WHITE EVE IN THE "PETRIFIED GARDEN":
THE COLONIAL AFRICAN HEROINE
IN THE WRITING OF OLIVE SCHREINER,
ISAK DINESEN, DORIS LESSING
AND NADINE GORDIMER

By

ROBIN ELLEN VISEL
B.A. The City College of the City University of New York, 1975
M.A. The University of British Columbia, 1977

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
Department of English

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

November 1987
© Robin Ellen Visel, 1987
In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of English

The University of British Columbia
1956 Main Mall
Vancouver, Canada
V6T 1Y3

Date 2/15/88
ABSTRACT

Olive Schreiner, writing in the tradition of George Eliot and the Brontës, was an isolated yet original figure who opened up new directions in women's fiction. In her novels, *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) and *From Man to Man* (1926) she developed a feminist critique of colonialism that was based on her own coming-of-age as a writer in South Africa. Schreiner's work inspired and influenced Isak Dinesen, Doris Lessing and Nadine Gordimer, who have pursued their visions of the colonial African heroine in changing forms which nevertheless consciously hark back to the "mother novel." Dinesen's *Out of Africa* (1937), Lessing's *Martha Quest* (1952) and Gordimer's *The Lying Days* (1953) are in a sense revisions of Schreiner's *Story of an African Farm*. These texts, together with later novels by Lessing and Gordimer (such as *Shikasta* and *Burger's Daughter*, 1979) and key short stories by the four writers, form a body of writing I call the "African Farm" texts. Written in different colonial countries—South Africa, Kenya and Rhodesia—in response to different historical circumstances, from different ideological and aesthetic stances, the "African Farm" fictions depict the problematic situation of the white African heroine who is alienated both from white colonial society and from black Africa. Through her own rebellion against patriarchal mores as she struggles to define herself as an artistic, intellectual woman in a hostile environment, she uncovers the connections between patriarchy and racism under colonialism. She begins to identify with the black Africans in their oppression and their
incipient struggle for independence; however she cannot shed her white inheritance of privilege and guilt. Just as colonial society (the white "African Farm") becomes for her a desert, a cemetery, a false, barren, "petrified garden," so black Africa becomes its idealized counterpart: a fertile realm of harmony and possibility, the true Garden of Eden from which she, as White Eve, is exiled. I trace the "African Farm" theme and imagery through the work of other white Southern African writers, such as J.M. Coetzee, whose stark, poetic, postmodernist novels can be read as a coda to the realistic fiction of the four women writers. Finally, I look at the post-"African Farm" texts of such transitional writers as Bessie Head, whose novels of black Africa preserve a suggestive link with Schreiner.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abstract</th>
<th>ii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One - Introduction: Stories of an African Farm</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Mother Novel and Its Daughters</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Colonial Heroine in the Context of the Female Bildungsroman</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Colonial Heroine in the Context of White African Literature</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two - Olive Schreiner: Eve Divided</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Story of an African Farm</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Man to Man</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three - Isak Dinesen: Eve as Adam</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of Africa</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadows on the Grass</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinesen and Schreiner</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four - Lessing and Gordimer: Two Contemporaries and a Problematic Inheritance</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Five - Doris Lessing: Eve in Exile</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lessing and Her Precursors</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Grass is Singing</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martha Quest</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Shikasta and Beyond</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Problem of &quot;Exile&quot; in Lessing's Fiction</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Patricia Merivale for her continued advice and support, without which I could not have successfully completed this project. I am also indebted to Professors Diana Brydon and Craig Tapping whose perceptive comments improved the final version.

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Jonathan and Elsie Visel, and my husband, Yorgos Papatheodorou.
Chapter One

Introduction: Stories of an African Farm

A Mother Novel and its Daughters

Olive Schreiner's *Story of an African Farm* has shaped the white colonial literary vision of Africa. Schreiner's African farm is a setting for human brutality amid harsh natural beauty, a setting of open vistas which oppress the spirit and imprison the body. It is a despoiled Paradise which symbolically rejects its colonists.

Through her autobiographical heroines Schreiner challenges the inequities of colonial society from a feminist stance, becoming conscious in her later work of the racial subtext of the "African Farm" story. Her successors, Isak Dinesen, Doris Lessing, and Nadine Gordimer, develop the problematic of the white woman in black Africa: the heroine who rejects the patriarchal and racist premises of colonial society only to find herself doubly exiled, from what she perceives as the false Paradise of the whites and the true Eden of the blacks.

