

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-65802-8 - Byron: Childe Harold's Pilgrimage  
Edited by A. Hamilton Thompson  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

BYRON  
CHILDE HAROLD'S  
PILGRIMAGE

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-65802-8 - Byron: Childe Harold's Pilgrimage  
Edited by A. Hamilton Thompson  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---



LORD BYRON  
*(Statue in Trinity College)*

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-65802-8 - Byron: Childe Harold's Pilgrimage  
Edited by A. Hamilton Thompson  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

**BYRON**  

---

**CHILDE HAROLD'S  
PILGRIMAGE**

Edited by  
A. HAMILTON THOMPSON, M.A., F.S.A.

Cambridge :  
at the University Press  
1913

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-65802-8 - Byron: Childe Harold's Pilgrimage  
Edited by A. Hamilton Thompson  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,  
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press  
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107658028](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107658028)

© Cambridge University Press 1913

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception  
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,  
no reproduction of any part may take place without the written  
permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1913  
First paperback edition 2013

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

ISBN 978-1-107-65802-8 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or  
accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in  
this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is,  
or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-65802-8 - Byron: Childe Harold's Pilgrimage  
Edited by A. Hamilton Thompson  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

## PREFACE

THE notes in this edition of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* are intended chiefly to supply a commentary upon the historical, literary and topographical allusions, which are plentiful in the poem, especially in the concluding canto. Explanations of the more involved passages have been added where necessary, with notes here and there on the principal characteristics of the poet's thought and the style in which it is clothed. These last, however, are sufficiently obvious to the reader without elaborate discussion, and some of the more striking points in connection with them are summed up in the introduction to this volume. Quotations from the classics or from foreign writers, where they throw light on passages of the poem, have been translated in the notes. The text has been obtained by a collation of the best editions, which present very few variations.

A. H. T.

GRETTON, NORTHANTS  
July 1913

Cambridge University Press  
 978-1-107-65802-8 - Byron: Childe Harold's Pilgrimage  
 Edited by A. Hamilton Thompson  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

## CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE . . . . .	v
CONTENTS . . . . .	vi
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	vii
TEXT :	
Preface to First and Second Cantos . . . . .	1
Addition to Preface . . . . .	3
To Ianthe . . . . .	6
Canto the First . . . . .	8
Canto the Second . . . . .	45
Canto the Third . . . . .	81
To John Hobhouse, Esq. . . . .	123
Canto the Fourth . . . . .	128
NOTES . . . . .	190
APPENDIX :	
Summary of the contents of <i>Childe Harold's Pilgrimage</i>	278
LORD BYRON (Statue in Trinity College)	<i>Frontispiece</i>

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-65802-8 - Byron: Childe Harold's Pilgrimage  
Edited by A. Hamilton Thompson  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

## INTRODUCTION

THE first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* were published in March 1812. Their author, George Gordon Noel, sixth baron Byron of Rochdale, born 22 Jan. 1788, had succeeded his grand-uncle in his barony soon after entering upon his eleventh year. While still at Trinity college, Cambridge, he had published with a bookseller at Newark, near his mother's house at Southwell, a volume of short poems called *Hours of Idleness* (1807). An unfavourable notice of this book in *The Edinburgh Review* impelled him to write *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809), a satire in the manner of Pope. These were his only published works at the time when he began *Childe Harold*. His natural sensitiveness, much increased by the misfortune of a deformed foot and by the unwisdom of a capricious and hysterical mother, bred in him a self-consciousness which proved a serious hindrance to his entry into life. Much of his time after leaving Cambridge was spent in company with his chosen friends at his seat of Newstead abbey in Nottinghamshire, where he indulged in orgies of a boyish and comparatively harmless character. The coldness of his guardian, lord Carlisle, who, probably misunderstanding his ward's poetical tendencies and

T. B.

b

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-65802-8 - Byron: Childe Harold's Pilgrimage  
Edited by A. Hamilton Thompson  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

disliking his dissipations, neglected to introduce him to the house of Lords, and the difficulties in which his already over-burdened estate was becoming involved, preyed upon his spirits; while an early and disappointed affection for a cousin, Miss Chaworth, may have been an additional cause of chagrin. On 2 July 1809 he sailed from Falmouth for Lisbon, with the intention of abandoning England and visiting the East.

