



RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Traditions of Albanians and Their Portrait in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes Albanian tradition from 1800 to 1900 in Lord Byron's poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, exploring its significance in the international recognition of Albanians and their culture and in the realm of literature in Lord Byron's work. Employing a literary and historical approach through Textual analysis combined with Comparativist methods, the analyses delve into the main themes that characterize and portray Albanians in the poem, such as the desire for freedom, honor, and hospitality. The tradition of Albanian hospitality, which is deeply ingrained in the nation's cultural fabric and remains an essential aspect of our identity, was an attractive feature for Byron. Likewise, Byron portrays Albanian women as emotional and radiant, suggesting a sense of beauty and resilience in their character; furthermore, he depicts the role and treatment of women within the family unit. This is an important finding related to Albanian culture and the role of women in it, as well as the emancipation of women. The main novelty of the study lies in the fact that it brings substantiated information about the traditions and the portrait of Albanians at that time, which has yet to be done in previous studies about Byron. The uniqueness and importance of this study are its findings, which shed light on Albanian culture and its people in the 19th century for readers worldwide.

INTRODUCTION

In this study, the authors will analyze how L. Byron portrays the Albanians and presents their culture between 1800 and 1900. This topic has not been addressed by national or international researchers in the past; hence, it is a distinct and significant case that sheds light on the culture, faith, emancipation, and life of the Albanians under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, as Albania came under Ottoman rule in the late 15th century, which lasted until the 19th century.

Lord Byron was the first writer to ever visit Albania. Through his work, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, he

dedicated 360 verses of his career in Canto II to his travels in Albania (1809). In Canto II, known for its beautiful and evocative descriptions of nature and its exploration of the human condition, Byron also wrote about his stay in the palaces of Ali Pasha Tepelena. He provided his perspective on Albanians by highlighting the main features, characteristics, and values of the Albanian people and their traditions. Hospitality combined with Albanian nature and culture were the elements that inspired Byron to write about Albania. Considering all of the above, the literary work of Lord Byron holds significant importance in the realm of

Albanian culture and literature.

However, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage was important not only for Albania and its culture but also for Greece, Portugal, Malta, Spain, and Turkey (Kuzmic, 2007) due to the portrayal of these countries and their people as well as for being the pioneering poem of the Romantic Literary Movement.

Furthermore, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage was crucial to his literary recognition as a writer and served as the cornerstone for his international fame and appreciation. This study is the groundwork for creating a clearer idea of how Byron and his art, inspired by exotic countries such as Albania at the time, became renowned and highly valued. Imprints from Albania and other countries that Byron visited enabled him to explore and expand the literary scope of Romantic poetry. The popularity and significance of this work for Albanian culture and its people are immense because it managed to make our country popular and attractive not only to English tourists but also to travelers and writers (Durham, 2013) and to different visitors who are interested in making the same tour that Byron did in 1809, which is called "in Byron's footsteps," a trip that is based on Hobhouse's diary" (Neville, 2013).

This is the first study approach that brings information and data about the importance and values of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage concerning Albanians and their culture.

No national or international studies focus on the presentation of the Albanian people and their cultural traditions in Byron's work; therefore, the realization of these objectives can enrich the studies about this pivotal work in the Romantic literary canon and this author in particular.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Byron was not renowned or famous before he published the first chapters of his work, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. He became famous after the publication of this work, thus becoming an influential figure in English literary and cultural life. Regarding this fame, when he published Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, he became quite famous (Marchand, 1957). An interesting fact concerning his fame is that it became so great that Byron was adored by thousands of women who wrote him tons of letters

(Marchand, 1957). In other words, his life, nature, and relationship with the public directly affected his poetry (Martin, 1982). However, his work and figure became known and were disseminated not only due to the creative originality of his career but also to the innovation he brought to the Western world through it. In the beginning, his poem, according to Keith Walker, was appreciated "as a descriptive poem of travel" and was praised for its accuracy (Walker, 1979). He was introducing English development and culture to an exotic, attractive, and fascinating world not previously seen in the works of other writers. So, the reader was attracted not just by the events and the journey as a process but also by the portrayal of the people and costumes of the Near East, which were almost unknown at that time in the West. His descriptions and impressions were from the first literary accounts of the world of the Near East in European Literature, creating in such a way a pattern that was followed by other writers" (Koçi, 2015). In this form, Byron created a poetic achievement, which, according to scholars, was a romanticism of a special kind because it was based on experience (Cochran, 2008) and was a romanticism that has shaped and brought about an accomplished poetic work, after the exotic eastern reality was touched and experienced, with its topics, people, life, and specifics, not only in Albania but also in other countries such as Spain, Portugal, and Greece.