Schreiner, Dinesen, Lessing and Gordimer describe different colonial societies from the perspective of their different nationalities, generations, classes, political views and literary styles. Schreiner, Lessing and Gordimer, who grew up in what were, respectively, the Cape Colony, the Colony of Southern Rhodesia, and the Union of South Africa, can be classified as white African writers. Dinesen, who spent
seventeen years in the Protectorate, later the colony, of British East Africa or Kenya, is an expatriate writer whose vision of Africa reflects her European origins.

The connection among these four writers is the relation of Dinesen's *Out of Africa* (1937), Lessing's *Martha Quest* (1952), and Gordimer's *The Lying Days* (1953) to Schreiner's autobiographical masterpiece, *The Story of an African Farm* (1883). Schreiner, Dinesen, Lessing and Gordimer share a geographical, historical, and literary connection which, I hope to prove, is more significant than their differences. Each of them is white and female, and lived in a British colony or territory in Africa, or—in the case of Nadine Gordimer—continues to live in the Republic of South Africa, a country still struggling to emerge from its colonial past. Each of them began to write in geographical isolation and in some degree of cultural isolation from the mainstream of English literature; each strove to describe a landscape and a society first described by Olive Schreiner in *African Farm*, from a female point of view first exemplified in Schreiner's heroine, Lyndall.

It is generally accepted in feminist literary criticism that the relationship between female writers of different generations is less fraught with jealousy and hostility than is the relation between male writers. Whereas the male writer supposedly battles to overthrow his predecessor in order to assert his identity and to create something new, the female writer is more likely to find in her predecessor a mentor whose work inspires and encourages her own efforts.¹ Rather than
feeling oppressed by the weight of the literary tradition from which she springs, she feels heartened by the example of that small body of women who have stepped outside their allotted roles to become creative artists. Thus the emphasis in women's literary history is less on disruption than on continuity, less on negative than on positive influence.²

This emphasis on the continuity of women's literature is all the more appropriate when we are dealing with a small group of related authors who have in common a mother-novel, a prototype for their writing about Africa. Each of the early autobiographical novels and the memoir with which this thesis is chiefly concerned bears a direct relation to that first story of an African farm; each of the later writers pays tribute to and acknowledges the influence of Schreiner's pioneering text, which is both a cornerstone of feminist fiction³ and the founding text of Southern African fiction in English.⁴ The Story of an African Farm has had such a powerful influence on other writers because it is an original and courageous work of art poignantly flawed by the young artist's unashamed passion and her--only partly deliberate--ignorance of the fictional conventions. Virginia Woolf described Schreiner as "one half of a great writer; a diamond marred by a flaw" ("Olive Schreiner").⁵ African Farm is a near-great novel, which, far from being a daunting precedent, invites improvement, embellishment, rewriting. Isak Dinesen, in describing its attraction, quotes from the novel itself: "the whole of the story is not written here, but it is suggested" (Introduction v-vi). She, Lessing and Gordimer have taken up
that suggestion, and have written their own stories, for which Schreiner's *Story of an African Farm* is the germ.

Schreiner's novel is the story of the intellectual awakening of two children--their search for knowledge, work, and freedom--and the brutal extinguishing of their ideals, indeed of their very lives. In a pattern similar to that of *Wuthering Heights* (which there is no proof that the book-starved young author had read) the role of the heroine is split between the female main character, Lyndall, and her male alter ego, Waldo. Whereas Lyndall's failed quest is feminist, Waldo's is artistic; together they enact the tortuous death of the young female artist in colonial South Africa, killed by human cruelty and ignorance, physical isolation, cultural starvation, and finally, by the harsh desert setting which proves inimical to their flowering. Ultimately, implies Schreiner, it is the soil of ancient Africa itself which refuses to support these transplanted flowers of an alien, European culture.

It is a novel full of suggestion about the role of the female artist-intellectual at odds with the native land and culture. However, Isak Dinesen in her memoir *Out of Africa* chooses not to explore these conflicts suggested by Schreiner, but rather to transform them into myth. *Out of Africa* is as essentially novelistic as *African Farm* itself; for *African Farm* is a novel in which fiction is jostled by polemic, allegory and autobiography. Dinesen's is the story of the transformation of the Danish bride Karen Blixen into the world-renowned
story-teller Isak Dinesen. In the process, she transforms her often lonely, bitter, and frustrating experience into a triumphant pastoral idyll. In Isak Dinesen's Africa, "Ralph Iron's" tiny, stunted plants of beauty and possibility flourish luxuriantly. Dinesen discovers, in her gloriously imagined setting, the freedom and power to recreate herself as heroine and artist. By the same token, however, she recreates, that is, distorts, her setting and its inhabitants to fit her mythic self-conception.

