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„THE MOST BEAUTIFUL UGLY PEOPLE”- THE IMAGE OF THE GIPSY IN TRANSYLVANIA’S MENTALITY

Abstract: Gypsies, or Romanies, have provided writers with a source of color since their very appearance in Europe in the Middle Ages. In Transylvania, perhaps even more than in Western Europe, Romanies turn up with some frequency — never as characters who happen incidentally also to be Gypsies, but because they are Gypsies, and because they serve a specific purpose. This purpose has, broadly speaking, three manifestations: the Gypsy as liar and thief either of property or (especially) of non-Romani children; the Gypsy as witch or caster of spells; and the Gypsy as romantic figure. In order to understand why the Romani should find him or herself in this mainly unflattering role, it is necessary first of all to understand what a Gypsy really is, and what historical circumstances have led to the emergence of so deeply-rooted a fictional image.

Gypsies are often thought of as fantasy beings: journalist Randolph Conner writes of “witches, devils, ghosts, monsters, fairies, gypsies and other supernatural characters” celebrating Hallowe’en; the Cooper Manufactur¬ing Co. of New York includes a Romani with the witches and monsters which make up its line of Halloween costumes sold each year. Among those who know that Gypsies are actual people, there is the wide¬spread idea that they are a social, or a behavioral population like hip¬pies or tramps, rather than an ethnic group. There are many references in the literature to individuals becoming Gypsies by joining such a group or adopting a stylized way of life.

Gypsies, or more properly Romanies or Rom, share a common origin in India. Evidence for this is abundant, whether linguistic, historical, cultural, or anthropomorphic. Leaving India at the time of (and probably because of) the Indo-Persian wars, the original population found itself in the Byzantine Empire by the eleventh century, and by the fourteenth century had been pushed up into southeastern Europe on the crest of the encroaching Turkish move West.

The Transylvania in which those early Romanies found themselves was a land in turmoil. The Muslims were preventing access to the eastern trade routes and to the Holy Land; the economy and Christendom were both threatened, and the Crusades had drastically depleted the manpower. Romanies, being dark-skinned, unfamiliar to the Europeans in language and dress, and coming from the east, were thought to be Muslims themselves. Even today, they are called “Tatars” or “Heidens” or “Turks” in some parts of Transylvania, and the very word “Gypsy” derives from “Egyptian,” a medieval label vaguely applied at that time to any exotic eastern peoples.

Prejudice against Romanies became embedded in the attitudes and eventually in the folklore of European culture, not to mention the Transylvanian one.. Unable to defend themselves, easily recognized in large groups, Romanies learned to stay away from urban areas and to travel in small numbers, denying whenever possible their very identity as Gypsies. They were people who moved around the edges of Transylvanian society, whether it was Romanian, Saxon or Hungarian, forced to poach or beg because shopkeepers would not deal with them, and to make a living using skills and equipment that could travel with them: dealing in horses, or mending metal utensils, or fortune-telling, for example. The last gave this victimized population a small measure of power over the superstitious Transylvanian peasantry, but in turn it contributed to the perception of Romanies as practitioners of the occult, and increased the fear of them. Because Gypsies were prevented from attending

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school, Romani cultures have developed as non-literate cultures, and this persists to this day. After the abolition of slavery, the ex-slave-owners were compensated by the government for their loss but nothing was done to reorient the newly-freed Gypsies . Thus, the freed population of some 600,000, uneducated and penniless, was left to survive as best it could. Everywhere throughout Europe they encountered the anti-Romani laws that operated against the non-enslaved Romani people. However, their presence provided a beautiful body on which locals' fantasies could be projected.

Keywords: Gipsy, tongue, body-language, figure, stereotypes, understanding, otherness, assimilation.

There have been made some estimative assumptions that there might be eight million Rroma and Sinti living in Europe – located mostly in the Balkans and in central and Eastern Europe and commonly referred to as 'Gypsies' –however, as they are are a widely dispersed people, this number is far from the true figure. They do not make up just 'one people', but a puzzle of groups scattered across the world. This great dispersion of Romani groups in conjunction with their way of living which doesn't suppose having a piece of land, has led a number of scholars to identify Roma as dispersed groups. And yet, very few Roma have attempted to formulate their national identity (as one nation or as scattered groups of people). The situation is the same in Transylvania: people witnessing the Rroma lifestyle made attempts to define, categorize and label them- their physical appearance and language being so different from anything seen before: these two have become through the centuries the targets of mockery, but also of attraction.

