Elements of Romanticism in *The Story of an African Farm*

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Despite, or perhaps because of, the enthusiastic reception which greeted it when it was first published in 1883, The Story of an African Farm has been largely ignored by critics in this century. It is passed over quickly, almost as an embarrassment by most modern South African critics as though any expression of interest, let alone approbation, would brand them as jingoistic and unacceptable in literary circles. Uys Krige, for instance, begins his introduction to Olive Schreiner: A Selection by beating the novel soundly, apparently to demonstrate his objectivity about South African literature so that he may later, with a clear conscience eulogise Olive Schreiner's Thoughts on South Africa with its strongly pro-Boer predisposition. Dan Jacobson's Introduction to the Penguin edition of The Story of an African Farm, is like most criticism, chiefly biographical. As Jacobson admits, it is extraordinarily difficult for South Africans to evaluate Olive Schreiner's work: "She was in my experience and I cannot pretend otherwise." Apart from this and the few biographical studies, Olive Schreiner has been pressed into the service of feminism, her novels have been picked over to furnish quotable fragments which support the feminist viewpoint. To some extent this pursuit is justifiable. Olive Schreiner certainly did, throughout her life, expouse the cause of women's rights, and her novels and stories reflect this concern. But their interest is wider than this. The Story of an African Farm is not just a feminist tract; it deserves recognition on other grounds.

The peculiar appeal of the novel lies not only in the sense of timelessness which the descriptions of the Karoo evoke, but also in the extraordinary union of apparent opposites within its composition - a realism which is almost as analytical as a scientific paper of the period and a poetic element which, both thematically and stylistically, reflects the influence of Romanticism. This diversity is apparent also in the polarity of emphasis which is at once concrete and abstract, local and universal. Clearly, The Story of an African Farm merits an exhaustive analysis but in this paper I propose only to analyse the Romantic elements of the novel, since these are, in themselves, considerable and pervasive.

Despite the lack of a universally agreed-upon definition of Romanticism, and the diversity of writings labelled Romantic, it is possible nonetheless to list certain basic themes and attitudes predominant in the Romantic period, and it is these which I shall trace in relation to The Story of an African Farm. The reaction against a narrowly classical intellectual outlook, the elevation of passion and emotion and the affirmation of a sense of mystery in life led to the assertion of the imagination as the fundamental creative process and of the primacy of the perceiver in the world...
he perceives. Such a belief logically implied the value of solitude and introspection, of communication with nature rather than with society. The intimate relation of the Romantic with nature was seen as an organic one which was in turn both part and proof of a transcendent spiritual unity operative throughout the universe.

If we now look for specific points of comparison with Romantic writers, the closest single parallel to The Story of an African Farm is Emily Brontë's great romantic novel. We know that Olive Schreiner referred to Emily Brontë as the greatest woman writer of genius whom the English-speaking people have produced and that she included Emily Brontë in her list of the world's twelve greatest women. V. Buchanan-Gould has, in passing, compared The Story of an African Farm with Wuthering Heights because of the vivid sense of place evoked in both novels, and D. R. Beeton, discussing Smuts' admiration for Emily Brontë, notes the intensity of both writers and of their protagonists, but the similarities rest on a broader basis than these critics suggest. It is indeed illuminating to consider briefly the striking similarities between these two novels as an indication of the extent to which Olive Schreiner consciously saw herself as a writer in the tradition of Emily Brontë and of the Romantic poets.

In both there is a combination of realistic description, implicit social analysis, the record of passionate and intense experiences, and, perhaps most obviously, a strongly Romantic attitude to nature. At the level of plot and characterization too the parallels are striking. Like Heathcliff and Cathy, Waldo and Lyndall are first indulged by a kindly father-figure, and subsequently persecuted by an authoritarian tyrant under whose regime hell-fire religion is the standard Sabbath fare. As Cathy forsakes the uncouth Heathcliff and her "roots" in the moors for a life of manners and social graces, so Lyndall leaves Waldo and the farm to seek fulfilment in a more urbane and cultured sphere. Waldo, like Heathcliff, disappears for a time from his natural milieu to return only when it is too late to win the woman he loves, while Gregory Rose, with his gentle, half-feminine nature, his extraordinary tenderness towards the unresponsive Lyndall and, not less, his petulance is almost a parody of Edgar Linton. Lyndall, like Cathy, dies of pneumonia, self-induced, after the birth of a child, although of course Lyndall's child dies while Catherine Linton lives. Both Cathy and Lyndall think they wish to dictate to men, but really desire to be mastered, to adore a superior man, and both, despite their heroic qualities, are fundamentally self-centred. In each novel the male protagonist, dies, apparently of grief after the death of the beloved woman and, in each case, a kind of serenity is restored at the end although in effect it does not approach the intensity of emotion evoked during the time of tumult. But the Romantic elements of the novel are more pervasive than this brief comparison would indicate, as will be apparent from a fuller thematic discussion.

The most strikingly Romantic aspect of the novel is the presentation of nature which is seen variously as the expression and revelation of an immanent, universal life force, as teacher and alma mater, as the source of peace, the embodiment of transcendent power, and as the origin of the sense of otherness, of selfhood and of moral awareness in man. It is worth looking at each
of these components in turn for, though apparently diverse, all have singularly close parallels in Romantic poetry and together contribute to that ill-defined but recognisable concept, the Romantic view of nature.

