CARMEN, THE NOBLE WILD CHILD

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Abstract: Prosper Mérimée's novella Carmen (1845), particularly with the myth of Carmen herself, has evolved into literary and visual constructions of novel, opera, and cinema. These constructions have allowed for a variety of reactions from the public that adhere to presenting either a positive or negative image of the female figure, Carmen. It is through this female figure that racial, gender, and sexual motifs, to name a few, have served as a reminder of the various interpretations that the actual work has built upon. This essay explores themes of the above mentioned concepts and also emphasizes how both male and female genders can be subject to marginality and dichotomies of destruction of the other, as with Carmen.

Starting from this questionable dichotomy in literary and artistic representations of the Rroma, the paper aims to examine the intrinsic duality of the stereotype in what the artistic figure of Carmen is concerned. The indispensable freedom of the Roma "lifestyle" seems to be the dominant and recurring theme of the fictionalizing and appreciating discourses around the legendary Gipsy woman, created by Prosper Merimee while its opposite, i.e., the constant primitivism of this mysterious figure, appears as the leitmotif of all the denigrating discourses.

In the context of identifying the sources of an ambivalent cultural stereotype on the Roma people, the history of multiple mystifications and of the circulation of certain fictions by various types of discourse (anthropological, political, literary) pointed to an extremely remarkable case that does the most to illustrate the creation of the modern myth of the freedom/primitivism of the Roma people: the case of the birth of the most famous fictional Roma character in history, Carmen.

Keywords: Prosper Mérimée, Carmen, Roma people, Gipsy women.

The fundamental topic and the question that led to this article can be expressed cocisely as follows: Why does the modern cultural imaginary generate a set of contradictory representations of the Roma people, which, on the one hand, primitivize and belittle this ethnic/racial group and, on the other, exalt and idealize the ethos of freedom inherent to the lifestyle of the Roma people? As we see in Clark and Ivanic's theory, the imagery largely depends on the coercive practices of the dominant culture and its intrinsic discourse:

"Society is not homogeneous; it is made up of different social classes and groups with competing and often conflicting interests and ideologies operating, as we see it, in a hierarchy. The dominant ideologies are those that have the power to project particular meanings and practices as universal, as `common sense'. This power operates either by winning the consent of others (hegemony, in Gramsci's terms) or, in moments of crisis and instability, by coercion, forcing others either to follow or to avoid certain practices; the ultimate coercion being the threat of imprisonment or death."[1]

[1] See R. Clark and R. Ivanic, *The Politics of Writing* ,London: Routledge, 1997, p. 21.

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The worldwide popularity achieved in the social imaginary by the story of the Gitana of Seville and the fact that this character continues to hold the leading position in the cultural surveys related to the Roma people in 21st century mass media makes the mythogenesis of the most famous fictional Roma character extremely relevant for the dichoyomy in artistic representations of the Roma woman, as, on the one hand, the notoriety of the character massively contributed to the stereotype concerning the intrinsic freedom of the Roma people and, on the other, the history of the multiple origins of the myth perfectly illustrates the mechanism by which the high intellectual discourses of the European modernity produced, in the 18th and 19th centuries, a contradictory cultural construct, both anti-Roma and philo-Roma.

Therefore, the retrogressive study of her ancestral descent in texts that established Carmen as a central character in the culture and social imaginary of Europe is the major sustaining factor of my theory. However, beyond the texts, what ultimately matters is the contexts and sub-texts that made the myth of Carmen possible and, at the same time, generated a highly persistent cultural stereotype regarding an alleged wild/savage and free essence of the Roma identity. Although fascinating in itself, the intertextual history that starts with Bizet's opera and goes, through Mérimée, down to the rather unknown origin of the Carmen character in Pushkin's poem *The Gypsies*, is actually relevant primarily because it reveals the cultural and intellectual contexts in which modernity fictionalizes the Roma identity, inventing a myth of gypsies as the wildlings within the European continent. From this viewpoint, the aim of the descent into the sub-texts of the myth of Carmen surpasses the limits of a historical interest in the intellectual origin of a fictional story or in the reconstruction of the biographic and literary circumstances in which Pushkin's poem, Mérimée's story or the libretto of Bizet's opera were created. ”As literary characters, `Gypsies' seem to be particularly appealing to Western authors, almost as if they were endowed with an intrinsic aesthetic quality, a figurative connotation that makes them, parodying Levi-Strauss' noted expression, `good to be written about'. [2] The deeper goal is to show how an agenda of philosophical and identity-related concerns of the Enlightenment is in fact transferred into the Romantic discourse with its fascination with the idea of gypsy freedom, although it may look like the Romantic philo-Roma attitude displaces the anti-Roma representations of Enlightenment anthropology. Quoting a relevant piece of writing:

”the [written] sign reflects social struggle - not just in terms of class, [...]but also in terms of gender, ethnicity and all contested areas of social life - and is itself a site of struggle.”[3]

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[2] C. Levi-Strauss, *La pensee sauvage* ,Paris: Plon, 1962

[3] Clark and Ivanid, *The Politics of Writing*, Routledge, New York, 1997, p. 29.

To the extent that the research topic involved revealing the multiple origins of the myth of Carmen and of the stereotypes on the freedom/primitiveness of the Roma people, the analyses could have been organized either in ascending chronological order, from the Enlightenment and Romantic roots of the myth to its relevance still persisting in collective representations nowadays, or vice versa, regressively, from the contemporary relevance of Carmen's image to the sources of its creators in the 18th and 19th centuries.From the contemporary readings of Carmen's story to the intellectual context in which the libretto of Bizet's opera was written, then to the exoticizing and primitivizing context of the story of Mérimée and finally to the meanings of Pushkin's poem and the Enlightenment and orientalizing Romantic sources of the creation of *The Gypsies*, each and every aspect proves to be significant in the build-up of the „Carmen-phenomenon”.

Even nowadays, in the 21st century, we still seem to put to work, in our portrayals of the Roma people, the inherited logic of this contradictory cultural construct to the same extent that we are still the inheritors of the cultural construct of our own modern identity, that is, of an identity that has changed its agenda so often as to become complex and contradictory. Narcissistically obsessed with the question "Who are we?" rather than "Who are they?", modernity projected the successive agendas of its own identity-related preoccupations in this form of a radical but convenient alterity (convenient because familiar owing to its social and geographic proximity). The mythogenesis of the wild gypsy freedom, on both sides of the myth, accumulates successive layers of anti-Roma and philo-Roma fictional representations that mirror, first of all, and more than anything else, the relationship of the modern non-Roma identity to the idea of freedom and the concept of civilization.

”By representing a particular definition of reality as if it were the actual real thing, written texts are likely to influence and guide the behaviour of individuals and help support what Foucault calls a `regime of truth', which sanctions and enforces a particular set of values and beliefs considered functional to the institutions in power. ”[4]

To the extent that the wildness/savageness and freedom that the cultural stereotype attaches to the Roma people primarily refer to a body, i.e., to the "uncivilized" or "hard-to-civilize" spontaneities of the individual bodies and to the essential freedom of the Gypsy social body, the metaphors by which the modern cultural discourses attempt to grasp the ungraspable identity of an alleged Roma ethos always refer not to a different spirituality, but to a different corporeality. In other words, the metaphors describing the alterity of a (non-European, non-civilized, non-adhering to the norms of modern society) way of living always resort to corporeality: whether envisaged as an undisciplined individual body (in point of drives, sexuality, hygiene, behavior) or as an uncontrollable social body (as it is either nomadic or incapable of being politically disciplined because of the assumed inherent freedom of the Gypsy ethos), the fictional portrait of the Roma people drawn by the European modernity seems to put forth, with both repulsion and fascination, the idea that Roma people experience their bodies in a different way than the civilized man, whose manners and norms of coexistence remain unknown to these inherently free savages - either to the political exasperation of the authorities, to the pseudo-scientific contempt of racist anthropologies or to the exoticizing enthusiasm of the philo-Roma behaviours of Romantic descent.

Obviously, the plausibility of the assumption concerning the fascination and repulsion that the free and undisciplined Carmen-figure exercises on the civilized man and on the disciplined modern subjectivity needs to be tested beyond the limits of the texts that governed the birth of the myth of Carmen, but these texts can surely be also read in light of this assumption.

