

## Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Canto the Third

“... afin que cette application vous forçât à penser à autre chose. Il n'y a en vérité de remède que celui-là et le temps.”<sup>17</sup> – *Lettre du Roi de Prusse et de M. D'Alembert.*

### 1.

Is thy face like thy Mother's? my fair child  
Ada!<sup>18</sup> 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 –  
                                Awaking with a start,   5  
The Waters heave around me;<sup>19</sup> and on high  
The Winds lift up their voices: I depart,  
Whither I know not<sup>20</sup> – but the hour's gone by,  
When Albion's lessening shores could grieve or glad mine eye.<sup>21</sup>

### 2.

Once more upon the Waters! yet once more!   10  
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 strained mast should quiver as a reed,  
And the rent canvas fluttering strew the gale,   15  
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, or tempest's breath prevail.

### 3.

In my Youth's summer I did sing of One,  
The wandering Outlaw of his own dark mind;   20  
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,  
Which, ebbing, leave a sterile track behind,   25  
O'er which all heavily the journeying Years  
Plod the last sands of life – where not a flower appears.

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**17:** “... so that this hard work will force you to think of other things. There is in truth no remedy other than that, and time.” Frederick the Great is writing to d'Alembert about the death of his friend and (perhaps) lover, Julie de Lespinasse.

**18:** Augusta Ada, B.'s only legitimate child, was born on December 10th 1815.

**19:** We are to imagine that B. is crossing the channel.

**20:** In fact he's going to Ostend.

**21:** Compare *Childe Harold's Farewell* in Canto I – except that there he has no children to miss.

## 4.

Since my young days of passion – joy – or pain –  
 Perchance my heart and harp have lost a string,  
 And both may jar: it may be, that in vain 30  
 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  
 Forgetfulness<sup>22</sup> around me – it shall seem 35  
 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  
 Can Love – or Sorrow – Fame – Ambition – Strife, 40  
 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  
 Still unimpaired, though old, in the Soul's haunted cell. 45

## 6.

'Tis to create, and in creating live  
 A being more intense, that we endow  
 With form our fancy,<sup>23</sup> gaining as we give  
 The life we image, even as I do now.  
 What am *I*? Nothing – but not so art thou, 50  
 Soul of my thought! with whom I traverse earth,  
 Invisible but gazing, as I glow  
 Mixed with thy Spirit, blended with thy birth,  
 And feeling still with thee in my crushed feelings' dearth.

## 7.

Yet must I think less wildly; I *have* thought 55  
 Too long and darkly, till my brain became,  
 In its own eddy boiling and o'erwrought,  
 A whirling gulph of phantasy and flame:  
 And thus, untaught in youth my heart to tame,  
 My Springs of life were poisoned. 'Tis too late, 60  
 Yet am I changed; though still enough the same  
 In strength to bear what Time cannot abate,  
 And feed on bitter fruits without accusing Fate.

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**22:** Compare *Manfred*, I, i, 136: *Spirits*: What would'st thou with us, Son of mortals – Say? *Manfred*: Forgetfulness.

**23:** Compare *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, V, i, 16-17: *And give to airy nothing / A local habitation and a name*. The line is echoed at CHP IV 37.

**8.**

Something too much of this<sup>24</sup> – but now 'tis past,  
 And the Spell closes with its silent seal. 65  
 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 altered him  
 In soul and aspect as in age; Years steal 70  
 Fire from the mind as Vigour from the limb;  
 And life's enchanted cup but sparkles near the brim.

**9.**

His had been quaffed too quickly, and he found  
 The dregs were Wormwood; but he filled again,  
 And from a purer fount, on holier ground, 75  
 And deemed its Spring perpetual; but in vain!  
 Still round him clung invisibly a chain  
 Which galled for ever, fettering though unseen,  
 And heavy though it clanked not; worn with Pain,  
 Which pined although it spoke not, and grew keen, 80  
 Entering with every step he took through many a scene.

