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Baroness Emma Orczy's Divided Loyalties in the 1910s and 20s[1]

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to examine the ambivalent attitudes of the British-Hungarian popular writer Baroness Emma Orczy towards involvement in the Great War. In the 1910s Orczy participated in British military recruitment drives, whilst also maintaining cultural ties with her homeland of Hungary. The questions this study attempts to answer are: what kind of strategies of identification did Orczy employ in order to come to terms with supporting both the Allies and the Central Powers? And: whether through her contrasting stances the operation of a hybrid identity can be captured.

Keywords: Baroness Emma Orczy, Hungary, Britain, World War I, hybridity, identification

The British-Hungarian popular writer Baroness Emma Orczy is mostly celebrated as the creator of the seminal figure of the Scarlet Pimpernel, the prototype of the modern superhero. She is much less known as a devout participant of World War I recruiting efforts. However, in the 1910s she was an avid supporter of the British army, which appears ambiguous, especially if we view her activity from the perspective of her dual Hungarian-English background. Thus, the aim of this research is to shed light on the ambivalent attitudes of Baroness Emma Orczy towards World War I military action, and answer the questions: what kind of strategies of identification did she employ to come to terms with supporting both the Allies and the Central Powers, and also to examine whether through her contrasting attitudes the operation of a hybrid cultural identity can be captured.

However, before starting to seek answers to these research questions, the thematic-conceptual framework of this study shall be established in order to gain a more thorough

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understanding of Emma Orczy's World War I activities. The two concepts which are going to be central to these investigations and hence, widely used, are the notions of cultural hybridity and identification.

In terms of cultural hybridity, this research builds on the theories of Homi Bhabha, and thus on the premise that cultural hybridity shall not be described as the juxtaposition of two cultures within an individual, rather, as an entangled amalgam of cultures, which "may open the way to conteptualising an *inter*national culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity" (Bhabha 38).

The other notion which requires some clarification is identification. Since the concept of identity is highly debated and often challenged (see Krzyżanowski and Jones 38), it is more fruitful for this study to focus on the process of identification, and especially on its Stuart Hall-ean approach. According to his views identification "is subject to the 'play', of différance. It obeys the logic of more-than-one. And since as a process it operates across difference, it entails discursive work, the binding and marking of symbolic boundaries, the production of 'frontier-effects'" (Hall 3). Thus, identity is not seen here as a static state of being, rather as a never-ending process, of which Emma Orczy's texts provide us with numerous examples.

The Orczy family arrived in Britain in 1880, when Emma was fifteen years old. She was astonished by the free and emancipated life in London. In her memoir *(Links in the Chain of Life* published posthumously in 1947) she called England her "spiritual birthplace" (Orczy, Links in the Chain of Life 24), and she often expressed her commitment towards her host-country in her public appearances. For instance, in 1913 a nine-page long report, published in The Bookman magazine, she accentuated her acquired Englishness, which is manifested through an almost miraculously effortless acquisition of the English language:

> "I think," she says, "I must have been extraordinarily predisposed to the assimilation of the English tongue, for directly we arrived in London I, as a schoolgirl rising fifteen, was sent to a preparatory school for the purpose of learning the language, and within three months I was acting in the school play, and had passed a first-class College of Preceptors' examination with honours, winning a special prize for languages. My theosophist friends tell me, "she adds whimsically, "that this fits so perfectly into the theory of reincarnation that in one of my previous existences I must certainly have been an Englishwoman! (Rutland 193)

Yet, even though she reiterated her spiritual, fatalistic and unavoidable connection to England, in parallel she also harnessed the exoticism of her Eastern roots, and emphasised her passion and fascination towards Hungarian lifestyle, music and horses:

> Nowadays, Baroness Orczy lives in Kent, much occupied with her beautiful garden there and her favourite horses and dogs. She has a team of five Hungarian horses which she drives herself. Often, where the width of the roads will permit – which in Kent is not very often – she drives them Hungarian fashion: two wheelers and three leaders, at lightning speed. (Rutland 200)

Therefore, it transpires that intellectually and ideologically she defined herself as English, however, meanwhile she also capitalised on the marketability of her Hungarian aristocratic background. It is apparent from her memoir and from The Bookman-interview that there were extended periods in her life when she managed to harmonise the two sides of her cultural background. However, after the 1910s world politics got increasingly complicated and polarised: Hungary and England found themselves on opposite military sides, the former being a member of Central Powers along with Germany and Italy, while the latter, part of the Allies with France and Russia. Thus, it became more and more difficult for Orczy to balance her cultural and political duality, and to maintain her image of a devout Hungarian and a loyal Englishwoman simultaneously.

