

Francis Bancroft's *Of Like Passions* and the Politics of Sex in Early Twentieth-Century South Africa

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I

In this essay I offer a detailed reading of a colonial South African novel in which the politics of racial domination intersect with those of sex and gender in ways which seem to me intriguing and instructive. My conclusion is that the novel's ostensible investment in a discourse of race separatism is in large measure a displacement of and disguise for its protest against the subordinate status of women in colonial society. The example of *Of Like Passions* raises the general question of the extent to which the contours of "colonial discourse" are determined in the first instance by issues of gender rather than economic or race relations.

"Francis Bancroft" was the nom-de-plume under which Frances Charlotte Slater published eighteen works of fiction between the years 1903 and 1933. *Of Like Passions* (1907) was Bancroft's third and most successful novel, reaching a ninth edition by 1911 and eliciting this tribute from a reviewer in the *Times Literary Supplement*:

It is a fine book showing sympathy and wisdom and it is not without deliberation that we say that since the story of the "South African Farm" we have read no book on South Africa so startlingly true in its representation of South African humanity.

("Of Like Passions")

Bancroft was born in 1862 on the farm Carnarvondale near Grahamstown, one of 13 children in a family which in the next generation produced an outstanding poet, Francis Carey Slater (1876-1962). She worked as a governess and schoolmistress before training as a nurse, subsequently serving with the Ambulance Department of the British South Africa Company forces in Bulawayo. During the South African War she worked in a military hospital in Francistown. While taking convalescent

leave at Carnarvondale in 1903, Bancroft turned her hand to writing fiction. The successful publication of a first novel persuaded her to try to earn a living from her pen, and she moved for a time to England. Returning to the Eastern Cape just before the outbreak of the First World War, she continued writing into her seventies; she never married, and died at Carnarvondale in 1947.¹

Writing provided Bancroft with a physically undemanding occupation yielding an income superior to that of a teacher or nurse; it also offered a medium for prosecuting the several causes to which she became so passionately devoted: Purity, Temperance, social and political equality for women, and — in later years — Pacifism and Socialism. Although her career was unusual for a woman of her day, it would have been recognized as the path followed by a “New Woman”, a woman whose choice of economic independence and useful work almost inevitably entailed the sacrifice of a traditional home and family life.

Typically of Bancroft’s “mature” work (see also *An Armed Protest, Great Possessions*), *Of Like Passions* is a novel written for a purpose, as the prefatory Author’s Note makes clear:

In the cause, and for the safe-guarding, and protection of the Daughters of Greater Britain — the white womanhood of our Colonies, this Story mirrored in its essence from events now exercising a direct bearing on life and legislation abroad, has been penned.

What the “Daughters of Greater Britain” need protection from is the Black Peril, (the threat of) rape by black men. Yet it is not black men but white men who are the primary object of Bancroft’s social criticism: the novel exposes the moral duplicity of a social order in which assaults by black men on white women are hysterically reviled while the debauchery of black women by white men is ignored or swept under the carpet. The argument of the plot is that Black Peril incidents are acts of revenge for the casual seduction of black women by white men. The novel therefore proposes that in order to protect both black and white women, legislation must be enacted to prohibit all inter-racial sexual liaisons.

At the time that Bancroft was writing, the notion that the Black Peril was complemented and even “caused” by a generally unacknowledged “White Peril” was beginning to enter public discourse. In the *Report* of the Native Affairs Commission set up in Natal in the aftermath of the “Bambata Rebellion” (1906-07), for instance, two lengthy paragraphs are devoted to the matter.

No nation can tolerate members of an alien race tampering with their women, and nothing is more calculated than the debauchment of their girls to stretch the endurance of even the most submissive people to the breaking point. The evidence teems with references to this unpalatable subject, the cumulative effect of which cannot be disavowed or ignored. It constitutes one of their principal grievances, and was emphasized by them, with an intensity of purpose and warmth of feeling, which showed the extent of the evil, and its resultant injury to themselves. Moreover, the mischief is not confined to the Natives. It is recoiling upon the race most guilty of such practices, especially in the direction of concubinage. We are distinctly losing in moral reputation, and, at the same time, producing a harvest of legal, social and political problems by an ever increasing number of bastards The Morality Act imposes severe imprisonment upon Native men going with white women, who also may be penalized, but avoids the converse, and they do think, and frequently say, in reference to this law, with telling scorn, "If your men may, with impunity, go with ours, why may we not go with yours?" (*Colony of Natal* 25, 26)

During the Black Peril panic of 1910-11, Sol Plaatje published an article in the *Pretoria News* in which he remarked that

. . . it would be interesting to hear what the superior race feels about the other phase of the social pest — the white peril.

By this I refer to the young gentlemen who follow and coax unescorted native girls on their way home from work, or from week night prayer meetings, to the employer who seduces his black servant girl when the mistress has gone to the coast with the children; it may be that a master is entitled to greater liberties than his wife; but from my humble point of view a white master is no more entitled to a criminal conversation with the black servant girl than the mistress would be to a tête-à-tête with the native boy.

(Plaatje, "Miscegenation" 83)

Later in the same year, no less than three separate items on a single page of an issue of *The Christian Express* drew attention to the hypocrisy of white outrage; these are extracts from two of them:

Looming behind this unhappy case is the Black Peril — a grave and loathsome peril indeed, to be dealt with effectively yet justly — every case on its merits. We may not forget, however, that from the side of the native there is a White Peril. It is common knowledge that in these parts native women are not immune from the attentions of men whose skins may be white, but who are white men in no

other sense. The shame of this, as of the kindred vice, the willing victims of which are white women, we should feel as keenly as the dread danger of this other peril. ("The Lewis Case")

The "black peril" would not be half as great as it is — probably, it would not exist at all — if there was not a white peril. The native girls have ten times more reason to dread the majority of unmarried white men, than the white women have to fear the natives.

(Sandstrom)

The White Peril sub-discourse achieved its fullest articulation in Plaatje's pamphlet of 1921, "The Mote and the Beam: An Epic on Sex-Relationship 'Twiixt White and Black in British South Africa." Here Plaatje added to his moralizing a historical dimension consonant with the revisionist project of the novel he had just written, *Mhudi*: "before the European invasion there were no prostitutes in South Africa . . . no mothers of unwanted babies, no orphanages because there were no stray children. The Natives had little or no insanity; they had neither cancer nor syphilis and no venereal disease because they had no prostitutes" ("The Mote and the Beam" 85, 88). Yet although Plaatje spoke with the powerful oppositional voice of a black South African, it was still a male voice, sharing with the dominant colonial discourse a full measure of patriarchal prejudice: "fancy salaries, free education and preferential treatment have not succeeded in keeping white people's fingers off other people's goods" (meaning black women) (85). In *Of Like Passions*, however, what we hear is the voice of a white woman keenly aware of the discrimination to which her sex is subjected within a social and political order which simultaneously confers upon her the very real privilege of an unquestioned racial superiority. As we might expect, its speech is a complex blend of "complicity and resistance,"² riddled with contradiction and paradox.

II

The novel is set in a "Dutch" village, possibly in the Orange Free State, prior to the Anglo-Boer War. It opens with the death in childbirth of an African woman, Noyale (also called Lassie), attended by the physician Dr Devine. The twin daughters born to her have been fathered by Devine's friend Bryan Trevanor. Devine and Trevanor are led to believe that the babies, too, have died; in fact they have been spirited away to "the mountain homeland" by Araska, a former mistress of Devine. In a dream on her deathbed, it is revealed to Noyale that Fate has decreed a destiny of suffering for her daughters, in the service of a higher purpose.

The scene moves forward twenty-five years. Dr Devine's daughter, Mary, has developed a distaste for men since being told by a friend — the aloof, mysterious Irene Mabile — of the sexual adventures of the young white men of the village with women of the "location." Mary's increasing indifference towards her suitor, Trevanor's son Bryan junior, induces the hitherto "pure" young man to join a party of revellers bound for a night's entertainment in the location. Among the party is young Trevanor's sister's fiancé Philip Rooyen, who makes off with an African girl, Nichinette. The girl's sister, Noyale (they are later revealed to be the twin daughters of Bryan Trevanor senior), is comforted and reassured by Bryan. Later that same night, Nichinette's husband, Andries — Devine's half-caste son by Araska — attacks another white man, believing him to have been his wife's seducer. Andries is convicted of assault, lashed and sent to prison for six months, while Rooyen continues his liaison with Nichinette.

Noyale has been devoted to Trevanor since his kindness on the night of her sister's abduction, and has taken to following him about. Mary Devine glimpses the two of them together one evening, misconstrues the scene, and will have nothing more to do with Trevanor. In cynical despair, he yields to Noyale's charms, thereby unwittingly becoming the lover of his own half-sister. Rooyen marries Kathleen Trevanor and breaks off his relationship with Nichinette.