The successive stages of his journey, in company with John Cam Hobhouse, through Portugal and the south of Spain are recorded in the first canto of *Childe Harold* and will be found chronicled in their proper places in the notes at the end of this volume. From Gibraltar he sailed to Malta, and thence to Prevesa in Albania. It was during his travels in Albania that he began at Janina, on 31 October 1809, the stanzas which developed into the first canto of the poem, which was finished on 30 December, soon after his arrival at Athens, and had been written, as stanzas LX.—LXIV. and LXX. shew, at intervals during his journey. The second canto, which describes the Albanian journey in detail, was finished in its first form at Smyrna on 2 May 1810, but was subsequently enlarged by the addition of passages relating to later incidents of his tour. It contains stanzas referring to the scenes in Greece which impressed him most, but his visit to Smyrna, Ephesus and the Troad in the spring of 1810 is left unrecorded. He stayed at Constantinople for two months in the summer, and returned to Athens about 18 July. He made Athens his head-quarters until the following May, when he returned to England, reaching home in July.



Cambridge University Press  
 978-1-107-65802-8 - Byron: Childe Harold's Pilgrimage  
 Edited by A. Hamilton Thompson  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

## INTRODUCTION

ix

His fame as a poet was ensured by the publication next year, after much revision and with some additions, of the first two cantos of his poem, which are virtually complete in themselves. His series of oriental tales in verse, beginning with *The Giaour* (1813), won him further popularity, and he became the fashionable poet of the day. On 2 Jan. 1815, at the height of his success, he married Miss Milbanke. Their child was born in the following December, and some six weeks later his wife suddenly left him, never to return. A formal separation followed; and, in the misery and scandal caused by this event, Byron, with his hopes broken, his popularity turned to obloquy, and at the lowest ebb of his fortunes, again left England. He never set foot again in his native country. Travelling through Belgium and along the Rhine to Basel, he reached the lake of Geneva in June 1816. Here he had the society of the Shelleys, and the poet beside whose funeral pyre he stood six years later exercised a profound influence upon his thought. In the autumn of 1816 he entered Italy and took up his abode at Venice, his chief place of residence till 1819. From 1819 to 1821 he made his head-quarters at Ravenna. From Ravenna he moved to Pisa, and in the autumn of 1822 to Genoa. In July 1823 he sailed to Greece, to take part in the Greek war of independence: he died at Missolonghi on the gulf of Patras on 18 April (Easter day) 1824.

The third and fourth cantos of *Childe Harold*, published in 1818, are founded upon his journeys of 1816 and 1817. The third canto follows the course of his travels by the field of Waterloo and the Rhine to Morat and the lake of Geneva. The fourth canto,

b 2

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-65802-8 - Byron: Childe Harold's Pilgrimage  
Edited by A. Hamilton Thompson  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

beginning in Venice, is chiefly occupied with the impressions of a hastily made journey to Rome in April and May 1817. Begun about the end of the following June, it had reached the length of 144 stanzas early in September, but it was gradually extended to 184, the final additions being made while the poem was still in the press.

*Childe Harold* thus consists of two distinct portions, which reflect emotions of a somewhat different kind. The earlier part was written in petulant chagrin, and, although its general tone is misanthropical, its contempt of humanity is something of a pose, and it is not without flashes of gaiety. Byron, while describing a journey which he had taken himself, invented an imaginary wanderer who, although naturally possessing many of his own characteristics, was not wholly identical with himself. The excesses of *Childe Harold* and the satiety which they produced are both exaggerated: Byron himself had a capacity for enjoyment which he denied to his hero. On the other hand, *Childe Harold's* separate individuality, such as it is, is of no special interest. Byron's poetry depended on his own emotions: the characters of his poetry have life only in so far as they are embodiments of his own broodings. It is, therefore, natural that in the last two cantos, written in a mood of deeper suffering than the first two, the supposed hero practically disappears, and the poet himself and his misfortunes become the undisguised motive of his song.

