

# Albanian Themes and Motifs in Byron's Works

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*Byron was inspired to explore Albanian themes and motifs after his visit to Albania in 1809, as the landscapes, folklore and people of Albania left a lasting impression on him. Not only did he influence many Albanian writers, but he also drew inspiration from the Albanian environment, which he incorporated into his poetic verse. This paper uses qualitative and comparative literary methods to analyze the Albanian themes in some of Byron's notable works, such as Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, The Bride of Abydos, The Giaour, The Siege of Corinth, Lara, Parisina and Don Juan. The analysis reveals that Byron's poems glorify the enchanting nature of Albania, the Albanian character, the virtues of Albanian women, national costumes, folklore and historical figures such as Scanderbeg and Ali Pasha, etc. The conclusion is that Byron's verses were a valuable source of inspiration for patriotic poets during the Albanian National Renaissance, as they exuded a sense of patriotism, heroism and poetic inspiration. Byron's travels to Albanian lands and his interest in Albania and the Albanians, as well as his writings about them, greatly enhanced and promoted literary and cultural relations between Albania and England. Byron's admiration for Albania and its people positioned him as a cherished friend, ally and supporter of the Albanian people, earning him great love and honor and making him the Albanians' favorite and most popular poet.*

Keywords: English literature / Byron / imagology / Albania / Albanian culture

## Introduction: Byron and Albanians

The exploration of Albanian themes and motifs in English literature begins with Geoffrey Chaucer and continues with the English Renaissance writers such as William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, and Edmund Spenser, and then goes on in the period of English Neoclassicism with Thomas Whincop, William Howard, and George Lillo, who have written dramas on Scanderbeg. They culminated later in the nineteenth century in the works of great English Romantic and Victorian poets and writers, such as Percy B. Shelley, Mary W. Shelley, G. G. Byron, Benjamin Disraeli, Edward Lear, Lord Alfred Tennyson, Matthew Arnold, etc. Furthermore, various writers and researchers, such as Edith Durham, Stewart Mann, Ann Bridge, Charles Ewert, Dorothy Gilman, Loreta Chase, Katherine Neville, etc., have written works with Albanian themes and motifs even during the twentieth century.

However, it is true that G. G. Byron is the most distinguished and outstanding poet when it comes to writing about Albanian themes and motifs. This is due to his personal encounters, contacts, interactions, and engagements with Albanians, as well as his extensive readings on the matter. The echo of George Byron's life and works reached small Albania, albeit a little late, due to its political, historical, economic, social, and cultural conditions. Byron himself was clearly influenced by the Albanians, what he expressed in his writings, both poetry and prose. But Byron also left many profound and unforgettable memories and traces in Albania. The Albanians transmitted this memory, passing it on from one generation to another until nowadays. These memories are so deep that there are some old Albanian men and women who still remember hearing their ancestors say that they saw Byron passing through certain places in Albania (Karagozi 17). The works of George Byron about Albanians, mostly poetry and especially *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, and his letters, from the time they were written until today, have always aroused the interest and curiosity of foreign poets, intellectuals, and scholars in many aspects. Byron was the first to spread the Albanian theme, which quickly stimulated the readers' curiosity, sympathy, and desire to get to know this country and its people with special features. His work was read by the masses of different people, and these readers not only liked it but were also influenced by it (Kadija 45). Robert Elsie maintains that "of all English writers to have introduced Scanderbeg and Albania to the English-speaking public, none was more influential than Lord Byron (1788–1824). Byron

was fascinated by Albania and the Albanians during his travels in the Mediterranean and indeed began to learn the Albanian language” (Elsie 40). Namely, around four hundred verses in Canto the Second of his *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* extensively delve into Albanian themes and motifs. Additionally, his Oriental poems like *The Bride of Abydos*, *The Giaour*, *Lara*, *Parisina*, and *The Siege of Corinth*, along with the masterpiece *Don Juan*, skillfully explore Albanian nature, character, settings, folklore, and historical figures like Ali Pasha and Scanderbeg. Moreover, Byron vividly and romantically portrays in his works the virtues of Albanian women, magnificent national attire, and the richness of Albanian history and culture. Although articles and research papers in Albanian about Byron were written by distinguished Albanian scholars, such as Abdullah Karjagdiu, Afrim Karagiozi, Skender Luarasi, Rexhep Qosja, Refik Kadija, Nexhip Gami, Vittorio Gualtieri, Jup Kastrati, Dhimitër Shuteriqi, Klara Kodra, Andrea Varfi, and others, unfortunately, very few research articles about Byron and Albanians were written in English, and almost no papers were written in English about the Albanian themes and motifs in Byron's poems and works. Therefore, this paper will attempt to conduct an analysis of his poems and works and an in-depth review of relevant scholarly articles, books, and critical essays that explore the impact of Albanian themes, motifs, characters, etc., in the works of G. G. Byron. To this end, we will emphasize qualitative methods and comparative literature methods. Newton P. Stallknecht and Horst Frenz provide a definition that best fits the aims of this paper: “Comparative literature often deals with the relationship between only two countries or two authors of different nationalities or one author and another country (e.g., Franco-German literary relations, Poe–Baudelaire, Italy in the works of Goethe)” (Stallknecht and Frenz 10). In this case, the paper deals with the relationship between Albanian and English literatures, that is, with Albanian themes and motifs in G. G. Byron's works.