Fresh out of prison, Andries sees Noyale with Trevanor one night and mistakes her for her twin sister, his wife Nichinette. In a jealous, drunken frenzy he bludgeons Nichinette to death. After being arrested for this murder, he escapes with the aid of Araska and rapes and murders Kathleen Rooyen (née Trevanor) in a further act of revenge for the seduction of his wife. He is eventually recaptured in a routine "pass raid," tried and sentenced to death. Meanwhile Devine and Trevanor senior have discovered the truth of their relationship to the half-castes Andries, Noyale and Nichinette, and are stricken with guilt and horror. Trevanor is paralyzed by a stroke on hearing of his daughter's murder.

The aged missionary Jeremiah Hall visits Andries in gaol the night before his public execution and fights for his soul; Noyale commits suicide, Araska dies. In a long sermon the following Sunday, Hall interprets these tragic events as the working out of divine purpose and natural justice, castigating the authorities for their failure to make laws forbidding all mingling of white and black blood. Rooyen leaves Africa for good, Trevanor junior and Mary Devine are reconciled and marry, and they and their parents move to Johannesburg. In a dream, Irene Mabile is summoned by the spirit of

Kathleen Trevanor to campaign for legislative intervention to avert a repetition of this unhappy chain of events.

The narrative's twisted skeins of ironic coincidence are made meaningful by its repeated insistence that the pattern so revealed is not authorially imposed but inherent in a reality which it is concerned merely to record. But because, as an effect of its own verisimilitude, the narrative is obliged to acknowledge that the sequence of events it portrays offends against ordinary criteria of plausibility, it must resort to the constant invocation of an invisible cosmic authority for its representations. This authority is labelled "Fate" (138, 175, 249, 251, 268), "Fate the Unseen" (146, 170, 275, 277, 282), "Destiny" (175), "Providence" (179), a controlling "Higher Power" (194), an "unseen Potentiality" (228), "the Unseen Agency men call Coincidence, or Fate, or Destiny" (261). Relatively early in the story, this "agency" is characterized as the true author of the events to unfold:

Peer as we may into the dark womb of Futurity, our eyes are holden from piercing its darkness, from reading the handwriting which God Almighty has written on its walls. (118)

— an image which recurs much later, when a birth register is described as "the accusing Book, skin-covered, and hoary with age and constant use, but written as with the finger of the Recording Angel" (311). By then it has become quite clear that "fate the unseen" is nothing less than the will of God:

"Look up, Lucas Devine" — a stern, insistent voice breathed in his ear — "See your Maker in the Heavens above you; in the Earth around you! Acknowledge His Hand in this! Unbeliever! have you forgotten Retribution? Faithless one! dost not remember, I will repay?"

This was Retribution, Nemesis, Fate! call it what he may
(259-60)

Who after this would defy the workings of that strong Unseen Agency, those "Mills of God", which, we are told, grind slowly, but with exactness? (261)

In his fiery sermon, the Revd Hall — whose credentials are unimpeachable, "the very essence of the divine in man; the type that redeems humanity" (271) — adds another (surely redundant) element to this ineffable Identity: "the unalterable laws of Nature" (300), "Nature, or nature's God" (303):

Hear the Message! Own in this dire calamity a Higher Power whose dealings ye cannot know! Own the unfailing laws of Nature . . . the careless action . . . leading — step-by-step, link-by-link — to

Nature's solidly-wrought unbreakable chain; to the wide-reaching
Consequence

(303-4; cf. Bancroft, *Great Possessions* 151)

God Himself, the reader is given to understand, elaborating His aims through His own discourse of Nature, is the author of the tragic events portrayed in the novel. (That "fate the unseen" should thus be identified with the Christian God is somewhat surprising in view of the pagan mythological apparatus which sets the plot in motion, the "three spirits" of Lassie's dream [28-30].) The human characters in the novel are therefore deprived of real agency, reduced to the role of marionettes manipulated according to the directions of a divine script, and Bancroft is presumably under no obligation to invest their actions with conventional psychological motivation or moral significance. But of course she does, and the collision of these opposing logics is most conspicuous in the portrayal of the half-caste characters.

The "careless action" which forges the first link in "Nature's solidly-wrought unbreakable chain" is the sexual congress of white men with black women (Devine with Araska and Trevanor with Noyale/Lassie). The wrongness of this behaviour is ostensibly demonstrated by the fact that Trevanor's half-caste daughter Noyale subsequently lures Trevanor's white son into an incestuous relationship, while Devine's half-caste son Andries rapes and murders Trevanor's white daughter. The confusion in the narrative becomes apparent when the reader pauses to analyse the logic which purportedly holds these events in causal connection. The novel is obliged to insist that "by the mysterious threads of the Unseen Agency men call Coincidence, or Fate, or Destiny, they had been brought together" (261), precisely because there is no rational or visible connection between them whatsoever, or at least no connection in terms of the discourse of race — Nature as biological destiny — which is consistently privileged by the text.

The young Trevanor's relationship with his half-sister is the result of ignorance and, apart from the fact that he is attracted to her because of her European looks (161), has nothing directly to do with the fact that she is of mixed racial parentage. Blame for the unfortunate liaison is effectively ascribed to Mary Devine, whose obdurate rejection of Trevanor's attentions has induced him to find an alternative outlet for his romantic passion. By having Trevanor senior believe that Noyale and Nichinette had died soon after they were born, and by stressing his otherwise exemplary character (14), Bancroft virtually exculpates him too. In fact the logic of the plot proposes that, on the contrary, what makes "miscegenation" wrong is a social attitude which refuses to regard mixed-race coupling with sufficient moral seriousness and denies a legitimate social position to its half-caste

progeny. Thus Noyale/Lassie is “the girl whom [Trevanor senior] had *callously* drawn within his influence, whom he had *carelessly* taken away from her daily drudgery” (14, emphasis added). Trevanor’s solicitude for Lassie is in fact unusual; as Dr Devine reflects, “[m]ost fellows roughing it out here wouldn’t think a brass button of this — careless devils where human life is concerned” (22). Twenty-five years later, the ranks of these “careless devils” have been swelled by a “rougher element who had overflowed the country of late” (55), a “cosmopolitan population” (46) of adventurers whose sexual exploits in the “location” are regarded by them as a mere “sport” or “spree” (54).³ It is worth pointing out that the moral irresponsibility of these men’s casual seduction of their social inferiors would be no less blameworthy were the women white: the power relation which lies behind the moral laxity that Bancroft is protesting is in the first instance a function of gender difference, not racial difference. Moreover, it would appear that her attitude is informed at least in part by a desire to ensure the containment of sexuality and procreation within the sole sphere in which (white bourgeois) women held both real and symbolic power: the home, the domestic space of marital and maternal relations.

The circumstances which permit the incest between the younger Trevanor and Noyale have nothing to do with her mixed blood as such, but with the way in which people of mixed blood are treated by the white community — more especially, perhaps (although it does not apply in this particular instance), with the way in which white men fail to assume paternal responsibility for their children by black women. Denied the formal identity and human order of a legitimate lineage, the “nameless progeny [of such unions] swarmed over the length of the land” (260).⁴ With blood-relations among individuals thus unknown or unacknowledged, what prevails is a nightmarish promiscuity in which human beings couple randomly like animals, untrammelled by the customary sanctions against in-breeding. The degree of exaggeration is absurd, even pathological; but there is no doubt that for colonials like Bancroft inter-racial breeding indeed represented what H el ene Cixous has called “the hole in the social cell”: a more than symbolic fissure which threatened to dissolve the discrete integrity of identity, permitting simultaneously a random leaking out of white ethnic capital and a secret seeping in of black contagion.

