

INOCULATION AND EMPIRE: CIGARETTE'S HEALING POWER IN OUIDA'S *UNDER TWO FLAGS*

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Abstract

As the popular literature of the nineteenth century receives more attention from scholars, Ouida's novels have grown more appealing to those interested in exploring the many forms of the Victorian popular novel. *Under Two Flags* is perhaps her most well-known work, and this fame stems in part from the character of Cigarette, who fights like a man while also maintaining her status as a highly desirable woman in French colonial Africa. Whilst several scholars have argued that Ouida essentially undermines Cigarette as a feminine and feminist character, I argue that it is possible to read Cigarette as a highly positive element in the novel. This is demonstrated in the ways that Cigarette's actions are based on a very feminine understanding of medicine, as Ouida draws on contemporary and historical developments in medicinal technology to develop a metaphorical status for Cigarette as a central figure of healing. Specifically, we see that Cigarette takes on the form of an inoculation for the male protagonist's (Bertie Cecil) downfall. In this way, I hope to offer a view of Ouida's text that does not read her famous character as merely an "almost-but-not-quite" experiment.

I. Introduction

Among all of Ouida's novels, it is Cigarette from *Under Two Flags* (1867) who has remained one of her most memorable and notorious characters. In the twentieth century Ouida's biographer Yvonne Ffrench evaluated Cigarette as 'absolutely original and perfectly realised'.¹ Yet upon her first appearance in Ouida's novel, the response was anything but resounding praise. In 1866 Geraldine Jewsbury advised the new editor at the *British Army and Navy Review*, which had serialised the opening chapters of the novel, against publishing Ouida's novel in volume form. Likely due in part to Cigarette's scandalously contradictory nature, Jewsbury wrote that *Under Two Flags* was 'not a story that will do any man or woman or child any good to read, it is an idle and very unmoral book [...]. I daresay the story would *sell* but you would lower the character of your [publishing] house if you accept it.'² While the discrepancy between Ffrench's and Jewsbury's assessments of the novel and its principal female character are indicative of the shifts in cultural mores between 1866 and 1938, it is clear from Ouida's description of Cigarette as a woman who 'had had a thousand lovers, from handsome marquises of the Guides to tawny, black-browed scoundrels' why Jewsbury may have chosen to describe the book as 'unmoral'.

As Celia Phillips points out in her brief publication history of the novel, the

¹ Yvonne Ffrench, *Ouida: A Study in Ostentation* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1938), p. 49.

² Quoted in Celia Phillips, 'Under Two Flags: the Publishing History of a Best-Seller', *Publishing History*, 3 (1978), pp. 67-69 (p. 67).

British Army and Navy Review was not primarily a literary journal: Ouida's stories often found themselves printed 'side by side with serious discussions on military strategy and lengthy descriptions of the latest army equipment'.³ Ouida was not attempting to publish 'moral' literature, as such, neither was she seeking notoriety as an 'unmoral' author; her fiction found its primary audience amongst British soldiers. As she writes in the very brief preface, *Under Two Flags* 'has been fortunate enough to receive much commendation from military men, and for them it is now specially issued in its present form' (p. 7).⁴ Similarly to Ouida and her novel, *Cigarette* is very much defined by her relationships with the soldiers of the French foreign legion, and with one soldier in particular. As a vivandière for the foreign legion fighting in Algeria, *Cigarette* is in close contact with the soldiers; she becomes enthralled with the novel's protagonist, the disgraced British aristocrat Bertie Cecil, who has fled England and gone into self-imposed exile. After serving many years in Algeria under the French flag, Bertie is (by a grand coincidence) reunited with some of his former relations from England. Struggling now under the oppressive weight of his exile, Cecil is insubordinate to a high-ranking French officer who insults his aristocratic sensibilities. Court-martialled and sentenced to death, it is only through *Cigarette* sacrificing herself by leaping in front of the firing squad that Bertie Cecil survives to return to England, marry the princess, and reclaim his fortune. So while the structural story arch has Bertie Cecil at its centre, *Cigarette* undoubtedly steals the show, due largely to her 'unmoral' nature and her final sacrifice to save Cecil.

However, we must ask specifically what it was that made Geraldine Jewsbury recoil at *Under Two Flags*, since the mere mention of *Cigarette*'s promiscuity would not have justified such a resounding and total condemnation. In her development of *Cigarette*, Ouida presents a seemingly contradictory character who exhibits archetypal qualities of both metropolitan France and the elusively exotic colonial space. Such archetypes would have registered strongly in the minds of readers like Jewsbury, and if, as James R. Lehning argues, 'the strangeness of the colonies invited the use of metaphors about gender and sexuality to describe the relationship between France and its colonies', then it is possible to read *Cigarette* as a representation of this discourse from British literature.⁵ The French political narrative which Lehning describes characterised the country's relationship with the colony as that of a mother nurturing her child to maturity. As an implicit corollary to this narrative, the metaphors of gender and sexuality that described the 'native' state of the colony were often couched in terms of disease and sexual degeneracy. As such, it was France's mission to guide the colony out of this impoverished state.

