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From the Romani to the Other:

How Literature Created the "Gypsy" and its influence on the public perception of the Romani

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If asked to describe a “Gypsy,” a person’s response would oscillate between descriptions characteristic of the exotic or the immoral. Though several common misconceptions exist throughout the Western world, particular stereotypes of the “Gypsy” are more prevalent depending on location. Romani scholar Ian Hancock contends that Americans are more likely to associate the “Gypsy” with notions of bohemianism and freedom compared to their European counterparts who tend to consider the “Gypsy” as a depraved individual (Hancock, 67). Each attitude reflects the dominant stereotypes embedded within either society. Deriving from misconceptions surrounding the Romani, the differing responses are symptomatic of how the “Gypsy” has been exploited by literature to suit the particular demands of the public. While in Europe, a person’s response reveals how the “Gypsy” has been depicted as the inferior Other to enforce Western hegemony,[1] the American perspective exposes how the “Gypsy” has been “colonized” as an emblem of cultural attitudes relating to expansion and liberty.

As a result of mainstream society “learning” from books rather than first-hand interaction, a surprising number of Americans do not realize the Romani exist (Hancock, 67). For American society, the “Gypsy” has become a projection of their cultural ideals born from beliefs such as manifest destiny. With the term “Gypsy” more extensively used to convey an image rather than identify actual individuals (Hancock, 66), the Romani’s identity has been replaced in favor of a metaphorical means to describe a life of travel and freedom.

It is not uncommon for Americans to describe themselves as having a “Gypsy soul”[2] as a way of imparting the belief they possess an innate desire for freedom or rather the gift of fortune-telling. A prophetic “ability” that is often claimed to be inherited from a grandmother,

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[1] A philosophy that defines oneself against what they are not. Commonly applied to a variety of “factors” including class, gender, and race as a means of forming identity through negation.
[2] An essence of being derived from Romani stereotypes used to define an inherent desire for freedom and wanderlust.

individuals wish to imbue their lives with a sense of mystery and importance. The ever-growing increase in people practicing tarot cards and “performing” palm readings in public spaces is further evidence of how the “Gypsy” is becoming disassociated from the Romani. While not entirely harmful for the “Gypsy” and Romani to be considered separate, this perception remains damaging as society appropriates a culture they do not understand. As contemporary society faces more unprecedented uncertainty and increased levels of stress, being a “Gypsy” becomes all the more appealing.

A diverse group of people tracing their roots to Northern India, the Romani form an ethnic group of people whose population spans across the world and are known for their rich and diverse cultural traditions such as music and dancing. Rather than a monolithic whole, the Romani are made up of several groups all of which are unique from the other. However, due to their perceived Otherness and the absence of a fixed homeland, the Romani have endured a history marked by persecution and marginalization. A shadow cast over their lives that has been exacerbated by literary works disseminating unfounded rumors. Labeled by Hancock as the last group of people that fictional literature can get away with discriminating against (Hancock, 50), it is important to clarify that although the term "Gypsy" is often used synonymously to refer to the Romani, this usage is widely accepted as erroneous by scholars and Romani, alike.[3] While the “Gypsy” certainly shares a strong connection to the Romani, instead of being interchangeable, the “Gypsy” is a separate literary construction derived from the “Western imagination” (Trumpener, 847).[4] Accordingly, the term Romani will be used to refer to the group of people, whilst “Gypsy” denotes their appropriated likeness in fiction.

[3] Other variations of the term exist across Europe such as Sipsiwin, Ijito, Gjupci and Gitano.
[4] Another term used by Katie Trumpener to describe the set of pejorative stereotypes about the Romani based on “false European surmises”

Commonly depicted as a woman in a headdress, hoop earrings, and colorful skirt, the stereotypical image of the "Gypsy" persists in the public consciousness not as a reminder of the discrimination against the Romani but rather as a representation of a lifestyle founded on early American principles. Ironically, a symbol that was later assumed by the hippy movement, it is this contrasting use of the "Gypsy" that demonstrates just how the concept became a canvas of social projection. As the "Gypsy" meant nothing to the public, it could become anything. A school of thought that derives from the belief that the Romani are without history (Hancock, 62).

Due to American society's appropriation of the "Gypsy," an ambiguity regarding the usage of the term arose. No longer a representation of just one thing, the "Gypsy's" vague connotations can be evidenced in the music of Billy Joel, Cher, Shakira, Cypress Hill, Jennifer Lopez, and Fleetwood Mac. Having all written songs either about or referencing the "Gypsy," it is significant that every artist offers differing depictions. Whether presented as an exotic dancer, a symbol of freedom, or a metaphor for traveling and stealing clothes,[5] the lack of uniformity signifies society's ignorance and the number of delusions surrounding the "Gypsy." The "Gypsy" has been manipulated and misconstrued into a literary trope that has little or no relevance to the people who identify as Romani.

However, this form of misconception is not an issue exclusive to America. Given their proximity with the Romani, the "Gypsy" for European society became a means to enforce Western superiority. Associating their darker features and alterity with immorality and destitution, European society shaped the "Gypsy" as a marker to define themselves. A perspective that was reinforced by medieval Christian doctrine that associated light with

[5] The exact lyrics referenced are from Shakira's song, "Gypsy" whereby she sings, "I might steal your clothes and wear them if they fit me. Never made agreements just like a gypsy." An indication of the term's separation from the Romani, notice how the word "gypsy" is not capitalized.

purity and darkness with sin.[6] As society sought to define the boundaries of civilization, the adverse depictions of the "Gypsy" as thieves and vagabonds instilled in Europeans the belief of their superiority. Unlike American society which had little to no interaction with the Romani, European society possessed the opportunity to subvert pejorative attitudes of "Gypsy." However, like any form of bias that encourages dominance, it was easier for society to accept these harmful beliefs rather than reconcile with the Romani. Thus, as society's understanding of the Romani appears inconsistent at best, it seems perplexing why the appearance of "Gypsy" endures in literature, film, and television.

Although many would have you believe society has moved beyond the days of outwardly discriminating against groups of people in works of fiction, Hancock argues that the "Gypsy" - as an illustration of the Romani - stands as the definitive counterclaim to this suggestion (Hancock, 68). Due to the variety of film and television shows, including the likes of Marvel's *Thor* and Netflix's *The Gentleman*, which continue to depict the "Gypsy" as either fantastical or hostile caricatures, it appears apparent why Hancock would contest such a claim.[7] However, given the "Gypsy" is frequently depicted through coded language or appropriated likeness, this discriminative portrayal goes unnoticed.

Contemporary writers often rely on the culturally familiar tropes that the "Gypsy" offers. Imbuing their work with a sense of exoticism, danger, or alterity, writers continue to draw from the symbolism of the "Gypsy" for textual effect. Without needing to explicitly name the type of character, in depicting the individuals as carefree wanderers or connecting them with criminality or magic, it is expected that the audience will recognize the writer's intentions. Though in some instances the character will be explicitly referred to as a "Gypsy,"

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[6] Other misconceptions were drawn from Christian doctrines, similar to those ascribed to Jewish people. For example, the Romani were accused of forging the nails of which Christ was crucified.

[7] Other contemporary depictions in film and television include *Peaky Blinders*, *Sherlock Holmes: Game of Shadows* (another film directed by Guy Ritchie. Let us not also forget *Snatch*), and *How I Met Your Mother.*

if they are seen to be in harmony with the public's false consciousness (Trumpener, 861),[8] these often-harmful depictions will face little or no reproach as they are deemed authentic representations. While for some readers it may be a challenge to identify examples of the "Gypsy" appearing in contemporary fiction, it would not be a difficult task to describe the characters given the number of times their tropes are exploited. A heuristic approach that plays on the audience's unconscious biases, if not explicitly to support the Romani, these tired cliches should be challenged for the sake of creative cinema.

Many prominent Romani figures have seen their identities altered on account of negative public perception relating to the "Gypsy." One of the most influential European Jazz performers of the 20th century, Jean "Django" Reinhart had his Romani origins concealed to appeal to an American audience. While Reinhardt pioneered a genre known as "gypsy Jazz," the music industry sought to separate Reinhardt from the adverse perception of the Romani that had disrupted his career in France. In the same manner that the American perception of the "Gypsy" was an image rather than a reference to a group of people, "gypsy Jazz" was presented to an American audience not as a genre of music created by a certain group of people but as a spirited tone with an intricate playing style. Having performed with the likes of BB King and Duke Ellington, many people are aware of Reinhardt and his influence on Jazz, however, far less are aware that it was his Romani heritage that inspired his body of work. An example of the Romani existing outside the realm of fiction, the life and works of Django Reinhardt typify the unnoticed presence of the Romani in contemporary society. Other notable Romani figures include singer-songwriter, Robert Plant, comic-actor, Charlie Chaplin, and film director, Tony Gatiff, the latter who has produced multiple works focussed specifically on the Romani in Europe.

[8] Originally coined by Karl Marx, "false consciousness" is used by Katie Trumpener to refer to an understanding of the Romani untrue to reality.

While adverse opinions will never cease to exist in society, it is the depictions of the "Gypsy" that enable ignorance to thrive. "Gypped" or "Jipped" is a term used by many to describe an act of being cheated or bothered, however, those who use it are often unaware of its etymology. A by-product of the word, "Gypsy," this verb finds common usage in everyday life without as much as a second thought. The real issue does not lie in its pejorative usage but rather in those who do not realize the term's connotations.

There should always be a space to understand the perspectives of others, and this should be no different for the Romani. Because distorted perceptions of the Romani remain, appropriate action should be brought about to amend this. As the Romani continue to face persecution across the world in the form of environmental discrimination,[9] attacks from far-right groups, and police brutality (Feher, 84), the first step that mainstream society can take is to appropriately acknowledge their existence as a group of people and the struggles they face. To bring about such change it is the source of the problem that needs to be tackled. Which, in the case of the "Gypsy," stems from their depiction in fiction. In consideration of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame,* written by Victor Hugo in 1831*, Wuthering Heights,* written by Emily Bronte in 1847*,* and *Thinner,* written by Stephen King in 1984 - three of the most well-known novels that contain depictions of the "Gypsy" - this essay will look to analyze each portrayal in bringing to light how these characters have been exploited by literature and the influence that this literature has had on the public perception of the Romani.

The Hunchback of Notre Dame

Described as an "ambitious" tale with an abundance of "disconnection… and Romantic cliches" (Zarifopol-Johnston, 22), at the center of Victor Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* exists a common misconception. Contrary to the novel's reference to Esmeralda

[9] Life expectancy of the Romani is lower than the average European, whilst the rate of infant mortality is higher (Hancock, 89).

as "the gypsy girl" (Hugo, 22), it is, in fact, the titular character Quasimodo who is a "Gypsy." Kidnapped as a child, Esmeralda, as it is later revealed, is the daughter of Paquette, a French sex worker turned recluse from Reims. Though the "Gypsies" raise Esmeralda, she shares no genealogical relationship with the people. Rather, as it is stated in the novel, Quasimodo is the "monstrous child of some gypsy women who had given herself to the devil" (Hugo, 86). Exposing his own disconnection, Hugo misses the implications of this substitution. While the father of Esmeralda is never revealed, there is no evidence to suggest that the man Paquette conceived Esmeralda with was a "Gypsy" – an omission of detail that would subsequently indicate Esmeralda not to be a "Gypsy."[10] Thus, as Hugo describes Esmeralda's "dark" coloring and likens her appearance to the "beautiful golden luster of Andalusian or Roman women" (Hugo, 23), a discrepancy arises in his writing: how did Esmeralda, the daughter of a French woman, inherit features commonly associated with the "Gypsy?"

Although one could argue that Esmeralda came to resemble the "Gypsies" as she adopted their customs, Hugo's frequent references delineating the "Gypsies" as an "evil race" separate from the "whitest and most innocent people" (Hugo, 69) point toward an emphasis on Esmeralda's physical appearance rather than her mere attire. A more probable explanation behind the confusion is that Hugo made a mistake, albeit one that can be reasoned. Hugo needed his character to possess an Otherness that, as literature has long dictated, could be readily found in the "Gypsy." It is Esmeralda's status as a "Gypsy" that Hugo uses to challenge the French government and the Church's authority. While Hugo does convolute the backgrounds of two characters, this error does not wholly detract from his writing. Rather by recognizing that Quasimodo is a "Gypsy" and that Esmeralda "masquerades" as one, *The*

[10] A similar contradiction also appears in Miguel de Cervantes', *La Gitanilla,* a narrative centered around "Gypsies," which Hugo just so happens to draw upon.

Hunchback of Notre Dame opens itself to an interpretation that more accurately brings to light both the depiction of the Romani in literature.

Whereas interpretations of the relationship between Esmeralda and Quasimodo have largely focused on them as symbols of "the interchangeability behind the sublime and the grotesque"[11] (Grossman, 207), the contrasting depictions of the two characters as "Gypsies" have been disregarded by many scholars of the novel. Encapsulating the variety of stereotypes derived from misconceptions surrounding the Romani, Quasimodo, and Esmeralda epitomize the three literary manifestations of the “Gypsy” as symbols of the exotic, vilified, and picaresque. Having long functioned in literature for little other than textual effect, it is not until recently that the false consciousness surrounding the “Gypsy” has been subverted in place of a more accurate representation of the Romani. However, while a shift in contemporary society has begun, for early 19th-century French literature the “Gypsy” remained a literary trope that could be exploited for the needs of entertainment and narrative cohesion without fear of consequence.

A History Mistakenly Ascribed to “Mystery”

Dating back to the 15th century, the initial depictions of the “Gypsy” in European literature accentuated their physical appearance. With little understanding of the Romani beyond brief interaction, descriptions of the “Gypsy” remained minimal. Typically, not deviating far from an authentic representation of the Romani, the “Gypsy” was noted by early European authors for their marked differences on account of their darker complexion and nomadism. (Figueira, 82).[12] However, as “fascination” about “Gypsy life” and their “mysterious origins” grew among the public (Trumpener, 873), characters derived from a

[11] A reflection of Hugo's perspective on Gothic architecture
[12] Their darker skin color meant that the Romani were often confused with Ottoman Turks, who during the 13th century were extending their political influence across Europe.

group of people that were once portrayed as little other than “looking wild” and “black” (Figueira, 82) soon became distortions of the “Western imagination” (Trumpener, 846).

Trumpener argues that literature has historically portrayed the "Gypsy" as exotic, inferior, and in need of Western domination. Influenced by Europe's imperialist attitudes, and, later on, ideas of human taxonomy, the “Gypsy” was shaped by European literature into the archetypal Other. While the “Gypsy” existed only in the realm of fictional literature, their depiction having derived from misconceptions regarding the Romani enabled mainstream society to define their identity against a distinct alterity. Literature created a fictional character to help establish a dominator-dominated relation that European culture inherently craves. An “invention” that meant the Romani saw their identities replaced by a false consciousness as the “Gypsy” took center stage in the public’s perception of the people (Okely, 11).

However, due to the excess of stereotypes attributed to the “Gypsy,” miscellaneous manifestations of the character emerged. With their depictions ranging from the exotic to the vilified, the mythical to the malevolent, the “Gypsy” became an influential trope not only because of its Otherness but the narrative possibility it offered authors. A character used fundamentally to reinforce cultural hegemony, the “Gypsy” functioned in literature to satisfy social fantasies, evoke a sense of “magical timelessness” and convey psycho-political allegories (Trumpener, 869).