However, it seems that the incest motif is introduced by Bancroft for another reason also.⁵ One might accuse her of collocating the act of “miscegenation” (which infringes a law of endogamy) with the act of incest (which infringes a law of exogamy) in order sensationally to enhance the transgressive stature of the former. Indubitably, something of the horror

purportedly evoked by the incest seems metonymically to extend to, or derive from, the fact that Noyale has “black blood,” that Trevanor is repeating the error of his father. The narrative alludes to “the revolting hidden meaning of Bryan’s unnatural revolt against the ties of Blood, and of Kin — against the laws of God, and of nature” (261). The implication, though unintended, is unmistakable: although incest supposedly comprises “the revolting hidden meaning” of Bryan’s conduct, this conduct is already “unnatural,” in contempt of racial and therefore divine and natural law. It is perhaps possible to argue that Bancroft is cleverly exploiting the association of “miscegenation” with what is probably the most universal human taboo in order to convey to the metropolitan reader the sheer power of the social sanction against race-mixing as experienced by the colonial. However, it is more likely that this attempt to invest “miscegenation” with a super-added abjection (demonstrably spurious because simply not supported by the evidence of the text) is not wholly deliberate. The author seems overcome by a sense of disgust which, defying rational explanation or representation, is accorded the post-hoc rationalization of the incest taboo. It is a disgust most vividly dramatized in the experience of Mary Devine:

“something stronger — greater than myself — forced me here to drive her away — to save Bryan from — I hardly know what. But there it was, before my heart, before my eyes — a dark hideous shadow — a destruction of body and soul — a frightful unnatural crime —.” (200-01)

All else being equal, Noyale seems a good catch for Trevanor: she strikes him as “an inherently clean-minded savage” (82), with a “low musical voice” (82), a “graceful careless figure” (107), and a supple body bedecked with clothing “arranged with that wonderfully correct artistic touch, that is so marked among their people” (143). In all her dealings with Trevanor she is a model of modesty, propriety and devotion, and in the confrontation with Mary Devine, Mary is obliged to acknowledge “a higher soul, a loftier nature in [Noyale’s] solemn eyes. She felt small before her ignorant rival” (197). In fact almost everything we learn about both Noyale and Nichinette contradicts the epithet “savage” which the narrator insists on attaching to them. However, their difference from white women is signalled in two (largely unrelated) ways. The first is in terms of the way they speak. In so much colonial fiction, blacks are cruelly patronized by being made to express themselves — and signal their inferiority, make fools of themselves — in a pidgin version of the conqueror’s language. But in *Of Like Passions*, the black characters are accorded the dignity of their own language, which “in translation” acquires an elevated, archaic and poetic register. Such a

rendition of African speech — which we might call “Haggardese” after the author with whose romances it is chiefly associated — is of course ideologically ambivalent. Having its origin, as Jeremy Cronin has remarked, in the Enlightenment myth of the Noble Savage, it allows its speakers to be presented as “possessors of a full speech whose seamless plenitude contrasts with the stuttering hesitancy of the Whites . . . a primal and transparent speech in which word and meaning are indivisible” (Cronin 27). The juxtaposition of such language with the “normal” prosaic utterance of the whites serves to emphasize the difference, the otherness of its speakers. In the same way in which the text insists that the proper home of blacks lies in “the mountain Homeland” and not in the Dutch village (e.g. 17, 246), so does the manner in which they speak suggest that Africans inhabit a different world of meaning from whites, a world seemingly remote in time and place. Exchanges between African and white characters are curiously discontinuous, as though conducted in mutually unintelligible tongues; a feature of the text is the long narrative monologue, delivered by a black character and represented by linear division on the page as a poem, which intervenes in the unfolding of the story to impart an important revelation. These speeches or songs are inward-turning, seeking no direct engagement with an interlocutor and uttered in an apparent state of trance. Most of them are given to Araska (254, 267, 297), but here Noyale has picked up the word “Lassie” in the white men’s conversation:

“Lassie” — She had caught the name, and now idly improvised her song:

“Lassie, called by her people Noyale;
Who dwelt in the hut outside of this village
Five-and-twenty years ago;
The beloved of the blue-eyed White Man;
The mother of his twin daughters;
Who died in giving them birth.

. . .
Here dwell I in the house of my lord;
I am his slave: The Child likewise is his slave:
O White Men! Noyale’s tale is told.”

She closed her lips, and instantly sank once again into dreamy immobility. (205)

Not all indicators of difference work to the disadvantage of the differentiated, and my view is that the conventions for the representation of speech adopted by Bancroft in this novel evoke an indigenous culture which, although strange and mysterious, is whole and rich and civilized,

rather than rudimentary or absent. (To commend thus a typically colonial romanticizing strategy is no doubt to place oneself at odds with the perspective of the dominant liberal tradition in South African literary historiography, whose oppositional political stance has consistently mandated the denial or domestication of difference. But times change: a similar position has recently been adopted in an analogous context by Michael Green, who remarks — apropos of the “magical” or “tribal” elements in Daphne Rooke’s mythopoeic novel *Wizards’ Country* — “Perhaps difference needed to be more strongly guarded in a different way, even as it was politically proclaimed in every corner of South African life” [Green 134].)

The other way in which the half-caste sisters Noyale and Nichenette are distinguished from their white counterparts is by their sexual complaisance. What they seem to share with full-blooded black women is their sexual availability, but this has little to do with the stereotype of the lascivious negress. While Noyale’s full red lips and “deep inscrutable eyes . . . blackly blue, fathomless and slumberous, yet full of hidden fires in their untamed depths” (162) hint at the sensuality bequeathed by her black blood, there is not the slightest trace of salaciousness in the way in which she and Nichenette comport themselves. The only evidence of sexual licentiousness is indirect, to be inferred from racial generalizations by the narrator and white characters. For instance, white sexual adventurers in “the location” whet their appetites by watching the natives dance, a “massed circle of black nudity and frank unblushing barbarism . . . hot palpitating bodies” (81). Or two white characters display their knowledge of the native:

“But these Natives have not got susceptibilities and feelings like other races. Why, I have heard the very word *love* does not occur in their lingo.”

“That is perfectly correct. There is no such word known to them. The only interpretation of our word *love* is in their language defined as sexuality — animalism. Marriage is barter — pure and simple — with them.” (133-34)

A considerably more salient aspect of the twins’ sexuality is their seemingly absolute submissiveness to men, as witnessed by Noyale’s description of herself as Trevanor’s “slave.” This is a racial characteristic to the extent that it is seen as archaic, atavistic: when Andries succumbs to the raging fury in which he murders Nichenette, he reverts to primitive type,

the aboriginal brute-beast man pure and simple, who for untold Ages had held sway over the lower creation of brute-beasts, one phase of that lower scale of creation being *woman*. Man, to him, as to his

pre-historic ancestors, was lord of woman. She was his property, his possession; bought, possessed; punished if disobedient, and invariably slain if unfaithful. In his madness he saw the reddened axe of his people for generations past. "Would'st thou be less than a man?" they gibed at him. "Would'st let thy heifer sport with another? Thine! Thine?" (152)

Clearly the narrator disapproves of the lowly status of women in African society, though perhaps not primarily for reasons of altruistic fellow-feeling: the fact is that the docility of black women renders them easy pickings for the sexually predatory white male. The narrator's presentation of black women is thus not unmixed with an element of sexual jealousy, especially to the extent that the women are "orientalized" as denizens of the seraglio of Victorian fantasy (e.g. "their dark slumbrous eyes — wise as serpents" [143]; "deep inscrutable eyes" [162]): what is presented as submissiveness in the text may well be a displacement for an imagined female sexuality, passive but luxuriant, from which the prevailing discourse on sex shrank in fear. Clues to its nature are to be found in scattered references, free of gender qualification, to the natives' "free, unconventional habits . . . their frankly sensual lives" (139), "their frankly unconventional customs" (272, see also 80).

The second tragic event in the novel adduced as evidence of the wrongness of "miscegenation" is the rape and murder of Kathleen Rooyen, née Trevanor, by Dr Devine's half-caste son Andries. To the extent that the novel, like Anna Howarth's *Jan, an Afrikander* (1897), offers an extended narrative definition of the half-caste, Andries — rather than Noyale and Nichinette — is the focus of Bancroft's attention. Andries is also the primary vehicle for the novel's explanation of Black Peril crime in general, and these two interrelated elements will be considered in tandem.

The tragedy to unfold is adumbrated in an exchange between Dr Devine and Trevanor the elder in the first section of the novel. A grim irony attaches to their conversation because both men at this point have not only cohabited with black women but also, unwittingly, sired half-caste children. (Devine's curious remark that the matter of sex between the races is "the business of the Nation not of the individual. Individual cases don't count," presumably registers an authorial attempt to mitigate the irony and thus shore up Devine's reliability as a social commentator.)

"Here are we condemned to live our lives out under unusual conditions. There are niggers in their thousands. The country is now getting more thickly peopled with Europeans through the influx of a new cosmopolitan population of whites — principally men,

prospecting, mining, trading; mostly men in fact. The result of this unequal condition of things we see exemplified daily, that is the system of bargaining between white man and native; *both*, mind you, both, keen on the exchange . . . this sort of legalized bargaining — one might almost call it — will hit back on us in the shape of a scourge twenty or thirty years hence. The Governments don't care, and after all it is their business, the business of the Nation not of the individual. Individual cases don't count." (37-38)

"Why are there not laws — why have there never been laws, to prevent and check this traffic in undesirable intercourse between the races? — laws so essential for the future of both races . . . Only legislation can save the future of the nation. Wise legislation can guard against mixed-breeding and dop-selling, both fatal to the Kaffir . . . I tell you there will arise another evil from this neglect of our legislators, a far graver matter. The Native is both imitative and revengeful. Twenty years hence there will be a fine harvest of retaliatory acts hitting back, I am afraid, on the Europeans. There will be more families in the country then — more women and children."

