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New Women in the Anglo-Indian Novel, 1878-1901

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NEW WOMEN IN THE ANGLO-INDIAN NOVEL, 1878-1901

by

McKenna Coon

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for graduation with Honors in the English

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Submitted as partial requirement for graduation with Honors in the Department of English
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Florence Boos
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Abstract

By the late nineteenth century, Englishwomen had established themselves in India in considerable numbers, gaining the sobriquet, *memsahib* (female superior), seen as a stereotyped English woman, concerned only with her material home and social life. However as the century progressed Anglo-Indians rose in social status, adopting the same demands for education and sexual independence along with the “New Women” of England. Their concern with independence, respect, and intellectualism can be seen in Victorian Indian novels as India becomes a space where people push against the social norms of Britain. Yet this space is also highly segregated, only leaving room for white English women to break their oppression. New Woman novels often champion racial segregation and “purity” in the domestic sphere, complicating the feminist ideal.

This segregation leads to the claim of innocence through ignorance and inaction. Women writers and their female characters frequently are excused from responsibility for imperialist actions. While New Woman characters reach happy resolutions in the end, such resolutions come at the expense of native death. No one is spared. Even children, both Indian and mixed race, are killed by these narratives to resolve the conflict between cultures and preserve Pax Britannica.

In this project, I examine two New Woman novels within India and by contrast two novels by an Indian author set in Britain. While the New Woman in Anglo-Indian novels was often glorified, the racist roots of the authors have been left untouched. I will consider the space that India provides for the female writers and characters, along with what the writers consider to be a New Woman and her interaction with the wider world. This also leads to the question of mixed race children, and these novels reveal that the imperialist New Woman ideal goes hand in hand with racial purity, so that mixed-race children are killed. Of the four New Woman novels examined, the first, *Anna Lombard* (1901), appears to break racial segregation, only to reinforce it through the heroine’s second British marriage and the death of her first Anglo-Indian child. The second, *On the Face of the Waters* (1896), reflects on Britain’s rise to power through the Great Mutiny, shifting the focus to the domestic sphere and the racism instilled within. Finally, as an Indian native, Toru Dutt’s novels, *Bianca or the Young Spanish Maiden* (1878) and *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d’Arvers* (1879), present an anti-colonialist perspective on the domestic sphere and intersection of cultures, subverting the imperialist New Woman narrative and its resolution. These novels form a conversation about death and grief as well as revealing the New Woman’s role in imperialist India, with the Indian writer “writing back” against the assumptions of the Anglo-Indian women novelists.

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The Angel, the Memsahib, and the New Woman of India

One of the most potent symbols of the Victorian Era was that of the sacred bond between mother and child. This view was firmly used to enforce the norms of domesticity, which women were expected to fulfill. Although the trope of child death was a common theme in Victorian literature, within colonial fiction child death became a vehicle for the rhetoric of British imperialism. Here it falls on the British woman's shoulder to find a viable British husband and produce racially pure children, making her the keeper of the domestic sphere. Such views also denied the value of any child who failed conform to British standards, marking them for death. In what follows I will examine two such imperialist novels by Anglo-Indian¹ women and two by a native Indian woman who argues for the equal value of Indian and English woman alike.

It has been nearly a century since India, once called the crown jewel of the British Empire, gained independence in 1947 after fifty years of concentrated struggle. Yet, when polled in 2016 by YouGov, forty-four percent of English citizens “felt the Empire was something to be proud of”, and former Prime Minister, David Cameron, pointedly refused to apologize for the 1919 massacre in which four hundred Indians were killed by British forces². This pervasive imperial attitude has stayed with the British even as the twentieth century has seen the majority of England's former colonies become nations. Often the arguments for the beneficial effects of colonialism within the context of the British Raj cite the British building of railroads, the establishment of government structures, and the unification of India. Yet this argument frequently ignores the systematic segregation these institutions enforced. The Indian Civil Service severely limited the jobs native Indians could fill in their own government, as the

¹ The term Anglo-Indian has taken different meanings over the centuries. I am using it to denote British people who lived and worked in India. Further I refer to people with mixed ethnicity and race as Eurasian for clarity.

² Jon Stone, “British People are Proud of Colonialism and the British Empire, poll finds”.

examination for the position was held in England until 1922. Native Indians were also denied other forms of equal opportunity, self-governance and legal rights. A regime cannot be justified by any kind of infrastructure. Moreover, historically the study of colonization has been about the men of India and the institutions they worked for and against. This placed roughly half the population in the margins, as women lived, worked and participated in imperial rule. Ironically, it was alleged concern for British women's "honor" which led to the rationale for the bloody backlash against India after the Great Mutiny.

The Great Mutiny, also known as the Indian Rebellion of 1857, was the violent upheaval which precipitated the transfer of power from the East India Trading Company to the British government. Before the Mutiny, the East India Trading Company had kept multiple puppet Muslim and Hindu kings and princes in power in order to control the contracts and treaties for the subcontinent's imports and exports. Over time, a gradual shift occurred during which native kingdoms were completely annexed into the British empire before the final sweep during the Mutiny. Due to these annexations and the denial of Indian self-governance, tensions increasingly rose between the English and Hindu and Muslim soldiers. The final act that triggered the Mutiny was the British's utter lack of respect for religious dietary restrictions in their demands that Indian soldiers rip off the tops of cartilage seals containing beef and pork fat using their teeth. The uprising began May 10th 1857 and was declared over in July 8th 1859. During this period, there were multiple accounts of the slaughter of noncombatants, including English women and children who sought refuge in Indian palaces, and the killing of entire Indian villages by British forces in response. The result of the Mutiny led to tightening of British control over India, with sweeping social legislation in favor of the British, creating a racial segregation between English and Indian cultures.

While the British Raj was administered by men, the Anglo-Indian domestic sphere was administered by women. Several housekeeping handbooks were published for such Anglo-Indian woman to model the roles for imperial domestic employers. In *The Complete Indian Housekeeper & Cook: Giving the Duties of Mistress and Servants, the General Management of the House, and Practical Recipes for Cooking in all its Branches*, Flora Annie Steel and Gloria Gardener advise on how to address and direct Indian servants in particular. Further the book is dedicated “to the English Girls to whom fate may assign the task of being House-Mothers in our Eastern Empire.” While this confines women to the house, it also gives them power over that domestic sphere. It should be noted that this power is relative. The domestic sphere was essentially created for masculine pleasure and for the wellbeing of children. The women within the domestic sphere was rarely considered valuable for their own sake but instead served the people who surrounded them.

This role led to dual narratives and accusations. The first was that feminine involvement within the Empire caused its ruin. This often took on the form of criticizing the memsahib³, as the wife of a British officer or bureaucratic worker was called. Patrick Brantlinger notes,

Before British women or ‘memsahibs’ came in numbers, the male imperialist freely intermingled with Indians, often acquiring Indian mistresses and wives and creating a sizeable ‘Eurasian’ population. According to the ‘ruin of the empire narrative’, the memsahibs broke up the party...⁴

From this viewpoint, the memsahib was frequently portrayed as an isolated, shallow woman who was only interested in her own material household. This prejudice was also reflected in

³ Memsahib: Mrs. Master.

⁴ Brantlinger, 64.

contemporary media, as Indrani Sen argues, “the discursive tendency was to make a cultural scapegoat of the memsahib for the general problem of racism which demonstrably had larger and more complex factors behind it.”⁵

In contrast to the view that Anglo-Indian women were responsible for colonial problems, another line of thought completely dismisses women’s racism due to their lack of agency and limited role within the imperialist era. For example, Jean Haggis argues against women’s involvement in the Empire in “Gendering Colonialism, Or Colonising Gender?”; the fact that the memsahib was isolated within her English home and society in India was not the true reason she was blamed for India’s social problems, however, and neither was her racism, which British men also systematically embodied. Instead, the memsahib in literature was censured when she did not fulfill the moral requirements laid out within the trope of “The Angel in the House.”⁶

Theorized by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, the Angel is described as:

...Enshrined within her home, a Victorian angel-woman should become her husband's holy refuge from the blood and sweat that inevitably accompanies a "life of significant action," as well as, in her "contemplative purity," a living memento of the otherness of the divine.⁷

The major theoretical difference between the memsahib and the Angel is that the memsahib is seen as focused on the tangible world rather than morality. EM Collingham provides a standard description of the memsahibs as “Anglo-Indian women who allowed themselves to sink into a

⁵ Sen, 20-21.

⁶ This term was first used in a poem by Coventry Patmore, describing his wife, whom he saw as the perfect woman, with the opening lines “Man must be pleased; but him to please/is woman's pleasure.”

⁷ Gilbert and Gubar, 24.

state of debility, who gave into the climate, breakfasted in bed and only moved from the bed to the sofa in a dressing gown to read literary trash....”⁸ While the “Angel” is constrained by her morality and purity, the memsahib is seen as exercising desires.⁹

However, there were also defenses of the memsahib. One instance of more favorable view occurs in Flora Annie Steel’s *On the Face of the Waters* (1896). While the novel itself has many side plots and messages,¹⁰ the central narrative focuses on Kate Erlton, an unhappily married woman living in India. However, her own desire is to be with her child still in England, and in the meantime, she works to maintain British aspects of life. Her own struggles are rewarded as she is widowed, remarried to a worthy man, and returns home to England. Although she is presented as a model wife and mother due to her loyalty to her unfaithful husband, she also leaves her home and thus cannot be considered a true Angel in the House. She then serves as the bridge between the ideals of conventional womanhood and those of the New Woman which gained support in the later nineteenth century.