Probably the climatic Romantic expression of the organic union between man and nature, which Coleridge calls the "One Life," is Wordsworth's "Lines Composed a few Miles above Tintern Abbey," with its almost mystic conviction of seeing "into the life of things." Indeed the following lines might well stand as an epigraph to Olive Schreiner's novel:

... a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.5

Olive Schreiner herself believed that "if I must put it into words, I would say: the Universe is One and It lives; or if you would put it into older phraseology I would say: there is NOTHING but God."6

Repeatedly in the novel the same image of an eternal life force flowing through all things recurs in association with the contemplation of nature:

Nothing is despicable - all is meaningful, ... all is part of a whole whose beginning and end we know not. The life that throbs in us is a pulsation from it; too mighty for our comprehension, not too small.7

For the soul which knows itself no more as a unit, but as a part of the Universal Unity of which the Beloved also is a part; which feels within itself the throbb of the Universal Life; for that soul there is no death. (II, 13, p. 290)

The Divine Compensation of nature is made manifest. She shows herself to you. So near she draws you that the blood seems to flow from her to you, through a still uncut cord: you feel the throb of life. (II, 14, p. 298)

Such faith in a universal unity, inclusive, nurturing, non-judgmental, offers ultimate peace from struggle, and indeed the only peace to be found in the novel arises from the contemplation of nature. Emotionally exhausted by their yearning "for a token from the inexorably Silent One," the children of the "Times and Seasons" chapter reject religious orthodoxy along with its Bible but immediately after this they experience a profound sense of the healing peace of nature.

Upon our hot stiff face a sweet breath of wind blows. We raise our head, and with our swollen eyes look out at the beautiful still world, and the sweet night-wind
blows in upon us, holy and gentle, like a loving breath from the lips of God. Over us a deep peace comes, of calm, still joy... Oh, the unutterable gladness! At last we have found it! (II, 1, p. 143)

So, eventually, Waldo too achieves peace through his response to the rhythms and wondrous details of nature:

He rubbed his hands in the sunshine. Ah! to live on so, year after year, how well! ... To live on so, calmly, far from the paths of men; and to look at the lives of clouds and insects; to look deep into the heart of flowers. ... Ah! life is delicious; well to live long, and see the darkness breaking, and the day coming! (II, 14, p. 299)

But such faith, it is stressed, is attained only through the acceptance of pain and suffering and a series of disillusionments. It involves the endless Romantic quest for an absolute Truth which may be glimpsed after a life of struggle, but never fully known. That it is not mere escapism is made clear in the "Times and Seasons" chapter. Here the children try at first to weave a beautiful fantasy about an all-loving, beneficent nature, a fantasy which defies reason:

In the centre of all things is a Mighty Heart, which having begotten all things, loves them; and having born them into life, beats with great throbs of love towards them. No death for His dear insects, no hell for His dear men, no burning up of His dear world. ... In the end all will be beautiful. Do not ask us how we make our dream tally with facts; the glory of a dream is this - that it despises facts, and makes its own. (II, 1, v, p. 145)

The tone of self-derision throughout this passage emphasises that this is too facile a view, that it affirms as true what it desires to believe despite the unpalatable facts, the problem of pain and suffering. The children's dream can survive neither the impressing of reality nor their own sceptical rationalism. Ultimately, for Olive Schreiner as for the great Romantics, nature is autonomous; it must be accepted for what it is and neither called to account before the court of man-made morality nor glossed over as something superficial, pretty - and false. In the Stranger's fable of the Hunter "The mountains of stern reality will rise before him; he must climb them: beyond them lies Truth" (II, 2, p. 162). So, too, the children, robbed of their comforting illusions about nature, turn coldly to the dispassionate study of facts. Only then is it possible for them to arrive at a new and greater vision of nature based on an honest contemplation of reality. What they discover is Wordsworth's "something far more deeply interfused":

This thing we call existence; is it not a something which has its roots far down below in the dark, and its branches stretching out into the immensity above, which we among the branches cannot see? Not a chance jumble; a living thing, a One... all is meaningful; nothing is
small - all is part of a whole. . . . The life that throbs in us is a pulsation from it. (II, i, vii, pp. 153-54)

This passage encompasses not only the Romantic affirmation of oneness and meaning within the universe but also the assertion of the mystics that the individual is simultaneously of no account and of infinite worth, a faith shared at various times by Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley.

As in Shelley's "Mont Blanc," nature in The Story of an African Farm is never merely benign. Indeed the overwhelming impression is of the power of nature, ruthless, arbitrary, careless of the petty concerns of men. The starkness and immensity of the Karoo virtually unrelieved by man or his objects, and the precarious hold of the farmstead in this inhospitable land are repeatedly emphasized. Either drought has all but removed any sustenance, or floods threaten to inundate the farm; dust clouds obliterate it visually, and, regularly, by moonlight, it is reduced to a mere shadow in a wilderness, dwarfed even by the nearest "kopje" which is itself but slight. This is emphasized in the opening description which sets the relative scale of nature and of man for the whole novel.

The full African moon poured down its light from the blue sky into the wide lonely plain. . . .

In one spot only was the solemn monotony of the plain broken. Near the centre a small, solitary "kopje" rose. Alone it lay there, a heap of round, iron stones.

. . . At the foot of the "kopje" lay the homestead.
(I, i, p. 35)

The immensity of nature so apparent in this stark African setting elicits terror, whether as the crude superstitions of Blenkins and Tant' Sannie or the moral awareness of a transcendent otherness experienced by the children in the "Times and Seasons" chapter.

One day we sit there and look up at the blue sky, and down at our fat little knees; and suddenly it strikes us, who are we? This I, what is it?. . . . Then we get up in great fear and run home as hard as we can. We can't tell anyone what frightened us. We never quite lose that feeling of self again. (II, i, ii, p. 139)

As in the bird-nesting, the skating and the boat-stealing episodes of The Prelude, the experience of the power and autonomy of nature engenders an awareness of the self as other than the environment. Indeed the whole "Times and Seasons" section may be read as an extraordinarily close parallel to the childhood section of The Prelude, transposed into a different setting but describing similar experiences of, and resultant attitudes to, nature.