Byron, specifically with the work Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, has attracted the attention of Albanian scholars in different periods. This occurred because, in Canto II, he elaborates on and presents the Albanian world of the 1800s and has an original artistic approach to the Albanian culture and world. This has been the reason that special conferences (Gregory, 2009) have been dedicated to this author, and some of his aspects have been studied; as Karagiozi calls it, "his myth transformed figure" (Karagiozi, 2002). Karagiozi is a researcher who has done a special study on the contribution of L. Byron (Karagiozi, 2010) in both languages (Karagiozi, 2010). The only approach to the portrayal of Albanians that is made by D. Koçi focuses on Byron's orientalism and sees the portrayal of Albanians as "clearly based on oriental motives, on binary oppositions where appear not only the positive values of bravery and hospitality but also

those of savagery, cruelty, cunning, and oriental lust (Koçi, 2015). An interesting study is the one that points out the interplay between these two cultures, the Albanian and English ones, in search of "common themes between the two kinds of literature" and "the mention of Albanians in foreign historical and literary works" (Kadija, 2003). The rediscovery of Albanian in English literature is the result of research realized by the Albanologist R. Elsie, who stated that "Byron was the first writer to open Albania up to the English public with his long verse tale *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812–1819)" (1993). And here we can say that this work Byron has had a great impact in making Albanians known to the English public, and for the same reason, researchers think that he has also impacted aspects of tourism at two different times, "which can discover the difference between Albania of 1800 and Albania of nowadays" (Fermor, 2022). But also, according to Erkoçi, this work is important regarding the "rediscovery of Albania through travel" (Erkoçi, 2013).

The background of the studies done on Byron's work, the values, and the fame he achieved internationally, as well as the studies done by the Albanian researchers, will be of immense help to the authors of this study in stating their first hypothesis: how Byron presents the Albanians, their culture, and their traditions in his work, a fact that can be rewarded for comparing the ancient Albanians with today's ones. Furthermore, they will also be able to clarify the second hypothesis: the role this work played in the recognition of Albanians by the English public and in increasing their interest in visiting Albania.

METHODOLOGY

Textual Analysis is the most important method in literary studies. Nearly all the works analyzed in the literature include, in their approaches, a thorough analysis of textual elements employing which light is shed not only on the meaning of the poetic text, style, and ideas but also on the context of the time of writing that work. Researchers who approach the text employing this method in literary texts cover in their analysis not only the direct meanings but also the subtext, symbolism, etc.

Therefore, through textual analysis, the authors of this study have chosen to understand how Byron describes

the Albanians and how he presents their culture and traditions. Therefore, the poetic text of L. Byron will be the basic material of the analysis, from which the context of the time in which the Albanians lived when Byron visited their country and wrote about them will be understood. The interpretation of Albanians and their culture will be based on Byron's presentation in his work. The letters Byron wrote during his stay in Albania will also be used to argue some positions or reinforce ideas in the work. So, the authors have chosen comparativist methods to achieve their objectives.

RESULTS

The portrait of Albanians and their nature

To describe the portrait of Albanians, Byron first touches on the land of the Albanian people, opening his poetic description with evaluations that create a magical and real background. This is because he begins the description by referring first to the most important heroic figure of legendary proportions in the history of Albania and highlighting qualities of Albanians, such as wisdom (Byron, 1900: 88). His observational ability and creative originality have brought the reader impressive and stylistically rich verses, with metaphors, comparisons, symbols, and extraordinary contrasts (Byron, 1900: 92–96), about nature, which unfolds before his eyes and occupies the most significant part in the verses dedicated to Albania, verses in which he also speaks of human nature. We find this fact in his poetic work (Byron, 1900: 92–98) and in his letters to his mother (Byron, 1982: 29–34).

In this manner, the author realizes and adheres to some typical features of romantic creativity, as Drabble states: "Romanticism may be regarded as the triumph of the values of imaginative spontaneity, visionary originality, wonder, and emotional self-expression over the classical standards of balance, order, restraint, proportion, and objectivity" (Drabble, 2000). Apparently, for him, Romanticism is created by the following three criteria, which are defined by Wellek: "imagination for the view of poetry, nature for the view of the world, and symbol and myth for poetic style" (Wellek, 1963).

