Subverting the *Gazhe* Gaze:

Reclaiming Roma Identity in the European World and Beyond

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Abstract

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For centuries, the Romani people in Europe and North America have been the focus of a non-Roma gaze which simultaneously fetishizes and vilifies them. This ascription of a tropic identity serves to both reify the constructed identity of the non-Roma as societal elite and to ensure the Roma remain marginalized and divested of any voice or agency Using Gayatri Spivak's 1988 essay, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, as a point of departure, this dissertation explores the various methods by which the Roma strive to make their voices heard. Analyzing depictions of "Gypsy" figures in classical works of the European canon in order to highlight the language within which the Roma are situated, this dissertation then pivots to an examination of several key texts written by Roma authors in order to observe their approaches to working within the context of these tropic ascriptions to negotiate a space from which they might successfully communicate with their non-Roma audience and

be recognized as autonomous individuals. While it becomes apparent that cultural blending and invisibility, along with direct communication and engagement, are ineffective strategies met with resistance, the texts demonstrate a third, indirect strategy, running obliquely between passive silence and direct confrontation, which subverts the very gaze fixated upon them.

Table of Contents

Introduction—The Gypsy Curse: Silent Subaltern and Unquiet Phantoms

In 1983, riding the wave of intersectionality emerging in feminism and postcolonial studies, scholar and activist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak wrote *Can the Subaltern Speak?,* an essay that would revolutionize the way that the academic world viewed the struggle of those people cast to the peripheries of society to be recognized and respected. This work sparked an explosion of discourse, garnering both praise and contempt among Postcolonial and Subalternist scholars; in fact, "[t]he most sustained debate on representing "postcolonial Others" centres on Gayatri Spivak's now-famous question: "Can the subaltern speak?"" (Griffiths, 299). In her essay, Spivak examines the systemic oppression evident in the colonial treatment of the people of India at the hands of British Imperialists, particularly focusing on the experiences of those who are disenfranchised on a number of axes (such as women of color belonging to low socioeconomic classes), and boldly questions whether communication on the part of the marginalized is even effectively possible, not because of a lack of communicative output on the part of the subaltern, but because of their inability to be heard by the members of the societal majority. "All speaking, even seemingly the most immediate, entails a distanced decipherment by another, which is, at best, an interception. That is what speaking is" (Spivak, 2124). Thus, if said decipherment fails, the speaker remains inscrutable, and no communication comes to pass. As such, Spivak deems meaningful communication necessarily impossible in the cases where the social elite can and do refuse to acknowledge the marginalized, given that the status of the social elite, indeed, of the entire social structure

which allows for them to occupy this hierarchical position, relies in many ways on the presence of the marginalized.[1] Furthermore, Spivak advances another complication:

> When a line of communication is established between a member of subaltern groups and the circuits of citizenship or institutionality, the subaltern has been inserted into the long road to hegemony. Unless we want to be romantic purists or primitivists about "preserving subalternity"—a contradiction in terms—this is absolutely to be desired. (It goes without saying that museumized or curricularized access to ethnic origin…is not identical with preserving subalternity) (2125).

This statement implies that, in order to be able to communicate with the societal elite who orchestrate and direct the systems of oppression responsible for their marginalization, the subaltern must participate in the very institutions that disavow them. Thus, as Spivak demonstrates, there is no clear path to recognition and respect from the societal majority without compromising communal identity and playing the game of subjectivation, feeding into the forces that perpetuate marginalization and silencing.

Spivak's Subaltern and the Plight of the Roma

Though written nearly four decades ago, Spivak's essay speaks to issues still relevant to this day, in ways that she, herself, perhaps did not foresee. While intersectionality has become an academic buzzword and there are now university mandates in place protecting the

[1] See Patrut, Iulia-Karin. *Phantasma Nation: Zigeuner und Juden als Grenzfiguren des Deutschen*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2014. This concept will be more fully explored in chapter one of this dissertation.

study of what is usually given the problematic umbrella term "minority literature", the voices of the marginalized still struggle to be heard. This is especially true for marginalized communities often left out of consideration due to lesser visibility, a more nebulous history, or a romanticized/fetishized reputation built around limiting stereotypes. For such groups, Spivak's words still hold weight, perhaps for none more so than the Roma. Historically considered among the lowest of the low in terms of social undesirables, the Roma have all but faded into obscurity due to persistent and aggressive silencing at the hands of the societal majority, and when they are acknowledged, it is only in the form of tropes so exaggerated that they appear as caricatures at best. Situating Spivak's essay in terms of the circumstances faced by the Roma, both historically and in the present day, can enrich an understanding of the complex social maneuvers through which the Roma are forced to navigate interactions with the privileged societal majority, as well as highlight ways in which the Roma complicate and expand upon Spivak's conclusions, demonstrating that this remains a living, evolving set of issues.

The Roma are a group uniquely positioned at a nexus of marginalization, in part due to their effective lack of a homeland and their traditional strategy for dealing with Outsiders through cultural blending and invisibility.[2] As a widely diasporic group that has historically been systemically denied opportunities for education or stable employment, the Roma turned to nomadism as a survival strategy, moving from village to village both to find work and to escape the ire of those uncomfortable with the prolonged presence of the Other. Thus, the

[2] Though the Roma originated from a population in India, their connection to their homeland was severed when invading forces claimed the territory for their own; since then, the Roma have been a diasporic community, adapting to the cultures of the lands they inhabit or else striving to maintain a low profile and avoid the attention of the public eye. More detailed information on the history of the Roma will be available in chapter one.

Roma became a handy scapegoat upon which the societal majority could pin the blame for any number of ills. That the Roma are a marginalized group goes without question, but according to Spivak, mere status as an ethnic or cultural Other is not enough to deem one *subaltern*; Spivak builds upon Gramsci's notion of the subaltern as one who is denied access to hegemonic power, who is denied access to both mimetic and political forms of self-representation—the subaltern is a group "whose identity is its difference" (Spivak, 2119).[3] For the Roma, these words ring particularly true; throughout European history, the Roma have served as the perennial Other, the antithesis of what is considered civil and respectable, to the point that their perceived identity in the public imagination is constructed entirely around the idea that they are that which good, Christian Europeans are not. In addition, resulting from the strategies of invisibility combined with aggressive silencing at the hands of the societally privileged, the Roma are often forgotten when it comes to recognizing marginalized groups victimized by violent oppression—thanks to low visibility, relatively few are aware of the Roma's continued existence as a thriving ethnic community, and despite the fact that thousands of Roma were specifically targeted and killed during the Holocaust, though they are commonly overlooked in conversations about the racially-motivated violence of the Nazi regime. The Roma are thus marginalized among the marginalized, existing as a mere shadow of themselves, a Phantom Nation as author Iulia-Karin Patrut calls them: half-seen in silhouette and then vanishing from the public eye, heard of only in rumor, trapped in a world that refuses to give them form, yet unable to move on.[4]

[3] For further reading, see Gramsci, Antonio. *The Southern Question*, trans. Pasquale Verdicchio (West Lafayette, Ind.: Bordighera, 1995).
[4] See Patrut, Iulia-Karin. *Phantasma Nation: >Zigeuner< und Juden als Grenzfiguren des >Deutschen<*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2014.

Even today, the Roma face extreme discrimination and opposition when they arrive in a township:

> The typical and immediate response from wider society to temporary Gypsy encampments is usually uproar from local residents, who do not want Gypsies anywhere near their land. Where Gypsies live in more permanent settings…they still face the same levels of hostility from non-Gypsy neighbors (Bhopal, 202-3).

There is a clear place for the Other, and that place is far enough away that there is no threatened breach of identity. There is, however, another light in which the *Gazhe* view the Roma—that of a titillating object of exotic desire, all the more arousing because of their taboo Otherness: "Together with imagined uninhibited pagan (that is, non-Christian) behavior, the pathologized, Janus-faced image that emerged both fascinated and, at the same time, repulsed" the homogenized West (Hancock, 187). The Roma, as a nomadic people, are caught in this dual gaze, due to the fact that they sustain themselves through working for and interactive with the communities they pass through. Whether this takes the form of doing manual labor like digging ditches, performing and entertaining, or peddling sundry goods, Roma interaction with the non-Roma is a necessity, and becomes even more inescapable as the world grows ever more connected. Returning to the image of the double-faced Janus, while it may be easy to focus on the face which looks with scorn and repugnance, one should not forget that there is also one gazing at the Roma with fetishizing curiosity and intrigue. It is through this lens that a complicating factor lends nuance to our

understanding of this relationship. The exotic—even if it is only perceived as such—will always hold a strange appeal for its break from the mundane, and the figure of the exotic Roma, conceived as a people with an almost mystic attunement to the natural world and the knowledge to cure, curse, and read one's fate, has managed to captivate the Western imagination for centuries. This dichotomy is markedly shown in the popularity of Cher's song "Gypsies, Tramps and Thieves" when it was released in 1971, which explicitly raises the point of this two-sided reaction:

> I was born in the wagon of a travellin' show, / my mama used to dance for the money they'd throw. / Papa would do whatever he could, / preach a little gospel, sell a couple bottles of Doctor Good. / Gypsies, tramps and thieves, / we'd hear it from the people of the town. / They'd call us gypsies, tramps and thieves / but every night all the men would come around (Cher, 1971).

While the popularity of this song stands as a testament to the allure of the "Gypsy" figure in pop culture, the lyrics speak to the tenuous relationship that has historically characterized Roma/non-Roma interactions and continues to prove accurate in contemporary times. Each of the actions noted in the verse exemplify the chameleonic strategy of performing to non-Roma expectations in order to safely navigate these interactions, from busking to peddling dubious cure-all remedies. Recognizing this allure toward the exotic, many Roma adopted a certain measure of performativity in order to better navigate these interactions and maintain their ability to, at least to some extent, continue to survive and to preserve their way of life. "This appears to have been achieved

through a fine-tuning of their performance under the 'gaze' of others" (Pusca, 329). If the non-Roma have essentially created the 'Gypsy' character through their collective exotifying imagination, the Roma, by conforming to that characterization and playing the role, could be afforded some measure of agency and ability to navigate these roads, in both a literal sense of border-crossing and free movement between locales, and in a metaphoric sense alluding to the relationship dynamics coming into play in a Rom/non-Rom encounter. If a villager or citizen expects the Rom, through some not-quite-human nature, to be able to divine her future or heal his injured horse, this provides the Rom with an opportunity to obtain money or food, indulges the exotic and romanticized fantasy of the citizen, and provides just enough otherness to maintain that safety net of distinction between *us* and *them*. The Rom might endure scorn and derision by day, at the hands of the population en masse, but small and discreet transactions like this, made by the individual, present a mode of survival that manages to bring some benefit to both parties. The non-Roma gaze may create and impute a fictitious "Gypsy" identity onto the Roma community at large, but by performing this role and using it to work within the existing paradigm, Roma have the ability to subvert this controlling ascription of identity and gain a sense of indirect power. This compliance to the expectations of the societal elite, however, can only grant so much; while this tactic may help the Roma to survive and avoid some degree of persecution, it still leaves them trapped in an ascribed identity that does not conformed to lived experience, divested of agency, their voices left unheard.

Voice and Identity

As a group marginalized among the marginalized, Spivak's essay speaks to the Roma in ways that offer relevant insight into the field of Romani Studies, as scholars begin to look beyond the level of the ethnography and into the performances—literary and otherwise—through which the Roma attempt to assert their own identities and claim space. This highlights the link between voice and identity, an integral part of this discussion, and a matter close to the heart of Spivak's argument: the ability to speak and be heard in inextricably tied to a sense of identity, as it is through interaction and interrelation that identity can truly be forged. From Althusser's classic example of *interpellation* to Lacan's idea of the *mirror stage*, the concept that the construction of one's self-identity is in some way linked to one's interaction with society is not a new one.[5] The idea that one truly comes to Selfhood through the experience of the Other (here meant from the perspective of the individual, rather than the cultural) certainly seems sensible, concise, and logical. This concept takes on an interesting implication, though, when examined in a societal context through the case of a particular group marginalized to the point that meaningful interaction with the Other is severely limited at best. Without a voice, the ability to create and sustain a social identity is tenuous, perhaps even impossible; in such cases, it stands to reason that these groups are not only *subaltern* in the sense that they cannot communicate, but also in the sense that they, then, are not the authors of their own identities, as members of the social elite ascribe to them whatever narratives advance their own supremacy or otherwise serve their needs. For the Roma, this translates into an experience of being overwritten, having their identities created by the societally privileged and ascribed to them, whether out of

[5] See Althusser, Louis. *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* and Lacan, Jacques. *The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience*.

fetishization of the exotic or contempt for the Other. They become so many tropes and stereotypes, consumed for entertainment or held up as straw men to reinforce the superiority of the ideological status quo, as will later be explored in depth.

Such play between voice and identity is intimately interwoven with one's capacity for freedom and autonomy. "The limits of liberation are to be understood not merely as self-imposed, but, more fundamentally, as the precondition of the subject's very formation" (Butler, 33). Those who would become a subject—that is, a recognized participant in a global, intercultural discourse—must necessarily give up their autonomy as they are placing a part of the process of constructing their identity in the hands of those with whom they engage. And yet, without participating in this act of subjectivation, one lacks the ability to engage discursively in a way that allows them to speak out for themselves and their needs as an individual. Thus, the business of claiming identity and finding one's voice becomes something of a troublesome double-bind, situating the subaltern groups Spivak describes in a considerable labyrinth as they try to navigate the complexities of intercultural interaction. Historically, the Roma have relied on invisibility as a survival strategy for dealing with non-Roma: the more they are able to avoid the attention of the societally privileged, the better their chances of successfully navigating interaction without being subjected to confrontation.[6] As we move toward a more global stage for connectedness and discourse, however, the act of blending into the background begins to offer more harm than benefit, as minority advocacy groups consistently overlook their needs and their culture comes to face

[6] This idea will be properly explored in chapter one. For a more in-depth discussion, see Hancock, Ian. *We are the Romani People* and Lee, Ronald. *Goddam Gypsy*, both of which will be taken up as focal points later in this dissertation.

the threat of extinction. If the Roma want to be heard and heeded as subjects in the discourse of an increasingly interconnected world, they must make themselves visible, and thereby make themselves vulnerable to *subjectivation*—for "the soul [or, in less metaphysical terms, identity] is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body"—or else remain voiceless (Foucault, 34). While this theoretically applies to any group or individual seeking to operate within the framework of society, it carries added gravity for the Roma. The Roma, through a considerable segment of European and American history, "have successfully maintained their invisibility within a larger host society" to the degree that the fact of their continued existence as an ethnicity comes as a surprise to many (Weyrauch, 21). As such, the Roma largely resist traditional modes of identity and identification. Considered from the perspective of such a group, this forms a true dilemma.

The consequences of remaining voiceless, however, go beyond mere neglect; the absence of a voice (and the absence of an identity thereby implied) here often translates to the voiceless group becoming a blank canvas of sorts, having an identity imputed upon them at will by the dominant sociocultural group. Choosing to avoid identification and remain silent when the connectedness of new media allows for no real place to hide makes the Roma vulnerable to those who would take advantage of them, as the next chapter shall discuss in detail. Knowing that the subaltern, being aggressively and forcibly silenced by the societal majority, often could not gain a voice with which they could advocate for themselves, whether they desired to engage in identity politics or not, Spivak saw that "[n]ow the question was not "What is the true form of the subaltern?" The question had become "How

is the subaltern represented?" Represent here meant both "present again" and "stand in place of." Both the subjects and the methods of research underwent a change" (Chatterjee, 83). Those without a voice are still, indeed, spoken for; thus, the point of examination is more productively placed on the matter of these representations, their origins, and their effects. In the case of the Roma, this representation follows a clearly established pattern, a tropic caricature employed in Western culture for centuries.[7] In so doing, the societal elite conjure up false images of this phantom nation, putting words in the mouths of the dead and forgotten, while the unseen shades whose images and identities are projected, distorted, and used as a spectacle can do little more than watch in silence.

Of course, as humanist thought gains traction, such spectacles tend to lose their appeal, as the public can no longer easily ignore the blatant indignity of the act. An early solution to this was the creation of *tsiganology*—an early field of academic study taking the Roma as its focus. Even those ethnographers and anthropologists who purportedly strive to give voice to the subaltern are not without problem, however; many such writers simply present a spectacle of a different sort, and are no less problematic in their coopting the image and representation of the subaltern, as shall be demonstrated in following chapters. Thus, while examining the particular forms of representation and images used in literature is still of value in a contemporary study of subaltern identity and representation, it becomes necessary to move toward a closer and more suspicious scrutiny of the very systems which not only enable but also necessitate such persistently tropic representations of the Other, whether in the form of blatant, near-comical stereotypes, or as exotic and fetishized objects of

[7] See Hancock, Ian. *We are the Romani People*. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2010.

investigation. This investigation, then, will take these tropes and forms of representation as a starting point, along with inspiration from questions highlighted in Spivak's essay, in order to approach questions of how such representations are constructed, the functions that these constructs serve in maintaining the societal paradigms of the privileged majority, and how these may be manipulated in order to further agency and create space for the voices of those who are represented:

> More than the question of how the third world subject is represented within Western discourse, or the arguments about strategic essentialism (on which Spivak herself would vacillate), or the relative merits of the philosophical insights of Deleuze, Foucault, and Derrida, it is the difficult and laborious shift to a consciously poststructural method that was facilitated by Spivak's intervention (Chatterjee, 84).

The message of Spivak's work, and the spirit in which it is evoked in this dissertation, is not to merely list stereotypes in an effort to try and uncover some single, fabled, "authentic" subaltern identity, or to glibly conclude that the subaltern simply need to find their voice. Rather,

> Spivak turns the ethical imperative inwards, pushed by a concern that analytical attempts to let "the oppressed speak for themselves" evidence a "first world analyst" "masquerading as the absent nonrepresenter" (1988, p. 292). On this, Spivak is unforgiving, contending that "[s]ome of the most radical

> criticism coming out of the West today is the result of an interested desire to conserve the subject of the West, or the West as Subject" (1988, p. 271) and criticising directly "the banality of leftist intellectuals' lists of self-knowing, politically canny subalterns ... representing them, the intellectuals represent themselves as transparent" (1988, p. 275) (Griffiths, 304).

As Spivak indicates, any meaningful work in this area necessitates examining not only the tropic representations and the circumstances of silencing in circulation vis-à-vis a given minority group, but also the very foundations of the systems which benefit from and are built upon such silencing. Turning the ethical imperative inward to more closely scrutinize one's own position within these social mechanisms may be more productively illuminating than exclusively viewing this issue in terms of the minority's action or inaction. It is a simple thing to make the observation that the subaltern cannot speak; the true merit comes with asking why that might be so.

Shortcomings of Spivak's Approach

Of course, it should be noted that Spivak's essay and subsequent positions regarding the subaltern are not without their flaws, not the least of which could be described as an essentialism of sorts regarding the subaltern identity and the nature of their position at the margins of society. Spivak, herself, admitted as much later in her life:

> In the debate, prominent figures such as Benita Parry and Ania Loomba have sought to nuance the apparently absolute terms of

> Spivak's original thesis, cautioning against "deliberate deafness to the native voice where it can be heard" (Parry, 1987, p. 39) and "too absolute a theory of subaltern silence" (Loomba, 2005, p. 197). Indeed, Spivak's subsequent revisions brought a notable qualification: "in the first version of this text, I wrote, in the accents of passionate lament: the subaltern cannot speak! It was an inadvisable remark" (1999, p. 308). (Griffiths, 299).

To posit, as Spivak's original essay did, that the subaltern simply and absolutely cannot speak with regards to the societal elite is perhaps overhasty, and does not offer much by way of hope for resolution. "While Spivak is excellent on the 'itinerary of silencing' endured by the subaltern, particularly historically, there is little attention to the process by which the subaltern's 'coming to voice' might be achieved" (Moore-Gilbert, 106). As such, though this dissertation will take the core focus of Spivak's essay as a point of departure, I will at times argue against or call into question the claims made in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in the interest of extending this line of inquiry into new and potentially more productive directions with regards to the possibility of communication between the marginalized and the marginalizers.

Project Outline

The project of this dissertation, then, is to examine the instances of attempted communication between Roma and non-Roma, referred to from this point on using the Romani word *Gazhe*, and to examine the strategies used. Utilizing as a starting point the framework established by Spivak regarding the power dynamic between the disavowed and

the societal elite and the key relationship between communication, representation, identity, and agency, I will explore a series of key texts—some, respected titles from the established literary canon; others, scarcely recognized and barred from the canon due to their status as "minority literature", where the term "literature" is used only begrudgingly—in an attempt to plot a trajectory showing the intricate strategies used by the Roma in order to be heard and understood by the *Gazhe*, the impact these attempts have had on Roma representation and identity, and the implications of the societal majority's continued resistance to hearing the voices of this phantom nation.

The first chapter will lay the foundation for this exploration by examining several canonical works featuring the tropic image of the Roma—a stereotype so successfully popularized that it continues to shape how the Roma are viewed to this day. Close readings of works such as von Arnim's *Isabella von Ägypten,* Hugo's *Notre Dame de Paris*, and Mérimée's *Carmen* will present an established historical language of Othering within which the Roma must operate if they do not wish to render themselves inscrutable to the *Gazhe*. I demonstrate how this language, supported and perpetuated throughout European history and reaching even into contemporary pop-culture, reduces the Roma to stereotypes emphasizing their allegedly beastly, less-than-human nature and painting them as savage brutes, as cunning manipulators, or as overly-sexualized lechers unable to control their base urges. I will also illustrate how these stereotypes are part of a much larger systemic process of Othering, originated and perpetuated as a counterpoint needed to reify a constructed *Gazhe* identity as the innately superior civilized, white, Christian European.

Chapter two begins investigating works by Roma authors with a specifically *Gazhe* audience in mind, as a sensible and direct attempt at cross-cultural communication. Specifically, I examine Ronald Lee's autobiographical novel, *Goddam Gypsy*, and Cecilia Woloch's anthology of autobiographical poems, *Tsigan*, as works illustrating the difficulty of directly approaching communication with *Gazhe* from a Roma perspective. Using the language established in the first chapter, these Roma authors attempt to convey the realities of their struggles at the margins of society in hopes of being heard, raising awareness of their circumstances, and effecting change. Such direct methods, however, may be counterproductive within the context of this power dynamic, as I demonstrate. Ultimately, *Gazhe* in these accounts find the Roma unpalatable and inscrutable unless they perform the expected tropic identities ascribed to them, even going to far as to register this refusal to conform or any direct confrontation of the problematic nature of the Roma-*Gazhe* power dynamic as a threat, leading to a complete breakdown of communication. The alternative, however, is silent complacency, which leads only to further exploitation of the Roma, and could eventually result in the extinction of a culture.

The third chapter identifies a third option between these two poles, and shifts from Roma writing in *Gazhe* genres for *Gazhe* readers to a style less concerned with pandering to tropic expectations. I examine a series of poems written by Roma from myriad countries and walks of life, sourced from Ian Hancock's anthology, *Roads of the Roma*. Lyric poetry, with its strong kinship to the folk songs and oral traditions historically used by the Roma, embodies an alternative mode of navigating these societal boundaries, utilizing the *Gazhe's* tendency to fixate on and objectify the Roma as exotic spectacles to create a space for

literary communication of the experiences, needs, and fears of members of this marginalized community without directly playing into the double-bind of subjectivation. The chapter then explores how these poems, through the use of the lyric "I" both as a way to give voice to opinions that would otherwise be shut down, and as a means to have Roma engage in dialogue with *Gazhe* without directly participating as an interlocutor. Due to the nature of the poetry, the reader is placed into the position of this lyric "I", reading the words as though they come from his or her perspective, and thus bypassing to a degree the defensive barrier the *Gazhe* have erected in order to avoid the uncomfortable predicament of being confronted by those they (even tacitly) oppress. This indirect method of communication, then, is an approach that offers the possibility of succeeding in fostering communication by reaching through to readers where more straightforward means would be resisted.

The fourth chapter carries this idea of an alternative means of negotiating power dynamics further through autobiography, relying on the *Gazhe* desire to fetishize and consume Roma figures appearing in stories to covertly transmit the messages that have otherwise fallen on deaf ears. In much the same way as the poems from the previous chapter, this exploration draws upon the memoires of Roma Holocaust survivors Ceija Stojka and Philomena Franz as examples of literature which take advantage of the *Gazhe* attraction to Roma storytelling in order to simultaneously rebuild a community and process grief in the aftermath of the Holocaust, and to educate *Gazhe* on the particular hardships and violence faced by minority groups as a result of oppressive Othering and subsequent systemic silencing. I argue that these narratives, due to their nature as prose texts with a distinct storytelling element, may be even more accessible to *Gazhe* readers than the lyric poetry of

the preceding chapter, in part because of a hybridity of genre that combines Roma voices with a format familiar and palatable to Western audiences.

The coda outlines areas for future research as Romani Studies becomes a more academically recognized and respected field, analyzing Roma theatre as yet another example of a hybrid genre using indirect communicative strategies to illustrate the performance of identity and guide *Gazhe* audiences to consider this social power dynamic from a less privileged perspective. I will also highlight the potential of new social media and the now-ubiquitous presence of the Internet—some of the very globalizing forces which have contributed to the need for a change of communicative tactics on the part of the Roma—as a promising new direction in the evolutionary trajectory of strategies for cross-cultural communication, as well as a platform for recreating a sense of community for a diasporic group forced through institutional and individual violence to scatter across continents in search of refuge. This chapter examines several websites, including amateur archives, message boards, and social media groups, in order to showcase how these modalities benefit marginalized communities—particularly diasporas—not only through providing a sense of community and a platform for regular engagement, but also by recording and preserving cultural artifacts such as songs, stories, and art with a dedication that the more traditional canon has not historically provided to minority voices.

Modes of Communication—Parallel, Perpendicular, and Oblique

Over the course of this dissertation, I will be relying upon a number of categories of communicative and navigational strategies which I have conceived with regards to their modes of approach. These categories are broadly applicable, describing means of negotiating

the power dynamics between the marginalized and the marginalizers both in formal literature, as well as in informal, casual communication. As I understand it, and as I shall endeavor to demonstrate through the following chapters, standard strategies for negotiating the disconnect between the societally privileged and the minority groups disenfranchised by them tend to take one of two forms: a direct approach openly seeking to engage with the majority and confront inequality, or a more passive method of blending in or minimizing oneself in order to avoid drawing the potentially dangerous attention of the oppressor. The former strategy I have termed *perpendicular communication*, as it forms a point of direct opposition to the societal status quo, while the latter I term *parallel communication*, striving to simply go along with expected roles and ascribed identities, finding ways to live while maintaining the status quo insofar as social disruptions might provoke even worse conditions. To these, however, I would like to add a third possible strategy, highlighted by the self-aware performances of tropic roles by the Roma to manipulate the *Gazhe*'s fixation with them as a means of indirect communication. Inspired by the etymology of the term "trope", deriving from the Greek τρέπειν and related to the concepts of turning, veering, or diverting, I term this third strategy *oblique communication*.[8] Running slantways between *perpendicular* and *parallel*, this category refers to those strategies which draw upon imputed roles and appear to follow the expectations of the majority while covertly undermining or drawing into question their impositions. For the Roma, as I will demonstrate in chapters three and four of this dissertation, this involves a canny manipulation of what I term the *Gazhe* Gaze, the view which reduces the Roma to objects of entertainment for the *Gazhe* to

[8] See Woodhouse, S. C. *English–Greek Dictionary: A Vocabulary of the Attic Language*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Limited, 1910.

enjoy, while couching in these performances commentaries, lived experiences, and cultural trauma regarding those oppressive and silencing practices supporting and supported by *Gazhe* society, thus turning performative acts into something of a Trojan Horse. Thus, as I will argue, this method of *oblique communication* offers a potential solution to the silencing highlighted in Spivak's essay through reframing the question "Can the subaltern speak?" as "How can the societally privileged be led to listen?".

Why Literature?

At this point, readers may question whether a project revolving around the interaction and communication between the white majority and a diasporic ethnic minority might be better suited to the realm of philosophy or anthropology, as opposed to literature. To be fair, these fields do offer perspectives and information vital to approaching an understanding of this issue. After all, this undertaking does rely on an awareness of the cultural and social history of the Roma, as well as a series of critical lenses through which to discuss questions of identity, power, and representation. Why, then, does this dissertation deal primarily with literary investigation and analysis? What does literature have to offer to this issue that these fields lack? As I will demonstrate over the course of this dissertation, literature not only offers a unique platform from which the voices and perspectives of the disavowed may be heard, but also provides insight into the societal mechanisms with which these groups are silenced, the various strategies which aid (to various degrees) in working around these mechanisms, and allows the marginalized to engage in attempted dialogue with the privileged majority without falling into the trap of subjectivation.

To elaborate on this point, consider once more the process of subjectivation: in seeking to be recognized as a subject in sociopolitical discourse, to be heard and understood, a speaker must necessarily engage with society, thereby becoming a subject of society, beholden to all its laws, vulnerable to its structural mechanisms:

> Bound to seek recognition of its own existence in categories, terms, and names that are not of its own making, the subject seeks the sign of its own existence outside itself, in a discourse that is at once dominant and indifferent. Social categories signify subordination and existence at once. In other words, within subjection the price of existence is subordination. Precisely at the moment in which choice is impossible, the subject pursues subordination as the promise of existence. The pursuit is not choice, but neither is it necessity. Subjection exploits the desire for existence, where existence is always conferred from elsewhere; it marks a primary vulnerability to the Other in order to be (Butler, 20-21).

This process works in both directions, for each member of a party seeking to be recognized as a valid subject in its own right for the sake of discourse and communication must undergo the same subjectivation. For a member of a systemically marginalized group, this can have drastic implications, both because of their social status and perceived place low in the established hierarchy, and because of the uncomfortable fact that—by virtue of the two-way process of subjectivation—they do possess a degree of influence and psychosocial

power over the privileged as Other against which their prestige and social value may be defined. The reminder of this power, and the threat which it represents, contributes to the breakdown of communication between the societal elite and the subaltern that Spivak describes, leading to subaltern voices being either outright ignored or spoken over and distorted into tropic fuel used to reinforce their deservedness of a place at the margins of society. Through literature, however, this process might be bypassed. As I hope to demonstrate in this dissertation, literature creates a phantom speaker, a fictitious voice; there is an allowance of distance between the identity of the author and the identities of the characters created. These fictitious speakers are immaterial, insubstantial, and incapable of participating in the identifying process of subjectivation, yet their words carry weight and can thus be heard in ways that flesh-and-blood individuals from these marginalized communities cannot.

