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**BYRONIC “RUGGED NURSE OF SAVAGE MEN” IN THE 21ST
CENTURY: THE PERPETUALLY ROMANTIC ALBANIA**
**GEORGE’A BYRONA „RUGGED NURSE OF SAVAGE MEN” W XXI WIEKU,
CZYLI ALBANIA WIECZNIE ROMANTYCZNA**

Słowa kluczowe: Lord Byron, Edward Said, Orientalizm, Wschód, Zachód, literatura albańska, sztuka albańska, kolonializm

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Lord Byron’s visit to Albania in 1809, represented in the second canto of “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage,” constitutes a rare mention of the country and one of its most memorable evocations in verse. While not every Albanian may be familiar with the canto’s actual lines, Byron’s visit to the land is a well-known fact and point of pride. For the people of a still relatively obscure country, the mere attention of a world-renowned British poet suffices, a viewpoint which existed in Byron’s time and continues to linger. The poet’s importance for the nation cannot be overstated. Ultimately, his lines have served as the foundations on which every major international work concerning Albania would be built. In “Albania: Family, Society and Culture in the 20th Century”, Andreas Hemming, quoting Stephen Minta, writes that “Byron’s fantasy of Albania as one of the world’s wild places, [became] the mainstay of most English travel writing about the country ever since”¹. In the *Financial Times* article entitled “Albania: in Byron’s footsteps”, Auron Tare, the present director of the National Coastal Agency in Albania, owner of a traveling agency, and a public figure tells the writer, Tim Neville, “over Turkish coffee”, that “Albanians love Byron. He didn’t judge Albanians and they didn’t judge him. He accepted them and their world and they

¹ Eds. A. Hemming, G. Kera, E. Pandlejmoni. *Albania: Family, Society and Culture in the 20th Century*, Münster, LIT Verlag, 2012, p. 115.

loved him for it”². While it is true, as Tare claims, that Albanians value the poet and his verses on the country, the statement of a lack of judgement from the poet’s part may be questionable. The effects of his verses on the West’s perspective of Albania and, consequently and more importantly, on Albanians’ perception of their own country, will be the focus of this research. While Byron’s verses may have immortalized Albania and its beautiful landscape, they have also firmly placed the country in the category of exotic and less-civilized locations, a part of the body of Orientalism as defined by Edward W. Said in his seminal work, *Orientalism*. Throughout the centuries, Byron’s depiction of Albania has been accepted as true and continues to affect the nation’s self-definition in many aspects, the self-exoticizing being especially visible in artistic representations, both local and international.

Disappointed with the place generally assumed to be the cradle of Western civilization, Greece which, in early 19th century, according to Byron, merely displayed an echo of its former glory, the poet or, rather, his fictional alter ego, Harold, sets out to see more remote places. His disappointment eventually leads him to Albania, an unknown and exotic land to the British reader of Byron’s time. While not the Orient in the strictest geographical sense, Albania is located in the Balkans, a region which has long been regarded as marginal, borderline separating “Europe’s well-ordered civilization from the chaos of the Orient”³, as Misha Glenny phrases it in the introduction to “The Balkans, 1804–2012: Nationalism, War, and the Great Powers”. Aware of the appeal of exoticism, specifically of the Orient’s pull on the British audience, as this quote from a 1813 letter to Thomas Moore demonstrates, “Stick to the East – the oracle [Madame de] Stael told me it was the only poetical policy”⁴, Byron is also cognizant of the pragmatic benefits of recounting his strange adventures. Yet, it is not simply strategic planning which motivates him. Above all, Byron wants to experience new lands which he will, in turn, introduce to a curious and novelty-hungry British audience. The poet yearns for the very opposite of the newly industrialized England. He seeks wilder, more natural places and, according to stanza 37 of “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage”, he appears to have not only found one of them in Albania but he swiftly becomes the first to literally and figuratively mark it: “Though I have marked her when none other hath, / And sought her more and more, and loved her best in wrath”⁵. Further on, he continues: “Childe Harold passed o’er many a mount sublime, / Through lands scarce noticed in historic tales: / Yet in famed Attica such lovely dales / Are rarely seen; nor can fair Tempe boast / A charm they know not; loved Parnassus fails, / Though classic ground, and consecrated most, / match some spots that lurk within this lowering coast,”⁶ clearly pleased to experience and introduce a novelty, a place that is

² Neville T., *Albania: in Byron’s footsteps*, “Financial Times” 2013, 26 April, <https://www.ft.com/content/7551924e-a8d0-11e2-bc9b-00144feabdc0>. [30.11.2017].

