THESIS

RECONSTRUCTING THE EMBODIED FEMININE: SEXUALITY, POSTCOLONIALISM AND REVOLT AGAINST VICTORIAN MORALITY IN OLIVE SCHREINER'S *THE STORY OF AN AFRICAN FARM*

Submitted by

Kristina Rhiannon Wickizer

English Department

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Summer 2010

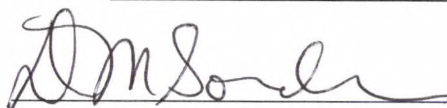
PR9369.2
.S37
Z778
2010

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

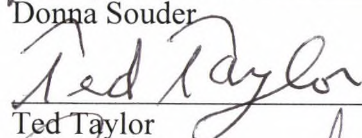
February 18, 2010

WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY KRISTINA RHIANNON WICKIZER ENTITLED RECONSTRUCTING THE EMBODIED FEMININE: SEXUALITY, POSTCOLONIALISM AND REVOLT AGAINST VICTORIAN MORALITY IN OLIVE SCHREINER'S *THE STORY OF AN AFRICAN FARM* BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS.

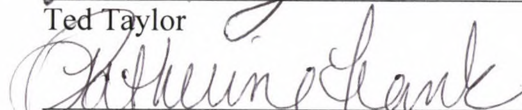
Committee on Graduate work



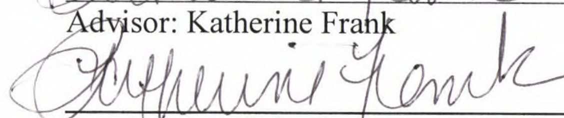
Donna Souder



Ted Taylor



Advisor: Katherine Frank



Department Chair: Katherine Frank

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

RECONSTRUCTING THE EMBODIED FEMININE: SEXUALITY, POSTCOLONIALISM AND REVOLT AGAINST VICTORIAN MORALITY IN OLIVE SCHREINER'S *THE STORY OF AN AFRICAN FARM*

In this thesis, I argue that Olive Schreiner's 1883 novel, *The Story of an African Farm*, though most often dismissed as an example of "New Woman" literature, is, in fact, a scathing look at sexuality in a postcolonial society. Moreover, by understanding the role, or lack thereof, that sexuality had in Victorian society, modern scholars can see the ways that sexuality and an individual's expression of it are still limited by socially constructed ideologies.

In the first section, titled a "Review of Literature," I quote Edward Said's argument that postcolonialism needs a variety of voices in order to better understand the effects of imperialism on the colonized. Consequently, *The Story of an African Farm* is important to the field, because it offers the experience of a white English woman living in South Africa. I then show how Olive Schreiner's novel added to the discussion and the rise of the New Woman novel. Discussing these two different literary traditions allows me to contextualize the importance of imperialism and the "new" feminism in my reading of *The Story of an African Farm.* In the second section, titled "*Argument*," I argue that Schreiner's depiction of her characters' sexuality allows us to discuss the societal limitations placed on an individual's sexuality.

I conclude by summarizing the ways in which sexuality is still a personal construct that society tries to control and label. I then suggest future implications for how the limitations of gender and sexuality can be discussed in regards to feminist and imperialist studies today.

Kristina Rhiannon Wickizer
Department of English
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, CO 80523
Summer 2010

INTRODUCTION

"For the Master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change."

--Audre Lorde[1]

"I cannot live all my life; I can only live part, and I select the past or a life of pure reflection, or the life of practical labour alone; if I try to live more, I shall not live at all."

--Olive Schreiner[2]

Olive Schreiner's 1883 novel, *The Story of an African Farm*, attempted to educate the reading public that action against the homogenizing effects of imperialism needed to be taken. Schreiner uses the genre of the novel and allegory to argue her case. *The Story*

---

[1] This quote was taken from Audre Lorde's 1984 speech, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House", which originally appeared in *Sister Outsider* (p 113). Lorde argues that the absence of certain voices or consciousness from scholarship creates a gap in Feminist and Postcolonial studies, and that this gap prevents the two disciplines from moving forward in their attempts to give voice to the experience of those "attempting to emancipate themselves from silence." She urges her scholar's to work together as a community to fill these gaps. Furthermore, Lorde is arguing in this statement that if scholar's ignore these other experiences—then they are continuing in the tradition of patriarchy to which they are opposed.

[2] This quote appears in, *Olive Schreiner: Letters* (1998): p 369. Olive Schreiner, in a letter to Havelock Ellis, chastises the attitude of those who do not try to live their lives more wholly. The letter continues with Schreiner conveying one wish that she hopes all individuals will strive for, "[w]hat a man may do, each soul, is to exert a tiny influence in the good and beautiful…" (370).

of an African Farm encourages readers that it would be through action and resisting being silenced that beneficial change for women, and ultimately men, could actually occur. This struggle was what inspired her life's work and what gave her the strength to become a political figure in South Africa and England.

Olive Emile Albertina Schreiner (1855-1920) was raised in the Cape Colony; her parents, Gottlob and Rebecca Lyndall, were German missionaries. Following the death of her younger sister Ellie, Schreiner began to reject and question Christianity. It is also speculated that in 1872 she had an affair with an older man, Julius Gau; the affair is said to have resulted in a pregnancy which Schreiner aborted on her own. She eventually married politician Samuel Cronwright. Cronwright uncommonly took his wife's last name when they married; however, the couple lived separately towards the end of their marriage. The Cronwright-Schreiners' traveled and lived in England for some time, but returned to the Cape for Schreiner to die. The Schreiner's had a hard time finding peace with herself and the world that defined her: "the emotional conflicts of her life were expressed in physical restlessness. She moved from one place to another, failed to finish a piece of work… These struggles with self-realization sometimes inspired her to write, but at other times prevented her from doing so" (First and Scott 18). Schreiner also had difficulty separating herself from her writings and even confided to Havelock Ellis, "I would like to have your critical judgment of my mind, or rather my work, which is really me" (qtd. in First and Scott 18). Her writings were her attempt to understand herself and society. It seems fitting then that her own life was as tragic and turbulent as the life of her heroines.

The Story of an African was Olive Schreiner's first novel to be published. Schreiner had it published in 1883 under the pseudonym Ralph Irons. Her editors had only one request, which was to have Lyndall marry her lover. Despite refusing this request, the novel was initially a success. Schreiner's social circle widened with this success and included the likes of Havelock Ellis, Karl Pearson, Edward Carpenter, and Eleanor Marx. Her new circle of friends allowed her to find the type of camaraderie that Lyndall, lacked. However, there were also those who opposed the novel. They objected to her rejection of conventional Christianity and her strong willed, openly sexual heroine.

New Woman Literature

Olive Schreiner is often associated with New Woman novels of the 1880s and 1890s. The term "New Woman" was introduced by the author Sarah Grand in defense of her novels. The term represented women and heroines that chose "… not to pursue the conventional bourgeois woman's career of marriage and motherhood… for her transgressions against the sex, gender, and class distinctions of Victorian England, she was accused of instigating the fall of man" (Ardis 1). While it may not be fair to blame Schreiner and the character of Lyndall for causing the fall of man, Schreiner was trying to bring attention to the rights of the individual.[3]

As a New Woman novelist, Olive Schreiner joined the ranks of great writers. Thomas Hardy, George Gissing, Henrik Ibsen, and Oscar Wilde along with Sarah Grand, Grant Allen, and George Egerton were some of the authors attributed with the New Woman novel. They all approached the issue of woman's and man's right to seek a life

[3] Olive Schreiner notes in one of her letters: "… the only people I really care to read it are people struggling with *material* want and the narrowness and iron pressure of their surroundings… The only thing that ever induced me to write it out was the feeling that some soul struggling with its material surrounding as I was might read it and feel less alone… " (Letters 210).

outside of society's acceptance. Ann Ardis argues in *New Women: New Novels*, "...they challenge not only the bourgeois Victorian social order's prescriptive definition of 'correct' female behavior but also the pattern of thinking in hierarchically organized binary oppositions that pit men against women, "good" women against "fallen" ones... and European against non-European cultures" (27). Ardis's argument is in response to the way that many trivialized the New Women movement in literary history.

The vehement critics of the New Women novels were predominantly male.[4] Elizabeth Lynn Linton feared and wrote against the New Women writers' portrayal of women that challenged the ideal "Angel in the House"; she "labeled them 'Wild Women' and strongly chastised them for warring as they do against the best traditions, the holiest functions, and sweetest qualities of her sex" (qtd. in Fernando 21). Most critics attacked the femininity (or lack thereof) of women writing these novels. Henry James offered this observation in his essay "The Future of the Novel": "It is the opinion of some observers that when women do obtain a free hand {i.e., as writers, rather than readers, of fiction} they will not repay their long debt to the precautionary attitude of men by unlimited consideration for the natural delicacy of the latter" (qtd. in Ardis 47). Arthur Waugh was also a critic of New Woman literature and claimed it threatened "to make the novel indistinguishable from either photography or pornography" (Ardis 49). Waugh's judgment borders on being hysteric. The masculinity of men, such as he and James, was threatened by these novels that drew into account the ideas and passions of both sexes. Waugh contends that the novel is at its best when the author regards "... life with the untrammeled view of the impartial spectator, when we pierce below the substance for its

[4] While many men such as James, Waugh, James Ashcroft, and Walter Besant were extremely outspoken in the criticism of the New Woman novel, women were not silent in their disapproval either. Elizabeth Lynn Linton and Ouida wrote in critique of the New Woman novel, as well.

animating idea, that we approximate the artistic temperament" (qtd. in Ardis 48). Hence, he contends art is about ideas not senses. Other critics followed D.H. Lawrence's observation The New Woman was no different than her predecessors: "There have been lots of women like ours in the past, and if you've been married to one of them, you wouldn't have found her any different from your present wife" (qtd. in MacLeod Walls 237). Despite Lawrence's flippancy about the idea of a "new" woman he does, however, envy New Women to an extent because of they have a meaningful cause and he "… regrets that men do not have a "crusade" as women do—such as votes or temperance—for their lack of a cause makes their gender as well as modern life itself dull" (MacLeod Walls 238). The New Women's lack of dullness made them interesting even in their defiance of tradition.[5]

Postcolonialism

The cause of women is what connects Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* to Postcolonial studies. The inhabitants of the farm all suffer from the effects of imperialism. Edward Said, the grandfather of Postcolonial Studies, quotes Michael Doyle in an attempt to define the role of the empire in postcolonial studies: "Empire is a relationship, formal or informal, in which one state controls the effective political

