Lord Byron, "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage"

[extract on countries of Europe]

CANTO IV

Ī.

I stood in Venice, on the Bridge of Sighs;
A palace and a prison on each hand:
I saw from out the wave her structures rise
As from the stroke of the enchanter's wand:
A thousand years their cloudy wings expand
Around me, and a dying glory smiles
O'er the far times when many a subject land
Looked to the winged Lion's marble piles,
Where Venice sate in state, throned on her
hundred isles!

II.

She looks a sea Cybele, fresh from ocean, Rising with her tiara of proud towers At airy distance, with majestic motion, A ruler of the waters and their powers: And such she was; her daughters had their dowers

From spoils of nations, and the exhaustless East Poured in her lap all gems in sparkling showers. In purple was she robed, and of her feast Monarchs partook, and deemed their dignity increased.

III.

In Venice, Tasso's echoes are no more,
And silent rows the songless gondolier;
Her palaces are crumbling to the shore,
And music meets not always now the ear:
Those days are gone—but beauty still is here.
States fall, arts fade—but Nature doth not die,
Nor yet forget how Venice once was dear,
The pleasant place of all festivity,
The revel of the earth, the masque of Italy!

[...]

XCVI.

Can tyrants but by tyrants conquered be,
And Freedom find no champion and no child
Such as Columbia saw arise when she
Sprung forth a Pallas, armed and undefiled?
Or must such minds be nourished in the wild,
Deep in the unpruned forest, midst the roar
Of cataracts, where nursing nature smiled
On infant Washington? Has Earth no more
Such seeds within her breast, or Europe no such
shore?

XCVII.

But France got drunk with blood to vomit crime,
And fatal have her Saturnalia been
To Freedom's cause, in every age and clime;
Because the deadly days which we have seen,
And vile Ambition, that built up between
Man and his hopes an adamantine wall,
And the base pageant last upon the scene,
Are grown the pretext for the eternal thrall
Which nips Life's tree, and dooms man's worst—
his second fall.

XCVIII.

Yet, Freedom! yet thy banner, torn, but flying, Streams like the thunder-storm AGAINST the wind;

Thy trumpet-voice, though broken now and dying,

The loudest still the tempest leaves behind;
Thy tree hath lost its blossoms, and the rind,
Chopped by the axe, looks rough and little
worth.

But the sap lasts,—and still the seed we find Sown deep, even in the bosom of the North; So shall a better spring less bitter fruit bring forth.

Byron's "Childe Harold" – begun as "Childe Barun", using an archaic form of his own name, follows the continental travels of the title-character—in one place called 'self exiled Harold'—through France, Spain, Italy, Albania and Turkish lands. The journey was real enough: Byron travelled on the same itinerary with Thomas Cam Hobbes (his Cambridge college-friend "Hobby") in all those regions. In substance, the poem takes the form of a meditative diary in which the author's thoughts are conveyed in direct speech intersperse with third-person remarks about the character and his doings and occasionally paeans to beautiful ladies—such as Inez—whom he meets along the way. In fact his journey was if anything more romantic than the poem tells. For one, he encountered and fell in love with the three daughters, all under fifteen, of the widow of a British Ambassador in Rome. As an essayist poem in rhyming stanzas, it gives a witty view of the French Revolution and other politicall *débacles* from the standpoint of an aristocratic libertarian.