Schreiner's tragic delineation of conflict and Dinesen's mythic resolution, Schreiner's awkward realism and Dinesen's well-wrought romance, Schreiner's radical ideology and Dinesen's conservatism, provide different models for Doris Lessing. We will see that she has been influenced by both of them, but primarily, in the early part of her career, by Schreiner. Her description of the influence of *The Story of an African Farm* upon her own career echoes Isak Dinesen's. It was "the first 'real' book that I'd met with that had Africa for a setting"; "the book became part of me", acting "on the rawest and most workaday level, like earthworms making new soil where things can grow" ("Afterword to *The Story of an African Farm*" 98-99).

Lessing's second novel, *Martha Quest*, is essentially a rewriting of Lyndall's story, told from the more ironic, self-conscious point of view of a child of the nineteen-thirties. Martha boldly embraces Freud and Marx, psychological analysis and socialism. However, her intellectual and moral rebellion against the mores of her elders ends more ordinarily than does
Schreiner's uncompromising tragedy. Unlike Lyndall, Martha compromises her ideals by temporarily conforming to colonial social norms. Unlike Lyndall, she survives—to fill four more volumes of the *Children of Violence* series.

While Martha's story was clearly inspired by Schreiner's *Story of an African Farm*, we can also note clear parallels with Dinesen's *Out of Africa*. First of all, Lessing's rural Rhodesia is very similar to Dinesen's East Africa: it is portrayed as a magnificent physical setting in which European eccentricity, genius and nobility of spirit can find a home, in contrast to the cramped society of the colonial towns. It is also significant that *Martha Quest* and all of Lessing's subsequent fiction was written, like Isak Dinesen's, "in exile" from Africa. So it is not surprising that despite her radical politics we can trace a movement in her work towards the distilled, idealized, nostalgic Africa of Dinesen. Nor, in light of Lessing's movement toward Dinesen's vision, is it completely surprising that in her recent "space fiction" version of the Africa of her youth she embraces a hierarchical ideology that resembles Dinesen's.

There is no such movement toward a mythical or metaphorical European vision of Africa, nor toward a conservative ideology, in the fiction of Doris Lessing's contemporary, Nadine Gordimer. Gordimer, whose first novel *The Lying Days* is a tentative, rather timid version of *The Story of an African Farm* and *Martha Quest*, has developed a complex, sophisticated realism which extends the premises of Schreiner's, Lessing's, and her own early fiction. Although her obvious historical and thematic
links are to Olive Schreiner rather than to Isak Dinesen, there are some interesting parallels between her writing and Dinesen's, particularly in the redemptive role that black characters play for the white protagonists. For Nadine Gordimer's fiction has a romantic streak as well, which is manifested in a deep sensual attraction to Africa and Africans, much like Dinesen's.

For Gordimer's fiction, then, as well as for Lessing's, we can find models in Schreiner and Dinesen. And yet, just as Lessing's later fiction has grown beyond the boundaries of the earlier writers, so has Gordimer's, except that whereas Lessing has gradually become an English writer, in whose fiction Africa is increasingly symbolic, Gordimer continues to portray contemporary South African society. When she does use myth and metaphor (as in *The Conservationist*, 1974) her references are increasingly African rather than European. Thus we can see in her major novels of the seventies, particularly in *Burger's Daughter* (1979), both the culmination of the essentially European themes and forms of the other three writers and the filtering of these themes and forms through her increased awareness of the black political and literary perspective.

In summary, then, Schreiner's *Story of an African Farm* is the original of these subsequent fictional considerations of Africa by Dinesen, Lessing and Gordimer, while Dinesen's *Out of Africa* has provided a second model for Lessing and Gordimer. Schreiner offers surrealistc tragedy against a realistic background and setting within a loose, inclusive structure; her
novel, a passionate argument for freedom, looks toward the future. In contrast, Dinesen offers an artfully edited fairy tale of Africa which looks backward to an idealized feudal Europe of brave nobles, loyal servants and consummate story tellers. For all of her conservatism, however, Dinesen is more receptive than Schreiner to the Africa around her: its smells, its sky, and above all, its people—who for Schreiner are obscured by her own inner drama. Dinesen mythologizes but also identifies with her African servants who had so recently been dislodged from their sovereignty over "her" land. This intuitive empathy enriches her work, as Gordimer's empathy for Africans enriches hers a generation later.