---

5 Lyndall tries not to let her sex impose restrictions upon her gender or limit her desires. While these characteristics might appeal to the modern reader, it was this wanting that critics such as D.H. Lawrence mocked in their criticism of "New Women" and their novels: "Women used to see themselves as softly flowing stream of attraction and desire and beauty, soft quiet rivers of energy and peace. Then suddenly the idea changes. They see themselves as isolated things, independent females, instruments for love, instruments for work, instruments for politics…And as instruments they become pointed and they want everything…to have a point. (qtd. in MacLeod Walls 238).Lawrence's criticism reveals the fear men had of the New Woman; moreover, this fear reveals why a novelist as talented as Schreiner was ignored by literary critics for so long. The modernists sought to "…make people aware of the "false" realities presented in Victorian and Edwardian literature" (MacLeod 231); consequently, writers like Schreiner were disparaged for their idealized views on how the sexes should interact.

sovereignty of another political society. It can be achieved by… economic, social, or cultural dependence" (qtd. in *Culture and Imperialism* 9). Schreiner's heroine, Lyndall, is dependent in every way as a single, penniless orphan and, of course, as a woman. Waldo's only advantage over Lyndall is that he is a man; nonetheless, even as a man he and Gregory Rose are still expected to embody the Empire of Britain's definition of manliness. Nonetheless, both fail to adhere to such standards and the social repercussions take a toll on them mentally and physically. Dan Jacobson remarks in his introduction to *The Story of an African Farm* that "a colonial culture is one which has no memory… it is perfectly possible to live without memory; in some ways it can be more comfortable to do so" (7). However, Schreiner does not allow her characters to forget nor does she allow her readers to forget. *The Story of an African Farm* is not a quiet observation of the inhumanity colonialism forces it subjects to endure, but it is a novel that reminds the reader of the struggles the individual endures and the consequences of being an individual. [6]

Postcolonial studies began to gain prominence in 1978 with the publishing of Edward Said's, *Orientalism.* Said explored the way Western "Occidental" cultures defined themselves in comparison to Eastern "Oriental" cultures. Oriental then became associated with "other," a term which is now used in Postcolonial Studies to describe how dominant cultures maintain their superiority by distancing themselves from the "other." Gayatri Spivak also explores the negative effects of othering; especially, in relation to how women are viewed in society. Essentially, postcolonialism can be used in any discussion of the way power is exercised to subjugate any group. This adaptability

---

6 I am concerned with colonialism in direct relation to the nature of imperialism, which is a much broader term. I will further discuss the role of both in the argument of my thesis.

lends itself to the discussion of *The Story of an African Farm*. Schreiner's characters reflect the struggle of the oppressed at a variety of social levels. [7]

Structure of Analysis

In this thesis, I argue that Olive Schreiner's 1883 novel, *The Story of an African Farm*, though most often dismissed as an example of "New Woman" literature, is, in fact, something more. I argue that *The Story of an African Farm* is a scathing look at sexuality in a postcolonial society. Moreover, by understanding the role, or lack thereof, that sexuality had in Victorian society, modern scholars can see the way that sexuality and an individual's expression of it are still limited by socially constructed ideologies.[8]

In the first section, titled a " Review of Literature," I quote Edward Said's argument that postcolonialism needs a variety of voices in order to better understand the effects of imperialism on the colonized. Consequently, *The Story of an African Farm* is important to the field, because it offers the experience of a white English woman living in South Africa. I will then show how Olive Schreiner's novel added to the discussion and the rise of the New Woman novel. Discussing these two different literary traditions allows me to contextualize the importance of imperialism and the "new" feminism in my reading of *The Story of an African Farm*. In the second section, titled "*Argument*," I will argue that the way Schreiner depicts her characters' sexuality allows her to discuss the limitations placed on not only sexuality, but also on the individual by society. In the

---

7 Deepika Bahri's in,"Feminism in/and Postcolonialism", describes oppression as denying "Those "other" to the dominant discourse… [a] voice or say in their portrayal, they are consigned to be "spoken for" by those who command the authority and means to speak" (204). In The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies ed. Neil Lazarus (2004). As an author, Schreiner speaks for her characters: Lyndall, as a penniless orphan, does not have political clout nor would Waldo as a foreigner; even Gregory a white landowner, does not know how to tell his father, much less society his views concerning free will. Schreiner also calls attention to how the Hottentots and Kefirs are treated on the farm.

[8] See Richard D. Alticks "The Weaker Sex" in *Victorian People and Ideas: A Companion for the Modern Reader of Victorian Literature* (1973).

Conclusion, I will summarize the ways in which sexuality is still a personal construct that society tries to control and label. I will then suggest future implications for how the limitations of gender and sexuality can be discussed in regards to feminist and imperialist studies today.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Postcolonial studies have encouraged us to rethink the history of the novel. The novel is not a passive thing; it speaks for its author and for the history in which it was conceived. Hence, the Postcolonial novel embodies the history of the colonizers and the colonies. More often than not, such novels reflect a history of "silencing" of not only the colonized, but also of woman's experience in general.[9] Edward Said's discussion of the rise of the novel in the nineteenth century is valuable for understanding the role novelists played in shaping their readers' (as well as our own) impressions of the changes occurring as Britain's empire grew during the Victorian Era. He cites Joseph Conrad, Rudyard Kipling, Charles Dickens, George Eliot and even Jane Austen as prime examples of authors changing the content of the novel. Their analyses of foreign affairs piqued the interests of their bourgeois audience and helped create an air of mystery with respect to newly colonized land and people.

---

[9] Two of the most discussed novels in postcolonial studies: Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* both deny women an authentic, meaningful place in their writing. The women in *Kim* are relegated to stereotypical roles of harlots or talkative widows; they are merely props in the novel. The two most important women in Conrad's work are used to define the mysterious, dying Kurtz. The African mistress of Kurtz is sexualized, whereas, his intended is the picture of English innocence. Neither woman is given an active speaking parts; furthermore, both author's define women by their bodies and relationship to male characters.

Hence, it seems odd that an author such as Olive Schreiner is often left out of discussions concerning the colonial novel.[10] Her first novel, *The Story of an African Farm*, was an immediate success, yet scholars have neglected it in favor of more masculine novels (Jacobson 12). However, the inclusion of Schreiner adds the voice of not only the South African experience, but of an English woman far from her mother country. Schreiner's novel portrays the struggle of a woman trying to reconcile her personal beliefs—religious, political, and feminist—within the limitations imposed on her by a distant government. As a result, her work offers insight into how the novel was changing. The novel was becoming a vehicle to promote change while still operating within the space of propriety that would appeal to its middle-class readers. *The Story of an African Farm* is not just about rural life in South Africa, but about what it is to be an individual in a society that perpetuates homogenization and the effects of such rigidity.[11] Schreiner wanted to make her readers see that the laws/mores in place were asphyxiating to the soul and that changes must be set in motion to free the individual.

In this thesis, I draw upon Said's argument that we learn more from history by including a multitude of voices in order to understand the complexity of Schreiner's writing. I suggest that the study of Schreiner will help in creating the

> … antitheses between involvement and theory has been a broad perspective from which the large historical dialectic between one and the other might be observed even though its myriad details cannot be except occasionally… proceed on the

---

[10] Ode Ogede, Sarah Ruden, and Raymond Heard realize the value of Olive Schreiner's work to the study of the postcolonial novel.

[11] Mark Sander's "Towards a Genealogy of Intellectual Life: Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm*"discusses the implications of relegating the expression of sexuality to gender. Sander's also notes that Schreiner emphasized the need for intellectual and sexual satisfaction in a relationship (87).

> assumption that whereas the whole of a culture is a disjunct one, many important sectors of it can be apprehended as working *contrapuntally* together. (Said 194)

Schreiner's novel is constructed differently than Conrad's or Kipling's works, therefore, adding a new voice to England's experiences in the colonies. Schreiner does not paint a portrait of exotic lands and people, nor is her writing as straightforward as her male counter-parts. Her introduction to *African Farm*[12] prepares the reader that the novel will be told in a more "realistic" manner. Schreiner writes,

> Human life may be painted according to two methods. There is the stage method, according to that each character is duly marshaled at first, and ticketed; we know with an immutable certainty that at the right crises each one will reappear and act his part, and, when the curtain falls, all will stand before it bowing. There is a sense of satisfaction in all this, and of completeness. But there is another method—the method of life we all lead. Here nothing can be prophesied… Men appear, act and re-act upon each other, and pass away. When the crisis comes the man who would fit it does return. When the curtain falls no one is ready… Life may be painted according to either method; but the methods are different. The canons of criticism that bear upon the one cut cruelly upon the other. (Schreiner 27)

It is this latter method that Schreiner uses that has led to criticism of her novels, as well as her heavy incorporation of allegory and symbolism into the text. The voice she adds to the discussion of colonial literature compliments the contrapuntal nature of Postcolonial Studies.

Schreiner's South Africa becomes a place to *try* and recreate the self. The novel opens by showing all the characters as they lay sleeping, the exception being the young Waldo, who is wide awake fretting over the force of death. Schreiner writes,

> The boy lay with his eyes wide open. He saw before him a long stream of people, a great dark multitude, that moved in one direction; then they came to the edge of the world, and went over. He saw them passing before him, and there was nothing that could stop them. He thought of how that stream had rolled on

[12] I will now reference, *The Story of an African Farm*, as *African Farm*.

> through all the long ages of the past—how the old Greeks the Romans had gone over…and all the while the watch kept ticking on; just like God's will, that never changes or alters, you may do what you please. (37)

Schreiner emphasizes that all civilizations, and their subjects, will eventually meet their demise. Therefore, it is in life that we should have control over how we *live*. Unfortunately, government played a large part in how its citizens lived. Edward Said points out that it is this resistance, however, that defines the colonial novel. Said says, "… modernism is rediscovered in the formerly colonized, peripheral world, where resistance, the logic of daring, and various investigations of age old tradition together set the tone" (58). From the beginning of *African Farm*, Schreiner positions her story to be an exploration of the human condition and of the consequences of exercising free will. Lyndall, a woman, and Waldo, a German, exist on the peripheries of the dominant culture.