According to the widely quoted definition proposed by William Safran, the key components of this classical diaspora paradigm are

1) dispersal from a homeland;
2) collective memory of the homeland;
3) lack of integration in the host country;
4) a 'myth' of return and a persistent link with the homeland. [1]

Robin Cohen (1996:515) supplemented this list of key diaspora features as follows:

1) dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions or expansion from a homeland in search of work/for trade/colonial ambitions;
2) a collective memory and an idealization of the homeland and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation;
3) the development of a return movement that gains collective approbation;
4) a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history and the belief in a common fate;
5) a troubled relationship with host societies;
6) a sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement;
7) the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism.[2]

The issue of analytical interpretations of diaspora is that they are written from the perspective of sedentary majority societies and encounter difficulties in grasping the

[1] Safran 'Diaspora in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return', Diaspora 1(1), 1991,pp. 83-99
[2] Robin Cohen. Global Diasporas: An Introduction (London: UCL Press), 1997, p. 14

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'deterritorialised and spatially unbounded culture'[3] of Roma/Gypsies who are 'at home' anywhere, in the sense that they share their home with the non-Gypsies, yet nowhere, since wherever they go they are constantly reminded of their difference and their inability to 'fit in' and to be identified with a well-defined national territory. Their situation is reminds us of what Agamben describes as the condition of the refugee:

[…] the refugee represents a disquieting element in the order of the nation-state […] primarily because, by breaking the identity between the human and the citizen and that between nativity and nationality, it brings the originary fiction of sovereignty to crisis.[…] the refugee, an apparent marginal figure, unhinges the old trinity of state-nation-territory…[4]

All foreign visitors to the Romanian territories expressed their shock and horror when seeing the conditions in which Gypsy slaves had to live. The need and desire for an abolutionist movement „was reflected in Romanian literature of the mid-19h century. The issue of the Roma slavery became a theme in the literary works of various liberal and Romantic intellectuals, many of whom were active in the abolitionist camp. Cezar Bolliac published poems such as *Fata de boier şi fata de ţigan* ("The boyar's daughter and the Gypsy daughter", 1843), *Ţiganul vândut* ("Sold Gypsy", 1843), *O ţigancă cu pruncul său la Statuia Libertăţii* ("A Gypsy woman with her baby at the Statue of Liberty", 1848), Ion Heliade Rădulescu wrote a short story named *Jupân Ion* (roughly, "Master John", from the Romanian-language version of Župan; 1844), Vasile Alecsandri also wrote a short story, *Istoria unui Galbân* ("History of a gold coin", 1844), while Gheorghe Asachi wrote a play called *Ţiganii* ("The Gypsies", 1856) and V. A. Urechia the novel *Coliba Măriucăi* ("Măriuca's cabin", 1855). A generation later, the fate of Ştefan Răzvan was the inspiration for *Răzvan şi Vidra* ("Răzvan and Vidra", 1867), a play by Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu"[5].

This movement was nevertheless instigated so to say by the much larger movement against Black slavery in the United States as locals had the possibility of studying press reports and a translation of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Translated by Theodor Codrescu and first published in Iaşi in 1853, under the name *Coliba lui Moşu Toma sau Viaţa negrilor în sudul Statelor Unite din America* , it was the very first American novel published in Romanian, and it included a preface by Mihail Kogălniceanu.

The influence of slavery on Romanian civilization became a topic of interest in the years after the Romanian Revolution of 1989. In 2007, Prime Minister Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu approved the creation of Comisia pentru Studierea Robiei Romilor ("Commission for the Study of Roma Slavery"), which should be dealing with recommendations for the Romanian education system and on promoting the history and culture of the Roma. The commission, chaired by Neagu Djuvara, would also focus on the creation of a museum of the Roma cuture, a Roma research center, a Roma slavery commemoration day and the building of a memorial dedicated to Roma slavery[6].

Let us view a few cliche representations and symbols of the Gipsy in Transylvania, using this as a thermometer to what they are supposed to represent in our archetypal thinking.

Thievery

Gypsies in the Market by Hans Burgkmair

[3] J. Okely. 'Deterritorialised and Spatially Unbounded Cultures within Other Regimes', Anthropological Quarterly 76(1), 2003, pp. 151-164

[4] G.Agamben. The Coming Community, trans. M. Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 1993, pp. 20-21

[5] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavery_in_Romania

[6] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavery_in_Romania

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Hundreds of Western European accounts mention the Gypsies' tendency to display the behaviour of thievery right from their appearance. [7]One may find never -ending complaints in every document, and there are documents exemplifying hard regulations too. In the 20 th century this changed dramatically and thievery has become a strong stereotype.