Defined by one scholar as the ultimate “objects of literary desire” (Bardi, 33) authors shaped “Gypsy” to suit the demands of their narrative. A useful tool upon which both fantasies and anxieties could be simultaneously projected. While there was considerable overlap between the different manifestations of the “Gypsy,” it was the Romani’s perceived

nomadism that was first exploited for its exoticism.[13] It is not by chance that the exotic portrayal of the "Gypsy" first appeared in literature during the collapse of feudalism (Hancock, 12). A figure perceived not to share in "the construction of the state nor subscribe to the notion of a nation" (Figuera, 81), the "Gypsy" represented a way of life separate from the burgeoning socio-economic constraints of European society that saw the lower classes pushed into early capitalist structures. Authors used the "Gypsy" as a projection of society's desire to return to a time removed from "the vicious cycle of production and consumption" (Figuera, 80) as they portrayed the character to be "pure," and in harmony with nature (Toninato, 144). "A representation that becomes more and more attractive in an increasingly complex and regimented world" (Hancock, 3). While the "Gypsy" exoticization may appear innocuous, it signified the conception of the character as an inferior Other. Once categorized as subhuman, it became the standard for European literature to exploit the "Gypsy" without fear of backlash.

Often lacking the depth of character beyond textual effect, the exotic depiction of the "Gypsy" became a prominent feature in many works of the 17th century, most notably Miguel de Cervantes' *La Gitanilla.* Published in 1613, Nomadism scholar Paola Toninato cites Cervantes's portrayal of the "Gypsy" as a "symbolic embodiment of a utopian society, governed by the laws of love and mutual respect and spontaneously inclined to a sense of order and justice" (Toninato, 144). Though she notes how the characters are influenced by a sense of "aesthetic primitiveness" (Toninato, 144),[14] Toninato claims Cervantes depicts his characters in this manner to highlight the "content" lives of the "Gypsies" despite their lack of material goods (Cervantes, 101). With their exoticization helping to permeate the characters in a positive light, the "Gypsy" is shown as unspoiled by the modern world and

[13] Exoticization can be defined as the representation of one culture for the consumption of the other
[14] This is a common consequence of Othering as the character's "primitiveness" in the reader's mind subconsciously renders them inferior.

against the possession of land and material wealth. By creating a false consciousness around the "Gypsy" as a simplistic yet fulfilled character, Cervantes both provides his story with aesthetically pleasing imagery and affords himself the disguise of a foreign perspective in critiquing the principles of a "civilized society" (Toninato. 144). A response to the rising dissatisfaction within the dominant society, Cervantes's depiction marks one of the first major novels that contain the "running away with the Gypsies" trope.[15]

However, as a result of portrayals such as Cervantes's cultivating an "us vs them" relationship, animosity toward the Romani arose among the public. A change in perception that was fuelled by the rise in European nationalism by the end of the 18th century (Figuera, 81), literature both mirrored and encouraged the growing persecution of the Romani in everyday life. The "Gypsy" became a vilified symbol as the Western Imagination fostered several pejorative stereotypes. Frequently accused of practicing magic, spreading disease, and kidnapping children (Mayall, 266), the public's perception of the "Gypsy" was distorted not only by hearsay and rumors but also by the narratives pushed by authors. A form of "epistemic violence" (Spivak, 271), texts depicting the "Gypsy" as "uncivilized animals," and "human vermin" signified how literature sought to redirect social anxiety onto the Other (Figuera, 81). While the exotic portrayal of the characters was preserved in British literature due to the increasingly industrialized populations desiring "the time of the Other" (Fabian, 22), the "Gypsy's" literary purpose became predominantly to reinforce Western hegemony.

The "Gypsy's vilification also took the form of reinforcing misconceptions about the Romani as sexually promiscuous and possessing loose morals. Another literary method of implementing Western supremacy, the "Gypsy" was depicted in the form of overtly

[15] A storyline that gained prevalence many years later during the Victorian period by authors such as George Eliot and Emily Bronte. This is evidenced in Eliot's *Mill on the Floss*, published in 1860, and Bronte's *Wuthering Heights,* published in 1847.

sexualized, “darker” female characters, to impose a power dynamic in favor of Western culture. A form of Othering to create a normative relation analogous to societal gender roles, literature fetishized the “Gypsy” as the racially inferior Other in need of being “civilized” by the dominant Western protagonist. Society’s dehumanization of the Romani was facilitated by the literary “colonization” of the “Gypsy” becoming the embodiment of lawlessness and immorality. Given the Romani could not be colonized in the truest sense of the word. It was left to literature to colonize the image of the people through the “Gypsy” (Spivak, 172).

Although the vilified portrayal of the “Gypsy” undoubtedly had a profound and disturbing impact on the Romani, it was due to this vilification of the character that the “Gypsy” quickly evolved into a representation of the picaresque.[16] Authors employed the “Gypsy” as a unique means of challenging social norms through unconventional action as they drew upon the “Gypsy’s” outsider status and associations with “magic and malevolence” (Trumpener, 873). Due to years of perpetuated stereotypes in literature, the Romani became the archetypal "outcasts of society" (Trumpener, 866). Authors like Walter Scott contributed to redefining the "Gypsy" as an "unlikely hero."

By embellishing the Romani’s persecution as a noble fight for autonomy, the “Gypsy’s” unconventional attributes were exploited for new social allegories. A paradoxical portrayal given that authors relied on reinforcing stereotypes they once used to marginalize the character. With the “Gypsy’s” characteristics and demeanor being seen as “self-conscious refusals of state authority” (Trumpener, 865), by the turn of the nineteenth century the “Gypsy” had developed a reputation as a symbol of liberty and political resistance (Trumpener, 865). The "Gypsy's" existence at odds with established civilizations during the

[16] Originally a genre of prose fiction, the picaresque can be described as the depiction of a rough but courageous hero.

era of revolution offered 19th-century authors a fitting means to vent their frustrations toward corrupt government authorities.

Authors capitalized on the “Gypsy’s” roguish allure to their benefit as they strategically employed the character to create a powerful narrative for change, progress, and community. With the characters carrying with them a literary legacy of defiance, poverty, and oppression, the "Gypsy" resonated deeply with individuals marginalized by hierarchical structures.[17] Reinforced by an emphasis on their magical capabilities that imbued the characters with a sense of latent power, “Gypsy’s” supernatural associations came to represent an underlying “threat to the establishment” (Hancock, 51). The "Gypsy" offered authors a nuanced avenue to critique authoritarian regimes while simultaneously mobilizing support for their own political beliefs. This was achieved by prompting readers to confront the poverty and inequality that existed prominently in their midst (Wood).

The “Gypsy” has become a useful tool upon which both fantasies and anxieties could be projected. While authors primarily rely on their Otherness, the “Gypsy” has become an influential literary trope. When a "Gypsy" is depicted in literature, it typically symbolizes one of three manifestations: the exotic, the vilified, or the picaresque. Rarely do the characters embody more than one of these roles at the same time given the lack of agency and depth infused into the “Gypsy.” However, Victor Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* stands out as a counterexample to this notion. In strategically depicting Quasimodo and Esmeralda as central figures driving the narrative, Hugo adeptly employs all three archetypal "Gypsy" manifestations. Though Hugo at times challenges negative stereotypes connected with the "Gypsy," the primary purpose of these characters is to employ literary devices that enable him

[17] An increasingly prevalent issue in the early 19th century as evidenced by the numerous uprisings throughout Europe.

to critique a wide range of social issues in 19th century France, spanning from the problems of the July Revolution to the corruption of the Catholic Church.

Political Resistance

In his youth a socially conservative royalist, by the publication of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* in 1831, Hugo had adopted a more politically progressive stance. Dissatisfied with what he saw as a "repressive" monarchy (Spires, 47), Hugo became known as "a champion of democracy" (Spires, 47) – a shift in political perspective that was apparent in his later work. A supporter of the July Revolution[18] delivering a new constitutional system and challenging social injustices, Hugo, however, harbored reservations about its lasting impact. As part of the French intellectual elite, Hugo remained wary of the masses and their capacity for brutality and violence. Hugo feared that the destructive potential of radical action could damage any political movement, and he sought an approach of endorsing political progress whilst cautioning that revolution would invariably bring about harmony in France. A complicated political ideology in need of a complicated character, it was the "Gypsy" who filled the gap for Hugo in conveying his critique of French society.

Set in medieval Paris, *the Hunchback of Notre Dame* follows the life of Quasimodo, a deformed bell-ringer. Raised by the archdeacon Claude Frollo after being left to die on the Cathedral steps, Quasimodo finds sanctuary within the Cathedral walls under the care of his adopted Father. However, after discovering Frollo's lust for Esmeralda, a beautiful "gypsy girl" who is seeking to find her real Mother, has turned him to evil, Quasimodo finds that his loyalties are conflicted. Saved by Esmeralda after taking the blame for Frollo's criminality, Quasimodo realizes there is more to life than what he knows within the Notre Dame walls. With the story reaching its crescendo as the Cathedral is under siege by the people of Paris,

[18] An insurrection in 1830 Paris that brought Louis-Phillipe to the throne of France after overthrowing King Charles X.

Quasimodo must decide between right and wrong in choosing whether to side with the man who raised him or the girl he loves.

While several devices contribute to Hugo's critique of revolution, it is his use of the three manifestations of "Gypsy" that typifies his complex outlook. Hugo cultivates a false consciousness around his characters to expose the shortcomings of revolution. Aided by the anachronistic imagery of the "Gypsies" evoking a sense of "primitiveness" to establish a contrast to a bourgeoisie Paris on the brink of classical reason, it is their perceived "love of liberty and tradition of political resistance" (Trumpener, 865) that drives Hugo's political critique. Similar to the first depictions of the "Gypsy" in European literature, Hugo initially describes his character's outward appearance. Described as "very strange looking people" (Hugo, 84), the "Gypsies" are represented as the Other from the onset. Although Hugo initially seems to use this portrayal to justify subsequent stereotypes like "prophecy" and child-stealing (Hugo, 85), his depiction of the "Gypsy" serves a deeper purpose in drawing parallels to "The Court of Miracles."

Mentioned by Pierre Gringoire as a "magic circle" where "no honest man had entered" (Hugo, 35), Hugo conflates "The Court of Miracles" with "Gypsy life" to portray the possibility for alternative rule where authority is achieved and maintained through democratic means. Similar to the trope of "agents against state authority" (Trumpener, 865), "The Court of Miracles" is shown to be a space where "boundaries between race… have been obliterated" (Hugo, 35). "The Court of Miracles" shares an analogous description to the early literature depictions of "Gypsy" life as "a society, governed by the laws of love and mutual respect and spontaneously inclined to a sense of order and justice" (Toninato, 144). With their "primitive" status emphasized as a group made up of "gypsies, unfrocked priests… and scoundrels" (Hugo, 33), Hugo encourages the capability of the common classes to form a constitutional system of their own." A description not quite as "utopian" as Cervantes's *La*

Gitanilla, “The Court of Miracles” remains a community founded on the principles of democracy.

However, indicative of his love-hate relationship with revolution, Hugo also demonstrates that the inherent issue of revolution derives from the masses' proclivity to violence. While depicting the “Gypsy” as a symbol of the picaresque, Hugo simultaneously borders on a vilified portrayal of the characters to evoke a sense of immorality in need of constraint for liberty to thrive. With the “counts and dukes” of the “Court of Miracles” sentencing Pierre Gringoire to death under the justification that “we apply the same law to you that you apply to us” (Hugo, 39), Hugo imparts his fears of the masses and how social injustices will rise again if revolution is left uncontrolled. An advocate of a democratic system, Hugo also feared the idea that excessive liberty without ethical guidance could lead to moral decay and believed that true liberty should be accompanied by a sense of moral responsibility and ethical structure. An insight that is demonstrated through the “Gypsy” functioning as a symbol of depravity to caution against life without some form of regulation. Though Hugo does not explicitly single out the "Gypsy," by employing analogous descriptions of the characters as "outlaws" and "bandits" (Hugo, 36) and highlighting their mere presence, he draws from the vilified “Gypsy” to convey a lifestyle engulfed in depravity and immortality. A state of being which he infers to be a consequence of uncontrolled liberty.

The appearance of Esmeralda once again signifies Hugo’s complex relationship with revolution. A “graceful and dazzling figure” (Hugo, 44) upon her entrance to “The Court of Miracles,” Esmeralda’s depiction exemplifies the exotic portrayal of the “Gypsy” as a projection of fantasy. Inspired by Cervantes’s depiction of Preciosa,[19] Hugo cultivates a feeling surrounding Esmeralda which he subsequently ties to his political ideologies.

[19] Both characters are noted as having been stolen as children who go on to become street dancers.

Esmeralda's action of saving Gringoire from execution functions as a representation of the conduct needed for liberty to succeed. While it becomes apparent that Esmeralda does not personally care for Gringoire,[20] her love for liberty and the common man outweighs her contempt for the playwright. Consider her hostile remarks, "What do you want from me?" and "I can only love a man who can protect me" (Hugo, 48) Hugo leverages Esmeralda's love of liberty and stoic demeanor to indicate how the common classes should treat each other. An action that is further highlighted when Esmeralda provides water to Quasimodo on the pillory.

Hugo creates an image around the "Gypsy" as a means to critique French society's inherent flaw of "not accommodating those who appear to be different" (Grossman, 208). With Hugo hoping to promote solidarity among the common classes, Esmeralda's symbolism functions to change the narrative of French citizens' tendency to bring down each other. Rather than continue the repressive dynamics of the monarchy that has brought about conflict, Hugo implies that union among the common classes is a necessity for progress. Though fueling stereotypes by depicting a "bizarre gypsy law by which a man condemned to hanging would be spared if any woman in the tribe was willing to marry him" (Moore, 260), Esmeralda emerges as a beacon of hope for the marginalized people of France.

"Cut off forever from society" because of "his deformity" (Hugo, 59), and compared to "the devil himself" (Hugo, 16), Quasimodo is used by Hugo to critique revolution and the mindset that comes with it. While he is not recognized as a "Gypsy" by other characters, Quasimodo's outsider status due to his "grotesque" appearance serves the same effect as the portrayal of the vilified "Gypsy." Exploited as the Other to distinguish the "boundaries of civilized society" (Trumpener, 869), Quasimodo is condemned to marginalization as his life

[20] A character whose narrative arc is reminiscent of the "running away with the Gypsies" trope as he later joins Esmeralda in her street dancing (Hugo, 117)

is defined by a misconception. Much like the “Court of Miracles” who are similarly described as “a hideous wart on the face of Paris” (Hugo, 36), Quasimodo’s appearance functions as a representation of society’s projection of anxiety toward difference and the potential for change. Highlighting how ingrained society’s pervasive attitudes toward the Other are, it is no coincidence that a Cathedral-goer refers to Quasimodo as the “offspring of a Sow and a Jew” (Hugo, 83). Hugo draws a comparison between Quasimodo and the descriptions of Jewish people as a means of challenging stereotypes and exposing the masses' flawed thinking. Often depicted with physical deformities such as boils and warts, and characterized as an inferior race (Jensen, 156), like the Romani who have seen their lives engulfed by the invention of the “Gypsy,” Jewish people have endured a history shaped by pejorative misconceptions circulated by literature. With a gratuitous description and frequent references to the devil, Hugo provides Quasimodo with tropes analogous to the “evil Jew” (Gerstenfeld, 20) to imply how the Other is seldom real. Believing that every individual should have the freedom to express themselves and live with dignity, free from oppression and injustice, Hugo exposes the unfounded nature of prejudices and the tendency for the masses to be blindly led in illustrating the inherent banality and arbitrary nature of stereotypes.

With the final events of the novel indicative of the July Revolution, Hugo reveals the cannibalistic propensities of radical action by pitting Quasimodo against the “Court of Miracles.” Though either faction is for the same cause, and both share the status of the Other, the escalation of what could be an agreeable discourse into extreme violence underscores Hugo’s belief that radical action results in gratuitous chaos. With either faction's efforts in vain as Esmeralda is hung whilst the two parties continue to suffer at the hands of each other, Hugo demonstrates how the failings of revolution stem from its potential to destroy its very members. An inference that is supported by the arrival of the King’s men at the Cathedral demonstrating the failings of a democratic “mob.”

