Sorina Georgescu

Romanian Literature in the Context of the Rroma Integration Decade: Ioan Budai-Deleanu’s Tieriada – Cantos I and II –

Recommended Citation:
Sorina Georgescu
Hyperion University, Bucharest

Romanian Literature in the Context of the Rroma Integration Decade: Ioan Budai-Deleanu’s Țiganiada – Cantos I and II –

Abstract
A comic-heroic poem, Țiganiada (The Gypsiad) was written by Transylvanian Ioan Budai-Deleanu first in 1800, then in 1812, but published only in 1875. Quite a complex work, it was interpreted in many different ways, from the standardized version of Gypsy caricature to a mixture of Greek and Roman literature, Italian and Spanish Renaissance (Romanian Don Quijote), Deism, comedy of literary works, harsh satire of all world vices, to didactic literature, Romanian folklore, and Enlightenment ideas of liberty and equality. The present study will see the poem as allegory and as a parody of war and will try to define ‘literary blackness’ or ‘literary Gypsyness’ as opposed to ‘literary whiteness’ or ‘literary Romanianness’ in the first two Cantos of the poem, by applying the theories of Toni Morrison (1992), Louise Anne Keating (1995) and Martin Favor (1999). The two Cantos will also be compared with some famous American movies/TV series: M*A*S*H, Love and Death and Forest Gump. My thesis is that Ioan Budai-Deleanu does not make Gypsies as such, he rather sees them as funny human beings, and uses them to laugh at Romanians and, mostly, I would argue, at those people fond of making war.

Keywords: Țiganiada, Gypsy, literary whiteness, literary blackness, parody, war, Romanianness

Introduction: The Cultural and Political Context: ‘Școala Ardeleană’ (‘The Transylvanian School’)¹
For most students of Romanian (literary) history, modernization in the Romanian Principalities usually means France’s powerful influence on Țara Românească and Moldavia, during the 19th century. Much less analyzed by critics, the previous influence of the Catholic Austrian Enlightenment in Transylvania, in the 18th century, gave birth to an intellectual manifestation called ‘Școala Ardeleană’ (‘The Transylvanian School’).

According to Ioan Chindriș, the leading researcher in this area, in his 2001 and 2007 books, respectively, Cultură și societate în contextul Școlii Ardeleene (Culture and Society in the Context of the ‘Transylvanian School’) and Unirea cu Roma și Școala Ardeleană (The Union with Rome and the ‘Transylvanian School’), the 17th century meant superstition and illiteracy for the Orthodox Romanians dominated by Calvinist Hungarians and Lutheran Saxons, turning this ‘School’ into a political, religious, educational and cultural movement.

Thus, politically speaking, we have Supplex Libellum Valachorum (The Petition of Transylvanian Wallachians – 1791), which argued for Romanians’ Latinity and continuity in Transylvania, emphasized the important political personalities and educated figures they had produced, blamed the Calvinist Reform and the imposed Hungarization for their current decline, and, as a conclusion, asked for equality with the other nations in the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. Their petition was, unfortunately, rejected.

Religiously speaking, the Union with Rome meant the modernization of the Church and its alignment with the “European civilized religions” (Chindriș Cultură 230), and the maintainance of the Oriental Church² rituals plus a whole series of religious books and the publication of the

¹ All translations in this paper are mine
² They were and are called today ‘Greek-Catholics’
Catechism paid by the Cardinal. This leads us to the educational side of this ‘School’, which was offered to all religions and ethnicities. It began with twelve students, three of whom were then sent to Rome with scholarships, like in a sort of American-type of expansion in Nicolae Iorga’s view, or like a friendly dialogue instead of subjection, in Ioan Chindriş’s view.

As a mandatory curriculum, they studied Languages, Sciences, and Theology, in Transylvania, and Philosophy, Politics, Natural History, Mathematics, History, Geography, Aesthetics, Philology and how to argue and criticize, at the Propaganda Fide College in Rome and the two Austrian Pázmáneum University and the St. Barbara College.

Catholic influence, as Caius Dobrescu argues in his “Budai-Deleanu şi proiectul european” [Budai-Deleanu and the European Project] (2009), also meant Jesuit influence, which in its turn opposed Protestantism in two different ways: by austerity and rigor, promoting the renaissance of ascetic practices, while on the other hand, it offered the possibility of living a complete and happy earthly life, without compromising the salvation of one’s soul, the program adopted by the ‘Transylvanian School’ and which will be reflected in its major poem: Ţiganiada.