Lyndall and Waldo are "other," something to be analyzed and measured in order for the English man to be assured of his superiority. Said argues, "[f]or even as Europe moved itself outwards, its sense of cultural strength was fortified… colonies were created and ethnocentric perspectives secured" (*Orientalism* 117). Lydall's and Waldo's failure to live and prosper challenges the idea that the British masculine traditions in place were best for everyone.[13] The rigidity of roles was demoralizing and offered little hope for a different future. Seamus Deane argues British Imperialism sought to maintain its power over those that challenged imperialism through the practice of "[r]epression, both in the political and psychological sense… That which is foreign to an established structure of

[13] Ode Ogede notes, "Waldo's vision tends to feed on the innocence of nature, and his inspired and bewildered existence signifies Schreiner's own pastoral answers, which posit nature as a counter to the oppression of colonialzation" (253). Ogede focuses on Schreiner's rejection of colonialism and her activism that occurred as a result.

representation, its other, is demonized and thereby laid open to extinction" (357). Schreiner's inclusion of Napoleon Bonaparte's story emphasizes Lyndall's belief that society punishes those that challenge imperialism. Lyndall observes,

> … he had what he said he would have, and that is better than being happy. He was their master, and all the people were white with fear of him… He was one and they were many, and they got him down at last… They were many; he was only *one*. They sent him to an island in the sea, a lonely island, and kept him there fast… Then he was alone there in that island with men to watch him always… it seemed to him that the sea all around him was a cold chain about his body, pressing him to death. (48)

Lyndall sympathizes greatly with Napoleon and envisions him as a great hero that fought for what he believed; that, more than anything, is his appeal. She does not discuss whether or not he was good, but instead focuses on his greatness: the ability to fight for and hold on to one's ideals, a much more desirable trait to Lyndall. She identifies with Bonaparte because of her own repression.

Lyndall also foreshadows the harshness of her own future when she muses on the way his story ends. Lyndall muses, "… it is only made-up stories that end nicely; the true ones all end so" (48). Schreiner's outlook for the individual is bleak, yet the novel still proves that its characters deserve their own history. Said uses Eric Wolf's term, "people without History," to describe the phenomena that Schreiner addresses with her novel about

> … people on whom the economy and polity sustained by empire depend, but whose reality has not historically or culturally required attention. In all of these instances the facts of empire are associated with sustained possession, with far-flung and sometimes unknown spaces, with eccentric or unacceptable human beings, with fortune-enhancing or fantasized activities like emigration, money-making, and sexual adventure. (64)

Schreiner depicts for her readers what is was to be a Boer, German, English, and Hottentot of both sexes and economic levels. Her characters seek not only truth and fortune, but those that leave the farm experience life and all of its complexities. The truth seeking leads to various internal complications for Schreiner's characters.

Through the characters of Waldo and Lyndall, Schreiner examines what happens to the spirit of the individual when they realize how little power they have to resist the larger forces that are "in power." In the second half of the novel, the story is interrupted by the narrator musing about the fate of the soul. The narrator philosophizes, "[w]hen a soul breaks free from the arms of superstition, bits of the claws and talons break themselves off in him. It is not the work of a day to squeeze them out" (150). Schreiner realizes that to change things, individually and collectively, is not a simple task; moreover, this section speaks to readers who are struggling to make changes in their lives personally, socially, and politically.[14] This section includes a short parable about man's search for "Truth;" the narrator of this passage, a traveling stranger, offers this advice to Waldo at the end of his tale, "[w]e of this generation are not destined to eat and be satisfied as our fathers were; we must be content to go hungry" (171-172). However, her characters are not content with their hunger, especially Lyndall and Waldo.

Lyndall's meeting with her unnamed lover illustrates the range and depth of her emotions. Lyndall is often haughty because she feels so isolated and misunderstood. Her views on womanhood and love are either mocked or just taken in passing. Therefore, after Lyndall's lover leaves her and she is left to contemplate whether to join him or look

---

[14] Alan Gray in "The Troubled Mirror: Some Notes on Olive Schreiner," concludes with the argument: "… what Olive Schreiner put into the lips of Lyndall about the lot of women was her lot also…" (305). Olive Schreiner's activism was linked directly to her experience as a woman and her life in South Africa.

to Gregory Rose for support, there is an emotional breakdown. Lyndall cries, "I am so tired. There is light, there is warmth, why am I alone, so hard, so cold? I am so weary of myself! It is eating my soul to its core—self, self, self! I cannot bear this life! I cannot breathe, I cannot live! Will nothing free me from myself? I want love! I want something great and pure to lift me to itself!" (241-242). Lyndall's view of life is so bleak because it is utterly devoid of meaning. In her refusal to subject herself to a parasitic life, Lyndall rejects creating a superficial purpose in her day. Instead she is left to contemplate the emptiness of her life and creates an even greater hunger for the independence denied to her. John Kucich speculates on the psychiatric effects of such a life. Kuchich argues,

> Over-dependence and undernourishment both signal failures in the achievement of stable intersubjective relationships… She [Schreiner] endowed feminism with tremendous social and psychological authority by representing women's social and psychological authority by representing women's demands as the antithesis of self-interest and as crucial to the survival, not just of women, but the entire human race. (91)

Although Waldo's struggles are very much related to those of feminists in that he is also fighting against the control of an external agent that defines him, consequently, Waldo struggles to find something in which he can believe. His plight reflects the spiritual emptiness of the period.

Schreiner intertwines the elements of resisting external control while trying to still maintain a sense of spirituality in order to connect with her audience. The vast majority of the reading public was not looking for literature that chastised their ways of life, but rather for something to which they could relate. Richard Altick argues that, "Victorian readers also went for inspiration. Moralized stories and biographies, sermons, religious

literature of all kinds…" (63).[15] The interweaving of the two characters' struggles also makes their battles more poignant. The reader is able to see how the way women's roles are restricted and the emptiness of traditional religion affects a person, especially one that is otherwise alone in the world. Kucich's analysis of Waldo's plight further emphasizes a despair that affected many others. He claims that,

> Waldo's inability to accept divine abandonment fuels a series of anguished intellectual speculations, following the familiar paths of nineteenth century freethought, in which he tries to renew his spiritual faith. His religious crisis, one of the novels two great themes (together with Lyndall's precocious feminism) is driven not by concerns with dogma, but by despair over what appears to be an abandoning and uncaring deity, whose withdrawal is evident in the absence of purpose or order in the universe. (85)

This dilemma of Waldo's is evident from the beginning of the novel. The despair he experiences foreshadows the religious journey of his throughout the novel. The traveling stranger serves as a transition between the anxieties of Lyndall and Waldo's youth and the bleak reality of their future. Moreover, the fervent nature of Waldo's and Lyndall's beliefs sets them up as martyrs of their causes and to teach the reader that, "[i]t is sometimes easier to build than to break" (*African Farm* 163). Lyndall and Waldo, as well as Schreiner's readers, need to change the systems from the outside rather than fighting the current. Hence, the novel serves to whet the readers' appetites for change from the didactic and cliché bound readings/preaching of the period.[16]

Lyndall is eventually allowed to attend school in hopes that it will prepare her to be independent and pursue a career, but the experience does not fulfill her expectations.

---

[15] Richard Altick has produced several works concerning the mindset of the Victorians as they reacted with/to the numerous changes in literature, politics, and industry.

[16] For further discussion on the literature of the Victorians, see Altick (p 191).

She returns to the farm a grown woman jaded by men and finishing school. Lyndall had hoped to acquire knowledge that would allow her independence; however, Schreiner uses Lyndall's return as an opportunity to critique finishing schools and the way power is dispersed in society. Lyndall condemns her experience at school,

> They are called finishing schools, and the name tells accurately what they are: They finish everything but imbecility and weakness, and that they cultivate. They are nicely adapted machines for experimenting on the question, "Into how little a space a human soul can be crushed?" I have seen some souls so compressed that they would have fitted into a small thimble, and found room to move there—wide room. (185)

Lyndall, as are women in general, is denied access to the type of knowledge that would allow her to be independent; therefore, she is denied access to the type of power available to men.[17]

Schreiner's way of attacking power structures is perhaps the reason literary critics often align her with the New Women Novels, rather than colonial novels. Her work deserves recognition within both literary traditions. Gerald Monsman helps to position Schreiner as an important colonial author. He argues,

> Literature, after all, deals with human values; and if Victorian imperialism sacrificed anything at all for the sake of progress, it was human values—not the appearance of religion, morality, or respectability, but its substance. The scientific discoveries, the technological progress of Victoria's age could not compensate for the loss of justice and humanity... Olive Schreiner rebelled against the agents and instrumentalities of colonialism and sought to voice an alternative. (3-4)

The Story of an African Farm does not voice an alternative, but it did establish Schreiner as an author and granted her access to the type of political[18] circles that would allow her

---

[17] Lloyd Fernando's *"New Women" in the Late Victorian Novel"* (1977) furthers the conversation on the lack of women's education during the late Victorian period 1865-1895.

to voice alternatives to the way the Empire was functioning. It was later novels such as *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonland*, in which Schreiner openly and vehemently challenges colonialism and its capitalistic exploitation of people and land.[19]

The novel did, however, serve as a tool to gently open readers' eyes to the injustices of both sexes. In the introduction to Schreiner's feminist work, *Woman and Labor*, she retells a conversation she had with a Kaffir woman that made her realize

> … that the women of no race or class will ever rise in revolt or attempt to bring about a revolutionary readjustment of their relation to their society, however intense their suffering and however clear their perception of it, while the welfare and persistence of their society requires their submission… a close analysis will always show that the changed or changing conditions of that society have made women's acquiescence no longer necessary or desirable. (x)

Unfortunately, although Lyndall is full of feminist ideals—she never acts on them. Upon her return to the farm, she strikes up an argument with Waldo concerning what kind of life is offered to women. Lyndall tells him, "[w]e are not to study law, nor science, nor art: so we study you…They bring weighty arguments against us when we ask for the perfect freedom of woman…They say that women do not wish for the sphere and freedom we ask for them and would not use it!" (192). Lyndall continues her speech by pointing out that it is not that women would not make use of their newfound freedom but that they would not know *how* to use it. Women were trained to take care of the home, and not to provide for it. The Victorian woman was encouraged to "… cultivate fragility, leaning always on the arm of the gentleman… she was The Angel in the House, to

---

[18] Cecil Rhodes, was an influential businessman and politician whose wealth came from diamond mining; he was also the founder of the country of Rhodesia.

