

DANGEROUS CROSSINGS: VICTORIAN FEMINISM, IMPERIALIST DISCOURSE,  
AND VICTORIA CROSS'S 'NEW WOMAN' IN INDIGENOUS SPACE

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## ABSTRACT

### Dangerous Crossings: Victorian Feminism, Imperialist Discourse, and Victoria Cross's 'New Woman' in Indigenous Space

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This thesis examines the intersections of gender and race in the construction of the New Woman in three of Victoria Cross's early novels: Anna Lombard (1902), Six Chapters of A Man's Life (1903), and Life of My Heart (1905). These texts explore the dangers of boundary crossing, which are constructed through representations of indigenous space in general, and the 'native' male in particular, as physically threatening to the sexually transgressive New Woman. The stereotype of Indian women as quintessential victims operates, in these texts, as a model against which to define the New Woman in her quest for social and sexual freedom. By representing gender and sexual deviancy in terms of racial deviancy, Cross critiques British masculinity, attempts to manage the crisis in gender categories, and challenges utopian representations of the colonies in late Victorian feminist discourse. The analysis both situates Cross' texts historically and interrogates the recuperative methods of late-twentieth-century feminist literary criticism.

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Dedicated to the Memory of my Grandmother

Marion Marguerite (Martin) Brittain

1902-1989

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Three New Woman Texts and a Critique of Imperialism:

Reading at the Intersections of Race and Gender

"How do you like me in Eastern dress, Helen?" she said, addressing her sister, for whom Digby was deciphering some old coins. Digby and I confessed afterwards to each other the impulse that moved us both to suggest it was not at all complete without the trousers. I did offer her a cigarette, to enhance the effect. (Victoria Cross, "Theodora: A Fragment" 33)

In a fourth-year English class entitled "Queer Matters," I first encountered the work of Victoria Cross, and the figure of the New Woman. We read a number of nineteenth-century literary works, examining and discussing them for their representations of homosexuality, but the passage quoted above, from "Theodora: A Fragment," Cross's first published work, stood out for me from the rest. Because all the texts in the course dealt in some way with representations of unconventional sexualities, I was not surprised by Cross's depiction of an androgynous woman. I was, however, struck by the fact that Theodora's androgyny, her gender and sexual 'deviance', is constructed so obviously in relation to race.

In "Theodora," published in 1895 in the avant garde periodical The Yellow Book, the British New Woman's gender and racial cross-dressing stimulates the sexual desires of Cecil, a decadent aesthete Egyptologist who likes "everything

extraordinary" (6). In my subsequent research on Cross's work, I found that four out of five of her earliest texts engage in some way with racial and colonial stereotypes and 'Eastern' settings, and I became curious about the intersection of discourses of gender and race at the *fin-de-siècle*. How, I wondered, would these texts have been read by Cross's contemporaries? What meaning is produced by the depiction of a British woman in 'Eastern' dress? In British men's clothes? How, exactly, does the New Woman as gender *and* racial 'deviant' work to construct a transgressive female subjectivity? It became clear that an analysis of these works would enable a deeper understanding of some of the ways in which female subjectivity was constructed by New Woman writers at the *fin-de-siècle*, and how these subjectivities are related to discourses of race, empire, and feminism.

As the only recent scholar who has published articles on Victoria Cross, Shoshana Milgram Knapp's work is important for its recognition of this best-selling author as a strong voice in the contentious debates around gender roles and identities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In her article "Revolutionary Androgyny in the Fiction of 'Victoria Cross,'" Knapp celebrates this late Victorian and early Edwardian novelist for "her increasingly daring attempts to place at the core of popular fiction a woman who challenged conventions of gender and thought." She says that "years before Modernist writers . . . used cross-dressing as a metaphor, Victoria Cross considered what it would mean for women and for men to cross the border of gender construction

and identity" (4). Knapp says that Cross is characterized by critics "primarily as a 'New Woman' novelist and a defender of the rights of women against the wrongs of men," but that this description of Cross as a "late Victorian polemicist" is limiting:

[Cross] exemplified, in fact, not only a rejection of the legal restriction of women's freedom and the social constriction of women's biological and emotional identity, but a thorough engagement in what Marjorie Garber has called "category crisis," the disruption and foregrounding of "cultural, social, or aesthetic dissonances" . . . testing and questioning boundaries.

(4)

Knapp characterizes Cross as a "revolutionary": a writer with "radical visions" whose readers "seemed to miss the point" (3) of much of her writing. She says that one contemporary reviewer could not "see in Theodora," the protagonist of both "Theodora: A Fragment" and the later novel Six Chapters of a Man's Life, "anything more than a 'woman who did.' Victoria Cross's crossover character remained, to a large degree, invisible" (15).

Knapp participates in the vital feminist project of recovering 'lost' or neglected women writers whose work is part of a larger cultural and political discourse. However, like most Western feminist work of this kind, produced as it was in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it demonstrates a blind spot with regard to race and imperialism. While Knapp does mention that many of Cross's earliest novels "all dealt with erotic adventures, several in exotic settings," and that Cross sometimes "portrayed romances across racial boundaries" (16), there is no

analysis of the role discourses of race and empire play in Cross's depictions of transgressive New Women and alternative gender identities. My project attempts to move beyond Knapp's work by examining the ways in which racial and colonial stereotypes are mobilized as a means of critiquing British masculinity and constructing the New Woman's subjectivity in three of Victoria Cross's early novels: Anna Lombard (1902), Six Chapters of a Man's Life (1903), and Life of My Heart (1905).

In "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak laments the continued reproduction of "the axioms of imperialism" produced in feminist criticism that practices "a basically isolationist admiration for the literature of the female subject in Europe and Anglo-America" (798). She says that as long as we continue to read "nineteenth-century British literature without remembering that imperialism, understood as England's social mission, was a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English," and as long as "the role of literature in the production of cultural representation" is ignored, "the imperialist project" continues to succeed, "displac(ing) and dispers(ing) into more modern forms" (798). As a method of remedying this situation, Spivak suggests that when we read the literatures of nineteenth-century Britain, we keep in mind both the role of imperialism and the role of literature in the production of cultural representation. By doing this, we can "produce a narrative, in literary history, of the 'worlding' of what is now called 'the Third World'" (798). We can, in other words, produce a narrative of how the English represented themselves to themselves by constructing representations

of "the Third World" (798) that tell us more about the English than about that 'Other' world.

In a feminist context, a narrative of this sort would enable us "to situate feminist individualism in its historical determination," and "wrench" feminist criticism "away from the mesmerizing focus of the 'subject-constitution' of the female individualist" (Spivak 799) that preoccupies many feminist critics. My project shifts the critical focus away from the subject-constitution of Cross as feminist individualist by positioning her texts within their historical discursive contexts, mainly feminist and imperialist. This will produce a reading of the ways in which Cross's novels participate in the 'worlding' of 'the Third World', and how that 'worlding' was crucial for her representations of the New Woman.

In Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text, Jenny Sharpe asserts that throughout the Victorian period and well into the early twentieth century, "English women ground[ed] their own emancipation in the moral superiority of the British as an enlightened race engaged in raising natives into humanity," and that "the British feminist argument for equality appeals to the idea of social progress on which modern colonialism is founded" (10-11). Positioning Cross's texts within this imperialist feminist project involves a mapping of the discursive fields<sup>1</sup> that make such texts possible in the first place,

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<sup>1</sup>According to Spivak, there are "discrete 'systems of signs' at hand in the socius, each based on a specific axiomatics." She calls these systems 'discursive fields,' and says that 'Imperialism as social mission' is a discursive field that "generates the possibility of one such axiomatics." Individual writers tap "the discursive field at hand . . . in order to make the narrative structure move" ("Three Women's Texts" 801).

and requires an analysis of the meanings produced by her particular engagement with discourses of race, gender, and empire.

Spivak's claim about the construction of the feminist individualist subject in "Three Women's Texts" is highly pertinent to my analysis:

. . . what is at stake, for feminist individualism in the age of imperialism, is precisely the making of human beings, the constitution and 'interpellation' of the subject not only as individual but as 'individualist.' This stake is represented on two registers: childbearing and soul making. The first is domestic-society-through-sexual-reproduction cathected as 'companionate love'; the second is the imperialist project cathected as civil-society-through-social-mission. (799)

According to Spivak, the British woman must contribute to the imperialist project as either a producer of children or a civilizer of 'natives' in order to qualify as an individual subject in humanist terms. As novels that engage in the construction of British women's identity at the *fin-de-siècle*, Cross's texts participate in this configuration of female subjectivity. In Six Chapters of a Man's Life and Life of My Heart, the New Woman protagonists fail miserably at both childbearing and soul making, but in Anna Lombard the New Woman's sexual knowledge, gained through an interracial romance, helps to make her more suitable for the role of colonizer.

In the novels studied in the following pages, the New Woman's inability to participate in either legitimate childbearing or successful civilizing of 'natives' is blamed on the refusal by British men to understand the desires and changing

needs of the New Woman, and on the New Woman's own excesses. All three novels explore the possible consequences, both constructive and destructive, of the transgressive New Woman's venture into colonial space without the protection of British men and the British patriarchal system. The destructive and dangerous aspects of boundary crossing are constructed through representations of indigenous space in general, and the 'native' male in particular, as physically threatening to the New Woman who crosses too many boundaries. The stereotype of Indian women as quintessential victims operates, in these texts, as a model against which to compare and contrast the British New Woman in her quest for social and sexual freedom.

Jenny de Reuck notes that "analysing any text occurs by looking through a prism of our own" (de Reuck 35), and my prism is a post-structuralist feminism that sees categories of race, gender and sexuality as socially produced. In her recently published book, Impossible Purities: Blackness, Femininity, and Victorian Culture, Jennifer De Vere Brody deftly articulates the concept of identity employed in my examination of Cross's texts:

All identities can be understood as imbricated and intersubjective in order to work against ideas of identities as ossified categories reproduced in hegemonic discourse. Race and gender, the tame and the wild - or even the human and the animal - are not 'conflicting' categories; they are mutually constitutive as well as always already divided and divisive terms. (9-10)

In the chapters that follow, I provide a partial mapping of the larger discursive

field of late nineteenth-century discourses on race, masculinity, femininity, and sexuality. I also look at the ways in which the New Woman protagonist's subjectivity is produced through a blending of identities constructed as separate and often conflicting in *fin-de-siècle* British discourse.

In Chapter Two, I look at how Cross produces Theodora, the New Woman protagonist of Six Chapters of a Man's Life, as a sex and gender radical.

Published in 1903, the novel develops the story begun in “Theodora: a Fragment” eight years earlier. By representing her as a combination of the mannish New Woman and the decadent aesthete, as both similar to and different from the stereotypical 'Eastern' woman, and as a gender and racial cross-dresser, Cross creates an androgynous figure who has femininity violently inscribed on her body through rape. I have chosen to analyze this text prior to Anna Lombard, which was published a year earlier, because it more readily lends itself to a complex reading of the debates surrounding issues of gender, the New Woman, and the decadent, enabling me to provide a solid contextual grounding for all three novels early on. I position Six Chapters in relation to discourses on the Contagious Diseases Acts, British and 'Eastern' male sexuality, 'Eastern' women, and the idea of public space as sexually dangerous to women. Chapter Three is an examination of Anna Lombard in relation to nineteenth-century discourses of female sexuality produced in pornographic literature, melodrama, and narratives of the Indian Mutiny. I argue that Anna Lombard's subjectivity is constructed in terms that enable her to be recuperated back into the realm of 'proper' femininity by the end of the novel, despite the

racial and sexual transgressions that mark her as a sexual and racial deviant. Anna's deviancy is not marked on her body like Theodora's, but is instead represented through a gender role reversal and constituted by an inter-racial romance. In both of these texts, the stereotype of the 'dark male rapist' and the European fear of interracial rape is invoked to signal danger for the transgressive New Woman, and this theme is continued in Cross's 1905 novel, Life of My Heart.

Chapter Four examines how Life of My Heart, the third text in my study, employs the threat of Indian male sexual violence, the trope of 'going native', and the British idea of Indian women as passive victims, to criticize British men and expose differences between nineteenth-century codes of male and female behaviour. I look at how the sexuality of the New Woman is modelled after that of the decadent aesthete, and compare Rudyard Kipling's short story "Beyond the Pale" (1888) to Cross's novel, arguing that both use imperial Gothic conventions, but for different reasons. While Kipling's British male character can 'go native' and return to British society, Cross's New Woman loses her British identity, *becoming* an Indian woman when she transgresses racial and spatial boundaries. I examine contemporary narratives of inter-racial romance between British men and Indian women, and between British women and Indian men, as a method of contextualizing the story within imperialist discourses of racial transgression and regression.

In any project that claims to contextualize historically its object of study, the critic must recognize her own subject position and agenda as profoundly

influencing the choice of texts, the interpretation of these texts, and the primary focus of the analysis. Since my primary focus is on reading the ways discourses of gender, race, and imperialism intersect to construct the subjectivity of the New Woman in Cross's texts, I do not always address discourses of class as fully or readily as others might. Reading for the ways in which gender, race, *and* class work to mutually constitute each other would provide a differently inflected reading of the various methods used by Cross to create representations of the New Woman, but this type of analysis is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this particular project.<sup>2</sup>

At stake for me in this project is my participation in Western feminist discourse as a white woman whose subjectivity has been constructed in the very terms this project sets out to challenge. I attempt to move from a feminist individualism based on the civilizing mission of humanism, to a position that can challenge the grounds on which this feminism was constructed without totally undermining the politically useful work the movement has done in the past, and can still do. To remain politically useful as agents in the struggle for social justice, feminists must continuously examine the theoretical and historical basis of their methodologies and identities, and attempt to change their methods and ideologies when they threaten to produce new forms or reinstate old forms of oppression. And although this constant interrogation can seem self-indulgent at

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<sup>2</sup>Sally Ledger has begun to address the relationship between socialism and the New Woman in her 1997 text, The New Woman, but more work needs to be done in the area of reading for the ways class figures in representations of the New Woman in both fiction and the periodical press.

times, learning how my own identity has been formed in relation to and at the expense of those previously constructed as 'Other' will perhaps suggest alternative modes of imagining ourselves: modes that will, along with other inquiries in a similar vein, challenge the discourses and ideologies that enable and justify the continuance of racial discrimination and oppression.

## Chapter 2

### Critiquing Masculinity/Reinscribing Femininity:

#### The Rape of the Decadent New Woman

Rape could best be defined as a sexualized and gendered attack which imposes sexual difference along the lines of violence. (Sharon Marcus, "Fighting Bodies, Fighting Words" 397)

Victoria Cross's third novel, Six Chapters of a Man's Life, published in 1903, engages with a number of the major issues at stake in the *fin-de-siècle* debates around gender and sexuality. In an effort to begin examining how discourses of race and empire inflect the depiction of transgressive gender performance and sexuality in Cross's work, I look at how she constructs an image of an androgynous and sexually transgressive New Woman using identity traits attributed to decadent aesthetes and 'Eastern' women. The rape of Theodora by the Egyptian men who hold her hostage, I argue, enables a critique of British male egoism and sexuality. Both the transgressive identity of the British female and the criticism of a dangerous male sexuality are produced, however, at the cost of perpetuating and reinforcing racist ideologies and stereotypes.

Six Chapters is narrated by Cecil, an Egyptologist and decadent aesthete temporarily in Britain, but soon to return to Egypt, hopefully with a male friend to accompany him. Cecil meets Theodora, a manlike woman, who attracts him

because of her androgynous look and her disdain for arbitrary systems of conduct. Cecil dislikes most women, but likes Theodora's peculiarity, which is signalled both by her androgyny, and by her likeness to 'Eastern' women. Theodora cross-dresses, first of all in an Eastern outfit, and then as a Western man so she can accompany Cecil to Egypt. She passes as a man on ship, fraternizes with men, flirts with women, has sex with Cecil, and enrages him by staying up all night playing cards and drinking with a group of men. He is happy to find out that Theodora does not want children, and thinks of their relationship as ideal, better than any romance or marriage he could imagine.

A crisis occurs in Port Said when Cecil, aroused by the dance of a Levantine boy, kisses Theodora, bringing her to the attention of their Egyptian host, who insists on detaining her for a week. If they do not comply, they will both be killed, and despite Cecil's desire to kill Theodora before she is 'dishonoured', she convinces him to leave her with the Egyptian men, arguing that their lives are far more valuable than her 'honour'. She returns to Cecil after a week, her face "blotted and covered with sores" (238), and in a feverish and delirious state. Convinced that Cecil will no longer love her, Theodora kills herself by jumping ship, and the story ends with Cecil reproaching himself for his failure to love her as more than a possession.

A version of the first two and a half chapters of Six Chapters of a Man's Life was published in 1895 as a short story in the fourth issue of the Yellow Book as "Theodora: A Fragment." Unlike the novel, which insinuates by its title that a man's life is the focus of the narrative, the title of the short story places the focus

on a woman's life, even though, like the novel, it employs a male narrative voice. Shoshana Milgram Knapp notes that "Theodora" met with condemnation by critics who categorized its author as a 'degenerate', and attacked the story for its representation of "Cecil's 'confused and morbid' passion," while virtually ignoring the characterization of Theodora herself ("Revolutionary Androgyny" 7).