Trevanor started and stared at his friend. "You don't mean that!"
(38-39, 39-40)

And "that," precisely, is the tragedy that is destined to overtake Trevanor. Twenty-five years later, Dr Devine has not ceased to wax sententious, here to some young men planning a "spree" in the "location":

"Take my advice and keep away . . . Because . . . there is no sense in needlessly irritating the natives, and exposing ourselves to their vengeance. They are *outwardly* submissive to a certain extent, yet capable if once roused beyond that limit, of the deepest, most savage passions. Passions lead to acts of vengeance, murder, bloody death . . . They may not harm you or any of us men . . . but it is our duty as men to remember our womenkind — our wives, our sisters, our daughters." (89, 90)

It is of course Devine's own son, Andries, who is "fated" to fulfil this dire prediction.

Andries's crime is remarkably "overdetermined" in the novel. Apart from "fate the unseen," three other interrelated or mutually reinforcing causative factors are adduced. The first and most important is the revenge motif. This is most clearly insisted upon in a lengthy section in which Bancroft scornfully indicates how misguided the typical public response to the Black Peril crime has been:

The ferocity and brutality of the Natives were alarmingly depicted [in the Press]. There was a general petition for sterner measures, stricter laws, and more stringent prohibitive regulations to be introduced by Parliament in their dealings with the Black Races, who remained savages at heart, despite all attempts to civilize them, barbarous, and a danger to Europeans. The murderer in question was a type of his race — idle, drunken, savage, irresponsible, who, for want of something to do, had clubbed his wife to death. This was the root of the matter, the very elemental essence of the shocking tragedy — the idle roving lives led by the native population. The want of a Vagrant Act to restrain their movements was insisted on. The need to enforce habits of industry upon them was a serious need. The natives as a people should be compelled by law to labour.

(235-36)

The opportunistic linking of the Black Peril issue with the “Labour Problem” is further satirized (237), and is in any case effectively undermined within the text by the fact that what has brought Andries and Nichinette to the village in the first place is his job with the Railways (82). On the contrary, the narrator insists,

[t]he real cause of the first murder — jealousy, and of the second — revenge, were either totally unknown to the Press, or else carefully suppressed and entirely ignored by it. But the roaming, thieving, intractable disposition of the kaffir — as was perhaps natural — was insisted on with marked repetition; and the insult, the affront, the menace to every white inhabitant of South Africa were vehemently dwelt upon. (236)

But these two rather ordinary human motives — jealousy and revenge — are typically qualified in the way in which they here present themselves to the mind of Dr Devine:

Oh these blanketed barbarians! these blanketed barbarians! with their deep savage resentments, never appeased except by a swift and sure revenge! — When would men learn to understand their natures, and cease trifling with them and theirs as with a match to gunpowder? (231)

In other words, it is the impact of strong emotion on the “savage” natures of such as Andries that results in crimes of violence: it is not only the motive of revenge but also Andries’s racially-determined propensities that are responsible. On the question of whether these propensities are the result of his “black” blood, or because his blood is “mixed,” the text equivocates. The attack on Kathleen Rooyen is at one point explained in terms of a notion of

phylogenetic regression to which half-breeds were held to be vulnerable, and which even Olive Schreiner was prepared to take seriously (“the crossing of different varieties which each breed perfectly true . . . produce[s] . . . unstable creatures with a tendency to revert to the primitive original type of the race” [Schreiner 133]):

Inherited instincts, inherited tradition, handed down through countless generations of primeval animal heathen, awoke within this poor child of Nature, with overwhelming force, turning him to the aboriginal brute-beast man pure and simple, who for untold Ages had held sway over the lower creation of brute-beasts, one phase of that lower scale of creation being *woman*. (152)⁶

However, the narrative repeatedly emphasizes that not even psychological motive and racial proclivity are sufficient to set off the chain of events which culminates in the murder of Kathleen Trevanor. The factor that converts Andries's jealousy into the murderous rage in which he murders Nichinette is alcohol, a fact agreed by virtually every character in the novel, including Andries himself:

“A savage lot at heart when roused”, he [Devine] remarked.

“But what roused him, father dear?” . . .

“Brandy . . . and *bad* brandy, such as that infernal stuff they sell to inflame the blood of these poor blanketed barbarians . . . Will the legislation of this, a so-called Christian Country, never make laws to prevent this disgraceful traffic? — this physical and mental and spiritual destruction, this demoralization and death and everlasting perdition to the native in South Africa?” (155)

“I have heard . . . that these canteen-keepers — and they are like flies all over the country — steep rolls of tobacco and other fiery ingredients, in kegs of vile stuff, horribly bad brandy, to sell to the natives. No wonder the poor wretches get maddened whenever they get drink.” (Irene Mabile, 155)

“I . . . have drunk and drunk of the fiery brandy to make this man mad — that in my madness and heat I might have fierceness to slay her . . . and I drank of the Brandy, that I might have the fierceness to slay her . . . had drunk of the white man's brandy that taketh away the senses, and maketh the heart as the heart of a fierce, bloodthirsty beast . . .”

(Andries, 171, 283, 284) (See also 145, 165, 170)

The context makes it quite clear that in the last cited passage, Andries is referring to his attack on Kathleen Trevanor: brandy therefore plays a role in both murders. Moreover, it is not just brandy, but *bad* brandy sold by unscrupulous traders who “take the kaffir’s money, and cheat him, just because he is ignorant and untaught” (156); a wicked trade conducted “by the permission of the paternal government, to aid in the completer demoralization, and more expeditious extermination of the black man” (149). As himself a victim, Andries is in a measure exculpated: the blame shifts the more decisively onto the shoulders of white men, who not only provoke the black man by abusing his women but profit by trade in a substance which is capable of converting the cuckold’s anger into savage violence.

The ironic reversal, or at least mutual subversion, of the roles of violator and victim is adumbrated by the reaction of the whites to the murder of Kathleen Trevanor: Andries is made to face “the oaths and hoarse exclamations of horror and vengeance from the rough, madly-incensed [Dutch]men” (224) (to these same whites, news of the murder of Nichinette brought “no intense feelings of horror or shock — it was merely a Native” [155]); and Rooyen responds “O Lord, what cruel devils they are . . . Oh, I should like to strangle that brute — to kill him like a mad dog!” (175). The reversal is consummated on the day of Andries’s execution, when he is led out to face the crowd of colonists,

vengeful, passion-pale, lusting for the blood of the murderer of their country-woman. There before them, towering in a huge isolation above the right bank of the river, stood the black, frowning, fearsome Monster, the murderous Gibbet, with its primitive swinging noose. Ghastly and sickening it rose and fell in the pale rays of the rising Sun.

A howl of execration — a long, swelling, wolfish cry — a great roar of curses, threats, hisses and hootings arose as those nearest the prison caught the first glimpse of the condemned man being led forth to his doom. (292)

As Andries, that “child of Nature” (243), is led forth before this inhuman mob, he metamorphoses into a latter-day Christ, the very paradigm of suffering humanity:

There, between a body of armed police — sunken, inert, crouching — with bared head and stalwart limb, now palsied and trembling — the wretched Son of Humanity moved forward on his last earthly journey He was goaded along at every stumbling step, and was roughly pushed head-foremost into the van hearing as in a dream

those wild, vengeful cries, those wolfish howls, and frenzied screams, as the crowd rushed together . . . They longed to rend the palsied criminal limb from limb — to tear his living body in pieces.

(293)

The liberal paternalism which seems here to triumph over the less benign racialism in evidence elsewhere in the novel informs also the conclusion to the Revd Hall's sermon, which provides the most direct statement of Bancroft's message in the entire text:

"Think of wild blanketed barbarians — Nature's untamed children! Think of primitive instincts, primitive passions, handed down through countless generations of rude primitive man — instincts which cry only 'an eye for an eye; a tooth for a tooth'! Think of retaliation; revenge; primitive savage retributive justice!

