

Gender and landscape in the works of Olive Schreiner

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Key Words

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Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland



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WESTERN CAPE

Abstract

Gender and Landscape in the works of Olive Schreiner

My research will focus on the relationship between gender and landscape as portrayed in Olive Schreiner's first published novel, *The Story of an African Farm*, and her much later novel, *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*, with reference to her letters and the non-fictional text, *Woman and Labour*. In *The Story of an African Farm*, Schreiner explores a young person's viewpoints on religion, feminism and the social and physical environment of the Cape Colony. Published in 1883 under the pseudonym Ralph Irons and widely recognised as among the first South African novels, the novel shows Schreiner's interest in the emergence of female subjectivity revealed through the protagonist, Lyndall, in a landscape shaped by social hierarchies. I will also explore the protagonist Waldo, as a figure whose religious views are close to Schreiner's. In *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*, she engages with landscape within a politicised framework and exposes the violence of colonialism.

In *African Farm*, my particular focus will be on how landscape figures in Schreiner's imagination as both potentially liberating and constraining; a source of spiritual exploration and a framework for patriarchal enforcement. If Schreiner can be regarded as not only a proto "South African" novelist but also as a woman writer of the Victorian age living in a British colony, does the South African landscape provide a liberating space in the same way as it does, for example, in Emily Bronte's novel *Wuthering Heights* (1847)?

DECLARATION:

I declare that *Gender and Landscape in the works of Olive Schreiner* is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Nicolette Jacobs

Date: 31 August 2022

Signed:



I have used MLA 8th edition referencing style throughout.

Abbreviations

- OS – Olive Schreiner
- WEL – Woman’s Enfranchisement League
- KJV – King James Version



Acknowledgements

At the beginning of 2019 I had no idea who Olive Schreiner was. I was introduced to her by my supervisor, Lannie Birch, and in 2020, Schreiner became the subject of my MA thesis. I would like to thank Dr Birch for her patience, support and belief that I was capable of taking on a MA. She gave me the space to write in a manner that made me feel comfortable to explore my own writing style.

To Mark Espin, thank you for the conversations we had that have helped maintain my sanity when I thought I would not be able to complete this thesis.

My thanks are also owed to my family and particularly my husband, Jonathan, for his understanding, for being my sounding-board and for enduring the many, many conversations about Olive Schreiner. Thank you for taking me on an eight hour journey to Cradock (and back home) so that I could find a way to connect with Schreiner and her Karoo.

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Preface

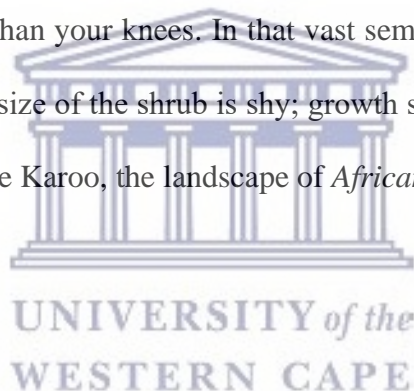
During my studies in my English Honours year, I wrote a mini thesis on Emily Brontë's only published novel, *Wuthering Heights*. This led me to become interested in how the writer used the landscape both to engage with the characters and, at the same time, to reveal her own intense connection to landscape. In a letter, Ellen Nussey writes of Brontë, "On the top of a moor or in a deep glen Emily was a child in spirit for glee and enjoyment" (Shorter 179). I have always felt strongly connected to nature and being in the outdoors, whether it is on the mountain or along the ocean; the experiences of my senses in the natural world have a calming effect on my whole being.

A discussion with Dr. Birch and my interest in landscape led me to Olive Schreiner and her obsession with the Karoo and the inclusion of it in her many writings. I then decided to travel through the Karoo to Cradock to visit the Olive Schreiner House Museum and bookshop. The vast landscape of the Karoo appeared aged, dull and grey. The hardened soil had developed its own wrinkles. Brightly scattered flowers of pink and white dotted the landscape attempting to provide a sense of visual distraction from the monotony of grey/brown shades of colour, but the attempt was lost as the flowers simply drowned in the dull colour of the landscape. I could not help but wonder if it was a mirage that teased my vision, allowing me to stop for a closer inspection. During my eight-hour journey through the Karoo, I became completely immersed in the landscape and could only imagine what Schreiner was exposed to. I had the comfort of an air-conditioned vehicle to mask the heat and dust, while Schreiner had the "comfort" of an ox wagon. The vast and expansive landscape in various shades of browns, beiges and greys was empty and lifeless and appeared to swallow me up, making me feel lost on an unending grey road edged by flat lands and broken fencing. The silence in the car was occasionally interrupted by the hollow sounds of the wind blowing against it as it strewed dust and sand

over the road. But what was captivating was the appearance of the nothingness rich in Schreiner's history of the landscape. In Schreiner's words, there were many moments where "there is not a tree on the velt nor a bush on the mountains as far as the eye can reach" (OS to Havelock Ellis 25 March 1890), and the endless journey seemed even more tiring in the heat, despite driving with the air conditioner on. As we trekked through the vacant plains of the Karoo, the *koppies* would interrupt the flat lines of the plains by sticking out their heads and observing the comings and goings of visitors, of those who came and never left and of those who were not brave enough to stay. Trees appeared lifeless, their grey, crooked fingers pointing towards the skies, towards the person responsible for the harsh ordeal they must endure. Flat fields as far as the eye could see, barren, with some stunted bushes and the occasional appearance of the Karoo aloe all sheltered together in bands. The soil transformed from dusty shades of red, orange and brown to grey, mimicking the tarred roads I was driving on. Dried out streams and riverbeds revealed a pathway of rocks and sand, mimicking the appearance of untarred roads. Old, abandoned buildings appeared ever so often, derelict from the harsh climate, providing signs of a pre-existent home. And even the skeleton of a cow scattered on the dried sand made the reality of the extreme climate very real. Driving past familiar signage pointing the way to Matjiesfontein, Middelburg, De Aar, Hanover, Graaff-Reinet and Cradock created a sense of connecting with Schreiner's journey through the Karoo and the places where she lived. This snippet of my experience of travelling through the Karoo and being in Cradock for only three days raised the question: how did Schreiner feel about this harsh, bitter environment?

Jeanette Eve's *A Literary Guide to the Eastern Cape* provides an overview of writers and their relationships with landscape in the region of the Eastern Cape. She refers to as "journeys that focus on the literature of place" (Eve 2) and covers the literature of writers from various areas

in the Eastern Cape. In chapter seven entitled “Bush World,” Eve describes the strong connection between the natural world and Schreiner. The title refers to Schreiner’s unfinished short story *Diamond Fields* where she characterises the natural world as an “idealised, paradisaical place with luxuriant vegetation and inhabited by many birds and small creatures” (Eve 247). The natural environment of the Karoo in particular is important in Schreiner’s work; somehow she cannot exclude it from her writing, not only in *African Farm* but in her other written texts as well. Those who live in and travel through the Karoo will experience extremities. Eve writes that “the Karoo is a place of extremes: the vast and the tiny; heat and cold; drought and flood; colours that range from drab to brilliant” (Eve 191). Schreiner describes this experience not only in the many letters which she wrote but also in her stories. As Eve writes in a description which echoes Schreiner’s introduction to *African Farm*, “the air is dry, distances clear, and scarcely a shrub grows higher than your knees. In that vast semi-desert it is difficult to forget your smallness; the colour and size of the shrub is shy; growth slow and stubborn” (Eve 191). After spending a few days in the Karoo, the landscape of *African Farm* was real to me.



INTRODUCTION: SCHREINER, VICTORIAN WOMEN AND LANDSCAPE

“To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment.”
(Ralph Waldo Emerson, www.emersoncentral.com)

Olive Schreiner’s writing heralds her as a free-thinker and as a champion for women’s rights and for the rights of the indigenous people of South Africa. In her works, landscape, and particularly the landscape of the Karoo, serves to highlight how humans engage with one another, as well as with the natural environment. As I will show, it is often through the representation of landscape in her letters and novels, as well as through her characters’ engagement with, and reflections on, the land itself that Schreiner’s work explores and expresses her thoughts on religion, education, the oppression of women and the politics of colonial South Africa. In *The Story of an African Farm* the Karoo landscape and the space of the farm enable her characters to explore spirituality, the history of man and ‘deep time’, as well as gender inequality, whilst in *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*, she expresses her political views on the impact of colonialism by directly confronting issues of land dispossession. This dissertation aims to explore her complex responses to the South African landscape, which was both very dear to Schreiner, but was also the site of contestation, struggle and injustice, as her work shows.

Biographical Details

Olive Emily Albertina Schreiner was born on 24 March 1855 at the Wittebergen Wesleyan Mission Station in the Eastern Cape and was named after her three dead brothers: Oliver, Emile and Albert. From a young age she displayed a strong interest in feminism, social politics, criticism of religion and the unjust treatment of other races, and she sought equality between the sexes. These interests are common threads in many of her novels and short stories, including *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*, *Woman and Labour*, *From Man to Man*

(published posthumously), *Undine* (published posthumously) and her collection of short stories entitled *Dreams*. She is most widely-recognised, however, for her novel, *The Story of an African Farm*. Published in 1883 under the pseudonym Ralph Irons, it is her only novel to have been published while she was alive and it represents a challenge to Victorian attitudes and mores. The novel introduced Schreiner to society as a New Woman¹, a woman who thinks independently, who questions the rules set down by the patriarchy and who shows the ability to create her own independent path.

Schreiner was the ninth of the twelve children of Gottlob and Rebecca Schreiner. Her parents were missionaries who came from England and were stationed throughout the Eastern Cape and Northern Cape areas. When they arrived in South Africa in 1838, they were first stationed in Philippolis. Thereafter, they lived in Basutoland, Lishuani, Bloemfontein, Wittenbergen and Healdtown. After Gottlob was forced to resign from the Wesleyan Mission Society in 1865 due to irregular business practices, the Schreiners moved to Balfour where he opened a trading store. The family was struggling financially however, and Gottlob proved to be an incompetent businessman who was subsequently declared insolvent. This led to some of the children – Olive, Will and Ettie – moving to live with their older brother, Theo, in Cradock. At the time, Theo was employed as a headmaster of a school and Schreiner and her siblings were for the first time able to receive formal education. Here, she also developed an affinity for the Cradock library. Schreiner was already thirteen years old and any form of education she had received prior to her arrival at her brother's place had come from her mother and from other families in the area. In their detailed biography of Olive Schreiner, Ruth First and Ann Scott describe the cost of education in South Africa at the time, a factor which led Rebecca Schreiner to educate

¹ The concept of 'New Woman' steered away from the stereotypical Victorian woman: "She was intelligent, educated, emancipated, independent and self-supporting. The New Women were not only middle-class female radicals, but also factory and office workers" (<https://victorianweb.org/gender/diniejko1.html>)

her own children. The schools in South Africa were more expensive than the schools in England and considered inferior. First and Scott comment that “from time to time they also participated in an exchange system with other white families – an informal network which supplied governesses for the education and care of younger children” (First and Scott 45). As young children they, and particularly the girls, were accountable for household duties, making regular schooling “impossible” (First and Scott 45). However, Schreiner’s brothers (including William Schreiner who was born after her) received proper and formal education. Her two older brothers, Fred and Theo, studied abroad and became teachers, and William studied law and eventually became the Prime Minister of the Cape Colony in 1898. During the Victorian period, greater importance was placed on the education of men compared to that of women, and from a young age Schreiner became acutely aware of how society favoured men. She was already conscious of the unfair advantages of a patriarchal society. The theme of the education of a woman is often raised in *African Farm*, and the disparity between men and women is seen as frustrating for the young character of Lyndall. The comments regarding education in the novel are at times subtle, deliberate or with a hint of humour. In a conversation between Lyndall and Waldo, Lyndall comments, “I once heard an old man say, that he never saw intellect help a woman so much as a pretty ankle; and it was the truth” (*African Farm* 172), poking fun at how men valued the education of women as being beneficial to no one. Educating a woman was considered futile, as a woman’s place was meant to be occupied in the domestic space of the home. Schreiner often pointed out the unequal role of women in society and the social disadvantages women were subjected to, showing how the Victorian period was an era which dismissed a woman’s intellect and the contribution that she could make beyond the domestic

space of the home. Schreiner makes this argument explicitly in her later treatise, *Woman and Labour*² (1911).

Schreiner began her writing career during the 1870s while living in the Karoo and her environment became a dominant feature in her writing. In letters written to family and friends, her choice of words used to describe the Karoo such as “beautiful free” (OS to Mary Drew 11 October 1889), “wild” (OS to Havelock Ellis 25 March 1890), and “so wild so untamed” (OS to Edward Carpenter 20 July 1890) provides images of a landscape that cannot be controlled but where continuous and unhindered freedom can be experienced. Her letters provide a personal connection to her innermost thoughts and ideas and are reflective of her everyday life and her relationship with her environment. These letters also provide a strong contrast to her experiences with the landscape in Europe, particularly England. Schreiner had lived in England between 1881 and 1889, and for a few months during 1897. She wrote to Edward Carpenter: “I can understand now why that English life was such a death to me, shut out from the sun & mountains & planes [sic] that had made all my life before I went there” (OS to Edward Carpenter 20 July 1890). Her many letters reveal the nostalgia she experienced while away from her South African home, as well as the impact this absence had on her mental state. Her written work and her deeply personal letters which I have come to enjoy, reveal her emotional struggles with her health, her wavering mental state, her struggles with sexual freedom, her political involvement, as well as her failing efforts to produce acceptable literary work which she felt was good enough to be published. What is apparent in her work is that the influence of the landscape stems from her youth, a time in which she suffered from the oppressive social conditions of farm life.

² The treatise focusses on the independence and labour of women in society and argues for equality between the sexes. As Tina Barsby observes, “*Woman and Labour* was taken up as the Bible of the women’s movement” (43).

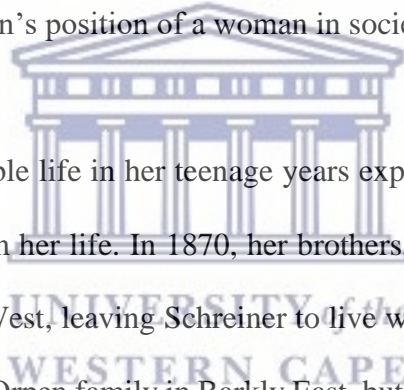
Schreiner's childhood saw her move around various parts of the Karoo frequently. Her movement from place to place allowed her to explore the Karoo landscape from an early age and she was able to have a 'reading' connection with the places she lived in. In Cradock it was the library (1868), in Hermon she was introduced to Herbert Spencer's *First Principles* (1871), in Kimberley she was reading Darwin's *Descent of Man*, JS Mill's *Principles of Political Economy*, and John Russel's *History and Heroes of the Art of Medicine* (see Barsby 2) and she began writing *Undine* (1873). In Cape Town she read Emerson's *Essays* (1874) and in Ganna Hoek she furthered her readings on JS Mill and Darwin's *The Variation of Plants and Animals under Domestication* (1875). According to Andrew van der Vlies "while drafting *African Farm*, Schreiner read Shelley, Ruskin and Emerson and in 1876 to 1878 Shakespeare, Goethe, Macaulay and Gibbon" ("BSANZ 2020: Andrew van Der Vlies: Olive Schreiner and the (Anti-) Colonial Southern-Hemisphere Sublime" 05:35–05:45). She also completed most of *Undine* in Ganna Hoek. Her journey through the Eastern Cape and the Karoo became her journey of self-discovery through reading. Tina Barsby quotes Karel Schoeman's description of Schreiner's "pattern of restless, unstable wandering, of never being at home and never settling down...that was to mark the rest of her life (1991:181)" (Barsby 13). However, this condition of restlessness also seems to have supported a life of intellectual enquiry and exploration.

Schreiner's keen interest in books other than the Bible was probably as a result of her limited access to reading materials as a child. Her mother, Rebecca, did not provide a conducive learning experience for the children and used the Bible as a primary source of education. In true Christian fashion, even as the children became older, they remained accountable to their parents. Schreiner's sister, Kate, at the adult age of twenty-two, had to "prove herself a dutiful child" (Parker Lewis 46) for her to be allowed to marry John Findlay. It was a tumultuous time

for Kate and Findlay as her father initially disowned her. They eventually rekindled their relationship, and it was Findlay who assisted her parents financially. Rebecca Lyndall was born in England, and was “reared in a strict, puritanical household in which pleasure and joy and happiness were equated with the work of the Devil” (Parker Lewis 18). She was a disciplinarian, and it was her strict religious and pious upbringing that she enforced on her children. Gottlob Schreiner was born in Germany and “was considered soft, sentimental, accommodating and childlike when compared to his wife” (Parker Lewis 23). Rebecca’s upbringing in a stern Calvinist home had an impact on her children, particularly on the young Schreiners which included Olive. Schreiner described her mother as being “cold and distant” (First and Scott 45), these sentiments being shared by her siblings as well. The strong religious indoctrination by Rebecca may be represented by the character Tant Sannie in *African Farm*. However, in the afterword of *African Farm*, Samuel Cronwright writes that Tant Sannie mimics a traditional “good housewife at Klein Ganna Hoek” (*African Farm* 309) and “is not meant wholly to portray Mrs Fouché,³ for whom Olive had an affectionate and humorous admiration” (*African Farm* 309). Tant Sannie forces Lyndall and Em to be educated at home in a strictly Christian learning environment. Schreiner’s Calvinist upbringing meant that other Christian denominations were frowned upon and this is likely why Tant Sannie comments, with reference to the visitor Bonaparte Blenkins, who had comfortably and slyly sidled his way into the household, that “she wished she hadn’t called him a thief and a Roman Catholic” (*African Farm* 42). Being called a Roman Catholic, for Tant Sannie, is humorously shown to bear the same degradation and insult as a common thief. It is through such parody that Schreiner expresses her objection to her Calvinist roots within the novel.

³ Schreiner worked as a governess for the Stoffel Fouché’s in Klein Ganna Hoek, near Cradock.

Lyndall, the orphan child in *African Farm* whom I will treat as the central protagonist, yearns to go to school so that she may “be very wise, and [come] to know everything – to be clever” (*African Farm* 15). Lyndall’s frustration with the limited education she received on the farm may reflect Schreiner’s own disappointing education under her disciplinarian mother. Similarly, the book also reveals Schreiner’s personal point of view that for women to succeed, there needs to be formal education in place and that an education based solely on Christianity and the Bible cannot lead to a successful and fulfilled life for a woman. Her belief in a proper education was formulated when she was young, writing at age twelve in a small book of poems and other things of interest “that she wanted above all ‘to be clever, to be wise’” (First and Scott 51). Both Schreiner and the character of Lyndall represent the New Woman who challenges authority and the patriarchal system. Lyndall becomes the feminist figure in the novel who opposes the Victorian’s position of a woman in society.



Schreiner’s transient and unstable life in her teenage years exposed her to people who would later come to have an impact on her life. In 1870, her brothers, Theo and Fred, moved to the diamond fields in Griqualand West, leaving Schreiner to live with various family and friends. She became a governess to the Orpen family in Barkly East, but abandoned this position a year later and moved in with her aunt and uncle, the Rollands, in Hermon. While in Hermon, she met Willie Bertram who introduced her to Herbert Spencer’s *First Principles*. Barsby writes, “Spencer’s *First Principles* (1862) was one of many contemporary books on the conflict between an emerging rationalist science and religion” (14). This chance meeting had an immense impact on Schreiner’s life and was “crucial to [her] development as a freethinker” (Barsby 14). Her exposure to Spencer’s philosophy provided her with the space for intellectual development and to question religious instruction. Her position as a freethinker allowed her to

be vocal in her thoughts and ideas on matters of gender, particularly with regards to the types of work and the spaces available to women.

Victorian Women and Landscape

Schreiner's work continues to be celebrated as that of both a late Victorian and an early modernist feminist who articulates the problem of the limited space that women occupy. This limited space was reflected in all aspects of her life, from her place in society to her political activism. In a foreword to a special issue of *English in Africa* commemorating the centenary of Schreiner's death, Dorothy Driver commented that:

[H]er writing searches for ways to formulate an authorial perspective at once anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, anti-consumerist, anti-racist and feminist. The boldness of her literary art makes it appropriate to celebrate her writing at any time, but perhaps more so today, one hundred years after her death, given her prescient glimpses of what a history of imperialism and racial capitalism would leave as a legacy for our present and future. (Driver *Foreword* 13)

She was living her life as a conscious thinker and became aware of the suppression of women from a young age. Being raised as a Victorian woman where religious instruction played a significant part in her daily life, she used her writing as a form of resistance to religious ideology. As a Victorian woman, one was assigned to the domestic space as a nurturer and caregiver and placed in a submissive social position. In *Writing Women and Space*, Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose point out anthropologist Shirley Ardener's argument "that the 'social map' of patriarchy created 'ground rules' for the behaviour of men and women, and that the patriarchy constructed some spaces as 'feminine' and others as 'masculine' and thus allocated certain kinds of (gendered) activities to certain (gendered) places" (Blunt and Rose 1). The divisions of labour in terms of gender are clearly defined in *African Farm* as the male counterparts are assigned to farm labour such as tending the animals, inventing machinery, working the land and driving wagons, while the female counterparts are to be found in the domestic space of the farm. Roles for educating and religious instruction were also assigned to the men, placing them in a position of directing and controlling the narrative on how women

should think and behave. Other positions of interest suggested by Lyndall in the novel are “doctors, lawyers, lawmakers” (*African Farm* 174), all positions which were denied to women.

In this dissertation I will argue that Schreiner’s use of the distinctive African landscape reveals her broader concerns with questions of society and freedom, as well as the influence that the landscape had on her as a South African Victorian woman. Gerald Monsman points out that Schreiner “embodied an unusual combination of feminism and colonial Victorianism” (Monsman xi). By looking at the South African landscape and how it is connected to transformations of imperialism, he argues that it provided Schreiner with the freedom to challenge traditional “sex roles and sexual hierarchies”, paving a new way to resist the existing “Eurocentric ways of telling stories” (Monsman xii). There are resonances in the novel with Schreiner’s own life experiences and, as readers, we are able to empathise with the social injustices and oppression Schreiner experienced at the time. It is in the chapter entitled *Lyndall* that Schreiner’s personal ideology as a woman in a male-dominated space emerge, an ideology which Monsman relates to “her acutely felt personal suffocation” (Monsman xi). The unconventional traits of Lyndall as a Victorian woman show strong opposition towards the social norms imposed upon her. Lyndall returns to the farm after being away for a few years to explore and experience life outside its confines. Her experience is, however, nothing but disappointment and with Waldo she laments the drudgery of being a woman. Her speech to Waldo is “about her views on men, love, and the bitterness of the female condition” (First and Scott 95). When Waldo asks Lyndall, “Have you learned much?” he remembers how she had once said, “When I come back again I shall know everything that a human being can” (*African Farm* 168). Lyndall’s use of the words “everything” indicates her thirst to be educated and the intense desperation to learn and to acquire as much knowledge as humanly possible. In a letter

to Mary King Roberts, Schreiner captures the essence of her vision for a woman's independence. She writes:

Our first duty is to develop ourselves. Then you are ready for any kind of work that comes. The woman who does this is doing more to do away with prostitution and the inequalities between man and woman, and to make possible a nobler race of human beings, than by all the talking and vituperation possible. It is not against man we have to fight but against ourselves within ourselves. We have to rise. ... It seems to me you and Dr. Roberts have such an ideally beautiful life with one another; there is so much you can give him, and so much he can give you. I think marriage is much the highest condition physically and mentally, though it is not attainable by many of us in the present condition of society. ... To help any woman to be independent, that is the real Secret of Freedom. Please don't give up your longing to be materially independent because your husband is noble and generous; you must be lovers and friends and companions right on to the end of your lives, and not sink into the sad old groove. It is this which matters, not whether one signs one's name in a register or not. ... Please don't mind all I've said in this letter. (OS to Mary King Roberts 1889)

Schreiner's last comment in the letter to Mary Roberts was perhaps not to offend her should she not share Schreiner's position on and sentiments about a woman's independence. The point of view of the letter expresses a similar position to that of Lyndall who also seeks to have her own financial independence and to harness her own wealth. Although this letter was written six years after the publication of *African Farm*, Schreiner is still steadfast in her position that women should aspire to be educated, informed and independent and that this would help resolve the inequality between men and women. She will come to develop these themes more fully in *Woman and Labour* (1911). It is in *Woman and Labour* that her interest goes beyond the frustration with the limited social position of women and extends to the good of society. Progress of knowledge and the healthy functioning of a society depends on women being engaged in meaningful labour outside of the domestic space that a woman is accustomed to. The book critiques the position of women in society, an idea which Schreiner had already established in her "early youth" (Schreiner *Woman and Labour* 1). The ideas and information are however unfortunately only a "fragment" (Schreiner *Woman and Labour* 4) of the original book which was destroyed in the South African War. In it, Schreiner seeks recognition for women's contribution to society and comments:

In the larger book I had devoted one chapter entirely to an examination of the work woman has done and still does in the modern world, and the gigantic evils which arise from the fact that her labour, especially domestic labour, often the most wearisome and unending known to any section

of the human race, is not adequately recognised or recompensed. (Schreiner, *Woman and Labour* 5)

Dedicating an entire chapter to the work done by women would have been to proclaim the importance of a woman's position in a patriarchal society. Many of her letters validate her thoughts and opinions about the oppression of women.

