

*KNOWING THE MARGINS: COLONIZING THE GYPSIES IN VICTORIAN LITERATURE*

*by*

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Knowing the Margins: Colonizing the Gypsies in Victorian Literature

Thesis directed by Professor Jeffrey N. Cox

The Roma have a complicated history with the Western world that is less explored in scholarship than other racialized groups. Previous scholarship has failed to examine the ways in which Roma, or the Gypsy as it appears in these texts, have been misconstrued into a literary phenomenon that has little or no relevance to the people that identify as Roma. This analysis focuses on Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* to critique the methods of Victorian authors in using the Gypsy figure in literature as representing the Roma in Victorian England. The tools each author uses to create the Gypsy figure align with the colonizing efforts of Victorian Britain. This study is pertinent as the Roma in the twenty-first century continue to face extreme discrimination and misrepresentation ascribed to the ideas constructed and perpetuated in the literary trope of the Gypsy.

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## Part I: Introduction

### SITUATING THE GYPSY IN VICTORIAN LITERATURE

The British Empire during the Victorian period was heavily involved in colonizing lands and peoples outside the limits of the British Isles. While this colonization has been reviewed and critiqued through postcolonial theories, the colonization of internal Others, living within the physical boundaries of England, has not been investigated to the same degree as the effects of British imperialism on external Others. One of these groups, referred to as “Gypsies,” found themselves the subjects of interest for Victorian authors. While much scholarship has identified this group as existing under the umbrella term of “Roma,”<sup>12</sup> there are specific nomadic groups, such as the Sinti, that are included in this category. I will be examining the use of the term Gypsy, but use Roma to refer to the historical groups, throughout this investigation with an acknowledgement that the term is not entirely inclusive of all the nomadic groups existing in Victorian Britain and Europe during the nineteenth century.

In this analysis, I will focus on the texts of *Jane Eyre*, by Charlotte Brontë, and *The Mill on the Floss*, by George Eliot to critique the methods of Victorian authors in using the Gypsy figure in literature as representing the Roma in Victorian England. The tools each author uses to create the Gypsy figure in literature align with the colonizing efforts of Victorian Britain. The

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<sup>1</sup> “The Indian origin and affiliation of the Roma is most obvious linguistically, by the language still spoken by many members of this heterogeneous ethnicity. The Roma consist of various groups, which are labelled with different ethnonyms – self designations as well as external designations: Arlije, Calé, Gurbet, Kaale, Kalderaš, Lovara, Manuš, Sepečides, Sinti, Ursari, etc.; many groups also use the self-designation Roma” (Council of Europe 4).

<sup>2</sup> Additionally, I would like to note that some groups prefer the term Romani to Roma. This depends upon the individual or group in question.

language used to describe the Gypsy characters in the text is reminiscent of colonizing techniques utilized by Victorians to expand the British Empire. While it can be argued that many Victorian texts rely on the literary trope of the Gypsy to situate their protagonists, I believe these texts are particularly intriguing for this analysis. Both of these works have been analyzed extensively by feminist and postcolonial academics because of their influence on literary and cultural studies. I will situate my research among previous scholarship that has failed to examine the ways in which Roma, or the Gypsy as it appears in these texts, have been manipulated and misconstrued into a literary phenomenon that has little or no relevance to the people that identify as Roma. This study becomes especially pertinent as the Roma in the twenty-first century continue to face extreme discrimination and misrepresentation ascribed to many of the ideas that were constructed and perpetuated in the literary trope of the Gypsy. It is important to study Victorian texts when examining how Roma are portrayed in the current day for, as David Mayall suggests, “at no time since the late nineteenth century has the question of the travelling population received such attention” (Mayall 8). The high interest of the nineteenth century in the “travelling population” is viewed as a benchmark from which to understand the increasing interest in these groups today. Additionally, the racialization of the Roma has often left them out of productive discourse and denied them agency in the modern construction of Europe. This is further explained by Fatima El-Tayeb as “Roma populations play a central part in the uniting Europe’s history, while being nearly completely absent from its memory” (El-Tayeb 178). It is in this analysis of two canonical Victorian literary works that I want to acknowledge how the figure of the Gypsy is problematic and used as a tool of oppression against the Roma. These texts use racial difference as a space from which to engage oppressive social structures that do not actually define the concerns of those racial groups, but rather the concerns of the authors as women.

## **RACE IN VICTORIAN LITERATURE**

The construction of race in the Victorian period was multifaceted and allowed for the Othering of the Roma reflected in literature. Historicizing the construction of race in the Victorian period leads to the acknowledgement of different forms of racism. This is explained by MacMaster as follows: “during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries European racism...assumed two paradigmatic forms, that of anti-black racism with its historic roots in slavery and colonial conquest, and racial anti-Semitism grounded in a totally different tradition of Christian oppression” (MacMaster 2). The Gypsies who lived on the periphery of Victorian society were subjected to both the racialization of having darker skin and features, so that they were referred to as “black”, and the stigma of statelessness that was a feature of anti-Semitism. The Gypsies physically and culturally represented an Other that the Victorians could not accommodate, especially pertaining to their close physical proximity and the “threat” that they were believed to pose to Victorian society. The result of racializing the Gypsies placed them within the category of Other and “those Others who were regarded alien (Jews, Gypsies, the Irish, blacks) could never be assimilated or cross over, since they were locked into an ineradicable biological difference” (MacMaster 23). The Gypsies were just one of the many groups that were excluded from actively participating in British Victorian society. Their exclusion was legitimized through their perceived racial differences, regarding physical appearance, and their alleged cultural deviance as they did not recognize national boundaries. The racialization of the Gypsies echoes the anti-Semitism that was prevalent during the Victorian period. The evolution of anti-Semitism in nineteenth century England is explicated as follows:

During the age of emancipation (1782-1871) the Jews were seen as primarily a religious and cultural group....however, from the late 1860s onwards the Jews were increasingly defined not only as an alien presence within the nation...but as quite a distinctive racial group that would remain totally separate from the people of Europe. (MacMaster 15)

The Jews, much like the Gypsies, were not viewed as an immediate threat when they first arrived in Britain. However, as their time in Britain progressed, the Gypsies too became an “alien” racial group that were perceived as inassimilable. The Gypsies and the Jews were “regarded as a ‘stateless other’, a racial group that threatened the integrity of the host society” (MacMaster 24). Their existence as an Other challenged Victorian society, yet they also became the subject of interest and intrigue for scholars, authors, and artists as their origin and their purpose in Victorian England was relatively unknown. The intrigue that the Gypsies offered Victorians is reflected in the Gypsy figure’s multitude of appearances in Victorian literature. Interest in using the Gypsy as a metaphor did not fade as the Victorian period progressed and “the gypsy became a figure of fascination to a number of English scholars and writers as the nineteenth century wore on” (Meyer 153).