The same influence affects the outward form of the poem. It is clothed in the Spenserian stanza of eight ten-syllabled lines, with a concluding Alexandrine or

line of twelve syllables. In the earlier portion Byron affected Spenserian archaisms, as did Thomson and the eighteenth-century imitators of Spenser; but these were actually uncongenial to him, and after the opening stanzas are of fitful recurrence. In the third and fourth cantos they are so rare that they are practically non-existent. His stanza is no longer hampered by the necessity of imitation, but becomes an unfettered vehicle of sombre thought. Similarly, the tendency to burlesque writing which appears here and there in the first canto, and was apparently thought by Byron to be consistent with his archaic experiments in language, becomes in the second canto mere vivacity of description, and is utterly absent from the last two. While the opening cantos are rich in magnificent passages, and the poem has few things as fine to shew as the picture of the giant, Battle personified, standing on the mountain (canto I., st. XXXIX.), or the prelude of the second canto, conceived in the ruins of the temple of Zeus at Athens, the sustained eloquence and dignity of the third and fourth cantos is still more remarkable.

In no respect, however, is the deepening of subjective emotion more clearly visible than in the descriptive passages to which the reader naturally looks for enjoyment. If Byron in his earlier days felt deeply, he had not yet learned to discover his own sorrows in everything which he saw. He moralised his travels: the cave of Honorius and the crosses on the mountain path at Cintra, the skull amid the ruins of Athens, the field of Marathon, are subjects for pensive reflection. Personifications of abstract qualities, such as those in which the poetry of Gray and Collins abound,

constantly occurred to him and were used with fine effect. But he could describe what his eye observed, for its own sake without deeper reflection. The picture of Ali's court at Tepaleni, with its several details woven into verse, has no parallel in the third and fourth cantos; and one has only to compare the bull-fight in the first canto with the stanzas upon the Coliseum in the fourth to realise the change which has come over the author's spirit. His embarkation in the third canto, the apostrophe to Ocean at the end of the fourth, belong to a period of thought entirely different from that to which the lively description in the second of the voyage through the Mediterranean belongs.

The contrast is due in the first instance to personal experience, which has driven the poet back upon himself and absorbed his whole mind, so that he fills the world with 'the pageant of his bleeding heart.' There are few stanzas in the third and fourth cantos which do not revert to his shattered hopes and bitter memories. Even the beauty of the Rhine, which seems to call him for a moment out of himself, leads to the reflection that this earthly Paradise cannot be so to him, unless the river were Lethe, to bring forgetfulness of woes. Beneath the Alps the shadow deepens: in Italy, amid the ruins of an ancient civilisation, the gloom is profound and there is no relaxation of memory. But it must be owned that the attitude of mingled pride and despair, expressed though it is with majesty of phrase and rhythm, would be monotonous were it not for the presence of an alleviating element. This is found in the sense of the power of nature to calm and console—a sense which, though it may be contradicted by the

Cambridge University Press  
 978-1-107-65802-8 - Byron: Childe Harold's Pilgrimage  
 Edited by A. Hamilton Thompson  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

## INTRODUCTION

xiii

poet's words, is very seldom far absent. This is not felt, at any rate so keenly, in the earlier cantos, where Byron, still under the influence of eighteenth-century poetry, looked upon nature as a theme for picturesque and animated description. Even in the third canto, the Rhine afforded him material for something of the same kind of writing. It is at the lake of Geneva that the change is first clearly visible, and that Byron becomes 'portion of that around' him. The influence of Shelley and, with it, the growing acknowledgement of that revolution in the poetic conception of nature which Wordsworth had achieved, were the partly external causes accountable for Byron's altered attitude. Henceforward the conviction of kinship with nature is responsible for the most noble passages of *Childe Harold*. Splendid as are the eloquent Roman episodes, one feels that, as in Florence, Byron is more restless among ruins and statues than he is in the open air among mountains or in sight of the ocean. The beautiful Venetian stanzas are inspired by the blending of the decaying city with 'the spouseless Adriatic' and the memory of her marriage with the sea. And the passages of the poem, the intrinsic beauty of which, as distinct from splendour of rhetoric or invective, rises most readily to the mind, are the stanzas on Clarens (canto III., stt. C.—CIII.), the sunset landscape seen from the banks of the Brenta (canto IV., stt. XXVII.—XXIX.), the description of Arquà (*ibid.* stt. XXXII., XXXIII.), which defines so well the spirit of the 'soft, quiet hamlet,' the pictures of the source of Clitumnus and the cascade of Terni (*ibid.* stt. LXVI.—LXXII.), the reflections on the grotto of Egeria (*ibid.* st. CXV. sqq.),

and the all too brief sketches of Nemi and Albano (*ibid.* stt. CLXXIII., CLXXIV.). Here Byron, face to face with nature, discovers her healing power and procures a 'suspension of disgust' from his woes.

