

**SAKUNTALA-SAFTA/TWO DIFFERENT OR NOT SO DIFFERENT AVATARS OF
THE ROMANIAN FICTIONAL 'GYPSY' GIRL**

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Abstract: The literary writings habitually include descriptions of female Gypsies that highlight their Oriental and exotic looks, their animal natures, and their potential for explosive and potentially dangerous sexuality. Almost all such descriptions tend to be static portraits. These figures never play a role in the narrator's experience or function as active characters in the narrative; they barely move and never speak; they are evoked purely as images, as objects to be taken in with the eye. For the average author, Gypsy women appear the same in all places, languidly leaning against the wall, magnetic, indifferent; a swift animal, like a strung bow, bringing all the East with her, and ashy wildness which is the Gypsy's only. (Arthur Symons, In Praise of Gypsies, 297) There is a suggestion in this description of powerful energy coiled and ready to strike, a dormant but nonetheless readily apparent erotic aggression. The portraits of 'Gypsy' girl include a catlike diabolique charm, another „wild beauty” as a. Again and again, eyes and teeth are emphasized, as are languorousness and its opposite, passion. Authors and their readers safely project sexual desire onto these canvases: the women promise sexual adventure but, still and subordinate, never pose a threat. Wordless and motionless, or loud and serpentine in bed and in the street, they possess the erotic power of the odalisque.

Keywords: Romanian literature, 'Gypsy', witch, initiation

In the present paper I will deal with two striking female characters from Romanian literature, striking in their presence as an overwhelming beauty that attracts males through exoticism, magic and physical/psychological charm: Safta, from George Mihail Zamfirescu's novel, *Maidanul cu dragoste*, (*Love's waste land*),¹ written in 1933; the first volume of a trilogy (*Bariera- The Barrie*)², including the two following volumes: *Sfânta mare neruşinare- The holy great shamelessness* (1935) and *Cântecul destinelor- The song of fate* (1939). The novel was an immediate success, especially among readers, critics describing it as: "An impressive 'Gypsy' epos and a vibrant Walpurgic night of tragic witches congregation, where the hex consists of chasing demons."³ We must specify that a Walpurgic night refers to the night of 30.04., when witches are supposed to have a secret meeting, dancing and performing hex-rituals; but it also refers to a nightmarish situation.⁴

A recurring theme in the magical realist prose of Voiculescu and the expressionist-naturalist prose of G.M. Zamfirescu is erotic demonism, obsessive love like a state of trance, who can tempt many other protagonists, especially male ones. Exemplary in this respect are *Sakuntala* and *The waste land of love*, this topic seems to explore the limits of the abyss of the human soul, trying to show us the extent to which seduction and mechanisms of the soul's mood can amount to in a trap of carnal and spiritual attraction. And just as in *Lostrîţa* the first explanation we are given is that of the spell, telling us is that those who are in this state have

¹ My translation

² idem

³ Perpessicus, cited in <http://jurnalul.ro/cultura/arte-vizuale/de-pe-maidan-cu-dragoste-516096.html>, accessed on 30.04.15

⁴"Dicţionarului Explicativ al Limbii Române", Editura Univers Enciclopedic, 1998

been bewitched, that the state of the soul / psyche was altered by the action of their force / energy coming from outside. If in *Sakuntala* Vasile Voiculescu only creates the exposition of this issue by creating an extraordinary magical atmosphere, in *The Waste Land of Love*, we are given the solution for getting out of this situation, namely casting a counter-spell that cancels the effect of the alleged initial spells: a trip into the depths of the subconscious ("the omniscient unconscious")⁵: exploring the `mahala` (Romanian slum)

In the case of Vasile Voiculescu's prose, the stage of unsophisticated exposure of this topic is exceeded, wrapping the sordid topic of subconscious animalic yearning into a network of events described with such finesse and power of capturing our attention large that the events seem more significant than their symbolic meaning⁶. The narrator in both cases though can be determined by magic, incantation, spiritual focus on the partner, to live according to a model that transcends everyday events. The transfer occurs between individuals, from the owner of magical force to the innocent man, developed by framing the narrator in a spiritual stream which until then has been ignored by him which gives him the possibility to abolish boundaries imposed by space and time.

