Mutual Images of Romanians and Hungarians in Proverbs Collected in the Nineteenth Century

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Abstract: This article analyzes Romanian and Hungarian proverbs collected in the nineteenth century that convey images of the Other. These were published mostly in the masive collections of proverbs, sayings, and riddles edited by András Dugonics, Ede Margalits, and Iuliu Zanne. Proverbs speak first of all about the differences between "us" and "them," about the negative traits of those around us, by which we identify ourselves and which highlight our superiority and "normality" in relation to dangerous and peculiar strangers around us. Peasants did not reflect on their neighbours in order to outline an objective portrait of them, but to display and reinforce their own cultural features, setting themselves apart from the strangers surrounding them. For this reason, they usually mocked and did not praise the Other. Mockery and ridicule were much more common than positive assessments, regardless of whether the relations between the two communities were good or bad. In this general framework, the popular images of the two peasant communities were agreeable and conveyed a sense of closeness and familiarity rather than a high degree of otherness, as was the case with the imagological relationships maintained with the Gypsies or the Jews.

Keywords: Romanians, Hungarians, proverbs, nineteenth century, historical imagology

Abstract: Acest articol analizează proverbe româneşti şi maghiare culese în secolul al XIX-lea care transmit imagini ale celuilalt. Acestea au fost publicate în mare parte în colecțiile masive de proverbe, zicători şi ghicitori editate de András Dugonics, Ede Margalits şi Iuliu Zanne. Proverbele vorbesc în primul rând despre diferențele dintre „noi" şi „ei", despre trăsăturile negative ale celor

din jurul nostru, prin care ne identificăm şi care ne evidenţiază superioritatea şi „normalitatea" în raport cu străinii periculoşi şi ciudaţi din jurul nostru. Ţăranii nu reflectau asupra vecinilor lor pentru a contura un portret obiectiv al acestora, ci pentru a-şi etala şi întări propriile trăsături culturale, deosebindu-se de străinii din jurul lor. Din acest motiv, de obicei i-au batjocorit şi nu l-au lăudat pe Celălalt. Batjocura şi ridicolul erau mult mai frecvente decât aprecierile pozitive, indiferent dacă relaţiile dintre cele două comunităţi erau bune sau rele. În acest cadru general, imaginile populare ale celor două comunităţi ţărăneşti erau agreabile şi transmiteau un sentiment de apropiere şi familiaritate mai degrabă decât un grad ridicat de alteritate, aşa cum era cazul relaţiilor imagologice întreţinute cu ţiganii sau cu evreii.

Cuvinte-cheie: Români, Maghiari, proverbe, secolul al XIX-lea, imagologie istorică

Folklore sources express the mentality of entire communities, because, as they say, they spread information from mouth to mouth, disseminating it over large spaces and over long periods. But in the latter regard, historians are very cautious. The ballad *Mioriţa*, for example, certainly reflects older conceptions, states of affairs, and beliefs, which probably date back to the Middle Ages. But how old are they? The only answer that historians can give to this question, if they are to act like genuine scientists, is that they predate the nineteenth century, when the ballad was collected by folklorists and polished by Vasile Alecsandri. Other than that, we can resort to different approximations, based on arguments, but it would not be right to push it into the mists of the ages at all costs. It is true that folklore persists for a long time and that it conveys archaic messages. But at the same time it is subject to constant change, in keeping with historical developments.

To capture how Romanians and Hungarians saw each other, at the level of traditional culture, I have resorted to a series of folklore species that explicitly convey images of the Other: proverbs, sayings, and riddles. In fairy tales and ballads, references to other ethnicities or peoples are quite rare and veiled, camouflaged among messages of a different type. Proverbs, on the other hand, tend to define something clearly, sharply, and sententiously, and to briefly convey a general truth, which synthesises the life experience of society—including on the topic that concerns us here.

Regarding the dating and chronological framing of ethnic stereotypes entrenched in popular sayings, given that they were collected and published in the nineteenth century and taking into account the

methodological cautiousness I spoke of above, I preferred to approach them as a preamble to the modern era. Undoubtedly, the proverbs under discussion, most of which sound very traditional and authentic, were not born the day before they were collected. But it would be difficult to say how far back in time they go. What we can say with certainty is that they represent an imagological baggage that *comes* from the medieval period and with which the Romanians and Hungarians stepped into the modern era, in the eighteenth-nineteenth centuries.

Moreover, if other imagological sources concerned mainly the images circulated by a small elite, in educated milieus, popular sayings belonged primarily to the peasants, those who made up the majority of the population, among both Romanians and Hungarians. In this regard, however, readers should be forewarned that despite widespread prejudices, folklore should not be seen as an area impervious to influences coming from high culture. Although it expresses the peasants' mental universe, popular culture always communicates with scholarly culture, with the discourse of the Church, of the political powerholders or of the noble elite.