Chapter 1—Strangers Among Us: Romantic Roma and the Birth of a Trope

"Mädel, mach's Ladel zu / 's kommt e Zigeunerbu,

führt dich an deiner Hand / fort ins Zigeunerland" (Büchner, 14).

Introduction

Though well-known in Europe, the figure of the *Rom* is not met with much recognition in the States; far more familiar is the term "Gypsy", and even then only in terms of pop-culture characters from film and television. To the majority of Americans, the term "Gypsy" evokes images of women from bygone times with raven hair and colorful, flowing skirts, perhaps dancing for coin on the streets or reading palms. A romanticized image, to be sure, but one that leaves little room for reality; in fact, the status of Roma as a community living and thriving in current times (even in the U.S., no less) comes as a surprise to most. Most in the States know the Roma through figures such as Esmeralda from *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (more often than not by Disney's account, rather than Hugo's), through the plot device of a "Gypsy curse" thrown about in no small number of B-horror films, or through the persistent popularity of so-called "bohemian" fashion lines, but never through a living, breathing human.

Europe, however, holds a more complex view of the Roma than America; in addition to creating and propagating the largely romanticized image above, there is an equally reductionist and prejudiced view of the Roma as a somehow savage and uncivilized parasitic Other, wandering uninvited into a community, taking work, money, and goods that are not rightfully theirs, and vanishing into the night just as suddenly as they appeared. Incredibly

popular literary figures during the Romantic, the Roma were painted with this Janus-faced simultaneous allure and repugnance in novels, poems, artwork, and music, to the extent that these tropic versions of themselves became more commonly recognizable than the flesh-and-blood realities of the people they were meant to represent, giving us stereotypes that have remained unchanged into the present day.

Despite having a diasporic presence stretching from Russia down into the Balkan Peninsula and through to Spain and even the United Kingdom through migration stemming back as early as the 1300s and before[9], and leaving a romanticized impression on the realms of literature, music, and the experience of everyday life in Europe across generations, there is surprisingly little scholarly research into the groups of Roma and Sinti. As a result, this minority group is known to the West nearly entirely through tropic characters and stereotypes invented by white Westerners, if it is known at all. The mention of the word "Gypsy" to the average *Gazho* (non-*Rom*) might conjure up images of lascivious women, wizened old crones, or thieving con artists and ruffians. Stereotypical views such as these extend largely unchanged through some of the earliest references by Westerners about the Roma, and the tropes are sustained in this manner simply because legitimate and authentic cultural information regarding the Roma is not now and has not historically been readily available to the public at large. In order to fill in the gaps and fit the figure of the *Rom* into a cohesive cultural framework, the *Gazhe* Gaze—the common Western cultural view which constructs and perceives the *Rom* figure, and which reduces the *Rom* to a mere object to be taken in and evaluated—resorts to these superficial commonplaces in the attempt to

[9] See chapters 1 and 3 of Hancock's *We are the Romani People* for a more detailed account of the history of the Roma and their exodus into the West.

categorize the Roma and their relationship to the white Western majority. "Romani identity still remains to a great extent controlled by the non-Romani world… by novelists and journalists" (Hancock, 188). Whether one examines the literary figures of Isabella in Achim von Arim's *Isabella von Ägypten* or Mignon in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, the musical style and lyrics of Schumann's *Zigeunerleben* , the incendiary sermons of Martin Luther, or the subject of Frans Hals' portrait of *Die Zigeunerin*, one finds a common thread of Roma identity solely being constructed, narrated, and perpetuated by non-Roma, with the Roma themselves remaining noticeably silent.[10]

In many ways, this one-sided need to establish a concrete identity defining the Roma as the quintessential Other speaks to the role they play in creating a comfortable sense of self for the non-Roma Western Europeans, in much the same way that Hegel's master/slave dialectic describes the seemingly contradictory nature of the power dynamic in this relationship as working in both directions. In her essay, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak tells us that the marginalized and subaltern are simply forced to endure a fate of silence and invisibility thrust upon them by their status.[11] In response to the question posed by the title of her essay, Spivak concludes that the subaltern indeed cannot speak, which is of course simply untrue. The subaltern can and do speak, as seen through the folk songs sung in resistance and solidarity by slaves working American plantations or through Tibetan villagers refusing to give up their icons of the Buddhas during the oppression of the Maoist regime, but the social majority continually speak over or silence

[10] Wilhelm Solms, in pages 299-311 of his work *Zigeunerbilder*, lays out a succinct examination categorizing the appearances of various tropic Roma figures in the German literary canon. This would be useful supplemental reading for those who wish to delve deeper into this subject. To no great surprise, every author mentioned in the 12-page long list of references is *Gazhe*.

[11] Found in chapter 3 of *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*.

them.[12] Communication requires the active efforts of both the speaker and the listener; when the subaltern speakers try to reach out and make their voices heard, it then becomes the onus of the majority listeners to receive and decipher the message, which they all too often cannot—or will not—do. That would undermine the carefully constructed narratives the majority impose over the subaltern for their own purposes, as this work shall demonstrate. However, a closer look at the historical and contemporary endeavors of one such subaltern group—here, Roma and Sinti—to navigate the nebulous realm of socio-cultural interactions reveals far more agency and action than initially meet the eye, cloaked in a veil of subversion.

The intention of this work is not to offer a historical analysis of Roma stereotypes, nor is it an attempt to unearth a single, shining, "true" Roma-essence, though it does make use of historical representations and ethnographical scholarship. Rather, the aim of this text is to work through the *Gazhe*-penned characterizations of the Roma in the European literary canon and beyond, bringing these into dialogue with Roma self-representation, in order to demonstrate that, contrary to Spivak's assertion that the subaltern cannot speak, these people can, in fact, participate in an ethno-political discourse wherein they are heavily marginalized, employing subtle subversion and strategic silence or compliance in order to successfully navigate this space. This is not always accomplished through means recognized in the Western conception of genre or canon, necessitating an exploration and an expansion of what is considered to be academically viable material worthy of study, which may reveal some holes in Spivak's argument in and of itself. To truly begin to approach formulating a

[12] While it is not the aim of this dissertation to speak in depth about disavowed minority groups in a broad sense, familiarity with the history of colonialism and the systemic damage it has done to indigenous people, as well as the various paths of resistance with which it has been met, would highlight what is at stake in my argument. For further reading, see Part 3 of *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin.

response to Spivak's assertion, one must first ask oneself whether there is truly a language not already infected by the *Gazhe* narrative of Roma. This will necessitate an examination of the stereotypes found in *Gazhe* characterization of the Roma as exemplified by three influential works of the European literary canon: Achim von Arnim's *Isabella von Ägypten*, Victor Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris*, and Prosper Mérimée's *Carmen*, and an evaluation of the ways in which these stereotypes simultaneously hold a solid and persistent place in the Western cultural imagination and also contradict, destabilize, and undermine themselves, bringing into question the validity of the image of the *Rom* as it currently stands in the common public imagination. These texts, and the ethnographies by which they were informed, establish terms by which Spivak would have judged the Roma as a subaltern group incapable of their own speech separate from the language of their oppressors. As I will demonstrate in subsequent chapters, however, the Roma are quite adept at taking the language of the *Gazhe* and subverting it, using the images available in order to navigate the social sphere.

To begin this exploration, I look to the early depictions of Roma which would have been among the first to appear in mainstream media as part of the greater literary canon. Many early appearances occurred as the Roma initially moved across Western Europe, and include largely only brief mentions or descriptions. For instance, in 1596, Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* states that a man impassioned by love becomes so blinded that he "sees Helen's beauty in the brow of Egypt", indicating that the populace of England at the time was aware of the Roma—albeit as "Gypsies", thought to have risen out of Egypt—and generally held the opinion that they were undesirables (V.I.11). There is little detailed

characterization of the Roma in works such as this; they serve largely as references or points of comparison, held up as examples of the ugly, the uncivilized, or the mysterious, while having little direct involvement in the plot, and revealing only the most general of stereotypes. The European fixation with the Roma truly blossomed in the Romantic period, stretching across the 19th Century—it is during this period that Roma figures became popular as more complex and developed protagonists, rather than mere social signposts, providing a deeper and more complete insight into how they were perceived in the social imagination at the time. The timing of this is no coincidence; it is in the 19th Century that Nationalism is born on the European continent, and as Europeans strive to build not only nations, but also a new national identity, it becomes useful to have a representative Other in order to more firmly reify that identity in the public view (Berger, 22). To this end, I look to one of the earliest published novellas featuring Roma as main characters and not simply background figures or curiosities, Achim von Arnim's *Isabella von Ägypten*, debuting in 1812, predating both Mérimée's *Carmen* and Hugo's *Notre Dame de Paris*.[13] While both of these later (and arguably more commonly known) works will be examined in this chapter to further situate the image of the Roma in European culture at large, I will begin with von Arnim's classic novella in order to contextualize the subject of Roma life and the depiction thereof within the German literary canon and to open with a text which places Roma in the spotlight, so to speak, rather than leaving them to flesh out the background.

Origins of Othering

[13] For a detailed timeline of appearances or mentions of Roma in the German literary canon, see the appendix of Wilhelm Solms' *Zigeunerbilder*.

Many of the Romani tropes and stereotypes that appear in literature as early as the Romantik and earlier remain commonplace in the Western cultural imagination centuries later; even today, one continues to see "the belief that [Roma] steal, that [they] are dirty, that [they] can't stay in one place, that [they] have no morals, that [they] practice magical arts and place curses on people", demonstrating both that these cultural views have remained in place and unchanged since before even the early Romantic, and that the authors and artists of the Western cultural canon have been drawing upon and reinforcing these same tropes in a lineage of stereotyping (Hancock, 94). Von Arnim alone touches upon each of these stereotypes over the course of his work, and later texts such as Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris* and Mérimée's *Carmen* follow suit to the letter. Of course, the stereotypes presented here in literary examples were already circulating as social commonplaces well before these works were published. Current scholarship places the exodus of the Romani people out of India relatively recently in world history, at about 1000 C.E., and the Roma people were already a common sight and societal point of conflict in Western Europe by the Middle Ages; a sermon by Martin Luther as early as the 1500s uses the Roma as an example of the evils of ignorance and what becomes of society without proper education: "Was will da bleiben ynn deudschen landen, denn ein wuster wilder hauffen Tattern…ia villeicht ein sewstall vnd eine rotte von eitel wilden thieren?" (Luther, 6).[14] Luther makes two tacit assumptions in this sermon, which serve as a fair summarization of the ascriptions and assumptions regarding Roma through the present. The first assumption is that, given their nomadic lifestyle, the

[14] On pages 6-7 of his work, *Ame Sam E Rromane Dzene*, Prof. Ian Hancock theorizes that, due to linguistic similarities between Romanes and early Indic languages prior to the New Indo-Aryan period, the group which would go on to become the Roma must have left India before the sound shifts and grammatical changes this period brought, placing their emigration at some point before 1000 C. E.

Roma are wild and beastly people who live in a state of filth, little better than swine. The second assumption is that, given the above, they do not care for education, the social graces, or for contributing to the greater community, and are thus threatening to proper civilization. These two related concepts go on to form the basis for the further animalizations and associations imputed on the Romani people, casting them both as savage animals and as exotic objects of lust, as I shall illustrate.

Greed, Lust, and Black Magic: The *Romni* in von Arnim's *Isabella von Ägypten*

In von Arnim's story, the titular character and protagonist is not only a young *Romni*, but is also depicted as royalty of sorts—the daughter of a fictitious Romani leader who dreamed of realizing a great "Zurückführen nach Ägypten" for his people (von Arnim, 5). This establishes a number of points: first and foremost, that the myth of the Roma descending from the mysterious antiquity of Egypt remains unchanged from nearly 300 years before, demonstrating that the public was more interested in perpetuating an fashionably exotic and mystic-seeming fiction than in the actual history of these people. Second, this is very clearly a *different* kind of *Romni*—she's not like the common "Gypsy" rabble so frequently seen as less than human, but is elevated by her status in a class system which seems to subtly impress upon the reader that this makes her worthwhile as the central figure of a narrative. In addition, the assertion that there is one single "Gypsy king" who yearned to reunite his people and lead them back to their homeland of Egypt conveys that Roma, too, have at least some redeeming civilized qualities, and are thus relatable and humanizable figures, even if they are more primitive and unscrupulous by nature than their *Gazhe* counterparts, as the fact that he was hanged for thievery forcibly reminds the reader.

Isabella is immediately contrasted against the secondary character Braka, an elderly *Romni* who serves as a mother figure, given that Isabella's father is dead and her biological mother is conspicuously absent. Braka engenders all of the worst tropes and stereotypes of Roma, with which the readers are intimately familiar. She is a liar, a thief, a squatter, and a con artist, and it becomes clear to the reader that whatever maternal affection she may show to Isabella is really a couched manipulation to maneuver her into a position of wealth and power, with Braka as the beneficiary at her side. In fact, it is Braka who instigates the main action of the plot through scheming to manipulate Isabella into stealing the heart of the young prince Charles V. and thereby situating the Roma—and, of course, herself in particular—in a place of status-by-proximity. Though this does not occur until well into the text, she reveals her true priorities early on when, in response to Isabella asking if there was a way she could walk the streets as a *Romni* without fear of judgment or persecution, she replied "Ich weiß kein anderes, als viel Geld zu haben, da kann man eingehen, wo man will, das ist der wahre Hauptschlüssel, die wahre Springewurzel, bei deren Berührung die Türen aufspringen" (von Arnim, 17). Braka exemplifies the stereotypical Romani fixation with money and willingness to go to any means—moral or not—in order to accrue it. Cleverly enough, even as Braka exemplifies an ethnic slur against the Romani people as greedy and immoral, she simultaneously illustrates the point that *Gazhe* society is just as deeply entrenched in these traits, if not more so—if money truly is the key to unlock every social door barring one's way in *Gazhe* society, can the Roma really be scorned for holding it in such high regard?

Isabella and Braka are in many ways foils to each other, both representing a specific type of *Gazhe* reaction to and assumption about the Romani presence. Braka is cunning, manipulative, dishonest, and unattractive—she is the "old Gypsy woman" con-artist figure so prevalent in the cultural imagination, encapsulating so many of the negative tropes associated with Roma, while Isabella is viewed as sweet, naïve, and (above all) attractive. She is described in an exoticized manner, highlighting her Romani "darkness" in an almost fetishizing way, accentuating her "lieben, vollen, dunkelgelockten Kopf mit den glänzenden schwarzen Augen" (Arnim, 3). It is her beauty and her innocently loving nature which mark her as a demure, if not exotic, object of desire. When confronted with the prospect of meeting the prince who threatens to take away her home—and whose vassals were potentially responsible for the execution of her father—she reacts with curiosity and excitement instead of anger: "Hör', Braka…den Prinzen möchte ich doch gern sehen, ich habe so viel von ihm gehört, wie schön er ist, und wie edel" (ibid, 11). She is just "Roma" enough to be enticing, but her behavior and personality largely conform to the existing expectations of girls at the time. Further, the reader learns that there is good reason Isabella is so (comparatively) tame and demure—she is only half-Roma. Her mother, who died during Isabella's early childhood, was not only a white German, but also "aus einem alten Hause der Grafen von Hogstraaten", making Isabella half Roma, half European, and full nobility by birth (ibid, 9). It is by virtue of this particular combination of circumstances and attributes that Isabella becomes a viable literary protagonist; her story is only worthy of readers' attention because she is at least partly white and of noble stock—this tempers her innate savageness and renders her more like the protagonist a western European audience would expect.

Isabella is not entirely pure and tame, however. There are more than a few moments in the text wherein her more beastly side shows, thus demonstrating her Roma nature. Her complicit involvement in the deception of the prince may be innocuous enough—after all, she was merely coerced into the role by the more scheming Braka, but Isabella has conceived of and voluntarily engaged in a number of shocking acts which would be considered well beyond the pale of civilized behavior. For instance, she practiced black magic at the gallows where her father was executed, in order to create a supernatural servitor out of a mandrake root. To make this act worse, she sacrificed an animal in order to complete the spell safely; rather than risking death by unearthing the mandrake herself, she had taken one end of a rope and tied it to the root, and the other "um den Hals des schwarzen Hundes angeschirrt", so that the dog would be the one to pull the creature from the earth and fall victim to its deadly cry (ibid, 22-3). This demonstrates both the stereotypical Roma association with the dark forces, curses, and the occult, and the lack of a sense of the sanctity of life, especially if ending that life furthers their own goals. She lusts after and becomes fixated upon a wealthy white prince, with at least some idea of using his money and political gravitas in order to better her life and the lives of her family members.

This touches on an idea that will be explored in greater depth later—namely, that the *Gazhe* hold a paradoxically contradictory view of the Roma, simultaneously attracted to and repelled by their seemingly inherent Otherness. It is precisely this Otherness which renders them threatening to the safety of societal homogeny, which makes them exotically appealing and attractive in the eyes of the *Gazhe*, and which scandalizes that attraction, leading to a tenuous and complex series of shifts within the mores and pre-established conceptions of

"civilized society", thus endangering the balance of the entire paradigm. This refusal to conform to the European nationalistic sentiments and mores quickly turned the Rom into a scapegoat figure onto which the antithesis of any number of values could be painted. "Im historischen Längsschnitt betrachtet werden…Zigeuner als Andere des Christentums, der Vernunft, der Nation, des Bürgertums, des Volks, oder der 'Rasse' entworfen" (Patrut, 21). Possessing culture unrecognizable to the West and concepts of identity which rendered them inscrutable, it was no difficult feat for Europeans to impute labels and characteristics upon them which reinforced the white Christian European identity and furthered grounded the social norms which the Roma presence would have otherwise destabilized. Of course, any attempts at blending in with the majority culture resulted in suspicion and the threat of infiltration, much the same as with the Jewish population of Europe at the time. As such an inescapable Other, the Roma faced extreme prejudice throughout much of Europe's history from the 1600s on, being banned from towns and cities at best, and the targets of bloody hate crimes at worst.[15] This aggressive Othering forced the Roma to redouble their efforts at remaining culturally camouflaged and distant, beginning the process anew in a vicious cycle.

Maligned Opportunists and animalistic *Naturvolk*: The Roma in Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris*

In Victor Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris*, first published in 1831, Roma are depicted in a somewhat more sympathetic light, as a marginalized people suffering under the heavily imbalanced societal norms and bylaws of the day. Quite possibly the most widely recognized

[15] "In 1571, a young Gypsy was stabbed in Frankfurt am Main. The court ruled that the perpetrator, a non-Gypsy, should be acquitted, on the grounds that since Gypsies were not to be tolerated in Germany, the man was justified in taking the law into his own hands" (Tebbutt, 2).

fictional Roma character, La Esmeralda remains to a great extent the archetypal standard upon which the public at large models its conceptualization of the *Romni* even today, whether this is patterned after Hugo's descriptions or the art of the Disney film that brought his words to a new generation of audiences across the globe. Here, one sees the full stereotype writ large, gold bangles, loose skirts, and all:

> …when she danced thus, to the humming of the Basque tambourine, which her two pure, rounded arms raised above her head, slender, frail and vivacious as a wasp, with her corsage of gold without a fold, her variegated gown puffing out, her bare shoulders, her delicate limbs, which her petticoat revealed at times, her black hair, her eyes of flame, she was a supernatural creature (Hugo, 55).

This description presents a good deal of insight regarding the perception of the Romani people, particularly the young women. First, it is of no small importance that Hugo introduces this character as she dances in the street for a crowd, accompanying herself with the rhythmic beating of her tambourine. Her dance was not the stately and socially graceful dance of the aristocracy; as she was performing to collect coins from her audience, it was undoubtedly the enticing and sexually charged sort, which would have ordinarily been an intimate affair. The seductive qualities of her movements are further accentuated by the roundness of her arms raised in a pose of abandon to the passions of her art, by her scandalously bare shoulders, and by her visible legs revealed by her petticoat lifting dangerously as she whirled. She is painted as "a creature"—a *creature*—of lust and desire and temptation.

However, there is one small detail that might be overlooked at first glance, buried amidst all of the sumptuous and seductive descriptions of La Esmeralda. Couched between the beauty and the temptation is one small phrase, likening her to a wasp, of all animals. This is a statement rich in symbolism; while Esmeralda may seem to be a lovely and delicate—even fragile—thing, the delicate appearance hides the fact that she has a vicious sting and corrosive venom for those who dare tread too close. On the one hand, this points to her barbed tongue, as she tends to favor sharply direct speech or total silence over soft and socially appropriate propriety. On the other, however, her danger can also be far more literal: in a total departure from what is considered proper and civilized for a lady, she carries a hidden dagger on her person at all times, and she knows how to use it:

> The gypsy's corsage slipped through his hands like the skin of an eel. She bounded from one end of the tiny room to the other, stooped down, and raised herself again, with a little poniard in her hand, before Gringoire had even had time to see whence the poniard came; proud and angry, her cheeks as red as an api apple and her eyes darting lightning (ibid., 89).

While beauty may not be a common trademark among all depictions of the Roma people as a whole in Hugo's work, ferocity and the willingness to survive by any means available are factors they all by necessity seem to share. As readers of Hugo's work learn, any outsider who sets foot in the outcast-ruled Cour de Miracles must prove themselves to be fellow enemies of the dominating social structures or else be put to death. Whether one looks at La Esmeralda sharply deflecting any unwanted advances, the young vagabond "taking a lesson in epilepsy from an old pretender" to better his alms when begging, or the brutal

treatment of any bourgeois Frenchman who manages to enter the Cour des miracles, one sees once more the hardness and self-preservation that was evident in Braka's character in *Isabella von Ägypten* (ibid., 77).

There is a definite quality of hardness about the Roma characters in this work, but unlike von Arnim, Hugo goes on to blatantly explain this quality from the perspective of the Roma themselves. Clopin, the "Gypsy King" figure of this work, puts it rather succinctly when he tells the poet Gringoire "As you treat our people in your abode, so we treat you in ours! The law which you apply to vagabonds, vagabonds apply to you. 'Tis your fault if it is harsh" (ibid., 79). This attitude demonstrates a sort of savagery, but savagery is needed if minority groups are to survive in the world as it has been constructed by the dominant. One can hardly argue with the logic; the Roma in this story fulfill the stereotype in that they act as thieves, charlatans, brigands, and other scorned figures at the fringe of society, but only because the fringe of society is the sole place the minority is allowed; an immoral life is the life which they are afforded if they wish to have the means to survive. Aside from thievery, deception, and brutality, Hugo's novel touches upon another major trope passed down from Arnim's work and from stereotypes which remain common to this day—one of the more pivotal plot points of the story hinges around the accusations that La Esmeralda is a sorceress and practitioner of the black arts, albeit in Hugo's novel, this claim is a blatant falsehood, drawing upon the stereotype to justify her execution before a fearful and superstitious public.

In addition to the trope of the Roma as simultaneously a creature of exotic beauty and untamed wildness, the near-animal nature of the Roma is highlighted both by the

descriptions of La Esmeralda in terms of creatures, as has already been touched on, and by her goat companion, Djali. There is rarely a scene in which the two appear separately, and the goat is shown several times to be a vital part of her life and livelihood. She relies upon Djali's performances to earn money on the streets, asking questions such as the date or time, and having the goat answer by striking its hoof a number of times against a tambourine (ibid., 57). Moreover, when her safety is threatened, the goat immediately and without command or hesitation interposes itself between her and her would-be attacker, "bristling with two pretty horns, gilded and very sharp" (ibid., 89). The relationship between La Esmeralda and Djali goes beyond that of mere pet and owner, and the two seem somehow linked on a deeper and more subtle level, as though the goat could respond to her very thoughts. Animality touches upon the supposed identity of the Roma as a *Naturvolk*, being closer to the beasts of the wilds than to civilized, Christian people, and thus having a sort of animal magnetism rendering them able to train and handle all manner of creatures with uncanny aptitude. La Esmeralda's relationship with Djali is in many ways a sign of her animal grace and wild allure—Gringoire describes her as animal in terms of her "lightness, agility, and dexterity", though this is a double-edged sword hearkening back to the Janus-faced image of the Rom mentioned earlier. While Esmeralda's animality is seen as appealing, seductive, and sensual, so-called "animal nature" is also a common tool in propaganda used to dehumanize minority groups and reduce them to only the most base and primal functions. As such, the image of the Roma as animalistic *Naturvolk* "gives immediacy to the idea that Gypsies are 'savages,' hopelessly controlled by nature, a threat to family life, and, thus, to the very foundation of national community" (Landon, 58). In truth, though, La Esmeralda is no more animal than, say, the noble Captain Phoebus who would have raped her in an

alleyway were it not for Djali attacking him; she relies so heavily on the company of the goat simply out of necessity. She cannot earn money by respectable means, and something as lurid as dancing in the streets may not be met well in religious locales, but the antics of a well-trained animal are a safe spectacle for nearly any audience; moreover, as an outcast, she is denied the friendship and social interaction of other people, and subsequently turns to her pet for companionship.

Heartless Savages and Femmes Fatales: The Roma in Mérimée's *Carmen*

While Hugo sought to illustrate the social inequalities and marginalization that may justify many Roma stereotypes, Mérimée's *Carmen*, however, takes an uncompromisingly disdainful approach to the Roma people. Written in 1845, Mérimée was fascinated by Orientalist accounts of the Romani people, and drew upon many previously established "Gypsy" works for inspiration, ranging from George Borrow to Alexander Pushkin. His representation of the *Romni* is the most aggressively negative of the three selections examined, and the first in which the Roma are explicitly painted as villains with no redeeming values or reason justifying their behavior. The work centers on a European narrator who uncovers the history of the elusive *Romni* Carmen even as he is ensnared and endangered by her allure. In fact, the bulk of the story details how Carmen has seduced a *Gazhe* man and subsequently destroyed his life, corrupting him into an outlaw and leading him to turn to crime in order to keep her happy. This poor soul, a dragoon by the name of Don José Navarro, was heartlessly manipulated by Carmen, who saw him as nothing more than an easy mark she could use to abet her smuggling and other illicit activities. This manipulation led to a romantic infatuation, which resulted in Don José's murder of a

superior officer (another victim of Carmen's manipulation whom he perceived to be a rival lover) and subsequent expulsion from the military and life on the lam. Don José confessed that he was "so weak in that creature's hands, that [he] obeyed all her whims" (Mérimée, 25). Already, the trope of the *Romni* seducing and corrupting the *Gazhe* is well at play in this novella.

Unlike La Esmeralda or Isabella, who, even when acting in a negative or manipulative manner toward *Gazhe* men, are shown to be justified and acting in the interest of preservation of the marginalized in a society stacked against them, Carmen genuinely seems to be operating from a position of self-interest alone; if Esmeralda is a wasp, an animal that stings to protect itself and its hive, then Carmen is a predator who methodically hunts her prey. Carmen, perhaps more than any other literary figure discussed so far, embodies the trope of the *Romni* as chameleonic deceiver. She pretends to be Basque in order to seduce and gain sway over the Basque Don José, and she lures the narrator to her camp under the false pretense of reading his fortune in order to have him mugged and killed. Were it not for the fact that the narrator had already made a friendship of sorts with Don José, who served as Carmen's henchman and muscle, he would have died barely halfway through the second chapter of the novella at the whim of the merciless Carmen. Her scheming is as vicious as it is self-serving; she is never shown to have the capacity for compassion or empathy, and remains fickle and egotistical up to the point where she goads Don José into killing her. Mad with love and jealousy, Don José confronts Carmen about her promiscuity and capriciousness, and she refuses to take responsibility for his seduction and subsequent fall from social grace, insisting that, as her husband, "[he has] the right to kill [his] *romi*, but Carmen will always

be free. A *calli*[16] she was born, and a *calli* she'll die" (Ibid., 35). In a fit of rage, Don José kills her, and laments for the love that could never have been reciprocated. Just in case the reader might be inclined to believe that Carmen's unscrupulous nature was an individual personality trait, and not the mark of her entire race, Mérimée closes with a statement professing that "it's the *calle* who are to blame for having brought her up as they did" (35). The story of Carmen's short life serves as a morality tale of sorts, illustrating why proper Christian men should never become involved with pretty, young Romani girls, and why proper Christian women should never be tempted to emulate them or their behavior, as such a life can only lead to a swift and passionate demise.

Depictions of Romani Men

Romani men also share in the literary tropes, but these representations tend to be even less well-developed than those of the *Romni*, who at least have the dubious benefit of being an object of desire for *Gazhe* men. The figure of the *Rom* is far less frequently featured as a main character in a work, and is usually cast as the antagonist or the comic relief. The stereotypes attributed to the *Rom* are similar to those given to men of many non-white ethnicities: they are either fools evoking laughter, or fearsome and savage beasts, unable to control their passions and desires like the civilized man.[17] This chapter has already shown how Clopin, the king of the Cour des Miracles in Hugo's *Notre Dame de Paris*, serves to add

[16] Merimee is attempting to add credibility by drawing upon the Romani language here. This is a rendering of *kali*, meaning black, identifying the Roma by the alleged color of their skin. It should be known, though, that this usage as a synonym for the Roma ethnicity is stilted, and serves to highlight the fetishization with which the author writes.

[17] Again, see Hancock's *We are the Rromani People* for an extensive discussion of the various stereotypes held about the Roma, as well as a response to the historicity of these claims. Further examples of masculine Roma tropes may be found in George Borrow's *Lavengro*, Ernst Freiherr von Houwald's *Der Zigeunerbube*, and Ludwig Tieck's *Der junge Tischlermeister*.

both a sense of real danger and a wry bit of sardonic humor, acting as the de facto ruler of a den of thieves and charlatans. In Clemens Brentano's *Die mehreren Wehmüller*, published in 1817, the *Rom* Michaly is a traveling violinist "von eigentümlicher Schönheit und Kühnheit", touted as being the best musician in the land (12). His sole function in the text seems to be providing entertainment. Even here, though, there is a subtle display of manipulation, as he influences characters' emotions through music: "Der Zigeuner griff wie ein zweiter Orpheus nach seiner Violine…und spielte eine so rührende Weise auf seinem Instrument, daß …Nanny konnte ihm nicht widerstehen, sie weinte auch und reichte ihm die Hand" (Brentano, 27). Given the amusing nature of Brentano's text, Michaly is not cast as an overtly threatening rapist, yet one still sees how he uses his talents to pluck Nanny's heartstrings until she could no longer *withstand* his wiles.

