

## On Teaching, Not Teaching, and Teaching *The Sheik*

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**Abstract:** When I began teaching courses on popular romance fiction in 2005, E. M. Hull's *The Sheik* was an integral part of my syllabi—only to drop off, a few years later, and resurface in the contexts of my modern literature surveys. This essay explores why I chose to teach the novel, how my approaches to it evolved, and what shifts in my pedagogical goals and my sense of popular romance history led me to remove the book from genre-specific courses, but revisit it as part of Anglo-American literary history, with particular attention to the novel's treatment of Diana's whiteness. I share study questions and essay prompts that proved productive in each context, as well as contextualizing materials, including the lyrics to the "Kashmiri Song" that is repeatedly mentioned in the novel, Helen Kane's period hit "He's So Unusual," and discussions of desire, trauma, and narrative from Anne Carson and Lynne Pearce.

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### In the Beginning (Notes and Topics)

In mid-July, 2005, I opened a new Word file and sketched out the reading list for ENG 285, my first class devoted to popular romance fiction. The quarter before I had been on leave, ostensibly to start a book on A. S. Byatt's *Possession: A Romance*. On my return I was slated to teach a follow-up course on "Romance," broadly considered – but while on leave, on the New Books shelf of my local public library, I had stumbled on *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* by Pamela Regis, and that led me to change my plans. Rather than a class on

“Romance,” I had decided, I would teach a class on “the popular romance novel,” the genre I had likewise stumbled upon at my library some six years before. (Credit this time goes to a flyer listing “Books to Read While You’re Waiting for the Second *Bridget Jones’s Diary*.” At the top of the alphabetical list was *The Boyfriend School* by Sarah Bird; I never looked back.) Regis’s monograph begins with *Pamela* and moves into the twentieth century with a chapter on E. M. Forster’s *A Room with a View* (1908), but her chapters on the twentieth-century popular romance novel use E. M. Hull’s *The Sheik*, “the ur-romance novel of the twentieth century” (115), as their touchstone.[1] Regis said it; I believed it; that ended it, and for the next five years, every romance class I taught would start there as well.

Because my teaching style is improvisatory and discussion-based, I have fewer records than I would like of what I did in those early courses. A file called “Sheik Quiz 1” reveals what I must have thought were the most important things for students to note in the first half of the novel – if memory serves, I passed this out for reading notes, with the warning that I’d be asking some subset of the questions the following day in class:

- What is the name of our heroine?
- What happened to her father and mother?
- Who raised our heroine, and how did he raise her?
- Why did she begin her “ceaseless travels”?
- As the novel begins, how often has our heroine been in love? How often has she been kissed? How often has she been afraid?
- What does our heroine think of marriage at the start of the novel?
- What does our heroine hear at the party, while she sits outside with Arbuthnot?
- What happens when our heroine tries to shoot the rock, or the Sheik?
- What does the French servant Gaston call the Sheik?
- Why has the Sheik kidnapped our heroine?
- To what sort of animal does she compare the Sheik?
- What does the Sheik do to the colt?
- Who is “Shaitan” in the novel?
- What does the Sheik think (or know) of love?
- According to the Sheik, what would happen if our heroine loved him? How would he then feel about her?
- What does our heroine realize as the Sheik brings her back to camp?

Alas, I have no “Sheik Quiz 2” for the second half of the novel, but clearly I wanted my students’ to focus on some of the more resonant or symbolic aspects of the book (Diana’s name, the pervasive and phallic firearm symbolism, the treatment and naming of horses), as well as its thematic content regarding love, gender, sexuality, and so on.

From a second file, “*The Sheik: Some Notes, Via Pam Regis’s Categories*” I gather I used the novel to illustrate and inculcate the eight genre-defining elements of the romance novel that *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* introduced to scholarship. In effect, I had my students replicate what Regis does in her study (119-23), albeit with some twists. Regis, for example, touches only briefly on the rude but powerful symmetry of the novel’s structure – “Hull spends about half the book bringing Diana to a recognition of her love for Ahmed; the second half she spends having Ahmed recognize his love for Diana” (122) – while I must have

wanted my students to look more closely at this central shift, both in terms of Ahmed's realization that Diana's surrender leaves him full of "unaccountable dissatisfaction" (166) and in compositional terms, such as the way Hull abruptly begins to offer the reader Ahmed's point of view. The paper topics I offered likewise start with Regis's terms but then expand outward into compositional, psychological, and feminist socio-political issues raised by the novel, and they make clear that I talked with my students about Tania Modleski's *Loving with a Vengeance* and assigned some essays from Jayne Ann Krentz's anthology *Dangerous Men, Adventurous Women*, although my syllabus does not specify which ones:

