

6

Content Analysis of the ‘gypsy’ Mask or the ‘Gypsy’ Mask as a Cluster of Attributes

— ※ —

This chapter focuses exclusively on the content of the ‘gypsy’ mask. Broadly speaking, the content of the ‘gypsy’ mask refers to the characterisation of the imaginary ‘gypsy’ figure: its distinctive qualities, personality traits, inner values and other notable attributes that are ascribed to it over the length of a given film. Cinematically, these qualities and values are communicated in various ways: directly, in dialogues or through voiceover, and indirectly, by means of speech acts, actions and gestures, as well as via visual portrayal (costuming and colour schemes) and choice of temporal and spatial setting. Besides naming each and every attribute ascribed to the ‘gypsy’ mask throughout a given film, it is also necessary to view these attributes in their totality as a specific cluster, a kind of content grid. Abstracting and visualising the constellation of ‘gypsy’ attributes elicited in each concrete film is particularly helpful, because it allows us to study the content matrix of the ‘gypsy’ mask in its idiosyncratic variations. It is also crucial to articulate the constellation of attributes ascribed to the ‘gypsy’ mask in individual films – the specific content grid they form – because this content matrix is the main technique of generating knowledge about ‘gypsies’ and is therefore central to the strategy of radical Othering.

In the next pages, the focus falls on the following questions: How is the ‘gypsy’ mask coded in the film in terms of character traits and values? Is it explicitly or implicitly contrasted with the ‘white’ mask? What qualities are ascribed directly (through speech acts) or indirectly (through actions and emotional states) to it? What aspects of human

existence do these qualities reflect: personal integrity, social and professional integration, parenthood, sexuality, religious belief, language mastery and education, diet, health, and personal hygiene, national affiliation etc.? What kind of cluster do these qualities form? Is the 'gypsy' figure individualised? Does it have a name and how is it characterised through its name? How is it coded with regard to time (day vs. night and linear vs. circular) and space (light vs. shadow and city vs. forest)?

It has to be said here that the content of the 'gypsy' mask remains, by and large, overlooked in critical analyses of films. When discussing 'gypsy'-themed films, media scholars tend to limit their attention to the plot and to the portrayal of the main characters, largely ignoring the import of the numerous codifying sequences and scenes. This approach to film assessment that takes into consideration only the story structure and the characterisation of the main figures is better suited to the so-called cinema of narrative integration. Applied to 'gypsy'-themed films, however, it proves inadequate, as it fails to account for scenes and sequences that expand on the content matrix of the 'gypsy' mask without having any relevance to the story's dénouement. An assessment of films that is alert to the overall impact of codifying scenes and sequences scattered throughout a film is called for, because, structurally, gypsy'-themed films bear strong resemblance to what the film scholar Tom Gunning has defined as "the cinema of attractions"⁸⁶ (*Cinema* 384).

86 In his paradigm-shifting article "The Cinema of Attraction(s): Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-garde", Tom Gunning directs scholarly attention to one until then disregarded quality of the medium – cinema's singular ability to *make images seen*, its primal power to *show*, which is celebrated with full brio in early silent films, and especially in Lumière's actuality films and Méliès' trick films. Gunning argues for a new conception of cinema which he calls "the cinema of attractions", pointing out that history and theory of film have been written "under the hegemony of narrative films" (381). In his view, the cinema of attractions, as a historical period, lasts until about 1906–1907 and is then followed by another period, from 1907 to 1913, during which the narrativisation of the film form takes place, with the feature film as its culmination. In his article, first published in 1986, Gunning claims that after 1907 the attractions go "underground", leaving room for narrative to dominate and emerging only occasionally in avant-garde works and films of certain genres, such as the musical. Later, he refines his initial conception, proposing that the cinema of attractions and the cinema of narrative integration represent the two dialectical poles of modernity: "The new systematic organisation through narrative dominance does not eliminate the anarchic energy of cinema of attractions and modernity; rather it sublates this energy, using and transforming it" (*Modernity* 312). On the trends towards narrative integration, industrialisation and aestheticisation in early cinema, see also Keating's article "The Silent Screen, 1894–1927" (11–17).

Similar to early silent films, the majority of these films place greater emphasis on 'spectacle' than on narrative, a feature they share with blackface minstrel shows, too.⁸⁷ For the most part, they have loose plots interspersed with numerous self-contained 'acts' which also accounts for the films' remarkable genre hybridity. The stories they tell are often just a frame onto which a series of incoherent, unmotivated incidents are strung, edited together in an energetic and visually striking form. The central aim of these often disconnected scenes and sequences is to put on show the Otherness of 'gypsy' lifestyle in its various aspects, such as daily occurrences, habits and life-cycle rituals (baptism, marriage, burial) or musical numbers, and by doing so to entertain, shock, surprise or instruct the audience.⁸⁸ Thus, as far as genre is concerned, 'gypsy'-themed films tend to display radical hybridity and may contain – in a different measure – elements of musical, vaudeville, costume (melo)drama, film *noir*, picaresque, road movie or Western, horror, erotic

87 Looking at the form of early minstrelsy (from 1843 to the 1860s), Lott highlights the non-narrative structure of these performances. The first minstrelsy shows featured "Negro Concerts" strung together with burlesque skits while the standard minstrel procedure evolved over time to contain ensemble songs interspersed with solo banjo songs and Negro impersonations, such as witticisms, ripostes, shouts, and puns. The main purpose of blackface performance was to pander to 'white' fascination with commodified 'black' male bodies by displaying the latter in comic set pieces, repartee and physical burlesque. Lott adds: "Black figures were there to be looked at, shaped to the demands of desire; they were screens on which audience fantasy could rest, securing white spectators' position as superior, controlling, not to say owning, figures" ("Love and Theft" 28).

88 Concrete evidence in support of this claim comes from Peiró's "regionally prompted", "parametered" analysis of Spanish folkloric musical comedies from the silent era to the 1950s; her analysis is set against a panoramic and highly detailed backdrop of the films' material and intellectual histories (xi). Pejoratively called *españoladas*, Spanish musicals have been dismissed by critics as a reactionary, escapist fare which is also culpable of reducing the image of Spain to flamenco and bullfighting (cf. 2). Yet, the author claims, these films should be included in the discussion of nation building, because they "profoundly and subliminally shaped the Spanish national imaginary" (41). Taking the silent film *La gitana blanca* (1923, Dir. Ricardo de Baños) as her paradigmatic example (hence the title of her book *White Gypsies: Race and Stardom in Spanish Musicals*), Peiró shows that digressions are the film's most salient structural feature. It contains military digressions (war scenes, military footage, ethnographic film situated in Africa) coupled with racialised performance digressions (a customs-and-manners portrait of a 'gypsy' camp). These plot deviations to time-spaces of Otherness respond to the same internal logic that informs the cinema of attractions, the author argues, pointing that elements of spectacle, i.e. residues of the cinema of attractions, such as *zerzuelas* (operetta), circus acts, short theatrical skits, and song and dance numbers, are integral to *españoladas* of the 1930s onwards (47–51).

film, socialist (magic) realism or Italian neo-realism, as well as ethnographic documentation. There is hardly a 'gypsy'-themed film without a scene showing a song and dance number. Displays of nudity (stark-naked children, women with bare breasts or breast-feeding, naked-to-the-waist men), violence (knife fights, wife-beating) and wretched poverty are also a regular feature, but one of the main attractions in these films – which is hardly a topic of scholarly investigation – comes from exhibiting human depravity.

To isolate the content of the 'gypsy' mask, I consider two sample films by segmenting them into meaningful units (scenes and sequences), and then provide a detailed description of those sequences that contribute to the characterisation of the 'gypsy' role and sum up the import of each sequence in the form of key words or phrases. The suggested keywords are not established terms with a fixed meaning but rather interpretative shortcuts to the 'gypsy' attribute(s) communicated in the described sequence. For instance, if we have a sequence in which a 'gypsy' male by the name of Devilshoof jumps over a castle's wall after sunset and, hiding in a dark corner, eavesdrops on a conversation between the castle's inhabitants, it is veracious to say that, in this portion of the film, the 'gypsy' figure is coded with the following attributes: 'creature of the night', 'trespasser', 'evildoer'. The choice of keywords does not make claims of exclusiveness – that is to say, other formulations could be just as valid – but rather to a fair degree of interpretive accuracy. By applying the analytical approach proposed here, I am able to accomplish several goals: to visualise the content grid of the 'gypsy' mask within a given film, to point to the cumulative effect of quality-attributing sequences over the length of a film, to regard the 'gypsy' mask as an abstract entity – a specific constellation of values, qualities and traits – and finally to compare its transformations across film productions that are removed from each other in time and space.

The sample films that are subjected to content analysis in the current chapter are two US productions with a 42-year interval in between, namely *The Bohemian Girl* (1936) and *King of the Gypsies* (1978). Choosing to examine and compare two films from the same national culture allows me to highlight the functionality of the 'gypsy' mask and its subordination to the 'white' mask, as well as the continuities and discontinuities – even arbitrariness! – in its fabrication. In my content analysis, the focus is on the 'gypsy' mask as an element of European and US American cultural grammar, positing that it represents a stable meaning-generating pattern that is decipherable across national cultures in

a pan-European and US American context. Since 'gypsy'-themed films are circulated far beyond their country of origin, many of the local and historical particularities they convey are lost on distant audiences, but their core message about 'gypsies' is invariably imparted.

6.1 The Content Matrix of the 'Gypsy' Mask in *The Bohemian Girl* (1936): Sequence-by-Sequence Description

The Bohemian Girl (1936) is a feature-length Viennese-style operetta directed by James W. Horne and Charley Rogers starring Stan Laurel, Oliver Hardy and Thelma Todd. The tradition behind this Hollywood film production is a good illustration of the stability (universality) of the 'gypsy' mask and its translatability across historical periods, cultures and genres. It has an earlier version, a British period drama of the same name from 1922, directed by Harley Knoles and starring Gladys Cooper, Ivor Novello and C. Aubrey Smith (BFI). Both films take inspiration from the ballad opera *The Bohemian Girl* (1843), "the most popular of all nineteenth-century operas in England", composed by the Irish prodigy Michael William Balfe who, in turn, based his popular work on the Spanish *novela* "The Gypsy Girl" ("La gitanilla") by Miguel de Cervantes, written in 1613 (Charnon-Deutsch 54). When reading the analytical description that follows here, the reader should also bear in mind that upon its release, the film had great success in France, but was censored in Japan, Norway, Sweden, Hungary, Latvia and Malaysia and was banned altogether in Nazi Germany⁸⁹ on account of being subversive with its 'gypsy' theme (cf. Louvish 340, 356; Stafford).

The story in *The Bohemian Girl* is set in seventeenth-century Bohemia.

89 In the censorship decision, we read that the Film Inspection Agency

„bei der Verlogenheit des Films, der in wesentlichen ein falsches Bild eines abzulehnenden Zigeunerlebens in kitschiger Form gibt, weit davon entfernt ist, ein Kunstwerk in ihm zu sehen“; „[d]er Film erschöpft sich in einer Darstellung, die, wie die Filmprüfstelle zutreffend ausführt, vom Beschauer nicht als Parodie gewertet wird und die ihrer inneren Gesamthaltung nach [im dritten Reich] keinen Platz hat“ (Dick).

“given the phoniness of the film, which essentially gives a false picture of an objectionable gypsy life in a kitschy form, is far from seeing a work of art in it”; “the film amounts to nothing more than a representation which, as the Film Inspection Agency correctly explains, is not regarded as a parody by the viewer and which, with its implied overall stance, has no place [in the third Reich]” [my translation, R.M.].

Content Analysis of the 'Gypsy' Mask

Sequence 1 [0'53:1'24] The film opens with a long, low-angle shot of a wooden bridge as a 'gypsy' caravan is just crossing it over. A single file of horse-drawn wagons, led and escorted by horse riders, passes by. It is a sunny summer day. The camera cuts to medium shots showing details of the wagons: one of them is steered by a 'gypsy' couple, behind them, another 'gypsy' couple is standing together with their child, all of them singing [nomadic].

Sequence 2 [1'25:2'12] A high-angle shot shows the 'gypsy' camp set up in a forest clearing, while in the background towers the majestic silhouette of a castle [close to nature]. The wagons are arranged in a circle and the space in the middle is buzzing with activity: adults milling around, animals in the way, a campfire, children dancing. Then, the crowd is introduced through group portraits, each group set against the entrance of a wagon: four 'gypsy' women hanging around; two wives – one cooking, the other sewing – with two little girls and a baby in a rocking cradle – one of the girls is tending the baby, the other is stroking a pitch-black cat; a group of men and women playing cards; a group of musicians playing different instruments; a woman wringing out her washing, and next to her a couple courting, the girl's naked legs on display; a group of older men drinking and raising a toast with their glasses. All activities take place outside, in the open, and all the while, the 'gypsies' are singing in chorus:

Gypsy vagabonds are we
As free as anyone can be
Wandering on without a care today
We are so free! Without a care
Anywhere that we may roam
Is where we make our home
Be it on the road or sky
On high! In the sky!

The men and women are dressed in elaborate folkloric costumes characterised by various patterns, such as stripes, dots, floral ornaments. The 'gypsy' males stand out with their longish dark hair, sideburns and thick moustaches, earrings and pirate-like head cloths or feather-decorated hats. The 'gypsy' females are defined by their big ornate earrings; some of them have long dark plaits [nomadic, backward, musical, free, merry-making, dark (hairy) types: their main occupations are singing and

dancing, playing cards, drinking alcohol, making love and parenting]. The sequence aims at a collective portrait of 'gypsies'; the gaze of the camera imitates that of a scientist providing an ethnographic tableau of everyday life in the 'gypsy' camp.



Fig. 19. Screenshot from *The Bohemian Girl* (1936, Dir. James W. Horne and Charley Rogers): the 'gypsy' queen (Zeffie Tilbury) giving her orders to Salinas (Mitchell Lewis), the leader of the 'gypsy' rogues.

Sequence 3 [2'12:2'42] Against the background of the 'gypsy' camp, the camera frames an elderly white-haired woman (Zeffie Tilbury) with a younger man who bows to her, addressing her like royalty (**Fig. 19**):

- S: Good morning, my queen.
Q: What news, Salinas?
S: Do you realise where we are?
Q: Perfectly well.

The two enter the queen's tent and continue their conversation inside, with a scheming tone:

- Q: So once more, we are encamped on the domain of the good Count Arnheim.
S: Count Arnheim! Pah! (He spits.)
Q: What we pick up here we must pick up quickly. For he'll never allow us to stay here long.

S: One of these days, I'll... (He makes threatening gestures.)

[trespassers, thieves, in open conflict with aristocracy/authority]. This sequence introduces the central conflict in the story: 'gypsies' vs. aristocrats.

Sequence 4 [2'43:3'40] The camera takes us to Count Arnheim's castle, first showing a regiment of armed soldiers in uniforms, singing and marching in a formation and then, framed in a gate, the count himself, clad in lavish clothes, jewels, a black triangle hat rimmed with white down feathers and a jewel-studded cane. The count is just entering the castle garden where he greets his small daughter Arline (Darla Hood), a blonde girl in a white dress playing with a white dog. At this point, the captain of the guard comes to report:

C: Count Arnheim, there is a band of gypsies in the woods below the castle.

A: Gypsies, eh? See that they are gone by high noon tomorrow. If they are caught on my estate, have them flogged within an inch of their lives.

[trespassers, punishable].

Sequence 5 [3'41:5'56] Back in the tent of the old 'gypsy' queen, we see her laying cards on a small round table [fortune-tellers, sorcerers]. The queen hears a singer performing what she calls the "true song of the gypsies" and urges Salinas to go outside and "listen how she sings of life and love". In the next shot, we see a beautiful young woman (Thelma Todd) with big elaborate earrings, wearing a glittering two-piece dress that reveals some of her skin:

When love calls the heart of a gypsy
It calls to the heart that is free
The will of a gypsy caresses her
Only to die with the dawn
Oh, the road that a gypsy must travel
Is planned by the fortunes of time
So, it's one hour of bliss and a passionate kiss
Then farewell to gypsy romance and melody (...)

The singer is surrounded by courting couples who pick up her song in chorus, while some perform individual and group dances [amorous, free, passionate, nomadic, musical]. In this sequence, 'gypsies' are portrayed in a Romantic mode. Interestingly enough, their dance performances are reminiscent of the Russian folk dance kazachok.

Sequence 6 [5'57:11'19] The camera cuts to a mid-shot of Ollie and Stan sitting in front of their wagon, wastefully peeling vegetables and throwing them in a pot that is simmering on an open fire in front of them. In the background, there is a line of washing drying; on the one side, a horse is eating hay, while on the other side, various animals appear in the frame: a goose, hens, a small dog [close to animals and nature]. Inside the wagon, we see Ollie's wife (Mae Busch), who receives a visit from a handsome man (Antonio Moreno) knocking at her window. On her way out, she responds to Ollie's affectionate address "Hello, honey!" with unwarranted hostility: "Don't honey me, you, big bag of suet! I told you five minutes ago not to talk to me. And an hour ago! And a week ago!" What ensues is a loud quarrel Mrs. Hardy picks up with Ollie and then also with Stan, during which she comes across as both verbally and physically abusive [loud-mouthed and abusive (the females)]. Then, she goes to the man who awaits her behind the wagon and undergoes a change of personality, pledging her devotion to him: "Oh, my love! I am so content and happy when I'm with you. Just like a nestling dove. You're so big and strong and brave..." Stan warns Ollie of his wife's infidelity: "I'm not gonna say anything until I get positive proof but I saw Devilshoof kissing your wife." Ollie confronts the couple but is not disturbed by their flagrant courting: "There was nothing to it. They were just having a little innocent fun. Don't you understand that a man to be married nowadays must be broad-minded?" The lovers say goodbye to each other, flaunting their affair, exchanging flowers and kisses in broad daylight, while Ollie and Stan watch them, busy discussing what is permissible and what not [adulterous, devil's sidekicks, promiscuous]. The humour in the sketch derives from Ollie's inability to discern his wife's abusiveness and barefaced adultery.