The darker side of the *Rom* is exemplified in Gottfried Keller's 1856 work, *Romeo und Julia auf dem Dorfe*, through a figure known only as the *schwarze Geiger*. Another itinerant violinist, this figure plays a vastly different role than Brentano's Michaly and illustrates the fear of the Roma as dangerous and disruptive social influences. In the story, it is this *schwarze Geiger* who brings the protagonists' feelings of alienation and lack of accepted communal identity to a boil, ultimately leading to their decision to commit suicide. As the two protagonists, fulfilling the roles of the "star-crossed lovers" the novella's title recalls, realize they cannot bed wed and retain their standing in their families and in their community, the *Geiger* appears with a solution: "Komm mit mir und meinen guten Freunden in die Berge, da brauchet ihr keinen Pfarrer, kein Geld, keine Schriften, keine Ehre, kein Bett, nichts als euren guten Willen" (Keller, 73). He urges the young lovers to run away and leave

the entire concept of their societal identity behind, to abandon the mores and norms that form civilized life, and to live wild and free as he does. Though initially hopeful, the protagonists soon realize that this is not a feasible option—no matter where they go, they can never truly escape the civilized norms which surround them and permeate them on a deeply internalized level, and decide that only in death can they truly be at peace together.[18] This is the *Rom* as instigator, as the figure who threatens and destabilizes the normalcy and complacency of the social status quo, spreading unacceptable ideas about the unquestionable need for society's rules and inciting malcontent. This is the real threat that the Roma present, more so than theft or vandalism or assault. When the Other crosses onto civilized territory, he brings his Otherness with him, along with new paradigms and the knowledge that there are different ways of relating to and identifying oneself and one's place in the world than doctrine would have one think.

"Tsiganologie": Ethnographies and Early Fetishization

As demonstrated by these fundamental works from multiple perspectives within the overarching frame of European Romanticism, there are very prevalent recurring motifs in the representation of Romani culture and people, amounting to a core palette of tropes, most of which are negative or dehumanizing in one way or another. Roma are depicted as overly sexualized and alluring (albeit in a wild and untamed sort of way), as manipulative deceivers, as practitioners of sorcery, and as more primal than civilized. Each of these stereotypes is touched upon in all three of the works discussed earlier, a testament to how widespread and

[18] Interestingly enough, one sees here yet another example of a text which may be read from different perspectives. While it is the *Rom* who acts as a catalyst for the story's tragic end, there would be no tragedy here if it were not for the strictures of *Gazhe* society imposed on the lovers.

persistent these were (and continue to be) in the cultural imagination. These tropes are not, however, limited to the literary and fictitious; reason would dictate that they must have originated somewhere in order to gain entry into the collective societal imagination. Ethnographies and anthropological studies driven by fetishized orientalism and the allure of the exotic laid the foundations for what would become a widespread and persistent set of ethnic attributions and cultural myths, establishing these stereotypes in a language of science and credibility which no doubt contributed to their survival. Even before the popularity of Rom as a literary figure, the tropes still ascribed to them today were already part of the common cultural imagination. Martin Luther's sermons, as previously discussed, were promulgating the idea that Roma were wild and beastly heathens, and Johann Hartlieb, in his 1456 *Buch aller verboten Kunst, Unglaubens, und der Zauberei*, wrote about the Roma as sorcerers and soothsayers, claiming "die treiben die Kunst gar vast und verführen manich ainfalticlichen Menschen etc." (432f). This is in addition to the presumption that, because they were drifters who never stayed long in a settlement and thus held no perceivable steady jobs of which to speak, the Roma must be thieves and swindlers. The accusations of malfeasance and sorcery were taken so seriously across Europe that "[t]he volume of anti-Gypsy legislation was growing rapidly, with over 120 laws being passed in the two hundred years between 1551 and 1751" (Tebbutt, 2). These laws ranged from the barring of transients from entering a township or setting up camp in the vicinity to the legally protected assault of Roma found within a city, justified by claims that they bore the mark of Cain in the darkness of their skin or were creatures who sprang from the Underworld, and that it was the duty of any good Christian to strike them down (Tebbutt, 92). As is plainly evident, the tropes presented and distributed through depictions of Roma in literature were already

firmly planted in the mind of the public by rumor, by official edict, and by European minds who presumed to consider themselves experts on the Roma, usually wielding them as propaganda fodder.

Cultural historian and author Heinrich Moritz Gottlieb Grellmann was one such early ethnographer, publishing *Die Zigeuner*, one of the first books on so-called *Tsiganologie*, in 1783, nearly 30 years before Arnim introduced his Romani protagonist. While there are earlier references to Roma in *Sachbücher*, Grellmann's is unique in that it attempts to lay out the history, culture, and lifestyle of the Roma, rather than a thinly veiled treatise demonstrating their danger to Christian society through association with the diabolical. Even Grellmann's work, however, accomplishes more exoticizing than educating, and presents a prejudiced and tropic portrayal of the Romani people.

While Grellmann openly denounces the idea that Roma are devilish monsters, he still falls far from giving a humanizing and accurate depiction, fetishizing them in a way that creates just as distorted an image. He still perpetuates the idea that the Roma are nomadic thieves and more bestial than the common civilized man. Regarding their physicality, Grellmann attributes near-animal resilience and stamina to the Roma, stating that they can outrun all but mounted pursuers when escaping with stolen goods, and that they have a preternatural ability to withstand great heat and cold, and can regularly be observed travelling through frost and snow from one village to the next, with only the thinnest and most threadbare clothes as protection against the elements (29). Of course, this assertion completely ignores the fact that Roma may not always have had the money or the raw

materials to properly clothe themselves for winter's chill, and simply had to make do as best they could.

In addition to chapters devoted to (largely inaccurate) descriptions of their customs, their lifestyle, even their household matters, Grellmann openly discusses the political implications the presence of the Roma would have on a city and what local governments should do with these people. Having already established that the Roma were a primitive race given to acts of barbarity and immorality, Grellmann goes to recount how the kingdoms and principalities of Western Europe, in order to protect themselves from the Romani threat, established strict laws against the Roma, but claims that these were ineffective in quelling the predicament. According to Grellmann, the only way to properly deal with the Roma in any meaningful and lasting manner was for the so-called superior races to educate them and lift them out of their primitivism:

> An dem Zigeuner, als Zigeuner, würde freylich kein Staat etwas verlieren; er gewinnt vielmehr durch seine Entfernung, indem er das Hindernis hebt, das bisher die gemeine Wohlfahrt hemmte. Aber das ist der Fall nicht, von dem hier geredet wird. Jeder Mensch hat Anlagen und Kräfte; der Zigeuner aber eben nicht in geringster Maße. Weiß er nun nicht gehörig damit umzugehen; so lehre es ihn der Staat, und halte ihn so lange im Gängelbande, bis die Absicht erreicht ist. (140).

This way of considering the Roma is remarkably similar to the historical paradigm through which many minority groups were viewed. It becomes the moral obligation of the white savior to lift the poor, underprivileged, primitive savages out of their station and into society, provided they can be taught to be obedient and profitable. Of course, the Roma, not having the money to own land or the reputation or stability to hold a steady job in a single village, did not live up to Grellmann's expectations, and the tropes about their itinerant and unreliable character were perpetuated, stronger than ever.

These stereotypes, which were held with such fervor to be the simple and entire truth of an entire group of people, already contain within them the seeds of their own contradiction and subversion; examined beyond the surface, even within logic of the ethnic paradigm in which they were constructed, they begin to destabilize and collapse inward upon themselves. Contradictions are revealed and inconsistencies laid bare, clearly demonstrating how the self-antagonizing "Janus-faced" depiction of the Roma always already plant the seeds of their own undoing. When one looks at the examples discussed previously, it is clear that the average *Gazhe* holds a contradictory and highly polarized view of the Roma, seeing them as being simultaneously desired and despised, alluring and repulsive, symbolizing freedom and the atavistic return to the natural on the one hand, and moral decay and depravity on the other. One sees each of the common stereotypes attributed to Roma across the three selected literary texts, seemingly confirming their validity, though upon closer inspection they can be seen to contain their own self-contradiction.

First and foremost, if—as the tsiganologists and those who followed their assertions profess—the multitude of tropes regarding the Roma can be ascribed to their nature as a

lesser and more primitive race, then one would expect members of the more civilized race to be clearly distinguishable, both in terms of appearance and temperament. This becomes problematic, however, when one considers the fact that all of the Romani women featured in the three works previously discussed had varying degrees of Romani heritage. Isabella was only Roma on her father's side, while her mother was a European of noble blood. La Esmeralda was not actually a *Romni* at all, but rather the child of a wealthy French noblewoman who was kidnapped and merely raised by the Roma. Carmen is a *Romni* by blood, only pretending to be Basque in order to seduce the guard José. Despite the different heritages of these characters, there is practically no effective distinction between the descriptions of their appearances or characteristic traits, as I have already demonstrated. They all are shown to embody each of the primary tropic identifying markers of the Roma, regardless of their ancestry. Clearly, if these stereotypes are just as applicable to Roma as they are to those of entirely European descent, this undermines the supposition that they are inherent racial traits. If they are cultural traits, then one must consider the factors which shaped the culture in question, including extensive marginalization and a sweeping status as societal Other, again undermining the solidity of these traits even as it explains them.

As one can see here, in both the literary and ethnographic texts examined, Roma are consistently written as signposts, not as people. Their lived experiences, their reality, is not as important as what they represent to the *Gazhe*, and what they represent is the Other personified. As such an Other, the Roma and other subaltern groups like them form the basis of a crystalized and reified sense of Selfhood for the *Gazhe*. This is a case of definition by negation—we are everything they are not; we are civilized where they are wild, we are

Christian where they are heathen, we are productive members of society where they are vagrants and ne'er-do-wells. "Es gilt also, die Darstellungen der 'Zigeuner' in ihren historischen Veränderungen als Funktion deutscher Selbstentwürfe zu beschreiben" (Patrut, 10). To this end, the literary representations of the Roma as created by *Gazhe* serve to reinforce and perpetuate not only a list of inaccurate and disingenuous stereotypes, but also a specific idealized version of the *Gazhe* identity by means of contrast. The Roma make an ideal scapegoat—they arrive unexpectedly from distant and unknown lands, and they vanish just as quickly as they came, allowing all manner of societal markers and identifiers imputed on them without being challenged or corrected.

Having the Roma merely exist as signposts of some inherent Otherness allows the *Gazhe* to then demonize them, both in literature and in common social parlance, in order to ameliorate (or distract from) the guilt stemming from their desire for Otherness. Simultaneously gazing upon the Roma with lust and loathing, the *Gazhe* yearn for the exotic even as they fear it, forbidden fruit of great beauty and grave threat. Thus the trope of the beautiful but deceptively dangerous *Romni* is born; it allows *Gazhe* to lust in such a way that they can blame their sinful desires on evil temptation, even sorcery, professing to themselves and to the greater community that they have no wish for anything other than upholding the status quo and abiding by their white Christian values, and denying that the idealized images they create of a people wild and free to follow their passions speaks more to a hidden craving in their hearts than to alleged attributes of an ethnicity. Bounded by the strictures of social propriety such as they are, the *Gazhe* only tell themselves that they have freedoms and liberties, and the worlds that they construct through their literature reveal this for the

illusion that it is—in the same breath that they use to condemn the Roma for their savage wildness, they praise and romanticize them for their freedom. Wild and free are merely two sides of the same coin; one cannot have one without the other. Any act operating outside of the established norms of social rule is simultaneously liberation from constraint for the individual and a threat for the community. Thus, this analysis returns to the idea of the Janus-faced gaze, looking with both personal longing and public disgust.

This contradiction may, however, have something of a resolution in the form of the half-breed child, a tropic figure employed fairly commonly in literature featuring the Roma. Isabella and La Esmeralda particularly showcase this figure of the Half-Roma, white children raised as "Gypsies". These characters were popular among the Romantics, and played off the common idea that Roma kidnap children to bring up as their own, establishing a "Motiv des Kinderraubs" that, though diminished, still exists as a cultural fear to this day (Solms, 10).[19] In the case of Isabella, while she was not kidnapped, she is of noble European birth, and would have certainly been properly indoctrinated and socialized had her father been of respectable blood and station; indeed, even if her father had absconded after her conception—which marks another stereotype commonly attributed to Roma—Isabella's life would have been considerably more acceptable by societal standards than as a *Romni*. La Esmeralda, another child of partial highborn heritage born to a nobleman and a prostitute, was indeed kidnapped, but came to identify strongly with the Roma who raised her, witnessing firsthand the social injustices levied en masse against the marginalized. Through

[19] Irish police made headlines for prejudice in 2013 when they arrested three Roma discovered with a blond and fair-skinned child for alleged kidnapping, only to discover that the child was, indeed, Roma and related to the detained. For the full story, see: www.cnn.com/2013/10/23/world/europe/europe-mystery-girls/index.html

figures such as Isabella and La Esmeralda, one comes to a uniquely hybridized *Gazhe* iteration of Romani identity. These figures function as bridges to allow (or, perhaps, force) a decidedly *Gazhe* audience to relate to the Roma and to view society from a new perspective. Unfortunately, these roles are still penned by *Gazhe* for *Gazhe*, and thus do not yet illustrate any true or meaningful communication on the part of the subaltern, but rather establish the considerable precedent of the majority speaking over and for the minority, however arguably progressive their intentions may be deemed for the time.

However, the words that the *Gazhe* placed into the mouths of the fictional "Gypsies" of their literature did not stop at reaffirming the *Gazhe* identity; they were stronger and more far-reaching than that. These stereotypes began to be performed by the Roma over time—in seeking employment, many took up the profession of traveling musician, fortune-teller, or suave con-artist, as I will explore in the next chapter on Roma auto-biography. There is sometimes truth in stereotypes, but such truths are incomplete. For the Roma, conforming to the caricatures that were written for them was often the only path open to them in order to navigate the social sphere. "Where social categories guarantee a recognizable and enduring social existence, the embrace of such categories, even as they work in the service of subjection, is often preferred to no social existence at all" (Butler, 20). The following chapter will build upon the implications of these issues, discussing how Roma have taken and adapted these stereotypes into their own performative behavior, essentially working within the language the *Gazhe* have established in order to negotiate and navigate their social interactions in the *Gazhe* world. As Spivak may well concede, the language of the oppressor is ubiquitous and deafeningly loud, and subaltern groups very well may not be able to escape it; they can and

do, however, take this language and turn it back on itself, wielding it in their own ways and for their own purposes, as further examination shall illustrate.

Chapter 2—Familiar Words on Unfamiliar Lips: Roma Literature in the *Gazhe* World

"Ángla mánde dui drômá / Thai chi zhanav savo te lav / Wôrka o drôm o Rromano / Wôrka o drôm o Gazhikano / Lem o drôm Gazhikano / chi dur, chi páshal me gêlèm / Ánde bári béda me pelem"—Kalderash table song[20]

Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the ways in which *Gazhe* authors created and promulgated fetishized representations of the Romani people across the European literary canon, both as alluring objects of desire and as highly caricaturized Others against whom the lines of national identity and civilized propriety could be drawn. As the literary depictions demonstrate, the Roma at this time were mere objects of the *Gazhe* gaze, figures kept at the fringes of society to be looked at with lust or scorn (or a mixture of the two), but never to be heard. Even in tales with Roma who speak and do not merely dance, play music, or engage in illicit activities, the words placed in their mouths are still written by *Gazhe*, effectively leaving them voiceless from Spivak's perspective. The texts examined have shown how these Roma images were created to be tantalizing in some cases, frightful in others, but always to further the *Gazhe* agenda by presenting the silent image of an Other across from which their own identity may be reified and upon which, by virtue of the image's silence, they may impute whatever traits, values, and behaviors they see fit. Careful analysis explored how these *Gazhe* writers, through their fictions, have created an image of the Rom that is so widespread and canonical that it has become more real to the collective *Gazhe* worldview

[20] Recorded by Ronald Lee in 1960 from Vanya Kwiek, as found on pg. 222 of *Das-duma Rromanes*. The translation reads: "Two roads lie before me / and I don't know which to take. / Either the Romani road / or the *Gazhe* road. / I took the *Gazhe* road / and I didn't get far: / I fell into deep trouble."

than the actual lived experience of the people this image purports to portray, thus establishing a language of and about the Rom which persists through this day.

This chapter, however, will undertake to examine precisely that which has been left out of the conversation thus far—the voices of the Roma themselves, as they strive to find ways to effectively navigate this social landscape in which they find themselves severely limited by the ideations thrust upon them, and work to echo, distort, and subvert these imputations as a strategy to be heard by an unwilling audience. More specifically, this chapter will analyze examples of what I term parallel and perpendicular communication strategies—that is to say, strategies which respectively either play along with or directly oppose the established language already written for and thrust upon the Roma. This will be accomplished through the exploration of texts specifically written by Roma authors for consumption by the masses, translating and communicating various Roma lives and experiences to the *Gazhe* in a format they might more readily accept. Utilizing a theoretical framework incorporating ideas of identity construction, subversion, assimilation, and performativity from thinkers such as Judith Butler, Edward Said, and others, this chapter will investigate two texts representative of the Roma endeavor to turn the language placed upon them into a functioning dialogue: Ronald Lee's *Goddam Gypsy* and Cecilia Woloch's *Tsigan*.

Despite the fact that these texts are quite different, coming from distinct genres and written by authors from different countries and backgrounds, they are united in that they are both products of Roma authors dealing with the task of communicating their lived experience and existence to the *Gazhe* world with the language they have available to them,

and with what it means to identify as Roma in a world where Outsiders decree the meaning of Roma identity and heritage. Just as both of these works serve as bridges striving to span the gap between familiar and Other, *Gazhe* and *Rom*, the authors who composed them are in turn standing with one foot in each world, culturally speaking, as those who come to their Romani heritage as adults, raised by *Gazhe* but seeking to explore and connect with their cultural inheritance.[21] In a sense, they embody the figures of the hybridized Roma popular during the Romantic Period, and though they, like these hybrid characters, must utilize the language of the *Gazhe* authors, Lee and Woloch take this language and make the choice to wield it in their own ways, to their own ends, using one or more communicative strategies in an attempt to let their voices be heard.

Roma Otherness and the Construction of Identity

To begin to understand the intricacies of developing a sense of personal and cultural identity in the face of the aggressive Othering and the forcible imputation of identity encountered by the Roma, one must first examine the implications of identity construction in a broader sense. If, as Judith Butler theorizes, the identity is a construct continuously and meticulously created and recreated, what impact does this have on one whose identity is disavowed, marginalized, and oppressed?[22] It is obvious that external influences play a significant role in the creation and maintenance of personal and communal identity, as in the case of the influence a majority exerts over the (self) perception of a minority, but Butler also

[21] In chapter 1 of his autobiography, *E Zhivindi Yag*, Ronal Lee describes himself as a Canadian with Kalderash heritage, though not raised within the culture, and largely ignorant of this ancestry until young adulthood. Cecilia Woloch, in *Tsigan*, describes her relationship with a grandmother she suspects was *Romni*, but who died before Woloch knew what such an identity meant or that she might one day want to learn about and share in it.
[22] See Judith Butler's *Bodies that Matter* for a more detailed explanation of performativity vis-à-vis identity

posits that this is not always a unilateral exchange; the minority, even when aware of the biased influence exerted upon them and shaping their identity from the outside, may at times choose to conform to this identity as a means of social navigation:

> Where social categories guarantee a recognizable and enduring social existence, the embrace of such categories, even as they work in the service of subjection, is often preferred to no social existence at all…Social categories signify subordination and existence at once. In other words, within subjection the price of existence is subordination (Butler, 20).

At first glance, this seems to come from a particularly privileged perspective that does not bear weight when discussing groups with such a disproportionate discrepancy in social power, especially when active and systemic oppression is involved—it is one thing to talk about individuals of more or less similar standing exerting a reflexive sort of subjugation upon each other, and acknowledge this exchange as simultaneously mutually assuring both social existence and subordination to the other, but how can such a reflecting operate when the gap between the parties involved is so vast? It seems far more apparent that the minority must accept subordination in exchange for social existence, while the majority remains exempt from this rule. Indeed, given the narrative foisted upon the Roma and the animosity with which they have historically been met, as discussed in the previous chapter, it would be easy to declare that this relationship works in one direction only. And, to be fair, I would argue that this assumption is not an incorrect one, as far as the ability to so violently thrust subjection and subjugation upon a group is concerned.

This relationship echoes that between historical colonizers and their colonies—as Said explains, "It is Europe that articulates the Orient; this articulation is the prerogative not so much of a puppet-master as of a genuine creator" (170). Europe does not necessarily always create the labels and definitions of the Other for purposes of direct manipulation or control, but out of the need to categorize and hierarchicalize the ever-shrinking world around it and subsume everything new and exotic into the currently existing paradigm in service of bolstering its own identity and position of superiority at the center of its worldview. Orientalism and practices like it may certainly be considered harmful influences, but they are examples of an "intellectual weapon for exercising epistemological and political power", and thus intended more for the Europeans who create it than individuals from cultures who may or may not have any knowledge of these ascriptions—at least, not until the Europeans begin trade or colonization (Saul, 163).

The reflectivity of this relationship comes in a subtler form; as has been earlier mentioned, the *Gazhe* created the image of the *Rom* as a quintessential Other, a figure against which they might more firmly establish their own identity.[23] The identity comes to rely on the presence of an Other against which it may stand; without this Other, the identity is in danger of collapsing upon itself. "Relationships between self and other are crucial for the construction of both self and of community. The self is not a simple, stable entity…[it] is constituted reflexively and is radically dependent on the actions of others" (Douzinas, 383). As much as the *Gazhe* construct the Roma as a lower, lesser Other to be kept to the margins of society, they also rely on the Roma to for the reification and security of their identity.

[23] Refer to chapters 1-2 of Patrut's *Phantasma Nation* for a more detailed exploration of the historical configuration of the *Rom* as Other, in terms of the political, the religious, the social, and the literary.

This situation leads to an interesting double-bind: white, Christian Europeans systemically oppress the Roma and brand them as inherently lesser, with no real social power or merit, yet at the same time, such minority groups as the Roma hold the stability of the *Gazhe* identity through simply existing and performing as the Other. Thus, as the Roma employ parallel communicative strategies to blend in or conform to this constructed role as Other, they face silencing and demeaning oppression, but are able to eke out some small space for themselves in the social order; if they engage in perpendicular communication—if they do not conform to this identity and sufficiently perform an acceptable and controlled version of the prescribed Otherness—then they risk destabilizing the power dynamic predicated upon this distinction. Roma can either embody the "Gypsy" stereotype and be granted social recognition at the cost of subjugation, or reject the imputation of a false set of traits and characteristics at the risk of incurring the violent wrath of the *Gazhe* retaliating against a perceived threat against their very identities.

Of course, as Hegel might remind us, things are not always a simple matter of thesis/antithesis; another option remaining in this scenario, and one which many Roma have adopted, is to take a middle path between the two extremes of total assimilation and total rejection of imputed identity. It is possible to perform the role given, but only as a sort of lip service, such that one may retain an inner sense of integrity regarding personal values and beliefs. Many *Gazhe* ethnographers studying the Roma, even those who exhibit sympathy toward them and the social difficulties they face, come to the conclusion that "Gypsies lie. They lie a lot—more often and more inventively than other people. Not to each other, but to *gadje* [sic]" (Fonseca, 15). While these statements may not be made with malicious intentions,

precisely, they still carry the effect of corroborating in the mind of the reader the various tropes of "Gypsy" untrustworthiness and deception set forth in earlier texts. Fonseca, and those who echo her claims, however, may not be entirely wrong, though they do not quite convey the cultural understanding of this behavior from the Roma perspective. Ronald Lee, Roma author and activist, tells us that "Le Romeski shib motol o chachimos ande xoxayimos—The Gypsy tongue tells the truth in lies" (ii).[24] This is precisely the action of the aforementioned subversion—through the performance of the false, one can draw attention to often unnoticed or ignored truths, while remaining inwardly faithful to one's own sense of personal identity.

Unstable Identities and the Complications of Communication

For the Roma, as for many minority groups, attempts at directly speaking out against the identities and roles imposed on them may be seen as an attack on the oppressing majority and the worldviews through which they construct their sense of self. As a result, such modes of navigating the social sphere and gaining a voice in public social discourse are often met with harsh resistance and redoubled attempts at silencing. Thus, recognizing the *Gazhe* allure toward the exotic, many Roma adopted a certain measure of performativity in order to better navigate these interactions and maintain their ability to, at least to some extent, continue to survive and to preserve their way of life. "This appears to have been achieved through a fine-tuning of their performance under the 'gaze' of others" (Pusca, 329). If the non-Roma have essentially created the 'Gypsy' character through their collective

[24] Lee, through his autobiography as well as his innovative textbook on the Romani language, relays a number of such proverbs and folk-sayings held dear by the Roma. In addition to providing examples of grammar and vocabulary in action, or adding authenticity to his memoir, they offer a unique view into cultural values not commonly available to non-Roma.

exotifying imagination, the Roma, by conforming to that characterization and playing the role, could be afforded some measure of agency and ability to navigate these roads, in both a literal sense of border-crossing and free movement between locales, and in a metaphoric sense alluding to the relationship dynamics coming into play in a Rom/non-Rom encounter. If a *Gazho* expects the Rom, through some exotic nature, to be able to divine her future or heal his injured horse, this provides the Rom with an opportunity to obtain money or food, indulges the fetishized and romanticized fantasy of the citizen, and provides just enough Otherness to maintain that safety net of distinction between *us* and *them*. The Rom might endure scorn and derision at the hands of the population *en masse* by the light of day, but small and discreet transactions like this, made by the individual, present a mode of survival that manages to bring some benefit to both parties. The non-Roma gaze may create and impute a false and fetishized "Gypsy" identity onto the Roma community at large, but by performing this role and using it to work within the existing paradigm, Roma have the ability to subvert this controlling ascription of identity and gain a sense of indirect power. The possibility of equal standing between these groups is thus indirectly realized by a reliance on and submission to their perceived inequality. This indirect sort of power, achieved through seeming compliance and subsequent subversion, prevents the *Rom* from appearing to threaten the social status quo and identity established by the *Gazhe*, allowing the *Rom* to interact with the *Gazhe* in a way that is facilitated and bounded by expectations well within the comfortable framework of their social paradigm, all while affording the *Rom* some modicum of social agency.[25] It may seem contradictory for disavowed groups to come to any

[25] In her 2006 article, *Gender, Status, and the Use of Power Strategies*, psychologist Shira Keshet offers a detailed psychosocial analysis of the means of acquiring agency afforded to disenfranchised groups, finding that direct

sort of power by acting within a system which aims to keep them voiceless and powerless, but as Judith Butler states in *The Psychic Life of Power*, "the act of appropriation may involve an alteration of power such that the power assumed or appropriated works against the power that made that assumption possible" (13). This is exactly the type of subversion one sees in Lee's depiction of Roma behavior, turning the tropes against themselves in order to dismantle them.

Strategies of Communication in Lee's *Goddam Gypsy*

Lee's autobiography, *Goddam Gypsy*, explores both of these modalities of attempting to navigate the cultural gap between majority and silenced minority—parallel compliance and perpendicular rejection—as he strives to reclaim his Roma heritage and negotiate the space between what the Roma speak and what the *Gazhe* hear. Over the course of this narrative, Lee, who was adopted by *Gazhe* and whose upbringing was thereby distanced from the Roma community at large, recounts how he came to explore his cultural heritage and learn Romani values, only to immediately be faced with the difficulty of marrying his newfound lineage with the culture in which he was raised. He attempts to take advantage of this unique position and fashion himself as a bridge between cultures, striving to bring legitimacy to the Roma in the eyes of the *Gazhe*, though he quickly learns that this endeavor is fraught with complexities imperceptible to anyone but those forced to face the world from the perspective of a cultural outsider, necessitating a subversive strategy toward indirect power, if power is to be had at all.

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paths are seen by a wide margin as an attack against the majority, while indirect paths are more easily tolerated and generally more successful in terms of accomplishing a given goal or conveying an opinion.

Lee's first experience with Roma strategies for dealing with *Gazhe* stems from one early encounter with a *Rom* who would go on to become like a father figure to him, eventually taking him in and teaching him about his cultural inheritance. In this encounter, the *Rom*—named Kolia—is found in a small-town diner, disguising his ethnicity by pretending to be Spanish, a much less offensive identity in rural Canada. This is Lee's first lesson: "The greatest strength of the Gypsies is their invisibility. It is not without good reason that many people consider them to be extinct, for the Roms themselves do everything in their power to perpetuate the myth of their non-existence" (Lee, ix). Social spaces are far easier to navigate when you can simply claim an identity with more social capital, provided that you are capable of looking and acting the part. In his interactions trying to find work with the *Gazhe* of rural eastern Canada, Kalia might have been Spanish to one factory owner, Italian to another, and Greek to a third, switching languages, names, and mannerisms to complete the charade (Lee, 6). This strategy of chameleonic blending bypasses the need for negotiating majority/minority power dynamics altogether, but not without the risk of discovery and being accused of the malicious deception so frequently pinned on Roma; it also hinges upon the ability to pass, which depends largely on physical markers such as skin tone, as well as command of multiple languages and enough general knowledge and creativity to be able to invent personas. In addition to these potential barriers to the success of this strategy, this blending also entails another, larger problem: it does nothing to better the long-term situation of the Roma, being a short-sighted mitigation at best. Kolia himself admits as much: "Nobody kills us, but our culture is dying. We hide in the cities from the *Gazhe* and at times…even from one another. Soon, there'll be none of us left" (ibid., 9). The Roma cannot hide forever; this is not a viable solution for the long term, and in an increasingly globalized

world, a group without visibility and advocacy cannot hope to flourish. Invisibility and chameleonic hiding are useful strategies for avoiding active and immediate persecution and violence, and allow one to move about the web of social networks unhindered to find work and the like, but such a strategy ultimately cannot provide any meaningful social power, direct or indirect.

