

# 7

## Formal Analysis of the ‘Gypsy’ Mask or the ‘Gypsy’ Mask as a Set of Cinematographic Conventions and Devices

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*We know a thing by its opposite.*

Blaine Brown (40)

In the preceding chapter, the notion of the ‘gypsy’ mask has been employed as a meta-term to denote an abstract cluster of attributes that underwrites the ‘gypsy’ role and its universe, the mythic anti-world of ‘gypsies’. In this chapter, the focus will shift from the content to the form and materiality of screen images and, therefore, the term ‘gypsy’ mask will also be used in a very concrete sense, to refer to the artistic rendition of the human face and figure on the two-dimensional surface of the silver screen.

To make the ‘gypsy’ figure legible for cinema audiences, filmmakers avail themselves of a broad palette of visual devices and tools, such as lighting, framing, editing, colour schemes, make-up, hair-grooming, costumes and props, etc. Not only are these visual elements numerous and diverse, but they can be employed in countless combinations to accommodate the film genre and its conventions, as well as the filmmaker’s artistic style. Cinematic tools and conventions have evolved immensely since the early days of cinema, so it is also crucial to bear in mind that the technical options available to the first filmmakers differ greatly from the range of options directors have at their disposal nowadays. For all these reasons, it is

impossible to pick out a specific and relatively stable set of cinematic tools and devices and claim that it is characteristic of 'gypsy'-themed films in general; instead, it is more productive to study the deployment of the historically available visual elements in the context of individual works. Common to all 'gypsy'-themed films, though, is a visual design that employs a sharp colour-coded dichotomy, juxtaposing the 'white' mask against the 'gypsy' mask and their mythic worlds. In early silent film, as well as in very recent films, the rich panoply of available visual elements is invariably harnessed to stylise the norm-setting ethno-social identity as white, in opposition to the black/non-white 'gypsies'. Almost without exception, 'gypsy' characters in 'gypsy'-themed films are portrayed metaphorically and/or literally as 'non-white'/'black', often presented in a realist style that alludes to and borrows from the authority of ethnographic documentation, reducing 'gypsy' protagonists to generic figures and depriving them of an elaborate individuality. For the sake of contrast, characters representing the normative ethno-social identity in 'gypsy'-themed films are, as a rule of thumb, conspicuous blond-haired types.

In the previous chapter, we saw that the content matrix undergirding the 'gypsy' mask is antithetical to the model (= 'white') human being and its aspirational qualities; the 'gypsy' mask designates in a summary form the depravity of human nature, providing an instructively entertaining spectacle of the fallen human being and his/her inner values, traits, gestures, emotional states, acts, and life-script trajectory. Visually, the embodied anti-norm is marked by a symbolic colour: black as well as all its non-white substitutes, such as soiled white, black-and-white stripes and/or patterns, signal red, a mix of variegated colours and patterns. The formal analysis of 'gypsy'-themed films, therefore, foregrounds the colour symbolism of the 'gypsy' mask as well as its complex and often ambivalent relationship to film lighting, facial visibility and realist skin colour. The leading questions concerning form to be tackled in this chapter can be summed up as follows: How is the 'gypsy' mask modelled by means of any of the following visual tools and devices: lighting style, colour control in lighting, use of lenses, choice of location, camera angles, set design and colour scheme, set dressing, wardrobe, make-up, casting choice? What qualities are ascribed to it through the use of these visual elements? Is it crafted in juxtaposition to the 'white' mask and how? Who in the film is privileged by the use of

facial lighting, close-ups and white colour schemes? Who is de-individualised and how? Is the film explicitly intent on producing difference on the level of skin colour? What aesthetic strategies does it pursue to achieve this goal?

### 7.1 Colour Schemes in *Gucha – Distant Trumpet* (2006), Serbia

The feature fiction film *Gucha – Distant Trumpet* (2006), written and directed by Dušan Milić, readily lends itself to analysis of the various visual elements that are regularly employed for the cinematic construction of the 'gypsy' mask. The Serbian filmmaker makes a very straightforward, deliberate use of lighting and colour schemes, set design and dressing, wardrobe, make-up, hair styling and casting to stylise Serbians (representatives of the dominant culture) as 'white' in opposition to Serbian 'gypsies', who are portrayed as 'black'. In this section, I examine how the opening sequence in *Gucha* [00'51:3'40] establishes the two opposing worlds associated with the 'white' mask and the 'gypsy' mask. Here is how the film begins: after showing footage from the real-life Brass Festival in the village of Gucha, which imparts a documentary aura to his work, Milić acquaints us in a three-minute sequence with the rivalry between two Serbian orchestras. The one called Vladisho Trandafilović – Satchmo represents the national majority; the other, called the Sandokan Tigers, stands for the minority. The rivalry between the two bands, which is to unfold over the course of the story, satirises the strained relationship between these two groups in Serbian society. The camera introduces first the main 'gypsy' character, the young trumpeter Romeo (Marko Marković), while he is playing together with his fellow musicians in the dim interior of a crowded restaurant boat. The place gives an impression of a murky underworld populated by swarthy males: the faces of the 'gypsy' musicians are poorly lit; as the camera moves from one musician to the other, we can see the dense shadow of a trumpet crossing one of the faces, literally blotting it out. The sense of darkness is reinforced by the fact that all the trumpeters wear identical dark blue shirts and black trousers. It is also apparent that during the casting, preference was given to darker types; their phenotypical colour is accentuated in addition by the hair styling: all the men have relatively long black hair.

The shots acquainting us with the 'gypsy' orchestra alternate through parallel editing with shots of the Serbian orchestra playing at

a wedding in the next restaurant boat. A series of medium shots focus attention on its lead trumpeter Satchmo (Mladen Nelević). Unlike the 'gypsy' band, the Serbian musicians are shown outside, on a raft<sup>109</sup> flooded in sunlight that brings out the shine of their uniform-like white shirts and gold ties, the outline of a modern cityscape in the background. The men have their hair cropped short, so in spite of being mostly brunets, their hair colour has little impact on the overall colour scheme. The mise-en-scène is dominated by the colours of light: gold and white. The camera cuts to the bride, radiant in her pristine white dress, and the groom, who wears a beige suit; the wedding decorations are also in white, with masses of white balloons filling up the frame.

In a fit of competition, the two orchestras abandon their engagements and move to confront each other. The 'gypsy' trumpeters rush out of the dark boat's belly and align themselves along the raft edge, so that they can face their Serbian rivals, who gather at the railing on the opposite raft. Anchored on the riverbank, the two restaurant boats have almost identical rafts that are situated within earshot of each other, so while the rival bands can show off with their musical dexterity, they stay framed through the set design as two distinct groups separated by a stretch of water. A long shot of Satchmo's orchestra and its cheering crowd shows them enveloped, as if in a group portrait picture, with a festoon of white balloons, their gold ties and brass trumpets glittering in the sun. The sun is overhead, producing a flattering top-light on the Serbian musicians, with a good amount of bounce light from below (**Fig. 30a**). In fact, the front lighting is so strong that the men have to squint their eyes, one of them even shading his eyes with a hand. The musicians at the railing are joined by a brunette with blonde highlights in her hair, who cheers with them, the pale gold colour of her blouse rhyming with their gold sparkle. The woman is Satchmo's wife and Juliana's mother; Juliana (Aleksandra Manasijević) is the film's main female character and the apple of her father's eye. Soon the girl is also introduced, in a separate frame, gazing out of a window decorated with a festoon of white balloons (**Fig. 31a**). The filmmaker uses a frame-within-a-frame composition to focus attention on Juliana's sweet, innocent face: she is fair-skinned, blue-eyed, with long golden hair, to which the camera is soon to pay

109 The film's shooting location is the famous Belgrade moored floats (in Serbian called '*splavovi*'): these are floating boats or anchored rafts holding up cafés, restaurants or clubs.



**Fig. 30a and Fig. 30b.** Screenshots from *Gucha – Distant Trumpet* (2006, Dir. Dušan Milić): the Serbian orchestra Vladisho Trandafilović – Satchmo marked by the colours of bright daylight, and the ‘gypsy’ orchestra the Sandokan Tigers marked by the colours of night’s darkness.



**Fig. 31a and Fig. 31b.** Screenshots from *Gucha – Distant Trumpet* (2006, Dir. Dušan Milić): Juliana (Aleksandra Manasijević), the blue-eyed, blonde-haired beauty who serves as a cue, prompting the viewers to perceive her fellow people in the modus of the ‘white’ mask; Sandokan (Slavoljub Pesić), the leader of the Sandokan Tigers, has a distinctly darker face that serves as visual cue, prompting the viewers to perceive his fellows in the modus of the ‘gypsy’ mask.

a special tribute.<sup>110</sup> The blonde maiden is placed slightly above all the other protagonists in the scene, as befits someone who is closest to the aspirational ideal of ‘whiteness’.

By contrast, the mise-en-scène of the ‘gypsy’ orchestra and their cheering fans is dominated by the colours of darkness: black and dark blue, invigorated by elements in bright red, such as tablecloths, decorative flags and t-shirts (**Fig. 30b**). Unlike the Serbian musicians, the

110 Exactly ten minutes into the film, there is an entire scene dedicated to Juliana’s blonde hair [10’06:11’21]. For over a minute and a half, we watch the girl unfasten, shampoo under the shower, dry, comb and plait her beautiful, waist-long, golden hair. At first, Juliana is alone, to be joined later by her black pet lamb, which goes by the name Cigo. One cannot skate over the allusion of the black animal and its name Cigo to the denigrating term *cigan/циган* in Serbian.

'gypsy' musicians are not top-lit but backlit by the sunlight, with the result that their faces and bodies appear overshadowed. The camera cuts to a closer view of Sandokan (Slavoljub Pesić), lingering for a moment on his distinctly swarthy face (**Fig. 31b**); set against his white shirt (the latter is used as a neutral reference for the white balance), it comes off as a dark spot. The attention to his appearance has a strategic function: it literally adds skin colour to the collective portrait of the 'gypsy' band and provides a visual cue for the spectators, prompting them to perceive the entire group as 'non-white' in the modus of the 'gypsy' mask. The woman who finds her way to the centre of the 'gypsy' band is a black-haired temptress, her curvaceous figure outlined by a tight-fitting, glittering silver dress. She wears bright red lipstick, which is yet another detail alluding to her allegedly passionate 'gypsy' nature. With an agitated gesture, she takes a deep pull at her cigarette, then energetically swaps it for a microphone and starts singing. The song lyrics also deserve some attention here, because they address the colour/light contrasts worked out at the level of imagery and furnish a mythic frame of interpretation:

The one over there, no, she's not me.  
That one stole my love.  
The one over there, on your shoulder, she's not me.  
Her hair is blonde, not black like the night. [my translation, R.M.]

