

Selected Poetry

by George Gordon, Lord Byron



READING 2A Compare and contrast works of literature that express a universal theme. **3** Evaluate the changes in sound, form, and figurative language in poetry across literary time periods.

DID YOU KNOW?

Lord Byron . . .

- kept wild and exotic animals as pets.
- made speeches in England's House of Lords in support of social reform.
- participated in the movement to free Italy from Austrian rule.

Meet the Author

George Gordon, Lord Byron 1788–1824

Like the celebrities of pop culture today, Lord Byron was a superstar personality in his own time. Daring, flirtatious, brooding, and strikingly handsome, Lord Byron was, as an acquaintance famously remarked, “mad, bad, and dangerous to know.” His scorn for hypocrisy and repression and his enthusiasm for rebellion and great passion made him a symbol for the romantic spirit.

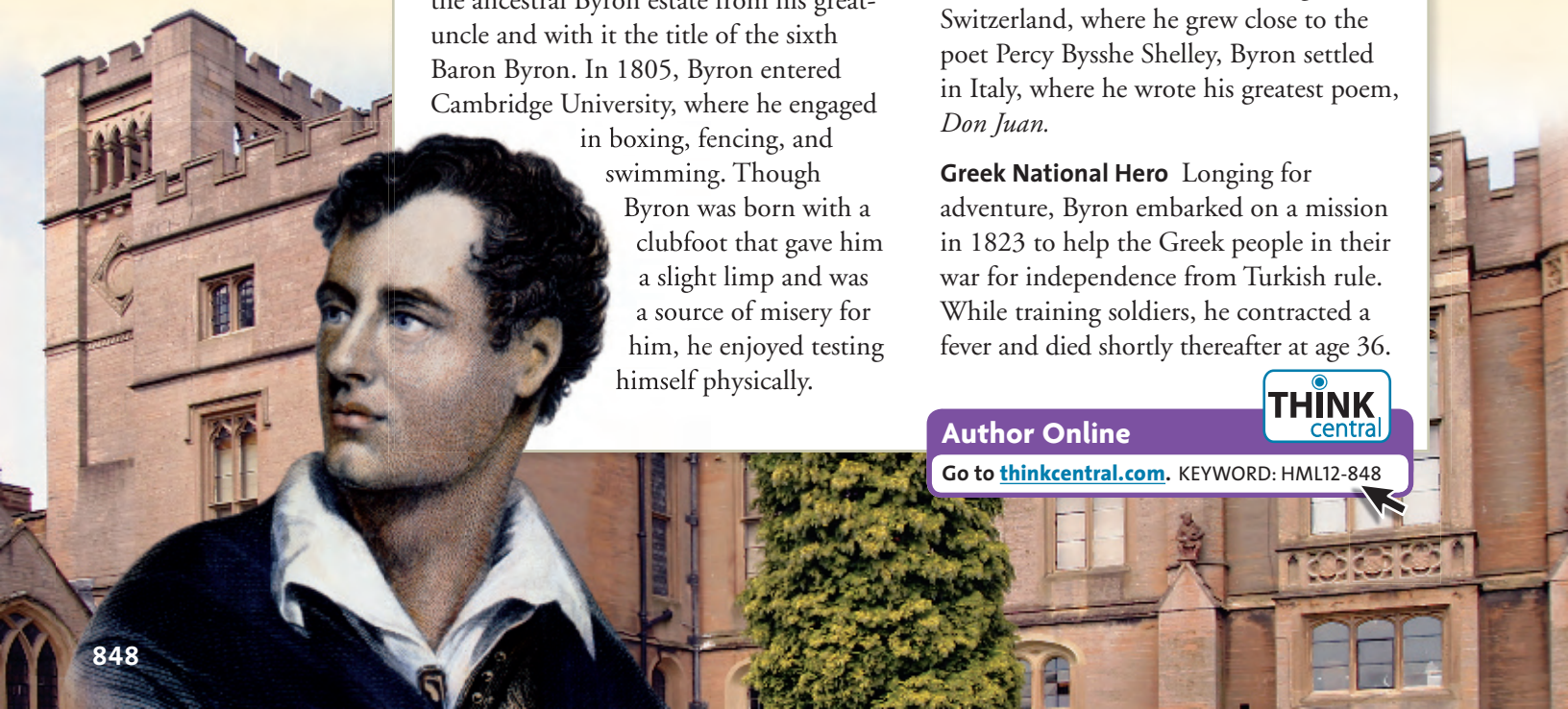
Changing Fortunes Born in London to a Scots heiress, Catherine Gordon of Gight, and her reckless husband, Captain John “Mad Jack” Byron, Byron endured a turbulent childhood. After squandering most of his wife’s fortune, John Byron abandoned his family in 1789 and then died two years later. Mrs. Byron retreated with her three-year-old son to Aberdeen, Scotland, where they lived on a meager income until 1798, when Byron inherited the ancestral Byron estate from his great-uncle and with it the title of the sixth Baron Byron. In 1805, Byron entered Cambridge University, where he engaged in boxing, fencing, and swimming. Though Byron was born with a clubfoot that gave him a slight limp and was a source of misery for him, he enjoyed testing himself physically.

