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EMOTIONAL EXCESS AND RACIALISATION IN THE 19th-CENTURY ROMANIAN NOVEL¹

The Roma have been present in the Romanian provinces for many centuries, ever since medieval times². Their history has been shaped and irreversibly determined by centuries of slavery, exploitation, and marginalisation, which still impact their community and their treatment today. So it should come as no surprise that the Roma have also been part of Romanian literary history, serving as the protagonists of the first Romanian epic, *Țiganiada* [*The Gypsyiad*] by Ion Budai-Deleanu, written in the early 19th century, and continuing to appear in poetry, dramatic texts, and prose on a fairly regular basis. However, given the history of Roma oppression, it is the *manner* of their representation in fiction that needs studying, especially when working with a corpus of Romanian-language texts written by non-Roma authors whose views on race and ethnicity often reflected the dominant (pseudo)scientific and cultural dogma of their time. Specifically, an analysis informed by critical race theory reveals the ways in which Romanian literature fostered, challenged, or even explicitly addressed the racialisation of Roma bodies, labour, and culture throughout the centuries, creating a network of racist and anti-racist tropes which remain relevant to this day.

In this article, I discuss the nineteenth-century Romanian novel and its depiction of Roma affect. I use the Digital Museum of the Romanian Novel (MDRR1)³, which contains approximately 90% of all the novels published between 1845 and 1900⁴, selecting those texts in which Roma characters express their emotions in response to their circumstances and, in doing so, are given very specific positions and roles in a racialised social hierarchy. Thus, a distant reading of the MDRR1 with a particular focus on the Roma presence inevitably highlights the political nature of affect, which lends itself to oppressive structures of power and emancipatory projects alike. In Ben Anderson and Paul Harrison's words, "it is

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² Viorel Achim, *The Roma in Romanian History*, Budapest, CEU Press, 2004, p. 13.

³ Ștefan Baghiu et al., *Muzeul Digital al Romanului Românesc: secolul al XIX-lea* [*The Digital Museum of the Romanian Novel: The 19th Century*], Sibiu, Complexul Național Muzeal ASTRA, 2019.

⁴ Andreea Coroian-Goldiș et al., "Arhivele romanului românesc și posibilități de digitizare" ["The Archives of the Romanian Novel and Digitization Possibilities"], *Transilvania*, 2019, 10, p. 4.

often through affect that seemingly entrenched relations are interrupted, changed or solidified”⁵. This is especially true of ethnic or racial prejudice and its naturalisation, which notoriously relies on the dialectic of fear and desire: from Frantz Fanon and Homi Bhabha to Sarah Ahmed and James Thomas, the following analysis of Roma representation draws on theorists who understood the centrality of affect in “the production and maintenance of racial order”⁶. At the same time, while postcolonial studies and critical race theory have shown time and again that systemic oppression depends on and weaponizes the feelings of a dominant class towards a subaltern group – fear and desire, anxiety, hatred, disgust (to name but a few) – the feelings of the oppressed have also been used to prove their supposed subhuman nature, their unpredictability, antisocial behaviour, excessive sexuality, or irreparable backwardness.

The racialisation of affect has long been a double process, in which the Other is cast as both “the ‘source’ of our feelings”⁷ (the cause of racist rage, for instance) *and* as a threat to civilisation and order through their own “improper” or dangerous emotions: the racialised subject is simultaneously punished for their own emotional lives *and* for the emotional reactions of their oppressor. In the following paragraphs, I keep in mind that these two forms of victimisation are mutually constitutive, so that the emotions of a dominant class and the emotions of the marginalised can only be studied together. However, I focus on the depiction of Roma affect, which occurs more rarely and is always ideologically connoted. In the (mostly) short episodes in which Romani characters appear, speak, and convey their feelings, they also confirm or disprove the nineteenth-century hegemonic narrative regarding their humanity (or lack thereof), their presumed inferiority, and their natural rights: as readers, we must pay attention to who is *able* to feel and who is *allowed* to feel in these novels; whose emotions are recorded by the text and consequential to the plot; and, finally, what kind of affects are experienced by the Romani characters as opposed to their Romanian counterparts.

Ethnic Representation in the Novel

In recent years, quantitative analyses of the MDRR1 have shown that approximately 10% of the archived novels have characters belonging to an ethnic minority⁸. Fewer than 90 novels out of 157⁹ involve or mention Romani people,

⁵ Ben Anderson and Paul Harrison, *Taking-Place: Non-Representational Theories*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2010, pp. 16-17.

⁶ According to James M. Thomas, “Affect and the Sociology of Race: A Program for Critical Inquiry”, *Ethnicities*, 14, 2014, 1, pp. 73-74, contemporary sociology still lacks “an affective program for the study of race”, although postcolonial studies and research into “affective landscapes” have provided a solid foundation for its development.

⁷ Sarah Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2014, p. 1.

⁸ Vlad Pojoga et al. “Diversitate identitară în romanul românesc (1844–1932)” [“Diversity and Identity in the Romanian Novel (1844–1932)”], *Transilvania*, 2020, 10, p. 35.

with more than 600 occurrences¹⁰ of the word “Gypsy” or its derivatives¹¹. While the Roma do represent the second most present category¹², their novelistic depiction does not measure up to the data provided by the 1930 General Census, where 1.5% of the respondents declared they were of Romani origin¹³. We can only speculate about the causes of this low degree of representativity, but one hypothesis has to do with the nation-building function of the novel in the 19th century, as famously discussed by theorists such as Benedict Anderson or Edward Said. Not only does Anderson describe the novel as a “device for the presentation of simultaneity”, of instantaneous kinship with the entire body politic of the nation, “moving calendrically through homogenous, empty time”¹⁴, but Said argues that the “monumental” realist novels produced by the European imperial powers enshrined a hegemonic¹⁵, unitary worldview and mapped “otherness” by interpreting it through the lens of imperialism¹⁶.

In the Romanian case, the novel might not have “spoken” for the empire, but the project of nation-building certainly occupied the second half of the 19th century, as did the gradual transition from civic to ethnic nationalism¹⁷. On the one hand, Romanian Romanticism and the construction of a “national identity” were mutually constitutive phenomena, because, as Paul Cornea writes, “while the ideal of the Enlightenment was a cosmopolitan society in which civilizational unity was more important than cultural differences, the ideal of Romanticism was to unearth and magnify the elements that set human groups apart”¹⁸. On the other hand, the

⁹ Coroian-Goldiș et al., „Arhivele romanului românesc”, p. 6.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 36.

¹¹ The word “Gypsy” is a pejorative term, employed historically to place the Roma in a subhuman category. In this text, I only use it when quoting nineteenth-century sources, novel fragments, or when explaining my methodology, given that the words “Roma” and “Romani” do not appear in the MDRR1. On the topic of terminology in Roma studies, see Alexandra Oprea and Margareta Matache, “Reclaiming the Narrative: A Critical Assessment of Terminology in the Fight for Roma Rights”, in Ismael Cortés Gómez and Markus End (eds.), *Dimensions of Antigypsyism in Europe*, European Network Against Racism and Central Council of German Sinti and Roma, 2019, pp. 276-299.

¹² Pojoga et al., „Diversitate identitară”, p. 37.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 35.

¹⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London & New York, Verso, 2006, pp. 25-26.