In a very elliptic manner, the last line construes similarity between daylight and blond hair, evoking in the same breath its logical inversion: night-time and black hair. In Milić's film, blond hair functions not only as an embodied metaphor of light but – through the figure of Satchmo's daughter Juliana – it is also made a distinguishing attribute of Satchmo's band, and by extension of the Serbian 'white' nation. All the while, black hair being an embodied metaphor of darkness is made a characteristic sign of the Sandokan Tigers, and by extension of the 'non-white' Serbian minority. In the film's visual design, the figurative meaning of light (white, fair and good) and darkness (black, ugly and bad) is expanded through the phenotypical feature of hair colour to include a biological ('white'/'non-white' 'race') and ideological ('white' nation/'non-white' minority) signification.

In its opening sequence, Milić's fiction film already establishes an unbreachable rift between two groups of people within Serbian society, constructing 'ethno-racial' alterity by the coordinated use of numerous visual elements: choice of location, the film's lighting and colour

palette, costumes, props, hair styling, make-up, casting and editing. It is insightful to specify the visual tools and devices used to design each of these two worlds. Put in abstract terms, we can say that in the introductory sequence, the world of the 'white' mask is modelled through profusion of sunlight, the colours white and gold, uniform costumes consisting of white shirts with gold ties and ochre trousers, neatly cropped hair for the men and blonde hair for the women, a cast of 'normal' types. In keeping with the principle of obverse mirroring, the world of the 'gypsy' mask is modelled through profusion of shadow, the colours black, dark blue and silver, uniform costumes consisting of dark blue shirts without ties, black trousers, black longish hair for men and women, a cast of swarthy types. The contrast is also emphasised through the use of rhythmic parallel editing; its metaphoric meaning is also intimated in the song lyrics. Without doubt, the film's visual design aims to evoke the archetypal opposition between light and darkness (absence of light), bringing Satchmo's brass band into association with daytime and golden sunlight, while the Sandokan Tigers are associated, as far as the circumstances allow it, with night-time and silver moonlight. As for the cast, let us be reminded here that Dušan Milić works with select actors who are chosen on the basis of their only slightly differing flesh tones, a difference that the filmmaker deliberately magnifies through strategic deployment of lighting, costumes and grooming to produce two 'races' within Serbian society: a 'white' national majority and a 'black' minority. In a video interview, Milić provides a forthright rationale for his choice of visual storytelling elements:

On the first picture, you have two completely different worlds: one is black and the other is white. For me that was the most interesting conflict. Through that conflict, I tried to raise the forbidden love story. A film is a picture. If you have two very similar faces, people can be, maybe, sometimes, you know, not so sure what they are looking at. Because of that I wanted to have the girl Juliana with green eyes or blue eyes and blond hair and the complete opposite to her: this Gypsy Roma boy who is completely black, you know. From their skins, from their completely different cultures, this music is completely different. (*Gucha* DVD)

The broken syntax in the last sentence, in which the director first decides for one object ("skins") and then complements and clarifies it

## Formal Analysis of the 'Gypsy' Mask



**Fig. 32a and Fig. 32b.** Screenshots from *Gucha – Distant Trumpet* (2006, Dir. Dušan Milić): Satchmo's brass band in traditional Serbian dress, in sharp contrast to the Sandokan Tigers, who wear Italian purple suits with large tiger-patterned lapels.

with another ("cultures"), clearly evidences the logical slip by which skin colour difference is equated with cultural difference. This difference is, moreover, perceived as unbridgeable in spite of the fact that "Serbians are living for a long, long time, for decades, for centuries with the Roma people and they have developed some special connections", as the director himself acknowledges in the interview (*Gucha* DVD). Near the film's end, Milić creates another colour-coded contrast between 'white' and 'gypsy' Serbians that also deserves a brief mention here (see also Section 8.3). During the climactic competition for the Golden Trumpet Award, Satchmo's brass band appears on-stage in traditional Serbian attire: the trumpeters play costumed in white shirts decorated with intricate embroidery (**Fig. 32a**). The Sandokan Tigers, by contrast, are dressed up in shiny purple suits with large tiger-patterned lapels; a point is made to inform the viewers that the purple suits were ordered especially for the occasion from Italy (**Fig. 32b**). The clear-cut separation created through the choice of costumes sheds light on the polysemic and slippery nature of antigypsyism. Dressed up in their imported garish suits, the 'gypsy' musicians – and by extension the entire ethnic minority – are branded not only as 'ethno-racially' different, that is, as 'non-white'/'coloured' and somewhat animal-like, but also as symbolic foreigners to the Serbian national project.

There is something ironic about the film's blatant use of racialising imagery and symbolism. Dušan Milić adopts, in all earnestness, the black-and-white lens towards his protagonists in order to expose and satirise racism (antigypsyism) at the level of the narrative. Invoking association with Shakespeare's tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*, he produces a light-hearted semi-documentary comedy with a happy ending, in which the main 'gypsy' hero is celebrated for his ability to end up victorious



and transcend the boundaries between majority and minority. Romeo outplays Juliana's father Satchmo at the Gucha Trumpet Competition, earning himself the right to become his son-in-law. The story's message is clearly at odds with the film's visual design. It would be interesting to examine, scene by scene, the conflicting meanings that arise from the film's racialised look and its anti-racist narrative, how these two storytelling levels contend for domination, subvert or support each other. Questions concerning the film's ideological implications, however, go beyond the scope of this section. It suffices to provide here only one quote from the director's comment published in the film's press book:

Before I started making this film I had intended to tell a Bollywood-style story of forbidden love; a colourful, lyrical, film about two teenagers from totally different worlds, socially and – more importantly – racially. Two people whose love for one another is prevented from flowering because of the environment they live in.

What I wanted to highlight was the power of the force opposing them. The racial problem alone was potent enough to build the story around, but I wasn't interested in only that. I didn't just want to make a real-life story revealing the dark sides of human nature, where aggression and rivalry explode ending in bloodshed, and I didn't want a sad end, demonstrating how cruel life can be.

My mission here was to portray the main character – a talented gypsy trumpet player who – with his instrument as his only weapon – matures through music, finds love and discovers the world of his elders, regardless of their skin colour. (Milić 3)

The director's comment is an industry-created paratext that was circulated during the Panorama of the 57<sup>th</sup> Berlin Film Festival. It is important to mention it here, because – while denouncing racism – it foregrounds the notions of 'race' and 'racial' difference as one of its basic tenets, and thus sets the interpretative frame for the story and determines how it will be received by professionals, the media and wider audiences.

To wrap up, the opening sequence in *Gucha* offers a particularly dense example of the various tools and devices that filmmakers resort to when modelling the 'gypsy' mask on the big screen. Dušan Milić creates two collective portraits, fabricating a colour-coded difference between the two by means of highly contrastive colour and lighting schemes,

layered with archetypal symbolism and reinforced by a casting based on skin tone. Commonplace as this approach may be in the industry of 'gypsy'-themed films, it represents – and this has to be underscored here – a glaring instance of racialisation. The sequence illustrates the effect of radical Othering that visual elements have when harnessed *en masse* and when their message is supported by official paratexts. What is more, by using the above-described devices, Dušan Milić, or virtually any filmmaker, can produce a 'white' and a 'black' 'race' within or among any of the European nations and cinematically reify imaginary divides that pit national majorities against a given minority, but also Europe's North against the South, or the West against the East. The question is what makes Dušan Milić's visual design in *Gucha* so unobtrusively normal.

## 7.2 Europe's Golden-haired Nations vs 'Gypsies'

*Hair of Gold, Heart of Gold*  
TV Tropes

Impossible as it is to make sweeping generalisations about the formal aspects that are singularly characteristic of 'gypsy'-themed films, Dušan Milić's work exemplifies one common black-and-white perception lens: visualised in juxtaposition to 'gypsies', national majorities in Europe and the USA appear to be markedly blond (**Fig. 33**, **Fig. 47a**, **Fig. 48b**, and **Fig. 49a**). If we consider that a film cast is selected from a wide spectrum of possible human types ranging from pale-skinned blonds to swarthy brunets, then we can establish the following rule of thumb. To signal that a figure belongs to the national majority, filmmakers tend to choose individuals from the light end of the spectrum, casting blond actors and especially blonde actresses as emblematic embodiments of the 'white' nation and/or its blue-blooded aristocracy. When Roma are selected for a 'gypsy'-themed film – in the majority of cases as authentication extras – preference is given to individuals from the dark end of the spectrum; their swarthy appearance gives a visual cue to the viewers, prompting them to perceive the entire minority in the modus of the 'gypsy' mask. In turn, celebrity stars cast to perform in 'gypsy' mask tend to be brunets. In terms of skin and hair tone, they occupy the ambivalent middle of the human type spectrum. This pattern of



**Fig. 33.** Screenshot from *Gucha – Distant Trumpet* (2006, Dir. Dušan Milić): a medium two-shot of golden-blonde Juliana (Aleksandra Manasijević) and her black-haired Romeo (Marko Marković); the forbidden love between the Serbian 'white' nation and its 'non-white' minority triumphs.

casting based on hair colour and skin tone is ubiquitous in European and US American cinema. Augmented by the wide palette of cinematic visual tools and devices, it provides for a spectacle of sharp, racialising contrasts in which the colours 'white' and 'black' are richly layered with metaphoric and emotional content. The examples of racialising visual designs in films are countless. The male 'gypsy' protagonists in *Hot Blood*, *The King of the Gypsies* (**Fig. 25a** and **Fig. 25b**) and *Queen of the Gypsies*, for instance, have hapless affairs with females from the majority society, all of whom are conspicuous if not exaggerated blondes. Also yellow blond is Phoebus in the animated version of *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* (1996, Dir. Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise), set against a black-haired and dusky Esmeralda (**Fig. 16a** and **Fig. 16b**) and so on. Blond hair has been glamorised and fetishised through film lighting in ways that no other artistic medium has achieved before and, obviously, filmmakers do not hesitate to avail themselves of this visual shorthand, effectively underscoring the 'whiteness' of Europe's national majorities.

Regrettably, even filmmakers who are sympathetic to the plight of Roma seem to make an automatic use of blond-haired actors to mark representatives of the national culture. Consider, for instance, the short fiction film *Remember* (2017, Dir. Igor Kachur), in which the story of the Roma Holocaust in Ukraine is recounted<sup>111</sup> (**Fig. 34**). The young

111 The producer of the short film (13'24 mins) is the Ukrainian Roma Petro Rusanienko; his project was supported by the International Renaissance Foundation (IRF).