[19] Carolyn Burdett's article, "Olive Schreiner, South Africa, and the Costs of Modernity," discusses Schreiner's view that: "South Africa was urgently imperiled by monopolist capitalism. Under such capitalism, human beings were reduced to calculable means to an end, and social powerlessness served only as a catalyst to increasingly brutal forms of exploitation" (132).

borrow the title of Coventry Patmore's hugely popular versified praise of domestic sainthood and the mystical, non-fleshly institution of marriage" (Altick 53). The miseducation of women is an issue that reoccurs throughout Schreiner's fiction, as well as her political works.[20]

The character of Em serves as a contrast to Lyndall and her desire for freedom and equality. However, despite Em's saintly goodness and acceptance of her place as a woman, she also exhibits a quiet intelligence and the strength to survive in the colony. Em does not say much throughout the novel, but when she does, it is with a quiet assurance. In the scene after Lyndall argues the merits of Napoleon, the three children discuss how their world came to exist. Em muses,

> 'Oh, Waldo, God put the little "kopje" here,' said Em with solemnity.
>
> 'But how did He put it here?'
>
> 'By wanting.'
>
> 'But how did the wanting bring it here?'
>
> 'Because it did.'
>
> The last words were uttered with the air of one who produces a clinching argument. (49)

It is this conversation and other such statements by Em that show there is more to Em being merely: "… simpleminded. Unreflective and phlegmatic, wholly passive, Em as the submissive partner is a foil to Lyndall and represents the traditional domestic housewife whose vision does extend beyond the world of her farm" (Monsman 67). However, I argue that this judgment of Em is flat and unfair. Although Em does not challenge the institution of marriage the way Lyndall does, Em does not rush into a marriage with

---

[20] *Women and Labor* (1911) is Olive Schreiner's most in-depth work concerning the problem of the miseducation of women.

Gregory Rose. When she realizes her fiancé has feelings for her cousin, Em stoically calls off the wedding maintaining that "… it would be better" (222). It is only later that Em and Gregory decide to marry out of a mutual need for each other instead of out of childish infatuation.

Perhaps, it is not that Em's vision does not extend beyond the farm, but that what she has heard about the world beyond it is less appealing. Em does not want to give up her comfort for a world of cruelty and suffering. The protagonists, Lyndall and Waldo, and their foils, Em and Gregory Rose, illustrate the limitations of imperialism. Said argues,

> At the apex of high imperialism… we have a conjectural fusion between…the historicizing codes of discursive writing in Europe… and, on the other hand, a massively colonized world. The object of this consolidated vision is always either a victim or a highly constrained character, permanently threatened with severe punishment, despite his or her many virtues, services, or achievements, excluded ontologically for having few of the merits of the conquering, surveying, and civilizing outsider. For the colonizer the incorporative apparatus requires unremitting effort to maintain. For the victim, imperialism offers these alternatives: serve or be destroyed. (*Culture and Imperialism* 168)

Schreiner adds a feminist angle to the colonial novel by exploring the limitations of gender roles along with general societal controls.[21] Lyndall and Waldo find comfort from those limitations with each other; she confides to him, "I like you so much, I love you. When I am with you I never know that I am a woman and you are a man; I only know that we are both things that think…you are a spirit" (210). Although, Lyndall's sentiments seem romantic, they are far from ideal. In her letters, Schreiner describes what she hopes to happen between the sexes: "…we come back to the old point, that we cannot hate any one. Man injures woman and woman injures man. It is not a case for

21 Daphne Marlatt and Nicole Brossard argue, in their introduction to Narrative in the Feminine (2000), the importance of discussing gender in tandem with postcolonial studies.

crying out against individuals or against sexes, but simply for changing a whole system" (66). This ideology is what motivates Lyndall to refuse marriage to her stranger; she also chastises him for what his love means, "[y]our man's love is a child's love for butterflies. You follow till you have the thing, and break it. If you have broken one wing, and the thing still flies, then you love it more than ever, and follow till you break both; then you are satisfied when it lies still on the ground" (238). His love is brutal and aims only to conquer her; yet, when asked why she loved him, she replies, "[b]ecause you are strong. You are the first man I ever was afraid of. And because I like to experience, I like to try. You don't understand that" (238). Their love affair takes on the traits of colonialism. She is the "other" that he seeks to break down and mold into something that better suits his needs; he is appealing because of his power, status, and strength that offer her a glimpse into another world.

Lyndall's existence is tragically lonely; there is not another being that fulfills her intellectual needs, as well as her physical ones. She loves the two men closest to her for very different reasons, and will later develop an intimacy with Gregory Rose as he takes on the role of nurturer/caretaker. Gerald Monsman quotes a letter of Schreiner's in which Schreiner details what Lyndall seeks, "… in love is a total statement, "absolute love and sympathy"; the ideal lover must be one who is himself whole, both subject and object, not merely half of the duality" (71). However, Lyndall's idea of love is convoluted by her feminist beliefs; she finds it impossible to be both subject and object to one man and to allow a man to be both for her as well. Schreiner argues in *Women and Labor* that this inability to have an equal relationship has much to do with the lack of "new forms of labor and fields for the exercise of their powers" (17). Schreiner's argument that a man

and woman can never be equal, as long as women are forced to be economically dependent on the man is echoed in Lyndall's resistance to her lover. Hence, Lyndall always knows that her stranger has power because of his wealth and that with Waldo she would live a life of poverty; neither option appeals to Lyndall. Her character lacks vision to see beyond her limitations; she is a "woman that is galled with her confines and burdened yet more with her vastness, born too great for her ends, never at peace with her goal"[22] (Monsman 100). While her determination not to settle for anything is admirable, it is also unrealistic for her times.[23] Therefore, Schreiner must make her pay the price by exposing the exhaustion that comes from fighting a cause by oneself and the result of constantly fighting—death.

Another argument that arises concerns Schreiner's structural choices; although, Elaine Showalter deems Lyndall "…the English novel's first wholly serious feminist heroine" (Sanders 80), she dismisses the way the novel is constructed and her lack of control over form. Monsman argues, "[i]f Showalter is correct in arguing that *An African Farm* lacks even a coherent allegorical form, then the novel owes its canonical status less to any imaginative achievement than to Schreiner's portraying, albeit clumsily, the sociopolitical facts of the "feminine predicament" in the nineteenth century" (50). Moreover, this feminism theme continues in other works such as, *From Man to Man* and *Undine*. Schreiner's discussion is also influenced by her displacement in the colony of South Africa. Georgina Horrel argues that this displacement created in Schreiner, as well

---

22 Monsman is paraphrasing Sir William Watson's "Hymm to the Sea" (1905). Watson was a prolific poet in the 1890s and like Schreiner, opposed the Boer Wars.

23 Lloyd Fernando elaborates on Lyndall's unrealistic expectation to be allowed the same freedom as a man in his chapter: "Novel and Ideology 1865-1895: Some Relations," 'New Women' in the Late Victorian Novel (1977).

as other female writers of South Africa, a hyper awareness of femininity that is revealed in these writings by "… an 'obsession' or 'narcissistic insurance' which remains implicit in the writing of white women: who like Schreiner in colonial, pre-apartheid southern Africa are compelled to ask, 'What must I be and do—or rather, perhaps—what must my protagonist be and do, to live in South Africa at this time?'" (769). Hence, Schreiner's writing is not only of value to the canon for creating the protagonist, Lyndall, but also for what it reveals about life in the colonies.

Schreiner's characters' literal displacement from England emphasizes the internal displacement they feel not only for others, but within themselves.[24] Em's final speech to Waldo embodies the void that is apparent throughout the novel. She confesses,

> 'Why is it always so, Waldo, always so?' she said; 'we long for things, and long for them and pray for them; we would give all we have to come near to them, but we never reach them. Then at last, too late, just when we don't want them anymore, when all the sweetness is taken out of them, then they come. We don't want them then… (296)

The farm's inhabitants were denied freedom for so long that they no longer desired it. This is the reality of the colonies; Schreiner emphasizes this emptiness in a letter to Havelock Ellis written shortly after the novel's publication. She writes, "[w]hy can't we men and women come near each other and help each other, and not kill each other's souls and blight each other's lives?...The question of woman's having the vote, and independence and education, is only part of the question, there lies something deeper" (40). This is the value of Schreiner's work. There is more to *African Farm*, as well as to her other writing, than the simple justification for women's rights. Indeed, it is

---

24 See Seamus Deane's Imperialism/Nationalism (1990) for more on the effects of imperialism on its subjects .

Schreiner's focus on the struggle of the individual and what happens when individuality is denied to any human being, is Schreiner's literary contribution.

Schreiner, like other New Women novelists, moved away from the domestic novel, and, as Michael McKeon's study of the novel suggests, Schreiner believed that,

> … literary history is conceived not as the dream work but as the dream analysis, not as distortion but as enlightenment, then the successive stages of literary evolution become just that: an evolution from the darkness of distortion toward semantic light. The archaic mind… becomes a confused clutter of figurative identifications whose purpose is to mystify consciousness by "displacing" real human relations into imaginary significations. (10)

African Farm uses dreams, history, and religion to portray the struggle of the individual. However, Schreiner portrays the struggle in a manner that not only provokes the reader to think about humanity in new ways, but remains, for the most part, inoffensive.[25] Schreiner was shrewd enough not to offend the beliefs of the reading public. It was her controversial beliefs that made Schreiner rely on allegory and symbolism to convey her message.

Consequently, Schreiner gives the characters who conform to tradition a "happy" ending in *African Farm,* thereby, appeasing the reading public for Lyndall's actions. Lyndall and Waldo, the quiet revolutionaries, live a short and difficult life because, realistically, the world was not ready for them. In one of Schreiner's letters to Havelock Ellis, she describes her own personal connection to her characters' plights,

> I have never been to school you know or had one sixpence expended on my education. When I think of all the advantages that other people have I sometimes feel bitter, at least I used to, I don't know. When people say it is unnatural for

---

25 In their biography of Schreiner, authors Ruth First and Ann Scott note that Schreiner's book was, overall, well received. There were, of course, some that found the novel offensive including one woman who tossed the book in the fire with a pair of tongs.

people placed as Lyndall and Waldo were to have such thoughts and feelings I laugh to myself. It isn't that one can't teach oneself everything, one can, but it's a fearful cost of strength. (*Letter,* 47)

In a later letter to Ellis, Schreiner discusses her own suffering, "I can't stay here anymore. I shall go mad. I never felt like this before. It's so awful. Harry, what does make me feel like this? It's as much my mind as my body that is ill" (*Letters* 51). The latter letter describes Schreiner's illness as similar to that of her dying heroine; Lyndall and Waldo both meet their deaths in states of exhaustion and quiet suffering. The *African Farm* also serves as a platform for the New Woman novel that was starting to emerge. Proponents of the New Woman novel argued for allowing women a truly meaningful life; they also challenged jobs that reduced men like Waldo to machines.[26] Thus, *African Farm*, is a novel about what it means to be human, but to be denied basic human rights. The barren landscape of Schreiner's South Africa serves as a backdrop to the mental and physical turmoil of her characters as they struggle to find meaning and purpose in the ever-changing world. An isolation that Schreiner also expressed in her letters, "…I feel a shrinking from all human creatures. We none of us sympathize with each other, none of us understand each other, each one only himself… We are good and true and earnest at heart, meaning the best we humans. But we can't understand each other, and understanding is friendship…" (*Letters* 140).