After a few years of living as a *Rom* and experiencing Roma culture and identity firsthand, Lee shifts strategies and attempts to use the advantage of his *Gazhe* upbringing—such as his literacy, education, respectable job history, etc.—in order to become a suitable representative advocate for the Roma, bringing their culture, their language, their history, and the injustices they face directly before the eyes of the *Gazhe*. He attempts to take the path of assimilation, showing how the Roma can be fashioned into upstanding model citizens, if only afforded the opportunities that *Gazhe* are. After all, Lee is a *Rom* by birth, but went to *Gazhe* school and even "worked in the offices of the *Gazho*", a rarity among Roma attesting to their ability to conform to societal standards if given the chance (ibid., 3). The reasoning stands that if Roma can be guided to be more like the social majority, they will be more acceptable, and thus the severe social marginalization they face might be put to rest. Unfortunately, this reasoning does not pan out, as it violates the need for a clear and distinct Other in order to ground and reify the identity of the majority. In Lee's autobiography, this is demonstrated when he holds a meeting with a reporter in an endeavor to legitimize the plight of the Romani people and bring their experiences and the situations they face to the masses in a respectable mainstream newspaper. While Lee wishes to discuss matters such as the authenticity of so-called "Gypsy" stereotypes, the heavy racial and ethnic biases of the

judicial system, and the legitimacy of Romani culture, the reporter persistently shows interest only in angling for sensationalist headlines that serve only to reaffirm the common tropes: "Mr. Lee, is it true that Gypsy children are taught to pick pockets by their parents by practicing on a dummy rigged up with bells, and if they can't get the wallet out of the dummy's pocket without ringing the bells, then they don't get any supper?" (ibid., 88). Lee, understandably irritated, brushes the question aside with a biting commentary on the *Gazhe* disguised as an offhand observation:

> "It's funny," I added, "how people always put their own vices onto the Gypsies. In Hungary, they say 'she makes love like a Gypsy' or in Yugoslavia, 'he drinks like a Gypsy.' Why are Anglo-Saxons so obsessed with Gypsy theft?—even the word gyp. 'He tried to gyp me but I jewed him down.' Isn't that a typical English-Canadian expression?" She didn't answer that one (ibid., 89).

Lee goes on to condemn the racialization of crimes in association with the Roma and other minorities, stating that he would like to be quoted saying that "Gypsy criminals…should be treated as individual law-breakers, and that the group as a whole shouldn't be castigated or held responsible for the actions of the individual" (ibid., 107). He then cites the common occurrence of race being mentioned in crime headlines only when the perpetrator is not white, resulting in the media creating a blatant confirmation bias in the perception of the public at large. The reporter's response to this is nothing more than lip service sympathy, and telling of her real interest in the matter:

> She listened to all this and told me that it was good that my people had somebody like me to represent them, to fight their battles for them, somebody intelligent, educated, and strong. She felt my muscles as she said this last bit. "But what do you want the white man to do for the Gypsies?" she concluded (ibid., 107).

The reporter's line of questioning and wildly inappropriate behavior is to be expected, in a sense. She is looking to maintain the current social status quo, to run a story that can pique the interests of readers regarding the mysterious lives of an exotic people while still remaining firmly grounded within the paradigm of what the *Gazhe* "know" about Roma, keeping them tightly bound to the roles that have been created for them. She sees Lee not as an individual, with a complex history and a multitude of needs and drives, but as a collection of stereotypes she has been fed by media and led to believe as fact. She sees only the "Gypsy", at times as the compellingly tragic eternal wanderer, as the alluring and overly-sexualized exotic lover, or as the panhandler who never interacts with the white man unless he wants something. Despite his status as a cultural hybrid of sorts, Lee is not heard in his attempts to bridge this gap.

In fact, as Lee comes to identify more and more with his Roma heritage, and builds more of a public identity for himself as both Roma and activist, he swiftly finds himself facing similar types of discrimination in both his personal and professional life. When applying for a job, Lee—who has an education, experience, and expertise in multiple languages—was ultimately turned away because of his lack of a stable job history during the

time he stayed with the Roma and lived as a *Rom*: "The full impact of it finally hit me…I was an outlaw, a person without roots or records of his unbroken history of employment…So Gypsy I would be and, like the rest of my cursed people, do what I had to to survive. By choosing this life I'd burned my bridges behind me"(68).[26] Lee is not alone in his experiences; I have discussed at length how the Roma are stigmatized for their Otherness even as they are branded by it, but even those who try to assimilate still face hardship: "The typical and immediate response from wider society to temporary Gypsy encampments is usually uproar from local residents, who do not want Gypsies anywhere near their land. Where Gypsies live in more permanent settings…they still face the same levels of hostility" (Bhopal, 202-3). As a person who was able to pass for white, Lee enjoyed all of the social privileges entailed therein; the moment that he revealed himself to be an Other and aligned himself with the cause of the marginalized, he was branded and marginalized as an Other, himself, even though nothing about his appearance, upbringing, or qualifications changed. This shows that the strategy of assimilation is a faulty one—the Roma might be able to benefit from it as long as they are able to conceal who they are and maintain a convincing charade, but the moment that the truth is discovered, severe backlash must surely follow.

The reason for this backlash touches upon a point discussed earlier—the absence of an Other destabilizes the foundation of identity for the *Gazhe*, and is thus seen as a threat. The site of identification lies in repudiation, cultivated through the instillation of a litany of prohibitions and rejections—when one thinks "I am not that", one arrives at the conclusion

[26] In chapters 1-3, readers see that Lee did, indeed, have steady employment during these years, though employment typical to Roma is not often one that leaves a paper trail. Lee worked as a repairman, a smith, and an artist, all traditional jobs for Roma, given their mobility and necessity. As Lee performed these jobs under the table, so to speak, across different cities and towns, they were of little use on a conventional application.

"I am the opposite of that", resulting in a concrete sense of self (Butler, 136-139). The Other, therefore, can never truly be allowed to assimilate; they may be encouraged to blend, to make themselves more acceptable and conform to whatever social standards reign at the time, but they cannot ever be truly integrated, or else the paradigm of self-identity would collapse. Additionally, if an Other was discovered to be disguising him- or herself as a *Gazhe*, this could be viewed as an attack against the sanctity of the civilized, white, Christian identity. This was part of the reasoning behind clearly labelling ethnic, behavioral, and idealistic minorities in pre-war Germany, to clearly differentiate them from the party-loyal citizens when personal appearance alone may not suffice.[27] Rather than seeing the chameleonic identity shifting of the Roma as a survival strategy, it becomes corroboration of their supposed deceptive and treacherous nature, enabling them to infiltrate a city and commit criminal acts under the cover of disguise; on a subtler level, and perhaps where the true fear originates, the Roma's ability to "pass" brings into question the arbitrary and unreliable nature of the system used to artificially separate people into social categories—these categories become somehow less concrete when individuals can pass freely from one to another, and the line between "us" and "them" begins to blur in an uncomfortable and unacceptable way. It is not enough for the Other to exist as a purely abstract, theoretical constellation; it must be visibly and demonstrably Other, and it must remain so in order to preserve the illusory boundary.

Thus, if the Roma cannot find a means of attaining social power through speaking out against and disproving the stereotypes placed upon them or by trying to hide or blend, that leaves relatively few options remaining: either they accept the roles placed upon them and

[27] See Biefang: "*Volksgenossen". Nationale Verfassungsbewegung und 'Judenfrage' in Deutschland* 1850-1878 and Kapralski: *The Voices of a Mute Memory*, p.97.

stop trying to be heard altogether, or they resort to a more indirect method. According to Lee, the latter strategy of parallel communication is and has been the more preferred of the two by far: "Gypsies never fight against constituted authority; they simply agree to do what they are told to do, pretend to accept the assumptions of the stronger party, and then, in their time-honored way, they keep on doing what they have always done" (x). Seeing the ineffectiveness of overt tactics and the undesirability of doing nothing to better their station, the Roma engage in "the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete [social categories] as cultural fictions" sustained by social pressure to conform and the taboo associated with breaking them (Butler, 179). From within the superficial performances of these roles, the Roma are able to inwardly identify how they please, as well as acquire some power or agency with which they can engage with the *Gazhe* and sustain a place for themselves, while subverting the roles and undermining the paradigm that makes them possible. Giving lip service to the law of the land provides at least some modicum of safety, while performing the prescribed roles ensures a platform from which the *Rom* will not necessarily be immediately silenced off-hand. Lee's autobiography itself is an example of this.

Where Lee failed to have the plight of the Roma, their history, and the reality of their culture and experiences published in a newspaper, in a format generally accepted as delivering facts from trusted sources and authority figures, he was not altogether unsuccessful in his aims; turning to the trope of the *Rom* as storyteller and entertainer, he is able to accomplish this goal through the production of an autobiography, which even he freely admits is at least partially fabricated in order to make for a better, more marketable story: "the drama is in places fictionalized, a parallel rather than the actuality. But the

pathos, tragedy, and humor are a part of my life and my struggle to find recognition and equality" (viii). Clearly, Lee succeeded as an author telling a story where he did not as an activist giving a report, because this is within the scope of what *Gazhe* find acceptable from the Roma. The book describes how this same strategy is used by *Romni*, who have traditionally taken up the role of fortunetellers for the sake of business with the *Gazhe*:

> Gypsies usually cater to the style of the particular customer: for the old man, there is the vigorous matron with the hefty backside and magnificent bust; for the middle-aged lady, there is the wizened old hag; for the young man…if he seems respectable and polite, the young, voluptuous Gypsy temptress; or if he is rough and uncouth-looking, the hard-fisted, loud-mouthed Gypsy Amazon who can lay him out on the carpet, minus his teeth, if he puts his hand in the wrong place (ibid., 19).

There is the understanding that this is entirely a performance, and a conscious effort to play the role in the most advantageous way possible in order to ensure that the Roma receive the maximum benefit from these exchanges with the *Gazhe*. The customer is presented with what he or she wants to see in an exotic Romani fortuneteller, ensuring happy (and paying) customers, but this is never done at the cost of the *Romni*'s safety; there are always multiple women in the back rooms of such parlors, not only to see that the particular customer is served in the most appropriate way, but also as a precaution in case things turn violent. The *Romnya* allow themselves to be commodified, playing the part of the sideshow curiosity, like an exhibit in a *Völkerschau*, for their customers really come for the exotic

allure and the glimpse into the "Gypsy" life as much as for the pretense of a tarot or palm reading—the difference here is that the *Romni* does this on her own terms, ensuring that the exchange is one that benefits her. It is a simultaneous acquiescence to and manipulation of the tropes ascribed to them, establishing a means of indirect power enabling these women to have a place on the social stage and to generate an income by taking the money of the *Gazhe* without having to exchange any of their own resources in the process.

Performing the Other in Woloch's *Tsigan*

Cecilia Woloch approaches the issue of bridging the communication gap between Roma and the *Gazhe* world from a different perspective. Like Lee, Woloch was separated from her Roma heritage: her grandmother, who was talked about as a *Romni* by the family, died when Woloch was young, leaving her to explore her heritage on her own. Unlike Lee, however, Woloch does this through literature, rather than activism, and crystalizes the process of her self-discovery through a narrative anthology of poems. These poems detail the steps along Woloch's path as she travels Europe to find some connection to her ancestry, and highlight the dire silencing and prejudice that ensure the continued existence of this distance. From the beginning, it is clear that Woloch has decided to follow in a performance of her Romani heritage by composing her experiences into poems. As a people viewed widely as performers, storytellers, and musicians, the image of the *Rom* is evoked by Woloch's artistic choice, and this citation helps to frame Woloch's message, as well as create a sense of expectation in a *Gazhe* readership. In much the same way as the women described in Lee's autobiography used the exotic stereotype of the "Gypsy" as fortuneteller to attract *Gazhe* readers, Woloch calls upon an iteration of the "Gypsy" musician plaintively mourning loss of

family, culture, and home.[28] Thus, from the very beginning, this work is already utilizing the parallel power of navigating and manipulating stereotypes in order to be heard.

Woloch's descriptions of her childhood convey a sense of a close-knit family, albeit one whose history her parents strive to keep hidden from young eyes. After the death of a grandmother, the black sheep of the family, Woloch learns that this grandmother was a *Romni*, and became aware of a new aspect to her heritage; she thus discovers her status as a cultural hybrid, much like Lee and the protagonists of the literary works discussed in the first chapter. This hybrid identity is clearly touched upon in the poetry:

> "Daddy called me *tsiganka* / when I began to wander / restlessly
> the world. / *Just like your grandmother*, he'd say / and touch my
> hair / (*the Kushner hair*) / and kiss my forehead / (where the
> priest had once left ash) / as if to mark me: / *you will never be*
> *afraid* / *to not stand still*; / as if to bless me / where I stood, /
> where I would stand: / *you will not kneel*" (Woloch, 27).

This stanza addresses the blending of cultures present within Woloch, from the performative tropes of the Roma, such as restless wandering, and aspects of *Gazhe* upbringing, such as the institutional Christianity of the mass on Ash Wednesday, blending them into a double-blessing—one combining the free spirit, the *Wanderlust*, and the untamable nature attributed to the Roma with the self-sovereignty of the *Gazhe*. Traits from both of these groups blend in Woloch to create a unique experience, passionate about her ancestry and

[28] Further examples of this trope may be found in Brentano's *Die mehreren Wehmüller* and in Keller's *Romeo und Julia auf dem Dorfe*.

traveling in her forebears' footsteps to try and connect with them, yet able to pass for *Gazhe* in her travels, allowing her to witness the cultural divide from both sides.

One such encounter occurs when Woloch arrives in Paris, having chased the memory of her grandmother across the Atlantic to Western Europe, where family history said she fled after being forced into an arranged marriage. Woloch begins with descriptions of how she never left her flat without Isabel Fonseca's *Bury Me Standing*, a *Gazhe*-authored ethnographic biography of a Romani family living in modern day Eastern Europe, which she read religiously. She claimed it offered her a precious glimpse of the side of her family she never met, what their culture must be like, how they must live (24-28). This is a decidedly *Gazhe* constellation of circumstances, in terms of the power dynamic—sitting in cozy Parisian coffee shops or on the train, reading about a far-off and exotic group of people from a book that said people had no hand in writing, extrapolating the (potentially exaggerated or misunderstood) experiences of a few to be a norm applicable to all Romani, and imagining what their sufferings must be like from the comfort of her own relatively privileged position. Then, Woloch undergoes a role shift when she describes a romantic encounter which left her feeling objectified and fetishized:

> "*Bewitched*, he says, / this man who studies Gypsy, / takes my hand, who's come / with books from Bern by train, / ticks off the languages / he speaks: *Swiss-German,* / *German, English, French;* / among the Slavic: *Russian,* / *Serbian, Croatian*—when I ask / if he speaks *Roma* / he says *Romanesh,* / corrects me, shakes his head" (47).

This young man, a *Gazhe* Tsiganologist, purports to be someone who studies the Romani people and their culture—someone who *should* act as a bridge himself, facilitating communication between the two groups and establishing facts, rather than perpetuating myths. This man, however, immediately engages in the tropes his research should work to dispel, by specifically calling Woloch "bewitching", hearkening back to the stereotype of the *Romni* as a beguiling practitioner of the dark arts who seduces the *Gazhe* through sorcery or trickery. Furthermore, he goes on to focus primarily on showing off how much he knows about the Roma, rather than engaging in a discussion or listening to Woloch's stories of her grandmother. He goes so far as to correct Woloch when she mistakenly calls the Romani language *Roma*—despite the fact that he is correct, the brazen manner with which he does serves as a sharp reminder of the power dynamic the Roma and the *Gazhe*—even those who profess to be ethnographers wishing merely to promote better understanding of this people to the world at large—share; ultimately, the *Gazhe* are the authorities, and will create their own narratives of the Roma, regardless of what the Roma themselves say or do. Woloch's lover mirrors Fonseca, whom she so diligently reads earlier in the narrative's events, in that he is primarily concerned with sharing and finding evidence to support his own preconceived tropic notions of the Roma, rather than letting them speak for themselves and risking any information that might contradict the stereotypes or turn the Roma into a living, breathing people, complex, and with voices of their own.

The young man, in his fetishization of the Roma in general and of Woloch as a *Romni* in particular, mirrors yet another tendency of the *Gazhe* Tsiganologist that both takes advantage of and reinforces the difference in power between the two groups: the view of the

Romni as an object of sport, an exotic creature to pursue and conquer, regardless of how she may feel about the matter. Such acts of fetishization and objectification have been an insidious part of Tsiganology since its inception as an organized field, a dark undercurrent driven by the need to display dominance over the 'lesser' and to satisfy the carnal cravings that the civilized *Gazhe* could not admit to possessing, himself, and thus foisted upon the more primitive Roma:

> "The oldest organisation devoted to the study of the Romani people is the Gypsy Lore Society, established in 1888 and still in existence. Some of its male members—all non-Romanies—referred to themselves as *ryes*, a self-designation interpreted to mean one who had gained privileged entrée into the Romani world, but which in Romani itself (as *rai*) means a person in a position of authority, including 'lord' and 'policeman'. For some ryes, at least, it seems to have had a more specific in-group meaning: managing to bed a Romani woman" (Hancock, 215).

Though this may be an extreme example, it is not an uncommon one, as it mirrors how the white majority has treated so many marginalized and vulnerable groups throughout colonial history, and exemplifies the fact that even those who appear to be advocates for the marginalized can still perpetrate and perpetuate violent acts of oppressive Othering against them, removing their agency both in terms of fetishization and dehumanization. To an extent, even authors such as Woloch's beloved Fonseca participate in this by collecting Roma stories and experiences and exploiting them for profit, displaying more concern about

speaking for (read: over) the Roma than they do about giving the Roma a platform from which they might speak for themselves. One need here recall the way in which Fonseca habitually described the Roma as simple primitives to see that her book focuses more on her ethnographic work among such a simple people than on the conditions and realities of the people, themselves. For example, when talking about time spent living with a group of young *Romni*, Fonseca writes:

> "They were fascinated by my body, which, apart from being made up of the same basic female components and being about the same color, was totally unlike theirs. In common with most Gypsy women, the *boria* were short—around five feet—and they had almost no indentation from armpit to thigh. They were narrow-hipped as boys, small-breasted and short in the legs. Their feet were ridiculously small. Both girls were unexpectedly hairy—unexpectedly, I supposed, according to the child analogue they presented. It was my breasts that really intrigued them, though, as if they were boys experiencing their first close-up viewing. Without any hesitation, they moved straight in to inspect. They poked and cautiously squeezed, and…very briefly they pinched. … they unself-consciously yanked their own breasts out of the tops of their dresses, and presented them as proof of my freakishness…their breasts hung in yamlike

> triangular flaps…more tuber than sexual characteristic, strange and beautiful." (49-50).

Such a description is incredibly problematic—even if the events described were entirely accurate, the manner with which Fonseca recounts them is far too reminiscent of Jane Goodall's descriptions of the apes, highlighting, in a bemused sort of way, the primitive intelligence and the comically uncivilized nature of the interaction. Fonseca engages in the infantilization of the Other, a strategy familiar to those studying Postcolonialism, by comparing the *Romni* to children, both explicitly in a physical and implicitly in a mental sense.[29] Additionally, Fonseca manages to paint the scene in such a light that she, the white ethnographer, is a point of unabashed wonder for these simple people, describing in nearly an entire page the awe with which these women investigate a breast that has been supported by the wondrous invention of the bra and not ravaged by years of breastfeeding, using this clear display of a discrepancy in privilege for comedic effect. She then goes on to fetishize these primitive women and their "tuberous" breasts as "strange and beautiful", effectively celebrating the primitiveness and the disadvantage of these people. Fonseca's ethnography, and the works of those like her, do bring the Roma to light, but not in such a way that raises awareness or gives voice to a people stripped of sovereignty; rather, these works tend to have the effect of making a spectacle of the marginalized and creating praise for the ethnographer, courageous and benevolent enough to spend time among these people and to bring their experiences back for the enjoyment and entertainment of the masses. For all intents and

[29] See Nayar's *The Postcolonial Dictionary*, pp. 95-96, for a more thorough definition and history of infantilization in the context of Othering and removing agency and self-sovereignty from indigenous people.

purposes, this may as well be another romanticized novel like those discussed in the previous chapter, as Woloch soon comes to see through her encounters with actual Roma.

After her jarring experience of objectification and fetishization at the hands of her Tsiganologist acquaintance, Woloch moves on from Basel, carrying a new understanding of the plight of her ancestors with her. This encounter took everything that she had read about, everything that she intellectually knew, and made it somehow real, concrete—she could no longer read accounts like Fonseca's as one might read a travelogue, innocent and full of curious facts; having felt a small taste of the Othering the Roma face, Woloch's perspective on the matter was irrevocably altered:

> "The words I've read / and read again until / I'm numb with facts / are facts /…*not so much nomadic by nature* / *as that they were never* / *allowed to stay* / How have I lived / this many years, / come this far west, / swept through, returned / and never known / what my own freedom meant, / or exile, / homelessness? / How do I live / inside this history, / wheel slipping / through my hands? -- / *they were slaves in Wallachia* / *until the 1800s*" (70-71).

Woloch begins to understand that, while the authors she treasured may have done something of a small service by bringing the Roma to the popular imagination once more, this was not to be construed as any sort of activism to help better their circumstances; as in the novels examined in the first chapter, the Roma seem here far more likely to be used to add an exotic flavor that would ensure an author's work is alluring to the public, and the

authors put forward narratives that further this aim. Thus there are accounts of the Roma which conform to the preexisting stereotypes, depicting them in turn as *Naturvolk*, as carefree and idyllic wanderers, as inherently sexual and hot-blooded creatures of lust, as superstitious primitives, as witches, as conmen, etc., always through the cultural lens of the *Gazhe* gaze, never allowing the Roma to speak for or explain themselves. One could infer from this trend that the point was never really to understand or attempt to create a cultural bridging with the Roma, but rather to gain an association with their alluring Otherness, to become a *Rai*, as the Gypsy Lore Society called it, and have a symbolic power over the Other, imputing an identity and a narrative on them that may not necessarily reflect the truth, and selling a contrived version of their culture as a novel commodity providing titillation and escape from the doldrums of mundane life.

Despite this, Woloch still includes Fonseca's work in her book, including quotes and facts from *Bury Me Standing* interspersed throughout her poems. If, as Woloch realizes, the *Gazhe* Tsiganologists merely engage in the unjust coopting of Roma stories and culture, then why include them at all? The answer to this question may be hinted at by the ways in which Woloch uses these quotes. On page 46 of her text, Woloch places a quote from Fonseca's *Bury Me Standing* addressing the propensity of the Roma to lie, to hide and disguise themselves:

> "Among gypsies, continual self-reinvention has been the primary tool of survival, but the not-knowing has of course had terribly alienating consequences, as did, for example, the forced

> name-changing in Bulgaria in the late 1980s. Already, many Bulgarian gypsies cannot remember their own names."

This quote directly precedes the incident mentioned earlier, in which Woloch's Tsiganologist lover attempts to show just how much he knows and understands the Roma, as though they are nothing more than a field of study for him to master, while at the same time reducing her to a stereotype under his *Gazhe* gaze. This placement speaks volumes. Readers are shown Fonseca talking about the Roma's constant creation of new identities, to the point of alienating themselves from the truth of their heritage, their families, their own names, with Fonseca's tone might implying that this is related to her accusation of the Roma as a people predisposed to lying, though careful reading will note that this reinvention of self is actually a survival strategy made necessary by the *Gazhe*. It is the *Gazhe* who, either directly or indirectly, force new identities upon the Roma. This statement is carefully placed just before Woloch relates an experience in which she, having a sense of her identity and self as a result of her inner and outer journeys, has that identity effectively negated and a new one foisted upon her at the hands of the *Gazhe*. This contrast shows us how Woloch uses the voices of such *Gazhe* Tsiganologists in her work, as a means of gaining indirect, parallel power. Woloch cannot simply come out and directly challenge the works of the Tsiganologists or denounce them for what they are, as she is not granted the recognized legitimacy or authority coming from the academic study of the Tsiganologist, and because she is a *Romni*, whose voice would not be heard on such matters anyway. She can, however, through a performance of the stereotypes built into the language surrounding the Roma, echo the words of the *Gazhe* in order to make her arguments and illustrate her points. She uses

Fonseca's words to start a conversation, and then subtly shades the quotes with means that are more appropriate for the Roma: plaintive poems and stories of her life experiences. She does not explicitly say a single word to correct or condemn the appropriation of the *Gazhe* Tsiganologists, but nevertheless is able to convey her meaning indirectly in order to attain agency and make her voice heard.

As the previous chapter has shown, the *Gazhe* cannot be trusted to speak for or on behalf of the Roma, as doing so might work against the narrative constructed to reinforce the sense of Otherness and thus reify the *Gazhe* sense of identity. As the works examined in this chapter demonstrate, however, attempts by the Roma to engage in perpendicular communicative strategies, to try and speak for themselves in a direct and straightforward fashion, were not historically met with success—as one sees in Lee's case, Roma who act in a way that is expected of *Gazhe* (e.g. holding respectable press conferences, speaking in an informed matter about the sociopolitical inequalities present in the media, etc.) are ignored or met with confusion, and only learned *Gazhe* are viewed as being reputable sources of information about the mysterious and exotic Roma, as one sees in the events touched upon in Woloch's poetry. The Roma must utilize parallel strategies, comporting themselves to the language that has been created for them, regardless of how well this language actually reflects the reality of their culture, beliefs, or values, or else they risk becoming illegible, inscrutable, and lost in translation. They must be the object, never the subject, for this languaging was not built with the capacity to place the Other as the subject and agent; therefore, to avoid being written out of the conversation entirely, Roma rely on the language that has been written for them, performing the tropes that are imputed upon them while

simultaneously subverting these tropes, as a means of accruing indirect power. Lee and Woloch occupy unique positions in this relationship, having seen both sides of this divide; discovering Roma identity as outsiders moving inward into the culture of the Other, they then work to bring awareness, education, and understanding back out, revisiting tropes in order to communicate to a wider audience beyond Roma stereotypes.

Moving Toward a New Approach

At this point, it is necessary to examine several issues which arose during my research for this chapter, and which bear significant impact on the direction of this investigation. First and foremost, as was shown through the engagement with the texts by Lee and Woloch, though comporting to the tropes and playing the parts expected of them may have afforded them some measure of capacity to navigate the social sphere, this is still far from an empowered position to take part in the global discourse, to speak and truly be heard. These texts, as Lee points out, in large part tell the "story of that failure" (x). In *Goddam Gypsy*, Yanko failed to gain the recognition and platform for legitimization that he sought, instead ultimately leaving the country to seek a more tenable life elsewhere, knowing that his people, his culture, his heritage are essentially doomed to either assimilate entirely or stubbornly persist another generation or so before dying out. Woloch's poems also demonstrate a failure, as she never truly comes to a place of groundedness from which she can use her position of privilege as a *Gazhe*-passing woman raised as white to challenge stereotypes, begin to dismantle unequal power structures, or act as an advocate in the *Gazhe* world; she merely follows the shadows of her forebears, haunted by the parts she may have tacitly played in

perpetuating this system and learning the difference between authentically appreciating a people or culture and fetishizing or exoticizing them.

Thus, I return to Lee's statement regarding the power of invisibility. He maintains that, in his opinion, this ability to blend in and be unseen is the greatest gift of the Roma, and the most vital to their survival. This, I believe, is just the crux of the matter—this strategy of playing the roles and subverting them is useful for survival, for all intents and purposes maintaining the social status quo and allowing one to avoid being enough of an outlier to rouse the anger of the majority, but the messages sent through these acts of subversion are not loud enough to be heard. They open up easily enough to textual analysis, but as a means of participating in discourse at large, they are simply too easily overlooked. For this reason, the strategy of chameleonic blending and subversion, while useful in certain ways as a tool to navigate social spaces unperturbed and maintain personal agency, is ineffective as a means of speaking and being heard as a minority, leaving Spivak's assertion unchallenged. There is, however, another alternative path of indirect speech, which shall be the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 3—In Their Own Words: Subverting the *Gazhe* Gaze

"Everything started here. What used to be / and what will be converge at this point: at the end / of that first Romani road lies the fate of my people" (Hancock, 25).

Introduction

Chapter two discussed how the Romani have used the stereotypes composed by the *Gazhe* and performed the roles expected of them by a people who have by and large only ever encountered the fictitious representations of "Gypsy" figures created by other *Gazhe*, pandering so that they might have a voice in the global conversation, even if the words they speak are not their own. Of course, this is still far from what can be construed as a fair and equal conversation, demonstrating the kind of speech from the subaltern that Spivak was indicating; as I have illustrated through Lee and Woloch, Roma attempting to address the *Gazhe* as equals are unheard and unheard of, repeatedly ignored and rendered inscrutable outside the context of a trope. Some have been able to subvert their performances of this trope in order to make a statement, but a statement is only part of a conversation. It must be heard, understood, and responded to, and this is difficult to achieve through veiled messages alone.

This chapter will expand that seeming dichotomy by exploring a different sort of communication on the part of the Roma. Here, I will examine texts created by Roma, for Roma, written not to cross the barriers of Insider/Outsider or to broach greater cultural exchange, but rather to serve as a reminder of community in diaspora, to foster a sense of culture and connection among the Roma scattered across the West. I will investigate a

collection of poetry from various Roma authors, all detailing aspects of the unique life experiences of the Romani from the standpoint of one *Rom* talking to another, speaking to the need for strength through community in negotiating a sociopolitical landscape largely weighted against them. These works contain no such posturing or performing for the sake of meeting the expectations of a *Gazhe* audience, and are incredibly raw and unguarded. Without the need to translate their experiences or emotions into something palatable to a *Gazhe* audience, Roma authors speak freely as members of a common in-group, affording readers a glimpse of Roma identity, culture, and history performed for themselves and themselves alone, displaying what could be considered a more authentic presentation than that found in the texts discussed in the previous chapter. Taking this as a foundation, I will make a case for the possibility of a different strategy for navigating the global discourse as a marginalized people, drawing upon oblique communication and taking advantage of the *Gazhe* Gaze.

