

"KUSHELO AND GADJO" THE GIPSY WOMAN'S CURSE AND THE WHITE MAN IN MIRON RADU PARASCHIVESCU'S „CÂNTICE ȚIGĂNEȘTI"

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Abstract: In this paper , inspired by an article by Adelina Timaru , "Imprecation in the poetics of Miron Radu Paraschivescu"¹ , I will try to prove the existence of a Gypsy witch's who is charming through her chant and song ,a gypsy curse . Reading the article, I felt there was a lot more to say about curses and incantations present in "Gypsy chants" by Miron Radu Paraschivescu².

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

Is the Gypsy curse or isn't it the strongest form of imprecation known ?

This is the question asked by many for whom unfathomable mysteries and curious fearful imprecations have been going on for centuries in unknown cultures such as that of the Gypsies. I think that we must understand and process many events and happenings without a normal explanation . So what do we do? Negative events can be explained by Gypsy curse from time to time . The Gypsy myth of a woman who tells your future or curses in exchange for some cash will survive no matter what happens. We know very well that there is a whole business based on curses, - just like religious faith- imprecation has no tangible evidence for phenomenon not having a so-called mystical influence on our lives . This is the trap that many fall into-naïve circles attending magical Gypsy fortune tellers' tents or houses. The only semi - scientific explanation for the effectiveness of a curse is a way of focusing the energy , negative thoughts , which works for some people more sensitive than most , and especially more pessimistic . I would add that what actually happens is a negative auto-suggestion with negative results if the victim can say that the curse - behold -worked.

We know in our society , the Targu Mureș one, there are common forms of curses , which may have lost their status of fearful imprecations . "Let my horse die, if not true , " " Let my cat die , " " I'll be damned, if this is not true! " , " Let me die of cancer! " Let my mother die!" a Gypsy mother would say " Let my baby die ! " . A feature of the curse on himself / herself is the goal of the speaker is to be believed, at any price –thus being responsible for proving authenticity . Following the logic of this kind of imprecation : if I curse myself very often or those whom I love, I will be believed to be truthful. It's almost unbelievable , but the Gypsy curse has a playful side , that told to their loved ones , "Walk in gold up to your knees and may you not be able to bend over ." A mother could say to her child : "May your father go crazy if I don't love him ." And they , like those before , are imprecations which are designed to show the strength of feelings.

Or some contemporary curse , heard on the street :

" Devla Liker " - " God take care of you! "

" Marla Devla brishindesha " - " Let's beat the hell out of him ! "

¹ Adelina Timaru, Imprecația în poezia lui Miron Radu Paraschivescu, în Caiete Critice, nr. 9, 2011.

² Miron Radu Paraschivescu, Cântice țigănești și alte poeme, colecția Jurnalul Național, București, 2011

" Ianelo Beng – „Devil knows ! "

" Tut Avela a beng " - "I bless him! "

The Gipsy Valentine charm is known to be extremely popular and well paid , it is used as an artistic method in literature to express an impossible love , forbidden or platonic , just as it is presented in the volume written by Miron Radu Paraschivescu. For instance the phenomenon of „Armaiaslo- The Curse” appears in poems like „Cântic de fată mare”- ”The grown girl’s chant” Another phenomenon that appears in these poems could be called ”Kushelo-Charm” , that can be seen in poems like „Amar”-„Bitter”.

The Valentine charm,a Gypsy curse extremely popular and well paid, is used as an artistic process in literature to express an impossible love, forbidden or platonic.