Schreiner's Letters

Letters and the art of letter writing were important to Schreiner. In this thesis I have made use of many letters as points of reference. It has been noted that over 20 000 letters survived before her husband, Samuel Cronwright-Schreiner, burnt them (Stanley and Salter xxxix). In a letter to her sister Francis she wrote about the importance of letters:

Dear, they are such beautiful letters; the tears came into my eyes as I reread them. I can't destroy them. I am sending them to you I think Dot would value them so much; but I can't give them to her with out your consent. Letters are such sacred things to me: especially when they show the inside of a tender self forgetting spirit as yours do. I think they are so beautiful I would like Dot to have them that your grand children may read them some day. But do as you like with them. Its such sad work this going through old letters destroying them. One seems to be tearing up oneself. (OS to Francis Schreiner 17 November 1913)

Schreiner was speaking of letters which she had received from Francis over the years. She shows an extremely emotional attachment to the letters, which are seen as an extension of the self. Of the thousands of letters written by Schreiner, just over 5000 have been curated on the digital platform *Olive Schreiner Letters Online*. Her letters serve as a gateway into her world and in *Olive Schreiner Online* they refer to:

Her letters are an unparalleled resource for investigating colonialism under transition, feminism and socialism, prostitution, marriage, changing understandings of 'race' and capital, imperialism in southern Africa, the South African War, women's franchise campaigns, 'race' and labour issues, international feminist networks, pacifism and war economies, political and economic change in South Africa post WW1, and much more. (Oliveschreiner.org)

Schreiner's letters reveal a personal side to her that is not always reflected in her published articles and novels. Many of her letters serve to maintain a connection with the receiver, to highlight political dissatisfaction and also to reveal her everyday living experiences, including personal challenges.

Letters to friends abroad, such as Mary Drew, Havelock Ellis, Erilda Cawood and Edward Carpenter, include descriptions of the Karoo landscape and the emotions Schreiner attaches to the landscape. These were letters which she had written shortly after her return to South Africa, after having been away for nearly eight years. The descriptions of the Karoo are usually filled with a tone of excitement and stem from years of pining to be on home soil. The landscape of the Karoo reconnects her to a sense of home. I feel that while she was abroad, she was always trying to find a landscape that she could connect with and as a result, she often voices her dissatisfaction with the place she is in. Often these places and spaces reflect a sense of claustrophobia and a disconnect with people and place. While articles and novels reveal Schreiner to be a critical thinker, a feminist, an advocate for the rights of women and minorities, her letters reveal a vulnerable side and at times show a woman lacking in confidence and suffering grief. The letters also shows a softer side to her and her affection for family and friends. Many of her letters focussing on landscape, reveal the freedom she associated with it and the freedom associated with its access to others. Her continuous reference to the landscape hints of her socialist attitude and that the land should be accessible to all. It is as if through her writing about the Karoo, Schreiner becomes the custodian of the Karoo.

Her repeated references to the Karoo often depict it in terms of the sublime. The early concept of the sublime draws its lineage from Longinus, followed by Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant. Longinus speaks of the sublime as being an inexplicable overwhelming feeling which a person experiences, Burke refers to the sublime as an object of terror which a person is drawn towards and Kant provides two definitions of the sublime: the mathematical sublime and the dynamic sublime. The mathematical sublime relates to something that is vast or shows greatness in size and the dynamic sublime relates to something that a person is drawn to and an unknowing

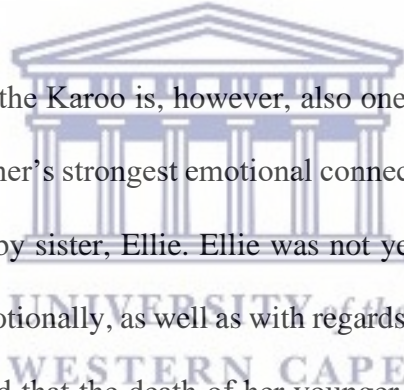
attraction. The landscape of the Karoo fulfils the characteristics of it being “of magnitude – of vastness in size and seeming limitlessness or infinitude in number” (Abrams 309); it is this characteristic of the Karoo that seems to generate a transcendental experience for Schreiner. Her Karoo landscape with its enormity and sense of limitless boundaries can therefore be defined by Kant’s definition of both the mathematical and dynamical sublime. The landscape which is untamed and natural provides Schreiner with a comfort that she cannot find in life. Anne McClintock comments that “the weird, compelling beauty of the Karoo gave Schreiner the lifelong respite of a metaphysical solace” (265). While she was living in Ganna Hoek, she wrote the following in a letter to Margaret McNaughton:

This is a wild beautiful place. The farm house is perched high up, on the side of one of the mountains & the bush which comes down to the very garden is as unman defiled as one could wish & wild as one can wish & I have only to teach for five or six hours a day & all the rest of my time I can spend out of doors, or in my own little room studying. (OS to Margaret McNaughton 24 September 1878)

This letter was written when Schreiner was 23 years old. She was already working on *African Farm* and had revised *Undine*. The elevated position of the farm house relates to her sense of a spiritual connection in being closer to God, but it also refers to the ability to take in all of the land from a sensory perspective. Her comment that it is “unman defiled” reveals her preference for an environment that is unspoiled by the hands of man. In another letter, written nine years later from England, she includes the elevated appeal of landscape again. While living in England, Schreiner moved around many times, showing herself to be a person who struggled to settle down, who couldn’t attach herself to a single place and was always searching for that ideal connection to the landscape. Yet it also reveals Schreiner as someone who was searching for a place that could connect her to the feeling of home. While living in England, she wrote to Havelock Ellis:

It is the first & only place I have seen in England that gives one that feeling – the feeling we both miss so here. It is a bare wild mountain top 2000 feet above the sea. You have that sense of solitude even though there are many people near you. (OS to H. Ellis 5 August 1887)

Schreiner had already been living abroad for six years and was perhaps trying to find a place that could help her to create a connection to the Karoo. The elevated feeling of being on the mountain in England can be compared to the elevated feeling she had on the *koppies* while overlooking the openness of the flat Karoo plains. It also includes the sense of being alone. Schreiner places her characters in her novels in elevated landscape positions: in the novella *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*, a lost trooper, Halket, finds himself alone on the “kopje” (*Peter Halket 2*) and the children in *African Farm* sit “on the side of the koppie” (*African Farm 13*). The spiritual association of being alone and in an elevated space creates a feeling of distancing oneself from the rest of humanity below and of being closer to the heavens and God. The overwhelming vastness of the Karoo illustrates the insignificance of humans in relation to God’s creation.



Schreiner’s personal history of the Karoo is, however, also one that reflects trauma connected to her childhood. One of Schreiner’s strongest emotional connections with the Karoo landscape stems from the death of her baby sister, Ellie. Ellie was not yet two years old when she died and this impacted Schreiner emotionally, as well as with regards to her stance on religion. Carol Barash wrote that “She believed that the death of her younger sister catalysed her break with orthodox Christianity, her move toward free-thought and mysticism” (Barash 6). Ellie’s death had a marked impact on Schreiner, which would last for years to come. In a letter to Erilda Cawood she wrote:

There’s a little bit of African earth which I took from my little sister Ellie’s grave more than twenty years ago, when I was a child and tied up in a silk rag. (OS to Erilda Cawood March 1888)

Schreiner had stored relics in a brown box of items that were important to her. The silk bag with the soil in it connected her to Ellie and to the Karoo. In another letter to her brother Will Schreiner she wrote of Ellie:

Will isn’t it strange that I’m only beginning to realize Ellie’s death now – my Ellies! Not the poor agonized soul & body for whom one is so grateful that it has found the everlasting sleep – but my

little sister whom I used to play dolls with & “sisters” at Heald town & Witteburg. Whom I shall never see again. (OS to Will Schreiner April 1912)

The realisation of Ellie’s death 47 years after her passing signifies that Schreiner was still haunted by her death all those years later and shows the deep connection she had with Ellie during her short life of less than two years. The impact of this realisation was life-changing for Schreiner in terms of her stance on Christianity, which in turn would indirectly impact her values regarding education; if the Bible no longer guided her spirituality, then it is fair to say it could no longer serve her as an educational aid. Schreiner’s early teen years were difficult and she began questioning her Christian upbringing. She was going through a confusing time but Spencer’s *First Principles* provided her with some clarity on life. In a letter to Betty Molteno she wrote:

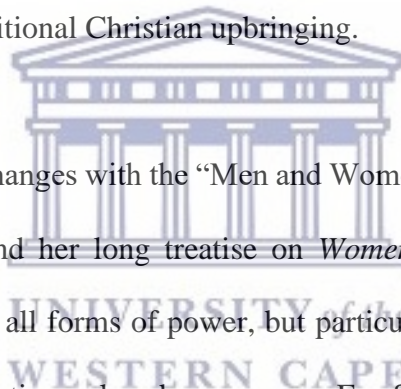
When I was sixteen and doubted everything, his *First Principles* showed me the unity of existence; but it was an intellectual aid, which I myself had to transmute into spiritual bread. (OS to Betty Molteno 24 May 1895)

The book opened a new world to her and its “impact conveyed to Schreiner the enormous power of ideas and their ability to traverse the specificities of time and place and influence people entirely unknown to an author” (Stanley and Salter XV). This “intellectual aid” provided her with a new and different perspective on the world around her. It was a new system of learning which she was exposing herself to. Her perseverance to better herself through a formal education would catapult her into an accomplished New Woman, a notable achievement considering that during Victorian times education for women was not considered a priority.

When Waldo questions Lyndall about the education she received at the finishing school for girls, his question opens a floodgate of critique on the role of women in society and their oppressed position. Lyndall did not in fact get the education which she had anticipated at the girls’ boarding school and comments that “they finish everything but imbecility and weakness, and that they cultivate” (*African Farm* 169). She continues to describe throughout the chapter how women are shaped, controlled and socialised to conform to patriarchy. She opposes the

typical Victorian woman's stance on marriage and rebels against the institution of marriage. She compares it to a form of prostitution and states "with good looks and youth marriage is easy to attain. There are men enough; but a woman who has sold herself, even for a ring and a new name, need hold her skirt aside for no creature in the street. They both earn their bread in one way" (*African Farm* 174). Marriage for a woman is regarded as a business transaction. The submissive image that Lyndall paints of the Victorian woman under a patriarchal society shows women as being dutiful and socially abiding. Lyndall points out that women do not have a choice in their own development and that they are shaped and moulded to conformity; she comments: "I have seen some souls so compressed that they would've fitted into a small thimble" (*African Farm* 169), "they begin to shape us to our cursed end" (*African Farm* 172) and "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" (*African Farm* 173). These comments indicate Lyndall's view that women are being suppressed and oppressed to conform to a social narrative driven by men. She highlights her stark awareness of the plight of women to Waldo who in turn shows sympathy towards her and other women. He listens attentively to her grievances without interrupting and shows an interest in what she is saying. The placing of his hand on her, watching "her intently" (*African Farm* 177) are indications that he is in support of her feminist ideologies and comments on her taking the lead for independence by saying "When you speak I believe all you say; other people would listen too" (*African Farm* 180). It is in this instance that Schreiner shows that the social environment between men and women is changing and that the voice of the woman will one day be strong enough for even men to pay attention. Schreiner's experience of living in the Karoo as a woman shows how she moves between quasi-religious freedom offered by the sublime landscape and the narrower discussion of political and social freedom.

Gerald Monsman states that “the South African landscape provided a source of emotional and narrative strength in Schreiner’s works and that it furnished her with the freedom to break away from these traditional notions of sex roles and sexual hierarchies” (Monsman xii). Although written during the Victorian times, which MH Abrams defines as a period characterised by “narrow-mindedness, sexual priggishness, the determination to maintain feminine ‘innocence’ (that is, sexual ignorance), and an emphasis on social respectability” (Abrams 329), Schreiner’s novel clearly writes against these Victorian mores. Lyndall’s unconventional traits replicate Schreiner’s passive rebellious nature and her position as a free thinker from a young age. In a letter to Havelock Ellis, she writes, with reference to her brother Theo, that “When I was ten & began to be a free-thinker he drifted away from me” (OS to Havelock Ellis 10 July 1884). Theo had distanced himself from Schreiner because of her new way of thinking which was steering her away from her traditional Christian upbringing.



Her letters, particularly her exchanges with the “Men and Women’s Club” in England between 1885 and 1886, her novels, and her long treatise on *Women and Labour* (1911), offer a significant set of reflections on all forms of power, but particularly on the psychological and intellectual impact of the limitations placed on women. For Schreiner, freedom for women relates to her claustrophobic experiences of womanhood, and in *African Farm* we are able to grasp the social injustices and oppression Schreiner experienced at the time. Schreiner uses the character Lyndall to reveal the injustice experienced by women. Lyndall expresses her realisation of the defined space which she occupies in the world when she comments to Waldo “but this one thought stands, never goes – if I might be but one of those born in the future; then, perhaps, to be born a woman will not to be born branded” (*African Farm* 171). Schreiner’s use of the word “branded” refers to being sadistically marked as a woman who is destined for confinement and ownership like the cattle or sheep on the farm. As a female, you are born into

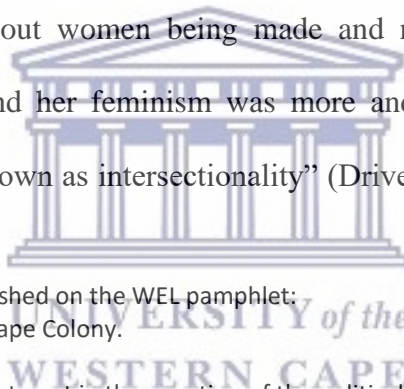
a world where the foundation for your position in society has already been prescribed. For Schreiner, this statement signifies her stance that there should be equality between men and women. She was a pioneer and spokesperson for the rights of women across all races in South Africa, nearly a century before the rights of women culminated in the historical march of 9 August 1956, where thousands of women from all over South Africa marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria. The march was a protest against the South African government which had passed a law forcing black women to carry a permit which allowed them access into urban white areas for work purposes. “You strike a woman, you strike a rock” is a key phrase which came out of the women’s freedom song sung at the march and shows the unmoving strength and determination that the women had to oppose the law. Schreiner also had a significant influence over South African women under apartheid. In her history of the Olive Schreiner Scholarship, founded to assist in furthering the education of all women, Mary Bock notes: “In 1955 a group of Olive Schreiner’s former friends and admirers of her work founded a scholarship for South African women: in accordance with her ideals of education for women and equality of opportunity for all peoples, the scholarship was open to South African woman, irrespective of race, colour or creed, who wished to study at a university in South Africa” (Bock 123). Schreiner explicitly wanted to leave an educational legacy for women of all races.

Schreiner’s initiation into the women’s rights movement began when she became involved in the Men and Women’s Club in England in 1885. She also wrote many articles and open letters regarding women’s enfranchisement and racial issues, some of which were sent to prominent organizations and politicians. These essays reflect Schreiner’s thoughts and ideas on the emancipation and the empowerment of women and the importance of women having a voice in the political realm of socio-economic governance. During the early 1900s she became a member of the Women’s Enfranchisement League (WEL). Her commitment to the league

“shows that she conceived the Woman Question as a whole, not just the franchise, but embracing women’s position in society and the existence of vast & vital human problems” (Stanley and Salter 165). Schreiner was concerned with the political representation of women of all races. Despite her initial commitment to the league, in 1912 she resigned from it “because of its campaign for franchise for white women only” (Barsby 7). On a WEL pamphlet she wrote to Ruth Alexander (Stanley and Salter 297):

It was not a personal matter that made me leave the society
The women of the Cape Colony all women of the Cape Colony
These were the terms⁴ on which I joined. (OS to Ruth Alexander January – March 1912)

Schreiner’s personal interest in and concerns about the social position of women is prominent in *African Farm*. Dorothy Driver comments that “*African Farm* provided a release on matters that she was struggling with in her personal life. Schreiner was a pioneering thinker – Lyndall’s statement in *African Farm* about women being made and not born predates Simone de Beauvoir’s by fifty years – and her feminism was more and more informed by an early articulation of what is today known as intersectionality” (Driver *Foreword* 12). According to



⁴ The following information was published on the WEL pamphlet:
Women’s Enfranchisement League, Cape Colony.

OBJECT. – To promote an intelligent interest in the question of the political enfranchisement of Women in Cape Colony, and advocate the granting of the vote to them on the same terms as men.

President: Mrs. A.N. Macfadyen, Plumstead.
Hon. Treasurer: Mrs. Solly, Sir Lowry’s Pass.
Hon. Secretary: Mrs. Chandos Pringle, Rhine Road, Sea Point.

WHY SHOULD WOMEN DEMAND THE FRANCHISE?

Because it is unjust that those women who are taxed equally with men should have no direct representation in the Parliament which decides how the public money should be raised and how it should be spent.
Because women, no less than men, must obey the laws.
Because some laws affect the interests of women specially.
Because women as a class must be the best judges of their own interests.
Because political experience shows that no large class of citizens is fully protected without a share in the making of the laws which affect them.

‘The Woman’s cause is man’s:
They rise or sink together,
Dwarfed or godlike,
Bond or free.’ - Tennyson. (www.schreineronline.org.za)

the *Merriam-Webster* dictionary, intersectionality is “the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups” (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intersectionality>). As such, oppression is the result of intersecting forms of exclusionary practices. Schreiner was aware of inequalities that overlapped between women across race groups. The WEL further segregated women of colour as they, the WEL, were only concerned about the voting rights of white women.

Schreiner’s unusual position in the early 1900s was in support of inclusivity and freedom for all women. In Victorian society, religion and education together served to control women in their thoughts, speech and behaviour. As Tina Barsby comments on Schreiner’s other novel, *Undine*, “the novel thus highlights how religious discipline was especially harsh for girls, combined as it was with Victorian notions of appropriate feminine behaviour. In a colonial context, such pressures on women are intensified” (Barsby 13). Similar sentiments are highlighted in *African Farm* with Tant Sannie’s insistence on the Bible being the only means of a virtuous and educational upbringing, while all other forms of reading material should be disposed of. This point was made evident when the book *Political Economy*, given to Waldo by Em, caused an uproar in the household, with Tant Sannie expostulating “Didn’t the minister tell me when I was confirmed not to read any book except my Bible and hymn-book, that the Devil was in all the rest?” (*African Farm* 91). Waldo’s book was to be destroyed in a fire. Schreiner was aware of the ways in which religion and education combine to prevent thought and enquiry.

Through her writing, Schreiner was able to share her childhood and real-life experiences of living in the Karoo as a Victorian woman with the world beyond the borders of South Africa. She offered a new perspective on how the arid and harsh landscape of the Karoo could be seen as nurturing and as a place of solace. She also, however, subtly introduced the reader to a woman writer who was aware of the colonial and politicised aspect of the landscape. Her depiction of the politics of the farm community, and of the harsh landscape as being “naked and bare” (*African Farm* 13) associates it strongly with anti-pastoral qualities. In *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa*, J.M. Coetzee argues that the South African landscape could not be viewed as pastoral by early novelists and landscape painters. For the landscape to be pastoral from a European perspective it would have to be presented as a garden of Eden and “it must portray white labour” (Coetzee 5). The Cape was originally regarded as a garden as presented by the Dutch East India Company in order to provide sustenance to passing trading ships. But further exploration into the interior of the land would find it to be the opposite; Coetzee notes the concern among settlers “that Africa might turn out to be not a Garden but an anti-Garden” (Coetzee 3). The inclusion and ill treatment of black labour in *African Farm* nullifies it as pastoral. It is this anti-garden with which Schreiner’s landscape is associated. Those who had previously written about pastoral life had based it on the Western ideals of a retreat, a space that provides sanctuary, a spiritual awakening. The pastoral tradition in particular does not recognize the labour that supports this idyll. Pastoral life is seen as an escape from civilisation and from the confines of societal pressures. Schreiner’s landscape is neither a sanctuary nor a space that provides spiritual awakening and it clearly depicts the black man or woman as a servant whose labour and sweat sustain that land while allowing colonialism to prosper. The landscape which she presents to the reader is a uniquely African one, and lacks the pastoral attributes associated with the Romantics. Coetzee’s further comment that Schreiner’s farm is a “dystopian” space – it does not hide the presence of black labour and

nor does it disguise the operation of unjust and arbitrary power is instantiated particularly in the figures of Tant Sannie and Bonaparte Blenkins. However, while Schreiner's anti-pastoral landscape might lack certain obvious visual traits associated with the Romantic traditions of landscape, there are underlying aspects it does indeed share, as I will discuss further in this dissertation.

Landscape in the Romantic Tradition

While the term "landscape" refers to the geographical and physical location of a particular area, with the strong visual elements to which painters respond, a literary definition of landscape considers the writer's relationship with a particular landscape that goes beyond the physical aspect it displays. Therefore, landscape is two tiered: the first tier being the physical, that which we as readers can see or visualise, and the second tier being the abstract, that which we cannot see but is linked to the human relationship which the writer has with it. I would approach this representational set of issues via the European traditions of landscape painting, as Coetzee does in *White Writing*. Janice Monk writes that "in creating landscapes we express our social and personal identities, so that landscapes come to reveal our tastes, values, aspirations, and even our fears" (Monk 24). As I will discuss later in the thesis, space is associated with a person's social relation to an environment while place is associated to a location. The sublime also figures not only in landscape art but in well-known 18th and early 19th century Gothic writing. Prominent Gothic writers include Ann Radcliff (*The Mysteries of Udolpho* 1794), Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (*Frankenstein* 1818) and the Brontë sisters (*Wuthering Heights* 1847 and *Jane Eyre* 1847).

In Emily Brontë's only published novel, *Wuthering Heights*, for example, the sublime landscape plays an integral part in the narrative and becomes a euphoric gateway for Catherine

and Heathcliff's relationship. They would "run away to the moors in the morning and remain there all day" (Bronte 50). Similarly, the children in *African Farm* find their escape from the farm on the *koppies*. While the sublime space of the moors is associated with tempests and danger, to Catherine and Heathcliff it serves as an antidote to the social constructs and a counterpoint to a judgemental world. The social world which Heathcliff and Catherine belong to is an environment that is controlling and stifling. Schreiner's treatment of the landscape is however less idealised than Brontë's. While landscape in her first novel also forms an integral part of the narrative, it is not met with the same sense of elation experienced by Heathcliff and Catherine. Schreiner's landscape is not unequivocally the sublime one of *Wuthering Heights*, nor one that yields pastoral characteristics of European traditions in landscape paintings.

