

# Childe Harold's Pilgrimage by Lord Byron (Stanzas 178-186)

'*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*' by Lord Byron was published between 1812 and 1818. It's a long [narrative poem](#). It extends for 555 pages and 1674 lines in its full publication. Some consider the piece to be autobiographical. It certainly contributed to the image of Byron (George Gordon) as a wandering Romantic. It was likely inspired by Byron's travels through the Mediterranean and Portugal in the years before he started writing the piece. The poem is dedicated to "lanthe," a loving nickname he used for Charlotte Harley, the daughter of the 5th Earl of Oxford. After the first parts of the poem were published, Byron was thrust into the public spotlight



## Summary of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (Stanzas 178-186)

This section of *'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage'* is at the very end of the poem, after [Lord Byron](#), in the guise of Childe Harold, has traveled throughout the ancient world.

He's just visited several cities in Italy, mused on the lives of fellow poets, Alighieri and [Petrarch](#), and considered the lives of the great leaders of the world. The fourth [canto](#) ends with stanzas 179-186, in which the poet addresses the ocean.

He describes nature as a [symbol](#) and image of freedom and sublime. It can be overwhelming, he suggests, but one should not surrender entirely. Rather, one should visit great places, as he did, around the world and try to understand humankind and what has been created. At the same time, Byron contrasts the ocean to the civilizations he's seen and learned about. The concluding lines end Childe Harold's journey with the poet encouraging the reader to take the lessons they've learned and gone out into life changed.

## Themes in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (Stanzas 178-186)

In these lines of *'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,'* the poet engages with themes of change, the sea, and power. The latter is used to reference the power of the sea as well as humankind's lack of power in the face of the indomitable ocean. It has raged the same since the dawn of creation, and no human force can control or tame it. This is something that brings the [speaker](#) great joy rather than fear. He relishes in the idea of what the ocean harbours and its ability to refuse humankind that which it desires. The sea represents true freedom to the speaker and to Byron. It's untamed, pathless, and unpredictable, like the woods in which no one has ever tread. By the end of the poem, Byron admits that things have changed. He and his speaker are not the same as they were at the beginning of the poem, at the beginning of Byron's journeys, or at the beginning of life. It's time to move on, he says.

## Structure and Form of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*

*'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage'* by Lord Byron is a narrative poem separated into four parts. The poem is quite long, and this analysis only focuses on the final eleven stanzas, 178 through 186. The line numbers for this section are 1594-1674. The poem is made up of four cantos that are written in Spenserian stanzas. The stanzas are eight lines long with a rhyme scheme of ABABBCBCC. They also use [iambic pentameter](#) in the first seven lines. The final line is an alexandrine or twelve syllables iambic line.

# Literary Devices in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*

Byron makes use of several literary devices in '*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.' These include but are not limited to [anaphora](#), [apostrophe](#), [alliteration](#), and [caesura](#). The latter is a [formal](#) device, one that's concerned with the pauses that a poet inserts into their lines. In the case of this particular poem, the pauses are quite evident, seen through various types of punctuation, especially dashes. For example, line four of stanza 179. It reads, "Stops with the shore; — upon the watery plain." Or, another example, line one of stanza 181, reads, "The armaments which thunderstrike the walls."

Alliteration and anaphora are both types of [repetition](#). The first is concerned with the use and reuse of the same consonant sound at the beginning of words, while the latter is focused on the broader repetition of words at the beginning of lines. Anaphora can be seen in the first stanza. The words "There is" start the first three lines, and "From" start two more. Alliteration can be seen in the first line of the poem with "pleasure" and "pathless" and in line three of stanza 182 with "waters washed."

An apostrophe occurs when the poet's speaker talks to something or someone that cannot hear or respond to them. This might be someone whose deceased, an inanimate object, or in this case, the ocean (as seen in the first lines of stanza 179).