Sequence 7 [11'20:12'36] 'Gypsy' couples move along singing, all gather around an open campfire and some start dancing in the middle [merymaking].

Sequence 8 [12'37:13'04] Inside her tent, the 'gypsy' queen is in the company of a beautiful young woman. Salinas enters and reports to the queen: "The moon is very good to us tonight. The village will be in darkness and the pickings will be easy." The old woman claps her hands contentedly and gives her orders: "Off with the rogues, that they may fill their purses and replenish our coffers!" She rubs her hands, laughing wickedly, the face of the beautiful girl behind her breaking, too, into a mirthful smile. The camera cuts to a close-up of the old woman's face, lit up by a candle and resembling that of a witch: "What wouldn't I give to go with them," she laments [creatures of the night, organised thieves, witches].

Sequence 9 [13'05:13'28] The camera takes us back to the singing crowd of 'gypsies' who begin to disperse with the falling darkness, singing: "So black as we work and believe we'll be finding darkness shortly." Ollie and Stan appear in the foreground, making a shushing sign and performing a pantomime of pickpocketing. The next shot shows a young mother with her two young children instructing them to not make a sound [creatures of the night, thieves (young and old)].

At this point, it is worth taking a look at the succession of sequences and the internal logic according to which they are edited together. During the first nine sequences, which last less than fifteen minutes and set the context for the story, the image of 'gypsies' undergoes several transformations that require closer scrutiny. In Sequence 1, 'gypsies' are introduced as an itinerant group consisting mainly of joyful young couples and families. In Sequence 2, their caravan transforms into a hustling and bustling camp in a forest clearing. Sequence 3 introduces the queen of the 'gypsies', while Sequence 4 establishes the conflict between her people and the local count. Sequences 5 and 7 elaborate on the atmosphere and the activities in the 'gypsy' camp during the day: the place overflows with vivacious revelry and eroticism, a song by a notably beautiful and scantily-clad 'gypsy' female forming the centrepiece. Sequence 6 acquaints us with Ollie and Stan in gypsyface. In Sequence 8, the queen of the 'gypsies' is framed together with a beautiful young woman, both of whom rejoice at the prospect of robbing the villagers: the beauty of the young 'gypsy' female, her face in full view and well-lit, is thus discredited and exposed as a deceptive appearance, a temporary disguise for her witch-like nature that is going to reveal itself with time (**Fig. 19**). And finally, Sequence 9 shows the crucial metamorphosis: with the arrival



Fig. 20. Screenshot from *The Bohemian Girl* (1936, Dir. James W. Horne and Charley Rogers): a 'gypsy' mother telling her children to keep quiet.

of the night, the festive group of amiable 'gypsies' transfigures into a band of plundering rogues. As the light diminishes, the inhabitants of the 'gypsy' camp get busy preparing for their night-time activities, admonishing each other to keep quiet. The camera frames a mother making a shushing sign to her two small children, indirectly incriminating them as thieves, too (**Fig. 20**). So, if we play these sequences in fast-forward, we can see how the 'gypsy' caravan transforms into a 'gypsy' camp dominated by a boisterous celebration of musicians and dancers during the day who, after sunset, change into a band of rouses where young beautiful women, mothers and even young children are implicated in its criminal activities. In a matter of seconds, the positive image of the 'gypsy' celebrated in the Romantic period for its carefree and amorous lifestyle flips into its opposite; during the night 'gypsies' show their true nature [with deceptive appearance]. Clearly, this moment of revelation contains an archetypal layer of meaning: day is ousted by night, light withdraws to make room for darkness and so does the conscious Self, leaving the stage free for its unconscious alter-ego, an oxymoronic duality signified by the 'gypsy' mask. It is no surprise then that 'gypsies' are portrayed as an anonymous group; except for Salinas who has an individual name, all other characters remain anonymous and mutually interchangeable. The queen of the 'gypsies' and Devilshoof have generic appellations that point to their role in the story. Not even Ollie's wife is granted a personal name, appearing in the film credits as Mrs. Hardy

[lacking individuality]. This also means that the qualities ascribed to one or another 'gypsy' figure are not treated and are not meant to be perceived as individual traits but rather as characteristic of 'gypsies' in general. The figures are manifestations of the various aspects and inflections, by age, gender and social status, of the same 'gypsy' mask.

The main purpose of the 'gypsy' crowd scenes, replete with wagons and campfire festivities, is to establish the setting for Stan and Ollie's slapstick comedy, supplying it with an air of 'gypsy' authenticity. As Simon Louvish notes, "the story provided an opportunity to tweak their familiar characters in an unfamiliar setting", where the new setting is substantiated with an ensemble of musical 'gypsies' who are "costumed to the gills" (340). The comic gags that follow thrive on the tension between the seeming and the real (a tension also central to film *noir*) established in the beginning, the notorious discrepancy between outer appearance and inner nature associated with the 'gypsy' role. The non-identity of signified and signifier is dramatised by Ollie and Stan in a series of pickpocketing routines that centre on the keenness of sight, creating an opposition between that which is plainly visible to the eyes and that which is visible to the enlightened mind.

Sequence 9 also highlights Laurel and Hardy's liminal position, their two-fold presence as popular Hollywood comedians (who appear in this fiction film with their real first names) and as 'gypsy' impersonations. The two are framed in the foreground, their much bigger and clearly outlined bodies are dissociated from the blurry 'gypsy' camp in the background (**Fig. 21**). Visually, they are situated in a 'gypsy' context but are not part of it; this is also signalled by the choice of costumes, the use of musical devices and their special role in the story. Ollie and Stan are comic buffoons in pauper garments; their theatrical costumes clearly distinguish them from the rest of the 'gypsies' stylised in traditional folk attire. Nominally 'gypsies', the two are excluded from the 'gypsy' community through the musical organisation of the film, too. As the film historian Rob King observes:

the opening sequences use the "society of voices" device to organise and divide the different groups within the film's narrative: first, an extended sequence of gypsies singing and dancing ("Gypsy vagabonds are we/As free as anyone can be," etc.); next, a brief marching song as soldiers arrive at Count Arnheim's estate. Yet Stan and Ollie's place within this divided social world, and thus their relation to song, is again an ambivalent one, in which



Fig. 21. Screenshot from *The Bohemian Girl* (1936, Dir. James W. Horne and Charley Rogers): Stan and Ollie in gypsyface gesturing to the spectators to keep quiet.

they serve primarily as intermediaries between the social poles of the narrative, fully belonging to neither. (148)

I would instead argue here that Ollie and Stan mediate – just like black-face performers – between the mainstream audience in the cinema hall and the world of the ‘gypsy’ Others: what they offer is a comic spectacle of ‘gypsy’ Otherness that claims to draw on an ethnographic (to wit scientifically validated) truth. In the last shot (**Fig. 21**), the two clowns seem to acknowledge both the camera and the audience watching them on-screen. In a momentary rupture of the film’s self-enclosed fictional world, they solicit the spectators’ attention, trying to entice their curiosity with a pantomime of thieving, as if extending an invitation to a guided tour into the clandestine universe of ‘gypsies’.

In the sequences that follow, Stan and Ollie make a farcical demonstration of ‘gypsy’ pickpocketing tricks, offering, as we shall see, an aesthetic experience that remains with the audience as a lesson. In a mode that invigorates the idea of deceptive appearance, the two introduce themselves to various villagers with the irony-loaded line: “We are a couple of gypsies and we are trying to make an honest living by telling fortunes.” Then, with a notable ruthlessness, they empty the pockets of five men who belong to different social strata and who are all openly well disposed towards ‘gypsies’.

Sequence 10 [13'29:15'20] Stan and Ollie appear at the entrance of the village, already enveloped in darkness, ducking to hide from a passing guard. A watchman is striking his bell and announcing the evening hour: it is nine o'clock. Stan and Ollie stop him to ask about the time and while he obligingly answers, they steal his purse and the clapper of his bell [creatures of the night, thieves].

Sequence 11 [15'21:16'44] Devilshoof sneaks around the count's castle, climbs over the wall and, hiding in a dark corner, overhears a conversation between the count and his daughter, who are sitting inside in a well-lit room. Arline wants to wear her father's medallion, and the count agrees to give her the precious jewel, explaining that it belonged to her great-great-grandfather who was also the founder of the House of Arnheim. Outside, before he is able to fulfil his illicit plans, Devilshoof is caught by the guards [creatures of the night, trespassers, evildoers].

Sequence 12 [16'45:19'32] Stan and Ollie continue with their pickpocketing: they meet a respectable man who wants to have his fortune told and who is ready to pay them well. Stan performs a trick, asking the man to close his eyes and robbing him in the meanwhile of his purse. The next victim is a shop owner of liberal views who abides by the motto: "Live and let live!" This time, it is Ollie's turn to do the eye-trick, but he botches it up and the man fights back. Stan demonstrates the trick to Ollie and, while doing it, takes Ollie's purse [fortune-tellers, use fortune-telling as smokescreen for stealing, ruthless, pickpockets, steal from each other].

Sequence 13 [19'33:19'43] Devilshoof, stripped naked to the waist, is tied to a post and subjected to public flogging. A close-up shows the frightfully savage face of his executor. The 'gypsy' is encircled by units of uniformed soldiers who are marching and singing in chorus [criminals, punishable].

Sequence 14 [19'44:22'59] Ollie and Stan approach a foppish aristocrat and offer to tell his fortune. The man, wearing a hat just like Count Arnheim's, answers that he is delighted by the offer, adding: "You know, those of us who are more fortunate should help those in distress, don't you think?" Ollie waves off the man's benevolent remarks with a perplexing: "Yes, madam." Then, he uses his clumsy eye-trick on the aristocrat and, thinking the man has his eyes shut, starts telling him the

tale of Little Red Riding Hood while emptying his numerous pockets and passing the valuables to Stan. In the meantime, the nobleman has taken his lorgnette out and is carefully observing the two 'gypsies'. When they are done, he points his pistol at them and claims his possessions back. Ollie is slow to restore the stolen goods, rummaging in his pockets, while Stan disappears, returning shortly afterwards with a gendarme. The officer, seeing the aristocrat holding Ollie at gunpoint, orders that the former should return all the stolen valuables to the latter. The nobleman attempts to explain the misunderstanding, but the gendarme dismisses his words with: "I saw the whole thing with my own eyes." So, in addition to all that has already been stolen, Ollie – dressed in rags – claims the nobleman's watch, his diamond-studded case, medal, rings, lorgnette, and cane. The aristocrat is divested of all his valuable accoutrements and taken into custody by the gendarme, shouting in protest that he has never been so embarrassed in his life. Ollie rewards the gendarme with "a small stipend". Finally, to cap off his arrogance, the portly 'gypsy' claims the nobleman's pistol, too [swindlers, ruthless, thieves]. As in Sequence 6, the humour in Ollie and Stan's sketch revolves around the (in)ability to see the obvious, the implicit message being that people of lower stations, gendarmes included, are easily fooled by 'gypsies', while enlightened aristocrats, who also happen to suffer the most at the hands of 'gypsies', are the ones with clear sight.

Another digression is warranted here to briefly comment on a subtext added by the film editing in Sequences 10 to 14. In this section of the film, Ollie and Stan's comically exaggerated pickpocketing gags are intertwined through cross-cutting with Devilshoof's arrest and punishment, which are shot in a distinctly earnest, realist style. Cutting from one scene to the other, the camera establishes a temporal relation between the two actions, suggesting their simultaneity, but it also creates a causal link as a way of explaining the one line of events with the other. Here is what I mean: Devilshoof is publicly flogged without a court's sentence for an act that – at least on the surface of it – hardly constitutes a serious offence, but when placed in the context of Ollie and Stan's callous thievery and with a view to his tell-tale name, his illicit presence on Count Arnheim's grounds after sunset deserves the harshest of measures, or at any rate this is the surmise that the parallel editing drives at. As a representative of the enlightened aristocracy, the count can see – unlike those beneath him – through 'gypsies' and recognise the threat they pose to his county. So, his order to have Devilshoof

lashed in public is nothing less than an act of discerning foresight. In addition, the count's portrayal is subject to an ironic reversal, one of the many in the film: what appears unjustly cruel on his part is, in fact, a well-informed concern for his subjects.

Sequence 15 [23'00:27'16] Stan and Ollie go to a pub to celebrate the winnings of the day. At the entrance, Stan bumps into an ordinary man, gets reprimanded by Ollie but vindicates himself by showing that he has stolen the man's chain watch [compulsive pickpockets]. The two discover that the aristocrat's cane they have stolen is full of gold coins and spend the evening gambling with their spoils, trying to outsmart and steal from each other. At the same time, they strike a gentleman's agreement with a handshake [tricksters, steal from each other, ungentlemanly].

Sequence 16 [27'17:27'33] Devilshoof is thrown out of the castle [despicable].

Sequence 17 [27'34:27'55] The 'gypsy' camp is packing up in a flurry of activity. A regiment of soldiers marches in and the commander issues a warning to the 'gypsy' queen.

Sequence 18 [27'57:29'33] Dressed in white, Arline is playing with a white rabbit in the castle garden. Her governess is inattentive, flirting with one of the guards. The white rabbit runs off and Arline follows her pet, leaving the castle grounds. At that same moment, the 'gypsy' caravan is passing by: in one of the carts, Mrs. Hardy is tending to Devilshoof's wounds, putting a curse upon the count: "Curse you, Count Arnheim! For every whip-stroke you have bestowed upon my beloved, may you suffer a year of woe" [vengeful, with evil supernatural powers]. This is when Mrs. Hardy casts her eyes on small Arline. Devilshoof explains that the girl is the count's only child, whereupon Mrs. Hardy snatches Arline, wrapping her in a shawl [child snatchers].

Sequence 19 [29'34:31'04] The 'gypsies' set up camp on a new site. Ollie and Stan are busy scrubbing down their horse while playing pranks on each other [nomadic].

Sequence 20 [31'05:33'56] Mrs. Hardy lets Arline go outside the wagon, assuring Devilshoof that she has dressed the girl as a 'gypsy', so that

no one would be able to recognise her [con artists]. Devilshoof warns his paramour and accomplice that they should keep Arline's identity secret. Arline lives with the Hardies, and to make sure her identity is protected, Mrs. Hardy fools Ollie into thinking the girl is their daughter. Ollie is overjoyed and, holding Arline in his arms, announces to Stan that he has just become a father. Stan congratulates him and, to celebrate the happy occasion, offers some cigars to Ollie and to a 'gypsy' couple passing by. Then, the two friends go to the camp to spread the glad tidings. No one from the 'gypsies' is disturbed by the fact that Arline is a grown-up child or, for that matter, questions Ollie's fatherhood [child-abduction is a norm].

Sequence 21 [33'57:43'02] Devilshoof tells Mrs. Hardy that he plans to go and leave her behind: "Since I was a boy, I've had no other roof but the stars. I've been free to come and free to go. And I give my love to whom I fancy" [unreliable as lovers]. Mrs. Hardy wants to follow Devilshoof, but he dismisses her wish as impossible. The man explains that he possesses nothing except his horse and the clothes he stands in and would only take Mrs. Hardy along if she can provide some money or jewels [mercenary as lovers]. Mrs. Hardy asks Stan to hand her Ollie's money bag and Stan agrees to do this for her, saying: "I could gyp that gypsy anytime!" While the two 'gypsy' clowns try to outsmart each other, Mrs. Hardy takes their stash of stolen jewels and elopes with Devilshoof, to whom she is blindly loyal [dissemblers, gypers, steal among themselves, devil's servants]. She abandons not only her husband Ollie but also Arline [irresponsible as adults/parents]. The two 'gypsy' clowns realise they have been tricked by Mrs. Hardy, and Ollie reprimands Stan: "Aren't you ashamed of yourself? After all I've done for you! I took you out of the gutter and gave you a career, made a first-class pickpocket out of you and this is your gratitude! It hurts, Stanley, I tell you, it hurts!" [without personal integrity, first-class pickpockets]. Ollie laughs at the events, then he gets serious, grabbing Stan by the throat; the final shot shows their caravan rocking [physically violent].

Sequence 22 [43'03:43'29] At the castle, the count receives news that the search for his daughter has been futile.

Sequence 23 [43'30:47'58] Ollie is getting Arline ready for bed. She has no nightie, so he takes a pair of long johns with buttons, cuts the legs

shorter and dresses the girl in the resulting cloth [wretched]. Before going to bed, small Arline insists on saying her prayers: "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep." At this point, she falters with the words and asks Ollie and Stan for help, but neither of them knows the text, so Ollie makes up a new, profane version of the prayer. Instead of saying: "If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take", he comes up with the following line: "If at first you don't succeed, try, try... try again" [heathens, pseudo-Christians].

Sequence 24 [47'59:48'08] An intertitle informs us that after twelve years the 'gypsies' encamp again the woods of Count Arnheim.

Sequence 25 [48'08:56'00] In a bird's-eye shot, the camera shows us the 'gypsy' camp in winter; everything is white with snow. Then, the camera cuts to grown-up Arline (Jacqueline Wells), setting up a breakfast table inside the wagon. She calls for Ollie and Stan, who are sleeping outside in an open cart in the company of a dog and under a layer of snow [close to nature, insensitive to the extremities of nature]. The family gathers for breakfast and Arline recounts a dream she has had during the night. While she sings, Stan devours all the food at the table leaving nothing for Ollie [greedy, no sense of solidarity]. The character of Arline provides a contrasting counterpoint to the loud-mouthed, abusive and spectacularly unfaithful brunette that Mrs. Hardy has showed herself to be. In opposition to her, Arline is an attractive blonde with gentle manners and a strong sense for home and family that manifests itself in her respectful and caring attitude towards her adoptive father and his friend; it is Arline who patches up the broken family left behind by Mrs. Hardy.

Sequence 26 [56'01:1'00'10] A comedy routine of Stan, in which he tries to siphon a barrel of homemade wine into bottles, getting completely inebriated in the process [drunkards].