While the narrative's setting helps to evoke a sense of cyclical repetition, it is the "Gypsy" whom Hugo leverages to highlight France's political stagnation. Hugo uses the portrayal of the exotic "Gypsy" to "exert a decisive power over the temporal cohesion" of the novel (Trumpener, 869). Hugo advances Esmeralda as a projection of societal desire by imbuing her with his political ideologies that stand against physical violence. A technique whereby Hugo exploits both society's nature to Other and the "Gypsy's" primitive connotations to induce a cultural memory of France's damaging revolutionary tendencies. Esmeralda functions to bridge the events of 1482 with the contemporary context in which the novel was written. Of the opinion that violence begets more violence, Hugo uses Esmeralda's magical timelessness to emphasize the habitual nature of revolution and its adverse effects. Hugo draws from the symbolism of the "Gypsy" as a "time bandit" to conflate the two time periods into one (Trumpener, 869) which he implies to be equally destructive.

The "Gypsy" and the Catholic Church

Not entirely "anti-Catholic" during the writing of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame,* by this time in his adult life, Hugo had become critical of what he saw as faith abuse among the clergy ("Horror, Abuse Scandals, and the Hunchback of Notre Dame"). *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* marked Hugo's growing uncertainties about organized religion as he sought to depict the Church's abuse of power in an analogous manner to the monarchy's repressive treatment of the common classes. While the debauched depiction of the archdeacon, Claude Frollo highlights Hugo's antipathy toward the Church, it is the "Gypsy" that Hugo uses to expose the problems of Catholicism and its unchallenged authority.

Though the reveal of Esmeralda as Paquette's daughter underscores the fallacious nature behind the concept of the "Gypsy" as a symbol of Otherness, Hugo fails to subvert this narrative in favor of using Esmeralda to expose the corrupt nature of organized religion. In

combining the character's depiction as "agents against state authority" (Trumpener, 865) with their perceived magical capabilities, Hugo develops Esmeralda into a symbol of autonomy and underlying "threat" to the Church (Hancock, 51).[21] With numerous characters accusing Esmeralda of "witchcraft" (Hugo, 164), Hugo not only illustrates how society seeks to evade responsibility by rationalizing their mistreatment of the Other but positions Esmeralda in direct opposition to Catholicism.[22] Hugo induces support for Esmeralda in her efforts to escape the grasp of Claude Frollo, the personification of corrupt religious authority. Hugo highlights organized religion's tendency to restrict autonomy in creating a dichotomy between the two characters who epitomize the struggle between autonomy and organized religion. Esmeralda is depicted as virtuous to signify she is on the side of what is morally right. Emphasized by Gringoire ironically referring to Esmeralda as a "Heavenly angel" (Hugo, 52), the contrasting portrayal of Frollo as evil reinforces a sense of opposition toward the Church whilst also exposing their hypocritical nature.

Esmeralda's arrival marks the transformation of Frollo's true character from vice to virtue. Hugo illustrates Frollo's divergence from Catholicism through his shift from theological pursuits to sorcery. However, it is Frollo's attribution of his downfall to Esmeralda, labeling her a "vassal of Satan" (Hugo, 121), that exposes his insecurity and religious uncertainties. This unraveling of Frollo's integrity is depicted as his perception of Esmeralda mirrors his own anxieties and fears, with Hugo using the "Gypsy's" status as the Other to reveal the archdeacon's malevolent nature. Frollo's obsession with Esmeralda undermines the moral authority of the clergy, highlighting not only his epistemological

[21] An innovative portrayal given no manifestation of the "Gypsy" had historically been used in literature to challenge religious authority. Ironic, however, as the Romani were initially seen in Europe as a threat to the Christian establishment on their erroneous associations with Islam.
[22] Interestingly, around the same time Hugo set the novel, The Holy Roman Church had enacted laws banishing the Romani from their realm.

collapse but also the hypocrisy of religious doctrine such as resisting temptation. Demonstrated when Frollo admits that “extraordinary fantasies” regarding Esmeralda have “troubled his brain” (Hugo, 195), it is through the “Gypsy” that Hugo shows Frollo to be unable to control his feelings of attraction. This serves as a critique of the Church's hierarchy and its claim to moral superiority over others as Hugo shows Frollo to be no different from any other man when it comes to the human condition. Through this narrative, Hugo challenges conventional religious authority as he portrays Esmeralda to be a steadfast symbol of virtue amidst Frollo's moral decay.

Though his reference to Esmeralda as a “witch” and “demon” may appear little more than a mere insult, Frollo’s turn of phrase is symptomatic of his fear that faith alone cannot control his feelings toward the “Gypsy” (Hugo, 190). A feeling derived from his innate need to conquer what he believes to be an inferior Other, the status of Esmeralda as a “Gypsy” is what causes Frollo’s epistemic dilemma. Running parallel to an underlying critique of the effects of celibacy on the clergy,[23] the inadequacies of organized religion are exposed. Hugo aims to encourage the need to challenge the Church’s authority as the incontrovertible truth. By providing an alterity to the dominant society, the “Gypsy” functions to bring to light the incongruities of authority that often go unnoticed.

However, despite imbuing the “Gypsy” with several remarkable qualities, Hugo’s depiction of Esmeralda is ultimately constructed within the framework of self-orientalism. A product of colonization, self-orientalism occurs when an individual, distinct from mainstream society, begins to internalize and recognize themselves according to the standards and stereotypes set by mainstream society. Reminiscent of Cervantes’s Preciosa*,* Esmeralda is shown to perceive herself as lesser than other characters, in particular, Phoebus, the Captain

[23] As evidenced through Frollo’s statement, “human passions ferments and boils when it is refused any outlet” (Hugo, 128).

of King Louis XI's Archers. As demonstrated when Esmeralda states, “you saved my life, even though I’m only a poor gypsy girl… I dreamed of an officer who would save me” (Hugo, 147), while Hugo predominantly uses Esmeralda as a symbol of autonomy and liberty, he is unable fully escape the fetishization of the “Gypsy” that has marred their literary existence. A dichotomy between Phoebus and Esmeralda that is indicative of superior-inferior race distinctions born from imperialist attitudes.

Hugo adds to this critique through the character of Paquette as he reveals her irrationality. Shown initially to hate the “Gypsies,” after the discovery that Esmeralda is her lost daughter, Agnes, she rebukes her previous sentiments, stating “I love the gypsies. That’s why my heart leaped every time you passed” (Hugo, 284). By excusing her behavior as rooted in ignorance of the truth, Hugo subtly highlights society's capricious nature—a critique that remains relevant today, considering the persistence of such conduct in contemporary society and the ease with which the masses can be influenced. Paquette's language not only underscores the drastic shifts in opinions but also symbolizes society's tendency to initially respond with hatred toward what they fail to comprehend.

Though she rejects the advances of Pierre Gringoire, Esmeralda’s obsession with the “noble” Phoebus reflects the age-old literary trope that has seen the “Gypsy” used to enforce Western hegemony. For every time Esmeralda is illustrated as a beacon of hope for the people of France, her portrayal as the inferior Other reinforces misconceptions about Romani being sexually promiscuous and in need of civilizing. A compelling argument as to why there needs to be more Romani voices in literature. It makes it all the more disturbing to know that while the 1996 Disney film adaptation chose to separate Claude Frollo into two characters to appease the Catholic church, the Romani were not afforded the same understanding. Rather the decision was made to further sexualize Esmeralda. She currently stands as the only female Disney character depicted pole dancing. The basis of this depiction may be

mainstream society's innate attraction to the exotic, however, it more likely derives from the implicit perspective of non-white people as inferior.

Paradoxically, however, Hugo does not fully endorse the supremacy of Phoebus nor Western hegemony as he indicates its inherent superficiality. While he appears "noble," in mistakenly referring to Esmeralda as "Similar" (Hugo, 210), Hugo infers how the concepts of nobility and status are but constructs of society. Another means of challenging hierarchal structures, Hugo breaks down the fallacious nature of how regimes maintain power. Each time he refers to Esmeralda as "Similar," Hugo hints toward a subconscious slip that reveals his dominance as an entirely baseless claim. An inference that gains further traction when Fleur-de-Lys, who is also described as a "noble" feels challenged by Esmeralda's mere presence (Hugo, 111). Fleur-de-Lys and Phoebus find companionship as both characters buy into the idea of the "Gypsy" "as a common enemy" (Hugo, 100). In scapegoating Esmeralda, either character asserts their "noble" status. However, rather than rationalize the marginalization of the Romani, Hugo underscores the triviality and insecurity of the dominant society. In revealing how the "noble" classes exploit Esmeralda, Hugo implies how authority is a mindset imposed by those at the top of society to keep the oppressed downhearted.

Frollo's varying treatment of Quasimodo further reflects Hugo's grievances regarding organized religion. It is Frollo's change in "compassion" for the bell ringer that symbolizes how the Church exploits the masses. Quasimodo is at first abused and then neglected by Frollo for his gain. In taking sole responsibility for Frollo's attempted kidnap of Esmeralda, Hugo goes on to reveal that the bell ringer's criminality derives from the influence of Frollo. Having "loved the archdeacon as no dog… ever loved its master" (Hugo, 66), Quasimodo's separation from Frollo signifies how the Church's abuse negatively affects those who serve them.

With his appearance taking on the form of “noble grandeur” (Hugo, 190) during his rescue of Esmeralda from the pillory, Hugo uses Quasimodo’s status as “Gypsy” to reveal Frollo’s wickedness. By advancing the literary device of the “Gypsy” as a projection of society’s fears and desires, Hugo leverages Quasimodo as a reflection of those around him. A common literary device authors have exploited through the “Gypsy,” the characters function as a reflection through negation. However, rather than acting merely as a tangible alterity against which other characters can “recognize” themselves, Hugo employs Quasimodo as a psycho-political allegory. Described as a “little monster” (Hugo, 53) upon his arrival at the Cathedral, it is Quasimodo’s relationship with Frollo that mars his reputation. With his increasingly “grotesque” descriptions paralleling Frollo’s growing abuse of power, Hugo indicates how Quasimodo’s character is connected with the archdeacon. Under Frollo’s influence, Quasimodo is described as “savage” and “malicious” (Hugo, 61), However, once he “cuts through the fateful web” of the “wretched” Frollo by rescuing Esmeralda, Quasimodo feels himself become “strong and majestic” (Hugo, 190). A representation of how his newfound autonomy away from the Church has given him a new life. While Quasimodo's physical appearance undergoes momentary alteration, it is the shift in his overall depiction from this moment on that signifies his transformation into the novel's "unlikely hero."

It is not until Esmeralda finds “sanctuary” within the Cathedral walls that the two characters directly acknowledge each other’s existence. Described as the “two ultimate miseries of nature and society who had come together to help themselves” (Hugo, 190), Quasimodo and Esmeralda’s relationship represents the inverse reflection of the “Gypsy” - marking the moment where the amalgamation of “Gypsy” stereotypes are contrasted to each other. Like two sides of the same coin, despite Quasimodo’s “ugliness” juxtaposing Esmeralda’s “beauty” (Hugo, 203), Hugo demonstrates how either character innately identifies with the other. Esmeralda and Quasimodo are shown to form a connection through

their shared status as the Other. In discovering this innate sense of self that had always existed, Quasimodo takes on the same symbolism as Esmeralda in becoming a counterforce against organized religion.

Now embodying the portrayal of the picaresque "Gypsy," Quasimodo is employed by Hugo as a unique means of challenging organized religion through unconventional action. Supported by the allegory of the "two vases filled with flowers" (Hugo, 212) illustrating Quasimodo's innate goodness, Hugo exploits Quasimodo as a stoic symbol of liberty and the capability for people to change their ways. Quasimodo's hardship is imbued with rose-tinted glasses for allegorical effect as he becomes the "unlikely hero." A character arc employed to resonate with those marginalized by hierarchical structures, Quasimodo's final interaction with Frollo is symbolic of contesting the Church's power. Highlighted by the remark, "Oh! Everything I loved" (Hugo, 301), as Quasimodo watches both Esmeralda and Frollo die, Hugo fosters sympathy toward Quasimodo for doing the right thing whilst inducing anguish toward the Church for causing the events.

Though a novel famed for its depiction of Esmeralda, Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* relies on more than just one "Gypsy" manifestation. Hugo exploits the "Gypsy" for his political critiques. Whether conveying a complex opinion toward revolution or challenging the authority of the Church, Hugo shapes his characters to suit the demands of his narrative. However, while these portrayals undoubtedly aid Hugo in imparting his political ideologies, the consequence is that he subtly reinforces stereotypes about the Romani. Encapsulated in the final scene of the novel where the skeletons of Quasimodo and Esmeralda are found "tightly wrapped together" (Hugo, 302), the entwined death of the contrasting depictions of the "Gypsy" symbolize how stereotypes will forever harm the Romani regardless of the prevailing perception they derive from.

Wuthering Heights

Written by Emily Brontë in 1847, *Wuthering Heights* details the lives of two gentry families after the arrival of a mysterious foundling. Profoundly rooted in Romanticism and Gothic fiction, at the heart of this literary marvel lies Heathcliff, a character whose enigmatic demeanor and tumultuous journey typify the convergence between the two genres. While Heathcliff's alluring persona is synonymous with the Byronic hero,[24] extensive discussion remains over his origins. Introduced as a "Dark-skinned gypsy" (Bronte, 11), Bronte's descriptions of Heathcliff have sparked much debate regarding her character's potential ethnicity. Literary scholars have proposed several intriguing hypotheses. Referencing Mr. Earnshaw's return with Heathcliff from Liverpool, it has been posited that Heathcliff was of African descent. A key port in Britain's slave trade during the 18th and early 19th centuries, Corrine Fowler asserts that Mr. Earnshaw's trip to the Mersey is representative of not only Britain's involvement in the Transatlantic Slave trade but how gentry families preserved their fortunes (Fowler). Similar arguments have also derived from Heathcliff's only traceable point of origin, with Victorian scholar Joseph Boone suggesting that Heathcliff was the child of a Lascar[25] or rather the product of an extramarital affair.[26] Though these particular arguments contribute to adding another level of complexity to the novel, Heathcliff is a "Gypsy" in the truest sense of the word.

While the word, "Gypsy" is widely used for differing effects, the etymology is complex. Stemming from the Middle English, *Egipcien*, the term "Gypsy" reflects the false belief that the people hail from Egypt (Hancock, 44). This attributed coinage has since enveloped the existence of the Romani. The Romani as a community define themselves as

[24] Typically defined as a charismatic character depicted at odds with society
[25] The 19th-century term for an Indian sailor
[26] The insinuation is that Heathcliff is Mr. Earnshaw's "illegitimate son" (Boone, 153).

Rrom. However other self-ascribed terms will vary depending on the region they live in. For instance, in most parts of Britain, the Romani refer to themselves as Romanichael, compared to France, where they call themselves, Manouche. While some individuals, like those in the Irish traveler community, have "reclaimed" the term "Gypsy," it is important to note that they often have little connection to the Romani people beyond their shared "nomadic" lifestyle. The Romani are "descendants of those who left the north-west of India at the beginning of the 11th century in response to a series of successful Islamic incursions led by Mahmud of Ghazni" (Hancock, 10).[27] However, due to their once elusive history, the Romani became fertile ground for literary fiction to distort and manipulate. With limited historical information, authors propagated an inauthentic portrayal of the Romani that has resulted in the many misconceptions that persist today. Because of this, "the gypsy became a figure of fascination to a number of English scholars and writers as the nineteenth century wore on" (Meyer 153).