³ Glenny M., *The Balkans, 1804–2012: Nationalism, War, and the Great Powers*, London: Granta, 2012, p. 3.

⁴ Ed. Murray Ch.J., *Encyclopedia of the Romantic Era, 1760–1850*, vol. 2, New York: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2004, p. 834.

⁵ Byron G.G., *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, The Gutenberg Project: eBook, February 2004, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/5131/5131-h/5131-h.htm> [30.08.2017, stanza 37].

⁶ *Ibidem*, stanza 44.

absent from books, one both unseen and of incomparable beauty. The poet is a pioneer in both reaching Albania and describing it and, beauty-wise, he presents it in the most advantageous light. In “Romantic Marginality: Nation and Empire on the Borders of the Page”, Alex Watson affirms that “Byron’s verse sought to acquaint a wider audience with Albania,” and that, even beyond his verse, “his annotation attempted to deepen this engagement”⁷. Yet, the poet’s motivations so positively summarized by Watson, assume a darker tone in light of Said’s reading. Indeed, the attitude expressed in the aforementioned verses, one of a fearless and curious explorer, introducing the world to beautiful places unknown to it, corresponds to Said’s “modern Orientalist [who] was in his view, a hero rescuing the Orient from the obscurity, alienation, and strangeness which he himself had properly distinguished”⁸. Watson obviously disagrees with the position of superiority assumed by the Western poet implied in Said’s lines. He claims that in “Childe Harold,” Byron is speaking from “within the culture he represents”⁹, not from outside or above it.

While Byron does travel to the Orient in order to experience it firsthand and avoid the limited perspective of a passive reader, “convinced that the advantages of looking at mankind instead of reading about them, and of the bitter effects of staying home with all the narrow prejudices of an Islander”¹⁰, as he writes to his mother, he is most definitely not within the culture he describes. Firstly, similar to many other authors and artists succeeding him, Byron’s interests partake of a greater “Romantic preference for the Balkan mountains and fierce, proud mountaineers (Albanians, Herzegovians, Montenegrins, Suliots)” which “meant that the Balkan city dwellers who were not seen to be a ‘genuine article’ were much more rarely described.”¹¹ Thus, from the outset, the focus of the search is clear, narrow and already colored by the projected result of the exploration. Romantic travelers, including Byron, purposefully selected remote areas, preferably untouched by urban influences. They sought the “wildness” gradually effaced by the growing metropolises of the West. Indeed, Byron’s first call to Albania, in stark contrast to “Fair Greece”¹², to which he refers as the cradle of Western civilization, the birthplace of the *polis*, is “Land of Albania...thou rugged nurse of savage men! / The cross descends, thy minarets arise”¹³. These lines not only introduce Albania as a “rugged” and “savage” rather than a fair, i.e. beautiful and just, country, they also firmly place the country in the Muslim and, hence, oriental category, as defined by Said. Epithets like wild, turbulent, bold, stern, barbarians, among others, follow “rugged” and “savage”: “Morn dawns; and with it stern Albania’s hills / Here roams the wolf, the eagle whets his beak, / Birds, beasts of prey, and wilder

⁷ Watson Alex, *Romantic Marginality: Nation and Empire on the Borders of the Page*, London: Routledge, 2012, p. 124.

⁸ Said E, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1979, p. 121.

⁹ Watson, *Romantic Marginality*, p 124.

¹⁰ Ed. Lansdown R., *Byron’s Letters and Journals: A New Selection*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 74.

¹¹ Ed. Youngs T., *Travel Writing in the Nineteenth Century: Filling the Blank Spaces*, London: Anthem Press, 2006, p. 27.