While Ouida at first seems to legitimate this narrative by frankly stating *Cigarette*'s sexual freedom, along with Bertie's 'civilised' resistance to her advances, the character actually demonstrates a far greater degree of complexity than the standard colonial narrative would have provided for. She is almost simultaneously

³ Phillips, p. 67.

⁴ Ouida, *Under Two Flags* (Rockville: Wildside Press, 2006), p.7. All subsequent references are to this edition, incorporated in the text.

⁵ James R. Lehning, *To Be a Citizen: The Political Culture of the Early French Third Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 129.

masculine (drinks, swears, fights), feminine (beautiful, graceful), desirable, and charitable (cares for the sick and wounded). To an extent, in nineteenth century literature, such a woman could only exist in a colonial space, where, in a sense, all bets are off with respect to traditional feminine roles. Rather than simply parroting the traditional colonial narrative of the coloniser's civilising influence, Ouida demonstrates how Cigarette makes possible Bertie's return to the civilisation he fled. Cigarette's medical skill becomes a metaphor that encompasses many of her disparate qualities, and which ultimately leads to her sacrifice at the novel's conclusion.

Yet the place of women in medicine in nineteenth century Britain was also a conflicted space, similar to the colonies in that it merged questions of sexuality, gender, and corruption (or degeneration). As Kristine Swenson explains, 'in Victorian sensation fiction, the world of nursing is portrayed as hiding a "secret world" of "sex, shame, and scandal"'.⁶ Thus it became extremely difficult for nurses in general, not to mention a colonial nurse, to 'escape from the shadow of her cultural "other," the fallen woman; [...] the medical woman's legitimacy depended upon her ability to protect women from male sexual danger with her "unsexing" knowledge of sex'.⁷ Writing *Under Two Flags* at the height of the Sensation furore in England, Ouida merges the sensational 'fallen woman nurse' with the more redeeming (and romantic) Nightingale nurse of the empire, since 'medicine was one of the few activities that allowed women to contribute actively to imperial expansion'.⁸ But, unlike Swenson's description, Cigarette uses her medical knowledge to save and protect men, rather than women. In this way Cigarette's paradoxical contradictions seem to stem from the confluence of her status as sexually open (with all the implications of disease accompanying that status) with her role as a healer and surgeon.

To some extent the conflict between notions of the imperial space and women in medicine is not entirely surprising, nor is Ouida's adoption of the inherent contradictions between the two. As a woman author writing for an almost exclusively male audience (military servicemen), Ouida is particularly aware of her audience's cognizance of imperial interests and concerns. In the same way that the British conceived of the colonies as 'sexually loose [...] frequently excessive' places, so too is the Algeria of *Under Two Flags*.⁹ Because Algeria is a French colony, Ouida was probably allowed more latitude by her British readers to portray a highly sexualised character like Cigarette, however, she does not handle her male protagonist according to the same sexual narratives that were ascribed to men in the colonies. Although he is problematic in other ways, Bertie Cecil does not succumb to the 'unmanning threat' of 'over-sexedness' in the colonial space.¹⁰ However, Cecil does exude a high degree of liminality, both in terms of race and gender, and it is only by being 'healed' of his liminal positions, being returned to the 'correct' position of the white, male aristocrat,

⁶ Kristine Swenson, *Medical Women and Victorian Fiction*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005), p. 2.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁹ Philippa Levine, 'Sexuality, Gender, and Empire', in *Gender and Empire*, ed. by Philippa Levine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 134-155 (p. 135).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

that he can return from exile.

Cigarette's death plays a key role in Cecil's 'redemption', and contemporary critics have drawn varying conclusions about her demise which doubles as the moment of Cecil's restoration. Pamela Gilbert finds that, 'only in death, its breast pierced by hundreds of bullets, is the permeability of the upper body sufficient to balance Cigarette's femaleness, to achieve sufficient closure [...] that she may be identified as a hero'.¹¹ Likewise, Talia Schaffer describes Cigarette as 'too revolutionary for the novel to contain her; she dies in a spectacular act of self-martyrdom [...] a death that both salvages and disposes of this troublesome character'.¹² Gilbert and Schaffer both frame Cigarette as an impediment that must be eliminated; only as a corpse can she become a 'hero' or be 'salvaged'. However, I argue that Cigarette's final sacrifice becomes an act of metaphorical medical intervention that represents a fulfilment of her multiple contradictions. It is this act that I will term 'inoculation'. In addition to her sacrificial death at the end of the novel, Cigarette saves Bertie Cecil's life on two occasions; she is, in effect, Bertie's inoculation against the dangers of the colonial space. With each successive saving, Cecil's position seems more and more calamitous, and yet each time Cigarette manages to appear just at the right moment. Finally, she performs an act of permanent inoculation and provides lasting immunity to Cecil against ignominy, exile, and poverty. As such, she is an inoculant who both subverts, because Cecil needs her to make his return, and reaffirms, because she makes his return possible, the British ideal of a landed country gentleman.

