



Between Pedagogy and Self-Articulation: Roma Necessary Fictions in East Central Europe

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The aim of the chapter is to compare the main narrative strategies of depicting Roma in such “necessary fictions” by East Central-European authors after World War II (Holdosi 1978; Lakatos 1975; Šmaus 2005; Staviarsky 2007), e.g. the concept of nation, representation of Otherness (especially the Roma as “the Other”) and its (un)solvable social consequences, dealing with common stereotypes and “oral tradition,” and prospects for the future.

Studies in post-war Roma communities in Europe reveal a deep rift between the democratic and socialist parts of the continent in the way the states on both sides of the Iron Curtain designed their politics towards the Roma, which still bears on the present condition of this ethnic group. Researchers observed the difference in the situation of the Roma in the east and west of Europe, and the consequences of that division after the fall of the Berlin Wall. They underline the fact that anti-Roma discourse is fairly unified and common on both sides of the former divide, but the lack

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S. Huigen and D. Kołodziejczyk (eds.), *East Central Europe Between the Colonial and the Postcolonial in the Twentieth Century*,

Cambridge Imperial and Post-Colonial Studies,

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-17487-2_9

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of awareness of differences in the Roma situation between them is one of the main reasons for misunderstandings on various levels of interstate communication. This also includes difficult communication between the Roma from different states (Bogdal 2011; Fraser 1992; Mappes-Niediek 2012; Wippermann 2015). It is problematic to list all the reasons for this state of affairs, but demographic disproportion between Western and East Central Europe is one of the main factors (ca. 1.5 million Roma live in the West, almost 4.5 million in East Central Europe, but the statistics on the Roma population are far from precise¹). Another important factor contributing to the lack of solid information on the Roma in Europe, in general, is the different historical experience of Roma communities in various regions and states: mainly, the Roma enslavement lasting from the fifteenth century until the mid-nineteenth century in Romania, while in, for example, Poland, anti-Gypsy edicts were issued from the sixteenth century, forbidding the nobility to allow the nomadic Roma to camp on their land (these edicts were not really obeyed); massive migration movements after World War II, but also social advancement controlled from above by socialist authorities, and, in contrast to that, the grass-roots civic movement that developed at the same time in the countries of Western Europe (Gress 2015; Hancock 1986). Despite similar stereotypes across the continent, the deep rift dividing the Roma condition in Western and East Central Europe, respectively, results in the fact that literature about the Roma, and, most of all, written by the Roma, differs remarkably on both sides. The distinguishing feature of Roma literature in East Central Europe is that the struggle to find one's voice and to negotiate between pressures of integration and preserving one's identity is much more pronounced.

This fundamental difference is visible in artistic activity by the Roma and relating to the Roma—for example, the inhabitants of Hungarian Miskolc do not necessarily feel any connection with the crafts for which British Travellers are known. However, this art, cultural activity and writing can play an important mediating, negotiating and educating role. The aim of this chapter is to present several well-known literary texts which provide a synoptic view of the post-war fate of local Roma communities in East Central Europe. Their common feature is that they

¹ According to data from 2014, the European Commission estimates the number of the Roma in Europe as six million, of which 4.5 ml live in East Central Europe and 1.5 in Western Europe: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-14-249_en.htm.

were written for readers from outside the Roma community and with a strong ideological message imposed either by the socialist regime or by nationalist attitudes unleashed after the fall of the system.

The continued underprivileged condition of the Roma in East Central Europe warrants the application of postcolonial interpretive tools to develop adequate research methods that would help investigate Roma voice and modes of self-representation. The community has been entangled in complex dependency from the majority society, manifested also in the literary trend I have signalled above. Postcolonial tools are sensitive to the nuances of narrative and imagological representation of authenticity, difference and agency, especially where we can trail in the text the strategies of appropriation and/or simultaneously giving voice to the Roma subject. This subject, in turn, due to its prolonged declassified status, functions here in a way parallel to the postcolonial subaltern subject. The value of the postcolonial perspective lies especially in its ability to grasp the ambivalence of Roma self-representation in literature. Such self-representation is conditioned by a range of factors resulting from the specific situation of that community. First, due to the community's overall illiteracy, literature has not been a space of identity construction for the Roma. Second, after World War II, due to compulsory assimilation programmes implemented by the communist state, a need appeared, also prompted by the authorities, to create literary opportunities for the Roma. Even though it was a licensed and controlled creativity, the Roma voice which appeared in these literary representations has much in common with the emergence of the postcolonial subject in anti-colonial and postcolonial fiction—seeking self-expression in negotiations between authenticity and social and cultural change, and between literary derivation from available patterns and Roma oral cultural resources. These efforts continued after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. We should, however, remember that although these forms and strategies of representation were imposed on the Roma community from outside (still, a lot of the Roma subjects could identify with them), the horizon of expectations from the majority society created a palpable interpretive space in Roma literature, making the majority society as it were one of the voices. To explain how this phenomenon of mixing self-representation with the external horizon of expectations works, I would like to draw on Homi Bhabha's concept of "necessary fictions." In *Representation and the Colonial Text: A Critical Exploration of Some Forms of Mimeticism*, Bhabha writes about the trap of representation that the subjects released from