¹² Byron, *Childe Harold*, stanza 73.

¹³ *Ibidem*, stanza 38.

men appear,”¹⁴ or “The scene was savage, but the scene was new”¹⁵; and “a nation, turbulent and bold”¹⁶, to cite only a few instances. The occurrences of these or similar terms are too many to recount but their nature, one emphasizing the Islamic faith and the bold, savage nature of the men corresponds to Said’s description of the West’s general perception and creation of the Orient in *Orientalism*: “The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity ‘a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences’”¹⁷. Furthermore, he unambiguously adds that the true purpose of thus defining the Orient is the implied definition of West – here, primarily Britain and Germany as the cradles of Romanticism and, to some extent, France – as its very opposite, a civilized and rational place: “The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, ‘different’; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, ‘normal’”¹⁸. Indeed, Byron’s emphasis on Albanians as “bold” and “savage” and Albania as “rugged”, correspond to Said’s definition of the Orient as perceived by the Western viewer. This perspective is unavoidable, suggests Said, as an author, a scholar, a traveler cannot escape the boundaries of his/her culture. All that the individual perceives is colored by the society of his/her provenance: “for a European or American studying the Orient there can be no disclaiming the main circumstances of his actuality: that he comes up against the Orient as a European or American first, as an individual second”¹⁹. Thus, a view from within the culture, as Watson suggests, remains impossible as “never has there been such a thing as a pure, or unconditional, Orient”²⁰, concludes Said.

Despite its lush appearance, Byron’s Orient, i.e. Albania in this specific case, conceals a darker, threatening layer which corresponds to the Westerner’s view of the Orient as “depraved.” The presence of this darker side can be detected in Byron’s impressions of Ali Pashë Tepelena, the Ottoman Albanian ruler whose court was located in Ioannina. Ali Pasha, otherwise called the Lion of Ioannina, ruled over Albania and the western parts of Thessaly and Greek Macedonia in Northern Greece. The meeting with Ali Pasha greatly impressed Byron as its detailed inclusion in the second canto of “Childe Harold” demonstrates. In a letter to his mother, Byron describes the positive and negative aspects of the Albanian ruler, rendering a conflicted verbal portrait of Ali Pasha, one interweaving elements of a great hero of antiquity with clichés of the despotic Muslim ruler. The pasha shows great hospitality to the British author who has “not been permitted to pay for a single article of household consumption... Indeed he treated me like a child, sending me almonds and sugared sherbet, fruit and sweetmeats twenty times a day”²¹. In accordance with Byron’s philhellenism, the hospitality

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, stanza 42.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, stanza 43.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, stanza 47.

¹⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, p. 1.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 40.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 11

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

²¹ Byron G.G., *Lord Byron: Letters on Albania 1809–1810*, http://www.albanianhistory.net/1809_Byron/index.html [01.10.2017].

recalls *xenia*, the ancient Greek law of hospitality upheld and evoked in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Yet, in the same breath, the poet describes the overly-ornamental excess of the palaces, typical of the Muslim despot, which are "splendid but too much ornamented with silk and gold"²². He presents the same excess in "Childe Harold," overtly connecting lavishness and Islam: "And gazed around on Moslem luxury, / Till quickly wearied with that spacious seat / Of Wealth and Wantonness, the choice retreat / Of sated Grandeur from the city's noise: / And were it humbler, it in sooth were sweet"²³. Indeed, not only does the poet associate excessive luxury with Islam in these verses, he openly condemns the greed, lust, and indulgence that such luxury represents. The extravagance of Ali Pasha's quarters, Byron suggests, hides terrible deeds. In both the letter and poem, Byron notes the discrepancy between the pasha's polite demeanor and the cruelty concealed underneath. "His manner is very kind and at the same time he possesses that dignity which I find universal amongst the Turks. 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 Buonaparte"²⁴, he writes to his mother. In stanza 47 of "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage", Harold meets Ali Pasha, "Albania's chief, whose dread command / Is lawless law; for with a bloody hand / He sways a nation, turbulent and bold"²⁵. While in the letter, Byron notes the gap between the ruler's polite or, rather, "civilized" behavior and his savage nature, in the poem he refers to the pasha's iron rule over the "turbulent" and "bold" nation, again reinforcing the Orientalist views of the Orient as savage and unstable and the Oriental leader as a cruel, bloodthirsty despot.

