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The Literary Motif of Child-stealing ‘Gypsies’ and Silent Film

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Appraising ‘gypsy’-themed films produced in the beginning of cinema, and more precisely, in the period between 1894 and 1927, known as the silent film era, constitutes in itself a Brobdingnagian task, and saying this is hardly an exaggeration. Silent films that avail themselves of ‘gypsy’ tropes are astonishingly numerous and just as astonishing is their popularity in the first years of filmmaking production; works like *Rescued by Rover* (1905), to give one example, are cited nowadays as aesthetic landmarks in the evolution of film language. However, up until today, there has been no sustained research that examines the scale and the impact of antigypsyism during the silent film era, not to mention a systematic survey of film productions. Therefore, as an effective point of entry into this vast and hitherto untraversed territory, I focus attention on the tenacious motif of child-stealing ‘gypsies’. As I have shown elsewhere, the literary motif of child-theft lies at the core of the ‘gypsy’ construct and forms a stable component of its malleable content. Over the past four centuries, this motif has been re-interpreted in a plethora of art forms, only to be revived anew with the tools of the seventh art in silent film. What makes this motif particularly intriguing is the fact that it disappears in the era of sound film. During the silent period, it enjoyed immense popularity, but with the advent of sound, the highly lucrative drama of ‘gypsy’ child-theft vanished from the silver screen almost immediately and for good. One cannot help but wonder why.

To navigate the complexity of the topic – and for that it is necessary to develop a perspective that transcends traditional academic distinctions between art forms as well as between national cinemas – I take

the following steps in the current chapter. In Section 1, I examine the motif's narrative content and visual form, paying special attention to the aesthetics of whiteness as the latter has been transposed to the silver screen. For this purpose, two silent films are subjected to a close study, namely D.W. Griffith's cinematic debut *The Adventures of Dollie* (1908) and the work of an unknown filmmaker entitled *Zigeuneren Raphael* from the year 1914. Section 2 offers new, further evidence of the motif's widespread popularity in the silent era,³⁴ commenting on its disappearance or rather fragmented residue in cinema as we know it. Section 3 throws light on the motif's indebtedness to Cervantes' *novela* "La gitanilla" (1613); the analysis here aims to emphasise the fact that Cervantes' exemplary tale provides a nascent narrative blueprint for national identity formation, hence the tale's remarkable sway over national literatures across Europe. Section 4 considers the motif's plausibility, its disciplinary function and its specific relation to what a given culture perceives as reality. By comparing four cinematic versions of *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, Section 5 focuses on a number of variations in the motif's content and form, showing how the fictional and intrinsically metaphoric 'gypsy' persona is stabilised on the big screen into an 'ethno-racial' one, which is racialised,³⁵ colour coded in a realist style. By taking an analytical stance that intersects media and

34 The impulse to examine the child-theft motif in the context of film and to write this chapter came from the conference 'Gypsy' Images in Children's and Youth Literature („Denn sie rauben sehr geschwind jedes böse Gassenkind...“ „Zigeuner“-Bilder in Kinder- und Jugendmedien), which took place in Berlin in 2016. In 2018, I took a year's break from my doctoral research to coordinate the pilot project *The Stigma 'Gypsy'. Visual Dimensions of Antigypsyism*, in the framework of which I had to examine the motif of 'gypsy' child-theft in visual media. My findings were published in 2019 under the title *Patterns of Symbolic Violence*. The book concludes with an uncommented, annotated filmography of 49 works on the motif; the main source for my annotated filmography is *Filmography of 'Gypsy' Films: 1897–2007* (*Filmografie des 'Zigeunerfilms': 1897–2007*), a database containing more than 2,500 film titles. Due to these developments, I had to re-work Section 2 of the current chapter. It is now no longer the principal source of evidence that attests to the motif's popularity in the silent era and its later disappearance, as originally conceived, but only furnishes additional proof, listing further film titles, which I have also been able to view and provide summaries of.

35 The term 'racialisation' is employed here in the sense of Robert Miles. In his book *Racism*, the British sociologist posits that 'racialisation', or its synonym 'racial categorisation', is "a process of delineation of group boundaries and of allocation of persons within those boundaries by primary reference to (supposedly) inherent and/or biological (usually phenotypical) characteristics. It is therefore an ideological process" (74–75).

national cultures, my aim is to shine a light on the interdependence of modern visual media, and especially film, the aesthetics of illusionist realism, and the ideology of racism. Furthermore, by adding a diachronic dimension to my film survey, I want to redress the presumed East-West geographic asymmetry in the production of ‘gypsy’-themed films. It is rather significant that the cinema of the silent era – which came into existence and flourished in Western Europe and the USA – abounds in films about ‘gypsies’, a thematic domain associated nowadays almost exclusively with Eastern European and “Balkan cinema”, as the latter has been problematically dubbed by the film scholar Dina Iordanova³⁶ (*Cinema of Flames* 213).

3.1 The Symbolism of Light and Colour in *The Adventures of Dollie* and *Zigeuneren Raphael*

Early silent films are for the most part black-and-white works, to re-state the obvious; they employ the full spectrum of tones – from the brightest white to the darkest black – to create the illusion of form, showing a three-dimensional world on the two-dimensional screen. However, in early films about ‘gypsy’ child-theft, the black-and-white value contrast – the basic prerequisite for the effect of reality – is

36 Re-charting the cultural space of Europe, the film scholar Dina Iordanova creates a new field of film scholarship that she calls “Balkan cinema” and that she then analyses and evaluates from a perspective which, while being mostly critical of the Western gaze, at times however coincides with it. Thus, unsurprisingly, ‘gypsy’-themed films are treated as a characteristic feature of this newly coined and under-researched cinema, as “endemic” to ‘the Balkans’ (*Cinema of Flames* 214). Again, not surprisingly, Iordanova’s book *Cinema of Flames: Balkan Film, Culture and the Media*, published in 2001 by the British Film Institute, is one of the few largely accessible and often-quoted academic publications that consider the phenomenon of ‘gypsy’-themed films in a broader cross-cultural framework. By reviving the perception of ‘the Balkans’, Iordanova’s book attains international visibility. It is much easier, indeed, for Western (academic) audiences to relate to the inclusive concept of ‘Balkan cinema’ than to work on a differentiating list of cinematic traditions belonging to remote and ‘obscure’ nations. But the book does little justice to the region in question and its seventh art. It maps out a new field of film studies by bundling a broad range of national cinemas under the label of ‘the Balkans’, limiting at the same time its inquiry to the perceived Europe/Balkan divide and to a critique of the Balkanist discourse. Although the author claims to have been influenced by seminal texts from post-colonial studies, Iordanova runs the risk of reproducing the colonial gaze with an approach that perpetuates the language of hierarchical asymmetries in its spatial map of references. (cf. 5–26, 213–232).

layered, in addition, with a number of metaphorical significations. The drama of child-theft stages the encounter, a rather hostile encounter, between two mutually exclusive worlds: the world of the 'white' mask and the (under)world of the 'gypsy' mask. If we take recourse to Lotman's terminology, we can say that these films elaborate an edifying visual juxtaposition of the embodied cultural norm (or centre) and the embodied cultural anti-norm (or boundary). And if the contrastive relationship between white and black (the colours used to represent light and darkness) is that which allows the human eye to make out physical forms, the contrastive juxtaposition of 'white' vs. 'gypsy' figures provides viewers with a mental coordinate system, moulding their inner 'picture of the world' and assigning them a place in it, and thus nourishing a collective sense of reality. These fictional stories spell out the basic moral coordinates a given culture lives by, training the mind to distinguish that which is good and commendable from that which is bad and despicable. With recourse to 'white' and 'gypsy' characters, the photographic effect of three-dimensional verisimilitude attains a fourth, psychological dimension; the fictional reality of film world is expanded into a shared cultural reality.

When approaching these films, a wealth of information can be drawn from analysing the strategies that filmmakers use to stage 'normality', on the one hand, and the strategies they employ to stage alterity, on the other hand. Here, I pay special attention to the correlation that the films establish between the characters' appearance, inner qualities and their role in the story. When it comes to the figures' outer appearance, it is illuminating to examine who is privileged by the use of light and the colour white, who is not, and how. The question of how this is achieved foregrounds the technological options that early filmmakers had at their disposal and that were required for the construction of the highly demanding – from a cinematographic point of view – ideal of 'whiteness'. The photographic apparatus available at that time imposed various limitations, so, as the films here evidence, it is the medium of dress that filmmakers use to articulate social and 'ethno-racial' taxonomies; 'whiteness' as well as 'gypsiness' are marked mostly through the costumes. When filmmakers are able to construct 'whiteness' on the level of skin colour, the emphasis, naturally, falls on facial skin colour, especially in close-ups, as well as on hair colour. Still, costumes – with their cut, fabric, colours, designs, and accessories – remain the privileged medium for designating the characters' social status and 'ethno-racial' affiliation.

Before moving to the film examples, it is necessary to consider one substantial difference that sets apart textual from cinematic portrayals of characters. In a written text, be it a literary or a scientific one, it suffices to describe a character's appearance once; usually this is done upon introducing that character. If the text brings up the fact that a given character is clad from head to toe in white every time it refers to that character, the text will be criticised for undue repetitiveness, even for its bad style, unless we talk of epos, with its pervasive use of epithets. In film, by comparison, the attribute 'white' is part and parcel of the medium; in fact, it is a portion of visual information that is repeated throughout the entire length of the story. If a character is clad from head to toe in white, the image of its white body will be reproduced with each and every successive frame and it plays an integral part in the film's overall visual design. This is to say that the medium of film – unlike the medium of written text – is predisposed to give greater prominence to the black-and-white colour symbolism underpinning the characters' portrayals and, therefore, can leave a stronger impression on the spectator's mind. This specific asymmetry in aesthetic impact that privileges the cinematic portrayal of characters should also be borne in mind when reading the text descriptions of film scenes in this as well as in the following chapters.

3.1.1 *The Adventures of Dollie* (1908), USA

There is one moment in D.W. Griffith's debut film *The Adventures of Dollie* (1908), one portion of a scene only about twenty seconds long, that captures the pith of the drama hinged on the elusive threat of child-thieving 'gypsies'. The subtlety of the moment provides an insight into the cinematic genius of this controversial American director. In the scene, we can see little Dollie (Gladys Egan), a three-year-old girl with a white ribbon in her hair and an impeccably white dress playing on the lawn at her family's country residence. She is bathed in sunlight, which makes her doll-like figure glow with whiteness. Her loving parents have left her for a minute on her own. (Dollie looks like a smaller image of her mother (Linda Arvidson), also clad in white from head to toe; whereas her father (Arthur V. Johnson) wears a darkish trim suit.) In that short moment of parental absence, out of the shady bush behind Dollie's back jumps the vengeful 'gypsy' (Charles Inslee) running at full speed towards the child. We have seen him earlier in the film when he tries to peddle his handmade baskets to Dollie's mother and snatches



Fig. 5. Screenshot from *The Adventures of Dollie* (1908, Dir. D.W. Griffith): clad in a radiant white dress, little Dollie (Gladys Egan) is contrasted to her 'gypsy' abductor (Charles Inslee), whose shady figure looms threateningly behind her.

at her purse but is caught in the act and beaten up by Dollie's father. The 'gypsy' wears a rural outfit; his clothes have, in comparison to the elegant bourgeois family, a dowdy look and are dark in colour. So, when he is sprinting towards Dollie, the man appears like a fast-moving shadow among the trees. Instead of snatching the girl and disappearing, though, he halts in the shaded area right behind Dollie. His threatening dark body makes several lunges at the girl, yet for some reason he is unable to reach her (**Fig. 5**). It is as if the 'gypsy', this shadow of a human being, is afraid of the light: in one of his lunges, his face catches a ray of sunlight, quivers and instantly shrinks back into the shade. All the while, Dollie, radiating whiteness in the sunlit area at the foreground, stands within an arm's reach. Eventually, the man from the shadow manages to pull the small girl towards him, grab her in his arms and exit the lawn.

