The Hijacked Monomyth or How Racism Structures Collective Imaginaries

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The paper makes a case for adopting a structuralist approach in racism-critical analyses of narratives. It proposes a novel analytical model, based on Joseph Campbell's monomyth, Yuri Lotman's insight into the structure of the artistic text and Birgit Rommelspacher's definition of racism, and showcases the model's utility in the context of antigypsyism, the ugly underside of nation-building projects. Taking key examples from (children's) literature and (silent) film, the author offers an exemplary application of the model and is thus able to crack the narrative code of antigypsyism, explaining how and why 'gypsy' figures and their netherworld have been used as narrative devices for (re)shaping and inculcating normative notions of class, 'race', gender, sexuality, nationality or homeland. The usefulness of the proposed analytical model is, in fact, twofold: on the one hand, it provides verifiable criteria for identifying problematic (racist) fictional storyworlds; on the other hand, and most valuable, it has the potential to revive the question of universality in literary studies, and the humanities in general.