Officially emerging in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the figure of the New Woman was a highly controversial one due to her expanded views on women’s rights. Though the sub-genre was firmly established by the 1890s, the New Woman novel does not have a set start date. As Sharad Shrivastava notes:

A woman is ‘new’ if her basic concerns are deeper than merely seeking equality with men, asserting her own personality and insisting upon her rights as a woman... The

⁸ Collingham, 179.

⁹ These desires frequently focus on both the material gains of wealth or clothing and the desire to be around English society, in particular parties and entertainment.

¹⁰ See Chapter II.

woman is 'new' when she analyses and reflects upon her position essentially as a woman in the scheme of things which includes the social, moral and spiritual fields.¹¹

While this is a broad definition of what a New Woman is, the exclusion of non-European women was a major limitation, as the term was invariably meant English women within the Victorian period. Both in life and literature, the movement lasted for decades in multiple different aspects and fields. Some of the key issues raised were the need for marriage equality, social reform and financial independence, as frequently represented in the literature. This gives the New Woman a new form of morality, where she is concerned with matters outside of her home. This can become a double-edged sword, for while the New Woman is allowed out of the house, often she is still expected to marry and produce children. While Gail Cunningham notes that the New Woman is frequently concerned with limiting the number of children she produced, only a few radical novels completely reject Victorian marriage, and most conclude with a British couple coming together in the end.

Another deeply rooted issue involved in women's rights is the drive for improved education for children. The needs of children frequently occupied the British mind, and as the ideal domestic sphere was created by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert's royal family, upper and middle class families followed suit. This is where women's inferior education was called into question. If she did not receive an education, how could she be responsible for her sons' early lessons? Frequently, the arguments for feminine rights were not centered on a woman's own person but on the benefits this would bestow on the people who surrounded her.

This concern for women's rights took on a new form within the colonies, but especially in India, due to its unusually high population of English women. The need for racial purity,

¹¹ Shrivastava, 17-18

morality, and the raising of good British children was emphasized because the British had placed themselves in a hierarchy, where they felt the need to prove their superiority. Not only was the ideal colonial woman serving her husband but also the Empire itself. According to Anglo-Indian fictional norms, by performing this noble act she was absolved of all colonial wrongdoing, as her struggle for gender equality takes precedence over any other.

Perhaps the most radical example of this subgenre is Victoria Cross's *Anna Lombard*, published in 1901. While its protagonist, Anna Lombard, in many respects fits the ideals of a New Woman, who stands as an intellectual equal to her English fiancé, her affair with an Indian man, Gaida, results in his objectification by Anna and the narrative. When she later discovers her pregnancy, Anna defies the literary odds that typically came with children out of wedlock and survives. However, the narrative is only truly resolved once she shockingly kills her Eurasian child and reunites with her British fiancé.

Previous Anglo-Indian novels often took the form of the Station Romance. This subgenre frequently focused on a young girl coming to India, meeting her romantic interest in the English exclusive settlements called stations and, after a brief misadventure, eventually marrying him and becoming a proper Englishwoman. The New Woman novels discussed here shift away from this simplistic form of the genre, promoting more independent female protagonists.

In an entire reversal of this genre, Toru Dutt's novel's *Bianca or the Young Spanish Maiden* (1878) and *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d'Arvers* (1879) shift the narrative away from India, instead presenting a young woman who enters into imperialist spaces. Contrary to prejudiced norms, Bianca thrives and is accepted, whereas Marguerite's lack of understanding about the imperial world leads to her own death.

Each of the novels to be discussed thus moves away from the standard station romance and exhibits a variation of the literary New Woman. *Anna Lombard*'s obsession with racial purity and alleged English intellectual superiority leads to the killing of a mixed race child in order to resolve the narrative, showing profound racism in the fact that the heroine is simply able to find resolution by killing her child. *On The Face of the Waters* exhibits similar concerns, as Eurasian and Indian children are killed by the narrative to the vague relief of multiple characters, whereas literary British children are deeply mourned by the character and audience alike. Yet native Indian authors also take part in this literary debate, as Toru Dutt subverts the narrative of child death by creating a protagonist of mixed cultures, who lives successfully within the English domestic sphere, and another whose death is caused by imperialism. These novels come together to form a rarely discussed conversation about gender, race, and death.

“English Men do not Share their Wives”
Race, Sex and Motherhood in *Anna Lombard* (1901)

Anna Lombard, published under the pseudonym Victoria Cross, appeared at a pivotal time in history. First appearing in 1901, during the last year of Queen Victoria’s reign and one year after the Indian National Congress was formed, the novel reflects the shift in British control over India. The novel’s author, Victoria Cross,¹² born Annie Sophie Cory, lived in India for the majority of her childhood, where her father worked for the British Army. Cory returned to England as an adult, where she wrote New Women novels and eventually represented British life in India in *Anna Lombard*. The novel opens in a period of strictly enforced racial segregation between Anglo-Indians and Native Indians, forty-six years after the Great Mutiny. The contemporary British anxiety about shifting power and the difficulties of maintaining segregation appears in *Anna Lombard*, splitting it into two thematic parts. While, like Cross’s other works, *Anna Lombard* advocates for women’s sexual and educational equality, the novel does so by reinforcing racism and British nationalism, as Anna kills her child in order to be accepted by her fiancé, Ethridge, and form a “perfect” British union. While the novel has traditionally been read as a celebration of Anna’s assertion of her agency, this view ignores the racial and imperialist themes of the novel and enforces the violent racial segregation of the domestic sphere.

Narrated by a British Civil Commissioner, Gerald Ethridge, *Anna Lombard* details the courtship between himself and the eponymous character. Ethridge describes the couple as the perfect intellectual match from their first meeting, only to be prevented from marriage by Anna’s infatuation for her Muslim servant turned husband, Gaida, while Ethridge resists temptation from an Indian girl named Lulloo. Although Anna is unable to break away from her feelings of lust for

¹² Cross went by several different names and various pseudonyms during her career and lifetime. The most common variations were the spelling of her pen name, either as Cross or Crosse. This was due to the significance of the name, Victoria Cross which was one of Britain’s highest military honors.

Gaida, Ethridge is unable to break away from his feeling of love for Anna and decides to remain her fiancé. This conflict is resolved by Gaida's death, shortly followed by Anna's discovery that she is pregnant with his child. She then suffers throughout her pregnancy, only to miraculously find her maternal instinct when the child is born. Then, seeing how jealous Ethridge is, she kills her and Gaida's child, repents for a year and is able to remerge as the "perfect wife" for Ethridge.

Anna Lombard has typically been considered a New Woman novel, giving Anna the sexual freedom to live with two different men. Yet in response to imperial norms, Ethridge is presented as the correct choice, while Gaida as a Muslim man dies for his sexual transgressions with Anna. This departs from previous Anglo-Indian fiction in which "the issue of love between a memsahib and an Indian is rarely scripted, a point that is in fact is often missed by scholars. In rare cases where potential Indian lovers are present, the sexual inaccessibility of the white woman is always eventually ensured."¹³ Further, Anna's decision to kill her and Gaida's child is treated as a solution to her marital impasse, suggesting that British and Indian segregation is the dominant concern, and that motherhood and the domestic sphere can only be achieved through racial purity. While in *Anna Lombard*, a woman is allowed to have desires independent of her role as a wife and mother, the narrative forbids the intermingling and equality of British and Indian cultures.

"As if We were One Mind": Ethridge's Narration and Control

This depiction of segregation has largely been untouched by contemporary and modern critics, shifting the discussion about *Anna Lombard* to Cross's use of a male narrator from a feminine viewpoint or Anna's dual relationship with Gaida as a way of subverting the gender hierarchy. One scathing 1901 critic in *The Athenaeum* labeled the novel "inartistic" and noted,

¹³ Sen, 84.

“It is unfortunate that Victoria Cross has chosen to narrate this novel under the character of a man. The fact is that Victoria Cross... has very little conception of a good man’s characteristics”. Yet Cross’s decision to make Ethridge the narrator, while focusing on Anna as a character, means that he is given authority over the narrative. He is the one who is given the opportunity to begin and end the novel, recounting Anna’s pregnancy and the later infanticide.

This also means Ethridge never truly surrenders control as a man. While it has been asserted that the triangular relationship between Ethridge, Anna and Gaida is one of gender reversal and what Gail Cunningham calls a “frustrated passivity,”¹⁴ which leaves Ethridge “disempowered and feminized,”¹⁵ I would argue that the arrangement does not completely subvert the gender hierarchy or reverse the roles. Ethridge continues to tell the story throughout and to “choose” how the events are told.

It is because the novel is told from his perspective, that the reader also understands how Ethridge views Anna. He does not see her as a complete equal, even though it is emphasized that Anna has equal intellectual ability and is able to work in the Indian Civil Service with him. Ethridge even goes so far as to comment that Anna has done a better job at paper work and translating judicial memos than both he and the other men at the office. Despite the fact that she as his fiancé is as competent as he, and in her early twenties, he still calls her “my child”. While this could result from the idea that Ethridge is a Christ-like figure, as Victoria Cross asserts in the Preface, the dynamic of women as children and the idea of the child-bride cannot be forgotten. Ethridge slides into the role of protector and patriarch when he marries Anna, not just because he loves her but because she is pregnant and in need of protection from British social sanctions.