In a condensed manner, the child-snatching scene juxtaposes light and darkness, conjuring up the archetypal fear of darkness engulfing light. What Griffith so finely achieves in his first film is to overlay the

age-old dichotomy of light and darkness (lack of light) with the colours white and black (non-white), and to associate this with the complex matrix of social hierarchies. The figures are associated with light and the colour white³⁷ in strict accordance with their gender, social class and – there are reasons to assume – ‘ethno-racial’ affiliation. Judging by the costumes, Dollie and her mother are modelled as true incarnations of physical, moral and ‘ethno-racial’ purity, and as such are virtually defenceless against the ‘gypsy’ intruder. It is a responsibility of the father to stay alert and protect them. To provide for the security of his family, he is allowed to retain his aggressive streak, which is also signalled by the darker tone of his otherwise elegant suit. We can read about the father’s encounter with the ‘gypsy’ peddler in the *Biograph Bulletin* from 1908:

There has come into the neighborhood a band of those peripatetic Nomads of the Zingani type, whose ostensible occupation is selling baskets and reed ware, but their real motive is pillage. While the mother and child are seated on the wall beside the stream, one of these Gypsies approaches and offers for sale several baskets. A refusal raises his ire and he seizes the woman’s purse and is about to make off with it when the husband, hearing her cries of alarm, rushes down to her aid, and with a heavy snakewhip lashes the Gypsy unmercifully, leaving great welts upon his swarthy body, at the same time arousing the venom of his black heart. (“Synopsis”)

By implication, the film’s official synopsis leads one to believe that the father has a ‘white’ body and a virtuous heart, while the violence he inflicts upon the ‘gypsy’ male is morally justified, because it constitutes nothing other than a necessary self-defence measure.

It is important to note that the film does not construct ‘ethno-racial’ differences on the level of skin colour, for all characters are of the same skin hue. This uniformity of facial skin colour can be probably explained by limited skill and technical constraints: Griffith composed his first film out of medium and long shots; only later would he come to employ

37 When discussing white as a hue, Dyer points out that it is considered by most Western theorists of colour to be the colour of light. The paradox of white is that it signifies both colourlessness and the fusion of all colours, which makes it very suitable for the designation of a social group or ‘race’ that considers itself universal. Unlike other colours, white has an absolute opposite, black (cf. 46–48).

close-ups with protagonists wearing the typical thick layer of white make-up (on the functions of white make-up in early film, see Section 7.3.1). In other words, in medium and long shots, the character faces have a surface that is too small for intelligible 'ethno-racial' coding. Again, due to technical constraints, it was not possible to construct difference with regard to hair colour. *Dollie* was shot on an orthochromatic film stock, an early type of film stock that was insensitive to reds and yellows and did not allow cinematographers to capture such significant traits as blond hair. The story takes place in the open, so for the lighting Griffith used natural daylight, which has a blue colour temperature and is therefore well suited for the orthochromatic film stock. When it comes to facial skin or hair tone, the characters are indistinguishable from one another, so 'ethno-racial' difference is marked on the surface of their bodies: through integration with sunlit or shadowy décor and through the amount of the colours white and black apportioned to their apparel. The female 'gypsy', for example, is given a bit of whiteness: under her dark bib apron, there is a white shirt showing, but the lower part of her body is wrapped in a black skirt; the 'gypsy' male is covered head to foot in dark clothes.

Circulated as an advertisement text by the Biograph Studio,³⁸ the official film synopsis provides a first-hand indication that the carefully graded light and colour symbolism in Griffith's film is meant to be deciphered not only in moral and social but also in 'ethno-racial' terms (see also Section 1.4.1). So, it is legitimate to say that the tension created between light/white and shadow/black in the child-snatching scene has one more layer of signification, and that is 'ethno-racial' affiliation. The short scene dramatises, in other words, the existential danger that 'non-whites' pose to 'white' society. What is at stake here is the family's heiress. By stealing 'white' *Dollie*, the swarthy 'gypsy' not only commits a heinous crime against a loving parental couple; he also poses a threat to their hereditary bloodline from a classist point of view, and creates conditions for miscegenation from a racist point of view. The 'gypsy' child-theft as such threatens to destabilise the regnant model of social integration based on inherited property and 'blood' purity.

To sum up, if we read *Dollie* as a dialogic exchange between the cultural centre and the cultural boundary, we can say that the 'white'

38 Peter Gutmann, for example, quotes the official film synopsis, giving *New York Dramatic Mirror* from 18 July 1908 as his source, which shows that the synopsis appeared in the press.

protagonists in the film embody and act out the dominant socially integrative force that, in these particular socio-historic circumstances, is marked with the following positively loaded constellation of values: white (= good, enlightened, of noble blood, white 'ethno-racial' identity), bourgeois class, love, family, property, affluence, modern sedentary lifestyle. The 'gypsy' protagonists embody and act out respectively the peripheral force of social disintegration brought into association with the following negatively charged constellation of values: dark (= evil, unenlightened, of impure blood, non-white 'ethno-racial' identity), social outcasts, vengeance, (domestic) violence, theft, poverty, pre-modern nomadic lifestyle. Cinematically, all these values are colour coded mainly via the characters' outfit: the elaborate costumes – with their colours, forms and accessories – assist the viewers in making out who the figures are, what social and 'ethno-racial' groups they belong to, how they relate to one another, and, not unimportantly, what their inner qualities and intrinsic motivations are.

3.1.2 Lucrative Literary Motif

The story of the little 'white' girl who is first kidnapped by a vindictive 'gypsy' and then restored to her loving parents is pivotal in the career of D.W. Griffith, the man who pioneered modern filmmaking and whose prolific body of work³⁹ earned him the title of the "Father of Film" and "Inventor of Hollywood" (Brownlow and Gill). Before making his director's debut, Griffith scraped by as an actor and writer. He had a scornful attitude towards cinema and agreed to shoot *Dollie* – stepping in as a replacement for an indisposed director – forced by financial difficulties and on the condition that he could resume his acting job with Biograph afterwards. His entry into the filmmaking industry, in the words of Tom Gunning, "was a matter of financial necessity rather than an act of preference" (Gunning and Mottram 1). *Dollie* was, above all, a profit-oriented venture. As the opening lines in the synopsis suggest, the topic of 'gypsy' child-abduction was deemed to be the film's

39 In addition to *The Adventures of Dollie*, there is one more work in the director's long filmography that takes up the motif of 'gypsy' child-theft, namely *The Peach-basket Hat* (1909); see the synopsis in Section 3.2. At least another five of Griffith's films revolve around the topic of 'gypsy' vengeance: *An Awful Moment* (1908), starring Florence Lawrence; *A Tragic Love* (1908), starring Arthur Johnson; *What the Daisy Said* (1910), starring Mary Pickford; *A Romany Tragedy* (1911), starring W. Christy Cabanne; and *The Spanish Gypsy* (1911), starring Wilfred Lucas.

main selling point: "One of the most remarkable cases of child-stealing is depicted in this Biograph picture, showing the thwarting by a kind of Providence of the attempt to kidnap for revenge a pretty little girl by a Gypsy" ("Synopsis").

In all fairness, D.W. Griffith cannot be held responsible for choosing the story of 'gypsy' child-theft: the film script was written by Stanner Taylor. Yet Griffith was able to produce a piece of work that "showed a remarkable understanding of the medium" and "was as good as most films made by veterans of five years of direction, and better than many" (Everson 42). Film scholars underline the artistic merit of Griffith's early Biograph films and emphasise that these films should be evaluated on their own and not "merely as stepping stones to *The Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance*" (Gunning and Mottram 2). In *100 Silent Films: BFI Screen Guides*, Bryony Dixon describes *Dollie* as "a little proto-feature film – like a seed. Sprinkle it with a few subplots and swell to an hour's running time and it would make a perfect little American drama that generations of us are familiar with" (8).

In his book *Before the Nickelodeon: Edwin S. Porter and the Edison Manufacturing Company*, the film historian Charles Musser explains that the kidnapping genre emerged in 1904; it was made popular in the USA by such English imports as *The Child Stealers* (1904). As illustrious examples of this family-centred drama Musser gives Cecil Hepworth's *Rescued by Rover* (1905) and D.W. Griffith's *The Adventures of Dollie*, commenting⁴⁰ that:

All have remarkably similar narratives. A gypsy or some other outcast steals and then abuses the young child of a respectable, upper-middle-class family. The parents experience a range of emotions – anguish, guilt, remorse – over their loss. As in *Stolen by Gypsies*, the situation is usually more poignant because the victim is an only child. In the inevitable happy ending, the child is rescued and the nuclear family restored. (314)

The film scholar Jon Gartenberg argues in turn that "[t]he apparent sophistication in his [Griffith's] first directorial effort may be due more to the genre conventions of the gypsy films (including camera pans)

40 Setting Musser's film appraisal aside, it cannot be left unremarked that this well-known film scholar and practitioner refers to the Roma ethnic minority as one type of social outcast.

having been established in 1904 and 1905 than to Griffith's ingenuity." In an exhibition on early cinema that Gartenberg curated for "the Whitney Museum of Modern Art [sic]" in November 1979, and more specifically in a programme entitled "Makes and Remakes: The Kidnapped Child Story", he compares *Weary Willie Kidnaps a Child* (1904), *Rescued by Rover* (1905), *The Lost Child* (1904), *Stolen by Gypsies* (1905), *Rescued from an Eagle's Nest* (1908), and *The Adventures of Dolly* (1908). Tracing the development of chase films in these stories of child-kidnapping, Gartenberg shows that "plot elements of inattentive parents, the disappearance of the child, worried adults, and a reunited family became established as conventions of the genre. (...) Griffith brought to *The Adventures of Dollie* these plot elements. In structure, his film is transitional, looking forward to his rescue films" (16n8).

In his book *D.W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film: The Early Years at Biograph*, the film historian and theoretician Tom Gunning also points to the structural identity between *Dollie* and Griffith's later works:

Dollie's story forms a perfect match with Todorov's "minimal complete plot". It provides an archetype for many Griffith Biograph films: the threat to a bourgeois family by an invading alien causes narrative disequilibrium, while narrative closure is achieved by regaining family harmony. (65–66)

Gunning explains Griffith's breakthrough with the intelligibility of his storytelling and with the film's reliance on stock character types. The understanding of stock character types, as the next quote shows, partially overlaps with the term 'mask' adopted for the analysis of films here. As has been explained in Chapter One, the notion of the mask stands for a decipherable sign embodied by the face; it is a visual form subject to representational conventions that has control over the body and expresses itself in culturally coded behaviour, a face-as-a-sign that triggers a social role (cf. Belting 44–55). In the case of *Dollie*, due to the cinematographic constraints, it is the characters' entire bodies, their clothing and movements, and not their faces, that take over this expressive function:

With its stock melodramatic character types and simple moral dualism, *Dollie* deals in action rather than psychology. Camera distance limits access to characters. The small, puppetlike figures

are of necessity limited to a series of stock, easily recognizable gestures. (...) In his first film, Griffith showed his ability to supply the easily comprehensible stories that nickelodeons demanded. (69)

Gunning's comment can be pushed a little further to say that in *Dollie* D.W. Griffith showed his ability to shoot black-and-white films that sold well, because their narrative fed into the black-and-white paradigm of racist mentality in US American culture at the turn of the century. Griffith's debut film evidences that the 'gypsy' mask – with its complementary function to the 'white' mask – already belonged to the arsenal of stock characters in the first years of cinema history. What is more, the motif of child-stealing 'gypsies', which had a career-turning effect for the Father of Film, was inflected in the aesthetic modus of whiteness, a filmmaking approach Griffith later raised to new heights of craftsmanship in his excessively popular white supremacist work *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). Turning to take a look at the silent films made in the same period on the Old Continent, we can see that film directors in Europe used the same black-and-white visual design in their ecranisations of child-theft stories, creating racialised images of 'gypsies' in juxtaposition to 'white' representatives of the dominant culture. Certainly, European nations did not share the US American history of slavery and 'race' relations, a history that to a great extent can be held accountable for Griffith's mind-set, yet what Europeans did have in common with their US American counterparts is the self-complimentary self-perception of belonging to a 'white' nation and thus of being 'white', something which the following Danish film demonstrates.