The pig, the goat and Oláh Géci's bagpipe

I will start with an analysis of Hungarian sayings about Romanians. The first important collection of such texts, compiled by Dugonics András, dates from 1820,[1] but the most comprehensive collection was published by Margalits Ede in 1896.[2] It contains over 25,000 sayings and proverbs, including all the items published in previous anthologies, some (not very many) having been collected as early as the sixteenth-eighteenth centuries.

The sub-entry "oláh" comprises about 20 Hungarian sayings referring to Romanians, but the latter's ethnonym (only in this form) occurs almost 100 times in the work, most of the time in repetitive versions of the same proverbs. We can collate this sample with the 23 Hungarian sayings about Romanians listed by Iuliu Zanne,[3] the author of a collection of Romanian proverbs similar to that compiled by Margalits.

Comparing the number of sayings about Romanians with the number of those about other peoples, we can get a fairly good estimate of

[1] András Dugonics (ed.), *Magyar példabeszédek és jeles mondások*, I (Szeged: Grünn Orbán, 1820).

[2] Ede Margalits (ed.), *Magyar közmondások és közmondásszerü szólások* (Budapest: Kókai Lajos, 1896).

[3] Iuliu A. Zanne, (ed.), *Proverbele românilor din România, Barasabia, Bucovina, Ungaria, Istria și Macedonia*, VI (București: Socec, 1901), 280-281.

the Romanians' imagological importance in the eyes of Hungarians. In Margalits's collection, while Romanians appear 98 times, Gypsies are mentioned 550 times, Germans 292 times, Jews 261 times, Slovaks 198 times, and Turks 183 times. Only Serbs appear even less often than Romanians, with under 20 occurrences, and Russians are featured only in a few cases. This ranking approximates very well both the notoriety and number of contacts, and the extent of differences or the degree of otherness. Proverbs speak first of all about the differences between "us" and "them," about the negative traits of those around us, by which we identify ourselves and which highlight our superiority and "normality" in relation to dangerous and peculiar strangers around us.

The most different and, therefore, the ones who had the worst image were the Gypsies. Lagging not far behind were the Jews. These were the most vilified ethnic groups by the Hungarians. Germans also received special imagological attention (quantitatively they ranked second), this time as a category demonised for its dominant political status or for some negative traits identified with urban life. Given that most sayings about other peoples are depreciating, the fact that Hungarians did not create many proverbs about Romanians shows that they did not hate and despise them as much, especially among the masses, as the Romanians were tempted to believe. The belief that Hungarians harboured ill feelings towards Romanians is primarily a Romanian stereotype about Hungarians, often refuted by situations such as this one.

Proverbs about Romanians outline the image of a nation of peasants, rather primitive if we compare them with the Hungarian peasantry. They are thus depicted from the perspective of a community that is rural too but enjoys a higher standard of civilisation.

Romanians always wear belts around the waist, opanci squeeze their feet, and their carts creak. Reference is often made to the swelling bagpipes they keep playing (an instrument also attributed to the Serbs), sometimes to the "Romanian cornmeal" or to vinegar, which is also identified with their ethnicity.[4] Romanian vinegar is so strong that it "kills even the mortal sin in a Wallachian."[5] Romanians are frequently associated with their animals: the ox, which Wallachians drive and force to work, or the goat, which is taken to the fair, and above all the pig ("the Romanian pig"), which grunts in the wheat field—a hint at the negligence of Wallachian peasants, who allow their livestock to graze in their

[4] Margalits, *Magyar közmondások*, 585-586; Zanne, *Proverbele*, 280-281.
[5] Dugonics, *Magyar példabeszédek*, 97.

neighbours' fields. The Romanian is inseparable from his pig and "he must be a dog if he doesn't have a pig."[6]

All these things, which may sound suspicious in the ears of a city dweller, do not actually contain anything special or pejorative. They fall within the scope of ordinary peasant banter. This is how the peasants would portray their neighbours, anywhere in the world.

Other sayings go further and even if they do not demonise the Romanian peasant, they present him as a fool, a trait associated with his rudimentary character, mentioned above. "Oláh Géci" is the name generically assigned to this lovable fool, who "enjoys his half-eye."[7] At other times, his female counterpart, "Oláh Jutka," "enjoys her red slipper." To give another, generic example, anyone could enjoy "a Wallachian bagpiper standing on every toe of their feet." In one case, the Romanian peasant is portrayed as a *trickster* who takes his goat to the fair to sell it, but because its skin is worn off, he pretends that the goat's hair has grown on the inside and keeps the animal quite warm (hence the saying: "His hair grows on the inside, like the Romanian goat's.")[8] Even in this situation, the Romanian's ruse is more likely to amuse than to impress us with its ingenuity. Because of this, such poses denote either neutrality or benign irony.

