

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Study Guide



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Summary

Byron began *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* on his first trip abroad, when he and Hobhouse toured Spain, Portugal, Albania, and Greece. It was originally titled "*Childe Burun*"; "Childe" refers to a young nobleman who has not yet officially taken his title, and "Burun" is an earlier form of Byron's own name. Inspired by his recent reading of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590, 1596), Byron chose to employ the nine-line Spenserian stanza for the major part of this work.

The first two cantos were published in 1812, and Byron's ensuing popularity among the social and literary circles of London was unprecedented, in part because the public insisted—with some accuracy and despite Byron's prefatory disclaimer to the contrary—upon identifying the intriguing Harold as Byron himself. Byron's own confusion of the two, however, is evident in his frequent dropping of the story line of the work to engage in repeated authorial digressions, which themselves intrude on the almost gratuitous plot. Harold is a young, though not inexperienced, Englishman who is compelled to flee Britain, although, the reader is told, it is in fact his own psyche he is trying to escape. The young man has a mysterious background, an unspeakably painful secret in his past. Perhaps, it is suggested, the secret is of some illicit love. With Harold, Byron introduces the first of his many Byronic heroes.

In canto 1, Harold leaves England, having lived a life of sensuous indulgence. He bids farewell to no friends or family, not even to his mother and sister, although he loves them both deeply. Landing in Portugal, Harold proceeds to visit various battlegrounds across Europe, thus giving Byron as narrator the opportunity to digress on historical, political, and even moral issues of the recent Peninsular War in which England served to help the Spanish resist the French invasion, an event that portended the end of Napoleon I's tyranny. As he looks upon the towns that were devastated by Napoleon's army, Byron laments the loss of life and champions those who nobly fought for the preservation of liberty. Byron praises the courageous women of the Spanish province of Aragon who joined the men in resisting an invading French army. Though these women were not trained to be warriors, like the mythological Amazons, but were taught to love, they nevertheless proved themselves to be strong and brave; thus, Byron suggests, they emerge far more beautiful than the women of other countries such as England.

In Spain, Harold witnesses a Sunday bullfight in one of the most famous passages from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, in which Byron is clearly at the same time fascinated and repelled by this violent yet graceful sport. Though Harold is moved by the beauty and song of the festivities around him, he cannot participate, for his pain alienates him from the joys of human activity. He remains a spectator. Singing a ballad, "To Inez," Harold mourns the futility of running away when it is his own "secret woe" that he is attempting to escape. Comparing himself to the "Wandering Jew" of medieval legend who, having mocked Christ, is doomed to roam the earth eternally, seeking the peace of death, Harold bemoans the "hell" that lies hidden in the human

heart.

Canto 2 opens with a meditation upon the contributions of classical Greece, a salute prompted by Harold's visit to the Acropolis. As Harold views the ruins of Greece's high achievements, Byron interprets them as reflections of the present loss of Greek freedom, thus foreshadowing his later involvement in the cause of Greek independence. Descriptions of the mysterious land of Albania in this canto represent one of the earliest authentic representations of this exotic country by an Englishman.

Canto 3 begins with Byron sadly recalling his daughter, Ada, whom he has not seen since the breakup of his marriage. Byron returns to the story of Harold, first warning readers that the young hero has greatly changed since the publication of the first two cantos. During the interim, Byron has endured the painful separation and the scandal concerning his relationship with Augusta, all of which essentially forced him to leave England. His bitterness is evident in the far darker tone of canto 3, and the character of Harold and that of the narrator, never strikingly different in temperament, now are more clearly merged.

Still unable to completely detach himself from feeling the pangs of human compassion, Harold flees to the solitude of natural surroundings, finding nature to be the one true consoler. He feels a communication with the desert, the forest, the ocean, the mountains. Finding Harold at the site of the Battle of Waterloo, "the grave of France," Byron resumes the theme of Napoleon's despotism and takes the opportunity to examine tyranny in general. Praising the heroes of that fateful and momentous battle, Byron blames Napoleon's extremism, arguing that moderation would have prevented the disastrous results of a once noble plan. Harold then travels to Germany, where he still is not immune to feelings of love and joy, however fleeting.

Visiting the Swiss Alps leads Harold to the sites of other battles. Lake Lemman (Lake Geneva) recalls to Byron the great French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, one of the forerunners of the Romantic movement. This section, it has often been noted, has a distinctly Shelleyan mood, and indeed Byron wrote it while visiting Percy Bysshe Shelley. Byron explores the pantheistic philosophies of William Wordsworth, Shelley, and Rousseau and expresses feelings of oneness with nature, though he ultimately rejects their ideas. These feelings, furthermore, lead him to consider his feelings of alienation in the world of humankind. Insisting that he is neither cynical nor completely disillusioned, Byron insists that he believes that there are one or two people who are "almost what they seem" and that happiness and goodness are possible. Byron concludes the canto as he begins it, lamenting his absence from Ada, imagining what it would be like to share in her development, to watch her grow.

Canto 4 takes Harold to Italy, at first to Venice, decaying yet still beautiful because its spirit is immortal. Byron confesses that he still has some love for his native country and that he hopes that he will be remembered there. If he dies on foreign soil, he confesses, his spirit will return to England. The canto concludes with Byron's famous apostrophe, or address, to the ocean.

Characters: Characters Discussed

Childe Harold

Childe Harold, a wandering young man. the term "childe," in medieval English, denoted a young man of the noble classes, about to enter knighthood. Harold begins the story as a rather desperate young man, engaged mostly in debauchery and drunkenness. He leaves England ("Albion's land") in a quest for truth about the world, or at least about himself. He travels by sea to Portugal, Spain, France, and Germany, and finally Greece and Italy. Throughout the journey, he is bewildered about the truth and never quite finds his way. He begins to find his way in Germany, on the banks of the Rhine. There, he finds a young woman with whom he can have a meaningful relationship, but he decides he is unworthy. He then travels to Greece, where he is astounded by

natural beauty once again but is appalled by the decadence to which the once great Greeks have fallen. In Rome, he finds a similar situation, and there he dies. Childe Harold is more of a metaphor than a real human being. He represents Lord Byron in some sense, but more important, he represents the fall of humankind from the glory of ancient times to the decadence that Byron perceives has befallen his own generation.

Harold's page

Harold's page, whose age is unclear. He is useful in the narrative only as the one person Harold seems to care about seriously as he leaves England. Apparently, though this is unclear, he does not accompany Harold on the journey. His major function in the poem is to suggest that Childe Harold, generally a callous individual, can show real love to a boy, even if he has difficulty showing such love to a grown woman.

Julia

Julia, Harold's first love on his travels. Julia is introduced about midway through the poem and is soon gone. She is the first nonsexual love object that Harold encounters, apart from his page. She is described as beautiful, and Harold describes himself as unworthy of her. Her principal task in the narrative is to provide the first platonic love for Harold. Knowing Julia changes him significantly. After he meets Julia, Harold has more to say about the beauties of nature and less to say about the evils of humankind.