3.1.3 *Zigeunerren Raphael* (1914), Denmark

The silent feature film *Zigeunerren Raphael*, shot by an unknown director, tells the story of a noble heir who is stolen as an infant by 'gypsies', only to discover his true identity twenty years later by falling in love with a 'white' lady. The film's opening sequence centres on the figure of a small fair-haired boy – clad in white – who is raised high by a group of gentlemen during a social gathering in an affluent residence hall. The gentlemen wear black tie, while the ladies are predominantly costumed in white dresses. An intertitle informs us that "Baron Wilhjelm feiert die Taufe des Stammhalters" (Count Wilhjelm celebrates the baptism of his son and heir). One may notice that the boy is not introduced by

his name in the explanatory text; the omission tells us that the boy's significance in the story derives from his place in the family's genealogic lineage rather than from his individual personality.

In the next sequence, we see the arrival of a group of 'gypsies' who scramble chaotically out of a wheel-wagon, each carrying a different musical instrument. The uninvited entertainers pour into the hall where the count's celebration is taking place and cause havoc among the genteel guests by begging and making all-too-insistent offers to play music. The 'gypsy' intrusion foreshadows a rupture in the patrician family, as the arrangement of bodies in **Fig. 6** foreshadows. Soon after their entry, the 'gypsy' king and queen succeed in separating husband from worried wife, settling themselves in the unlit space in between the couple.



Fig. 6. Film still from *Zigeunerer Raphael* (1914, Dir. unknown): the 'gypsy' interlopers posing a threat to the unity of Baron Wilhelm's family. Film still courtesy of the Danish Film Institute.

The scene's main appeal lies in the taxonomic spectacle of dress: the contrastive display of various costumes is there to stress the figures' belonging to two diametrically opposed social and 'ethno-racial' groups.

The elegant formalwear of the aristocrats is set off by the 'gypsy' attire, an assembly of disparate elements that evoke associations with pirates, circus entertainers and exotic Indians. In the still, the 'gypsy' king has taken off his hat, revealing his long, dark, somewhat unruly hair and bushy beard in stark contrast with the clean-shaven and balding count. In this and most of the other scenes, the insignia of the 'gypsy' king are his big black pirate's hat trimmed with long feathers and coins, his ornamental kingly robes and his voluminous black cloak. The costume of the 'gypsy' queen comes close to white here, but her skirt – compared to the count's snow-white shirt or to his wife's fine gown – appears worn out and in need of washing. She is adorned with numerous flashy decorations and carries a black-haired baby strapped on her back – all of which give her figure a darker appearance. Disgruntled, the count sends the intruders away. In revenge, the 'gypsy' king sneaks into the count's mansion later that day and steals his son, enveloping the child's white figure in his black cloak. During the night, the boy is christened Raphael by an old 'gypsy' sorceress in a ceremony that can be best described as an inversion of the Christian ritual. The 'gypsy' baptism takes place under the cupola of the dark sky, by the light of an open fire, amidst smoke and wild vegetation. It is notable that the count's heir acquires his individual first name, which will stay with him throughout the story, through the agency of the 'gypsy' sorceress; paradoxically, it is the contact with the shady 'gypsy' world that confers individuality on the 'white' hero.

Twenty years later, Raphael is a full-fledged member of the 'gypsy' clan, his distinguishing marks being a pair of round earrings, often highlighted in close-ups, and a beplumed hat. Raphael's fellow companion is the 'gypsy' princess Zelma, who stands out through her headdress, decorated with coins, beads and long feathers, and her eye-catching skirt in broad black-and-white stripes. The true drama in the film ensues when Raphael and his cousin Inger, a light-haired girl invariably dressed from head to toe in immaculate white, meet, unaware of their kinship, and fall in love with each other. Between them stands jealous Zelma (Fig. 7).

Just as in *The Adventures of Dollie*, the story follows the circular structure of an initiation rite. The main 'white' hero enters the dangerous zone of the shadows (psychologically, a sign for his unconscious self), represented as a narrow dark space or as the night world of the 'gypsies': when the 'gypsy' king snatches Raphael, he envelopes the boy's white body in his black cloak; later the 'gypsies' hide Raphael in a bass guitar;



Fig. 7. Film still from *Zigeunerer Raphael* (1914, Dir. unknown): the once stolen-child Raphael (Emanuel Gregers) participates in a dangerous circus act in which the ‘gypsy’ princess Zelma (Emilie Sannom) plays a knife-thrower, aiming at him, while the ‘white’ lady Inger (Zanny Petersen) acts as his protectress. Film still courtesy of the Danish Film Institute.

in the still above (**Fig. 7**), he finds himself at the far end of a ‘gypsy’ tent (Dollie is also hidden by the male ‘gypsy’ in a wooden keg). In the zone of the shadows, the ‘white’ hero undergoes a series of trials. As we can see in the still (**Fig. 7**), Raphael participates in a dangerous circus act: he is the target boy, the jealous ‘gypsy’ Zelma plays the knife-thrower aiming at him, while the high-born ‘white’ Inger acts as his protectress. Eventually, the hero returns to the normal world of daylight or to his conscious self, gaining in the process a new understanding of himself. If ancient myths couch this ordeal in plastic metaphors of light and shadow, modern texts and especially film tend to provide a literal, black-and-white interpretation that bears directly on the hero’s social and ‘ethno-racial’ identity and contributes to its stabilisation. What Raphael discovers through his ordeal in the shady world of the ‘gypsies’ is the skin-deep truth of his noble descent, his helper being a ‘white’ girl who vouches his noble origin by falling in love with him.

In *Zigeuneren Raphael*, modelling facial skin colour through lighting and make-up⁴¹ is not the main strategy for racialised Othering. White facial make-up is used in the film primarily to ensure visibility, to make the faces of the main actors legible, no matter whether they play a 'gypsy' role or that of a noble aristocrat. Still, some difference is marked with regard to hair tone, grooming and styling: it is noticeable, for example, that Inger, like Raphael's mother, is fair-haired, while Zelma is an indisputable brunette. The significant colour coding, however, as in *Dollie*, occurs on the level of the costumes: the finely graded amount of white renders social hierarchies visible in terms of their class, gender and 'ethno-racial' ingredients. It is the aristocratic children and women that form the top end of the whiteness hierarchy and 'gypsy' men its bottom end. The film's black-and-white visual design coupled with its archetypal narrative structure serves to re-affirm the superiority of the 'white' upper class, providing visual evidence for its genealogically essentialist rationale. Adjacent is the idea of the superiority of the 'white' 'race' and its biologically based rationale. Even though Raphael has been brought up by 'gypsies', the story seems to argue, he knows to recognise the virtues of a 'white' lady and succeeds in winning her heart because he, too, has noble blood running in his veins.

The fact that social and 'ethno-racial' difference is marked with recourse to the characters' costuming is of crucial consequence for the story's dénouement: Raphael can return to his birth family and resume through marriage his rightful place in the upper class. As in a theatre play, it is enough for him to change his 'gypsy' attire for a 'white' one; he is not hindered by skin colour. In this early silent film, 'white'/'gypsy' identity are not linked to a realist and thus immutable 'ethno-racial' colour: they are not systematically modelled by the use of lighting and make-up. 'White'/'gypsy' identity are mutable, which

41 In analysing the aesthetic technology of light, Dyer states that "it was developed with white people in mind", the human face being the touchstone and the white face, the norm (89–90). Dyer exemplifies his point by taking a look at the interaction of film stock, lighting, and make-up in the early years of cinema. Until 1926, filmmakers had no other choice but to use orthochromatic film stock, which was insensitive to the colours red and yellow and rendered them dark. The solution to this problem was to use white make-up in combination with carbon arc lights; the latter were, however, very hot and highly unpleasant for the actors. An alternative and much more convenient option would have been incandescent tungsten light, but the filmmaking industry refrained from it, because it contained red and yellow, which made faces look dark on the orthochromatic stock (89–92).

suggests that they are to a great extent metaphoric in content. At this point, the underlying matrix of masquerade clearly transpires: the film stages an initiatory change of masks, where the mask functions as legible signs for psychological and social roles. Raphael has first to experience the 'gypsy' spectrum of life values before he can truly commit to their 'white' opposites. But if this initiatory cycle is believable and fully legitimate in fiction texts or on the theatrical stage, it falls short of plausibility in the medium of film as we know it. The more film-storytelling is dominated by the aesthetics of realism, the more obsolete become plots like in *Zigeuneren Raphael*, where the *full* cycle of initiation is related, that is, the hero's temporarily changing his 'white' mask for a 'gypsy' mask as a way of gaining access to his individuality and acquiring his name. To put it in other words, a film that is invested in illusionist realism cannot support a story in which the leading character is initially 'white'-skinned, then turns 'non-white' to re-emerge again as 'white'-skinned, not in a modern culture whose picture of reality is underpinned by the biological concept of 'race'. What contemporary film narratives tend to do instead is focus exclusively on one of the two worlds that are part of the hero's initiation rite, thereby stabilising his metaphorical 'white'/'gypsy' identity as an 'ethno-racial' one. (This phenomenon is further discussed in Section 3.5 in reference to four contemporary screen adaptations of Victor Hugo's novel *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*.) In this line of thought, the silent era provides an invaluable insight into the mechanism by which fiction texts are transformed into cinematographic ones. Sharing greater affinity with the figurative language of literature and theatre, silent films resort with greater ease and more frequently to the motif of 'gypsy' child-theft, thereby laying bare the motif's multiple layers of signification: the psychological, social, 'ethno-racial' aspects conflated in this initiatory narrative, as well as its black-and-white aesthetics of representation. Meaning is produced through juxtapositions between light and shadow and their human embodiments: the world of the 'white' hero is set in stark contrast to the world of the 'gypsy' anti-hero.

Without doubt, *Zigeuneren Raphael* is a work of remarkable artistry. In its narrative structure, it follows the logic of 'ethno-racial' masquerade by the force of which modern 'white' and 'gypsy' identities are (re-)produced in complementary juxtaposition to each other, being the two defining structures of the European semiosphere, one embodying its centre; the Other, its boundary. If we are to sum up, in the form of



Fig. 8. Film still from *Zigeunereren Raphael* (1914, Dir. unknown): the 'gypsy' king (Valdemar Møller) leaves the stolen count's heir on the ground, which leads to the incident with the snake-bite. In the still, the 'gypsy' king, who blends in with nature, is even shown to hold a writhing snake directly above the child's head. Film still courtesy of the Danish Film Institute.

keywords, the cluster of attributes which the two masks represent in this silent Danish film, we can say the following. The 'white' mask is coded positively with the attributes of whiteness, aristocracy, love, family, Christianity, wealth, sedentary life. The 'gypsy' mask is coded with the opposite values of non-whiteness, social pariah, vengeance, jealousy, child-theft, pseudo-Christianity, poverty, nomadic life and, in addition, it is also associated with snakes and calamities. The association of the 'gypsy' mask with reptiles and natural disasters is rendered in such a haunting way that it deserves a mention here by way of a short digression. Images of reptiles appear both at the start and at the end of the film. At the beginning, just after having kidnapped Count Wilhelm's heir, the 'gypsy' king leaves the child on the ground and while he is away throwing his pursuers off track, the boy is bitten by a snake (**Fig. 8**). (This scene represents a contrastive inversion of the formal gathering in the count's affluent mansion, in which the

not-yet-baptised child is raised high towards the ceiling by his father and his fellow gentlemen.) Snakes also appear towards the end of the film, when the vindictive 'gypsy' Zelma sets about to collect vipers in a pond and then secretly slips into Inger's bedroom to fill her bed with the horror-instilling reptiles. There are very evocative close-ups in this sequence, one of them showing Inger's white leg – so white it almost blends in with her white bed sheets – covered in black vipers, (or so we are informed by the intertitle; at a closer look, the vipers look more like lizards). On account of the snake incident, the townsmen gather and decide to chase the 'gypsies' away. The latter flee, and in an attempt to obstruct their persecutors, they set the heath on fire, causing a large-scale calamity.