The Karoo landscape does not reflect the Romantics' view of a country life "represented as innocent, the symbol of an easier past, contrasted with the inherent corruption of the city or court" (Hayes 83). However, in her letters where she writes of the Karoo landscape, the notion of the sublime becomes more prominent. In the preface to *Landscape and Power*, WJT Mitchell comments that "landscape exerts a subtle power over people, eliciting a broad range of emotions and meanings that may be difficult to specify" (Mitchell vii). The inability to describe these emotions refers to an element of the sublime. There are many moments in Schreiner's letters in which she expresses a more familiar "Romantic" attitude to the South African landscape as a sublime space associated with metaphysical upliftment and psychic freedom. In a letter to Havelock Ellis, Schreiner comments, "yes our African sky gives one the same sense of perfect freedom & wild exhilaration; sometimes one feels as though, for no reason that could be given, one were almost in an ecstasy of happiness when one goes out alone. Here one never is alone" (OS to Havelock Ellis 24 March 1884). The aspect of "no reason that could be given" alludes to the sublime. Schreiner's euphoric view of the South African landscape gives her the

sense of freedom which she failed to experience in England. Her comment that “one is never alone” suggests a sense of social entrapment which she experiences amongst the English people. Her longing for the African landscape is an antidote to the social landscape of England. In another letter she comments “It is curious, & to me very attractive this mixture of civilization & the most wild untamed freedom; the barren mountains & wild Karroo & the railway train” (OS to Havelock Ellis 25 March 1890). The combination of “curious” and “attractive” shows an incomprehensible magnetism towards the unknown that is made up of an eclectic mix of both civil and wild. Schreiner and Brontë shared a similar attitude towards landscape. For Brontë, her experience of living in the countryside, the stark and lonely personal life that she led, is similar to the life of the older Catherine in *Wuthering Heights*. In her Diary Paper (July 30, 1841), Emily Brontë wrote, “It is Friday evening – near 9 o'clock – wild rainy weather I am seated in the dining room 'alone'”. She is not actually alone as her family, which includes her father, aunt and housekeeper, are in the house at the time. Brontë is so absorbed in the tumultuous weather that she blocks out all others in her presence. It is on the landscape of the moors that she finds most pleasure. Four years later Brontë wrote that “though the weather was broken, we enjoyed ourselves very much,” (Emily Brontë's Diary Paper, Thursday, July 30, 1845). In a letter, Ellen Nussey comments of Bronte, “On the top of a moor or in a deep glen Emily was a child in spirit for glee and enjoyment;” (Shorter 179) and “a spell of mischief also lurked in her on occasions when out on the moors” (Shorter 179). We see that both Schreiner and Brontë had an affinity for their environment.

Other nineteenth century English writers in the Romantic tradition, such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, drew on the relationship between landscape and nature and human experiences. In Coleridge's poem, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, for example, the sea is shown as a force of nature that cannot be controlled by man, and reveals

how the relationship between man and nature is intertwined. The poem in its entirety provides an understanding of geographics, history and “colonial expansion” (Rudolph 187). Similarly, the manner in which Schreiner writes of the Karoo landscape attaches the same aspects of geography, history and colonial expansion as *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Schreiner’s unique landscape of the Karoo informs the reader of a past without colonialism as well as the pitfalls of colonialism, but also how the land with its environment dictates the conditions under which people live. People who live in the extreme conditions of the Karoo have no control over how nature behaves, and are at its mercy. The farm in *African Farm* experiences “the great drought, the year of 1862” (*African Farm* 13). The harsh landscape of the Karoo plays a pivotal role in the dynamics of the characters and despite its harshness, it is this landscape that keeps them connected to each other. The dystopian environment of the farm is the homing beacon for the characters. Despite all the disappointments and the abuse that the farm offers, the characters return because it is the place which helps them to find each other.

While Coleridge may have been able to distance himself from the mariner’s experience of his environment, Schreiner’s harsh Karoo landscape was her reality. Knowing that this reflects her true environment, the emotional effect on the reader is not the same as that on the reader of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. As a reader, I am more empathetic with Schreiner’s characters. Her landscape carries a message of truth which she wants her reader to be aware of. She uses the landscape to convey to the reader the personal meaning and the connection that she has with it. I would argue that her realistic representation of the harsh Karoo landscape helps the reader to empathise not only with the youthful characters of *African Farm* but also with Schreiner as a woman. The effect of the Karoo landscape is to shape and influence the readers’ impression of a colonised landscape in her position as a colonist and in being colonised. The Karoo landscape is an ambivalent space: she loves the wildness, the freedom, and shares the

Romantic fascination with the sublime, however she is also deeply conscious of the Karoo as a social space, as an isolated and parochial environment in which petty oppressions flourish.

The name of the Karoo is derived from a Khoisan word 'karo' which means "land of thirst". In the context of the novel, the protagonists reveal a "thirst" for more than what their current life offers them. The Karoo landscape frames the complex relationship of people and place that defines a social world governed by cultural values and identity. Ann Summer's article "Visual Landscapes and Sensual Settings" in Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm*, draws on the 'self' as part of the natural environment and claims that there is an interconnectedness between the two. Summer "highlights powerful resonances between human subjects and their environment" (Summer 143). Schreiner's interest in the natural environment was greatly influenced by Herbert Spencer, Charles Darwin and Ralph Waldo Emerson whose written works encouraged her to view the natural world from a deeper perspective than what she could physically see. Their philosophies and ideologies on science and the natural world were deployed in her initial writing. In *African Farm*, Schreiner shows an awareness of the evolution of animals and plants (influenced by Darwin). For example, Waldo comments "there on the flat stone, on which we have so often sat to weep and pray, we look down, and we see it covered with the fossil footprints of great birds, and the beautiful skeleton of a fish" (*African Farm* 131). The human connection to the landscape and to the environment can best be understood in the following extract:

We walk in the great hall of life, looking up and round reverentially. Nothing is despicable – all is meaning-full; nothing is small – all is part of a whole, whose beginning and end we know not. The life that throbs in us is a pulsation from it; too mighty for our comprehension, not too small. (*African Farm* 133)

The extract is taken from the chapter "Times and Seasons" and sums up Schreiner's thoughts on the natural environment and human connectivity: our environment is what gives us life and

gives us purpose.⁵ There is unity between nature and people. It is the physical earth “that throbs in us.” In the final chapter of the novel she uses the term “throb” again: “you feel the throb of her life” (*African Farm* 297). Nature is the heartbeat that provides life and it is the source to which life eventually returns. The use of Darwin’s philosophy in Schreiner’s writing highlights a renewed direction she was taking as a Victorian woman writer.

Schreiner showed a strong interest in Darwin’s theory of evolution in her encounters with religion and the natural environment. She provides examples of evolution in terms of the animals and the formation of the land in *African Farm*. Darwin (1809 – 1882) explains “the history and diversity of life on earth” (Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy – online) and Darwinism reveals “doubts about the truth of religious beliefs, and in some instances, a reversion to strict biblical fundamentalism” (Abrams 329). Schreiner’s interest in Darwin’s scientific approach to exploring the beginnings of life reveals her new direction in understanding the birth of human existence in a way other than from a religious perspective. Darwinism shows that all living entities including humans evolve over time and that as humans we have a deep connection with our natural environment. As fascinated as she was with Darwinism, Schreiner’s intellectual interests gradually moved away from the theories of Spencer and Darwin, as they did not concern themselves with the moral social responsibilities that she was concerned with.

Schreiner’s use of landscape in the novel combines the protagonists and their selves as a means of expressing the different types of relationships which they have with their environment. The

⁵ Recent studies have shown that the activities we do to electrically connect to the Earth are also known as a technique called “grounding” or “earthing”. By being in physical contact with the Earth (by being barefoot), we connect to the Earth’s electrical charges which influence us in a positive way. "The Central Theory from one review study is that grounding affects the living matrix, which is the central connector between living cells" (<https://www.healthline.com/health/grounding#the-science>).

characteristics of the Karoo landscape influence how Waldo and Lyndall identify with the environment. As Janice Monk suggests, landscape incorporates the “natural and cultural features we see around us, and [...] has personal and cultural meaning” (Monk 23). Monk identifies three related themes for research done on women and landscape: women and nature, women and environment, and women and space. The connection between women and nature stems from theories that characterise nature as female and therefore the connection between women and nature is seen as an extension of the female self. Monk refers to Carolyn Merchant who links “contemporary environmental concerns with women by suggesting that both give particular significance to the concept of home” (Monk 25). Women and space refers to the domestic space that women occupy, be it urban or suburban, public or private, and the gender associations and the gender ideology attached to the space. These three themes that Monk identifies relating to landscape feature prominently in *African Farm*. Lyndall represents the social changes which women were confronting in a rural colonised landscape. She questions the position of women in a patriarchal society and demonstrates a movement towards the independence of women. Lyndall represents a forceful and independent character who challenges gender-defined spaces as well as male authority, thus breaking the “ground rules.” With reference to woman and space, the space of the farm is shown to be a patriarchal rural home which creates a division of labour for men and women. The farm is associated both with a space that highlights the concept of home, as well as with socially gender-defined spaces. The external landscape outside of the farm is viewed as a space which offers a promise of freedom and independence, despite being steeped in other social aspects such as culture, history and geology.

Writers frame aspects of culture, history and geology through their depiction of landscape and has been explored by John Sutherland and others. With reference to Jane Austen, Sutherland

comments that “Austen acknowledges in her writing that any conception of ‘landscape’ is inextricably bound up with human presence and human purpose and human idiosyncrasy” (Sutherland 17). Similarly, Schreiner’s Karoo landscape displays characteristics that resonate with her personal experience which is rooted in the cultural, the historical and the social. These, along with aspects of Darwin’s theory of evolution of the animal kingdom, are all evident in the scene in which Waldo, Lyndall and Em are sitting on the side of the *koppie* under a shelving rock. Here, they are able to see “some old Bushman paintings, their red and black pigments having been preserved through long years from the wind and rain by the overhanging ledge; grotesque oxen, elephants, rhinoceroses and a one horn-horned beast, such as no man ever has seen or ever will” (*African Farm* 13). As Dorothy Driver commented:

Schreiner started reading Darwin during her period as a governess in the 1870s, and Plato during the 1880s. Her reading in Darwin was massively influential. Specifically, his *The Variation of Animals and Plants Under Domestication* and *On the Origin of Species* gave her an understanding of the theory of reversion, latency and the interdependence of all organic beings, which deeply informed her notion of history (for her, evolution was part of history) and the development of the individual subject. And then her reading in Plato gave her a way of understanding evolution as progress, for she introduced the notion of progress into an evolutionary science that was generally non-teleological, and also of pursuing a quasi-divine ‘copy within’, for it was this ‘copy’ or ‘ideal’ which served as both an origin and an end for the human subject. (Driver *From Man to Man* 125)

While Darwin was focused on natural selection of life from a biological perspective, Spencer adapted the idea that “only the fittest survived” to an analysis of human society. Schreiner draws on Darwin’s and Plato’s ideas as part of her storytelling in *African Farm*. Her inclusion of their ideas allows her to mediate between present life and the past, suggesting that all living things eventually do evolve, including humans and landscape.

As mentioned before, Schreiner was aware of the politics of land. With reference to 18th century landscape art, Stephen Bending argues that “landscapes were experienced quite differently because of class, gender, and education” and that we should acknowledge that the central concern of landscape art is actually about the self (Bending 1). I would like to add further to his argument by suggesting that besides class, gender and education we should also consider

the historical influence of the physical place that forms part of the discussion of landscape. South Africa has always been, and is still, embroiled in heated debates around the ownership of land as a result of the Natives Land Act 1913 (this will be dealt with in chapter 2). Prominent activists and leaders such as John Dube (1871 – 1946), Sol Plaatje (1876 – 1932) and Mahatma Gandhi (1869 – 1948) had opposed the Act and strongly protested. Plaatje and Dube had travelled to London with a petition, though the attempt to have the Act overturned proved unsuccessful.

Schreiner touches on the ownership of land in *African Farm* through her inclusion of the Bushmen. The land of the Karoo is rooted in historical ownership, and there are indicators in the novel that recognition should be given to the predecessors of the land. Waldo's comment to Lyndall, "Lyndall, has it never seemed to you that the stones were talking with you?" (*African Farm* 19), serves as a reminder to the reader that there existed a previous culture and society that should be acknowledged. Waldo's comment together with the painted Bushman art in the caves documents their culture and existence in the novel.

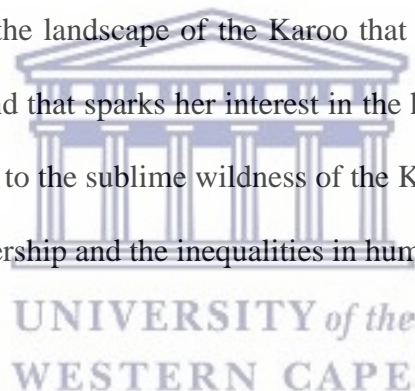
Other South African writers and artists such as Chris Mann, Walter Battiss and Ernst van Heerden have also paid homage to the historical inhabitants of the Karoo landscape by incorporating them in their writing and their art. In Mann's poem "Cookhouse Station," the landscape connects people or visitors coming into the area to local culture and experiences. He tells the reader to "make certain you see / the shades of those who once lived there, / squatting in the cool of the bluegum tree / at ease in the fellowship of the after-death." "The shades" is a reference to the spirits of the ancestors (Eve 192). Mann acknowledges those who have previously dwelled on the land and wants others to do the same. Eve comments that it "encompasses something beyond the here and now and suggests that all time and space are

interconnected” (Eve 193). If you are in the presence of objects or elements of a past experience, you are connecting to its history. *African Farm* elicits these experiences when the children are in the natural environment of the Karoo.

Battiss, a well-known South African artist and writer, was known for his paintings that commemorated the work of the Bushmen. His paintings often replicated their paintings. In an untitled poem he writes, the “Karoo mountains – fierce beauty for the initiated only” (Eve 195). The words “fierce beauty” indicate the presence of the sublime, bringing us back to Schreiner’s opening paragraph where she describes the landscape as an “oppressive beauty” (*African Farm* 3). The Karoo, very much like the moors in *Wuthering Heights*, can be linked to experiences of the sublime which I will be discussing at a later stage. Van Heerden’s “Karooonag” (Karoo Night) provides a glimpse into the tranquillity of the landscape at night. The peace and the silence are introduced similarly to the way in which Schreiner introduces *African Farm*. Like Mann, he too provides homage to those who have passed; “Rest in peace: pioneers and roadbuilders, waggoners and stockmen, townsfolk, and my mum and dad” (Eve 198). In paying homage is a way to connect and honour the past people and their history.

In *African Farm* landscape is viewed in its totality and not as a series of disparate elements. Schreiner’s Karoo landscape is not only focussed on the *koppie*, the dusty rocks or the dusty and red veld. The landscape also includes what lies beneath the surface – the history of its formation and the relationship with people. It is the combination of all of these elements that makes up her landscape. The individual elements do, however, also elicit their own sense of connection with Schreiner’s self. The *koppie* that Waldo sits on and the mountain that Lyndall longs for when she is dying provide a sense of being closer to the heavens and closer to God; the spiritual aspect of the landscape. (Schreiner’s place of burial, at the top of a *koppie* known

as Buffelskop, which overlooks Cradock, connects her to the Karoo even after her death). The Bushmen's rock art serves to make us aware of our predecessors and as a reminder of the impact of colonialism, the cultural and historical aspect of landscape. The dried-out lands that were once lakes show the evolution of the land and the continuous change it is undergoing. The same applies to all living entities animals, plants and humans. It is the combination of these elements which creates the Karoo landscape that Schreiner is connected to and sees the development of the self through this connection. As Jeanette Eve observes, "Schreiner's first home witnessed the dawn of her consciousness of self and of the natural world around her" (Eve 248). For Schreiner, there is a sense of comfort and peace in the Karoo. Coetzee comments on this connection as the "idea, that when people are 'at home in' or 'at harmony with' a particular landscape, that landscape speaks to them and is understood by them" (Coetzee 10). As I argue in this thesis, it is the landscape of the Karoo that is in conversation with Olive Schreiner in her early works and that sparks her interest in the human/landscape relationship. Schreiner reveals her attraction to the sublime wildness of the Karoo but also an awareness of contestations over land, its ownership and the inequalities in human relations.



CHAPTER ONE: THE STORY OF AN AFRICAN FARM

“When I behold a rich landscape, it is less to my purpose to recite correctly the order and superposition of the strata, than to know why all thought of multitude is lost in a tranquil sense of unity.”

(Ralph Waldo Emerson, www.emersoncentral.com)

In this chapter I will offer a close reading of the way in which landscape features as both “anti-pastoral” and also potentially liberating for the oppressed child-figures in *The Story of an African Farm*. Landscape frames the social environment, segregating and articulating how it is occupied and by whom. Following Mark Sanders’ suggestion, I will read the figures of both Lyndall and Waldo as “feminized,” and will consider the ways in which the physical space of the farm offers both relief from gendered oppression, and subjection to it. The connection between gender and landscape frames the complexities surrounding the social hierarchies and colonial discourse that brings the voice of the ‘New Woman’ to the fore within the novel. Dissatisfied with the limited role that feminised figures occupied, Schreiner’s novel paved the way for her emergence as a feminist who challenged the lack of women’s rights and equality in a social landscape moulded by patriarchy. Her experience of living in the harsh landscape of the Karoo provided her with the opportunity to disclose these gender inequalities, while simultaneously highlighting the impact of colonialism on the indigenous people and the land. Both women and the indigenous people can be viewed as analogues for one another, as both represent oppressed groups that are subjected to the impact of colonialism and patriarchy, respectively. Scott and First comment that the Karoo landscape “contained and expressed the passage of time, and the originality of *The Story of an African Farm* lay in its attempt to present time as experience and to give that experience a historical dimension” (Scott and First 92). While the passage of time is evident in the landscape, Schreiner presents an essential unity between people and nature that she believes is obscured by racial and gender inequality.

The Story of an African Farm, first published in 1883 by Chapman and Hall and under the pseudonym Ralph Irons, is widely recognised as among the first South African novels published. Critics have lauded Schreiner as “a South African literary icon” (Lewis 7), “South Africa’s first major novelist” (Driver 9) and “the great antipastoral writer” (Coetzee 4). The name Ralph Iron is derived from the name of the American philosopher and writer, Ralph Waldo Emerson (Waldo is also the name given to the principal male protagonist in the novel). This highlights from the outset one of the influences used in Schreiner’s writing, and points towards her intellectual interests. The novel reveals Schreiner’s interest in the emergence of female subjectivity through the protagonist, Lyndall, in a landscape which is moulded by social hierarchies. Perhaps Andrew van der Vlies’s elaborate description of the novel as being “South African farm novel, new woman fiction, Dickensian farce, naturalist tragedy, colonial gothic, Victorian melodrama, allegorical tale, spiritual autobiography and neo-transcendentalist novel of ideas” (“BSANZ 2020: Andrew van der Vlies: Olive Schreiner and the (Anti-)Colonial Southern-Hemisphere Sublime” 02:14–02:28) demonstrates how complex *African Farm* is and describes how the novel crosses so many genres. While van der Vlies’s description provides a broad sense of what the novel deals with, my own reading narrows it down as Emersonian in its sense of transcendental “unity” offered by the landscape.

I suggest that Schreiner’s first novel foregrounds both the promise of a sublime landscape and its failure. The promise of space for Schreiner, her desire to be a realist in a truer sense than that of Victorian realism, is closer to the complexity of daily life in a South African context. *African Farm* cannot be truly viewed as Victorian Realism because the concept was formulated from a European perspective and excludes the impact of colonialism’s use of indigenous people as labour. For J.M. Coetzee, Schreiner is a key example of what it means to write against the European landscape tradition. Coetzee elaborates on the presentation of the South African farm

in Schreiner's novel as being anti-pastoral, and, she rejects the notion of a pastoral colonial farm as written by white writers. The farm is treated as anti-pastoral as it reveals elements of racism, gender inequality, language barriers, divisions of labour and the ill treatment of children and adults. Schreiner shows the farm as a dystopian space but one which holds a promise of deep history, of open space and of liberation, which Schreiner often mentions in her numerous letters and which links to the notion of the sublime. It is these elements which create a sense of unity that Schreiner observes in the open landscape of the Karoo. What Schreiner does with the landscape is to show that the deep history, the dystopian social space, the sublime religious feeling and ancient societies are all blended together by the "unity" of landscape, a philosophical point of view that reflects her influence by Ralph Waldo Emerson. The essence of unity shows that there is an interconnectedness between people and nature.

Schreiner drew great inspiration from Emerson and this is evident not only in the pseudonym she used when publishing the novel or in her choice of name of the protagonist, but also in the strong traces of Emerson's beliefs which come across in her writing. Historian Grant Wacker describes Emerson's belief regarding God as "best understood as a spirit, an ideal, a breath of life; everywhere and always filling the world with the inexhaustible power of the divine presence" ("How Does Nature by Emerson Relate to Transcendentalism?"). Emerson, along with Henry David Thoreau, was one of the early founders of Transcendentalism, a philosophical movement that began during the 19th century. The philosophy provided an alternative to stringent Christian principles and practices and "advocated the idea of a personal knowledge of God, believing that no intermediary was needed for spiritual insight. They embraced idealism, focusing on nature and opposing materialism" ("Transcendentalism"). As my discussion about *African Farm* will show, the protagonists Lyndall and Waldo both embrace "Emerson's five elements of Transcendentalism which are non-conformity, self-reliance, free thought, confidence and the importance of nature" (www.emersoncentral.com).

The focus of Transcendentalism was on man's ability to be liberal in thought and practice, to embrace individualism, to be self-reliant and to find spirituality in nature.

Reading History

It was not only Emerson, however, who had an impact on Schreiner's writing. In *African Farm*, reference is made to various titles of books and authors such as J.S. Mills' *Political Economy* (*African Farm* 86), Matthew Fontaine Maury's *The Physical Geography* (*African Farm* 18), the mathematician and astronomer Copernicus (*African Farm* 49), *The Illustrated London News* (*African Farm* 155), *Black-eyed Creole* (*African Farm* 245), *First Principles* by Herbert Spencer (*African Farm* 245), *Faust* and *Iphigenie* by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (*African Farm* 176) and Shakespeare (*African Farm* 272). Her inclusion of these well-known philosophers and authors provides the reader with a glimpse of what material Schreiner was reading and how she was developing her interests and her philosophical beliefs about the individual and the natural environment. Writing about Schreiner's work on her novel *Undine* (1929) – written before *African Farm* – Tony Voss notes other writers and novels of interest to Schreiner were *The Wide Wide World*, an 18th century Bildungsroman by Susan Bogert Warner, works by Elizabeth Barret Browning, and *Arabian Nights* (Voss 14). Her list of reading material while employed as a governess at the Robinsons in Dordrecht allowed her to familiarise herself with “contemporary European theology, science and anthropology” (First and Scott 60). While in Dordrecht, she was able to expand her reading interests and First and Scott indicate that she was also reading “Buckle's *History of Civilization in England*, four volumes of *The Spanish Conquest of America*, Liddle's *Student's Rome* and Carl Vogt's very influential *Lectures on Man*” (Scott and First 60). In Cradock, she was able to borrow Darwin's *Variation of Plants and Animals* from the Cradock library. Schreiner had an affection for the Cradock library and in a letter to Erilda Cawood she comments “That dear little library! When I am rich I am going to send out £50 for it! It has given me more help and pleasure than

anything else in my life almost” (OS to Erida Cawood 19 March 1886). In *African Farm* Waldo too subscribes to a library and he writes in a letter intended for Lyndall, “I hired a little room and subscribed to a library, so I had everything I needed” (*African Farm* 251). Schreiner’s expansive intellectual knowledge and engagement at such a young age helped her to develop and express her ideas freely. She was, however, also limited in discussing these ideas: “she did not reveal all her thinking; she had apparently already experienced the limits of intellectual tolerance in these colonial communities” (First and Scott 61). For Schreiner to openly express her new-found thoughts and ideas would have been frowned upon in a society that stifled the intellectual development of women. Ultimately, her new way of thinking provided her with a foundation for challenging her position in a patriarchal society which placed limitations on the development of women, and she used the novel as a means of presenting these challenges.