But if we take another step in examining these attitudes towards Romanians, we will come across a trait that is more clearly outlined. Given that the Romanian peasant is so simple, dumb and uncouth, one could naturally assume that he has no brains. "Green horses and smart Romanians" or "green horses, smart Romanians and kind mother-in-laws"—there are no such things on the face of the Earth![9] It is true that, elsewhere, the Romanians' place is taken by Serbs or Russians, for it is just as difficult to find "a Lutheran Gypsy, a funny Calvinist or a bright Russian."[10] The fact that the Hungarians' irony can also be directed against their fellow Reformed countrymen tones down its interethnic jabs.

The stereotype of the Romanian fool is illustrated even more convincingly, with an even more personalised reference, by the story of

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[6] Margalits, *Magyar közmondások*, 585.

[7] I have not been able to identify the origin of this ethnic nickname, which may have a connection with the name of Géczi (Ghyczy) János, Governor of Transylvania at the end of the sixteenth century, a nobleman of Romanian origin according to the authors of the petition *Supplex Libellus Valachorum* (1791). It might as well be derived from a common name, "Ghiță the Wallachian".

[8] Dugonics, *Magyar példabeszédek*, 210.

[9] Margalits, *Magyar közmondások*, 586; Zanne, *Proverbele*, 280.

[10] Margalits, *Magyar közmondások*, 129.

Bedeu forest. The Romanians from a Bihar village, distressed that a flock of crows had settled in their forest, cut down all the trees lest they should be eaten by the crows. That is why it is said that mindless people "cut down the forest of Bedeu."[11]

But all these sayings and anecdotes primarily sanction "human stupidity" in general, while "Romanian stupidity" is seen as a particular instance of it. Therefore, they cannot be considered as expressions of a Hungarian sense of superiority that is very specific or out of the ordinary, as long as most nations portray their neighbours in similar ways and make jokes about the stupidity attributed to them. For Romanians, for example, the preferred target in this regard is Bulgarians.[12]

More explicit ethnic values and images can be found in proverbs that resort to direct comparisons between the two peoples. The saying "Hungarian ox, German dog, Wallachian pig" might introduce such a parallel, but it does not seem to be directed against anyone in particular, considering that none of the three animal poses is very flattering. The association of the Wallachian with the pig, which I have also encountered in other sayings, does not seem to suggest the filth of the Romanian, since this is just a characteristic aspect of his peasant life. Dugonics András, who collected this saying, offers us the possibility of an ambivalent interpretation, in the accompanying note: "it has two meanings: it shows either the favourite animal of each of these three peoples, or the animal with which they can be likened." In another note, however, he settles on the former alternative: "the Hungarians have the most beautiful oxen, the Germans the most beautiful dogs, and the Romanians the best pigs."[13]

A rhymed saying, collected by Szirmay Antál in 1805 and which can finally be aligned with the nationalist vision that attributes to Hungarians the tendency to dominate the nations around them, sounds as follows: "May the Lord bless us with all that is best,/ And may the Wallachian, the German, and the Slovak serve the Hungarian without rest!"[14]

Szirmay was a scholar and county clerk, so the folk saying he collected could be influenced by the noble mentality and political ideology of the well-educated Hungarian classes. On the other hand, the adage above also sounded quite good, in whatever language, from the peasants' perspective, because the popular view was strongly imbued with social egotism: it would not be such a bad idea to dance a czárdás on the backs of others and to have all the nations around serving us!

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[11] Dugonics, *Magyar példabeszédek*, 127.
[12] Zanne 1901, *Proverbele*, *sub-entry*.
[13] Dugonics, *Magyar példabeszédek*, 285.
[14] Margalits, *Magyar közmondások*, 585.

This unleashed a streak of negative, hostile ethnic images, sometimes visibly fuelled by people in highly educated milieus. The following saying is included in an 1851 collection, published by Erdélyi János: "Let the Wallachian do, let the Hungarian promise."[15] It is not clear to what extent it expresses a peasant view, in the sense of conveying the social egotism mentioned above (the peasant can also be cruel and push slander into cynicism), or whether it is influenced by the national confrontation climate from the aftermath of the 1848 revolution. In any case, the similarity with a French quip, applied in an exclusively social sphere, is surprising: *promettre c'est noble, tenir c'est bourgeois*.