colonial domination fall into (Bhabha 1989). Their chief goal is to reveal their own cultural authenticity, unspoiled by colonial heritage. This aspiration results in a wave of literature that functions as native. Since nativity has to be recovered from under the layers of colonial influence, this literature is presumed to go back to pre-colonial times. However, this move back in time is possible only through the use of “historical and ideological determinants of the western civilization,” as Bhabha claims (Bhabha 1989, 94). In Roma literature, these pressures become manifest in narratives of the inevitability of modernising change and the vulnerability of tradition. Bhabha underscores the fundamental contradictions that “necessary fictions” are premised on: the search for the pristine authenticity that is reached via the language and/or forms of the coloniser, thus only available as reconstruction, reimagining and translation; and the unwillingness to admit that these are, precisely, constructs mediated by the “conspiracy of historicism and realism” defined as follows: “(...) historical and ideological productions without any of the inevitability that they claim. They are necessary fictions that tragically believed too much in their necessity and too little in their own fictionality” (Bhabha 1989, 97). The critical reading of “necessary fictions” would be less to track the inevitable constructedness of authenticity as a reflection on how such “[re-]invented traditions” produce the so-far missing postcolonial, and, here specifically, Roma subject. Therefore, it is not the “fictionality” of these constructions as their “necessity” that becomes an object of critical analysis for a cultural interpretation.

An essential attribute of the East Central-European genre which I propose to call the “Roma necessary fiction” is its (partial or total) fictionality and a broad temporal horizon which serves a didactic purpose. Such a “Roma novel,” with its typological differentiation which I will present later, is a transnational phenomenon that should be interpreted comparatively—it transgresses the borders of nation-states, yet it is, in the context of its ideological message, dependent on these borders, as the Roma identity represented there is not one and unified, but, rather, additionally Hungarian, Slovakian, Romanian, or Polish. The genre is suffused with a characteristically paternalistic style which the socialist authorities developed in relation to the Roma community, represented as antisocial, criminogenic and unyielding to integration. But the effect of these novels was also that they made the Roma more familiar to readers and helped them understand this community better. In Western Europe, the place of these texts, “translating” the Roma to non-Roma readers, is occupied by

important autobiographical and biographical testimonies (Stojka 2013) and journalism (Wippermann 2015; Mappes-Niediek 2012). These narratives work openly against the stereotype, which does not mean that they are effective in broadening the scope of the Roma voice.

The perceptible social advancement of the Roma in the west of Europe after World War II was also marked by their visibility in the book market and other areas of public space. Surely, the phantasm of “the beautiful Gypsy” is still there in popular literature, but, more often than not, it would be difficult to view it as educational in any measure. The mission that European literature has taken on is carried out in two distinctively different patterns: biography and journalism in Western Europe; reportage and “necessary fictions” in East Central Europe.

FOR THE RIGHT TO FREE MOBILITY

Angus Fraser (1992) in *The Gypsies* points at two basic problems with which Western European states had to deal with in relation to their Roma communities. The first related to implementing adequate regulations that would allow free movement for the Roma communities still leading a nomadic lifestyle, accompanied by simultaneous work on including them into civic communities (with rights to medical care, education, social security and so on). Hence began the gradual “de-ethnicization” of the local Roma in Western Europe, called “the Travellers” in the UK, “the Manouche” in France and “Sinti” in Germany (Fraser 1992, 270–319). In England, the Caravan Sites Act was introduced in 1968, which regulated the so-called legal camping sites, having existed in that country since the beginning of the twentieth century. In France and Italy, the situation was more complicated because of the steady inflow of Roma immigrants from the Balkans after World War II, and the problem of migration that does not yield to integration was not solved entirely successfully, leading to the development of shanty town ghettos in the suburbs and the lack of viable integration programmes. The urgent and sensitive question of the Roma camps on the outskirts of Western European cities² is,

² See, for example, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/sep/05/rome-ready-demolish-gypsy-camps>; <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2579247/Dozens-Romas-flee-camp-50-strong-mob-attack-site-following-claims-two-gypsies-raped-local-girl-Italy.html>; <https://www.morgenpost.de/berlin/article105078565/Roma-Lager-stellt-Kreuzberg-vor-Probleme.html>; <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-25419423>.

however, a contemporary phenomenon, overlapping with the new security measures related to terrorist attacks and the increasingly xenophobic and anti-immigrant attitudes throughout Europe. We can state that before President Nicolas Sarkozy's idea in 2010 to send Roma immigrants back to their country of origin and the wave of anti-Roma protests around that date, measures had been taken to eradicate the illegal camps and shanty towns. In Sweden, the Roma were treated as refugees from communist countries and were given asylum; however, as Wolfgang Wippermann (2015, 96) observes, Roma children were taken away from their parents. The Roma situation was relatively the best in Germany, where, admittedly, while struggles to get the status of the Third Reich genocide victims for the Roma and to secure compensation had lasted for decades, the local grassroots civic activism succeeded in integrating the Sinti with the majority community (Wippermann 2015, 93; Mappes-Niediek 2012, 179–183). Now, we can observe in both Western and Eastern European countries a process of identifying homeless people living on the margins of society with the Roma. This peculiar ethnicisation of poverty rekindles anti-Roma stereotypes and hostile reactions.