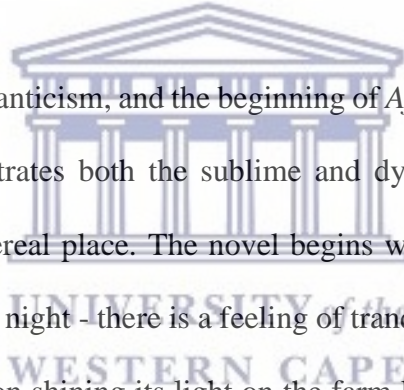
Literary genres the novel employs

Schreiner’s interesting and diverse literary influences were fused in the novel which showcases various literary genres as van der Vlies has already indicated. In writing *African Farm*, it is clear from the beginning that Schreiner intended the novel to break with the traditions of 19th century Victorian literature. As the writer Richard Rive commented on *African Farm*, “With its publication it not only challenged traditional values by its very nature, but it gave a breath of vision never experienced in a South African novel before” (Rive 238). *African Farm* displays elements of being a farm novel (plaasroman) or a Bildungsroman, but I believe neither of these genres provides a just description of the novel. Although most of the plot developments do take place on the farm or in close proximity to the farm, it lacks the “true intimacy” (Coetzee 63) associated with farm life. The plaasroman has its roots in the Afrikaner farmer or boer who is absorbed in the work and life of the farm. It is concerned “almost exclusively with the farm and *platteland* (rural) society, with the Afrikaner’s painful transition

from farmer to townsman” (Coetzee 63). Schreiner’s farm is a sheep farm but the labour and the struggles of the male farmer, in this case represented by Tant Sannie, do not form a strong part of the discourse of the novel. The farm forms a backdrop to the oppressive relationships that exist. Schreiner’s farm represents a colonialist’s farm which therefore, when coupled with the fact that the novel was written by a colonialist, provides an outsider’s point of view and is merely suggestive of farm life. Although it displays elements of a plaasroman, it does not fulfil the true essence of this genre.

In *A History of the Bildungsroman*, Sarah Graham addresses how the genre has developed and been adapted across various countries such as Germany, France, Britain, America and Russia. Since its inception in Germany during the 18th century, it has been used by many writers to record the development of an individual from their youthful stage to adulthood, while encompassing the social environment which they find themselves in. Graham defines the traditional view of the Bildungsroman as one that “traces its protagonist’s journey to social integration and success” (Graham 3). *African Farm* begins with the formative years of the protagonists and then takes the reader on their journey of self-discovery along with the triumphs and losses which they experience. At first the novel seems to be a Bildungsroman but deliberately fails to develop in this direction, given that the social structures which would support such a narrative remain dystopic and unjust. Both Waldo and Lyndall appear to be outsiders and neither one of them feels as though they belong in the social environment of the farm. They also fail to develop the social skills to integrate and accept their lifestyle on the farm. If we were to measure the “social integration and success” (Graham 3) aspect of a Bildungsroman against the protagonists of *African Farm*, then the novel fails to comply with this genre. Both characters fail to achieve adult successes in social integration and they both die fairly young, I feel that *African Farm* therefore does not conform to the European definition

of a Bildungsroman. The lives of both Waldo and Lyndall as adults are brief as they struggle to adapt and find their way in an oppressive social environment. In a letter to her brother Will, Schreiner admits that “Lyndall is a child of seventeen when she dies” (OS to William Schreiner 1918), not quite an adult. I feel that the novel draws on a few genres but never quite attaches itself to a single one, instead invoking a combination of the plaasroman, Bildungsroman, romance, and tragedy. Perhaps as Barsby indicates, it “can best be understood as a novel of ideas” (Barsby 33) that explores Schreiner’s new way of thinking, a way of thinking which challenged social conformity. Richard Rive’s comment that “literature does not lend itself to a prescribed formula, and there is no reason why a writer cannot use interpolations in the body of a work” (Rive 240) points out Schreiner’s ability as a writer to create characters and a story that is original and relatable to the current social situation of the time.



There are also elements of Romanticism, and the beginning of *African Farm* reads like the start of a Romantic novel and illustrates both the sublime and dystopian potential of the farm, delivering to the reader an ethereal place. The novel begins with a description of the Karoo landscape and how it appears at night – there is a feeling of tranquillity and peacefulness about the farm. The image of the moon shining its light on the farm like a spotlight is a fitting way to introduce an important feature of the novel:

The full African moon poured down its light from the blue sky into the wide, lonely plain. The dry, sandy earth, with its coating of stunted karoo-bushes a few inches high, the low hills that skirted the plain, the milk bushes with their long, finger like leaves, all were touched by a weird and an almost oppressive beauty as they lay in the white light. (*African Farm* 3)

The romanticised image of the moon shining its light on the plain is however undermined by Schreiner’s use of words such as “lonely,” “dry,” “stunted,” and “oppressive.” These words offer a sombre and depressing image of the environment but provide an apt description of the children in the novel who are shown to be lonely, stunted in personal growth and oppressed by a patriarchal society. Schreiner’s description of the moon as being “African” creates the

impression that the moon belongs to Africa, the continent where, according to Charles Darwin, human beings originated⁶. The first sentence provides an instant indication of the loneliness which one can experience in the Karoo. The use of the comma placed between “wide” and “lonely plain,” although grammatically correct, subtly creates an emphasis on the vastness of the environment but also on the emptiness and isolation that is connected to it.

“Moonlight” is mentioned eight times in the first few pages of the novel, but it is the effects of the moonlight on the human figures and the landscape that are most intriguing. The word “poured” creates a sense of generosity that is needed by the “lonely plain.” The moonlight also provides a false image of the people and the landscape. The moonlight is cast as an omniscient presence that seems to pour down its light, creating a “dreamy beauty” (*African Farm* 3) of the farmhouse, softening the imprisoning brick wall that surrounds it and majestically illuminates the zinc metal sheeting of the roof. It hides the “defects here as elsewhere” and gives Lyndall, who is otherwise freckle-faced with a “low forehead and a face of freckles” an “elfin-like beauty” (*African Farm* 4). The introduction of the Karoo farm bathed in the moonlight hides the harsh reality of the farmhouse and its inhabitants. “The moon is one of the “two great lights” made by God on the fourth day. According to Genesis 1.16, the sun and the moon are described respectively as “the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night” (Ferber 129) and the same opposition is reflected in what Schreiner says when she comments, “the farm by daylight was not as the farm by moonlight” (*African Farm* 6). It is during the day that the truth of the farm life and of its people is revealed. The “loving moonlight hid defects” (*African Farm* 4) and softens the harshness of reality whereby “the sunlight had no mercy” (*African Farm* 7). The imagery of the moon masks the social dysfunction that takes place on

⁶ “The idea that humans evolved in Africa can be traced to Charles Darwin. In his 1871 book *The Descent of Man*, Darwin speculated that it was “probable” that Africa was the cradle of humans because our two closest living relatives—chimpanzees and gorillas—live there” (www.smithsonianmag.com).

the farm. The moon at night in contrast to the sun during the day are binary opposites that can be linked to sun and moon symbolism. Susan Rowland's review of Howard Teich's *Solar Light, Lunar Light: Perspectives in Human Consciousness* remarks on the two natural lights "that have been historically used to justify gender difference, as in a solar masculine and lunar feminine" (Rowland 76). With the understanding that the lights represent gender differences, we can see that *African Farm* at night is in a peaceful state and during the day, when the harsh sunlight is streaming down on the farm, a polar opposite is revealed. The land basking in sunlight appears to be non-nourishing, infertile and unable to sustain life; a landscape used to frame a dysfunctional society and one that is governed by male power.

But it is not only male power that compromises sociality in the novel. As the novel moves between the different modes of storytelling (it shifts between storytelling, allegory and semi-autobiography) it also identifies the social mores of religion, gender, culture and colonialism to demonstrate the power that these aspects offer. These were the social challenges that Schreiner was dealing with in her environment in the Karoo. As a young person, she struggled to fit in with the norms of society and the novel reveals "an attempt at accommodating the polarities of truth and dream, religion and freedom, male and female that were presenting themselves in Olive Schreiner's own life" (First and Scott 92). We see these polar complexities resurface throughout the novel with the lead protagonists Lyndall and Waldo. In the preface to the novel Schreiner comments, with reference to the artist or novelist, "But should one sit down to paint the scenes among which he has grown, he will find that facts creep in upon him" (*African Farm* xiv). This alludes to the idea that her writing holds some factual truth; a truth she is unable to distance herself from in her writing. Therefore, like an artist who "must paint what lies before him" (*African Farm* xiv), Schreiner must include her life experiences as part of her writing. It is therefore from the very beginning of the novel that *African Farm* sways

between fact and fiction and that the omniscient narrator lies close to Schreiner's own interests. The semi-autobiographical elements of the novel provide descriptions and experiences that touch on her personal life. It is not only the detailed description of the Karoo that awards it its semi-autobiographical quality, but it is also the names given to her characters and certain experiences that Schreiner includes, not only in *African Farm* but also in *Undine*, *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* and *From Man to Man*. Having written *African Farm* at such a young age, Schreiner reveals advanced intellectual ability and an awareness of her social environment. Jeanette Eve writes that "even in childhood, [Schreiner] bore the marks of a deep thinker who responded with sensitivity to the world around her and with questions about her place within it" (Eve 249). Although Eve is referring to Schreiner in her youthful days in Witteberg, these are the same characteristics expressed in the protagonist Lyndall. The novel carefully weaves Schreiner's real life experiences within the characters of Lyndall and Waldo and who equally share her journey in the Karoo.

A Brief Summary

The Story of an African Farm tells the story of Lyndall, who is orphaned and lives with two other children, Em and Waldo, on a farm in the Karoo. It deals with the physical and emotional hardships which the children experience while living on the farm. As Jeanette Eve comments, "All Schreiner's novels with the Eastern Cape settings feature children moving, often through harsh ordeals from innocence to experience, and often the age of innocence is linked to images from nature just as childhood experiences of nature were vitally important in the author's own nurturing" (Eve 250). Throughout the novel, the young children are often outside the physical parameters of the farm where they are able to freely explore and share their thoughts and ideas. The novel is divided into two parts: the first part reveals the children on a Karoo farm and touches on their struggles and aspirations; the second part deals with the

departure of two of the children, Lyndall and Waldo, while Em remains on the farm. Lyndall is Em's cousin and both girls are under the guardianship of Tant Sannie who is also Em's stepmother. Tant Sannie rules the farm with an iron fist and ensures that the children's education is based on the Bible. Bonaparte Blenkins' arrival on the farm introduces a strong patriarchal figure whose intention is to take over the farm and to replace Waldo's father Otto,⁷ the German overseer. Blenkins, a stranger who arrives on the farm and resides there for a short while, charms, lies to and manipulates Tant Sannie into firing Otto so that he can be the overseer on the farm. His comment to Waldo, "I am to be master of this farm now" (*African Farm* 79) indicates his pride in accomplishing stepping into this position of power. Blenkins is a self-indulgent man who fabricates grand tales of personal success to elevate his social status. It is Lyndall who at the very beginning of Blenkins' stay on the farm questions his honesty when she mentions to Otto that if "he had walked for only one day his boots would not have looked so" (*African Farm* 26), referring to his boots that were so broken that "through which the flesh shone" (*African Farm* 26). Her suspicions were however dismissed by Otto. The opinions and ideas of children are often dismissed throughout the novel. Under adult authority the children are treated poorly. They are part of the labour force (Waldo), have minimum access to education, and are locked up or beaten for improper behaviour. Waldo appears to be the character who is subjected the most to the arbitrary power displayed by Blenkins and Tant Sannie. The inclusion of Blenkins and his abusive ways also demonstrates the position of the colonialist as a capitalist and as a saviour of the land. In a conversation he has with Otto, he mentions the discussion he had with his wife about Africa: "There is Africa, a struggling country; they want capital; they want men of talent; they want men of ability to open up that land. Let us go" (*African farm* 32). Although Africa is a continent, he states that it is a country. It shows his ignorance about the land and its people. But in whose eyes is Africa perceived to

⁷ The character of Otto is said to be based on Schreiner's father, Gottlob Schreiner.

be a struggling continent? Who is to say that the continent was struggling before the arrival of the colonists? To say that the country is struggling is used as an excuse to “open up,” to dig up and remove the diamonds or gold, to remove what belongs to Africa. The inclusion of Blenkin’s idea about the needs of Africa subtly informs the reader about the deception of colonialism and its ability to destroy the natural land and its resources through plunder. While this novel predates Schreiner’s personal relationship with Cecil John Rhodes, she was aware of the burgeoning mining empire which had begun to evolve in Kimberley in the 1870s and was aware of the atrocities taking place there that were feeding a capitalist society. Schreiner highlights this pursuit of capitalist wealth in *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*.

In *African Farm*, Blenkins’ lust for wealth and control leads him to lie about Otto. Otto is relieved of his position and dies early in the novel, leaving Waldo orphaned at a young age. Both Blenkins and Tant Sannie provide comic relief in a story that is contemplative and thought-provoking in nature. An example of this comic relief can be seen when Tant Sannie marries a younger man, Piet van der Walt, who calls her “aunt” and he recounts a dream his wife had before she died instructing him that he “must marry a fat woman” (*African Farm* 190) and one without a mole. This was his wife’s way of making sure he did not marry her sister who had a mole.

The chapter “Tant Sannie Holds an Upsitting and Gregory Writes a Letter” reveals a humorous and witty side to Schreiner’s writing style because she portrays the characters as being silly, stupid and lacking insight. The writing soon however diverts to the life challenges Waldo and Lyndall are facing. Waldo is portrayed as struggling with his faith in God, Lyndall struggles with the education of women and the place of women in society, and Em is a subdued character who is accepting of her traditional role as a woman in the domestic space of the farm. Waldo

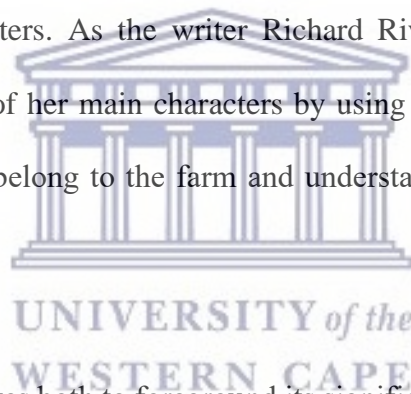
and Lyndall are the only two characters who leave the farm in pursuit of self-fulfilment. Lyndall is the first one to leave, seeking her independence and wanting to become educated. She returns to the farm and expresses her disappointment about her experiences to Waldo. At this point in the story a new man, Gregory Rose, arrives on the farm and he becomes engaged to Em. However, Em notices his interest in Lyndall and she breaks off her engagement to Gregory Rose. Waldo soon leaves the farm (after Tant Sannie's wedding) and it is the last time he sees Lyndall. On the morning of his departure he reflects on what his life on the farm was like; it was dull and repetitive. He seeks to have new experiences which will change his life for the better but he is uncertain as to how he can achieve this. There are no future prospects for him on the farm should Gregory Rose marry Em. He tells Lyndall, "I shall not stay here when he is master" (*African Farm* 182). The power dynamics on the farm will change if Gregory Rose becomes the new master; his newly acquired position on the farm will ensure that Waldo remains in his menial position of simply being a farmhand. Waldo therefore leaves the farm to get a "taste of life" (*African Farm* 209) and to create a new experience for himself.

He was leaving them all to that old life, and from his height he looked down on them pityingly. So they would keep on crowing, and coming to light fires, when for him that old colourless existence was but a dream. (*African Farm* 212)

After Waldo leaves, a stranger, whom Lyndall had previously had a relationship with, arrives at the farm and Lyndall then leaves with him. After a few months Gregory Rose also leaves the farm, in search of Lyndall. He finds her but she is very ill, having suffered the loss of her baby after giving birth. He disguises himself as a nurse so that he can care for her but Lyndall eventually succumbs to her illness and dies at the foot of the blue mountain. When Waldo returns to the farm, he is told about Lyndall's death. Shortly after this we assume that Waldo also dies, for when Em places the glass of milk beside him Schreiner writes, "He will wake soon," she said, 'and be glad of it.' But the chickens were wiser" (*African Farm* 300). The fate of Waldo and Lyndall is tragic as they both never achieve the meaningful existence they sought outside the social confines of the farm.

The Farm

The farm in *African Farm* is central in the development of the characters. The physical environment in the novel is observed from the domestic space of the household on the farm and from the outdoors, the land beyond the borders of the farm. The various spaces also reflect how the children connect with each other. The space which the children occupy outside of the farm is one where they are free to question authority, to question or discuss the creation of the world, to validate the existence of God and to find their individual purpose in life and their place in the broader world outside of the farm. It is the land beyond the farm's borders that offers a different perspective to the social world experienced by the children on the farm. The space which they occupy on the farm is filled with religious indoctrination, abuse and intellectual inhibition. Yet it is the farm that holds the story together as the common ground which connects all the characters. As the writer Richard Rive notes, Schreiner "skilfully maintains a unity in the lives of her main characters by using the farm as a converging and diverging point. The children belong to the farm and understand its different moods" (Rive 238).



Schreiner's use of the farm serves both to foreground its significance to colonists, and to show the ways in which space is organised along gendered lines. The farm shows segregation between men and women and places the woman in a subordinate position. The indigenous people of the Karoo appear in *African Farm* as servants and labourers; disillusioned and reduced as people. Schreiner uses the landscape and the notion of "unity" as an antidote to the segregationist dystopia. Coetzee suggests that the farm be regarded "as a figure in the service of her critique of colonial culture" (Coetzee 66). The farm is a space that preserves the colonial mindset; it is a space where dreams can never be accomplished and where power is exerted unjustly and arbitrarily. Schreiner represents the Karoo landscape beyond the borders of the

farm as one of promise and opportunity. The Karoo landscape which is the antithesis of the farm space, despite the promise of freedom, is also steeped in a deep colonial history of exploitation and genocide. It is through the protagonists Waldo and Lyndall that Schreiner expresses the complexity of gender, religion and social inequality.

Waldo

Waldo represents Schreiner's fascination with Emerson. As a young person, Waldo's inner conflict with authority and religion is one which he struggles to voice and to make sense of, thus finding himself alone on his personal journey of discovery. In her letters Schreiner mentions the loneliness she experienced as a child but contrasts it with the freedom and contentment she found in nature. In a letter to Francis Smith she wrote,

My childhood was so very bitter and dark, but I cling to the memories of it and especially the places I lived at, they were so unutterably lovely and it was in nature I found all the joy and help I had in those lonely years. (OS to Francis Smith 19 April 1907)

Lyndall and Waldo are both representative of Schreiner, in their actions and in their thoughts, but they represent two different sides of Schreiner. With reference to Schreiner's relationship to a masculine intellectual and philosophical tradition, Mark Sanders observes that "when Olive Schreiner contemplated participation in intellectual life, she found it not only dominated by men in fact, but also imagined as male sociality" (Sanders 77). He argues that Schreiner's participation in intellectual life in Victorian England was dominated by men and that it was socially constructed. Although the social landscape of Victorian England was more progressive than that of South Africa, Schreiner was still an outsider. Furthermore, Sanders suggests that the female figure who is represented in *African Farm* is a character who is not female but male. In other words, when "Schreiner figures her own entry as a young woman into the intellectual life, it is not through the female protagonist Lyndall but through the boy, Waldo Farber, the subject who gives 'love glances' toward an unnamed male Stranger who leaves him with a book" (Sanders 78), the book being Spencer's *First Principles*. These "love glances" are the

admiration and hunger Schreiner has for education, literature and history. She awards herself the freedom to have the intellect through Waldo.

The connection which Waldo has with landscape shows it to be a space where he questions and tests the existence of God, as well as seeking enquiry into the historical existence of life and the formation of the land. His sense of deep history speaks to Sanders' argument from a different point of view and that is with Schreiner's connection to the landscape of the Karoo. Waldo views landscape in its entirety, its history, its culture and in its physical formation. His relationship with landscape is a metaphysical one and he uses it to explore the aspect of his life that he struggles with, religion. When he places self in the formation of the world or in the formation of the landscape, it reveals Schreiner's link to Emerson and his influence:

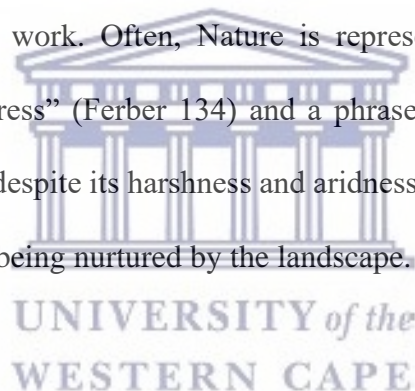
One day we sit there and look up at the blue sky, and down at our fat little knees; and suddenly it strikes us, Who are we? This *I*, what is it? We try to look in upon ourself, and ourself beats back upon ourself. Then we get up in great fear and run home as hard as we can. We can't tell anyone what frightened us. We never quite lose that feeling of *self* again." (*African Farm* 116)

The above passage is taken from the novel's chapter entitled "Times and Seasons" which reads like a philosophical essay or sermon. I feel that it is in this chapter that the influence of Emerson is shown most strongly, and it is in this chapter that Schreiner is trying to understand her sense of the self in the broader world and her connection to nature. The chapter is written in the first person where Schreiner uses "we" and "our" as if she is inviting the reader to be part of her journey. It barely addresses the characters in the novel and only mentions Waldo's name in the first line of the chapter. This chapter "traces the development of Waldo into adulthood through the use of an inclusive first-person plural narrative style" (Summer 144) and can be seen as "Schreiner's blending of the self with the environment" (Summer 147). The passage reflects the contrast between the magnificence of the blue sky and the landscape and the insignificance of our human ungainliness. Perhaps it was Schreiner's intention to make the Victorian reader aware of a world outside of that which the Bible represented to them. "Times

and Season” is philosophical and reveals Waldo’s transitioning from his Christian upbringing to his inclusion of a new view on the world cultivated through his reflection on the landscape. His submersion of the self in nature is influenced by an essay by Emerson called *Nature* which says:

How easily we might walk onward into the opening landscape, absorbed by new pictures and by thoughts fast succeeding each other, until by degrees the recollection of home was crowded out of the mind, all memory obliterated by the tyranny of the present, and we were led in triumph by nature. (Emerson 224)

It is in nature, away from the noise of society, where one can find peace and one can reflect on oneself. It is also in nature where the imagination is free to explore possibilities and to create new ideas in a safe space. Michael Ferber writes of *Nature* that “the usual romantic view is that nature governs our most human feelings, our imaginations, our hearts” (Ferber 134). Ferber provides references to writers such as Wordsworth, Chaucer and Shelley who have all used *Nature* as symbolism in their work. Often, Nature is represented as a female figure, “a goddess,” “a darling,” “a mistress” (Ferber 134) and a phrase we use commonly, “Mother Nature.” The open landscape, despite its harshness and aridness, becomes Waldo’s safety net. There is almost a sense of him being nurtured by the landscape.



An indication of Waldo’s sense of freedom in wild nature is that he is able to speak freely with Lyndall and Em, outside the confines of the farm. The farm does not provide him or the other children a safe space to voice their opinions and thoughts. The narrator comments that “the barb in the arrow of childhood’s suffering is this: its intense loneliness, its intense ignorance” (*African Farm* 12). They are at times treated like outsiders. Schreiner often mentioned the loneliness that she experienced as a child in her letters. While in Cape Town she wrote to Havelock Ellis stating that she felt “more lonely even than when I was a girl” (OS to Havelock Ellis March 1890), indicating that even as an adult, her childhood memories of being alone, of being excluded and not belonging, still haunt her. Both Lyndall and Waldo experience

loneliness on the farm as a result of being overlooked and not being heard by the adult characters.