¹⁵ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, New York, Vintage Books, 1994, p. 62.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

¹⁷ Diana Mishkova, “Introduction: Towards a Framework for Studying the Politics of National Peculiarity in the 19th Century”, in Diana Mishkova (ed.), *We, the People. Politics of National Peculiarity in Southeastern Europe*, Budapest & New York, CEU Press, 2009, pp. 10-13. See also Balázs Trencsényi, “History and Character: Visions of National Peculiarity in the Romanian Political Discourse of the 19th Century”, in Mishkova (ed.), *We, the People*, p. 154.

¹⁸ Paul Cornea, *Originile romantismului românesc. Spiritul public, mișcarea ideilor și literatura între 1780–1840 [The Origins of the Romanian Romanticism. Public Spirit, Intellectual Trends and Literature Between 1780 and 1840]*, București, Cartea Românească, 2008, p. 446. Unless otherwise stated, the quotations are translated into English by the author of this paper.

importation of Western novel subgenres into Romanian literature (the mystery novel, the historical novel, the sentimental novel etc.) also implied the fictional construction of the nation in a manner similar to that theorised by Anderson, with an added focus on ethnicity as a marker of national belonging: given the semi-peripherality of Eastern European states, their national movements were “susceptible to more than just defining the nation in cultural terms”, making “inner freedom” and “democratic rule” appear as dependent on “external (irredentist and ethnic) nationalism”¹⁹. Hence the partial erasure of Romani people from the national struggles portrayed in the novel – from revolutions and uprisings to the process of “modernisation”. However, when they do make an appearance, mostly as episodic and nameless characters, their presence and the stereotypes associated with Roma emotion are fundamentally linked to the nineteenth-century vision of nationhood, either reinforcing or challenging it.

Evolutionism, Affect Theory, and the Racialisation of Emotion in the 19th Century

In the second half of the 19th century, as the theory of evolution was gaining momentum and credibility in the international scientific community, it prompted debates (such as the question of monogenesis vs. polygenesis) that also had a significant impact on the understanding of race, racial hierarchies, and the role played by sensation, sensitivity, and emotion in the history of human progress. For instance, in 1867, Charles Darwin conducted a survey regarding the emotional behaviour of non-white people and used the (predictably biased) observations of his scientific correspondents around the world to prove the “universality of the emotions (even among animals)” and to “deliver one more blow to polygenist accounts of human development”²⁰. In their turn, ethnologists and biologists such as James Cowles Prichard, Petrus Camper and Cuvier classified the human races based on a ratiocination between sensation and thought, associating children, women, and the “lower” races due to their “sensitive and emotional” nature caused by the development of the senses to the detriment of their mental capacities²¹. Finally, the neo-Lamarckian American school generated a new theory of evolution based on the relationship between sensation and sentiment, in which progress was achieved through the “self-control” of “intelligent selection” and “the faculty of sentiment appeared in the most advanced species and races” as a result of physical impressions²². For Edward Drinker Cope and his peers, there was even a hierarchy with refined emotional responses (sentiments) at the top and impulsive emotions,

¹⁹ Mishkova, “Introduction”, p. 11.

²⁰ Zachary Samalin, “Affect Theory’s Colonial Sources”, *Victorian Studies*, 64, 2022, 4, p. 565.

²¹ Richard McMahon, *The Races of Europe: Anthropological Race Classification of Europeans 1839–1939*, Florence, European University Institute, 2007, p. 118.

²² Kyla C. Schuller, “Taxonomies of Feeling: The Epistemology of Sentimentalism in Late-Nineteenth-Century Racial and Sexual Science”, *American Quarterly*, 64, 2012, 2, p. 278.

typical of underdeveloped peoples²³ further down. Ultimately, the entire cult of civilisation, “the most ubiquitous ideological justification for empire, for capitalism, and really for any and all forms of modern domination”²⁴ relied heavily on the racialised interpretation of evolutionism and on a colonial theory of affect that emerged before the turn of the century.

In Romania, the popularisation of science and especially the theory of evolution went hand in hand with “the diffusion of racial classification theories”²⁵. As amply documented by Cosmin Koszor-Codrea, the public lectures given at the Romanian Athenaeum in Bucharest by naturalists and intellectuals, as well as the printed versions of these presentations²⁶ often promoted controversial theories about gender and racial hierarchies based on ideas borrowed from Darwin, Lamarck, Blumenbach, or Cuvier, among others. The “struggle for existence” and “the survival of the fittest” became arguments for racial “amelioration”²⁷, while pragmatic measures against national “degeneration” were proposed as early as the 1870s by the likes of Mihail Petrini-Galatz²⁸. Consequently, by the beginning of the 20th century, scholars such as Victor Babeş and Gheorghe Marinescu would openly discuss the possibility of “perfect races” and the imperative of “the racial betterment of humanity” by practical means²⁹, paving the way for the interwar eugenic project and its ethno-racial definition of the Romanian nation³⁰. Racial thinking eventually permeated all fields of knowledge and discourse, and literature was no exception. Not only was the national body politic often represented as homogenous, excluding other ethnicities or casting them in minor, peripheral roles, but literary and cultural criticism also metabolised the evolutionary model and its racial logic. For example, Titu Maiorescu, arguably the most important Romanian critic of the 19th century, gave lectures invoking Darwin’s work and Paul Broca’s craniometric theory to prove that an underdeveloped nation can be recognised by its lesser cranial capacity³¹. As Teodora Dumitru recently wrote, he also criticised the use of diminutives in poetry, considering them to be a “disgusting” practice and “a form of ‘linguistic decadence’ and, at the same time, of ethnic corruption”

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 282.

²⁴ Samalin, “Affect Theory”, p. 562.

²⁵ Cosmin Koszor-Codrea, “Authorities of Erudition: Reshaping the Categories of Race and Gender in Romania, 1850–1900”, *Revista de Antropologie Urbana*, VIII, 2020, 15, p. 17.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 20.

²⁷ Cosmin Koszor-Codrea, *The Word of Science: Popularising Darwinism in Romania, 1859–1918*, Diss. Oxford Brookes University, 2021, p. 134.

²⁸ Koszor-Codrea, “Authorities of Erudition”, p. 21.

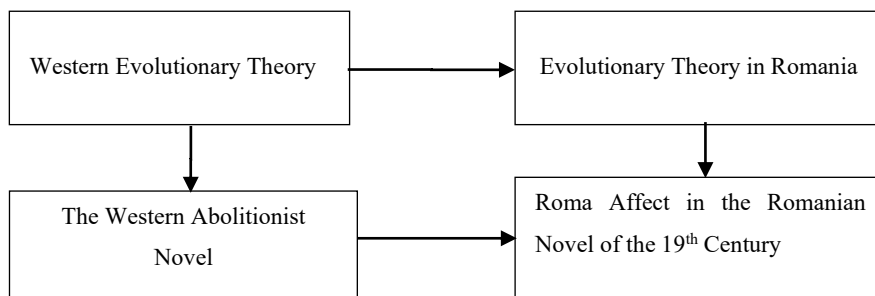
²⁹ Koszor-Codrea, *The Word of Science*, p. 160.

³⁰ Marius Turda, “The Nation as Object: Race, Blood, and Biopolitics in Interwar Romania”, *Slavic Review*, 66, 2007, 3, p. 415.

³¹ Koszor-Codrea, “Authorities of Erudition”, pp. 22–23.

associated with the Roma³². Likewise, Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea's theory of the genius casually presented the artist as a superior human being in the same sense that "the white race is superior" to other races through "cognitive development"³³.