Gypsies’ career in literature began to truly take off in the Romantic period, in the literature from the seventeenth century and the first decades of the eighteenth century. This era describes them as good-hearted sensitive thieves though remarkably skilled at deceiving people. "Their crime was not shocking in a world of the picaresque, where to crime was an everyday event, I could say it was the most common occupation, the groups of Gypsies being only a segment of many groups on the roads living in crime large and small. "³

Although later Gypsies begin to be a problem for civil servants and representatives of social order, in the mentality of the Enlightenment they are presented as an interesting alternative socio-political group . We find a good example of this phenomenon in the novel by Henry Fielding , *Tom Jones* ,from 1749 , in the episode when the protagonist, along with his servant go willy nilly to a Gypsy wedding . To our surprise , Tom will admire the wisdom of the Gypsy driver when there's a very important dialogue between the two . The leader is perfectly aware of the negative public opinion about Gypsies as being "thieves " and looks surprised that Tom respects them, explaining that Gypsies steal from whites, whites instead steal from them. This would be the explanation for the social problem in the England of the time.⁴

In a world increasingly bourgeois many Gypsies kept the nomadic way of life , slipping ever further down the social hierarchy . A good example would be cavalier Goethe's drama , *Götz von Berlichingen* ⁵ , where a knight depends on the help of the leader of a Gypsy thieves’ gang . In the Neoclassicist era, Gypsies’ primitive democracy symbolized the enlightenment that later came to symbolize an obstacle to the development of civilization . Let's think about Gypsies that hamper progress in *Guy Mannering* , by Walter Scott , although they are not responsible for the situation.⁶

Romantic literature starts from an opposition between the autonomy and the resistance of Gypsies to authority - these are the characteristics of the underlying symbol of freedom – the figure of the Gypsy . They are treated as a community who loves and keeps its freedom and political resistance , despite all the shortcomings and persecution . The most

³ Veres András: Cigányok az irodalomban. în Barangoló, szomorú nép .: Kritika 1997 (12):10—11.

⁴ Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones* , Norton Critical Editions,London, 1994 , p.192.

⁵ The Drama: Its History, Literature and Influence on Civilization, vol. 11. ed. Alfred Bates. London: Historical Publishing Company, 1906.

⁶ Walter Scott, *Guy Mannering*, Penguin Books, New York, 1999.

representative in this regard was Pushkin's great poem *Gypsies*; ⁷ written in 1824, the hero of which, Aleko became a favorite in the whole nineteenth-century Russian literature. He became a prototype for "the superfluous hero" later. Aleko escapes from the civilized world into an uncivilized existence: he chooses a nomadic Gypsy community for the scene of his survival. The Roma Vaida gladly accepts him, allowing him to share everything with them. Only later does Aleko find out that the Gypsies are not only outside society, but also outside historical time: once they had provided shelter to Ovid, during his political exile, act for which the Gypsies have received the *Orphic Songs*, as a symbol of gratitude. Aleko falls in love with the Vaida's daughter, Zemfira, who shares his feelings, so everything seems perfect until we learn the secret of any Gypsy: they, free natures of birth, cannot become the property of anyone, just like their love cannot be owned by anyone. Aleko can't bear the girl's unfaithful behaviour—a girl who would drive any man crazy with her beauty—and becomes a murderer. The Vaida casts them out from his world, a world where no human life nor love can become someone's property. Aleko yearned for his own liberty at the price of Zemfira's freedom, which is unacceptable, so it is compulsory for him to return to where it ran away from.

For the Romantic aesthetics bizarre impressions spiced with grotesque elements were the long awaited expression of Otherness – of the Gypsy in this case. The antagonism between the bourgeois existence and the Gypsy intoxicates in the bud any attempts of dialogue between the two groups. It is possible that Victor Hugo's novel *Notre Dame de Paris*,⁸ written in 1831 to be the most successful example in this regard. Esmeralda is a street dancer of Gypsy origins who is full of charm and compassion from birth, staying natural no matter what she does. She is the center of the human drama of the story. Each and every citizen of Paris is watching her incessantly, while she experiences the volatile moods of the masses: at first, she is worshiped for her exceptional dance moves, then hated and despised for being a witch; after which being praised for her dramatic rescue of Quasimodo. When the king decides for her to be executed, he is firmly convinced that the Parisian crowd wants her death. Esmeralda, the charming Gypsy girl is not able to make herself understood by the people around her, though she fascinates them all, and everyone who comes into contact with her, becomes a victim of her charms. In a world full of primitive superstitions, in which each protagonist lives a world of obsession and hallucinatory visions, running towards a predestined death Esmeralda's being a Gypsy is free ticket to the witches' club. A highly revealing twist in the plot of the novel is that she is not even a Gypsy, she was only kidnapped and raised by them. The fact that she became a "Gypsy Witch" is due solely to her surroundings and education – an issue worthy of the famous debate between Noam Chomsky and Jean Piaget⁹. Her tragedy is the tragedy of a Gypsy Esmeralda. With a similar catastrophe ends the love story between Don Jose and Carmen in the novel by Prosper Merimee¹⁰. The boy, who is in military service, is so enchanted by the beauty of Carmen, that he kills for her driven by his jealousy, and becomes a bandit. Carmen's first appearance

