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**Romany Letters in the Making:**

**Testing the Frontiers of Legitimate Literature.**

**A Comparative Analysis of Four Romany Life Stories.**

Rodící se romská literatura. Ohledávání hranic oficiální literatury.

Komparační studie čtyř romských životních příběhů.

## 1 Introduction

In my thesis, I have combined the methods and findings of both Eastern and Western Romany studies, or Romology, in order to do a comparative analysis of four Romany life stories. The texts under scrutiny comprise: Victor Vishnevsky (Brazil): *Memories of a Gypsy*; Mikey Walsh (the United Kingdom): *Gypsy Boy* and *Gypsy Boy on the Run*; Irena Eliášová (the Czech Republic): *Naše osada* and Andrej Giňa (the Czech Republic): *Pativ. Ještě víme, co je úcta*. The language of production is English for Vishnevsky and Walsh, Czech/Slovak/Romani for Eliášová and Romani for Giňa.

Literature is an aspect of Romany studies that has mostly been the stuff of footnotes and has not been paid serious attention. This thesis, which is groundbreaking both in the scope of languages it covers and in the way it theorises Romany writing by means of formerly untested methodological frameworks, brings it to its forefront. Two areas are paid particular attention: the construction of Romany identity and the relation of these Romany life stories to the existing literary tradition(s), or literary field(s).

Using Judith Butler's essay on the keenly observed trial over Franz Kafka's legacy<sup>1</sup>, I have sought to illustrate the fundamentally ambiguous state of belonging of Romany writers. Just like Kafka was an amalgam of identities, who did not feel fully comfortable as a Czech, German or Jew, so do the majority of Romany writers around the world represent crossroads of multiple and often conflicting identities. Nevertheless, the existing treatises of Romany writing tend to present the field as straightforward and unproblematic. Their authors<sup>2</sup> imply that Romany writers are people of Romany origin who either produce their texts only in Romani, or conversely only in contact languages, while simultaneously including in their overviews individuals with neither the origin, nor the language.

While I firmly believe that complex identities are the norm for the growing corpus of Romany literature, I am also critical of including writers from Non-Romany itinerant groups such as Irish Travellers, the Yenische or the show people; writers whose membership would lend the subfield prestige but whose belonging is presumed such as John Bunyan; writers who assume Romany identity despite their temporally removed or non-existent claim to it such as

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<sup>1</sup> Butler, Judith. "Who owns Kafka?" in London Review of Books vol.33, number 5, March 3 2011, pp. 3 – 8.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Rajko Djuric, Ian Hancock, Beate Eder and Milena Hübschmannová.

Louise Doughty, Yvonne Slee or Dominic Reeve and writers who made the Roma their subject but their own Romany identity was fabricated such as George Borrow.

Moreover, my own sample excludes what Martin Shaw refers to as *collaborative life stories*<sup>3</sup>, that is stories which were recorded and then edited by Non-Romany editors whose input into their form and content is impossible to assess.<sup>4</sup> Contesting somewhat the discredited status of authenticity, I have chosen it as a criterion for my selection of texts which have authentically and verifiably been written by their narrators.

A consistent theorising of Romany writing has so far been missing from the discourse. On my sample, I have tried and tested postcolonial theory, African-American literary theory, Walter Ong's concept of oral and chirographic/typographic cultures and Pierre Bourdieu's notions of *habitus*, *misrecognition* and the theory of the genesis of the literary field. I have found all of them partially useful, but never unreservedly. I propose the creation of a unique theory of Romany writing that would reflect the recently oral character of Romany culture.

Due to the extremely diverse nature of Romany studies in different countries, an attempt to present a systematic overview of the predominant trends in it is made in the introduction. I have identified two major contrary tendencies: the essentialist/primordialist one, the supporters of which believe in an unchangeable nature of the Roma based on pedigree, language, culture and/or anthropological type; and the radically constructivist one, which essentially rules out ethnicity as a form of racism and promotes social categorisation rather than one based on a sense of group belonging. Although the area of overlapping is not negligible, I believe these two trends to be the ones which most fundamentally affect thinking about the Roma both academically and in the public sector.

