Apart he stalk’d in joyless reverie,
And from his native land resolved to go,
And visit scorching climes beyond the sea;
With pleasure drugg’d, he almost long’d for woe,
And e’en for change of scene would seek the shades below.

From Canto the Third
(“ONCE MORE UPON THE WATERS”)

Is thy face like thy mothers, my fair child?
Ada’s sole daughter of my house and heart?
When last I saw thy young blue eyes they smiled,
And when we parted,—not as now we part,
But with a hope.—

Awaking with a start,
The waters heave around me; and on high
The winds lift up their voices: I depart,
Whither I know not; but the hour’s gone by,
When Albion’s lessening shores could grieve or glad mine eye.

Once more upon the waters! yet once more!
And the waves bound beneath me as a steed—
That knows his rider. Welcome, to their roar!
Swift be their guidance, wheresoe’er it lead!
Though the strain’d mast should quiver as a reed,
And the rent canvass fluttering strew the gale,
Still must I on; for I am as a weed,
Flung from the rock, on Ocean’s foam, to sail,
Where’er the surge may sweep, or tempest’s breath prevail.

In my youth’s summer? I did sing of One,
The wandering outlaw of his own dark mind;
Again I seize the theme, then but begun,
And bear it with me, as the rushing wind
Bears the cloud onwards: in that Tale I find
The furrows of long thought, and dried-up tears,
Which, ebbing, leave a sterile track behind,
O’er which all heavily the journeying years
Plod the last sands of life,—where not a flower appears.

Since my young days of passion—joy, or pain,
Perchance my heart and harp have lost a string,
And both may jar! it may be, that in vain
I would essay as I have sung to sing.
Yet, though a dreary strain, to this I cling:
So that it wean me from the weary dream
Of selfish grief or gladness—so it fling
Forgetfulness around me—it shall seem
To me, though to none else, a not ungrateful theme.

He, who grown aged in this world of woe,
In deeds, not years, piercing the depths of life,
So that no wonder waits him; nor below
Can love, or sorrow, fame, ambition, strife,
Cut to his heart again with the keen knife.
Of silent, sharp endurance: he can tell
Why thought seeks refuge in lone caves, yet rife
With airy images, and shapes which dwell
Still unimpaired, though old, in the soul’s haunted cell.

’Tis to create, and in creating live
A being more intense, that we endow
With form our fancy, gaining as we give
The life we imagine, even as I do now.
What am I? Nothing: but not so art thou,
Soul of my thought! with whom I traverse earth,
Invisible but gazing, as I glow
Mix’d with thy spirit, blended with thy birth,
And feeling still with thee in my crush’d feelings’ dearth.

Yet must I think less wildly:—I have thought
Too long and darkly, till my brain became,
In its own eddy boiling and o’erwrought,
A whirling gulf of phantasy and flame:
And thus, untaught in youth my heart to tame,
My springs of life were poison’d: ’Tis too late!
Yet am I changed; though still enough the same
In strength to bear what time can not abate,
And feed on bitter fruits without accusing Fate.
And life's enchanted cup but sparkles near the brim.

His dregs were wormwood; but he filleth again,
And from a purer fount, on holier ground.
And deem'd its spring perpetual, but in vain to soothe and mollify.
Still round him clung invisibly a chain
Which gall'd for ever, fettering though unseen,
And heavy though it clank'd not; worn with pain,
Which pined although it spoke not, and grew keen,
Entering with every step he took through many a scene.

Secure in guarded coldness, he had mix'd
Again in fancied safety with his kind,
And deem'd his spirit now so firmly fix'd
And sheathed with an invulnerable mind,
That, if no joy, no sorrow lurk'd behind;
And he, as one, might 'midst the many stand
Unheed'd, searching through the crowd to find
Fit speculation; such as in strange land
He found in wonder-works of God and Nature's hand.