## **REPRESENTATIONS OF THE “GYPSY” IN VICTORIAN LITERATURE**

The persecution and misrepresentation of the Roma in Britain was not just a phenomenon related to the Victorian period. The discrimination that the Roma faced began much earlier: “from their arrival in the early sixteenth century, the presence of the Romani people in the British Isles was marked by oppressive legislation that arose in an attempt to regulate and contain their community” (Bardi 31). While I am not focusing on the legal limitations placed upon the Roma



community during the pre-Victorian era in this analysis, it is important to note that from the beginning of their time in Britain they were outsiders and faced very real consequences in the form of legal racial discrimination. This is explicated in the January 20, 1838 edition of the British weekly *The Penny Magazine* as “Acts of Parliament have been thundered at them – the law has dealt with them – justices and constables have chased them from county to county” (*The Penny Magazine* 18). Their Othering became solidified with the rise of European nationalism “in identifying peoples in historical relationship to place, would redefine civil society to exclude Gypsies from being part of the nation or forming a distinct nation themselves” (Trumpener 864). Once the nation was defined, the nomadic lifestyle of the Gypsies was considered a form of transgression. Interestingly, at the same time that they faced legal repercussions for their lifestyle, the “very elements of Gypsy life” that deviated from the Victorian norms, became “objects of literary desire” and the “literary portraits of Gypsies, though fraught with ambivalence, grew more prevalent, as well as more powerful and appealing” (Bardi 33-4). The rise in Gypsy literary figures during the Victorian period is fascinating, though problematic, as any rendition of the Gypsy in literature was done by a non-Gypsy and allowed for the creation of false stereotypes. These “representations that are made of them tend to reflect an imaginary sense of the Gypsy which is configured, in general, from a non-Gypsy perspective” and leads to misrepresentations of Gypsies (Bhopal and Myers 1).

As a literary figure, the “Gypsy” was made to represent forms of alienation, the exotic, the feminine, and the pastoral, and forced to uphold, by contrast, traditional Victorian social norms. We see this occur in texts as “everywhere the Gypsies appear in nineteenth-century narratives, they begin to hold up ordinary life, inducing local amnesias or retrievals of cultural memory, and causing blackouts or flashbacks in textual, historical, and genre memory as well” (Trumpener 869).

Perhaps because of their conjectural links to Egypt, they become associated with a past, with a time, that was never truly their own. These associations are placed onto the Gypsy figure in literature without actively engaging the Gypsy as an autonomous, agential being. The use of Gypsies as a literary figure becomes especially problematic as they are recognized as a racial and cultural Other from the Victorian norm. This affects how they are treated and the implementation of oppressive structures that are used to contain them. We see in Victorian society, as reflected in the literature, that “the process by which Gypsy groups are categorised and labelled affects how they are treated in society and how they are seen and represented” (Bhopal and Myers 19). The treatment of the Gypsy by George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë in their literary works was influenced by Victorian expectations of what it meant to be a Gypsy and the subsequent racialization that occurred due to their seemingly deviant lifestyle and rejection of Victorian society.

## **THE GYPSIES OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË AND GEORGE ELIOT**

The Gypsies that appear within *The Mill on the Floss* and *Jane Eyre* are imbued with significance related to the personal concerns of the respective authors. Their use of the Gypsy as a metaphor has been explored by scholars as a representation of their dissatisfaction with Victorian gender roles. Both Susan Meyer and Reina Lewis address the methods by which the Gypsy has been used as a racialized figure in the literature of “Charlotte Brontë, Emily Brontë, and George Eliot... [as they] use race metaphorically in their fiction as they explore issues of gender” (Meyer 7). Using the Gypsy community as a metaphor for a space in which to analyze gender norms becomes a political act to Lewis. She suggests that “some of the key writers of the twentieth-century feminist literary canon, like Brontë and Eliot, couched their demands for female

emancipation precisely through the Orientalizing of a structural other” (Lewis 29). Orientalizing the Gypsy, who was undoubtedly an Other in Victorian society, allows these authors to address issues regarding their own subjectivity without explicitly acknowledging the repercussions of Othering the Roma. Katie Trumpener, has investigated the manner in which the Gypsy was used to serve as a symbol, and as representative, of exotic subjects in literature:

In the course of the nineteenth century the Gypsies became increasingly stylized, exoticized, ‘generic’ figures of mystery, adventure, and romance, they also become intimately identified, on several different levels, with the formation of literary tradition itself, acting as figurative keys to an array of literary genres and to the relations between them. (Trumpener 873)

The Gypsy as a literary figure is molded to fit the needs of the author, whether to provide a response to a societal problem that the author intends to address or to supply a literary metaphor to indicate to the reader that the subject is exotic, different, Other.

Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot primarily use the Gypsy in their texts to deconstruct the gender norms of their own societies. Their approach aligns with the concerns of women at this time in that “given the intimate and inextricable connection between race and gender as constructed in nineteenth century British thought” it is necessary to examine “interest in race in the fiction of some of the women novelists of nineteenth-century England who manifest the most overt discontent with the constraints of gender” (Meyer 24). Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot are authors who show an obvious disdain for the conventional expectations of women in the Victorian period and their use of the Gypsy figure as a metaphor illustrates their concerns. The Gypsy allows them to offer figures who do not conform to traditional gender norms, as Abby Bardi points out in *Jane Eyre*: “in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, too, an ambiguous Gypsy figure enters the narrative

and deconstructs gender. When Mr. Rochester poses as a female Gypsy fortune-teller...he merges Gypsiness and gender ambiguity” (Bardi 38). The Gypsy is used here as a space from which Brontë is able to construct a character with gender ambiguity without facing repercussions for transgressing strict Victorian gender norms. That is, the very Otherness of the Gypsy opens up a space in which other gender behaviors can be explored, behaviors that would be roundly condemned if they were taken up by, say, white and well positioned young English women.

While Brontë’s assessment of the oppressive structures used to enforce gender roles in Victorian society is accurate, her use of the Gypsy as a means to express her dissatisfaction is puzzling, since she employs one stereotype to undermine another. Susan Meyer’s scholarship addresses the ways in which “*Jane Eyre* associates nonwhite races with the idea of oppression by drawing parallels between people of the ‘dark races,’ black slaves in particular, and those oppressed by the hierarchies of social class and gender in Britain” (Meyer 78). It becomes a bit too easy to find women to be “slaves” in marriage while the actual situation of a wealthy married woman, as oppressed as it may be, fails to engage with how race and gender are mutually constituted. The correlation between race and the subjugation of women by the gender hierarchy is also reflected in the works of George Eliot. This leads one to infer that correlating gender and racial oppression is not an isolated incident but rather a persistent ignoring of privilege by the author. In Eliot’s work we see that “the Gypsy, set apart by appearance and, ostensibly by what the Victorians understood as race, suited Eliot well in her desire to represent difference and unassimilability” (Nord 100). Eliot uses the Gypsy figure in a manner that echoes Brontë’s text in that “she saw the Gypsy as a figure who could signify gender heterodoxy – feminized masculinity and, for Eliot, unconventional femininity” (Nord 100). As this analysis is focused on *The Mill on*

*the Floss*, the manner in which she analyzes Maggie Tulliver and her subsequent interest in the Gypsy community is most pertinent:

Most repeatedly, throughout the novel, Maggie is compared to a gypsy. Perhaps the reason that this comparison is most frequent is that the gypsies, though a ‘dark race’ of reputedly Eastern origins, were living, at the early nineteenth-century date at which the novel is set, within England itself. The gypsies thus provided an especially apt metaphor for an English girl who feels alien within her society, just as the gypsies are the bearers of ‘marks of race’ ‘repulsive’ to the larger English population around them. (Meyer 133-4)

The ostracization that Maggie faces, in response to her dark coloring, is related to the racialization of the Gypsy community regarding to their own darker features and their unknown origin. It is suggested in *The Mill on the Floss* that Maggie shares the same heritage. In this example, Nord indicates that Eliot’s use of the Gypsy figure in the text is not solely in opposition to Victorian gender norms, for “the Gypsy figure serves as a means of escaping not only from gender, but also from the confines of British society and its strictures based on class and race” (Bardi 41). The Gypsy is used by Brontë and Eliot as an ambiguous space from which to critique Victorian society with reference to its strict regulations of gender and class, while side-stepping an accounting for racial discrimination.

