

## THE WARBLOODED GIPSY WOMAN AND THE GADJO IN LITERATURE

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*Abstract: The seductiveness exercised by the figure of the Other often becomes encapsulated into a special concern with women. And, as a series of postcolonialism theorists from Edward Said to Gayatri Spivak have emphasised, the Other is always gendered. The image of the Gypsy woman has historically occupied an important place in non-Roma works of fiction, such as novels and films. At the end of the nineteenth century the allure of ‘Gypsies’, ‘Bohemians’ or ‘Tsiganes’ emerged as a twin sister to the Orientalism and primitivism popular among the European aristocratic and educated elites. In Central Europe at that time the entertainment of the nobility and the military was invariably accompanied by choirs and troupes of ‘passionate’ Gypsy musicians. The literature, operas and operettas of the same period evoke the enamoured fascination with Gypsy women on the part of men from non-Roma high society. The imagery of the ‘warmblooded’ Gypsy, momentarily defying male domination by her personal choice of a partner (a non-Gypsy, or Gadjo, possibly) is the basis of a narrative structure found equally in Romantic writers like Prosper Mérimée or Alexander Pushkin and in realists such as Leo Tolstoy, and even much later in the work of contemporary filmmakers like Emir Kusturica and Tony Gatlif. The Gypsy woman is thus constantly presented as steeped in mystery and erotic passion thanks to sexual and psychological qualities that are presumed exceptional.*

*Keywords: Gipsy, Gadje, female norms, attraction*

With their big, black, round eyes, the girls of the tribe have a dignified look and a slender bearing; they clap their hands against their bewitching hips with a clink of necklaces, earrings and bracelets.<sup>92</sup> The seductiveness exercised by the figure of the Other often becomes encapsulated into a special concern with women. And, as a series of postcolonialism theorists from Edward Said to Gayatri Spivak have emphasised, the Other is always gendered. The image of the Gypsy woman has historically occupied an important place in non-Roma works of fiction, such as novels and films –just as the ‘passionate’ Gypsy musicians.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Zaharia Stancu, *Șatra [The tribe]*, Editura Militar, București, first edition 1968, 1986, p 91

<sup>93</sup> As explained in Henriette Asséo, *Les tsiganes, une destinée européenne*, Gallimard, Paris, 1994.

In this article, I examine the particular form that the gendered image of the Gypsy Other takes in literature. Gypsy' female characters, they are represented as having divining faculties, as experts in the magic arts. They are frequently depicted as exotic creatures with a diabolic ability to bewitch non-'Gypsy' males, who cannot help falling madly in love with them' against their will. In the next part I will focus in particular on the stereotype of the 'femme fatale', which emerged in nineteenth-century European literature and greatly contributed to shape the imagery of the Gage about 'Gypsy' women. The role played by 'Gypsy' female characters in works by non-'Gypsy' artists appears to follow a recurrent pattern. In many works, the 'Gypsy' is at the centre of some intricate plot, often entailing child stealing, the use of magic or various forms of trickery. 'Gypsies' are here perceived as synonymous with ruse, deception and double-dealing: they are ambiguous, mischievous characters by definition. Female figures in particular are portrayed as malicious and treacherous. In addition to hatching evil plots and harbouring hostile feelings against non-'Gypsies', they are also employed to give the narration a magic connotation. This is particularly evident in literary works by nineteenth-century authors, where the presence of 'Gypsy' female characters is generally surrounded by a magnetic aura.

The appearance of the 'Gypsy' character on the scene tends to provoke feelings of admiration, surprise and amazement. Such is the appearance of Carmen at the beginning of the homonymous short story by Prosper Merimee. In Victor Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris*, Esmeralda appears as a supernatural creature, a dazzlingly beautiful 'vision':

Dans un vaste espace laisse libre entre la foule et le feu, une jeune fille dansait. [...] Elle n'était pas grande, mais eile le semblait, tart sa fine taille s' elanciat hardiment. Elle était brune, mais on devinait que le jour sa peau devait avoir ce beau reflet dore des Andalouses et des Romaines. [...] Ses cheveux noirs, ses yeux de flamme, c'était une surnaturelle creature<sup>94</sup>

Everybody seems completely absorbed in the contemplation of the 'Gypsy' girl - 'Autour d'eile tous les regards étaient fixes, toutes les bouches ouvertes' (around her,

all eyes were fixed and all mouths agape) - as if under a magic spell. Preciosa seems to have an analogous effect on her audience:

”El aseó de Preciosa era tal, que poco a poco fue enamorando los Ojos de cuantos la miraban. De entre el son del tamborin y castanetas y fuga del baffle salio un rumor que encarecia la belleza y donaire de la gitanilla, y corrian los muchachos a verla, y los hombres a mirarla.”<sup>95</sup>

This way of looking at 'Gypsies' was quite widespread in nineteenth-century European literature and contributed to establish Romani art as a recurrent literary trope. References to 'Gypsy' musical talent may be found in a wide range of authors, such as Cervantes, Dostoevsky, Hugo, Tolstoy, Garcia. Lorca and many others.<sup>96</sup> This is how Hugo describes the singing talent of the young bohemienne:

<sup>94</sup> 'In a huge space left free between the crowd and the fire, a young girl was dancing. [...] She was not tall, but so boldly erect was her slim figure that she looked it. She was dark, but you could tell that in the daylight her skin must have had that lovely golden sheen of Roman or Andalusian women. [...] Her black hair, her fiery eyes, she was indeed a supernatural creature'. V. Hugo, *Notre-Dame de Paris* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), pp. 62-63; trans. by J. Sturrock.

<sup>95</sup> 'Preciosa was so attractive that as time went on she won the hearts of everyone who clapped eyes on her. Amid the sound of tambourines and the castanets, and the flurry of the dance, praises of the beauty and grace of the little gipsy girl brought the lads running to see her and the men to gaze at her'. M. de Cervantes, *Vovelas Ejemplares* (Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, 1980), p. 64; trans. by C. A. Jones.

<sup>96</sup> On the theme of Gypsy art and music within the body of European literature, see Djuric's article 'Rome Sinti nella letteratura', in Lacio Drom 3-4 (1993), pp. 18-32.

'C'etait indefinissable et charmant; quelque chose de pur, de sonore, d'aerien, d'alle';  
'eile semblait chanter, comme l'oiseau, par serenite et par insouciance'.<sup>97</sup>

But besides the vague atmosphere of enchantment created by their talent as dancers, 'Gypsy' girls seem to excite rather insane passions among the non-'Gypsies'. In *Notre-Dame de Paris*, Frolo (a priest and alchemist) is devastated by his passion for Esmeralda. The features of this love are unmistakably described by the victim himself as the result of a magic spell with terrible consequences:

Oh! quelle desertion de toute vertu! quel abandon desespere de moimeme!  
Docteur, je bafoue la science; gentilhomme, je dechire mon nom;  
prete, je fais du missel un oreiller de luxure, je crache au visage de mon  
Dieu! tout cela pour toi, enchanteresse! pour titre plus digne de ton  
enfer!<sup>98</sup>

In Romantic literature starts from an opposition between the autonomy and the resistance of Gypsies to authority - these are the characteristics of the underlying symbol of freedom – the figure of the Gypsy . They are treated as a community who loves and keeps its freedom and political resistance , despite all the shortcomings and persecution . The most representative in this regard was Pushkin's e great poem *Gypsies*<sup>99</sup>; written in 1824 , the hero of which, Aleko became a favorite in the whole nineteenth-century Russian literature . He became a prototype for " the superfluous hero " later . Aleko escapes from the civilized world into an uncivilized existence : he chooses a nomadic Gypsy community for the scene of his survival .The Roma Vaida gladly accepts him , allowing him to share everything with them. Only later does Aleko find out that the Gypsies are not only outside society, but also outside historical time: once they had provided shelter to Ovid, during his political exile , act for which the Gypsies have received the Orphic Songs , as a symbol of gratitude. Aleko falls in love with the Vaida's daughter, Zemfira , who shares his feelings , so everything seems perfect until we learn the secret of any Gypsy : they , free natures of birth,cannot become the property of anyone, just like their love cannot be owned by anyone. Aleko can't bear the girl's unfaithful behaviour-a girl who would drive any man crazy with her beauty - and becomes a murderer . The Vaida casts them out from his world , a world where no human life nor love can become someone's property . Aleko yearned for his own liberty at the price of Zemfira's freedom, which is unacceptable , so it is compulsory for him to return to where it ran away from.

For the Romantic aesthetics bizarre impressions spiced with grotesque elements were the long awaited expression of Otherness – of the Gypsy in this case. The antagonism between the bourgeois existence and the Gypsy intoxicates in the bud any attempts of dialogue between the two groups . It is possible that Victor Hugo's novel *Notre Dame de Paris*,<sup>100</sup> written in 1831 to be the most successful example in this regard. Esmeralda is a street dancer of Gypsy origins who is full of charm and compassion from birth, staying natural no matter what she does . She is the center of the human drama of the story. Each and every citizen of Paris is watching her incessantly, while she experiences the volatile moods of the masses : at first, she is worshiped for her exceptional dance moves ,then w hated and

<sup>97</sup> 'It was both enchanting and indefinable: something pure, resonant, aerial and winged, so to speak; [...] she seemed to sing like a bird, out of serenity and a light heart'. From V. Hugo, *Notre-Dame de Paris*, p. 86; trans. by J. Sturrock.