My own standpoint in the debate is close to the circumstantialist or situationalist perspective which represents "a shift in emphasis from the primordial criteria for ethnic group

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<sup>3</sup> Martin Shaw: *Narrating Gypsies, Telling Travellers: A Study of the Relational Self in Four Life Stories*. Umeå: Umeå Universitet 2006.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. *Winter Time* by Walter Winter (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press 2004; the original German edition from 1999 was recorded and edited by Thomas W. Neumann and Michael Zimmermann), *On the Cobbles: The Life of a Bare-Knuckle Gypsy Warrior* by Jimmy Stockins (Edinburgh and London: Mainstream Publishing 2000, recorded and edited by Martin King and Martin Knight) or *From Coppersmith to Nurse: Alyosha, the Son of a Gypsy Chief* by Alyosha Taikon (Hatfield: Centre de recherches tsiganes/University of Hertfordshire Press 2003, the original Swedish edition from 1999 was recorded and edited by Gunilla Lundgren).

membership and its emotional function to the processes of group formation and boundary-making stimulated by self-interest and practical needs” (Mayall 2004: 194).

To illustrate the more general character of the two extreme forms of conceptualising Romany identity, I offer a comprehensive overview of the current schism in Romany studies in the Czech Republic, broadly represented by the constructivist Department of Anthropology at the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen and the essentialist Department of Romany Studies at the Charles University in Prague.

## 2 The Masculine Activist

Victor Vishnevsky’s *Memories of a Gypsy* serve two declared purposes: they are intended as a memoir for his family to “remember him by”<sup>5</sup> and a piece of political activism in support of the oppressed Roma. Vishnevsky negotiates his identity between two positions: that of a proud Roma, one of a non-territorial nation of homogenous Romanies, aimed centripetally and displaying emancipatory and nationalist tendencies; and that of a *better Gypsy*, emphasizing the extreme heterogeneity of the people, aimed centrifugally and motivated by the wish to merge with the surrounding *gadjo* majority. In the most extreme cases, he conceives of himself and the Lovara subgroup to which he belongs as white. These versions of his identity coexist and are utilised strategically.

Although Romani is Vishnevsky’s mother tongue, he has written his book in English. He wanted to reach a wider audience but also did not believe writing in Romani was possible.<sup>6</sup> Of all the texts in my sample, Vishnevsky’s displays the highest degree of misrecognition and symbolic violence. Although he seeks to de-objectify the Roma and “find [his] own voice in writing” (Gates 1989: 21) after the fashion of African-American writers, he readily conforms to many forms of stereotypical majority thinking (e.g. the Roma love freedom, suffer from Wanderlust, adore children, excel in music and dancing, everybody speaks Romani and has dark skin. etc.). I suggest that epistemic violence (the use of a

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<sup>5</sup> Dedication in *The Memories of a Gypsy* (2006) plus email from the author from December 12, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> With a few exceptions (Macedonia, Austria, the Czech Republic), standardised forms of Romani suitable for printing do not exist. The use of Romani in Romany-authored texts often has an emblematic function to “serve as a symbol and to trigger emotional identification” (Matras 2002: 254).

language which is not one's mother tongue and the use of writing as opposed to oral deliverance) co-produces instances of the colonised mind.

Vishnevsky's book epitomises the conservative patriarchal values of traditional Roma. It is homophobic, sexist and chauvinist all at the same time. It displays racist tendencies both towards the *gadje* as the ultimate Other and the other Romany subgroups. For instance, the Lovara are in his words "taller in size [than the Kelderasa tribe], more European-like (...) more civilised" (*Memories*: 81). Likewise, he constructs himself as a phenomenal musician (*Memories*: 22, 57, 60), a natural-born leader (*Memories*: 27, 44), a popular man who throws the best parties (*Memories*: 104, 116), a cunning businessman (*Memories*: 51, 93) and also sexually irresistible (*Memories*: 44, 52, 97, 136). There is no hint of irony and no perceived distancing of the author from his written self. This lack of self-reflection, combined with a complete absence of reflexivity, suggests amateur writing outside of the literary field.

His life story can be interpreted within the tradition of slave narratives whereby the family's incentive for their extensive travels is the escape from communist regimes. His one attempt to consciously communicate with an established genre, namely Bildungsroman (*Memories*: 136), is aborted through his extreme patriarchy which inhibits him from admitting any kind of shortcomings or mistakes, including the ones from his youth. In keeping with his activist approach, he relates to India as his imaginary homeland (Rushdie 2010: 10). But it is a homeland twice-removed, as unlike post-colonial writers, he was not born there and his link to it is tentative, intellectual rather than emotional. He lacks the intentionally postmodern approach to writing found amongst postcolonial writers, whereby "the empire writes back"<sup>7</sup>. His book thematises a sense of belonging more immediate, personal and one that he has always carried with him – it is his *romipen*, his Romany way of being.