This analysis, though relying heavily on the work of Abby Bardi, Susan Meyer, Deborah Nord, and Katie Trumpener, attempts to move beyond their approaches to address the relationship between the Gypsy as a literary outlet for the authors and the people that experience real discrimination resulting from the perpetuation of racialized stereotypes in Victorian literature. The Gypsy has been acknowledged in scholarship and history as an Other, but rarely do academics discuss exactly how the Roma have been Othered. It is necessary to understand why the Gypsy

figure in literature has harmful effects on the peoples who have been placed under that category of “Gypsy” by the cultural and physical associations placed under the term “Gypsy” by others. Situating the racialization of the Roma in the “Gypsy” of Victorian texts places it among a discourse of how race functions in relationship to Victorian colonialism.

## **ISSUES IN THE USE OF THE GYPSY AS A LITERARY FIGURE**

Brontë and Eliot using the Gypsy figure as a metaphor to express their own dissatisfactions with Victorian society is extremely problematic. Comparing their own subjectivity, as white women in Victorian society, to that of marginalized races creates an imperialistic relationship between these two groups. This relationship highlights and privileges a particular form of suffering over the other. Women authors may sympathize with their notion of Gypsies while ignoring how gender oppression and racial oppression are mutually instituted. They certainly see the Gypsies as embodying an oppression, parallel to that experienced by women, as a possible way to escape that oppression. However, these writers never allow the Gypsies to exist in the reality of their own plight. In the end, these women writers “colonize” this internal Other by writing about them in terms of Victorian colonialism. This phenomenon was not relegated only to Brontë and Eliot, as Deidre David points out:

Powerful codes governing the middle-class British woman—her importance in cultivating the private, domestic sphere, her imagined moral superiority and capacity for sacrifice, her supposed incapacity for sustained intellectual activity...were sufficiently in ideological place at the beginning of the Victorian period for them to become available to an emerging and adjacent discourse: that of writing the imperial nation. (David 5)

The “powerful codes” that Deidre David refers to are fundamental in implementing the “writing of the imperial nation”. Writing was an accessible outlet for women to engage with, and they were part of writing the British Empire. This is explicated as a specific model of “Victorian ‘writing the nation’ which is produced by women and which is about women as resonant symbols of sacrifice for civilizing the ‘native’ and women as emblems of correct colonial governance” (David 5). In a similar vein, Meyer notes that the “idea that white women were like, or could be likened to, people of other races, with the corollary that events within the English home had a certain parallel with events in the colonies, recurs frequently in nineteenth-century writing” (Meyer 7). Brontë and Eliot may not have intended to use the Gypsy figure in their texts as a mode of “colonial governance,” but it is in the Gypsies’ relations with the white Victorian characters that remnants of this colonial impetus are made relevant. The trials of Maggie Tulliver and Jane Eyre in *The Mill on the Floss* and *Jane Eyre* are restored in the Gypsy figures of those novels. Their inclination to equivocate their own subjugation with that of other races, though possibly benign, causes many problems in how those other races are perceived and negates their own cultural histories through further racializing their experiences.

Focusing on the problems inherent in using the experiences of ethnic and racial groups to express discontent in the British Empire, we arrive at the conclusion from Chandra Talpade Mohanty that “in the context of Western women writing/studying women in the Third World, such objectification (however benevolently motivated) needs to be both named and challenged (Mohanty *Dangerous* 260). Her sentiment is echoed in the works of Lewis as she directly inquires “How can a Western woman, who is feminized as the symbolic inferior other at home (a placement that is also class-specific) exercise the classificatory gaze over the Orient that Said describes?” (Lewis 18). Both of these scholars are correct in addressing the problems associated with First

World Women trying to explain the lived experiences of subjugated groups or to use them as metaphors for their own experiences. It is here that we can really begin to critique the ways in which Eliot and Brontë utilize a Gypsy to express their own discontent, without ever allowing the Gypsy to speak, act or have agency beyond that of the symbolic. They did engage with “writing the nation” as they used tools of colonization to contain the Gypsy figure and promote false expectations for Gypsies living on the outskirts of British Victorian society. The motivations for using this approach lie in the fact that it was

Clear that many women authors expended as much energy as their peers on creating the powerful narrative voice afforded by British colonialism. After all, nineteenth-century women who transgressed the codes of femininity to publish or exhibit art were to some extent aspiring to recognition in the terms of their culture. (Lewis 22)

The want for recognition allowed these authors to continue to express their discontent within the rigid boundaries and gender roles forced upon them. It would be difficult for Victorian women to deconstruct the roles that had existed since at “the beginning of the Victorian period, [as] gender differences within British society were becoming part of the cultural furniture” (David 5). This is echoed in “how writing about empire both appropriates and elaborates Victorian gender politics in a construction of national identity defined by possession of ‘native’ territory and control of ‘native’ peoples” (David 5). Put another way, given the rigid gender identities open to Victorian women writers, it is understandable that they turned to writing, and a writing of an Other who escapes those limitations in particular, but we must also note the damage done through such textual moves. We see that “the metaphorical use of race is as important to Eliot’s fiction as it is to Charlotte or Emily Brontë’s” (Meyer 127). Neither of these texts should be exempt from criticism in how they have utilized the Gypsy as a means of promoting alternate agendas. They have used the tools of



colonialism to influence the ways in which the Gypsy is allowed to appear in the text; false representation of the Gypsy figure does not leave room for a more productive and less racialized discourse about this internal Other.

To better understand the representation of Gypsies in the two novels under consideration, it will be useful to take up three interrelated topics. First, it is important to understand how Gypsies as a nomadic people were marginalized within England, which allowed them to be considered as an Other that could be subject to “internal colonization.” Second, Gypsies in these novels are identified with domestic or private spaces that are themselves feminized. Third, because these novels approach Gypsies as an object of observation, they rob Roma of intentionality and control over their definition. As a marginal figure, feminized and robbed of agency, the Gypsy provides a woman author with the possibility of thinking through new gender configurations – conceiving solutions to the problems facing women. However, there is always the threat that the writer will fall into the language of colonization. Gypsies in these novels become a metaphor for women’s problems and their possible solution; these figures are not able to represent the actual Roma living in England’s midst.

## **Part II**

### **LIVING IN THE MARGINS OF THE “NATION”**

Within the pages of *Jane Eyre* and *The Mill on the Floss*, the Gypsy figure has significance for the white, British heroine that has little to do with the actual conditions of Gypsies in England. Existing in the physical margins of communities in Victorian England, Gypsies are unable to engage fully with Victorian society and yet are affected by aspects of traditional British

Imperialism. A group of people that is nomadic, and yet exists within the confines of England, cannot be colonized through “true colonization” (Spivak, *A Critique* 172). They cannot be colonized through the acquisition of their land by a foreign power; however, Othering this group through gendered terminology and relegating them to gendered spaces is a method in which to subject them to the dominant power of the colonizer.