1. One of the marvelous things about *The Sheik* is E. M. Hull's ability to maintain tension throughout the book, notably by multiplying what Pamela Regis calls the "barriers" – both external and internal, or psychological – that keep our heroine and hero apart. Write an essay that focuses on this structural element of romance (the barrier) in *The Sheik*. Moving through the novel sequentially, from start to finish, discuss the various barriers we encounter in the book and, as each comes down, how new barriers rise to take their place until the final moments of the text.
2. Tania Modleski has written of the "self-subversion" of romance heroines, and of the way that female readers are encouraged to accept, or even embrace, this "self-subversion." Diana would seem a perfect example of this tendency in action, moving as she does from independence to submission over the first half of the novel and never quite recovering. *Or is she?* Write an essay that argues *against* Modleski's theory, based on a close reading of *The Sheik*. Feel free to draw on the essays in *Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women* to build your case: i.e., you may wish to argue that the reader does not identify simply with Diana, but also in part with Ahmed; or that Diana is not quite so self-subverted by the end of the novel as she seems.
3. In class we began to explore the psychological motivations of both Diana and Ahmed: specifically, the childhood of each, and how each was shaped, however unconsciously, by the relationship and / or death of her / his parents. Write an essay that explores this topic in more detail. Show how each of these characters *restages* or *works through* that early trauma, and how each comes to find in the other some reassurance and healing, however twisted (or pleasantly twisted) the process or final outcome may seem.
4. In class, we discussed the final scene between Ahmed and Diana as crucial to the novel: the one final chance we get to see their relationship as anything other than a static, gender-defined master/slave, dominant/submissive pair. Write an essay on that final scene, or even just the final page, with attention as needed to earlier material, that shows how E. M. Hull tries, however successfully, to establish some sort of mutuality, or even equality, between the heroine and hero as the novel ends.

In retrospect, I'm struck both by the gaps and the curious, even problematic assumptions in these paper topics. Nothing here asks students to think in historically-informed ways about the novel, either in its treatment of masculinity or in its Orientalism, a term that is conspicuously absent. Nothing mentions the novel's enthusiastic racism, nor the role that Diana's white supremacy plays in rebuilding her character in the second half of the novel. Nothing talks about rape, or invites my students to address Hull's treatment of the relationship between femininity and sexual assault, even though the novel insistently links

these two. (Ahmed knows that Diana is “not a boy” and means to force that understanding upon her [81]; after her rape, the narrator refers to “the shivering piece of womanhood that had been born with tears and agony last night” [63], etc.) I still think the option to do a close reading of the final page is useful, since the series of names that Diana uses for Ahmed is revealing, as is the fact that she draws his head to hers for the final kiss, not the other way around. Still, in nudging my students to celebrate the novel’s largely-unacknowledged artistry, I seem also to be inviting them to write apologies for and defenses of the novel’s sexual politics, in line with the defenses of the genre and of hypermasculine heroes found in the Krentz anthology (e.g., the essays by Malek, Donald, and Krentz herself).

## Adventures in Context

In my third year of teaching *The Sheik*, I began to contextualize the novel much more robustly. The contexts take three forms. On the one hand, my file of “Contexts and Notes” includes references to British losses in World War One, to T. E. Lawrence and the Arab Revolt, and to Elaine Showalter’s influential argument in *The Female Malady* (1985; subsequently contested, refined, and developed by others) that the war caused a “crisis in masculinity” in Britain and elsewhere. Hints of this crisis – and, thus, of a longing for some stronger or unwounded gender norm – can also be found, in a lighter vein, in some instances of popular culture that I brought to the class. I’m sure in my earlier classes I had mentioned that *The Sheik* created an iconic character, later embodied by Rudolph Valentino (and thence provoking a backlash), but now for the first time I seem to have played my students Helen Kane’s “He’s So Unusual,” a hit song from 1929 (so a decade after the novel) that illustrates how “sheiking” had entered public consciousness as a name for sexually commanding male behavior, or perhaps more specifically, for such behavior as an object of female desire:

You talk of sweeties, bashful sweeties  
I’ve got one of those!  
Oh, he’s handsome as can be, but he worries me  
He goes to college, and gathers knowledge  
Oh, what that boy knows!  
He’s up in his Latin and Greek  
But in his sheikin’ he’s weak

’Cause...when I want some lovin’,  
And I gotta have some lovin’  
He says, “Please! Stop it, please.”  
He’s so unusual!  
And when I want some kissin’,  
And I gotta have some kissin’,  
He says, “No! Let me go.”  
He’s so unusual!

