

Kirsten von Hagen

**“L’oiseau que tu croyais surprendre/Battit de l’aile
et s’envola”.**

**Rewriting and Mythic Bricolage in the Work of
Contemporary Francophone Roma Authors**

Abstract

In the last past decades, Romani writers have tried to create their own literature with the aim of representing their minority and establishing their own language. This serves, among other purposes, to differentiate themselves from the representation of Roma in the majority society, as well as from the associated stereotypes reproduced in art and culture. With the help of the concept of rewriting, stereotypes are deconstructed, and an attempt is made to create a new identity through the creation of a new *écriture*, which both plays with the prejudices of the majority society against Roma and at the same time breaks away from them. The intention is not to create a literature by Roma for Roma, but to make their works accessible to world literature, which is done, among other things, through the retelling of myths, as well as through intertextual references.

1. Introduction

Since the 1940s, there have been increasing attempts by Roma authors to develop their own *écriture* in the mode of polyphony and mythic bricolage, which oscillates between their own minority culture and the literature of the majority society. At the same time, this can be understood as a response to deconstruct the well-known heterostereotypes, as they have existed since the early modern era, for example in Cervantes’ novella “La gitanilla”, by subjecting them to a revision, which often deviates from the prescribed narrative patterns and dominant genre specifications of the majority culture in the form of mythic bricolage (cf. von Hagen 2020, 95). Forms of masquerade, hybridisation of identities, and polyphony are narrative topoi that subvert common stereotypes in these texts in the mode of rewriting and break up common attributions and topoi. These

narrative procedures, as they can be observed in texts by Roma women authors, serve to establish a small literature that can at the same time be understood as world literature, since it breaks open and questions common patterns of knowledge of the entire world. A particularly striking example of such procedures is Miguel Haler's autofiction *Les mémoires d'un chat de gouttière (memories of an alley cat)* (2011), reminiscent of magical realism, which simultaneously inscribes itself in world literature because it takes up Virginia Woolf's well-known text *Flush: A Biography* (1933), which also oscillates between fiction and biography. Other texts that inscribe themselves in world literature through forms of intertextuality and myth-bricolage as well as a re-writing of stereotypes are Sandra Jayat's novel *La longue route d'une zingarina (The Long Road of a Zingarina)* (1978), Anina's programmatic self-quest *Je suis Tzigane et je le reste (I am a Gypsy and I remain one)* (2013) and Virginie Carrillo's poetic-dramatic text collage *La vierge noire (The Black Virgin)* (2016). Re-writing is understood here as counter-discursive writing as defined by Gymnich (2006). The analysis of self-presentations also takes into account the phenomenon that altered subjects—in order to become visible—often have to inscribe themselves in predefined images and patterns of representation “that are available to them in the field of hegemonic representation with its exclusion effects” (Schade/Wenk 2011, 105; cf. also Hertrampf/von Hagen 2020b). This tension becomes productive as in-between/third space (Bhabha 2000). Using the concept of rewriting, i.e. forms of writing against predefined images of the dominant society or subversions/revisions of representational and epistemological orders through counter-discursive re-enactment are brought into focus. The subversive functions of rewritings and their identity-forming role are investigated (Gymnich 2006). These oscillate between a confirmation of common heterostereotypes in the form of a conscious self-construction and a more or less subtle subversion of traditional forms of foreign representation. On the one hand, the works explore new forms that reflect borrowings from familiar patterns of autofiction; on the other hand, the authors attempt to develop their own form of autofiction by recourse to Roma myths and a design based on oral narrative tradition. In doing so, they often make use of familiar oppositions of centre and periphery between re- and deconstruction, borrowing from magical realism as well as subtly exploring modes of the “writing between worlds” outlined by Ette (2005).

The first author to be presented as an example in this context is Sandra Jayat, who came out with her autofiction *La Longue Route d'une Zingarina* in 1978, a text that was also well received by the dominant society in the 1980s. Recommended as reading in French school lessons, the volume achieved sales figures of more than 40,000 copies (cf. Blandfort 2015).

2. Sandra Jayat's Forms of Mythic Bricolage in *La Longue Route d'une Zingarina* (1978)

In the form of a mixture of poetry, orally transmitted stories and myths, and a novel of development characterised by digressions, this autofiction describes the difficult search for identity of the young Romni Stellina. Stellina lives with her family in their winter camp on Lake Maggiore, which she leaves before her 15th birthday. She also thus abandons her marriage to her cousin Zerko, because she sees no alternative to escape it.

The text, which is organised in a polyperspective manner, describes the difficult situation of a young woman who not only was born between the countries of France and Italy, but who, through her decision to leave the family and thus the encrusted traditions, also sets out on her own in search of a new home and an identity. Toninato writes:

Jayat's work portrays Romani women as independent characters with a strong sense of justice. They refuse to accept a subordinate role in society and take full control of their lives, regardless of the consequences. This is far removed from the stereotypical view of Romani women as victims of their own culture. (Toninato 2014, 111)

In the text, different myths and narratives overlap, including the oral ones of the Roma and those of the majority society. In the first part of the novel, which describes her long journey to Paris, there are many Roma songs and poems that construct their own mythical world, which, especially in the second part, which is characterised even more by their own poetry, leads to their own aesthetic reminiscent of "oraliture"¹. This is particularly evident in the topos of the bird as a symbol of freedom, as already