Knapp suggests that in her effort to "placate readers who might have been shocked or frightened by Theodora, Victoria Cross hid her character so well within the male narrative that the novelty [of the unconventional Theodora] was too subtle to be felt" ("Revolutionary Androgyny" 8) by readers of the short story. After the success of Anna Lombard in 1902, Knapp writes, Cross felt safe enough to more fully explore the transgressive qualities of Theodora's personality with the publication of Six Chapters a year later, which "appears designed to reassure readers that she had no intention of neglecting the male perspective," but goes on to develop the transgressive aspects of Theodora's personality and her unconventional relationship with Cecil ("Revolutionary Androgyny" 12-14). To be sure, Theodora's transgressive sexuality is more developed in the novel than it is in the 'fragment', but the title change encourages the reader to pay special attention to 'a man's life'. This focus on the male perspective suggests either that Cross had to 'hide' Theodora's character more carefully within the male narrative in 1903, and/or that she wanted to encourage readers to focus on Cecil's point of view, and on his motivations and actions. While the story tells of only 'six chapters' in Cecil's life, they are the last 'chapters' in Theodora's.

I am in agreement with Knapp's claim that the conclusion of Six Chapters implies that "there is no place in the world for the androgynous woman" ("Revolutionary Androgyny" 14), and that both the fragment and the novel ultimately leave Cross's own opinion on the transgressive New Woman unstated. I would argue, however, that the novel goes further than simply suggesting that the androgynous woman's inability to find a place in the world "is the fault of that world" ("Revolutionary Androgyny 14"). It seems to me that the novel is quite specifically engaged in a critique of British masculinity and misogyny, and that despite Cross's lack of commitment to a definite perspective on the androgynous woman, it seems designed to provoke a genuine concern for and anxiety over the potential dangers that await the New Woman who transgresses traditional gender boundaries in a social climate that claims to respect and protect women, but actually abhors and endangers them. This concern and anxiety is expressed in the text through the representation of the transgressive New Woman as a complex mixture of racial and sexual stereotypes, the British man as decadent and self-serving, and the 'East' as a sexually dangerous space.

Six Chapters, like many of Cross's other novels, can be read as a text that took some literary chances simply by engaging in topics that many people avoided for fear of being publicly castigated.<sup>3</sup> Reviews of Cross's early work that

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<sup>3</sup>Perhaps Victoria Cross's pseudonym has something to do with the courage it took a woman writer to publish on these topics. Shoshana Milgram Knapp suggests that Annie Sophie Cory may have chosen her pseudonym "as a complicated joke: she deserved the Victoria Cross for her valor, and she hoped to make (Queen) Victoria cross through her candor" ("Stead" 15).

express concern over and contempt for her representations of both male and female sexuality give us an idea of why she may have wanted to abstain from more clearly indicating her own opinions on the issues her texts so clearly engage with. Cross's conservative readers were often shocked by her audacity, and criticized her for her boldness in even attempting to depict passionate scenes and socially deviant characters, calling her writing "[m]orbid, confused, putrescent, brazen, disgusting, nauseating, gross, and repulsive (Knapp, "Stead" 17).<sup>4</sup> Less conservative readers, like Oscar Wilde, approved of her boldness, and reportedly admired her candid depictions of "real passion" (Stokes 144).<sup>5</sup> While anti-feminists vehemently criticized the New Woman, constitutional feminists of the 1890's attempted to distance themselves from any association with her, especially her sexual libertarianism and disdain for marriage.<sup>6</sup> Despite

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<sup>4</sup>Janet Hogarth's article, "Literary Degenerates," appeared in April 1895, three months after the publication of "Theodora: a Fragment" in the Yellow Book. In her invective against England's "rising school of women writers" (587), from which pours "a flood of feminine literature, more or less admirable in manner, certainly more rather than less objectionable in matter" (588), Hogarth criticizes Cross directly: "Tolstoi, at his worst, is almost preferable to the flood of literature professing to lay bare the mysteries of sex with a daring only possible to a shameless depth of ignorance. Few people are without the germs of possible disease; but are the confused and morbid imaginings, which the sane hide deep within their breast, to be offered to the world at large as the discovery of a privileged few? To be silly and sinful is not necessarily to be singular. We commend this consideration to the authoress of *Theodora*" (592).

<sup>5</sup>In Pilloried (1929), Sewell Stokes, upon meeting Cross, writes: "Could this doll-like little person really be the woman whose work had inspired Oscar Wilde to say: 'If one could only marry Thomas Hardy to Victoria Cross he might gain something of real passion with which to animate his little Keepsake pictures of starched ladies?'" (144-45).

<sup>6</sup>Sally Ledger uses the term 'constitutional feminists' to refer to late-nineteenth-century supporters of female suffrage. These feminists, she writes, "saw themselves neither as campaigners against motherhood nor as sexual radicals" ("The New Woman and the Crisis of Victorianism" 24). Millicent Garrett Fawcett's criticism of Grant Allen's New Woman novel,

the condemnation by critics however, Cross's novels sold well, and she continued to risk vilification by engaging with contentious issues.

In Six Chapters, Cross's two main characters are lovers fashioned after stereotypes that represented the biggest challenge to the normative sexual codes and traditional gender categories of the late Victorians: the New Woman and the decadent. The New Woman, Sally Ledger notes, was perceived "as a direct threat to classic Victorian definitions of femininity," and was connected by her critics in the press to the decadent and the dandy, who were themselves seen as a threat to the "robust, muscular brand of British masculinity deemed to be crucial to the maintenance of the British Empire" ("The New Woman and the Crisis of Victorianism" 22).<sup>7</sup> Despite the overt challenge both New Women and decadents posed to Victorian sexual codes and gender categories, however, the ideological positions signified by these figures were not necessarily aligned.

Elaine Showalter argues that the decadent aesthetic philosophical position that

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The Woman Who Did, is an attempt to distance constitutional feminism from the criticism of marriage and traditional family life. Fawcett disparages Allen for what she sees as his advocacy of 'freelove', arguing that "[h]e is not a friend, but an enemy [of the women's movement], and it is as an enemy that he endeavours to link together the claim of women to citizenship and social and industrial independence with attacks upon marriage and the family" (review of The Woman Who Did, qtd in Ledger 33).

<sup>7</sup>Hugh Stutfield, publisher of Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, was one such critic. He suggests that the New Woman and the decadent both threaten the integrity of the nation, arguing that "[t]he new criticism, the new fiction . . . the new woman" and the decadents (including of course the most notorious 'sexual deviant' of the time, Oscar Wilde), are "the offspring together of hysteria and Continental decadentism" (837). "Decadentism," writes Stutfield, "is an exotic growth unsuited to British soil," and he worries about the popularity of the new fiction, that "debased and morbid literature" that is especially popular "among women". The "new fiction" refers to both decadent and New Woman fiction, and Stutfield considers this literature a "disease . . . which, if left unchecked, will poison the springs of national life" ("Tommyrotics" 843).

"rejected all that was natural and biological in favor of the inner life of art, artifice, sensation, and imagination," could lead to misogynist claims that debased women's bodies. The "antinaturalism" of the decadents, "inevitably leads to antifeminism": "women were seen as closer to 'Nature,' to the body, and to a crude materialism, while men were aligned with 'Art,' to the intellect, and to spiritualism" (Sexual Anarchy 170).

In The New Woman and The Victorian Novel, Gail Cunningham argues that legal reforms and an opening up of some educational and professional institutions by the 1890s made new opportunities available to women. She writes that "frank discussions of sexual questions, together with rational investigations of woman's place in contemporary society, had done much to dispel the stifling clouds of mystique which had gathered protectively round the fair sex" (10). The New Woman could now shift her focus from matrimonial to professional achievement, "and could justify her decision by pointing out that marriage, as conventionally defined, was a state little better than slavery" (10). Women who argued for the liberatory effects of single motherhood, careers for women, or short hair and comfortable shoes, were often labelled New Women. It was an "essentially middle-class" phenomenon, notes Cunningham, since working-class women "still led lives so totally remote from the cosy domesticity and shining feminine ideal against which the New Woman was reacting" (11).

Cunningham argues that the treatment the New Woman got from the press was "largely what created the public image, and set the context in which the novels dealing with the new type of heroine were judged" (11). The threat to

traditional ideas of women's sexuality posed by real and imagined New Women was a cause of anxiety in a culture that constructed women as asexual. Writers who used the figure of the New Woman in their novels were characterized as 'erotomaniacs' (Stutfield, "Tommyrotics") when their literary protagonists defied the traditional Victorian ideology of women as asexual and passionless. Although "[t]he New Woman was held up as a symbolic figurehead for a type of social rebellion which many women might concede to be generally desirable," the lifestyle was, for many, unattainable (Cunningham 16). It was in the novel, Cunningham writes, that the "clash between radical principles and the actualities of contemporary life" could be explored (17), and "[a]lternatives to marriage, including divorce and free love, were enthusiastically canvassed in fiction" (17). The ideal of female purity was examined in some New Woman novels, and "arguments for new standards of morality, new codes of behaviour" were put forward (17).

The issues at stake in the wider cultural debate about changing gender roles led to the construction of various types of New Women. The boundaries between these 'types' are somewhat fluid, but they help to explain some of the characteristics attributed to this figure. There was the 'mannish' New Woman who rejected the role of motherhood and challenged existing gender boundaries by refusing to perform femininity. She was slim hiped and flat chested, wore plain-fitted clothes and often smoked. She was well educated, self-directed, and satirized as self-absorbed and humourless. The mannish New Woman represented a major threat to both the social and natural order, and many

doctors believed that the development of a woman's brain caused the womb to atrophy, thereby inducing infertility. The educated mannish New Woman, with her large brain and small womb, was cast as a threat to the 'race' (Pykett 140).

A second type was the "ultra-feminine" New Woman, whose "degenerate emotionalism" was considered both a symptom and a cause of social change (140). This New Woman's 'hysteria' was caused by woman's natural affections, but was also a form of "brain-poisoning" induced by the stress of modern life and by women's attempts to resist their 'natural' roles as wives and mothers, making her a threat to the whole social order and the future of the 'race' in general (Pykett 141). Thus we get the strong and independent mannish New Woman on one hand, and the weak, hysterical New Woman on the other, and sometimes a combination of opposing qualities in one character.

Six Chapters' Theodora is an example of a mixture of New Woman types; she is both mannish and ultra-feminine. Within the discursive framework of Victorian gender ideology, Theodora's character is paradoxical; she exhibits 'feminine' submissiveness but 'masculine' independence, is passive and childlike when the lovers are alone, yet cross-dressed as a man in public she displays the confidence and assertiveness expected of a man. Cecil's friend Digby describes her "peculiar" looks to Cecil: "She is tall, and with a bent-about sort of figure . . . Features straight as a billiard cue, and the most thundering eyes you ever saw; and then her eyebrows, they start from her nose, go up to the middle of her forehead nearly, and then come down to her ear! . . . She's got a moustache" (9-10). The absurd eyebrows suggest to Cecil "a tremendous force of intellect," and

the moustache, of course, marks her as a mannish, or "half-male" character (20).

Theodora's ultra-femininity is characterized as a lack of will. When Cecil first clasps Theodora's hand, he is surprised by its softness: "it seemed to yield and yield and collapse more and more like a piece of velvet within one's grasp. Where were its own bones and muscles, its own strength and will?" (34). Cecil is drawn to the "strange mingling of extremes in Theodora: at one moment she seemed will-less, deliciously weak, a thing only made to be taken in one's arms and kissed; the next, she was full of independent, uncontrollable determination and opinion" (76). The combination of male and female physical characteristics in Theodora, along with her 'masculine' and 'feminine' personality traits, mark her as a gender deviant. She is a hybrid who blurs the boundaries of traditional gender categories.

Theodora is marked as a sexual deviant by her disdain for children and motherhood, by her attraction to Cecil, and by her resemblance to the 'Eastern' objects of Cecil's desire depicted in his sketchbook. In an age when 'normal' female sexuality was "inextricable from the maternal instinct" (Showalter 173), Theodora's extreme dislike of children (150), and Cecil's categorization of her as a woman not fit for reproduction (66), easily identify her as sexually 'abnormal.' Her attraction to Cecil, an 'effeminate' man, hints at female homosexuality and links her to the 'unnatural', even amongst the more radical people of the day.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> According to Eleanor Marx, for instance, herself considered a member of the "bohemian set" (Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight* 69), both "[t]he effeminate man and the masculine woman . . . are two types from which even the average person recoils with a perfectly natural horror of the unnatural" (qtd in Showalter 175).

Theodora cross-dresses as an Indian man to stimulate Cecil's homoerotic desires, as well as his passion for things 'Eastern'. Her resemblance to the sexualized 'Eastern' objects of Cecil's desires further insinuates her sexual transgressiveness, and associates sexual deviance with the 'East' and with 'Eastern' men and women.

Despite my separation above of the characteristics that mark Theodora as both a gender and sexual deviant, and by extension a racial deviant, these categorizations are not exclusive, but rather, as Jennifer De Vere Brody suggests, they are categories that are "mutually constitutive" of each other (10). A closer look at the narrator's description of Theodora's facial characteristics and the cultural meanings associated with them demonstrate this concept nicely. Not only can Theodora's eyebrows be read as indicative of her intelligence, which mark her as a well educated and therefore peculiar woman (i.e., gender deviant), but they are also a hint that Theodora's racial identity is in question, and this becomes part of what marks her as a sexual deviant.

According to Billie Melman, harem literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, written by Western visitors to the East, usually provided elaborate descriptions of women inside harems, which led to a "stereotyping of oriental features and, subsequently, oriental character." Dark eyes were referred to "by virtually every observer," while many writers "comment on eyebrows, and the Ottoman women's custom of plucking the hair above the eye and blackening it" (116). Melman quotes a passage in Marianne Young Postans' Facts and Fictions Illustrative of Oriental Character, published in 1844, which contains the

following description of a woman in the harem of Sami Pasha: "the fine dark eyebrow was painted in a broad arch of light sienna [*Henna*] extending from the temple to the centre of the nose" (117). Theodora's eyebrows, which "go up to the middle of her forehead . . . and then come down to her ear" are reminiscent of this description, and others like it, and throw Theodora's racial 'purity' into question.

The representation of Theodora's face as "[w]hite, so that it looked blanched" (20) also suggests her likeness to Ottoman women, who apparently, it was noted by Lady Amelia Bythinia Hornby in 1858, made "their skins as snow white and their eyebrows as jet black as possible" (qtd in Melman 116). In a scene that connects her to both 'Eastern' women and prostitutes, who were both noted for their use of cosmetics (Melman 116), Theodora appears with her eyes artificially "darkened" (44). Through a description of her physiognomy, Cross metonymically associates Theodora with Eastern women and prostitutes, marking her as racially degenerate and a sexual deviant, categories that work to constitute each other.<sup>9</sup>

As a sexual deviant, Theodora is represented in a similar light as the decadent homosexual. Elaine Showalter notes that the term decadence was often used at the *fin-de-siècle* as "a euphemism for homosexuality" (171), and

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<sup>9</sup>According to Sander L. Gilman, "[t]he concepts of human sexuality and degeneracy are inseparable within nineteenth-century thought" (72). The discourse of degeneracy was constructed in relation to discourses of race, and Krafft-Ebing, writing in the late nineteenth century, thought that "the Christian nations obtained a mental and material superiority over the polygamic races, and especially over Islam" (qtd in Gilman 78).

Six Chapters places both Theodora and Cecil in this category.<sup>10</sup> Cecil has the decadent's desire to satisfy his sexual appetites as they arise. He considers himself "easy-going, loose in morals, and adverse to every sort of restriction, responsibility, or tie" (14), and he dislikes "in a mild, theoretical way, women in the general term" (76). Cecil lives in the moment, seeking the "'new, the rare, the strange, the refined'" (Showalter 170), and he finds this combination in Theodora, an androgynous New Woman trained in the classics, whose ability to 'pass' both as a British man and an 'Eastern' man makes her the exoticized/racialized object of Cecil's 'transgressive' desires.

In late Victorian society, those considered decadents or homosexuals were discursively linked to the biological degeneracy of the British 'race',<sup>11</sup> but while both of Cross's characters are marked as sexual and gender deviants, it is interesting to note that their identities are differently constructed in relation to race. While Cecil is depicted as one who is stimulated by difference, and who exoticizes the bodies of 'Eastern' men and women, his own body is not racially marked like Theodora's. As an Egyptologist, Cecil objectifies racial others, a position that works to maintain his racial difference from the Eastern people

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<sup>10</sup>Sander Gilman writes that Krafft-Ebing replaces childhood masturbation "with homosexuality as the exemplary sexual degeneracy," and thinks that "[t]he homosexual is the prime violator of 'natural drives'" (Gilman 79).

<sup>11</sup>According to William Greenslade, "[t]he late Victorian establishment and the propertied classes generally harboured anxieties about poverty and crime, about public health and national and imperial fitness, about decadent artists, 'new women' and homosexuals." The creation of a medico-psychological discourse enabled these classes to "justify and articulate their hostility to the deviant, the diseased and the subversive" (1-2).

sketched in his book and Theodora, the newest object of his desires. When Theodora crosses the "threshold" of Cecil's apartment for the first time, he feels an "instinctive, involuntary, momentary and delightful sense of ownership" (65). He thinks of Theodora as the "new object of [his] desires" (83), comparing her to the Eastern objects of his desire depicted in the sketchbook (68-70). When Theodora poses for Cecil "in Eastern dress" (70), his desire to possess her overwhelms him, and "an involuntary, unrecognised voice within [him] said, 'It is no good; whatever happens, I must have you'" (80).

Despite Cecil's desire to possess Theodora, and his objectification of her, their relationship suggests the possibility of altering the traditional contract between women and men in sexual relationships. As a decadent who appreciates Theodora for her unusual looks, her unconventional beliefs and behaviour, as well as for her superior intellect, Cecil claims to accept Theodora as a companion on equal terms:

I had never been in a more strange relationship with any human being before. Theodora was not my wife. In many senses she was not my mistress, a term which always carries a shade of disrespect with it. To her I might give, with the greater justice, the tenderest name to me in the language, that of companion. (138)

Although a companionable relationship is held up as an ideal by both Cecil and Theodora, Cecil's uncontrollable passions and tendency towards violence, along with Theodora's passive behaviour in private, threaten their ability to maintain this type of partnership. Cecil needs to be reminded of Theodora's independent

and equal standing when he gets jealous, and Theodora draws on the popular notion of Indian women as culturally inferior to British women to argue for her own equality with Cecil:

I am not a little Hindu wife of eleven years old. I have been free, perfectly my own mistress ever since I can remember, and at close upon four-and-twenty one is too old to make over one's will to another person. I am your friend and companion and equal, and you must treat me as such; but you have half a knack of speaking as if I were one of your Kashmeri women, bought for a few hundred rupees. (155)

This comparison between British and Indian women relies on an imperialist discourse of Indian women as victims, an idea created by the British in India and used by Victorian feminists in their struggle for agency.