But who can view the ripen'd rose, nor seek
To wear it? who can curiously behold
The smoothness and the sheen of beauty's cheek,
Nor feel the heart can never all grow old?
Who can contemplate Fame through clouds unfold
The star which rises o'er her steep, nor climb?
Harold, once more within the vortex roll'd
On with the giddy circle, chasing Time,
Yet with a nobler aim than in his youth's fond prime.

But soon he knew himself the most unfitt'd
Of men to herd with Man; with whom he held
Little in common; untaught to submit
His thoughts to others, though his soul was quell'd
In youth by his own thoughts; still uncompell'd
He would not yield dominion of his mind
To spirits against whom his own rebell'd;
Proud though in desolation; which could find
A life within itself, to breathe without mankind.

Where rose the mountains, there to him were friends;
Where roll'd the ocean, thereon was his home;
Where a blue sky, and glowing clime, extends,
Unattended, he was unvisited.
He had the passion and the power to roam;
The desert, forest, cavern, breacher's foam,
Were unto him companionship; they spake
A mutual language, clearer than the tomb.

Of his land's tongue, which he would of forsake,
For Nature's pages glass'd by sunbeams on the lake;
Where specks of glistening glitter'd to me and me not;
One moment of the mightiest, and again
On little objects with lake he would fix.

Like the Chaldean, he could watch the stars;
Till he had peopled them with beings bright
As their own beams; and earth, and earth-born jars,
And human frailties, were forgotten quite:
Could he have kept his spirit to that flight?
He had been happy; but this clay will sink
Its spark immortal, envy it the light
To which it mounts, as if to break the link
That keeps us from ye heaven which woos us to its brink.

But in Man's dwellings he became a thing
Restless and worn, and stern and wearsome,
Droop'd as a wild-born falcon with clipt wing.
To whom the boundless air alone were home;
Then came his fit again, which to o'ercome,
As eagerly the barr'd-up bird will beat
His breast and beak against his wiry dome
Till the blood tinge his plumage, so the heat
Of his impeded soul would through his bosom eat.
Self-exiled Harold wanders forth again,  
With nought of hope left, but with less of gloom;  
The very knowledge that he lived in vain,  
That all was over on this side the tomb,  
Had made Despair a smilingness assume,  
Which, though 'twere wild,—as on the plunder'd wreck  
When mariners would madly meet their doom,  
With draughts intemperate on the sinking deck,—  
Did yet inspire a cheer, which he forebore to check.

[WATERLOO]

Stop!—for thy tread is on an Empire's dust!  
An Earthquake's spoil is sepulchred below!  
Is the spot mark'd with no colossal bust?  
Nor column trophied for triumphal show?  
None; but the moral's truth tells simpler so,  
As the ground was before, thus let it be;—  
How that red rain hath made the harvest grow!  
And is this all the world has gain'd by thee,  
Thou first and last of fields! king-making Victory?

And Harold stands upon this place of skulls,  
The grave of France, the deadly Waterloo;  
How in an hour the power which gave annuls  
Its gifts, transferring fame as fleeting too!  
In "pride of place" here last the eagle flew;  
Then tore with bloody talon the rent plain,  
Pierced by the shaft of banded nations through;  
Ambitions life and labours all were vain;  
He wears the shatter'd links of the world's broken chain.

Fit retribution! Gaul may chomp the bit  
And foam in fetters;—but is Earth more free?  
Did nations combat to make One submit,  
Or league to teach all kings true sovereignty?  
5. Referring to the triumphal arches erected in ancient Rome to honor conquering generals, a custom Napoleon had revived.  
6. Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, near Brussels, had occurred only the year before, on June 18, 1815. The battlefield, where almost fifty thousand English, Prussian, and French soldiers were killed in a single day, quickly became a gruesome tourist attraction. See "Romantic Literature and Wartime," p. 741.  
7. "Pride of place," a term of falconry, and means the highest pitch of flight [Byron's note, which continues by referring to the use of the term in Shakespeare's Macbeth 2.4]. The eagle was the symbol of Napoleon.  
8. The Grand Alliance formed in opposition to Napoleon.  
9. Napoleon was then a prisoner at St. Helena.  
10. France, Byron, like other liberals, saw the defeat of the Napoleon of the tyrannical kings and the forces of reaction throughout Europe.