A harsh comparison from an imagological perspective is implicit in the statement "worse than the Wallachian Gypsy."[16] Although the deprecatory element of the comparison is not the Wallachian in this case, but the Gypsy, the association between them reinforces the negative perspective, in both senses. As seen above, being a Gypsy fared worst in the Hungarians' ranking of ethnic others. But there was something even worse, that is, being a Romanian Gypsy!

As a result, "the only good Wallachian was a roasted one, but let the devil gobble them all up!"[17] The main negative trait attributed to the Romanians in the Hungarian folk imagology, which was also featured in the chancellery documents of the Middle Ages, is related to their presumed violent character, which takes mainly the form of revenge. "Romanian blood boils over in him" and "Romanians never forget" are two sayings that highlight this attribute.[18] Dugonics comments in a note that "one bad trait of the Wallachian is that he crawls up stealthily until he does you in."[19]

The idea that Romanians have a passive-aggressive behaviour, that they are oppressed and can suffer in silence for a long time before snapping into a bloody outpour of vengeance made a spectacular career at the end of the twentieth century. During this period, it underpinned both the Hungarians' view of Romanians and the Romanians' self-image, encapsulated in the phrase "polenta does not explode." We have already seen that Hungarians associated Romanians with cornmeal, their pastoral

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[15] János Erdélyi (ed.), *Magyar közmondások könyve* (Pest: Kozma Vazul, 1851), 309.

[16] Margalits, *Magyar közmondások*, 586. Zanne 1901, *Proverbele*, 281 translates the proverb as follows: "Romanians are worse than Gypsies." The translation (which probably belongs to one of the folklorist's collaborators) emphasises the pejorative character of the saying but is incorrect.

[17] Margalits, *Magyar közmondások*, 585.

[18] Zanne 1901, *Proverbele*, 280-281.

[19] Dugonics, *Magyar példabeszédek*, 97.

food, with oppression and revenge. This expression tied the markers of the Romanians' image into a trope expressing what was deemed to be an essential truth. Romanians often defined themselves by referring to images and clichés that were first wielded in the Hungarian environment.

Returning to the proverbs gathered by Hungarian folklorists, we should note that their hostility is limited to the characteristics outlined above. Some of these seem influenced by the prejudices of the elite culture, others by the political-national confrontations of the nineteenth century. For example, in the collection compiled by Margalits I have not encountered the phrase "Romanians never forget," mentioned by Iuliu Zanne, but it is frequently used by Hungarian authors of historical or literary writings.

The Romanian peasants are sometimes a little hilarious and sometimes a little violent and vindictive—all these aspects being associated with their rudimentary livelihood. At other times, they are pitied by the Hungarians. Destitute, Romanians will eat crab pears, and instead of laughing, they always cry. Even St. Paul forsook the Romanians. "Poor Wallachian peasants say that if the sword breaks, then they will get beaten with the hammer."[20] Not least, "the Wallachian people are the Romans' remnants,"[21] which makes their fate even sadder.

It is obvious that even if these maxims were eventually integrated into folklore discourse, they were derived from high culture. Authentic folk sayings are most often mocking, since peasants are interested in strengthening their self-esteem and self-sufficiency, in relation to the strangers from whom they stand apart. Peasants rarely see anything positive in them, much less are they willing to take their side. But even in these circumstances, the Wallachian peasant does not seem to be a target of particular imagological adversity for the Hungarian peasant. Rather, he is just another peasant, with his specific animals, flaws and habits, which can be scoffed at by any other villager. As an untranslatable pun puts it, tapping into the similarity of *olálkodik* (*stalks*) and *oláhkodik* (a coinage meaning *Romanianises*), "he who does not Romanianise/ lurk walks in peace."[22] This is perfectly true for two peasant communities that did not spend too much time "stalking" one another, even from a paremiological point of view, when they were allowed by their elites to quietly raise their oxen, goats and pigs.

[20] Margalits, *Magyar közmondások*, 607.
[21] Ibid., 585.
[22] Ibid., 592.

Hungarian Bungarian up your arse a rapier

Hungarians do not have many proverbs about Romanians and Romanian sayings about Hungarians are also quite rare. Romanian culture has a paremiological collection similar to that compiled by Margalits and published exactly in the same period, on the cusp of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. Even the number of entries (over 20,000) that appear in *Romanian Proverbs*, a work in ten volumes edited by Iuliu Zanne, is close to the number of sayings edited in the Hungarian collection. Significantly for the nationalist agenda of the two cultural endeavours, Margalits's volume was printed in the year celebrating the Hungarian Millennium (1896), while that of Zanne was presented by the Romanian delegation to the Versailles Peace Conference in 1919 as a testimony of the unity of Romanians everywhere and argument in favour of expanding the borders of Romania.[23]

The Romanian sayings with ethnic references published in this collection are generally fewer than those in the Hungarian collection. This, however, should not be attributed to the very different outlook of Romanian folklore or to the Romanians' mentality. It's explanation lies in the different ways of collecting these texts (a process that, for the Hungarians, began in the sixteenth century), as well as in the different relations between popular and elite culture in Hungary.