In "Contentious Traditions: The Debate on *Sati* in Colonial India," Lata Mani argues that the early nineteenth-century debate on *sati* constructed Indian women as helpless victims. Within this discourse, Indian women were "neither subjects nor objects, but rather the ground of the discourse on *sati*," and "the question of women's status in Indian society posed by the prevalence of widow burning becomes the occasion for struggle over the divergent priorities of officials and the indigenous male elite" (352). "For the British," Mani writes, "rescuing women becomes part of the civilizing mission" (353).

As an element in Theodora's claim to equality with Cecil, her reference to racial superiority over Indian women participates in the British feminist struggle for agency, a struggle Jenny Sharpe says was "contingent upon establishing

[British women's] racial superiority over Indian women" and based on "the idea of social progress on which modern colonialism is founded" (Allegories of Empire 10-11). Melman suggests that although many Victorian women with first-hand experience of the women in Egypt, India, and Arabia thought that Muslim women enjoyed many more freedoms than European women did, it was fashionable in Europe to "pity the women of the East" (104).

In Six Chapters, Cross uses the notion of the Hindu woman as quintessential victim as a powerful image against which to construct Theodora's subjectivity as an emancipated British woman, thereby complicating her subjectivity further by representing her in terms of both racial difference and similarity. While Theodora herself insists she is different from Hindu women, the narrative asserts her likeness to them, effectively placing her in the same category as the women she least wants to resemble. Theodora's ability to transgress traditional gender and sexual roles is represented by asserting her similarity to those considered most confined to submissive gender roles, which suggests that her quest for sexual freedom makes her more vulnerable to objectification by men and to a dangerous male sexuality.

This paradox can be understood more easily when we look at how the emancipated woman's struggle for equality, sexual freedom, and independence, is in tension with late Victorian notions of public space as sexually dangerous for women, and of women as victims who had to be protected both by, and from, men. The idea that male sexuality threatened both women and the stability of the nation was on the rise in the late Victorian period. It is paradoxical that the

feminist movement, which facilitated the entrance of large numbers of women into the public sphere, was built on arguments that constructed public space as a dangerous place for women. As more and more women ventured into public spaces, social narratives about the dangers of male sexuality increased, seemingly in reaction to the threat this transgression posed to the male dominance of the public sphere. "By venturing into the city center," writes Judith Walkowitz, "women entered a place traditionally imagined as the site of exchange and erotic activity, a place symbolically opposed to orderly domestic life" (City of Dreadful Delight 46). Walkowitz says that "[s]pectacular narratives" like W.T. Stead's "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" and the journalistic flurry surrounding the Whitechapel murders of 1888, "turned on the seeming paradox of the city as a place of danger and possibility for women . . . [d]isciplining as well as inciting, fictions of sexual danger significantly shaped the way men and women of all classes made sense of themselves and their urban environment" (City 80).<sup>12</sup>

The campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866, and

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<sup>12</sup>Stead was the editor of the Pall Mall Gazette and writer of "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon," a four-part series of articles documenting his "findings" regarding the "traffic in girls in London's vice emporiums" (Walkowitz, City 81). The articles caused a major public stir, forcing the passage of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 which "raised the age of consent for girls from thirteen to sixteen . . . [and] gave police far greater power to prosecute streetwalkers and brothel-keepers." It also inspired a mass demonstration in Hyde Park to demand the enforcement of this newly passed legislation (City 82). The media discourse around the Whitechapel murders of 'Jack the Ripper' "provide[d] a common vocabulary of male violence against women" by helping "to popularize expert medical opinion on sexual pathology," and by providing "narrative materials that sexologists would process into the most notorious case history of sex crime to date" (Walkowitz, City 227-28).

1867, which were an attempt to "control the spread of venereal disease among enlisted men in garrison towns and ports" (Walkowitz, Prostitution and Victorian Society 1), were a major factor in the discourse of public space in general, and of men in particular, as sexually threatening to women. The Acts prompted a sixteen-year campaign against the regulations and created a feminist discourse around sexuality. By reacting to what they saw as the sexual degradation of womanhood itself, feminist repealers<sup>13</sup> helped to construct a discourse around both masculinity and femininity that remains the foundation of much feminist theory today. Susan Kingsley Kent writes:

The campaign for repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts explicitly identified for thousands of women the socio-sexual structure set up by patriarchal society. It crystallized for women their status as sexual objects and catapulted many complacent, mild-mannered women into the public sphere to discuss a heretofore unmentionable issue. (9)

The Acts, feminists argued, threw into relief the position of women as sexual objects for men. Legislation that attempted to make prostitution safe for men while exposing women to male licentiousness, and to sexually (thus morally) degrading medical examinations, sanctioned male sexual depravity and

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<sup>13</sup>The campaign for the repeal of the C.D. Acts was instigated by "a coalition of middle-class nonconformists, feminists, and radical workingmen" in the late 1860's (Walkowitz, Prostitution 3). The National Association, formed in 1869, excluded women from its first meeting, and despite the fact that it opened its doors to women later, the Ladies' National Association, under the leadership of Josephine Butler, soon formed its own markedly feminist position on the Acts. Various repeal organizations were formed, and each reflected the many "ideological, class, regional, and gender divisions within the repeal camp" (Prostitution 2).

condoned the use of women by men for sexual purposes. Feminist repealers considered the Acts a sanctioning, by the state, of the double standard of sexual morality which justified male sexual access to a class of women considered 'fallen', while penalizing the women who provided this service for men (Walkowitz, Prostitution 3). "The sixteen-year campaign against state regulation," argues Walkowitz, "ingrained the theme of the sexual wrongs perpetrated against women by men on later feminist consciousness" (Prostitution 255).

Given the repeal campaign's focus on the dangers of male sexuality and the necessity of raising the moral standards of society, it is not surprising that when the Acts were repealed, they were followed by "the rise of social-purity crusades and with police crackdowns on streetwalkers and brothel keepers" (Walkowitz, Prostitution 7). The repeal of the Acts did not lessen the anxieties about the spread of disease and the sexually decadent behaviour associated with it. Ironically, the purity crusades, which were in many respects the legacy of the repeal campaign, targeted prostitutes and other sex workers, just as the Acts had done, instead of challenging the social structures that made 'decent' work unavailable to lower class women and criticizing the ideology that perpetuated the objectification of women by men. The purity crusade focused on reforming male sexuality, and crusaders called for the use of state legislation to enforce a repressive sexual code, attempting to protect the young from the 'dangers' of sex by instructing them to repress their sexual desires (Walkowitz, Prostitution 246).

Although Cross's text cannot be said to take a definitive position in relation to the purity issue (it neither overtly condones transgressive sexuality nor seems

to call for a repressive sexual code), it does set up for examination various aspects of the surrounding debates. As a 'loose' woman, the New Woman is an easy victim of male licentiousness and the sexual double standard, and will suffer the same fate as the 'fallen' woman of repealer discourse, the story suggests. It also insinuates that despite the belief that Eastern men pose the biggest danger to British women, British men themselves are the most immediate threat to women's well-being. In this inference, Cross is not alone.

In her 1897 article, "Truth Before Everything", Josephine Butler, leader of the original feminist repeal campaign, condemns British men as immoral in her argument for the repeal of the 'Cantonment Rules', which "permitted brothels to operate within regimental lines and subjected Indian women to the by now infamous compulsory examination" (Burton 141). The article, with its ideas for attaining moral order without the repressive legislation, provides an example of how British masculinity was under attack in the late 1890's, and posits an ideal of British maleness that calls for men to take responsibility for reforming their sexuality, and for protecting women and the British empire. Similar to her "warning" that the threat of reinstatement of the Acts at home will "stimulate the revolted feelings of the masses" (11), Butler cautions her readers that the present treatment of Indian women could cause an Indian revolt:

Is it not to be feared that India may one day herself answer her rulers, and cut through the heart of this problem in her own manner? . . . there are grave signs of a secret revolt in [the minds of the native soldier] against the supreme contempt for their women expressed in the high handed and

degrading measures taken under the Cantonment Acts. (18)

This warning, with its suggestion of a "secret revolt", exploits a popular image of the Indian Mutiny of 1857<sup>14</sup> as an unexpected rebellion by a 'race' considered passive by the British prior to the uprising (Sharpe 58).

While Butler's article employs racist stereotypes of 'natives', it is not Indian men that are the main target of Butler's criticism:

For the natives of India, superstitious and ignorant, and for the present apparently submissive, *have yet enough of the man in them* not to endure forever that the women of their people,--a conquered people,--should be taken and bound to the service of the vices of the troops of their conquerors. They have their harlot temples and certain impure rites, but they are not all impure, as the British Army authorities themselves attest; the native soldier being in a far more honourable position as to vice and disease than the British soldier. . . . (Butler 18, my italics)

In Butler's view, it is the British soldiers who partake in sexual vice on a regular basis, as well as the authorities who support this "state organization of sexual vice" (Butler 5), who are sexually and morally corrupt, despite their claim to masculine superiority over Indian men. According to Butler, the manhood of the Indians lies in their desire to protect their women from the "vices of the troops of their conquerors," and British men are less 'manly' for failing to protect women from these same vices. In fact, despite their castigation of Indian men, British

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<sup>14</sup>The rebellion of 1857 came to be known among Indians as the "Great Revolt" (Sharpe 59).

men are represented in her text as the worst perpetrators of vice because they actually sanction the use of women as objects for the sexual pleasure of men.

Butler's article expresses a popular *fin-de-siècle* concern about the state of British masculinity and communicates a desire for a new British man who will reform himself and repeal the Acts in order protect Indian women from the licentiousness of men, thereby ensuring national stability. Instead of threatening empire and race with his immoral sexual practices that infect all British society with "a moral pestilence more destructive of the national stamina than the disease on which [the Acts and the purity campaigners] have concentrated [their] attention" (Butler 16), the ideal British man will be as morally virtuous as women, with the strength required to protect both women and empire.

In *Allegories of Empire*, Jenny Sharpe argues that the idea of protecting women was used to maintain a commitment to empire. She says that in narratives about the Indian Mutiny, "the brutalized bodies of defenseless English women serve as a metonym for a government that sees itself as the violated object of rebellion" (7), and says that the figure of woman was "instrumental in shifting a colonial system of meaning from self-interest and moral superiority to self-sacrifice and racial superiority" (7). Butler seems to be harkening back to this earlier discourse, replacing the image of brutalized British women with that of sexually violated Indian women, and calling for a return of heroic British masculinity.

While Cross's representation of Egyptian men as the rapists of Theodora suggests that it is 'Eastern' men who pose the biggest threat to British women, it

can be argued that like Butler, Cross's focus is on a critique of British men: their immoral behaviour, their contradictory attitudes towards women, and their egoism. As someone who thinks of himself as unconventional, Cecil turns out to be no more than a 'typical' or 'traditional' British man in his views about women.<sup>15</sup> Cecil blames his own inability to control his passions and look out for Theodora on Theodora herself, reasoning that the contradictions in her character incite his passions and his violence. Cecil sees Theodora's yielding hand as representative of her whole body, and his response to her passivity is sexual arousal. As Theodora's yielding hand slides out of his, Cecil "felt vaguely that [he] was in the chains of a freshly-sprung passion . . . in me the languid touch and the heat of the strengthless fingers seemed to appeal to every nerve in my own frame and excite them to response" (34). While Theodora's physical lack of strength and will sexually arouse Cecil, her contrasting "independent security" provokes him to near violence. Since he cannot control her independent mind and her social interactions with others, he longs to control her physical movement; Cecil wants her to "swerve and stagger" so she will "seek his support" (187), but also admires her self-sufficiency.

Cecil is willing to protect Theodora when she appears vulnerable, but becomes sexually violent when she demonstrates her independence of will.

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<sup>15</sup>As a sexual 'deviant', Cecil can be seen as outside of 'proper' British masculinity, and as such, a figure that does not represent all British men. Or, he can be read as only an extreme example of the 'degeneracy' of all British men. Cross's depiction of male sexuality, which will be discussed later, supports my reading of Cecil as figure that stands in for a 'degenerate' British man, who despite his unconventionality, stands in as an example of British men in general.

When Theodora is cross-dressed as a British man, Cecil becomes jealous when she is playing cards late at night with a group of men, and in a fit of rage, he physically forces himself on Theodora: "conscious of nothing but a furious, intolerably stimulated rage of passion and jealous anger," he kisses her, and although unable to strike her, his "feelings" were nevertheless "akin to blows" (167). In this scene, Theodora is the victim of Cecil's rage, which is expressed through sexual violence, and can be read as a foreshadowing of the more brutal reinscription of femininity onto Theodora's body that is carried out in the sixth chapter, when Theodora is raped by a group of Egyptian men.<sup>16</sup>

The rape of Theodora is carried out by the Egyptian men, but can be read as a displacement of Cecil's aggression onto these 'Eastern' men, who carry out the sexual violence that Cross cannot bring herself to attribute to a British man, especially a decadent aesthete/homosexual.<sup>17</sup> The Egyptian men act out the physical aspects of British misogyny, violently enforcing British patriarchal ideas of masculinity and femininity.<sup>18</sup> Cecil is not represented as physically committing

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<sup>16</sup>I am working here with an idea articulated by Sharon Marcus in "Fighting Bodies, Fighting Words: A Theory and Politics of Rape Prevention." Marcus argues that "social structures inscribe on men's and women's embodied selves and psyches the misogynist inequalities which enable rape to occur," and that "[m]asculine power and feminine powerlessness neither simply precede nor cause rape; rather, rape is one of culture's many modes of feminizing women . . . rape is not only scripted--it also scripts" (391).

<sup>17</sup>The analysis of the rape scene that follows was influenced, to a large degree, by a class discussion of this novel in a course offered by Dr. Susan Brown, "Sexual Assault: Constructions and Feminist Reconstructions," in the Fall of 1998. I would like to thank Dr. Brown and my classmates for their insights into Six Chapters, particularly their thoughts on the meaning of the rape of Theodora.

<sup>18</sup>If one agrees with Marcus that "rape is one of culture's many modes of feminizing women" (391), it follows that it is an act that also masculinizes the male body. In this view,

the rape, but he is, nevertheless, implicitly blamed for it. In the middle of a crowd of Egyptian men, as they watch a "white-skinned" (215) Levantine boy dance, Cecil is unable to control his passion, and endangers Theodora by kissing her (218). In men's clothes, Theodora resembles a young man, and both she and the boy are described as "boneless" and white-skinned (34, 217). Perhaps originally interested in Theodora because of this resemblance, their Egyptian host orders her detainment. When it becomes clear that the Egyptians will kill both Cecil and Theodora unless he leaves her there, Cecil's reaction invites the reader to associate the rape with Cecil's own violent tendencies, and with the misogynist ideology that supports them.

The introduction of the rape scenario provides a situation in which the narrator's violent desires, which are an aspect of his sexuality, can be spoken, without completely alienating the reader. Cecil's first "instinct" his "one thought," is a "murderous desire to kill [Theodora]," and this is intricately connected to sexual desire:

I felt no tenderness, no pity, no remembrance of love. These were obliterated, annihilated in the savage, mindless, brutal lust to kill, this impulse which lies so closely curled round the roots of every lover's passion that only reason divides the two. I longed to destroy her now, as I had once longed to possess her, to shatter and burst those eyeballs and

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the fact that it is the colonial subjects who reinscribe femininity onto the transgressive New Woman suggests that they are more 'masculine' than British men, arguably, not the models of masculinity that Cross would consciously condone.

blot out their light for ever, to lay open the temples and transform them into a shapeless bleeding mass, to keep her mine now as I had made her mine then. (224)

In this passage, Cross represents the "lover's passion" as barely differentiated from the "brutal lust to kill," and the selfish desire to possess is linked to the destruction of the loved one. Murdering Theodora would, in Cecil's mind, enable him to maintain ownership of her, to "keep her [his] now as [he] had made her [his] then."