Ioan Budai-Deleanu: Life and Work

Romanian for the Romanians and Roma for the Roma, Ioan Budai-Deleanu was born on the 6th of January, 1760, in Cigmău, in the family of a Greek-Catholic archbishop Solomon Budai and died at Lemberg in 1820. His primary school was in his native village, then he went to Blaj to study at the Greek-Catholic seminary. From this, he was sent to Vienna, to the Faculty of Philosophy – from which he also received his PHD, – and to the St. Barbara College, also in Austria, to study Theology. He was interested in Philology, Magic, Medicine, Law, History, Philosophy, Politics, Theology, Chemistry and Mathematics. He loved Arts and was a man of Letters. He spoke French, German, Italian, Latin, Hungarian, Polish. He loved music. He saw the Bible as both historical source and literary work and he went deeply into the study of classic languages. He became a psalm singer at the Greek- Catholic Church St. Barbara on the 1st of February, 1785. Then he received a job at the Official Court in Lemberg (Lvov) in Galitia in 1787, where he worked intensely as a translator of juridical documents. He wrote both history and poetry. He finished the first version of Ţiganiada in 1800, and its second version in 1812, but did not publish any of them. The first version was edited by

---

3Sate şi preoţii din Ardeal (1902): “Catholics made Romanians see the beginning of an era of freedom and light” (qtd. in Chindriş Cultură 230)
5Current debate: Romanians have always seen Ioan Budai-Deleanu as a Romanian, which is also my own view, while today’s Roma intellectuals see him as a Roma writer, grounding their arguments on his “Epostolie închinătoare: cătră Mitru Perea, vestit cântăreţ!” (“Letter to Bow: to Mitru Perea, Famous Singer”) (where he defines himself and Mitru Perea – the anagrammed name of Petru Maior – as Gypsies) instead of historical facts. Romanian critics, on the other hand, consider this “Letter” a mere figure of speech (Ioan Chindriş, Niculina Iacob), an invented biography, copied from Cervantes: soldier, hostage, mutilated and himself a master in references to manuscripts and his own work – the Renaissance idea of attributing the narrated facts to alleged real and historical sources, its end parodies the projects of the ‘Transylvanian School’ of evoking the national past faithfully (Nicolae Manolescu), a less solemn attitude, a more humane one, than was the case with the classic norm, imaginary letter to Mitru Perea, inspired by Tassoni (Cornel Regman), a fake map, commentators mistook the narrator for the author, there is no proof that the introductory texts were written before the verses (Marius Chivu); Budai-Deleanu invents an imaginary biography (Şerban Cioculescu), et cetera.
Theodor Codrescu in *Buciumul Român* only in 1876-1877. The second, by Gheorghe Cardaș in 1925 and 1928.

As we can notice, Ioan Budai-Deleanu was contemporary with some exceptional events, which are reflected in *Ţiganiada*, the *European Declaration of Human Rights* (1785) among them, according to Valeriu Rusu.

As a writer, critics notice, he was influenced by Homer, Virgil, Tasso, Tassoni, Ariosto, Cervantes, the French Enlightenment (Voltaire). As a scholar, he argued for secularization and ‘decharming’ and supported the Enlightenment, defined as reason, cosmopolitan federalism, and legitimacy for all ethnicities, in a word, Josephinism.

He perceived the emperor as lawfully elected by his people, instead of the Lord’s anointed. Thus, for him, society had to be ruled through laws, as a contract: “The mutual agreement between the people who makes this country and the lawful prince who enforces the law” (Chindriş and Iacob 35). He was an expert in law and politics and “the only one from the ‘Transylvanian School’ who put religion on the same footing with all the other themes treated in comic key, or even in a biting aqua fortis” (Chindriş and Iacob 35).

**Synopsis of the Poem**

Briefly speaking, we have two parallel plans: Vlad the Impaler’s request for the Gypsies to organize themselves in an army and help Romanians fight the Turks, with the promise that he will reward them with freedom (as opposed to slavery), lands and houses, so they turn into normal peasants just like Romanians. Gypsies’fight among them and their journey from one village to another, all with symbolic names, as well as their imagined fight against the Turks, will be parallel with Romanians’ real fight and will be full of comic adventures and stories in the story; the final defeat of Romanians and Gypsies will also be paralleled.