In the case of the Romanian proverbs, the main "targets" of imagological reflection are the Gypsies, with over 100 entries in Zanne's collection. Next come the Turks, with 50 entries. Positions 3 and 4 are occupied almost equally by Germans and Jews (*jidani*, *jidovi, uvrei*), with about 30 entries each. Greeks appear with 25 entries, Russians (and Moskals) with 15, Tatars about the same, and the neighbouring Bulgarian and Serbian peoples are featured in only 9 and 5 proverbs respectively. In this context, the collection includes only 5 sayings about Hungarians, plus 4 about *ungureni* (Romanians of Transylvanian extraction) and 3 about "Ianoş." Those about Hungarians were collected mainly in Transylvania and Banat, while those about *ungureni* and "Ianoş" in Muntenia.

Such low figures also indicated that for the Romanian peasants the Hungarians did not represent an important imagological partner, and their specific features were not capable of provoking a significant reaction. For those in old Romania, they did not really exist, except in the form of Transylvanian (*ungureni*) neighbours, and the Romanians in Transylvania did not perceive the Hungarians as a major figure of

[23] Stelian Dumistrăcel, in Iuliu A. Zanne (ed.), *Proverbele românilor din România, Barasabia, Bucovina, Ungaria, Istria şi Macedonia* (Iași: Vasiliana'98, 2019), I, Cover 4.

otherness to be portrayed in garish tones, as they did with the Gypsies, the Jews or the Turks of yesteryear. Hungarians were not so foreign, in other words.

If we analyse the meagre content of the five Romanian sayings about Hungarians included in Zanne's collection, we may notice that they were all negative and used the basic clichés that composed their image.

"The Hungarian is a cur"[24] defines the most important feature of the Hungarians in the Romanians' view. This perspective was first voiced in the writings of the Wallachian chroniclers: Hungarians are vile. This must have been a peasant phrase, as revealed by the animal register of the comparison, but it should be noted that Zanne's source had been a priest from a Banat village.

The second saying states that "the Hungarian is boastful, but fearful."[25] The self-conceit attributed to Hungarians was the most widespread stereotype that defined them not only in the eyes of Romanians, but throughout the European continent. The Hungarians' lack of courage, entwined with their pompousness, reinforced this idea, because the absurdity of Hungarian pride stood out even better if it was doubled by cowardice. The portrait meant to systematically disqualify the Hungarian was thus complete. Logically speaking, one might think that the Hungarian's wickedness could fuel his ability to harm the Romanians, but this contradicted the image of the coward who could not act. But ethnic images, as mentioned above, are usually not guided by the rules of rational thinking and can serenely harmonise deeply contradictory drives.

Moreover, the Hungarians' "vileness," evoked in the first saying, did not necessarily imply the actual manifestation of hostile actions. It was, first and foremost, a visceral characteristic of the Hungarians, a form of immanent evil intrinsically linked to these people—an aspect that was captured by Zanne in an explanatory note: "meaning un-merciful, bad to the bone."[26]

The third maxim, also from the Banat, says: "when you're most fond of a Hungarian, pull one of his eyes out."[27] The violence of phrase may upset a modern reader, but these references were deeply entrenched in the popular mentality and were intended to bring out an essential truth. At the same time, it can be considered a popular version of Eminescu's famous adage from the poem "Doina": "Those who strangers have loved/ Let hounds chomp their heart" (1883).

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[24] Zanne 1901, *Proverbele*, 429, position 14.409.
[25] Ibid., position 14.410.
[26] Ibid., position 14.409.
[27] Ibid., position 14.408.

The message thus pithily conveyed was as follows: never get close to a Hungarian, never become his ally. Harbouring warm feelings towards him was totally forbidden. Since compliance with this taboo was extremely important, to avoid violating it, one had to do the worst thing that could be done to one's enemy, namely pull his eyes out. In a similar way, the ballad "The Frank's Daughter" stigmatises relationships with foreigners. When the protagonist, a mighty young man, wishes to marry a woman epitomising radical otherness (she comes from the world of the "Franks" or the "Latins," Godless heathens), the only options that can save him are either to kill her or "shoot" her in the eyes.[28] Such a forbidden liaison can only end very badly, which is why it must be put an end to by the most severe means.

The question was whether the Hungarian was also part of this world of absolute otherness, which was embodied by the "defiled Latin, not cross-baptised" in the Middle Ages. According to the above-mentioned saying, collected in a Banat village at the end of the nineteenth century, the answer was yes.