My brethren, think of these evil passions, warring within tameless breasts, and savage hearts, increased and inflamed by the poison of drink, made fiercer and more ungovernable by the brandy, which he has bought, and with which he has besotted and brutalized himself . . . Nay, my brethren, heathen the people are, and as children, knowing not that which is for their welfare, and as children shall ye guard them, making wise provision, wise laws, protecting them from the evils that ye yourselves have brought among them . . . say not, 'It was because the man was a worthless vagabond; or because he with his people should be forced to work; or because he was a drunkard, and a savage; untameable and lawless' — Nay People say not so . . . labour for the amendment of your laws, and cause the agitation to spread to all parts throughout the Land, until by every Assembly of law-makers in the vast Southern Continent, shall be framed a code of Laws, my Brothers, wise, all-embracing, restraining, prohibitive — protective alike to the diverse Races of our Land!" (302-03)

This little exercise in self-deconstruction encapsulates the tortuous, compromised logic of the narrative as a whole. The epithets "savage" and "tameless" are simply conventional markers for human difference, difference which is social or cultural (e.g. the "heathen" [Old Testament!] idea of retributive justice) rather than racial, because the behaviour of individual blacks is not to be accounted to their race, that is, to any inherent or biological difference. Blacks are only a threat to whites to the extent to which they have been contaminated by the evils of "civilization," corrupted by the bad moral example and the even worse brandy purveyed by white men. They are as harmless as children who "[know] not that which is for their welfare" and require "protecting from the evils that [whites] have

brought among them.” And yet the text has earlier insisted that, until the growth of the towns and the influx of undesirable immigrants — the sort of men whom Dr Devine describes as “those who are indeed of my colour, but never of my race” (265) — the African had “proved himself to be faithful to a trust reposed in him, honourable to his own limited idea of honour, and harmless where white women and children were concerned” (238; see also Bancroft, “White Women” 263). This is hardly the description of an unruly child who requires firm laws to show him right from wrong; on the contrary, the erring children in need of protection from themselves are white men. Thus the final effect of *Of Like Passions*, a novel written with the express purpose of raising consciousness about the need to keep the races apart, is to unsettle the very notion of a fixed and hierarchic difference between those races. This subversive ambivalence is conveniently focused in the novel’s title.

According to a contemporary reviewer, the significance of the title was to be found in the fact that “Mr Bancroft contends that the elemental passions — revenge and jealousy, lust, love — are as strong in the black race as the white” (“A New Novel”). And indeed, as I have argued, the novel delivers a strong plea for the recognition of the full, (in some ways different but) equivalent humanity of black people, for their right to be accorded the same social dignity and legal rights as whites (see, i.a., *Of Like Passions* 23, 165, 231, 241). In the comparison implicit in this reading of the phrase “of like passions,” the primary term is “white” and the secondary, “black.” As Dr Devine’s formulation of a sentiment reiterated in the novel has it: “the native is both imitative and revengeful” (39) — a phrase repeated word-for-word in later essays by Bancroft on the subject of racial purity (Bancroft, “White Women” 263; “Race Purity” 838). In the latter piece, the author actually adduces her own novel as supporting evidence for her thesis: “For the native, as we have shown in a former work on this subject — ‘Of Like Passions.’ 9th Edition. (Gardner and Co.; 1s) — is both imitative and revengeful . . . He will follow where we lead.”

Yet the source from which the novel’s title is drawn in fact reverses this priority. The phrase is lifted from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, Acts 14 v.15: “We also are men of like passions with yourselves.”⁷ The setting is Lystra, where the Apostles are performing miracles in the Holy Spirit. The astounded local inhabitants have assumed that these followers of Jesus are gods descended from the heavens, and have taken to calling Barnabas, Jupiter, and Paul, Mercury. St Paul speaks to them to reassure them that he and his companions are mere mortals like themselves. White men, the title of Bancroft’s novel suggests, are not gods, although they have

arrogated to themselves the arbitrary power of gods and, as bearers of light to the Dark Continent, they may claim to come in God's name.⁸ In essence, they are no different from black men, all too human, vulnerable to the same passions, frailties and temptations. In the comparison implicit in the novel's title, then, "black" becomes the primary term, and "white" the secondary or derivative term — a reversal which seriously compromises the whole discourse of white trusteeship in which the novel is grounded. It is the same reversal which informs the disturbing core of Marlow's experience in *Heart of Darkness* and on which that novel's strategy of subversion is based: Marlow's recognition in the "savages" of a more truthful image of his culture than the lies which it tells itself, and the consequent collapse of any meaningful distinction between "civilization" and "savagery."

In the preceding paragraph, I deliberately restricted racial reference to the male gender because men would appear to be the subject of Bancroft's agenda: in the presented world of the novel, it is not women who are accused of abusing their racial privilege for selfish sexual gratification, nor indeed is it women who commit rape and murder. However, in the remainder of this essay I wish to argue that there is another dimension to the novel which is concerned with the politics not of race but of gender, and which suggests another sense for the novel's title: a sense in which the notion is explored that women are human beings "of like passions" to men.

III

In the colonial writings of men, white women feature largely as symbols or signifiers (rather than as producers of signification), as "potent objects of purity and symbols of home" (Mills 58). The real challenge which confronted the late nineteenth-century movement for the liberation of women was, arguably, to disturb the discursive relationship which relegated their gender to the role of represented object, the soft currency of a patriarchal symbolic enterprise. The recurrent images in which women were imprisoned arose from inter-related habits of perception which were at the time distinguished as the "domestic" theory, the "intention-of-nature" theory, and the "pedestal" theory of feminine identity (Fernando 2). This cluster of entrenched perspectives on the proper place and role of women is contested or at least scrutinized in *Of Like Passions*, but in ways marked by ambivalence and indeterminacy and shaped by the colonial context.

According to the "pedestal or pinnacle theory," as the *Women's Suffrage Journal* called it, woman was "a minor goddess to be worshipped from afar" (Fernando 3). The veneration of women — which presumably had much to do with sexual mystery and the survival of the tradition of courtly love —

was rationalized by women's representation, in a world beset by religious doubt, as a kind of spiritual absolute, as the morally superior guardians of symbolic value. Lorna Duffin writes that

[a]s an image, the moral and spiritual influence of women provided a counterbalance to the ruthless, competitive economic world of men. The woman appeared as the good conscience of Victorian society. The burden of moral responsibility in a society where religion and sanctity seemed in decline, was conveniently shifted from the shoulders of men. (70)

The consequence of such representation, which assumed also the validity of the "domestic" and "intention-of-nature" theories, was another manifestation of the notorious double standard: men were different from women, they faced different sorts of difficulties and temptations, and could not be expected to live up to the same high standards that they demanded of their women. Besides, as Duffin points out,

Most men did not in fact believe that women were their moral superiors. In any case there is little evidence that they believed in any special capacity possessed by women. It was, I suggest, a negative view of women linked to the more important belief that women lacked sexuality. Woman might be morally superior in the negative sense that she lacked the corrupting sexual drives but she was always morally inferior by virtue of her weaker nature. (70)

Of course, there was no way out of this discursive double bind: if a woman did dare to display any sign of sexual initiative, she was immediately toppled from her pedestal and labelled a whore. The Victorian discourse on gender was driven largely by an economy of male sexuality:

Women were classified into polar extremes. They were either sexless ministering angels or sensuously oversexed temptresses of the devil; they were either aids to continence or incontinence; they facilitated or they exacerbated male sexual control. Although apart, these polarities shared an attitude of disguised masculine hostility toward women In its disguised hostility the world of respectability admitted and lamented the latent depravity of women, but exalted them in their angelic innocence. (Cominos 167)

In *Of Like Passions*, the "pedestal" idea is indirectly challenged when Bancroft has a sage old man say:

"Take my advice and learn to know women. It is you youngsters, who fight shy of knowing the sex intimately, and ignorantly imagine

them to be a higher creation than mere man, who invariably get into the devil's own row over them." (89)

Women, he seems to imply, are not goddesses but creatures "of like passions" to men. But it is important not to misunderstand the nature of the "feminist" point being made here. For Bancroft and the majority of nineteenth-century feminists, the postulate of equality did not mean the extension to women of the moral latitude (and sexual opportunities) already available to men: "Rather, it demanded from men the sexual repression that nineteenth-century morality required from women" (Banks 63). The angry response of women to the Contagious Diseases Acts, for instance, is generally understood to have been provoked by the unfairness of the way in which the legislation discriminated in its measures between prostitutes and the men who used them. But Josephine Butler's primary objection to the Acts was that they provided men with "a licence to sin," and her whole campaign for their abolition had a decidedly Evangelical bias (Banks 65). The association between feminism and moral purity was strengthened in the latter part of the nineteenth century by the prominent role played by women in the great Purity crusades, spearheaded by religious organizations like the Women's Christian Temperance Union.