THEY LIVED IN THE DARK UNTIL THE PEOPLE'S AUTHORITY THOUGHT ABOUT THEM!

The states in the socialist bloc applied comparable politics in relation to those Roma who survived the Nazi genocide (the Roma Holocaust) during the World War II. It consisted in the declared interest of the authorities in improving the living conditions of the Roma and their integration into the majority society, with a simultaneous and consistent denial of their right to the status of Holocaust victims to the point of blocking the fact of their annihilation in post-war collective memory, and silent acceptance of further discrimination. Biographies of the Roma provided state propaganda with good material for stories about discrimination by bourgeois society before World War II and worked for the socialist state as proof that social advancement of the Roma was needed and plausible (Golonka-Czajkowska 2013). It needs to be stressed that such facts as the increase in literacy rates, compulsory employment and obligatory education for children confirm that this purpose was at least partially achieved. It came, however, at a cost—the state intruded into the Roma cultural model, most of all by forcefully settling clans as well as tampering with the traditional social structure and the way of earning

sustenance. For almost half a century, the socialist state, choosing the effective strategy of forced assimilation, manoeuvred between treating the Roma as a pauperised social group and, at least at the beginning, respecting their ethnic distinctiveness.

However, as Ian Hancock states: “The Marxist ideology gave Roma a social identity, not an ethnic one” (Hancock 2015, XIX–XXX). At the beginning, the Soviet Union served as a model of the politics of recognition—already before World War II, not only had it tacitly accepted the nomadic lifestyle of the Roma (despite the settlement decree of 1926), but it also supported various forms of self-organisation including, among others, institutions of culture, such as the Roma theatre “Romen,” active in Moscow since the thirties. However, shortly before the onset of World War II, it radically changed these politics to discrimination against ethnic differences with regard to all ethnic groups in the USSR (Fraser 1992, 278). After the war, all Soviet-satellite states apart from Yugoslavia introduced legislation enforcing Roma settlement.³

From the 1950s, the Polish authorities adopted a policy of “soft” encouragement for the Roma communities to change their lifestyle: the Roma were offered apartments, social benefits and help in creating forms of cooperative business and employment, especially in big construction projects that were landmarks of the new socialist state, like the Nowa Huta township in the vicinity of Kraków, which gives the title to this section.⁴ When these actions proved rather futile, in 1964 legislation on public meetings and rallies was implemented in relation to the Roma, and compulsory registration was introduced.

In Czechoslovakia, the Roma were resettled from the poor regions of Slovakia to towns and villages in the west and north-west of Czechia, where German speakers had been expelled after the war. In Hungary, the

³ It is worth remembering that in East Central Europe, in the territory of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Roma had led settled lives since the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Nomads included mostly the Polish Roma, Chaladytka Roma and Lovari.

⁴ The title of an article from “Budujemy socjalizm,” a periodical published in Nowa Huta, the Polish socialist urban experiment initiated in 1949. Some of the first builders of this utopian township were Roma resettled from the south of Poland, from the Bergitka Roma clan (the Polish Highland Roma). Nowa Huta as an urban project of ideal social and architectural proportions had its equivalents in other countries of the Eastern Bloc, such as, Eisenhüttenstadt in the GDR and Ostrava in Czechoslovakia. The latter was also built by, among others, the Roma (Golonka-Czajkowska 2013, 189–230).

representative bodies of the Roma minority were intermittently dismantled and set up again, and the Roma were forced to settle down and take employment in state companies. The situation of the Roma was the most difficult in Romania and Bulgaria. The socialist state needed them as cheap labour but refused to grant them privileges that would protect them as an ethnic minority in general, and as an underprivileged group in particular. As a result, they were refused any state support in the form of benefits (Fraser 1992, 274–285).

The system transformation launched in 1989 in the former Eastern Bloc states sealed the fate of the Roma in the twentieth century, bringing about a conspicuous decline in their social condition. Apart from the right to free mobility that many Roma people embraced when emigrating to the West, official recognition of Roma ethnic identity was the only positive move on the part of the state. The transformation period meant the loss of stable employment for the Roma and restrictions in the social benefits system.

The success of integration during the communist period was of great propaganda significance for the state. It meant, in particular in those states in East Central Europe which, unlike Poland, retained their ethnic diversity after World War II, the success of de-ethnicising policies in relation to ethnic and national minorities. Another crucial element of the integration policy was an effective fight against illiteracy. That is why the steady erosion of the traditional cultural model (the patterns of sustenance, family structure, etc.), and of the palpable elements of culture such as, for example, language, were accompanied by superficial compensation manoeuvres that made space only for the cultivation of the most stereotypical attributes of Gypsy identity, reduced to folklore, music, poetry, dance and so on. Individual life stories of the Roma who chose the path of integration by learning to read and write, and succeeded in graduating from universities and/or publishing their own books, were valuable propaganda tokens for socialist governments. At the same time, they were losing their position in the local communities, which remained traditionally antagonistic towards any assimilationist practices from outside. The integrated Roma were to encourage their fellow community members to follow in their footsteps. These plans, however, met vehement opposition from traditional Roma communities. They closed ranks and refused to yield information about their culture.