The Indirect Voice of Lyric Poetry

The focus of this chapter will be poetry—a type of literature that could be seen as closest to a culturally Romani form of expression. This is due to the fact that the Roma, for much of their history, have relied on oral traditions to preserve and transmit cultural information and intangible heritage; as such, the rhythms and flow of music and poetry not only provide a mnemonic device to help ensure that the information contained therein is retained with some degree of fidelity, but also become an integral part of the telling of the stories, the melody and beat contributing to the conveyance of a history or a folk tale in a way that mere prose alone never could. This is not a uniquely Romani phenomenon—indeed,

many cultures around the world, ranging from ancient Greeks and Scandinavians to Mesopotamians, have used the musicality of metered verses to similar ends.[30] The classic works of epic poetry served as a unifying cultural force, transporting the Everyman to the mythic scenes of a clan's heroes or gods as a means of promoting ideals or cementing kinship-group cohesion. Here, however, I am not simply looking at poetry as a means of passing along a particular legend or set or cultural moral values, but rather as a particularly fitting means of constructing and communicating a sense of self while sidestepping the issues of parallel versus perpendicular communication detailed in the previous chapter. The reader is shifted, through the poetry, to the perspective not of a specific and well-known figure, but to that of a relatively anonymous speaker, almost reversing the above process, and inviting the reader to participate in a transformation of perspective allowing for a more intimate understanding of the nameless, marginalized Other.

As discussed in the introduction of this dissertation, the process of gaining a voice and being recognized as a subject in one's own right is a sort of double-bind; in order to be recognized as a subject and take part in discourse on an interpersonal or intercultural level, one must necessarily make oneself *subject* or subordinate to the Other.[31] This has been touched upon so far both in terms of the *Gazhe* efforts to dictate the character and identity of the Roma, and in terms of Roma efforts to maintain a cultural invisibility to avoid said *subjectivation* even at the cost of their voice. Lyric poetry provides a means of bypassing this bind through the device of the lyric "I". As Culler, a scholar of poetry with a keen interest in comparative literature and an interdisciplinary approach to poetological analysis, notes in

[30] For reference, readers may wish to consider *The Iliad*, *The Poetic Edda*, or *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, respectively.
[31] See Butler, Judith. *The Psychic Life of Power*.

his *Theory of the Lyric*, the subject-speaker of a lyric poem is not necessarily to be strictly identified with the person of the poet; rather, "the statement-subject is not a personal *I*, but a linguistic function. Since the statement-subject is a subject of enunciation and not a person, the concept of subjectivity will be eliminated from the theory of the lyric" (105). Thus, the poet creates a sort of proxy "I" from whose perspective they may speak to the reader, but who ultimately remains distinct. Furthermore, as opposed to the narrative approach of a novel, the lyric poem must be taken as-is. Readers have no context for interpreting or extrapolating other than the poem as it is given, even rejects contextualization beyond such base non-diegetic factors as the title or possibly the date or place of publication. Lyric poetry, resistant to the ascriptions and imputations of tropic assumptions that could speak over the intended messages, forces readers to acknowledge and carefully consider what the poet is saying. In this way, such poems are quite appropriate for the work of communicating lived experiences to an audience without allowing said audience to impute any sort of caricaturized identity or tropic lens onto the speaker or message.

In this chapter, I will discuss four poems in an exploration of Roma identities and experiences navigating social encounters: Gregory Dufunia Kwiek's *I am the common Rom*, Rajko Djuric's *Prayer of an Impious Father and Gypsy Mother*, Leksa Manus' *Ode to the Twentieth Century*, and *The Gypsy from India*, by Nicolas Jimenes Gonzales. The texts chosen for this chapter are poems by various authors written for and collected in the anthology *Roads of the Roma,* dealing directly with the work of finding community and reclaiming identity in a world which either ignores, fetishizes, or vilifies them in turns, and exemplifying different facets of the difficulties of cross-cultural communication. These texts are unique in

that, though they were written in many different languages—including dialects of Rromanes—they were translated and published in English and thus intentionally made accessible to a wide, *Gazhe* audience. Despite this fact, these poems are not written for *Gazhe*, but rather for other members of the Roma community; their language is open, raw, and unfiltered. These authors do not busy themselves with keeping up the performances demanded by a *Gazhe* readership in order to appease the need for Roma to be Other, nor do they face the need to encode their experiences for an audience who cannot directly relate to them; these texts written by and for Roma are thus more representative of authentic identity and genuine communication, rather than pandering to a stereotype for the sake of social acceptability. The emotions and experiences discussed in these works are clear, without the need for concealment under layers of subverted tropes or expected scripts, thus providing an example of naked Roma voices, though this only arises when the *Gazhe* are removed as the overtly intended audience and must instead listen at the threshold, negating the insider/outsider dynamic and creating a conversation of equal footing between members of the same in-group.

As a culture that only relatively recently adopted a standardized orthography and gained access to education and resources necessary to foster widespread literacy, the Roma have historically relied upon oral tradition to preserve and pass down their stories (Hancock, 9-11).[32] To aid in retaining the fidelity of these oral histories, they were often composed as

[32] Hancock is careful to note that the lack of a written history should in no way be construed to imply that the Roma are a culture without literature: "Part of the conventional description insists…that we are a 'people without letters', and sometimes that even our *oral* narrative has really been appropriated from the non-Romani populations around us. If we are indeed a people without any kind of literary heritage, then we are obliged to wonder why, in the few years since the opening of eastern Europe, Gypsy literature has flourished in such

poems and set to music; it is to Romani poetry that I now turn as a source of raw and unfiltered self-creation and representation, written as they were for a Romani audience and then published and made accessible to the *Gazhe*. The source that I will be using for these poems is *Roads of the Roma*, an anthology collected and edited by Roma scholar and renowned voice in the field of Romani Studies, Ian Hancock. This anthology contains works written by Roma of various ages, from various countries, all conveying unique perspectives on their experiences and identities as Roma, reclaiming and lifting up their identity as their own expression, regardless of the scripts that have been written for them.

Kwiek's *I am the common Rom* and the Struggle to be Heard

The first poem that will be examined is by Gregory Dufunia Kwiek, a American *Rom*, and is entitled *I am the common Rom*. In this piece, the author explicitly grapples with the struggle of having his identity, his history, his character assigned to him by *Gazhe* who know nothing about the reality of his lived experience. This reflects the tropes and stereotypes initially discussed in chapter one and the feelings of frustration and anger directed at these by Lee and Woloch in chapter two. The very title of the poem, with its assumption of a singular "common *Rom*", reflects the *Gazhe* tendency of reductionism and essentialism in terms of the Other—there is one script, one blanket series of traits and presumptions that can identify the Roma *en masse*. Before the poem even begins, readers are already primed with the image of a single narrative being stamped over the Roma, drowning out their voices with an imposed and inauthentic script. The construction of the poem is very formulaic, each

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overwhelming abundance…its origins run deep and old in the Romani experience and lie in a long era of being silenced" (10).

stanza shaped in a definitively patterned fashion, creating what feels like a litany of sorts in reaction to that script, acknowledging and responding to the traits ascribed to the "common *Rom*":

> Hello, I'm the common Rom. / Some fool told me to reveal to *gadje*[33] that I'm a Rom, and stand up -- / (I don't think this guy was a Rom).
>
> Hello, I'm the common Rom. / What do you mean we are trash, the lowest of the low? / Then we probably deserve the way *gadje* treat us.
>
> Hello, I'm the common Rom. / Education? Are you joking? / We can't change—it's in our blood, / We will always be stupid Rom (106).

Here, a rhythm of resignation is pounded out, like a heartbeat, until it becomes internalized. The motif of the repeated introduction, the one-sided conversation, demonstrates the futility of trying to speak with someone who refuses to actually listen, the frustration of trying to reach out, only to be ignored and have to start over again. Eventually, as can be seen in this excerpt, the speaker simply begins echoing the tropes concerning the Roma that *Gazhe* have decided are fact. Readers can see from the reaction to the admonition to stand up for himself that this litany of identity is not reflective of any truth, but is accepted merely because the power dynamic does not allow otherwise; it is

[33] An alternate spelling of *Gazhe*, or non-Roma

pointless to try and correct those who, having considerably more power and social clout than you, insist that they know better, and thus will not listen.

The poem continues to describe how the *Rom* strives to hide as much as possible, trying desperately to blend in so as to avoid confrontation with the *Gazhe*, even if it means abandoning the town and any sources of livelihood he has secured within it: "Again they recognized us as *Rom*! / I told you kids not to speak Romanes in front of the *gadje*. / Now it's time to move again" (ibid., 107). The poet is describing that selfsame strategy of assimilation and invisibility that Lee explains in his work *Goddam Gypsy*, and when that invisibility is compromised, vanishing on the road to avoid drawing ire for being suddenly outed as Other. This, in the poet's eyes, is the experience of the "common *Rom*"—striving constantly to minimize oneself in order to avoid upsetting the *Gazhe* majority as much as possible and simply accepting the identity that one is handed. One might be tempted to conclude that communication as such between the marginalized and the marginalizer is not an apparent possibility in the view of this poet, mirroring the conclusion that Lee reached, and seemingly confirming Spivak's assertions, as discussed in chapter one. This, then, is the state of the Roma's predicament as it is and as it historically has been. In fact, the poem demonstrates how any situation in which the Roma are forced to comport themselves to *Gazhe* standards entails a measure of risk, and yet that risk is unavoidable; Roma cannot live communally in camps or caravans now, and thus are forced to navigate interactions with *Gazhe* to secure housing. This means that the *Gazhe* are then in a position to evict the Roma if they do not successfully camouflage themselves and maintain their performance, as the poem shows. In a more extreme example of the control *Gazhe* exert over the lives of the Roma and the danger

they pose, the very first line of the poem states that "When us Rom are organized and live in one area, that place is a *lageri*[34]" (ibid., 106). This reference to World War II and the *Porrajmos* ensures that the poem is charged from the very beginning with a clear and vivid illustration of the ways in which subjugation by *Gazhe* and forced conformity to societal standards they can never truly live up to is not only a threat to Roma culture, but to their very lives. Readers will note here the specific usage of the passive voice: "When us Rom *are organized*", highlighting the fact that this is involuntary, an act that is done *to* them, making the entire scene a dark reflection of the Roma's own camps and gatherings, which were sources of safety, community, and kinship, but which were taken and tainted by *Gazhe* authority. Thus, the poet laments that the Roma cannot return to the way things were, cannot be seen to identify with their own culture or ethnicity, and cannot really succeed in navigating a system designed to be weighted against them. The poem ends with the *Rom* gathering his family and, with resignation, moving on to try their luck in a new town. There is no true conclusion, only the knowledge that the cycle will begin itself again, and the next iteration will likely run a similar course, as will the one after it, and so forth. The *Rom* is still the eternal wanderer, the nomad, by force rather than by choice.

Interesting to note here is the fact that the *Rom* in this poem seems to be addressing *Gazhe*; the poem has an explanatory tone, almost as of one introducing oneself. The structure of the poem centers around the rhythm of the repeated phrase "I am the common Rom", followed by a description of the *Rom*'s life experiences or thoughts. The speaker is trying to be acknowledged, to be known and understood, to communicate in a way that is meaningful

[34] Related to the German *Lager*, used in Rromanes to refer to concentration camps

and effective, but the repeated introductions and explanations give the impression that this communication is difficult, halting, and not entirely clearly received. This comes as no surprise to the speaker, whose explanations and descriptions themselves convey previous instances of failed communication. The poem, then, is a citation: a failed communication of failed communication, and the speaker's frustration is palpable. The reader, through the device of the lyric I, is simultaneously placed in the position of the "common Rom" and the one this *Rom* is addressing, forced to acknowledge the *Gazhe* ignorance of the *Rom's* situation and the degree of power which the *Gazhe* as cultural and ethnic majority hold over every aspect of the *Rom*'s life, and bear this knowledge together with the vivid imagery of the ramifications such factors have on the *Rom* and his family. Holding these together in tension creates a dialogue mirroring the dialogue that fails to occur within the text itself, and the reader is thus forced by this interaction with the poem to engage in the work of listening to the voice of the Other presented as the lyric I, possibly creating a scaffold for the act of listening to the voice of the Other in society.

Navigating Marginalization in Djuric's *Prayer of an Impious Father and Gypsy Mother*

Prayer of an Impious Father and Gypsy Mother, written by Serbian *Rom* Rajko Djuric, follows this theme of thwarted communication and the dire consequences therein entailed. The poem takes the form of a lament dedicated to a young Romani boy who, dying of an illness that proper medical attention could have prevented, was then refused a proper burial place due to his status as Roma.[35] The poem is divided into two parts, detailing the thoughts

[35] Hancock et al., 123. While this information may seem to conflict with the previous statement regarding the necessity to read only that which is written in the poem, adding no extraneous context, the above information comes in a preface to the poem as it was collected, and thus should be admitted into an analysis of the work.

and emotions of the titular father and mother, respectively. These two figures differ drastically in their understanding of and reaction to the passing of their child, and this difference is perhaps first coded in the way they are described in the title. While readersare told in no uncertain terms that the mother is *Romni*, only the word "impious" is given to characterize the father. This is an interesting choice, and one which leads to a number of questions when read in conjunction with details given through the text of the poem. Instead of addressing the *Gazhe*, as *I am the common Rom* does, or even other Roma, the father here speaks directly with God, demanding to know how the world could have become such a cruel place and calling for justice:

> *Devla morrea*[36] / If you have shut your house / open at least a grave / or let us dig a grave / a grave in the air…
>
> *Devlea karalea*[37]/ Bury then the father with the son / blow down my house / spit on my courtyard / or better still / piss on this village / that I might see your handiwork. / Then obliterate me into silence / …that the name of the stone even / may be lost to oblivion / that I might see how they call us / "Gypsies". / Ah, do something / you blasted god / or leave me be the judge (ibid., 124).

This is the clearly a source of the father's accusations of impiety. If the father feels that he must bend the knee and placidly bow to the whims of the *Gazhe*, this sentiment is not

[36] My God
[37] Lustful or Desiring God

shared with his God. The father here is presented as full of grief, understandably, but also open anger and outrage; the strategy of blending and hiding to avoid direct confrontation does not extend to interactions with the divine. The father even goes so far as to level harsh language against God, cursing him and claiming that he would do a better job of justice and judgment. This is notably in-group language, an intimate sharing of emotion with a frankness and directness that would not be used in dealing with cultural outsiders (i.e. *Gazhe*).[38] This degree of intimacy shows the *Rom* at his most authentic and unguarded, bearing his heart before his God, and this self-representation depicts the bitter consequences of silencing and the anguish arising from this powerlessness. All of the pain and sorrow that should be conveyed to the *Gazhe* responsible are instead directed at God, implying that God is the only one who will listen. And yet, if the father is identified solely by his sin, then it would seem strange for the mother's defining trait to be her ethnicity by comparison, leading one to wonder whether this could be an implication that her ethnicity is also to be considered equally sinful. If so, then she represents a sin against society, rather than against the church—a sin which is punished, like impiety and blasphemy, by excommunication and ostracization. Readers will recall from chapter one that the societal grudge against Roma was often given religious justification, with rumors being promulgated accusing the Roma of everything from being the damned descendants of Cain to having forged the nails used in the

[38] Recall descriptions from Lee's work and Hancock's commentary in the previous chapter regarding the mistrust Roma feel for *Gazhe* and the tendency to filter speech or avoid certain topics in their presence. Yaron Matras discusses the historical need for such secrecy on pages 125-128 of her work, *The Romani Gypsies*, explaining how the relative obscurity of the Romani language was used to Roma's advantage within in-group communication, allowing members of the group to "convey warnings…coordinate trade and service transactions in the presence of customers, and sometimes to conspire together to carry out activities that were not in line with mainstream society's norms or values" (127).

Crucifixion, so this constellation of both religious and social condemnation is fitting.[39] The Roma are indeed cut off and shunned from society, and it is exactly this punishment for the sin of their identity that precipitates the circumstances leading to the sin of impiety. The social takes priority over the religious for the *Gazhe* looking to exclude the Roma, and the same holds true for the Roma dealing with the aftermath of this exclusion. The impious father prays not for redemption or salvation for the immortal soul of his lost son, but for the societal circumstances trapping the Roma in this vulnerability to be overthrown. He begs for the power to make himself heard and to demand fair treatment, to avenge his losses and cast down his oppressors, or else he prays for death so he will not have to endure this any longer.

The mother, on the other hand, takes a much more practical approach, shifting focus even more from the religious to the societal needs—she does not curse God, nor does she set loose her anger against the *Gazhe*, for neither of these actions will accomplish anything. Instead, she organizes a burial for her son as best as the circumstances will allow, in an unmarked grave outside of town.

> Dig brothers dig / a deeper trench still / dig down to the bowels / of the earth / so I can enshroud / this wound of six days / this grief of six nights / Dig brothers dig / a trench deeper still / dig into me / with your black-eyed gaze / dig into me / and make of me his tombstone (ibid., 125).

[39] Refer to Ian Hancock's *We are the Romani People*, Solms' *Zigeunerbilder*, Patrut's *Phantasma Nation*, and Tebbutt's *Sinti and Roma* for more complete descriptions of the various religious accusations and ascriptions made to justify discrimination and violence against the Roma in Western Europe from the 1500s through the Enlightenment.

Here, again, a distinctive rhythm is pounded out by repeated phrases and meter, echoing the act of driving shovels deep into the ground and heaving dark earth as the grave deepens. She urges her kin to dig so that she might put her son, her grief, her indignity to rest, but what is left unsaid speaks just as loudly as this, if not more so. This is simply one instance of grave-digging necessitated by the social injustice and ostracizing faced by Roma, but her response is prepared and practiced; this is clearly not the first time this clan has been forced to bury one of their own in an unmarked grave, fenced out of acceptance and dignity even in death, and this will not be the last. This is commonplace, just one more facet of a life subjected to silencing and aggressive Othering, relegated to the margins of "civilized" society and then scorned for being uncivilized. Recognizing this futility in asking for acknowledgement, to say nothing of actual respect or assistance, she, as many Roma, is forced to look after her needs and the needs of her family herself, utilizing whatever methods or resources are available to her. And here, there is strength. The mother, knowing that the *Gazhe* will never remember her son or honor the grief she has suffered due to their oppression of their own volition, takes it upon herself to become a gravestone, a reminder, a standing testament that preserves the memory of what transpired here. She will not stand by and allow the *Gazhe* to remain willfully ignorant of the consequences of their actions, nor will she allow the plight of her son, and by extension, her people, to be forgotten. In a way, the mother's decision to become her child's tombstone is reminiscent of the poet's decision to write—this poem, in a more real sense, has become the tombstone; this poem digs into the reader and plants there the parents' memories of the child's death and the injustice that led to it, cold and heavy and grave, in a way that the reader cannot ignore.

A History of Oppression and Willful Blindness: Manus' *Ode to the Twentieth Century*

Ode to the Twentieth Century, by Latvian *Rom* Leksa Manus, concerns itself with the historical developments that have taken an already marginalized group and pushed them even further toward the boundaries of society, taking from them many of the few freedoms they had and forcing them to assimilate their way of life to that of the *Gazhe*, or else risk more aggressive open persecution. Even after the Porrajmos, there were rules and regulations restricting travel, prohibiting camps, mandating registration and a formal (and permanent) address in order to be considered for even the most basic of social services, while social prejudice made finding steady work and a more socially acceptable living situation incredibly difficult.[40] Consider, for example, the difficulty of renting an apartment or taking out a loan for a house when one does not have steady, credible, aboveboard employment, and the simultaneous difficulty of applying for a job when one does not have a stable home and legitimate address. For the marginalized and underprivileged, this creates a negative feedback loop which keeps a person reliant on under-the-table work and whatever shelter they can manage. The twentieth century, which brought the world closer together than ever before, still left marginalized groups like the Roma to face exclusion, isolation, and alienation wherever they turned:

> Twentieth Century, / What did you hold in store for the sad Roma people? / Did you bring the sun into our dark lives? / Did you dry the tears from our women's eyes? / Did you lighten our

[40] See chapter five, "Explaining antigypsyism", of Ian Hancock's *We are the Romani People* for an explanation of many of the ways that social prejudice against the Roma have translated into societal exclusion and refusal of opportunities to better their circumstances, both historically, and stretching into the present day.

> songs and dances with joy? / Twentieth Century: listen to our songs. / Can you hear from the notes / how our hearts have been drowned in tears? / Look at our dances: / Our women's steps may seem as light as a bird's, / but in reality they are trying / to cast off a bitter burden / from their aching shoulders. / That burden is you, / Twentieth Century, / and the sorrow you brought / into each of our lives (ibid., 54).

Here, the poet illustrates how the Roma, still performing their roles as defined by *Gazhe* texts as far back as the 1800s, are continually, perhaps even knowingly and willfully, misinterpreted by the *Gazhe*—those who consume Roma cultural performances see the song and dance as charming, idyllic, romanticized examples of a carefree life. Indeed, in recent years, "gypsy" and "bohemian" have become an aesthetic representing a highly idealized and free-spirited lifestyle; pop-culture authorities and lifestyle bloggers tell us that this aesthetic appropriated from what is presumed to be Roma culture is "associated with passion and romance; it is raunchy, wild-at-heart, and mysterious" (Bhopal, 64). And yet, for all their consumption of what is topically designated "gypsy", the *Gazhe* fail to see and understand the signal being conveyed by the actual performances. Roma songs are not just emotionally evocative folk music to be enjoyed, but messages clearly and directly communicating the sorrows that have been inflicted upon the Roma, their alienation, their oppression, and how they yearn for a sense of belonging, for a home where they will be free from this prejudice. The poet appears "to point out to the reader that what is frequently portrayed as an allegedly carefree existence is in fact dominated by violence, oppression, and social exclusion"

(Toninato, 96). Their dances are not merely sultry and scintillating morsels of an exotic culture performed for the pleasure of *Gazhe* viewers; they are an attempt to throw off the fetters of *Gazhe* oppression, to slip loose from the weight of their sorrow, and find joy and freedom in ecstatic movement, even if only for a fleeting moment. These also represent rare occasions for the Roma to celebrate their culture and publicly acknowledge aspects of their heritage without fear of the usual repercussions, merely because these happen to be commodified by the *Gazhe* Gaze. The Roma convey these clearly, and the technological advancements of the twentieth century make their audience larger than ever, yet the *Gazhe* consistently—perhaps intentionally—miss the point.

For many non-marginalized individuals, the twentieth century may have brought a treasure trove of technological and social advancement, but for the Roma, among others, it brought atrocities greater than any other in a culture's living memory. The poet gracefully dances around this theme, much like the *Romni* mentioned in his poem, but through the motif of repeated address and questioning of the twentieth century, as well as the carefully placed clues citing "bitter burdens" and "sorrow", the text clearly points to the one event in the twentieth century that brought previously unimaginable pain and devastating trauma to the Roma, the *Porrajmos*, or Great Devouring.[41] Estimates place the total number of Roma who were killed as a result of the *Porrajmos* at 15,000 or more, making this among the largest mass killings in history (Hancock, 385). While this ordeal was devastatingly traumatic and very often fatal to the Roma, as well as other minority groups, its effect on members of the privileged majority was quite different—after the war ended, these individuals were left with

[41] The Romani term for the Holocaust. Also sometimes referred to as the *Samudaripen*, or "Mass Killing"

the knowledge of what they had done or tacitly supported and allowed to be done to other human beings. Naturally, it was much easier to repress and forget this dark period, rather than acknowledge and process what happened and why.[42] The survivors of the *Porrajmos*, however, have no such opportunity. Their pain follows them, haunts them, in the forms of families torn apart by violence, of the harrowing accounts of those fortunate enough to have escaped with their lives. Needing to grieve, yet seeing their wounds ignored by those who inflicted them, the Roma carry on, using their art to give voice to their feelings.[43] As the poem states, the *Gazhe* Gaze is immediately drawn to such performances, and consumes them as idle pleasures or entertainment. Whether this comes from genuine ignorance or from a psychological resistance to facing this past, the effect is the same: the Roma bitterly mourn what the twentieth century has brought upon their people while the *Gazhe* watch and applaud.

Resistance in Activism: Gonzalez's *The Gypsy from India*

The final poem examined in this chapter is *The Gypsy from India,* by Spanish poet Nicolas Jimenes Gonzalez. Immediately from the title, readers are faced with an interesting tension: Gonzalez acknowledges the more historically accurate view that the Roma as an ethnic group originated in India, yet in the same breath reclaims the use of the term "Gypsy", and the rumor that these people came from Egypt from which this appellation comes. Thus, the first thing readers are confronted with in the poem is the tension between truth and myth,

[42] Consider Adorno's *Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit* for a discussion of the ways in which denial can obscure painful feelings of shame and hinder productive self-reflection necessary to reconcile oneself to the past.
[43] The topic of art being used to give voice to voiceless grief in the wake of the *Porrajmos* will be explored in greater detail in the next chapter.

between actual heritage and ascribed identity—a tension that Roma contend with in their daily lives, as previous discussions have illustrated. The poem that follows is a continued exploration of this theme, addressing both the violence of imputed identities and the hypocrisy of *Gazhe* casting scorn on Roma for performing the very identities they created:

> I go looking for Gypsies / in the olive grove / because I was told / they were turned into dogs. / I am an Indian Gypsy woman / and learned from *Kali*[44] / the justice of logic, / the romance of magic. / I predicted your futures / throughout the centuries. / I developed the cures / for your sick mules and donkeys. / You never noticed me, / as if it was madness / that drew money from / your fine young ladies. / But the time has come / to honour my people, / and free them from / the evil spell that I will / break with the spell I make. / They won't be dogs any more, / they will be what they were, / they will return to being the Roma-- / Gypsies, as you would say (Hancock, 49).

The poem begins with the speaker searching for her kin, unable to find them as they've been "turned into dogs". This is fairly straightforward symbolism—the Roma people, through generations of oppression and Othering, have essentially had their humanity taken away from them. They've consistently been viewed as animal, primal, primitive; readers need only recall the descriptions by Luther and Grellmann mentioned in chapter one to see

[44] A Hindu goddess associated with wrath, righteous anger, and fierce protection. See Wangu, Madhu Bazaz. *Images of Indian Goddesses*. Abhinav Publications, 2003.

just how long this stereotype has been imputed upon the Roma. As dogs, the Roma have no voices of their own, though this metaphor goes further than simply highlighting their lack of social agency; dogs are subservient creatures, bound to obey the will of their masters, or else they are abandoned strays left to fend for themselves on the streets, a position which aptly describes the situation thrust upon the Roma as discussed previously in this work. The speaker, however, is no dog; she escaped this transformation and remains empowered through her identity. She boldly claims and proclaims her heritage, and declares that Kali has taught her "the justice of logic, the romance of magic". This single sentence speaks volumes—Kali, a Hindu goddess, not only speaks to the Indic origins of the Romani people, but also to the wrath and righteous anger that destroys hostile forces. Typically depicted bearing weapons, such as sword and trident, and ornamented with the severed body parts of her foes, she is a fierce slayer of demons and a representation of the power to vanquish that which hinders or threatens.[45] In fact, one of the traditional epithets of Kali, *Cāṃuṇḍā*, references her victory in battle over two fearsome monsters terrorizing villages in the service of tyrannical demon-kings (Wangu, 72). It is through this force of fury and protective anger that the speaker learns "the justice of logic", directly refuting the false logic that the *Gazhe* use to justify their Othering and dehumanizing of the Roma, and the "romance of magic", the power which is intrinsically linked to freedom from the daily assault of these ascriptions. This, then, is the source of her power, the reason that she was not transformed like the rest of her kin: she hold fiercely to her own sense of identity and refuses to accept any foisted upon

[45] See Wangu, Madhu Bazaz. *Images of Indian Goddesses*. Abhinav Publications, 2003. See also Kinsley, David R. (1988). Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition. University of California Press. Pp. 86-90.

her, turning *Gazhe* weapon of logic to her defense, and wielding not direct force, but *magic*, a subtle and sideways power, to protect herself.

The speaker goes on to describe how, for centuries, the Roma have made themselves useful to *Gazhe* society, crafting goods and providing services which the *Gazhe* clearly needed or desired, and yet for their all their usefulness, they were neither acknowledged nor thanked. Indeed, in many cases, the Roma were stigmatized for the services they offered, despite the fact that the *Gazhe* consistently provided a demand for them. Looking back to the stereotypes introduced in chapter one, it becomes clear that the livelihoods which the Roma made for themselves directly feeds into the negative tropes with which they are associated: if they have a talent for training or healing animals, it is because they are beastly or animalistic; if they have a knowledge of which plant medicines to use to cure an ailment, help with fertility, or get rid of an unwanted pregnancy, it is because they practice the black arts; if they repair or forge metal, they are dirty brutes, etc. Thus, the *Gazhe* use the very social functions they need the Roma to fulfill in order to cast them in a negative light and keep them at the edges of society, ensuring that they remain Other enough to maintain the perceived superiority of their own identity as good, white, Christian citizens. This is more clearly illustrated at length in Lee's *Goddam Gypsy*, discussed in chapter two.

The speaker, however, does not stop with an analysis of the current situation, as is the case in the other poems examined. Unlike the rest, this poem ends on a note of determination—empowered as she is, the speaker boldly claims that she will break the spell that has reduced her kin to animals; she will use her power, her own spell, to return them to their personhood and bring honor to them. This specific mention of honor seems to imply

that this recognition is an integral aspect of breaking the spell, transforming her family back into Roma; indeed, the entirety of this dissertation has been a discussion enumerating the ways in which Roma try to gain respect, recognition as human beings with their own complex identities and voices and needs in a society that would rather keep them silent, as exotic objects of desire or caricaturized examples of uncivilized behavior. The spell that the speaker casts, then, is the act of writing, remembering, and sharing her truths and the stories of her kin, using "the justice of logic, the romance of magic" to shape her words and give them life. With her magic words, the speaker is able to illuminate the darkness of cultural commonplaces and willful ignorance regarding institutional racism and prejudice; she can conjure empathy and awareness where previously there was none to be found. This succinctly summarizes the goal of Hancock's project in collecting and publishing these poems, and the impetus of the poets to create them—this is an act of resistance, of fighting for "acceptance as real and feeling members of the human community" (Hancock, 20). By choosing to use poetry as a tool of resistance, rather than essays or the like, Hancock and the authors demonstrate the power of oblique forms of communication, showing how these strategies can be utilized to manipulate the *Gazhe* Gaze, which is drawn to the Roma as an object of strange allure to be consumed, into giving audience to Roma voices couched in performance and art.