<sup>98</sup> 'I have abandoned all virtue, have abandoned myself in despair! I am a doctor but I sneer at learning, a gentleman but I dishonour my name, a priest, but I have made myself a pillow of debauchery, I spit in the face of my God! All this for you, you enchantress! To be worthier of your hell!' V. Hugo, *Notre-Dame de Paris*, p. 468; trans. by J. Sturrock.

<sup>99</sup> A.D.P. Briggs, "Did Carmen come from Russia?" in *English National Opera Programme.*, 2004

<sup>100</sup> Victor Hugo, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, Translated by John Sturrock. Penguin Classics, London, 1978

despised for being a witch; after which being praised for her dramatic rescue of Quasimodo . When the king decides for her to be executed , he is firmly convinced that the Parisian crowd wants her death. Esmeralda , the charming Gypsy girl is not able to make herself understood by the people around her , though she fascinates them all, and everyone who comes into contact with her, becomes a victim of her charms. In a world full of primitive superstitions , in which each protagonist lives a world of obsession and hallucinatory visions, running towards a predestined death Esmeralda's being a Gypsy is free ticket to the witches' club . A highly revealing twist in the plot of the novel is that she is not even a Gypsy , she was only kidnapped and raised by them. The fact that she became a " Gypsy Witch " is due solely to her surroundings and education - an issue worthy of the famous debate between Noam Chomsky and Jean Piaget .<sup>101</sup> Her tragedy is the tragedy of a Gypsy Esmeralda . With a similar catastrophe ends the love story between Don Jose and Carmen in the novel by Prosper Merimee.

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'etais fou, [...] J'etais comme un homme ivre' (I was crazy, I was like a drunken man). 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 écrit, mais tu ne me feras pas ceder [...] Carmen sera toujours libre. Calli eile est nee, calli eile mourra'.<sup>102</sup> 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'.

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

<sup>101</sup> *Language and Learning: The Debate Between Jean Piaget and Noam Chomsky*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980

<sup>102</sup> '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.

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.

This is how Carmen charms him with a sexuality that makes her the constant center of attention, and an icon of femininity at the sheer frontier of immorality.

Carmen, through her attitude, allows herself to be independent, and in the meantime to avoid becoming the property of anyone, as stated by Sidiya V. Hartman:

"Just like Zemfira couldn't bear any kind of chain around her ankles and couldn't be owned by anyone, Carmen-in the same way- couldn't be enslaved by any love affair. Rather the men around them are possessed by the devil after coming into contact with these charming Gypsies."<sup>103</sup> Both men are whites in trapped and fascinated by the beauty of the Gypsy, enslaved beauty and exoticism. Their greatest sin is trying to bind a freedom loving Gypsy.

How is the distance between Self and Other constructed through the use of a different device, that of conceptualising the Other through its female figures? For the Gypsy – and especially the Gypsy woman – becomes a fantasised character and allows the imagining of the Other. The question is why the female Roma is considered the most appropriate for displaying this fiction of the Other. One might ask whether the practice of 'dressing up like the women of the Other', as performed by Gadje, does not represent the expression of a vision according to which, whatever they do, women cannot seriously endanger the foundations of the political order. One might say, in this case, that transgression does not threaten the inter-ethnic boundary. At the same time, we observe how crossdressing, completely de-sacralised and de-ritualised, is transformed under certain conditions into a type of fashion, becoming the out-and-out instrument of the dominant Gadje ideals and ideology. It is in this way that 'Gypsy fashion', consisting of numerous clinking jewels, flounced skirts, brightly coloured cloth and so on, is presented in Western ready-to-wear catalogues as associated with a hypothetical nomadic lifestyle and 'the wind from the steppes'. So the Gypsy 'de luxe' featured by one of Jean-Paul Gautier's collections in 2005 is associated with a 'rekindling of passion in the warm-blooded Gypsy woman. Winking an eye to the hippy years, chic Gypsy style sets the latest trend.'<sup>104</sup>

Female clothing is indeed strongly highlighted throughout all kinds of non-Roma representations of Roma. To give one example: in Zaharia Stancu's novel (1986/1968) the only character privileged with being described in bright colours (all the others are dark, obscure, grey) is the young Lisandra, a Gypsy who defies her husband by loving his rival: The woman, knowing down to the last detail what lay in store for her (a public beating) had put on a yellow cotton skirt and a white silk blouse; her waist was narrowed by a belt and her hair fastened behind her neck by a blue ribbon.<sup>105</sup> The same is visible in filmic representations of Roma, such as Emil Loteanu's,<sup>106</sup> where the main erotic scene centres on the interminable removal of her skirts by the main female character Rada – an act of undressing that never extends to nudity.