The story of Papusza, a Polish Roma poet, is a good case in point illustrating these practices. Her literary output, delivered to broader audiences in a strongly interventionist translation by the Polish poet and Roma scholar, Jerzy Ficowski, an enthusiast of folklore and a translator, was used by communist propaganda as a model of successful integration. Papusza wrote several poems in the socialist-realist spirit where she thanked the socialist state for dragging the Roma out of the forests and civilising them. For the Roma author, it meant banishment from the Roma community for her “betrayal” of the secrets of the tabooed language and culture (Kledzik 2013, 210–211). This was also the role to be played by educational novels authored by the Roma, including Menyhért Lakatos’ *Füstös képek* (1975) and József Holdosi’s *Kányák* (1978) which I will discuss later. They performed a didactic and propagandistic role, developing stories about a great change that occurred in the lives of the East Central European Roma due to the catastrophe of the World War II and the reforms ordained by the communist state. In this sense, they also offered a departure from the monotony of the folkloristic narration branded by Jerzy Ficowski (1952) as “cheap” literature about the Roma.⁵ What he meant by this was, most probably, the use of romanticising and brutalising clichés which had clung to the Roma throughout their existence on the social margin in Europe.

Replacing the negative charge of Ficowski’s category of “cheap” fiction with the category of “necessary fictions” allows for the avoidance of an evaluative approach to the literary material written by non-Roma about the Roma. Necessary fictions represent the pursuit of equity premised on the need to anchor it in the sense of authenticity that, as mentioned above, has to be recuperated from under the layers of external influences and impositions. However, Bhabha argues, they also warrant the obliteration of the nature of the postcolonial subject, which he defines as the subject of difference. This kind of seemingly “unmediated and universal” fiction emphasises cultural continuity, constructed in contrast to the orientalisng fictions of the coloniser. Contrary to this nativist move in

⁵ Ficowski (1952) used this phrase when commenting on a chapter of his unfinished novel *Quenched fires*, which he wrote based on experiences with the Wajs family camp. Nevertheless, the Polish Roma expert gave up his fiction project and took up an ethnographic study entitled *The Polish Roma*, followed by *The Roma on the Polish Roads* [*Nie pogardzam nawet najmizerniejszą wizją. Z Jerzym Ficowskim rozmawia Magdalena Wapińska*, in: *Wcielenia Jerzego Ficowskiego według recenzji, szkiców i rozmów*].

postcolonial literature, the Roma “necessary fictions” are not, due to the obvious oral character of their culture, constructed by the Roma and for the Roma. Their “necessity” results from our non-Roma need to find a place for the Roma in modernity, or, perhaps, to explain the reasons why the rift between the Roma and the majority is so definitive. These are the stories, which, in the face of the total lack of Roma testimonies, are written for the non-Roma readership.

This constructivist impulse in the name of authenticity and for the good of the Roma is the focus of my discussion, and Roma necessary fictions adds an interesting paradox that combines the desire for authenticity with an appropriating gesture of the colonial kind—speaking for the mute or absent subject. This literature, often written by the non-Roma, and, if by the Roma, then the integrated ones who are on the outside of the community they revisit in their narratives, addresses the audience who are representatives of mainstream culture. Likewise, the forms available to the writers are deployed from narrative patterns developed in the majority culture. In this way, the disturbing lack of knowledge about how the Roma lived throughout the twentieth century, and how they imagined co-existence with the mainstream culture, is filled with narratives whose chief role is to cater to the expectations of the majority readership. We do not find in these narratives a story about the successful integration of the two cultures—rather, the Roma continue to live in their decrepit environment without a chance for social advancement, or they forget about their background and assimilate with mainstream culture.

The selection of the four novels I have chosen for analysis is premised precisely on their specific mode of narration, which effectively appropriates the Roma subject for the cause of restoring authenticity. In what follows I want to focus on the paradoxes and ironies of such a recuperation.

The first novel is *Děvčátko, rozdělej ohníček* [Girl, Kindle the Fire] (2005), which was awarded a prize by the Czech Book Club (2005) and is the debut work of Martin Šmaus (2005), an electric technician from the Czech town of Odry. The protagonist, Andrejko Dunka, is born in Polana in eastern Slovakia, in the 1970s or 1980s, at a time when the Roma were forced to resettle in housing projects developed for them by the communist authorities. His life is marked by oppression which he always somehow manages to endure. He experiences practically all kinds of heterotopias that modern society has invented: he is taken away from his mother, forced to beg and steal in Prague, he is sent to a reform

school for young offenders, which he flees and eventually moves into an orphanage. When he falls in love with a *gadjo*⁶ girl, he is beaten up and kills one of the attackers. He goes to jail, but becomes mentally ill there, which saves him from serving time for homicide. He is placed in an institution for the mentally ill and leaves on the wave of amnesty after the fall of communism. He returns to Slovakia and starts a family there. Andrejko's wife and cousin, however, provokes the non-Roma with her beauty and her indulgent lifestyle. A tragedy known from other stories about the Roma occurs—after giving birth she is raped and dies soon after. Andrejko decides to deposit his daughter in a children's home and have a fresh start once again.

