**Byron: Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage**

A prose rendering of Stanzas 178-186

Contributor: Partha Pratim Bandyopadhyay, Department of English

**CLXXVII (178):** I find a pleasure in dense forests with no paths through them, and in lonely seashores with no man around. I can find the company of nature when no human being accompanies me. When I stand alone by the deep sea I am in company of the sea and earth – I can hear lovely music in the roar of the waves. It is not that I do not love human company, but nature gives me greater company and unmixed happiness. During my interviews with nature in absence of human company, I move out of my human self and identity – from what I have been and may become – and become only a soul, a consciousness freed from the flow of human experience or history. On those occasions I become one with the universe, and feel things beyond human understanding or expression. I fail to express them, yet they overwhelm me so that I cannot also keep them within myself.

**CLXXIX (179)**: O deep dark blue ocean, roll on over the earth, and over human history. The vaunts of man are nothing compared to your immense timeless power. Numerous fleets of ships sail over you, vainly thinking they have conquered the seas. Mankind may conquer the forces of nature with their arms, they may change the earth’s face with exploits, but their powers are limited to the land. On your vast watery domain no man may rule – all that happen there are your doing. You are the lone sovereign in your huge empire. Men fight over your surface to share it, hoping to control a profitable part, but not even the shadow of their fights and exploits remain in the end. Ironically, only the final tragic moment of man’s self-destruction in the vast expanses of the ocean remains in memory. It is a moment that proves man’s tiny insignificance before oceanic immensity – like a drop of rain he vanishes into the roaring depths, and is never found again. He misses the fortune of a proper coffin and grave, and the mourning of friends and family.

**CLXXX (180):** O ocean, man’s steps do not trample your body; your vast spaces are not his dominion. Time and again you rise up in your might to shake off his puny creeping movements over you. His evil strength that he has used to deface nature’s beauty and spoil her wealth on land is powerless over you. You hate his polluting greed and throw it over when he tries to apply it on you. It is with you that he receives his due punishment. You drown him in your great storms and cross-currents, and throw him up again in playful fury. He is dashed and scattered by the waves and rocks, and sent afloat to some nearby shore, to lie mangled and dead. That is his utmost hope – to be washed ashore and found for burial. Thus is nature’s revenge on man taken – with cruel but fitting justice.

**CLXXXI (181):** The strongest instruments of war made by man create great terror in the world of men. The arms that hit the strong walls surrounding rock-built cities and fortresses make human races tremble with fear, and even kings in their secure palaces are shaken. The huge oaks, reminding by their gigantic size the Leviathan (the fabled sea-beast thought to be the hugest creature), by their solidity give the impression that the land (their ‘clay creator’) is master of the ocean – that man may claim to be lord of the seas upon the strength of warships he makes out of those oaks. The vain belief that armaments and warships are the real ‘arbiters of war’ (factors deciding victory) is busted by the ocean when it treats these as tiny toys. A raging sea-storm can throw them apart like tiny flakes with its snowy foam, and draw the flakes into the endless depths of the ocean. All man’s pride can thereby melt into invisibility. History is full of proof of human power annihilated by the seas – as in the cases of the Spanish Armada or the battle of Trafalgar.

**CLXXXII (182):** O ocean, on your shores have grown great empires – great civilizations like Assyria, Greece, Rome and Carthage. Where are they now? All have perished with time – time has brought them to dust. Only their locations on your shores have remained, the only constant amidst the human flux. These empires grew in power based on your waters – conquests and trade over the seas made them wealthy. You gave them their greatness, and when they fell from it, tyrants came sailing over you to destroy them. Their histories have witnessed many vicissitudes with strangers and savage races landing on their shores. Time has worn out their glory and turned vibrant civilizations to deserts. But you, ocean, have stood out of the ravages of time. Nothing has ever changed you except your own forces. No mark of age or change shows on your blue (azure) face – you roll on the same as you were in the beginning of creation.

**CLXXXIII (183):** You, ocean, are the mirror of God himself – of his wrath in your tempests, of his mercy when you are calm, of his mysterious ways when you are rocking or boisterous. In your myriad states and appearances – whether in pleasing breeze, or violent gale and storm, whether in the frozen seas of the poles, or in dark surges of hot, humid tropics – you are an emblem of eternity, an endless, immeasurable unknown that is only comparable to the sea of time deluding human thought. You are the seat of the wrathful gods that man fears and obeys. Great fearsome monsters are born in your depths, you are sovereign over the three realms – feared and unknown by all.

**CLXXXIV (184):** All my life I have loved you, ocean. My favorite sport since childhood has been to be carried far and away riding the crest of your waves, like the bubbles and foam. As a boy I played with your breakers (waves that break on the shore) – they gave me the joy of freedom, the liberty from monotonous law. Even when your waves terrified me, the terror was a pleasure to my wild soul, tasting of the enchanting unknown. I have identified with your immense free spirit and all-conquering power all my life, and devoted myself to your call. I have always submitted to your primal energies and aspired to ride them – to be as you are.

**CLXXXV (185):** Now my life is lived, my song is ended; my story now, being told, shall die into oblivion. It is proper now that this long dream should end. The torch of inspiration that had kept my lamp burning at midnight while I wrote is now put out, and what is written cannot be changed. I am spent – my inspired, singing self s gone, the eyes of my imagination have grown dim, and the divine light that kindled me inwardly is faint and low.

**CLXXXVI (186):** Farewell! It is a sad and sweet word that must be said some time, and has been said by all before. The word inspires a yearning to stay back, but that must be overcome. Readers, you who have followed the Pilgrim to this end of his song – if you remember a thought you have found in his song, the Pilgrim’s task is done. Let the pains of singing be kept up for him alone, he will be happy to leave you with the moral meaning of his song.