⁷ A.D.P. Briggs, "Did Carmen come from Russia?" in English National Opera Programme., 2004

⁸ Victor Hugo, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, 1978. Translated by John Sturrock. Penguin Classics, London

⁹ Language and Learning: The Debate Between Jean Piaget and Noam Chomsky, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980

¹⁰ Prosper Merimee, *Les Âmes du Purgatoire, Carmen*, 1973, Garnier Flammarion, Paris

is essential in understanding the mystery woven around a legend like her. She appears in a red skirt so short that most people who saw it cross themselves. Her body, her walk and her whole attitude causes a hypnotic delight in the mesmerized eyes of the people witnessing her existence. Even the first encounter with Don Jose is hypnotic, though more reserved. She asks for his necklace and asks if he has any ideas of how many moles she has on her body. Taking into account the mentioned moles, the open and shameless flirt – clearly we are talking about a witch, aren't we? To finish flirting, Carmen takes the rose from between her teeth and throws it between the Don's eyes who, instead of ignoring the provocative gesture, bends over and lifts the flower, keeping it for himself as a dear souvenir, which was an act of madness in the respective era. This is how Carmen charms him with a sexuality that makes her the constant center of attention, and an icon of femininity at the sheer frontier of immorality.

Carmen, through her attitude, allows herself to be independent, and in the meantime to avoid becoming the property of anyone, as stated by Sidiya V. Hartman¹¹:

Just like Zemfira couldn't bear any kind of chain around her ankles and couldn't be owned by anyone, Carmen-in the same way- couldn't be enslaved by any love affair.... Rather the men around them are possessed by the devil after coming into contact with these charming Gypsies. Both men are whites in trapped and fascinated by the beauty of the Gypsy, enslaved beauty and exoticism. Their greatest sin is trying to bind a freedom loving Gypsy.

But Gypsies, girls and women are not only provocative and victims of fate, they are also spokespersons of destiny. It seems that the most recognized occupations of Gypsies are thievery and fortunetelling. Taken any appearance of them in literature, Gypsies seem to be in extremely good relations with the future, which can be based on the fact that they are outside historical time. As in Baudelaire's poem about nomadic Gypsies or Bohemians, they are uprooted in the present moment, but feel at home in the future.

If we want to have an idea about why Gypsies were considered witches, we have to read the book of Alfonso M. di Nola *The Devil, Faces, Exploits and History of Satan and His Evil Presence in all the Peoples Stories from the Antiquity until Today*¹²

Plants used in filters and ointments by some people, so-called witches, give state of torpor and arousal (...) a state of unconsciousness, so it was easy for dreamlike images and lascivious undercurrents to appear, and the testimonies thereof (...)

Usually many activities such sorcery magic, fortune-telling, spiritism, necromancy, are necessary help and cooperation with demons fall into this category. Witchcraft is represented by the widespread belief in the supernatural activity of women, called striges, lamiae, maleficae, mulierculae.