Since their first arrival in Britain, the Romani were "racialized as the Other" more than anything due to their different "political and economic or material relations with a dominant sedentary society" (Okely, 65). However, like any form of racism, this racialization meant the Romani soon became a vehicle for projecting cultural anxieties. Often depicted with mystical powers and a perceived temperament marked by a passion for freedom, autonomy, and associations with delinquency, it was 19th-century literature that played a central role in shaping contemporary perceptions of the Romani. Over time, works such as *Wuthering Heights* and Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* facilitated the term's evolution to encompass additional stereotypes such as exoticism (Hancock, 10). While neither of the Brontë sisters can be directly accused of forming these narratives, their works catalyzed this false consciousness. While David Mayall asserts that the "Gypsy" was romanticized as an

[27] Knowledge of the people that was not known until the late 18th century.

“exotic, dark-skinned, romantically alluring rural nomad” (Mayall, 139), during this period of literature, the reality for the Romani was very different who faced persecution daily. However, owing to subsequent interpretations of their novels and the increase in anti-Romani sentiment, scholars and the public alike began appropriating the term. With interpretations of characters like Heathcliff obscuring the division between a group of people and their appropriated way of life, the term “Gypsy” has been indiscriminately applied to individuals perceived as fitting certain stereotypes (Hancock, 8).

The inept use of the term "Gypsy" has caused the Romani to become one of the "most ostracized, hated, and feared ethnic minority populations in Britain" (O’Nions, 470). Judith Okely argues that this false consciousness surrounding the Romani allows for "anti-Gypsy rhetoric [to] be uttered without the same public caution as anti-Semitism" (Okely, 66). The largest minority group in Europe, these misrepresentations not only contributed to the erasure of Romani's presence in literature but also endorsed the marginalization of the people by providing a rationale for their mistreatment. Powerless to articulate their experiences due to the enduring effect of mainstream society suppressing their voice, many Romani writers such as Menyhért Lakatos and Ronald Lee struggle to find their places in the annals of contemporary literature.

While literary manifestations of the “Gypsy” tend to exploit the character as symbols of the exotic, vilified, and picaresque, the characters themselves commonly fall into two categories of inspiration: the literary “Gypsy” and the Roma. Although misconceptions shape both portrayals which has resulted in occasional overlap between the categories, the literary "Gypsy" more frequently trivializes the character. The literary "Gypsy" functions as a tool for authors to embody a state of existence beyond societal norms or to rationalize supernatural phenomena. Authors who depict the literary “Gypsy” will often not know the Romani. In contrast, the Roma depiction acknowledges the character as a distinct ethnic group, exploiting

their presence as a racialized Other. Rooted in some degree of reality, this model often provides a contrast for other characters in the novel, acting as a tangible alterity against which other characters can "recognize" themselves. Authors continue to use the Roma as a self-affirmative mechanism in times of crisis. Though it may be argued that Heathcliff's Romani influence is not inconsequential, given his racial Otherness need not be strictly defined by ethnicity, it is crucial to acknowledge how such a perspective has undermined the Romani as a distinct group of people not only in literature but real life.

Bronte's Inspiration

Sir Walter Scott remains a towering figure in the archives of English literature. A leading figure in the Romanticism movement and credited for popularizing historical fiction, Scott was renowned for his pioneering storytelling techniques, accurate depictions of historical settings and characters' primacy. Beyond the realm of historical fiction, Scott's writing influenced the craft of countless writers, none more so than Emily Bronte. While the specific novels Brontë read remain undisclosed, Brontë was known to be an avid admirer of Scott's work (Gaskell, 104). Scott's influence permeates the pages of *Wuthering Heights* (Watson, 258). Laden with themes reminiscent of Scott's oeuvre, multiple scholars have noted Brontë's direct inspiration drawn from *Waverley*, *The Black Dwarf,* and most notably, *Rob Roy* (Gaskell, 104). However, an often-overlooked influence of Scott emerges from the second novel in his Waverley series, *Guy Mannering.*

Guy Mannering is a blend of fictional narratives mixed with events and figures inspired by real life. Scott subverts traditional historical accounts to embody "a transnational sensibility that emphasizes the role of minority and underrepresented groups in national narratives and historical memory" (Arant, 50). Central to Scott's story is Meg Merillies, a "Gypsy" figure who "inhabits" the story's underlying message of resistance against social

order (Arant, 50). Described as a “Harlot, thief, and gypsy” (Scott, 163) and visually depicted as “dressed in a red turban… looking like a sibyl in a frenzy” (Scott, 197), Merillies functions as a symbol of alterity and freedom. Merillies deviates from the 18th-century portrayal of “Gypsies,” representing “a force of social regression” (Trumpener, 867) as she becomes more than a one-dimensional background character. Merillies embodies a sense of agency and difference that resonates with society’s deeper concerns of identity and power. Endowed with “relatable and sympathetic qualities” (Arant 50), Scott’s character magnifies the struggles of the oppressed.

Scott argues that the criminal actions of the "Gypsies" are a consequence of the “intensified gap between property holders and the propertyless and affected the eviction or enforcement of the whole folk community” (Trumpener, 867). By suggesting the “Gypsies” to be the figures of “original displacement,” Scott uses the mistreatment of the “native” Romani (Trumpener, 871), to reflect the corresponding anxieties of the Scottish working class. Scott's depiction of the Roma also represents the "price of modernity" (Trumpener, 868). Foreshadowing future upheavals of the working class in Victorian Britain, the “Gypsies” in *Guy Mannering* represent the fight for autonomy against a world that is becoming bounded by industry. In emerging as a counterforce against the social order, Merillies was one of Bronte’s foremost inspirations for Heathcliff.

Although the two characters possess contrasting dispositions, it is their shared presence as a “Gypsy” representing a racial Other that drives each author’s respective plots forward. Mysterious disruptors to societal norms, both Merillies' and Heathcliff’s roles as “Gypsies” catalyze the progress of other characters. By compelling their counterparts to transcend their perceived limitations and explore notions of identity and freedom by embodying both their “fears and desires,” it is the “Gypsy’s” social status and defiant behavior that subvert ideas about power and autonomy (Nord, 3). Though both characters are

marginalized because of their racial Otherness, this marginalization becomes an element of their identity. The “Gypsy” provides a means for the author to express the feelings of other characters who feel they have endured similar mistreatment.

Fittingly described as “the great agent” (Arant, 50) by one reviewer, it is Merillies's temperament and spirit for freedom that encapsulates the anxieties of the working class regarding the “displacement from their ancestral homes… and fears of state expansion” (Arant, 55). While Scott's portrayal marks an improvement in the literary representation of Romani characters from the previous century, his characterization of Merillies perpetuates the tendency of using the “Gypsy” for social allegory rather than providing an authentic representation of the Romani’s experiences. A suggestion that is best illustrated in the novel when Merillies sacrifices her life for the protagonist, Harry Bertram. A selfless act imbues Merillies with a martyr-like status. However, as is the common outcome for the “Gypsy,” Merillies’ death reflects the underlying belief the character is meant to serve the superior white protagonist.

Scott's character is grounded in some degree of reality, albeit shaped by poetic license that enriches the narrative. Scott's cultural investigation would have acquainted him with the Romani as a distinct "Romany race” (Mayall, 75). Research that would have led him to base his character on the historical figure, Jean Gordon (“Jean Gordon, Famous Gypsies”). Gordon was arrested in 1732 for the charge of being an "Egyptian" – just a few years before the events depicted in the novel. While this was not uncommon for the Romani at the time, Gordon challenged the discrimination she faced. However, Gordon’s resistance led to a tragic end when an enraged mob drowned her (“Jean Gordon, Famous Gypsies”). Asserted by Mayall, Scott would have been keenly aware of the persistent discrimination faced by those like Gordon and the Romani under UK law. Despite the repeal of the “Egyptian Act,” legislature that aimed to curtail Romani's presence in the UK continued to exist. By the turn

of the 19th century, the UK Parliament enacted the "Rogues and Vagabonds Act," which sought to reinforce previous legislature targeting the Romani, now under the coded language of "migrants, vagrants, and nomads" (Mayall, 53). Scott recognized British society's ongoing persecution of the Romani.[28]

Merillies emerges as a character grounded in authenticity. In a period marked by heightened discrimination, Scott's depiction subverts the pejorative representations of the Romani prevalent in earlier centuries. Scott cultivates a deeper understanding of the Romani, revealing not only the struggles they face but also their shared humanity. Merillies transcends the tropes of literary fiction. Scott portrays the Romani not merely as creations of the Western imagination but as individuals who exert influence on society. While it was 19th-century literature that advanced the presence of literary "Gypsies," the contemporary reading of such novels as *Guy Mannering* has diluted the Romani's direct influence. With only 32 years separating the publication of Scott's book and *Wuthering Heights*, the inspiration and rationale behind including a Romani presence would not have been as obscured in Bronte's time as it is today. It is plausible that Bronte, having read Scott and been aware of the prevailing laws of the time, would have been conscious of Merillies's Romani ethnicity and how Scott employed his character to enrich the subtext of his narrative. Similar to how Scott utilized Merillies, Bronte's portrayal of Heathcliff functions to resonate with society's broader concerns of the time.

A Tale of Two Sisters

Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* also features the appearance of the Roma. While there is not a direct portrayal, Rochester's disguise as an elderly "Gypsy" woman supports the assumption that Heathcliff is utilized for the effect of Otherness. An apt illustration of the

[28] This was not a law exclusive to the United Kingdom as many other European nations such as Finland made it illegal to be "born" Romani (Hancock, 34).

literary “Gypsy” given it is a disguise, Rochester masquerades as a “Gipsy” named “Mother Bunches” insistent on telling the “the quality… their fortunes” (Bronte, 163). Described as an “ugly old creature… almost as black as a crook” from a nearby “Gipsy camp” (Bronte, 164), Rochester effectively assumes an identity unfamiliar to those around him to elicit information. As the only guest of Thornfield Hall to stand scrutiny and unveil Rochester’s trickery,[29] Jane’s response reveals her innate kinship to a man who happens to be disguised as a “Gypsy.” In drawing parallels to Catherine’s impassioned speech about her feelings for Heathcliff,[30] this passage offers insight as to why both Bronte sisters include the presence of the “Gypsy” in their novels.

Before recognizing Rochester, Jane states, “the old woman's voice had changed: her accent, her gesture, and all, were as familiar to me as my own face in a glass-as the speech of my own tongue” (Bronte, 231). While it may seem that Jane implies Rochester's face and speech are as familiar to her as her own, her mention of seeing her "own face" and "own tongue" in the “Gypsy” suggests that gazing at the racial Other is akin to staring at her reflection. Through the guise of “Mother Bunches,” Jane perceives Rochester not solely due to familiarity but because he embodies a part of her identity that is intrinsically related to a sense of femininity and autonomy that she has concealed. The “Gypsy” for Bronte functions as a character that allows her to explore non-traditional gender norms.

In masquerading as a figure outside social class boundaries, Rochester unintentionally helps Jane establish her “unorthodox femininity” (Nord, 195). Though he “throws off the limitations of his class in an attempt to penetrate the secrets of female discourse,” it is Rochester’s temporary freedom from the “social restrictions based on his class and gender”

[29] Jane is the only character who most disparagingly describes Mother Bunches as she emphasizes her lowly “Gypsy” status in referring to her as “troublesome” (Bronte, 174). The term crook is also a reference to a cooking utensil.
[30] Whom Isabella coincidently likens to “the son of the fortune-teller who stole my pheasants” (Bronte, 46)

(Bardi, 42) that resonates deeply with Jane's innate longing for independence. Rochester's appearance as a "Gypsy" reinforces Jane's longing for autonomy as he offers her a means of reconnecting with her innate femininity. Edward Said suggests that while the "Gypsy was associated with a rhetoric of primitive desires, lawlessness, mystery, cunning, sexual excess, godlessness, and savagery," the character also "operated" for British society "as a field for the projection of what… was desired" (Aran, 51). Said's suggestion is indicative of the "Gypsy" as a reflection of Victorian Women and their longing for a life away from the shackles of gender roles. Bronte uses the race of the "Gypsy" to metaphorically explore issues of gender" (Meyer, 7). By providing marked deviance from the "fine people" at Thornfield Hall (Bronte, 186), Rochester not only mirrors Jane's actions of having to "disguise" who she is but exposes her to a world outside "generic hedge-clipped Englishness" (Nord, 190). In prompting her desire for something else, Jane resonates with "Mother Bunches."

Though "Mother Bunches" is considered inferior to the "quality" at Thornfield Hall and is subsequently placed among the "servants" (Bronte, 164), Jane is drawn to the "Gypsy" as she deviates from the expected roles of women. The name "Mother Bunches" specifically highlights the character to be a female who is capable of occupying a space of her own in society. Bronte furthers this point by illustrating the women at Thornfield Hall to be more drawn to visiting the "gipsy camp" than to have their fortunes told. Brontë writes, "Ladies, you talked of going to Hay Common to visit the gipsy camp" when Mother Bunches is waiting in the hall to meet with them (Brontë 194). Bronte shows how the women are attracted to "Gypsy" not because of their supposed prophetic abilities but because "Mother Bunches" provides them the opportunity to explore a world outside the realms of what is expected of them.

Foreshadowing the eventual appearance of Bertha, who also makes her initial appearance "in a glass" (Bronte, 249), Jane's connection with a racialized Other symbolizes

the onset of her liberation from the traditional conventions imposed upon women. The absence of a connection between Jane and Bertha, another racial Other,[31] underscores the unique significance of the "Gypsy" as a projection of inherent freedom. Encapsulated by the comment that "you could scarcely find one" like her (Bronte, 168), Jane envisages her possibilities for autonomy she has not known before, mirrored in the face of a figure with whom she resonates. Rochester's disguise in becoming the Other allows Bronte to address issues regarding her subjectivity as a woman without explicitly challenging the social order. As Bardi states, "when Mr. Rochester poses as a female Gypsy fortune-teller…he merges Gypsyness and gender ambiguity" (Bardi 38). A device that Bronte uses to explore what it is like to be a woman in Victorian Britain, she does so at the cost of perpetuating stereotypes about the Romani. Bronte undermines her critique by reinforcing the "expected" role of the "Gypsy" as she seeks to challenge societal structures that have oppressed women. While a character that allows Jane to explore her womanhood, Bronte depicts "Mother Bunches" as a caricature reflective of an "imaginary sense of the Gypsy… from a non-Gypsy perspective" (Bhopal and Myers, 1). Bronte's inability to escape society's false consciousness is indicative of how literature has consistently overlooked the oppression of the Romani even when challenging the oppression of someone else. However, in considering the "Mother Bunches" is a disguise of Rochester's, one can argue that Bronte challenges the stereotype of "Gypsy" by showing how easily the "quality" of Thornfield Hall can be fooled. Bronte criticizes the dominant society for falling folly to the Western imagination. Though it seems if she continues the adverse narrative, there is a subtle suggestion that Bronte may be poking fun at this commonly employed literary trope given that it was only Jane who recognized Rochester, the master of Thornhill Hall, was dressed as an elderly lady.

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[31] Susan Meyer addresses this relationship in more detail in her essay whereby she explores how Charlotte Bronte associated "non-white races with the idea of oppression in drawing parallels between people of the dark races, and those oppressed by the hierarchies of social class and gender in Britain" (Meyer 78).

Catherine's comments reveal a similar state of mind regarding her kinship with Heathcliff. Catherine is a complex character troubled by society's expectations that restrict her "unusual" feminine nature. Claiming that she cannot marry Heathcliff but loves him fervently, Catherine tells Nelly, "He is more myself than I am…I am Heathcliff" (Bronte, 70-72). A means of escapism "amid English reserve, decorousness, and control" (Nord, 190), Heathcliff as the racialized Other imbues the novel's famed quote with different implications. Catherine's language reveals she feels an innate connection to Heathcliff, not because they are in love but because he is a means for Catherine to explore her identity. Being a "Gypsy," Heathcliff allows Catherine to live out her aberrant femininity and longing for freedom away from society's scorn. As Heathcliff "injects impetuousness, brooding and passion" (Nord, 190) into an otherwise mundane life, Catherine's declaration "I am Heathcliff" transcends romantic sentimentality and signifies Heathcliff as a physical embodiment of a suppressed part of herself. Heathcliff functions to deconstruct the gender norms that were suppressing Bronte's own life. The fact that Heathcliff drives himself mad is most likely symbolic of the frustration Bronte herself felt. Her desire for freedom is just as strong as Heathcliff's for Catherine.