Dressing in "Gypsy style"

In early pictures (i.e. before 1850), no dresses can be found which an average Hungarian or Romanian viewer of today would label Gypsy-style; except for the small-gentry-like costume of the musicians, which had turned to its opposite by the first decade of the 20th century. The others wore simple peasant clothing, and if the then contemporary viewer may have found one or two Gypsy -like details, this knowledge has since faded away. But almost at the same time, in the late 1860s, two new Gypsy styles appeared in the pictures that seem Gypsy -like even for a viewer of today: the Kalderash and the Vlah Gypsy ("oláhcigány" in Hungarian) styles .The former disappeared in the second half of the century, but the latter remained and became a strong visual stereotype and formed at least "the Gypsy-style".

According to today's popular opinion, the Gypsy -style costume consists of the following: a hat with a wide brim, a short coat and a waistcoat for men (many times they were represented with a moustache), a colourful headscarf bound on the nape, big, glittering jewels, long flower patterned skirt, sometimes slippers worn by the women. The appearance of this outfit in pictures indicates the appearance of the Vlah Gypsies in the territory. In Hungary, it happened in the last two decades of the 19th century. Before 1900, the Vlah Gypsy outfit was simply one of the visual clichés reflecting Gypsy clothing, and it became dominant only from the middle of the 20th century.

Here is an example of Kaldaresh men's outfit

[7] A.Fraser. A cigányok. Budapest, Europa Kiado, 2006, p. 70.)

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Here is an example of Kaldaresh women's outfit



Erotic visualization

Even before the 20th century there were depictions of the bare breasted Gypsy girl - and this visual cliché has remained popular up until today . It seems to be the case that at the time of its appearance it was an acceptable way of expressing eroticism; and later on it became a commonplace. The underlying reason for this may most probably be a very strong common supposition that Gypsy girls are –to put it this way –easy going, they are considered. to be simply common possessions of non-Gypsy men and anyone has the right when given the opportunity to seduce them.

When those pictures are analysed, in which the intention of artistic representation did not interfere, it turns out that the concept of the coquettish Gypsy girl was the product of a misunder standing between two cultures . In the view of the Gypsies the concept of bare breasts is completely acceptable, the other, i.e. the one prevailing in most of Europe, considers

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it intolerable and as the sign of becoming a prostitute. It can be assumed that behind this e of the naked child) lay the concept of the cleanness -uncleanness tradition of the Gypsy culture: according to this view, the human body is considered to be unclean below the waist, thus it should be covered, whereas above the waist it is clean; therefore , there is no reason to cover that part, too.[8] Easy to see in the following anonymous representation.



Woman smoking pipes



It is the violating of a norm that flourishes even today albeit there is no rational explanation for its existence at all : smoking pipes is reserved only to men; women are not allowed to smoke pipes. Once again the Gypsies are allowed to break the norms or, more precisely put, they are supposed to do so. There are early written sources of this phenomenon

[8] I.Fonseca,Állva temessetek el!A cigányok útja.Budapest, 2010,p. 71.

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as a conceptual cliché (Contemporary sources report that Panna Cinka, the famous 18th century Gypsy violinist and music group leader used to smoke her pipe even while playing her violin.See Augustini ab Hortis , S. *A magyarországi cigányok mai állapotáról, különös szokásairól és életmódjáról, valamint egyéb tulajdonságairól és körülményeiről*[9]dating back many centuries and it appeared much later, in the last third of the 19th century as a visual cliché. From that time onwards it comes up frequently, even in the photos which were set and taken in studios. Although it cannot be proven form the documented data, it seems that the Gypsies eventually accepted this cliché and identified themselves with this role; even so as it had no clear negative connotations, it was only considered a curiosity.

Adult barefooted



This is one of the most frequent visual clichés. Simultaneously it is a commonplace . Not because the Gypsies never walked barefoot –most presumably they did–, because it was generally the case of the peasants in Hungary at that time. However, in the 17th -19th century peasants were more rarely depicted barefooted than Gypsies. It is obvious that it reflects the common idea of social prestige. When the analysis of the absence of headdress above was made, it would have been possible to add that this was not only the reflection of marginality but also of their sense of freedom and extravagancy. Depictions of Gypsies being barefooted have no such positive connotations, however. It is a clear sign of poverty, what is more, that of subjection. The common opinion made a distinction and ranked the types footwear as well, placing the sandal (the footwear made of one piece of skin, in Hungarian bocskor) at the very end, and the boots at the very beginning of the scale. Using the same principle, they also ranked the people who wore this footwear. Having nothing to put on should express that they were the bottommost members of society.