Sequence 27 [1'00'11:1'03'46] Standing in front of Count Arnheim's castle, Arline overhears the count singing about his lost child. Enchanted by the music, she enters the castle grounds. The guards capture her and throw her into the dungeon, the captain of the guard telling her: "I'll show you what we do with thieving gypsies here." He reports to the count, who orders that – a woman or not – the 'gypsy' should be lashed and that she should remain in the dungeon until he finds time

to observe the lashing [thieving, punishable]. Ollie witnesses the arrest of Arline and calls Stan for help.

Sequence 28 [1'03'46:1'08'09] Ollie and drunken Stan enter the castle grounds and try to free Arline. Disguised in Arline's overcoat, Stan manages to fool the captain of the guard and causes chaos for a while among the soldiers [impersonators]. Eventually, Arline is undressed and tied to the post for the lashing. The executor tears off her medallion and throws it away, so that the jewel lands at the count's feet. The latter recognises the medallion as well as Arline's family birthmark, realising that the young blonde 'gypsy' on the post is his lost child. Father and daughter fall into each other's arms.

Sequence 29 [1'08'08:1'10'27] Ollie and Stan are brought to the castle's chamber and placed in medieval torture machines. Before Arline can intervene, Ollie is stretched on a rack into a giant, while Stan is squeezed in a press into a dwarf with stunted legs [punishable]. After this grotesque gag on retribution, the film ends with a low-angle shot of the count's castle. The social order is restored.

The attributes, values and character traits abstracted in the brackets form a heterogeneous constellation that connects together different and disparate dimensions of human existence. Grouping the keywords in thematic clusters, we can see that the characterisation of the 'gypsy' modus of being in *The Bohemian Girl* focuses on four major areas of human life which are at the core of social cohesion: land ownership, livelihood, religion, and long-term social bonds. In all these areas of life, the 'gypsy' role is shown to score negatively, displaying a deficiency, an inability or a lack of required virtue. When it comes to human bonding, the film suggests that the relationships 'gypsies' form as spouses, lovers and friends are abusive, short-lived and unreliable, motivated primarily by cold monetary interests and/or by unrestrained sexuality. Negatively formulated, their unions with others – be it a family, an amorous partnership or a friendship – are marked by a lack of love and its associated values: mutual respect, charity and camaraderie. The failure to form stable bonds with other humans is explained by a lack of personal integrity, an absence of a unified Self that can keep in check the baser bodily instincts and impulses, such as greed, aggression, jealousy or desire for revenge, all of them catalogued by Christianity as carnal sins. This is directly connected to the religious aspect of 'gypsy'

life, upon which the film only touches, but the demeanour and the look of the 'gypsy' queen, the setting in her tent and the scene of Arline saying her bed-time prayer clearly signal that 'gypsies' are perceived as heathens who practice witchcraft and sorcery. Even small Arline knows more about praying than grown-up 'gypsy' males. Otherwise stated, it is implied that 'gypsies' are not proper Christians and make profane use of Christian rites and sacraments. When it comes to work, the film claims that the main source of livelihood for 'gypsies' is thievery in an organised form, which involves men and women, young and old; being talented at music, dance and other performance arts, 'gypsies' use their entertainment skills as a cover-up for their criminal undertakings. Put negatively, according to the film, 'gypsies' do not have proper occupations and do not earn their living by means of skilled work. As the establishing shot in the film announces, the 'gypsies' lead a nomadic way of life. In other words, they are not a sedentary people and as such do not belong to social structures organised around land ownership and heritage lines. In terms of mythic space, they are situated on two main locations: the road and the forest (not a settlement), while in terms of mythic time, they are assigned to the darkness of the night (not the day), the moon and candle-light being their allies (not the sun). As Kyp Harness pertinently observes: "*The Bohemian Girl* is dark, grim, somewhat unpleasant – as one might assume a film featuring infidelity, kidnapping, whipping and torture as its backdrop might well be. The photography itself seems dark" (187). Last but not least, the physical appearance of 'gypsies' is colour coded: they are dark-haired types sporting costumes with various black-and-white patterns, which is to say that they are not 'white', socially and 'ethno-racially'. In short, the para-ethnographic portrayal of 'gypsies' is furnished with a mythic layer of signification and is also racialised.

The anti-norm that underwrites the 'gypsy' modus of being becomes more intelligible when considered in relation to the norm in power; the latter is made explicit in the film through the portrayal of Count Arnheim. The body of the aristocrat is invested with the most power, visualised and symbolised by his castle, clothes and accoutrements as well by his armed troops, while the body of the 'gypsy', divested of all power, is punished. Count Arnheim is the physical embodiment of the social norm that promises successful integration for the members of the dominant culture, placing value on the rule of aristocracy with its feudal system of property ownership and wealth accumulation (which is another way of defining sedentary lifestyle in the context of the

story), family life centred on love and affection, honest work, Christianity, advancement of the sciences and the arts, and control of oneself, including in sexual matters. It is in relation to this norm that the 'gypsy' anti-norm acquires its content that is marked with a negative sign; the anti-norm is residual and derivative of the norm. The two – norm and anti-norm, 'white' mask and 'gypsy' mask – mutually define and complement each other in the film,⁹⁰ one asserting its power by castigating the other.

The humour in the film resides in Oliver and Stan's slapstick comedy that exploits the principle of ironic reversal and exaggeration. By turning the 'gypsy' mask into an object of ridicule, magnifying and dramatising its qualities into comedy routines, and treating it positively in a tongue-in-cheek manner, Laurel and Hardy raise the entertainment value of their film, but they also endow it with a disciplining effect, akin to blackface minstrel shows, offering a lesson that is to remain with the audience. John V. Brennan rates *The Bohemian Girl* as the funniest of their operettas, adding that "with Laurel and Hardy getting the lion's share of the film footage, it just may be the best of the three, at least for those who watch Laurel and Hardy to laugh." He highlights two comedy routines as deserving "a hallowed spot in the Laurel and Hardy Hall of Fame", namely "the pickpocket routine" and Stan's solo scene with the wine bottles. Just like all experts on Laurel and Hardy's comedy art, Brennan pours lavish attention on the puckish pickpockets but has little to say about the 'gypsy' scenes in the story, discarding them as brief, hence insignificant:

As for the plot scenes that most critics find extremely dull: yes, they are, but they go by quickly, leaving all the more room for Laurel and Hardy. The film starts out unpromisingly, with a few songs and some exposition about the mutual hatred between Count Arnheim and the Gypsies, but once the camera finds Laurel and Hardy, they become the focus of the film and are never too long out of sight. Instead of getting brief moments of comedy in between the story, we get brief moments of story instead.

90 There is also a very practical reason for this juxtaposition from an artist's point of view: since it is difficult to produce a compelling image of, say, temperance or honesty and assert it convincingly as a value of significance for the whole society, one effective alternative is to create a contrastive image of inebriation or thievery, definitely rich in drama, and negate it through public ridicule or exemplary punishment.

For example, we learn of Devilshoof's capture and subsequent flogging by Count Arnheim's men only in short cutaways during The Boys' extended pickpocketing routine.

I propose to reverse the optics on *The Bohemian Girl* and bring to the fore the 'gypsy' child-theft story that supplies Laurel and Hardy's highly lauded comedy with three important elements: a narrative framework that integrates the self-contained routines into one coherent piece; a new setting for the comic duo that is widely recognisable for its exotic Otherness and therefore cheap to stage and easy to exploit; and an inexhaustible source of widely familiar negative clichés.

At this point, it is worthwhile to subject the juxtaposition of aristocrats and 'gypsies' to an analysis that resorts to the devices of political anatomy, as proposed by Foucault and set out in his insightful book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Foucault posits there that knowledge (or the truth) is not external to power and thus an instrument in its aid but rather that knowledge (or the truth) is a function of power; and here he argues that "power and knowledge directly imply one other; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (27). In this line of thought, the knowledge (or the truth) about 'gypsies' that the film exposes us to is a function of the cultural norm in power; this knowledge is constituted by the Count Arnheim's normative worldview and is also adopted by the film's narrative and reproduced through the gaze of the camera. Count Arnheim is the source of the truth about 'gypsies' that the film offers us as an authoritative perspective; and his truth-power is displayed for all to see by the spectacle of public flogging performed on his orders, in illustration of Foucault's claim that "the truth-power relations remain at the heart of all mechanism of punishment" (55). Foucault notes also that "with feudalism, (...) we find a sudden increase in the corporal punishments – the body being in most cases the only property accessible" (25).

Borrowing Foucault's terms to describe the apposition of aristocrats and 'gypsies' in *The Bohemian Girl*, a recurrent motif in 'gypsy'-themed films, we can say that the 'gypsy' represents the symmetrical, inverted figure of the aristocrat, and by the same token that "the condemned man represents the symmetrical, inverted figure of the king", being its opposite pole in the symbolic scheme of power relations (29). The film constructs the 'gypsy' figure as punishable by

default;⁹¹ the mere presence of the 'gypsy' constitutes a grave offence to the nobleman, which in abstract terms reflects the two-way dynamics between the norm and its residual anti-norm: the norm has the power to chastise its anti-norm but – conversely – the anti-norm has the power to subvert the norm. The threat of subversion is at the crux of the matter in the film. It is play-acted in two pivotal scenes: once in the gag where Ollie and Stan rob and humiliate a random aristocrat whose attire rhymes with that of Count Arnheim, and a second time when Mrs. Hardy steals Arline, the count's offspring and – which is of immense political importance – his heiress (denoted also by the father's and daughter's alliterating names). Count Arnheim's line of heritage, symbolised by the family medallion – material proof of noble blood and entitlement – is the prime source of legitimacy of his rule, so the theft of Arline, as the bearer of the medallion, represents a direct attack on the familial lineage of aristocracy and the legitimacy of its dominion. The film skates over the issue of bloodline purity, but the latter lingers between the lines: the abduction of Arline by 'gypsies' inevitably poses the threat of miscegenation. Considering then the subversive danger associated with the 'gypsy' anti-norm, we can read the ceremonial flogging and expulsion of Devilshoof as a political ritual, in which the rule of the norm is manifested at its most spectacular. The ceremony of punishment, with the pillory surrounded by the count's marching troops, displays for all to see – and, here, the spectator in the cinema hall is actually the main addressee – the power relations that give force to the dominant political order. The public punishment asserts the dissymmetry between the aristocrat and the 'gypsy' figure; its function is to sustain the stability of the total imbalance of power between these two figures. The theme of retribution runs through the entire film and is an important organising force, as already discussed in Section 3.4.

In conclusion, it is necessary to consider one detail of far-reaching significance: in *The Bohemian Girl*, the apposition of aristocrats and 'gypsies' is colour coded; their difference is contrastively constructed on the level of costumes, hair and other associated objects, ascribing

91 Consider, for example, the fact that from the mid-sixteenth century up until the late eighteenth century, "a gypsy could legally be put to death in England simply for being a gypsy. No other crime need be committed; just by existing, gypsies were breaking the law" (Houghton-Walker 15). Adopted in 1562 by the English Parliament, the Egyptians Act, which regulated the legal position of gypsies as gypsies, was repealed in 1783.

'whiteness' to the dominant norm and 'non-whiteness' to the repudiated anti-norm (for example, Arline, blonde and dressed in white, plays with a snow-white rabbit, while a nameless 'gypsy' girl, dark-haired and in patterned clothes, plays with a pitch-black cat). The film reproduces an antigypsy narrative and a colour-coded, racialising mode of seeing that is a remnant of the age of feudalism and as such bears witness to the fact that the complex, multi-faceted phenomenon of antigypsyism is at the very roots of modern racism. Evidence in support of this claim comes also from Benedict Anderson's insightful observation:

The dreams of racism actually have their origin in ideologies of class, rather than in those of nation: above all in claims to divinity among rulers and to 'blue' or 'white' blood and 'breeding' among aristocrats. No surprise then that the putative sire of modern racism should be, not some petty-bourgeois nationalist, but Joseph Arthur, Comte de Gobineau.^[92] Nor that, on the whole, racism and anti-Semitism manifest themselves, not across national boundaries, but within them. In other words, they justify not so much foreign wars as domestic repression and domination. (149–150)

From the present-day standpoint, we can see that models of social cohesion (norms) change over time – aristocratic rule has long been toppled by other forms of governance, but one key mechanism of asserting the authority of the sovereign remains intact: public ridicule, denigration and expulsion of the 'gypsy' figure, a very rewarding ritual, because it is also the inverse technique of projecting 'whiteness' onto the norm that reaches for power. Or as Nelly Furman puts it: "notions of social hierarchies or hereditary privileges do not disappear but seem to have commuted into racial and ethnic rankings" (125). Foucault examines the political functions of corporal punishment in the age of feudalism, tracing the transformations of this public ceremonial to its virtual disappearance in the modern age, but he also points out that there is another development to be observed – the re-orientation of the economy of punishment from the body to its representation (cf. 94), a development of which the phenomenon of 'gypsy'-themed films is a relevant and undeservedly underrated case in point.

92 Eva Woods Peiró notes that the French thinker Arthur de Gobineau, who associated entire nations with 'racial' types, was a major influence on Prosper Mérimée, the writer who "established the fiery Gypsy Carmen as a Spanish icon" (19).

6.2 The Content Matrix of the 'Gypsy' Mask in *King of the Gypsies* (1978): Sequence-by-Sequence Description

Written and directed by Frank Pierson, the film *King of the Gypsies* (1978) is a very loose adaptation of Peter Maas' work of creative non-fiction by the same name, published in 1975. Peter Maas wrote his best-selling book using material provided by Steve Tene, a young Roma informant, and then combining it with biased newspaper clippings and police records. As Ronald Lee points out, it is hard to say "how much of the actual information contained in the book was true, exaggerated, or apocryphal", while the film disproportionately fictionalised the events (217).

The story is set in New York City and begins in the 1950s.

Sequence 1 [0'14:2'42] The film opens with a long shot of a man (Matt Glaser) dancing a gypsy jig on a sandy spot by a river bank. He is wearing an elegant, earth-coloured suit with a red carnation in his breast pocket and a white hat. The camera pans left showing more 'gypsies', three of them grooming a horse, and then zooms on a single young man with his horse; he is bringing the animal from the river bank to the camp. The camera follows the young man and, thus, gradually it introduces us to the space and its inhabitants, tilting by the end of the sequence to a high-angle shot – we can see women in motley dresses wringing out their washing in the open, children running around, men tending to their horses or striking a deal over a horse. All these activities take place in a spacious green field dotted with big military greenish tents, open fires and cars. It is an overcast day and the light paints a picture dominated by earthy colours. Our entry into the 'gypsy' camp is accompanied by the young man's monologue, added in a voiceover: "Maybe my life would have turned out quite different in the olden days, *before private property*. There was always a farm or land field to camp in. Gypsies were free to roam, they did not pay taxes, named with some damn computer I could not even find. It was better. Maybe I was born too late but who gets to pick when to be born or to pick the mother and the father. The biggest decision in your life and nobody gets to say anything about it. All the rest of your life you live with it, or you fight it." A procession of cars enters the 'gypsy' camp and comes to a halt at the central tent, passing by a pole with the US flag fluttering at its upper end [dancers, close to nature, horse-dealers, nomadic, averse to private property, delinquent citizens (do not pay taxes)].

Sequence 2 [2'43:4'13] A medium shot frames the face of an adolescent girl; her name is Rose. She is the mother of Dave, whose voiceover guides us retrospectively into his life story. Spiro Giorgio, the girl's father and the boss of the tribe, tells Rose to hide. The camp is visited by king Zharko Stepanowicz and queen Rachel, to whom Spiro Giorgio has promised his daughter and accepted a payment of four thousand five hundred dollars. Stepanowicz claims the girl, but the father reneges on his word, explaining that he was drunk when he promised Rose and that she is not ready to marry. Stepanowicz calls for a trial before the council of the elderly. While the two bosses talk (**Fig. 22a** and **Fig. 22b**), the camera offers more eye-catching details from the 'gypsy' camp: whole animals roasting on a spit; a dancing woman with numerous bangles and necklaces and in colourful clothes; another female smoking a pipe; massive gold medallions, various jewels and rings with gemstones, etc. [pre-modern: with a feudal clan structures, practice arranged marriages, drunkards, may not keep their word, dancers, women with masculine habits].



Fig. 22a and Fig. 22b. Screenshots from *King of the Gypsies* (1978, Dir. Frank Pierson): Spiro Giorgio (Michael Gazzo) and his wife Danitza (Antonia Rey) (left) receive a sudden visit by king Zharko Stepanowicz (Sterling Hayden) and queen Rachel (Shelley Winters) (right), who have come to ask for the hand of their daughter in marriage.

Sequence 3 [4'14:5'27] A 'gypsy' tent is laid out before the camera, resembling a stage, its back wall made up of colourful, patterned carpets. Against this background, a band of musicians are playing their instruments while a group of 'gypsies' are dancing. The men have elegant suits and hats; the women wear long skirts, each in a different colour, and have their long dark hair loose. The party takes place at dusk, the flames of an open fire flicking in the foreground of the shot [merrymaking, dancers, musicians, colourful, dark types].

Sequence 4 [5'28:8'42] The council of the elderly has gathered and the two bosses present their cases before it. Stepanowicz accuses Giorgio of violating a tradition that is two thousand years old. Giorgio offers to pay him two thousand five hundred dollars back, demanding that Stepanowicz stay out of New York and Eastern Pennsylvania. Stepanowicz accuses the father of wanting to sell his daughter again while she is still virgin. He adds that he has warned his son not to beat up the girl, noting, "You cannot ask better than that." It becomes clear that the marriage is part of Stepanowicz's plan to take over Giorgio's clan. A musical number is inserted. The party continues and we see Stepanowicz seated at a table, playing cards with other men. His son Groffo stands nearby, mind blown by the news that Rose hates him. Stepanowicz offers advice to his son and mocks him for talking like a gadjo,⁹³ that is, with respect for the law. "Life ain't like that," the father concludes authoritatively [involved in clan fights (mafia), tradition-bound, marriage-swindlers, sell their girls into marriage, prone to (domestic) violence, musicians, disrespectful to the law].