The rhetoric and invective, however, must not be forgotten in the contemplation of these more placid features. Although, as Byron stands amid the vestiges of bygone history, the ruins of the past assume for him the complexion of his own tragedy, and he contemplates, as George Meredith says of Shakespeare, 'the seas without upon the reflex of that within,' he is also filled with a passion which, if it arises in the beginning from a feeling of personal restraint, is pure and disinterested in its effect. Liberty has found no more eloquent laureate, and kings and priests, who deserve the gratitude of mankind for the provocation they have given to the highest poetry, no more devoted opponent. In this respect the whole poem is upon the same level, although naturally the later part is tinged by a more keenly personal sympathy for the victims of tyranny. *Childe Harold* was written at the end of the most epic chapter in modern history, and its two parts faithfully reflect the fluctuations of opinion which its development produced in minds earnestly set upon the enfranchisement of Europe. The French Revolution, which had awakened the enthusiasm of Wordsworth and Coleridge in England and of the romantic poets throughout Europe, had run its course. Its sympathisers had seen the nation, which they fondly imagined as 'standing on the top of golden hours,' sink into anarchy, 'drunk with blood to vomit crime.' When Byron arrived in Portugal in 1809, the power of

## INTRODUCTION

xv

Napoleon had reached its zenith. The peninsular war was in progress; and to Byron the eagles of France, flying over the peninsula, were vultures come to feed upon the dead body of a ruined nation. Napoleon was the tyrant, England the champion of freedom; and for the time England had forfeited her reputation by her concessions at Cintra. But in 1816 the position was changed. Byron's feelings towards Napoleon were never cordial, and, while he praised his fortitude upon the field of Waterloo, at Rome he condemned his vanity. Nevertheless, he felt that, had Napoleon achieved his whole ambition, his empire might have made for the liberty of Europe. His fall, the promulgation of the Holy alliance, the settlement achieved by the congress of Vienna and the peace of Paris, had restored the old sovereigns, and Europe was doubly yoked in servitude. These events and the sentiments which they excite prompt some of the noblest verse in *Childe Harold*. Byron's sympathy, aroused by his own isolation, was with the enslaved and the outcast. In Greece, the mother of European civilisation, given over to slavery and degradation, he found its most congenial object; and the faults of his life, faults which arose from a natural incompatibility to meet the world with its own weapons and mould his mind to accept its standards, were in no small measure redeemed by his final expedition to relieve the sufferings of the country which, in happier days, had repelled the Persian invader at Marathon and Salamis, and sacrificed her noblest sons in the cause of freedom at Thermopylae.

In estimating the literary and artistic judgments of the poem, we have to remember two things. In the

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-65802-8 - Byron: Childe Harold's Pilgrimage  
Edited by A. Hamilton Thompson  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

first place, Byron was not one of those poets who, like Milton, pass a long apprenticeship to the earlier masters of poetry, and have a mind stocked with literary reminiscence. The expression of his thoughts in verse came to him spontaneously: his tendency was to amplify his naturally fluent verse, not to subject it to that condensation and refinement which is the fruit of careful literary discipline. As we have seen, his adoption of the Spenserian stanza is a mere accident of the poem, and no one who has used that form has probably owed so slight a debt to Spenser. His classical reading had been desultory. In Greece the sentiment of a glorious past and the picturesqueness of the local mythology filled his mind as he composed, but the memory of the great Attic poets, a memory which was ever present to such writers, men of sympathies so akin to his own, as Shelley, Landor and their disciple Swinburne, was so far of secondary interest to him that he does not allude to them directly. Epaminondas, Thrasylbulus, Brasidas, Leonidas, warriors and champions of liberty, are the names which he chooses to commemorate: Euripides is mentioned only once, and then in a context which does not refer directly to Greece or intimately to his poetry. For Latin literature he seems to have had more feeling. He confesses that the necessity of reading Horace at school as a task checked that complete enjoyment which he saw was a desirable possession; and the Latin author whom he seems to have admired and appreciated most was Cicero, a preference not unnatural in a poet whose genius found a natural vent in passages of oratory. He shared with Vergil the sense of mortality in human



Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-65802-8 - Byron: Childe Harold's Pilgrimage  
Edited by A. Hamilton Thompson  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

## INTRODUCTION

xvii

things, and such passages as the description of Arquà or Clitumnus have a Vergilian note of quiet melancholy in their contemplation of rural scenery; but this likeness is merely general, and springs rather from the abiding spirit of the places than from any direct remembrance of the appeal which such scenes made to Vergil. In Vergil's characteristic power of compression of phrase Byron was wanting: striking and vivid phrases escape from him in plenty, but his deliberate attempts at confining an impression of a place within the limits of a few words or lines are—like his description of the effect of the interior of St Peter's—involved and sometimes obscure. Further, in estimating the poets of modern Italy, his interest was primarily directed to the circumstances of their lives and to their strife with tyranny. The style of Dante, like that of Vergil by which it was formed, was too restrained and compressed to affect Byron's torrent of language; but the idea of the exile, driven from his native place to end his life in a foreign city, touched his imagination all the more strongly in that he saw in it a general resemblance to his own lot. He shared the taste of his day for the less severe poets of the Renaissance, for Ariosto and Tasso; and his translation of the first canto of Pulci's burlesque epic, *Morgante Maggiore*, prepared the way for his own *Don Juan*, a mass of discursive wit and satire, mingled with passages of the finest poetry, and hung together on the thread of a rambling succession of incidents. But his lines on Tasso are concerned with the traditional misfortunes which the poet suffered at the hands of a monarch. Just as when he refers to Rousseau by the lake of

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-65802-8 - Byron: Childe Harold's Pilgrimage  
Edited by A. Hamilton Thompson  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

Geneva, the tumult in his own mind fills his horizon, and Rousseau and Tasso alike are not objects of literary criticism, but reflections of Byron himself. *The Prophecy of Dante*, in which he used Dante's own form of rhyme, and *The Lament of Tasso* are similarly expressions of personal feeling aroused by a sense of his own banishment and distress; while the sonnet of Filicaja, combined with the fabric of *Childe Harold*, so closely reflects his own enthusiasm for liberty that he echoes it from the depths of his own spirit.

In the second place, he cared little for painting and sculpture. Painting, indeed, suggests to him no reflection for his poem. Sculpture, on the other hand, plays a prominent part in the fourth canto of *Childe Harold*, and Canova excited his admiration more than all the contemporary artists and men of letters of Italy. In this, as in his appreciation of Tasso, he followed the taste of his day; and the ancient Florentine and Roman sculptures which moved him to poetry were just those which any educated tourist of the time would have selected. He expressly disclaims any understanding of their artistic merits: their general effect brings before him the beauty and majesty of the vanished ages which produced them. Like the architecture of the Coliseum and the tomb of Caecilia Metella, they are the enduring fragments of the irrevocable past, and his thought turns from their actual form to the creative power of which they are the embodiment, to the circumstances in which that power was moulded, and by a natural transition to the decay of civilisations and the vanity of human hopes. It is significant of his attitude of mind that his most graphic

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-65802-8 - Byron: Childe Harold's Pilgrimage  
Edited by A. Hamilton Thompson  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