Similarly to Jews, Gypsies were demonized because of their nomadic lifestyle which was rejected by society's norms in those ancient times. Monk Niccolo of Poggibonsi considered them descendants of Cain and argued that they inherited the divine curse fallen on their ancestor's head. This monk claimed that being forced to live a life of wandering, in case

¹¹ Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. 1997., New York: Oxford University Press, p. 82

¹² Alfonso M. di Nola, *Diavolul, Chipurile, isprăvile, istoria Satanei și prezentul a sa malefică la toate popoarele din Antichitate până azi*, trad. de Radu Gâdei, ed. All, București, 1991., pp.231- 252.

they make an attempt to settle down somewhere , their body will be filled with worms that quickly kills them from the inside.

Consequently , Gypsies and spells cast by devilish sorcerers bore a dangerous identification . In France , Gypsy women were among the first women burned on the stake and, in 1499 , the first woman sentenced to the gallows for witchcraft was of Gypsy origins . The Synodal statutes of Saint Malo in 1618, convicted "all magicians , soothsayers and charmers " and made an explicit reference to " those who claim they can predict the future , how do the so-called Bohemian ". In the small French town Halem, the Gypsy tribe was considered to be the favourite place of Satan for his nightly feasts and the area was known as " sorcerers' kitchen" Gypsy humiliation followed an evidently upward curve , says Alfonso M. di Nola .

Even in the poetry of Miron Radu Paraschivescu, Gypsies appear spewing imprecations , or chant magic words , through the beauty of their face and body .However, let us check, who were the models M. R. Paraschivescu used when formulating these chants which are still so mesmerizingly beautiful. Why did he have to "steal " - as many claimed he did- from Pushkin or Lorca ? What were the common points with the two famous ones , especially with Lorca, who was also translated by Miron Radu Paraschivescu ...

The *Romancero Gitano* by Lorca , translated by our poet , is the climax of an artistic rebellion against the system from the beginning of the century: the first decades of the 20th century . It shows us famous artists who rebel against the limits of realism proposed by the authority- using Surrealism (consider the paintings of Salvador Dali) and Cubism (paintings from this era by Picasso) for their purposes. While choosing romance which is a medieval way of literary expression, Lorca focuses more on a series of images related to a dream vision than on a consistent narrative line . A good example of this is the poetry of Lorca's *Romance Sonambulo*. While many traditionalist critics identify a narrative difficult to follow in this poetry , others talk ,more openly about a lack of anecdote, however , we can distinguish a series of shocking images which introduce us into a sleepy-dreamy mood. This refusal of the traditional convention faced by astounding metaphors leads us to think of the poet's minirevolution against patriarchal society in Spain during the early years of the century; a Spain in a Europe of full political, social and cultural change, as if it was an ice island frozen in the past, the inhabitants of which who will not know about the imminent change . Revolted against convention , M.R. Paraschivescu's minirevolution against Ceausescu's totalitarianism becomes evident in his lines.

The decade of the '20s meant the birth of many spectacular cultural movements called almost always "- isms" , of which Symbolism and Surrealism were the most revolutionary . Surrealism, whose 'parents' were the French Andre Breton , Paul Eluard , Louis Aragon , was taken to Spain immediately via artists' filter like Luis Bunuel and Salvador Dali where it became " pure surrealism ." These rebellious movements contained the sweet promise of freedom unthinkable of in 19th-century realism . Using C.B. Morris's words, " Surrealism is the explosion of a repressive society beneath the anguish of year antiquated morality"¹³ With the works of poets of "the generation of '27 " in Spain (where there is a constant tendency of overflowing imagism in the Spanish spirit, inclined to a distortion of real data , often pushed

¹³ C. B. Morris , *Surrealism and Spain 1920-1936*, Cambridge University Press, England, 1972., p. 19

onto a sphere of onirical metamorphoses) Surrealism took a specific look . The poem was present , in various phases, in the experience of writers of 'the generation of 27 ' , and other renowned poets (Juan Larrea , Rafael Alberti , even Garcia Lorca , Vicente Aleixandre , Damaso Alonso , Manuel Altolaguirre , Emilio Prados , Pablo Salinas) . Death and moral incompatibility between the world of Gypsies and bourgeois society are the main themes addressed in " *Romancero Gitano* " . It shows some specific procedures typical of popular poetry and the influence of the composer Manuel de Falla.