The desire to possess his lover dominates Cecil's sexuality, and Theodora's response to this threat demystifies the Victorian ideal of female 'honour', and reveals Cecil's "impulse" as irrational and self-serving: "My honour! A term for the preservation to yourself and your own egotistical, jealous, tyrannical passion, of this flesh and blood. Think what our life has been! Cecil, you accepted me for your own desires as Theodora; you can't now, for those same desires, turn me into a Lucretia!" (225). In the Roman story, Lucretia kills herself to save the honour of her father and brother after she is raped, and Theodora argues that she is not willing to sacrifice her life for her 'honour', or for the 'honour' of Cecil. Indeed, she calls the whole idea of female honour based on chastity into question, claiming that it is her "mind," her "soul," and her "will" that are of value, and argues that these "cannot [be] touch[ed]" by her rapists (227).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>This argument may also be calling into question the 'death before dishonour' dictum that circulated during the Indian Mutiny. In the face of British narratives of Sepoy atrocities against English 'ladies' during the Mutiny (found later to be grossly exaggerated by the British and Anglo-Indian press and rumour), women were expected to sacrifice their lives

Theodora's later suicide confuses the reading of this scene as a straightforward indictment of sacrificing a woman's 'virtue' or 'honour' instead of her life, and represents rape as a violent inscription of femininity onto the androgynous body of the transgressive New Woman. It is not the act of rape itself that inscribes femininity, it is suggested, but rather the propensity of men to reject 'fallen' women that renders them powerless. When Theodora returns to Cecil after her ordeal, "convulsed in an agony of sobs," she cries: "Oh, Cecil, Cecil, it would have been better had you shot me as you wished . . . Oh, I have lost you! I know I have lost you! You won't care for me now" (238). Because Cecil's love was based, as Theodora says, on his "egotistical, jealous, tyrannical passion" of her "flesh and blood," she does not notice that her suffering causes a change in him. When she returns to him "disfigured and degraded," he is for the first time able to love her "unselfishly" (239):

Now at last, when my passion was held paralysed and revolted in my veins, when Theodora was no longer lovely and desirable to me, when all my senses turned from her, stricken with loathing, it was then that I knew and could claim that I loved her in the truest, highest meaning of the word. (239-240)

The text implies that it is the irresponsibility of individual men, their egoism and

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before their honour, often "[keeping] poison in case of an attack and instruct[ing] their husbands to avenge their deaths" (Sharpe 69). Despite the fact that women's honour rested on them sacrificing their lives before an attack, or on committing suicide after, English women's descriptions of their Mutiny experiences express "a concern for staying alive rather than . . . saving their honor" when faced with Indian attacks (Sharpe 69-73).

their failure to love women as equals instead of as objects for their own pleasure, that is the ultimate reason for Theodora's suicide. In her "delirium, the instinctive knowledge of what men are, the intuitive sense of how little strain their love will bear, and the dread born of both, these had oppressed and haunted her" (265). How to love unselfishly is, ostensibly, the lesson Cross wishes British men would learn. And what is the lesson for women?

Given that Cecil loves Theodora unselfishly when she becomes an object of his pity, the text suggests that women will be loved when they appear helpless and victimized. Theodora is in a state of exaggerated helplessness after the rape. She is "weak" and "strengthless" (239), "[m]otionless, speechless, on the verge of coma" (243), and childlike (246), largely because she is certain "that [Cecil] should condemn her and . . . that no pity and no mercy could be expected from [him]" (243). Although companionship is idealized throughout the story, it will not be gained, the text implies, by women becoming more like men. Theodora's gender cross-dressing in combination with her participation in the practice of 'freelove' results in sexual assault, implying that women who act like men are endangering themselves and making it less likely that they will gain equality in relationships with men. The text is not in agreement with "moralists" (266) who encourage the suppression of passion, however. It is not passion that is harmful, but love's "egoism," which is "an amorphous, cancerous growth . . . [that] consumes and eats away the whole constitution of our love . . . . Let us cut this out," urges Cecil: "This had killed Theodora, as it has killed, directly and indirectly, its millions" (267).

The text uses the stereotype of the dark rapist and the idea of foreign space as threatening to warn women of the dangers of the egoism of British men and male sexuality. Transgressive female subjectivity is signified both by Theodora's likeness to 'Eastern' women and men and, paradoxically, by her claim to racial superiority over them. While Theodora's bid for equality with Cecil depends on this claim, and on the construction of Indian women as the victims of men from a less civilized nation than Britain, the ending suggests that British women can end up the victims of British men, whose egoism is more dangerous than the physical threat posed by rapacious Egyptian men.

The New Woman's quest for equality in personal relationships with men, the novel implies, can only be realized when men themselves become less selfish. Women must be careful not to endanger themselves by becoming sexually involved with licentious men who care more about their own pleasure than the well-being of their lovers. The ideal lover, thinks Cecil, loves "an object for the object's sake, and not [his] own sake . . . in relation to its pleasure and not in its relation to [his] own pleasure" (49). In Anna Lombard, Victoria Cross imagines a selfless British man whose patience and sexual self-control enables him to rescue the sexually transgressive woman from her racial 'fall' and facilitate her return to the realm of 'proper' femininity.

### Chapter 3

The 'Fall' and 'Rise' of the Transgressive New Woman:

Representing the Unrepresentable in Anna Lombard

For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. (Genesis 3.5, King James Version)

Victoria Cross's Anna Lombard, written in 1901, "ultimately sold more than six million copies . . . and went through more than forty editions." Although popular amongst readers and greatly admired by some reviewers, it was also despised by many critics for its depiction of transgressive sexualities and relationships (Knapp, "Revolutionary Androgyny" 11). Like Six Chapters of a Man's Life, Anna Lombard can be read as a text primarily occupied with the widely debated issues of female sexual identity and gender relations of the *fin-de-siècle*, and as a text that represents alternative models of both masculinity and femininity. Although its overall considerations are similar to those of Six Chapters, the figuration of female subjectivity in Anna Lombard is substantially different. Anna Lombard utilizes the device of gender role reversal, and daringly represents an inter-racial romance between Anna Lombard and her Pathan servant, to construct an image of British female sexuality that had rarely (if ever) been represented in any detail outside of pornographic texts.

The well-educated and beautiful Anna Lombard lives in India with her

father, a British general. She meets the narrator of the story, Gerald Ethridge, a young assistant commissioner with the Indian Civil Service, the evening before he finds out he will be stationed in Burmah for five years. Gerald considers asking Anna to marry him and go with him to his new post, but decides it is not in her best interest to accompany him to "Lihuli, a lonely, desolate station" (21), where "there is always some epidemic raging" and "where the face of a white woman is never seen" (22). Soon after Gerald leaves without saying goodbye, Anna secretly marries Gaida Khan (her Pathan servant), and they have a passionate sexual relationship. Gerald is relieved from his post after only a year, and returns to Anna and their romance continues. When Gerald learns of Anna's marriage to Gaida he is shocked, but still wants to marry her.

Gerald does not push Anna to leave Gaida, even though he worries for her safety. And when Gaida contracts cholera, the selfless Gerald attempts to nurse him back to health. Shortly after Gaida dies from the illness, Anna realizes she is pregnant with his child, and when Gerald finds out, he insists on marrying her immediately. When the baby is born, Anna becomes obsessed with it, but murders her child when she realizes it is creating a barrier between herself and Gerald. After spending a year alone to recover and repent for her sins, she calls Gerald back, and the story ends with their reunion and the start of a happier life together. The sexual experience Anna has gained in her relationship with Gaida, the novel implies, will make her a better wife for Gerald. Anna has explored her own sexuality prior to marriage, and she is now ready to enter a more ideal partnership with Gerald.

Anna Lombard employs a gender role reversal to suggest that the sexually experienced woman will make the best kind of wife for the progressive British man, and to explore the consequences of the newly declared female sexual agency of the New Woman for the nuclear family and the empire. In an effort to portray Anna as a sexually desiring subject who retains her identity as an English lady, Cross attempts to represent the unrepresentable, and like all cultural producers, she can only do so in the context of previous discourses.

Because, as Thomas R. Metcalf writes, "[f]or the British, female sexuality, *at least among respectable women*, simply was not supposed to exist" (Ideologies of the Raj 107, my emphasis), the models available for representing the sexuality of middle-class British women in the later nineteenth century were extremely limited. In The 'Improper' Feminine, Lyn Pykett says that William Acton's 1857 version of the "non-sexual or passionless woman" was very influential, proving "remarkably pervasive and persistent," and that it is "the version of woman within which, and against which, both the women sensationalists and the New Woman writers worked." Acton's 'proper' female is passionless and passive, only engaging in sexual activity with her husband for his gratification or to satisfy her own desire to be a mother. For Acton, writes Pykett, "[a]ctive and autonomous sexual feeling [in a woman] . . . denotes masculinity, or a deviant, 'improper' femininity. Women are either non-sexual, or they are omni-sexual, criminals, madwomen, or prostitutes" (15-16).

Anna, although displaying 'improper' behaviour, never quite loses her identity as a 'proper' British lady. While Anna is intelligent and well-educated like

Theodora, she is not mannish or androgynous, and instead of having the dark features of the Eastern woman, she is represented as the picture of 'Englishness': she "was like an English summer day. Her hair was fair . . . her eyes were blue . . . and her skin [was] like the wild rose in the English hedgerow first opening after a summer shower" (15). Her physical characteristics do not signal her transgressive sexuality by linking her to Eastern women like Theodora's do, but it is nonetheless constructed in terms of racial transgression.

Richard Dyer's discussion of the construction of male and female sexuality in Western discourse enables a reading of the way Anna's sexuality is constituted differently than Theodora's. He says there is a difference in the way that men's and women's sexualities were produced in racial terms, and argues that while the white man's sexuality was represented as a struggle against his own "dark drives," the white woman's was imagined quite differently: "The white woman on the other hand was not supposed to have such drives in the first place. She might discover that she did and this is the stuff of a great deal of Western narrative, but this was a fall from whiteness, not constitutive of it, as in the case of the white man's torment" (White 28). Female sexuality in this account is depicted as a racial "fall", whereas the "dark drives" that inform men's sexuality constitute their identity as white.

Anna's sexuality is not attributed to mannishness, and her "fall from whiteness" is not marked on her body like Theodora's is; she has fair, not dark, features. Instead, her sexuality is represented as a struggle between virtue and passion that arises in the context of inter-racial sex, and is constituted by her

physical union with a racial Other. The 'forbidden fruit' of which Anna partakes is the sexualized and eroticized Indian man who is her lover, and her transgression of racial boundaries leads to a loss of sexual innocence, threatening, but not eradicating, the possibility of surviving her experience and taking her place beside Gerald in the Anglo-Indian community. Because the English lady's identity is constructed in terms of sexual innocence and racial purity, Anna must do penance for her sins, and eliminate all traces of her racial transgressions before she can be recuperated back into the realm of proper femininity. Unlike the Genesis story of Eve's transgression against God, Anna's fall is depicted as beneficial; her knowledge of sin makes her better, wiser, and more able to love the British man as a proper British wife should.

In the face of the nineteenth-century discourse of middle-class white women as asexual, Cross's attempt to construct Anna as sexually active without sacrificing her class and her whiteness requires a number of complicated manoeuvres between discourses of race, gender, and sexuality. I will start by looking at a contemporary review of Anna Lombard as a method of positioning the text within the debates surrounding gender and the sexual double standard, and of exposing some of the barriers Cross had to overcome to represent a gender role reversal between Anna and Gerald, without necessarily representing Anna as mannish. An outline of the various narratives of women's sexuality that preceded Anna Lombard will follow, and I will discuss how they are manipulated to construct an image of Anna as an English lady with sexual desires.

William T. Stead, editor of the Review of Reviews, author of the "The

Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon," and a major figure in the debates surrounding sexual danger in Victorian London,<sup>1</sup> wrote a highly favourable review of Anna Lombard that focuses on the novel's gender role reversal, and helps position it within the *fin-de-siècle* debates about the double standard of sexuality. Stead praises Cross for her "bold, brilliant, defiant presentation of a phase of the relations of the sexes which [he does] not remember ever having seen treated with the same freedom, delicacy and audacity" (595). He claims that through the novel's role reversal, "Victoria Cross enables the reader to understand how women feel in relation to the pre-marital unions which so many men form and continue with the female counterparts of Gaida." He outlines the story, then praises it for its

clearly cut . . . representation of an embodiment in a woman of what, alas! is common enough in a man. Ethridge, an almost ideal hero, plays the part which is so normal to women as never to call for remark, while Anna abandoned [sic] herself to the force of a passion to which men succumb so often as seldom to call for comment or censure. (597)

Stead sees the novel as a criticism of men's promiscuity and a comment on the

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<sup>1</sup>Stead was the editor of the Pall Mall Gazette and writer of "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon", a four-part series of articles documenting his "findings" regarding the "traffic in girls in London's vice emporiums". The articles caused a major public stir, forcing the passage of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, which "raised the age of consent for girls from thirteen to sixteen . . . [and] gave police far greater power to prosecute streetwalkers and brothel-keepers." It also inspired a mass demonstration in Hyde Park to demand the enforcement of this newly passed legislation (Walkowitz, City of Dreadful Delight 81-82).

heroism of women who, if they are like Ethridge, experience ordeal after ordeal waiting for their fiances to drop their unsuitable and improper lovers, and who make personal sacrifices in order to save men from the uncontrollable "force" of passion.

Stead's concentration on the role reversal is not surprising given that his main political preoccupation was with the immorality of male promiscuity, and the dangers lecherous men posed to women's moral and physical health, and to the well-being of the nuclear family (see Knapp, "Stead Among the Feminists"). However, his reading of the novel as a straight role reversal, that is, as if Cross *could* represent men and women as simply switching roles without having to revise the previous discourse of female sexuality that represented proper women as asexual, suggests that there is a difference between the way he and Cross perceived gender categories. Stead seems either unaware of or unwilling to comment on the complex manoeuvres the novel makes in order to represent Anna's fall from and subsequent rise back to the realm of proper womanhood. This elision enables him to make use of the text and author for his own political purposes, and avoid the highly contentious issue of the depiction of transgressive female sexuality so obviously present in the novel.

Stead conceives of Anna's sexuality in the exact terms of a strict role reversal; he imagines she is a man, with the same rights and options a man would have in a similar situation. This is evident in his criticism of Cross's choice to have Anna murder her baby: "It is much to be regretted," he writes, "that the authoress should have marred so splendid a study by apparently sanctioning

murder." He suggests a number of ways out of the position: having Ethridge remove the child before Anna sees it, having Anna consent to its removal, or having the "little half-caste . . . [take] its place in the family" after Anna and Gerald produce other children (597). But only by disregarding the ways in which women's sexuality was previously constructed as very different from men's, and the multiple manoeuvres Cross makes to represent Anna as sexual, can Stead read the novel as "sanctioning murder."

The novel quite clearly establishes that the choices available to European men who have native concubines and half-caste children, and those available to Anna, are different. A European man can, as a colleague of Gerald's points out, simply leave when his term is up, and his native wife "will go back to her own people . . . with the kids" (55). This behaviour is condemned by Gerald, a character whom Cross, in her Preface, says is modelled after Christ himself, and Gerald's criticism follows a general trend to discourage interracial sexuality and concubinage between British men and Indian women in the latter half of the nineteenth century,<sup>2</sup> and to discourage the abandonment of mixed race children by British men.<sup>3</sup> Despite the criticism against what is seen as irresponsible

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<sup>2</sup>As Margaret Strobel states, "[c]oncubinage was a feature of early periods of European conquest and rule in Africa and Asia," but after the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857, racial boundaries hardened as the British drew in among themselves, and "[b]y the late nineteenth century, imperialist sentiments were strong in Britain, and various ideologies - scientific and medical as well as political - situated whites as the superiors of people of color," and interracial sexuality began to be policed more intensely (Gender, Sex and Empire, 6-7).

<sup>3</sup>Ann Laura Stoler, in her article "Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers," points out that the abandonment of mixed race children by European men became a contentious issue in the early twentieth century, and argues that this was largely due to the threat they posed to the racial categories that determined, for Europeans, national identities (198). Stoler

behaviour, it is clear that the Anglo-Indian men in the novel have very different choices than Anna does, and Stead's suggestions of an alternative to the baby-killing reveals a blind-spot that may have to do with his privileged position as a British male, and with his own political agenda of critiquing British male sexuality and morality.

To represent Anna as sexual is to represent her as deviant, and within the discursive context of deviant female sexuality in the nineteenth century, Anna cannot be represented as a good mother: her 'unnatural' sexuality goes hand in hand with her 'unnatural' ability to murder her own baby, which may actually have been read as less reprehensible than abandonment. In order for Anna to be exonerated by the end of the novel, that is, to be brought back into the realm of proper British femininity and represented as an angel in the house, "[a] figure in white with the sunlight in the eyes and hair . . . with feet that hardly touched the ground" (AL 216), she must rid herself of all ties to the racial Other. It is her interracial romance with Gaida that helps mark her as sexual in the first place, and that presents a threat to the well-being of Anna and Gerald, as well as to the stability of the strict racial boundaries set out for the colonists. Like a man in a similar position, Anna must rid herself of the ties that connect her to her Indian lover, but unlike a man, she cannot simply leave the situation. She must remove

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writes that "The consequences of mixed unions were . . . collapsed into a singular moral trajectory, which, without state intervention, would lead to a future generation of Eurasian paupers and prostitutes, an affront to European prestige and a contribution to national decay" (206).

all traces of her fall from whiteness.

Early twentieth-century educational efforts by the British to provide white women with skills that would increase the health of the general population prevailed alongside ideas about maternal instinct and the strength of the maternal bond.<sup>4</sup> Within this context, and alongside ideas of the threat to the stability of empire posed by the abandonment of children born out of inter-racial relationships, infanticide may have seemed a less contemptible solution to the readers of Anna Lombard than abandonment of the half-caste child would have been. Stead's suggestions attest to his difficulty in reconciling proper femininity with child abandonment, especially after the mother has seen the child. All his alternatives to infanticide require that if Anna and the child are to be separated, they do not have a chance to bond. One of the ways in which Anna's racial 'purity' is questioned in the novel is in terms of her attachment to her racially mixed child, and her whiteness is reaffirmed with her choice to murder the baby, the only remaining evidence of her attachment to Gaida after his own death from cholera.

Anna's decision to kill her baby may, paradoxically, make it more likely that readers will believe that fallen women are redeemable, both because it gets

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<sup>4</sup>Anna Davin's article, "Imperialism and Motherhood," gives a detailed account of early twentieth-century efforts to reduce child mortality by educating mothers in child-care practices and ensuring that the ideological burden for their survival was borne by women. The emphasis on the need for mothers to improve "was reinforced by the influential ideas of eugenicists: good motherhood was an essential component in their ideology of racial health and purity. Thus the solution to a national problem of public health and of politics was looked for in terms of individuals, of a particular role--the mother--and a social institution--the family" (90).

rid of the physical evidence of her racial transgression, and because abandonment after mother and child have formed an attachment to each other was considered even more heinous than murder. The child's half-caste status may also have worked to make the infanticide less heinous to British readers than the murder of a white child would have been. The infanticide helps to rid Anna of any trace of her fall from virtue, since the half-caste baby is a manifestation of her sexual transgressions, which are figured in racial terms. Because the half-caste baby represents a threat to the stability of racial categories, and thus to British rule in India, its death renders Anna herself less threatening to empire. By having Anna kill the baby herself, instead of having it die naturally, Cross makes Anna an active participant in her return to 'proper' femininity. Her choice signals her willingness to start considering Gerald's feelings, instead of following her own selfish passions to the detriment of their marriage.