An Orientalist representation would be incomplete without the sexual aspect, never absent from evocations of the Orient. Referring to the Orient constructed by Orientalists, Said mentions its despotic element and sexual nature in conjunction:

Now one of the important developments in nineteenth-century Orientalism was the distillation of essential ideas about the Orient—its sensuality, its tendency to despotism, its aberrant mentality, its habits of inaccuracy, its backwardness—into a separate and unchallenged coherence; thus for a writer to use the word Oriental was a reference for the reader sufficient to identify a specific body of information about the Orient²⁶.

Indeed, Childe Harold's description of his visit to the vizier in stanza 56, includes all the Orientalist elements spelled out by Said:

He passed the sacred harem's silent tower, / And underneath the wide o'erarching gate / Surveyed the dwelling of this chief of power / Where all around proclaimed his high estate. / Amidst no common pomp the despot sate, / While busy preparation shook the court; / Slaves, eunuchs, soldiers, guests, and

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ *Ibidem*, stanza 64.

²⁴ Byron, *Letters on Albania*.

²⁵ Byron, *Childe Harold*, stanza 47.

²⁶ Said, *Orientalism*, p. 205.

santons wait; / Within, a palace, and without a fort, / Here men of every clime
appear to make resort²⁷.

The court includes soldiers, guests and, of course, eunuchs, the presence of whom denotes the ever-present harem. Supposedly, Ali Pasha had both a male and female harem. Rumors of his bisexuality circulated, a phenomenon not unusual in the Ottoman Empire and Greece at the time and one which attracted many British artists, the famously-bisexual Byron included. Sexuality is always present and emphasized in the Orientalist discourse as Said demonstrates in numerous cases, including those of great and influential authors like Byron and Flaubert. Referring to the latter, Said writes: “Woven through all of Flaubert’s Oriental experiences, exciting or disappointing, is an almost uniform association between the Orient and sex. In making this association Flaubert’s instance was neither the first nor the most exaggerated of a remarkably persistent motif in Western attitudes to the Orient”²⁸. In Byron, this link between the Orient and sex emerges as well, although it remains implicit. In addition to the mention of the harem, this sexual aspect surfaces most clearly in his description of Ali Pasha. In his portrait of the brave leader/cruel despot, the poet notes the discrepancy between the ruler’s venerable and wise appearance and the ferocious passions underneath: “It is not that yon hoary lengthening beard / Ill suits the passions which belong to youth: / Love conquers age – so Hafiz hath averred, / So sings the Teian, and he sings in sooth”²⁹. While not overtly, Byron clearly seems to ridicule the older man who apparently continues to indulge in youthful, i.e. lustful, passions. The poet’s tone seems judgmental even though one of the main reasons that attracted Western artists like Byron and Edward Lear, for instance, was precisely the region’s lax sexual laws during the Romantic period. In *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire*, Nigel Leask, discussing Byron’s bisexuality, claims that in the poet “there is a clear association between his homosexuality and the (less homophobic Orient)”³⁰... Certainly, despite the passage of time, this kind of draw continues to exert its influence today. Western tourists continue to visit Albania for similar reasons. With incomes that far surpass those of the locals, these foreign individuals can afford most items provided by the country, including younger girls from poorer and mostly rural backgrounds. This consequence is one of the repercussions of Orientalism. Thusly, the idea of a freer and more sexual Orient which was, if not created, then emphasized by the body of Orientalism, including Byron, is still in effect today. The West which perpetuated this idea through travel writing and art, among other means, still profits from it presently.

The attitude of judging, creating, and exploiting – already visible in Byron’s portrait of Ali Pasha – and its long-lasting consequences, derive from the establishment and reinforcement of a superior (Western) position and an inferior (Oriental) one. Said has written a great deal about this dangerous dynamic:

²⁷ Byron, *Childe Harold*, stanza 56.