The relationship between representations of the nation and gender has been analyzed thoroughly by feminist and postcolonial theorists; as McClintock puts it, “women are typically constructed as the symbolic bearers of the nation but are denied any direct relation to national agency” (McClintock *Dangerous* 90). This notion of women as “symbolic bearers of the nation” relies on the assumption that women are themselves only symbols and are an empty space upon which to impart meaning. Colonized people, insofar as they are feminized, are also imbued with meaning that is, to them, foreign. This reflects the hierarchy that has been constructed in Western society to value the masculine/colonizer while devaluing the feminine/colonized. This is a prominent issue in Victorian England:

By the latter half of the nineteenth century, the analogy between race and gender degeneration came to serve a specifically modern form of social domination, as an intricate dialectic emerged – between the domestication of the colonies and the racializing of the metropolis. (McClintock 43)

This form of social domination, in utilizing the feminine/masculine binary as a means of legitimizing the subjugation of a community or group of people, was justified to the Victorians as the Gypsies were an Other that could not be identified through their affinity to a nation or the Western construct of nationalism. Their nomadic lifestyle challenged the notion of nationalism and was a factor in their marginalization by Victorian Britain. The idea of “nation” as a foundation

for this investigation into the internal colonization of the Gypsies in Victorian England stems from Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities." Anderson situates the nation as a social construction:

Definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. (Anderson 6)

These are "very real bonds," as succinctly stated by Nancy Duncan in her summary of Anderson's text, and these bonds are the basis for what we can describe as nationalism. A set of characteristics are perceived as being naturalized and inherent to a group based on geographic locality and then used, during the Victorian era, to justify colonization of other groups and other nations. The disassociation of the idea of nation from political and geographical boundaries is difficult to untangle as

Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye. Such an image of the nation – or narration — might seem impossibly romantic and excessively metaphorical, but it is from those traditions of political thought and literary language that the nation emerges as a powerful historical idea in the west. (Bhabha 1)

The idea of nation in the West is used as a political and cultural tool to colonize other groups that exist outside of the construction of that particular nation. This notion of "nation" justifies the acquisition of other perceived nations, and the people living within them, based upon geographical boundaries and shared cultural characteristics. In this analysis of *Jane Eyre* and *The Mill on the*

*Floss*, I am focusing on literary language as means of symbolic colonization of the internal Other, the Roma, through the representation of “Gypsy” figures.

Nationalism is historically gendered. Using Anderson’s notion of “imagined communities,” we can see that this gendering is related to the construction of identities for groups of people that are then disseminated through that community as foundational components of individual identity. The “imagined community” of the nation is defined not only by inclusion but exclusion, not only by including some people within the political community but also by Othering those who lie outside or below it. This differentiation through the nation between “us” and “them” is achieved through “systems of cultural representation whereby people come to imagine a shared experience of identification with an extended community, they are historical practices through which social difference is both invented and performed” (McClintock *Dangerous* 89). The gendering of nationalism is a tool of the colonizer from which to identify themselves against the colonized Other. We see this occur in British Imperialism as the description of colonized land is associated with the feminine or the female body, and connected to the idea that women somehow embodied the traditional narrative of the nation in which they were associated and/or identified (McClintock *Imperial* 90-93).

While the gendering of colonization has been studied by scholars of postcolonial studies and feminist studies, I believe it is also productive to analyze the groups that fall outside of “traditional,” i.e. external, colonization. The conversation of what constitutes nationalism becomes problematic as migratory groups are not restricted by geographic limitations which are included in a theoretical understanding of what constitutes a nation. They are excluded from the definition of nation and the benefits of citizenship that are associated with a centralized geographical identity. The relationship becomes further strained as “migration is defined against identity: it is that which

already threatens the closures of identity thinking” (Ahmed 82). Nationalism is considered an immutable characteristic of identity in Victorian society. Migration challenges the identity formed by nationalism because migration is not controlled by the imagined bonds of the community that are based upon a static, centralized location. A particular narrative exists in Victorian literature about nomadic peoples that becomes problematic:

The very detachment from a particular home grants the nomadic subject the ability to see the world, an ability that becomes the basis for a new global identity and community. In such a narrative, identity becomes fetishized: it becomes detached from the particularity of places which allow for its formation as such. (Ahmed 86)

Given their life of constant migration, the Roma become a possible agent against which the nation can be defined. In this case the Roma are placed on the literal outskirts – their camps lie outside of cities and towns – and figurative – their identities are Othered in literary texts – outskirts of Victorian society. Their position can be better understood through the work of Homi K. Bhabha concerning migrant authors: “the margins of the nation displace the centre; the peoples of the periphery return to rewrite the history and fiction of the metropolis” (Bhabha 6). The “rewriting” that he refers to includes the experiences of those who exist on the margins of society who are often left out of Western thought and discourse. This is true for “true colonization,” as conceived by Spivak, and the “internal colonization” of the Gypsies by the Victorians as is facilitated by their existence on the margins (Spivak, *A Critique* 172). By refusing to acknowledge the Gypsies’ presence in Western history, the portrayals of the Gypsies by Victorian authors are very much based on their own narrow and fabricated perceptions. The positionality of existing in the margins can be explained more fully: “the margin as such is the impossible boundary marking off the wholly other, and the encounter with the wholly other, as it may be figured, has an unpredictable

relationship to our ethical rules. The named marginal is as much as concealment as a disclosure of the margin” (Spivak 173). One “wholly other” that the Victorians are confronting within the political boundaries of Victorian England are the Gypsies.

The locational margins are considered to be innately feminine, and the Victorians would partially justify an internal colonization of the Gypsies through their perceived femininity. This occurs in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* through the language with which the Gypsy woman, and interaction with the Gypsy woman, is described. The terms in which the Gypsy woman personally is described and the descriptions of acts that are applied to her create a disruption in the text and affect how she is portrayed to the reader. These include the terms of “vagabond,” “whim,” “hackneyed” and “low imposter” as they appear in Brontë’s text (Brontë 196). This investigation has a focus on Ms. Blanche (white) Ingram’s personal vendetta against the Gypsy woman as Blanche Ingram embodies, even in name, the privileged position of a white, upper class woman in Victorian society.

The scene with the Gypsy woman, who the reader later discovers is Mr. Rochester, has been a point of intrigue for scholars of Victorian and postcolonial literature. However, while Mr. Rochester’s cross-dressing has been studied from a variety of perspectives and positions, other scholars have failed to recognize that at this point in the novel, to the reader, to Jane Eyre, and to the residents and visitors of Thornfield Hall, this is an actual Gypsy woman; this works because Mr. Rochester has fulfilled their expectations of what a Gypsy is and how a Gypsy should behave. This is the perspective I am taking when analyzing how Gypsies are portrayed in the novel. The scene begins:

‘Now, now, good people,’ returned Miss Ingram, ‘don’t press upon me. Really your organs of wonder and credulity are easily excited: you seem by the importance you all – my good

mama included – ascribe to this matter – absolutely to believe we have a genuine witch in the house, who is in close alliance with the old gentleman. I have seen a gipsy vagabond; she has practised in the hackneyed fashion the science of palmistry, and told me what such people usually tell. My whim is gratified; and now I think Mr. Eshton will do well to put the hag in the stocks tomorrow morning, as he threatened.

(Brontë 196)

At first glance, this excerpt from the novel appears to reflect general Victorian treatment and knowledge of their Gypsy neighbors. However, the novel attempts to undermine this portrayal by highlighting the arrogance and ignorance of Blanche Ingram. She is the only one to actively speak out against the Gypsy woman and take offense to the Gypsy woman's presence in Thornfield Hall. Her treatment of the servants and other characters, Jane Eyre specifically, to this point in the novel has been reprehensible. That she is the one character to have the most issue with the Gypsy woman points to the novel's self-awareness of the problematic portrayal of Gypsies in Victorian Britain. However, this acknowledgement by the novel does not negate the issues in racializing a group of people based upon outside literary and cultural representations.