The dominant narratives of white female sexuality in the late nineteenth century that could be used to describe a respectable woman were ones that told of women being forced into sexual acts; if they were not forced, then women who had sex outside of marriage were considered fallen, and were shunned by those who considered themselves members of respectable society. Throughout the Victorian period, narratives of sexuality were published in the form of melodrama and pornography, and according to Judith Walkowitz, these genres share both "a linked history in radical publishing" and a "sexual script":

As purveyors of irreverent, bawdy populism, French and Latin libertine

literature, and popular melodrama, Grub Street publishers moved beyond an older restricted radical audience towards an emerging 'mass' reading public which cut across middle- and working-class boundaries . . . . melodrama and pornography contained the same sexual script, which focused on the transgression of class boundaries in the male pursuit of the female object of desire, the association of sex and violence, and the presumption of aggressive male sexuality bearing down on a passive asexual female. (City of Dreadful Delights 97)

The perpetrators in these publications were aristocratic men who preyed on young working-class women. Walkowitz argues that class exploitation was "imaginatively represented and personalized as sexual exploitation of the daughter, which was a threat to family hierarchy and an infringement of male working-class prerogatives" (City 86). The representation of women as passive sexual victims served a specific political purpose in these melodramas, which were "compatible with the democratic, antiaristocratic, and antistatist traditions of popular radicalism" in the first half of the nineteenth century (City 87).

Other narratives of the sexual exploitation of white women in the nineteenth century were accounts of European women sold into white slavery, and of colonial women raped by black men. These narratives warned of outside threats to British women, and translated into threats to the well-being of the British family unit, and to the moral and physical well-being of the British nation and empire. Like melodrama and pornography, these narratives made links between sex and violence, and represented women as the passive victims of

male sexual aggression. The stories of sexual danger produced and circulated in the Anglo-Indian and British press during and after the Indian Mutiny, continued in narratives of all kinds well into the twentieth century, and provide a discursive background to the representation of female sexuality in Anna Lombard.

In Allegories of Empire, Jenny Sharpe argues that the crisis in British authority signalled by the Mutiny was managed by narratives that "position English women as innocent victims and Indian men as sadistic sex criminals; insurgency is thus represented above all else as a crime against women" (67). Sensationalist reports, often from authors claiming 'eyewitness' status, "[declared] the sepoy crimes to be 'unspeakable,'" and then went into elaborate detail about the rape and torture of British women. They told of women being systematically "stripped naked, sexually abused, and then tortured" (66). Despite these claims, "[m]agistrates commissioned to investigate the so-called eyewitness reports could find no evidence to substantiate the rumours of rebels raping, torturing, and mutilating English women" (2). Nevertheless, writes Sharpe, Anglo-Indian fiction "gave coherence to the Mutiny narratives by lending a literary imagination to what was 'unspeakable' in the first-hand reports" (2).

In order to make the scenario of Indian men raping and mutilating British women believable, the racial stereotype of the Hindu male as passive had to be revised, and earlier ideas of the 'Asiatic' as duplicitous, cunning, hypocritical, treacherous, and secretive resurfaced. Despite these revisions, however, the Hindu male, although believed to be cruel and duplicitous, was still considered physically weak and less than savage. "In the absence of a stereotype for the

'savage Hindoo'" writes Sharpe, "the 'blood-thirsty Musselman' was often identified as the perpetrator of the worst crimes" (Allegories 59). The discourse of the rape of innocent and helpless women by rebellious and barbaric Indian men managed the crisis in colonial authority by "displac[ing] attention away from the image of English men dying at the hands of the insurgents," thereby preserving the image of the British man as invulnerable and as naturally superior to Indians (Allegories 67). It also declared that the Victorian institution of the English lady had been desecrated, and played into "a code of chivalry that called on Victorian men to protect the weak and defenceless," justifying the cruel punishment meted out on Indians in the name of the victims' honour (Allegories 76). Instead of describing real cases of the rape of British women by Indian men, many of these Mutiny narratives used images of "the brutalized bodies of defenceless English women . . . as a metonym for a government that sees itself as the violated object of rebellion" (Allegories 7).

According to Sharpe, the idea of white women's moral purity was held up in Mutiny narratives as a valuable commodity that must be protected at all costs, and British women were expected to kill themselves before Indian attackers had a chance to violate them: "female moral fortitude [was] the sign of racial purity," and moral fortitude required women to kill themselves rather than sleep with the enemy. So "an English woman who cohabited with rebels during the Mutiny could not reenter Anglo-Indian society without confessing her weakness, expressing horror over her decision, and demonstrating the extremity of her coercion" (Allegories 72). An English woman who chose an Indian man over

death was considered racially impure, and the only "place of female agency" in the official narratives was located in "a woman's choice of death over dishonor" (Allegories 71).

Nineteenth-century pornographic texts told a very different story of female sexuality than official Mutiny narratives did. There were plenty of stories in this genre that told of a woman's fall from virtue and her initiation into sexuality which began with force, but ended in pleasure for both parties. The Lustful Turk, an "erotic" text first published anonymously in 1828, reprinted twice in the eighteen sixties, and again in 1893, is considered by H. Montgomery Hyde, in his Introduction to the 1967 edition, "a classic of its kind. It is likely," writes Hyde, "to remain one of the most characteristic period examples of English erotic literature" (11). The text depicts scene after scene of European women forced into sex with either the Dey of Algiers, the Bey of Tunis, or with French and Italian Monks (who allegedly "carried on an infamous traffic in Young Girls" [Introduction to LT 9]), and eventually falling in love with their assailants.<sup>5</sup>

After Emily Barlow, an "English lady", and the main narrator of the Lustful Turk, is captured by the Dey of Algiers, she is subjected to what one publisher of Victorian erotica calls "the salacious Tastes of the Turks" (qtd in Hyde's Introduction 10). In this particular passage, however, the struggle is less between the Dey and Emily, than between Emily's "virtue" and her surrender to physical

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<sup>5</sup>The myth that women need to be forced into sex with men, but that after their initial resistance (and loss of virginity) they will come to love it, is still an element of pornographic representations today, and a factor in the construction of the images and practice of female sexuality in North American and European cultures.

pleasure:

If anything was wanting to complete my confusion, it was the thrilling sensation I felt, caused by the touches of his finger. What a dreadful moment was this for my virtue! with all the highest notions of the charms of the dear innocence which I was doomed to be so soon deprived of, dreading even in my soul's disorder nothing so much as losing it, how strange then it was that pleasure should overcome with such fear about me. (The Lustful Turk 23)

Emily's confusion in this scene is caused by her knowledge that to maintain her virtue she must not succumb willingly to the Dey or enjoy sex, and by her inability to understand how, with all the social edicts in place to protect her virginity, she can still find pleasure in the Dey's touch.

Unlike Emily Barlow, Anna Lombard is not forced into sex, but like Emily, she becomes a victim of her own passions, which are activated by an 'Eastern' man. In this passage, Gerald reprimands Anna for her sexual transgressions, and Anna describes her helplessness in the face of passion:

'Passion without love, Anna; even men are ashamed when they feel that.' Her head drooped a little and she colored. Then she looked up again as before. 'I feel it too like that,' she murmured, 'but it has come so. It is not my fault . . . He is hard and mean and cruel, and when he shows me these things, I feel I hate him; yet I can not tear myself away from him. His lips lie to me all day, and I know it, and I could strike them; yet, when they come to kiss me, I am only too glad to submit. It is horrible to feel in that

way, to feel your soul and body fighting together and your body forcing your soul to submission. (93-94)

Anna knows that her passions for Gaida are improper, but she cannot control her body, despite the fact that her "soul" tells her to resist. Anna is not a helpless victim of Gaida, but is, instead a victim of her own passions; there is no physical force used here. Gaida is Anna's servant, and as such, his only control over her is his threat to leave her household if she does not marry him; it is an emotional rather than a physical hold he has on her, and the position of power is Anna's because of her race and class standing.

Anna's sexual agency is, paradoxically, figured as a lack of agency. By employing ideas of Indian men as sexual, and by representing Gaida as a Greek beauty (110), Cross depicts women's sexuality as partially similar to men's. The classic argument for men's inability to control their sexuality blames the loss of control on beauty and deviant female sexuality, and Cross is, in some ways, reversing this argument. While Anna seems to choose marriage with Gaida after she thinks Gerald has abandoned her, the depiction of her lack of control over her passions in the face of Gaida's beauty (110), suggests that she has no agency over her actions when she is with him. Anna argues that her submission to Gaida is based on her *feelings* of passion for him, and describes the control her passions exert over her actions as *physical*.

In an attempt to explain to Gerald why she cannot leave her Indian lover, Anna describes her helplessness in the face of passion, which she describes as "a great monster possessed of one long tentacle, with an immensely powerful

claw at the end . . . there is no getting away from it" (165). She has been "hypnotize[d]" into "an exquisite trance" by this phallic monster, a trance from which she cannot escape: "the claw of passion came out upon me from Gaida's beauty and pinioned me and I wanted to get away from it, that was horrible" (166). The image of the phallic claw that traps Anna is suggestive of a violent male sexuality, and her description of sex with Gaida suggests rape than consensual sex. Like men in the face of beauty, Anna loses control over herself, but unlike a man, she has the ideology of virtue to contend with. Her helplessness suggest she is not wholly responsible for her actions, and leaves room for Gerald to excuse her sexual transgressions.

The incongruities of passion and virtue, or moral purity, are part of what delineate female sexuality in both Anna Lombard and The Lustful Turk. Both texts are also similar in their use of stereotypes of Eastern men as animators of such passions, and their depiction of a racial fall, in the form of inter-racial sex, is part of what makes the representation of female sexuality possible. In the face of male beauty and deviant Indian male sexuality, Anna cannot control herself, despite her struggle against the monster, passion. By mixing the stereotype of the violent Muslim with that of the physically beautiful Pathan, Cross can stage the gender role reversal crucial to her argument against the double standard of sexuality that, according to Edward Bristow, accepted "male sexual incontinence and its division of womanhood into rigid categories of pure and fallen" (5). The idea that sexual passion can exert physical control over the body is extended to women, suggesting both that if women's sexual desires are

similar to men's, they too must struggle to control their passions, and that, like men, women too can be saved from their sexuality and brought back into respectable society.

Anna Lombard reverses the image of the virtuous British woman waiting at home to rescue the errant British man from his own lusts. Anna is ultimately saved by Gerald's sexual and emotional self-control, which Cross claims "reflect Christ's own teaching": Gerald "forgives the sinner, raises the fallen, comforts the weak . . . [and] works and suffers to reclaim the pagan and almost lost soul of Anna Lombard" ("Preface"). If this is the role women usually play, then the text insinuates that women themselves have traditionally been Christ-like in their willingness to forgive men their sexual sins. But because Anna's sexuality has been constituted in relation to an Indian man, and in light of the existing narratives of Indian male lasciviousness, Anna must be rescued quite differently than a British man would be.

In a passage reminiscent of Mutiny narratives, Anna is figured as the victim of the lasciviousness of Indian men, and Gerald realizes that he is the only one that can rescue Anna from the "unknown dangers" of her marriage to a "native":

Married to a native! One needs to have lived in India to fully understand the horror contained in those words. Aside from the moral degradations of life shared with one who, according to the British standpoint, has no moral sense, of being allied with a race whose vices and lives are beyond description; there is the daily, hourly physical danger from a native's

insensate jealousy, unreasoning rage, and childish, yet fiendish, revenge . . . A smile bestowed on another, one of those hundred little social amenities of functions fulfilled by his wife, not understood in its right sense by the unlettered, unthinking barbarian; and a naked corpse, with breasts cut off, and mutilated beyond recognition, flung out upon the *meidan*, are but likely cause and probable result. (104)

The stereotype of the barbaric native is evoked to suggest that Anna's uncontrollable passions have put her in danger, and Gerald sees himself as responsible for her salvation. When Gerald realizes the danger his own negligence has caused, he reproaches himself for awakening Anna's passions and then leaving her alone while he went to Burma, because when he returned she was married to Gaida, or as he puts it, "enveloped in a horror and a darkness worse than death" (104).

As a Muslim, Gaida qualifies as the most threatening type of Indian male according to the Mutiny narratives, but as a Pathan, he is part of a race considered one of the most beautiful and dignified, and therefore perhaps the best example of an Indian who could be imagined by Cross as worthy of a British woman's admiration.<sup>6</sup> It is Anna's passions, along with Gerald's failure to carry

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<sup>6</sup>The idea that Pathan men possess a 'pride of race', and that many of them are physically beautiful is supposedly an ancient one, and is described in Olaf Caroe's *The Pathans* (1964). Caroe says that tribal genealogies of the Pathans link them to the Greek and Macedonian soldiers who invaded their territory in 326 B.C. One tribe, the Afridis, "have their tradition of an admixture of Greek blood," says Caroe, and they point to their Grecian features as proof. Caroe agrees that "indeed many a young Afridi might stand as a model for Apollo," and writes that "[t]here are young Pathan warriors, not only among the Afridis, whose strong classical profile and eagle eye recall the features of Alexander himself" (44-

through on his responsibility of making himself available to play the role of proper object of her desires, that has made Anna vulnerable to the 'violence' and 'lasciviousness' of the 'irrational' Muslim man: "If you had stayed and been with me, and I had met Gaida," Anna admonishes Gerald, "I do not think I should have cared or taken any notice of him" (113). Gerald is partially culpable for Anna's transgressions because he failed to treat her as an equal, leaving for Burma after awakening her passions without giving her a choice about whether or not she wanted to go with him, and instead making the decision for them both (26-28). Despite his initial mistake, Gerald is able to help 'rescue' Anna from the dangers of this threat to her life and moral purity, not through revenge like the Mutiny narratives call for, but through his "Christ-like conduct" (Preface). He waits patiently for Anna's marriage with Gaida to end, and even nurses Gaida when he is ill (152-153).

The ideal of love reached by Gerald and Anna by the end of the novel is a chaste love, one that is achieved largely because of the sexual and emotional self-control of Gerald, which Cross claims "reflect[s] Christ's own teaching": Gerald "forgives the sinner, raises the fallen, comforts the weak . . . [and] works and suffers to reclaim the pagan and almost lost soul of Anna Lombard ("Preface"). Out of Gerald's "self-repression . . . self-restraint [and] a total denial of the physical will" comes his realization of the "supreme happiness" of a pure

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45). These ideas were undoubtedly known to Cross, who exploits the image of the light-skinned and Greek-featured Pathan to provide her New Woman heroines with lovers who satisfy Western aesthetic tastes.

love. In his self-denial of physical pleasure he "discovers the essence of joy" that occurs "when the soul and brain take up the supreme command of man" (186). On their marriage night, Gerald sees Anna as "happy, protected, safe," and knows that he is the "one who gave her that happiness, protection, safety." Gerald is rewarded for his patience and care by the return of Anna's beauty (216) and her submission to him in marriage: "When I marry you," Anna tells Gerald, "I put my will in your hands. I make you a present of it" (184). Read in relation to the Mutiny narratives, Cross is calling for a different kind of colonial man than the type that will revenge the desecration of British femininity. Instead, she calls for a more patient and loving colonizer, one who understands women and treats the colonized with kindness. Women, especially transgressive New Women, need to be rescued from both Indian men and their own sexuality, and only a man who has conquered his own passions can do this.

Infanticide is presented as a way for Anna to atone for her sins of transgression, and she sees it as a sacrifice made to Gerald to reward him for his patience: "I have expiated my sins to you, at last," she tells him, "I have killed the child" (210). After the murder, Anna lives the life of "a penitent" (213) for a year before being transformed back into the picture of English womanhood she was prior to her fall. She returns to proper womanhood even better than before. She now has "the look behind the eyes of one who has read all the secrets of life, and the look above the brows of one who has met life and conquered it" (216). Through her fall, Anna has gained a form of subjecthood, which is then contained within marriage, as indicated by Anna's promise to make Gerald a

"present" of her "will."

In Anna Lombard, the New Woman's sexuality is constructed in relation to stereotypes of Indian men as sexually violent. Her involvement with Gaida signifies a fall from whiteness, and her racial and sexual transgressions go hand and hand in the text and signify a threat to the 'purity' of the race, signalled by the birth of her half-caste child. Her willingness to kill the child signals her desire to return to the realm of proper femininity and white privilege, and to show her complicity with the dictates of empire and traditional gender roles that require her to submit to dominant ideologies of racial and sexual propriety. Anna's sexuality is represented as a threat to herself, to British men, to the peacefulness of the British household, and to the empire itself.<sup>7</sup> Read in the context of the debate on New Women's sexuality, Anna Lombard can be interpreted as a warning of the dangers of this newly imagined sexual agency. The novel suggests that as victims of their own passions, women are the same as men, who were also seen

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<sup>7</sup>In 1898, Flora Annie Steele, Schools Inspectorate in India, President of the Women Writers' Suffrage League and author of many short stories and novels set in India (Williams 62), co-authored a book with Grace Gardiner entitled The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook. The book is dedicated to "The English Girls to Whom Fate May Assign the Task of Being House-Mothers in Our Eastern Empire," and outlines a regime for running a household in India. The concerns of the text focus on a need to create an atmosphere of controlled interaction between the Anglo-Indian woman of the house and her servants, suggesting that there was a perceived danger that women might act otherwise. The authors stress the importance of women's role in this regime and link it to British rule of the whole empire in an interesting way: "We do not wish to advocate an unholy haughtiness, but an Indian household can no more be governed peacefully, without dignity and prestige, than an Indian Empire" (9). Women, the authors argue, like their male counterparts who are in charge of running the empire, must rule the household with "dignity and prestige" if it is to remain peaceful. These claims attempt to establish the importance of women's role in the empire; their complicity in the method of rule is crucial because they are in close contact with Indians on a daily basis.

as unable to regulate their sexuality, except through the practice of self-control. The need to control one's sexual passions is here extended to women. Like Six Chapters, Anna Lombard warns of the dangers of female sexuality, and at the same time calls for the non-repressive treatment of fallen women, and for a new type of British man.