## Analysis of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (Stanzas 178-186)

### Stanza 178

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

In the first line of this extract from the much longer *'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,'* the poet's famed lines describe the peace Byron (through his character Childe Harold) finds in nature. In the unexplored and uncontrolled woods, he takes pleasure in the freedom and the lack of structure. It's there that he feels the most at home, despite how scary and isolating that natural landscape might seem. Out on the ocean, where most of this extract is focused, the speaker finds "society" or the togetherness that he's unable to find among people. There, he finds peace. This is a traditional Romantic idea, one that fills the last lines of this long poem.

When he's by the sea, he finds that his love of Nature is bolstered. It is higher than his love of Man, but the latter also exists. From his time communing with nature, which in its own way, speaks back to him, he has come closer to understanding the universe. Byron feels that a deep connection with the natural world is the only way one can truly understand humanity's purpose in the world.

## Stanza 179

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, unknell'd, uncoffin'd, and unknown.

The next stanza begins with a very clear apostrophe or address to something that cannot hear or respond to the speaker. In this case, the ocean. He encourages it to "Roll on" and show its power. There is no human force that can command or control the ocean, despite the "Ten thousand fleets" that have tried in vain to do so. Humanity might be able to alter the land, but it's "control / Stops with these shore." The ocean is something different, something that can't be tamed.

The next lines of the stanza reference the numerous losses that humankind has suffered in its quest to better understand the ocean. Ships and men have been lost as they seek out new passages through dangerous waters. The [imagery](#) at the end of this stanza is remarkable.

## Stanza 180

His steps are not upon thy paths, — thy fields  
Are not a spoil for him, — thou dost arise  
And shake him from thee; the vile strength he wields  
For earth's destruction thou dost all despise,  
Spurning him from thy bosom to the skies,  
And send'st him, shivering in thy playful spray  
And howling, to his Gods, where haply lies  
His petty hope in some near port or bay,  
And dashest him again to earth: — there let him lay.

The speaker continues to talk to the ocean in the next stanza. He describes the ocean, again, as a [contrast](#) to the world on land. There, humanity walks on paths they made and takes their spoils from fields. This is not the way the ocean works. When humankind comes to the ocean, the ocean rises and shakes them “from thee.” Humanity’s vile strength, that which has been working steadily to destroy resources on land, is all the ocean “despises.” The ocean has no time or patience for humankind. It disposes of those who seek to travel on it as fast as it wants. The words “playful” and “howling” are interestingly juxtaposed in this stanza, suggesting that life and death are all a game.

## Stanza 181

The armaments which thunder — strike the walls  
Of rock-built cities, bidding nations quake,  
And monarchs tremble in their capitals,  
The oak leviathans, whose huge ribs make  
Their clay creator the vain title take  
Of lord of thee, and arbiter of war;  
These are thy toys, and, as the snowy flake,

They melt into thy yeast of waves, which mar  
Alike the Armada's pride, or spoils of Trafalgar.

The image of the ocean playing with humanity continues into the next lines. It sees the strongest forces that humankind can command as its "toys." These include the "rock-built cities," which it can tear down when and how it chooses. The thunderous waves of the ocean bid "nations quake" and "monarch tremble in their capitals."

The ocean can destroy the strongest ship, like a British warship, that crosses its waters. The last lines refer to the "spoils of Trafalgar" and the loss of ships to the ocean.

## Stanza 182

Thy shores are empires, changed in all save thee —  
Assyria, Greece, Rome, Carthage, what are they?

Thy waters washed them power while they were free,  
And many a tyrant since; their shores obey

The stranger, slave, or savage; their decay

Has dried up realms to deserts: — not so thou,

Unchangeable save to thy wild waves' play —

Time writes no wrinkle on thine azure brow —

Such as creation's dawn beheld, thou rollest now.

Unlike old civilizations like "Assyria, Greece, Rome, Carthage," the ocean remains unchanged. No matter who lives or commands the shores. These people come and go, but the ocean remains the same. Time has no effect on the waters and "writes no drink on thine azure brow." The ocean rolls on today as it did at creation's dawn, he says.