### 3 The Gay Man

Mikey Walsh is the pseudonym of an English *Romanichal*, whose decision to come out of the closet severed his ties with his family and community. *Gypsy Boy* followed by the sequel *Gypsy Boy on the Run* is a coming-out story, the genre nowadays being recognised as a

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<sup>7</sup> Salman Rushdie "The Empire Writes Back, with a Vengeance", *The Times* 1982: 8. Ashroft et al. used it for the title of their collective monograph on postcolonial literary theory.

category by itself (Plummer 1995: 50). However, the extremely patriarchal environment and the fact that the group observes strict rules of ritual purity account for it being a different kind of coming-out narrative, whereby the issues of one's problematic sexual identity are further exacerbated by other minority concerns. For Romany Gypsies, being gay and being Gypsy are mutually exclusive. The narrator is acutely aware of his difference both among the *gadje* and the gays<sup>8</sup>, while being paralysed by a deep sense of loss for his original community.

Despite being gay, he was raised as a bare-knuckle boxing champion. He detests the normative violence among Romany Gypsies but cannot help being more masculine than the average Non-Romany gay with a penchant for campness.<sup>9</sup> Walsh conceptualises his difference in hindsight, a typical feature of coming-out stories (Plummer 1995: 83). He reads meaning into isolated events such as being dropped down the hospital stairs as a baby (*Gypsy Boy*: 6) but also into his mother's and his maternal grand-father's relative introvertedness and love of solitude (*Gypsy Boy*: 14, 15, 33). Silence is the central metaphor of the book. It stands for the coerced secrecy and the obligation to comply with the heteronormative expectations of the community. Metatextually, silence also prevails on the book's cover concerning homosexuality as the subject of the book. Silence, and the need to break it, represents classic traits of modern sexual stories (Plummer 1995: 50).

Although his particular predicament stigmatises him as a "freak among Gypsies" (*Gypsy Boy*: 175), Walsh is proud of his Romany heritage, he celebrates their insularity (*Gypsy Boy*: 66) and highlights their prestigious status among other British travellers by providing a negative portrayal of their rivals, the Irish Travellers (e.g. *Gypsy Boy*: 149, 158).

He is trapped between two identities, which qualify his writing for current or future hybridity, an "interstitial passage between fixed identifications (...) that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (Bhabha 1994: 4). Homi K. Bhabha in his theoretical work and Salman Rushdie in the practise of writing fiction conceive of hybridity in a productive sense, dismissing previous post-colonial research which depended on binary oppositions such as centre/periphery, the Same/the Other, the local/the immigrant (Musilová

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<sup>8</sup> In Czech Romany gay milieu, this is often referred to as triple discrimination, a term coined by David Tišer: discriminated against as a Rom, discriminated against as a gay, and discriminated against as a gay among the Roma.

<sup>9</sup> Similar criticism of violence and unrelenting patriarchy among the Finnish Roma can be found in the work of the Romany lesbian writer Kiba Lumberg, whose autobiographical trilogy *Memesa* (Turku: Sammakko 2011) is used in this chapter to lend more weight to my conclusions about homosexuality among Roma as depicted by Walsh.

2012: 77 – 78). Post-colonial writers have managed to turn hybridity and syncreticity to their advantage, making it the source of their empowerment:

*In writing out of the condition of 'Otherness' postcolonial texts assert the complex of intersecting 'peripheries' as the actual substance of experience. (Ashcroft & Griffiths & Tiffin 2002: 77).*

But Mikey Walsh's embeddedness in his culture and its *habitus* has an absolute power which overrides all else. He struggles to reconcile an identity he was born and raised with (his Gypsiness), which is highly homophobic, with the one he feels he was cursed with (his homosexuality). In his primordial understanding of identity, they are both given and unchangeable.

Nevertheless, despite his late education and the disregard for the Non-Romany world typical for the dichotomisation between us, the Roma, and them, the *gadje*, his writing displays higher level of reflexivity than Vishnevsky's. First, his communication with the genre of coming-out stories is remarkably consistent, following the pattern a) silence and suffering, b) need for action, c) coming-out and d) coming-to-terms (Plummer 1995: 50). Second, he employs a manner of intertextuality which shows a high degree of familiarity with the existing field of cultural production, despite it being visual rather than textual. He uses his vast knowledge of popular culture to convey and expand meaning, which betrays an ambition to position himself inside of it.