The narrator's love for Sakuntala is motivated by two phenomena: the girl offers a revelation of his own archetype visible in her, and his friend Dionis lets him experience his own love instead of him as otherwise our narrator would not have understood Dionis and says, providing in the simplest possible way, the proof that spiritual transfer is possible: "You were another me. A second Dionis, who repeats that a part of my life, so I can check and correct myself."⁷

The characters in *The Waste Land of Love*-except chapters dedicated to the tragedy of the romantic existence of hooligans-live their life, a life where the sun does not rise, lacking of ideals and probably therefore more mixed-up, more complicated, or simply more diverse, but in the same time, most picturesque and more fierce. As the author puts it himself, "In all these works, (he) was obsessed with the same idea: *the mystique of human beings*. The characters of *The Waste Land of Love* have only troubles and sins and a know-how of cruel death without revolt and without curses. (...) They live their fate without a murmur wrapped in the gentle and apostolic unconsciousness of the sheep taken to the slaughterhouse. This novel is dominated by *the mystique of life*."⁸

Male writers habitually incorporate portrayals of female `Gypsies` that emphasize their disturbingly foreign and exotic appearance, their animalic behaviour, and their hidden feature of fulminant and hazardous sexuality. The vast majority of such portrayals show a tendency to be static portraits. These figures never play a role in the narrator's experience or function as active characters in the narrative; they barely move and never speak; they are evoked purely as images, as objects to be taken in with the eye. For Arthur Symons, `Gypsy` women appear the same in all places, „wherever one travels, East or West”: a girl of fifteen in Belgrade leans languidly against the wall, „haughty, magnetic, indifferent; a swift animal, like a strung bow, bringing all the East with her, and ashy wildness which is the `Gypsy`s only.”⁹ There is a suggestion in this description of powerful energy coiled and ready to strike, a dormant but

⁵<http://revistanautilus.ro/articole/firescul-realismului-magic-vasile-voiculescu/>

⁶<http://www.poeziile.com/autori/Vasile-Voiculescu/proza-lui1569119.php>

⁷ Vasile Voiculescu, *Iubire magică*, Biblioteca pentru toți, București, 2001, p.208, traducerea mea

⁸ G.M. Zamfirescu despre Mădănuț cu dragoste, in *Mădănuț cu dragoste*, Biblioteca pentru toți, București, 2009, p.417, trad. mea

⁹ Arthur Symons, *In Praise of Gypsies*, quoted in Deborah Epstein Nord, *Gypsies and the British Imagination 1807-1930*, Columbia University Press, New York Chichester, West Sussex, 2006, p 159

nonetheless readily apparent erotic aggression. Charles Leland portrays one Gypsy girl as „pantherine, with diabolique charm”, and another „wild beauty” as a „damsel... with devil’s gunpowder in her...of a figure suggestive of leaping hedges; and with...white teeth and burning black eyes, there was a hint of biting, too, about her”¹⁰. Again and again, eyes and teeth are emphasized, as are languorousness and its opposite, passion. Groome quotes a passage from the Illustrated London News that underscores a Gypsy beauty’s „veiled fire”, „serpent-like power”, „filmy languor” and latent magnetism driving to obsession. The white male safely projects sexual desire onto these canvases: the women promise sexual adventure but, still and subordinate, never pose a threat. Wordless and motionless, they possess the erotic power of the odalisque.¹¹