When World War I broke out in 1914, Emma Orczy's allegiance with her host country became even more fervent. She joined the League of White Feather, a female military recruitment group, whose members regularly shamed civilian men into enlisting by publicly giving them a white feather. When female participation in the Great War is discussed, women are usually portrayed as channels of feminine energy who strongly opposed physical aggression, and who mostly acted as carers of the wounded and those in need. Nevertheless, female participation in British recruitment was considerable and significant (see Gullace). The reason for its omission from feminist historiography is probably "the result of the shameful meaning this practice acquired after the war than of any absence of convincing sources" (Gullace 180). When observing Orczy's wartime activities, traces of this controversial attitude unfold. In her case, the over-enthusiastic expression of her loyalty to England was probably fuelled by her desire to compensate her emigree status.

In 1914 Orczy even founded her own recruitment group for women, whose details she shared in an article published in The Daily Mail entitled *To the Women of England – The Answer to "What Can I Do?"* The rhetorical question of the title is answered straight away in the subtitle "Give your Sons and Sweethearts," and then explicated further in the next paragraphs:

> Women and girls of England, you cannot shoulder a rifle, but you *can* actively serve your country all the same. You can serve her in the way she needs it the most. Give her the men whom she wants! Giver her your sweetheart, she wants him; your son, your brother, she wants them! Your friends, she wants them all! And if – as sometimes happens, your sweetheart, your brother, or your son hangs back – possibly because he is afraid to give you pain – then use all the influence you possess to urge him to serve his country in the way she needs it most. (Orczy, To the Women of England – The Answer to "What Can I Do?" 3)

The call is clear and imperative: the writer urges women to actively compel their male family members to enlist. The rhetoric of this text is in accordance with contemporary populist propaganda journalism: the individual is not seen, pain and death are concealed, sacrifice is glorified. Even though it is only hinted in the last sentence of the quote, influence to make men join the army includes strong reliance on female power. A soldier dressed in military uniform was seen as the pinnacle of masculinity, whereas men wearing civilian clothes were portrayed as unworthy of female admiration. (Intriguingly, Orczy's fiction is much more nuanced in terms of representing mascu-

linity.) The image Orczy's Daily Mail article – and other propaganda pieces – painted of women was based on the archetype of the manipulative woman, who can coerce men into abandoning their own free will, and merely act according to her machinations. The basis of this Machiavellian argumentation was that all men outside military service could be labelled unmanly and cowardly. As Nicoletta F. Gullace points out in her insightful study, "[g]endered conceptions of patriotism thus implicated women in defining the parameters of male citizenship" (Gullace 183).

In her article, Orczy also took advantage of the fame of her Scarlet Pimpernel: on the premise of the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel she established her Women of England's Active Service League "whose sole object will be that of influencing our sweethearts, our brothers, our sons, and our friends to offer themselves at once to the nearest recruiting officer." She concluded her piece with an order: "Send me your names. I want 100 000 this week!" (Orczy, To the Women of England – The Answer to "What Can I Do?")

Another intriguing wartime writing of Orczy's is her foreword to the propagandist anthology, *Lest We Forget*, published in 1915 by Jarrold & Sons, edited by H. B. Elliott. The tone of this piece is tamer than the Daily Mail article. Here the Baroness also addressed the women of England, and called them to act, however, the scope of this action was less intrusive: instead of actively coercing their beloved to fight, here she encouraged women to accept the fact that their male family members and friends are away in the trenches, and knit warm clothes for them. In this piece, Orczy relied on and enforced the conservative gender concept, according to which women belong to the realm of the house, while men to the perilous battlefield.