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[4] M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* ,Brighton: Harvester, 1980

As I will show, it was under the ideological regime monopolized by the Gage (non-Roma) that stereotypical representations of the `Gypsies' emerged as the only unchallenged repository of the `truth' about this alleged `mysterious' people. With the words of Liegeois I emphasize that stereotypes and legends concerning `Gypsies', far from being confined to the literary sphere, permeate almost every area of public discourse, giving rise to a `constant and repellent caricature of the nomad'.[5]

Prosper Mérimée's novella *Carmen* is a blatant manifestation of the 19th-century European fascination with the foreign and the exotic. The setting of the story in Andalusia (in southern Spain) creates a colorful backdrop for the focus on the clash of cultures between Europeans and Gypsies, an ethnic group that was widely despised in the public sphere but romanticized by the popular imagination and the arts. The encounter with difference - leading to both attraction and violences - is a theme that Mérimée explores on many levels in Carmen. The title and the plot imply that the novella revolves around the story of Carmen and Don José, both members of minority populations, Gypsy and Basque, that were marginalized in Spain.

However, Carmen is also a narrative of adventures abroad experienced by the French narrator who recounts the tale, a scholarly traveler whose erudition, ironic detachment, and well-informed outsider's perspective on Spain suggest a resemblance to none other than Mérimée himself, a learned civil servant and academician who traveled widely for his work and his research on architecture and history. Mérimée's six-month trip to Spain in 1830 initiated a lifelong friendship with the aristocratic Montijo family, including the daughter, Eugenia, who married Emperor Napoleon III of France in 1853. Carmen apparently originated in an incident recounted to Mérimée in 1830 by her mother, the Countess Montijo.

Carmen blends the genres of travelogue, adventure story, and romantic novel in an intriguing hybrid of fantasy and nonfiction. Mérimée first published Carmen in 1845 in the predominantly nonfiction journal Revue des deux mondes ("Review of the Two Worlds"), without any indication that it was a novella rather than a travelogue like his four Lettres d'Espagne ("Letters from Spain") of 1831-33. The narrator's classical allusions and eye for details of topography, local customs, and language endow the narrative frame with an aura of realism, and his agency (aiding Don José's flight from justice, succumbing to Carmen's charms) obscures the boundary between the frame and the central plot.

Mérimée's decision to shift the conclusion of the story from Don José's words absolving himself of responsibility for the fate of Carmen:'*The Calé are to blame, for bringing her up as they did*.' to the narrator's philological reflections reinforces the central importance of language in the novella, which begins with a misogynistic Greek epigram: *"Every woman is as bitter as gall. But she has two good moments: one in bed, the other in death.*"and ends with an enigmatic Romany proverb: "*A closed mouth, no fly can enter*."[6]

While the narrator sprinkles his account liberally with linguistic erudition, only Carmen masters the art of language as persuasion, using Basque, Romany, and Spanish to manipulate those around her. Her name, from the Latin carmen, which can mean a song, poem, or magic spell - appropriate for a character associated with song, dance, and seduction as well as with "Gypsy magic."

Carmen is not an epic tale of battles and thrones won and lost, though it is as filled with sex, doom, and bloody incident as Macbeth, more explicit than I would have believed possible for a novella published in 1845. Either Mérimée was the Tarantino of his day or the

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[5] Jean-Pierre Liegeois, *Gypsies and Travellers: Dossiers for the Intercultural Training of Teachers* Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 1987, p. 132.

[6] Prosper Mérimée, Carmen Paris: Pocket, 2004

literature of the time was a good deal more lively than we suspect. It's certainly more exciting to read than Hugo.

Describing Carmen, the author immediately will put her „in between" two worlds, we witness a contradictory cultural construct, both anti-Roma and philo-Roma:

" I seriously doubt whether Señorita Carmen was of the pure breed; at all events, she was infinitely prettier than any of the women of her nation whom I had ever met. No woman is beautiful, say the Spaniards, unless she combines thirty so's; or, if you prefer, unless she may be described by ten adjectives, each of which is applicable to three parts of her person. For instance, she must have three black things: eyes, lashes, and eyebrows, etc. (See Brantôme for the rest.) My gypsy could make no pretension to so many perfections. Her skin, albeit perfectly smooth, closely resembled the hue of copper. Her eyes were oblique, but of a beautiful shape; her lips a little heavy but well formed, and disclosed two rows of teeth whiter than almonds without their skins. Her hair, which was possibly a bit coarse, was black with a blue reflection, like a crow's wing, and long and glossy. To avoid fatiguing you with a too verbose description, I will say that for each defect she had some good point, which stood out the more boldly perhaps by the very contrast. It was a strange, wild type of beauty, a face which took one by surprise at first, but which one could not forget. Her eyes, especially, had an expression at once voluptuous and fierce, which I had never seen in any mortal eye. "A gypsy's eye is a wolf's eye" is a Spanish saying which denotes keen observation. If you have not the time to go to the Jardin des Plantes to study the glance of a wolf, observe your cat when it is watching a sparrow."[7]