Before moving to the next section that foregoes a close reading of filmic texts to offer instead a bird's-eye view of the silent era and its preoccupation with child-theft stories, I want to draw attention to some intriguing details that concern costume colours and patterns. As the close analyses of *The Adventures of Dollie* and *Zigeuneren Raphael* have shown us, early black-and-white films use costumes to mark their wearers' social status, 'ethno-racial' affiliation and inner traits. Not only the amount of white or black colour apportioned to the clothes, but also the fabric, the cut and the accessories are carefully placed clues that help the viewer to locate characters within the complex matrix of social and 'ethno-racial' hierarchies and to decode their role in the film – how central or peripheral they are for the story's dénouement. Most films feature the ideal female figure, often the mother of the stolen child, who is a woman of noble descent elegantly dressed from hat to shoes in impeccable white. As a symbol of beauty, status and wealth, she is also the aspirational presentation of the collective social and/or 'ethno-racial' self. In antithetical contrast, the ignoble 'gypsy' figures wear predominantly black – exotic, mismatched, variously patterned, or simply ragged clothing. Interestingly, in many black-and-white films, 'gypsy' figures stand out with their striped outfits; in fact, the stripes in 'gypsy' costumes appear to be singularly characteristic of early black-and-white films, because we see them disappear with the advent of colour film.⁴² Beside Zelma in *Zigeuneren Raphael* (Fig. 7), the reader

42 In colour films, 'gypsy' costumes mobilise, more often than not, a colour of symbolic significance. This colour can be black, intense red, a mixture of bright, contrastive tones, or even white, but in juxtaposition with swarthy skin. The costume scholar Sarah Street notes, for instance, in her book *Colour Films in Britain* that 'gypsy' costumes are used to display colour in *Wings of the Morning* (1937, Dir.



Fig. 9. Screenshot from *Betta the Gypsy* (1918, Dir. Charles Raymond): Betta (Marga Rubia Levy) and her beloved Hubert (Edward Combermere), both dressed in photogenic striped clothing, take a love pledge by making a small cut on the wrist and mixing their blood.

can find further examples of 'gypsy' figures marked by a striped piece of clothing in the section to follow, as well as in Annex II; consider in particular *Rescued by Rover* (1905), *The Firefly* (1913), or *Betta the Gypsy* (1918) (**Fig. 9**). In Ernst Lubitsch's *Carmen* (1918), towards the film's end, Asta Nielsen moves about with a long, striped cloth over her shoulder. In *Jánošík* (1935), as discussed in Chapter Two, a stripy shawl is the distinguishing trait of the 'gypsy' traitor.

Harold D. Schuster), the first Technicolor film made in the British Isles. The film tells the story of a love affair between a horse trader and a young 'gypsy' girl. When the girl "first visits Clontarf's castle, her dress is distinguished by a daisy pattern which is differentiated from the less decorative costumes worn by the non-gypsy women. One of the gypsy dancers has an orange underskirt which is shown as her outer dress swirls up as she dances for the guests, emphasising the spectacle of the dance as well as the revelation of colour" (Wigley).

3.2 The Motif of 'Gypsy' Child-theft in Silent Film

As films that cash in on the story of 'gypsy' child-theft, *The Adventures of Dollie* and *Zigeuneren Raphael* represent just the tip of the iceberg. The silent period abounds in 'gypsy'-themed films and, as I demonstrate in the annotated filmography in *Patterns of Symbolic Violence* (149–181), the stock motif of child-abduction is among the truly popular ones in the formative years of cinema, if not the most popular antigypsy motif. In the present study, I provide a list of twenty-two films that offer further evidence of the motif's ubiquity, expanding the above-mentioned filmography with yet another fifteen titles (see Annex II).

It is notable that some of these silent films are, in one sense or another, pivotal works: they are either debut films or provide a fruitful platform for the development of new stylistic devices, making a lasting contribution to the development of film language. Such titles are Lewin Fitzhamon's short film *Rescued by Rover* (1905), which, according to the British film scholar Michael Brooke, "ranks amongst the most important films ever made", marking "possibly the only point in film history when British cinema unquestionably led the world", because it represents "a key stage in the medium's development from an amusing novelty to the 'seventh art'",⁴³ or Edwin S. Porter and Wallace McCutcheon's short film *Stolen by Gypsies* (1905) (see here Gartenberg⁴⁴ 9–10; and

43 Brooke adds that the film enjoyed an unprecedented success, with more than 400 copies ordered, which prompted the producer Hepworth to re-shoot the film twice so that he could produce new negatives. *Rescued by Rover* also appears to have influenced the innovative style of D.W. Griffith; it has two sequels, also produced by Hepworth and directed by Fitzhamon, which represent variations of the same story: *Dumb Sagacity* (1907) and *The Dog Outwits the Kidnappers* (1908). In *Fifty Key British Films*, the film historian Ian Christie points out that *Rescued by Rover* succeeds in incorporating several well-known motifs "that would prove to be a winning formula", namely a nursemaid who is distracted by a soldier while tending to a baby, a snubbed beggar-woman who avenges herself by stealing the baby and a faithful dog who helps the family find its stolen child. Christie remarks in a footnote that the kidnapper is not strictly a gypsy "since we see her attic lair" (7), but his argument does not hold ground, because it is not uncommon for silent films to portray 'gypsies' as slum dwellers and, moreover, the film credits are very clear on this point, naming Mrs. Sebastian Smith "as Gipsy" (BFI).

44 Jon Gartenberg discusses the stylistic device of camera movement in a number of chase films produced by Edison and Biograph from 1900 to 1906; the scholar takes a particular interest in the question of how camera movement was employed to suggest or articulate simultaneous action. One of the paradigmatic films that he analyses is *Stolen by Gypsies*, which through panning "creates a more sophisticated narrative with two autonomous stories: on the one hand, the chase, and on the

Musser 314–317); or Charlie Chaplin's film *The Vagabond* (1916), which Graham Fuller defines in one article for the British Film Institute as "Chaplin's first masterpiece", a "pivotal work" of his Mutual period "and his most touching"; or Karel Anton's directorial debut *Gypsies* [*Cikáni*] (1921), which together with his film *The May Fairy* (1926) is credited with inaugurating the lyrical tradition in Czech cinema (Bock 15). The selected listing also suggests that some silent film directors like Lewin Fitzhamon and A.E. Coleby literally specialised in the motif.

Finally, at the risk of repeating myself, I have to say that the filmography on the 'gypsy' child-theft motif is still far from complete. So far, I have been able to identify the presence of the motif primarily by surveying the films' titles, synopses or the keywords of their content and, of course, by viewing the works. The real number of films that take up this archetypal story, however, must be significantly larger if one considers works from other cultural zones, as well as films with non-transparent titles that lack a synopsis or keywords of content, or in which the motif of child-stealing 'gypsies' is used as a subplot.

In all of these films, the main drama involves the temporary loss of one's 'white' mask to the 'gypsy' mask and its subsequent (re-)discovery. This carnivalesque change of masks, as already discussed, represents an archetypal story pattern for identity formation, be it individual or collective identity. The psychological function of the story aside, it is not difficult to spot here another function of the 'gypsy' child-stealing motif that is very cinematic and has to do with the technical challenge of indoor and outdoor shooting: the provisional acquisition of the 'gypsy' mask allows for a visual study of two diametrically opposed modes of existence. On the one hand, there is the world of 'normality' situated in spaces that are in themselves signs of the attainments of Western culture and civilisation: solid mansions and castles, rich interiors full of fine furniture pieces, books and scientific contraptions, inhabited by human beings sporting shapely apparel and making use of advanced transportation devices, etc. Placed next to the world of the 'gypsies', this 'normality' appears estranged, enabling the viewer to re-evaluate and appreciate it in its own right. Unlike 'white' people, 'gypsies' move through spaces that are the sole work of a magnanimous but often merciless nature; there are hardly any material signs of culture in their surroundings. The camera rejoices in contemplating dramatic

other, the recovery of the baby, unrelated to the apprehension of the supposed culprits" (10).

landscapes, such as vast fields, steep mountains, overflowing rivers, majestic waterfalls where one can directly experience the extremities of the weather: snow, rain, flood, or mud. The 'gypsy' world is populated by human beings clad in old-fashioned, striped or tattered clothes, their property amounting to musical instruments, makeshift tents and wooden wagons. In films that construct and exploit such clear-cut oppositions, the motif of 'gypsy' child-theft comes to serve as a ploy that enables filmmakers to bring these two mutually incompatible modes of existence into a single story and to demonstrate, at the same time, their technical skills and the technological advancements in photographic equipment. The motif furnishes the narrative logic behind the repetitive jump cuts from one world to the other; it connects these two worlds in a contrastive study producing a thrilling visual spectacle, both in psychological and cinematic terms.

3.3 The Motif's Literary Roots: "La gitanilla" (1613), Spain

The literary roots of the 'gypsy' child-theft motif, as scholars have pointed out,⁴⁵ go back to Miguel de Cervantes' *novela* "The Gypsy

45 In his book *Zigeunerbilder: Ein dunkles Kapitel der deutschen Literaturgeschichte. Von der frühen Neuzeit bis zur Romantik*, the German literary scholar Wilhelm Solms dedicates an entire chapter to the child-abduction motif, arguing that the rumour of child-stealing 'gypsies' has been circulated primarily by literature and belongs to one of the most infamous antigypsy stereotypes. The author notes that all works in German literature published before 1800 that make mention of this motif are directly or indirectly indebted to Cervantes' tale "The Gypsy Girl". This observation brings him to the conclusion that the pernicious rumour does not rest on historical events but is a literary borrowing from Cervantes which has been subsequently transformed. Solms provides a list of more than fifteen German writers who employ this literary borrowing in their texts, among which Goethe, Schiller and E.T.A. Hoffmann (cf. 159–167). In *The Spanish Gypsy: The History of a European Obsession*, Lou Charnon-Deutsch reports that the classic 'gypsy' motifs of Golden Age Spanish literature – baby-snatching being one of them – were already tested in the sixteenth century by Cervantes' Spanish and Portuguese literary predecessors (18). Lope de Rueda, one of these authors, had used the motif of child-stealing for his play *Comedia llamada medora (A Comedy Called Medora, 1567)* having, in turn, borrowed the device from Luigi Giancarli's *La Zingana (The Gypsy Woman)* written in 1545. According to Charnon-Deutsch, the myth of baby-snatching by 'gypsies', though, was first propagated by German historians in the fifteenth century (56). It should also be born in mind that stories about paupers who turn out to be nobleman as well as other tales of mistaken identity were the literary stock in trade at the time (35).

Girl" ("La gitanilla"); published in 1613, it is the first tale in the famous collection *Novelas ejemplares*.