The following entry on Hungarians from Zanne's collection can help us to better understand the context in which these sayings made sense. According to this proverb, "There's fresh air in the Carpathians / but they are littered with Hungarians." In addition to this aphorism (passed on by his father to "Badea Ciobanu, an old man of over 80 years, who had fled Transylvania" and currently resided in a commune in Vlaşca County), the publisher reproduced a "folk poem," gathered from the same informant:

> Hungarians here,
> Hungarian there,
> Hungarians find trails everywhere,
> Hungarians, filthy barbarians,
> They're onto trails in all the areas.
> They come and sneak in on our land,
> Worse than beasts of the hinterland.
> Now woe to Romanians, alas,
> With masters like these in the morass,
> Of whom they'll ne'er get rid
> Lest blood is shed, God forbid.[29]

[28] Sorin Mitu, *Transilvania mea. Istorii, mentalități, identități* (Iași: Polirom, 2013), 492-493.
[29] Zanne 1901, *Proverbele*, 430, position 14.412.

What is easily noticed is the elevated nature of the so-called folk saying quoted above, in terms of its lexical and semantic components (a real peasant would never have spoken about the "fresh air in the Carpathians"). The lyrics that accompany it and that deploy folklore motifs (the filthy barbarians, the foreigners waylaying us on every path and surrounding us) give a popular whiff to these texts and somehow connect the traditional mentality with the national political disputes of the 1900s. They are, however, no longer folklore proper, but the creation of a literate author who introduced his contemporary Hungarians to storylines implicit in older folk motifs.

Moreover, the fact that all four sayings analysed above (there's not many more of these) convey the same negative image regarding Hungarians, with no distinguishing nuances, relates to the political atmosphere of the century of nationalities. Zanne's intention must have been to create a certain portrait of the Hungarians, consistent with what the national disputes of the time said about them.

Reservations and adversity towards foreigners, in general, and the negative traits attributed to Hungarians, in particular, were genuine responses, illustrating popular mentality. However, their inclusion in a monolithic discourse that lacked any nuances in depicting the national conflict with the Hungarians was due not so much to a folklore image but to a highbrow cultural form. The peasants or the rural elites of the time could indeed compose such texts. But these no longer illustrated the traditional beliefs of an illiterate rural society, since they made the transition to other forms of expression and sensibility, specific to the modern age.

The last saying whose meanings I will try to draw out evokes a traditional peasant mentality, highlighting the way the Hungarians were seen by the Romanian peasants, with their own eyes, and not through the lens of ideological messages filtered by the priest, the notary or the teacher: "Hungarian/ Bungarian," with the versions "Hungarian Bungarian/ up your arse a rapier" and, respectively, "Hungarian Bungarian/ Sniffing his arse like a vulgarian."[30]

Readers who think that such fragments, seemingly devoid of any subtlety, do not deserve much comment are sorely mistaken. At first glance, they belong to the same hostile register as the previous sayings, a fact that is emphasised in Zanne's correct comment: "they say that to Hungarians, in mockery." However, this time the reason for slander no longer pertained to some irresolvable historical or national adversity, or

[30] Ibid., position 14.408.

to the need to condemn the infamous Hungarian oppression. Transpiring now was the ordinary, healthy, everyday folk slur, which can be noticed in most Hungarian sayings about Romanians as well.

But why did the Romanian peasants laugh at the Hungarians? Because their names sound funny! And this was not at all a superficial reason, except from the perspective of an observer with a modern mindset. These peasants laughed much the same way the ancient Greeks mocked the language and the names of the Barbarians, those who, from their point of view, could only say *bar-bar*!

Laughing at the way the Others looked, behaved, fed their animals, or talked to each other, the peasants delineated their self-identity in relation to otherness. Collective mockery of the neighbouring communities was a method by which they emphasised and perpetuated their own cultural traits, while managing to feel comfortable within the limits of their own symbolic sphere. From here came the special satisfaction with which peasants shouted at the others, grinning mockingly, "Hungarian Bungarian/ up your arse a rapier!" and not from some uncouthness that could only be sensed by the stranger who came from the city, but who did not find his place in the peasants' value system.

The sayings whose protagonist is "Ianoş"—and which Zanne did not count among those concerning the Hungarians—illustrate the same traditional peasant view and are devoid of the hostile sharpness of the first pieces analysed above. "The Hungarian" was an abstract collective figure, condensing all the negative traits attributed to his nation, while "Ianoş," even if this was also a generic name, embodied the Hungarian as a real human figure. Significantly, the three adages that evoke him come from Wallachia, and not Transylvania.