At first glance, it becomes obvious that Šmaus had two intentions: first, he wanted to present a shortened history of twentieth-century Roma. In retrospective we learn about forced labour and the death camps, where the family of Dunka were transported during World War II. The birth of the protagonist coincides with the forced resettlement of the Roma to urban areas. Subsequently, a change in the political system follows: the time of thaw, the fall of communism and the end of the Czechoslovak state. Šmaus' story does not differ from other local transformation novels critically assessing “the vortex of history” which affects people belonging to the social underclass the most dramatically,⁷ additionally deepening their passivity. These people could not find their footing in the post-war system or later in the post-transformation period. The purpose of these kinds of narratives is to show that the abrupt urbanisation of East Central European communities who had up to that point known only provincial, rural life, inevitably led to their annihilation and the rise of pathology and misfortune. The second intention of Šmaus is to “explain” to the non-Roma the cultural specificity of the Roma. For example, the reader may come across seemingly obvious information for teachers that Roma children spoke their own native language, and thus that they should not have been placed in special needs schools only because they did not speak Czech. The implied reality here is that Roma children were often hastily labelled as mentally deficient, while in fact they simply did not speak the majority language. We can find empathy for children who lived in a pathological environment while the majority of society—under the influence of

⁶ The term used by the Roma for the non-Roma.

⁷ See, e.g., Stasiuk (2003).

racist clichés—does not warrant help. The author wants to show the ways in which twentieth-century history marginalised the Roma. At the same time, however, by succumbing to the clichés and stereotypes, he indicates that the Roma doom themselves to marginalisation, because in modern society they are the quintessence of otherness. Šmaus explains to *gadjos* where Roma misery comes from: yes, they are victims of history, but they are also indolent and cannot adapt; they are infantile, archaic, impervious to change, closed as a community and stubborn. In the images of endless alcohol feasts in Praha's Žižkow, the Roma live in the constant present, in clear contrast to the well-organised and time-minding *gadjos*. A sumptuous table and music are the only important things for them. Boosted by strong emotions, they do not pay attention to memory, nor do they care to develop plans for the future. This representation of atemporal dwelling and carefree existence on the margins of modernity is a common cliché that has been internalised as natural and obvious.

The paradoxical narrative situation in which the author found himself is that he uses stereotypes to construct the plot, which later on he feels compelled to rationalise and justify by identifying them as alleged Roma cultural rules. The main character—Andrejko—serves here as a good example, being a typical “beautiful Gypsy” (Brittnacher 2012, 130–145), whose life is full of adversities, and who wants to break free from his condition, but is unable to do so due to the social environment and his own nature, which forces him to chase impossible goals. Andrejko, like his literary predecessors, desires an undefined liberty that he associates with closeness to nature, lack of worries, negligence and violent mood swings. During his peregrination through the *gadjos*' heterotopias, he begins to understand that his destiny is to follow the call of the nomadic wild. He never goes beyond the cliché of the Gypsy who cannot assimilate (even though he really wants to). Not only is he not allowed to do so by the hostile mainstream society, but also by his own “blood.” His partner, Anetka, is, in turn, a stereotypical “beautiful Gypsy woman” (Brittnacher 2012, 93–124) whose true nature is to provoke *gadjos* to lustful thoughts and actions. Similarly, like her numerous literary predecessors, she keeps her distance from *gadjos* women, excels in beauty over them and despises them, as she is supposed to.

The image of the Roma which emerges from Šmaus' plot resembles Cervantes' *La Gitenilla*, where the Roma are portrayed collectively as noble savages and the innocent children of nature. This motif is also

recognised in modern stories about noble children stolen by Gypsies and raised in their camps (they are more dexterous than their Romany peers, but they do their pickpocketing job unwillingly).⁸ Šmaus wanted to convince mainstream society that the unfortunate condition of the Roma population is not wholly their fault. At the same time, however, he reproduced the stereotype of the infantile, inept, but also dangerous Roma living on the margins of modernity, whose foundational fault is that they are unable to assimilate.

Due to the use of free indirect speech, Šmaus' novel is stylised into oral narrative. We find a slightly different strategy in a Slovak short story entitled *Kivader* by Vit' o Staviarsky (2007).⁹ Here the narrator speaks from inside a Roma settlement, which radically changes the sender-receiver situation. Kivader's son, Rudko, whom the community refers to as "retarded," is to be given away to an institution for disabled children, as he is growing up and the community is afraid that he would pose a sexual danger to girls. Kivader decides to see his son off to the institution. On getting there, he learns that he cannot leave his son at that place due to the anti-Roma prejudice of the principal. On their way back, he comes across a fair where he gets drunk and loses his son. The next day he does not want to tell his wife what happened, so he lies and tells her that their son was admitted to the institution, while resuming his search. The further adventures of his life are told by Smok (Dragon), a member of the local criminal underworld. Smok decided to see Rudko off to a Roma settlement, but he confused the addresses and eventually took him to another family with a disabled child. While fleeing through the woods, Smok abandoned Rudko to fend for himself in a sudden flood caused by torrential rains. Kivader decided, in the end, to go to the police to report his son's disappearance. The police informed him that Rudko had drowned. Kivader returned home with the sad news, and a moment later his son stood at the door. The moral of the story is that the parents learned to love their disabled son and decided not to institutionalise him.