Outcast from Society Byron achieved literary renown with the publication in 1812 of the first two sections of his poetic travelogue *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*. Inspired by a two-year adventure through Portugal, Spain, Malta, Greece, and Asia Minor, the book made Byron the darling of London society. With his subsequent publications, his literary reputation grew and he became known for the typical protagonist of his poems—the “Byronic hero,” a restless, tortured soul who disdained conventional values. Unfortunately, the dashing poet’s own reckless lifestyle often left him in debt and suffering from melancholy. Hoping to avoid scandal from his many romantic liaisons, he married in 1815, but his wife left him just one year later. The rumors circulated about his failed marriage caused Byron to flee from England in 1816, never to return. After living in Switzerland, where he grew close to the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, Byron settled in Italy, where he wrote his greatest poem, *Don Juan*.

Greek National Hero Longing for adventure, Byron embarked on a mission in 1823 to help the Greek people in their war for independence from Turkish rule. While training soldiers, he contracted a fever and died shortly thereafter at age 36.

Author Online

Go to thinkcentral.com. KEYWORD: HML12-848



LITERARY ANALYSIS: FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

To express the intense emotions he wished to convey, Lord Byron frequently used **figurative language**—language that communicates meaning beyond the literal meaning of the words. Two types of figurative language are **metaphors** and **similes**, which make a comparison between two unlike things. A metaphor compares things directly; a simile uses the word *like* or *as*. Another type of figurative language used to express strong emotion is the **apostrophe**. With this figure of speech, an object, abstract quality, or absent or imaginary person is addressed directly, as if present and able to understand. *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* contains an apostrophe to the ocean. As you read, be aware of these figures of speech and consider why Byron chose to use them.

READING SKILL: UNDERSTAND STANZA STRUCTURE

Poets often use a poem's **stanza structure** to reflect or emphasize the poem's main ideas. **Stanzas**, or groupings of lines, are used to group ideas. Byron often uses traditional stanza structures, in which all of the stanzas contain the same number of lines and often the same rhyme scheme and meter. Traditional stanza structures include

- the **quatrain**, consisting of four lines
- the **sestet**, consisting of six lines
- the **octave**, consisting of eight lines

A more unusual, but still traditional, type of stanza is the **Spenserian stanza**, named for the poet who created it, Edmund Spenser. In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron uses the Spenserian stanza, which consists of nine iambic lines rhyming in the pattern *ababbcbcc*. Each of the first eight lines contains five feet (pentameter), and the ninth, called an **alexandrine**, contains six (hexameter). The rhyming pattern of the stanza creates unity, and the six-foot line slows the rhythm of the stanza's ending, giving it a more dignified pace. As you read these poems, note the stanza structures for each poem and how they contribute to the poem's meaning. For each poem, record your observations in a chart.

<i>"She Walks in Beauty"</i>	
Type of Stanza	
Rhyme Scheme	
Effect Created	

What takes your BREATH away?

What sights and scenes fill you with emotion? What sorts of experiences trigger your imagination and take your breath away? During the romantic period, poets were often inspired by scenes in nature to write about their very intense responses to the world. They believed these experiences gave them a deeper understanding of life's spiritual dimensions.

QUICKWRITE With a small group, list sights or places in the natural world that have inspired powerful feelings in you. Then, choose one that had a particularly strong impact, and describe what you saw, how you felt, and what you learned.



Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.



She Walks in Beauty

George Gordon, Lord Byron

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:
5 Thus mellowed to that tender light
Which heaven to gaudy day denies.

2 **climes:** regions; climates.

4 **aspect:** appearance.

One shade the more, one ray the less,
Had half impaired the nameless grace
Which waves in every raven tress,
10 Or softly lightens o'er her face;
Where thoughts serenely sweet express
How pure, how dear their dwelling place. **A**

9 **tress:** lock of hair.

And on that cheek, and o'er that brow,
So soft, so calm, yet eloquent,
15 The smiles that win, the tints that glow,
But tell of days in goodness spent,
A mind at peace with all below,
A heart whose love is innocent!

A STANZA STRUCTURE
What type of stanza is used in this poem so far? Do the lines follow a regular pattern of **rhythm**? Explain.