Whether the representation of `Gypsy women` are limited to these static portrayals or more active ones in Western fiction- `Gypsy` characters have been generally invested with deep symbolic meaning. ”They are mostly regarded as forceful images, able to strike the imagination of the reader. The mere mention of the fictional `Gypsy`, however fleeting and incidental, is enough to evoke-as if by some magic virtue- a sense of enchantment and mystery.”¹²

The association of `Gypsy` women with magic is undoubtedly one of the most deeply rooted in the imagination of the non-Gypsies. Ever since they first appeared among populations that had chosen to live a sedentary life, the perception which surrounded `Gypsies` nomadic way of life was likely to result in immediate incrimination of any kind and eventually, accusations of witchcraft. Such allegations served as impressively authoritative and competent strategies of social control and predisposed them to their integration in the ranks of sorcerers, witches and deviants, rebels and trouble-makers.” `Gypsies` itinerary was also frequently connected with some kind of supernatural entities and mysterious events which had occurred in a distant, obscure past. They were thought to be carrying the weight of a terrible curse, to be the descendants of biblical figures, and consequently regarded as the phenomenal materialization of a reality forever lost in the mists of time. As a result of these beliefs, `Gypsies` were rarely seen as a people immersed in the historical present. Rather, they were looked at as relics of a vanished humanity, the living remnants of a separate dimension, remote from the present both in terms of space and time. It was this temporal and spatial displacement that laid the basis for the unrealistic images and features projected in the course of time onto this enigmatic people. Atypical in their outward features and bizarre in their habits and occupations, `Gypsies` gradually came to epitomize, in the `collective conscience`, the source of all the arcane, occult phenomena falling outside the domain of the ordinary.”¹³

The original sin is evident in the `mahala` (slum) or `shatra` (`Gypsy` camp), special locus of the original sin, a place where the obscenity and rawness of the inhabitants’ lifestyle should not surprise us.¹⁴ G.M.Zamfirescu’s novel is one of environment and atmosphere,

¹⁰ idem

¹¹ Deborah Epstein Nord, *Gypsies and the British Imagination 1807-1930*, Columbia University Press, New York Chichester, West Sussex, 2006, p 159

¹² Paola Toninato, *The Rise of Written Literature among the Roma: A study of the Role of Writing in the Current Re-Definition of Romani Identity with Specific Reference to the Italian Case*, University of Warwick, March 2004, p. 88

¹³ Idem, p. 89

¹⁴ G. M. Zamfirescu, *Maidanul cu dragoste*, Biblioteca pentru toți, Jurnalul Național, București, 2009
Prefață de Marius Chivu, p.16

populated with characters as colourful as possible, Safta being the most representative of them, prone to moral promiscuity and primordial sexuality, "permanently mixing the grotesque with the nostalgic, the idyllic with the mystical and the sordid with the pathos, written in the colourful language of the nineteenth century , *The Waste Land of Love* is a tragic and trivial Balkan epic of the periphery, conceived in the melancholy confession of a slum Peter Pan."¹⁵

With Safta and Sakuntala we enter an imaginary museum of images, whether these images are dreams, lies, truths or fictions, these `Gypsy` heroines provide us with a miraculous pathway to the depths of the human soul. The imaginary appears as an immaterial double of the concrete world, reality being constantly projected into the magic, which in turn is projected back into other protagonists' life. They hold a special position in this doubled area, they represent the magician and the magic. The categories of this sphere (witch, charm, spell, hex, related to old beliefs and superstitions, traditions; aim to reveal hidden truths about the subconscious desires of male narrators. The described features are remnants of ancient cults, magic rites pertaining to tradition, many groups believing, not just individuals. The shape and rhythm of magical rites is "eminently transferable and confirmed by public opinion."¹⁶ The magic effect occurs through words, chants, gestures of some occult forces, or spirits. In the view of Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert, the magic act is "any rite which is not part of an organized cult, a private rite, secret, mysterious, tends to cross the threshold of a forbidden rite."¹⁷