¹⁴ Cunningham, xix.

¹⁵ Cunningham, xviii.

During Anna's pregnancy, their marriage is not consummated as Ethridge wants Anna to be "free of all previous ties". The abrupt absence of General Lombard, Anna's biological father, after her marriage and pregnancy suggest the idea of the husband as alternate father and protector as Ethridge takes his place.

Instead of portraying complete gender reversal, I would argue that *Anna Lombard* as a New Woman novel stretches the limits of the patriarchy rather than breaking it. As previously stated, the relationship between Ethridge, Anna and Gaida takes place because Ethridge allows it. He is the narrator and the witness. If he had chosen to leave Anna or condemn her, the narrative would have followed him, meaning masculine power was never truly removed. While Anna is presented as a New Woman because of her sexuality and intellect, Melisa Britain asserts, "Cross makes Anna an active participant in her return to proper femininity, and makes visible both the racial aspects of the Angel in the House, and the limited options available to colonial women who wished to remain within the pale of British society."¹⁶ This recalls Gilbert and Gubar's notion of women as an "Angel of Death" which complicates the line between the literary New Woman and Angel in the House. Anna's control over her child's life and death is something which gives her power, but it is the same kind that allows for violence against innocents within the colonial period. Simply because a woman can assert her agency, does not mean that there cannot be negative consequences to that power. Anna's choice shows agency but inflicts violence against her child in order to return to an segregated system of heavily enforced roles for both women and Indians.

"The Peculiar Whiteness of her Skin Threw up its Dusky Tint": Infanticide and Eugenics

Another review, from the *Review of Reviews*, also introduces the reversal of roles and

¹⁶ Brittan, 91.

focuses on Anna's desire in contrast with her love for Ethridge. This is met with understanding from the review's author, who notes, "The roles are reversed, and Victoria Crosse enables the reader to understand how women feel in a relationship towards the premarital unions which so many men form and continue with the female counterparts of Gaida."¹⁷ While this review takes on a feminist tone, it neglects to note how both Gaida and his female counterparts become sexual objects within the novel. The reviewer goes on to state:

If Ethridge had been wise, he would have removed the child before its mother had recovered consciousness; or if that opportunity had been neglected, Anna, by the exercise of much less torturing resolution than that which nerved her to destroy her infant could have assented to its removal. After their own children had been born, the little half-caste might have taken its place in the family. Anything would have been better than the apparent extenuation of murder

While it is good the writer does not directly endorse infanticide, this response also shows the prejudiced real-world British view of Eurasian children. Mixed race children were not welcome in a British household. The reviewer appears doubtful that Anna's child would ever be accepted into the domestic sphere or the larger British society, despite the child looking like Ethridge and not being noticeably different than any other baby. The bond between mother and child only truly matters when they are British.

In the later twentieth century the focus has been on reading Anna's crime of infanticide as an act of agency. Gail Cunningham notes, "...Anna's decision to kill her own baby, is her one independent act of will by which she can claim her own body and later offer it freely to

¹⁷ *Review of Reviews*, 597.

Gerald.”¹⁸ Further Melissa Purdue states, “Just as Cross reverses gender roles throughout the novel, so, too, might she be playing with traditional tropes of the colonizer and colonized.”¹⁹

This attempt to defend Anna Lombard and her actions appears to be hollow. There is very little that can justify a murdered child. These attempts to maintain Anna’s agency or the power she claims over her body do not account for infanticide, or the deeply entwined racism that comes with the death of her son.

These attitudes also have roots in eugenics. Initially laid out by Francis Galton in 1883, the eugenicist view that hereditary could determine human traits and create more superior humans led to the racist desire to choose a mate with “good” genetic traits. While Melissa Purdue writes “Although on the surface Anna’s murder of her child could be interpreted as an endorsement of eugenic feminism, this does not seem to be the case. Anna willingly chooses to engage in a sexual relationship with Gaida and expresses no concerns over the child’s race when she discovers she is pregnant”²⁰. I would argue the opposite. When Anna reveals her pregnancy, she tells Ethridge, “he [Gaida] was not worthy... and I loathe the very memory of him, his very name, and now good God — his child.”²¹ This is terribly close to Lady Victoria Welby’s speech in 1904, arguing for women’s role in eugenics as she proclaims:

The refined and educated woman of this day is brought up to countenance, and to see moral and religious authority countenance, social standards which practically take no account of the destinies and the welfare of the race. It is thus hardly wonderful that she

¹⁸ Cunningham, xx.

¹⁹ Purdue, 132.

²⁰ Purdue, 131.

²¹ Cross, 108

should be failing more and more to fulfil her true mission... spending her instinct of devotion in unworthy, or at least barren, directions.²²

Anna's maternal bond and her later decision to kill the child, who is not given a name, play a dual role. Ethridge endorses the Victorian ideal of "new maternal passion,"²³ finding that "the child's actual presence had effaced, apparently, all those months and the feelings that belonged to them, as if they had never been."²⁴ Anna takes to motherhood because, in Ethridge's eyes, this is natural and follows the rules of Victorian domestic life. Anna takes her place as a mother, but not a British mother to a British child. However, the child is able to pass as an Anglo-Indian and "to no eyes but those that knew the secret of its birth would it have seemed different from a European's. I myself being so dark, the child was supposed to 'favor me' and 'resemble me.'"²⁵ Although the child does not look different from a European child, yet Ethridge views as him as "hideous with that curious hideousness that usually belongs to the fruit of Eurasian marriages,"²⁶ later noting "it had lost a little of its first repulsiveness."²⁷ This echoes the idea that in the narrative, Indians are seen as inferior because of their allegedly different mental processes, yet this expands on that idea to the point where the baby, who does not speak or act, is simply seen as repulsive for existing. Anna follows the expectation of being a mother and taking care of her child. However Ethridge and through him, the narrative, views the relationship between Anna and the child as unnatural because the child is of mixed race.

²² Welby, Victoria. "Eugenics: Its Definition, Scope, And Aims." *The American Journal of Sociology* vol. 10, no.1 1904.

²³ Cross, 128.

²⁴ Cross, 129.

²⁵ Cross, 128.

²⁶ Cross, 127.

²⁷ Cross, 128.

This is also why Anna kills the child and why this act is considered a redeeming rather than a damning one. While she breaks her role as a mother, which is considered to be the goal of womanhood, her act allows for her to be with Ethridge, as a British man and wife. She says as she shows Ethridge the child's body;

It was revealed to me...I looked through the previous months, then I looked into the future and saw what had to be. One had to be sacrificed, either you or the child. And how could it be you? Was this your reward for all you have done and suffered for my sake? Had it lived it would have taken my life. Now my grief will only take me a few months...I am your own forever and ever. While you live I will live for you and in you, and when you die I will die.²⁸

By killing the child, Anna turns away from the commitment of raising a child with Indian ancestry and changing the British-Indian hierarchy. The wider community views the child as Ethridge's, and if he had lived he would have been considered an Anglo-Indian with the rights of a British man, breaking down the barrier of servitude and segregation. He would have the social benefits of being a high-ranking official's son and the grandson of a general. The child could have received an English education and become the intellectual equal to other characters in the novel, disrupting the entire basis of Ethridge's supposed superiority. Instead this possibility is killed in the cradle.

Anna's actions also reinforce the idea that she has strayed from the British standard and must now return into the real world. Melisa Brittan notes:

...because Anna and Gaida's half-caste baby represents a threat to the stability of racial categories, and therefore to colonial power, its death renders Anna herself less

²⁸ Cross, 132-3.

threatening to the empire' (90). While alive, the baby is a continual reminder of Anna's sexual transgressions, but its death opens up the space for her to be 'reassimilated into conventional social roles' and for 'dominant ideologies of race and gender' to be reinstated.²⁹

Yet Brittan does not note that the ideology and empire that Anna is choosing are Ethridge's. The idea that Ethridge is the one who deserves to live and that his ideology of racism and segregation is what should live on conforms to the his notions of British supremacy and racism. Further, Anna also conforms to it, and after spending a year at a nunnery, she is reinstated to fulfill her fiancé's expectation that she will be a British wife.

"I Believe I am Forgiven": Anna's Imperialist Repentance

Anna's repentance at the nunnery for the murder of her child, and the justification for permitting her to live, takes on more meaning when Cross's Preface is considered, as she claims Ethridge is a "Christ-like figure" who "raises the fallen" and "suffers to reclaim the Pagan and almost lost soul of Anna Lombard". Anna's death would be a blemish on Ethridge's saint-like and imperial authority. It is her devotion to her colonizing, patriarchal husband that allows her to be a part of British society again. While Anna becomes "Pagan" through her first Muslim marriage to Gaida, her second marriage makes her pure. Her pregnancy is not a punishment for premarital sex but for a non-Christian marriage. She describes her Islamic marriage ceremony as follows:

One night he came and got me to come away and go through the marriage ceremony amongst his own people. He took me, veiled, to a queer sort of house, and we went through the ceremonies he said meant marriage. Of course, I could not tell or say if they

²⁹ Cunningham, xxiii.

were so or not, but I think so, because, you see... He is anxious to tie me to him in every way in his power.³⁰

This could have played into the common trope of false marriage in Victorian literature, and freed Anna from the commitment. Instead the marriage is given legitimacy by Ethridge and the narrative, as he views her and Gaida's relationship as a marriage. However, this also shows an uncomfortable power imbalance between Anna and Gaida. While the narrative focuses on British supremacy and British gender equality, Anna lacks agency in her marriage to Gaida. Their marriage is on his word, and further, Anna feels that Gaida is working to gain power over her through marriage. This anxiety that British women would not adhere to British husbands but instead fall under the influence of someone that they viewed as of a lesser race shows through in this context. It also gives Gaida a sinister edge as he attempts to bind Anna without her knowledge. While the marriage is treated as legitimate, Anna's consent is not emphasized. This could easily play on the anxieties of rape which the British government used as a rallying cry for the revenge against the Indian Munity, where it was reported that British women and children were raped and killed by Indian rebels. This unspoken narrative exists on the edges of Anna and Gaida's marriage and creates a tension in the plot.