Therefore, we notice that from the first verses dedicated to the Albanians, a portrait of their

external and internal worlds is outlined, a world that surprises the poet but also attracts him (Byron, 1900). The verses of the poem confirm features of his romantic creativity, such as spontaneity, original vision, personal emotional expression concerning the observed reality, and in a special way, "a concept of the poetic imagination that acted as a single unifying force within all creative acts... (and) defined the doctrine of Romanticism" (Holmes, 2000), features that have made this author one of the essential and distinguished masters of the world of Romanticism.

People

The description of people is the most poetic description of Albanians. It is artistically achieved by narrative verses, which is a feature of his creativity, according to Fischer (1991). It is one of the things for which Byron has also been appreciated by Bloom (2009). This fact is also found in his letters to his mother, which makes us think that the impression of the people of this country has been boundless and exceptional, especially that of Ali Pasha, of whom Byron (1982) states: "He has the appearance of anything but his real character, for he is a remorseless tyrant, guilty of the most horrible cruelties, very brave, and so good a general, that they call him the Mahometan Bonaparte." As it is defined by researcher Flemming due to "his character and combat strategies" (Flemming, 2002). In this case, the observation of Byron is real and objective, thus highlighting not only the positive qualities but also the negative ones that Ali Pasha of Tepelena had as a leader and person. But this description of Ali Pasha of Tepelena by Byron, according to researchers, also depends on other factors because, as Rizzoli states, "Byron had three interviews with Ali and decided Ali was attracted to him, partly because the poet had long nourished a fantasy about being Pasha's beloved. Ali probably saw him as the embodiment of a despised local stereotype, the effeminate, sexually available boy, but disingenuously told him his appearance bespoke aristocratic origins" (Rizzoli, 2020). But regardless of these other factors, based on his work and the letters he wrote, he describes the portrait of the Albanians with objectivity and a kind of positive attraction due to the hospitality and treatment they receive in Ali Pasha's Palace.

So thanks to his observation and experience, Byron

completed the portrait of Albanians in his work with the men and women he saw during his journey and his stays in Albanian lands. In Byron's view, the men are stern and fearless.

"Fierce are Albania's children, yet they lack
Not virtues; were those virtues more mature?
Where is the foe that ever saw their back?"
(Byron, 1900)

They are mainly warriors that engage in work and activities; they require the exercise of force but are also brave, loyal, and unyielding. In addition to the wonderful presentation of the nature of men from Byron's description and the poetic verses of his work, we also get information about the difference and division that existed between the worlds of men and women in that period, about how Albanian women were treated, and how, surprisingly for the poet, even though they were very oppressed,

"Here the woman's voice is never heard:
apart And scare permitted, guarded, veil'd,
to move" (Byron, 1900)

They were also very devoted to their families and loyal to their husbands.

"She yields to one, her person and her heart,
Tamed to her cage, she does not feel a wish to roam.
For, not unhappy in her master's love,
And Joyful in a mother's gentlest cares"
(Byron, 1900).

Byron (1982), from the verses but also in his letters, seems to admire the strength and loyalty of this human race the most, as he presents in the following passage when he describes one of the Albanian warriors and expresses himself thus: "His name is Viscillie, and like all the Albanians, he is brave, rigidly honest, and faithful, but they are cruel though not treacherous, and have several vices but no meanness. They are perhaps the most beautiful race in point of countenance in the world; their women are sometimes beautiful too, but they are treated like slaves, beaten, and, in short, complete beasts of burden; they plough, dig, and sow. I found them carrying wood and actually repairing the highways. The men are all soldiers, and war and chase are their sole occupations."

With this artistic presentation in his work, L. Byron has helped understand the Albanian world during the 1800 Ottoman occupation, the people and their development, the principles they relied on, and their unique life compared to the European world. The figures of these men and women attracted Byron, making him observe them with curiosity, punctuality, and objectivity, but also with great admiration and pleasure on his part, thus making possible the realization of a masterpiece such as "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage." The recognition and benevolent presentation of the Albanian people in the international world was made possible through this masterpiece, which would increase the number of English and world travelers and intellectuals who would visit Albania in later periods to give various information about the Albanian world (Hobhouse, 1813), and also to create other works dedicated to Albania (Durham, 2013).