The two writers are unique if we consider their unlocking of ancient imaginary aiming at magic, through the thoroughness in the description of the magic act. The rite is depicted from a subjective perspective, in both cases, despite the aura of authenticity given by the first person narration seems to have roots in the fairy tale, as who believes in pieces of bones hidden in the pot which bear the power to change existences? In *The Waste Land of Love (Maidanu cu dragoste)*,

"Moravurile fiind uşoare, ("căci ispita trupului nu ştie carte şi u are lege"), iar bordelurile, la îndemână, mahalaua este erotizată la modul primar şi promiscuu: "se pasionează" şi face adulter, umblă după secrete, cere răzbunare şi trăieşte din plin fiecare scandal. Se colportează bârfe, se ţes intrigi, se plănuiesc răfuieli. Femeile sunt curioase şi iscoditoare, înşală, scornesc şi clevetesc tot timpul ("noi o cunoaştem pe femeie doar de la brâu în jos" spune cineva la un moment dat)ş femeile au superstiţii, unele, mai bătrâne, ştiu descântece, vrăji şi blesteme, iar când se confruntă faţă în faţă, ca pentru a-şi marca teritoriul, şi aruncă oări, batjocuri, se spurcă, ţipă şi se iau de păr."

„The moral laws were lenient ("for the temptations of the body body do not know how to read and do not have a legislation"), and with brothels at hand, the slum is eroticized in a primordial and promiscuous way "it is passionate" and commits adultery, looking for secrets, demanding urgent revenge and lives every scandal to the full. Gossip, intrigue is woven, and repercussions are devised. Women are curious and inquisitive, cheating, backbiting and chattering all the time ("we know the woman only from the waist down," says somebody at a moment in the story) and women have superstitions, some, older, know incantations, spells

¹⁵ Idem, p.17

¹⁶ Marcel Mauss, Henri Hubert, Teoria generală a magiei, Trad. de Ingrid Ilinca şi Silviu Lupescu, Editura Polirom, Iaşi, 1996, p. 26

¹⁷ Idem, p.32

and curses and when confronted face to face, as if to mark their territory, they throw insults, taunts, scream and tear each other's hair.¹⁸

The description of the witch in Sakuntala is so realistic that we actually forget about our reluctance towards any kind of magic, all our suspicions being put to sleep:

”Sătui de zarvă, ne-am depărtat spre fundul văii, unde ne-am dat într-o rînă pe velințe moi, cu Stanciul alături. După noi s-a luat, ca o cățea greoaie, lăbărțată de prea mult făt, cu țite fleascăte atimind aproape de pământ, Kiva, vrăjitoarea laii. Și aici eram dezamăgiți. Ea dezmințea tipul clasic de babă încovrigată pe picioare sfrijite ca fusele. Mă așteptam la un chip de smochină neagră, ponosită, din zbîrciturile căreia să iasă lama unui cosor coclit și să frigă doi ochi răutacioși de viperă, fără pleoape. Kiva, dimpotrivă, era o bălădiră groasă, butucănoasă, cimă, cu fața rotundă slinoasă și pătată ca o lună mîncată de vîrcolaci, dar cu o expresie de bunăvoință și înțelegere omenească. De pe șoldurile revărsate ca niște perne în lături, de pe tirna umflată a pîntecului bardahanos și de pe fundul de băniță al tirtitei, fustele, urcate ca pe niște coviltire, cădeau în cascadă peste picioarele umflate și, curios, părul frumos pieptănat, cu cărare la mijloc, bătea în roșu. Tip de codoașă! Numai ochii o dau de gol. Ochi rotunzi de bufniță care scruteaza umbrele și văd în beznă iar mîinile mici, cu degete delicate și nervoase, îi destăinuiau toate iscusințele”

