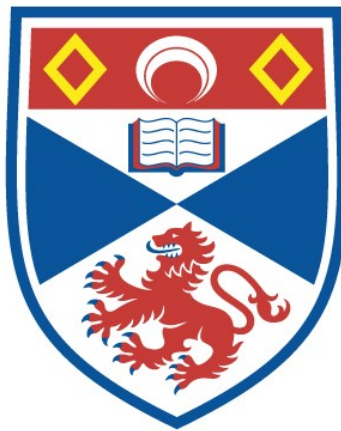


'PAPER GYPSIES':
REPRESENTATIONS OF THE GYPSY FIGURE IN
BRITISH LITERATURE, C.1780-1870

Alexandra L. Drayton

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews



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‘Paper Gypsies’:
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May 2011

‘Paper Gypsies’: Representations of the Gypsy Figure in British Literature, c.1780-1870

Representations of the Gypsies and their lifestyle were widespread in British culture in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This thesis analyzes the varying literary and artistic responses to the Gypsy figure in the period circa 1780-1870. Addressing not only well-known works by William Wordsworth, Jane Austen, Walter Scott, John Clare, Robert Browning, Matthew Arnold and George Eliot, but also lesser-known or neglected works by Gilbert White, Hannah More, George Crabbe and Samuel Rogers, unpublished archival material from Princess Victoria’s journals, and a range of articles from the periodical press, this thesis examines how the figure of the Gypsy was used to explore differing conceptions of the landscape, identity and freedom, as well as the authoritative discourses of law, religion and science.

The influence of William Cowper’s Gypsy episode in Book One of *The Task* is shown to be profound, and its effect on ensuing literary representations of the Gypsy is an example of my interpretation of Wim Willem’s term ‘paper Gypsies’: the idea that literary Gypsies are often textual (re)constructions of other writers’ work, creating a shared literary, cultural and artistic heritage.

A focus on the picturesque and the Gypsies’ role within that genre is a strong theme throughout this thesis. The ambiguity of picturesque Gypsy representations challenges the authority of the leisured viewer, provoking complex responses that either seek to contain the Gypsy’s disruptive potential or demonstrate the figure’s refusal to be controlled. An examination of texts alongside contemporary paintings and sketches of Gypsies by Princess Victoria, George Morland, Thomas Gainsborough, J. M. W. Turner, John Constable and John Everett Millais, elucidates the significance of the Gypsies as ambiguous ciphers in both literature and art.

Candidate's declarations:

I, Alexandra Louise Drayton hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 80, 000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

I was admitted as a research student in October 2007 and as a candidate for the degree of Ph.D. in October 2008; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2007 and 2011.

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For my grandparents
and
To George

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List of Abbreviations

OED — *Oxford English Dictionary*

PMLA — *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*

SEL — *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*

Note on the Text

There are a variety of spellings of the word ‘Gypsy’. I have chosen to follow Deborah Epstein

Nord, David Mayall and Wim Willems by using a capital ‘G’.

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INTRODUCTION

In December 1836, approximately seven months before she became queen, Princess Victoria was staying at her uncle's house in Claremont, Surrey. As usual, she attended dinners, went for walks, read, drew, and wrote in her journal. On this occasion, however, the Princess also encountered a group of Gypsies that were camped in the grounds of the estate. Throughout her time at Claremont, Princess Victoria recorded her Gypsy encounters in her journal, mentioning the group over thirty times in a two-month period. Such was the impression that the Gypsies had on the Princess that they continued to live on in her thoughts and journal entries even after she saw them for the final time. In this respect, the young princess was responding to a figure that fascinated the society that she was born to rule; the diary entries reflect certain key discourses of the picturesque, law, independence and Romantic notions of escape that surrounded the Gypsies, which we shall see in all the other texts examined in this thesis.

The Princess' focus on the Gypsies is symptomatic of a wider fascination with the Gypsy in British literature, where the figure was found in every genre. In the steady stream of newspaper and journal articles about Gypsies throughout Victoria's girlhood and reign, ranging from reports of the missionary efforts of James Crabb and the Wesleyan-Methodists in the 1830s and 1840s, to the ruthless evangelism of George Smith of Coalville in the 1880s and 1890s,¹ there is abundant evidence that the Gypsies were very much a feature of the British countryside during the Victorian period, despite the increasing tendencies of writers to associate the group with 'a world that no longer existed'.² As my thesis will go on to explore,

¹ George Smith (1831-1895) led a movement to reform the Gypsies, which resulted in the nine Moveable Dwellings Bills brought before parliament between 1885 and 1894. Smith's zeal to reform the Gypsies stemmed from an early-acquired, intense dislike of the group. David Mayall notes: 'Smith desperately wanted to expose the truth about present-day Gypsy life and so redress the balance upset by the efforts of novelists and others to paint the Gypsies white', *Gypsy-travellers in nineteenth-century society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 134.

² Deborah Epstein Nord, *Gypsies and the British Imagination, 1807-1930* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 45.

from the 1780s through to the 1860s (and beyond), a wide range of texts drew on and perpetuated the myth of the Gypsy figure.

I begin my investigation of ‘paper Gypsies’ in the second part of this introduction by examining Princess Victoria’s journal entries made between December 1836 and February 1837. The Princess’ observations are invaluable because they are a unique demonstration of sympathy for an ‘undesirable’ group of people from a member of the British ruling class, a section of society that has hitherto been perceived as openly hostile to the Gypsies. The journal entries, a mixture of personal observation and quotations, are a striking and vivid record of the Princess’ encounters with the Gypsies and they provide an example of the way that the phenomenon of the ‘paper Gypsies’ permeates all types of literature, including the (semi-) private sphere of the journal.

1

The Gypsies: a ‘living enigma in human history’

I have taken the term ‘paper Gypsies’ from the historian Wim Willems’ study *In Search of the True Gypsy: From Enlightenment to Final Solution* (1997). In this monograph, Willems traces the evolution of the ‘myth’ of the ‘true Gypsy’, starting with a discussion of Heinrich Grellmann’s seminal work on Gypsy origins, *Die Zigeuner, ein historischer Versuch über die Lebensart und Verfassung, Sitten und Schicksahle dieses Volks in Europa, nebst ihrem Ursprange* (1783).³ Willems argues against other Gypsy historians such as Angus Fraser (1992) by claiming that Grellmann’s approach to his subject was original only because he was the first to create ‘an ethnic homogeneity and [...] coherent picture of the history of the Gypsies’;⁴ Grellmann was important not because of his ‘historical retrieval of knowledge that had been lost’, but because

³ Matthew Raper translated Grellmann’s *Die Zigeuner* into English in 1787. See 1807 reprint *Dissertation on the Gipseys [...] With Historical Enquiry Concerning their First Appearance in Europe* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1807).

⁴ Wim Willems, *In Search of the True Gypsy: From Enlightenment to Final Solution*, trans. by Don Bloch (London; Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1997), p. 297.

he ‘construct[ed] a Gypsy identity which previously had not existed as such’.⁵ Grellmann had no actual contact with the Gypsies themselves, but instead drew his conclusions from certain similarities that he found between the Gypsy groups described in the works of others. Willems uses the term ‘paper Gypsies’ in his conclusion when he questions how far certain writers after Grellmann (including George Borrow of *Romany Rye* fame) were able to ‘come forward with trustworthy ethnographic articles’, or whether they all instead relied on *supposed* truths (or myths) put forward in previous ‘histories’ of the Gypsies: ‘paper Gypsies’.⁶ I have built on Willems’ term, with its implications of specifically *textual* (re)constructions of the Gypsy figure, and I argue that all of the writers featured in my thesis create their own ‘paper Gypsies’ that draw upon a shared cultural, literary and artistic heritage, as well as their contemporaries’ and predecessors’ works, in an attempt to understand the ‘living enigma’⁷ of the Gypsy figure.

Despite the abundance of Gypsies in British literature, the topic has hitherto been given little critical attention. Whilst Katie Trumpener’s wide-ranging and impressive study ‘The Time of the Gypsies: A “People without History” in the Narratives of the West’ (1992) called for further investigation into the function of the Gypsy in literature to correspond with the growth in ‘historical, anthropological, and polemical writing’ about the figure, little has been done to build upon her ‘attempt to open up a field of theoretical and literary inquiry’.⁸ The scope of Trumpener’s article precluded any in-depth investigation of the Gypsy figure, but her identification of several key Gypsy texts is invaluable for further study. In the last two decades, articles have appeared that explore the role of the Gypsy either in individual author’s works or as a precursor to further, more thematic examinations of the Gypsy’s role in literature.

⁵ *In Search of the True Gypsy*, p. 293.

⁶ *In Search of the True Gypsy*, p. 297.

⁷ William Howitt, *The Rural Life of England*, 2 vols (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1838), I, p. 245.

⁸ Katie Trumpener, ‘The Time of the Gypsies: A “People without History” in the Narratives of the West’, *Critical Inquiry*, 18: 4, Identities (Summer 1992), p. 848.

Most of the research on the figure of the Gypsy in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature is concerned with how individual writers have responded to the figure. Claire Lamont's 1994 essay, 'John Clare and the Gypsies', focuses on Clare's autobiographical writing, his poetry, and the historical Gypsy-context in which they were produced. Lamont's work is a seminal biographical recovery of the Gypsy context of Clare's work and I build on this in Chapter III through closer examination of the metaphorical value of the Gypsy figure. Sarah Houghton-Walker produced two articles (both 2009) that draw in parts upon Lamont's article and examine literary influences on Clare's representation of Gypsies. Her article 'John Clare's Gypsies' demands that Clare is read primarily as a poet rather than a chronicler of rural life and she rejects Kristine Douaud's interpretation of Clare's work (2008). Houghton-Walker's first article on literary Gypsies (2008) focused on Cowper's Gypsy encounter in *The Task*, which I discuss in Chapter I. David Simpson approaches William Wordsworth's poem 'Gipsies' in *Wordsworth's Historical Imagination: The Poetry of Displacement* (1987) and in his article 'Figuring Class, Sex and Gender: What is the subject of Wordsworth's 'Gipsies'?' (2000), both of which question Wordsworth's surprising outburst at the Gypsies he encounters (see Chapter II). The character of Meg Merrilies has generated a variety of critical discussions, the most notable being Peter Garside's two comprehensive articles 'Meg Merrilies and India' (1991) and 'Picturesque figure and landscape: Meg Merrilies and the gypsies' (1994). Demonstrating the importance of Meg Merrilies as an influence on later Gypsy representations, Claire Lamont's article 'Meg the Gypsy in Scott and Keats' (1987) explored how a description of Scott's famous Gypsy shaped Keat's poem 'Old Meg she was a gipsey'. Amit Yahav-Brown's 2006 article 'Gypsies, Nomadism, and the Limits of Realism' examines *Guy Mannering* along with novels by Fielding, Dickens and Lawrence in light of the idea that 'British realism does not realize its gypsy figures [...] because it does not recognize them as national subjects'.⁹ All of these critics have identified important areas for research into the function of the Gypsy in British literature and I

⁹ Amit Yahav-Brown, 'Gypsies, Nomadism, and the Limits of Realism', *MLN*, 121 (2006), p. 1127.

build upon their explorations, examining individual Gypsy representations but also comparing them to other contemporary accounts.

Aside from Trumpener's article, the most notable of recent surveys of the function of the Gypsy in literature is Anne Janowitz's essay, 'The transit of the Gypsies in Romantic period poetry' (1999). Janowitz focuses on images of the Gypsy and the Wandering Jew used by Romantic-period writers to explore anxieties about identity and society; she also examines the two-fold identity of the Gypsy as both 'an anxious negative type for the laboring poor' and 'a noble exotic'.¹⁰ I develop Janowitz's idea of the Gypsy as the 'quasi-fantastical double to the English cottager',¹¹ specifically in relation to Hannah More's tale *Tawney Rachel*, William Wordsworth's poem 'Gipsies', the Gypsy encounter in Samuel Rogers' poem *The Pleasures of Memory*, Walter Scott's novel *Guy Mannering* and John Clare's Gypsy poems. Whilst Janowitz briefly discusses the idea of the Gypsy as a double to the English cottager in her work on John Clare, she has not considered it in relation to the other writers listed above.

Celia Esplugas (1999) and Michael Kramp (2006) have also written surveys of the Gypsy figure in literature, although both of these are highly generalized. Esplugas' article has been widely criticized for relying on outdated research and Kramp's idea that the Gypsies progressed from 'menace to malleability' in the course of the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is an over-simplification of a far more complex and nuanced issue, as I demonstrate in this thesis.

Deborah Epstein Nord's 2006 monograph *Gypsies and the British Imagination, 1807-1930* is the most recent sustained full-length study of the Gypsy figure in British literature: the critic's broad survey of Gypsy portrayals charts the progress of Gypsy representations in over a century of literary output. Using Edward Said's idea of Orientalism, Nord figures the Gypsy as

¹⁰ Anne Janowitz, 'The transit of Gypsies in Romantic period poetry', *The Country and the City Revisited, England and the Politics of Culture, 1550-1850*, ed. by Gerald Maclean, Donna Landry and Joseph P. Ward (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 216.

¹¹ 'The transit of Gypsies', p. 214.

the ‘other’ in British literature. In agreement with Janowitz’s idea of the Gypsies as a double to the English cottager, Nord sees the Gypsies as a mixture of ‘foreignness and familiarity, exoticism and homeliness’ and she quotes Jonathan Boyarin when she describes the phenomenon of “‘the other within’”.¹² I have invoked this terminology where it is metaphorically helpful, rather than using it, as Nord does, to identify a particular racial type.

After an examination of Princess Victoria’s journals, my point of departure is a discussion of the function of the Gypsy figure in the picturesque. I argue that the ambiguity of the Gypsy, which stems from the figure’s refusal to be assimilated into society, destabilizes the ordered world of the picturesque and challenges the authority of the leisured viewer: are the Gypsies used in the picturesque in order to contain their disruptive potential, or are they a cipher for the ‘horror within’, a threat that refuses to be controlled? In order to demonstrate the power of the Gypsy figure in the picturesque, I turn to William Cowper’s Gypsy encounter in Book One of *The Task*. Initially, Cowper’s impression of the Gypsy group appears to be negative, yet the poet’s vacillation between condemnation and admiration of the group complicates this negativity and renders the poet’s attitude towards his Gypsy subjects ambiguous. I compare Cowper’s uncertainty at how best to portray the Gypsies with the indeterminacy in George Morland’s painting *A Gypsy Encampment* (undated).

In Chapter II I develop the idea of how the Gypsies’ ambiguity complicates any critical decision to see the figures as simply a negative figure in the landscape. Through an examination of a number of texts I demonstrate how the inclusion of a Gypsy unsettles the viewer’s assumptions; bound up with this notion is a discussion of how Romantic subjectivity influences perceptions of the Gypsy and how this creates and perpetuates the myth of the figure and the ‘paper Gypsies’. I also examine how the figure’s evasion of legal or scientific categorization is linked with constructions of the self and the ‘other’.

¹² *Gypsies and the British Imagination*, p. 5.

I begin Chapter II with a discussion of a letter by Gilbert White, in which he records his observations of the Gypsies. White's letter demonstrates frustration at being unable to categorize the Gypsies and he resorts to classifying them alongside other anomalies in the landscape; this letter represents another version of Cowper's inability to understand why the Gypsies should choose to reject society and live as they do. I then examine Hannah More's tale *Tawney Rachel*, in which she sees the Gypsies as a negative moral example that needed to be purged from society. I show that the attempt to remove the problem posed by the Gypsies demonstrates how the threat posed by the 'other' cannot be contained successfully: Rachel's husband dies and she is transported to the colonies but their children remain to become a burden on society. *Tawney Rachel* also reflects More's anxieties about the threat of the 'other' within: a recognition of the appeal of Gypsy life for settled people. More images Rachel as a 'counterfeit' or non-native Gypsy, and her efforts to punish Rachel and expel her from society demonstrate this anxiety about the 'other', unruly labouring poor who stubbornly refuse to accept the constraints of Evangelical reform. Wordsworth's poem 'Gipsies' is also concerned with both the 'other' within as well as the 'other' without; in this case the anxiety in the poem stems from the speaker's recognition of similarities between himself and the Gypsies, and the attempts that he makes to distance himself from the charges of uselessness and purposelessness leveled at the Gypsies. Wordsworth's outburst is an example of the conflicts of Romantic subjectivity that George Crabbe explores in his poem 'The Lover's Journey'. Using Crabbe's 1807 poem 'The Hall of Justice' as an example of the poet's previous sympathetic treatment of a Gypsy woman, I argue that Crabbe was concerned with the consequences of Romantic subjectivity as much as he was concerned with the problems that Gypsies presented 'as a negative social force'.¹³ Crabbe sees the Lover's sentimental subjectivity as dangerous because his happiness leads him to ignore the Gypsies' poverty and to give charity without thinking of the consequences; his thoughtless action perpetuates the Gypsies' miserable existence instead of

¹³ 'The Time of the Gypsies', n.34, p. 865.

helping them.

The final passage that I focus on in this chapter is Harriet Smith's Gypsy encounter in *Emma*. In Austen's text we can trace echoes of Crabbe's concern that charity-giving only encouraged the Gypsies to beg more, rather than find 'useful' occupations, but her view of the Gypsy incident is humorous rather than censorious; Harriet's fear of the Gypsies is exposed as ridiculous and the 'threat' that the Gypsies pose is dramatically reduced when we realize that the group is only composed of a women and some rather boisterous children (who are not unlike many of the other children in the society of Austen's novels). The Gypsies in *Emma* are also an example of how myths about the Gypsies are created and disseminated as a true story, so that the encounters between the settled folk and the 'other' are fictionalized and become part of folklore.

In Chapter III, I examine works by Samuel Rogers, Walter Scott and John Clare. I focus on the writers' use of childhood memory and the way in which this influences Gypsy representations. Surprisingly, for Rogers the Gypsy becomes a figure through which he could explore the latent power of the rural poor; for Scott, the Gypsies allow an exploration of the impact of socio-economic changes and a critique of contemporary society. Conversely, in the Gypsy poems by John Clare, a poet who is usually aligned with the voice of the outsider and the oppressed, we see a far more literary exploration of the figure. So much emphasis has been placed on the authenticity of Clare's Gypsy poems, but I argue that several of these poems are deliberately and self-consciously literary: rather than an examination of society or the 'real' Gypsy, they explore Clare's developing poetic style and owe more to intertextuality, myth and folklore, than to physical experience.

I finish my exploration of 'paper Gypsies' by examining Victorian portrayals of Gypsies in works by Robert Browning, Matthew Arnold and George Eliot. In this final chapter I focus on the allure of freedom and potential escape that the Gypsy figure promises. In Browning's

poem 'The Flight of the Duchess' I look at how Browning shows that freedom is only ever an illusion: the Duchess' 'escape' with the Gypsies is merely an exchange of one type of imprisonment (marriage and convention) with another (sexual enthrallment). In this poem Browning interrogates the desire to be free and, ultimately, exposes freedom as a myth, a state that even the Gypsies cannot attain. Browning's Gypsies are animalistic figures created from the most disturbing characteristics noticed by earlier writers on Gypsies: they are hirsute, compared to insects and the ugliest Gypsy is seen as having an overpowering, disturbing magnetism; the Gypsies' representation is suspended between the promise of new life they hold for the young Duchess and an overwhelming sense of decay and rottenness.

Matthew Arnold's four Gypsy poems, 'To a Gypsy Child by the Sea-Shore', 'Resignation', 'The Scholar-Gypsy' and 'Thyrsis', are the focus of the next part of Chapter IV. In this section of the chapter I explore the way in which Arnold develops his Gypsy characters, from the isolated child in 'To a Gypsy Child', to the patient acceptance of the Gypsies in 'Resignation', and on to the mythical Scholar-Gypsy in the later poems, who is in danger of being destroyed by the ills of modern society. In Arnold's poems we see how the Gypsies are still imaged as a version of the 'other' but with the threat removed; rather than Wordsworth's urgent need to separate the figure of the poet from that of the Gypsy, in 'The Scholar-Gypsy' Arnold sees the Scholar-Gypsy as the ideal: a fusion of a poet's mind with the Gypsies' distance from mainstream society. Arnold sees life outside conventional society as the only way for this ideal Scholar-Gypsy to survive, yet there is a constant threat that the 'strong infection of our mental strife' (222)¹⁴ will contaminate the figure and bring an end to Arnold's hopes.

The final text examined in this thesis is George Eliot's novel *The Mill on the Floss*. I see Maggie's childish imaginings of Gypsy lifestyle as an 'example within an example' of 'paper Gypsies': the stereotypes of Gypsies that Maggie imagines and (mis)remembers from stories are

¹⁴ *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, ed. by Kenneth Allott; 2nd edn ed. by Miriam Allott (New York; London: Longman Group Limited, 1979), p. 368.

de-bunked by Eliot in her description of Gypsy life; after the initial excitement of escape, Maggie realizes that the Gypsies were not at all as she had fantasized they would be. The episode also highlights imperialist attitudes towards the Gypsies and the way in which Eliot satirizes attempts to civilize the group.

I have chosen to exclude two well-known representations of Gypsies from nineteenth-century popular culture. The first of these is works by the author George Borrow, whose books *The Zincali; or, an account of the Gypsies of Spain* (1843), *The Bible in Spain* (1843), *Lavengro* (1851), and *The Romany Rye* (1857), popularized tales of Gypsies. In *Gypsies and the British Imagination*, Nord includes a chapter on *Lavengro* and *The Romany Rye*, and, while I differ from Nord's readings of Romantic period and Victorian poets, I would have little to add to her discussion of Borrow; in addition, his texts are less amenable to the methodology of historicized close reading that I employ for all my other writers. I have specifically excluded a study of *The Zincali* and *The Bible in Spain* in the interests of maintaining a focus on the literary representation of Gypsies in the British landscape. Although I allude to the 'afterlife' of Meg Merrilies in Chapter Three, I have also chosen not to discuss depictions of the Gypsy figure on the stage: much of Meg's extended notoriety derived from Daniel Terry's play *Guy Mannering; or, The Gipsy's Prophecy* (1816), and the role of the Gypsy figure on the stage is the subject of a forthcoming study by Frederick Burwick. Given the diverse proliferation of Gypsy roles in nineteenth-century theatres and music halls, and the need to include music and dance in any serious investigation of drama in the period, I decided that this area lay outside the parameters of this thesis. There is, of course, scope for an extended study of the Gypsy figure in eighteenth and nineteenth-century plays, as well as in the ballad tradition and songs, and Burwick's study will open the field for subsequent scholars.

Throughout this thesis I use the metaphor of the picturesque because this enables me to discuss the volatile challenge the Gypsies posed to cultural authority in discourses of law,

religion, economics and anthropology. By 'picturesque' I mean a specific way of viewing the landscape that emphasizes the role of the viewer and his or her organization of a specific real or imagined landscape in an attempt at domination; as the word 'attempt' signals, this domination is not always successful. I argue that the Gypsy is an ambiguous figure and its inclusion in the picturesque can either represent an endeavour to control the threat it poses, or demonstrate its ability to disrupt accepted power relationships.

Critics have previously discussed Gypsies in terms of 'abjection' and the 'other'. I use the term 'other' where it is associated with identity. In my use of the term I am referring to a conceptualization of the Gypsies as a group distinct and intrinsically different from mainstream society. I see the 'other' as a group or groups deliberately separated from society (either by their own choice or by that of society), but intimately involved in the development of conceptions of the individual 'self'. In doing so, I partly follow Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, when he explains: 'the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience'¹⁵ and his notion that the relationship between the Occident (or, in my argument, 'society') and the Orient (the Gypsies) 'is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony'.¹⁶ In my discussion of the 'other' within and the counterfeit Gypsies, however, I diverge from Said's Orientalism because I find it too reductive.

Said focuses on a strict separation of West from East, Occident from Orient, which relies on a conception of fixed geographical distance and a specificity of place: a country in the East that can be visited, explored and understood by a Westerner within a particular (Western) cultural and historical framework. Said argues that 'there is no real analogy for taking a fixed, more or less total geographical position towards a wide variety of social, linguistic, political,

¹⁵ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1978; repr. London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 1-2.

¹⁶ *Orientalism*, p. 5.

and historical realities'¹⁷ and his idea of Orientalism takes its shape from these geographical contours: the 'boundary notion of East and West' and 'a willed imaginative and geographic division made between East and West'.¹⁸ Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gypsy representations do not conform to this strict division along geographical boundaries because the Gypsies had no widely-accepted place of origin at that time: they were exotic and familiar, foreign and native; most importantly, they did not exist in another country 'over there' but were represented as living 'here', in the British landscape. I examine texts using Said's framework of Orientalism only up to a point: too close an adherence would lose the identification and recognition of self-in-other that produces the anxiety in many of the texts; Said's interest lies in how a geographical and conceptual division has acted as a structuring principle in the literary imagination, whereas I am interested in the representation of a specific figure.

In Chapter I, I use a passage from Julia Kristeva's work *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* to explain the unsettling nature of the Gypsies' ambiguity in the picturesque. Kristeva explains:

The abject is not an ob-ject facing me, which I name or imagine. Nor is it an ob-jest, an otherness ceaselessly fleeing in a systematic quest of desire. What is abject is not my correlative, which [...] would allow me to be more or less detached and autonomous.¹⁹

Because of this distinction between 'abject' and 'object', the figure of the Gypsy itself is excluded (it is an 'object' as well as, in this definition, an 'ob-jest'), although the feeling that is engendered by the Gypsies' ambiguous presence is 'abjection'. There are instances examined in this thesis where the portrayals of Gypsies are 'abject': the references to their tendency to 'swarm' like insects, for example, in Gilbert White's letter or the description of rotten food in Cowper's *The Task* and Clare's 'The Gipsy Camp', are related to what Kristeva describes as:

¹⁷ *Orientalism*, p. 50.

¹⁸ *Orientalism*, p. 201.

¹⁹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 1.

‘Food loathing [...] the most elementary [...] form of abjection’.²⁰ The potential danger that is suggested by the presence of the Gypsies is also ‘abject’: ‘Abjection [...] is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that disassembles’.²¹ Yet a rigid application of Kristeva’s theory would, as with Said’s, be reductive. A concentration on the negative aspects of the Gypsies prohibits or stunts an examination of the positive. Whilst a discussion of abjection may be useful when examining the anxiety about the Gypsy as a ‘horror within’, it is unhelpful when, for example, one reads Scott’s portrayal of the Gypsies as a protest about the Highland Clearances. Whilst I draw out the importance of ambiguity in Gypsy representation throughout my thesis, I do not apply Kristeva’s understanding of the abject to all of the texts; Kristeva’s focus is on descriptive psychopathology whereas I look at the ways in which the figure of the Gypsy functions in specific texts, and only occasionally see them as symptoms or signs of abjection.

Although Said and Kristeva’s theories work for some elements of the texts I study, they do not take into account the challenging range of the ‘paper Gypsies’. The complex aesthetic layering in the picturesque allows me to discuss the unsettling effects of the Gypsy figure in whatever genre it appears, permits the possibility of political critique and enables me to account for the complexity and diversity of each individual Gypsy representation within the selective frame of this thesis.

It would also be possible to consider some of my examples in terms of Martin Heidegger’s interpretations of dwelling and being, but close analysis of a wide range of Gypsy texts convinced me that this is not adequate for all of them. Whilst Heidegger’s ideas may be useful in a discussion of the Gypsies as doubles for the settled people, (for example, in *Tawney Rachel*), it does not allow for a focus on the Gypsy as a figure of escape and as a group that wilfully resists rootedness; Heidegger was working towards a specific philosophical system that

²⁰ *Powers of Horror*, p. 2.

²¹ *Powers of Horror*, pp. 2-4.

characterizes 'being' itself, and not the function of figures in texts. In *Demythologizing Heidegger* (1993) John D. Caputo argues that the "“jewgreek”", a category that includes, 'everyone who is out, outside, silenced, deprived of an idiom or a home or both',²² is excluded from Heidegger's 'myth of Being' and this is one of the main reasons that I have chosen not to use a Heideggarian paradigm to examine texts. Criticism of Heideggerian philosophy has also highlighted its emphasis on nation and nationalism, which by definition excludes itinerant groups and those without a nation such as Jews and Gypsies.

In this thesis I have used a methodology of historicized close reading. In all my case studies, I have read both with and against the grain to examine the full extent of textual identification with and resistance to the Gypsy figure. My approach to my chosen texts is along the lines of criticism by Anne Janowitz and David Simpson in their readings of Romantic-period Gypsy texts, as well as, more generally, criticism by Nicholas Roe and Tim Fulford.

2

The Princess and the Gypsies

Princess Victoria first came across the Gypsies at Claremont on the 3rd December 1836, whilst out walking with her governess, Baroness Lehzen, and Lady Theresa Strangways. The Princess recorded the meeting in a short sentence: 'We met two Gipsies, an old and a young woman; the young one was beautiful and so picturesc!'.²³ The description in this first journal entry is characteristic of the Princess' later journal entries. What interests her are the way that these Gypsies look, their family relations, their living conditions and the way that other members of the settled classes see the group.

Victoria's view of the Gypsies appears to have been influenced by James Crabb (1774-1851), a Wesleyan-Methodist preacher who was greatly interested in Gypsy welfare. In *The Gipsies' Advocate* (first published in 1831), Crabb argues for 'the necessity [...] of engaging in the

²² John D. Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 7.

²³ RA/VIC/MAIN/QVJ/ 3 December 1836. Journal material reproduced with the permission of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

great work of the conversion of the poor Gipsies'.²⁴ The author provides a brief 'history' of the Gypsies, based on earlier accounts by Heinrich Grellmann (pub. 1783) and John Hoyland (pub. 1816), and he then proceeds to outline the urgent need for instructing the Gypsies 'in the blessed truths of the Christian religion' (54). Crabb's work is peppered with personal observations and anecdotes, and extracts of letters from others also committed to the conversion of the Gypsies.

Although she refers to Crabb's book frequently, recording on several occasions: 'Read in the Gypsies' Advocate',²⁵ Princess Victoria's recollections of the Gypsies differ in both style and tone from Crabb. Richard Stein sees *The Gipsies' Advocate* as a sort of model from which the Princess could shape her view of the Gypsies and he argues that 'Crabb provides [Princess Victoria] with a language that is at once sympathetic and detached'.²⁶ My reading of the journals, however, is markedly different; whilst Crabb's views certainly have some influence on the Princess, her opinions are in dialogue with Crabb, rather than following him. Indeed, she even goes so far as to put her own ideas on a par with Crabb's: 'There is so much in this book which so exactly agrees with my own feelings concerning these forlorn people'.²⁷

The Princess' summary of *The Gipsies' Advocate* reads:

[The Gypsies] have originally no religion, but many have been reformed [...] Their conjugal, filial, and paternal affection is very great, as also their kindness and attention to their sick, old, or infirm. Their morals are almost always very pure, with the exception of an addiction to petty thefts and fortune-telling.²⁸

Whilst Crabb does mention the Gypsies' good qualities, commenting that 'there are many genuine features of humanity in the degraded and despised people' (13), his prose and his focus

²⁴ James Crabb, *The Gipsies' Advocate; or, Observations on the Origin, Character, Manners and Habits of the English Gypsies: To which are added, Many Interesting Anecdotes on the Success that has Attended the Plans of Several Benevolent Individuals, Who Anxiously Desire their Conversion to God* (London: Lindsey and Co., 1831; repr. Teddington: The Echo Library, 2007), p. 80. All references to this edition are made parenthetically in the text, unless otherwise indicated.

²⁵ RA/VIC/MAIN/QVJ/ 28 December 1836; 30 December 1836; 13 January 1837; 15 January 1837; 16 January 1837; 17 January 1837; 18 January 1837; 19 January 1837; 20 January 1837; 21 January 1837; 22 January 1837; 23 January 1837; 28 January 1837; 29 January 1837.

²⁶ Richard L. Stein, *Victoria's Year: English Literature and Culture, 1837-1838* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 26.

²⁷ RA/VIC/MAIN/QVJ/19 January 1837. Emphasis in original.

²⁸ RA/VIC/MAIN/QVJ/17 December 1836.

differ quite dramatically from the Princess'. Crabb's desire to reform the Gypsies is rooted firmly in his Evangelical desire to convert the 'miserable wanderers' (3), and he blames the many instances of 'great guilt, depravity and misery' that the tribe suffers on the fact that they are 'destitute of the knowledge of salvation in a crucified and ascended Saviour' (21).

Although Stein argues that the Princess uses *The Gypsies' Advocate* as a 'literary and moral model',²⁹ key differences between the writers demonstrate that this is not the case: the Princess calls the Gypsies variously her 'friends',³⁰ 'protégés',³¹ and 'a nice set of Gypsies',³² whilst Crabb speaks of the 'unhappy race' and the 'poor English heathens' (3). The Princess acknowledges the need to act in a Christian way towards the Gypsies 'in the admirable manner Mr. Crabb [...] so strongly urges',³³ and records her desire to do 'something for their spiritual and mental benefit',³⁴ but she stops short of the strongly worded opinions that we find in Crabb's work.

Crabb urges his reader to preach to the Gypsies and is concerned with their spiritual rather than physical needs:

An active person might be found in every place [...] who should visit [the Gypsies'] tents, instruct them in the Scriptures, and pray with and for them (the latter he should never neglect) by which means he would gain their confidence [...] Indeed at all times he should converse with them plainly and affectionately about the great love of the Redeemer, in coming into this our world, to suffer and die for guilty sinners, of whom [the Gypsies] make a number. (45)

The Princess, however, is mainly concerned with the need to provide physical comforts – food, fuel, blankets and clothes – and, for whatever reason, she chooses not to divulge her thoughts on much more than the Gypsies' immediate needs. There are clues as to the Princess' views on the spiritual welfare of the Gypsies: after they de-camp from Claremont, she writes: 'I trust Providence will protect them from all dangers, but particularly spiritual',³⁵ but otherwise

²⁹ *Victoria's Year*, p. 26.

³⁰ RA/VIC/MAIN/QVJ/ 5 January 1837.

³¹ RA/VIC/MAIN/QVJ/ 27 December 1836.

³² RA/VIC/MAIN/QVJ/ 5 January 1837.

³³ RA/VIC/MAIN/QVJ/ 25 December 1836.

³⁴ RA/VIC/MAIN/QVJ/ 29 December 1836. Emphasis in original.

³⁵ RA/VIC/MAIN/QVJ/ 19 January 1837.

she chooses to withhold comment. Instead, the Princess becomes greatly concerned with the living conditions of the Gypsies, especially once a baby is born to one of the ‘pretty young sister-in-law[s]’ on the 16th December.³⁶ Several journal entries end with the Princess’ thoughts on the Gypsies’ comfort. On Christmas Eve 1836 she writes: ‘I was anxious to know how our poor friends were after this bitterly cold night’.³⁷ A day later, after visiting the camp and in the knowledge that the Gypsies were to receive broth, fuel, blankets and ‘old flannel things’, she records: ‘I went to bed with a light heart, knowing these poor good people were better off and would not feel the cold quite so much’.³⁸

Another great departure from the model that Crabb had supposedly given Princess Victoria is found in the precision with which she records the Gypsies’ physical characteristics and mannerisms. Aspects such as the Gypsies’ cleanliness are noted: ‘The whole set [...] seem very clean [...] for they wash their linen, handkerchiefs and cloaks & c., almost every day’.³⁹ The Princess is as interested in the Gypsies’ language as, for example, Gilbert White, but her attitude towards the group is markedly different. Whereas White ponders the possibility of finding the ‘remains of [the Gypsies] native language’ amongst the Gypsies’ cant, but dismisses it because of the unlikelihood of meeting ‘with an intelligent person among them’,⁴⁰ the Princess almost seems to act as a scribe and translator for the group, recording their dialect with phonetic precision: ‘Aunt Sarah said in her peculiar dialect [that the woman] is “very sad”, meaning “very unwell”’.⁴¹

One of the most striking features of the journal entries is their visual quality and the Princess’ attention to the smallest human detail, which marks a dramatic divergence from anything she would have read in *The Gypsies’ Advocate*. The Princess devotes much of her time to

³⁶ RA/VIC/MAIN/QVJ/ 16 December 1836.

³⁷ RA/VIC/MAIN/QVJ/ 24 December 1836.

³⁸ RA/VIC/MAIN/QVJ/ 25 December 1836.

³⁹ RA/VIC/MAIN/QVJ/ 22 December 1836.

⁴⁰ Gilbert White, *The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne, in the county of Southampton: with engravings, and an appendix* (London, 1789), p. 195. See Chapter II for a discussion of White’s interest in the Gypsies.

⁴¹ RA/VIC/MAIN/QVJ/ 18 December 1836. Emphasis in original.

recording the individual features of the Gypsies, rather than their setting in the landscape, as was common in much of the contemporary literature featuring Gypsies. Although she refers to the Gypsies as ‘picturesc [*sic*]’,⁴² she spends little time describing their camp, other than to note ‘their frail abode of canvas’⁴³ and, once the Gypsies have left, she records mournfully: ‘When we approached the spot where the Gipsy encampment was, all, all was gone [...] and the only trace left of them was their litter of straw!’.⁴⁴ The Princess is most interested in the physical appearance of the Gypsies, and many of her journal entries focus on the way that the individuals looked. Her description of the Gypsy women has a distinct painterly quality:

I never saw Aunt Sarah look more beautiful than she did this time [...] she has a tawny complexion, a low forehead, finely pencilled [*sic*] but not arched eyebrows, beautiful, dark, expressive eyes with splendid eyelashes, a small high nose, high cheek bones, a projecting mouth, beautiful teeth, and a falling back chin; et pour comble de tout raven black hair, over which she wore a bright crimson handkerchief fastned [*sic*] under her chin [...]⁴⁵

As well as recording her encounters in her journal, the Princess also made several sketches of the Gypsies, which again demonstrate her interest in the Gypsy figures rather than the scene in which they were found.

The sketches of the Gypsies were all made after Princess Victoria’s visits to the camp, once she had returned to her uncle’s house. On 1st January 1837, she records: ‘I do so wish I could take [Sarah’s] likeness from nature! What a study she would be!’⁴⁶ The main caption under this picture of Sarah Cooper and her nieces and nephews, drawn in December 1836 [Figure I], reads: ‘Gypsy woman and children near Claremont: from recollection’. There is a suggestion that a sketch ‘from nature’ rather than ‘from recollection’ might have had a less stylized, formal framework; perhaps the Princess would have been able to capture the ‘mind and soul’ in Sarah’s countenance, which, she explains, ‘[was] most difficult [...] to draw from

⁴² RA/VIC/MAIN/QVJ/ 3 December 1836; 15 December 1836.

⁴³ RA/VIC/MAIN/QVJ/ 11 December 1836.

⁴⁴ RA/VIC/MAIN/QVJ/ 5 January 1837.

⁴⁵ RA/VIC/MAIN/QVJ/ 1 January 1837. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁶ RA/VIC/MAIN/QVJ/ 1 January 1837. Emphasis in original.

recollection'.⁴⁷ Whatever the possibilities, the sketches that we have represent Princess Victoria's memories and recollections of the Gypsies, memories that are structured into an artistic representation clearly governed by pre-existing codes that dictated the 'correct' way to present a scene.

Stein notes the importance of the fact that the Princess had recently been informed of the death of her drawing-master, Richard Westall, and the critic proposes that these Gypsy sketches could in some way serve as a tribute 'to Westall's memory'.⁴⁸ Whilst there is no doubt that Westall's influence is felt strongly in Princess Victoria's sketches there, is also a suggestion that she wished to go beyond this influence as well as Crabb's.

Stein remarks:

As artist, [the Princess] identifies herself with that well-established role of aristocratic spectator, who studies the poor as curiosities and maintains her own distance by treating them as aesthetic objects.⁴⁹

Although Stein then acknowledges that this separation is 'a reflex rather than a deliberately chosen strategy',⁵⁰ I feel it underestimates her independence and intellectual curiosity. The Princess was more than a 'Generous Outsider, part of the legion of ladies who visited the poor with their baskets'⁵¹ and it is unlikely that a merely 'Generous Outsider' would so wish to capture the 'mind *and* soul' (italics mine) of her subject.

Princess Victoria's repeated wish one day to 'do something for these poor people',⁵² and her frequent longing that she could help the Gypsies immediately, speak not only of her preoccupation with helping 'this singular and wandering people'⁵³ but also attest to her desire for independence. In a revealing sentence from a passage about the naming of the newborn Gypsy baby, the Princess writes:

⁴⁷ RA/VIC/MAIN/QVJ/1 January 1837.

⁴⁸ *Victoria's Year*, p. 26.

⁴⁹ *Victoria's Year*, p. 25.

⁵⁰ *Victoria's Year*, p. 25.

⁵¹ *Victoria's Year*, p. 25.

⁵² RA/VIC/MAIN/QVJ/ 29 December 1836.

⁵³ RA/VIC/MAIN/QVJ/ 28 December 1836.

Had I been my own mistress, I would willingly have told them to call the boy Leopold [...] but of course I could not.⁵⁴

In her book *Queen Victoria's Sketchbook*, Marina Warner decides that this entry can be explained 'because the gipsies did not ask [the Princess] to be sponsor [to the child]',⁵⁵ but I feel that this is not an adequate explanation. Instead, I see the interaction with the Gypsies as a small but definite demonstration of the Princess' desire to foster relationships and control, however indirectly that control may come about.

The desire for control is tempered with a great sense of duty – exemplified by the line 'but of course I could not' in the above quotation – that manifests itself in a wish to help others less fortunate than herself and is made possible because of the deference that the Princess pays to her situation, her superiors and the strict rules that would have governed the life of a future queen. Whatever her occasional outbursts –one of the most notable of which is against 'some people' who refused to be persuaded of the need to be kind to the Gypsies⁵⁶ – Princess Victoria was constantly aware of the conventions by which she must abide, hence her wish to help the Gypsies more remains just that: an unfulfilled hope. It is perhaps for this reason that the Gypsies continue to live on in her memory long after they disappear.

Despite her avowal one day 'to do some real good for our poor Gipsy friends',⁵⁷ however, Princess Victoria did little to change the lives of her Gypsy subjects once she became queen. David Mayall records thirteen pieces of major legislation relating to Gypsies during Queen Victoria's reign, only three of which – the Public Health Acts of 1875, 1883 and 1891 – could be seen as having any sort of positive impact on the Gypsies.⁵⁸ But if we look at the journals as part of the Romantic subjectivity that she inherited from earlier literature, the records of the Princess' Gypsy encounters and the feelings that they engendered stand as

⁵⁴ RA/VIC/MAIN/QVJ/ 1 January 1837. Emphasis in original. The Princess' uncle, Leopold, owned Claremont and shared a birthday with the Gypsy baby.

⁵⁵ Marina Warner, *Queen Victoria's Sketchbook* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1979), p. 45.

⁵⁶ RA/VIC/MAIN/QVJ/ 19 January 1837. Emphasis in original.

⁵⁷ RA/VIC/MAIN/QVJ/ 14 January 1837. Emphasis in original.

⁵⁸ *Gypsy-travellers in nineteenth-century society*, pp. 191-2.

examples of the way in which an otherwise powerless Princess Victoria was able to exert her independence.

In her kindness to the Gypsies, Princess Victoria saw a way in which she could demonstrate her desire for freedom of thought and action. The 'picturesc' and remarkably clean Gypsy 'friends' also provided an imaginative outlet for the Princess, as she wondered what became of the group, imagined what she could do if she had more freedom to help them and drew her sketches 'from recollection'. Marina Warner remarks upon how meeting with the Gypsies would have been welcome respite from the 'silent, gloomy and tense' atmosphere of her life at Kensington Palace.⁵⁹ From her journal entries it is clear that the Gypsies provided a welcome diversion from the Princess' daily life. In Chapter IV of this thesis, we see how Robert Browning uses the figure of the Gypsy in 'The Flight of the Duchess' as a demonstration of the ultimate escape from quotidian dullness; the Princess' interest in the Gypsies, however, has more in common with John Clare's views, discussed in Chapter III. Princess Victoria was captivated by the Gypsies in a similar way to Clare but without being able to follow through the fantasy, just as Clare would seek out the Gypsies' company but never seriously entertained the idea of running away with the group forever.

⁵⁹ *Queen Victoria's Sketchbook*, p. 45.

CHAPTER I

'Not merely to adorn': Gypsies in the Picturesque.

Art and Poetry, c. 1754–1870

In his 1838 work *The Rural Life of England*, William Howitt wrote:

The picture of the Rural Life of England must be woefully defective which should omit those singular and most picturesque squatters on heaths and in lanes, the Gipsies. They make part and parcel of the landscape scenery of England. They are an essential portion of our poetry and literature.⁶⁰

Howitt's statement touches on key tenets in this thesis: the identification of the Gypsies as 'an essential portion of our poetry and literature' and the notice of their 'picturesque' appearance. Howitt's use of the term 'picturesque' appears to mean 'suitable for a picture', but the Gypsies often appeared in more complex roles in picturesque poetry, prose and art in this period. In this chapter, I examine William Cowper's Gypsy encounter in *The Task* and examples of paintings in the light of William Gilpin's idea, expressed in his poem 'On Landscape Painting', that the group is used in a picturesque scene 'not merely to adorn' (578).⁶¹

Whilst Howitt's description in *The Rural Life of England* romanticizes the Gypsies, the group was seen as much as a danger to society and the founding principles of property, wage-labour and a market-driven economy, as it was described positively; portrayals of the figure are caught in this dichotomy, displaying at times an idealization of Gypsy life and at other times a horror of the unstructured impenetrability of the group.

In order to elucidate her argument about the Gypsies' threat to established order, Abigail Bardi turned to Julia Kristeva's discussion of abjection. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* Kristeva writes:

There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside [...] It lies

⁶⁰ William Howitt, *The Rural Life of England*, 2 vols (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1838), I, p. 219.

⁶¹ William Gilpin, '[Poem] On Landscape Painting' in *Three Essays: On Picturesque Beauty; On Picturesque Travel; And on Landscape Painting, to which is added a poem, On Landscape Painting* (London: R. Blamire, 1792), p. 21.

there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced.⁶²

Bardi uses Kristeva's theory to argue that the Gypsy figure in literature is caught in a struggle between Romantic idealization and a fear of the unknown.⁶³ Kristeva remarks:

It is [...] not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.⁶⁴

In her imagining of abjection Kristeva encapsulates the anxiety that surrounded the Gypsies in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries; the key word in her argument is 'ambiguous'. This chapter focuses on the ambiguity that infuses the Gypsy figure's inclusion in picturesque art and theory with an unsettling and, potentially, politically volatile significance.

Copley and Garside argue that "The Picturesque" is a notoriously difficult category to define.⁶⁵ This section of my thesis develops Tim Fulford's understanding that the term 'picturesque' refers to a particular way of looking at the landscape that places emphasis on the authority of the viewer or observer and stems from the need to organize a landscape into a form compliant with the observer's particular desires or aims. The idea of proprietorship implicit in this usage of the term 'picturesque' is essential. Fulford argues:

For [a] gentleman the proper source of power and stability in the nation was the possession of land, and the organization of the prospect-view was an expression of their authority over the national landscape which they owned [...] Through landscape-gardening, through painting, and through the descriptions of prose writers and poets, views of the landscape owned by gentlemen became representations of the legitimacy of their power [...]⁶⁶

⁶² Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 1.

⁶³ Abigail R. Bardi, 'The Gypsy as Trope in Victorian and Modern British Literature' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Maryland, 2007), pp. 1-4, in *DRUM (Digital Repository at the University of Maryland)*, <<http://hdl.handle.net/1903/7703>> [Last accessed 2 May 2011].

⁶⁴ *Powers of Horror*, p. 4.

⁶⁵ *The Politics of the Picturesque: Literature, landscape and aesthetics since 1770*, ed. by Stephen Copley and Peter Garside (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 1.

⁶⁶ Tim Fulford, *Landscape, Liberty and Authority: Poetry, Criticism and Politics from Thomson to Wordsworth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 2-3.

Conversely, as Fulford recognizes, ideas of the picturesque also allowed for challenges to the authority and legitimacy of the landed gentry. I argue that the Gypsy is a figure for this tension, specifically (although not exclusively) in paintings and in literature.

If the idea of the picturesque is seen as a physical manifestation of gentlemanly virtues, as it certainly was by Richard Payne Knight and Uvedale Price,⁶⁷ then the inclusion of Gypsies in these scenes raises several possibilities: are the Gypsies shown in order to demonstrate how a threat can be controlled through inclusion, or are they a disturbing challenge to hegemony? The complex range of 'meanings' that the Gypsy figure holds is shown in both contemporary paintings (discussed later in this chapter) and in picturesque theory. In 1772 (pub. 1786), William Gilpin described how 'Figures in long, folding draperies; gypsies; banditti; and soldiers' impress the viewer with 'some idea of greatness, wildness, or ferocity'.⁶⁸ The inclusion of the Gypsy figure is so much more than a mere aesthetic adornment, a fact that Gilpin reiterates in his 1792 poem 'On Landscape Painting':

And gipsey-tribes not merely to adorn,
But to express that sentiment,
Awak'd already by the savage-scene (578-80)⁶⁹

Given the frequency with which the Gypsies were featured in legislation and periodical articles, especially from the 1780s onwards, it is impossible to read them as only benign figures of little or no importance; Gilpin's idea that the inclusion of Gypsies in a landscape would impress the wildness of a scene more strongly upon the viewer suggests that they are much more potent figures of disruption.

The disruptive potential of the Gypsies permeates a range of discourses, be they literary, artistic, moral or legal. In 1772, sixteenth-century acts⁷⁰ that carried the death penalty

⁶⁷ See *Landscape, Liberty and Authority*, pp. 116-34.

⁶⁸ William Gilpin, *Observations, relative chiefly to picturesque beauty, made in the year 1772, on several parts of England; particularly the mountains, and lakes of Cumberland and Westmoreland*, 2 vols (London, 1786), II, pp. 45-6.

⁶⁹ *Three Essays: On Picturesque Beauty & etc.*, p. 21.

⁷⁰ 1&2 Phil. & Mar.c.4 (1554) and 5 Eliz.c.20 (1562/3). See *The statutes of the realm: printed by command of His Majesty King George the Third, in pursuance of an address of the House of Commons of Great Britain; from original records and authentic manuscripts*, 4 vols (London: George Eyre and Andrew Strahan, 1810-1822; repr. Burlington, VT:

for simply being identified as a Gypsy were repealed.⁷¹ Although this marked a change in the way the Gypsies were seen by the statute makers, as Richard Foster points out, the repeal served to obfuscate further the position of Gypsies in British society.⁷² Whilst being a Gypsy or 'Egyptian' was no longer punishable by death, Gypsy identity became even more confused by being classified alongside the general British poor.

With these ideas of picturesque theory that revolve around challenges to the authority and legitimacy of the landed gentry, and the eighteenth-century change in Gypsy legislation in mind, I wish to approach a well-known section of Cowper's poem *The Task*, in which the poet encounters a group of Gypsies. I look at how Cowper's rendering of the Gypsies as 'a vagabond and useless tribe' becomes unsettled through his oscillation between sympathy and dislike for the tribe. I then proceed to examine paintings by Thomas Gainsborough, J. M. W. Turner and George Morland. While the framing theory of the picturesque is clear in all these paintings, the extent of the unsettling power of ambiguity is the focus of my discussion, especially in reference to Morland's painting *A Gypsy Encampment* [Figure II].

In a letter to his friend William Unwin, Cowper writes:

My descriptions are all from Nature. Not one of them second-handed. My delineations of the heart are from my own experience. Not one of them borrowed from books, or in the least degree, conjectural.⁷³

This extract is illuminating when considered in the light of the Gypsy encounter in Book One of

The Task:

I see a column of slow-rising smoke
O'er top the lofty wood that skirts the wild.
A vagabond and useless tribe there eat
Their miserable meal. A kettle slung

Tanner Ritchie Publishing in collaboration with the Library and Information Services of the University of St Andrews, 2007), IV.1, pp. 242-3; pp. 449-50.

⁷¹ '14 April 1772', Fifth Session (21 January 1772 - 9 June 1772), *Journals of the House of Commons*, XXXIII, p. 695, in *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers (HCPP)* <http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:hcpp&rft_dat=xri:hcpp:rec:jhc-009434> [Last accessed 6 April 2011].

⁷² Richard Foster, 'The Rural Other: Representations of Gypsies in British Art, 1740-1795' (unpublished M.A. dissertation, The Courtauld Institute of Art, 2006), pp. 23-5.

⁷³ 'Letter to William Unwin, Sunday, 10th October 1784', *The Letters and Prose Writings of William Cowper*, 4 vols, ed. by James King and Charles Ryskamp (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979-84), II (1981), p. 285.

Between two poles upon a stick transverse,
 Receives the morsel; flesh obscene of dog,
 Or vermin, or at best, of cock purloin'd
 From his accustom'd perch. Hard-faring race!
 They pick their fuel out of ev'ry hedge,
 Which kindled with dry leaves, just saves unquench'd
 The spark of life. The sportive wind blows wide
 Their flutt'ring rags, and shows a tawny skin,
 The vellum of the pedigree they claim.
 Great skill they have in palmistry, and more
 To conjure clean away the gold they touch,
 Conveying worthless dross into its place.
 Loud when they beg, dumb only when they steal.
 Strange! that a creature rational, and cast
 In human mould, should brutalize by choice
 His nature, and though capable of arts
 By which the world might profit and himself,
 Self-banish'd from society, prefer
 Such squalid sloth to honorable toil.
 Yet even these, though feigning sickness oft
 They swathe the forehead, drag the limping limb
 And vex their flesh with artificial sores,
 Can change their whine into a mirthful note
 When safe occasion offers, and with dance
 And music of the bladder and the bag
 Beguile their woes and make the woods resound.
 Such health and gaiety of heart enjoy
 The houseless rovers of the sylvan world;
 And breathing wholesome air, and wand'ring much,
 Need other physic none to heal th'effects
 Of loathsome diet, penury, and cold. (557-91)⁷⁴

Sarah Houghton-Walker's article 'William Cowper's Gypsies' has recently opened up the debate regarding the significance of this episode, challenging the idea of the passage as a 'convenient bridge between the coastline that frames Kate and the more general argument of the poem';⁷⁵ Houghton-Walker instead analyzes its unsettling effects on the poem as a whole. Her conclusion, however, that '[t]he gypsies seem to be an itch Cowper cannot resist scratching, and as he surrenders to this particular temptation, he adds an interestingly

⁷⁴ *The Poems of William Cowper*, ed. by John Baird and Charles Ryskamp, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980-1995), II (1995), pp. 131-2.