**Fig. 34.** Screenshot from the short film *Remember* (2017, Dir. Igor Kachur): a two-shot of the persecuted black-haired Romni Lyalya (Serine Sianosyan), who finds a temporary hiding place in the house of blonde Maria (Anastasiya Pustovit).

filmmaker condenses the historical events to a brief but highly dramatic encounter between two young women: the black-haired Lyalya (Serine Sianosyan), who stands for the Ukrainian Roma, and the pale-skinned, blonde-haired Maria (Anastasiya Pustovit), who represents the Ukrainian national majority.

Another example of unwitting racialisation comes from the children's animation *Bango Vassil* (2016), scripted and directed by the Berlin-based Bulgarian filmmakers Milen Vitanov and Vera Trajanova.<sup>112</sup> The artists take a local custom – the celebration of Bango Vassil, which is popular among Bulgarian Roma – and weave it into a universal story about overcoming prejudice and experiencing the gift of friendship. As in Igor Kachur's *Remember*, their film presents a brief but intensely dramatic encounter between a 'gypsy' and a representative of the national culture; in this case, these are the 'gypsy' girl Ati and the Bulgarian boy Emil. In tune with the pictorial tradition of pitting the 'gypsy' mask against the 'white' mask, Ati is darker-skinned and with long black hair, while Emil is lighter-skinned and yellow-haired (**Fig. 35a**). When assessing a film's cast, there is always the possibility that the director has been influenced in his/her choice of actors by accidental factors. Animators, however, have full control over their characters' appearance and can specify their features to the minutest detail. For that reason,

<sup>112</sup> The animated short (8'30 mins) is a German-Bulgarian production, supported by the Robert Bosch Stiftung, BKM/Kuratorium Junger Deutscher Film, Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg and Bulgarian National Film Center.

it is worth paying closer attention to the colour-coded dichotomy that organises the fictional world of *Bango Vassil*. It is striking that, compared to Emil and his playmates, Ati is emphatically marked as 'non-white'. The 'gypsy' girl stands out with her darker skin tone (produced through the finely nuanced contrast with her head-enveloping flesh-coloured hat), her thick, brush-like black eyebrows and her waist-length, pitch-black hair. By contrast, Emil and his playmates all share the same 'normal' skin tone (no colour contrast is sought in their case) and thin eyebrows, and have a variety of hair colours (**Fig. 35b**). In addition to being marked as 'non-white', Ati is also the only one to wear a knit hat with bear ears that move when she walks; though endearing, this visual detail may be interpreted as an allusion to the supposed affinity 'gypsies' have with nature and animals or as an allusion to a clichéd feature of 'gypsy' culture. The story is set in the open, in a snow-covered forest populated by talking animals and the latter inevitably invite a comparison with the girl. (In fact, visual allusions to wild animals are often used by filmmakers to characterise a 'gypsy' figure; consider the 'gypsy' trumpeters in *Gucha*, who are likened to tigers, or the title character in *Gipsy Anne*, who wears raptor feathers in her hair.) So, the attempt to tell a local story with universal appeal that every child can relate to makes *Bango Vassil* a telling example of an artwork that, while designed with the best intentions and great skill, reproduces the racialising aesthetics spawned by the 'gypsy' mask.



**Fig. 35a and Fig. 35b.** Screenshots from the short animation *Bango Vassil* (2016, Dir. Milen Vitanov, and Vera Trajanova), in which the 'gypsy' girl Ati is portrayed with waist-long black hair and thick black eyebrows. Following the logic of racialisation, Emil, the 'white' Bulgarian boy, who undergoes a cathartic ordeal together with Ati, is yellow-haired. Ati is also the only child to wear a brown knit hat with bear ears.

### 7.3 Elements of Visual Style and Facial Visibility

*Die unterhaltendste Fläche auf der Erde für uns  
ist die vom menschlichen Gesicht.*

Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, "Sudelbücher"

By convention, the 'gypsy' mask is brought to life in artworks as a universally recognisable sign that signifies *absence of light* (or *shadow*). This meaning can be interpreted figuratively to refer to *darkness*, that is, *the dark side of human nature*, and/or 'ethno-racially', to indicate *the character's belonging to the 'non-white'/'black' part of the spectrum of human groupings*. As we saw in the previous section, in the medium of film, a whole arsenal of visual tools and devices is mobilised to model the 'gypsy' mask on the screen – from lighting through colour schemes to casting, whereby the metaphoric shadiness of the 'gypsy' mask and/or its 'ethno-racial' 'non-whiteness' is coded on one or more levels: it can be marked via costumes, through the rendering of face and hair colour, and/or by the figure's integration in the setting.

Again, by convention, the main function of the 'gypsy' mask is to furnish a dark contrastive background for the 'white' hero who can stand out in relief against it. This is to say that in purely aesthetic terms, the 'gypsy' mask confers visibility on the 'white' mask and is therefore suited to performing auxiliary roles. When elevated to the status of a main hero, the 'gypsy' figure presents – not only from a narrative but also from an aesthetic point of view – a contradiction in terms. The main hero, as a rule, is both individualised and credited with the limelight. By directing the spotlight towards the 'gypsy' figure, the filmmaker has the challenging task of bringing this figure out of the shadows, illuminating its face and making it visible in all its individuality. This is further complicated by the fact that 'gypsy' roles are often performed by (inter)national celebrities, that is, by glamorous 'white' faces whom (inter)national audiences strongly identify with in the pro-filmic world. Since 'gypsy'-themed films lay claim to a so-called authenticity, filmmakers have to juggle numerous variables that pertain, on the one hand, to the film's diegesis and, on the other hand, to the socio-historical world inhabited by the spectators. To illustrate the difficulty of negotiating visual elements from the film's narrative world that are of relevance to the socio-historical world of the audience, we can consider two screenshots from Frank Pierson's film *King*

of *the Gypsies*. The first is a close two-shot that shows the handsome ‘gypsy’ David cheek to cheek with his blonde girlfriend Sharon; both roles are performed by actors from the dominant culture: the debuting Eric Roberts (Julia Roberts’ brother) and Annette O’Toole, the “go-to actress for all-American girlfriend roles” (Sweeny) (**Fig. 25a**). When Sharon and David’s heads are in the same frame, Sharon is clearly privileged by the composition: her blonde hair and pale-skinned face are beautifully illuminated and in full view, while David’s head is cast down, his face in shadow, so that his dark-brown hair comes to the fore. In the medium two-shot (**Fig. 25b**), Sharon’s face is foregrounded again and juxtaposed to David’s backgrounded reflection in the mirror. Elaborately composed, these two-shots evidence that the director Frank Pierson has compromised the facial visibility of the titular character (David will become the new king of the ‘gypsies’) for the sake of the colour contrast that runs through his entire film (see also Section 6.2). Pierson’s solution is just one of the many possible options, as we are about to see.

Taken as a whole, the specific difficulty of filming the ‘gypsy’ mask in a lead role arises from the complex interplay of casting choice, the film’s visual aesthetics and design, and its narrative structure. Therefore, to enable the comparative analysis of ‘gypsy’-themed productions at the level of form, our initial catalogue of questions has to be expanded with the following queries: Is it an early film or a later, more technically advanced production? What range of options does the filmmaker have at his disposal, especially when it comes to the rendering of facial and hair colour? Does the filmmaker use close-ups as an element of his visual language? Has the filmmaker developed a consistent pattern of contrasts between the ‘white’ mask and the ‘gypsy’ mask in his film? Or is it a film that brackets out the world of the ‘white’ mask, concentrating entirely on the world of the ‘gypsy’ mask? Does the film strengthen the message of its fictional story by claiming to present a truthful slice of ‘reality’ and feigning ethnographic documentation? As all these questions make it clear, the analysis has to account for a large number of variables, so it is hardly possible to draw general conclusions. A more useful approach is to consider the unique solutions individual filmmakers have opted for, and we shall do so by taking a close look at two black-and-white productions with a ‘gypsy’ female character in the lead: the 1920 Norwegian film *Gipsy Anne* and the 2013 Polish film *Papusza*.

### 7.3.1 Facial Visibility, Character Centrality and White Make-up in *Gipsy Anne* (1920), Norway

Rasmus Breistein's silent film *Gipsy Anne* (1920) takes us back to the early days of cinema when filmmakers had at their disposal a considerably limited palette of technical options. Examined next to recent productions, such as *Gucha* (2006) or *Papusza* (2013), Breistein's carefully thought-out film instructs us about the axiomatic interdependence of facial visibility, character centrality and white make-up that operated in early black-and-white films. Heavy white make-up was indispensable in the first days of filmmaking as it had two fundamental functions: by rendering the face literally white, it ensured its radiant visibility on the screen, so that the white (= visible) face also signalled the character's prominent place in the story. However, before examining the multiplicity of meanings generated by the masks of white make-up in this Norwegian 'gypsy'-themed film, it is necessary to give a short summary of the story.

The film is about Anne, a 'gypsy' foundling raised by a family of rich Norwegian farmers.<sup>113</sup> The opening sequence focuses on the childhood pranks of Gipsy Anne, who is portrayed in clear opposition to her slightly younger stepbrother Haldor. An intertitle informs us from the very start that "the girl was a wild one", whereas "Haldor was more of a silent tranquil boy." Three brief episodes from Gipsy Anne and Haldor's childhood are recounted in the film's prologue, which should prepare the viewer for the drama in their adult lives. In the first episode, Gipsy Anne climbs up a big birch tree and destroys a bird's nest. Two farmhands come along and, seeing the misdeed, punish Haldor, while Anne hides in the grass and laughs at him. In the second episode, Anne shows a precocious interest in love affairs, and after spying on a courting couple, she urges Haldor to behave like her sweetheart and kiss her on the mouth. In the third episode, Anne takes Haldor to a creek that is off limits for the children; the boy falls into the water, gets wet

113 The story set-up is a symmetric inversion of the kidnapping tale; the axis of inversion is the common theme underlining the foundling/kidnapping narratives: the unchangeability of inborn human nature. In other words, these two types of stories both explore the question of nature vs. nurture, upholding the essentialist view of the unchangeably noble nature of the Self and the incorrigibly wild nature of the Other. It is notable that when a 'gypsy' child is raised by 'whites', whereby its wild nature is put on display, the child is always a foundling. Conversely, when a 'white' child is raised by 'gypsies', whereby the constancy of its noble nature is put to a test, the child is, by all means, a stolen one.



and returns home crying. In a fit of anger, the mother shouts at Anne: “You only stir misery. You don’t belong here and should never have been allowed to stay here at Storlien, you little rogue.” That is how both Anne and the spectators learn about her ‘gypsy’ origins.