Perhaps one of the reasons Schreiner is most often aligned with New Women novels is that the heroines of the New Women novels defied the typical roles of marriage, motherhood, and chastity (Ardis 1). Lyndall certainly embodies such traits: she is sexually active with a man she refuses to marry, and she bears and buries her child with a

26 John Stuart Mill's On Liberty (1859) and The Subjection of Women (1869) also promoted a government and economy that supported the cultivation of the individuals mind and talents.

detached coldness. Ann Ardis in *New Women, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism* explores the marginalization of New Women novels and the writers that "…choose not to view art as a sphere of cultural activity separate from the realm of politics and history, these narratives refuse to be discrete. They do not want to be read singly or separately; moreover, they choose not to be silent about the intertextual debate in which they participate" (4). Schreiner's preface to the book in which she discusses the two methods for portraying life prepare the reader for a more realistic novel. She also thanks the reading public for kindly receiving a book "[d]ealing with a subject far removed from the round of English daily life, it of necessity lacks the charm that hangs about the ideal representation of familiar things" (27). Moreover, it is fitting that Schreiner chose the colony of South Africa to be the home of her untraditional heroine. This distance is an easy way to make her readers feel less threatened by such an unconventional woman.[27] Lyndall is unconventional. Even as a child, Schreiner's heroine is prone to daydreaming and introverted philosophizing. As a child, Lyndall shares her fantasy of womanhood with her cousin Em. Lyndall states,

> I do not want your sheep, I want things of my own. When I am grown up, there will be nothing that I do not know. I shall be rich, very rich; and I shall wear not only for the best, but every day, a pure white silk, and rosebuds, like the lady in Tant' Sannie's bedroom, and my petticoats will be embroidered, not only at the bottom, but all through. (46)

---

27 Alessandra Tanesi, in An Introduction to Feminist Epistemologies (1999), quotes Patricia Hill Collin's idea of "… 'outsider-within.' According to Collins, the "outsider-within" is the position occupied by people who are within a community or society but inhabit its margins" (152). Although Collin is using the term predominantly in reference to black women in academia, it is true of women like Lyndall. Lyndall may have been a white English woman by birth, but she refused to conform to the mores and values of her society.

In this declaration, Lyndall is not only expressing her desire for nice things, but for attaining them on her own. She does not want things given to her by family or through marriage, nor does she imagine herself as an old maid.

In her letters, Schreiner often defends women who have chosen to live "unconventional" lives, and defends her own decisions for leading her life freely. In a long letter, which details her views on sex, sexuality, and marriage, Schreiner offers to tell her close friend, Karl Pearson, the frank details of her own life, if it would help him understand women. Schreiner writes, "I wonder if it would be any use to you in your study of the woman question if I were to tell you more of myself; exactly what I had thought and felt, good and bad, and "naturally" as a woman… One often wishes one could see just what the world is like to a one of another sex or race… " (*Letters* 94-95). Alys Pearsall Smith also asks of her audience to imagine themselves in a woman's shoes. She argues,

> … The revolt of the daughter is not… a revolt against any merely surface conventionalities…but it is a revolt against a bondage that enslaves her whole life. In the past she belonged to other people, now she demands to belong to herself. She asks simply and only for freedom to make out her own life the highest that can be made… She claims only the ordinary human rights of a human being… (Ardis 18)

Just as Schreiner uses her novel as a means to discuss the belief that women must rebel against the crushing social construct of feminine behavior so does she align herself with the postcolonial, feminists, and New Women novels.

ARGUMENT

Schreiner's scathing portrayal of sexuality in *The Story of an African Farm* is often what aligns it only with New Women writings.[28] However, it is her unabashed treatment of sexuality and her exploration of Victorian gender roles in a postcolonial society that extends her novel's value to that of Postcolonial Studies. Her characters embody a variety of deviant Victorian sexual stereotypes that still happen to be the topic of 21st century discussions of gender and sexuality. It is the novel's ability to extend beyond 1883 that makes it a worthwhile discussion in current literature debates.

The character of Tant' Sannie is almost comical in her voraciously pious pursuit of the "next husband." She is a woman ruled by her appetite in waking and sleep: "… she dreamed bad dreams. Not of the ghosts and devils that so haunted her waking thoughts; nor of her second husband… but only of the sheep's trotters she had eaten for supper that night" (*African Farm* 35-36). Food, God, and the attainment of a new husband are the reasons for Tant' Sannie's very being. When the con artist, Bonaparte Blenkins, arrives on the farm, he is able to appeal to these ever apparent qualities of hers; when where Bonaparte grieves for his supposedly newly-dead spouse, Tant' Sannie sees the potential for a new husband, but eventually forces him out after she catches him wooing her younger, much, much, thinner relative, Tranna. She forces him out with the

28 Novels such as Tess of the D'Urbervilles, The Woman Who Did, and The Odd Women are associated with early New Women novels. For more information on New Women novelists see Ann Ardis's, New Women: New Novels (1990).

same cruelty she uses on anyone who crosses or defies her. Tant' Sannie dumps "… a stream of cold pickle-water, heavy with ribs and shoulders, descending on his head abruptly terminated his speech… as he passed out at the front door a shoulder of mutton, well-directed, struck the black coat in the small of the back" (*African Farm* 130). Although Tant' Sannie is a comical figure in many ways, it is her temper that causes the other habitants of the farm to loathe the Boer woman.

However, Tant' Sannie cares nothing for the opinions of the children or anyone else of lower stations than herself, which would be anyone who wasn't Dutch or courting her. The only fleeting moment of envy that she experiences when her husband-to-be remarks on the great qualities his deceased wife possessed, "She was such a good wife, aunt: I've known her break a churn-stick over a maid's head only for letting dust come on a milk-cloth" (*African Farm* 203). The scene also portrays the young betrothed's reluctance to marry Tant' Sannie. Tant' Sannie's suitor relays that his wife on her death bed made him promise to marry a "fat woman… over thirty, and who's had two husbands… and mustn't marry a woman with a mole" on account of being visited by their dead baby (204). Tant' Sannie further respects his wife not only for her stern treatment of staff, but for her impeccable taste in women. Unfortunately, the young man is less than thrilled: "He thought of a younger sister of his wife's who was not fat, and who *had* a mole… and he wished the little baby had liked better staying in heaven" (204). Although the young man is far from thrilled of his becoming her third husband, the farm's inhabitants are happy to see Tant' Sannie's tyranny passed on to another household. It seems ironic that the most gluttonous, wrathful character is blessed with multiple matrimonies and a child to carry on in her tradition.

Despite Tant' Sannie's numerous husbands, it is Lyndall that was viewed as the promiscuous woman in the novel.[29] Lyndall is a character defined by dichotomies: she is feminine yet masculine, passionate and icy. Lyndall finds it difficult to blur the boundaries of these polarizations. Upon returning from finishing school, she is no longer the elfin child, and her cousin Em is struck by her grace: "[s]he was more like a princess, yes, far more like a princess, than the lady who hung on the wall in Tant' Sannie's bedroom" (*African Farm* 183). Even the asexually introspective Waldo is unnerved by her more womanly presence: "Waldo looked at her so intently that he stumbled over the bushes, Yes, this was his Lyndall who had worn checked pinafores; he saw it now, and he walked closer beside her" (*African Farm* 187). The only character who can see beyond the beautiful visage is Gregory Rose, a similarly perplexing character in his own right, who cattily remarks to his sister: "… there's something so proud about her. She thinks just because she's handsome there's nobody good enough to talk to her, and just as if there had been nobody else but her sent to boarding-school before" (*African Farm* 205). Gregory is obviously intrigued by her physical beauty, but feels threatened not only by her knowledge of it, but of the fact that she is an 'educated' woman. Moreover, the blurring of her sex arouses in him a combination of desire and fear: "She has got the littlest hands I have ever saw—I could hold them in both of mine, and not know that I'd got anything except they were so soft; but she held those horses in as though they were made of iron… It's so unwomanly" (*African Farm* 206). Yet it is her "unwomanliness" that is ultimately attractive to him.

---

29 Ruth First and Ann Scott, in their biography of Olive Schreiner, note that a contemporary of Schreiner's, Laurence Housman, claimed that the book should be taken out of circulation: "It was not only for its bad morals that it deserved reprobation…" (122).

It is only Waldo, and her unnamed lover, who facilitate any sort of passion in Lyndall, but in two very different ways. With Waldo it is a meeting of intellects: "When I am with you I never know that I am a woman and you are a man; I only know that we are both things that think. Other men when I am with them, whether I know them or not, they are mere bodies to me; but you are a spirit…" (*African Farm* 210). Their connection transcends that of the body, whereas, her lover's masculinity dominates her physically and emotionally. It is only with him that she has trouble separating her rational side from her sexuality: "If you were not more to me than any other man in the world, do you think—I love you when I see you; but when you are away from me I hate you" (*African Farm* 236). Her pregnancy causes her to resent him not only because she needs him emotionally, but because this pregnancy ends her freedom. Consequently, all her ideals of what love is or what love could be appear to be shattered.

Lyndall's way of defining love is deeply rooted in the way she views herself and her right to choose how she exercises that sexuality. Love is rooted in passion; it is for her the ultimate connection to another and to the self:

> There is love that begins in the head and goes down to the heart, and grows slowly; but it lasts till death, and asks less than it gives. There is another love, that blots out wisdom, that is sweet with the sweetness of life and bitter with the bitterness of death, lasting an hour, but is worth having living a whole life for that hour… It is a blood-red flower, with the colour of sin; but there is always the scent of god about it. (*African Farm* 228)

Lyndall connects love and sexuality to religious experience. The experience is a sort of Purgatory for Lyndall, because of her resistance to give herself wholly to another, even to God. Consequently, in the end she retreats back into herself.