Soon after meeting the narrator, she admits to sorcery and dealings with the Devil. The writer, who admits to dabbling in it himself in his school days, in intrigued and wishes to see her practice her art.

The bulk of the novella is the third part, the prison interview, as Don Jose tells the story of his downfall to our author. Much of it will be familiar to fans of the opera, with the fracas at the cigar factory and Carmen convincing the lonely young corporal to let her escape before they reunite after his demotion and spell in the guardhouse. But there are several meaty tales after Don Jose deserts that are disposed of or condensed by Bizet, elaborating on his downward spiral that turns into a death-dance with Carmen. From the duel with his lieutenant on, sin plucks on sin, as Shakespeare's Richard noticed. Don Jose and Carmen join a small band of smugglers, mostly bringing English goods in from Gibraltar, but when desperate or when opportunity presents itself, they turn to robbery. He descends from smuggling to robbery to outright murder, egged on by his lover. There's little honour among thieves, and the two best scenes are a running gunfight with the military where the band's dreadful leader kills a wounded comrade by discharging a blunderbuss into his follower's face, and a knife fight between Don Jose and Carmen's husband, the same leader who killed one of his followers and then settled down to a game of cards. These incidents, the "business of Egypt" as Carmen phrases it, are quite well-told and would stand up well against any of the authors more frequently discussed here at Black Gate.

Meanwhile, Carmen grows increasingly distant and fatalistic, for her fortune-telling keeps revealing that she must die, then Don Jose shortly after.

It's easy to forget what it's like to be a stranger in a strange land in our world where you can be both everywhere and nowhere. Don Jose, as an exile (he owes his army enlistment to a knife fight after a tennis match in his youth), is urged into throwing away his rank over

[7] Prosper Mérimée, Carmen Paris: Pocket, 2004, p. 23

something as minor as a few words in his home tongue, albeit atrociously pronounced. The novella does a great job of handling tribalism, whether its that of the Gypsy smugglers, the military, the women at the cigar factory where Carmen works, or the church and aristocracy.

The fights and escapades, in their small-scale grit and sweat, convey an authenticity that impresses. When you have a man whipping off his hat to use it as a shield in a fight involving folding knives, the stakes of a bandit's campfire seem every bit as great as a clash of empires. Carmen's alley escape introduces us once again into the exotic escapism of the era:

"At that moment we were passing one of the narrow lanes of which there are so many in Seville. All of a sudden Carmen turned and struck me with her fist in the breast. I purposely fell backward. With one spring she leaped over me and began to run, showing us a fleet pair of legs! Basque legs are famous; hers were quite equal to them-as swift and as well moulded. I sprang up instantly; but I held my lance horizontally so as to block the street, so that my men were delayed for a moment when they attempted to pursue her. Then I began to run myself, and they were at my heels. But overtake her! there was no danger of that, with our spurs, and sabres, and lances! In less than it takes to tell it, the prisoner disappeared. Indeed, all the women in the quarter favoured her flight, laughed at us, and sent us in the wrong direction. After marching and countermarching, we were obliged to return to the guard-house without a receipt from the governor of the prison."[8]

Mérimée manages to cram a great deal of flavor into a few words, especially when describing the busy, narrow streets of the cities and the dusty, lonely roads of the hills and mountains. So on the rare occasions he resorts to a paragraph of description, it has all the more significance.

And last, Carmen is a supreme example of an independent woman in a period, patriarchal society (including that of the Romani, who don't let their women engage in outright prostitution and frown on a woman taking lovers). Though there's no nonsense about her being a match for a skilled man in a knife fight, she's worth any three men of the smuggling band for her brains, audacity, and skill. Even Don Jose in his jail cell, though he frequently calls her "a devil," grants her that. Sex is both a tool and a pleasure in its own right for her. While she's not a hostage to her loins, they do betray when she returns to Don Jose multiple times when she might be rid of him. Her sexuality, to my mind, is more of a symbol of the freedom she holds so dear. I would rank *Carmen* with Mitchell's resourceful Scarlett O'Hara or Austen's uncompromising Elizabeth Bennet as one of the most memorable women of literature.