II. Inoculation

In *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes chose the term 'inoculation' to describe one facet of bourgeois myth. For Barthes, this rhetorical inoculation is a process whereby 'one immunizes the contents of the collective imagination by means of a small inoculation of acknowledged evil; one thus protects it against the risk of a generalised subversion'.¹³ In this way, Barthes understands that the bourgeois imagination comes to terms with the 'principal evil' of its 'class-bound institutions' by recognising, and thereby rendering ineffectual, a nominalised version of something subversive.¹⁴ Earlier in *Mythologies*, Barthes describes an image on a magazine cover; the image is of a black man 'in French uniform [...] saluting, with his eyes uplifted, probably fixed on a fold of the tricolour'.¹⁵ The significance of the image lies in its implicit statement that the French empire has been a success, that the 'zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors' silences any contention that the imperial

¹¹ Pamela Gilbert, *Disease, Desire and the Body in Victorian Women's Popular Novels*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 147.

¹² Talia Schaffer, *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), p. 126.

¹³ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), p. 150.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 116.

interests of France have been anything but beneficial to the colonials.¹⁶ The image becomes, then, a form of inoculation, whereby the viewer is immunised against the subversive notion that the Empire was an oppressive and selfishly motivated enterprise that sought to enrich the colonising country through the forced subjection of its colonies. Instead, the viewer is provided with an image, which, although it could be construed as evidence of the subversive narrative, allows the viewer to refute the subversive narrative by pointing to the image's evidence of colonisation's success.

Similarly, through Cigarette's presence as a potentially subversive feminine and masculine woman in the novel, Bertie Cecil is successfully inoculated against the likelihood that his time in Algeria would make his return to Britain impossible. And, as part of the process of his restoration, Ouida reverts to the conservative principle of the demure and silent woman in Venetia, who Cecil marries after Cigarette dies. However, the situation in *Under Two Flags* complicates Barthes's conception of cultural inoculation because, contrary to Barthes, Cigarette does not inoculate against the 'principal evil' of colonisation. Indeed, on several occasions, Cecil explicitly states his preference for the rebel Arabs against the French, whereas Cigarette is fiercely loyal to the French cause. On the other hand, Bertie's successful return to his lands and social position does represent a reassertion of the bourgeois ascendancy. What Ouida accomplishes through the novel is, in essence, an inoculation against the 'evils' of colonial life as conceived by the metropole. If, as Philippa Levine argues, 'the sensuality of the colonial environment might unhinge [a man] from the British path of civilized moderation,' then it is clear that Bertie does not succumb to this potential downfall.¹⁷ Still, inoculation is more than a metaphorical construct, and it has a deep historical importance to colonial and post-colonial discourse, especially with respect to women, sexuality, and medicine. In order to fully establish Cigarette's role as a metaphorical inoculant for Bertie Cecil, a brief but necessary detour is appropriate.

Both inoculation and vaccination developed out of an effort to stem the infectious tide of smallpox. This centuries-long effort succeeded in eliminating the disease in the 1970s. However, both inoculation and vaccination were treated with scepticism and distrust upon their initial introduction to British medicine. Inoculation is 'the subcutaneous instillation of smallpox virus into non-immune individuals [...]. A local skin lesion would usually appear after 3 days and develop into a large [...] lesion'; in other words, a patient would be infected with the smallpox virus itself and, after a brief period of infection, the inoculated patient was immune to the disease.¹⁸ This method of immunisation was championed in England by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu who "discovered" the practice of inoculation amongst women and children, during her years as wife of the British Consul in Constantinople in the 1720s'.¹⁹

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Levine, p. 137.

¹⁸ Gulten Dinc, Yesim Isil Ulman, 'The introduction of variolation 'A La Turca' to the West by Lady Mary Montagu and Turkey's contribution to this', *Vaccine*, 25 (2007), 4261-265 (p. 4262).

¹⁹ Alison Bashford, 'Medicine, Gender, and Empire', in *Gender and Empire*, ed. by Philippa Levine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 112-133 (pp. 114-5).

Unfortunately, almost from its very beginning as a Western practice, inoculation was conceived of as an ‘other’ in both racial and gendered terms, to negative effect. As Isobel Grundy describes, ‘The first English *advocates* of [inoculation] gender it as male [...] advocates call the leading practitioner in Turkey “an old Greek” [...] while an *opponent* writes “some old *Greek Woman*”’.²⁰ It was not uncommon for vehement opponents of inoculation, like William Wagstaffe, to base much of their arguments against the practice on the racial, cultural, and gender inferiority of its origins in Turkey.²¹ Lady Mary only added fuel to the fire by claiming that the only proper way to inoculate was according to the Turkish method and that this method was simple enough for a woman to administer. She felt that the British doctors had irresponsibly altered the Turkish method in a vain effort at prestige.²² As such inoculation became ‘increasingly associated with feminine and feminised folk tradition’, and ultimately its ‘connections with the “East” and its associations with feminine [...] medical practice made it unscientific’.²³

Vaccination, on the other hand, developed in a way that made it more palatable to the British scientific and medical community. First of all, it was a man, Edward Jenner, who discovered that a vaccine developed from cowpox could also immunise against smallpox. The primary contrast that must be emphasised here is that unlike inoculation, in which the human smallpox virus was used, Jenner’s method involved injecting the less dangerous cowpox virus, which also provided an immunity to smallpox. While Alison Bashford correctly argues that vaccination’s winning out over inoculation involved the conflict between ‘Oriental,’ feminine medicine and domestic, male discovery, it would be wrong to claim that Jenner’s method was always preferred.²⁴ Like inoculation, vaccination was not readily accepted upon its initial introduction; whereas those opposed to inoculation feared the implications of an ‘Oriental’ method, now the problem was a fear of creating a man/animal hybrid (because the cowpox virus came from cattle).²⁵ However, it soon became clear that Jenner’s method was generally safer than inoculation. When using the human smallpox virus to inoculate a patient, there was a risk that the inoculation could lead to a full-blown case of smallpox, in which case the patient was in danger of dying as a result of the procedure, but Jenner’s method of using cowpox did not have this lethal downside. As such, vaccination became the standard immunisation against smallpox, and inoculation as a medical procedure was made illegal in 1840.

