

Representations of the Rroma in Herge's Tintin Story- The Castafiore Emerald

Abstract

I shall examine the Castafiore emerald which was serialized weekly from July 1961 to September 1962, where Tintin and Haddock come face to face with the Rroma or gypsies and their nomadic culture, they are generally distrusted by the inhabitants and labelled as petty thieves, in return the Rroma too distrust the Europeans. This is also because their nomadic lifestyle makes their community insular which in a way protects their language and culture and prevented assimilation with the dominant culture.

Keywords: Romany, Rroma (Used Interchangeably), Thieves, Gypsies, Emerald, Prejudices.

Introduction

The Wikipedia gives a comprehensive account of the Romany people of their origins from India. According to its genetic findings confirm that the Romani came from a single group that left north west India some 1500 years ago. Another group called Dom too left India 1000 years ago. The practices of the people are similar to ones in India such as worship of Shakti, notions of impurity of women during menstruation, etc. Their customs are similar to those practiced in India such as virginity being mandatory for brides and some may even practice child marriageable. (wikipedia, 2019)

Aim of the study

To explore the representations of the Romany people in popular cartoon of the times, Tintin, to evaluate if they have been dealt with fairly by the author.

Review of Literature

The adventures of Tintin, the teenage reporter is a set of 24 comics created by Herge or Georges Prosper Remi, a Belgium citizen originally written in French has been translated into many different languages worldwide, 70 to be precise. By 2007, their sale had touched 200 million. These were all published between 1929-1976. (contributors, 2019)

They are basically adventure cum detective cartoon with a fair share of adventure, automobile chases, the feisty Tintin travels around the world with his dog Snowy, and Captain Haddock. He is often joined by the brilliant but deaf, Professor Calculus, and the blundering but loveable detective twins, Thomson and Thompson having hair raising adventures escaping by the skin of his teeth many a time. The world they recreate is more innocent than the present also because it is a children's cartoon and also because the world they recreate is less crowded more forested, has more wildlife than the present, a time before the age of the internet and global warming. Because of this they are also a useful artefact in exploring many of the attitudes and prejudices of the time. Herge has been accused of racism too for his illustration of black characters. (Dardel, 2017)

The Castafiore Emerald is a mystery cartoon story by Herge starring his world famous detective Tintin. The famous soprano Bianca Castafiore comes to visit Tintin and his confirmed bachelor friend, an old sea Captain too fond of his drink at the Captain's residence, Marlinspike.

Amidst much media coverage given to the famous Soprano Bianca and a speculative reporters jumping to conclusions about a brewing romance between Bianca and Captain Haddock, much to the Captain's chagrin as he has decided to be a bachelor to the end of his days, the Emerald disappears. The emerald is a gift by the Indian Raja of Gopal.

The story starts with Captain Haddock and Tintin going for a walk early morning to experience the chorus of birds carolling and to breathe in the "sweet smelling" fragrance of the earth so pure that one could drink it, when they are confronted by a bad smell, and lo and behold what do they find but a caravan of gypsies camping on a rubbish site. Haddock is

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surprised that some people are attracted by this rubbish and appear to prefer to camp at the rubbish site. He calls them guttersnipes and is surprised by their lack of hygiene. They go past it, deeper into the woods where a young gypsy girl of 8 has lost her way. Captain Haddock, in his brusque way demands that she reveal her name, but scares her by his clumsy mannerisms. The girl ignorant of the Italian or any of the other European languages she bites Captain Haddock in fear. And then she runs away only to trip over a stone and hurts herself on a tree. Once again the young gypsy girl gets helped by Tintin and Captain Haddock, so she starts trusting them and allows them to lead her back to the camping site at the rubbish bin. As they take the lost gypsy girl back to her people, we get a glimpse of the culture and popular perceptions the Europeans have of gypsies. Captain Haddock is not surprised that the Roma are living amidst the filth and rubbish of town. He is promptly informed by a belligerent gypsy youth that they are not dirty in their ways but have been forced to camp here by the police, who haven't given them permission to camp elsewhere in cleaner environ. Captain Haddock being kind hearted invites them to camp on his spacious property.

