

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage

Lord Byron

Paper 9: British Romantic Literature

Lord George Gordon Noel Byron
'Childe Harold':
canto III, verses 36–45 (lines 316–405)
canto IV, verses 178–86 (lines 1594–674)

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Cover page of the Dugdale edition of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*

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https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lord_Byron_-_Childe_Harold%27s_Pilgrimage_-_Dugdale_edition_-_original_scan.png

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LIFE AND WORKS OF LORD BYRON(1788-1824):

Lord Byron was born George Gordon Byron, on 22nd January 1788 in London. His parents were Captain “Mad Jack” Byron, known for his gambling, and Catherine Duff-Gordon.

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An undated engraving of Byron's father Captain John "Mad Jack Byron

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord_Byron



A portrait of Catherine Gordon, Byron's mother, by Thomas Stewardson

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord_Byron

Byron never saw his father, as his father abandoned his mother and went abroad to escape his creditors. Catherine was his second wife. He had a daughter—Augusta Leigh—by his first wife Lady Carmarthen.

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Portrait of Lord Byron by Richard Westall.

Richard Westall painted several portraits of Byron. He also illustrated the first two cantos of John Murray's edition of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord_Byron

When Byron was one year old, his mother moved to Aberdeen, which explains the Scottish accent Byron is said to have. Byron was influenced by Agnes and May Gray, two Calvinist sisters, who encouraged him to study the Bible. Byron's biblical knowledge is amply exhibited in his frequent biblical allusions.

At the young age of eleven, Byron inherited the baronial title of a grand uncle and acquired Newstead Abbey. Byron was an exceptionally handsome man, which made him prone to vanity. Yet, a deformed foot gave him a violent and aggressive side to his nature. Byron's personality was the chief reason for his popularity. His noble birth, and his participation in the Greek fight for freedom made him appeal to his readers even more. As Graham Hough says, "his school life, like his infancy, is sadly marked by vanity, violence and rebellion against every form of authority; yet it was not without its hours of nobility and generosity." (Hough n.p.)

Byron did his schooling at Harrow and then went on to the University of Cambridge. Not exactly an outstanding student, Byron excelled in swimming, though not at the other, more

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popular sports. At both institutions, he could not play certain sports due to his deformity, and he was terribly self-conscious about this. Sports, and the glory it brought, was an important part of public schools like Harrow, Eton and Rugby. Even though he was part of the first cricket team of Harrow against Eton, he remained largely undistinguished as a sportsman..Byron published his first book of poetry, *Hours of Idleness* in 1807. A critical review of the book published anonymously by Henry Brougham in the *Edinburgh Review* made Byron react by writing the vitriolically satirical *English Bards and Scottish Reviewers* in March 1809. Byron criticized almost all the well-known poets of the time, including Walter Scott and William Wordsworth. Byron used the heroic couplet to great effect in this poem. While his first book of poetry was not refined, his passion made this work stand out. Here's a sample of his lashing satire, where he mocksthe famous Lake poet Robert Southey:

Oh Southey! Southey! cease thy varied song!
A bard may chant too often and too long:
As thou art strong in verse, in mercy, spare!
A fourth, alas! were more than we could bear.
But if, in spite of all the world can say,
Thou still wilt verseward plod thy weary way;
If still in Berkley ballads most uncivil,
Thou wilt devote old women to the devil,
The babe unborn thy dread intent may rue:
"God help thee," Southey, and thy readers too.

When Byron was twenty-one years old, he took a tour of Europe. This was the period that produced the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. The book was an instant success, as the English public enjoyed Byron's beautiful descriptions of the scenic countryside of the European countries he visited. This work brought him great fame. In his own words, "I awoke one morning and found myself famous."

Byron was known for his several love affairs. He was romantically involved with Lady Caroline Lamb, and was even suspected to have had an affair with his half-sister Augusta Leigh. In fact, it was common knowledge that he had fathered Leigh's daughter Medora. It was when he was caught in debt that he began to consider marriage. On his return from the continent, Byron married a rich heiress, Annabella Milbanke in 1815. He had his only

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legitimate child, a daughter called Ada by her. Milbank left him abruptly in 1816, and Byron himself left England soon after. She could not tolerate Byron's infidelity, as he continued to associate himself with Augusta, and declared he was insane. In January 1816, she initiated divorce proceedings against him and, taking their daughter along, left Byron's home. Thus, he hardly met his daughter or spent any time with her. Perhaps it was the longing for his daughter that made him make Ada the muse of Canto III of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. He toured Italy, mostly with his friend and fellow Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, until Shelley's death in a boat accident in 1822. During this time he finished the last two cantos of *Childe Harold* and wrote his other famous poems. "Darkness" was another poem inspired by a real event. The eruption of a volcano revealed the superstition ingrained in people, and Byron describes this hysteria in his poem. "She Walks in Beauty" is another famous poem by Byron, in which he describes the beauty and elegance of a cousin, Mrs. Wilmot, who has recently been widowed. He breaks down different aspects of her personality to describe her beauty.

