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THE CONSTRUCTION, INTERNALIZATION AND SUBVERSION OF HEATHCLIFF'S "GYPSY" IDENTITY IN WUTHERING HEIGHTS

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Abstract: This study re-examines the racialized ontology of Heathcliff in Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights through the theoretical lens of Internal Orientalism, arguing that his enigmatic "Gypsy" identity functions as a strategic cultural construct rather than a mere biological marker. While previous scholarship has frequently oscillated between metaphysical and class-based interpretations of Heathcliff's vengeance, this research contends that his presence constitutes a localized eruption of colonial anxiety within the domestic sanctuary of the Yorkshire moors. By integrating Edward Said's framework of Othering with the spatial politics of the nineteenth-century English estate, the article demonstrates Heathcliff is constructed as a "Gypsy" Other through racialized and animalized representations, his exclusion from domestic and educational spaces, and exoticized fantasies about his unknown origins. Such discursive and institutional practices construct him as uncivilized and socially illegitimate and turn his ambiguous identity into a threat to the established order of family, marriage and property.
Keywords: Wuthering Heights; Heathcliff; Gypsy; Internal Orientalism

1 INTRODUCTION

Published in 1847, Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights is now widely regarded as a significant work of nineteenth-century English literature, known for its unconventional treatment of love, class, violence, and social conflict. Set in the Yorkshire moors, the novel traces Heathcliff's transformation from an abandoned child of uncertain origin into a powerful yet isolated figure whose love for Catherine and pursuit of revenge bring him into conflict with the social and familial order around him. Early Victorian critics often regarded him as a demonic Gothic figure, emphasizing his cruelty and capacity for revenge. Later critics have explored his emotional complexity and unstable social identity. Arnold Kettle describes as "the revived Byronic satan-hero" [1], while Terry Eagleton argues that Heathcliff "destroys the established order because he has no real place in society" [2]. These different readings reveal the complexity and instability of Heathcliff's identity.

Some critics have noticed the importance of the "Gypsy" label. As Deborah Epstein Nord points out, the novel repeatedly associates Heathcliff with possible Gypsy ancestry. Such observations reveal the ambiguity of his identity, that is, he is both a family member and a permanent outsider. However, many discussions remain preoccupied with whether Heathcliff is indeed a Gypsy, leaving unexamined what the label itself does in the novel.

In nineteenth-century Britain, "Gypsy" wasn't simply a neutral ethnic designation but a socially constructed category shaped by longstanding stereotypes of wandering, criminality, superstition, and cultural difference. Since Romani people left few self-written texts, representations of the "Gypsy" were largely produced and circulated by external observers [3]. Therefore, "Gypsy" derives from the mistaken belief that the Romani originated in Egypt, rather than from a name used by the Romani themselves.

Therefore, this paper shifts attention from the question of whether Heathcliff is actually a Gypsy to the discursive function of the "Gypsy" label itself. It argues that the "Gypsy" label should be understood as a culturally constructed marker rather than a precise ethnic classification. Heathcliff's "monstrosity" is a result of an external Orientalist gaze. The Earnshaws and the Lintons use this label to define their own pure English bloodline. As dominant families, they bring Heathcliff into the household while repeatedly making him feel different that helps preserve their authority. This dual constraint leads to Heathcliff's internalized stigma. He begins to see himself through the descriptions of wildness, lawlessness, and linguistic difference that others have imposed on him. Heathcliff's internalization of this imposed identity is real, but never complete. As an adult, he uses wealth, marriage, and property law to challenge the families that excluded him, turning the institutions that secure their power into instruments of revenge.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Studies on Wuthering Heights's Heathcliff

Studies of Heathcliff have developed from early moral condemnation to more pluralistic modern interpretations. Yet most studies still focus on class conflict, psychology, or metaphysical meanings, while insufficient attention has been paid to his "Gypsy" identity and redefinition of the image of the "Gypsy" [4].

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In Marxist criticism, Heathcliff is often interpreted as the embodiment of capitalist spirit. Terry Eagleton reads Heathcliff's ascent primarily as an economic ascent, achieved through wealth, mortgages and marriage contracts, inheritance manipulation, and contractual control of property [5]. Arnold Kettle similarly sees him as representing the violent resistance of the dispossessed lower class against the established property order. Raymond Williams situates Wuthering Heights within nineteenth-century English social transformation, highlighting the tension between landed authority and emergent social mobility and the resulting instability of a class system in which family relations are inseparable from property, kinship, and social authority [6]. Heathcliff's seizure of the two estates, therefore, symbolizes the erosion of traditional class legitimacy.

Psychological critics, by contrast, explain Heathcliff's "monstrosity" through innate evil or acquired trauma. Early Victorian critics often portrayed Heathcliff as a demonic and inhuman figure [7], whereas later interpretations emphasize the rejection and repression he suffers from society, family, and social structures. Psychoanalytic perspectives further understand Heathcliff's revenge through trauma, humiliation, and abandonment. Feminist critics Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar likewise read the extreme emotional conflicts in Wuthering Heights in relation to oppressive patriarchal and familial structures [8].