Sequence 5 [8'43:11'57] On the next morning, the elders gather again and pronounce themselves in favour of Giorgio and his daughter, telling Stepanowicz to stay out of Giorgio's territory and to stop calling himself "the king of all Gypsies". Giorgio shakes hands with the oldest man, thanking him; Stepanowicz claims he is a man of his word and believes in the old days, warning that putting the girl's feelings ahead of the law will cause a lot of trouble. On his way out, he snatches Rose, shoves her into his car and drives off, causing a great commotion in the camp [pre-modern, violent, untrustworthy].

Sequence 6 [11'58:13'37] A close-up of a naked baby being baptised informs us that Dave is born and Stepanowicz, now king of New York and Eastern Pennsylvania, throws a big party. "Gypsies celebrated anything. Any excuse for a party, dance, have a few laughs, get drunk...", Dave's voiceover muses. A long table is set with food, a whole roasted pig in its middle. Dave's drunk father, Groffo, in a reddish suit over a yellow shirt, starts dancing on the table, with the pig between his legs, then collapses on top of it and hugs it (**Fig. 26**) [party-makers, drunkards, on a par with pigs].

93 As defined in Encyclopedia Britannica, the Romani word 'gadje' refers to all non-Roma and can also be spelled 'gadze' or 'gaje'; it is a term with a pejorative connotation meaning 'bumpkin', 'yokel' or 'barbarian'.

Sequence 7 [13'38:15'28] The opening shot shows a dance performed by the elegant man in the earth-coloured suit (from the introductory scene). In the aftermath of the party, the drunk king is playing cards and continuing to drink. The camera zooms on the face of a small child sleeping in Queen Rachel's lap, and Dave's voice narrates the story of his sister's birth. "We kept moving, living an independent life like gypsies have had for a couple of thousand years, taking care of ourselves. We didn't need nobody else, we didn't need doctors, not for the simple things like the birth of a child. We just pull over and wait so you got no birth certificate which ain't bad when there is a war on 'cause you only got the gypsy to swear when he was born." Later he adds that 'gypsies' "like the girl kids. Girls are the money-makers" [nomadic, outsiders, averse to modern medicine, social outsiders, shirkers, mercenary as parents].

Sequence 8 [15'29:15'24] Dave's voice gives account of the clan's routes during the year: 'gypsies' visiting the spirits of their families in the cemeteries (the elegant dancer doing his gypsy jig in the background), making money with fortune-telling in the Midwest, traveling to Florida for the rainy season. He also explains that the times are changing: the welfare system is putting pressure on the settled 'gypsies' to send their kids to school, the police are cracking down on fortune-telling [nomads, fortune-tellers, in conflict with the modern state/the law].

Sequence 9 [16'24:20'17] Dave's voice tells us that his mother has decided to open up a fortune-telling business in New York, where people are ignorant and have more money. We can see Rose first unrolling and then hanging out a poster with the name "Madame Pauline" written on it; her studio is lavishly decorated with curtains in deep purple and gold, with drapes in flowered patterns, a dim lamp, many candles. Madame Pauline, wearing golden necklaces, bracelets and earrings, one scarf over her head and another one over her shoulders, consults a rich lady with a fox-fur hat and a matching collar. Madame tells the lady that a curse has been put on her ex-husband's money in the bank; she drives the lady's evil spirits away by breaking an egg and instructs her to bury the money in the graveyard, naked. The lady agrees to follow the instructions but begs Madame to do the money-burying for her. All the while, little Dave is watching from behind the curtains [scam artists, cheats, phony fortune-tellers, sorcerers].

Sequence 10 [20'17:25'51] The father, acting as a chauffeur, drives Rose and little Dave to a high-end jewellery store. Rose pretends to be an Argentinian aristocrat who wants to buy a present for her aunt, a real diamond. She wears a stylish black dress with fur lapels, a small black hat with a veil, smoking a cigarette and posing with her elongated holder. The shop owner discusses various stones with her; in the meantime, Dave gets restless and throws a tantrum. Rose uses the turmoil to steal a solitaire and unobtrusively slips it into Dave's mouth while offering him a glass of water. The police are called; soon the entire 'gypsy' family arrives, too, led by the king. Since the shop owner cannot prove that Rose has stolen the diamond, he has to let her go. When the man asks in a wailing voice about his diamond, the king laughs a sinister laugh, while the detective replies that its whereabouts is another 'gypsy' mystery [scam artists, swindlers, thieves (young and old)].

Sequence 11 [25'52:25'55] A close-up shows a child's bottom on a potty. While waiting for Dave to "deliver" the diamond, Rose tells him that he is special, like his grandfather. Then she relates him a story of the 'gypsy' who stole the big nail meant for the heart of good Jesus; out of gratitude Jesus promised the 'gypsies' that from that day on they could roam and steal. The next shot cuts to the slightly blurred image of Rose, reflected in a mirror, marvelling at the stone with satisfaction, a cigarette smoking in the corner of her mouth [itinerant thieves who raise their children as thieves, with faux biblical stories].

Sequence 12 [26'56:28'00] Half-naked Dave plays on the floor in the middle of a flurry of colourful female skirts. The women in the family dance around him in celebration; an elderly one sits nearby dragging at her pipe. His father takes him in his arms and exclaims: "Has he got the heart of a thief, yeah!" Then, taking pride in Dave's masculine attributes, he throws the bare-bottomed child into the arms of another male relative who passes him around in a circle until Dave starts crying. The king intervenes to protect his grandson, who calms down in his arms playing with his gold medallion [proud thieves, make their children steal].

Sequence 13 [28'00:31'50] A short interlude with the elegant dancer ushers us into the life of the family. Dave's voice admits loving his mother, who is unable, however, to stop their mad drunk father from knocking them all about. Dave and his younger sister work selling flowers on the street, but they also take interest in the nearby school. While

watching through the fence, the two are invited by a friendly coach to join a basketball game. The children withdraw apprehensively, bumping into their drunken father, who begins to shout invectives against the gadjo school. He promises to beat the hell out of Dave if he goes to the gadjo school, offering to teach him something useful instead. Groffo pushes his son into the driver's seat of his car and gives the boy his first driving lesson while cursing, denouncing the gadjo school and yelling at him, and all the while taking swigs at his flask of liquor. After several near misses, the boy collides with another car. The father blames him for not watching out, gets out and picks a fight with the other car's owner, vehemently kicking his vehicle. Dave's voice comments that his father had a bad name in the clan and was expected to bring disaster as king [prone to domestic violence, averse to schooling, drunkards, violent, abusive and incompetent as parents, with feudal clan structures].

Sequence 14 [31'51:35'38] Groffo is summoned before the traffic court judge for failing to pay more than a thousand parking tickets worth over six thousand dollars. He appears in court together with his family and the entire clan and pleads ignorance, saying he thought the papers were advertisements and also explaining that he cannot read or write. The judge threatens him with jail if he refuses to pay. The king intervenes, presenting himself as Groffo's father and offers a deal to the judge: he promises to make the several thousand licensed gypsies in New York pay their fines. The judge wonders how he could do that and the king brags that he can give orders to his people. The judge scolds him for having his hat on and reduces Groffo's fine by half. The king thanks the judge and insists on shaking hands with him in confirmation of the deal; the judge looks perplexed, while the king is triumphant and puts his hat back on. All the while, the clan interjects vociferously in the conversation with the judge, clapping and commenting like a chorus with a collective voice [delinquent car drivers, liars, illiterate, disrespectful to the court, alien to the legal system, a non-individualised group].

Sequence 15 [35'39:37'38] Walking down the stairs from the courtroom, the king and queen answer questions from the press, feigning authority. The queen protests at the cameras, saying that photographs are against the king's religion. The king takes twelve-year-old Dave aside for a talk. Standing in the middle of the majestic courthouse, the old man tells the boy he should think of getting married, of getting a money-maker. The boy refuses to listen and runs away and out of the

courthouse. Dave's voiceover narrates the rest of the story: he went to a priest to ask for advice, because he did not want to marry, but the priest told him to go home and be a good kid, apparently not listening [con men, practice child marriage].

Sequence 16 [37'39:40'16] An extremely low-angle shot of the elegant man dancing opens up the story of Dave's growing up alone on the streets of New York. We see the boy breaking into a car, then warming himself by an open fire in a barrel on the street (the flames moving in rhythm with the extra-diegetic music), then stealing apples from a grocery shop, then spending the winter in a cardboard box, then being chased by two police officers down a deserted railway road. The scenes are interposed with short numbers featuring the elegant dancer. Dave's voice elaborates: "I couldn't read, I couldn't write, I couldn't go to school, they'd send me home... I was sure as hell I was not going home. I was not even going to be a gypsy anymore." And also: "Without a birth certificate and not reading and writing, you can't get in the union. Without the union, you can't get a job and without a job you get fired from, you can't get unemployment. It's a god damned conspiracy. Insurance fraud was my survival tactics. At least, it wasn't stealing from the poor." His voice accompanies a scene in which he – now a grown-up young man – jumps in front of a taxi, rolls over its windscreen and falls prostrate on the street. Instead of stopping, the driver speeds away, the tyres squealing. Dave makes an obscene gesture in his wake, adding that the man must have been a gypsy [car thieves, street dwellers/social outcasts, petty thieves, illiterate, unemployed and unemployable, delinquent citizens, irresponsible and ruthless drivers].

Sequence 17 [40'17 :42'47] Young Dave is in a supermarket where he orchestrates an accident, slipping on a broken egg he has previously tossed on the floor. At the hospital, he is examined for spinal injuries and granted compensation. He comes out of the hospital being pushed in a wheelchair, only to suddenly spring to his feet and bolt [insurance fraudsters].

Sequence 18 [42'47:46'47] Young Dave relates that he earns his living also by attending parties where rich women take immediate interest in him, being a gypsy. "Easy life," he intones. After one such party, he is wrestled down by two men in brownish overcoats and shoved into the back seat of a car, where his grandfather awaits him. The king wants

Dave to come home and take care of the tribe. He shows Dave his hand, bragging that this is the hand of a man who's never done an honest day's work; that he lives like a millionaire. Dave questions the king's millionaireship and the old man explains that his strategy is to spread the money around, taking care of the friends and the family. Now and again taking a gulp from a bottle of wine, the old man advises Dave to share his strength with that of the tribe. Dave questions the supposed tribal strength, which in his words amounts to boho women, a bunch of corny fortune-tellers, insurance fraud specialists, pickpockets, card sharks and slum dwellers. He mentions he would like to be a surgeon and asks where the gypsy surgeons or the gypsy astronauts are. The king discloses that he is terminally ill and needs Dave home where his place is [into easy life, alien to honest work, boho women, phony fortune-tellers, insurance fraudsters, pickpockets, card sharks, slum dwellers].

Sequence 19 [46'48:50'53] Dave decides to return to his family because he loves the old man. "And I missed the gypsies, if you want the truth. And maybe things could be different," he adds. Back home, Dave announces that his homecoming means a change and an end to Groffo's violent outbursts. The son confronts the father; the tension between the two men quickly heats up and Dave pulls out a knife, threatening to kill Groffo. Groffo mocks Dave for thinking like a gadjo. Dave replies he wished to god he were a gadjo. Shocked, Groffo shouts back that Dave is no gypsy, that nothing matters to him, no rules, no nothing. Then, he asks him: "Are you my son?" Dave answers in the negative and in return Groffo suggests that Dave fucks his mother. He tears Rose's blouse off and pushes Dave's face into her bare breast. Dave threatens Groffo again with a knife, but Groffo finds a pistol, starts shooting and chases Dave away. Dave jumps through a window, noisily smashing the glass, and climbs down the building, which has a grim and desolate look with a car burning in its backyard; the space rings with the sound of a child crying and an approaching police siren. "The same thing all over. Always the same, for all times. Not for me," Dave concludes [physically and verbally brutal, fiery (hot-blooded), impulsive, excessive, murderous, monstrous (incestuous), not open to change, slum dwellers].

Sequence 20 [50'54:52'18] Dave finds himself a job as a waiter and a singer, which allows him to date blondes and red-heads. The scene ends up with a close-up of a pale blonde girl, her face lit up and in full view [musical, into 'white' girls].

Sequence 20 [52'19:54'05] The film cuts to a close-up of queen Rachel in a dimly lit profile: her head covered in a black scarf, a pipe in her mouth fuming (**Fig. 23a**). She is in the hospital room tending to the sick king: she has tied a bag with herbs around his neck and is giving him a drink from a bottle of liquor (**Fig. 23b**). A nurse, dressed in white, arrives and orders all relatives out [superstitious, alien to modern medicine].



Fig. 23a and Fig. 23b. Screenshots from *King of the Gypsies* (1978, Dir. Frank Pierson): with a black scarf on her head and a pipe in her mouth, queen Rachel (Shelley Winters) visits the bed-ridden king (Sterling Hayden) in the hospital.

Sequence 20 [54'06:55'23] Blonde-haired Sharon has taken Dave on an ice-skating date. The two are alone at a beautiful, large frozen lake; the entire landscape is white with snow. Sharon is in a white sports outfit that emphasises her slim, nimble figure, while Dave – with a cigarette in the corner of his mouth – is clad in a long black leather coat that, in turn, accentuates his stooping posture and stiff movements (**Fig. 24a**). Dave can hardly balance on the ice, while Sharon freely circles around him, showing great elegance and skill, and then finishing with a perfect pirouette. She urges Dave to start moving and he lands on the ground



Fig. 24a and Fig. 24b. Screenshots from *King of the Gypsies* (1978, Dir. Frank Pierson): blonde-haired Sharon in a white sports outfit moving nimbly around Dave, whose stooping posture and stiff movements are in turn accentuated by a long black leather coat.

with a spectacular fall (**Fig. 24b**) [black, clumsy due to lack of skills that require self-control, doomed to fall/fail].

Sequence 21 [55'23:55'48] On his deathbed, the king asks for Dave.

Sequence 22 [55'49:1'02'14] Dave and Sharon drive back to Dave's apartment, but their sexual interlude is put to an abrupt end by Rose. She has come to ask for Dave's help, because his father wants to marry off Tita against her will; the girl ran away twice and was twice beaten up. "Nothing ever changes with you people, does it?" Dave angrily asks. Groffo has received a payment of six thousand dollars, which he has then blown at the races; according to Rose, calling the police won't help; everybody will lie and the girl will get beaten up again. Tita and Rose start bickering, and Dave flips out, smashing the coffee cups they have just been served against the wall. Rose also informs him that the king plans to pass the ring and the medallion on to him, and Dave, almost in tears, kneeling in front of Rose, says: "Mom, you have to understand – we live in a democracy, there are no kings" [with pre-modern marriage customs, abusive, averse to change, into gambling, liars, quick-tempered, quarrelsome, alien to democracy].

Sequence 23 [1'02'14:1'03'59] Dave and Sharon talk about their parents.

Sequence 24 [1'04'00:1'04'40] A high-angle shot shows a full parking lot. 'Gypsies' from all over the country have come to pay respect to the dying king; Groffo canvasses for support.

Sequence 25 [1'04'41:1'11'24] Dave enters the hospital. The building is crammed with 'gypsies'. Walking down the corridor, he meets his mother, with a cigarette in her mouth, his sister and another female relative, Persa, also smoking, who comments flirtatiously on his good looks and invites him later to her place. On his deathbed, the king passes his ring on to Dave and tells him he should take care of the future. "Private property, too much private property. Once, I used to be able to camp anywhere," the king laments. He also instructs Dave to take care of the girls, to make sure they do not reject the family and all follow the old ways. Dave replies that he'd be a king only to lead the gypsies into the twentieth century. The king passes away [promiscuous, averse to private property, pre-modern, tradition-bound].

Sequence 26 [1'11'24:1'13'32] A shrill women's wail fills up the parking lot; led by Groffo, all the men stream towards the hospital. At the entrance, they bump into Dave, who shares the sad news and shows the ring and the medallion that he was given, saying he does not want to have them, nor does he want to be a 'gypsy'. His words fall on deaf ears.

Sequence 27 [1'13'33:1'16'35] Dave goes to Persa's fortune-telling studio in what looks like a red-light district. Persa has spread out a set of tarot cards and offers to tell Dave what they say. Dave dismisses card-reading as bullshit, Persa admits, too, of not believing in cards. Rose arrives and tells Dave that no matter what he does with the king's medallion, the fact is it has been given to him. She raises the topic of Tita's marriage; Dave replies she should call the police and not bother him, exploding: "You act like you live in the Middle Ages!" [fortune-tellers, impostors, alien to the police system, medieval].

Sequence 28 [1'16'36:1'19'08] Dave goes back to his flat. While unlocking his door, he is attacked from behind by two thugs, who wound him and chase him through the neighbourhood.

Sequence 29 [1'19'09:1'21'09] With his face covered in blood, Dave goes back to his flat. Sharon is there and is shocked by his appearance. "My father hired a couple of guys who tried to kill me," Dave explains. He assures Sharon that this is only temporary [prone to extreme forms of domestic violence, criminal, vengeful].

Sequence 30 [1'21'10:1'24'53] Still with a blood-smearred face, Dave goes to Persa's flat. She shoos her two children away and tends to his wounds. Dave removes his bloody clothes and as he is standing half-naked, Persa puts the gold medallion on his neck. The two make love [impulsive, promiscuous, unfaithful].

Sequence 31 [1'24'54:1'32'48] At the king's funeral, men in suits discuss business with Groffo. One exclaims: "It's against the law," to which Groffo replies: "Just don't think about it. It's our way, that's all." The flag of the USSR stands in one corner of the hall; the funeral home director complains about having a communist flag. Groffo snubs him saying that this was his father's wish since the family comes from Russia. Spiro Giorgio arrives and a brawl ensues; then Dave arrives and all quieten down. Dave confronts Groffo about Tita's marriage, saying he will take

care of the money. Groffo refuses the offer and Dave makes off with Tita, stealing a getaway car from the street [criminal, foreign (of Russian/communist background), cantankerous, car thieves].