In this article, I argue that, as Romanian scientific and racial thought was increasingly impacted by Western evolutionism, the ethnic landscape of the nineteenth-century novel also incorporated the local understanding of race. This contamination was caused by the authors often being involved in politics, activism, or the management of cultural institutions (e.g., V.A. Urechia was a co-founder of the Athenaeum), as well as by the adoption of evolutionism in literary criticism and historiography. At the same time, however, the Romanian novel was being shaped by a specifically literary epistemology, namely the ideological configuration and the racialised worldview of American and British abolitionist narratives. Not only were they directly informed by evolutionist theories³⁴ and racial thinking³⁵, but, as will become apparent in the following sections, their translation into Romanian³⁶ and the spreading of Western abolitionist ideas are likely to have influenced the local novelistic depiction of Romani characters and their affective lives:



³² Teodora Dumitru, "About the Mechanistic-Scientist Origins of the First Theory of Poetry in the History of Romanian Literature: The Influence of Schopenhauer and Herbart on Titu Maiorescu", in Maria Sass, Ovio Olaru, Andrei Terian (eds.), *The German Model in Romanian Culture*, Berlin, Peter Lang, 2023, p. 47.

³³ Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea, "Tendenționismul și tezismul în artă" ["The Role of Tendency and Thesis in Art"], in *Studii critice [Critical Approaches]*, vol. I. Edited by George Ivașcu, București, Editura pentru Literatură, 1967, p. 120.

³⁴ See Kyla Schuler's work on the connection between sentimentalism and biopolitics: "The Biology of Intimacy: Lamarckian Evolution and the Sentimental Novel", *American Literature*, 92, 2020, 3, pp. 457-484.

³⁵ Josephine Donovan, "A Source for Stowe's Ideas on Race in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*", *NWSA Journal*, 7, 1995, 3, pp. 24-34; Arthur Riss, "Racial Essentialism and Family Values in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*", *American Quarterly*, 46, 1994, 4, pp. 513-544.

³⁶ See Ștefan Baghiu, "Translations of Novels in the Romanian Culture during the Long Nineteenth Century (1794–1914): A Quantitative Perspective", *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory*, 6, 2020, 6, pp. 101-102.

Corpus Selection and Findings

For the purpose of this analysis of Roma affect, I propose a simple distant reading of the Romanian novels published between 1845 and 1900, conducting complex word searches in the MDRR1 to identify the episodes involving Romani characters. Given that the nineteenth-century vocabulary regarding the Roma was generally comprised of pejorative terms, my search focused on the following words: “țigan” (Gypsy) with its variants (“țigani”, “țigancă”, “țigănesc”, “țigănuș/ țigăncușă”, “țigănie” etc.); “șatră” and “lae” (a group of Roma living together, usually as nomads or in temporary settlements), “lăutar” (a musician who was not classically trained and who plays traditional instruments and songs at weddings, village dances, etc.) with its variants (the plural “lăutari”); finally, pejorative terms such as “baragladină” (a possible reference to “being hungry”), “aramină” (thief), “băhanie” (ugly person/creature), “gașper” (a possible reference to the Christian tradition of the three wise men from the Orient), “faraon” (pharaoh), “balaur” (dragon), “cioară” or “cioroi” (crow). Fewer than 5 novels included the first 5 ethnophaulisms, 6 included the term “balaur” (especially N.D. Popescu’s outlaw novels), and 9 used the term “cioară”. Fewer than 5 novels name a group of Roma “șatră” or “lae”, and 58 novels mention “lăutari”. While only a dozen of these present the musicians as Roma, it is a well-known fact that “lăutari” were and still are “Romani performers who have long monopolized traditional music-making, especially for Romanian society” and who were originally enslaved in Wallachia and Moldavia.³⁷ The search for the term “țigan” and its derivatives rendered the highest number of results: 85 novels and 644 occurrences. Only a few of these turned out to be references to placenames (“Țigănești”) or were misidentified because of the transition alphabet.

After this initial phase, a second selection process involved choosing those episodes which portray the Roma expressing emotions. As a result, the actual corpus of the analysis is much slimmer: out of over 100 novels identified through complex lexical searches, only 38 remain, published between 1855 (*Manoil* by Dimitrie Bolintineanu) and 1895 (*Iubita* [*The Beloved*] by Traian Demetrescu). The discrepancy is noticeable: less than half of the novels mentioning Romani people show them as capable of feeling and acting on their feelings, i.e., less than 25% of the 157 novels in the MDRR1. For example, in Nicolae Filimon’s *Ciocoii vechi și noi* [*Upstarts Old and New*] from 1862 there are 31 occurrences of “țigan” and its

³⁷ Margaret Beissinger, “‘Lăutar Space’: Marriage, Weddings, and Identity among Romani Musicians in Romania”, *Martor*, 2020, 25, p. 97. Also, see Mihail Kogălniceanu’s speech given at the Romanian Academy in 1891 (“Dezrobirea țiganilor, ștergerea privilegiilor boierești, emanciparea țăranilor” [“The Liberation of the Gypsies, the Abolition of the Boyars’ Privileges, and the Emancipation of the Peasants”]), in *Scieri literare, istorice, politice* [*Literary, Historical, Political Writings*]. Edited by Geo Șerban, București, Editura Tineretului, 1967, p. 249): “The rich boyars even had music rooms and ensembles of lăutari. All these functions were fulfilled by the Gypsies”.

derivatives. However, the Roma who appear in the story have marginal roles, being addressed rather than speaking and being the object of white affect rather than expressing their own emotions. Especially in those scenes where the Roma are attacked and abused, the absence of any emotional response is conspicuous. In Filimon's novel, when a Romani man is treated poorly, yelled at, and called a "crow", he simply "retreats", whereas the master is described as "upset"³⁸: elsewhere in the book, an old Romani woman is threatened by a character described as angry and impatient, but she has no reaction whatsoever³⁹. Similar narrative choices are made in Ionu C. Pañu's 1890 *Liniştea casei* [*Domestic Peace*]⁴⁰ and in N.D. Popescu's 1893 *Radu Anghel*⁴¹, with the narrative voice recording the emotions of the abusive master but not the victim's. As for the 38 novels that did make the list, their Romani characters are, with very few exceptions (such as V.A. Urechia's 1855 *Coliba Măriucăi* [*Măriuca's Hut*] or Ioan M. Bujoreanu's 1862 *Mistere din Bucureşti* [*Mysteries of Bucharest*]), episodic: they are often nameless and silent, they sometimes appear as a collective character rather than as individuals, and their actions rarely influence the plot itself. It comes as no surprise that their *emotions* seem to matter just as little.

But there is more to this erasure. In Wallachia and Moldavia, the Roma were enslaved and exploited for five centuries, from the fourteenth century to their emancipation in 1856. They were turned into a dependent, economically vulnerable and "subaltern" population, as defined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: people "whose identity is their difference"⁴² and who, as victims of political and economic marginalisation, as well as "epistemic violence"⁴³, are not allowed any agency or self-representation; they are mere "pointer[s] to an irretrievable consciousness"⁴⁴ which gets lost in the utterances of the dominant class. In the Romanian case, the delayed manifestation of Roma agency means that, in the 19th century, even the abolitionist discourse belonged to a white, Romanian majority speaking in the name of those supposedly "lacking" group consciousness. When it comes to the novel, the absence of Roma affect from the vast majority of nineteenth-century narratives implies either a racial hierarchy, in which the Roma are incapable of experiencing emotion (or at least complex, refined emotions), or the irrelevance of their affective lives. The latter interpretation tells a clearly ethnocentric story of

³⁸ N. Filimon, *Ciocoii vechi și noi. Roman social* [*Upstarts Old and New*] (1862). Interpreted by George Baiculescu, Craiova, Scrisul Românesc, 1934, p. 51. All the novels referenced in this text are included in the MDRR1 archive, cited above.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 223.