Waldo shows a pattern of demonstrating disappointment in male figures such as God, his father, Otto, Blenkins and Gregory Rose. His comment, “He [God] will not hear my prayer. God hates me” (*African Farm* 10), indicates a strong sense of disappointment in a spiritual father who has disappointed his son. The promise of a benevolent patriarchy is seen to fail in the figure of Otto. Otto does not represent a strong fatherly figure as he is not assertive; he is naïve, he believes Blenkins’ tales and cannot stand up to Tant Sannie’s abrasive mannerisms. Despite Otto’s shortcomings, Waldo is hurt and traumatised by his father’s sudden death. If Otto is representative of Schreiner’s father, then he represents a weak fatherly figure. Schreiner’s father, Gottlob, was in fact considered to be “a failure as a missionary and head of household” (Scott and First 45) and it was left to her mother to be in control. Similarly, Tant Sannie, who represents the motherly figure, controls the household on the farm. And like Schreiner, the relationship between child and parent, in this case Waldo and his father, is not representative of being a loving and nurturing relationship.

Waldo represents Schreiner’s attitude to the world around her and this attitude is also echoed in the character of Lyndall who shows an awareness of her surroundings in a similar manner to Schreiner. His connection to the history of the land allows the narrator to create an awareness of the effects of colonialism on the natural inhabitants of the Karoo, namely the Bushmen. This is woven into the conversations that take place when the children are on the *koppie*. Waldo asks Lyndall “has it never seemed to you that the stones were talking with you?” (*African Farm* 19). The stones are symbolic of a previous period and a civilisation that existed before colonisation. It represents the past of the true inhabitants of the land, the Bushmen. The inclusion of the

Bushmen in the narration allows Waldo to reflect deeply on the history of the land and its past inhabitants, thereby helping him to move beyond the world of the farm and its anti-pastoral world of the farm. By acknowledging the Bushmen paintings, he integrates them into “their” landscape, thereby creating a permanent space for them in the landscape. Through their paintings, the Bushmen are staking their claim as the rightful owners of the land and Waldo, by acknowledging their paintings, acknowledges their ownership. From a young age Schreiner showed an awareness of and an interest in the atrocities that took place towards the indigenous people of the Karoo as well as an interest in the importance of local heritage and culture. The landscape of the Karoo is rich in history and Schreiner acknowledges the predecessors of the land by introducing “some old Bushman paintings” with “their red and black pigments [...] preserved through long years” (*African Farm* 13) early on in the novel. The history of those that have come before cannot be washed away and will always be preserved to some extent. Despite the challenges of harsh weather and being hidden for many years, they have marked the landscape with their presence as a reminder to those that come after. The paintings also illustrate the artistic abilities of the Bushmen although the writer describes them as being “grotesque”. But grotesque in whose eyes? Is Schreiner (the writer) revealing a colonialist’s point of view by describing the paintings as “grotesque”?

Schreiner displays a definite intent to convey the discourse of colonialism and its impact on the environment and on the indigenous people. Her engagement in the narrative serves to create a definite awareness of the eradication of the Bushmen. Waldo’s comment to Lyndall and Em “Now the boers have shot them all, so that we may never see a little yellow face peeping out among the stones” (*African Farm* 19) is his way of distancing himself from act of genocide against what Waldo highlights is the human impact of colonisation on the land. Schreiner’s connection with the indigenous people, in this instance the Bushmen, stems from her feelings

of being ousted as a female in a patriarchal society. Van Wyk Smith comments on critics such “as Toril Moi (1985), Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979), and Sara Mills (1991), who argue that the woman writer in a colonial context, because of her marginalized relationship to both patriarchy and empire, tends to identify with the oppressed indigene as much as with the suppressed feminine, and hence inevitably produces a coded, transgressive discourse” (Van Wyk Smith 9). Schreiner’s empathy towards the Bushmen and her inclusion of them in *African Farm* creates an awareness of a silent genocide that took place at the hands of the colonist.

Waldo questions the formation of the world and how it came into existence. In a conversation with Em about how the *koppie* was formed, he refers to his own personal reading and neglects the biblical account. His reference to how the world evolves is an indication that he has read other works besides the Bible.

‘This koppie if it could tell us how it came here! The *Physical Geography* says,’ he went on most rapidly and confusedly, ‘that what are dry lands now were once lakes; and what I think this is – these low hills were once the shores of a lake; this koppie is some of the stones that were at the bottom, rolled together by the water.’ (*African Farm* 18)

Waldo’s position in the social hierarchy of the farm is viewed as a displacement. He is seen as a farm labourer and although slightly better off than the black workers on the farm, he still fails to garner amicable respect. His character seems out of place and he never truly connects with or establishes a firm relationship with the others, other than a fondness for Lyndall. He is portrayed as being a wanderer, a true shepherd who lives on minimalist possessions and is often wandering about the open spaces of the Karoo or spending time on the *koppie*. This adds to the anti-pastoral sense of the novel, as Coetzee poignantly points out: “the pastoral platitude that the wandering shepherd, with his meagre possessions and his easily satisfied wants, shows us a way of escaping from the cares of civilization, is nowhere spoken” (Coetzee 19). The writer draws on the readers’ empathy in understanding Waldo as an individual who struggles to

connect with society and the farm life, but who has a strong connection to the landscape beyond the borders of the farm.

Lyndall

The character of Lyndall represents the proto feminist – she questions the place of the woman in society and reveals the unjust and oppressed position of women. She demonstrates that women are socially constructed, however she is willing to create her own destiny. The farm is regarded as a form of entrapment for all three children, and they are governed by patriarchal rules and the domestic space occupied by women and men. Em’s perception of an ideal life for a woman is to be married as soon as possible, and she comments rather disappointedly at the age of twelve “that we cannot marry till we are seventeen. Four years, five – that is a long time to wait” (*African Farm* 14). For Lyndall, the concept of marriage is regarded as a trap to remain on the farm and to be subservient. She would be part of a system where the success of a woman is determined by her marriage, forcing her to become financially dependent on her husband. It is Em who chooses to remain on the farm and maintain her status as a proper Victorian woman, while Lyndall envisages no future on the farm and plans her escape through education. At the age of twelve, Lyndall was already aware of the oppressive rules that governed her place on the farm. When Lyndall and Em have a discussion about diamonds and wearing them one day, Em questions how she (Lyndall) will get them as she will remain on the farm. She responds to Em ““And you think that I am going to stay *here* always?” The lip trembled scornfully” (*African Farm* 14). There is a sense of determination in her voice when she alludes to leaving the farm. Her character highlights the predicament of women and the forced roles they were expected to perform during that time and perhaps still today. It is suggestive of her awareness of the social position of women. First and Scott comment that:

Lyndall pinpoints that division of roles which become internalized as the archetypal distinctions of male and female: between creativity/receptivity, expression/reflection, self-expression/self-reflection. (Scott and First 101)

Lyndall believes that the value of a good education will provide her with the emancipation she requires to be independent and successful. She shares her opinion with Em:

“There is nothing helps in this world,’ said the child slowly, ‘but to be very wise, and to know everything – to be clever.’

‘But I should not like to go to school!’ persisted the small, freckled face.

“When you are seventeen this Boer-woman will go; you will have this farm and everything that is upon it for your own; but I” said Lyndall, “will have nothing. I must learn.”

“Oh, Lyndall! I will give you some of my sheep,” said Em, with a sudden burst of pitying generosity.

“I do not want your sheep,” said the girl slowly; “I want things of my own. When I am grown up,” she added, the flush on her delicate features deepening at every word, there will be nothing that I do not know. I shall be rich, very rich [...]”. (*African Farm* 15)

As young girls they each have their own ideas, opinions and dreams of an ideal life for a woman. It is clear from their conversation that when they become adults, they would want different things out of life. Lyndall wants to pursue her education, work and carve her own path in society as an independent woman. Em tries to draw Lyndall back into the farm life by offering her sheep, which Lyndall rejects. The offer of sheep not only adds humour but it indicates the value of sheep to a woman; sheep are considered a prolific commodity and a woman should be grateful for such an offering. Lyndall’s comment, “I want things of my own,” is a firm statement of independence, her desire to be self-sufficient and self-supporting as a woman who is not in need of a man or any other person to support her. Their conversation reveals that Lyndall has been seeking her independence from a young age and that she understands the value which independence offers. She speaks of being “wise” and being “clever” and realises that a woman needs to be smart in order to create her own wealth and that she needs to be educated in a formal school in order to acquire this success. Em on the other hand shows complacency, and is accepting of being given her wealth and not earning it. She lacks the ambition and motivation that Lyndall displays, and she conforms to the Victorian ideals of womanhood, accepting of the prescribed social norms and the content behaviour of women. In contrast, Lyndall represents a New Woman, a figure who emerged during the late Victorian period when women became aware of their limited and oppressed position in a patriarchal society. She decides on the direction her life should take, unhindered by the social

norms. It becomes apparent that the domestic space of the farm for both Lyndall and Em as children is neither nurturing nor conducive to personal and independent development. The farm's dystopic space is not the Eden of harmony and personal sustenance and does not benefit the New Woman. Lyndall's exact departure from the farm the first time is not indicated in the novel but the reader is made aware that she was gone for four years. She leaves in pursuit of furthering her education and to better herself. However, when she returns to the farm she shares her disappointment in her experiences with Waldo.

The world on the outside did not fulfil her expectations of recreating herself as a New Woman and her disappointment leaves her feeling alone, caught up in her own world of the oppression of women. Her response to Waldo regarding the girls' finishing school, "they are nicely adapted machines for experimenting on the question, 'Into how little space a human soul can be crushed?'" (*African Farm* 169), expresses concisely the despair she feels about her experience at the school. The finishing school that she attended proved to be as suffocating as her experience on the farm. The chapter titled "Lyndall" provides the opportunity for the narrator to speak of female subjectivity in the Victorian period. Her comment to Waldo about the schooling system for girls is "they finish everything but imbecility and weakness, and that they cultivate" (*African Farm* 169). The education system fails women and, instead of liberating them, simply educates and constructs them into what a society cultivated by men deems acceptable. In other words, the education system is cultivating a domestic woman. Prominent positions in society such as those of doctors, lawyers and politicians are held by men, while women are told there is no need for them to hold these positions for as a woman their competencies are in their outward appearance. Lyndall's comment to Waldo that "with good looks and youth marriage is easy to attain" (*African Farm* 174) asserts that all a woman needs is to depend on her youthful looks to be married and successful in life. Parallel to this

statement is that a woman's intellect is of no importance and does not offer any value to a marriage. Further in their conversation, she compares the oppression of women to that of a caged bird, "If the bird does not like its cage, and does like its sugar and will not leave it, why keep the door so very carefully shut?" (*African Farm* 177). A woman will not leave the confines of her home even if the opportunity presents itself to her. She will remain with what she is accustomed to and to what she knows.

Lyndall's departure the second time with a stranger and having a baby out of wedlock shows the independence she seeks as a woman. As much as the stranger wants to marry Lyndall, she chooses not to marry him. During the Victorian times this would have been taboo and would have caused quite a scandal. The character of Lyndall demonstrates that a woman has free will and can choose to live a life she wishes upon herself. Schreiner knew that there is more to a woman than being viewed just as a wife or mother, and "as a feminist, she was over-whelmed by the evidence of sacrifice and waste of female potential" (Parkin-Gounelas 87). The choices which Lyndall makes do not however give her the success she was seeking to achieve, and the novel ends on an anti-climax when Lyndall dies. Lyndall's life can be regarded as a failure; a price she pays for deviating from the Victorian woman's path of being a righteous woman. Scott and First claim "in one sense rightly, for the ending, in which an unmarried mother dies, can be read as punishment for the threat of deviance from the right moral path" (Scott and First 104). But her success lies in her freedom to choose a life she wants to live. She might not be the heroine the reader wishes her to be but she does represent success by emerging as the proto-feminist.

Both Lyndall and Gregory Rose demonstrate disrupted patterns in gender and sexual conventions. These patterns categorise Gregory Rose as a feminised character and Lyndall is

represented as a forceful and independent character who challenges both gender-defined spaces and male authority, thus breaking the “ground rules.” Schreiner challenges the prescribed gender roles which society dictates to be appropriate for men and women by creating two characters whose gender roles are in a way reversed. In a letter to Havelock Ellis, Schreiner wrote:

The principle of equality applies equally to women ~~with~~ & men! ~~We perceive~~ It is evident that the imperfect education of women in the school & in the world, her economic dependence, her inequality in the face of the law, her limited & artificial industrial & professional activities have resulted hitherto in an immense injustice, not to women alone but also to the race. We recognize that women are entitled to a development as complete & unfettered as men, & that they possess the same rights & responsibilities. (OS to Havelock Ellis 2 November 1884)

Gerald Monsman points out that Schreiner “embodied an unusual combination of feminism and colonial Victorianism” (Monsman xi). By looking at the African landscape and how it is connected to the transformation of imperialism, he argues that using the South African landscape provided Schreiner with the freedom to challenge traditional “sex roles and sexual hierarchies”, thereby paving a new way against the existing “Eurocentric ways of telling stories” (xii). By reading *African Farm* as a semi-biographical novel, we are able to grasp the social injustices and oppression Schreiner experienced at the time. It is in the chapter entitled “Lyndall” that Schreiner’s personal ideology as a female in a male-dominated space emerges most clearly and Monsman relates to this as “her acutely felt personal suffocation” (Monsman xi). The fact that Lyndall displays unconventional traits as a supposed Victorian woman shows her strong opposition to the social norms imposed on her.

Religion: Christianity and Transcendentalism

Beyond raising the social struggles that concerned Schreiner, the relationship between Waldo and Lyndall also serves to frame her evolving perspectives on religion and spirituality. It was the influence of Herbert Spencer’s *First Principles* that first showed Schreiner “the unity of existence; but it was an intellectual aid, which I myself had to transmute into spiritual bread”

(OS to Betty Molteno May 1895). Her acceptance of Spencer's *First Principles* provided her with a form of relief for her spiritual anxiety by combining science and religion. Schreiner admits that on receiving the book, she was "in such complete blank atheism. I did not believe in my own nature, in any right or wrong, or certainty" (First and Scott 59). While it is Waldo who most noticeably struggles with his faith, Lyndall does so too. In the days before her death she says to Gregory Rose, "one day I shall find something to worship" (*African Farm* 275), admitting that she is not convinced by Christianity. This voices Schreiner's daily struggle with her spirituality and the Christian faith, and her attempts to make sense of it.

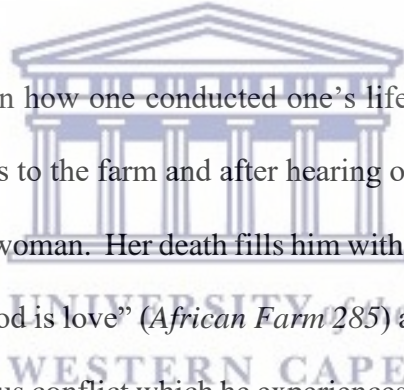
It is perhaps Waldo who provides the reader with an awareness of Schreiner's internal religious struggles and her disillusionment with the Christian faith. Waldo, who is contemplative by nature, seeks to confirm his faith by testing the existence of God:

"Oh, God my Father, I have made Thee a sacrifice. I have only twopence, so I cannot buy a lamb. If the lambs were mine I would give Thee one; but now I have only this meat; it is my dinner-meat. Please, my Father, send fire down from heaven to burn it. Thou hast said, Whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou cast into the sea, nothing doubting, it shall be done. I ask for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen." (*African Farm* 9)

This scene occurs early on in the novel, revealing that Schreiner was grappling in processing religious principles and how to incorporate religion into a world which she was beginning to view from a different perspective. In Waldo we can read Schreiner, seeking to find the physical existence of God.

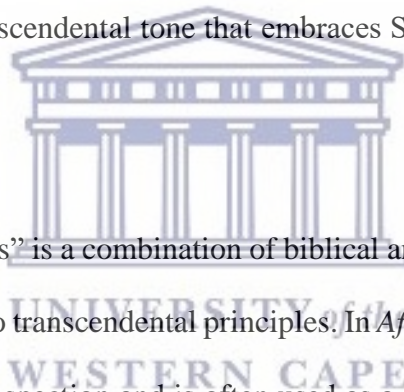
Tant Sannie's insistence on biblical teachings being the only means of a virtuous education, and on disposing of all other forms of reading material, is an indication of how women are kept oppressed on the farm through religion. Tina Barsby comments on Schreiner's novel *Undine* – and I suggest that this applies equally to *African Farm*: "the novel thus highlights how religious discipline was especially harsh for girls, combined as it was with Victorian notions of appropriate feminine behaviour. In a colonial context, such pressures on women are

intensified” (Barsby 13). This point is made evident when the book *Political Economy* is given to Waldo by Em, causing an uproar in the household with Tant Sannie commenting “didn’t the minister tell me when I was confirmed not to read any book except my Bible and hymn-book, that the Devil was in all the rest” (*African Farm* 91). The biblical teachings are not only for the purpose of enforcing religious indoctrination, they are also a means to instil appropriate manners and behaviour in people, especially young children. As Scott and First note, Schreiner’s domestic life was filled with constant reminders of the importance of religious instruction as a means of control, not only by her father (being a minister) but more pressingly by her mother’s own stringent religious upbringing. They comment that “[t]he Victorian obsession with proper conduct was taken to extremes in the Schreiner family and the girls were ‘kept close’, even when grown up” (Scott and First 46).



Religion was critical not only in how one conducted one’s life but also how one would deal with death. When Waldo returns to the farm and after hearing of Lyndall’s death he dreams of her first as a child and then as a woman. Her death fills him with agony and conflict. He reflects in his biblical teachings that “God is love” (*African Farm* 285) and that he will “see her again” (*African Farm* 285). The religious conflict which he experiences in understanding the Christian faith becomes a form of comfort in dealing with the death of Lyndall, as he selectively chooses the good from it. The narrator aptly states that “he it is who uses his Bible as the pearl-fishers use their shells, sorting out gems from refuse; he sets his pearls after his own fashion, and he sets them well” (*African Farm* 285). His lament to God about his dream, “can anyone dream it not sleeping?” (*African Farm* 286), is that he wants to be able to physically see her again. And so, not satisfied by his biblical teachings, he turns to Transcendentalism to connect with death where only the spirit which lives within the physical body is valued, not the physical body itself. It is the spirit that is the basis of life and not the physical body. He finds solace in this

explanation of eternal life and states that “It is but the individual that perishes, the whole remains. It is the organism that vanishes, that atoms are there” (*African Farm* 288). The body is only a physical vessel for the spirit that dwells inside. When a person dies, the spirit is released and becomes part of the environment. It is in death that he and Lyndall can be together and he exclaims, “Let us die, beloved, you and I, that we may pass for ever through the Universal Life!” (*African Farm* 288). It is assumed that Waldo dies peacefully “in the yellow sunshine” (*African Farm* 299) with the chicks nestling on him. For Waldo, he and Lyndall will be together eternally in the spiritual realm of nature that connects all living entities and those that have passed on. Earlier in the novel Schreiner writes, “Nothing is despicable – all is meaning-full; nothing is small – all is part of a whole, whose beginning and end we know not” (*African Farm* 133). This sentiment echoes Emerson and the notion of unity prevailing even in death. The novel ends on a transcendental tone that embraces Schreiner’s new-found spiritual connection to the world.



The chapter “Times and Seasons” is a combination of biblical and philosophical discourse that moves from biblical teachings to transcendental principles. In *African Farm*, the Bible provides a strong basis for religious introspection and is often used as a directive as to how one should conduct one’s life. The chapter illustrates the connection between humans and the natural environment and also combines Schreiner’s knowledge of the Bible with Transcendentalism. The chapter relates to the Old Testament of the Bible, Ecclesiastes 3:1.⁸

⁸ Ecclesiastes 3:1⁸. states that:

1. To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven;
2. A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;
3. A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;
4. A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
5. A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
6. A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
7. A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

Ecclesiastes 3: 1 refers to 14 contrasting experiences or emotions that occur in a person's life that cannot always be controlled and are said to be in the hands of God. While we are able to control man-made elements, there are certain things such as nature that we are unable to control. The character of Waldo reflects on the unique combination of the spiritual and the exploration of the self in the natural environment. His exploration of the self seeks to find his spiritual truth and is seen to be testing God. Judith Raiskin comments that "for Schreiner, it is finally 'our' (Waldo's) recognition of the wonders of the Karoo and a methodical study of nature that lead to a unified sense of identity and selfhood" (*SAF*, p.152). Through Waldo's development, Schreiner fictionalizes Emerson's statement that "Know thyself" and "Study nature" are in the modern world the same maxim" (Raiskin 41). The seasons also reflect the transitions that humans go through, thereby demonstrating our connection with the transience of nature.



Landscape

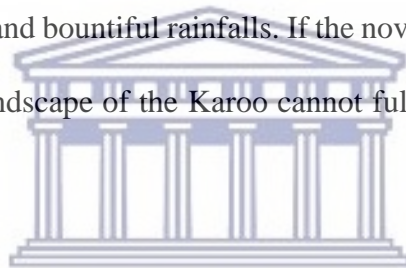
Schreiner's landscape is not unequivocally the sublime one of *Wuthering Heights*, nor one that demonstrates the pastoral characteristics of European traditions in landscape paintings. As previously mentioned, Hayes' view of the Karoo landscape does not reflect the Romantics' view of a country life "represented as innocent, the symbol of an easier past, contrasted with the inherent corruption of the city or court" (Hayes 83). The landscape represents both claustrophobia and freedom with contrast to other Romantic writings of the period. Schreiner uses the physical element of the landscape to underpin a more serious concern with questions of social justice. In particular, she explores her concerns about the struggles of women being

8. A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace. (King James Version)

accepted as individuals in an environment sculpted by males. In reading *African Farm*, Schreiner's use of landscape provides a critical element in understanding the relationship between gender and the environment. Her struggle was not only one of establishing herself as a female writer but also one of being a woman trying to occupy a male-dominated space and trying to claim that space.

The farm, although it is a dystopian space, has economic value and its own culture of labour. The inclusion of labour which is provided by the indigenous people creates a different perspective of the landscape. Stephen Bending argues that "landscapes were experienced quite differently because of class, gender, and education," and that we should acknowledge that the central concern of landscape actually concerns the self (Bending 1). Bending argues that landscape not only encompasses that which is visually seen and what is "out there" (Bending 1), but that it should also be viewed in terms of it being pastoral and Georgic. The farm in *African Farm* is a working farm, which is associated with labour and sheep farming conducted in a difficult and harsh environment. In contrast to Coetzee's view that the landscape in *African Farm* is anti-pastoral, it can also be viewed as Georgic. Bending also suggests that the writer's representation of the landscape, whilst being a personal perspective, is also suggestive of ideology, politics and power, which in this case would refer to Schreiner's ideology. I would further like to add to his argument by suggesting that besides class, gender and education, we should also consider the historical influence of the physical place that forms part of the discussion of landscape. South Africa has always, and is still, embroiled in heated debates around the ownership of land and who are the rightful owners. Schreiner touches on this issue in the novel by introducing the Bushmen as part of the discourse, thereby showing that the landscape of the Karoo is rooted in historical ownership, as highlighted by Waldo.

The landscape of the Karoo offers the promise of hope to the protagonists, a spiritual awakening, an offer of promise. It is the landscape that cannot be ignored, and it is made clear from the beginning of the novel that it will feature prominently. In the preface to *African Farm*, Schreiner comments that the environment or the subject will not be the familiar one that is part of “English daily life, it of necessity lacks the charm that hangs about the ideal representation of familiar things” (*African Farm* xii). The colonist’s daily life in South Africa is not to be compared to the English life in England. The ideal landscape from an English perspective is one that is inviting, soft and pastoral, an escape from the chaos of urbanisation. Landscape art or landscape painting in 18th century England depicts scenes that are inviting, pleasurable and pastoral. The rural countryside living of the Karoo forms a stark contrast to the countryside of England with its lush greenery and bountiful rainfalls. If the novel is to be regarded a Victorian novel, then the anti-pastoral landscape of the Karoo cannot fulfil its role with its harsh lands that appear to offer no comfort.