While it is never directly stated, Anna and Gaida's marriage does not appear to be considered binding or exclusive. Anna is able to remain engaged to Ethridge and it is her desire that continues the relationship with Gaida, rather than a legally or spiritually binding commitment. Instead her relationship is presented as a parallel to the taking of Indian wives by Ethridge's peers in Burma. One man comments:

³⁰ Cross, 67.

A Burmese wife. Oh, don't look so contemptuous. You'll come to it. Most of them do, it saves time and trouble to settle down at once... She will be contracted to you for five years; that's your appointment here isn't it? Yes, very good. Then you'll have someone at the head of your table and to look after the house for you... You'll enjoy legitimate matrimony for five years and when your time's up, you'll pay the bill and say good-bye, and there's no further questions...³¹

Ethridge reacts with contempt to the idea that British men would take an Indian wife and then leave after a few years, yet then urges Anna to give Gaida up.

It is the fact that Gaida and Anna are married at all which causes the problem. While this does break down the segregation between colonizer and colonized which had grown deeper as the British Crown took authority over India and inserted a heavy emphasis on British domesticity into the lives of Anglo-Indians, the narrative punishes both Anna and Gaida for the transgression, though to different degrees. Gaida dies because he breaks the mold of what the narrative says a good native should do, but Anna is able to be rehabilitated through suffering and Christianity.

Further, Anna's suffering is highly feminized. While she does contract chorea through Gaida, her pregnancy results from the relationship. This type of punishment would not be applicable to the men who had taken Burmese wives, as Anna tells Ethridge how much she hates being pregnant with Gaida's child. She says "I shall hate it, Gerald, so much, I never want to lay eyes on it. You will have it taken away from me where I can never see it, and then I shall be all your own and nothing can come between us anymore."³² She is forced to carry a child she does not want by the narrative and to give birth to the child while telling Ethridge that "I am in such

³¹ Cross, 17.

³² Cross, 128.

horrible pain.”³³ By having sex with someone whom the narrative has deemed racially inferior, she is punished by pregnancy and childbirth, in order to gain Christian redemption.

This religious revitalization is the final step for Anna to reenter the traditional British sphere. In the feminist literary tradition this is a revolutionary step as Anna is able to survive having a child and an illegitimate marriage and still marry a “worthy” British man. This is perhaps why so many critics are willing to look past the infanticide and all of its racial implications. A defense of this comes from Melissa Purdue, who asserts:

Cross’s shocking decision to write a novel about an infanticide requires careful contextualization. As Josephine McDonagh observes, ‘the figure of child murder often disavows its most literal referent – the murder of a child – and connotes instead a host of other meanings’ (13). On one hand, much of the rhetoric surrounding the child and Anna’s decision to kill it echoes that found in Cross’s non-colonial fiction. Anna felt passion for the child’s father, and loves the baby because of the union that produced him. The child is a bond between her and Gaida’s memory and thus a firm barrier between herself and Gerald.³⁴

This theory however, is directly contradicted by *Anna Lombard’s* text. Anna tell Ethridge that Gaida is “... a beautiful toy to me. He is like some pet...He is a possession that I value... What link is there between his brain and mine?”³⁵ She does not see Gaida as human but only wants him as an object that she owns. This changes how the marriage supposedly functions, but maintains the racial hierarchy between British and Indian people. Anna does not love her child because of Gaida because she simply views Gaida as an object. Further she describes her affair

³³ Cross, 124

³⁴ Purdue, 137

³⁵ Cross, 56

as “when the claw of passion came out upon me from Gaida’s beauty and pinioned me, and I wanted to get away from it, it was horrible.”³⁶ Instead it is the standard Victorian maternal instinct which makes Anna fall in love with her child up to a point, only to have her kill the child for the love she has for Ethridge and the imperial empire he represents.

These killings show that Cross, while working to promote a British marriage based on equality, does not show any mercy towards Indian people who would attempt to assert their own equality within the British Raj. Even as more native Indians began to obtain western educations and demand the rights for equality, this novel attempts to deny these rights.

³⁶ Cross, 103.

“This isn’t like England you know”
Morality and New Womanhood in *On the Face of the Waters* (1896)

It is frequently debated how to read Flora Annie Steel’s works and life. Flora Annie Steel (1847-1929) was born near London and moved to India with her new husband at twenty years of age and lived in India for twenty-two years. She soon became a reformer within the Indian Civil Service and began to interact with Indian women in Punjab, before writing about her own experiences and fictionalized versions of Indian myths and history. She returned to India in 1894 to do research and write *On the Face of the Waters* (1896). It is because of her interaction with Indian women and cultures and efforts to reform the British Civil Service that she is either considered a New Woman herself or a memsahib. While her works are frequently read within the context of her life and it is argued that these works do not exhibit racist attitudes, I intend to isolate *On the Face of the Waters* from Steel’s personal life and focus on what she has written and the wider world with which it interacts.

While Steel’s forward focuses primarily on the fact that her book is meant to be historical, the major focus of the novel is on four British characters. Kate Erlton takes on the isolated role of a memsahib while her husband, Major Erlton, carries on an affair with a married woman, Alice Gissing. In order to save her family’s reputation, Kate pleads with a disgraced soldier, Jim Douglas, not to pursue her husband for cheating in a horse race. The narrative then follows Douglas as Zora, his Indian mistress, dies and he becomes a spy for the British Army. During the fighting in Delhi, a pregnant Alice Gissing is killed and Major Erlton is killed attempting to go to Delhi to save her. Kate and Jim Douglas reunite and live happily as they move to Scotland.

Despite the fictional aspect, in the Preface Steel writes, “...Neither the fair race or the dark one is ever quite likely to forget or to forgive... That they may come near to the latter is the object with which this book has been written”, prompting many reviews to note that within the

novel blame fell on both forces during the Great Mutiny. Yet it was also noted by *The Athenaeum*'s review that "...We regret that the author is unable to shake herself free from the objectionable habit prevalent among so many lady writers of dragging in the sexual question freely. This blemish renders the work unsuitable for young people."

In Flora Annie Steel's *On the Face of the Waters* the character Alice serves as both a counterpart to Cross's *Anna Lombard* and yet also a continuation of her story. Both women are blonde, intelligent Anglo-Englishwomen who marry an Indian man earlier in their life and have a Eurasian child who later dies, before remarrying into segregated British society. Anna's narrative ends there and Alice's picks up years later as she has an affair with a married Englishman while she is also married. This transgressive sexual behavior later leads to the death of another young Indian child, who is run over by the carriage Alice and her married lover Major Erlton are riding in while returning from the mourning ritual of placing flowers on her Eurasian child's grave. Alice shows an extreme lack of remorse for this accident, similar to how Anna casually reveals to Ethridge that she has killed her and Gaida's child. While Anna can simply be redeemed by returning to Ethridge, Steel's Alice does die. However, her death becomes a heroic moment, as she saves a white toddler, Sonny, from a fanatical Muslim Iman. This complicates her punitive redemption because neither Steel nor Alice addresses the other child's death, simply focusing on Sonny. In *On the Face of the Waters*, Indian and Eurasian child deaths exist in the margins of the novel and are not truly addressed, leading to further devaluing of Indian lives and enforcing racial segregation through a lack of sincere grief and sympathy.

"A Trace of Dark Blood": Eurasian Death and British Grief

Both in *Anna Lombard* and *On the Face of the Waters* Eurasian children are killed. While the newborn within *Anna Lombard* is overtly killed, the children who die within *On the Face of*

the Waters exist on the margins, similar to Lulloo's death in *Anna Lombard*. In Steel's novel, these infants' death are not caused by a human decision but result from other forces. Effectively they are not killed by their parents but the narrative. Both mixed race children mentioned in *On the Face of the Waters* die without cause, but the narrator makes the decision that they must die.

The two mixed race children killed before the narrative begins and within the novel are only briefly mentioned by their Anglo-Indian parent. In a pattern similar to *Anna Lombard*, only the English parent survives, as their Indian or Eurasian parent dies. This shifts the overtly racist message of *Anna Lombard* into a subtler pattern, showing that Indians who intermix with the English as equals will not survive.

This becomes especially prominent with mixed race children within *On the Face of the Waters* as they only truly exist within the narrative as a memory. They have become a neutralized threat. This is shown through Alice Gissing's theatrical grief for her long dead child. Alice's bringing of flowers to her child's grave becomes extremely performative as she creates an audience by always bringing her current lover with her to the gravesite. Further, there the audience becomes larger as Steel describes the scene to the readers, writing "...the admirers whom she took in succession into her confidence, thought it sweet and womanly of her never to have forgotten the dead baby, though they approved of her dislike to live ones."³⁷ This shifts her grief from truly being about her child as a person and treats the child as an object. While her actions can be read as a part of a Victorian mourning ritual overall to show status or power, as James Steven Curl notes in *The Victorian Celebration of Death*,³⁸ or as a reflection of Alice's worth as a mother, I would argue that Steel's reference to "a trace of dark blood"³⁹ emphasizes

³⁷ Steel, 53.