⁷⁵ Sarah Houghton-Walker, 'William Cowper's Gypsies', *SEL*, 48:3 (Summer 2008), p. 654.

troublesome edge to his poem',⁷⁶ seems wholly unsatisfying and fails to account for Cowper's inclusion of the Gypsies in *The Task*.

Cowper's encounter with the Gypsies is introduced with the line 'I see a column of slow rising smoke | O'er top the lofty wood that skirts the wild' (l. 557-8). This introduces the reader to the Gypsies at a distance, the only evidence of the group's existence being the column of smoke appearing above the trees. These lines are consistent with Fulford's definition of the picturesque: the use of the pronoun 'I' signifies confidence and an assertion of the speaker's interpretation of the scene to come, and the use of the verb 'see' indicates his visual interaction with the landscape. Cowper is, in this instance, keen to establish the concrete legitimacy of his own view.⁷⁷ As Fulford argues:

[For Cowper] the representation of a commanding view was a means of establishing [his] own authority over the objects of [his] contemplation and the whole cultural field.⁷⁸

These two apparently simple lines of description, however, also contain a number of clues and references as to what the reader is about to encounter and they are details that, while emblematic of Gypsy life, are also open to interpretation. By the early nineteenth century, the 'column of slow-rising smoke' that first signals the Gypsies' existence had become a classic motif of the Gypsies in both literature and painting.⁷⁹

Houghton-Walker suggests a negative significance to the smoke being described as 'slow-rising', and links it to Cowper's preoccupation with laziness and indolence in *The Task*.⁸⁰ But it is equally important to note that the word 'slow' may also hint at the Gypsies' dogged perseverance in the face of the tedious difficulties that they encounter just for daily survival.⁸¹

⁷⁶ 'Cowper's Gypsies', p. 672.

⁷⁸ Houghton-Walker also notes the significance of the 'confident "I see"', 'Cowper's Gypsies', p. 654.

⁷⁹ *Landscape, Liberty and Authority*, p. 11.

⁷⁹ See, among others: Poems: William Wordsworth 'Tintern Abbey' (1798); John Clare 'The Gypsies Evening Blaze' (1807-10); George Crabbe 'The Lover's Journey' (1812); Paintings: Samuel Palmer, *The Gypsy Dell – Moonlight* (n.d.); William Shayer (Jr.) *The Gypsy Tent* (mid-19th century); George Morland: *Gypsies by the Campfire* (1794), *Gypsies in a Wood* [n.d.], *Gypsy Encampment* [n.d.], *Gypsies* [n.d.].

⁸⁰ 'Cowper's Gypsies', p. 656.

⁸¹ Cowper uses the word 'slow' elsewhere in *The Task* to different effect to that suggested by Houghton-Walker. Instead, Cowper's use of the word signifies a sense of ease rather than of indolence, a crucial point that Houghton-

It is crucial to remember that once the Gypsies are safely hidden within the depths of the forest, rather than crouching on its edges, their Gypsies' alleged sloth changes into 'dance and music' that 'made the woods resound' (I. 584-5).

Gypsies, whether in literature, art, or even in reality, are often found to inhabit a borderland, a space between the familiar and the unknowable in both geographical and metaphysical terms. Their occupation of borderline spaces has become one of the main reasons that they hold so much fascination for the observer: they are almost – but tantalizingly not quite – out of the reaches of society's understanding.⁸² Thomas Gainsborough's painting *The Gipsies* (also known as *Wooded Landscape with Gypsies Round a Campfire*), c. 1754-64 [Figure III], is a classic example of this marginal existence: the painting depicts what has, by this time, become a traditional grouping of Gypsy characters. Gainsborough's Gypsies are not as hidden as Cowper's Gypsies appear to be: the Gypsies are situated in the foreground of the painting, and yet they are still imaged as a separate and inward-looking group and are clearly imaged as a distinct community, in contrast to the more conventional settlement that is just apparent from the sight of a church tower in the top right-hand corner of the picture. The fact that the group is situated so close to the thick woodland, on the left of the painting, hints at the Gypsies' more shady potential.

Cowper finds his Gypsies hidden near a wood, not quite out in the wild. Houghton-Walker notes inaccurately that Cowper encounters the Gypsies '[on] the expanse of common,

Walker misses in her discussion: 'We tread the wilderness, whose well-roll'd walks | With curvature of slow and easy sweep [...] give ample space | To narrow bounds' (I. 351-3); 'The lake in front becomes a lawn [...] And streams as if created for his use, | Pursue the track of his directing wand | Sinuous or straight, now rapid and now slow' (III. 774-8). Alternatively, Cowper uses the word to signify a gradual (positive) development, such as the coming of evening: 'Come ev'ning once again, season of peace [...] Methinks I see thee [...] With Matron-step slow-moving' (IV. 243-6); or the acquisition of knowledge that, whilst the process is painful, brings a positive end result: 'Experience, slow preceptress, teaching oft | The way to glory by miscarriage foul' (III. 505-6). See John Neve, *A Concordance to the Poetical Works of William Cowper* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), p. 402.

⁸² Kristeva touches on this idea in her discussion of abjection, but what her theory fails to grasp, in terms of the Gypsy, is the positive aspect of this 'unknowability' of the figure. The rigid application of Kristeva's theory to the figure of the Gypsy in this period runs the risk of focusing too much on the sublime features of the figure (in Burkean terms), and does not allow for the creative possibilities that the figure's ambiguity could suggest.

“overgrown with fern, and rough | With prickly goss”,⁸³ an identification of place which leads to a slight misreading of the poem and ignores the full complexity of Cowper’s reaction to the Gypsies. It is crucial that Cowper encounters the Gypsies in the place in which he does, rather than, as Houghton-Walker argues, in the same physical space that Crazy Kate inhabits, ‘roam[ing] | The dreary waste’ (l. 546-7) of the common where:

[...] the turf
Smells fresh, and rich in odorif’rous herbs
And fungus fruits of earth, regales the sense
With luxury of unexpected sweets. (l. 530-3)

The Gypsies’ marginal geographical situation symbolizes their social ambiguity; metaphorically, one is unsure where to ‘place’ them, an uncertainty that is manifested by the physical placement of the tribe just on the edge of civilization.

The secrecy that surrounds the Gypsies, compared to the openness with which we are able to understand Kate’s story, is reflected by the scenery in which the different figures are encountered: Kate is exposed on the wide-open common land, while the Gypsies are sheltered and semi-hidden by the forest. The difference is that Kate’s subjectivity is laid bare, whereas the Gypsies retain their mystery and the speaker cannot decipher their interiority.

The curious approach of the speaker in the first two lines of the poem appears, however, to be challenged by the lines that follow. In what must be one of the most often-quoted descriptions of a Gypsy tribe, Cowper embarks on his depiction of the group as a whole:⁸⁴

A vagabond and useless tribe there eat
Their miserable meal. A kettle slung
Between two poles upon a stick transverse,

⁸³ ‘Cowper’s Gypsies’, p. 658.

⁸⁴ In a letter in *The Weekly Entertainer*, ‘The Letter-box, No. 67’ (3 April 1809), ‘X’ quotes Cowper’s Gypsy passage and states that ‘[the poet] gives such an excellent description [of Gypsies], as to supersede the necessity of any attempt of my own’, p. 262. For a later example, see also: ‘The English Gypsies’, *The Penny Magazine* (20 January 1838), p. 17. By 1838 it appears that Cowper’s idea of the Gypsies has pervaded the public consciousness to such an extent that, in some cases, his description became the prototype against which every other description – be it of a real or an imagined camp – was held. Even Princess Victoria quoted Cowper in her description of the Gypsies as a ‘hard-faring race’, RA/VIC/MAIN/QVJ/ 11 December 1836.

Receives the morsel; flesh obscene of dog,
 Or vermin, or at best, of cock purloin'd
 From his accustom'd perch. Hard faring race! (l. 559-564)

Instantly and dramatically this description diverges from any sort of picturesque imagery that the first two lines might have conjured up in the reader's mind. As the poet moves in closer on the group, the view changes from a tranquil picture of majestic woods and trailing smoke to a scene of squalor and deprivation. Just as the visual imagery changes from a sweeping perspective to a jarring observation of the clutter of the camp, Cowper's language also changes.⁸⁵ The softness of diction created by the continued use of 'o' sounds in 'O'er top the lofty wood' and the repeated 's' sound of the 'slow rising smoke [...] skirts' is interrupted by the harshness of the 'v' in 'vagabond', while the tranquil 's' sound alters to the hissing of 'useless'. The effect is completed with the alliteration of 'miserable meal'.

Houghton-Walker notes the importance of the observer's position at this stage.⁸⁶

Whilst Cowper would have us believe that he is observing the minutiae of the camp, he oscillates between this practice of detailed description and sweeping generalizations, suggesting that he is unsure of how to describe the Gypsies. The food that they are cooking is either dog, or vermin, or chicken, stolen from a farm. Having drawn the reader into the scene of the Gypsies' camp, Cowper now reverts to a description that, crucially, would not seem out of place when describing a painting of a Gypsy scene, where one can pick out certain visual features but is unable to experience the scene in the same way as someone who had actually encountered it.⁸⁷ The lack of factual precision creates a sense of ambiguity that questions the poet's authority; despite avowing that all his descriptions are 'from Nature' and 'from [his] own

⁸⁵ This attention to detail has much less in common with picturesque principles and much more in common with later Victorian portrayals of Gypsies by artists keen to show the social realism of the situation. See for example: Frederick Walker, 'The Vagrants' (1866) and Hubert Von Herkormer, 'A Gypsy Encampment on Putney Common' (1870).

⁸⁶ 'Cowper's Gypsies', p. 655.

⁸⁷ Although Cowper's poem appeared before Gilpin's *Essays on Picturesque Beauty* (1792), which set out Gilpin's theories in more detail, *Observations on the River Wye* was published in 1782, three years before *The Task*. Given the popularity of *Observations on the River Wye* it is not improbable that Cowper was aware of it and the picturesque style in which Gilpin described the scenery he encountered. It would appear that Cowper's style in lines 559-64, and indeed throughout the Gypsy episode, owes some debt to Gilpin's picturesque prose.

experience', Cowper's description of the Gypsies in lines 559-64 seems far more like 'an exercise of the imagination'.⁸⁸

Whilst Cowper's distaste for the Gypsies' way of life is obvious in lines 559-64, there is ambiguity in the exclamation 'Hard-faring race!' at the end of line 564. The impetus behind this line is uncertain, although the *OED* definition of 'hard-faring' implies a sense of sympathy for the hardship of the Gypsies' lives⁸⁹ rather than a criticism of their lifestyle, which is what Houghton-Walker reads into the line: '[Cowper] *reduces* the members of the camp to a "Hard-faring race!"', (italics mine).⁹⁰ The question remains as to why Cowper included these three words at the end of a critical series of lines. The very nature of the exclamation is confused: Cowper is at once holding the Gypsies' harsh lives against them *and* admiring their stamina. A possible explanation for this peculiar outburst comes a few lines later when the poet berates the Gypsies for choosing to live the lives that they do:

Strange! that a creature rational, and cast
In human mould, should brutalize by choice
His nature, and though capable of arts
By which the world might profit and himself,
Self-banish'd from society, prefer
Such squalid sloth to honourable toil. (l. 574-79)

In a letter to William Unwin on the 29th September 1783, Cowper wrote:

We are Rational, but we are Animal too [...] The only difference between us [and the cattle] is, that they know not the cause of their dejection, and we do[.]⁹¹

Having the faculty of reason is a fundamental part of being human; Cowper thus makes it explicit that this is what the Gypsies are. This distinction, which serves as evidence for the Gypsies' human nature, is that they *choose* to 'brutalize [their] nature' and that this is an act of

⁸⁸ 'Cowper's Gypsies', p. 655.

⁸⁹ See *OED* definition of hard-faring: 'C2. With hardship, severely, etc.'. An *OED* definition of the verb 'to fare' is 'To 'get on' (well or ill); to experience good or bad fortune or treatment' and Cowper's use of the word elsewhere in *The Task* is cited as an example: 'Ill fares the trav'ler now' (IV. l. 341) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/84124?redirectedFrom=hard-faring>> [Last accessed 23 May 2011]. The idea that the Gypsies 'get on' is echoed in Matthew Arnold's poem 'Resignation': 'they rubbed through yesterday | In their hereditary way, | And they will rub through, if they can [...] on the self-same plan', (138-41); see Chapter IV.

⁹⁰ 'Cowper's Gypsies', p. 655.

⁹¹ Cowper: *Letters 1782-1786*, p. 164.

which animals are not capable. For the purposes of this thesis, it is crucial to note that whatever animal characteristics the Gypsies have (and Cowper admits in the letter above that all humans are, in part, animal) Cowper cannot regard them as other than human.

Cowper's previous disgust could be interpreted as exasperation at a group of men and women who so willfully refuse to conform to conventional patterns of human behaviour, which causes them to suffer as a consequence. Considering the fact that Cowper wrote *The Task* to 'keep depression at bay',⁹² as well as to reconnect with society, and that Book One 'imply[s] that virtue thrives in a social condition somewhere between brutishness and sophistication',⁹³ it is unsurprising that Cowper has such a troubled reaction to a group who deliberately avoid the company of others. In fact, much of the Gypsy episode in *The Task* wavers between sympathy for and marked disapproval of the Gypsies and their way of life; a change of attitude which arises every few lines. After the description of the food that the Gypsies eat,⁹⁴ and the outburst of 'Hard-faring race!', Cowper refers to the Gypsies' habit of stealing wood from the hedgerows, but this description is not without sympathy: the imagery of the group who 'pick their fuel out of ev'ry hedge' (l. 565) is pathetic rather than threatening and gives the

⁹² William Cowper: *The Task and Selected Other Poems*, ed. by James Sambrook (London; New York: Longman, 1994), p. 23.

⁹³ William Cowper: *The Task and Selected Other Poems*, p. 25.

⁹⁴ The description starts with the most revolting food possible and ends with chicken, 'tainted' only in a metaphorical sense because it is stolen. Gypsies are often portrayed as poachers and thieves in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century newspaper and journal articles: 'Gypsies', *Caledonian Mercury* (12 June 1802): 'Of the depredations of this banditti, in milking cows in the night, stealing poultry &c. she gave a very probable account', p. 2; 'The Gipsy-Camp', *Cleave's Penny Gazette of Variety and Amusement* (4 March 1843): 'They're rum fellows; one dosent [sic] deny 'em ought, cos if they axe for any mander o thing, an we'll not give 'em it, it's allos wos for us I'th'end', p. 121; 'Gipsies', *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser* (12 November 1845): 'they invariably domicile in their tents, in some lonely lane or sequestered spot [...] for as their pursuits are chiefly of a furtive character, so, to avoid any detection [...] they are in the practise [sic] of locating at some little distance from any town or village', p. 4; 'Gipsy Foragers', *The Ladies' Treasury: An Illustrated Magazine of Entertaining Literature, Education, Fine Art, Biography, Domestic Economy and Fashion*, [n.d.] (published between March 1857 and December 1865): 'Nearer to the gipsy mother, another child, about twelve years old, staggers beneath his burden – the fattest bird of a neighbouring farm-yard, specially reared to grace a Christmas feast', p. 7. They are also seen as being prepared to eat the most disgusting food. See: 'Some Account of the Gypsies', *The Times* (30 November 1787): '[they are] foul feeders on dead cattle and dogs, particularly if burnt to death', p. 4; 'Letters', *The Lady's Newspaper & Pictorial Times* (22 November 1862): 'I have seen [the Gypsies] baking their hedgehogs in clay [...] They told me that the flesh could scarcely be distinguished from the choicest parts of chicken or rabbit – two delicacies with which they were rather too familiar', p. 35.

impression that the Gypsies work hard simply to stay alive. In this context, the minimal presence of the fire is to do with the shortage of fuel.⁹⁵

Despite Cowper's disapproval of the Gypsies' probable theft of the chicken (l. 563), his description of their taking wood from the hedgerow (much like Goody Blake in Wordsworth's poem 'Good Blake and Harry Gill' from the *Lyrical Ballads*), is constructed in a more compassionate tone: the fire made from the stolen wood, '*just saves unquench'd | The spark of life*' (l. 566-7, italics mine). Houghton-Walker reads these lines as a statement of the Gypsies' determination to live by the least effort possible: 'extending a metaphor of fire to encompass the shadowy figures themselves, Cowper portrays a subsistence existence, where the limited expenditure of energy "just saves unquench'd | the spark of life."⁹⁶ It is possible, however, to see the question of to whom the 'spark of life' belongs (whether it is the fire or the Gypsies themselves) as adding to the (albeit scant) compassionate tone in the poem and allowing for an understanding of their way of life that has hitherto remained unseen.

Just before Cowper starts to describe the usual habits of the Gypsies, their ability to 'conjure clean away the gold they touch, | Conveying worthless dross into its place' (l. 571-2), he comments on the appearance of the Gypsies, noting their dark skin and torn clothes. Despite the common imagery of the Gypsy as tawny-skinned and dressed in rags, Cowper's figures are shown as victims of the nature that surrounds them. Coming directly after the description of how the tribe gleans wood from the surrounding hedgerows to keep the fires burning, it seems that even nature is determined to persecute them:

⁹⁵ The idea of the Gypsies picking fuel out of the hedges also makes an implicit reference to a wealth of legislation about wood and wood theft that was issued in the late-eighteenth century. In his work on rural conflict in Herefordshire, 1800-1860, Timothy Shakesheff has charted the impact of wood-related legislation on civil unrest and crime: 'Conflicts [...] ensued when ["customary use" rights of wood-gathering] disappeared during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries [...] The taking of wood without the owner's permission was essentially illegal and any customary rights that may have existed were extinct, if not forgotten [...] The gathering of wood was often regarded as a criminal act by landowners and farmers.' *Rural Conflict, Crime and Protest: Herefordshire, 1800-1860* (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2003), p. 113.

⁹⁶ 'Cowper's Gypsies', p. 656. Charlotte Smith also uses the idea of the spark of life in *The Emigrants*: 'And from the Parish the reluctant dole [...] hardly saves | The lingering spark of life from cold extinction', *The Works of Charlotte Smith*, ed. by Stuart Curran et al., 14 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2005-2007), XIV (2007), p. 141. Given that Smith dedicated her poem to Cowper, and 'enlists Cowper as her poetic champion', it is highly probable that Cowper's line 'just saves unquench'd | The spark of life' is meant sympathetically.

The sportive wind blows wide
 Their flutt'ring rags, and shows a tawny skin. (I. 567-8)

The wind blows at their clothes to expose their skin that will, presumably, make the Gypsies even colder and appear more indecent; that the wind is 'sportive' seems to add an extra element of cruelty to the picture, as well as a sense of deliberateness – it suggests that even Nature has turned its back on the Gypsies, toying with them for its pleasure, rather than providing them with support and protection.⁹⁷

Cowper's reference to the Gypsies' 'tawny skin' (I. 568) is, as I have indicated, traditional: the darkness of the Gypsies' skin is often alluded to and it appears 'Sun-burnt' and 'swarthy' in many descriptions.⁹⁸ Cowper's comment that the Gypsies' skin is 'the vellum of the pedigree *they* claim' (I. 569, italics mine) is, however, more unusual. As James Sambrook points out, 'pedigree' refers to 'the supposed Egyptian ancestry of gipsies' and it 'alludes ironically to aristocratic pedigrees, which were often inscribed upon vellum',⁹⁹ but the notice

⁹⁷ Cowper's description of the Gypsies' rags bears similarities to *King Lear*, III.4.28-32: 'Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are, | That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm, | How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides, | Your looped and windowed raggedness, defend you | From seasons such as these?' The similarities add to the implicit sense of sympathy for the Gypsies in *The Task*. The idea of the fluttering rags exposing the Gypsies' skin also brings to mind *King Lear* III.4.99-107, in which Lear attempts to tear off his clothes, noting the slim divide between man and beast: 'Is man no more than this? [...] Unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, | bare, forked animal as thou art.' By making reference to this, Cowper once again wavers between sympathy for the Gypsies and classifying them as sub-human; the important distinction to draw is that in *King Lear*, Lear shows that all humans are merely a few habits and affectations away from being like animals. All references to *King Lear* are taken from: William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. by Reginald A. Foakes (London: Arden, 1997).

⁹⁸ See 'Some Account of the People called Gypsies', *Monthly Ledger* (2 November 1774), p. 576. Wim Willems describes how Heinrich Grellmann was fascinated 'with how the Gypsies looked[.] [In] the earliest chronicles, Gypsies were portrayed as black and hideous beings but that in the following centuries their appearance was described in primarily positive terms [...] Characteristic of the thinking of the time was the explanation offered by [Grellmann] for the colour of their skin. This was said to be a brownish yellow because they grew up in the midst of smoke and filth. It wasn't a question of skin pigmentation inherited at birth, but rather the way they were raised and lived that had left its mark': *In Search of the True Gypsy: From Enlightenment to Final Solution*, trans. by Don Bloch (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1997), p. 49. See 'Some Account of the Gypsies', *The Times* (30 November 1787): '[The Gypsies have] skin [that is] black [...] not discoloured by nature, but by habitual filthiness', p. 4.

⁹⁹ William Cowper: *The Task, and selected other poems*, p. 75. There is a double irony in this use of the word 'vellum' when one considers that the Gypsies' leaders were often referred to as the 'King' and 'Queen'. See: A. L. Beier, *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England, 1560-1640* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 59, 'Some seventeenth-century Romanies claimed to be kings and queens: Margaret Finch [...] was the first queen of the Lambeth encampment[.]' Margaret Finch is reported to have died in 1740, making the title of 'queen' more relevant for this study as it was also used throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. See: Owen Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture, 1736-1951* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 134. For one of many mid-

of this 'pedigree' is surely made by the observer, rather than being pointed out by the Gypsies themselves.

Cowper's portrayal of the Gypsies may be a reaction to the increasingly widespread debates surrounding the origins of the race that filled many of the periodicals or newspapers from the late-1780s.¹⁰⁰ The publication of Heinrich Grellmann's book *Die Zigeuner, ein historischer Versuch über die Lebensart und Verfassung, Sitten und Schicksahle dieses Volks in Europa, nebst ihrem Ursprunge* in 1783 is one of the key examples of the interest in the origins of the Gypsies in this period. Wim Willems explains:

[An] essay prize [was] announced in August 1779 by the Swedish Royal Academy of Sciences [...] on the topic 'the origin of the Gypsies' [...] The subject appealed to the imagination [...] for between 1770 and 1790 a remarkable number of publications were devoted to it, among which Grellmann's can [...] be seen to have been one of the most interesting.¹⁰¹

Willems sees this 20-year debate as being fuelled in part by 'the accusation of cannibalism made against a group of Gypsies in the Hungarian district of Honth in the summer of 1782'.¹⁰² The incident is referred to in an article in *The Times* on the 30th November 1787 and we can infer that the history and habits of the Gypsies had been brought to the attention of the public at the time: '[there is] a strong presumption that in Hungary they are cannibals, and near 100 were executed for it in August and September 1782, as related in the Hamburgh [*sic*] and other German newspapers'.¹⁰³

Thus, Cowper's brief mention of the Gypsies' pedigree gestures towards a large body of debate and knowledge that was of great interest in the period. It is, perhaps, his frustration

nineteenth century uses of the title see: 'The Gypsy Queen', *John Bull* (13 November 1837), p. 543. 'Old Bridget', the 'Queen of the Norwood Gypsies' was buried in Dulwich Old Cemetery in 1768.

¹⁰⁰ See: 'Curious Account of the people called Gypsies', *Weekly Miscellany; or, Instructive Entertainer* (July 1781), pp. 327-8; 'The History of the Gypsies farther illustrated', *Gentleman's Magazine* (February 1784), pp. 99-102; 'Some Account of the Gipsies', *The Times* (30 November 1787), p. 4; 'Of Gypsies, and the Laws respecting them', *New wonderful magazine and marvelous chronicle* (October 1794), pp. 117-18.

¹⁰¹ *In Search of the True Gypsy*, p. 25. A similar resurgence of interest in Gypsies occurred in England in the late 1830's when the subject for the Newdigate Prize for poetry at Oxford was 'Gipsies'; biographers have linked Matthew Arnold's interest in the figure to this.

¹⁰² *In Search of the True Gypsy*, p. 25.

¹⁰³ 'Some Account of the Gypsies', *The Times* (30 November 1787), p. 4.

at being unable to understand the Gypsies (a factor which reoccurs in Wordsworth's poem 'Gypsies'), or an awareness of the debates surrounding the Gypsies' origins, that cause him to write the line 'the pedigree they claim', a statement that opens links with this wider debate. It is as if Cowper is suspicious of the Gypsies and their lack of a written, established history; the word 'claim' implies a possible deception and, despite the emergence of histories that see the Gypsies as something other than useless vagrants and thieves, the poet is ill-at-ease with their new identity.

Lines 570-73 follow a standard stereotyping of Gypsies that is found later in Hannah More's *Tawney Rachel* (1797).¹⁰⁴ Although a search of the Old Bailey records and newspaper articles shows regular reports of the prosecution of Gypsy women for fortune-telling, a law expelling the Gypsies in order to prevent them deceiving members of the public was first introduced in 1530 (the 'Egyptians Act'). As discussed earlier, the repeal of subsequent acts in 1783 lead to an increase in debates regarding the Gypsies and their activities.¹⁰⁵ Cowper refers to the Gypsies' habit of fortune-telling in lines 570-2. Although his condemnation of the Gypsies' ability to 'conjure clean away the gold they touch' (l. 571) is wholesale, he prefaces his condemnation by noting the 'Great skill they have in palmistry' (l. 570). By the 1780s, as Foster has shown in his dissertation, the image of the Gypsy-as-fortuneteller was widespread in the public imagination. Foster claims that 'the earliest British painting to include [...] a Gypsy [was by Francis Hayman and] is now known only from a 1743 engraving by Francis Vivares entitled *The Fortune-Teller, Or Casting the Coffee Grounds*.'¹⁰⁶ From Cowper's description it is impossible to tell how this knowledge of the Gypsies' habits had been related to him; presumably we, as the readers, are already supposed to be aware of the Gypsies' unsavory

¹⁰⁴ Houghton-Walker also includes a discussion of *Tawney Rachel*, and links More's disapproval of the Gypsy way of life to a distrust of wandering and permanent transit, 'Cowper's Gypsies', p. 662. See Chapter II for a full-length discussion of *Tawney Rachel*.

¹⁰⁵ 'Cowper's Gypsies', pp. 659, 662, 673-4.

¹⁰⁶ 'The Rural Other', p. 13; see also, David H. Solkin, *Painting for Money: The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 145-6.

pastimes. The relative frequency with which the Gypsies appeared in contemporary paintings may well have had some bearing on Cowper's description.

The line '[g]reat skill they have in palmistry' also implies a grudging sense of respect for the Gypsies' abilities, although the ambiguity also allows for the fact that Cowper's admiration could be ironic. In lines 576-7 Cowper reintroduces the idea that the Gypsies might really have some good qualities. Whilst the lines are presented in economic terms, and hint at a potential exploitation, the tone of the phrase 'though capable of arts | By which the world might profit and himself'¹⁰⁷ points to a deeper understanding of the Gypsies' true worth whilst also showing exasperation that they do not seem to want to 'profit' honourably from their skills. Houghton-Walker notes that the Gypsies simply 'do not bother' to profit from their abilities.¹⁰⁸ But upon closer reading this conclusion is inadequate: Cowper intimates that the 'Self-banish[ment]' from society could come from fear as well as from willfulness. Later on in the poem, Cowper describes the transformation that the Gypsies undergo when they are free to roam in the 'sylvan world' (l. 588) and the reader learns of what energetic activities the Gypsies are capable when they are in a place of safety.

The idea of the Gypsies' banishing themselves from society is particularly upsetting to Cowper, given that his aim when writing *The Task* was to reconnect with society (and to show how simple life in the country was in comparison to the corruption of life in the city). The Gypsies destroy Cowper's idea of cohesion and tranquility in the countryside, but they also raise questions for the poet as to the nature of his own retirement; surely his removal to the countryside was a form of self-banishment from society too? This unsettling and unexpected, albeit subconscious, identification with the lives of the Gypsies may in some part explain Cowper's later sympathy with the tribe.

¹⁰⁷ See Chapter Four for a discussion of this point in relation to Matthew Arnold's 'The Scholar-Gipsy'.

¹⁰⁸ 'Cowper's Gypsies', p. 667.

In Foster's discussion of Gypsy representations he notes that the 'association of the Gypsy with fortune-telling allied them with a providential notion of human experience, at odds with a culture that laid stress on the importance of individual agency in the historical process.'¹⁰⁹ The Gypsies' ability to see fortunes, Foster argues, explains their appearance as 'others': it separates the group from the rest of society who do not challenge such conventions. The grudging respect that Cowper has for the Gypsies' skill at fortune-telling emphasizes the difficulty that the tribe face: it is their skill at predicting the future that will earn them their living and provide them with sustenance, yet this same skill keeps the group separate from conventional, Christian society. For Cowper, the Gypsies' insistence on maintaining the life they lead in the face of societal rejection is almost unfathomable.

Cowper's disapproval of the Gypsies' practice of 'feigning sickness oft' (I. 580) and 'vex[ing] their flesh with artificial sores' (582) is obvious, but he is also confused as to why the Gypsies would want to live the unproductive, uncomfortable lives that they do: the narrator wonders 'Strange!' how someone should prefer 'squalid sloth to honourable toil' (I. 579). Houghton-Walker insists that Cowper does not see the Gypsies as humans, rather as 'perform[ing] a kind of ontological squatting in their apparently human form',¹¹⁰ and argues that this is demonstrated by the vexing of the flesh that the Gypsies resort to, that 'insinuates some fundamental antagonism between the gypsy and the form it inhabits'.¹¹¹ On the contrary, Cowper portrays the Gypsies as very definitely human, as discussed above. Cowper is, however, concerned as to why the Gypsies should choose to act as they do. Whilst Houghton-Walker's argument clearly derives from Cowper's description of Gypsies as 'creature[s]' 'cast in human mould', the evidence that the Gypsies are actual human beings outweighs any other, as witnessed in Cowper's use of the word 'rational'. Whilst Cowper refers to conventional

¹⁰⁹ 'The Rural Other', p. 15.

¹¹⁰ 'Cowper's Gypsies', p. 659.

¹¹¹ 'Cowper's Gypsies', p. 664.

myths surrounding the Gypsies, and shows both horror and disgust at their way of life, he does not let this portrayal settle as their identity.

Following directly on from the horrified description of the lengths to which the Gypsies go to in order to preserve their way of life, there is a sudden change of tone as the poet describes how, once they are in a place of safety, the Gypsies transform:

Yet even these, though feigning sickness oft
They swathe the forehead [...]
And vex their flesh with artificial sores,
Can change their whine into a mirthful note
When safe occasion offers (580-4)

The abrupt change asserts more boldly that the Gypsies' habitual demeanour might somehow be due to society. This is not to suggest that Cowper instantly becomes a champion of the Gypsies, but he does, in some way, foreshadow John Clare's Gypsy poems and his understanding of the Gypsies as a 'quiet, pilfering, unprotected race'.¹¹² No explanation or apology is offered for the behaviour of the Gypsies, but *The Task* acknowledges that they are a group under threat and without protection.

The final part of the Gypsy episode in *The Task* is characterized by liveliness, noise and vitality; once the Gypsies are within the safety of the woods, they are able to create their own self-sufficient community. This is a state that eludes them when they are in their usual position inhabiting the liminal space between known and unknown; once they are away from this boundary existence they stir into life. Cowper transforms the figures from (feigned) decrepitude into the idealized and pastoral 'houseless rovers of the sylvan world' (588) who enjoy '[s]uch health and gaiety of heart' (l. 587). At this point that Cowper's Gypsies are rendered almost ethereal: they are described as being more like spirits who dance and sing in the woods. The poet is quick, however, to resume a sense of reality that prevents the image from becoming too idealized: 'breathing wholesome air, and wand'ring much' (l. 589) may

¹¹² John Clare, 'The Gipsy Camp', *The Later Poems of John Clare: 1837-1864*, ed. by Eric Robinson et al., 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), II, p. 29.

seem idyllic, but it also stops the Gypsies from suffering with the rather less romanticized effects of 'loathsome diet, penury, and cold' (l. 589-91).

It is clear from this end piece why the Gypsies are 'Self-banish'd from society' if their reward for their way of life is to gain freedom in the forest. The image of the Gypsies as free in the forest is echoed by John Clare in his much later poem 'The Gipseys Song' (1825),¹¹³ which celebrates the liberty of the Gypsies' life, unconstrained by laws and arbitrary government. For Cowper, the Gypsies' main enemy appears to be civilization. Once the Gypsies are free to roam in the woods, Cowper's description of them shakes off the image of the 'vagabond and useless tribe' to which the reader is first introduced. The Gypsies' use of 'music of the bladder and the bag' could also be interpreted as an assertion of identity and freedom. Whilst Gypsies are traditionally well-known for their musical ability, the particular description of the 'bladder and the bag' is reminiscent of bagpipes (once common in rural England as a favourite instrument), the use of which was seen in Scotland as an act of defiance and was outlawed after the Battle of Culloden in 1746, not to be repealed until the 1800s.

Cowper's use of the Gypsies points to the complexities that surrounded their portrayal at the end of the eighteenth century. Although aspects of his description are at times generalized,¹¹⁴ the episode also reveals the extent to which Gypsies were becoming a key subject of debate in the period. Given the verbal overlaps between articles on Gypsies in periodicals and the similarities between the representation of the Gypsies in the poem and in contemporary art, it is not hard to see why Cowper would choose to include the Gypsy episode in *The Task*. The implicit references to current events (such as the debates engendered by Grellmann's dissertation) suggest that late-eighteenth century readers were familiar with the subject and would be accustomed to this as a topic of polite debate. What is also vital to

¹¹³ John Clare, 'The Gipseys Song', *Poems of the Middle Period, 1822-37*, ed. by Eric Robinson et al., 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), IV, pp. 52-7.

¹¹⁴ Houghton-Walker writes: 'Gypsies, of course, are always both strange and familiar to those outside the "tribe": we can identify them by their distinguishing features, but those same features ensure that we cannot truly know them', 'Cowper's Gypsies', p. 671.

acknowledge is the effect that Cowper's inclusion of the Gypsy episode had on subsequent literature, the evidence of which is found in many nineteenth-century articles that take Cowper's Gypsies to be the 'genuine article' and thus blur the distinction between the literary and actual history of the Gypsies further. Wim Willem's term 'paper Gypsies', used in the title of this thesis, has developed out of the phenomenon of intertwining the real and imagined histories of the Gypsies to create a textual version of the figure that represents all that is known about the group.¹¹⁵

My discussion of Cowper's Gypsy episode in *The Task* has shown how closely related art and literature were in the period: Cowper's first mention of the Gypsies, for example, owes a great debt to picturesque art, while the borderland existence of the Gypsies is as abundantly clear in paintings from the period as it is in Cowper's poem. Closer analysis of these genre paintings, in particular one by George Morland, will show how this ambiguity and difficulty of interpretation really was just as common in art as in literature. The key link between Cowper's Gypsy episode and Morland's *A Gypsy Encampment* (undated)¹¹⁶ is the ambiguous moral message encapsulated within each representation. For Cowper, I argue, this stems mainly from his surprise at the sympathy he feels for his subjects; with Morland, however, it is far more difficult to determine the impetus behind his Gypsy paintings.

In *The dark side of the landscape: The rural poor in English painting 1730-1840*, commenting on George Morland's painting *A Gypsy Encampment*, John Barrell writes:

I can detect no more principle of composition in the picture taken as a whole than I can in the group of figures taken by itself [...] The group [of Gypsies] seems to be arranged entirely at random, and to be in no obvious structural relation to the farmer: it is a problem that would be less obvious had Morland [...] elevated [the farmer] above his social inferiors[.] [In] choosing not to do so, he has disturbed our sense at once of the social relations in the picture and of its composition.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ In *Search of the True Gypsy*, p. 297.

¹¹⁶ The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, lists the title of this painting as *Encampment of Gypsies*. To avoid confusion, I follow John Barrell in using the title *A Gypsy Encampment*.

¹¹⁷ John Barrell, *The dark side of the landscape: The rural poor in English painting 1730-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 127-8.

Barrell sees social composition as an integral part of a painting's meaning: 'there are obviously social assumptions in the notions of composition, about the proper relationship between the figures in a group'.¹¹⁸ It is, then, curious that he feels unable to interpret Morland's *A Gypsy Encampment*. Barrell's conclusion is that Morland chooses not to depict any sort of relationship between the Gypsies and the farmer in his painting, or at best imbues his work with a sense of ambiguity because the artist did not want to portray 'the only possible relation of farmers and gypsies, of authority and obedience'.¹¹⁹

George Morland (1763-1804) was a landscape painter who took his subjects, for the most part, from the rural life of England that he observed around him. According to Barrell, Morland:

[Cannot] be approached in terms of any obvious literary or artistic influences
[because] he detested reading [and] probably did not read a single book after he
had left his parents' house at the age of twenty-one or twenty-two.¹²⁰

What is so fascinating about *A Gypsy Encampment*, however, is that it displays visually what so many writers of the period were attempting to express verbally: enigmas that form the subject of my later chapters and have informed the above discussion of Cowper's Gypsy episode in *The Task*. It does not follow that because Morland had no literary influences his work did not share many of the characteristics inherent in works of art and literature that focused on the same topic.

Barrell's difficulty in interpreting *A Gypsy Encampment* is that he cannot read any class-conditioned relationships within the painting; in this particular painting there is apparently no overt evidence of class struggle, subjugation, feudal dominance or any other interpretations of power balance. Morland presents us with a woodland scene in which there are eight characters: seven of these are Gypsies (one man, three women, two young boys and a baby), of

¹¹⁸ *The dark side of the landscape*, p. 123.

¹¹⁹ *The dark side of the landscape*, p. 128.

¹²⁰ *The dark side of the landscape*, p. 93.

which all but two (a woman and a young boy) are standing. A 'farmer or gentleman'¹²¹ (it is difficult to determine his status other than, gathering from his dress, he is clearly of a superior class to the Gypsies) leans over a stile and is watching the Gypsy group with a serene expression on his face. A large (oak?) tree dominates the painting's central background and sky, while behind the farmer there is obviously a wood or a dell. To the left of the scene, behind the Gypsies, the land becomes less wooded, indicating that like Cowper's Gypsies, they are on the edge of society. Whilst the picture may seem to Barrell to be difficult to interpret in a traditional way – there is no obvious elevation of the farmer above the Gypsies, and the expressions of the group are difficult to read – there is still much more that can be read from the painting than Barrell is prepared to admit. As Richard Foster argues, Barrell has almost entirely overlooked the importance of the Gypsy figure in eighteenth-century British society and art.¹²²

The ambiguity of *A Gypsy Encampment* is precisely what makes it so fascinating: why did Morland choose not to elevate the farmer? Why is the expression of every character in the group so hard to read? Barrell sees this as a statement of Morland's 'attitude to the social relations which must govern the meeting of the rich and poor';¹²³ that is, Morland is unwilling to depict a 'traditional' power relationship between rich and poor because he does not agree with this hierarchical principle. This is a valid theory and helps to understand the painting slightly better, but it fails to provide a wholly satisfying explanation.

One of the most striking aspects of Morland's painting is that the farmer on the right-hand side of the scene is separated from the Gypsies by a stile. There is no reason to assume that he is threatened by the group that he has encountered – quite the opposite, in fact, given his posture of repose, leaning on the fence. Despite this sense of relaxation there is still an element of tension and watchfulness. Firstly, there is the physical barrier between the farmer

¹²¹ *The dark side of the landscape*, p. 127.

¹²² 'The Rural Other', pp. 3-4.

¹²³ *The dark side of the landscape*, p. 128.

and the Gypsies, as mentioned above; although this fence may appear of little importance at first, it is also a symbol of the enclosures that were taking place throughout the country and which threatened the Gypsies' way of life. The casualness of the farmer's stance hints at his superiority to the Gypsies from the safety of his vantage point behind the fence. Secondly, the posture of the only Gypsy woman standing also implies hostility, even downright defiance. Dressed in a cloak, and with her back to the viewer of the painting, it is hard to tell what attitude she has adopted, although there is a suggestion of opposition in her pose and, from the shadowing on the back of her cloak, it seems as if she is deliberately obscuring from view the girl that is seated behind her.

The Gypsy woman who is seated closest to the farmer adds a different atmosphere to that of her hostile companion. This woman is seated with a baby on her lap, perhaps in a position of subservience and deference to the superiority of the farmer, and yet there is a sense of authority in her pose and demeanour that suggests otherwise. It would also seem that the gaze of the gentleman is directed mainly towards this woman. The dynamics of the relationship between the seated Gypsy woman and the observer is hard to uncover and even harder to interpret, but, given her position in the centre of the picture, she is clearly of some importance. The representation of Gypsy women in art and literature often has a suggestive erotic undertone: they are portrayed as beautiful, sensual, enticing and knowing. The Gypsy woman in Morland's picture has at least two of these characteristics, although her maternal role would work against any suggestion of illicit desires. The seated Gypsy woman holds the key to my interpretation of Morland's painting that sets out to disprove Barrell's idea that the artist, through his 'lack' of composition, wished not to depict any relations between the figures. On the contrary: there is a very clear (although perhaps not very conventional) composition at work in the painting, and it is one that has several layers, each one with the seated Gypsy woman at its centre.

One possible key to *A Gypsy Encampment* lies in the idea of the observed and the observer, both in and out of the painting: the figures in the painting are all watchful and observe each other, while the viewer of the painting observes all of the characters watching each other. This idea of observation fits in neatly with the principal ideas of the picturesque and the farmer/gentleman could quite easily be looking at the Gypsies as part of the picturesque scenery. Except, of course, that this painting is executed in far too much detail and at far too close-quarters for the picturesque ideas of proportion and vista to come into play. Instead, there is an unsettling element at work through the idea of observation that is portrayed in the painting, and the observer of the work is drawn into this.

As mentioned above, the focus of the painting is on the seated Gypsy woman and baby in a pose reminiscent of the Madonna and Child. These two figures are not merely the focus of the observer outside the painting, but also those within it: the visual interaction between the farmer and the seated woman is being watched closely by the standing Gypsy woman and it is uncertain whether her watchfulness is from distrust or hostility. It may seem curious here that the Gypsy man plays such a small role in the painting as a whole: he is not immediately noticeable, obscured in the painting's shadowy background, and takes a literal and metaphorical 'back seat'. Morland's focus is on the Gypsy women, a theme that recurs often in literature about Gypsies: there is something about these women that was of intense appeal and curiosity to painters, writers and poets alike. Indeed, just fifteen years after Morland's death, Scott's *Guy Mannering* was to feature a Gypsy woman as its strongest and most memorable character,¹²⁴ and, as we have seen, later in the 1830s, it was a female Gypsy who was to capture the imagination of the young Princess Victoria.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ See Chapter III for a discussion of Meg Merrilies and *Guy Mannering*.

¹²⁵ See: Introduction to this thesis; Marina Warner, *Queen Victoria's Sketchbook* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1979), pp. 41-5; Richard L. Stein, *Victoria's Year: English Literature and Culture, 1837-1838* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 23-7; Peter Garside, 'Picturesque Figure and Landscape: Meg Merrilies and the gypsies', *The Politics of the Picturesque*, ed. by Stephen Copley and Peter Garside, p. 146.

Although it is difficult to determine, the Gypsy man in the painting appears to be looking to the standing Gypsy woman, rather than at the gentleman intruder or the seated Gypsy woman. The Gypsy man's physical distance from his kinswoman in comparison with the gentleman's relative closeness is interesting, especially when the added element of the stile is introduced. The distance of the Gypsy man from the group of women and the direction of his gaze contrast strongly with that of the gentleman, which serves to underline the importance of the gentleman in the picture; this may not be the elevation that Barrell was looking for, but there is most certainly some sort of importance bestowed upon the gentleman (wearing a hat) above that of the Gypsy man (who is bareheaded). The composition could easily be seen to suggest that it is the gentleman who holds the power (financial, social and sexual), and the Gypsy man, by comparison, is relegated to the shadowy outskirts of the painting. It is also possible that the Gypsy man's shadowy existence hints at criminal misconduct. The Gypsy man's position in the dark recesses of the painting might stand as a visual metaphor for the dark deeds and thefts that were so often attributed to the Gypsies; alternatively it could show him as a lurking threat to the propertied classes, which are represented in the painting by the figure of the gentleman and his dogs.

Martin Wallen, in his article on the significance and symbolism of dogs in late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth century paintings, argues that dogs featured in paintings of this period:

[C]ould reflect either side of the widening class division. On the one hand, a painting depicting a dog accompanying a laborer, peasant, or gypsy could signify the person's illegal incursions into the forests or parks reserved for the landowner. On the other hand, depictions of dogs [...] accompanying a gentleman provided a potent badge of the rights of ownership[.]¹²⁶

Wallen uses Morland's painting *A Gypsy Encampment* as an example of how the use of dogs in a painting can convey a sense of authority. Where Wallen's thesis fails to convince, however, is with his idea that *A Gypsy Encampment* is Morland's 'most dramatic [painting], in terms of its

¹²⁶ 'Lord Egremont's Dogs: The Cynosure of Turner's Petworth Landscapes', *ELH*, 73 (2006), p. 857.

portrayal of rural class relations'.¹²⁷ The whole power of Morland's painting lies in its ambiguity and the fact that it provokes many different conclusions. This is not to say that there is no evidence for Wallen's argument; the critic opposes Barrell's idea that there is no composition evident in *A Gypsy Encampment* and, instead, shows that the scene is structured delicately between the two men in the painting – the Gypsy and the gentleman – with the authority of the latter being exerted strongly by the presence of his three dogs, a reminder that he can hunt and is therefore a man of property, unlike the Gypsies.¹²⁸ Wallen fails to persuade in the preciseness of his criticism and the imposition of too absolute a meaning, which is quite the opposite of Barrell's inability to decipher anything conclusive in the scene. There is no doubt that the gentleman in the picture is a figure of authority, but Wallen is determined to show that the Gypsies in the picture are deliberately concealing something in the pot at the front of the picture, possibly an animal that had been poached by the Gypsy man (reminiscent of the 'cock purloin'd | From his accustom'd perch' in *The Task*), hence his shady presence hiding at the side of the picture. For Wallen, the Gypsy woman in the centre serves as a distraction for the gentleman whilst the other two Gypsy women cover up the ill-gotten gains. Again, there is evidence for all of these points, but Wallen does not take in the wider composition of the painting and thus perpetuates the negative stereotype of the Gypsy figure.

This is potentially Morland's intention in *A Gypsy Encampment*: to present a seemingly peaceful scene and then undermine the tranquillity with carefully observed but nevertheless enigmatic details. Wallen's argument pivots on the use of the three dogs in the painting that highlight the gentleman's masculinity and, presumably, his capacity as provider, hunter and landowner. The difficulty comes when Wallen states:

Barrell would not have had such trouble [understanding the painting] if he had begun his reading by noting that the farmer has a gun, indicating that he is hunting, and that his dogs are spaniels, one of the three primary hunting breeds.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ 'Lord Egremont's Dogs', p. 863.

¹²⁸ 'Lord Egremont's Dogs', p. 865.

¹²⁹ 'Lord Egremont's Dogs', p. 864.

It is difficult to see, but Wallen is misguided in his criticism; the gentleman does not carry a gun.

That the gentleman does *not* appear holding a gun throws Wallen's argument off-balance entirely; whilst the gentleman still retains his position of authority in the painting, the absence of a gun removes any physical threat. The dynamics of the relationship between the two men in the picture is also altered by our awareness that there is no weapon present. The Gypsy man, as mentioned above, is without doubt nearly concealed in the back left-hand corner of the painting, but this does not have to mean that he is trying to hide from the law: whilst Wallen may assume that the Gypsy man is a poacher, it may well be that the emphasis is on the gentleman as a poacher not of animals, but of the Gypsy women. Again, the artist's intention is ambiguous; the male Gypsy's retreat into the background may not necessarily indicate guilt, rather wariness in recognition of a stronger opponent. Although the focus is on the Gypsy woman in the centre, it is unclear whether it is she who is bewitching the gentleman with her beauty (as Wallen suggests) in order that he will not realize the Gypsies are harbouring poached goods, or whether it is the gentleman who is stalking the Gypsy woman with his predatory gaze. The description of the figures in hunting terms is by no means a mistake, for Wallen is undoubtedly correct in identifying the unsettling undertones of the hunter and the hunted; the question, which Morland refuses to answer, is which one is which?

The setting of the painting emphasizes the sense of uncertainty. It is not unusual to find Gypsies in paintings from this period, and, of course, they are almost always found in the countryside. But in this painting it is of interest that the Gypsies are situated in a relatively open part of the wood, whilst it is the gentleman who approaches from a dark and shaded background. The way that Morland presents the gentleman in *A Gypsy Encampment* makes it appear that it is *he* who emerges from the dark undergrowth, whilst the Gypsies live more openly in the daylight. We could, therefore, view this compositional arrangement as a

demonstration of Morland's admiration for the Gypsies' way of life and their freedom. The encroachment of the gentry on the places inhabited by Gypsies, the acts of enclosure and the Game Laws all make this interpretation plausible, as the gentleman leans over the stile from his 'world' and infringes that of the Gypsies in a predatory manner.

A more radical interpretation of the positioning of the figures is to view it in terms of want and desire that do not involve sexual longing: this time a sense of envy stems from a wish to live with the Gypsies. The gentleman is placed behind a fence or stile and is emerging from the darkness at the back of the painting. The stile forms a barrier, both physically and metaphorically, and it is this that stops the gentleman from being able to join the Gypsies. The difference in shading, with the gentleman's back to the dark and with the light concentrated on the Gypsy group, could also hint at the gentleman's desire to join the Gypsies that is hindered by the physical barrier. Whichever interpretation is more plausible, the Gypsies are still seen to be living on the edge of society.

If we compare Morland's painting to Cowper's poem and other paintings of Gypsy encampments, the reason for Morland's choice becomes clearer. In *Gypsy Encampment, Sunset* (c.1778-80) [Figure IV], Gainsborough shows the Gypsies sheltering in the forest on the left-hand side of the picture, whilst the sun's setting light is shining on some distant settlement nestled in a valley on the right hand side of the picture. Even in Gainsborough's earliest depiction of Gypsies, *Landscape with Gipsies* (c.1753-4) [Figure V], whilst the Gypsies are exposed on the top of a hillside under the shelter of only one tree, the picture intimates that they are separate and isolated from the community just visible in the distance behind them. In J. M. W. Turner's painting *A Beech Wood with Gypsies Seated in the Distance* (c.1799-1801) [Figure VI], the Gypsies are, as the title explains, just tiny figures in a small clearing in a majestic beech wood. In another painting by Turner, *A Beech Wood with Gypsies Round a Campfire* (also c. 1799-1801) [Figure VII], the Gypsies are gathered around a small fire in the bottom left of the

picture, and are sheltered not only by the dell in which they are sitting, but also by the soaring beech trees of the forest surrounding forest. Cowper's description of the Gypsies' location is not as precise, for obvious reasons, but they are still found on the outskirts of a wood from which they quite clearly gain some sort of protection.

All of these paintings mentioned above point to the 'otherness' of the Gypsies and show how, whilst still being human, they are separated from the rest of society and are hidden away in remote places. Gainsborough's Gypsies illustrate their borderland status best, ensuring that a view of some settlement or village is always in the far distance. Turner's two paintings show the secrecy of the Gypsy figures, hiding them deep in the centre of a forest. Cowper's Gypsy episode covers both of these aspects, depicting the Gypsies as figures on the outskirts of civilization as well as free spirits within the forest. Morland shares many similarities with these artists and Cowper, yet at the same time his painting is wholly different. Morland's *A Gypsy Encampment* can be distinguished from these other paintings because of the artist's concentration on the finer details of his scene. While Gainsborough and, to a lesser extent, Turner portray the Gypsies in some detail, the figures are still dwarfed by their surroundings: both artists are keen to set their subjects into the landscape. Morland's Gypsies, in contrast, are positioned right at the front of the picture and so strike the viewer's eye immediately – he does not treat them as scenery.

Morland's choice to show the Gypsies in such detail and, arguably, to show how the Gypsies are about to be found out for stealing food is revelatory of the painter's attitude to his subjects. Wallen strives to show how the picture depicts a scene of tension that is about to unfold into the discovery of theft:

The "relation" among the figures, which baffles Barrell, functions dramatically as a subtle and impromptu series of ruses to distract the hunter from what the seated woman is concealing and what the dog is about to discover.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ 'Lord Egremont's Dogs', p. 865.