²⁸ Said, *Orientalism*..., p. 188.

²⁹ Byron, *Childe Harold*, stanza 63.

³⁰ Leask N., *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 58.

Orientalism is never far from what Denys Hay has called the idea of Europe, a collective notion identifying “us” Europeans as against all “those” non-Europeans, and indeed it can be argued that the major component in European culture is precisely what made that culture hegemonic both in and outside Europe: the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures. There is in addition the hegemony of European ideas about the Orient, themselves reiterating *European* superiority over Oriental backwardness usually overriding the possibility that a more independent, or more skeptical, thinker might have had different views on the matter³¹.

The power and longevity of Orientalism’s body of work precludes the option of a different perspective on the matter. This attitude of superiority, condescension and judging is obvious as early as Byron’s time. An evaluating tone permeates a great number of lines on Albania and Albanians in “Childe Harold”, as the following case demonstrates: “Fierce are Albania’s children / yet they lack / Not virtues, were those virtues more mature”³². Their virtues exist but they lack the maturity reached by more civilized nations, the poet seems to suggest. Similarly, in a letter, referring to his attendant Albanian soldier, Byron writes: “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”³³. The attitude of the poet in both letter and poem is one of assessment, similar to a teacher’s report card containing the assignment of a grade and a summary of the student’s behavior. One source for this attitude can be identified in the active role of the West and the passive one of the Orient concerning the production of a body of work: “a still more implicit and powerful difference posited by the Orientalist as against the Oriental is that the former writes about, whereas the latter is written about”³⁴. The West is the party that, like Byron, marks new lands, while the Orient allows itself to be marked by the West and its representatives. These contrasting roles allow for the dominance of the West’s perspective and the Orient’s absorption of these views in defining itself and, consequently, the West: “In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience”³⁵. This continual cycle of self-definition through contrast fails to produce new values and definitions. Instead, it strengthens and engenders the superficial opposition between the West and the Orient.

A number of issues spring from the perpetuation of the ideas, concepts and definitions of Orientalism. Regarding Albania specifically, it quickly becomes clear that these views have been absorbed through the centuries and reflected back to the West. This desire to please is obvious in many Albanian artists’ propensity to select topics and approaches that cater to the expectations and implied demands of a Western

³¹ Said, *Orientalism*..., p. 7.

³² Byron, *Childe Harold*, stanza 65.

³³ Tanner M., *Albania’s Mountain Queen: Edith Durham and the Balkans*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2014, p. 22.

³⁴ Said, *Orientalism*..., p. 308.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 1–2.

audience in regard to a less-developed Eastern European nation or, even more specifically, an Eastern European nation from the Balkans. This relationship resembles one between colonizer and colonized but, in this case, the colonization is implicit. Another elucidating parallel could be the parent-child relationship in which, consciously or subconsciously, the child automatically mimics the parent or selects the behavior that will win the parent's attention or earn his/her approval. Tare's words "Albanians love Byron... he didn't judge them"³⁶, express the prevalent Albanian attitude towards the West, one unaware or conveniently dismissive of the implications and beliefs inherent in the great poet's words. Tare's perspective betrays the Albanians' willing acceptance of an inferior position, recalling Said's concerns about the Arab world's internalization of the West's ideas: "Indeed, there is some reason for alarm in the fact that its influence has spread to the Orient itself"³⁷. And, more poignantly, Said unambiguously states that "there has not been "an unlearning of the inherent dominant mode"³⁸.