Moving beyond Blanche Ingram's initial description of the Gypsy woman, it is necessary to consider the terms she uses in a broader context. To begin with an analysis of the terms, I believe it is crucial to examine "vagabond" as it is derived from the notion that one is a vagrant; implying that they have no real economic stability nor occupy a position in which they are benefiting the capitalist economy. Its negative connotation also invokes the idea that the "vagabond" mentioned, the Gypsy woman, is involved with begging and is thus economically dependent on others. Though the Victorian period in Britain was marked by industrialization and an unprecedented fluidity between the middle and upper socioeconomic classes, the poor in

England continued to be disenfranchised and exempt from engaging in the new economies. We see that “a neat separation of industrialism and the novel is nearly impossible in the years between 1832 and 1867” (Childers 148). The novels *Jane Eyre* and *The Mill on the Floss*, reflect the changing economics of this period without engaging the construction of the socioeconomic classes on a critical level. Novels during this period,

Played heavily on the middle classes’ lack of direct knowledge about either the conditions or the culture of the working classes....the novels and investigative reports acted as a sort of cordon sanitaire insulating the middle classes, while defining and broadening the gap between the classes. (Childers 150)

Blanche’s use of the term “vagabond” echoes the ignorance of the middle and upper classes about the living conditions of the working and lower classes. The Gypsy woman that Blanche is addressing is the implied representative of the entire Gypsy community and therefore Blanche’s comments indicate her ignorance in the matter of the livelihoods of the Gypsies living in her community. It is reported that many of the Gypsies living in England had reputable occupations and worked as “dealers in horses and asses, farriers, smiths, tinkers, braziers, grinders of cutlery, basket-makers, chair-bottomers, and musicians” (*The Penny Magazine* 19). Additionally, the use of “vagabond” reflects the migratory nature of the Gypsies living in Victorian Britain and refers to their lifestyle geographically and economically. They are not contained by political boundaries but rather transcend rigid land borders. Economically, they are able to pursue employment without being held to one geographic location. They can move to locations with more economic prospects, unlike their stationary Victorian counterparts, and this was viewed as a threat to the stability of the Victorian economy (Behlmer 231).



## **GYPSIES IN DOMESTIC SPACES**

The relationship that occurs between nationalism and the notion of identity that I examined earlier regarding the Victorian period is reflected in the strict gendering that transpires regarding the occupation of space and the associations with which that space, specifically the public or private, are characterized. We see that “spaces were coded as masculine or feminine” (Langland 295). The gendering of these spaces reflects the gendering of nations as “the familial home and the national home are images of each other” (Nord 108). Though women would be tasked with the duties of running the familial home, the patriarch, usually the father, would be recognized as the leader of the family, though his contributions would primarily stem from his work in the public sphere. That the realm assigned to women through the gendering of identity and acceptable locations was the cause of much dissatisfaction for Victorian women is reflected in the characters that they have written.

Maggie Tulliver’s obstinate refusal to participate in the domestic sphere assigned to her as a woman in Victorian society would have been discouraged but was not a complete anomaly. This correlation between public spaces as masculine and private spaces as feminine has been analyzed by feminist scholars and postcolonial scholars as it pertains to the justification of imperialistic actions. The gendered relationship between the public and private spheres/spaces is described by Nancy Duncan: “It is clear that the public-private distinction is gendered. This binary opposition is employed to legitimate oppression and dependence on the basis of gender” (Duncan 128). This relationship is echoed in the domestic expectations of Victorian women and seen in the relationship between Maggie Tulliver and her society and its expectations of her. The domestic sphere becomes an ambiguous space in which to enact imperialistic measures as well as to do the reasoning for the

“true colonization” that Spivak describes as it existed in the Victorian period. Homi K. Bhabha describes this phenomenon:

The intimate recesses of the domestic space become sites for history’s most intricate invasions...the border between home and world becomes confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting. (Bhabha *Dangerous* 445)

The ambiguity of the domestic space, similarly to the ambiguity of margins, is recognized as feminine. As the Gypsies existed at the margins, one of the ways to colonize them was by putting them into the private space that was typically associated with femininity. While this ghettoizing of the Gypsies in a gendered space reflects society’s overall oppressive stance towards them, at the same time the Gypsies’ incongruity within Victorian social and gender norms made them appealing to British Victorians that felt that they, too, did not fit the strict roles that were assigned to them. This led to a fascination with the figure of the Gypsy as a means of circumventing rigorous social norms in literature without causing negative repercussions in their daily lives for directly confronting these limitations. For women, this became an especially attractive route as they could challenge their reduction to the private sphere and what has been traditionally associated with it as “the domestic, the embodied, the natural, the family, property, the ‘shadowy interior of the household’, personal life, intimacy, passion, sexuality, ‘the good life’, care, a haven, unwaged labour, reproduction, and immanence” (Duncan 128). Men were encouraged to be actively involved with public spaces and consequently the privileged positions in a Western society that are associated with the public sphere. In the hierarchy that exists between the public and private spaces, favoring the public, it stands to reason that an intersection between colonization and space would occur in Victorian England.

The focus on the domestic in *The Mill on the Floss* and *Jane Eyre* regarding the heroines stems from authors' own positionalities in Victorian society. Arguably, one of the most fascinating aspects of this use of the private sphere for postcolonial scholars is the way in which domesticity, and the focus on domestic life in the novels, echoes the imperialistic motivations and incentives of British imperialism in the nineteenth century. The most obvious means in which this method is utilized is in the relationships between men and women in Victorian England (Meyer 28). However, this relationship is never static and isolated, there is always another figure, often a Gypsy in Victorian literature, who is forced to represent a third space in which strict gender and social norms can be challenged.

The cult of domesticity, as constructed in the Victorian period, was implemented as a tool of colonization. Regarding the internal colonization of Gypsies, as explicated by Spivak previously, we can investigate how domesticity, and specifically in this study the use of hygiene, was utilized by Victorian authors as McClintock explains:

The cult of domesticity...became central to British imperial identity, contradictory and conflictual as that was, and an intricate dialectic emerged. Imperialism suffused the Victorian cult of domesticity and the historic separation of the private and the public, which took shape around colonialism and the idea of race. (McClintock *Imperial* 36)

The Gypsies living in Victorian Britain, through their close physical proximity and yet racial, social, and cultural Otherness, became associated with the private sphere because Victorians could not reconcile them to the public, and yet they also did not fit into the private. In order to show conventional society's cultural superiority and dominance, Gypsies were associated with deviance (Behlmer 232). Hygiene falls under the umbrella of the domestic and Victorians were focused on

physical appearance and its sequential representation of social and economic class as a means of differentiating groups of people. This is described by McClintock in her text, *Imperial Leather*:

A characteristic feature of the Victorian middle class was its peculiarly intense preoccupation with rigid boundaries....Soap and cleaning rituals became central to the demarcation of body boundaries and the policing of social hierarchies.

(McClintock *Imperial* 33)

Using this perspective to analyze the portrayal of Gypsies in Victorian novels, reveals the manners in which the descriptions of the Gypsies, often as unhygienic and unclean, would have imperialistic undertones rather than as a statement of absolute truth. Modern scholars have analyzed the frequency with which this phenomenon occurs and have found that “the regularity with which dirtiness, for example, is attributed to the descriptions of Gypsies regardless of their personal or community lifestyles is symptomatic of a process initiated and perpetuated by non-Gypsy society” (Bhopal and Myers 89). The association with “dirtiness” has become ingrained into the trope of the Gypsy that appears in British literature without any true basis to support it. The effects of the non-Gypsy society on how Gypsies are portrayed in Victorian literature is directly related to Victorian imperialism and the techniques in which Gypsies were oppressed by British Victorians as a means to understand an internal Other.