Whilst this is a plausible reading into the painting's composition, Morland's willingness to reveal the Gypsies' actions to the viewer, rather than concealing them in a hollow in the corner of the painting, as other artists have done, shows his sympathy for his subjects. Whilst the Gypsies may or may not be guilty of poaching – apart from the stereotype of the Gypsies as thieves there is no definite evidence in the picture for their criminality – the pose of the gentleman, encroaching into the Gypsies' space in the painting, is telling. It could be interpreted that the Gypsies and the gentleman have swapped their traditional pictorial representation, because the gentleman, as we have seen, is the one who has just emerged from the dark, mysterious forest, whilst the Gypsies are living in the relative open. Had Morland's sympathies not lain with the Gypsies, it is unlikely that he would have chosen to show the details of their situation so openly. In doing so, Morland powerfully challenges the viewer's stereotypes.

Does this interpretation disallow the ambiguity for which I argue as being a necessary part of Gypsy representations? On the contrary: Morland forces his viewers to alter their perceptions of the relationships in the painting and thus challenges preconceived stereotypes of both Gypsies and gentry. In doing so, Morland makes the viewer uneasy: we learn that there is no simple or precise way to interpret the Gypsies or their way of life and no moral can be drawn from it; a sense of unease creates a constant risk of imbalance in the interpretation of the painting. The painting's ambiguity is thus an important reflection of the indeterminate and unclassifiable quality of Gypsy life, a necessary unreadability that is transposed onto the painting itself to capture their spirit. Morland's painting depicts two types of society – that of the gentleman and that of the Gypsies – existing in a delicate and anxious tension between harmony and suspicion. Thus, the social relations that Barrell finds to be absent within the painting are, in fact, distinctly and realistically characterized by perpetual watchfulness and wariness – from both sides.

Cowper's Gypsy episode from *The Task* introduces the reader into the contradictions and ambiguity that surround representations of the Gypsy figure. This early example of writing from the Romantic period shows how the Gypsies come to be a topic of debate throughout the following century. Paintings from the period demonstrate how stereotypes of the Gypsy can be used to challenge and also to conform to key parts of society and the community in which the artist was living and working. Given Cowper's use of picturesque rhetoric, art and literature were clearly closely connected and this is no more so evident than in the very suggestive figure of the Gypsy. With the ambiguities, stereotypes, conflicts and ideas that this chapter has set up in mind, Chapter II approaches the Gypsy through its 'negative' portrayals in literature. By examining a wide variety of works, I aim to see how the Gypsy figure's ambiguity, as discussed at length in this chapter, permits writers and poets to imbue the figure with the negativity evident in parts of Cowper's portrayal, but also allows this negativity to become undermined and problematic.

CHAPTER II

'The stars have tasks – but these have none':

Anthropological, Legal and Religious Views of the Gypsy in Poetry and Prose, 1789–1816

In Chapter I, my discussion of the Gypsy episode in *The Task* and my examination of Morland's painting *A Gypsy Encampment* demonstrated how complex even apparently simple representations of Gypsies can be. Part of this complexity stems from the ambiguity with which the Gypsies are represented: the artist or writer presents us with several details, many of which can be interpreted in different ways. This chapter looks at how writers and poets view the Gypsy as a negative figure in the landscape, but, crucially, I also show how these negative representations are destabilized by this pervasive uncertainty.

What have been seen as negative depictions of Gypsies more often serve to destabilize the assumptions of the viewer and the authority discourses of scientific observation, the law, religion and literary language. In *The Task* we have seen how Cowper vacillates between sympathy and disgust for his Gypsy subjects; in Chapter II, an examination of works by Gilbert White, Hannah More, William Wordsworth, George Crabbe and Jane Austen will show how this negativity and wavering uncertainty is manifest in Gypsy representations from the late-eighteenth through to the mid-nineteenth century and beyond.

Gilbert White

In 1789 Gilbert White published *The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne: with engravings, and an appendix*, based mainly on a series of correspondence between White, Thomas Pennant and Daines Barrington. In a letter dated 2nd October 1775 (Letter XXV to Daines Barrington), White mentions the Gypsies that 'infest the south and west of *England*'.¹³¹ White

¹³¹ Gilbert White, *The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne, in the county of Southampton: with engravings, and an appendix* (London, 1789), p. 195. This letter will be referred to as 'Letter XXV' throughout this thesis. There are

only mentions the Gypsies in this particular letter, but it contains detailed observations and an anecdote that encapsulate a particular attitude towards the group, demonstrating the late-eighteenth century interest in the figure's origins and their scientific and anthropological value.

The letter reads as follows:

Dear Sir,

We have two gangs or hordes of gypsies which infest the south and west of *England*, and come round in their circuit two or three times in a year. One of these tribes calls itself by the noble name of *Stanley*, of which I have nothing in particular to say; but the other is distinguished by an appellative somewhat remarkable. – As far as their harsh gibberish can be understood, they seem to say that the name of their clan is the *Curleople*; now the termination of this word is apparently *Grecian*: and as *Mezeray* and the gravest historians all agree that these vagrants did certainly migrate from *Egypt* and the East two or three centuries ago, and so spread by degrees over *Europe*, may not this family-name, a little corrupted, be the very name they brought with them from the *Levant*? It would be a matter of some curiosity, could one meet with an intelligent person among them, to inquire whether, in their jargon, they still retain any *Greek* words: the *Greek* radicals will appear in hand, foot, head, water, earth, etc. It is possible that amidst their cant and corrupted dialect many mutilated remains of their native language might be discovered.

With regard to those peculiar people, the gypsies, one thing is very remarkable, and especially as they came from warmer climates; and that is, that while other beggars lodge in barns, stables, and cow-houses, these sturdy savages seem to pride themselves in braving the severities of winter, and in living *sub dio* the whole year round. Last *September* was as wet a month as ever was known; and yet during those deluges did a young gypsy-girl lie-in in the midst of one of our hop-gardens, on the cold ground, with nothing over her but a piece of blanket extended on a few hazel-rods bent hoop-fashion, and stuck into the earth at each end, in circumstances too trying for a cow in the same condition: yet within this garden there was a large hop-kiln, into the chambers of which she might have retired, had she thought shelter an object worthy of her attention.

Europe itself, it seems, cannot set bounds to the roving of those vagabonds; for Mr *Bell*, in his return from *Peking*, met a gang of these people on the confines of *Tartary*, who were endeavouring to penetrate those deserts and try their fortune in *China*.

Gypsies are called in *French*, *Bohemians*; in *Italian* and modern *Greek*, *Zingari*.

I am, etc. (195-6, italics in original)

White displays a marked disapproval for the Gypsies from the very beginning of this letter. He summarizes many of the fears that people had about Gypsies in this period: the

two letters entitled 'Letter XXV' in *The Natural History of Selborne*: one in the section entitled 'Letters to Thomas Pennington' and the other in the section entitled 'Letters to Daines Barrington'; I refer to the letter in the latter section. References to this edition will be denoted parenthetically in the text, unless otherwise stated.

Gypsies are 'gangs or hordes', two appellations with clear negative connotations. The use of the word 'gang' is suggestive of a group of thieves; the *OED* records that one use of the word 'gang' was employed 'chiefly in a bad or depreciatory sense, or associated with criminal societies' from 1632 onwards. The word 'hordes' suggests a nomadic tribe, such as Genghis Kahn's, who travelled around leaving devastation and destruction in their wake. White's use of the word 'infest' suggests that the Gypsies are like a plague and overrun the countryside.¹³² His identification of the Gypsies' travelling habits appears to have its roots based in fact. David Mayall

explains:

Circuits were followed and certain districts were regularly visited, with the exact route and length of stay in any area dependent on the nature of the relationship between the Gypsies and the local community[.]¹³³

As White mentions at the end of his letter that the Gypsy girl gave birth in a hop-garden, and as the Gypsies were often employed seasonally to harvest crops of grain, fruit and hops, it can be assumed that the Gypsies' reason for visiting Hampshire must have had some connection with the agricultural nature of the area, and the high density of hop-gardens there.¹³⁴

White is obviously fascinated by the Gypsies as people and also by their origins.

Grellmann's dissertation, mentioned in Chapter I, was not published until 1783, eight years

¹³² White's description of the Gypsies as an infestation is strikingly similar to that of Robert Browning's in 'The Flight of the Duchess' (see Chapter IV). For an historical precedent, see: Thomas Dekker, *Lantern and Candlelight, or, The Bellman's Second Night's Walk*: 'One shire alone and no more is sure still at one time to have these Egyptian lice swarming within it, for, like flocks of wild-geese, they will evermore fly one after another', in *Key Writings on Subcultures, 1537-1727: Classics from the Underworld*, ed. by A. V. Judge, 5 vols (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), I, p. 345. For contemporary examples, see also: 'Some Account of the People Called Gypsies', *Monthly Ledger*, 2 (November 1774), p. 576, 'These swarthy itinerants have spread themselves all over Europe'; 'Curious Account of the People called Gypsies', *Weekly Miscellany; or, Instructive Entertainer* (July 1781), p. 327, 'It appears, upon enquiry, that the vagrants called Gypsies, those pretended fortune-tellers that infest most countries [...] were originally of Egyptian extraction.'

¹³³ David Mayall, *Gypsy-travellers in nineteenth-century society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 16-17.

¹³⁴ 'Traditionally, Gypsy Travellers worked in the rural areas of Hampshire. Many came to work in the hop fields and to pick strawberries for the London market.

<<http://www3.hants.gov.uk/education/ema/travellers/gypsy/gypsy-facts.htm>> [Last accessed 12 April 2011]. See also: Carl J. Griffin, 'Cut down by some cowardly miscreants': Plant Maiming, or the Malicious Cutting of Flora, as an Act of Protest in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Rural England', *Rural History*, 19:1 (2008), p. 39.

after Letter XXV was written, and it appears that in the 1770s (at least for White) the predominant theory of the Gypsies' origins was that they were from Egypt.¹³⁵ White's mention of 'Mezeray and the gravest historians' (195) shows that he had at least a cursory knowledge of Gypsy history, as well as awareness of the historical and newly forming debate about their origins. Whilst White's description of the 'Curleople' is far from flattering (he notes their 'harsh gibberish' (195)), the intellectual interest taken in their language is notable:

It would be a matter of some curiosity, could one but meet with an intelligent person among them, to inquire whether, in their jargon, they still retain any *Greek* words: the *Greek* radicals will appear in hand, foot, head, water, earth &c. It is possible that amidst their cant and corrupted dialect many mutilated remains of their native language might still be discovered. (195)

White finds himself unable to discuss the Gypsies in a positive way, but he also shows excitement at discovering the etymology of Gypsy words. He tempers his interest with negative comments: he wishes to find out more about the Gypsies' language (although he cannot bring himself to use this word, instead substituting it with the derogatory term 'jargon'), but he anticipates the difficulty of this wish by assuming that 'intelligent' Gypsies are rare.¹³⁶ He identifies possible ways to trace the etymology of the words and then undercuts this with a series of negative words: 'amidst their *cant* and *corrupted* dialect many *mutilated* remains [...] might be discovered' (italics mine). Thus, the apparently neutral scholarly task of tracing linguistic origins is turned into a cultural judgment: most Gypsies are quite without intelligence and so the exercise will be futile; potentially, the words may be so mutilated and corrupted that any Greek origins will be extremely difficult to find. Despite this negativity, however, there is

¹³⁵ The earliest legislation that exists for Gypsies in England is the 'Egyptian Acts' of the early- to mid-sixteenth century, mentioned briefly in the previous chapter. For more information see David Mayall, *Gypsy Identities, 1500-2000: From Egipcians and Moon-men to the Ethnic Romany* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 61.

¹³⁶ For contemporary accounts see: 'Some Account of the People called Gypsies', *Monthly Ledger*, 2 (November 1774), p. 576: 'These swarthy itinerants have spread themselves all over Europe [...] and [...] pretend to keep themselves as a distinct people, not intermixing [...] and talking a harsh gibberish or jargon peculiar to themselves [...] falsely dignified with the appellation of a language.' In Samuel Rid's, *Martin Markall, Beadle of Bridewell: His Defence and Answers to the Bellman of LONDON* (1610), the origin of the Gypsies' cant is given a distinctly criminal flavour: '[After] a certain time [the 2 chiefs of the vagabonds] met [to] entreat of matters that might tend to the establishing of [...] their new-found government. [They] devised a certain kind of language, to the end of their cozening, knaveries and villainies might not so easily be perceived and known in the places where they come', in *Key Writings on Subcultures, 1537-1727*, I, p. 421.

still an assumption of pure origins beneath all the layers of roughness and corruption. I say *apparently* neutral scholarly task, because, as Edward Said has argued: 'Language and race seemed inextricably tied'.¹³⁷ White makes an implicit distinction between what Said has termed the "good" Orient, which gave the West the classical languages, and the "bad" Orient, which, for White, the Gypsies seem to represent.¹³⁸

Before White embarks on his description of the 'Curleople' he also mentions, very briefly, a tribe of Gypsies who go by the 'noble name of *Stanley*' (italics in original). White's use of the word 'noble' here must surely be ironic, although the Gypsies were often referred to as 'King' and 'Queen', both in this period and later.¹³⁹ Mayall notes:

It is sometimes claimed that, initially at least, the Gypsies received a positive welcome when they first appeared, partly resulting from the belief that they were on a religious pilgrimage and also because of the presence of high-sounding dukes, counts and lords among their group.¹⁴⁰

The surname Stanley was one of the most well-known Gypsy surnames in the period and, according to George Borrow: '[Stanley] is the name or title of an ancient English family

¹³⁷ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1978; repr. London: Penguin, 2003), p. 99.

¹³⁸ *Orientalism*, p. 99.

¹³⁹ A gravestone in the graveyard of the chapel at Dulwich College reads: 'Old Bridget, Queen of the Gypsies, 1768'; 'After travelling the kingdom for many years as Queen of the Gypsie [*sic*] Tribe, she fixed her place at Norwood [and died] in the year 1740'; 'Account of Margaret Finch, Queen of the Gypsies at Norwood', *Wonderful and Marvellous Chronicle*, 1:1 (January 1793), p. 120. See Chapter I for a discussion of 'noble' Gypsy titles. Robert Browning describes the old Gypsy crone as a 'Queen' in line 899 at the end of 'The Flight of the Duchess', *The Complete Works of Robert Browning with Variant Readings and Annotations*, ed. by Roma A. King et al., 17 vols (Athens, OH: Athens University Press, 1969-1998), IV (1973), pp. 207-36.

¹⁴⁰ *Gypsy Identities, 1500-2000*, pp. 56-7. Articles in the periodical press demonstrate how widespread the Gypsies' use of 'noble' titles was: '[The Gypsies] travel[ed] in numerous hordes, under leaders who assumed the titles of Kings, Dukes, Counts, or Lords of Lesser Egypt' from 'Notices concerning the Scottish Gypsies', *Weekly Entertainer or, Agreeable and Instructive Repository* (May 1817), p. 401; 'In the Church-yard of Calne, Wilts, is a Tomb (generally designated by the title of *The Gypsy's Tomb*), erected to the memory of "Inverto Boswell," who is said to have been a Prince, or (at least) the Son of "the King of the Gypsies"', 'Gypsy's Tomb at Calne', *Gentleman's Magazine* (August 1818), p. 112; 'Her Most Gracious Majesty, Charlotte Lee, Queen of the Gypsies, honoured the little village of Hellingley with a visit last week' from 'The Gypsy Queen', *John Bull* (November 1837), p. 543; 'She was, we were told, called the "Queen", and her neatly arranged dress seemed to betoken some superiority' from 'Gipsy Encampment', *Cleave's Penny Gazette of Variety and Amusement* (8 July 1843), p. 1; 'The Gipsy King', *The Penny Satirist* (21 September 1844), p. 2; 'The venerable patriarch of the gipsy tribe, Will Faa, died at Kirk Yetholm last week [...] Will held his kingly honours unchallenged for may years' from 'On the Death of the Gypsy King', *The Satirist; or, the True Censor of the Times* (17 October 1847), p. 71; 'Yetholm – Monday being the day appointed for traversing the boundary of the common, and for the coronation of Charles Blythe, successor to the late Willie Faa, King of the Gypsies' from 'Coronation of the Gipsy King', *The Aberdeen Journal* (November 1847), p. 6.

celebrated in history [...] It was adopted by an English Gypsy tribe, at one time very numerous, but at present very much diminished'.¹⁴¹

Despite his interest in the 'Curleople' tribe, White is more interested in the general habits of the Gypsies, a topic that forms the basis of the second part of his letter. This second part is characterized by White's identification of the 'otherness' of the Gypsies: he describes them as 'peculiar people' and 'remarkable', as well as asserting that the Gypsies come from 'warmer climates' (195). Katie Trumpener comments on White's preoccupation with placing the Gypsies in the correct context, 'between the categories of history and of nature'.¹⁴² The need to rationalize, classify, understand and, ultimately, control the Gypsies was not uncommon in late-eighteenth century literature, as we have already seen in Cowper's *The Task*. Just as Cowper states 'Strange! that a creature rational [...] should brutalize by choice | His nature' (l. 574-6), White finds it incomprehensible that:

[W]hile other beggars lodge in barns, stables, and cow-houses, these sturdy savages seem to pride themselves in braving the severities of winter, and in living *sub dio* the whole year round. (195-6, italics in original)

White's astonishment at a young Gypsy girl's behaviour compounds his belief that the Gypsies are more like animals than humans, or perhaps even beneath animals:

Last *September* was as wet a month as ever [...] and yet during one of those deluges did a young gipsy-girl lie-in in the midst of one of our hop-gardens, on the cold ground, with nothing over her but a piece of blanket [...] in circumstances too trying for a cow. (196, italics in original)¹⁴³

White cannot understand why the Gypsy girl would choose to give birth outdoors rather than in the 'large hop-kiln, into the chambers of which she might have retired'; his conclusion

¹⁴¹ George Borrow, *Romano Lavo-Lil – Word-Book of the Romany or, English Gypsy Language* (London: John Murray, 1907), p. 191. In his 1815 survey, John Hoyland also notes that one of the most common Gypsy surnames is Stanley. See: John Hoyland, *Historical Survey of the Customs, Habits, & Present State of The Gypsies. Designed to Develop the Origin of this Singular People, And To Promote The Amelioration of their Condition* (London: Darton, Harvey, & Co., 1816; repr. Oxford: The Romany & Traveller Family History Society, 2004), p. 66.

¹⁴² Katie Trumpener, 'The Time of the Gypsies: A "People without History" in the Narratives of the West', *Critical Inquiry*, 18: 4, Identities (Summer, 1992), p. 865.

¹⁴³ September was the main month for 'hopping' (hop picking) in Kent, Sussex, Surrey and Hampshire, and so it is perhaps unsurprising that the girl chose a hop-garden for her 'confinement'. See: *Gypsy-travellers in nineteenth-century society*, pp. 63-4.

implies that the Gypsies hold the settled humans in contempt: 'had she thought shelter an object worthy of her attention'. Roger Sandall draws this particular incident to his readers' attention:

White was not to know that the girl may well have agreed with him that the hop-kiln would be a good place to go and have her baby, and may even have wanted to go there; but that strongly held Gypsy beliefs about pollution (and especially about the polluting female organs of reproduction) forced her to go outside [...] Nothing is keeping her out of the hop-kiln except the fears and taboos of her fellow-Gypsies [...] White finds the whole thing astonishing, but knows it would be foolish to intervene.¹⁴⁴

Yet the impetus behind White's description of this episode is uncertain: does he have sympathy for the girl, who was obviously more preoccupied with having her baby than finding shelter, or does he hold a degree of grudging respect for the stoicism of the girl, who was prepared to fight the elements alone whilst giving birth?¹⁴⁵ Though White compares the girl's unfortunate situation with that of a cow (comparison with another human is clearly out of the question), it is unclear whether this is done with sympathy or scorn.

What is notable is that White appears unconcerned that the Gypsy girl is, in fact, encroaching on private land: 'one of *our* hop-gardens' (italics mine). In fact, it almost seems that White wishes for the Gypsy to shelter in the 'large hop-kiln' so as to relieve her discomfort; in White's use of the conditional 'might have retired' there is an implication that, should the girl have wished to give birth indoors, White would not have considered it a trespass. This apparent acceptance of the Gypsy girl on 'our' land shows that, to a certain extent, the settled and vagrant population lived relatively comfortably side-by-side in rural

¹⁴⁴ 'Gypsies', <<http://www.rogersandall.com/gypsies>> Sandall's article, which comments on a BBC news item entitled: 'Gypsies: Europe's most hated people', highlights interesting points about White's attitude to the Gypsy girl, although none of these sheds any further illumination on the letter. Whether or not White knew of the Gypsies childbirth-related customs is irrelevant, as is the fact that he chose not to intervene in the birth. This lack of intervention is precisely in keeping with White's agenda – he is an observer of nature and not anything more; it is highly unlikely that a man of White's position would consider intervening in the birth of a child, let alone a Gypsy's child.

¹⁴⁵ As Sandall alludes to in his article (quoted above), the Gypsy girl could be alone because she was adhering to the Romani code of *mokadi*. The first category of *mokadi* governed all of the taboos surrounding female sexuality and its association with uncleanness: 'Childbirth was singled out for exceptional treatment with the woman being physically ostracized from the family and the main body of the camp.' See: *Gypsy-travellers in nineteenth-century society*, p. 77.

communities, each acknowledging the temporary need to be within the other's vicinity. Whilst Gypsies are often seen as existing outside the rural economy, it is clear that in practical terms the enormous demand for labourers to bring in the harvest would never have been met had it not been for the resources provided by an itinerant work force. White's lack of concern for the Gypsy girl's trespassing demonstrates this co-dependency that existed between rural communities and the Gypsies.

White's Letter XXV is slightly anomalous in the context of the other works that this thesis studies and the aims of the author can also be assumed to be different from the poet, the novelist or the journalist. White was an eminent naturalist, but he was also well-read in both modern and classical literature. Paul Foster notes:

In choosing to present his observations in the form of letters, White was following the accepted practice of his time. For decades the exchange of letters between scientists had formed the primary vehicle for reporting new observations and for communicating results, just as in literature the epistolary novel was a dominant form in the years of White's maturity [...] To mediate an understanding of the world by means of letters, whether fabricated or real, invited the reader to participate in the writer's own journey of exploration, to share the very motions of his mind [...] its astonishment in discovery, and, most important of all, the satisfactions obtained from investigative activity itself.¹⁴⁶

The overriding tone of Letter XXV is that of scientific observation and research: White's description of the Gypsy girl appears to owe little to any literary precedents; instead, it really would seem to be that, in the words of Cowper: 'My descriptions are all from Nature. Not one of them second-handed'.¹⁴⁷ As discussed in Chapter I, Cowper's Gypsy encounter seems too stylized and self-aware to be drawn straight from 'Nature'. White's description of the Gypsies, however, is more matter-of-fact; he is certainly not, in this letter, a picturesque observer of the landscape – rain, blankets and hops are hardly key features of the picturesque.

¹⁴⁶ Paul Foster, 'White, Gilbert (1720-1793)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, September 2004; online edition May 2009) < <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29243>, accessed 12 April 2011 > [Last accessed 12 April 2011].

¹⁴⁷ 'Letter to William Unwin, Sunday, 10th October 1784', *The Letters and Prose Writings of William Cowper*, 4 vols, ed. by James King and Charles Ryskamp (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979-84), II (1981), p. 285.

White does, nevertheless, have one key similarity with picturesque artists: his general lack of interest in the human figures of the landscape. It seems that they are described only briefly for no other purpose than to acknowledge their existence, but not to draw anything else from this. So, although White will describe in detail the uptake of water by different types of trees, and the water cycle (205-7), or 'Hedge-hogs' (76-8), his descriptions of the human inhabitants of the countryside are less precise. Mabey notes:

[T]o tell the truth, there is a kind of animal quality about the few humans that do cross [White's] pages. They are curiosities, like the bat and the moose: a leper, a mad bee-boy, gypsies, a toad-witch. They are described objectively, but with little of the sympathy or respect that White shows for his favourite wild creatures. They are not met on their own terms.¹⁴⁸

Despite the inclusion of the Gypsy girl anecdote, White's readers are still left with the sense of unknowability that surrounds the Gypsies and this can be attributed to Mabey's argument that the Gypsies are never 'met on their own terms'. In this period at least, it must be remembered that the Gypsies are hardly ever 'met on their own terms'. As we will see later in this thesis, writers preferred to use the figures as demonstrations of good or bad, but rarely for the Gypsies' own sake: for example, in Wordsworth's poem 'Gipsies', the Gypsies' presence cause him to question the validity of his occupation as a poet, but he is unconcerned with the Gypsies themselves. White's interest in these human anomalies – the bee-boy that seems 'a very *merops apiaster*, or *bee-bird*' (201, italics in original); the ladies who 'took a fancy to a toad' (48); and, of course, the Gypsies – can be attributed to the fact that these people are those most like animals, or the closest to nature.

Even White, an educated naturalist, in correspondence with some of the most well-known scientific minds of the day, is unable to classify the Gypsies. The need to position Gypsies both within history and in everyday life, as Trumpener has argued, is clearly part of the reason behind White's 'dislike' of the Gypsies: unlike plants or animals, no amount of observation seems to yield any further information and they resolutely resist categorization.

¹⁴⁸ Gilbert White, *The Natural History of Selborne*, ed. by Richard Mabey (London: Penguin Classics, 1987), p. xx.

From White's description, Gypsies are seen to be very different from most other humans (excluding those anomalies listed above) and the fact that they are both isolated from settled communities (like the one in which White lived at Selborne) yet play an important part in the seasonal rural economy, makes them hard to classify: are they the same genus as humans, just a different species, or are they something altogether more different? Ultimately, White decides that these scientific speculations are not his concern; he instead ends the letter rather abruptly, remarking that Gypsies are found all over the world and listing the names by which they are labelled in different countries: 'Gypsies are called in French, Bohemians; in Italian and modern Greek, Zingari' (196). In this etymological quest, he follows poetic tropes: representations of Gypsies are so often coloured by references to their past or to their literariness, as if the Gypsies' actual, *human* existence is not quite enough by itself.

White was an ordained minister of the Church but makes no moral or religious judgement on the Gypsies; rather, he regards them as objects of scientific research. Slightly later, in the nineteenth century, beginning with John Hoyland's *Historical Survey of the Customs, Habits, & Present State of the Gypsies* (1816), and continuing with James Crabb and John West, certain religious (mainly Quaker) sections of British society undertook the great task of reforming and Christianizing the Gypsies. These men and women saw their task as one set by God to recall the lost members of the flock (i.e. the Gypsies) to the fold through various charities, missions and schools. White's religious views, however, have somewhat perplexed his biographers:

It is difficult to say just what sort of a Churchman White was. An onlooker would probably have said that he was a clergyman by reason only of the compulsion of the Statutes of Oriel [...] he had a hankering after what has been called 'the holy alliance of science and religion'.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ Walter S. Scott, *White of Selborne* (London: The Falcon Press, 1950), p. 72. Scott explains: 'It is clear that were [White] alive to-day [*sic*] he would find it difficult to fit himself into any religious coterie. Neither the Anglo-Catholic nor the Evangelical would attract him; the one he would find fantastic and unreasonable, the other overcharged with emotion or hysteria. With the Church and the theology of the day he was not inclined to quarrel', p. 73.

For White, there is no real religious moral to be drawn from his observation of the Gypsies. In his letter he makes no judgement on the tribe, or on the girl who gives birth in the hop-field and there is a total absence of religious moralizing. Instead, White blends observation, speculation, scientific rationale and history, presenting the facts (as he sees them) with the minimum of personal opinion.

Moral lessons are certainly not lacking in Hannah More's treatment of Gypsies in *Tawney Rachel*, a tract written with the aim of instructing and cautioning readers against believing in, or talking to, 'CHEATS, IMPOSTERS, CUNNING WOMEN, FORTUNE-TELLERS, CONJURERS, AND INTERPRETERS OF DREAMS'.¹⁵⁰

Hannah More

First published in April 1797 by the Cheap Repository of Moral and Religious Tracts, *Tawney Rachel; or, The Fortune Teller: with some Account of Dreams, Omens, & Conjurors*, tells of the exploits and cunning deeds of the Gypsy, Rachel.¹⁵¹ Rachel:

[T]ravelled the country with a basket on her arm [and] pretended to get her bread by selling laces, cabbage nets, ballads, and history books [...] But Rachel only made this traffic a pretence for getting admittance into farmers' kitchens, in order to tell fortunes. (87)

Eventually she is sent to Botany Bay for her wrongdoing. Rachel is also punished by the death of her husband, Black Giles, who is crushed by a wall whilst trying to steal a net in the tale *Black Giles the Poacher, Part II* (first published in December 1796). More's tale of Tawney Rachel could not be more different from White's description of the Gypsies; the former sees the Gypsies (or those who act like Gypsies) as heathens who defy the will and the laws of God,

¹⁵⁰ Hannah More, *Tawney Rachel* in *Tales for the Common People and Other Cheap Repository Tracts*, ed. by Clare MacDonald Shaw (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2002), p. 94. All subsequent references are displayed parenthetically in the text.

¹⁵¹ The tale was first published in April 1797 as *Tawny Rachel*. The text that I use is based on the 1799 edition of the tracts.

whilst the latter is content to describe, ponder and then leave the Gypsies to the adjudication of the reader.

The Cheap Repository of Moral and Religious Tracts ran between 1795 and 1798, although some of the more popular tracts (amongst them *Tawney Rachel*) were 'borrowed' and reprinted after this date.¹⁵² The tracts were written by More and other prominent evangelicals: 'the Cheap Repository was a major literary, financial, and administrative enterprise on the part of the evangelicals and their aristocratic friends'.¹⁵³ The style and content of the pamphlets were designed to ape the more successful, but also more ungodly, chapbooks that were sold by hawkers and devoured by the lower classes of society.¹⁵⁴

An example of a distinctly ungodly chapbook tale about Gypsies is *Love in a Barn; or, Right Country Courtship: Shewing how a LONDON LORD was tricked by a FARMER'S DAUGHTER. To which is added The CAUTION* (1795).¹⁵⁵ In this tale, as the title makes clear, a young farmer's daughter tricks a nobleman with the help of the Gypsies. The young nobleman falls in love (or lust) with the farmer's daughter and plans to seduce her. The girl has no desire for him, but she agrees to meet in the barn after dark. They meet in the barn under the moonlight and drink a large amount of wine (although the farmer's daughter only pretends to do so). Once the young nobleman has passed out, the girl pays the Gypsies £5 to strip naked and lie next to him, tie his hands together and tie a little Gypsy boy to his back; the aim is that the young man will wake and run away in fright. Everything goes according to plan and the man ends up keeping the child because the Gypsies disappear. The man recognizes the superior intelligence of the farmer's daughter, as well as her beauty, and he marries her. The bawdy humour of this story would undoubtedly be horrifying to someone like More.

¹⁵² Owen Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture, 1736-1951* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 160.

¹⁵³ Susan Pedersen, 'Hannah More Meets Simple Simon: Tracts, Chapbooks and Popular Culture in Late Eighteenth-Century England', *The Journal of British Studies*, 25: 1 (January 1986), p. 85.

¹⁵⁴ See: *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture*, pp. 158-9; 'Hannah More Meets Simple Simon', pp. 84-8.

¹⁵⁵ *Love in a Barn; or, Right Country Courtship: Shewing how a LONDON LORD was tricked by a FARMER'S DAUGHTER. To which is added The CAUTION* (London[?]: 1670, repr. 1795).

To counter such depravity, the moral of *Tawney Rachel*, like many of the other Cheap Repository tracts, is made abundantly clear: readers are warned against lying, cheating, deceiving, avoiding work and mischief making. They are told not to question the authority of God, or pretend to know His plans for mere mortals. There is also, as Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace notes more generally, a strong element of 'them' and 'us' in the tracts, and an argument for a middle-class, gendered authority:

Evangelicalism [...] involved women in an important dynamic: by assuming control over the symbolic body of an infantilized, working-class "Other", the Evangelical woman defined herself in relation to what she was not; her supreme bodily self-discipline became the identifying mark of her class privilege.¹⁵⁶

In *Tawney Rachel*, More not only separates herself from the 'other' in the form of the working class, but also the 'other' of the Gypsy.¹⁵⁷ In doing so, More defines herself more firmly: she is neither the sinful Gypsy woman who dupes others and plays on their credulity, nor is she foolish enough to be taken in by the Gypsy's promises and wise words, as are the farmer's wife and Sally Evans. Instead, More is in a position of educated authority: able to point out and correct the faults of her inferiors, whilst maintaining her distance and authorial control.

Like White, More is clearly concerned with the otherness of the Gypsy. Although White's interest in them is as a separate species to examine, More's concern is directly sociological. The categories of undesirables that More lists at the end of the tract ('CHEATS, IMPOSTERS, CUNNING WOMEN' etc.), demonstrate her attempt to define this section of society and to separate them from the 'young men and maidens' (there is clearly an emphasis on the purity of the 'maidens') that form decent society. Whilst Rachel is punished first by imprisonment and then by deportation, More is unsuccessful in removing the scourge of society that her protagonist represents; the idea of Rachel and those like her as being 'vermin' (94), a

¹⁵⁶ Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Their Fathers' Daughters: Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth and Patriarchal Complicity* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 74.

¹⁵⁷ Claire Macdonald Shaw notes: 'Although Rachel might deserve transportation to Botany Bay as punishment for her crimes, More shows persistent anxiety about the Other who will not conform to the established social order', *Tales for the Common People*, p. 169, n. 21.

plague of pests that have overrun the country, shows that the problem is almost too large to contain and control.¹⁵⁸ Even though Rachel is removed to another country, the simple fact that she still exists demonstrates More's inability to remove completely the threat to society that the Gypsy-like figure represents.

More also evades the problems and the burden imposed by the children of Black Giles and Tawney Rachel, who are left behind after the death of one parent and the deportation of the other. Presumably, More felt that with the removal of the bad example set by the parents, the children would be rescued and brought up as good, hard-working Christians; there is no comment on the increased strain that this would put on the already over-loaded Parish Poor Relief. As we learn in *Black Giles, Part Two*, one of the couples' young sons, Dick Giles, is shown to have some latent good qualities despite his unfortunate parentage:

[Dick] had naturally a tender heart, though hardened by his long familiarity with sin [...] though utterly devoid of principle he had some remains of natural feeling and of gratitude. (79)

From what is known about More, not least her work with the Sunday School movement, she would most likely have sided with the faction in society who insisted on the 'improvement' of the Gypsies through schooling and intensive rehabilitation. These improvements appear to have begun with the efforts of Empress Maria Theresa in Hungary in 1761 to settle and educate the Gypsies, an incident that was recorded in *The Times* in November 1787.¹⁵⁹ In his discussion of this event, Hoyland wrote:

¹⁵⁸ *Tales for the Common People*, p. 94, n. 7. The Gypsies were often described as pests, vermin and plagues (fitting with their supposed Egyptian pedigree). See also n. 2 of this chapter.

¹⁵⁹ See: 'Some Account of the Gypsies', *The Times* (30 November 1787), p. 4; and Thomas Acton, *Gypsy Politics and Social Change: The development of ethnic ideology and pressure politics among British Gypsies from Victorian reformism to Romani nationalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 104. There is some confusion as to the date of this incident: *The Times* article and Acton report it as 1761, while James Crabb claims that it was '[about] the year 1748', *The Gipsies' Advocate; or, Observations on the Origin, Character, Manners and Habits of the English Gypsies: To which are added, Many Interesting Anecdotes on the Success that has Attended the Plans of Several Benevolent Individuals, Who Anxiously Desire their Conversion to God*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Lindsay and Co., 1831; repr. Teddington: The Echo Library, 2007), p. 92. Acton is probably correct in setting the date at the beginning of the 1760s.

It is to be regretted that, not until the reign of Empress Theresa, does there appear to have been any plan laid down for the gaining over these poor ignorant people to virtue, and to the state.¹⁶⁰

The article in *The Times* states that the Empress Maria Theresa's plans were 'never put in execution', but Acton claims: '[though] benevolent in intention, the policy was carried out by the army, brutally but ineffectively'.¹⁶¹ It appears that the Empress' plans were, in actuality, carried out and, as James Crabb described, involved:

[The] taking away, by force, all [the Gypsy] children of a certain age, in order to educate and protect them; but such an unnatural and arbitrary mode of benevolence, defeated its own object.¹⁶²

Mayall notes early nineteenth-century efforts to 'civilize' Gypsy children, including Hoyland's suggestion of a charity school for Gypsies between the ages of six and fourteen,¹⁶³ the education of a few Gypsy children in the early 1800s, and the work of James Crabb and the Southampton Committee.¹⁶⁴ This shift towards 'humanizing' and settling' the Gypsies (what Acton terms 'manipulative benevolence')¹⁶⁵ continued throughout the nineteenth century with the 'establishment in the 1830s and 1840s of schools and missions in Kirk Yetholm in Scotland, in Farnham, Surrey and in Southampton'.¹⁶⁶

Tawney Rachel is mainly a tale of female faults. Two women are fooled by Rachel: the first, Mrs Jenkins, the farmer's wife, 'a weak and superstitious woman' (88) who loses her

¹⁶⁰ *Historical Survey of the Customs, Habits, & Present State of The Gypsies*, p. 30. See also: 'Notices Concerning the Scottish Gypsies', *Weekly Entertainer or, Agreeable and Instructive Repository*, 57 (August 1817), pp. 625-6 (part of a longer discussion of the Gypsies in Scotland which runs from June to August 1817); 'Gleanings: Gypsies', *Imperial Magazine* (May 1828), p. 486; 'A Question Answered Respecting Gypsies', *Imperial Magazine* (November 1828), p. 1009; 'Conversion of the Gypsies', *The Times* (12 April 1839), p. 6; 'Gypsies', *The Times* (4 June 1840), p. 6; 'Gypsies', *Freemason's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser* (12 November 1845), p. 4; 'Schools and Missions for the Gypsies', *The Bristol Mercury* (15 July 1854), p. 6; 'The Gypsy Race – Labours for their Improvement', *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine* (August 1854), pp. 697-702. See also: Derek Binns, 'History and Growth of Traveller Education', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 38:3 (August 1990), pp. 251-8.

¹⁶¹ The author of *The Times* article also writes that, whilst the Empress' efforts were unsuccessful, the current Emperor 'has undertaken to humanize [the Gypsies]', p. 4.

¹⁶² *The Gypsies' Advocate*, p. 92.

¹⁶³ See also: *Historical Survey*, p. 97.

¹⁶⁴ See: *Gypsy-travellers in nineteenth-century society*, pp. 97-111.

¹⁶⁵ *Gypsy Politics*, p. 104.

¹⁶⁶ *Gypsy Politics*, p. 104. Acton is mistaken: the Gypsy school was established in Farnham, Dorset in 1847, not Farnham, Surrey. See: 'Obituary: Rev. John West, A. M.', *Gentleman's Magazine* (February 1846), pp. 213-4. The Reverend West was one of the founders of the Gypsy school in Farnham, Dorset. According to the obituary an 'aged reformed gypsy' performed the ceremony for the laying of the school's foundation stone on the 24th July 1846, p. 213.

gold; the second, poor Sally Evans, an 'ignorant, and superstitious' (89) servant girl who is cheated out of her money, her true love and, eventually, her life. In this tale More, is severe with her female characters, although (with the exception of Rachel) the sum of their crimes is really only credulousness, lack of education and superstition. Apart from the cruel Robert Price, 'a rambling, idle young gardener, who, instead of sitting down steadily in one place, used to roam about the country' (90), all of the male characters in the story speak with the voice of reason and sense. Mr Wilson (the clergyman) is responsible for protecting the children of the village by preventing Rachel from selling them some ballads and Farmer Jenkins will not rest in the pursuit of the woman who swindled his foolish wife. It is important to recognize More's approval of the honest farmer, who seeks revenge for moral rather than for financial reasons:

He had taken pains to trace her to her own parish: he did not so much value the loss of the money, but he thought it was a duty he owed the public to clear the country of such vermin. (94)

The male judge who sentences Rachel to deportation is a guardian of the Godly and patriarchal values upon which a decent society is founded.¹⁶⁷ In this final part of the tract, More demonstrates how decent society works: each man concentrates on his own task whilst working towards a common good.

In *Tawney Rachel*, More's political aims are complex: she is bowing to the dominance of a patriarchal society, as well as showing that this is the best type of society but also asserting the importance of (middle-class) women in society by writing a didactic pamphlet for the edification of the lower classes. Rachel's character stands outside these class distinctions and More attempts to use her as a pawn to demonstrate how not to behave; but, as we have seen, the character of Rachel raises more problems than More is able to contain. More is, however, unconcerned with anything other than the religious education of these credulous women in the

¹⁶⁷ Old Bailey records show that transportation, most commonly for seven or fourteen years, was often given as a punishment for theft.

tale (the advice given to avoid falling into the trap of the fortune-teller is to avoid them altogether and become a better Christian), and she is indifferent to the fate of Rachel, other than to see her receive her just punishment. In More's eyes, Rachel deserves what she gets because she refuses to be a member of the 'honest poor' (an example of which is found in the two-part *The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain* (1795) in the *Cheap Repository* series).¹⁶⁸ The author ultimately resigns both Rachel and Giles to their miserable ends without further question.

More would not have had to look far for inspiration for the characters of Rachel, Sally and Mrs Wilson. Evidence for the sort of duping that Rachel undertakes can be found in contemporary reports. For instance, the proceedings of the Old Bailey record that on the 3 July 1751, Mary Norman 'was indicted for stealing eight silver table spoons [...] two silver tea spoons [...] two silver salts, and one silver pepper-box' from Matthew Huntley.¹⁶⁹ The accused managed to gain access to Huntley's house by befriending his servant Sarah Biginton. Mary Norman (who is described as going 'under the character of a Gypsy')¹⁷⁰ then offered to tell the servant's fortune. According to Norman, the servant girl was to receive:

[T]wenty-five large pieces of gold, some large pieces of silver, three gold rings, silver spoons, and other things, which were buried by an old man and an old woman [specifically for Biginton].¹⁷¹

In order to receive this fortune, Biginton was told by Norman to keep a large amount of silver and gold in her right pocket. A couple of days after the original meeting, Norman returned and wrapped up the household silver that Biginton had laid on the kitchen table. Norman then instructed the servant girl to throw salt into the fire. Presumably it was at this point that the Gypsy swapped the cloth parcel containing the silver for one that contained 'a wooden spoon, a flint, a steel, and some powder [presumed to be gunpowder]'.¹⁷² Norman and Biginton then

¹⁶⁸ Hannah More, *The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain, Part One and Part Two* in *Tales for the Common People and other Cheap Repository Tracts*, ed. by Clare MacDonald Shaw, pp. 33-52.

¹⁶⁹ *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (version 6.0), 3 July 1751, trial of Mary Norman (t17510703-16) <www.oldbaileyonline.org> [Last accessed 12 April 2011].

¹⁷⁰ *Old Bailey Proceedings*, 3 July 1751, Mary Norman (t17510703-16).

¹⁷¹ *Old Bailey Proceedings*, 3 July 1751, Mary Norman (t17510703-16).

¹⁷² *Old Bailey Proceedings*, 3 July 1751, Mary Norman (t17510703-16).

placed the parcel in the cellar and the latter was told not to touch it until the Gypsy returned in a few hours; the Gypsy never returned and Biginton opened the parcel to find that the silver had been stolen. A man who had seen her before, 'deceiving the unwary in such like manner', apprehended Mary Norman.¹⁷³ Norman confessed in part to the theft but refused to confess further. She, like Tawney Rachel, was sentenced to seven years' transportation.¹⁷⁴

Although it is unlikely that Hannah More would have been aware of this particular case, Brian Vesey-Fitzgerald's evidence shows that this duping of servants (or others) was a common pastime of the Gypsies:

[Fortune-telling] is used to cover bigger operations than picking pockets or petty pilfering. It is used, or rather was used (for I have not heard of the trick being practised in Britain of recent years), to cover the larger sort of fraud, in particular as a cover for [...] the *hokano baro*, the great trick [...] It is the confidence trick [...] In its standardised form it consists of three parts. Firstly, getting into the house of the dupe, or, if that is not essential, into his or her confidence (this is generally achieved by fortune-telling, but it may be done by means of offering cheap goods for sale or even by plain begging.) Secondly, the removal of property. Thirdly, the binding of the victim by oath not to say anything about it for three or more weeks.¹⁷⁵

Vesey-Fitzgerald then goes on to describe three incidents of *hokano baro*, one of which is an imaginary example from Charles Godfrey Leland¹⁷⁶ (written in 1890), the second of which is a German example from Richard Liebich's *Die Zigeuner* (1863), and the third, an account of the

¹⁷³ *Old Bailey Proceedings*, 3 July 1751, Mary Norman (t17510703-16).

¹⁷⁴ There are many similar tales to this: Owen Davies refers to a case in 1762 where 'a man of Crawley, Oxfordshire, gave a gypsy eleven guineas and eighteen pence in return for a promise that two nights later three white doves would place 200 guineas, a watch, a gold ring, and some silver buckles and shirt buttons under his pillow', pp. 260-1. Davies also records several other incidents of *hokano baro* in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. See: *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture, 1736-1951*, pp. 258-65. An article from *The Times* (3 August 1826), p. 2, reported that a 'credulous woman' was told by a gang of 'real Gipsies' that she was entitled to 100 pounds, and to get this money she had to place a packet containing another hundred pounds in the family bible. The Gypsies returned after a few days to 'examine the packet' and told the woman that they would return again 'for a final development of the mystery'. They never returned, and the woman, when she opened the packet, discovered that her money was gone. Another report from *The Times* (24 April 1848), p. 7, notes how a servant girl (Susan Grant) was duped into giving a Gypsy, Alice Lee, half a crown, a sovereign, two gowns, 'body linen' and stockings, in order that the Gypsy could 'rule the planets' and find Grant's sweetheart. Predictably enough, Alice Lee never returns the items to their owner, but is discovered one day in Kensington carrying a baby wrapped in Grant's shawls and wearing Grant's gown. The magistrate 'expressed surprise' at Grant's credulity (she 'had been educated at the Kensington National School') and committed Alice Lee to the House of Correction for three months' hard labour.

¹⁷⁵ Brian Vesey-Fitzgerald, *Gypsies of Britain: An Introduction to their History* (London: The Country Book Club, 1951), pp. 130-1.

¹⁷⁶ *Gypsies of Britain*, pp. 131-2. Charles Godfrey Leland was the first president of the Gypsy Lore Society from 1888 to 1892.

trick being played in Cardiff, in 1933.¹⁷⁷ It can be deduced, therefore, that this practice was both fairly widespread and fairly well-known.

What is even more interesting about More's Gypsy character is that she may be a counterfeit Gypsy, of the type first identified in the early legal statutes discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. Claire MacDonald Shaw remarks:

Since Rachel lives in 'that Mud Cottage' (see *Black Giles I*), she is not a true Romany; the term 'gipsy' reflects prejudice against her appearance and irregular way of life. Her skin is tanned and tawny; she is a 'sun-burnt oracle'.¹⁷⁸

Whilst this may appear to throw doubt on the usefulness of *Tawney Rachel* as a valid example of the use of Gypsies in literature, it actually demonstrates exactly the kind of problem that critics and anthropologists have in determining the 'true' Gypsy. MacDonald Shaw herself confuses the issue by claiming that Rachel was not a true Romany, exposing her view that to be Romany is to be a proper Gypsy; this is resolutely not the case.¹⁷⁹

The difficulty of determining the 'true' Gypsy is outside the scope of this thesis, my focus being the 'paper Gypsies': textual (re)constructions of the Gypsy figure. I referred to early legal definitions of the word 'Gypsy' in my introduction and it is statute 5 Eliz.c.20, 'An Acte for the Punishment of Vagabondes calling themselves Egiptians', which allows for Rachel to still be a Gypsy, despite her settled status: she is clearly 'counterfeiting transfourming or disguising [herself] by [her] Apparell Speache or other Behaviour [*sic*]';¹⁸⁰ although the earlier statutes were repealed in 1783 (23 Geo. III.c.51), the idea of the counterfeit Gypsy (someone

¹⁷⁷ *Gypsies of Britain*, pp. 133-4.

¹⁷⁸ *Tales for the Common People*, p. 169, n. 21.

¹⁷⁹ In the first chapter of *Gypsy Identities, 1500-2000*, Mayall addresses this very conundrum and shows how the word 'Gypsy' means so many different things to different people: 'The word 'Gypsy' conjures up in the minds of outsiders or non-Gypsies a range of evocative, and perhaps even provocative, images of the people and their way of life. Alongside the familiar bewitching and alluring Gypsy maiden [...] sits the fortune telling hag. For some the nomadic Gypsy lifestyle evokes the romance of the open road [...] For others, Gypsies, itinerancy and itinerants go hand in hand with criminality, parasitism and deceit', p. 1.

¹⁸⁰ *The statutes of the realm: printed by command of His Majesty King George the Third, in pursuance of an address of the House of Commons of Great Britain; from original records and authentic manuscripts*, 4 vols, (London: George Eyre and Andrew Strahan, 1810-1822; repr. Burlington: TannerRitchie Publishing, 2007), IV.1, pp. 449-50.

who is not an ethnic Gypsy, but lives a Gypsy way of life) still remains and adds to the confused definition of the term 'Gypsy'.

Despite not being Romany, Rachel is, to all intents and purposes, a Gypsy: she is the exact embodiment of Janowitz's idea of 'the screen onto which the English native is reinscribed as an alien [...] a quasi-fantastical double to the English cottager', but not in the way that Janowitz had originally intended.¹⁸¹ The critic sees Gypsies as the 'double to the English cottager', but Rachel *is* an English cottager (albeit a very slovenly one). Significantly, the cottage that Rachel and her family live in is located 'on the borders of one of those great moors in Somersetshire';¹⁸² as we have seen in Chapter I, the Gypsies are traditionally seen to inhabit borderlands.

The character of Tawny Rachel hangs very delicately on the borderline between the Gypsies and the settled folk: she has the potential to go either way, and risk upsetting the social balance (more than she has already done so). It is as if More has decided not only to condemn the foolishness of believing in fortune-tellers (the most obvious moral of the story), but has also attempted to tackle a darker and more pressing aspect of the human character: the potential lure of the Gypsy way of life Gypsy for ordinary, settled people, and all of the horror that would invoke for an author like More. It almost seems as if it would be preferable if Rachel were an actual Gypsy (i.e. of no fixed abode) so that her flagrant disregard for the way that a decent cottager lives would not be so shocking or wicked.

This is perhaps the reason why Rachel's character changes from the slutty housewife in *Black Giles the Poacher* to the more enigmatic figure that we see in *Tawney Rachel*. In the first part of *Black Giles* we learn that Rachel did her family's washing on a Sunday (instead of going to church), that '[n]either her husband's nor her children's cloaths were ever mended', and that

¹⁸¹ Anne Janowitz, 'The transit of Gypsies in Romantic period poetry' in *The Country and the City Revisited: England and the Politics of Culture, 1550-1850*, ed. by Gerald Maclean et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 214.

¹⁸² *Black Giles the Poacher; with Some Account of a Family who had rather live by their Wits than their Work* in *Tales for the Common People*, p. 67.

she was the sort of woman who pawned her children's shoes for a bottle of gin.¹⁸³ In *Tawney Rachel*, however, Rachel changes from the slovenly mother into the Gypsy-like woman who roamed the countryside in order to trick and dupe credulous women. In the transition from *Black Giles* to *Tawney Rachel*, More distances the character of Rachel from her cottage, her family and her settled life in an attempt to isolate the threat she represents and ease the process that removes this threat from society.

More's final treatment of Rachel shows an imperialist approach to the question of how to deal with undesirable elements of society: remove them out of sight to another (lesser) country. This, of course, does not relieve or solve any of the problems posed by Rachel and her family, nor the credulity of the women she dupes. The social and textual disruption caused by the 'other' that More struggles and, ultimately, fails to deal with resurfaces repeatedly in literature about Gypsies. A most notable example of this struggle with the 'other' is found in William Wordsworth's problematic poem 'Gipsies'.

William Wordsworth

David Simpson's 1987 essay on William Wordsworth's poem 'Gipsies' raises more questions than it answers. At the end of his discussion, Simpson asks: 'But does such "making clear" *explain* poetry, and in particular does it explain "Gipsies"?' (italics in original).¹⁸⁴ The poem both fascinates and perplexes Simpson, who has to date written at least three articles grappling with this poem.¹⁸⁵ For Simpson, the Gypsies function as stage dressing, a screen on which Wordsworth appears to project the anxieties of his inner and outer life. Deborah Epstein Nord

¹⁸³ *Black Giles*, pp. 70-1.

¹⁸⁴ David Simpson, *Wordsworth's Historical Imagination: The Poetry of Displacement* (New York; London: Methuen, 1987), p. 54.

¹⁸⁵ See: David Simpson, *Wordsworth and the Figurings of the Real* (London: Macmillan, 1982) and 'Figuring Class, Sex, and Gender: What Is the Subject of Wordsworth's "Gipsies"?' *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 88:3 (1989), pp. 541-67.

writes with a similar emphasis, and explains Wordsworth's outburst as stemming from the poet's similarity to the Gypsies:

As a poet [Wordsworth] is witness and wanderer, and his nervousness about this aspect of his vocation is registered as a strident and exaggerated protest[.]¹⁸⁶

As Simpson explains, it is this (perhaps subconscious) psychological identification with the Gypsies that leads to the complexities of the poem:

I find in ['Gipsies'] a major statement of the preoccupations of Wordsworth's poetic intelligence considered as a simultaneously subjective and intersubjective faculty [...] A rather brief poem, it is yet one that demonstrates in a very complex way the degree to which the lyric moment is not simply informed but *constituted* by both literary-historical and social-historical intuitions.¹⁸⁷

Whilst I agree with Simpson and Nord that the poem 'Gipsies' demonstrates many of Wordsworth's insecurities about his status as a poet, I think that the poem is more nuanced than either of these critics have recognized fully. My argument for a more open reading of 'Gipsies' is based not only on a close reading of that particular poem, but also a consideration of two of Wordsworth's other poems: 'Beggars', which also appeared in *Poems, in Two Volumes*, and 'The Female Vagrant' from *Lyrical Ballads*.