The story proper expands on these three episodes. Grown-up Haldor (Lars Tvinde), the richest and most sought-after bachelor in the village, has a playful relationship with Anne, who works at the family’s summer farm. Haldor sets out to build a big house, and when Anne raises the question of marriage, he promises to share his life with her in the new place. Haldor’s mother (Johanne Bruhn) is against their union and tells her son that he cannot take a woman of unknown origin. Easily swayed by her words, Haldor proposes to another girl, the rich and respectable Margit (Kristine Ullmo), who befits his social status. Deeply hurt and carried away by her impulsive nature, Anne destroys Haldor’s “nest”, setting his new house on fire. This time the damage is paid by the cotter Jon (Einar Tveito), who has all along been protective of Anne. In court, Jon takes the blame for the arson and goes to prison. When he comes out, he suggests to Anne and his mother (Henny Skjønberg) that they leave for America. The last intertitle announces a happy end: “And on the next American line ship, three happy people crossed the ocean. They travelled to the country where every man can be himself – without class difference and prejudice.” The film has a complex message that transforms the conventional binary opposition of Self and Other in a surprising way. While maintaining that ‘gypsies’ are incorrigibly different, it also employs the plastic figure of Gipsy Anne to level criticism at the social mores in Norway, thereby shifting the spotlight from the rich farmer Haldor to the cotter Jon; as it were, the story’s ending restructures the chain of events in retrospect, showing Jon to be the real hero and a model worthy of emulation. We are reminded that none other but the humble cotter Jon saves baby Anne’s life when her mother is turned away by Haldor’s family and left to die of exhaustion in their barn. He comforts the girl when her stepmother disowns her, and it is again Jon who asks Anne for her hand in an attempt to spare her the pain of seeing Haldor marry another woman. Jon’s compassion, patience, self-sacrifice and unflinching love transform Gipsy Anne into a likeable character and bring about the story’s happy ending.<sup>114</sup>

114 As pointed out in Chapter Two, the film marks a number of firsts for Norwegian cinema: *Gipsy Anne* is the first film shot by a Norwegian director in Norway with a story based on a Norwegian novel; it is the first film to make use of professional actors and the first to receive support from an official institution. Moreover,



**Fig. 36.** Screenshot from *Gipsy Anne* (1920, Dir. Rasmus Breistein): Gipsy Anne (Aasta Nielsen) in her new role as a nanny taking care of two town children; the three of them are clad in impeccable white from head to toe.

At this stage, we can direct our attention to the film's symbolic imagery. Rasmus Breistein takes recourse to costuming to create and model Anne's plastic alterity: as a small girl, Gipsy Anne wears a dark dress with an eye-catching pattern of stripes and not the radiantly white, doll-like dress that little girls invariably sport in early film. Instead of a big white ribbon, she has striped raptor feathers as hair decoration. Grown-up Anne, however, wears a traditional Sunday dress, identical with the dresses worn by the other village girls of marriageable age (notably, the imagery in Breistein's silent film allows one to imagine the 'gypsy' as part of the nation, unlike the imagery in Dušan Milić's recent work *Gucha*). The truly pivotal moment – when Anne transcends her 'gypsy' nature – comes with Jon's decision to pay for her impulsivity and take on the punishment. While her saviour is in prison, Gipsy Anne transforms into a responsible nanny who is employed in town: in her new role, we see her wearing a shining white maid's apron while in charge of two small children, also clad in radiant white (**Fig. 36**).

as the first Norwegian film to take up the topic of the countryside, *Gipsy Anne* must have enjoyed great popularity. The few available sources confirm that, in Myrstad's words, rural films "ranked close to the top in competition with masterpieces by Charlie Chaplin and Cecil B. De Mill" (184). Furthermore, and not unimportantly, *Gipsy Anne* marked the start of Rasmus Breistein's filmmaking career. Myrstad reports that to shoot this "'true' Norwegian film", Breistein, one of the most cherished Norwegian directors, took out a mortgage on his house and invited fellow actors to spend a holiday in the scenic village of Vågå (cf. 184).



**Fig. 37a and Fig. 37b.** Screenshots from *Gipsy Anne* (1920, Dir. Rasmus Breistein): two-shots of Gipsy Anne (Aasta Nielsen) with Haldor (Lars Tvinde) and with Jon (Einar Tveito); it is plain to see that due to the lack of white make-up, Haldor's bandaged hand appears almost black, strongly contrasting with his and Anne's faces.

It is notable that Breistein was not interested in constructing alterity on the level of skin and hair colour. Throughout the film, Anne's face is shown in numerous close-ups and two-shots where her face appears as 'white' as that of the other protagonists, all of them 'proper' Norwegians (**Fig. 37a** and **Fig. 37b**). However, there is one make-up anomaly that can help sharpen our understanding of 'whiteness' and the multiple functions this ubiquitous convention fulfils in film. In Breistein's film, only the characters with significant roles wear white make-up which makes their faces visible; moreover, the make-up is applied in such a conspicuous manner that it often looks as if the actors were wearing a white mask (**Fig. 39**). The extras, in turn, have no make-up, so their faces appear, by comparison, distinctly darker and far less discernible (**Fig. 38** and **Fig. 39**). Most probably, the filmmaker had to economise on the resources; his frugal distribution of the valuable white substance tells us that Breistein discriminated between characters with significant roles and characters with less significant roles; by privileging only the main cast of actors with white make-up, he constructed, metaphorically speaking, characters with faces, as opposed to the faceless extras. Importantly, the visibility of Gipsy Anne's face – which gives the figure her individuality – was a priority for the Norwegian filmmaker and he enhanced it through the combined use of white make-up, lighting and framing.

The way Breistein apportioned make-up betrays one axiomatic interdependence that is specific to the medium of film – that between a character's status in the story, the discernibility of his/her face on



**Fig. 38.** Screenshot from *Gipsy Anne* (1920, Dir. Rasmus Breistein): Hal-dor (Lars Tvinde), his fiancée Margit Moen (Kristine Ullmo) and mother (Johanne Bruhn) sit in the first row during the court hearing. They all wear a thick layer of white make-up, which renders their faces visible; in the film, being visible equals being white. The extras in the background, by contrast, wear no make-up and their flesh tones come off much darker, so that their faces appear both non-white and less clear to see.



**Fig. 39.** Screenshot from *Gipsy Anne* (1920, Dir. Rasmus Breistein): Jon (Einar Tveito) before the judge (Edvard Drabløs) in court. The faces of the men in the background are without white make-up, looking distinctly darker.

the screen and the cinematic construction of ‘white’ identity. This conflation of significations, all of which gravitate around the filmic convention of ‘whiteness’, may result from different visual tools: in early films, it was the white make-up that privileged an actor’s face, ensuring its visibility and signalling to the viewer that the character had a central role in the story, while also assigning that character to allegedly the most beautiful of all human ‘races’. In later black-and-white films, facial make-up and lighting techniques become much subtler, but the correlation between the character’s facial visibility, centrality and ‘whiteness’ continues to be prevalent. Applied to ‘gypsy’ protagonists, this cinematographic axiom entails a contradiction in terms, especially when racialisation – the construction of a skin colour alterity – is one of the filmmaker’s goals. In the next section, I examine *Papusza* (2013), a realist black-and-white film, to demonstrate the problems that arise – in purely aesthetic terms – when the ‘gypsy’ mask is staged in a lead role, but also the intriguingly complex solutions that contemporary filmmakers come up with in keeping with the racialising aesthetics of authentication.

### 7.3.2 Lighting, Framing and Facial Visibility in *Papusza* (2013), Poland

The Polish feature fiction film *Papusza* (2013), written and directed by Joanna Kos-Krauze and Krzysztof Krauze, offers an example of much subtler tactics of negotiating ‘whiteness’ on the big screen. If *Gucha* mobilises exaggerated, almost farcical colour dichotomies, *Papusza* opts for black-and-white cinematography that reduces the palette of possible colours to an unobtrusive play with tonal values. One may say that the black-and-white cinematography here has a paradoxical effect. Despite its obvious artifice, it allows the filmmakers to gain full control over the black-and-white contrasts in the film in a way that makes these contrasts appear natural and realistic. The juxtaposition of ‘non-white’ Polish ‘gypsies’ to the ‘white’ Polish majority is achieved through elaborate lighting schemes, and since lighting schemes are themselves less conspicuous (as compared to colour-coded costumes or sets), they can enact and thus affirm in an indirect but highly convincing manner the default black-and-white lens of perception. In this section, I focus on this aesthetic property of the film and, more specifically, on the use of lighting and camera technique for the construction of visual alterity in which ‘white’ and ‘non-white’ skin colour play a central part.

Often categorised by reviewers as a biopic, *Papusza* is based on the real-life story of Bronisława Wajs, the first Roma poetess in Poland to be translated into Polish, who has been celebrated for her work ever since. Even the title, which refers to Wajs' nickname, already prepares us for a story that places the female artist centre stage, shedding light on her complex self. Yet a close study of the film's use of lighting overthrows this expectation. In spite of the directors' widely advertised intention to produce an intimate portrait of the Romni poetess, their *Papusza* is disadvantaged, not privileged as befits a central character, by the lighting and camerawork. The character is deprived in various ways of her most significant individualising attribute: facial visibility on the big screen. Throughout the film, *Papusza*, and especially her face, remains largely inaccessible to the viewers, dimly illuminated, obstructed and/or placed away from the camera. The filmmakers seem to say by their choice of visual style that they have little interest in *Papusza* as an individual and an artist, reducing her character rather to a generic 'gypsy' figure. I will venture to say that *Papusza*'s name and dramatic biography are used as a pretext for staging a picturesque 'gypsy' spectacle, the effect of which is an implicit affirmation of Polish 'white' national identity.<sup>115</sup> To support this claim, I consider in detail the three-minute scene in which *Papusza*'s character is first introduced to the viewers [6'18:9'44]; then, listing the various uses of figure lighting and camera movement in a number of other scenes, I sum up the ways in which the character is de-individualised in the modus of the 'gypsy' mask. In addition to that, I examine the aspirational ideal of 'whiteness'

115 Interestingly, Joanna Kos-Krauze and Krzysztof Krauze's film shares some telling similarities with Harley Knoles' black-and-white silent film *The Bohemian Girl* (1922). Shot four years after WW1 and Poland's reappearance on the political map, Knoles' film reworks the familiar plot of Cervantes' "La gitaniella" to tell the dramatic story of Thaddeus, a young exiled Polish officer, who is referred to as the Baron of Poland in the film's intertitles; as a male figure of high birth, he metonymically stands for the Polish nation and its re-emergence on the map of Europe. In the film, it is Thaddeus (Ivor Novello) who resurfaces as a true nobleman (to wit 'white') out of the dark 'gypsy' world, where he has been forced to hide for twelve years, and succeeds in marrying the daughter of an Austrian count, Arline Arnheim (Gladys Cooper). A metaphysical proof of his nobility is Arline's unwavering love for him, as well as her readiness to sacrifice her social rank and lifestyle in order to be with the man of her heart. *Papusza* contains a number of key scenes and motifs that are reminiscent of scenes and motifs in Knoles' film *The Bohemian Girl*. One example is a scene which visualises a dream of Arline's: one night, she dreams of being in a palace full of white marble sculptures; Arline stands in the middle of it wearing a lavish white dress and relishes the company of suitors and white angel boys.

and the place it has in the film visual design. Finally, I take a look at the use of facial lighting in the production of skin colour difference.