Useful insight into Francis Bancroft's position on the Woman Question is therefore provided by the fact that she was an active member of the WCTU in South Africa. We learn from her correspondence that as early as 1894 she was attending meetings of the local branch of the WCTU or "Band of Hope" in Kroonstad (NELM 88.3.1.16). The WCTU had three departments, Temperance, Purity and — from 1907 in South Africa — Enfranchisement (Stapleton 17). Bancroft's views on the abuse of alcohol, especially by blacks, require no further discussion;⁹ but it is as well to point out that the causes of Temperance and Purity were closely allied: "both drunkenness and sexual immorality were interpreted as a failure of self-control, and, because drunkenness weakens judgment and will, it was seen not simply as analogous to sexual immorality but one of its major causes" (Banks 80). (When Trevanor turns to drink in *Of Like Passions*, the brandy is described as "working in his veins, pouring its hot, tempting, maddening breath through every fibre, nerve, and muscle of his passion-laden frame" [124]; his resistance to Noyale is overcome.) As far as the Purity aims of the WCTU were concerned, some indication of the discursive use to which women put an assimilated version of the "pedestal" theory of female moral superiority is given by this extract from an address by Mrs John Brown to a Band of Hope meeting in Grahamstown in 1898: "I want you girls to be strong, to be brave, to be pure. The greatest thing you

can bring to this country is a pure, brave womanhood As we women raise the ideals, so will our men climb” (Stapleton 14). F.C. Stapleton describes the impact of a speech on Purity by the same Mrs Brown some years later:

The speaker had been down into the depths; she had seen impurity and its awful uncleanness and held it up for us to see. We saw it in the light of a woman’s purity, and its uncleanness amazed and affrighted us . . . a noble speech . . . fired with a woman’s passion against all forms of impurity. (19)

All these “forms of impurity” in fact boil down to sex, and “purity” is in this context a euphemism for chastity. In *Of Like Passions* the apostle of purity is Irene Mabile: the impurity which is her sole concern is the sexual dalliance of young white men with black women.

Irene Mabile is something of a mystery figure in the village, a “woman with a past” dismissed by the men as “a prude, and severely ‘down’ on our sex” (108); “a dangerous woman of the secretive type — one who sought to know too much; one who enquired too closely into the lives and habits of others . . . intrusive, bold, unfeminine . . . unnatural” (210). She is described as having

a tall, graceful figure with the rounded but slim development of perfect womanhood . . . tender passionate eyes, and the curving red lips with their suggestion of a *real* though suppressed knowledge of the heights of bliss and depths of suffering.

(61, emphasis added)

Irene Mabile was one who had, through the depths of a bitter experience, gained knowledge. She understood the attitude of the flatterers and their veiled insinuations inviting to friendship and folly. (63)

As one who has presumably been used and betrayed or discarded by some selfish man, the “knowledge” that Irene has gained is ostensibly about “the ways of men,” men’s sexuality. And indeed, the knowledge which she imparts to Mary Devine with such fateful consequence concerns the sexual adventures of white men in the “location.” But before we explore the representation of her role as the purveyor of such information, I would submit that Bancroft’s contemporary reader would have been alerted to the fact that the “knowledge” that Irene has gained includes also the knowledge of her own sexuality: her obvious but restrained sensuality and the coy reference to her “suppressed” acquaintance with “the heights of bliss” suggest a woman who has had some experience of sexual passion.

The ideal of Purity brought together the “pedestal,” “domestic” and “intention-of-nature” theories of feminine nature in the late nineteenth century via the doctrine of “separate spheres.” The greater moral purity of women fitted them to be the spiritual inspiration and moral guardians of their husbands and children; home was where they belonged and exercised their uplifting influence, domesticity their “natural” and proper sphere; their biological destiny as mothers precluded their participation in the wider world. More than this, it was feared that the sphere of male experience was dangerous for them,

that their special characteristics of tenderness, affection and moral purity were a consequence not so much of innate differences between men and women as of the protection from the wickedness of the world that allowed the maintenance of that state of innocence on which women’s nature depended. (Banks 87)

Hence the repeated insistence that the innocence of women be protected, encountered in texts of the period ranging from *Heart of Darkness* — “They — the women I mean — are out of it — should be out of it. We must help them to stay in that beautiful world of their own, lest ours gets worse” (84; cf.39) — to Stoker’s *Dracula* —

Mrs Harker is better out of it. Things are quite bad enough for us, all men of the world, and who have been in many tight places in our time; but it is no place for a woman, and if she had remained in touch with the affair, it would have infallibly wrecked her.

(256; see also 235, 242)

Purity imposed on women the “duty” of innocence, and — particularly in the case of young women — ignorance about matters sexual. The profession of innocence was no doubt often enough the result of a tacit contract between the sexes in which agreed roles were played. In *Of Like Passions*, the subject of his black mistresses has never arisen between Rooyen and his mother:

Between mother and son words had never passed on the subject; it had been strictly tabooed; the old lady affecting entire ignorance of the bare knowledge of evil, of the darker side of life; the son holding her to this position. (48)

But when the hitherto genuinely innocent young Mary Devine is told by Irene Mabilie just what the young white lads get up to at night, she is devastated. Taxed by Trevanor as to why she is spurning his attentions, she responds that she has been “turned against [his] sex” by her discovery that men are guilty of “objectionable doings [she] can’t put into words” (58). Just

how important it is that they are doing these objectionable things with black women is never spelled out: the “knowledge” that Mary gains from Irene is effectively the knowledge of male sexuality and the “facts of life.”¹⁰

Naturally Trevanor is angered by this turn of events, demanding to know who has “poisoned” Mary’s mind and filled it “with unprofitable ideas” (58). Mary’s response in this confrontation is interesting:

“It is not fit,” his voice rose emphatically, “it is not right that your innocence and purity should be sullied by the mention of these sordid subjects.”

“No, it is not fit,” retorted Mary, plucking up spirit. “Still, Bryan, my innocence and purity must put up with knowledge at some time of my life, I suppose. . . . I am not a child, Bryan . . . Remember I am a woman now — I *must* learn, sooner or later, what lies below the surface — the sooner, perhaps, the better. Believe me, it is right. Yes, it is a woman — a woman who has reason to know her fellows — who has opened my eyes.”

She went on slowly.

“Think how deeply this knowledge, unwisely hidden from us, affects us, when — when — in the future — a woman has to make her choice — . . . I have never said a word of the trouble to Kathy.”

“God keep her ignorant,” Kathleen’s brother cried hastily. “God forbid she ever knows — never breathe a word of this knowledge to her.”

“If you wish it I will not,” Mary returned coldly.

“*If I wish it!*” he cried passionately. “I would give ten years of my life to make you forget what you have learned — to make you as ignorantly innocent, as unknowing, as before some fiend of a woman poisoned your mind.”

The girl stiffened perceptibly.

“What are you saying? My innocence is unchanged — I am just as innocent — just as pure-minded, just as good as I ever was,” she cried quickly, “it is only my ignorance, my former denseness and blindness to realities, that has gone.” (59-60)

However warmly we would applaud Mary’s spirited defence of her right to know, or later, of her personal autonomy — “She was, so she would remind Irene, at an age when wisdom comes, and a woman learns the value of her own independent existence, and the absolute right which is hers, of belonging entirely to herself should she so please” (65) — the response of the narrator and implied author of the novel remains equivocal.¹¹ Part of the problem is that the narrator seems not altogether convinced by Mary’s distinction between innocence and ignorance: the evidence of the text is that Mary’s new-found knowledge does indeed undermine and corrupt her

character. The narrator remarks that “[o]ne, perhaps, of the saddest things in life is the fatal ease with which the knowledge of evil once acquired pursues us” (66): Mary’s knowledge of “what lies below the surface” (59) of life is a contaminating poison. While Mary will subsequently refuse to stand by Bryan’s side at Rooyen’s wedding “for fear . . . of being contaminated by him” (138), she is already critically infected by her knowledge of “the mud and slime beneath the fair surface of the stream of life” (64).¹² This imagery recalls the figuration of the enduring dichotomy of upper and lower body which was so pervasive in nineteenth-century Europe: the problem to which its use gives expression is outlined by Lloyd Fernando:

[By the 1890s] Victorians could avoid no longer the conclusion that the challenge of the movement for the freedom of women had become at last a challenge on sexual issues, for it induced, more than any other movement did, a fresh consciousness and acknowledgement of individual sexual motivation in human relationships. They were unable to fit this discovery into their traditional scheme of value, and thus found themselves saddled with the seemingly unresolvable, and therefore morally disconcerting, dualism in love which had plagued Christian societies for many centuries. (23)

Now that “into Mary’s brain and body and soul [there] had entered an insidious poison” (65), she abjures the company of men and causes Bryan Trevanor some distress. Ironically, it is Irene Mabile who pleads his case with her, pointing out that Trevanor is drinking excessively

“because you will not make it up with him. Life is hard enough, my dear, without suffering, and a man can’t bear suspense and suffering as we can. It drives him to badness — or suicide . . . He is not the man to deceive a woman; and Mary dear, a woman can forgive a man anything — everything, but that . . . Forgive him because he was too manly, too noble, to deceive a woman.” (114-15)