The disparities between the origins and implementations of inoculation and vaccination are significant for my specific use of inoculation as a metaphorical conception within Ouida’s novel. An inoculation is, first and foremost, a dangerous procedure, in which the patient’s life is put at risk in the hope that an immunity, rather

²⁰ Isobel Grundy, ‘Inoculation and its After-Effects’, *Lumen*, 13 (1994), 13-42 (p. 16, emphasis mine).

²¹ Isobel Grundy, *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 216.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 217-8.

²³ Bashford, p. 115, p. 117.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

²⁵ Tom Fulford and Debbie Lee, ‘The Beast Within: The Imperial Legacy of Vaccination in History and Literature’, *Literature and History*, 9.1 (2000), 1-23 (p. 8).

than a full infection, will be attained. Cigarette's interventions come nearer and nearer to the brink of death for Cecil as the novel progresses. Secondly, unlike vaccination, inoculation is specifically a human-to-human form of immunisation. As I will show, Cigarette's body literally intersects Cecil's in a final dramatisation of inoculation's use of a human disease. Finally, inoculation stoked intense concerns about colonial hybridity and duality. Whereas vaccination was developed within the domestic sphere of Britain, inoculation carried the stigma of originating abroad and being the province of 'woman's medicine'. Concomitant with these concerns was the seemingly illogical notion that something which initially makes you sick can eventually make you well. Likewise, Cigarette's contradictory roles make her ability to be the instrument of Cecil's salvation and social elevation seem paradoxical.

III. The Illness

Unlike smallpox, Bertie Cecil's illness is not physical but cultural and socio-economic. After his unscrupulous younger brother, Berkeley, takes out a loan in Bertie's name, forging a friend's signature as the guarantor, Bertie finds himself under pursuit for the unpaid debt. The only way he can clear his name, however, is to expose a certain paramour who Bertie was with at the time the loan was taken out by Berkeley. Rather than reveal her identity, Bertie flees Europe and travels to North Africa with only his faithful valet, Rake, as a companion. In keeping with common Victorian suspicions of the aristocracy, the world out of which Bertie escapes is highly feminised and languorous. As Gilbert notes, Ouida's description of Bertie Cecil's rooms is uncannily similar to M. E. Braddon's description of Lady Audley's chamber in *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862).²⁶ Ouida even describes Cecil as effeminate: 'His features were exceedingly fair—fair as the fairest girl's', and this effeminacy leads to his being scorned by his father' (p. 12). Suspicious of his wife's fidelity, Cecil's father doubts whether his eldest son is legitimate; Cecil's strong resemblance to his mother removes him even further from his masculine aristocratic heritage. This paternal estrangement based on Bertie's beauty prevents him from appealing to his father for help when the debt collectors arrive. While his self-imposed exile is in part due to his femininity, it is also an exile executed under false pretences. Cecil's 'self-quarantine' because of his 'dishonour' is paradoxically necessary because of his ineffable honour to the woman who he refuses to disgrace; neither has he committed the forgery of the loan notice, although he suffers for it. Within the society of the novel, Bertie Cecil has, in medical terms, been 'infected' with the taint of dishonour, but we as readers know that he is innocent.

By fleeing to the exotic locale of Africa Cecil exposes himself to a greater threat. Taking on the name Louis Victor, Cecil enters the French Foreign Legion as a low-ranking soldier. Ouida immediately thrusts her protagonist into a scenario in which his upbringing dramatically contradicts the social station in which he now lives. It is the conflict between these paradoxical positions that nearly kills Cecil on several occasions. Additionally, because of his feminine features and healthy libido,

²⁶Gilbert, p. 145.

his retreat into the land of the ‘languorous harem’ draws him closer to the ‘unmanning’ influence of colonial sexuality.²⁷ Ouida underscores the colonial space as highly variable in one of her first descriptions of Algeria:

Pell-mell in its fantastic confusion, its incongruous blending, its forced mixture of two races—that will touch, but never mingle; that will be chained together, but will never assimilate—the Gallic-Moorish life of the city poured out; all the colouring of Haroun al Raschid scattered broadcast among Parisian fashion and French routine. [...] In the straight, white boulevards, as in winding ancient streets; under the huge barn-like walls of barracks, as beneath marvellous mosaics of mosques; the strange bizarre conflict of European and Oriental life spread its panorama (p. 134).

Even within her description, Ouida is constantly vacillating between Europe and the Orient in building her metaphors. This vacillation becomes even greater in Ouida’s characterisations of Cecil and Cigarette.