I know lots of boys who would be crazy over me  
If they only had this fellow’s opportunity.

You know, I would let him catch me  
But the darn fool, he doesn't let me!  
Oh, he's so unusual that he drives me wild!

The song is a fascinating knot of paradoxical desires – for a boy who “sheiks”; for this boy, who doesn’t; for this boy *because* he doesn’t (but might) – and can be used to introduce the paradoxical desires that play out over the course of the novel. Indeed, although it might seem a leap from Kane, the “original Boop-Boop-a-Doop Girl,” to the work of the Canadian poet and classicist Anne Carson, that seems to be a leap I made in class, and a brief digression on Carson will make this notion of paradox clearer, leading to the third of my contextualizing gestures.

In her monograph *Eros the Bittersweet*, Carson observes that the experience of eros was framed by Greek and Roman authors as one of contradiction and ambivalence. The “instant of desire,” she writes, “staggers under pressure of eros,” so that one’s “mental state splits” into a “simultaneity of pleasure and pain,” love and hate, heat and cold, honey and gall, presence and absence, knowledge and ignorance, sameness and difference, flight and pursuit, and so on (3). Even “moral evaluation,” says Carson, “fractures under pressure of paradox, splitting desire into a thing good and bad at the same time” (8-9). This fracturing *breaks us into song*, we might say, with the art of lyric embodying this double-sense of eros in characteristic figures of speech and twists of syntax: paradox, oxymoron, antithesis, pun, the déjà-vu Greek adverbial tense of *dēute*, or “right now-again” (Carson 118-19) in which past and present intertwine. The arts of narrative, by contrast – first epic, then drama, then the novel – unravel these compact figures of doubleness into a linear sequence, “play[ing] out as dilemmas of plot and character all those facets of erotic contradiction and difficulty that were first brought to light in lyric poetry” (79). In a lyric poem, that is to say, I hate and love simultaneously; in a novel, my hatred *turns* to love, pride and prejudice yielding to affection and admiration.

Carson presents this difference between lyric and narrative as structural, rather than qualitative: that is, there is nothing more or less appealing about either art’s representation of love. Briefly, though – in no more than a sentence – she hints that other readers may feel differently. Carson invites us to “superimpose on the question ‘What does the lover want from love’” a second question: “‘What does the reader want from reading?’” (78). The answer, she says, is “novels” (78) – which suggests that the romance novel may be a *popular* form at least partly because the sequential experience of conflicting emotions is so much easier to process than their simultaneity. Romance scholar Lynne Pearce uses trauma theory to elaborate this claim. The “will-to-narrative in romance,” she writes, “is first and foremost a way of putting into some sort of order the willfully irrational psychic and sexual drives that subtend the condition,” rendering “*visible*” and “*causal* all that is essentially irrational, contradictory and cause-less” about our amatory lives (17). The “traumatic present of love,” which lyric spelunks and sustains, gets transformed in by love stories into a healing illusion of sequence and coherence, the sublime “self-abandonment” and “impossible contradiction[s]” of love turned into something that is “merely a ‘phase’ with a beginning and, mercifully, an end” (19).

In *The Sheik*, Hull touches on this structural bond (and psychological tension) between lyric and narrative love. Our first glimpse of Sheikh Ahmed is, in fact, not a glimpse at all, but a *sound*: Diana hears someone singing the “Kashmiri Song,” an Edwardian hit,

outside her window in Biskra. The song recurs, and is once again named, so it's not a nonce detail, and when we look up the lyrics, we understand why. Composed by Amy Woodforde-Finden, the "Kashmiri Song" borrows words from a once-famous poem of that name by Laurence Hope (Adela Florence Nicolson) from her 1901 collection *The Garden of Kama*.

### **Kashmiri Song (Song Lyrics)**

Pale hands I loved beside the Shalimar,  
Where are you now? Who lies beneath your spell?  
Whom do you lead on Rapture's roadway, far,  
Before you agonise them in farewell?  
Pale hands I loved beside the Shalimar,  
Where are you now? Where are you now?