There are even indications that Byron has exerted influence on many Arbëresh poets (Albanian poets of Italy) and poets of the Albanian National Renaissance (Rilindja), such as Jeronim De Rada, Elena Gjika, Anastas Kullurioti, Faik Konica, Asdren, Luigj Gurakuqi, Ismail Kadare, Agim Shehu, and Dhori Qirjazi. However, this paper will only delve into Albanian themes and motifs in Byron's poems, as we can talk about influence only when we can ascertain, on the basis of a comparison between two texts, that the qualities of one work have been inspired by the special character of the other (Brandt Corstius 185).

## Albanian themes and motifs in Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*

According to Bernard Blackstone, Canto the Second is at the heart of Byron's reflective or intuitive verse, distinguishing him from poets like Wordsworth, Coleridge, or Keats (Blackstone 19–25). The protagonist of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Childe Harold, is a sensitive and noble yet disillusioned young man. As he travels, he observes, admires, reflects, reminds, and advises oppressed people to reclaim their dignity and glory. He embodies a romantic hero and an individualistic rebel who is disillusioned, desperate, melodramatic, prone to wandering, homesick, and bored with life. D. W. Harding notes that Childe Harold, despite being an outcast, serves a crucial role in his society and is paradoxically more embedded in it than many poets of the time (Harding 42). The poem's full title is *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage: A Romaunt*, using "Childe" to represent a medieval term for a small owner or a knight. The term "romaunt" reflects a chivalric romance in verse. Byron created his hero, influenced by a modernized chivalric romance (Hergešić 254).

However, to this day, it still remains debatable: Is Harold really an entirely autobiographical hero? This presents one of the most intriguing aspects of Byron's work overall. Considering the shared traits of young Byron and Harold, doubts about their connection diminish. Both grapple with a sense of hopelessness, gloomy sorrow, and boredom with life. Byron's love for nature corresponds to Harold's admiration for it, and both share discontent with England, a fondness for solitude, and a sense of remorse. The parallel travels, love for the arts, freedom, and beauty, as well as their shared activism for freedom, suggest a strong connection. However, Byron himself sought to distance Childe Harold's character from his own. Some scholars partially agree with Byron, proposing that Harold is not a direct reflection of Byron but an imagined hero embodying the author's vision. In the midst of ongoing debates, certain critics such as Guy E. Smith firmly contend that Childe Harold undeniably symbolizes Byron himself (Smith 33), a viewpoint echoed by other academics in the discipline.

Biographers find the autobiographical element in a significant portion of Byron's works particularly captivating. According to Francis M. Doherty, there are three facets of Byron: the sharp and witty diarist, the popular yet cursed and misanthropic poet, and the genius satirist of his later poems, such as *Don Juan* (Doherty 6). When discussing Byron as a poet, one inevitably delves into his life, journeys, experiences, and

impressions. While for many poets, mixing their lives with their literary works can be risky, the poetic world usually stands as a separate entity from normal thinking or behavior (Knight 18). René Wellek, Austin Warren, and David Daiches argue that while biography may offer some insight into understanding literary works, it cannot alter critical assessments (Wellek and Warren 71; Daiches 326).

According to Wellek and Warren, even for an objective poet, the distinction between a personal autobiographical statement and the use of the same motif in a work of art should not be overlooked. They argue that a work of art operates on a different plane, with a unique relationship to reality, compared to a memoir, diary, or letter (Wellek and Warren 71). Artists are influenced by compulsions, motivations, and creative inspiration, although inspiration is not a constant in artistic creativity. Different writers have diverse approaches to this, and researchers and critics often have their own opinions, which may differ from the writers' claims and explanations.

Byron's approach to his own life in letters, notes, and conversations makes the biographical analysis of works like *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and Oriental poems more accessible. Byron's extensive documentation of his life, including reports, visits, and letters, intertwines seamlessly with his poetry, making it challenging to separate the two. Byron's preference for drawing from real, personal experiences rather than excessive fiction contributes to this intertwining. In discussing Byron's poetry, incorporating episodes and facts from his life poses no risk of deviation, as his life exists in a poetic dimension (Knight 18). Recognizing this interplay between his life and poetry enhances the greatness of Byron's already esteemed literary works.

This assertion is most effectively demonstrated and substantiated by examining Canto the Second of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, especially the Byronic stanzas and verses dedicated to Albania and the Albanians. Comprising ninety-eight Spenserian stanzas, each with nine iambic lines, the verses detailing Albania and its people commence from the thirty-seventh stanza. Before delving into Albania, Harold first describes its nature:

Dear Nature is the kindest mother still,  
 Though always changing, in her aspect mild;  
 From her bare bosom let me take my fill,  
 Her never-wean'd, though not her favour'd child.  
 Oh! she is fairest in her features wild. (26)

Then, Harold turns to Albania, greeting it as the land of Iskander, of the brave men, and of the great battles:

Land of Albania! where Iskander rose,  
Theme of the young, and beacon of the wise,  
And he his namesake, whose oft-baffled foes  
Shrunk from his deeds of chivalrous emprise;  
Land of Albania! let me bend mine eyes  
On thee, thou rugged nurse of savage men!  
The cross descends, thy minarets arise,  
And the pale crescent sparkles in the glen,  
Through many a cypress grove within each city's ken. (26)