Bare-headed

Today the headdress is more than just a piece of clothing, because it is worn on the head, the visual centre of the body. Its appearance is more emphasised as well. One of its functions is to symbolise the value (being an adult) of its bearer. Superiority and inferiority relations were very often expressed by whether the headdress was kept on or taken off. In the case of a situation where one man is standing with his hat on and another is standing with his

[9] Augustini ab Hortis , S. A magyarországi cigányok mai állapotáról, különös szokásairól és életmódjáról, valamint egyéb tulajdonságairól és körülményeiről.Budapest/Gödöllő, 2009.009. p.217.

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hat in his hand in front of him, we may deduce who the lord and who the inferior is in an instant. It is a late adaptation to the values of the majority that for today the hat has become a prestigious piece of clothing for Gypsy men. One of the current visual clichés of Gypsies includes men wearing hats and women wearing colourful headscarves. One and a half centuries ago the situation was the reverse; almost all major members of society, lords and peasants, adults and children had some kind of headdress in their pictures, but hardly any Gypsies. The contemporary audience at that time probably felt that bare headedness was signifying both freedom (and extravagance) and subjection. If a look is taken at the contemporary photos, it becomes clear that Gypsy adults wore headdresses almost as often as members of the majority. Even in the photographs which were taken in studio settings, there are different headdresses. So far, the artists (and viewers) of the 19th century Gypsy drawings formed an involuntary judgment about the Gypsies by depicting them bareheaded; they considered them as people out of normality, out of orderliness but inferior. Another question is that for a long time the members of the majority accepted the Gypsies as such; they acknowledged their different way of life, even though they did not want to follow their lead. They would most probably have said: "we who wear headdresses are the ordinary, and they are the extraordinary, the bareheaded". Only one element remains active today from this visual cliché: the old Gypsy woman with long, dishevelled hair. An elderly woman letting her hair down is still not considered to be acceptable by the Hungarian way of thinking; and if somebody wears her hair in such a fashion, she is considered to be someone who contravenes the social norms: a Gypsy, a foul or an artist –that is all the same after all.

Fortune telling, wizardry

Here's a Caravaggio painting which shows exactly this stereotype

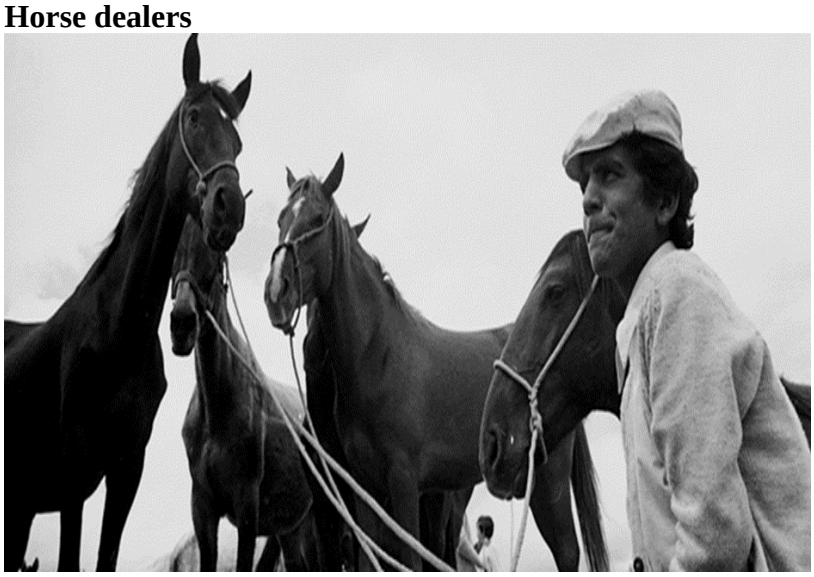


Wizardry comes even before metal craftsmanship. This source, from around 1068, includes a Bulgarian legend of a saint mentioning certain "atsinganos", who brushed off the wild beasts from the gardens of the emperor of Byzantium with their knowledge of wizardry. Although it is not entirely certain that this text refers to the Gypsies, the scholarly sources consider it, similarly to the other instances of atsinganos being mentioned in the forthcoming

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centuries [10] Therefore, it may be claimed that the Gypsies arrived to Europe with some knowledge of wizardry -at least that is what people assumed in connection with them. In the first half of the 20th century, the visual cliché in the form of the Gypsy woman telling one's fortune and doing cartomancy appeared in Hungary as well, but it bore no connection with real life. This was only the acceptance of the general Western European set of visual clichés, later completed by the special Spanish -French stereotypes (great round earrings, girls dancing with tambourines, etc.). During the first half of the 20th century, the coquettish Gypsy girl showing her snow-white smile and red lips to the audience, or telling fortune by cards had become a strong international visual cliché. Eventually, the role had found its performers and the visual cliché had created reality: the Gypsy fortune teller woman can be found everywhere in Hungary.