Studies of Heathcliff's racial and cultural identity offer another perspective on his marginalization. Rather than viewing him only as a class outsider or a psychologically damaged individual, these studies draw attention to his foreign appearance, uncertain origin, language, and repeated association with the "Gypsy". Dana Medoro describes Heathcliff as a non-white or "Gypsy"-like character in the novel, stressing that he is repeatedly animalized, demonized, and associated with cultural primitivism [9]. Susan Meyer similarly argues that Victorian representations of racial difference often link "difference" with moral and social disorder [10]. These studies suggest that Heathcliff's exclusion is shaped not only by his social position but also by the ways in which his physical and cultural difference is interpreted by those around him. This emphasis on the interpretation of difference provides a basis for an Orientalist reading of Heathcliff. His foreign appearance, uncertain origin, language, and association with the "Gypsy" become signs through which the dominant characters construct him as an Other within Victorian English society, pointing toward the concept of Internal Orientalism.

However, the discussion of Heathcliff's "Gypsy" identity can be further connected to the broader cultural construction of the Gypsy in Britain. Rather than being a neutral ethnic description, the image of the "Gypsy" was shaped by representations produced largely from outside the Romani community. Deborah Epstein Nord's study of the British imagination shows how Gypsies were repeatedly represented through literary and cultural stereotypes, while Katie Trumpener examines their exclusion from dominant narratives of history and national belonging. These studies help shift the discussion from whether Heathcliff is "really" a Gypsy to how the category of the "Gypsy" itself is constructed and imposed.

This line of research provides a basis for understanding Heathcliff through the perspective of Internal Orientalism. Ken Lee argues that Romanies can be understood as "Orientals within" Europe, showing that the logic of Orientalism can operate not only between Europe and its external Others but also within European society itself [11]. From this perspective, Heathcliff's "Gypsy" identity can be understood as an internally constructed form of Otherness, produced through naming, stereotyping, and social exclusion.

Yet existing studies tend to focus more on how Heathcliff is represented and marginalized by others than on what happens after such representations become part of his own sense of identity [12]. This leaves room to examine a further process: the internalization of imposed otherness and Heathcliff's subsequent response to it. Rather than simply accepting the identity assigned to him, Heathcliff gradually turns some of the qualities associated with his "Gypsy" otherness into means of resistance against the social, familial, and property structures that have excluded him.

2.2 Internal Orientalism

Throughout Wuthering Heights, Heathcliff is repeatedly represented through language marked by racial and cultural otherness. The logic behind Heathcliff's identity construction is closely related to Said's theory of Orientalism. For Said, the "Orient" functions less as a geographical space than as a system of representation produced by Western discourse. The Oriental Other is often represented as irrational, primitive, savage, uncontrolled, and dangerous, while the West defines itself as rational, civilized, ordered, and morally superior [13]. Orientalism does not simply describe difference. It actively creates and stabilizes difference through naming, representation, and classification. Language thus becomes a form of power, because the Other rarely speaks for itself and is instead interpreted by dominant discourse.

While classical Orientalism concerns the construction of external colonial objects [13], internal Orientalism relocates this logic within the social structure of the metropolis itself. Dominant groups create culturally ambiguous figures within their own society as primitive, irrational, threatening or morally inferior "Others" and thereby consolidate their own identity and authority. It examines the way dominant groups construct marginalized groups inside their own society as exotic, backward, irrational or inferior. This logic is not confined to any single national context and has been observed wherever a dominant group defines its own modernity against an internal Other. Ken Lee argues that nineteenth-century European scholarship performed exactly the operation Said locates abroad, but at home, "Whilst Orientalism is the discursive construction of the exotic Other outside Europe, Gypsylorism is the construction of the exotic Other within Europe – Romanies are the 'Orientals within'" [11]. Katie Trumpener's influential study of Gypsy figures across three centuries of Western literature similarly demonstrates that British and European writers excluded Romani characters from full historical belonging through techniques of exoticization strikingly similar to those Said

identifies in colonial discourse [14]. Internal Orientalism, in other words, has already been used to analyze the literary construction of the Gypsy in the West, which is precisely the terrain Wuthering Heights occupies. In this sense, internal Orientalism follows a paradoxical logic that marginal groups are excluded from full belonging yet remain necessary to the dominant community's self-definition. They are transformed into symbolic Others that help sustain the ideological structure of the ruling class.

More importantly, internal Orientalism also works through psychological internalization. This process recalls Frantz Fanon's concept of the "epidermalization" of inferiority, through which the dominant representation of the racialized Other becomes internalized by the marginalized subject and shapes his or her sense of self [15]. People repeatedly described as inferior, primitive, irrational, or dangerous may gradually understand themselves through categories imposed by dominant discourse. In Wuthering Heights, the Earnshaws, the Lintons, and even Nelly Dean repeatedly describe Heathcliff as wild and morally dangerous. Over time, Heathcliff internalizes these projections. His violence, emotional extremity, and destructive revenge are therefore best understood as the result of years of discursive oppression rather than as innate monstrosity. Victorian society first constructs him as a monster through language and then condemns him for becoming the image it has produced.