In Albania, this lack of unlearning is most apparent in art. The following lines in "Childe Harold:" "Blood follows blood, and through their mortal span, / In bloodier acts conclude those who with blood began"³⁹, reflect one of the most popular subjects for a number of successful and internationally renowned Albanian art works. The savage, bloodthirsty, warrior-like men and the like are of the protagonists of nearly all the Albanian films that receive any international acclaim. One instance, among countless others, is the 2012 film "The Forgiveness of Blood," one of the rare Albanian films to receive prizes in international film festivals, such as Berlin and Telluride. The film is a cooperation between an American director, Joshua Marston, and Albanian screenwriters. Interestingly, alongside "The Forgiveness of Blood," Marston has also directed "Maria Full of Grace", a 2004 film about drug trafficking, specifically drug mules in Columbia. Having focused on the biggest cliché regarding Columbia, he achieves something similar with "The Forgiveness of Blood", in which he tackles the phenomenon – rare nowadays – of blood feuds in the rural, mountainous regions of Albania. Blood feuds were based on the *Kanun*, the ancient code of behavior observed in the country in the distant past and echoes of which remain in remote corners of the country. Yet, nowadays, the practice of retributive justice is uncommon, no longer representing a central issue in Albanian reality. Why, then, focus on it? For the Albanian artists, the answer is simple: financial support and a certain amount of renown, both of which depend on the interest of a Western audience. Without the latter's support, the development and success of a project are improbable. Only through a collaboration with an American director can an Albanian screenwriter win the Silver Bear in Berlin, as Andamion Murataj did for the screenplay of the aforementioned film⁴⁰.

³⁶ Neville, *Albania: in Byron's footsteps*.

³⁷ Said, *Orientalism*..., p. 322.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 28.

³⁹ Byron, *Childe Harold*, stanza 63.

⁴⁰ Macaulay S., *Five Questions with "The Forgiveness of Blood Director Joshua Marston"*, "Filmmaker Magazine" 2011, September 8, <http://filmmakermagazine.com/28454-five-questions-for-the-forgiveness-of-blood-director-joshua-marston/#.WmZauqinHIU> [01.10.2017].

A similar case is “Sworn Virgin” (2015), another recently successful film based on Elvira Dones’ novel *Hana* and directed by Laura Bispurri, an Italian director⁴¹. The film has enjoyed wide international acclaim as it deals with issues of gender, a current concern in the West, especially in the U.S. In the film in question, the subject is removed from Western reality and finds its place in the mountains extending between Albania and Kosovo. Again, the phenomenon of *burrnesha* is a rural phenomenon. *Burrneshat* were sworn virgins who, in lieu of a paterfamilias, assumed his place when no male was available. On rarer occasions, the role was taken on in order to avoid marriage. The phenomenon is marginal and no longer practiced *en masse*, yet the movie received critical acclaim and was covered by major internationally-read newspapers like the *Los Angeles Times*. The reason for this success lies, undoubtedly, in the films’ subject matter and collaboration with more economically powerful nations like the United States and Italy. It becomes clear that the financial factor, both in terms of investment and earnings, plays a fundamental role in determining the content and eventual success of both these films and many others not included here. As Said writes in *Orientalism*, a great problem in the perpetuity of Orientalism is “the fact of consumerism in the Orient. The Arab and Islamic world as a whole is hooked into the Western market system”⁴². The same phenomenon occurs in Albania where the West essentially purchases “artists” and works of art or, rather, products which it predicts will be successful and attractive to an audience. The Albanian artist, in turn, provides the material that the West indirectly demands, thus perpetuating the cycle of Orientalism ad infinitum.

This cycle produces questionable consequences, not only for the “Oriental” countries but for the West as well, based, as it is, on half-truths or untruths. In addition to a damaging self-definition by countries like Albania, still undeveloped and marginal, it also leads to greater and more destructive threats. Following the logic of self-definition as absorbed by the West’s definitions, the ones defined as “bold” and “savage” might actually act that way, a response and phenomenon that may prove relevant in today’s world of terrorist attacks. In addition, the perception and continuous definition of the West as more civilized is also difficult to believe in light of the Holocaust and, more recently, the recurrence and frequency of mass shootings in the United States. The construction of the opposition between the East as less civilized and the West as the pinnacle of civilization has started to show its cracks. It seems as though these oppositions and definitions hide a multitude of sins on both sides. It remains uncertain whether the dominant mode of thinking can be unlearned, but attempting to undo this system of thought constructed by multiple layers of lies may prove to be a worthy and valuable effort.