Despite the containment of Anna's transgressive sexuality in marriage, the sacrifice of her own will to Gerald, and her reabsorption back into proper British femininity, Cross has transgressed some previous boundaries of representation and provided an image of a woman who dares to violate sexual and racial boundaries, yet goes on to live a happy life, unlike Theodora in Six Chapters, and most other transgressive women of Victorian literature.<sup>8</sup> In fact, contrary to the implication that sexual knowledge is negative in the biblical story of the original fall from innocence, Cross seems to suggest that the sexually experienced woman will make the best kind of mate for the British man, since she "has met life and conquered it," instead of remaining ignorant of and protected from the dangers that lurk beyond the protective arm of the British man. There is also the fact that female sexuality has been imagined in a new way in this novel, and the discourse has been altered, if just a little. The

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<sup>8</sup>According to Rachel DuPlessis, most nineteenth-century novels end in death "for the female character when she has a jumbled, distorted, inappropriate relation to the 'social script' or plot designed to contain her legally, economically and sexually. Death is the result when energies of selfhood, often represented by sexuality, at once their most enticing and most damaging expression, are expended outside the 'couvert' of marriage or valid romance: through adultery . . . loss or virginity or even suspected 'impurity' . . . or generalized female passion" (Writing Beyond the Ending 15).

suggestion of an alternative to the passive female victim of aggressive male sexuality, and the idea of women as equals to men in terms of their passions, has been articulated in Anna Lombard, and even if it is contained within a traditional institution in the end, women's sexuality is considered a reality to be reckoned with.

Despite the fact that Gerald is partially implicated in Anna's fall, he is idealized as an almost perfect British man, in contrast to the British men in Life of My Heart, who are condemned for their unwillingness to understand and inability to satisfy the desires and needs of Frances, the New Woman protagonist in the novel examined in Chapter Four. The racism of Frances's father, and his refusal to let her marry her Indian lover and take him to England, causes her to flee into Indian space, where she is endangered by Indian male sexuality, which is again constructed as lascivious. Through a depiction of a consensual sexual relationship between an Indian man and a British woman, Life of My Heart examines some of the implications of the sexual double standard for both British and Anglo-Indian women.

## Chapter 4

The New Woman 'Beyond the Pale':

Racial and Spatial Transgressions in Victoria Cross's

Life of My Heart

Pale: A district or territory within determined bounds, or subject to a particular jurisdiction, e.g. English pale, the confines or dominion of England, the pale of English law. (OED, 2nd ed.)

A man should, whatever happens, keep to his own caste, race, and breed. Let the White go to the White and the Black to the Black. Then, whatever trouble falls is in the ordinary course of things--neither sudden, alien, nor unexpected.

This is the story of a man who wilfully stepped beyond the safe limits of decent everyday society, and paid for it heavily. He knew too much in the first instance; and he saw too much in the second. He took too deep an interest in native life; but he will never do so again. (Rudyard Kipling, "Beyond the Pale," 1888)

Seventeen years before the publication of Victoria Cross's Life of My Heart (1905), Rudyard Kipling published his short story, "Beyond the Pale". As the passage quoted above suggests, "Beyond the Pale" is ostensibly a cautionary tale aimed at British men; it is a story about the importance of maintaining social distance from the "native". As one reads further along in the story, it becomes apparent that this is a very specific warning, focussed mainly on the dangers of sexual liaisons with Indian women. As Robert H. Macdonald suggests, the narrator's claim that the protagonist takes "too deep an interest in native life" becomes heavy with irony when it is discovered that this refers to the

Englishman's copulation with a "Black". Any sexual pairing between the races will result in "trouble" for the British man, the story suggests, and even more "trouble" for the native woman (Macdonald 415).

While the Englishman in "Beyond the Pale" pays for his transgression with a limp, caused by a stab to the groin, his Hindu lover, Bisesa, suffers much more severely: her hands are cut off by the same assailant. The perpetrator of the violence is never positively identified, but the reader is led to assume that a male relative of Bisesa's is responsible. Macdonald argues that the story does indeed deliver an ideological "object lesson in behaviour" (413) to the British man, but that it also criticizes the "disparity in the punishments of imperial master and subject race" (418). The story implies, Macdonald writes, that the British man is at least partially culpable for the violence done to Bisesa, even though it suggests that the actual violence was done at the hands of an Indian man.

In Life of My Heart, Victoria Cross makes the invisible "Black" male assailant of imperial Gothic stories such as Kipling's visible, directly implicating the Indian man in the violence brought to bear on the British, and on Indian women. While this aspect makes it possible to read Life of My Heart as a more overt expression of racism than that found in "Beyond the Pale," the novel can also be read as a partial critique of a British colonial system that enforces racial segregation and the mistreatment of both Indians and British women. As a response to and subversion of the political discourses and literary genres that Kipling's story works with, Life of My Heart exposes the differences between nineteenth-century British codes of male and female behaviour and gender

construction.

While it is very likely that Victoria Cross was familiar with Kipling's work<sup>1</sup>, and possible that Life of My Heart is a response to "Beyond the Pale," it is not necessary to read Cross's novel as a direct response to Kipling's story to see how they are connected. For my purposes, an analysis of their engagement with similar issues, and their utilization of analogous images, as well as their mutual use of the conventions of the Imperial Gothic tale, is sufficient. This chapter will look at some of the similarities and differences between the two texts in an effort to examine how Cross's unconventional engagement with these topics and generic conventions produces a critique of British masculinity and patriarchy, and speculates about the consequences of racial and sexual transgression for the New Woman in indigenous space. While Cross's text may serve as a warning to sexually transgressive British women, it is also a critique of the gendered codes of behaviour that restrict them. And like "Beyond the Pale," Life of My Heart cannot be read as separate from a critique of a particular type of colonial rule, despite the simultaneous reinstatement of colonial ideologies and stereotypes used to enable a representation of the sexuality of the New Woman.

Life of My Heart reverses the motif of the white man with the Indian

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<sup>1</sup>Although little is known about Cross's later life, we do know that she was born in Punjab, India, that her parents and eldest sister spent much of their lives in India, and that all three sisters and her father were involved in writing professions. Isabel Edith, the eldest sister, was editor of the Sind Gazette in Karachi for many years. The youngest sister was 'Laurence Hope' (Adela Florence, later Violet Nicolson) a fairly successful poet. And Cross's father, Arthur Cory, a captain in the Bombay Army, was the joint editor of the Civil and Military Gazette in Lahore, India. Kipling filled the position of co-editor of the CMG when Colonel Cory left for England to recover from an illness. (Knapp, "Victoria Cross"; Marx).

woman lover of Kipling's imperial Gothic story, puts a British woman in the starring role of a colonial adventure story, and employs themes and characters common to New Woman literature. Racial cross-dressing, descent into the native village, the motif of the seclusion of Indian women, and the stereotype of the brutally violent Indian man, are conventional colonial tropes used in both narratives, but for different reasons. While Kipling's text can be read as an attempt to change the discursive terrain around acceptable sexual behaviour for Anglo-Indian men<sup>2</sup>, Cross uses these tropes as a method of engaging in contemporary debates on gender roles and women's sexuality. The unequal distribution of economic resources between British men and women, the double standard of sexuality, and the effects of higher education on women's lives, are all issues taken up in the novel. Unlike the British man in Kipling's story, who is able to maintain his life in the Anglo-Indian community during the day, and transgress the boundaries between Indian and British space at night, the British woman in Life of My Heart has no freedom of movement between cultures. Frances, the New Woman protagonist, must choose between racial communities, and she discovers that once she has gone 'beyond the pale' of Anglo-Indian society, there is no possibility of returning, or of even surviving, within Indian space.

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<sup>2</sup>The year "Beyond the Pale" was published, 1888, was also the year of the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts in India, and of continuing debates about the 'proper' sexual behaviour of British men in India. Kenneth Ballhatchet's detailed study of this debate and the accompanying legislation is informative. A reading of "Beyond the Pale" in light of this debate would prove intriguing.

Life of My Heart taps into entrenched racial and colonial anxieties by exploiting imperial Gothic conventions, effectively displacing these anxieties onto contemporary concerns over the New Woman. Patrick Brantlinger, who coined the phrase 'imperial Gothic', claims that this genre has close links with the occultism which he says "is especially symptomatic of the anxieties that attended the climax of the British Empire" (227): "Imperial Gothic expresses anxieties about the waning of religious orthodoxy, but even more clearly it expresses anxieties about the ease with which civilization can revert to barbarism or savagery and thus about the weakening of Britain's imperial hegemony" (229). John McBratney claims that Kipling, as "the foremost British imperial writer" during the last decades of the nineteenth century, was "one of the most uninhibited exploiters of the Gothic genre" (17). McBratney looks at how "Beyond the Pale" uses imperial Gothic conventions to instruct its "Anglo-Indian readers in the ways of serving empire" (30):

In a period of increasing foreboding about the prospects of empire, Kipling's imperial Gothic tales of female entrapment would have served to reinscribe all the more deeply the bounds that marked off the Anglo-Indian Inner Ring and warned the careless Briton against idle transgression into a 'barbaric' Indian world. (31)

It is these anxieties over Britain's imperial hegemony and the fear of a reversion into barbarism that Cross brings to bear on the figure of the New Woman in Life of My Heart.

Brantlinger lists the three major themes of imperial Gothic literature as

"individual regression or going native; an invasion of civilization by the forces of barbarism or demonism; and the diminution of opportunities for adventure and heroism in the modern world." McBratney's plot summary of two of Kipling's imperial gothic stories, "Beyond the Pale" and "Without Benefit of Clergy," could be summaries of the plot of Life of My Heart, if only the genders were reversed and the endings changed:

In both [of Kipling's] tales, an adventuresome British man 'goes native' by becoming romantically involved with an Indian woman. At a crucial point in their relationship, the 'civilized' Briton is threatened by Indian 'barbarism', and the affair ends with the victimization of the Indian woman and the retreat of the British man to the diminished but safer world of Anglo-India.

(17)

In Cross's story, the adventuresome British *woman* 'goes native' by becoming romantically involved with an Indian *man*. She is *constantly* threatened by Indian 'barbarism', and the affair ends with the victimization of *both* the British woman and her Indian lover. The story implies that the possibility of colonial adventure for the British woman is extremely limited, and that both the Indian man and the British woman are in similarly powerless positions in relation to British men and a British patriarchal system that is both racist and sexist. As in Kipling's story, all three major elements of the imperial Gothic surface in Cross's novel, and the plot is similar, but Life of My Heart suggests that the gender of the British character determines whether or not the transgressive Anglo-Indian will survive the colonial adventure. There is *no* possibility of return to the 'safer world of Anglo-India' for

the transgressive British woman, for unlike the transgressive male Briton, I shall argue, she cannot regain her previous racial identity.

Life of My Heart strongly implies that it is British male cruelty and irrationality, not simply or only Indian male 'barbarism' or the New Woman's 'peculiar' desires, that are largely to blame for the New Woman's demise. Frances' father, General Wilson, is contrasted to his daughter for his inability to see beauty in a "native" worker's face (14-15), and represented as a cruel and coarse man who denies his daughter both permission to marry Hamakhan, her Pathan Indian lover, and the financial aid she needs to support them until she receives her inheritance in another year (94-94). The "whole proposition" that Frances and Hamakhan should marry and go to England "was so utterly horrible" to the General because, the narrator states, "[t]he Englishman's brain is not adapted for reasoning; he seldom can give a logical reason for his actions. Nor does he try to; he simply rides roughshod over everything and everybody on the wild horse of his prejudices" (98). The General's refusal to let Frances marry Hamakhan and assimilate him into English society represents the stubbornness of an outdated British patriarchal system that is prejudiced against both women and Indians.

The text contrasts the General's views with those of Frances and her sister, Mrs. Harding, whose approach to interracial relationships promises not only to prevent women who take Indian lovers from reverting to barbarism, but to actually aid in the civilization of the Indian, possibly making him less of a threat to

British rule in India.<sup>3</sup> After Frances's death, her sister blames their father, and restates Frances's earlier claim that under English influence, the Indian man can be 'tamed'. "If you had let them marry properly," Mrs. Harding tells her father, "and if they had lived in the correct European way, where [Frances] would have had much more influence over him, and he would have had money and interests other than running amok, this would never have happened" (388). Frances's ability to see the classical beauty of the Pathan, and her desire to educate him and incorporate him into English society, represent a different version of racism than that held by the older British establishment, epitomized by her father.

The colonial philosophy of assimilation held by Frances and Mrs. Harding accepts traditional stereotypes of the Indian man as a barbaric and inferior being, but argues that he is clever enough to be trained in English ways, and that an English education will free him from his supposedly primitive habits and vices. It eroticises the 'native' and imagines him a suitable mate for the exceptional New Woman, who is repulsed by the "average young Britons" she meets in her own society, who despite all their learning, remain ignorant. Frances contrasts Hamakhan's "quick, interested look, the desire to learn, that marks natural brain power, with the look of young Thompson" (32-33), who she says "has no real intellect. He has learned, but he has never thought--like most Englishmen" (29). Frances, an educated New Woman, criticizes British men for failing to use their

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<sup>3</sup>While it was widely known that the Indian nationalist movement was started by British-educated Indians, some still saw 'uneducated' Muslims as a major threat to British rule, and thought that assimilation might lessen this threat.

intellect, and naturalizes the intelligence of the Indian man. The British man is irrational, Frances argues, and his prejudices rule his judgements. His inferior intellect, along with his cruelty and the vice of "drunkenness," are all named as reasons for his failure to make a good mate for the New Woman protagonist (97). Within the context of the text's critique of British masculinity, the Indian man is posited by Cross as a possible alternative to the substandard British male.

The difference between what motivates Kipling's English character, Trejago,<sup>4</sup> and what drives Cross's New Woman, Frances, to transgress racial and spatial boundaries, reveals the very different rules at work in the construction of English female and male sexuality in Anglo-India in the late nineteenth century. While Trejago's move into 'native' space barely needs justifying, Frances's requires the careful manipulation of various stereotypes of the New Woman, the decadent, and the Indian man. During "an aimless wandering," Trejago "stumble[s]" into "Amir Nath's Gully," and hearing "a little laugh from behind the grated window," goes forward and begins to recite 'The Love Song of Har Dyal' from "the old Arabian Nights" (5). The "Song" is

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<sup>4</sup>In Robert H. Macdonald's reading of "Beyond the Pale," he suggests that for an Englishman, Trejago has "an odd 'un-English' name; that he is perhaps a Cornishman, a Celt, born outside the pale" (416), and that this, along with other elements found in the text, confuse the reading of the story as a warning only for the English. He argues that "[t]he disparity in the punishments of imperial master and subject race insist that the lesson to be learned is not so much for the white man, nor even for the reader, as for the black, and particularly for the woman" (418). While this seems to me an interesting and valid interpretation (although it would be interesting to find out just how many Indians would have been reading Kipling's texts in comparison to the number of English readers), I read the use of an 'un-English' name like Trejago as a displacement onto the not-quite-pure English the anxieties of racial transgression, and as primarily aimed towards Anglo-British men.

completed by "a little voice" from behind the grating, and the next day Trejago receives a package from the young Hindu woman whose voice he heard the day before. The package contains a love letter and an object-letter, something which the narrator warns us "[n]o Englishman should be able to translate" (6). That night, "clad in a *boorka*, which cloaks a man as well as a woman," Trejago goes to see Bisesa, and their affair begins.

An explanation for Trejago's sexual attraction to Bisesa, who "was as ignorant as a bird" (8), but "good to look upon" (7), is unnecessary, because, as McBratney suggests, the Indian woman confined inside the home "became for the Anglo-Indian male the most secret sanctum of 'exotic' India." McBratney writes that because the Indian woman "was most sedulously removed from the public world of the Anglo-Indian official, she was thereby most seductive. The ultimate form of 'going native' was, then, making love to an Indian woman: the colonizing male who would penetrate the 'mystery' at the heart of the East would ultimately, to put it crudely, have to penetrate her" (24). Trejago, as colonizing male, penetrates the mystery of India by penetrating both Bisesa and Indian space. The *boorka* hides both his race and his gender, enabling him to penetrate the female space of Bisesa's quarters, and to gain sexual access to the secluded Indian woman.

The narrative tradition of British male desire for Indian women was by Kipling's time so ensconced, that stories like this were required as disruptive measures. In an effort to change what is considered proper sexual behaviour for Anglo-Indian men, Kipling's text suggests that the British male desire for Indian

women must be contained, because acting on these desires will have negative consequences. The harm caused to both Bisesa and Trejago is a consequence of Trejago's indulgence in the (newly) forbidden pleasure of interracial sex between British men and Indian women.<sup>5</sup> Unlike earlier narratives, in which interracial sex between a British man and Indian woman would have left the white man unscathed, Trejago suffers a slight injury, but unlike Frances, he maintains his identity as British. He sheds his *boorka* when he no longer needs it to penetrate India and the Indian woman, and returns to his former life and the privileges his whiteness, and gender, afford him.