Lyndall's refusal to give herself to her lover results in a tension between the two of them, and is evident in the conversation between Lyndall and her lover. The dialogue

Schreiner crafts for Lyndall and her lover portrays the power struggle. He and Lyndall both know he has the power, which causes her to resist him, but at her own expense:

> 'Would you ask me what you might and might not do?' Her companion raised the moustache with a caressing movement from his lip and smiled. It was not a question that stood in need of any answer… 'What have you done with the ring I gave you?' he said. 'Sometimes I wear it; then I take it off and wish to throw it into the fire; the next day I put it on again, and sometimes I kiss it.' (236)

The dialogue begins by her lover reminding Lyndall that they are sexually linked; the way he caresses his moustache further implies his pleasure in reminding her of this. The ring symbolically unites Lyndall and her lover and serves as a reminder to Lyndall that she will be forever bound to him because of her sexual transgressions. Her lover could easily ruin her reputation if he chooses.

Lyndall's struggle to resist him, as well as her own sexuality, wears her down throughout the scene. Her language moves from being heated and sexually—charged to defeated and docile. Moreover, her physical bearing alters from her usual "queenly bearing" and becomes eerily submissive:

> It was not in her power to resist him, nor any strength in her made his own at that moment grow soft as he looked at her… She turned her face to his shoulder, and buried it against his neck; he wound his strong arm about her, and held her close to him. When she had sat for a long while, he drew with his hand the face down, and held it against his arm. He kissed it, and then put it back in its old resting-place. 'Don't you want to talk to me?' 'No.' 'Have you forgotten the night in the avenue?' He could feel that she shook her head… They sat quite still, excepting that only sometimes he raised her fingers softly to his mouth. (240)

Schreiner's depiction of Lyndall's regression stops the novel from becoming to risqué; by doing so she prevents her novel from being ostracized and marginalized.[30]

---

30 Ann Ardis's in New Women, New Novels, further articulates the debates of the period: "The question of where sexuality figures into the whole of the human character is, I think, one of the most significant issues to emerge in the debate on realism and representation in the New Woman novel. As I have tried to suggest in the previous section, it also takes this fiction out of a strictly literary context and places it in the context of a growing interdisciplinary discourse on sexuality. (50)

Waldo is an equally enigmatic character. After a childhood shaped by a series of losses: mother, father, and his beloved machine that would have freed him from a life of servitude, Waldo seems to have lost an interest into physically, much less emotionally connecting, with anyone or anything. The narrator says of him as he lays carving: "With material loves, as with human, we go mad once, love out, and have done…" (*African Farm* 156). It is his meeting and conversation about the quest for "Truth" with a traveling stranger that instills hope in Waldo once again. The stranger is also the only person besides Lyndall with whom he is able to connect: "And Waldo waited till the moving speck had disappeared on the horizon; then he stopped and kissed passionately a hoofmark in the sand… There was a rare beauty to him in the sunshine that evening" (*African Farm* 173). He maintains his childhood worship of Lyndall through the years; upon her return to the farm he gives her a box he had made. He likens the intricate and eclectic design of it with the beauty he sees in her and the sky: "… but is it not monotony and is it not variety that makes beauty. What is it? The sky, and your face, and this box—the same thing is in them all, only more in the sky and in your face. But what is it" (*African Farm* 197). For Waldo, passion lies within nature and only in those individuals that retain the same sort of depth and integrity can he connect.

In a letter to Lyndall, Waldo tells her the difficulties he has faced in his travels from the farm. The only comforts he found were in nature and in glimpsing his stranger once again. Recalling the latter, he writes to Lyndall: "That day on the farm, when we sat on the ground under the thorn trees, I thought he quite belonged to me; now, I saw he was not mine. But he was still beautiful. His brown eyes are more beautiful than any one's eyes, except yours" (*African Farm* 260-261). Yet, when he sits by the sea, he feels

connected to it. The sea and he are both restless. Waldo reveals to Lyndall, "… only the sea is like a human being; the sky is not, nor the earth. But the sea is always moving, always something deep in itself is stirring it… it is always wanting, wanting, wanting…" (*African Farm* 259). Waldo eventually realizes the only thing he wants is Lyndall. She is his reason to return to the farm and wait. He claims, "I was not meant live among people… I came back here. I knew you were not here, but it seemed as though I should be nearer you; and it is you that I want—you that other people suggest to me, but cannot give" (*African Farm* 261-262). There is no one else for Waldo except Lyndall.

The character of Gregory Rose also cannot help but to become engrossed by Lyndall. Gregory is a delicate character from the beginning: "Gregory kept a little duster folded in the corner of his table drawer, just as he had seen his mother do, and every morning before he went out he said his prayers, and made his bed, and dusted the table and the legs of the chairs, and even the pictures on the wall and the gun-rack" (*African Farm* 174). Moreover, Lyndall is able to see a feminine quality in him before he undergoes his change. She mocks him by saying, "[t]here goes a true woman—one born for the sphere that some women have to fill without being born for it. How happy he would be sewing frills into his little girls' frocks, and how pretty he would look sitting in a parlour, with a rough man making love to him!" (197). Nevertheless, despite Lyndall's ridicule of Gregory, he is one of Schreiner's most complicated characters. Gregory embodies Victorian ideals and morals regarding the place of men, women, and the working-class. He believes, "[i]f a man lets a woman do what he doesn't like, *he's a muff*" (207), but Gregory's beliefs change with the circumstances of his life.

Gregory eventually sets out in the Transvaal to find Lyndall. He learns that she is very ill and devises a way to care for the woman he now loves: Gregory knows that she will never be his or his lover, but he wishes, "… only to see her; only to stand sometimes in a place where she has stood before" (*African Farm* 248). Therefore, Schreiner has Gregory undergo a risqué transformation. She writes, "[h]e drew from his breast pocket a little sixpenny looking-glass… he then dressed himself in one of the old fashioned gowns and a great pinked out collar. Then he took out a razor. Tuft by tuft the brown beard fell to the sand… Then the glass showed a face surrounded by a frilled cap, white as a woman's…" (*African Farm* 270). By assuming the costume and the demeanor of a woman, Gregory puts aside his masculine bravado and embraces his feminine qualities.[31] The doctor who cares for Lyndall, is surprised by the now female-identified Gregory's soft and caring nature. The doctor says, " '[s]he is the most experienced nurse I ever came in contact with.' Gregory, standing in the passage heard it, and laughed in his heart. What need had he of experience. Experience teaches us in a millennium what passion teaches us in an hour" (273). Ironically as a woman, Gregory is finally able to have the intimate connection with Lyndall that she had denied him as a man.

Consequently, the way in which Schreiner frames her characters' sexuality and their struggles in achieving any type of sexual satisfaction or social acceptance is directly related to the function of power in a postcolonial society.[32] The dominant culture/discourse maintains its power and superiority by first establishing an "other,"

---

31 Gerald Monsman argues that this change allows Gregory "… to move toward a total mode of being, uniting contraries to rediscover a unity in which one cannot have any single identity without also possessing many others. By his refusal to privilege either extreme, Gregory escapes into the protean possibilities of endlessly renewed meaning" (Landscape and Power 75).

32 To read more on the uneven dispersal of power see: Deepika Bahri's "Feminism in/and Postcolonialism" in The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies ed. Neil Lazarus.

which it can define itself against. Seamus Deane's discussion of imperialism "... claims to have its roots in a universal human nature... and its more fully articulated characterization of itself as a missionary project to the world at large" (354). Schreiner takes issue with imperialistic attitudes imposing a universal human nature upon those individuals who live in the colonies. Moreover, any divergence from the generic universal expectations of human nature becomes "other" and deviant.[33] Schreiner's own sexual experiences had made her aware of how Victorian England viewed those that transgressed from the prudish norm. Hence, *African Farm* uses sexual freedom as a way of discussing the harm in trying to control humanness through laws and mores that infringe on the basic rights afforded to any human being. Thus, Schreiner uses her novel in order to enlighten her audience regarding the changes that need to take place in the imperiastically dominated society. She relies on the theme of "naturalness" in order to emphasize this point. Schreiner believes that it is not natural for society to confine women or men to rigidly defined roles, and she uses Lyndall to give voice to this argument. Lyndall ponders, "I wonder how many men would give up everything that is dear in life for maintaining a high ideal purity... when you have made women what you wish, and her children inherit her culture, you will defeat yourself" (*African Farm* 194).

Although "naturalness" may be a key theme of the novel, the idea of self-defeat shapes the plot. As the readers, we are asked to watch the characters try to fight their social systems, but we also know that they lack the tools necessary in order to succeed. In fact, those who defy society's rules, pay for it with suffering and an unfulfilled life.[34]

---

33 See Seamus Deane's Imperialism/Nationalism (1990) for an explanation of "othering" and the way it is used by the colonizer to assure cultural superiority (356).

34 Lyndall, Waldo, and Gregory all pay for their transgressions. Lyndall becomes pregnant out of wedlock; ultimately, both she and her daughter die from childbirth complications. Since Waldo refuses to

Lyndall, Waldo and Gregory all set out upon different journeys in order to try and attain the lives and freedoms that they desire. Waldo, the poor immigrant, seeks knowledge and the ability to be his own master, but fails because he does not know what to do without the farm. Lyndall seeks a life where she can love freely and pursue a vocation; however, as a single penniless woman, that life is denied. Gregory's situation is a little different; what he seeks is Lyndall, the one woman who both challenges his masculinity and emasculates him. There is something in Lyndall's nature that Gregory and Waldo need in order to feel alive. The way Lyndall defies social conventions and challenges them to do the same arouses their passions and makes them feel alive. Schreiner, likewise, challenged her readers to question dominant social constructs.