The African novels of Lessing and Gordimer which follow the autobiographical pattern of the growth and education of an intellectual and artistic heroine make explicit a theme which is for the most part implicit in Schreiner and Dinesen. Their subject is the heroine's predicament as a white girl or woman who rejects her given place in colonial society, and who, in her rebellion against her limited role as daughter and wife, identifies with that mass of dislocated, oppressed people among whom she lives: the black Africans. Of course, her empathy with the Africans and her love for their spacious and beautiful landscape is problematic, because by virtue of her white skin she is an alien, and in Doris Lessing's words "a destroyer" in Africa. In the books which form a set with The Story of an African Farm—Out of Africa, Martha Quest (along with the Children of Violence series) and The Lying Days--the white
 heroine is exiled in some way from her African "home". It is only in Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter* that the heroine solves the contradictions of her allegiance and returns to South Africa to take up a role in the black struggle. Even *Burger's Daughter*, however, is, as we shall see, a recognizable version—a granddaughter—of *The Story of an African Farm*.

Not only are the four primary works so strongly connected, but so are later texts by Schreiner, Dinesen, Lessing and Gordimer. Olive Schreiner, for instance, followed *The Story of an African Farm* with *From Man to Man* (1926). Begun before *African Farm* and continued long afterwards, *From Man to Man* was left unfinished and published posthumously. Dismissed as an unsuccessful work of fiction, a curiosity, it was long out of print and probably had little or no influence on later authors. Although this ambitious life-work of a novel is uneven and at times tedious, it nevertheless contains passages of brilliance and is of great importance as a companion and, in effect, a sequel to Schreiner's early masterpiece. In particular, this novel of ideas clarifies and develops the connections between feminism and colonialism which the author began to explore in *The Story of an African Farm*.

Isak Dinesen followed *Out of Africa* with a second African memoir, *Shadows on the Grass* (1961), which unlike Schreiner's second major novel adds little to the first work. Dinesen's Africa remains perfect, fixed forever in the glowing archetypes and luminous prose of *Out of Africa*. The stories which form the main body of her fiction are not about Africa. They are gothic
tales set in an imaginary Europe of the past. Some of the stories in her first volume, *Seven Gothic Tales* (1934), had been outlined in Africa, but the main connection between Africa and her stories is that her experience in Kenya—rich, traumatic, fantastic as it was—enabled, even compelled, her to write; it made Karen Blixen into Isak Dinesen. Or, to put it another way, Karen Blixen became a character in Isak Dinesen's fiction.

Doris Lessing left Rhodesia in 1949, returned for a visit in 1956 (the journal of her trip was published as *Going Home*, 1957), then because of her political affiliations was banned from re-entering either Rhodesia or South Africa. During the fifties and sixties she published novels and stories based on her childhood and youth as the daughter of white settlers in the thirties and forties.

Doris Lessing, like Isak Dinesen writing in the thirties about the tens and twenties, presents a picture of an earlier time. However, her vision of colonial society, unlike Dinesen's, is not static, but rather reflects her Marxist analysis that white settlerdom must give way to African socialism. She concludes in *Going Home* that whites could have no permanent home in what she correctly predicted would be the short-lived Federation of Central Africa.

In contrast, Nadine Gordimer, who has remained in her native South Africa, has arrived more gradually at a radical critique of white hegemony, in imaginative response to the political changes in her society from the forties to the eighties.
Both writers have had long, prolific, and successful careers, developing—as daughters of Olive Schreiner—in very different directions after *Martha Quest* and *The Lying Days*. One barometer of the changes in Lessing's use of her autobiographical African material is the development of the *Children of Violence* series (*Martha Quest*, *A Proper Marriage*, 1954; *A Ripple from the Storm*, 1958; *Landlocked*, 1965; *The Four-Gated City*, 1969). The nonfiction *Going Home* presents a point of comparison with Dinesen's memoirs, while *The Golden Notebook* (1962) is a distilled version of the middle volumes of *Children of Violence* in the complex fictional, political and psychological context of Anna's notebooks. The young Martha figure appears again in *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974), while *Shikasta* (1979) and other *Canopus in Argos: Archives* novels demonstrate how the themes of Lessing's colonial African girlhood have continued to appear in her space fiction.