Against the backdrop of Victorian norms, the female protagonist's repression of identity mirrors the stringent gender roles imposed on women. Like the depiction of the "Gypsy," Catherine and Jane find themselves relegated to the social periphery because they are confined to subsidiary roles as women. Although they are not restricted to life "on the outskirts of society" (Nord, 189), they are controlled by rigid societal roles that dictate their lives. Rather than on the outside looking in, Catherine and Jane face the inverse challenge of struggling to break free from a culture that stifles their independence as women. A dichotomy that the Bronte sisters exploit by employing the "Gypsy" as a reflection of the hidden identities of their female characters. Just as Rochester's disguise triggers Jane's longing for

independence, it is Heathcliff who facilitates Catherine's pursuit of freedom and autonomy. The "Gypsy" allows Bronte to comprehend possible solutions to the problems she faces as a woman. However, while this is beneficial for Bronte, she perpetuates the use of the "Gypsy" as a projection of desires for freedom and autonomy.

Catherine offers Heathcliff an opportunity to assimilate into a world from which he has been shunned. While it is clear that Catherine uses Heathcliff to project her suppressed identity, Heathcliff similarly uses Catherine. Heathcliff is drawn to Catherine as she offers him a chance to rise from his lowly status. Although he does not want to forfeit his freedom as a "Gypsy," as evidenced in the quote, "I'd not exchange, for a thousand lives, my condition here, for Edgar Linton's at Thrushcross Grange" (Bronte, 50), Heathcliff desires to no longer be an outsider. However, their mutual inability to fulfill each other's desires contribute to their respective downfall. While Jane is fortunate that Rochester only disguises himself, Catherine is not as lucky in experiencing freedom through the "Gypsy." Catherine admits that she cannot marry Heathcliff because it would "degrade" her (Bronte, 70). Though Heathcliff's racial Otherness provides Catherine "a source of little visible delight" (Bronte, 72), Catherine's language reveals she must continue to suppress her feelings for Heathcliff to maintain the benefits of her genteel birth. Wishing to "aid Heathcliff to rise" (Bronte, 71), it is apparent that Catherine wants to be free yet is inhibited by the fear of rejection from mainstream society. Indicative of the issues faced by women in Victorian Britain, Catherine's impassioned speech suggests that while she and Heathcliff possess the ability to achieve each other's desires, societal norms prevent them from doing so.

Both female protagonists appear to establish their longing for difference through the racial Other, albeit one is labeled as a "Gypsy" and the other merely adopts the guise of one. The Bronte sisters use the "Gypsy" to facilitate the expression and growth of their female protagonists. By forming a connection with characters who exist beyond conventional

boundaries, the “Gypsy's” racial alterity resonates with Jane and Catherine’s struggles of being a woman. Rochester's temporary assumption of “Mother Bunches” mirrors Heathcliff's relationship with Catherine as both characters initiate questions regarding identity and liberation. Their racial Otherness becomes a tangible alterity against which other characters can know themselves as both Bronte sisters use the “Gypsy” as a means of “escaping not only from gender but also from the confines of British society and its structures based on class and race” (Bardi 41).

The Foundling

Within *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff is referred to explicitly as a “Gypsy,” or another variation of the word, on six occasions. While the frequency of the term alone does not outrightly signal that Heathcliff is employed as a racialized Other, other references within the text provide more substantial evidence to support this claim. Named after “a son who died in childbirth” (Bronte, 36), Heathcliff’s sudden appearance at Wuthering Heights mirrors the recurring motif of the foundling. A trope often associated with the depiction of the “Gypsy” in literature.[32] Derived from fabricated kidnapping stories associated with the Romani, these folktales have been widely circulated in fiction. The equivalent to the cautionary tales parents tell their children about the bogeyman and sharing notable similarities with “the age-old blood libel myth surrounding the Jewish people” (Jago 199), the “Gypsy” foundling trope has entered the public consciousness through notable works such as Victor Hugo’s *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss*[33] and Walter Scott’s “*Guy Mannering*.

[32] Upon Heathcliff’s initial arrival at Wuthering Heights, Bronte uses the word "gibberish" (Bronte, 36) to describe his nonsensical speech. The term originates from the Romani word "jib," meaning tongue – an example of the Romani’s unnoticed influence on society

[33] It was Eliot’s Millon the Floss” which popularized the spelling Romany, though she initially spelled the word “Rommany.”

Though Heathcliff does not directly assume the identity of Mr. Earnshaw's deceased son, nor is he swapped with him, his character is exploited for the same literary effect. Heathcliff is the "Gypsy" foundling by all but explicit reference. Described as "a usurper of his parent's affections" (Bronte, 37), Heathcliff's arrival at Wuthering Heights is another instance in a larger novelistic custom whereby an unknown outsider becomes involved with a family, only to begin "poisoning" (Bronte, 157) the family's existence through a form of "cultural cannibalism" (Trumpener, 872). Bronte employs Heathcliff to evoke a sense of terror for a Victorian audience who consider the "Gypsy" a "threat to health, property, and person" (Mayall, 21). Coupled with the trope of child-swapping, it is no coincidence that Bronte has Lockwood refer to Heathcliff as a "cuckoo" (Bronte 33).[34] Given that Victorian society placed a high value on cultural traditions and heritage, Bronte plays on the fears of child-swapping with the Other to induce concern regarding the potential for "cannibalism" of cultural identity.

The Family

Bronte delves deeper into Heathcliff's relationship with the Earnshaw family as Nelly envisions Heathcliff's backstory: "Your father was Emperor of China, and your mother an Indian queen… And you were kidnapped by wicked sailors, and brought to England?" (Bronte, 98). While Nelly hopes to instill the young Heathcliff with a romantic past befitting of the Earnshaw's noble status, it is telling that Heathcliff's racial Otherness assumes precedence in her fantasies. Nelly's inability to overlook Heathcliff's mysterious origins and marked difference from the other characters causes her thoughts to veer toward the threat of danger. Like a "ghoul or a vampire" (Bronte, 266), Nelly watches the "dark-skinned" Heathcliff drain the "health" of his adoptive family as her biggest fears come to fruition. A

[34] A bird known for infiltrating other species of bird's nests

suggestion that is typified through Heathcliff's later actions whereby he purposefully seeks to undermine the ancestral heritage of the Earnshaws and Lintons. Heathcliff ultimately seizes control of their homes and introduces “a moral poison that would contaminate the most virtuous” (Bronte, 97).

Though Heathcliff's eventual downfall appears to be due to his nefarious activities catching up to him, his journey throughout the novel exposes that it was “his isolation brought on by society” that precipitated his demise (Watson, 458). In the context of being born without a home, any child would face some degree of societal ostracization, especially in Victorian Britain. However, because of his Otherness, Heathcliff is rendered as perennially different. Despite his attempts to elevate himself, returning after his time away with “no marks of former degradation” (Bronte, 82), Heathcliff's “dark skin” proves to be an insurmountable barrier in his quest to transcend social boundaries. Believing his newly acquired wealth and refined manners would facilitate his ascent from his lowly class, Heathcliff's failure to assimilate fully into his surrogate family is attributed to his “eternal” status as a "gipsy brat."

The Future

Contrary to the perception held by the characters regarding how Heathcliff’s racial Otherness adversely affects their lives, Heathcliff’s arrival as a “Gypsy” elevates the families from their state of “commonness” (Nord, 197). Described as a “mutant gene” (Nord, 197) by Victorian scholar Deborah Nord, Heathcliff’s “moral poison” is what provides the heirs of the Earnshaw and Linton estates with the advantageous attributes needed to survive in an ever-industrializing world. In Following the perspectives of literary Darwinism, a branch of literary criticism that examines texts through the lens of evolution and natural selection, Heathcliff's racial Otherness becomes a "mutant gene" that permeates the genetic sequence

for future generations. Though Bronte does not depict Heathcliff as the embodiment of a theory that emerged long after her novel was published, by interpreting Heathcliff retrospectively through this lens, the character can be shown to question ideas related to social hierarchy.[35]

Reflective of the concept of survival of the fittest, it is Heathcliff's primeval instincts that drive his ability to assert dominance and "contaminate" the Earnshaw-Linton gene pool. Rising from the ranks of servant to master, Heathcliff exposes the inherent weaknesses of characters such as Hindley and Linton. Both characters are shown to be wealthy yet insecure Gentry figures who succumb to alcoholism or disease. Heathcliff manipulates the social hierarchy of Wuthering Heights in a way that benefits him. Emphasized by the harsh background of the Yorkshire moors, Heathcliff embodies the principles of natural selection as he adapts to his surroundings to benefit the most from them. Heathcliff forces the other characters to evolve by providing them a ruggedness that their genteel existence has caused to weaken.

"Not strictly determined by biological inheritance" (Nord, 197), Heathcliff's racial Otherness bestows upon Cathy and Hareton the essential attributes for their future resilience. Heathcliff imprints his DNA onto the next generation. While Heathcliff and Isabella's biological son Linton Heathcliff meets an untimely demise, this reflects the weaknesses he inherited from Edgar Linton to whom he bears a closer resemblance. In contrast, Hareton, despite being Hindley's offspring, exhibits a "roughness" (Bronte, 82) more akin to his "spiritual" father, Heathcliff (Nord, 198). Heathcliff's fatherly impact distinguishes Hareton from the sickly Linton Heathcliff as it allows him to survive the harsh landscape of the

[35] Although "social Darwinism" was not coined until the late 19th century, concepts associated with the school of thought such as white supremacy were used to justify existing class distinctions and other social hierarchies in Victorian society.

Yorkshire moors. Together with Cathy, who also inherits the qualities of the "gipsy brat" (Bronte, 36), Hareton is infused with primal qualities that although make him “half-civilized” (Bronte, 82), provide the pair with the necessary tools needed to continue the family line.

On the other hand, the lens of literary Darwinism also provides insight into the fact that Cathy and Hareton's prospective success is more than just contingent upon the traits they inherit from Heathcliff. Nord suggests that the presence of the “Gypsy,” while associated with a primitiveness that is both feared and desired, “simultaneously confirms the perceived superiority of British culture” (Nord, 3). Though Heathcliff is “taller and twice as broad” (Bronte, 51) as Edgar Linton, it is because of Heathcliff’s marked difference that society can establish a contrast that enforces Edgar’s racial superiority. Edgar epitomes Victorian ideals of appearance rooted in “principles akin to white supremacy and imperialism at the time of publication” (Nord, 189). By using Heathcliff’s racial Otherness as a tool of negation, individuals like Edgar establish a rationale that distinguishes them from the “Gipsy, plough-boy” (Bronte, 81). Mainstream society restricts the Other to reinforce their perceived superiority. Although Heathcliff is physically stronger and able to “out-compete” Edgar, the belief that skin color makes an individual innately superior enables Hareton and Cathy to elevate themselves to a position unattainable for Heathcliff. A cultural norm that is illustrated at the beginning of the narrative, where Lockwood states, “Mr. Heathcliff forms a singular contrast to his abode and style of living” (Bronte, 11). Foreshadowing the end of the novel, Lockwood’s perception reveals that while the likes of Hareton and Cathy can prosper from the “mutant gene,” societal norms hinder Heathcliff's ability to thrive on account of his racial difference.

As Bronte employs tropes reminiscent of the "Gypsy," identifying Heathcliff as a character inspired by the Romani may initially seem contradictory in subverting harmful stereotypes. However, by delineating the boundaries between the realm of fiction and reality,

one can better grasp the extent to which Western Imagination has prejudiced contemporary understanding. A more profound examination of Heathcliff's character reveals the distinct cultural influence of the Romani on Bronte's writing. An understanding that is significant in light of literature having obscured the lives of the Romani. Rarely is it discussed by academics how the Romani have been Othered due to the depiction of the "Gypsy." In interpreting Heathcliff as an individual grounded in reality, this offers a perspective that both challenges and revises perceptions of a historically marginalized group confined to the fringes of society.

Thinner

"So burdened with cardboard characters the terror and suspense never fully materialize" (Herron, 22). Janis Eidus's comments from the *New York Times Book Review* fittingly reveal the central issue of Stephen King's *Thinner* – the novel's social critique is at the expense of perpetuating stereotypes. In highlighting the paradoxical portrayal of "Gypsy," Eidus's observation resonates with the notion that over the past 300 years, literature has played a role in fostering cultural mythology surrounding a group of people who, in return, have been subjugated by authors to allegorize the social anxieties of their respective eras. Published in 1984 under the pseudonym Richard Bachman, King's *Thinner* tells the story of Billy Halleck, an obese and corrupt lawyer living in upper-middle-class America. After accidentally killing an elderly "Gypsy" woman with his car, a "curse" is placed on Halleck by the woman's father, Taduz Lemke. Causing him to lose weight rapidly, Halleck desperately seeks a way to lift the "curse," eventually confronting the "Gypsy" responsible for his transformation.

King's writing succumbs to the exploitation of "Gypsy" stereotypes. Despite his intention to critique issues related to 1980s America, like the prevalence of social inequality,

systemic racism, and the rise of Yuppie culture, King's "comic book" (Hancock, 6) portrayal of the "Gypsy" undermine his efforts at enlightened social commentary. While King criticizes society's tendency to project anxiety onto the Other, the irony lies in his heavy reliance on stereotypes. By reducing a complex and diverse ethnic group to caricatures based on "Western stereotypes" (Trumpener, 846), King merely adds to the harmful narratives that have long plagued the Romani's existence.

King's depiction of "Gypsies" has been shaped by enduring misrepresentations of the Romani by Western literature. In an already dense false consciousness, King's "Gypsy" becomes yet another distorted representation amidst a cacophony of fallacies and stereotypes. Hancock contends that it is literature's ascription "of immorality and lawlessness" to the "Gypsy" that has led the Romani to become a defining marker of mainstream society (Hancock, 3). Employed primarily to facilitate social comparison, the representation of the "Gypsy" has resulted in the Romani being exploited as a standard through which mainstream society reinforces its social status and identity. The "Gypsy" has cultivated an attitude whereby the Romani are marginalized not only out of fear but to support mainstream society's perception of dominance by virtue of their perceived subsidiarity. Consequently, this has created a self-perpetuating loop where fiction shapes attitudes and, in turn, attitudes influence fiction. Eidus's critical review reveals the age-old tropes that continue to represent the Romani. Seldom materializing into three-dimensional figures, the "Gypsy's" exploitation at the hands of non-Romani[36] renders them "cardboard characters." Beyond being a tired cliché, King's depiction of the "Gypsy" serves as a pointed indictment of the persistent use of racial tropes to project various cultural anxieties.

[36] Gadzo or Gadjo, the Romani word for somebody who is non-Romani.

In contrast to his American counterparts such as Robert Silverberg and Tim Powers,[37] King's depiction of the “Gypsy” is to some degree influenced by his acknowledgment of the Romani as a distinct ethnic group. While his language can often fall into exoticized fantasies, as evidenced by the quote, “as a kid growing up in New York he’d heard of Gypsies had the gift of prophecy” (King, 6), King depicts his “Gypsy” not merely as the culturally-appropriated free-spirited beings often seen in American fiction but as “racialized Others” (Sears 11) – a depiction more accustomed to European literature given its pejorative implications.