⁴¹ Chang J., “Sworn Virgin” is an absorbing glimpse at Balkan tradition, “Los Angeles Times” 2016, April 28, <http://beta.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/la-et-mn-sworn-virgin-review-20160429-story.html> [01.10.2017].

⁴² Said, *Orientalism*..., p. 324.

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Streszczenie

W *Pielgrzymce Childe Harolda* (1812–1818) Lord Byron pisze o Albanii: *Kraina Albanii! pozwólcie, że zwrócę moje oczy / ty, surowa pielęgniarko dzikich mężczyzn!* Ta jedna z najbardziej niezapomnianych wizyt w tym regionie została uwieczniona w portrecie Thomasa Phillipisa *Portret lorda Byrona w albańskim stroju* (1813). Przywołana przez lorda Byrona w tym wierszu Albania przedstawia powszechnie obecny obraz regionu jako krainy dzikich ludzi. Wizja ta zostaje wzmocniona krwawą historią Bałkanów, która także została zinternalizowana przez jej mieszkańców. Wykrzyknik Lorda Byrona jest powtarzany przez innych zachodnich turystów, takich jak Edith Durham i Edward Lear, którzy w 1848 roku piszą, że w Albanii jest „luksus i niedogodności, z jednej strony wolność, ciężkie życie i brud z drugiej”. Choć stwierdzenia te zawierają fragmenty prawdy, szczególnie odnosząc się do luksusowego krajobrazu i ubóstwa na obszarach wiejskich, działa w nich również orientalistyczna perspektywa zdefiniowana przez Edwarda Saïda. Tutaj Zachód definiuje Wschód jako gorszy, miejsce dziczy, które zostało powoli wyparte przez industrializację w krajach ojczystych zachodnich turystów. Szczególne niebezpieczeństwo związane z tą perspektywą leży w jej absorpcji i utrwaleniu przez samych Albańczyków. Sztuka, która koncentruje się na tematach takich, jak krwawe waśnie i zaprzysiężone dziewice (*Broken April* Ismaila Kadare i *Sworn Virgin* Elvira Dones to tylko kilka przykładów), odnosi największe sukcesy w otrzymywaniu wsparcia finansowego i międzynarodowego uznania. Takie działanie umożliwia kontynuację i rozpowszechnianie romantycznej idei kraju jako miejsca egzotycznego i niebezpiecznego.

Summary

In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812–1818), Lord Byron writes these verses on Albania: “Land of Albania! let me bend mine eyes / on thee, thou rugged nurse of savage men!” One of the most memorable visits to the region, eternally immortalized in Thomas Phillips’ *Portrait of Lord Byron in Albanian Dress* (1813), Lord Byron’s evocation in this poem presents a commonplace perspective on the region as a land of savage men, a view further reinforced by the Balkans’ bloody history and one which has been internalized by its inhabitants as well. Lord Byron’s evocation is echoed by other Western visitors like Edith Durham and Edward Lear who in 1848 writes that, in Albania there is “luxury and the inconvenience, on the one hand, liberty, hard living and filth on the other.” Although these statements contain fragments of truth, especially pertaining to the luxurious landscape and the poverty of rural areas, an orientalist lens, as defined by Edward Said, is also at work. Here, the West defines the East as the other, a place of savage wilderness which has been slowly erased by industrialization in their home countries. The particular danger of this perspective lies in its absorption and perpetuation by the region itself. Art that focuses on topics like blood feuds and sworn virgins (*Broken April* by Ismail Kadare and *Sworn Virgin* by Elvira Dones are only a few examples) are the most successful in receiving financial support and international acclaim, thus enabling their continuation and proliferation of the Romantic idea of the country as an exotic and dangerous place.

Biography

Kleitia Vaso – has graduated with a Bachelor of Arts (2004) and a Master of Arts (2009) in Comparative Literature from the University of Georgia, the United States. In 2010 she returned from the United States to Tirana, Albania where, for five years, she taught English and Academic Writing at Polis University. Currently, she is a doctoral candidate in Literature at the Pomeranian University in Słupsk, Poland. She published a bilingual collection of essays entitled *Fluturim/Flight* in 2017.

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