What shall reviving Thralldom again be,  
The patch'd-up idol of enlighten'd days?  
Shall we, who struck the Lion down, shall we  
Pay the Wolf homage? proffering lowly gaze  
And servile knees to thrones? No; prove² before ye praise!

If not, o'er one fallen despot boast no more!  
In vain fair cheeks were furrow'd with hot tears  
For Europe's flowers long rooted up before  
The trampler of her vineyards; in vain years  
Of death, depopulation, bondage, fears,  
Have all been borne, and broken by the accord  
Of roused-up millions: all that most endears  
Glory, is when the myrtle wreathes a sword  
Such as Harmodius drew on Athens' tyrant lord.³

There sunk the greatest, nor the worst of men;⁴  
Whose spirit antithetically mixt  
One moment of the mightiest, and again  
On little objects with like firmness fixt,  
Extrome in all things! hadst thou been betwixt,  
Thy throne had still been thine, or never been;  
For daring made thy rise as fall: thou seekst  
Even now to re-assume the imperial mien,  
And shake again the world, the Thunderer of the scene!

Conqueror and captive of the earth art thou!  
She trembles at thee still, and thy wild name  
Was ne'er more bruited in men's minds than now.  
That thou art nothing, save the jest of Fame,  
Who woold thee once, thy vassal, and became  
The flatterer of thy fierceness, till thou wert  
A god unto thyself; nor less the same  
To the astounded kingdoms all inert,  
Who deem'd thee for a time whate'er thou didst assert.

Oh, more or less than man—in high or low,  
Battling with nations, flying from the field;  
Now making monarchs' necks thy footstool, now  
killed Hipparchus, tyrant of Athens.  
². Await the test (proof) of experience.  
³. In 514 B.C.E. Harmodius and Aristogeiton, hiding their daggers in myrtle (symbol of love),  
⁴. Napoleon, here portrayed with many characteristics of the Byronic hero.
More than thy meanest soldier taught to yield;
An empire thou couldst crush, command, rebuild,
But govern not thy pettiest passion, nor,
However deeply in men’s spirits skill’d,
Look through thine own, nor curb the lust of war,
Nor learn that tempted Fate will leave the loftiest star.

Yet well thy soul hath brook’d the turning tide,
With that untaught innate philosophy,
Which, be it wisdom, coldness, or deep pride,
Is gall and wormwood to an enemy.
When the whole host of hatred stood hard by,
To watch and mock thee shrinking, thou hast smiled
With a sedate and all-enduring eye;
When Fortune fled her spoil’d and favourite child,
He stood unbend’d beneath the ills upon him piled.

Sager than in thy fortunes; for in them
Ambition steel’d thee on too far to show
That just habitual scorn which could contemn
Men and their thoughts; ’twas wise to feel, not so
To wear it ever on thy lip and brow,
And spurn the instruments thou wert to use
Till they were turn’d unto thine overthrow;
’Tis but a worthless world to win or lose;
So hath it proved to thee, and all such lot who choose.

If, like a tower upon a headlong rock,
Thou hadst been made to stand or fall alone,
Such scorn of man had help’d to brave the shock;
But men’s thoughts were the steps which paved thy throne,

Their admiration thy best weapon shone;
The part of Philip’s son was thine, not then
(Unless aside thy purple had been thrown)
Like stern Diogenes to mock at men;
For sceptred cynics earth were far too wide a den.

But quiet to quick bosoms is a hell,
And there hath been thy bane; 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.

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

Their breath is agitation, and their life
A storm whereon they ride, to sink at last,
And yet so nursed and begot to strife,
That should their days, surviving perils past,
Melt to calm twilight, they feel overcast
With sorrow and supineness, and so die;
Even as a flame unfed, which runs to waste
With its own flickering, or a sword laid by,
Which eats into itself, and rusts ingloriously.