An important note has to be made here that bears direct relevance for the formal analysis, namely that the film's production set-up is analogous to a blackface minstrel show with its asymmetrical distribution of power (see Chapter Five). *Papusza* is conceived, written and directed by a Polish director duo, a popular Polish film star (Jowita Budnik as adult and old *Papusza*) is cast in the lead role, and the film as a whole makes an elaborate effort to provide an allegedly authentic rendition of the lifestyle and worldview of Polish 'gypsies', which sets it on a par with a para-ethnographic show meant to instruct and entertain a 'white' national majority.

Here is how we get to know *Papusza*: as the title dissolves, the film opens with a low-angle shot of a prison wall reinforced at the top with barbed wire. The camera cuts to a long shot of the prison entrance, an imposing wooden gate painted in a black-and-white zigzag pattern and with a tiny cut-in window on the right side. It is an overcast, wintry day. A woman gets out of a black car and enters the building. In the next shot, we see her 'white' face in a medium close-up, lit with three-point lighting in the classic Hollywood style (**Fig. 40a**), as she tries to convince the head of the prison to release *Papusza*. The man ponders, shadows crossing his face as he turns his head to the left into a profile. We can infer from the dialogue that the woman has been sent by the Polish minister of culture. Next, the camera cuts to a long shot of a prison cell full of women. A female guard calls out the name of Bronisława Wajcs; one of the prisoners steps forward and then walks out of the frame, her face turned down. A close-up of *Papusza*'s personal items follows as they are returned to her one by one: a pair of round golden earrings, a ring, a pen, a lighter, a notebook, a gemstone necklace, an amulet-like bag, a set of tarot cards, and a feather. The camera cuts again to a long shot of the prison entrance. *Papusza* is still inside, but we can see that she is walking towards the exit, because her face is bobbing within the frame of the small cut-in window. In the next shot, already outside, she is ushered into the backseat of the car and when the car starts moving, the camera cuts – for the very first time – to a close-up of *Papusza*. For a good few seconds, we can observe her dark profile, silhouetted against the light coming in from the car window (**Fig. 40b**).<sup>116</sup>

116 Similar is the introduction of Marlene Dietrich's 'gypsy' character in *Golden Earrings* (1947). Lydia finds herself in the woods at night, when the English colonel –



**Fig. 40a and Fig. 40b.** Screenshots from Papusza's introduction scene: an employee from the Ministry of Culture (Maja Meissner) and a peripheral character; the first close-up of the main character Papusza (Jowita Budnik) (*Papusza*, 2013, Dir. Joanna Kos-Krauze and Krzysztof Krauze).

One may wonder why of all possible beginnings, the filmmakers have chosen to mark Papusza as a 'petty criminal' instead of introducing her, say, as a 'Holocaust survivor' or as a 'self-aware poetess' by showing us an extreme close-up of her handwriting. It is also astounding *what* the camera, assisted by the lighting, singles out as important for us to pay attention to in this introduction scene. We should take a good look of the prison building, the camera seems to say, and its thick concrete wall, its entrance accentuated by the black-and-white paintwork, its director and guards, its cells with locked metal doors, and its inmates in drab, shapeless prison uniforms. We should examine Papusza's modest belongings, metonymically describing their owner and invoking, by chance or not, associations with typical female 'gypsy' activities, like smoking, divination and witchcraft. We should register the face of the woman from the Polish ministry rendered perfectly visible and white by the lighting, even though the character has an episodic role and is not even introduced by name. The camera draws our attention to all these details, while simultaneously denying us visual access to Papusza's face.

The face of the nameless Polish woman is handled in the modus of the 'white' mask: it is shown in full view with 'normal' lighting,

and by extension the viewer – first casts his eyes upon her. According to the film script, the atmosphere is "[m]oon-shadowed, eerie." The camera goes with the colonel and a description is given of his first sight of Lydia: "[n]ear a large rock, A WOMAN is kneeling with her back to the camera. She is bent over a fire built deep in the ground, and so cleverly concealed that it is scarcely visible. A faint glow, however, silhouettes her darkly" (Butler 16). Later in the film, however, we do get to see close-ups of Marlene Dietrich's delightful and theatrically blackened face. Her role in the film is that of an ordinary 'gypsy', not of a prominent poetess like Papusza. As noted earlier, *Golden Earrings* belongs to the category of films that take a subversively playful stance towards antigypsy clichés.



which makes it appear conventionally white, its colour emphasised by the frame that her dark hair and equally dark fur lapels form, as well as by the shadowy background. The woman's face receives 'normal', that is to say individualising, visibility, and as such it does not draw special attention to itself; viewers will register it as the default way of staging and illuminating a figure. At the same time, the 'normal' face of the ministry employee provides an important reference for comparison<sup>117</sup> – not only in this scene but also in the entire film – for the camera never grants the privilege of 'normality' to Papisza. There is not a single close-up of her face in full view in daylight or with three-point lighting with a frontal key light in the entire 126 minutes of the film. The unfavourable treatment of the titular character evokes even greater puzzlement when one considers the fact that the role of adult and old Papisza is performed by Jowita Budnik, a well-known Polish actress with a wide emotional range and a captivating face that has a lot to offer to the camera. The visual negation of Papisza's individuality, presence and agency, the aesthetic segregation of the film's main character, also becomes obvious when one compares Kos-Krauze and Krauze's work with *Yentl* (1983, Dir. Barbra Streisand). In fact, it is enough to take a brief look at the posters of the two films to see the diametrically different approaches they have to their main characters' facial visibility, which needless to say strongly affects the manner in which spectators identify with the female protagonists. Again, a biographical film about a young woman from a Polish ethnic minority, *Yentl* tells the story of Yentl Mendel, a girl living in an Ashkenazi shtetl in Poland in 1904, who, just like her contemporary Papisza, is drawn to learning and fights to have her own way in an oppressively patriarchal society. The starring role is performed by Barbra Streisand, whose expressive face the audience can enjoy throughout the entire film, shown in numerous close-ups and lavished with light from various sources.

In the numerous debates I have had about Papisza's diminished visibility in Krauze's film, the counterargument has been raised that her shadowy portrayal reflects the character's marginal position in society, and that the film's aesthetics should be interpreted as a critique

117 My critical approach draws on Dyer's discussion of movie lighting techniques and the construction of 'whiteness'. Dyer focuses on face lighting and articulates its functions, stressing that "the face is seen as both the most important thing in an image, and also, as a consequence, the control of the visual quality of everything else", and also that "[m]ovie lighting of the face is at the heart of ordinary production" (88–89).

of Polish mainstream society for averting its eyes from the Romni poetess. Here, I have to note that among the voices defending *Papusza*, Urs Heftrich has been the most vocal. My differing position, however, is informed by the view that “images are much better understood as framing the conditions of possibility – that is, in influencing what can and cannot be seen, thought, discussed, and articulated” (Bleiker 320). Later in this chapter, I also compare the invisibility of the title heroine with that which the camera makes accessible for the spectator and rejoices itself in ‘seeing’. In this context, it is worth pondering one more general question: what would become of films if we agreed that filmmakers were entitled to deny facial visibility and voice to, say, female characters or people forced into slavery, on the grounds that women or people forced into slavery, as a rule, have no visibility nor the right to speak in society?

### 7.3.3 The Strategy of Diminished Light

The establishing sequence which introduces us to adult *Papusza* is characteristic of the film’s idiosyncratic visual style; unobtrusively but quite successfully, it marginalises and de-individualises its titular character by depriving her of facial lighting. Most of the time, the camera shows *Papusza* from a distance – in a medium shot or a medium-long shot – either in three-quarters view with strands of uncombed hair across her face, often smoking or looking down, or in profile (**Fig. 41a**, **Fig. 44a**, **Fig. 45a**), or from the back (**Fig. 41b** and **Fig. 43b**).<sup>118</sup> In a number of highly dramatic scenes, *Papusza* is shown in silhouetted profile: when she writes poetry at home; when she asks Jerzy Ficowski (Antoni Pawlicki) to burn her poems; or when she herself burns her poems. There is also a recurrent use of shots that circumvent *Papusza*’s face while

118 In a number of scenes, *Papusza* is shown for relatively long stretches of time from the back. The standard repertoires of character shots commonly used in films (like a close-up or a medium shot, etc.) do not list a shot that shows a character from the back. It is self-evident that this type of shot, which should probably be better called an anti-shot, does not add to the figure characterisation and is therefore not considered “one of the fundamental building blocks of cinema”, to use Blaine Brown’s definition (20), nor is there a special term to denote it (cf. Brown 22). One short note: when examining the narrative use of lighting, Brown gives an example from the film *The Natural* (1984, Dir. Barry Levinson) and its *femme fatale*. The scholar explains that the Lady in Black is first presented to the viewer in silhouette and from the back, further adding that this female character is “[u]sually portrayed backlit or in shadow, as befits her evil nature” (71).



**Fig. 41a and Fig. 41b.** Screenshots from *Papusza* (2013): Jerzy Ficowski (Antoni Pawlicki) bringing Papusza a newspaper with her published poems and her pay; Papusza (Jowita Budnik) selling the pen that Jerzy Ficowski gave her as token of his friendship.

centring on another character, again in emotionally charged moments that invite a psychological study of her inner state and therefore a close-up. When Papusza receives the news that her work has been published in the Polish media, we get to see her posed in profile in half-light, while Jerzy is filmed face-on (**Fig. 41a**). When she sells the pen that Jerzy has given to her as a special gift, we get to see the back of her head in an over-the-shoulder shot, and the shop owner's face shot in full view (**Fig. 41b**). These are some of the numerous examples. The film's lighting scheme credits its central character with diminished light, showing Papusza illuminated by a bonfire in the recurrent night scenes, as a silhouette in the background, with her face marred by shadows, or enveloped in smoke, or behind falling rain (**Fig. 45b**). For the most part, the cinematography adheres to a strategy of obstruction, limiting the viewer's visual access to the protagonist, while, at the same time, it follows the aesthetic conventions of realism. That the film is able to efface its own artifice and pass for a regular biopic is in itself a remarkable artistic feat. Papusza's partial visibility is purposefully staged and well calculated scene for scene; the effect is also aided by the interplay of camera perspective, body posture in front of the camera and physical objects placed between the camera and the protagonist. One may only wonder why all this effort to limit the light on Papusza's face when the film is dedicated to her.