Literary Analysis

1. **Clarify** Reread lines 3–4. What coexists, or “meets,” within the woman?
2. **Interpret** What is the relationship between the woman’s inner self and her appearance?
3. **Paraphrase** Reread lines 13–18, and restate the meaning of these lines in your own words.



When We Two Parted

George Gordon, Lord Byron

When we two parted
In silence and tears,
Half broken-hearted
To sever for years,
5 Pale grew thy cheek and cold,
Colder thy kiss;
Truly that hour foretold
Sorrow to this. **B**

The dew of the morning
10 Sunk chill on my brow—
It felt like the warning
Of what I feel now.
Thy vows are all broken,
And light is thy fame;
15 I hear thy name spoken,
And share in its shame.

They name thee before me,
A knell to mine ear;
A shudder comes o'er me—
20 Why wert thou so dear?
They know not I knew thee,
Who knew thee too well—
Long, long shall I rue thee,
Too deeply to tell.

Language Coach

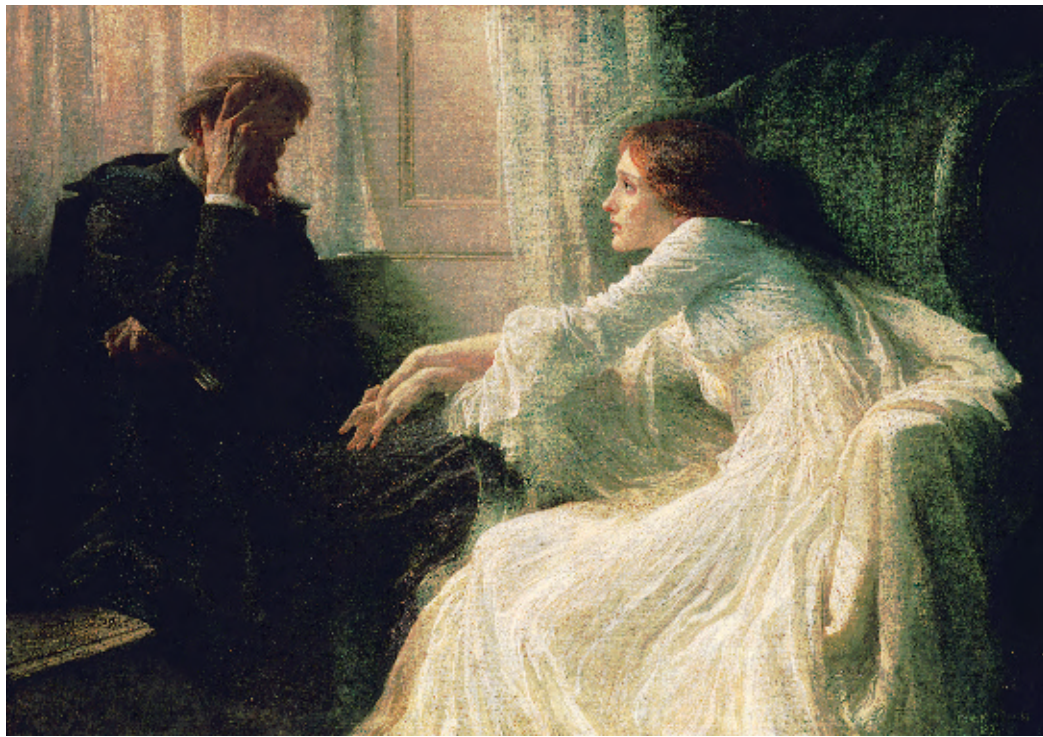
Connotations *Part* (*parted*, line 1) and *sever* (line 4) are synonyms. How do the feelings connected with the words differ?

B FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

The poet uses **apostrophe** in this poem. Who is the speaker addressing in the poem?

18 knell: the ringing of a bell to announce a death.

23 rue: remember with feelings of sorrow; regret.



The Confession, Sir Frank Dicksee. Roy Miles Fine Paintings. © Bridgeman Art Library.

25 In secret we met—
 In silence I grieve,
 That thy heart could forget,
 Thy spirit deceive.
 If I should meet thee
 30 After long years,
 How should I greet thee?—
 With silence and tears. **C**

C STANZA STRUCTURE

Reread lines 25–32. Identify the type of stanza, and paraphrase the ideas presented in it.

Literary Analysis

1. **Clarify** Why does the speaker of “When We Two Parted” feel bitter toward his former lover?
2. **Interpret** In the poem’s final line, Byron repeats the phrase from line 2 of “When We Two Parted.” What idea is emphasized through this **repetition**?
3. **Compare Poems** Describe the emotions expressed by the speakers in “She Walks in Beauty” and “When We Two Parted.” What similarities and differences are there?

from Childe Harold's Pilgrimage

George Gordon, Lord Byron

BACKGROUND *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is considered a semiautobiographical account of Lord Byron's adventures on a European tour from 1809 to 1811. The complete poem contains four cantos. The publication of the first two cantos in 1812 propelled Byron to fame. *Childe* is an archaic term for a young nobleman awaiting knighthood.