He who ascends to mountain-tops, shall find
The loftiest peaks most wrapt in clouds and snow;
He who surmounts or subdues mankind,
Must look down on the hate of those below,
Though high above the sun of glory glow,
And far beneath the earth and ocean spread
Round him are icy rocks, and loudly blow
Contending tempests on his naked head,

And thus reward the toils which to those summits led.

5. An inversion: "all who choose such lot" (i.e., who choose to play such a game of chance).
6. Alexander the Great, son of Philip of Macedon.
7. The Greek philosopher of Cynicism, contemporaneous of Alexander. It is related that Alexander was so struck by his independence of mind that he said, "If I were not Alexander, I should wish to be Diogenes.
8. Learned men. But the term often carries a derogatory sense—thinkers with a penchant for tricky reasoning.
9. In the stanzas here omitted, Harold is sent sailing up the Rhine, meditating on the "thousand battles" that "have assailed thy banks."
Thus Harold inly said, and pass'd along,
Yet not insensibly to all which here
Awoke the jocund birds to early song
In glens which might have made even exile dear.
Though on his brow were graven lines austere,
Thou know'st thou know'st
Of feelings fiercer far but less severe,
Joy was not always absent from his face,
But o'er it in such scenes would steal with transient trace.

Nor was all love shut from him, though his days
Of passion had consumed themselves to dust.
It is in vain that we would coldly gaze
On such as smile upon us; the heart must
Leap kindly back to kindness, though disgust
Hath wear'd it from all worldlings: thus he felt,
For there was soft remembrance, and sweet trust
In one fond breast, to which his own would melt,
And in its tenderer hour on that his bosom dwelt.

And he had learn'd to love,—I know not why,
For this in such as him seems strange of mood,—
The helpless looks of blooming infancy,
Even in its earliest nurture; what subdued,
To change like this, a mind so far imbued
With scorn of man, it little boots to know;
But thus it was; and though in solitude
Small power the nipp'd affections have to grow,
In him this glow'd when all beside had ceased to glow.

And there was one soft breast, as hath been said,
Which unto his was bound by stronger ties
Than the church links withal; and, though unmoved,
That love was pure, and, far above disguise,
Had stood the test of mortal enmities
Still undivided, and cemented more
By peril, dreaded most in female eyes;
But this was firm, and from a foreign shore
Well to that heart might his absent greetings pour!

Lake Leman woos me with its crystal face,
The mirror where the stars and mountains view
The stillness of their aspect in each trace
Its clear depth yields of their fair height and hue:
There is too much of man here, to look through
With a fit mind the might which I behold;
But soon in me shall Loneliness renew
Thoughts hid, but not less cherish'd than of old,
Ere mingling with the herd had penn'd me in their fold.

To fly from, need not be to hate, mankind:
All are not fit with them to stir and toil,
Nor is it discontent to keep the mind
Deep in its fountain, lest it overboil
In the hot throng, where we become the spoil
Of our infection, till too late and long
We may deplore and struggle with the coil,
In wretched interchange of wrong for wrong
Midst a contentious world, striving where none are strong.

There, in a moment, we may plunge our years
In fatal penitence, and in the blight
Of our own soul turn all our blood to tears,
And colour things to come with hues of Night;
The race of life becomes a hopeless flight
To those that walk in darkness: on the sea,
The boldest steer but where their ports invite,
But there are wanderers o'er Eternity
Whose bark drives on and on, and anchor'd ne'er shall be.

Is it not better, then, to be alone,
And love Earth only for its earthly sake?
By the blue rushing of the arrowy Rhone,
Or the pure bosom of its nursing lake,
Which feeds it as a mother who doth make
A fair but froward infant her own care.

1. Commentators agree that the reference is to Byron's half-sister, Augusta Leigh.
2. Byron with his traveling companion and physician, John Polidori, spent the gloomy summer of 1816 near Geneva, in a villa rented for its proximity to the household that Percy Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Claire Clairmont (who would marry Shelley at the end of the year), and her half-sister Claire Clairmont set up there. The famous ghost-story-writing contest in which these five participated, and which saw the genesis of both
Frankenstein and Polidori's "The Vampyre," took place that June. The Shelley household's involvement in Childe Harold is extensive. The fair copy of this canto was in fact written out by Claire, and Percy would eventually deliver it to Byron's publisher in London.
3. River rising in Switzerland and flowing through France into the Mediterranean.
Kissing its cries away as these awake:—
Is it not better thus our lives to wear,
Than join the crushing crowd, doom'd to inflict or bear?