Like the most jealous god, nature is seen to demand absolute devotion before revealing its secrets and its truth. The loss of rapport with nature recorded by Wordsworth in "Intimations of Immortality" and by Coleridge in "Dejection" is described explicitly
here too. Preoccupation with self, or with personal and materialistic concerns, casts an impenetrable veil between man and nature; there are no more epiphanies.

There are only rare times when a man's soul can see nature. So long as any passion holds its revels there, the eyes are holden that they should not see her. . . when there comes a pause, a blank in your life, when the old idol is broken . . . then the divine compensation of nature is made manifest. She shows herself to you. (II, 14, p. 298)

The Story of an African Farm thus emphasises both the mysterious, transcendental aspect of nature expressed in Coleridge's poems of phantom magic with their evocation of the numinous, and as well the sense of intimate communion with nature as a personal, all-embracing force. The descriptions are also characterised by the careful observation of nature, the almost scientific precision in rendering details, which we find in Wordsworth, Coleridge and Keats, and which was, indeed, one of the articles of the Lyrical Ballads manifesto. In the novel we have the same painstaking clarity in the evocation of details, the sudden change in focus leading, characteristically, to a new perception, a new dimension.

The rocks have been to us a blur of brown; we bend over them and the disorganized masses dissolve into a many-coloured, many-shaped, carefully-arranged form of existence. Here masses of rainbow tinted crystals, half-fused together; these bands of smooth grey and red, methodically overlying each other. This rock here is covered with a delicate silvery tracery, in some mineral, resembling leaves and branches. . . . The bitto flower has been for us a mere blur of yellow; we find its heart composed of a hundred perfect flowers, the homes of the tiny black people with red stripes who move in and out in that little yellow city . . . Farther on walks a horned beetle, and near him starts open the door of a spider, who peeps out carefully, and quickly pulls it down again. (II, 1, vii, p. 152)

One little leaf of the ice-plant stood upright and the sun shone through it. He could see every little crystal cell like a drop of ice in the transparent green. (II, 14, p. 298)

The novel is studded with such precise descriptions, nearly always of minute details, and again this reflects the dual vision of the Romantic mystics who saw "a World in a grain of sand, / And a Heaven in a wild flower."

Olive Schreiner was Romantic, too, in seeing her writing as the work, not primarily of the intellect, but of the creative imagination or the subconscious will. The year after the publication of The Story of an African Farm she wrote to Havelock Ellis,

Did you ever read the passage in Shelley's letters when he talks about genius. Genius does not invent, it per-
ceives! I think this is so wonderfully true, and more true the more one looks at it. It agrees with the true fact that you noticed the other day, that men of genius are always childlike. A child sees everything . . . without any preconceived idea; most people, after they are about eleven or twelve, quite lose this power, they see everything through a few preconceived ideas which hang like a veil between them and the outer world.

Buchanan-Gould quotes from an unpublished letter of 1902 in which Olive Schreiner described how the story of Trooper Peter Halket had occurred to her during sleep, so that she woke with the story "fully clothed within her mind": "you cannot make them [stories and poems] if they do not make themselves."

So too, within the novel, and especially in the childhood sequences, she asserts the primacy of the observer. What is perceived is not objective and discrete, but an extension of the perceiver's consciousness. Thus when Lyndall relates to the other children her imaginative construction of Napoleon's feelings in exile and her own response to what she sees as his greatness, she is affirming the validity of her subjective vision.

"You have read it, have you not?"
He nodded, "Yes; but the brown history tells only what he did, not what he thought."
"It was in the brown history that I read of him," said the girl; "but I know what he thought. Books do not tell everything." (I, 2, p. 48)

Arising out of this belief in the unconscious self as the origin of the creative imagination, was the Romantic affirmation of the experiencing self as being at least as important as the external world. This Romantic "egotism" was indeed an inevitable consequence of both the attitudes considered above, for the inner-self, unfettered by social ties and conventions was seen as both the channel through which flowed the tide of Universal Being and, simultaneously, the source of creativity. The growing interest in psychology and particularly in subconscious levels of experience, dreams and fantasy, led in turn to the Romantic emphasis on childhood as a time when the subconscious promptings, the springs of the creative imagination have been least tramelled by convention, when, in Freudian terms, the ego has not yet been inhibited by the Super ego. Thus to Wordsworth the child is

Thou best Philosopher, who yet dost keep
Thy heritage, thou Eye among the blind,
That, deaf and silent, read'st the external deep,
Haunted forever by the eternal mind,
Mighty Prophet! Sée blest!
On whom those truths do rest,
Which we are toiling all our lives to find.10

and Blake's Songs of Innocence elevate the natural wisdom of the child free from the "mind-forg'd manacles" of the adult world.

These assumptions figure largely, often explicitly, in The Story
of an African Farm. Only the children and those who, like Uncle Otto, are children at heart, are able to perceive true moral values, to experience with aching intensity the beauty of nature and the spiritual dimension beyond the material world. The entire "Times and Seasons" chapter is an affirmation of the superiority of the child’s perception over the adult’s:

There has been a thunderstorm; the ground, as far as the eye can reach is covered with white hail; the clouds are gone, and overhead a deep blue sky is showing; far off a great rainbow rests on the white earth. We, standing in a window to look, feel the cool, unspeakably sweet wind blowing in on us, and a feeling of longing comes over us... and oh, we want it, we want - we do not know what. We cry as though our heart was broken. (II, 1, i, p. 138)

We are run through with a shudder of delight when in the red sand we come on one of those white wax flowers that lie between their two green leaves flat on the sand. We hardly dare pick them, but we feel compelled to do so; and we smell and smell till the delight becomes almost pain... .

Beyond the "kopje" grow some pale-green, hairy-leaved bushes. We are so small, they meet over our head; and we sit among them, and kiss them, and they love us back... it seems as though they were alive. (II, 1, i, p. 139)

Moreover only the children, like the child of Wordsworth’s Ode, perceive the reality behind the material world.