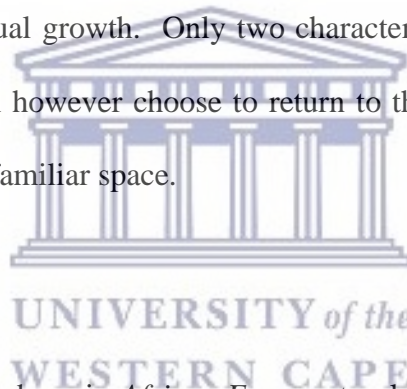
Yet for Schreiner, the harsh, unforgiving landscape of the Karoo, despite the novel’s depiction of its vastness and bleak imagery – “On the farm, day after day, month after month, the water in the dams fell lower and lower; the sheep died in the fields; the cattle, scarcely able to crawl tottered as they moved from spot to spot in search of food” (*African Farm* 13) – provided a liberating experience for her, enabling her to return to the land of her birth. In a letter to Mary Drew, she describes the land as “the most beautiful free wild country on earth” (OS to Mary Drew 11 October 1889). There is a tone of excitement as Schreiner wrote this while travelling to South Africa on board the Northam Castle ship. While living in Matjiesfontein, a small town in the Karoo she wrote to Havelock Ellis: “such a sense of wild exhilaration & freedom comes to me when I walk over the Karroo [sic]” (OS to Havelock Ellis 25 March 1890). The use of

the word “wild” provides an emphatic contrast to her tamed and restricted life in Victorian England. Further on in the letter she states that “this place is the ideal place for which I have so been longing.” This shows the intense emotion she felt for the Karoo.

While she lived in the Karoo, the colour associated with the landscape influenced her writing. If we look at the physical landscape of the Karoo, we associate it with the colour red, an association made with the colour of the dry loose sand. Schreiner draws on the colour red throughout the novel. Not only does it describe the landscape – “red earth everywhere” (*African Farm* 6 and 260), “red sand” (*African Farm* 6 and 182), “red bank” (*African Farm* 265), “a reach of monotonous red” (*African Farm* 131) – but it influences the colours of other things such as “red-brick building” (*African Farm* 3 and 198), “red blanket” (*African Farm* 66), “red light” (*African Farm* 69), “red cloak” (*African Farm* 159), “red bed” (*African Farm* 265), “red pencil” (*African Farm* 275), “red lions” (*African Farm* 69), things that are not necessarily always found in the colour red. Schreiner even makes reference to a “red cow” (*African Farm* 159). The colour red appears more than twenty times in the novel, highlighting the influence the Karoo landscape had on Schreiner’s writing. The colour of the Karoo embraces and infiltrates everything it comes into contact with. It is a colour which the eyes become accustomed to, and it is a colour that represents home for Schreiner.

While it might appear strange that Schreiner preferred and longed to be in an environment characterised by its vastness and alienation from the outside world as opposed to opting to be in the intellectual sociality of England, the letters she writes to various individuals in which she refers to the landscape are written with much admiration and a sense of her eagerness to be there. In *African Farm* the landscape can be seen to be divided into two sections: the farm and

the land beyond the borders of the farm. Furthermore, the characters also demonstrate their own unique relationship to the landscape of the farm and a different relationship to the landscape beyond the farm. The farm that Schreiner provides us with in the novel has “stifled innate and antecedent possibilities for productivity, light, and peace and yields itself as a place of spiritual impoverishment where a dominance/subservience hierarchy perpetuates racial and sexual abuses and where women are excluded both from patriarchal power and from the native African world” (Monsman 166). It should be mentioned that not all women in the novel are excluded from patriarchal power as Tant Sannie displays matriarchal power, which is equally arbitrary and unjust. The farm demonstrates oppressive and abusive domestic relationships both between adults and children and between adults and adults. The farm itself becomes a prison for those that reside on it, creating limitations for formal education, progressive thinking, and personal space for individual growth. Only two characters are able to escape the farm: Waldo and Lyndall. They both however choose to return to the farm, as it is the space that holds them together; it is their familiar space.



Labour

The inclusion of black labour in *African Farm* not only reinforces the dystopic space of the farm but its presence also demonstrates the harsh realities of colonialism. In J.M. Coetzee’s view, this makes Schreiner an unusual figure among writers of her day. In *White Writing*, Coetzee explores the way the landscape traditions of Europe have been imported into the South African situation, and he makes the point that black labour in particular is excluded from the landscape, the power dynamics being invisible. The idealised colonial landscape is one where black workers are rendered invisible. Coetzee uses Schreiner as a key example as someone who writes against the traditions of a pastoral landscape. In *African Farm* Schreiner displays the relationship between master and servant and introduces the reader to a landscape

that is harsh, dry and which lacks the lush pastoral presence associated with the English countryside.

The culture on the farm illustrates the social discrimination between the owners and the workers of the land. The farm is representative of a particular community, governed by rules and the positioning of individuals that occupy that space. It represents a period in history which was defined by race and gender positioning. Furthermore, it demonstrates the political nuance of the time. Positioning the farm in this manner confirms Coetzee's notion of its being anti-pastoral and rejects the idea of a pastoral colonial farm as written by other white writers. For Coetzee, the "scandal" of the treatment of the idealised colonial landscape is that black workers are rendered invisible. It is these words that articulate the meaning of the landscape in a South African context and how it should be addressed (Coetzee 166). Schreiner addresses this by including farm workers in the novel, portraying them as servants. The workers or servants are portrayed as weaker individuals, those who speak only when spoken to, who adhere to the religion of the master, who are forced to wear the clothes of the colonist but are treated as the dispossessed; their beliefs and cultural values are not considered. The servants are further divided into racialised groups, the "Kaffirs" and the "Hottentots," and represent class differences of labour. The novel expresses division amongst the indigenous people that displayed colonial control and power that was exerted during Schreiner's life. The division is illustrated by the "Hottentots" who are allowed to attend and be part of the Sunday service while the "Kaffir servants" (*African Farm* 41) are not⁹. They are considered not good enough to attend church services as they are regarded as being "descended from apes and needed no salvation" (*African Farm* 41). Although welcomed to the Sunday service, the Hottentot still

⁹ The word "kaffir" does not have the same derogatory force as it would today. Schreiner was writing well before the apartheid era in which the term was commonly used in relation to the Xhosa-speaking nations (associated with the Eastern Cape, then known as 'Kafraria' by the settlers).

have to subscribe to the rules and ways of the colonist. At a Sunday service, “there, too, was the spruce Hottentot in a starched white kappie, and her husband on the other side of the door, with his wool oiled and very much combed out, and staring at his new leather boots” (*African Farm* 41). I find the use of the term “kaffir” uncomfortable as it represents racist ideology and places Schreiner in a patronising position. Although Schreiner uses it to critique her own community and to show their callous treatment of the indigenous people, she is still part of that community. The term holds immense historical notoriety in South Africa from the 1800s onwards, and “in South Africa, the use of the term *Kaffir* to refer to a Black African is a profoundly offensive and inflammatory expression of contemptuous racism that is sufficient grounds for legal action. The term is associated especially with the era of apartheid, when it was commonly used as an offensive racial slur, and its offensiveness has only increased over time. It now ranks as perhaps the most offensive term in South African English” (Merriam-Webster). In general, there is a negative connotation associated with the word not only from a race perspective but from a religious perspective, as it could also refer to a non-believer of the Islamic faith. Schreiner also casually uses the term in her numerous letters and so in my opinion this reveals her awareness of how she is using the term in the novel. Her use of the word reveals racist undertones and authority. While she does show much empathy towards the indigenous people, Schreiner also shows herself to be in a position of superiority when using the term. In a letter to Cronwright-Schreiner she wrote:

The cigarettes have come... The little girl servant is a Kaffir – quiet & willing, only very very slow, like a Kaffir... (OS to Samuel Cronwright-Schreiner 17 January 1907).

Schreiner wrote this letter many years after the publication of *African Farm*, yet she still uses the term “kaffir” and her use of it can be seen as a form of degradation and a critique of the behaviour of the indigenous people. Coetzee mentions the “idleness” of the indigenous people or their lifestyle mannerisms as observed by colonists and travel writers, and argues that “one of the common Discourses of the Cape is that Hottentots are idle” (Coetzee 16). Coetzee further

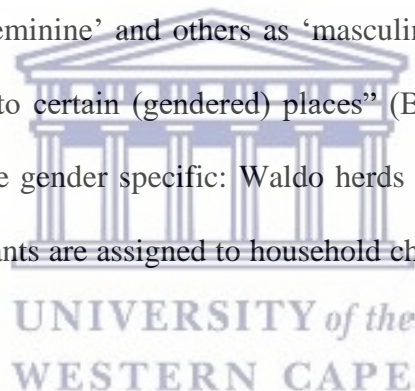
provides references to other writers who have described them as “lazy and grimy people,” referred to “the native inclination to idleness and a careless life,” and concluded that “they are extremely lazy, and had rather undergo almost famine than apply themselves” (Coetzee 17). Therefore, Schreiner’s comment “slow like a Kaffir” feeds into the discourse of the Cape and the colonists’ impression of the indigenous people – they do not conform to Westernised ideals and so they are segregated. Schreiner, in comparing the servant girl’s behaviour to “a Kaffir,” is opposing a behaviour that does not conform to her ideals. It is racist in the sense that it generalises and denigrates a racially stereotyped form of behaviour.

Schreiner illustrates that the indigenous people are regarded as the outsiders and as those that do not belong in a westernised society. They have to imitate the colonist in how they look and behave. The colonists are transforming the way the indigenous people look and changing their lifestyles to conform to theirs so that they (the colonists) feel comfortable. At the home church service “the spruce Hottentot in a starched white kappie” while her husband stares “at his new leather boots” (*African Farm* 41) is an indication of the indigenous people having to conform to western ideals. This enforced transformation of the indigenous people highlights the power attached to the farm as well as the social hierarchy that pervades it.

The chapter entitled “Idleness in South Africa” in J.M. Coetzee’s *White Writing* explores how the indigenous people were viewed by European settlers at the Cape. Coetzee writes that “the early discourse of the Cape effectively excludes him [the Khoi-San] from Eden by deciding that, though he is human, he is not in line of descent that leads from Adam via a life of toil to civilized man” (Coetzee 25). In the eyes of the colonist, the indigenous man is not recognised as part of the civilised culture that has been constructed through biblical and western ideology. The indigenous people are human but not the European version of what a human is considered

to be. The “scandal” of the Cape is that the indigenous people fail to conform to the image of “the noble savage” – the pastoral ideal of man in harmony with nature. The European term “noble savage” contextualises the indigenes as being wild, primitive and living self-sustaining life. However, in *African Farm*, the indigene is westernized, communicates in the white man’s language and integrates the white man’s culture into his own.

It is not only black labour that is visible in the novel but gender prescribed labour as well. The physical environment prescribes particular spaces for women and men which are enforced by a patriarchal society. In *Writing Women and Space*, Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose point out anthropologist Shirley Ardener’s argument that the “social map” of patriarchy created “ground rules” for the behaviour of men and women, and that the gender dynamics of patriarchy constructed some spaces as ‘feminine’ and others as ‘masculine’ and thus allocated certain kinds of (gendered) activities to certain (gendered) places” (Blunt and Rose 1). In *African Farm*, the duties performed are gender specific: Waldo herds the sheep and performs other outside duties, the female servants are assigned to household chores and Sunday services and education are led by men.



In *African Farm*, Schreiner introduces a new way of thinking, one where the literary traditions of the Victorian novel are challenged as a result of a pertinent focus on how the African landscape is written and perceived. The Victorian perception of landscape is that it is connected to the pastoral in the English tradition. But Schreiner, through her constant inclusion of black labour in the novel, labourers who have to partake in the family’s westernised traditions, proves that this is not the case with *African Farm*. The landscape of the Karoo provides an aesthetic framework for the dystopian environment of the farm. Blenkins and Tant Sannie show arbitrary control over the farm as well as the lives of the children and others. Waldo and Lyndall, despite

their search for freedom and success, never fulfil their dreams. Waldo shows his disappointment in religion and highlights the deep history of the landscape and the cultural injustices associated with it. Lyndall's experience in the broader world proves that education and the access to land for women is controlled by a patriarchal society. However, *African Farm*, highlights Schreiner as New Woman writer and her letters and interest in Emerson reveals another side to the landscape, which is that Transcendentalism is the unifying spirit of the landscape of the Karoo.



CHAPTER TWO: TROOPER PETER HALKET OF MASHONALAND AND SCHREINER'S LETTERS

“What I must I do is all that concerns me, not what the people think.”
(Ralph Waldo Emerson, www.emersoncentral.com)

In this chapter, I will review the subject of landscape in *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (1897) and Schreiner's relationship with landscape as expressed in her many letters to family and friends. *Peter Halket* was a very important novella for Schreiner as she explained to her brother, Will Schreiner:

Peter Halket killed me, as the Raid did old Robinson, only I haven't "kicked out" in the same way. It isn't artistic; it failed in doing anything; & yet if I were dead I would like them to write on my grave "She wrote Peter Halket", nothing else. It's funny but when I think of dying the only thing that comforts me is that I wrote that book. (OS to Will Schreiner, 10 May 1908)

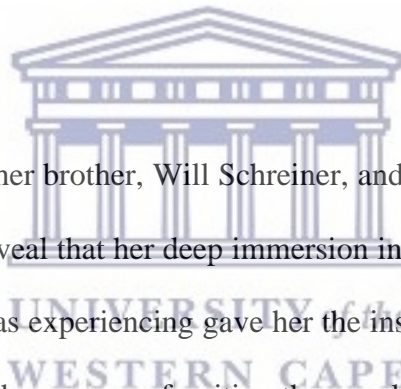
Although it was not a literary success, she felt immensely proud of her accomplishment. The novella reveals the complexity of her feelings towards Cecil John Rhodes, the powerful mining magnate, born in 1854 in England, who served as Prime Minister of the Cape Colony between 1890 until 1896 and was instrumental in expanding the British Empire in Africa. Her letters indicated a shift from great admiration of him to deep disappointment. Her conflicting feelings toward Rhodes were in response to the political and capitalist power he flaunted, used to ensure personal mining rights and bringing about new developments to the colony that amounted to massive cost to human life. Rhodes facilitated legislation that promoted segregation amongst the indigenous people and colonists, and ensured that land was expropriated from the indigenous people.

Many of Schreiner's letters reveal her disillusionment with Rhodes, and she shared her disappointment with many people. To James Rose Innes she wrote:

“Since I came from England pinned with Stead's stories about Rhodes as the lover of Humanity, the ideal millionaire – leader-of the people, & found when I got to know Rhodes personally, that he was none of these things.” (OS to James Rose Innes 7 May 1896)

Schreiner, who at one time held Rhodes in high regard, and who had commented that “he is a great man who is leading & transforming the discordant parties in South Africa” (OS to Emilia Francis Dilke 17 March 1891) felt betrayed by realising the true man that he was.

Peter Halket highlights historical events taking place in her home country through a process of storytelling which provides a more engaging means of conveying her political message. Schreiner’s emerging political consciousness is revealed in the novella and she demonstrates an evolution in her political views, strongly portraying her awareness of the indigenous people and the land which they had occupied, and from which they had been dispossessed by Rhodes’ imperialist project. For Schreiner, the success of *Peter Halket* was not dependent on it being a literary success but instead she focused on exposing the atrocities that Rhodes was committing in Mashonaland.



The letters between Schreiner, her brother, Will Schreiner, and other associates such as Betty Molteno and John Merriman reveal that her deep immersion in South African politics and the political frustrations that she was experiencing gave her the inspiration to write *Peter Halket*. However, she did not describe the process of writing the novel in these terms. According to a letter Schreiner had written Betty Molteno, the idea to write *Peter Halket* occurred between 10 and 20 August 1896 at Coles Hotel in Kowie River (Port Alfred). Her letter suggests that the idea occurred almost suddenly and spontaneously:

The first four days we were here we did nothing but bathe & walk about bare foot on the sand, but the other morning I woke, & as I opened my eyes there was an allegory full fledged in my mind! A sort of allegory story about Matabele land. So I’ve been writing hard ever since. (OS to Betty Molteno 20 August 1896)

In a letter to G.W. Cross Schreiner wrote:

Did I tell you I’d been writing an allegory story here called ‘Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland. I haven’t quite done it yet. (OS to GW Cross August 1896)

In a letter to her publisher, T. Fisher Unwin, she wrote:

Further, I have a story, somewhat of the nature of an allegory, dealing with Rhodes and the problems in Rhodesia, more especially with the treatment of the natives. I have it only in rough draft now. (OS to T Fisher Unwin 28 September 1896)

All three of these letters indicate that the process of constructing the story was still unfolding and being finalised. Years later, in another letter to her sister, Henrietta Schreiner, she wrote:

With Peter Halket I was at the Kowie & had slept heavily all night from one o'clock, an unusual thing with me. About six o'clock I woke, & jumped out of bed Cron asked me what was the matter, & I said a whole new story had come to me just as I woke, & I told him all just as it stands but short. I had nothing further from my thoughts that the writing of such a book the night before & I was busy on my stray thoughts. I just as I opened my eyes saw Peter Halket on the kopje & heard the voices talking. (OS to Henrietta Schreiner 25 December 1901)

As much as Schreiner suggests that *Peter Halket* is a spontaneous piece of writing, the numerous letters Schreiner had written various family members, friends and politicians several years prior her letter to Betty Molteno indicate that the idea to expose Rhodes and his atrocities had been forming in the back of her mind and that the idea of the novella did not just appear suddenly; as Liz Stanley and Helen Dampier comment, "Schreiner's letters emphasise 'proofs' of the facticity of the book's contents" (Stanley and Dampier 67). Her concern with Rhodes's power is made clear in a letter to her brother, Will, and she wrote:

He must never come back to any form of power this side of the Zambeze. Since he is going to fight we too must be prepared to stand by our guns, with pen, & tongue. (OS to Will Schreiner 17 Jan 1896)

There is a strong intent to expose Rhodes and the only way Schreiner was going 'to fight' Rhodes was by exposing him through the written word. In a letter to John Merriman she wrote:

We fight Rhodes because he means so much of oppression, injustice, and moral degradation in South Africa; - but if he passed away tomorrow there still remains the terrible fact that something in our society has formed the matrix which has fed, nourished, and built up such a man! (OS to John X Merriman 3 April 1897)

Although she sought to create an awareness about Rhodes' atrocities, she knew that he did not act alone. Those that stood by and watched in silence condoned his immoral acts. Therefore, the contents of her many letters to family and friends reflect similar concerns to those of *Peter Halket*, in which she combines real with fictional experiences. In Stanley and Dampier's description, Peter Halket includes "the use of factive devices in a fictional narrative; that is,

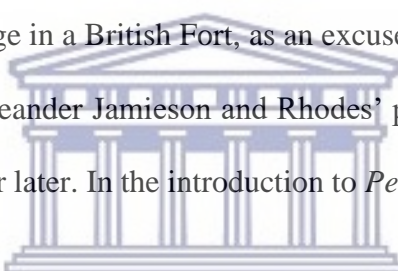
the interconnections of the factual with and its effects on, fictional narrative” (Stanley and Dampier 61). Schreiner’s story thus becomes more believable and places Rhodes in a questionable political position from a public perspective. By the time Schreiner wrote the novella, her relationship with Rhodes and her view of his imperial project had changed dramatically from her first encounter with him in the early 1890s. While she represents the writing of *Peter Halket* as a response to a “vision,” this vision itself emerged from a long process of reflection on, and struggle with, the political system which Rhodes represented.

Cecil John Rhodes and the Chartered Company

The key plot of the novella is to expose the atrocities of British Imperialists as they forced their way through Matabeleland, acquiring vast tracts of land for mining purposes through bribery, corruption and mass murders. According to the website *Historic UK*, “through his vision and determination he [Rhodes] had, almost single handedly expanded the British Empire by some 450,000 square miles.” His invasion into Matabeleland resulted in the founding of Northern and Southern Rhodesia, today known as Zimbabwe and Zambia. Rhodes was ambitious and his vision was to set up, along the length of the African continent, a direct passage from the Cape to Cairo, by establishing settlements and a rail network. Before becoming involved in gold mining, Rhodes had already started his mining interests in the diamond fields of Kimberley. In 1880, along with his business partner Charles Rudd, he formed the De Beers Mining Company. Rudd signed the Rudd Concession, which was “an agreement to the mineral rights of Matabeleland and Mashonaland” from King Lobengula of Matabeleland (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Rudd). The Rudd Concession was not vested in the British South Africa Company, but in a short-lived ancillary concern of Rhodes, Rudd and others, called the Central Search Association, an association which was quietly formed in London in 1889. The implication is that Rhodes, along with his business partners,

ensured exclusive mining rights to the elite few. In the novella this is highlighted when one of the officers comment “if England took over the Chartered Company tomorrow, what would she find? – everything of value in the land given over to private concessionaries – they’ll line their pockets if the whole land goes to pot!” (*Peter Halket* 49). After the concession was signed, Rhodes had illegally allowed British settlers to have access to the land, which was not part of the agreement with King Lobengula.

The novella highlights the corruption Rhodes facilitated and the forceful use of power he asserted over the African inhabitants and the land which they occupied, all in pursuit of wealth. Rhodes’ Chartered Company was responsible for the massacres that took place in Matabeleland and Mashonaland. Rhodes used the attack by the Ndebele on the Mashonas for stealing their cattle, and who had sought refuge in a British Fort, as an excuse to retaliate. During 1893, the Matabele War was started by Leander Jameson and Rhodes’ private army, the British South African Police, and ended a year later. In the introduction to *Peter Halket*, Matthew Blackman wrote:



In October 1893 Jameson marched south from Fort Salisbury (now Harare) with a force of 600 members of Rhodes’ paramilitary known as the British South Africa Police and 900 Shona auxiliaries. This private army routed the Matabele nation, mowing down hundreds of warriors with Maxim guns and burning down their capital at Bulawayo. (Blackman *Introduction* vi).

Although Blackman implies that the private army burnt down the capital at Bulawayo, other sources (www.britannica.com and www.sahistory.org.za) claim that it was King Lobengula who gave instructions to burn down the capital. The king attempted to resist the occupation of Rhodes and at first put up a fierce battle. However, the resistance of the Mashona people was not strong enough and they were forced to retreat. It was always Rhodes’ intent to have complete control of Mashonaland for mining purposes. A few years later Rhodes, along with Jameson, sought to take over the Transvaal. This would have resulted in British Imperialism spreading throughout South Africa. Jameson’s attack on the Boers began on 29 December 1895

and ended on 2 January 1896, with Jameson and his militia being forced to surrender. As a result of this failed coup attempt, Rhodes was forced to resign from his position as prime minister. *Peter Halket* can therefore be read as a form of literary protest against British Imperialism, voicing Schreiner's concerns about the unjust treatment of South African 'natives' and the capitalist use of land. This brings her stance on the Native Question in South Africa to the fore.¹⁰

While Schreiner was trying to garner anti-Rhodes support nationally and internationally, her family, with the exception of her older brother Fred Schreiner, was still in support of Rhodes. Schreiner was hurt by her family's decision not to support the novella, commenting in a letter that "I do not think I feel anything so much as the attacks from members of my own family" (OS to John T Lloyd 14 December 1896). Many others also voiced their disapproval of the novella, with *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* calling it a "political pamphlet of great bitterness, linked on to the very smallest thread of a story that ever carried red-hot opinions and personal abuse of the fiercest kind into the world" (First and Scott 230). Schreiner initially had misgivings about publishing the book as she felt it could affect future work and jeopardise her relationships. Yet, despite being conflicted, she went ahead and had it published in London. In a letter to her brother, William Schreiner, she wrote:

Peter Halket has been apparently such a dead failure, in spite of its immense circulation. I do not believe it has saved the life of one nigger,¹¹ it had not the slightest effect in forcing on the parliamentary examination into the conduct of affairs in Rhodesia, & it cost me, every thing. And yet I have never for one moment regretted that I published it. (OS to William Schreiner 29 June 1898)

¹⁰ The Native Question was to garner sympathy and understanding for the plight and struggles of the 'natives' and the exploitation of their labour by white people which was rooted in imperialism and racism.