A brief note is in order here: Cervantes wrote his exemplary tale at the beginning of the seventeenth century, when, obviously, key organising concepts of present-day modern societies like 'race', 'nation' and 'ethnicity' had different functions and signification. It is beyond the scope of this work to delve into the history and the semantic complexity of these concepts; it is also beyond the scope of this work to trace how these concepts are related to the ideologies of *limpieza de sangre* that emerged in mid-fifteenth century Spain (cf. Hering Torres 1) and which Cervantes mocks in his tale through a ludic play of subversive elements (cf. Patrut 70). However, it is important to point out the significance of these concepts for the analysis of the text, because already on page one Cervantes' tale introduces 'gypsies' as a "nación" (2), (translated in English as a "race" (3)), and then, in a very elaborate manner, also by including a para-ethnographic description, juxtaposes 'gypsies' to Spanish nobility. The thesis that I advance here is that Cervantes' early modern *novela* has been (mis)used as a narrative model for the nation-building fictions which would later reconfigure the political boundaries in Europe and bring about the establishment of modern nation-states.⁴⁶

When discussing "La gitanilla", scholars generally highlight the exceptional personality of the main female figure, Preciosa, just as the story's omniscient narrator does through the title and the numerous descriptions of her wit, talent and wisdom. What needs to be stressed here, though, and what, in my view, constitutes a pivotal element in "La gitanilla", is the masquerade structure of the narrative, in which Spanish nobility temporarily assume a 'gypsy' name and dress, undergo trials as in a rite of passage and only then are seen fit to take their due place in society.⁴⁷ In fact, the story stages a rite of passage for both its main

46 As I have demonstrated elsewhere, the story of 'gypsy' child-theft gains unprecedented popularity in nineteenth-century print media, because the 'gypsy' figure is "instrumental for the transformation of 'whiteness' from an aristocratic (classist) attribute to an 'ethno-racial' (racist) attribute" (*Patterns* 101).

47 In "Inszenierte Alterität: Spiel der Identitäten in Cervantes' *La gitanilla*", Kirsten von Hagen proposes a performative reading of Cervantes' story, pointing to the parallels between early modern and postmodern storytelling. Her analysis focuses on the three central characters Preciosa/Costanza, Andrés Caballero/Don Juan de Cárcamo and Alonso Hurtago/Clemente, examining in detail the theatrical manner in which gender and ethnic identities are staged and simultaneously subverted by the text's self-conscious use of names, costumes, gestures, speech and behaviour

characters: not only is Preciosa put to a test, but so is her admirer Don Juan de Cárcamo. I consider the characterisation of both protagonists to emphasise the centrality of the masquerade rite, for it represents in itself an aesthetic technology for cultivating socially desirable human beings, as well as for establishing social hierarchies based on gender, class and 'ethno-racial' affiliation.

Preciosa, *la gitanilla*, is raised by an old 'gypsy' woman, yet everything about her says that she is a woman of noble birth and that she belongs to another *nación*. At the beginning of the story, some chance admirers of her singing comment: "It's a pity this little lass is a Gypsy! Truly, truly, she deserves to be the daughter of a great lord" (7). The text provides many indications that Preciosa is an exceptional human being who cannot be placed on a par with her fellow 'gypsies'. The story reaches its culmination when Preciosa's true identity is revealed: the old 'gypsy' admits to stealing the girl-child years earlier; the noble parents ascertain her identity with recourse to various pieces of evidence, including a birthmark, and only then is the all-too-precious virgin given in marriage to the nobleman of her heart. His identity, by the way, is also ascertained via his clothes.

Through the character of Preciosa, Cervantes constructs an aesthetic model of femininity that aligns, albeit ironically, physical beauty with light and 'whiteness': fair skin, blonde hair and green eyes. Already on page one, we learn by inference that Preciosa has 'white' skin, since her 'gypsy' way of life was "not able to tarnish her face or tan her hands" (3). The omniscient narrator informs the reader that she "shone forth among the rest like the light of a torch among other, fainter lights" (23). We can also see her through the eyes of Doña Clara who, upon meeting Preciosa, exclaims: "Yes, this can really be called golden hair. These really are emerald eyes!" (23). Later in the story, Preciosa herself mentions that her beauty is esteemed "more highly than the sun" and praised "beyond gold" (65).

In the same breath, Preciosa's external beauty is fused with her inner virtue, as the latter has been laid down by the Christian tradition. Though raised amongst 'gypsies' who, as the text claims, do no care for

styles. In reference to Deleuze, von Hagen suggests that the text portrays the main figures as oscillating between an actual and a virtual (mirror-reflected) identity whereby the latter are not to be treated as distinctly separate but rather as overlapping. The ludic instability of the text, according to the author, is indicative that Cervantes aimed at opposing antigypsy tendencies in his time and experimented with a novel discursive articulation of established stereotypes (162–177).

marital ceremonies and even tolerate cases of incest, Preciosa places exceptional value on her chastity, "the jewel of my intact virginity", which she esteems more highly than her life (35). So, when her fellow 'gypsies' offer her as a wife to Don Juan, Preciosa cleverly manages to postpone the consummation of the 'gypsy' matrimony by putting Don Juan's love to a test, setting up a masquerade rite of initiation for him: "assuming the garb of a Gypsy, you must study in our schools for two years" (37).

While Don Juan thinks over Preciosa's proposal, she visits his home and interacts with his family. At this point, the text itself mimics a repetitive change of masks (or if we bring the argument one step further, points to the two complementary modes of the character's consciousness): in every second or third paragraph, the name of Preciosa's admirer changes, alternating between Don Juan and Andrés (51–57). Eventually, the Spanish nobleman Don Juan de Cárcamo becomes the 'gypsy' Andrés Caballero; his temporary identity transformation is signalled by a change in costume ("Think about when you want me to change clothes" (38–39)), and described as a rite of initiation:⁴⁸ "they performed the ceremonies of Andrés's initiation as a Gypsy" (59). What follows is one of the story's moral lessons: Don Juan may alter his name and outward appearance, but already "his first lesson in theft" demonstrates that his inward character remains constant (note that Preciosa's baptismal name is Doña Costanza): "but even though they gave him many lessons during that excursion, none stuck with him; on the contrary, in accordance with his noble blood, his soul was pained with every theft his teachers committed" (69). In his seminal work *Europa erfindet die Zigeuner*, Klaus-Michael Bogdal describes the life among 'gypsies' that the young noble lovers go through as a "besonders

48 In her article "Role Playing and Rites of Passage: *La ilustre fregona* and *La gitanilla*", Ann Wiltrout argues that the story structure in "La gitanilla" hinges on the completion of an initiation rite. The analysis is concentrated expressly on the male protagonists, placing them on a par with artists in general. In the author's words, the 'gypsy' milieu crystallises as a space where one can "escape the paternal hearth" (399), dissociate from the paternally imposed name and social status, undertake a journey of self-discovery and undergo a personal transformation, before reincorporating oneself into society (cf. 388–399). I can elaborate on Wiltrout's observations by saying that in literary or cinematic texts the world of the 'gypsies' often comes to signify the symbolic space beyond established social control, being as it were the blind spot of European culture's panoptic eye. One can also think of it as the border area where one can experience life directly and accumulate information about it without the controlling mediation of language.

ausgefallene Tugendprobe" (a particularly striking test of virtue), a life phase in which their virtue is put to a test (100).

The exemplary figures of Preciosa and Don Juan represent a concentration of socially desirable qualities: both, but especially Preciosa, embody simultaneously the beauty paragon of whiteness and the ideal of Christian morality while participating in a story that is constructed so as to provide evidence that these qualities should be regarded as hereditary, transported by blood and pertaining to the nobility. Bogdal makes no specific mention of the ideal of 'whiteness', yet he registers Preciosa's aristocratic pallor and proceeds with a description of the heroine that supports the argument put forward here:

Die Figur ist der Idee ›reinen Blutes‹ verpflichtet. Auch ohne ihr Wissen fließt es durch ihre Adern. Ehre hat sich durch Geburt erworben, ein Gut, das durch das ›Zigeunerleben‹, das Gegenteil des von Überwachung und Einsperrung charakterisierten Lebens eines adligen Mädchens der Zeit, nicht verloren geht. Ihre adlige Herkunft ist ein soziales Kapital, das durch die widrigen Umstände sogar eine Wertsteigerung erfährt. (94)

The figure is bound to the idea of "pure blood". Even without her knowledge, it flows through her veins. Honour has been acquired through birth, a possession that is not lost on account of her "gypsy life", the opposite of a noble girl's life in those days, one that was characterised by surveillance and confinement. Her noble origin is a social capital, which even grows in value due to adverse circumstances. [my translation, R.M.]

The 'gypsy' figures, in contrast, since their main function is to provide a testing ground and a contrastive background, are repeatedly associated with the figure of the devil and with the negative qualities it symbolises, especially deceit and rejection of charity. The omniscient narrator informs the reader that 'gypsy' girls "have for teachers and instructors the devil and experience, which teaches them in one hour what would otherwise take them a year to learn." (23). A similar opinion is directly voiced by the constable in the story: "These Gypsy women have the devil in them!" (31). Even the old 'gypsy' chimes in with the remark: "You've got the Satan in your heart girl!" (39). At one point, the narrator strays away to give a brief para-ethnographic lecture on 'gypsy' habits and customs; I will spare the reader the taxonomic enumeration of the

'gypsy' stereotypes interspersed throughout the text, but it is worth taking a look at the story's notorious opening:

It would seem⁴⁹ that Gypsy men and women were only born into the world to be thieves: they are born to parents who are thieves, they grow up among thieves, they study to be thieves, and finally succeed in being thoroughgoing thieves on every occasion; and the desire for stealing, and the act of stealing, are like inalienable traits in them, not extinguished except by death. (3)

Parece que los gitanos y gitanas solamente nacieron en el mundo para ser ladrones: nacen de padres ladrones, críanse con ladrones, estudian para ladrones y, finalmente, salen con ser ladrones corrientes y molientes a todo ruedo; y la gana del hurtar y el hurtar son en ellos como accidentes inseparables, que no se quitan sino con la muerte. (2)

In a single sentence, the omniscient narrator expounds the blood argument, relaying it with a negative inflection in relation to the 'gypsy' *nación*. The opening provides the counter-narrative in a nutshell. What the rather intricate story structure communicates in positive terms with regard to the Spanish nobility is asserted here in reverse. If noble blood secures Preciosa social capital, 'gypsy' blood guarantees social stigma, with the spectre of capital punishment lurking at the end of the sentence. The 'gypsy' milieu is laid out as a negative foil against which the positive face of the Spaniards gains its individual contour. It is no accident that the only characters delineated as recognisable, memorable individuals are the Spanish aristocrats in a 'gypsy' garb, while their 'gypsy' companions serve as a negative frame of reference, either crudely sketched or portrayed as a whole group. Stanley Appelbaum,

49 Kirsten von Hagen stresses that the verb '*parece*' (translated with "it would seem" in English) destabilises the statement to follow and creates, in the words of Selig, a "state of non-reality" (167). Indeed, the strategy of self-subversion is consistently pursued by the omniscient narrator who devises various ways to point at the sign-like nature of 'gypsy' identity, its mask status, and later drops the following remark: "because a thief thinks everyone is of the same nature as himself" (75) / "porque piensa el lardón que todos son de su condición" (74). Yet the self-reflexivity and the ironic subtlety of the text are lost on most of its readers and, as Solms and Bogdal show, the reception of the story tends to disregard its fictional nature, ascribing factual truth to some of its elements (cf. Solms 159; Bogdal 92–93).

the book's editor and English translator, makes a pertinent observation in his introduction:

Yet the author's obvious belief that heredity does more than environment to mold the personality borders on racism, as his three "purely Spanish" protagonists display their natural leadership qualities: they are not only brighter than their Gypsy companions, but even excel them at physical sports. (vii)