To fill this gap within the scholarship, this article uses the internal orientalism as its main analytical framework. In Wuthering Heights, the Earnshaw and Linton families function as such dominant groups. Through the dual mechanism of assimilation and exclusion, they maintain the boundaries of their own superiority while gradually forcing Heathcliff into internalized stigma, making him the literary product of sustained discursive violence. The remainder of this article traces this process in two stages. This paper traces how Heathcliff's "Gypsy" identity is constructed through spatial, institutional, psychological, and economic forms of othering, and how this imposed identity is gradually internalized. It further examines how Heathcliff turns the very traits assigned to him into a weapon against the property, marriage, and moral order that once excluded him.

3 THE CONSTRUCTION OF HEATHCLIFF AS A "GYPSY" OTHER

Within the nineteenth-century British cultural imagination, "Gypsies" functioned as a symbolic category associated with lawlessness, mystery, cunning, primitive desires, and godlessness [16]. Even the word's etymology betrays this constructed nature. "Gypsy" derives from "Egyptian," a mistaken belief that the Romani people had migrated from Egypt, and the Oxford English Dictionary notes that the term's earliest recorded use dates only to the late sixteenth century, coined entirely by outside observers rather than by the Romani themselves. This history is important for understanding how the term operates in the novel: "Gypsy" was a cultural label already burdened with meanings of foreignness, disorder, and social marginality. Brontë draws upon these established associations when constructing Heathcliff, whose appearance, behavior, and social position repeatedly invite comparison with the stereotypical Gypsy figure. In this sense, Heathcliff's "Gypsy" identity emerges from the accumulation of meanings attached to the label within the British cultural imagination.

The label was, in this sense, external from its very origin which is a name imposed on a people who left few self-authored records to contest it. In Wuthering Heights, Emily Brontë weaves together these stereotypical traits through his body, behavior, emotions, and actions, gradually constructing him as a dangerous Other, well beyond a simple label of ethnic difference. To understand this construction, it is necessary to move beyond the novel's linear timeline and examine the scattered features of Heathcliff's life together. Among them, his most striking trait is his nomadic attachment to the wilderness, which resists patriarchal domestic order and places him at the margins of civilization.

3.1 Spatial and Institutional Exclusion

This spatial nomadism is rooted in Heathcliff's childhood. Unlike Edgar Linton, who is carefully confined indoors and associated with rational order, Heathcliff's attachment to open space repeatedly takes the form of trespass into places from which he is explicitly barred. When he and Catherine creep up to the windows of Thrushcross Grange to spy on the Linton children, they are discovered and seized by the Lintons' servant, who identifies Heathcliff as "a lad here who looks an out-and-outer," speculating aloud that "the robbers were for putting them through the window, to open the doors to the gang, after all were asleep, that they might murder us at their ease" [17]. A single moment of looking through a window is enough to conjure the image of an entire criminal conspiracy, because Heathcliff's presence in a space that does not belong to him is instantly legible as an act of aggression rather than curiosity. The reaction becomes even more revealing when the servant calls him a "foul-mouthed thief" and threatens that "you shall go to the gallows for this," while Mr. Linton orders that the gun be kept ready. The sequence of "thief," "gallows," and "gun" places a child at the extreme end of a criminal and judicial vocabulary, showing how quickly Heathcliff's ambiguous presence is translated into criminal identity. Mr. Linton's later question, "would it not be a kindness to the country to hang him at once, before he shows his nature in acts as well as features?" is particularly significant because it shifts suspicion from what Heathcliff has done to what he supposedly is. The word "nature" suggests an essentialized criminal character, while "features" makes his physical appearance part of the evidence against him. His body, once merely undomesticated, becomes in this moment actively dangerous. His detachment from domestic space is mistakenly regarded as hostility toward civilized institutions, including family discipline and religious authority.

In 19th-century ethnic discourse, marginal outsiders were often represented as naturally resistant to law, education, and church discipline. Heathcliff's defiance fits this stereotype, but so does the response of the institutions that confront him. Education provides another form of institutional exclusion. After Hindley becomes master of Wuthering Heights, Heathcliff is "no longer allowed to share Cathy's lessons" and is instead "degraded to the position of an ordinary farm-servant". The contrast between "lessons" and "farm-servant" is significant: Heathcliff is not simply denied knowledge, but deliberately removed from the social position that education represents. His exclusion is therefore both intellectual and social, cutting him off from the means through which Catherine and Hindley continue to receive the privileges of the household. Nelly later makes the consequences of this deprivation explicit, observing that "continual hard work, begun soon and concluded late, had extinguished any curiosity he once possessed in pursuit of knowledge, and any love for books or learning". The verbs "extinguished" and "lost" suggest that his apparent lack of interest in education is not innate but produced by prolonged labor and exclusion. Even more revealingly, Nelly recalls that Heathcliff "struggled long to keep up an equality with Catherine in her studies," before finally yielding when he realized that he would "sink beneath his former level". Education thus becomes a mechanism through which the boundary between Heathcliff and the socially privileged Lintons and Earnshaws is reproduced that once deprived of learning, he is simultaneously deprived of one of the recognized routes toward social equality. The family curate, meanwhile, faults Hindley for allowing Catherine, in Heathcliff's company, to "grow up in absolute heathenism", so that Heathcliff's exclusion from religious and legal order is confirmed by two institutional voices, church and law, in the same breath. This repeated institutional rejection gradually shapes Heathcliff's silence. When his presence is repeatedly interpreted as criminal, his lack of education is produced by exclusion, and his association with "heathenism" marks him as morally suspect, speech itself offers him little possibility of recognition or acceptance. He therefore increasingly withdraws from open communication, turning silence into a form of self-protection. His silence, in other words, is not simply an absence of speech but a defensive response to a social world that has repeatedly defined him before allowing him to define himself.