The tale of deceit and intrigue in exotic Spain titillated readers.

"I doubted whether that girl ever said a true word in her life; but when she spoke, I believed her; it was too much for me. She murdered the Basque language, yet I believed that she was a Navarrese. Her eyes alone, to say nothing of her mouth and her colour, proclaimed her a gypsy. I was mad, I paid no heed to anything. I though that if Spaniards had dared to speak slightly to me of the provinces, I would have slashed their faces as she had slashed her comrade's. In short, I was like a drunken man; I began to say foolish things, I was on the verge of doing them."[9]

When observed thus at a safe distance, Carmen fascinated nineteenth century readers. The novella did not merely seek to tell a tragic tale of bohemian Spain since, as Corry Cropper notes, "whether Mérimée's narratives are set in the past or in an exotic world [...]

[8] Prosper Mérimée, Carmen Paris: Pocket, 2004, p.25
[9] Prosper Mérimée, Carmen (Paris: Pocket, 2004), p.25

their intent is to uncover what is being ignored in contemporary France."[10] When treated as more than just a novella, then, Carmen becomes a metaphor for the sometimes dangerous influence and power of the marginalized Other. Mérimée's narrative structure, however, manages to mitigate the shocking immorality in the tale, and tames Carmen with a masculine narrator, and a passionless, scientific context to neutralize her enticing danger and seductiveness. Thirty years later, though, Georges Bizet eliminated safety from the narrative, presenting the savage, seductive Carmen in all her exotic glory, complete with non-traditional music. This rapprochement of the previously distant Other unsettled the Parisian audiences in a way that few works had done before. Sorcery can and should be utterly mundane, at least occasionally. In Carmen, beyond the frequent fortune-telling, there's a good deal of talk of love charms and "when will I see him again" devices resorted to by desperate young lovers that Romani and their ilk are only too happy to use in fleecing the gentiles. Take inspiration from daytime television advertising. We can make our own sorcerers a little more believable by having them continually sought for help (or desperate enough to earn some coin), intervening with love lives, anti-aging remedies, help with finances and profitable employment, seeking installation of or relief from pregnancy, and other everyday crises.

Prosper Mérimée sets up a narrative duality in his novella by switching narrators and frameworks several times. At the outset of the novella , an archeologist narrates from Andalusia, where he and his guide, Antonio, encounter a man with a strange accent, and soon discover him to be Don José, a notorious bandit. Antonio decides to turn Don José in, so the narrator wakes him and warns him, and the chapter ends with Don José's escape. This first section introduces the reader to the Andalusian setting, creating an authentic expository moment, emphasized by the lack of translation of foreign words. When Mérimée references an Andalusian or Basque word, he leaves the reader with only context from which to glean the meaning. For instance, when the narrator and Antonio accompany Don José to a hotel, he begins to sing and play the mandolin, and the narrator remarks, "'[s]i je ne me trompe, lui dis-je, ce n'est pas un air espagnol que vous venez de chanter. Cela ressemble aux zorzicos que j'ai entendus dans les Provinces , et les paroles doivent être en langue basque.'" [11] Throughout the first three sections, Mérimée 's tactic of leaving the reader to guess the meaning of the unknown words heightens the exotic verisimilitude of the setting , and causes the reader of the novella to experience the same disorientation that affected the operatic audience many decades later. The author subjects

them to a series of unfamiliar, foreign sounds that they must attempt to decipher unaided. Because the narrator himself approaches the language from a standpoint of doubt, he and , "[I]I f I am not mistaken, I said to him, it was not a Spanish air that you just sang. It resembles the zorzicos that I heard in the Provinces, and the words must be in Basque ." [12]