Albanian traditions - The tradition of hospitality

Coming from a completely different world and having contact with a reality like that of the era of Ali Pasha of Tepelena greatly influenced Byron's artistic and life experiences. As the scholar Koçi (2015) points out, "Lord Byron's poetry and knowledge about the Orient were also enormously affected by the figure of Ali Pasha of Tepelena, the charismatic Albanian pasha who welcomed him in his Pashalik of Yanina in October 1809." This is noticed in the comparisons that the author makes between the two worlds, as Kuzmic has noticed: "Harold's adventure in Albania can be read as 'Orientalizing' in as far as it functions to perpetuate such conventional binary opposites as West and East, progress and stasis, experience and innocence, and so forth" (Kuzmic, 2007) One of these cases is found in the verses:

"Of Wealth and Wantonness, the choice
retreat
Of sated Grandeur from the city's noise:
And were it humbler, it would be sweet;
But Peaceabhorreth artificial joys..."
(Byron, 1900) and

"But these did shelter him beneath their
roof,
When less barbarians would have cheered
him less

And fellow countrymen have stood
aloof..." (Byron, 1900).

In the first case, he compares the country and the holidays. In the second case, he emphasizes Albanian hospitality as one of the traditions that surprises and pleases him the most. Even in the presentation of this centuries-old Albanian tradition, the figure of A.P. of Tepelena reflects and represents it the most, along with other traditions such as the given word, loyalty, etc. However, L. Byron creates the image and description of the Albanian hospitable traditions through the people, their behavior, and their hospitable treatment of his character (Harold) during his stay there (Byron, 1900). Verses in which Byron expresses great admiration and appreciation are human and important features; a preference that he constructs employing metaphors is remembered (Byron, 1900) by creating a fantastic mosaic for the lives of these simple and attractive people simultaneously.

Costumery

Traditional clothing. Clothes fascinate and attract the English poet so much that he expresses this admiration not only in his poem (Byron, 1900) but also in the letters he writes during his stay in Preveza, where Byron (1982) describes them as follows: "The Albanians in their dresses (the most magnificent in the world, consisting of a long white kilt, gold worked cloak, crimson velvet gold-laced jacket and waistcoat, silver-mounted pistols and daggers). This admiration is also understood by the fact that he wears these traditional Albanian clothes (Phillips, 1813), preserving his image dressed in them as one of the most beautiful images (Hudhri, 1990). The description of the garments in the poem is brief and in small detail, constructed using simple epithets (Byron, 1900), but clearly expresses the admiration and attraction that the author has for these special garments, with bold colors and made of golden cloth that shines in all that poor and simple reality.

Religiou Belief

The period when L. Byron visits Albania is a period when it was occupied by the Ottoman Empire, which with its power and administrative and political organization, spread linguistic and religious influence on the people because the occupation lasted over 500 years (Anamali and Prifti, 2002). Among the first

things that attracted the author to these people are their religious (Muslim) faith and their devotion to it, a feature that, in his initial description, he presents as something that completes the picture as an identifying part of this reality.

"The cross descends; thy minarets arise..."
(Byron, 1900).

But then displays it as a precious but also astonishing bond because of the respect, the fulfillment of religious obligations, and the purity of their faith.

"Hark! From the mosque, the nightly
solemn sound
The Muezzin's call doth shake the minaret,
There is no god but God! To prayer, lo! God
is great!" (Byron, 1900).

Faith, which apparently was adapted to the patriarchal and vicious world of the Albanians of the time, is a detail that the author observes and presents to us at the moment when he describes Albanian women, whom he admires for their loyalty and devotion but also feels sorry for the extremely shut-out and enslaved lives they lead.

"Here the woman's voice is never heard:
apart
And scarce permitted, guarded, veil'd, to
move"(Byron, 1900).

This detail is very important for shedding light on the reality of time but also for the objective and impartial treatment by the author, making him, although through art, real in the artistic reality he creates.

The Songs

The way the Albanians celebrate and enjoy life surprised and captured the traveler Byron, and he liked very much this simple and dynamic life, which includes everyone, both warriors after the war, believers after fasting, and servants after work; they all get together when the entertainment and music start (Byron, 1900). Byron presents the spontaneity, naturalness, and dynamism of these holidays through verses rich in detail and occasionally using comparisons between the reality from which he came and the young man he was discovering (Byron, 1900). This is a point of view that has to do with what

was considered Orientalism as expressed by Edward (1978): "Orientalism was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, "us") and the strange (the Orient, the East, "them"). This vision created and then served the two worlds thus conceived.

The poem "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" brings us rich information about the entertainment and the role of music in the life of the Albanian people, about their lively and artistic spirit, regardless of the conditions and circumstances. Still, it is also proof of the observation and artistic taste of the author in composing the text. It's not pointless that the song is also the element with which the author concludes the part dedicated to Albania in Canto II of the poem, and he does this with an original intertextual technique, with the integration of a text of a traditional Albanian song (Byron, 1900) in the text of his poem. This technique proves not only his cognitive and creative abilities in literature but also the construction of a very original artistic reality of the time the author belonged to.