King's portrayal of his "Gypsy" characters as demonstrated by phrases like "sleeping in fields… like an old traveling carnival" (King, 309), draws from the cultural associations that have often conflated the Romani with members of traveling circuses (Jago, 185). While stereotypes of child stealing and sorcery have been embedded in the European consciousness since the German Reichstag accused the Romani of such crimes, it was the result of several falsely propagated news articles in the early 20th century that similar hostile feeling was cultivated in the United States (Jago, 185). One notable news story in Pennsylvania accused a group of fortune-telling "Gypsies" accompanying a “transient circus” of kidnapping a young child (Jago, 185). Though exonerated as it was later discovered the child had “simply wandered off” (Jago, 185), the lasting impact of such accusations perpetuated harmful portrayals of "Gypsies" in American fiction. Often manifested through coded language ascribing harmful “Gypsy” stereotypes to characters referred to as “carnies,” television shows such as *The Simpsons* and *Scooby-Doo* can disseminate adverse misconceptions based on the Romani. By embellishing characters with “Gypsy” tropes whilst also portraying them as vindictive and aggressive, this portrayal further reinforces Romani as the Other.

[37] Both authors have published stories about “Gypsies” associating them explicitly with magic or outer space.

In using the “Gypsies” racial Otherness and the ingrained belief that their perennial mistreatment has created bitterness towards mainstream society, King emphasizes the “Gypsy’s” alterity to challenge the prevailing Yuppie culture of the 1980s.[38] Though it is inherently problematic to impose a divide on account of someone’s race, as Hancock reminds us, it was a belief that “provided the rationale for an attempted genocidal obliteration” (Hancock, 4), King's construction of Otherness exposes the pervasive racialization of social issues. A technique that echoes the sentiment that "problems were often racialized" in the 1980s (Rossinow, 140).

Reagan’s America

The 1980s in the United States[39] marked a transformative period characterized by “conservative policies, economic reform, and a shift in societal ideologies” (St. Pierre, 326). For King, Reagan’s policies marked an “overturning of the uncertainties and paranoia” (Brown, 68) that had prompted much of his writing in the 1970s - “replacing fear of the government with fear of the external threat of the Soviet Union” (Brown, 68). Beneath this newfound national self-confidence, however, Reagan's presidency ushered in a widening social and economic disparity between social groups. Reagan's policies not only intensified concerns related to economic equality and social justice but also gave rise to anxieties “over violence, violation, and disorder” (Rossinow, 140). While Reagan did not create racial tension, “the tendency to racialize social problems, especially those of social class” (Rossinow, 141) was only strengthened by his nationalistic vision for America and the implementation of Reaganomics. Reagan endorsed the theory that tax cuts for the wealthy would eventually benefit everyone.[40] However, as those at the top were not regulated, this

[38] A lifestyle characterized by conspicuous consumption and immorality
[39] Also referred to as the “Reagan Era”
[40] A form of trickle-down economics

only reinforced wealth disparity as those at the bottom were not privy to the tax benefits. King's portrayal of Yuppies and "Gypsies" symbolically underscores the shortcomings of trickle-down economics by elucidating the divide between the two groups. The Yuppies represent the excesses and inequality perpetuated by the system, while the "Gypsies" exemplify the marginalized groups overlooked amidst the faux promises of prosperity. “Ignorant of the ethnic experience and Civil Rights history” (Lowy, 336), Reagan’s America re-established racial inequality due to these structural distances between different social groupings. Leading to what one writer described as “the worst period in racial relations since the 1890s” (Rossinow, 141), Reagan’s Presidency brought to the forefront the “deep cultural dysfunctions in American life” (Rossinow, 141) that had been germinating in the public consciousness predating even the 1970s.

Though King’s concerns surrounding the Vietnam War were alleviated, as Reagan's second term unfolded, the growing divide between the affluent and the marginalized, white and non-white populations generated a palpable unease that brought with it new cultural anxieties. With remarks such as “Nothing but a filthy bunch of Gypsies” (King, 8) and "Keep your distance. They're crooks" (King, 46), it appears King attempts to justify the marginalization of “Gypsies” by indicating they are just another social burden for America. However, in sustaining their role as the perennial outsiders, King depicts the “Gypsies” as the racial Other to emphasize the cultural anxieties that came from Reagan’s economic policies disproportionately favoring wealthy whites while neglecting the needs of the vulnerable “underclass” (Lowy, 449). By exposing how Reagan’s America not only failed to address but, in fact, reinforced the structural barriers and systemic injustices that perpetuated socioeconomic disparities, King challenges society's abandonment of principles such as fairness, justice, and equality. King employs the "Gypsy" as a projection of fear to expose America's tendency to elevate itself by relegating the Other. Through his exploitation of the

Romani, King suggests that the innate problems with mainstream society are the cause of their own anxieties.

Lingering Presence

As a lawyer, Halleck embodies the Yuppie lifestyle prevalent during Reagan's era. Categorized as a young urban professional, being a part of the Yuppie culture represented "upward mobility, financial prosperity, materialism, and consumerism, which draws its inspiration from the economic ideology of Ronald Reagan" (Lowy, 448). However, the rise of this capitalist-driven, self-interested lifestyle reinforced "structural inequalities and class cleavages based upon ethnic exclusion" that prevented people of color from accessing the same opportunities (Lowy 449). Reagan solidified a cultural hegemony that marginalized those deemed socially and racially inferior, perpetuating America's centuries-long socio-economic history marred by slavery, segregation, and the public degradation of non-white individuals. The already privileged were further favored, while opportunities for the marginalized were deliberately restricted.

Indicated by his constant thoughts of "the Gypsy with the rotten nose" (King, 16), Halleck's interactions with other characters lay bare the concealed self-interest, corruption, and inequality at the heart of the Yuppie lifestyle. In the passage where Heidi asks, "You can't get it off your mind, can you?" (King, 6) Halleck's internal monologue unveils his preoccupation not only with the "Gypsies" but also with Cary Rossington, the judge who acquitted him of manslaughter - "Billy, it was not your fault" (King, 7). While it is noteworthy that Halleck deceives Heidi by claiming he is thinking of "housing starts" (King, 8),[41] it is the free indirect discourse that is most significant. Insight into Halleck's mind not

[41] An economic indicator that reflects privately owned homes.

only exposes his affinity with corruption but also demonstrates how his anxieties spring from his privileged position.

Reagan's policies went beyond the conventional approach to crime. With the incarceration rate doubling during his Presidency (Tonry, 98), being "tough" on those who violated the law was not enough (Rossinow, 140). Individuals in essential roles, such as judges, were expected to alleviate fears emanating from the "violent underclass" (Lowy, 449). However, this "alleviation" disproportionately targeted non-whites (Tonry, 98). Reagan's policies exposed broader systemic issues such as limited access to resources and opportunities. By prioritizing punitive measures and focusing on punishing crimes more frequently committed by non-whites, Reagan perpetuated cycles of poverty and marginalization.

Highlighting an incident where Rossington is described as the man who "grabbed [Heidi's] oh-so-grabbable tit during the traditional happy-new-year kiss," King uses this account to emphasize the irony behind "good old Cary" (King, 8). An example of injustice based on social status, King demonstrates how those like Rossington abuse their power to favor their "golfing-and-poker buddy" (King, 8). Rossington's eventual transformation into an "alligator" (King, 98) signifies how the "scales of justice" unfairly swing in favor of the white middle class. With Halleck's thoughts shifting to the "bunch of filthy Gypsies" (King, 8), - the term "filthy" connoting depravity, the narrative develops to determine how anxiety breeds. King suggests that the inherent cause of social anxiety is internal or rather embedded within American culture. With Rossington's corruption triggering Halleck's views of the "Gypsies," King criticizes how the racialized Others have become society's externalized way of dealing with their guilt. While it may seem that Halleck fears the "Gypsies" due to their Otherness, King suggests his fear is rooted in the injustices the "Gypsies" have suffered because of him. King shows Halleck to be fearful about the potential repercussions his

privileged position has afforded him. Unable to reconcile with this reality, the “Gypsies” become a means for Halleck to avoid accountability. However, this tactic proves ineffective given that the “Gypsies” remind Halleck of his wrongdoings and ties with corruption. In highlighting a cycle of guilt and anger ensues for Halleck, King demonstrates how Reagan’s America perpetuated divisions between social classes by fostering frustration toward the Other.

Symbolic of Yuppie culture’s connotations with conspicuous consumption, Halleck’s obesity operates to reinforce how corruption in the societal system unfairly benefits a privileged few whilst leaving many others disadvantaged. While Halleck enjoys a life of indulgence, the “filthy Gypsies” suffer scarcity of most basic human rights. As Halleck’s actions go unpunished due to his social status, the “Gypsies” endure mistreatment because of their perceived racial and social underclass.[42] The stark contrast between Halleck’s privileged existence and the depravity of “Gypsies” illustrates how “the American stratification system permitted forms of dominant White participation that are disproportionately unavailable to marginalized groups” (Lowy, 449). Halleck’s weight signifies how the system creates disparity by disproportionately favoring whites to the extent that they have too much. It is only after Halleck loses weight, a physical representation of the excess and lavish lifestyle his privilege affords him, that he knows what it is like to “feel… like a Gypsy” (King, 307).

Lemke's later assertion that a "curse is your word, but Rom is better” (King, 287) serves as a crucial moment in King's narrative. A comment that suggests that Lemke has bestowed upon Halleck a unique opportunity for empathy and shared humanity. As Lemke reveals that the Romani for “curse” translates to “child of the night-flowers” (King, 287), King subtly hints at the “curse’s” transformative power. Though he is thinning, Lemke

[42] A reference to Rossington, Lemke informs him that this is because he has “friends” (King, 294).

suggests that Halleck can, like a child, “grow” (King, 288) from his experience by accepting what he has done. As a vocal critic of conspicuous consumption, King suggests how Lemke's “curse” can purge Halleck of his Yuppie behaviors. An inference that points towards a deeper moral awakening of the world around him. As an obese character, Michael Carolan asserts that Halleck embodies “material abundance” (Carolan, 95). An inference that implies the lack of weight to mean the opposite. Halleck’s transformation is symbolic of the hardships of the Other and how "tensions in Western culture" have given rise to a system that disproportionately benefits him (Carolan, 93).

In guiding Halleck toward realizing what is morally right, Lemke assumes a paternal role. Akin to a father instructing his son, Lemke tells Halleck that he must become a “father” to the “curse” (King, 290). While Halleck perceives his physical transformation negatively, Lemke unveils a positive aspect of his thinning is that it provides him with the means to confront the reality that has caused his condition. As Halleck states, "it’s inside, isn’t it? It’s inside, eating me" (King, 288), it is this language that suggests that he is aware that the problem comes from within.

Despite these glimpses of personal growth, Halleck fails to view his transformation as anything other than a "curse." Halleck's inability to accept his transformation as an opportunity for self-improvement reflects society's tendency to avoid taking responsibility despite the choice for them to be better. However, evidenced by Halleck's misinterpretation of Lemke's advice, "a curse was a living thing, something like a blind, irrational child" (King, 291), King suggests society may have reached a state where they are completely blind to the problem. Though Lemke intended for Halleck to understand that nurturing the problem would prevent its recurrence, Halleck instead blames the “child” for its irrationality. As common knowledge dictates, a child's behavior often mirrors the parents.

Both during and after his meeting with David Duggan, Halleck finds himself inundated with constant thoughts of the “Gypsies.” Although they are not addressed in conversation, the free indirect discourse once again unveils Halleck’s connection with social inequality. Described as being "halfway through a huge glass of Chivas and wanting to tell Polish jokes" (King, 16), Duggan’s relationship with Halleck signifies the suspicion on the surface of Reagan’s America. Tempered by his need to remind himself that he is "one of the good guys" (King, 16), Halleck’s self-doubt after a successful “damage suit” (King, 16) reveals anxiety regarding his position in society and the part he plays in perpetuating inequality. Though winning the “damage suit” would indicate that his client was the rightful party, per a fair judicial system, Duggan’s partiality to “Polish jokes” hints otherwise. Duggan's adherence to prejudiced beliefs undermines whether he was morally deserving to be rewarded by financial gain. By showcasing this form of casual prejudice, King not only interrogates the ethics of Yuppies who unfairly benefit from the system but also highlights the underlying suspicion of equality in 1980s America. Duggan’s bigotry, despite his financial achievement, implies a systemic issue in Reagan’s America that makes people undeservedly wealthy. Halleck's need for reassurance is symptomatic of his guilt as a a lawyer in a system that tolerates racial prejudice.

King employs a similar technique during Halleck’s first encounter with Doctor Houston. Described as a “Fairview archetype” (King, 42), Houston lacks the qualities expected of someone in his professional position. Vulgar and obnoxious, Houston’s inappropriate jokes, such as “How many pallbearers does it take to bury a n***** in Harlem” (King, 44) coupled with his indulgence in recreational drugs, which he brazenly refers to as “Toot-Sweet” (King, 56), serve as a satirical social critique employed by King. Amid Reagan's fervent implementation of strict anti-drug policies, the conspicuous involvement of a doctor in drug use becomes particularly ironic. By revealing the contradictions behind the

anti-drug policies, King uses Houston to signify how Reagan's Presidency unfairly targeted the "underclass" whilst leaving the Yuppies unpunished. While non-whites faced aggressive policing and harsh penalties for drug-related offenses, Houston's blase attitude towards committing the same offense reflects the disparity in law enforcement practices and sentencing policies prevalent in Reagan's America. Juxtaposed with Halleck's recount of how the "Gypsies" were ejected in Fairview, this brief interlude during Houston's substance abuse serves to emphasize the racial prejudice of 1980s America.

Halleck parallels the "Gypsy's" removal with "The Rape of the Sabine Women" (King, 48) as a way of expressing his familiarity with the inevitable conclusion. Halleck's description reflects a deep-seated intolerance, illustrating the subtle but prevalent problem of unconscious racial bias in society. Despite the "Gypsies" absence of any wrongdoing, evidenced in Halleck's statement, "No one was selling anything," "no dogs were unleashed… there was no swinging billy clubs" (King, 48), Hopley, the Chief of Police expels the "Gypsies" from the "public common" (King, 49). Halleck chooses to conceal the inequality from Linda rather than confront it. Constructing a web of dishonest explanations to justify the removal of the "Gypsies," Halleck's deceitfulness epitomizes how mainstream society perpetuates the marginalization of the "undesirables," ensuring they remain "perennial outsiders" (Trumpener, 864).

By describing them as "vagabonds… and crooks," who "put up a show of being mad," Halleck fabricates the "Gypsies" "illegal" presence by maintaining that "they hand out posters saying where they'll be" (King, 52). He further implies that "Gypsies" do not pay taxes with the sweeping declaration "common means commonly owned by the townspeople, the taxpayers" (King, 53). Most ironic of all, Halleck allows Linda to believe the "Gypsies" sell drugs, stating they have "hashish, maybe… or opium" (King, 53). With this "classic scene" in the forefront of Halleck's mind during his conversation with Houston, the fact that

the “Fairview archetype” so openly indulges in “Toot Sweet” reveals how Fairview, like the rest of America, disproportionately favors Whites. Given the context of Halleck’s flashback, King emphasizes the prevalence of implicit borders and how society is unfairly constructed to benefit middle-to-upper whites while marginalizing the Others. While a doctor openly commits a crime that should see him face prison time, the “Gypsies” are ousted from a “public common” for no better reason than being considered “undesirable.”

However, though King exposes the implicit boundaries ingrained in society, he also illustrates their perpetuation. Described by Richard Lowy as "white indifference" (Lowy, 449), what prompts Halleck's flashback during his encounter with Doctor Houston is his failure to confront the prejudice he witnesses. King unveils Halleck's uneasiness with both situations stems from his inaction to rectify injustice through his free indirect discourse. Halleck’s failure to challenge Doctor Houston's substance abuse or defend the unjust removal of the "Gypsies" reveals that he does not want to disrupt the system that benefits him. Despite recognizing the injustice of both events. Halleck's indifference signifies his desire to maintain his privileged position, yet the "Gypsies" persistently plague his mind akin to a lingering sense of guilt.