> It is their skill, their industry, their devotion which makes our gallant soldiers' and sailors' lives at the post of duty a little more happy and a little more comfortable. The warm clothing, which loving fingers at home fashion for the magnificent man who fights on land or at sea, is a comfort not only to his body, but also for his heart, for it reminds him of home, of brave hands that work while brave lips are praying for him. (Orczy, Foreword 8)

It is quite noticeable that in her wartime texts Baroness Orczy only addressed her words to British women, and tactfully avoided naming any of the enemies: there is no mention of Germans, and especially not Austria-Hungary. Nevertheless, some authors of this anthology were more specific about explicating the opponents. One of the contributors, for instance, Mr Reginald Wright Kauffman in his poem entitled *The Nation's David* thus vilified the Central Powers:

> While village after village fell, cottage and church engulfed in smoke;
> While all the land became a Hell and served to turn a Teuton joke;
> While Belgian women prayed in vain for German mercy, trusting, fond;
> While German "Culture" burned Louvain, and German tenderness Termonde:
>
> You did it, little Belgium – you! You stopped the dyke with half your sons;
> You did what no one else could do against the Vandals and the Huns. (Kauffman 33)

The last quoted line can be interpreted as a reference to Hungary, hence reminding us of the complex nature of Orczy's self-selected national identity. Even though in the

foreword she did not mention her Hungarian-ness, of which until now she had been so proud of, yet, her name and the public persona she constructed are constant reminders of her dual nationality.

Her forced Englishness – to an extent – might have been a result of her loose ties with Hungary. Even though she came from a highly illustrious aristocratic family, and her parents were devout Hungarians both culturally and politically, Emma did not possess these unquestionable ties: she left Hungary when she was five years old, and spent the next ten years of her formative youth in Brussels and Paris – in countries which always seemed temporary places of residence for the family. When she arrived in England as a teenager, she formed a strong – and probably very conscious bond with the country. As a young person who lived in numerous temporary places during her short life, she lacked the cultural anchor along which she could define herself. Her parents' Hungarian-ness must have seemed remote, mythical, unreal – something which could be harnessed artistically, but not something which could be inhabited in her everyday life. She embraced London's exciting and diverse cultural life, which facilitated her personal and professional goals. Thus, became her mythical and pre-destined English identity a central theme for her, which was forged into those sets of myths she created around herself.

Nevertheless, even in 1910s Orczy did not completely lose sight of Hungarian politics. In the Preface to her 1915 novel, *A Bride of The Plains* – dedicated to Lajos Kossuth, a revered Hungarian politician of the 1840s-50s uprising against the Habsburgs, – Orczy lamented about the unfortunate fate of her home-country. Here she excused Hungary by claiming that historically it had been connected to Austria, hence, it shall not be blamed for the misjudged decisions: "tied to Austria's chariot wheel, the catspaw and the tool of that Teutonic race which you [Kossuth] abhorred." (Orczy, A Bride of the Plains)

With the rhetorical move of making the Germans/Austrians the enemy of Hungary, she vaguely implied that by nature the Hungarians could be allies with the English. Naturally, this logic is flawed, however, it aptly signals Orczy's technique of fictionalising historical truth and facts. (Just as she did in her *Scarlet Pimpernel* series regarding the French Revolution.)

In 1924 Orczy wrote a novel entitled *Pimpernel and Rosemary*, which explores the topic of Hungarian-Romanian post-war territorial changes. The plot takes place in the 1920s just after the Treaty of Trianon was implemented in Transylvania. This area used to be an economically and culturally vital part of Hungary, which was joined to Romania (also a member of the Allies after 1916) after the war. About 1,6 million Hungarians became Romanian citizens, thus forming a significant minority in the country (Romsics 123).

In the 1920s lots of revisionist pamphlets, statement and literary pieces were written in Hungary. Taking Orczy's background into consideration, it is intriguing to observe how she managed to come to terms with the paradox that as a member of British military recruitment movements she actively supported the Allies, and thus indirectly Romania, however, at the same time, she was deeply saddened by the Treaty of Trianon which ensured that Transylvania will cease to be a Hungarian territory.