It is the speaker's early identification of the Gypsies as human beings that complicates his later attempts to distance himself from them. Had the poet not been so definite about the Gypsies' humanity in 'Gipsies', he would not have been able to identify with them, or to recognize unwittingly a parallel between his life and theirs. Cowper identifies the Gypsies as human, but with a subtle difference (his Gypsies are 'creature[s] cast | In human mould' (574-5)); Wordsworth, however, sees no difference between these Gypsies and ordinary humans, apart from the way that they choose to behave, a sentiment that is closer to More's ethical concerns in *Tawney Rachel*. In 'Gipsies' Wordsworth does not try to transform the Gypsies into animals or to compare them with swarms of insects or pests, as Gilbert White and Hannah

¹⁸⁶ Deborah Epstein Nord, *Gypsies and the British Imagination, 1807-1930* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), pp. 54-5.

¹⁸⁷ Wordsworth's *Historical Imagination*, p. 26. Italics in original.

More do. Whilst Wordsworth's Gypsies may have a disconcerting stillness (they are 'the same unbroken knot' (1)), the poet takes great care to show that the Gypsies share the poet's humanity: they are 'human Beings' (2) and 'Men, Women, Children' (3).¹⁸⁸

If Wordsworth had followed other writers and identified the Gypsies as sub-human or more like animals, then his process of separating himself from the group would be clear: the poet would have drawn a clear distinction between 'them' and 'us.' There are, however, too many similarities between the role of the poet and the life of the Gypsy for this separation to become absolute in this poem. Nord argues:

Most striking in its inadvertently ironic reference to the poet and the Gypsies alike is, of course, the word "Traveller," used often by Wordsworth to describe himself as wanderer on the hills and moors and commonly by others to refer to Gypsies.¹⁸⁹

I agree that it is with the word 'traveller' that the link remains between the poet and the Gypsies. Simpson argues that Wordsworth's anxiety about the nature of his work was a theme of *Poems, in Two Volumes*:

Wordsworth's poetry is constantly posing the question of its status as authentic labour [...] Anxieties about the business of poetry, and its place in the labour cycle and in the 'respectable' world, in fact occur throughout the 1807 *Poems, in Two Volumes*, the collection in which 'Gypsies' first appeared [...] Wordsworth in 1807 lived both with the embarrassment and guilt of dependence, and with the insecurity of his vocation as an unestablished writer.¹⁹⁰

Despite Wordsworth's attempt to undo the entwined roles of the wandering poet and the Gypsy (a link Matthew Arnold re-forges in the mid-nineteenth century), questions remain about the validity of poetry as an economically viable occupation and its usefulness to society.

As Nord and Simpson note, Hazlitt and S. T. Coleridge were both quick to point out the similarities between Wordsworth's speaker in 'Gypsies' and the Gypsies themselves, and

¹⁸⁸ William Wordsworth, *Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems, 1800-1807*, ed. by Jared Curtis, 21 vols (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1975- 2007), VII (1983), pp. 211-2. This edition of the poem is the 1807 version. The 1820 version will be referred to where necessary and the date will be indicated in parentheses.

¹⁸⁹ *Gypsies and the British Imagination*, p. 53.

¹⁹⁰ *Wordsworth's Historical Imagination*, pp. 34-6.

both take issue with the seeming hypocrisy of the poem. In a discussion of 'Gipsies' in his *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge writes:

Whereat the poet, without seeming to reflect that the poor tawny wanderers might probably have been tramping for weeks together through road and lane, over moor and mountain, and consequently must have been right glad to rest themselves, their children and cattle, for one whole day; and overlooking the obvious truth, that such repose might be quite as necessary for *them*, as a walk of the same continuance was pleasing or healthful for the more fortunate poet; expresses his indignation in a series of lines, the diction and imagery of which would have been rather above, than below the mark, had they been applied to the immense empire of China improgressive for thirty centuries [...]¹⁹¹

Hazlitt supplies a similarly acerbic comment in a footnote to his essay 'On Manner':

Mr Wordsworth, who has written a sonnet to the King on the good that he has done in the last fifty years, has made an attack on a set of gipsies for having not done anything in four and twenty hours. 'The stars had gone their rounds, but they had not stirred from their place.' And why should they, if they were comfortable where they were? We did not expect this turn from Mr Wordsworth, whom we had considered as the prince of poetic idlers, and patron of the philosophy of indolence[...]¹⁹²

Although both of these comments stem from plausible readings of the poem – as Simpson notes, 'Coleridge and Hazlitt were hardly naïve readers'¹⁹³ – they seem not only to have an agenda against Wordsworth (for various reasons), but also to miss the nuances of the poem (perhaps deliberately). In fact, both Coleridge and Hazlitt identify the very themes that make Wordsworth anxious in 'Gipsies': Coleridge mentions the poet's habit of walking (for leisure and/or pleasure rather than necessity), and Hazlitt inextricably links the occupation of 'poet' with (dreaded) notions of idleness and indolence. Hazlitt not only appears to confirm Wordsworth's worst fears about his own usefulness to society, but also makes the connection between Wordsworth and what was perceived to be the worst traits of the Gypsies. The connotations of idleness and indolence (laziness, worthlessness, habitual avoidance of work)

¹⁹¹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria or, Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, ed. by James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, Bollingen Series 75; 7 (2 vols) (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), II, pp. 137-8. Italics in original.

¹⁹² William Hazlitt, 'On Manner', in *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, ed. by Duncan Wu, 9 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998), II, p. 46.

¹⁹³ *Wordsworth's Historical Imagination*, p. 29.

were exactly the sort of labels that Wordsworth was trying to escape and work through in 'Gipsies'.

Wordsworth's attempts to distance himself from the Gypsies show how strongly he recognized himself in them; his dismissal of them in the 1807 version: 'The stars have tasks – but these have none' (24), is changed to: 'they are what their birth | And breeding suffer them to be; | Wild outcasts of society!' (26-8, 1820), a change that distances the Gypsies further from the speaker. In the 1807 version, the distance was only provided by the 'unbroken knot' that the Gypsies made – the community that shut out the speaker firmly – but in the 1820 version, it is the speaker who dismisses the Gypsies with a sort of double exclusion: the Gypsies are still the tight, self-sufficient community that they were, casting off and ignoring the world around them, but now the world around them has also cast them out. There is a sense of the speaker trying to regain moral ascendancy: he positions himself as a useful member of society, disavowing any similarities he may have with the Gypsies.

The distancing that Wordsworth is concerned with is increased by the location of the speaker of 'Gipsies': firmly outside the group, isolated and unable to establish anything more about the 'unbroken knot' of people he re-encounters. Toby Benis notes:

Examination grows out of an ethic of detached surveillance; storytelling assumes an engaged exchange. Examination implies an unequal distribution of power [...] Both storytelling and examination assume the listener has an interest; however, examination asks certain questions and seeks certain answers.¹⁹⁴

Because the speaker is outside the Gypsy group he appears as an 'examiner' of the Gypsies, although he does not manage to ascertain much about them. Despite this supposedly 'superior' position, and the speaker's best attempts to assert his rightful place in society ('while I | Have been a Traveller under open sky, | Much witnessing of change and cheer' (9-12)), the group of Gypsies is resistant to his examination, and wilfully refuse even to move or to reveal its secrets.

The Gypsies' secrecy and self-containment is an affront to the view that the poor should be

¹⁹⁴ Toby Benis, *Romanticism on the Road: The Marginal Gains of Wordsworth's Homeless* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p. 66.

knowable and accountable. Wordsworth's Gypsies are apparently numberless and resistant to classification; the important interaction between examiner and examinee breaks down – the Gypsies are not behaving as expected. This refusal to be viewed, understood or contained challenges the superiority of the status quo and settled society.

Benis' use of the word 'surveillance' in his discussion of the difference between 'examination' and storytelling' adds an extra, political element to 'Gipsies'. The idea of surveillance and examination draws parallels with Wordsworth's own experience of being under investigation whilst at Alfoxden. Although this is only a minor aspect of the poem, the Gypsies' apparent status as criminals, members of a dubious subculture and potential revolutionaries add an interesting dimension to the poem: if Wordsworth in some way recognizes his former, revolutionary self in the Gypsies, then it is possible that he is attempting to distance himself as far as possible from that self by siding with the authorities and Government inspectors.

James Garrett follows this idea of counting and classifying in 'Gipsies' and remarks on its political significance:

Lacking individuation, [the Gypsies] are not available for the type of government inspection exemplified by the taking of a national census [...]. Since to be identified as a gypsy was to risk being fined or imprisoned, it seems likely that the gypsy population would want to remain a mysterious and unknown entity despite the government's attempt to count the people.¹⁹⁵

The Gypsies in 'Gipsies' appear to the speaker as they did to the government: a sea of undistinguishable, undifferentiated and uncountable people living outside conventional society and its laws. In the face of his potential identification with the 'outlaw' Gypsies, Wordsworth's speaker does much to distance himself from the group, including, just like the officials from the government, being unable to count or quantify the Gypsies.

¹⁹⁵ James M. Garrett, 'The Unaccountable "Knot" of Wordsworth's "Gipsies"', *SEL*, 40:4 (Autumn 2000), p. 615.

Garrett decides that the undercounting, or lack of counting, of the Gypsies denies them an empirical existence.¹⁹⁶ The denial of empirical existence, I argue, allows for the Gypsies' existence between fantasy and reality. Wordsworth's 'Gipsies' is evidence of this: knowledge promotes understanding, so if knowledge is missing (the speaker cannot determine anything about the Gypsies apart from their faces), then stories, speculations and rumours fill the void. Garrett suggests that the Gypsies escape official counting and recognition because they fall into a gap produced either by their unwillingness to cooperate in the census records, or because the government or ruling classes wish to negate the Gypsies' existence through lack of evidence. 'Gipsies' seems to reveal both of these gaps in knowledge: the Gypsies resist being classified and the speaker, wishing to distance himself from the group, cannot determine any distinguishing features.

Garrett's idea of the official investigation and examination in 'Gipsies' is discussed by Benis with reference to another of Wordsworth's Gypsy poems: 'Beggars'.¹⁹⁷ In this poem, Benis argues:

Wordsworth casts himself not only as a professional writer but also a kind of investigator of the poor and their conditions. Potentially a social monitor, he employs elements of official investigative method, but his unpredictable responses to lies and other 'suspect' behaviour are by turns sympathetic, charitable, and wilfully self-deceiving.¹⁹⁸

There are the same elements at play in 'Beggars' as there are in 'Gipsies': in both poems Wordsworth's speaker is 'a professional writer' and, from what we can deduce, he is also a sort of self-appointed 'social monitor'. This latter 'job' is evident in the speaker's admonition of the Gypsies, and the horror at the group's lack of useful occupation. The differences between the two poems are, however, also crucial, the most important being that in 'Beggars' the speaker

¹⁹⁶ 'The Unaccountable "Knot"', p. 616.

¹⁹⁷ *Poems, in Two Volumes*, pp. 113-14. See also Chapter IV for a discussion of 'Beggars' in relation to Matthew Arnold's poem 'To a Gipsy Child by the Sea-Shore'.

¹⁹⁸ *Romanticism on the Road*, p. 141.

has a conversation with the Gypsy woman.¹⁹⁹ This difference alters the tone of the poem, which, in Benis' classification, becomes 'storytelling' rather than an 'examination'; the exchange between the speaker and the Gypsy woman places the encounter on a slightly more equal footing because it 'depends on a shared sense of emotional potential and involves personal motives'.²⁰⁰

This 'storytelling' rather than 'examination' may explain why the speaker's response to the Gypsy woman is so completely different from the response in 'Gipsies'. Firstly, this woman is alone; secondly, she has many identifying features; and thirdly, she has a voice. This all leads to a much less threatening encounter where the speaker is able to understand his subject; he is far less concerned by the woman's apparent lies than he is by the silent, recalcitrant knot in 'Gipsies'.²⁰¹

Apart from the element of storytelling in 'Beggars', which makes the speaker more at ease, the process by which the speaker distinguishes himself from the Gypsies is very different to that in 'Gipsies'. In 'Beggars' the speaker comes across a woman who is very quickly identified as an outsider:

She had a tall Man's height, or more;
No bonnet screen'd her from the heat;
A long drab-colour'd Cloak she wore,
A Mantle reaching to her feet:
[...]
[...]
In all my walks, through field or town,
Such Figure had I never seen:
Her face was of Egyptian brown:
Fit person was she for a Queen,
To head those ancient Amazonian files:
Or ruling Bandit's Wife, among the Grecian Isles. (1-12)

¹⁹⁹ I refer to the woman in 'Beggars' as a Gypsy to avoid confusion and because, as will be discussed, there is a wealth of textual evidence to suggest that is what she was.

²⁰⁰ *Romanticism on the Road*, p. 66.

²⁰¹ Benis is concerned with showing that the woman in 'Beggars' is a liar and he states, '[The speaker] tells us that the stately beggar woman he encounters in the first part of the poem is lying', *Romanticism on the Road*, p. 154. Whether the woman is actually lying or not, however, depends on how the lines 'on English Land | Such woes I know could never be' (15-6) are read. The emphasis is uncertain here: is the speaker stating that the woman is lying (things like that don't happen in England, she must be making it up), or is he emphasizing her otherness by pointing out that her tales could not have happened on English soil, and therefore must have happened abroad?

The woman displays all of the characteristics of a foreigner: she is tall, dark-skinned, exotic, romanticized and, most notably, has potentially experienced woes that would never occur 'on English Land' (15); it is probably of no small significance that she was 'beautiful to see' (18).²⁰² This woman looks and acts like a Gypsy woman and, safe in the knowledge of this, the speaker can act as a benevolent observer: 'a boon I gave her' (17).²⁰³

From the description of the beggar woman it is clear that she was a Gypsy; the 'Egyptian brown' is the biggest clue to this surmise and is a nod to the discussions over the Gypsies' origins. We have seen earlier that there was widespread debate about the origins of the Gypsies in this period.²⁰⁴ An article in the February 1784 edition of the *Gentlemen's Magazine* states: 'The received opinion sets [the Gypsies] down as Egyptians, and makes them out to be the descendents of those vagabond votaries of Isis', and an earlier article in *The New and Wonderful Magazine and Marvelous Chronicle* argued: 'Gypsies form a strange kind of commonwealth among themselves [...] being at length subdued and banished from Egypt, they

²⁰² Benis argues: 'the speaker rewards the female liar because he finds her sexually attractive', *Romanticism on the Road*, p. 156, but there are no particular grounds to assume this. Other than that the woman is described as tall and Amazonian, there is no reason to see her portrayal as overtly sexual. It is more likely that she simply appears as a romanticized beggar woman should: beautiful and neat but poor.

²⁰³ See below for a discussion of charity and the effect of Romantic subjectivity in Crabbe's poem 'The Lover's Journey'.

²⁰⁴ The word 'Gypsy' is derived from these supposed Egyptian roots. Early statutes dealing with Gypsies were called the 'Egyptians Acts', named for 'People callynge themselves Egyptians', 22 Hen.VIII.c.10., *The statutes of the realm: printed by command of His Majesty King George the Third, in pursuance of an address of the House of Commons of Great Britain: from original records and authentic manuscripts*, 4 vols (London: George Eyre and Andrew Strahan, 1810-1822; repr. Burlington, VT: TannerRitchie Publishing in collaboration with the Library and Information Services of the University of St Andrews, 2007), III, p. 327. In his copy of Gilbert White's collected works, *The Works, in Natural History, of the late Rev. Gilbert White* (1802), Coleridge's marginal notes on Letter XXV show that he was well acquainted with the discussion of the Gypsies' origins. Coleridge writes 'a learned German [Heinrich Grellmann] [...] has made it evident, that [the Gypsies] are the remains of an expelled nation from between Persia and Hindostan.' He also notes, in a correction to White's statement, that '[the] Zingani in Calabria and Apulia are not Gypsies; but Christian Greeks with a very strange religion.' Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Marginalia*, ed. by H. J. Jackson, George Whalley et al., Bollingen Series 75; 12 (16 vols) (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), VI, pp. 149-50. The editors' note to Coleridge's comment 'C's note may indicate direct personal experience or at least some informed discussion in Italy' (p. 150) shows that Coleridge was reasonably knowledgeable on the topic of the Gypsies (and non-Gypsies) and it is therefore possible that Wordsworth would have been as well. Although Coleridge's comments are dated after 1805, 'Beggars' did not appear until 1807. Perhaps Wordsworth chose to ignore the debates about 'true' Gypsy origins for this poem, and instead chose the more romantic idea that the Gypsies were exiles from Egypt; this fits in more with the poem's mood of storytelling and imagination, rather than scientific fact.

dispersed themselves [...] into every country in the known world'.²⁰⁵ The female beggar is, on paper, a Gypsy.

Although the woman lies, the speaker seems more comfortable with her than the speaker who confronted the unfathomable 'knot' in 'Gipsies'. There appears to be a 'knowability' about this Gypsy woman; despite, or because of, her lies (a stereotypical Gypsy trait), the speaker is able to place her and distinguish her individual features: she was extremely tall, she wore a long cloak, she wore a snow-white cap, her face was brown and she '[poured] out her sorrows like the sea' (14).²⁰⁶ Nord points out that the Gypsy appears to be an 'ancestor of both Scott's Meg Merrilies and Keats's "Old Meg"' because 'this beggar woman is commanding, almost marshal in her bearing'.²⁰⁷ The cloak that the beggar woman is wearing is a familiar symbol of the Gypsies. As Nord mentions, it is one of Meg Merrilies' characteristic features, and it became a fashionable item to wear; women were able to purchase Gypsy cloaks so that they could dress up like their exotic counterparts, just as they were able to copy the Gypsies by eating outdoors at a picnic.²⁰⁸ Wordsworth's Gypsy has crossed over the border from the threatening unknown to the fanciful imagination.

'Beggars' is based on an encounter of Dorothy Wordsworth's, which she recorded in her journal:

On Tuesday, May 27th, a very tall woman, tall much beyond the measure of tall women, called at the door. She had on a very long brown cloak, & a very white cap without Bonnet – her face was excessively brown, but it had plainly once been fair. She led a

²⁰⁵ 'History of the Race of the Gypsies farther [sic] Illustrated', *Gentleman's Magazine*, 54:2 (February 1784), p. 99; 'Of Gypsies, and the Laws respecting them', *New and Wonderful Magazine and Marvelous Chronicle*, 5:49 (October 1794), p. 117.

²⁰⁶ This is one of the elements that Wordsworth transports directly from his sister's journal. The whiteness of the cap could suggest that these beggars are worthy of charity because, despite their outward deprivation, they still remain clean and wholesome-looking.

²⁰⁷ *Gypsies and the British Imagination*, p. 51.

²⁰⁸ An example of 'fashionable' Gypsy attire is this advertisement in *La Belle Assemblée; or, Bell's Court and Fashionable Magazine*, 32 (1 June 1808) 'Gypsy Cloak: The Nobility and Gentry are respectfully informed the above Cloak may be had of Mrs Barclay, No. 33, Frith-street, Soho', p. 49. This mimicking of the Gypsies through the adoption of their clothing and habits had the effect of diminishing the threat that they posed. Imitating someone else's culture reduces it to mere play and fancy, whatever the reality may be. For a discussion of the evolution of picnicking, see: Andrew Hubbell, 'How Wordsworth invented picnicking and saved British Culture', *Romanticism*, 12:1 (2006), pp. 44-51; see also the discussion of the 'gypsy party' picnic in *Emma*, later in this chapter.

little bare footed child about 2 years old by the hand & said her husband who was a tinker
was gone before with the other children. I gave her a piece of Bread.²⁰⁹

Wordsworth's use of his sister's journal entry is fascinating: he exoticizes the beggar woman and identifies her as a Gypsy when she seems, in Dorothy Wordsworth's prose, to be only one of the many itinerant labourers common in the period:

The woman had told me in the morning that she was of Scotland, which her
accent fully proved, but that she had lived (I think at Wigton) that they could not
keep a house, & so they travelled.²¹⁰

The main distinction between Wordsworth's poem and Dorothy's journal entry lies in the interpretation of Dorothy's line 'her face was excessively brown, but it had plainly once been fair'. Nord mentions this in her account of the poem, but does not draw any particular significance from it.²¹¹ I suggest that Wordsworth's transformation of the beggar from a woman whose face has become suntanned during her travels, to a woman who is clearly a Gypsy (that is, her skin had always been brown) is significant; Wordsworth also adds that the woman was beautiful, a fact which Dorothy omits to comment upon (perhaps Wordsworth changes the meaning of 'fair' in Dorothy's description). Wordsworth's appropriation of his sister's encounter shows his exoticization of the domestic and homely (or homeless); once again it also demonstrates a version of Janowitz's idea that the Gypsy is the double to the English cottager (that More's *Tawney Rachel* has also shown); the beggar woman is a (Scottish) cottager in one account, and her double in another account becomes a Gypsy. Wordsworth transforms an ordinary itinerant figure into a true outsider, but he has done so in the full knowledge that she is simply a homeless woman searching for work. Arguably, this subtext explains and excuses the speaker's giving of a 'boon' to the woman: he knows that, in reality, she is deserving of it.

²⁰⁹ Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Grasmere and Alfoxden Journals*, ed. by Pamela Woof (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, repr. 2008), pp. 9-10.

²¹⁰ *Grasmere and Alfoxden Journals*, p. 10.

²¹¹ *Gypsies and the British Imagination*, p. 51.

Why does Wordsworth choose to exoticize the beggar woman? I think that this is an example of how far the figure of the Gypsy had permeated the British consciousness.

Wordsworth dramatizes his sister's description of the encounter, making it more literary and thus turning it into another example of a 'paper Gypsy': he has constructed his Gypsy woman from other texts and has willed her into being. Wordsworth suffuses his poem with the same sense of interrogation and fact-finding that he does in 'Gipsies', but to a very different end.

The poem 'Beggars' acts as a counterpart to the other Gypsy poem in *Poems, in Two Volumes*, 'Gipsies', and it demonstrates the 'correct' relationship between Gypsy and onlooker: deference on the part of the former, and amused benevolence on the part of the latter. There is no immediately obvious threat or danger, and everyone plays his or her part and is understood. In 'Gipsies' the group that Wordsworth encounters on his walk are *real* Gypsies, not figments of a fanciful imagination. The reference to the group's lack of interest in the movements of the sun and moon, the coming of night and the waning of day, shows that they cannot – or wilfully refuse – to be controlled by anything or anyone: 'Behold the mighty Moon! this way | She looks at them – but they | Regard not her' (19-21). Wordsworth is unable to control their menacing presence in 'Gipsies', as he manages to do in 'Beggars'.

The puzzle of why Wordsworth should prefer 'vain deed or evil than such a life!' (22 (1807)) and 'better wrong and strife [...] than this torpid life' (21-2 (1820)) can be explained by looking at another example of Wordsworth's use of Gypsies in 'The Female Vagrant'.²¹² In the 1798 version of this poem, the female vagrant is rescued by a 'wild brood' (215), but in the 1802 version this is changed to 'Travellers'; she is either welcomed into the group by the 'rude earth's tenants' (218 (1798)), or the 'Wild houseless Wanderers' (218 (1802)). The word 'travellers' instantly links 'The Female Vagrant' with 'Gipsies', although in the latter it is the speaker who is the 'Traveller' (10); the 'Wild houseless Wanderers' foreshadow the 'vagrant

²¹² Wordsworth and Coleridge: *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. by Richard L. Brett and Alun R. Jones, 3rd edn (London; New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 97. All references to this edition are displayed parenthetically in the text.

dweller in the houseless woods' (21) of 'Tintern Abbey', and the line is an echo of Cowper's Gypsies in *The Task*: 'The houseless rovers of the sylvan world' (I, 588). There is an identification between the poet and the Gypsies, which is a positive link in Wordsworth's earlier poems, but provides another form of anxiety for the speaker of 'Gipsies'.

Whilst the Female Vagrant is unable to stay with the Gypsies because she has been 'brought up in nothing ill' ('Female Vagrant', 242 (1798)), the speaker of the poem draws no moral conclusion from the behaviour of the Gypsies.²¹³ The Female Vagrant is seen in a sympathetic light because she is unable to endure the Gypsies' way of life, but this does not reflect badly on the group. As Simpson argues: 'The gypsies are both criminal and socially enlightened, and the one fact is not deployed to discredit the other'.²¹⁴ It is plausible that the 'vain deeds and evil life' to which the speaker refers in 'Gipsies' are the very deeds that the Gypsies are seen to perform in 'The Female Vagrant':

O'er moor and mountain, midnight theft to hatch;
To charm a surly house-dog's faithful bark,
Or hang on tip-toe at the lifted latch (236-8)

Wordsworth's Gypsies are like Cowper's, 'Loud when they beg, dumb only when they steal' (*The Task*, I. 573), and the similarity between the Gypsies in 'The Female Vagrant' and *The Task* is striking. In *The Task* the Gypsies:

Can change their whine into a mirthful note
When safe occasion offers, and with dance
And music of the bladder and the bag
Beguile their woes and made the woods resound. (583-6)

Similarly, the Gypsies in 'The Female Vagrant' enjoyed music and dance after their night-time occupations were over:

[Life] of happier sort to me pourtrayed,
And other joys my fancy to allure;
The bag-pipe dinning on the midnight moor
In barn uplighted, and companions boon
Well met from far with revelry secure,

²¹³ See: *Wordsworth's Historical Imagination*, pp. 46-7, for Simpson's discussion of Gypsies in 'The Female Vagrant'.

²¹⁴ *Wordsworth's Historical Imagination*, p. 46.

In depth of forest glade. (228-33)

Wordsworth accepts the immorality of the Gypsy in 'Beggars' and the Gypsies in 'The Female Vagrant' because they contribute to the external world, whether it be through their beauty, companionship, help or by relating an interesting 'tale'. The Gypsies of 'The Female Vagrant' may inhabit the murky underworld of society, but they are portrayed as merry rogues (like George Crabbe's Gypsies, discussed next in this chapter, which again flags up the reliability of Romantic subjectivity), and the outsider can understand them; the groups form a separate community, but it is one that is easily penetrated.

Hostility arises from what the speaker cannot understand or cannot decipher.

Wordsworth is not hostile to the Gypsies generally, but he is careful to distinguish 'them' from 'us': they may be hospitable to strangers, have a love of liberty and be very engaging but, recalling Cowper's description of a 'creature [...] cast in human mould', the woman in 'Beggars' is 'the Creature' (17) and 'a Weed of glorious feature!' (18), and the Gypsies in 'The Female Vagrant' only *appear* to be human: 'Semblance they made | Of potters wandering from door to door' (226-7). This is especially interesting considering Wordsworth's emphasis on the Gypsies as definitely human in 'Gipsies'.

In asking for a more open view of the poem 'Gipsies' I am not trying to argue that the poem is sympathetic to the Gypsies; I agree with Simpson when he states that 'the primary message of this poem is an admonitory one'.²¹⁵ I believe, however, that this poem is representative of the difficulty of dividing Gypsy representations into binary categories. To dismiss this poem as merely 'negative' is to miss the complex reaction that Wordsworth has to the Gypsies, both in this poem and elsewhere in his work. Wordsworth's indecision appears to have been common in contemporary society: it was rare to have outright condemnation without the chance for rehabilitation or the potential for regeneration as 'acceptable' citizens, as even Hannah More would admit. Wordsworth's poem is troubling because it reveals the

²¹⁵ Wordsworth's *Historical Imagination*, p. 54.

complex inner-workings of a man brought to the fore by a confrontation with a group of outsiders; the resultant outburst stems from both Wordsworth's identification of himself with the group, and the need to distance himself from it dramatically. George Crabbe's poem 'The Lover's Journey' censures precisely this sort of conflicted subjectivity.

George Crabbe

'The Lover's Journey' was first published in 1812 and is included in one of George Crabbe's later volumes of poetry, *Tales in Verse*. Neil Powell, one of Crabbe's most recent biographers, argues:

[The poem's] crucial point, stated at the very outset, concerns the relationship between natural scenes and the perceiving consciousness [...] Beauty, says Crabbe, is not so much in the eye as in the soul and mind of the beholder. This distinction, which at first may look unimportant, is of huge significance: it is the difference between an aesthetic view of the world and a moral one [...] man's relationship with the world around him is [a complex] transaction, governed less by the innate ability of what is seen to affect the observer than by the observer's inescapable tendency to affect what he sees, depending on his spiritual and psychological state at the time.²¹⁶

Powell here identifies one of the most interesting points about the perception of the Gypsies by writers and poets in this period: much of what is said about the Gypsies is, in many cases, more a reflection of the viewer than of the viewed.

Gypsies are a test case for an analysis of Romantic subjectivity; it is this preoccupation with subjectivity that allows for the vast spectrum of different attitudes towards the Gypsies, as well as allowing for the ambiguity that is evident in many portrayals of the group. In the opening lines of 'The Lover's Journey', Crabbe warns us of the problems arising from Romantic subjectivity that are demonstrated throughout the poem, most notably in Orlando's encounter with the Gypsies.

Crabbe begins his poem:

It is the Soul that sees; the outward eyes
Present the object, but the Mind describes;

²¹⁶ Neil Powell, *George Crabbe: An English Life, 1754-1832* (London: Pimlico, 2004), pp. 43-4.

And thence delight, disgust, or cool indiff'rence rise:
 When minds are joyful, then we look around,
 And what is seen is all on fairy ground;
 Again they sicken, and on every view
 Cast their own dull and melancholy hue;
 Or, if absorb'd by their peculiar cares,
 The vacant eye on viewless matter glares;
 Our feelings still upon our views attend,
 And their own natures to the objects lend;
 Long as the passion reigns th' effects endure (1-13, *PW* II)²¹⁷

This passage suggests several points of contact with Cowper and Wordsworth's poems: the inner preoccupations of the poets are transposed onto their Gypsy subjects. Cowper's attitude towards the Gypsies stems in part from his worries about community and belonging. Wordsworth's attitude stems in part from his anxieties about labour, the worth of poetry and property. Trumpener includes Crabbe's 'The Lover's Journey' in her list of poems that demonstrate 'early nineteenth-century anxieties about Gypsies as a social force';²¹⁸ I wish to open up her statement to challenge not just Crabbe's supposed negative or anxiety-ridden view of the Gypsies, but also to see the relationship between the law and Romantic subjectivity in relation to notions of charity and giving.

Trumpener includes Crabbe's poem 'The Lover's Journey' in a list of works that includes, among others, More's *Tawney Rachel*, but the poem is demonstrably different from More's evangelical preoccupations in her cautionary tale. An illuminating place to begin a consideration of George Crabbe's Gypsies is with his earlier poem 'The Hall of Justice' from *Poems* (1807). 'The Hall of Justice' is a dramatic poem consisting of a dialogue between a vagrant and a magistrate. From the epigraph, taken from Ovid's *Epistulae ex Ponto*: 'Confiteor facere hoc annos; sed et altera causa est, Anxietas animi, continuusque dolor', ('I confess that

²¹⁷ George Crabbe: *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. by Nora Dalrymple-Champneys and Arthur Pollard, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), II, p. 132. All references to this edition will be indicated parenthetically in the text and denoted parenthetically as *PW* II where appropriate.

²¹⁸ 'The Time of the Gypsies', p. 865.

time does this; but there is another cause, too, anxiety of mind and continued pain'),²¹⁹ it is evident that the poem will be a tale of woe and, perhaps, compassion, rather than one of condemnation and blame – this challenges a supposed 'negative' view of Gypsies.

The story in 'The Hall of Justice' is about the life of a Gypsy woman and the terrible brutalities that she has had to endure. The Gypsy has been brought before the magistrate to answer a charge of theft: she has stolen food to feed her starving grandchild. Once this is established at the beginning of the poem, the magistrate allows the woman to tell her life story and recount how she has ended up as she has:

Magistrate: Fond Wretch! And what canst thou relate,
 But Deeds of Sorrow, Shame, and Sin?
 Thy Crime is prov'd, thou know'st thy Fate;
 But come, thy Tale! begin, begin! (I. 5-8, *PWI*)

It is extremely unusual to hear Gypsies speak for themselves in this period: Wordsworth, for example, does not recount the conversation between himself and the Gypsy woman in 'Beggars', and appears to doubt her veracity 'on English Land | Such woes I knew could never be', (15-16). Cowper claims that the Gypsies are 'Loud when they beg, dumb only when they steal' (573), but he never gives any example of their speech. It is almost as though Crabbe is dramatizing records of an actual parish trial.

The Gypsy woman's tale is one of shame and horror. Following the death of her mother and the 'loss' of her father, the woman joins a group of Gypsies and was 'Train'd in the Arts that mark [their] Race' (I. 49, *PWI*). She falls in love with a Gypsy boy, Aaron, whose father was the 'Party's Chief' (I. 69, *PWI*), but the father is jealous of the match and banishes Aaron from the clan. The woman is then raped by Aaron's father and forced to marry him. In the second part of the tale Aaron returns to find the woman married to his father, he swears a 'dreadful' oath (II. 10, *PWI*), kills his father and then also marries the woman. The vagrant woman is haunted by a spectre of her 'Father-Husband' (II. 40, *PWI*) and then gives birth to 'a

²¹⁹ George Crabbe: *The Complete Poetical Works*, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), I, p. 707, n. 55. References to this poem will be denoted parenthetically in the text as *PWI*.

lovely Daughter [...] His Father's Child, in Aaron's Bed' (II. 49-50, *PWI*). Aaron is furious and banishes the child, claiming that she is dead. Aaron then dies in a fight and the Gypsy woman is married again to a husband who hires her out as a prostitute.²²⁰ This third husband also eventually dies and the woman is left to fend for herself by telling fortunes; she is prosecuted for this and, once in prison, finds her long-lost daughter. The daughter had been given by Aaron to another Gypsy crew and was now in prison facing transportation. When this daughter was transported, she left behind 'an Heir to her Distress' (II. 100, *PWI*), the grandchild for whom the Gypsy woman stole to provide.

By letting the Gypsy woman speak, Crabbe allows for all of the complexities and moral dilemmas of her life, and that of any vagrant, to become apparent.²²¹ Aside from the horrors that the woman endures, outlined above, the force of her story is made clear early on:

My Crime! – This sick'ning Child to feed,
I seiz'd the Food, your Witness saw;
I knew your Laws forbad the Deed,
But yielded to a stronger Law. (I. 9-12, *PWI*)

A manuscript variant for these lines challenges the morals and values of the court, showing morals to be a luxury of the privileged and against 'natural' laws:

What is my crime? a deed of love;
I fed my child with pilfer'd food:
Your laws will not the act approve,
The law of Nature deems it good.²²²

Crabbe, whom Byron called 'nature's sternest painter',²²³ displays great sympathy for his vagrant character, which only increases as the poem progresses.

²²⁰ Gypsy women were sometimes believed to be prostitutes, and were certainly known for their overt sexuality: '[Giles Hather] carried about with him his whore, called Kit Callot, which was termed the Queen of Egypties', *Martin Markall, Beadle of Bridewell* (1610) in *Key Writings on Subcultures, 1535-1727: Classics from the Underworld*, I, p. 421; 'The women deal in old clothes, prostitution, wanton dances, and fortune-telling', *The Times* (30 November 1787), p. 4. See also: *Gypsy-travellers in nineteenth-century society*, pp. 56-7: 'Town officials and clergymen repeated the customary charges of theft and prostitution and sought to discourage the public from visiting the camps'.

²²¹ The magistrate has approximately 35 lines of direct speech in the poem; the vagrant woman has approximately 215.

²²² *George Crabbe: The Complete Poetical Works*, I, notes for lines 9-12, p. 311. This manuscript, designated as CoS, is in Special Collections, The Colorado College, Colorado Springs, USA. See also: *George Crabbe: The Complete Poetical Works*, I, p. xx.

Whilst one reviewer argued in *The Universal Magazine* that the vagrant woman's actions lead the poem to '[bring] detestable profligacy before the imagination, which cannot be compensated by any excellence of poetry', Crabbe's representation of the woman's problems is handled with compassion (although in what would appear to his contemporary readers as shocking detail).²²⁴ Crabbe's point is that it is society that has failed the vagrant woman, rather than the woman failing to adhere to the principles of common decency and behaviour. Much like Wordsworth's *Female Vagrant*, Crabbe's vagrant is forced to join a Gypsy band after losing her family and she is ill-at-ease with the life of the Gypsies: 'Yet well I knew my deeds were ill; | By each Offence my Heart was pain'd' (II. 70-1, *PW I*). Unlike the *Female Vagrant*, however, Crabbe's woman 'wept, but [...] offended still' (II. 72, *PW I*). Another more sympathetic reviewer in the *Annual Review* writes:

[The] poor creature is one whom circumstances had made 'The slave, but not the friend of Vice.' She had still that kind and degree of moral feeling which is denied, we believe, to none of God's creatures who do not themselves take pains to smother it.²²⁵

Perhaps it is Crabbe's use of religion (in the form of redemption and salvation) at the end of the poem that makes the Gypsy woman and her crimes more acceptable: she is presented as a woman wracked by the mental torment of her sins, who supplicates herself in order to receive absolution for her sins. The magistrate commands her to:

Recall the Word, renounce the Thought,
Command thy Heart and bend thy Knee,
There is to all a Pardon brought,
A Ransom rich, assur'd and free;
'Tis full when found, 'tis found if sought,
Oh! seek it, till 'tis seal'd to Thee. (II. 127-32, *PW I*)

Yet this seems morally unsatisfactory when the Gypsy's statement at the beginning is brought back into focus: whilst she is repentant of her way of life, the woman admits that she does not

²²³ Lord Byron, 'English Bards and Scotch Reviewers', *The Works of Lord Byron: With his letters and journals, and his life*, ed. by T. Moore, 17 vols (London: John Murray, 1833), VII, p. 275.

²²⁴ 'Unsigned Review', *Universal Magazine* (November 1808-February 1809), ed. by Arthur Pollard, *Crabbe: The Critical Heritage* (London; Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 71.

²²⁵ See: 'Unsigned Review', *Annual Review*, VI (1808) in *Crabbe: The Critical Heritage*, p. 66.

feel it to be a sin to steal to feed a starving child. Crabbe leaves it to his readers to decide what is the correct judgement.

Crabbe's poem does not resolve the moral dilemma it proposes, but it handles the problem in a sympathetic and humane manner. During the period in which Crabbe wrote 'The Hall of Justice', Gypsies were widely considered to have no religion. A writer in the *Monthly Ledger* claimed: 'The men are all thieves, and the women libertines; they follow no certain trade and they have no fixed religion', whilst the *Britannic Magazine* warned: 'Of religion, however, they have no sense; though, with their usual cunning and hypocrisy, they profess the established faith of every country in which they live'. *The Times*, meanwhile, declared:

Those who profess any religion represent it to be that of the country in which they reside: but their description of it seldom goes beyond repeating the Lord's prayer; and only few of them are capable of that. Instances of them attending any place of worship is very rare.²²⁶

The emphasis on the Gypsy woman's Christianity (or not) is perhaps unsurprising given Crabbe's occupation as a clergyman, but more surprising when we consider that Gypsies were still at this stage seen as heathens. From the beginning of the poem, the woman marks herself out as a sinner and recognizes her faults; she is a sympathetic figure because she seeks understanding and tolerance, without complaint against her punishment and shows that her most recent crime was borne out of love for her grandchild, rather than innate evil. Arguably, Crabbe is able to portray her in this way because she was not born a Gypsy: 'I wander'd with a vagrant Crew [...] With them, on Want and Error forc'd, | Like them I base and guilty grew' (l. 38-42, *PWI*). As with the stolen food, the woman's sins appear to stem from necessity rather than a flawed soul. If this is the case, and the woman is not a 'real' Gypsy, she can be claimed back into the fold: 'I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance' (Luke

²²⁶ 'Some Account of the People Called Gypsies', *Monthly Ledger* (November 1774), p. 577; 'History of the Gypsies', *Britannic Magazine*, I (1793), p. 81; 'The Gipsies', *The Times* (19 July 1816), p. 3.

15.7).²²⁷ The example that Crabbe gives in 'The Hall of Justice' – as with the examples by Wordsworth ('Beggars') and Hannah More – is another case of a counterfeit Gypsy.

Yet using the distinction between 'real' and 'counterfeit' Gypsies as a reason for Crabbe's sympathetic portrayal of the woman is not wholly convincing. The female speaker makes it clear that, whilst originally she was not a Gypsy, she married into the race and identifies with them strongly: 'But lost my Bosom's sweet Content, | When first I lov'd, the Gipsy-Boy' (l. 55-6, *PWI*). She uses the possessive 'our' to mean 'the Gypsies': 'our Race' (l. 49, *PWI*), 'our Party' (l. 69, *PWI*), and had a child who was a Gypsy (although this is complicated further by the rape that resulted in this pregnancy). Crabbe's poem, then, is not only about the Gypsies (real or counterfeit), but also about the relationship between human and divine law.

George Crabbe and Hannah More, as representatives of different branches of Christianity, have vastly diverging opinions of the Gypsies. Whilst both believe in a benevolent and forgiving God, More's interpretation is far stricter. For More, God is of 'infinite power, justice, and holiness',²²⁸ and 'can't save the vilest Harlot',²²⁹ but it seems doubtful that she would look kindly on Crabbe's vagrant woman. The aspect of Gypsy life on which Crabbe and More diverge most strongly is fortune-telling.

As discussed earlier, More views anyone who tries to foresee the future as transgressing the laws of God:

Never believe that God conceals his will from a sober Christian who obey[s] his laws, and reveals it to a vagabond gipsy who runs up and down breaking the laws both of God and man. King Saul never consulted the witch till he had left off serving God. The Bible will direct us what to do better than any conjurer, and there are no days unlucky but those which we make so by our own vanity, folly, and sin.²³⁰

²²⁷ 'The Gospel according to St Luke – Chapter 15.7', *The Holy Bible, King James Version* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1611), in *Credo Reference* <http://www.credoreference.com/entry/cupkjvbible/the_gospel_according_to_saint_luke_chapter_15> [Last accessed 24 May 2011].

²²⁸ *The Story of Hester Wilmot: Part One*, in *Tales for the Common People*, p. 105.

²²⁹ *The Story of Sinful Sally*, line 157, in *Tales for the Common People*, p. 136.

²³⁰ *Tawney Rachel*, in *Tales for the Common People*, p. 95.

Crabbe implicitly condemns the practice of fortune-telling, but he also shows it to be a fairly harmless sin:

Ceaseless I rov'd the Country round,
To win my Bread by fraudulent Arts,
And long a poor Subsistence found,
By spreading Nets for simple Hearts.
Though poor, and abject, and despis'd,
Their Fortunes to the Crowd I told;
I gave the Young the Love they priz'd,
And promis'd Wealth to bless the Old;
Schemes for the Doubtful I devis'd,
And Charms for the Forsaken sold. (II. 79-88, *PW* I)

Crabbe's Gypsy woman now appears to have almost turned into some sort of joy-bringer for her customers. Through Crabbe's word choice, the 'sin' of fortune-telling does not seem to be as grave as More believes; Crabbe's Gypsy is merely providing a harmless service that can bring happiness to the people who hear it. The words 'Love', 'priz'd' and 'bless' detract from the seriousness of the crime, and the Gypsy woman's actions become understandable, even benevolent.

At the end of the poem the focus is on the child that the Gypsy woman cares for, and who, indirectly, is the cause of the court hearing. The concentration on the child, 'that Heir to Shame and Pain' (II. 101, *PW* I), foreshadows Matthew Arnold's attention to the Gypsy child in 'To A Gipsy Child by the Sea-Shore', the 'meek anticipant of that sure pain' (41).²³¹ There is also, however, a sense of hope in the poem, not only of the Gypsy woman's redemption, 'There is to all a Pardon brought [...] 'Tis full when found, 'tis found if sought' (II. 129-31, *PW* I), but also for the future of the child:

Yet as the dark and muddy Tide,
When far from its polluted Source,
Becomes more pure, and purified,
Flows in a clear and happy Course; –
In thee, dear Infant! so may end,
Our Shame, in thee our Sorrows cease!
And thy pure Course will then extend,

²³¹ *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, ed. by Kenneth Allott, 2nd edn, rev. by Miriam Allott (London: Longman, 1965; 2nd edn 1979), p. 25. This poem is discussed in Chapter IV.

In Floods of Joy, o'er Vales of Peace. (II. 111-18, *PWI*)

Aside from the description of the atrocities that the Gypsy woman suffered at the hands of the tribe she joined, the lines quoted above are the closest that the poem comes to condemning the Gypsies: the hope that the child will be able to lead a better life away from the tribe, brought up by good people, away from bad influences. Crabbe also suggests that it is upbringing, not birth, which determines a person's character.²³²

'The Hall of Justice', like More's *Tawney Rachel*, fails to resolve all of the issues it introduces: the Gypsy woman will still be punished for her crimes, and although it is suggested that she will be forgiven (by God, not necessarily by society), the question of the child's future is still a significant problem. Trumpener is, therefore, correct in part when she identifies that Crabbe has 'anxieties about Gypsies as a social force', but the problem of how to rehabilitate the Gypsies is not necessarily the only anxiety that appears. Although the Gypsy woman can hope that once the baby is separated from her life of ill repute it will prosper, the reality of the situation made that far from definite. Just as More has Rachel transported to the colonies, leaving behind her many children to be cared for by charities, Crabbe's Gypsy child is thrown into a similar predicament.

Coupled with the concern about the child's future is the anxiety that whilst this particular Gypsy woman may repent of her sins and see the errors of her former behaviour, there are still many others like her who are 'unreformed'. Like Black Giles (Tawney Rachel's husband), Crabbe's Gypsy woman's husbands are all punished for their crimes with death. While More is indignant in her prose and harsh with her punishments, Crabbe seeks an answer for the social evils he sees. Crabbe recognizes the 'sins' of the Gypsies, he is also aware of the

²³² The notion that a person's upbringing influences character more than birth does is also raised in 'The Lover's Journey', discussed next in this chapter.

negative aspects of society that perpetuate the need for begging and stealing; 'The Lover's Journey' is a poem that deals with just these sorts of problems.²³³

At the end of his encounter with the Gypsies in 'The Lover's Journey', Orlando leaves saying "Rogues [...] | Doubtless they are, but merry rogues they be" (196-7). Frank Whitehead argues that this attitude demonstrates 'the lover's idealizing vision [that has] betrayed him into a dangerous insensitivity to the moral aspect of human character and conduct'.²³⁴ Presumably the 'idealizing vision' can also betray others into a 'dangerous insensitivity' to moral conduct, and this is the argument that can be levelled at many of the authors and poets who celebrate the lives of the Gypsies: they wilfully avoid the negative aspects of Gypsy life because they are so fixated on the joys and positive aspects.

Orlando's cheerfulness – 'Every heart seem'd happy like his own' (203, *PW* II) – is very much at odds with the scene of the Gypsy camp before him. Initially, the description of the camp fits in with picturesque theory and for a few lines the Gypsies' camp seems to be a simple adornment to a quintessential English summer scene. Everything appears tranquil: the sun is shining and the Gypsies are quietly getting on with their business:

Again, the country was enclos'd, a wide
And sandy road had banks on either side;
Where, lo! a hollow on the left appear'd,
And there a Gipsy-tribe their tent had rear'd;
'Twas open spread, to catch the morning sun (141-5, *PW* II)

As has been shown with other descriptions of Gypsy settlements, this camp is set in a typical location: sheltered in a hollow, at the side of a road and in-between the open countryside and the town. This signals the liminality of the group and it affords them the best access to passing travellers.

In the use of 'enclos'd' there is an awareness of the different possibilities that the word suggests. There is a reference to the Enclosure Acts that were threatening the Gypsies'

²³³ George Crabbe: *The Complete Poetical Works*, II, pp. 132-42.

²³⁴ Frank Whitehead, *George Crabbe: A Reappraisal* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1995), p. 139.

lifestyle, but there is also a simple indication of the natural changes that would be expected between open heath land and the town. Finally, perhaps at odds with the suggestion of the Enclosure Acts, there is a hint at security for the Gypsies: the spot is fairly secret, nestled in a hollow and gives the opportunity for privacy from prying eyes, if necessary. What is safe and hidden for the Gypsies, however, could also mean a threat to any traveller unlucky enough to be passing by. In this sense, the word takes on a slightly sinister meaning and it is in just this sort of location that Harriet meets the Gypsies in *Emma* (discussed below).

The lines that follow the description further destabilize this scene, which Orlando completely misreads, and it is again a warning against the dangers of projecting one's own feelings onto the scene. Crabbe highlights his point by framing 46 lines of detailed description of the Gypsies' appearance with Orlando's action of giving out his money: 'While yet *Orlando* held his pence in hand' (149, *PW* II, italics in original), to 'This said, a portion from his purse was thrown' (202, *PW* II). While any observant person would perhaps think more deeply on the situation of the Gypsies, Orlando fails to take in the scene around him properly: 'But this *Orlando* felt not' (196, *PW* II, italics in original). There are a few comments on his reactions to the Gypsies: 'a look of languor he descries' (153, *PW* II); 'He mark'd the features of her vagrant race' (156, *PW* II); 'looks of pity in the Trav'ler's face' (162, *PW* II), but Orlando starts and ends his only engagement with the Gypsies with a financial transaction. This gesture is, apparently, enough to put the Gypsies out of his thoughts: 'He hurried forth, for now the town was nigh — | "The happiest man of mortal men am I"' (204-5, *PW* II).

As opposed to the impenetrable 'knot' of Wordsworth's Gypsies, Crabbe gives minutely observed vignettes of each member of his Gypsy family, containing complexities and uncertainties that render Orlando's thoughtlessness even more worrying. The first member of the Gypsy family that the reader encounters properly is the daughter, the portrayal of which avoids the sort of judgements that an author such as Hannah More might make:

He saw their Sister on her duty stand;
 Some twelve years old, demure, affected, sly,
 Prepar'd the force of early powers to try;
 Sudden a look of languor he descries,
 And well-feign'd apprehension in her eyes;
 Train'd but yet savage, in her speaking face,
 He mark'd the features of her vagrant race;
 When a light laugh and roguish leer express'd
 The vice implanted in her youthful breast. (150-8, *PW II*)

The overall impression of this description is that the girl is acting her part. The girl's character might be expected from a Gypsy, but it is complicated by Orlando's notice of her 'languor', a word that implies ill health, lethargy and dullness. Crabbe is not prepared to portray this girl as simply bad, but adds a dejectedness and world-weariness to her character that belies her years. At the same time that Orlando notices the girl's languor, he also notes her 'well-feign'd' apprehension; she exhibits a mixture of qualities that, ultimately, make her character unreadable.

A sense of sympathy or pity for the girl comes, in part, from Crabbe's suggestion that her characteristics are learnt rather than innate. The young girl who has 'vice implanted in her youthful breast' (158, *PW II*) echoes the Gypsy woman in 'The Hall of Justice', who was 'Train'd in the arts' of the Gypsies, and opens up a debate as to the nature of 'Gypsiness': is it a part of one's character from birth, or does one gradually become a Gypsy? In this poem, and in 'The Hall of Justice', Crabbe does not appear to believe that people – Gypsies or otherwise – are born bad; features may be inherited: 'in her speaking face, | He mark'd the features of her vagrant race' (155-6, *PW II*), but character is acquired; even 'real' Gypsies are, to some extent, counterfeit.

The Gypsy father is obviously supposed to be the provider for the family and in this capacity has been sent out to find (steal) wood for the fire: 'the Father, who from fences nigh | Had brought fuel for the fire's supply' (163-4, *PW II*).²³⁵ His efforts are rewarded only by a 'feeble blaze' (165, *PW II*), which is the cause of his dejection. The notice of the weak fire is an

²³⁵ See Chapter I for a discussion of wood-theft.

echo of the Gypsies' fire in *The Task*, which 'just saves unquench'd | The spark of life' (l. 566-7). The fire often appears as a symbol of the Gypsies' struggle for existence, and so the father's inability to provide properly for his family emasculates him, sending him to the outskirts of the family. It is the son, not the father, who is alert to any potential outside threat.

The mother's state of undress and reclining position fits in with stereotypes of slovenly Gypsy women. As with the description of her daughter, there is a suggestion of the mother's sexuality and immodesty: she is lying on a dirty cover from the bed, 'negligently dress'd' (168, *PW II*), as she feeds her baby, 'an infant at her breast' (169, *PW II*). Yet Crabbe does not simply dismiss the woman as sluttish and wanton, he draws out a sadder history for her by mentioning that 'In her wild face some touch of grace remain'd, | Of vigour palsied and of beauty stain'd' (170-1, *PW II*). There is again an echo of the Gypsy woman in 'The Hall of Justice': 'The Age, which these sad Looks declare, | Is Sorrow's Work, it is not Time's' (43-4, *PW I*). Both of these women had a potential which, had circumstances been otherwise, could have led them in a different direction. Although Crabbe never condones the lives and choices of these women, he makes the reader aware of mitigating circumstances.