Sequence 32 [1'32'50:1'38'37] Dave and Tita are in the car making plans to go to California. Dave tells Tita she does not have to take shit all her life, that she can do what she wants to do. Tita confronts him, asking if he himself wanted to be out at night stealing cars, breaking up 'gypsy' funerals and driving around. Dave says he did this for her, that he had no choice. In a cross-cut shot, we see that Groffo is after his children in another car. He tells his partner that he plans to kill his son. His partner proclaims him crazy. Brother and sister dream up their life in California. Soon, Groffo catches up with them and starts hitting their car from the side, causing them to crash. Then, he gets away, not even stopping. A passer-by rouses Dave, then goes to call the police. Tita is dead; Dave bids good-bye to her and limps away [crazy, monstrous, ruthless drivers, vengeful, abusive as parents].

Sequence 33 [1'38'38:1'44'32] Groffo is playing cards with the family he sold Tita to. He gives his word that he will find his daughter. Dave arrives with a rifle, shoots the door lock and chases Groffo around the flat, which – to his inconvenience – is swarming with children and adults. Groffo escapes upstairs, where Dave manages to track him down and shoot him just as his father is about to escape through a window, with the result that his body flies through the air, landing on the roof of a car. The whole family pours out into the street. The police arrive and Rose tells them the shooter was black; another voice adds that gypsies don't do things like this. The police ask the onlookers to disperse, and slowly Dave walks away from the scene of his crime [heartless, untrustworthy, vengeful, criminal, distrustful of and obstructing state institutions].

Sequence 34 [1'44'33:1'49'00] In a large graveyard, a band of brass musicians leads a big funeral procession; above the people, all dressed in black, the big, bright flags of the USA and the USSR stick out. The 'gypsies' say goodbye to Groffo, casting banknotes into his grave; a man wants to cast in a cheque and a quarrel erupts. Dave, with a scar on his brow and a gold cross on his neck, comes forward, too, and throws the ring and the medallion into the grave. Then he walks away and the entire procession follows him, with his mother and Persa in the first row.

We hear his voice: "Maybe I can lead them into the twentieth century, but I don't know if anybody could make them do anything except what they damn all wanna do. They'll go on, the gypsies." In the background, the man in the elegant suit appears again and starts dancing among the gravestones. The camera focuses on his figure, which then freezes into a posture and appears as a cut-out next to the film credits [foreign (of Russian/communist background), quarrelsome, with a medieval mentality, backward (not of the twentieth century), impossible to control/ of untameable nature/unwilling to change].

The values, qualities and personality traits abstracted in the brackets form a heterogeneous constellation that brings together different and disparate aspects of human life. Organising these keywords in thematic clusters, we can see that the characterisation of the 'gypsy' modus of being in *King of the Gypsies* encompasses a number of areas that are crucial for the social integration of the individual in a modern state: marriage, livelihood, religion, health care, public education, car driving, law enforcement, military service and state governance. Not surprisingly, in all these areas of human life, the 'gypsy' role is defined in the negative, displaying a deficiency, a deviance or a lack of a required virtue. In terms of socio-political organisation, 'gypsies' are portrayed as incorrigible remnants of feudalism, forming clan or tribe structures around faux (self-proclaimed) kings and heritage lines. Conversely, 'gypsies' are shown to be alien to the political system of democracy and the core value of private property it upholds. In a bizarre way and in line with the Cold War rhetoric, this quality is attributed to the great ideological foe of the US: the Soviet Union. With regard to the legal system, the film maintains that 'gypsies' adhere to their own tribal rules and traditions and follow, albeit irregularly, the orders of the elderly and their clan leaders. Conversely, 'gypsies' refuse to acknowledge the rule of law and avoid or obstruct/disrespect the state's law enforcement bodies, and especially the police force and the court system. When it comes to public education, the film is quite explicit about the hostility they harbour towards mainstream schools. It shows how 'gypsy' children grow up on the street, picking up the lessons life is willing to teach them there; their command of the English language is shown to be limited and often compensated for with clamorousness. Their relation to the system of public health care is not very different: even though 'gypsies' occasionally reach for the knowledge of modern medical science, they still prefer to give birth on the road, the film maintains,

thus depriving their children of birth certificates, while in hospitals they do nothing but obstruct the medical staff, swarming in big, noisy congregations, smoking cigarettes and pipes (the women especially), putting their trust in herb amulets, offering alcohol and cigarettes to the patients. The lack of birth certificates, in turn, preordains 'gypsies' to be permanent outsiders to various social bodies, such as the unions, and reduces them to unreliable conscripts. When it comes to livelihood, we are informed that 'gypsies' earn their living by a whole array of dishonest practices that include but are not limited to scams, divination and insurance fraud – which is another way of saying that they are opposed to honest (skilled, productive) work. The film does not delve much into the question of religion, but it shows that 'gypsies' perform faux divination and sorcery, indirectly asserting that they are alien to Christianity. To assist the spectators with their orientation, the story offers visual clues, small but significant details, as to where Christian values lie: the traffic court judge whom 'gypsies' try to trick, for example, is seated under a big sign with embossed golden letters saying "In God we trust"; Dave who rebels against 'gypsy' ways but finally agrees to take the 'gypsies' into the twentieth century wears in the final scene a small gold cross on his neck instead of his grandfather's medallion. And finally, we come to the question of marriage. The practice of arranged marriages causes the greatest contention in the film – at the start, we have a clan argument over an arranged marriage against Rose's will and, at the end, the story's circular structure comes to a close with a clan argument over an arranged marriage against Rose's daughter's will; the generations may change, but the practice stays the same. By directing the focus on to marriage, the film is in position to assert that 'gypsies' form family unions driven by monetary interests, which – decoded in reverse – means to say that 'gypsies' do not form familial bonds based on love. This practice also reflects the inferior position of women: according to the film, 'gypsy' females are treated as goods for sale, with little or no consideration for their will and feelings, while within the marriage they are exploited as the chief money-makers.

There is one 'gypsy' attribute in *King of the Gypsies* that requires a separate paragraph. This attribute draws attention to itself because it appears as a defining 'gypsy' quality only in this particular film – and in no other film from the entire corpus – and it refers to car-driving behaviour: 'gypsies', supposedly, do not follow driving etiquette and do not respect the rules and regulations of the road. In the film, not only do they break into cars, steal cars or intentionally cause car

crashes, but they also teach their children to drive while in a state of drunkenness and drive off after running somebody over. The fact that undesirable car-driving behaviour is marked as a 'gypsy' attribute in the film points to the socially disciplining function of the 'gypsy' mask; the road traffic system can only function if all participating individuals internalise its rules and regulations and conscientiously apply them. Attributing deviant behaviour to 'gypsies' then does not convey relevant knowledge about the actual people but instead lays bare the mechanism of cultural coding at work: normatively sanctioned and socially rewarded qualities are ascribed to the 'white' mask, while their opposites are communicated by means of the 'gypsy' mask. Both masks can then be viewed as historical accretions of normative values and their deviations that have fused into legible face-signs, one coded positively, the other negatively. Thus, our attempt to segment the two masks into their constitutive elements and spell out their heterogeneous content is no less than a form of cultural archaeology. By the same token, it is worth analysing 'gypsy'-themed films as mirror-inverted reflections of concrete historical norms. Instead of indexing the 'gypsy' stereotypes in them, it is much more informative to subject these films to a backwards reading, reversing the focus from the 'gypsy' mask to the dominant perspective that generates this 'gypsy' mask, examining the normative values, identity narratives and social taboos that are (re-) negotiated in the films by implication. Such an approach to complex, time-bound artworks like films brings to the fore the need for historical contextualisation, designating it as its indispensable research method.

Back to the description of the 'gypsy' mask in *King of the Gypsies*, I continue my analysis by considering its coding with regard to space, time and colour, and then in relation to the 'white' mask. In terms of mythic space, the establishing sequence situates 'gypsies' in nature and on the road, but since the main story unfolds in the city of New York, the mythic quality of space is diminished in their portrayal. It is indicated instead that 'gypsies' populate the city's peripheral zones, such as the streets and red-light districts or slums; they are also shown in a number of mainstream city spaces behaving as impostors or as pre-modern outsiders, such as the jewellery shop, the supermarket, the court, and the hospital. In terms of time, the film attempts to situate 'gypsies' in a historical line of events, taking stock of the changes and developments over the course of three generations: horses are replaced by cars, caravans are swapped for apartments in New York, and new and more sophisticated scams are devised in the place of the old ones.



Fig. 25a and Fig. 25b. Screenshots from *King of the Gypsies* (1978, Dir. Frank Pierson): classic two-shots of the handsome 'gypsy' Dave (Eric Roberts) and the girl of his dreams, the pale-skinned, blonde Sharon (Annette O'Toole).

But the sense of cyclical, mythic time is nonetheless co-present: with its circular structure, the film suggests that 'gypsies' are stuck in the same loop of time, explicitly labelling them as medieval, tradition-bound and resistant to change.

In terms of colour, the film makes a conscious use of black-and-white contrast, but still this contrast is not the main organising force behind its visual aesthetics, since the focus is on the 'gypsy' world, with 'white' protagonists having only a brief, episodic presence. The black-and-white contrast operates on the level of hair colour and costumes; on the level of skin tone, though, 'gypsies' are *not* marked as different (**Fig. 25a** and **Fig. 25b**). The ice-skating scene (**Fig. 24a** and **Fig. 24b**) sums up the symbolism of the colour coding: handsome brown-haired Dave (Eric Roberts), the future king of the 'gypsies', is dating the girl of his dreams, the pale-skinned, blond Sharon (Annette O'Toole), a typical WASP. The two go ice-skating, all alone in a white, snow-covered landscape. Sharon is wearing a white sports outfit, moving with grace and self-confidence on the white surface of the frozen lake, almost blending with it, while Dave, wrapped in his awkward black leather long coat, stumbles like a beginner, needs help and eventually falls down. Their relationship soon falls apart, too, unable to bear the ups and downs of 'gypsy' life; and in the last film scene Dave is coupled with curly, black-haired Persa who, unlike Sharon, is able to envision him as the new king of the 'gypsies'.

By describing the 'gypsy' mask and its various components, my aim is to shed light on the inner logic that governs its manufacture. But to present the 'gypsy' modus of being as a constellation of attributes requires a certain degree of abstraction, which is inevitably exercised at the expense of many details, nuances and inherent ambiguities. The point here is that if a film were to construct the 'gypsy' mask only in negative terms following the above-described pattern, it would be

unwatchable. That is why filmmakers opt for different compensatory strategies adding – on one level or another – positive aspects that give balance to their story and warrant the box-office performance of the final product. In the case of *King of the Gypsies*, what makes Pierson's film appealing – in addition to its faux 'gypsy' spectacle – is the musical score composed by the mandolin virtuoso David Grisman and performed by the legendary jazz violinist Stéphane Grappelli, both of whom appear on-screen as 'gypsy' musicians; the superb cinematography created by Sven Nykvist, whose delicate colour palette adds a mythic quality to the family drama; the physical attractiveness of the lead cast, among whom are Eric Roberts, Susan Sarandon, Brooke Shields, Annie Potts, and Annette O'Toole; the straightforward allusions to *The Godfather* and, on the level of the story, the occasional tokens of strong human bonds: Spiro Giorgio stands up for his daughter, Zharko Stepanowicz protects his grandson, Dave tries to rescue his sister, etc.

In conclusion, it can be said that the 'gypsy' mask is not simply a list of clichéd (negative) stereotypes but stands for a world order that negates the normative reality in its entirety; it is an obverse mirror image of the established world order, an anti-norm. In *King of the Gypsies*, the anti-world signified by the 'gypsy' mask is not juxtaposed to an explicit normative reality, unlike in *The Bohemian Girl*, where 'gypsies' are opposed to aristocrats, thereby marking the two poles of symbolic power. Still, it is not difficult to deduce the norm underwriting the worldview in *King of the Gypsies*, since it provides the parameters for the 'gypsy' anti-norm and is actually rather banal in itself. Implicitly, the film affirms as normal (i.e. desired, socially commendable) the 'white' hero who is integrated into modern society through the systems of marriage based on individual choice and love, public health care, education, employment, the army, the police and the courts, as well as capitalist democracy, with the latter clearly set in opposition to the political system of communism, which upholds public property as one of its core values.

At this point, it is very illuminating to compare the coding of the 'gypsy' mask in *King of the Gypsies* (1978, USA) with that in *I Even Met Happy Gypsies*⁹⁴ (1967, Yugoslavia): the two films originate from countries that embraced two ideologically opposed systems during the Cold

94 For a detailed analysis of the film's plot structure, character delineation and visual aesthetics, see Mladenova's article "The Figure of the Imaginary Gypsy in Film: *I Even Met Happy Gypsies* (1967)."

War, namely Western capitalism and Eastern communism. The gap of eleven years between the release dates of the two films is negligible in the context of our discussion, so we can say the 'gypsy' masks in both works were produced more or less at the same time. While the American film portrays 'gypsies' as swindlers (of Russian/communist background) who have never done an honest day's work and are incompatible with the capitalist system organised around private property, the Yugoslavian film portrays them as entrepreneurial businessmen incompatible with the communist system organised around collective (state) property. It is noteworthy that both films use the respective normative notion of work to designate 'gypsies' as deviating outsiders. The coding of the 'gypsy' figure as alien to the ruling working class in communist Yugoslavia takes place in the following scene, which lasts a mere 30 seconds:

[10'34:11'04] Three Serbians visit the antique dealer Djerdj at this house. The first man addresses him with "Hey, gypsy!" and asks about old lamps. Then, a woman wrapped in a tan trench coat comes in, asking about antique desks. The third man, in a dark suit with a white shirt and a tie, greets Djerdj with "Hey you crook, when are you going to join the working class?" Djerdj replies, "Hey, mister comrade, a crooked gypsy or a crooked worker, what's the difference?" [harbingers of the past (antique dealers), alien to the working class].

Sudar comments at length this short scene, explaining the significance of the address "mister comrade" and the way it encapsulates Aleksandar Petrović's critique of Yugoslav society that strived towards classlessness:

[Djerdj] addresses the person with "Mister Comrade" which sets the picture immediately, as post war communist Yugoslavia agreed to use the term "comrade" for men and women as the formal style of address, (...) a reminder of everyone's equality. Titles such as "Sir", "Mister" or "Miss", were disqualified as bourgeois and discriminatory. Djerdj, by addressing his customer as "Mister Comrade" uses what may appear to be an oxymoron, although Petrović's use of it here is highly caustic. The arrival of socialism challenged the class system in name (everyone was to address each other with the same title), but did not change the position of Gypsies, who were again left on the margins. (...) In such circumstances, people who can be addressed as "Comrades" are lucky, as they are part of the new system. Gypsies, though, can only see them as privileged, thus their title "Comrade" can be

“honoured” with the prefix “Mister”. (...) After such an address, which hides irony and resentment equally, Djerdj proceeds to say that “wheeling and dealing” anywhere is the same for the ones who have to do it. (...) Therefore, less than 15 minutes into the film, Petrović manages to create a critical picture of Yugoslav society, depicting the specifically awkward position of one of its minorities. In this instance, the minority is also a social class in itself – the class “below” the proletariat. (131)

Petrović’s strategy of character delineation reproduces another recurrent pattern in the construction of the ‘gypsy’ mask, which can be interpreted in a light that is less flattering for the filmmaker: the ‘gypsy’ figure is often conceived as an antiquated version of the normative national Self. If we take up the perspective of communism, we can say that Djerdj sticks to an old-fashioned form of address and, being a private tradesman, he also leads an outdated and despised form of economic life. Even the nature of his business codes him as a remnant of the past. In the same manner, the characters in *King of the Gypsies* are depicted as bearers of the past. The ‘gypsies’ there mourn their earlier mode of life that preceded private property and is explicitly labelled as medieval; they appear unable to adjust as citizens to the institutions and practices of the modern democratic state. The main heroes – Zharko, Groffo and Dave – belong to a hereditary lineage of self-proclaimed kings that is symbolised by a gold medallion; and even though Dave dismisses, scoffs at and even throws the jewel away, its symbolic power has an irrevocable impact on his life and that of the entire ‘clan’. Exactly the same symbolic object, a gold medallion, is used in *The Bohemian Girl* (a film whose plotline originates from and unfolds in medieval times) to code aristocrats, albeit positively, as the rightful rulers in a long hereditary lineage, as well as being enlightened minds and champions of science, human progress and high culture. All these examples testify to the plasticity of the ‘gypsy’ mask, its imaginary nature and various cultural functions, and most importantly, its subordination to the ‘white’ mask.

6.2.1 Plot Structure and Genre

Structurally, *King of the Gypsies* displays the characteristics typical of ‘gypsy’-themed films that bring them closer to the cinema of attractions. The film’s plot is loose and of secondary importance, which has

provoked Paul Mavis, for example, to remark that “[t]he plotting is rather chaotic and haphazard”. The protagonists are partially individualised; they are conceived rather as generic figures who represent the entire community. As to character delineation, Brendan Foley makes the following pertinent observation:

The problem is that Dave is such a blank space as a character, it's never entirely clear why he is so adamant about rejecting the gypsy lifestyle, or what sort of dreams or goals the character might have instead. He makes occasional mention of being an actor or being a singer, but that never actually resonates as something he would rip his family apart over. The same goes for Judd Hirsch as Groffo, Dave's piece of shit father. Hirsch is one of the best character actors out there, but Groffo is such a belligerent, monotonous garbage-dump of a human being that there's nothing interesting about watching his conflict with Dave. There's a way to write/play this sort of character that allows them to be actually empathetic (...) but Hirsch never gets there. When the film boils down to a confrontation between father and son, there's no charge, no tragic kick.