Gordimer's remarkable development from *The Lying Days* to *Burger's Daughter* can be traced through her collections of stories and her novels, including *Occasion for Loving* (1963), *A Guest of Honour* (1970), and *The Conservationist*. The futuristic realism of *July's People* (1981) as compared with Lessing's futuristic allegory, demonstrates the different agendas of these two writers, who are such close contemporaries and whose points of origin are so similar. *July's People*, which is set in the throes of a black revolution in South Africa, can be seen as a postscript to the "African Farm" stories, which, despite being critical of the colonial system, are based on the
assumption of white dominance. With *A Sport of Nature* (1987), which is predicated on the triumph of the national liberation movement, Gordimer has embarked on a new imaginative course; in Hillela Kgomani she has created a white heroine who is "at home" in, rather than alienated from, black Africa. However, in trying to transcend the politics of an increasingly polarized South Africa, Gordimer compromises her verisimilitude; one hundred years after Schreiner it is still impossible for a white South African writer to escape her alienated position.

The Colonial Heroine in the Context of the Female Bildungsroman

The colonial women's vision embodied in the African fiction of Schreiner, Dinesen, Lessing and Gordimer has its closest parallel in English literature in fiction by white women set in such colonial or post-colonial outposts as British India and the Caribbean. Two notable examples are Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust* (1975) and Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). But we can also trace a wider connection between all of these colonial Bildungsromane and that key text of female rage, alienation and eventual self-actualization, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.

Rhys' revision of *Jane Eyre*, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which bears striking similarities to the "African Farm" texts, offers a clear link between the white African women writers and Brontë. Rhys tells the untold story of Antoinette Cosway (Bertha Mason), the Caribbean girl whom Rochester married and brought to England, where she was neglected, declared insane, and finally
consumed in the fire of her murderous rage—which mirrors the fires set by the rebellious slaves on her native island. In fact, Gayatri Spivak describes Bertha as a version of Antoinette's black self. Thus, "Rhys makes Antoinette see her self as her other, Brontë's Bertha" ("Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" 269).

It is surely significant that "the madwoman in the attic" who, as Gilbert and Gubar have shown, is such a central figure in the women's literary tradition, is a white colonial. Her particular agony, and its manifestation in an overt, violent form denied to the good heroines of the nineteenth-century novel, is that of an outsider in England who has no stake in the status quo, no place in polite society, no reason for good behavior. Antoinette/Bertha is a lost soul, caught between two cultures, scorned both by the ex-slaves who have taken control of her island and the English to whose reluctant bosom she has returned. Her situation resembles that of Baby Bertie in From Man to Man; she also becomes a prisoner in a dark, dreary house in alien England. Antoinette/Bertha's rebellion is akin to Lyndall's, and to Magda's in J.M. Coetzee's In the Heart of the Country (1977). She appears to Martha Quest as her teacher and soulmate in the form of Lynda Coldridge, the madwoman in the basement in The Four-Gated City.

It is, then, through their association with Antoinette/Bertha, which may be suggested in Schreiner's use of the name "Bertie" and clearly is intended in Lessing's Lynda Coldridge, that these "African Farm" texts connect most strikingly to the tradition of the female Bildungsroman in the English novel.
This tradition is discussed in *The Voyage in: Fictions of Female Development*, a collection of essays on the female Bildungsroman, in which the authors describe a characteristic pattern of the "awakening to limitations." This is the heroine's realization that her inner development will not be met by the complementary development in the social world that is available to her male counterpart. In these novels of female development, the heroine creates a rich inner life which has little correspondence with the choices offered her by her family and society, and thus implicitly challenges established values. Marianne Hirsch sees Antigone as a prototype for such heroines as Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss*, Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening*, and Rachel Vinrace in *The Voyage Out*. Hirsch argues that, "Maggie's values, like Antigone's, profoundly challenge the values of her culture" as well as "the very values of Bildung itself, as it has traditionally been understood . . ." (27).