Thus, when discussing Albania, Harold proudly references “Iskander,” the Turkish moniker for Alexander the Great (Leka i Madh), hailed as the “theme of the young and beacon of the wise.” He swiftly acknowledges Scanderbeg as the second Iskander, noting his retreat from chivalrous exploits. In such a resilient land inhabited by tough men, Harold embarks on his visit to explore magnificent places, enrich his life experiences, and delve into new customs, traditions, virtues, manners, emotions, passions, and worldviews. Subsequent stanzas find Harold reflecting on Greece’s historical past during his journey through the Cape of Leukas and the coasts of Greece, recalling figures like “Lesbia and her tomb” and “black Sappho,” a poetess who bestowed high orders and eternal life through her work. In this moment, Harold momentarily sets aside memories of harsh wars, particularly in Actium and Lepanto, despite harboring a general aversion to murderers and a penchant for mocking war heroes. Nonetheless, during his travels, Harold is paradoxically drawn into contemplation and a sense of longing for the past. Continuing his expedition, Harold notes the dawn over Albania’s stern hills and observes the ominous rocks of Dark Suli, where highlanders’ deeds stand out amidst storms and roaming wolves. Undeterred by the dangers of an unknown shore, Harold finds solace in the captivating scenes that make the ceaseless toil of travel sweet. While exploring new places, Harold momentarily sets aside contemplations of moral and religious issues. In the Orient, he expresses disdain for superstition and its various symbols, condemning the separation of gold from true worship. In the Ambracian Gulf, Harold recalls the ancient history of Greece, where Roman fleets clashed with those of the kings of Asia. Passing through Illyria’s vales, he boasts of possessing jewels surpassing even Tempe, and Parnassus pales in comparison to the coastal beauty. Journeying through Pindus and Acherusia’s lake, Harold proceeds to meet Albania’s chief, Ali Pasha Tepelena, a

ruthless ruler whose bloody sway over a turbulent and bold nation faces resistance from rebellious tribes like the Suliots. Ali Pasha employs force, cunning, and gold to subjugate those who dare oppose him. In the stanzas following the forty-seventh, Harold marvels at the enchanting landscapes, praising the Monastic Zitza with its harmonious blend of rock, river, forest, and mountain. He portrays the beauty of Chimera's alps, where herds graze amid waving trees and flowing streams. Approaching Ioannina, hidden by hills, he passes Dodona, the forgotten oracle of the ancient Greeks. Expressing regret for the lost Thunderer's shrine, Harold reflects on the impermanence of man and questions whether one should aspire to outlast marble or oak when all, including nations and worlds, succumb to fate. Reminding himself not to resist the destiny shared with the gods, he advises against futile resistance. Continuing his pilgrimage, Harold notices how the borders of Epirus are receding and the mountains are lowering as he gazes at the setting sun beyond Tomerit, and he depicts it in a magnificent way:

The sun had sunk behind vast Tomerit,  
And Laos wide and fierce came roaring by;  
The shades of wonted night were gathering yet,  
When, down the steep banks winding warily,  
Childe Harold saw, like meteors in the sky,  
The glittering minarets of Tepalen,  
Whose walls o'erlook the stream; and drawing nigh,  
He heard the busy hum of warrior-men  
Swelling the breeze that sigh'd along the lengthening glen. (29)

Approaching Tepelena, Harold spots the imposing residence of the influential leader, boldly announcing his high status. The bustling activity in the court signifies active preparations for war. Amid the crowd of knights, servants, Moors, Turks, Tartars, and Albanians, Harold discerns the distinct presence of the Albanians, indicating their involvement in the impending conflict: "The wild Albanian kirtled to his knee, / With shawl-girt head and ornamented gun, / And gold-embroider'd garments, fair to see" (30).

Harold observes the proud Albanian presence in the area, specifically noting their devotion during Ramadan. He delves into the secluded lives of Albanian women, emphasizing their restricted movements but also finding contentment in their roles as mothers. Despite the warlike demeanor of Ali Pasha, Harold acknowledges his mild and gentle side. At the palace, where the pilgrim takes respite, he contemplates the surroundings, the people, their attire, and the overall atmosphere.

In the other stanzas (up to the stanza seventy-three), Childe Harold sings almost entirely about the Albanians. Of all the stanzas, the following is the most popular among Albanians:

Fierce are Albania's children, yet they lack  
Not virtues, were those virtues more mature.  
Where is the foe that ever saw their back?  
Who can so well the toil of war endure?  
Their native fastnesses not more secure  
Than they in doubtful time of troublous need:  
Their wrath how deadly! but their friendship sure,  
When Gratitude or Valour bids them bleed,  
Unshaken rushing on where'er their chief may lead. (31)

Harold admires the Albanians for their bravery, love of freedom, strictness, loyalty, and honesty. While acknowledging their admirable qualities, he expresses a desire for them to possess even more refined attributes. Throughout his travels, Harold encounters Albanians frequently, and he recalls a specific encounter with them in Ali Pasha's tower.

Childe Harold saw them in their chieftain's tower  
Thronging to war in splendour and success;  
And after view'd them, when, within their power,  
Himself awhile the victim of distress;  
That saddening hour when bad men hotlier press:  
But these did shelter him beneath their roof,  
When less barbarians would have cheer'd him less,  
And follow-countrymen have stood aloof—  
In aught that tries the heart how few withstand the proof! (31)

Childe Harold describes the Albanians' generous hospitality and emphasizes the virtues and kindness of their people, contrasting them with the indifference shown by his own compatriots towards those in need of shelter and protection. He notes that his fellow countrymen often distance themselves in such situations, leading Harold to conclude that very few can withstand the test of the heart, appreciating the sentiment expressed in the popular Albanian proverb: "A friend in need is a friend indeed."