Still, how is it that a disgraced, self-exiled, aristocrat finds restoration during twelve years of service in Algeria? Ouida’s answer lies in Cigarette, and it is through the vacillations and liminal status of the two characters that she constructs a narrative solution for Cecil’s situation. In the areas of gender and of race, Cigarette’s hybridity is firmly established, whereas Cecil’s capacity to fully integrate into the hybrid colonial space is hindered by his connection to the ascendant class in Britain. Still, both Cigarette and Cecil have moments when they do not ‘fit’ into the prescribed role or space that their background and heritage would call for. By bringing them together in violent scenarios, in which Cecil’s life is threatened, Cigarette ultimately inoculates Cecil against colonial hybridity, while also enabling him to be restored to his proper place.

IV. Gender and Medicine

In the same way that Cecil is a man with many feminine qualities, so too is Cigarette’s femininity combined with a degree of masculinity from the moment she enters the novel:

She was pretty, she was insolent, she was intolerably coquettish, she was mischievous as a marmoset; she would swear, if need be, like a Zouave; she could fire galloping, she could toss off her brandy or her vermouth like a trooper; she would on occasion clinch her little brown hand and deal a blow that the recipient would not covet twice; [...] and she would dance the cancan at the Salle de Mars [...]. And yet with all that, she was not wholly unsexed; with all that she had the delicious fragrance of

²⁷ Piya Pal-Lapinski, *The Exotic Woman in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction and Culture* (Hanover: University of New Hampshire Press, 2005), pp. 10-11.

youth, and had not left a certain feminine grace behind her, though she wore a vivandière's uniform, and had been born in a barrack, and meant to die in a battle; it was the blending of the two that made her piquante, made her a notoriety in her own way (p. 145).

Ouida's use of the term 'unsexed' is significant, because it is a description which frames Cigarette's life in the novel, a word that she is insulted by at first, but learns to accept and turn to her advantage by the novel's end.

The earliest recorded use of the term is from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, in which Lady Macbeth commands the spirits to, 'Unsex me here; | And fill me, from crown to toe, top-full of direst cruelty!' (I.v.38-41). These few lines, which precede Macbeth's murder of King Duncan, an act in which Lady Macbeth is complicit, suggest that Lady Macbeth throws off her feminine qualities in order to assist in the murder. As Phyllis Rackin argues, the soliloquy 'implies that women have a natural aversion to killing, physically grounded in their sexed and gendered bodies'.²⁸ Thus the etymological basis for the term emerges from an act of violence. At the close of the eighteenth century it was popularly used as an epithet against early proto-feminist writers like Mary Wollstonecraft.²⁹ Thus feminine violence and feminine independence both have associations with being 'unsexed'.

However, Ouida suggests that Cigarette is not nearly as 'unsexed' as she might appear. The implication of the narrative is that most women who carry the same qualities as Cigarette *would* be 'wholly unsexed', but that she has managed to avoid this. Despite being described as pretty, Ouida locates her capacity *not* to be unsexed in less visibly perceptible qualities: her 'fragrance of youth' and her even more ethereal 'feminine grace'. Indeed, it is in the very preservation of her feminine allure and sexuality that Cigarette takes on a strong association with disease, both literal (through sexually transmitted infections) and metaphorical (through her social indeterminacy and gender bending). This is important to my contention that Cigarette functions as an inoculation because the European discourse on smallpox sufferers 'was gendered: referring to men, it spoke of danger to life; referring to women, of danger to beauty'.³⁰ Because Cigarette's appearance does not confer her femininity, I would suggest that her physical attractiveness is itself a symptom of the diseased sexuality of the colony. As such, Cigarette represents a human carrier of the social and sexual 'disease' that threatens Bertie Cecil.

Yet, despite her many lovers, Cigarette 'never loved anything, except the roll of the pas de charge' (p. 148). Thus Cigarette has no 'love' for those with whom she shares her body; rather, it is her 'masculine' activities of fighting and battle that claim her affection. While her 'own sex would have seen no good in her [...] her comrades-at-arms could and did' (p. 149). If, as Ouida's experience with her periodical

²⁸ Phyllis Rackin, 'Staging the Female Body: Maternal Breastfeeding and Lady Macbeth's "unsex me here"', in *Bodyscape: Women, Orgy, Parody*, ed. by Catherine Nesci (Atlanta: Rodopi, 1999), pp. 17-29 (p. 19).

²⁹ See Thomas Mathias, *The Pursuits of Literature* (1798), edition (London: T. Becket, 1803) and Richard Polwhele, *The Unsex'd Females* (New York: W. Cobbett, 1800).

