

Visions of a Past: Olive Schreiner's 'Colonial' Problematics

By

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Declaration

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, in the Graduate Programme in

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I declare that this dissertation is my own work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged. I confirm that an external editor was not used. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other university.

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Abstract

The 'colony' in Olive Schreiner's fiction and non-fiction is a place or space, I shall argue, that is both dynamic and complex. The comings and goings, the stories, of the 'characters' in the space are not reducible to the division of indigene/settler.

This dissertation takes as its starting point a still prevalent view that Schreiner's literary achievement displays a typical 'colonial blindness' in matters of dispossession and resistance: that the colonial person has little connection to his/her material surrounds. In reaction to what I regard as a binary language of response, my focus is on what I refer to as 'margins' in Schreiner's writings: that is, to apparently tangential incidents which add complexity to the conception of colony and, by extension, to that of the colonial novel.

My argument is that in her treatment of a colony of diverse, conflicting stories, which are told in both fictional and non-fictional forms, Schreiner challenged the dichotomous language of colonialism (in its sharp delineations between indigene and settler) and imbued her times (1880s-1920s) with visionary potential: a potential that continues to have import where the reductive categories of indigene and settler retain purchase even in postcolonial times.

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Introduction

I first read *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) in the second year of my undergraduate degree as part of a course concerned with 'Narrative in the Victorian Period'. I found my reading of Olive Schreiner's landmark novel generally at odds with the prescribed secondary critical material and with lectures which affirmed Schreiner's 'colonial blindness' to the history of dispossession and resistance. Instead, I found 'instances' and subtle manipulations in this early novel which – for me – problematised any simple use of the term 'colonial'.

The 'colony', whether real or metaphorical, has been variously depicted in literature from *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) to Albert Memmi's *The Coloniser and The Colonised* (1957). In H. Rider Haggard's popular African adventure novels, for instance, the colony is seen as a potential 'pot of gold', an exploitable space. Writing at the same time as Haggard, Schreiner saw the colony not as a place of wild adventure, but as a complex and dynamic phenomenon in which individuals struggle – and, often, fail – to realise their 'self'. Despite her nuanced treatment of 'colony', subsequent writers usually have not granted her depiction of colony its full complexity; some – like Memmi (1957), more generally – have categorised the white 'colonial' as either the man with the gun or the man with the Bible. Such simplicity reiterates the dichotomous language of colonialism, a language which makes sharp delineations between indigene and settler. Even though Mahmood Mamdani (2001) himself fails to elaborate on a more complex view of the colony, he points out that the binary discourse of the colony – indigene/settler – pertains in more contemporary postcolonial African societies. His challenge to the reader is to re-examine both the workings of a colonial society and its language of depiction, so as to avoid entrenched binaries. What Schreiner's writings offer – I shall argue – is such a depiction: one that complicates any singular conception of colonial space.

What emerges in the course of Schreiner's writing career is a 'colony' that refuses to remain static, but moves from her perspective in *African Farm* – a 'farm' that is situated at a metaphorical crossroads as it witnesses, to quote Schreiner herself as she seeks to articulate an appropriate form of novelistic representation, the "comings and goings" of assorted people, some being fortune seekers on their way to the newly discovered diamond fields of New Rush, or Kimberly. (See Schreiner's Preface (2004) to which I shall refer in the course of this study.) It is a farm, then, that is beginning to experience the early intrusion into a colony of modern

industrialisation. Even in Schreiner's earliest writings the colony is more complicated than any indigene/settler descriptive paradigm, but is a colony of many stories which are told in various forms, fictional and non-fictional and, as the past pushes into the future, in cross-generic representations of the history and the imagination. The colony has an intermittent memory which can be traced back to 'Bushman' records; it has a forward-looking trajectory according to which farm yields to suburb, and war invokes both the brutality of division and the ideal of a future beyond divisions of race, class and gender. Such is the colony in its complications, in its problematics, that I shall trace in Schreiner's achievement.

The aim of this study, therefore, is to pursue the appellation 'colonial' as it applies to both the content and form of Olive Schreiner's literary achievement. The approach will grant greater prominence than has hitherto been the case to what I refer to as 'margins' in the works: that is, apparently tangential incidents. What will be suggested is that such margins are not really tangential, but add complexity to Schreiner's treatment of colony. Hence, the subtitle, "'Colonial' Problematics". The title – "Visions of a Past" – infers in its implied paradox that far from remaining subject to an indigene/settler conception of colonial life, Schreiner imbued her times with visionary potential: a potential that retains its purchase not only in a post-apartheid South Africa, but also in our current global times. *The Story of an African Farm* will provide both a narrative 'model' and an interpretative perspective which, in the course of the study, will be applied to a range of the work, both fiction and non-fiction.

The still prevalent assessment of Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* as a work that in itself reveals the negative associations of the category 'colonial novel' is summarised by Stephen Clingman (1986), when he states that, as is characteristic of the colonial person in actual life, Schreiner's protagonists have little sense of connection to their physical surroundings; that the farm, far from operating as a material reality, is merely the objective correlative of the state of Lyndall's and Waldo's respective philosophical and spiritual preoccupations. *African Farm* – Clingman concludes – is oblivious of its own subscription to colonial-settler appropriation. Unquestioning in its territorial possession, Schreiner's novel "ignores the history whereby that position came about in favour of another kind of history: one of the human soul" (Clingman 1986:135). It is a perspective that both precedes Clingman (see Marquard 1976) and is replicated by Anne McClintock in her more latterly published *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (1995). In arguing against such a

view – one which implicitly supports the perspective that the black presence in Schreiner’s writing is a non-agentive and marginal one at best (Walsh 1970; Clayton 2004) – I shall examine small, but – in my view – important inclusions, references and allusions in the novel that, particularly when we read *African Farm* in the light of Schreiner’s later writings, lend a greater conditioning power to the colony on the lives of the two protagonists than critics have usually been willing to countenance. Accordingly, I suggest that rather than following the promptings of textual detail, scholarship has confirmed a portrait of Olive Schreiner that perpetuates a dualistic and, therefore, an inherently reductive conception of colonial life.

Such marginal aspects in the text include the reiterative attention granted even beyond the human landscape to the dog, Doss, reiterative to the extent that the dog begins to assume the significance of a leitmotif. Why such attention? Is this a precursor of what today is classified as ‘animal studies’ and, if so, what has this to do with colonial life? Here, I shall refer to Wendy Woodward’s (2008) imaginative insight into Schreiner’s treatment of farm animals. It is an insight that contributes to a revision of Clingman’s damning comment, above, which regards Schreiner’s references to Africa – as in much colonial writing – as a mere conceit or a “mirror to the settler condition” (1986:135). Then there are the snatches of commentary on Bushman art linked to the story of the white bird of truth, a tale that can be traced to indigenous oral tradition, but which is spoken by an interloper from the French boulevards. There are also the black servants on the farm, usually entirely overlooked in criticism, in which it is generally said that Schreiner revealed a typical colonial blindness towards any ‘non-white’ presence. When critics have dealt at any length with Schreiner’s depiction of the farm’s ‘Other’ inhabitants, her renderings are too quickly dismissed as ‘European’ limitations in the consideration of matters of race and civilisation. In his moving away from the farm and in sharp contrast to the androgynous Gregory Rose, Waldo turns unwillingly to menial physical labour, as important a marker as Waldo’s spirituality – I shall suggest – in charting a path to Schreiner’s later writings. My argument, in summary, is that an exploration of the apparently marginal aspects to which I have just referred ‘problematise’ what Clingman, among others, regards as a pervasive dislocation, or disconnection, of characters and lives from the material surroundings of the colony. Rather, the colony, as Sally-Ann Murray (1992a) has observed, lends substance to the paradox of Schreiner’s own comments on souls struggling amid material surroundings.

To understand Schreiner – I argue – one must permit the colony its own complexities of

demand. Such complexity is reflected in both the content and form of her writings, the latter invoking arguments about her methods and modes of both fictional and non-fictional representation. Those critics who desire to categorise her fiction in accordance with metropolitan literary conventions have disagreed as to whether *African Farm* is a romance (see Christie, Hutchings and MacLennan 1980) or whether Schreiner is a deliberate ‘violinist’ of novelistic realism. *African Farm* has been referred to, accordingly, as proto-modernist. In matters of form I find the critical terms and insights of Cherry Clayton (1983a), Myles Holloway (1989), and Arthur Ravenscroft (1983) of more value than those of critics who, as Holloway notes, have considered *African Farm* to be a “flawed masterpiece” (1989:77). Holloway himself argues for “a comprehensive theory of novelistic discourse that seems appropriate to the social and cultural disjunctions of South African life” (1989:78). Clayton, for her part, finds “more useful critical terms for [Schreiner’s] work than consistency of characterisation, realism, or non-realism mode, or unity of form, by which criteria her fiction has traditionally been found wanting” (1983a:22). I shall pursue the consequences of form beyond *African Farm* into the later non-fictional writings, particularly in the light of Nadine Gordimer’s (1983) comment that Schreiner, in not staying within the fictional mode, wasted her talents.

Granting the observations on politics and society of Frederick Cooper (1994) and Mahmood Mamdani (2001) a literary applicability, I argue that the ‘colony’ – its peculiar and diverse constraints as well as its opportunities – probably offered Schreiner no option but to be simultaneously less than an artist and more than an artist. Schreiner’s own view on the function of art and the role of the artist in society was, accordingly, guided by a belief in a purposeful art (Edmands 1978:37). In opposing Clingman I am suggesting that in Schreiner we begin to identify an ‘aesthetic’ of South African writing, in which boundaries between colony and metropole continually escape the binary of the indigenous or the settler condition. Yet, as Mamdani has it, new challenges in South Africa, indeed in Africa, keep tempting language away from nuance and back to older, more simplified categories of response.

In the light of perspectives on the past and the present in Schreiner’s work, Margaret Lenta in her introduction to the 1992 re-issue of *Thoughts on South Africa* (1923) aptly comments: “When it appeared posthumously in 1923 [*Thoughts*] had become something different from the introduction to the country and its peoples which Schreiner envisaged in the ‘nineties. It had become, and remains, a luminous window into South Africa’s past” (1992:8).

The paradox implied in my title, “Visions of a Past”, suggests that Schreiner’s fiction and non-fiction not only provide a window into South Africa’s past, but also offer the potential of a future in which categorisation and classification are to be scrutinised in definitions of the society. (The re-issue of Schreiner’s works not only in the 1920s, but also in the 1990s may be considered as a mark of the power of her insights and ideas.)

The ‘past’ of Schreiner’s career must be granted, in retrospect, the nuances and contradictions that we grant our own lived experience. The contradictions of her life – her intermediary position as an English-South African, the daughter of an unsuccessful missionary, a governess, and a woman writer at variance with her colonial culture – are intensified in a climate of instability in which she lived, both in the colony and in England. The instability of change is suggested in “the discovery of precious minerals in South Africa, the crises of late-Victorian industrialism, the socialist and feminist upheavals of the fin de siècle, the Anglo-Boer War and the great European conflagration of World War I” (McClintock 1995:259). In the context of such events an earlier Victorian confidence required redefinition of its mores and schemas. Joyce Avrech Berkman says, “Surpassing her contemporaries [Schreiner] like current poststructuralists, was bent upon exposing culture-bound binary oppositions, locating their roots in the errors of religion and science which reflected and upheld Victorian power relations in public and private spheres” (1990:231). The difference, however, is that Schreiner challenged these dichotomies unequipped with scholarly support (Berkman 1990:231). It is Schreiner’s own uncertain position, I suggest, that engendered a voice that, ahead of its time, was alert to ‘colonial problematics’.

In chapter one, ““Colonial Novels’?”, I permit, as I have said, previously ignored margins within *The Story of an African Farm* to guide my argument away from any indigeneity/settler duality to a more comprehensive view of the colony and, by extension, the colonial novel. Such a pursuit will involve matters of content and form, and lead to my suggesting that in *African Farm* we can identify the beginnings of Schreiner’s political and literary vision, one which may be discerned also in the other two fictional works of the same years as *African Farm*, namely *Undine* (1929) and *From Man to Man* (1926), both of which were published posthumously. (Critics to be considered here include Clayton, Holloway and Murray.) In responding to Schreiner’s vision I suggest also the beginnings of a model of South African writing, one that – as in Schreiner’s work – emerges from tensions between settler and indigene and which is not confined to Schreiner’s fiction, but may also be pursued in her non-fictional work. (It is a

tension, incidentally, that is encountered in early black writers such as Sol T. Plaatje, to whom brief reference will be made.)

A frequently remarked upon ‘fault’ in *African Farm* is that Part Two begins with what has been perceived to be a 20-page digression, “Times and Seasons”, Waldo’s lyrical-philosophical ‘dream’, which halts narrative progression. My chapter, “‘Dream Life’ and ‘Real Life’: The ‘Colony’ in Selected Later Writings”, considers whether such ‘digressions’ are marginal to the problematics of colonial representation. What this sequence points to is that Schreiner’s writings throughout her career veer from a metaphysical to a real pole of experience: that is, from stories such as “Eighteen Ninety-nine” (written c.1904) to the prose commentary *Thoughts on South Africa* (1923), or to combinations within the single work of allegory in history, as in *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (1897). While her dreams and allegories, according to Clayton (1983a), complicate any single intention, I shall argue that the interplay of fiction and non-fiction offers a powerful amalgam of personal and public insight. I challenge Gordimer’s (1983) comment, accordingly, that Schreiner wasted her literary talents by not confining herself to fiction. In consonance with the aim of my study, I shall argue that Schreiner’s mediation of dream and real aspects of experience signals a distinctive ‘style’ of her milieu.

The intrusion on the ‘African farm’ of the androgynous Gregory Rose will be considered in chapter one in contrast to Waldo’s difficulty in having to enter the material life of the colony as a drudge. Gender and labour continued to lend ‘shape’ to Schreiner’s visions of a past, as the isolated farm – in the comings and goings of people – begins to feel the harsh wind of future industrialisation and, in her several writings, as women enter into the labour markets of colonial modernity. Turning to Schreiner’s *Woman and Labour* (1911), the allegory, “Three Dreams in a Desert” (1890), and the long story, “Eighteen Ninety-nine”, I challenge – in the reminder of chapter two – the accusation that Schreiner remains distant from the particularities of the colony while at the same time, ironically, being accused of displaying the colonial trait of “the colonial always imitating the metropole”. Rather, Schreiner’s trajectory is to marginalise the (metropolitan) women’s question and locate it firmly in her material surrounds. Margin becomes a new centre and ensures her continuing interest: if as a colonial writer, then as a colonial writer for whom the colony becomes a precursor of a modernising South Africa. (Other texts to be considered here include “Closer Union” (1908) and “The Dawn of Civilisation” (1921).)

Finally, it could be argued that the willingness of the study to ‘centre’ margins, specifically in the first chapter, suffers from an over-interpretation of allusions that are simply too slippery, tangential, and elusive to sustain the weight of interpretation. Here it is useful to invoke Lenta’s mediation of past and present in her essay, “Racism, Sexism, and Olive Schreiner’s Fiction” (1987). Lenta also identifies instances in *The Story of an African Farm* that challenge the appropriateness of the appellation ‘colonial blindness’. Lenta is cautious not to “over-interpret” these instances; she does, nonetheless, acknowledge the value of small examples as “the way in which the novelist’s habit of accurate observation will lead her eventually to outgrow the prejudices which she has learnt” (1987:24). The inclusion of biographical detail, for example, leads Lenta to suggest that only “in our own day” (1987:27) can *African Farm* be read, to pick up on Clayton’s argument, as a “profound critique of exploitation and possession by displacement” (2004:13). “[T]he ability to read it in this way” – Lenta continues – “depends on an awareness which Schreiner acquired only in later life, that blacks possess potential which is being ignored by the white society of *The African Farm*” (1987:27).

While such attributions are important to my own argument, the synthesis of art and biography unintentionally favours biography to the neglect somewhat of the artistic dimensions of Schreiner’s work. If, argues Trotsky, artistic creation is “a deflection, a changing and a transformation of reality, in accordance with the peculiar laws of art” (in Clayton 1983a:22), then Schreiner’s “formal control” of *African Farm* allowed her to exercise a power that “transforms [and transcends] without destroying the reality on which it operates” (Clayton 1983a:29). Through such margins a colony of greater complexity emerges, as in both real and metaphorical ways colonial binaries are simultaneously maintained and destabilised. The colony can crush the sensitive soul; but it can also hint, ‘marginally’, at new recognitions. As an example, it is a marginal figure – Waldo’s stranger – who provokes contemplation on art. He might be a ‘Europeanised’ dandy, but his perceptions are truer than perhaps he realises. In attempting to interpret Waldo’s carved piece of wood the stranger states, “[T]he whole of the story is not written here, but it is suggested. And the attribute of all true art, the highest and the lowest, is this – that it says more than it says, and takes you away from itself. It is a little door that opens into an infinite hall where you may find what you please” (Schreiner 2004 [1883]:157). The observation provides an apt introduction to a re-reading of the category ‘colonial novel’, as it pertains to Olive Schreiner’s fiction in its artistic and ethical response to her times.

Chapter One: ‘Colonial Novels’?

Critical Reception in Metropole and Colony: Form and Content in *The Story of an African Farm*

To arrive at consensus on Olive Schreiner’s life and writings is not an easy task. Reception of her work remains divided on the efficacy of both her artistic and ethical accomplishment. By reviewing, initially, critical reception we may glean something of the ‘problematic’ as responses to her novelistic approach invariably involve consideration of the purpose of her literary endeavour. One of her biographers, D. L. Hobman, has called her “everything that was contradictory: a self-centred altruist, an individualistic Socialist, a hermit who craved for friends, a fierce and aggressive pacifist. She envied men, and therefore she exalted women; she abhorred war, yet most vehemently supported the Boers against her own countrymen; she denied God, while all her life her soul was penetrated with awareness and love of the Divine” (1955:1). As Myles Holloway points out, there is in criticism a tendency both “to applaud and to express reservations” about Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm* (1989:77). Since its publication in 1883 *African Farm* has engendered such contradictory reactions that, Holloway continues, Francis Brett Young’s (1929) “description of this novel as ‘the most perfect example of an imperfect masterpiece ever written’ may still stand as a typical response” (1989:77). More latterly, and following ‘literary-theoretical’ revisions of how one might respond to matters of form – a renewed interest in Bakhtinian ‘heteroglossia’, for instance – Stephen Gray, among others, has concluded that the distinctive feature of Schreiner’s seminal novel is that it is “constructed out of paradoxes” (1979:149). Despite apparent contradictions, or perhaps because of them, Schreiner’s literary achievement, particularly in *The Story of an African Farm*, retains an enduring hold over both readers and critics.

If that is Gray’s view, however, Stephen Clingman’s more damning comment also has purchase, as I indicated in my introduction, particularly with critics who question the materiality of Schreiner’s farm; who regard her references to Africa – as in much colonial writing – as a mere conceit or, as Clingman phrases it, a “mirror to the settler condition” (1986:135). Recognising the powerful depiction of the protagonist Lyndall, who talks as an individual of the late nineteenth-century women’s movement in England, critics have queried the relevance of the ‘British’ focus to the specific contours of the novel’s setting: that is, to colonial South Africa.

How, then, can we approach a paradoxical ‘Olive Schreiner’ without falling into facile literary judgements that deny the complexity of the colonial person and, more generally, the colony?

Schreiner’s life was characterised by a negotiation of boundaries. As missionaries who acted as a buffer between white colonials and black Africans, Schreiner’s mother, Rebecca, and her father, Gottlob, “took their place in [the] imperial narrative” (McClintock 1995:260). Anne McClintock points out, however, that “[c]ontrary to the cult of domestic colonialism, Schreiner’s family lived scarcely better than the fairly prosperous African farmers around them” (1995:266). Later, as a governess, Schreiner “was protected by racial privilege but not by economic security. She lodged among black servants, but not with them” (McClintock 1995:277). She was a coloniser, and by all accounts privileged, in relation to the black inhabitants of colonial South Africa; and yet Schreiner “lacking formal education and the cultural advantages of ‘home’, that is, metropolitan England, experienced the prevailing English contempt for the ‘inferior’ colonial, albeit white and British” (Berkman 1990:6). On the other hand, as a woman she was exiled from patriarchal colonial culture; the “alliance between patriarchy and racism ironically denied her colonial privilege yet endowed her with its guilt” (Monsman 1991:14). Although part of the ruling elite Schreiner, as a colonial intruder, was dislocated from her surroundings while being unable to find roots in metropolitan culture. Olive Schreiner’s life, states Cherry Clayton, “is a story of trying to negotiate on grossly unequal terms” (1983a:21).

I suggest that because of Schreiner’s own paradoxical position – her mediation of various boundaries – her perspective was more alert to ‘colonial problematics’ than has hitherto been pursued. It was a perspective that enabled her to “push some of the critical contradictions of imperialism to their limits” (McClintock 1995:260). Accordingly, in this chapter I aim to present ‘the colony’, in which Schreiner is a rudderless ‘colonial’, as a more dynamic and complex phenomenon than usually features in literary responses to Schreiner’s novel, indeed to most of her work. Through an exploration of what I call ‘margins’ in *African Farm*, I shall argue that Schreiner challenged contemporaneous binary thinking: that is, coloniser/colonised; white/black; domination/submission; metropole/colony; civilised/primitive; self/Other; and native/settler. Her ‘vision’ beyond dichotomous thinking, however, generally does not find its parallel in Schreiner criticism. Critics such as Stephen Clingman while recognising a crisis of colonial legitimacy replicate in their own critical response an indigene/settler binary; yet as Nadine Gordimer comments in a “Review of *Olive Schreiner: A Biography*”, “So far ahead of her own times, Olive

Schreiner has been obscured by the kind of critical assessment that the intervening times have been capable of producing” (1983:15).

Schreiner’s difficult vision of the colony is evident in *The Story of an African Farm*: in both the content and form, particularly as manifest in the ‘comings and goings’ of character and incident. In September 1883, Edward B. Aveling wrote in a review of *African Farm* that he hoped the “cumbersome” title of the book would not allow such a “remarkable” novel to be overlooked by the English reading public (1983:67). Aveling, however, did not realise just how appropriate was the ‘awkward’ title to the colonial South African setting of the novel. If the ‘*African Farm*’ focuses the reader geographically, then the word ‘*Story*’ in the title acquires particular significance: that is, it becomes the “key word” and the “ultimate principle” by which the novel is organised (Monsman 1991:91). On this unspecified, unproductive Karoo farm on the cusp of industrialising South Africa, Waldo’s and Lyndall’s respective spiritual and philosophical preoccupations challenge, and are challenged by, a constraining colonial culture. But theirs are not the only stories. Schreiner’s narrative is a Chinese-box of stories within stories which, like Waldo’s carving, contains a heterogeneity of meanings: the tall yarns of Blenkins interact with the stories told through the Bushman paintings and the open-ended and often more tragic stories of ‘real life’. The African farm is subject to the ‘comings and goings’ of various characters with equally diverse and conflicting stories that add to the complexity of the colony; no “cultural or socio-ideological group is granted permanent, unmediated hegemony; rather, interpersonal and intergroup relations are in a constant state of flux” (Holloway 1989:81). On the farm lives Tant’ Sannie, the Boer-woman; the German overseer, Otto; his son, Waldo; Em and Lyndall, both of whom are descendants of English colonists; and the ‘black’ servants who are primarily of Bantu and Khoikhoi descent. For Schreiner, the ‘comings and goings’ reflect life as it is lived in the colony where “[m]en appear, act and re-act upon each other, and pass away” (Preface 2004:23); they are, however, also a marker of the ‘character’ of colonial life. The departure of the Bushmen who, as Waldo points out, were exterminated in their clash with the Boers, is followed by the arrival on the farm – which is already a polyglot mix of cultures – of the outsider, Blenkins, the hunter-adventurer, who exploits both the land and its people. Before he flees the farm following an indiscretion, Blenkins connives and succeeds in the dismissal of the naïve German, Otto, whose idealised Christianity is at odds with the demands of the colony. ‘The man with the gun’ expels ‘the man with the Bible’; yet Blenkins himself is forced shortly

afterwards to leave the farm. 'Part Two' opens with the arrival and departure of another outsider, Waldo's stranger, the 'enlightened' but displaced French dandy whose fondness for the 'civilised' life disputes the validity of his 'truth' tale. In contrast to Blenkins and the Frenchman who disrupt the rhythms of the farm only to disappear, we have the arrival of Gregory Rose, whose grandiose self-image of a 'romantic adventurer' is subverted in a gender crisis within the realities of colonial life. Rose is not the only character to experience a difficulty of sexual identity in the colony. Lyndall's desire for material success sees her leave the constraints of farm-life; but she returns to the farm four years later, disappointed with what she has 'gained' and pregnant by her own stranger. Lyndall soon discovers that, as might not have been the case in metropolitan culture, her sexual identity – inversely paralleled in Rose's cross-dressing as a woman – goes unnoticed in the colony. To invoke 'Victorian' parlance, she is a 'fallen woman'; yet the colony with its lack of a class-stratified society is indifferent to her condition or fate.

The 'comings and goings' may suggest Schreiner's complex view of the colony, but have also been the source of critical difficulty. The question of whether *The Story of an African Farm* is a successful novel inextricably involves its method of presentation. Those critics schooled in the expectations of Western realism have had difficulty in accommodating the discontinuous, episodic narrative. According to Schreiner, however, the colony in its comings and goings is not reducible to a coherent narrative as in the then dominant metropolitan realist mode. Then again, the seriousness of her novel escaped classification as an African adventure story. It was an oddity of a novel that circulated in turn-of-the-century metropolitan and colonial literary cultures. Of course, criticism in the colony often echoed that of the metropolis; the 'comings and goings' thus being identified as an example of incoherence. More recently, a greater flexibility of critical response to form – an acknowledgement of hybridity, for example – has allowed for revisions in Schreiner scholarship. Yet, in spite of this, critics have rarely challenged the view – summarised by Clingman – that *African Farm* remains a typical 'colonial' novel: binary in its indigene/settler propositions. As I have said, I aim to pay closer attention to those aspects of the novel that present a challenging alternative to colonial dualistic thinking. Such aspects include commentary on Bushman art; the depiction of black servants on the farm beyond the confines of the topography; the two central protagonists' empathetic connection to the colonial Other; and the subjectivity of animals, more specifically the dog Doss. I shall consider then whether Schreiner's vision extends to her other less-known novels, *Undine* and *From Man to Man*.

Schreiner's *African Farm* was originally published in two volumes by Chapman and Hall, at the suggestion of the novelist George Meredith, early in 1883. The manuscript had been rejected on five previous occasions by various "established and influential" (Van der Vlies 2007:23) publishers before it was accepted by Chapman and Hall, a publishing house which, incidentally, "established itself by publishing Dickens" (First and Scott 1990:118). Though her novel was without precedent in the colony, its reception in England was informed by a well-established metropolitan literary culture. *African Farm*, therefore, operated in a culture that was certainly a part of, but also other than, the colonial world of which Schreiner wrote. Andrew van der Vlies, with reference to Jerome McGann, has commented that literary works "are 'particular forms of transmissive interaction', the socio-historical conditions under which each text enters the world establishing the 'horizon' within which its life-history is played out" (2007:22). If, as Van der Vlies suggests, a reader's "reception of a work involves a comparison of his or her conception of its aesthetic value with that of previously read texts" (2007:22), then Schreiner's novel was judged according to literary criteria not wholly unlike those that would come to be established in the colony but, at times, incompatible with the peculiarities of colonial life. Schreiner did not altogether deviate from metropolitan generic categories; however, the insertion of her novel into the metropolitan literary tradition has shaped Schreiner criticism both abroad and in South Africa to the detriment of the specificity of her literary achievement. The varied and, on occasion, conflicting responses to Schreiner's novel problematise any straightforward assumptions about the critical reception of *African Farm* in the decades following its publication. Van der Vlies has also observed that "[r]eaders interpreted the novel differently, [...] and to suggest that a universal ideal of mimetic representation applied as a critical standard in the 1880s and 1890s is to oversimplify a complex field" (2007:22). Laura Chrisman quite rightly states that the metropolis "needs to be disaggregated" (2000:7).

A multifaceted metropolis notwithstanding, certain broad metropolitan norms can be ascertained which fashioned the reception of this book. The Victorian readership responded, both negatively and positively, to the topical issues of the novel. Readers might not have always been sympathetic to the trajectory of Schreiner's plot, but, as Clayton has it, they identified with Schreiner's sensitivity to, and "intimate connection" between, various structures of power: that is, "the structures of conventional Christianity and those of the family and the broader social relations of women" (2004:8). The presentation in *African Farm* of this intertwined power-

relationship resonated with readers of the book as “[t]hey had been living the same distorted lives in England” (Clayton 2004:8). Some contemporaneous reviews, such as Aveling’s (1883), praised Schreiner for her “bold outspokening” on such issues (1983:68); while Canon MacColl (1887), on the other hand, was a little more reticent in her praise concerning Schreiner’s handling of contemporary issues. In the only review that “approached doctrinal exegesis” (First and Scott 1990:122), MacColl cautioned the counter-positioning of Agnosticism, the result of which in *African Farm* is “a moral chaos, ending in a wild wail of despair”, and the “ghastly theology of Calvinism” (1983:72-73). Surely, asserted MacColl, there are Christian alternatives other than the doctrine of Calvinism, which she deemed “not Christianity at all, but a hideous excrescence essentially foreign to the religion of Christ” (1983:73). The radical inclination of Schreiner’s novel engendered several sensational responses, one from a woman who, “in a ‘tone of vengeful relish’, described ‘how having read it she took it up in the tongs, and put it upon the fire’” (First and Scott 1990:123). MacColl maintained, nonetheless, that the book was obviously written by a “pure” soul (1983:73) not, as the *Church Quarterly Review* (1890) reported, by “a mind that seems hopelessly diseased” (Anon. 1983:74).