At this stage, it is tenable to raise the interpretation to another level and discuss Cervantes' story as a programmatic text, one that outlines, as far back as 1613, the idea of the nation as a possible matrix for social cohesion and also furnishes it, in metaphorical terms, with its core elements. By core elements, I mean a negative background and positive ideal figures – inflected in terms of gender, class and 'race' (nationality/ethnicity)⁵⁰ – performing ideal roles in a narrative set up as an initiatory test of virtue. In support of my argument, I recapitulate some of Ruth Seifert's main findings in her perceptive semiotic analysis of war that focuses on the cultural constructions of nation and gender. Seifert posits that the nation as an imaginary community should be understood as a hetero-masculine project, in which women and subordinate males occupy specific, hierarchically ordered positions (cf. 236). In the context of the nation, the female body functions as a particular cultural sign. It is the focal point of materiality and respectability, women being the biological reproducers of the nation and symbolising the nation's moral integrity. They also embody the nation's frailty, its need for protection and its boundary (cf. 239). The woman's body is claimed by the nation; she commits a "national adultery" when she associates with men from another nation (cf. 240). Moreover, if the state and citizenship are seen as masculine, the nation and national identity as a body, but also as a spiritual principle and moral conscience, are seen as feminine (cf. 245). It is difficult to overlook the parallels with Cervantes' story and the interconnectedness between the idea of the nation, the racialising ideal of 'whiteness' and its negative foil in the face of 'gypsies'. None other

50 Here, I am not interested in the specificity of and fine distinctions between the notions of 'race', nationality, and ethnicity as identity ingredients, but rather in the constellation that constitutes an identity-forming opposition between a 'white' ethnic majority that also coincides with a nation vs. a 'non-white' ethnic minority within the European semiosphere.

but the aristocratically pale Preciosa can stand the test of spiritual and physical purity and succeed in maintaining a clear-cut boundary between herself (her virgin body and soul) and the marginalised, suntanned 'gypsies'. Stylised as an allegory for poetry, as the lost and recovered soul of Spain in Bogdal's words (cf. 100, 96), 'white' Preciosa is indisputably the incarnation of the nation, elevated through the singular obstacles in the story to an ennobling (= 'whitening') source of collective identity. If her accomplishments are judged in literal terms, she comes across as a highly improbable character. Appelbaum, for instance, remarks that the plot contains "improbable, 'romantic' events and states of mind (such as Preciosa's innocence in the midst of crime, and her savoir vivre, incredible for her age and situation)" (vii). But if we read "La gitanilla" in metaphoric terms as a fictional blueprint for a nation-building project, then we can understand the story's immense political value, its precocity and its extraordinary influence across cultures in the centuries to come.⁵¹

Before we move to the topic of film, one further note is in order here. In my case study *Patterns of Symbolic Violence*, I consider the transformations of the 'gypsy' child-theft motif across visual media, placing a special focus on seventeenth-century Dutch history painting. Since these findings have a direct bearing on Critical Whiteness Studies as the approach opted for here, it is worthwhile to recapitulate them in summary form. Firstly, it has to be borne in mind that in its time the genre of history painting was deemed the highest form of art: the stories chosen for the painter's canvas were thought of as eternal stories. Secondly, a good number of eminent seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Dutch history painters chose to immortalise the scene of anagnorisis from Cervantes' tale "La gitanilla", the establishment and recognition of Preciosa's high birth. Thus, by closely analysing three

51 Bogdal cites the first translations and adaptations of "La gitanilla" and the way they popularised the image of the beautiful 'gypsy' in Spanish, French, German, English and Dutch literature (92). Appelbaum enumerates some of "La gitanilla"'s literary and musical descendants, highlighting their genre diversity: theatre plays (*Preciosa* (1821) by Pius Alexander Wolff, *Don Álvaro; o la fuerza del sino* (1835) by Duque de Rivas); ballets (*La Gypsy* (1839) by Benoit, Thomas and Marliani); and operas (*La forza del destino* (1862) by Verdi, *The Bohemian Girl* (1843) by Michael William Balfe); as well as other stories and stage works with different plots but analogous inspiration: the play *Don César de Bazan* (1844) by Dennery and Dumanoir; the opera *Maritana* (1845) by Vincet Wallace; Prosper Mérimée's tale "Carmen" (1845); Georges Bizet's opera *Carmen* (1875); and Victor Hugo's novel *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1831) (viii).

works by Jan Lievens, Paulus Bor and Jan van Noordt, I show in my book how the fetish of 'white' skin was conveyed on the canvas, and importantly how the visual effect of 'white' skin was achieved with recourse to 'gypsy' figures. In metaphorical terms, Preciosa's 'white' skin colour stands for her virginity; by safeguarding her chastity while growing up among 'gypsies', the stolen girl proves herself to be of noble origin and thus attests to the superiority of her kind. On the canvas, the whiteness of her skin is, on the one hand, positively correlated with objectively white artefacts, such as white linen lace or the very fine and highly expensive white fabric of shirts, sleeves or headgear, or white feathers and white animal fur, white freshwater pearls, white marble and white paper. On the other hand, Preciosa's white skin is negatively correlated with her 'gypsy' thief-mother, who is contrastively depicted as a shadowy figure in brown, earthly tones. Moreover, Dutch history paintings present complex figure compositions which sometimes also include Africans of a very dark skin tone, as well as artefacts that are objectively black, such as textiles or birds with black feathers. Thus, the eye of the viewer is trained to perceive and recognise the objective whiteness of skin and attribute it to European aristocrats, and through juxtaposition to differentiate it from the dark skin of 'gypsies' and 'black' African servants.

3.4 Stock Characters in an Improbable Story

Cervantes' influential *novela* provides evidence that the 'gypsy' mask and the child-abduction motif are constitutive elements of a civilisational spectacle that aims at inaugurating the 'white' mask. As explained in the theoretical part, the 'gypsy' mask is a dynamic conceptual shorthand which describes a symbolic position, as well as a set of attributes associated with this position, and is materialised using a number of artistic conventions. It is visualised by reference to a specific appearance (countenance, grooming, jewellery, costumes, etc.), behaviour (gestures, actions, states) and a space-time continuum. What we have at hand is a legible sign that has been transposed from the medium of literature into the medium of cinema, already gaining great popularity in the silent era. This universally recognisable sign, or stock character as it may also be called, is significantly, if not entirely, removed from its denotatum and the following incident from the early years of filmmaking in the USA is a case in point.

On 14 October 1923, the *New York Telegraph* newspaper published an open letter by the American director Maurice Tourneur that speaks of the high demand for recognisable stock character types in the filmmaking industry. Tourneur's statement, addressed to the American Farm Bureau Federation, comes as a reply to the accusations that he failed to give a fair depiction of farmers. The filmmaker replies that "[t]he American public demands types. It recognises a farmer as a farmer only when he chews a straw, wears jeans and chin whiskers. It wants a Texas sheriff to wear a sombrero with a six-inch brim, not a derby, as one of my acquaintance does." Later in his letter, Tourneur refers specifically to 'gypsy' stock characters:

Gypsies, today, I found during several weeks of visiting Southern California camps, travel in motors and live in tents. Some of them even have gasoline stoves and hot water flowing from the tank through a faucet. But when I filmed a gypsy story, *Jealous Fools*, this summer, I pictured a band of them living in the wagon; tradition says they do. Gypsies in a motor would not have been accepted by the motion picture public. Life as it exists in the imagination of the American public is not life as it is lived, but it is the life that must be pictured for the public's entertainment, whether in a novel or a newspaper, on the stage or on the screen. ("American Public")

Not only are 'gypsy' figures removed from life but so are the stories, in which they are introduced as main or subsidiary figures. If judged on the basis of its plausibility, the widely popular motif of children stolen by 'gypsies' who then, years later, discover their true identity will prove highly improbable in both its parts: first, in the part that entertains the fear that 'gypsies' steal children and, second, in the part that upholds the naive belief that a child raised by 'gypsies' can seamlessly resume its place in its original, often upper-class, milieu. The motif's plausibility, however, has hardly been discussed. Dixon notes in relation to *The Adventures of Dollie* that "[t]here is nothing remarkable about the plot – it is faintly ludicrous, the gypsies are portrayed in an unsympathetic way that would no longer be tolerated today" (8). Gutmann offers an explanation that is not as antiquated as he thinks: "Even setting aside more enlightened modern notions of political correctness, the story of Dollie seems ridiculous and incredible by any standard. Yet, in the context of its times, the notion of gypsies as evil incarnate was tantamount

to an axiomatic truth.” Fuller observes that “[e]ven in 1916, audiences must have known that the idea of the Tramp being integrated into a wealthy family ruled by a society matriarch was absurd.”

The most salient verdict on the motif’s plausibility, however, is delivered by the medium itself: in films of today, increasingly dominated by the demands of verisimilitude and the documentary style, stories of young children first stolen by ‘gypsies’ and then restored to their (upper-class) families are virtually absent. In my annotated filmography on the theme of ‘gypsy’ child-theft, I have identified all in all nine sound films, mostly titles from the 1940s and 1950s, where the motif is significantly altered, either staged in a burlesque manner or refashioned into a story of passion where adults rather than children are kidnapped (see *Patterns* 129–170). One telling example is the American comedy operetta *The Bohemian Girl* (1936),⁵² starring the famous duo of Laurel and Hardy. In their film, the story of stolen ‘white’ Arline is pushed to the background and is used simply as a frame onto which the two comedians can string their gags and slapstick routines. In addition, the psychological portrayal of Arline’s character proves, on close inspection, to be highly improbable: little Arline does not protest at the abduction and embraces with sweet graciousness her new ‘gypsy’ parents, while grown-up Arline is shown as woman who has all her life been readied to return to the mansion of her patrician father. This is only to underscore that if filmmakers attempted to treat the drama of child-kidnapping and recuperation in all earnestness, they would be confronted with insurmountable difficulties in creating believable, that is, psychologically realistic, characters and dialogue situations. It is not plausible that a child who has grown up among ‘gypsies’, say in a city ghetto, could seamlessly resume its place as a rightful heir in an aristocratic milieu. The recuperated child would not be able to converse in the appropriate language register, to start with, nor have the social flair to blend in with its birth family. For all these reasons, the motif is no longer to be seen on the silver screen in its original form, but is also seldom staged in more plausible re-workings of the story. It may receive, now and again, a fleeting mention in film dialogues as in *The Loves of Carmen* (1948, Dir. Charles Vidor), but since its metaphoric structure cannot match the level of realism achieved in sound film, the motif

52 The film is inspired by the opera *The Bohemian Girl* (1843) by Michael Balfe (libretto: Alfred Bunn), while the opera itself is based on Miguel de Cervantes’ tale “The Gypsy Girl” (1613).

itself clearly loses its power of fascination. In this respect, the recent German production *Nelly's Adventure* (2016, Dir. Dominik Wessely), in which the child-theft story is recycled in a decidedly realist mode, is a striking exception. (In Chapter Eight, I discuss the claims to truth raised by this fiction film for children and juveniles as well as some of its authentication strategies.) Still, if we compare the obsessive popularity of the 'gypsy' child-theft story in the silent era with its almost sudden disappearance in the age of sound, there is a clear signal that the medium has undergone some profound changes.⁵³

3.4.1 The Disciplinary Message of *The Bohemian Girl* (1936), USA

At this point, a slight digression is called for to highlight the theme of punishment that runs throughout the story in *The Bohemian Girl*, because it suggests one more viable reading of the motif. The imaginary threat of 'gypsy' child-abduction can be understood as an aesthetic tool for corrective disciplining since it has the power to activate the primal fear of social exclusion. Read figuratively, the motif serves as an indirect warning, which says that if a child, or generally any member of society, fails to internalise the 'white' mask (i.e. the cultural norm, the internalised values that ensure one's social integration), they will be severely punished for being a 'gypsy'. *The Bohemian Girl* provides a good example in this line of thought, because it consistently constructs 'gypsies' as punishable by default.⁵⁴ Repeatedly, they are portrayed as trespassers who deserve castigation regardless of their actual actions. In the first part of the film, Count Arnheim sentences the 'gypsy' Devilshoof – note the religious implications of the name – to public lashing for trespassing. There is no criminal investigation or court verdict; instead, the sternness of the count's order is justified implicitly with

53 The interest of filmmakers has shifted to child-adoption stories, and especially to documentary stories about Roma children placed in institutions who are adopted by families from the dominant culture; such stories stir the fascination of contemporary audiences for one specific reason: while stilling the spectators' hunger for realism, these stories offer titillating material for the debate about nature vs. nurture. The film examples from the corpus here include the documentaries *The Long Way Home* (2014, Dir. Boriana Puncheva) and *Bread and TV* (2013, Dir. Georgi Stoev), as well as the fiction films *Brats* (2008, Dir. Zdeněk Tyc) and *Baklava* (2007, Dir. Alexo Popov).