Pale hands, pink tipped, like Lotus buds that float  
On those cool waters where we used to dwell,  
I would have rather felt you round my throat,  
Crushing out life, than waving me farewell!  
Pale hands I loved beside the Shalimar,  
Where are you now? Where lies your spell?

Like the poem it derives from, the "Kashmiri Song" is a knot of erotic ambivalence. In it we hear desire and resentment, longing and bitterness, an erotic violence turned at once inward (if only you had strangled me) and outward (I cut off your hands, metaphorically speaking, and in the poem, the speaker cuts through their skin to the hot blood beneath). In the poem, the beloved's hands are "pale dispensers of my Joys and Pains, / Holding the doors of Heaven and of Hell," yet another pair of contradictions. The final question of the song, "Where lies your spell?" does not occur in the poem, but it, too, plunges us into paradoxes, suggesting at once that the spell is broken (which it clearly isn't) and that the spell has simply moved on elsewhere (though the singer is still heartsick and enchanted). That this is (ostensibly) a Kashmiri song gives the reader an Orientalist excuse to indulge in a *Leibestod* fantasy, yet if we wonder *why* the speaker feels this extremity of emotion, we are stymied. In *The Sheik*, by contrast, the violent emotions of Diana and Ahmed, each of whom pivots precipitously from pain to joy and hate to love, get painstakingly psychologized in terms of each character's history and upbringing. That Diana would rather die than have Ahmed say farewell, while he would rather say farewell than do more harm, not only echoes the poem; it also, and far more palpably, repeats and varies incidents between the lovers' respective parents. Their feelings may be irrational, traumatic, contradictory, and explosive, but they're also *explicable*, offering the reader a safely exoticized sojourn in emotions too intense for ordinary life. (As Q. D. Leavis avers in a critique of bestseller culture published just over a decade after *The Sheik*, the novel seems designed to "excite in the ordinary person an emotional activity for which there is no scope in his life" [64], offering readers both an escape from, and some compensation for, the actual "poverty of their emotional lives" [58].)

## Waving Farewell

By this third year of teaching romance, I had arrived at a sturdy, repeatable shape for the course and a readily mastered palette of interpretive approaches for my students to employ. The shape was chronological. We started with *The Sheik*, then talked about the moral and intellectual critiques that it (and novels like it) prompted in Leavis and others – that is, the concern that a book like *The Sheik* is making its reader either immoral, like the book itself, or thoughtless, easily manipulated by the deployment of stereotypes and emotional rhetoric. Those critiques, in turn, set up our next novel – Georgette Heyer’s *Devil’s Cub* – from which we moved on to a mid-century Gothic romance (*Mistress of Mellyn* by Victoria Holt) or a romantic suspense (Mary Stewart was my go-to author here) before arriving at Kathleen Woodiwiss’s epochal 1972 bestseller *The Flame and the Flower* and a selection of late-20<sup>th</sup> / early 21<sup>st</sup> century romances that shifted from class to class. In terms of approaches, I found that starting the course with a list of “lenses” through which any romance novel can be viewed equipped students to be metacognitive about their (and my) decisions about how to make each individual novel “as interesting as possible”: aesthetic approaches, concerned with structure, Regis’ “elements,” allusions, and other literary aspects of each text; historical / political approaches, which included historicized issues of gender and race; psychological approaches (either to characters or to the reading experience); and philosophical approaches (e.g., considering each romance as potentially a novel of ideas, as with my discussion of Eros a moment ago).

Looking back, I feel nostalgic: these were good courses, and this a good structure, one that lent itself to narrative purposes (the “story” of the survey, and thus of the genre’s development) and that set up pedagogically useful opportunities for comparison and contrast. Diana’s effort to shoot Ahmed, early in the novel, is a benchmark of female agency against which firearms use by other heroines – say, Mary Challoner in *Devil’s Cub*, Jessica in Loretta Chase’s *Lord of Scoundrels*, or Daphne in Chase’s *Mr. Impossible* – can be measured; likewise the painful scene of Ahmed cruelly breaking a colt is a superb setup for the poignant healing of a horse, heroine, and hero in Laura Kinsale’s *Prince of Midnight*. Why, then, did I abandon that structure – and, in the process, stop teaching *The Sheik*?