It is clear that it is the grandmother (and possibly the mother, when she does not have a young baby) who is the main breadwinner of the group: she 'reads the Milk-maid's fortune in her hands' (177, *PW II*), the only mention of 'proper' labour in the passage. This explains the women's status, superior to men, the mother's wrath at her useless 'mate' (172, *PW II*), and the grandfather's uselessness now that his 'worthless labours' are done (184, *PW II*). Again, it is suggested in the description of the grandmother that it is the life these people lead that makes them how they are, rather than them being created that way: the grandmother's face shows a permanent falsehood that has been 'assum'd through years' (178, *PW II*). Crabbe's description of the women is damning, but he chooses not to comment further on their morals and turns, instead, to draw a moving picture of the grandfather.

In the character of the grandfather, Crabbe gathers all of the sympathy for the Gypsies in 'The Lover's Journey'. The description of the old, useless and worn-out man, 'Neglected, lost, and living but by fits' (183, *PWII*), only 'half protected' (185, *PWII*) and 'half support[ed]' (186, *PWII*) by the 'vicious Son' (185, *PWII*), is extremely poignant. Crabbe saves his final sympathy for the 'Grandsire' (182, *PWII*), who looks on his progeny with despair for their future. The worst fears for the infant Gypsy in 'The Hall of Justice' are seen in the sadness of the old man's face when he looks at his grandchildren. He appears:

To trace the progress of their future years;
Through what strange course of misery, vice, deceit,
Must wildly wander each unpractis'd cheat;
What shame and grief, what punishment and pain,
Sport of fierce passions, must each child sustain –
Ere they like him approach their latter end,
Without a hope, a comfort, or a friend! (189-95, *PWII*)

The word 'trace' in line 189 is echoed from line 178, where the grandmother 'Trac[es] the lines of life' in the milkmaids' hands in order to tell their fortunes. Although doubt is thrown on the predictions that the old lady makes (her features over the years have assumed a 'steady falsehood' (179, *PWII*)), and we know from 'The Hall of Justice' that the Gypsy fortune-tellers often made up the fates of their customers, there seems to be some truth in the fortune that the Gypsy grandfather sees for his grandchildren. A sense of inevitable sorrow hangs over the futures of the small children in the Gypsy family, and the sad truth of the children's fortune, compared with the happiness that was most likely predicted for their grandmother's customers, adds an extra poignancy to the scene; clearly not all Gypsy fortunes are made up. In this sense of inevitable sorrow there is another thematic overlap with Matthew Arnold's poem 'To A Gipsy Child by the Sea-Shore': both poets insist that the children's suffering is unavoidable, although Crabbe has made his children unaware of their fate, whereas Arnold's child is sure of his.

Orlando's happiness is shocking when we consider the poignancy of the figure of the grandfather, discussed above. His summary of the encounter is, for a lover, characteristically shallow:

Rogues, [...]
 Doubtless they are, but merry rogues they be;
 They wander round the land, and be it true,
 They break the laws – then let the laws pursue
 The wanton idlers; for the life they live,
 Acquit I cannot, but I can forgive. (196-201, *PW* II)

Orlando is in no position to forgive anybody; his negligent charity and lack of empathy present a serious problem.

As we have seen, many depictions of Gypsies involve the giving of charity. The nature of the Gypsies' lives, and the near-impossibility of accounting for all of them, made organized charity an unlikely option, had anyone been willing to found one at this particular point. In his discussion of legislation for the relief of the poor, Gary Harrison writes:

Generally to be considered productive members of society who would refuse to accept poor relief even under the most abject conditions, the industrious poor were considered, ironically, those who best deserved respect and charity from those who were not poor. The idle poor, on the other hand, those who could not or would not work, were considered to be the undeserving poor [They] were considered to be objects of contempt, were not eligible for private charity (which would only encourage their profligacy) and so fell upon the parish and the workhouse for a grudging relief.²³⁶

Harrison's argument can be applied to the case of the Gypsies. Giving charity to those who were unwilling to help themselves was seen as a means of encouraging profligacy and idleness; giving charity to Gypsies was seen only to persuade the Gypsies to beg more and work even less.

In his essay 'The Gypsies', John Thelwall tackles the problem of charity and the Gypsies, although the group that Sylvanus Theophrastus encounters is markedly different from that encountered by Orlando:

²³⁶ Gary Harrison, *Wordsworth's Vagrant Muse* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994), p. 34.

The figure that now presented itself with supplicating strains before us, at the end of a little woody lane (in which several of his companions, stretched at their ease upon the grass, and under the arching boughs, were boiling their sooty kettle over a little fire) was a robust and ruddy youth [...] with nothing of evident distress about him, except the ragged apparel, which, according to the *custom* of these people, scarcely concealed his nakedness. The plaintive cant of his voice, however, was acted with such address that, in spite of his sleek appearance, the heart of the Ambulator was affected, and he was going almost mechanically to give him money.²³⁷

The differences between this encounter and that in 'The Lover's Journey' are clear, but there are equally obvious similarities, namely in the instinctive action of the onlooker to give charity.

Sylvanus Theophrastus, unlike Orlando, hesitates and asks the Gypsy:

"Is this an object of charity?" [...] "Look at those limbs, and that healthful countenance: and then tell me whether you consider it to be part of a professor of real benevolence, to encourage his vagrant indolence? Misery, indeed, ought to be relieved, even when the effect of vice; and he himself is vicious who can be deaf to its appeal: but if *Labour*, as must be admitted, constitutes the real wealth of the community, it can never be the part of a good member of society to contribute to the *useless* and the *idle*."²³⁸ (Italics in original)

The Gypsies that Orlando meet have signs of ill-health and misery, but there is evidence of their ability to work and their unwillingness to do so, which complicates the moral situation.

Encounters between begging Gypsies and other members of society often open difficult questions about the motivation of charitable donation. The issue of giving charity to the Gypsies who beg and seem willfully to refuse to help themselves is also raised in Harriet's encounter with the Gypsies in Austen's *Emma*, when she is 'set upon' by a gang of Gypsies. With Austen, however, the motivation of gentle society is scrutinized with an irony that far surpasses Crabbe.

Jane Austen

In a comment on the 'brief but famous [Gypsy] episode in *Emma*', Katie Trumpener writes:

Austen glosses and reworks [late eighteenth-century Gypsy reception's] almost hysterical moralism in the face of Gypsy intransigence [...] [S]pecial care must be

²³⁷ John Thelwall, 'The Gipsies', in *The Peripatetic or, Sketches of the Heart, Of Nature and Society; In a Series of Politico-Sentimental Journals, In Verse and Prose of the Excursions of Sylvanus Theophrastus; Supposed to be Written by Himself*, ed. by Judith Thompson (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2001), p. 195.

²³⁸ Thelwall, 'The Gipsies', p. 196.

taken to hold on to a history that exists only as an oral tradition: the psychic trauma of social violence is subsumed into a narratological compulsion to repeat.²³⁹

Trumpener is correct in positing that the inhabitants of Highbury cannot resist the desire to turn the brief episode into a continuation of the long oral history of the Gypsies, embellishing it and giving it more dramatic impact, but the critic also falls into the trap of assuming that the incident is one of 'social violence', rather than accounting for Austen's rather more humorous view of the event.

The other works discussed in this chapter have demonstrated how negative depictions of Gypsies unsettle ideas of property, belonging, religion and law. In *Emma* Austen also appears to draw on a received negative view of the Gypsies, but for satiric effect. The Gypsy episode in *Emma* relies on the preconceptions and prejudices of the reader towards the Gypsies as much as those of the characters. In a novel that is all about mistaken perception, can we be sure that the Gypsies are not there as a representation of a 'truth universally acknowledged'? The narrative and the ensuing tale that is repeated to Emma's little nephews 'every day', aggrandizes the incident, which otherwise 'dwindled soon into a matter of little importance' (336).²⁴⁰

Harriet Smith comes across the Gypsies in the company of another boarder, Miss Bickerton, on 'the Richmond road, which, though apparently public enough for safety, had led them into alarm' (333). The initial description of the encounter sets up what I argue to be a more humorous episode than has hitherto been seen. Rather than the 'violence' that Trumpener mentions, this passage seems more to be a demonstration of how Austen's character(s) overreact and misread events and circumstances. As Nord, Kramp and Mooneyham White have all noted, the location of the Gypsy encounter is symbolic.²⁴¹ It is outside Highbury but not too far away, about 'half a mile'; it is 'deeply shaded by elms', in a

²³⁹ 'The Time of the Gypsies', p. 868.

²⁴⁰ Jane Austen, *Emma*, ed. by Robert W. Chapman (Oxford: Clarendon, 1923; repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). Page numbers are displayed parenthetically in the text.

²⁴¹ *Gypsies and the British Imagination*, p. 4; Michael Kramp, 'The Woman, the Gypsies, and England: Harriet Smith's National Role', *College Literature*, 31:1 (Winter 2004), p. 150; Laura Mooneyham White, 'Beyond the Romantic Gypsy: Narrative Disruptions and Ironies in Austen's *Emma*', *Papers on Language and Literature*, 44:3 (Summer 2008), p. 314.

retired spot 'on a broader patch of greensward'²⁴² by the side of the road (333). This location is, as has been seen elsewhere, a quintessential Gypsy spot, between what is known (at least, what is 'known' by most of the female inhabitants of this novel) and what is unknown and (almost) foreign. Nord argues that 'Gypsies tend to exist not in the midst but on the periphery of British settlement, so they were present but separate, often within view but almost never absorbed, encountered but seldom intimately known'.²⁴³ The existence of the Gypsies on the periphery of society hints at danger and 'anxiety about the Gypsies as shadowy, haunting discursive figures',²⁴⁴ but the events that occur serve to negate any real threat that the Gypsies might pose.

Significantly, Austen describes the group of Gypsies as a 'party' (333): there is no evidence of Wordsworth's troubling, indistinguishable 'knot' of bodies, nor are they described as the 'horde' or 'infestation' that can be found in other contemporary accounts. Austen uses this word later when she reports Mrs Elton's desire to picnic at Donwell Abbey:

There is to be no form or parade – a sort of *gipsy party*. – We are to walk about [Knightley's] gardens, and gather the strawberries ourselves, and sit under trees [...] it is to be all out of doors [...] (355, italics mine)

Mrs Elton's desire to ride on a donkey continues the Gypsy theme: 'I wish we had a donkey. The thing would be for us all to come on donkies [*sic*]' (356). Her plans for the picnic present a more fashionable, Bohemian version of the Gypsies' existence: the picnic is to be in a safe place (in the grounds of Donwell Abbey), and the only food that the group would have to find for themselves is the strawberries.

Mooneyham White notes that by having the picnic 'under trees' the group would be in a very similar place to where Harriet was 'attacked' by the Gypsies, and, the critic argues,

²⁴² Mooneyham White notes that the word 'greensward' is 'an archaic term Austen uses nowhere else in her fiction', 'Beyond the Romantic Gypsy', p. 314. The use of this word suits the romanticized and fictionalized history of the Gypsies.

²⁴³ *Gypsies and the British Imagination*, p. 4.

²⁴⁴ 'The Time of the Gypsies', p. 868.

'Austen hints at the dangers of Mrs Elton's romantic pretensions',²⁴⁵ but it seems more that Austen uses these parallels to mock the inhabitants of Highbury for their fear on hearing of Harriet's Gypsy encounter. Mooneyham White then mentions that 'Mr Knightley rebukes Mrs Elton, the world of the gypsies, and the romantic view of the gypsies, all at the same time'.²⁴⁶ Certainly Mr Knightley (and Austen) rebuke Mrs Elton's foolish fantasies and her romanticized view of the Gypsies, but he does not appear to make any comment, rebuke or otherwise, on the lives of the actual Gypsies.

Whilst Harriet's terror of the Gypsies' perceived threat may be understandable in the circumstances (she was, after all, alone on a public road, thanks to her friend's self-preserving and unladylike swift departure), any real terror or threat in the Gypsy episode is negated by the actual description of events. The humour of Miss Bickerton's flight is unmistakeable, as Austen describes her steeple-chasing escape: she 'ran up a steep bank, cleared a slight hedge at the top, and made the best of her way by a short cut back to Highbury' (333). The source of Miss Bickerton's alarm is merely 'a child on the watch, come towards them to beg' (333). Harriet's rather pathetic efforts to flee the Gypsies are equally humorous, although tempered with a certain degree of sympathy for the poor, incapacitated girl: 'her first attempt to mount the bank brought on such a return of [cramp] as made her absolutely powerless' (333). At this point, however, Harriet's fear can only be attributed to what the Gypsies *might* do, and have historically and anecdotally been known to do, rather than anything that they attempt on this occasion.

Austen shows that the Gypsies are more opportunists than deliberately intent on preying on young, vulnerable girls. The statement 'How the trampers might have behaved, had the young ladies been more courageous, must be doubtful' (333), implies that the Gypsies would not have been so bold had the girls not instantly shown such alarm. This statement is

²⁴⁵ 'Beyond the Romantic Gypsy', p. 324.

²⁴⁶ 'Beyond the Romantic Gypsy', p. 324.

clarified by the assertion that follows: 'but such an invitation for attack could not be resisted' (333), which again implies the opportunity that the occasion presents to the Gypsies, rather than any *malus animus*. Austen's use of the word 'attack' is also undercut as we learn that Harriet was only 'assailed by half a dozen children, headed by a stout woman and a great boy' (333), a description that swiftly quells any doubts about the viciousness of the incident.²⁴⁷

Austen's description of the Gypsies as 'impertinent in look, though not absolutely in word' (334) again underlines the separation between Harriet's hysterical perception of events and the reality of them as shown in the narrative (which has a resonance with Crabbe's argument about the misleading power of subjectivity). In Austen's description, the Gypsies are little more than a rowdy group who spy an opportunity to get some money from a scared girl, but in Harriet's eyes they become more and more terrifying so that she has to beg them 'not to use her ill' (334). Austen's portrayal of the terrors the Gypsies can have for young girls are not altogether unfounded, as a report on the 14th June 1802 from the *Hampshire Telegraph and Portsmouth Gazette* testifies:

[About] seven months ago, being sent a small distance out of the town [a girl] was met by a gang of gypsies, consisting of five men and six women, who seized her and forcibly carried her away to their camp, in another part of the country, at a considerable distance, having first stripped her of her own clothes, and in exchange, dressed her in some of their rags [...] in this garb she had travelled about the country with them ever since, treated as the most abject slave in every respect, and her life threatened if she endeavoured to escape, or divulged her story.²⁴⁸

Austen aims to play on the prejudices instilled in the public by articles such as this.

The end of the encounter sees the Gypsies as little more than rowdy beggars:

[Harriet] was then able to walk, though but slowly, and was moving away – but her terror and her purse were too tempting, and she was followed, or rather surrounded, by the whole gang, demanding more. (334)

²⁴⁷ Mooneyham White notes the potential danger of the attack on Harriet, and points out that the reader initially does not know whether there are any men in the Gypsy group. If there had been, the event would have had a much more serious and unsettling significance. See 'Beyond the Romantic Gypsy', p. 310.

²⁴⁸ 'Gypsies', *Hampshire Telegraph and Portsmouth Gazette* (14 June 1802), p. 4. This article was also printed in the *Caledonian Mercury* (12 June 1802), p. 2.

The Gypsies are viewed as opportunistic and, although they are described as surrounding Harriet, when the reader remembers that the group consists of little more than seven or eight Gypsies (most of whom are children), the sinister aspect of their actions diminishes. When Frank Churchill arrives on the scene (and the 'gang' of Gypsies transforms back into a 'party'), 'unseen by the whole party till almost close to them', any threat has all but disappeared. As Mooneyham White notes, Frank's status as Harriet's saviour is rather spoilt by the lack of danger that she was in,²⁴⁹ and the fact that he is extremely un-gentlemanly when he terrifies the group of children and a woman: 'The terror which the woman and boy had been creating in Harriet was then their own portion. He had left them completely frightened' (334).

Austen's portrayal of the Gypsies in *Emma* deploys a double narrative that presents two different views of the Gypsies at the same time. Harriet's fear of the Gypsies is presented alongside the account of the 'real' event as it occurred, and thus the fear is lessened. Austen's opportunist Gypsies are an embodiment of the fears that Thelwall's Sylvanus Theophrastus has about the perils of charity-giving: by the giving of charity the Gypsies are only encouraged to beg more, rather than being forced, through want, to make themselves useful to society. Yet Austen is not really concerned with the ethical implications of her Gypsy characters; they serve more as a plot device to prevent Emma from realizing that the greater threat to Harriet came from Harriet's misfortune at the ball at The Crown, rather than from any danger arising from her encounter with the Gypsies.²⁵⁰ The fact that Harriet feels more isolated and threatened at the ball tells the reader that the Gypsy encounter was a minor incident and it is only Emma who views Frank as the memorable saviour.

As Trumpener identifies, the Gypsy episode soon becomes drawn into the oral tradition, although she is mistaken in placing such a heavy emphasis on the supposed violence of the encounter. Mooneyham White also notes how, through repetition of the story to the

²⁴⁹ 'Beyond the Romantic Gypsy', p. 314.

²⁵⁰ 'Beyond the Romantic Gypsy', p. 309, pp. 321-2.

young Knightley boys, 'Harriet's adventure has become lore, gypsy lore'.²⁵¹ I would hesitate to use this suggestive term 'gypsy lore' because it implies something internal about the Gypsy group – this incident, in fact, tells us nothing about *Gypsy* lore, rather it shows us how *folklore* is created. Harriet's story certainly adds an embellishment to what is 'known' about the Gypsies; in the repetition of the story to Emma's nephews Austen acknowledges the prevalence of fictions that society has created about the Gypsies as a race.

In this chapter I have examined a range of texts that supposedly portray Gypsies in a negative light. I have argued that this negativity is undermined by the ambiguity evident in the portrayals, which allows for a more open reappraisal of the works and the writers themselves. Each writer tries to 'read' the Gypsies that they see, but their attempts to do so are continually frustrated. In White's case, the author is unconcerned with what the 'true' Gypsy is – he even negates any possibility of discovering more about the Gypsies because he doubts that he could meet an 'intelligent person among them' – and the anecdote that he recounts poses more questions about the Gypsies than it answers. Hannah More's Gypsy, Tawney Rachel, is a complex character, imbued with not only the worst traits of the Gypsies (she is deceitful and dishonest) but also the worst traits of the settled people (slovenliness and a lack of care for her family or wider society); it is crucial to remember that Tawney Rachel is a 'counterfeit' Gypsy. More attempts to contain the threat that Tawney Rachel poses by sending her off to the colonies, but again, as with White, we are left with many unanswered questions: what happens to Rachel's children, and why is Rachel portrayed as a Gypsy in the first place? William Wordsworth's Gypsies are completely unreadable – we know little about them other than that they are human and they have not moved – but their total separation from society and all things 'useful', and Wordsworth's disproportionate reaction to the group's stasis, tells us much about the poet's preoccupation with the validity of poetry as an occupation. George Crabbe stands alone in this chapter as a writer who seems the most sympathetic to his Gypsy characters; his

²⁵¹ 'Beyond the Romantic Gypsy', p. 322.

portrayal of the Gypsies shows his concern for the way that society treats the group of outcasts, especially in the way that charity-giving only perpetuates poverty. Finally, in Jane Austen's Gypsy episode in *Emma*, we see how received stereotypes of the Gypsies are presented to undermine society's perceptions of the group; the whole episode is an exercise in misreading and the continual repetition of the story shows how society fictionalizes Gypsies and perpetuates stereotypes.

In the next chapter I look at supposedly 'positive' representations of Gypsies and again argue that ambiguity destabilizes these assumptions. By examining works by Samuel Rogers, Walter Scott and John Clare I will again show how representations of the Gypsy figure change the way that we look at writers themselves, as well as the works that they produce.

CHAPTER III

'Old Meg she was a gipsey':

Retrospective Views of the Gypsy in Poetry and Prose, 1792–1841

In Chapter II, my focus on depictions of Gypsies in literature that have been seen as 'negative' portrayals demonstrated how misleading this simple categorization has been as it overlooks the full complexity of each text. In this chapter I will examine examples of literary Gypsies that can be categorized as 'positive' and consider how these representations are just as multifaceted as their 'negative' counterparts. As in Chapter II, the texts I discuss cover a range of genres and forms: from Samuel Rogers' romanticized memories in *The Pleasures of Memory* (1792), to Walter Scott's portrayal of the infamous Gypsy Meg Merrilies in *Guy Mannering* (1815), and finally on to John Clare's portrayal of Gypsy life in 'The Gipsy Camp' (1841) and his other Gypsy poems. Through a close reading of these poems in the light of recent criticism, I show that 'paper Gypsies' continually evade easy critical categorization, shadowing the problems of legal codification that I identified in Chapter I. In Rogers' and Scott's texts the Gypsy also figures socio-economic change in England and Scotland, as a double to the settled cottager; a doubling that, in Clare's work is thwarted by the poet's own subjectivity.

Samuel Rogers

The current unpopularity of Samuel Rogers' poetry and his relative obscurity has been well documented.²⁵² Although in the past twenty-five years some critics have discussed the case for a re-evaluation of his work, Rogers remains much less well-known than he was in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.²⁵³

²⁵² 'In [...] the first half of the nineteenth century [Rogers] has an importance which is in sharp contrast to his present obscurity [...] Even before Rogers' death [contemporaries] judged his work as essentially worthless', E. Hall, 'Samuel Rogers (1763-1855): The Case for A Reassessment', in *Imperfect Apprehensions: Essays in English Literature in Honour of G. A. Wilkes* ed. by Geoffrey Little (Sydney: Challis, 1996), pp. 188-201.

²⁵³ Avery Gaskins, 'Samuel Rogers: A Revaluation', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 16:3 (Summer 1985), pp. 146-9.

The poem *The Pleasures of Memory* was extremely popular when it was first printed in 1792. Observing this, Richard E. Roberts notes that '[a] first edition of 250 copies [of the poem] was printed and sold out immediately',²⁵⁴ whilst William St Clair estimates that the publishers produced around 22, 000 copies of the 1793 edition of the poem.²⁵⁵ *The Pleasures of Memory* was reprinted nineteen times between 1792 and 1816; Edward Moxon's edition of the poem was published in 1838.²⁵⁶ The popularity of the poem is important because of the impact it would have had on the wider reading public. In this context, it is fair to assume that Rogers' Gypsy figure would have become a familiar character: John Clare's later reworking of Rogers' Gypsy encounter in 'The Gipseys Camp' (1819-20), discussed below, is one example of the poem's enduring impact in the period. Peter Murphy argues that '[when reading Rogers' poetry, we] remember Goldsmith, Gray, Collins, Warton, Akenside, and some others'.²⁵⁷ *The Pleasures of Memory* is, then, an example of a text constructed from memories of the poetry of Rogers' predecessors, just as Clare's poem is a reconstruction of Rogers' own memories.

William St Clair argues that the dissemination of imagery and thought from poetry and prose permeated further into society than estimated production figures might show. As he demonstrates, many people can read or be influenced by an individually purchased text:

In the Romantic period the selection of the books, the reading, and the subsequent discussion, were often collectively decided through book clubs, but every reading family was, to an extent, a reading society[.]²⁵⁸

St Clair also emphasizes the extent to which popular texts became part of the public consciousness through frequent re-reading and memorization:

²⁵⁴ Richard Ellis Roberts, *Samuel Rogers and His Circle* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1910), p. 21.

²⁵⁵ William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 218. *The Pleasures of Memory* is listed as the sixth most popular 'individual long romantic poem', ranked by St Clair in the order of the number of copies produced.

²⁵⁶ *The Reading Nation*, p. 632. Moxon's edition of the poem appeared eight years after Rogers had lent him £500 to set up a publishing company.

²⁵⁷ Peter T. Murphy, 'Climbing Parnassus, & Falling Off', in *At the Limits of Romanticism. Essays in Cultural, Feminist, and Materialist Criticism*, ed. by Mary A. Favret & Nicola J. Watson (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 42.

²⁵⁸ *The Reading Nation*, p. 394.

Sometimes the books were re-read because nothing different was available, but for many readers, frequent re-reading was a conscious choice [...] Then there was memory [...] Committing long passages of text to memory was additional to, and to an extent substitutable for, the reading of printed books.²⁵⁹

Whilst St Clair's study shows how a text becomes part of the reading nation's consciousness (and, indeed, memory), Rogers' poem, which focuses on private memory, also demonstrates how this private memory becomes public; more specifically, Rogers' poem shows how an individual's memory of a Gypsy becomes a shared idiom.

Murphy describes the plan of *The Pleasures of Memory* as 'purely abstract, [where] movement is produced by opening one cupboard after another, all located in the spacious room labeled "Memory"'.²⁶⁰ For Murphy, this appears to be a fault of the poem: there is no overriding and obvious message that can be drawn from *The Pleasures of Memory*, because 'Memory absorbs all loss, and also all plots'.²⁶¹ It is perhaps more helpful to see the poem as a 'collectio', a term which David Fairer uses to describe the effects of word repetition in Goldsmith's poem *The Deserted Village* (1770),²⁶² but which can also be used to describe the arrangement of memories in *The Pleasures of Memory*. In the 'Analysis of the First Part', Rogers states:

When ideas have any relation whatever, they are attractive of each other in the mind; and the conception of any natural object naturally leads to the idea of another which was connected with it either in time or place, or which can be compared or contrasted with it [...] (vi)²⁶³

The plan of the poem is not, then, as abstract as Murphy would have us believe. Although the memories appear diffuse and varied, Rogers makes it clear, and Fairer's use of the term

²⁵⁹ *The Reading Nation*, p. 395.

²⁶⁰ 'Climbing Parnassus, & Falling Off', p. 46.

²⁶¹ 'Climbing Parnassus, & Falling Off', p. 46.

²⁶² David Fairer, *Organising Poetry: The Coleridge Circle, 1790-98* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 135. Rogers was a well-known 'man of taste' whose house in St James's Place was filled with exquisite paintings, furniture and ornaments: 'The entrance hall set the tone of the house. There were a pair of painted seats [...], a marble-topped table, and on a fluted pedestal a bust of Antinous', Donald Weeks, 'Samuel Rogers: Man of Taste', *PMLA*, 62:2 (June 1947), p. 473.

²⁶³ Samuel Rogers, *The Pleasures of Memory* (London: J. Davis, 1792; repr. Oxford: Woodstock Books, 1989). References to this edition will be displayed parenthetically in the text.

'*collectio*' reiterates, that they are all linked together as part of a collection by an 'associating principle' (vi).

It is precisely because of this emphasis on 'Memory' and the 'associating principle' that Rogers' inclusion of the Gypsy is so interesting. The remembered and romanticized encounter demonstrates the imaginative power that the Gypsy figure held, and shows how these memories, for some, transmuted into 'facts' about Gypsy life. The 'associating principle' that leads the poem straight from 'home' scenes of the village and the hall to that of the Gypsy raises some important questions about the way that the figure was seen: is the nostalgia for one's childhood home set against the vagrant way of life embodied by the Gypsy, or are memories of the Gypsy woven inextricably into the fabric of the old village scene and a way of life that exists now only in a memory?

In his analysis of Rogers' poetry, Murphy argues:

Recovering Rogers might seem oddly useless because, especially today, what we have when we are done is in some ways what we feel we started with: orthodoxy, visibility, centrality. [Rogers' poetry] generates no "problems".²⁶⁴

According to Murphy, critics dislike (or ignore) Rogers' poetry because 'we like troubled and problematic poetry and poets'.²⁶⁵ Murphy decides that the poem is useful for critics only because 'poems are part of the world, and the world is always interesting'; the 'calm' of the poem 'can *only* be thought of as a balm for the pain of the French Revolution and its disappointing violence' (italics mine).²⁶⁶ As we have seen in previous 'picturesque' pleasures, however, the consolation of a framed vignette does not always pacify all elements of the scene.

I would also question Murphy's use of the terms 'orthodoxy, visibility [and] centrality'. The critic relates these to the supposedly 'unproblematic' nature of the poem that seems to be politically orthodox, but this does not explain the 'visibility' or the 'centrality'. Does 'visibility' suggest that the poem has no deeper meaning than that which appears at first sight?

²⁶⁴ 'Climbing Parnassus, & Falling Off', p. 54.

²⁶⁵ 'Climbing Parnassus, & Falling Off', p. 55.

²⁶⁶ 'Climbing Parnassus, & Falling Off', p. 55.

Or does 'centrality' imply an absolutely neutral political standpoint, or a small 'c' conservatism? Taking the figure of the Gypsy as my point of departure, I argue against Murphy's reductive reading of *The Pleasures of Memory*, which is a poem far more subtle and complex than he or Janowitz would have us believe.²⁶⁷

Rogers' emphasis on the passing of time, and the setting of his poem at twilight, fits well with the idea of the Gypsy as an indeterminable figure. Despite Murphy's sense of 'visibility', the reader is left with only a blurred impression of what the Gypsy looked like. Although certain parts of the Gypsy are clearly in focus (we know, for example, that she has a 'sun-burnt face' (l. 109) and wears a 'tatter'd mantle' (l. 110)), these are stereotypical characteristics of the figure. Rogers' Gypsy sits well in a mystical, eerie setting and the generalized description means that the reader can participate in Rogers' experience; it becomes a communal memory.

Although the initial setting of *The Pleasures of Memory* on the village green might seem familiar, Rogers begins to inject the supernatural:

Twilight's soft dews steal o'er the village-green,
With magic tints to harmonize the scene.
Hush'd is the hum that thro' the hamlet broke,
When round the ruins of the ancient oak
The peasants flock'd to hear the minstrel play,
And games and carols clos'd the busy day. (l. 1-6)

Whilst the parallels with the opening passages of Goldsmith's *Deserted Village* are clear, Rogers' interests lie not just in recreating the past, but also in making it mythical. Rogers colours or 'tints' this natural landscape with allusions to the supernatural, a technique that James Hogg uses to great effect in the early-nineteenth century. Unlike Hogg's use of the supernatural,

²⁶⁷ Anne Janowitz's essay 'Clare Among the Gypsies' seems also to follow Murphy's line when she refers to Rogers' apparently straightforward portrayal of the 'sheltered naïf' who was afraid of what the Gypsy might foretell about his life. Janowitz's critique of Rogers stands in an unfavorable comparison with John Clare's portrayal of a more worldly 'youthful self, decidedly *not* in awe [of the Gypsy], and demystifying the gap between poet and gypsy'. The comparison, of course, is not simply a critical intervention: John Clare's poem 'The Gipsys Camp' (1819-20) is, as Janowitz notes, 'obviously Clare's critical response [...] to a passage in Samuel Rogers' 1792 *The Pleasures of Memory*. See 'Clare Among the Gypsies', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 29:3 (Summer 1998), p. 168.

however, Rogers makes it clear that the 'magic' of the scene is not meant to unsettle the readers, but to soothe them and 'harmonize the scene'. Aside from the early mention of the peasants and the minstrel, the speaker also describes how he and his friends 'at midnight's fearful hour, | [...] scal'd the lonely tow'r' (I. 43-4), and appears to make a reference to the murder of the princes in the tower, the children of Edward IV: 'O'er infant innocence to hang and weep, | Murder'd by ruffian hands, when smiling in its sleep' (I. 45-6). This reference, coupled with the description of the 'storied arras' (I. 53) and the heraldic crest on a dim window (I. 55-6), completes the tone of Wartonian gothic gloom.

After Rogers has constructed his lost world of childhood, he acknowledges what has been implicit so far in the poem – that pleasant memories exist to soothe and sustain us:

Childhood's lov'd group revisits every scene,
 [...]
 Indulgent MEMORY wakes, and, lo! they live!
 Cloth'd with far softer hues than Light can give.
 Thou last best friend that Heav'n assigns below,
 To sooth and sweeten all the cares we know (I. 81-6)

The result of this is that memories are often romanticized, with the harsh edges of reality smoothed over: 'What soften'd views thy magic glass reveals, | When o'er the landscape Time's meek twilight steals!' (I. 91-2).

In the Gypsy encounter, however, the pleasure of memory comes from the delight that all children have in being *slightly* scared. Janowitz notes that Clare takes care to distinguish his childhood self from the naïve, over-awed child that was Rogers, and that Clare felt the need to situate 'the anecdote in the concretion and physical reality of poverty driven commoners'.²⁶⁸ While this argument is certainly firmly grounded, it misses out on a key point in Rogers' poem; although Clare may have been concerned with 'concretion and physical reality', Rogers was *deliberately* concerned with the opposite, and wanted to express the powers, as well as the

²⁶⁸ 'Clare Among the Gypsies', p. 168.

pleasures, of memory and the imagination. For Rogers, one of the best ways of expressing the suggestiveness of a child's imagination was through the figure of the Gypsy.

From the beginning of the Gypsy encounter in *The Pleasures of Memory*, it is clear that Rogers deliberately plays on many of the Gypsy stereotypes and adds an element of the grotesque to paint a thrilling and vivid image of the Gypsy woman and her children. The initial description of the Gypsy builds up a scene akin to Act IV, Scene I of *Macbeth*, where the witches make their potion in a bubbling cauldron before they foretell Macbeth's future.²⁶⁹ The similarities between some of the settings and the descriptions in these two passages are striking, although the outcome is, of course, dramatically different. Rogers writes:

Down by yon hazel copse, at evening, blaz'd
The Gipsy's faggot — there we stood and gaz'd;
Gaz'd on her sun-burnt face with silent awe,
Her tatter'd mantle, and her hood of straw;
Her moving lips, her cauldron brimming o'er;
The drowsy brood that on her back she bore;
Imps, in the barn, with mousing owlet bred,
From rifled roost at nightly revel fed;
Whose dark eyes flash'd thro' locks of blackest shade,
When in the breeze the distant watch-dog bay'd:
And heroes fled the Sibyl's mutter'd call,
Whose elfin prowess scal'd the orchard-wall.
As o'er my palm the silver piece she drew,
And traced the line of life with searching view,
How throb'd my fluttering pulse with hopes and fears,
To learn the colour of my future years! (l. 107-22)

The evening setting of the Gypsy encounter is crucial: it allows for ideas of 'witching hours' and the effect of things appearing not quite as they should be. The choice of the word 'cauldron' is clearly aimed at recreating a scene of mystery and magic, as is the description of the Gypsy woman's 'moving lips', which suggest muttered spells and incantations and is echoed later in the poem: 'And heroes fled the Sybil's mutter'd call' (l. 117). The watching children also

²⁶⁹ Claire Lamont makes the same reference to *Macbeth* when discussing literary influences on John Clare's Gypsies, as does Sarah Houghton-Walker, who notes the influence of both Rogers and Shakespeare on Clare's depictions of Gypsies. See Claire Lamont, 'John Clare and the Gypsies', *John Clare Society Journal*, 13 (1994), p. 27; Sarah Houghton-Walker, 'Clare's Gypsies and Literary Influence', *John Clare Society Journal*, 28 (2009), p. 80.

appear to become part of this magical scenery, almost literally spellbound by the vision of the Gypsy woman: 'we stood and gaz'd; | [...] with silent awe' (I. 108-9).

A few lines later in Rogers' poem there is an echo of the supernatural midnight revelry in the graveyard of Burns' 'Tam o' Shanter': the Gypsy's children, her 'brood' (I. 112), are fed 'at nightly revel' (I. 114), a word choice which conjures up the idea of the dancing witches and warlocks that Tam sees. In his study *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture, 1736-1951*, Owen Davies notes the common idea that 'fairies and witches were thought to have a fondness for dancing in meadows and pastures at night'.²⁷⁰ Rogers gestures towards this mythic frisson when he mentions the Gypsies' 'nightly revels'. Rogers' decision to describe the children as 'Imps' (I. 113) emphasizes the connection between this Gypsy and the figure of a witch:

[Witches' familiars] were actually popularly referred to as 'imps' [...] They were thought to be evil spirits who generally manifested themselves in the form of small or domesticated animals. Much of a witch's power was invested in these imps [...]²⁷¹

In line 118, Rogers describes the Gypsy's 'elfin prowess' in scaling an orchard wall. The connection between the Gypsy children and the 'mousing owlet' (I. 113) continues the link between the Gypsies and animals that I discussed in Chapter II.

Gypsies were often referred to as animals, but the comparison of the children to the owlets hints at ideas of metamorphosis, which once again links the Gypsies to magic and superstition. The *Dictionary of Celtic Mythology* notes the threat that shape-shifters represented in folklore and myth: shape-shifters were often fairies or sprites that had the potential to harm, although could also protect and help humans.²⁷² There is no reason to assume that Rogers' Gypsies are as dangerous as their malevolent fairy cousins, but his poem draws on elements of

²⁷⁰ Owen Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture, 1736-1951* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 185.

²⁷¹ *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture, 1736-1951*, p. 181. A definition of 'imp' in the *OED* reads: '4b. A little devil or demon, an evil spirit; esp. in 17th C., one of those with which witches were supposed to be familiar' <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/92030?rskey=psscRJ&result=1&isAdvanced=false>> [Last accessed 15 April 2011].

²⁷² 'bòcan: a hobgoblin, sprite, or spectre [...] The bòcan could be a shape-shifter and a trickster; he was usually dangerous but sometimes helpful', in 'bòcan', *A Dictionary of Celtic Mythology*, James McKillop, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

potential danger and subversion. Although the Gypsies are not seen to do anything more than steal food from the 'rifled roost' (l. 114), their flashing dark eyes and hair 'of blackest shade' (l. 115) hint at their supernatural powers and indicate the underworld; traditionally, references to the shade black are a warning, especially when linked to magic and the supernatural.

It is apparent, therefore, that Rogers' view of the Gypsies is not wholly 'positive', a fact which supports my argument against simplistic categorization of 'positive' and 'negative' attitudes towards Gypsies in literature. Rogers' poem reveals the English public's enduring fascination with Gypsies: in their exotic and unusual ways, they represent an acceptable amount of danger and upset into daily life and, as Janowitz has noted perceptively '[return] as a quasi-fantastical double to the English cottager'.²⁷³ As with the previous chapter, where the unknown element of Gypsy life and nature has allowed writers to project their own anxieties onto the figure, it is now transformed into potential fantasy, but on a figure that is familiar and recognizable enough not to present too much danger in these fantasies.

The fact that the gothic imagery in the poem is specifically English emphasizes Janowitz's comparison of Gypsy and cottager. The inclusion of the 'ancient oak' (l. 4), the 'babes [who] wander'd in the wood' (l. 41),²⁷⁴ 'Robin Hood' (l. 42), and the infants in the tower (l. 43-6) all situate Rogers' memories in English folklore. Although Rogers' Gypsy seems to be alive, unlike the ghostly babes in the wood or the childish imaginings about Robin Hood's 'forest-feats', it is clear that she too has her place in English folklore and history, and seems as ancient as the other symbols of England.

By situating the Gypsies in English history, Rogers does not necessarily make the figure of the Gypsy any less controversial. In fact, he adds to the suggestion of the 'enemy within'

²⁷³ 'Clare Among the Gypsies', p. 167.

²⁷⁴ The story of the 'Babes in the Wood', or *The Children in the Wood*, has been part of English folklore since the late-sixteenth century. The ballad tells the story of two orphaned children who are sent into a forest by their uncle who hopes to steal their inheritance. The children become lost, they die, and their bodies are covered with leaves by robins. See *A Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, ed. by Elizabeth Knowles, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). The tale has been reworked and revised many times since its first appearance. The Special Collections at the University of St Andrews Library holds several copies of the ballad dating from the 1790s onwards, while the University of Florida has digitized its 41 copies of the ballad from the late-nineteenth century.

that I uncovered in Chapter II; this is the 'ontological squatting in their *apparently* human form' (italics mine) that Sarah Houghton-Walker notices about Cowper's Gypsies,²⁷⁵ mentioned in Chapter I. Establishing the Gypsies as part of English history may serve to reassure the reader of the Gypsy's part in English culture, but it does not fully demystify the figure. If we see the Gypsy as a double to the English cottager (a reading with which I agree), the Gypsy becomes a way of exploring the latent power of the rural poor, just as banditti in picturesque images made a space for challenges to civic and patriarchal authority.

Whilst the imagery of *The Pleasures of Memory* links the Gypsy to English folklore and legend, the Gypsy is also, almost by definition, distinctly un-English. This un-Englishness not only refers to the Gypsy in the poem, but also to the characterization of Gypsies in the period: they are an unsettling element in the landscape because of their foreignness and because, as we have seen, they stand on the threshold of the unknown. Rogers' Gypsy straddles the known and unknown, the familiar and the exotic, the natural and the supernatural. The poet never resolves this contradiction and thus we are never quite sure where, as readers and as members of society, we should stand in relation to the figure.

In *The Pleasures of Memory* Rogers provides the exact description of events that Hannah More warns against five years later in *Tawney Rachel*. More's 'sun-burnt oracle of wisdom'²⁷⁶ has its prototype in Rogers' Gypsy, who had a 'sun-burnt face' (I. 109)²⁷⁷ and is identified as a 'Sybil' (I. 117) who could '[trace] the line of life with searching view' (I: 120). Of course, the fortune can only be told if a silver piece has been exchanged: 'o'er my palm the silver piece she drew' (I. 119). The reader, either contemporary or modern day, is preconditioned to be skeptical about and suspicious of anyone pretending to know the future, but for Rogers this

²⁷⁵ Sarah Houghton-Walker, 'William Cowper's Gypsies', *SEL*, 48:3 (Summer 2008), p. 659.

²⁷⁶ Hannah More, *Tawney Rachel* in *Tales for the Common People and Other Cheap Repository Tracts*, ed. by Clare MacDonald Shaw (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2002), p. 90.

²⁷⁷ Robert Browning's description of a Gypsy in 'The Flight of the Duchess' as 'Sunburned all over like an Æthiop' (892) is a verbal echo of this. See 'The Flight of the Duchess', *The Complete Works of Robert Browning with Variant Readings and Annotations*, ed. by Roma A. King et al., 17 vols (Athens, OH: Athens University Press, 1969-1998), IV (1973), pp. 207-36.

belief in the future and destiny appears to be something that he hopes to recover as a pleasure of memory. The Gypsy incident in the poem is a recollection of a time when life appeared to be simple and one's hope and expectations were untarnished by experience and the passage of time; nothing demonstrates this juvenile hope for the future better than an incident involving a time when looking to the future was exciting and full of possibilities: 'How throb'd my fluttering pulse with hopes and fears, | To learn the colour of my future years!' (l. 121-2).

Rogers links the idea of fortune-telling with the theme of time's passing, which is illustrated by the identification of the Gypsy woman as a 'Sibyl', and also by connecting the place where memories reside '[in] the countless chambers of the brain' (l. 169) with the mythical abode of the sibyl in the chambers of Cumae, where she made her prophecies. Rogers hereby links the power of memory with the power of prophecy. The identification of the Gypsy with the Cumaean sybil, or any sibyl for that matter, further mythologizes the figure.

So far, I have alluded to the 'contained danger' element of Rogers' Gypsy episode, but it is important to consider this aspect of the poem in its entirety. Janowitz refers to *The Pleasures of Memory* as a 'literary walking-poem' and labels the Gypsy episode as 'one element in a picturesque scene' and a 'picturesque Gypsy image'.²⁷⁸ The poem offers the visual appeal of the ruins of the old house, the abandoned school, the deserted village, the abundance of trees and woodland, and even the Gypsies: all aspects of the picturesque as set down by Gilpin.²⁷⁹ Rogers has clearly adopted the 'suitable' elements of a ruin: the 'hollow turret', ivy-clad windows, 'mouldering gateway', 'grass-grown court' (l. 14-17), and stained-glass windows (l. 56). Instead of using a Claude glass to make his landscape more painterly, he has used the 'magic glass' (l. 91) and 'darken'd mirror' (l. 96) of memory through which to view his own internal landscape. The reference to a 'darken'd' mirror must surely be likening the mind to a

²⁷⁸ 'Clare Among the Gypsies', p. 168.

²⁷⁹ William Gilpin, *An essay upon prints; containing remarks upon the principles of picturesque beauty, the different kinds of prints, and the characters of the most noted masters; Illustrated by Criticisms upon particular Pieces; To which are added, Some Cautions that may be useful in collecting Prints* (London: J. Robson, 1768), p. 2.

Claude glass, which was a 'convex mirror backed with black foil';²⁸⁰ ideas of harmonizing, the tinted scene (l. 2) and soft 'hues' (l. 84), are also arguably references to the picturesque and the use of the Claude glass in drawing a picturesque scene.

There is more than visual pleasure, however; there is a more unsettling association in the way that the Gypsy episode gives way to a prolonged narrative about exile, wandering and the function of 'home'. Starting with the idea of homelessness that both the Gypsy and the beggar embody, Rogers discusses the effects of isolation from one's homeland on various figures, from 'Th' adventurous boy [that] hies from home' (l. 191-2) to seek his fortune, to the tale of Foscari's exile (l. 223-30)²⁸¹, and on until he ends questioning how a bee who 'cannot see many inches before her'²⁸² is able to return home 'to her cell' in the hive (l. 352). It is obvious from this, and from Rogers' emphasis on the associating links that memory makes, that in the poet's mind, the Gypsy is linked backwards to memories of home, and forwards to the loss of that home, exile, and isolation.

Rogers' characterization of the Gypsy owes its nature to the effects of time and memory, which give a sense of cohesion, a structure and a meaning to the disparate string of memories, not unlike the way that one can reorder the landscape in a picturesque view to present a more aesthetically pleasing outlook. The Gypsy forges the link between the past and the present but this endurance is shadowed by the threat of dispossession and exile. *The Pleasures of Memory* is not, then, a merely pleasant meander through the poet's past, and neither is it Murphy's abstract collection of thoughts, unhelpfully lumped together as 'Memory'. Instead, Rogers places the Gypsy at the centre of this chain of memory, which is always on the verge of extinction, revealing the 'pains of memory'.

²⁸⁰ 'Claude glass' in Michael Clarke, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001; repr. 2003).

²⁸¹ In 'To a Gipsy Child by the Sea-Shore', Matthew Arnold makes the link between Gypsies and exile more explicit, although he states 'No exile's dream was ever half so sad' (27). See Chapter IV.

²⁸² 'Note XVII', *The Pleasures of Memory*, p. 68.

The importance of the Gypsy figure as a link between the past, present and future is employed by Walter Scott in his 1815 novel *Guy Mannering*, in which the infamous Gypsy Meg Merrilies restores the lost laird of Ellangowan to his rightful inheritance; Meg is the memory keeper in *Guy Mannering* and, in a reversal of the role of the Gypsy in *The Pleasures of Memory*, is the link that transforms dispossession and homelessness into security and property.

Walter Scott

The literary, artistic and theatrical legacy of Scott's famous Gypsy Meg Merrilies, 'the great agent' of the novel,²⁸³ and her existence as a separate entity with the ability to exist outside the constraints of the text, have been analyzed, traced and recorded by many critics and observers since the first publication of the novel in 1815. In the last two decades both *Guy Mannering*²⁸⁴ and Meg herself have received impressive and far-reaching critical interrogation, which ranges from Scott's use of the picturesque, ideas of race, history, oral tradition and ballads, geography, folklore and myth, to concepts of nation-building, aspects of Freudian psychology, and theories of empire and imperialism.²⁸⁵

The inspiration for the Gypsies in both *Guy Mannering* and *The Pleasures of Memory*, discussed above, comes from the authors' childhood memories. In an article in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, Scott recalls the time that he heard the story of Jean Gordon, a legendary seventeenth-century Gypsy matriarch from Kirk Yetholm, Roxburghshire:

²⁸³ 'Unsigned review', *Augustan Review* (July 1815), pp. 228-33, in *Scott: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by John O. Hayden (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 88.

²⁸⁴ Walter Scott, *Guy Mannering*, ed. by Peter Garside (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999). All subsequent references to this edition will be displayed parenthetically in the text, unless otherwise mentioned.

²⁸⁵ See: Claire Lamont, 'Meg the Gipsy in Scott and Keats', *English: The Journal of the English Association*, 36 (1987), pp. 137-45; Peter Garside, 'Picturesque figure and landscape: Meg Merrilies and the gypsies', ed. by Stephen Copley and Peter Garside, *The Politics of the Picturesque: Literature, Landscape and Aesthetics since 1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 145-74; Garside, 'Meg Merrilies and India', *Scott in Carnival: Papers from the Fourth International Scott Conference. Edinburgh 1991* (Aberdeen: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1993), pp. 154-71; Katie Trumpener, 'The Time of the Gypsies: A "People Without History" in the Narratives of the West', *Critical Inquiry*, 18:4, Identities (Summer 1992), pp. 867-8; Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Deborah Epstein Nord, *Gypsies and the British Imagination, 1807-1930* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), pp. 21-42; Amit Yahav-Brown, 'Gypsies, Nomadism, and the Limits of Realism', *MLN*, 121 (2006), pp. 1124-47.

My father remembered old Jean Gordon of Yetholm, who had a great sway among her tribe. She was quite a Meg Merrilies, and possessed the savage virtue of fidelity in the same perfection [...] Jean had among other demerits, or merits, as you may choose to rank it, that of being a staunch Jacobite. She chanced to be at Carlisle upon a [...] market day, soon after the year 1746, where she gave vent to her political partiality, to the great offence of the rabble of that city [...] [T]hey inflicted upon [her] no slighter penalty than of ducking her to death in the Eden [...] [W]hile she had voice left, continued to exclaim at such intervals, "*Charlie yet! Charlie yet!*" — When a child, and among the scenes she frequented, I have often heard these stories, and cried piteously for poor Jean Gordon.²⁸⁶

Slightly later in the article is an anecdote about Madge Gordon, Jean's granddaughter, who was also seen as an influence in the creation of Meg Merrilies:²⁸⁷

[Madge Gordon] was a rather remarkable personage — of a very commanding presence and high stature, being nearly six feet high. She had a large aquiline nose — penetrating eyes [...] — bushy hair that hung around her shoulders from beneath a bonnet of straw — a short cloak of a peculiar fashion, and a long staff nearly as tall as herself [...] If Jean Gordon was the prototype of the *character* of Meg Merrilies, I imagine Madge must have sat to the unknown author as the representative of her *person*.²⁸⁸

In a continuation of the 'Scottish Gypsies' article in the May 1817 edition of *Blackwood's*, the historical and imaginary meet to render any distinction between 'truth' and 'fiction' redundant:

This description [of the settlement at Kirk Yetholm] may perhaps appear to some readers more minute than the occasion requires; but some little indulgence, we trust, will be allowed, - if not on the account of our early partialities, - at least for the sake of the now-classical scenery of gypsy [*sic*] heroism — the native haunts of *Jean Gordon*, alias *Meg Merrilies*.²⁸⁹

Later still, in a letter to J. W. Croker (1826), Scott makes the connection between these childhood recollections and Meg Merrilies more explicit: 'poor Jean Gordon, the prototype of

²⁸⁶ 'Notices concerning the Scottish Gypsies', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Review* (April 1817), pp. 54-6, italics in original. The author of this article does not refer to Scott by name and instead states: 'We have much satisfaction in being enabled to relate the following characteristic anecdotes, in the words of another correspondent of the highest respectability', 'Scottish Gypsies' (April 1817), p. 54. Critics, including Garside and Nord, have identified Scott as the 'correspondent of the highest respectability'. A previous owner of the copy of *Blackwood's* (April 1817) now held in the Special Collections, University of St Andrews, has annotated this particular section of the article, underlining 'another correspondent' and writing by its side '*W. Scott*'.

²⁸⁷ This anecdote, 'extracted from the letter of a friend' appears not to be by Scott, 'Scottish Gypsies', p. 56. Peter Garside argues for a healthy degree of scepticism in accepting Madge Gordon's influence on the character of Meg: 'Both these sequences [tales of Jean and Madge] were included in the Magnum Introduction (1829) to *Guy*, where, in introducing the latter, Scott also claimed a personal connection with Madge Gordon [...] Perhaps this second 'source' needs to be viewed with a degree of scepticism, however, if only in view of the apparent absence of any earlier mention', 'Historical Note', *Guy Mannering*, p. 505.

²⁸⁸ 'Notices concerning the Scottish Gypsies', (April 1817), pp. 56-7, italics in original.

²⁸⁹ 'Scottish Gypsies (Continued)' (May 1817), p. 155, italics in original.

Meg Merrilies'.²⁹⁰ In the 1829 'Preface' to the 'Magnum' edition of *Guy Mannering*, Scott

makes the connection between Meg Merrilies and Jean Gordon public, and claims:

The individual gipsy upon whom the character of Meg Merrilies was founded was well known about the middle of the last century by the name of Jean Gordon [...] The Author gave the public some account of this remarkable person in one of the early numbers of *Blackwood's Magazine* [...]²⁹¹

Scott also mentions Jean's granddaughter, Madge Gordon, but he does not make any overt

claim that Madge influenced the characterisation of Meg, as Garside implies:

[A] granddaughter survived [Jean], whom I remember to have seen. That is, as Dr. Johnson had a shadowy recollection of Queen Anne [...] so my memory is haunted by a solemn remembrance of a woman of more than female height, dressed in a long red cloak, who commenced acquaintance by giving me an apple, but whom [...] I looked on with [...] awe.²⁹²

Whilst there is no comparable documentary evidence to suggest that Gypsies featured so

strongly in Rogers' early life, it is important to note that, real or imagined, the influential

Gypsy encounters occurred during both Scott's and Rogers' childhoods.

These childhood recollections are, then, quite obviously (and self-confessedly) a main influence on the representation of the Gypsy woman in each work, both within the texts (Harry Bertram's childhood experiences with Meg and Rogers' encounter with the Gypsy woman) and out of them (Scott's memories of Gypsy stories and Rogers' fascination with the process and function of memory). Childhood and recollection play an important role in both *The Pleasures of Memory* and *Guy Mannering*; and it is this aspect of the writers' use of their Gypsy figures that shape the next part of my discussion.