¹ "Oraliture" is a concept that was coined in the French-Caribbean context (cf. Mirville/Glissant/Chamoiseau 1994, 151–158). However, as Blandfort has pointed out, it can be made useful for the analysis of Roma literatures (cf. Blandfort 2015, 84–99). Markus Klaus Schäffauer understands the term scriptOrality,

found in Bizet's opera *Carmen* (1875), one of the most famous foreign representations of the 19th century. First, to consider the figure of Carmen, constitutive of her representation on the operatic stage, alongside the equally central Seguidilla, is the Habanera sung by Carmen and the chorus ("L'amour est un oiseau rebelle" ("love is a rebellious bird"), 1st act, no. 5). Here she explains that love comes from the Gypsies and refers to the topos of the love of freedom attributed to them: "L'amour est enfant de Bohème, il n'a jamais connu de loi; Si tu ne m'aimes pas, je t'aime; Si je t'aime, prends garde à toi."² In the second stanza, Carmen herself is associated with the evasive principle of love: "L'oiseau que tu croyais surprendre/Battit de l'aile et s'envola."³ The bird finds a central symbolic function throughout the text as an opposition of coercion and freedom.

Not only does the song musically expose the lawlessness and freedom of the "Gypsies", but the word "bohème" also figures here in a double sense of the word: as an expression for the "Gypsy", but also for an alternative way of life, that of the artistic bohème. Jayat revises precisely this topos in the form of a re-writing.

Here, too, marriage is understood as a cage, but not marriage as a whole, as in the femme fatale Carmen, but the forced marriage of a young Romni in her teens: "Pourtant, j'imagine mon corps dans cette robe comme un oiseau impossible à apprivoiser"⁴ (Jayat 1996, 11sq.) In Jayat's work, the focus on one's own body is put into a kind of forced corset with marriage, whereas in *Carmen* free love is contoured as the sign of the Gypsy woman stylised as femme fatale, but also the love of freedom of the entire people to which she belongs.

This is different with Jayat, who contours this freedom rather as a necessary consequence of various social conflicts and negotiation processes, i.e., not as a freely chosen situation, but as a last resort. Jayat describes a young Romni's search for self-determination between cultures. In Jayat,

which he coined in relation to Latin American literature, as "a specific historical constellation of logocentrism [...] that emerges from phonocentric fixation of origin in combination with a graphocentric teleology" (Schäffauer 2000, 59). All translations in this essay are mine.

² "Love is a child of Bohemia, it has never known any law; If you don't love me, I love you; If I love you, beware".

³ "The bird you thought you were catching/Flapped its wings and flew away"

⁴ "However, I imagine my body in this dress as a bird that cannot be tamed"

the bird already figures in the paratext and thus controls the reading by giving the topos a somewhat different direction. The text is preceded by a motto, a poem by Jayat with the programmatic title “Laisse grandir l’oiseau” (“let the bird grow”), which explicates the metaphor right at the beginning. The journey is already mapped out here when it says: “Laisse grandir l’oiseau/Je briserai la cage/De l’enfant tragédien/Je prendrai la liberté”⁵ and further: “Mon parcours sera long/Difficile solitaire invisible/Bavard ou silencieux/Mais je serai libre”⁶ (Jayat 1996, 5). The bird in the cage, which wants to be free and embarks on a long wandering, focuses more on the processual, the process of becoming, the search for an ego between speaking and silence, visibility, and invisibility. The dialectic of speech and silence that distinguishes Roma literature, which for a long time was characterised by mistrust of the language of the dominant society, is also prefigured here. The bird, which structures the text as a leitmotif, especially in the first part, is accompanied by another animal within the framework of animal symbolism, the dog, which, unlike the bird, stands for loyalty and commitment and contrasts with the cat attributed to Carmen, which also signifies freedom. The dog’s name, Toska, refers to another opera, *Tosca*, composed by Giacomo Puccini, whose premiere took place on 14 January 1900 at the Teatro Costanzi in Rome. In her loyalty and jealousy, the title heroine Tosca is at the same time a counter-image to Bizet’s Carmen. In this way, the animal symbolism and the operas cited create a mythic bricolage whose ambivalences also reveal the fragility of identitary attributes and subvert common patterns of construction. Thus, a sense of belonging, the community she seeks, is only ever temporarily possible for the protagonist. Belonging is conveyed to her primarily by her widely ramified family and by the prejudiced children of the dominant society.

At the same time, Jayat’s protagonist is repeatedly confronted with the common hetero stereotypes, as she is called a “Sale bohémienne! ... Voleuse d’enfants!”⁷ (Jayat 1996, 51) and is thus aware of her marginalised position, her marginalisation. In France, the country she is looking for,

⁵ “Let the bird grow/I will break the cage/Of the tragic child/I will take the freedom”

⁶ “My journey will be long/Difficult and lonely, invisible/Talkative or silent/But I will be free”

⁷ “Dirty Gypsy! ... Thief of children!”