³⁸ Curl notes that Victorian funeral rites and public displays of grief exhibited the mourners' status within society, often mimicking the upper-classes' lavish funeral arrangements.

³⁹ Steel, 48.

the racial component and the fact that Eurasian children are not allowed to exist within the Anglo-English narrative, including New Woman novels.

The fact that Alice does not truly care for her child is revealed by the character least likely to understand. It is Major Erlton, Kate's husband and Alice's admirer, who points out the distance between Alice's grief and her noted dislike of actual children, noting,

"I've been wondering, Allie," he said, 'what you would have been like if that baby had lived. Would you have cared for it?"

Her eyes grew startled. "But I do care for it! Why should I come if I didn't? It isn't amusing I'm sure; so I think it very unkind of you to suggest—"

"I never suggested anything," he protested. "I know you did— that you do care. But if it had lived," he paused as if something escaped his mental grasp — "Why, I expect you would have been different somehow; and I was wondering."

"Oh! Don't wonder, please, it's a bad habit," she replied suddenly appeased.⁴⁰

Throughout the novel, Major Erlton is not in the habit of wondering. This a rare moment where he almost makes a mental connection before leaving it up to the audience to understand that Alice does not truly care for her child. Alice's dismissal of Erlton's question shows that she does not want people to suspect how she truly feels about the child. This closely aligns her with Anna Lombard, who only needs a year of penitence to be able to return to British society. While Steel does not approve of Alice, yet this is because of Alice's personal flaws, rather than the child's objectification.

Steel's representation of Alice's insincere grief is paralleled in Jim Douglas's reflection about the death of his own Eurasian child. While he does think about his child, he does not feel

⁴⁰ Steel, 53-54.

grief over the death, only, “He had never told her of the relief it was to him, of the vague repulsion which the thought of a child had always brought with it.”⁴¹ While this is not the infanticide of *Anna Lombard*, it still normalizes the characters’ racism and promotes segregation between British and Indian cultures and people. Any child with the slightest trace of Indian blood is purged from the narrative by dying.

These two Eurasian deaths serve as commentary to show that these children cannot be a part of the narrative. The Eurasian children are not given names or genders, even by their parents, making them less human. Further this shows that English parents are not supposed to publically mourn these children or truly feel grief over their deaths. This would be different for a white child within the narrative, as Kate clearly mourns the child from whom she is separated and Alice even dies to save an English toddler.

“One never knows what will make them laugh or cry”: Imperial Harm and Responsibility

Alice’s grief over her child becomes even more dubious after her and Major Erlton’s dogcart kills an Indian girl. She and the narrative simply ascribe this to fate, with minimum effect on the plot, leading to the marginalization of the toddler’s death. Alice comments, “There was nothing we could do. Tell the woman, Herbert, that we couldn’t help it.”⁴² This becomes a denial of responsibility, as Alice removes herself from the cart and becomes an observer, as she was during the prior auction and the performance mocking the British. While Alice does take on the role of New Woman, she thus also returns to being a passive observer without responsibility for imperialism and its effects.

Within either role, Alice still normalizes the child’s death. Her response is flippant;

⁴¹ Steel, 38.

⁴² Steel, 56.

“Take care,’ said Mrs. Gissing lightly, ‘don’t run over another child. By the way, I forgot to tell you— the Fair was so funny — but Erlton ran over a black baby. It wasn’t his fault a bit, and the mother, luckily, didn’t seem to mind; because it was a girl, I expect. Aren’t they an odd people? One really never knows what will make them cry or laugh.’”⁴³

Alice makes the girl’s death into an anecdote about the Fair, undercutting the tragedy of a young child being killed. Alice further removes herself from responsibility for the child’s death. In her later comment it was Major Erlton who ran over the girl, whereas before she told had the surrounding audience at the scene that “there was nothing we could do”, absolving herself entirely of responsibility. In this moment, the reader can see her shift back from an amoral New Woman to an untouchable Angel in the House devoid of all responsibility.

Alice’s second defense is that the Indian mother was not deeply affected by her child’s death, lessening the tragedy. Alice appears to believe a child’s worth can be determined by how much a parent mourns their child. Jim Douglas’s quiet relief at the death of his Eurasian child is seen as appropriate while Alice’s performative grief for her mixed race child is not, and part of what makes Kate Erlton a truly good woman is her own quiet longing for her absent son. When the Indian mother apparently does not show grief, Alice uses the mother’s reaction to dehumanize the Indian woman on account of her race, similar to Ethridge’s own generalizations about race in *Anna Lombard*.⁴⁴

The narrative supports this dehumanization. While the English characters do not have sympathy for the young girl or her mother and could be read as bigots, the narrative slips into the

⁴³ Steel, 59.

⁴⁴ A notable instance of Ethridge’s racist generalizations is, “a race whose vices and loves are beyond description, there is the daily, hourly physical danger from a native’s insensate jealousy, unreasoning rage, and childish, yet fiendish, revenge.” (61)

Indian mother's point of view and shows a complexity that confirms what Alice observes. Steel writes:

She [Alice] might have been the incarnation of Fate itself as she glanced down at the dead child in the dust... at the slow tears of the mother herself as she acquiesced in the eternal fitness of things; for a girl more or less was not much in the mud hovel, where she and her man lived hardly, and the *Huzoors* would doubtless give rupees in exchange, for they were just.⁴⁵

While the mother is upset, Steel lessens the mother's grief by imagining her financial concerns. The mother believes that her child's life does have a price and that it is "just" that Erlton pay her. This makes Alice and Erlton have an "understanding" about how native Indian people feel and relieves the couple of responsibility for killing the child. The mother's view of the "eternal fitness of things" coincides with Alice's comment that "The thing had to be."⁴⁵ The narrative, the Indian and the English perspective are all the same when it comes to the dead toddler; her death was regrettable yet unavoidable and unremarkable.

This incident aligns the young girl's death with the infanticide in *Anna Lombard*. While Steel, through both the mother's and Alice's point of view, calls it "fate", Anna Lombard also states that killing her child "had to be" and that "it was revealed to me."⁴⁶ This signals that neither Anna and Alice take responsibility for their actions, no matter how horrible. Both women are accountable for the deaths, yet the narratives pardon them for these outcomes. While *Anna Lombard* directly enforces racial and cultural segregation within the domestic sphere, *On the Face of the Waters* is subtler in prompting an imperialist domesticity. Here the general Indian domestic setting is signified as Other, away from the Anglo-Indian settlements. The "Indian"

⁴⁵ Steel, 57.

⁴⁶ Cross, 132-133.

domestic sphere is shown to be dangerous for children without the physical and societal English structures to keep them safe.

Both within *On the Face of the Waters* and during the British Raj, there was a significant effort to physically separate the Indian and Anglo-Indian spaces. The British home acted as a personalized semi-public space and level of power, as Collingham argues:

If the bungalow was seen as a site for the display of British prestige, for its inhabitants it was ‘an extended form of personal space’, ‘a culturally determined radius’ or ‘territorial unit’ within which they were able to cultivate and protect their own culture...thus creating a domestic atmosphere which confirmed the identity of the bodies which inhabited it as British and provided ‘a pleasant contrast to the bamboo and jungle huts, the dirty native houses that forms the main environment of our lives’.⁴⁷

This concept of the Anglo-Indian home that provided both physical and symbolic segregation is transferred into Steel’s novel, providing separation between the “civilized” domestic sphere and the “primitive” native homes. As Steel adopts the Indian mother’s perspective, she notes, “for a girl more or less was not much in the mud hovel”⁴⁸ as the woman stares at her child’s corpse.

This establishes the difference between the space occupied by the memsahib mothers, who keep their child safe within the bungalow and British prestige, and the Indian mother and child, who are signified as Other by occupying a hut, without the protection that comes with Victorian domestic mores. Erlton observes that the mother was likely a camp follower,⁴⁸ which implies that the mother is a sex worker, and a possible threat to an English wife and her domestic sphere. The fear of Indian sexuality and deviance is further enforced when the mother thinks about “her man”, rather than a husband, implying that she is not married. This shows that the family does

⁴⁷ Collingham, 168.

⁴⁸ Steel, 57.

not conform to British standards of domesticity, and the child's death become deeply entwined with this lack, showing an intolerance to anything but an English domestic sphere and the children who exist in it.

Further, Alice's terrible action and cold response is not mentioned by contemporary commentators or current critics; as an 1896 review notes, "So as long as Alice Gissing, the high-voiced, cold-eyed, merry-hearted temptress, is alive, she carries the book along bravely on her own shoulders."⁴⁹ The audience does not appear to truly dislike her, despite her saying, "I suppose you will think it horrid...but it doesn't feel like killing a human being, you know. I'm sorry of course, but I would have been much sorrier if it had been a white baby. Wouldn't you?"⁵⁰ Her lack of guilt over the child she has murdered is simply not addressed, similar to the response of reviewers to Anna Lombard as a character.