The film's main appeal lies in the 'gypsy' spectacle set out in a series of self-contained scenes which put on show the various and highly disparate aspects of the 'gypsy' modus of being; in this case, the film offers a remarkably exhaustive list: clan strife and celebrations; marriage traditions; internal rules and forms of self-governance; council of the elderly; itinerant life; giving birth; baptism; family reunions; reunions with the deceased ancestors; fortune-telling and sorcery; car driving; substance abuse; relationship to the police, courts, public education system and modern medicine; love affairs; family feuds; funerals; scams, etc. As to the spectacle nature of the film, Foley notes:

[T]he early sections maintain a novelistic feel, bouncing through time for what amounts to loosely connected vignettes detailing the kind of living that comes with being a child in a gypsy clan, examining the habits and culture of a nomadic group. So you've got big party scenes, marriages being brokered, you have trouble with the law and the detailing of the various scams and superstitions that the gypsies run.

The loosely connected incidents in *King of the Gypsies* are pieced together with recurrent short cutaway shots featuring elegant 'gypsy' dancers and musicians. This conspicuous montage technique provides a visual rhythm to the work, in addition to its musical organisation and the broad framework furnished by the plot. Inevitably, the film stands out with its genre hybridity: besides the para-ethnographic 'gypsy' exotica, the autonomous musical and dance numbers inserted between the film sequences, Pierson's work "plays like a sorry retread of disparate *Godfather* themes" (Mavis), while Sean Sweeney comments that "*King of the Gypsies* switches tones from family melodrama to the vibe of an ugly '70s [New York] vigilante revenge flick."

Film reviewers offer pertinent critique of the minority's cinematic representation. Vincent Canby, for example, appears genuinely outraged in his 1978 review for *The New York Times*:

The gypsies should sue. True, it would be something of a con job, since "King of the Gypsies" isn't the worst film of the year. Yet I think the ancient, Romany-speaking tribes could whomp up a good case for their having been maligned by a movie that presents them as an endangered species without once making their plight emotionally arresting or anthropologically important. They've been ripped off. The gypsies themselves would call it a boojo (...) Frank Pierson has written and directed a melodrama about three generations of gypsies that is all color and no substance (...) [T]he film fails so utterly to make these people's problems at all moving or urgent. Because we don't feel for them, they become minor freaks of time.

Thirty years later, Paul Mavis also expresses strong disappointment with the film's unfulfilled promise to present an examination of Roma culture, describing Pierson's work as "a fairly worthless exercise in faux-exotica" and "an unconvincing immersion into this little-explored culture, a clichéd, scattershot script, and some curious (to say the least) performances." His critique targets especially the one-dimensional delineation of the characters:

But *King of the Gypsies* is all surface show when it comes to exploring the gypsy lifestyle – and not even all that well executed surface show, at that. Who are these people? Are we to admire them? Fear them? Dismiss them? Pity them? The film

refuses to help us come to any answers because what it shows is filtered through the same fake crap that has marked Hollywood depictions of other “exotic” cultures through the decades. In *King of the Gypsies*, the gypsies are always dancing. Or singing. Or scamming. Or fighting. But we never get a real sense of who and what they are as a people, as a culture. The only insightful “fact” about the gypsies that’s imparted to the audience, over and over again, from *King of the Gypsies* is that gypsies will always lie, no matter what.

All these critics are right in observing that the screen ‘gypsies’ in Pierson’s work are only surface appearances devoid of substance, psychological depth and individuality. However, their criticism – and this has to be really stressed – rests on the fallacious assumption that a complex, genuine and deeply felt representation of ‘gypsy’ figures is at all possible. What these critics fail to account for is that the ‘gypsy’ mask is an artefact, a phenomenon of artistic surfaces. No matter whether it is produced in literature, opera, theatre, photography or film, the ‘gypsy’ mask is and remains an auxiliary (one-dimensional) device whose primary purpose is to provide a contrastive background adding salience and reality to the ‘white’ hero; the illusion of three-dimensionality (realism) of the ‘white’ mask is rendered through the interplay of light and shadow, literally and metaphorically, where the ‘gypsy’ mask is the signifier for shadow, and the ‘white’ mask has the privilege of being identified with light. In other words, if a Roma character is cast in a psychologically truthful light as a complex individual, s/he will be no longer visible and recognisable as a ‘gypsy’, though certainly an intelligent and caring filmmaker could present a Roma character by using elements of the ‘gypsy’ mask in a way that questions this representational tradition.

6.2.2 Elements of Film *Noir* and the Message of the Plot

The film contains also one noiresque element that makes up the essence of the ‘gypsy’ role. This element has been partially captured in Christopher Forsley’s review, written on the occasion of the film’s Blu-ray edition:

[T]his ensemble of characters explores how the seeds of tradition, family, and culture, once planted inside a[n] individual’s

subconscious, often develop roots so deep that they are impossible to escape from. Even if you sever whatever these seeds produce on the surface, their roots never stop growing and it's only a matter of time before they again break through the soil of reality and make demands. *King of the Gypsies* is about a young man who must face these demands, even though it's the last thing he wants to do.

The reviewer has picked a vegetation metaphor to account for Dave's inner conflict and for his failure to resolve this conflict in a non-criminal way; the explanatory framework provided by the image of seeds of tradition (i.e. family and culture striking deep, inextricable roots into the hero's subconscious) conveniently skates over the brazenly racist portrayal of the minority where tradition is shown to be medieval, family is depicted as disturbingly dysfunctional and culture amounts to a diverse array of fraud and scams. If Forsley's commentary endorses, subconsciously or not, the views of cultural racism, the film is quite straightforward in positing the blood(line) argument with its attempted generational portrait of the 'gypsy' Other.

The story of Dave, elucidated by his first-person voiceover, is the story of a man who rejects his 'gypsy' identity, lifestyle and milieu, doing all in his power – or at least this is what Dave strives to convince us of – to extricate and elevate himself from it, but eventually falling back and down into his old 'gypsy' ways. Typologically, this narrative belongs to the repertoire of black stories⁹⁵ employed in *noir* films that Norbert Grob describes so well. Stressing that “*noir*” should be understood as a structure, the German film scholar provides a narrative typology of the genre outlining seven central storylines (38–49). The first two – which he calls “the victim of destiny” and “the fetters of the past” – bear an eerily close correspondence with Dave's story. The victim of destiny is the anti-hero who wanders homeless in the big world, trying to find a way out for himself, but eventually gets lost. This is the tragic *noir*-destiny *par excellence*, Grob explains, where contrasts are put together, the everyday and the criminal, without forcing them into a straight-line story. Grob mentions that these weak, melancholic males serve as a counter-image to the eternal winners in cinema (cf. 39–40). In accordance with this narrative type, the 'gypsy' hero Dave depicts

95 Grob speaks of “schwarze Geschichten” (black stories) and “schwarze Formen” (black forms) in his theoretical introduction to *Filmgenres: Film Noir* (14).

himself as a victim of 'gypsy' lineage: his destiny is predetermined by his parents, we hear him already lament in the first sequence. Unable to reconcile with his 'gypsy' identity, he runs away from his family and clan, renouncing their traditions and lifestyle, roaming the streets of New York homeless, until one day when he is forced to go back. The film also suggests that Dave is unable to sustain a long-term relationship with a 'white' girl and, having killed his own father, he has no other choice but to withdraw from the 'normal' world he aspires to and resume his place in the 'gypsy' world.

Another prevalent anti-hero in *noir* films is the insecure, unstable type who is unable to forget or escape his past. Here Grob refers to the American film director and critic Paul Schrader (his "Notes on *Film Noir*" is considered the most influential short piece on the *noir* form) who writes: "this *noir* hero dreads to look ahead but instead tries to survive by the day; and if unsuccessful at that, he retreats to the past." Thus, the critic adds, the techniques and stylistic devices of the film *noir* emphasise "loss, nostalgia, lack of clear priorities, insecurity and instability" (Schrader 58). The same atmosphere of loss and doom is present in Pierson's film, too. Dave's melancholy musings deplore the irretrievably lost past, depicted as an idyllic time when 'gypsies' were free to roam and set up their camps wherever they chose; throughout the entire film his gaze is turned backwards. He ushers us into his story with a flashback; actually, the entire film unfolds in a flashback with Dave's voice commenting on the events from a later point in time, when the dice are already cast and destinies decided. Pierson employs flashbacks in combination with a voiceover narrative, a technique typically used in *noir* to amplify the sense of futility the hero feels standing face to face with destiny, the sense of time lost and all-surrounding hopelessness (cf. Grob 23).

It is notable that destiny, the past and 'gypsy' lifestyle are all three perceived as synonymous forces in *King of the Gypsies*. Going back to his clan, Dave steps back to the medieval 'gypsy' modus of being he has tried futilely to outrun (i.e. he withdraws to the past) and having committed a murder, he has failed and symbolically fallen down into the mythic world of shadow (i.e. he is fettered by his 'gypsy' destiny). His return is then a return to another – vertically opposed – time-space, the mirror-inverted universe of 'gypsies'. Such an organisation of symbolic space-time along a vertical line is characteristic both of *noir* films and 'gypsy'-themed films. Grob points out that the dramaturgy in *noir* films does not unfold horizontally, as in the Western,

where the plot advances in a forward motion and can be constantly subjected to changes, but vertically, as in melodramas, and is marked by the hero's inability to change life circumstances through conscious effort or action, also containing abrupt, fateful disruptions which cut off all ways leading ahead, pulling everyone back into the abyss (cf. 23–24).

Considering the similarities between film *noir* and 'gypsy'-themed films, I want to note in passing that these can be observed on all the four pertinent levels highlighted by Grob: atmosphere, style, motifs and themes. As in *noir* films, the atmosphere in 'gypsy'-themed films is often marked by a sense of futility, by a discrepancy between outer appearance and inner nature, and by the ambiguity of situations. Stylistically, 'gypsy'-themed films contain a play with light and shadow (or black and white colour) and contradictory compositions. The *noir* motifs in 'gypsy'-themed films encompass the following: sympathy for suspect characters, the seductive lure of the *femme fatale*, preference for night-time activities, and a tendency to blur (or even remove) the boundary between reality and insanity. Thematically, 'gypsy'-themed films espouse the power of destiny, entanglement in criminal activities and violence that permeates all spheres of life (cf. 15–16). All these *noir* characteristics, it has to be pointed out, are modulated to accommodate the central 'gypsy' theme and are further shaped by the filmmaker's artistic style.

One dimension of film *noir* that is absent in Grob's multi-aspectual description of the genre is *noir*'s reliance on racial tropes. Here the inherent similarity between film *noir* and 'gypsy'-themed films becomes immediately apparent, for both forms take interest in the seamy side of life, coding the underworld of human degradation in 'ethno-racial' terms; both forms are "variants of film grey or film off-white", working with all shades of black, if we are to borrow Paul Schrader's formulations, where the rich palette of black also emerges as a broad gallery of racialised characters (53–54). In his perspicacious article "The Whiteness of Film *Noir*", Eric Lott focuses attention on this hardly broached problem, namely that racial tropes shape the sense and structure of cultural products which on their surface have nothing to do with 'race' (542). The author demonstrates that the figural play of light against dark in film *noir* is in fact animated by racial concerns. By referring to a number of canonical works – *Double Indemnity* (1944), *In a Lonely Place* (1950), *Mildred Pierce* (1945), *Gilda* (1946), among others – Lott points at the fusion of moral terminologies, visual devices

and racial codes. As he astutely remarks, film *noir* is about people falling from (g)race and into the zone of the shadows (548). Lott's discussion considers the various racial auras projected onto characters (black, Mexican, Asian) and is vigilant enough to consider a 'gypsy' presence in a classic *noir*: in Michael Curtis's *Mildred Pierce*, the main villain, the mysterious roué Monte Beragon introduces himself as "an old gypsy fortune teller". Beragon's lineage becomes subsequently a source of fascination; the character is implicated in miscegenation and incest, while "his racial aura is in some sense aligned with his profligacy" (560). A worldly 'gypsy' madam shows up in another *noir* film from the genre's classic era. Orson Welles's masterpiece *Touch of Evil* (1958) features Marlene Dietrich as the raven-haired, mystical fortune-teller Tanya.⁹⁶ The *femme fatale* makes a memorable entrance in one scene, speaking in a Germanic-tinged baritone and blowing clouds of smoke with her cigar. In this context, it is hardly a coincidence then that Raoul Walsh, Ray Nichols, Joseph Losey and Charles Vidor, four of the classic *noir* filmmakers, have also authored popular 'gypsy'-themed films: *Carmen* (1915, with Theda Bara) and *The Loves of Carmen* (1927, with Dolores del Rio); *Hot Blood* (1965); and *The Gypsy and the Gentlemen* (1958) and *The Loves of Carmen* (1948, with Rita Hayworth) respectively. What is more, Vidor's version of *The Loves of Carmen* represents, in some sense, an organic synthesis of the two aesthetic movements: his is a 'gypsy'-themed *noir* in which Rita Hayworth enacts the quintessential *femme fatale*, the very first anti-heroine to rebel against domesticity, "a siren whose libidinal victims crash on the rocks of fatal desire" (Evans 115). Curiously enough, Vidor's *The Loves of Carmen* is not included in Schrader's or Grob's canonising lists of *noir* films, although the film was created directly after *Gilda* (another Vidor-Hayworth collaboration and Hayworth's most discussed role as a *femme fatale*) and although, stylistically and thematically, it adds only a nuance, another shade of black to the *noir* diffuse formula.⁹⁷

96 In *The BFI Companion to Crime*, Marlene Dietrich's character in *Touch of Evil* is described as "the weirdest ever Mexican gypsy" (Phillips 330).

97 Further titles from the film corpus that draw on the stylistics of the film *noir*: *The Barefoot Contessa* (1954, Dir. Joseph L. Mankiewicz), starring Ava Gardner; *I Even Met Happy Gypsies* (1967, Dir. Aleksandar Petrović), starring Bekim Fehmiu and Olivera Vučo; *Guardian Angel* (1987, Dir. Goran Paskaljević), starring Ljubiša Samardžić and Jakup Amzić; *Gypsy* (2000, Dir. Manuel Palacios), starring Joaquín Cortés; *The Pilgrimage of Students Peter and Jacob* (2000, Dir. Drahomira Vihanová);

I want to conclude this section dedicated to the *noir* elements and the message of plotlines in 'gypsy'-themed films by wrapping up our discussion of *King of the Gypsies*. Even though the plot in Pierson's film is loose, haphazardly meandering through the multi-faceted 'gypsy' world, its underlying structure is quite simple and follows the established pattern of a *noir* (black) story. Dave is a typical *noir* (black) anti-hero whose life story develops backwards (in time) and downwards (in space) in symbolic terms and constitutes in its totality a moral downfall; the disparate events of the plot are organised by his voice and around his *noir* (black) plight. This parallel to the *noir* genre allows me to isolate the 'ethno-racial' coding in Pierson's film, to view it separately from the *noir* elements and to highlight its significance with regard to the story's overarching message. In film *noir*, it is a 'white' hero who falls into a state of abjection, into the moral underworld populated by 'non-whites', who also come to signify its shadows. In 'gypsy'-themed films, it is a 'non-white' hero who fails to transcend his abject state and join the translucent and spiritually immaculate 'whites' above ground. So, we could say that *King of the Gypsies* is an ethnicised form of a *noir* film, one particularly dark version of it, where the colour black – in addition to a moral symbolism and a type of storyline – comes to denote a stigmatised ethnicity through its main anti-hero. Conversely, *King of the Gypsies* spawns a colour-coordinated universe where the 'gypsy' mask is loaded with a mythic symbolism, racialised and specifically employed to enact the story of human demise. Taking 'gypsy'-themed films as a vantage point, one may also ask if *noir* films are not, in fact, a de-ethnicised ('whitened') variation of a 'gypsy'-themed film; after all, the 'gypsy' figure of Carmen is the prototype for the *femme fatale*, the latter being the most emblematic figure of the *noir* genre. Whatever the answer, the bottom line is that the visibility and recognisability of the 'gypsy' mask rests not only on its conventional appearance or on its established repertoire of qualities, gestures and emotional states, but also on its affiliation with destiny, of which I give a broad variety of examples in the next section. Needless to say, the cultural practice of ethnicising (racialising) the story of man's failure has far-reaching political, social and psychological consequences.

Papusza (2013, Dir. Joanna Kos-Krauze and Krzysztof Krauze), starring Jowita Budnik; or *Suburra* (2017, Dir. Stefano Sollima).

6.3 The 'Gypsy' Mask in Motion or the Vertical Storyline in 'Gypsy'-themed Films

As to the plotline in 'gypsy'-themed films, the leading questions are as follows: What kind of plot is the 'gypsy' figure set in? Is the 'gypsy' figure the main hero in the story and if so, is there an option for him/her to complete the hero's journey, transcend his/her limited circumstances and achieve a higher level of individuation? If the plot negotiates the relationship between a 'gypsy' figure and a 'white' figure, a representative of the dominant culture, does it allow for the possibility of coexistence (a love relationship or marriage)?

Set in motion in 'gypsy'-themed films, the 'white' mask and the 'gypsy' mask perform identical movements in two mythic worlds that symmetrically mirror each other and have a clear hierarchical ordering: the upper world of light (consciousness) and the lower world of shadow (the subconscious). The 'white' hero begins his journey from the world of light, becomes submerged temporarily in the world of shadow, only to resurface renewed into the world of light. The same sequence of movements but in an inverted order is performed by the 'gypsy' anti-hero: his starting point is the world of the shadow, which he leaves striving for the world of light, only to plunge back unchanged into the world of shadow. Both masks make a circular movement with three distinct stages that can be described in terms of (presence/absence of) light. The movement of the 'white' mask follows the scheme of light – shadow – light, while the movement of the 'gypsy' mask follows the reverse scheme of shadow – light – shadow. There is one significant difference in the ontological status of these two movements: the trajectory of the 'white' mask is perceived and represented as the linear (historical, individualising) time of culture that leads to the future and signifies progress, while the trajectory of the 'gypsy' mask is perceived and represented as the circular time of nature that points to the past and stands for regression.⁹⁸ Thus, 'gypsy'-themed films form an aesthetic tendency, even a genre in their own right,⁹⁹ where stories unfold along the vertical axis, joining the group of film *noir* and melodrama

98 It is insightful to consider in this context the imagery of failure discussed by Alexandra Zsigmond (540).

99 The question of the "Gypsy genre" is treated summarily by Jordanova in her article "Mimicry and Plagiarism: Reconciling Actual and Metaphoric Gypsies". The film scholar, however, examines the "Gypsy film" exclusively through the lens of literary analysis, defining it as a set of tenacious tropes or stereotypes; a represen-

as the only two genres of the vertical (cf. Grob 24). It is also important to highlight that the above-described dynamics are pertinent to 'gypsy'-themed films in particular; the 'gypsy' mask and the 'white' mask are generally dramatised in juxtaposition in narratives that (re)-negotiate European national ('white') identity where the 'gypsy' mask is often used on its own to (re)define the national 'white' Self by implication. In the following pages, I consider the vertical storyline in 'gypsy'-themed films, as well as some salient elements in their plot structure, providing various types of examples.