she also realises that this stereotyping does not automatically change. Stereotypes are constructed here and subverted and dissolved by the context. Here, too, there are nuances, for the last family she meets is at the same time the one that does not send her off into the morning with encouragement, but mentions something to her with an ironic smile: “Tu voulais voir la France, la France est grande!”⁸ (ibid., 94). At that moment, she realises that nothing has changed, the longed-for arrival in what she considers France has not changed her situation. The clouds, the autodiegetic narrator remarks, are still the same. She takes up the image of life as a journey when she realises, in the form of a paradox, that although everything has changed because she has reached her destination, nothing has changed because she still feels pursued: “Tout a changé, car j’ai atteint mon but. Rien n’a changé, car je me sens traquée comme je le suis depuis Sesto Calende”⁹ (ibid., 94). The word “traquée” that she chooses in this context is revealing, as it is used for both humans and animals. For a large part of her journey, she is accompanied by the dog, Toska, who keeps her company. In many situations, the dog proves to be more humane than the humans Stellina encounters, which results in a subversion of common heterostereotypes. The focus is on his capacity for empathy (Jayat 1996, 61). He almost appears as the protagonist’s alter ego. When he is hit by a truck during one of his evasive manoeuvres in front of the puddles, following a playful impulse, the driver continues on his way without caring about the fatally hit animal.

Although the theme of being on the road plays a major role in her text, Jayat does not show the topos of the road as we know it from other foreign attributions, a conventional dichotomy of nature and civilisation, freedom and conformity. It is not the stereotypical image of the free and happy ‘Gypsy’ that dominates in majority society, but the text very clearly and differentiatedly shows the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Jayat’s novel makes it clear that this life in the roulotte has a tradition but is also linked to numerous prohibitions of the dominant society. At the same time, life offers freedom and happiness in the impermanent, but the novel also shows the high the price that the protagonist and her family have to pay for that.

⁸ “You wanted to see France, France is great!”

⁹ “Everything has changed, because I have reached my goal. Nothing has changed, because I feel stalked as I have been since Sesto Calende”.

Although the Roma in this text are portrayed in their typical fields of activity—as fortune-tellers, healers, horse traders—Jayat shows the background in a differentiated way. Her grandfather is able to heal, but, as in the picaresque novels, he also appears as a hero who partly knows how to exploit the gullibility of his well-heeled clientele for his own ends, which leads to a clear sympathy effect. For example, when a baker's wife is looking for a remedy against rats, he says he needs sugar and tobacco instead of a remedy that contains no harmful substances. It becomes clear that the grandfather never acts this way out of ill-will or uses really dangerous ingredients for his attempts at healing. Stellina, too, is later forced to play a game with the customs officials, acting cunningly like a fox. The chosen image of the fox makes it clear that this is a matter of survival, as otherwise Stellina could not possibly cross the border.

As in Bakhtin's conception of carnivalesque, what happens here is merely a temporary reinterpretation and reversal of the all-too-common relations of dominance. The journey is to be seen as a threshold situation that begins with the departure at the beginning and then continues on the road. Bakhtin understands the chronotopos of the threshold as a site of crisis and transition, both culturally and within the development of a literary figure (Bakhtin 1986, 375sq.). He also ascribes to the threshold a prominent ideology-critical function in genre-innovative forms of inversion and border-crossing through forms of carnivalesque (Bakhtin 1986, 316). The threshold obtains its function above all through the moment of temporal completion, of crossing over. As such, it can also be seen as a transgression of genre conventions. Here, too, we are dealing with an exploration of new forms, a novel of development and an anti-education novel. Above all, this novel ascribes a central function to being on the road and to the process of education, which here, however, takes place above all in oral dialogue and in exchange with nature and other people on the journey. The processual, a becoming in the sense of Derrida, is emphasised again and again: "Nous sommes des nomades parce que la seule chose permanente dans la vie c'est le changement"¹⁰, explains the grandfather (Jayat 1996, 44). This corresponds to Derrida's demand of becoming worldwide, which is conceived of as a process of a new humanisation that wants to be considered a radical difference.

Born in the no-man's land between Italy and France, the Romni becomes a borderline figure who develops a critical attitude towards the

¹⁰ "We are nomads because the only permanent thing in life is change".

way of life of the Roma community as well as the dominant society and sets her own fluid images against this space. The character participates in different groups, thus representing hybrid identity constructions. Just as Stellina herself is a speaker, she is also an object of autofiction. This process of increasing hybridisation creates a figure of cultural translation and reflection that attempts to bring the human into view as a category beyond racial typologies and cultural classifications.

“Mon pays ... C’est partout où il y a un humain ... Un humain libre à côtoyer. La terre est partout terre”¹¹, Jayat’s text reads (Jayat 2010, 102). If the stereotype of the cheerful “Gypsies in a green wagon” is part of the tradition of images of the majority society—one only has to think of Thomas Mann’s novella *Tonio Kröger*—then here the deterritorial way of life is turned in a modern way into a code of cultural multiple belonging, as it is not only found in the political program of various Roma organisations, but also belongs to the definition of the global citizen of the world (cf. Blandfort 2015, 125ff.).

The image of the border is striking because, on the one hand, it is a metaphor for an *écriture* that moves between orality and writing, between auto- and heteroimages. On the other hand, the protagonist, who in the paratext uses the Italian attribution “Zingarina” as a diminutive for a female Roma, is an adolescent in the liminal space of adulthood. Spatially and temporally, the text is also set in a liminal situation between the countries of Italy and France, in the *entre-deux* where Stellina was also born. This *entre-deux* also becomes the marker of an *écriture* that moves between cultures and also dissolves media boundaries. The text is thus an assemblage of images, poems, and dance that can be read as an expression of the search for a language of one’s own.