⁴⁰ Ionu C. Pañu, *Liniştea casei* [*Domestic Peace*], Braşov, Tipografia A. Mureşianu, 1890, p. 157.

⁴¹ N.D. Popescu, *Radu Anghel*, Braşov, Editura Librăriei Ciurcu, 1893, p. 57.

⁴² Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds.), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory. A Reader*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1994, p. 80.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 78.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 82.

literary nation-building: the novel might help construct a homogenous temporality and a sociological organism akin to the nation, as Anderson believed, but the Roma are certainly not seen as part of the process of national becoming, as recorded or even enacted by the Romanian novel.

What Do the Roma Feel? Part I: Anger and Violence

When Roma affect does get a mention, there are a few recurring tropes which dominate its depiction: the Roma proclivity for *violence*, coupled with anger, blood lust, and lack of self-control (in at least 15 out of 38 novels); the loud, disruptive presence of Romani people, who express their emotions by *whining* and *complaining* (in more than 20 novels); finally, their submissive behaviour (in more than a dozen novels) or even *affectionate loyalty and gratitude* towards the white master (in 10 out of 38 novels).

To begin with, most episodes of physical violence perpetrated by the Roma are noticeably devoid of any heroism or idealism: the Roma are described as “devils” and are the first to start a fight⁴⁵; a “Black Gypsy man” has his drink stolen and reacts violently⁴⁶, just like the majority of the Roma attacking a random Romanian man who enters their camp⁴⁷; a couple walking in a public garden meets with a group of Romani labourers who “raise their clubs to strike us” for no apparent reason⁴⁸; when a Romani woman is left by her Romanian lover, “her anger fires up and her savage nature shows itself with all its might” as she tries to stab him to death⁴⁹. Similarly, the outlaw Fulger in one of Ilie Ighel’s novels is the opposite of a selfless Robin Hood, being portrayed as casually cruel and depraved⁵⁰. Even when the initiative belongs to someone else, the Roma are chosen as the perfect perpetrators of any crime, being tasked with organising an uprising in which the children of the master’s family are beaten to death and the mistress is abused. Although they appear as nameless instruments used by the Romanian protagonist, at no point do they question their mission⁵¹. At the same time, the tension between violence and cowardice governs the behaviour of several Romani characters: some refrain from attacking their interlocutors because they are afraid (eyeing their weapons⁵², changing their minds and being mocked for it⁵³) or wait until the

⁴⁵ Al. Pelimon, *Jidovul cămătar* [*The Jewish Moneylender*], București, Tip. Stephan Rassidescu, 1863, p. 45.

⁴⁶ Th. Myller, *În Iassy* [*In Iassy*], București, Tip. Ioanovici, 1871, p. 18

⁴⁷ Iacob Negruzzi, *Mihai Vereanu*, Iași, Tipografia Națională, 1873, pp. 373-374.

⁴⁸ N.D. Popescu, *Amasoana de la Rachova* [*The Amazonian Woman from Rachova*], București, Tipografia Frații Ioanițiu, 1879, p. 29.

⁴⁹ N.D. Xenopol, *Brazi și putregaiu* [*Fir Trees and Rot*], București, Leon Alcalay, 1880, p. 164.

⁵⁰ Ilie Ighel, *Tâlharul Fulger* [*The Outlaw Fulger*], București, Editura Librăriei H. Steinberg, 1892, p. 112.

⁵¹ E. Schwarzfeld, *Gângavul* [*The Stammerer*], București, Tipografia ziarului *Egalitatea*, 1895, p. 141.

⁵² Gr. Granda, *Vlășia sau ciocoi noi* [*Vlășia or the New Upstarts*], București, Tipografia Govora, 1887, p. 254.

situation is no longer dangerous (e.g., Stoica the Roma attacking Scatiu's dead body in *Tănase Scatiu*⁵⁴); conversely, the unnamed Romani man in Panait Macri's *Crima misterioasă din Calea Mogoșoaiei* [*The Mysterious Murder in the Calea Mogoșoaiei Boulevard*] agrees to carry out a murder after being threatened and coerced⁵⁵. Throughout these novels, Roma anger and aggression are taken for granted as natural phenomena and instinctual responses, relegating an entire ethnicity to an intermediary evolutionary stage between animality and (civilised) humanity⁵⁶. Nowhere is this as striking as in the case of characters who are otherwise described as cunning and calculated, such as Gheorghe, the “terrifying Gypsy” from *In Iassy*. The fact that a skilled manipulator is the victim of his own passions and violent outbursts brings to mind Homi Bhabha's definition of the stereotype as necessarily contradictory⁵⁷ and confirms the ideological role of racialised emotion. In these episodes, not only is Roma violence rarely explained or contextualised, but it is also used as a pretext, having no influence on the actual trajectory of the characters involved. For example, the mob attack in *Amasoana de la Rachova* gives the white hero the opportunity to prove his bravery in front of a young woman⁵⁸. Moreover, it is the same assumption that the Roma are naturally inclined to commit violent acts that seems to justify their labour as executioners. In those novels which deploy multiple racist clichés, such as B.P. Hasdeu's 1864 *Ursita* [*Fate*], Romani executioners do not even shy away from killing other Roma⁵⁹.

The most important implication of this emotional landscape, in which the Roma appear as unable to control their violent impulses, is that they are the chaotic and destructive elements of a society trying to find cohesion and a stable national identity. Thus, a significant number of nineteenth-century Romanian novels replicate both the Orientalist worldview according to which non-white populations are incapable of self-governance and need to be taught self-control and good

⁵³ Duiliu Zamfirescu, *Viața la țară* [*Love in the Countryside*], București, Carol Müller, 1898, pp. 193-194.

⁵⁴ Duiliu Zamfirescu, *Tănase Scatiu*, București, Alcalay, 1895, p. 159.

⁵⁵ Panait Macri, *Crima misterioasă din Calea Mogoșoaiei* [*The Mysterious Murder in the Calea Mogoșoaiei Boulevard*], București, Editura Librăriei H. Steinberg, 1893, pp. 43-48.

⁵⁶ In his analysis of Liviu Rebreanu's 1920 canonical novel, *Ion*, Andrei Terian shows that, in the universe of the Transylvanian village, the Roma, the Jews, and the disabled are all part of “inferior humanity” and can never gain a better social condition. See Andrei Terian, “Oameni, câini și alte dobitoace: O lectură pseudo-darwinistă a romanului *Ion* de Liviu Rebreanu” [“Men, Dogs and Other Beasts: A Pseudo-Darwinian Reading of Liviu Rebreanu's *Ion*”], *Transilvania*, 2018, 11-12, p. 20.

⁵⁷ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London & New York, Routledge, 2004, p. 100: “I suggest, in a very preliminary way, that the stereotype is a complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation, as anxious as it is assertive”.

⁵⁸ Popescu, *Amasoana*, p. 29.