She walks in beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
And all that's best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes;
Thus mellowed to that tender light

Which heaven to gaudy day denies. (lines 1-6)

In 'The Prisoner of Chillon' and dramas like *Manfred* and *Cain*, Byron was sympathetic to the revolutionaries he met and supported their endeavours. In the poem "The Prisoner of Chillon", Byron chose a 16th century patriot of Geneva as the hero. Many poems that Byron wrote were inspired by incidents in his life or people he had met. "The Prisoner of Chillon" was written to express his solidarity for Francois de Bonnivard, a 16th century patriot who was a real-life revolutionary of Geneva. He heard of him when he visited the Chateau de Chillon at Lake Lemand in Geneva with his friend Percy Bysshe Shelley. Bonnivard's attempts to attain freedom for Geneva, and his subsequent imprisonment is described in the poem. *Don Juan* is Byron's attempt at a mock-epic and explores the meaninglessness of social pretensions. Don Juan is an innocent protagonist to begin with, but several incidents and situations cause him to gain a bad reputation. Though he is thought to be an incorrigible lover, he is actually the victim in most of the episodes.

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In 1824, Byron visited Greece. He was so affected by the plight of the Greeks at the hands of the Turks, that apart from helping them monetarily, Byron decided to join the war himself. Unfortunately, before he could reach the actual battlefield, he died of a fever in Missolonghi. Byron's death shocked England and Europe. Jane Welsh is said to have told Thomas Carlyle, "If they had said the sun or the moon was gone out of heaven, it would not have struck me with the idea of a more awful and dreary blank in the creation of the words, "Byron is dead." (Iyer 124)

SOME IMPORTANT SOCIO-POLITICAL EVENTS

THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT

Most critics regard 1790 as the year that marks the beginning of Romanticism, and pin its end on 1824, with the death of Byron. 1790 was the year of the publication of Wordsworth and Coleridge's *The Lyrical Ballads*. Peter J Kitson opines that, "for most critics, the Romantic period has generally been regarded as covering the years for C 1790 up until around 1830 (or even upto 1850) while the word 'Romantic' has been used to describe a body of work using widely different techniques and styles but showing a number of shared characteristics or symptoms that have been used to justify such periodization." (Kitson qtd in Bhattacharya 2)

In the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth describes poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings". This description forms the crux of how we would define Romantic poetry. An interest in medieval romance in the nineteenth century, as a sharp contrast to the classicism of the previous century gave the Romantic movement its name. Romanticism began in Germany, where there was a sudden interest in mysticism and the supernatural. Romanticism influenced British writers through German writers like Goethe and Schelling. From novelists like Walter Scott and Mary Shelley to the poems of the Romantic poets John Keats and P.B.Shelley, all literature of the time reflected the shift from the rationality of the classical outlook to a heightened awareness and importance given to the Imagination and intuition

Historically, the period saw a heightened importance of the individual. The French Revolution gave importance to Liberty, Fraternity and Equality. The Independence of

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America in 1783 and the French Revolution in 1789 were precursors to the Reform Bill of 1832, which established democracy in England for the first time.

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

The Romantic Movement came at a time of great political upheavals and historical turmoil. The French Revolution of 1789 can easily be called one of the most significant events in European history. It marked the abolition of class distinctions. Its slogans of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity affected the entire continent of Europe. England too felt the repercussions of this upheaval, and its poets incorporated the revolution into their poetry. It influenced all areas of public life—from politics to literature. The French Revolution began on 14th July 1789, with the storming of the Bastille. Inspired by the philosophy of political thinkers like Rousseau, it adopted the “Declaration of the Rights of Man” which propagated equality.



Water colour by Jean-Pierre Houel depicting the Fall of the Bastille.

Source: British Library

<http://www.bl.uk/collection-items/painting-of-the-storming-of-the-bastille-1789>

The ideas of the French Revolution influenced the Romantic poets deeply. The early Romantics supported the intellectual ideas behind the Revolution. These poets included

BYRON AND NAPOLEON

It is widely accepted by most critics that the hero of *Childe Harold* Canto III is Napoleon. Byron mentions in his preface to Canto IV that now the persona of *Childe Harold* was insignificant and he would now express his ideas in his own 'voice'.

A newspaper in Venice once published an article which proclaimed that the protagonist of *Childe Harold* was Napoleon. Byron wrote a letter to the editor to object, saying "Bounaparte is not the protagonist of the poem under any name!"

In 1815, when Napoleon escaped from Elba, Byron was greatly impressed by him. He copied the carriage Napoleon used to ride in, and called Napoleon his "pagod". Although Byron admired Napoleon, he did not share with him his passion for warfare. Due to this Byron felt let down when Napoleon declared himself Emperor of France. Byron was critical of war and *Childe Harold's* story is his effort to impress upon people the futility of war.