An early response to the manuscript suggests the literary climate against which Schreiner inevitably had to struggle. A report of one of George Macmillan’s readers, John Morley, comments that in Schreiner’s characterisation, “‘one feel[s] that the writer is often drawing from life’” (in Van der Vlies 2007:24). Yet, Morley calls the depiction of Lyndall “‘so unreal in every respect, and her action is so unrealisable, that the whole effect is marred, the last third or more is horribly mawkish and morbid, as well as fantastically improbable’” (in Van der Vlies 2007:24). The novel’s originality – having been acknowledged – is then dismissed for its failure to remain true to the conventions of verisimilitude. Morley’s criticism, states Van der Vlies, reflects significant assumptions about realism: “[he] commends the author for ‘drawing from life’, but dismisses the plot as unreal, relying on a requirement for verisimilitude to particular standards of propriety and probability, based on assumptions about femininity, to police the content” (2007:24). In *The Fortnightly Review* (1883) Henry Norman similarly discerns a “number of faults” attributed to the “hand of the beginner”, but, more positively, he regarded his reading of *African Farm* with its original characters as an “unspeakable relief to escape from the domains of the ordinary novelist – from Homburg and the Highlands, from yachts, clubs, hansoms, and Piccadilly” (1983:69-70). He argued that the book could alternatively be entitled, the “Romance

of the New Ethics”, because of Schreiner’s tangential consideration of pertinent issues such as “Orthodox Christianity, Unitarian Christianity, woman suffrage, marriage, Malthusianism, [and] immortality” (1983:69). Norman’s suggestion for an alternative title paradoxically alludes not only to the seemingly contradictory critical categorisation of *African Farm*, but also to the novel’s refusal to be easily classified. The review applauds the book’s faithfulness to the conventions of literary realism and, at the same time, “[figures] the novel both as a new – an ethical – kind of romance and as a kind of *anti*-romance, breaking with what [Norman] portrays as the ‘ordinary’ novelist’s obsession with frivolity and escapism” (Van der Vlies 2007:34). The third edition of Schreiner’s book incidentally bore the inscription, ‘*A Romance*’, alongside the continued use of her male pseudonym, Ralph Iron, which – as Van der Vlies surmises – “allow[ed] her to escape the expectations of a young ladies’ or circulating library romance” and to assert the novel’s more serious content (2007:31). (Interestingly, the cover of the first edition of *African Farm* mirrored its mingling of literary genres with the outline of an exotic palm tree at odds with a desolate Karoo landscape.)

It was according to the tenets of realism, therefore, that critics and reviewers, whether consciously or unconsciously, judged the aesthetic value of Schreiner’s novel, a criterion against which the novel inevitably fell short. Contemporaneous metropolitan norms in all probability were closely aligned with what Ian Watt would later articulate as formal realism in his authoritative book, *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), in which Watt notes a shift in some eighteenth-century literature away from the narrative model of the Romance towards a greater “truth to individual experience” (1957:13). This shift heralded “psychological rationalism, narrative continuity and homogeneity, and moral and social resolution [...] as preferable to various forms of discontinuity, including psychic or social neurosis and irresolvable contradiction” (Holloway 1989:78). George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* (1871), which forms part of F. R. Leavis’s ‘Great Tradition’, was central to the serious Victorian strand of literature, and is the novel against which *African Farm* is most frequently evaluated.

Leavis classifies *Middlemarch* as part of ‘the Great Tradition’ of the English novel because of its “sheer informedness about society” and its “profound analysis of the individual” (1973 [1948]:61). In accordance with Watt’s definition of formal realism George Eliot, as Leavis would have had it, was a great novelist as in her “maturest work she handled with unprecedented subtlety and refinement the personal relations of sophisticated characters exhibiting the

‘civilization’ of the ‘best society’, and used, in so doing, an original psychological and moral insight” (1973:15). According to Leavis, however, Eliot’s *Middlemarch* is not without fault: its tendency in its subplots towards Dickensian caricature belies formal realism’s ideal of a truthful reflection of lived experience. Thus, even a novelist like Dickens – who mingled conventions of Victorian theatrical melodrama with conventions of realism – could not be included in Leavis’s line of great novelists as Dickens’s novels were ‘great entertainment’ rather than serious fiction. (Leavis was later to change his mind about *Great Expectations*, but without retracting his earlier, more disparaging opinion of Dickens’s literary achievement.) If Dickens occupied a precarious position in relation to ‘the Great Tradition’, then the more popular Victorian strand of novelists – which included such works as Arthur Conan Doyle’s *Sherlock Holmes*, Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Treasure Island*, and H. Rider Haggard’s African adventures – were disregarded entirely by Leavis’s rather limited definition of novelistic greatness.

To add to its difficulties *African Farm* was at odds not only with the serious Victorian strand, but also with the popular African adventure story. Schreiner’s treatment of the colonial farm, for instance, was at variance with Mary Ann Carey-Hobson’s “discourse of masculine adventure” in *The Farm in the Karoo; or, What Charley Vyvyan and His Friends Saw in South Africa* (1883) (Van der Vlies 2007:30). In the Preface to the second edition of *African Farm*, Schreiner explicitly states the two methods by which human life may be portrayed, and the convention according to which her novel should be judged. The first of these is the stage method where, with colour on their brush, the writer who works in Piccadilly or the Strand will paint scenes emanating from their creative imagination. According to this method each character is “duly marshalled at first, and ticketed”, and as each one “reappear[s] and act[s] his part [...] [t]here is a sense of satisfaction in this, and of completeness” (Schreiner 2004:23). Perhaps Schreiner was reacting against African adventure novels such as Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* (1885) when she described this first method of representation. Haggard’s widely read adventure imagines a wild and savage Africa, a “dark land” whose feminised and sexualised terrain is penetrated by the white man’s quest north to the uninhabited interior of the continent (1984 [1885]:21). As Allan Quatermain and his cohorts trek to the diamond mines of Solomon, we hear of hair-breadth tales involving lion and elephant hunting, and encounters with savage and marauding “natives”.

Schreiner wanted to write about another Africa: that is, she wished to “paint the scenes among which [s]he has grown” (Schreiner 2004:24). In response to a “kind” critic who proposed that he would have preferred *African Farm* had it been “a history of wild adventure [...] ‘of encounters with ravaging lions, and hair-breadth escapes’”, Schreiner retorts that such a novel is best written abroad where the imagination is “untrammelled by contact with any fact” (2004:23-24). It was to this latter method that Schreiner subscribed: the writer must “squeeze the colour from his brush” and “dip into the grey pigments around him”, so as to depict life as it is lived in a particular milieu (Schreiner 2004:24). This, as Schreiner points out, is the “method of the life we all lead” and is characterised by strange, incoherent encounters whereby people “act and re-act upon each other” (2004:23). From her comments in the Preface one can deduce that Schreiner’s commitment to authenticity was not entirely at odds with the conventions of metropolitan novelistic realism even as her use of ‘Dickensian’ caricature suggested – to many readers – a divergence from the conventions that she ostensibly wished to establish in her Preface. Such an assumption inevitably leads to the question, which I shall go on to explore, as to whether an adherence to the truth of realism within the dislocations of colonial life could have produced a novel similar to *Middlemarch*. Sally-Ann Murray suggests not. Schreiner, states Murray, obviously “thought the open-ended, ‘haphazard’ fictional text closest to her experience of life, and therefore manipulated techniques of ‘depth’ and ‘caricature’, ‘expansion’ and ‘attenuation’, ‘discontinuity’ and ‘coherence’, so as to convey the textures of life in the colony in a way that struck her as authentic” (1992a:20). In the Preface Schreiner clearly establishes her novel as contrary to the high imperial romance; its relationship to metropolitan novelistic realism, on the other hand, is less consistent in its articulation: her suggestion of a certain incoherence in the characteristic comings and goings of colonial experience intimates a very different reality from metropolitan generic expectations (Van der Vlies 2007:28). The discontinuities of colonial life escape any consistently applied mode of formal realism.

If her novel was somewhat of an oddity in England, how then did it fare in the colony? At least in the metropole Schreiner’s *African Farm* enjoyed a fairly “sustained presence” judging from late nineteenth-century reviews (Van der Vlies 2007:35). A commentator in the April 1897 edition of the *Saturday Review* mentioned that the book had “created a considerable amount of interest in literary circles” and had both “a bookstall and public library success” (Danby 1897:388). Van der Vlies argues that it is very difficult to ascertain what Ann Ardis terms the

“semi-underground economy” – the reading circles and network of friends – which allowed a book like *African Farm* to enjoy such unswerving popularity in England even after the turn of the century (2007:38). Its status in the colony is even more difficult to gauge. In an attempt to determine the literary interests of the colonial girl, Constance Barnicoat in the journal, *The Nineteenth Century and After*, concluded that *African Farm* was “rarely, if ever, cited” by the South African public (1906:944). The contentious subject matter, particularly the unorthodox religious questioning within a dogmatic colonial society, meant that the novel was not readily available: one of the Cape Colony’s largest libraries, the Grahamstown Public Library, refused to order the book (First and Scott 1990:123). Van der Vlies appropriately queries, “Just how ‘South African’, then, was Schreiner’s work considered to be *in* South Africa?” (2007:38).

African Farm was initially published prior to the Act of Union (1910) and thus before South Africa could claim (a partial) nationhood. It is therefore not surprising that only by the late 1920s had it “become a critical commonplace – abroad – that *The Story of an African Farm* was, despite its flaws, distinctly ‘South African’” (Van der Vlies 2007:39). The ambivalent reception of the novel in South Africa, as suggested by Van der Vlies, is certainly similar to its reception in metropolitan reviews: that is, its acclaim did not proceed outside of condescending and dismissive statements about its ‘inadequacies’. In his modest appraisal of the novel in *South African Literature* (1925), Manfred Nathan, who is clearly schooled on the expectations of Western realism, states that in its “earnest discussion of the deepest problems of life [...] bold treatment of psychological and sex-relationships, and in the keen delineation of character” *African Farm* had “not been surpassed by any South African writer, not even by the gifted authoress herself” (1925:204). In a 1929 article entitled, “Writers of South Africa”, Winifred Holtby deemed Schreiner the “first and greatest of South African writers” (1929:280), while, in the same year, Francis Brett Young was pleased that Schreiner’s “not very great” novel had at least carved out the beginnings of a South African national literature (1929:509). As Holloway notes, subsequent South African critics in remaining faithful to metropolitan formal expectations have criticised Schreiner “because the plot or story is not developed, because the characters are not fully drawn out, and because the novel lacks organic unity” (1989:77). In “The South African Novel and Race” (1963) Kevin Magarey has described the book as having “powerful sections but an artistic incoherence that reminds one of George Eliot at her worst” (1963:30). Uys Krige’s review in *The Cape Argus* (1955), the only South African review to be included in Clayton’s

critical anthology (1983b), is indicative of the extent to which the South African response to the novel imitated metropolitan norms as far as seriousness is concerned. Evoking an anonymous review of the novel from *The Young Man* (London) Krige does not mention George Eliot but intimates such a comparison when he adjudges negatively Schreiner's "intensely subjective" narrative and its lack of "detachment" – objectivity being the "chief characteristic of the great novelist" – from both her characters and her own feelings (1983:76). (Margaret Anne Doody has noted that the desire for objectivity or a more scientific novel "ranks with other attempts [...] to masculinise the genre and render it more respectable" (1996:470).) Schreiner's juxtaposition of 'flat' and 'round' characters, her use of Dickensian caricature, and her at times admittedly inexplicable and disordered plot, belie Krige's own conclusion that *African Farm* is "perhaps the most remarkable novel to have come out of South Africa" because of its "evocative power" (1983:77). In order to substantiate this apparent contradiction Krige argues that *The Story of an African Farm* should be understood as a poem rather than as a novel: that is, rather patronisingly, a poem created by a woman "hardly out of her teens" (1983:77).

In neither the metropole nor the colony, then, was Schreiner's novel considered to match either the formal realism of Eliot's *Middlemarch* or to meet the expectations of popular adventure tales, as in Haggard. Its heterogeneous narrative, nonetheless, probably suggested a Dickensian shift of different conventions. At variance with metropolitan conventional expectations (which inevitably informed serious colonial critical opinion), *African Farm* was adjudged in terms of both form and content according to criteria that were not altogether context-specific. Thus, critics grappled with her so-called irrelevant 'digressions', her juxtaposition of 'flat' and 'round' characters, and the novel's apparent formlessness, finding fault with the novel instead of with the applied critical criteria. Schreiner, as Clayton has observed, was variously referred to as a visionary (see Taylor 1942), a poet (see Krige 1968), or a sociologist (see Edmands 1978). Clayton rightly states that "[n]obody ever questioned, or even defined their own assumptions about what a novel is, or which criteria might be appropriate to its assessment" (2004:9). All the afore-mentioned characteristics may "in fact be indispensable components of the hybrid art of the novel" (Clayton 2004:9). In Clayton's introductory essay of recent critical opinion, we begin to identify the novel genre as protean, and more alert to the relationship between form and content than had hitherto been acknowledged: Arthur Ravenscroft, with reference to Andrew Gurr's insightful comment, has called for an awareness of the unique and

meaningful relationship between life and literature in what previously had been called Third-World conditions (1983:46). Even in the metropolitan centre, Leavis's (and, by extension, Watt's) sharp delineation of the Novel as displacing and replacing other, older forms of narrative – that is, the Epic or the Romance – has come under criticism for its parochialism. Such a simple separation of generic categories, asserts Doody, has entrenched sharp differences which are inclined to “obfuscate connections and blot out continuities” (1996:9). In conditions where the mingling of diverse peoples, cultures, and stories resist a homogeneous narrative, the Novel “easily relapses into its old ways” (Doody 1996:471). Malcolm Bradbury reiterates Doody's more flexible approach to the form when he states that “[t]he novelist accommodates the ongoing flow of experience, smashing anything that impedes his sense of it” (1977:20).

More latterly, in light of this greater critical flexibility, there has been a revision in Schreiner scholarship as to how one might respond to matters of form. Schreiner's own comments on the comings and goings and on the character of colonial life have guided critics to acknowledge heterogeneity or hybridity as a feature of the form appropriate to the theme, to quote Murray, of the “soul struggling” in the colony against “its material surroundings” (1992a:19). In the absence of any “secure framework of belief or art” for the writer in the colony (Holloway 1989:78), critics have adjusted their response to the formal elements of the novel from metropolitan novelistic discourse towards a recognition of the dislocations of colonial life. Patronising comments have increasingly yielded to alternative, context-specific ways of reading such a hybrid narrative. In recognition of the dialectic of literature and experience Murray has proposed that the “discontinuous” and “episodic” structure of *African Farm* could be indicative of “Schreiner's struggle to address her own experience” of colonial discontinuities (1992a:20). Earlier, Stephen Gray had commented similarly that “[s]ince the society out of which Schreiner wrote simply was not a homogenous, stable one [...] the novel that represents it could not be either” (1979:156). Alert to the limitations of conventional categories of response, Clayton even suggested alternative modes of inquiry that encourage the formal distinctiveness of the novel:

Her narrative derives its data from her historical situation, draws the existential curves of invented biographies which crystallise her own potential response to that situation, and allows the formal elements to interact in a story which is complex, full, and truthful (more useful critical terms for her work than consistency of characterisation, realism or non-realism of mode, or unity of form, by which criteria her fiction has traditionally been found wanting. (1983a:21-22)

Gerald Monsman goes further than this in finding a certain unity in the disparate narrative through the formal, or rather artistic, control of a “series of dialectical or ironic contrasts” of images, of its amalgamation of distinct generic categories, and of the self-references in the book told through Waldo’s carvings and the Bushman paintings; all of which, according to Monsman, have consciously created a “multivocal narrative structure” (1991:51,81).

Perhaps more comprehensively than most other critics whose revision of form generally suffers from a sociological bias, Holloway has argued for a “theory of novelistic discourse that seems appropriate to the social and cultural disjunctions of South African life, particularly in the early colonial phase” (1989:78). In his study of the structural and thematic organisation of *African Farm*, and more generally the English South African novel, Holloway posits that a knowledge of Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of novelistic heteroglossia offers a lens into which the formal elements of Schreiner’s text can be seen as a “socio-linguistic necessity” (1989:88). Briefly, Bakhtin (1929) argues that as a “product of social and linguistic processes”, the novel “cannot escape the heteroglot nature of language” (Holloway 1989:79). The existence of the novel genre is only possible with heteroglossia and with its associated multiplicity of socio-ideological perspectives. Bakhtin concludes,

It is precisely in the most sharply heteroglot eras, when the collision and interaction of languages is especially intense and powerful, when heteroglossia washes over literary language from all sides (that is, in precisely those eras that most conduce to the novel) that aspects of heteroglossia are canonised with great ease. (1981 [1929]:418)

In view of Bakhtin’s theory Holloway endeavours to show the relationship of Schreiner’s “thematic concerns and social constraints” to the form and style of her novel (1989:80). For Holloway, therefore, the discontinuity of Schreiner’s context does not inhibit the creation of literary art, but rather provides an appropriate “thematic and structural paradigm for her experience of colonial life” (1989:81).

Despite such revisions, the more traditional ‘realist’ criticism of commentators like Christie, Hutchings, and MacLennan retains purchase as it applies to both form and content. Holloway criticises their judgement that in *African Farm* the “protagonists are not matched by their antagonists” (Christie *et al.* 1980:42) for neglecting to take account of the pivotal relationship between the social and the aesthetic (1989:84). The disregard by such critics of the constraints of context has, in addition, influenced their classification of *African Farm* as a Romance alongside *King Solomon’s Mines*, the similarity resting on a singular focus on the

characters' personal and individual quests. Such a tendency to universalise Waldo's high spirituality and Lyndall's 'women's discourse' was also evident in the early reception of the novel where the struggles of the two protagonists were assumed to be the principal focus of the novel and to strike a chord with then contemporary metropolitan concerns of religious crisis and suffragette agitation. Aveling (1883) argued that the cerebral nature of the book – the characters are “so many minds rather than bodies” – meant that “the events and the thoughts recorded in the two volumes might, with but slight modification, be recorded of an Indian bungalow or an English homestead” (1983:67). This does not imply that the 'exotic' setting was totally disregarded: Aveling observes the “local colouring [which] runs through the book” (1983:67). The universalising tendency, however, does have significant implications for the later reception of Schreiner's novel. It is a tendency that persists even after the turn of the century, including in South Africa. One notes Uys Krige's *Olive Schreiner: A Selection* (1968) in which Schreiner's writings are “mined for valuable nuggets” and thus removed from their social contexts (Clayton 2004:8).

In her article “‘Hagar's Child: A Reading of *The Story of an African Farm*’” (1976), Jean Marquard claims that in the opening chapters Schreiner is concerned with Waldo's spiritual insomnia, not with a powerful description of the Karoo landscape (1983:144). By transcending the specific in favour of the universal, Marquard perceives Waldo's identification with the land as “incomplete and undefined since it is never more than the private experience of an isolated individual” (1983:148). Clingman repeats this argument in classifying *African Farm* negatively as a 'colonial novel'. His argument – to return to points I made in my introduction – is that in its unquestioning territorial possession Schreiner's novel “ignores the history whereby that position came about in favour of another kind of history: one of the human soul, which it then projects on to the surrounding African landscape as if the latter were an external correlative of the former” (Clingman 1986:135). The displacement, the existential angst, felt by Lyndall and Waldo is not adequately understood by Schreiner – Clingman concludes – as a condition of the material surroundings of colonial life; at least, the two main characters express no such connection, but transfer their alienation to a vague notion of universal discontent as experienced, anywhere, by the sensitive individual. If Lyndall's angst is granted any specificity, it is in a British discourse on the women's question; Waldo's alienation is even less historicised, but is transmuted onto an overarching metaphysical plane. Yet, paradoxically, Clingman seems to suggest, such refusal to

grapple with the particular is itself an aspect of the colonial mind: a mind wishing to avoid the challenges of the very colony to which it seeks to respond. It is the view also of McClintock (1995), who has argued that Schreiner is blind to the history of colonial plunder and takes consolation in a universal unity; while, as Deborah L. Shapple has it, Schreiner overlooks colonial-settler appropriation through an act of imaginative displacement of the “more original, indigenous” San who “threaten[...] the colonist’s identity as keeper of the land” (2004:82).

Intertwined with such a limiting application of the term ‘colonial’ there is the view that *African Farm* regards its black characters as inconsequential to the story of Waldo and Lyndall. Schreiner’s multifaceted view of the colony, her “sensitivity to all forms of oppression”, and her “profound critique of exploitation”, as Clayton identifies her strengths (2004:7,12), co-exist with her colonial limitations in matters of race. The marginal and non-agentive role to which Clayton attributes Schreiner’s black characters on the farm (Marquard, 1976, and Oboe, 1991, apparently agree) can “become damning in our time” (Clayton 2004:12). Other critics have argued that Schreiner at least kept “close to the reality her fiction refers to, although she reflects the mentality of her society and her time”, that is, its racial insensitivities (Vivan 1991:105). Margaret Lenta, as I have noted, adds in mitigation that Schreiner’s faithful recording of reality hints at her eventual transcendence of the racial prejudice of her time (1987:24). Despite Schreiner’s so-called “‘European’ limitations in matters of race and civilisation” (Murray 1992a:29), Lenta believes that in her willingness to depict in *African Farm* “a vital moment in the movement of a settler society into the earliest phases of conscious coexistence with the indigenous peoples”, Schreiner surpassed many of her contemporaries (1987:26). We certainly cannot expect Schreiner to have had our understanding of race. Nevertheless Gordimer’s argument that Schreiner’s absorption with gender inequality limited her concern, “then as now”, to the “actual problem of the country, which is to free the black majority from white minority rule” (1983:17), is at best ahistorical. Instead, Lenta points out that although Schreiner exhibited an empathy towards the oppressed majority, “the ‘actual problem’ had not in the late nineteenth century yet presented itself in quite such clear terms” (1987:16).

So for some the comings and goings of different types of people across small, backward farms represents, in microcosm, real activities of a frontier society; for others, Schreiner is said to avoid the challenges of the colony. Despite its mixed reception, or rather because of it,

Schreiner's novel re-emerges in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century as part of a challenging and ongoing debate. As Clayton has remarked,

One of the qualities of an authentic book is that each generation, thinking itself the first to see it clearly, sees in it its own face. This is very true of Schreiner's strong and magical *Story of an African Farm*. Patient and enduring as the koppie on which its children play and pray, it has outlasted the fluctuations of taste and ideology which have determined the frameworks within which it has been praised or damned by successive generations. (2004:7)

Here Clayton echoes J. M. Coetzee's conclusion when he asks, while invoking T. S. Eliot's lecture of the same title, "What is a Classic?" (1993). Coetzee moves away from the idea of a classic as simply timeless to a conception of the classic as that which has a continuing allure for later generations whether it is received negatively or positively. Rather than possessing some essential quality the classic "defines itself by surviving. Therefore the interrogation of the classic, no matter how hostile, is part of the history of the classic, inevitable and even to be welcomed" (Coetzee 1993:20). The "decentring acts of criticism", as Coetzee has it, "may be what the classic uses to define itself and ensure its survival" (1993:20): that is, its continuing significance.

The continuing significance of *African Farm* – that critics wish still to return to it – returns us to Clingman's question as to whether Schreiner's view of the colony is limited. If not, in what ways does her farm challenge what I see as Clingman's own limited perception of the colonial mind? If Lyndall's 'women's concerns' and Waldo's 'spiritual concerns' are seen to be universal (and thus, by implication, disconnected from any particular colony), can we see instead and, paradoxically, a particular colonial condition: not a wish to escape to the metropole, but a struggle – we are reminded of Murray's point – with the constraining realities of colonial life? The colony is different from Haggard's adventure space; the colony may provoke Mamdani's question – a question which I shall pursue – as to when the settler becomes an indigene. Such a question insists that one does not confine Lyndall and Waldo to a narrative of individual exploration, but depicts their comings and goings among other comings and goings.

In the light of this, would the novel have been better had it confined itself to the story of Lyndall? Many critics have treated Lyndall as Schreiner's mouthpiece and, hence, have been inclined to domesticate the heterogeneous and conflicting narrative by approaching it, Murray disagrees, as "the single story of Lyndall's quest for self-realisation" (1992a:23). In his early review of the novel Aveling could be seen as initiating this perspective when he called Lyndall

“the soul of the book [...] [t]he rest are all grouped round her” (1983:68). Schreiner initially considered naming her book “Lyndall” and, as Murray points out, Lyndall certainly resembles the recognisable heroine of contemporaneously published realist fiction. In addition, by contrasting the outspoken Lyndall against the more submissive Em, Schreiner “[subscribed] to a central feature of realist novels in the 1800s” in that the sharp juxtaposition of the two realistically drawn characters allowed Schreiner to debate the social position of women and in effect to “impose a universalising tendency on the regional soil of a mid-nineteenth century South African farm” (Murray 1992a:23-24). From such a perspective Lyndall’s feminist rhetoric may appear to be of minor concern to settlers; more easily aligned with the metropolitan ‘women’s question’. Similarly, it is possible to adopt a perspective from which – according to several critics – Waldo’s elevated spirituality is a foil to Lyndall’s gender preoccupations. Such a view would call for a greater centrality to be granted to Waldo who, along with Lyndall, illuminates the “two sides of Olive Schreiner’s character [...] the two kinds of issues with which she grappled all her life” (Beeton 1974:22). Preoccupied with matters that were topical in late nineteenth-century England, Lyndall and Waldo – as some critics have it – do become alienated from their immediate surroundings. Christie, Hutchings, and MacLennan have argued that the Boer wedding scene in the novel “is not particularised”; instead, Schreiner is “concerned to show Waldo and Lyndall as outsiders to it all, as alienated beings” (1980:32). Does the temptation to treat Lyndall (and/or Waldo) as independent from the novel’s surrounding ‘disorder’ lead one to underplay the comings and goings of other less realistically drawn characters (or types, such as Bonaparte Blenkins) and skew the narrative towards a preferred cohesion?

Critics who work within the metropolitan formal realist mode might wish to extract Lyndall’s story from what they perceive to be the extraneous sections of the novel. Lyndall’s story is undoubtedly significant. Her musings on the position of women in the latter half of the nineteenth century were certainly applicable, albeit with some modifications, to the metropolis: a Lancashire working woman described how she “‘read parts of it over and over [...] [a]bout yon poor lass [Lyndall] [...] I think there is hundreds of women what feels like that but can’t speak it, but *she* could speak what we feel’” (in First and Scott 1990:121). But, if Lyndall’s story is isolated from the dislocations of the colonial setting (a setting which governs her story’s trajectory), then many critics, as Murray argues, are “disqualified from considering the actual dynamics of her experience, in which an implicit dialectic defines behaviour in the colonies

against idealistic, but distant and often romanticised, metropolitan possibilities” (1992a:24). Critics like Murray and Holloway, who allow for a Bakhtinian idea of the dialogic imagination, would be more sympathetic towards and more willing to embrace the so-called extraneous sections of *African Farm*, and to find what Monsman calls a “unity in multiteity” (1991:91).

In the Introduction to the 1971 edition of *The Story of an African Farm*, Dan Jacobson notably remarked, “A colonial culture is one which has no memory. The discontinuities of colonial experience make it almost inevitable that this should be so” (1971:7). In new, less than ‘established’ literary cultures, where such diverse and divisive conditions impede the development of “a vital, effective belief in the past as a present concern, and in the present as a consequence of the past’s concerns” (Jacobson 1971:7), a writer creates without precedent: that is, devoid of a repertoire of accepted or widely shared narratives the novelist writing from the colony must invent stories without access to any secure framework of tradition. Schreiner, of course, drew her sense of continuity from a transplanted English tradition, but – given her education and social position – haphazardly. Yet, her ‘story’ of an African farm also involved a project of identity-making that was specific to her experience of the colony. Schreiner’s interaction with the polyglot mix of people who inhabit or pass through her fictional farm, even if some feature only peripherally, certainly informed her ‘story’ and enabled her to manipulate a space from where she could “capture, reorder, and even reinvent a sense of the self in society” (Chapman 1998:85). The heterogeneity of the stories told in *African Farm*, the formal mingling of discordant elements, is not simply an attempt by Schreiner – as the artist – to be true to the very dislocated experience of colonial life; rather, her method assumes significance beyond a mere adherence to verisimilitude. Experientially, Schreiner has explored a space – in the ‘experientially’ heterogeneous language of the colony – in which heterogeneous realities, or more specifically identities, are allowed to struggle for their different registers of expression. Between the hunter-adventurer, Blenkins, and the preacher-like Otto, lie individuals like Waldo who elude simple colonial classification: Waldo discards his father’s ‘transplanted’ religion, for example, and searches for a ‘truth’ that is specific to his own experience in the colony.