In another instance, Harold fondly remembers the Albanians' generosity with reverence and longing. When a storm caused Harold's boat to crash on the rocks of Suli, he and his companions feared potential harm from the local Albanians. To their surprise, the natives approached and rescued them. Despite initial apprehension due to the

fierce appearance of their rescuers, Harold and his companions soon realized they were not in danger of robbery or harm:

Vain fear! the Suliotes stretch'd the welcome hand,  
Led them o'er rocks and past the dangerous swamp,  
Kinder than polish'd slaves though not so bland,  
And piled the hearth, and wrung their garments damp,  
And fill'd the bowl, and trimm'd the cheerful lamp,  
And spread their fare; though homely, all they had:  
Such conduct bears Philanthropy's rare stamp—  
To rest the weary and to soothe the sad,  
Doth lesson happier men, and shames at least the bad. (31)

Hence, Childe Harold developed a deep affection for these people, choosing to be constantly accompanied by a reliable group of these Albanian men. The Suliots near Utraikey astonished and captivated Harold, their friend and guest, with unforgettable moments of dinner, toasts, songs, and spirited dances. The rhythmic and powerful dances in particular left Harold enchanted:

On the smooth shore the night-fires brightly blazed,  
The feast was done, the red wine circling fast,  
And he that unawares had there ygaz'd  
With gaping wonderment had stared aghast;  
For ere nights midmost, stillest hour was past,  
The native revels of the troop began;  
Each Palikar his sabre from him cast,  
And bounding hand in hand, man link'd to man,  
Yelling their uncouth dirge, long daunced the kirtled clan. (32)

Childe Harold watched the Suliots with interest during the dance, for he liked the dances and songs he heard:

Childe Harold at a little distance stood  
And view'd, but not displeas'd, the revelrie,  
Nor hated harmless mirth, however rude:  
In sooth, it was no vulgar sight to see  
Their barbarous, yet their not indecent, glee;  
And, as the flames along their faces gleam'd,  
Their gestures nimble, dark eyes flashing free,  
The long wild locks that to their girdles stream'd,  
While thus in concert they this lay half sang, half scream'd. (32)

Childe Harold listened to the Albanian song *Tamburxhi*, a clarion call celebrating the bravery, courage, enterprises, determination, invincible endurance, hatred towards the enemy, and loyalty to their incomparable leader, Ali Pasha.

As evidenced, *Canto the Second* is dominated by Albanian themes and motifs. Namely, Byron shares beautiful verses about Albanians and Albania, reflecting his impressions and inspirations from travels, encounters with diverse people, and insights into customs, traditions, language, and folklore. The vast majority of these verses can be connected to and even identified with Byron's experiences in the villages of southern Albania and northern Greece. In other words, Harold often adheres to the itinerary of Byron's wanderings, visits the same places in which Byron wrote his letters, paints, and reflects similar or even the same scenes and figures that Byron mentions in his letters or notes; nevertheless, the difference between Harold and Byron is striking. Although William A. Borst manages to identify and ascertain more than twenty autobiographical places in *Canto the Second*, mainly in the verses dedicated to Albanians (Borst 77–78), Harold and Byron, however, cannot be identified with each other completely. As follows are some of the differences between Byron and Childe Harold that we have encountered: While Byron, through letters and notes, appears to us as a young man who experiences everything he sees, hears, and witnesses as a boy from "flesh and blood," Harold is a more idealized type, romantic and curious, who is aware that on the journey, he does not intend only to wander but also to commemorate, contemplate, appreciate, and glorify freedom, to yearn for the past, to be enchanted in the landscapes of the countries he visits, and to compare the race and psyche of people he meets with the race and psyche of his countrymen. Whereas Byron travels to broaden the horizons of life knowledge, to confirm his grasp of the Orient gained through reading, and to admire Ancient Hellas, Harold, for his part, lets us know from the get-go that he travels because he is dissatisfied with his homeland, because he is extremely interested and curious about the places he visits, and because he has a mission in life. Byron and his portrait appear to us without embellishments and distortions in Byron's notes, with dramatic, melodramatic, unexpected, pleasant, and unpleasant situations, with bizarre moments and honorable situations, with moments of pleasure and bitter moments, while Harold, who subsumes in the poet's vision, has the duty to observe, ponder, protest, lament, and grieve in the name of the high ideals of freedom, justice, humanity, and virtue.

### **Albanian themes and motifs in *The Bride of Abydos*, *The Giaour*, *The Siege of Corinth*, *Lara*, *Parisina* and *Don Juan***

To Romantic poets, the Orient seemed like a new and fascinating world where one is not oppressed by the cursed bourgeois society and a place with landscapes, nature, qualities, and virtues that the Europeans of central and northern Europe, especially the English, lacked. Namely, a place with wonderful and colorful sights and scenes, with more pristine, natural, and original life, less affected and spoiled by civilization, brilliant costumes and traditions, and even more humane and nobler people (Karjagdiu 24). According to Martin Stephen, “the concept of the Byronic hero is drawn from both heroes and narrators in Byron’s poetry. He is a morose, enigmatic, cultured, bitter figure, gloomy, outwardly devil-may-care, but full of dark secrets. All the controversy about Byron’s life, as well as sometimes obscuring an accurate picture of his poetry, has made some readers see the figure of the Byronic hero and Byron himself as one and the same thing” (Stephen 230).