Horse dealers



Horse dealing is considered to be a traditional Gypsy profession not only by the majority of society, but also by the Gypsies themselves - it is part of how they define themselves . This is not entirely correct. Among the surveyed stock of pictures there is only one single piece depicting Gypsy horse trading . The lack of more pieces should guide one to be cautious with hasty judgments. It is known from written sources that buying and selling horses has been considered to be an occupation practiced by the Gypsies for centuries[11]. If there is hardly any depiction of this activity, it must have a single explanation: the stereotype is much stronger than the reality behind it. The contradiction may have been caused partly by the need of a positive Gypsy self-image, a self-identification with this prestigious activity. It was strengthened by the fact that he Gypsies really bought and sold horses quite often. But we also have to add that the major ity saw this selling and buying not as real trade. The simple fact is that the Gypsies were always ready to change their horses if they thought they could gain a profit, while the peasants (the majority of society) kept their animals usually for a lifetime. Still, a 16th century source reports that the Gypsies "change their horses frequently". That is where the common opinion comes from.

Musicians

It is worth noting that there seems to be no other identifiable commonplace on the pictures depicting musicians . A testimony of no other fact, than that the majority of Romani

[10] A.Fraser, 2006.A cigányok . Budapest, 2006, p.52.
[11] B. Mezey , A magyarországi cigánykérdés dokumentumokban. Budapest, 1986,p. 56

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musicians, especially with respect to the second part of the 19th century, lead to a much more settled lifestyle than those still errant. That is why errant Romani people had violins, too. However, it is not possible to conclude whether the image constructed in Transylvania about the musician Gipsy merely crammed together different commonplaces into one composition.

These stereotypes are shared by many sedentary people witnessing the Rroma lifestyle amongst their houses, and making these assumtions- which proved to be true or false- based on the tests of time.

Despite these shared elements, however, diaspora scholars emphasise the fact that the Roma/Gypsies also lack some crucial diasporic features. This is particularly true for the feature that lies at the core of the classical notion of diaspora, a strong link with a homeland. Safran for example underlines that Roma/Gypsies have 'no precise notion of their place of origin, no clear geographical focus, and no history of national sovereignty' and that they are a 'truly homeless people'[12]. As Barany argues, the Roma/Gypsies 'are unique in their homelessness'; for them 'every country is a "foreign" country, a "country of residence"[13] (Barany 1998:143 quoting Liégeois 1994:225) and this is the reason why their communities cannot be defined, as a diaspora. The second crucial diasporic feature that is amissing in the Gypsy case is a consciousness of their being a diaspora. Before analysing the main feature of Gypsy practices, it is worth pointing out that for a long time only the non-Gypsies (Gadźé) have been interested in identifying the Gypsies' origins, and not the Gypsies themselves[14]. It is their speech which is the greatest part of [Romani common heritage], and even among those populations whose Romani [Romanes] has been reduced to only a vocabulary, as in England or Spain or Scandinavia, it remains a powerful ingredient in Romani ethnic identity.[15]

The diffusion of Romanes has been encouraged through a number of written publications and journals, with both national and international circulation, aimed at overcoming linguistic and physical barriers and promoting a better knowledge of Romani history and culture. A more recent trend has been the launch of online news and journals in Romanes and the creation of an impressive number of Romani websites and chat groups, which 'have become one of the main mobilization tools for Romani activism'[16]. The Roma's marginality is the result of active social exclusion on the part of the dominant group, and demands the political mobilization of Roma/Gypsies based on affirmative action and on what Charles Taylor calls 'the politics of recognition' [17]

To conclude, Gypsy stereotypes and images heve been and are internally/externally diversified phenomena throughout history and all over Europe, not only in Transylvania, or Romania.This is largely due to their nature as social practices, thereby intrinsically context-specific and subject to change. Furthermore, the plurality of voices within the Gypsy diaspora discourse reflects the great differentiation of Romani groups and their diverse situation in their host countries – what Gheorghe and Acton have defined as the 'Gypsy archipelago'[18]

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