The first of them says: "poor Ianoş, he died with his pipe up his arse!" This is how Zanne explains the meaning of the saying: "When someone asks for a high price on a stupid thing, then he is answered, in jest, with the above saying."[31] The Hungarian Ianoş is the character summoned to embody this human evil, which has a vague negative connotation, albeit a rather benign one, because it turns against the one who illustrates it. The phrase is used in jest, Zanne claims, and not in mockery. Ianoş is therefore more of a pitiful fool than an unsympathetic character, corresponding to Oláh Géci from the sayings of the Hungarians. His behaviour is a bit unrealistic, an aspect that can be associated with the conceit and emphasis attributed to Hungarians, but

[31] Ibid., 155, position 13.537.

very discreetly. The "anal" reference, which is also found in the previous sayings, has nothing to do with the Hungarians. I have come across it in many sayings, because for the Romanian peasant to shove something up one's arse was entirely unnatural; consequently, any reference of this kind was guaranteed to achieve a hilarious effect, while ensuring that deprecation reached the target of irony.

The other two sayings are largely phonetic wordplay, like "Hungarian Bungarian," and have a similar purpose: to show us that Ianoş's language is hilarious and unintelligible. The first goes as follows: "Helter-skelter splosh/ From our bloke Ianoş."[32] It is significant that in this saying, collected in Buzău County, where many Hungarians from Transylvania lived, Ianoş is defined as a familiar, as a "bloke," that is, a fellow villager of the same age and social status. The second saying, "Ianoş/ Paţoş/ Curpuţel,"[33] is told to Hungarians, Zanne reminds us, in jest and is accompanied by an explanatory anecdote that reproduces the dialogue between a Romanian and a Romanian-speaking Hungarian:

> 'Who's there?'
> 'It are me!'
> 'Who's there?'
> 'It are me, Mistah Ianosh Patsohs curputsel, who lives at Tutescu artisan Covaci. Sent mistress shake quilt at river edge!

The Hungarian is hilarious, his words are guaranteed to cause laughter and make him into a clown who is looked down upon with benevolent irony—a posture that is a far cry from the image of the evil and oppressive hound, which deserves to have its eyes pulled out, from the previous sayings. The quote is important because it foreshadows two of the strongest Romanian stereotypes regarding Hungarians, according to which *the Hungarian language is ugly*, and Hungarians *won't / can't learn Romanian*. In the anecdote above, the emphasis was laid on the corrupted manner in which Hungarians speak Romanian, just as Jews, Gypsies, Germans or Turks have their own specific ways of mispronouncing Romanian words. These differences highlighted the otherness, the abnormality, the distance between us and them. And secondly, in the ordinary man's view, it's quite all right to laugh at someone who does not speak Romanian well!

Their different language and the odd way in which they spoke Romanian (coupled with the image of the fool) represented an essential marker of otherness in the popular mentality. The symbolic distance

[32] Ibid., 154, position 13.536.
[33] Ibid., 155, position 13.537.

between Romanians and Hungarians was shaped primarily by expressions like "Hungarian Bungarian," emphasising the linguistic differences that separate us. The Romanian peasants could learn about the generic "wickedness" of the Hungarians as a whole nation (and not just of the nobles or some Hungarian authorities), from the discourse of the elites which overlapped the aforementioned notions. This way of defining the other could be taken up in folklore as well. However, the perception that the Hungarians spoke in an incomprehensible way was a result of the Romanian peasants' direct observation.

The peasants of Wallachia were struck by these aspects, as they must have wondered why the Hungarians spoke so peculiarly. For the Romanian peasants of Transylvania, who were accustomed to hearing such words, articulated sounds in the same manner, used similar lexical items, and maybe even spoke the Hungarian language (or, in any case, could swear in it), it was more difficult to mock the accent or the language of their Transylvanian compatriots, particularly since there were no other radical elements of otherness which would differentiate them from the Hungarian peasants, except for religious confession.

But the latter, like other ethnographic or mentality aspects that distinguished them, did not generate such a dramatic perception because the two communities, by and large, peacefully coexisted on a daily basis. Typically, in times of social tranquillity, when there were no uprisings or religious unrest, the religious otherness that separated Romanians and Hungarians was tamed by centuries of cohabitation. Sometimes peasants lived in mixed villages with two or even more places of worship of different denominations. Both Romanians and Hungarians were quite familiar with the religious particularities of their neighbours, who, after all, were Christians and had their own church—even if, in some cases, it had a cock at the top of the spire, instead of a cross, or its priest was a bearded peasant muttering things in Slavonic.