**Previous Interpretations and Current Methodological Approach**

Most of the critics see this poem as a meditation on the human condition, as a political pamphlet where Gypsies stand for the Romanians, and as a comedy, a comedy of literature mostly.

6See Dumitru Vlăduţ ["Proprietate, bunuri şi integrare în opera literară a lui Ioan Budai-Deleanu". *Revista Transilvania*. 2011]; Ion Chindriș and Niculina Iacob [Ioan Budai-Deleanu în mărturii antologice. Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărtii de Știință, 2010] – the effort of building and organizing a society; critique of the major human faults; history as an ocean of blood from which Gypsies are trying to escape; the failed ambitions towards social harmony; life is a journey; being ironic with the hole world; allegory.

7See Dumitru Vlăduţ ["Proprietate, bunuri şi integrare în opera literară a lui Ioan Budai-Deleanu". *Revista Transilvania*. 2011], Marta Petreu, Ovidiu Pecian and Marius Chivu [Ioan Budai-Deleanu – 250. *Ţiganiada azi*. Ed. Irina Petreș. Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărtii de Știință, 2010] – combine fiction and its own critique; turn the chivalrous universe upside-down; ridicule the clergy, the nobility, the scientific technique and the honesty of the Enlightened writings; make magic, witchcraft and the supernatural; make the bookish, the intertextuality and the scholarly subject, carnivalesque fantasy; parody of the divine intervention.

8See Nicolae Manolescu, Ion Urcan, Iulian Boldea, D. Popovich, Cornel Regman, Daniela Petroșel, Ion Pop-Curșeu, Ovidiu Pecian [Ioan Budai-Deleanu – 250. *Ţiganiada azi*. Ed. Irina Petreș. Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărtii de Știință, 2010], Clara Mărgineanu ["Ţiganiada, o lută tragică, zguduită de râs". *Jurnalul Național*. 2011] and Adrian Popescu ["Precursorii spiritului modern (1)". *Ramuri* 2010] – combine fiction and its own critique; turn the chivalrous universe upside-down; ridicule the clergy, the nobility, the scientific technique and the honesty of the Enlightened writings; make magic, witchcraft and the supernatural; make the bookish, the intertextuality and the scholarly subject, carnivalesque fantasy; parody of the divine intervention.
The present study analyzes only the first two Cantos of Țiganada as an allegory of the Romanian people and of people in general, following the definition from the Dictionary of the History of Ideas, quoting Isidore of Seville in the 17th century: “in saying one thing a person conveys or understands something else” (Fletcher 42) and as a parody of war.

Therefore, I will mainly follow African American Toni Morrison’s concepts of ‘literary whiteness’ and ‘literary blackness’ as they are defined in her Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination (1992), and as later developed by Anne Louise Keating in “Interrogating Whiteness”, (De)Constructing Race (1995) and Martin Favor’s 1999 Authentic Blackness:: The Folk in The New Negro Renaissance.

Analysis

As I have just mentioned, one of the main purposes of this study is to try and define ‘literary blackness’ or, perhaps, ‘literary Gypsyness’, as opposed to, or, as a parallel to, ‘literary whiteness’, or, perhaps, ‘literary Romanianess’, in Ioan Budai-Deleanu’s first two Cantos.

Besides the already discussed context of the ‘Transylvanian School’, we still have to talk about the image Gypsies had in the Romanian and the Western and Eastern-European imaginary, from the Middle Ages to the end of the 18th century, when the poem was written.

From the Romanian perspective, all we can talk about before, or during the poet’s time is not literature, but folklore, which he also declares as his main Romanian source of inspiration. So, which was Gypsies’ image in the Romanian mind? They were stupid, thieves, lazy and hungry⁹, a perfect match for a black in Ann Louise Keating’s view, for instance. They were muzicians⁸, fortune-tellers, cowards¹¹, cooks, they “killed twelve dragons”, they “hammered well”, they “killed a sow with [his] sledge” and they were poets by inclination¹³. And there are examples of proverbs with Gypsies: “to get drowned as the Gypsy when/before reaching the shore” (or “to lose by a neck”); “He doesn’t know what the suffron is/ as the Gypsy doesn’t know what the sofa is”; “From a Gypsy mare, (you cannot make) a noble horse!”¹⁴.