"The quaintest mother's darling": Favored English Children

While nameless Eurasian and Indian children die within *On the Face of the Waters*, Anglo-Indian children are valued and protected. The audience is shown that Kate Erlton is a good woman by portraying the longing she has for her son, who is being educated in England. While Alice's mourning for her own dead child is seen as performative, Kate's private suffering over her still living son is humanizing within the novel. Yet Kate's desire to protect her son also becomes rhetorical, if not performative, as it convinces Jim Douglas not to ruin Major Erlton at the beginning of the novel. Ultimately Kate's feelings are given more legitimacy than Alice's, as Kate exclaims, "You have no children, Mrs. Gissing! If you had, you would understand the shame better— Oh! I know about the baby and the flowers— Who doesn't! But that is nothing. It

⁴⁹ "Mrs. Steel's New Novel". Edited by William Hienmann. *The Saturday Review*. November 28, 1896. (569)

⁵⁰ Steel, 59.

was so long ago, it died so young, you have forgotten.”⁵¹ Ultimately, Kate does not see Alice’s child as worth mourning, even though Kate fiercely defends her own child’s reputation, and yet the narrative agrees with Kate, as she is featured as the main character.

Alice’s “redemption” from not originally adhering to Kate’s morality is achieved when she sacrifices her life for Sonny’s safety. While Alice herself does not meet the novel’s highest moral requirements, Steel nonetheless requires the character’s partial reform in order for her to reach the end of *On the Face of the Waters*. LeeAnne Marie Richardson writes, “She dies saving the life of a small child not only to prove that she is, and always has been, a good woman.”⁵² Yet Alice can scarcely be classified as a good woman. Defying Victorian social mores, she marries twice, is pregnant with Major Erlton’s child at the time of her death, and “preferred India, where they were received into society, to England, where they would have been out of it.”⁵³ While Alice enjoyed the freedom granted to New Women, Steel shows that she does not deserve to live happily because she does not meet the moral requirements needed for motherhood. She exists out of the traditional confines of social class, gender roles, and sexuality, even though her death draws her back into a traditional feminine role.

Richardson also does not address Sonny’s position as a white child. Alice’s sacrifice does not negate her earlier racism, yet her death redeems her in the eyes of the narrative and critics. Alice reverts to the role of a self-sacrificing Angel in the House and throws off the standard of New Woman to die for a white child. This also returns her to the moral center of the house, without changing or challenging her racist attitudes or the racial bias of the audience. The narrative’s redemption of Alice seriously undercuts Steel’s sincerity about forgiveness and

⁵¹ Steel, 206.

⁵² Richardson, 135.

⁵³ Steel, 48.

Richardson's similar claim, "Appropriating the ideological strategies that characterize the New Woman novel, Steel revises the typical adventure narrative to challenge women's role in empire, reconsider racial hierarchies, and emphasize cooperation over colonization."⁵⁴ On the contrary, Alice's death reinforces these standards. Race and gender come into conflict when a British child is worth the life a British woman to defend against an Muslim Iman. Alice's "noble act" is to resist the Foreign Other, placing him as the uncontrolled enemy. While he is described as an "old man in a faded green turban"⁵⁵ the major focus is on his lance and the danger that comes with it. This emphasis does not reconsider the racial hierarchy but rather highlights a justification for it. The text emphasizes that Indian men are a threat to British women and children and will invade their homes.

The gender dynamic also reverts back in this moment. Douglas's sudden intervention and use of a western gun is what stops the attack. Alice and Kate fall into passive roles, as Alice is unable to defend herself and Kate cannot get out of the house. Her inability to leave the domestic sphere and act to save the child's life is a tacit criticism of the gender dynamic, but Steel does not give either woman the power to survive by themselves. Instead it is the masculine western action, through the symbol of the gun, that saves the child.

"Flowers from his wife's pet bed": Feminine Morality for the New Woman

Kate's entire narrative focuses on her leaving her house and stepping away from the role of memsahib. Her initial attempts at keeping an English garden in India are doomed from the start, as Alice notes that the pansies Kate tries to tend do not last long in the Indian climate. Oddly enough it is Kate, a church-going, long-suffering mother and wife, who is

⁵⁴ Richardson, 120.

⁵⁵ Steel, 205.

permitted to live at the end of the novel. Her survival is twofold. Steel ensures that Kate is forced from her status as a memsahib and Angel in the House into becoming a New Woman of the Mutiny. By living to the end of the novel, Kate Erlton rejects the traditional fate of the Angel in the House. Susan Gilbert and Sandra Gubar write, "...it is the surrender of herself — of her personal comfort, her personal desires, or both — that is the beautiful angel-woman's key act, while it is precisely this sacrifice which dooms her both to death and to heaven. For to be selfless is not only to be noble, it is to be dead."⁵⁶ While Steel's narrative generally adheres to this maxim, Alice, as a redeemed fallen woman, selflessly dies for a English child and Kate is the one who survives through abandoning her traditional home. This transforms Kate's identity both literally, as she is disguised as an Indian woman, and symbolically from Angel in the House to New Woman. However, this is not a permeant shift and she eventually returns to the confined roles of a wife, mother and Englishwoman. Kate is in an inherent position of privilege from her first introduction, and while she temporarily changes her appearance, she always remains British.

Racial bias is shown in the contrast between Zora as an Indian woman and Kate, a British one. Much as in *Anna Lombard*, the contrast between superior mental and physical traits is emphasized, as Zora is sexualized until her death and Kate is considered to have a greater intelligence. Kate is shown to meet the moral requirements and pass the unwritten test which Steel lays out for the audience as she conforms to the self-sacrifice expected from a woman. Kate is raised up from the beginning and is never truly allowed to fall.

This means that while Steel may not approve of the British Raj, she still sees the British people as superior. Further, Steel absolves her own character from the fallout of the Mutiny. By removing Douglas and Kate from the narrative, Steel removes them from the responsibility of

⁵⁶ Gilbert and Gubar, 25.

Indian oppression. This distance undercuts Richardson's assertion that "Kate's growth as an autonomous woman is enabled and measured by her increasing respect for, understanding of, and participation in Indian culture."⁵⁷ While Kate may interact with her surroundings and leave the house, she does not continue to impact Indian culture where the problems are occurring. She gains autonomy, but does not use it, remaining separated from the imperialist violence. While Alice is clearly involved in colonial violence, especially against children, Kate does not act for or against imperialism. Her departure from India is simply a way of avoiding responsibility for the atrocities from which she benefits. As *The Saturday Review* comments:

They [Kate Erlton and Jim Douglas] have twenty times as much to say and do as the others...but they remain shadowless forms. It is apparent the author has bestowed the most anxious toil on these relatively respectable people. Her artifice exhausts itself in providing... the most upright sentiments amid the compromising situations; but all to no purpose. One is forced to read about them because it is their story.

By simply placing the blame on faceless figures and dead characters like Alice Gissing, Steel avoids placing the responsibility for imperialism on British rulers and memsahibs. Ultimately while Eurasian and Indian children are killed once they threaten the British domestic sphere, Steel simply changes characters and locations to avoid the conflicts and aftermath. The reviewer for *The Critic* in 1897 writes, "The very end, as children say, is rather oddly told in an appendix, which some may overlook, and adds nothing really important to what we know already."

Like Victoria Cross's *Anna Lombard*, Steel's *On the Face of the Waters* focuses on the racial division between the British and Indian cultures. The plots of both novels allow for Indian and mixed race children to die without recourse, even as the narration marginalizes their deaths

⁵⁷ Richardson, 127.

with other concerns. By developing Kate Erlton into the moral New Woman, Steel removes her from any responsibility during or after the Great Munity as Kate and Jim Douglas retreat back to their British homeland.

“How Wild You look! Your Hair is Loose and Deckerd with Flowers too, I Declare!”
Colonialism and Sexual Liberty in Toru Dutt (1878-1879)

While *Anna Lombard* and *On the Face of the Waters* attempt to reaffirm the segregation of Indian and English cultures and replicate a hierarchy within New Women novels, these novels have an antecedent which refutes these claims. The novels of Toru Dutt, *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d’Arvers* (1878) and *Bianca or the Young Spanish Maiden* (1879), are the first Victorian novels written by a native Indian woman. Each features a young woman entering into a space that is not her own. These two works reverse imperialist claims of dominance, as the colonized also influences the colonizer. Dutt writes within a European-centric setting yet focuses on the outsider. In *Bianca*, a young woman with a Spanish father and English mother is wooed by a young Englishman after the death of her docile sister, and in *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d’Arvers*, a naive young French girl leaves a convent and enters into society, where she is oblivious to the true motives and feelings of everyone around her. Both within *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d’Arvers* and *Bianca, or the Young Spanish Maiden*, Dutt portrays the necessity of mixing cultures and experiences to find freedom within the larger world, rejecting the domestic sphere and the racial hierarchies which underlie them.

Whereas Steel returned Kate and Jim Douglas to Scotland and removed them from segregated Anglo-Indian life, Dutt places Bianca’s narrative entirely in England. However, this does not resolve the tension of being an outsider. While Bianca is characterized as Spanish in the novel’s title, the bigotry she experiences is ethnic rather than cultural. Chandani Lokugé writes, “Dutt’s description of Bianca’s physique is even closer to a self-portrait than Marguerite in *Le Journal*, right down to the mass of black hair perpetually in disorder.”⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Lokugé, xxxi.