Critical Essays: Critical Evaluation

Lord Byron was one of the greatest poets of the Romantic Era of British literature. He was a rebel, a malcontent, and a traveler. While Byron was writing *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, he was himself traveling; he visited all of the places he described in the poem. When the first two cantos were published in 1812, he became an overnight sensation. The poem made Byron famous in Europe. It was favorably reviewed in the leading periodicals of the time and translated into many languages.

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage is a poetic journal, recording what Byron, as Harold, sees, learns, and feels as he travels. Immediacy is provided by the use of the present tense. The poem is subtitled *A Romaunt*, and it is a romance in the sense of a narrative of adventure. It was published in three sections, over a span of six years, and Byron wrote other works in between. Since the poem first appeared, critics have disagreed as to its meaning and whether it should be considered as two separate poems, or even three. The first two cantos (the equivalent of chapters in prose) were published together in 1812 and are as much a travelogue as they are the story of a pilgrimage. Byron interrupts his narrative regularly to make political and sociological comments about his own time. Canto 3 (pb. 1916) and Canto 4 (pb. 1918) are also travelogues with commentaries about Byron's present. The cantos vary in length, ranging from 93 stanzas in the first to 186 stanzas in the fourth. Contained within the cantos are additional lyric poems, such as "Good Night" in Stanza 13 and "To Inez" in Stanza 84 of Canto 1.

According to his preface to the first two cantos, Byron intended the poem to be a long narrative poem in the style (and even the meter) of Edmund Spenser, a sixteenth century English poet. Using ancient forms was an interest of the Romantic poets such as John Keats, who wrote "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" (1820) as a ballad, using archaic language. In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, the language of the first two cantos is deliberately archaic. Byron uses Middle English words such as "whilome" and "hight," and the very title is intended to lend a medieval flavor to the work: "Childe" was originally a term used to refer to a young man approaching knighthood. Consequently, it is an appropriate word to describe Harold, since a knight's duty is to go on quests.

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage is in the tradition of a romantic quest, a mission that will prove the hero's courage and test his moral values. However, Harold, a libertine and cynic, is no medieval knight. On one level, the poem tells the story of Harold's journey, but "pilgrimage" is probably an inappropriate word for this journey. Harold never searches for anything specific; rather, he runs away from his past and tries, in the process, to find some meaning in life.

Although the poem is written in Spenserian stanzas and uses archaic language, there is a visible change in the meter and language beginning with Canto 3. By this canto, much of the archaic language is gone, and the verse itself begins to flow more naturally. Finally, in Canto 4, the medieval language is almost entirely gone, replaced by the language that Byron spoke himself. Only a few outmoded words remain to preserve some of the flavor of the earlier sections and try to give some coherence to the whole.

Travelogues were popular literary forms in the early nineteenth century, but *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is more than a travelogue. It is like a diary in which Harold not only writes about places and people but also comments on the beauty of nature and human activities through history. The focus of these comments ranges from the creativity of ancient writers to a critique of the evolving political order in contemporary Europe. The poem includes reflections on nature and on social institutions, which are characteristic concerns of the Romantic poets. There are also powerful political messages, most of them having to do with the decadence Byron perceived in his own times as compared to the glorious past of ancient Greece and Rome. At a deeper level, Byron explores the question of human identity itself.

Many critics have insisted that, in *Childe Harold*, Byron was merely fictionalizing his own life. In his preface to the first two cantos, Byron insists that the narrator, Childe Harold, is fictitious. In the manuscript version of the cantos, however, the hero is named Childe Buron, an early form of Byron's family name. After reading the reviews of the poem, Byron wrote the "Addition to the Preface" in 1813, affirming that Harold was a "fictitious personage." However, Byron and Harold have much in common. This becomes increasingly obvious in the third and fourth cantos. In his 1818 letter to Hobhouse, prefacing Canto 4, Byron finally states what critics and readers have already surmised: that Childe Harold is Byron. In the introduction to Canto 4, Byron virtually disowns Harold, explaining that since almost everyone seems to assume that he is Byron's alter ego, there is no longer any point to keeping up the pretense.

It is essential to view *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* in its historical context. When it was written, the French Revolution had failed and Napoleon had assumed the robes of emperor. These events deeply disappointed the idealistic Romantics, who had seen the French Revolution and Napoleon as beacons leading the way to a bright new era of Republican liberty, equality, and brotherhood. Although Byron and many of his contemporaries longed for bygone days, they also emphasized the dignity of humankind and the importance of equality. The rise of Napoleon, his subsequent fall, and the return of the French monarchy were tragedies, as was the destruction of many ancient works and the barbarism of the Reign of Terror. Canto 3, in the stanzas on Waterloo, reflects on that battle and questions whether the earth is "more free" because of Napoleon's defeat, or whether the defeat of one tyrant simply means a return to an older tyranny. Like other liberals, such as William Blake and Percy Bysshe Shelley, Byron was against any type of tyranny. Some critics see Canto 4 as a political poem and a plea that Italy, which during Byron's time was a collection of states, be recognized as a cultural whole and throw off the tyranny of Austrian rule. Like other Romantic poets, Byron decries the unnaturalness of a people and a land subjected to an outside authority.

The influence of this poem on later literature has been great. There are no earlier or later versions of the specific tale, but its echoes are immense. In *Childe Harold*, the "Byronic hero" was born, a literary device that has lasted to the present day. The Byronic hero is essentially an antihero, alienated and rebellious. He is moody, passionate, and remorseful. Harold sees himself as a "wandering outlaw," and it is characteristic of this antihero that he needs to be forever traveling, trying to assuage his "deep hurt." The Byronic hero is full of guilt for past deeds yet is unrepentant. In Canto 1, the character of Harold is self-indulgent and judgmental,

but he becomes more human and sympathetic to others as his pilgrimage continues. Harold is deeply affected by a series of losses at the end of Canto 2, reflecting Byron's own loss of his mother and two close friends, who died while he was traveling. Canto 3, which is the emotional center of the poem, provides a clear picture of the Byronic hero. It begins with a heartfelt goodbye to his daughter Ada and England, as Harold once again departs into voluntary exile, echoing Byron's own final departure from England in 1816. Speaking more as Byron himself than as his character, he says goodbye to his daughter Augusta Ada, born a month before Byron and his wife Annabella Milbanke separated. He never sees her again.

Canto 3 also includes stanzas describing the poet. Characteristic of Romantics such as Shelley, Byron escapes into poetry. For him, writing is therapeutic, and in the poem his personal limitations are transcended. In creating the poem, the poet gains as he gives his ideas the physical form of words. As Harold, Byron sees himself as a rebel with little in common with humankind. He will not "yield dominion of his mind" to others, and he feels that he has little in common with others and can live his life "without mankind." Again, in the Romantic tradition, Harold finds companionship in nature; the mountains and the ocean are both friends and a home. Echoing Shelley, Byron describes nature as speaking a language he can share and, like William Wordsworth, the hero finds solace and renewal in nature.