"Oh, God! do they not understand that the material world is but a film through every pore of which God’s awful spirit-world is shining through on us?" (II, 1, iv, p. 142)

They, like Blake’s innocents, respond to the teachings of Jesus, to love and mercy, pity and peace, and reject the Nobodaddy of the adults’ creed.

One day, a notable day, we read on the "kopje" and discover the fifth chapter of Matthew, and read it all through. It is a new goldmine. Then we tuck the Bible under our arm and rush home. They didn’t know it was wicked to take your things again if someone took them, wicked to go to law, wicked to - ! ... we tell them we have discovered a chapter they never heard of; we tell them what it says. The old wise people tell us they knew all about it. Our discovery is a mare’s nest to them; but to us it is very real. (II, 1, iii, p. 139)

It is precisely this intensity of vision, peculiar to childhood, which Wordsworth extols in "Intimations of Immortality," lamenting its inevitable loss in adulthood. In Olive Schreiner’s novel the anomalous contrast between the wisdom of the children and the ignorance of the adults is even more extreme. With the exception of
Uncle Otto, the adults who people the world of the farm are at best shallow, at worst demonically sadistic. It is of course one of the many ironies that Blenkins should set up as a teacher, for not only is he himself profoundly incompetent, but his attitudes are in every way antithetical to the pursuit of knowledge. He steadfastly refuses to admit his ignorance, lies as naturally as he breathes, burns any books he does not understand and attempts to inculcate his travesty of knowledge through the end of a stick. There is a similar ironic contrasting of the children's true spiritual devotion with the hypocritical behaviour of the adult congregation at church and the vindictive doctrines of the elect which they hear preached from the pulpit. Like Blake they reject it as a travesty of religion and, to the horror of the scandalised adults, run from the church.

What do we there in that place, where all the words are lies against the All Father? Filled with horror we turn and flee out of the place... Then a head is shaken solemnly at us. No one can think it wrong to go to the house of the Lord; it is the idle excuse of a wicked boy. When will we think seriously of our souls, and love going to church? We are wicked, very wicked. (II, 1, v, pp. 147-48)

The parallel with Blake's "Holy Thursday," "The Little Vagabond" and "The Garden of Love" is striking.

The Romantics' interest in the child was not confined to extolling his vision of the world. The child was also "father of the man" and the study of his development was, in itself, fascinating to those preoccupied with the experiencing self and its response to the world. Significantly, The Story of an African Farm is prefaced by an epigraph from Alexis de Tocqueville:

We must see the first images which the external world casts upon the dark mirror of his mind; or must hear the first words which awaken the sleeping powers of thought, and stand by his earliest efforts, if we would understand the prejudices, the habits, and the passions that will rule his life. The entire man is, so to speak, to be found in the cradle of the child.

This emphasis on the paramount importance of the child's early years is put forward explicitly in the novel as part of Lyndall's argument for the better education of women:

The souls of little children are marvellously delicate and tender things, and keep for ever the shadow that first falls on them... The first six years of our life make us; all that is added later is veneer. (II, 4, p. 193)

But implicitly it underlies the whole structure of the novel. The lives and values of Lyndall, Em and Waldo are seen as being influenced mainly by their early environment and their individual responses to that environment. It is significant that these impressions of childhood are more subtle in their effect than a mere im-
printing on a tabula rasa such as the mechanistic theories of Locke and Hartley had suggested. This is one of the reasons why the tyrannous regime of Blenkins which might be expected to leave an indelible mark on the children's personality, eliciting hatred, calculation and brutality, passes with apparently so little effect. It is Uncle Otto who, coming at an earlier and hence more impressionable stage in their lives, has the stronger and more enduring influence. His principles of acceptance are so deeply ingrained that Blenkins' gratuitous cruelty does not breed cruelty or a desire for retaliation but a Shelleyan hatred of the tyranny exercised over others. Thus Waldo, although previously he has been beaten almost senseless by Blenkins, nurses no desire for revenge but, like his father in a parallel scene, complies with all Blenkins' requests for aid in the day of the latter's discomfiture (I, 13, p. 133). Lyndall concentrates her attack on the discrimination against women, Waldo speculates endlessly on social harmony and equality but his only acts of violence are elicited, not by his own suffering, but by the maltreatment of helpless animals. On a larger scale, this is why there is almost no trace of Blenkins in Part II. He reappears unnecessarily at the end, to Tant' Sannie's annoyance, but significantly the protagonists never refer to him. This has seemed to some readers a flaw in construction, but in fact it is an integral part of the author's assertion.

One interesting outcome of Olive Schreiner's interest in the child and childhood perception is the characterization of Tant' Sannie and Bonaparte Blenkins, almost universally decried by critics as mere stereotypes. Krige, for example, writes:

There is a flaw that runs right through The Story of an African Farm: the split in her vision or presentation of her characters. About half of her characters are seen from the outside and the other half from the inside.

Of the "outer" characters Napoleon [sic] is such a one. Not the slightest effort is made to explain him, to motivate his cruelty and sadism to the boy Waldo. This is to misunderstand completely the important fact that Blenkins is drawn predominantly as he appears to the children, not as he is. The implied perspective throughout Part I is, almost without exception, that of the children. The obvious parallels are David Copperfield and Jane Eyre where again the adult characters are, for the most part, grotesque because that is how they appear to the child who provides the implied authorial consciousness. Like the Murdstones and the Reeds, Tant' Sannie and Blenkins are not flaws in the novel but embodiments of common nineteenth-century attitudes as they appeared to children. The stolid, uncomprehending, often cruel Tant' Sannie and the authoritarian sadist, Blenkins, are not far removed from the world of horror and persecution which Dickens, and later Butler, disclosed beneath the cosy Victorian domestic scene.

