peak to peak, the rattling crags among  
865 Leaps the live thunder! Not from one lone cloud,  
But every mountain now hath found a tongue,  
And Jura answers, through her misty shroud,  
Back to the joyous Alps, who call to her aloud!

7. The sash of Venus, which conferred the power to attract love.

8. It is to be recollected, that the most beautiful

and impressive doctrines of the Founder of Christianity were delivered, not in the *Temple*, but on the *Mount* [Byron's note].



93

And this is in the night:—Most glorious night!  
870 Thou wert not sent for slumber! let me be  
A sharer in thy fierce and far delight,—  
A portion of the tempest and of thee!  
How the lit lake shines, a phosphoric sea,  
And the big rain comes dancing to the earth!  
875 And now again 'tis black,—and now, the glee  
Of the loud hills shakes with its mountain-mirth,  
As if they did rejoice o'er a young earthquake's birth.

94

Now, where the swift Rhone cleaves his way between  
Heights which appear as lovers who have parted  
880 In hate, whose mining depths so intervene,  
That they can meet no more, though broken-hearted;  
Though in their souls, which thus each other thwarted,  
Love was the very root of the fond rage  
Which blighted their life's bloom, and then departed:—  
885 Itself expired, but leaving them an age  
Of years all winters,—war within themselves to wage.

95

Now, where the quick Rhone thus hath cleft his way,  
The mightiest of the storms hath ta'en his stand:  
For here, not one, but many, make their play,  
890 And fling their thunder-bolts from hand to hand,  
Flashing and cast around: of all the band,  
The brightest through these parted hills hath fork'd  
His lightnings,—as if he did understand,  
That in such gaps as desolation work'd,  
895 There the hot shaft should blast whatever therein lurk'd.

96

Sky, mountains, river, winds, lake, lightnings! ye!  
With night, and clouds, and thunder, and a soul  
To make these felt and feeling, well may be  
Things that have made me watchful; the far roll  
900 Of your departing voices, is the knoll<sup>9</sup>  
Of what in me is sleepless,—if I rest.  
But where of ye, oh tempests! is the goal?  
Are ye like those within the human breast?  
Or do ye find, at length, like eagles, some high nest?

97

905 Could I embody and unbosom now  
That which is most within me,—could I wreak  
My thoughts upon expression, and thus throw  
Soul, heart, mind, passions, feelings, strong or weak,  
All that I would have sought, and all I seek,  
910 Bear, know, feel, and yet breathe—into *one* word,  
And that one word were Lightning, I would speak;

9. Knell (old form).

634 / GEORGE GORDON, LORD BYRON. -->"

But as it is, I live and die unheard,  
With a most voiceless thought, sheathing it as a sword.

98

The morn is up again, the dewy morn,  
915 With breath all incense, and with cheek all bloom,  
Laughing the clouds away with playful scorn,  
And living as if earth contain'd no tomb, —  
And glowing into day: we may resume  
The march of our existence: and thus I,  
920 Still on thy shores, fair Leman! may find room  
And food for meditation, nor pass by  
Much, that may give us pause, unpodered fittingly.

» 3

I have not loved the world, nor the world me;  
1050 I have not flattered its rank breath, nor bow'd  
To its idolatries a patient knee, —  
Nor coin'd my cheek to smiles, — nor cried aloud  
In worship of an echo; in the crowd  
They could not deem me one of such; I stood  
1055 Among them, but not of them; in a shroud  
Of thoughts which were not their thoughts, and still could,  
Had I not filed<sup>1</sup> my mind, which thus itself subdued.

114

I have not loved the world, nor the world me, —  
But let us part fair foes; I do believe,  
1060 Though I have found them not, that there may be  
Words which are things, — hopes which will not deceive,  
And virtues which are merciful, nor weave  
Snares for the failing: I would also deem  
O'er others' griefs that some sincerely grieve;  
1065 That two, or one, are almost what they seem, —  
That goodness is no name, and happiness no dream.

" 5

My daughter! with thy name this song begun —  
My daughter! with thy name thus much shall end —  
I see thee not, — I hear thee not, — but none  
1070 Can be so wrapt in thee; thou art the friend  
To whom the shadows of far years extend:  
Albeit my brow thou never should'st behold,  
My voice shall with thy future visions blend,  
And reach into thy heart, — when mine is cold, —  
1075 A token and a tone, even from thy father's mould.

116

To aid thy mind's development, — to watch  
Thy dawn of little joys, — to sit and see

1. Defiled. In a note Byron refers to *Macbeth* 3.1.66 ("For Banquo's issue have I filed my mind").

Almost thy very growth, – to view thee catch  
Knowledge of objects, – wonders yet to thee!  
1080 To hold thee lightly on a gentle knee,  
And print on thy soft cheek a parent's kiss, –  
This, it should seem, was not reserv'd for me;  
Yet this was in my nature: – as it is,  
I know not what is there, yet something like to this.

117

1085 Yet, though dull Hate as duty should be taught,  
I know that thou wilt love me; though my name  
Should be shut from thee, as a spell still fraught  
With desolation, – and a broken claim:  
Though the grave closed between us, – 'twere the same,  
1090 I know that thou wilt love me; though to drain  
*My* blood from out thy being, were an aim,  
And an attainment, – all would be in vain, –  
Still thou would'st love me, still that more than life retain.

118

The child of love, – though born in bitterness,  
1095 And nurtured in convulsion, – of thy sire  
These were the elements, – and thine no less.  
As yet such are around thee, – but thy fire  
Shall be more tempered, and thy hope far higher.  
Sweet be thy cradled slumbers! O'er the sea,  
1100 And from the mountains where I now respire,  
Fain would I waft such blessing upon thee,  
As, with a sigh, I deem thou might'st have been to me!

1812, 1816

**Manfred** *Manfred* is Byron's first dramatic work. As its subtitle, "A Dramatic Poem," indicates, it was not intended to be produced on the stage; Byron also referred to it as a "metaphysical" drama – that is, a drama of ideas. He began writing it in the autumn of 1816 while living in the Swiss Alps, whose grandeur stimulated his imagination; he finished the drama the following year in Italy.

Manfred's literary forebears include the villains of Gothic fiction (another *Manfred* can be found in Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*; see p. 579) and of the Gothic dramas Byron had encountered during his time on the board of managers of London's Drury Lane Theatre. *Manfred* also shares traits with the Greek Titan Prometheus, rebel against Zeus, ruler of the gods; Milton's Satan; Ahasuerus, the legendary Wandering Jew who, having ridiculed Christ as he bore the Cross to Calvary, is doomed to live until Christ's Second Coming; and Faust, who yielded his soul to the devil in exchange for superhuman powers. Byron denied that he had ever heard of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, and because he knew no German he had not read Goethe's *Faust*, of which part 1 had been published in 1808. But during an August 1816 visit to Byron and the Shelley household, Matthew Lewis (author of the Gothic novel *The Monk*; see pp. 595 and 602) had read parts of *Faust* to him aloud, translating as he went, and Byron worked memories of this oral translation into his own drama in a way that evoked Goethe's admiration.

Like Byron's earlier heroes, Childe Harold and the protagonists of some of his