Negative was their image in Europe, since the Middle Ages. Their skin was considered anti-Christian, their culture and life-style were unacceptable. Thus, even if not enslaved there, they were rejected by the Church, restricted to their tents by trade guilds, or they were extra-charged. Laws were given against them in England, Sweden, Finland, France, Holland, Denmark, Switzerland, where “Gypsy hunts” were fashionable in the 16th century, in Hungary, Moravia, Bohemia, Spain and Norway, where they also had one ear cut and were sterilized¹⁵.

In this national and international cultural, legislative and folkloric context, Ioan Budai-Deleanu starts by defining ‘literary Gypsyness’ with a rather negative, stereotypical image, an ‘acting Gypsy’, or ‘acting black’, as Ann Louise Keating or Martin Favor would have it. They are “brave” (Deleanu 44), but they “quarrel” (Deleanu 44), they cannot stand working together. They are “bastard crowds” (Deleanu 46) and look like “crows” (Deleanu 46), an association also explainable through the Romanian folklore. According to Simeon Florea Marian, in his 1883 Ornitologia populară română¹⁶:

---

⁹Gh. D. Speranzia: Anecdote populare (1892); Gheorghe I Tăzlănanu: Comorea neamului. Snoave și basme (1943); Dr. M. Gaster Literatura populară (1883)
¹⁰Ion Cazan: Literatura populară (1947); Grigore Tocilescu: Materialuri folcloristice (1981)
¹¹Ion Cazan: Literatura populară (1947)
¹²Mihai Eminescu: Opere complete – I – Literatura populară (1902)
¹³Grigore Tocilescu şi Christea Tapu: Materialuri folcloristice (1981); Grigore Tocilescu: Materialuri folcloristice
¹⁴“Te îneci ca ţiganul la mal”, “Nu ştie ce e sofranu/ ca ţiganu divanu”, “Din iapă ţigănească, cal boiereci!”
¹⁵See Gypsies: A Persecuted Race, William A Duna - 1985
¹⁶Romanian Folkloric Ornithology
Romanians often call the black people ‘crow’... But they mostly call Gypsies by this name, because the pellicle on their cheek is as dark as the feathers of the raven, then because, as the crows are very brazen and bold, that you drive them away on the left and they come back from the right side, Gypsies do the same, no matter how far you drive them away from your home, and no matter how much you would try to get rid of them, they still jump down your throat and ask you for the moon (Marian 32).

And:

Romanians have also invented a lot of anecdotes, a lot of funny stories, where they say Gypsies don’t even want to say the name of these birds so as not to call themselves names and make fun of themselves (Marian 33).

In Ţiganiada, they are also “scoundrel” (Deleanu 48), but they are holding a council, they are deliberating “in pleasant ways” (Deleanu 48) how to give up their traditional life-style, perceived, as we have seen, as contrary to the established norm in both mainstream Romania and Europe, and turn into organized people, just like Romanians (although the poet is Transylvanian, the action takes place in 15th century Țara Românească). That is, they are ‘acting white’, or Romanian-like, in response to Romanian-Muntenian ruler Vlad the Impaller’s decision to make them help him fight the Turks, as soldiers, and to his promise-reward to free them from slavery and give them lands. ‘Acting white/Romanian’ or aspiring to become white/Romanian is probably why they start their journey to the battlefront from Alba, i.e “The White”, which is, at least theoretically speaking, not their skin color, but that of Romanians.

Stereotypically speaking, they are “impatient” (Deleanu 56), like “any stupid people” (Deleanu 56) and, even if they express their opinions each at his turn, nothing can actually be decided. They sleep like “frogs in a pool” (Deleanu 61), one above the other, in “small black tents” (Deleanu 61). This unpleasant image is actually meant to support a first piece of advice given by the poet to the Romanian people:

...whose grandsons are now covered
with disgrace
in our country; and we will share their
fate in others’ view,
if we do not care for our own country (Deleanu 63).