The Poetry of Oblique Communication

These poems each deal with the theme of the pain and indignity of being silenced, marginalized, and Othered; together, they paint a detailed picture of the lived experience of many Roma, and this experience has not changed much if at all from what accounts dating back to the Enlightenment describe, as I have shown in chapter one. These poems, written

by different authors, from different parts of the world, from different periods of time, share a common narrative: that the Roma are again and again trying to reach out and communicate their needs for respect, for dignity, for a place at the table alongside the *Gazhe,* but this cry is ignored at best, or met with aggression at worst. Reading these, one would be hard-pressed to disagree with Lee, or with Spivak, for that matter, in thinking that any sort of meaningful exchange between the marginalized and their oppressors is a futile endeavor; they certainly cast a grim light on the chances that such a strategy of direct communication should succeed, and show how even indirect communication—such as the songs and dances mentioned in Manus' poem—are often misinterpreted, as the indirect nature of the communication allows room to do so.

There is, however, another reading of these poems, hinted at in the ending statement of Gonzalez's work. In a meta-textual analysis, these texts themselves are a form of what I would call oblique communication—running neither parallel, as performing (even subversively) the anticipated tropes and aiming for cultural invisibility, nor perpendicular, as directly confronting the oppressors and condemning their actions, demanding equality that would endanger their self-made position at the top of the social hierarchy and throw their sense of identity into crisis, but rather running slantways between the two: this oblique communication directly addresses other members of the marginalized, bearing the raw emotion and authenticity of exclusively in-group exchanges, but is done on a platform where the *Gazhe* can plainly bear witness to as voyeurs, thus taking the *Gazhe* Gaze that has so long rendered the Roma voiceless objects to be held as Other, as exotic enjoyment, as scapegoat,

etc., and using this gaze to turn the conversation back on the truths they do not feel empowered to speak.

Consider the failed encounter with the reporter from Lee's *Goddam Gypsy*, as discussed in chapter two—communication broke down immediately precisely because the journalist refused to see Lee as anything other than an exotic source of entertainment, the culmination and embodiment of so many tropes and stereotypes.[46] Lee tried to steer their conversation toward a subject that threatened to expand the Roma into complex individuals with their own needs and fears, rather than allowing them to remain as static caricatures whose strange way of life and alluring Otherness would make for a trendy fluff article to entertain the *Gazhe* masses, and communication immediately came to an uncomfortable impasse. As I touched upon in chapter one, the image of the Rom as an innate Other is intimately tied to the reification of the *Gazhe* identity as societal elite and superior. Of course, this necessitates that the Roma be held as an inert, unchanging object of reference, their perceived Otherness to be scorned, pitied, or even lusted after, but never to be allowed to change. If that were to happen, then the illusion of a concrete *Gazhe* identity would become destabilized. As such, this means that any encounter in which *Gazhe* directly interact with Roma must be very carefully scripted; if the Roma are too humanized, then maintaining that sense of identity becomes a difficult task. Therefore, the direct approach of perpendicular communication strategies tends to be met with resistance or outright ignored.

As has been demonstrated, lyric poetry is uniquely suited to these types of communicative strategies for a number of reasons. First and foremost is the nature of the

[46] Lee, Ronald. *Goddam Gypsy*. New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1972.

speaker, the lyric "I", as an entity related to, yet distinct from the poet. Each of the above instances show poets writing about matters close to their hearts, reflective of their own histories and experiences, but this is no way should be construed as implying that the two are identical; in Gonzalez's case, the poet and the speaker do not even share gender identity or expression. The device of the lyric "I" has already been discussed as allowing the poet to participate in public discourse without becoming trapped in the double-bind of *subjectivation*—when reading lyric poetry, "[w]hat we 'hear' is our own ventriloquizing of ambiguously directed address, though we may, and in some cases certainly do, construe this as overhearing a distinctive poetic voice" (Culler, 187). This literary trick makes lyric poetry a powerful tool for marginalized voices; it reverses the process discussed in chapters one and two, in which the words of the *Gazhe* are essentially forced into the mouths of the Roma. Through this "ventriloquizing", as Culler puts it, the words of the Roma are cleverly placed in the thoughts of *Gazhe* readers, as though arising from their own voices, thus ensuring the readers create a platform for the Roma's words within themselves. When *Gazhe* read Kwiek's *I am the common Rom*, for example, they find themselves temporarily shifted into the Roma headspace that the poet has constructed, repeating the refrain "I am the common Rom" to further solidify that change of perspective; readers are guided to feel the frustration of the speaker, the weight of the imposed narrative, and, on some small and momentary level, what many Roma experience on a daily basis. The internal voice of the reader is led to express thoughts that the Roma could not directly convey: "Education? Are you joking? / We can't change—it's in our blood, / We will always be stupid Rom" (Hancock, 106). Confronting the subject of unfair stereotypes and institutionalized bigotry would lead to being dismissed out of hand, but by having the poem place the reader in the position of the speaker, the reader is

guided to see these issues on their own. The reader is led to temporarily assume and experience the identity of the Other, and to witness what the other end of this power dynamic is like for the authors. In this manner, poems such as these can indirectly convey the experiences and opinions of Roma while avoiding the feeling of confrontation and threat to identity that would bring communication to an abrupt end if expressed directly.

The lyric "I" is not the only literary device the Roma use to their advantage within these texts. Most of these poems also take the form of an apostrophe—a poetic call to an absent figure, abstract idea, or other thing which cannot properly respond, taking the reader not as the addressee, but as a witness of sorts. Such a form of distant, disconnected involvement fits well into the framework of oblique communication as I have envisioned it:

> A primary force of apostrophe is to constitute the addressee as another subject, with which the visionary poet can hope to develop a relationship, harmonious or antagonistic; apostrophe treats that bringing together of subject and object as an act of will, something accomplished poetically in the act of address (Culler, 223).

If the lyric "I" brings the reader into a position of even momentarily identifying with the speaker, and the form of apostrophe seeks to establish a relationship between the speaker and the absent or abstract addressee as another subject, then the function of these two in tandem creates a compelling effect for readers. In many of the poems discussed above, the entities addressed are either situations resulting from *Gazhe* oppression, or individuals with

whom they are discussing these circumstances. In each of these cases, if the Roma were to directly address their complaints or accusations to the *Gazhe*, the result would undoubtedly be one of hostility and defensive *Othering*, as seen in Lee's *Goddam Gypsy* and Woloch's *Tsigan*. Instead, the poetry takes advantage of the *Gazhe* voyeurism and places the reader in proximity to the speaker, thereby allowing the relationship with the circumstances or figures addressed to be seen through an intimately close perspective without the movement appearing confrontational:

> Lyric language doubtless works subliminally, and much of its social efficacy may depend on its ability to embed itself in the mind of readers, to invade and occupy it, to be taken in, introjected, or housed as instances of alterity that can be repeated, considered, treasured, or ironically cited (ibid., 305).

In fact, unless the reader is aware of the nature of such literary devices and their functions, he or she may come to the conclusion that any insights stemming from the recognition of such relationships were the result of their own mental efforts, unaware that they were guided to this perspective by the voice of the poet. The poetry, thus, "seems to seek, above all, to establish relations between self and other", and establishes this transpersonal relationship through subtle, even subversive means (ibid., 225).

Each of the poems examined differs from the autobiographical novel and the poetry collection discussed in chapter two in key ways, presenting a mirroring effect which serves to highlight the contrast between the strategies for negotiating the social sphere that each

demonstrates. The texts from the previous chapter, as I have already stated, were created for a specifically *Gazhe* audience; they engaged in an attempt at direct communication, and as such, they indulged in a performance of the tropic behavior expected of them in order to be noticed and read. In an attempt at establishing direct lines of communication and addressing the *Gazhe* in a straightforward manner, these authors were forced to articulate themselves and their message in the language established by the *Gazhe*, despite the fact that this language is, by nature, always already infected with the aggressive *Othering* the Roma are trying to overcome. Through this infected performance, then, the message is lost. The *Gazhe* see either a charming exotic or an uncivilized savage, and the actual voice of the Roma remains inscrutable. With the texts analyzed in this chapter, however, there is a marked absence of focus on the performance of tropic behavior—it appears incidentally in the background, if at all, and no effort is made to emphasize it or its place in Roma life; there is no pandering to a readership demanding the exotic or the romanticized, as the texts are written as from one *Rom* to another, or to a more abstract addressee. Because these words are not directed at *Gazhe*, there is no need for pretense, for embellishment, for flourishes of cunning and craft, as are present in Lee's work, for instance; these texts do not seek to impress or concern themselves with living up to an identity fashioned after a storybook "Gypsy". Nor do these texts demonstrate the Roma need to filter or censor themselves in the presence of *Gazhe*, as is alluded to in some of the more ethnographic or anthropological works discussed. Because of the unique nature of the poetic form, these authors can express themselves freely and openly, broaching topics and airing emotions without posturing or minimizing. They simply and clearly emphasize the values of kinship, family, and heritage

that are understood among the Roma, allowing this genuine self-representation to come through and be seen via the oblique manipulation of the *Gazhe* Gaze.

Now, however, I must return to Spivak's essay in an attempt to check this oblique mode of communication through poetry against her thesis. As discussed in the introduction, Spivak argues that, due to massively imbalanced power structures and a conflict of interest, those relegated to the margins of society do not have the ability to speak to those who make up and benefit from hegemonic social institutions and make themselves heard.[47] Looking at the works highlighted in the first two chapters, one might feel compelled to agree—*Gazhe* in power directly benefit from keeping Roma disenfranchised, whether as a group whose extreme and negative *Otherness* reifies and affirms by counterpoint the *Gazhe* sense of identity and civilized superiority, or as a scapegoat to be exploited. If the Roma attempt to challenge this status, they thereby threaten the stability of the power complex, and are therefore silenced, ignored, villainized, or spoken over. This chapter has shown how, when using poetry as a form of oblique communication, the Roma might be able to bypass this reaction and more successfully ensure that their voices may be heard. However, such a strategy presents its own pitfalls and limitations. In order for these poems to function in the way discussed above, readers must first be sympathetic—at least to a degree—and must be able to meaningfully engage with poetry in a general sense. This is not to imply that readers must have a degree in literature before being able to feel empathy as a result of reading a poem, of course, but if a reader is actively disinterested in poetry or cannot muster the imagination necessary to be transported by the lyric "I" into the perspective of another, then

[47] Refer to Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism. Ed. Vincent Leitch, et al. New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2010. 2114-2126.

the poet's voice will be lost on them. Furthermore, much like the dances and songs in *Ode to the Twentieth Century*, it is entirely possible that the reader will simply mistake the encoded message of the poem for a simple object of exotic beauty or other such trifle to be enjoyed, feeling perhaps a small sort of catharsis at most, but not connecting to the work on a deeper level. Given that the oblique communication through poetry only functions under a limited set of circumstances, can the claim still be made that an oblique strategy is effective in any meaningful way? The next chapter will explore the question of oblique communication through the lens of another genre, that of autobiography. Autobiography, with its own unique answer to the problem of *subjectivation*, may provide an additional—and perhaps more reliably accessible—means of engaging in oblique communication and creating a space for Roma voices to be heard, addressing the questions that lyric poetry leaves unanswered.

Chapter 4—Living Memory: Autobiography and Oblique Communication

"Im April 1947 verließen wir unser Winterquartier. Ein bestimmtes Ziel hatten wir nicht. Wir furhren einfach darauf los und machten das Beste daraus. Von jetzt an waren die Landstraßen, die Wiesen und Wälder unser Zuhause" (Stojka, 16).

Introduction

The previous chapter explored the concept of oblique communication and how it functions as a means of navigating social spaces innately weighted against members of minority groups, such as the Roma, in a way that allows their voices to be heard. While, as Judith Oakley states in her introduction to Toninato's work on Roma literature and identity, *Romani Writing*, "invisibility was the defensive strategy in the past", accounts by authors such as Lee, Stojka, and others have shown that the opposite of this cultural invisibility—blatant and obvious direct engagement—are met with such opposition from the cultural and ethnic majority that their messages are lost and rendered ineffective (xvi). Thus, oblique communication comes into play, taking advantage of the *Gazhe* gaze seeing Roma identity and interaction as exotic performances to be consumed, and presenting for consumption a performance which subverts the *Gazhe* gaze and forces a perspective which enables the *Gazhe* to see from the Roma point of view. In theory, this works well; as was demonstrated in the last chapter, this method of subverting the *Gazhe* gaze effectively places *Gazhe* readers in a position where they must acknowledge the reality of the Roma circumstances and the weight of their voices.

The question which now must be asked is to what extent this strategy can be applied in a meaningful sense. Beginning with the premise that a work must be generally accepted as literarily valid and part of the greater canon at large in order to be influential on a societal scale, one can see the issues arising from a lack of recognition of works by minority voices: if these are not accepted as valid literature, then these voices do not become part of the cultural canon, and thus the voices go unheard, leading to an echo-chamber effect in which a culture's canon tends to affirm and perpetuate only the voices and ideas of the majority again and again, while minority members of the community are drowned out. For some time, the Western cultural and literary canon did not recognize or accept the works of minority groups, and even now, those considered diasporic are still severely underrepresented because of their nature as the necessarily perennial Other, as discussed in previous chapters. What's more, many of these groups are presumed to be "without letters"; the general line of thought is that groups with predominantly oral traditions—such as the Roma—are illiterate, and as a people without literacy, are by necessity a people without literature. Thus, they have no place in the literary world, and their means to communicate *en masse* are not recognized. Even poetry, as evocative and emotionally powerful as it is, can often be dismissed as mere *folk art* when written by the uneducated, unprivileged minority, lacking the political and cultural gravitas to be taken seriously as a literary endeavor of merit.

For this reason, this chapter will explore the concepts of literacy and literature among the Roma, arguing against the notion that Roma literature only began with the relatively recent development of works created by Roma voices and published in formats recognized

and accepted by the *Gazhe*, ignoring the validity of anything that predates this shift. [48] This chapter will also examine the concept of the literary canon—such as it currently stands—as a means of perpetuating the silencing of cultural Others and repackaging and redistributing commonplace ascriptions regarding their identities, a tool of a subtler form of oppression. I will discuss this in conjunction with an undertaking of examples of Roma autobiographies, namely, Ceija Stoika's *Reisende auf dieser Welt*, and Philomena Franz' *Zwischen Liebe und Hass*, as they are literary works which embody a sense of oblique hybridity that may prove more accessible and effective than those discussed in previous chapters.

It is important to note here that both Ceija Stojka's *Reisende auf dieser Welt* and Philomena Franz' *Zwischen Liebe und Hass* document the experiences of their respective families before, during, and after their imprisonment in Nazi concentration camps. This fact has a dramatic effect not only on the stories contained in the autobiographies, but also on the actual production of the works, themselves, and on their reception by the public. While the study of the Holocaust lies beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is nevertheless vital to understanding

Autobiography as Literature

As mentioned above, two of the works examined in this chapter are autobiographical in nature, which creates something of a break in the trend of texts discussed in this dissertation thus far. To be fair, it is worth questioning what place, if any, pure

[48] While there is evidence that Roma have had knowledge of and were able to use literacy skills as far back as the early 15th Century, as Toninato discusses in *Romani Writing*, Roma publications on the level of those discussed in the previous chapter did not begin to emerge in significant numbers until after the fall of the Iron Curtain, as noted by Loreley French in *Roma Voices in the German-Speaking World*.

autobiographies have in the context of a literary investigation, as the genre displays a number of sharp distinctions when compared with literary fiction, not least of which being the stylistic straightforwardness and lack of symbolism, presenting its message completely on a surface level. Even Lee's *Goddam Gypsy* from the previous chapter, despite being influenced by the author's life events, makes use of standard devices such as metaphors and the imposition of a unified, overarching plot, and the author himself is rather upfront in admitting that his work is essentially a novel inspired by his life experiences, capturing the essence if not the actuality.[49] Woloch's work, while absolutely autobiographical, is rendered in the form of poetry, complete with symbolism, metaphor, and the judicious use of creativity in its recounting, giving it a distinct place in the realm of literature as autofiction. What, then, can be said about the inclusion of pure autobiography in the examination of literary works? This question is not a new one; Paul de Man examines the topic of autobiography as a genre in his article "Autobiography as De-facement", questioning this position by stating that "compared to tragedy, or epic, or lyric poetry, autobiography always looks slightly disreputable and self-indulgent in a way that may be symptomatic of its incompatibility" (919). After all, how can a simple memoir retelling the events of the author's life in black and white stand up to the complexity and creativity of literary fiction or poetry? For de Man, the question is resolved by moving beyond autobiography as genre and positing that autobiography "is not a genre or mode, but a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts. The autobiographical moment happens as an alignment between the two subjects involved…in which they determine each other by mutual reflexive substitution" (921). Author and reader are aware of each other; the

[49] See the previous chapter

author knows that her work will be read by an audience, and the audience knows that the work was written by an individual. Thus, even a work of pure fiction is created with at least some active conveyance of the author as a person. All literature, at its most fundamental level, is an act of communication, of storytelling; the communication may happen on multiple levels and be opaque enough to require interpretation, but it is communication all the same.

The authors of the autobiographies examined in this chapter narrate the events of their lives in a straightforwardly chronological order, certainly, but this does not diminish their merit as texts, especially in the context of this dissertation. These authors convey narratives with a definite sense of direction, detailing the events and experiences in their lives through which they arrived at their current state, giving readers the sense of a unified plot. The authors, therefore, either consciously or unconsciously, chose the specific events to present in the texts because they felt that these occurrences were integral to the formation of their personal identity, allowing readers to see a subtext through the specific arrangement and presentation of life events. The authors are still able to draw upon stylistic elements, to express themselves through word choice and tone, creating a text that has both artistic and intellectual value. Even despite the above, however, the autobiographical texts examined in this chapter would still play a vital role in the investigative work of this dissertation; after all, I am examining expressions of personal, cultural, and intercultural identity, instances of self-representation, and communicative strategies relied upon to navigate societal power dynamics . To that end, autobiographies can be just as fruitful as "pure" fiction or poetry,

and as I have already shown, those lines of genre sometimes begin to blur in the hands of Roma authors.

Roma Autobiography in the Aftermath of the Holocaust

Before beginning our analysis of these texts, however, it is necessary to understand the context in which these works were written. Both Ceija Stojka's *Reisende auf dieser Welt* and Philomena Franz' *Zwischen Liebe und Hass* document the experiences of their respective families before, during, and after their imprisonment in Nazi concentration camps. This fact has a dramatic effect not only on the stories contained in the autobiographies, but also on the actual production of the works, themselves, and on their reception by the public. While a comprehensive study of the Holocaust and the communal wounds it left in its wake lies beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is nevertheless vital to an understanding of the significance of this writing. The Holocaust was not only responsible for decimating the Romani population, but also for scattering the Roma community, as families were forced to flee wherever opportunity led them to try and escape the violence, or as survivors were shunted from one city to the next, outsiders that nobody wanted to take in. As I have previously mentioned, being a scattered diasporic group spread across the Northern hemisphere and being forced to abide by a scripted role rather than communicate authentically has somewhat prohibited the formation of a Romani literary canon as such; what few works there are tend to be subsumed into the canon of whatever country in which they were published, and end up being more representative of the dominant culture than of

the views or experiences of the Roma. In fact, one would be hard-pressed to find much in the way of published Romani literature before the 1990s.[50]

Scholars such as Milena Hübschmannová speculate that this is due to one primary cause potentiated by two supporting factors: after the atrocities of the *Porrajmos*[51] and the subsequent scattering of Romani families and social groups, the Roma felt a deep need to tell their stories and process their individual and collective trauma, and the increase in public educational opportunities in the years leading up to that time, as well as the desire to overcome increasing social and political isolation, led to many Roma reaching out to others on a broader scale, publishing autobiographies to try and rebuild a sense of the community lost (95). Margita Reiznerová, Chair of the Association of Romani Writers in 1991, explains that she simply felt "so lonely, imprisoned in the modern town quarter, with no Roms to talk with," and that she wrote "to avoid becoming mad".[52] The uptick in Romani authorship was not due to perceived interest or attempts to market to a *Gazhe* audience; the Roma were writing to finally come together and grieve, to overcome feelings of anguish and alienation, and to keep the stories of their survivors from dying with that generation (French, 27). Thus, the works I examine in this chapter must be read with this context in mind: these autobiographies do not merely represent the history of the individual authors, but also acts of reforging communities that have been lost, rejoining ties that have been severed. These works are acts of grieving, of processing, of Roma reaching out to one another, so that their stories might not be lost. Despite the deeply personal and emotionally open nature of this

[50] Loreley French, *Roma Voices in the German Speaking World*, 27.
[51] The Romani term for the Holocaust, meaning "fragmentation", "destruction", or "cutting apart"
[52] Reiznerová, cited in Hübschmannova, 95.

content, these works were published and released to the world—something completely at odds with the Roma's mistrust of *Gazhe* that previous chapters have highlighted. This demonstrates a similar sort of oblique communication to that conveyed by the poetry of the previous chapter, by taking that which would seem intended for other members of the Roma in-group and placing it where the *Gazhe Gaze* would consume it. This iteration, however, utilizes autobiography as a more contemporary extension of the attempt at communication, taking up a *Gazhe* genre to create a hybridity allowing the authors' voices to be heard without the ascription of identity or being part of subjectivation.

Challenging Tropes in Franz' *Zwischen Liebe und Hass*

The author of the first autobiography I will examine, Philomena Franz, was born to a family of musicians in 1922, a little over a decade before the height of the Nazi regime. As such, this account of her life's events provides a unique perspective through which readers can follow the trajectory of how this societal upheaval violently transformed multiple facets of her daily life and the strategies which were employed to navigate her social sphere, as well as the lasting impact of these atrocities on the social survival strategies of the targeted groups reaching into the present day. Although bigotry and the widespread promulgation of negative tropes created a social stigma for the Roma in Western Europe long before the *Porrajmos*, some members of the Roma and Sinti community were eventually able to cultivate a positive and even respectable reputation for themselves within the *Gazhe* community before the Nazi party came to power and fanned the embers of racial prejudice to a blaze; such was the case for Philomena's parents. Her father, Johann Köhler, was a popular cellist who played such venues as the Liederhalle Stuttgart and the Wintergarten Berlin, and

her mother was an accomplished singer in her own right.[53] As her autobiography, *Zwischen Liebe und Hass* opens, readers see that this musical family both acknowledged and transcended the tropes expected of them at the time: "Wir spielten Dramen, auch Operetten, heitere Stücke, aber natürlich auch den *Zigeunerbaron* und *Carmen*. Das waren Stücke, zu denen wir Zigeuner paßten, von denen die Zuschauer glaubten, sie seien ein Teil unseres Zigeunerlebens" (Franz, 11). In a way, this is indicative of the performative strategies discussed in the previous chapter, but while those examples stressed keeping as close to the script of *Gazhe* expectations as possible in order to maintain safety, Franz's account describes how her family merely gives these tropes a tongue-in-cheek nod, offering them a small space in a repertoire full of more serious and respectable artistic endeavors.

Musical performance is not the only area where the Franz's family acknowledges and also transcends stereotypical behaviors expected from Roma; she describes how her family, in addition to the ubiquitous *vôrdón*[54] that all Roma are assumed to possess, Franz's parents owned a house, something almost never attributed to the "nomadic" Roma (ibid., 11). Having a *vôrdón* in which to live while traveling from performance to performance and a more permanent home to return to in the off season, Franz at once displays the tropic behavior of a nomadic lifestyle and elements of a highly normalized *Gazhe* upbringing, such as formal schooling, and though this in itself was not enough to shield her and her siblings from racial tension and Othering, Franz was soon able to forge intercultural connections with her classmates:

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[53] Manuel Werner: *Jugenderfahrungen der Auschwitz-Überlebenden Philomena Franz geborene Köhler*. „Die Wahrheit ist schmerzlich, aber nur mit ihr können wir unser Glück aufbauen… "https://ns-opfer-nt.jimdo.com/opfer/sinti/erlebnisse-von-philomena-franz/

[54] The caravan or wagon stereotypically serving as the mobile home for nomadic Roma figures

> Auch die Schule fiel uns nicht schwer. Ich kam mir vielleicht manchmal vor wie ein Affe in einem Käfig, der einfach so dasitzt. Und die Kinder kommen in den Zoo, begaffen ihn, wie er wohl reagieren wird. Aber das dauerte nicht lange. Wir fanden schnell Kontakt zueinander. Meine Schwester und ich lehrten die Mädchen unsere Spiele, und wir lernten ihre (ibid., 26).

Here, one finds what appears to be a model of communication demonstrating exactly the type of strategy that the previous chapters showed as unrealistic and untenable; Franz simply and directly shares aspects of her cultural identity with her *Gazhe* classmates, who then accept this new information—though it may be at odds with the culturally indoctrinated fictitious image of the Roma—and then share examples of their own culture in equivalent exchange. Such a reading, however, ignores several prominent points. First, despite appearances, it is made explicit from the beginning of the encounter that Franz and her siblings are not the societal equals of their classmates; though they display an acceptable degree of aptitude in their studies that places them alongside the *Gazhe* students, Franz and her siblings are still treated as not only Other, but also lesser than the *Gazhe*. She explicitly states that she was made on more than one occasion to feel like a performing monkey in a zoo, with the other children watching with curiosity to see what she would do next. This single comparison speaks volumes regarding her situation among the other children—a monkey has intelligence and can be trained to do all manner of very clever things, but remains definitively less than human. Anything the animal may be trained to do, regardless of the intricacy of the task or the degree of intelligence shown, is dismissed as being a mere *trick*,

amusing, but nothing more. Also notably absent from the narrative is the word "friendship"; Franz says only that she is able to find common ground in communication with her classmates. The fact that there is no mention of friends, what would commonly be thought of as an integral part of a child's formative years at school, hints at the possibility that this common ground is not enough to bridge the gap between these disparate cultural groups, keeping the Other intact as such even while indulging in curiosity about an Other way of life. The relationship Franz has with her *Gazhe* classmates, however close it may or may not be, is fundamentally shattered shortly after Hitler's rise to power, when Franz sees one of the girls with whom she felt she had established a connection wearing a Hitler Youth uniform:

> Ich war wie erstarrt. Ich schlug verzweifelt die Hände vor mein Gesicht und fing an zu weinen. Sie konnte nur den Kopf schütteln und andeuten, daß ihr Vater es so gewollt hatte. Sie kam nahe an mich heran und sagte: "Ob du es glauben willst oder nicht…wir bleiben doch Freundinnen." Aber ich schüttelte den Kopf. Die Uniform stand zwischen unserer Freundschaft…Sie hielt bis zu meiner Deportation zu mir (ibid., 45).

Franz is clearly stricken with grief to learn that the connection she thought she had established was so suddenly broken, the betrayal made all the more painful by the fact that it was committed by a girl Franz played with, shared her culture with, grew close to over time. The girl's attempts to assuage Franz's fears are empty and ineffective, as Franz is able to see. The girl protests that she doesn't want to wear the uniform, and that it was her

father's idea, but this completely sidesteps the fact that this issue goes deeper than clothing. Despite her performance as an ally, Franz understands that if this girl wears the Hitler Youth uniform, then she is attending Hitler Youth meetings, she lives in a household that supports what Hitler and the Nazi regime stand for, and she is not demonstrating any resistance to this movement. Her insistence that she and Franz are still friends can be read as an attempt at gaslighting Franz, downplaying or dismissing the very real feelings of danger at the hands of the *Gazhe* majority, and, from her place of social privilege, she seems to fail to see what is so horrifying about the situation. The final statement in this chapter may initially seem like a statement of friendship, but on closer inspection actually corroborates and succinctly summarizes the ultimate meaning of such performative acts of alliance—the girl stayed by Franz up until her deportation, her most desperate hour of need, and then did nothing as Franz and her family were detained by authorities and sent to concentration camps.

This provides an interesting subtextual parallel to the Franz family's status as legitimized musicians, especially later in the narrative, as Hitler comes to power and issues of racial hatred are brought to a boiling point. Franz describes how, under this new regime, her family comes under increasing scrutiny due to their ethnicity, losing much of the freedom and social dignity they enjoyed:

> Aber immer mehr wurde unsere Freiheit eingeschränkt. Wir durften die Stadt nicht mehr verlassen…Unsere ganze Lebensweise, unsere ganze Tradition verschwand von einem Tag auf dem anderen, weil uns der Rest von Freizügigkeit noch

genommen wurde. Wir wurden herausgerissen, total aus den Angeln gehoben (ibid., 43).

The family that had mere years before been invited to perform at renowned concert halls and for members of the aristocracy was suddenly treated as a public menace, no longer allowed the free travel that sustained their livelihood and made to feel like criminals under house arrest. Such a sudden and extreme shift in the public perception of Franz and her family leads one to question whether, despite appearances, they were ever truly viewed as on near-equal social standing, or whether they, too, were more a curiosity to be enjoyed by the *Gazhe*, and understood to be no more than a lesser Other trained to perform some amusing tricks. In fact, this relationship is even hinted at by the previous quote describing how Franz's family was often pressed to perform the plays and operas expressly showcasing the highly caricaturized Roma figures discussed in chapter one, implying that the public never lost sight of this identity—artificially constructed and imputed though it may be. Franz and her family were spared from more overt, aggressive Othering for a time, due to their ability to perform (both musically and socially), but this performance never erased their perceived Otherness.

Franz and her family are ultimately rounded up and sent to Auschwitz, and later Ravensbrück, where her parents, uncle, nephews, nieces, and siblings are killed.[55] Franz, after struggling to understand and process the massive trauma of the Porrajmos alone in the wake of the destruction and scattering of her community, decides to turn to writing.