The few sayings about Hungarians collected by Zanne in every region inhabited by Romanians also show us how Romanian popular culture was influenced by nationalist messages in the nineteenth century. These were circulated by elites, primarily rural ones—the priests, notaries, and teachers who frequently featured among the folklorists' informants. One may wonder how "popular" these expressions were, or, in other words, how well they reflected the peasants' view. But, as mentioned before, there is no such thing as a "pure" rural mentality, unaffected by the most diverse interferences: it is a construct shaped by the townspeople fascinated by the illusion of rural "authenticity."

Finally, it will be increasingly difficult to distinguish between the folk sayings of the peasants, who used to cry "Hungarian Bungarian," and the allegedly folk lyrics that maintained a negative image of the Hungarians, based on political messages, this time, composed by literate people. Romanian writers reinforced this representation in highly expressive ways. Great poets who lived at the time of the Dual Monarchy, such as Mihai Eminescu, George Coşbuc and Octavian Goga, composed lyrics "inspired by folk verse." Their vision was more or less close to that of the peasants, but these were, in any case, elevated and refined creations, in which the Hungarians were projected as the national enemy, the irreconcilably antagonised foreigners: "From Braşov to Abrud/ What I see and hear could/ Were cruel Hungarian in the underwood."[34] Mihail Sadoveanu, the most representative prose writer of Romanian classical literature, author of the novel *Baltagul* ['The Hatchet,' 1930], resorted not to the cliché of the "vile Hungarian," but to that of the boastful, perky and rowdy Hungarian: "The good Lord, having made up the world [...] beckoned the Hungarian and chose for him a few toys that were lying around himself: 'Here, I'll give you boots and spurs and resin to shape your moustache into swooping handles; to feel conceited and to like partying with companions."[35] In this way, Sadoveanu proved to be closer to the popular vision, which he intended to faithfully convey in his work, because the Romanian peasant, as seen above, was much more tempted to mock a familiar neighbour than to demonise an unassailable enemy.

On the other hand, his educated readers, who had previously read Eminescu and Goga and learned from the first years of school about the endless conflicts between the two nations, were already well aware of how vile the Hungarians were. Because of that, Sadoveanu's readers read even these more benign passages in a hostile key. In contrast to the traditional peasant mentality, accustomed to less tense representations of the Hungarians, the educated Romanian public would never accept that Hungarians could be decent human beings, since in their view the various negative aspects of the latter's image kept adding up and reinforcing the biased stereotypes.

Conclusions

As I have already mentioned, these popular clichés, whether Hungarian or Romanian, went back at least to the eighteenth century and, in all likelihood, reflected the mentalities of an even more distant past. Like in

[34] Mihai Eminescu, *Poezii tipărite în timpul vieții*, III (București: Fundația „Regele Mihai I", 1944), 5.

[35] Dan Horia Mazilu, *Noi despre ceilalți. Fals tratat de imagologie* (Iași: Polirom, 1999), 5-6.

today's media, peasant representations of the other rested on the principle of "no news is good news." Peasants did not reflect on their neighbours in order to outline an objective portrait of them, but to display and reinforce their own cultural features, setting themselves apart from the strangers surrounding them. For this reason, they usually mocked and did not praise the Other. Mockery and ridicule were much more common than positive assessments, regardless of whether the relations between the two communities were good or bad. In this general framework, the popular images of the two peasant communities were agreeable and conveyed a sense of closeness and familiarity rather than a high degree of otherness (as was the case with the imagological relationships maintained with the Gypsies or the Jews).

The Hungarians' image about Romanians, as it emerges from Margalits's collection, is quite considerate. I have not encountered collective insults such as "stinky Wallachian" (*büdös oláh*), an expression whose origin lies in other sources, or "thieving Wallachian" (*rabló oláh*), present in medieval documents and narrative sources. Some harsher popular clichés relate to the violence characteristic of the Middle Ages, while references to the political superiority of the Hungarians were obviously influenced by the discourse of the educated noble elite. In 1896 the Romanians could still seem quite mild and harmless, in the eyes of a Hungarian who neglected their radicalisation and did not suspect what they would end up doing in 1918.

For Romanians, on the other hand, the years between the revolution of 1848 and the first world conflagration represented the culmination of their confrontation with the Hungarians. This view belonged primarily to the cultivated elite, but it would also quickly spread among the peasantry. On the other hand, many Romanian peasants in Transylvania had taken part in the revolution, as well as in the interethnic conflict it generated. This watershed moment in the history of Romanian-Hungarian relations gave rise later to a conflicting, bellicose popular image. The fact that the Romanian sayings, assembled by Zanne from this perspective, are more hostile compared to the Hungarian ones relates to these political circumstances. Notwithstanding all this, in traditional Romanian images the relationship with the Hungarians was rendered through assertive irony, and not through xenophobic diatribe.[36]

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