Victoria Cross had a very different narrative tradition from which to create a representation of an attraction between an Indian man and a British woman. Despite the earlier dominance of the rape narrative from the Indian Mutiny that cast Indian men as sexual predators of British women, and of British women as their asexual victims, there was, by the turn of the century, another narrative that was surfacing in official discourse. An underlying anxiety about the possibility of

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<sup>5</sup> According to Kenneth Ballhatchet, the threat to British rule in India was on the rise in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Indian Mutiny of 1857 "showed [the British] the insecurity of their military power," and census reports revealed that the Indian population vastly outnumbered their own. The rise of Indians who qualified for the Indian Civil Service, and the founding of the Indian National Congress "by Western-educated Indians with nationalistic sentiments" in 1885, also represented a threat to British power. Lord Curzon, who served as Viceroy of India between 1899-1905, "assumed that the social hierarchy should correspond to the political hierarchy and that sexual behaviour should be subordinated to the need of both." While some military authorities argued for the need to provide "facilities for sexual relations between British soldiers and native women," others discouraged "sexual relations between British officials and native women." Ballhatchet argues that the "fundamental concern" in both cases "was for the preservation of the structure of power" (Race, Sex and Class Under the Raj 6-9).

reciprocal attraction between Indian men and British women shows up clearly in the late nineteenth century, with the creation of guidebooks about proper behaviour by Anglo-Indian women towards their male Indian servants.<sup>6</sup> This anxiety is exposed and reproduced in the correspondence of two British officials when they attempt to minimize the embarrassment caused by the apparent appeal of Indian princes and soldiers to British women.

Kenneth Ballhatchet writes that in an exchange of letters between Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India between 1899 and 1905, and Lord George Hamilton, Secretary of State, "[t]he traditional stereotype of the white woman at risk from lascivious Indians seemed not to accord with realities" (119). In the letters, written in 1901 and 1902, Curzon and Hamilton are deciding which Indian princes should be invited to London to attend the coronation of Edward VII. They discuss the various qualities of each prince in an attempt to choose the ones that will not think of themselves as equals or superiors to the British officials. Another thing they must consider is the attractiveness of the princes to English women who have, in recent years, revealed a fascination with the visiting Indian princes and soldiers. Lord Curzon writes to Hamilton:

The 'woman' aspect of the question is rather a difficulty, since *strange as it may seem* English women of the housemaid class, and even higher, do offer themselves to these Indian soldiers, attracted by their uniform, enamoured of their physique, and with a sort of idea that the warrior is

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<sup>6</sup>See Chapter 3, fn 25, p 60 for my brief discussion of The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook, Flora Annie Steele's conduct book for Anglo-Indian women.

also an oriental prince. (my italics, Ballhatchet 119)

Hamilton writes that "the craze of white women for running after black men" is a "very unpleasant characteristic" that plagued the Indians during their visit.

Curzon notes with relief that despite this attention, the Indians "behaved on the whole with great self-restraint and propriety" (Ballhatchet 119).

Curzon's relief at seeing these Indian men return to India where "they fall very quickly into their proper place" (qtd in Ballhatchet 119-20), is understood by Ballhatchet as the result of an anxiety put to rest: "If Indian princes, who were members of a ruling class, behaved like Europeans, married European women, and were accepted in society in Europe, how could one safeguard the social distance between the ruling race and the races of India?" (Ballhatchet 118). I would suggest that it is not only the maintenance of social distance in India these British officials wish to safeguard. Their letters reveal anxiety over the spectre of an active female sexuality, which was a rising threat to British male hegemony as more and more women began to speak and write about it themselves in an effort to reconstruct alternative subjectivities in the face of newly promised freedoms and privileges.

The exchange between Curzon and Hamilton outlined above reveals an aspect of the discursive terrain with which Life of My Heart is specifically engaged: the threat posed by new expressions of women's sexuality, coupled with British women's attraction to Indian men. Rape narratives circulated after the Indian Mutiny elide female sexual agency, casting women as the helpless victims

of an imagined Indian rapacity,<sup>7</sup> and Hamilton cannot reconcile this accepted version of relations between British women and Indian men with the apparently new craze of the white woman lusting after Indian men. Strange as it seemed to Curzon and Hamilton, British women were expressing sexual interest in Indian men, especially Indian princes, and the articulation of these particular sexual desires threatened the maintenance of racial and gender hierarchies, in both Britain and India. It threatened the status of English men in both countries, and challenged their claim to exclusive entitlement to British women.<sup>8</sup> Cross's work engages with the complexities of an ideology of female sexuality that simultaneously denies sexual agency for women while revealing anxiety over its existence, especially when it expresses itself as a desire for the racial 'Other'. Within a discursive tradition that recognizes the threat, but cannot reconcile the attraction of white women for Indian men, Cross's narrative constructs an explanation for this attraction, producing both a critique of British masculinity and

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<sup>7</sup>See Chapter 3, pp 50-53 for Jenny Sharpe's account of the rape narratives circulating after the Indian Mutiny.

<sup>8</sup>In Colonial Narratives/Cultural Dialogues, Jyotsna G. Singh notes that the imperial discovery and adventure narratives that predominated in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, were eventually "subsumed within a broader vision of transforming the empire into a Victorian domestic idyl" (91), and that within a newly constructed discourse of a 'civilizing mission,' European women were seen as "repositories of morality, in contrast to the Indian women whom they had replaced" (91). The image of the white-skinned woman as idealized sexual object and prize possession of the British rulers could not be sullied through contact with Indian men without injury to the British male sense of superiority and the need to maintain this illusion in both his own eyes, and the eyes of the natives. If British women did stray from the path of 'proper' womanhood by engaging in sexual partnerships with Indian men (like British men did with Indian women), British male superiority would be challenged, and their authoritative position amongst Indians damaged.

a warning about the possible problems posed by the exercise of female sexual agency.

The figure of the British New Woman provides Cross with a model of transgressive femininity and superior intellect that challenges British notions of female asexuality and intellectual inferiority. But to construct the particulars of an atypical female sexuality, Cross turns (as she did in Six Chapters) to the stereotype of the decadent aesthete.<sup>9</sup> The decadent aesthete as a type is represented quite distinctly in Oscar Wilde's 1891 novel, The Picture of Dorian Gray. Elaine Showalter calls Dorian Gray, "the English Bible of decadence, as well as a kind of bible for male homosexuals" and says that Wilde himself was "one of the leading theorists of decadence" (176). Showalter writes that the novel describes a "perfected form of male aestheticism, a 'romance of art' rather than a romance of the flesh. The picture of Dorian Gray itself is to represent a new Platonic school of art, which will combine Greek romance with Greek 'perfection of the spirit,'" and act as a "rationalization of homosexual desire as aesthetic experience" (Sexual Anarchy 176). In Life of My Heart, Cross uses a similar model to that set out by Wilde in Dorian Gray to rationalize Frances's desire for the Indian man as an aesthetic experience. Adopting the male gaze of the decadent aesthete, Frances views Hamakhan as an object of beauty, and

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<sup>9</sup>Two important differences between the construction of the sexualities of the New Woman in Six Chapters and Life of My Heart is that Theodora looks 'mannish', while Frances does not, and Frances's racial transgression is marked on her body through dress and character change rather than physiognomy. These differences will be discussed in more detail in my concluding chapter.

discovers that she has the power to possess this "pretty boy," this "new toy" (49).

Basil Hallward is an artist whose love for Dorian Gray "had nothing in it that was not noble and intellectual" (DG 132). Frances's love for Hamakhan is described in similar terms. While the kiss of "the Pathan" is motivated by his "youth, nature, and impulse," Frances's is "the deliberate kiss of the artist and the philosopher" (55). Basil knows beauty, "the silent spirit," when he sees it, and he recognizes its "perfect form" in Dorian Gray. Like Frances, who is attracted to Hamakhan "half by the force of the unknown, half by the claims of an old acquaintance" (52), Basil's recognition of beauty is also elusive: "He remembered something like it in history. Was it not Plato, that artist in thought, who had first analysed it?" (42-43). Dorian is a "marvellous type . . . Grace was his, and the white purity of boyhood, and beauty such as old Greek marbles kept for us" (Wilde 42). Frances thinks that Hamakhan is "[j]ust like a statue" (53), and her "trained, cultivated eye," influenced by her study of Plato, "caught the sweet profile and oval face in a glance" (14-15). Frances recognizes Hamakhan as "a remarkable piece of human beauty . . . of the classic, peculiar type . . . It was as if one of those figures whose beauty lives in the pages of Plato and Aristophanes had stepped out of them before her" (52).

Like Basil's love for Dorian, Frances's love for Hamakhan is Platonic; it is a love of beauty and youth that works through the intellect to stimulate a recognition of the higher Forms or Ideas, which exist on a plane beyond that which we can see and touch, but that are intelligible to those who have developed their intellect in the correct way. Plato warned that love can be

"inspire[d] in a temperate and cultivated mind" when it comes into contact with "beauty combined with a noble and harmonious character," but that this love "must . . . be kept from all contact with licentiousness and frenzy . . . where a passion of this rightful sort exists, the lover and his beloved must have nothing to do with [sexual pleasure]" (92).

In these philosophical terms, Frances's passion becomes the wrongful sort even prior to taking part in sexual pleasure with her beloved. She comes into "contact with licentiousness and frenzy" in the form of Hamakhan, whose very identity as an Indian man marks him as "licentious" to the British, but whose "youth and beauty excused, in [Frances's] eyes at least, his licentiousness" (57). Just as in Anna Lombard, Cross uses the figure of the Pathan to stimulate the passions of her New Woman protagonist, who in this later novel, gets her ideas of beauty from classical Greek art and literature, and whose peculiar appetites can only be satisfied by the extraordinary. The narrator insists that while

[m]ost European women would have trembled before [the passion of the 'Asiatic'], recognising something different here from the regulated, moderated, legalised desires of their own race . . . Frances leaned to the untried, the strange, the terrible in everything, and she felt only a wild exhilaration as they sped away over the plain, farther and farther away from home, protection, law, and her own race. (125)

Frances's desire for adventure, and an alternative to what she is offered by British men, is combined with the intellectual tastes and objectifying gaze of the decadent aesthete. Unlike the decadent, however, Frances does not signify as a

homosexual, but she is nonetheless cast as sexually transgressive. Her 'perversion' is constituted by her desire for an Indian man.

Cross's choice of a Pathan Muslim as Frances's lover enables her to combine the intellectual attraction with the physical, while simultaneously suggesting that the New Woman's tastes for the exotic will lead to trouble.<sup>10</sup> Our first glimpse of Hamakhan displays the incongruities present in his character, and hints at the dangers that lie ahead for Frances. His profile "was a proud, severe, and beautiful outline, of the noblest type, but one that from its very regularity would have had something of stony cruelty in it, save for the bloom, the soft, vivid bloom of youth upon it now" (11). During one of Frances's frequent visits to the room in her house in which Hamakhan is weaving carpets, he misreads Frances's intellectual admiration of his physical beauty for an invitation to sex. After Frances "touche[s] his head with her hand as an artist might have done," on her way into the recess of the drawing room, previously figured as space primarily occupied by Hamakhan, he pins her against a wall and bites her cheek (45-46).

The assault can be read as a symbolic rape, taking place in Indian space, with Frances fleeing back to the safety of the British "drawing room" (46). The assault takes place when Frances crosses into the "recess at the end of the one that was being matted," penetrating Hamakhan's space to reach "this inner

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<sup>10</sup> In his 1871 book, The Indian Musalmans, W.W. Hunter claims that Muslims are "a source of permanent danger to the Indian Empire," and considers Pathans the "most turbulent and most superstitious of the Muhammadan peoples" ("Dedication").

recess [which] was almost dark" (44-45). Frances's penetration of Hamakhan's space is depicted as the cause of penetration by him, and the assault is an indication of the dangers that await Frances when she crosses over into Indian space that is "farther away from home, protection, law, and her own race" (125).

In this symbolic rape scene, Frances is penetrated by Hamakhan after she crosses over into his space. The scene can be read in terms of a reversal of McBratney's formulation of the male colonizer's going native, and the first step in Frances's personal regression. If, as McBratney suggests, the ultimate form of "going native" for "the colonizing male" involved "penetrating" an Indian woman (24), then going native for the colonizing female can be figured in opposite terms: the ultimate form of going native for the colonizing female involved *being penetrated by* the Indian male. The colonizing woman, on these terms, becomes a receptacle of Indianness. Going native for the British woman means becoming the passive receptor of Indian male sexuality, which is constructed in relation to the violent appropriation of white women's bodies, and figured in the text as Frances's adoption of the identity of a Muslim woman. Frances *penetrates* Indian space, but is also *penetrated by* India. Unlike Trejago, she cannot penetrate Indian space without being penetrated herself, and after she crosses over into Indian space, she is constantly threatened by a rapacious and violent Indian male sexuality that forces her into seclusion. As the story progresses, she becomes more and more like the stereotype of the secluded and oppressed

Muslim woman pitied by many Victorian feminists.<sup>11</sup>

From the moment of the metaphoric rape onwards, Frances begins her 'descent' into passive femininity, which coincides with her 'descent' into the native city. She becomes subject to her passions and more willing in her subjection to Hamakhan as she moves from British to Indian space. Immediately after Hamakhan's initial attack of Frances, her intellectual state of mind is replaced with an emotional one when she realizes that she can use Hamakhan's "violent passion" to "make that magnificent beauty her own" (49). Her desire to possess Hamakhan, and the realization that his passion for her enables her to own him, cause her to "open the gates of her mental state to the emotion now knocking at them" (50). Like the women in nineteenth-century pornographic texts, Frances's passions are initially activated by male perpetrated sexual violence, but result in her enjoyment of and emotional attachment to her attacker and the desire to please him.

The scene of Frances's racial cross-dressing signals a further decline into feminine passivity. Frances loses the gaze of the decadent aesthete that originally attracted her to Hamakhan, and that enabled her to maintain an authoritative position in relation to her object of desire. In order to hide both her

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<sup>11</sup>In "The White Woman's Burden: British Feminists and 'The Indian Woman,' 1865-1915," Antoinette M. Burton argues that "[d]espite both their genuine concern for the condition of Indian women and the feminist reform activities of prominent Indian women during [the late nineteenth-century], many middle-class British feminists viewed the women of the East not as equals but as unfortunates in need of saving by their British feminist 'sisters'. By imagining the women of India as helpless colonial subjects, British feminists constructed 'the Indian woman' as a foil against which to gauge their own progress" (137).

fair colouring and her blue eyes, Frances dons two veils, "the regular white linen veil, which has merely two large slits for the eyes" as well as "an under transparent veil" that covers the slits so her blue eyes cannot be seen at all. Frances "could see through" the veils, "and that was all." She complains to her lover: "Hama dear, I am suffocated, it is so hot, and I can hardly see anything. I can't find my way" (130).

The "costume" of the "Mohammedan woman" (128) is adopted by Frances when she and Hamakhan flee together "Across the Meidan" (68) so she can escape notice by the British who may come after her to return her to her father. But it also becomes a protective measure for hiding her white skin and fair hair from the native men who, the narrator insists, "[value] fairness in a woman to such an extent that the prices paid for wives vary according as the skin is a shade paler and less brown" (9). Racial cross-dressing becomes, for the white woman, a double-edged sword: it enables her to pass as an Indian, providing her some freedom of movement, but it also limits her gaze and, as we shall see, restricts her movement, making her even more vulnerable to the violence of 'lascivious' Indian men. By dressing as a Muslim woman, the text suggests, she is also entering into an economy in which women are literally bought and sold.

In Indian space, Frances becomes the object of the gaze of Indian men who have seen or heard about her white skin, and the threat of sexual violence operates as a mode of feminizing the New Woman even further. Hamakhan becomes jealous of his friends when he realizes they are coveting Frances for

her white skin, and he forces Frances to hide from their gaze, confining her to the hut while he is away during the day (162-63). This works to limit her own gaze even more completely than the veils, for "[t]here was nothing to look at" in the hut (164). Frances thinks of her "position" as a "dangerous one." She sees herself "cast in the tiny boat of Hamakhan's protection on a dark and seething tide of uncontrollable humanity without a light or a stay on the whole surface" (166). The danger arises from the jealousy of the Indian men who, because they cannot have her for themselves, might turn Hamakhan against her, or who might "really gain possession of her, and after dishonour she believed she would have nothing but death to expect at Hamakhan's hands. Or, most frightful thought of all, they might kill or injure him to secure her" (166). Her willingness to forfeit her own freedom for Hamakhan's safety and happiness represents a further decline into a passive femininity. Sexual assault, or "dishonour," becomes less frightening to Frances than Hamakhan's death, and she accepts "the most absolute seclusion and privacy," braving the boredom and heat (167) so she will not attract attention to herself and put Hamakhan in danger. In her own home, her first fear in the face of sexual violence was for her own safety. After she is attacked by Hamakhan, she is "[i]n a perfect frenzy of terror, the terror of his peculiar violence and of how much he might disfigure her beauty" (46). But the longer she spends in native space, the more feminized she becomes, and the more her concerns turn towards Hamakhan's happiness and safety.

Instead of providing protection from Indian men, her confinement, paradoxically, makes her more vulnerable to their gaze and violent sexuality.

Even secluded in her own hut, Frances is in danger from the rich and "woman mad" Sirjan, who "will pay anything for a new face and a new body" (234). Hearing that Hamakhan has a white wife, Sirjan sends spies to "obtain a glimpse of the hand, or foot, or face" of the white woman, and although Frances "put up the hurdle and barred herself into the hut" after Hamakhan left (258), she is subject to the gaze of these Indian men. Sirjan's spies climb to the roof, and peering into the "hole of the roof" that holds the "windsail", they see Frances on the floor of the hut, and return to tell their master of her whiteness (261). Frances intuits Sirjan's plan and spoils his attempt to kill Hamakhan and abduct her, but it is clear that she will never be safe from Indian men as long as she lives amongst them.