As a part of the Romantic tradition, Byron creates a poet hero whose ultimate gift to humankind is the poem. Much like Shelley, Byron realizes how the poem itself can communicate his ideas beyond his lifetime. In Canto 3, stanzas 113 through 118, Byron again restates the position of the hero, alone and apart from the world. He repeats that the poem is his gift to Ada, his lost "child of love," and prays, since she can never know him, that she might discover him through his words.

Ultimately, Byron's basic goal in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is to explore the nature of humankind and humanity's relation to nature. The descriptions of natural and ancient architectural beauty are moving and are fine examples of Romantic poetry. Byron's long forays into social criticism are even more fascinating. For Harold (Byron), the poem chronicles a journey from despair to self-renewal.

Critical Essays: Childe Harold's Pilgrimage

Byron was already an established writer by 1812, but with this work he replaced Sir Walter Scott as England's most popular poet. His audience was eager for material dealing with the Near East, and this he supplied. Of particular interest were his vivid descriptions of Albania, which Byron was one of the first Englishmen to visit.

The poem also created the popular Byronic hero--proud, brilliant, and attractive, but also bored, gloomy, lonely, disillusioned, and isolated from the rest of humanity. This figure, who narrates the poem, provides much of whatever unity the wide-ranging poem possesses.

This hero offers moral and personal reflections as he travels, thus combining the poetry of landscape and travel with the confessional and the meditative. He contrasts the power and permanence of nature with the insignificance and transience of man. Waterloo will fade from the memory; Venice will crumble into the sea. The tone of the poem is therefore somber: Byron's tour passes through a fallen and decayed world.

Yet it is a world capable of redemption. If Waterloo and Venice will not endure, Marathon, Shylock, and Othello will. Through noble deeds and great art, mankind can achieve immortality.

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Analysis: The Poem

In Canto 1, Byron introduces Childe Harold, a young English nobleman who has been wasting his life with drinking, idleness, and making love to unsuitable women. The woman he does love he cannot have.

Despondent, he leaves his family, his family home, his heritage, and his lands to travel, albeit with no clear destination. Perhaps, he thinks, he will find happiness and some meaning to his life once he leaves England.

Leaving, he sings a mournful song—the poem "Good Night"—bidding farewell to his homeland, to his parents, and to his wife and sons. Harold encourages the young page who accompanies him over the ocean not to be afraid. When Harold lands on the shore of Portugal, he finds himself moved in strange and unexpected ways. He begins exploring the land on horseback, moving aimlessly in search of his destiny, and he wanders into the mountains northeast of Lisbon, to Cintra, the site of the Convention that allowed the defeated French army to withdraw intact. Harold comments on the disgrace of this event. He makes many such comments on political events. He also reflects on the scenery, finding the land beautiful but the people dirty and immoral. Harold laments on the sorry state of these men and women who live in such a beautiful land. He continues into Spain.

In Spain, Harold is again thrilled by the magnificence of the scenery but appalled at the depths to which the civilization has fallen. His first real understanding of human cruelty occurs in Spain, where he watches a

bullfight. He watches the cruelty of the humans tormenting the bull and the courage of the beast, who cannot understand why anyone would try to hurt it. The bullfight, as always, ends in the death of the bull but brings Harold no further in his quest to understand the meaning of his life.

Canto 2 shows Childe Harold's first change of heart when he travels through Albania into Greece, meeting a great many people of various nationalities and religions. He finds the Albanians to be barbaric by his standards but in some ways nobler than the more civilized people he has encountered thus far. His spirits begin to rise as he realizes that, whatever the situation of civilization, there is still great hope as he witnesses both the wonders of nature and the goodness of humankind. However, at the end of the canto, reflecting on death and loss, Harold decides to return home and confront what he had left behind.

In Canto 3, Harold again leaves England, embarking on a second Grand Tour. He travels to Belgium, the Rhine, Switzerland, and the Alps. Harold reflects on the child, Ada, he has left behind, yet he embraces the continuance of his journey. It is at this point that the fiction of Harold is replaced by the reality of Byron's own voice. This canto includes a description of Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, as well as "Harold's" commentary on Napoleon. In Germany, along the banks of the Rhine, Harold finally feels a sense of hope and begins to see some meaning in the human condition. He continues on his journey, exalting in the beauty of the Swiss Alps and sites that remind him of the courage of the human spirit. Harold reflects on Rousseau and his life and work. The canto concludes with verses to his daughter.

Canto 4 is prefaced by a letter to Byron's friend John Hobhouse. Byron finally does away with the third-person narrator and speaks in the first person. He turns "from fiction to truth," telling his own story. The canto begins with Byron's reflections while standing on the Bridge of Sighs in Venice. Byron travels through the Italian countryside and the ancient cities that were once part of the Roman Empire. He comments on sites and on the people who lived there, average men, military leaders, and authors. His journey, like those of many pilgrims, ends in Rome. The stanzas on Rome constitute more than half of the canto. Finally, turning from cities and people, Byron speaks about the ocean and declares his "task is done."

Analysis: Places Discussed

***Spain**

*Spain. In canto 1, Childe Harold departs Albion, or England, and crosses the Bay of Biscay to Portugal and Spain, which has become the battleground for "Gaul's," or France's, "unsparing lord" (Napoleon). Although Napoleon is dramatized as a conqueror justly condemned for his ruthlessness, he also represents a new force for freedom sweeping away Europe's monarchies and rejuvenating its people. Harold himself is seeking precisely this kind of renewal. With Napoleon's defeat "Britannia," or England, "sickens," Byron exclaims. He exhorts: "Awake, ye sons of Spain! awake! advance!" Spain is no longer the land of chivalry; it is ruled by a corrupt king, a "bloated Chief," and will soon be a conquered province over which European nations will squabble. The ebbing strength and nobility of cities such as Seville and Cádiz are lamented as Harold makes his way through the "nerveless state."

***Greece**

*Greece. In canto 2, Harold visits the famous site of the Parthenon, a temple devoted to Athena, the goddess of wisdom. However, like Spain, Greece has been robbed of its glory. British marauders have taken away parts of the ancient building and defaced a shrine. All Greece has become a "sad relic of departed worth." Seeking inspiration in the places of Western greatness, Harold finds only degradation as he traces Alexander the Great's path through Albania and other parts of the Balkans.

*Belgium

*Belgium. In canto 3, the “self-exiled” Harold visits the “grave of France, the deadly Waterloo,” where Napoleon suffered his final defeat. In the aftermath of that great event, many of Europe’s monarchies were reestablished. From this scene of defeat Harold turns toward Switzerland and the places where great writers, such as Edward Gibbon, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Voltaire, employed their “gigantic minds” to comprehend the tragedy of humanity. Indeed, Gibbon’s great work on the Roman Empire leads Byron to think of the degraded state of Italy, which provides yet another example of humanity’s fallen state and of Byron’s theme: “We are not what we have been . . . We are not what we should be.”