³⁰ Grundy, p. 15.

publisher indicates, this novel was seen as highly ‘unmoral’, then this very phrase takes on a more subversive quality as Cigarette’s comrades, many of them her lovers, find good *in* her. However, in defiance of this description, Cigarette is drawn to Bertie Cecil precisely because, unlike other soldiers, he is not drawn to her. Indeed, he is first in the novel to verbalise the opinion that Cigarette is ‘unsexed’, a comment which Cigarette is both insulted and bewildered by, ‘Unsexed! If you have a woman’s face, may I not have a man’s soul? [...] What did he mean?’ (p. 166). Bertie Cecil finds Cigarette at once attractive and repulsive; while believing that her sexual liberality has left her ‘buffeted about’, Cecil is also entranced by her ‘feminine’ and ‘penetrate[ing]’ speech (p. 201). This penetration belies both Cigarette’s combined masculine and feminine qualities, while also foreshadowing the role that she will play as inoculant. In order for the inoculation to occur, there must be penetration, through which the patient is given a minor infection of the full disease.

Ouida complicates Cigarette’s association with disease by also making her an accomplished nurse and medic. While clearly possessing an intimate knowledge of sexuality that was associated with medical women, the fact that Cigarette receives her training from a surgeon and performs medical procedures in the military, demonstrates how ‘women crossed over and between the different modes of [medical] practice – [...] modes which only became firmly distinguished from the late nineteenth century’.³¹ In this way Cigarette shares inoculation’s ‘illogical’ quality; she has the simultaneous potential to heal and infect. This medical skill is linked to Cigarette’s liminal gender status through the connections that Ouida draws in describing Cigarette. As Gilbert observes, ‘Ouida ties together images of the “yellow” (diseased), “vulture-eyed” (death and disease consuming) camp follower (sexually promiscuous woman), who is “foul mouthed” (consuming and spewing filth) with Cigarette’s attractiveness, i.e., her sexual availability’.³² The conception of Cigarette as ‘disease consuming’ is especially appropriate to her status as metaphorical inoculant. Her sexual desirability and masculine behaviour are a part of her role as feminine medic, and through this linkage, Ouida makes her the agent of disease consumption for Bertie Cecil.

V. Racial Liminality in the Colony

In *Under Two Flags* both Bertie and Cigarette are racially liminal: Cigarette’s skin is not a reliable marker of identity, and Bertie’s loyalty to white colonial interests is less than certain. When he first decides to escape into the Algerian colonial conflict, Cecil plays a game of dice with a French officer to decide which side of the struggle he will join. On the surface it would seem that his loss of fortune has left Cecil so apathetic as to not really care which side he joins, and yet, in a precarious moment of honesty, Cecil tells the Frenchman that he is ‘more inclined to your foes [because] in the first place, they are on the losing side; in the second; they are the lords of the soil; in the third, they live as free as air; and in the fourth, they have undoubtedly the right of the

³¹ Bashford, p. 123.

³² Gilbert, p. 147.

quarrel!' (pp. 137-38). Cecil is attributing several aristocratic ideals to the Arabs in his characterisation of their involvement in the colonial conflict: as 'lords' of the soil, Cecil makes a fairly unabashed connection between English nobility and the Arabs fighting against colonialism. English nobility drew power from the land under their control – agriculture maintained through the leasing of property to tenants was the foundation of upper society – so that Cecil's description gives the Arabs more in common with a standard of upper class 'English-ness' than the French colonisers. At this moment Cecil reveals the extent to which he is in danger of being made unsuitable for returning to England by his exposure to the colonial space and its conflict. To side with the native fighters against the European imperial presence would be to renounce all loyalty to his heritage, even if such a defection was couched in metaphors that show the similarities between the Arabs and the English landed gentry.

However, even as a soldier for the French, Cecil moves well beyond a general admiration for the Arabs when we learn that he falls in love with an Arab woman. Ouida skips over a large portion of Cecil's time in Africa, so that this event is related in retrospect, but the memory is revealed in a powerful way. Cecil recalls Zelme, 'a woman he had loved well: a young Arab, with eyes like the softness of dark waters [...]. Her death had been the darkest passage in his life in Africa' (p. 165). This woman was a spoil of war, and her being acquired as property casts a negative light on the whole affair. However, unlike the sexual excesses and diseased associations of Cigarette, this woman fosters a lifestyle of restraint and sacrifice in Cecil. In order to provide Zelme with 'such few and slender comforts as he could give her', Cecil would deny 'himself cards, or wine, or tobacco, or an hour at the Cafe' (p. 165). Ouida demonstrates how Cecil is playing on the precipice of the social disease of the colonies, because he brings the honourable behaviour of a gentleman into a taboo inter-racial relationship.

It is, in part, his unwillingness to relinquish his social origins that brings him to the brink of death. He must endure constant reminders, primarily through his interaction with higher-ranking officers, of his social descent, and no officer embodies this conflict more than the Marquis de Chateauroy. The Marquis, like Cigarette, has been in Algeria for many years. Consequently, his skin has been 'burned black by long African service' (p. 153). Ouida makes an interesting distinction with respect to this 'blackening': it is not just his presence in Africa, but also his service, which have combined to burn his skin black. As such, the novel draws a connection between the kind of service in which Chateauroy has taken part and racial hybridity; he represents an oppressive force, but even his staunch opposition to the Arabs cannot keep him from being darkened. Cecil's antagonism to Chateauroy eventually lands him in front of a firing squad. Cecil meets Venetia, the sister of a former brother officer in England, and the widow of an Italian prince while she is sight-seeing in Algeria; noticing his affinity for Venetia, and assuming Cecil to be nothing more than a low-ranking soldier, Chateauroy questions Venetia's purity, an insult for which Cecil strikes Chateauroy across the face. This unforgivable assault on a superior officer results in Cecil's death sentence. However, it is in this moment that Cecil both realises his opposition to the French and tries to reclaim some of his