Apostrophe to the Ocean

- 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:
5 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 can not all conceal. **D**
- 10 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
15 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.

D STANZA STRUCTURE

Note the **rhythm** and **rhyme scheme** of this stanza. What idea is emphasized in the **alexandrine** line?

15 **ravage**: destruction.

18 **unknell'd**: with no announcement of his death.



Daybreak on the Goodwins, Thomas Rose Miles. Oil on canvas. Private collection. © Bridgeman Art Library.

- His steps are not upon thy paths, thy fields
 20 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
 25 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. **E**

Language Coach

Connotations *Spoil* refers to property taken by war. How would the tone of lines 19–20 change if *spoil* became *prize*?

25 haply: perhaps.

E FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Reread lines 19–20. Identify the **metaphor** in these lines. How does this comparison reinforce the idea that the ocean is powerful?

The armaments which thunderstrike the walls
 Of rock-built cities, bidding nations quake
 30 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,
 35 They melt into thy yeast of waves, which mar
 Alike the Armada's pride or spoils of Trafalgar.

Thy shores are empires, changed in all save thee—
 Assyria, Greece, Rome, Carthage, what are they?
 Thy waters wash'd them power while they were free,
 40 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;
 45 Such as creation's dawn beheld, thou rollest now.

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
 50 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.

55 And I have loved thee, Ocean! and my joy
 Of youthful sports was on thy breast to be
 Borne, like thy bubbles, onward. From a boy
 I wanton'd with thy breakers—they to me
 Were a delight; and if the freshening sea
 60 Made them a terror—'t was 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. **F**

31 oak leviathans: large ships.

32 their clay creator: humankind.

33 arbiter: judge; decision-maker.

35 yeast: turbulent froth.

36 Armada's . . . Trafalgar

(trə-fäl'gər): The British defeated the mighty Spanish Armada in 1588; Trafalgar is a Spanish cape, the site of a great British naval victory over the French and Spanish in 1805.

38 Assyria . . . Carthage: four powerful ancient civilizations.

44 azure (äzh'ər): sky blue.

47 Glasses . . . tempests: is reflected in storms.

49 torrid clime: the intensely hot regions near the equator.

53 zone: one of the five climatic regions of the earth.

54 fathomless: too deep to measure; beyond comprehension.

58 wanton'd: frolicked playfully; **breakers:** large waves.

62 billows: swelling waters; waves.

F FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE
 Identify the **metaphor** in the last stanza, and explain what this comparison indicates about the speaker's relationship to the ocean. Cite phrases that support your opinion.

Comprehension

1. **Clarify** Why does the speaker in the excerpt from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* enjoy spending time by the “deep Sea”?
2. **Paraphrase** In your own words, restate the meaning of lines 46–50.
3. **Summarize** What aspects of the ocean does the speaker seem to admire most? Briefly explain.



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Literary Analysis

4. **Draw Conclusions** Although “She Walks in Beauty” contains the image of a woman walking, there are no descriptions of her legs or arms, only her face. Why do you think the poet chose to describe only her face?
5. **Examine Ideas** Reread lines 37–45 in the excerpt from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. What is the speaker saying about the relationship between civilization and the ocean? Provide examples to support your interpretation.
6. **Analyze Figurative Language** Note **metaphors** and **similes** in the following passages. Explain the meaning of each comparison.
 - “She Walks in Beauty,” lines 1–6
 - “When We Two Parted,” lines 17–18
 - from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, lines 34–35
7. **Compare Stanza Structure** Review the notes you recorded on stanza structure for “When We Two Parted” and the excerpt from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. What similarities and differences are there in the structure of these two poems? How do the different stanza forms support the meaning of each poem?
8. **Evaluate Apostrophe** Is Byron's use of the apostrophe in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* an effective method for conveying strong emotion? Find two passages from the poem that you think serve as good illustrations, and explain why you chose them.

Literary Criticism

9. **Critical Interpretations** The poet T. S. Eliot once remarked, “Of Byron one can say, as of no other English poet of his eminence, that he added nothing to the language, that he discovered nothing in the sounds, and developed nothing in the meaning, of individual words.” Based on the poems you read, do you agree or disagree with Eliot's comment? Explain.

*What takes your **BREATH** away?*

Standing on top of a mountain or seeing the ocean for the first time can inspire a strong reaction. Describe the intense emotions people feel when they are “at one” with nature. What do you think causes this reaction?