

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage

A poetic journey through Europe by Lord Byron, following the disenchanted wanderer Childe Harold as he searches for meaning in a changing world.



A travelogue



The modern sceptic's version of pilgrimage

A quest for meaning in a Europe no longer centred on Christianity or fired with the French revolutionaries' secular belief in human perfectability.



The Protagonist, Harold: Byron's alter ego

A libertine satiated with sin. A libertine, an embittered sceptic, and anti-hero, the obverse of the Christian knight idealised in the Middle Age. Also a man of feeling.



The tone

Sardonic mockery and serious concern. The pilgrim's paradoxical search for an ideal in spite of his pessimistic awareness of the tarnished nature of the fallen world, his elegiac lament for the heroism of the past, this very contradictory mixture of the fervour and despair was the essence of Byronism.



Spenserian stanza

ABABBCBCC

Canto I

The first canto introduces the character of Childe Harold and begins his journey through Portugal and Spain, with specific commentary on historical events like the Convention of Cintra.



Introduction

Stanzas 1-4 introduce our protagonist, a melancholy young nobleman who, jaded with his life of pleasure, sets off on his pilgrimage.



Portugal Journey

Harold's travels through Portugal reveal Byron's contempt for British policy in the Peninsular War.



Convention of Cintra

Stanzas 25-26 criticize the controversial agreement that allowed French forces to evacuate Portugal with weapons and loot.



Spanish Travels

Harold's journey continues through Spain, where Byron explores themes of national character and the impact of war.

Canto II

The second canto follows Harold's journey through Albania and Greece, with notable reflections on Ali Pacha's military forces and the condition of Greece under Ottoman rule.



On Ali Pacha's Army

Stanza 72 explores Harold's observations of Ali Pacha's formidable military forces in Albania, reflecting Byron's fascination with this powerful regional leader.



On Greece

Stanza 73 contains Harold's melancholic reflections on Greece's fallen grandeur under Ottoman rule, lamenting the contrast between its glorious past and present subjugation.



Byron's Journey

Canto II draws heavily from Byron's own travels through these regions in 1809-1811, where he was warmly received by Ali Pacha and developed his lifelong philhellenism.