Like other texts by the author, the intermedial text in the current folio edition opens with a cover artistically designed by the author herself, whose imagery is reminiscent of Marc Chagall. In a later, longer version of the novel, *La Zingarina ou l’herbe sauvage* (*The Zingarina in the Wild Grass*) (2010), which will only be referred to in this essay briefly in a comparative perspective, she sets off for Paris to meet her uncle Django Reinhardt; the later version of the text also integrates considerably more of the author’s lyrical texts. The self-designed book cover of the edition *La longue route d’une Zingarina* features a woman bent forward, looking

¹¹ “My country ... It is wherever there is a human ... A free human to be around. The land is land everywhere”.

at a shrub with brown withered leaves and gazing at them with an inward, slightly melancholic gaze. She is wearing a red, long dress, and her long, reddish-brown hair falls open over her shoulders. Flies seem to be buzzing above her head, but the images could also be dark thoughts weighing her down, or even symbolise the constriction and exclusion caused by the projections of mainstream society, which cumulates in persecution. This corresponds with the text itself, as the narrator says in the context of the time of the occupation: “Parce que nous vivons dans la nature, ils nous prennent pour des sauvages! Nous n’avons même pas droit à une de leurs misérables cartes de nourriture. They veulent nous faire mourir comme des mouches!”¹² (Jayat 1996, 28). A few, smaller green leaves appear between the brown leaves. The painting points to the situation of the protagonist, who at the beginning sees the fig tree that promises fruit, referring to her happy childhood, withering away when she leaves her family. The few green leaves are to be read in the context as a signal of hope, which can conquer the dark thoughts and fears. The emblematically arranged caption “c’est ça la vie!”¹³ seems to reinforce this statement and point to the importance of choosing one’s own path in life - despite all difficulties, a symbol of departure and life. This also affirms the role of dance and music. Here, it is not the dance itself that is portrayed in the familiar stereotypes, as in the texts of mainstream society—one only has to think of Hugo’s Esmeralda dancing in the glow of the fire with glittering ear hangings or Mérimée’s and Bizet’s Carmen performing an erotic dance that is under the sign of exoticism—but an autonomous dance that directs the gaze inwards and puts one’s own mood into words: “Aux premiers accords, seules mes épaules frémissaient et, à mesure que le rythme de la guitare s’accélérait, tout mon corps s’enflammait”¹⁴ (ibid., 30). This means that it is no longer the stereotypical dance in front of the fire but dance itself that has advanced to become a medium of expression of inwardness, an art form that takes place in the signum of agency. Following Kockelman, the term is negotiated in a broader sense as “capacity whereby social actors (whether individual or institutional ones)

¹² “Because we live in the wild, they think we are savages! We don’t even get one of their miserable food cards. They want us to die like flies!”

¹³ “That’s life!”

¹⁴ “At the first chords, only my shoulders quivered and, as the rhythm of the guitar accelerated, my whole body was on fire”.

effectively transform a context of action and thereby enlarge the sphere of their enablements” (Kockelman 2007, 388). The concept of rewriting is used to focus on forms of writing against predefined images of the dominant society or subversions/revisions of orders of representation and knowledge through counter-discursive re-enactment.

3. Myth-Bricolage in the Work of Virginie Carrillo’s *La vierge noire* (2016)

Virginie Carrillo’s text, which oscillates between autofiction, novel, and performance and was also presented in a multimedia performance that combined dance, text, and music, is also about forms of rewriting that are linked to a reconstruction of memory. Life in the extermination camp is remembered, expulsion and exclusion are evoked, which at the same time take on global dimensions and include the extermination, the Porajmos in Romany i.e. the genocide of the European Roma during National Socialism. The grandmother of theatre-maker Virginie Carrillo, “mamita”, as she is lovingly addressed in the second person in the text, was deported by German rulers and taken to one of the numerous extermination camps, where all other relatives met their death:

Tu n’as plus jamais revu ceux que tu aimais. Leurs corps se sont perdus dans un feu de débauche et de haine. [...] Tu cherches dans ton reflet, l’effroi ou la monstruosité que tu peux bien leur inspirer. Peut-être tes yeux noirs, ta peau, couleur ébène? [...] Tu veux croire qu’il y a quelque part, sous une autre lumière, un pays ami. Tu reconstruis une ombre de vie au milieu des cadavres. [...] Nous étions des esclaves, privés de droit, voués à une mort certaine. Ils ont été cinq cent mille gitans en Europe à mourir à Dachau, à Auschwitz, Birkenau, Buchenwald ... dans des camps de la mort! (Carrillo 2016a, 14f.)¹⁵

The text is a mixture of poem, song, dance, novel, and play, bringing together different voices in an aesthetic of dialogicity and polyphony inspired by Bakhtin. By addressing the grandmother, the absent other in

¹⁵ “You never saw your loved ones again. Their bodies are lost in a fire of debauchery and hatred. [...] You search in your reflection, the fear or the monstrosity that you can inspire in them. Perhaps your black eyes, your ebony skin? [...] You want to believe that somewhere, under another light, there is a friendly country. You rebuild a shadow of life among the corpses. [...] We were slaves, deprived of rights, doomed to certain death. Five hundred thousand gypsies in Europe died in Dachau, Auschwitz, Birkenau, Buchenwald ... in death camps!”