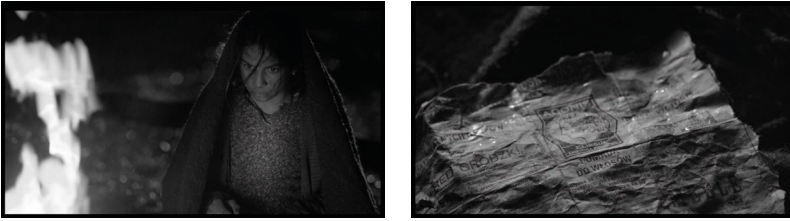
#### 7.3.4 The Film's Take on the Ideal of 'Whiteness'

From a cinematographic point of view, it is the ideal of 'whiteness' that plays the main role in *Papusza*, not the Romani poetess. What is at stake in this Polish film is 'whiteness' in its threefold manifestation – as a

lighting convention that ensures facial visibility, as a set of aspirational values, and as an 'ethno-racial' national marker. The filmmakers present their main character as a borderline figure of ambivalent colour, one that oscillates between the cultured Polish majority and the illiterate 'gypsy' minority. She is shown to be 'non-white' when compared to Polish 'white' females, yet 'whiter' than other 'gypsy' women. This is where her value lies: Kos-Krauze and Krauze's Papusza is a curiosity, an exception – not an exceptional human being herself, but rather an exceptional 'gypsy' who is drawn to the symbol of 'whiteness', i.e. to written culture, to the elevated art of poetry and to Polish men of letters. Papusza is the only one among her fellow people who is literate; a voracious learner, she teaches herself to read and write at the risk of being ostracised. There are several scenes in the film which reveal the brutal aggression that Papusza's educatedness triggers in some of the 'gypsy' males. In community gatherings, it is her solitary voice that advocates for school education and sedentary life; nobody else seems to place value on the attainments of the national culture. Thus, the sympathy created for Papusza underlines the abusive and violent behaviour of her uneducated fellow 'gypsies', ensuring antipathy for them, emphasising their distinct difference to her but also the threat that their incorrigible backwardness poses to the cultured 'whites'. This juxtaposition also underscores the refinement and sophistication of the Polish, whose claim to Europeanness and whose elevated sense of 'white' self is asserted as the default value through the film's visual design; their 'whiteness' is validated as normality.

There is one scene [30'51:31'25] in which Papusza's aspiration to 'whiteness' is visualised so artfully that it reads like a textbook definition, mobilising almost all the layers of meaning linked to this cultural ideal. A high-angle shot shows young Papusza at night in the forest, sitting alone by the light of a burning log and teaching herself to read. She has a black cloth over her head and body to protect her from the night chill and the coming rain, her face is smeared with dirt and her hair tousled (**Fig. 42a**). In these precarious circumstances, the 'gypsy' girl spells out letter by letter the word "Adonis", which she then repeats five times during the scene; the name of Adonis is meant to evoke images of ancient Greek statues, to wit, lofty models of male beauty and perfection.<sup>119</sup> An insert zooms in on the word "Adonis": through Pap-

119 Visual references to the marble-white sculptures of antiquity is an established topos in film narratives that claim 'whiteness' for European nations. A particu-



**Fig. 42a and Fig. 42b.** Screenshots from *Papusza* (2013): young Papisza (Paloma Mirga) learning to read by the light of a self-made fire on a rainy night in the forest; a line drawing of a ‘white’ male, where the meaning of ‘whiteness’ can be decoded, all at once, as a social norm, as an ‘ethno-racial’ category and as a representational convention.

usza’s magnifying glass, one after the other we can see the big printed letters that make up the word. The next insert, however, dismisses all these lofty associations to reveal an image that is humorously mundane in comparison, but just as symbolic. It turns out that Papisza is gazing at a newspaper advertisement of men’s hair pomade, the camera re-focusing on a line drawing of a gentleman’s profile (**Fig. 42b**). Through the editing, Papisza’s illicit passion for books and learning is thus mockingly devalued, linked to a cheap promotional drawing of a ‘white’ dandy (the line drawing is made on a white sheet of paper, so that the dandy’s skin colour is identical with that of the newspaper’s neutral background). In a wry play of associations, the image of the desirable ‘white’ Polish male is connoted in this scene with classic antiquity, sophisticated stylishness and a literally white skin colour (cf. Dyer 111).

The ‘white’ and ‘non-white’ imagery in the film spawns a line of dichotomies that give the structure to its implicit message: the colour antinomy is used to mark skin colour difference, but in addition to that, it is overlaid with a number of identity-forming attributes. These attributes are imagined by default to be in place for the Polish national

larly good illustration here is Leni Riefenstahl’s technically innovative documentary *Olympia* (1938). The film’s 24-minute-long prologue constructs a genealogy that connects the ancient Acropolis to the modern Olympic Games in Berlin. In the opening sequence, the camera presents a gallery of marble statues, lingering on the faces of Alexander the Great, Ares, Aphrodite, Apollo, etc. all drenched in hazy light that gives them almost an ‘alive’ look; then it moves on to the sculpted muscular body of Erwin Huber, blending it with the stylised movements of female athletes to finally present the parade of national teams in Berlin, the Germans clad from head to toe in glowing white.

majority and to be absent for Polish 'gypsies'.<sup>120</sup> In one of her conversations with Jerzy, Papisza formulates the difference between the two groups by inferring a causal relationship between physical traits and cultural traditions:

I have black eyes; you have green eyes but we see the world just the same. Because the world is there. *We* see the world just the same, but we live differently. Your people are strong; mine are weak, because *we* have no science or memory. Maybe that's for the better. If Gypsies had memory, they would all die of worry. [48'19:49'50] [my translation of the German subtitles; my emphasis, R.M.]

One should bear in mind that Papisza is the mouthpiece of the script-writers, who reproduce the common slippage, described by Dyer, whereby 'ethno-racial' markers become conflated with cultural ones (cf. 61–70). The dialogue, with the two different "we" in it, also signals Papisza's borderline position, her 'ethno-racial'/national and cultural in-betweenness that will also become the source of her personal tragedy.

Papisza's yearning after 'whiteness' culminates in her infatuation with the Polish poet Jerzy Ficowski, who, following the paradigm of 'whiteness', is unable to reciprocate her feelings, because he himself is apparently caught in the snarl of this ideal. The character of Jerzy is motivated by the specific position he occupies in the aspirational matrix

120 One scene early on in the film constructs in a very deliberate manner an opposition between the Polish majority and Polish 'gypsies' with regard to memory. It is a short dialogue between the poet Jerzy, Papisza's little son Tarzan and Papisza. In a playful mode, Tarzan grabs Jerzy's notebook and runs away with it. Jerzy chases after the boy and the following dialogue ensues:

Tarzan: What do you write there?

Jerzy: I write poems.

Tarzan: What are poems?

Jerzy: Poems will let me remember tomorrow how I felt yesterday.

Tarzan: Doesn't it hurt your head. I would kill myself.

Papisza: In Romani "yesterday" and "tomorrow" is the same. [00'21'50:00'22'20]

It is presumptuous to suggest that only the literate majority has memory as opposed to the illiterate 'gypsies' who, as Tarzan's reply suggests, do not have the body constitution for memory work (remembering gives them physical pain), for there are other ways for conserving and transmitting knowledge besides written texts. Let us also be reminded here that many Roma made a living with itinerant cinema, so again it is presumptuous to portray the minority as averse to the fruits of enlightenment.



**Fig. 43a and Fig. 43b.** Screenshots from *Papusza* (2013): Wanda Ficowska (Joanna Niemirska), a peripheral character, asking her husband if Papusza was in love with him; a ten-second take of Papusza’s back (Jowita Budnik) after parting with Jerzy Ficowski and disclosing her feelings to him in an unreciprocated kiss [57’38:57’47].

of ‘whiteness’: as a Pole and a man of letters, he is an embodiment of ‘whiteness’, but as a male, he is less ‘white’ than Polish women and therefore irresistibly drawn to their light. The cinematic portrait of the Polish intellectual is modelled on the pattern “dark desire for the light”, both a lighting scheme and a metaphoric relationship that film lighting constructs between male and female characters, all of which is discussed in detail in Dyer’s chapter on the glow of ‘white’ women (139). This is the underlying logic that explains Jerzy’s indifference to ‘gypsy’ girls, his markedly asexual interest in ambiguously ‘white’ Papusza and his overt passion, later on, for his ‘white’ (Polish) wife. Wanda Ficowska (Joanna Niemirska) has a marginal role in the story – she is mentioned by name only in the film credits – yet we do get a 30-second glimpse of her delightful, young face shown in full view in a medium shot [1’11’33:1’12’04]. Several times during the sequence, Wanda’s face catches the direct sunlight, which gives her skin that highly cherished translucent glow. The frame composition also uses the effect of internal framing to draw our attention to the character’s face: Wanda is shown from the chest up, moving left and right of the screen, but for a moment, her ‘white’ face is framed emphatically by the woodwork of her painting stand (**Fig. 43a**).

The scene in which we see young Papusza admire the image of a ‘white’ male and spell the name of Adonis provides a key to her life story: it helps us understand Papusza’s desire for education as well as her passion for the highly cherished national poet, a passion that he never reciprocates. This scene, however, is a figment of the filmmakers’ imagination, which is more revealing of their specific perspective on historical events than that of Papusza’s.

There is also one scene in which young Papisza stares at a male torso cast in bronze, a brief encounter which, apart from displaying a model of classic beauty in a black material, has, in my view, little to offer. Papisza is sold as a teenage bride to a much older 'gypsy' who – we are shown – mistreats and disrespects her, scoffs at her reading and writing skills, cheats on her and is often physically violent. The fact that teenage Papisza is forced into wedlock is shown to be highly traumatic for the girl, because we see her swearing an oath against having children with her husband. One may ask whether this really happened. At the same time, had the film shown Jerzy Ficowski admire a female torso in a black material, had the film suggested that the famed Polish poet is drawn physically to Papisza, it would have been possible to consider its stance subversive to the prevailing aesthetics of racialisation. Yet Joanna Kos-Krauze and Krzysztof Krauze's story repeatedly suggests that there is an impermeable line of difference between the Polish majority and the Roma minority, making it crystal clear that Ficowski is not and cannot be drawn to the talented Romni. Again, this is a view which has strong antigypsy undertones and which is imposed by the filmmakers, reflecting their own interpretation of historical events, for it is not possible to know with full certainty how the Polish poet felt for the Romni poetess.