3.2 Racialization and Animalization

Heathcliff's silence and unreadable appearance further make him appear dark and cunning to the civilized world. In the Victorian imagination, wandering Gypsies were often regarded as dangerous because their language and inner thoughts seemed opaque. This opacity is inscribed on Heathcliff from the moment he enters the household. When Mr. Earnshaw first brings him home, Nelly recalls "the little black-haired, swarthy thing, as dark almost as if it came from the Devil," a child who could only "repeat over and over again some gibberish that nobody could understand". The wording of Nelly's description is significant. "Black-haired" and "swarthy" are the first features she notices, making Heathcliff's dark physical appearance the basis of his initial identification. Yet she does not simply call him a "boy" or "child"; she calls him a "thing." This noun reduces him from a human subject to an unfamiliar object, suggesting that his difference has already made him difficult to recognize within the ordinary categories of the household. The following comparison, "as dark almost as if it came from the Devil," intensifies this physical difference into moral and supernatural otherness. The word "Devil" does not describe anything Heathcliff has done; instead, it imagines his darkness as evidence of an evil or unnatural origin. His body is therefore read as a sign of character before his character has had any opportunity to reveal itself. The description of his speech produces a similar effect. Nelly does not merely say that she cannot understand Heathcliff's words; she calls them "gibberish", a dismissive term that turns an unfamiliar language into apparently meaningless sound. The repetition in "repeat over and over again" further emphasizes his inability to communicate in a form the household recognizes, while "nobody could understand" presents unintelligibility as a collective judgment that Heathcliff is constructed as incomprehensible because the people around him cannot or do not attempt to interpret his speech. Thus, "swarthy," "thing," "Devil," and "gibberish" work together to transform an unfamiliar child into a figure of racial, moral, and linguistic otherness.

This process of othering is further reinforced through animalization. As Heathcliff grows older, descriptions of his body increasingly blur the boundary between human and animal. Catherine describes him as "a fierce, pitiless, wolfish man", combining the human noun "man" with the adjective "wolfish." The phrase does not simply portray him as violent; it suggests that his violence belongs to an animal nature that lies beneath his human appearance. The image becomes even more explicit when Nelly describes Heathcliff during Catherine's illness: he "gnashed at me, and foamed like a mad dog". The verbs "gnashed" and "foamed" depict an uncontrolled body, while the simile "like a mad dog" transforms emotional suffering into animal madness. Most significantly, Nelly admits that she "did not feel as if I were in the company of a creature of my own species". The progression from "thing" in childhood to "creature" in adulthood is revealing: Heathcliff is repeatedly denied the status of an ordinary human subject, until his difference is expressed as a difference of species itself. Animalization therefore extends the earlier racial and linguistic othering of Heathcliff, turning physical difference and emotional intensity into signs of an allegedly uncivilized and dangerous nature. Nor does wealth or age ever fully dissolve this marking. Years later, when the narrator Lockwood meets Heathcliff for the first time as the propertied master of two estates, he still describes him as "a dark-skinned gypsy in aspect, in dress and manners a gentleman", as though the outward trappings of gentility could never quite absorb the darker sign fixed on him in infancy. As his trauma deepens, his silence becomes increasingly fierce, and his mute suffering come to be interpreted by others as cunning, repression, and potential violence.

3.3 Supernatural Imagery and Othering

Heathcliff's preoccupation with death and the supernatural further develops the Gothic dimension of his "Gypsy" otherness, extending his marginality from the physical and social world into the spiritual realm. His attachment to the dead is most clearly expressed in his response to Catherine's death. Rather than accepting death as a final separation, Heathcliff repeatedly imagines the possibility of her return and begs her spirit to remain with him. After Catherine's death, he cries, "Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest, as long as I am living!" and later pleads, "Be with me always—take any form—drive me mad! only do not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you!". His language collapses the boundary between life and death: Catherine is physically dead, yet Heathcliff insists on maintaining a relationship with her as a spiritual presence. His desire to remain connected to the dead therefore places him outside the emotional and religious norms through which death is supposed to be accepted and contained, reinforcing the image of the Gypsy as a figure associated with mystery, irrationality, and resistance to established religious order. This association with the supernatural becomes even more explicit when he later believes that Catherine's ghost has returned to the Heights. He describes himself as haunted by her presence and asks that her spirit "haunt me then!" rather than leave him alone. The repeated movement between the living and the dead makes Heathcliff appear psychologically inseparable from the supernatural, a Gothic representation that intensifies his image as an uncanny outsider who cannot be fully absorbed into ordinary social and religious life. Death does not mark a boundary that he accepts; instead, it becomes the space in which his emotional attachment continues. In this sense, his obsession with the dead reinforces the image of Heathcliff as a figure who cannot be fully contained within the rational and orderly world of the living.