¹¹ Schreiner's use of the word "nigger" was in keeping with her times. Her terminology has caused some dismay among critics and Bart Moore-Gilbert argues "that at a latent level Schreiner's novel is haunted by a repressed but often sympathetic acknowledgement of subaltern resistance albeit of a relatively weak form" (Moore-Gilbert 43). The writer suggests that the racist language reflects the portrayal of colonialism and the subconscious influence it has.

Peter Halket was extremely personal to Schreiner and she felt that it was one of her best written works, despite her claims of its failure. She was accepting of the fact that it did not expose Rhodes and the Chartered Company as it was intended to do. Yet, there was still a sense of personal moral achievement attached to the publication. Her intention was to spread knowledge of the impact and brutality of British Imperialism in southern Africa with the rest of the world and by publishing her novella she managed to do that.

As in *African Farm*, Schreiner maintains her interest in the human/landscape relationship in *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*. However, the issue of land in the novella is viewed differently to that in *African Farm*, where the novel presents the land as a place which for Waldo holds the secrets of deep and ancient history, for Lyndall it is associated with arbitrary power, and for the narrator it holds the failed promise of experiencing the sublime. In *Peter Halket* land instead presents the contested space between colonisers and colonised. Schreiner's image of the land in this novella reflects not only the slaughtering of the indigenous people (made apparent by the original frontispiece showing three black men hanging from a tree) and the abuse of the women, but also demonstrates how the land is exploited and destroyed by the colonists in the pursuit of capitalist and imperialist expansion. *Peter Halket* was intended to speak directly to the colonist, and specifically to Rhodes himself, on the theme of British imperialism. It is strongly political and conveys Schreiner's critique of what had happened in Mashonaland – the murderous exploitation of people and land. The novella deliberately sways between historical fact and fiction, creating “an explicitly political as well as ethical point” (Stanley 200) as it focuses on the atrocities of imperialism by the British.

Schreiner was not always in opposition to Rhodes and was, in the earlier days, a strong advocate and admirer of his capacity for governance and business. Even towards the end of Rhodes'

failed political career, Schreiner still had empathy for him. Prior to the publication of *Peter Halket* Schreiner was living in South Africa, and in 1890, when Schreiner was first introduced to Rhodes, she was in awe of the work he was doing. She had her first meeting with him in November 1890. In several letters she spoke of his greatness and her admiration for him: “Cecil Rhodes must be a splendid man, the one man of genius we have in this Colony” (OS to Erida Cawood February 1890); “There is one man I’ve heard of, Cecil John Rhodes, the head of the Chartered Company, whom I think I should like if I could meet him; he’s very fond of An African Farm” (OS to Havelock Ellis 15 April 1890); “The only big man we have here is Rhodes, & the only big thing the Chartered Company” (OS to William Thomas Stead 12 July 1890); and “He is a great man who is leading & transforming the discordant parties in South Africa” (Os to Emilia Frances Dilke 17 March 1891). Her letters herald him as a saviour, as a man of good standing and someone who could provide much needed leadership in South Africa. Schreiner’s interest in Rhodes extended not only to her admiration of his political achievements but she even shows an infatuation towards him. First and Scott comment that “she admitted to a mysterious attraction – not love or admiration, a deliberate feeling that ‘this man belongs to me’” (First and Scott 198). In a letter to Rhodes she wrote:

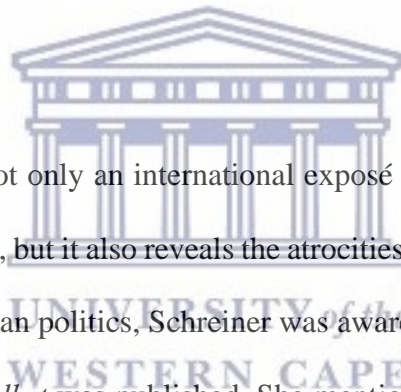
Dear Mr Rhodes

I am afraid to speak to you so I must write this line to tell you how very sorry I was I troubled you with that letter. The train had not left five minutes when I wanted it back, & I have suffered the agony of a lost spirit about it ever since. Please forgive me, & don’t mention it to me.

I am very grateful to you, though I have not shown it, for the sympathys you expressed with my work the other night. No one has ever done so in just the same way. I am very thankful to you for having told me it helps me ~~to decide~~. (OS to Cecil John Rhodes 15 November 1890).

For an outspoken feminist, Schreiner appears unsure of herself and seems apologetic for her opinions, to what was said in a previous letter to Rhodes. While Schreiner voiced much admiration for Rhodes after her return to South Africa, her dislike of and disillusionment with his political conduct began showing as early as 1891. In a letter to Ettie Stakesby Lewis she

wrote, “I had to oppose him on the native flogging bill”¹² (OS to Ettie Stakesby Lewis 16 July 1891). Schreiner was beginning to show her dissatisfaction towards Rhodes and his treatment of the African inhabitants, also indicating that Rhodes was beginning to demonstrate his imperialist authority on the indigenous people. In a satirical skit which Schreiner wrote in 1891, “The Salvation of a Ministry”, “Rhodes was damned to hell as a capitalist and a supporter of the Strop Bill” (Blackman *Introduction* iv). In a letter to her brother she writes that she wants no association with Rhodes; “& that we are not in any way friends beyond that I admire his genius” (OS to Will Schreiner May 1891). While she still held respect for Rhodes, Schreiner no longer acknowledged the existence of a friendship between them. In letters to her brother and William Thomas Stead she wrote of Rhodes, “I have not spoken to him for 10 months” (OS to Will Schreiner May 1891), and “I have not seen Rhodes for a long time” (OS to William Thomas Stead July 1891).



The novella, *Peter Halket*, is not only an international exposé of Rhodes and his murderous exploitations of people and land, but it also reveals the atrocities of British imperialism. Given her familiarity with South African politics, Schreiner was aware of the repercussions that she could be faced with if *Peter Halket* was published. She mentions this in a letter she wrote to her brother:

After I had finished *Peter Halket* I spent three days & nights almost entirely with out sleep pacing up & down my verandah, trying to decide whether I should publish it or not. I believed that Rhodes & the Chartered Company would proceed against me; & I felt sure that the matter would kill me, as it did to a very large extent. (OS to Will Schreiner 29 June 1898)

It was from a young age that Schreiner was aware of the “convulsions of colonial capitalism” (McClintock 259). In 1872, at the age of 17, she moved to the Diamond Fields in New Rush (later renamed Kimberley) to stay with her siblings, Theo and Ettie. She stayed in New Rush

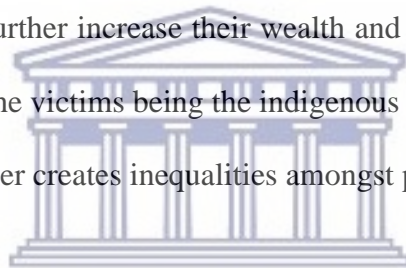
¹² “The Masters’ and Servants’ Amendment Bill, also known as the ‘Strop Bill;’ if passed, would have permitted flogging servants for misdemeanours, but it failed to become law” (Stanley and Salter 25).

for less than a year before moving to Fraserburg where she stayed with her sisters. Her brief stay at the Diamond Fields gave her the opportunity to focus on her writing, “noting in her diary that she had begun writing *Other Men’s Sins* and the first chapters of *Undine*” (Barsby 16). But while she was living in New Rush, she witnessed the atrocities of British imperialism in the treatment of the land and the indigenous people. Those that were hoping to make a living from mining diamonds were being subjected to rigorous regulations instigated by the British government. Although the “diggers” were represented as white males, it was the indigenous people who were doing all the digging and the hard labour. Life on the Diamond Fields was becoming intense and a few years after Schreiner moved away from the Diamond Fields, she commented in a letter to her sister:

I am feeling very anxious about the dear folks up at the Diamond Fields; things up there seem in a very critical state. They write me that the niggers enrolled by the government are every where to be seen swaggering about & saying how they don't mean to fight with the diggers but to have it out on their wives & children. If once a blow is struck up there, on either side, there will be terrible mad work, I fear, as the diggers have been quite maddened by injustice & taxation to which all have been more or less subjected & would fight to the death even though their case is utterly hopeless & they know it to be so. Theo & all my other friends up there have armed them selves & even Ettie has her revolver with which to protect herself in case of the worst. (OS to Catherine (Katie) Findlayson 28 April 1875)

Having to defend one's birth land because of the intrusion of immigrants could be seen as an insult, particularly when those who are in the act of defending are actually the victims. “At the same time, Africans were entirely denied possession of the diamonds they dug from the earth. A law was quickly rushed into force by the white invaders: no African would be allowed to own, buy, or sell a single diamond” (McClintock 275). But it was not only the “Africans” that were treated unjustly; the Boers were also subjected to British tyranny and Schreiner became sympathetic towards them. This is evident in *Peter Halket* when the wife of the preacher asks why he mentioned the Chartered Company's attack on the Boers when the congregation had no Boers but was instead filled with “wealthy and important people” (*Peter Halket* 27).

There is a strong intent in the novella to create awareness among those in England of the oppression and injustices that were taking place towards the land and the indigenous people of South Africa. It is mentioned a few times in the novella for Halket to share the message of oppression: “Peter Simon Halket take a message to the people of England” (*Peter Halket* 37); “Cry to the wise men of England” (37); “Cry to the women of England” (38); and “Cry aloud to the working men and women of England” (38). The ownership of land was very much a contentious issue between the colonists and indigenous people. The intention of the colonist is one of capitalist greed, and land forms the basis of an exploitable resource as a means to amassing wealth. In the novella, a preacher comments in his sermon, “this morning we considered the evils this land is suffering under the hands of men whose aim is the attainment of wealth and power” (*Peter Halket* 33). Those who possess the land, in this case the white colonists, are in a position to further increase their wealth and to dictate to and control those who are dispossessed of land, the victims being the indigenous people. The ownership of land and the value it possesses, further creates inequalities amongst people.



Schreiner’s personal views on both transcendentalism and socialism also reveal themselves in the story as possible solutions to resolving inequalities and to creating the unification of all people, regardless of race and cultural backgrounds. Her political critique of the situation in South Africa reveals that she followed the news closely on the political front. Between 1890 and 1897, Schreiner was extremely vocal about the political situation in South Africa, and she demonstrated this in many of her letters to family and friends where she highlighted the problems and difficulties the country was facing. Her letters were critical of Rhodes and his activities and we also see her advising her brother, Will Schreiner, on his own political journey. Her political concerns included the Native Flogging Bill, the unjust treatment of the indigenous people, the Jamieson Raid, land ownership and distribution, and the treatment of the Boer

people. Schreiner became a self-proclaimed political analyst during this time. Her letters indicate that she was not afraid to voice her opinions and concerns on pertinent political matters and would point blame at those who were causing conflict and who were engaged in unjust political governance. In *The World's Great Question*, Stanley and Salter comment that "Schreiner's letters not only are lively, personal in tone and contain rich detail about everyday life, but also concern many intellectual and political matters, including how to produce a future just and equal society" (Stanley and Salter XXXV). The passion she demonstrates in her letters reveals how closely connected she was to the political situation in South Africa.

In her political writings, Schreiner expressed her strong antipathy to both the colonisation of land and the treatment of African inhabitants. In a letter to T. Fisher Unwin, who published the essay *The Political Situation*, a letter co-written with her husband, Samuel Cronwright-Schreiner, she wrote:

You will see that I am publishing a series of articles in the Fortnightly for which I am getting £3 a page for the English rights alone; but had I had your letter in time I should have offered them to you. Could you send me a couple of copies of your periodical, as I have never seen it, nor am I likely up here to do so.

Political life is absorbing all one's thought & strength here just now; things are very dark, but I believe it is the dark that comes before the dawning. (OS to T Fisher 13 April 1896)

The "series of articles" Schreiner is referring to are her essays entitled *Returned South African*. These articles cover her thoughts, opinions and experiences on the political and economic changes South Africa was going through. They were published in the *Fortnightly Review*, the *South African News*, *Cosmopolitan* and various other publications. In March 1897, she had a flier entitled *Christ Came to Matabeleland* published in *Review of Reviews* as an advertisement for *Peter Halket*. It is evident that Schreiner had become entrenched in the politics and resistance towards the unjust governance that was taking place at the time, as many of her writings sought to criticise the political developments that were occurring. In 1896, she published *The Boer* and *The Problem of Slavery* as part of her *Returned South African* essays.

With titles such as *The Races of South Africa: Thus Saith the Lord*, *The Problem of Slavery*, *The Boer*, and various other instalments over a period of two years, put out between 1896 to 1897 under the title *Stray Thoughts on South Africa*, it is clear that Schreiner was critical about the political situation in South Africa. More importantly, she wrote “the allegorical novella *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*, which powerfully responded to the massacres by troopers working for the Chartered Company controlled by Rhodes” (Stanley and Salter 29) as he invaded Matabeleland and Mashonaland. *Peter Halket* reveals a real life South African tragedy that Schreiner was living with at the time.

However, Schreiner chooses to address this tragedy in an unusual literary mode, one that she describes as ‘allegory’. In a letter to Betty Molteno she wrote that *Peter Halket* is an allegory: “as I opened my eyes there was an allegory full fledged in my mind! A sort of allegory story about Matabele land” (OS to Betty Molteno 20 August 1896). In a recent article, Marike Beyers writes that traditionally allegory is used as a “mode of writing to represent experiences of the marginalised, and especially the colonised, because it can bring together and bridge the diverse experience of many cultures thrown together” (Beyers 14). Beyers further comments that “allegory is understood to refer to multiple and alternative layers of meaning beyond the surface of the text” (14). *Peter Halket* clearly demonstrates Schreiner’s unusual way of writing that combines realism and allegory. In the novella, she uses elements of colonialism and the impact on the indigenous people as a means to educate the reader about their ill treatment by the Chartered Company. It is through the use of allegory that she creates an idealist vision of how the world should be: which is a Christian vision, a spiritual one that is humane and where equality amongst all exists. Instead, the world is reflected as being inhumane and violent, an imperialistic vision.

A Brief Summary

Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland is set on the vast, open veld of what was later to be called Rhodesia (named after Cecil John Rhodes in 1895), and which even later became Zimbabwe in 1980. The novella is set during a period where opportunities for gold and diamond mining had culminated in political collusion and deceit as means to gain access to the right land for mining and agriculture. Rhodes was to become involved with both diamond and gold mining companies, and was protected by the British government when he expropriated land from the indigenous people to serve his mining interests. Early on in the novella, Schreiner's reference to the Chartered Company's forces and their destructive behaviour alerts the reader to what Rhodes was doing in Africa, and this sets the tone for what the rest of the novella will be about. Similarly to *African Farm*, the novella begins with an image of the landscape viewed at night-time. However, unlike *African Farm* where the landscape is serene under the moonlight, a lost trooper, Peter Halket, finds himself alone on a kopje (koppie) in "an impenetrable darkness" (*Peter Halket* 1). The darkness is not only an indication of night but also of moral confusion and the inability to see the truth of the ongoing war. Schreiner continues with the image of the landscape which has been left in ruins and devoid of human activity. She writes:

Since eight in the morning he had wandered among long grasses, and ironstone kopjes, and stunted bush, and had come upon no sign of human habitation, but the remains of a burnt kraal, and a down-trampled and uncultivated mealie field, where a month before the Chartered Company's forces had destroyed a native settlement. (*Peter Halket* 1)

As in *African Farm*, the landscape is also different during the day. The landscape in *Peter Halket* reflects a dystopic space in ruins, ruins created by the after-effects of a battle which favoured Rhodes' Chartered Company. The haunting memories that remain are of a space that was once filled with life, and a place that served as home to many indigenous Mashona people. Words such as "burnt kraal," "down-trampled," "uncultivated" and "destroyed" reflect the harsh plundering and destruction that took place. Their plundering leaves the land

uninhabitable and the soil degraded, making it unsuitable for the locals to sustain themselves. What is revealed here is that colonialism causes the displacement and land dispossession of indigenous people and that this will impact future generations.¹³

Separated from the rest of his group, Halket finds himself alone in the veld. He makes a fire and reflects on what he would do with the land he will take from the Mashonas, the rightful owners of the land, while the Mashonas would work for him as his slaves. He thinks about the conversations he has had with his comrades and how they destroyed kraals and killed the “niggers” (*Peter Halket* 3). He shows no remorse when he recollects those moments shared with the rest of the troop. He is more concerned about the acquired wealth he will receive as “all men made money when they came to South Africa” (*Peter Halket* 5), and he mentions the names of Cecil John Rhodes and Barney Barnato. The latter arrived in South Africa from England a poor man, but after ten years working in the diamond mines established Barnato Diamond Mining Company and became a rival to Rhodes. Halket’s comment “Other men had come to South Africa with nothing, and had made everything! Why should not he?” (*Peter Halket* 5) speaks directly of Barnato but also of the opportunities that existed for the colonists.

While at his campfire Halket meets a stranger, someone who critics have assumed to be Jesus. The stranger mentions that he is a Jew of Palestine (*Peter Halket* 10), he loves all people, and that he was without food for forty days and nights (11). Halket observes the poor condition of his feet (16) and the old wounds on both his hands (38), and the stranger alludes to his omniscient presence of being everywhere and hearing “all cries” (23). Halket’s naivety shows that he is oblivious to the stranger’s likeness to Christ and openly shares and boasts about the

¹³ On 19 June 1913 the Natives Land Act was passed which saw many indigenous people dispossessed of land. It limited “African land ownership to 7 percent and later 13 percent through the 1936 Native Trust and Land Act of South Africa. The Act restricted black people from buying or occupying land.” (<http://www.gov.za/issues/land-reform>)

abuse and murder of the “natives.” Halket’s ignorance points out the hypocritical nature of one who regards himself as a Christian yet performs un-Christian like acts. In one particular part of his conversation with the Christ-like stranger, he repeats Rhodes’ comment that “*I prefer land to niggers*” (original emphasis, 18). These italicised words as they appear in the novel are steeped in capital greed and racism. This is a bold statement, and it expresses the importance of the power that land holds and also reflects the lack of value placed on life and the racist attitude towards the indigenous people. The Christ-like stranger delves into Christian values and teachings regarding the treatment of people and land.

The stranger shares a story with Halket about a priest giving a sermon in church. The priest mounted his pulpit and read from “an old book more than two thousand years old” (26). It could be assumed that he was reading from the Bible. The sermon by the priest is a complex tale. He compares what he has read from the old book (a story of Naboth who has a vineyard that yields gold and Ahab that wants it so that he may be wealthy) to a new book, “the Blue Book Report¹⁴ of the Select Committee of the Cape Parliament on the Jameson Raid” (26). Rhodes is being compared to Ahab, who is taking the land from the Mashonas for the sake of wealth. The tale sounds like a parable, “a fictitious story that illustrates a moral attitude or a religious principle” (www.merriam-webster.com). It yields certain truths that involve Rhodes. The priest further talks about the “Blue Book Report” (*Peter Halket* 27), which refers to the failed attack on the Boers. The sanctimonious and self-righteous sermon given by the priest represents the principles of Christianity. Halket listens intently to the stranger’s speech on living righteously and with purpose, where all people across nations will live in harmony. The stranger speaks of the land as creating unity instead of creating division:

¹⁴ “A book of specialised information often published under government auspices” (www.https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/blue%20book)

Man shall not gather in it to worship that which divides; but they shall stand in it shoulder to shoulder, white man with black, and the stranger with the inhabitant of the land; and the place shall be holy; for men shall say, “Are we not brethren and the sons of one Father?” (*Peter Halket* 36)

Stating that men are “sons of one Father” is claiming that there should be no divide amongst men as all worship one Father. After the stranger’s address on how Halket should conduct his life: “love your enemies... succour the oppressed; deliver the captive” (*Peter Halket* 45), Halket transforms his beliefs on how he should conduct himself.

In the second part of the novel Halket is with his troop again. He now has the opportunity to enforce his new beliefs. A wounded “native” is captured and is due to be hanged. Halket views this as his opportunity for redemption. He attempts to dissuade the captain from hanging him and delivers a speech about justice and the treatment of the “natives” saying that they are just defending their own land. One of the troopers had overheard Halket’s conversation with the captain and relays Halket’s Christian rhetoric that “all men were brothers, God loved a black man as well as a white; Mashonas and Matabele were poor ignorant folk, and we had to take care of them” (*Peter Halket* 54). Here, Halket’s changed perception of the ownership of land and of the “natives” is revealed. He tells the captain that “we ought to let this man go; we ought to give him food for the road, and tell him to go back to his people, and tell them we hadn’t come to take their land but to teach them and love them” (54). His colonial sentiment towards land and the “natives” has changed. The captain punishes Halket for his revelation on land and “natives” by making him march in the blazing sun while keeping watch on the prisoner, whom Halket is to shoot the next morning. However, during the night Halket cuts the captive free from the tree. For so doing, Halket is shot. The murder is covered up and the Mashonas are blamed for shooting Halket. However, it is suspected that Halket was murdered by the captain. In the end, Halket dies a martyr and he is buried beneath the same tree where the “native” was held captive.

Halket, a representative of Rhodes' Chartered Company, is initially in agreement with Rhodes on the treatment of land. It is the question of the land that is prominently addressed between the stranger and Halket:

“Who gave you your land?” the stranger asked.
“Mine! Why, the Chartered Company,” said Peter.
The stranger looked back into the fire. “And who gave it to them?” he asked softly.
“Why, England, of course. She gave them the land to far beyond the Zambezi to do what they liked with, and make as much money out of as they could, and she'd back 'em.”
“Who gave the land to the men and women of England?” asked the stranger softly.
“Why, the devil!” They said it was theirs, and of course it was,” said Peter.
“And the people of the land: did England give you the people also?”
Peter looked a little doubtfully at the stranger. “Yes, of course, she gave us the people; what use would the land have been to us otherwise?”
“And who gave her the people, the living flesh and blood, that she might give them away, into the hands of others?” asked the stranger, raising himself.
Peter looked at him and was half afeared. “Well, what could she do with a lot of miserable niggers, if she didn't give them to us? A lot of good-for-nothing rebels they are, too,” said Peter. (*Peter Halket* 20)

Schreiner wants the reader to question the validity of what Rhodes is doing and how he is treating the land and its people. How can one who claims to be a Christian be involved in such horrendous acts against humanity, for the purpose of accumulating wealth? Two issues are being addressed in this extract: the Native Question and the Capitalist Question. As previously mentioned, the Native Question raises concerns about race, the focus being on the moral treatment of the indigenous people. In a letter to William Thomas Stead, Schreiner writes of Rhodes, “he has believed that with the same merciless injustice with which he has handled the natives he may handle the well armed Boers: the results at this moment it is difficult to foretell” (OS to William Thomas Stead 4 January 1896). This letter, written just before the publication of *Peter Halket*, shows Schreiner's disappointment with Rhodes' treatment of the African inhabitants. She also indicates that the Boers could be faced with the same injustice. The Capitalist Question raises concerns about the treatment of land for wealth purposes. As a socialist, Schreiner's view about the land would have been that it should be accessible to all and that the land should not be exploited for the benefit of the elitists.

The dialogue between Halket and the stranger continues with further probing questions from the stranger, eventually leading to enquiries around who and what can be considered (a) Christian. Halket then fervidly admits that he and the Chartered Company are Christian. The efficacy of the dialectical method is to create a consciousness about the situation on hand, and for Halket to reflect on his behaviour and that of the Chartered Company and whether it was aligned to Christian behaviour. What they were doing was destructive.