the second person, a special atmosphere of intimacy, of tension is evoked, which locates the entire text in an intermediate space between the individual and the general, the private and the public. *La vierge noire* already refers to a mythical level through the paratext, since on the one hand the Roma were persecuted for a long time because of their alleged lack of religion (although many of them were Christians), and, on the other hand, some Roma cultivated their own tradition, which is commemorated in the form of the pilgrimage to Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer. Here, the black Sara is carried through the streets in a procession to express veneration for Sara, the black servant of Mary (cf. Engbring-Romang 2014). The paratext already points to an ambivalence, an ambiguity and a mythic bricolage that is characteristic of the entire text.

The text thus obeys the principle of the in-between-world writing of literatures without a fixed abode, as Otmar Ette has described it:

Ein mobiles Koordinatensystem wird entworfen, das die Orte aus der Erfahrung, die Räume aus der Bewegung, die Vergangenheit aus dem Erleben und die Gegenwart aus dem Prozess sich herausbildender Zukunft entstehen und ein bewegliches Netzwerk sich bilden läßt, in welchem [...] die Bewegungen der Vergangenheit nicht von den Bewegungen (in) der Zukunft zu trennen sind.¹⁶ (Ette 2005, 10)

Mamita, who was taken to a concentration camp as a little girl and is repeatedly categorised with various notions of the foreign Other, returns in a text punctuated by poems in italics, in a discourse of memory that links global history with personal fate. In this way, the genre-hybrid text simultaneously constitutes the history of a persecuted people, of lost memory, rites, customs. It tells of a people “sans avenir”¹⁷ as well as its own life story, which led from being on the road to a sedentary lifestyle: “Un grand cri de bonheur, de liberté”¹⁸, as Carrillo said on the occasion of the performance of the text at the Art Studio Théâtre as part of the Printemps de la Création 2016 festival (Carrillo 2016b). The text inscribes itself in an orality, an oral tradition, when it speaks of “ces contes

¹⁶ “A mobile coordinate system is designed that allows the places to emerge from experience, the spaces from movement, the past from experience and the present from the process of emerging futures, forming a mobile network in which [...] the movements of the past cannot be separated from the movements of (in) the future”.

¹⁷ “without future”

¹⁸ “A great cry of happiness, of freedom”

que l'on clame au coin de feu"¹⁹ (Carrillo 2016b). Flamenco rhythms and music are resigned here and recoded into expressions of artistic freedom. In poetic-dreamlike sequences, the past and the present, individual and collective history or memory are restaged, with the construction of time and identity assuming a separate significance. Through the interplay of several media of memory—dance, music, text—a re-reading of several myth fragments is made possible, which at the same time results in a metaisation. The immanent level of the dramatic event (characters, plot) overlaps with the situational level of the theatre (author, director, actor, stage, audience) as well as the drama- and theatre-transcending level (cf. Wodianka 2005, 65). In this way, the spectator witnesses the creation of the myth and, on the one hand, participates in the creation of the myth, but at the same time, through metaisation, the spectator is permanently made aware of this very process. This enables the viewer, like the mythologist in Roland Barthes' description, to reflect on and resignify the process at the same time.

In the theatre space, the texts, chansons, music and dance merge into a polyphonic tableau that forcefully dissolves the boundaries between the past and the present, the foreign and the own. In the form of the vectorisation described by Ette, a new experiential space of particular intensity emerges, a mythic bricolage in which old myths, such as that of the dancing salamander-like "Gypsy" Esmeralda, are invoked just as much as that of the corrupting seductress Carmen, only to be subtly subverted at the same time: "La gitane avance, visage d'ange, cheveux noirs, avec son regard froid, un bout de lune glacée"²⁰ (Carrillo 2016a, 30). The black topical hair is countered by the face of the angel, just as the now cold gaze, the icy moon superimpose it in another layer of meaning, a "glissement de sens"²¹: "Ô toi, Carmen, femme martyre, laissant des traces de sang, laissant des traces de larmes, quand son regard se perd sur des nuées et des cimes, sa liberté imagine des voyages incertains"²² (Carrillo

¹⁹ "those tales that are told by the fireside"

²⁰ "The Gypsy woman advances, angelic face, black hair, with her cold gaze, a piece of frozen moon"

²¹ "shift in meaning"

²² "O you, Carmen, martyred woman, leaving traces of blood, leaving traces of tears, when her gaze is lost on clouds and peaks, her freedom imagines uncertain voyages".