However, in setting up a contrast between the female Bildungsroman and the traditional male Bildungsroman (as described in its original German form by Martin Swales and in its English form by Jerome Buckley), Abel, Hirsch and Langland oversimplify the varied patterns of both the male and female stories. They contrast the problematic maturation of the heroine with the hero's relatively smooth accommodation to his society; when his values differ profoundly from his society's, he can avail himself of the Künstlerroman pattern, in which his frustrations are channelled into artistic accomplishment. In
fact, for Swales, "The great Bildungsromane inhabit the awkward middle ground between possibility and actuality" (157), and, "Over and over again, the novels . . . pose the question of whether the hero has achieved any kind of worthwhile goal or insight" (30). Certainly Lessing and Gordimer have consciously placed themselves in the larger tradition of nineteenth-century realism, having similarly described the themes of Children of Violence and Burger's Daughter as the relation between private and public life, and as an exploration of what the individual owes to the collective. Both writers have downplayed and at times even denied the feminist aspect of their fiction. (I discuss their views on feminism in Chapter Four.) Yet their subjects, themes, characters and imagery are to a large extent gender-based. The problems of development faced by their heroines are specific to their identity as colonial daughters: reluctant or rebellious inheritors who cannot easily disavow their pioneer fathers and homeward-looking mothers. These heroines relate specifically as females to Africans and Africa: they are attracted to and threatened by blacks and blackness in terms that are explicitly or implicitly sexual. This is obvious in Lessing's first novel, The Grass is Singing, as well as in Gordimer's most recent novel, A Sport of Nature.

Isak Dinesen wants to be bound by the category of women's literature no more than do Lessing and Gordimer. Nevertheless, while she is not overtly in Schreiner's strong feminist tradition, she writes as a woman, relates to Africa as a woman. Her revolt against nineteenth-century middle-class European values
is physical and sexual as well as intellectual. She places great value on the freedom she discovers in Africa (which is of course specific to her situation as a white settler), including the freedom to take on male roles while not relinquishing her woman's identity.

The "African Farm" texts, along with *Wide Sargasso Sea*, exploit the revolutionary potential of the female Bildungsroman by building upon the angry madwoman-in-the-attic subtext of *Jane Eyre* as well as the explicit misery, isolation, passion and pride of Brontë's heroine. Yet these colonial texts also enrich the female Bildungsroman by stretching its boundaries from the primarily domestic and personal domain of the voyage inward to the wider historical and political domain of the voyage outward. Schreiner's social and intellectual isolation in South Africa enabled her to rethink religion, male-female roles and sexual mores. Whereas Lyndall and Waldo's miserable lives and early deaths are a devastating commentary on the possibility of female Bildung in her society, Rebekah's qualified success in *From Man to Man* is an example of how the inward journey of self-discovery and the outward journey of self-actualization can mesh. Rebekah succeeds at both writing and mothering. She also succeeds in integrating what is European with what is distinctively African in herself. Significantly, it is her budding identification with the world of the Africans that frees her from her husband and the oppressive--jointly patriarchal and imperialist--mores that he represents.

For Isak Dinesen, Africa offers a setting in which it is possible to realize the world of her imagination, to transform
inner vision into flesh and earth. Her voyage inward blossoms into a voyage outward: a brief delicate harmony between fantasy and reality in which she too rewrites the female role, giving herself a freedom and power unattainable in Europe.

However, insofar as Dinesen's fantasy of autonomy becomes flesh it is at the expense of the indigenous men and women whose autonomy she has usurped. She transcends the European sexual hierarchy only by assuming the prerogatives of the white male settler, and thus becoming implicated in the colonial system of exploitation. Dinesen becomes an apologist for the feudal structure based on racism which buttresses the white-settler order. Her role as apologist for and romanticizer of this neo-feudal society is congruent with her class background and conservative predilections, but it is also clear that near-absolute power over her black serfs and their land is an essential element of Karen Blixen's "freedom." Schreiner largely avoids this conflict by creating characters who are oppressed as opposed to freed by the patriarchal colonial order, characters who discover themselves, and in a sense free themselves, through an incipient revolutionary consciousness which includes an awakening if hesitant identification with the mass of oppressed Africans.

For Lessing and Gordimer, the characteristic inward movement of the female *Bildungsroman* is explicitly linked to a corresponding outward movement from the constricting white enclave into the larger world of blackness. By exploring and coming to identify with the richer, more ancient world of the
Africans, the heroine's perception of herself and her own culture is deepened. Her central awakening is to an awareness of the African Other. How to deal with the consequences of this awakening is the protagonist's central problem, which often leads to a second awakening: a revelation of her own otherness, her alienation from the white colonial and black African worlds as well as from the European culture of her parents. For some of the heroines, for Mary Turner in *The Grass is Singing* and possibly for Maureen Smales in *July's People*, this negative awakening leads to death, as it had for Lyndall. But most of them, like Martha Quest, Rosa Burger and Hillela Kgomani, find in their sense of difference Rebekah's freedom to think originally, to envision a new society—and to take the first steps in achieving it.