²⁹⁰ *The Letters of Walter Scott 1787-1832*, ed. by Herbert J. C. Grierson, 12 vols (London: Constable & Co Ltd, 1932-7), IX (1935), p. 474. Also quoted in Garside, 'Historical Note', *Guy Mannering*, p. 505. For a more general discussion of the inspiration behind the character of Meg Merrilies, see: William S. Crockett, *The Sir Walter Scott Originals: An Account of Notables and Worthies the Originals of Characters in the Waverley Novels* (Edinburgh: Grant & Murray Limited, 1932), pp. 105-15.

²⁹¹ 'Guy Mannering' in *The Prefaces to the Waverley Novels*, ed. by Mark A. Weinstein (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), p. 112.

²⁹² *Prefaces to the Waverley Novels*, pp. 112-13.

The *Catalogue of the Library at Abbotsford*²⁹³ lists Rogers' *The Pleasures of Memory* (1810 edition) as being amongst Scott's enormous collection, which confirms that the author was (at the very least) a purchaser of Rogers' work; an entry in the 1808 (pub. 1810) *Edinburgh Annual Register* supports this,²⁹⁴ as does the fact that the two men were friends. There are, therefore, biographical details to support the idea that Rogers' Gypsy might have influenced Scott's characterization of Meg Merrilies.

There are several verbal overlaps between *The Pleasures of Memory* and descriptions of Meg Merrilies in *Guy Mannering*. Rogers' Gypsy is described as having a 'sun-burnt face' (l. 109), wearing a 'tatter'd mantle' and 'hood of straw' (l. 110), and her 'dark eyes flash'd thro' locks of blackest shade' (l. 115); she is a 'Sibyl' who can tell the 'colour of future years' (l. 117-122). The first encounter with Meg Merrilies in *Guy Mannering* has echoes of Rogers' supernaturalism:

[Meg's] appearance made Mannering start. She was full six feet high, wore a man's great-coat over the rest of her dress, had in her hand a goodly sloe-thorn cudgel, and in all points of equipment, except her petticoats, seemed rather masculine than feminine. Her dark elf-locks shot out like the snakes of the gorgon, between an old-fashioned bonnet called a Bongrace, heightening the singular effect of her strong and weather-beaten features, which they partly shadowed, while her eye had a wild roll that indicated something like real or affected insanity. (l. 3, 14)

Both Gypsy representations are, to a certain extent, part of the wider textual reconstruction and reworking that was evident throughout the period with which this thesis is concerned; there are certainly a multitude of 'stock' characteristics that writers use in their Gypsy descriptions and I do not mean to argue that Rogers' Gypsy had as profound effect on Scott's representations as, for example, Madge and Jean Gordon.²⁹⁵ There are, however, distinct and particular similarities between Rogers' and Scott's Gypsy women, which bear close

²⁹³ *Catalogue of the Library at Abbotsford* (Edinburgh: T. Constable, 1838), p. 194.

²⁹⁴ 'General View of Literature: Of the Living Poets of Great Britain', *Edinburgh Annual Register*, 1 (January 1808), p. 426.

²⁹⁵ For example, a search for 'Gypsy' (and its disambiguation) on the website *Spenser and Tradition: English Poetry 1579-1830* <<http://spenserians.cath.vt.edu/Homepage.php>> brings up several results containing a description of sun burnt, tanned or dark-skinned Gypsies: 'the Sun's scorching rays | Imbrown'd [the Gypsy's] visage grim', William Somerville, *Hobbinol; or, The Rural Games* (1740); 'To Gipsies brown in summer glades who bask', James Thomson, *The Castle of Indolence* (1748). [Last accessed 2 May 2011].

comparison; the similarities between Rogers' and Scott's Gypsies are representative of the wider intertextuality from which the figure of the Gypsy as we know it, has emerged. Meg's 'combination of feminine and masculine characteristics'²⁹⁶ and her unnaturally large stature seem to derive from anecdotes about Jean and Madge Gordon, as well as other influences, such as the description of Wordsworth's Gypsy woman in 'Beggars'.

Meg Merrilies is frequently referred to as a 'witch' as well as a 'sibyl', an uncanny figure who is as much within the world as without. At times she is 'supernatural', in all senses of the word, as her abilities transcend the powers of nature and the progress of time. Early in the novel Dominie Sampson calls Meg a "Harlot, thief, witch, and gypsey" (I. 3, 15); when Meg is seen by Mannering to foretell the new baby's fortune, she is described as '[conveying] the exact impression of an ancient sibyl' (I. 4, 23); at the expulsion of the Gypsies from Derncleugh Meg is a 'sibyl in frenzy' (I. 8, 44); Hattaraick describes Meg as 'a witch of the fiend – a real deyvil's-kind [*sic*]' (II. 13, 193); the tobacconist at the funeral of Margaret Bertram mentions 'an auld gypsey [*sic*] witch wife at Gilsland' (II. 17, 222); Meg is likened to the 'witch of Endor' when she feeds Dominie Sampson in a house at the Kaim of Derncleugh (III. 7, 280); later on, Mannering refers to her as 'our Egyptian sybil' (III. 10, 298); Lucy Bertram and Julia Mannering 'recoil with [...] terror' from the 'Galwegian sybil upon the common of Ellangowan' (III. 14, 325).²⁹⁷ As already mentioned, Rogers' Gypsy is a 'Sibyl', but she also seems to be a witch. The kinship between the two figures becomes more obvious in an examination of one of the most well-known scenes from the departure of the Gypsies from Derncleugh.

²⁹⁶ *Gypsies and the British Imagination*, p. 40. I agree with Nord's idea that "androgynous" seems too tame a word for [Meg Merrilies].

²⁹⁷ Although the terms 'sibyl' and 'witch' are not synonymous, it appears that, in this period at least, the terms were almost interchangeable. The *OED* cites at least two examples of the use of 'sibyl' as a synonym for 'witch': 'A prophetess; a fortune-teller, a witch [examples of such a use include] Sheridan, *Duenna*, I. iii, 'Thou wanton sybil, thou amorous woman of Endor', (1775); W. R. Spencer, *Poems*, 'To pow'r like thine no sybil spells pretend', (1811) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/179151?redirectedFrom=sibyl>> [Last accessed 15 April 2011].

In the description just before Meg's famous speech, 'ride your ways, Laird of Ellangowan' she is described in strikingly similar terms to that of Rogers' Gypsy. Scott writes:

[F]rom beneath [her turban] her dark eyes flashed with uncommon lustre. Her long and tangled black hair fell in elf-locks from the folds of this singular head-gear. Her attitude was that of a sibyl in frenzy [.]. (I. 8, 43-4)

In comparison, Rogers' Gypsy has 'dark eyes [that] flash'd thro' locks of blackest shade' (I. 115) and she is described as having 'elfin prowess' (I. 118). That the Gypsy's eyes 'flash'd' at the spectators through her locks of hair suggests anger, passion or, indeed, a frenzied mind.

The smaller details in the description of Meg, and the similarities between them and the description of Rogers' Gypsy, can, in part, be attributed to the generally accepted image of Gypsies at the time: flashing, dark eyes, black hair and fortune-telling are hardly unique to the plots of Rogers' and Scott's creations, although, as argued above, there are many facts, both biographical and textual, which point to an influence. Where Rogers' influence may again be felt in *Guy Mannering*, however, is in the connection between Gypsy, memory and place, and this is found mainly in the original description of Meg's prophecy about Harry Bertram's future.

Nord rightly emphasizes the importance of memory in the plot of *Guy Mannering*: it is, after all memory (however hazy) that eventually brings back to Harry the 'truth of his identity'.²⁹⁸ The description of the site of Meg's prophecy is, in parts, uncannily similar to Rogers' description of the memory of his childhood home. In *Guy Mannering*, Meg is spied sitting 'upon a broken corner-stone' (I. 4, 23) in the 'Auld Place'. A few lines earlier, Scott describes the ruins of the old house of Ellangowan:

Upon entering the gateway, he found that the rude magnificence of the inner court amply corresponded with the grandeur of the exterior. On the one side ran a range of windows lofty and large, divided by carved mullions of stone, which had once lighted the great hall [...] The doors and windows were ornamented with projections exhibiting rude specimens of sculpture and tracery, partly entire and partly broken down, partly covered by ivy and trailing plants, which grew luxuriantly among the ruins. (I. 4, 22-3)

²⁹⁸ *Gypsies and the British Imagination*, p. 37.

Rogers' Gypsy encounter may not take place inside his former home, although it occurs in the grounds of it, but there are similarities between the descriptions of the houses:

That casement, arch'd with ivy's brownest shade,
First to these eyes the light of heav'n conveyed.
The mouldering gateway strews the grass-grown court,
Once the calm scene of many a simple sport;
When nature pleas'd, for life itself was new,
And the heart promis'd what the fancy drew.
See, thro' the fractur'd pediment reveal'd,
Where moss inlays the rudely-sculptur'd shield. (I. 15-22)

The crucial link between Meg in *Guy Mannering* and Rogers' Gypsy is found in their relation to the childhood home; the Gypsies are not only fortune-tellers but also memory keepers, and their presence (almost literally) colours these memories of childhood. As Trumpener argues, 'Meg Merrilies plays a central role in the novel's enactment of memory and forgetting'.²⁹⁹ For Rogers, whatever the fate was that the Gypsy predicted, memories of home would always contain the Gypsy and her prophecy; for Harry Bertram, the Gypsy's prophecy that was given in the grounds of his childhood home, and the memory of Meg's presence in the surrounding landscape, would eventually lead him back to find his true identity. Nord has noted that, 'Meg [...] is at the center of memory for Harry' and it is Meg who protects Harry's inheritance and orchestrates its return to the rightful heir;³⁰⁰ for Rogers, the Gypsy is also at the centre of his memory (as a point of departure from which to ponder different types of exile) and is closely tied to his other memories of home and childhood. For both writers, the Gypsy's fortune-telling is an important part of this memory.

In both *The Pleasures of Memory* and *Guy Mannering* the main purpose of the Gypsy is to predict the future life of a young child (although in *Guy* the role is extended and elaborated upon). In *The Pleasures of Memory* the reader is left uncertain as to what Rogers' fortune was to be:

²⁹⁹ *Bardic Nationalism*, p. 222.

³⁰⁰ *Gypsies and the British Imagination*, p. 36.

As o'er my palm the silver piece she drew,
 And traced the line of life with searching view,
 How throb'd my fluttering pulse with hopes and fears,
 To learn the colour of my future years! (I. 119-22)

The cynical reader (and the cynical, older Rogers) will, of course, be aware of the 'transaction' that has taken place in order that the child's future might be foretold;³⁰¹ the amount of money given to a Gypsy was often thought to colour the nature of the predictions.³⁰² Rogers' mention of the 'searching view', the tracing of the 'line of life' and learning 'the colour of [...] future years', all have parallels in Meg's prophecy that Mannering overhears, although there are also several crucial differences.

The similarities between the two predictions are clear. Both Gypsy women predict the future of a child by 'seeing' into the future. For both children the future is seen as a linear progression: Rogers' Gypsy 'traced the line' (I. 120), whilst Meg 'spun a thread' (I. 4, 23). Both predictions are also 'coloured': the child Rogers waits in fervent anticipation to learn 'the colour of my future years' (I. 122), and Meg's prophecy-by-spinning is 'drawn from wool of three different colours, black, white, and grey' (I. 4, 23). Whilst the locations of the predictions are different – Rogers and the Gypsy are in the grounds of his old home, whilst Meg is in the ruins of the 'Auld Place'³⁰³ – the atmosphere of the two is similarly gothic and gloomy: Rogers' encounter takes place 'at evening' (I. 107) and, although Meg is lit by a 'strong sunbeam', 'the rest of the apartment was very gloomy' (I. 4, 23).

The first major difference between the two accounts is the mode in which the predictions are told. Whilst Rogers' future is read straight from his palm, with the idea being

³⁰¹ Houghton Walker notes: 'whilst Rogers gently mocks his own earlier capacity for belief [...] his earlier self apparently entertained a simple faith in gypsy prediction', 'Clare's Gypsies and Literary Influences', p. 77.

³⁰² 'Sir Roger and the Gipsies', *The Spectator*, 130 (30 July, 1711), 'I have an honest dairy-maid who crosses their hands with a piece of silver every summer, and never fails being promised the handsomest young fellow in the parish', in *Addison: Selections from The Spectator*, ed. by John H. Lobban (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1946), p. 101; 'The Epsom Gipsy's Art of Telling Fortunes', *Punch* (5 June 1852): 'The art is very simple. It depends entirely upon the price. The larger the price the stronger the fortune', p. 233.

³⁰³ Nord notes that this scene 'locates Meg within the decaying walls of the laird's ancient castle, not by her cauldron in a forest or Gypsy encampment, and so identifies her with the "auld wa's [old ways]," as she will later refer to the traditions of patronage and privilege associated with the landowning class', *Gypsies and the British Imagination*, p. 29.

that he (literally) holds the clue as to what his future will be, in *Guy Mannering* Meg constructs Harry Bertram's future through her process of spinning. The signifiers of this future – the coloured wool that Meg uses – are organic and, presumably, taken from the sheep on the Ellangowan estate. Whilst Mannering 'reads' the baby's fate in the stars, in Meg's prediction Harry's future is 'made' from elements produced on the estate on which he was born, which are formed into an (somewhat) intelligible sequence by Meg (also a long-term inhabitant of the estate). Meg constructs a future for Harry that, through her process of spinning, literally binds together the Ellangowan estate and the Gypsies into the baby's destiny.³⁰⁴

Meg's practice of wool spinning also links her to the Fates of the ancient world. The connection between spinning, weaving, female society and superstition has been long been recognized.³⁰⁵ From the Fates' spinning the thread of life, Penelope and Arachne's weaving in the *Odyssey* and *Metamorphoses* respectively, and on to Western tales of the Norse Valkyries, the Germanic goddess Holda and the Celtic belief in Habetrot, spinning was largely associated with women and the domestic sphere. In Scott's lifetime, spinning and its association with the supernatural were once again brought to the fore, most notably through the Grimm brothers' *The Household Tales (Kinder und-Hansmärchen)*, which first appeared in 1812. In his 1892 edition of *Guy Mannering*, Andrew Lang 'identifies Grimm's fairy tales and other German fables as possible sources for Meg's spinning'.³⁰⁶ Ruth Bottigheimer draws attention to the symbolism of the spindle and the role that spinning played in the transmission of folk stories:

In German tradition [the spindle is] not only the identifying mark of wise women, but of all women [...] German folk tales were assumed to have originated in or to have passed through [...] the *Spinnstube* [spinning room], for it was there that women

³⁰⁴ Yahav-Brown also makes the distinction between Mannering's 'passive' fortune-telling and how Meg 'commands the future she prophesies', *Gypsies, Nomadism, and the Limits of Realism*, p. 1135.

³⁰⁵ Hand spinning as a cottage industry carried out by women, rather than the later nineteenth-century associations of mechanized spinning in mills, undertaken by both male and female workers.

³⁰⁶ *Gypsies and the British Imagination*, p. 181, n. 35. Although there is no record of *The Household Tales* in the Abbotsford library catalogue, Scott did own another work by the Grimm brothers, *Die beiden ältesten Deutschen Gedichte aus dem 8^{ten} Jahrhundert: Das lied von Hildebrand und Hadubrand, und daa Weissenbrunner Gebet &c.*, (1812). [*The Two oldest German poems from the eighth century: Hildebrand and Hadubrand, and the Weissenbrun Prayer*], *Catalogue of the Library at Abbotsford*, p. 63.

gathered in the evening and told tales to keep themselves and their company awake as they spun.³⁰⁷

The supernatural occurrences in the *Tales* – the spinning of straw into gold in *Rumpelstilzchen*, for example – and the use of the spindle as a plot device, 'a hinge on which the tale turns',³⁰⁸ can find their equivalent points in *Guy Mannering*. Although the spinning episode is only brief, its significance in this novel is profound. The shaping of *Guy Mannering*, with its twists and turns, even mirrors the process of spinning and winding:

[U]ndoing the thread gradually, [Meg] measured it, by casting it over her elbow, and bringing each loop round between forefinger and thumb [...] "A hank, but not a haill ane—the full years o' the three score and ten, but thrice broken and thrice to oop, (i.e. unite)". (I. 4, 24. Italics in original.)

The links between Meg's spinning, her prophecy and the wider female community, from which men, on the whole, were excluded, seem to underline and emphasize her strength and authority in the novel.

There is hardly a more apt illustration of the Gypsy as the 'double to the English cottager'³⁰⁹ than the description of Meg spinning, although in this case she is a Scottish 'cotter': 'she spun a thread [...] by assistance of those ancient implements of housewifery now almost banished from the land, the distaff and spindle' (I. 4, 23). The practice of spinning, the reader is told, is an art that is gradually dying out in the Scotland of *Guy Mannering*, and this is one of the first examples of the ideas of progression and change that occur throughout the novel.³¹⁰

The fact that the distaff and spindle are 'almost' banished from the land is not only significant in the context of the novel as a whole – old habits and traditions are passing and giving way to new practices – but also in the specific case of the Gypsies, and, more minutely, of Meg herself.

This view of the Gypsies as industrious and as playing a part in the rural economy could not be

³⁰⁷ Ruth Bottigheimer, 'Tale Spinners: Submerged Voices in Grimms' Fairy Tales', *New German Critique*, 27, 'Women Writers and Critics' (Autumn 1982), p. 143.

³⁰⁸ 'Tale Spinners', p. 148. Bottigheimer notes that in some of the tales the spindle is 'merely' a device that drives the plot. I argue that although the spindle and the spinning may only appear briefly, they are of fundamental importance to the plot as a whole; without them the story would not be possible.

³⁰⁹ 'Clare Among the Gypsies', p. 167.

³¹⁰ See: *Gypsies and the British Imagination*, p. 27, pp. 34-5; *Bardic Nationalism*, pp. 184-6, p. 191, p. 263; Graham McMaster, *Scott and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 155-63.

further from William Wordsworth's portrayal of the group in 'Gipsies' as static, unproductive 'others', who stubbornly refuse to participate in society and are wholly detached from the world of work.

On the most general level, the gradual eradication of the spinning wheel illustrates a society in flux, a transitional period in which the country moves from a feudal society through various stages towards industrialization. As a more specific reference to superstition and folklore, the slow but certain removal of the spinning wheel from the home ensures the gradual removal of all traces of the cunning woman and the relegation of such figures into distant memory. The decline of the spinning wheel, a tool used not only by Meg but other Gypsy women, too – 'The women spun mittens for the lady and boot-hose for the laird' (I. 7, 37) – mirrors the falling-away of superstition, the place of the Gypsies as a part of the history and proponents of superstition, and the decline of the oral tradition and folklore. A more productive rationalism replaces credulity, just as factories replace cottage industry.

The scene that depicts Meg sitting in the ruins of the old house 'spinning' the fortunes of the future heir is one of altered domesticity, once again bringing the reader back to Janowitz's idea of the Gypsy as a double of the cottager. In *Guy Mannering* some of the Gypsies 'yet remain [in Scotland], chiefly in such situations as afford a ready escape either into a waste country, or into another jurisdiction' (I. 7, 37). The age of enclosure is symbolized in *Guy Mannering* by the repairs made to the main gateway to the house: 'formerly, having only one hinge, [the gate] remained at all times hospitably open – he had caused this gate [...] to be newly hung and handsomely painted' (I. 7, 38), and in Godfrey Bertram's renewed enthusiasm to 'close certain holes in the fences' that had previously allowed the local people (Gypsies included) to wander across the grounds of the house.

Many critics have read Godfrey Bertram's zealous clearance of the Ellangowan estate as a 'parable of contemporary [Scottish] events': the Highland clearances.³¹¹ If this is so, and there are enough similarities between the fictional clearances and those that occurred during Scott's lifetime, then the Gypsies are given some sort of status as Scots by proxy.³¹²

Evidence for a 'Scotfication' of the Gypsies is plentiful:

They lost in a great measure, by this intermixture [with the Scots], the national character of Egyptians, and became a mingled race, having all idleness and predatory habits of their eastern ancestors, with a ferocity which they probably borrowed from the men of the north who joined their society. They travelled in different bands, and had rules among themselves, by which each was confined to its own district. (I. 7, 35)

Having begun as a 'distinct and independent people' (I. 7, 35), the Gypsies have taken on the characteristics of their Scottish neighbours (notably, only the bad characteristics). That 'men of the north' have joined the group confirms suspicions that the Gypsies' lifestyle would appeal to the settled community and would draw them away from their conventional lives. This influence works both ways, however, and the Gypsies are portrayed in a similar way to the Highland clans: 'they travelled in different bands, and had rules among themselves, by which each was confined to its own district' (I. 7, 35). The idea of the Gypsies as alternative Highlanders is continued in the following description: 'The least invasion of the precincts which had been assigned to another tribe produced desperate skirmishes', (I. 7, 35); the diminished numbers of Gypsies in the contemporary setting of *Guy Mannering* also has parallels with the depopulation of the Highlands: 'Their numbers, however, are so greatly diminished, that, instead of one hundred thousand [...] it would now be impossible to collect above five hundred through all Scotland' (I. 7, 37).

The Gypsies in *Guy Mannering* have, in fact, assimilated so far into Scottish society, and more specifically into the life on the Ellangowan estate, and over such a long period of time, that 'they were considered in some degree as proprietors of the wretched sheelings which they

³¹¹ *Scott and Society*, p. 159.

³¹² *Gypsies and the British Imagination*, p. 30; *Scott and Society*, pp. 157-60.

inhabited' (I. 7, 37). The Gypsies have become a form of feudal tenant of the laird: the Gypsy women spun 'mittens' and 'boot-hose' as Christmas presents for the laird and his family, the 'aged sybils' blessed the 'bridal bed' and the 'cradle of the heir', and the Gypsy men repaired the family's broken china and acted as gillies for the laird (all I. 7, 37). In return for these tokens and for their earlier assistance, 'service to the laird in war, and, more frequently, by infesting and plundering the lands of [...] neighbouring barons' (I. 7, 37), the Gypsies are offered protection and a place to live. Whilst the Gypsies are still described in animal similes, 'they harboured unmolested as the crows that roosted in the old ash-trees around them' (I. 7, 37), and they are the same 'hordes' that 'infested' parts of Gilbert White's Hampshire, they are also given a recognized, albeit subservient, position in the estate's hierarchy.

Yahav-Brown and Nord both argue that Scott:

[O]ffers his readers a version of the history of the Gypsies that emphasizes their deep and mystical presence in the Scottish past, their intermingling with the Scots themselves, and their vulnerability to the vagaries of historical, political, and economic change.³¹³

Scott uses the Gypsy figure to articulate and contain the energies of the peasantry. The figure is caught in a delicate balance between realism and the uncanny but allows for more protest than is usual in Scott's novels. Conversely, John Clare is often seen as a figure of protest but in his use of the Gypsy figure, we see far more of a literary exploration of the figure than we do a political commentary.

John Clare

In a 1994 article on John Clare's use of Gypsies in his writing, Claire Lamont wrote 'Clare was the only English writer of the period to be entertained in a gipsy camp, and [his writing] gives us insight from close quarters'.³¹⁴ It is this familiarity and personal experiences with the Gypsies that supposedly marks Clare out from the other writers included in this thesis. Despite

³¹³ *Gypsies and the British Imagination*, p. 25.

³¹⁴ Claire Lamont, 'John Clare and the Gypsies', *John Clare Society Journal*, 13 (1994), p. 24.

earlier critical convictions that Clare is uniquely close to the reality of Gypsy life, however, my thesis shows that his Gypsies are just as literary as his predecessors'; they can be considered as 'paper Gypsies' just as much as any of the other Gypsy representations discussed in this thesis. Clare's Gypsy poems have received a lot of critical attention, but in this part of the chapter I will show that the decision to claim Clare as almost Gypsy-like, and the more recent critical correctives to this move, oversimplify Clare's complicated textual relationship with this particular set of outsiders. Sarah Houghton-Walker has also seen a more literary side to Clare's Gypsies but her articles overlook key aspects of Clare's work, which I will discuss below. Clare's works about Gypsies mark a boundary between earlier eighteenth-century representations, which for the most part view the Gypsies as figures to be encountered in the landscape, and nineteenth-century representations that tend more towards seeing the Gypsies as figures of escapism, disconnected from everyday experience.

The received idea of Clare as an authentic recorder of the Gypsies' lives is shown in the extract below in which Alan Vardy discusses one of Clare's later poems, 'The Gipsy Camp' (c.1840-1):

Clare's poem takes *truth* for its immediate object. This Coleridgean distinction provides a succinct expression of the aesthetic divide between Clare and mainstream Romantic aesthetics. His insistence on the truth of his poetic representations is in direct opposition of the construction of the poetic self that dominates the poetics of both Wordsworth and Coleridge [...] Clare refuses to differentiate between ethics and aesthetics[.]³¹⁵

As Claire Lamont and, later on, Sarah Houghton-Walker point out, however, any critic of Clare's must be careful not to fall into the trap of taking Clare too literally; whilst they should avoid seeing Clare's Gypsies 'as *representatives* of something Clare has lost or covets, or suffers'³¹⁶ (italics mine), they should also be aware of strong literary precedents that shaped Clare's portrayal of the Gypsies. Nord notes:

³¹⁵ Alan Vardy, *John Clare, Politics and Poetry* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 28, italics in original.

³¹⁶ Sarah Houghton-Walker, 'Clare's Gypsies and Literary Influence', *John Clare Society Journal*, 28 (2009), p. 71.

[The Gypsies'] literary representation was bound up with particular poetic conventions, with ways of understanding and imagining the landscape, and with the transformations they registered in the countryside around them.³¹⁷

Drawing on this idea that the figure of the Gypsy was already an established image in poetry by the time Clare was writing, I argue that Clare is just as literary in his picturesque representations of Gypsy life as Cowper or Rogers, but he adopts and discards this eighteenth century persona at will and the perceiving 'eye' / 'I' of the poems is volatile and unstable.

One must remember that Clare was not only crafting his poems and prose but was, to a great extent, crafting his own idea of himself as a writer, and how he wished that self to be seen. In a thorough interrogation of Kristine Douaud's 2008 article in *Romani Studies*,³¹⁸

Houghton-Walker writes:

Yes, we need to be attentive to what [Clare] seems to be saying about gypsies; but we also need to pay far closer attention to the way in which he says it. This [...] involves avoiding the seduction of Clare's biography [...] Throughout his career, Clare makes particular choices at particular times regarding the way in which he chooses to represent things precisely because he is able to so, because he is a poet.³¹⁹

With these warnings in mind Houghton-Walker suggests that '[t]he more interesting objective [instead of trying to find the 'truth' in Clare's work and life] is thus to study how this writer [...] chooses to represent [Gypsies] in art'.³²⁰

Clare's Gypsy poems are a complex blend of record and representation in which he uses and distorts picturesque traditions primarily by disrupting the stable view point, becoming more like a voyeur or interloper than a distanced observer. To explore this relationship between truth, fiction and literary tradition further I will turn to one of Clare's early poems, 'The Gipsies Evening Blaze' (c. 1807-10), quoted in full below.³²¹

³¹⁷ *Gypsies and the British Imagination*, p. 44.

³¹⁸ Kristine Douaud, 'The tie that binds: Gypsies, John Clare and English folk culture', *Romani Studies*, 5, 18:1 (2008), pp. 1-38.

³¹⁹ Sarah Houghton-Walker, 'John Clare's Gypsies', *Romani Studies*, 5, 19:2 (December 2009), p. 129.

³²⁰ 'John Clare's Gypsies', pp. 129-30.

³²¹ *The Early Poems of John Clare, 1804-1822*, ed. by Eric Robinson and David Powell, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), I, p. 33. References are displayed parenthetically in the text where appropriate. James McKusick notes that although the poem was first published in *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life* (1820) it 'was written at least ten years earlier, at the age of fourteen or fifteen (according to Clare's own dating)', 'Beyond the Visionary Company:

To me how wildly pleasing is that scene
 Which does present in evenings dusky hour
 A Group of Gipsies center'd on the green
 In some warm nook where Boreas has no power
 Where sudden starts the quivering blaze behind
 Short shrubby bushes nibbl'd by the sheep
 That alway on these shortward pastures keep
 Now lost now shines now bending with the wind
 And now the swarthy sybil [k]neels reclin'd
 With proggl'ing stick she still renews the blaze
 Forcing bright sparks to twinkle from the flaze
 When this I view the all attentive mind
 Will oft exclaim (so strong the scene pervades)
 'Grant me this life, thou spirit of the shades!' (1-14)

The opening lines of 'The Gipsies Evening Blaze' offer, as Philip Martin identifies, a 'dramatic tableau' in a 'language of conventional aesthetics'.³²² He goes on to demonstrate how Clare interweaves fact and fiction – the poet 'makes an artifice out of the biographical fact of [his] occasional dwelling with gypsies' – which 'de-authenticate[s] the real by displacing what may have been Clare's desire to stay with the gypsies into the realm of a very specific kind of poetic decorum'.³²³ Whilst the roots of Martin's analysis of the poem are in biographical and aesthetic detail, McKusick's argument is a socio-economic linguistic one:

[E]conomic displacement occasioned by enclosure is reflected in the poem's linguistic texture [and the] juxtaposition of discourse types enacts a bizarre dislocation of the standard loco-descriptive mode.³²⁴

He notes that Clare's language is at points conventional, in the way of an eighteenth-century topographical poem: 'how wildly pleasing is that scene' (1), 'where Boreas has no power' (4), but at other points swoops into language considered highly inappropriate for poetry, despite ideas of using the 'real language of men':³²⁵ 'Short shrubby bushes' (6), 'the swarthy sybil' (9), 'With proggl'ing stick' (10).

John Clare's resistance to Romanticism' in *John Clare in Context*, ed. by Hugh Haughton, Adam Phillips and Geoffrey Summerfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, repr. 2005), p. 227.

³²² Philip Martin, 'John Clare's Gypsies: Problems of Placement and Displacement in Romantic Critical Practice', *Placing and Displacing Romanticism*, ed. by Peter Kitson (Aldershot; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, c. 2001), p. 56.

³²³ 'John Clare's Gypsies: Problems of Placement and Displacement', p. 56.

³²⁴ 'Beyond the Visionary Company', p. 228.

³²⁵ 'Preface' (1800) in *Wordsworth and Coleridge: Lyrical Ballads*, ed. by Raymond L. Brett and Alun R. Jones (London; New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 287.

Martin and McKusick identify several important aspects of 'The Gipsies Evening Blaze': the function of language (especially language that is deemed 'acceptable' in poetry), the idea of and the role that the picturesque plays in poetry (with all the prior conventions and associations that come with the use of certain key words), the changing landscape brought about by enclosure³²⁶ and what makes a proper subject for a poem. McKusick argues that:

[The] standard loco-descriptive mode [of the poem] is radically transformed by the intrusive presence of gypsies [who] would normally be excluded or at least sentimentalised by the traveller's touristic detachment from the harsh material basis of their existence.³²⁷

I would question McKusick's view by comparing 'The Gipsies Evening Blaze' with two earlier pieces of poetry, Cowper's Gypsy encounter in *The Task* and Wordsworth's 'Gipsies' (poems discussed respectively in Chapter I and Chapter II).

Contrary to McKusick's idea that the Gypsies would 'normally' be 'excluded or at least sentimentalised' by the traveller, we have seen that the speakers in Cowper and Wordsworth's poems display complex reactions to the Gypsies that they encounter. Whilst Cowper and Wordsworth's speakers begin as disinterested, picturesque observers, they never manage to remain wholly detached from the 'harsh material basis' of the Gypsies' lives and nor can they bring themselves to maintain a sentimental picture of the group's existence.

It is well known that Clare was a great admirer of Cowper's poetry by the late eighteen-teens (the years immediately following the composition of 'The Gipsies Evening Blaze'); we know that he 'owned an 1815 edition of William Cowper's poems' (although we do not know exactly when this edition was acquired) and that 'Clare admired dozens of passages of natural description in [Cowper's] long poem *The Task*, as well as [...] shorter lyrics'.³²⁸ Clare mentions in his autobiographical writing that 'Thomson Cowper and Walton

³²⁶ The dates of the progress of the enclosure of Helpston and its surrounding area coincide almost exactly with the poem's progression from composition to eventual publication in 1820. See Jonathan Bate, *John Clare. A Biography* (London: Picador, 2004), p. 48.

³²⁷ 'Beyond the Visionary Company', p. 227.

³²⁸ *John Clare: A Biography*, p. 101.

[were] often [taken] in [his] pocket to read'.³²⁹ He was also familiar with Wordsworth's poetry and we know from his letters that by December 1819 he had read Wordsworth's poems, sent to him by Octavius Gilchrist.³³⁰ Cowper and Wordsworth's poetry had a significant influence on Clare's poetic development, and their reworking of the Gypsies' place in picturesque tradition is evident in 'The Gipsies Evening Blaze'.

Clare's poem begins with a line that instantly shapes and personalizes the 'scene': 'To me how wildly pleasing is that scene' (1). He continues over the next couple of lines to frame the usual cluster of Gypsies-round-a-fire that he beholds:

Which does present in evenings dusky hour
A Group of Gipsies center'd on the green
In some warm nook where Boreas has no power (2-4).

Houghton-Walker remarks that:

The first four lines [of the poem] assiduously establish a picturesque view, in which elements are carefully disposed [...] and the gypsies are physically 'centred' [...] In content and composition the poem resides in the picturesque tradition.³³¹

She goes on to argue how this initial picturesque scene is undermined gradually throughout the poem. I agree with her outline, but I think that this undermining takes place much more quickly. Whilst we are led to believe that the Gypsies are literally and figuratively at the centre of the poem in line three, this is undermined immediately in line four by the description that they are actually positioned in 'some warm nook'. All definitions of 'nook' in the *OED* are based on the idea of a space that is secluded and off-centre, and it is at this precise point in the poem (before the breakdown in poetic language that McKusick alerts us to) that the picturesque, loco-descriptive nature of the poem becomes unstable.

In both Wordsworth and Clare's poems the main focus is on the fire. For Wordsworth, Cowper and Clare, the Gypsies' fire is a familiar trope, and reflects the poets'

³²⁹ *John Clare's Autobiographical Writings*, ed. by Eric Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 43.

³³⁰ *The Letters of John Clare*, ed. by Mark Storey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 23.

³³¹ 'Clare's Gypsies and Literary Influence', p. 81.

attitudes towards the Gypsies as a group. In 'Gipsies' the fire is a menacing presence, suggestive of dark deeds that the Gypsies are capable of: 'Only their fire seems bolder, yielding light: | Now deep and red, the colouring of night' (5-6). For Cowper, the Gypsies' fire is weak and almost lifeless: 'They pick their fuel out of every hedge, | Which, kindled with dry leaves, just saves unquenched | The spark of life' (*The Task*, I. 565-7). Clare's description of the Gypsy fire suggests playfulness 'bright sparks to twinkle from the flaze' (11) but hints at an underlying struggle and shows the instability of the group's lives: 'Now lost now shines now bending with the wind' (8). Although the Gypsies in Clare's poem are sheltered from the sort of 'sportive wind' that tugs at Cowper's Gypsies' rags (*The Task*, I. 567), Clare's Gypsies' fire comes and goes as it is blown by the gusts of wind. Clare's Gypsy woman is both kneeling and 'reclin'd' (the latter word suggesting picturesque repose) but she has to work to keep the fire burning: 'With proggl'g stick she *still* renews the blaze' (10, italics mine). There is a suggestion of resilience in her actions, but also a sense of vulnerability. Clare's positioning of the Gypsies in 'The Gipsies Evening Blaze' is more disordered than the opening lines suggest. The fire in the poem is positioned behind 'Short shrubby bushes nibbl'd by the sheep' (6) and this, coupled with the Gypsies' location in the protective nook, reveals that the Gypsies themselves are not 'center'd' on the green but are off-centre and apart in a more enclosed space.

The sense of concealment in the poem, which places the Gypsies to one side of the space we would expect them to occupy, confirms Lamont's statement that '[we] have in one sense first-hand information; but as we get closer to the gypsies we find them receding'.³³² The regression we see is reminiscent of Cowper's Gypsy passage when, after viewing the Gypsies from a distance, the speaker of the poem comes closer to the camp, the description of which

³³² 'John Clare and the Gipsies', p. 25.

fluctuates between close, detailed observation and uncertainty.³³³ Houghton-Walker also recognises the oblique view in 'The Gipsies Evening Blaze', arguing that the scene:

[S]eems to be being watched *through* the shrubby bushes [...] Clare is not straightforwardly a part of this scene; he offers us a closely observed description of the action, but his viewpoint apparently remains 'behind' the bushes.³³⁴

We know that Clare, unlike Cowper, had actually visited several Gypsy camps, but in this poem Clare remains intriguingly silent about the actual details of the camp except for his description of the 'swarthy sybil' in line nine. Even this description, however, is a stock phrase. Both Samuel Rogers and Walter Scott use the word 'sybil' in connection with female Gypsies and the use of such a description is just another example of Clare's literary interplay.

Martin agrees that Clare's Gypsy descriptions derive from widely-held stereotypes of the Gypsy figure, arguing that:

By the time that Clare writes his poems about gypsies, there is an established habit of representation that does not allow us to read his figures as original and remarkable because of the documentary details they contain [...]³³⁵

Because of the history of the literary representation of Gypsies it is almost impossible, by the early nineteenth century, to portray the Gypsies in a 'new' way. Whilst acknowledging the idea of Clare's 'honest documentary approach',³³⁶ put forward by John Goodridge and Kelsey Thornton's essay 'John Clare: the trespasser',³³⁷ Martin argues for an approach to Clare's Gypsies that could see them as being 'used for the purposes of socio-political satire'.³³⁸ He then goes on to draw out an argument that joins the Gypsies as figures through which Clare articulates his socio-political critique with the idea of Clare as a poet who recorded his own authentic experiences in his poems.

³³³ See Chapter I, p. 10 of this thesis.

³³⁴ 'Clare's Gypsies and Literary Influence', p. 83, italics in original.

³³⁵ 'John Clare's Gypsies: Problems of Placement and Displacement', p. 53.

³³⁶ 'John Clare's Gypsies: Problems of Placement and Displacement', p. 52.

³³⁷ John Goodridge and Kelsey Thornton, 'John Clare: the trespasser' in *John Clare in Context*, ed. by Hugh Haughton, Adam Phillips and Geoffrey Summerfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 87-129.

³³⁸ 'John Clare's Gypsies: Problems of Placement and Displacement', p. 53.

Although there is plentiful evidence of Clare's political sympathies in his other poetry, I think that in his Gypsy poems, Clare is less of a socio-political activist and more a poet. In 'The Gipsies Evening Blaze' Clare highlights the challenges of perspective and its role in the recording of scenes. Whilst Martin acknowledges that the 'representation of the identity of the perceiving self is all-important',³³⁹ he argues that the way that Clare 'construct[s] no consistent allusive references' and places the 'perceiving eye' in positions which ensure that the speaker is within, rather than an observer of, the scene.³⁴⁰ This placing, Martin continues, marks Clare's Gypsy poems as different from Wordsworth's or Cowper's. The varying position of the speaker is, however, exactly on a par with Cowper's moving speaker in *The Task*, who starts off observing the Gypsies from a distance, comes close enough into the camp *almost* to see what the group eat, and then observes the Gypsies from a distance again, once they are within the safety of the forest. Whilst the position of the speaker in Wordsworth's 'Gipsies' may be more conventionally separated from the group he observes, the language of 'The Gipsies Evening Blaze' draws attention to the act of perception.

Houghton-Walker argues that Clare is working against picturesque ideas of a static landscape when he describes the movement in the Gypsy camp,³⁴¹ but I think that ideas of movement, stasis and recollection in the poem are more complicated than she allows. Whilst the first eleven lines of the poem have an immediacy that is conveyed by Clare's use of the present tense, the final three lines throw confusion over this. The speaker's admission that he 'Will oft exclaim', indicates that the scene is one that has been seen before. This recasts the description of the Gypsy camp as something held in the speaker's memory, part of a Wordsworthian sentiment of imaginative recuperation.

³³⁹ 'John Clare's Gypsies: Problems of Placement and Displacement', p. 53.

³⁴⁰ 'John Clare's Gypsies: Problems of Placement and Displacement', p. 54.

³⁴¹ 'Clare's Gypsies and Literary Influence', p. 81.

This distancing of speaker from subject, to which both Lamont and Anne Williams³⁴² refer, is furthered by Clare's use of the sonnet and language, which 'descends from such neoclassical personifications as 'Boreas' into such rustic dialect words as "proggles" [...] and "flaze"'.³⁴³ The use of the sonnet formalizes its subject; the elevated lyric form contrasting with the lowly subject and the use of dialect words.

McKusick argues that Clare's use of language creates:

[A] sense of class solidarity that exposes the inauthenticity of such effete poetic diction as 'Boreas and 'sybil', conveying instead the desperate scarcity that pervades these 'shortward pastures'[.]³⁴⁴

McKusick's sense of radical urgency in Clare's work appears in direct contrast to Williams' and Lamont's idea of distancing, although the various strands of critical discourse that I have identified can be brought together in Martin's idea of displacement in the poem. McKusick goes on to argue that the 'impoverished landscape, far from being a timeless fact of nature, is the result of an ongoing historical process – the enclosure of common fields', to which it is well known that Clare was strongly opposed.³⁴⁵

Clare displaces (and thus formalizes) his own experience with the Gypsies by using a poetic form and language that distance him (and the speaker of the poem) from the Gypsies. The displacement of experience foregrounds the difficulties of perception and the literary medium. By using the form of the sonnet Clare elevates the Gypsy encounter into an epiphany and he reanimates a poetic trope in the idea of the 'wildly pleasing' scene and the sentiments expressed in the final couplet of the poem.

By using just two words of dialect in 'The Gypsies Evening Blaze', Clare does not de-select rustic language as Wordsworth had done, but he incorporates it within an eighteenth-century literary tradition. In a letter from April 1825 Clare writes to William Hone detailing

³⁴² Anne Williams, 'Clare's Gypsies', *Explicator*, 39:3 (Spring 1981), p. 10.

³⁴³ 'Beyond the Visionary Company', p. 227.

³⁴⁴ 'Beyond the Visionary Company', p. 227.

³⁴⁵ 'Beyond the Visionary Company', p. 227.

'miscellaneous superstitions and shadows of customs almost worn out'.³⁴⁶ Towards the end of the letter Clare apologises for 'bring[ing] a dirty reality so near' to Hone's 'poetical description' of the 'Plough Monday' celebrations,³⁴⁷ and I argue that this is very similar to what Clare creates in 'The Gipsies Evening Blaze': he deliberately brings the 'dirty reality' of the Gypsies' lives (and the more general rural way of life) in close contact to the (romanticized or 'poetical') way of life that the speaker of the poem is extolling.

Another early poem in which Clare demonstrates a complex layering of literary and 'real' Gypsy experiences is 'The Gipseys Camp' (c. 1819-20).³⁴⁸ Lamont, Houghton-Walker and Anne Janowitz all emphasize the intertextuality of this poem, identifying the roots of the poem in Rogers' Gypsy encounter in *The Pleasures of Memory*; Lamont notices an allusion to the witches from *Macbeth* in the mention of the 'midnight hags',³⁴⁹ but this too also has its roots in Rogers' poem as well as in Shakespeare's play.

In the opening line of 'The Gipseys Camp' describes how 'oft on Sundays' (1) he would visit the Gypsies' camp to have his fortune told. The word 'oft', which we saw used at the end of 'The Gipsies Evening Blaze', shows a subtle attempt to establish a concrete connection between the poet and the Gypsies: this apparently was not a chance meeting, but a relationship formed through regular, deliberate encounter. In a discussion of this line, Martin notes that the 'opening phrase (a construction commonly used by Clare in his prose) suggests a habitual and familiar practice'.³⁵⁰ Again we see how Clare plays with concepts of truth and fiction. The poet claims that the meeting between him and the Gypsies was a common occurrence, which therefore leads the reader to believe that the events he describes actually happened, and yet the

³⁴⁶ John Clare: *Major Works*, ed. by Eric Robinson and David Powell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984; repr. 2004), p. 483.

³⁴⁷ John Clare: *Major Works*, p. 486.

³⁴⁸ John Clare: *Major Works*, p. 48.

³⁴⁹ 'John Clare and the Gipsies', p. 27.

³⁵⁰ 'John Clare's Gypsies: Problems of Placement and Displacement', p. 54.

references made to another fictionalized Gypsy encounter in the poem draw a veil of literary creation over this apparent reality.³⁵¹

Janowitz argues that 'the boy and the Gypsy [in 'The Gipseys Camp'] met on level ground as far as their canniness and their vocabulary [...] goes' in contrast to the awe-struck child that Rogers presents in *The Pleasures of Memory*.³⁵² Janowitz's use of the phrase 'level ground' is interesting because of the implications that it has for an analysis of Clare's relationship with the Gypsies, both in and out of the poems.

As I suggested earlier, much has been made of the biographical details that connect Clare and the Gypsies. We know that he spent a lot of time associating with the Gypsies, he 'observed their customs'³⁵³ and was even taught to play the fiddle by them.³⁵⁴ The Gypsies are seen by some as Clare's 'natural allies', fighting (or, more accurately, resisting) enclosure, and they are also outsiders, just as Clare considered himself to be.³⁵⁵

The idea of 'level ground' that Janowitz places Clare and the Gypsies on is echoed in the language describing the speaker's actions in 'The Gipseys Camp': like the Gypsies, the speaker 'tramp[s]' (1) and goes on 'rambles' (2) and he is close enough to the Gypsy scene to be able to bend over 'their fire and smoak' (13) and 'hear their gibberish tale so quaintly spoke' (14). Yet this poem also emphasizes distance from the start: the Gypsies are both real *and* legendary, they are 'real effegies of midnight hags' (3), an expression that reanimates myths about the Gypsy women. There is a physical proximity between the speaker and the Gypsies, especially when they are grouped around the fire, but this is unstable: at one point the speaker is able to observe the Gypsies building their shelter from a distance, and at the next point the speaker is sitting around the fire with the group. There is also an intellectual distance between

³⁵¹ I use the word 'fictionalized' because although the young Rogers may well have had his fortune told by a Gypsy when he was a boy, the encounter that he describes in *The Pleasures of Memory* owes much to poetic licence and is clearly heavily stylized.

³⁵² 'Clare among the Gypsies', p. 168.

³⁵³ *John Clare: A Biography*, p. 95.

³⁵⁴ *John Clare: A Biography*, p. 94.

³⁵⁵ 'John Clare: the trespasser', p. 103.

the speaker and the Gypsy group: he listens to their 'gibberish tale so quaintly spoke', which indicates that the sound of the Gypsies' conversation is compelling but also complete nonsense.

As Martin has also noticed there is a contradiction in the description of the speaker's boyhood wanderings: he is described as being able to ramble and tramp, but this sense of freedom is curtailed by the mention that these rambles only happened on Sundays when the speaker had 'time' to explore the countryside, i.e., on the only day of the week that he was not working;³⁵⁶ the gap between the Gypsies and the speaker widens. The distance of the speaker from the scene he observes again shows Clare's disruption of the secure picturesque perspective.

To begin with, the speaker is on a 'level ground' with the Gypsies, which then changes to an altered picturesque observation of the Gypsies' labour in trying to build a shelter:

Along the greensward uniformly pricks
Her pliant bending hazels arching sticks
While round topt bush or briar entangld [*sic*] hedge
Where neath broad flag leaves spring or ramping sedge
Keep off the bothering bustle of the wind
And give the best retreat they hope to find (7-12)

The description is a long way from Wordsworth's image of the static knot in 'Gipsies' who have done nothing whilst the Wordsworth has travelled around 'witnessing [...] change and cheer' ('Gipsies', (12)). In 'The Gipseys Camp', the change that is witnessed comes from the Gypsies' alterations to the landscape to provide them with shelter, and the 'cheer' comes (for the boy, at least) from having a fortune told. The speaker is very definitely an observer, or witness, of the Gypsies' activity. Unlike picturesque Gypsies, Clare's figures are industrious and occupied with the task of building their shelter, a reversal of the roles of speaker and Gypsies in Wordsworth's poem 'Gipsies'. Lines thirteen and fourteen, which describe the Gypsies' conversation around the fire, also place the speaker in an odd position. Where in 'The Gipsies Evening Blaze' the speaker was squatting behind a bush, he now appears to be to some

³⁵⁶ See 'John Clare's Gypsies: Problems of Placement and Displacement', p. 54.

extent a part of the group around the fire, but is also an outsider who has to bend over the fire to be able to hear what the Gypsies are saying.

In her discussion of the relationship between Samuel Rogers' Gypsy encounter and 'The Gipseys Camp', Janowitz argues that Clare 'demystif[ies] the gap between poet and gypsy by drawing on local language'.³⁵⁷ Whilst the speaker of Clare's poem is decidedly less naïve than that of Rogers we can challenge Janowitz's argument about the language of the Gypsies and the speaker. Although Clare renders the Gypsies in a more quotidian manner than Rogers, the language used in the poem is not as straightforward as Janowitz would lead us to believe. She cites the passage that describes the fortune-telling (lines sixteen to twenty-two) as her evidence for the use of local language in the poem. Her argument depends on a focus on this section, rather than the lines that come before it: 'To hear their gibberish tale so quaintly spoke' (14), which is the only record of the oral register of the Gypsies. There is no direct Gypsy speech in the poem, but it is clear that the Gypsies' language was not the 'local language' of the rest of the poem. As we have seen, Janowitz suggests that the boy and the Gypsies in 'The Gipseys Camp' are on an equal footing 'as far as their canniness and their vocabulary of chinks and morts goes' and the critic sees this point as separating the 'reality' of the Gypsies in the poem from those in *The Pleasures of Memory*. In making this point, however, she ignores the fact that the speaker of 'The Gipseys Camp', when settled around the Gypsies' fire, only hears the 'gibberish tale', which implies a gap of understanding.

'The Gipseys Camp' is not a wholesale reversal of Rogers' Gypsy encounter. Despite the fact that Clare de-romanticizes many of Rogers' childhood memories in his own poem, we are still uncertain as to how far Clare believes the Gypsy woman's curse at the end of his poem. Both Houghton-Walker and Lamont acknowledge that there is a healthy degree of scepticism evident in Clare's poem, which is clearly lacking in Rogers', but there are also vestiges of long-held superstitions that Clare cannot wholly dismiss, or does not wish to.

³⁵⁷ 'Clare Among the Gypsies', p. 168.

Clare writes elsewhere:

In fortune telling [the Gypsies] pertended to great skill [...] the preface to every bodys fortune was the same [...] The credulous readily beleved them and they extorted money by another method of muttered over their power of revenge [...] I have h[e]ard them laugh over their evening fire at the dupes they had made[.][sic]³⁵⁸

Considering the above statement, it is unsurprising that the speaker of 'The Gipseys Camp' notes that 'as mans unbelieving taste came round' (23) he no longer believed the power of the Gypsy's prediction. Lamont recognizes, however, that in the final three lines of the poem, 'Alas for fourpence how my dye is cast | Of neer a hurded farding be possest | & when alls done be shovd to hell at last' (34-6), the Gypsy woman got 'very close to [Clare's] deepest fears'.³⁵⁹ Houghton-Walker is more sceptical about the truth of the prediction – as she points out, the Gypsy woman's prediction is actually Clare's because it is his poem.³⁶⁰ Her conclusion that the poem's ending is the result of a wry cynicism about the nature of the Gypsies' dubious practices, is not altogether satisfactory. Instead, I think that there is poignancy at the end of the poem that involves a complicated displacement and re-placement of the poet. Clare dismisses the power of Gypsy predictions, showing belief in them to be the preserve of children and the naïve, which allows him to put his own fears about the future into the mouth of the Gypsy and thus 'write off' these fears as speculative nonsense uttered by an angry woman who wants to be paid. Yet the future predicted at the end of the poem comes so close to the fears Clare articulates later in 'I Am': 'I am - yet what I am none, cares or knows'.³⁶¹ Although 'I Am' was written at a much later point, there is a general sense of foreboding at the end of 'The Gipseys Camp'; it is not inconceivable that the poet can imagine that readers will perceive his words as merely a 'gibberish tale'.

³⁵⁸ *John Clare's Autobiographical Writings*, p. 71.

³⁵⁹ 'John Clare and the Gypsies', p. 27.

³⁶⁰ 'Clare's Gypsies and Literary Influence', p. 79.

³⁶¹ John Clare, 'I am', first printed 1 January 1848, *The Later Poems of John Clare, 1837-1864*, ed. by Eric Robinson et al., 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), I, p. 396.

In 1837 Clare went into an Asylum at High Beach in Epping Forest. He continued to write a range of poems that feature Gypsies during his 'asylum' period (from the late 1830's until his escape in 1841 and from his return, later in 1841, until his death in 1864). Janowitz identifies the 1830s as a period in which Clare changes from seeing the Gypsies as a group to being 'an isolated [figure], now a separate self, rather than the member of the social clan life'.³⁶² She links this change to Clare's altered personal circumstances, 'living half in and half out of therapeutic [*sic*] confines'.³⁶³ Several of the poems from this period feature 'bonny' Gypsy girls with bright eyes, pearly white teeth and coral lips – are somewhat more clichéd and balladic than the earlier Gypsy poems.³⁶⁴ A poem that stands apart from these is 'The Gipsy Camp' (c. 1840-41):³⁶⁵

The snow falls deep; the Forest lies alone:
 The boy goes hasty for his load of brakes,
 Then thinks upon the fire and hurries back;
 The Gipsy knocks his hands and tucks them up,
 And seeks his squalid camp, half hid in snow,
 Beneath the oak, which breaks away the wind,
 And bushes close, with snow like hovel warm:
 There stinking mutton roasts upon the coals,
 And the half-roasted dog squats close and rubs,
 Then feels the heat too strong and goes aloof;
 He watches well, but none a bit can spare,
 And vainly waits the morsel thrown away:
 'Tis thus they live – a picture to the place;
 A quiet, pilfering, unprotected race. (1-14)

Nord draws attention to the poem's parallels with 'The Gipsies Evening Blaze'.³⁶⁶

Although there is some loco-descriptive overlap between the two poems – in 'The Gipsy Camp' the camp is 'Beneath the oak, which breaks away the wind, | And bushes close, with snow like hovel warm' (6-7), compared with the 'warm nook [...] behind | Short shrubby

³⁶² 'Clare among the Gypsies', p. 169.