#### **4 The Witness and the Writer**

The life stories of Andrej Giňa (*Paťiv. Ještě víme, co je úcta*) and Irena Eliášová (*Naše osada*) are discussed in one chapter because of their shared, largely comparable cultural heritage<sup>10</sup> and linguistic and geographical background. They come from Eastern and South-Western Slovakia respectively but both of their families moved to the Czech part of Czechoslovakia pursuing work and a bettering of social circumstances when their children were ten years old. They experienced a similar structural change to their social existence, leaving a familiar position of relative integration into the Slovak rural society to face novel and challenging

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<sup>10</sup> They both belong to the subethnic group called *Servika Roma*, or Slovak Roma.

circumstances in their new home. Both reminisce their childhood surrounded by friendly Slovak peasants with fondness and a longing for a lost utopian world.

Their life stories unfold in an idyllic chronotope<sup>11</sup> of the Slovak countryside, which by virtue of having been shaped by the system of estates in pre-war Slovakia and the consequent mutual complementarity between the farmers and the Roma, represented an unparalleled ideal in the recent history of the Roma. The line between a topographically precise depiction of one's birthplace associated with regional literature and an imagined version of the same serving as a mythical ur-vision of the World is thin, often vague and negotiable.<sup>12</sup> Idyllic chronotope automatically lays basis for the interpretative framework of symbolic metaphor, whereby the Slovakia of the writers' youth serves as a commendable, desirable state worth returning to, if on a different level of development (compare Procházka 1993: 79). Simultaneously, it serves as a point of departure for a contemporary social critique, thus turning what seems to be a simple gesture of reminiscence into a political act<sup>13</sup>. *Pařiv. Ještě víme, co je úcta* and *Naše osada* can therefore be viewed as a particular type of political subversiveness disguised as nostalgia.

Both Eliášová and Giňa base their narratives around *vakeribena pal o dada*<sup>14</sup>, a not so formalised genre of Romany folklore, but depart from it and utilise it to different ends.

The chief principle of formal organisation in Eliášová's book are the four seasons of the year, which the author employs to present the Romany folk traditions related to them. By using a mischievous child narrator, Gužka, whose seemingly unpremeditated comments betray an adult mind and a keen eye for social injustice, the writer has joined ranks with classics of children's literature such as Mark Twain (*Huckleberry Finn*) or Astrid Lindgren (*Pipi Longstocking*). Eliášová's is a woman's perspective, which commentators generally find

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<sup>11</sup> The system of chronotopes was coined and devised by Michael Bakhtin. *Idyllic chronotope* referenced in M. M. Bakhtin: *Román jako dialog*. Translated by Daniela Hodrová. Praha: Odeon 1980, p. 352.

<sup>12</sup> Zdeněk Hrbata: "Úvodem" in Hrbata, Zdeněk, Housková, Anna (Eds.) *Román a „genius loci“*. *Regionalismus jako pojetí světa v evropské a americké literatuře*, Praha: Ústav pro českou a světovou literaturu ČAV, pp. 5 - 6.

<sup>13</sup> M. Procházka identifies three characteristics of regionalist literature produced by small nation- and ethnic groups: 1) The struggle between the centre and the periphery is transformed into the opposition of the oppressive state and the oppressed people. 2) If the centre/establishment is spatially removed, every-day habitual activities of the periphery are elevated to represent culture and consequently political opposition. 3) The liveliness and peculiarity of the region is juxtaposed against the dryness of the estranged centre. (Procházka 1993: 75 – 76)

<sup>14</sup> Tales about forefathers.



more adventurous and daring in the depiction of tabooed gender issues among the Roma than that of Romany males.<sup>15</sup> Eliášová's eye for balance and sufficient reading experience enables her to cater for her readership's needs and expectations, when she equips her (sub)plots with satisfactory closures/endings.<sup>16</sup> All of the above features of her writing combined with reflexivity, even if elementary, position *Naše osada* inside of the existing literary field.

Andrej Giňa, on the other hand, is a witness and reporter who would not bend facts in order to meet the formal requirements of literature. He is indifferent to the formal censorship of style and typography<sup>17</sup>. Moreover, by using solely Romani as his language of production, Giňa renders his work simultaneously least subject to instances of the colonised mind and most inaccessible to his readership. His approach is in harmony with G. Ch. Spivak's project of a future comparative literature in native languages that would cancel all centres and hegemonies (Spivak 2003) but for the time being, his uncompromising use of Romani along with zero reflexivity positions Giňa's writing outside of the existing literary field. In terms of established literary genres, his cycle of four stories dedicated to his father broadly relates to war narratives.