How does one explain this stress on women's clothing in non-Roma representations of the Roma, and in particular on skirts? A psycho-sexual mystery seems incarnated by skirts,

<sup>103</sup> Sidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 82

<sup>104</sup> See [http://absolutfeminin.nouvelobs.com/mode/mode2104\\_012.html](http://absolutfeminin.nouvelobs.com/mode/mode2104_012.html) (website accessed 20 February 2006).

<sup>105</sup> Stancu, op cit, p 26

<sup>106</sup> Emil Loteanu, *Tabor Ukhodit v Nebo 'The Gypsy Camp Vanishes into the Blue'*, USSR, 1975

and they are also extremely important to the Roma themselves. Among the Kaldarari with whom I worked, skirts (rotkia) constituted an object of prime importance. They are seen to protect the 'pure' environment from the pollution contained in the genitalia (mij). The ways in which they are worn, washed or destroyed

trace the lines of demarcation between the pure and impure symbolic areas delimited on the body (the lower part is 'polluted', the upper part is 'pure'). Skirts evoke metonymically the boundary between Roma and Gadje and this is why they are such an important item in women's dowries.

This 'two in one' female body – the separation and yet unavoidable connection between the two halves evidenced by the compulsory use of the skirt – seems to be portrayed also by the mermaids which often figure in acrylic mural paintings inside Kaldarari houses throughout Romania and sometimes also on the façades of houses or on carts. These paintings are remarkable for their good sense of composition and symmetry, albeit without always respecting the rules of perspective. Bare-breasted mermaids – called Pharaonnes – more often than not with blonde hair, hybrid and fantastic, languish in larger-than-life grandeur in landscapes dotted with little lakes covered with water-lilies, or on seas with sailing ships floating on the horizon. The Pharaonnes are centrally positioned and immediately visible on the wall opposite the entrance of a house, or else on the outside, above the door. In the overall composition, they seem to reign over luxuriant and peaceful paradise worlds. If it is true that Kaldarari see Roma women as mermaids in a broader and metaphoric sense, so do the Gadje. Although the Gadje have no knowledge of Roma ideas about the female body and the role of the skirt, they nonetheless erotically emphasise Roma women's breasts and their enigmatic, troubling, hidden lower body. In Loteanu's film, Rada is repeatedly shown bare-breasted and Lisandra and the other girls of the Gypsy tribe are said to 'have little breasts, like apples'.<sup>107</sup>

Elsewhere in Stancu's novel the two halves of the body are reversed and the world is turned upside down (signifying the war which overthrows the status quo). Thus Lisandra, after having been beaten by her husband in front of the whole tribe, appears as follows in the eyes of others (and of the author): Spread across her shoulders and back, her black, shiny hair, wet and

mixed with mud and blood, covered like a piece of strange and barbaric clothing the whole of her upper body. The other part, with its curves, remained totally naked.<sup>108</sup>

One should note this allegory, so explicit for a patriarchal reading: the endangered world order is announced by a rebellious woman; an adulteress, beaten half to death, stands up, the two halves of her body interchanged from the viewpoint of the mermaid whose lower part of her

body is 'normally' uncovered. Likewise the character of Sabina in the film *Gadjo Dilo*<sup>109</sup> shows complete nudity only as prelude to a catastrophe: the Romanians set fire to Roma houses after Sabina is seen washing her hair, her breasts naked and skirts covering her lower body. It is worth mentioning that the main characters in all these various representations are males, as are the authors.