³⁶³ 'Clare among the Gypsies', p. 169.

³⁶⁴ See: 'My Love She Was a Gipsy O', pp. 787-8; 'Sweet Sophy's Eyes are Chrystals Clear', p. 789; 'The Bonny Gipsy', pp. 866-7; 'My Own Sweet Gipsy Girl', pp. 1096-7. All in *The Later Poems of John Clare, 1837-1864*, II.

³⁶⁵ *The Later Poems of John Clare, 1837-1864*, I, p. 29.

³⁶⁶ *Gypsies and the British Imagination*, p. 49.

bushes' (4-6) in 'The Gipsies Evening Blaze'³⁶⁷ – the differences between the two poems are much more striking. In 'The Gipsy Camp', far from centring the group 'on the green' ('Blaze', 3), Clare places them somewhere in a 'Forest' that 'lies alone' (1).

Houghton-Walker draws attention to the fact that nature 'continues to play the benevolent, protecting role it has in Clare's earlier gypsy poems',³⁶⁸ yet the role of nature in 'The Gipsy Camp' is far more cruel than we have seen previously. Houghton-Walker acknowledges this in her description of the forest as presenting an 'inhospitable solitude', but she then asserts that:

Nature continues to protect the gypsies as it has always done [...] and Clare's additive style of writing in the fifth to seventh lines emphasises this, syntactically building up a nest of physical, natural protection.³⁶⁹

But there is no 'nest' in the poem, syntactic or otherwise: Clare describes the Gypsies' camp specifically as a *hovel*.

The benevolence of nature in the poem is, therefore, problematic. Although the oak tree 'breaks away the wind' and 'bushes close' to form some sort of shelter for the Gypsies, the snow still 'falls deep' and the only food that is on offer is 'stinking mutton' (8). The fire that provided the communality in 'The Gipseys Camp' is again problematical. Whereas before it was described as dancing and sparkling in the wind, now it is simply described as 'coals' (8); rather than providing an hospitable warmth for the nook, the fire half-roasts the dog and the image is reminiscent of Cowper's idea that the Gypsies would eat practically any form of meat.

Whatever sense of community that Clare might have built up through shared experience and conversation in 'The Gipseys Camp' is lost in 'The Gipsy Camp'. The effect of the picturesque is different to that which we have seen in Cowper's *The Task* or in 'The Gipseys Evening Blaze'. The physical presence of the speaker is removed from 'The Gipsy Camp'.

³⁶⁷ 'The Gipsies Evening Blaze' will be displayed parenthetically as 'Blaze', where necessary, to avoid lengthy repetition of the title.

³⁶⁸ 'Clare's Gypsies and Literary Influence', p. 84.

³⁶⁹ 'Clare's Gypsies and Literary Influence', p. 85.

Unlike *The Task*, 'The Gipseys Evening Blaze' or 'The Gipseys Camp' the scene of 'The Gipsy Camp' is given to its reader without any intervening personal presence, as a scene that is stripped away to the bare minimum. The speaker is isolated from us and from the scene he is observing and the removal of the speaker as a participant in the scene gives us a more poignant, unmediated account of the scene in 'The Gipsy Camp', emphasizing the alienation of the Gypsies from the outside world.

Although Houghton-Walker argues that in 'The Gipsy Camp' 'the role of literary precedent [...] is here, finally, diminished',³⁷⁰ I argue that Clare notably draws on two literary representations of Gypsies in this poem. The poet simplifies Cowper's idea of Gypsies who are 'loud when they beg, dumb only when they steal' into a 'quiet, pilfering' group, and he negates Cowper's idealized view of a tribe who are transformed into 'houseless rovers of the sylvan world' once they are within the safety of the forest, away from the gaze of the outsider. Clare also changes Wordsworth's description (similar to that of Cowper's) of the Gypsies' 'revelry secure, in depth of forest glade' in 'The Female Vagrant'. In his poem Clare questions the moralizing of the Female Vagrant, and instead concludes his poem with a calm, neutral statement.

As Williams notes, the 'concluding rhyme' of 'The Gipsy Camp', (the only two rhyming lines in the poem),³⁷¹ 'gives a strong sense of closure and limitation'.³⁷² The statement ' 'Tis thus they live' conveys an impression of finality that is not to be found elsewhere in Clare's Gypsy poems. McKusick posits that the final couplet of the poem:

Juxtapose[s] the consciousness of the boy and the dog, both marginal figures even within the marginal world of gypsy life, and thus [...] suggest[s] a sympathetic identification with Clare's own existence, excluded from the warmth of human kindness in the utterly marginal world of the asylum.³⁷³

³⁷⁰ 'Clare's Gypsies and Literary Influence', p. 87.

³⁷¹ Also noted by Houghton-Walker, 'Clare's Gypsies and Literary Influence', p. 87.

³⁷² 'Clare's Gypsies', p. 11.

³⁷³ 'Beyond the Visionary Company', p. 234.

Whilst I agree that Clare was very clearly sympathetic with the plight of the Gypsies, I do not believe that his sympathy stemmed from a 'craving for the lost community and shelter which he finds in the gypsy camps'.³⁷⁴ For all the parallels that might be drawn between Clare and the Gypsies – the outsider, the victim of enclosure, the lover of freedom and liberty – it is important to remember that it was he who sought them, not the other way around. As Lamont argues, 'Clare always goes to the gypsy camp; I detect no sense that the gipsies go to him, although they make him welcome when he goes'.³⁷⁵ In this statement, Lamont sums up exactly Clare's relationship with the Gypsies and why, as with other writers in this thesis, the relationship is one-sided: Clare's Gypsies are there for him when he needs to find them (either in reality, as when he is a boy, or as an imagined presence when he is in the asylum in later years). Despite the occasional temptation to join their ranks, Clare recognizes the differences between his own self and Gypsy groups he writes about; he prefers to maintain these differences whilst drawing on the similarities and cultural implications of the use of the Gypsies in his work as and when he needs to.

Although Clare can identify with the Gypsies as fellow outsiders, the cultural differences still mark them apart. The reader must be careful to remember that, although he occasionally articulates a desire to join the Gypsies, 'I became so initiated in [the Gypsies'] ways and habits that I was often tempted to join them',³⁷⁶ he never does. Lamont, amongst others, emphasizes Clare's love of his home,³⁷⁷ (also a recurrent theme in Jonathan Bate's biography of the poet), which, perhaps is an underlying reason for never giving in to the temptation of a life where 'the joys of the camp are not cares of the crown'.³⁷⁸

Lamont points out that, whilst Clare associated often with the Gypsies when they camped in the area close to his home, when they leave Clare is incurious as to where they go or

³⁷⁴ 'Beyond the Visionary Company', p. 234.

³⁷⁵ 'John Clare and the Gypsies', p. 24.

³⁷⁶ *John Clare's Autobiographical Writings*, p. 69.

³⁷⁷ 'John Clare and the Gypsies', p. 21.

³⁷⁸ 'The Camp', *The Later Poems of John Clare, 1837-1864*, I, pp. 457-8.

what they do;³⁷⁹ only once does he state an awareness of the Gypsies' lives away from his native Helpston, 'their descriptions of summer revelings [*sic*] their tales of their yearly journeys to Kent and their rendezvous [*sic*] at Norwood [...] were tickling temptations to my fancy'.³⁸⁰ This separation from the Gypsies is illustrated in Clare's famous, and extremely poignant, recollection of his escape from the Northampton Asylum:

[W]ent a walk on the forest in the afternoon – fell in with some gipseys one of whom offered to assist in my escape from the mad house by hideing [*sic*] me in his camp to which I almost agreed but told him I had no money [...] but if he would do so I would promise him fifty pounds and he agreed [...] on friday I went again but he did not seem so willing [...] On sunday I went and they were all gone[.]³⁸¹

Clare sees no reason as to why the Gypsies *should* have stayed to show him on his way, but the fact that they did not draws more clearly the line between Clare (and his settled counterparts) and the ever-travelling Gypsies. In this important episode in the poet's life there is no romanticized Gypsy rescue (as there is in contemporary ballads and as there will be in Robert Browning's poem 'The Flight of the Duchess', discussed in the next chapter), but there is also no need for one. The Gypsy community remains as separate from Clare as it ever was; just as a picture can be dissected, discussed and described down to the smallest detail, it remains unknowable because the observer is always on the outside.

This chapter has demonstrated how the figure of the Gypsy offers both a double for the cottager and a double for the poet. Scott and Rogers, both of whom were establishment figures, might be expected to have a vested interest in 'framing' the peasantry, but we see instead a voice of protest, exile and eviction coming through in their work. John Clare, by contrast, is famous for his outcast status as the 'peasant poet' and voice of political opposition. Yet in the Gypsy poems examined in this chapter we see the way in which Clare uses the Gypsies as a vehicle of fantasy and a critical reflection on Romantic subjectivity. In the next

³⁷⁹ 'John Clare and the Gypsies', p. 25.

³⁸⁰ *John Clare's Autobiographical Writings*, p. 72.

³⁸¹ *John Clare's Autobiographical Writings*, p. 153.

chapter, we shall see how Victorian writers treated the Gypsies in relation to notions of escape and freedom.

CHAPTER IV

An 'Indifferent omen': Prospects of Gypsy life, 1843-1860

In this chapter I address the works of three writers: Robert Browning, Matthew Arnold and George Eliot, and the way that they build on Gypsy types that were created and perpetuated by the earlier writers that this thesis considers. As we have seen, Princess Victoria's 'Gypsy' journal entries demonstrate a desire for independence and freedom that the Princess identifies in her Gypsy 'friends'. This desire is felt strongly in the works that I have chosen to examine as my final examples of 'paper Gypsies'; in these texts I focus specifically on how writers saw and evaluated a potential for escape in the figure of the Gypsy.

In 'The Flight of the Duchess' (first published in sixteen sections in *Dramatic Romances* (1845)), Browning explores concepts of freedom and challenges the idea that anyone can ever attain 'true' freedom; through the Duchess' escape with the Gypsies, we see that, as social beings, we can never wholly shake off the shackles that bind us to society. In Matthew Arnold's four Gypsy poems (written between 1843 and 1866), the poet seeks a way to escape the influence of one of his poetic fathers, Wordsworth, as well as exploring the imaginative possibilities of the Gypsy figure and its (in)ability to withstand the effects of an increasingly urbanized and industrialized England. Finally, I turn to George Eliot's novel *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) to look at how Eliot questions Gypsy stereotypes and, like Browning, demonstrates the difficulties inherent in the concept of escape.

Robert Browning

The ambiguous prospect of escape is central to 'The Flight of the Duchess'. Browning uses the Gypsy woman and her tribe to portray an alternative, inviting society set against a world in which the trappings of courtly life were valued above personal happiness, fulfillment and love. For Browning, the figure of the Gypsy represents a freedom that exists outside society, but the

poet also demonstrates that attaining this freedom is fraught with difficulty; there is an underlying question as to whether freedom can ever really be attained. In his use of the Gypsies, Browning is able to explore the potential and actual positive and negative effects of confinement and freedom.

From the beginning of the poem, Browning constructs a finite, complete and compact society. Despite the huntsman's claim 'If you climb to our castle's top, | I don't see where your eye can stop' (7-8), it is significant that his description of the dukedom is a short, itemized list. In this space the huntsman describes an entire miniature world, starting with:

[...]the cornfield country,
Where vineyards leave off, flocks are packed,
And sheep-range leads to cattle-tract,
And cattle-tract to open-chase,
And open-chase to the very base
Of the mountain [...] (9-14)

Until:

[...] at the last, for a bounding belt,
Comes the salt sand hoar of the great sea-shore,
– And the whole is our Duke's country. (29-31)³⁸²

Encapsulated in this description is the contradiction that is implicit throughout the entire poem: the huntsman describes an extensive but bounded landscape. This contradiction foreshadows the later, and greater, contradiction in the young Duchess' flight: while her escape with the Gypsies may appear to signify her newfound freedom, she is potentially exchanging one set of tribal laws for another.

The opening scene of the poem also constructs the idea of confinement and the need for escape, even before the young Duchess is introduced.³⁸³ Although the huntsman makes claims for the region's vastness, he also describes the borders and boundaries that will trap the

³⁸² *The Complete Works of Robert Browning with Variant Readings and Annotations*, ed. by Roma A. King et al., 17 vols (Athens, OH: Athens University Press, 1969-1998), IV (1973), pp. 207-36. All subsequent references to this edition will be displayed parenthetically in the text.

³⁸³ When commenting on the musicality of the Gypsy crone's song, Donald S. Hair notes: 'In effect she is doing what Browning tried to do in all his poetry: to put the infinite within the finite.' My argument here is slightly different to that of Hair's but, nevertheless, the similarities demonstrate Browning's interest in the idea of the infinite. See *Browning's Experiment with Genre* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1972), p. 83.

Duchess. The sense of entrapment is increased by the huntsman's description of the countryside that progresses from agricultural land to the mountain upon which the pine trees look 'like black priests' (18) climbing up the mountainside 'at a funeral pace' (14), to the Miltonic, hell-like iron and copper mines: 'one vast red drear burnt-up plain' (21), from which there seems to be no escape; the sea is the final, looming boundary after which the description stops, almost as if the 'salt sand hoar of the great sea-shore' (30) forms the edge of the world.

After this introductory description, Browning continues to create a closed-off, tight-knit and feudal community. The reader is told of the rest of the land that the Duke and his mother visit: 'Abroad and afar they went, the two' (93), and Browning mentions Paris, but the precise location of the Dukedom is left unknown. All that is known about the area, apart from the huntsman's earlier description, is that it is a 'wild' nook (107) left over from the 'Mid-Age' (106), where one can find:

[...] true castles, with proper towers,
Young-hearted women [and] old-minded men (109-110)

This part of the poem builds up the imaginative scenery into which the Gypsies will erupt and from which the Duchess will need to escape; in no other landscape, except for one which was left over from an earlier and more superstitious age, could the magical Gypsies live.

Before the Gypsies appear in the poem (over a third of the way through, in line 348), the poet constructs a vivid picture of the life of the Duke, his mother and the young Duchess.

Everything about the Duke's life is false, engineered and static:

So, all that the old Dukes had been, without knowing it,
This Duke would fain know he was, without being it;
'Twas not for the joy's self, but the joy of his showing it,
Nor for the pride's self, but the pride of our seeing it (112-15)

The reader recognizes that the life of the Duke and the society which he creates lack any sort of purpose beyond being seen to do the correct thing. Browning demonstrates this lack of substance beneath a veneer of sophistication in his comparison between the Dukes' horses: the

old Duke had 'red Berold | With the red eye slow consuming in fire' (121-2), whilst the young Duke had 'a lathy horse, all legs and length, | With blood for bone, all speed, no strength' (119-20). Browning makes a clear distinction between the old, strong and lasting ways, and the new-fangled, flighty ways, which are all for show and have no real substance.

It is not surprising that the Duchess should later prefer to choose the Gypsies' way of life to that of the Duke and his mother, because the Gypsies' priorities are markedly different:

And thou shalt know, those arms once curled
About thee, what we knew before,
How love is the only good in the world. (613-15)

The shift from the Duke's concerns about appearance and dress to the Gypsy's emphasis on the importance of love demonstrates the appeal of a life free from convention and one that is more spiritually fulfilling. William De Vane notes that the use of the Gypsies demonstrates a 'romantic tendency towards escape from over-civilized and over-crowded England [.][The Gypsies] lived a simpler and freer life'.³⁸⁴

The distinction made between the false pageantry of the Duke and the organic simplicity of the Gypsies' existence is an important factor in the Duchess's desire for freedom. While the Duke struggles with his attempts to revive the mediaeval traditions of his ancestors, 'He revived all usages thoroughly worn-out' (116) and his stiff movements make him appear as if 'his backbone were not jointed' (157), the Gypsies' actions are undertaken without any of the self-consciousness that causes the Duke's unease. The contrast between the Gypsies' poise and the Duke's unease is no more obvious than in the juxtaposition of the descriptions in stanzas XII and XIII.

In stanza XII, the Duke is described as being:

[...] in a perfect sulkiness,
Since, before breakfast, a man feels but queasily,
And a sinking at the lower abdomen
Begins the day with indifferent omen. (339-42)

³⁸⁴ William C. De Vane, *A Browning Handbook* (New York: Apple-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1955), p. 176.

The picture is one of intense discomfort, a characteristic that is associated with the Duke throughout the course of the poem, and it is confirmed with the description that he then 'looked around uneasily' (343). The description of the Duke's 'queasi[ness]' hints at indigestion and sickness; the Duke's mother's jaundiced appearance also signals illness and disease. While the Gypsies are characterized by fluid movement, which is the opposite of the Duke's stilted movements, they are also 'like insects which breed on | The very fruit they are meant to feed on' (358-9).³⁸⁵ This image of fouled food not only hints at an unchecked and unhealthy sexual appetite, but also links the poor health of the Duke and his mother to the sickening habits of the Gypsies. Although the young Duchess may feel that she needs to escape from the sickness of a life with the Duke and his mother, the description of the Gypsies' filthy practices does not offer a satisfactory alternative; there appears to be no escape from the rottenness in their world.

The reader's sense of revulsion is heightened by the huntsman's description of the old Gypsy woman, who has 'worn-out eyes, or rather eye-holes | Of no use now but to gather brine' (405-6), is 'sordid' and 'bent well-nigh double' (433), and who has grown 'so hirsute | That [her] own fleece serves for a natural fur-suit' (435-6). The old, blind woman has more in common with an animal than a human being, but, as in many fairy-tales, the old crone transforms into a powerful, compelling and magnetic figure that is easily capable of dissolving the Duke's power and stealing his bride.

Another important part in Browning's first description of the Gypsy tribe is the emphasis that he places on the fact that these particular Gypsies, diverging from descriptions of

³⁸⁵ Browning compares the Gypsies to 'insects' (359) and 'new-hatched spiders' (389). The comparison of Gypsies to insects is not new: we have seen in Chapter II that both Gilbert White and Hannah More characterized the Gypsies as such. Yet Browning's use of the simile goes beyond that of White or More. By describing the group in such terms there is an attempt by Browning to harmonize the Gypsies with their surroundings – they are literally part of the fabric of the countryside: they 'rise out of the ground' (356) and their skin is tinted by their home soil, but at the same time this detracts further from their humanness.

other tribes, have sprung (almost literally) from the immediate countryside surrounding the Duke's castle. Other Gypsies will:

[...] reach you, only
 After reaching all lands beside;
 And still, as they travel far and wide,
 Catch they and keep now a trace here, a trace there,
 That puts you in mind of a place here, a place there. (350-55)

Yet these Gypsies 'rise out of the ground' (356):

And nowhere else [...] are found
 With the earth-tint yet so freshly embrowned (357-8)

Browning's Gypsies are the true masters of the land that they inhabit, being so much a part of it that the colour of their skin is that of the soil; there is also an implicit comparison with the colour of the duke's mother's yellow, unnatural skin. The idea that they are the genii of the countryside extends the supernatural aspect of the Gypsy figure: their command over nature emphasizes the peculiar connection that the Gypsies have with the land. They have an ability to transform raw materials into items that have near-magical properties: bits for horses that 'never a brute can baffle' (366), horseshoes 'which turn on a swivel | And won't allow the hoof to shrivel' (368-9), bells 'like the shell of a wrinkle' (371) and exquisite glass:

Glasses they'll blow you, crystal-clear,
 Where just a faint cloud of rose shall appear,
 As if in pure water you dropped and let die
 A bruised black-blooded mulberry (375-8)

While the Duke is only concerned with artificial compounds: 'flap-hats and buff-coats and jack-boots' (253), the Gypsies use their natural surroundings to their advantage: 'For the earth – not a use to which they don't turn it' (361). In this passage (350-90), Browning appears to show the Gypsies in a positive light. Yet, in contrast to the majority of Gypsies, this particular tribe has not travelled over land. By claiming that these Gypsies simply spring up from the ground, Browning introduces a supernatural aspect, which foreshadows the later actions of the old Gypsy woman.

If, however, the Gypsies do not leave the Duke's land then the Duchess can never really escape. Whilst the Gypsy woman emphasizes the importance that her tribe ascribes to love, the Duchess' flight is not all that it promises to be. Had the Gypsies been the sort that 'reach you, only | After reaching all lands beside' (350-1), the Duchess may have been able to leave the Duke. Instead, it looks as if she is doomed to live a life in the grounds of the castle with a group that is bound to visit the Duke every autumn 'for profit or pastime' (399).

Browning does not present the Gypsies' way of life as one that is without complication. It is vital to remember the significance of the narrator-figure because he demonstrates Browning's idea of the difficulty in attaining the sort of lifestyle that the Gypsies lead. It is the huntsman's wish to 'scrape together [his] earnings' (869):

And arrive one day at the land of the Gipsies
And find [his] lady (885-9)

Yet he states specifically that he will only pursue this desire once the Duke has died: 'I must see this fellow his sad life through | He is our duke after all' (854-5), a statement that is at odds with the usual reckless urge to escape from conventionality. The huntsman only chooses to follow in the footsteps of his old mistress once he has no more ties to his original home:

For, you see, in the churchyard Jacynth reposes,
And our children all went the way of the roses (870-1)

He not only feels a sense of duty to his master but to his father as well: 'My father was born here, and I inherit' (857).³⁸⁶

While the Duke is seen to represent the inhibitions and dominance of a patriarchal society, it is unsettling to learn that the Duchess' escape is the result of enchantment rather than a conscious decision. The issue is complicated further by the sexual undertones in the poem, partly in the huntsman's obvious desire for the Duchess (suggested by the voyeurism implicit in

³⁸⁶ The huntsman's desire to 'arrive one day at the land of the Gipsies' is curious because the Gypsies in the poem 'rise out' of the ground on which the huntsman actually lives. His wish to travel to the Gypsy-land is, then, either the product of confusion, or is a reaffirmation of his connection with the area in which he lives; alternatively, Browning could simply be reiterating the difficulties that an escape implies.

watching the young duchess and the Gypsy through the open window), but also from the interaction between the Gypsy and the Duchess.

John Woolford and Daniel Karlin point out the sexual nature of the Gypsy's hold over the young Duchess and argue that the Gypsy gives the Duchess sexual pleasure: the 'duchess's "loose and abundant" hair is a common sign in Browning of female pleasure'.³⁸⁷ The use of the Gypsy to represent female sexuality and exoticism is not a new idea. In Chapter I, we saw how in 'The Gypsy Encampment', George Morland places a young Gypsy woman in the central foreground of his painting to draw the eye of the gentleman at the back of the painting and that of the viewer. In Chapter II, meanwhile, the discussion of Wordsworth's poem 'Beggars' focuses on the poet's exoticization of the woman that his sister, Dorothy, encountered.

As mentioned above, the Gypsy woman is portrayed as having a mixture of raw animalistic characteristics and repugnant features combined with a powerful mystique and compelling magnetism. The Gypsy is described as a 'sordid crone bent well-nigh double' (433) and as a 'loathsome [...] helicat' (439), but an underlying exoticism lingers in the description of her wolf-skin cloak, hung with 'Gold coins [...] glittering on the edges' (480), which 'proves the veil a Persian woman's' (81). The Gypsy is mesmerizing, a power that is conveyed through her eyes that transform from 'worn-out eyes, or rather eye-holes' (405) to the following description:

For it was life [the duchess's] eyes were drinking
From the crone's wide pair above unwinking,
– Life's pure fire received without shrinking (540-2)

Browning portrays the Duke and (potentially) the huntsman as incapable of being able to fulfil the Duchess' desire. The patriarchal dominance of society is threatened by the suggestion that the Gypsy woman has promised more sexual fulfilment than the men in the poem.

Sexual freedom, however, is not without its complications. In fact, it is debatable whether one who is free to express their sexual desires is actually free at all. The description of

³⁸⁷ John Woolford and Daniel Karlin, *Robert Browning* (London; New York: Longman, 1996), p. 127.

the Gypsy and the Duchess 'between [the Gypsy's] knees' (525) mixes sexual submission with the innocent image of 'a child at ease' (524). Yet the relationship between the Gypsy and the Duchess is far from that of nursemaid and child, as their positions may suggest. The description of the Gypsy's pupils that could 'double and quadruple | At pleasure' (530-1) is a clear sign of the desire that the Gypsy feels for the young woman, as well as being a sign of the hypnotic trance under which she has placed the Duchess. The sexual undertones are heightened later in the passage when the huntsman realizes that the Duchess, far from sitting passively at the Gypsy's feet, is reciprocating the Gypsy's intoxicating stare until:

As her head thrown back showed her white throat curving;
And the very tresses shared in the pleasure,
Moving to the mystic measure,
Bounding as the bosom bounded. (548-51)

The sensual nature of this passage is unmistakable, especially when, followed by a description of the Duchess' burning cheeks and glistening eyes, the passage draws the huntsman into the scene:

When all at once a hand detained me,
The selfsame contagion gained me,
And I kept time to the wondrous chime (555-7)

The mention of 'contagion' recalls contemporary prejudice about Gypsies as being unclean and carriers of infection, as well as echoing the images of infestation that we saw earlier in this chapter and in Chapter II.

Richard Kennedy and Donald Hair argue that when Browning came to revise and complete 'The Flight of the Duchess' (started as early as 1842), he 'altered his original conception'³⁸⁸ of the poem. Instead of writing about the Duchess' escape and her life with the Gypsies, Browning 'no longer emphasized the lady's new freedom in the gypsy world but was drawn instead towards his favourite theme of a damsel in need of rescue'.³⁸⁹ It is clear that

³⁸⁸ Richard S. Kennedy and Donald S. Hair, *The Dramatic Imagination of Robert Browning: A Literary Life* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2007), p. 120.

³⁸⁹ *The Dramatic Imagination of Robert Browning: A Literary Life*, p. 120.

Browning became less interested in to what the Duchess was to escape, and focused solely on the means of her escape; as a result there is only ever a *promise* of freedom in the poem. The Gypsy woman describes at some length the life that the Gypsies lead and that the Duchess will lead, but the reader can only imagine this new life. Although the Duchess does escape, the reader never hears about her new, (supposedly) free life. Instead, the reader, like the huntsman, can only guess as to what became of the young Duchess:

“You never knew, then, how it all ended,
What fortune good or bad attended
The little lady your Queen befriended?”(897-9)

Kennedy and Hair, however, do not discuss the possibility that Browning's decision to concentrate only on the Duchess' escape might indicate the poet's interest in the complexities of escape. The poem is so much more than a 'damsel-in-distress' story; identifying it as such trivializes Browning's intention to explore the difficulties of attaining true freedom.

Browning's change in focus from an idealization of the freedom that the Duchess finds 'with her gypsy lover',³⁹⁰ to a concentration on how she effects her escape, indicates his change in focus from prospects of freedom to the dynamics of release and his apparent distrust of magic, superstition and enchantment.

Browning's imaginative engagement with the figure of the Gypsy is complex. Initially it appears that the Gypsies' main function is to serve as a comparison for the rigid, joyless life of the Duke. It soon becomes apparent, however, that they serve a far greater and far more troubling purpose. The opportunity to escape from the confines of a rigidly structured society, and the potential for the discovery and reawakening of love and desire that the Gypsy figure extends to the characters in the poem, are powerful examples of the poet's imaginative engagement with his subject. Browning is careful, however, to demonstrate the complications implicit in abandoning one societal structure for another and emphasizes the strength of familial and hereditary ties and obligations. Whilst Browning explores the appeal of the Gypsy figure,

³⁹⁰ *The Dramatic Imagination of Robert Browning*, p. 120.

his poem also explores the fear of abandoning social protocol and the fear of abandonment itself. Fascination with the Gypsy figure lies as much in the actual flight of the Duchess as it does in the huntsman's imagined future escape. Holding both the potency of rebellion and the fear of this desire itself, Matthew Arnold's poems make a significant intervention in the nineteenth-century construction of 'paper Gypsies'.

Matthew Arnold

[Arnold's] rebellious inclinations, notorious during his Oxford years, were never quelled but profitably channelled as he aged [...] By this account it is perhaps unsurprising that a central, indeed mythic figure in Arnold's poetry of 1843 to 1866 is the gypsy, a cultural outsider.³⁹¹

The figure of the Gypsy features prominently in four of Matthew Arnold's poems: 'To a Gipsy Child by the Sea-Shore'³⁹² (written c. August 1843 or 1844), 'Resignation' (1843-8), 'The Scholar-Gipsy' (1853) and 'Thyrsis' (1864-6).³⁹³ The way that Arnold treats his Gypsy subjects varies, although, as many critics have noted, these poems are all imbued with a deep sense of loss and longing for an earlier, simpler time. Arnold used the figure of the Gypsy to explore themes of childhood, identity, poetic vision, the function of the poet and belonging; in conjunction with this, at least two of Arnold's Gypsy poems are strongly influenced by William Wordsworth, but Arnold uses the figure of the Gypsy to correct the older poet's philosophy.

Traditionally, Arnold's four Gypsy poems have been paired so that the earlier two poems ('To a Gipsy Child' and 'Resignation') are seen as answers to, or a re-writing of Wordsworth's poems, most obviously 'Ode. Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of

³⁹¹ Antony Harrison 'Matthew Arnold's Gipsies: Intertextuality and the New Historicism', *Victorian Poetry*, 29 (1991), p. 366.

³⁹² To avoid lengthy repetition, the title of 'To a Gipsy Child by the Sea-Shore' will be abbreviated to: 'To a Gipsy Child' where appropriate.

³⁹³ *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, ed. by Kenneth Allott; 2nd edn ed. by Miriam Allott (New York; London: Longman Group Limited, 1965; 2nd edn 1979). Dates for the composition of the above-named poems are taken from this edition.

Early Childhood' and 'Tintern Abbey'.³⁹⁴ The other two poems, whilst undoubtedly displaying a Wordsworthian influence, have been seen as sister poems: 'When Arnold [...] wrote "Thyrsis" [...] he made it a companion-piece to "The Scholar-Gipsy"', as Clinton Machann argues.³⁹⁵

In a letter to his sister Jane (K), Arnold wrote:

More and more I feel bent against the modern English habit (too much encouraged by Wordsworth) of using poetry as a channel for thinking aloud, instead of *making* anything.³⁹⁶

This letter was written in 1849, five or six years after Arnold started to write 'To a Gipsy Child', and a similar period of time after he wrote 'Resignation'. The letter marks a key phase in Arnold's poetic life, representing a turning away from one of Arnold's poetic fathers, Wordsworth. Stefan Collini argues that '[i]n literary terms, [Arnold's] relationship to Wordsworth bordered on the filial'.³⁹⁷ In Bloomian terms, Arnold in this letter attempts to break away from the influence of his 'father' in order to assert his own voice and claim his own poetic identity. This letter can also be interpreted as a prose re-statement of Arnold's earlier attempts in his poems 'To a Gipsy Child' and 'Resignation' to modify the poetic philosophy of Wordsworth that had impressed him so deeply as a young man.³⁹⁸

In 'To a Gipsy Child', the figure of the Gypsy is at first used by Arnold to examine his own philosophic beliefs and to answer Wordsworth's optimism and hope that can be found in 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood'.³⁹⁹ Interestingly, Nord does not include 'To a Gipsy Child' in her examination of Arnold's Gypsy poems, although she (like so many other critics) does acknowledge Wordsworth's influence elsewhere

³⁹⁴ See: Deborah Epstein Nord, *Gypsies and the British Imagination, 1807-1930* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), pp. 56-67; Stefan Collini, 'Arnold', *Victorian Thinkers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 229-32; Clinton Machann, *Matthew Arnold: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1998), pp. 16-22; Harrison, 'Matthew Arnold's Gypsies', pp. 367-73; Michael J. Bugeja, 'A Matter of Gypsies: Matthew Arnold and the Wordsworthian Outcast', *Liberal and Fine Arts Review*, 5 (June 1985), pp. 20-8.

³⁹⁵ *Matthew Arnold: A Literary Life*, p. 37.

³⁹⁶ 'To Jane Martha Arnold' (7 March 1849), *The Letters of Matthew Arnold*, ed. by Cecil Y. Lang, 6 vols (Charlottesville, VA: Virginia University Press, 1996-2001), I (1996), p. 141. Italics in original.

³⁹⁷ 'Arnold', p. 231.

³⁹⁸ Park Honan, *Matthew Arnold: A Life* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981), p. 39.

³⁹⁹ The title of this poem will be abbreviated to 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality' for the rest of this chapter.

in Arnold's *oeuvre*. Nord's exclusion of 'To a Gipsy Child' in her analysis is curious given her interest in the Gypsy figure, but the reason may well be that in the poem, Arnold appears to say little about Gypsies as a people, and instead seems to focus on re-writing Wordsworth's 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality'. Nord's discussion overlooks what I see as a significant encounter between Arnold and the Gypsy child so that, as Arnold escapes from a poetic precursor, he also details the impossibility of escape in the figure of the child.

As we have seen in works by writers from Cowper to Browning, the subject's separateness from society is a common theme in Gypsy poems. Where Arnold's poem is different from the others we have analyzed is that the child itself is separated not only from society, but also from its mother: 'half averse | From thine own mother's breast, that knows not thee' (13-4). This separation is doubly unsettling for the reader. The isolation of the child because it is a Gypsy is one thing; that the child is somehow distanced from its mother whilst being held in her arms is more deeply worrying, given that the picture of a mother and child is a classic image of mutual love. What completes this image of dislocation is that even as a Gypsy (traditionally part of a close-knit tribe) and as a child (who is rarely without its mother) this child appears to be completely alone. In 'To a Gipsy Child' Arnold goes even further in his rejection of Wordsworth's poetry than has been perceived by most critics. We have seen that, in 'Gipsies', Wordsworth is incapable of identifying a separate being in the Gypsy camp, which leads him to describe the group that he sees as an 'unbroken knot' (1).⁴⁰⁰ The Gypsy child in Arnold's poem is so carefully distinguished from its mother (and any other human being) that it is totally alone. Not only is it alone, it is also unable to console itself with any of the traditional Wordsworthian comforts: the beauty of nature, the home, knowledge of one's position in the universe, family and a sense of belonging.

⁴⁰⁰ William Wordsworth, *Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems, 1800-1807*, ed. by Jared Curtis, The Cornell Wordsworth, 21 vols (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975-2007), VII (1983), p. 211-12.

The promise and innocence of childhood are denied to this child, and his passivity and silence show a marked difference to many of the other children depicted by Wordsworth. The child at the beginning of 'We Are Seven' 'lightly draws its breath | And feels its life in every limb - | What should it know of death' (2-4),⁴⁰¹ but Arnold's Gypsy child has 'an infant's gloom' (2) and a 'meditative guise' (3). In a stark rejection of Wordsworth's question 'what should it know of death', Arnold replies with horrifying certainty that the Gypsy child is the 'meek anticipant of that sure pain' (41) of one who has 'Foreseen [his] harvest – yet proceed'st to live' (40). Arnold's rejection of Wordsworth is so complete that 'To a Gipsy Child' appears as a response to 'To H. C., Six Years Old'.⁴⁰² Whereas Wordsworth looks on the young Hartley Coleridge, the 'fairy voyager', and agonizes over the future pain and grief that the child may yet experience, Arnold's Gypsy child will soon have 'fathomed life too far' (47); the Gypsy child has no concerned protector to look out for him and so has little time to indulge in childhood pursuits, instead becoming an unnerving child-adult figure.

Arnold completes his fracturing of the Wordsworthian ideal of childhood in 'To a Gipsy Child' by inviting comparison between the idyllic renderings of a young child in the 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality': 'a six years' Darling of a pigmy size!' (87), who is 'Fretted by sallies of his mother's kisses' (89), and the image of the Gypsy child who is 'half averse | From [his] mother's breast' (13-14). Arnold's Gypsy child's omniscient gaze stands in contrast with Wordsworth's description of a child's play acting:

See, at his feet, some little plan or chart,
Some fragment from his dream of human life,
Shaped by himself with newly-learnèd art;
A wedding or a festival,
A mourning or a funeral;
And this hath now his heart,
And unto this he frames his song:

⁴⁰¹ *Wordsworth and Coleridge: Lyrical Ballads*, ed. by Richard L. Brett and Alun R. Jones, 3rd edn (London; New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 110-13.

⁴⁰² 'To H. C., Six Years Old' in *Poems by William Wordsworth: Including Lyrical Ballads, and the Miscellaneous Pieces of the Author. With Additional Poems, a New Preface, and a Supplementary Essay* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1815; repr. Oxford: Woodstock Books, 1989), pp. 42-3.

Then will he fit his tongue
 To dialogues of business, love, or strife;
 But it will not be long
 Ere this be thrown aside
 And with new joy and pride
 The little Actor cons another part (91-102)⁴⁰³

Arnold's Gypsy child cannot have the protected childhood that some of Wordsworth's best-known poems draw on. Arnold's choice to cut off the Gypsy child from his surroundings and to deny him the solace that can be found in Nature is a direct contrast to Wordsworth's idea of the importance of childhood and the idea of pre-natal happiness.⁴⁰⁴

In a peculiar double to Wordsworth's idea in *The Pedlar* that:

While yet a child, and long before his time
 He had perceiv'd the presence and the power
 Of greatness, and deep feelings had impress'd
 Great objects on his mind (130-33)⁴⁰⁵

Arnold presents his Gypsy child as having knowledge long before his time that fills the child with immense sadness: 'Down the pale cheek long lines of shadow slope, | Which years [...] and suffering give' (37-8), rather than providing what is for the Pedlar a 'precious gift' for his future life (*The Pedlar*, 138). Like the Pedlar, Arnold's Gypsy child appears to have 'an eye which evermore | Looked deep into the shades of difference' (*The Pedlar*, 346-7) and which could 'find no surface where its power might sleep' (*The Pedlar*, 353). The key similarity between the Pedlar and the Gypsy child is that they were both able to 'see into the life of things'.⁴⁰⁶ The outcome of this is positive for the Pedlar:

[His eye] spake perpetual logic to his soul
 And by an unrelenting agency
 Did bind his feelings even as in a chain (354-6)

⁴⁰³ William Wordsworth, 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality' in *William Wordsworth: The Poems*, ed. by John O. Hayden, (New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 526.

⁴⁰⁴ Notes 'To a Gypsy Child by the Sea-Shore', *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, p. 23.

⁴⁰⁵ William Wordsworth, *The Pedlar*, MS. E., in *The Ruined Cottage and The Pedlar*, ed. by James Butler, The Cornell Wordsworth, 21 vols (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975-2007), IV (1979), pp. 392-4. Wordsworth here identifies a child that is old before his time, but the poet sees this as a positive. In 'To A Gypsy Child' Matthew Arnold transforms this positivity into something altogether different: a figure of sadness and lost innocence, prefiguring Thomas Hardy's character nicknamed 'Little Father Time' in *Jude the Obscure*.

⁴⁰⁶ Line 49, 'Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey', *Wordsworth and Coleridge: Lyrical Ballads*, p. 157.

Arnold, however, inverts this positive ability into a negative one for his Gypsy child who has a 'soul-searching vision' that enables him to 'foresee' his 'harvest'.

Arnold's child is not even similar to the two Gypsy boys who are the subject of Wordsworth's poem 'Beggars', inspired by an entry in Dorothy Wordsworth's journal.⁴⁰⁷ In this poem, Wordsworth avoids the utter disdain that he has for the tribe in 'Gipsies', and instead romanticizes the encounter with 'A pair of little Boys at play' (21), who were 'whooping with a merry shout' (28) and delighted in nature, 'Chasing a crimson butterfly' (22).⁴⁰⁸ For Wordsworth, reflecting on the Gypsy encounter years later,⁴⁰⁹ the children whom his sister met that day were 'wanton Boys' (1), 'Spirits of beauty and of grace' (14), for whom the world was 'filled with animated toys' (3); they had not aged and were able to 'Walk through the fire with unsinged hair' (40), 'Destined, whate'er their earthly doom, | For mercy and immortal bloom!' (47-8). Arnold's Gypsy child, however, has no hope of the 'Kind Spirits!' (42), or 'care | Of pitying Heaven' (44-5) that Wordsworth's beggar boys enjoy because Arnold denies his child-subject the hope of any protection, even from its own mother. Arnold will have no cause to look back on his encounter many years later and wonder what happened to the child, because he knows from the look in the Gypsy's eyes that its life will be one of 'sure pain' (41).

To return to the quotation from Arnold's letter to his sister, a plausible reason for Arnold's denial of an idyllic childhood for the Gypsy was because his emphasis at this time was on social action and amelioration rather than recollection of thoughts. 'To a Gipsy Child by the

⁴⁰⁷ 'Beggars', *Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems, 1800-1807*, pp. 113-16. See Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Grasmere and Alfoxden Journals*, ed. by Pamela Woof (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, repr. 2008), pp. 9-10. See Chapter II for a longer discussion of this poem in relation to 'Gipsies'.

⁴⁰⁸ Wordsworth's notice of the Gypsy children's interaction with nature is in direct contrast to the figures in 'Gipsies' who ignore their surroundings: 'Behold the mighty Moon! this way | She looks as if at them — but they | Regard not her' (19-21).

⁴⁰⁹ William Wordsworth, 'Sequel to the Foregoing [Beggars], Composed Many Years After', in *Shorter Poems, 1807-1820*, ed. by Carl H. Ketcham, The Cornell Wordsworth, 21 vols (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975-2007), XIV (1989), pp. 231-3.

Sea-Shore' is the only one of Arnold's Gypsy poems that is inspired by an actual recorded encounter with the Gypsies:

In 1843 or 1844 the family passed part of the long vacation at Douglas in the Isle of Man. Matthew and a companion were one afternoon on the pier [...] There was a crowd and in front of them stood a poor woman; she might have been a gipsy [...] and the child in her arms was looking backwards over her shoulder. Its pitiful wan face and sad dark eyes rested on Matthew for some time without change of expression.⁴¹⁰

Whereas in 'Resignation' the speaker of the poem and 'Fausta' observe the Gypsies from a distance, and in 'Thyrsis' and 'The Scholar-Gipsy' the Gypsy is only seen in fleeting glimpses and its origin is based in legend, the Gypsy child that Arnold observes on the shore is not a fantasy. Unlike the individual outcasts that feature in many of Wordsworth's poems, this Gypsy child is unable to speak or to tell his story, and yet its tale is all conveyed in a silent gaze; this gaze is directed solely at Arnold, who becomes the interpreter for the Gypsy child and for all other outsiders like him: 'With eyes which sought thine eyes thou didst converse, | And that soul-searching vision fell on me' (15-16). Arnold has now become the voice that speaks for the outsider, and his medium for change and 'making something' is his poetry.

Park Honan remarks that '[a]pparently the child has a grave stereoscopic view of its future – and even a sense of its exile in the world',⁴¹¹ a point that only seems to half-explain Arnold's portrayal. Certainly the Gypsy has a view of its future, but he states explicitly that 'No exile's dream was ever half so sad' (27). The meaning here is obvious: the child is worse off than an exile who, although he may experience a longing when thinking of his former homeland and remembering 'how the past was glad' (25), at least had the opportunity to experience gladness in some form.

The idea of the Gypsy as an exile in the world is a theme that has already featured in this thesis: in Chapter I we saw that Cowper described the Gypsies as 'self-banish'd from society' (I. 578), while in Chapter III, we saw that Samuel Rogers implicitly links the figure of

⁴¹⁰ 'Matthew Arnold by One Who Knew Him Well', *Manchester Guardian* (18 May 1888). Also quoted in Notes 'To a Gipsy Child by the Sea-Shore', *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, p. 22.

⁴¹¹ *Matthew Arnold: A Life*, p. 88.

the Gypsy into a discussion of the home, banishment and belonging. Arnold's child, by contrast, will never experience any sort of happiness that is bound up with memories of home and childhood, or have a homeland from which to be exiled. The definition of the word 'exile' implies that there must have been a sense of belonging to begin with; without a native country to belong to, the Gypsy has become more isolated and even more dislocated from society. Arnold's Gypsy child is presented as the ultimate exile – from life itself – and Arnold imagines the resultant existential confusion by depicting a life devoid of natural childhood innocence.

Whilst the unsettling stillness and acceptance of the Gypsy child prompts Arnold's philosophical ruminations, the description of the child's gaze is reminiscent of Crabbe's Gypsy encounter in 'The Lover's Journey'. When Crabbe's 'Lover' comes across the Gypsy encampment, he remarks on the young Gypsy girl as having a 'speaking face' (155), although she does not actually talk to him.⁴¹² The similarity between the girl's 'speaking face' and Arnold's Gypsy child's eyes that 'didst converse' is striking. At the beginning of the 'To a Gipsy Child', the speaker asks: 'Who taught this pleading to unpractised eyes?' (1), which implies that even at a tender age the young Gypsy has learnt or been taught the art of begging or pleading. Crabbe remarks on a similar trait that is obvious in the young Gypsy girl when he mentions 'the vice *implanted* in her youthful breast' (158, italics mine) and the 'well-feign'd apprehension in her eyes' (154).

Arnold's Gypsy poems soon reveal the poet's interest in the idea of the Gypsies' seeing or being seen. In 'To a Gipsy Child', the connection between the speaker and the child is made through their shared gaze: in the next poem, 'Resignation', a similar theme occurs. The function of the Gypsies in this poem, however, differs slightly from the use of the Gypsy child in the former poem. In 'Resignation' the 'gipsies, whom we met below' (108) act as a double for the speaker and 'Fausta' and both groups have 'long roamed to and fro' (109). Instead of

⁴¹² George Crabbe: *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. by Nora Dalrymple-Champneys and Arthur Pollard, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), II, pp. 132-42.

the single, isolated Gypsy that Arnold focuses on in 'To a Gipsy Child', in 'Resignation' the poet emphasizes that there is a whole group of Gypsies: 'they ramble' (110), 'they recognise' (115), 'they see' (120). Arnold uses the Gypsies in 'Resignation' as a means of comparison for his speaker and Fausta (the speaker's companion) and he attempts to show how the Gypsies have resigned themselves to their way of life without experiencing the painful recognition of time passing.

Whilst 'Fausta' may be sceptical of the similarities between the speaker, herself and the Gypsy group: '*Those gypsies [...] Are less, the poet more, than man*' (203-4) because the Gypsies '*feel not, though they move and see*' (205, italics in original), Arnold is sympathetic to the Gypsies that he sees. In fact, he implicitly draws many comparisons between his speaker, Fausta and the Gypsy group. For example, the speaker and Fausta travel with 'ghosts of [their former] boisterous company' (89), whilst the Gypsies have also left '[t]heir fragments on the cumbered grass' (111) and are in the presence of 'the ghost [...] of former days' (123).⁴¹³ Although this line comes before Fausta claims that the Gypsies '*feel not*' (205), in the ambiguous syntax of the Gypsy encounter, Arnold suggests that the Gypsies could have the ability to be sensitive to their surroundings and have the potential to be aware of the environment:

Signs are not wanting, which *might* raise
The ghost in them of former days –
Signs are not wanting, if they would (122-4, italics mine)

The repetition here serves to emphasize the Gypsies' potential, as well as reasserting their quiet resignation to the life they lead.

It is Arnold's emphasis on the Gypsies' potential ('if they would' (124)) that hints at further sympathy for the group. Although Fausta later dismisses the Gypsies as 'less [...] than man' (204), Arnold suggests that they have the potential to see and feel what the poet does, but because they are an harassed and hounded race, 'It seems as if, in their decay, | The law grew stronger every day' (134-5); instead, they choose to '[rub] through yesterday' (138) and they

⁴¹³ For another discussion of Arnold's use of the word 'ghost', see *Gypsies and the British Imagination*, p. 59.

will continue to 'rub through, if they can' (140). Arnold allows for the possibility that the Gypsies could, like the speaker and Fausta, 'compare [...] times past with times that are' (136-7) and then interjects in a manner that could indicate exasperation:

But no! – they rubbed through yesterday
In their hereditary way,
And they will rub through, if they can,
To-morrow on the self-same plan,
Till death arrive to supersede,
For them, vicissitude and need. (138-43)

Experience has taught the Gypsies that the best method of survival is to focus only on their immediate needs. Instead of being incapable of feeling, they have chosen not to feel; the best way of avoiding pain is to disassociate themselves from anything that is not involved with their daily battle to survive. The repetition of the verb 'to rub', defined in the *OED* as: 'To continue in a certain course [...] to contrive, make shift, manage, get by',⁴¹⁴ and the phrase 'rub through',⁴¹⁵ imply a sense of dogged perseverance and single-mindedness in the face of any obstacles and an acceptance of the burden that must borne in life: the 'resignation' of the poem's title.

Arnold's choice of the phrase 'in their hereditary way' (139) indicates that the Gypsies have somehow evolved to bear the burdens that society has inflicted upon them. At the beginning of the poem, Arnold distinguishes between two different types of resignation: the first is of those for 'Whom schooling of the stubborn mind | Hath made [...] resigned' (26-7), and the second is that which has been evident from birth. It is clear that the first description refers to the figure of the poet, and the second to the figure of the Gypsy. The Gypsies' unquestioning acceptance of their fate is a theme that both Clare and, to a lesser degree, Crabbe explore in their Gypsy poems, summed up by Clare in the penultimate line of 'The Gipsy

⁴¹⁴ *OED* <<http://www.oed.com:80/Entry/168277>> [Last accessed 21 May 2011].

⁴¹⁵ The word 'rub' used in this sense is unusual in poetry but is more common in prose. Arnold's use of the word points to the textual disruption that the Gypsies cause, bringing an unsettling trail of narrative into the lyric.

Camp': 'Tis thus they live – a picture to the place' (13).⁴¹⁶ The idea of resignation corresponds with the Gypsy child's foreknowledge of its future pain and suffering in 'To a Gypsy Child'. Like the Gypsy child, the speaker in 'Resignation' can see 'life unroll' (189), but for the poet it is a life that is a 'placid and continuous whole [...] Whose secret is not joy, but peace' (190-3), rather than one full of sorrow and pain, like that of the Gypsy child. The poet's view of life conforms more to Fausta's statement: '*Not deep the poet sees, but wide*' (214, italics in original) and underlines the fundamental difference between the Gypsies and the poet. The Gypsy group in 'Resignation' has learnt to accept whatever they come across without question; the Gypsy child in 'To A Gypsy Child' has the ability to see 'deep[ly]' into its own life and has reacted accordingly, displaying the Gypsies' 'hereditary way' of passive acceptance. The poet, on the other hand, can gain perspective on the whole of humanity, and '*flees the common life of men*' (212, italics in original).

For Fausta the idea that the Gypsies are connected to the figure of the poet in a positive way through the theme of sight would be objectionable, given her statement that the Gypsies '*feel not, though they move and see*' (205); the distinction between the poet and the Gypsy is that, while both figures 'see', it is only the poet who is able to transform what he has seen into a genuine feeling. The Gypsies, on the other hand, apparently lack the necessary sensitivity to be able to interpret the scenes that appear to them. Nord notes:

The poet's greatest strength is his ability to observe, his watchfulness and his disinterestedness. In stanza 6, which evokes the poet's powers of resignation, the language of seeing and watching dominates.⁴¹⁷

She then leads on to debate the extent to which Arnold attempts a 'yoking of poet and Gypsy' and concludes: 'the poet's vocation is noble and his vision complex, while the Gypsy, although resigned, never transcends the realm of the mundane'.⁴¹⁸ I would agree with this, but Nord's

⁴¹⁶ *The Later Poems of John Clare, 1837-1864*, ed. by Eric Robinson et al., 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), I, p. 29.

⁴¹⁷ *Gypsies and the British Imagination*, p. 59.

⁴¹⁸ *Gypsies and the British Imagination*, pp. 59-60.

reading misses the complexities of Arnold's use of the Gypsy figure and ignores the subtlety with which Arnold treats the Gypsies 'Resignation'. Perhaps she should have concluded instead that the Gypsies *choose* never to 'transcend the realm of the mundane'. Nord's oversimplification persists in her discussion of 'The Scholar-Gipsy', as we shall see.

In 'The Scholar-Gipsy' Arnold combines his characters of the Gypsy and the poet that he presented in 'Resignation'⁴¹⁹ and appears to come closer than he has before been able to in presenting an ideal vision of the poet and 'an artist in quest of full possession of his own uniqueness'.⁴²⁰ More than in any of the other Gypsy poems, Arnold displays a Keatsian influence in 'The Scholar-Gipsy'.⁴²¹ The opening of the poem appears almost to borrow pastoral imagery straight from *Endymion: A Poetic Romance* in Arnold's description of the peeping 'scarlet poppies' (23), the creeping tendrils and the scent-filled air in lines 25-7.⁴²² Even the speaker's position, reclined in a shady bower, away from 'Oxford's towers' (30), is reminiscent of the numerous mentions of beautiful, peaceful bowers in *Endymion* away from the 'city's din' (l. 40).⁴²³ The story of the young scholar, who, 'tired of knocking at preferment's door' (35) decided to run away and join the Gypsies, marks Arnold's first use of the Gypsy as a means of imaginative escape, and is the first of his Gypsies whose appearance stems from myth rather than from a remembered encounter.

Instead of showing the Gypsies as a poor, despised, outcast race, Arnold portrays their ability to tell fortunes as a skill and an art as valid, if not more valid, than any other skill man might learn:

[...] the gipsy-crew,
His mates, had arts to rule as they desired
The workings of men's brains (44-6)

⁴¹⁹ See also *Gypsies and the British Imagination*, p. 60.