⁵⁹ B.P. Hasdeu, *Ursita* [*Fate*]. With a preface by Iuliu Dragomirescu, București, Minerva, 1910, p. 184. By contrast, the Romani executioner in N.D. Popescu's 1872 *Bujor haiducul* [*Bujor the Outlaw*] (București, Editura Librăriei H. Steinberg) ends up taking pity on his victim and tries to spare his life (pp. 115-117).

measure⁶⁰, and at the same time the Balkanist stereotypes which are used against the Roma to this day⁶¹: the notion that, as an exotic, untamed, excessively emotional group (similar to the dangerously “hybrid” Balkan peoples), the Roma are the internal Other whose backwardness threatens the Romanian project of modernisation⁶². The racialising clichés associated with the Roma are clearly not particular to the nineteenth-century novel but travel far and wide across national borders and historical periods. However, what stands out in this corpus is the almost total disconnect between the so-called “proclivity” for violence identified with the Roma and their socioeconomic situation at the time, namely their enslavement and the extremely precarious conditions in which they lived after their emancipation. While the Roma do appear as lowly servants and “robi” (a euphemism for “slaves”) in Romanian fiction, their violent acts are almost never the result of rebellion or organised resistance; rather, they are the consequence of individual and rudimentary emotions such as anger, cruelty, or seemingly unmotivated hatred. This is because, as Albert Memmi has written, fear of black violence shapes the hegemonic worldview, causing the demonization of any violent form of contestation or protest: “Even in Europe, very few people admitted that the oppression of the colonized was so great, the disproportion of forces so overwhelming, that they had reached the point, whether morally correct or not, of using violent means voluntarily”⁶³. The same can be said about the Romanian novelists writing about enslaved or disenfranchised Romani people and proving incapable of imagining their violence as anything other than the instinct of an unevolved population.

This is especially visible in two of the volumes in the corpus, Bujoreanu’s 1862 *Mistere din București* (a sensation novel) and Ighel’s 1892 *Tâlharul Fulger* (an outlaw novel), which have Romani and half-Romani protagonists, respectively. These characters are the authors of atrocious crimes throughout the story: Neagu Bolboacă is a determined parvenu, willing to do anything to become rich and powerful (including the murder of his lover’s husband, a kidnapping, rape, manipulation that leads to filicide etc.), whereas Fulger tries to abuse his master’s daughter and becomes an outlaw who relishes violence and revenge. Both men are presented as naturally predisposed to cruelty and perversion. Bolboacă is described

⁶⁰ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, London, Penguin, 1977, pp. 32-34, 107.

⁶¹ Carol Silverman, “Music, Emotion, and the ‘Other’. Balkan Roma and the Negotiation of Exoticism”, in Mark D. Steinberg and Valeria Sobol (eds.), *Interpreting Emotions in Russia and Eastern Europe*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2011, p. 246: “In the Balkans the association of Roma (Gypsies) with emotion is demonstrated via a set of common stereotypes linking them to passion, sexuality, wildness, and violence”.

⁶² Alina Haliliuc, “Manele Music and the Discourse of Balkanism in Romania”, *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 2015, 8, p. 291.

⁶³ Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1967, p. 30.

as a “miserable Gypsy” characterised by “Satanic greed”⁶⁴, he is shown stealing from his own family as a reflex action and never experiences guilt or pity, unlike his Romanian master, who is equally murderous but plagued by doubt. Fulger, too, is constantly possessed by “extraordinary passions”⁶⁵, including erotic desires which transcend his social standing: “His blood boiled, it boiled like lava in a volcano”⁶⁶ but “his *soul* was incapable of a pure love”⁶⁷. In many ways, he is the product of a white fascination with black masculinity and power, described by Fanon as “the civilized white man retain[ing] an irrational longing for unusual eras of sexual license” and as the projection of “his own desires onto the Negro”⁶⁸. Despite his eventual conversion to Christianity (after going on a killing spree) and his involvement in the 1848 Revolution, Fulger, just like the unapologetic Bolboacă, is a monstrous, sadistic figure. In part, these “villains” are imagined in accordance with the conventions of the novel subgenres they inhabit. As the protagonist of an outlaw novel, Fulger is a half-Romanian man whose corrupted, hybrid, evil nature is ultimately purified through religion (as an Orthodox monk) and extreme patriotism (putting his life on the line for the revolutionary cause). Not only does his biography contribute to the national role of the genre, which made it so popular at the time⁶⁹, but it also illustrates the process of the Roma’s absorption into a Romanian body politic which sanctifies even the most barbaric criminals. In Bolboacă’s case, his complete lack of self-reflexivity or morality makes him the perfect antagonist of a sensation novel meant to elicit extreme emotions from the reader (dread, surprise, outrage, pity, and so on). After all, using racial Others to embody danger, monstrosity and antisocial chaos was a transnational literary strategy in the 19th century, typical of Victorian fiction as well⁷⁰.

As Patrick Brantlinger points out, these sensation novels were more “democratic”, in that they had “low” origins and a mixed audience⁷¹, but “crime and evil emanate[d] from below”⁷² and race was often used as a key component of

⁶⁴ Ioan M. Bujoreanu, *Mistere din București [Mysteries of Bucharest]*, București, Editura N. Cernovodeanu, 1862, pp. 45-46.

⁶⁵ Ighel, *Tălharul Fulger*, p. 62.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 60.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 63, my emphasis.

⁶⁸ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. Transl. by Charles Lam Markmann, London, Pluto Press, 2008, p. 127.

⁶⁹ Andrei Terian et al., “Genurile romanului românesc în secolul al XIX-lea. O analiză cantitativă” [“The Genres of the 19th Century Romanian Novel. A Quantitative Analysis”], *Transilvania*, 2019, 10, p. 18.

⁷⁰ For an explanation of the combined importance of elite and popular culture in semi-peripheral literatures, see Benedikts Kalnačs, “The Historical Contexts and Aesthetic Self-Reflexiveness of Nineteenth-Century Latvian Literary”, *Dacoromania litteraria*, 2025, 12, pp. 135-154.

⁷¹ Patrick Brantlinger, “Class and Race in Sensation Fiction”, in Pamela K. Gilbert (ed.), *A Companion to Sensation Fiction*, Malden, Wiley-Blackwell, 2011, pp. 431-432.

⁷² *Ibidem*, p. 434.

sensationalism, even when it was relativised⁷³. Moreover, since these stories focused primarily on social underdogs whose trajectories were often scandalous (from mixed-race characters to “fallen” women), their presence and involvement in the plot often challenged and changed the understanding of social and national identities, as well⁷⁴. Therefore, Neagu Bolboacă and Fulger perform necessary functions for the importation of new novel subgenres into Romanian literature, embodying both the fast pace of social change (the emergence of new social classes, class struggle, Roma slavery being contested and abolished etc.) and the anxieties of the dominant ethnicity⁷⁵. In the process of their demonization and through their complicated relationship with the Romanian national identity, their affective impulses are further racialised as incompatible with social progress or any noble ideals.

What Do the Roma Feel? Part II: (Performative) Self-Pity and Social Disruption

Another stereotype which gets ample representation in our corpus is that of Roma being constantly displeased and expressing their pain, grief, or discontent in very visible and audible ways⁷⁶: crying, begging, humbling themselves in front of more powerful social groups, performing their self-pity and, all the while, disrupting the plot of these novels, interrupting the characters’ trajectory and pursuing their own interests. On the one hand, the insistent depiction of Roma *whining* reproduces the hierarchy between the class of the white, independent, authoritative Romanians (especially boyars and slaveholders) and the racialised, dependent, powerless Roma who must renounce their own dignity simply to survive in a hostile environment. A Romani woman is sent by her Romanian master to cause a scene by revealing that someone’s lover is of Romani origin⁷⁷; in another novel, when four Romani men (including a child) are to be tortured and executed, their leader pleads with the authorities and even asks them to execute the child first⁷⁸; although

⁷³ *Ibidem*, pp. 439-440.