Staviarsky chooses a completely different strategy of "domestication" of this ethnic group from Šmaus. From his perspective, Gypsies are some

⁸ Cervantes' Preciosa from "La gitanilla" is the matrix of the figure of a noble child kidnapped by the Gypsies. The same motif appears in Victor Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* and in Johann Wolfgang Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. See: Bogdal, 2011. *Europa erfindet die Zigeuner*, 86–140.

⁹ Staviarsky Vit' o, *Kivader* (Vista, P. Mervart: Bratislava, 2007).

kind of funny, slightly foolish community living on the margins of society, but not posing any real threat (either to society or to themselves). The narrator—a Roma—embodies the *topos* of the clown, a trickster representing so-called folk wisdom. In *Kivader* the Roma live separated from the non-Roma. The insight into their lifestyle is rendered in the form of an amusing anecdote framed by a superficial anthropological analysis. If they interact with anyone from the *gadjo* community, it is members of the criminal underworld. The Roma camp is a site of mixed orders and endless carnival, which the author renders through a light and witty style of narration aided by the grotesque and stylised into orality. Similar to Šmaus' depiction, the Roma here are also maladjusted to post-transformation modernity, infantile and naive, similarly devoid of a sense of time, but this is precisely what makes them attractive. Staviarsky seems to say that without the Roma, the Slovak countryside would lose its colour and identity as a counter-project to civilisational acceleration. We find here the stereotype of the Roma camp as an idealised place in which people are reconciled to a simple and modest lifestyle that their non-Roma brothers can only dream of (Brittnacher 2012, 198). As can be expected, socialist literature produced a starkly opposite image of the Roma camp, devoid of sentimental idealisation and functioning as the residue of the bourgeois past from which the socialist state rescued the Roma population as a whole.

A story about a Roma camp during pre-war times has been written by Menyhért Lakatos (1926–2007). Lakatos, although raised in a Hungarian Roma settlement, thanks to the determination of his mother graduated from a Hungarian primary school and learned the Hungarian language. Because of the increasing persecution of the Roma, he had to leave secondary school and only resumed his education after 1945. After his high school exams, he studied at Budapest's University of Technology. In 1961, he received his degree and later worked as an engineer. From this time onwards, he was actively engaged in improving standards of education for the Roma minority.

He wrote ten novels, the first of which and the best known, *Füstös kepek* (*The Color of Smoke: An Epic Novel of the Roma*, 2015), was published in 1975. As for the genre, it is an autobiography or ethno-autobiography (Bogdal 2011, 389) with elements of *Bildungsroman*, in the sense that the story is developed in a broad retrospective through a first-person collective voice belonging to a group of Roma. It consists of three parts: the

first is devoted to the childhood of the main character and his early education. The second part narrates vacations spent with a nomadic group of Roma far from the family camp, during which time some initiations take place. In the third part, the main character is affected by repressions in fascist Hungary. The novel ends with a suggestive image of the Roma leaving Hungary in locked wagons going to the north.

If we acknowledge the didactic import of this novel, then it is a story about successful emancipation from a society which does not have any chance of surviving. In an educational novel, the protagonist departs from the point where he indulges in his desires, undergoes a process of transformation to become in the end a willing member of a particular social order. However, in contrast to the post-transformation novels, here the factors which destroy Roma autonomy are not modernity, understood as urbanisation, the acceleration of change, etc. In *Füstös kepek*, the Roma die as victims of mainstream culture that gradually but steadily besets them. The idealised past, which is remembered by the oldest, is the time when the Roma travelled from “sea to sea.” Life on the road was upheld by ancient laws and traditions which the community organically understood and obeyed. Demoralisation came with the onset of a sedentary lifestyle. The “Gypsy Paris” is a place controlled by Hungarian gendarmes and kept in isolation from mainstream society. The main character is the only inhabitant of the settlement who had obtained the right to education. The narration is rife with racist confrontations between ethnic Hungarians and the Roma. The ignorance of historical changes among the Roma is so absolute that they learn about the death of Franz Josef I twenty years after the fact. The border between the Roma settlement and mainstream society seals up gradually but ineluctably. After the outbreak of World War II, they lose contact with the outside world completely. Finally, they are transported to concentration camps.

The first-person narrator in the novel, is, like in Staviarsky's story, native to the world presented, but removed at a considerable distance from it. It is not only a distance created by retrospection, but also the distance of an outsider who now belongs to mainstream society, having left behind the Roma world (or what remained of it after the catastrophe of World War II). Even though his story mainly concerns the pre-war period, we can see a trait of Marxist teleology in the narration: the Roma's tragedy is an effect of the class egoism of the Hungarian middle class, and the fact that this class would have become radicalised with the increase of war mobilisation. Lakatos is, however, far from describing the Roma