Just as in large numbers of images depicting colonial situations (postcards or press pictures), in the media that I am discussing here the women of the 'Other' are fantasised and displayed as aesthetically attractive and hence sexually desirable. But representations of

<sup>107</sup> Stancu, op cit, p 93

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, p 31

<sup>109</sup> Tony Gatlif, *Gadjo Dilo* (France/Romania), 1997

Roma women are very different from the colonial images that emphasise the domestication of women,<sup>110</sup> or display them nude for pornographic purposes.<sup>111</sup>

Roma/Gypsy women by contrast are draped in coloured clothing that appears to come straight from the theatre, the carnival or bacchanalia. But this scenario contains the classic elements of sexual attraction vis-à-vis the Other. Depicting Gypsy women as mermaids, on the other hand, appears more a question of seduction than of rape (which, for the subjects of colonisation, takes the form of the pornographic image). This seduction, which opens the door to a kind of theatrical fiction-world, has a strong erotic dimension. Mircea Eliade's fantasy short story illustrates this stress on seduction very well.<sup>112</sup> Its protagonist is spiritually initiated by a mysterious encounter with Gypsy women: they appear as creatures of dream, attracting and bewitching, testing the hero and leading him like spiritual guides – or misleading as mermaids do! Out of the dream, the question arises of taming this woman of the Other: washing her, dressing or undressing her, while still observing her 'natural' beauty. These paternalistic views and practices toward the Other's women reveal a typical relation of domination.

Despite this, I see no contrast between Gadje fantasies and Roma practices centred on femininity, but rather a continuity that needs to be emphasised. For Roma, as much as for Gadje, the lower part of the female Roma body remains hidden from sight as the taboo half. The particular eroticisation of the Gypsy woman by the Gadje meets the Roma image of femininity. One could state that skirts precisely institute Otherness in this figure of the mermaid. This continuity between representations does not obliterate the interethnic boundary but, on the contrary, constantly works to reiterate it. The representations of Roma and Gadje women do not coincide but significantly overlap and help to reinforce a cultural politics that is unfavourable to the aspirations of Roma to achieve the prerogatives of citizenship freely granted to other Romanians. These registers accord Roma both a ritually marginal place and the function of answering a bacchanalian need,<sup>113</sup> rather than considering them as part of an overarching and effectively shared culture. And the museum is only one example of the representation of the Gypsy Other at work in other cultural institutions, both formal and informal. Every cultural form that I have discussed (the fair and museum, fantastical or realist novels and feature films) ceaselessly proclaims a Roma/Gypsy femininity turned into a fantasy by the Gadje's coordinates of the unconscious: they emphasise a costumed, fictional Gypsy heroine, herself a disguised form of seduction in all its meanings. In modern times, in a more oblique way, as we have seen, romantic poetry and fashion all connive at a similar attitude towards Gypsies. Although the modes of expression are not the same in all the cultural products concerning Roma that have been mentioned here, it seems to me that it is a question each time of the same poetics of the Other, based on a semantic configuration in which the categories 'woman' and 'Gypsy' are closely related. The Gadje way of thinking about Roma through their womenfolk is also related to the absence of women in the museum-based discourse of Nation and Peasant. To de-poeticise, in order to politicise, as Anikó Imre puts it, does not seem part of the vision underlying institutional thinking for the immediate future, either in the Museum or in other Romanian institutions. In her words, 'poetry and

<sup>110</sup> Eric Savaresse, 'Montrer la Féminité, Figurer l'Altérité. Le Corps des Femmes Indigènes dans l'Imaginaire Colonial Français à Partir de l'Illustration (1900–1940)', in *Le Corps dans tous ses états : regards anthropologiques*, Gilles Boëtsch and Dominique Chevè, CNRS, Paris, 2000, pp 39–52

<sup>111</sup> Boris Wastiau, 'Les Plaques Sensibles de la Mémoire Ethnographique. Congo Belge 1890–1930', in *Xspéculation sur l'imaginaire et l'interdit*, Marc-Olivier Gonseth, Jacques Hainard and Roland Kaehr, MEN, Neuchâtel, 2003, pp 239–65

<sup>112</sup> Mircea Eliade, *La țigănci, Pe strada Mântuleasa*, At the Gypsy Women's Place. On Mântuleasa Street, Humanitas, Bucuresti (first edition 1969), 2003

<sup>113</sup> The term 'bacchanalia', originally the feast of Bacchus in Roman antiquity, is a synonym for orgy. This term is used in Mattijs Van De Port, *Gypsies, Wars and other Instances of the Wild: Civilization and its Discontents in a Serbian Town*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, 1998. Van de Port uses it to speak of the 'feasts of unreason' (lumpovanjie) celebrated by Serbs, who have Gypsy musicians play in bars.

irony function to distance ideal femininities from actual women and to silence the gender politics of representation'.<sup>114</sup>

In this sense and more generally one might reflect that the way in which the female body is imagined is mirrored by the role that society accords to women in politics.<sup>115</sup> This also relates to more general paradigms: the control of the Other is achieved through the manipulation of the image of 'his' women.<sup>116</sup> this institution exploits stereotypes of Gypsies to project an image that is oneiric, absurd and carnivalesque, and it does so at least in part through the utilisation of women and images of femininity. Beyond the continuities between representations of the Roma/Gypsy woman by both Roma and Gadje, what is at stake is the unquestioned creation of a depoliticised system of thought that works to ghettoise the Roma in the Romanian imagination and self-conceptualisation.