To console him after his humiliation at Hindley's hands, Nelly invents a fantasy of noble Oriental birth, telling him "your father was Emperor of China, and your mother an Indian queen," kidnapped as an infant by "wicked sailors, and brought to England". Sympathy, no less than cruelty, can only imagine Heathcliff's unknown origin through the vocabulary of a distant, exoticized East. Charlotte Brontë's own 1850 preface to the novel reaches for an almost identical vocabulary, concluding that Heathcliff, once his few redeeming attachments are set aside, is "child neither of Lascar nor gipsy, but a man's shape animated by demon life – a Ghoul – an Afreet". The sentence is striking because it appears to reject racial classification while simultaneously replacing one form of Othering with another. The phrase "neither of Lascar nor gipsy" first places Heathcliff between two already racialized categories. "Lascar", a historical term associated in British usage with sailors from South and Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean world, locates him within a colonial vocabulary of foreignness, while "gipsy" places him within the European figure of the wandering internal Other. Yet Brontë does not resolve the uncertainty between these categories. Instead, she moves beyond them: Heathcliff is "a man's shape animated by demon life." The contrast between "man's shape" and "demon life" separates his outward body from the identity or force supposedly inhabiting it. His human appearance is therefore retained only at the level of form, while his inner nature is imagined as non-human. That even the novel's own editor could describe him only by first invoking, then discarding, named racial categories in favor of an Arabic-inflected supernatural vocabulary shows the extent to which Heathcliff was read through the logic of internal Orientalism from the moment of the novel's first publication.

3.4 Economic Exclusion and Appropriation

Heathcliff's conduct in matters of property likewise marks him as a Gypsy-like predator. As Eagleton observes, "the social unit of the Heights—the family—is both 'natural' (biological) and an economic system," one that "naturalising property relations and socialising blood-ties" [2]. Eagleton further argues that "what governs interpersonal relations in Wuthering Heights is a tightly material economy of labour, kinship and inheritance," in which "law and property and inheritance are the very stuff of the plot". This connection between property and kinship is embodied in the novel's two estates: Wuthering Heights passes through the Earnshaw family line, while Thrushcross Grange remains tied to the Linton family through inheritance and marriage. Because of his obscure origins and unverifiable ancestry, Heathcliff is from the outset excluded from this legal and genealogical order, who is an exclusion that Victorian bourgeois society reinterpreted not as injustice but as further confirmation of his nature as an unproductive, parasitic outsider, the wandering Gypsy speculator who infiltrates and consumes the property of settled communities. Heathcliff's manipulation of property becomes more explicit in adulthood, when he turns marriage and inheritance into instruments of revenge. By forcing Catherine Linton to marry his son Linton, he seeks to gain control of her inheritance, bluntly declaring that "my son is prospective owner of your place". Rather than remaining excluded from the property system, Heathcliff learns to exploit its own rules against the families that once excluded him.

Through spatial, institutional, physical, spiritual, and economic forms of othering, Brontë gradually constructs Heathcliff as a "Gypsy" Other. His attachment to the moors and exclusion from domestic spaces mark him as an outsider. His exclusion from education, religion, and social life further deepens this marginalization. Racialized, animalized, and supernatural descriptions turn his appearance, silence, and emotions into signs of an uncivilized nature. His later manipulation of marriage, inheritance, and property also makes him a threat to the established social order. Together, these forms of othering show that Heathcliff's "Gypsyness" is a cultural construct shaped by repeated labeling and exclusion. This external construction of his identity also lays the foundation for the next chapter, which examines how Heathcliff internalizes and later redeploys the identity imposed on him.

4 HEATHCLIFF'S REDEFINITION OF "GYPSY" IDENTITY: FROM INTERNALIZATION TO SUBVERSION

4.1 Childhood: Imposed Labeling and Spatial Marginalization

Heathcliff's status as an imposed "Other" begins before he has spoken a word or performed a single action. When Mr. Earnshaw first brings the foundling home, Mrs. Earnshaw's immediate reaction is to demand why he would bring "that gipsy brat" into the house, rather than asking who the child is or where he came from. The label thus precedes identity. Heathcliff is designated as "Gypsy" purely on the basis of appearance, in the instant he crosses the threshold of the family home. This scene establishes the pattern that the rest of the novel will repeat, naming as exclusion, prior to and independent of conduct. The deprivation of a legitimate name compounds this initial branding. Heathcliff is given only a single name, recycled from an elder Earnshaw son who had died in infancy, and this name must "serve him ever after, both for Christian and surname". Unlike Hindley and Catherine, who inherit the Earnshaw surname along with their place in the family line, Heathcliff possesses no patronymic to anchor him within genealogical order. He remains, linguistically as well as socially, outside the structure of legitimate inheritance from the very beginning, a condition that will become central to his later manipulation of that same structure.

During Heathcliff's upbringing, Hindley systematically excludes him from family life. After treating him as a servant, Hindley deprives him of the right to eat at the family table and forces him to work in the kitchen and storeroom. This spatial exclusion thus marks Heathcliff as physically marginal and as an "Other" outside the domestic order. Tasks such as carrying food, sweeping floors, and taking care of livestock diminish his visibility in the family's symbolic social space and strengthen his status as a non-family member.