Frances's love for Hamakhan places her under the constant threat of a rapacious Indian male sexuality, and eventually works to change Frances's character from that of a high-spirited and willful New Woman, to a stereotypically passive and submissive Indian woman. Eventually, seclusion takes its toll on Frances, and after a few months, "She looked far more . . . the subdued Mohammedan wife than the imperious English girl. There was an indefinable droop of the eyelids, a submission in the curve of the pale lips, that stamped her as a woman who has bowed her neck under the yoke of a tremendous passion (182). Frances's "tremendous passion" is racially marked on her body through this description of her as a stereotypical Muslim woman. She is no longer the British New Woman desiring 'freedom', but a Muslim woman who is willing to sacrifice everything for her husband. Although Frances's "true British blood"

(198) makes an appearance a few more times in the text (for instance, when she gives her word to repay a debt [200]), as she becomes more deeply immersed in the everyday life of the village and Indian married life, she loses her 'progressive' British female identity. Frances *becomes* a stereotypical Indian woman, wilfully subjecting herself to the desires of an Indian man and the rules of a patriarchal system considered by many late Victorians far more restrictive than the British one.

Frances's willingness to abandon her child while she accompanies Hamakhan on his journey to deliver three Hindu heads for his friend (as proof to a fellow Muslim that a crime against him has been avenged) signifies a final descent into a 'barbarism' from which she will not escape. The irretrievability of her British identity is finally signified by her inability to influence the British police officers who stop them, and by her sati-like death. Hamakhan stabs himself, and given the choice to live without him, or to die with him, Frances chooses the latter: "kill! kill!" she tells him, "the obedient longing to gratify him to the last annihilating her nature" (381). The "nature" that is annihilated is described a page earlier as "the full, vigorous flood of life in her" (380). This vigour of life is represented throughout the text as a result of her Britishness,<sup>12</sup> while the "obedient longing to gratify him" refers to the British idea of Hindu women as passively sacrificing themselves on their husband's funeral pyres.

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<sup>12</sup>Earlier in the story, when Hamakhan threatens to "cut off [her] breasts" when she disobeys him, "the true British blood rose in her veins," and she gains the courage to defy him, no matter what the cost (197-98).

In "Contentious Traditions," Lata Mani argues that "[f]or the British, rescuing women [became] part of the civilizing mission," and that "nineteenth-century discourse between British officials and Indian 'informants' represents Hindu widows as either "abject victim[s]" or "heroine[s]" (352-353). In Jenny Sharpe's analysis of Jane Eyre, she argues that Charlotte Brontë uses the image of sati to represent female helplessness: "As a proper name for a woman's submissiveness, meekness, and devotion to her husband, sati locates female passivity in Hindu women" (Allegories of Empire 49). Victoria Cross adopts this tradition, employing of the concept of sati to present a final image of Frances as submissive and meek, a victim of her own passions, of Indian male violence, and of racial regression.

While Frances's racial cross-dressing both signifies and causes her total descent into 'barbarism', Trejago's represents only a minor transgression, one that does not threaten his identity as a member of British society. His gender accords him the privilege of entering and leaving both British and Indian space as he pleases. Frances's movements are much more restricted, within both British and Indian space. Because Frances is denied the permission and means to assimilate her lover into British culture, she must forfeit her British identity if she wants to be with Hamakhan. The results of her choice are seclusion and subservience within an Indian patriarchal system represented as even more oppressive, and dangerous, than the British one she comes from. Within Indian culture, she is, ironically, unable to maintain the character traits that attracted her to Hamakhan and Indian life in the first place. While the novel does seem to be

arguing, on one hand, that it is the British man's fault that women like Frances must find satisfaction outside British society, and that there is a certain logic to her desires, it also presents reasons for the condemnation of her, especially through its evocation of anxieties over racial regression. Cross seems, ultimately, to be pointing to the impossibility of gender equality and the safe expression of women's sexuality in societies that confer unequal amounts of power to men.

Throughout the text, the threat of sexual assault from Muslim Indian men works to maintain racial stereotypes, while suggesting that the penalty for the racial transgressions of British women is rape or death. It perpetuates ideas of women as victims of men's sexual lasciviousness, and as helpless in the face of their own sexual desires. As mentioned previously, both stories function, on one level, as warnings against cross-racial relationships and the dangers of 'going native', of going 'beyond the pale' of British society, providing instructions on what is sexually permissible. But they also both function as narratives of the forbidden, creating images meant to titillate their audiences by providing details of 'exotic' love affairs.

Although Frances dies as a result of her sexual and racial transgressions, the text is not simply a critique of this version of the New Woman. Her demise is partially attributed to the racism and sexism of a patriarchal system that enforces racial segregation and breeds substandard specimens of masculinity. Far from explicitly condemning the New Woman, Cross encourages women to decide for themselves who is more unfortunate, Mrs. Harding, living "her cheerless, lonely life, beside the husband who was neither handsome nor intelligent, but a good

fellow," or Frances, who lay buried in a "desolate grave in the meidan" (390), but had lived her life "thoroughly" in that last year (386). "Wasn't a year of life thoroughly lived better than these dreary yards of existence she travelled over," Mrs. Harding asks herself. "Was the plain where her sister lay buried more desolate than the stretch of empty, cheerless, unimpassioned life before herself?" (386-87). Mrs. Harding's questions are those of the decadent aesthete who challenged the traditional consolations of life: nature, religion and love (Showalter, Sexual Anarchy 169). Walter Pater, who according to Showalter is "the father" of decadence philosophy, wrote that "our one chance lies in . . . getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time. Great passions give us this quickened sense of life" (Sexual Anarchy 170). Life of My Heart encourages women to ask themselves whether or not this philosophy is an appropriate one for women to adopt, especially given the dangers that supposedly await women who transgress racial, spatial, and sexual boundaries.

## Conclusion

### Chapter 5

#### Victoria Cross's New Women: Helpmeets of Empire?

In this study, I have attempted to move beyond previous criticism of Victoria Cross that situates her as a feminist “revolutionary” with “radical visions” (Knapp, “Revolutionary Androgyny” 3) by focussing on how three of her early representations of the New Woman rely on the discursive fields made possible by imperialism. In an effort to place Six Chapters of a Man's Life, Anna Lombard, and Life of My Heart in their historical context, I have paid special attention to the intersections of race, feminism, colonialism, the New Woman, and the decadent. In all three texts, Victoria Cross attempts to manage the nineteenth-century British crisis in gender categories by constructing white female subjectivity in relation to race; gender and sexual deviancy are represented in terms of racial deviancy, and these categories are revealed as mutually constitutive of each other.

If Spivak is right, and “what is at stake . . . for feminist individualism in the age of imperialism . . . [is] childbearing and soul making” (799), what can be said about the relationship between Cross's texts and this larger feminist project? What are the specific meanings produced by Cross's constructions of the New Woman who rejects the traditional terms laid out for imperial women: producing children and civilizing ‘natives’? And how are Cross's New Women similar to and

different from other representations of European women in colonial settings?  
Why does Cross choose colonial settings and depictions of interracial sex to  
construct representations of the New Woman?

When read in relation to contemporary feminist discourses of the colonies as places where women's emancipation could be staged, and where women could gain equality with men, Cross's novels can be read as a direct challenge to some of these claims, and as warnings to women who planned to achieve equality outside the domestic sphere.<sup>1</sup> In her detailed study of the rhetoric and discourse of European travel in the nineteenth century, and its impact on social divisions in England and India, Inderpal Grewal outlines some of the ways in which feminists relied on discourses of empire and race to construct an image of the emancipated female subject. She points out, for instance, that Englishwomen's claim to equality with Englishmen frequently "emerged from contrasts with Asian women. It also emerged from the accounts of adventures of English women travellers, emigrants, and explorers whose adventures showed that they could be the equals of Englishmen" (65). Women travellers, some feminists pointed out, demonstrated "the power of an Englishness that could be supposedly inviolate while living and being in the 'East'" (65), and the "contrast between the English female traveller and 'Eastern' inhabitant of the harem

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<sup>1</sup>For some feminists, including Josephine Butler, the domestic was figured in terms of the English nation, and England was figured as 'home'. According to Inderpal Grewal, Butler was connected with other nineteenth-century writers by "her concern for describing the domestic as the proper role for women, and the English nation as a domestic space" (59).

emphasized the mobile-immobile, free-unfree opposition that was part of the structure of colonial relations" (66).

Theodora of Six Chapters contrasts herself to Hindu and Kashmeri women in her claim to equality with Cecil, yet her travels to Egypt with him reveal that she cannot act like his equal in colonial space. Her femininity is violently reinscribed through sexual assault, and her attempt to play a masculine role is represented as extremely dangerous. The text suggests the impossibility of escaping gender roles in colonial space because of the heightened threat of male sexuality, which is represented by employing the stereotype of the dark male rapist. Life of My Heart denies the possibility of women maintaining their status as liberated within colonial space by depicting the racial regression of Frances when she travels into Indian territory. Frances becomes the Indian woman that feminists contrast themselves to when she follows her quest for sexual freedom and her desire to escape the limits of an Anglo-Indian culture, suggesting that instead of gaining equality with men, women who travel in the East are risking becoming even more oppressed. Frances's failure to summon the 'power of Englishness' to save Hamakhan from arrest disputes the feminist claim that their race makes British women inviolate while in colonial space. In fact, the novel asserts, Frances's whiteness actually puts her in more danger, since the wealthy Indian man who tries to abduct her values her largely for the fairness of her skin.

Cross's texts question the ability of the sexually transgressive New Woman to contribute to the British imperial project of racial regeneration. By suggesting that the New Woman who is preoccupied with satisfying her own

sexual needs is actually a danger both to herself and to the continuance of the British race, Cross's texts imply that women who enter the colonies to gain freedom for themselves will hinder the imperialist project. As a New Woman who survives her experience of transgressive sexuality in colonial space, Anna Lombard can be read as a possible figure of compromise between feminist discourses of self-fulfilment and equality with men, and the directives of empire.

After the death of her Indian lover and their child, Anna returns to the realm of 'proper' femininity. She is not the traditional 'angel in the house,' however; she is not an innocent, but rather a fallen angel. Her new subjecthood is a knowing one, in the carnal sense, and having gained this knowledge, she is ready to submit to Gerald's will in marriage. The key to Anna's survival in colonial space is the presence of the kind of British man who understands and accepts her need to explore her sexual desires, and who, despite his flaws, stands by to protect her from the dangers that await the transgressive New Woman. The price Anna pays for her experience and her 'knowledge' is not death (as it is for both Theodora and Frances), but rather the death her child, and the death of her will in marriage. She is, by the end of the novel, a potential contributor to the colonial project, positioned to bear racially pure children and aid in the civilizing mission, but she has lost her status as an emancipated woman in the process. The difference between Anna and other English ladies is that she has been allowed to explore her sexuality under the watchful eye of an understanding patriarch. She has come face to face with her passions and "conquered" them (216), and can now settle down to a 'proper' colonial marriage. Women who are given the

freedom to explore their sexuality under the watchful eye of a caring British man, the text implies, will make the right choices in the end, returning to the realm of proper femininity, suppressing their own subjectivity in marriage, and becoming helpmeets of empire.

Despite Anna's sacrifice of her will in marriage, the novel suggests that she is the *newest* of New Women by implying that the truly progressive woman will recognize that forfeiting her own will in marriage to the right type of British man is the best possible option. On the eve of their wedding, Anna tells Gerald she is happy she will "belong to [him] after to-morrow": "Fancy not being one's own mistress any more, having no will indisputably of one's own . . . Is not that what [marriage] must come to, practically? . . . When I marry you, I put my will in your hands. I make you a present of it. I have no further use for it" (183-84). Gerald laughingly tells her she is "terribly unfashionable in [her] views," and that she does not "seem to belong to the nineteenth century," since "[j]ust now . . . when woman is fighting to take the lead in everything," she is willing to submit to his will. Anna replies that she does not think she does belong to the nineteenth century: "The nineteenth century is nearly over, any way. Perhaps I am a product of the twentieth, and come too soon" (184).

The question Mrs. Harding asks herself at the end of Life of My Heart, about whether or not Frances's fate is worse than her own, highlights the dilemma Cross presents for women in all three novels; a woman can either sacrifice her will and freedom in marriage, the question suggests, or risk her life in a quest for social and sexual freedom. Cross's world is one in which women

are endangered by the sexuality of 'Eastern' men, and by British men's egoism, and where women who seek sexual freedom will perish. Cross does not deny or condemn the existence of women's passions or their desire for emancipation, but seems to be calling for the exercise of passion within 'safe' parameters, and sexual fulfilment within marriage: both which seem possible only in marriage to a 'Christ-like' British man like Gerald of Anna Lombard.

In the second half of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth, Cross was only one of a number of European women writers using colonial settings and European conceptions of colonized peoples to explore the implications of changing gender roles for the constitution of white masculinity and femininity. Olive Schreiner's colonial novel, Story of an African Farm (1883), for instance, is considered by Sally Ledger a novel that represents "a prototype New Woman" (The New Woman 2), and that explores the ways in which femininities are constructed in imperial space while examining and critiquing European masculinities (83). Flora Annie Steel's 1896 fictional treatment of the Indian Mutiny, On the Face of the Waters, engages with issues similar to those taken up by both Schreiner and Cross. In his analysis of Steel's novel, Patrick Williams looks at the ways in which "the coordinates of female subject constitution . . . are worked out" in a colonial setting (62). He also points to the ways British female sexuality is constituted by representing Alice Gissing, the sexually transgressive female character in the text, as "capable of behaving like a man" (68). When analysed in relation to these other novels, Cross's ideas about women seem counter-revolutionary to women's emancipation, rather than "revolutionary" in

feminist terms, as Knapp would have it.

Schreiner's Story of an African Farm is similar to Cross's texts in its assertions that life for white women in the colonies is not the idealized one some feminists imagine it is, and that sex outside marriage equals death for the transgressive New Woman. It is different than both Anna Lombard and Life of My Heart in that Lyndall does not sacrifice her own will in marriage; she refuses to marry the man whose child she is carrying because she is "unwilling to marry a 'manly' man who could dominate her" (Ledger 82). In Schreiner's text, the New Woman asserts her will until her death, unlike Anna Lombard, who gives hers up when she marries Gerald, and Frances, who is willing to forfeit her own freedom for Hamakhan's safety, and would rather die than live without him.

In her analysis of Steel's novel, Jenny Sharpe says that "[t]he feminist plotting of On the Face of the Waters lies in its undoing of the domestic ideal that confines women to the protected space of the home" (97). Sharpe argues that "the energy of Steel's narration goes into demonstrating that English women need neither protection nor saving" (101), and points to the fact that Kate Erlton "is not saved by a man but by her own ingenuity" when the garrison she is in is attacked (100). She says that Steel's English woman in indigenous space is "not once confronted with the possibility of sexual assault" (100), and this point is backed up by Nancy Paxton, who writes that "by silencing stories about rape and sexual desire," Steel's text works to "authorize British women's emancipation" (271). In contrast, Theodora of Six Chapters is the emotional victim of men's 'egoism,' and the physical victim of Egyptian men, and Anna Lombard suggests

that the presence of a British man is required if British women are to survive the 'dangers' of colonial space. Stories about rape and sexual danger in all three of Cross's novels studied here seem to work to contain women's sexuality in marriage, and to caution, rather than encourage, women who seek sexual equality with men, especially in the arena of empire.

Although their constructions of both European and native, and male and female subjectivities vary, and their responses and solutions to gender issues differ, all three of these writers found colonial settings fruitful as alternatives to the European context. The social rules that applied in the colonies were different than those that applied at home, and the colonies provided the opportunity to present interactions between people from different cultures, religions, and linguistic backgrounds. In Cross's case, at least, the 'exotic' settings of Egypt and India provided ample opportunity for the representation of interracial romances as a method of titillating audiences, which was no doubt a factor in the popularity of these novels.

Colonial tropes and settings also provided ready-made literary devices for the construction of white female subjectivity that, as Spivak points out, were being developed at least as early as 1847 with the publication of Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre. In her analysis of Jane Eyre, the novel she refers to as "a cult text of feminism" (798), Spivak looks at how Jane's struggle for self-determination takes place within the discursive field of colonialism. Jenny Sharpe continues Spivak's analysis by looking at how the "subjectivities of subaltern women" provide a "shadow text to the constitution of the English sexed subject"

(29). By Cross's time, the construction of white women's subjectivities within the "discursive field of colonialism," and in relation to images of 'native' women, was thoroughly embedded in both the British women's literary tradition, and the English movement for women's suffrage (Grewal 64), and she is fully engaged in this practice. If twentieth-century feminist critics continue to read European women's texts without looking at the ways in which they engage in this tradition, we will continue to reproduce and reinforce the "axioms of imperialism" (Spivak 798).

Although the novels by Cross studied here seem to configure women's sexuality in new ways within the context of this British women's literary tradition, when judged from a twentieth-century anti-racist feminist perspective, they are less than revolutionary in terms of racial politics. Knapp's claim that Cross is a "revolutionary" refers to the latter's willingness to create bold representations of middle-class British women as sexually active, but does not look at the ways these narratives cautioned women against the free expression of their sexuality. Knapp's description of Cross as a revolutionary is also problematic for its failure to consider that this label can only be applied from a late twentieth-century perspective if we see feminism as separate from other movements against oppression. Only if we overlook the ways in which Cross's texts construct images of the New Woman in the imperialist literary tradition can we, as twentieth-century feminists in the academy, claim her texts as "revolutionary" in our continuing quest for social equality and institutional authority.

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