**10.**

Secure in guarded coldness, he had mixed  
 Again in fancied safety with his kind,  
 And deemed his spirit now so firmly fixed  
 And sheathed with an invulnerable mind, 85  
 That, if no Joy, no Sorrow lurked behind;  
 And He, as one, might 'midst the many stand  
 Unheeded, searching through the crowd to find  
 Fit speculation; such as in strange land  
 He found in wonder-works of God and Nature's hand. 90

**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?  
 Who can contemplate Fame through clouds unfold 95  
 The Star which rises o'er her steep – nor climb?  
 Harold, once more within the vortex, rolled  
 On with the giddy circle, chasing Time,  
 Yet with a nobler aim than in his Youth's fond prime.

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24: *Hamlet*, III, ii, 72.

## 12.

But soon he knew himself the most unfit 100  
 Of men to herd with Man<sup>25</sup> – with whom he held  
 Little in common; untaught to submit  
 His thoughts to others, though his Soul was quelled  
 In youth by his own thoughts; still uncompelled,  
 He would not yield dominion of his mind 105  
 To Spirits against whom his own rebelled;<sup>26</sup>  
 Proud though in desolation; which could find  
 A life within itself, to breathe without mankind.

## 13.

Where rose the Mountains, there to him were friends;  
 Where rolled the Ocean, thereon was his home; 110  
 Where a blue Sky, and glowing Clime, extends,  
 He had the passion and the power to roam;  
 The desert – forest – cavern – breaker's foam,  
 Were unto him Companionship; they spake  
 A mutual language, clearer than the tome 115  
 Of his land's tongue, which he would oft forsake  
 For Nature's pages glassed by sunbeams on the Lake.

## 14.

Like the Chaldean, he could watch the Stars,  
 Till he had peopled them with beings bright  
 As their own beams; and Earth, and earth-born jars, 120  
 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  
 To which it mounts, as if to break the link 125  
 That keeps us from yon heaven which woos us to its brink.

## 15.

But in Man's dwellings he became a thing  
 Restless and worn, and stern and wearisome,  
 Drooped as a wild-born Falcon with clipped wing,  
 To whom the boundless air alone were home: 130  
 Then came his fit again,<sup>27</sup> which to o'ercome,  
 As eagerly the barred-up bird will beat  
 His breast and beak against his wiry dome  
 Till the blood tinge his plumage, so the heat  
 Of his impeded Soul would through his bosom eat. 135

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25: Compare *Manfred*, III i, 121-2: *I disdained to mingle with / A herd, though to be leader, and of Wolves.*

26: Compare *Manfred*'s refusal to submit to the demons in II, iv.

27: *Macbeth*, III, iii, 21.

## 16.

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, 140  
 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.

## 17.

Stop! – for thy tread is on an Empire's dust!<sup>28</sup> 145  
 An Earthquake's spoil is sepulchred below!  
 Is the spot marked with no Colossal bust?  
 Nor Column trophied for triumphal show?  
 None; but the moral's truth tells simpler so:  
 As the ground was before, thus let it be; – 150  
 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?

## 18.

And Harold stands upon this place of skulls,  
 The grave of France, the deadly Waterloo;<sup>29</sup> 155  
 How in an hour the Power which gave annuls  
 Its gifts, transferring fame as fleeting too!  
 In "pride of place" here last the Eagle flew, \*  
 Then tore with bloody talon the rent plain,  
 Pierced by the shaft of banded nations through; 160  
 Ambition's life and labours all were vain;  
 He wears the shattered links of the world's broken chain.

\* "Pride of place" is a term in falconry, and means the highest pitch of flight. – See *Macbeth*, &c

"A Falcon towering in her pride of place  
 Was by a mousing Owl hawked at and killed."<sup>30</sup>

## 19.

Fit retribution – Gaul may champ the bit  
 And foam in fetters – but is Earth more free?  
 Did nations combat to make *One* submit; 165  
 Or league to teach all kings true Sovereignty?  
 What! shall reviving Thraldom again be  
 The patched-up Idol of enlightened days?  
 Shall we, who struck the Lion down, shall we  
 Pay the wolf homage?<sup>31</sup> proffering lowly gaze 170  
 And servile knees to thrones? No; *prove* before ye praise!

**28:** A sudden transition of the kind B. often makes in *CHP* I and II.

**29:** The battle had been fought on June 18th of the previous year (1815). An international force under Wellington and Blucher beat the French under Napoleon.

**30:** *Macbeth*, II, iv, 12-13.

**31:** The Lion is Napoleon, the Wolf, Louis XVIII (and the rest of the Allied Sovereigns).