Ten years on, two answers come to mind. The first is simple and practical: the more romance I read, the more late-twentieth and early twenty-first century novels and novelists I wanted to teach, yet this course structure didn’t let me reach the 1980s until halfway through the quarter. The books that I thought would resonate most with my students, and would match their own diversity (in race, religion, gender, sexuality, and more), had to wait – and by the time we reached them, it was often too late for students to feel that this genre included them, too. Call me sentimental or unprofessional, but increasingly, year after year, my students confess that they haven’t read a novel simply for pleasure since they were children, and sometimes *ever*. After reading the right romance, they light up with excitement, realizing just how many others are out there. That was, after all, my own experience – but if *The Sheik* had been the first romance I read, I doubt I’d be writing this essay, let alone editing this journal. Why, then, impose a structure on my students that maps so poorly onto the path I followed into the genre?

My second reason derived thanks in no small part to the questions posed by the Belgian romance scholar An Goris, who sat in on my classes while pursuing her research as

a Fulbright fellow, I had grown increasingly uneasy with the very coherence that I and my students enjoyed. Those syllabi told a shapely story, yes – but the more I learned, myself, about the history of the genre, the more I realized I had had to exclude to make the narrative hold together. My choice of *The Sheik* as a starting point, for example, was based on the fact that Pamela Regis (and Carol Thurston, and others, but mostly Pam) had said that it was the “ur-romance” of the twentieth century. By 2007, thanks to Lynn S. Neal’s *Romancing God: Evangelical Women and Inspirational Fiction* (2006), I knew that I could have opened my classes with *The Finding of Jasper Holt* by Grace Livingston Hill: a book published four years before *The Sheik* and, if not equally popular – few books have been – certainly just as plausibly linked to later developments in genre history. (Hull’s Sheik Ahmed ben Hassan begat generations of “desert romances” and alpha heroes, racist and otherwise, but Hill’s narrative of Christian sentimental redemption “honed the evangelical romance formula, boy plus girl plus conservative Protestant Christianity equals a happy marriage” [Neal 22]: the faith that launched a thousand ships, or at least a dozen publishing lines, in the century to come.) Florence Barclay’s *The Rosary* (1910) now strikes me as another plausible place to start a survey. The bestselling book in both Britain and the United States that year, translated into eight European languages across the following decade (Hipsky 129), *The Rosary* is, in Martin Hipsky’s deft metaphor, a “marbled” text (135) in which “representations of erotic passion...not found in the respectable anglophone romance before the turn of the century” (Hipsky 132) flesh out the novel’s Christian sentimentalism, making it a work of “stealth eroticism” (133). In a course on American popular romance a case might well be made for starting with *Iola Leroy: or, The Shadows Uplifted* (1892) by Frances E. W. Harper: not because of its popularity in the 1890s, but because its testimony to Black love – and its wary treatment of Black sexuality – resonate with the writing, reception, and publishing history of any number of BIPOC American romance novelists, and thereby with American romance as a whole.

## Whiteness is All?

After those first five years, then, I set aside chronological surveys until Deborah Longworth at the University of Birmingham, UK invited me to pair our romance classes in the winter of 2019, using Hull as the starting point and interweaving more recent novels – say, a K. J. Charles queer regency novel, or a contemporary Gothic, or a Tang dynasty Harlequin novel by Jeannie Lin – to show what recent novelists were up to within older, established subgenres. I agreed, and following Deborah’s advice, I emphasized the historical contexts of *The Sheik* to frame our seminar discussion. It went well enough, and students were grateful for the distancing that the history provided – but honestly, the most memorable moments came when we broke the historical frame and grappled more intimately with the text. One student offered, right at the start, that they’d found the novel’s abduction and rape scenes surprisingly erotic, not least because it reminded them of more contemporary erotic fiction and media that were “all over the internet.” This set some students at ease, flustered others, and let the discussion serve as a fine set-up for our later reading of *Fifty Shades of Gray*, another scandalously popular and controversial bestseller. Students also found the novel’s treatment of race, and more specifically of race and gender, equally topical. What scholars have said about Hull’s treatment of the New Woman and other



early twentieth century feminist ideas was inextricable, for my students, with her treatment of *whiteness*, which they related to debates about “white feminism” that were already part of their intellectual (and social media) environment.