By extension, his audience are deprived of the essential aspects of communication, language and meaning ,which might make a foreign Other considerably less unsettling and more relatable. The narrator's description of Don José's music further highlights the very same sense of unfamiliarity. He characterizes the voice as, "rude, mais pourtant agréable," and the song itself as, "mélancolique et bizarre[.]" [13] Mérimée makes the reader privy to his own point of view in his role as a scientist investigating a culture. This objective viewpoint, coupled with the cultural authenticity of the language, infuses the first sections of the work with the feel of an almost historical account of the Archeologist's travels. Mérimée's Don José differs notably from his later operatic counterpart, partly. By virtue of the timing of his introduction to the audience. The appearance and demeanor of the Don José of 1845 already

[10] Corry Cropper , "*Prosper Mérimée and the Subversive 'Historical' Short Story*," Nineteenth Century French Studies 33 ,1/2, 2004, 69
[11] Prosper Mérimée, *Carmen* (Paris: Pocket, 2004), p.25.
[12] Idem. ,p. 35
[13] Ibidem, p. 35

bear the signs of all the troubles Carmen has brought upon him. The narrator first describes the darkness of his once fair features, and goes on to note that, “sa figure, à la fois noble et farouche, me rappelait le Satan de Milton.” [14] The comparison to John Milton’s Satan, the epitome of the romantic anti-hero, only darkens the image of Don José further, giving the reader little indication of whether they should trust or dislike this mysterious bandit. This reference also echoes his description of Carmen as a servant of the devil, foreshadowing their connection. This dynamic of Carmen as the inferior character disappears in the opera, in which her character dominates the plot. In the second chapter, the narrator experiences the culture of Cordoue (Córdoba) more intimately, at once including himself in it and separating himself from it. Throughout the initial descriptions of the chapter, he primarily employs the pronoun “on” ,meaning „one”. This relates him directly to the culture in question, while establishing him definitively apart from them, maintaining a relative distance[15]. At the outset, he witnesses a group of women bathing in a river, and describes, “des cris, des rires, un tapage infernal.” “[C]ries, laughter, an infernal racket . ” [16] Here again Mérimée draws attention to the disagreeable sounds created by the foreign characters. This chaotic sound of the bohemian Other, even when not musically represented , speaks to an underlying uneasiness surrounding the unavoidability of marginalized groups such as these women . It is in this setting that the narrator encounters Carmen for the first time: ”Un soir, à l’heure où l’on ne voit plus rien, je fumais, appuyé sur le parapet du quai, lorsqu’une femme, remontant l’escalier qui conduit à la rivière, vint s’asseoir près de moi. Elle avait dans les cheveux un gros bouquet de jasmin, dont les pétales exhalent le soir une odeur enivrante...à l’obscure clarté qui tombe des étoiles, je vis qu’elle était petite, jeune, bien faite, et qu’elle avait des très grands yeux.”

”One evening, at an hour when nothing was visible, I was smoking, resting on a parapet of the quay, when a woman, climbing back up the stairs that led to the river, came to sit near me. In her hair she had a large bouquet of jasmine, whose petals emitted an intoxicating odor into the night...in the dim clarity coming from the stars, I saw that she was small, young, good-looking, and that she had very large eyes. ”[17]

In contrast with his later descriptions, the narrator’s first impression of her is purely sensory (visual and olfactory, the most evocative of the senses). He sees a pretty, young woman of alluring presence, and creates an almost innocent image of her at their initial meeting. He describes her clothing as simple and black, and he sees her face as her mantilla (scarf/shawl) slides to her shoulders. Her large eyes and small frame do little to betray her duplicitous nature. This rather dispassionate description notwithstanding, the narrator clearly finds Carmen ’s presence.

Alluring as he describes the intoxicating smell of the jasmine in her hair , further eroticizing her. Having invited her to go get ice cream with him, he soon learns her identity, and his description of her quickly changes, as her reputation has preceded her. He now refers to her as, “une servante du diable.”/ „a servant to the devil”.[18] Even so, Carmen entices him all the way back to her home, where they are surprised by her lover, Don José, who, despite this betrayal, shows mercy on the man who previously allowed him to escape the authorities. Only after leaving does the narrator realize Carmen has stolen his watch. Her deceptively sweet appearance draws him in, but turns out to belie her nature. Therein lies a thinly veiled metaphor for the exotic Other, suggesting that it seduces but cannot be trusted. Mérimée leaves little of this appearance to the imagination as he provides his readers with a “[A]