DISCUSSION

This study has been focused on the Albanian traditions and their portrayal by Byron in his work titled *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. After analyzing and researching the text and previous studies related to this work, we have noticed a need for more treatment of the cultural aspects that Byron presents in this work. Aspects we have documented and presented above in detail include features related to the portrait, the tradition of hospitality, clothing, religion, and songs of the Albanians. In previous studies, researchers have focused on the biographical and life aspects of Byron's relationship with Ali Pasha (Rizzoli, 2020), on the journey as a process and on Byron's tourist aspect in Albania (Erkoçi, 2013), on the environmental aspects (Karam, 2022), on aspects of war (Beaton, 2013), and on emotions related to war (Csengei, 2018), among many other studies, some of which are found in the Literature review chapter. Some of them have entered the internal part of the themes and issues that Byron presents through his art, revealing special and important aspects of his romanticism and his role as a romantic author compared to other authors such as

Coleridge, Scott, Wordsworth, Shelley, etc. (Cochran, 2009). However, until today, no approach has focused on the cultural and traditional aspects of the Albanians of the 1800s in Byron's work. No study has been carried out concerning the religious faith of Albanians or the Albanian woman and her portrayal in this work. The findings in our study are an important and valuable feature to better understand the mentality and development of the Albanians during the years 1800–1900. In the landscape of the studies done on Byron and the Albanians, especially for the Albanian culture, such an approach is worth it, which, in contrast to the studies done to date, gives a complete representation of the romantic description that Byron makes in his work. Concerning other Byron studies, this study completes the landscape by providing an approach lacking on this subject.

The study is not based on any literary type or genre theory or the Romantic Movement. Still, it has followed an analysis of the textual content, highlighting important elements of the presentation of Albanians and their culture in the work *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. As such, it suggests exciting information about the Albanians of the 1800s, making it possible to compare them with other nations in the historical context or today's Albanians.

Actually, in the context of today's studies on Albanians and their culture, this means a new approach and important information through which other studies can be carried out in the future.

We present this alternative because we have yet to give alternatives regarding the reasons for preserving culture among the occupied Albanians, and we consider it a limitation of the study. We have also yet to collect more data about women, their emancipation, and the role they have played in preserving these traditions. These directions provide opportunities for future studies dedicated to this work.

CONCLUSION

After this review, we can say that we have reached several conclusions about the way L. Byron, in his poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, presents Albanians and their world, and we can list them as follows:

This work of L. Byron and his journey was crucial for the recognition of the culture and of the Albanians of the time, as well as extremely important for attracting

the international attention of travelers and other intellectuals who would follow. As is confirmed by important books and studies by Hobhouse and Durham, Fermor, Erkoçi, etc.,

In the verses dedicated to Albania, Byron, thanks to his observational and creative ability and his original romanticism, manages to create an attractive and impressive portrait of Albanians of 1800–1900. He documents the physical description of the Albanians with the elements of nature and their country. At the same time, he observes the spiritual one by looking at their relationship with war, freedom, religion, etc.

As far as traditions are concerned, through his character, *Childe Harold*, he impressively presents the most characteristic habit of Albanians, hospitality. The habit that surprises the author the most is the great evaluation they give and the way they treat him. He presents this aspect in his works and the letters he exchanged with his friends and relatives during his stay in Albania.

Albanian clothing and costume design is another element of culture that fascinates Byron; his description is impressive and attractive. He likes this clothing to the point that he even makes a painting of Albanian clothing that he takes as a souvenir from that trip.

The religious faith of the Albanians of the time and their loyalty to it have caused the author of this work to present special elements of Muslim life and faith. At this point, we conclude that Byron emphasizes the difference between man and woman, the fixed division between the two worlds that surprised Byron, and how they managed to live very well with each other, regardless of the oppression and subjugation of the woman.

At the end of his description of Albania, Byron was amazed by the Albanian songs and holidays, which united everyone. He appreciates the spontaneous and joyful world of their lives and makes part of his work an Albanian song, which he quotes in the poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* at the end of the second song.

Therefore, the authors of this article can say that this artistic poem is important not only for the internationalization of art and Byron as a writer but also for the Albanians and their particular culture.

Through his aesthetic-artistic presentation, he manages to display in vital, social, religious, cultural,

and historical dimensions the condition, image, and portrait of the Albanians of the 1800s

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