It is the child's perspective too which is partly responsible for the apparent arbitrariness of the adults' behaviour in the novel, their unexplained comings and goings. To the child, the rationale of the adult world is incomprehensible for no one bothers to justi-
fy it. Yet overwhelmingly critics of the novel have proclaimed as
a serious defect the arrival of two different strangers and their
failure to return, even though Olive Schreiner explicitly answered
such complaints in her preface to the second edition - a defence,
in effect of what would later have been called the "slice-of-life"
technique.

Related to the emphasis on the child and his innate wisdom was the
Romantic interest in the role of the subconscious in adult experi-
ence, since this was seen as continuous with, and most closely re-
lated to, childhood awareness. The Story of an African Farm too is
almost aggressively introspective. The impression is fostered by
the physical starkness of the setting, the sense of isolation which,
from the opening description, characterises the novel. The deserted
Karoo, the solitary "kopje" are symbolic of the isolated individuals
to follow and the three incidents of the first chapter all reinforce
the impression of Waldo's extreme loneliness, forsaken even by his
God. Already there are the first intimations of his later aware-
ness of an inner self as essentially alone, defined, at this stage,
through a theological rebellion.

There was a secret he had carried in his heart for a
year. He had not dared to look at it; he had not whis-
pered it to himself; but for a year he had carried it.

"I hate God!" he said. . . . He knew he was certainly
lost now; he did not care. . . . Beter so! - But oh,
the loneliness, the agonized pain! (I, 1, p. 42)

In Lyndall too, because of her sensitive and passionate nature, we
suspect the same kind of process, although it is not made apparent
until much later in the novel. More specifically, "Times and Sea-
sons" contains an extraordinarily precise analysis of the phases of
development towards self-awareness, and this amplifies the descrip-
tions of the children in Part I. Again in this general chapter we
have a description of the young child's first experience of self.

We . . . look up at the blue sky, and down at our fat
little knees; and suddenly it strikes us, Who are we?
This I, what is it? We try to look in upon ourself,
and ourself beats back upon ourself . . . . We never
quite lose that feeling of self again. (II, 1, ii, p.139)

In this passage the self is perceived by its distinctive otherness,
its separation from its environment. Later this inner self reas-
serts itself in a rebellion against the accepted beliefs and mores
of society:

Occasionally, also, unpleasantly shrewd questions begin
to be asked by someone, we know not who, who sits some-
where behind our shoulder. We get to know him better
afterwards. (II, 1, iii, p.140)

Here we see the full significance of Waldo and Lyndall's scepticism,
their need to find their own answers. The scene where Lyndall pre-
pares to leave the farm for the last time is a remarkable dramati-
zation of this conviction of an inner self. Seeing her reflection in her mirror, Lyndall begins to address her mirror-image, gradually centring down upon the reflected eyes (traditionally the windows of the soul) and through them lapses into a dialogue with her inner self.

Presently she looked up. The large dark eyes from the glass looked back at her. She looked deep into them.

"We are all alone, you and I," she whispered; "no one helps us, no one understands us; but we will help ourselves." The eyes looked back at her. There was a world of assurance in their still depths. So they had looked at her ever since she could remember. "We shall never be quite alone, you and I," she said; "we shall always be together, as we were when we were little."

The beautiful eyes looked into the depths of her soul.

"We are not afraid; we will help ourselves," she said. She stretched out her hand and pressed it over them on the glass. "Dear eyes! We shall never be quite alone till they part us; - till then!" (II, 9, pp. 242-43)

The mirror is an interesting and effective device for introducing this display of introspection which, although it is not narcissistic in the usual sense, is certainly, at a deeper level, an expression of self-love and admiration, as the use of the mirror suggests. It is clear that Lyndall's outer self is not in conflict with her inner self; the two are, on the contrary, allies against the world. This is a reflection of the self-assurance so characteristic of Lyndall who despises the dictates of others. That her inner self is more attractive to her than any potential rival for her affections is apparent in the language she uses, "beautiful eyes... dear eyes." Significantly, the words she had as a child used about her hero-figure, Napoleon, the object of her adoration, "He was one man, only one... He was one and they were many," are echoed here as she addresses the inner self which has replaced all other objects of devotion: "We are all alone... no one helps us, no one understands us." This implicit, if unconscious, identification between her hero-figure and her inner self explains why it is impossible for Lyndall to find a viable relationship with another. She thinks that she desires a man to master her, to subdue her will, and that she has failed in her travels to achieve such a relationship because men persist in adoring her - hence his high-handed treatment of the humble Em and his initial complaints of Lyndall's arrogance - when in fact he is fascinated only by a woman who despises him.

In Lyndall, Olive Schreiner both portrays the extreme Romantic cult of the self and suggests the criticism of that cult. At times
even Lyndall herself seems to recognise the limitations of egotism. Before leaving the farm she visits the grave of old Otto, who represents the antithesis of egotism, the man who lived all his life for others.

Why she had come there she hardly knew; she stood looking down. . .

"Dear old man, good old man, I am so tired!" she said. . . . "I am so tired. There is light, there is warmth," she wailed; "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 to love! I want something great and pure to lift me to itself! Dear old man, I cannot bear it any more! I am so cold, so hard, so hard; will no one help me?" (II, 9, pp. 241-42)

But no one can help her. The same strong sense of an inner self, separate from, but in complicity with her outer self, is reinforced and epitomised at Lyndall's death. Again the mirror imagery introduces the dialogue between the two selves and underlines the parallel with the earlier scene.

The dying eyes on the pillow looked into the dying eyes in the glass . . . . She raised one hand and pressed the stiff fingers against the glass. . . . She tried to speak to it, but she would never speak again. Only the wonderful yearning light was in the eyes still. The body was dead now, but the soul, clear and unclouded, looked forth.