*Italy

*Italy. Canto 4 begins in Venice, a magical city of great beauty, which seems to rise out of the water and yet is a site of disintegration with its palaces “crumbling to the shore.” Its great buildings, St. Mark’s Cathedral, for example, call to mind Venice’s history as an independent city-state, but now its freedom and glory are gone.

Certainly Italy remains a source of inspiration as Byron thinks of great writers such as Dante, who was associated with Florence, the Italian version of Athens. Italy is where Vergil wrote his poetry, but here also an empire was born and decayed, a fact that brings to mind Napoleon and France once again. France has “got drunk with blood to vomit crime,” but Rome is the very “field of freedom, faction, fame, and blood.” Nowhere is the scene of human achievement and defeat better seen than in Harold’s visit to the Roman Colosseum, which is an architectural wonder and a place of torture, where gladiators fought for sport.

Indeed Byron’s description of Rome’s Colosseum coalesces the poem’s sense of the importance of place: “While stands the Colosseum, Rome shall stand;/ When falls the Colosseum, Rome shall fall.” Each place Harold visits is an emblem of the human desire for permanence and achievement, yet each place is in ruins, an emblem of human defeat. That ruins and some historic structures such as the Roman Pantheon and St. Peter’s church and dome still stand evokes in Byron the hope that human greatness can be revived. Viewing St. Peter’s, Byron comments that “growing with its growth, we thus dilate/ Our spirits to the size of that they contemplate.”

The pilgrim’s final resting place is the ocean, Byron emphasizes, which evokes the immensity of the world out of which man struggles to create and endure. Nature itself becomes the titanic force against which all human created places must be measured.

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Quotes: "A Roman Holiday"

Context: Reaching Rome in the Fourth Canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron lists and describes some of its most notable sights, and mention of them leads him into bypaths of his own personal philosophy. His description of the ruins along the Appian Way near Rome and the fountain where the lovers Numa and Egeria traditionally met in secret, turns his thoughts to love in general and to the part that the mind plays in creating its physical representation. He then looks on the Coliseum and is led to ponder on the power of Time to cast a spell of beauty over things of the past. Perhaps Time will bestow a gift on him. After his death, it may reveal the truth of the calumny spread about him and act as a balance to give him someday his just position in the literary world. Back to the Coliseum, he thinks of the many people slain in its arena. He is reminded of the famous statue, then called "The Dying Gladiator," now believed to represent a dying Gaul. How unjust that man's death was, killed to provide excitement for a crowd of blood-thirsty spectators enjoying a holiday! In his anger Byron calls on the Goths to take revenge on Rome. Then looking around, he sees that Time has already had its revenge. Now the city lies in ruins, plundered to provide building material for many walls and palaces. Beginning in Stanza 140, the poet declares that in his imagination:

I see before me the gladiator lie:
He leans upon his hand—his manly brow
Consents to death,
but conquers agony . . . The arena swims around him—he is gone,
Ere ceased the inhuman shout
which hail'd the wretch who won.
He heard it, but he heeded not—his eyes
Were with his heart,
and that was far away;
He reck'd not of the life he lost nor prize,
But where his rude hut by the
Danube lay,
There were his young barbarians all at play,
There was their Dacian mother—he,
their sire,
Butcher'd to make a Roman holiday—
All this rush'd with his blood.—
Shall he
expire
And unavenged?—Arise! ye Goths, and glut your ire!

Quotes: "A Palace And A Prison On Each Hand"

Context: In a letter to his publisher, John Murray, Byron wrote, on July 1, 1817: "The Bridge of Sighs (i.e., Ponte dei Susperi) is that which divides, or rather joins the palace of the Doge to the prison of the state. It has two passages: the criminal went by the one to judgment, and returned by the other to death, being strangled in a chamber adjoining, where there was a mechanical process for the purpose." Standing on the Bridge of Sighs, Byron reflects upon the "dying Glory" of Venice, thinking back to a time "when many a subject land/ Looked to the wingéd Lion's marble piles. . . ." Thomas Hood (1799-1845) used the Bridge of Sighs as a title for a

pathetic poem on suicide (1846). The first two lines of Byron's Canto IV read:

I stood in Venice, on the Bridge of Sighs; A palace and a prison on each hand. . . .

Quotes: "All Ashes To The Taste"

Context: Arriving on the Field of Waterloo in 1816, Byron moralizes on the tragedy of the great battle in which so many brave men have lost their lives. He remembers, in particular, Frederick Howard, whose father, Lord Carlisle, he had wrongfully satirized in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809). In Stanza 33 he speaks of the broken hearts, which, like broken mirrors, multiply the images of sorrow. In the stanza quoted, he observes that people become accustomed to the deepest sorrows—"There is a very life in our despair, / Vitality of poison. . . ." Although Byron is inspired here by Waterloo, he is undoubtedly thinking, as usual, of his own sorrows—his separation from his wife and his self-imposed exile from England. He reflects sadly:

. . . Life will suit itself to Sorrow's most detested fruit, Like to the apples on the Dead Sea's shore, All ashes to the taste. . . .

Quotes: "Butchered To Make A Roman Holiday"

Context: In Canto IV of Byron's long poem, *Childe Harold* (Byron) visits Venice, Florence, and Rome. His pilgrimage ends at Rome, the goal toward which all his journeying has tended. The title "Childe" is one which candidates for knighthood bore, in the days of chivalry, until their pilgrimage was done and knighthood was conferred upon them. The poem's title thus symbolizes Byron's wanderings over Europe, seeking an escape from himself and from the world that wearies him. His love and admiration for Rome, the eternal city, "lone mother of dead empires," is such that he declares it his country. Saddened by the ruins of its former glory and conscious of its past greatness, he calls the roll of famous men who made the city what it was. Some of them were tyrants; Byron considers the nature of tyranny and despairs of the achievement of true freedom by mortal men. Byron's passionate devotion to freedom is not merely rhetorical: at the age of thirty-six he will die of a fever contracted while fighting in the name of Greek liberty. Now he visits ancient tombs, wondering about the lives of those who were buried there. In the ruins he sees "the moral of all human tales" retraced: "First Freedom and then Glory—when that fails, / Wealth, vice, corruption,—barbarism at last." Byron ponders the sequence as Rome experienced it: the greatness which passed into softness, indulgence and orgy—until, too fat and corrupt to resist, the great empire fell before hordes of barbarians. Contemplating the vastness of the Colosseum, Byron envisages the bloody spectacles that were staged there for the excitement and entertainment of bored and sated crowds—part of that degeneracy which led to the nation's fall:

I see before me the Gladiator lie: He leans upon his hand—his manly brow Consents to death, but conquers agony, And his dropp'd head sinks gradually low— And through his side the last drops, ebbing slow From the red gash, fall heavy, one by one, Like the first of a thunder-shower; and now The arena swims around him—he is gone, Ere ceased the inhuman shout which hail'd the wretch who won. He heard it, but he heeded not—his eyes Were with his heart and that was far away; He reck'd not of the life he lost nor prize, But where his rude hut by the Danube lay, There were his young barbarians all at play, There was their Dacian mother—he, their sire, Butcher'd to make a Roman holiday— All this rush'd with his blood.—Shall he expire And unavenged?—Arise! ye Goths, and glut your ire!