Schreiner was visionary with regard to the future of the land because of British Imperialism and its aftermath on the indigenous people because of mining and land pursuits. In a letter to John X Merriman, Schreiner commented, “But the native question & the capitalist question are in their infancy now, will loom right over the land in fifty years’ time, & unless some might change set [s] in, will deluge the land with blood” (OS to John X Merriman 25 May 1896). Her comment at the time was deeply prophetic and shows a deep concern about the possible future bloodshed and destruction of humanity that would take place. The African inhabitants are regarded as objects, a source of cheap labour and as material possessions that can be passed around. The way they are treated and spoken of becomes dehumanising. They are viewed as an accessory to the land that will make the land more valuable. Halket’s comment “what use would the land have been” clearly defines the importance of having the African inhabitants to work the land and their purpose being to serve the owners of the land. England has taken ownership of the land as if it is rightfully theirs to possess. The probing questions from the stranger start off being subtle and fatherly. The word “softly” is repeated as a means of showing patience and concern and an attempt to understand Peter’s response. However, Halket’s responses do not turn out to be the responses that the stranger had anticipated and wanted. Halket’s answers typify colonial sentiment and superiority. He claims that as colonists, they are blessed with the land and the access to labour that comes with it. The stranger “raising

himself up” shows that he is troubled by Halket’s inappropriate responses. The stranger is attempting to create an awareness about the ownership of the land and claims that all persons should have access to it, and not just a singular person or group of people. This awareness about the access of land reflects Schreiner’s socialist ideals.

The stranger’s role is to make Halket question his own imperialist views and become cognisant of what he and Rhodes’ Chartered Company are doing to the land and its people; to allow him to change his beliefs and to share the message with the people of England and South Africa. The Christ-like stranger’s stories of how life should be lived and how people should be treated (particularly through the story about the priest) allow Halket to reflect on what he and the Chartered Company are doing. Halket is soon persuaded by the stranger’s Christian ideals and stories to lead a virtuous life and to persuade others to do the same. Halket becomes a disciple of the Christ-like stranger and says while at his feet, “I would like to be one of your men,... I am tired of belonging to the Chartered Company” (*Peter Halket* 36). The biblical image that is being portrayed here is one of remorse and salvation. In the Bible, Peter whose name was first Simon, was an apostle and a disciple of Jesus; Halket’s middle name is Simon and we can link his character to someone who becomes “reborn.”

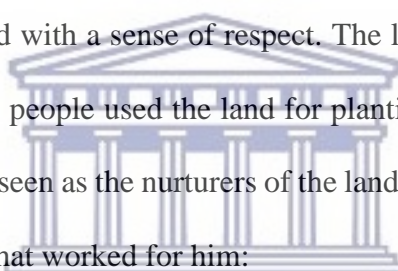
In the novella, then, Schreiner opposes Christian values to those of imperial conquest and expansion. In her comment to William Stead, she showed empathy towards Rhodes and felt that he should admit to his unjust actions against humanity and all his wrongdoings.

Poor old Rhodes! If he would throw up his arms now, confess everything & make a bold stand on ~~at least~~ the truth at last & for once! But his nature does not allow of it. (OS to William Stead January 1896)

Schreiner was still hoping that Rhodes would confess to his wrong doings and that he would show remorse. However, she knew him well enough to know that he would not accept responsibility for the bloodshed he had caused.

How is the Landscape Viewed?

As in *African Farm*, *Peter Halket* reveals many of Schreiner's beliefs and ideologies with regards to the indigenous people of the land, but approaches the landscape from a strongly political point of view. Her previous focus was on the access of land for all people while highlighting atrocities of capitalism. The shift from *African Farm* to *Peter Halket* in terms of thinking and response to landscape moves from self-awareness and spiritual awakening towards a strongly polemical framework on the future of the land. Moreover, the indigenous people are seen to work the land with a sense of respect. The land is used for sustenance and not enrichment. The indigenous people used the land for planting crops, particularly mealies, and it was the women that were seen as the nurturers of the land. Halket shared a story with the stranger about the two women that worked for him:


She 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, and I used to sell green mealies and pumpkins to all the fellows about. (*African Farm* 13)

There is an almost pure and honest relationship that exists between the indigenous people and the land, one that is not based on greed but on needing to sustain themselves. Farming is used as means to feed oneself and to sustain life. Halket uses what his land has produced for financial gain. In a manner, Halket shows how colonialism corrupts the essence of what farming means for the indigenous people. The relationship to the idea of “unity” offered by landscape in *African Farm* evolves or develops into a more profound understanding of the different relationships to land between indigenous people and colonial people in the novella.

Protest Writing

The allegorical novella, *Peter Halket*, can be considered a piece of writing that articulates Schreiner's political position and stance against Rhodes' agenda of the late 19th century or it can be considered "a piece of moralising Victorian realism" (Blackman 38). Tony Voss comments that the monologic narrative of *Peter Halket* "has been read in three hermeneutic ways: as political pamphlet, urging action; as allegorical 'message,' encouraging a change of heart; or as Victorian realism, a report from the colonial frontier to the metropole, designed to inform" (*Foreword* Voss 8). Since the novella sways between fact and fiction, it can at times be read as historical narrative, as it mentions key facts pertaining to South Africa's history. Schreiner was known for the use of allegory in many of her writings, the literary device serving as a means of saying that which could not be said. It is often associated with religion as well. During Victorian times, it was fitting for a woman writer to push the boundaries of politics, religion, race and gender by using allegory, as a means of expressing her sentiments. Schreiner's use of allegory in *Peter Halket* not only voices her political concerns, but also symbolises a form of resistance to the current political landscape. She uses the novella to express her reality and simultaneously engage with history as it unfolds. Coetzee poses the question in *The Novel Today*: "are we trying to escape historical reality or, on the contrary, are we engaging with historical reality in a particular way that may require some explanation and some defence?" (Coetzee 2). Jap-Nanak Makkar writes that:

In "The Novel Today" (1988), Coetzee distinguishes between category of fiction oriented toward historical or mimetic accuracy and an alternative category to which fiction belongs: novels that rival history. Novels of the first sort aim to capture the firsthand experience of life lived alongside notable historical events, whereas the latter strive toward unbounded autonomy (3). (Makkar 205)

Schreiner's novel uses storytelling as a basis to promote the historical narrative that was taking place at the time. The factual elements of the narrative which deal directly with Cecil John Rhodes – the murderous exploits of his Chartered Company, "the spree they had up Bulawayo, hanging those three niggers" (*Peter Halket* 17), the unwarranted abuse of the African inhabitants by allowing servants to be flogged, the distribution of land to pioneers, the forceful

taking of the land for mining purposes, and “the Blue Book Report¹⁵ of the select Committee of the Cape Parliament on the Jameson Raid” (*Peter Halket* 27) – reflect historical events that were taking place in South Africa. Yet they simultaneously raise the question: is this what a Christian does? Schreiner’s inclusion of religious principles in her novella, alongside the unethical behaviour of Rhodes and the Chartered Company, contradicts the religious stance of the English. How can one be religious and Christian yet commit such violent acts against humanity? Halket’s response to the stranger that the Chartered Company is Christian makes a mockery of Rhodes and Christianity. The conversation between the two characters “Is the Chartered Company Christian also?” he asked. “Yes, oh yes,” said Peter (*Peter Halket* 23) highlights how flawed Rhodes’ behaviour is as a Christian. While Schreiner was not a practising Christian, her staunch upbringing meant that she was aware that one was reared to live a life according to biblical teachings. She uses religious principles to point out the flaws in the behaviour of Rhodes and the Chartered Company, as a means to illustrate how un-Christian-like their behaviour is. Stanley and Dampier comment that “Thus on the surface, *Trooper Peter* is written as [...] a Christian morality tale concerning the murderous evil of Chartered Company troopers in Matabeleland and Mashonaland” (Stanley and Dampier 62).

Although land and the acquisition of land are viewed from a political perspective in *Peter Halket*, Schreiner’s spiritual awareness of the land can be viewed as being socialist. The Christ-like stranger does not lay claim to ownership of land. He regards the act of humanity as living in harmony with each other in a land where movement across the land is free and access to the land is free. The landscape is a sublime wilderness that cannot be owned and where spiritual revelation can take place. The vast open landscape of the Karoo represents the freedom that

¹⁵ “A book of specialized information often published under government auspices” ([www.https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/blue%20book](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/blue%20book))

people should have and the freedom that Schreiner enjoys. Besides connecting to freedom, she also connects to the deep history and cultural elements of the Karoo. In many of the letters that Schreiner has written about the Karoo, she creates a romantic image of what she sees before her, painting it as a place where one can find serenity and where a troubled soul can be at peace. The natural environment of the Karoo represents an unhindered space, providing a person the freedom to exist in a natural state. She romanticises the Karoo that European writers would have viewed as anti-pastoral. In *Peter Halket*, Schreiner makes quite a sentimental argument with regards to the land, and questions how is one able to live on the land after being dispossessed as an indigenous owner?

During the few years prior to the publication of the novella, Schreiner shows a heightened interest in politics. Her letters show serious concerns about the political developments that were unfolding in South Africa at the time. Some of the aspects that concerned Schreiner, those that are reflected in both her letters and *Peter Halket*, were the treatment of the African inhabitants, England's obliviousness to Rhodes' unethical behaviour towards the African inhabitants, the Jamieson Raid and questionable politicking linked to various business dealings. Her letters reveal plenty about the resentment she felt towards Rhodes' and his ongoing political agenda to bleed the land for capitalist enrichment while committing reprehensible acts against the indigenous people of Southern Africa. She argues that it was because of his wealth that he was able to do what did and that the English government was unaware of his criminal acts and his treatment of the African inhabitants. In a letter to her publisher she wrote:

It is not for me, ~~put~~ but for the English public (the people, & not the even government) to insist on an official inquiry which shall make clear the conduct of the Chartered Company during the last five years, & ~~wh~~-will show how mild & pale a picture of things in Mashona & Matabele land was contained in Peter Halket!!

When my two last articles of "Stray Thoughts" appear, my attitude on this question will be made much clearer & the last article will have a much more powerful effect, I believe in moving English public opinion on this matter than were I to publish the most terrible eye-witness accounts which I have, of shooting & floggings in Mashona land. (OS to T Fisher Unwin 30 July 1897)

There are various links that can be established between some of her letters and the content of *Peter Halket*. The ignorance displayed by the English government and the public is mentioned in both *Peter Halket* and in various letters to Schreiner's friends and family. In the novella Halket says to the stranger, "if we get the British Government here, they'll be giving the niggers land to live on; and let them have the vote, and get civilised and educated, and all that sort of thing" (*Peter Halket* 18). Halket's comment shows the general racist sentiment of people at the time. Halket also mentions to the stranger, "They said there was lots of loot to be got, and land to be given out, and that sort of thing," (*Peter Halket* 13), this echoing the capitalist greed of the Chartered Company. In a letter to Alf Mattison Schreiner wrote:

You people in England don't know what the heel of a capitalist is, when it gets flat on the neck of the people! We have an awful struggle before us in this country" (OS to Alf Mattison 13 April 1896).

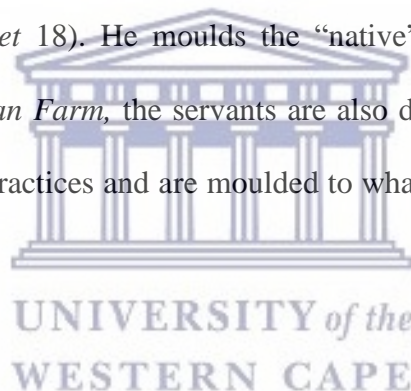
However, Schreiner also assumes that the African inhabitants would have been treated better if the British government had been made aware of what was happening in the country. I do not believe that this would have been the case. When Rhodes was relieved of his political position, the African inhabitants were not better off. Although the Natives Land Act 1913 was passed 11 years after Rhodes' death, during his lifetime and political career he created the idea of segregation which would ensure the disenfranchisement of indigenous people. The campaign for the segregation of indigenous people, in fact, began with the Glen Grey Act 1884, which was drafted by Rhodes. The purpose of the act was to regulate the ownership of land by Black people and to force them to become labourers on farms or industrial workers. It targeted the indigenous people as a means to further the growth of capitalism.

Peter Halket epitomises Rhodes' mentality of exploitation of land and people at all costs. The expropriation of land in order to mine gold highlights the ruthless undertaking of colonial capitalism. In a letter to Betty Molteno Schreiner wrote:

The way they are hounding the Mashonas for what they call murder, - i.e. for killing people in time of war - is to me far more terrible than anything that is happening in the Colony. But I feel I am powerless. The English people are given up to their lust for gold & Empire & there is nothing left to appeal to. (OS to Betty Molteno 18 July 1896)

Schreiner was frustrated by the underhanded manner in which the British were handling the war with the Mashonas. She believed that the British were killing the Mashonas in retaliation for being attacked by them. Yet, the Mashonas were only defending their own land.

Halket's attitude towards the African inhabitants and the land concerns the ownership and financial benefits related to them. He shows no empathy towards the treatment of the indigenous people and the way in which their lives are impacted by the colonists. He attempts to 'civilize' the indigenous women and refers to one of the woman who worked for him when he says that "She picked up English quicker than I picked up her lingo, and took to wearing a dress and shawl" (*Peter Halket* 18). He moulds the "native" women to what he feels is appropriate. Similarly in *African Farm*, the servants are also dressed in westernised clothes, take part in western religious practices and are moulded to what is assumed to be appropriate for a civilised society.



My copy of *Peter Halket* includes a photograph of three African inhabitants hanging from a tree. In the original edition of *Peter Halket*, this photograph was the frontispiece but it was subsequently removed from further editions. The photograph served as an introduction to what was taking place in Matabeleland and the brutal reality of imperialism. In the text of the novella, Halket asks the stranger "Did you hear of the spree they had up Bulawayo way, hanging those three niggers for spies?" (*Peter Halket* 17). The casual demeanour of the white men witnessing the hanging, their relaxed body language showing their hands on their waists, presents an image of accomplishment but also one meant to instil fear in the "natives." According to Paul Walters and Jeremy Fogg, the photograph was discovered in a barbershop in Kimberly by Schreiner

and her husband. In a letter to her publisher, T Fisher Unwin, Schreiner writes, “When you can manage it too, please add to the words “From a Photograph”, the words “taken in Matabeleland” (OS to T Unwin Fisher 12 February 1897). To Schreiner it was important that the origin of where the photo was taken be included in the publication, as it would demonstrate Rhodes’ reign of terror in Matabeleland. It is evident that Schreiner had put much thought and planning into the possible impression the novella would make and the message that she wanted to transpire from the novella.

In *Peter Halket*, land as the contested space between the colonists and indigenous people becomes an instrument of wealth appropriation. The greed for land far outweighs the value of human life, and Schreiner shows an explicit intent of publicly revealing the unlawful and questionable behaviour of Rhodes and the Chartered Company’s involvement in land appropriation under the guise of imperial expansion. She draws attention to the global consequence of global colonisation and she shows how the indigenous people are exploited and how genocides are occurring in the name of capitalism. Although Schreiner claims that *Peter Halket* was a spontaneous piece of writing, her letters indicate the contrary. The vision that spurred Schreiner to write the story was the product of long and careful thought about the political system Rhodes represented, and the cost to humanity his vision of opening Africa up to capitalist exploitation in the name of “civilising” it had brought.



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CONCLUSION

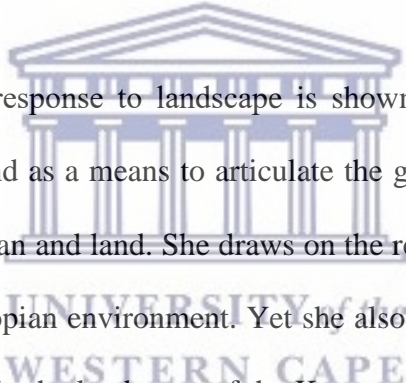
“Nature is made to conspire with spirit to emancipate us.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson (www.emersoncentral.com)

The figure of Olive Emily Schreiner is featured in a recent installation entitled *Long March to Freedom*, held at Century City Boulevard in Cape Town, in honour of 300 influential individuals who have contributed to South Africa’s democracy. She takes her rightful place as a life-sized bronze statue among many other significant individuals in South African history, such as Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Frances Baard, Helen Joseph, Ruth First and many more. The *Long March to Freedom* traces the journey of South Africa’s democracy from the periods of colonisation and apartheid to the present day. The website claims that the bronze statue installation “spans four centuries of South Africa’s history, and is an attempt to redress the historical imbalances that exist in a cultural landscape littered with colonial conquests and racial segregation” (www.nhmsa.co.za). As this study has shown, it is evident in *The Story of an African Farm* and *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* that from a young age Schreiner displayed an enquiring mind that challenged the social imbalances, and which eventually led to her becoming a pioneer for the rights of women and the indigenous people of South Africa. In this thesis, I have tracked the way in which Schreiner views landscape, from a youthful and instinctive position in *African Farm*, to one that is informed, researched and experienced when writing *Peter Halket*.

In Schreiner’s first novel, the landscape of the Karoo becomes her touchstone of freedom, providing her with a sense of liberation from social control and the moral moulding of a Victorian woman. The novel pays close attention to the themes of a woman’s place in a patriarchal society, gender inequality, race and religion. In chapter one of this thesis I discuss *African Farm*, and I argue that, for the character of Waldo, the land has a spiritual connection

and that the writer incorporates the landscape of the Karoo as an extension of his existence. Furthermore, Schreiner uses the belief systems of Emerson and Darwin to integrate questions she has about her Christian faith and the nature of existence. She also begins her journey as the New Woman as she engages the character of Lyndall in a lengthy discussion about the position of a woman in a patriarchal society. Lyndall shows that the world is full of injustice and inequality, and her experiences outside of the farm leave her feeling disappointed by the systemic conditioning of women in a patriarchal society. Schreiner's thoughts and ideas on gender inequality would eventually lead her to taking on the role of a feminist who engages in championing the rights of women on a global platform. *African Farm* promotes Schreiner's collection of new ideas on human experiences, particularly from a woman's perspective, and offers opinions on an alternative reality for a woman in society.

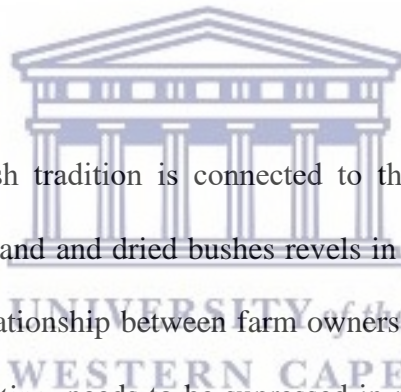


In *African Farm*, Schreiner's response to landscape is shown as being anti-pastoral, anti-colonial and anti-patriarchal, and as a means to articulate the gender discrimination which is connected to the theme of woman and land. She draws on the romantic traditions to show the failure of the farm and its dystopian environment. Yet she also shows the possibilities which the landscape has to offer. It is in the landscape of the Karoo where Waldo feels the presence of the spiritual body and where he feels a sense of connection with the world. He attaches a geological and historical consciousness to his environment. The awareness of an archaeological record in *African Farm* through Schreiner's inclusion of the Bushman paintings in the novel points to Schreiner's interest in evolution of the landscape, deep history and culture. The landscape of the Karoo figures as a spiritual dimension for Schreiner, something suggested to her primarily by Emerson's Transcendentalism and Christianity. In *African Farm* the landscape offers an Emersonian unity between religion and science. Her stance on landscape becomes further adjusted by its deep history and geological formation, influenced

by her reading of Emerson and transcendentalism and *The Physical Geography* which is mentioned in the novel.


In the opening scene of the novel, the romanticised vision of the landscape at night as the moon glosses over it provides a reference to a sublime landscape, one which is not the same during the daytime when the dysfunctional social relations become apparent. The feel of an ethereal and spiritual landscape which is full of possibility is suddenly locked into a dystopian universe and is conditioned by the operation of power. The youthful Schreiner allows her instinct to guide her with regard to how landscape is dealt with in *African Farm*. She uses the protagonists of the novel, Waldo and Lyndall, to demonstrate her own personal connection to the Karoo, and both characters engage in a journey of exploring the self. Waldo as a young child demonstrates that the space of the Karoo is rich in cultural heritage, is a landscape that transforms geographically over time, and that his spiritual connection to the environment extends beyond the religious realm of what the Bible instructs. Lyndall on the other hand demonstrates that patriarchy defines the role of the woman and this sets her on a trajectory to challenge the conventions of society. The novel has a tragic ending: both protagonists die. Waldo never realises his dream of being with Lyndall and Lyndall never achieves the goals she had set herself. Yet, despite the tragic ending, Lyndall can be viewed as a pioneer of women's rights. Her approach to marriage is based on the love between two people and not on marriage as being a convenience or an achievement for a woman. She tells Em that "marriage for love is the beautifullest external symbol of the union of souls; marriage without it is the uncleanliest traffic that defiles the world" (*African Farm* 174). The fact that she gives birth to a child out of wedlock, indicates her independence and her choice to live a life that is not defined by marriage.

Schreiner's position as a feminist shows her concern about the development and conditioning of all people, and that she believes that while it is important for a woman to be independent, it is equally important for a man to accept a woman as an equal. The issue of "equality," for Schreiner, is not solely about justice for the woman, but also concerns the development of society as a whole (an argument she makes strongly in *Woman and Labour*). In *African Farm*, young Lyndall, after her arrival back on the farm, comes to the realisation that equality does not exist between men and women and that the only place it exists is in birth and death. She comments to Waldo, "We were equals once when we lay newborn babies on our nurse's knees. We will be equals again when they tie up our jaws for the last sleep" (*African Farm* 174). Lyndall argues that when a person enters the social order, equality is lost and injustice between the genders prevails. It is perhaps in dying that Lyndall wins her fight against the inequality between the genders.



While landscape in the English tradition is connected to the pastoral, Schreiner's Karoo landscape with its barren, red sand and dried bushes revels in being anti-pastoral. The novel also shows the complicated relationship between farm owners and black labourers which, as Coetzee indicates in *White Writing*, needs to be suppressed in pastoral writing traditions. The land is also shown to be anti-pastoral in Schreiner's novella *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*. As argued in this thesis, land in *Peter Halket* is a scene of murderous exploitation of resources and people, one where the land is an element of political contention. The novella is a critique of British imperialism designed to raise awareness of the atrocities taking place in southern Africa during that period. Her numerous letters and *Peter Halket* reveal her sympathetic position on the narrative around the appropriation of land. Schreiner steps away from her spiritual stance that she took in *African Farm* and promotes a strong anti-colonial position regarding land and the ownership of land. She delves into the political sphere

of the access to land and uses a socialist approach to show that access to land should be a right granted to all people. The landscapes in both these novels are anti-pastoral as they foreground hardship, deep history and the dystopian nature of South African society. Both novels also reveal the ways in which religion may serve to uphold a colonialist and patriarchal society and how it is used as a means to oppress the majority and women. While the oppression of women is highlighted in *African Farm*, it is the treatment and oppression of the indigenous people that Schreiner focusses on in *Peter Halket*. Schreiner shows great empathy towards the treatment of the African inhabitants of the land and in her many letters she shows a strong opposition to Rhodes and his treatment of both land and African inhabitants. For Schreiner there is a responsibility and a respect for how the land and its people are treated which also brings in her transcendentalist approach to the land.



The unlimited and rich space of the Karoo landscape served as a stimulus for Schreiner's personal growth, the unification of her religious upbringing with her natural environment, her ability to challenge patriarchal society, to highlight the damaging impact of colonialism and to promulgate the feminist movement. Her final resting place in a sarcophagus on Buffelskop in the Karoo is perhaps fitting: on a *koppie* overlooking "the dry, sandy earth, with its coating of stunted karoo-bushes a few inches high, the low hills that skirted the plain, the milk-bushes with their long, finger-like leaves" (*African Farm* 3).

Photographs of my travels through the Karoo to Cradock

In the distance, the sky kisses the sweltering land but they will never hold hands.



Figure 1 "The plain was a weary flat loose red sand, sparsely covered by dry karoo-bushes that cracked beneath the tread like tinder, and showed the red earth everywhere" (*African Farm* 6).



Figure 2 "From end to end of the land the earth cried for water" (*African Farm* 13).



Figure 3 "Oh, Waldo, God put the little koppie here," (*African Farm* 21).



Figure 4 "[A]nd only the milk-bushes, like old hags, pointed their shrivelled fingers heavenwards, praying for the rain that never came" (*African Farm* 13).

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