54 In seventeenth-century Spain, for example, various laws stipulated that a citizen could be brought before a trial court merely on account of being declared a 'gypsy' (Charnon-Deutsch 21).

the help of the parallel editing. The action with Devilshoof, who enters the count's property, alternates with scenes of his fellow 'gypsies' mercilessly robbing – be it of the upper or lower social strata – the good-hearted and admirably generous inhabitants of the nearby town, a territory that falls within the count's jurisdiction. Thus, what initially comes across as ungrounded cruelty turns out to be the count's far-sighted concern for and protection of his townsmen. Twelve years later, 'gypsy' Arline is also convicted by him to public lashing, but luckily, in the nick of time, Count Arnheim recognises her as his stolen 'white' daughter, aided by a family medallion and a birthmark. Unlike innocent and noble Arline, 'gypsy' Ollie and Stan cannot escape the punishment they have earned with their multiple offences, a punishment that, interestingly enough, is reminiscent of the methods used by the Holy Inquisition. Its disciplinary effect clearly sounds in Jeff Stafford's personal reaction to the film finale:

Despite a light and whimsical tone, *The Bohemian Girl* is dark around the edges unlike most of Laurel and Hardy's features from this period. Those who saw this film as children will be forever haunted by the grotesque final shot of the boys, emerging from a torture chamber – Ollie stretched by the rack to the size of a giant while Stan has been crushed down to dwarf size. Could there be a more graphic representation of Laurel and Hardy as outsiders and social outcasts?

The theme of punishment deserves special attention, because it bears direct relation to the dominant perception of reality and by extension to the aesthetics of realism. Before considering this relationship, it is necessary to comment on a process of fragmentation that has gradually become apparent in the exposition here and that the reader may have already taken notice of. In its original design, the motif under scrutiny has the structure of an initiatory rite and consists of two distinct phases: separation or the hero's entry into the world of darkness, and incorporation or the hero's return to the world of light. Over the course of time, however, this structure has been reduced to and identified with its first phase, the act of child-stealing, and has been used primarily for disciplinary purposes. As discussed in the previous subsection, Cervantes' urtext constructs the world of 'gypsies' as an ironic inversion of the established order. This world is a metaphoric representation of the dark phase in the 'white' hero's journey towards personal or collective

(national) individuation. From the perspective of the normative centre, the obverse 'gypsy' world and its inhabitants are by definition subject to punishment. Cervantes juxtaposes the suntanned 'gypsies' to 'white' Spanish aristocrats to underscore, albeit in a subversive, ironic and self-reflexive manner, the inborn physical and moral superiority of the upper class. The high point in his *novela* is the second phase, the uncovering of the protagonists' 'white' identity and their incorporation into society. The child-stealing act is of lesser importance in the dramatic economy of the text; it is a precondition for the carefully staged culmination. The talk of child-stealing 'gypsies' then, as we know it nowadays, is but a fragment of a literary mechanism for 'white' (class and/or nation) identity formation, and represents its first phase. This fragment has gained a life of its own and is still in currency today due to some new functions it has acquired, and is thus widely exploited in all forms of popular culture.⁵⁵ Not only were American children watching *The Bohemian Girl* in 1936 warned via the silver screen about the consequences of acting like a 'gypsy', similar messages belong to the standard repertoire of admonitions that Bulgarian parents, for example, resort to nowadays. The threat "Do as I say, or the 'gypsies' will take you away!" in its numerous variations is an effective and affecting way to communicate to children that disobedience brings about punishment, spanning the whole spectrum from ridicule and denigration to physical abuse, social ostracism and even death.

Punishment, and especially ultimate punishment, whose task is to instil fear and terror in individuals, is not only a proven and time-honoured method for moulding human behaviour towards a desired social norm, it is also a method for producing reality itself, or what a society takes for reality. In support of this claim, I refer to Alexander Kiossev's "An Essay on Terror", in which the scholar illustrates by way of an anecdote the role of violence in the process of imposing and internalising social norms and conventions:

Lyotard recounts how the King of Ou ordered his general, Sun Tze, to make fine soldiers out of 180 of his favourite wives. The general started drilling them to turn "right!", "left!", and "about face!" to the drumbeat. The women giggled, chatted, and refused to obey. The general drew his sword and chopped off the heads

55 On the use of the child-theft motif in children's and young adult literature, see Josting.

of two of the king's best-loved wives. He got perfect discipline. The new symbolic order promptly triumphed: the women started behaving as soldiers. The lapse into laughter was no longer possible. Death stabilizes the new realities. (140)

In addition to that, as an interpretative frame for the anecdote, Kiossev puts forward an understanding of reality that greatly supports my critical approach to 'gypsy'-themed films:

Realities are symbolic conventions which are forgotten to have been conventions. (...) Conventions are the result of ultimate violence – a violence which does not concentrate on a visible bursting point, but drains through an infinite network of invisible channels: violence so stark that it suppresses its own terror turning it into a habit, into naturalness, naturality, reality. Realities are conventions which are forgotten to have been conventions; conventions are violence forgotten to have been violent. Suppressed (from "suppression" or *Verdrängung*) violence is what welds the signifier and the signified together. To be born, "the world" was terrorized. (137)

There are, however, some details in the 'broader picture' presented by the scholar here that need further elaboration. The mechanism of reality production outlined by Kiossev acknowledges only the visible centre of power in the semiosphere, while turning a blind eye to its boundary, the other, inverted pole of symbolic power. In other words, Kiossev's explanatory model has the capacity to account for abrupt political changes, such as the instalment of a totalitarian regime, during which a set of social norms and conventions is imposed by means of an exemplary act of violence that is directed to select members of the in-group and is bound in time; the result is that with the passage of time, the violence being forgotten, these norms become normality or are generally perceived as such. At the same time, what Kiossev's model fails to account for is the unremitting violence exercised upon the perceived 'gypsies' over the past five centuries across all of Europe, not only in real life but also in cultural artworks, ranging from scorn, vilification, social exclusion and persecution to public executions and genocide (see also Section 9.2). Another tell-tale symptom pointing to the agency of symbolic 'gypsies' in the production of European reality is the degree of public concern, compared to other minority groups, regarding the

ritual violence unleashed upon them. To state the obvious, brutality against 'gypsies' is so commonplace that, in spite of its breath-taking magnitude, it seldom warrants attention, having turned into a norm, a collective habit, a natural reaction, normality, a shared reality.⁵⁶

3.5 Masquerade at a Stand-still: Four Cinematic Versions of *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*

The motif of child-abduction and recuperation poses a specific difficulty for films with a realist aesthetic and form. It is particularly ostensible in the cinematic versions of Victor Hugo's novel *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, also a text thematically and structurally indebted to "La gitanilla". Just like Cervantes, Hugo stages a figurative masquerade in his novel, a game of fluid identities, in which the main characters, Esmeralda and Quasimodo, are able to swap their 'white' and 'gypsy' masks, and by doing so, they allow the author to examine tensions and discrepancies between outer appearance and inner nature, between social/'ethno-racial' origin and individual character. Esmeralda is the daughter of a prostitute and an exiled rogue king who was stolen as a child and brought up by 'gypsies', while Quasimodo is a 'gypsy' foundling raised by the Notre-Dame clergy. The revelation of their true identity is the highest point in the novel. In the medium of film, in dire contrast, this moment is cut out. Not only that, the whole concern with true identity is relegated to the periphery, which also means that the dynamics of masquerade are brought to a stand-still; the characters' fluid identities are conceived of instead as rock solid. Here, I refer in particular to three of the cinematic versions, namely the American film from 1939 directed by William Dieterle and featuring Charles

56 Cinematic works that set themselves the task of exposing the mechanisms of symbolic, systemic and/or direct physical violence against perceived 'gypsies' are still a rarity. Among the documentary films included in the corpus here, a mention should be given to: *Zigeuner sein* (1970, Dir. Peter Nestler); *Das falsche Wort: Wiedergutmachung an Zigeunern (Sinti) in Deutschland?* (1987, Dir. Katrin Seybold); *Natasha* (2008, Dir. Ulli Gladik); *Our School* (2011, Dir. Mona Nicoara and Miruna Coca-Cozma); *Revision* (2012, Dir. Philip Scheffner); and *Judgement in Hungary* (2013, Dir. Eszter Hajdú). The list of fiction films that question the conventions of European reality include: Tony Gatlif's filmography; *The Raggedy Rawney* (1988, Dir. Bob Hoskins); *And the Violins Stopped Playing* (1988, Dir. Alexander Ramati); *Brats* (2002) and *El Paso* (2009), both directed by Zdeněk Tyc; *Just the Wind* (2012, Dir. Benedek Fliegauf); *Peaky Blinders* (2013), scripted by Steven Knight; and *Aferim!* (2015, Dir. Radu Jude).

Laughton and Maureen O’Hara in the main roles; the French-Italian film from 1956 directed by Jean Delannoy starring Anthony Quinn and Gina Lollobrigida; and the British-American TV film from 1982 directed by Michael Tuchner with Anthony Hopkins and Lesley-Anne Down. In these films, the role of Esmeralda is performed by famous actresses who – in the pro-filmic world – are situated, being fair-skinned brunettes, on the ambiguous border between ‘white’ and ‘gypsy’. Their Esmeraldas all stay in the role of the ‘gypsy’ throughout the entire length of the film. However, the films offer different visual interpretations of the leading ‘gypsy’ heroine, modelling or rather fixing her skin colour through the use of make-up, lighting and costume. Accidentally or not, films that imagine Esmeralda as ‘ethno-racially’ ‘white’ also come up with a new, happy ending to her story, whereas the films that construe her as ‘ethno-racially’ ‘non-white’ stick to Hugo’s original plot and stage her death. In this respect, cinematic interpretations significantly deviate from the novel, where Esmeralda is portrayed simultaneously as ‘ethno-racially’ ‘white’, being a child stolen by ‘gypsies’, and destined to a tragic death. The screenshots below (**Fig. 10** to **Fig. 14**) show the three film renditions of Esmeralda enacted respectively by Maureen O’Hara, Lesley-Anne Down and Gina Lollobrigida.

In the 1939 black-and-white version of *The Hunchback*, O’Hara’s ‘gypsy’ is lit in the classical Hollywood style, that is, in the modus of whiteness. In the screenshots (**Fig. 10a** and **Fig. 10b**), we can see that her face receives profuse light from above, exuding the mandatory white glow⁵⁷ expected of female characters. Again, following the Hollywood lighting conventions, O’Hara’s Esmeralda is a shade whiter than her male companions, the Archdeacon and Phoebus, who provide a good reference point, being representatives of the indisputably ‘white’ majority. In terms of skin colour, the ‘gypsy’ girl is in no way different to them. At the end of the film, she not only escapes death but also finds her happiness with the ‘white’ poet Pierre Gringoire. Throughout the story, Esmeralda remains a ‘gypsy’ girl; she is spared the experience of discovering her true identity. Her lower position in society is communicated through her clothes (**Fig. 11a** and **Fig. 11b**), and contrasted with Phoebus’ fiancée, who is pale blonde and clad in white (**Fig. 12a** and **Fig. 12b**). Esmeralda’s skin colour and the story’s happy ending,

57 See Dyer, especially the subchapter “The Glow of White Women”, for an insightful analysis of this lighting convention (122–142).