## INTRODUCTION

xix

lines upon a piece of sculpture—the so-called dying gladiator—were not suggested in the presence of the statue itself. It was in the Coliseum, with his mind busy upon the slaughters of which the amphitheatre had been the scene, that the statue recurred to him and was endowed with life as the centre of the tragedy. Here, as ever, his thoughts go back to himself: it is the distant land, the Dacian mother, the children at play, which are the absorbing subject of the wounded gladiator's thoughts, and blend themselves with Byron's indignation and regret for all that he himself had forfeited. Of the dramatic power which Byron here displays the Roman stanzas are full. Great architecture, although its details probably interested him little, impressed him by its vastness and splendour; and although, as we have already seen, the most finished beauty of the poem is in those passages which deal directly with nature, its highest eloquence and its ability to call the past to life are awakened by the buildings of Rome and by that sentiment of antiquity which, five centuries before, they had aroused in Petrarch and, more recently, they had communicated as an inspiration to Gibbon. Still, of direct architectural description *Childe Harold* contains little, and Byron's taste was fitful in this respect. If the Coliseum filled him with reverence, the mole of Hadrian provoked only a perfunctory and uncomplimentary stanza. For the gorgeousness of the Medici chapel in Florence he had only contempt, but the huge mass of St Peter's at Rome, largely a production of the same period of florid architecture, awed him with the sense of his own littleness in the face of such grandiose conception; and

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-65802-8 - Byron: Childe Harold's Pilgrimage  
Edited by A. Hamilton Thompson  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

St Peter's is the only building which he seems to have admired in the first instance upon its own merits. It is noteworthy that from the first and second cantos, buildings, apart from the ruins of Athens and the description of Ali's house at Tepaleni, are practically absent. In the third canto, the ruined castles of the Rhine and the remains of Aventicum are isolated examples of meditations on architecture. Even in Venice he singles out no special buildings for description: the bridge of Sighs, the bridge of Rialto, the palaces 'crumbling to the shore'—those palaces which in *Marino Faliero* he likened to 'altars ranged along the broad canal'—are merely notes in a general impression. It was on his way to Rome, amid the tombs of the mighty dead in Santa Croce at Florence, that he seems first to have realised in his poetry what the Roman stanzas so clearly shew, that the architecture of the past is the most noble monument of history.

No detailed notice need be given here of the style of the poem. Some of its characteristics, its impetuous eloquence and oratorical power, its use of personification, its softness and beauty under soothing influences, have already been touched upon. Byron wrote with freedom, and his faults of style are those of a poet whose language comes almost too readily to his command. The perpetual presence of one thought naturally leads him into repetition of the same themes, but with a variety and richness of imagery which save his treatment from monotony. It is impossible not to feel, as stanza runs on into stanza in moments of the deepest emotion, that the expression is too luxuriant, and that such passages might have been revised and

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-65802-8 - Byron: Childe Harold's Pilgrimage  
Edited by A. Hamilton Thompson  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

## INTRODUCTION

xxi

pruned with advantage. The poem is full of inversions of subject and object, subject and predicate, used with a remarkable licence which occasionally veils the sense of a passage. Here and there Byron is tempted into solecisms of grammar which in one instance, at any rate—the famous ‘there let him lay’ of canto IV., st. CLXXX.—amount to vulgarity. We know from the records of Byron’s life that his taste was not impeccable: the very incidents of the journey which is the subject of the fourth canto, the casual day in Florence, the hurried and crowded sight-seeing in Rome, are characteristic of his want of taste. Few people would have had the effrontery to make such a tour the subject of verse: no one else, perhaps, could have recorded it in verse which is immortal. But *Childe Harold*, although it has enriched the memory of the traveller with descriptions and phrases which add a new beauty to the scenes to which they refer, is only in a secondary sense a poem which celebrates some of the most famous shrines of the continental pilgrim. Nor does its real importance arise from its revelation of the sorrows of a poet’s heart: in this respect it is not unique, and Byron’s sorrows, due largely to his own waywardness and endured in a spirit which was the reverse of stoicism, could not by themselves have invested *Childe Harold* with that sublimity which it assumes at its best. But his genius identified his disappointments and distresses with those of the world at large; and, by virtue of his personal experience, he spoke with the voice of struggling humanity throughout Europe, at a period when the birth-throes of a new era were upon it. It is at such

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-65802-8 - Byron: Childe Harold's Pilgrimage  
Edited by A. Hamilton Thompson  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

epochs that poetry has its greatest opportunity, and in that 'iron time of doubts, disputes, distractions, fears,' Byron took 'his seat upon the intellectual throne' and interpreted from his own heart the anguish and aspirations of his contemporaries. In England itself the other great poets of the romantic movement hold as high a place as he; but the author of *Childe Harold*, appealing to no one nation in particular, but to all mankind which shared his despair and entertained his hopes, gained a place above them all in the affection of Europe.