The multifaceted colony that begins to emerge in *African Farm* is ignored when critics concern themselves solely with Lyndall’s plight; indeed, as I suggested in my introduction, such a narrow focus calls to mind Albert Memmi’s (1957) simplification of the ‘illegitimate’ white colonial as either the man with the gun or the man with the Bible. In *The Coloniser and The*

Colonised, Memmi saw the ‘colonial’ in somewhat Haggard-like terms. The European perceives the colony as a place of adventure, a “voyage towards an easier life”, where one “earns more and spends less” (Memmi 1991:3,4). Alternatively, the colony is occupied by missionaries who “greatly assisted the colonialist [...], contributing to the acceptance of colonisation”, but “only by accident” (Memmi 1991:72). The farm in Schreiner’s story, however, attracts an assortment of characters: not only the man with the gun (Blenkins) or the man with the Bible (Otto), but those in-between, whose ordinary lives do not fit such dichotomous categorisation. The novel moves beyond the exotic (where the exploitative adventurer can pillage, or the missionary can ‘civilise’ the ‘heathen masses’) to the ordinary where, instead of marauding ‘natives’ and encounters with ravening lions, the black characters live more complex lives as husbands or wives, and the animals we come across include a dog, an ostrich, and a beetle. In fact, Schreiner’s novel is characterised by an inversion of the normative and exotic whereby the exotic ‘British urban’ – what Murray calls the “supposedly enlightened British order beyond the farm” (1992a:28), a possibility which attracts Lyndall and Waldo – is unexpectedly juxtaposed against the mundane life of the farm (see Gray 1979), its mundanity punctuated by intrusions from the outside. Both protagonists are subject to ‘comings and goings’, and their respective experiences in the “British world” (Gray 1979:139) of boarding school, transport riding, and storekeeping are met with disappointment: the urban space is not a proxy for, or superior to, the farm and its inhabitants, the inhabitants of whom Otto refers to, significantly, as “primitive” (Schreiner 2004 [1883]:46). Waldo’s experience as a “common, meandering adventurer” (Gray 1979:139) may not be a meaningful substitute for the dull rhythms of life on the farm, but the ‘comings’ of metropolitan adventurers like Blenkins, Gregory Rose, and the French dandy do have an impact on the ‘African farm’.

Blenkins, as a “frightening” parody of the colonial hunter-adventurer, exploits not just the land and the ‘black’ characters, but also the ‘white’ characters who, in the case of Otto and Tant’ Sannie, are vulnerable to his “deceptive rhetoric” (Murray 1992a:25,26). The ‘children’ – Waldo and Lyndall – also suffer at the hands of his domination; they collaborate with their oppressor even as they exert a certain agency. For instance, Lyndall’s admiration of Napoleon Bonaparte paradoxically occurs alongside Blenkins’s dubious familial connection to the emperor, thus making Lyndall to some extent complicit in and “answerable for the domination by Blenkins” (Monsman 1991:63). Blenkins’s caricatural depiction, therefore, serves Schreiner as “social

critique”: “not so significant in himself”, argues Holloway, Blenkins instead “is given important social and historical specificity in the world of the novel” (1989:84). For Murray this parodic presentation “turns romance conventions to serious effect” (1992a:25). If Blenkins is (to apply Memmi’s terms) the “colonist who will”, then Gregory Rose could be called the “colonist who won’t”. Dislocated from his surroundings – the inside walls of his farm house are “covered with prints cut from the *Illustrated London News*” (Schreiner 2004:162) – Gregory Rose imagines himself in the colony as the central figure in “a romantic adventure, and begins by asserting his sexist and class-based power” (Murray 1992a:25). This role of ‘English’ power, nevertheless, soon gives way to his cross-dressing and an assumption of characteristically feminine traits. Rather than the “dissolution of fixed sexual opposites” (Clayton 1989:52), Gregory Rose’s sexual ‘transgression’ and submission to the needs of Lyndall is more an inversion that paradoxically maintains the status quo: “When Gregory goes to [Lyndall] in the Transvaal, their roles have been reversed, but the essential power structure, the pervasive sense of domination and subservience, remains” (Monsman 1991:72). (As a “parod[y] of matriarchal power”, Tant’ Sannie’s relationship with her husbands is also characterised by an inversion, rather than a shift, of the dominance/submission binary as she “rules her husbands with an iron fist” (Monsman 1991:65).) Such polarities are held up as an indictment at the same time as Schreiner permits a certain complexity to enter the binaries of domination/submission: Blenkins’s dominance is not hegemonic and he soon flees the farm. If power is subject to complications, so too is oppression: the figure of a “Hottentot” who stares at his new shoes while participating in a religious service conducted in a language that he does not understand suggests what Cooper calls the “complex *bricolage* with which Africans in colonies put together practices and beliefs” in fashioning their lives (1994:1528). Schreiner’s more complex presentation of the white colonial (or, is that colonist?) leads to the question as to whether Lyndall’s, or Waldo’s, or Em’s respective suffering is any less significant than the cruelty experienced by the colonised person.

What I have hoped to suggest is that a shift from the story of Lyndall or the story of Waldo to interlocking stories of larger or smaller presences is appropriate to Schreiner’s particular narrative form; that despite ongoing debate as to the achievement or otherwise of that form the structure of *African Farm* holds true to the intentions of its colonial problematics.

Colonial Problematics: Revisiting ‘Margins’ in *The Story of an African Farm*

The aforementioned notwithstanding, the ‘content’ of colonial problematics requires further elucidation. In similar vein to Clingman, for example, Stephen Gray has argued, “If Schreiner is to be typified as a major colonial writer, this must be because she has defined the effects of stultification and oppression that the mental life is subject to in a lost quarter of the globe. *The Story of an African Farm* remains pre-eminently a colonial novel. Its characters may be born in Africa, and are put to death by Africa, but that is not the same thing as being African” (1979:153). In arguing against such scholarship that continues to invoke, even by implication, an indigene/settler binary, I shall go on to refer to certain small but, in my view, significant attachments to the surroundings, more immediately to the farm, that critics have hitherto tended to ignore, or to relegate to states of inconsequentiality. These inclusions, references, and allusions to which I shall grant a new prominence, include Bushman art; black Africans in the landscape; labour as both reality and metaphor; and animals on the farm. An exploration of these apparently marginal aspects ‘problematizes’ the argument about a sense of pervasive dislocation, or disconnection, from the material surroundings of the colony. Unlike Clingman, I do not see the African setting as a mere correlative of the state of Lyndall’s mind or Waldo’s soul. Rather, I place the farm as a conditioning presence both more stifling and potentially more free than its metropolitan alternative.

In arguing for the greater materiality of the farm, however, I risk subsuming the stories of the original inhabitants under those of the colonials. Yet Schreiner’s insistence in *African Farm* on the multiplicity of conflicting ‘South African’ stories, including those of the Bushmen, should check any such effacement. In *The Native Races of South Africa* (1905), the geologist George William Stow comments that Bushman rock art, as a record of an original possession of the land, resembles “*title-deeds*” which are “so valued among landowners in more civilised portions of the earth” (in Shapple 2004:78). The landless Waldo concedes the legitimacy of such ‘title-deeds’ when he points to the paintings on the surface of a shelving rock that narrate ““the time when the little Bushmen lived here”” (Schreiner 2004:42). These representations ‘talk’ to Waldo who acknowledges that ““[t]o us they are only strange things, that make us laugh; but to him they were very beautiful”” (42). Here, Schreiner certainly observes a ‘first people’ who were dispossessed and largely exterminated, as Waldo has it, by the Boers, ““so that we never see a yellow face peeping out among the stones”” (42). The farm, then, does not simply exist in what

appears to be a “void, without anchoring in time or space” (Green 1983:163); instead the chapter, “Plans and Bushmen-Paintings”, is given precise historical markers. It opens by situating the narrative in the year of the great drought of 1862; it suggests the extermination of the Bushmen by colonists; Lyndall’s aspiration for diamonds intimates the forthcoming mining revolution; and all this occurs alongside the arrival of the hunter-adventurer, Blenkins. Schreiner, therefore, does not ignore the ‘problematics’ of Waldo’s colonial identity, indeed of the colony as a place of ‘comings and goings’. Waldo’s admission of the plundering of the land complicates any colonial blindness. Such an awareness is shaped by a connection to the specificities of the land: that is, Waldo’s ‘universal’ spiritual preoccupations are grounded in an historical context. Despite this critics have remarked upon Waldo’s relationship to his surroundings as somewhat ethereal. Connection to the soil through a displacement of the land’s first inhabitants, as Shapple argues, is troubling given the historical context in which Schreiner writes (2004:103). Shapple’s argument is that the narrative, whether intentional or not, establishes Waldo, who has the ability to read the “natural-historical significance” of the terrain, as the rightful successor to the land (2004:84). Such a possession, however, is presented as tenuous, relying on fragile, even symbolic, links between Waldo’s woodcarvings and the pictures of the San artists: ‘artists’ who have all seemingly disappeared. The “fetishistic eulogy” to the Bushman in *African Farm*, Shapple points out, “ultimately proves to be premature, yet imaginatively and politically expedient”: the colonial in the novel has access to the land because the “image of the true Bushmen [has been relegated] to another time” which, inadvertently, “also detract[s] from the contemporary experiences of indigenous forced labourers” (2004:80). Tony Voss to an extent concurs. In Schreiner’s narrative of transition, he notes, African ‘agricultural’ presence is also ignored as land appears swiftly to pass from the hunter-gatherer to the settler pastoralist, “a characteristic elision in settler history” (2011:59).

The effacement of the Bushman’s “lingering presence”, Shapple posits, is further complicated by Waldo who, as “artist and sole interpreter of rock paintings”, “subject[s] their histories to his own narratives” (2004:92). Yet Waldo is alert to his role in filtering the Bushman narratives through his own consciousness, as he states, “I know that it is I who am thinking, [...], but it seems as though it were [the Bushmen] who were talking” (Schreiner 2004:43). Unlike Shapple, I argue instead for an approach to Waldo’s discourse on the Bushman paintings in a complex, dynamic colony that is not limited by an ‘either/or’ conception of narrative-making.

The interaction, the stories told amongst the children under the shelving rock, is situated against the backdrop of the paintings which have their own ‘indigenous’ stories that supplement, and perhaps even challenge, Schreiner’s – and Waldo’s – own. *African Farm* on occasion notes the limitations of any one particular narrative as Waldo, alert to the fact that “[b]ooks do not tell everything” (41), questions, ““Could a story be told in opposite ways and both ways be true?”” (60). (The narrative structure of the novel, we must remember, allows for a multiplicity of voices and of conflicting stories.)

The presence of the Bushmen in the book, in short, is not restricted to images on a rock. Michael Chapman argues that the allegory of the white bird of truth – told by Waldo’s stranger – remains detached from its source in Bushman mythology. The allegory, Chapman points out, is “colonised as Europe’s, or Schreiner’s, own universal lesson” (2003:136). By her essentialising the historical specificity of the allegory, Schreiner’s comprehension of the South African situation is circumscribed (Chapman 2003:136). But Schreiner’s treatment of the allegory and its teller, who is a “representative of French decadence” (Marquard 1983:148), is not a mere endorsement of a universal ‘folk lesson’. The tale is told by a “world-weary” (Marquard 1983:148) stranger who “object[s] to travel in these out-of-the-world parts. He liked better civilised life, where at every hour of the day a man may look for his glass of wine, and his easy-chair, and paper; where at night he may lock himself into his room with his books and a bottle of brandy, and taste joys mental and physical” (Schreiner 2004:145). Indeed, this stranger – another interloper probably seeking his fortune – is not the “noble representative of continental enlightenment” (Murray 1992a:26). His is a slightly decadent air and, as Murray has it, we cannot simply endorse the allegory of the stranger who is clearly depicted as “out of place” on the African continent (1992a:26). The stranger may offer Waldo the illusion of “an escape through the realm of ideas”; yet in the colony Waldo needs more than the ‘European’ dandy’s universal lesson in his search for a South African identity (Marquard 1983:148). When Waldo stumbles upon the stranger in Grahamstown, Marquard continues, the irrelevance of a class-conscious European culture in the colony is palpable. In Waldo’s words,

‘I saw that there were ladies sitting close to me on a wooden bench, and the stranger who had talked to me that day in the Karoo was sitting between them. The ladies were very pretty, and their dresses beautiful. [...] When I was listening to the music I did not know I was badly dressed; now I felt so ashamed of myself. I never knew before what a low, horrible thing I was dressed in tancord. That day on the farm, when we sat

on the ground under the thorn-trees, I thought he quite belonged to me; now, I saw he was not mine. But he was still as beautiful.' (2004:242-243)

Instead of Europe's 'universal' lesson, the allegory in the context of the farm may be regarded as a South African lesson, its white bird of truth as alluding as much to Bushman tradition as to universal ideas of art. Here the French dandy despite his allure to Waldo is seen by the reader as another version of Blenkins: as a leech on the colony.

Incidentally, it is the figure of the artist/thinker, Waldo, who, for Ode Ogede, has been "taken up by a number of African writers such as Chinua Achebe, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Wolé Sáyínká, and Ayi Kwei Armah" (2000:252). The link between *African Farm* and black African literature is a rarely made but important connection. Schreiner's fiction has been variously aligned with the white liberal tradition in South Africa (see, for example, Haresnape 1983) while Christopher Heywood argues for the "importance of Olive Schreiner for the novel in English in late Victorian and Edwardian times" (1976:42) as he notes her influence on George Moore and D. H. Lawrence. Heywood offers an interesting perspective which suggests that the colony could influence the metropolis; Schreiner's influence on black South/African writers, however, is seldom acknowledged. In making such a connection Ogede observes the "identical purpose" that Waldo, Achebe's Edogo, Ngũgĩ's Waiyaki, Sáyínká's Sekoni, and Armah's Baako and Ocran all share: "they are tender individuals who seek to use their gifts to unsettle the established, oppressive regimes in their respective societies" (2000:252). In their complication of the gun/Bible dichotomy they all complicate also any singular colonial/liberation narrative.

What I am arguing to be Schreiner's more 'inclusive' narrative operates not only alongside a 'Bushman' story, but also alongside the marginal, supposedly non-agentive position that 'Hottentots' and 'Kaffirs' have been seen to occupy in the novel. (The word "Kaffir", or "Kafir", had not in Schreiner's time accrued to itself the full force of racial insult. It retained reference to the territory 'British Kaffraria', the annexation to the Cape Colony of Xhosa ancestral land, today part of the province of the Eastern Cape.) Referring to the "other characters" who populate the book William Walsh argues, for instance, that "the Kaffirs are hardly individualised at all; only the German overseer seems to have a truly human relationship with them" (1983 [1970]:136). Similarly, Vivan, in considering the (non)presence of Africans on the farm, points out that of the seventy-two times that black Africans appear in the narrative, apart from the six occasions where their presence "creates a narrative event within the story"

(1991:96), they merely pass through the stories of white lives, or, instead, form part of the physical background against which the white characters struggle. They are objectified; they never “achieve the level of characters [...] and they never exert any influence on the course of events” (Vivan 1991:96). As a consequence of their marginalisation, they are “deprived of a language”; “the only time they articulate words is either to translate the whites’ speech (never quoted, however, but only hinted at), or to mutter incomprehensible (and savage) sounds, or to laugh” (Vivan 1991:96). Critics appear perplexed by Schreiner’s position as somewhat of a visionary with regard to her analysis of gender and, on the other hand, her limited conception of racial prejudice. Accordingly, they tend to attribute these limitations – her ostensible acceptance, as Murray phrases it, of “the ‘Hottentot’ servant as a kind of biological primitive” (1992a:29) – to the limited race consciousness of her time. Clayton and others have noted the influence of Charles Darwin (an ascending scale of the species) and Herbert Spencer (“human ‘progress’ towards an ideal state”) (1983b:19) on Schreiner’s understanding of progress and civilisation. If her vision is circumscribed by contemporaneous discourse, then Vivan and Lenta seem to argue, at least, that Schreiner faithfully recorded an aspect of colonial reality: that is, in Clingman’s sense of her seeing through the limitations of ‘white’ eyes. Schreiner might have eventually outgrown her earlier prejudices, comments Vivan, but her Social Darwinist attitude meant that in *African Farm* she “wrote of blacks ‘realistically’, that is, reflecting the actual way blacks were considered by whites” (1991:106). Lenta, for her part, cites Waldo’s thoughts on the gradual ‘disappearance’ of the Bushman and Lyndall’s question as to whether the ‘Kaffir’ race will “‘melt away in the heat of a collision with a higher?’” (Schreiner 2004:213), both as instances in which the novelist’s thought was in alignment with then current evolutionary theory. In linking the Bushman’s disappearance to that of the “‘strange fishes and animals’” (42), Lenta concludes, Waldo hints at the inevitability of their demise, “on which moral judgements are inappropriate” (1987:19).

As Lenta implies, Schreiner no doubt gleaned her own idea of progress from the language of her times; she also deviated in some respects, however, from the ideologies of both Darwin and Spencer. Unlike the majority of Victorian intellectuals who, as Berkman has it, found prevalent evolutionary theory sympathetic with their own thoughts, “Schreiner saw much that disturbed her, kindled some of her most fiery critical writing, and spurred her to develop an alternative concept of progress” (1990:74). Nineteenth-century theories of progress (specifically,

of species development) in the context of imperial expansion served to buttress the “hierarchical and conflict model of social life”, a model that rationalised and perpetuated militarism, race, class and gender discrimination; all of which Schreiner was vehemently to attack (Berkman 1990:74). Her unique conception of progress as the diminishing of patterns of domination, as Berkman argues, was informed by her careful, if somewhat romantic, observation of the diversity and uniformity, the universal unity, of South African animal and plant life. In her posthumously published *From Man to Man* (1926) her protagonist Rebekah, a keen naturalist in the Cape Colony, comments, ““Let him not imagine when he prates the survival of the fittest that he is enshrouding himself and his desires in impenetrable armour; he is only an ass masquerading in the scientific lion’s skin put on hind-side before!”” (Schreiner 2004 [1926]:533). As Berkman draws Schreiner’s conclusion: “The privileged position certain groups of people commanded during any given period of human evolution was the consequence of shifting environmental influences and not, as Social Darwinists contended, a sign of innate superiority” (1990:82).

Was Schreiner alert, however, to the limitations of contemporary ‘Darwinian’ theory when she wrote *African Farm*? Though her critique of evolutionary discourse is more perceptible in her later published works, like *From Man to Man*, we have in the musings of both Waldo and Lyndall an indicator of what was to become her more ‘progressive’ thought. Gender difference, Lyndall proposes, is shaped by cultural codes of behaviour:

‘They begin to shape us to cursed end’, she said, with her lips drawn in to look as though they smiled, ‘when we are tiny things in shoes and socks. We sit with our little feet drawn up under us in the window, and look out at the boys in their happy play. We want to go. Then a loving hand is laid on us: ‘Little one, you cannot go’, they say; ‘your face will burn, and your nice white dress be spoiled’. We feel it must be for our good, it is so lovingly said; but we cannot understand; and we kneel still with one little cheek wistfully pressed against the pane. [...] We see the complexion we were not to spoil, and the white frock, and we look into our own great eyes. Then the curse begins to act on us. [...] We fit our sphere as a Chinese woman’s foot fits her shoe, exactly, as though God had made both – and yet He knows nothing of either.’ (Schreiner 2004:176-177)

Waldo is also alert to the impact of environment on identity-making; he empathetically connects his own spiritual and mental degeneration as an exploited labourer with that of the socially marginal: ““A convict, or a man who drinks, seems something so far off and horrible when we see him; but to himself he seems quite near to us, and like us. We wonder what kind of a creature he is; but he is just we, ourselves. We are the wood, the knife that carves on us is the circumstance”” (240). Although Lyndall and Waldo, as Lenta points out, consider the

disappearance of the Bushmen and 'Kaffirs' to be inevitable in their clash with a 'higher' race, their awareness of the plasticity of difference alludes to a more complex understanding of social evolution. Significantly, it is Tant' Sannie – depicted unfavourably by Schreiner – who announces that “the Kaffir servants [...] were descended from apes” (62).

Schreiner's description of the mask-like faces of black Africans with “lips hideously protruding” (Schreiner 2004:79) may be a reflection of colonial discourse. Or it may be aimed at demanding an interrogation of what lies beneath such social inferences. For instance, early one morning the German Otto in returning from his search for lost sheep “caught sight of a Kaffir woman [...] [who] was no other than the wife of the absconding Kaffir herd” (79). The courtesy the German extends to the woman – “it was not his way to pass a living creature without a word of greeting” (79) – has the effect of ameliorating her mask-like appearance that includes “lips hideously protruding” and signalling a recognition of her own suffering. With a “baby tied on her back by a dirty strip of red blanket”, the woman explains in “broken Dutch that she had been turned away” from the farm without food because of her husband's actions (79). This slight ‘unsettling’ of colonial Othering is emphasised in contrast to the depiction of Tant' Sannie and Bonaparte Blenkins as more hideous than the appearance of a black woman. Not only is Tant' Sannie, whose actions Otto describes as “Hard-hearted! cruel!” (79), responsible for the dilemma of the black woman, but her tirade of admonishing Otto on his return to the farm culminates in her – rather grotesquely – “[wiping] the moisture from her mouth with the palm of her hand” (81). Otto, who is bewildered at the “lies and falsehoods” with which Tant' Sannie accuses him, turns to a ‘Hottentot’ woman – one of the servants – in a bid to understand the accusations. But the ‘Hottentot’ woman answers “by a loud, ringing laugh. ‘Give it him, old missis! Give it him!’ It was so nice to see the white man who had been master hunted down” (82). Ironically, the ‘Hottentot’ woman's admonition of the German occurs subsequent to his good intentions towards the ‘Kaffir’ woman. There presides an unholy alliance of Blenkins, Tant' Sannie and the ‘Hottentot’ woman as “the three laughed together grimly” at the thought of Blenkins's impending abuse of Waldo (96). Despite his display of kindness Otto to the servants remains a ‘colonial master’ on the farm. For Clayton, Schreiner is the “hard-headed realist” in her portrayal of the ‘Hottentot’ in servitude (2004:12). Here Schreiner dispels the myth of the ‘noble savage’ in her denial that “people become noble under brutal treatment” (Clayton 2004:13). The ‘Hottentot’ woman's reaction to Otto could be understood to subvert colonial authoritarianism

practices, in pursuit of what Homi K. Bhabha considers an act of mimicry according to which the “gaze of the discriminated [turns] back upon the eye of power” as a means to confront oppression (1994:112). Bhabha’s notion of mimicry intimates a way in which Schreiner’s novel, specifically in instances such as the peculiar alliance of the aforementioned characters, could be perceived to be more attuned to matters of racial oppression than has hitherto been acknowledged. By mimicking her colonial masters, the ‘Hottentot’ woman subverts her own oppression not only through the return of the gaze, but through the “possibility of multiplying [her] identities” (Mbembe 1992:25).

Despite what I have just said, the argument that the black inhabitants on the farm are limited to “fitful shadows through the white people’s lives, unnamed and without identity” persists in critical argument (McClintock 1995:268). My argument, however, is that the peripheral black characters intrude as ‘translators’ at the interstices of inter-racial encounters and are, therefore, essential to the functioning of a white colonial society that is inescapably a multicultural society in which English is not the only, or even the best, medium of communication. (In a recent essay, Voss (2011) reminds us that the colony – and Schreiner’s novel – had a multilingual idiom.) The multilingualism is evinced in the need for rudimentary translations from English to Dutch by both Tant’ Sannie and Blenkins in their collusions of domination on the farm. It is first Otto and then the ‘Hottentot’ maid who must translate Blenkins’s English into Dutch “as far as [the ‘Hottentot’ is] able” for “her mistress”, Tant’ Sannie (Schreiner 2004:66). As Clayton points out, it is not only language translation, but also cultural translation that is necessary. Otto must explain to Blenkins that ““the – Dutch – you know – do not like people who walk – in this country – ah!”” (45) while Trana, Tant’ Sannie’s niece, misinterprets the romantic gestures of Blenkins. Those like the ‘Hottentot’ maid and Otto, who translate language and culture for the ‘outsider’, could be accused of complicity in the dominating intentions of Blenkins and Tant’ Sannie: a marker, perhaps, of the complexity of colonial life. At the same time, those who translate hold a certain power. Black people are also essential as labourers and mediators, “present at every moment”; though peripheralised, they are “on all occasions [the] messengers and suppliers of all kinds of services” (Lenta 1987:25). As the black people perform the bulk of the physical work, it is not surprising, Lenta concludes, “why Tant’ Sannie weighs 260 pounds at the end of the novel” (1987:25)!

The function of the black people on the farm as mediators and translators grants them a voice: they negotiate boundaries established by a colonial power that, as Cooper notes, is not all-determining; the form their interaction assumed “might actually alter the boundaries of subordination within a seemingly powerful colonial regime” (1994:1518). Black Africans are unwanted presences, yet indispensable to the workings of the farm. “For Schreiner, as for most colonials”, as McClintock maintains, “African women served principally as boundary markers. Their chief labour function is to perform boundary work, they stand at thresholds, windows and walls, opening and shutting doors” (1995:268). As boundary markers black women occupy an ambivalent position: that is, their servitude belies their manipulation of boundaries. In *From Man to Man* the Old Ayah, instead of the white mother, controls the access of the child Rebekah to various rooms in the house and, according to McClintock, “[guarantees] racial difference and decorum”; it is black women, then, who “preside over the civilising mission and the cult of domesticity” (1995:268): ““Get down from that wall, child, will you! Standing there with nothing on your head! You’ll be burnt as black as a Kaffir before your mother gets up. Put your *kappie* on!”” (Schreiner 2004:423). In the dwelling-house in *African Farm*, on the other hand, Tant’ Sannie’s ‘Hottentot’ satellite, who is often in the doorway or on the door-step, mediates and, in turn, destabilises the ‘entrenched’ divide between coloniser and colonised. It is not only the ‘Hottentot’ maid, however, who occupies the door-step: “On the door-step stood the Boer woman, a hand on each hip, her face red and fiery, her head nodding fiercely. At her feet sat the yellow Hottentot maid, her satellite, and around stood the black Kaffir maids, with blankets twisted round their half-naked figures” (2004:44). In another instance, the ‘Hottentot’, Blenkins, and the Boer woman all stand in the doorway as Lyndall, with her “quivering white lips” (83), commands Blenkins to let her pass after the trio’s unjust tirade against Otto.

The position of Schreiner’s black characters, therefore, is not only one of servitude; she is not altogether unaware that black people live more ordinary, complex lives as wives or husbands. The Mozambiquer maid, who has been attending to the dying Lyndall, tells the landlady that she can no longer assist Lyndall as her ““Husband says I must go home”” (Schreiner 2004:250). Lenta points out that the Mozambiquer’s command of English is “inadequate to explanations of the fact that she belongs to another social group where she is a wife, and no doubt has other obligations which must take precedence over duty to her employer” (1987:24). This for Lenta is an example, which she does not wish to over-interpret, of how Schreiner’s “habit of accurate

observation will lead her eventually to outgrow the prejudices which she has learnt” (1987:24). In fact, in light of Schreiner’s presentation of the colonial Other as exceeding one-dimensional categorisation, the apparently marginal reference to the Mozambiquer assumes unusual significance. It is a significance that bears upon the relationship of Lyndall and Waldo to the marginalised majority, an observation to which I wish to turn.

Despite a critical emphasis on the universalising tendency of the respective spiritual and proto-feminist preoccupations of Waldo and Lyndall, I argue that the two protagonists are firmly situated within the impulses of colonial South Africa. Waldo in his contemplations begins to acknowledge the plight of black people while Lyndall’s proto-feminist concerns move, at least tangentially, beyond ‘European’ affiliation. As Monsman has observed, the children of Schreiner’s fiction are the “archetypal outsider; and their restricted lives are emblems of all race, gender, and class victims who are stifled to the end. In this respect, the stories of Schreiner’s children become intertwined with the broader history of oppression in colonial South Africa itself” (1991:29). As adults Waldo and Lyndall, therefore, are to an extent empathetically able to connect to the broader oppression as experienced by the colonised person. (Such a correlation between the child and adult is hinted at in the epigraph to *African Farm* where Schreiner quotes Alexis de Tocqueville’s comment that “[t]he entire man is, so to speak, to be found in the cradle of the child” (2004:26).)