But exclusion also provides Heathcliff with separate freedom and wildness. In the kitchen, the storeroom, and later the moors, he learns to move flexibly within marginal spaces. His escapes with Catherine into the open moors, where they run, climb, cross marshes, and chase animals, release both physical energy and emotional instinct. These bodily practices echo the traditional "Gypsy" image of mobility, wildness, and resistance to discipline. However, society interprets this untamable behavior as evidence of cultural and moral inferiority. In this way, spatial marginalization and bodily practice together contribute to the construction and internalization of Heathcliff's "Gypsy" identity. Rather than being innate, his resistance is produced through prolonged exclusion, spatial control, and emotional injury.

In childhood, the traits regarded as "Gypsy-like" in Heathcliff—such as nomadism, contempt for family discipline, emotional intensity, attachment to the wilderness, and resistance to authority—emerge from the context of his exclusion from domestic and institutional life. This development is clear in his and Catherine's movement across the moors. Nelly recalls that they were "doomed to go astray" and would run into the moors at daybreak, staying there all day. Nelly's phrase "doomed to go astray" is revealing because "go astray" carries spatial and moral meanings. Literally, it describes their movement away from the house and into the moors. Morally, it suggests a departure from the proper path. Their physical wandering is interpreted as a form of moral deviation. The moors function as a marginal space outside the domestic order of Wuthering Heights, where Heathcliff and Catherine move beyond the routines of family discipline, education, and supervision. What matters is how Heathcliff doesn't belong and how his wandering isn't tolerated within the social order of the novel. Once he hasn't been granted access to the spaces of family, education, and disciplined labor, his movement outside the household is read as evidence of his unwillingness to belong to civilized society. Heathcliff's attachment to them echoes the nineteenth-century stereotype of Gypsies as wandering, unsettled, and resistant to discipline. Unlike Edgar Linton, who is associated with the interior space of Thrushcross Grange and the routines of family and social order, Heathcliff's body is tied to open, fluid, and unstable spaces. His identity is spatially coded as an outsider to the domestic and social order, reflecting social exclusion due to innate wildness.

After Hindley reduces Heathcliff to a laborer, his refusal to submit is described as "sullen". These two adjectives transform a response to humiliation into a judgment of character. "Sullen" suggests withdrawal and refusal to communicate, while "obstinate" frames his resistance as unreasonable stubbornness. Neither term acknowledges the conditions that have produced his resistance, including the loss of education, status, and equality with Catherine. Instead, the source of the conflict is shifted from Hindley's treatment of Heathcliff to Heathcliff's supposedly defective nature. He rejects both religious teaching and secular discipline. In Victorian discourse, Gypsies were often imagined as unmanageable people who refused enlightenment. Thus, the novel reveals a circular logic: mainstream society first creates Heathcliff's marginality by depriving him of education and status, then interprets the rebellion caused by this oppression as proof of his innate savagery. Even his silence before humiliation becomes part of this identity, as his unreadability is seen not as suffering but as a dangerous sign of hidden violence.

4.2 Adolescence: Emotional Internalization and Self-Exile

In the context of internal Orientalism, Heathcliff's emotions and actions are also interpreted as "Gypsy-like" traits. His passionate love, vengefulness, and intimacy with Catherine are interpreted by the ruling families as racial or cultural features, thereby obscuring his actual psychological trauma and reaction to social rejection. Hindley humiliates and punishes the young Heathcliff, forcing him to labor and excluding him from family meals and gatherings. These experiences contribute to his psychological marginalization and lead to defensive, extreme emotional expression.

At the same time, Heathcliff's bond with nature is reinforced through imagery that presents the moors as a space of instinctive freedom beyond the constraints of domestic order. Catherine's famous declaration, "I am Heathcliff," suggests that their relationship transcends considerations of religion, law, inheritance, and social contract, grounded instead in instinctive emotional identification. The statement is significant because Catherine doesn't merely say that she loves Heathcliff or belongs to him, as the verb "am" collapses the distinction between the self and the other, making