A good illustration to start with is one of the very first Russian fiction films,¹⁰⁰ *Drama in a Gypsy Camp near Moscow* (1908), because it – or, to be more precise, what is presumed to be the extant film's opening sequence – represents a mini-narrative of the 'gypsy' mask in motion, outlining its signature 'dance'. Within a mere 104 seconds, the film director, scriptwriter and photographer Vladimir Siversen has managed to pack in an entire jealousy drama with a fatal ending: a young 'gypsy' kills his fiancée after she rejects him, having promised her heart to another man. Eventually, driven by penitence or by fear of punishment, the murderer hurls himself off a steep cliff. For several seconds, we watch his body falling vertically down in a straight line. Denise Youngblood describes Siversen's work as one of the earliest examples of "murder-and-mayhem films" in Russian cinema, commenting that "[t]he schematic development and lack of obvious motivation for the actions are not unique but are (...) generally characteristic of early experiments with narrative film" (91). Discussing the beginning of Russian cinema, Graham Roberts claims that the very early fiction films already point to the development of a 'Russian style', with its predilection for "sad denouements, particularly as punishments for earlier misdoings" (36). In his short commentary to the film in *Silent Witnesses*, Paolo Cherchi Usai links the story to the socio-historic world and wraps up the moral of its downward movement.

tational pattern that allows for little variation and boils down to stories of "poor, passionate, freedom-loving Gypsies who end up in self-destruction" (306).

100 The first Russian fiction film is generally regarded to be Alexander Drankov's production *Stenka Razin* (Dir. Vladimir Romashkov), released on 15 October 1908. It preceded by a little over two months the release of *Drama in a Gypsy Camp near Moscow*, a production of Alexander Khanzhonkov's studio, which premiered on 20 December of the same year; Khanzhonkov cherished the "dream of releasing Russia's first picture on an everyday theme" but failed to materialise it, because the film was flawed (Tsivian 50).

Despite its flaws, this gypsy drama insists on an atmosphere drawn from real life: the final shot of the suicide of Aleko, victim of his own demonic fever, turns the *dénouement* into a symbol of figurative harshness. (Tsivian 46)

Even though the film does not show the 'dance' of the 'white' mask, it is not difficult to reconstruct by implication its normative values or the schematic narrative it espouses, namely fidelity, love and a celebration of life moving in an upward direction.

In its movement through space, the 'gypsy' figure marks the trajectory of human downfall. Filmmakers create different visual metaphors to suggest the moral and spiritual dimension of this descending parabola. In *King of the Gypsies*, for instance, Groffo's degradation is signalled in one memorable scene where we watch him collapse over a huge roasted pig and continue to lie there in a drunken stupor, with the animal in his embrace (**Fig. 26**). His son's undoing is visualised in a more stylishly subtle manner (wrapped in his elegant black leather long coat, Dave falls down on the white skating ice (**Fig. 24b**), as described earlier in Sequence 20), but the underlying message in both cases is the same. Later in the film, each of these two 'gypsy' males, father and son, will commit a grave murder.



Fig. 26. Screenshots from *King of the Gypsies* (1978, Dir. Frank Pierson): costumed in a flamboyant red suit and a yellow shirt, Groffo (Judd Hirsch) lies in a drunken stupor over the huge roasted pig served on the table.

Another example of deploying the pig metaphor as a way of suggesting the demise of the main 'white' hero can be seen in the British melodrama *The Gypsy and the Gentleman* (1958) directed by the American émigré filmmaker Joseph Losey. Here, I consider the opening

sequence¹⁰¹ and the way it relates to the main story, because, as I demonstrate, it represents a metaphorical miniature of the entire film and indirectly provides the interpretive coordinates for understanding the story. Losey's Regency-period melodrama starts with a close-up of a burning torch, against which the film credits – in thick red letters – roll down. A long low-angle shot reveals that the burning torch, actually two of them, illuminate the entrance of an imposing building; it is apparently late at night. Well-dressed gentlemen come in and out of the building. A horse-drawn carriage stops in front of it and a gentleman in a brown frockcoat and a tall hat gets off in a state of great agitation. On the stairs, he bumps into two other gentlemen and asks them if Sir Paul Deverill is in the club. They reply that he is in the cellar, having found a new entertainment. The film cuts to the cellar; a mid-shot of Sir Deverill (Keith Michell) highlights his blond hair and impeccably white shirt with frilled collar and sleeves. The gentleman in the brown frockcoat enters the cellar and starts descending towards the gathering. The camera pulls back showing that Sir Deverill is in the company of other gentlemen, all engaged in a betting game (Fig. 27). One of the noblemen, in green livery, offers Sir Deverill a glass of wine and announces the next round. Two servants appear in the foreground holding a small squealing pig that is smeared in white fat. "Mademoiselle the piglet awaits your attention," the man in green livery announces. The piglet is placed on the floor and held by the servants. "To Mademoiselle!" Sir Deverill raises his glass; "To Sir Deverill!" the nobleman in green livery raises his glass. Sir Deverill steps towards the animal on the floor with his arms open, cooing: "Come to my arms, you bundle of charm!" A close-up of the nobleman, his white shirt filling up the frame, is edited to a close-up of the piglet, covered with white slabs of grease, standing amidst legs in white socks. Sir Deverill hurtles towards the

101 By choosing to focus on the symbolic import of the introductory scenes, I lean on "the multifaceted and stereometric approach to narratives" which the film theorist Thierry Kuntzel has advanced with his two ground-breaking analyses of the film openings in *M* (1931, Dir. Fritz Lang) and *The Most Dangerous Game* (1932, Dir. E.B. Schoedsack, and Irving Pichel) (Elsaesser 52). As Elsaesser and Hagen point out, "Kuntzel's ambition was to show how the entire film is folded or condensed in the opening scenes, at once prefiguring what follows in a kind of mini-narrative, and anticipating it in a condensed and encrypted form" (53). The idea that the opening sequence may figuratively recap the entire film is indebted to Freud's dream work, to which Kuntzel overtly refers; his exemplary textual analysis has encouraged a new tendency in film studies, one that is especially attentive to the different intensities and textures of cinematic language (cf. 53).



Fig. 27. Assembled screenshots from *The Gypsy and the Gentleman* (1958, Dir. Joseph Losey): Sir Paul Deverill (Keith Michell) trying in vain to hold on to Mademoiselle, a small pig smeared with white grease.

piglet, grabs it and tries to hold it tight in his embrace while the other gentlemen count the seconds. Several times, he slips on the floor, also smeared with fat, falling down, then scrambling back to his feet until finally he falls flat on his back, the piglet fleeing from his arms. While still on the floor, he is served another glass of wine and gulps it down in one go. His audience cheers.

It is not difficult to detect the correspondences between the film's opening scenes and the main story, which revolves around Sir Deverill's humiliating and self-destructive infatuation with the 'half-breed' 'gypsy' temptress Belle (Melina Mercouri in her first English-language film). Belle is portrayed as a beautiful but tempestuous brunette, wearing black or inflaming red, who drinks, lies, steals and as a typical *femme fatale* uses her sexual appeal to lay her hands on the nobleman's wealth. She is loyal only to her 'gypsy' lover and partner in crime, Jess. Holding Belle under a spell, it is Jess who hankers after Sir Deverill's riches. A true incarnation of evil,¹⁰² he contrives various horrifying plots to

102 It calls to attention that the same motif is used in *The Bohemian Girl* (1936, Dir. James W. Horne, and Charley Rogers), where the 'gypsy' wife turns out to be an instrument in the hands of an unscrupulous 'gypsy' lover, Devilshoof, who maintains an amorous relationship with her only because she can steal from her husband and supply him with valuable possessions. Both films emphasise the evilness of the 'gypsy' lover by showing that Devilshoof and Jess are only inter-



Fig. 28. Assembled screenshots from *The Gypsy and the Gentleman* (1958, Dir. Joseph Losey): by pretending to be lost on a rainy night in the forest, Belle (Melina Mercouri) manages to enter the carriage of Sir Paul Deverill (Keith Michell); infatuated with her, Deverill marries Belle, sinks into alcoholism and eventually drowns together with her. Sir Deverill's sister Sarah (June Laverick) is the moral, social and 'ethno-racial' opposite of Belle.

dispossess Sir Deverill and his sister Sarah – blonde, blue-eyed and dressed invariably in white with bluish undertones (**Fig. 28**) – of their inheritance. Feverishly obsessed with Belle, Sir Deverill tries to take possession of her by marrying her and making her the lady of the house, but all he achieves is to demean himself, turning into everybody's laughing stock. He sinks into debilitating alcoholism, vicariously aiding

ested in riches and are brazenly indifferent to their blindly infatuated partners. Obviously, the function of this motive is to excoriate miscegenation and to sound the theme of the inescapable decline and degeneracy of social classes/nations due to their mixing with social outcasts ('gypsies'). In their discussion on Hollywood and 'race', Shohat and Stam point out that the figure of the "half-breed" whose along with the positively connoted figures of the class/national elite are some of the stereotypes Hollywood has inherited from Anglo conquest fiction. Their discussion actually focuses on the representation of Mexicans, but some of the points raised in it are just as relevant to 'gypsy' figures (196–197).

Jess' nightmarish schemes and eventually ends up, with Belle in his embrace, at the bottom of the river.¹⁰³

In short, the film recounts the story of a decadent Regency baronet whose life spirals downwards into a living hell and finishes with a horrible death. In the opening sequence, the nobleman's moral degradation is visualised metaphorically as a vertical descent in space: instead of taking us directly to the club gathering, the camera focuses on a burning torch at night and then follows Sir Deverill's lawyer as he goes down into the club's cellar. We see the man at the top of the stairs, standing well above the inebriated gathering of gentlemen, from where he can observe Sir Deverill throwing himself onto a piglet placed at the feet of the servants and then wallowing in the dirt on the floor in futile attempt to keep hold of the animal. When we consider the arrangement of bodies, of the men and the piglet, in relation to the architecture of the club building, with its various levels, it becomes evident that all these bodies are studiously placed in a way that aims to pinpoint the extreme lowliness of Deverill's fall.

In the main story, the nobleman's demise is signified by his relationship to the half-'gypsy' *femme fatale*. The more Sir Deverill tries to get a firm hold of Belle, the deeper he sinks into the hellish schemes plotted by her 'gypsy' lover. It should be noted here that Losey's period melodrama contains some *noir* devices and verges on a horror film in its second half. In combination with the film's imagery, these elements also foster the allusion to biblical hell, inviting us to witness the 'white' hero's plunge into the moral darkness of sin. At some point, Sir Deverill says to Belle: "I was only half bad when I

103 Many parallels can be drawn between *The Gypsy and the Gentleman* and Veit Harlan's anti-Semitic propaganda film *Jud Süß* (1940) with regard to film genre, storyline and individual scenes. Both films are historical costume melodramas and cautionary tales, revealing the destructive force of an ethnic Other. In both films, the fatal intrusion takes place in a carriage: after a road accident, Jud Süß solicits a lift from Dorothea Sturm, whom he later rapes and drives to suicide. To her question about where he comes from, he answers that the world is his home. In a similar vein, Belle is rescued on a stormy night by Sir Deverill and his sister Sarah (Fig. 28), both of whom are to suffer greatly at her hands. When asked where she comes from, Belle replies that the fields and rivers are her home. It should be noted that while *Jud Süß* is classified as a "reserved film" in the collection of Murnau Foundation and generally viewed as "one of the most notorious and successful pieces of anti-Semitic film propaganda produced in Nazi Germany" (Culbert 205), *The Gypsy and the Gentleman* is available for purchase and hardly perceived as racist. It would be a worthwhile endeavour to conduct a comparative study that takes these two films and the history of their reception as its focus.

met you. Now I am Satan's man." His remark invigorates the film's religious subtext but also raises the important question of agency: is it that the baronet is brought low by the evil 'gypsies' or is it that he brings himself to ruin? Judging from the opening sequence, it seems that the director foregrounds Deverill's personal responsibility, for it is the nobleman who willingly and consciously brings himself down to the level of the piglet. A lot can be said here about Losey's critical stance on historical events, but I want to draw the reader's attention to the figure of the pig, which is used in the film to mark the lowliest of all social positions and is matched with the 'half-breed' 'gypsy' female character in the main story. The parallel between the two is suggested in a couple of ways: both are females, both become Sir Deverill's female partners in his 'social games' and both have names that rhyme with one another, Mademoiselle and Belle. In addition, both figures are brought into association with 'whiteness' in a way that foregrounds the absurdity of the idea: the body of Mademoiselle the piglet is covered in big slabs of white fat, whereas Belle receives a title of nobility; she is, however, incongruous with her new role and is despised even by 'pure' 'gypsies'. An elderly 'gypsy' woman dismisses Belle with the scornful remark: "You may own the land but you are no lady. You belong to a ditch."

The image of the pig requires particular attention here, because it is often used in the context of 'gypsy'-themed films as an emblem of the fallen man (**Fig. 26** and **Fig. 27**), and this once again points to the religious elements woven into the fabric of the 'gypsy' mask. Now, as we shall see, metaphors relating to pigs have, first of all, an overpoweringly negative meaning and, secondly, boast a long history of use in European culture, harking back to the Bible. Judith Paterson argues that the image of the pig appears in a broad range of metaphors and is coded mainly with "dirtiness, bad conduct, dirty behaviour, lack of taste, poor physical shape, etc." Allan also notes that "[p]igs (or swine)...were...seen as unclean animals in the Jewish tradition, and are therefore used as symbols of filthy, subhuman creatures 'standing for what is despicable and hated'" (qtd. in Paterson 34). In her concluding remarks, Paterson makes the important observation that the figurative usage of pigs is one of the oldest in the English language, adding that this fact can be partially explained by the large number of allegorical uses for swine in the Scriptures, the latter also being highly influential during the Middle Ages (45). Barak-Erez's analysis of biblical texts and other Jewish sources furnishes further pertinent details:

In various exegeses, the pig appears as a Janus-like character. In other words, it is an animal that purports to be pure because of its cloven hoof and yet not, and is hence a symbol of guile and duplicity (...) The pig is often singled out as a symbol of abomination. It is the ultimate profanity. (17)

And also:

In the New Testament, pigs still appear in negative contexts. Jesus warns his believers: "Do not cast your pearls before swine" (Matthew 7:6). He also drives the demons out of possessed men into a herd of swine (Matthew 8:28–34). (20)

The use of visual metaphors involving pigs is not unique to antigypsy discourse; as Barak-Erez demonstrates, it occupies a specific centrality in anti-Semitic discourse and, certainly, the metaphor has a broad applicability and can be used in reference to any minority or majority group. The point here, however, is that both imaginary constructs, the 'gypsy' figure and the pig, have strong religious connotations that tend to surface rekindled in narratives where the centre stage is given to the 'gypsy' mask and its subterranean universe. The attention to the symbolism of pigs in 'gypsy'-themed films has also been heightened by the observation that scenes with pigs are almost an obligatory component in documentary films attempting portrayals of the Roma minority.¹⁰⁴

The short excursion into the usage and history of the pig metaphor lends further weight to the argument that the 'gypsy' mask is constructed to signify and enact the destiny of the fallen man. This background information also helps us to understand the religious symbolism in another 'gypsy'-themed film that has enjoyed enormous popularity in the 1970s and is still referred to as the most successful Yugoslavian film production, namely Aleksandar Petrović's work *I Even Met Happy Gypsies* (1967). Here again, the opening scenes set out common interpretative coordinates for the entire film, this time by evoking the destiny of the Gadarene swine with a direct quote from the Gospel of Luke:

104 Here are just a few of the countless examples: *Kinder des Windes – Zigeuner in Europa* (1991, SWR); *Bread and TV* (2013, Dir. Georgi Stoev); *Ghetto No.1* (2007, Dir. Ivan Pokorný); *When the Road Bends... Tales of a Gypsy Caravan* (2006, Dir. Jasmine Dellal); or *A Mother* (1972, Ferenc Grunwalsky).

And there was there an herd of many swine feeding on the mountain: and they besought him that he would suffer them to enter into them. And he suffered them.

Then went the devils out of the man, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and were choked. (KJB, Luke 8.32–33)

Attached to the opening credits, this epigraph appears directly after the director's name¹⁰⁵ and stays for good ten seconds against the backdrop of an Orthodox church fresco depicting a man possessed by demons. The man represented on the fresco is naked and in a state of agony, with his hands raised in the air. Two black creatures fly in the whirls of his steaming breath: a devil with a long tail and a dragon with wings. Though small in size, the demonic creatures draw attention to themselves, because they occupy the centre of the frame and their black silhouettes clearly stand out against the whitish clouds of breath exhaled by the man. The biblical quotation appears overlaid upon the fresco, which is a direct invitation to the audience to perceive the 'gypsy' characters in the film through the lens of the Gadarene swine. It is a fitting introduction for a story that revolves around a lust triangle in an isolated 'gypsy' community, a lukewarm drama with incestuous and heathenish undertones that closes with a brutal murder, after which the victim's body is dumped in a lake, while the other two characters vanish into thin air. The character portrayal and their destiny are in line with the customary view that 'gypsies' embody the forces of moral and social disintegration, rightfully rejected as an object of divine punishment. Discussing the quotation from the Gospel of Luke, the Serbian film scholar Nevena Daković succinctly concludes that the "story of Gypsy passion could be read as (cinematic) exorcism, expelling demons/Gypsies and their passions from the normal world" (400).