aristocratic background: 'He was no longer the soldier bound in obedience to submit to the indignities that his chief chose to heap on him; he was a gentleman who defended a woman's honour, a man who avenged a slur on the life that he loved' (p. 384). The difficulty, of course, is that he is still bound to the colonial system he has joined, and it seeks to infect him terminally. No matter how much Cecil attempts to change his conceptual relationship with Chateauroy, he is still a subordinate coloniser who has committed a serious offence. Ouida reveals that Cecil requires help from within the colonial culture in order to form his immunity against colonial retribution.

In contrast to Bertie Cecil, Cigarette, while very much indicative of the racial hybridity of the colony, exudes far less uncertainty about her political loyalties and status. Indeed, her very beginnings are firmly embedded in the sexual stigma of the colony: 'her mother was a camp-follower, her father nobody knew who' (p. 148). Cigarette's own sexuality is a reflection of her mother's, and a woman with many sexual partners would have no certain way of knowing who fathered her child. Her upbringing is also confused, as she seems to have spent most of her life in Africa, yet she carries fierce loyalty to France and was probably in Paris during the 1848 Revolution (although the precise revolution is not made explicit in the text). Ouida emphasises Cigarette's being a democrat, relating how even as a child she 'had sat on the topmost pile of a Parisian barricade' (p. 361). It is on this particular point that there is a discontinuity in the text: in the first mention of Cigarette's Parisian revolutionary activity, Cigarette was ten years old and 'had loaded carbines behind the barricade', but later we are told that Cigarette was only two years old on the barricade (p. 207). This inconsistency, while adding to Cigarette's racial hybridity, also confirms her narrative as part of the colonial narrative, with all the confusion and uncertainty that this entails. She is a child born in Africa of unknown parentage, yet she also comes from Paris and is of an uncertain age.

However, even with these confusions, Cigarette, unlike Cecil, is certain of her place in the social order – she has no ties to an ascendant class in the metropole. In order for her to serve as Cecil's inoculation, she must fully represent the qualities of the colonial setting that he seeks to escape. Ouida paradoxically demonstrates that while both Cecil and Cigarette are hybrid, the precise nature of their hybridities is fundamentally dissimilar. Whereas Cigarette's is fully within the colonial discourse, Cecil's is a constant reminder of his displacement and the danger that he will never return to his home. The 'disease' of colonial living threatens to remove his chance to return, but Cigarette, having been born into the 'diseased' status of a colonial hybrid, inoculates him by being a representative of the very thing he hopes to escape.

VI. Bertie Cecil's Inoculation

Cigarette saves Bertie's life twice before her final sacrifice of jumping in front of the firing squad. The first is a violent confrontation in which Cigarette asserts her masculine qualities through combat, the second involves her medical skill, and the final moment of salvation involves a combination of both, an act of masculine heroism with the medicinal qualities of inoculation and immunization. Ouida seems to build through these moments to the climax of the novel, showing her readers at

each successive stage the capacity that Cigarette has to *prevent* harm (the inoculation).

The first encounter occurs when Cecil takes on four drunken Arabs on horseback who have just trampled over an old man. Despite his affinity for the rightness of the Arab quarrel with France, Cecil's aristocratic notion of honour cannot abide this affront. Still, recognition of the Arabs' just complaint causes him, as he struggles against these four men, to attempt 'avoid[ing] bloodshed, both because his sympathies were always with the conquered tribes, and because he knew that every one of these quarrels and combats between the vanquisher and the vanquished served further to widen the breach, already broad enough, between them' (p. 216). But his honourable intentions only hasten his inevitable defeat at the hands of the four drunkards, and it is Cigarette who fires three times, killing one and wounding the others. Cigarette, still harbouring bitterness over Cecil's calling her 'unsexed', now gloats:

It was well for you that I was unsexed enough to be able to send an ounce of lead into a drunkard! [...] If I had been like that dainty aristocrat [Venetia] down there! [...] It had been worse for you. I should have screamed, and fainted, and left you to be killed [...]. [T]hat is to be 'feminine,' is it not?' (p. 217).

Ouida makes a conscious distinction between Cecil's restraint, despite his position as a coloniser, and Cigarette's willingness to fire without hesitation. The description is specifically that of infection; because of Cigarette's being raised around the Army, she 'caught fire at the flame of battle with instant *contagion*' (p. 216, emphasis mine). Her violence is linked directly to her upbringing in the colony and is described in terms of a diseased infection – something contagious that spreads from person to person. Cecil himself is not yet immune to this contagion, as he is one of the best fighters in the Legion. But his prowess in combat, unlike Cigarette's, is not a result of his exposure to the colony. Indeed, as I have indicated, Cecil's loyalty to the French was determined in a game of chance, and so his violence, again, is linked to his notions of aristocratic honour. In this moment, however, Ouida warns that Cecil's honour, unless infected by the colonial practices of Cigarette, may very likely kill him.