⁴²⁰ *Matthew Arnold: A Life*, p. 275.

⁴²¹ See Michael O'Neill, "'The burden of ourselves': Arnold as a Post-Romantic Poet", *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 36:2, Victorian Literature (2006), p. 109.

⁴²² See *Matthew Arnold: A Literary Life*, p. 37; Notes 'The Scholar-Gipsy', *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, p. 359; and *Matthew Arnold: A Life*, p. 276.

⁴²³ John Keats, *Endymion: A Poetic Romance*, in *The Poems of John Keats*, ed. by Jack Stillinger (London: Heinemann, 1978), pp. 107-216.

The positive view of the Gypsies' fortune-telling varies greatly from the majority of other tales of Gypsy wisdom, where the art of fortune-telling is seen as the primary way in which the Gypsies could practice deception, trick their 'customer' and lie their way into earning some money.⁴²⁴ Cowper alludes to the potential benefits of fortune-telling in *The Task* and acknowledges that the Gypsies are 'capable of arts | By which the world might profit and himself' (l. 575-6), but his admiration of the Gypsies' skill is never as whole-hearted as Arnold's.

In 'The Scholar-Gipsy', the art of fortune-telling is related to mesmerism, a topic that Robert Browning found unsettling, which interested Elizabeth Barrett and quite clearly captured the imagination of Arnold.⁴²⁵ When the Scholar-Gipsy states that 'the secret of their art [he] will to the world impart' (48-9), there is a very definite sense of approval of the skill of fortune-telling, and the Scholar-Gipsy is the one to impart this secret to the world.

It is in the Scholar-Gipsy's decision that he will reveal the Gypsies' secret art to the world that Arnold's connection between the Gypsies and the poet becomes clear. The Gypsies' ability to see into the 'workings of men's brains' (46) is a similar ability to that of the poet, and the avowal of the Scholar-Gipsy to divulge the secrets of this ability invites comparisons between the figure of the poet and that of the Gypsy; this connection is strengthened when it is made known that the mesmerism can only take place in 'heaven-sent moments' (50), or those moments of 'poetic inspiration'.⁴²⁶

The description of the Scholar-Gipsy is much less realistic than 'To a Gipsy Child by the Sea-Shore' or 'Resignation': at one time he is seen, 'leaning backward in a pensive dream |

⁴²⁴ See the discussion of Hannah More's *Tawney Rachel* in Chapter II.

⁴²⁵ 'The art that the Gypsies practiced would be known today as hypnotism; among the Victorians it was known [...] as mesmerism. It is very possible that it was through this interest that Arnold was first drawn to Glanvill's volume, for when the poem which resulted from it first appeared in appeared in the lists of his poetic projects, it was described as "The First Mesmerist" (in 1849) and as "The wandering mesmerist" [in 1850-1].' A. Dwight Culler, *Imaginative Reason: The Poetry of Matthew Arnold* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 179. See also: Notes 'The Scholar-Gipsy', *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, p. 356.

⁴²⁶ Notes 'The Scholar-Gipsy', *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, p. 359.

And fostering in [his] lap a heap of flowers' (77-8); at another time he is 'Sitting upon the river bank' in an 'outlandish garb' (97-8); and we learn that 'Two hundred years are flown | Since first [the Scholar-Gipsy's] story ran through Oxford halls' (131-2). The Scholar-Gipsy is now 'in some quiet churchyard laid' (137) and his body has blended back into the countryside of which his spirit is an integral part. Yet the speaker of the poem resists the idea that the Gypsy could have died, despite the logic of the matter: '— No, no, thou hast not felt the lapse of hours!' (141). Closer to Keats' nightingale who 'wast not born for death' (61, 'Ode to a Nightingale'),⁴²⁷ the Scholar-Gipsy 'possessest an immortal lot' and is 'exempt from age' (157-8) because he 'didst [...] leave the world' (161) before any of the 'sick fatigue [or] the languid doubt' (164) could affect him.

Whilst in reality it was not unusual for Gypsies to be buried in churchyards and be married and baptized in churches, literary Gypsy figures are more often seen as heathens: Hannah More's character Tawney Rachel, for example. Immortality and the promise of a 'spark from heaven' (120) in return for unswerving belief is reminiscent of the assurance of eternal life in return for loyal obedience to the Christian God; the verbal similarities between the Gypsy's '*one aim, one business, one desire*' (152, italics in original), and the affirmation of the *Nicene Creed*⁴²⁸ to believe in 'one God', 'one Church' and 'one baptism for the remission of sin', furthers the emphasis on a kind of Christianity. Yet Arnold's long struggle to accept orthodox Christian beliefs undermines the possibility of a comfortably Christianized Gypsy figure.

Reversing the usual association of Gypsies with disease (as we have seen in Browning's poem), Arnold makes it clear in the case of the Scholar-Gipsy that is necessary for the figure's survival that he stay away so that he will not be tainted by 'this strange disease of modern life'

⁴²⁷ *The Poems of John Keats*, p. 371.

⁴²⁸ The *Nicene Creed* is more properly known as the 'Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed'. I refer to the extended version of the *Creed* from 381 A.D., rather than the one agreed at the Council of Nicea (June 325 A.D.) See Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology. An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1993; 4th edn 2007), p. 15.

(203).⁴²⁹ Through a continual repetition of the idea of the moral sickness of society: 'sick hurry' (204), 'palsied hearts' (205), 'our feverish contact fly!' (221), and 'strong the infection of our mental strife' (222), the speaker attempts to distance himself from the Scholar-Gipsy in order that the figure can remain pure and unsullied by social contact:

And we should win thee from thy own fair life,
Like us distracted, and like us unblest.
Soon, soon thy cheer would die,
Thy hopes grow timorous, and unfixed thy powers,
And thy clear aims be cross and shifting made;
And then thy glad perennial youth would fade,
Fade, and grow old at last, and die like ours. (224-30)

It is clear that, for Arnold, the existence of hope for the future rests in the idea that the Scholar-Gipsy should be preserved as a Keatsian memory and a part of the landscape. At the beginning of 'Thyrsis', Arnold's vision of the Scholar-Gipsy has dimmed, and the figure melts even further into the background scenery of the poem. Whilst the scenery is still suggestive of the memory of the Scholar-Gipsy, it almost seems that, now Thyrsis has died, the existence of the figure has been thrown into doubt:

That single elm-tree bright
[...] I miss it! is it gone?
[...] while it stood, we said,
Our friend, the Gipsy-Scholar, was not dead;
While the tree lived, he in these fields lived on. (26-30)

Thyrsis' death has realized the doubts of the poet-speaker about the Scholar-Gipsy's ability to continue living in the 'sickly' modern world.

In order to keep the doubt alive about the survival of the Scholar-Gipsy, the figure is not mentioned again for over one hundred and fifty lines, and he never physically appears in the poem. The speaker's questioning of the Scholar-Gipsy's resilience makes it seem that he, too,

⁴²⁹ In his 1823 poem 'The Choice', Leigh Hunt posits the idea that the best combination in a person would be 'a gipsy's body, and a poet's mind' (303) because the Gypsies are so healthy: '[They] have a health in every look and limb, | To which our best perceptions must be dim' (301-2). *Selected writings of Leigh Hunt*, ed. by John Strachan, 6 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2002-2003), VI (2003), pp. 22-32. Arguments such as this were scarce and writers instead tended to focus on the unhealthiness of the Gypsies' lives, as I have demonstrated in my previous chapters.

like Thyrsis, has died. When the poem reaches a dramatic and poignant climax, the speaker spies 'Bare on its lonely ridge, the Tree! The Tree!' (160). Whilst the Scholar-Gipsy himself has not appeared, the continued existence of the tree symbolizes that the figure yet endures:

*Why faintest thou? I wandered till I died.
Roam on! The light we sought is shining still.
Dost thou ask proof? Our tree yet crowns the hill,
Our Scholar travels yet the loved hill-side.* (237-40, italics in original)

In fact, the Scholar-Gipsy never appears in the poem in the same way that he did in 'The Scholar-Gipsy'; in 'Thyrsis' the Scholar-Gipsy is only present by suggestion, and the figure has become more and more ghost-like, haunting the Cumnor Hills.

Despite the speaker's obvious despair at being left alone, he finds comfort in the fact that the Scholar-Gipsy still exists in some form; the speaker states: 'yet will I not despair. | Despair I will not' (192-3) because he knows that 'Our Gipsy-Scholar haunts, outliving thee!' (197). The Scholar-Gipsy's survival indicates that the promise of hope still survives too. While it is true that the speaker finds in the Scholar-Gipsy 'the promise of his own survival',⁴³⁰ the emphasis is more on the fact that the speaker's poetic quest is still, and will always be, valid: 'A fugitive and gracious light he seeks, | Shy to illumine; and I seek it too' (201-2).

Arnold's elegy for Clough allows him to find validation for his own poetic calling, as Machann argues:

Keeping in mind Harold Bloom's contention that the great elegies centre on the creative anxieties of the poet rather than on his grief, it is easy to see how Arnold's anxieties about his own accomplishments are reflected in ['Thyrsis'].⁴³¹

The Scholar-Gipsy's continued existence allows the speaker to continue with his poetry, despite the death of Thyrsis and being "'Mid city-noise' (232), he too becomes a figure like the Scholar-Gipsy, enabling the continuation of the speaker's poetic quest:

– Then through the great town's harsh, heart-wearying roar,
Let in thy voice a whisper often come,
To chase fatigue and fear (234-6)

⁴³⁰ *Gypsies and the British Imagination*, p. 66.

⁴³¹ *Matthew Arnold: A Literary Life*, p. 71.

From 'To a Gipsy Child' to 'Thyrsis', Arnold's use of the Gypsy has ranged from seeing the figure as a stark outsider, to uniting the figure of the poet and the Gypsy into one. Arnold's aim in 'To a Gipsy Child' was not only to reply to Wordsworth's idealization of the child figure, but also to develop his own poetic voice and to begin to examine the calm stoicism of the Gypsies. In 'Resignation', Arnold has not quite managed to escape the Wordsworthian influence and yet his treatment of the Gypsies shows a stark difference to that of Wordsworth's. The cyclical wandering that the Gypsies undertake foreshadows both the speaker's journey and that of the Gypsies in 'The Scholar-Gipsy' and 'Thyrsis'. In these final two poems, Arnold unites the figure of the poet and the Gypsy, although, crucially, the figure always remains more 'scholar' than 'Gypsy'; in the last line of 'Thyrsis', the speaker says: '*Our Scholar travels yet the loved hill-side*' (240, emphasis mine; italics in original).

Arnold transforms the received stereotype of the Gypsy figure, portraying them as a race that has much from which the individual can learn. By depicting the Gypsies as the people who offer the Scholar-Gipsy protection from the evils of the modern world (they are the 'dark Iberians' (249) who aid the 'Tyrian trader' (232) in 'The Scholar-Gipsy'),⁴³² Arnold becomes a champion for the Gypsy race by showing them to be the guardians of the goodness in the world. The decision of an educated man to choose life as a Gypsy-wanderer rather than to remain within conventional society shows a startling shift in the representation of Gypsies, from envisaging them as the 'enemy within', to seeing them as guardians without, protectors of all that is good in an increasingly corrupt society. Arnold confirms legislators' fears about settled people becoming 'counterfeit' Gypsies, but he transforms this fear into a celebration of the life that exists out-with a conventional social order. The idea of an escape from society, however, is not without complications: there is a constant danger that this new life will be tainted by the

⁴³² See Notes 'The Scholar-Gipsy', *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, p. 368.

'strange disease of modern life', and it is clear that the escape is only open to those who have a poet's sensibilities and breadth of vision.

George Eliot

Maggie's escape from St. Ogg's, whether to London or to Dunlow Common where the gypsies camp, remains forever forbidden and blocked.⁴³³

In *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot uses her Gypsy characters to explore problematic Romantic notions of escape and freedom. Just as Browning poses the problems implicit in the idea of escape in 'The Flight of the Duchess', Eliot uses Gypsy figures not only to prove that, at least for Maggie, it was impossible to 'run away from her shadow' (I. xi, 91), but also to dispel any misconceptions about the Gypsy way of life; Eliot mocks Maggie for her foolish assumption that the Gypsies will welcome her into their lives, and that she will be able to 'instruct the gypsies, and [gain] great influence over them' (I. xi, 95-6), and also mocks the reader who, like Maggie, may well expect the Gypsies to be found on 'a mysterious illimitable common, where there were sand-pits to hide in, [where] one was out of everybody's reach' (I. xi, 94).⁴³⁴

There are two main strands to Maggie's escape to the Gypsies that I will discuss. Firstly, there is a connection between Maggie's identification with the Gypsies and her need to escape from a family in which she felt she did not belong. Secondly, the author's use of Gypsy characters simultaneously exposes and discounts common Gypsy stereotypes; there is a very obvious warning to both child and adult of the dangers of romanticizing and idealizing the figure. Eliot's description of the Gypsies and their camp has much in common with contemporary accounts of the figure and she employs picturesque techniques in a similar way to other writers featured in this thesis.

⁴³³ Deborah Epstein Nord, "Marks of Race": Gypsy Figures and Eccentric Femininity in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing', *Victorian Studies*, 41 (1997-1998), p. 200.

⁴³⁴ George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, ed. by Gordon S. Haight (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980). Subsequent references to this edition are shown parenthetically in the text.

The description of Maggie's struggle in deciding whether or not to run away at the beginning of Volume I, Chapter XI, demonstrates the dichotomy of Eliot's Gypsy episode. Maggie's overwhelming need to belong and to be wanted provides her with the excuse to run away to the Gypsies whom 'she had been so often told she was like', yet this decision was made only when she was 'miserable' because 'it seemed to her the only way of escaping opprobrium' (I. xi, 91). The little girl cannot see her escape to the Gypsies as wholly positive and views it as her last resort: 'Maggie thought her misery had reached a pitch at which gipsydom was her only refuge' (I. xi, 91). Although Maggie idealizes the Gypsy way of life, thinking that she 'would [...] live in a little brown tent on the commons', and envisages that she would have a superior place in the tribe, 'the gypsies, she considered, would gladly receive her, and pay her much respect on account of her superior knowledge', her attitude to the group is tainted by her brother's description of the Gypsies as 'thieves [who] hardly got anything to eat, and had nothing to drive but a donkey' (I. xi, 91). In this passage, Eliot introduces the conflicting Gypsy images (the two extremes of idealism and cynicism) that she will later expose when Maggie finds her 'kindred' camped in the lane.

The Gypsy encounter is one of many examples of Maggie's childhood misconceptions and Eliot builds on Maggie's childish, half-understanding view of life throughout the rest of the chapter. Maggie's encounter with the 'two shabby-looking men' (I. xi, 92) in the lane foreshadows her disappointing meeting with the Gypsies in the camp; her impulse to give these men her only sixpence stems more from her wish to be thought of as 'a generous person' (I. xi, 92) than from any in-built sense of benevolence. As a young girl, Maggie is naïve in her expectations when she meets the men and her desire to please and to be accepted overrules any innate sense of self-awareness and common sense. The humiliation that the child feels when the two men laugh at her is a warning that Eliot directs at all Romantic misperceptions.

Maggie's escape to find the Gypsies is symptomatic of her need to control and to reassert herself as the dominant force in her life. In the episode prior to the Gypsy encounter, Maggie pushes her cousin Lucy into the mud at Aunt Pullet's house. Nord argues that this misdemeanour is Maggie's attempt to 'punish Lucy for her much praised femininity and decorousness', yet this only partially explains the episode.⁴³⁵ When Lucy is covered in mud and cow dung she becomes brown just like Maggie, but this superficial brownness, which can and will be easily washed off, is nothing compared to Maggie's own, much-commented on dark skin: '[her] brown skin as makes her look like a mulatter' (I. ii, 12). Maggie's escape to the Gypsies is partly occasioned by her childish fear of punishment and her anger at her brother's behaviour, but also by her need to assert her superiority and regain what she sees as her rightful place. Whilst Maggie idolizes her older brother, Tom, he views her with disdain, leaving Maggie with a gnawing sense of inferiority. Because of this, Maggie seeks a relationship in which she has power, independence and freedom, in a similar way to how Princess Victoria saw a way that she could exert her autonomy in her treatment of the Gypsies. By running away to find her 'unknown kindred' (I. xi, 93), Maggie is able to envision a welcoming double for her own family, who are, at this point in the novel, particularly unkind. It is because these Gypsy-kindred are unknown that Maggie is able to create a fantasy in which she, for once, will be the leader rather than the interloper and changeling.

The description of Maggie's search for the Gypsies is reminiscent of the quest of a hero for his homeland. Eliot ironizes Maggie for the importance that the girl places on her journey and for her over-active imagination, fed by her voracious appetite for reading:

[Maggie] crept through the bars of the gate and walked on with new spirit, though not without haunting images of Apollyon [...] a highwayman [...] and other miscellaneous dangers [...] She had rushed into the adventure seeking her unknown kindred, the gypsies (I. xi, 93)

⁴³⁵ "Marks of Race": Gypsy Figures and Eccentric Femininity', p. 200.

Seen through the rational eyes of an adult, the lane that Maggie creeps into is simply a rather wide country road; for Maggie, who had 'never seen such a wide lane' (I. xi, 93), the discovery, out of her usual range of experience, is a sign that she will soon meet with her elusive kindred.

Eliot's description of the Gypsies' camp is reminiscent of the opening lines of the Gypsy episode in *The Task*:

Maggie [...] saw the little semicircular black tent with the blue smoke rising before it, which was to be her refuge from all the blighting obloquy that had pursued her in civilized life. (I. xi, 94)

The similarity between the two texts continues in Eliot's mention of the 'column of smoke' rising from the Gypsies' fire, which is comparable to Cowper's description of the 'column of slow-rising smoke' that first signals the Gypsies' presence in his poem. As well as the similarities with other works of literature, the description of the Gypsy camp evokes picturesque representations of Gypsy camps in paintings. John Constable's painting *The Vale of Dedham* (1828) [Figure VIII] shows a tiny crouched Gypsy figure in the foreground of the painting, sitting in front of a pitched tent and a fire that is sending up a column of smoke.⁴³⁶ J. M. W. Turner's painting *A Beech Wood with Gypsies Round a Campfire* (1799-1801) [Figure VII] shows not only the obligatory Gypsies' campfire, but is also situated in a hollowed-out dell, and his painting *A Beech Wood with Gypsies Seated in the Distance* (1799-1801) [Figure VI] is much like Maggie's imagined place where the Gypsies would live. Turner's engraving *Sandbank and Gypsies* (n.d., exhibited 1809)⁴³⁷ [Figure IX] is the pictorial embodiment of Maggie's idea that

⁴³⁶ 'Constable's inclusion of the figure of a gypsy mother nursing her child beside a fire has been criticized as a concession to the taste for the Picturesque. Charles Rhyne, however, has noted that according to an ordnance survey map a well was located in this area, and this would have made it a natural camping site for gypsies [...]. Reynolds also noted that gypsies were frequently to be seen in East Anglia and that the inclusion of this detail does not infringe Constable's rule that only actual or probable figures should appear in his landscape paintings. [...] Suffolk had been affected by the agricultural depression and social unrest during the 1820s, and the gypsy may reflect the instability of rural life at this time, and Constable's sympathy with the cause of ordinary people.' *Constable: Land, Sea and Sky* <<http://www.nga.gov.au/Exhibition/CONSTABLE/Detail.cfm?IRN=143206>> [Last accessed 21 May 2011].

⁴³⁷ John Gage, 'Turner and the Picturesque – II', *The Burlington Magazine*, 107:743 (February 1965), p. 79.

Gypsies have 'sand-pits to hide in'. From this crossover between art and literature, it is not hard to see how the little girl's ideas of fantasy and reality have become confused.

When the reader learns a little more of the Gypsies' camp, the similarities between the description and the paintings of Gypsy camps become even more striking. Eliot groups her Gypsy figures as many artists do when painting a scene:

There was quite a group round the fire [...] An old gypsy woman was seated on the ground nursing her knees and occasionally poking a skewer into the round kettle [...] two small [...] children were lying prone and resting on their elbows [...] and a placid donkey was bending his head over a tall girl [...] The slanting sunlight fell kindly upon them, and the scene was very pretty and comfortable (I. xi, 94-5)

Eliot's writing evokes many images of Gypsies found in paintings;⁴³⁸ for example, the old woman by the steaming pot and the donkey carrying a heavy load in Thomas Gainsborough's *Landscape with Gypsies* (c.1753-4) [Figure V], while the description of the family gathered around Maggie is strongly reminiscent of the pictures of a Gypsy family sat around the feet of a tall woman in J. M. W. Turner's *Gypsy Camp* (c. 1807) [Figure X] and the family huddled together around the campfire in Gainsborough's *Gypsy Encampment, Sunset* (1778-80) [Figure IV]. The description of the 'tall figure, who proved to be a young woman with a baby on her arm' (I. xi, 94) is reminiscent of John Everett Millais' early watercolour *The Gypsy* (1846) [XI].

Maggie's introduction to the Gypsies spans the difference between imagination and reality, fiction and fact, and, at some point, Eliot has to dispel the picture built up by the descriptions of the camp and the Gypsies' appearances. The young Gypsy woman that she first meets who has a 'tall figure' and a face with 'bright dark eyes and [...] long hair' (94) is not unlike the Gypsy mother in Wordsworth's 'Beggars'; a mixture of the exotic and the familiar, a figure in literature and reality. The young Gypsy woman is also a double of Maggie 'before she cut her hair off' and Maggie takes comfort from this: 'Maggie [...] was reassured by the thought

⁴³⁸ Gordon S. Haight makes frequent mentions of Eliot's visits to galleries and exhibitions, including those at the Royal Academy, South Kensington Museum, the National Gallery, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the British Museum, the Grosvenor Gallery and the Dulwich Gallery. See *George Eliot: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968).

that her aunt Pullet and the rest were right when they called her a gypsy' (I. xi, 94). Yet this supposed connection with the 'unknown kindred' is soon to be broken and Maggie realizes that, despite their picturesque, fairytale appearance, the Gypsies too are living, breathing and very real people.

Josephine McDonagh argues that the Gypsy encounter in *The Mill on the Floss* is one of Maggie's most 'conforming and consoling acts' in which she becomes 'a kind of missionary herself'.⁴³⁹ The sense of missionary zeal that is evident in Maggie's wish to join the Gypsies reflects society's changing attitude towards that particular group, as well as reflecting a later nineteenth-century frame of mind. Maggie's wish to domesticate the Gypsies and to instruct them is an example of how members of both her and Eliot's contemporary society wished to tame the Gypsies and assimilate them into society, yet at the same time attempt to retain some of their difference in order to keep alive their exotic possibilities.

Maggie's picturesque first impression of the camp is still subject not only to her flights of fancy, but also to her domination. In the same spirit that a colonialist may view his newly-conquered country, Maggie expects her new-found discovery to have elements of the familiar, including the quintessentially British tea and bread and butter, as well as an excitingly new (but safely tamed) exoticism. This idea of colonization is underscored later in the chapter by Maggie's idea that she will teach the Gypsies about 'Geography too' (I. xi, 95), and the irony of her decision to tell them about Columbus 'a very wonderful man, who found out half the world' (I. xi, 96), is not lost on the adult reader of the novel. In fact, Maggie's description of Columbus, a man who was 'put [in] chains' and 'treated [...] very badly' (I. xi, 96), after his great discoveries draws several parallels with Maggie, although, at this point, the only similarity between the historical figure and the little girl is their shared need for adventure and discovery.

⁴³⁹ Josephine McDonagh, 'The Early Novels' in *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*, ed. by George Levine, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 53.

When Maggie first enters the Gypsy camp hand-in-hand with one of the Gypsies, she is, by and large, pleased with the scene that was 'really pretty and comfortable' (I. xi, 95), but decides inwardly that:

Everything would be quite charming when she had taught the gypsies to use a washing-basin, and to feel an interest in books. (I. xi, 95)

The frequent references to tea and bread and butter reinforce the idea of Maggie as a true daughter of the Empire with her colonial spirit fully intact. Unlike Arnold's Scholar-Gypsy who ran away to be taught by the Gypsies, Maggie has a reassuringly British and conventional attitude that she will be able to educate the Gypsies, so that they can come to represent her vision of the ideal Gypsy.

Eliot manages to combine the two dominant contemporary attitudes towards the Gypsies in one small chapter. Through Maggie, the author shows the attraction of Gypsies' way of life, who were traditionally seen as providing refuge and protection to outlaws and runaways; at the same time, the Gypsies are seen as uneducated, villainous vagabonds, who think nothing of stealing from a young, helpless girl. When Maggie comes to the swift realization that she would never be able to change the Gypsies, or to educate them, it is not only her dream of belonging with the Gypsies that is shattered, but also her missionary, empire-building zeal.

The imagery and description in the Gypsy chapter of *The Mill on the Floss* share many similarities with several eighteenth- and early-nineteenth century texts. Maggie expects the Gypsy camp to be on a common, an occurrence that would have become very rare since the acts of enclosure and the 1824 Vagrancy Act had been put through parliament. Instead, as seen in much of Clare's poetry, the camp is hidden away, safe from too many prying eyes because, according to the 1824 Vagrancy Act:

[E]very person wandering abroad and lodging [...] in the open air, or under a tent, or in any cart or wagon [shall be committed] to the house of correction [...] for any time not exceeding three calendar months.⁴⁴⁰

Maggie's childish view of the Gypsies owes much more to literature than fact, as the uncompromising statement above makes very clear, the Gypsy encampments of Maggie's imagination were fast becoming a romanticized aspect of the past.⁴⁴¹ Stories for children that featured Gypsies were not uncommon: Mrs Sherwood's *The Gipsy Babes: A Tale of the Last Century; Southstone Rock* (1827), for example, represents the sort of story that Maggie might have read.

The tale of *The Gipsy Babes* opens with a family listening to their grandfather telling a story about an aristocratic little boy who was kidnapped by the Gypsies after his father banished them from his lands. An old, wise Gypsy who also cares for a Gypsy baby girl looks after the little boy and they make a living 'by begging, fortune-telling, and pilfering'.⁴⁴² When the old Gypsy's son dies, she tells the children to pay a visit to a big house; they do this and the little boy starts to find everything familiar. Eventually the boy's parents (who live in the big house) recognize him and the family takes in him and the Gypsy baby. A few years later, the old Gypsy lady visits the big house and is given a place to live; she is also converted to Christianity. When the little boy grows up he marries the Gypsy girl and the story comes full-circle, explaining why the narrator (the granddaughter who relates her grandfather's story) has 'black eyes and black hair' and 'had more right to look like [a Gypsy] than perhaps [she] knew' (6).

⁴⁴⁰ 'Vagrancy Act 1824', 5 Geo.4.c.83 (1824), <<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo4/5/83/contents>> [Last accessed 21 May 2011].

⁴⁴¹ 'The enclosure movement gathered momentum throughout the [nineteenth] century, taking away increasingly large areas of common land. The impact on the nomadic population was felt early on with accounts of the Gypsies complaining of the difficulties occasioned by enclosure', David Mayall, *Gypsy-travellers in nineteenth-century society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 20. By 1876 and the introduction of the Commons Act, the Gypsies were effectively shut off permanently from using any part of the common land (see *Gypsy-travellers in nineteenth-century society*, p. 190). The 1876 Commons Act built on the statutes laid down in the 'General Inclosure Act' of 1845, which had already all but excluded the Gypsies from being able to use common land to camp on. The 1845 act allowed for people interested in the common land to appoint attorneys to act for them in their claim; for obvious reasons the Gypsies were unable to comply with these instructions. See 'Inclosure Act 1845', 8&9 Vic. c. 118 (1845) <<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Vict/8-9/118>> [Last accessed 21 May 2011].

⁴⁴² Mrs Sherwood, *The Gipsy Babes: A Tale of the Last Century; [and] Southstone Rock* (London: 1827), p. 27. Subsequent references will be made parenthetically in the text.

This story contains several characteristics common to many other stories about Gypsies and is a perfect example of its type in both descriptions and plot. Firstly, the idea of the kidnap of a child from a middle- or upper-class family by the Gypsies is deeply-embedded in story-telling tradition;⁴⁴³ the idea of the Gypsies' revenge is likewise familiar and, in Victorian England, tales of the Gypsies' acts of retribution appeared with frequency in the periodical press.⁴⁴⁴ Mrs Sherwood's descriptions of the Gypsies and their camp also conform to the traditional idea of a Gypsy camp:

[In the wilderness behind the house] furthest from the view [of outsiders] was an embowered spot, shaded on one side by a rock and on another by an exceeding thick copse [was the] resort of a horde of gipsies. (9)

The later description of another Gypsy camp in *The Gipsy Babes* changes from having similarities to Cowper's description in *The Task*, to the picturesque ideal that Maggie expects when she runs away to join the Gypsies:

They had made a kind of tent by spreading a ragged cloak from the edge of the rock to the boughs of an old oak which was near at hand, having made a fire on the greensward near to the brook, over which hung their kettle hissing and boiling. (11)

In a similar vein to Maggie's missionary zeal to teach the Gypsies what she considers as useful knowledge, the old Gypsy woman and the baby who grows up to marry the young heir in Mrs Sherwood's story both become 'civilized': the old Gypsy becomes a Christian and adapts to life as a settled person; for the baby the change is more gradual, as she grows out of her Gypsy ways and eventually marries an heir.

⁴⁴³ News articles about actual kidnapping by the Gypsies also appeared in the papers at the time. See: 'Gypsies', *Caledonian Mercury* (12 June 1802), p. 2; 'The Providence of God Asserted', *Methodist Magazine* (January 1820), pp. 44-6; 'The Bohemian Girl: To the Editor of the *Weekly Review*' (November 1852), pp. 147-8. For an example of the fiction about kidnapping by the Gypsies as a form of revenge, see: 'The Gipsy Boy', *Trewman's Exeter Flying Post Or Plymouth and Cornish Advertiser* (12 July 1865), p. 6.

⁴⁴⁴ See: 'Letter to Mr Urban: The Gipsie's Prophecy [sic]', [Source Unknown: University of Liverpool Archives B. 4.30.] This prophecy was supposedly written by a Gypsy and hidden in the eaves of a house in Cheshire. It foretells the execution of Charles I and the Civil War. See also 'The Gipsy', *The Odd Fellow* (22 August 1840), p. 185, for the story of a Gypsy woman's supernatural revenge on a Kentish fisherman; 'The Gipsy's Prophecy', *The Belfast News-Letter* (21 April 1848), p. 4; 'The Gipsy's Curse', *Le Follet: Journal du Grande Monde, Fashion, Polite Literature, Beaux Arts &c., &c.* (1 November 1854), pp. 84-5; and 'The Gipsy's Malison', *Supplement to the Manchester Times* (15 May 1869), p. 1.

Whilst the idea of Gypsies marrying into the British ruling class might seem unsettling, Mrs Sherwood carefully neutralizes the Gypsy threat and retains only aesthetic advantages – the black eyes and black hair, which we know Maggie Tulliver also possesses; that the story is the first time that the grandchildren learn of their Gypsy ancestry shows that no other bad Gypsy traits have been inherited.⁴⁴⁵

Whatever her literary fantasies might have promised, Maggie's dream of running away to live with the Gypsies falls apart when they offer her food. The social gulf that exists between Maggie, and indeed society as a whole, and the Gypsies is represented by the meal that the tribe prepares. When Maggie first arrives in the camp, the only note of discord in the picturesque scene is the 'odorous steam' that issues forth from the kettle on the campfire (I. xi, 94). Soon after, when Maggie is beginning to feel hungry, the Gypsies offer her 'a lump of dry bread [...] and a piece of cold bacon', but she asks for her longed-for bread-and-butter instead; when she is told by the old Gypsy woman: 'We've got no tea or butter', Maggie answers that instead she will have 'bread and treacle' (I. xi, 96). Although the colonial implications of asking for a quintessentially British meal have been discussed, Maggie's request for bread and butter is also a symbol of how the Gypsies' camp has begun to shatter her illusions about leading a life with the tribe. By asking for bread and treacle, Maggie shows how young she is (bread and treacle are a quintessential 'nursery tea'). This is also evident in the fact that she is oblivious to the Gypsies' poverty and she asks for food that they cannot provide; by doing so, she further undermines her superficial similarities with her 'kindred'. With her request for bread and treacle, Maggie is still able to entertain her idea of playing at being a Gypsy. When the reality of the Gypsies' existence strikes the little girl, she is no longer keen to join in with them and instead wants to go home; Eliot's irony shows how Maggie's schemes are thwarted mainly by an empty stomach.

⁴⁴⁵ The grandchildren's lack of bad Gypsy blood, despite being descended from a Gypsy, stands in stark contrast to the constant references in *The Mill on the Floss* to Maggie's supposed Gypsy looks and changeling appearance in her blond, pale family; in *The Gipsy Babes* the Gypsy inheritance is obviously acceptable in a sanitized, romanticized version.

As a result of this episode, Maggie comes to the conclusion that 'it was impossible she should ever be queen of these people, or even communicate to them amusing and useful knowledge' (I. xi, 97).⁴⁴⁶ Her dream of running away to a people who would welcome her and accept her as their leader transforms into a cautionary tale, where the Gypsies change from being exotic creatures of interest to monstrous thieves who might 'kill her as soon as it was dark, and cut up her body for gradual cooking' (I. xi, 98). In this part of the chapter, Maggie reverts to the stereotype of seeing the Gypsies as people who kidnapped white children and would then, just like natives on a newly-discovered island, chop up their victims and feast on their flesh; her colonizing ambitions fall prey to a fear of the colonial 'other'.

Maggie's childish imagination searches for a hero to come and rescue her from her supposed plight: 'if Jack the Giantkiller, or Mr Greatheart, or St George who slew the dragon [...] would happen to pass this way!' but then decides 'with a sinking heart that these heroes were never seen in the neighbourhood of St Ogg's – nothing wonderful ever came there' (I. xi, 98). The narrator points out that '[Maggie's] thoughts generally were the oddest mixture of clear-eyed acumen and blind dreams' (I. xi, 98), and it is obvious that Maggie's ideas about the Gypsies are a product of this mixture of dream and reality. In fact, her ideas about the Gypsies are characteristic of the general view of the group at the time: they were either semi-mythical Romantic outcasts, or a type of renegade human in need of conversion and Christianizing; it is perhaps no coincidence that Maggie's thoughts are continually turning to episodes and characters from *The Pilgrim's Progress* when she is confronted with the Gypsies. What Maggie fails to see is that, being close to St Ogg's, the Gypsies are unlikely to be the fantastical monsters of her imagination, and instead are only interested in taking a few pennies and then accompanying the little girl home.

⁴⁴⁶ The statement that Maggie wishes to 'communicate to them amusing and useful knowledge' appears to derive directly from something that Maggie might have picked up from her class-obsessed aunts; it seems to be almost a mockery of Victorian society's values that the little girl thinks that knowledge should be amusing as well as useful. This is another example of Maggie's 'playing' at a figure much older than herself.

Maggie's journey home with the Gypsies forms the final part of the chapter. To begin with, the journey is described as a continuing part of Maggie's nightmare – 'no nightmare had ever seemed to her more horrible' (I. xi, 99) – and yet, as the Gypsies, the donkey and Maggie draw closer to St Ogg's, the nightmare transforms back into a familiar and comforting reality:

At last – O, sight of joy! – this lane, the longest in the world, was coming to an end, was opening on a broad high-road [...] And there was a finger-post at the corner [...] The gypsy really meant to take her home, then: he was probably a good man, after all, and might have been hurt at the thought that she didn't like coming with him alone. (I. xi, 100)

The description of the route back towards St Ogg's really does seem like the description of a heroine in a child's story battling to return home under the setting sun which 'seemed to have a portentous meaning', and past a sinister braying donkey and two cottages that were probably 'inhabited by witches' (I. xi, 100). The unfamiliar presence of the Gypsy causes Maggie's unease and feeds her fertile imagination; when she sees the sign pointing towards home and then sees her father, the Gypsy changes from being a thief and a murdering kin-of-the-devil into a 'very kind, good man' (I. xi, 100). Mr Tulliver refuses to be taken in by his daughter's sudden good opinion of the Gypsies and, although he pays the man, he leaves the Gypsy with the parting remark: 'that's the best day's work *you* ever did' (I. xi, 100, italics in original). It takes more than a kind deed to change Mr Tulliver's opinion of the Gypsies.

The episode when Maggie runs away to the Gypsies is important because it shows, in one small chapter, a spectrum of different opinions about and stereotypes of the Gypsies. It allows Eliot to develop Maggie's character further and shows her more fully as an outsider even to outsiders, who cannot belong anywhere. Unlike either Browning or Arnold, Eliot shows what a life with the Gypsies is like *after* the excitement of the escape is over.

Robert Browning, Matthew Arnold and George Eliot all identify the potential for escape that is associated with the Gypsy figure, but all three show how attempts to break away focus the problem of Romantic subjectivity: the Miltonic sense that 'Which way I fly is Hell'

(IV.75).⁴⁴⁷ In 'The Flight of the Duchess', Browning's characters are unable to find a true freedom, and instead they swap one form of bondage for another: the young Duchess flees from her loveless (and, by extension, sexless) marriage, but only exchanges aridity for a disturbing sexual enthrallment. Matthew Arnold's Gypsies range from being the isolated, alien figure of the Gypsy child, to the idealized Gypsy-Scholar, but the sense of separation from society is acute. In Arnold's early poems, the Gypsies are quietly resigned to their fate and their separateness is seen as a way of enduring the burden existence. In 'The Scholar-Gipsy' and 'Thyrsis', however, the Scholar-Gipsy's ethereal separation from society is a pointedly unique way of negotiating 'this strange disease of modern life'. Arnold's 'Scholar-Gipsy' and 'Thyrsis' do not offer the possibility of escape precisely because they have already gone; their phantom presence in the landscape is a sign of hope, but one that must remain remote to ensure it survives.

In poetic terms, Arnold's reworking of William Wordsworth's poetry, specifically in 'To a Gipsy Child', is an escape from one of his most profound poetic influences; he challenges Wordsworth's ideals, moving poetry away from being (as he wrote to his sister, Jane) a somewhat egotistical Wordsworthian 'channel' for 'thinking aloud', towards a more active, socially-grounded discourse. That socially-grounded discourse, however, only sharpens awareness of social dislocation as the Gypsy epitomizes Arnold's subdued sense of the prospect of belonging in the modern world. In Arnold's poetry, the aesthetic distance necessary for the construction of the picturesque becomes the subject of agonized interrogation, symptomatic of the estrangement of the poet from his society.

In the final section of this chapter, we saw how Eliot refuses to romanticize the Gypsies and Maggie's escape to them. Eliot demystifies the Gypsy characters from the poetic tradition by showing them to be figments of a little girl's imagination. As well as discrediting the exoticized view of the figure, Eliot also breaks down the idealized picturesque view of the

⁴⁴⁷ John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 75

Gypsies by juxtaposing Maggie's fantasy with some of the (equally extreme) negative portrayals of Gypsy life: the stinking, scarce food, the stealing and the vagabond way of life. By foregrounding the Gypsies' day-to-day existence, and contrasting it with Maggie Tulliver's idealized notions of them, Eliot shows how the Gypsies' illusion of freedom depends on the distance of the spectator. This illusion breaks apart on closer inspection and we realize, conversely, that the Gypsies are bound by the constraints of their own freedom, just as we saw in *The Task*, when Cowper moved from his distant position as a picturesque viewer of the Gypsies to a position in which he was able to describe the harsh details of life in the camp. By replicating Cowper's move from distant spectator to troubled first-hand observer, Eliot teaches both Maggie and her readers to alter their perceptions.

CONCLUSION

In the Introduction to this thesis I quoted a phrase from William Howitt's 1836 work *The Rural Life of England*, where he describes the Gypsies as 'a living enigma in human history'. Over two hundred years later, the question of who the Gypsies really are is still puzzling writers, artists and legislators. The 'Definitions' section of a 2004 government report entitled 'Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions – Thirteenth Report', opens with the disconcerting statement that 'the definition of a Gypsy or Traveller is far from clear-cut'.⁴⁴⁸ In the latest census on the 27th March 2011, however, there was an option to choose 'Gypsy or Traveller' as an ethnic origin; although the government does not seem to be able to define what a Gypsy is, the Gypsies themselves evidently have no such problem of identification. Curiously enough, especially when we have seen the persistent stereotype of the Gypsies' dark skin highlighted in this thesis, the 'Gypsy or Traveller' option came under the heading 'White'. Two hundred and ten years after Wordsworth wrote 'Gipsies' and displayed a deep anxiety about the 'uncountability' of the group he met, attempts have been made to identify the number of Gypsies living in Britain. Yet, despite this counting and quantifying, for the non-Gypsies the issue of the definition of 'Gypsy' is still surrounded by anxiety.

The persistent unreadability and undefinability, demonstrated by the Select Committee's recent attempts (and failure) to define the term 'Gypsy', is what has attracted writers and artists throughout the ages to use Gypsy figures in their work, as Howitt recognized in the 1830s. The mysterious unknowability of the Gypsies allowed, and still allows, room for artistic interpretation and they become a figure onto which one can project a variety of complex feelings of attraction and repulsion. Indeed, society is still at a loss how to react to the

⁴⁴⁸ 'Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions – Thirteenth Report', 26 October 2004. <<http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm200304/cmselect/cmodpm/633/63306.htm>> [Last accessed 21 May 2011].

Gypsies, because it is unable to define them, but it remains fascinated by a group that appears continually to resist attempts at assimilation

Whilst writing this thesis I came across a number of modern-day Gypsy representations, which have a particular relevance for my topic. Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy (pub. 1995-2000) contains characters called 'gyptians', whose name, travelling lifestyle and the abuse they experience at the hands of the settled people are reminiscent of the Gypsies' own. The similarity between Pullman's gyptians and the Gypsies is at its strongest in the character of John Faa, who is not only 'the king of the gyptians',⁴⁴⁹ but has a well-known Gypsy surname; the Faas were a famous Scottish Gypsy family, and Jean Gordon (of *Guy Mannering* fame) was married to William Faa.

Interest in the Gypsies is not just limited to fiction, however. In August 2010, news of President Sarkozy's expulsion of Roma illegal immigrants from France unleashed a torrent of debate in the international press about Gypsy rights, Gypsy history and Gypsy persecution. Clover Stroud's article 'Jealous of the gypsies' in *The Spectator*, which was provoked by Sarkozy's policy, argues that society's aversion to the Gypsies stems from a secret envy of them.⁴⁵⁰ More recently, the popularity of the 2010 Cutting Edge film *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* and the recent Channel 4 documentary series of the same name (February-March 2011) have demonstrated our enduring fascination with Gypsy lifestyle.

What links many of these disparate strands is that they demonstrate my interpretation of Wim Willems' term 'paper Gypsies': many rely on a received knowledge of the Gypsies and their lifestyle, without necessarily having any first-hand experience. As the articles on Sarkozy's decision to 'repatriate' the Roma demonstrate, the issues of how to deal with the Gypsies as well as what we mean by 'the Gypsies', are emotional as well as political: the response to Sarkozy's actions cannot be untangled from notions of political correctness and,

⁴⁴⁹ Philip Pullman, *Northern Lights* (London: Scholastic, 1995; repr. 2001), p. 110.

⁴⁵⁰ Clover Stroud, 'Jealous of the gypsies', *The Spectator* (4 September 2010), pp. 20-1.

post-Holocaust, his critics cannot avoid drawing parallels with Nazi ethnic cleansing and social engineering.

My thesis ends well before the traumatic experience of the Gypsies in Europe of the 1930s and 1940s, but all the case studies I have presented show the enduring nature of the ‘paper Gypsies’. In 1941, Gertrud Kolmar, a German-Jewish poet who was assigned to a forced labour camp during the Second World War, wrote:

I sat all alone on a bench with a young Gypsy woman, who did nothing, said nothing, only gazed unmoving out into the desolate factory yard [...] on her face lay not just the apathy, the acquiescence of animals [...] but also much more: an impenetrable closedness, a silence, a distance, which could not be reached by any word, any glance from the outside world.⁴⁵¹

As we have seen, Matthew Arnold’s notice of the Gypsy child in ‘To a Gipsy Child by the Sea-Shore’ is strikingly similar to Kolmar’s: both writers share the view that the Gypsies are somehow in this world, whilst remaining distinctly separate from it. Unlike Arnold, however, Kolmar is not able to read anything in the Gypsy’s expression; she is now totally cut-off from the outside world. It is, I would argue, the late-eighteenth and nineteenth-century reception of the Gypsies that established what Kolmar would see, as well as the terms of her description.

In this thesis I have not attempted to define what a ‘Gypsy’ is, or was, in anthropological terms. I feel that, whether or not this question can ever really be answered, it is a discussion that will exceed the limitations of a literary thesis. Instead, I have traced how writers and artists have created their own Gypsies, using a shared literary heritage as well as adding their own individual impressions of the figure. Whilst there are several key tropes that continually re-emerge – for example, the situating of the Gypsies on a literal and metaphorical borderland, the tawny faces, the Gypsies’ watchful gaze, or the presence of a camp fire – each writer recreates the Gypsies in a way that tells us more about their art than about the mysterious figures they encounter.

⁴⁵¹ Katie Trumpener, ‘The Time of the Gypsies: A “People Without History” in the Narratives of the West’, *Critical Inquiry*, 18:4, Identities (Summer, 1992), pp. 856-7.

In Chapter I we saw how William Cowper became unsettled by the group of Gypsies he encountered, which provoked a range of emotions from sympathy for the group, to disgust and disbelief at the Gypsies' self-inflicted separation from society. In Chapter II, Gilbert White's Gypsies were seen as a subject worthy of brief scientific examination, although he began this examination by anticipating an inability to understand much about the group; Hannah More's Gypsy served as an example of how *not* to live; the trouble that the Gypsies posed for Wordsworth was that they exposed the vulnerability that he felt about the legitimacy of his occupation as a poet; George Crabbe used the Gypsy figure to demonstrate his concerns about social responsibility, charitable giving and the function of law; and finally, Jane Austen foreshadowed George Eliot in her wry portrayal of the Gypsy encounter, and its subsequent fictionalization.

In Chapter III, Samuel Rogers, Walter Scott and John Clare were shown to have recognized the Gypsy as an important figure in their memories of the past, but their depictions of the figure marked a departure from their other works: Rogers' and Scott's works registered social protest, whilst Clare's outlook was more literary and his Gypsy poems were as important a part of his poetic development as they were a testament to his 'authentic' rural experiences.

Chapter IV explored how Robert Browning, Matthew Arnold and George Eliot used the Gypsy in their work as figure through which they could discuss various conceptions of escape and freedom. Browning used his Gypsies to work through the problematic question of whether freedom could ever really be attained; Matthew Arnold's Gypsy portrayals ranged from seeing the Gypsies as resigned figures that accepted the harsh realities of life, to celebrating them as protectors of all that was good in society, whose separateness from society was essential; George Eliot, the last writer to be considered in this thesis, not only debunked the myth of the Gypsy and showed us what life was like *after* an escape, but also held a mirror

up to the way that society saw the Gypsies and reflected the misconceptions about, and romanticization of, the figure back to her readers.

In the texts examined in this thesis, the Gypsy is a cipher: in this sense it is a figure valued little for what it is in itself – we get no real understanding of the Gypsies' own lives, feelings or motivations – but it gathers meaning from its context whilst also exerting power over that context. As a cipher, the Gypsy figure stands as a gesture towards a history of meaning but is also a shape onto which writers can project their anxieties. The figure is a symbol with coded, multi-layered meanings: as William Gilpin explains in 'On Landscape Painting', a Gypsy will 'express that sentiment, | Awak'd already by the savage-scene', simply by *being* there.

My identification of the ambiguity of Gypsy representations has allowed me to examine the varying responses to the figure within individual portrayals as well as across a range of texts. I have shown that the Gypsies' ambiguity allows for multi-valent representations, as we find in picturesque paintings. Whilst the presentation of a Gypsy character may at first seem to be 'negative' or 'positive', a closer historicized and contextual examination reveals the complexity of the figure and often demonstrates a tension created by a recognition of self set against a desire to separate the Gypsy as an 'other'. By placing each text in its literary context I have shown how the 'paper Gypsies' are continually reworked; in particular, I have demonstrated how influential William Cowper's Gypsy episode in *The Task* was to other writers. By considering the influence of the periodical press and newspapers on Gypsy representations, I have revealed the extent to which literary Gypsies pervaded the public consciousness and shaped subsequent ideas about the group. William St Clair's research on the number of readers of *The Task*, for example, and the widespread reviews like *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, shows how widely Gypsy representations were disseminated in the period.

The texts and paintings that I have chosen to discuss represent a wide range of attitudes towards the Gypsies. The course of my research has also led me to many other interesting and complex Gypsy representations and although my thesis is necessarily selective, I will briefly indicate the nineteenth-century texts that I chose to exclude. In Chapter III I focus on Walter Scott's use of the Gypsies as parallels for the displaced tenants of the Highland Clearances, and their importance as doubles for the settled people. In preparation for my work on Scott I was introduced to the unique relationship that Scotland has with the Gypsies. There is scope for an extended study of the Gypsies in nineteenth-century Scottish literature, which can focus not only on Scott's *Guy Mannering*, the afterlife of the novel and its Gypsy heroine Meg Merrilees (in Keats' poem 'Old Meg she was a gipsy'⁴⁵² and in theatrical adaptations), but also John Galt's novel *Sir Andrew Wylie of that Ilk* (1822); a study such as this would also include an in-depth examination of the Gypsy articles in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (1817-18), some of which I quote from in Chapter III.

My research on Robert Browning's 'The Flight of the Duchess' led me to the well-known ballad 'The Gipsy Laddie', which appeared frequently in chapbooks and pamphlets and was popular in the nineteenth century (the ballad is now best known as 'The Raggle-Taggle Gypsies'). Not only is there further scope for research into Browning's use of 'The Gipsy Laddie' – the plot of 'The Flight of the Duchess' derives from this ballad – but also for the role that the Gypsy figure played in the ballad tradition.

If my thesis had been limited to the nineteenth century, a discussion of Heathcliff, the 'gypsy brat' of *Wuthering Heights*, and the Gypsy episode from *Jane Eyre*, would have been possible in my final chapter, but I felt that the issues raised by the Brontës' Gypsy depictions – the uncertainty as to whether Heathcliff *was* a Gypsy, and Rochester's *temporary* disguise as a counterfeit Gypsy – were too big to discuss here. Given more space, an inclusion of a

⁴⁵² The title of which is quoted in the title of Chapter III. See John Keats, 'Old Meg she was a gipsy' in *The Poems of John Keats*, ed. by Jack Stillinger (Heinemann: London, 1978), pp. 266-7.

discussion of *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* would allow me to explore further issues of identity that the novels and their Gypsies raise; an examination of identity and the outsider in *The Mill on the Floss* could be extended to include *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, for example. My thesis begins with eighteenth-century texts because we need to see the eighteenth-century context that lays the ground for nineteenth-century Gypsy representations. I have discussed canonical and popular culture in this thesis to show the extent to which writers used the Gypsy figure. Although the works that I have just mentioned lie outside the scope of this thesis, I have laid the contextual ground that would enable further study at a later date.

The power of the 'paper Gypsy' is in its symbolic potential. The figure can be interpreted in many different ways, provoking a wide range of emotions that become subsumed as part of its meaning; it shows us the limits of what is readable in a figure that is, for the most part, unreadable; not just William Howitt's 'living enigma' but also Gertrude Kolmar's idea of 'an impenetrable closedness'. Society fictionalizes the Gypsies to fill the void created by its frustrated attempts to 'read' and know the Gypsies' *real* life; this fictionalization averts the threat that the Gypsies' unknowability poses to secure constructions of self and 'other'. Ironically, this process contributes to, and reinforces, the Gypsies' multivalent and complex state-of-being in literary representations. Thus the myth of the Gypsy and its enduring ambiguity is perpetuated, as the world outside the text is continually usurped upon by fiction.

APPENDIX

FIGURE I



'Gipsy woman & children near Claremont: from recollection'
Claremont. Dec: 1836

*The woman called Sarah Cooper & the children (her nephew & nieces) called: Dinah,
Job, Britannia, Emmeline, Helen &c.*

RCIN 980013, fol. 10.

FIGURE II



A Gypsy Encampment (n.d.)

George Morland (1763-1804)

© The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, UK.

The Fitzwilliam Museum has listed the title of this painting as *Encampment of Gypsies*, but I have followed John Barrell in referring to it as *A Gypsy Encampment*.

FIGURE III



The Gipsies/ Wooded Landscape with Gypsies Round a Campfire (c.1754-9)

Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788)

Engraved by J. Wood (1759)

Every attempt has been made to find the copyright licence-holder for this image.

FIGURE IV

*Gypsy Encampment, Sunset* (c.1778-80)

Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788)

FIGURE V

*Landscape with Gipsies* (c.1753-4)

Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788)

© Tate, London 2011

FIGURE VI



A Beech Wood with Gypsies seated in the Distance (1799-1801)

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851)

FIGURE VII



A Beech Wood with Gypsies Round a Campfire (1799-1801)

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851)

FIGURE VIII

*The Vale of Dedham* (1828)

John Constable (1776-1837)

National Gallery of Scotland, purchased with the aid of The Cowan Smith Bequest and the Art Fund 1944.

FIGURE IX

*Sandbank and Gypsies* (n.d.)

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851)

© Tate, London 2011

FIGURE X

*Gipsy Camp* (c.1807)

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851)

FIGURE XI

*The Gipsy* (1846)

John Everett Millais (1829-1836)

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