The oppression and resistance that the characters feel internally and from society is echoed in Schreiner's landscape. The empty South African countryside is bleak and harsh as is the reality of their existence. Olive Schreiner writes, "[w]eek after week, month after month, the sun looked down from the cloudless sky. Till the karroo-bushes were leafless sticks, broken into the earth, and the earth itself was naked and bare; only the milk-bushes, like old hags, pointed their shriveled fingers heavenwards praying for rain that never came" (Schreiner 44). Without water, life on the farm wanes, and the atmosphere becomes desolate. Water is synonymous with life in nature. According to Schreiner, a purpose and independence function in the same manner as water in the pursuit of creating a life for the farm's inhabitants and the inhabitants of the farm are

---

accept his place as a lowly worker on the farm, he encounters numerous struggles as he attempts to become his own master. Consequently, when he returns to the farm and learns of Lyndall's death, Waldo realizes the earth has nothing left to offer him and joins her in death, silently passing on among the chickens. Gregory rejects a life of domestic tranquility with Em to pursue Lyndall in the Transvaal. Lyndall, upon her death, writes to him that she wishes for him to marry Em; like Waldo, Gregory becomes apathetic to the world, but he accepts his duty to Em.

given enough to keep them alive, but not enough to flourish. In addition to the barrenness of the land, Lyndall notices how even the setting appears to mirror the confines of her life. She tells Em, "I thought the windows were higher. If I were you, when I get this place I should raise the walls. There is not room to breathe here; one suffocates" (*African Farm* 183). Indeed, the landscape of the karoo, a plain situated between mountains in South Africa, is not the type of setting that allows for mobility. The setting is a reminder that there will always be barriers for those such as Lyndall, Waldo, and Gregory. Their lives began to echo that of "[t]he beetle… hard at work trying to roll home a great ball of dung it had been collecting all the morning but Doss broke the ball, and ate the hind legs, and then bit off its head. And it was all play, and no one could tell what it had lived and worked for. A striving, and a striving, and an ending in nothing" (*African Farm* 107). The beetle's existence is like the farm's human inhabitants: their struggles are in vain, unless society is willing to change.

The misuse of power and exploitation of people is also central to the way in which Schreiner argues for social change. She makes her readers witness to the cruelty of which humans are capable. Violent acts are evident throughout the novel, and Schreiner challenges readers to judge whether the acts are justified, and if one accepts them as so—then what does that say about the reader? Schreiner is not trying to promote the type of deviant behavior that would do any actual harm; she merely suggests that men, women, and minorities should have equal rights to a better quality of life.[35]

---

35 Gerald Monsman argues that Schreiner's works are tied closely to her personal life and allegories addressing "(love, sympathy, and duty; freedom, reform, and gender; conflict , sorrow, and vision) and actions (questing, choosing, suffering)" (176). Schreiner's Woman and Labor also illustrates her views on the rights of all individuals.

Tant' Sannie uses her authority and religion on the farm as excuses to beat her workers and mistreat the children. As she watches Bonaparte beat Waldo for supposedly stealing some worthless peaches, she reflects on her own experience with violence: "Tant' Sannie felt half sorry for the lad; but she could not help laughing, it was always so funny when one was going to have a whipping… Anyhow he would forget all about it when the places were healed. Had not she been beaten many times and been all the better for it" (*African Farm* 123). Violence is the tool she has been taught to use and it is frequently exercised on the children. Nevertheless, there is something about Lyndall that prevents her from physically harming her. Tant' Sannie "… waddled after them, and caught Em by the arm. She had struck Lyndall once years before, and never done it again, so she took Em" (*African Farm* 91). Tant' Sannie's rule relies on violence, because the children and the other tenants deny her respect due to her ignorance. Although Tant' Sannie represents an outdated system of power, the children and servants are unable to revolt because they lack necessary knowledge and tools.

Schreiner emphasizes the fatal impact society has on women who, like Lyndall, must constantly fight for their freedom as well as for the freedom of others. Schreiner constructs a poignant scene in the beginning of the novel where she illustrates Lyndall's refusal to be powerless and her desire to rescue Waldo from his confinement:

> Lyndall had climbed up into the window, and with her fingers felt the wood-work that surrounded the panes. Slipping down, the girl loosened the iron knob from the foot of the bedstead, and climbing up again she broke with it every pane of glass in the window… she arranged the night-gown carefully in the corner of the window, with the chips of the frame about it. There was only one match in the box… for an instant it burnt up, then flickered and went out… (92-93)

Although Lyndall fails at this mission, she tells Em, "[w]hen that day comes, and I am strong, I will hate everything that has power, and help everything that is weak" (93).

Schreiner's Lyndall and Waldo are astutely aware of their powerlessness as children. They both seek comfort in the knowledge of books that they hope will one day aid them to be independent and free of another's power.

Due to Lyndall's experiences on the farm and away at school, she becomes a champion of the oppressed. After Waldo's beating, she comforts him by prophesying, "… we will not be children always; we shall have power too, some day" (*African Farm* 127). Unfortunately, Lyndall learns the only power available to her is her beauty and sexuality and she exercises her rule out of bitterness at its pettiness. She says, "[t]he less a woman has in her head the lighter she is for climbing. 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. They begin to shape us to our cursed end" (*African Farm* 189). Schreiner uses Lyndall to voice the problems of that result when women are denied a purpose beyond the home, and how men suffer as well:

> Power! Yes we have power; and since we are not to expend it in tunneling mountains, nor healing diseases, nor making laws, nor money, nor on any extraneous object, we expend it on *you*. You are our goods, our merchandise, our material for operating on; we buy you, we sell you, we make fools of you… We are not to study law, nor science, nor art; so we study you. (*African Farm* 192)

Hence, Lyndall does not know to form healthy, meaningful relationships. Relationships are a game to her and, as a result, Lyndall tries to see exactly what she can make a man do for her. This game ultimately wears her down and serves as a warning to the emptiness of a woman's domain. She is unable to fulfill her promise of: "When the day comes, and I am strong, I will hate everything that has power, and help everything that is weak" (*African Farm* 93). Unfortunately, Lyndall never becomes strong enough to help the weak.

Through Lyndall and Waldo's interactions with each other, as well as with the other characters, Schreiner is able to dissect what power is and what it means to subjugated women and men. Schreiner argues that, although the sexes are equal, as very young children females begin to be pushed into a sphere that hinders their power. Lyndall appears obsessed with attaining power because of its inaccessibility. In the section, "Lyndall," Lyndall and Waldo discuss the place (or lack thereof) of women in society—a place that not even Waldo would want to occupy. She argues just how artificial the power allotted to women can be. Lyndall says,

> Look at this little chin of mine, Waldo, with the dimple in it. It is but a small part of my person; but though I had knowledge of all things under the sun, and the wisdom to use it, and the deep loving heart of an angel, it would not stead me through life like this little chin. I can win money with it, I can win love; I can win power with it, I can win fame. What would knowledge help me? The less a woman has in her head the lighter she is for climbing. 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. (189).

The power Lyndall speaks of is not the power of making political decisions or the right to be respected and heard for no other reason than being male.[36] Although, Lyndall is clever, she depends on her beauty to win men and uses it to her advantage. Her power is worth no more than the power a child has over its parents; it is an illusion that fades with age and beauty.[37]

Lyndall is also driven by her desire for a meaningful existence. According to Lyndall, she exists in a perpetual state of emotional limbo. She tells Em, "I am never

---

36 Richard Altick explains the way women's power was constructed during the Victorian period. A woman's "power' allows her to captivate men in order to marry well and to be a clever woman was "...something unpleasant, even alarming about strong-willed women who insisted on using their minds" (54).

37 Ann Ardis in New Women, New Novels points out that Lyndall's speech "...quite ruthlessly demythologizes the Victorian sexual ideology of passionlessness. She quite ruthlessly demythologizes the Victorian patriarchy's idealization of female beauty by exposing its usefulness in ensuring women's physical and political powerlessness" (64).

miserable and never happy" (*African Farm* 186). The only thing Lyndall feels strongly about is the position of women; however, her inability to change that position only creates a greater feeling of despair. Lyndall is also concerned about the way women's rights are treated in conversations, and when Waldo expresses his lack of interest in the position of women she scolds him: "[n]o one does, unless they are in need of a subject upon which to show their wit" (*African Farm* 187). Lyndall is obviously bitter about her position, or lack thereof, as woman. It is this frustration that causes her to slowly distance herself from anyone who could potentially love her.

Waldo is different from the other characters, in that he has no interest in power or justice. Although Schreiner would argue that as a man, he already has power. He wanders through life and finds himself oppressed by one cruel master after another. Waldo is naturally passive, but when pushed, another side of him becomes evident. "His eyes are as wild as if the devil was in them. He never *was* like other children" (*African Farm* 104). This wild, aggressive quality comes out in him again years later when a fellow worker takes advantage of his kindness and rides Waldo's old grey mare to her death. In his letter to Lyndall, he retells the sudden rage he felt in his inability to save the old mare and the haughty attitude of the offender: "… I sprang over the counter, and got him by his throat… I asked him where he had killed her, and I took him till he slipped out of my hand… I caught him by his collar, and I lifted him from the ground, and I threw him out into the street, half-way across it" (*African Farm* 254). Waldo regresses back to what he learned as a child that violence equals momentary power.[38] Unfortunately,

38 Schreiner's description of Waldo's beating by Bonaparte Blenkins illustrates the agony Waldo feels at being powerless. Waldo is not only beat, but is also physically restrained: "For a moment the boy struggled to free himself; then he knew that he was powerless, and stood still" (124). However, despite his physical powerlessness, Waldo still projects mental control that his aggressor fears: "The boy looked up at him—not

Waldo's life of servitude continues to take its toll on his psyche. Waldo confesses, "[y]ou may work a man's body so that his soul dies. Work is good. I have worked at the old farm from the sun's rising till its setting, but I have had time to think and feel. You may work so that all but the animal in him is gone… You may work a man till he is the devil" (*African Farm* 256). Waldo's suffering is the opposite of Lyndall's: he is given work, but not the kind that stimulates the mind. He too must return back to the farm.

In contrast to Waldo, Gregory Rose has everything: he is a male from the privileged class. He is educated, has living family, and comes from at least some money. Power is not earned; it is given to him. However, his role as a man confines him, and his resentment is obvious when he writes to his sister, "You know how cruelly father always used me, calling me a noodle and a milksop, just because he couldn't understand my fine nature. You know he has made me a farmer of me instead of a minister… I have borne it all, not as a woman… but as a man should in silence" (*African Farm* 176). His hypersensitivity to his masculinity makes him insufferable to Lyndall and Waldo. Waldo says he will leave when Em marries Gregory and Lyndall sympathizes. Lyndall says, "[t]he rule of a woman is tyranny; but the rule of a man-woman grinds fine" (*African Farm* 197). Gregory's thoughts to his sister reinforce this observation: "If I had a wife with pride I'd make her give it up, *sharp*. I don't believe in a man who can't make a woman obey him" (*African Farm* 206-207). Unfortunately, Gregory does not know what he wants and becomes a victim, because he is forced to live life as a man.

---

sullenly, not angrily. There was a wild, fitful terror in the eyes. Bonaparte made haste to go out and shut the door, and leave him alone in the darkness. He himself was afraid of that look" (125).