King uses this interaction to communicate how Reagan’s America created disparity by selectively implementing rules based on an individual’s status in society. Set against the backdrop of Dr. Houston’s paradoxical drug abuse, King underscores the persistence of racial biases in the American collective consciousness through the motif of the perennial “Gypsy”. King implies that those who perpetuate racial division are trapped in a state of denial, either choosing to believe their falsehoods or wilfully ignoring the systemic issues that benefit them. Ginelli succinctly phrases it when he says, “An asshole is a guy who doesn’t believe what he is seeing” (King, 220).

The origins of Halleck's racial biases come to light through his statement, "those are truths you learn in high school… from your sorority sisters or maybe it just comes, like a shortwave transmission from outer space." (King, 54). While it appears that Halleck is affirming how the “Gypsy’s” negative reputation is but a fact of life, by emphasizing the irrationality of his explanation with the description, King illustrates how racism is not a rational belief but rather a projection of inner turmoil and insecurity. King challenges prevailing social perceptions by implying that the perpetuation of stereotypes reflects ignorance and misgivings about the individual. In Halleck defending his indifference by relying on such unfounded claims, King suggests that his anxieties derive from a failure to understand not just the Other but also his inability to accept his flaws. As captured by Houston’s comment, “what could I do?” (King, 59), like someone “with almost no brain at all” (King, 58) Halleck’s default response to witnessing discrimination is indifference. While the correctness of King's approach may be debated, his underlying point is clear: society often uncritically accepts beliefs without questioning their origins.

It is only Duncan Hopley, the police officer responsible for “kicking those Gypsies out” (King, 118), who acknowledges his role in their mistreatment. In the statement, "All his life he’s heard a bad deal called a dirty gyp. The ‘good folks’ got roots; you got none… the ‘good folks’ take what they want and then you get busted out of town" (King, 124), Hopley appears sympathetic to the enduring marginalization of the “Gypsy,” Through his sarcastic use of the term “good folks,” Hopley implies it is Fairview's "archetypes" who bear accountability for the continued mistreatment of the “Gypsies” – including himself. Despite expressing an understanding towards the “Gypsies” situation, evidenced by the statement, “an instant of justice to make up for a lifetime of crap -” (King, 124), Hopley struggles to rid himself of hatred towards the Other. Hopley wishes to harm the “dirty gyp” rather than effect change in the system that encouraged his transgressions. His misdirected projections

highlight how deeply embedded fear of the Other is. Marked by his face covered in "malignant red pimples the size of tea saucers" (King, 125), Hopley's transformation symbolizes society's repulsive attitude toward the Other, laid bare for all to witness.

King shows some understanding of the Romani's marginalization, evidenced by the quote, "Hitler had tried to exterminate them with the Jews and the homosexuals" (King, King, 53). However, rather than develop the perception surrounding the Romani, King's language serves to reinforce the irony within *Thinner*. King draws a perceptive parallel in comparing the Romani to African Americans. Also having endured a history of slavery and segregation in Eastern Europe (Petrova, 126),[43] King makes an apt comparison between two marginalized groups by conveying how white society has consistently subjugated the Other. Yet, despite the progressive opportunity this comparison affords, King detracts from his social critique by completely disregarding the history of the Romani. Rather than addressing the Romani as victims of the Holocaust,[44] King portrays them akin to the Western imagination as thieves and vagabonds. A decision that perpetuates the same harmful stereotypes that the Nazis used to justify their genocide of the Romani. In referring to them as "human tumbleweeds," King highlights the ignorance of those like Halleck and how this perception of the Romani "breeds" anxiety (King, 52). Though, by failing to communicate the scale of the Romani's suffering other than a brief remark, King exposes how he is just as culpable for their continued marginalization.

Although the "Gypsies" are physically absent throughout Halleck's interactions, their lingering presence as an afterthought is significant. King portrays the "Gypsies" as a mirror "held up to the souls of men and women" (King, 275). King critiques Reagan's America by

[43] Slavery of the Romani in Modern-day Romania was not abolished until the 1860s. There are also numerous accounts of the Romani working on plantations in the Americas.
[44] The Romani word for the Holocaust is Porajmos which translates to "destruction."

pinpointing the incongruities at the heart of the culture and the values that are promoted. However, while a helpful tool, King's failure to depict the "Gypsy" without the presence of "magic" symbolizes their enduring roles in literature as both the victim and the scapegoat.[45] King attempts to evoke empathy for the Other, however, in portraying the "Gypsies" as inherently malevolent, his descriptions only reinforce anger and intolerance towards them. Despite the expectation for a judge, a doctor, and a successful defendant to be defining symbols of Reagan's strengthened American nationalism, they are revealed to be corrupt, prejudiced, and unprofessional – factors associated with Yuppie culture. While the acts of corruption are evident, the inclusion of the "Gypsy" serves a crucial role in exposing how corruption leads to inequality. Functioning as an opposing alterity to challenge preconceptions of Yuppie culture, King uses the "Gypsy" to not only scrutinize key archetypes who personify Reagan's America but also reveal the source of cultural anxieties deriving from excess in the face of scarcity and conspicuous consumption.

In emphasizing the looming presence and mistreatment of the "Gypsies" during Halleck's interactions, King fosters a deeper understanding of the cultural anxieties of 1980s America. King uses the "Gypsies" to demonstrate that the call is coming from inside the house. In a paradoxical blend of contradictions, these are just some examples of King's attempts to illuminate societal ignorance, which inadvertently reveals his own.

Direct Reference

Much like King's portrayal of Dick Hallorann in *The Shining* or Paul Coffey in *The Green Mile,* the depiction of Taduz Lemke bears a troubling resemblance to the "magical negro" trope (McAlister, 481), or, in the case of *Thinner*, the "magical gypsy." While the comparison reveals the problematic interplay between social critique and the perpetuation of

[45] An early example of the "Gypsy" being scapegoated in literature can be found in Grimmelshausen's *Simplicius Simplicissimus*, which happens to be a picaresque novel.

racial archetypes in the work of King, further concern extends to the roles assigned to King's characters who exist to assist the white protagonist. King feigns inclusivity and authenticity in the form of tokenism, to exploit society's subconscious biases for the benefit of his stories. With King's social critique hinging on Lemke's supernatural abilities, the impetus behind the narrative would cease to exist if it were not for his racialized "cardboard character," – highlighting how the character also functions as a plot convenience. While King has "effectively" used other marginalized groups in the past to illuminate society's tendency to project fears onto the Other, it is specifically the "Gypsy" that embodies tropes such as the ability to "curse" and a sense of magical timelessness.

King exploits Lemke as a "creature of phantasm" shaped by societal ignorance and their illusions of mystery (Sears, 12). Though King incorporates elements of magical realism to delve into the experiences of a character beyond the conventional mainstream, fundamental issues emerge when a character such as Lemke is rooted more in fantasy than reality. As Hancock states, "It has always been the case that non-Gypsy specialists have attempted to control and define Romani identity" (Hancock, 6). A concern that is epitomized by his neglect to provide Lemke with the Romani language. King replaces Lemke's voice with his own. Having Lemke speak a convoluted blend of Swedish, Danish, and Serbia (Rogak, 44), King uses societal ignorance to his advantage. Paradoxical in its own right, this serves as just one example of King's social critique being undermined by his tokenism and perpetuation of racial archetypes. However, King's "Gypsy" paradox does not stop there. Like Alice chasing the Rabbit into Wonderland, Halleck must follow Lemke "up the turnpike" (King, 157).

What Trumpener asserts about the appearance of "Gypsies" in post-colonial literature draws direct comparisons with the 1980s and Reagan's vision for America. Trumpener suggests that during times of cultural disruption for "a dislodged Bourgeoise…Gypsies are

remembered as insouciantly happy… without a social contract or country to bind them" (Trumpener, 853). As a result of the 1970s instigating "fears of the societal, economic, and moral decline" (Judis, 222), Reagan's Presidency was promoted as the solution. Seeking to capitalize on the nation's anxieties as a launching pad for his campaign, Reagan employed the slogan "Let's Make America Great Again" to evoke a new sense of romanticized nationalism (Judis, 223). Perceived by conservatives as embodying a deep yearning to restore an idealized version of 1950s America, Reagan's presidency purportedly offered to lead America back to a better time. However, for many others, Reagan's vision for America was based on a mystical past that never existed - a vision open to bigotry and the acceptance of white supremacy.

Embroiled with segregation, racial violence, and the resurgence of the enduring undercurrent of white supremacy, Reagan's vision of returning to a time reminiscent of the 1950s was heavily criticized. Many argued that this vision hinted at a nation rooted in colonial values which would entail the use of violence and the subjugation of non-white populations. While "a dislodged bourgeoisie" (Trumpener, 853) saw Reagan and his vision for America as a beacon of hope, the marginalized underclass was reminded of a darker time in their country's recent history that continued to cast shadows on their lives. With the suggestion that the "Gypsy's" presence in post-colonial literature is inextricably linked with the rise of "a dislodged bourgeoisie," Trumpener's observations are substantiated by King's depictions of "Gypsy" during a time in America's history that longed for an idealized past.

Published in 1985, Ronald Florence's *The Gypsy Man* tells the story of an "American female lawyer who is derailed from her high-powered career path by the erotic and mystical allure of a Gypsy man" (Trumpener, 869). After successfully clearing a "Gypsy" named Ral of the murder of a former Nazi prison guard, the protagonist rebukes her "glamorous ways" in favor of a simpler life. Unaware of the other's existence, Florence's and King's novels share remarkable similarities. Going beyond the protagonist's occupation, both authors use

the “Gypsy” “to effect a change in life in a single yuppie protagonist” (Trumpener, 869). The “Gypsy” creates a textual effect of magical timelessness that taps into society’s distorted belief that the past was somehow better. Though the conclusions of their stories diverge significantly, both Lemke and Ral are physical embodiments of false nostalgia that remind their respective protagonists of a forgotten lifestyle during a time of cultural disruption and the rise of Yuppie lifestyles. Both characters assume the role of a “noble savage” in symbolizing the goodness that comes with being primitive and uncorrupted by the world. A portrayal of the “Gypsy” that is supported by events in the 1970s that saw several groups wishing to contact the Romani as “they were desperate to affiliate themselves with the Gypsies” (Hancock, 30). Claiming distant Romani heritage, Romani groups referred to this advent of interest as “fantasy correspondence.”[46] (Hancock, 30). While not everyone desires a reconnection with the past to the extent that they delude themselves, the chance publication of *Thinner* and *The Gypsy Man* indicates that the public certainly longed for the “image” of a happier life that they saw in the “Gypsy.”

Referred to as "the last of the great Magyar chiefs" (King, 257), Lemke functions as a representation of the old country and an embodiment of false nostalgia. Using his elusive age and shadowy origins, King employs the “Gypsy” to cultivate an innate desire to reconnect with a memory that is more mythical than historical. An attitude indicative of Reagan’s vision for America, while normally a sign of resistance, King exploits the “Gypsy’s” symbolism as an exponent of the “good old days” (King, 298). Depicted as being beyond the reach of the established order, King uses Lemke’s “magical timelessness” to symbolize a world without social anxieties and regrets of the past. A symbolism that is akin to the school of thought based around the idea of the “noble savage.” Appearing on the outskirts of society with “the sight of 100 years” (King, 201), King aligns Lemke’s “magical timelessness” with Reagan’s

[46] A period when people wanted to connect with the “image” of being a “Gypsy” and “return to their roots”

vision for America to romanticize this attitude of a simpler time. Rather than endorsing a cultural shift to become “nomadic and illiterate” (Trumpener, 853) King exploits Lemke’s status as a “Gypsy” to reinforce the same “traditional American values” purported by Reagan. Arighon Starr describes King’s use of Lemke best when he said, “everyone warns to be a Gypsy, but if they could, they would find it scary” (Elkind, 1).

However, like the many beliefs surrounding “Gypsies,” the “good old days” that America’s “dislodged bourgeoise” longs for is also a product of false consciousness. King's attempt to give his character a mystical backstory inadvertently exposes the fabricated nature of his beliefs. Described as "the last of the great Magyar chiefs" (King, 257), King weakens his comparison of Lemke’s magical timelessness to Reagan’s vision for America as he reveals the “Gypsy” not to be Romani at all. "Magyar" refers to Hungarians and is not a term used to describe the Romani, who constitute a distinct ethnic group. King's subtle mistake underscores the false parallel he attempts to draw as his failure to grasp the identity of his character is symbolic of the fallacy behind the romanticized notions of America’s “good old days.” In pushing a false perspective of reality, King reveals how politicians such as Reagan rely on fictitious embellishes to help endorse their agendas.

If being fat is indicative of Yuppie culture and excess (Carolan, 93), then being thin for King represents being “like a Gypsy” (King, 307). After listening to Lemke’s offer to "fatten" him up (King, 286), Halleck’s free indirect discourse reveals a conflicting desire to rebuke his Yuppie ways. With the remark, "I don't want to be fat. I've decided I like being thin" (King, 286), this brief glimpse into Halleck's "dream self" (King, 286) exposes the inherent longing for redemption from a life marked by excess, self-interest, and corruption. Halleck experiences a fleeting taste of liberation from the constraints of Yuppie culture, as he experiences his brief moment of magical timelessness in chasing “the Gypsies up the coast” (King, 308). Though Heidi and Doctor Houston oppose Halleck turning “loony” (King, 227),

Halleck's transformation into "some sort of supernatural creature" (King, 191), provides him with a newfound perspective.

Unencumbered by the pressures of his job, marriage, and, most significantly, interactions with Fairview "archetypes," King uses Halleck's journey to signify how America can return to the "good old days" by rejecting their Yuppie ways. King suggests that for America to begin to achieve a state of magical timelessness society must take responsibility for their role in perpetuating inequality. A suggestion that is revealed in Halleck's final meeting with Lemke whereby Lemke asks him, "why not eat your own pie, white man from town?" (King, 291). A statement redolent of the English expression, "You can't have your cake and eat it too," King communicates the message that for American society to rid themselves of anxieties, they must face up to the consequences of their past actions. King suggests that society should actively seek to understand how they contribute to their own fears rather than continue to shift the blame.

Encapsulated in Halleck's letter to Heidi, where he writes, "I know a lot more about Gypsies than I use to… you could say that my eyes have been opened" (King 155), King suggests that Halleck is ready to rectify his past transgressions. However, although it appears King is encouraging a change of perception towards "Gypsies," his efforts are not concerned about their well-being. Epitomizing the central issue of *Thinner* it appears King is more interested in rejecting Yuppie culture than he is in changing society's perceptions of "Gypsies." King implies that the decision to "do better" and "be strong" (King, 291) comes at a cost. While accepting responsibility will bring about justice, quash anxieties, and prevent the suffering of others, this decision will lead to Halleck's immediate demise. Halleck's death by thinning symbolizes society rejecting its self-interested tendencies as it signifies the end of Yuppie culture. Indicating that his sacrifice is for a more significant cause, Lemke informs Halleck that he will "die strong" (King, 296) if he does the moral thing. King emphasizes the

profound significance of this decision. In a Christ-like fashion, Halleck is poised to embrace his fate in the pursuit of justice that will lead to a better America. However, ironically, believing his pre-curse life to now be the “good old days” (King, 298), Halleck reverts to his former habits and rejects his chance of redemption. Halleck's refusal to eat the pie symbolizes Reagan's America's inability to accept responsibility and come to terms with its own issues. Halleck dismisses Lemke’s advice and shows little interest in learning from his experience. Reinforced by the statement "just trying to put litter in its place… and keep it there" (King, 298), Halleck opts to rejoin Yuppie culture and continues to deflect his anxieties. However, as Lemke warned him, Halleck cannot elude the injustice his actions have caused.