When the Gypsy woman does appear in Brontë’s text, and she is never mentioned as being outside of Thornfield Hall; she is first referred to in derogatory terms: “Sam, here, says that one of the old Mother Bunches is in the servants’ hall at this moment, and insists upon being brought in before the quality, to tell them their fortunes” (Brontë 194). Not only is she described with the term “old Mother Bunches” which in itself gestures to the methods in which the Gypsy is feminized in this text, by “Mother” and “old”, but her first location is the servant’s hall. Before she is allowed

to come before the “quality,” she is mentioned to be in the servants’ hall. The servants would take care of all the domestic chores, concerns, and the tasks that were associated with “care” as a characteristic of the private sphere. The Gypsy woman immediately is placed into the domestic sphere/private space without the chance to extricate herself or challenge this characterization.

While this scene is pivotal to the plot, it also contains many layers concerning the representations of Gypsies in Victorian literature. The first person to mention that the Gypsy woman is in Thornfield Hall is the footman. We see the footman bringing in the coal, an item used for heat and comfort, when he is describing the Gypsy woman as “quite troublesome”. This invites a question of why one of the first adjectives to describe this Gypsy woman is “troublesome”. I am arguing that she is said to be “troublesome” because she deviates from their expectations of what it means to be a regular member of society, even of the lower classes. To control her, they try to place her into the private sphere, which is unsuccessful because she is a marginal Other and cannot fit into a space of which she has had no part in creating. We see the merging of domestic and racialized terms when she is described as being “black as a crock” (Brontë 194). The crock that is referred to is a cooking instrument. We see in this moment that the Gypsy woman is described with a term that refers to her location of domesticity and is also racialized by stating that she is as “black” as the kitchen tool. She is dehumanized through being compared to a cooking pot, a tool to be used, and immediately limited to a private space in order to control her more fully. This concept of relegation to the private, while prominent in the pages of *Jane Eyre*, is utilized more fully as a tool of colonization in *The Mill on the Floss*.

Eliot’s Othering of the Gypsy figure in *The Mill on the Floss* in relation to the Gypsies’ own migratory practice, is less direct than in Brontë’s novel. In *The Mill on the Floss* Maggie

Tulliver runs away “to the gypsies” which indicates that the Gypsies are outside of her community and her physical location. This scene occurs in the text as Maggie declares:

No! She would run away and go to the gypsies, and Tom should never see her any more. That was by no means a new idea to Maggie; she had been so often told she was like a gypsy, ‘half wild,’ that when she was miserable it seemed to her the only way of escaping opprobrium, and being entirely in harmony with circumstances would be to live in a little brown tent on the commons: the gypsies, she considered, would gladly receive her, and pay her much respect on account of her superior knowledge. (Eliot 104)

Similarly to *Jane Eyre*, *The Mill on the Floss* acknowledges the issues lying in the Victorian portrayals of Gypsies by saying that once Maggie runs away to them, she will no longer be able to be seen. This invisibility reveals the text’s recognition of the limitations of the literary Gypsy to describe the lived experiences of the nomadic peoples in Victorian Britain. Once Maggie joins them, she will no longer exist in a way that is tangible or accessible to the Victorians. Even to Tom, her own kin, she will be unreachable and unseeable as soon as she joins this community.

Maggie does runs to the Gypsy community on the outskirts of her town, “the commons,” to escape “opprobrium,” or criticism that is specifically public (i.e. masculine). Her naivety in the novel becomes apparent as the Roma, an Othered, marginalized group, were not exempt from criticism in the forms of persecution that they suffered for their perceived differences. That Maggie is running away from public/masculine criticism to the Gypsies indicates that this group occupies an accessible space for her. The Gypsies are occupying the margins of Victorian society and are then made into representatives of an ambiguous space between the strict public and private spaces of the Victorian period, a third space that allows for Maggie Tulliver to escape the rigid social norms placed on her as a woman. The idea that she will reach “harmony” when she believes that

she will be accepted into the Gypsy community indicates to the reader through the description that the Gypsies are an outside group that can be colonized by Maggie through her “superior knowledge”. This knowledge refers to her “book knowledge” which would typically be considered in the realm of the masculine as women in Victorian society were dissuaded from pursuing rigorous scholarship as that was considered superfluous, and even undesirable, in the domestic sphere. Though a woman, and running to the Gypsies to escape the strict social norms that limited women in Victorian England, she is still bringing masculine/colonizing intentions through knowledge to their marginalized space.

The situation of women in the Victorian period was strictly controlled by social conventions that reflected socioeconomic class. They were often at the mercy of the men in their lives as they were discouraged, and legally prevented, from obtaining financial autonomy except in special circumstances. However, “Nineteenth century women were not always the passive, submissive and pure creatures of popular idealizations, but neither were they ever completely free from this stereotype” (Vicinus xix). Some, such as Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot, were able to critique the expectations for women through their own writing and education. While it was understood that “Better education meant, in theory, financial independence and wider career choice... women found that the end results [due to legal complications] of their agitation were often less than the promise” (Vicinus xix). The successes of Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot as authors were difficult to replicate for most Victorian women who were not born into the same circumstances. While financial independence through education may appear to be a key factor in dissolving strict social norms and freeing women from the confines of the domestic and private space, it was not a sufficient answer. As wealth was not the main factor in controlling social status, “status was fluid” due to the industrial revolution, there was an emphasis on “the manipulation of

social signs” to determine class position (Langland 293). In the Victorian period the, “most pervasive and effective form of control was through the social and individual demand for respectability” (Vicinus xix). The reliance on respectability pushed women back into the domestic sphere and negated their attempts at financial and social freedom through education.

Investigating the relationship between Victorian women’s roles and the appeal of the Gypsies to the wayward Maggie, leads us to an investigation of the use of the term “refuge” by George Eliot through the character of Maggie Tulliver. This appears in the text as “Gypsydom was her only refuge” (Eliot 104). This “refuge” – “Gypsydom” as it is written in the text – is stated to be Maggie Tulliver’s haven from her domestic life and the expectations put upon her. Her proclivity to spend her time outside, in public, masculine, spaces creates tension between herself and her family members. As a woman in Victorian society, even though she is a child during the first portion of the novel, she is required to remain in the domestic sphere. She challenges society’s expectations of her and runs to what she perceives to be an ambiguous space outside of Victorian society, but still close enough to appear to be accessible.

The internally Othered Gypsies, occupy a symbolic space for Maggie Tulliver as she believes her personal difficulties with the limitations placed on women in the public sphere are the equivalent to the challenges that the Gypsies face living on the periphery of Victorian society. The “refuge” that Maggie describes invokes sentiments similar to what Anne McClintock considers the “feminizing [of] the land [as it] represents a ritualistic moment in imperial discourse, as male intruders ward off fears of narcissistic disorder by reinscribing, as natural, an excess of gender hierarchy” (McClintock *Imperial* 24). Her description of the Gypsies, the community, as her “refuge” reflects that imperialistic, masculine, objective through feminizing land, or in this case a group, in order to take control and mold it into what one wants based upon the “established” gender



hierarchy which privileges the masculine over the feminine. She is warding off her own “narcissistic disorder” in expecting the Gypsies to provide her with a “refuge” from her own difficulties living as Victorian woman and, in her mind, legitimizing her expectations that they provide her with this haven that does not actually exist.