This is not folk opera , but one based on issues related to the world and to the Andalusian Gypsies . In what concerns the Gypsy topic, Lorca exaggerates it and takes it to the level of literary myth , as it will be done later with the literary Black person and the Jew (a word-for -word translation) in " *Poeta en Nueva York* " and in " *Romancero Gitano* " romance is used in all its variants : epic , lyrical and dramatic ; language is the fusion of the cult and the popular. In Surrealist poetry , the reader should not be influenced in any way by an apparent narrative line, there is only an allusion to a story-line by fragments of stories, but one should make intuitive associations triggered by these images from shocking dreams. Jacques Derrida, in his essays on deconstruction, argues the arbitrary nature of language , which means that language refuses any fixed meaning ¹⁴. Using Surrealist technique of juxtaposing images without any fixed purpose or without concrete interpretations, Lorca shows a way out of the limits of traditional logic or realism of the last century, or the fixed poetic language without freedom. In this game the poem denies any definite sense, any official reading of the text. Lorca and other Surrealist artists claimed total freedom without limits and rebelled against the constraints of conventional reality in all forms . As Cobbs says , " their momentum was central in the direction of freedom, freedom to throw the shackles off- shackles that bind the full expression of personality, including scatology and sexual taboos " ¹⁵. *Romancero gitano*, which has become the most popular book of Lorca , is a collection of Spanish romances or ballads that offer the greatest freedom of all forms to a poetically traditional poet . Romance, at its medieval origins , was used to account for events or anecdotes so as to inform and used as propaganda , while surely it had to be entertaining. In fact, centuries later, the romance has become a text used by national authority to enunciate national values. Wolfgang Iser writes that romance served to remove the authority and stability of the system¹⁶. Despite this, many medieval romances exude an air of mystery , fascinated floating between reality and dream. However , romances remained associated with national history , they were expected to present a historical event in details. Later on, heroes and poets added dramatic elements to lyrical romances, especially in Romanticism , where romance was resurrected by poet Angel Saavedra to be the vehicle of revolt against Neo - Classical Greek and Roman cultural values . The romance of the 19th century celebrated figures who managed to rebel against social mores , reaching unfathomable heights in the respective era as they were outsiders –considering social mores - they are outside the law (in a romantic sense) and above morals and people (the exception being just a few). Later, in the

¹⁴ J. Derrida, (1988), "Structure, Sign and of the Human Play in the Discourse Sciences" in Lodge, David, (ed.) Modern Criticism and Theory. A Reader., New York, Longman, pp. 123-128

¹⁵ C. W.Cobb,(1967) Federico Garcia Lorca, New York, Twayne, p.3.

¹⁶ Iser Wolfgang , (1978), The Act of Reading. A Theory of Esthetic Response, Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press, p. 78

last decades of the 19th century . , romantic poets did not appreciate the romance, it being too exuberant for their tastes and purposes . Only in the '20s did the romance make its dramatic comeback on the literary stage, being the perfect vehicle for the revolutionary ideas against limiting artistic Realism . While romantic poets used romance to idealize history and historical figures that embodied rebellion , poets of the '20s used the romance primarily to give a suitable framework for the manifestation of social rebellion , but neglecting its traditional story-telling function . Lorca , more than any other poet of his generation , used romance in this way.

The poet of *Gypsy Chants* (1941) protests, like Lorca, but through his exotic exaltation and lightning senses his poems become truly local.