Quotes: "I Have Not Loved The World, Nor The World Me"

Context: It is often the fate of great men to be misunderstood and unappreciated by their fellow men. They feel rejected by the world, and so they reject the world in turn. Men as different from Byron as Dr. Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) and Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) have expressed parallel thoughts in parallel words: "I never have sought the world; the world was not to seek me." (Johnson, quoted in Boswell's *The Life of Samuel Johnson LL.D.*) "Goodbye, proud world! I'm going home:/ Thou art not my friend, and I'm not thine." (Emerson, "Goodbye," Stanza I.) Johnson and Emerson, however, rejected the world in idea only, but continued to live conventional lives. Byron lived his world rejection, in deeds as well as words, and the world, perversely enough, loved him for it.

I have not loved the world, nor the world me; I have not flatter'd its rank breath, nor bow'd To
its idolatries a patient knee. . . I have not loved the world, nor the world me.—But let us part
fair foes. . . .

Quotes: "Let Joy Be Unconfined"

Context: Though the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* brought Byron his great fame when published in 1812, it was the third canto, which did not appear until 1816, that is universally considered the finest part of the poem. It begins with words for his daughter Ada, not seen since he angrily left his wife fifteen months after their marriage. Then he ponders the effect of time on his hero who, too proud to be dominated by others, has sought independence in travel. In the course of his wanderings, Harold reaches the battlefield of Waterloo, "the grave of France," where in June, 1815, Wellington ended the power of Napoleon I. Thackeray, too, incorporated the battle into his *Vanity Fair*, but Byron gives it a different twist. He sees the struggle as the effort of enemies of liberty to tear to pieces the eagle of freedom. Though it resulted in the fall of one despot, it gave increased power to many rulers. Napoleon was a composite of mighty ambitions, as well as petty ones, but they were so extreme that they caused the overthrow of a great man. Stanza 21 begins on the eve of the battle, with a well-known line: "There was a sound of revelry by night." It came from the Duchess of Richmond's ball, on the night of the 15th of June. Byron describes the "fair women and brave men" dancing in Brussels, Belgium's capital. Suddenly they hear a cannon shot, "a deep sound strikes like a rising knell." Byron's description of the heedlessness of the gay dancers in the great ballroom and the sudden shock of their realization of the approaching battle, fills Stanza 22.

Did ye not hear it?—No; 't was 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—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! it is—it
is—the cannon's opening roar!

Quotes: "Mammon Wins His Way Where Seraphs Might Despair"

Context: Even as a youth, Byron formed strong emotional attachments which frequently ended in disillusionment. The Cambridge friends he gathered about him at Newstead Abbey showed no sorrow at the imminence of his departure, in 1809, for two years of travel. His dearest friend, Lord Delawarr, declined to see him off on the last day because he had some shopping to do. Worst of all, his childhood sweetheart, Mary Ann Chaworth, had called him "that lame boy," and had subsequently married a prosperous country squire. As the *Childe* (young man of noble birth) of the poem, Byron expresses his cynicism. He refers to his erstwhile friends as "flatt'ners of the festal hour;/ The heartless parasites of present cheer. . . ." His "Iemans" (sweethearts) care only for "pomp and power."

Maidens, like moths, are ever caught by glare,And Mammon wins his way where Seraphs might despair.

Quotes: "Of Its Own Beauty Is The Mind Diseased"

Context: Canto IV, the last part of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, was written in Venice and published six years after the first two cantos, with Canto III in between, appearing in 1816. Though resembling the other parts in being a narrative in verse, it is a more mature work, carrying its message by indirection and inference, and requiring a greater acquaintance with the history and sights of Italy. While Byron does mention some of the famous places, on many occasions he is led down a poetic bypath to some personal reaction. The mention of ruins along the Appian Way near Rome and the remains of a fountain there, remind Byron of the legend of two lovers Numa and Egeria, who met secretly in the near-by grotto that provides water for it. After six stanzas about the beauties of the surroundings and the delights of the love they shared, Byron is moved to an apostrophe to love in general. He calls it a feeling that in the young runs to waste and only produces "weeds of dark luxuriance," "rank at the core, though tempting to the eye." Here he is probably thinking of his own unfortunate marriage, that ended in a never-explained separation after the birth of a daughter, Ada (to whom he sent a loving greeting at the end of the preceding canto). Then, in development of his theme, Byron discusses love as "an unseen seraph," and declares, "no habitant of the earth art thou." Love is something that has never been looked on by man, but is only a creation of his mind, like the gods and goddesses with whom the Greeks peopled their Olympus, in such shapes and images as their minds needed, and as untrue to life and to Nature as are most creations of poets and painters. The rest of Byron's thoughts on love, beyond the one here quoted, are melancholic and pessimistic. Few find the love they seek, and to most it ends in heart ache. But not for that reason should we abandon the gift of thought; we should try to exert it, even though the divine faculty is from birth "cabin'd, cribb'd, confined," as Shakespeare declares in Macbeth.

Of its own beauty is the mind diseased,And fevers into false creation:—where,Where are the forms the sculptor's soul hath seized?In him alone. Can Nature show so fair?Where are the charms and virtues which we dareConceive in boyhood and pursue as men,The unreach'd Paradise of our despair,Which o'er-informs the pencil and the pen,And overpowers the page where it would bloom again?

Quotes: "Quiet To Quick Bosoms Is A Hell"

Context: The first two cantos of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, which appeared in 1812, offered a kind of facile versifying that so caught the popular fancy that, as Byron said, he became famous overnight. The book was a romanticized travelogue based on his own trip to Greece and Turkey after graduation. After its publication, he made a marriage that he soon considered incompatible, and he left his wife five weeks after the birth of their child, to spend the summer in Switzerland with Shelley. Here he wrote the third canto of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, a much improved example of his poetry that contained a famous description of the Battle of Waterloo, of 1815. Standing on that battlefield, the poem's romantic hero thinks of what happened there. A rebel against conventions himself, unhappy among people, and at peace only with nature, Harold recreates that revelry in Brussels on the eve of the battle, the sound of the first cannon shot, the figures in the fight: the Duke of Brunswick who hurried to the battlefield and died in the fighting, and the many others who, after the night of dancing and gaiety, marched away at dawn to destruction. He declares Napoleon "greatest nor the worst of man," who might still be in power except that his lack of balance, while it brought him power, made impossible any hope of maintaining it. He might have endured if he had stood like a tower on a rock. But there are people, Byron mused, perhaps thinking of himself, who crave high adventure and are exhausted by doing nothing. Such a love of action is fatal to anyone who possesses it. In Napoleon's case, he became "conqueror and captive of the world," still feared even though in exile, an example of how a favorite of Fortune can stand unbowed under misfortune. Harold goes on to think what might have happened if Napoleon

had shown more regard for human beings whom he had scorned but employed. He had used man's admiration only for his pleasure and advancement, and had failed to follow "stern Diogenes," who disregarded and mocked men and their opinions. Stanza 42 expresses the belief of the author, through the lips of Harold, that this feeling of adventure was very deep in the conquered French leader of Waterloo.