Maggie Tulliver’s interactions with the Gypsy community on the outskirts of her hometown, St.Ogg’s, demonstrates her naivety and her innocent yearning to become involved in the Gypsy community. Her interest in them stems from the almost constant comparisons she hears from her mother and others that her appearance, from her dark hair and dark complexion, is “Gypsy-like”. She runs away from her family when she faces punishment for pushing her cousin into the mud. Instead of facing the consequences, she runs away to the Gypsies because she feels that she is one of them, without ever questioning her preconceived notions of what a Gypsy is or what her fellow Victorians have constructed a Gypsy to be. Along her journey, Eliot describes Maggie’s juvenile reasoning: “she was getting rather tired and hungry, and until she reached the gypsies there was no definite prospect of bread-and-butter” (Eliot 106). In her naivety, Maggie Tulliver believes that she can expect sustenance from the Gypsy community that lives on the outskirts of her village. There is no question for her of whether she will be accepted, attributed to her coloring and “wild” temperament; she is certain, that the Gypsies will welcome her since others have said she is just like the Gypsies. The “definite prospect” implies that the Gypsies already exist within the confines of the cult of domesticity and are accessible to Maggie.

Maggie continues her journey and follows the “little semicircular black tent with blue smoke rising before it” to immediately come upon a “tall female figure by the column of smoke – doubtless the gypsy mother, who provided tea and other groceries” (Eliot 107). While the obvious association of domesticity of the “tea and other groceries” with the private space as a means of

nourishment and care, as described by Nancy Duncan, we also see the woman explicitly described as a “mother”. Her physical proximity to the column of smoke is indicative of her supposed relationship to the duties associated with women during the Victorian era in that she is near the mechanism used for sustenance and comfort. In description and in placement the Gypsy woman is relegated to an area that is intrinsically related to the domesticity associated with the feminization of private space. Additionally, she is immediately supposed to possess the aforementioned “tea and other groceries” by Maggie. Here the labor behind the making of the tea and groceries, is hidden to the reader and unaddressed by Maggie Tulliver. While George Eliot did craft this character to represent an authentic eight or nine year old girl, her assumptions regarding the accessibility and immediacy of the “tea and other groceries” includes an implicit bias in the character that the Gypsy woman is relegated to the same roles that she, as a Victorian woman, will be made to perform while simultaneously she, the Gypsy woman, is associated with a marginality that Maggie believes to be echoed in her own situation.

Maggie’s initial impression of the Gypsies, while supposedly of the same “race” focuses on what she perceives as their lack of hygiene, and therefore lack of civilization. Even when the Gypsy community is treating her with hospitality, the instincts of British imperialism are shown in what she values in the community she is invading. This passage from the novel exposes Maggie’s imperial bias:

‘I’m come to stay with you, please.’ ‘That’s pretty; come then. Why, what a nice little lady you are, to be sure,’ said the gypsy, taking her by the hand. Maggie thought her very agreeable, but wished she had not been so dirty. (Eliot 108)

The Gypsy woman’s personality and her kind treatment of Maggie are overshadowed by the “dirtiness” that is implied as McClintock’s “demarcation” of social and racial boundaries in

Victorian society. Maggie, as the white, Victorian woman, obviously is more hygienic than the Gypsy woman she is intruding upon. Dirtiness as a characteristic is racialized and relies upon the notion of the Other in not conforming to Western ideals as an expression of deviance. She is described as “pretty” by the Gypsy woman, as she is a white, Victorian woman, and yet the first thoughts that come to Maggie’s mind are not that the Gypsy woman is agreeable, but rather that her “dirtiness” takes precedence over her otherwise helpful actions. One cannot be extricated from the other for Maggie Tulliver. That she “wishes” the Gypsy woman “had not been so dirty” also refers to the underlying belief that the Gypsy woman cannot change her appearance and her dirtiness for it is as much a part of her as her Gypsiness.

### **Part III**

#### **“KNOWING” THE GYPSY FIGURE**

In their attempts to “know” the Gypsies living alongside their communities without engaging with them directly, the Victorians developed their own notions of what it meant to be a Gypsy. The incongruity between the actions of the Gypsy figures in both *Jane Eyre* and *The Mill on the Floss as the Gypsy* with the white, Victorian women’s expectations of what a Gypsy should be reflects how the perceived characteristics of the Gypsies by the Victorians created an unattainable figure for actual Gypsies to ever achieve. They would continue to fail in their abilities to recreate the Gypsies that the Victorians believed them to be, and it is in this failure that we are lead to question the validity of these portrayals in literature.

In the scene of *Jane Eyre*, in which Mr. Rochester is disguised as the Gypsy woman, Mr. Rochester is performing the Gypsy woman character using his own expectations of what a Gypsy woman should be and how she should act. His Gypsy woman soon proves unsatisfactory to his intended audience. Blanche Ingram's dissatisfaction with her fortune reveals to the reader that Mr. Rochester's Gypsy woman is incomplete. There is an unraveling of Mr. Rochester's performance of the Gypsy woman when she cannot accurately predict the future through fortune-telling. As a Gypsy, she should have access to this type of knowledge in order to fulfill the role that the audience expects from her. She is unable to live up to the predominant beliefs about Gypsies in the community, which implies that she is failing as the object of knowledge. She cannot be the subject of knowledge as she is forced to live up to a false expectation of the abilities and knowledge of Gypsies, i.e. the fortune-telling.

Referring to the passage from *Jane Eyre* earlier in this analysis to look at the language that is used to describe the Gypsy woman Mr. Rochester is playing resonates with the discourse concerning knowledge production. Alone, the use of the term "vagabond", as discussed previously, is not sufficient to investigate the subjugation of the Gypsy figures in Brontë's novel through language. However, the terms chosen by Blanche Ingram in her description of the Gypsy woman compound upon one another to indicate that her perception of the Gypsy woman has weight in the novel. She describes her interest in the Gypsy woman's divinational abilities as only a "whim," considering it a passing fancy in that it is without any inherent substance or meaning. Nevertheless, she pursues this "whim" with vigor and encourages the others present at Thornfield Hall to do the same.

The Gypsy woman is used to satisfy Ingram's "whim" by telling her fortune. The term "whim" implies that the Gypsy is unable to provide any substantial, i.e. rational knowledge,

because she is unable to participate as the subject of knowledge production. This can be attributed to her nomadic lifestyle or her inability to function as a “traditional” Gypsy. This sentiment is reflected in the use of “hackneyed” to describe the practice of the Gypsy and carries the connotation that her practice is related to her position as an object in her inability to produce something worth knowing. Blanche Ingram, not realizing that the Gypsy woman is actually Mr. Rochester, is upset when her preconceived notions of what a Gypsy should be/be able to do are not “gratified”. The Gypsy woman fails to exhibit the behaviors and abilities that are expected of her.