In *Pimpernel and Rosemary* the author is clearly biased for the Hungarians. Yet, even though the Romanians are criticised, they are not portrayed as evil. Orczy seemingly strives to maintain an internationally acceptable portrayal of both Romanians

and Hungarians. Her narrative solution is that in the plot not only the two impeccable protagonists are English, but the antagonist, the cruel and despicable Jasper Tarkington is also an Englishman. Thus the – quite imperial – message here is that the important characters are English and Western, whereas the others, Romanians and Hungarians equally remain side characters even in their own land. Probably this message was not intended by Orczy, however, this novel can still be read as a metaphor of World War I by capturing the political agency of Western countries, and the powerlessness of Central/Eastern-European ones.

As we have already seen in her *Pimpernel and Rosemary*, Orczy's commitment to Britain, and especially to its World War I participation had shifted by the mid 1920s. This gradual detachment from the 1910s propaganda becomes even more noticeable by the 1940s: at the end of her life, when she composed her autobiography, the *Links in the Chain of Life,* she radically re-evaluated her involvement in military action, and completely omitted any reference to these from her memoir. This is what she shared about the period:

> I am not going to talk about 'the crash'. So many books have been written about it. Everything has been told and retold, and so much has been lived through, and so much remembered, so little forgotten. My son was too young and we were too old to be of any use 'out there.' (Orczy, Links in the Chain of Life 133)

Thus, here she clearly intended to forget the fact that her league "was reputed to have raised 600,000 men for the king's army" (Gullace 50). Naturally, when analysing one's memoir we cannot expect objectivity, and we must come to terms with its subjectivity and unreliability, and the blending of present and past, and truth and facts with myths and unreliable memories. However, it is important to examine Orczy' attitude to World War I in the 1910s, and the way it was narrated in her autobiography, in order to be able to draw attention to her technique of self-construction, and that how she managed to maintain the myth of the English Baroness with a modicum of Hungarian exoticism, a brand, which she could efficiently utilise and maintain during her professional character.

We can see that the evaluation of past events happens from the vantage point of the present, since "people may consciously or unconsciously mold the memory to today's situation" (Conway). Thus, the fact that in disillusioned, peace-seeking post-war 1947 Orczy omitted her propagandist past from her memoir, reveals as much about the late 1940s, as about the 1910s. Hence, it is also reminder that identification – although considered an individual matter – can never be independent of one's actual cultural and political context. As Raymond Williams noted in *The Analysis of Culture*: "We tend to underestimate the extent to which the cultural tradition is not only a selection but also an interpretation. We see most part work through our own experience" (Williams 56).

The aim of juxtaposing these contradictory writings of Orczy was not to catch her out or to expose her. Much rather, to draw attention to the malleability of one's sense of identity and belonging. According to the above-mentioned Stuart Hall-ean approach, identification is "a process of articulation, a suturing, an over-determination

not a subsumption. There is always 'too much' or 'too little' – an over-determination or a lack, but never a proper fit, a totality" (Hall 3).

When looking at Emma Orczy's oeuvre this flexible nature of identification is apparent. In her case, we can witness the operation of the Protean identity, which is always changing and consists of internal contradictions: "fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions" (Hall 4). This definition aptly captures Orczy's process of identification, which is indeed characterised by clashing cultural discourses, and which is not exempt from contradictory allegiances constructed along myths and fantasies.

Orczy's mosaic-like and fragmented identity is rooted in her cultural hybridity, which – as Homi Bhabha's often quoted definition states – often disrupts "the stability of the ego" (Bhabha 47). This instability suggests that the migration between different cultures or communities is not a one-way gravitation. Much rather, an eternal oscillation between the home and the host cultures. During her life, a hybrid individual constantly re-constructs her commitments, sympathies, senses of belonging, since one often remains a member of both communities in parallel to each other, thus maintaining dual lives, and dual identities.

To conclude, we can agree that hybridity "is not a third term that resolves the tension between two cultures" (Bhabha 113-114), however, it facilitates capturing the essence of this tension: the unresolvable and always present contradictions which Baroness Emma Orczy's wartime writings are apt examples of.

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