Poems like *The Giaour*, *The Bride of Abydos*, *The Corsair*, *Lara*, *The Siege of Corinth*, and *Parisina* share common elements in content, characters, and worldviews. These works are variations of a certain tale or story and the heroes embody qualities reminiscent of Byron’s idealized self. Moreover, certain characters possess Albanian features.

Therefore, the discussion of Albanian themes, motifs, characters, conflicts, etc., in Byron’s poems will focus on events, settings, and characters with Albanian characteristics. These poems narrate the tale of a romantic hero facing a similar plight: depression, demoralization, and a descent into evil due to uncontrollable events. Endowed with unmatched pride, courage, burning passions, and a broken heart, the heroes of these poems, often hindered by fate or ruthless adversaries, experience a thwarted love life.

However, the heroes and themes in Oriental poems portray and constitute an authentic Byronian Orient, dominated by a feudal patriarchal climate. Contrary to a fantastical medieval fairy tale, the dramatic events unfold in the countries and tales of the Orient that Byron encountered in reality. These powerful tales of heroism and passion against exotic backdrops feature lonely, sad, and rebellious heroes entangled in unfortunate circumstances, fights, disputes, and rivalries that eventually lead them toward the abyss (Mouni 11). Byron experts hold diverse views on the autobiographical dimension of the Oriental poems. Some believe that the protagonists embody different spiritual facets of Byron himself, while others assert that the

poems draw inspiration from oriental narratives prevalent during that period. Yet another faction acknowledges autobiographical elements but underscores the incorporation of Albanian cultural attributes in certain characters and settings.

Hence, to better understand the logical connection, a general comparison of the Byronic heroes in Oriental poems with essential Albanian features is paramount. Both groups, as portrayed by English and European writers, share distinct traits. Byronic heroes with Albanian characteristics are distinguished individuals within their societies. Loyalty is a common trait, with Byronic heroes typically portrayed as proud and poor, much like the Albanians. Both groups rebel against societal injustice, cannot tolerate tyranny or despotism, and seek revenge for insults. The shared qualities include honesty, a connection with nature, difficulty with controlling passions, and a commitment to freedom. Byronic heroes and Albanians both value their word, whether given as an oath or a promise of honor. The Byronic heroes' features align with intelligence, nobility, and a cult of freedom and love, mirroring qualities found in Albanians such as hospitality, openness, and independence (Konitza 49). Thus, it is no wonder that the following question is posed: To what extent was Byron inspired by the qualities, characteristics, and features of the Albanians that he met?

Byron repeatedly emphasizes the profound impact of his initial journey to the Near East on his creative works, notably on the passages of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and of Oriental poems. Expressing admiration for the Albanians, he acknowledged their influence on his literary works. The journey, spanning from fall 1809 to spring 1811, led to the creation of significant works like *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, *The Giaour*, *The Bride of Abydos*, *The Corsair*, *Lara*, and *The Siege of Corinth*. This experience not only ignited Byron's artistic inspiration and imagination but also instilled a newfound appreciation for the Albanians' resilience and dignity despite their challenges, difficulties and humble living conditions. Byron credited these people and landscapes for awakening his true poetic sentiment, a sentiment he shared in correspondence with Thomas Moore (Marchand 66–79).

To some extent, this corresponds to the opinion of Miodrag Šijaković who suggests that many, if not all, heroes in Byron's early works retain qualities from the Albanians he encountered during his travels in the mountains (Šijaković 215–216). Simultaneously, it is essential to acknowledge that during this phase of his literary career, Byron endowed his heroes with qualities from both the Albanians he encountered and his idealized self (Lovell 135). In the Oriental poems,

these characters can be identified as “demonic” embodiments, reflections of revolutionary ideas of the era, and sometimes even as portraits of Byron himself.

To demonstrate the presence of Albanian themes, motifs, characters, conflicts, etc., in Byron's poems, we have to examine a few examples.

In *The Giaour*, the action unfolds in the wild gorges of Parnassus, Greece. The protagonist, Giaour, falls in love with Leila, the wife of a Turk named Hassan. After Leila attempts to escape, Hassan, following the strict customs of the country, punishes her by putting her in a sack and throwing her into the sea. Hassan, driven by revenge, becomes an outlaw and leads a group of Albanian outlaws to capture Giaour. In a fierce battle, Giaour succeeds in killing Hassan but is haunted by a black shadow on his soul. Despite seeking peace through travels, he finds solace only in monastic life, where he confesses, reflects, and suffers for the crime committed in the name of love (Marshall 40–41).

In *The Giaour*, the monk is referred to as “kaloje,” a term Byron used for Greek monks near Ioannina. The Zica monastery, which left a profound impact on Byron, inspired the description of Hassan's palace in the poem. In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Ali Pasha is depicted as a formidable leader of Albanian warriors, while in *The Giaour* Hassan is portrayed as their sworn enemy. Giaour, of Venetian origin, seeks revenge on Hassan and allies with the Albanians. He dresses in Albanian attire, highlighting his camaraderie with them. Giaour shares common traits with Albanians, such as pride, vengefulness, loyalty, fearlessness, and patience. Despite his Italian origin, Giaour's life among the Albanians shapes his character, although he was more knowledgeable and cultured than his counterparts. His participation in their fight against feudal lords reflects his personal intentions and quest for revenge against Hasan's heinous acts.