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 to be
A link reluctant in a fleshy chain,
Class'd among creatures, when the soul can flee,
And with the sky, the peak, the heaving plain.

And thus I am absorb'd, and this is life:
I look upon the peopled desert past,
As on a place of agony and strife,
Where, for some sin, to sorrow I was cast,
To act and suffer, but remount at last
With a fresh pinion; which I feel to spring.
Though young, yet waxing vigorous, as the blast
Which it would cope with, on delighted wing.

And when, at length, the mind shall be all free
From what it hates in this degraded form,
Reft of its carnal life, save what shall be
Existent happier in the fly and worm,—
When elements to elements conform,
And dust as it should be, shall I not
Feel all I see, less dazzling, but more warm?
The bodiless thought? the Spirit of each spot?
Of which, even now, I share at times the immortal lot?

Are not the mountains, waves, and skies, a part
Of me and of my soul, as I of them?
Is not the love of these deep in my heart
With a pure passion? should I not contemn
All objects, if compared with these? and stem
A tide of suffering, rather than forego

Such feelings for the hard and worldly phlegm
Of those whose eyes are only turn'd below,
Gazing upon the ground, with thoughts which dare not glow?

Clear, placid Leman! thy contrasted lake,
With the wild world I dwelt in, is a thing
Which warns me, with its stillness, to forsake
Earth's troubled waters for a purer spring.
This quiet sail is as a noiseless wing
To waft me from distraction; once I loved
Torn ocean's roar, but thy soft murmuring
Sounds sweet as if a Sister's voice reproved,
That I with stern delights should e'er have been so moved.

It is the hush of night, and all between
Thy margin and the mountains, dusk, yet clear,
Mellow'd and mingling, yet distinctly seen,
Save darken'd Jura," whose cap't heights appear
Precipitously steep; and drawing near,
There breathes a living fragrance from the shore,
Of flowers yet fresh with childhood; on the ear
Drops the light drip of the suspended oar,
Or chirps the grasshopper one good-night carol more;

He is an evening reveller, who makes
His life an infancy, and sings his fill;
At intervals, some bird from out the brakes^ Starts into voice a moment, then is still.
There seems a floating whisper on the hill,
But that is fancy, for the starlight dew's
All silently their tears of love instil,
Weeping themselves away, till they infuse
Deep into Nature's breast the spirit of her hues.

Ye stars! which are the poetry of heaven!
If in your bright leaves we would read the fate
Of men and empires,—'tis to be forgiven,
That in our aspirations to be great,
Our destinies o'erleap their mortal state,
And claim a kindred with you; for ye are

4. During the tour around Lake Geneva that they took in late June 1816, Percy Shelley introduced Byron to the poetry of Wordsworth and Wordsworth's concepts of nature. These ideas are reflected in canto 3, but the voice is Byron's own.

5. The mountain range between Switzerland and France, visible from Lake Geneva.
A beauty and a mystery, and create
In us such love and reverence from afar,
That fortune, fame, power, life, have named themselves a star,

All heaven and earth are still—though not in sleep,
But breathless, as we grow when feeling most;
And silent, as we stand in thoughts too deep—
All heaven and earth are still. From the high host
Of stars, to the lull’d lake and mountain-coast,
All is concentr’d in a life intense,
Where not a beam, nor air, nor leaf is lost,
But hath a part of being, and a sense
Of that which is of all Creator and defence.

Then stirs the feeling infinite, so felt
In solitude, where we are least alone;
A truth, which through our being then doth melt,
And purifies from self: it is a tone,
The soul and source of music, which makes known
Eternal harmony, and sheds a charm,
Like to the fabled Cytherea’s zone; 6
Binding all things with beauty,—twould disarm
The spectre Death, had he substantial power to harm.