Having returned from finishing school after a four-year absence, Lyndall arrives at the farm “well-read, sophisticated and concerned about the position of women” (Lerner 1983:183), a position, I have already noted, that Lyndall herself acknowledges as dependent on her social conditioning. Despite the fact that her proto-feminist rhetoric – she at times ‘lectures’ Waldo – is influenced by the late nineteenth-century women’s movement in the metropolis, her observations are also specific to the colony. In Europe, according to Marquard, Lyndall’s “position as a ‘fallen woman’ [we recall that she is pregnant] would have been clearly defined. On the African veld the dividing line between respectability and social outcast is not as clear” (1983:150). Metropolitan middle-class decorum is not necessarily upheld in the colony. Although a feminist discourse seems to be anything but marginal in *African Farm* (as I have said, Lyndall, according to some critics, dominates the novel) I suggest a certain ‘marginality’ in that Lyndall has yet to attach herself meaningfully to the difficulties of living in a colony. Yet, in spite of this, Lyndall’s capacity to empathise with the gender oppression of a black woman hints at her author’s

recognition of the specificities of the colonial context, a context that has demand of an appropriate language register. Schreiner's own trajectory, paradoxically, would be to marginalise the metropolitan 'women's question' and locate it firmly in her local, material surroundings. Lyndall observes,

'There at the foot of the 'kopje' goes a Kaffir; he has nothing on but a blanket; he is a splendid fellow – six feet high, with a magnificent pair of legs. In his leather bag he is going to fetch his rations, and I suppose to kick his wife with his beautiful legs when he gets home. He has a right to; he bought her for two oxen. There is a lean dog going after him, to whom I suppose he never gives more than a bone from which he sucked the marrow; but his dog loves him, as his wife does.' (Schreiner 2004:213)

The sardonic inflection to Lyndall's observation signals her acute awareness of racial stereotyping. It is as though Schreiner's advanced opinions on 'the women's question' had been sharpened by her observant eye in the colony. Lyndall's 'women's discourse' may, at times, be dislocated from her milieu but, as Monsman says, "the oppression of women was certainly the model by which Schreiner understood racial and ethnic oppression" (1991:14). Schreiner's proclivity here to traverse discursive boundaries is also evident in her depiction of an older, perhaps more emblematic Waldo.

In the context of the mid to late nineteenth-century mining rush, Waldo performs hard, unrewarding work which signals the onset of industrialisation and commercial exploitation in the colony. "When I had been in the shop three days", Waldo recalls of his employment as a salesman in an unspecified town, "I wanted to go away again. A clerk in a shop has the lowest work to do of all people. [...] I asked my master to let me go [...] but he would not. [...] I found out afterwards he was only giving me half as much as he gave to the others – that was why" (Schreiner 2004:235). Waldo continues, "I had fear when I looked at the other clerks that I would at last become like them. All day they were bowing and smirking to the women who came in; smiling, when all they wanted was to get their money from them" (235). In contrast, Waldo observes "one respectable thing in that store", the 'Kaffir' storeman, whose "work was to load and unload, and he never needed to smile except when he liked, and he never told lies" (235). After Waldo completes his six-month contract with the shopkeeper, he "hire[s] [himself] to drive one of the transport-rider's wagons" (237) that was transporting loads for the Diamond Fields. This labour, however, stunted Waldo's intellectual growth as he found himself "too tired" to read after travelling all night: "I know I thought of nothing; I was like an animal. My body was strong and well to work, but my brain was dead. [...] You may work a man's body so

that his soul dies. [...] You may work a man so that all but the animal in him is gone; and that grows stronger with physical labour. You may work a man till he is a devil” (238). His work as a transport driver further ties the labour question to the colour question. Waldo descends into alcoholism, a condition comparable with that of a “Bushman boy” who grins at Waldo in a manner that asserts a bond, “It was as though [‘the Bushman boy’] said, ‘You and I are comrades. I have lain in a road too. I know all about it” (239). The Bushman’s gaze establishes a kinship – as does Waldo’s conviction that the “convict” or the “man who drinks” is “just we, ourselves” (240) – that complicates any colonial process of ‘white/black’ Othering. Here the Bushmen enter the narrative as ‘indigenous’ forced labourers problematising what Shapple calls Schreiner’s convenient eulogy to their mythic presence.

It would be anachronistic to suggest that in *African Farm* Schreiner presents what would become her radical understanding of the relationship between capital and labour: that is, as First and Scott phrase it, that “the colour question was really the labour question” (1990:338). Instances in the novel when read in light of her later convictions, nonetheless, show a mind grappling with such ‘problematics’ of colonial life. What of Waldo’s spiritual preoccupations? Through Waldo, Tant’ Sannie, Otto and Blenkins, Schreiner, as Duranti argues, offers various scriptural interpretations and distortions that “subvert the traditional role of the Bible as a criterion of truth by making it the main source of inspiration for the network of lies and deceptions that dominates the whole of the first part of *The Story of an African Farm*” (1991:76). In Blenkins’s religious pretending, for instance, biblical parallel is manipulated in order to authorise his “sadistic attack on Waldo”, and in his deception of Tant’ Sannie and Otto the Bible is the “picklock” whereby he ensures his entry into the farm (Duranti 1991:77). Tant’ Sannie “also makes frequent recourse to odd biblical precedents in order to justify her obtuse traditionalism, or use the Bible as a shield behind which her ignorance may thrive” (Duranti 1991:77). Otto, like Tant’ Sannie, is duped by Blenkins as his naïve religiosity has little relevance in the context of colonial exploitation. Here Schreiner suggests that the Christianity of the dominant inhabitants of the farm establishes the foundation for Blenkins’s oppressive rule; Otto’s “ruin” for “sticking too closely and too naïvely to the evangelical commandments”, his “lack of judgement”, is both a marker of his unconscious collusion with, and suffering at, the hands of Blenkins’s will to power (Duranti 1991:77). Although the Bible influences his thoughts, Waldo dismisses dogmatic Christianity and embraces “reason, experience and Nature” (Voss

1983:172). His high spirituality – I argue – is intermittently attached in the materiality of the colony as he begins to extend his thoughts to include the lives of black people. He struggles with a religion that, in an era of proselytizing missionaries, was manipulated to sanction the ‘imperial project’ which condemned the ‘Sons and daughters of Ham’ “to be hewers of wood and drawers of water” (Marquard 1983:147). Unsatisfied with biblical succour Waldo, in seeking knowledge from other books, begins to ask such questions as, ““why black people are black”” (Schreiner 2004:89). His mistrust of an unforgiving institutionalised religion occurs well before the words of Steve Biko who, in apartheid times, questioned the relevance for black people of “the white man’s religion”, Christianity:

To this date black people find no message for them in the Bible simply because our ministers are still too busy with moral trivialities. [...] They constantly urge the people to find fault in themselves and by so doing detract from the essence of the struggle in which the people are involved. Deprived of spiritual content, the black people read the Bible with a gullibility that is shocking. [...] The anachronism of a well-meaning God who allows people to suffer continually under an obviously immoral system is not lost to young blacks who continue to drop out of Church by the hundreds. [...] Obviously the only path open for us is to redefine the message in the Bible and to make it relevant to the struggling masses. The Bible must not be seen to preach that all authority is divinely instituted. It must rather preach that it is a sin to allow oneself to be oppressed. The Bible must continually be shown to have something to say to the black man to keep him going in his long journey towards realisation of the self. (1988 [1978]:45)

Waldo ends up finding comfort in the more inclusive notion of the Universal Unity of nature: “Only then, when there comes a pause, a blank in your life, when the old idol is broken, when the old hope is dead, when the old desire is crushed, then the Divine compensation of Nature is made manifest. She shows herself to you. So near she draws you, that the blood seems to flow from her to you, through a still uncut cord: you feel the throb of her life” (2004:279). This spiritual connection to nature, a rare moment “when a man’s soul can see Nature” (278), is in sharp contrast to what Ogede terms the “life-denying abstractions of rules and codes of conduct”, so alien to being “intimately involved in a dynamic and spontaneous relationship with nature” (2000:255).

The interconnectedness established through Waldo’s alternative spiritual philosophy – between the ‘coloniser’, the ‘colonised’ and nature – does not mean that Schreiner altogether dismisses what was integral to her childhood teachings, that is, the Bible. The Sermon on the Mount, “which resisted articulation with the rest of the colonial enterprise”, was integrated into Schreiner’s novel: it “became the textual model for a mystical, healing answer to the problems of

political, economic and social exploitation” (Monsman 1991:xiv). Schreiner thus challenges social norms by including the “very part of the Christian gospel that her society resisted”, a part which can be “understood as the voice of the oppressed Other” (Monsman 1991:17). Her “fifty different true stories” (Schreiner 2004:158), then, permit such voices to be heard “in contrast to the colony’s fraudulent manipulation of the missionary’s ‘story’ of spiritual worth” (Monsman 1991:xiv).

It is an intrinsic unity within material surrounds that, significantly, informs Schreiner’s depiction of Doss, the “white and sleek” dog with “one yellow ear hanging down over his left eye” (Schreiner 2004:39). Bestowed of a complex emotional interiority and, according to Wendy Woodward, possessed with “thoughts, actions and emotions which give insight into the selfhood of the dog” (2008:98), the depiction of Doss challenges Western philosophy’s anthropocentrism and – as opposed to the self/Other dichotomy of Western thought – tends towards a more egalitarian, perhaps traditional African relationship between humans and animals. In *The Animal Gaze: Animal Subjectivities in Southern African Narratives* (2008) Woodward argues that in selected literatures from southern Africa the animal gaze “contradicts any assumed superiority of the human over the nonhuman animal” (2008:1). These particular instances of interspecies communication occur not in a timeless, romanticised zone but in a particular historical juncture, and in a “historicised culture which animals inhabit as humans do” (Woodward 2008:1). Woodward’s emphasis on the context-specific act of the animal gaze – that is, the “gaze of a being who actively claims his or her own subjectivity, looking at another who takes her human subjectivity as given” (2008:1) – is significant both in light of exclusionary Victorian colonial society and criticism that regards *African Farm* as simply promulgating a sense of pervasive dislocation. It is a gaze of ‘intersubjectivity’ which Njabulo S. Ndebele in “The Year of the Dog” (2007) sees as having been utterly destroyed by a colonised, racialised modernity.

Despite Ndebele’s strictures interspecies communication in the last thirty years has been acknowledged, at least in Western discourse that had hitherto shunned the possibility of such an interchange. Peter Singer points out that a transformation has occurred in Western philosophy from the conviction that nonhuman animals are of “no ethical significance” to a recognition that “animals have rights”, and to the desire to “bridge the ethical gap” that has thus far been constructed between humans and animals (2004:xi). Central to Woodward’s reading is Jacques Derrida’s destabilisation of the tenets of humanism by illustrating an animal’s capacity to “look

at [a human] in a way which challenges their ideas of subjectivity” (Woodward 2008:3). Derrida, however, remains within the limits of the self/Other binary, a dichotomy that Woodward seeks to complicate by way of notions of ‘we’ and ‘another’ that highlight an egalitarian connectedness in (some) traditional African beliefs: beliefs which cross thresholds and into previously fixed identities (2008:4). *The Story of an African Farm* is situated within the realm of an egalitarianism reflected in African beliefs rather than in a more abstract Western philosophy. It is a perspective that has consonance, nonetheless, with Herbert Spencer’s notion of Universal Unity, in which Waldo – in mourning Lyndall’s death – finds comfort: an enduring Universal Whole that persists beyond the transitory nature of individual human lives.

Not only the individual human being acts as focaliser but, indeed, Doss’s canine subjectivity allows us, the reader, access to his cognitive perceptions. These include judgement and subtle emotion, which suggests the animal as agentive. Sitting among the Karoo bushes with his master Waldo, who “found immeasurable satisfaction in the handling of his machine” (Schreiner 2004:97), Doss,

[W]inked and blinked, and thought it all frightfully monotonous out there on the flat, and presently dropped asleep, sitting bolt upright. Suddenly his eyes opened wide; something was coming from the direction of the homestead. Winking his eyes and looking intently, he perceived it was the grey mare. Now Doss had wondered much of late what had become of her master. Seeing she carried someone on her back, he now came to his own conclusion, and began to move his tail violently up and down. Presently he picked up one ear and let the other hang; his tail becoming motionless, and the expression of his mouth was one of decided disapproval bordering on scorn. He wrinkled his lips up on each side into little lines. (97-98)

Doss’s distinctiveness – his emotional complexity, his scorn of the approaching Blenkins, and his peculiar expressions – connects him (the personal pronoun reinforces my argument) to Waldo and Lyndall: “symbolically”, states Woodward, “he is Waldo’s alter ego and Lyndall’s psychopomp” (2008:96). Schreiner’s projection into the consciousness of a nonhuman animal and the prominence that she places on the connectivity of all life is an ethical act that resonates beyond the portraiture of animals per se. In the context of South African colonialism we are obliquely reminded of colonialism’s exclusions: the dog; the black Other, as is part of Ndebele’s critique. Schreiner’s presentation of animal subjectivity and interspecies communication – almost a century before Western discourse had shed its arrogance on such a matter – challenges those who would unproblematically typecast *African Farm* as a ‘colonial novel’.

After Blenkins leaves following his destruction of Waldo's sheep-shearing machine, Doss watches "his retreat with cynical satisfaction" and, "finding no notice was taken" from his attempt to engage with Waldo, the dog "walked off to play with a black-beetle" (Schreiner 2004:99).

The beetle was hard at work trying to roll home a great ball of dung it had been collecting all the morning; but Doss broke the ball, and ate the beetle's hind legs, and then bit off its head. And it was all play, and no one could tell what it had lived and worked for. A striving, and a striving, and an ending in nothing. (99)

Doss, of course, is not anthropomorphised. He remains a dog with a dog's instinctual nature. Nonetheless, this 'animal subjective' interaction is purposefully situated at the oppressive interface between Blenkins and Waldo, thereby establishing a kind of alliance of the vulnerable between the beetle and Waldo that further enforces a conception of unity. Such instances of human/animal connection complicate the oppressor/oppressed relationship on which colonial life is usually portrayed as being 'lived' in its everyday cruelties. Notwithstanding the nomenclature of colonial discourse and in view of the connectivity of all existence, Waldo's rage at the abuse perpetrated on a dying ox and his subsequent admission that, while employed as a storeman, "There was one respectable thing in that store – it was the Kaffir storeman" (235), contradicts binary thinking. As Woodward has it, "Not only are animals of central significance to [Waldo], but he affirms the humanity of an indigenous man, placing him above the (white) men engaged in commercial activities" (2008:101).

In a similar qualification of racialised binaries, we may read Schreiner's passage describing the interplay between Doss and a naked black toddler; an interplay that could read as a simple rehearsing of a colonial discourse that relegates black people to the echelon of lower-order brutes. While Waldo is in the wagon-house occupied with making a kitchen-table for Em, he is observed by Doss and a "small naked nigger, who had crept from his mother [...] and had crawled into the wagon-house":

From time to time the little animal lifted its fat hand as it expected a fresh shower of curls; till Doss, jealous of his master's noticing any other small creature but himself, would catch the curl in his mouth and roll the little Kaffir over in the sawdust, much to that small animal's contentment. It was too lazy an afternoon to be really ill-natured, so Doss satisfied himself with snapping at the little nigger's fingers, and sitting on him till he laughed. (273)

On the evidence of this passage Vivian concludes that the black child is disparagingly equated with the dog, Doss, and "is even defined as a 'small animal'. The child's mother, in the

background, works and murmurs ‘a sleepy chant’: elements which make her remote from the reader, and again place her along with animals (‘far off bees’)” (1991:101-102). Woodward, however, argues that when read with due awareness of the novel’s premise of Universal Unity, the correlation between child and dog is not a scene, as Vivian would have it, of “remoteness and inferiority” (1991:102); rather child and dog engage in an affable game. Here Woodward highlights Doss’s individuality and his being “an essential part of the lives of both Waldo and Lyndall and, almost as their surrogate [...] he engages compassionately and humorously with a small black child who would be constituted as all matter/all body and without intellect within colonial discourse” (2008:101). Through Doss the intervening presence of the lives of Lyndall and Waldo find a complicated ‘materiality’ on the farm. Without looking across the plain, Waldo “glanced down at them now and then, and smiled [...]. He was conscious without looking of that broad green earth; it made his work pleasant to him” (Schreiner 2004:273). The unity that Schreiner establishes between human and nonhuman is contrasted with “a different life” that “showed itself in the front of the house, where Tant’ Sannie’s cart stood ready in-spanned” (273) (the term ‘in-spanned’ returns us to the constrictions of colonial life). It is a life preoccupied with the very limitations against which both Waldo and Lyndall rebel. The allusion – towards the end of the book – to impending mechanisation may be seen, in hindsight, cataclysmically to subvert Schreiner’s ideal of a universal whole. The interspecies and interracial unity that is suggested by Doss’s gaze, in all probability, will be thwarted by an industrialising South Africa. But then again, there is the hint of a kinder, more inclusive possibility in the future.

As McClintock points out, in contrast, there could be a problem with Schreiner’s notion of an intrinsic unity that animates all beings. The possibility of a Universal Unity may offer Waldo, who has been denied such a “functioning dimension of thought during his life[,] [...] an article of faith in the last of the novel’s ‘Dreams’” (Daymond 1991:186). But Schreiner’s “monist vision” of the interconnectedness of nature “concealed the very real history of colonial plunder that gave her privileged access to [the] immensity” of the expansive veld: a veld which, given colonial and missionary intrusion, was not in fact that expansive (McClintock 1995:265-266). Such checks on the visionary predisposition, however, are to be expected in the material realities of (a divided) colonial South Africa.

More than two decades later Doss would find his footprint in the popular colonial adventure novel, J. Percy FitzPatrick’s *Jock of the Bushveld* (1907). Jock, the plucky dog who

accompanies his master, the fortune-seeking transport rider FitzPatrick in the early days of the Transvaal gold rush, shares in the excitement and dangers of game hunting in what Dolores Fleischer, in an introductory note to the 1976 edition of the South African classic, calls “an Africa still untamed and largely untrodden by man” (1976:14), an ‘Africa’ reminiscent of Haggard’s in his early colonial adventure novels. In contradistinction to the audacious Jock it is Schreiner’s presentation of Doss’s complex emotional interiority that challenges the superficiality of the adventure genre and reinforces my argument as to how far Schreiner had moved, and would continue to move, from the line of colonial adventure books. Whereas Doss points to the underlying unity between humans and nonhumans, Jock – a ‘lapdog’ to his colonial master – serves to endorse the self/Other dichotomies of colonial frontier societies. Such an ‘adventure’ strain in literature continued well after Schreiner’s implicit dismissal of Haggard-like literary expectations. Like Joseph Conrad, whose adventure to the ‘heart of darkness’ is inflected with a “weighty [analysis] of social problems” (Gray 1991:xii), Schreiner, too, struggled to inject the adventure mode with serious African content: ‘the farm’, perhaps reflecting her ragged learning as a young colonial, may be granted its real and symbolic purpose in the story of the soul struggling against its material surroundings. Without a ‘local’ literary tradition to invoke, Schreiner was compelled to invent her stories where none had previously existed.

The next serious – as opposed to ‘popular’ – colonial novel in South Africa after Schreiner’s *African Farm*, as most critics agree (see Gray 1991), was Douglas Blackburn’s *Leaven: A Black and White Story* (1908). (The novel was republished in 1991.) Like *Jock of the Bushveld*, *Leaven* is set before the turn of the century and, here, Blackburn takes up the story of industrialisation, a process which Schreiner hints at in *African Farm*, especially through the character of Waldo. (Voss (1991) has argued that the work Waldo performs resembles that of Bulalie in *Leaven*.) A novel of race relations, a subject that has been called the primary concern of the South African novel, *Leaven*’s interconnected stories of Bulalie, who leaves the rural ‘reserve’ to seek his fortune in the city, and David Hyslop, the naïve missionary, are “truly a long way from the world of H. Rider Haggard” (Gray 1991:xiii). *Leaven* is an “indictment of the colonial urbanising process” (Chapman 2003:140), shifting from black to white, rural to urban, in what is the first novel in a line of the so-called ‘Jim comes to Joburg’ books which reached an apotheosis in Alan Paton’s *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948). (The ‘Jim comes to Joburg’ trope, unfortunately, continues to be presented in dichotomous forms in a great deal of African-

language literature.) If *African Farm* is anticipatory of more penetrating perceptions of colonial life including those that we find in Blackburn's *Leaven*, what of Schreiner's other two novels, both published posthumously: *Undine*, completed before the publication of *African Farm*; and *From Man to Man*, written throughout Schreiner's life? Was Schreiner able to write only one novel of real significance?

Farm, Metropolis, Colonial Suburb: *Undine* and *From Man to Man*

Schreiner began writing *Undine* (1929) in 1873 while she was living on the Diamond Fields with her siblings, who had left for New Rush in the "pell-mell dash for the diamonds" discovered only a couple of years earlier by a surveyor's wife (McClintock 1995:274). The frantic rush by diggers to seek their fortune and the emergence of a "small syndicate of ambitious white capitalists jockeying for control of the riches" (McClintock 1995:274) were radically to alter the landscape of South Africa, symbolised in the influence of the De Beers Consolidated Mines Company, founded by Cecil John Rhodes, whose policies Schreiner indicted in her polemical *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (1897). De Beers established "a monolithic corporation destined to control two-thirds of the world's entire stock of diamonds" (McClintock 1995:274). In contrast to this accumulated wealth, the black African diggers, by law, were not allowed to "own, buy or sell a single diamond" (McClintock 1995:275). It was in such a context that Schreiner began her first novel, *Undine*, a critique of the hypocrisies of orthodox religion, (sexual) exploitation, and the accumulation of wealth which, in Berkman's words, "is invariably the product of deceit and cruel exploitation of the poor and ignorant" (1990:162) – all themes that were to feature in her later writing.

With the novel set in colonial South Africa and England, the wilful child, Undine Bock, who questions orthodox religious understanding, travels from the colony, where she lives on a Karoo farm with Boers, to England where metropolitan culture turns out to be as unsympathetic to her religious doubts as narrow-minded colonial life. In her relationships with Albert Blair and his wealthy father, George Blair, Undine experiences the constraints of well-established metropolitan gender roles and, in effect, sexual oppression. (Undine marries the elder Blair not for love, but for financial wealth so that she may give money to her real love, the disinherited Albert who, indeed, had jilted her!) After the death of her husband, Undine returns to South

Africa to the Diamond Fields, where she finds employment in ironing and sewing and dies after having seen the dead body of her “Piece-of-perfection” (Schreiner 2004 [1929]:62), Albert Blair.

On completion of what Schreiner herself articulated as her “poor little” (in First and Scott 1990:84) juvenile novel, however, she decided not to publish it, asking Havelock Ellis, to whom she gave the manuscript of the novel, to destroy it, which he did not (Beeton 1974:29). Like *African Farm*, *Undine* has had a contradictory reception: in a contemporaneous review in *The New Statesman* (London) a critic calls the “not [...] great novel” “immature and rashly expressed”, but the “thought in the book [...] is as fine as in all Olive Schreiner’s writings, and its rashness has a nobility which quite redeems it from the pretentious insolence that disfigures so much modern revolt” (Anon. 1983 [1929]:89). In a later review the book is referred to as “undoubtedly” having “merit” though it is “riddled with weaknesses and gaucheries” (Beeton 1974:29-30). For the most part the novel is set in an imaginary England as, at the time of writing, Schreiner had not yet left African soil. Beeton comments that the part set in the metropolis is “unrealistic, melodramatic and dull. The writer at such times seems to have lost her gift for graphic and precise description; when set beside her very assured evocations of Africa, the rendering of England seems permeated by her ignorance” (1974:30). For Monsman, too, the vividness of the African scenes as opposed to the “melodramatic or static” depiction of the English scenes signals that Schreiner, as author, is “truly an inhabitant only of the kloofs and on the plains of Africa” (1991:41-42).

It is a comment that in unexpectedly literal ways has applicability to recent commentary on South African fiction today and which links ‘place’ to race and gender concerns. In “A Whiter Shade of Pale: White Femininity as Guilty Masquerade in ‘New’ (White) South African Women’s Writing” (2004), for example, Georgina Horrell states, “The susceptibility of white skins to sunburn becomes more than a corporeal indicator of the inadequate adaptation of people of European origin to African conditions. It becomes a page of betrayal, a surface which may seep, may reveal guilty subtexts [...]” (2004:773). White skin must be protected from the harsh climate in a country where “anxious discourses surrounding skin colour are of course endemic to South African narrative, the taint of pigment expressed in its crudest form within the laws of the apartheid state” (Horrell 2004:773). Schreiner’s central protagonists are often in the harsh sun, in the case of her female characters, wearing their kappies for protection. *Undine*, however, frequently stands under the scorching sun without the protection of her kappie, risking, as

McClintock has it, “a dark complexion – the ungodly sign of racial and gender transgression” (1995:276). Sitting in the “calm”, “still” outside which, for Undine, is “so far removed from all passion and strife, damnation, fire and brimstone; so strong, so self-contained” (Schreiner 2004:9), she is reproached by her governess, ““Do you wish to ruin your complexion completely, you wicked child, that you sit here staring up into the sky as if you had never seen it before and were bereft of all your senses? Get your *kappie* from that ape and come into the house at once”” (11). Here, as McClintock has suggested, Undine defies racial and gender norms and, in her determination to sit in the sun, she suggests her own suitability to African conditions. Like Undine, Rebekah in *From Man to Man* also flouts dominant conventions: “It was long past ten o’clock and she was never allowed to be out in the sun so late” (Schreiner 2004 [1926]:406). Rebekah knows that such a transgression is “wicked” (408); she is certainly not accustomed to the blazing sun as she “shivered with heat” and “little drops of perspiration began to gather under her eyes and on her upper lip; she would not wipe them off. Her face began to get red, and her temples to throb; the heat was fierce” (407,408). Yet Rebekah “liked” the “heat scorching her arms through her little cotton dress” (408). It is the ‘Hottentot’ maid who polices established colonial boundaries and who demands of Rebekah to ““[g]et down from that wall, child, will you! Standing there with nothing on your head! You’ll be burnt as black as a Kaffir before your mother gets up”” (423).

On her return to the Diamond Fields of colonial South Africa following the death of her husband George Blair, with whom she had lived almost as a kept woman, Undine “discovers that she is the victim of a perilous exclusion. Like Africans, she is barred from the white male scramble over the diamonds and the economy of mining capitalism” (McClintock 1995:276). Undine can only find work in industrialising South Africa in servitude as a sewing and ironing woman. Here Schreiner creates an intricate web between metropolis and colony that, as McClintock says, may be “indifferent to the racial question of the plundered profits of the diamonds” (1995:276), but was an indictment of the exploitative process that was unfolding before Schreiner herself.

In England Undine had been embroiled with both George and Albert Blair who, in their brutality, dominance, and intolerance, are both caricatures of “malignant wealth” (Berkman 1990:162). In her marriage to the elder Blair, Undine, with altruistic intentions ‘prostitutes’ herself for a large sum of money and lives as a sex-parasite in metropolitan society (see

Schreiner's discussion of sex-parasitism in *Woman and Labour*). Undine whose attraction to the younger Blair defies her own best sense is a reluctant participant, nonetheless a participant, in the high life of metropolitan society, the wealth of which, Schreiner recognised, was the product of exploitation. In the colony, on the other hand, Undine seeks freedom from the stultification of her previous life but, like the metropole, the colony offers opportunities only for white males. Utilising the mode of free indirect speech, the narrator enters Undine's consciousness:

If she had been a man she might have thrown off her jacket and set to work instantly [...] she might have made enough in half an hour to pay for a bed at one of the lower hotels, might have wandered about the town, seen something of life, and enjoyed herself in a manner. As it was, being only a woman and a fine little lady with the scent not yet out of her hair nor the softness rubbed from her hands, she stood there in the street, feeling very weak, bodily, after her illness, and mentally, after her long life of servitude and dependence – very weak and very heartsick. (Schreiner 2004:117)

Undine's employment at New Rush, as I have said, is confined to that of servitude; however, unlike the austere class stratification of the metropole, in the colony few are troubled by her ironing work from which she salvages her respectability: "Is not all work, if it be earnestly done, noble and ennobling? Is not all labour worship, be it only scraping a carrot or ironing a shirt? No longer would she be bound by prejudice, but, leading a life based on reason, she would enjoy the greatness of man who labours" (138). Of course, Schreiner is not so naïve as to think that all white males benefit from the exploitation of mineral extraction, or that all women are mute before male domination: a Malay ironing woman dupes Undine out of her possessions and a digger, who has come to seek his fortune at the Mine, lies debilitated while he is nursed by Undine, "When a man who has called himself a gentleman falls to that, he can fall no lower" (158).