### 7.3.5 Face Lighting and Skin Colour

There is a noticeable difference in the way the faces of Paloma Mirga, a young, unknown actress, and Jowita Budnik, an actress with star status in Poland, are modelled by the lighting. Paloma Mirga, in the role of young Papisza, is marked as distinctly 'non-white' (**Fig. 44b**), while the skin colour of Jowita Budnik, playing adult Papisza, is left uncommented on, so that at times it is clearly visible that she has an identical skin tone to that of other 'white' characters (**Fig. 45b**) and thus appears to be 'whiter' than her people; finally, old Papisza, again performed by Jowita Budnik, literally fades to a shadow of herself. On the one hand, there is ambiguity about Papisza's skin colour and, on the other hand, there is an unambiguous difference in the lighting schemes used for the two actresses.

Paloma Mirga's Papisza is portrayed as 'non-white' in terms of skin colour through the use of the lighting set-up and strategic contrasts in two-shots. There are several scenes in which she is juxtaposed to 'white' ladies: when she learns to read under the instruction of her Jewish





**Fig. 44a and Fig. 44b.** Screenshots from *Papusza* (2013): young Papusza (Paloma Mirga) talking about books and reading with an upper-class lady, a peripheral character; a close-up of young Papusza readied for her wedding, which takes place at night in a forest.

teacher, Papusza is posed in profile in the shadow, while her teacher's face is lit up in full view in the modus of the 'white' mask; and when Papusza talks to an upper-class lady sitting opposite her, the 'gypsy' girl is profiled and semi-silhouetted with her back to a large table-lamp – the only visible source of light in the room – while the light falls full on the 'white' lady's face and arms (**Fig. 44a**), etc. All the main characters in the film are shown without exception in medium-close shots, that is, from the chest up, but there is one close-up of Papusza, actually the only close-up in the entire film, that is particularly memorable because it stands out in many ways. It is a night portrait of Paloma Mirga wearing a white bridal veil, her face separated from the background with a 'bokeh' effect (**Fig. 44b**). The light coming from the background blur highlights the bridal veil, producing a tell-tale contrast between the white fabric and the girl's skin tone, which comes off a shade darker. The purpose of this singular close-up is nothing other than to provide



**Fig. 45a and Fig. 45b.** Screenshots from *Papusza* (2013): Papusza (Jowita Budnik) next to a swarthy-faced 'gypsy' female, the three women secretly examining the contents of Jerzy Ficowski's bag; Papusza (Jowita Budnik) and Jerzy Ficowski (Antoni Pawlicki) standing shoulder to shoulder behind a thin curtain of rain.

a visual cue to the viewers, prompting them to perceive the character as 'non-white' in the modus of the 'gypsy' mask. The 'non-white' skin colour here is modelled through lighting, camera focus and a piece of white fabric used for a reference point of 'whiteness'. If Mirga's face were lit up with a three-point lighting against a darker background, like the Polish woman in **Fig. 41a**, her skin would have come off just as 'white'. Or, if her bridal veil were not backlit,<sup>121</sup> it would not contrast so strongly with her face and, subsequently, her skin tone would not come across as markedly 'non-white', for it is obvious that she is filmed in dim light during a night scene.

The comparison between Paloma Mirga's 'non-white' Papusza and the 'white' Polish women in the film highlights two major predicaments that filmmakers, as a rule, have to deal with in 'gypsy'-themed films. The first question is how to construct 'non-white' skin colour that is markedly visible on the screen and that is perceived as realistic by the viewers when the actors are no different – in terms of their pro-filmic skin tone – to a great number of Europeans, those who can be very broadly described as fair-skinned brunets. This predicament can be formulated in a different way so as to reveal the potential for symbolic violence concentrated in it: the majority of Europeans can be lit up as 'non-white' if filmmakers choose to do so. Hence, the majority of Europeans can be represented on the screen in the modus of the 'gypsy' mask. It is a film convention informed by a long literary tradition that prescribes that representatives of one singled-out minority in Europe should be seen as 'non-white' or 'black'. This specific way of seeing reflects the needs of the medium, especially if the artist's goal is to create the effect of realism: as in literature, images and stories on the big screen are produced through the contrastive use of light and shadow, of the colours white and black both in their literal and figurative sense. Thus, portraying a character as 'non-white' or 'black' in the modus of the 'gypsy' mask has much more to do with the inner logic of the written or filmed story than with the objective rendering of skin tones.

121 The primary function of backlighting or rim light is to foreground the figure from behind, separating it from the background. This effect is intensified here by the camera's shallow focus, which profoundly separates and foregrounds Papusza's face by blurring the clutter in the background. Another function of backlighting is to provide definition and subtle highlights around the figure's outline, while other areas remain darker. In the screenshot, the soft back light is used to model the outline of Papusza's veil-covered head, i.e. it places emphasis on the white colour of the fabric.

The second predicament is related to the blackface set-up that ‘gypsy’-themed films often have: ‘white’ celebrity actors giving a performance in the screen face of the ‘non-white’ Other. Here, the issue for filmmakers is how to present realistically a Hollywood or national film star cast in a lead ‘gypsy’ role so as to accommodate the demands of the diegesis, on the one hand, according to which the ‘gypsy’ character is ‘black’/‘non-white’, with the audience’s pro-filmic knowledge, on the other hand, according to which the film star is ‘white’. Jowita Budnik’s Papusza is a good example here: she gains her ‘non-white’ skin colour vicariously through the delineation of Paloma Mirga’s Papusza and other ‘gypsy’ females (**Fig. 44b** and **Fig. 45a**). Jowita Budnik’s celebrity status provides one possible explanation as to why the filmmakers felt the need to use all the tactics and strategies described above to keep her face visually inaccessible. So, one may ask here: if the filmmakers were so concerned with preserving Jowita Budnik’s ‘whiteness’ on the big screen that they had to obliterate the individuality of their titular character, why didn’t they simply opt for another lead actress? Or were they simply unable to discern and acknowledge Papusza’s individuality from the very beginning?

### 7.3.6 A ‘Gypsy’-themed Film rather than a Historical Biography

Joanna Kos-Krauze and Krzysztof Krauze’s fiction film *Papusza* claims to take an interest in the personality of a Romani poetess, but in reality it reproduces the clichéd fascination with ‘gypsy’ lifestyle in a Romantic yet essentialist manner that places the film in the category of ‘gypsy’-themed films. In his Karlovy Vary review for *The Hollywood Reporter*, Stephen Dalton rightly observes that

barely a trace of historical or political context ever intrudes on this closed world. Only a handful of Papusza’s simple, folksy verses are quoted in the script, and nor is there much psychological insight into her character. Cursed for being self-educated and gifted by a fiercely patriarchal culture, her story becomes a kind of universal feminist fable, but low on personal detail or emotional warmth. Ultimately, *Papusza* is less of a literary biopic than a widescreen ensemble drama that recreates the lost, culturally rich world of Poland’s Roma community in the 20th century.

Also, in his film review for *Screenanarchy*, Patryk Czekaj makes the pertinent comment that

[a]lthough the movie serves its purpose as a biographical piece it doesn't put enough focus on the titular character, thus failing to reveal the complexity of a weary, troubled, emotionally imbalanced figure and a person that forever changed the way we perceive Romani culture. What we get is a rather vague description of a poet, who had to deal with a lot of criticism from the only people she could ever consider family. The character of Papusza is rarely in the foreground. That oversight gives an impression that she's there only to communicate a valuable message about Roma in general, not about the real Papusza herself. The fact that the film sparsely refers to Papusza's poetry also undermines her actual contribution to the literary world.

On the whole, the film conveys the highly questionable idea that there is an impervious line of difference between the sedentary and literate Polish majority and the nomadic and illiterate Roma minority: by showing that a nomadic lifestyle, a deep-seated hostility to education, and dysfunctional, abusive family relations constitute the minority's defining traits, the film implicitly asserts its alterity and non-integrability. It is striking that there is not a single strong relationship among Roma shown in the story, whether between friends, siblings or marriage partners. Usually, when filmmakers want to subvert antigypsy stereotypes, they stress the strong bonds, as is the case with films like *Korkoro* (2010), *Gadjo dilo* (1997), or *And the Violins Stopped Playing* (1988).

Moreover, there is a well-preserved body of poetry penned by Papusza, of which the spectator gets to hear only lame fragments. If the filmmakers were indeed interested in the titular character, why have they deprived the Romni poetess of her voice, too? It is after all a decision that the filmmakers have made as to which poems should appear in the story. The word "poems" is misleading with its plural form here, because throughout the entire film, we hear only one poem, a very short one, spoken by Papusza. It is striking that a biographical film about a celebrated poetess turns not only a blind eye but also a deaf ear to its main character and her artistic work. I see this as a tell-tale sign that the filmmakers do not take Papusza's poetic contribution seriously; in other contexts, such a treatment of a national poet would be considered downright offensive.

In conclusion, it is worth considering what the camera is drawn to: it indulges in panoramic long takes of 'gypsy' caravans moving through idyllic landscapes, all in all seven such scenes throughout the

film, alternating them with night-time crowd scenes by a picturesque bonfire, altogether four such scenes in the film. The camera's perspective betrays the filmmakers' para-ethnographic ambition to portray the community as a whole – instead of close-ups of Papsusza's face, preference is given to long takes of the 'gypsy' camp at night or bird's-eye views of it during the day.<sup>122</sup> Although the film narrates historical events that can be arranged along a linear timeline, its episodic and non-chronological structure – punctuated by vignettes of 'gypsy' lifestyle – evokes the mythic world of the radical, 'non-white' Other coded with nature, night and cyclical time. As the formal analysis indicates, by re-enacting the Otherness of 'gypsies', the film stabilises and reifies by implication Polish 'white' national identity, 'whiteness' being its most valuable attribute and also a visual assertion of the nation's rightful place in the history of Europe.