But quiet to quick bosoms is a hell,And there hath been thy bane; there is a fireAnd motion of the soul which will not dwellIn its own narrow being, but aspireBeyond the fitting medium of desire;And, but once kindled, quenchless evermore,Preys upon high adventure, nor can tireOf aught but rest; a fever at the coreFatal to him who bears, to all who ever bore.

Quotes: "Sapping A Solemn Creed With Solemn Sneer"

Context: Four years after writing the first two cantos of a travel book based on Byron's own postgraduate Grand Tour to Europe and the Orient, the poet began a sequel that turned out to be greatly superior to his first effort. Canto III, written while he was spending a summer in Switzerland with the Shelley family, presents the Byronic hero Childe (that is, Young Lord) Harold, standing on the spot where Wellington crushed Napoleon the year before. Byron contrasts the revelry by night before Waterloo with the massacre of friends and foes in one red burial afterward. He ponders on the personality of Napoleon whose downfall, like his rise, came because he did not seek a golden mean. Harold is full of melancholic thoughts. He who ascends the mountains will find "the loftiest peaks most wrapped in clouds." He who subdues his fellow men will be the target of their hatred. Then the traveler turns from men to ponder on nature. Going down the Rhine, he is led by sight of the castles to think of the bloodshed there, washed away by time. Lake Lemane (Geneva) makes him think that "there is too much of man here," though he is reminded of Rousseau, who lived there and there had his loves. Passing through Lausanne and Ferney, Harold recalls Voltaire and the English historian of the Roman Empire, Edward Gibbon (1737–1794). Finally he reaches Italy where he decides: "I have not loved the world nor the world me." However, Byron concludes the canto with the 118th stanza, remembering his "child of love," Ada, and sending his blessings back to her. Having been reminded in Stanza 105 of Voltaire and Gibbon, he devotes Stanza 106 to Voltaire and 107 to Gibbon. In 107, he declares that the historian gathered material exhaustively, then cuttingly attacked what Gibbon regarded as the outworn creed of Christianity, undermining it by his irony. Perhaps the series of "s's" in the line was to imitate the hiss of scorn. The defenders of Christianity retaliated by damning Gibbon as an atheist.

The other, deep and slow, exhausting thought,And hiving wisdom with each studious year,In meditation dwelt, with learning wrought,And shaped his weapon with an edge severe,Sapping a solemn creed with solemn sneer;The lord of irony,—that master-spell,Which stung his foes to wrath which grew from fear,And doom'd him to the zealot's ready Hell,Which answers to all doubts so eloquently well.

Quotes: "Ten Thousand Fleets Sweep Over Thee In Vain"

Context: Throughout Childe Harold, Byron alternately curses and woos mankind, but his attitude toward Nature remains unchanged. He regards Nature as powerful, timeless, and immutable—an inexhaustible source of strength and inspiration. Compared with Nature, man is cruel, selfish, mean, and destructive. The quotation is from one of six stanzas in which Byron apostrophizes the ocean—the one part of Nature which man is unable to control or ruin. "His steps are not upon thy paths." His mightiest ships "are thy toys . . . / Alike the Armada's pride or spoils of Trafalgar". The ocean remains "Unchangeable . . . / Time writes no wrinkle on thy azure brow". In context, the quotation from Stanza 179 reads:

Roll on, thou deep and dark blue Ocean—roll!Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain;Man marks the earth with ruin—his controlStops with the shore . . .

Quotes: "The Niobe Of Nations"

Context: Childe Harold, in Byron's poem, is the poet himself. The poem is a long one which took seven years to complete; it depicts a man who is weary of the world and who wanders over the face of it, fleeing from himself. The term "childe" is a title of honor which, in the days of chivalry, was given to noble youths who were candidates for knighthood; the candidate so honored bore this title throughout his probationary period, which usually involved a pilgrimage of some sort. The poem recounts Byron's experiences and impressions during his travels—Portugal and Spain in Canto I, Turkey in Canto II, Belgium and Switzerland in Canto III. In the fourth Canto he visits Venice, Rome, and Florence. In Venice he stands on the Bridge of Sighs and contemplates the fading glory of this great old city. In imagination he sees the history and magnificence that have passed; mentions the fact that he is an expatriate, misses his birthplace but is content to be buried in a foreign land. To Byron, Italy is still "the garden of the world, the home/ Of all Art yields, and Nature can decree;" even the wreckage of her greatness is a glory. He pays tribute to the great Italian poets, and moving on to Rome, speaks of various landmarks along the way. For the Eternal City he reserves his greatest praise. The reference to Niobe likens Rome to the Niobe of Greek legend, who was daughter of Tantalus and wife of Amphion, King of Thebes. She was proud of her twelve children and taunted the goddess Latona, who had only two, Apollo and Diana. Latona commanded her own children to avenge the insult, and they caused all twelve of Niobe's children to die. Niobe was inconsolable and wept herself to death; afterward she was changed into a stone from which water ran like tears. Niobe is thus the personification of maternal sorrow. Two stanzas of Byron's tribute follow:

Oh Rome, my country! city of the soul!
The orphans of the heart must turn to thee,
Lone mother of dead empires! and control
In their shut breasts their petty misery.
What are our woes and sufferance?
Come and see The cypress, hear the owl,
and plod your way O'er steps of broken
thrones and temples, Ye! Whose agonies
are evils of a day—A world is at our feet
as fragile as our clay. The Niobe of Nations!
there she stands, Childless and crownless,
in her voiceless woe; An empty urn within
her wither'd hands, Whose holy dust was
scatter'd long ago: The Scipios' tomb
contains no ashes now; The very sepulchres
lie tenantless Of their heroic dwellers;
—dost thou flow, Old Tiber, through a
marble wilderness? Rise, with thy yellow
waves, and mantle her distress!