They are nomads, they are the lowest of the low, they are mostly naked, they beg and steal. They are thus, from the first Canto, the prototype of the anti-hero in this heroic poem. Still, Vlad Vodă, the ‘true’ hero, needs them, or at least he pretends to, to help his army in a battle. This might be seen, in my view, as a literary subversion of a typical heroic poem; or as the need of the white/master of his servant/slave in order to define himself as the better character, just like in the American literature. And/or, as a third option, as a parody to a war in general, an aspect I will further analyze. Thus, he calls them “brave-Egyptian remains” (Deleanu 71), pharaohs, heroes, “proud Gypsy colony” (Deleanu 71) and advises them to advance to the status of Romanian peasants, a clear echo of Maria Tereza’s policies of sedentarizing Gypsies and, of course, again, the accepted standard of whiteness /Romanianess/civilization.

From now on, Gypsies are divided into groups, according to their skills and crafts. The stereotypical division and description are enriched by the original idea of turning groups into ‘regiments’, with weapons, flags and musical instruments and make them parade in front of Vlad Vodă, a complete caricature of real armies. It is also a kind of catalogue of names and descriptions in the spirit of the traditional epic poems.
They are sieve makers and house servants, led by Goleman, with pitch forks and tent poles with iron at their top, with a “white – tailed foal leather caught on a pole” (Deleanu 62) plus red spots on the leather and the wooden circle of the sieve upward, as the flag, and they are “playing a goat bellows bagpipe, beating the drum in unpierced sieves” (Deleanu 62). They are silversmiths, part of them well-armed and organized, led by young Parpangel, part of them naked, their skin “glittering black like a crow” (Deleanu 63), with copper maces and long knives, they are tall and thick-boned, their hair a mess, their beards tousled; they wear large or short, stripping clothes, with no sleeves and broken aback; their flag, a silver crow with spreading feathers and golden wings, their music, jew’s harps and bronze bells. They are boilermakers, led by the wise Drăghici, with caps, smoked beards, riding; their arms, hammers, their flag, a copper tray; their music, a roaring clarion and a boiler. They are blacksmiths with sledges and heymakings, and they are three hundred, a selected infantry; they sell scythes, knives, scissors, hanbecks, they have no money; their flag, a steel sparkling pie pan hanging on a large spit; their music, bells and cymbals. They are spoon makers, led by Neagul, with axes, well-dressed, with shaved beards; they mean business, they whistle and have a shovel as their flag. They are goldsmiths, led by Tandaler, the most select group, a group who doesn’t care a bit about Vlad Vodă; they are strong, their arms, long spears, their flag, a golden spear with silver butterflies; their music, a well-organized orchestra with lutes. Finally, the last group, the wandering Gypsies, the most detested by Romanians, and by some of the other groups, too. These make thick, deorganized lines, eat in vane, eat corpses; their women are naked or half naked, their arms, clubs and mallets; their flag, a rag hanging on a pole, their music, rearing horns and loud screamings. They are the group who will finally destroy all the others, under their own leader, Corcodel.

As we can see, it is actually a lifestyle turned into a caricatured army, with no black flag, the crows are white or yellowish, the rest of the colors are brown and red, even if Gypsy signs are everywhere. A unique way of picturing Gypsies in Romanian literature before and since then, and a complete mockery of armies in general at the same time. Let us just think for a moment at contemporary movie-parodies or book-parodies on war, and, for the time being, at such characters as Captain Hawkeye Pierce and Captain Trapper McIntyre from MASH 4077 (1970), coming for the morning military ceremony dressed in night gowns, while Caporal Maxwell Klinger, from the same movie, dressed like a woman.

Although Gypsies seem prepared and willing to go to war, their antiheroism means their only motivation is food and rest, until the apparently absurd requests to Vlad Vodă: to rest three times each time and to receive a shortened distance between the start and the finish localities plus guards to protect them. A sign of total absurdity and cowardness, in total agreement with the Gypsy stereotype. And yet, at the same time, a sign of fear, only natural in a war, and an absurdity as absurd as the idea of the war itself.

Let us now think at Woody Allen’s own character in Love and Death – his 1985 movie about the Napoleonic Wars in Russia – the shortest and most unprepared Russian soldier, the only one who finds no motivation in fight and no courage therefore:

Sonja: Boris, you can’t be serious, you’re talking about Mother Russia.
Boris: She’s not my mother. My mother’s standing right here, and she’s not gonna let her youngest baby get shrapnel in his gums.
Mother: He’ll go and he’ll fight, and I hope they will put him in the front lines.
Boris: Thanks a lot, Mom. My mother, folks.
......
Drill Sergeant: You want a dishonorable discharge?
Boris: Yes sir, either that or a furlough.