#### 7.4 Lighting Set-up and Skin Hue in Colour Film

As to the second predicament, discussed above, concerning 'gypsy'-themed films in which 'white' film stars are cast in the role of the 'non-white' Other, there are other lighting schemes worth mentioning. Directors of photography overcome this predicament by shooting the

122 The 'gypsy' camp is the most salient spatial trope of alterity in 'gypsy'-themed films. What is more, within the dominant visual regime, the image of the 'gypsy' camp has become an effective visual shorthand for ascribing radical Otherness to the supposedly eternally nomadic minority, while implicitly affirming a sedentary lifestyle as the common norm. Thus, it is not surprising that the 'gypsy' encampment is a recurrent theme in the visual arts across all of Europe. Here are some of the countless examples from the field of painting: *Rivieralandschap met zigeuners* (ca. 1585–1631) by Arent Arentsz, Rijksmuseum; *Mule Train and Gypsies in a Forest* (1612) by Jan Brueghel the Elder, Museo del Prado, Madrid; *The Gypsy Fires are Burning for Daylight's Past and Gone* (1881) by Sir James Guthrie, the Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery, University of Glasgow; *Landscape with Gypsies* (ca. 1753–1754) by Thomas Gainsborough, Tate Gallery; *Les roulettes, campement de bohémiens aux environs d'Arles* (ca. 1888) by Vincent van Gogh, Musée d'Orsay, Paris; *Wooded Landscape with Gypsies, Evening* (1745) by George Lambert, Government Art Collection, London; *Gypsies in a Landscape* (c.1790) by George Morland, Bristol Museum and Galleries Archive; *Accampamento di zingari* (1845) by Giuseppe Palizzi, Palazzo Pitti Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Florence; *Campement de tziganes, Roumanie* (ca. 1909) by Eustatiu (Eustache-Grégoire) Stoenescu, private collection; *A Beech Wood with Gypsies Round a Campfire* (ca. 1799–1801) by Joseph Turner, the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; *The Halt at a Gypsy Camp* by Philips Wouwerman, private collection.

entire film either in bleak, low-key lighting with dull earthy colours or in mid-key lighting with saturated colours; the sought-after effect is heightened by a predilection for interior scenes, night scenes or exterior scenes with overcast weather, to the total exclusion of bright, sun-drenched settings. The outcome is that all 'gypsy' characters in the film – no matter whether they are played by 'white' celebrities or Roma extras – appear to have uniformly darker (coloured) flesh tones. These lighting schemes are particularly well-suited for modelling the 'gypsy' mask when filmmakers find it important to define 'gypsies' as 'non-white' on the level of skin colour but also choose to portray them in isolation, as an encapsulated community that has little contact to the 'white' national majority. One example is Aleksandar Petrović's auteur work *I Even Met Happy Gypsies*<sup>123</sup> (1967), almost entirely "shot in a kind of sickly and drab grey-yellow light (...) [that] perfectly suits the dreary, flat, rainy and muddy landscape", not to mention the characters' faces (Partridge). Other influential auteur films are *Gipsy Magic*<sup>124</sup> (1997) by Stole Popov and Emir Kusturica's *Time of the Gypsies*<sup>125</sup> (1988), both of which stand out with their rich colour palettes.

In an interview for *Cahiers du Cinéma*, Kusturica confirms the pre-meditated use of colour in *Time of the Gypsies*: "My film resembles their typical outfit. Underneath their shirt, they wear three shirts of different colors. Their pants look like they come from another planet. In my film about them everything is mixed, because that's the way life is" (Bertellini 153). Kusturica's statement appears in a subsection of Bertellini's

123 Petrović's film features in the modus of the 'gypsy' mask the Yugoslavian celebrity actors Bekim Fehmiu, Olivera Vučo, Bata Živojinović and Milosav Aleksić. In 1967, *I Even Met Happy Gypsies* won the Grand Prix at Cannes Film Festival, the International Critics' Prize (FIPRESCI) and the Golden Arena Prize at the 14th Yugoslav National Film Festival in Pula; the following year, it received Oscar and Golden Globe nominations for Best Foreign Film as well as the award for the Best Foreign Film featured in Czechoslovakia (cf. Sudar 123–144).

124 Stole Popov's film features in the modus of the 'gypsy' mask the non-Roma actors Miki Manojlović, Katina Ivanova, Arna Shijak, Goran Dodevski, Toni Mihajlovski, Sinolicka Trpkova and Jordanco Cevrevski. In 1997, *Gipsy Magic* was the Macedonian candidate for Oscar nomination; the same year, it won the Grand Prix "Antigone d'Or" for Best Film at the IFF Mediterranean in Montpellier, and in 1998, it received the Special Jury Award at the IFF in Izmir (stolepopov.com).

125 Kusturica's film features in the modus of the 'gypsy' mask the non-Roma actors Davor Dujmović, Bora Todorović, Predrag Laković, Sinolicka Trpkova and Mirsad Zulić. In 1989, *Time of the Gypsies* won the Best Director Award at the Cannes Film Festival, where it was also nominated for a Palme d'Or. At the 1990 César Awards in France, it was nominated for Best Foreign Film, while at the 1991 Guldbagge Awards in Sweden, it won the award for Best Foreign Film (IMDb).

book bearing the tell-tale title “Filming Gypsies’ Bodies and Colors”. Both the filmmaker’s words and the scholar’s framing text evidence that the ‘gypsy’ mask is perceived and cinematically constructed in a colour mode that sets it apart from the ‘white’ mask. Commenting on Kusturica’s cinematography, Goran Gocić notes that, “like most works of ethno cinema, colours are indeed expressive”, going on to say that “[t]he colorfulness of Kusturica’s films is not only a stereotypical metaphor, it is a literal description, for the colours are an absolutely integral element of his work’s ‘fashion statements’ and its moods.” Oblivious to the issue of skin colour, the author wraps up the topic by making a general statement about light and colour being “absolutely essential for the differentiation of ethno”, innocuously admitting that there is a whole set of cinematic devices employed in the construction of ‘ethno-racial’ alterity (139).

## 7.5 Conclusion

As the numerous film examples from European and US American cinema have shown so far, the performance in ‘gypsy’ mask – be it in a short sequence or over the entire length of a film – presents a rarely powerful visual storytelling tool. We can think of it as a human personification of darkness, as a visual metaphor for lack of light where the notion of darkness can be inflected to convey any of its multiple meanings: biblical, symbolic, social, psychological, ideological or aesthetic. In other words, the ‘gypsy’ mask is a visual expression of the unilluminated side of the European semiosphere, signifying the multitude of diverse phenomena that are banished to the periphery of its conscious life. No wonder that this shadowy creation has always been in great demand in the art industries. So, in their own way, films reproduce, often unwittingly, a centuries-old black-and-white regime of seeing – formed and fostered by European literature, fine art and popular media – that sets ‘gypsy’ figures as a dark/colourful background against which the ‘whiteness’ of the upper classes and/or the national majority can stand out in relief.

Filmmakers have devised numerous creative ways of visualising the intrinsically dark nature of this universally recognisable anti-hero. The ‘gypsy’ has made its appearance on the big screen as an inverted reflection of a human being (**Fig. 2**), or as an insensate man turned upside down (**Fig. 3**), or as a fallen man (**Fig. 26** and **Fig. 27**), or as a

shadowy presence (Fig. 5), or as a silhouetted dark profile (Fig. 23a and Fig. 41a), or as a face/figure in the shadow (Fig. 25a and Fig. 44a), or as a figure dressed in black or any of its non-white variations, such as soiled white, black-and-white stripes and/or patterns, signal red, a mix of variegated colours and patterns (Fig. 7, Fig. 8, Fig. 9, Fig. 24a, Fig. 46b and Fig. 47b), or finally, but significantly, as a figure of 'non-white'/'black' skin colour (Fig. 15, Fig. 31b, Fig. 49a and Fig. 49b). In the medium of film, the metaphoric and mutable meaning of darkness is often transformed into a stable somatic quality, into an epidermal fact. All the while, the 'gypsy' figure is imagined as an antithesis to the normative human being (Fig. 1), invariably an embodiment of light – the so-called 'white' man, whose 'whiteness' can signify one or more of the following: social class (be it aristocrats or the bourgeoisie in the West, or the working class in the former Eastern bloc), nationality, European descent, and 'white' 'race'. This accounts for the immense plasticity and non-specificity of the 'gypsy' anti-hero – both in narrative and pictorial terms – as s/he appears to be equally threatening to feudal, democratic, socialist or post-socialist societies.

Unlike common types and stereotypes in film, the 'gypsy' figure has a remarkably wide range of application: it can be brought to life at any given historical phase of modernity in any national culture on the Old Continent or in the USA, and it can be contrasted with any socio-political form of organisation and its model human being. What makes it particularly suitable for the big screen is that the 'gypsy' mask comes with its own anti-narrative, its own *noir* aesthetics and its own anti-world. And even though the medium of film has contributed substantially to the racialisation of the 'gypsy' character, this imaginary figure continues to be a highly mutable construct, an empty signifier also visually; a handful of non-specific visual cues are enough to revive the metaphoric meaning of its intrinsic dark nature: a black cloak, a golden earring, a setting with low-key lighting. And if anti-Jewish or anti-African-American figures are little accepted in cinema nowadays, the 'gypsy' mask – with its negative life-script, with its black visual aesthetics and its titillating netherworld – continues to be regarded as a dramaturgically indispensable tool

If we conceive of the 'gypsy' mask as a structure of human psyche, as the unacknowledged part of one's own mental universe, then we can better understand its relationship to the aesthetics of realism and the market demand for 'authenticity'. Filmmakers are not interested in Roma but in re-creating the psychic reality of the cultural anti-norm;



the great masters among them are able to deliver extremely fascinating, very cinematic and just as lucrative film spectacles of anti-human beings who speak an anti-language, display an anti-behaviour and live in an anti-universe. When shooting in Roma villages or town ghettos, the filmmakers' gaze switches to the selective filter regime of the anti-norm, so that the mechanical eye of the camera is drawn to images of fascinating and photogenic deviations. Such 'gypsy'-themed films are nothing but catalogues of human depravity, meticulous para-ethnographic documentations of its various forms. Certainly, it is possible to shoot a film with an antigypsy gaze among the poorest of the poor within one's own ethno-national group, but such a spectacle would be unsettling and highly unflattering for the national culture, as well as dangerous for the filmmaker. It is much safer to meditate on one's own negative and negated traits by exporting them onto a stigmatised ethno-social group. The psychic anti-world is thus rendered real, while the masquerade that the dominant culture stages on the big screen is reified through ethnification, culturalisation and aesthetisation. Put bluntly, the Roma are scapegoated not only in socio-political but also in purely aesthetic developments. It has to be said here that Roma have become target of this symbolic violence due to unlucky historical circumstances; if by some magic they all become university professors and are no longer available in slums for artists to authenticate their studies of human aberration, the 'gypsy' underworld will continue to be a fascinating literary and cinematic topos. For other marginal groups can be blackened with the stigma, forced to perform in a 'gypsy' mask and then be celebrated as the 'real' ones using all the many available filmmaking tools and devices.