Heathcliff part of her own identity. Their bond is presented not as a relationship established through social institutions, but as an instinctive identification that precedes and resists them. In adolescence, Heathcliff deeply internalizes the cultural otherness imposed on him in childhood. His emotional extremity, rejection of class order, hostility toward institutions, and mysterious connection with death and wandering represent psychological effects of long-term marginalization. This is most evident in his absolute love for Catherine. When Catherine says, "Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are exactly the same," she denies the class, property, and social legitimacy on which bourgeois society depends. The comparison with Edgar makes this rejection of social classification even clearer. Catherine distinguishes Heathcliff from Linton not through social position or material status, but through an imagined sameness of souls: "his and mine are exactly the same," whereas Linton's soul is "as different as a moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire". The contrast replaces the social categories of class and marriage with a deeper, almost ontological distinction between sameness and difference. Heathcliff is therefore not presented as simply a lover whom Catherine prefers to Edgar; he is imagined as part of the same essential self. The earlier phrase, "he's more myself than I am," goes even further. The comparative "more" makes Heathcliff paradoxically more fully representative of Catherine's identity than Catherine herself. Their relationship therefore exceeds ordinary romantic attachment: Heathcliff becomes a measure of Catherine's own sense of self. For Heathcliff, this mutual identification is especially significant because the social world has repeatedly denied him a stable identity through family name, education, class position, and legitimate inheritance. The bond with Catherine consequently provides an alternative form of belonging that does not depend on the social categories from which he has been excluded. Catherine's description of their shared suffering further shows how completely Heathcliff has become embedded in her psychological world. She states that "my great miseries in this world have been Heathcliff's miseries" and that "my great thought in living is himself". The parallel structure of "my" and "Heathcliff's" erases the boundary between individual suffering and shared suffering. Heathcliff is no longer simply the object of Catherine's affection; he becomes the organizing principle of her emotional existence. Catherine then explains the difference between the two relationships through natural imagery: her love for Linton is "like the foliage in the woods," while her love for Heathcliff "resembles the eternal rocks beneath". The contrast between "foliage" and "rocks" is significant. Foliage changes with the seasons, while the rocks beneath the landscape remain relatively permanent and hidden from immediate view. Her relationship with Edgar is therefore associated with changeable social and emotional circumstances, whereas Heathcliff is associated with something elemental and enduring beneath the visible surface of life. The imagery places their bond closer to the permanence of the natural landscape than to the mutable arrangements of marriage and social convention. For Heathcliff, love transcends the boundaries of a social contract, functioning instead as a metaphysical union of souls. This understanding of love as instinctive and absolute corresponds to the Victorian exotic imagination of Gypsies as passionate and irrational.

Heathcliff's despair and hatred are unleashed by Catherine's decision to marry Edgar Linton. His sudden departure, his solitary rambling across the moors, and his later plan for revenge make him seem to outsiders impulsive and uncontrollable, like a "Gypsy". Yet psychologically, these actions can be understood as the result of long-term exclusion, humiliation, and identity uncertainty. His attachment to Catherine becomes almost existential, while his revenge becomes not only a response to personal injury but also a symbolic protest against the social order that has rejected him. This becomes clear in the targets of his revenge. Hindley is not simply a person Heathcliff hates; he is the figure who transformed him from an equal companion into a servant and deprived him of education and family status. Edgar, meanwhile, represents the class and marriage system through which Heathcliff learns that his love for Catherine is considered socially degrading. Later, Linton becomes a means through which Heathcliff enters the system of inheritance from which his uncertain origins had excluded him. Heathcliff's revenge therefore repeatedly turns the very structures that once marginalized him into instruments of retaliation. What appears as uncontrolled violence from the perspective of the dominant social order can thus be understood as a distorted response to the forms of exclusion through which that order had defined him. The significance of this transformation lies in the fact that Heathcliff does not simply reject the social order from outside it. He gradually learns to operate through its own categories of family, marriage, property, and inheritance, using them against the people who once used those same categories to exclude him. His revenge therefore marks a psychological transformation: the experience of being treated as an outsider is no longer merely something imposed upon him from outside, but becomes part of the way he understands and acts upon the social world.

When Heathcliff overhears Catherine implying that marrying him would degrade her, the rejection of mainstream class society becomes a final spiritual blow. His response thereby manifests as silent departure and self-imposed exile. The novel's omission of his three-year absence further strengthens his association with wandering and unknowability. After Catherine's marriage and death, Heathcliff's invocation of her ghost, "Be with me forever—in whatever form—drive me mad!" rejects Christian mourning and turns toward a heretical, almost mediumistic desire for the supernatural. His revenge is therefore not merely personal cruelty but an extreme internalization of the stereotypes and exclusions imposed on him.

Therefore, Heathcliff's "Gypsy-like" impulses are not natural racial traits. They are shaped through repeated labeling, humiliation, and exclusion and are finally internalized into his self-understanding. Through this narrative, Brontë reveals the psychological formation of racialized labels: social imagination shapes individual behavior, and marginalized individuals may gradually act within imposed identities that correspond to stereotypes. If childhood is the era of external imposition of the "Gypsy" label which is achieved by naming, spatial exclusion, and verbal violence before Heathcliff has any say in the matter, adolescence is the point of an inward turn at which Heathcliff begins to see himself through the very gaze that once only described him. This change is evident in his preference for self-exile over

confrontation, in the growing opacity of his silence, and in his turn toward a spectral, almost ghost-seeking desire for Catherine, all of which indicate that the othering gaze has migrated from outside him to within.

4.3 Adulthood: Otherness as a Weapon

Heathcliff's return to Wuthering Heights marks the final stage of his redefinition of the "Gypsy" identity. If childhood represents imposed labeling and adolescence emotional internalization, adulthood represents otherness as a mode of action outside legitimate social order. As a class outcast without clear lineage or inheritance rights, Heathcliff cannot enter Victorian society through orthodox channels. He therefore attacks it from the margins, turning the discourse once used against him into a weapon against the bourgeois world. His mysterious wealth does not grant him legitimacy; instead, it makes him appear even more dangerous.

This redefinition first appears in his parasitic attack on the patriarchal economic order. He exploits Hindley's gambling addiction and debt, replacing kinship inheritance with economic control and seizing Wuthering Heights. This method, which relied on infiltration and psychological coercion rather than legitimate production or inheritance, evoked Victorian fears of Gypsy speculators plundering settled property. His next ploy to gain possession of Thrushcross Grange through Linton and Little Catherine again manipulates the law and inheritance.