Further an old gypsy woman promptly offers to read his fortune if he but cross her palm with silver. She foresees the arrival of Bianca Castafiore, the Soprano with a golden voice who has a penchant for jewels. She foresees the disappearance of Bianca's jewel if not given silver. And the Captain being of scientific bent of mind does not believe in this mumbo jumbo and refuses to give her the silver coin and later pays for his mistake when all comes true. So we see that the author Herge does believe in prophecy and power of some like this old lady who is seer-like in foreseeing the future.

An old man calls the Captain Haddock gajo which is term the Roma use for people who are not Roma. Captain Haddock is glad he could be of help to the Roma. He reaches his palatial home Marlinspike in a good mood. As he is helping himself to a tall glass of neat whiskey, he receives a telegram that Bianca Castafiore has invited herself to Marlinspike Hall, Captain Haddock promptly exclaims that not Castafiore but cataclysm, calamity, catastrophe is coming to Marlinspike. He plans to leave Marlinspike immediately, but it is already too late, as he readies to pack his bags he falls on broken stair and breaks his leg, it seems as if the prophecy of the old female gypsy who predicted the arrival of a glamorous visitor with jewels is coming true. And sure enough along with her come a train of media attention. Suddenly all the Roma gypsies also land up with their bag and baggage, and their caravans inside the premises of Marlinspike, much to the consternation of the Butler and the other staff who are not happy with the arrival of the gypsies. The gypsies then leave Marlinspike but stay at the beautiful meadow of Captain Haddock. Tintin settles them in, a rough and ready gypsy says he hates non gypsies or gajos because they hate the gypsies. The Police commissioner calls the captain to warn him that his generosity will come to bite him as the gypsies cannot

be trusted as they are known to be big thieves. The insurance agent arrives trying to insure the jewels of Bianca Castafiore. Strange events start happening, Bianca gets more and more paranoid about her jewels, footprints are found under her window. Some journalists come to interview Bianca, the Nightingale of Rome as she is called. A piano is brought for her practice and soon she and her visitor are all over the place much to the Captain's chagrin. His peace is totally in pieces as the famous soprano gives him a talking parrot. Some paparazzi interview the deaf professor Calcus who being hard of hearing mistakenly confirms a love affair between the confirmed bachelor Captain Haddock and Bianca. Meanwhile in the gypsy camp the little girl finds a pair of gold scissors, obviously these are the same scissors Bianca's maid Irma lost, how did they reach the gypsy camp, the mystery deepens. The soprano assures the Captain that she is used to these link-ups as she is a celebrity, he should not be upset over it. Captain Haddock who prefers his bachelor life is flooded with a barrage of mails and telegrams congratulating him. Ultimately even the local band arrives to play for the couple a congratulatory song, finally some more reporter come to interview the famous soprano. Finally when the interview culminates in a operatic song by Bianca. The lights go out and Irma comes with the news that the emerald is stolen. One of the journalists has disappeared, the confusion results in the disappearance of the famous Emerald.

The Roma are suspected to be complicit in the theft, ultimately the thief is someone else, a surprise for all. This riveting story has all the elements of suspense and draws an interesting portrait of the Roma who are blamed unfairly for the theft by the local mainstream media and by the clumsy but endearing twin detectives, Thomson and Thompson. The story paints a sympathetic portrait of the gypsies, the tiny girl who gets lost, the old woman who claims to foresee the future if given some silver, the belligerent youngster who hates all non Romas. It also incorporates the attitudes of the dominant community where, the police does not let them camp in clean environs, and in return they too are hostile to mainstream life and culture. Of course, Tintin always believed in their innocence and is proven right, but the gypsies disappear before the tale finishes. (Herge, 1963) Ultimately one fine day, much to the Captain's relief, Bianca Castafiore decides to Milan for her performance there, her fans are eagerly awaiting her return to set the stage on fire.

Conclusion

The cartoon story offers some insights into how the mainstream society functions and marginalizes the Romany people. The Romany people face many hardships and prejudices but do not give up their nomadic lifestyle or their cultural beliefs or language to blend with the dominant culture. They are a brave people who have survived many years of hostility.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Dr. Prasannanshu for his invaluable inputs on the story. And for giving me a platform to explore a new area of interest

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