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Concluding Words

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In the present case study, I have explored the media journey of the motif of 'gypsy' child-theft, drawing a huge arc between seventeenth-century literature and twenty-first century film. By focusing on a number of paradigmatic works of art, the research throws light on the motif's literary origins, on its archetypal narrative structure as well as on its visual forms. A special point has been made to analyse the colour coding of bodies in texts and images and to highlight the racialised/antigypsy and nationalist uses the latter have been put to. Also, as far as possible, I have made a comprehensive survey of the motif's visualisations, (re-) interpretations and adaptations to different visual media, elaborating on its multiple layers of meaning and functions.

The current exploration and collection of artworks has started with a review of Cervantes' tale "La gitanilla" (1613), moving through seventeenth-century Dutch history painting, then taking a cursory look at nineteenth-century printed images – mostly from England and Germany – to end up with an annotated filmography of 49 cinematic works, produced in Western Europe. Against this backdrop, it is easy to observe that in the time span between the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries, the motif of 'gypsy' child-theft migrated from history painting, deemed to be the highest form of art, and spread into popular culture, making its way to nursery rhymes. The central argument put forward in the book is that the persistent and influential story of children-stealing 'gypsies' has been used by European societies, for some centuries now, as a malleable tool for identity construction, negotiation and consolidation on two distinct but intertwined levels: social and

‘ethno-racial’. The staying power of the motif has been identified as lying in its initiatory power to confer ‘whiteness’ both on different social strata – from the high nobility to the working classes – and on different national majorities across Europe.