And:

Sergeant: If they kill more Russians, they win. If we kill more Frenchmen, we win.
Boris: What do we win?
Sergeant: Imagine your loved ones conquered by Napoleon and forced to live under French rule.
Do you want them to eat that rich food and those heavy sauces?
Soldiers: No...!
Sergeant: Do you want them to have soufflé every meal and croissant?

The poet deals, apparently, with a patriotic war, but, let us remember that he is also writing the poem during the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815), and he might not have loved these wars at all. Thus, Gypsies choose to place the food in front of them so they have a reason to go further. They decide to arm themselves properly and/or rather run away if attacked. Another apparent proof of cowardice, which, however, reminds us of a Romanian famous saying “Running away is shameful but healthy”, or of one piece of advice from Forest Gump: Forest Gump’s girlfriend to Forest – “Run, Forest, run!” Or, again, about Love and Death:

Sonja: Boris, you’re a coward!
Boris: Yes, but I’m a militant coward.
Sonja: What are you suggesting, passive resistance?
Boris: No, I’m suggesting active fleeing.

The Gypsy anti-heroic vision of war continues with, one might argue, the most coward idea of all the poem, that of bending and begging for mercy from the stronger enemy if the runaway fails, and fight only with the weaker enemy if previous solutions fail. Of course, both bending and begging for mercy perfectly fit Gypsiness in its negative stereotype. Still, at a closer look, one may find that it is a natural human instinct to try and avoid and make peace with a taller, bigger, therefore stronger ‘enemy’ and to feel much more prepared to quarrel if not exactly fight, a smaller, shorter, thinner, therefore, weaker ‘enemy’, as “The Alpha Male” experiment, broadcast on the National Geographic on the 26th of April, 2013, shows. Then, one should consider these ‘Gypsy’ thoughts as meant to introduce Ioan Budai- Deleanu’s real, in my view, opinion of wars and the lives thus wasted:

That is, we should to the stronger
Bent and beg for mercy
(If we cannot escape running away)
And when fiercely attacked
By a weaker crowd
Then we should fight them.

But only if it was impossible for us
To escape and make good peace with them.....
Because, on my fair [judgment],
We only have one life,
That if you lose it once with no purpose,
You can’t find it again, if you go round
the world (Deleanu 83)
[....]

....but who,
Is such a crazy man,
To throw himself into the fire alive, and
In his right mind to really want to die!
Therefore he is crazy who
Wakes up and prepares to make war
On those miles way,
Whom he has never seen before,
Then he kills and destroys.
Those who have never harmed him (Deleanu 84).

Therefore, as we can see, war is insanity and to fight-attack those whom you don’t even know is the biggest injustice of all. Let us now see how some real soldiers saw the wars they were sent to fight as both parody and tragedy in Ruth A.W Lahiti’s article “Gesturing Beyond the Frame: Transnational Trauma and US War Fiction” (2012) and in Graham Seal’s book The Soldiers’Press: Trench Journalism in the First World War (2013).

For Ruth Lahiti, the book under scrutiny is a book about the American War in Vietnam, called The Things They Carried, for whose analysis she uses the concepts of American trauma, American guilt, parody, imitation and mimicry. Quoting from Kurt Vonnegut’s Slaughterhouse-Five, she gives quite a tragic definition of war: “a duty-dance with death” (Lahiti 8). What she sees as both parody and “American anxiety about the war” (Lahiti 8) at the same time, in The Things They Carried is, I think, a good parallel to our unenthusiastic and fearful Gypsy ‘soldiers’: “The American soldiers of the Alpha Company, young men unprepared for the action of war, keep fear at bay in the field by acting like the movie stars that they have seen in war films and westerns” (Lahiti 8). Analyzing their gestures, Lahiti concludes that they “stage scenes where the authority of the American military discourse comes into friction with those material realities that it cannot contain” (8).