William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey. William Godwin too was inspired to write his treatise *Inquiry into Political Justice*. Wordsworth and Coleridge experienced the Revolution first hand, as they happened to be travelling in France when it began. Just as the French Revolution brought a shift from the monarchy to the common man, the Romantic poets brought the common man into their poetry by making the themes closer to daily life of the common people. They used simple language which would appeal to a larger section of society. However, the first generation of Romantic poets were soon disillusioned by the violence that followed, such as the execution of Louis XVI and his queen. The second generation of Romantics—Shelley and Byron—were influenced more by the ideals that the revolution represented. Byron's admiration for Napoleon and his own love for liberty reflect in all his writings.

PROMINENT THEMES IN BYRON'S POETRY

LIBERTY

Byron's poetry has a strong theme of liberty. Influenced by his travels across Europe, liberty was a strong thread across his work. Having seen different forms of oppression, in governments and society, his poems—especially *The Prisoner of Chillon* and *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*-- have several discussions on oppression. Byron believed that the right to liberty belonged to everybody, and to deny this right was unthinkable. Byron's personal experience as an officer in the battlefield played a large part in his forming such strong ideas against oppressors. He had witnessed firsthand the Ottoman (Turkish) onslaught on Greece, and spoke out strongly in favour of the oppressed.

NATURE

The Romantics placed great value on Nature, and man's relation with it. Their descriptions of nature reflect the awe in which they held it. Wordsworth saw nature as the essential power through which God operates. He saw a divine presence in nature, and his poetry celebrates and records his love for nature. Several of his poems speak of how nature, and its influence, provides solace to the human heart. The Lucy poems highlight the formative influence of nature on young children. *Tintern Abbey*, *The Daffodils*, and *The Cloud* are some instances where Wordsworth speaks of the ennobling effect of nature. Having experienced the beauty of the daffodil flowers blooming on a hillside, Wordsworth derives pleasure from them much later, in a barren, urban setting:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;

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And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

(*The Daffodils* lns 19-24)

Nature is a source of comfort for Wordsworth, a sublime entity from which he draws succour and strength. He saw Man and Nature as parts of a Whole, which makes Nature an element which would give comfort to Man.

Unlike Wordsworth, Shelley did not see a Divine presence in Nature. Yet, like him, he saw Nature as a powerful force which was merciless in its treatment of Man. He saw Nature as a deadly force which was beyond Man's control or understanding. In the poem *Ozymandias* for instance, Shelley describes how the mightiest of rulers cannot hold against the destructive power of Nature. Since Shelley was an atheist, he differs in his vision of Nature from Wordsworth. Wordsworth, being a faithful member of the Church of England, saw Nature as a manifestation of God.

The later Romantic poets were quite often writing in response to the earlier Romantics. Byron too was influenced by Wordsworth and other earlier Romantics. Byron disagreed with the political views of Wordsworth and Coleridge. Although he followed the tenets set by them in the *Lyrical Ballads*, he sometimes disagreed with their view of nature as superior to the human spirit. Byron did not glorify and idealize nature, yet he recognised the power of nature to calm human emotions. Byron speaks of his relationship with Nature in Canto III:

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 it be
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.

(Canto III, Stanza 72)

The idea of finding a divine presence in nature is an influence of William Wordsworth. Another obvious influence, who was an inspiration to Wordsworth too, is Rousseau, the philosopher who propagated the idea that man should attempt to realise his place in the universe. Byron saw nature as a backdrop to humankind's life on earth. In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* he

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recognises not just the soothing power of nature but also the terror-inducing elements which make nature fearsome to humanity. Natural phenomenon like volcanoes, tornadoes and avalanches scare us yet at the same time create a sense of awe within us.

Roll on, thou deep and dark blue Ocean — roll!
Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain;
Man marks the earth with ruin — his control
Stops with the shore; — upon the watery plain
The wrecks are all thy deed, nor doth remain
A shadow of man's ravage, save his own,
When for a moment, like a drop of rain,
He sinks into thy depths with bubbling groan,
Without a grave, unknelled, uncoffined, and unknown.

(*Childe Harold* Canto IV Stanza 179)

The end of Canto IV describes the ocean as a force of nature. The ocean is seen as free and powerful. Byron encourages the reader not to feel overwhelmed by the greatness of the ocean, but to submit to its beauty and calmness. Byron also draws a contrast between the impermanence of man's great civilizations and the sublimity of the sea.

LOVE

“Man's love is of man's life/A thing apart./'Tis a woman's whole existence.”