At the heart of this representational system resides the female body and its appearance: the Gypsy costume is dislocated and instrumentalised in an elitist Gadjo world. In other words, the cultural use of the body in the context of dislocation appears to utilise to perfection the means offered by the system of Rom meanings translated into a pure objective: that of domination. This coherence as concerns the representation of the feminine is an efficient means of maintaining the status quo of gender in Gadje and Roma societies and of conserving the inter-ethnic boundary.

Bhattacharyya's tales titled "*The story of the exotic dancer*" from her book *Tales of dark-skinned women: Race, gender and global culture*. In it, she describes an interpretation of Salome, whose character can relate to that of Carmens' :

"So in translation, Salome's dance becomes a performance of the body struggling to become free of material constraint, the twitching of flesh which itches to be revealed. In the story reworked through Western performance, Salome mesmerizes because she demonstrates the body's need to be confirmed through sight, and for sight to confirm the body. She refuses her veils and reveals her flesh. Instead of being sublimely indescribable, the story becomes one in which sight fixes the previously unseen and no troubling mystery remains."<sup>117</sup>

Carmen can be seen as a subject of spectacle; she mesmerizes and enchants with her body and knows she is a threat. She uses this in her favor to indulge in the most cunning and sexual acts. In her book *Thinking the Difference*, Luce Irigaray argues that "women are still in a state of social and cultural subjugation, even those who believe they are free and emancipated. Why? Because the order that lays down the law is male".

After being taken in by the soldiers (Don José is one of them) because she slashed a woman's cheek in the cigar factory, she uses her tactics to convince him to let her escape. Carmen quickly recognizes that don José is In his article "*Visions of Salome: The Femme Fatale in American Popular Songs before 1920*," Larry Hamberlin defines Salome as "an archetypal exotic femme fatale whose dance before Herod and the beheading of John the Baptist offer a potent mixture of decadent obsessions: murder, incest, female sexuality, and the mysterious Orient In her book *Thinking the Difference*, Luce Irigaray argues that "women are still in a state of social and cultural subjugation, even those who believe they are free and emancipated."<sup>118</sup> Following Jayna Brown's analysis of possession from her book, *Babylon*

<sup>114</sup> Anikó Imre, 'Hungarian Poetic Nationalism or National Pornography? Eastern Europe and Feminism – With a Difference', in *Violence And The Body. Race, Gender and the State*, ed Arturo Aldama, Indiana University Press, Indianapolis–Bloomington, 2003, pp 39–58, p 57

<sup>115</sup> As argued in Moira Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies, Ethics, Power And Corporeality*, Routledge, London–New York, 1996

<sup>116</sup> As argued in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed with Ranajit Guha, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1988; and in Laura Nader, 'Orientalism, Occidentalism and the Control of Women', *Cultural Dynamics*, II:3, 1989, pp 323–55.

<sup>117</sup> Gargi. Bhattacharyya, *Tales of dark-skinned women: Race, gender and global culture*. London: UCL Press, 1998. Print., p330

<sup>118</sup> *Thinking the Difference: For a Peaceful Revolution*. Translated by Karin Montin. New York,



*Girls*, “Possession works as a trope for the mimetic contact Europeans sought. It becomes a poetic refrain in the anthropological writings of discovery, of l’art negre. Possession was a key concept for French ethnographers and artists during the surrealist period. To be possessed promised a reconnection with repressed aspects of the self; it promised a reunification of self, alienated by modern life”<sup>119</sup> Carmen will not be anyone’s property, and for this, she must embody the ‘femme fatale’ figure. According to Mary Anne Doane and her book *Femme Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis*, “The femme fatale is the figure of a certain discursive unease, a potential epistemological trauma. For her most striking characteristics, perhaps, is the fact that she never really is what she seems to be. She harbors a threat which is not entirely legible, predictable, or manageable [...] But the femme fatale is situated as evil and is frequently punished or killed”<sup>120</sup> This is vital to the myth of Carmen because Carmen, as a whole, represents one who goes against the norms and constraints of a male dominated society. As stated by Colmeiro, “Carmen’s body is a constant reminder of her resistance to domination. Gender: she resists male domination; sexuality (her desires are free and uninhibited, and create fears of emasculation); race (as a Gypsy, she illicit fears of miscegenation); religion (she practices occult magic and is repeatedly seen as a devil and a threat to Christian faith); and politics (Carmen not only continually resists both civil and military authority; she also obliterates geo-political borders...”<sup>121</sup>