⁷⁴ Lyn Pykett, *The Nineteenth Century Sensation Novel*, Tavistock, Northcote, 2011, p. 18.

⁷⁵ In Anindita Bhaumik’s words, “Victorian preoccupation with the ‘others’ can be interpreted as an attempt to recognise and assert the superiority of the dominant collective ‘self’”, with some Victorian novelists channelling *and* interrogating this preoccupation. See “Beyond the Conceptual Peripheries of Race: A Study of the ‘Racial Others’ in Wilkie Collins’s Sensation Fiction”, *Middle Flight*, 6, 2017, 1, p. 33.

⁷⁶ Based on data provided by the Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities, Tamás Kiss has shown that, when it comes to the Roma, “attributes such as lazy, backward, stinking, and filthy” are frequently used by Romanian people, alongside “slyness, sanguine temperament, verbosity, and loudness”, which “associate the Roma also with the Balkan mentality”. See “Escaping the ‘Balkanizing’ Gaze? Perceptions of Global and Internal Developmental Hierarchies in Romania”, *East European Politics and Societies*, 31, 2017, 3, p. 583.

⁷⁷ Dimitrie Bolintineanu, *Elena* (1862), in *Manoil – Elena*. Preface by T. Vârgolici, Buc., Editura pentru Literatură, 1971, pp. 164, 249.

⁷⁸ Hasdeu, *Ursita*, p. 184.

he refuses to renounce his (white) master when being tortured, an old Romani man is shown crying “like a woman”⁷⁹; an old Romani woman who begs the Romanian protagonist not to pursue a love she knows to be cursed falls to her knees, hugs his feet, cries and screams⁸⁰.

The list could go on, because the “spectacle” of Romani people begging for food and medicine, writhing in the hands of their captors or lamenting their miserable situation appears in multiple novels published in the second half of the 19th century⁸¹. Whether they are depicted as pitiful or despicable, these characters are clearly meant to be read as inferior and weak, in contrast with the Romanian heroes forging their own destinies. Moreover, their public display of emotions such as fear, pain, and despair is also often articulated with the cliché of Roma irrationality, especially in the case of Romani women working as fortune tellers. For example, Neacşa from Iacob Negruzzi’s *Mihai Vereanu* expresses her affection for a man she has known since his childhood, but her love for him is tainted by her magical worldview⁸²; yet another fortune teller is described as “she kept opening her mouth wide and articulating senseless words, inspired and rabid, as if she had consulted the spirits of hell”⁸³. At the same time, this focus on the performance⁸⁴ of emotion by Romani characters often implies that they are only able to experience shallow, short-lived, or selfish affects, which reaffirms their underdevelopment and the “notion of race as a relative account of the body’s affective capacity”⁸⁵.

The prime example in this sense is an episode in Ionu C. Panţu’s 1887 *Logofetulu Mateiu*, when a Romani woman is struck to the ground by a boyar but immediately starts laughing with delight once she is given some money⁸⁶. To quote Samalin, “nineteenth-century elaborations of civilization often were remnants of

⁷⁹ N.D. Popescu, *Iancu Jianul, căpitanul de haiduci* [*Iancu Jianu, Captain of the Hajduks*], Bucureşti, Editura Librăriei H. Steinberg, 1873, p. 156.

⁸⁰ Negruzzi, *Mihai Vereanu*, p. 501.

⁸¹ See Granda, *Vlăşia*, p. 254; Ionu C. Panţu, *Logofetulu Mateiu*, Braşov, Tipografia Alexi, 1887, pp. 7, 22; Panait Macri, *Ioan tunsu căpitan de haiduci* [*Ioan Tunsu, Captain of Hajduks*], Bucureşti, Cultura Românească, 1887, p. 39; Popescu, *Radu Anghel*, p. 108; Ioan Costin, *Moara din Şişeşti* [*The Mill of Şişeşti*], Baia Mare, Tipografia lui Mihail Molnár, 1894, pp. 184-185 (including long monologues meant to show the insistence of the Roma); Petre Vulcan, *Dragomir*, Craiova, Tipografia David J. Benvenisti, 1895, p. 13; Simeon Bălănescu, *Sfârşitul blestemului* [*The End of the Curse*], Bucureşti, Tipografia Gutenberg Joseph Göbl, 1895, p. 75; Duiliu Zamfirescu, *Tănase Scatiu*, Bucureşti, Alcalay, 1907, pp. 91, 143; Duiliu Zamfirescu, *În război* [*During the War*], Bucureşti, Tipografia Clemenţa, 1902, p. 117.

⁸² Negruzzi, *Mihai Vereanu*, p. 500.

⁸³ Al. Pelimon, *Un funcţionar sinucis. Fratele şi sora* [*A Clerk Who Committed Suicide. The Brother and the Sister*], Bucureşti, Tipografia Naţională C.N. Rădulescu, 1873, p. 172.

⁸⁴ The only novel which highlights the “sincerity” of Roma affect mentions the Romani musicians’ good wishes for a Romanian man, shifting the focus from their emotions to the object of their affection. Ilie Demetrescu, *Ea şi el* [*Him and Her*], Bucureşti, Tipografia şi Fonderia de Litere Thoma Basilescu, 1898, p. 86.

⁸⁵ Schuller, “Taxonomies of Feeling”, p. 282.

⁸⁶ Panţu, *Logofetulu Mateiu*, p. 67.

the Enlightenment project of stadial universal history” in which irrationality and rudimentary emotions placed racialised populations in an inferior position and justified their domination⁸⁷.

What Do the Roma Feel? Part III: Exceptional Roma, Submission, and Loyalty

In response to the white fear of “black violence” and in conjunction with the stereotype of Roma “whining”, many of the novels in the corpus present the Roma as submissive and passive. In this representational pattern, negative and selfish emotions such as fear, pain, grief, and despair appear as overwhelming and overshadow any possible ideal of self-determination or personal dignity. However, an even more striking form of submission is that of Roma being heroically loyal to their masters. These exceptional characters, whose morality and superior affects (devotion, bravery, patriotism) seem to derive directly from the relationship with a “white saviour”, prove their self-sacrificial love by ignoring their own pain to care for their “Lord”⁸⁸ or even dying to protect the slaveholder⁸⁹.

Significantly, they are also the only Roma capable of what Cope and his peers called “sympathy”, the unique and evolved quality which orients the human being towards the future and social good rather than an impulse reaction or their own survival: “those who possessed it could overcome the threats inherent in the impressible body, for sympathy allowed them to transform others’ suffering into opportunities for personal growth, rather than possibilities of degeneration”⁹⁰. The Roma who love their masters show self-restraint in their grief (unlike the Roma clamouring for freedom or help)⁹¹ and only use violence for noble, patriotic purposes such as a national revolution⁹². However, their displays of affection and candour towards the master are still infantilised (crying, superstitious fears⁹³, emotional overflow⁹⁴, none of which characterising the white heroes), assimilated to childish or womanly behaviour⁹⁵ and, with very few exceptions (e.g., V.A. Urechia’s *Coliba Măriucăi*), reserved for the master rather than other Romani people. Some of these instances of gratitude and devotion to a boyar or another

⁸⁷ Samalin, “Affect Theory”, p. 563.