There are no simply defined oppressors and oppressed: the protagonist, as both exploiter and exploited, disrupts any such delineation. In labouring for those who ensure the continuing existence of the Mines Undine, like the black labourers at New Rush, could be seen merely as a stooge of 'the imperial project'. In a land "where all locomotion is at the expenses of muscle and sinew" (Schreiner 2004:117), however, women's labour power is shown to have a 'subversive' effect. As I suggested earlier on, the colony is both more stifling and potentially freer than its metropolitan alternative. In *Woman and Labour* (1911), Schreiner, who – it seems – is principally concerned with white middle-class metropolitan women, calls for women's entry into productive labour, a field from which they were increasingly excluded alongside the

development of 'modern civilisation'. Her argument is that a repudiation of women's labour power will lead to the enervation of society. In light of Undine's greater freedom than in the metropolis to labour in the colony, Schreiner's critique in *Woman and Labour* has significant implications for England's empire. Her contrast between 'Africa' and 'Europe' is audacious with her allusion to a potentially 'freer' South Africa informing Stephen Gray's observation that in *African Farm* Schreiner's naming her protagonist Waldo, together with her own pseudonym of Ralph Iron, could have been evoking the name of Ralph Waldo Emerson who, in 1837, declared an American independence from British cultural domination:

Perhaps the time is already come...when the sluggard intellect of this continent will look from under its iron lids, and fill the postponed expectation of the world with something better than the exertions of mechanical skill. One day our dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close. The millions, that around us are rushing into life, cannot always be fed the sere remains of foreign harvests. Events, actions, arise, that must be sung, that will sing themselves. (In Gray 1979:133)

Yet, such a contrast belies the interconnectedness of 'Africa' and 'Europe'. Schreiner's sociological vision may neglect an explicit consideration of the racial question; in retrospect, however, by conflating religious piety and sexual submission, she offers a vision of how such oppressions are intertwined with the exploitation of labour on South Africa's mines. In the metropolis Undine realises that "men are the arbiters of religious belief and social mores (the former sanctioning the latter)" (Berkman 1990:54). In the colony, on the other hand, Undine thinks that she will be free from the gender constraints of metropolitan society; yet, as we have seen, there lingers a certain expectation of female propriety. Undine's oppression at the hands of the Blairs, whose wealth is a product of (colonial) exploitation, persists in the colony as, to reiterate McClintock, Undine – like black Africans – is excluded from the possible accumulation of 'New Rush' wealth.

Schreiner's denunciation of the sweeping alliance between sexism, racism, and religion in colonial life finds its most powerful expression in *From Man to Man* (1926), a novel on which she worked for over forty years. This was to be, as Schreiner herself said, her most significant work (although we must bear in mind that she said, also, that she wished only to be remembered for *Trooper Peter Halket*): it was her "summation, in artistic form, of life as she saw it" (Beeton 1974:38) even though it remained unfinished at her death. Here she considers race, evolution, the construction of gender norms, domesticity, prostitution, and art in what was meant to be a novel that would have a profound social impact. In a letter to Havelock Ellis she says, "I have always

built upon the fact *From Man to Man* will help other people. [...] Do you *long* too sometimes to lessen the pain and suffering in the world?” (in Berkman 1990:11-12).

From Man to Man, which intrudes polemic into its imaginative narrative, has engendered disparaging comments about Schreiner's status as a creative writer: her “poor novel” (Friedmann 1955:14) is a “fragmentary work of art emerging from a mass of argument” (C. M. 1983 [1926]:89) that, when it steps away from its “propagandist” parts (First and Scott 1990:172) “rises to great heights indeed” (C. M. 1983:90). In light of Schreiner's own comments to Ellis, critics have argued that the artistic value of the book is of “secondary importance” to its function in alleviating the suffering of those around her (Friedmann 1955:16). What did it say to its contemporaneous audience? If it was so specific to its times, what value might it have today?

The fictional element addresses similar issues to those in *Undine* and *African Farm*; but with a “growing sense of identity, community and responsibility” (Voss 1991:139). In this story of two sisters – Bertie and Rebekah – who grow up on a Karoo farm, Schreiner explores the sexual deception as experienced by women in colonial South Africa and England. The avid naturalist and storyteller, Rebekah, who has moved to the suburbs of Cape Town after marrying the disloyal Frank, terminates her sexual relationship with her husband having discovered many of his adulterous affairs. Rebekah, in First and Scott's words, “begins to come to life” again as she occupies herself with her domestic chores and scientific pursuits (1990:173), an interest that, at the end of the novel, sees her develop an intellectual rapport with her neighbour, Mr Drummond, the husband of one of Frank's mistresses. Her naïve sister, Bertie, on the other hand, breaks off her engagement to the principled John-Ferdinand after she discloses to him her seduction by her tutor. The scandal of this affair, the rumourmongers being principally women, follows Bertie as she moves from place to place in the Cape Colony, eventually leaving for England and living as a parasitic woman with a wealthy Jewish moneylender/diamond speculator. Bertie's protector casts her out of his home when he is misleadingly told that she has seduced his cousin and, consequently, she works as a prostitute in Soho.

Though conceptualised at the same time as her other two novels, *From Man to Man* deviates somewhat from the constraining, isolated, uncultivated, and alienating colony of *Undine* and *African Farm*. The self-assured colonial presence in a domesticated, populated colony, more specifically Cape Town, shows itself in Schreiner's increasingly coherent and explicit engagement with issues of race, gender, and class oppression. It is a colony with a nascent urban

‘colonial culture’ whereby fashions, though for the most part copied from the metropolis, inform women’s dress while, unlike Lyndall’s earlier barely noticed sexual transgression, Bertie’s liaisons engender disapproving ‘middle-class’ glances.

The novel is different from her earlier two for another reason: while *African Farm* could be considered her pastoral novel, this book, as Voss has suggested, with its “inclusive and varied structure”, is Schreiner’s epic (1991:138). The inclusive structure is evident in the “double plot (the story of two sisters), the variety of locale (‘Thorn-Kloof’, suburb, city, up-country town, Rebekah’s farm, London) and the extensive historical and sociological references (particularly in the central Chapters 7 and 8)” (Voss 1991:138-139). Of the post-industrial epic in English Voss writes that it is largely the “work of the provincial periphery rather than the metropolitan centre. [...] In fact ever since Virgil the epic has been the expression of a new sense of community, hence of centre” (1991:140). Indeed, the interconnectedness of race, class and gender oppression in this novel was Schreiner’s effort towards fashioning community in a divided and divisive colonial South Africa: her narrative would “express the individual/community relationship, as an ideal of totally voluntary association, and hence re-define and re-constitute community at a particular historical juncture” (Voss 1991:142). This juncture spanned the conflict-ridden context of racial segregation, industrialisation and urbanisation; the franchise question; and the 1910 Act of Union which, for Schreiner in “Closer Union”, signalled “internal conflict and bitterness” (2005 [1908]:175).

The peripheral colony, hence, becomes the centre in Schreiner’s epic that would “discredit old myths and promote new, devalue old heroisms and praise new” (Voss 1991:142). In “Science and Religion in the Feminist Fin-de-Siècle and a New Reading of Olive Schreiner’s *From Man to Man*” (2001), Rose Lovell-Smith points out how some late nineteenth-century feminists, such as Schreiner, blend and/or remould leading discourses like Darwinism and Christianity, both of which have reinforced gender (and race) inequality. In *From Man to Man*, Lovell-Smith argues, Schreiner rewrites and displaces biblical stories with those of women; moreover, she presents an evolved world, teeming with names of both exotic and indigenous plants and animals, that more obviously has moved away from, and replaced, the dogmatic Christianity of her earlier novels. But, as suggested with regard to *African Farm*, this evolutionary narrative is critical of the tenets of pervading Social Darwinism: Rebekah, by

arguing that progress is measured by self-sacrifice, decentres the central tenet of evolutionary theory, that is to say, ‘survival of the fittest’, as she questions,

‘[W]hat if to me the little Bushman woman, who cannot count up to five [...] warn[s] her fellows in the plain below that the enemy are coming, though she knows she will fall dead struck by poisonous arrows, shows a quality higher and of more importance to the race than those of any Bismarck? What if I see in that little untaught savage the root out of which ultimately the noblest blossom of the human tree shall draw its strength?’ (Schreiner 2004:517)

Rebekah goes on explain that when compared with the ancient civilisations of Africa, Asia, Greece, and Rome, her forbears were mere “primitive barbarian[s]” (522); that it is to ancient civilisations that modern civilisation owes its more recent developments in art, letters and science. Rebekah muses, “‘It ill becomes us, who are but the tamed children of yesterday, to talk of primitive savages’” (520).

This inversion and displacement of colonial language, according to which the civilised European becomes the savage, primitive, uncivilised Other, certainly complicates colonial binaries. It is a displacement which, as we have seen, also occurs in her other two novels. In *African Farm* we have the forewarning of a cataclysmic industrialisation juxtaposed against Otto’s conception of the farm as ‘primitive’. Schreiner’s proclivity to stereotyping for dramatic effect, in *Undine*, extends to her ‘England’: Undine’s dogmatic grandfather, like Tant’ Sannie, believes that it is a great crime “to give expression to an idea that has not been propounded at least one hundred times before you were born” (Schreiner 2004:21); the gossip, Mrs Barnacles, who evinces conventional gender behaviour, is described by the narrator in a manner reminiscent of the repulsive description of Tant’ Sannie, as “a yellow-faced big-nosed invalid, who passed her life on a sofa and was apt to take a dyspeptic view of things” (43). The narrator, at one point, calls Cousin Jonathan “grotesquely ugly” as he “smiled a sneering sort of smile” (46); and, back in colonial South Africa, “ragged little savages” denote both black and white children who hold onto a cart carrying a barrel of water “with their mouths wide open and upturned to catch the drops as they fell” (139). Whatever the limits of the stereotype, Schreiner’s tendency is to cut across any metropolitan (‘civilised’)/colonial (‘barbarian’) divide. Similarly, if her displacement of colonial nomenclature in *From Man to Man* could be seen as somewhat problematic, as she appears to hold to a classical ‘enlightenment’ conception of linear progress, the structure of the narrative contradicts linearity as a formative influence. In “Power, Agency, Desire: Olive Schreiner and the Pre-Modern Narrative Moment” (1996), Janet Galligani Casey points out that

Rebekah's childhood stories, which are related in an "insistently linear manner with a clear telos", yield to those more "organic" and "circular" stories that she tells as an adult (1996:127,129). The colony turns back on the metropolis applying and, in turn, discrediting metropolitan expectation and convention.

The centre may now become a margin; yet the colony's marginalised people are excluded from Schreiner's community. Voss points out that those who perform the "grinding, mechanical work" in industrialising South Africa are "missing from the total national community of *From Man to Man*" (1991:143). This exclusion is identified, by Voss, as a difficulty to "extrapolate across lines of class and colour from Rebekah and Bertie to the women of South Africa" (1991:143). McClintock, similarly, notes that as a "denunciation of the traitorous cult of domesticity, Schreiner seems moved only by its impact on white women" (1995:272). With hindsight, such a constriction is an obvious problem in a country shaped by race relations. But, with her circular narratives, the re-working of evolutionary theory, her biblical stories and, as Voss has it, in 're-defining' and 're-aligning' women and men, colony and metropolis, and exploited and exploiters in respect to one another, Schreiner, as in *African Farm*, creates a space from where other stories could be included in her unfinished epic. As a child, for instance, Rebekah keeps a "large soapbox with an odd collection of things in it" (Schreiner 2004:409). In amongst other objects the box includes a thimble, needles, an alphabet book, a replica of Queen Victoria's head, chocolate, and a Bushman stone. Rebekah's selection of these items to put next to the baby whom Rebekah, in her ignorance, does not realise is dead, is a sign both of the "internally divided identity" of the child and of the "integration of [...] dissociated elements of male and female, Africa and England" (Monsman 1991:157-158). In addition, Schreiner goes some way to include other narratives when Rebekah assumes the responsibility of care-giver to Sartje, the child of her husband's affair with the coloured housemaid. Although Sartje is raised alongside Rebekah's other children, McClintock argues that the adoption serves to "illuminate [the white mother's] spiritual largesse" in contrast with the coloured mother who is "portrayed as unsympathetic, uncaring and malicious" (1995:273). I suggest, instead, that the inclusion into Rebekah's family of Sartje, whom Voss calls the "symbolic descendant of her namesake Sartje Baartman" (1991:144), is another marker of Schreiner's desire for an inclusive national narrative.

A story that complements Schreiner's unfinished epic is to be found in Sol T. Plaatje's epic, *Mhudi* (1930), written around 1917 but only published four years after *From Man to Man*. This story shows the other, neglected side of Schreiner's narrative as it incorporates proverbs, folk-tales, Shakespeare, and Bunyan to reveal the "vision of a potential unified nation and the decline of that vision" (Couzens 1987:41). In the Preface Plaatje says that through his novel he intends to humanise the black African who, in light of Union and the 1913 Land Act, has been subject to dehumanising practices. In approximating Schreiner, part of this process involves the decentring of old South African narratives, like the Great Trek, to include new, previously silenced stories that allow a variety of voices to be heard. In her decentring acts of storytelling, Schreiner's unfinished novel possibly finds a certain parallel, even a completion, in Plaatje's *Mhudi*.

Again, 'story', as in *African Farm*, is a central feature of the posthumously published novels. The 'stories' Schreiner creates without the advantage of tradition serve to re-imagine and re-constitute the shape of colonial society: Rebekah's narratives as an adult, specifically with regard to gender and race relations, are intended to "instil counter-cultural values in her children" (Berkman 1990:148). It may not be "the Garden of Eden yet" (Schreiner 2004:440), as Frank says to Rebekah, but her visions imagine within the unfolding of history the creation of such a garden (see Voss 1991), a more positive vision of the future than that entertained by Plaatje's *Mhudi*.

We are reminded here of Lenta's comment that when Schreiner's socio-political tract, *Thoughts on South Africa*, was eventually published in 1923, it provided a lens through which we could gain insight into the history of South Africa. Like *Thoughts*, *From Man to Man* not only provides a 'luminous window' into South Africa's past, but offers a vision of a future – that, incidentally, has still not been attained – according to which the dichotomous language of Victorian colonial society no longer has purchase on the society in South Africa. Herein lies the continuing significance of the novel, a significance despite Hugh Walpole's comments in a 1927 review: "And so the interest of *From Man to Man* really depends upon how far a book belonging in form and manner and subject to an age far deader for us than the eighteenth century can by the force of its personality be interesting for us" (1983:91). For the modern reader accustomed to the work of Virginia Woolf, Walpole states, the subject and most of the style of the novel is "old-fashioned"; "[t]here is in fact almost nothing of value for the modern reader in three quarters of

this book” (1983:91). For Walpole, whose review was published in *The New York Herald Tribune*, the thematic concerns of the novel may render it irrelevant; indeed, more recent critics have also noted the limited social impact of the novel (see Casey, 1996, and McClintock, 1995). In a postcolonial South Africa, however, where binaries continue to have purchase, the subject matter of *From Man to Man* still constitutes a powerful critique of society. Rather than remaining trapped within the binaries of her time – and, by extension, of our time – Schreiner in her so-called ‘colonial novels’ presented a colony too intricate simply to acquiesce to a Victorian colonial language of dichotomies. In both form and content her literary achievement escapes simple classification; the heterogeneity of her work, the multiplicity of stories, lends itself to a postcolonial reading of South Africa or, at least, to a vision of a nascent postcolonial nation. Van der Vlies has said, “Nations emerging out of empires have sought to write their identities in literature, finding a voice and making their own those genres apparently validated and authored in the former imperial centre” (2003:259). The comment applies to Schreiner’s novelistic practice.

From Man to Man ends with a conversation between the like-minded Mr Drummond and Rebekah, in which they argue for the prophetic vision of the artist who ““sees that which his race has never seen”” (Schreiner 2004:697). ““The creative artist,”” concludes Mr Drummond, ““does not so much recall the life of the race; he paints its future, just as he often does his own. It can’t be explained”” (698).

Chapter Two: ‘Dream Life’ and ‘Real Life’: The ‘Colony’ in Selected Later Writings

What I aspired to be, and was not, comforts me.

– *Woman and Labour*

Supplementing History/Rivalling History

“[W]hat must I be, and do, to live in the colony at this time?” (Chapman 2003:133). It seems, as Chapman suggests, Schreiner asked herself such a challenging question almost in isolation of her Haggard-like contemporaries. And, as political questions became more pressing in South Africa on her return from England in the late nineteenth century, she grappled all the more with her own role as a now acclaimed writer and citizen of a ‘nation’ in the throes of change.

It was a question, incidentally, that she had also asked of herself earlier on in her literary career. In *The Story of an African Farm*, as I have argued, Schreiner carved out a space for the interaction of a multiplicity of (conflicting) narratives of identity-making. A critical concern with form – the question as to whether *African Farm* is a realist novel, a romance, or somewhere in-between – touched on the ‘problem’ of Schreiner’s so-called ‘digressions’: that is, her stories. In light of Schreiner’s comments in the Preface to the novel, the tension between the dream and real is seen as somewhat problematic. “Times and Seasons”, Waldo’s lyrical-philosophical dream, may disrupt the linearity of metropolitan formal realism; however, is his digression ‘marginal’ to colonial problematics? I have suggested not. Schreiner continued throughout her career to veer from a ‘metaphysical’ to a ‘real’ pole of experience: that is, from allegories and dreams to prose commentary. Of this tension, as I said in my introduction, Nadine Gordimer states that Schreiner “dissipated her imaginative creativity, whatever else she may have achieved, in writing tracts and pamphlets rather than fiction. [...] Was the definitive reason [for her turn from creative writing] her historical situation or the limitation of her talents?” (1983:18-19).

Is Gordimer correct? Did Schreiner’s ‘turn’ to politics (it appears to me that Schreiner was always to some extent a politically engaged writer) dissipate her imaginative creativity? Or does the mediation of dream and real aspects of experience not signal a distinctive style of her milieu? In this chapter I shall argue that after *The Story of an African Farm* Schreiner did not lose what Ridley Beeton calls her “unique sense of creativity” (1983:42); far from exhausting herself, the writing and mingling of imaginative literature and political tracts could be seen quite

simply as a response to an ongoing colonial problematic: the interplay of fiction and non-fiction offers a powerful amalgam of both personal and public insight – lenses through which to ‘read’ colonial South Africa – and, also, the ‘visionary’ potential to re-constitute and re-define colonial society. As Anna Maria Jones has argued in her article on New Women writers, “‘A Track to the Water’s Edge’: Learning to Suffer in Sarah Grand’s *The Heavenly Twins*”, the amalgam of the dream and the real is supposed to “fashion *new* women (and men) through the very process of reading New Woman novels” (2007:217). Thus it could be said that Schreiner, who came to be referred to as a New Woman writer, desired to fashion a *new* ‘South African’ society through the activity of our reading her literature.

To respond to Gordimer’s remark one has to consider Schreiner’s comments on the role of the artist: that is, an artist who, in Schreiner’s times, had to deal with issues pertaining to colonial South Africa. In *From Man to Man* Rebekah discusses with Mr Drummond, the man with whom she has an intellectual rapport, the ethical imperatives of the artist who has the unique potential to express those ideals of the community, ideals which are not yet fully articulated. The artist, Rebekah points out, is part of a community as “‘no man is merely an individual but is part of the great body of life; the thoughts he thinks are part of humanity’s thoughts, the visions he sees are part of humanity’s visions; the artist is only an eye in the great human body, seeing for those who share his life’” (Schreiner 2004:701). Because of this relationship between the individual and the community, the imaginative writer must be socially engaged:

‘[...] no art, no creative thought can be greater all round than the creature from whom it takes its birth. If the man or the woman dwarf himself for the sake of art, in devotion to thought, the art and the thought are both shorn. Is a lovely life also nothing? Is it not the highest ideal to realise it? Many a man has shorn his life of all devotion to any aims except his art and thought, and in the end they have died starved out and weaklings.’ (703)

Here Schreiner, through Rebekah, invokes Ralph Waldo Emerson’s idea of a purposeful art according to which the artist, uniquely “endowed with acute perception and imagination”, has a responsibility “to make others aware of social circumstances” (Edmands 1978:38). As Edmands has it, Schreiner came to such a view after having read Emerson as a teenager. Emerson was obviously writing about his own society, America, when he “emphasised that the role of an artist was particularly important in a society without a firmly established literary tradition” (1978:38); nevertheless, it seems that Schreiner found consonance with his appeal, as her thoughts attest.

The idea of a purposeful art is explicated later – in 1965 – by the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe in his authoritative article, “The Novelist as Teacher”. Achebe points out that, unlike the artist working in the more ‘secure’ literary tradition of Europe, writers in Africa must articulate the ‘vision’ of their society; they “cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done” (1988:30). Achebe makes a distinction between what he calls ‘applied’ art and ‘pure’ art, categorising his own work as the former. “But who cares?”, Achebe says, “[a]rt is important but so is education of the kind I have in mind. And I don’t see that the two need be mutually exclusive” (1988:30).

Schreiner certainly did not see the two as mutually exclusive. Instead, she found fault with contemporary criticism that wished to sever art from society. In an 1886 letter to Havelock Ellis, Schreiner had this to say about ‘art’,

One thing I am glad of is that [*From Man to Man*] becomes less and less what you call ‘art’ as it goes on. My first crude conceptions are always what you call ‘art’. As they become more and more living and real, they become what I call higher art and what you call no art at all. [...] You seem to say, “I will call ‘art’ only that artistic creation in which I can clearly see the artist manufacturing the parts and piecing them together; when I cannot see that, though the thing be organic, true, inevitable, like a work of God’s, I will not call it ‘art’.” [...] This of course is not in justification of my method but touches what seems to me a weakness and shallowness in your mode of criticism. (In Casey 1996:129)

Indeed, Schreiner believed in a purposeful art. The amalgamation of propaganda, didacticism and imaginative narrative was for her unproblematic; rather than an indication of artistic limitations, Schreiner’s ‘organic’ conception of art – as Berkman would phrase it – served to heal, or at least attempt to heal, the ills of her and, by implication, our society. In *African Farm*, as we have seen, the Hunter allegory tells of a man’s quest for the truth, or a perfected world (see Monsman 1992), which at present is unattainable, but through striving is possible. (Waldo’s faith in the universal unity of all beings comes close to such a realisation.) In *From Man to Man* Rebekah’s ‘digressions’ are intended to ameliorate social ills, for stories, as Schreiner has put it, must “‘help other people’” (in Monsman 1991:13). More obviously, in *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*, to which I shall later turn, the mingling of history and the transcendental power of allegory represented a desire both to condemn and reform.

As Monsman points out, we are not only dealing in Schreiner with a dream/real tension, but with a tension between “art for its own sake and her desire for reform” (1992:51). It was a century after the publication of *The Story of an African Farm* that Ravenscroft argued that the

canons of criticism in the metropolis were inadequate for 'Third World' literary evaluation: unlike in the West, the "political statement is obtrusive" where suffering and political strife dominate day-to-day living (1983:46). This is not to say that Schreiner ignored the artistic process; on the contrary, she was a self-aware artist, acknowledging that "there is as much structure in prose as there is in verse" (in Casey 1996:125). Schreiner's intense need to reform, nonetheless, did not lend itself to a cohesive narrative or a sharp divide between her prose commentary and her fiction. We only have to consider Lyndall's 'incoherently' placed proto-feminist passages and Rebekah's didacticism to realise that 'pure' art, undoubtedly in its metropolitan forms, was inadequate to the articulation of 'colonial problematics'. The generic range of Schreiner's literary achievement is a marker of her need to give voice to that which – for Schreiner herself – could not adequately be expressed in any other form.

Although Schreiner came from a milieu where she had to be both less than and more than an artist, critics have queried as to whether "the value placed within [a text like *From Man to Man*] on nonfiction writing [...] somehow undermines the novel, challenging the value of imaginative literature both in aesthetic (private) terms and in its (public) capacity as social commentary" (Casey 1996:135). Conversely, the mingling of fiction and non-fiction could be said to subvert the efficacy of her politically slanted writings. Significantly, it was on her return from England that Schreiner became more politically involved, writing prose commentary and, at the same time, creating her allegories and dreams. Hence, for Schreiner it seems that the dream and the real are inextricably intertwined. What I argue to be her ethical imperatives – developed from her sense of responsibility as a 'South African' – certainly grounded Schreiner's writings in the materiality of her surroundings. Monsman can argue, therefore, that "[...] in Schreiner's view her fiction's significance depended on its immediate social and political applicability. Her polemical writings and speeches, her satires, allegories, and intellectual or historical writings join her politically slanted fiction to define a contour of production that relates her work directly to contemporary issues, to ideological and didactic ends" (1991:13). Yet the inclusion of allegory permits Schreiner in her more obvious ethically motivated writings to transcend the material circumstance. If she had an intense need to address contemporary issues, then what purpose does the allegorical form serve? The universality of allegory in Schreiner's deployment, paradoxically, is bound to an immediate cause.

Allegories and dreams are central to her literary output. Published as *Dreams* (1890) and later, as *Stories, Dreams, and Allegories* (1923), these shorter symbolic forms have consonance with both her longer fiction and her prose commentary. Why the prominence of the dream or allegorical mode, however, in a country where one anticipates the artist practising an ‘applied’ art? At the same time as Schreiner concerned herself with the everyday political issues of colonial South Africa, the timelessness of allegories allowed her to rise above the immediate situation and to point to applicable exempla. The inclusion of such dreams and allegories in novels like *African Farm*, as Clayton argues, “complicate[s] any simple message because [the metaphysical sections] offer alternatives” that “transform without destroying the reality on which [imaginative power] operates” (1983a:28-29). Allegory in colonial South Africa, therefore, becomes a way of fashioning a ‘nation’, that is, allegory “[transcends] individual lives and [propounds] what [Schreiner] saw as universal principles and ethical imperatives” (Clayton 1986:8) that countered a divided and divisive ‘South Africa’. The universality of allegories served to heal the contradictions in Schreiner’s milieu: that is, the allegorical mode reconciles the division between the material and the spiritual by “bridging actual and ideal reality, mythic and spiritual perceptions, with material existence” (Berkman 1990:213). In short, Schreiner’s allegories are ethically engaged in that they are didactic, moralistic, and polemical; they “relate directly to contemporary issues, to ideological and instructive ends” (Monsman 1992:52). Schreiner highlights the wrongdoing of the Cape government in “The Salvation of a Ministry”, for instance, while she calls on women to undo the shackles of patriarchy in “Three Dreams in a Desert”. This notwithstanding, the tension between the material and the universal has led critics to argue either for the escapist function of the allegories, or – like Monsman – for their outspoken address of contemporary issues. Annalisa Oboe has argued that dreams or stories offered an escape for Schreiner from day-to-day life to another world, “which, in some ways, expressed her longing for a better world in the future” (1991:84). Holloway, for his part, points out that the French stranger’s (universal) Hunter allegory in *The Story of an African Farm* warns of the “dangers of ignoring the specificities of one’s own contexts of experience in favour of generalised notions of truth and value” (1989:86). I argue for the multiple function of allegory: the ideal world may be envisaged in allegory but the form, certainly in Schreiner’s hands, is committed to present-day issues. In Schreiner’s dreams the “ideal world is both above and ahead”: it is either, as in the Hunter allegory, transcendental, where “the spiritual grows out of

the material and transcends it”, or it is chronological, as in “Three Dreams in a Desert”, where the “movement is forward” towards the future (Wilhelm 1979:64). The very form, as Wilhelm notes, is paradoxically both universal and immediate as the genre often “seems to free itself from the detailed contingencies of contemporary history in order to point at its deeper issues” (1979:68). We return once more to an ethically engaged art where a certain didacticism permeates the allegorical form, a form that has, in fact, been thought of as the very “essence of art” (Symons 1983 [1891]:78). (Dreams, incidentally, are also of significance to South African writers who came after Schreiner. André Viola notes that “conflicts find a solution with the help of the semi-conscious activities of the characters” in various novels by Plomer, Gordimer, Brink, Van der Post, and Coetzee (1991:160); while more recently K. Sello Duiker’s *Thirteen Cents* (2000) draws on phantasmagorical imagery in order imaginatively to ameliorate the harsh conditions of Cape Town on the life of a street child.)

To return to Monsman, the experiential necessity is always palpable as Schreiner places historical markers alongside her allegorical mode in prose-forms as diverse as *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*, *Thoughts on South Africa*, and the long story, “Eighteen Ninety-nine”. We are reminded of the dream/real tension and, accordingly, must ask whether the mingling of the material and the metaphysical planes of experience gives us a convincing record of the past. (Connected to this is the question as to whose (hi)story is to be retrieved.) Historical markers may serve as a record of the past, but they are merely a certain kind of record. If the inclusion of allegory complicates the text as record, then what kind of an account of the past do we have? In what ways – if any – do dreams challenge ‘conventional’ history? J. M. Coetzee might ask whether the tension between the real and the symbolic in Schreiner’s literary achievement constitutes a rival to history.

In “The Novel Today” (1988) Coetzee addresses what he calls the “powerful tendency” in South Africa to read novels either as adjuncts to ‘real’ historical events or, if novels cannot be categorised as “imaginative investigations of real historical forces”, as “lacking in seriousness” (1988:2). Coetzee himself is concerned not with novels that supplement the historical text, but with those that rival it (1988:3). What does he mean when a novel is said to rival history?