Albanians fiercely battled foreign feudal tyranny in their quest for freedom, engaging in instinctive, spontaneous, and epic warfare during Byron's time. These conflicts involved ambushes, revengeful attacks, and incursions against despised vassals, drawing Byron's interest. Byron likely found parallels with the guerrilla warfare he witnessed in Spain, seeing small groups as the most effective form of national liberation war. The significance of brave fighters, their endurance, enthusiasm, and leadership qualities became evident in such conflicts. In *The Giaour*, the Albanians maintain their mountain peak due to their leader's, Giaour's, perceived bravery and unwavering commitment to revenge, as recognized by Byron: “Friends meet to part; love laughs at faith; / True foes, once met, are joined till death!” (258).

Giaour avoids the traps and comes out victorious from the ambushes in the mountain only due to the honest, decisive, and unreserved support of his Albanians. In the verses of *The Giaour* the scene is described as follows:

The deathshot hissing from afar;  
The shock, the shout, the groan of war,  
Reverberate along that vale,  
More suited to the shepherd's tale:  
Though few the numbers—theirs the strife  
That neither spares nor speaks for life! (25)

The mountain scene in *The Giaour* becomes a crucial moment in Giaour's life, mirroring the broader struggle of Albanians against Turkish feudalism. According to Šijaković, Byron drew inspiration for *The Giaour* from an event in Greece where a Turkish nobleman threw a woman into the sea for loving a Christian. Giaour, influenced by this experience during his travels through Albania, becomes an outlaw, leads the group, and seeks revenge against the nobleman, Hassan. Šijaković contends that Giaour embodies Albanian qualities, particularly resembling Dervish Tahir, one of Byron's companions. Byron's diary mentions Tahir's scandalous kidnapping incident in Athens, and Šijaković suggests that Giaour's details reflect features of Tahir and Albanian landscapes. In essence, Giaour epitomizes Albanian qualities and traits in Byron's Oriental poems (Šijaković 215–216).

What about other Oriental poems of this period? With the exception of the detailed portrait of Ali Pasha in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron never depicted or described the Albanian Pasha directly in his poetry. However, he did that indirectly. Ali Pasha and his traits and features were the images from which Byron borrowed some of the most striking attributes of his oriental heroes (Borst 77–78).

The portrayal of Pasha and Giaffir in *The Bride of Abydos* as ruthless, cunning, fearless, and strict characters is likely inspired by Ali Pasha, as noted by Byron. In the poem, Byron points out the parallel between Ali Pasha's actions in real life and Giaffir's ruthless elimination of a rival. Byron, during his time in Albania, likely heard of Ali Pasha's historical rival, interestingly named Giaffir (Borst 77–78). Byron borrowed this name for the victim in *The Bride of Abydos* creating an imaginative Pasha with the same name:

Begirt with many a gallant slave,  
 Apparell'd as becomes the brave,  
 Awaiting each his lord's behest  
 To guide his steps, or guard his rest,  
 Old Giaffir sate in his Divan:  
 Deep thought was in his aged eye;  
 And though the face of Mussulman  
 Not oft betrays to standers by  
 The mind within, well skill'd to hide  
 All but unconquerable pride,  
 His pensive cheek and pondering brow  
 Did more than he wont avow. (264)

Harold Wiener asserts that Giaffir in *The Bride of Abydos* unmistakably represents Ali Pasha, depicting him as an aged, dignified evildoer with a heart devoid of mercy, skilled in cunning and intrigue. Wiener notes Ali Pasha's historical actions, such as fighting against Paswan in Vidin and poisoning a rival in Sophia, comparing him with Giaffir's ruthless character. The shared name with Ali's victim adds to the association (Wiener 19). Additionally, Selimi, another character in the poem, is identified by Šijaković as having numerous Albanian traits, characterized by bravery, fearlessness, good manners, and self-confidence reminiscent of Albanian heroes met by Byron (Šijaković 215–216).

In *The Corsair*, some Byron scholars argue that Conrad also exhibits Albanian qualities, while Borst holds that Conrad reflects more of Byron's traits than those of Ali Pasha (Borst 77–78). However, the romantic hero archetype, who rejects society, becomes an outlaw, and leads others, shares similarities with Ali Pasha. Conrad's aura of terror is reminiscent of Ali Pasha's influence, highlighting the contrast between external cold-bloodedness and internal turmoil within his soul:

But who that Chief? his name on every shore  
 Is famed and fear'd—they ask and know no more.  
 With these he mingles not but to command. (278)

What is that spell, that thus his lawless train  
 Confess and envy, yet oppose in vain?  
 What should it be, that thus their faith can bind?  
 The power of Thought—the magic of the Mind!  
 Link'd with success, assumed and kept with skill,  
 That moulds another's weakness to its will;  
 Wields with their hands, but, still to these unknown,  
 Makes even their mightiest deeds appear his own. (280)

According to Šijaković, even the character Lara in the poem of the same name possesses some qualities of Albanians. Šijaković suggests that *Lara* reflects many Albanian qualities, marking the end of the first phase of Byron's career, where he celebrated true and noble love, evolving gradually into the character of Don Juan (Šijaković 215–216).