Then slowly, without a sound the beautiful eyes closed. (II, 12, p. 284)

Death is thus the separation of the two selves, but the future of the inner self is left to speculation:

Had she found what she sought for - something to worship? Had she ceased from being? Who shall tell us? There is a veil of terrible mist over the face of the Hereafter. (II, 12, p. 284)

Romantic also is the passion with which the children respond to experience. To the beauty of nature they react, as we have seen, with a Keatsian intensity, an aching desire to experience it to the utmost with all their senses. Equally intense is their desire for spiritual sensation, which rarely brings peace and is more often the source of desperate longing and the pain of unfulfilment. In the opening chapter, while Tant' Sannie's slumbers are disturbed only by indigestion and even the spiritual Otto sleeps soundly in the conviction of God's goodness, Waldo suffers the torments of the damned. Impelled by his longing for a sign of God's mercy he endures an agony of expectation followed by the conviction that his own unworthiness has made him abhorrent to God. He then attempts
to sacrifice a burnt offering to this implacable Jehovah, but his mutton-chop fails to be consumed by heavenly fire. The only heavenly fire in evidence is the fierce mid-day sun which melts the fat. Yet Waldo does not doubt the power of God to over-ride natural laws; he is only the more convinced of his own rejection by God:

He walked home behind his flock. His heart was heavy. He reasoned so: "God cannot lie. I had faith - no fire came. I am like Cain - I am not His. He will not hear my prayer. God hates me." (I, 1, p. 41)

This, too, is a peculiarly Romantic state of mind - the assumption of a great sin which can never be expiated and which irrevocably severs the sinner from God. The mark of Cain was an almost obligatory accessory of the Byronic hero, who also suffered spiritual agony over the enormity of his sin, usually, like Waldo's, unknown or unnamed, while Wordsworth's poem "The Borderers" and Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" turn upon a similar theme - the inordinate suffering consequent upon sin. At the end of this opening chapter, the author comments explicitly, in propría persona:

There are some of us who in after years say to Fate, "Now deal us your hardest blow, give us what you will; but let us never again suffer as we suffered when we were children." (I, 1, p. 43)

The "Times and Seasons" chapter corroborates this. The children alone feel the acute agony of spiritual rejection and the pain of emotional alienation. Indeed the responses described in this chapter read like a catalogue of Romantic moods from ecstasy to dejection. In adulthood only Lyndall retains her characteristic Romantic intensity. Her strongly introspective personality, her proud defiance of social conventions in refusing to marry or to conform to the expected feminine role, her determination to assert her freedom from the will of others, and, not less, her moods of deep depression with the emptiness of her life mark her as almost Byronic in conception.

Arising out of both the vision of nature and the passionate intensity of the experiences described is the pervasive, at times overwhelming, spiritual dimension of the novel. This is itself doubly ironic, for the book has such a mundane title that many early readers assumed it would be a treatise on ostrich farming (the first edition featured an ostrich on the spine), but whereas so many devoutly Christian writers of her generation included some passing reference to religion, Olive Schreiner, whose religion was unorthodox, saturated her novel in religious awareness. This spiritual fabric is woven out of several strands already considered - the starkness and loneliness of the setting, the emotional intensity of the protagonists, their habit of introspection, their yearning for the unattainable, and their fundamental seriousness which condemns as levity the materialism of their elders. Again "Times and Seasons" reinforces this judgement, for here it is clear that the adults who do not so agonize, who fail to respond with ecstatic joy to the Sermon on the Mount, are spiritually moribund.

Davies has defined the religious novel in the following terms:
By giving the human scene the eschatological backdrop of Heaven and Hell, the religious writer sees that apparently trivial actions of men and women have abiding consequences unperceived by the humanist. Unless a novel includes these dimensions of sin and grace, time and eternity, it cannot be considered a religious novel of any significance.

Clearly, *The Story of an African Farm* fulfils these criteria, not because it affirms the tenets of orthodoxy (these are shown as being at best irrelevant, at worst, pernicious) but because it implies a spiritual dimension in all experience, whether or not it is perceived, and dramatizes the relative unimportance of human concerns by setting them against the time scale of eternity. Paradoxically, it is Waldo's watch, the symbol of time, which explicitly introduces the dimension of eternity, the eschatological perspective, emphasising the transience and unimportance of human concerns and individual effort. This serves to reinforce the sense of man's insignificance in the scale of nature which has been firmly impressed upon the reader in the opening description of the desolate Karoo by moonlight. Characteristically this perpetual awareness of the infinite is rendered most forcibly in the two least realistic sections of the novel, the allegory of the Hunter and the "Times and Seasons" chapter, both of which are explicitly universalized descriptions of the human condition.

Moreover, despite its lack of orthodox religious dogma, the novel does assert a moral code of love and compassion. Just before her death the egotist, Lyndall, experiences a revelation which runs counter to her earlier creed of the autonomy of the individual and his paramount duty to himself. On her last day she writes to her lover:

"One day - perhaps it maybe far off - I shall find what I have wanted all my life; something nobler, stronger than I before which I can kneel down. . . . One day I shall find something to worship, and then I shall be - ." . . . And she said, in a voice strangely unlike her own, "I see the vision of a poor weak soul striving after good. It was not cut short; and in the end it learnt, through tears and such pain, that holiness is an infinite compassion for others; that greatness is to take the common things of life and walk truly among them; that . . . happiness is a great love and much serving." (II, 12, pp. 279-80)

This death-bed vision, which has the force of an epiphany for Lyndall, reflects also on the characters of Em and Gregory Rose, who, unlike Waldo and Lyndall, are portrayed as unaware of a spiritual dimension. Here at least Em's unspoken ethic of meekness and service and Gregory's extraordinary devotion to Lyndall, whatever the tangle of motives underlying it, are duly sanctified. There is thus a repeated insistence through the example of Otto, the attitudes of Waldo, the vision of Lyndall, the patience of Em and the tenderness of Rose, on the values of Christian charity and service, even though these are in no way associated with the characters who profess orthodoxy.
Apart from these thematic elements, *The Story of an African Farm* is also strongly influenced by Romanticism in its expression; its symbolism, its language, and particularly its use of allegory all reflect a poetic rather than a prosaic conception. I shall look first at the Hunter allegory since this has evoked considerable criticism, being decried as inflated rhetoric, irrelevant to the novel, and, more recently, as purely escapist fantasy remote, not only from the novel, but from life.