Lines 17-18, Canto I, *Don Juan*

Donna Julia's line in her letter to Don Juan aptly sums up Byron's own attitude to love. Byron's own experiences in love were not happy. He had several unstable love relationships. His poetry reflects these experiences. Don Juan's fickleness is a reflection of Byron's own nature. In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* he makes the women he idolizes the muses for his poems. Love, for Byron is an entity which cannot be realised. Byron was the Don Juan of his time. His attractive countenance made not just the women of his time, but also the men to be fascinated by him. Unfortunately, this attention made Byron vain and fickle in his commitment. Just as Don Juan moves from woman to woman, faithful to none, Byron too was unable to create lasting bonds with his women. Instead, he had several affairs which

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ended in heartbreak. Most of the themes Lord Byron chose for his poetry were personal, so there is a strong autobiographical element in it. Byron himself never had a strong romantic involvement with a single person, which led to his view of love as unattainable.

THE VALUE OF ART

An important aspect which Byron speaks of in the first two cantos is the value of art. Like the early Romantics, Byron too saw perfection in classical culture. He is saddened by the degradation of artefacts during his travels through Greece. Lord Elgin's famous marbles, which were held in great awe by other Englishmen, horrified Byron. He was disappointed that an Englishman had desecrated the ancient treasure of Greece.



A metope depicting a Centaur and a Lapith in combat. This is part of the Elgin Marbles.

Image from wikipedia

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elgin_Marbles

The Elgin Marbles

The Elgin Marbles are a collection of marble sculptures which were removed from the Parthenon in Athens. They had originally been made by sculptures under Phidias, who was a famous architect and sculptor of ancient Greece. In 1801, Lord Elgin, had these sculptures removed and transported to England by sea. While Lord Elgin received support from most people, Byron was among the most vociferous in condemning his action as vandalism. Subsequently, the Marbles were bought from Elgin by the British government in 1816, and displayed in the Duveen Gallery at the British Museum. Even as recently as 2014, Greece has been arguing for a return of the sculptures to the country they were made in. England has not relented, and the issue is currently being mediated by UNESCO.

CHILDE HAROLD'S PILGRIMAGE

The post-revolutionary era was a time of scepticism and cynicism—with a sense of loss for the period that had gone. *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is Byron's attempt to describe the transitoriness of glory and ambition. Byron describes the pilgrimage that the protagonist Harold, a young nobleman, takes around Europe. Harold's travels are loosely modelled on Byron's own travels through Western Europe, but Byron remained adamant that the readers should not read an autobiographical element in Harold's character. Yet, in Canto III and IV, Byron lets go of the hero, and the narrative is very clearly Byron's own response to the situation. Though the themes of the different cantos of the poem are disparate, the element that holds the entire work together is the form Byron uses. Byron uses the Spenserian stanza throughout the poem.



The Spenserian Stanza

In the poem's preface, Byron mentions that he will use the Spenserian stanza to write the poem. Each canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is written in Spenserian stanzas, which are eight lines in iambic pentameter, followed by an Alexandrine. The stanzas are interconnected by the themes described in them. The Spenserian stanza is different from the Petrarchan model as it is an octave with two quatrains and an extra line. Edmund Spenser used this stanza form in his magnum opus *The Faerie Queen*. The rhyme scheme of the Spenserian stanza is abab bcbbc. It is a nine line stanza in which the first eight lines are written in iambic pentameter and the last line is an alexandrine—in iambic hexameter. It is an extremely difficult rhyme scheme to adhere to, and Byron is one of the few who has used it after Spenser in *Childe Harold*. The other famous poet who has used the Spenserian stanza effectively has been Shelley in *Adonais*.



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The Frontispiece of the 1825 edition of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*

Source: www.wikimedia.com

The poem narrates the travels of Childe Harold, a young man who is representative of an entire generation. He chooses to travel across Europe as he is disillusioned with his life. Harold's melancholy and disappointment reflects the emotions of the people who were sick of the hostile environment caused by the war. The term Childe is a medieval term for a person who is a likely candidate for knighthood.



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A sketch of Charlotte Harley

Source: Wikipedia.

The invocation in the opening of the first canto is to “Ianthe”, the muse to whom Byron dedicates the opening poem. This personal muse “Ianthe”, is the name he fondly used for Lady Charlotte Harley, the daughter of the Earl of Oxford. (She was just eleven years old when *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* was published). Byron was deeply attached to her, even though she was much younger to him. She represented the ideal of unrequited love for Byron. The image of “Ianthe” is also connected to his concept of the fading of beauty with time. Interestingly, Lady Oxford too is said to have been Byron's love interest.



Ianthe in Classical Literature

There are several classical references to Ianthe. One Ianthe was from Crete. She was brought up by a man, and was betrothed to Iphis. Since they loved each other very deeply, the goddess Isis turned Iphis into a man so that they could marry. One of the daughters of Oceanus and Thetys was also called Ianthe. The third Ianthe spoken of in classical literature is a woman who was so dear to the gods that they honoured her by growing purple flowers around her grave. It is not clear which of these references Byron was alluding to in his invocation. The first seems plausible, since Byron himself was experimental with his sexual preferences and took some time to figure out his sexual identity. Yet, in the context of Lady Charlotte, who was an innocent young girl, the third Ianthe, whose simplicity and beauty earned her the love of the Gods, seems most appropriate.