Real war tragism is softened and moked in the trench press, by soldiers, Graham Seal argues, in order to “endure the palpable insanity to which they were consigned by forces beyond their control” (ix). Humor was, as he argues quoting Martin Taylor, “one of the few means of imposing order on an otherwise disordered existence, especially after faith in glory and patriotism had disappeared” (Tayhlor qtd. in Seal ix), humor that is, “in the face of official deception, petty regulations, physical discomfort, mental exhaustion and the ever-present threat of death” (Seal ix). Satire and cynicism were soldiers’ prevailing mood, accompanied by comradeship, complaint, rumor and superstition, all of them expressed in stereotypes, verses, cartoons and stories. The enemy was seen both as “intent on imposing ‘kultur’ on the rest of Europe” (Seal x) and/or, as in the case of our Gypsies, “as common soldiers suffering the same privations as the Tommy, the Digger and the Poilu” (Seal x). Just the same, trench soldiers’ only wish was to “survive to see their loved ones again and return to the normality of civilian peaceful life” (Seal x), and “held much of the mainstream press and their often blatant propagandist intentions” (Seal x) in “profound contempt” (Seal xi) 17.

Let us now see how Ioan Budai-Deleanu’s Gypsies are holding council again to decide the best way to fight or to “keep fear at bay in the field”, as Ruth Lahiti would put it, by imitating and/or deconstructing famous military techniques valid at the time of writing the poem.

According to young Boroşmândru, what they first need are good weapons, and each of them should be all dressed in iron, from head to feet, so that none of them will fear being cut or shoot, or killed, but will be able to behave bravely, as armor-clad warriors do. But, they should not fight with only one hand, they should all have a good sword in the right hand and a spear in the left hand, to sting the enemy with the spear and cut him with the sword. Then, they also need a rope chain to drag the enemy to the Gypsy camp. A legitimate objection to this solution comes from one of the footnote characters, “Cocon Erudiţian” 18, who recognizes in the Persian fights against the Greeks

---

17.“We will continue to die. Not because of the propaganda you feed us; not in obedience to the orders our officers need to give us and not because of the nonsense about death and glory penned by the press. We will suffer as a comradeship only through a negotiated transaction in which our sacrifice is carried out on our terms, and in our terms, as presented in the pages of these public communications. You will tolerate these expressions of the way things are for us and as we wish to present them – to ourselves, to you and to all we hold dear – in return for our willingness to serve until you, holders of the power, find a way to stop this insanity and return us to our homes” (Seal x).

18 “Mr. Learned”
some elements like the chains, but he says about the armors: “it wouldn’t be such a bad thing, but it would only mean trouble for the soldier, because people dressed like that wouldn’t be able even to move” (Deleanu 89).

According to Dondul, the spoon maker, what they need is to dig deep holes for the Turks to fall in like wolves going to hunt. They should cover the holes with leafage, straws and twigs, a Tartarian way of defending themselves this time, according to the same Erudițian, and a very Romanian one later, I would argue, if we think of famous Capra cu trei iezi19 (The Goat and Her Three Kids) story and the shegoat’s way of catching/punishing the bad wolf.

Of course, as the leit-motif of this poem, the council breaks when another Gypsy announces them that Parpangel’s girlfriend, Romica, has been kidnapped, a fight starts because of her and Parpangel, devastated, goes to find and rescue her, just like in romance stories. An opportunity for the author to open a parenthesis, that is, to start another story in this story and to show the absurdity of quarrels, besides that of the War as such.

Conclusion

Gypsies are seen here as normal human beings, even if, apparently, only negatively stereotyped, by our Transylvanian poet. They are defined by antiheroic and at the same time, I would argue, by logic, rational, even just attitudes when it comes down to go to war. War, on the other hand, is nothing but absurdity. Whether we define it as the battlefield or as a domestic quarrel.

---

19 Ion Creangă, 1875
Sorina Georgescu, “Romanian Literature in the Context of the Rroma Integration Decade: Ioan Budai Deleanu’s Țiganiada – Cantos I and II”. Multiculturalism and/or Transculturalism (Part II).

Works Cited:


Author
Sorina GEORGESCU is Ph.D.student at the University of Bucharest, with a thesis on slavery and abolitionism in America and Romania. She is a Lecturer at the Faculty of Journalism at the Hyperion University, where she teaches English. She also teaches English for the Faculties of Physics and Mathematics at the same University. She published in English and Romanian, on themes related to multiculturalism, American and Romanian literature and culture, history, national myths, racism, Ethnic Studies. She is a member of the “Romanian American Studies Association” (RAAS), and of the “European American Studies Association” (EAAS). Currently, she is editorial-assistant at HyperCultura.

Contact: sorinamaria21@gmail.com