”Fed up with the commotion, we departed together with Stanciu towards the bottom of the valley, where we came across a body wrapped in soft clothing. Following us, like a cumbersome bitch, from too much foaling, with her flaccid titshanging, Kiva, witch of the black peolpe. And here again I was let down. Her appearance denied the classic type of old hag with scrawny legs curled as spindles. I was expecting a battered face of black fig, from which two mischievous lidless viper eyes should have looked at me. Kiva, by contrast, was a fat old woman, her round face greasy and stained like a moon eaten by werewolves, but showing goodwill and understanding. From her hips the swollen belly poured out like cushions aside,; her skirts like walls of a verandah as if falling in a waterfall fashion, cascades over her swollen legs and curiously, her beautifully combed hair, parted in the middle, with streaks of red hair. Pimp type! Only her eyes gave her away. Her round owl eyes that see in the dark scanning shadows and her small hands, with delicate and nervous fingers, they proved all her dexterity”¹⁹

The readers must admit that they are charmed by the Sakuntala story, charmed by the fact that the narrator is so involved in depicting the witchcraft's multiple facets, that it is possible to believe ourselves to be voyeurs a little bit, waiting, counting with each breath the blows or spits of the old witch, Kiva. Her rough hand shuts the eyelids of the young lover in need of a cure for his suffering heart, her other hand caresses his hair, touching his neck, crown, and temples. The synesthetic reception from the reader's part of this act of magic makes this one true hex.

The style of the authors truly convince. One really believes the murmur of the incantation, in blowing on the cheeks three times, in spitting like angry black cats do, we feel the witches' breath on our face. This is why these two witches are full of life, that is why the lover boy will love even more passionately, he is helped by witchcraft to see and feel the true force of attraction. The witches are key figures as, with their appearance, we step into a fantastic realm of hallucinatory reality. The question arises: is magic dexterity or art?

¹⁸ G. M. Zamfirescu, *Maidanul cu dragoste*, Biblioteca pentru toți, Jurnalul Național, București, 2009
Prefață de Marius Chivu, p.14

¹⁹ Vasile Voiculescu, *Iubire magică*, Biblioteca pentru toți, București, 2001, p178., traducerea mea

Both Kiva and Safta are initiators of love to the narrator, presenting him with a possible avatar of magical beauty: Kiva, in love with Dionis, presents Dionis's alter-ego (the narrator) with a possible younger and more attractive avatar of herself: Sakuntala; Safta, committing adultery with a series of men, introduce the young narrator to her younger self: a seductress of the slums and not only. The amazingly beautiful avatars' appearance is prepared carefully in slight allusions of eroticism in other representations of erotic attraction. Before the anonymous narrator meets the much awaited exotic beauty, in Voiculescu's short story, he is exposed to all kinds of enchanting carnal visions:

„Deși mă uluieră amestecul de bazar pestriț, ițelea scânteietoare de culori, mișuna de pici despuiate, târgul de grumazi descoperiți, sânii goi și slobozi sub pieptarul salbelor galbene, pulpele suvelcate ale fetelor, nurii dezveliți ai femeilor răsturnate pe jos, dansurile dezvățate, pozele nerușinate, căutam totuși să găsec pe cea care vrăjise mințile lui Dionis și nu o aflam. Nu putea fi nici galeșa cu ochii genoși și pântecul armonios de baiaderă, nici nurlia cu trupul de violoncel de abanos, nici arzuia cu sânii durdulii și buturii coapselor neastâmpărate ca niște șerpi, nici almea mlădie de alături, cu umerii bucălați, cu carnea pătinată și sânii patetici, nici nubiana sfruntată ce-și lăfăia țâțele împungace cu sfârcurile boite în rumenele la fel cu buzele. Nici șopârla cu miezul ochilor galben, care se strecurase cu ghiocul pâna la noi, gătită în ilic roșu scurt, de sub care șalele de tuci șlefuit, frumos șănțuite, ca la o torsă antică, lunecau dirdaus amețitor spre rotunzimile buclilor. Nici molateca din față, cu priviri vulpeșe și piepții cărhoși buluciti sus spre gura polcuței, strânsă pe mijloc în copci gata să plesnească și care se marghiolea spre noi alintindu-și boiul pe șoldurile viclene.”