Irene’s persuasion and Mary’s “womanly” compassion gradually bring her around to an acceptance of her moral responsibility as a woman to “save” Trevanor:

She felt as only a strong nature could feel, that she was the murderer of her lover’s better nature, that she was driving him further and further from all good influences, and nearer and nearer to those things whose end is destruction . . . Was she responsible for this man’s soul? Had he given it unto her keeping, and had she thrust it into wretchedness and sin? . . . She must be reconciled to Bryan. It

was clearly her duty. For his wasted powers, for his lost soul, God would hold her responsible . . . [she ought to be] helping him to live the strenuous manly life . . . (116)

Convinced that he is “the man for whose soul she was responsible” (117), Mary will later confess to Kathleen Trevanor: “I have murdered Bryan . . . murdered his soul! . . . I have wronged Bryan” (184, 185); and to Irene: “Oh Irene! I felt myself to have been unspeakably to blame. I felt God would condemn me for his lapse into sin; his wasted life; his lost soul” (187). She has been abetted not a little in reaching this conclusion by the accusations of Trevanor senior (129), Dr Devine (200) and Bryan himself (181, 182, 201). Eventually she confronts Irene in a set-piece recantation:

“Oh, Irene, you have taught me a lot . . . I have learned to distrust men . . . I am not the same . . . God knows I don’t wish to reproach you — but, if I had never known — if I had remained in ignorance —” (189)

Bitterly reflecting that she has thrown away her chance of married happiness “for a fancy — a trifle,” she berates Irene:

“Yes,” she cried harshly, “a trifle Irene, because even if true — and it was *not* true in Bryan’s case — but if it had been, I ought not to have known of it; I ought not to have noticed it; I should have treated it as a myth, a matter best undwelt on, a part of man’s life which a woman cannot understand.”

Her voice rose defiantly.

“Because men and women can never be classed alike. You forget that, I think, Irene, when you dwell so bitterly and insistently on men’s selfish characteristics. They have been created with different natures, different instincts, stronger feelings, more intense developments, bigger hearts, bigger passions than women. A woman bears children, and her stronger emotions naturally centre on them. We must accept these laws of inheritance as they stand. Shall we endeavour to pit our puny ideas, our puny wills, against Creation, and against the great Creator?” (190)

At this point, the reader is apt to be more than a little bewildered. Although Bryan was “innocent” at the time of Mary’s initial accusation, by the time he forgives her (316) he has become incestuously involved with Noyale. Despite Mary’s earlier suggestion that the mere suspicion that a man had been having sex with a black woman would disqualify him as a suitor (59, 100), the affair with Noyale now presents no impediment to her marriage to Bryan whatsoever (“Too late! Too late!”, Trevanor says, “Dear, I am not worthy to touch you now”; to which Mary replies: “Yes, Bryan, yes, you

are. Only forgive me, only forgive my unkindness" [182]). This tolerant attitude, incidentally, is encountered — with no sign of authorial disapproval — elsewhere in the novel: Rooyen's "wild oats did not trouble the practical colonist [Kathleen's mother, Mrs Trevanor]. He would be a good husband, she argued, these wild natures invariably are" (73; see also 193). But if having sex across the colour line is a mere "trifle," the entire project of the novel is rendered nonsensical. What is this discourse that has intervened to upturn and trivialize the earnest, racist evangelizing we focused on in the previous section of this essay?

What Mary must effectively beg forgiveness for is her refusal to accept Bryan's masculinity, his male sexuality, and this is something the text makes easy for her by repeated insistence on the difference between men and women when it comes to sex:

[Kathleen's] innocence . . . seemed to Bryan . . . to be as an angel's spotless whiteness and icy purity, compared with the man's sensual nature, and gross passions — her innocence to be fastened with iron rivets in closest intimacy with man's selfish desires, man's profligacy, man's coarse sexuality . . . (136-37)

There are scattered references to "the strong carnal passions of the Sons of Men" (30), "manhood's temptations in life" (47), the "bigger passions" of men (190); when Bryan is considering joining in a "spree" at the "location," the narrator reflects that although he was

too fastidious, perhaps, to delight in these questionable amusements of a rough crew, [he] was still brimming over with vigorous manhood, and life and energy, and ready enough for fun. He hesitated — then the longing to see life, as his comrades did, in all its phases, swept over him, and he resolved to join them. (54-55)

Boys will, after all, be boys. The novel thus endorses the standard late nineteenth-century orthodoxy on sexual difference and on the role of women in helping men in the difficult task of keeping their animal passions in check. Yet this insistence on difference is simultaneously undermined in a delicate but distinctive way, through the presentation of the sexual awakening of Kathleen Trevanor.

Although the language eschews all overt reference to sexuality, it is clear that Rooyen recognizes Kathleen's potential in this direction:

The pure child-like heart was his, and with the innocent heart of a child, he recognized and valued the knowledge that there was in her nature a vast unprobed depth of generous, all-surrendering affection,

and hidden gulfs of an as yet undreamt-of love. His it would be to awaken, and to teach and possess; his in fullest measure. (71)

When Rooyen declares himself to her,

The man's being was a-glow. He felt the intensity of the emotion that ran through Kathleen's slender frame, and made her tremble in his arms.

In a moment she had slipped from him, unconsciously afraid of her great happiness — of something dread and intangible — her innocent heart knew not what. She ran panting, shuddering with a strange little shudder and wonder of ecstasy, thinking herself grown unfamiliar to herself by her late marvellous experience, thinking she had never before realized how dear Philip was to her. (71, 72)

And when, after their wedding, the narrator comments —

Newly-wedded couples are, under every circumstance, best left to themselves . . . Best left alone to enjoy the first full brief spell of wonder and happiness — and supreme content. Above all, best left alone to all that must follow — the inevitable disillusion, the necessary descent — often particularly rapid — from blissful Cloudland to commonplace Reality. (132)

— she is expressing not so much a cynical view of marriage as the pattern assumed by most marriages at that time, in which — as pointed out by Freud in 1908 (“‘Civilized’ Sexual Morality” 201-02) — after the honeymoon, long periods of sexual abstinence were enjoined on couples by pregnancy or the fear of pregnancy, resulting in mutual resentment and unhappiness. When Bryan asks after her marriage a few weeks later, Kathleen's enthusiastic response cannot but be inferred to include the element of sexual pleasure:

“Are you quite happy, Kathleen?” — his voice was serious — “as happy as you dreamed of being?”

She looked up at him, her beautiful face full of an exquisite sympathy.

“Ah Bryan, I pray your turn will come! . . . The dream has fallen short of the reality, dear! . . . Sometimes I wake . . . and am afraid — afraid —”

Her voice faded away. (176)

In fact the text appears to be endorsing the contemporary discourse on “sexual hygiene,” which prescribed regular “emissions” for men for the sake of their health. After Bryan Trevanor commences sleeping with Noyale, several characters comment on his obvious well-being: for instance, his

father comments on "how bright he looked . . . have you noticed, Alice, his eyes have lost their heaviness, and his face that clouded look" (174). What is more, sexual intercourse seems to have the same beneficent effect on Kathleen Rooyen:

with the free firm swing of healthy vigorous womanhood, life seemed to leap and intensify with fresh pulsations in every fibre of her youthful frame. . . . Her married happiness — but that was still too marvellous — too sacred for bare analysis. (208)

Perhaps women, after all, are creatures "of like passions" to men.

Bancroft's novel evidences the convergence and uneasy juxtaposition of a late-nineteenth century ideology of Purity and an emergent (and in the text, inchoate), more radical strain of feminist thought which interrogated the principle of general repression which had hitherto been a corollary of the rejection of the double standard in sexual morality. It is revealing that Irene Mabile, the "New Woman" heroine of the novel, who has proclaimed her enlightenment of Mary Devine "a duty women owe to their sisters" (75), is by the end of the novel a figure of pathos, not far removed from the stereotype of the unfulfilled spinster: "But she — she had no one — devoid of kin, set apart, with no close tie, no special duty; no home she could claim a right in — with nothing but the self-same self of whom she was already so weary" (322-23): "I seem to be waiting, waiting for something, I know not what," she says (323). Fortunately, "something" arrives, not in the form of Mr Right, but perhaps the next best thing: a "Mission" (330), a vocation to campaign for legislation to keep the races apart in South Africa and so avert the looming threat of the Black Peril.

If even the central theme of the novel breaks down into a set of gender rather than racial issues — the sexual jealousy of one class of women for another class of more available and therefore "advantaged" women, the injustice of the double standard which winks at men's sexual indulgences, the patronization and "keeping ignorant" of women by men, the abuse of power by men who casually seduce and abandon their "inferiors" and refuse to acknowledge responsibility for their own children — is there any sense in which race can be said to be crucial rather than contingent in respect of Bancroft's project?