Quotes: "The Fatal Gift Of Beauty"

Context: Byron's Childe Harold's Pilgrimage was written and published piecemeal. The poet finished the first two cantos in 1812, and reaped instant glory. Canto III, generally considered the best, with its references to Bonaparte and the Battle of Waterloo, was published in 1816, but Canto IV did not get into print until 1818. Byron wrote it during his stay in Venice in 1817, where gossip reported him living licentiously, yet he had the time to write this canto, the narrative poems Beppo and Mazeppa, and to begin his famous Don Juan. Canto IV is prefaced by a letter to John C. Hobhouse, (1786–1869), who had traveled with Byron on the trip through the Mediterranean that had inspired the first canto. In the preface, Byron declares that Harold the Pilgrim no longer exists for him. His poem has now become his own personal reactions. The canto begins with the famous lines, "I stood in Venice on the Bridge of Sighs,/ A palace and a prison on each hand." Originally he had intended to discuss contemporary Italian Literature and Manners, but the discussion would have made the composition much too long. He sees about him too many great writers who will leave their mark upon their country's literature. So instead, he writes of the loveliness of storied Venice, whose gondoliers used to sing verses by Tasso. The changes in the city remind him of the changes in himself. He pauses to remark that, though he has traveled far and learned many languages, he wants to die in England and be remembered there. Then back to Venice whose history he learned as a child through the plays of many of the world's dramatists. His thoughts expand to include all of Italy. He thinks of Petrarch's tomb in Arqua, and of the "Bards of Hell and Chivalry," that is, Dante and Ariosto. Their homeland whose beauty attracted all the world has, for that

reason, lost some of its power and glory, for those attracted to it have sapped its power and wealth. So he exclaims in Stanza 42:

Italia! oh, Italia! thou who hast
The fatal gift of beauty, which became
A funeral dower of
present woes and past,
On thy sweet brow is sorrow plough'd by shame,
And annals graved in
characters of flame.
Oh, God!, that thou wert in thy nakedness
Less lovely or more powerful,
and couldst claim
Thy right, and awe the robbers back, who press
To shed thy blood and drink
the tears of thy distress.

Quotes: "The Unreturning Brave"

Context: Not since the Faerie Queene of 1590–1596, by Edmund Spenser (1552–1599), the first important epic in English by a major poet, had the Spenserian stanza he devised been put to such good use as in Byron's Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. The stanza consists of nine lines, the first eight in iambic pentameter, and the last line with an additional foot. The rhyme is ababbcbcc. Byron uses it to record the wanderings of Harold, a Romantic figure, disillusioned and unable to live with his fellow men. Only in Nature can he find relief from his bitter thoughts. In Cantos I and II, published in 1812, the young lord follows the pilgrimage made by Byron himself, through the Mediterranean to Greece, beloved because of its struggle for liberty. In Canto III, not published until 1816, Childe Harold has reached the battlefield of Waterloo where the previous year Wellington had ended forever Napoleon's aspirations to power, and made it, as Byron declares, "the grave of France." The poet describes social activities in "Belgium's capital" when "fair women" and "brave men" in the ballroom are more interested in their dancing than in the struggle of Napoleon and Ney against Wellington and Blücher. However, the cannon roar tells the Duke of Brunswick that death is near. He rushes to the conflict and is one of the first to fall. After sudden partings amid tears, with the mustering of squadrons and the clattering of cars, the suddenly-awakened soldiers are drummed into ranks. Bagpipes shrill; the sound of "Cameron's gathering" inspires the soldiers to extra bravery. On to the battlefield they march, under the trees of what Shakespeare had called "The forest of Arden," but known as "the Ardennes Woods" to American soldiers of the First World War. In the early morning they are dripping dew as if mourning for those who will never come back. Battle figures for that day in June assign 32,000 casualties to the French and 23,000 to the allied British and Prussians. They were the brave who never returned. Describing the march to the battlefield at the beginning of the struggle—how next year some will be beneath the grass over which they now walk—Byron writes in Stanza 27

And Ardennes 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
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.

Quotes: "Then Farewell, Horace; Whom I Hated So, Not For Thy Faults, But Mine"

Context: The Apennines, described in Canto IV, did not impress Byron because he had seen loftier mountains in Switzerland. The peak, Soracte, however, because it had been described by Horace, reminded him of his classical studies at Harrow. The passage quoted, the two preceding stanzas, and Byron's own notes are a comment on the English school system of that day. Young school boys were forced to learn the classics by rote—"The drill'd dull lesson, forced down word by word . . ." (Stanza 75). Entirely too immature to feel the power and beauty in these passages, the young scholars felt only aversion for what they might have admired as adults. This unimaginative mode of teaching had colored Byron's attitude toward Horace. In the quotation

he does not exonerate himself, and in his note to Stanza 75 he confesses that he was "not a slow, though an idle boy." The first four lines of Stanza 77 follow:

Then farewell, Horace; whom I hated so, Not for thy faults, but mine; it is a curse
To understand, not feel thy lyric flow, To comprehend, but never love thy verse. . . .

Quotes: "There Was A Sound Of Revelry By Night"

Context: In 1816, Byron's travels brought him to the field of Waterloo, where, just the year before, Napoleon had met his defeat. In Stanza 21, Byron begins a dramatic description of the famous ball held in Brussels on the eve of the battle. According to tradition, the Duke of Wellington had authorized the ball in hope of keeping the citizens of Brussels in ignorance of his plans. His officers were in attendance, but left quietly at ten o'clock to join their regiments. In the popular mind, Byron's well-known description of the eve of Waterloo is rivaled only by Thackeray's long prose description in *Vanity Fair*. The first four lines of Byron's stanza are as follows:

There was a sound of revelry by night, And Belgium's capital had gather'd then
Her Beauty and her Chivalry, and bright The lamps shone o'er fair women and brave men. . . .

Quotes: "Time, The Avenger"

Context: Between the composition of the beginning and the end of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* stretches a space of six years. In the first two cantos, published in 1812, is seen the spontaneity of a young man of the Romantic Movement, enjoying adventurous experiences in oriental lands and writing about them in facile verse. The publication brought immediate fame to Byron. Canto III, after a four-year interval, shows a great advance in technique, and its description of the Battle of Waterloo helps to make it the best part of the poem. With Canto IV came another change. The poet dispensed with *Childe (Young Lord) Harold* as a spokesman, and made himself and his opinions the subject of the poem. But the travelogue, which provides the continuity for the entire work, is combined with a review of Italian history and literature, full of indirect references. Some are recognizable to the general reader, such as "The Bard of Hell," for Dante, but many readers will be doubtful about "The Bard of Chivalry," or the reference to "he who lies in a tomb in Arqua," or "the Roman friend of Rome's least-mortal mind" (Aervius Sulpicius), the "Goddess loves in stone," or "the hyaena bigots." However, Byron does include many memorable bits in this canto in unforgettable poetic descriptions of Nature, notably the six magnificent stanzas near the end, beginning: "Roll on, thou deep and dark blue Ocean, roll." *Harold* and his human prototype frequently voice their dislike of humanity and their joys of solitary communion with Nature. Byron's search for Liberty and his hatred of despots and tyrants who deprive men of their freedom are the occasions for highly colored lines, as are his feelings of a Romanticist who has lived too long and seen everything, and his belief that all is temporary and doomed to destruction. However, the passing years, even while destroying, give a patina of beauty to what they destroy. And in the case of people and their productions, Time, while avenging, acts as a balance to establish true values.