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<sup>15</sup>The fact that women writers subject traditional *romipen*, particularly with its gender connotations, to criticism has been noticed and addressed by several commentators e.g. Scheinostová 2010, Ryvolová 2014 or in a more popular vein Renáta Berkyová: "E bacht ke mande avel. O svobodnej mysli rómskych spisovateľiek" in A2 biweekly No. 9/2014, p. 6.

<sup>16</sup> The absence of a point or ending is perhaps a residuum of orality, in which – when a story is being delivered – the ad hoc atmosphere, the narrator's gestures and facial expression and conversely his audience's reactions to it, co-produce the piece (Ong 2002: 46). This is a phenomenon noticed by me or Lukáš Houdek in the public readings of Romany literature, where the Non-Romany audience are often at a loss, while the present Roma are always perfectly oriented and more often than not cheer the reader/narrator on with loud expressions of appreciation (a quality of traditional fairy-tale sessions remarked upon endlessly by M. Hübschmannová e.g. in Hübschmannová 2000: 128 ). Thus a story embedded in the writer's oral mindset can be typically ended abruptly mid-narrative, or the point can be missing altogether, or a(n) (auto)biographical note or a ready-made formula (*Te na mule, dživen dží doadađives./They lived happily ever after.*) may serve its purpose.

<sup>17</sup> The main reason behind the harsh criticism of Romany writing on the part of critics, journalists and editors does not seem to be, as would be expected, latent racism, but rather the clash of the norm/*habitus*/the way things are in the publishing industry with the unschooled and idiosyncratic way of saying/writing things by the Roma. It would seem useful to look at this phenomenon in the context of new censorship as developed by Pierre Bourdieu and Judith Butler, see Bourdieu, Pierre: "Cenzura a užití formy", Butler, Judith: "Zavrženo: jazyk cenzury" in Pavlíček, Tomáš, Píša, Petr a Wögerbauer, Michael (Eds.): Nebezpečná literatura? Antologie z myšlení o literární cenzuře. Brno: Host 2012.

Unlike Vishnevsky and Walsh who perceive the Non-Roma, their ultimate Other, as oppressors and antagonists, Eliášová and Giňa seek reconciliation and harmony with them. Their narratives should be interpreted as a way to explicate their *romipen*, the-art-of-being-a-Rom. The extreme fluidity of the term *romipen*, which encompasses the socially-determined ways in which the Roma differ from their surroundings - their uniqueness as perceived by insiders - demonstrates striking similarities with Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*. Bourdieu introduced it "to account for the actual logic of practise (...) as the product of a *practical sense*, of a socially constituted 'sense of the game'" (Bourdieu 1992: 120 – 121, original emphasis). M. Shaw used a different definition of *habitus* by Bourdieu as "an inexact and incorporated code that guides interrelations with people, objects and environments within the taken-for-granted everyday activities that agents participate in" (see chapter 1.5). Both definitions feature vagueness and the mundane. Likewise, *romipen* is an inexact umbrella term for a vast variety of human relations and unpremeditated reactions to typical situations in the everyday lives of the Roma. To seal the friendship that the Roma wish to establish with the *gadje*, they include select members of the majority into their *habitus* as *romipen* i.e. they apply the notions of Romany *pa'iv*/respect to them.

## 5 Conclusion

Both Salman Rushdie as a representative of postcolonialism (2010: 13 – 16) and Henry Gates jr. as the author of African-American literary theory (1989: 132) conceive of minority writing as a political act. It defies normative views held by the majority cultures and offers alternative histories. As such, Romany writing is a prime example. My analysis has shown that Romany identity is viewed differently by Western and Eastern Roma, whereby the former are readier to embrace the trans-national non-territorial status of the Roma, whereas the latter support it symbolically but their more immediate loyalty is with their host state. Marushiakova and Popov (2004: 81) suggest the relative integration of post-communist Roma into their countries of residence as a possible cause, to which I would add long-term sedentary status, at least in former Czechoslovakia; conversely, both Vishnevsky and Walsh have spent a considerable part of their lives on the move.