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Childe Harold's Pilgrimage was thought to be an autobiographical poem by many, since some of the descriptions match Byron's own travels across Europe. It also had some very personal reflections by Byron on his life. Through the persona of Childe Harold, Byron talks of how he has wasted his youth, and is now looking forward to travelling across Europe in a pilgrimage of sorts. Byron himself was unsure whether to publish the poem, since he felt it was a very personal poem. John Murray had the first two cantos published in 1812, after friends convinced Byron that he should have the book published. The success of *Childe Harold* brought instant fame to Byron. In his own words, "I awoke one morning and found myself famous."

Byron travelled across Europe between 1809 and 1811 and wrote the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* during this time. They were published together in March 1812. The third and fourth cantos were published in 1816 and 1818. The poem presents Byron's political ideas about Europe. He supported the Greeks in their war of independence against Turkey and states so in the poem. There is also mention of the Convention of Cintra, in which French soldiers were allowed to escape, instead of being captured and punished. . Since Byron travelled across the continent during a time of much upheaval, it was natural that Napoleon's legacy was reflected in Byron's descriptions of the journey. Byron travelled mostly across those countries which had not been under Napoleon's direct control, yet the threat of war was constantly present in these countries too. Much as Byron resisted calling the work autobiographical, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* became a poetic travelogue of Byron's own travels across Portugal, Spain, Greece and Albania. It seems fitting that Byron died while supporting the Greeks against Turkey, a cause that he supported vehemently.

The Structure of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*

Although the word 'pilgrimage' gives the poem religious overtones, it has been seen a secular poem. One can also think of it as a travel diary of the poet-persona who records his emotions and moods as he travels across Europe. Byron uses the Spenserian stanza in the poem. The rhythm of the Spenserian stanza contributes to the continuity across the cantos of the poem. *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* has four cantos. Even though they are unconnected in terms of themes and events, the form of the Spenserian stanza binds the cantos together into a single

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poetic work. This form of poetry has eight lines (two quatrains) in iambic pentameter followed by an Alexandrine.

CHILDE HAROLD'S PILGRIMAGE CANTOS I AND II

Byron explains the themes he will write about in the poem in his Preface. He describes Childe Harold as an unchivalrous character, even though he is expecting to be knighted for his valour. The Preface also makes it clear to the readers that they should not see the poem as autobiographical.

Canto I begins with an invocation to the Muse to allow the poet to present his poem in a beautiful manner. Byron then describes the hero Childe Harold. Although he is hoping to be knighted, Harold does not have very heroic qualities. He is "given to revel and ungodly glee" (Stanza 3) and has done some "evil deeds" which he is afraid will catch up with him. Harold is the typical Byronic hero, who is talented, yet debauched. His decision to travel to Europe is an attempt to get over his boredom. He visits his family before he leaves, and sings a song of farewell on board the ship.

Harold's first stop is Portugal, which the poet describes with great beauty. He also explains Portugal's delicate political relationship with France. Lisbon itself is not as beautiful as the countryside, and Byron describes how the landscape is ruined. Through Childe Harold's persona, Byron gives his own indictment of the political situation of the time. On travelling to Spain he realises that Spain is in a losing position. If it does not get military aid from anyone, it was bound to be captured by France. From Spain Harold travels to Greece. Even among the beauty of Greek history, his mind remains with the Spanish people, and he soon returns to Spain. Witnessing a joust makes him conclude that Spanish men are passionate and temperamental as they witness such bloodshed. In the last few stanzas of the canto, Harold speaks of the bloodshed for Spanish freedom. Byron's aim is to make the reader familiar with the continuous state of war in Western Europe.

The first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* were published in March 1812. This was the period of the Napoleonic wars in Europe. Since the narrative stems from Byron's actual travels across Portugal, Spain, Greece and Albania, where the threat of war loomed large, a large portion of the narrative dwells on the subject of the futility of war and violence.

The Byronic Hero

Childe Harold is an early example of Byron's idea of the serious and brooding hero, which is now quite famously referred to in literature as the Byronic hero. The idea of the Byronic hero is one who has great intelligence and adaptability in difficult situations. As one sees with Don Juan, a Byronic hero may have charm and sophistication, yet is also arrogant and cruel with the people around him. Byron's typical heroes are said to be modelled partly on how he himself was in real life. Thus, while on the one hand the Byronic hero has a distinctive style, on the other he is prone to dark moods and cynicism. Though attractive to women, he is not true to his love interests, and uses them mercilessly. The Byronic hero has inspired several spin-offs in novels, movies and theatre. One of the most famous Byron heroes in fiction is Margaret Mitchell's Rhett Butler in her famous novel *Gone with the Wind* which was based on the American Civil War.