„Although I was flabbergasted by the varied mixture of the colourful bazaar, the brilliant shine of different shades, the crawling naked feet, the fair of uncovered necks, free and naked breasts under yellow necklaces and breastplates, the bare thighs of girls, the charms of undressed women knocked down to the ground, obscene dances, shameless poses, I was still looking to find the one that had put a spell on Dionis and could not find her. It couldn't be the melancholy girls with heavy eyelashes and the belly of a choryphee, nor the gracious one with an ebony cello body, nor the burning girl with plump breasts and thighs restless like serpents, nor the Egyptian dancer-singer with chubby shoulders, with shiny flesh and pathetic breasts nor the plumper Nubian with jumpy tits and nipples like a painting the red of her lips. Nor the lizard with yellow iris that had crept up to us with her shells, dressed up in her red short skirt under which her polished, beautiful thighs, as an ancient torso, slid dizzying to the rotundity of her buttocks. Neither the soft one in the front with foxy eyes and fleshy breasts heaving up towards the mouth, belt on her waist stitched so that it was ready to burst out, while she was pamperingly looking at us patting her cunning hips.”²⁰

In Safta's case, every afternoon, when her loving husband, Gore was away at work, the house became Safta's meeting place with the girls from the slum. Neighbors and wives, young and old, gathered in joyful spree, to drink coffee, to find out the latest gossip or listen, heated and mute, full of lust and squinting from time to time, telling each other stories of sex at night with their husbands or lovers, while Safta, master of ceremony, „sat perched on top of the bed, among the pillows, wearing only a shirt, her flesh rolling away from her bare legs.”²¹

After the unveiling ceremony, any advocate of the happy gang dominated by Safta was obliged -among the comrades in tricks, clown-behaviour and the little coffee secrets weren't allowed- to tell everyone present how many times and how their husbands loved them at

²⁰Vasile Voiculescu, *Iubire magică*, Biblioteca pentru toți, București, 2001, p178., traducerea mea

²¹G. M. Zamfirescu, *Maidanul cu dragoste*, Biblioteca pentru toți, Jurnalul Național, București, 2009, p. 128, my transl.

night- the public giggling and smacking their lips. Discontent with the clumsiness of young wives with their husbands, especially the older women and the 'Gypsy' began to teach the tricks of carnal love to the novices. In case the new ones were simple minded or just did not follow the advice, they"were laid onto the bed and many attitudes were explained to them, while one of the young comrades (...) competent and happy to have an opportunity of extra excitement, sometimes borrowed the rhythmic attitudes of men . (...)

"Novicele, deseori cu sângele aprins inutil în îmbrățișarea ce nu le spusese nimic, plecau aiurite să se ofere, cât mai curând, întâiului întâlnit, șpe maidan sau într-un vagon gol de triaj.(...)Novicea era primită a doua zi în casa țigăncii cu îmbrățișări maternale și poftită la loc de cinste, alături de Safta, să bea cafea din ceașca mare și groasă a gazdei și să răspundă la ultima întrebare."

"The novice, often unnecessarily excited sexually, her blood lit up by the prelude, leaving the house, had sex with any man on the street or in a vacant lot or epty wagon yard. The next day the novice was received in house of the 'Gypsy' woman with maternal hugs full of lust and ostentatively, along with Safta, drank coffee from the host's large coffe cup while she answered all the curious questions."²²

Safta is an expert in love and erotic practices, as in her youth she was a renowned singer of the slums, roaming the city with her band of folk fiddlers. Young, enticing to the eye of partying drunks, always willing to breathe life into herself and others, she passed from hand to hand, and from lap to lap, always smiling, tirelessly employing an arsenal of seduction and reassurance that would stir the senses of any man. Sakuntala-Rada, on the other hand, is a virgin beauty, comparable only to an Indian goddess. She appears for the first time, trampling the meadow, similar to a miniature Indian sacred virgin. Like. The same walk modulated by ancient songs, the same posture in pure forms, the same proud tenderness her oval face and magical eyes framed by her black-bluish hair,

„sânii înfloriți pe negrul liman al pieptului, și mai ales sub borangicul galben al veșmântului, coapsele străvăzute ca două zeițe misterioase, pe umerii gemeni cu chiupul tainic al pântecului."