To answer this question, we must look ahead to two articles Bancroft published in 1911, at the height of the last and most sustained Black Peril panic in South Africa. In "Race Purity for South Africa," Bancroft rehearses the argument of *Of Like Passions* in some detail, perhaps placing greater stress on the sordid abjection of "miscegenation" as practised by "poor whites," and on the necessity for all white men to set a proper moral example

for their black counterparts to follow. In “White Women in South Africa,”¹³ Bancroft draws attention to the “recrudescence of the question of the safety of the white woman in South Africa” (262), and offers a history of the phenomenon whose narrative logic, again, is identical to that which informs *Of Like Passions*. She points to “the imperative need for a series of legislative Acts prohibiting in every shape and form both promiscuity and legalized union between the races” (266), and warns that “the effect of the Black Peril is to bar the way to the greatly-needed influx of white women into South Africa today” (267) (one might insert the unspoken corollary, that so long as white men could enjoy ready access to black women, there was no need for an influx of white women). But then Bancroft gets to the core of her argument, which links the “elimination” of the Black Peril with the enfranchisement of white women:

The Kaffir is essentially and entirely a creature of logic, he reasons towards an end. That which he sees he sees plainly, and his mind informs him that this is so. He sees today, as in the past, the spectacle of the white master standing above his woman, the white woman standing below her master. The Kaffir respects — up to a certain point — the white man’s possessions, but he will occasionally take chances. The white man’s possessions number, in the black man’s opinion, his horse, dog, woman, tobacco, grog. The Kaffir covets these and occasionally he takes, and risks even death in the taking. He sees too that he — the black man — has a vote, because he is a man. Woman, therefore, is but an inferior, a possession. Her deprivation of the coveted power to vote amounts to a public proclamation of the fact that her status is on a par with the status of the ordinary black man, and *below* the par of the status of the black man voter. (267-68)

Bancroft’s project, then, both here and in the novel, should be seen in the light of a protest about the low status and powerlessness of white women even within the racial hierarchy of colonial South Africa. Her strategy is to attempt to “feminize” the unruly domain of male sexuality by insisting that it be confined within the domestic space of the marital relationship over which the (white) woman reigned supreme. Her tactic is to harness the politics of Segregationism by playing on white male fears of black men as sexual rivals.

The vulnerability which white women felt in the face of the Black Peril was no doubt real enough, but it was also an expression of their vulnerability before men generally. The pecking order of colonial society made it natural that the black man should be the immediate target of Bancroft’s polemic,

especially in the light of the attribution to his culture of a particularly low estimation of the status of women. But her real animus was directed against the colonial patriarchy which had assigned her a political and constitutional status lower than that of a "kaffir."¹⁴ Race and sex were closely intertwined in Bancroft's intervention in the politics of gender, an intervention which, drawing on a variety of current racial stereotypes, found it convenient to make a scapegoat of the black man; but, at bottom, for Bancroft, race was a white herring.

NOTES

1. Biographical information gleaned from the Bancroft holdings at NELM, especially Rosalind Slater's privately printed *Carnarvon Dale Papers*, a ten-volume collection of Slater family documents. See Cornwell, "Francis Bancroft."

2. This is the subtitle of Chaudhuri and Strobel's collection of essays *Western Women and Imperialism*. The essay in the collection most apposite to the case of Bancroft is probably Nancy Paxton's study of Flora Annie Steel and Annie Besant.

3. Compare Trevor Fletcher, on the crass materialism of the "cosmopolitan" population of Johannesburg:

No, it's not the Black Peril that need be feared; there is something far more dangerous which comes from no contact with the native, but has its life and movement in the heart of the dominant race. Look where you will, it is hard to find any ideal that is stimulating this cosmopolitan people. ("Some Impressions" 598)

4. In "White Women in South Africa," Bancroft refers to "a race of half-breeds . . . overflowing the country, their miasmatic presence felt in every community" (264). The imagery of contagion is revealing.

5. Though not relevant to *Of Like Passions*, Calvin Hernton's explanation for the apparently irrational identification of inter-racial sex with incest is worth mentioning. Pointing to the fact that every white American Southerner has effectively two mothers, a white and a black (the "mammy" or maid), he proposes a "Dual Oedipus" complex for such men:

In every southern white man, whether a racist or not, there is, just below the level of awareness, the twilight urge to make love to a black woman, sleep with the alter mother, to consume her via an act of intercourse, thereby affirming his childhood affinity for black flesh and repudiating the interracial conflict of his masculinity. (99)

A similar line of argument is interestingly developed by Stallybrass and White, in the context of class distinction rather than racial difference. They re-read the sexual problems of Freud's Wolf Man in terms of his struggle with a virtual

incest-prohibition on lust for the peasant matron, the lower-class nurse or mother figure (156-68).

Some years ago, I argued that Kipling's story of transgressive love, "Beyond the Pale," was structured by the symbolism of Oedipal phantasy (Cornwell, "Beyond the Pale").

6. C. J. Ingram concludes a contemporary essay on "Criminalism" which acknowledges the influence of Lombroso, thus:

If the above hypothesis be correct, we have the true criminal mental type, a case of atavism to savage instincts; and, remediable or not, it is in accordance with such a definition of the criminal that we must base our criminal system. Whatever we may do, the atavistic nature is always there, non-apparent perhaps, but innate, and tainted with the microbe of crime, which only awaits a suitable environment of . . . influences . . . such as alcoholism or poverty, in which to germinate. (50)

7. The identification of this source is put beyond doubt (although the referencing is inaccurate) by the following inscription in the author's hand on the flyleaf of the Rhodes University Library copy of the novel:

F.B. Slater
7 Glebe Place
Chelsea S.W.
22.5.1907.

"We also are men of like passions with yourselves:"
Acts of the Apostles X Ch.VI verse.

8. Tzvetan Todorov describes how Franciscan monks in sixteenth-century Central America were more easily accepted by the Indians than other orders because of their readiness to adopt the native way of life; so much so, that the first words put into the Franciscans' mouth in the *Dialogues* of ancient Mexican tradition are these:

Let us not disconcert you as to something, take care lest you see us as something superior, indeed, we are only your peers, likewise we are only common people, furthermore, we are men, such as you are, we are surely not gods. We are also inhabitants of the earth, we also drink, we also eat, we also die of cold, we are also overwhelmed by heat, we are also mortal, we also can be destroyed.

(*Conquest of America* 200)

Compare Conrad's character Kurtz, in his Report for the "International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs":

He began with the argument that we whites, from the point of development we had arrived at, "must necessarily appear to them

(savages) in the nature of supernatural beings — we approach them with the might as of a deity” (*Heart of Darkness* 86)

9. In 1907, the year in which *Of Like Passions* was published, the women of the WCTU “were stirred to white heat” by the introduction of the Cheap Wine Licensing Bill; their opposition culminated in a march on the Houses of Parliament early the following year (Stapleton 16).

10. It is almost as if Mary finds out for the first time how babies are made:

the girl now painfully understood the reason, and turned pale at the sight of the white-skinned children, running nude and happy, among their black companions. The sight revolted her and added to the gloomy intensity of her bitter thoughts. (66)

11. It is considerably less so in Bancroft’s later novel, *An Armed Protest*, where there is a vigorous attack on the differentiated educations of boys and girls and an insistence on the right to know as a function of full personal majority (19-24).

12. Trevanor snr. knows “almost everything of [the village’s] inner life — the life going on so steadily under the smooth surface” (93); when Dr Devine discovers the truth of Noyale’s parentage, he “[feels] nothing, but the sense of a hideous, slimy horror that had risen from beneath his feet, and now enveloped him in its hellish folds” (255).

13. The article was deemed topical enough to have been translated as “La femme blanche dans l’Afrique de Sud” and published in the very first number of the Paris journal *Le Monde* (1.1 [1911]: 75-81).

14. A comparable resentment is felt by a character in Sarah Gertrude Millin’s novel *What Hath a Man?*, although the motivation is rather different. Mrs McGreevy considers her status cravenly demeaned by her husband’s infidelity with a black woman:

she never stigmatized men without remembering the degradation a man had brought her: rendering her one with a savage woman, no more than an animal to himself; giving his blood alike to her child and the children of this savage woman whom he thought of as an animal; making her son a brother to those animal-children in a kraal.
(108)

The passage rehearses several of the sentiments we have encountered in Bancroft’s novel; the essential difference is that neither Bancroft’s narrator nor any of her characters consider blacks to be mere “animals.” What shows here is Millin’s incurable disgust for sex itself.

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