⁸⁸ N.D. Popescu, *Iancu Jianu, zapciu de plasă* [*Iancu Jianu, District Constable*], Braşov, Editura Librăriei Ciurcu, 1887, pp. 61-62.

⁸⁹ Popescu, *Radu Anghel*, p. 111.

⁹⁰ Kyla Schuller, “Taxonomies of Feeling”, p. 288.

⁹¹ Popescu, *Iancu Jianu, căpitanul de haiduci*, p. 99.

⁹² A Romani man with “burning eyes” and “eyes swimming in blood” is prepared to “help” the revolution. Al. Pelimon, *Revoluţiunea română din anul 1848 – Muşătoiu* [*The Romanian Revolution in 1848 – Muşătoiu*], Bucureşti, Tipografia Th. Michaiescu şi Vaidescu, 1868, p. 134.

⁹³ Popescu, *Iancu Jianu, zapciu de plasă*, pp. 110-111.

⁹⁴ Alexandru Vlahuţă, *Dan* (1894), Bucureşti, Cartea Românească, 1938, pp. 124-125.

⁹⁵ Alexandru Antemireanu, *Din vremea lui căpitan Costache* [*From the Life of Captain Costache*] (1898). Edition and preface by Apriliana Medianu, Bucureşti, Tipografia Universul, 1937, p. 146.

figure of authority even ensue as a result of abuse and brutality against the Roma⁹⁶, suggesting that Roma loyalty might be an organic response rather than a conscious choice. In other words, even attachment to one's master is sometimes depicted as mere submission (out of fear and self-preservation), being downgraded to a more rudimentary affective pattern. Thus, the nineteenth-century Romanian novel showcases what Erin Dwyer calls the "emotional politics of slavery"⁹⁷, i.e., an affective regime in which the master aims to own, control, and police the emotions of the oppressed, forcing them to navigate their own emotional landscape in relation to those in power and their expectations⁹⁸. However, while Dwyer's concept refers to the complicated emotional bond between master and slave (based on mutual surveillance and influence), showing that "those in bondage used feelings to resist and survive slavery"⁹⁹, the Romanian novel prioritises the use of Roma emotion as a coping mechanism (through public displays of grief, submission, loyalty, even affection toward the master) rather than any example of Roma resistance. Not only does the corpus include no instance of slave rebellion, unless in the name of a specifically *Romanian* cause¹⁰⁰, but all the other violent acts perpetrated by the Roma (either randomly, collectively, and instinctively, or in the strategic, devious manner of Bujoreanu's protagonist) are presented as self-interested, destructive, and antisocial, without ever being correlated with the dire situation of the Roma and their prolonged oppression.

In short, the affective regime of the Romanian novel exclusively highlights the role of emotion in the negotiation of Roma subalternity and survival within a fixed system of oppression. Paying little to no attention to the agentive value of emotion, it reinforces a hierarchical and racialised worldview according to which even the project of Roma emancipation belongs to the white majority.

What Do the Roma Feel? Part IV: Abolitionist Prose Exposing Slave Suffering

This brings me to the final category of novels presenting Roma affect, namely two narratives with an abolitionist agenda – V.A. Urechia's *Coliba Măriucăi*, inspired by Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and Al. Pelimon's *Revoluțiunea română din anul 1848 – Mușătoiu* [*The Romanian Revolution in 1848 – Mușătoiu*] – which nevertheless perpetuate the trope of Roma passivity and the cliché of the Romanian heroes fighting for a minority that cannot emancipate itself.

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 35: When an army captain insults the Romani musicians and calls them "crows", they respond fearfully and humbly by "kissing his hands".

⁹⁷ Erin Dwyer, *Mastering Emotions: The Emotional Politics of Slavery*, Doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 2012, p. 6.

⁹⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 8-12.

⁹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

¹⁰⁰ Literary representation thus contradicts the historical reality of Roma agency and activism. See Adrian-Nicolae Furtună, Anca Parvulescu, and Manuela Boatcă, "Three Documents from the Archive of Roma Enslavement", *PMLA*, 139, 2024, 5, pp. 872-876.

The moralising narrators of the two novels uphold anti-slavery beliefs, explicitly condemning the boyars' hypocrisy (teaching their children the values of the French Enlightenment while torturing the Romani slaves¹⁰¹) and presenting abolition as the greatest achievement of the 19th century¹⁰². But they also describe the Roma as exceptionally forgiving, docile, and loyal, implicitly reassuring the white reader that Roma emancipation would contribute to the process of Romanian nation-building rather than posing a threat. Just like Beecher Stowe in her famous abolitionist story¹⁰³, Urechia and Pelimon highlight the patience of the Roma, their gentleness and delicacy when raising white children, their obedience in spite of the sorrows of slavery (e.g., Romani women do not protest when their children are sold, even though it brings them great sadness¹⁰⁴), i.e., the Christian profile¹⁰⁵ which prevents them from becoming vengeful revolutionaries seeking reparations from their oppressors¹⁰⁶.

On the one hand, Urechia uses the detailed depiction of slave suffering – the protagonist Vasile being unfairly punished, his mother dying alone – to the same end as Beecher Stowe and other American and British abolitionists: to prove the slaves' ability to feel pain, grief, and love, rehumanising them in the eyes of the public and using “indignation” or “moral outrage” to make anti-slavery attitudes commonplace and commonsense¹⁰⁷. So, even though these melodramatic episodes risk fetishizing Roma pain (both physical and emotional) and struggle against the affective limits of language¹⁰⁸, they are nevertheless meant to cause sympathy for the suffering body, which “intimates the possibility of responding to other bodies as singular entities, that is, in a non-conceptual way that does not reduce their otherness”¹⁰⁹.

On the other hand, while positing the “emotional equality” of all human beings, which animated the abolitionist struggle in America and Britain long before

¹⁰¹ V.A. Urechia, *Coliba Măriucăi [Măriuca's Hut]* (1855), in *Opere complete [Complete Works]*, București, Tipografia Göbl, 1883, p. 188.

¹⁰² Pelimon, *Revoluțiunea*, p. 113.

¹⁰³ See Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin. A Tale of Life among the Lowly*, London, G. Routledge, 1853, p. 121: “Their gentleness, their lowly docility of heart, their aptitude to repose on a superior mind and rest on a higher power, their childlike simplicity of affection, and facility of forgiveness”.

¹⁰⁴ Pelimon, *Revoluțiunea*, p. 114.

¹⁰⁵ Urechia, *Coliba*, p. 179.

¹⁰⁶ For a discussion of Urechia's collaborative work with Marie Boucher and its ideological implications, see Cătălina Stanislav, “Hardly a Room of One's Own. Gender and Collaborative Writing in the Prewar Romanian Novel”, *Dacoromania litteraria*, 2025, 12, pp. 218-238.

¹⁰⁷ Michael E. Woods, “A Theory of Moral Outrage: Indignation and Eighteenth-century British Abolitionism”, *Slavery & Abolition*, 36, 2015, 4, pp. 676-677.