The Literary Motif of Child-stealing 'Gypsies' and Silent Film



Fig. 10a and Fig. 10b. Screenshots from *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* (1939, Dir. William Dieterle): two-shots of Maureen O'Hara as Esmeralda and Edmond O'Brien as Pierre Gringoire: both characters share the same skin colour, 'white'.



Fig. 11a and Fig. 11b. Screenshots from *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* (1939, Dir. William Dieterle): Esmeralda's and Gringoire's black-and-white costumes mark their lower social rank, their social 'non-whiteness'.



Fig. 12a and Fig. 12b. Screenshots from *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* (1939, Dir. William Dieterle): the white costumes of Phoebeus (Alan Marshal) and his blonde fiancée Fleur de Lys (Helene Whitney) mark their high social station, their social 'whiteness'.



Fig. 13a and Fig. 13b. Screenshots from *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* (1982, Dir. Michael Tuchner): a medium shot of Lesley-Anne Down as Esmeralda and a two-shot of her and Gerry Sundquist as Pierre Gringoire: the characters share the same light brown hair and skin colour, both are ‘white’.

though, can be regarded as the filmmakers’ indirect hint as to her being a stolen ‘white’ child.

The case of the 1982 colour TV version of *The Hunchback* is similar. Lesley-Anne Down’s Esmeralda (**Fig. 13a**) is a blue-eyed, fair-skinned beauty, a clear sign that she is a stolen ‘white’ child: she is visibly whiter than her ‘gypsy’ companions, who exploit her looks, forcing her to dance in front of the crowd, so that they can perform their pick-pocketing activities undisturbed. Again, however, the ‘gypsy’ identity of the heroine is not ‘corrected’ or contested in the film. At the end, assisted by Quasimodo, Esmeralda manages to run away with the man of her heart, the ‘white’ poet Pierre Gringoire (**Fig. 13b**).

The 1956 colour version of *The Hunchback* offers a different interpretation of the story and its main heroine. Lollobrigida’s ‘gypsy’ (**Fig. 14a**) has a darker skin tone; her complexion bears a perceptible hue, unlike the literal white we see with O’Hara. Clearly, this reflects the technological advancement in filmmaking, for not only Esmeralda, but also the other characters in this colour film have discernible flesh tones. Next to Phoebus or next to the people in the crowd, however, Lollobrigida’s complexion appears to be a tone darker, as if the actress had been sent for further baths by the film director; and on this point, she differs from Lesley-Anne Down’s blue-eyed, fair-skinned Esmeralda, too. What is more, during her dance show, the camera frames Lollobrigida’s Esmeralda in a two-shot with the ‘gypsy’ musician who accompanies her and who has a very dark skin tone (**Fig. 15**). His complexion is a carefully placed cue which is there to suggest that the actress’s Southern



Fig. 14a and Fig. 14b. Screenshots from *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* (1956, Dir. Jean Delannoy): a medium shot of Gina Lollobrigida as Esmeralda; a two-shot of Phoebus (Jean Danet) and his fiancée Fleur de Lys (Danielle Dumont).



Fig. 15. Screenshots from *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* (1956, Dir. Jean Delannoy): a two-shot of Esmeralda and the 'gypsy' musician who accompanies her. The man has a very dark complexion that serves as a visual cue to suggest that Esmeralda's Southern beauty should be interpreted in the film's diegesis as 'non-white' in 'ethno-racial' terms.

beauty should be interpreted in the film's diegesis as 'non-white' in 'ethno-racial' terms, an interpretation that is additionally supported by the use of colourful costumes and strategic contrasts. The voluptuous body of the 'gypsy' dancer enveloped in a signal-red dress gains its full meaning when set in opposition to the slim, fairy-like highborn ladies in broadly cut whitish gowns with green undertones. Among them, Phoebus' fiancée stands out with her light complexion and pale white dress (**Fig. 14b**). The film's intricate colour scheme employs intense colours establishing contrasts on the level of costumes but also on the level of hair and skin tones. In this colour scheme, it is hard to imagine Lollobrigida's Esmeralda as a stolen 'white' child, and so it is hardly a coincidence that, unlike O'Hara's and Down's 'white' Esmeraldas, Lollobrigida's swarthy 'gypsy' has to part with her life at the end of the story (see also Section 6.3 for a discussion of the plotlines reserved for the 'gypsy' mask).

The 1996 Walt Disney animation film directed by Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise takes the next logical step. Hugo's story is again re-structured, so that Esmeralda can remain firmly entrenched in her 'gypsy' identity. Here, the ambiguity of human skin hue is replaced by the straightforwardness of painted colour. For the sake of clarity – since much of the action takes place in the dark hours of the night – Esmeralda's flesh is set in contrast with her snow-white blouse (**Fig. 16a**), the latter being a reliable reference for 'whiteness', so that viewers can avoid the mistake of interpreting her dusky complexion as affected by the night light or an overcasting shadow. The animated version also endows the 'gypsy' girl with bright green eyes that seem to have a cat-like glow in the dark.⁵⁸

58 The female 'gypsy' figure is traditionally attributed animal features. The strategy of animalisation is, for instance, profusely employed in Prosper Mérimée's undying tale "Carmen". The text repeatedly draws parallels between Carmen and different animal species, among which chameleons, cats, wolfs, monkeys and ravens. Carmen's eyes are said to be like wolf's eyes: "'Gypsy's eye, wolf's eye' is a phrase Spaniards apply to people with keen powers of observation. If you don't have time to visit the zoo in the Jardin des Plantes to study the look in a wolf's eye, watch your cats when it is stalking a sparrow" (14–15). In spite of being directly inspired by Cervantes' "La gitanilla", Mérimée's tale is of a paradigmatically different nature. It is a fictional story that disguises itself – through a number of textual gestures – as an eye-witness account written by a well-read and well-travelled French scientist. The tale was published in 1845 in *Revue des Deux Mondes*, a French monthly magazine which specialised at the time in travel and foreign affairs, having the reputation of an elite liberal vehicle of *haute culture*.

It goes without saying that the skin colour coding of the characters in **Fig. 16a** precludes the possibility of Esmeralda's discovering her true 'white' identity. The markers of 'whiteness' are attributed in full measure to her suitor Phoebus, whose name identifies him with the sun. Befittingly, he is not only fair-skinned, but also blue-eyed and golden blond (**Fig. 16b**).



Fig. 16a and Fig. 16b. Screenshots from *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* (1996, Dir. Gary Trousdale, and Kirk Wise): black-haired Esmeralda, whose snow-white blouse aids the viewer to perceive her as 'non-white', and yellow-blond Phoebus.

At this point, it would be useful to go back to the beginning of this chapter and remind ourselves of 'gypsy' portrayals in black-and-white silent films, where differences are coded primarily on the level of costuming and protagonists are free to participate in a game of identities exploring through transformational reversals the full spectrum of life experiences. Juxtaposed to these early films, the Disney animation marks a truly profound change in the representation and perception of identities, a change that has taken place within less than a century. Not only is the carnivalesque element annihilated and together with it the opportunity to explore aesthetically life's extremes, but there is also a radicalisation of colour difference, so that immaterial variations in skin tone are exaggerated and strategically employed to racialise characters constructing their unmistakable 'ethno-racial' alterity.

The four cinematic versions of Hugo's novel *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, all of them stemming from Western European imagination and spanning a timeframe of fifty years, provide a good example of the general tendency towards racialisation or stabilisation of 'ethno-racial' identities in films featuring 'gypsy' characters. What this tendency brings about is an obfuscation of the fictional nature of 'white' and 'gypsy' masks (as the two complementary lenses of European cultural

consciousness), coupled with an emphasis on unequivocal visual markers of 'ethno-racial' alterity. It also entails a disregard for the transformational effect of carnivalesque reversals, obliterating the paradoxical logic inherent in initiatory rites, namely the psychologically tenable technology of producing 'white' identity via a transitory phase in the 'gypsy' world. The result is a complete fragmentation of the original masquerade rite, so that the 'white' mask and the 'gypsy' mask are perceived as biologically determined and belonging to two separate and seemingly unrelated realities. In the next chapter, I consider how these fragments of European fiction are staged, substantiated, and sustained by films inflected in the aesthetic modus of realism.

3.6 Conclusion

Looking at the black-and-white films from the silent era through the prism of the motif of 'gypsy' child-theft, we can see that, on the one hand, the black-and-white colour dichotomy can be deciphered as presence and absence of light. In this case, the primary question is who gets to be in the limelight, whose face becomes the focus of public attention or, to put it even more simply, who qualifies as the main hero in the story? The white and black colours, on the other hand, have social and 'ethno-racial' implications: the higher the class standing, the 'whiter' the person (in the pecking order of social classes); the more (North) Western European (the USA is also included here) the background, the 'whiter' the nationality or the 'ethno-racial' background in the pecking order of nationalities. In all these scenarios, however, the 'gypsy' mask remains the rock-bottom benchmark, a stable marker for the European 'non-white'/'black' part of the colour spectrum. The connotations of the black and white colours have direct relevance to our initial question, namely who is deemed sufficiently worthy of being the main hero in the story? It seems that the answer here is left to the aesthetics of the photographic medium: the upper class and Western Europeans 'naturally' gain greater visibility, being 'whiter' than the rest of humanity, so that stories in which they play the main heroes 'naturally' become everybody's stories. This dominant aesthetic tendency can be summarised as follows: the hero with the 'white' mask (in whiteface) is in the limelight and is the main hero; his/her story has universal visibility. Read in reverse, the same tendency posits that the hero who is 'non-white' is out of the limelight and stands at the periphery; his/her story is absent.

In this chapter, I have subjected to examination the forms, meaning and functions of the 'gypsy' child-stealing motif as it has been employed during the silent film era. Having traced the fictional roots of the motif back to Cervantes, its impact on the literary imagination across European cultures, its transposition from the written word to the moving image and subsequent proliferation in the silent film era down to its sudden disappearance in sound film, I have been able to draw a number of important conclusions. Firstly, the child-abduction motif in silent film testifies to the interdependence of the 'white' mask and the 'gypsy' mask as the two modes of cultural disciplining; the first relays the social norms (for a given historical period in a given culture), while the second, the sanctions that the failure to conform entails. In its original design, the motif has the structure and the function of an initiation rite set up in aesthetic terms, where the 'white' mask gains its individuality, visibility and salience through a rite of passage, i.e. exchange with the 'gypsy' mask, its inverted mirror image. The carnivalesque swap of masks employed by European writers and filmmakers as an identity formation mechanism activates three distinct, yet simultaneously present levels of meaning. It accounts for the formation of individual identity, i.e. for the psychological individuation of the single human being; it accounts for the formation of class identity, i.e. for the psychological individuation of a social group; and finally, it accounts for the formation of a national identity, i.e. the psychological individuation of an 'ethno-racial'/national group. Secondly, the disappearance of the motif in sound film, nowadays the dominant film form, speaks of the suppression or even obliteration of initiation rites that partake in the formation of national/'ethno-racial' identities in present-day modern culture. This is a culture that renounces fluid identities which allow for ambiguity and carnival reversals, and promotes in their place fixed 'ethno-racial'/national identities. By upholding the aesthetics of realism, modern mass media – of which sound film is a key form – reduce the mutable figurative meaning of the 'white' and 'gypsy' mask to an immutable skin colour, stabilising and reifying in the process the notion of 'race', but also, more importantly, legitimising and normalising social hierarchies as 'ethno-racial' ones. Finally, the scrutiny of the motif of child-stealing 'gypsies' offers ample reason to believe that the 'gypsy' mask is not only an emblematic sign of socially disintegrative forces and a representational shorthand employed by artists to attest to the certainty of social sanctions, but it is also the source of our modern perception of reality, its Other modus.