Cigarette saves Cecil again, but through an application of medical skill rather than violence. However, even her medical skill is linked to the violent conflicts of the colony: 'how deftly she would cure [the soldiers]', 'dash[ing] through under raking fire, to take a draught of water to a dying man', and riding 'twenty leagues [...] to fetch the surgeon of the Spahis to a Bedouin perishing in the desert of shot-wounds' (pp. 148-49). After Cecil is critically wounded in a skirmish, Cigarette pulls him from the battlefield and cares for him. At this moment Ouida reiterates Cigarette's medical abilities:

She had certain surgical skill, learned [...] with marvellous rapidity, by observation and intuition; and she had saved many a life by her

knowledge and her patient attendance on the sufferers – patience that she had been famed for when she had been only six years old, and a surgeon of the Algerian regiments had affirmed that he could trust her (p. 287).

After hours of attending him, Cigarette gets the unconscious Cecil to drink, and the infusion of fluids revives his health. Once again, she connects her actions here with being unsexed: ‘If I were not unsexed enough for this, how would it be with you now?’ (p. 289). Cigarette is cognizant of the emerging pattern in which her very ‘unsexed-ness’ is repeatedly responsible for Cecil’s well-being; her quality of colonial hybridity is the very quality that preserves Cecil’s life, and she now is wary of what may occur if she is called upon to save him again.

Through these first two moments Ouida has established the two qualities of Cigarette that make up her final inoculative capability. She is both violent and dangerous, just as the inoculation with smallpox was potentially dangerous. Additionally, her continued rescuing of Cecil already enacts a partial inoculation, as she maintains his resistance to death. Through these initial deployments of Cigarette’s skills in the novel, Ouida’s narrative sets the stage for the final inoculation in Cigarette’s sacrifice to save Cecil. In the midst of his court-martial and death sentence, Cigarette rides through the night in an effort to bring proof of ‘Louis Victor’s’ true identity as well as a written commutation of the death sentence from the highest-ranking officer in Algeria.

Returning just as the soldiers are about to execute Cecil, Cigarette throws her body in front of the firing squad to save his life. Cigarette’s method of saving Cecil is most certainly dangerous; just as an inoculation had the potential to cause a full case of smallpox, so too does Cigarette’s action carry with it the possibility that she will not stop all the bullets, leaving a stray shot to kill Cecil. Ouida is aware of this as she notes that Cecil, though he has been saved, is only ‘almost unharmed, grazed only by some few of the balls’ (p. 409, emphasis mine). In having some of the bullets hit Cecil, Ouida recognises that Cigarette’s body could not stop every bullet. In this way there is a physical inoculation, a human transfer of tissue, as part of Cigarette is violently injected into Cecil. Finally, as Cigarette is dying, she encourages Cecil to marry Venetia because ‘she is not “unsexed” ’ (p. 412). While it has always been Cigarette’s ‘unsexed’ and hybrid nature that has saved Cecil, at this moment, she recognizes that her final act of salvation will allow him to attain the bourgeois feminine standard in Venetia. Ouida underscores Cigarette’s centrality in the final chapter as we learn that Venetia and Cecil have built a memorial to Cigarette at their home in the English countryside. Thus, just as inoculation leaves a scar at the site of infection, so has Cigarette left physical scars, from the bullets, and psychological ones, evidenced by the memorial. While scars do connote the presence of infection and pain, they also are signs of healing—the scar is evidence of a disease that is now past, and no longer of any danger. So Bertie Cecil, returned to his fortune and heritage, no longer lives in fear of permanent exile in the diseased and dangerous space of the colony.

What Ouida is doing in *Under Two Flags* is unique to the extent that it suggests a process through which a successful return from the colonies is possible. It is an

ambitious goal, in which Ouida is navigating the tenuous divisions of colonial discourse: Bertie Cecil supports the Arabs, but fights with the French; he falls in love with an Arab woman, but marries a European Princess. For other characters in British literature who have returned from the colonies, the contrast between colonial and domestic mindsets is often more stark. Mr Rochester's first marriage and return from the colonies in *Jane Eyre* makes women of colonial origins out to be unstable and violent. Mr Kurtz, on the other hand, is subsumed by the 'heart of darkness', again portrayed as a violent and sexualized abyss, making any return to Europe impossible.

Rather than trying to controvert colonial stereotypes (as Jean Rhys does in *Wide Sargasso Sea*), Ouida's novel seeks to demonstrate that Bertie Cecil can simultaneously begin to become a part of colonial life, but also eventually return to the domestic sphere in England. As his hybrid qualities indicate, Cecil becomes quite ensconced in colonial life, often in ways that, in other novels, would prevent his return. Ouida, however, introduces Cigarette as a counterpart to Cecil, and her role in the novel becomes a significant complication of Barthes's inoculation, in which Cecil is inoculated against being drawn inexorably into the repressive colonial project, but as a result is returned to his ascendant position in England. *Under Two Flags* raises the question of how other authors, especially of popular fiction, might have attempted simultaneously to criticize and endorse the colonial project. In Ouida's case, her female protagonist becomes the inoculation against the colony, while also attempting to present a tantalizing and adventurous conception of a colonial woman's life and death.

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