as victims of the unjust distribution of wealth. The way he describes his native community has some affinities with the colonial phenomenon of mimicry. The name of the settlement alone, “Gypsy Paris,” is, after all, an inefficient imitation that connotes an irreducible cultural difference manifested as inferiority (I have in mind a similar scene from *A Passage to India* directed by David Lean, where Indian women recite street names and districts of London by heart). The narrator is, in the eyes of Hungarian society (gendarmes, teachers) a *comprador*—an educated member of the dominated subaltern group, cognisant of both cultural systems, providing mediating services to both sides, but basically working for the hegemonic majority. The auto-creative interventions which he undertakes indicate that he acquires the role of a “sahib,” who, thanks to his education, identifies himself with the hegemonic mainstream, while enjoying the respect of his native community for excelling over them. His narration is a kind of embarrassing recognition of the Gypsy guilt and a means of redemption that happens through the releasing of information about Roma life to *gadjos*, who then can turn it into ethnographic knowledge. A good example of such an intimation of insider knowledge are extensive fragments on the Roma’s relation with horses and ways of tricking the *gadjos* while trading them. The Gypsy Paris is, in his view, a site of unprecedented poverty and suffering that has nothing ennobling in it, but rather, strips its inhabitants of humanity. And while the situation in the settlement can be justified by the isolationist politics of mainstream society in the eyes of the narrator nothing justifies the demoralisation of the Roma still living “freely” whom the narrator encounters during his vacation wanderings.

Among the stereotypes that Lakatos resorts to, three should be underlined: presentism, greed and unrestrained libido. His relationship with the described community changes—while in the portrayal of “Gypsy Paris” the story is told in a paternalistic-humorous tone; the story of wandering is narrated in a misogynistic-condescending style. He changes the tone of narration probably because the nomadic Roma did not have any jobs (nor even a trade) and had lost all of their old “Gypsy virtues,” including cleverness. As a consequence, they became passive and unresourceful. The main character transforms in this story in the way typical of stories about aristocratic children stolen by the Roma, popular in the eighteenth century: he quickly excels over his peers, as a diligent pupil at a Hungarian primary school he is always the top student and the most popular boy. He views the Roma, his once native environment, as a thoughtless herd of animals. Their existence is reduced to the bare satisfying of biological

needs and disregarding of any cultural norms. There are no Roma taboos related to, e.g. nudity, a woman's body, sexuality and eating (which is questioned in the last part of the book, anticipating the *Zigeunerlager* in Auschwitz, when the Roma waiting for transportation are embarrassed to deal with physiological needs in public). The narrator acts as a typical representative of the hegemonic society: he learns to use his intellectual advantage, but his contempt for the Roma does not prevent him from sexual encounters with Roma women. Even the gendarmes visiting the camp treat him as one of "them" and commiserate that his job forces him to be in such "inhuman" conditions. The method of description of this world profoundly dehumanises the Roma, turning them into an unrecognisable bodily mass:

The rattle of an old fuel pump that was powering the aggregate would stop for some moments, and then I would have an impression that naked thighs were extending, tufts of hair would change into blurry black stains, and wheezing of the sleeping people grew. Among the languishing groaning some were taking blankets from others. Here and there malodorous gases of half-raw bread would fly away, which prompted wriggling and curses. All around I was surrounded by naked asses and relentless rubbing. (...) I was jealous. They were whirling and making one big swarm, males with females. (Lakatos 1975, 169)

Lakatos is not able to bring the two cultures closer together. Instead of integration, he chooses a model of assimilation, suppression and condemnation. Irreversibly endangered by the logos that he officially identifies with, he brings to mind Bronisław Malinowski on the Trobriand Islands—an ethnographer engaged in "participant observation" who tries to grasp the cultural uniqueness of his "objects," but who privately, in his diary, vents his racist, misogynistic fantasy about domination.¹⁰

The last model I want to discuss is what I propose to brand Roma magical realism. I would like to illustrate it with the example of József Holdosi's Hungarian novel entitled *Kányák* [King's Snakes] (1978). Holdosi was born after the World War II and came from a group of Romungros, the Roma who had lived a settled life in the territory of

¹⁰ See, e.g., Young, 2014. *Writing his Life through the Other: The Anthropology of Malinowski*. <https://publicdomainreview.org/2014/01/22/writing-his-life-through-the-other-the-anthropology-of-malinowski/>.

historical Hungary since the Habsburgs' edicts.¹¹ This is the first important difference—Holdosi represents the group which had for decades led a sedentary lifestyle in contrast to the nomads, the Wallachian Roma. The novel was written in 1978 and its fundamental purpose was to tell the story of a few decades of Roma history: from the relatively calm, although precarious, pre-war time, through the catastrophe of World War II, to the arrival of the Red Army and, with it, the onset of a new social order which the author regards as a chance for the Roma to have a better life. I am more interested, however, in the unique way in which the novel represents the Roma community rather than in this simple ideological thesis to which the stories of the characters are subordinated. This uniqueness bears clear traces of the inspiration from magical realism, popular in the 1970s in communist countries.

First, even though he chooses a narrator from outside the world represented, Holdosi tells the story of a few generations of a Roma family, relying thus on the memory archives of private history. This kind of story is naturally non-linear (based on the generational cycle), oral and non-generalising—which means, in sum, potentially subversive. The opposition between the official and private narration is one of the constitutive features of magical realism—e.g. the story about the Buendia family in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by García Márquez. Another such feature is the choice of the time and place of the setting. The family lives near the estate of a count, in the so-called Street. Historical events, at the beginning only allusively outlined, become more and more evident with the development of the plot. The initial intention of the author was to create an impression of marvelousness characteristic of magical realism, where the action takes place outside historical time and geographical place. In this Hungarian Macondo, historical and realistic events intertwine in an uncanny way, and the narrator reports them in a rather matter-of-fact tone.