Traditionally, a novel like Schreiner's, would end in marriage.[39] That is not the case for *African Farm.*[40] Instead, there are a series of deaths both literal and metaphorical. Lyndall dies a slow, painful death, as a result of childbirth; yet, she claims, "I am not afraid of the world—I will fight the world... I shall find something nobler, stronger than I... "(*African Farm* 279). She maintains this attitude even in her final moments. Lyndall dies for her beliefs because Schreiner knew that, realistically, Lyndall could not have survived the constraints of a Victorian Imperialistic society. Without Lyndall, Waldo also dies, but his death, like his life, is quiet. He falls asleep on a sunny afternoon where Em finds: "... the chickens had climbed about him, and were perching on him. One stood upon his shoulder, and rubbed its little head softly against his black curls" (*African Farm* 300). Neither Waldo nor Lyndall were equipped for the world, such as it was. Unlike Waldo and Lyndall, Gregory keeps his life, but he returns to the farm a shell of a person. Schreiner writes, "... with his dead pipe lying on the bench beside him, and his blue eyes gazing out far across the flat, like one who sits at the sea-shore watching that which is fading, fading from him" (*African Farm* 294). He now has to struggle to find a way to live in a society that kills its strongest people. The only character who remains unchanged is Tant' Sannie who, fatter than ever, now has a child. The tradition of ignorance and rule by physical force is preserved in her offspring; suggests that society has failed somewhere.

39 For further reading see Ann Ardis's New Women: New Novels, the book discusses how New Women novels diverged from the Victorian marriage plot.

40 Olive Schreiner's novels reject the marriage plot: Undine, Man to Man, and Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland are further examples of this.

CONCLUSION

"When I look into my own heart, then I feel as strong and firm as a lion."

-- Olive Schreiner[41]

"... what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood."

-- Audre Lorde[42]

In a conversation with Waldo, Lyndall ponders how the individual fits in with the larger schema, "… what is more amusing still than tracing the likeness between man and man, is to trace the analogy there always is between the progress and development of one individual and of a whole nation; or again, between a single nation and an entire human race" (*African Farm* 198). Schreiner's work attempts to trace such an analogy. She acknowledges that her text alone does not encompass the reality of imperialism's effect on its subjects, nor does it offer any solution for change. However, Schreiner does suggest that individuals need to create the change they desire and to remain silent will not facilitate change. *African Farm* does serve as a starting point in the discussion regarding

41 From a letter to Havelock Ellis , Letters (1988): p 69.

42 Originally delivered at the Modern Language Association's "Lesbian and Literature Panel," Chicago, Illinois, December 28, 1977. First published in Sinister Wisdom 6 (1978) and The Cancer Journals (Spinsters Ink, San Francisco, 1980).

the needs of the individual. It is also a testament to the depths of the human condition; Schreiner explores what happens when individuality is stifled by the outdated rules of society. Her characters portray a variety of views and embody a diversity of views. As a result, to read the novel is to experience the society in which Schreiner lived and that still bears a resemblance to our society. The subjection of a group or minority based upon supposed inferiority is still a problem. Although more than a hundred years have passed since the 1883 publishing of *The Story of an African Farm*, individual expression of sexuality is still a subversive issue. Today it may be more common to see women, like Lyndall, who refuse to marry for the mere sake of it, but those women are still viewed as promiscuous. While it may not shock an individual to hear about cross-dressers like Gregory Rose, socially cross-dressing is still taboo in the dominant society. The "Waldo's of the world" are still viewed as strange and antisocial, because they live more comfortably in their dreams. Schreiner would most certainly still find society's phallocentric control over sexual expression alarming.[43]

Societies that most vehemently silence their people are more often than naught also guilty of crimes against women. Women in the Middle East, Asia, and other financially unstable countries are victims of some of the most heinous crimes.[44] Although, violence against women is not a central issue to *African Farm*, Schreiner's 1897 novel, *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* did criticize and publicize the rapes

---

43 In a letter to Karl Pearson, Schreiner voices her frustration with the narrowness of sexuality: "While we live through your use of our sexual natures, we are slaves, and our slavery reacts on you" (Letters 96). Unfortunately, Schreiner would be disappointed to see that women of today are not much different. Even the 21st century, women are still taught that sexuality is their greatest asset. Susan Bordo and Jean Kilbourne have both written extensively on this problem.

44 See Deepika Bahri's critique concerning the lack of representation of the "other" in current scholarly discussions in "Feminism in/and Postcolonialism," The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies ed. Neil Lazarus (2004).

that were committed by British soldiers during the Boer Wars. Schreiner's letters also reveal her concern for the well-being of prostitutes.[45] She emphasizes the fact that prostitutes have valuable insights into the relations between the sexes; Schreiner also clarifies that these women are drawn to prostitution because it is the only profession, outside of marriage, in which they are allowed a decent living.[46]

Future Implications

Despite the fact that more than a hundred years have passed since *African Farm's* publication, the novel and its arguments are still relevant today. Audre Lorde's speech concerning the state of Feminist and Postcolonial Studies holds the same relevance as well.[47] If we stop discussing, or do not discuss at all, the experiences of the oppressed, we deny them their validity. Silence remains as powerful, as ever at allowing the oppressors to continue the subjection of gender, race, and sexuality. Lorde argues, "Interdependencey between women is the only way to the freedom which allows the *I* and *be*, not in order to be used, but in order to be creative. This is a difference between the passive *be* and the active *being*" (111). To expand Lorde's argument, I think it is of utmost importance to extend the act of interdependency beyond just women. Although I believe "we", as women, deserve our own voice, I think it is more important to create a contrapuntal voice of those who have been silenced. The following is a partial list of studies that I believe would further contribute to Feminist and Postcolonial Studies:

---

45 Refer to Letters.

46 Richard Altick in Victorian People an Ideas (1973) discusses the harsh economic conditions of the working woman in Victorian England.

47 See footnote in Introduction.

1. A rhetorical examination of women's literature written during the Boer Wars. The Boer Wars were a violent, barbaric part of England's history in Africa. Women of all backgrounds were victims of violent attacks and their experience is neglected in literary studies.[48]
2. An analysis of the ways in which the media perpetuates a new type of parasitism in women. The media encourages women to define their value based on commodity system; thereby, I'd suggest, the media confirms the belief in "woman as commodity."
3. A consideration of the ways in which web 2.0 platforms might be utilized in order to stop the silence of the oppressed. Those of us who have access to these platforms have the ability to continually raise awareness for oppressed groups. Utilizing these platforms in classroom instructional practices, allows teachers to encourage, support, and ensure that *all* voices are heard.
4. A comparison of how South African writers use landscape to help discuss the political and social separation of the country.[49]
5. Building upon these above topics, a study of current representations/experiences of women in African countries suffering from political unrest, and as a result, become victims of violence.
6. Conducting a reading of the text through a LBGQT lens to understand issues of transgendering portrayed in the text.

---

48 Olive Schreiner's Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonland (1897) is an example of writing during the Boer War.

49 J.M. Coetzee also uses the landscape of South Africa to enhance the isolation of his characters. Joseph Conrad also could not escape using the geography of Africa to illustrate the feeling of insignificance experienced by Marlowe in Heart of Darkness.

These topics represent only a fraction of the discussions that could ensue. More importantly, any discussion, in which scholars incorporate the voices of marginalized peoples, is of value; for, as Patricia Hill Collins concludes, "… while individual empowerment is key, only collective action can effectively generate the lasting institutional transformation required for social justice" (290).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Altick, Richard D. *Victorian People and Ideas: A Companion for the Modern Reader of Victorian Literature*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1974. Print.

Ardis, Ann L. *New Women, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1991. Print.

Bahri, Deepika. "Feminism in/and Postcolonialism." *Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*. 4th ed. New York: Cambridge UP, 2004. 199-220. Print.

Burdett, Carolyn. "Olive Schreiner, South Africa, and the Costs of Modernity." *Women's Experience of Modernity: 1875-1945*. Eds. Ann Ardis, Leslie Lewis, and Rita Felski. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 2002. 130-45. Print.

Conrad, Joseph,. Heart of Darkness and Selected Short Fiction. New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2003. Print.

Deane, Seamus. "Imperialism/Nationalism." Critical Terms for Literary Study. 2nd ed. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1995. 354-68. Print.

Hill Collins, Patricia. "Toward a Political Empowerment." Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2000. Print.

Horrel, Georgina. "A Whiter Shade of Pale: White Feminimity as Guilty Masquerade in 'New' (White) South African Women's Writing." Journal of Southern African Studies 30.4 (2004): 765-76. JSTOR. Web. 19 Jan. 2009.

First, Ruth, and Ann Scott. Olive Schreiner: A Biography. New York: Schocken, 1980. Print.

Gray, Alan. "The Troubled Mirror: Some Notes on Olive Schreiner." African Affairs 54 (1955): 300-05. Print.

Heard, Raymond. "English Studies in Africa." Olive Schreiner and Death 2 (1959): 110-17. Print.

Kipling, Rudyard. Kim (Broadview Editions). New York: Broadview, 2005. Print.

Knutson, Susan. Narrative in the Feminine. Ed. Daphne Marlatt and Nicole Brossard. New York: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2000. Print.

Kucich, John. "Olive Schreiner, Masochism, and Omnipotence: Strategies of a Preoedipal Politics." Novel Fall (2002): 79-108. Print.

Lloyd, Fernando. "New Women" in the Late Victorian Novel. University Park: Penn State UP, 1977. Print.

Lorde, Audre. "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House." Sister Outsider. Berkeley: Crossing, 1984. 110-13. Print.

MacLeod Walls, Elizabeth. " 'Little Afraid of the Women Today': The Victorian New Woman and the Rhetoric of British Modernism." Rhetoric Review 21.3 (2002): 229-46. JSTOR. Web. 02 Apr. 2009.

McKeon, Michael. Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1988. Print.

Monsman, Gerald Cornelius. Olive Schreiner's Fiction Landscape and Power. New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers UP, 1991. Print.

Said, Edward W. Culture and Imperialism. New York: Vintage Books, 1994. Print.

Sanders, Mark. "Towards a Geneology of Intellectual Life: Olive Schreiner's

" 'The Story of an African Farm'" NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction 34.1 (2000): 77-97. JSTOR. Web. 19 Jan. 2009.

Schreiner, Olive. Olive Schreiner Letters. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988. Print.

-- The Story of an African Farm (Penguin Classics). New York: Penguin Classics, 1983. Print.

-- Woman and Labor. Mineola, N.Y: Dover Publications, 1998. Print.

Tanesini, Allesandra. An Introduction to Feminist Epistemoligies. Oxford: Blackwell, 1999. Print.