Heathcliff transforms the control of property through debt. In his struggle with Hindley Earnshaw, he does not rely on open violence or traditional inheritance but on debt. Wuthering Heights is under financial control, and Heathcliff is the absolute creditor. With the intensification of Hindley's gambling addiction, property became a movable financial contract, instead of a fixed inheritance, which shows the precariousness of bourgeois property and that land ownership is not based on natural law but on credit, debt, and economic manipulation.

This economic rationality also reshapes marriage. In Victorian ideology, marriage joined affection, class solidarity, and property continuity. Heathcliff strips it of moral value and turns it into a legal instrument. His elopement with Isabella Linton functions as a symbolic breach of the Linton household, using an unequal union to gain a legal foothold in the family and secure future claims over Thrushcross Grange through their son Linton. If Edgar Linton represents marriage as a defense of class order, Heathcliff turns it into a strategy of appropriation, revealing the vulnerability of Victorian family intimacy to exploitation. Building upon this tactical use of marriage, Heathcliff later orchestrates a second, distinct property transfer by forcing young Catherine to marry the sickly Linton. This second marriage targets a different estate and legal mechanism, as Heathcliff bypasses simple elopement to legally absorb both Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange through calculated inheritance manipulation.

Heathcliff extends this manipulation to the next generation through Linton Heathcliff and Catherine Linton. Linton himself is physically unsuited to the role his father assigns him. When he is brought to Thrushcross Grange, Nelly describes him as "pale and feeble", and his health continues to deteriorate throughout the marriage plot. Yet Heathcliff treats this fragile son less as a child than as an instrument for securing property. His intention is stated with striking bluntness, "my son is prospective owner of your place," and he admits that he does not want Linton to die "till I was certain of being his successor"; he even imagines "my descendant fairly lord of their estates, my child hiring their children to till their fathers' lands for wages". The repeated possessive "my" reduces Linton to a means of extending Heathcliff's power across generations. The fragile Linton serves as a "juridical pivot" for the redirection of inheritance and the insertion of Heathcliff into the legal structure of property, turning genealogical continuity into a tool to control their marriage.

Even on his deathbed, Linton remains valuable to Heathcliff only insofar as he can transfer property. Nelly later observes that Heathcliff showed Catherine Linton's will, which had "bequeathed the whole of his, and what had been her, moveable property to his father"; she adds that "the poor creature was threatened, or coaxed, into that act". The phrase "poor creature" emphasizes Linton's helplessness, while "threatened, or coaxed" reveals that even his final act is shaped by coercion and manipulation. Once the will has secured the property, Linton himself is effectively discarded. His death thus exposes the logic of Heathcliff's revenge at its most extreme: kinship is preserved only as a legal connection, while the son is valued not for himself but for what his body, marriage, and inheritance can transfer to his father. He uses genealogical continuity as a tool of power to control their marriage. The fragile Linton serves as a "juridical pivot" for the redirection of inheritance and the insertion of Heathcliff into the legal structure of property. In this distorted system, generational succession is no longer natural, no longer ethical, but institutionally manipulable. What Wuthering Heights ultimately reveals is that Victorian family, marriage, and inheritance are not moral absolutes but rather mechanisms through which desire is disciplined and class power is reproduced.

However, Heathcliff's revenge also reveals the tragic cycle of internal Orientalism. He repeats the very violence once inflicted on him, especially when he deprives Hareton of education and reduces him to an ignorant laborer. The marginalized subject, after internalizing institutional violence, becomes its unconscious reproducer. Although Heathcliff tries to destroy patriarchal order, his obsession with inheritance, property, and lineage shows that he has also been absorbed by its logic. In the end, he owns two estates but has no belonging; he possesses power but cannot achieve integration. Still wandering the midnight moors, he redefines the "Gypsy" from marginal outcast into a sovereign figure who commands both law and violence, wilderness and contract. Yet while he brings the civilized world close to ruin, he also exiles himself forever from redemption.

Heathcliff's revenge thus crystallizes the logic of internalization as weapon that structures his entire arc, he is not merely fashioned into a Gypsy Other by the discourse around him, but actively seizes upon marginality, wealth,

contract, and marriage, which are the very instruments of the order that once excluded him, and turns them back against the property, inheritance, and moral system that first produced his otherness.

5 CONCLUSION

Drawing on the framework of Internal Orientalism, this study re-examines Heathcliff's "Gypsy" identity in Wuthering Heights, arguing that it is not a stable ethnic identity but a historically and discursively produced form of otherness. The novel reveals that Victorian subjectivity is not founded on a fixed distinction between self and other but is produced through projection, transference, and symbolic exclusion. These processes always contain the possibility of being redefined. Heathcliff's "Gypsy" identity is therefore both a product of hegemonic discourse and a means of revealing its contingency. Ultimately, Heathcliff's significance lies not merely in his role as a transgressor or avenger but in his embodiment of the internal boundaries of the Victorian symbolic order. By making Heathcliff an active agent rather than an imposed Other, Brontë ultimately challenges the logic by which Victorian society naturalizes its own systems of property, marriage, and moral order, exposing them as discursive structures that are, like Heathcliff's "Gypsy" identity itself, historically constructed and thus susceptible to subversion.

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