[55] Christian Schmidt-Häuer: Häftling Nr. 10550. Ein Besuch bei Philomena Franz, die in diesen Tagen mit dem Preis der Europäischen Bewegung „Frauen Europas - Deutschland 2001" ausgezeichnet wurde, in: Die Zeit N° 11/2001.

Zwischen Liebe und Hass, the autobiography with which I occupy myself in this chapter, is the second of her literary works; before this, she writes and publishes *Zigeunermärchen*, a collection of Romani children's fairy tales and fables.[56] This book, however, also contains brief and simplified explanations of common Roma customs and values, and contains a clear message regarding the author's intentions and hopes for the work: "[Diese Geschichten] sollen auch Verständnis für die fremdartigen Menschen wecken, die seit Jahrhunderten unter den Vorurteilen ihrer Mitmenschen zu leiden haben und häufig von einem Land zum anderen ziehen mußten, auf der Suche nach einer Heimat" (Franz, 5). This inclusion of information on Romani culture, along with the directly expressed intent that this work catalyzes an understanding and feeling of empathy for the Roma in *Gazhe* readers is incredibly vital, representing another attempt at the intercultural communication that Franz made some small progress with in her childhood. While it is evident that Franz's attempts do not ultimately succeed in placing her on a completely equal ground in the social discourse, it must be said that her words and actions do have an impact on her classmates; she succeeds in humanizing herself and those like her in the eyes of the *Gazhe* children, even if only by degrees and over time. Franz's literary works, then, are a continuation of this sort of frank and open cultural sharing on a larger scale, demonstrating not only the cultural differences between *Gazhe* and Roma, but also the similarities—readers of Franz's autobiography find that her life as a Roma seems in many ways familiar, with such common concerns as family and home life or fitting in at school, and those who examine her collection of Roma fairy tales and fables will find some significantly familiar stories, as many of these tales cross

[56] This book is first published in 1982, primed and ushered in by the broader spirit of Vergangenheitsbewältigung

cultural boundaries with little difference other than naming conventions.[57] In this manner, Franz avoids both the performance of tropes and the invisibility of complete surface-level assimilation, striking a balance between highlighting Otherness and demonstrating similarity. This intimate discussion of such deeply personal traumas and experiences is something that only members of other minority groups—particularly other Roma—can fully understand and relate to, but Franz publishes this work for a broadly public audience, placing her story where it might be read by *Gazhe*.

Forging Community in Stojka's *Reisende auf dieser Welt*

Ceija Stojka, like Philomena Franz, was deeply affected by the Porrajmos due to her status as a *Romni*, and details the events surrounding the tragedy in her autobiography, *Reisende auf Dieser Welt*. Born in Austria in 1933, though, Stojka's experiences of this trauma occur at a much younger age than Franz, and though their perspectives are uniquely filtered through their age at the time of the Third Reich, their stories share many themes, highlighting the importance of kinship, of freedom, and of belonging. Also like Franz, Stojka writes about her experiences as a means of processing the trauma in the absence of a community killed by genocide or scattered by war; she writes to reach out and share her grieving with other Roma, wherever they may find themselves; she writes because she must: "Ich konnte die Vergangenheit nicht wie mein Buch weglegen, immer wieder holte sie mich ein" (17). Though published in German, and thus open for *Gazhe* to read, it is clear from the writing that Stojka's memories are set out primarily for herself and for other Roma in

[57] For example, the story *Das tapfere Schneiderlein*, included by the Brothers Grimm in their collection of German *Märchen*, is mirrored to a remarkable degree in the Romani tale *Der Zigeuner und der Drache*. The major differences are cultural ones—the tailor being replaced by a Rom, and the giant replaced by a large and serpentine dragon, whose hoard of treasure the Rom takes back to his family.

diaspora, explaining concepts that would be foreign to *Gazhe* when necessary, but always maintaining a candid voice reserved only for those who are members of the same social in-group—her people, her clan, her family.[58]

Stojka's autobiography picks up in many ways where Franz's leaves off; only twelve years old when the war ended, most of Stojka's memories center around the aftermath of the Porrajmos and the work of reclaiming a cultural identity and rebuilding a community after the concentration camps took and shattered them. Some of her earliest memories show how trying to navigate forming a community that, out of necessity, includes *Gazhe* in the form of the Allied soldiers now regulating and monitoring them is an ambivalent experience. On the one hand, the Allied soldiers helped to free a great many from the camps, but these soldiers are still *Gazhe* seeking to impose their governance on the Roma, and many of the Allied Nations also look on the Roma as an inferior Other, making attempts at reestablishing a strong sense of cultural identity and self-sovereignty a difficult endeavor. Stojka writes how, when encountering Russian troops as they travel from one city to the next, she and her mother and sister were all overcome with a distinct sense of uneasiness:

> Plötzlich sagte Mama zu mir: "Leg' dich hin Mädel, die Russen stehen auf der Straße!" Aber Mamas Angst war unnötig. Monis Vater konnte sehr gut Russisch. Ich hörte nur immer "*Zygane choroscho",* und durch einen kleinen Schlitz sah ich, wie sie uns deuteten, wir sollten weiterfahren. Es waren lauter junge, lustige

[58] For examples of the tendency of the Roma to distrust those who are not members of their cultural in-group and to censor or edit themselves in their presence, refer back to Lee's *Goddam Gypsy*, spoken of at length in the previous chapter.

> Männer. Trotzdem schlug mein Herz bis zum Hals, ich hatte Angst um meine Mama (25).

This encounter indicates how, for Stojka and her mother, even the faces of the *Gazhe* who fought against the Nazi regime are still sources of fear. Readers are left to wonder what would have happened if the Stojka family was not traveling in the company of someone who could speak Russian, whether the event might have taken a more confrontational turn. Would the soldiers have been as friendly? Would the Roma have been detained, once again held against their will by *Gazhe*, uncertain of what fate awaited them? By all accounts, the aftermath of the war was a tumultuous period for Germany, as the Allied Nations divided the country between themselves, each essentially installing their own temporary governing forces to fill the void left by the Third Reich's sudden downfall. Under such conditions, non-citizens who made a living traveling from town to town were not well tolerated; Stojka writes how the Roma were forced to register with the government(s) in place and obtain papers for official identification and residential zoning permissions, a harsh echo of the restrictions placed on those considered to be Other during the Nazi times:

> Genau vor unserem Wohnwagen machten sie Halt und riefen: "*Schto s waschimi pasportami zygane! Dawaj, dawaj!*" und so fort. Sie waren ärgerlich, warum, wussten wir nicht, und fragten nach unseren Identitätsausweisen. Man brauchten sie damals, um von einer besetzten Zone zur anderen zu gelangen. Jeder von uns hatte einen Ausweis für alle vier Alliierten, nur ich nicht. Ich war ja erst fünfzehn Jahre alt, also minderjährig (ibid., 30).

At the checkpoint, Stojka is then forced out of her family's wagon to accompany the soldiers to a prison holding cell for questioning, and after being held overnight, is eventually ordered to obtain proper credentials and told that she and her family—presumed to be homeless beggars—are never to be seen in the area again, or else they would meet with a much harsher fate (ibid., 31-34). As one can see, Stojka's experiences with the *Gazhe* are vastly different from Franz's; while Franz is able, to a degree, to forge a connection and to elicit some modicum of empathy from her classmates, Stojka cannot, and is treated as a criminal for something as inoffensive as not having her own official identification documents due to being a minor at the time, and this coming from *Gazhe* who fought against the Third Reich, unlike Franz's audience, who at least tacitly supported it. It is at this point that the notion of power dynamics must be closely examined in order to tease out what each of these experiences can say about communication between majority and minority. Franz's partially successful connection is between herself and her classmates—they are of a more-or-less equal age, and in a situation where the *Gazhe* classmates are not in a clear position of power and authority over her. While still marked as a social inferior, these circumstances could at least have the effect of creating a space for Franz in the social dialogue. Having a space on the stage, though, does not necessarily mean that her voice will be heard; Franz's classmates still have to be made open and receptive to her message and respond to it, and Franz achieves this neither through conforming to tropes nor through complete feigned assimilation, but through an authentic and transparent self-representation, including aspects of her life that both confirm and refute pieces of the traits prevalently ascribed to the Roma. Stojka, with a language barrier and a very stark imbalance in status, does not have this opportunity. Readers must bear in mind, however, that, powerful though her work may be, Franz's

autobiography did not reshape the way that society at large conceptualizes or interacts with the Roma community; the Roma still struggle for recognition and equality, a fact which stems from the social majority's need for an Other in order to construct and reify their personal and collective identities.

In a sharp contrast to the fears and uncertainty associated with her interactions with *Gazhe*, Stojka's autobiography paints a clear picture illustrating the importance of her family, highlighting themes of safety and comfort in community. This becomes sharply apparent when Stojka becomes a mother, and is forced to cede parental rights to the *Gazho* father, who claims that, because she is still a minor, she cannot raise the child:

> Plötzlich stand eines Tages der Kindesvater vor mir und meinte, ich sei noch zu jung, um ein Kind groß zu ziehen, ich sei ja noch minderjährig. Ohne mich entscheiden zu lassen, hatte er eine Frau besorgt, die mein Kind aufziehen sollte. Er nahm meinen süßen Jungen und fuhr mit ihm weg…Ich konnte nich essen und auch nicht schlafen. Ich sehnte mich nach meinem Willi (ibid., 51).

Stojka's family, seeing how she was taken advantage of and the infant was torn from her so flippantly, decides that they must act in order to protect their kin. Stojka's aunt tracks down the town where the infant was taken, and the family sets out to recover their newest member. They find the child playing outside his father's home, and once he recognizes his mother, and the others, he runs to their wagon, and they immediately leave the town,

never hearing from the child's father again (ibid., 51-52).[59] This episode brings several important factors to light. First and foremost, Stojka's recounting of this series of events illustrates how powerless she and the members of her family were when confronted by a *Gazhe* leveraging the full weight of his social status against them. This is not only evident in the fact that the father of the child is able to take him away from Stojka with literally nobody's consent but his own, but also in the fact that he used her status and an underage minor against her, while knowing that he, himself, would face no punitive retributions for impregnating a minor, and out of the bonds of wedlock, no less. Though Stojka was technically under the age of autonomous consent, neither she nor her family could have ever successfully pressed charges against the Father—what court system would take the word of a *Romni* over that of an upstanding white man? Even beyond that, what *Rom* or *Romni* would trust a legal system created by and for the *Gazhe*, with all the prejudices therein entailed? Thus, Stojka's family dealt with the problem using the channels that were open to them, subverting the tropic roles and wielding them against the *Gazhe* who sought to take advantage of them, much as Lee describes in the previous chapter.

Thus, readers see in Stojka's work a very different relationship between *Rom* and *Gazho* than what was apparent with Franz; here, the *Gazhe* are often shown represent a threat of hostility against the Roma and their sense of family. Her reaction, similar to what I have showcased in chapter two, is to deal with the *Gazhe* only as much as necessary, and

[59] This perhaps echoes the stereotype of Roma as child-thieves, as discussed in chapter one, but readers should carefully note here that the trope is actually reversed; the *Gazho* father is the actual child-thief in this scenario, utilizing superior social status and clout to take the child against the will of everyone else involved; Stojka and her family are merely rescuing the child from an unwanted and involuntary adoption. The inversion of this trope provides fascinating commentary on the accusations that *Gazhe* make regarding the Roma and the lengths they go to in order to justify the same behaviors when they are the ones engaging in them.

when the *Gazhe* impinge too much on her way of life or encroach on the sanctity and safety of her family, to use decisive, yet indirect measures to protect her kin. And yet, despite an autobiography detailing one incident after another in which she is oppressed, threatened, or taken advantage of by *Gazhe*, Stojka still writes and publishes in German rather than Rromanes, making her story widely available to Roma and *Gazhe* alike. One must question: to what end? As different as their postwar experiences were, Franz and Stojka both make their stories available to a *Gazhe* audience, addressing readers in a bold and uncompromising fashion regarding what they each endured, not only as a means of processing and healing the deep trauma of the Porrajmos, but also as a means of establishing and distributing a narrative showing representations and telling stories that they would have others see, rather than simply acquiescing to those that are assigned to them. The act of publishing their stories is simultaneously an act of healing, of educating the *Gazhe* public, and of resistance against the oppression of Othering. "All narratives—whether written or oral—can stand as examples of self-fashioning…For Roma—having faced not only a history of suppression but also continued threats of silencing—literature might, indeed, provide a shield for such battles" (French, 29-30). Presenting a self-fashioned representation to *Gazhe*, these authors take their stories and their identities into their own hands, albeit obliquely, through in-group storytelling that demonstrates a more authentic representation of their lives and experiences, rather than directly challenging and refuting the *Gazhe* assumptions and associations.

Literacy, Autobiography, and the *Métissage of Identity*

At this juncture, having thus examined several works containing the stories and experiences of Roma authors, it becomes necessary to recall that, as stated in the

introduction, the intention of this work is, in part, to unpack and analyze the dangers involved in the imputation of a single, sweeping identity on any group, especially one as marginalized and silenced as the Roma; as such, it would be remiss to continue this discussion without bringing attention to the fact that these narratives—though they certainly share similar themes and revolve around similar elements—should not be taken to constitute another unified and universalizable identity for the Roma community. No matter how good the intentions may be, replacing one ascribed identity with another still enacts the same sorts of silencing that I have been highlighting in this dissertation, and falls short of an act of true and effective communication. The question then becomes one of discovering how *Gazhe*, as readers, might more productively understand and engage with these texts in order to truly facilitate a meaningful dialogue with marginalized voices and work toward recognizing them as equals deserving of a place in the global discourse. Marginalized voices have been reaching out, speaking, trying to be heard and acknowledged; the issue lies with the majority, whose identity is so deeply entrenched in the strict binary of Self and Other, simply failing to heed them. Thus,

> [w]e have to articulate…new concepts that allow us to think *otherwise*, to bypass the ancient symmetries and dichotomies that have governed the ground and very condition of possibility of thought…in all of Western philosophy. *Métissage* is such a concept and a practice: it is the site of undecidability and indeterminacy, where solidarity becomes the fundamental

> principle of political action against hegemonic languages (Lionnet, 6).

This concept of *métissage*, this braiding together of diverse and unique strands of culture, history, art, geography, and literature, forms a continuum in which each individual thread can be identified and followed, but all are woven together into a single plait, positioning itself interminably between the individual and the communal, between Self and Other, becoming something more than merely the sum of so many constituent parts. This hybridity, both cultural and literary, allows for individual and collective identities to be "*multiply organized* across positionalities along several axes and across mutually contradictory discourses and practices" (de Lauretis, 136). Operating within a framework centralizing the intersectionality of identity opens a liminal space for the type of *otherwise* thinking that Lionnet describes.[60] "If…identity is a strategy, then *métissage* is the fertile ground of our heterogenous and heteronomous identities" (Lionnet, 8). Recalling the hybrid, half-Roma and half-*Gazhe* figures from the novels touched upon in the first chapter, it becomes clear that this sort of hybridity can make the *Other* more accessible, and thus more acceptable. Much as von Arnim's Isabella was a successful and compelling protagonist in the eponymous novella at least in part due to both her exotic status as *Romni* and her familiarity as a descendant of European nobility, bearing the expected traits and social markers thereof, the poems and autobiographical texts examined above blend Roma voices with familiar

[60] For further reading on the concept of intersectionality as it pertains to identity, see Collins, Patricia Hill; Bilge, Sirma. *Intersectionality*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2016. See also hooks, bell. *Ain't I a Woman: black women and feminism*. London, Boston, Massachusetts: Pluto Press South End Press, 1982.

Western modes of presentation, creating a hybridity which renders the otherwise inscrutable *Otherness* more legible to a *Gazhe* audience.

Of course, the very act of Roma engaging in writing constitutes, in many ways, hybrid behavior, in and of itself. As mentioned earlier, Roma are largely perceived as a people without letters, and in a context where Western culture is taken as the standard, this analphabetic illiteracy is often equated with lack of literature and lack of a serious, sophisticated culture. "Non-Romani definitions of literacy are almost exclusively preoccupied with writing, and alphabetic literacy is mistakenly taken to be 'literacy' *tout-court*" (Toninato, 52). Alphabetic literacy is not, however, to be understood as the whole of literacy in its entirety. The Roma, even in cases where they are denied access to formal education and thus are barred from the alphabetic literacy commonly recognized by the societally privileged, still possess an intimate command of skills used to recognize, understand, and transmit information. Learning and performing music, preserving and passing on oral histories, and reading and creating trail signs to communicate with other Roma traveling the roads are all intricate methods of communicating and creating meaningful texts, though one must move beyond a graphocentric understanding of the term in order to recognize them as such.[61]

[61] For an in-depth discussion of such Roma trail, or "Chine" signs, see Toninato, Paola. *Romani Writing: Literacy, Literature, and Identity Politics*. New York: Routledge, 2014, pp. 59-61. There, readers will find tables of abstract pictographs used to discreetly indicate such messages as "Roma have passed through here recently", "The people are very generous here", or "The Roma have been treated inhumanely here—avoid this place". If a definition of literacy is merely the ability to use written language actively and passively, then such a practice could certainly be argued as an example of functional literacy, albeit with a very specialized and need-based lexicon.

As Roma are frequently excluded from equal opportunities for education, however, it can be more difficult for them to gain the skills and academic background necessary to conform to the type of discourse that the *Gazhe* deem legitimate and respectable. "A further crucial dimension usually overlooked by the Western approach is the pivotal role alphabetic literacy plays in social and political contexts, especially its role in promoting and perpetuating state hegemony to the detriment of minority groups" (Toninato, 53). In many ways, this alphabetic literacy can be viewed the language of the oppressor; it may be the case that Roma who do have access to the education necessary to gain these literacy skills refuse the opportunity, for the very process of education may be likened to a forced assimilation endangering the tradition of Roma culture. Alphabetic literacy is one of the tools with which the *Gazhe* enact their marginalizing violence against the Roma, so it should be no surprise that it would be treated with mistrust. Whichever the case maybe, the result is that Roma, both historically and in the present, are presumed to be illiterate, and this presumption has a significant effect on the ways that Roma are perceived as being able to communicate with the *Gazhe*:

> "One of the main reasons why Romani writing has essentially been invisible to the eyes of the non-Roma is that nobody expected it to be there at all. The use of writing for literary purposes, in fact, clashes with deeply ingrained stereotypes of Gypsies as primitive and uneducated. Even when the existence of Romani texts has been acknowledged, they have not been regarded as an object of study for the literary critic, but as

> belonging to the domain of the folklorist or anthropologist. More generally, the 'literary ostracism' affecting Romani literature is interlinked with the Western graphocentric perspective of non-literate societies as intrinsically deficient in literary capacity…" (Toninato, 114).

Thus, for the Roma, the very act of writing—especially in genres typically thought of as characteristically and canonically *Gazhe*—already constitutes a blending or braiding of unique perspectives and traditions. In utilizing literature, the Roma author "thus becomes quite adept at braiding all the traditions at its disposal, using the fragments that constitute it in order to participate fully in a dynamic process of transformation" (Lionnet, 5). When paired with an awareness of and intention to utilize the *Gazhe* Gaze, this braiding becomes a strong strategy for the oblique communication allowing Roma to have a recognized voice without becoming trapped in the politics of subjectivation.

This single braid, however, is still composed of multiple individual strands, much as the texts presented should be read as outlining a multiplicity of Roma identities, rather than one uniform and overarching identity ascribed to the entire group, as "[t]he reactionary potential of a separatist search for a unitary and naturalized identity is a well-known danger…" (Lionnet, 8). This belief in and search for some innate story or identity generalizable across an entire ethnic group falls prey to the same sorts of tropic thinking that the tsiganologist ethnographers such as Fonseca demonstrated.[62] To this end, it is important

[62] Recall the discussion of Fonseca and other such ethnographers in relation to Woloch's poems in chapter two. See Fonseca, Isabel. *Bury Me Standing*. New York: Vintage Books, 1995. For a more detailed outlining of the

to examine these works using the guidelines Lionnet lays out in her discussion of methods of productively engaging in postcolonial narratives:

> My point is neither to suggest that the particular…experience of a given writer should be taken as an exemplar of the general…situation of a collectivity…Nor am I suggesting that individual and personal voices are the only legitimate locus for analyzing global political issues or, to put it another way, that the personal is political in a static way. My focus is on the *processes* that produce the personal and make it historically and politically unique (Lionnet, 4).

To view every utterance by the individual as a political statement applicable to an entire group is to ignore the speaker's individuality; to view such statements as bearing no traces of sociopolitical importance or indication of the types of situations faced by members of said group is tantamount to the active silencing of the Other. "It is by focusing on subjective elements and giving them broad relevance that these writers succeed in creating an intersubjective space where dialogue is possible" (Lionnet, 4). Thus, the recognition of such braiding and weaving together must take place not only on the level of genre and presentation, but also on the reader's understanding of and interaction with these narratives. It is this interaction that, ultimately, enables message—however eloquently written or truthfully told it may be—to be effectively understood and bear productive fruit.

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fetishization of the "exotic" under the guise of anthropological study, see Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

Art after the Holocaust

Given the subject matter of the works discussed in this chapter, as well as the previous, I feel it necessary to examine at least in some small scope the impact of the Holocaust on literature, specifically on the literature of minority voices from groups directly touched by the violence. Literary scholars will, of course, be familiar with Adorno's pronouncement on the state of art in a Postwar world:

> "Kulturkritik findet sich der letzten Stufe der Dialektik von Kultur und Barbarei gegenüber: nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben ist barbarisch, und das frißt auch die Erkenntnis an, die ausspricht, warum es unmöglich ward, heute Gedichte zu schreiben" (Adorno, 26).

While this is often read as a statement speaking against the possibility of art in the wake of such a profound and far-reaching tragedy, a closer examination of the text reveals alternative readings:

> "Two sentences derived from this passage have since made it to the rank of a 'dictum': (a) 'To write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric' and (b) 'It has become impossible to write poems today'. The second sentence, which, if understood literally, overrules and cancels the former one, is, however, a falsification – though copied verbatim from the English translation of Adorno's text. It is a segment from a sentence, which does not

> make the statement in question, but instead comments on it and thereby qualifies it" (Hofmann, 182).

Adorno described the act of writing poetry in a Postwar world as "barbaric", which is taken here to mean "cruel" or "exceedingly brutal"; the second sentence in his dictum thus becomes an admonition denouncing the act of creating poetry as an impossibility in the face of such rampant destruction. The text is then taken to imply that there can be no art after the Holocaust. To a degree, this seems a perfectly reasonable statement—after all, how can one begin to think about creating beauty again in the midst of such ruin? To even turn one's thoughts toward the aesthetic seems somehow disrespectful, almost dismissive of the gravity of the pain and violence the Holocaust brought. The West was shown an incredibly dark side of itself through these events, one which it could not easily look away from, and such a revelation would easily make any work of art intended to conjure beauty or evoke wonder seem a thin veneer at best.

However, alternative readings interpret Adorno's words differently, seeing his dictum not as denouncing poetry and describing the impossibility of art after the Holocaust, but as describing a drastic yet necessary shift in the qualities and character possessed by said art:

> "Adorno does not wish to negate representation; on the contrary, he argues that the aesthetics of post-Holocaust poetry are of a particular 'barbaric' character…The language is necessarily unstable because it engages with the embarrassing struggle—

> which often ends in failure—to forge a language adequate to represent the horror of the Holocaust" (Rowland, 58).

If the Holocaust can be said to have hindered the possibility of art for the white majority, the texts examined in this dissertation show that, in many ways, it can be said that this tragedy created a moment of shocked silence in which the voices of the oppressed and victimized minority groups could finally be heard. The poems from chapter three and the autobiographies discussed above may not be examples of aesthetically beautiful art, but they are exquisitely composed in their communication of sorrow and loss. These works are, perhaps, "barbaric", not because of any primitivism or artistic degeneracy, but because of the brutal honesty and openness with which they discuss the tremendous violence they take as their subject matter.

In the case of the marginalized, art is often born from great tragedy and oppression, rather than hindered by it, as Adorno seems to declare. In examining the above texts in light of this dictum and contemplating the relationship between tragedy and art, it becomes necessary to consider that it effectively took a tragedy on the scale of the Holocaust to force the privileged majority to even begin to consider listening to the voices of groups like the Roma; the pattern of *Othering* was—and, arguably, still is—so firmly set in the fabric of societal dogma that a rupture of such a magnitude was the only thing that, even temporarily, brought the voices of the traditionally silenced to the attention of those who silence them. The implications of this are tremendous—if one speculates that a traumatic and violent disruption is somehow necessary in order to shock a group largely complacent in being the beneficiaries of systemic oppression out of their habitual silencing and ignoring of the Other,

then the prospect of practical, effective communication becomes significantly less realistic. While I do not intend to imply that this is necessarily the case, or that the effort by marginalized communities to be heard is a hopeless endeavor, this does illustrate the fact that, if the privileged majority is too resistant to hearing the voices of the oppressed, the results are inevitably drastic. This can be seen both in terms of a fever pitch of oppressive violence leading to a shocked and shameful moment of lucid reflection on the part of the oppressors, or the escalation of riots and disruptive resistance on the part of the oppressed as they are forced to speak in what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. termed "the language of the unheard" (King Jr., *The Other America*).

Hybrid Voices and the Question of the Canon

Looking at the above narratives, one begins to see how the act of braiding and hybridizing Roma narratives with a literary presentation more familiar to a *Gazhe* readership helps to support and complete oblique communication in a more effective manner. Much like more authentic versions of the hybridized characters from novellas of the Romantic, these hybrid texts take Roma voices and encode them in a presentation both legible and palatable to the *Gazhe* audience, enabling the message to be heard. However, one matter still remains unresolved. These texts were published decades ago, and while they enjoyed a broad readership at the time, little, if anything, has changed regarding the circumstances of the Roma and their treatment as equal participants in the global discourse. To this day, they are still swept to the margins and all but forgotten, unless the need for a social scapegoat or a threatening Other should arise. Whatever impact these narratives may have had, they are clearly not enough to affect substantial and lasting social change on their own.

Here it bears merit to revisit Spivak's question, albeit from a different perspective. Rather than asking "Can the subaltern speak?", the better question seems to be "Can the privileged listen?". The subaltern can and do speak, and have been speaking for some time, and yet they remain unheard and ignored. Thus, the onus is not on the marginalized to speak louder and louder and jump through an ever-growing number of discursive hoops to be heard; it is the responsibility, however distasteful they may find it, of the *Gazhe*, the privileged majority, to listen. Strategies like oblique communication can certainly help make the messages more likely to be engaged with and not dismissed offhand, but once the message is conveyed, it becomes the responsibility of the *Gazhe* to actively listen to and understand the voices seeking to be heard, and then to honor and act on what these voices have to say. The works examined in this dissertation have shown that literature can be a uniquely powerful means of fostering intercultural communication, and certain communicative techniques and strategies may well improve the chances of a target audience receiving a given message and paying heed to a voice, but this alone is not enough to ensure that one's voice is heard and given weight. As these texts have demonstrated, *Gazhe* need exposure to Roma voices in order to begin the work of learning to listen and understand them; this, however, becomes a problem when the current literary canon tends to implicitly exclude works by marginalized authors, or else preserve only a token number of them under the reductionist umbrella of "minority literature" for the appearance of diversity. The question of how to facilitate this sort of exposure when the canon, and the institutional archives which uphold it, pay little heed to these voices is one that will take center stage in the next chapter.

Coda—Subaltern Speak

Romani Studies is still, in many ways, a burgeoning field, and—much like the Roma themselves—is as of yet far from widespread recognition and legitimacy in the public eye. In the process of researching material for this dissertation, I have discovered not only a significant dearth of primary sources composed by Roma and made available in a format classically considered appropriate for academic engagement (i.e. published samples of written works, film, etc.), there is just as sizeable a lack of serious scholarly attention to the subject. In the US, there are only a handful of universities offering any sort of resources or courses dealing with Roma, and even fewer deem the subject worthy of dedicated faculty or programs.[63] While this has at times constricted the scope and direction of my dissertation due to scarcity of primary texts to analyze or academically viable secondary sources to draw upon, this also signals the fact that the public is situated at the cusp of a conversation both incredibly important and remarkably overdue

Just as this work began, it seems only fitting to return, at last, to Spivak's bold question: "Can the subaltern speak?". On the one hand, this is a seemingly glib question with an appropriately glib answer: "Of course they can—why would one think otherwise?". Spivak's conclusion—perhaps a touch summary in its own right—suggests precisely the opposite, that the subaltern in fact cannot speak, and it would be naïve to believe that they could. As discussed in the introduction, and exemplified in each of the preceding chapters, there is merit to this conclusion; power structures in place make it exceedingly difficult for

[63] As of the time of this writing, the most notable American university offering courses involving Romani Studies is the University of Texas at Austin, while those seeking degree programs must look internationally, to institutions like the Central European University or Charles University at Prague.

the marginalized to be heard if the societally privileged are determined to ignore them, thus rendering direct communication ineffective at best. This phenomenon, as has been demonstrated, is intimately linked to the creation and superimposition of tropic identities over minority voices, and by extension, the removal of agency in terms of (re)presentation and public perception. There is, as these texts have illustrated, a possibility for communication based not on direct exchange, which in this case is doomed to failure from the start, but rather on the oblique subversion and manipulation of said tropes and the propensity of the societal elite to view minority groups such as the Roma as exotic sources of entertainment and titillation, turning this fetishizing gaze to willingly fall upon the very issues that cannot be directly expressed. This dissertation has only scratched the surface of the myriad iterations of such performances of Roma identity, and there are many avenues yet that merit further investigation, both in traditional literary formats and new digital modes.