2016a, 30). In a performance in which several codes coexist according to the procedure described by Hölz, these myths are both re- and deconstructed:

Die starre Rolle der Differenzetikettierung wird ‚performativ‘ in der Weise unterlaufen, dass die Alterität als inszenierte, durch Maskerade, Travestie, Spiel, Parodie oder Imitation hervorgerufene Merkmalsbeschreibung in Erscheinung tritt.²³ (Hölz 2000, 9)

Here, too, writing is staged as the key to a successful education, which thus once again figures as a synonym for adaptation and integration. The difference here is that the addressee does not read herself, but listens to the old stories. Moreover, the daughters do not want to submit to this dictum of the spoken language, which is seen in opposition to their own freedom. At the same time, however, writing is understood as a means of evasion, of fantasy travel, which again dissolves the opposition:

Parfois, il te lit des histoires et tu l'écoutes comme si tu écoutais les mots de Dieu. Les livres sont pour toi des voyages inconnus que tu n'as pas encore parcourus. Térésa a neuf ans et toujours pas de cartable. L'institutrice ne comprend pas son sentiment d'indépendance et de liberté. Elle a sa place parmi les écoliers, elle va s'habituer. Aller à l'école, étudier, avoir de bonnes notes, jouer dans la cour aux jeux des autres enfants, et essayer d'attraper les nuages, toujours plus haut sur la balançoire.²⁴ (Carrillo 2016a, 31–32)

In the image of the swing, which is topically associated with freedom, for example, in eighteenth-century rococo paintings, but also in Fontane's *Effi Briest* or in current performance art to suggest a temporary break from the codes of behaviour, a pendulum movement connects differently semanticised spaces with each other. In the end, Térésa, Mamita's daughter, will also acknowledge reading as a means of education, de-

²³ “The rigid role of difference labelling is subverted ‘performatively’ in such a way that alterity appears as a staged description of characteristics produced by masquerade, travesty, play, parody or imitation”.

²⁴ “Sometimes he reads you stories and you listen to him as if you were listening to the words of God. Books are unknown journeys for you that you have not yet travelled. Teresa is nine years old and still has no schoolbag. The teacher does not understand her sense of independence and freedom. She has her place among the schoolchildren, she will get used to it. Going to school, studying, getting good grades, playing in the playground with the other children, and trying to catch the clouds, higher and higher on the swing”

spite all attempts to defame and exclude her as a “sale gitane”²⁵ (Carrillo 2016a, 32). Only in this way can “la peur de l’autre”²⁶ (Carrillo 2016a, 33) be overcome and stereotypes dissolved, as the following passage, which addresses one of the most powerful and oldest stereotypical Gypsy figures, Cervantes’ Gitanilla, makes clear:

Progressivement, Térésa arrête ses explorations et dévore toutes sortes de publication. «Au milieu du son des tambourins et des castagnettes, au plus fort de la danse, s’éleva une rumeur pour célébrer la beauté et la grâce de la gitane, et les gamins accouraient pour la voir et les hommes pour la regarder. La petite gitane de Cervantès.»²⁷ (Carrillo 2016a, 33)

In that this myth is only present as a quotation, a meta-mythical configuration simultaneously addresses the process of myth re- and deconstruction, which already becomes clear in Cervantes’ performatively designed text.²⁸ The meaning of myth thus becomes free for re-mythification as its performative core, the mechanism of exclusion, is exposed. What Barthes writes about the task of the mythologist also applies here:

[...] son statut profond reste encore un statut d’exclusion. [...] Sa parole est un métalangage, elle n’agit rien ; tout au plus dévoile-t-elle, et encore, pour qui ? [...] Et puis le mythologue s’exclut de tous les consommateurs de mythe, et ce n’est pas rien.²⁹ (Barthes 1957, 265f.)

As Stephanie Wodianka rightly states, the “meta-mythical renarration” is the only possible form of destroying the myth (Wodianka 2005, 61); additionally, the special form of mythic bricolage should be mentioned again here (cf. von Hagen 2006a, 194).

²⁵ “dirty Gypsy”

²⁶ “the fear of the other”

²⁷ “Gradually, Teresa stopped her explorations and devoured all kinds of publications. ‘Amidst the sound of tambourines and castanets, at the height of the dance, a rumour arose to celebrate the beauty and grace of the Gypsy woman, and the children ran to see her and the men to look at her. The little Gypsy girl of Cervantes’”

²⁸ Cf. von Hagen 2006b.

²⁹ “[...] His profound status still remains one of exclusion. [...] His word is a metalanguage, it does not act anything; at most it reveals, and yet, for whom? [...] And then the mythologist excludes himself from all the consumers of myth, and that is no small thing”.

The performative element, which makes the Other a foreign Other in the first place through the attribution of stereotypical images, is already present in Cervantes on several levels, including the paratext, which arranges different identities like cue balls on a billiard table and thus emphasises the mobile element through the masquerade of the character, who is only apparently a Gypsy girl, advanced to a “gitanilla” by others and her own performance. The identity-constructing glances of the others are also central here. If this performative element is subsumed at the end of Cervantes’ novella in favour of a codifying gesture of inclusion when the supposed Gypsy girl is established to be the beautiful aristocratic Preziosa (cf. von Hagen 2006b, 171), in Carrillo’s text, precisely this performative element becomes the core of a performance that simultaneously reconstructs and deconstructs different images of the imagination in a *glissement de sens*, a de- and re-mythification at the same time.

The two forms of autofictions by Jayat and Carrillo mark different varieties of Roma aesthetics, in which a mythic bricolage is stylistically formative. This form of rewriting can also be seen in Miguel Haler’s text *Mémoire d’un chat de gouttière* (2011), which can thus also be assigned to this form of rewriting. Like Barthes’ *S/Z*, the story of a tomcat plays with gender categories as well as with the fixed and the fluid, with different constellations of space and time. With reference to narratives of other marginalised authors such as Kafka (as a Jew in Prague) or Virginia Woolf (as a woman among male authors), the polyphonic text constitutes an amalgam of travel diary, memoir, and adventure novel, which can be read at the same time as a manifesto of ecocriticism and an appeal for mindful interaction.