Borst suggests that Byron's encounters with tales of Greek pirates, particularly Lambro, during his Oriental journey may have influenced the creation of *The Corsair* (Borst 77–78). Lambro, a corsair in *Don Juan*, shares a name with a character from *The Corsair*. John Galt insists that Ali Pasha serves as the inspiration for Lambro, emphasizing Ali Pasha's flattery of Byron's hands and references in *Don Juan* to Lambro and his daughter Haidee's small hands (Galt 9). Some researchers believe that Byron, inspired by Albania, crafted a Lambro-like hero in *Don Juan*, resembling Ali Pasha as a prototype (Borst 77–78).

*Don Juan* emerges as Byron's greatest anti-society satire, presenting a lengthy poem in eight-line stanzas. The narrative revolves around the legendary Don Juan, a character found in various European versions of the legend. Typically, Don Juan is a handsome, mischievous, and villainous hero who engages in wild adventures with daughters, woos young girls with charm, flattery, and cunning, and deceives married women. In Byron's satire, Don Juan, despite his mother's guidance, becomes entangled with Donna Julia, a young woman married to an older man named Don Alfonso. The poem explores Don Juan's "successes" in love and his attempts at moral improvement. Don Juan and Donna Julia indulge in prolonged moments of covert affair, but their affair is discovered when Don Alfonso, after initial doubts, catches the young rogue in his wife's room. Before the scandal erupts, Don Juan's mother advises him to escape and embark on a journey to improve his morals. He sets out on a pilgrimage to Cádiz, but his ship sinks, casting him onto an island in the Aegean Sea. There, the revived but half-dead Don Juan is discovered by Haidee, the young and beautiful daughter of the island's chieftain and ruler. Haidee and her maid tend to and heal Don Juan in a cave. She is afraid that Don Juan will fall into the hands of her father, Lambros, who sells every slave that he captures. The idyllic love between Haidee and Don Juan lasts a long time: "She came into the cave, but it was merely / To see her bird reposing in his nest" (680).

Following the news of Haidee's father, Lambro, supposedly perishing in a pirate attack, Haidee takes Don Juan to her father's house. During a celebration, Lambro unexpectedly appears, capturing Don Juan and sending him onto a slave ship. Unaware of Haidee's fate after giving birth to their child, Don Juan is sold on the Turkish slave

market. Sultana, passing through the market, falls in love with him, purchases Don Juan, dresses him as a woman, and places him in the Sultan's harem.

Initially oblivious to Sultana's affections due to his lingering love for Haidee, Don Juan eventually engages in adventures with the dancers. Overcome with jealousy, Sultana orders him to be drowned in the sea. Don Juan escapes and joins the Russian army surrounding the Sultan's palace, displaying bravery in battle. This earns him the honor of delivering victory news to Russian Empress, Catherine the Great, in Saint Petersburg, becoming her favorite. Later, he is sent on a diplomatic mission to England, where he becomes the object of high society's adoration. Despite the poet using Don Juan's character to mock and satirize the upper class of English society, Don Juan finds happiness in his homeland, surrounded by women ready for love adventures: "Society is now one polish'd horde, / Form'd of two mighty tribes, the Bores and Bored" (819).

Don Juan becomes weary of high-class women and tries to resist Duchess Fitz-Fulke's advances. During this time, the legendary "Black Friar," a figure associated with births, deaths, and marriages, visits Don Juan. Duchess Fitz-Fulke disguises herself as a ghost to visit him. Canto the Sixteenth concludes with Don Juan revealing the attractive duchess, and Canto the Seventeenth is left inconclusive as Byron grapples with how to conclude Don Juan's story—whether to send him to hell or leave him in an unhappy marriage. Byron's Don Juan embodies the legendary character's traits while also carrying freedom-loving, critical, and satirical ideas, expressing disdain for societal corruption, hypocrisy, and oppression. This cynical Don Juan mocks the ruling class and supports the oppressed, advocating for human dignity, freedom, and social justice. Additionally, Borst notes that Byron's portrayal of Lambro in *Don Juan* combines qualities of both Lambro the Pirate and Ali Pasha, showcasing Byron's creative talent and humor (Borst 77–78). The following verses, however, also remind us of two main features of Ali Pasha:

Now in a person used to much command—  
 To bid men come, and go, and come again—  
 To see his orders done, too, out of hand—  
 Whether the word was death, or but the chain—  
 It may seem strange to find his manners bland;  
 Yet such things are, which I can not explain,  
 Though doubtless he who can command himself  
 Is good to govern—almost as a Guelf. (690)

High and inscrutable the old man stood,  
Calm in his voice, and calm within his eye—  
Not always signs with him of calmest mood:  
He look'd upon her, but gave no reply. (703)

He was a man of a strange temperament,  
Of mild demeanour though of savage mood. (704)

Byron's Oriental poems share common themes, motifs and structures, forming a cohesive narrative. The protagonists in these poems endure a life filled with unexpected challenges, escaping, abandoning family and homeland, facing societal stigma, and enduring abuse that compels them to migrate, seek revenge, cleanse sins, and restore honor. According to Nexhip Gami, these heroes are egocentric insurgents, placing their ego at the center of the universe, reflecting the individual protest characteristic of Byron's early literary career (Gami 30). Giaour, Conrad, Lara, and others lead solitary lives, shaped by a fierce conflict with society. Despite being wanderers, lost, homeless, or exiles, they experience violations of their honor, face, love, or rights. Disillusioned yet invincible, they harbor hatred towards those responsible for their misfortune, leading them to revolt, set traps, launch offensives, and engage in unequal battles against society or tyranny.