THE IBERIAN PENINSULAR WAR

The Iberian Peninsular War was fought between Napoleon and the allied forces of Spain, Portugal and Britain. The war was fought for control over the Iberian Peninsula, which was a crucial area during the Napoleonic wars. The war reached its height in 1808, when Spain and France were in conflict with each other. It ended in 1814 when Napoleon was defeated. It is considered important since it was seen as one of the

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Portrait of Lord Byron by Henry Pierce Bone

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord_Byron

Harold has embarked on a pilgrimage to escape some wrongdoings of his past which the poet does not describe. He tried to find relief in his travels through Europe. Harold's travels through various countries are documented in the first two cantos, though he begins to fade into the background in the later cantos. Byron himself was not happy in his school years since he had faced bullying from his classmates on account of his bad foot. This experience left him with a general disposition to support the weak and oppose suppression of any sort. It was this attitude that made him support the Greek war of Independence with the keenness that he did.

Byron expresses his dismay at the desecration of ancient art in Canto II. It is therefore apt that he chooses Athene, the Greek goddess of Wisdom and Architecture as his muse in this canto. His visit to Greece reveals the dismal state of the Greek ruins. So much so, that even a high lord such as Lord Elgin has been party to the ruin. Elgin's role in moving several sculptures to England were regarded as vandalism by Byron. In the first few stanzas, Byron laments the sad state that Athens is in. The present war is only making the situation worse. He had hoped to see the beauty of the varied cultures of Europe, but the war brings out the ugliest side of humanity, and Byron feels disillusioned. He contrasts the present citizens with their classical ancestors to challenge the current generation to rise against the Turks and the English.

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In stanzas 95-98, Byron shifts the focus from art to the loss of his friend John Edleston. He elevates the loss he feels on his school friend's death to the sense of emptiness he has on seeing the ruin of classical treasures in Greece.

The Greek War of Independence

The Greek War of Independence was fought by the Greeks against the Ottoman Turks in 1821. Greece had been under the Ottomans since 1453, and a minor revolt by Theodoros Kolokotronis in Peloponnese set off the Greek struggle for independence. A strong navy enabled the Greeks to resist the Turks, but they managed to get reinforcements from Egypt. With Egyptian support the Turks were able to reclaim Athens in 1825. It was only in 1828 that Greece was able to defeat the Turks with assistance from the French, Russian and English forces. Finally, after years of negotiations, Greece achieved independence in 1832. Byron's love for Greek art and literature made it difficult for him to accept how the country was controlled by the Ottoman Empire. He helped the Greek army with money, and later joined the war. Tragically, he died of an infection and was unable to enter the battlefield.

Even though Byron constantly suggests to the reader not to confuse the poet-persona with Byron himself, the ideas and beliefs set forth by Childe Harold and the poet persona are indeed Byron's own. However, he tells the readers in the Preface to Canto IV that he will not speak about Harold in this canto, since the readers constantly see Harold as a literary representation of Byron himself.

In Canto Four, one of the themes Byron dwells on is the timelessness of Art. Despite the decline of past cultures, their literature and art have survived, and influenced subsequent ages. He contrasts the destructiveness of oppressive political powers with the artist's ability to create beauty. Art will sustain longer than the civilizations which created them. Further, Byron speaks of punishment, "a day of reckoning", for oppressive leaders. In the first two cantos, the leaders who one can identify to fit this are Napoleon and Lord Elgin, whose bringing to England of the Elgin marbles was an act that Byron found condemnable.

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Canto III

The muse of Canto III is Byron's daughter Ada. Byron's daughter was taken away by his wife when she left him. Byron's acute sense of loss can be seen in his invocation, where he bemoans her absence. The hostile relations he had with his wife Annabella made it impossible for Byron to meet his daughter, and when he left England in 1816, he would have known that he may probably not see his daughter again. Byron was, like his heroes, struggling with an unhappy past, and travelling across Europe in order to find peace. Interestingly, in this canto, he calls his Muse by her name, Ada, and does not mask it with another name. This also marks a departure from the previous cantos, where he had struggled to detach himself from the narrative and claim that Harold was not to be seen as autobiographical. By canto III however, Byron openly expresses his opinions, while Harold is not mentioned.

LADY ANN ADA LOVELACE

Lady Ann Ada Lovelace was Byron's only legitimate child. Due to his estrangement with his wife Annabella, he was not allowed to meet her since she was a few months old. This misery is reflected in his invocation to her in Canto III. Sadly, he died in Greece when she was only eight years old, and she never got to see him.