"her breasts blossoming on the black lagoon of her chest, and most of all, under the yellow silk garment, her thighs as visible as two mysterious goddesses, on the twin shoulders of her dark secretive belly."²³

What is the magic facination surrounding the image of the 'Gypsy' in the eyes of he non-,Gypsy' authors? It is almost impossible to give a precise answer to this question. For certain, the magic of the fictional 'Gypsy may not be easily identified with some specific features, although some physical and material traits have been frequently associated with the belief in some special powers. The magnetic and piercing look of the 'Gypsy' male character, his deep voice, his agile limbs, the dark eyes and the sensual movements of the female 'Gypsy' seem to exert a mysterious, irresistible attraction on the non-,Gypsies' and may lead to disastuos events.

The 'magic characterization' of the 'Gypsy' within the body of non-,Gypsy' literature is so wide and pervasive that the mere attempt to investigate here its endless ramifications would represent an impossible, fruitless undertaking. However, a recurrent pattern that can be easily deduced from these representations consists in using the 'Gypsy' as a repository of some exceptional qualities, ranging from some arcane connetion with the devil to a number of

²²G. M. Zamfirescu, Maidanul cu dragoste, Biblioteca pentru toți, Jurnalul Național, București, 2009, p 139, my transl.

²³Vasile Voiculescu, Iubire magică, Biblioteca pentru toți, București, 2001, p.182, my transl.

occult powers. On the one hand, the ‚Gypsies’ seem to be the guardians of a secret world, the only creatures to have right of access to a mysterious, alternative dimension. The ‚Gypsy’ characters appear to dwell on the threshold between truth and illusion. As for ‚Gypsy’ female characters, they are represented as having divining faculties, as experts in the magic arts. They are frequently depicted as exotic creatures with a diabolic ability to bewitch non-‚Gypsy’ males, who cannot help falling madly in love with them against their will.

The magic of ‚Gypsy’ women

The role played by ‚Gypsy’ female characters in works by non-‚Gypsy’ artists appears to follow a recurrent pattern. In many works, the ‚Gypsy’ is at the centre of some intricate plot, often entailing child stealing, the use of magic or various forms of trickery. ‚Gypsies’ are here perceived as synonymous with ruse, deception and double-dealing: they are ambiguous, mischievous characters by definition. Female figures in particular are portrayed as malicious and treacherous. In addition to hatching evil plots and harbouring hostile feelings against non-‚Gypsies’, they are also employed to give the narration a magical connotation. This is particularly evident in literary works by nineteenth century authors, where the presence of a ‚Gypsy’ female character is generally surrounded by a magical atmosphere, emphasising their erotic nature.

In the two characters analyzed in this article, we can find the same trails of avatars initiating the narrators in the realms of love and: Kiva, in love with Dionis, presents Dionis’s alter-ego (the narrator) with a possible younger and more attractive avatar of herself: Sakuntala; Safta, committing adultery with a series of men, introduce the young narrator to her younger self: a seductress of the slums and not only. The amazingly beautiful avatars’ appearance is prepared carefully in slight allusions of eroticism in other representations of erotic attraction. Before the anonymous narrator meets the much awaited exotic beauty, in Voiculescu’s short story, he is exposed to all kinds of enchanting carnal visions. In Zamfirescu’s story, the reader is given access to a whole world of erotic experience by the famous and infamous Safta

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