Thus, despite the imagery of claustrophobia and sterility that surround the "African Farm" texts of Schreiner, Lessing and Gordimer, their protagonists, like Karen Blixen, paradoxically find greater fulfillment, more scope for creative work and meaningful action, in Africa than in England or Europe. For them, the journey "home" is an exile, a defeat, a closing rather than an opening. Her problematic position in Africa, as White Eve trespassing in the Black Garden, fosters strength, achievement and moral growth. The heroine's identification with the Africans in their oppression and in their latent power enriches her tremendously; the exploration of blackness enables her to expand physically beyond the narrow boundaries of white society, as well as to expand mentally beyond a narrow focus on her own ego.
The Colonial Heroine in the Context of White African Literature

The African setting in these texts is not, then, simply a background, but rather a key element of the heroine's development. Accordingly, the "African Farm" literature of Schreiner, Dinesen, Lessing and Gordimer should be seen within the wider context of colonial African fiction. Olive Schreiner provided the model and set the agenda for virtually all serious white Southern African writers, who have continued to employ her ironic natural imagery and to update her tormented protagonists.

An important link in the chain from Schreiner to Lessing is William Plomer, whose *Turbott Wolfe* (1926) was as far ahead of its time as were *The Story of an African Farm* and *From Man to Man* in the depiction of racial and sexual relations, which Plomer too saw as interconnected. *Turbott Wolfe* is an attack on the most deeply-held views and cherished values of "white civilization" in Africa. The protagonist-narrator is intensely attracted to black culture and goes so far as to fall hopelessly in love with a Zulu woman, whom he idealizes as the embodiment of beauty and "holiness." In the end, Wolfe leaves Africa, defeated by the "obscenity," the decadence and sterility, of white culture there, with which he feels himself to be tainted. While the white hero is denied his black wife, however, Plomer ends his novel with the marriage of a European woman to a Zulu man. According to Plomer, then, the sexual connection that in the context of white male/black female would be a symbol of colonial exploitation is in the context of white female/black
male based on a more equal power relationship, and thus offers some hope of regeneration for a sterile, racist social order.

Interracial marriage is rare in Southern African literature, including the "African Farm" texts. While interracial sex is acknowledged to occur, it is presented as the rape or prostitution of black women by white men, and alternately as a vengeful assault on white women by black men. Since Plomer, only Gordimer has explored the desire for and possibility of love between the races.

For Gordimer, like Plomer, the only sexual-racial combination that can approach the equal relationship required by love is that of the black man and white woman. The implication is that they have a common enemy in white, male-dominated colonial society, yet Gordimer's pessimism about the outcome of their bonding recognizes the inherent conflicts in their alliance. The white woman may be victimized by her sex, but she is privileged by her skin color—and color is the crucial division in South Africa. Thus the affair between Ann and Gideon in *Occasion for Loving* is foredoomed, while the optimistic marriage of Hillela to Whaila in *A Sport of Nature*, which does not completely ring true in terms of the present state of war in Southern Africa, ends with an assassin's bullet.

Plomer's focus on the malaise of the white outsider, the nonconformist whose knowledge and perceptions divide him against himself, has clear parallels with the divided, self-destructive protagonists of the three women writers, who, like Turbott Wolfe, choose some form of exile. Isak Dinesen, in the more benign
geographical and social climate of East Africa, is less haunted by the obsessions of the Southern African writers. Yet underlying her celebratory prose are the darker tones of personal loss and of violence against nature. And she too is aware of the parallels between sex and race under colonialism, noting that, "The relation between the white and black races in Africa in many ways resembles the relation between the two sexes" (Out of Africa 264). Characteristically she does not pursue this point, being unwilling to expose the conflicts between her quest for self-realization in Kenya and the parallel desire for self-determination of the Kenyan people. However, the celebratory prose of her memoir is undercut by darker strains of loss and violence which reveal her situation more truthfully.

Another major figure whose work seems clearly to descend from Schreiner and to connect with Dinesen as well as with Lessing and Gordimer is J.M. Coetzee. Whereas Gordimer has worked outward from her white, English-speaking milieu, Coetzee has reached out from his Afrikaner roots.