## Stanza 183

Thou glorious mirror, where the Almighty's form

Glasses itself in tempests; in all time,

Calm or convulsed — in breeze, or gale, or storm,

Icing the pole, or in the torrid clime,  
Dark — heaving; — boundless, endless, and sublime —  
The image of eternity — the throne  
Of the Invisible; even from out thy slime  
The monsters of the deep are made; each zone  
Obeys thee; thou goest forth, dread, fathomless, alone.

The speaker addresses the ocean in the next stanza, describing how the image of God is reflected in its waters. There, one can find God and find eternity, no matter if the waters are calm or convulsed. God is there through the dark and joyful times. The final lines of this stanza appear to be an [allusion](#) to *'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.'* The words “monsters” and “slime” are out of place in regards to the rest of the poem, perhaps suggesting, but delving into, the darker parts of the ocean that Harold clearly holds so dear. The ocean commands all that's within it, he says.

## Stanza 184

And I have loved thee, Ocean! and my joy  
Of youthful sports was on thy breast to be  
Borne, like thy bubble, onward: from a boy  
I wanton'd with thy breakers — they to me  
Were a delight; and if the freshing sea  
Made them a terror — 'twas a pleasing fear,  
For I was as it were a child of thee,  
And trusted to thy billows far and near,  
And laid my hand upon thy mane — as I do here.

His love for the ocean is reiterated in the 184th stanza. The lines are suggestive of Byron's own love for swimming as well. He spent time in the water as a boy and young man. The waters were a “delight” to him, and if there is ever a moment of fear, it was a pleasing one. He felt himself a child of the ocean, and he trusted the ocean as one has to trust a horse. He still feels this way today.



## Stanza 185

My task is done — my song hath ceased — my theme  
Has died into an echo; it is fit  
The spell should break of this protracted dream,  
The torch shall be extinguish'd which hath lit  
My midnight lamp — and what is writ, is writ, —  
Would it were worthier! but I am not now  
That which I have been — and my visions flit  
Less palpably before me — and the glow  
Which in my spirit dwelt is fluttering, faint, and low.

In the second to last stanza of *'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,'* the speaker says that his song is finally coming to an end. He feels his inspiration, his life force, and his will fluttering "faint and low." The speaker feels that he's not the same person, the same Childe Harold, that he was at the beginning of the poem. Here, readers will likely consider the parts of the speaker that were Harold and the parts that were purely Byron and how the two have come apart and together. He uses the [metaphor](#) of a torch being extinguished to describe the end of his time in these lines. What he wrote was written, and that's all there is to it.

## Stanza 186

Farewell! a word that must be, and hath been —  
A sound which makes us linger; — yet — farewell!  
Ye! who have traced the Pilgrim to the scene  
Which is his last, if in your memories dwell  
A thought which once was his, if on ye swell  
A single recollection, not in vain  
He wore his sandal-shoon, and scallop-shell;  
Farewell! with him alone may rest the pain,



If such there were — with you, the mortal of his strain!

The speaker bids farewell to the reader, who has followed him through all these lines in the last stanza. He considers the possibility that his time writing these lines and exploring the world has made some impact on the reader, perhaps it has, and perhaps the reader will go forth from the poem changed. He hopes this is the case that one will be improved by what they've learned.

## Similar Poetry

Readers who enjoy *'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage'* should also consider reading some of Lord Byron's other best-known works. For example, [\*'Darkness,'\*](#) [\*'My Soul is Dark,'\*](#) and [\*'She Walks in Beauty.'\*](#) The latter is one of his best-known poems. In it, the speaker describes his amazement at a woman's beauty and compares it to that one experiences in nature or while looking at art. *'My Soul is Dark'* expresses the poet's love for poetry, as well as its musical elements. *'Darkness'* is a longer poem that taps into a fear for the future of the human race. The poem is filled with chaotic and terrifying images of death, inequality, and a total loss of light.