The use of the term “low imposter” appears as the Gypsy woman is first made known to the inhabitants of Thornfield Hall and the reader. Using this term to describe the Gypsy woman implies that there are underlying expectations of the Gypsy woman that she is not conforming to at this moment. Without the other characters knowing that this is Mr. Rochester, we must assume in this moment that the people of Thornfield Hall believed her to be a “real” Gypsy woman. With this in mind, the term “imposter” must be investigated as applied to an “actual” Gypsy woman. Therefore, the description of “low imposter” is not referring to Mr. Rochester impersonating, poorly, a Gypsy woman but rather refers explicitly to the Gypsy woman in her ability to be a Gypsy. Additionally, the notion of “imposter” is related to how the Gypsies were viewed as internal Others in Victorian Britain. They had lived in Britain since the 1500s but were still considered outsiders. By refusing to participate in Victorian society as was deemed proper, and still living in Britain, they were the lowest of all possible pretenders as they did not live up to the expectations of the stereotype that was created around them.

The most striking moment in *Jane Eyre* regarding the portrayal of the Gypsy occurs when Blanche Ingram says that Mr. Eshton “would do well to put the hag in the stocks tomorrow

morning". Since the Gypsy woman's behavior does not suit Miss Ingram, she is not doing what is expected of her by the British women, she needs to be contained. The Gypsy woman does not fit the role ascribed to her by Ms. Ingram, in that she did not tell her the fortune she wished to hear, nor did she use the "proper" tools/skills that Ms. Ingram expected. Her deviance here, from the role Victorian society anticipated from her, immediately leads to the idea that she needs to be punished for her Otherness. Arguably, one of the best methods to punish a nomadic group is to place them in restraints. In this case it is suggested that the Gypsy woman be placed in the stocks. Ms. Ingram, described with the word "threatened" in this scene, reveals that it is she who is actually "threatened" by the Gypsy woman. This results to her uneasiness at not being able to "know" the gypsy woman when her fortune proves to be less than desirable. Her overdramatic response suggests there is more going on in this scene than superficial disappointment in her fortune.

In *Jane Eyre*, the women are the most interested in visiting the "gypsy camp" as it is stated in the text. Brontë writes, "Ladies, you talked of going to Hay Common to visit the gipsy camp" when Mr. Rochester, dressed as a Gypsy woman, is waiting in the hall to meet with the visitors of Thornfield Hall (Brontë 194). As a group relegated to the private sphere themselves, in that they are identified as women in the text, their interest in visiting this people is a curious phenomenon. I believe that a correlation exists in their interest in visiting the Gypsy camp and the limitations placed upon them, as women, to only have influence in the domestic domain. This is only possible because the Gypsy community is considered to be outside of the confines of Victorian society. This is one of the moments in which the women in the novel are actively engaging as the colonizers, even though they are exempt from external colonization as they cannot participate in the public. They intend to visit the Gypsy camp the way one would visit a museum or an exhibit. It is suggested that their looking upon the Gypsies, as they would not deem to interact with them

as equals, is an act of imperialism in itself. Their visit is one of curiosity, but also displays the power dynamics that are at play as the Gypsies are made into the object to be gazed upon, rather than the subject enacting the gazing. The Gypsies in the camp are the objects of knowledge here, rather than the subjects of knowledge production as they are not engaging with the Victorian women equally. The disparity between how the Gypsy woman is not welcome in Thornfield Hall and treated as an intruder, and the expectations of the white, upper class Victorians to assume that they will be welcome at the “gypsy camp” reveals the inconsistencies of this imperialistic relationship.

The sentiment of colonizing through knowledge, regarding which forms of knowledge are exalted, is echoed in *The Mill on the Floss*. In the following passage of the novel Maggie Tulliver muses over her choice of companions:

The slanting sunlight fell kindly upon them, and the scene was really very pretty and comfortable, Maggie thought, only she hoped they would soon set out the tea-cups. Everything would be quite charming when she had taught the gypsies to use a washing basin, and to feel an interest in books. (Eliot 108)

Again, we see that the Gypsies are not living up to Maggie’s expectations of domesticity, and of Gypsiness. At first glance they appear quite picturesque as the scene is deemed “very pretty and comfortable”. From a distance, they appear to fulfill her expectations of what a Gypsy community would look like at a surface level. This soon changes when the Gypsies fail to behave in the ways that Maggie expected. We see this when they still have not “set out the tea-cups” even after she requested tea from them. Her depiction of the Gypsies is quite different from Blanche Ingram’s; however, here too the Gypsies fail to live up to the notion of what a Victorian woman believes the Gypsies should be and how they should act.

The method Maggie believes to best remedy their aberrant behavior is through teaching them “to use a washing basin, and to feel an interest in books.” This is a form of colonizing though Maggie never describes it as such in explicit terms. Not only does the reference to washing denote the boundaries demarcated through hygiene – but also types of knowledge production as masculine and feminine. Eliot’s use of what is traditionally considered “masculine knowledge” and “feminine knowledge” in the West is utilized by Maggie as a tool for colonization. To her, the Gypsies need to be taught to “use a washing basin,” which is typically associated with the domestic sphere and femininity, and to “feel an interest in books,” something she is often reprimanded for as a woman. As the Gypsy exists in such a precarious position, neither living completely outside nor inside Victorian society or norms, variations of colonizing techniques are required to make them accessible objects of knowledge for Victorians.

The Gypsies, in their liminal position outside of the Victorian social norms, must be taught both forms of knowledge by Maggie as they are considered lacking in their roles as men and women. Their position is so ambiguous, so Othered, that the form of internal colonization the Gypsies face by the Victorians is a mix of imposed social norms and expectations. They cannot be colonized in the traditional ways as they are outside of what is considered more “traditional colonization,” or external colonization. Instead, as we see with the attempts of Maggie Tulliver, various combinations of imperial techniques were used in order to make sense of these people that were literally and figuratively living on the periphery of Victorian society.



## Part IV: Conclusion

The Gypsy figure in Victorian novels has been the subject of intrigue for scholars by virtue of its ambiguous position in literature. However, rarely is this figure investigated as a means of trying to understand and “know” the Gypsies that actually lived in Victorian Britain. Their position of living on the margins – and their unknown origin – sparked a fascination that invited authors, artists, and others to attempt to comprehend this very real community of people. The novels, *Jane Eyre* and *The Mill on the Floss*, are two canonical works of Victorian literature that utilize the Gypsy figure as a tool for the protagonists, and the authors, to challenge what they perceive as limitations in Victorian society. The nomadism of the Gypsy during the Victorian era, during which nationalism was considered a necessary attribute for identity, made them an anomaly. They existed outside of both the public and private spheres. To make sense of this group, the Victorians relied upon stereotypes and false expectations of what it meant to be a Gypsy and the assumed behaviors a Gypsy should exhibit. This affected how the Gypsy figure is treated in Victorian literature and the methods in which this phenomenon occurs in both of these novels indicates a propensity towards the colonizing efforts of the Victorian era.

The Roma have a complicated history with the Western world that has not been explored in scholarship to the same extent that other racialized groups have been the subject of intellectual investigation. The obstacles that face Roma today are very real, such as obtaining the legal rights associated with citizenship – and an education that is accessible and relevant to nomadic communities. This barely touches the harmful stereotypes that continue to permeate Western society and affect how Roma are still treated as an Other. These stereotypes are used as justification for the continued Othering of the Roma. The Victorian assumptions of what it meant to “be” a

Gypsy are echoed in the common misrepresentations of the Gypsy that appear all over Western popular culture today. These stereotypes are extremely harmful for Roma communities and limit their ability to participate in society as agential subjects rather than objects. While this study has focused on only two novels from the Victorian period, there are many other avenues for academics to untangle why the Roma have been portrayed in such disparaging ways, even when not intended, and how to deconstruct the Gypsy stereotypes and allow for more productive discourses that do not rely on culturally embedded biases.

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