And yet, at the same time, Holdosi's characters are affected by the same history that we know from hundreds of documentaries and fictions

¹¹ Maria Theresa and her son Joseph decided to “elevate” the social status of the Roma in the typical Enlightenment manner: by force. In the years 1758–1773, several edicts were issued ordering the Roma to settle, to pay taxes, prohibiting them from having horses, living in their villages, dressing in their traditional way, using their language, marrying other Roma, and even taking all the Roma children over the age of 5 from their parents and locating them in schools and orphanages. See Barany (2002, 93).

about life in East Central Europe in the middle of the twentieth century. They die because of typhoid, they die or barely survive in Nazi concentration camps, they join the army, they desert, move to the city, learn to read, find jobs in a factory, get involved in the communist movement. All along, they are essentially the same Roma as those whom we know from Lakatos' account: quarrelsome, impetuous, poor, superstitious, distrustful and internally divided. The difference between Lakatos' and Holdosi's story lies, again, in the narrator's point of view. While Lakatos chooses the strategy of a detached, seemingly objective ethnographer producing an illusion of an innocent eye, Holdosi seems to understand that a satisfactory aesthetic and ethical effect can be brought about only by contrasting various visions of history. It happens when the object being described is a group so completely saturated with stereotypes, as the Roma minority is, but also any other group that does not accept the model of identity narration imposed by European realism. Magical realism is, in this context, seen as a competitive method of expression of postcolonial societies, as a contestation of the totalising discourse of the centre, as a way of commemorating local history in a form in which it should be told before European modernity came (Warnes 2009). The validation of the "magical" ontology is crucial in this narrative mode. Therefore, the speaking "I" does not question the snakes in the crown, the Gypsy Christ or death as a bodily human figure. These are equal parts of the presented world, and they make this world less European, less logocentric, more local, folkloristic and authentic. In the end, the official policy of forceful integration articulated as a task for the socialist state wins—the novel leaves no doubt that the Roma culture has to disappear because its magical world belongs entirely to the past and has to surrender to the modernising sweep of the socialist order.

To sum up, I would like to propose a model of description of fictional prose on the Roma and addressed to non-Roma audience that I term "necessary fictions" (Table 1).

We can divide these works according to two criteria: the narrator and the narrative strategy. The narrator type belongs to the Roma community or comes from the mainstream society (*gadjo*). This is important, because the reader expects from a Roma author a non-linear narration that imitates the oral style, and, from a non-Roma, an additional usage of classical European modes of storytelling. The second criterion, the "narrative strategy," relates to a cultural framework that the narrator applies to the phenomena he describes. The narrative strategy tends to be premised

Table 1 Fictional prose on the Roma—a model

Narrator → Narrative strategy ↓	Roma	<i>Gadjo</i>
Essentialising	Carnivalisation (Staviarsky)	Magical-realist mode (Holdosi)
Ethnologising	Brutalising (Lakatos)	Empathy (Šmaus)

on essentialism, which may be observed in an uncritical replication and reinforcement of stereotypes whose role is to show an appreciation of the “Roma” culture and world vision, so that it is represented as a self-contained difference in a multicultural society and somehow of equal status with the *gadjo* culture. On the other hand, the point of departure for “ethnographers” is a belief that the Roma culture and modernity are orders that collide and cannot be brought together. Their narrators seemingly aim at objectivity and try to determine which side of the *gadjo*-Roma cultural conflict is responsible for the degeneration of the Roma culture. In this way, we obtain four models of stories which respond to the four sets of stereotypes present in the narratives I have analysed, but also in their prototypes and continuations. I suppose that each of them goes beyond the domain of literature and can be found in the general discourse of *gadjos* about the Roma, for example in non-fictional accounts such as reportage and other journalistic genres.

The East Central European literature about the Roma, which I have termed “necessary fictions,” represents possibilities of problematising in many narrative and discursive ways the deep cultural rift between the world of the Roma and the non-Roma. We can find strategies parallel to colonial and postcolonial writing in this literature, although the real subaltern remains indeed mute. This is what differentiates East Central European “Roma” literature of this time from that of Western Europe—the cultural authenticity that the Roma stands for is always mediated through the *gadjo* optics. This does not have to mean, however, that the literary way of articulating this identity is incompatible with Roma culture. In my opinion, the reason for this muteness lies elsewhere, namely, in the dramatically inferior social status of the East Central European Roma in their deepening “apartheid” (Wolfgang Wippermann’s term 2015, 109–128), which blocks their access to education, to fostering their political representation, and so on. In comparison with their Western-European

counterparts, Roma “necessary fictions” testify to, more often than not, the ongoing marginalisation of the Roma minority. Admittedly, they are also proof of the growing interest of the majority society in the matter. However, unless this situation radically improves, the East Central European subalterns will not regain their autonomous artistic voice.

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