[14] Prosper Mérimée, *Carmen* ,Paris: Pocket, 2004,p. 42
[15] Evlyn Gould, *The Fate of Carmen,* Baltimore&London: Johns Hopkins UP, p.81
[16] Prosper Mérimée, *Carmen* ,Paris: Pocket, 2004 , p. 43
[17] idem, p. 34
[18] Mérimée , op. cit. , p. 36

servant of the devil. ” In the image, the two occupy a room in disarray, and Carmen clings to a much taller Don José, who simultaneously dominates the frame in centrality and stature and is mostly overshadowed by Carmen. Mérimée thus depicts José as the protagonist, but suggests Carmen’s exotic allure attempting to overpower him. This watercolor demonstrates the importance both of José as the main focus of the narrative and of Carmen’s effect on him.

The Oriental Other, Carmen, seeks to undermine the dominance of the central, Western, character of José. Having learned that Don José has been imprisoned and having gone to visit him, the narrator agrees to listen to his tale, and in chapter 3 , we begin to hear Don José ’s story straight from his own mouth .This portion is the only part of Mérimée’s novella that corresponds directly to the opera. Don José describes being stationed in Seville near a cigarette factory full of alluring women who, “se mettent à leur aise, les jeunes surtout, quand il fait chaud.”69 . One of these exotic, uninhibited women is Carmen, with whom he falls madly in love , and for whom he abandons his military duty. In Mérimée’s tale, unlike in the opera, Carmen is already married to one of the bandits in the troupe she leads. The Carmen of 1845 is much more deceitful, wild and faithless than Bizet’s later character, who still shocked audiences, despite being a more tame, civilized version of her literary counterpart.

The third chapter ends abruptly when Don José murders Carmen, and vows that, “[c]e sont les Calé qui sont coupables pour l’avoir élevée ainsi.” “[I]t is the calé who are guilty for having raised her this way. ” [19]According to Don José, the entirety of the blame lies with her gypsy upbringing; the savage culture in which she was raised formed her treacherous nature.

The coming into public view of the the Carmen character tends to provoke feelings of admiration, surprise and amazement.[20] Such is the appearance of Carmen at the beginning of the homonimous short story by Prosper Merimee. ”J'etais donc le nez sur ma chaine, quand j'entends des bourgeois qui disaient: Voila la gitanilla! Je levai les yeux, et je la vis.C'etait un

vendredi, et je ne l'oublierai jamais”[21] Unable to govern his desire, the male character seems indeed to be possessed by a demon. Similarly, in Merimee's Carmen Don Jose cannot help falling in love despite himself: `J'etait fou, [... ] J'etait comme un homme ivre' (I was crazy, I was like a drunken man). [22]Carmen, for her part, displays an astonishing awareness of her power over her lover. The intentional nature of Carmen's seductive behaviour is essential to understand the textual functions performed by `Gypsy' female characters. There is a great deal of audacity in Carmen's beauty and she seems to exploit her sexuality as a sort of weapon, a challenge to the male's capacity to impose his will upon her. Like Pushkin's Zemfira, she prefers to die rather than to give up her freedom: `Tu veux me tuer, je le vois bien, dit-elle; c'est ecrit, mais tu ne me feras pas ceder [...] Carmen sera toujours libre. Calli eile est nee, calli eile mourra'. [23] This attitude of mockery and defiance contrasts with that of non-'Gypsy' women. In Bizet's Carmen, for example, we are presented with an opposition between the shy, innocent Micaela and the insolent, malicious `Gypsy', underlined by the contrast between the former's fair beauty and the dark beauty of the `Gypsy'.

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[19] Mérimée, op. cit. , p. 46

[20] Paola Toninato, *The Rise of Written Literature among the Roma: A Study of the Role of Writing in the Current Re-Definition of Romani Identity with Specific Reference to the Italian Case*, University of Warwick Centre for Translation and Comparative Cultural Studies March 2004, p. 104

[21] So there I was engrossed in my chain when I heard some townsfolk saying: "Here comes the gitanilla. " I raised my head, and saw her. It was a Friday; I'll never forget it'. P. Merimee, *Carmen at autres nouvelles* London: Harrap, 1962, p. 26; trans. by Nicholas Jotcham.