I mean – to put it in its strongest form – a novel that operates in terms of its own procedures and issues in its own conclusions, not one that operates in terms of the procedures of history and eventuates in conclusions that are checkable by history. [...] In particular I mean a novel that evolves its own paradigms and myths, in the process [...] perhaps going so far as to show up the mythic status of history – in other

words, demythologising history. [...] a novel that is prepared to work itself out outside the terms of class conflict, race conflict, gender conflict or any other of the oppositions out of which history and the historical disciplines erect themselves. (I need hardly add that to claim the freedom to decline – or better, re-think – such oppositions as propertied/propertyless, coloniser/colonised, masculine/feminine, and so forth, does not mean that one falls back automatically on moral oppositions [...]). (Coetzee 1988:3)

Schreiner, of course, engages with the historical present but – as I am arguing – she does so in a way that rethinks and redefines such oppositions as coloniser/colonised, dream/real, black/white, indigene/settler, and Europe/Africa. In addition, through the mediation of dichotomies she rivals conventional accounts of the unfolding of the historical present, a present that Schreiner imbues with visionary potential according to which she evolves her own paradigms that, incidentally, are also rivals to history-making today. The potential of allegory at once to invoke and to transcend the immediate situation allowed Schreiner imaginatively to re-constitute and redefine her society with an alternative, regenerative vision. Such an interplay between the immediate and the universal refuses any simple separation between allegory and prose commentary. In the allegory, “The Salvation of a Ministry” – to which I shall now turn – we see Schreiner move beyond the universality of the form to indict a specific person, Cecil John Rhodes, while in her prose commentary, *Thoughts on South Africa*, we are given a personal account of a ‘real’ country imbued with allegorical vision; and, in a more obvious mingling of historical context and allegory, *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* provides us, simultaneously, with a window on the past and, still pertinent today, a vision of a (possible) re-constituted future.

Allegories of Politics: “The Salvation of a Ministry”; *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*

On her return from England in 1889 Schreiner, who while abroad had been writing and continued to write allegorical stories, increasingly turned to more overtly political expression. Her engagement with and commitment to the political issues of the day were spurred by an aversion to what she identified as the debased form of imperial expansion in colonial South Africa. One of the leading figures of this expansion, however, was Cecil John Rhodes, a man whom Schreiner once admiringly referred to as “the only big man we have here” (in First and Scott 1990:198). In 1890 she met Rhodes who, as Schreiner herself once exclaimed, “belongs to me” (198), but their mutual admiration was soon to be complicated by divergent political opinions leaving Schreiner to declare that “her name should not be mentioned in connection with his ‘in any way whatever’” (199). Of Schreiner’s many grievances against Rhodes was his

support of the Masters and Servants Act Amendment Bill (1890), also known as the Strop Bill, which sanctioned the beating of black servants and – as Schreiner believed – was a reversion to slavery.

In response to the proposed Act and the general machinations of the Rhodes government, Schreiner in 1891 wrote the satirical sketch, “The Salvation of a Ministry”, which remained unpublished during her lifetime. Berkman argues that here, as is common in many of her writings, Schreiner appeals to Christian ethics against which the actions of those government ministers of the Cape Colony whom she indicts can be judged (1990:215). (She does not uncritically endorse Christian morality, as she is not above mocking its patriarchal tendencies.) The narrator – in this ‘skit’ – abandons writing on a winter’s afternoon to visit the Parliament House, where the narrator hears a Bondsman “telling of the wickedness of Kaffir servants” (Schreiner 2005 [1924]:29), an accusation of wickedness that we soon see is misplaced. After falling asleep the narrator dreams that s/he is at the gates to heaven, surrounded by angels and watching the members of Rhodes’s ministry trying to enter the celestial sphere. The first knock at the door to heaven is that of John X. Merriman, whose antiquated views on women are, as Schreiner’s God puts it in terms of *reductio ad absurdum*, “irrelevant” as “[m]any men feel so; and most women deserve it” (29). Thus Merriman is swiftly allowed through the gates. He is followed by Sir James Sivewright, who also passes through the gates, after which comes Sir James Rose Innes and J. W. Sauer. The last is immediately allowed entry as “[a]ll men who oppose the Strop Bill are saved” (31). Finally, Cecil John Rhodes stands at the gate and is sent to hell before the angel can finish reading from the book that brands Rhodes a “capitalist. Upholder of the Strop Bill. Disbeliever in the possibility of human...” (31). Rhodes, however, cannot be damned as he is “too great” for hell, and “[t]hrough grace” God, with whom “all things are possible”, allows him into heaven (32-33). The point of the sardonic remarks about women is that “Olive had hopes that [...] Merriman and his associates [despite their misogyny being accepted almost as a norm in the Cape Colony] would take a principled stand in the cabinet on matters of African policy, and that ‘anything would be better than that they should go out’” (First and Scott 1990:204). Unequivocally disenchanted with the policies of Rhodes’s government Schreiner was soon to change her mind about Rhodes as the only big man, eventually referring to his government as the “City of Destruction” (in First and Scott 1990:204). Notwithstanding what I have argued to be the regenerative potential of allegory, the

form simultaneously sheds light upon the failures of colonialism. Monsman says that what “colours [Schreiner’s allegorical writings] is a precarious message of hope nearly cancelled out by quiet desperation” (1992:50) while Berkman points to Schreiner’s use of allegory as unique for its condemnation of particular peoples and policies, making Schreiner “singular for her time in transforming the allegorical mode into political and social criticism” (1990:215). We return, therefore, to a purposeful art where ethical imperatives shape aesthetic representation: the allegorical form, adjusted to suit Schreiner’s instructive ends, denounces acts of government even as it yearns for redemption.

The ambivalent response to Rhodes in “The Salvation of a Ministry” – should he go to heaven or hell? – extends to his representation in *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (1897) where Schreiner struggled to “decide on the cause and the location of Rhodes’s material power” (Chrisman 2000:133). The difficulty which both stories have in characterising and categorising the Rhodes figure could, as Chrisman suggests, point to the possibility of his being a “transformable subject”, his admission to heaven suggesting Schreiner’s vain hopes of an “ethics of democratic inclusivity” in contradistinction to the exclusionary system that Rhodes actually supported (2000:134). The character, Peter Halket, is invested with such hopes.

Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland was first published in 1897 in response to the aggressive imperialism practised at the turn of the century by Rhodes and his British South Africa Company in Rhodesia. Schreiner wrote despairingly to a friend in Leeds that “[y]ou people in England don’t know what the heel of a capitalist is when it gets right flat on the neck of the people. We have an awful struggle before us in this country. [...] Now we are busy killing the poor Matabele” (in First and Scott 1990:226). Her contempt for Rhodes, as already indicated, had been growing even before the conflict in Rhodesia: the Jameson Raid is a case in point. With the support of a (pliable) Afrikaner Bond, Rhodes and his cronies in the government of the Cape Colony were to use their “political base in the Cape to annex and control the territories to the north” in the interests of British capital (First and Scott 1990:203). The 1896 Raid, however, proved to be a failed attempt to gain control of the gold-rich Transvaal Republic and so forced Rhodes to vacate his position as prime minister. (Schreiner always suspected the involvement of Rhodes in the Raid, which is seen by historians as the prelude to the South African (‘Boer’) War.) Although Schreiner commented that she could not “strike Rhodes [following his resignation as prime minister] as he is utterly broken down” (in First and Scott 1990:221), she

felt compelled to respond to his actions north of the Limpopo no matter what the cost to herself. This response took the form of what Schreiner herself has called her “allegory story”, an indictment of Rhodes’s Chartered Company’s “violent expropriation” of Mashonaland and Matabeleland, which initiated a mass rebellion against Company rule: that is, the *Chimurengas* of 1893-4 and 1896-7 (Chrisman 2000:121). (In “Our Waste Land in Mashonaland” (1891) Schreiner also considers the impact of imperialist expansion on the fauna of the region, arguing for the establishment of a national park, which would require a “strong, civilised government” for the preservation and study of diverse animal species (1992 [1891]:322). Later, in *Trooper Peter Halket*, Schreiner has the narrator comment that some white men in the camp have “gone out to see what game they could bring down with their guns”, but the “beasts seemed to have vanished” along with the destruction of the native settlements (Schreiner 1974 [1897]:96). As in *The Story of an African Farm*, the text is sufficiently inclusive in its concerns as to encompass the plight of animals.)

The story of Peter Halket came to Schreiner in a flash and, like her sketch “The Salvation of a Ministry”, mingled both ‘dream’ and ‘real’ aspects to create a work that is not easily classifiable. Several contemporaneous reviewers were more sympathetic than others to such a mix of representational modes. A discerning critic for *The New York Tribune* (1897) called the book both imaginative literature and a humanitarian pamphlet, even praising the “strong ethical idea at the bottom of her visionary scheme” (Anon. 1983a:81). In a Grahamstown review of the same year, G. W. Cross similarly argues that while she addresses the politics of the day – a subject that Cross notes is apt for the province of literature – Schreiner is also “inspired by a noble ideal” (1983:84). In one of the better-known appraisals of 1897 (in *Blackwood’s Magazine*), however, an anonymous reviewer disparagingly terms *Halket* a “political pamphlet of great bitterness, linked on to the very smallest thread of story that ever carried red-hot opinions and personal abuse of the fiercest kind into the world” (Anon. 1983b:83). The stark contrasts of response reflect a tension that has continued to beset critical opinion as more recent critics, in categorising *Halket* as a novel, have called the book a poor one (see Paton 1983), arguing that “nobility of intention” does not produce a work of literary value (Krige 1968:5). If it is not quite a novel, then some have called this “unsatisfactory piece of work” (Taylor 2002 [1942]:38) propaganda rather than allegory, as it lacks the universality of the allegorical mode (see Beeton 1974). Despite what has been argued to be a thin story erected only to carry

Schreiner's political convictions, *Halket* was somewhat of a "smash hit" (Walters and Fogg 2010:93) when first published by T. Fisher Unwin, "attract[ing] a good deal of press attention" (First and Scott 1990:230). Whether or not it was propaganda, a poor novel, or a unique – and, perhaps, successful – amalgam of fact and allegory the book, initially at least, stirred its audience as "enlightened British opinion was shocked at the vehemence of Schreiner's attack and at the savage world her book exposed" (Murray 1992b:13).

Despite the furore, the exposure of Company activity in Rhodesia was, as Schreiner herself said, meant to increase justice; critics, however, largely focused on her style to the detriment of the political critique (First and Scott 1990:230). Too insistent a focus on the specificity of her attack, on the other hand, can lead to a neglect of the artistic dimensions of the book. As Murray has it, the "impact of the story resides in its willingness boldly to incorporate, into a single structure, both 'fact' and 'imagination'" (1992b:32) (see also Burdett 2001). The politics/art tension has continued to present a critical challenge with Ravenscroft, to whom I have already referred, arguing for a greater recognition than many critics were prepared to grant to the "more intimate" relationship between fiction and politics that he believes is appropriate to Third World conditions (1983:47,57). Disagreement over the type of text Schreiner had produced – is it a tract or novel? – has, as Murray points out, foregrounded and "perpetuated 'academic' distinctions between 'poetry' and 'history'" (1992b:32). Of the review in *Blackwood's Magazine* Murray posits, "The reviewer voices here a classic 'literary' dilemma: has Schreiner produced a propagandist pamphlet (true only to its historical moment) or has she invested a particular event with the wider, even 'universal' truths of human nature?" (1992b:19). Critics have thus sought to demonstrate the literariness of the text by arguing for the subjective experience of character portrayal (see Murray, 1992b, and Gray, 1975). The debate over any particular/universal dichotomy, however, masks what Burdett identifies to be a more serious concern: a move *beyond* the more anticipated oppositions of tract/novel or particular/universal, "a move surely suggested in Schreiner's attempt to respond to the urgency of the political moment by her audacious [allegorical] literary method" (1994:224). It is such a shift that Schreiner also initiates through her engagement with, and challenge to, polarities such as personal/public; oppressor/oppressed; Europe/Africa; indigene/settler; and dream/real. The very tension between the real and the dream – I argue – presents us with a Rhodesia that is not reducible to the indigene/settler binary in a

literary form that, by analogy, is appropriate simultaneously to immediate politics and a revisioning human potential.

At the outset, however, Schreiner sets up the (moral) poles from which we are initially positioned to judge the narrative event. The first edition of the book had a controversial frontispiece: a photograph of three black men (allegedly ‘spies’) hanging from a tree during the siege of Bulawayo in 1896 while being casually observed by their white male executioners. The shocking depiction did not appear in subsequent editions, re-appearing only much later in Marion Friedmann’s 1974 Johannesburg edition. (Hers is an edition coinciding with a wave of ‘radical’, anti-apartheid South African literary publications by then new, non-mainstream publishers, in this case, Ad. Donker.) Walters and Fogg have noted that the initial frontispiece raised the question as to “what possible claim to ethical or cultural superiority (the foundational claim of Victorian imperialism – and one which [despite evidence to the contrary] even Joseph Conrad’s Marlow seems to have accepted) can a people have in colonising ‘heathen lands’ when they resort to such barbarism to achieve their goals?” (2010:94). We know in advance, therefore, that prompted by the terrible ‘reality’ of the photograph, Schreiner will give us a moral tale – an ethically infused allegory – in which the barbarism of the ‘civilising mission’ will be exposed and condemned. The dedication to Sir George Grey, a “great good man” who once ruled the Colony with “an incorruptible justice and a broad humanity”, is juxtaposed against the Rhodes figure and hints at Schreiner’s intention of appealing to a ‘humanitarian English public’. Of course, Schreiner may have thought of these two men as totally different; for us today, however, as Murray points out, “the [moral] poles may not be so securely anchored” (1992b:31). In holding Grey in such high regard, Schreiner inevitably “remained tied to notions of colonial dependency” (Murray 1992b:31). (In his novel, *Heart of Redness* (2000), Zakes Mda has put forward an alternative portrait of Grey as one who dispossessed the Xhosa of their ancestral land (see also Peires, 1989).) Eventually, with the arrival of a Christ-like stranger – as in the “The Salvation of a Ministry” – we realise that Christianity (or, at least, Peter’s interpretation of Christianity) will be the exemplum against which the machinations of the Chartered Company are judged. Schreiner, nonetheless, does not uphold Christianity in simple opposition to the dictates of Company rule; rather, the Christ-like stranger’s moral discourse reveals by contrast the hypocrisy of a wider, so-called Christian-British public sphere. Such a rehearsal of the moral poles may point to a didactic intention in the writing; what we increasingly are shown, however,

are mutual qualifications of such apparent oppositions, a complexity that is illuminated in the course of the unfolding narrative.

The youthful trooper, Peter Simon Halket, has come to southern Africa to seek his fortune, just as Rhodes and Barney Barnato had done before him. With a washerwoman mother in England, Peter in order to benefit both his mother and himself wants to transcend the social (class) constraints of home through the supposed opportunities attendant upon colonisation. Hearing of the “loot to be got” (Schreiner 1974:45) in Rhodesia Peter leaves his work with a prospector to join the Chartered Company in its conflict with the Matabele. One day, as the scout of the Company, he is parted from his comrades and settles in for the night on a kopje where this young lad, who usually “lived in the world immediately about him” (30), is given to thinking about the discrepancies between life in the metropole and the colony, a consideration little entertained in colonial camp-fire talk. A Christ-like stranger suddenly appears on the kopje and, as the night wears on, helps Peter make connections between discordant flashes of insight, thus igniting a transformation in Peter from careless, self-seeking trooper to a man who has willed himself to act selflessly for the good of others to the extent of his risking his own life in order to save that of a ‘native’ man. Here we have a powerful critique of the rape, murder, plunder, and enslavement unofficially sanctioned by the Chartered Company, conduct which – as noted by a reviewer – “probably gives as clear an idea of one of the wild soldiers on the borders of savagery, without principle or moral guidance or any kind of education, except a determination to grow rich” (Anon. 1983b [1897]:83). The atrocities are redeemed only through the possibility of personal salvation and, as is characteristic of Schreiner, through the dream/real tension: in *Halket* the immoral Rhodesian conflict is sharply juxtaposed against the ideal of the Christ-like stranger.

Peter is described as a young, “slight man of middle height, with a sloping forehead and pale blue eyes” (Schreiner 1974:28) who, as the narrative commences, has “lost his way” and is surrounded by a (literal and metaphorical) “impenetrable darkness” (26). His forlorn state is inscribed in the desolate landscape where, in the wake of Company pillage, there is “no sign of human habitation, but the remains of a burnt kraal, and a down-trampled and now uncultivated mealie field” of a former ‘native’ settlement (26). In arguing for the literary value of Schreiner’s book, Gray maintains that the character portrayal of Peter is significant in that the “apparently artless physical description of Peter is tinged with *what Peter conceives of as himself*” (1975:27).

As he understands himself, he is a slight man of average height; he is certainly not the hero of the colonial adventure novel (Gray 1975:27). Murray agrees that Schreiner “deliberately avoids depicting Peter as one of the rugged frontier adventurers who recur in South African literature” (1992b:14-15). The approval of his mother (her good nature parallels that of the stranger) plagues his thoughts in Africa and marks him apart from the Allan Quatermain-type of adventurer. Peter may assert his ‘bravery’ to the stranger, but he quickly notes that he is averse to “‘floggings and hangings’” because of his upbringing, “‘It’s the way one’s brought up, you know. My mother [...] was always drumming into me; – don’t hit a fellow smaller than yourself; don’t hit a fellow weaker than yourself; don’t hit a fellow unless he can hit you back as good again. When you’ve always had that sort of thing drummed into you, you can’t get rid of it, somehow’” (1974:51-52). If this protagonist diverges from the colonial adventure figure – Gray argues that Schreiner lets “character descend through stereotype into psychological density” (1975:28) – then the book is indeed an “undoing of a fantasy about men and their exotic dreams of the riches to be found in the bowels of Africa” (Burdett 2001:133). Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* may be a legitimation of British imperialism in that the novel perpetuates the fantasy of colonial mineral acquisition; *Halket*, on the other hand, “takes as its target the bloody culmination of this fantasy” (Chrisman 2000:120). This is not the story, however, of a universal Colonial Man “trying to find satisfying behaviour patterns” in a narrative that transcends social context (Gray 1975:28). Rather, Peter is formed by circumstance: his wartime experiences as well as his dreams and visions are those of this particular young man himself, a rural working-class English youth who is shaped by his class (see Chrisman 2000). (Chrisman draws our attention to the practice of British imperialists to ship out to the colonies the British poor in order to minimise class conflict at home.) As Chrisman notes, Peter’s rural working-class status is important in the story as it points to the dichotomy of land cultivation in the metropolis by those of Peter’s class and their complicity in the destruction of ‘native’ land abroad (2000:135). Such a destructive link between ‘Africa’ and ‘Europe’ is reiterated in Peter’s fantasy of a syndicate according to which he, in his muddled logic, would exploit Londoners for the attainment of material wealth. His willingness to take advantage of both ‘natives’ and Londoners for his own personal gain brings both the colony and metropolitan working class into focus in such a way that both end up as ‘victims’ of the same exploitative system.

Struggling to justify his reprehensible actions in the colony to his mother, Peter asserts – according to his somewhat limited perspective – that “it was all so different in England from South Africa” (Schreiner 1974:37). For Schreiner, in contrast, the tension between ‘Africa’ and ‘Europe’ is one that does not hold the two categories in opposition but that sees them as entities shaping, qualifying, one another: that is, the images of ‘Europe’ and ‘Africa’ that are filtered through Peter’s consciousness begin to challenge any colonial/metropolitan binary. With Peter sitting alone in the dark on the kopje, his reflections at first “shaped themselves into connected chains”:

And then, he fell to thinking of the little English village where he had been born, and where he had grown up. He saw his mother’s fat white ducklings creep in and out under the gate, and waddle down to the little pond at the back of the yard; he saw the school house that he had hated so much as a boy, and from which he had so often run away to go a-fishing, or a-bird’s-nesting. He saw the prints on the school house wall on which the afternoon sun used to shine when he was kept in; Jesus of Judea blessing the children, and one picture just over the door where he hung with his arms stretched out and the blood dropping from his feet. Then Peter Halket thought of the tower at the ruins which he had climbed so often for birds’ eggs. (30)

And, then, his thoughts became increasingly ‘distorted’:

Now, as he looked into the crackling blaze, it seemed to be one of the fires they had made to burn the natives’ grain by, and they were throwing in all they could not carry away: then, he seemed to see his mother’s fat ducks waddling down the little path with the green grass on each side. Then, he seemed to see his huts where he lived with the prospectors, and the native women who used to live with him; and he wondered where the women were. Then – he saw the skull of an old Mashona blown off at the top, the hands still moving. He heard the loud cry of the native women and children as they turned the maxims on to the kraal; and then he heard the dynamite explode that blew up a cave. Then again he was working a maxim gun, but it seemed to him it was more like the reaping machine he used to work in England, and that what was going down before it was not yellow corn, but black men’s heads; and he thought when he looked back they lay behind him in rows, like the corn in sheaves. [...] Then he thought suddenly of a black woman he and another man caught alone in the bush, her baby on her back, but young and pretty. Well, they didn’t shoot her! – and a black woman wasn’t white! His mother didn’t understand these things. (36-37)

The odious correlation between Africa and Europe is alluded to in this shocking juxtaposition of the black woman and the white mother, the one a rape victim the other a nurturing figure back at home (see Chrisman 2000). (The black/white relationship including the question of African agency is one to which I shall later turn.) Unlike both Schreiner and the reader, Peter is unable to “interrelate [...] in a total world-view” the flashes of bizarre and (dis)connected images of savage killing and waddling ducks which, as Gray points out, reminds Peter of his fear of “sacrificial

victimization” (1975:30). As Gray continues, these ducklings are linked to Jesus who “died that others might feed” and, following which, the bird’s-nests, like ‘native’ settlements, are attacked so that “the raider might feed and the birds be aborted; a childish vandalism becomes, although Peter doesn’t consciously realise it, the rape of a continent” (1975:30). (Interestingly, in Gordimer’s *The Conservationist* (1974) it is black boys who are accused by the white ‘master’ of the farm of taking birds’ eggs.) According to Gray, Peter is caught between so many contradictions – that is, the dilemma of the ‘Colonial Man’ – that his mind can easily shift from the reaping machine (or the cultivation of life) to the killing of black men (the taking of life): Peter’s “homespun religious assertions [...] kill him; his money-grubbing Empire-building kills him [...]; and the African whom he so nobly saves kills him too, for it is noteworthy that his released ‘spy’ in no way acknowledges [his] brave deed” (1975:33). As I have argued, however, his dilemma is not as ‘universal’ as Gray implies: the reaping machine is used by a working-class lad, one who is dissatisfied at home, and who in Africa – albeit, at the expense of others – seeks redress. Peter, like Undine, quite rightly acknowledges that there remain restrictions to his class mobility in Africa as “[t]here’s not too much cake and ale up here for those that do belong to [the Chartered Company], if they’re not big-wigs, and none at all for those who don’t” (1974:42). He is not the only trooper who is battling against an exclusionary system. His companion observes that “[e]verything in the land is given away for the benefit of a few big folks over the water or swells out here” (100). What both of these men demand, however, is an inversion of their class position rather than the dissolution of the system. Peter exclaims to the Christ-like stranger, “Wait till I’ve got money! It’ll be somebody else then, [other than my mother] who [will have to wash ‘clothes for those stuck-up nincompoops of fine ladies!’]” (54). But, it is an inversion that is denied to Peter and his cronies. Rather, as Schreiner makes explicit, their transformation relies upon the demise of such ‘class’ categorisation. Peter has to change his thinking in ‘Africa’ so as to include in his contemplations the issue of race: in Africa ‘the class issue’ is superseded by what Schreiner had identified in *The Political Situation* to be ‘the race question’.

The troopers, however, have come to ‘Africa’ for reasons more multiple than the hope only of personal gain. We are told that one of Peter’s fellow troopers, an Englishman, “had left England to escape phthisis; and he had gone to Mashonaland because it was a place where he could earn an open-air living, and save his parents from the burden of his support” (Schreiner

1974:103-104). And while in Africa Peter – who, as Gray has said, is caught between various contradictions – struggles to find his own core of being. In the course of his military service he impregnates a black woman and is disconcerted at the thought of the woman perhaps “[doing] away with [the baby] before it came; they’ve no hearts, these niggers; they’d think nothing of doing that with a white man’s child” (47). As Burdett argues, “it is in relation to his sexuality that Africa comes to *mean* something to Peter”: “[...] for Peter – through the company of women – Africa becomes more than a potential, if often disappointing, pot of gold” (2001:130). Gray similarly contends that “those children would represent [...] the deepest possible identification he could make with his new land, Africa” (1975:36). Here Schreiner deliberately and for the reader’s condemnation invokes a crude indigene/settler binary. According to Peter’s reasoning, his connection to the soil depends on a sexual bond: the rape of African women. (We are reminded of Rider Haggard’s African map/female body corollary in *She*.) What I argue to be Schreiner’s revision of this popular trope, however, allows for a regenerative attachment to the land that defies the destructive colonial-imperialist mark on African body and soil. It is after his conversion that Peter finds a bond – albeit a terrible bond – with his surroundings, “And, one hour after Peter Halket had stood outside the tent looking up [after releasing the ‘spy’], he was lying under the little tree, with the red sand trodden down over him, in which a black man and a white man’s blood were mingled” (1974:120). To realise the significance of this bond we might turn to the story “Eighteen Ninety-nine” where Schreiner would argue that the sacrificial shedding of blood is a symbolic claim to the land.

Of course, Schreiner does not let Peter easily bridge the divide between indigene and settler. The Christ-like stranger forces Peter to consider who gave him the right to the land and the people of the land. The stranger then asks, ““What is a rebel?””, to which Peter – notably “re-seating himself on the South African earth, which two years before he had never heard of, and eighteen months before he had never seen, as if it had been his mother earth, and the land in which he first saw light” – responds that a black man is a rebel for resisting Company rule (Schreiner 1974:55-58). (Schreiner appears still to hold out hope for benevolent intervention from the British government, that is, an idealised British rule, as the stranger assumes that to be free or under British governance is a preferable substitute to Chartered Company rule.) It is a preacher-character (a figure in a story told by the Christ-like stranger) who offers an alternative understanding of indigene/settler, attachment/exploitation, when he observes unambiguously that

those individuals who have “tortured and ruined” the land through extraction must leave the land so that “they cannot then crush our freedom with [their riches]” (70). (In her article, “Women and the Literature of Settlement and Plunder: Towards an Understanding of the Zimbabwean Land Crisis”, Julie Cairnie argues that Schreiner upholds the indigene/settler binary with regard to women as she establishes black women’s “prior claims” to the land in contrast to white women, who are written out of the narrative; their place – as Cairnie interprets Schreiner – is elsewhere, as “to admit white women to that already-peopled land would be an endorsement of Rhodes’s project” (2007:167,172). Whether or not this is a valid interpretation of Schreiner’s position, land dispossession by the Mugabe government in postcolonial Zimbabwe calls into question the meaning of home for both white and black: the sanctioning of land re-appropriation “profoundly affect[s] black women’s (and a few white women’s) ability to maintain a home” (Cairnie 2007:166).)

The phrase, ‘our freedom’, does not refer – I suggest – simply to the black inhabitants of southern Africa, but also to the white colonials who have made this region their home. Hence, oppression in *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* is multifaceted in that there is no direct correlation between native/settler and oppressed/oppressor. In fact, Schreiner resolves to redefine such oppositions so as to steer away from Peter’s ambiguities of response to his own situation. It is the tension between the ‘dream’ and the ‘real’ that permits Schreiner, simultaneously, to indict ‘the imperial process’ and re-constitute the unfolding of the historical present: the frontispiece clearly sets up the oppressed in relation to the oppressors; the dedication hints – at least, for Schreiner and her time – at the complications of the category ‘oppressor’; and the unfolding narrative, the amalgam of the dream aspects and the real aspects, tells of the difficult passage of Peter’s identity formation. Despite this Schreiner establishes moral guides in a process of transformation. As I have argued, Peter is oppressed by the ‘darkness’ in which he finds himself and, in spite of his participation in the domination of the black Other, he is to a certain extent a victim of the system that he supports. Having had his gun and cartridges stolen by a Mashona woman, Peter states, “If ever I’m shot, it’s as likely as not it’ll be by my own gun, with my own cartridges” (Schreiner 1974:48). Ironically, his comment is unknowingly prophetic; the only difference is that his ‘own gun’ belongs to the Chartered Company, and his shooter will not be a black man, but his own Captain. Gray states that the “Colonial Man is to be silenced not by the blacks [...] but by his own authority. His own system contains his obliteration” (1975:36). If

Peter is a victim, he is also held responsible for the perverse system in which he functions. It is at this point that Schreiner implicates the common man (in England or southern Africa) – the ordinary trooper – in the coercive practices of the Company. Of the man in power, the preacher says that “[w]e armed him, we raised him, we strengthened him, and the evil he accomplishes is more ours than his” (1974:70). The stranger, for his part, instructs Peter to take a message to the people of England in asking how they came to place the sword that imposes justice “‘into the hands of men whose search is gold’” (81). Here the stranger incriminates intellectuals; women (who, rather patronisingly, are told to respond to the cries of the “‘child-peoples’” from the colony (82)); and the working class who, as the stranger has it, does not “‘have the monopoly on suffering’” (Chrisman 2000:148):

‘You, who for ages cried out because the heel of your masters was heavy on you; [...] you, who have taken the king’s rule from him and sit enthroned within his seat; is his sin not yours to-day? If men should add but one hour to your day’s labour, or make but one fraction dearer the bread you eat, would you not rise up as one man? Yet, what is dealt out to men beyond seas whom you rule wounds you not.’ (1974:83)

As Chrisman points out, Schreiner appeals to a certain kind of Englishness, an idealised notion of the English, one that is “a political fiction, and [which Schreiner] uses [...] tactically to simultaneously appeal to and attack an existing English population”: that is, the “metropolitan subject is put on trial by Schreiner in a process that also turns them into the jury of the trial against Rhodes”; the appeal to both the working class and women, in particular, is a criticism of existing social relations as well as a tool to “facilitate mobilisation against Rhodes” (2000:145,146,150).