4. From the Cat’s Point of View: Haler’s *Mémoire d’un chat de gouttière* (2011)

In particular, the combination of a global orientation against a capitalist backdrop with the construction of hybrid identities, which also manifests itself in emancipating nomadic writing, is stylistically formative for Haler’s text. In this context, it is striking that even the paratextual title refers to the older tradition of autobiographical writings by French authors—memoir literature—but subverts the genre in an ironic game and thus creates a space for alternative identity designs that plead for the fluid against fixed descriptions. The plural of the genre, “mémoires”, which

seems to plead for a plurality of different memories, narratives and thus ego constitutions, makes the fluidity clear.

In the process, central discourses, such as the question of the human and the animal, as they are currently also moving Animal Studies, acquire new perspectives. The text explores the boundaries between the foreign and the own. On the one hand, the text ties in with the oral tradition of the Roma, but on the other hand, it also emphasises the necessity of a written discourse, which is supposed to make the visibility of the alternative designs possible in the first place. The oral tradition continues to be cultivated by finding its way into a traditional genre of the majority society—autofiction—which is at the same time subtly subjected to *réécriture*. The form of oraliture or scriptorality is specifically reflected in the novel by clarifying in the paratext that tape recordings form the basis for the later elaborated autofiction. The dichotomy of written and oral form is mirrored in domestic fiction by the cat's dependence on the guitar-playing unsuccessful poet Miguel Haler to publish his orally communicated autobiography fixed on cassettes. Haler thus inscribes himself as an author figure in the text by resorting to the editor fiction, as was common especially in the eighteenth century for authenticating correspondences and *mémoires*. Thus, in the epilogue, the autodiegetic narrator changes to a homodiegetic one, that of the author Miguel Haler, who reports that he had no success in publishing this “*étonnant récit*”, which he only edited and smoothed out a little, although he sent the manuscript to numerous publishing houses. Only when his own memory was awakened by the voice on a CD that he received 24 years later did he write down the cat's last thoughts, which took on a testament-like character. In this way the text also resembles the original texts of this type of text, i.e. the confessions of Augustine, Montaigne or Rousseau (cf. Haler 2011, 175). Unlike these autofictions, however, the last recording of the rooftop cat—according to the editor's fiction—ends with a clear ecological manifesto, even an eco-ethical appeal:

Il me faut maintenant clore la chronique de mon étrange histoire mais je voudrais toutefois vous avouer une chose avant de me taire tout à fait : aujourd'hui, je suis complètement intégré dans ma condition féline. Les affaires humaines ne m'attirent plus du tout. Je vois, par le truchement de la télévision et des journaux, les choses affligeants que les hommes peuvent se faire entre eux : guerres, massacres et autres atrocités effroyables ... Vous, les humains, n'avez pas de prédateurs, vous vous multipliez, mais par contre vous êtes en train de massacrer et d'anéantir toutes les espèces animales qui vous entourent ... [...] Vous devenez si nombreux, bientôt six milliards et ce n'est pas fini, que vous enva-

hissez tout... Ceci vous entraîne à faire de la déforestation à outrance et à transformer notre belle planète en une immense poubelle!! À cause de ceci, vous allez modifier tous les écosystèmes pour faire tout crever.³⁰ (Haler 2011, 174)

The address in the second-person plural, the self-exclusion from human society, contrasts with the signature; and thus, the reader learns here for the first time the name of the fictitious author, Victor Schlume, a name that virtually exhibits its own strangeness due to the unfamiliar sound. The text itself mixes different registers of language, relies on dialogicity in the sense of Bakhtin. The style of the novel consists in the combination of styles; the language of the novel is a system of “languages”. Each marked element of the novel’s language is directly determined by that subordinate stylistic unit into which it enters: by the stylistically individualised speech of the hero, by the narrator’s commentary, by the letter, etc. (cf. Bakhtin 1979, 157).

The boundary between the animal and the human becomes blurred, just as the boundary between cultures is dissolved. The numerous breaks are striking: the cat remembers his life as a human being and reflects on both forms of existence, but finally accepts the new form of life by recalling his former self. A complex narrative structure that repeatedly mixes different styles, genres, languages and codes also draws attention to the difficult writing situation of the Roma, which manifests itself here once again in a re-writing that seeks its own language for what it has experienced, moving between the oral tradition of memory and the written, over-formed one of the dominant society, and thus constituting a form of self-empowerment.³¹

³⁰ “I must now close the chronicle of my strange story, but I would like to confess one thing before I shut up: today I am completely integrated into my feline condition. Human affairs no longer attract me at all. I see, through television and newspapers, the distressing things that men can do to each other: wars, massacres and other appalling atrocities...) You humans have no predators, you are multiplying, but on the other hand you are massacring and annihilating all the animal species that surround you ... [...] You are becoming so numerous, soon six billion and counting, that you are invading everything ... This is leading you to deforest excessively and to transform our beautiful planet into a huge bin!! Because of this, you are going to modify all the ecosystems to make everything die”.