Both don José and the narrator are captivated by Carmen’s persona and charm. They perceive her as an ideal beauty with enchanting physical attributes, but as a threat to society and to the male gender. They believe she is wicked because she can tell one’s la bají and cause enchantment and obsession towards man. This construction parallels with Patrick Bade’s book, *Femme Fatale: Images of Evil and Fascinating Women*, where he states the following: “Of course wicked women had always existed in art as in life, and there had always been men who feared female sexuality or who took a masochistic delight in fantasies of fatal women. The superstitions that women are bringers of ill-luck and that they sap men of their virility and creativity, that they are tainted with evil and devious and mischiefmaking by nature are, in more or less primitive forms, universal.”<sup>122</sup>

She does not want to be subjugated or dominated by anyone. She is showing resistance and is not afraid of the consequences. The Roma woman embodies the heroic defiance of free spirit, desire, and natural instinct over the social governing modernity. She is the idealized image of the bohemian. But for those same reasons she also represents a symbolic threat. Her natural freedom warrants her autonomy, as she will not be tied to any man, and this constitutes a permanent threat to the confused identities of don José, the French narrator, and ultimately Mérimée”

But Gypsies , girls and women are not only provocative and victims of fate, they are also spokespersons of destiny . It seems that the most recognized occupations of Gypsies are thievery and fortunetelling. Taken any appearance of them in literature, Gypsies seem to be in extremely good relations with the future, which can be based on the fact that they are outside historical time . As in Baudelaire 's poem about nomadic Gypsies or Bohemians , they are uprooted in the present moment, but feel at home in the future.

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Routledge, 1994, p. 14

<sup>119</sup> Jayna.Brown, *Babylon Girls: Black Women Performers and the Shaping of the Modern*, London: Duke University Press, 2008., p.255

<sup>120</sup> Doane, Mary Anne. *Femme Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis*. New York:

Routledge, 1991, p.1-2

<sup>121</sup> Colmeiro, José F. “*Exorcising Exoticism: Carmen and the Construction of Oriental Spain.*”

*Comparative Literature*. Vol. 54, No. 2 (Spring 2002): p.144

<sup>122</sup> Patrick. Bade, *Femme Fatale: Images of evil and fascinating women*. London: Ash & Grant Ltd., 1979,p.9

“...while Carmen incarnates the principles of freedom espoused by bohemians, her independence threatens the male dominated social and narrative order”<sup>123</sup> It is not surprising that Carmen fails to conform to any man’s orders. She does not want to yield to anyone and refuses to change or be saved With regards to possession, Saidiya Hartman states: ”The disregard of sexual injury does not divest slave women of gender but reveals the role of property relations---the possession of the enslaved---and racial subjugation in the constitution of gender and sexuality. Possession occurs not via the protections of the patriarchal family and its control of female sexuality, but via absolute rights of property. Therefore terms like “protection,” “domesticity,” and “honor” need to be recognized as specific articulations of racial and class location. The captive female does not possess gender as much as she is possessed by gender---that is, by way of a particular investment in and use of the body.”<sup>124</sup>

Although Carmen does not wish to be held captive by anyone, she allows her body to be used for the purpose of gaining fame, luxuries, and envy. She refuses to be possessed and wants to be free. Following Luce Irigaray’s premise on love, “The elevation of love to its human and divine identity is, from the point of view of the genesis of our culture, women’s concern. And when women are banished from love or dispossessed of it, when their divinity as lovers is forgotten, love once more becomes drives that verge on animality, disembodied sublimation of them, or death”<sup>125</sup> Carmen and don José’s love-hate relationship, cause an obsession with one other, but yet, a resistance towards ownership and consumption. In his book , *The Scene of Harlem Cabaret: Race, Sexuality, Performance*, Shane Vogel discusses modes of nightlife performance that parallel with the scene of the cabaret. One argument that coincides with the relationship between the Roma girl and the Gadge male is their actual interaction with one another. They seem so close, yet so far from each other, and both resist in conforming and accepting to the norms imposed by themselves<sup>126</sup>. “It is this interplay of closeness and distance, acceptance and refusal, connection and disconnection, concentration and distraction that shapes the cabaret as an intimate formation, the perpetual disorganization and reorganization of sound, bodies, sightlines, “The woman is supposed to leave her family, live with her husband, take his name, let herself be possessed by him physically, bear his children, bring them into the world, and raise them...”<sup>127</sup>