"A starting point for *Gypsy Chants* is of course the <irmos>, as they were they passed through oral tradition and classical poetry, from Anton Pann to Ion Barbu. MRP is also a great <ugly sensitive> , <his mouth cavity spiced up > (George Calinescu), an intelligent Balkanic, a lover of fowl language, purified of any vulgarity as it was passed through the fine cloth of a naive lyricism (the fable) and refined by language and irony. "17

What is striking in these songs is the seemingly innocent violence of passion. Everything seems to be influenced by the affliction of love in this world of the periphery's slums. In their language this "disease" would be called "Chumidelp-nashfalo" / love-affliction.¹⁸

In the poem *The Sad girl*, (*Fata necăjită*), the troubled girl's suffering because no one has ever loved her, makes all of nature cry. The woman from the Gypsy camp cheats more often than her man, but her suffering is not less than a man's. However, she fails when it comes to violence. She curses terribly though, struggling in ways that are unimaginable, but her pride and hatred run like quicksilver from her mouth and then, after the horrible curse, her love comes back. „Viana is a living statue of her stormy passion” in *The Wedding Chant* (*Cântic de nuntă*).

Armaiaslo " - the curse , first appears as an ordinary, everyday imprecation, without any echo or greater effect in *Young Girl's Chant* (*Cântic de fată mare*):

"One evening's wind came,
Damn that wind in vain "

The troubled girl from *The Sad girl*, (*Fata necăjită*), offers us a weird invocation resembling the popular incantations addressed to Paparude for rain and fertility, but in our case, there is no question of fertility, as the girl remains unloved :

Further, in *The Chant of Yearning and Desire*) cute curses meet the real curse that springs from tortured soul of the charmed one this time, who starts to curse like a truck driver using the jargon the periphery. In an absurd way, the charmed victim would wake up from his coffin to protect and comfort the one that caused his death . "Like out of a curse

I jumped from five coffins"

The masterpiece , of course, is *Curse of love*, (*Blestem de dragoste*) which, while doing everything to convince through the expressiveness of the language - and even traps the reader with the anger of a jealous woman touches our souls towards the end with her hope for

¹⁷ Eugen Simion, *Scriitori români de azi*, ed. a II-a, ed. Cartea Românească, Bucureşti, 1978, pp. 14-23

¹⁸ Magyar-cigány szótár, Komp Press, Kolozsvár, 2000

her lover's return . The sorrowful thread of curses starts with the enumeration of all the possible diseases, then death, of course. In the meantime she doesn't avoid mentioning the fact that she lost her virginity with this man she is cursing now, so she lost everything- her life being worthless. An innocent little imprecation, easily changing into a blasphemy appears in *Prayer (Rugăciune)*. In *Rică*, all the curses of women in love with the local Don Juan are echoed-they curse his murderer.

This curse, which sometimes is changed into a love charm, is typical of M.R. Paraschivescu's approach to the poetical experience. He had often been accused of using excessive slang and explicit descriptions too. I think, given the topical songs about love-he could use more, in order to achieve a higher degree of authenticity, modernity or rebellion:

"When Arghezi printed *The Flowers of Mold (Flori de mucigai)* , it was an aesthetic revolution. The world of prisoners, including Gypsies who got an equal amount of attention, slang, raw vocabulary, anecdotes, narrative ingenuity, realistic dialogue (...), instincts of nature which seemed doomed, represented to many an ethical and aesthetic descent . But Arghezi was a really great poet, a very refined aesthetic intuition (...) Some poems, like *Rada* and *Tinca*, the boldly manifested eroticism rose to a sublime vision and indecency was transformed under lyrical emphasis."

¹⁹

In these romances "the woman is a delicious animal without any morals" we might think about Carmen or Zemfira "who allows her suitor to pamper her and offer her luxury in a similar way to her <partner in crime> from the upper social strata, however, in both cases, the man is passionate <sigher> who lives and dies, like in the Middle Ages, thinking non stop about his beloved lady whose serving knight he stays-only is another phase"

²⁰

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¹⁹ Pompiliu Constantinescu, Cântice țigănești [1941]; reprodus în Pompiliu Constantinescu, Scrieri, IV, 1970, pp.156-158

²⁰ Șerban Cioculescu, Cântice de lume, în ASPECTE ȘI DIRECTȚII LITERARE, Ed. Minerva, București, 1972, pp.190-192

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