As I mentioned earlier, Regis writes of the novel as divided into two halves: the story of Diana’s falling in love with Ahmed; and then the story of his reciprocal affection. The emotional arc of the first half depends on Diana’s male-patterned sense of agency and invulnerability, modeled on that of her misogynistic brother, being cruelly broken by her captor, with whom she then falls in love. He, having broken her will, discovers this brings no satisfaction, and his emotional arc in the second half of the novel requires him, too, to be transformed, in his case into a version of the “*preux chevalier*” that his friend St. Hubert has known all along he can be (Hull 185). (Not *too preux*, of course; in the final pages, Diana wants him to be her commanding “desert lover” and “Monseigneur,” not a chivalrous man who’ll deny himself and nobly send her away [296].) Now, there is much to be done with each of these story arcs – not least with the way that they replicate the conservative, even reactionary gender dynamics that William Reddy locates at the heart of the courtly love tradition that Hull’s use of the phrase “*preux chevalier*” evokes (see Reddy 163). What we noticed in 2019 that we’d missed in 2009, however, is that the second half of the novel isn’t just about Ahmed’s transformation; it’s also about the rebuilding and restoration of Diana: a process that depends on her reclaiming or reassertion of whiteness vis a vis over an assortment of Arab threats and one “gigantic Nubian” (214).

Late in the novel, when Diana finds herself threatened by Sheik Ibraheim Omair, Hull misses no opportunity to mention her whiteness. For example, when she and Gaston are chased down by Omair’s men they are “only a white man and a white woman together in their extremity” (211); to the evil Sheik she is “the white woman of my brother Ahmed Ben Hassan,” to be taunted with the thought that “[h]e has forgotten you already. There are plenty more white women in Algiers and Oran that he can buy with his gold and his devil face” (225); Omair tears off her shirt to expose “her white, heaving bosom,” and leaves “cruel marks marring the whiteness of her delicate throat” (226). Conversely, as Diana remembers that she “had learned her own power among the natives of India the previous year, and here in the desert there was only one Arab whose eyes did not fall beneath hers” (212), her courage is restored and she is able to fight “like a boy” (225): a remarkable shift for the woman who had been made to feel “so desperate, so powerless” (104) in the first half of the book, and one that is ascribed less to her love of Ahmed than to her status as a white British woman, superior to “natives” wherever they might be.

## ***The Sheik* in the Modern Lit Survey**

I have not gone back to teaching *The Sheik* in my romance courses, but the book has returned to my syllabi. Since revisiting the novel in that team-taught class it has found a home in ENG 207, a course on “Literature Since 1900” that does double-duty, here at DePaul, as a required introductory class for English majors and as a Liberal Studies (General Education) class. Influenced by Andrew Goldstone’s Stanford syllabus “Everything But Modernism: Low to Middling Genres” and by Laura Frost’s monograph *The Problem with Pleasure: Modernism and Its Discontents* (2013), I incorporate the novel in this course as a postwar bestseller: one that sits comfortably between poems by Yeats and Dashiell

Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* – and, someday, beside *The Waste-Land*, once we're back to face-to-face instruction – as we talk about cultural nostalgia, political reaction, and period debates about high-, middle-, and low-brow writing (the so-called "Battle of the Brows"). Rather than frame my students' expectations of popular romance, often estranging them from the genre, *The Sheik* works in this context to reframe their ideas about modern literature, bringing it closer as a (potential) field of study. It even equips them, indirectly, to read one of the most challenging texts of the quarter: the dense, allusive ghazal "Tonight" by the Kashmiri-American poet Agha Shahid Ali, whose epigraph and opening lines strike them as oddly familiar.

**Tonight**

Pale hands I loved beside the Shalimar  
—Laurence Hope

Where are you now? Who lies beneath your spell tonight?  
Whom else from rapture's road will you expel tonight?

Ali does not respond to Hull, but the fact that both authors use the "Kashmiri Song," as a reference point enables us to triangulate a relationship and strike up a conversation. Is Stephanie Burt correct that "[t]he epigraph amounts to both tribute and insult, thanking the English writer for her interest and then promising to show what a real Kashmiri song (a real ghazal) by a real Kashmiri (writing in English) can do"? How do the irreducible multiplicities of Ali's poem relate to the multiplicities that Hull's novel first opens up – of Diana's gender, of the Sheik's race (see Blake) – and then tries to contain or shut down? How might the drama of love, and even the *melodrama* of love, cross the great divides between disparate national traditions, poetry and fiction, old texts and new ones, high art and popular culture? In this context, asking such questions, I suspect that I will be teaching Hull's novel for many years to come.

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[1] Carol Thurston likewise calls *The Sheik* "the first romance of the 20<sup>th</sup> century" (38), although this is, as I will discuss, a highly debatable claim.

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