Carmen’s actions speak for themselves when warning don José about not wanting to abandon her malicious ways. Carmen lives to use her body, magic, and charm to have her way with the men in her life. Colmeiro states that “The pressure to stop Carmen’s devilish magic and menacing charm and, ultimately, to make her conform is clearly felt from the beginning of the narration. Because he is unable to tame Carmen’s independent spirit, the only way for don José to put an end to these practices is to put an end to her life”<sup>128</sup>

Carmen’s dead body allows don José to be free. He has now possessed and consumed her. In the film, he stabs her, she falls to the floor and he lays her on a pedestal, covered with her rose.

The Gipsy girl’s performance may be attractive to the reader and audience because she projects exoticism and sexuality as a woman. Her body is beautified and she is strong and fearless. This parallels with Jayna Brown’s point on burlesque women and their bodies. She

<sup>123</sup> Colmeiro, José F. “*Exorcising Exoticism: Carmen and the Construction of Oriental Spain.*” *Comparative Literature*. Vol. 54, No. 2 (Spring 2002), 138

<sup>124</sup> Hartman, Saidiya V. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, p.100

<sup>125</sup> Luce, Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. Translated by Carolyn Burke & Gillian C. Gill. New York: Cornell University Press, 1993, p.95

<sup>126</sup> Shane, Vogel, *The Scene of Harlem Cabaret: Race, Sexuality, Performance*. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009, p.63

<sup>127</sup> *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Translated by Gillian C. Gill. New York, Cornell University, Press, 1985, p.15

<sup>128</sup> José F., Colmeiro, “*Exorcising Exoticism: Carmen and the Construction of Oriental Spain.*” *Comparative Literature*. Vol. 54, No. 2 Spring 2002, p. 139

states that “Burlesque women were robust in constitution, physically agile, and sexually expressive, combining in their acts the properties of unbounded appetite with physical stamina. What I emphasize here is that female spectacles relied on particular fantasies of the working woman’s body”<sup>129</sup>. From the first introduction of Carmen as seen on screen and read in the novella, she is seen as a spectacle to those around her. She resists domination and goes against the norms of society; thus falling under the femme fatale motif. “Grosz explains that we can think of the body as a “productive and creative body which cannot be definitely known since it is not identical with itself across time. The body does not have a ‘truth’ or a ‘true nature’ since it is a process and its meaning and capacities will vary according to its context”<sup>130</sup>

There is one particular scene in both novella and film where Carmen exhibits a sense of resentment and defensiveness after her first sexual encounter with him. According to Colmeiro: Contemporary critical readings of the Carmen myth, particularly in cultural studies, follow two contradictory tendencies. Those informed by feminist theory see her as affirmation of free will, independence, and liberation; those informed by postcolonial theory seek to unmask the misogynist and racist undertones toward the other, which ultimately neutralize those emancipatory impulses.<sup>131</sup>

Both characters portray attitudes of resistance, marginality and oppression, but strive for an acceptance of each other. Both the Gipsy girl and white male fight to arrive to a utopian state of mind by catering to each other’s needs, but are not able to reach this; thus one must consume the other through death. The romantic cons After careful analysis of Carmen in both Mérimée’s novella and Aranda’s film, it can be concluded that the figure of Carmen embodies exoticism through her iconicity as a gypsy, and follows a construction and deconstruction of the feminine myth. It is through both male and female protagonists that issues of race, marginality, sexuality and resistance unfold to arrive at a state of reconfiguration through the other,<sup>17</sup> possession and consumption. It is through the death of the other that the male gender can arrive to a utopian state of mind because he is able to possess the highest of his ideals. “Don José clearly symbolizes bourgeois honor, duty, and possessiveness, yet he also embodies the fatal attraction to the life of freedom outside of bourgeois conventionality offered by Carmen”<sup>132</sup>. In order to free himself, as well as Carmen, he must end her life. With this act, consumption and possession has been fulfilled.

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<sup>129</sup> Jayna , Brown. *Babylon Girls: Black Women Performers and the Shaping of the Modern*. London: Duke University Press, 2008, p.99

<sup>130</sup> Idem, p.60

<sup>131</sup> José F., Colmeiro, “*Exorcising Exoticism: Carmen and the Construction of Oriental Spain.*” Comparative Literature. Vol. 54, No. 2 Spring 2002, p. 128

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