[22] Mérimée, op. cit. , p. 32

[23] `You want to kill me, I can see that - she said - it is written, but you will never make me submit. Carmen will always be free. Calli she was born, Calli she will die'. P. Merimee, *Carmen at autres nouvelles* London: Harrap, 1962, pp. 67-68; my translation.

The appearance of Micaela, a pretty, shy creature with tresses of fair hair, is very different from the bold attitude of Carmen, as we read in the libretto. The emotions aroused by `Gypsy' women represent the negative term of the manichean opposition between good and evil, life and death. Such passions are always extreme, dangerous or even lethal; they defy any rational order and may lead to a man's damnation and to his social death, that is, his exclusion from civil society. What lesson can the reader learn from the tragic ending of a non-`Gypsy''s love for a `Gypsy' woman? This negative finale could be interpreted in moral terms, as the consequence of an infringement of well-established rules and conventions. On the other hand, beneath the surface of this moral condemnation, we may detect a deeper message. Passions involving `Gypsies' are not merely 'devilish: they are also highly `anti-structural' : their violent and destructive nature is in symbolic opposition to more `constructive' forms of love - i. e. marital love - which are officially sanctioned and recognized by the majority society. A threatening and anti-structural character by definition, the female `Gypsy' is the target of ambivalent feelings of attraction and revulsion. She is the object of an immoderate desire, which stems from her own lack of restraint and morality: she represents a breach in the hegemonic social and moral structures. In this sense, she epitomizes the condition of her ethnic group, perceived as marginal and dangerous by the dominant society: the wild nature of `Gypsy' lifestyle and customs is presented as a sign of their radical diversity and incompatibility with the dominant social system. The readers may indeed sympathize with these tragic heroines for their determination to defend their freedom at the cost of their life -a form of celebration of the free spirit of the `Gypsy'. It is clear, however, that these

characters' heroic status is not meant to exceed the limits of the text: it is the outcome of a textual fiction of the `Gypsies' which is ultimately functional to the reassertion of their position as outsiders. From this point of view, the death of the `Gypsy' character may be likened to a sort of expiatory rite which confirms the validity of the hegemonic order.

It is interesting to note that the status of `Gypsies' as outsiders granted them the right of abode among other literary `deviants'. For instance, the fictional `Gypsy' bears significant similarities with the character of the picaro, and, more in general, with the ranks of vagrants, thieves and beggars dominating the `literature of roguery', [24] whose status was surrounded by an unfavourable attitude (see the negative connotation of the picaro in the mid-sixteenth century). It is not accidental then that the `Gypsy' characters should be found in genres which are considered `alternative' to mainstream, classical literature such as comedy, burlesque poetry, and the comic epic in macaronic. Neither is it surprising that the monstrous, hybrid character of the `Gypsy' is located in experimental texts enacting an apparent reversal of the hegemonic order and a triumph of the `carruvalesque' and the `grotesque'. In his work on Rabelais, Bahktin emphasizes that in carnival, life is represented as turned `inside out': the laws, prohibitions, and restrictions that determine the structure and order of ordinary, that is non-carnival, life are suspended during carnival: what is suspended first of all is hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette connected with it - that is, everything resulting from socio-hierarchical inequality or any other form of inequality among people. [25]

In the final analysis, the conclusion of this study is that the story of the Spanish gitana achieved universal notoriety and imposed Carmen as a paradigmatic Roma figure - defined by

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[24] See F. W. Chandler, *The Literature of Roguery* London: Boston, Mass: Archibald Constable, Houghton, Mifflin, 1907, A. Parker, *Literature and the Delinquent: The Picaresque Novel In Spain And Europe*, 1599-1753 Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1967,
See also R. Alter, Rogue's *Progress: Studies In The Picaresque Novel* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1964, R.Bjorson, *The Picaresque Hero in European Fiction* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977,
and H. Sieber, *The Picaresque* London: Methuen, 1977

[25] M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, pp. 122-123.

freedom from/resistance to the norms of modern society - for the very reason that the myth was created in the wake of certain cultural representations of the Roma people that were already combining, in the late 19th century, the motif of the gypsies' freedom with that of their resistance to civilization. The public success of the story not only feeds on the deep rooting of the ambivalent stereotype concerning the Roma people in the social imaginary, but also decisively fuels this stereotype, consolidating an equally fictional, yet resilient, a contradictory, yet persistent hetero-identitarian cultural construct.

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