Born on 10th December 1815, in London, Ada was a talented mathematician, and is considered to be the world's first computer programmer. Her mother insisted on a scientific education for her in the hope that it would encourage her to develop self control and not inherit her father's difficult temperament. She is known to have translated and added to an article by Charles Babbage. In fact, Babbage served as a mentor to Ada at the University of London. Ada was married to William King, the Earl of Lovelace. They had three children and the Earl encouraged Ada's academic interests. It is interesting to know that she personally knew Michael Faraday the scientist and Charles Dickens.

After 1837, she developed persistent health problems, and her medication made her prone to mood swings and hallucinations. Ada died on 27th November, 1852 and is buried in the Church of St. Mary Magdalene in Nottingham, England.

In 1980, a new computer language developed by the US Department of Defence was named "Ada" in her honour.

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Lord Byron



A painting of Ada Lovelace in 1840.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ada_Lovelace

Canto III maintains the form of the travelogue and describes Harold's journey from Dover to Waterloo, and then onwards to the River Rhine. The visit to Waterloo makes Byron reflect upon his views on war. He is saddened and appalled by the bloodshed that is caused by man's violence against his own kind. The opening of Canto III offers a requiem of sorts for Hon. Major Frederick Howard, a soldier who died in battle.

In a letter to Augusta dated 3rd January 1817, Byron wrote about Canto III that he felt it was the best piece of poetry he had ever written. He considered Canto III to be his best work so far. Canto III was begun by Byron in May 1816 in Brussels. He had visited Waterloo during his stay at Brussels. He completed it on 27th June 1816 in Ouchy near Lausanne. Thus the third canto is often referred to as the Swiss Canto, while the fourth, which Byron wrote while travelling across Italian cities like Rome and Venice, is called the Italian canto.

The stanzas from Canto III which are in the syllabus are often referred to as the Napoleon stanzas. In these stanzas Byron hails Napoleon for his greatness. He felt that Napoleon's downfall was due to, among other reasons, his genius.

There sunk the greatest, nor the worst of men,

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Whose spirit, antithetically mixt,
One moment of the mightiest, and again
On little objects with like firmness fixt;
Extreme in all things! hadst thou been betwixt,
Thy throne had still been thine, or never been;
For daring made thy rise as fall:

(Canto III, lines 316-322)

Even though Byron was a great admirer of Napoleon, his disappointment with Napoleon declaring himself as Emperor is obvious in Stanza 38. Byron was surprised at Napoleon's desire to obtain political control of the country. . Byron also comments on Napoleon's desire for power, which has forced so many others into war.

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;
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. 380

43

This makes the madmen who have made men mad
By their contagion;

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Lord Byron

Conquerors and Kings, Founders of sects and systems, to whom add

Sophists, Bards, Statesmen, all unquiet things

Which stir too strongly the soul's secret springs,

And are themselves the fools to those they fool;

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

Their breath is agitation, and their life 390

A storm whereon they ride, to sink at last,

And yet so nurs'd and bigoted to strife,

That should their days, surviving perils past,

Melt to calm twilight, they feel overcast

With sorrow and supineness, and so die;

(Canto III, lines 370- 395)

In Switzerland, Harold praises the bravery of warriors who supported Frances's fight for liberty. He also voices his opinion on Rousseau, the political thinker from Geneva. Byron feels that like Napoleon, Rousseau too has been misunderstood by his contemporaries, yet nature is a "great equalizer" and people will learn from the mistakes they have made. The canto ends with an invocation to his daughter, and Byron is sad that she is not with him.

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Canto IV

The next year after he wrote Canto III, Byron wrote Canto IV. He began writing it on 19th June 1817 and completed it by January 1818. The fourth canto describes Harold's journey through Italy. By this canto, the veil between the poet persona and Harold has lifted, and it is clear to the reader that Harold is indeed the poet's mouthpiece. In the preface dedicated to John Hobhouse, Byron admits that *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* does have autobiographical elements.

During his visit to Rome, Byron was distraught by the destruction of its past grandeur. He contrasted the impermanence of this greatness with the permanence of art and literature. Even though past greats like Boccaccio, Galileo and Dante are dead, their contribution to knowledge has remained. He condemns tyranny and speaks of the failure of the French Revolution due to Napoleon's "vile Ambition."

As it was written in Venice and Rome, this canto is often called the Italian Canto. Interestingly, in Canto IV, Byron no longer uses Harold's persona, but will speak in his own voice. Of special notice in Canto IV is Byron's nature imagery. In the stanzas extracted for the course, Byron describes the ocean. Unexpectedly for a later Romantic poet, Byron's nature imagery is as moving as Wordsworth's. His descriptions of nature in Canto IV align with the Romantic ideal of Nature.

There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,
There is a rapture on the lonely shore,
There is society where none intrudes,
By the deep Sea, and music in its roar:
I love not Man the less, but Nature more,
From these our interviews, in which I steal
From all I may be, or have been before,

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To mingle with the Universe, and feel
What I can ne'er express, yet cannot all conceal.