105 In the film's official press book from 1967, the producer company Avala Film circulated the following paratext signed with the name of the director: "By being on the brink of society, incomplete, constantly searching for something, they [Gypsies] are close to the absolute! And right next to them is the mystery of death which creates for these feather gatherers a specific relationship towards religion; they are neither religious nor antireligious. To these unreachable pagans, religion is similar to the rest – a part of life: grand and horrible, tender and bitter, charming and revengeful, free and luring, exactly the way this film wants to show it" ("Press Book").

Goran Paskaljević's film *Guardian Angel* (1987) is yet another Yugoslavian 'gypsy'-themed production that uses images of swine as a way of signalling the demise of its main hero, who in this case is the investigative journalist Dragan (Ljubiša Samardžić). Principled, brave and kind, Dragan takes to heart the plight of Sajin Saitović (Jakup Amzić), a 'gypsy' boy from the ghetto, sold into slavery in Italy by his destitute father. Dragan is resolved to save the boy from his fate but fails and instead meets his own death. Paskaljević's film grapples with the grim social realities of the 1980s, confronting the viewers with the fact that "over 20,000 gypsy children from all over Yugoslavia are being handed over to the mercy of white slave traders across Europe", as we are informed by the film's afterscript. The socially conscious filmmaker, however, packs the problem of child-trafficking into a noiresque drama in which one high-minded journalist is pitted against the mafia and its 'gypsy' abettors (all 'gypsy' adults in the film, without exception, are either drunk, ill or indifferent, or traffickers themselves), so the tragic ending is fated from the start. Going against good judgement, Dragan pursues his plan, without any support from the police and being warned on all sides that he cannot help Sajin. The futility of his heroic endeavour and tragic death are also foreshadowed by the film's noiresque elements: in one scene, we see Dragan sitting in a dusky hotel room, drinking and smoking, with shadows of the venetian-blinded window across his face; later that night, he is chased through the dark maze of narrow alleys in the 'gypsy' ghetto. The film ends with his dead body lying discarded on the rubbish dump, around it a herd of swine rummaging in search of food. The inexpedient mixing of visual metaphors, *noir* stylistics and almost documentary images of harrowing poverty robs Paskaljević's social critique of its sharp edge; what is worse, it reduces his film to a cautionary tale that predicts the downfall (death) of anyone who dares to change the lot of 'gypsies'.

Unsurprisingly, the image of the pig as a symbol of downfall and disintegration is used in Emir Kusturica's famous work *Black Cat, White Cat* (1998), where it is raised to a new level of surreal explicitness. In the tragicomic fairy-tale world of the film, the director inserts a miniature self-contained story that unfolds parallel to the main action; we watch a huge solitary pig busy eating away at the rotting hulk of an abandoned Trabant (**Fig. 29a**). At regular intervals, the camera returns to the pig, updating us on its progress until the Trabant is completely devoured. This montage sequence is so ludicrous that it impresses itself indelibly upon the memory of anyone who has seen the film. So, here



Fig. 29a and Fig. 29b. Screenshots from *Black Cat, White Cat* (1998, Dir. Emir Kusturica): two visual metaphors of disintegration and downfall – a Trabant being devoured by a pig, and the fall of Dadan (Srđan Todorović).

again, we have an indirect reference to 'gypsies' who, as the main story attests, represent the forces of social disintegration. Their uncontrolled bodily instincts – for which the pig is a visual metaphor – demolish the attainments of the spirit, even the mediocre ones, bringing society to the primordial state of chaos. Discussing the filmmaker's visual style, Bertellini comments that in *Black Cat, White Cat* Kusturica abandoned historical metaphors and opted instead for caricatures; the two examples he gives are the story with the pig and the story of Dadan Karambolo (Srđan Todorović) (104). The fate of the anti-hero Dadan, whose cocaine-induced frenzy fuels the pace of the story, is indeed a caricature of man's fall and a particularly revolting one. At the end of the film, the gun-toting 'gypsy' gangster is exemplarily punished for his cruel insanities – to the viewers' great satisfaction – by having to fall through the floor of an outside toilet, sinking up to his neck in excrement (**Fig. 29b**). As to this ending, a much more pertinent remark comes from J. Hoberman in his review for the *The Village Voice*:

Black Cat, White Cat is determined to twist every character into an ideogram for vulgar humanity. Perhaps these gypsies are a screen on which the Bosnian-born director can project his own feelings of ostracism and homelessness. In any case, the scatological closer rebounds unpleasantly on him.

When considering the storyline of 'gypsy'-themed films, it is mandatory to return once again to Kusturica's breakthrough film *Time of the Gypsies* (1988). It recounts the story of the steep, almost tragic human downfall of its main hero Perhan, an orphan and a 'half-breed' 'gypsy', the bastard child of an unknown Slovenian soldier. His mother is long

since dead and he and his sister Danira are taken care of by their grandmother. Perhan is portrayed as a dreamy, sensitive boy who supports his family by running a small business selling limestone. He is in love with the neighbours' daughter, Azra, whom he charms with his magic stories and telekinetic powers. Perhan asks for Azra's hand in marriage but is snubbed by her shrill, darkish mother, who tells him that her daughter, being a 'white' beauty, is worth millions. After a failed suicide attempt and other misfortunes, Perhan ends up in Milan, where he is offered the opportunity to earn real money by entering the underground world of human trafficking. Basically, the film shows how an honest person is broken; we watch how the gentle and imaginative Perhan transforms into a seasoned criminal, a thief, a pimp and a trafficker of minors. When he returns home to ask a second time for Azra's hand, now filthy rich, he finds out from her mother that Azra has slept with his uncle Merdzan. Almost nine months pregnant, Azra tries to convince Perhan that she is carrying their child, but to no avail. Having lost faith in humanity, Perhan abandons himself to alcohol and debauchery, plans to sell his own child into beggary, indirectly causes Azra's death, becomes a murderer and eventually gets killed. He is shot by an angry bride while trying to jump from a bridge into the open car of a passing freight train, so at the end we see his body falling off a bridge.

In a nutshell, the film narrates the story of the 'gypsy' anti-hero and his futile seeking after 'whiteness' (the 'white' beauty Azra); he ends up in the darkness of moral dissolution, visualised as a literal fatal fall. On a meta-level, his punishment is conceived and exercised by the scriptwriter and the film director. Here, I want to highlight one crucial detail and to show how the psychological motivation of the characters, often vague or even improbable, is sacrificed to the needs of the downward-spiralling storyline. One of the breaking points for Perhan comes when Ruža, Azra's mercantile mother, explains her daughter's pregnancy with the following remark: "She is a woman. She ran around and amused herself." Perhan is already a rich man, able to pay for Azra's 'white' beauty, yet Ruža misleads him into thinking that Azra is pregnant by somebody else. Clearly, Ruža's lie works against her daughter's interests, but also against her own interests, for Azra wants to marry the father of her child while Ruža wants to sell her daughter well. Ruža's insinuation, however, is supportive of the filmmaker's plan to portray the total moral and physical ruin of the 'gypsy' anti-hero. As Hinson remarks in his critical review for *The Washington Post*, when Perhan decides to sell his child, "the film loses its edge and collapses into a funk."

As in *The Gypsy and the Gentleman*, the opening sequence in Kusturica's film prefigures the story to follow. At the start, we have a 'gypsy' bride who laments her ruined wedding, her comatose drunken husband lying upside down in a cart, his head dragging in the mud (compare to **Fig. 3**). The camera cuts to the village fool,¹⁰⁶ who recites in a monologue: "They want to clip my wings. What's a spirit without wings? My soul is free. Free as a bird. (...) When God came down to earth, he couldn't get along with us Gypsies and took the next flight back. Not my fault." The film, as already said, is brought to an end by an angry bride, who gets revenge for her ruined wedding by shooting her husband's murderer, Perhan. At this stage, it is instructive to consider Nebojša Jovanović's unsavoury commentary, quoted below, because it deciphers the 'gypsy' mask as a shorthand for the trajectory of human downfall, inflected in this case both by filmmaker and film scholar in an abominably racist manner:

Time of the Gypsies (1988) opens with a long shot of a muddy Gypsy slum with its picturesque dwellers. One of them is an anonymous man who directly addresses the audience with a muddled rant about his miserable life (...). The shift between Malik's smiling gaze at the end of *Father* and the incoherent rambling of an underdog at the beginning of *Time of the Gypsies* testifies to Kusturica's progressive disillusionment with the Yugoslav condition in the late 1980s. If *Father* ends with the ascendant prospect of an open future, the opening shots of *Time of the Gypsies* challenge that prospect with a descent into dirt and insanity, inviting us to identify with Yugoslav Roma people, the most 'excremental' segment of Yugoslav society. (165)

Though Kusturica's film comes across as erratic, as if defying all genre definitions, it displays with predictable regularity the aesthetic and structural characteristics that I have isolated here as defining for 'gypsy'-themed films. To give further substance to my claim, I shall

106 In his article "Symbols and Dreams: Some Thoughts on Kusturica's *The Time of the Gypsies*", Ian Hancock interprets the character as an unnamed "shaven-headed inmate of the Nazi camps where over a million of Romanies were murdered during the Holocaust" (40–41). The film, however, offers no clues as to the character's identity. Hancock's overly positive reading of Kusturica's work draws heavily on the scholar's knowledge of Roma traditions and hardly on the film itself.

refer to some observations in Bertellini's analysis of the film's narrative structure and artistic influences.¹⁰⁷ The scholar-critic points out that:

Time of the Gypsies is divided into two distinct parts. The first consists of stories and scenes of Gypsy life, featuring a range of original characters. In the second part, attention centers on the young protagonist Perhan, and on his tragic odyssey from adolescence to adulthood, ending with his violent death. (51)

Even though Bertellini sides with Kusturica's unsavoury and unethical mix of crude anthropology and magic realism, he gives ample evidence of the director's central role in the fabrication of the cinematic 'truth' about 'gypsies' from script, through casting and musical score to location shooting, and he mentions that the film is "replete with folkloric and quasi-ethnographic details, featuring dialogues that are for the most part in Romany" (48-49). In addition, in support of my view that 'gypsy'-themed films revive the anarchic energy of the early cinema of attractions, Bertellini adds that *Time of the Gypsies* "has a choppy and surreal narration that carries magic realism to new heights" (49); "it was conceived as a *cinematic experience*, consisting of succession of emotions to live with for two and a half hours, where

107 Setting aside the aesthetic evaluation of the film, it has to be said that Bertellini uncritically reproduces the antigypsy discourse in his references to the Roma minority using disparaging descriptions, such as "the most unmodern European minority" (48), "a nomadic culture that has often been regarded as lacking civil dignity" (49) or "the primitive sounds of the Gypsy community" (61). His probably most perplexing statement is: "[w]e should remember that the oneiric dimension is an integral part of daily Romany life" (53) to explain the surplus of material collected during the film's shooting in Skopje's Roma quarters. Now, the term 'oneiric' is used in film analysis to describe the dream-like quality of the work, while Bertellini treats it as a quality inherent to an existing minority group. Yet, later in the text, he says that Kusturica has been profoundly influenced by Andrey Tarkovsky's oneiric obsessions and the endeavours of this Russian auteur "to enter *visually* into the dreams of his characters" (59-60). Bertellini also refers, in all earnestness, to some of Kusturica's statements that are unabashedly racist. In a section of the book called "Filming Gypsies' Bodies and Colors", the filmmaker is quoted to have said in an interview for *Cineforum* that "Gypsies lead a life and think at a pace that is different from ours. Their body temperature is usually around 100 to 102 degrees Fahrenheit. Music, which is quite present in the film, drives them crazy, and makes them very aggressive. I had to provoke the professional actors and bring them to the same body temperature" (152-153). At the same time, Bertellini refers, albeit briefly, to critical literature on the media representation of the minority and even maintains that Kusturica did not construct his film "on the basis of ethno-racial alterity" (59).

life and death, time and space diverge from their usual Western configurations" (54). The scholar does not fail to notice the characteristic fusion of the ethnographic and the aesthetic – another defining feature of 'gypsy'-themed films – the former lending authority to the filmmaker's community portrait, the latter contributing with visual appeal. In combination, the two elements produce a 'truth' about 'gypsies' that everyone – from ordinary viewers to experienced film experts – embraces with automatic readiness, hypnotised either by the aura of modern science or by the cinematic quality (allure) of the images or by both. Bertellini's eulogist text is just one example; for him "[t]he film is certainly an opportunity for an ethnographic celebration, but it is also infused with cinematic homages and media references" (59). Among the directors whose strong influence he detects in Kusturica's work, he mentions Charlie Chaplin, Orson Welles, John Ford and Andrey Tarkovsky (59–60), later also calling *Time of the Gypsies* Kusturica's *Miracle in Milan* (1951, Dir. Vittorio De Sica) (100). In another essay, Andrew Horton studies *Time of the Gypsies* as a cinematic remake of Francis Coppola's *The Godfather* (1972) and *The Godfather II* (1974). It cannot be disputed that Kusturica's 'gypsies' owe their singular screen presence and visibility to a long-standing tradition of prodigiously talented filmmakers.

In Kusturica's next auteur work, the dominant aesthetic and structural features of 'gypsy'-themed films are present in an even more extreme and self-conscious form, as the following quote by Bertellini illustrates, and from which it also becomes evident that the scholar does not take into consideration the implications of these features:

But in *Black Cat*, *White Cat* there are also important new developments in tone. If in the past Kusturica filled his screenplays with situation devoid of narrative relevance but rich in visual and spectacular effects, here he goes even further. It is as though the entire film were constructed like a series of out-of-phase and isolated sequences whose connection with or position within the flow of events is not all that important for the story's coherence. The relations between the scenes are not dictated by a desire to dramatize the actions of the characters; for one thing, there are no genuine *characters* in *Black Cat*, *White Cat*. They are all, to a certain extent, caricatures. The accumulation (and not the interweaving) of scenes leads to the increase in the delirious and carnivalesque effect. (107)

In defence of the Serbian filmmaker, Bertellini maintains that the caricatures in *Black Cat*, *White Cat* should be viewed as a token that the exaggerations in *Time of the Gypsies* “have not been understood and appreciated, or rather, as though they had been taken all too seriously¹⁰⁸ (which did indeed happen)” (104). The extent to which the issue of ethics in filmic representations remains a blind spot even for Giorgio Bertellini, an associate professor at the University of Michigan, becomes evident when we consider the same scenario but replace the Roma with the African American or Jewish minority. Hardly any film scholar nowadays would think of applauding the stock characters in blackface minstrelsy shows, nor could screen caricatures of Jews be easily played down as harmlessly funny. All the while, and somewhat unwittingly, Bertellini’s perspicacious analysis provides copious evidence in support of the claim that the ‘gypsy’ mask is a highly elaborate artefact; that film directors have to resort to a plethora of conventions, devices and motifs – meticulously crafted over centuries in the media of literature, painting, photography, opera, film and modern science – if they want to infuse their ‘gypsy’ figures with life, if they want to assert the truthfulness and reality, the realness, of their imaginary creations. Wondering “who are the Gypsies in the film”, Bertellini offers the only plausible answer:

One has to think of the Gypsies in the film as an invented community-character, highly eroticized and therefor “true” as a caricature. Although he has never been an ethnographer, Kusturica takes us this time into a dimension of extreme fiction that projects intense poetic constraints on the Gypsies (...). What is Gypsy, then, in the film is much more than the characters and the story. Instead, one must think on the level of pure textual surfaces, evident in the casting (...), the costumes, the makeup, the free editing, the highly-coloured cinematography, and the histrionic music. We should also consider the paratextual and extratextual levels: note the effect that the “Gypsy” element has on Kusturica’s authorship, a true Gypsy of international productions, the celebrated champion of antinaturalism, magic realism (...), and caricatural irreverence. (104)

108 In a filmed interview disseminated as DVD bonus material to *Time of the Gypsies*, Kusturica explains in all earnestness: “Gypsies when they keep the mobile phone in their hands, it’s apparently not like in our case who... race-wise who design it but in the Gypsy’s case it’s beautiful because instantly you have a communication in between medieval age and modernity” (“Rencontre”).

In the next chapter, the focus shifts to the formal aspects of the 'gypsy' mask, highlighting some of the cinematic devices involved in the fabrication of this material surface. In this chapter, however, I have demonstrated that the artfully constructed 'gypsy' face is lined with specific content representing a dynamic constellation of qualities, values and traits that encompass almost all spheres of human life and that mirror in reverse the shifting grid of qualities, values and traits that constitute the cultural norm. Historical developments may inflect its malleable content matrix in various ways, but pared down to its basic meaning, the 'gypsy' mask is our culture's sign for social disintegration *per se*. Consider, for example, the two diametrically opposed norms propagated in *The Gypsy and the Gentleman* and in *King of the Gypsies*. In the first film, an aristocrat is ruined because he rebels against the norm of arranged marriage, taking a 'gypsy' as a wife; in the second film, 'gypsies' fail to embrace the norm of love marriage and are doomed to perdition for adhering to the anti-norm of arranged marriage. Clearly, the stories manifest and negotiate the normative worldviews of two different historical periods, but in both films, the 'gypsy' role stands for the equally possible life trajectory of deviation and, as a consequence, it is exemplarily subjected to the most severe punishment. The disciplining message of the plot in 'gypsy'-themed films remains an invariable constant. Conventionally, the 'gypsy' mask is used to represent outlawed or even tabooed emotional states, the mixed bag of moods and feelings that come to the surface in carnivalesque reversals, and this psychic disorderliness, in turn, is reflected in the episodic structure and genre hybridity of 'gypsy'-themed films. Artists like Emir Kusturica turn to this ready-made and universally recognisable mask to express their sense of existential lostness, confusion or alienation, and they do it convinced of being genuinely revolutionary. What they fail to realise is that the 'gypsy' mask is a product of the status quo, its Other face, and has the important function of re-directing the energy of revolt towards the cultural periphery and away from the cultural centre against which it is aimed.