¹⁰⁸ See Mike Marais, “Violence, Postcolonial Fiction, and the Limits of Sympathy”, *Studies in the Novel*, 43, 2011, 1, p. 95: “For sympathy to gain ethical potential, writers must recognize and negotiate the tension between body and the language that informs it”.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 94-95.

the 1850s¹¹⁰, Urechia, Pelimon and the other novelists who depict the Roma as capable of noble emotions (such as affection and devotion) still view emancipation as the project of Romanian intellectuals. Despite the Roma being allowed to affirm their own humanity (“I have a heart just like you, the masters”¹¹¹), their praiseworthy docility stops them from ever directly contesting and fighting against the institution of slavery, reminding us, as Nicola Westwood explains, that “whilst most abolitionists advocated emotional equality between different races, they did not all believe that this racial equality extended to intellectual capabilities”¹¹². This also serves to show that, while many narrative strategies were deployed in the sentimental novel in order to cause “racial moves” and challenge the racialised order at play in the 19th century, the ideological limitations of abolitionist thought also impacted the mixed agenda of sentimentalism, which invoked “racial bonds for both appropriative and subversive ends”¹¹³.

Conclusions

This short and by no means exhaustive survey of Roma affect in the nineteenth-century Romanian novel has highlighted the malleability of emotion when used to portray oppressed and marginalised characters. While many novelists in the MDRR1 reinforce the stereotype of a violent, uncivilised, irrational, and antisocial Roma minority which threatens the process of Romanian nation-building and modernisation, others introduce representational nuances which rehumanise the Roma and showcase the “emotional equality” of all people. Yet other authors adopt an explicitly abolitionist agenda, striving to depict their Romani subjects as superior, virtuous individuals who are worthy of inclusion in the body politic and whose suffering at the hands of their owners is bound to trigger the indignation of the Christian readership. However, throughout the corpus, a racialised worldview is still in place. The few Roma who are shown feeling sympathy (depicted as an evolved emotion) do so only in relation to their masters. Most of the affects they experience are rudimentary and short-lived rather than complex or intellectualised, confirming the emotional hierarchy (or, in Kyla Schuller’s words, the “taxonomy of feeling”) generated by the circulation of evolutionary theory and its racial interpretations. Finally, even the exceptional Roma depicted in abolitionist fiction are reduced to passive, meek, and non-threatening spectators of their own fate,

¹¹⁰ Nicola Westwood, *Emotion in Abolitionist Literature during the British Slavery Debate, 1770–1833*, Dissertation University of Birmingham, 2023, pp. 11, 22, 44.

¹¹¹ Panait Macri, *Haiducul Țandură [Țandură, the Outlaw]*, București, Editura Librăriei H. Steinberg, 1894, p. 125. See also Urechia, *Coliba*, pp. 193, 206, and Dimitrie Bolintineanu, *Manoil* (1855), București, Alcalay, 1903, p. 181.

¹¹² Westwood, *Emotion in Abolitionist Literature*, p. 3.

¹¹³ Laura Doyle, “The Folk, the Nobles, and the Novel: The Racial Subtext of Sentimentality”, *Narrative*, 3, 1995, 2, p. 183.

waiting to be freed by a white saviour rather than pursuing their own emancipation. Thus, while some Romanian novels in the MDRR1 do test the boundaries of the racialised social structure which characterised the 19th century, the limits of their emancipatory vision are inflexible and especially visible in the continued racialisation of Roma affect.

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EMOTIONAL EXCESS AND RACIALISATION
IN THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY ROMANIAN NOVEL
(Abstract)

Based on the Digital Museum of the Romanian Novel (MDRR1: 1845–1900), this paper discusses the depiction and racialisation of Roma affect at a time when Roma slavery in Moldavia and Wallachia was either still in the process of being abolished or recently dismantled. The analysis relies on complex lexical searches within the corpus, using keywords pertaining to ethnicity, lifestyle, labour, and even pejorative terms associated with this minority, in order to showcase the Romani characters and their emotional response to their environment. By combining distant and close reading, my main objective is to demonstrate that, in the nineteenth-century Romanian novel, emotion and emotional excess were used programmatically: either as a racialised trope signalling the inferiority and uncivilised nature of the Roma or as a rehumanising strategy meant to cause an empathetic reaction and moral outrage among the readers of abolitionist prose (Woods 2015). Thus, this racially conscious investigation into the depiction of affectivity should highlight the replication of colonial representational patterns in a semi-peripheral literature vying for international recognition (Parvulescu & Boacă 2022) while also negotiating its own understanding of the body politic (Trencsényi 2009). For this purpose, I will be drawing on postcolonial classics like Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, as well as more recent writing on “the emotional politics of slavery” (Dwyer 2012), which reveals the transnational network of abolitionist thought (connecting America, Britain, and Eastern Europe) and its shortcomings. On the one hand, this sheds light on the ambivalence of emotion and its malleable ethical function rooted in the psychological theories of emotion circulating at the time (Westwood 2023). On the other hand, starting from Kyla Schuller’s (2012) and Zachary Samalin’s (2022) historical accounts of affect theory and its colonial sources, I aim to trace the influence of nineteenth-century scientific dogma on the Romanian intellectual landscape, the import of evolutionary theories (Koszor-Codrea 2021), and the consequent racialisation of affectivity as depicted in fiction.

Keywords: emotional excess, Roma slavery, abolitionist literature, affect theory, racialisation.

EXCES AFECTIV ȘI RASIALIZARE ÎN ROMANUL ROMÂNESC
DIN SECOLUL AL XIX-LEA
(Rezumat)

Pornind de la *Muzeul Digital al Romanului Românesc* (MDRR1: 1845–1900), acest articol discută reprezentarea și rasializarea experiențelor afective ale personajelor de etnie romă, într-un moment istoric în care sclavia romilor era încă în vigoare, fie o amintire recentă în Moldova și Țara Românească. Analiza se bazează pe căutări lexicale complexe în corpus, folosind cuvinte-cheie asociate etniei, stilului de viață și muncii, dar și termeni peiorativi la adresa acestei minorități, cu scopul de a pune în lumină personajele rome și reacțiile lor emoționale la mediul social în care trăiesc. Printr-o combinație de *distant* și *close reading*, demonstrez că, în romanul românesc din secolul al XIX-lea, emoția și excesul emoțional erau folosite programatic: fie ca un clișeu rasializat indicând natura așa-zis inferioară și necivilizată a romilor, fie ca strategie reumanizantă menită să genereze empatie și revoltă morală în rândul cititorilor de proză aboliționistă (Woods 2015). Astfel, această investigație evidențiază reproducerea unor tipare reprezentative tipic coloniale într-o literatură semiperiferică, ce concura cu alte literaturi minore pentru recunoașterea internațională (Parvulescu & Boatcă 2022) și negocia în același timp sensul conceptului de „națiune” (Trencsényi 2009). Apelez la clasici ai postcolonialismului precum Homi Bhabha și Gayatri Spivak, dar și la texte mai recente despre „politica emoțională a sclaviei” (Dwyer 2012), care expun rețeaua transnațională a aboliționismului (între America, Marea Britanie și Europa de Est). Pe de o parte, discut ambivalența și funcția etică a emoției, înrădăcinate în teoriile psihologice ale secolului al XIX-lea (Westwood 2023). Pe de altă parte, pornind de la textele Kylei Schuller (2012) și ale lui Zachary Samalin (2022) despre sursele coloniale ale teoriei afectelor, urmăresc influența dogmelor științifice din acea perioadă în spațiul românesc, importul teoriilor evoluționiste (Koszor-Codrea 2021) și contribuția lor la rasializarea afectivității.

Cuvinte-cheie: exces afectiv, sclavia romilor, literatură aboliționistă, affect theory, rasializare.