Oh, Time! the beautifier of the dead, Adorner of the ruin, comforter
And only healer when the heart hath bled—Time! the corrector where our judgments err,
The test of truth, love—sole philosopher, For all besides are sophists—from thy thrift,
Which never loses though it doth defer—Time, the avenger, unto thee I lift
My hands, and eyes, and heart, and crave of thee a gift.

Quotes: "To Fly From, Need Not Be To Hate, Mankind"

Context: In the Swiss Alps, where he is traveling in 1816, Byron feels an almost Wordsworthian kinship with Nature. However, to him Nature is a means of escape from people who have misunderstood and persecuted him. There have been dark rumors about his relations with his half-sister, Augusta; he is separated from his wife; and he has exiled himself from his native land. Here, he admires the beauty of Lake Lemman, but adds, "There is too much of man here . . ." In the stanza quoted, he observes that a man does not necessarily hate people because he prefers to be alone. By keeping to himself, he avoids the bitterness and contentions that are a part of human society.

To fly from, need not be to hate, mankind:
All are not fit with them to stir and toil,
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. . . .

Quotes: "When Rome Falls—the World"

Context: Changing his style of narrative, from the thoughts of its typical Byronic hero, Harold, to the personal reactions of the poet himself, Byron continued while living in Venice to work on the final canto of the travel poem that he had begun publishing in 1812. He writes of the great authors of old Italy, Petrarch, and Dante the "Bard of Hell," and of Ariosto, the "Bard of Chivalry." How many enemies have overrun the country, leaving many ruins never rebuilt! Byron shows his thorough familiarity with Italy, its history and its literature, by references that for the average reader require footnotes. Speaking of Ariosto, he is reminded how the iron laurels on the bust melted when struck by lightning while the poet's remains were being moved to the Ferrara Library. He calls the city of Florence ungrateful for not providing burial for some of her most distinguished citizens. Many of the poetic references are more interesting, however, to a historian than to a lover of poetry. Coming to a consideration of Rome, Byron calls it "My country! City of the soul," and in another stanza, "Niobe of Nations," after the Queen of Thebes whose scorn of a goddess with only two children, while Niobe had fourteen, caused the gods to kill all of them and leave her petrified, weeping for them. So Rome is bereft of her children. Its sepulchers have been plundered by barbarians, floods, and fire, and what has been called "The Eternal City," has suffered from the destructive hand of time. Byron comments on the destruction of one tyrant by another, and laments: "Can Freedom find no champion here such as Columbia saw arise in George Washington?" The efforts of France to achieve freedom have ended in a Saturnalia of blood. Everywhere he sees the sequence: Freedom, glory, and then corruption and barbarism. However, with Rome, each period of degradation has been followed by an upsurge of life. Rome is Eternal. Time's scythe and tyrants' rods have failed to bring it down. And the Coliseum is proof of that fact. In the phrase "While stands the Coliseum, Rome shall stand," Byron is quoting a sentence from *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–1788) by Edward Gibbon (1737–1797), which the English historian found in reports by Anglo-Saxon pilgrims about the end of the seventh century. Gibbon used it to prove that at that time the edifice was still entire and not the ruins seen by tourists today.

"While stands the Coliseum, Rome shall stand;
When falls the Coliseum, Rome shall fall;
And when Rome falls—the World." From our own land
Thus spake the pilgrims o'er this mighty
wall
In Saxon times, which we are wont to call
Ancient; and these three mortal things are
still
On their foundations, and unalter'd all;
Rome and her Ruins past Redemption's skill,
The World the same wide den—of thieves, or what ye will.

Quotes: "While Stands The Coliseum, Rome Shall Stand"

Context: In this stanza Byron is quoting from Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1781), Chapter 71. The saying, originally reported by Bede, is attributed to the Anglo-Saxon pilgrims of the late seventh or early eighth century. In the poem, Byron describes the Coliseum by moonlight—"This long-explored but still exhaustless mine/ Of contemplation . . ." (Stanza 128). Byron's own contemplations lead him, not only to the past grandeur of Rome and a stirring description of a dying gladiator, but also to his own wrongs, and he invokes Time and Nemesis to bring vengeance on his detractors (Stanzas 130-132). Eighteen stanzas of Canto IV are devoted to the Coliseum and Byron's reflections concerning both it and himself. In the last line of Stanza 145, he expresses his opinion of the world that has driven him into exile.

"While stands the Coliseum, Rome shall stand;When falls the Coliseum, Rome shall fall;And when Rome falls—the World." . . . and these three mortal things are stillOn their foundations, and unalter'd all;Rome and her Ruin past Redemption's skill,The World, the same wide den—of thieves, or what ye will.

Quotes: "Years Steal Fire From The Mind"

Context: One reason for the importance of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is that here for the first time is introduced the Byronic hero, who will reappear in half-a-dozen of his narrative poems, always with the same characteristics. He is a true romantic, satiated with life's pleasures, disgusted with civilized society, and though in love with some gentle woman, takes pride in suppressing all tender feelings. A deep regret over some youthful crime usually embitters his thoughts. This inherent melancholia was one reason for the poem's instant success. Elaborate descriptions of nature in exotic oriental countries added charm for its readers. Childe Harold ("Childe" meaning "Young Lord") is the chief character of a sort of travel book in verse, following the itinerary Byron himself took in the summer of 1809, in company with his friend John Cam Hobhouse (1786–1869). Instead of the usual postgraduate Grand Tour of France and Italy, Byron went through the Mediterranean as far as Greece and Turkey. After his return to England, the first two cantos were published, in 1812. The furor over them added to his charm and helped his courtship of Miss Anna Isabella Milbanke, a well-educated country girl, much given to moralizing. Immediately following the wedding, in January, 1815, Byron realized he had made a mistake and so did she. No reason was ever given for their separation, though some suspect it was her discovery of improper relations between Byron and his half-sister, Augusta Leigh. In any case, a few weeks after the birth of his daughter, Ada, he left his wife and England. Following his departure came a storm of gossip that settled on him the reputation for dissoluteness. He traveled to Switzerland, where he spent the summer with Shelley and had an affair with Mary Shelley's sister, Jane Clairmont. Here he wrote the third canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, that was published in 1816. Canto III is the most admired part of the poem. It opens with a message to his daughter Ada, whom he had not seen since she was five weeks old. Does she look like her mother? He declares himself "once more upon the waters" that are taking him away from England. Long ago, in his "youth's summer," he had first sung about Harold. How greatly things have changed since then! But he has retained one of his old traits, "the strength to bear what time cannot abate,/ and feed on bitter fruits without accusing Fate." So, too, has his hero Harold changed, and in stanza 8 the poet comments on the changes:

Something too much of this; but now 'tis past,And the spell closes with its silent seal.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 himIn soul and aspect as in age; years stealFire from the mind as vigor from the limb,And life's enchanted cup but sparkles near the brim.