The story ends with the promise that Halleck can be freed from the “curse” as long as someone eats the pie. He elects to offer the pie to Heidi, whom he now wholly blames for the accident. However, after waking the next morning to discover that Linda has also eaten a slice, Halleck decides to “cut himself a piece” (King, 318). Haunted by Lemke's final words, "Everybody pays, even for things they didn't do. Because that’s what it’s all about" (King, 317), Halleck understands the consequences of his actions and the harm they have caused to others when he realizes the fate he has inadvertently sealed for his daughter. Lemke's words gain significance for Halleck once they are understood to involve those closest to him. Despite his daughter's innocence, she bears the consequences of his actions. An outcome similar to the treatment of “Gypsies.” King employs this device to demonstrate how America’s self-interest and corruption have established a culture of societal inequality that impacts everyone. From the “Gypsies” first appearance in Fairview, the costs of Halleck's deceitful stories to Linda come full circle when she suffers the brunt of her father's indifference.

Whether or not King intends to endorse the harmful undercurrent accused of Reagan’s Presidency, he certainly believes in the vision of returning to a better place and the

demise of Yuppie culture. While Halleck epitomizes the excesses of Yuppie culture through his obesity, occupation, and self-interest, Lemke does not truly represent the Other. The true Other in *Thinner* should be acknowledged as the inequality that Halleck's actions perpetuate. However, by portraying Lemke as vindictive, in light of his refusal to "take off" the "curse" (King, 257), King merely reinforces misgivings towards the "Gypsy" that have been present in the United States since the early 20th century. While King seems intent on expressing his Reagan-influenced perspective, his inability to reconcile Reagan's undercurrents of white supremacy with his social critique causes his points to fall flat.

King suggests that Americans must take responsibility and acknowledge their wrongdoings to begin the process of "healing" (King, 44). A progressive stance given that King sufficiently identifies and criticizes the ongoing issues of inequality in America. However, King uses the suffering of "Gypsies" for his benefit. Without considering the potential for his writing to empower a marginalized group, King's portrayal of Lemke inadvertently disseminates racial biases at a fundamental level. While King is correct in believing the "Gypsy" could serve as a resource for America, his approach is misguided. Instead of using the literary "Gypsy" to bolster his social critique, King should have more extensively researched the Romani to change society's perception of the culture. In taking this approach, King would not only alleviate criticism regarding his "cardboard characters" but also attain a deeper understanding of the paradox he has created: highlighting a problem by inadvertently perpetuating it. However, Lemke is not the only distorted "Gypsy" that King uses to his advantage.

Romancing the Rom

Depicted as resembling animals or likened to nature, King's depiction of Gina, the great-granddaughter of Lemke, reveals the enduring impact of colonialism on the depiction of

Romani people. While writing about the “Africanist” presence in Western literature (Morrison, 10), Toni Morrison provides valuable insight that can help better understand King’s portrayal of Gina in her book *Playing in the Dark*. Having emerged due to the expansion of Western civilization that commenced in the 17th century, the notion of the Other became a canvas for the white imagination to explore. The discovery of new land and people offered white writers, in particular, the opportunity to address new themes such as race, oppression, and identity. However, a similar opportunity had been afforded to white writers ever since the Romani’s arrival in Europe. The Romani have been exploited to a comparable effect as blacks in America. Rather like a “mythological Africanism” (Morrison, 47), the presence of Romani people has been fabricated. The Romani provided an almost perfect template for Europeans to project their deepest fears and desires. With authors exploiting their perceived "historylessness" (Trumpener, 853), like the arrival of enslaved blacks in America, the Romani “enriched creative possibilities” (Morrison, 38). A means of forming identity and “establishing differences” (Morrison, 49), the “Gypsy” became the source of opposition for the protagonist and a tool used to define them by what they were not. Reminiscent of 19th-century depictions, King uses Gina to embody the “exotic” side of the “Gypsy.”

Gina embodies white culture’s desire to establish difference through her portrayal as the exoticized “Gypsy.” Expressed in the statement, “He saw the lovely shape of her inner thigh. In that moment he wanted her utterly and saw himself on top of her in the blackest hour of the night. And that want felt very old” (King, 50), Halleck's feelings towards Gina expose his perception of her as a means to fulfill his colonialist desires. Gina assumes a space for Halleck that he believes needs to be dominated. While remarks like these may be interpreted as exposing Halleck’s suppressed infidelity, being a “Gypsy,” Gina taps into a feeling that is more than that - a feeling that is “very old.” Gina’s exoticism provides Halleck

with something his wife cannot: a canvas to define himself. Due to her racial Otherness, Gina offers Halleck a way of knowing who he is. In believing she is “sleeping in fields… like an old traveling carnival” (King, 309) and travels around like “a raggle-taggle band” (King, 191), Halleck gathers a sense of identity from Gina’s cultural differences.[47] Living in suburban America and working as a Lawyer, Halleck defines himself against Gina. Abetted by animalistic imagery expressed in statements like, “But her body was exotic as that of some rare cat – a panther, a cheetah, a snow leopard” (King, 50), Halleck seeks to dehumanize Gina to enforce his racial superiority. Halleck establishes a social order with him on top in comparing her to an animal. This is explicitly demonstrated by the quote, “Sure we need the Gypsies. We always have. Because if you don’t have someone to run out of town once in a while, how are you going to know yourself you belong there?” (King, 284). Mirroring Halleck’s sexual desire to be “on top of her in the blackest hour of the night,” his yearning for Gina originates from society's inherent need for the Other to establish their own identity.

Halleck’s language also exposes the romanticization of the “Gypsy” regarding America’s cultural principles. While the “Gypsy” is far less idealized in contemporary Europe due to cultural exposure and historical context, *Thinner* explains why this is not true for Americans. In light of the United States' history of colonization and adherence to manifest destiny,[48] the "Gypsy" has evolved into a symbol of expansion and liberty. Often perceived as wandering freely and unburdened by modernity, like a “wandering breed,” a “Gypsy,” or rather the term for many Americans, has taken on implications of being a state of mind (King, 53). A perspective that is evidenced by Halleck’s “feel… like a Gypsy” (King, 307) after he returns home. Unlike any other racial group, Halleck believes he can assume an identity. Opposed to the European perspective that often stigmatizes the “Gypsies” as “vagabonds”

[47] The use of the phrase “raggle-taggle” is a reference to the title of a traditional folk song about a rich woman running off with “Gypsies.”
[48] The belief that America is land to be claimed

(Jago, 188), America's romanticized nationalism has empowered individuals to embody the notion of being a "Gypsy" as it captures the Country's inherent need to expand. Though American society can adversely stigmatize the Romani in the same way as their European counterparts, King reveals how the "Gypsy" also embodies an inherent part of being American – romanticized freedom.

However, King does attempt to provide a perspective more attuned to the Romani's experience as evidenced during Gina's interaction with Ginelli. Gina and Ginell's conversation offers a glimpse into the enduring effects of embedded colonialism from the view of the racial Other. Reflecting the colonialist notion ingrained in the national psyche since America's inception, Gina becomes a vehicle through which characters like Halleck reaffirm their entrenched sense of superiority. Just as colonists believed in the necessity of conquering the land for their perceived greater good, Gina is viewed as inferior and thus subject to exploitation under the guise of improvement and expansion. Ironically, holding a book on "statistical sociology" (King, 268),[49] Ginelli initially notices Gina's "loveliness" (King, 268). However, shortly after physically assaulting her, he changes his perception, noting "her lips draw back from her teeth in a snarl" (King, 271). A description that happens to parallel Halleck's use of animal imagery.

Gina's comments serve as a reminder of how colonialism's mistreatment of the Other has created an enduring divide between social and racial groups. While not directly reflective of the Romani experience in America, Ginelli's interaction underscores the historical pattern of white colonizers resorting to violence to achieve their objectives. Objectives that derive from the dominant society's need to establish superiority. Telling Ginelli that "God cursed us long before he or any of his tribe were" (King, 274), Gina alludes to the narrative imposed on

[49] The application of statistical methods to the study of social phenomena and patterns

her and her ancestors by white society. Trapped within the confines imposed by colonizing forces, Gina suggests that “Gypsies” are equated to animals because society has left them with no alternative but to assume such a role. Gina infers how “Gypsies” have been coalesced into an identity that mainstream society expects them to fulfill as the situation mirrors that of Native Americans who overtly “authenticate” their culture to appease mainstream society’s categorization of the culture. By offering fabricated pieces of their culture for the enjoyment of white society, like the practice of “fortune telling or palm reading” (King, 44), Native Americans find a way to survive. Typified in her statement, "Are we Hyenas? If we are, it was people like your friend who made us so" (King, 275), Gina illustrates how her identity has been shaped by individuals like Halleck seeking to assert their superiority. The reference to Hyenas is especially significant given that the animals are known for their scavenging habits and adaptability. “The curse of the white men from town” thus comes from white society’s efforts to categorize and relegate the Other to a subordinate position with little means of improving their circumstances. King offers an insightful perspective by granting Gina a voice that speaks to the repercussions of colonialism and the dehumanization of the Other at the hands of white society.

King further romanticizes his “Gypsies” by likening them to members of organized crime. A “cardboard character” in itself, Ritchie “The Hammer” Ginelli embodies an archetypal Italian-American mobster made popular in cinema during the 1970s and 1980s. Revealing the darker side of Yuppie culture given his friendship with Halleck and associations with the Law firm, Ginelli typifies the underlying reverence for corruption in 1980s America. Ginelli and his connection to organized crime assume the role of a maternal figure in Halleck’s life. Highlighted not only in Halleck’s free indirect discourse, where he reveals “it was Ginelli he thought of first” after he killed the elderly “Gypsy” Woman (King, 17), but also through Ginelli’s protection and sacrifice for Halleck, King implies how

corruption was the mechanism through which the Yuppies preserved their privileged position. A humorous perspective that compares Yuppies to infants, King's fascination with Ginelli does not end there.

"Charismatic," hostile, and involved in "gangland executions" (King, 19), Ginelli is depicted as a larger-than-life figure and the main aggressor toward the "Gypsies." Drawing upon the public's interest in cinema's glamourization of crime, King uses Ginelli not only to coerce Lemke to "take off" the "curse" (King, 257) but also to disseminate romanticized delusions about the Romani. King draws parallels to the Mafia as a way of romanticizing "Gypsy" values. Though the "Gypsies" actions portray a vindictive nature and are shown to be at odds with Ginelli, King's inclusion of a mobster figure facilitates a sense of loyalty amongst the "Gypsies." By having two groups going head-to-head, King implies that either faction adheres to a similar "unwritten code" rooted in honor and integrity. While their actions may not be legally appropriate, their rationale stems from morally reputable principles reminiscent of an idealized justice as seen in cinema. However, King's comparison prompts harmful repercussions for the Romani by misleadingly convoluting their culture to the Mafia. By reducing their existence to a romanticized depiction of cultural values and "unwritten codes," King perpetuates the stereotype of criminality falsely ascribed to the Romani

Merely piggybacking on the perpetual exploitation of the 'Gypsy' in literature, King's *Thinner* does little in the way of subverting age-old narratives about a marginalized group. Despite harboring a fondness for Reagan's post-Vietnam America, King provides an astute critique of Yuppie culture and systemic racism during the 1980s. However, King's paradoxical use of racial stereotypes to highlight the underlying presence of racism in society complicates the effectiveness of his commentary on prevalent issues like white indifference, wealth disparity, and corruption. The portrayal of the Lemke, specifically, sees the "Gypsy"

compared to the “noble savage.” Although there are fleeting moments of perception, particularly in Gina's remarks about the "cursed" ones, King neglects to develop these points fully. Instead, he elects to exploit society's subconscious biases for his benefit.

What Now?

By virtue of the character's narrative possibility, the “Gypsy” has become an influential literary trope. Though depicted in a variety of manifestations due to the “Western imagination,” the single most important factor of the “Gypsy” for authors is its Otherness. A projection of mainstream society’s desires, anxieties, and fears, literature has helped disseminate the perception of the “Gypsy” as the archetypal Other. The “Gypsy” has been utilized as a device to both critique and support numerous aspects of mainstream society. Demonstrated within *Wuthering Heights, The Hunchback of Notre Dame,* and *Thinner,* literature has used the “Gypsy” not only to challenge societal conventions such as female oppression but also to endorse economic policies like Reaganomics.

However, for every time the “Gypsy” has been depicted as little other than a character used for textual effect, the knock-on effect is that the Romani see their lives immersed in distortion. None of these novels should be excused from criticism for how they have utilized the “Gypsy” as a means of promoting other agendas. From Hugo to Bronte to King, each author undermines their critique by exploiting stereotypes. The false representation of the “Gypsy” in place of the Romani leaves no opportunity for a more productive and less racialized discourse about literature’s use of the Other.

More commonly vilified, the exoticized portrayals of the “Gypsy” are just as harmful in fostering dominant-inferior relations between the West and the Romani. In each novel that has been covered, there is never a positive resolution for the “Gypsy.” They either die or are left to “wander” without recompense for their mistreatment. Like the “noble savage,” the

characters' lives are treated like a gift to mainstream society. Almost as if they have chosen to sacrifice themselves for the betterment of others. This is the legacy of the "Gypsy" that literature has created and continues to seep into everyday life.

Though it is all but impossible for the "Gypsy" to be recognized by everyone as an amalgamation of harmful stereotypes rolled into a fictitious character, action can be taken to initiate a change in public perception. For those who wish to support the end of persecution against the Romani, steps can be made to promote works that accurately portray their lives. For those who believe that all Romani are thieves and beggars, the reality is that literature has had such an influence that mainstream society has forced the Romani into a limited space. Relying on the "Western imagination," the Romani often fulfill stereotypical roles such as palm reading as a means to earn a living by exploiting Gadzo. A tradition stemming from their Inidan heritage, many of the Romani practice fortune-telling as a means of making a living. Yet it is important to note that not all Romani take part in the practice, nor do they use a crystal ball.

Given the extent of marginalization experienced by the Romani, it's unsurprising that a small segment may resort to criminal activities. This phenomenon reflects a common response among groups facing systemic injustice as they strive to support their families rather than solely the Romani. This perspective also dismantles the notion that the Romani bring hardships upon themselves by supposedly opting not to assimilate into mainstream society. While it appears that they prefer to keep a distance, the truth is that the Romani harbor skepticism about how they will be received and treated by others. In actuality, Polls conducted by European Romanis during the 1990s indicate that the people do wish to integrate with Gadzo (Hancock, 93). As of now, no action has been taken to bring about better relations.

Another argument against the Romani is that they do not send their children to school, however, many of the people wish to see their children gain an education but are fearful of the violence they may face. An impact that still haunts the lives of the people to this day, it is often overlooked that over 50% of the Romani population in Europe were killed during the Holocaust. The Nazi's justification of the ethnic cleansing can be traced back to 17th Century German Literature that explicitly correlated the "Gypsy" with "thievery, magic, trickery, blood shame, and racial contamination" (Figuera, 88). Nobody was called on behalf of the Romani to testify at the Nuremberg Trials nor were the Romani mentioned in the US War refugee board. However, Neo-Nazi factions in Eastern Europe continue to enact racial violence against the Romani whom they see as their prime target (Hancock, 48). As a result of a century's worth of literature justifying persecution, the reason for the negative public perception of the Romani is that the people often have little other option but to be engulfed by the Western imagination.

In reading the stories by Romani authors such as Ronald Lee and Menyhert Lakatos and continuing to seek a more accurate understanding through the works of those like Ian Hancock and Thomas Acton, a new, authentic perception can be established in place of society's false consciousness. Moving away from the attitudes of the people as inherently immoral, inferior, or worse, non-existent, in recognizing the "Gypsy," in its truest sense as a projection of societal anxieties and desire, the Romani can begin to find their voice away that for too long has been subjugated for the "needs" of others.

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