³¹ Ursula Maria Egyptien also uses the example of the autobiographies of Cohen, a Jew in the Diaspora, to show how difficult it is to find one’s own language in comparable situations (cf. Egyptien 2000, 58).

Bibliography

- Anina/Veille, Frédéric (2013): *Je suis Tzigane et je le reste. Des camps de réfugiés Roms jusqu'à la Sorbonne*, Paris, City Éditions.
- Bachtin, Michail (1986) [1975]: *Untersuchungen zur Poetik und Theorie des Romans*, ed. by Edward Kowalski and Michael Wegner, Berlin/Weimar, Aufbau-Verlag, 262–506 (Russian original: Bachtin, Michail (1975): *Voprosy literatury i estitiki: Issledovanija raznych let*, Moscow, Khudožestvennaja literature, 425–446).
- Bachtin, Michail (1979): *Die Ästhetik des Wortes*, Frankfurt a. M., Suhrkamp.
- Blandfort, Julia (2015): *Die Literatur der Roma Frankreichs*, Berlin, De Gruyter.
- Carrillo, Virginie (2016a): *La vierge noire*. Montpellier, Chèvre-feuille étoilée.
- Carrillo, Virginie (2016b): *La vierge noire. Festival Printemps de la Création*, <https://www.theatre-contemporain.net/video/La-vierge-noire> [13.1.2020].
- Egyptien, Ursula Maria (2000): *Die Heimatsuche eines Heimatlosen: Der Konflikt des Juden in der Diaspora untersucht am Beispiel von Leben und Werk Albert Cohens*, Genève, Droz.
- Ehrlicher, Hanno/Poppenberg, Gerhard (eds.) (2006): *Cervantes' Novelas ejemplares im Streitfeld der Interpretationen. Exemplarische Einführungen in die spanische Literatur der Frühen Neuzeit*, Berlin, Edition Tranvia.
- Engbring-Romang, Udo (2014): *Ein unbekanntes Volk? Daten, Fakten und Zahlen. Zur Geschichte und Gegenwart der Sinti und Roma in Europa*, <https://www.bpb.de/internationales/europa/sinti-und-roma-in-europa/179536/ein-unbekanntes-volk-daten-fakten-und-zahlen?p=all> [13.1.2020].
- Ette, Ottmar (2005): *Zwischen Welten Schreiben. Literaturen ohne festen Wohnsitz*, Berlin, Kadmos.
- Hagen, Kirsten von (2006a): „À la recherche de Carmen“, in: Hoffmann, Yasmin/Hülk, Walburga/Roloff, Volker (eds.): *Alte Mythen – Neue Medien*, Heidelberg, Universitätsverlag Winter, 193–216.

- Hagen, Kirsten von (2006b): „Inszenierte Alterität. Spiel der Identitäten in Cervantes' *La gitanilla*“, in: Ehrlicher, Hanno/Poppenberg, Gerhard (eds.): *Cervantes' Novelas ejemplares im Streitfeld der Interpretationen. Exemplarische Einführungen in die spanische Literatur der Frühen Neuzeit*, Berlin, Edition Tranvia, 162–177.
- Haler, Miguel (2011): *Les mémoires d'un chat de gouttière*, Eth, Airvey éditions.
- Hölz, Karl/Schmidt-Linsenhoff, Viktoria/Uerlings, Herbert (eds.) (2000): *Beschreiben und Erfinden. Figuren des Fremden vom 18. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt a. M., Peter Lang.
- Hölz, Karl (2000): „Einleitung – Spiegelungen des Anderen in der Ordnung der Kulturen und Gesellschaften“, in: Hölz, Karl/Schmidt-Linsenhoff, Viktoria/Uerlings, Herbert (eds.): *Beschreiben und Erfinden. Figuren des Fremden vom 18. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt a. M., Peter Lang, 7–12.
- Hoffmann, Yasmin/Hülk, Walburga/Roloff, Volker (eds.) (2006): *Alte Mythen – Neue Medien*, Heidelberg, Universitätsverlag Winter.
- Knabel, Klaudia/Rieger, Dietmar/Wodianka, Stephanie (eds.) (2005): *Nationale Mythen – kollektive Symbole. Funktionen, Konstruktionen und Medien der Erinnerung*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Ludwig, Ralph (eds.) (1994): *Écrire la ‚parole de nuit‘. La nouvelle littérature antillaise*, Paris, Gallimard.
- Mirville, Ernest/Glissant, Édouard/Chamoiseau, Patrick (1994): „Que faire de la parole? Dans la tracée mystérieuse de l'oral à l'écrit“, in: Ludwig, Ralph (eds.): *Écrire la ‚parole de nuit‘. La nouvelle littérature antillaise*, Paris, Gallimard, 151–158.
- Schäffauer, Markus Klaus (2000): *scriptOralität in der argentinischen Literatur. Funktionswandel literarischer Mündlichkeit in Realismus, Avantgarde und Post-Avantgarde (1890–1960)*, Freiburg, FreiDok.
- Wodianka, Stephanie (2005): „Reflektierte Erinnerung: Metamythische Renarrationen des Jeanne d'Arc-Mythos“, in: Knabel, Klaudia/Rieger, Dietmar/Wodianka, Stephanie (eds.): *Nationale Mythen – kollektive Symbole. Funktionen, Konstruktionen und Medien der Erinnerung*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 37–66.