The truth whose value and beauty we are so pressingly asked to believe in has, by definition, no connection whatsoever with any life we could actually live; and the same goes for the Hunter's manner of pursuing it. His truth hasn't even the merit of being death itself. No wonder he never asks himself what he could possibly do with the bird if he were ever to get his hands on it.

Although Olive Schreiner later published "The Hunter" separately in *Dreams* it is, in its original form, an integral part of *The Story of an African Farm*. Not only is it stylistically consistent with the narrative but it is an essential part of the novel's meaning, and of the characterization of Waldo. Being, both by nature and as a result of his virtually non-existent education, inarticulate, Waldo cannot himself describe his inner feelings and aspirations. He cannot even isolate or examine them in his thoughts. Instead, until his last laborious letter to Lyndall (and it is part of the irony which besets Waldo that he should make his one explanatory gesture only after Lyndall is dead) he is dramatised very largely through the words and thoughts of others - through the Stranger's allegory, through the "Times and Seasons" chapter which, by analogy, interprets many of his earlier gropings and silences, and through authorial statement, as in the penultimate chapter, "Dreams." The Stranger who so fluently spins his fable is but little moved by its content, being concerned mainly to indulge his vanity about his own verbal facility and the response it elicits. But Waldo, as he listens to words he could not have formulated, passionately assents to their truth and by identifying with their meaning, makes them, in all but the literal sense, his own, just as when he first reads Mill's *Political Economy* he knows that its thought is his thought, though he had not thought it before. The achievement of both the allegory and the "Times and Seasons" section is that while they delineate and "explain" Waldo the individual, they also universalise him, and make their statement about the human condition.

Apart from this importance in the characterisation of Waldo, the Hunter allegory also recapitulates many of the themes of the novel and stresses their necessary inter-dependence - the sense of loneliness, the pain and suffering involved in dedication to an ideal, particularly an abstract ideal, the relative insignificance of individual achievement, but equally, the paramount importance of each individual's contribution to the development of the race. The parable reflects, too, the Romantic disposition towards fantasy and myth as a means of expressing an archetypal truth. Its closest parallel is probably "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." Both use the traditional motif of the journey in pursuit of truth, both
make use of the incantatory effect of simple, repetitive language to distance and universalise the specific incidents they relate. Like the wedding guest, Waldo - and we - are held by the mesmeric power of the Stranger's words because the story they tell is that of Everyman. It can scarcely be accidental that Olive Schreiner, too, uses a great white bird as the symbol of a spiritual dimension.

Not only is the allegory Romantic in its mode - fantasy - but its meaning involves a cluster of Romantic images and values. One of its central emphases is the isolation from society incumbent upon the idealist for, through failure or refusal to understand, society endeavours to blur the ideals of the seeker, to induce him to settle for a goal within the reach of the mediocre. Thus the Hunter allegory transforms the physical and emotional isolation of Waldo and Lyndall into a universal state. The Hunter is the archetypal Romantic, with overtones of the Byronic hero, compulsively scaling metaphorical mountains in his relentless and hopeless pursuit of absolute Truth.

Apart from the discrete example of the allegory, there is a significant incidence of symbolism throughout the novel, some of it supplementing the underlying irony but much of it deriving from Olive Schreiner's characteristic mode of thinking by analogy. The most extensive and explicit illustration of such analogy relates to the Spencerian theory of a basic organic principle of evolutionary development observable throughout the natural world. This is asserted explicitly, if abstractly, when Waldo, attempting to come to terms with the fact of Lyndall's death, discards sequentially various theories of personal immortality until he achieves some measure of tranquillity in the belief that the individual is part of the Universal whole. "It is but the man that dies, the Universal whole of which he is part re-works him into its innmost self" (II, 13, p. 290). Had it been unprepared for in the novel, such a belief might well seem as inadequate and comfortless as the Transcendentalist "solution" which is so fiercely rejected, but in fact it has been prefigured in the "Times and Seasons" chapter with its emphasis on an underlying order as the one ground left for faith - and sanity - in a God-less world.

Whether a man believes in a human-like God or no is a small thing. Whether he looks into the mental and physical world and sees no relation between cause and effect, no order but a blind chance sporting, this is the mightiest fact that can be recorded in any spiritual existence. It were almost a mercy to cut his throat, if indeed he does not do it for himself. (II, 1, p. 150)

This "truth" the children first discover symbolically in the similarity between the branching patterns they observe in blood vessels, in trees, in the veins of mineral in rocks, and in the channels of a watercourse. Analogy provides a symbol which points to a universal revelation.

Each branch of the blood-vessels is comprised of a trunk bifurcating and rebifurcating into the most
delicate, hair-like threads, symmetrically arranged. We are struck with its singular beauty. And, moreover - . . ., this also we remark: of that same exact shape and outline is our thorn tree seen against the sky in mid-winter; of that shape also is the delicate metallic tracery between our rocks; in that exact path does water flow . . .; so shaped are the antlers of the horn beetle. How are these things related that such deep union should exist between them all? Is it chance? Or are they not all fine branches of one trunk, whose sap flows through us all? (II, 1, vii, pp. 153-54)

At the level of logic this "argument" is tenuous, for the children, presumably with authorial approval, are arguing from a similarity of appearance to a similarity of cause and function, and such extrapolation is clearly invalid. The examples of inanimate branching result from an energy flow along the path of least resistance, while the organic examples reflect the most efficient system for maximum diffusion, and indeed neither group can validly be used to infer a universal plan. Nevertheless, in its context, the branching analogy does succeed as a symbol for the Romantic theory of the "One Life that throbs in us."