While these readings focus on Dutt's own self, I argue that within *Bianca*, Spain represents India. Spanish/Indian representation has a larger impact on the narrative, leading to a colonized foreigner coming into British land and threatening the hierarchical order. What Anna attempted to prevent by murdering her mixed race child and Steel narratively discouraged is embodied in the form of Bianca.

From the title, Bianca is a young Spanish maiden. However as the novel progresses she is shown to have an English mother and English-Spanish father.⁵⁹ If the audience reads Spain as India, then Bianca is a Eurasian woman, whose existence is considered taboo. Bianca's role as heroine of the novel allows her to have the narrative control that is granted to Etheridge in *Anna Lombard* and used for a much different purpose. In the novel, Bianca's future mother-in-law, Lady Moore's, chief complaint against Bianca is that she is a "Spanish gypsy."⁶⁰ This is closely paralleled to the racial discrimination in *Anna Lombard* where Ethridge is intrinsically disgusted by mixed race children, In contrast, Dutt shifts the narrative, so that in *Bianca*, the audience sympathizes with Bianca because her thoughts and ideas are understood by the narrator. However, Bianca is not initially welcomed into a solely British domestic sphere. This isolates her, yet makes the reader sympathetic to her radical position due to Bianca's mixed heritage. Her representation as not purely British and not purely ethnic contrasts with *Anna Lombard's* and *On the Face of the Water's* underlying anxiety regarding mixed race children and people. When the contemporary British reader is placed within the mindset of their biggest fear, they find a thinking, feeling human being.

⁵⁹ Dutt, 102.

⁶⁰ Dutt, 105; This also has a connection to George Eliot's "The Spanish Gypsy" (1868), where another young girl is married to a young nobleman, but is later conflicted about choosing life within the culture of her birth or the culture in which she was raised, eventually choosing to separate from her husband and return to her people.

Further, Lady Moore is shown to be the sole voice against her children's united approval of Bianca, as both Colin and his sister Maggie admire her. The importance of having both male and female voices as brother and sister is that both genders are shown to accept Bianca into the British domestic sphere. As Colin Moore says, "She shall be Lady Moore in spite of my mother."⁶¹ This creates an active defiance against Lady Moore's bigoted ideology. Having both purely British voices favor Bianca strengthens her authority to enter the domestic sphere as both a wife and a sister.

Another aspect of Bianca's acceptance into the domestic sphere is her close relationship with Colin Moore's much younger brother. Similar to Kate's relationship with Sonny, the motif of the woman's bond with children shows that she is a good woman within English norms. Further, the scene where Colin first meets Bianca is charged with tension as they are pulled together through the child. When Willie demands Colin kiss him while the child is on Bianca's lap, the two can physically get closer than allowed by British social norms. This creates sexual tension between Colin and Bianca, as "Lord Moore bent over the little face, his dropping brown hair almost touched Bianca's forehead as he kissed the child. There was a keen brightness in his hazel eyes, an unusual glow on his white forehead."⁶² However, as the couple comes together, there is a child between them. This suggests a completed British trio of father, mother, and child within the domestic sphere. Although Bianca's inclusion is radical because of her ethnic background. Dutt does not emphasize Bianca's heritage, which here permits the contemporary reader to accept her into the domestic sphere, but still allows her into the household as an equal to the other women as wife and mother.

⁶¹ Dutt, 104.

⁶² Dutt, 101.

While Bianca briefly forms a domestic sphere of her own, her initial domestic sphere is shattered by feminine death. The novel opens with the funeral of Bianca's sister, Inez, and the grief process before moving forward a year and focusing on Colin and Bianca's courtship. However, Inez's death is characterized as the death of traditional womanhood. While Alice Gissing does not completely fill the role of Angel in the House, Inez, or at least her memory, does. Bianca recalls her sister as "Inez with her child-like grace, her utter dependence on him, her caressing ways...Inez was the being to whom they were both devoted; father and sister worshiped Inez."⁶³ This description effortlessly slips into Gilbert and Gubar's description of the Angel as:

...[one who] surrenders herself to heaven as the ultimate shrine of the angel-woman's mysteries. At the same time, moreover, the aesthetic cult of ladylike fragility and delicate beauty — no doubt associated with the moral cult of the angel-woman — obliged "genteel" women to "kill" themselves (as Lederer observed) into art objects: slim, pale, passive beings whose "charms" eerily recalled the snowy, porcelain immobility of the dead.⁶⁴

Inez, described as pale in contrast to Bianca's dark complexion, possesses a delicateness which Bianca does not share. Instead Dutt describes Bianca as "womanly."⁶⁵ This characterization implicitly rejects the model of Angel in the House, because while Inez is treated like a saint, she lacks the agency within the narrative. She instead is pushed towards being a memory and a reverse reflection of Bianca, who lives and is capable of living within the domestic sphere. This

⁶³ Dutt, 94.

⁶⁴ Gilbert and Gubar, 28.

⁶⁵ Dutt, 94.

means that Bianca is allowed to survive as both an educated and mixed-race woman, something that *Anna Lombard* and *On the Face of the Waters* do not portray.

Along with Lady Moore's attempt to separate her son and Bianca to keep the British household "pure", exhibiting a racist femininity, Bianca's father, Garcia, develops into a patriarchal force, refusing to allow his daughter's marriage. However, his protests do not take on racist or ethnic tones. This moves the oppression from a racial issue to a gendered one. As Bianca comes from both cultures, she faces oppression in both as a woman. Within both cultures women were supposed to be kept from the male gaze and concealed from public life. M. Garcia's own heritage supports this bigotry, as the period's misogyny extends beyond cultures. Although England frequently rallied around "their oppressed Indian sister," such sentiments were often used as a racist tactic to show Indian men as a threat or to intervene with English Courts, as in *Anna Lombard* when Luloo is widowed at thirteen and beaten by her mother-in-law, or in *On the Face of the Waters* when Alice callously observes that the mother of the Indian child Erlton and Alice have run over would have been much more upset if her son had been harmed.

Dutt's portrayal of the patriarchy is subtle, however. The vulnerability that Garcia presents at Inez's funeral makes the audience empathetic towards him, as he become sick and behaved "docilely," meaning "submissive to training; tractable, manageable."⁶⁶ When he is first shown he seems weak and under the direction of Bianca, resulting in a power reversal. Yet within Chapter IV, he takes on a patriarchal role. As Willie plays with Bianca's hair and flowers are woven through it, the symbol of Bianca as a young maiden who is ready for courtship and desire becomes apparent. Hair was used to differentiate status within the Victorian period, as a public and private part of life, as Galia Ofek notes in *Representations of Hair in Victorian*

⁶⁶ Dutt, 92; *The Oxford English Dictionary*

Literature and Culture. Hair also had sexual connotations, as only young women could wear their hair at their shoulders before having it styled and controlled when married. With *Bianca*, her hair acts as a way to signal to the reader that she is beginning to feel desire and an anticipation of maternity as she plays with Willie. Yet her father's extreme disapproval of this signals that he refuses to acknowledge Bianca's desire to be a wife. His demand that she "go and bind [her hair] up then"⁶⁷ shows his own control over her sexuality and agency. This is a shift, because while English demands of what must be maintained in the proper English sphere have been represented, there has been little to show how Indians or their culture would react to interracial marriage. This contrasts with *Anna Lombard's* scene in which an Indian woman attempts to sell Ethridge a child-wife, showing that M. Garcia does not wish his daughter to marry at all, and to remain an asexual woman. This movement from child-woman who remains in her father's home, to feeling romance and desire for Lord Colin Moore, is what makes Bianca a radical New Woman.

While Bianca takes on the image of a progressive woman, the heroine of *Le Journal's* appears as her literary negative. While Bianca drives forward her narrative, Marguerite's own desires are subdued and hidden within her Journal, leading to her death after she gives birth to a child who represents the future of colonialism. Marguerite opens her narrative on the day she returns to her family's home from the nunnery where she has been educated. Quickly becoming entranced by Count Dunois, she details their early courtship before the Count kills his brother, Gaston, from jealousy over the affections of the maid, Jeannette, whom Marguerite had recommended to their service. The Count then kills himself and Marguerite is left to marry Louis, a family friend and soldier who had formerly been stationed in French Algeria. This union

⁶⁷ Dutt, 107.

eventually leads to Marguerite's pregnancy and death after giving birth to a healthy son. Her ultimate denial of passion and return to the maternal role of Angel in the House leads to lack of agency and her eventual death, as her life is exchanged for her son's, and for the imperialist future he will promote.

Much like Ethridge in *Anna Lombard*, Marguerite is the narrator and observer of another couple's passion. However, while Ethridge discovers and accepts the relationship of Anna and Gaida, Marguerite does not have the agency or the knowledge to understand what is happening within her own narrative until it is revealed to her. Marguerite's own desires are kept separate from the main plot events between Dunois, Gaston and Jeannette. After Gaston's murder, she can only watch as a marginalized figure when Dunois's own narrative comes to a climax.

Marguerite becomes an observer of Dunois, who has gone mad after observing his own brother's passion. Marguerite recalls, "...He threw himself on to the sofa and held his head in his hands. I sat by his side and watched his movements for a minute or two. O my beloved, at that moment I realized how dearly I loved him! I took his hands in mine, his burning feverish hands."⁶⁸ While Marguerite expresses to herself how much she loves Dunois, her passion is expressed through her diary rather than in words. Instead Marguerite's narrative is what she reports, rather than what she experiences. While Bianca argues for her agency, Marguerite's narrative is about her lack of knowledge and being kept within the margins, leading narratively to her own illness and eventual death.