All four writers approach their Romany identity as a given, primordial fact. Moreover, contrary to the post-structuralist academic discourse, Vishnevsky and Walsh consider themselves the members of a race, both implicitly and explicitly (e.g. *Memories*: 77, 81 and *Gypsy Boy*: 66, 82). My sample of writers has shown the irreplaceable position Romani

enjoys as a marker of *romipen*. There appears to be a connection between the degree of symbolic violence and misrecognition in a particular text and the language of production, i.e. a writer working in a second language displays signs of it shaping his utterances and it reflects on the content; the writers working in their mother tongue and/or a mix of Romani and contact languages demonstrate greater freedom from preconceived Non-Romany ideas infiltrating their discourse. Vishnevsky writes in English and is most affected by symbolic violence. Walsh cannot speak Angloromani but regrets it and finds himself deficient in that respect. Eliášová's blend of mother tongue and contact languages (Romani/Slovak/Czech) suggests an early form of hybridisation, which is not a conscious effort to escape the limitations of symbolic violence exercised through language yet but rather a giving-in into natural contextual impulses. The most complete escape from the shackles of symbolic/epistemic violence has been performed by A. Giňa. He uses Romani consistently, never switching codes; it co-creates a framework which is entirely self-sufficient and self-absorbed.

Dark skin is viewed as a crucial element of Romany identity by all four writers, although their relationship to its stigmatising effect renders it problematic. A. Giňa's complete lack of reflections on Romany darkness can be seen as a sign of its essentialist givenness. In his view, the world is shaped by the dichotomy of "dark Gypsies" and "white *gadje*" and it follows that all those Romany women and men who are not "šukar sar *gadje*", "handsome/white as *gadje*" must be dark. I. Eliášová's life story supports the dark Gypsies/white *gadje* paradigm whereby fair complexion is a prestigious feature but she also employs a distancing technique, subjecting the stigmatising quality to irony, and/or conversely, identifying it with positive values. M. Walsh constructs Romany Gypsies as dark-skinned despite the generally agreed fact that the British *Romanichal* are more clearly defined by their lifestyle than their appearance. Two types of dynamics are at play here: he taps into the Lorist "true Romany" stereotype, which stipulates that a real Gypsy must be dark and he sees what he wants to see, to him the *Romanichal* appear dark. V. Vishnevsky portrays the Lovara as white. By doing this, he distances himself and his family from the stereotypical Roma, whose inferior, dominated existence he thus seals.

All four life stories are related from the position of commendable difference. For instance, Vishnevsky's clan are "taller in size [than the Kelderasa tribe], more European-like (...) more civilised" (*Memories*: 81). M. Walsh's homosexuality is partly explicated, and excused, by the legacy of his sensitive, sensible and reclusive mother and maternal grandfather. I. Eliášová's protagonist Gužka wishes to become a student one day (*Osada*: 146,

150 – 151), while the general consensus among the Roma in her village is that “studying is only good for the *gadje*”<sup>18</sup> and those who study adopt *gadjo* ways (Osada: 151). A. Giňa’s father is constructed as “different from the other Roma”<sup>19</sup> in every conceivable way: he has seen the world (*Paťiv*: 115), he was the only Rom in the army (*Ibid.* 119), he is a popular blacksmith (*Ibid.* 111), an outstanding musician (*Ibid.* 121), the best maker of adobe bricks (*Ibid.* 145) and his wisdom attracts both the Roma and the *gadje* (*Ibid.* 121).

Belton (2005: 140, original brackets) paraphrases Frantz Fanon when he says: “[T]he urge to become like the oppressor, (white) and cultured, leads the acculturated colonial subject to despise those less fortunate in his society.” While I do not believe that the authors of the four life-stories necessarily “despise those less fortunate” among the Roma, I suggest that conceptualising themselves or their narrators as different is as much an apology for stepping forward and speaking on behalf of a stigmatised minority, as it is a symptom of the colonisation of their minds.

Cécile Kovacshazy (2011: 5) poses the question whether Romany literature as a homogenous whole is an intellectual construct, a performative act or reality. Although I am convinced that life-stories written by Roma in different countries share an essential worldview as embodied in the Romany *habitus*, I also agree with Kovacshazy that it is more applicable to use the plural form of Romany literatures because “while they contain common points, [they also contain] irreducible differences” (*Ibid.*). The future project of a unique Romany literary theory may well require the fashioning of not one but several frameworks to cater for these differences.

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<sup>18</sup> “Študovanie je dobré pre gádzov, dievka moja, a nie pre Rómov (...).“ (*Osada*: 151)

<sup>19</sup> “O Andrišis hino aver sar okla Roma.” (*Paťiv*: 111)

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