Much of the symbolic effect of The Story of an African Farm, and its archetypal force, is contingent upon its highly poetic language. It is this which creates the dream-like, even mesmeric tone of the descriptions and permits the accommodation in a realistic narrative of such apparently incongruous inclusions as the Hunter allegory, "Times and Seasons" and "Dreams." At this level too, the techniques involved witness to the influence of the Romantic poets and the particular aspects of Biblical style which they appropriated.

Most critics have recognised the clear effect on her style of Olive Schreiner's early familiarity with the Bible. The sonorous phrases of the Old Testament and the striking simplicity of the gospels are obvious influences but it is interesting to analyse some of the components which contribute to this effect. Like Blake she makes frequent use of phrases with specifically Biblical associations - "it came to pass"; "a knowledge of all things under the sun"; "no man can be really injured but by what modifies himself"; "what matter that a man's day be short... that of which he is but the breath has breathed him forth"; "was it only John, think you, who saw the heavens open?" "the son's knowledge was not as the father's..."; "so age succeeds age, and dream succeeds dream, and of the joy of the dreamer no man knoweth but he who dreameth." These random examples may be multiplied endlessly, but the cumulative effect is clear even from these. Like Blake's "Proverbs of Heaven and Hell," they have the epigrammatic force of Biblical Proverbs, of timeless truths rendered memorable and forceful by their succinctness.

The other Biblical device which recurs frequently is that of parallelism, used to obtain the antiphonal effect characteristic of the Psalms. Coleridge uses the same technique for a similar "distancing" effect in the parallel questions and answers of "Christabel,"
and less obviously in the repetition of phrases in "The Ancient Mariner." In The Story of an African Farm such repetition occurs both within and between sentences. Thus:

A little bitterness, a little longing when we are young, a little futile searching for work, a little passionate stirring for room to exercise one's powers...

"We stand here at this gate this morning, both poor, both young, both friendless." (II, 4, p. 189)

The longer passage of sustained parallelism which precedes this is ironically reminiscent in both phrasing and rhythm, of I Corinthians 13:

"Look at this little chin of mine, Waldo, with the dimple in it... though I had a 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?" (II, 4, pp. 188-89)

Here the Biblical overtones, the simplicity of language and the repetition of phrase combine to impart an impression of inevitability and universal truth to what is being affirmed. That Olive Schreiner knew the effect she achieved and fully intended it is obvious from the following letter to Havelock Ellis; it is equally clear that her method of achieving it was pragmatic and based on rhythmical functions, rather than theoretical.

Long ago I used to think that was quite a discovery of mine that there is as much structure in prose as in verse. The difference is that in verse... you are able to see clearly by looking at the work what the structure is... with regard to my own work, I feel what I must, and what I must not, do; I know perfectly when a line or a word or a sentence breaks the law, and it causes me agony to let it go. But what law it breaks I don't know... one must follow one's feeling there. I found out when I was quite a child that... writing "ribbed" was quite a different thing from writing plain.15

Frequently, the need to retain this underlying rhythm requires an inversion of the normal sentence pattern and this, in itself, serves to reinforce the sense of solemnity, even grandeur of utterance, by imparting a distancing effect. The simple words become slightly estranged, like the metrical cadences of the King James Bible, and gain correspondingly in dignity. This is particularly evident in the allegory, although it is not confined to this section.

"She [experience] will teach us that whoso sheddeth man's blood, though by man his blood be not shed, though no man avenge and no hell await, yet every
drop shall blister on his soul and eat in the name of the dead. She will teach that whoso takes a love not lawfully his own, gathers a flower with a poison on its petals; . . . that who lives to himself is dead, though the ground is not yet on him . . . and that who sins in secret stands accused and condemned before the one Judge who deals eternal justice - his own all-knowing self." (II, 2, pp. 171-72)

"Though a man should carve it into matter with the least possible manipulative skill, it will yet find interpreters . . . whosoever should portray truly the life and death of a little flower . . . would have shaped a symbol of all existence." (II, 2, p. 169)

Thus, like Blake, Olive Schreiner devised a style whereby simple language could be distanced and elevated in tone by the use of Biblical words and phrases and simple but compelling prose rhythms. The similarity to Blake's Songs becomes still more apparent when we realise that in her novel, too, the implied viewpoint is for the most part that of a child while the effect on the reader is the imparting of a universal truth.

In both content and style, then, *The Story of an African Farm* shows the pervasive influence of the Romantic Movement. Its emphasis on the obligatory pursuit of truth and the dignity and wisdom of the child, its passages of introspection and the intensity of the experiences described, its assertion of a spiritual dimension underly-ing the natural world and the importance of a simple way of life, and above all its vision of nature as the embodiment of a universal life-force uniting all things - all these mark the novel as a late but luxuriant flowering of Romanticism in barren and unlikely soil.

NOTES


4 It is interesting to speculate whether Olive Schreiner was influenced by *Wuthering Heights* when she wrote the scene of Waldo's death which has puzzled many readers. It is satisfying artistically but not altogether credible. Like Heathcliff's it seems almost a voluntary demise.

5 W. Wordsworth, "Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey," 11. 95-102.

7  O. Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), II:1, vii, p. 154. All further references are to this edition and given parenthetically in the text by Part, chapter, section, and pages, as in this note.


9  Quoted by V. Buchanan-Gould, p. 160.