Despite the anti-Rhodes rhetoric, Rhodes’s representation in *Halket* is not one that distances the “big man” from the reader: that is, Rhodes “cannot be accommodated within a single literary mode of representation that places him at a safe and knowable remove [from moral culpability]; the spectacular pathology of a Kurtz by contrast allows readers a more comfortable self-location” (Chrisman 2000:141). The ascendancy of Rhodes to heaven in “The Salvation of a Ministry” is illustrative of Schreiner’s own longing for a restorative ‘story’ in which we “‘weep rather than curse’” (Schreiner 1974:92) for those like Rhodes who do wrong. Peter exemplifies such a longing in his climactic and empathetic identification with a black man as a marker of his “[return] to the morality of his mother” (Monsman 1991:119). Accordingly, “Peter associates himself with all figures of oppression – women, natives, the scorched earth – and becomes the salvific martyr” (Monsman 1991:119). (It should be noted that this is not a case

of the oppressor becoming the victim, a role reversal, but rather a mediation of such a divide as the trooper learns to identify commonality in the colonial Other.) Thus Monsman attaches Peter's act to a renewal of the landscape, in that "'brother' has been defined for him here in startlingly new terms politically": his burial under the stunted tree against which a black man was tied now "symbolises redemptive love and brotherhood" (1991:115,120). Monsman concludes that the narrative "[breaks] down the dominance/subservience hierarchy in order to put in its place a regenerative love that dissolves the distinctions of superior and inferior, European and native, fiction and history" (1991:121). Gray, however, argues that Peter's demise "signifies little – he has won no major battle, achieved no great moral victory"; only the Englishman and the Colonial, two of Peter's comrades, know of his martyr's death; the other troopers remain ignorant of the 'meaning' of Peter's story according to which the coming of a new dawn is not possible until the recognition of "those inhibiting factors which suppress the Colonial mind" (1975:31,34). Peter's death may have no public impact; but what Schreiner seems to say is that transformation has to occur first within the individual: her vision of society, built not on binaries but on interlocking possibilities, necessitates the mediation of a public/private divide. She was later to admit that *Halket* had had little material impact: Peter's story of transformation had not conscientized the public. As Fogg and Walters (2010) implicitly ask, Was she naive to think that a work of literature could have had such an impact?

Chrisman (2000) maintains, nonetheless, that it is the amalgam of both 'fact' and 'fiction' in *Halket* that produces a more radical critique of, and alternative to, Rhodes and the monopolists than that which we encounter in *The Political Situation* (1896). This is a tract that Schreiner co-wrote with her husband, C. S. Cronwright-Schreiner, in which she tackled for the first time in prose commentary the politics of the day and, in so doing, gives us the pamphlet-correlative of both "The Salvation of a Ministry" and *Halket*. In *The Political Situation* Schreiner condemns what she identified to be the Retrogressive Movement in South Africa: in the Cape Colony, unlike in "all civilised countries", there is a definite tendency to "undo the more advanced and progressive legislative enactments of the past" (1896:10). It is the Monopolist Group (together with the Bond) which is identified by Schreiner as the retrogressive element in the Colony. Here Schreiner established herself as a defender of liberalism (see Beeton 1974) in her 'progressive' thought on the 'Native Question': that the "South African labour question included the whole of what was popularly termed the 'Native Question'" (First and Scott 1990:220). Her concern,

however, for the treatment of the 'native' population was, as First and Scott have it, marred by her recourse to the limited language of her time. As Schreiner herself has said, the "superior intelligence and culture" of the 'civilised' white person is to raise the black man in "the scale of existence" (1896:110-111). (It must be kept in mind, of course, that Schreiner was directing her pamphlet at a certain audience: a paternalistic English audience.) *The Political Situation* remains of value for us today, nonetheless, as a sign of the political realities of Schreiner's times in which – as in our own times – voices that hope to be heard in politics are often driven to the expedient argument. Fiction alone apparently could not encompass Schreiner's political aspirations, and from the mid-1890s she almost entirely turned her attention to the writing of political tracts (see Berkman 1990). Unfortunately, the tracts do not match the scope of *Halket*. In *The Political Situation* Schreiner criticised the motivation behind the annexation of lands north of the Transvaal, asking whether the conquest of Mashonaland and Matabeleland, the extension of the British Empire, was worth the inevitable "heavy price in the demoralisation of our institutions, and the retrogression in our legislation, which the Cape Colony is paying to support the Monopolist Group, and enable it to undertake its annexations" (1896:54). So we are 'told'. In *Halket*, in contrast, the tension between the 'dream' and the 'real', the utilisation of allegory, vividly 'showed' (rather than 'told') the reader the failings of the current system through the subjective impact on human beings of the dark side of 'the imperial-colonial project'. The scope of *Halket* is more than a record of an historical event; "its prophetic voice has outlived the particular government of its day" (Murray 1992b:23). Like Murray, Gray (1975) considers *Halket* to be a human 'take' on the entire colonial world rather than just a tract of the historical moment. Its political significance is enhanced by its symbolic import or, as Paton suggests, it is a "part of our literature and our history because it will explain many things that succeeding generations may otherwise find difficult to understand" (1983:34). It provides a 'vision' of a future which expands beyond the political platform of the day.

Trooper Peter Halket in its subjection of fact to its wider vision, then, is a subversive work that, undeservedly, has gone unnoticed by too many critics, certainly when compared with the prominence given to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902), the latter – as Chrisman reminds us – identified as "the origin of serious Western literary critique of empire" (2000:121). Such a claim for Conrad's work – Chrisman continues – is flawed in that *Halket* is a more comprehensive text than *Heart of Darkness* in its "exploration of metropolitan and colonial

populations and administrations to include women's agency (both African and English); working-class experience, military and economic expressions of power" (2000:122). We may note also Conrad's inability to explore a serious opposition to the exploitation of the Congo (his depiction of the Western pilgrims is caricatural). In contrast, Schreiner's alternative vision of colonial society offers "the conceptual possibility of an active opposition to imperialism" through the actions of its white and black characters (Chrisman 2000:122). *Halket* is not simply a record of history, to return to Paton's observation; instead, it is, as Coetzee would term it, a rival to history. Although Schreiner does initially establish moral poles, these serve only as markers of the subjective in-between, of the ethical landscape in which Schreiner rethinks the stark oppositions of indigene/settler, coloniser/colonised, dream/real, black/white, and Europe/Africa. As Berkman says, "the dream in this novella obliterates realistic historical and scientific causality" (1990:217-218) while allowing Peter to revise the contradictions of his experience. It is a revision that, paradoxically, connects the dream to material reality. Nonetheless, critics have argued that the story remains partial in that it excludes the agency of black Africans. It is a point that I pursued in my discussion of *African Farm* and to which I wish to return.

In 1892 J. Percy FitzPatrick published *Through Mashonaland with Pick and Pen*, a series of reports written for *The Cape Argus* and *The Star*, recounting the trip he made in 1891 with Lord Randolph Churchill to Mashonaland. FitzPatrick tells of the terrain, the transport, and the idiosyncrasies of the men with whom he travelled; but – like *Jock of the Bushveld*, written a few years later – his text failed to consider the presence, the agency, of black Africans on colonially expropriated land. (*Through Mashonaland*, incidentally, was republished in 1973, a year before the appearance of the new edition of *Halket* with the 'hanging' photograph as frontispiece, both books having been reissued by the same South African-based publisher.) Murray – as one among others – has said that although Schreiner's text on Mashonaland shows 'progressive' thought, its critique of imperialism is, to some extent, limited as the book "remains paternalistically 'colonial' in regarding Africans as victims of history; the possibilities of degeneration or regeneration remain, in Schreiner's view, the prerogative of the metropolitan power" (1992b:18). Schreiner may appeal to an English public; but that does not mean that she endorses metropolitan power. As Burdett has it, England is not a part of any ameliorative resolution in *Halket*: Peter refuses to take the stranger's message to conscientize the English public (2001:128). In spite of Burdett's acknowledging this, she agrees with Murray that Africans are depicted as victims of

history; Schreiner calls for a 'Western' humanitarianism to "preside over imperialist policy" (1994:224). Like Chrisman, however, I argue for what is, I think, a more agentic presence in *Halket* of the black African, and in particular the women: the colonised Other is presented as more than a victim of history, but is engaged in fashioning a historical present.

It is Peter – rather than the author – who is blind to the potential agency of black women. Enlightening the stranger as to how he got "a couple of nigger girls", Peter remembers,

'One girl was only fifteen; I got her cheap from a policeman who was living with her, and she wasn't much. But the other, by gad! I never saw another nigger like her. [...] She was thirty if she was a day. Fellows don't generally fancy women that age; they like slips of girls. But I set my heart on her the day I saw her. She belonged to the chap I was with. He got her up north. There was a devil of a row about getting her, too; she'd got a nigger husband and two children; didn't want to leave them, or some nonsense of that sort: you know what these niggers are?' (Schreiner 1974:42,43)

Peter refuses to grant either woman a presence beyond that of an object to be owned, to be bought with "a 'vatje' of Old Dop" (43); they are, as Monsman says, mere "chattel property" (1991:116). Peter, therefore, can easily ignore what Schreiner was conscious of in *African Farm*: that the woman has familial ties. What in Peter's culture would be regarded as a 'valid' familial relationship goes unacknowledged "because the husband is a 'nigger'" (Monsman 1991:116). Ironically, when she falls pregnant Peter is disgusted to think that she will most likely abort the baby of a white man. Monsman observes, accordingly, that Peter "criticises [the woman's] conduct as ostensibly lacking traits of European culture, yet at the same time his perspective on her as an object of barter causes him to overlook just how strong her emotional attachments to her native family really are" (1991:117). Peter's blindness to the 'realities' of the woman's situation is emphasised by contrast when juxtaposed against her industry and perceptiveness. Peter recalls that "[s]he made a garden, and she and the other girl worked in it; I tell you I didn't need to buy a sixpence of food for them in six months. [...] She picked up English quicker than I picked up her own lingo, and took to wearing a dress and shawl" (1974:44). One day Peter found the elder woman talking to a 'nigger man' whom he now believes to have been her husband. Having asked Peter for some cartridges in the course of telling him a yarn in order to distract him and get the ammunition, both women would later disobey Peter by leaving his hut so as to rejoin their own families, taking "every ounce of ball and cartridge [the older woman] could find in that hut, and my old Martini-Henry. [...] [T]hey left the shawls and dresses I gave them kicking about the huts, and went off naked with only their blankets and the ammunition on

their heads” (46). Just as she did not romanticise the servant-women in *African Farm* so she does not romanticise these women. The black woman’s potential to manipulate to her advantage the dominance/submission relationship suggests her agentic presence while casting a disparaging light on Peter himself: “his pride in her quickness [turns] into a commentary on his own imperceptiveness, personal and political” (Monsman 1991:117).

African resistance, therefore – as Chrisman suggests – is mediated “through the voice of Peter himself in his campfire story to Christ” (2000:138). The story that he tells of the two women’s “betrayal” may be used by Peter as a form of “male-male bonding and to aggrandise his ego”; however, the narrative reinforces the reader’s “awareness that racial, sexual, and labour domination of women is a central feature of colonial expansionism” (Chrisman 2000:138-139). In seeking to discredit the two women, Peter paradoxically and unconsciously points to their power to resist the system in which they are cast as chattels. Chrisman points out that Schreiner diverges here from her typical portrayal of black African people as passive victims of colonial domination. As I suggest, however, the agency granted to black people in *Halket* should prompt us to return to earlier texts and be sure that we have not glossed over other instances of black agency in Schreiner’s depiction of ‘colonial problematics’.

In addition to what I see as her complication of the dominance/submission schema Schreiner – as I have already intimated – provokes moral alternatives in order to subvert ‘Europe’ and ‘Africa’ as self-contained categories. The African women’s apparent embrace in *Halket* of colonial language and dress only to discard such appendages when convenient invokes – to reiterate – Cooper’s notion of the “complex *bricolage* with which Africans in colonies put together practices and beliefs” (1994:1528). Although such a rejection of European standards of propriety may seem to reinforce a Europe/Africa divide, Schreiner’s concern with the ‘common’ experience of gender oppression challenges such a division. As Burdett points out, Peter’s fellowship with a black African man at the end of the narrative makes it “impossible to avoid the question of *sexual* morality – of sexual double standards and the abuse of women – which was so central to the arguments about women’s emancipation in which [Schreiner herself] was involved throughout the 1880s” (2001:131). In alluding to the black woman’s family – that is, to her husband and children whom she had to leave when bought by Peter – Burdett argues that Schreiner begins to give the colonial Other an interiority even though influenced by a “European or Western subjectivity” (2001:131). In this way, “the central demands being made by Western

women – for self-determination, the right to bodily integrity, and freedom from sexual coercion – crash through the story and into the colonial scene in the African woman’s quiet determination to “refind her family” (Burdett 2001:131).

To identify crossovers of Western and African womanhood, of course, poses its own further problems. The relationship of (white middle-class) metropolitan women to colonised women is often a patronising one, in which, according to the stranger, the former are expected to respond to cries from the latter: that is, from the ‘child peoples’ of the colony (see also Chrisman 1993). White women may be called upon “to restore Empire to its authentic humanitarian form” (Chrisman 1993:27), but are seen by Schreiner – class differences complicate the matter – to be complicit in the exploitation of the black Other. In the dream, “I Thought I Stood”, a woman stands before God charging men with the oppression of those of her gender; but, as God points out, her own hands may be pure, yet her feet are “red, blood-red” (Schreiner 1982 [1890]:126). With this text written around the time of Schreiner’s concern with debates on prostitution, Burdett argues that Schreiner suggests here that the woman in “I Thought I Stood” is “complicit in the sin and suffering around her” (2001:131). It is only when she rescues a working-class woman from the street that both begin to flourish. “Class differences”, as Burdett has it, “are the focus of the story: middle-class women’s liberation cannot be bought at the cost of working-class degradation” (2001:131). By analogy, in *Halket* we are alerted to the fact that Peter’s working-class mother – akin in powerlessness to the black African women – suffers at the hands of both male and middle-class female oppression (see Burdett 2001). Like masculinity, Western femininity – “in the process of trying to sort right from wrong in relation to the sexes” – is implicated here as the commodification of black women is “soldered onto, Peter’s fortune-making dreams” (Burdett 2001:132). In other words, “metropolitan female emancipation debates [are pulled] onto the African veld” (Burdett 2001:132) where Schreiner demands of such discourse a greater complexity than the well-worn binaries would permit. It is a complexity that Schreiner demands also in her other feminist writings, writings which are the subject of the remainder of this chapter.

The Imagination of Commentary: “Three Dreams in Desert”; *Woman and Labour*; *Thoughts on South Africa*; “Eighteen Ninety-nine”

The hint of agency granted to black African women qualifies what is commonly argued to be the universality of Schreiner’s feminist discourse, as elaborated in “Three Dreams in a Desert” (1890) and *Woman and Labour* (1911). Her position on women was not, as Gordimer puts it, only “conceived in relation to the position of late nineteenth-century women in Europe” (1983:14) and transplanted without specific adjustment onto the African veld where black African women suffer from race as well as gender and class oppression (see also Lenta 1987). We have seen that Schreiner in *Halket* was concerned not only with territorial conquest but also, more tangentially, with the relevance of the women’s question to the conditions of the colony. The women are agentive both in their own forms of resistance and in their intrusions upon the masculinist ethos of the Chartered Company. Peter’s boasting and bonding, for example, are less secure because of his encounters with local black women. If a feminist discourse, to return to my earlier argument, is anything but marginal in *African Farm* (Lyndall, to some critics, dominates the novel), I suggested a certain ‘marginality’ in Lyndall’s position, in that she had yet to attach herself to the difficulties of living in a colony. Schreiner’s trajectory, paradoxically, is to marginalise the (‘universal’) metropolitan women’s question and to locate it firmly in her local, material surroundings. Her feminism might have been misplaced in a colony with no firmly-established gradations of middle-class society; however, Lyndall begins to locate her feminism in her milieu when she includes the plight of black women in her contemplations. As Chrisman points out, Schreiner’s was a feminism which was “neither fully and imperiously ‘universalist’ nor rooted in the essentialisms of concepts of cultural or racial ‘difference’” (1993:26). The ‘universality’ of *Woman and Labour* – which, for the most part, is a critique of middle-class ‘parasitic’ women – is but a fragment of Schreiner’s own thoughts on ‘the women’s question’. Rather, Schreiner sought to include working-class experience in her overall critique (see Berkman 1990). Even in her introduction to *Woman and Labour* she observes that at a young age she was affected by a conversation she had with a black woman, a conversation that “made a more profound impression on my mind than any but one other incident connected with the position of women has ever done” (Schreiner 1911:13). This woman – in considering her own oppression – exhibited no “bitterness against the individual man, nor any will or intention to revolt”, leading Schreiner to conclude that no woman will “ever rise in revolt or attempt to bring

about a revolutionary readjustment of their relation to their society, however intense their suffering and however clear their perception of it, while the welfare and persistence of their society requires their submission” (14).

Despite such an all-encompassing comment on oppression in the formation of a gendered identity, Schreiner avoids essentialising gender experience: she recognised, for example, that the divisions of South African society by race, class and sex had “militated against any organised women’s movement” (Clayton 1989:1). Nonetheless and despite her belief in a certain commonality in the oppression of women, she resigned from the (South African) Women’s Enfranchisement League when it refused to include black women in its campaign. As Edmands puts it, “The principles on which she acted, and from which she did not waver, were that *all* women must work together, and that freedom is not divisible” (1978:32). It is such a unity that we see in the allegory, “Three Dreams in a Desert” (1890), where Schreiner – who mingles both ‘real’ elements and ‘dream’ elements – includes allusions to past, present, and future in arguing for the liberation of women. The tension between the real and the dream – that is, suffering in the present; the dream of a utopian future – is, as Jones maintains, highlighted in Constance Lytton’s reading of Schreiner’s allegory in *Holloway Gaol*. For Lytton “this ‘Dream’ seemed scarcely an allegory” as she “committed [herself] to enduring the horrors of prison for a utopian vision of the future [as] she interprets her own activism *through* her reading” (Jones 2007:220). Lytton realised that there is ““some point, some purpose in [literature] after all”” (in Jones 2007:221). Moreover, the dream, which incidentally takes place on an “African plain” on the “border of a great desert” (Schreiner 1982 [1890]:67,68), transcends Victorian-established boundaries in that it “[reaches its climax] in an evocative vision of androgyny and female autonomy as well as male-female and female-female equality, comradeship, and affection” (Berkman 1990:214). As Schreiner herself said, the allegorical mode of “Three Dreams in a Desert” allowed her to express the emotion that was lacking in her ““abstract thoughts in argumentative prose”” (in Monsman 1992:57).

This suggests that “Three Dreams” is more accessible than *Woman and Labour*. Yet, in spite of its heightened emotionality and Gordimer notwithstanding, several critics (see, for example, Bishop, 1983, and Lerner, 1983) share the view that Schreiner’s fiction falls short of the power of her polemical writings, thus contradicting my earlier claim that allegory allows for the transcendence and transformation of her material reality. In contrasting the character of

Lyndall in *The Story of an African Farm* to the ‘virile’ women of *Woman and Labour*, Laurence Lerner argues that “imaginative writers who are also reformers, or politically committed, frequently find that their vision of society betrays the confidence of the programmes they support outside their creative work – and even, in a kind of voluntaristic way, inside it” (1983:75). Given ongoing critical indecision as to the value of fictional/non-fictional approaches to the subject, Clayton asks whether “fiction should offer ‘rôle models’ to women”, or whether it is simply “the function of the narrative artist to provide an ‘artificial memory’, to transmit the inner truth of history to those who come afterwards” (1989:56-57). If Lyndall failed to realise her ‘self’ on the African veld, Schreiner’s suggestion might have been that Lyndall’s feminism had yet to immerse itself to effect in its surroundings. As Jones says with reference to the New Woman writers, “[T]he payoff for suffering does not belong to the sufferers but to future generations” (2007:237). In the long story, “Eighteen Ninety-nine” (written c. 1904) – to which I shall now turn – Boer women may have been defeated in war; but it is these women who, according to Schreiner, sow the seeds that will regenerate the land.

With tension escalating between Boer and Briton prior to the outbreak of the South African War (1899-1902) Schreiner, in an attempt to “win the mass of thinking English people” (First and Scott 1990:235), did everything she could by writing tracts and sending cables with the hope that “it was possible to pierce British cant through an appeal to the British conscience” so as to avert impending war (Berkman 1990:110). Apart from her engagement with the War in the form of tracts and speeches, Schreiner wrote little during these years. What she did write has been adjudged by several critics as her best polemical writings: that is, *Thoughts on South Africa* and “Words in Season: An English-South African’s View of the Situation”. Schreiner appealed here to the self-interest of the metropolis, arguing that England was “committing imperial suicide” in going to war (Berkman 1990:115). She thus distanced herself somewhat from the particularised focus of *Halket*. Berkman argues that “[u]nable to convert public opinion through her novella, Schreiner turned to direct political polemic in which she combined appeals to both conscience and self-interest” (1990:113). At this point – following on what she perceived to be the ‘failure’ of *Halket* to sway political/public opinion – Schreiner was optimistic that tracts could have greater political efficacy. In “An English-South African’s View of the Situation” (published several months before the War), for instance, Schreiner in acknowledging her intermediary position as one who loves Africa and England appeals to “English patriotism and

pride” for peace in South Africa (First and Scott 1990:235). In *Thoughts*, on the other hand, she emphasizes knowledge and understanding as key to ameliorating the divisions in colonial South African society. Her disappointment as war broke out, however, directed her to turn once more to the transformative potential of her imaginative literature: the story, “Eighteen Ninety-nine”, points towards her own disappointment in England while it envisions the possibility of renewal in the Boer cause. That her appeals did little to transform the war-mongering climate has encouraged critics to question as to whether her tracts were – or are – of any value (*Thoughts*, we must remember, was not published contemporaneously in book form). Beeton has noted that although on occasion Schreiner herself “felt her pleas to be materially ineffectual [...] she yet continued her fight” (1974:71). He goes on to note that even though “An English-South African’s View” failed to avert the War, her “motives behind the attempt remain important” (1974:67). Similarly, Edmands says of *Thoughts* that the analysis of the Boers (and of South Africa, more generally) “retains a great deal of its relevance, though Olive could not, of course, foresee the changes that would occur in the twentieth century” (1978:36). After the War Schreiner realised that her support of the Boers could have amounted to a disservice to the black African population which was also affected by what appeared to be a war between two white groups, both of which were responsible for the oppression of the black Other. Davenport, nonetheless, comments that as a liberal (was Schreiner a liberal?) Schreiner in her polemical writing risks “not so much [failing] to engineer change as to promote thinking about change in the hope that thereby change would come about” (1983:100). Schreiner’s many speeches during the War point to her presence as an anti-war activist: “Friends and foes alike among her contemporaries testified to the effectiveness of Schreiner’s political activity” (Berkman 1990:101). This notwithstanding, Berkman also notes that her wartime opinions have been overlooked by more recent scholars on the South African War, including those writers specifically interested in pro-Boer Britons.

As a woman who proudly though not uncritically declared her Englishness, Schreiner’s “idealism suffered its greatest blow” when England went to war with the Boer republics, leading her to sympathise with the Boer cause (Edmands 1978:35). Despite her constant campaigning, only in her story “Eighteen Ninety-nine” did her ideal take on a tangible force. As in *Halket*, the conventions of ‘dream’ and ‘real’ tie vision to history. This is the story of a Boer woman who lives with her daughter-in-law in late nineteenth-century northern Transvaal and who, as a result

of the South African ('Boer') War, has experienced the dramatic deaths of her husband, sons and grandson. Both women tend the farm without male support during a conflict in which the grandmother's beloved grandson, Jan, bravely dies in defence of his land. By 1901, however, both women are dead and are buried in unmarked graves close to a Boer concentration camp; and, three years later, the narrator tells of how their possessions and land have fallen into foreign hands. The story, as Clayton maintains, is "a moving record of a phase of South African history" (1986:13): it begins with an account of the Great Trek, symbolic of longstanding antagonism between Boer and Briton; it touches upon the conflict between the Boer and Zulu as the Trekkers moved into the Natal region; and the story of this particular Boer family ends just after the South African War. (With hindsight Schreiner's 'record' of history both here and in *Thoughts on South Africa* is seen to be somewhat inaccurate, with Phyllis Lewsen (1983) pointing to Schreiner's misunderstanding of the Slagter's Nek rebellion while, more latterly, historians have offered 'revised' versions of the skirmish between Piet Retief and Dingaan.) The broad historical sweep of Schreiner's story has encouraged it to be seen as a kind of epic (see Beeton 1974). Schreiner tells of a single family over three generations whose dramatic deaths are representative of the experiences of the Boer people more generally (see Monsman 1991). As Monsman argues, "The epic sweep of this history has been reduced to story length through the effective device of focusing on the farm and its inhabitants, a single cultural, socio-economic unit within or around which the turning points of Boer history are highlighted by the deaths of the parents and children" (1991:124-125). The effect is to grant the private experiences of a family a national dimension: one that encourages an empathetic identification with the plight of the Boer people. (In *Thoughts* Schreiner engages with the public/private dichotomy as she informs the reader that her book is "simply what one South African at the end of the nineteenth century thought, and felt, with regard to his native land" (Schreiner 1992 [1923]:16).)

The sweep of "Eighteen Ninety-nine" accounts for what critics have identified as Schreiner's mythical and stereotypical portraiture of Boer society; to be explicit, of Boer women. In contrast to the extractive capitalism of the British 'imperial project', a project that repulsed Schreiner, her depiction of the Boer's idyllic life – their 'organic community' – was depicted as a force against capitalism (see Gentili 1991). Hence, Schreiner to a degree romanticised the Boer's "primitive life bound up with the soil which supports it" (Anon. 1983 [1923]:80). As in her imaginary tale, the Boers hold a similarly mythic status in her political tracts: for instance, in

“An English-South African’s View”, which Davenport argues held up an idealised picture of the Transvaal (1983:101). It is particularly in her representation of Boer women, however, that Schreiner naturalises the Boer way of life and, what is more, their appropriation of South African land: it is the grandmother who tells Jan, her grandson, of the history, the culture of their people, and who sows the seeds for future generations. In contrast to the caricatural portrait of Tante Sannie (*African Farm*), who is represented as the “deadening weight of convention and tradition” (Burdett 2001:114), the Boer women of Schreiner’s war literature are celebrated, paradoxically, as new women: women who ought to be emulated in turn-of-the-century society. As Schreiner maintains in *Thoughts*, “The new women from all the world over send you their greetings, Tante! In you and such as you we see our leaders, and we are following in your steps. [...] You are not only the backbone of your race and of South Africa, but you and such as you are the backbone of the human race” (1992:191-192). Despite this focus on the Boer Schreiner strives for an inclusivity in her war writings (as she did in *African Farm*), an inclusivity that resists the indigene/settler binary implicit in Burdett’s claim that *Thoughts* is a “troubling, uneven and revealing testimony to a settler culture’s attempts to legitimise itself, presented in terms which finally render that legitimacy impossible” – her discussion of Union in the chapter, “The Englishman”, undermines Schreiner’s image of Boer pastoralism (1994:227). Rather, her subscription to Boer pastoralism should be read as a comment on the need to look past colonial constraints: to the Boer’s right, at least, to South African land. Before the War Schreiner had confined her attack to Rhodes’s policy of dispossession of ‘native’ land (McClintock 1995:289); she suggests now that not only black Africans, but also Boers have land rights in colonial South Africa.