Not vainly did the early Persian make
His altar the high places and the peak
Of earth—o’ergazing mountains, and thus take’
A fit and unwall’d temple, there to seek
The Spirit, in whose honour shrines are weak,
Uproar’d of human hands. Come, and compare
Columns and idol-dwellings, Goth or Greek,
With Nature’s realms of worship, earth and air,
Nor fix on fond abodes to circumscribe thy prayer!

Thy sky is changed!—and such a change! Oh night,
And storm, and darkness, ye are wondrous strong,
Yet lovely in your strength, as is the light
Of a dark eye in woman! Far along,
From peak to peak, the rattling crags among
Leaps the live thunder! Not from one lone cloud,

But every mountain now hath found a tongue,
And Jura answers, through her misty shroud,
Back to the joyous Alps, who call to her aloud!

And this is in the night,—Most glorious night!
Thou wert not sent for slumber! let me be
A sharer in thy fierce and fair delight,—
A portion of the tempest and of thee!
How the lit lake shines, a phosphoric sea,
And the big rain comes dancing to the earth!
And now again ‘tis black,—and now, the glee
Of the loud hills shakes with its mountain-mirth,
As if they did rejoice over a young earthquake’s birth.

Now, where the swift Rhone cleaves his way between
Heights which appear as lovers who have parted
In hate, whose mining depths so intervene:
That they can meet no more, though broken-hearted:
Though in their souls, which thus each other thwarted,
Love was the very root of the fond rage
Which blighted their life’s bloom, and then departed—
Itself expired, but leaving them an age
Of years all winters,—war within themselves to wage.

Sky, mountains, river, winds, lake, lightnings! ye!
With night, and clouds, and thunder, and a soul
To make these felt and feeling, well may be
Things that have made me watchful; the far roll
Of your departing voices, is the knoll.
Of what in me is sleepless,—if 1 rest.
But where of ye, oh tempests? is the goal?
Are ye like those within the human breast?
Or do ye find, at length, like eagles, some high nest?

6. The sash of Venus, which conferred the
power to attract love.
7. It is to be recollected, that the most beautiful
and impressive doctrines of the Founder of
Christianity were delivered, not in the Temple,
but on the Mount [Byron’s note].
8. Old form of knoll: the sound of a bell.
Could I embody and unbosom now
That which is most within me,—could I wreak
My thoughts upon expression, and thus throw
Soul, heart, mind, passions, feelings, strong or weak,
All that I would have sought, and all I seek,
Bear, know, feel, and yet breathe—into one word,
And that one word were Lightning, I would speak;
But as it is, I live and die unheard,
With a most voiceless thought, sheathing it as a sword.

The morn is up again; the dewy morn,
With breath all incense, and with cheek all bloom,
Laughing the clouds away with playful scorn,
And living as if earth contain'd no tomb,—
And glowing into day: we may resume
The march of our existence: and thus I,
Still on thy shores, fair Leman! may find room
And food for meditation, nor pass by

Much, that may give us pause, if ponder'd fittingly,

I have not loved the world, nor the world me;
I have not flatter'd its rank breath, nor bow'd
To its idolatries a patient knee,—
Nor coin'd my cheek to smiles,—nor cried aloud
In worship of an echo; in the crowd
They could not deem me one of such; I stood
Among them, but not of them; in a shroud
Of thoughts which were not their thoughts, and still
Could,

Had I not filed* my mind, which thus itself subdued.

I have not loved the world, nor the world me,—
But let us part fair foes; I do believe,
Though I have found them not, that there may be
Words which are things,—hopes which will not deceive,
And virtues which are merciful, nor weave
Snare's for the failing; I would also deem
O'er others' griefs that some sincerely grieve;
That two, or one, are almost what they seem,
That goodness is no name, and happiness no dream.

* Defiled. In a note Byron refers to Macbeth 3.1.66 ("For Banquo's issue have I fil'd my mind").