(Canto IV, Stanza 178)

References to Childe Harold in Other Literary Texts:

It is interesting to note that Childe Harold finds its way into several literary texts in later times. In his book *Eugene Onegin* the Russian author Alexander Pushkin refers to Childe Harold several times while describing his own hero Eugene. Hector Berlioz, the French Romantic composer, is said to have been inspired by Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* in composing his own semi-autobiographical symphony *Harold en Italie*. In Anthony Trollope's novel, *The Eustace Diamonds*, Lizzie Eustace is read to from the fourth canto by Rev. Emilius. In popular culture, it finds mention in *Asterix in Belgium* and in the 2000 film *Britannic*. In art too, Turner painted a picture depicting the travels of Harold.



An 1823 painting by Joseph Mallord William Turner titled *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Childe_Harold%27s_Pilgrimage

CONCLUSION

In cantos III and IV Byron obliterates the distinction between the narrator and the hero Childe Harold. It is definitely Byron himself who gives us his views on subjects such as art and the nature of political power. Although the sections we deal with in Canto III concentrate on Napoleon and the War, the primary subject of the third canto is Art. Art is what brings out the significance of life. Byron wants the reader to realise the timelessness of art. Even when the greatest of civilizations are destroyed, their art and literature do not allow their culture to be

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forgotten. The creative power of the artist provides an enduring quality to art. In Canto IV Byron talks of the transience of power—especially political power—which he describes by citing the Fall of the Roman Empire and the decline of Venice as a major world power.

Cantos III and IV are distinctly better crafted than the first two cantos. The persona of the poet-hero allows Byron to be more direct and forceful in presenting his ideas. His veneration of Napoleon is presented, yet he does not romanticize him. He speaks of Napoleon's valour as well as his cowardice. Canto III traced the route from Belgium and Germany through Switzerland, and Canto IV narrates the poet persona's travels from Venice to Rome. The journey motif provides the basic structure of the poems. Byron saw the ocean as a symbol of eternity. The address to the Ocean towards the end of canto IV carries the message of the impermanence of earthly glory.

Thus, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* remains one of Byron's most personal and emotional expression of all that he felt strongly about.

GLOSSARY

Albania—An area on the eastern shore of the Adriatic Sea, which is next to Greece. In the time the poem is written, Albania was not a separate nation, but the area was called so.

Alexandrine—An Alexandrine is a line with twelve syllables or six iambic feet. It was popular in 16th century English drama before iambic pentameter became more popular. The Alexandrine form is more commonly known as iambic hexameter.

Byronic hero—The archetypal protagonist created and popularized by Lord Byron; the Byronic hero is characterized by a secret sin or tragedy in his past. He has a rebellious attitude and a love for freedom.

Canto—A canto is a section of a long poem, or a "song" which, together with other cantos, makes up the whole poem.

Calvinism—A major branch of Protestantism in Christianity, which follows the teachings and practice of John Calvin. The Calvinists broke away from the Roman Catholic Church in what is now famously known as the Reformation.

Childe—A young noble.

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Iambic Pentameter—A ten-syllable metrical line divided into five iambic feet. The foot used in this is an ‘iamb’, which is a set of two syllables, the first unstressed and the second stressed. Iambic Pentameter is a very common form in English poetry and drama.

Pagod—An idol, a person one holds in high respect.

Petrarchan stanza—A Petrarchan stanza form consists of two quatrains and a sestet. Though Spenser followed the Petrarchan tradition of sonnetting, he adapted the sonnet form to suit his style of writing, thus inventing the Spenserian stanza.

Pilgrimage—A long journey, particularly one with religious or spiritual significance and a specific, meaningful goal.

Spenserian stanza—A stanza devised by the poet Edmund Spenser that contains eight lines of iambic pentameter along with a ninth line in iambic hexameter, using the rhyme scheme abab bcbcc.

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https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lord_Byron_-_Childe_Harold%27s_Pilgrimage_-_Dugdale_edition_-_original_scan.png
2. An undated engraving of Byron's father Captain John "Mad Jack Byron"
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord_Byron
3. A portrait of Catherine Gordon, Byron's mother, by Thomas Stewardson.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord_Byron
4. Portrait of Byron by Richard Westall. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord_Byron
5. Water colour by Jean-Pierre Houel depicting the Fall of the Bastille.
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6. Elgin Marbles photograph. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elgin_Marbles

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7. Sketch of Charlotte Harley. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord_Byron
8. Portrait of Lord Byron by Henry Pierce Bone. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord_Byron
9. An 1823 painting by Joseph Mallord William Turner titled *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Childe_Harold%27s_Pilgrimage
10. Ada Lovelace painting. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ada_Lovelace

SOME INTERESTING WEBLINKS

1. You can read the entire text of Byron's *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* here. <http://readytogoebbooks.com/LB-English.htm>
2. Hear Tim Garcyk's rendition of *She Walks in Beauty* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yBKjI9qdOZg>