The narrative of “Eighteen Ninety-nine” begins on a warm night where the “stars shone down” on a daub-and-wattle house in the Transvaal, in which live two Boer women (Schreiner 1981 [1923]:79). We are told that the elder of the two had left the Cape Colony almost fifty years before and had trekked northwards with her parents away from British rule in the Colony to search – as Schreiner puts it – for a “world of absolute untrammelled individual liberty” (1992 [1923]:132). Boer liberty, however, was to come at the cost of the liberty of others: specifically the black Other. The elder woman recalls travelling in an ox-wagon with the stars yet again “shining down on her; and she had a vague memory of great wide plains with buck on them” (1981:80). This, however, is not a desolate landscape:

But the first thing which sprang out sharp and clear from the past was a day when she and another child, a little boy cousin of her own age, were playing among the bushes on the bank of a stream; she remembered how, suddenly, as they looked through the bushes, they saw black men leap out, and mount the ox-wagon out-spanned under the trees; she remembered how they shouted and dragged people along, and stabbed them; she remembered how the blood gushed, and how they, the two young children among the bushes, lay flat on their stomachs and did not move or breathe, with that strange self-preserving instinct found in the young of animals or men who grow up in the open. (80-81)

The Boer struggle to find land conflicts with the right of the Zulu people to secure their own territory. With the conflict taking place at Weenen, in which children and women “fell before the Zulus, and the assegais of Dingaan’s braves drank blood” (81), the fight – as Schreiner puts it in “An English-South African’s View” – is a “wild, free fight, on even terms”: “there were no maxim guns to mow down ebony figures by the hundred at the turn of a handle; a free, even stand-up fight; and there were times when it almost seemed the assegai would overcome the old flintlock and the Voortrekkers would be swept away [...] it was yet a fair fight; and South Africa has no reason to be ashamed of the way either her black men or her white men fought it” (2005 [1899]:69). The struggle in Natal over the Zulu right to their land drove the Boers to where they “settled down near the Witwaters Rand where game was plentiful and wild beasts were dangerous, but there were no natives, and they were far from the English rule” (1981:81). Similarly, in “An English South African’s View” Schreiner notes that the Boers settled where no “white man had entered or desired, they planted their people, and loving it as only men can love the land. [...] It is theirs, the best land on earth for them” (2005:68-69). Schreiner acknowledges in *Thoughts* that the Bushman and the Hottentot had seen the “silent plains” to which the Boers had trekked (1992:133); however, she describes the arrival of Boer wagons together with the tread of Bushmen feet as ‘stories’ that interact together to form a South African narrative. Like *African Farm*, she is conscious of white dispossession of Bushman land, even commenting that “when the little Bushman looked out from behind his rocks, he saw his game – all he had to live on – being killed, and the fountain which he or his fathers had found and made, and had used for ages, being appropriated by the white men” (134). Schreiner’s narrative, therefore, is not entirely biased towards the Boers: their right to land occurs at the cost of Bushman community. As Schreiner herself put it, decimation of the Bushmen was inevitable; to the Boer woman the Bushman “was no record of the past, but an awful actuality of the present” (137).

The foundation of Boer settlement is precarious, but in a country in which diversity – and colonisation – is a mark, Schreiner bridges the ‘divide’ between indigene and settler through a belief in possession as a “holding through love” (Monsman 1991:133). It is through labour, self-sacrifice and – by implication – love that the Boer family in “Eighteen Ninety-nine” possess the land on which they live: they reiteratively “[strike] root in the land”; each death symbolises a “new root driven deep into the soil and binding them to it through the grave on the hill-side” (Schreiner 1981:82). The family connection to the soil also depends upon the black African, the ‘Kaffir’ servant, who assists in burying the dead and in the everyday functioning of the Boer family/community. (It is the ‘Kaffir’ boy who rides behind one of the sons who has gone out to find a wife.) The women of the story, however, demonstrate a particular connection to their surrounds in that it is they who sow the seeds and tend to the land when their husbands and sons have died for various reasons and in various causes. After the news of the death of her grandson during the War, the grandmother initiates the immediate sowing of seeds in order to nourish the burghers as the “ground will be getting too dry to-morrow” (100). The narrator comments,

The light of the setting sun cast long, gaunt shadows from their figures across the ploughed land, over the low hedge and the sloop, into the bare veld beyond; shadows that grew longer and longer as they passed slowly on pressing in the seeds ... The seeds! ... that were to lie in the dank, dark, earth, and rot there, seemingly, to die, till their outer covering had split and fallen from them ... and then, when the rains had fallen, and the sun had shone, to come up above the earth again, and high in the clear air to lift their feathery plumes and hang out their pointed leaves and silk tassels! To cover the ground with a mantle of green and gold through which sunlight quivered, over which the insects hung by thousands, carrying yellow pollen on their legs and wings and making the air alive with their hum and stir, while grain and fruit ripened surely ... for the next season’s harvest! (101)

Schreiner suggests here that although the seeds or, by analogy, South Africa seems to be rotting, the splitting is indicative of a rebirth, a regeneration of the land. Thus what Schreiner gives us with her “blood/harvest imagery” is a “new myth of political liberation, the promise of a future transfiguration of the land and its people” (Monsman 1991:128). There is a certain renewal after death as Schreiner had already indicated in her allegorical dream, “Seeds-A-Growing”, in which the falling drops of blood “become the seed of freedom” (Wilhelm 1979:67). (It should be noted that the seeds planted by the Boer women in “Eighteen Ninety-nine” are not of one type: that is, diversity is imperative in regenerating a landscape such as that of South Africa.) Not only does Schreiner re-think the indigene/settle binary, but her narrative performs a sexual realignment (as in *From Man to Man*) in which in sowing the seeds the Boer women “repeat the male act of

insemination upon the body of the land nearly vulvar in its anticipation and reception of their seed” (Monsman 1991:129). It is the Boer women, figures of the new woman, who plant the seed in “[t]he mould in the lands [which] was black and soft; it lay in long ridges, as it had been ploughed up a week before, but the last night’s rain had softened it and made it moist and ready for putting in the seed” (1981:101).

Such mediation in metaphors of planting and sowing includes the realignment of pre-history and recorded history, a realignment that connects black and white in tangential ways. Schreiner may exhibit a certain ‘Anglo’ perspective (she was steadfastly English-South African); nevertheless, she “resisted cultural chauvinism at the expense of the Afrikaner” (Davenport 1983:93) and – I would add – at the expense of the black African. As we saw in *African Farm* in Waldo’s recognition of the Bushman artist-figures who – like Schreiner herself – ‘paint what lies before [them]’, Schreiner vehemently opposed any form of cultural imperialism. Monsman comments that, “sensitive to the differently constructed African cultures, Schreiner’s restatement of her literary self-image as a painter almost seems to anticipate recent anthropological debate on the polarisation of oral and literate cultures [...] and to offer a rapprochement that avoids any cultural imperialism [...]” (1992:54). In “Eighteen Ninety-nine” the oral, or pre-historical – the Boer women require a narrator to transmit their story – interacts with the written, or the historical record, in a way that establishes the two as interrelated in the telling of a South African ‘story’. (Of course, such a mingling of spoken and written registers is of significance in a country in which literacy is not universally enjoyed.) Here the Boer grandmother is reminiscent of the storyteller in African folklore: she is a “wise woman” who also happens to be a healer, “People came to her to ask advice about illnesses, or to ask her to dress old wounds that would not heal; and when they questioned her whether she thought the rains would be early, or the game plentiful that year, she was nearly always right” (Schreiner 1981:83). She demonstrates an instinctual knowledge of the land that is like that of the ‘Kaffir’ servants, all of whom had left the homestead except for two “which was a sign there had been news of much fighting; for the Kaffirs hear things long before the white man knows them” (96). The narration is inflected with a folklorish quality in the repetition of co-ordinating clauses such as, “And so it came to pass” (86). While awaiting the birth of her grandson – Jan – the Boer grandmother stepped outside and saw overhead the “white band of the Milky Way” (86), which recurs as a motif in the African oral tale. Returning inside she tells her pregnant daughter-in-law of a “wonderful thing [that] has

happened to me. As I stood out in the starlight it was as though a voice came down to me and spoke. The child which will be born for you tonight will be a man-child and he will live to do great things for his land and for his people. Before morning there was the sound of a little wail in the mud-house: and the child who was to do great things for his land and for his people was born” (87). So Schreiner in her Boer story touches upon a multiplicity of ‘stories’, here through the use of an oral-African allusion, in fact an allusion – the Milky Way – that connects Bantu-African to Bushman creation tales. Indeed, story is what initially connects the grandson to his grandmother: “[t]he stories she told him were always true stories of the things she had seen or of the things she had heard. Sometimes they were stories of her own childhood: of the day when she and his grandfather hid among the bushes, and saw the wagon burnt; sometimes they were of the long trek from Natal to the Transvaal; sometimes of the things which happened to her and his grandfather when first they came to that spot among the ridges [...]” (88). Sometimes her stories were of things even further in the past: she told him of the things that happened in the Cape Colony; of the Slachters Nek rebellion, the Great Trek, Dingaan’s Day, the battles at Laings Nek, Ingogo, and Amajuba; “[a]lways she told the same story in exactly the same words over and over again, till the child knew them all by heart, and would ask for this and then that” (89). Jan, in turn, seeks only true, or what we recognise as archetypal, stories, not Haggard-like adventure yarns. He comes, therefore, “to understand the history of his people through the oral history of their suffering and, even more, through their determination (his favourite story) to cross those literal or symbolic mountains ‘to freedom or to death!’” (Monsman 1991:130). What is excluded from Schreiner’s interlocking narratives is the narrative of the English colonist which resists engaging with “*all the lands of all the people*” (1981:90). A South African identity, a unity in multitude, Schreiner appears to say, is dependant upon a broad vision. The grandmother tells her grandson that “[t]his land will be a great land one day with one people from the sea to the north – but we shall not live to see it. [...] The land will make us one. Were not our fathers of more than one race?” (93). Schreiner had a similar optimism in *Thoughts* as she argued that our bond in South Africa is the very amalgamation of our different races (1992:56).

Such optimism is followed by another more sombre vision: of the land as “blackened and desolate” (Schreiner 1981:94); of both Boer women dead after being interned in a concentration camp. They are the “forgotten dead” with “no stone and no name upon either grave to say who lies there ... our unknown ... our unnamed” (102). By 1904 the farm-house had been burnt down

by English soldiers, but the terrain where the land had once been ploughed was still visible as “the veld never grows quite the same on land that has once been ploughed” (102) – the forgotten dead have made their mark upon the soil. Like *Halket*, episodic flashes of images from both ‘Africa’ and ‘Europe’ are abruptly juxtaposed, thus reinforcing Schreiner’s conception of indigeneity as a possession of the land through love. The grandmother’s stoof on which the child, Jan, used to sit may be little more than a curiosity in an English home. The ‘Boer land’ may have been bought by a syndicate of Jews in London and Johannesburg, “they have purchased it and paid for it ... but they do not possess it. Only the men who lie in their quiet graves upon the hillside, who lived on it, and loved it, possess it; and the piles of stones above them, from among the long waving grasses, keep watch over the land” (103). The point is that the dead, who continue to possess their land, have not been silenced by the ‘imperial project’ and, if the forgotten Boer still has a voice or a claim to the land, then – by implication – so do the ‘indigenous’ inhabitants. Schreiner asks in “An English South African’s View”, “Have the dead no voices?” (2005:96). Such a tension between pessimism and optimism suggests that the interplay of the dream and the real is essential to a commentary on, and a re-envisioning of, a South African present.

After the War it became even more obvious to Schreiner that, with the Boer incorporated into a white ‘union’, “the great impediment to the establishment of a just state in South Africa was the will of the white community as a whole to discriminate against all other races in the country” (Lenta 1992:8). Her wish to include essays on black people in *Thoughts on South Africa* never materialised and to some critics her support of the Boer – her apparent failure to see the black African as the real victim (see First and Scott 1990) – weighed against her outspokenness on oppression. Yet, as I have said, in all of her war writings – that is, “Eighteen Ninety-nine”, *Thoughts*, and “An English South African’s View” – Schreiner opened a space for the inclusion of a multiplicity of South African narratives. As Monsman says, in *Thoughts* Schreiner makes use of allegory to create “a national script liberated of racial or sexist oppression, a universal and perfected language” (“here the universalising quality of allegory makes possible through writing a fusion of the disparate non-literary cultures of Africa”) (1992:58,59):

Our dream of the future empire of our race is not of an empire over graves but in and through living nations. [...] We do not dream of our language that it shall forcibly destroy the world’s speeches and all they contain, reigning in solitary grandeur, but, a gold in a ring binds into one circle rare gems of every kind and some of infinitely greater beauty than itself, so we dream that our speech being common may bind together and bring into one those treasures of thought and knowledge which the peoples of earth have

produced, its greatest function being that of making the treasures of all accessible to all. (Schreiner 1992:347)

Schreiner also articulated such a vision in “Eighteen Ninety-nine” which, despite a focus on the Boer, strove for organicity in the making of a non-sectarian nation. This notwithstanding, First and Scott have argued that *Thoughts* and – possibly – Schreiner’s other depictions of war are somewhat ambivalent in that she at times “seems to be looking to a transformed society free of race oppression; at others she seems to endorse the ideological justifications of white conquest” (1990:197). To return to Mamdani, however, to remain within an indigene/settler understanding of land ownership in postcolonial society is to reify a dichotomous colonial/anti-colonial discourse. The vision of a transformed society, it appears, was Schreiner’s attempt to look past the limitations of her own times. And in one of her last writings, “The Dawn of Civilisation”, she leaves us with her vision, her hope for the future. Before that, however, she had turned more obviously with the advent of Union to ‘the native question’, as in “Closer Union”.

Visions of a Past: “Closer Union”

The South African War began to be seen increasingly by Schreiner as a fight between two white groups to “determine the terms of white power over South Africa; the majority African population was to be subject to the authority of the victor” (First and Scott 1990:243). As First and Scott deduce, despite her commitment to the underdog and her aversion to Britain’s imperial policy, Schreiner failed to see the Boer republics for the “racially bigoted despotisms they were” (1990:243). As War ended, however, Schreiner distanced herself from the Boer cause. As racial segregation was being formalised in what would be the 1910 Act of Union – so ensuring the supply of cheap black labour – Schreiner turned her attention to the plight of the black African population. Berkman, though, believes that Schreiner was aware, even before the War, that neither Boer nor Briton would protect the black African. Whatever the case, Schreiner looked to identify herself with black African political struggle, “barely [concerning] herself with white politics or white politicians, except to nag or attack those she knew personally” (First and Scott 1990:259-260). While debate over a federal or unitary constitution in a South African Union ostensibly marginalised the ‘native question’ such a question to Schreiner was the “pivot of all politics” (First and Scott 1990:256). In “Closer Union” (1908) she re-centres the native question

as she argues for federation which, as she thought, would permit the dynamic interaction of a multivocal narrative of South Africa: a way forward in South African politics.

“Closer Union” was first published in 1908 by *The Transvaal Leader*. It was a response to twelve questions posed to Schreiner by the editor of the newspaper and was subsequently published in book form. Schreiner makes explicit her support of federation as it lends itself more easily to the cultural pluralism of the country: “racial equality [was for Schreiner] the foundation for a new constitution” (Berkman 1990:119,117). The mining magnates, of course, favoured a centralised, efficient government (see Gentili 1991). As Milner had put it prior to the War, the British wanted to establish “a self-governing free white community [...] supported by a well-treated and justly governed black labour force” (in Gentili 1991:69). Schreiner was alert to the farce of such a statement; she saw that the British wanted to use the blacks only as a cheap labour supply. Hence, she appealed to the self-interest of the white leaders by pointing out, as Davenport pursues her argument, that the black African was indispensable to “the well-being of South Africa as a whole, and the pressing need, therefore, to incorporate him into the social order in a manner acceptable to himself” (1983:106). Schreiner made the point that the white man cannot exterminate or transport the black because “we want him!”: “We want more and always more of him – to labour in our mines, to build our railways, to work in our fields, to perform our domestic labours and to buy our goods. We desire to import more of him when we can” (2005 [1908]:180). Black Africans are “the makers of our wealth, the great basic rock on which our State is founded – our vast labouring class” (180). With their enviable social virtues they are, however, of more value than their labour. If we fail to see the black man as nothing more than “a vast engine of labour”, Schreiner cynically concludes,

If to us he is not man, but only a tool; if dispossessed entirely of the land for which he now shows that large aptitude for peasant proprietorship for the lack of which among their masses many great nations are decaying; if we force him permanently in his millions into the locations and compounds and slums of our cities, obtaining his labour cheaper, but to lose what the wealth of five Rands could not return to us; if, uninstructed in the highest forms of labour, without the rights of citizenship, his own social organisation broken up, without our having aided him to participate in our own; if, unbound to us by gratitude and sympathy, and alien to us in blood and colour, we reduce this vast mass to the condition of a great seething, ignorant proletariat – then I would rather draw a veil over the future of this land. (183)

It is, Schreiner notes, to “the small and for the moment absolutely dominant white aristocracy on whom the main weight of duty of social reconstruction rests” (182). Although her appeal is to the

white population, to their agency as makers of the nation, Schreiner acknowledges the black African's equal rights to citizenship – to the franchise – and, thus, to the fashioning of the nation. Possibly as a sop to white fear and prejudice, she proposed an educational test with regard to the franchise which would have excluded many black people. In spite of this, all citizens should be subject to the same law: “no distinction of race or colour should be made between South Africans” (166); to create such a division, “to base our national life on distinctions of race and colour, as such will, after the lapse of many years, prove fatal to us” (166).

In short, it is the handling of ‘the native question’ that will determine the contribution of South Africa to modern global development. Schreiner displays an alertness here to an increasingly globalised world that will necessitate the creative interaction of a diversity of cultures. Our greatness, as she asserts in “Closer Union”, depends upon our ability to solve the issue of the “interaction of distinct human varieties on the largest and most beneficent lines, making for the development of humanity as a whole [...]” (Schreiner 2005:181). Schreiner continues, “If it be possible for us out of our great complex body of humanity (its parts possibly remaining racially distinct for centuries) to raise up a free, intelligent harmonious nation, each part acting with and for the benefit of the others then we shall have played a part as great as that of any nation in the world’s record” (181). Schreiner argues that such a unity of our diverse parts is certainly a possibility given that our amalgamation of cultures transcends colonial-established borders: “diverse as our people, our land and our problems are in each part, they are yet more like each other than they are anything else in the world” (178). As Beeton has said of Schreiner’s claim, “The whole question represented a magnificent challenge to European intelligence, and it was a most wonderful opportunity to bind the black races to us, not through severity and fear, but ‘through their sense of justice and gratitude’” (1974:69).

Characteristic of both Schreiner’s thought and imagination, her concern with the immediate issues of Union included her vision of the ‘ideal’ South African union, one which is sensitive to the ‘individuality’ – that is, the cultural diversity – of the country. If the leaders of our nation, Schreiner argues, are able to “imbue us with their own larger conception of the national life, and lead us towards it, then I see light where the future of South Africa rises; if not we shall still attain to a political unification in some form or other, but it will be a poor, peddling thing when we have it – perhaps bloody” (Schreiner 2005:189). At the time her constitutional suggestions received little support (see Berkman 1990); however, Schreiner’s argument travels

beyond its time, beyond even forty years of apartheid. Beeton has argued that “Closer Union” remains a significant document in that as literature it helps “us define what we wish to make of our country” (1974:70). Schreiner saw the potential of a divisive society’s nonviolent transformation into an inclusive, multiracial society; the key would be mediation between black and white. Schreiner was, emphatically, a pacifist. As Berkman avers, “Schreiner wrestled with the question of how best to support black rights without arousing even stronger white racism or abetting black revolutionary violence” (1990:122). It is in “The Dawn of Civilisation” (written in 1917, but only published in 1921) that Schreiner explicates her pacifist position and, according to Berkman, perhaps exposes “the white liberal prejudices that some scholars and writers have accused her of” (1990:123).

If in “Closer Union” Schreiner engages specifically with immediate issues, to produce a document that could be read alongside Plaatje’s *Native Life in South Africa*, then in “The Dawn of Civilisation” she looks beyond the immediate situation to a global ideal in which war and oppression no longer exist. While critics have focused on her pacifism, I want to consider her vision not as an elusive, immaterial yearning, but as a ‘dream’ that emanates from within her own childhood experiences. As a response to the First World War, “The Dawn of Civilisation” is an autobiographical, “allegorically charged statement of hope for the future” (Monsman 1991:5), which serves as an outline for Schreiner’s own pacifist beliefs. She argues here for the conscientious objector who is against all war, even that which may have laudable aims: that is, “a war in which a class or race struggles against a power seeking permanently to crush and subject it” (2005 [1921]:206). She was a supporter of Gandhi’s *satyagraha* movement and, according to First and Scott, was later distressed to discover his support of Empire during war; “[s]he had the same reservations about Sol Plaatje” as “he advocates the natives coming [to England] to help kill” (1990:304-5). In her last undertaking – the unfinished “Dawn of Civilisation” – Schreiner, according to Berkman, reflected on the “hard-won balance struck in her mature years between her idealism and her sense of reality”: she examined “why ordinary people were drawn to warmaking and would resist pacifist idealists” (1990:40). Noting Schreiner’s waning optimism, Berkman calls “Dawn” the author’s most “pessimistic statement on human nature” (1990:232). Schreiner, nonetheless, continued to believe that societies were malleable and that her ‘ideal’ vision had purchase.

If, as First and Scott have argued, Schreiner tried “to recreate the conditions of her own formation in her novels and to struggle to transcend them” (1990:50), then in “The Dawn of Civilisation” she engages with her childhood so as to transcend the binary discourse of colonial society. The tension between the dream (the childhood visions) and the real (her response to war) – her optimism and her pessimism for the future – fashions a distinctive vision: her ideal realised among the contradictions of her milieu. In “Dawn” she recalls a childhood experience when, “not yet nine years old”, she had “walked out one morning along the mountain-tops”, having awoken early as she could not sleep:

My heart was heavy, my physical heart seemed to have pain in it, as if small, sharp crystals were cutting into it. All the world seemed wrong to me [...] the whole Universe seemed to be weighing on me. I had grown up in a land where wars were common. From my earliest years I had heard of bloodshed and battles and hair-breadth escapes. [...] In my native country dark men were killed and their lands taken from them by white men armed with superior weapons. [...] I knew also how white men fought white men; the stronger even hanging the weaker on gallows when they did not submit; and I had seen how white men used the dark as beasts of labour, often without any thought for their good or happiness. Three times I had seen an ox striving to pull a heavily loaded wagon up a hill, the blood and foam streaming from its mouth and nostrils as it struggled, and I had seen it fall dead under the lash. In the bush in the kloof below I had seen bush-bucks and little long-tailed monkeys that I loved so shot dead. [...] And sometimes I had seen bands of convicts going past [...] I had seen the terrible look in their eyes of a wild creature, when every man’s hand is against it and no one loves it, and it only hates and fears. [...] Why did the strong always crush the weak? Why did we hate and kill and torture? Why was it all as it was? Why had the world ever been made? Why, oh why, had I ever been born? (Schreiner 2005:209-210)

Amidst what seemingly recalls Waldo’s harsh experiences as a labourer Schreiner, like Waldo, gleans a certain hope in the African landscape. “I seemed to *see* a world in which creatures no more hated and crushed, in which the strong helped the weak, and men understood each other, and forgave each other, and did not try to crush others, but to help. I did not think of it as something to be in a distant picture; it was there, about me, and I was in it, and a part of it” (211). This observation does not quell its counterpart in the apprehensive question: “How could that glory ever really be?” (211). How could she – “a tiny, miserable worm, a speck within a speck, an imperceptible atom, a less than nothing!” – alter the world when her own heart holds “anger against those who injured me or others” (211). But, like Peter Halket, she came to realise that

you cannot by willing it alter the vast world outside of you [...] but this one only you can do – in that one, small, minute, almost infinitesimal spot in the Universe, where your will rules, there, where alone you are as God, *strive* to make that you hunger for real! [...] you also are a part of the great Universe; what you

strive for something strives for; *and nothing in the Universe is quite alone*; you are moving on towards something. (212)

As First and Scott point out, “In the ‘Dawn of Civilisation’ she returned to her insistence on the validity of the internal world, her vision of a place where the strong helped the weak, where men understood one another” (1990:306). Although conscious of the oppression, the cruelty, and the injustices in the world, Schreiner’s childhood vision – what had carried over into her writer’s vision – had become in the course of her life, a “hope” (Schreiner 2005:214) – a hope that remained a distinctive feature of her literature and that has a continuing significance in a world which, whether in South Africa or globally, has to be ever-vigilant in defence of ideals of fairness and justice.

Postscript

Was Olive Schreiner's a lone voice in South African literature? Before her there were in what would become the country, South Africa, probably two serious books of commentary and life experience, that is, books which grappled with the 'problematics' – principally, racial – of living in a colony: John Philip's *Researches in South Africa* (1828) and Thomas Pringle's *African Sketches* (1834). The former criticises the British government for its ill-treatment of the Khoi (to colonists, Hottentots); the latter "draws the reader into a struggle to understand and assess the colonial predicament" (Chapman 2003:95). Alongside these two books were ethnographic studies and travelogues, mainly descriptive from an uncritical British or European vantage point: for example, Sir John Barrow who 'mapped' the colony according to the Westminster civil-servant's eye. On the literary scene a similar avoidance of the real colony occurred in popular Haggard-like African adventure novels – to which I have already made reference – and in occasional sketches on camp life, as in J. R. Couper's *Mixed Humanity: A Story of Camp Life in South Africa* (1892), reminiscences of booze, brawls and brothels in New Rush. This is all very different from how Murray, accurately I think, describes Schreiner as a soul struggling amid material circumstance, or struggling in colonial life as it was lived in its everyday realities.

The only novel of comparable importance to *The Story of an African Farm* – I concur with critics such as Gray and Chapman – was Douglas Blackburn's *Leaven: A Black and White Story* (1908), published more than two decades after Schreiner's seminal novel. (Significantly, as in the case of the re-issue of Schreiner's work, Blackburn's *Leaven* was republished in 1991.) As in Schreiner's writing, Blackburn "indicts the debased form of the civilising mission that was the colonial practice and comes to despairing conclusions as to what it meant to be white in South Africa" (Chapman 2003:138). Unlike Blackburn's despair, however, Schreiner retained hope for the future. As I have argued, her vision of the past transcends the dichotomous language of the times and connects her writings to a possible path forward, as we encounter also – albeit, to a lesser degree – in the work of Sol T. Plaatje, a parallel figure to Schreiner and whose publications include his *Boer War Diary* (1900), his prose commentary *Native Life in South Africa* (1916) and, as in Schreiner's novelistic practice, his cross-generic real/romantic story, *Mhudi* (written around 1917, but published only in 1930).

Schreiner defended the 'underdog' – the Boer – in the South African War; Plaatje's *Boer*

War Diary acknowledged what Schreiner glimpsed: that the War, supposedly involving two white groups, made terrible inroads into the black African population. (14 000 Africans died in the War.) If Plaatje's *Native Life* (a response to the 1913 Land Act, which dispossessed Africans in the land of their birth) can be read in conjunction with Schreiner's "Closer Union" (a response to the 1910 Act of Union, a precursor of the Land Act), then *Mhudi* can be read as a corollary of Schreiner's *From Man to Man*. Both works – both, incidentally, straddling representational modes of realism and romance – dare to imagine the emergence from the colony of a multiracial, gender-sensitive society. (Plaatje, incidentally, named his daughter, Olive, after the writer whom he admired.)

One may continue to note Schreiner's influence on a range of writers' commitments. Christopher Heywood, for example, points to her influence on 'metropolitan' voices such as D. H. Lawrence and George Moore (1976); similarly, her influence on African writers such as Chinua Achebe and Wolé Soyínká (1991). Schreiner's cross-generic styles are a recurrent feature of a South African 'aesthetic' whether in Alan Paton, Guy Butler, Es'kia Mphahlele, Breyten Breytenbach or Antjie Krog. This is not to argue for any conscious 'anxiety of influence', but to suggest that the difficulty of generic uniformity in a social and literary terrain of heterogeneity, as experienced by Schreiner, has proved to be a deep-seated and an ongoing characteristic of the writer at the edge of any secure literary culture. How does the imagination interact with a contentious political reality?

I began this study in reaction to what I perceived to be Stephen Clingman's return to a binary language of response in his attempt to evaluate Schreiner's achievement. The term, 'colonial novel', was reduced to a simplification. Instead, I took a lead from Mamdani's promptings that a colony, even in its earlier functioning, was never a simple place or space. What I hoped to show was that the 'colony' in Schreiner's vision of the past, or the present, or, in anticipation, the future, contained within it intimations of modern dilemmas, whether of race, class, gender, or (to turn to postcolonial parlance) migration – Africa, the West – and globalisation: the diamond field, gold discovery, a War provoked by mineral acquisition, the colonial interloper becoming a settler, or a citizen of South Africa.

Schreiner should not be easily 'universalised'. She reveals both the limitations and possibilities of her time. Yet, as her soul struggled with its material surroundings, her works posed questions not only to her own time, but also to a world in which the public and the

personal remain interacting entities. A language of response together with a mode of representation which collapses complexity into easy alternatives is as inadequate to the challenges of today as it was inadequate to the challenges of a colony in which Schreiner saw beyond “wild adventure...ravens lions” (real or metaphoric?) to a “strange coming and going...where the facts creep upon one” and in which, whatever the temptation of colonial escape, one “dips into the great pigments of life”.

Olive Schreiner’s ‘colonial’ responsibility remains a contemporary responsibility.

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