Byron's encounter with Albania left an indelible mark on him, surpassing the influence of other countries he visited. He marveled at Albania's untamed natural beauty and was captivated by the Albanian people, appreciating their distinctive character, passionate nature, and unwritten laws. Their virtues, such as bravery, loyalty, and love for freedom, deeply inspired Byron, shaping his concept of the romantic hero. Recognizing the honesty and fearlessness of the Albanians, he seamlessly integrated these qualities into his Oriental poems. Scholars assert that Albania's impact on Byron exceeded that of Greece during his Levant journey, emphasizing the lasting impression the country and its people made on the poet.

## Conclusion

The primary objective of this paper was to address the gap in English studies regarding Albanian themes, motifs and characters in Byron's significant works, including *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, *The Bride of Abydos*, *The Giaour*, *Lara*, *Parisina*, *The Siege of Corinth*, and *Don Juan*.

The paper revealed that Albanian themes and motifs played a crucial role in Byron's literary works, prominently featured in approximately four hundred lines of Canto the Second of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. This exploration extends to other Oriental poems like *The Bride of Abydos*, *The Giaour*, *Lara*, *Parisina*, and *The Siege of Corinth*, as well as Byron's masterpiece, *Don Juan*. The paper also proved that the characters in Byron's poems possess Albanian characteristics. Hence, it is obvious and clear that in the aforementioned poems and works in which he wrote about Albanian themes and motifs, Byron was impressed and enthused by the masculinity, honesty, hospitality, loyalty, magnificent nature, nobility, and humanity of the Albanians. Clearly, it can be affirmed that the Albanians as well as the Albanian lands had a real poetic dimension in his poems. Among them, Byron, as an impressed and talented poet, gained inspiration; he was moved and incited to the point that he transformed his inspiration into powerful verses about Albanian themes and motifs both in form and content, as well as high and noble messages. About Byron's personality, his visit to Albania, his letters, and his poetry in which he mentioned and talked about Albanians, in all likelihood, there was interest both across the Atlantic, among the Arbëresh people in Italy, and among the representatives of the Albanian National Renaissance. Byron's writings about Albanians likely played a role in introducing them to a wider European audience, potentially influencing Arbëresh poets (Albanian poets of Italy) and poets of the Albanian National Renaissance (Rilindja). That is why Byron has taken his rightful, significant, and special place in Albanian literature, tradition, history, and culture. However, unfortunately, in Albanian literature and culture, the interest in Byron started later than in the rest of Europe and somewhat after the interest shown about him by the neighboring peoples of the Balkans.

It emphasized the creation of a unique cult of Byronic popularity in Albanian literature and culture, highlighting admiration for his principles and ideals rather than his purely poetic contributions. The tradition of Albanian literature and culture, more or less, still preserves and cultivates Byron's fame as a great English and world poet, while Byron's visit to Albania, his interest in and writing about Albania and Albanians, his style and ideas, along with other episodes in his life, are attracting and grabbing to this day the attention and interest of Albanians. Last but not least, Byron's verses about Albania and the Albanians were a precious discovery and motivation for the patriotic poets of the Albanian National Renaissance, given that his poems were full of patriotic, heroic, and poetic pathos and inspiration. Therefore,

it is hoped that this paper will incite Albanian translators, literary critics, researchers, and scholars to continue translating, appreciating, and writing about Byron's poems and other works and about his presence, reception, popularity, and influence in Albanian literature and culture, and in this way further contribute to strengthening and enriching Albanian-English literary and cultural connections, ties, and relations.

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## Albanske teme in motivi v Byronovih delih

Ključne besede: angleška književnost / Byron / imagologija / Albanija / albanska kultura

Byrona je k raziskovanju albanskih tem in motivov spodbudil obisk Albanije leta 1809, saj so albanske pokrajine, folklor in ljudje nanj naredili močan vtis. Ob tem ni vplival le na številne albanske avtorje in avtorice, ampak se je navdih, ki ga je črpal iz albanskega okolja, dodobra vsadil tudi v njegovo lastno poezijo. Članek s kvalitativno in primerjalno literarno metodo obravnava albanske teme v nekaterih znamenitih Byronovih delih, kot so *Romanje grofiča Harolda*, *Nevesta iz Abidos*, *Giaour*, *Obleganje Korinta*, *Lara*, *Parizina* in *Don Juan*. Analiza razkriva, da Byron v svojih pesmih slavi očarljivo naravo Albanije, albanski značaj, vrline albanskih žensk, narodne noše, folkloro in zgodovinske osebnosti, kot so Skenderbeg, Ali Paša in drugi. Poleg tega članek pokaže, da so bila patriotska čustva in junaštvo v Byronovih verzih dragocen navdih za marsikaterega domoljubnega pesnika v času albanskega narodnega preporoda. Byronova potovanja po albanskih deželah ter njegovo zanimanje in pisanje o Albaniji in Albancih so pomembno okrepili in utrdili albansko-angleške literarne vezi in kulturne odnose. Zaradi odkritega občudovanja Albanije si je Byron kot njen prijatelj, zaveznik in podpornik pridobil neizmerno naklonjenost albanskega ljudstva ter postal najbolj priljubljen pesnik med Albanci.

1.01 Izvirni znanstveni članek / Original scientific article

UDK 821.111.091Byron

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3986/pkn.v47.i3.02>