Roma Theatre and Performance of Identity

For instance, when discussing the performance of identity, it seems only appropriate to delve into the genres of theatre and opera as quite literal examples, and there is no question that the Roma have engaged in both of these artforms. For many years in Russia and the former Soviet Union, stretching from the late 1800s through the mid-1900s, groups of Romani creators and performers were able to enjoy no small amount of popularity, forming choruses and troupes which toured in much the same way as was described in Franz'

autobiography from the previous chapter.[64] One such troupe, the *Romen* Theatre, made a point to showcase not only the usual folksongs and performances, but also complex plays and operettas written, directed, and performed by Roma. This was also perhaps the earliest example of the Romani language being used as a medium in mass entertainment for the public at large:

> It was perhaps only in the 20th century that Roma became active in specifically Romani-language theatre in the former Soviet State. In 1931 the Romani theatre company *Romen* was established in Moscow, with Michael Jaščin as the first director. Their first production, *Žizn na kolesach* "Life on Wheels", was written by the Rom writer Alexandr Germano. The actors were untrained, natural talents…The plays are mostly in Russian, with some dialogues and all the songs in Romani. The Romen theatre has had much influence on many generations of Romani singers, musicians, actors, and dancers (Hubschmannova et al., 85-86).

The *Romen* Theatre, by all accounts, was a tremendous step forward in creating a bridge between the Roma and the *Gazhe* in a way that brought aspects of Roma life—both the idyllic and the troubled—to light while maintaining the outer appearance of pure entertainment. Works of early director Nikolai Shishkin, such as *Children of the Forests* and *Gypsy Life*, deal specifically with portrayals of Roma identity, both the romanticized

[64] See Rom-Lebedev, Ivan. *Ot tsyganskogo khora—k teatru "Romen": Zapiski moskovskogo tsygana*. Moscow: Isskustvo, 1990.

constructs and the lived experiences, communicating through what appears to be the same sorts of oblique strategies illustrated in other chapters of this dissertation. The issue that makes this area of research difficult to pin down and properly analyze is the fact that Shishkin, his works, and the *Romen* Theatre as a whole are mere footnotes in history; the names and dates have been duly recorded, but even thorough searches have found no libretti, no photographs or recordings of performances. The theatre itself is still standing and regularly housing performances, though the focus on Romani culture has since waned. The early works have been overlooked by the preserving power of the archive, likely due to the fact that such "minority" works are often considered of lesser cultural importance and excluded from a national canon. Still, though the texts remain elusive, hindering any rigorous literary analysis, the facts of their existence and relatively swift disappearance do speak to the idea that, no matter how well a text written by one from a societally disavowed group may employ communicative strategies to draw and engage an audience, its ability to fit within the established canon and the norms they perpetuate ultimately bear significant weight on the ability of such texts to be sufficiently preserved and curated to have a lasting, meaningful impact on the society they may wish to influence.

Still, not all Romani theatre troupes have been lost to the mists of historical disregard. A small number remained active even as recently as 2004, supported by contemporary humanitarian efforts in the European Union to try and educate the population about minority groups, as well as celebrate heritage and stimulate cultural exchange.[65]

[65] https://www.romarchive.eu/en/theatre-and-drama/institutional-theatre/roma-theatre-pralipe/

> Probably the most famous of all Romani theatre groups is the professional company *Teatro Roma Pralipe* ("brotherhood"). The actors and director are originally from Yugoslavia but they moved to Germany in the late 1980s…They perform mostly internationally famous dramas, especially translated into Romani by and for the group. Their plays include Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Federico Garcia Lorca's *Blood Wedding* and Sophocles' *King Oedipus*. They also attract audiences of non-Roma, who get a written summary of the play to help them follow it (Hubschmannova et al., 86).

By performing familiar and widely enjoyed dramas filtered through a Romani cultural lens and presented in the Romani language, this group created a culturally hybrid experience temporarily shifting the perspective of the audience to the margins. Members of the societal elite were invited to experience a play from their canon—one they thus already view with a certain degree of respect—as a cultural outsider, observing the story from a somewhat more alien point of view and in a tongue they do not comprehend, effectively placing them in a position akin to the Roma's for the duration of the performance. A key difference, though, is the fact that these audience members are accommodated, even as they are placed into this new position. These performances are intentionally welcoming of a *Gazhe* audience, to the point that programs and pamphlets containing non-Romani plot summaries are freely distributed, as the point is not to isolate and exclude, but rather to invite the

opportunity to see these works from a different perspective and encourage cross-cultural dialogue.

Shifting Perspectives in *Teatro Roma Pralipe's Soske?*

In the course of researching sources for this dissertation, I was fortunate enough to come across exactly one recording of a performance by a Roma theatre group—the aforementioned *Teatro Roma Pralipe*—curated by an independent online archive. Though this single play, with a duration of no more than forty-five minutes, may not be enough material for a chapter in its own right, this play does provide a unique glimpse into the ways in which stage performance can allow groups such as the Roma to address issues of identity and Othering in an oblique fashion, leading the audience to view their situation in the greater societal power dynamic from a different perspective. The play begins this work from the outset, provocatively entitled *Soske?*, which translates from the Vlax dialect of the Romani language as *Why?*.[66] This pithy question is the key which contextualizes every scene of the play, which is admittedly quite minimalist, eschewing elaborate scenery, costumes, and dialogue. Rather than a traditional play, with one overarching plot and central cast of characters, *Soske?* appears as a series of vignettes depicting the development of human civilization from animistic hunter-gatherer tribes to the Second World War, examining injustices and societal marginalization/exploitation every step of the way, with only the title of the play to act as a unifying thematic force.

[66] The Vlax dialect is one of the most widespread of the language, used among groups of Roma both in Western Europe and in North America. For further reading, see Lee, Ronald. Learn Romani. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2007.

For the recording of this performance, title cards bearing the names of the scenes further help to situate them in the context of the greater history they are striving to convey; though I have been able to find no playbills to verify this, one could assume given standard theatre protocol and the above quote about the group's focus on accessibility that such information would have been made available to the audience of these performances. This particular recording presented the scene titles in Croatian, which have been roughly translated here for the purposes of this analysis. The opening scene, entitled "Hunting the Head" presents a cast of six men, all wearing burlap sacks fashioned into crude tunics, beating out a rhythm with wooden staves on the stage floor and vocalizing in an almost hymnal manner before dried gourds carved with faces and mounted on poles, representing totems or deities. The men rise and appear to begin a hunt, wielding their staves as spears, until one triumphantly discovers another gourd, which he reverently places among the totems. This scene, depicting a primitive group of hunter-gatherers, shows what feels like an idyllic version of human society long since lost to the ages: there is competition in the hunt, yet overall camaraderie reigns, and each hunter seems to exist on equal social footing with the others. No one man is marginalized, excluded, or treated as a lesser Other.

This idyll does not last for long, however. The second scene, titled "Slave Owner", demonstrates the sudden shift from an egalitarian group to a hierarchy in which the successful hero of the hunt—clearly chosen by the gods—becomes a figure of power and authority. He picks up a crude scourge and turns on the others, uttering the first words of the play, driving the now-enslaved others to work. This continues until the man in power loses his scourge, at which point the others immediately rally and strike him down. Several themes

become apparent in this scene. First and foremost, the events demonstrate that the presence of a privileged few goes hand-in-hand with a power imbalance leading to marginalization, even exploitation. As soon as this tribe struck upon the notion of superiority, of one man being somehow better than his fellows, the earlier camaraderie devolves into oppressive exploitation of the less-fortunate. This rings particularly true in the history of the Roma when dealing with the *Gazhe*, as the first chapter explained, but features heavily in the interaction between most any disenfranchised minority group and the societally privileged. What's more, this scene speaks to the fears of the oppressors—the moment they, for whatever reason, stop exerting their oppression and keeping allegedly lesser groups disempowered, these groups will rise up and topple them, violently usurping their place. This relates back to the point made by Karin-Patrut discussed in chapter one, that the presence of the (often negative or inferior) Other is necessary to complete and secure the identity of the privileged, and that any deviation from the ascriptions and expectations that this Otherness entails is perceived as a direct threat against the identity of the dominant.

The third chapter is unique in that it presents a story familiar to most who hail from a Western background. Entitled "Chained Prometheus", the cast uses their minimalist style to retell the classic Promethean myth, from the symbolic sharing of fire with humankind to the subsequent punishment. Shackled to a large rock and chased around the stage by an actor representing the ravenous eagle, Prometheus' cries of sorrow and dismay are met with mockery and laughter from the gods on high. Initially, this scene appears to simply reinforce and expand upon the theme of the previous, continuing the motif. Once again, the audience is shown that power structures leading to a sense of innate societal superiority—such as the

dynamic between the ruling gods and the unworthy mortals in the myth—creates a system of perpetuated inequality meant to keep lesser groups oppressed. Any attempts made to alter this system and empower the marginalized are seen as a threat, and dealt with accordingly. The gods feared what humankind would become with the power of their divine flame, so Prometheus the Light-bringer had to be severely punished for his role in stealing this symbolic source of power and sharing it with the lesser mortals, thus upsetting the established power dynamic that ensured the gods remained supreme. This scene, however, has yet another important effect touching upon the idea of oblique communication—the usage of this familiar Greek myth, situated as it is within the context of a play addressing the struggle of the Roma against oppressive power dynamics, frames the topic in a way that *Gazhe* audience members can understand and relate to. Due to this, the following scenes dealing with more specifically Romani issues are rendered more accessible to the audience, given that they are subconsciously using a familiar point of reference to translate what could otherwise be inscrutable. Without the audience necessarily realizing it, they are being indirectly primed to receive and engage with the scenes to follow.

The fourth scene is titled "Cruel Wars". What was expressed through a mythic perspective is made real, as the cast depicts the religious wars marring so much of European history. Those who portrayed the Greek deities, their followers, and Prometheus, are addressed by a man wearing a rough wooden crucifix, demanding their conversion. Many listen to his pleas, taking up crosses and falling in line behind him. Prometheus, however, stands steadfast and warns the cast not to listen to the Christian's lies. Seeing his refusal to accept this new religion, the cleric orders the cast to take up arms against this pagan heretic.

Prometheus is restrained as men raise up a large wooden cross and impale him upon it, singing hymns and rejoicing in their victory. This scene carries the theme of unequal power dynamics and the dangers of trying to negotiate them one step further; as the audience sees through the fate of the Prometheus figure, conforming to the expected behaviors of the societally privileged is an utter necessity if one does not wish to be persecuted. Regardless of personal belief or creed, one must essentially adopt the identity that the social majority finds most palatable, or else risk exclusion or worse. This is a confirmation of what was illustrated in chapter two of this dissertation, through Lee's *Goddam Gypsy:* namely, that perpendicular communication results in confrontation triggering violence, while the passive parallel communication potentiates the loss of one's personal identity and culture and the forced acceptance of another. In addition, it is interesting to note that, of the entire ensemble, it is the Prometheus figure from the previous scene who resists the demanded conversion to Christianity and tries to preserve the agency and self-sovereignty of others, and who ultimately dies for these sins. Symbolizing empowerment of the oppressed and the upheaval of unjust systems, his crucifixion in this scene creates a potent image. In fact, the close resemblance this bears to the crucifixion of Christ would certainly not be lost on viewers, creating yet another point of reference to subtly influence how a *Gazhe* audience might perceive the scenes to come.

The fifth scene is the first dealing with specifically Romani history. The title—"Luri and Bahram"—as well as the legend it references would likely be lost on a *Gazhe* audience, as they deal with a sort of origin myth of the Romani people. For the sake of analyzing this

scene and its placement in the play, I include here a brief explanation, as written by Director of the Institute of Contemporary Romani Studies and Documentation, Dr. Donald Kendrick:

> Firdausi[67] relates that, in order to relieve the hard life of the peasants in Iran, the king Bahram Gaur asked his father-in-law to send from India 10,000 musicians. He then gave these musicians some wheat, an ox and an ass, so that they could support themselves by working on the land. Then they had to entertain the peasantry without payment with singing and dancing. Not surprisingly the musicians found that they did not have the time for these two jobs and ate the wheat and oxen, so that at the end of the first year, their land was still uncultivated. So the king told them to leave their land and travel around earning their living with music. Now Firdausi wrote (in 1011 AD) that these people, the Luri, were still nomadising in his day. And indeed they are still in Iran today, as any Iranian will inform you (Kendrick).

This myth is retold in the scene, with King Bahram demanding a group of Roma take up instruments and perform for him. At first, the musicians are glad to perform, but they quickly grow weary of the King's boundless appetite for their music, and whenever they show signs of flagging, King Bahram grows violent and demands that they continue. It is not

[67] Firdausi here refers to the famed Persian poet and historian, Abu 'I-Qasim Firdowsi Tusi, born c. 940-1020. Readers will recall from the history of the Romani people presented in chapter one and in sources such as Hancock's *Ame Sam e Rromane džene* that military forces from the Persian Empire initially instigated the displacement of what would become the Romani people.

long before the music becomes frantic and distressed, a clear indication that what could have been a mutually beneficial relationship is now one of abused authority and increasingly apparent servitude. This depicts the origin of the Roma figure as the wandering musician, traveling from village to village with musical instrument in hand, playing in the streets or town squares for whatever coin passers-by deem appropriate. Having been primed by the preceding scenes displaying such stories of injustice and abuse of power familiar to a Western audience, viewers are able to view the retelling of this Romani myth and engage with it in a meaningful way, bridging this cultural divide, even if only to a small extent, and leading *Gazhe* to examine the plight of the Roma from a perspective less able to willfully turn a blind eye to the power dynamics in question.

The final two scenes of the play depict the very height of this abuse, and the devastation that such a belief in innate superiority can culminate in when left unchecked: the Nazi regime and their concentration camps. The penultimate scene, III-C, opens with clear allusions to the military. A harsh, soldier-like figure acts as a taskmaster, barks orders at what appear to be prisoners, having them do manual labor as he kicks at them and laughs. His orders, it should be noted, are given in German, and shouts of "Eins, zwei! Eins, zwei!" drive a breakneck pace as the prisoners set about pointless tasks serving only to degrade them, such as shoving boulders around the stage in a manner reminiscent of the myth of Sisyphus. The taskmaster taunts the prisoners with bread and water, mocking them as they desperately beg for sustenance, and then grinding the bread to crumbs and dumping the water out on the stage. Eventually, the taskmaster abandons this mockery and returns to shouting commands, this time ordering the prisoners to build what appears to be a tent with

clear vinyl walls and ventilation ducts leading in. The action does not pause as the scene immediately transitions to "In the Gas Chamber", the final in the play.

The nature of the structure built becomes clear, as the taskmaster orders all of the prisoners inside. One by one, they pick up the instruments used in the "Luri and Bahram" scene and begin playing somberly as they march to their deaths. The last prisoner to be forced in turns and addresses the audience for the first time in the play, saying "A lamp burns in the midst of the camp. It burns for the Gypsies". Thick smoke begins to fill the chamber, visible through the clear vinyl walls, and the prisoners play with increasing distress. Soon, screams commence, and the stage lights dim. The taskmaster laughs viciously as the play's final lines are uttered from within the chamber: "Give me, my god, two great wings, so that I might fly away". The playing ceases, the prisoners collapse, and the chamber fills completely with smoke, occluding all visibility. The maddening laughter of the taskmaster echoes as the stage is plunged into darkness.

These two scenes represent the culmination of the increasingly violent abuse of imbalanced power dynamics charted through the course of the play. In fact, the production directly and explicitly parallels itself, showing that the genocide of the final scenes is nothing more than an extension of the abuse from the scene depicted in the Bahram scene; by referencing the way that King Bahram treated the Roma as less-than-human objects existing to satisfy his whims, the audience is shown that the events in the labor camp are simply manifestations of that same dehumanizing view of the Roma, drawn to its fullest conclusion. In both situations, the Roma are reduced to a state of being without agency, without personhood, even without any sort of individuating identity or personality—throughout the

play, cast members representing the Roma are nearly always interchangeable, acting only as an ensemble. The Roma are not, however, without voice. Though the King, and later, the military figure in the camp, refuse to acknowledge the Roma, their voices are heard by the audience. From the title of the play (*Soske*?—Why?) to the final lines, the audience cannot help but hear the words of the Roma, listen to their voices, and consider the societal factors which contribute to their circumstances. By relying on the performative modality of the theatre and the *Gazhe's* tendency to fixate on and consume the spectacle of the Roma, this troupe manages to shift the perspective of the audience such that they, through the proxy of the Roma, can begin to see the problematic nature of current societal institutions maintaining the oppressive silencing and overwriting of the Other. This is exactly the kind of oblique strategy that sidesteps the confrontation of telling the societally privileged that the systems which benefit them are dangerously harmful to the marginalized minority, instead working indirectly to guide them into seeing and recognizing this harm for themselves.

The staging of this production also lends itself to this effect, rather than the content alone. Though there is insufficient textual evidence to claim that the director of the play, Rahim Burhan, studied Brechtian theatre and made the conscious decision to emulate it in his work, it must nevertheless be said that many facets of this production bear striking similarities to those advocated by Brecht in his theory of Epic Theatre. As detailed in his *Kleines Organon für das Theater*, Brecht believed that a play, if it was to have any transformative didactic impact on an audience, should strive not to create the illusion of reality and sweep the viewers away, but rather distance the viewers from the plot so that they can appraise the message of the play with a more critical eye (180-185). Burhan's

choices in the production of *Soske?* help to establish this distance, from the set design to the costuming, even to the script, itself. The stage remains largely bare throughout the play, with absolutely no scenery, and only a bare minimum of props to help clarify the characters' actions. There is no costuming specific to any given role, as the entire cast wears burlap shifts, regardless of role; the cast also changes out roles with nearly every scene, and the relative lack of dialogue prevents the audience from coming to identify with or feel close to any one particular character. There is no suspension of disbelief in this performance, which ensures that the audience is present enough to actively evaluate and engage with the ideas presented, allowing for this oblique communication to take place and leading the audience to consider the issues touched upon for themselves.

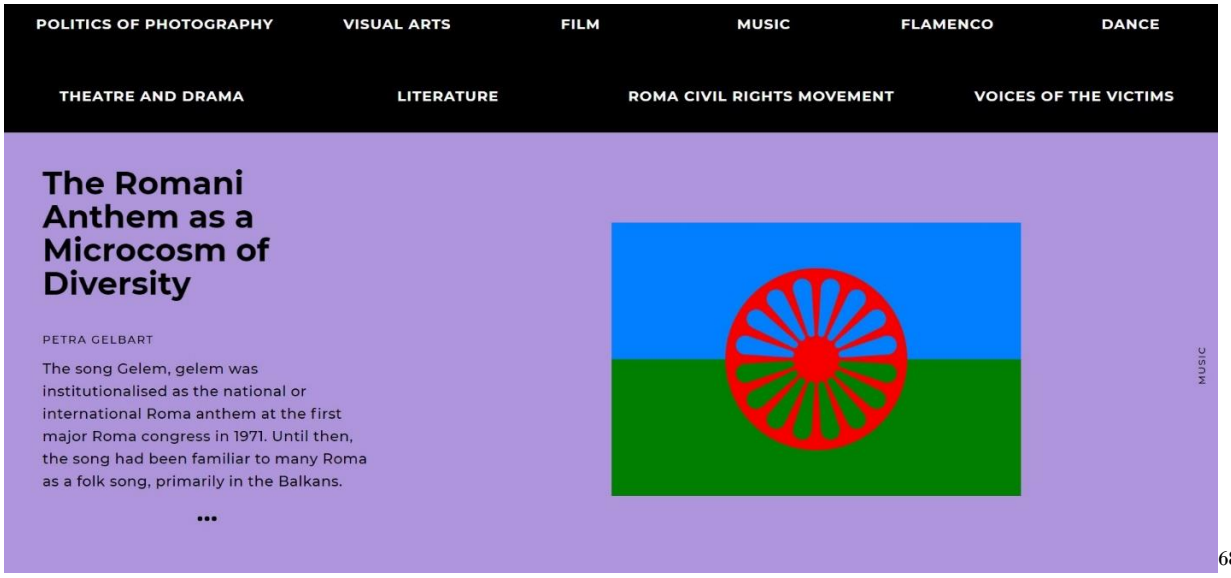
Digital Diaspora and Online Archives

However, in the end, Romani theatre is ephemeral. The handful of extant recordings of Romani plays such as the above are typically overlooked by institutions like public libraries, and would be entirely forgotten were it not for the efforts of individual volunteers with a vested interest in recording and preserving Romani cultural artifacts through online forums and archives. In fact, it was only due to the existence of just such an amateur online archive that I was able to find the film recording discussed above. For this reason, I will now turn to an examination of these forums and websites, both as a means of preserving and distributing media relevant to the Roma, and as a basis for a sort of virtual Roma community, complete with its own iterations of identity building, in-group relationships, and cross-cultural communication. While I am personally not well-versed in the digital humanities or new media studies, I nevertheless would like to point to the Internet as a

fruitful ground in terms of future research and highlight the overlap between these fields and Romani studies. Technology and social media

> … play a central role in the organization of society and in the shaping of the opportunities and constraints, meanings and ways, of life. People and groups adapt technology to their needs and interests, producing transformations in the organization of social life and profoundly changing the structures of current society… (Ros, 23).

Take, for instance, RomArchive, the aforementioned website which hosts the recording of *Soske?* drawn upon for the preceding section. A quick glance at the home page, shown below, reveals that this site provides not only precious archival services for Romani works of art, but also strives to be a place of education, displaying subsections designed to inform viewers about the violence against Roma during the Holocaust, or about the history of the Roma Civil Rights Movement. Articles and editorial pieces discussing relevant topics are also posted, such as the blurb shown in the screencap analyzing the Romani anthem, *Gelem, Gelem*.



[68]

This website exemplifies the diasporic, transnational nature of the Roma by providing options to view content in multiple languages, including English, German, and the Romani language, a trait which many other such sites share. This demonstrates the mission of the site in catering to the Roma as a diaspora, scattered across multiple countries, and also makes the information hosted accessible to a wide number of *Gazhe*, thus facilitating those with the willingness to learn about the Roma. Thus, digital archives such as this, established and maintained by volunteers, serves both marginalized and societally privileged communities in a way that more institutional archives and the traditional cultural canon do not, and precisely because these sites are organized by volunteers from these subaltern groups and therefore sympathetic to their particular plights and circumstances, the representations and documentation shared are free of the tropic trappings and stereotypical ascriptions that would otherwise be imposed upon works or artists in order that they might fit within the status quo-affirming collections of official state-supported public archives. This website

[68] Image taken via screencap from https://romarchive.eu/en/ on March 20, 2019.

exemplifies many of the traits which have come to be recognized as commonalities among the genre, if you will:

> The use of the Web in cross-cultural communication and overcoming ethnic ghettoisation is shown in a number of simple and visible facts. In particular, any Romani website usually contains texts in at least three languages: Romani, the language of the country of residence, and English, as an international language. A mixed Roma and non-Roma staff usually performs the web-design. The work of the organisation that hosts the site usually takes place in cooperation with non-Roma non-governmental organisations or governmental structures. Photos often show both Roma and non-Roma supporters and participants of events…This trend also occurs when important governmental documents in relation to ethnic minorities are discussed on the website. Usually representatives of a number of other ethnic minorities contribute in online discussions. Inter-ethnic dialogue also occurs in signing a petition in support of someone or in support of a joint cultural event or festival…As a result, information on Roma community activity and movement is easily conveyed to an audience that is ready to adopt such information, contribute to the exchange of ideas, and participate in community life (Novoselsky, 150).

In addition to providing the ability to curate their own archives and spread information, the Internet creates a space for marginalized groups—especially members of diasporas without easy means to be physically present with each other—to form a digital community and thereby regain a sense of togetherness and socialization that would otherwise be impossible, given geographical circumstances.

> High connectivity in migrant contexts shapes a new space for interaction and simultaneity, both at a distance and in the local context. First, new patterns of distant interaction and sociability based on new communication tools would be emerging in immigrant contexts and allow them to maintain ties to a distant community while supporting face-to-face ties closer to home. As new technologies give more opportunities of communication, existing family relationships may get stronger and much more coordinated. Second, more interaction may also imply more and new contacts in the host society (Ros, 25).

Social media websites, such as Facebook, allow users to connect with each other despite distance, forming groups and communities not only for social purposes, but also to share news, to engage in discussions, and even to search for and relay information pertaining to employment or housing opportunities. For instance, the image below shows a portion of the newsfeed of the Facebook group, "Gypsy Union", which acts as both a social group to help put members of the Roma community at large in contact with each other, and also as a forum in which users can create discussions and share political information, building activist

movements and working to support each other. In the screenshot, one can see an example of a French news article detailing a rising trend in anti-Roma hate crimes in Paris, which serves both as a catalyst for activist discussion, as a way to broadcast a warning to those who may be endangered by such attacks, and even as an opportunity for Roma in the area to let loved ones separated by distance know that they are safe.

[69]

[69] This image was taken via screencap from https://www.facebook.com/Gypsy-Union-13503377035/ on March 20, 2019.

This is a tremendous tool for groups such as the Roma, in that it is incredibly open—anyone with access to a public library can create an account and engage in these digital communities, regardless of their social or financial circumstances. Because so much of society, from education to employment, is closed off to or heavily biased against those who are disenfranchised, sites such as this provide a means of empowerment that should not be underestimated:

> IT unites what was previously divided…It makes it possible for marginalized people to penetrate and access middle- and upper-class circuits. For example, as members of virtual communities, their true lower-class identities are not revealed, something they could not hide in physical-interface interaction…If knowledge is power, the disenfranchised have access to the same information that is available to everyone online…Empowerment also occurs as the use of the computer allows a global space for social interaction…this form of practice deisolates the individual and relocates him or her in a more global social universe of interaction. (Laguerre, 56).

These websites not only allow for the Roma to connect with each other and exchange opinions and information, but also to construct and curate something along the lines of a digital identity, even to the point of a collective digital identity mirroring the function of the nation that diasporic communities otherwise lack:

> A diaspora becomes digital to the extent members of the group can access and use telecommunication instruments as a mode of information and communication to reach local and distant contacts. In other words, IT connectivity makes it possible for the diaspora to express and perform its *digital* identity (Laguerre, 50).

The expressions of identity here are not performed for the sake of communicating with a *Gazhe* audience and catering to their expectations, and often do not even explicitly acknowledge the fact that *Gazhe* viewers may be reading the posts; rather, these expressions are authentic to the self-identities these individuals wish to create, and to the collective identities that tie them together as a community. The fact that these websites are often public, and therefore may be viewed by *Gazhe*, is an incidental factor, but one that could well lead back to the sort of indirect, oblique communication discussed in this dissertation. In fact, some of these platforms actually showcase examples of *Gazhe* coming into these digital spaces and seeking to educate themselves and listen to these Roma voices. For example, see the screencap from the Romani message board of the popular forum website, Reddit, below:

[70]

Here, one sees a number of post titles ranging from questions clearly intended to open discussion among other Roma regarding current events and trending political topics, such as the issue of Roma children in the public school system or the idea of a physical Romani nation-state, to topics brought up by those seeking to learn more about Romani culture—presumably posted by *Gazhe*—asking for resources to help better educate themselves. There are many other such websites, fostering community and communication among members of the Roma diaspora, and facilitating the education of the *Gazhe*, either directly or indirectly.

> For example, the Roma Virtual Network (hosted on Yahoo Groups…) now functions globally. Started in Israel in July 1999, today it operates across all continents, offers up to 20 articles daily in English, Romani, and other languages (taken

[70] This image was taken via screencap from https://www.reddit.com/r/romani/ March 20, 2019.

> from the Roma Daily News, Romano Liloro, Roma Rights, Romane Nevipena, Mundo Gitano), and an electronic database. In the database, upon request or member subscription, one finds a variety of links, files, articles, and photos on a diversity of topics. Maintained by a volunteer editor and a dozen volunteer correspondents as a non-profit organization, it has become a "dwelling place" for many of its members…In providing actual information and making analyses of local and international events, at the same time they embody very specific notions of community that include sharing the same space and time. These sites encourage a sense of community, as do their sponsoring bodies, and seek to defend community interests when confronted (Novoselsky, 149-150).

There is power to be found in these online resources, contributing to a sense of agency for a group historically disavowed of such in the physical world, as these tools help create a platform from which the voices of the Roma may speak unobstructed. The fact that these groups "have taken technology and used it in ways that developers never expected raises the question of the relationship between power and technology for powerless social groups and regions" (Wellman, 177). As this dissertation has hopefully demonstrated, these resources speak to the topic of social power dynamics and the ability of marginalized groups to shape and give voice to their identities, allowing for the navigation of cross-cultural interactions with the societally privileged via methods of oblique communication. These also constitute a

rich area for further study, made particularly relevant today given the trends toward the digital humanities and new media studies, opening new avenues for legitimizing and advancing Romani studies beyond the constraints of the traditional canon and the imposed identities that entails.

Subaltern Speak

At this point, it is fitting to return to the question broached at the very beginning of this dissertation: Can the subaltern speak? Over the course of this work, I have catalogued and analyzed several accounts of individuals from subaltern groups doing just that; I have outlined the difficulties stemming from trying to engage in direct and open dialogue with the societal elite via perpendicular communicative approaches, as well as the pitfalls arising from complacently performing along with the expected tropes or simply blending in and striving for cultural invisibility using parallel communication strategies, as seen in Lee's *Goddam Gypsy* and Woloch's *Tsigan*. Both the lyric poetry of *Roads of the Roma* and the autobiographies of Ceija Stojka and Philomena Franz have illustrated alternative modes of oblique communication, which allow Roma voices to break their silence and speak without directly engaging in the double-bind of subjectivation; a metatextual examination has also touched upon the potential shortcomings of such approaches, given limited readership and accessibility. Finally, this dissertation has pointed to areas ripe for future research, such as the online archives and message boards, as well as the information they host. After writing this dissertation, it is clearer to me than ever before that the subaltern can—and do—speak. The Roma have, in the past, relied on silence and secrecy in order to ensure their safety, though this only resulted in their subjugation. They have—clearly and repeatedly—

attempted direct communication of their dissatisfaction with a society built upon and benefitting from the exclusionary mindset which keeps them relegated to the margins, though this is ignored or met with fierce resistance. As a result, it becomes easy to claim that the Roma simply cannot speak in this situation, though the reality is that they continue to find new ways to express themselves and convey their needs, and when both avoidance and direct communication prove ineffective, they utilize indirect strategies to manipulate the gaze that seeks to consume them, turning it instead upon their conditions as marginalized Others. The subaltern are speaking. Perhaps instead of asking whether they can, a question which foregrounds the presupposition of a lack of agency and imputes yet another ascribed identity of the marginalized as helpless victims, it would be more productive to ask *where* and *how* the subaltern speak, to reflect on why that is so, and to listen.

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