In both *Le Journal* and *Bianca*, the young women's ailments are a response to the men around them. When Bianca's father denies her the agency to marry whom she chooses and to sexually express herself, she immediately falls ill even after M. Garcia sees the error of his ways.

⁶⁸ Dutt, 42.

Her ability to recover is directly linked to his acceptance as she and Colin gain her father's blessing. Yet Marguerite's sudden shock at the events she did not witness lead to her illness and an eight-month gap within her journal, reflecting a lack of expression, and through that, agency.

Marguerite's agency is further violated when she discovers that Louis took a lock of her hair while she was ill. This represents a symbolic deflowering, as hair was often given as a token of love. However, Louis does not ask and takes without Marguerite's knowledge, telling her, "I stole it while you were so ill!"⁶⁹ Further, through the sexual symbolism of hair, Louis claims her sexuality while Marguerite is unable to consent, and does not mention that he has possession of it until she sees it, further marginalizing Marguerite and making her into a passive object of desire.

The possession of Marguerite's hair also falls in line with Louis's response to his own dead parents. When Marguerite asks about them, the only thing Louis produces is two locks of hair. Neither parent is truly shown to have a connection with Louis because he merely mentions that his mother "was extremely beautiful."⁷⁰ As Galia Ofek asserts,

Hair memorabilia may be seen as an objectification of human relationships, emotions and memories for it facilitates the tactile experience or commemoration of psychic—and therefore, intangible—events. It may even be said to objectify people, not only their sentiments, as it turns their body parts into material tokens.⁷¹

By possessing Marguerite's hair, Louis takes away her agency and marks her for death.

Louis himself embodies masculine imperialism. He returns home from the French colony Algeria to meet Marguerite, where there was mass oppression of native people, that the novel does not address in the narrative. Instead *Le Journal* focuses on Louis's colonization of

⁶⁹ Dutt, 60.

⁷⁰ Dutt, 63.

⁷¹ Ofek, 51.

Marguerite. It is often mentioned that while Bianca is a closer self-portrait to Dutt, Marguerite is also a reflection of the author. Chandani Lokugé points to Marguerite's black hair, and several more critics have pointed out the religious connection between Dutt as a Christian and Marguerite's faith in God. Yet in an imperial context, Marguerite takes on the role of the colonized, as Louis becomes the colonizer. This creates an unusual dynamic as Louis claims to love her, yet also is the cause of her death. Further, Marguerite accepts his marriage proposal and tells Louis, "I want him [our son] to be exactly like you."⁷² While this acceptance could be read as Marguerite's willingness to be a part of colonization, Chandani Lokugé asserts that Marguerite is an unreliable narrator who frequently does not realize the significance of the events that happen in front of her. This means that while she may seem to be an approving voice for colonization, the reader is invited to look deeper into what is surrounding her, and see what Marguerite has missed.

One of the major points which Marguerite does not realize, is that Louis is killing her. Her own fearful dream tells her that Louis is her death and yet he dismisses her fears. She tells him,

"I woke up, so sleepy and so much afraid that I did not dare open the window... And indeed there you were by the window... I went to you and leaned my head against your shoulder. You put your arm around me, but your head was turned away — I could not see your face at all: it was Death's!"⁷³

While Louis convinces Marguerite that he is not a bringer of death, it seems her own subconscious is telling her otherwise. Louis, also a colonizer, has created a future in which Marguerite cannot live. Just as Anna Lombard and Alice Gissing cannot have their own children

⁷² Dutt, 68.

⁷³ Dutt, 77.

live and maintain their place in a “pure” British domestic sphere, Louis has created a son who will promote an imperialist future at the expense of Marguerite’s life.

This imperial future is presented as innocent and even comical as Marguerite and her mother exclaim over the unborn baby’s military uniform. As her mother exclaims, “A little pair of boots! Good gracious! What is he going to do with these, the poor little creature!... And a little velvet *kepi* and these little military suits!”⁷⁴ However, it is clear this son is meant to be a soldier. Further, *kepi* was initially worn during the early colonization in Algeria, and is a militaristic symbol of oppression. While the uniform would look ridiculous on a baby, it is a foretaste of what Marguerite’s son is to become.

Both Bianca and Marguerite are two sides of the same coin, as Bianca is able to live within the British sphere and overcome the imperialist and patriarchal prejudice which actively seeks to harm her, while Marguerite is killed by the same forces, after giving birth to the promise of a violent colonial future. The difference between these women is Bianca’s education and ability as a woman to break out of the house and assert herself, while Marguerite succumbs to the pressure of her parents and dies as an Angel.

⁷⁴ Dutt, 72.

“Remember the women! Remember the poor babies!”

In contrast to the feminized domestic space, the imperial governance of India was considered men’s domain. Before India gained independence on August 14th 1947, the domestic sphere within the late nineteenth and early twentieth century remained largely hostile towards the desegregation of India’s households. Victorian standards existed within the Anglo-Indian domestic space well into the Interwar period, as E.M. Collingham notes: “Even in the 1930’s...everything carried an aura of the great days of the raj, when the stamp of Victorian upper-class society was on the British in India.”⁷⁵ Ultimately, Cross and Steel’s novels reflect the attitudes and biases held to some degree by Anglo-English households, with far-reaching social implications, both for women and for the future of British imperialism.

Of the New Woman Novels set within India, *Anna Lombard* is one of the most overt in its discrimination against native and mixed-race Indians. Anna’s affair with her Muslim servant Gaida has historically been read as a feminist action which pushed the boundaries of love and sexuality. Yet this criticism ignored the racist depiction of Gaida in favor of promoting Anna’s “agency”. Even worse, Anna’s decision to kill her Eurasian child upholds the ideology that the domestic sphere must be kept “pure” through eugenics.

This anxiety over maintaining British superiority within the domestic sphere is also reflected in works by other writers. The British had been in India first as merchants and then as imperialists since the sixteenth century. The fear of Indian customs and ethnicity entering into the earliest stages of life was expressed as

[m]edical pronouncements on the inevitability of tropical anemia [which] resonated with danger as in the nineteenth century, ‘blood’ resonated with race. The deterioration of

⁷⁵ Collingham, 153

European blood in India therefore signaled the deterioration of the British race. D.H. Cullimore predicted, apocalyptically, that if the European remained in India he underwent 'racial deterioration' and he 'or at all events, his children assume many of the mental, moral and physical traits of the half caste, or even the native himself'.⁷⁶

While these remarks are primarily focused on men and their children, women are the ones who give birth to and raise children, and typically choose the children's fathers. The fear of a foreign race and culture are expressed in literature, as in Cross's novel where Anna Lombard describes her wedding as a way to take power away from her. This later results in Anna's pregnancy, the result of which is accepted as Ethridge's child. Even so, this fear of having Eurasian children enter the home leads to the children's deaths.

This theme is also carried through in Flora Annie Steel's *On the Face of the Waters*. While Steel's narrative engages in multiple different plots and characters, native child are still killed with alarming frequency whereas English children's lives are preserved. Further, Steel provides two morally pure characters who are able to retreat back to England without committing colonial violence. This separates Anglo-Indians into categories, where those responsible for the children's death and the Great Mutiny are killed, and those who are innocent of active imperialism are able to leave, but ignores the systematic oppression of Indians in the latter half of the nineteenth century. By simply allowing both Anna and Kate to remain moral centers of their homes, both Cross and Steel create a discrepancy between their heroines' alleged morality and the colonial violence by which they abide.

This silence on imperialism was contested by Indian writers as Toru Dutt emerged to bring a combination of Indian and English cultures into the European domestic sphere. While

⁷⁶ Collingham, 177-178.

later Indian novels focused on India and Indian culture, Dutt as the first Indian novelist, still engages in the prevalent discussion of imperialism, death, and the fortunes of a New Woman character. Acting as a reflection of Dutt, her character of Bianca successfully enters into the domestic sphere as a hybrid herself, defying her sister's fate as an Angel in the House. Yet Dutt also portrays the opposite fate through her character Marguerite, who dies as a result of her imperialist husband, whom she imagines having Death's face. This shows a sinister edge to what appears as a beneficial patriarchy and imperialism. Further, Dutt marks the beginning of Indian novels, a hybrid art form, signaling the very beginning of India's shift against imperialism. By the time the twentieth century emerged the British Raj came into question:

...Linked by the telegraph and the shipping line, such agents of outward acculturation now also served as antennae for inward politicization. From Japan came word of Asian regeneration, from Europe came news of Ireland's struggle against British rule, and from white colonies of Africa and Canada came ideas of autonomy and dominion status. India was not alone. British rule was not immutable. Nor was it invincible.⁷⁷

Ultimately, the anxiety over India's status as colony and British superiority is reflected in Cross and Steel's novels, leading to narratives which to varying degrees reinforce injustice and segregation. While these New Woman novels do focus on Anglo-Indian women, children and their fathers also occupy a large proportion of the narrative. By showing a mixed-race child dying, the fear of the Other infiltrating the imperialist space is alleviated. Dutt's novels, however, act as a direct threat to the imperialist status. While Steel and Cross ultimately promote an imperialist agenda within the New Woman novel, reflecting Victorian attitudes for the time, Dutt provides an alternative perspective. All of these novels explore the hybridity of Indian and

⁷⁷ Key, 452.

English cultures, but only the Indian woman anticipates opening the future towards decolonization.

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