Olive Schreiner, who had intimate knowledge of and a great sympathy for the Afrikaner people, nevertheless writes about them from the perspective of an outsider. Doris Lessing's Afrikaners, although prominent in Martha Quest, are the other whites: "them" as opposed to "us." Nadine Gordimer, however, writes from the more heterogeneous perspective of modern Johannesburg; in her urban settings, the differences among whites are negligible compared to their shared situation as whites under apartheid. In Burger's Daughter she purposely
mingles the two white tribes in her main character, whose father is an Afrikaner revolutionary challenging the Manifest Destiny of his people.

Coetzee writes mainly in English in a poetic, non-realistic, fabulist, post-modernist idiom. His stark, mythic work brings into sharper relief themes of power, violence, guilt, desire and alienation that are usually dealt with less directly in Schreiner, Dinesen, Lessing and Gordimer, and so serves as a kind of coda for their "stories of an African farm."

In In the Heart of the Country and "The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee" (in Dusklands, 1974) he describes the inner visions of Afrikaners. However, by juxtaposing "The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee" with "The Vietnam Project," the narrative of an American military strategist, he shows that his concern is with the archetypal intrusion of a strong, technologically advanced culture into a weaker, less technologically developed culture. That his subject is the White Hunter, the Colonist, the Imperialist, is reinforced by Waiting for the Barbarians (1980), a fable of a crumbling and threatened empire with no recognizable historical setting. This novel deals powerfully with the relation between colonizer and colonized, master and servant—torturer and tortured. Foe (1986) pursues this theme in more abstract and literary terms.

In Dusklands, Waiting for the Barbarians and Foe the colonizer, hunter, destroyer, is male. In Jacobus Coetzee's words:
I am an explorer. My essence is to open what is closed, to bring light to what is dark.

I move through the wilderness with my gun at the shoulder of my eye. . . . Savages do not have guns. This is the effective meaning of savagery, which we may define as enslavement to space, as one speaks obversely of the explorer's mastery of space. ("The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee" 106; 79.)

The explorer is of course vulnerable to illness and death; madness is endemic, an occupational hazard. So it is too for Magda, living "in the heart of the country," but as female rather than male, as daughter rather than father, housekeeper rather than hunter, she is less powerful and less obsessed with "mastery" of her environment. Her medium of communication with "the brown people" who surround her is not the gun but the pen:

Alone in my room with my duties behind me and the lamp steadily burning, I creak into rhythms that are my own, stumble over the rocks of words that I have never heard on another tongue. I create myself in the words that create me, I who living among the downcast have never beheld myself in the equal regard of another's eye, have never held another in the equal regard of mine (In the Heart of the Country 8; emphasis added).

Magda is trapped between her subjection to her father and the subjection of the servants to her. Her pen cries out:

The medium, the median—that is what I wanted to be! Neither master nor slave, neither parent nor child but the bridge between, so that in me the contraries should be reconciled! (133).

As Coetzee recognizes, the white woman--the female colonist, settler, hunter--is "a bridge between" the absolute power of the white man and the absolute powerlessness of the blacks. In the fiction of Coetzee, Gordimer, Lessing, Dinesen and Schreiner she is portrayed as a victim of the deep
dichotomies in her society. For the dividing line that the male colonist draws between black and white becomes in his imagination a gulf between civilized and uncivilized, father and child, landed and landless, gun-carrier and gunless, actor and acted-upon--imaginative categories which echo and are in a sense modeled upon his primary division of power between male and female. He penetrates the wilderness with his gun, mastering the native people as he penetrates his wife and rules his daughters. But in the interests of "purity" he forbids any human contact between his white women and their natural allies, "his" blacks, thus fostering fear but also attraction between the two parties.

We see this theme of hesitant, fraught rapprochement of black and white through the ambiguous figure of the colonial woman in each of the four women writers. In Schreiner it is at first buried in her chronicle of the oppression of white women and children. But it emerges in From Man to Man, when Rebekah finally makes common cause with the Africans. Dinesen's memoir is a platonic, but sensual love affair with the Kikuyu, Masai, and Somali tribespeople, in which conflicts of allegiance are gracefully glossed over. Even her descriptions of lion hunting in which the lion mystically invites the hunter's bullet, transform the killing into a communion between hunter and animal--and in a larger sense between the European and Africa.

While Dinesen's mystique of hunting can be traced to her upbringing in Denmark and the upper-class passion for hunting, it is in Africa an imperialist gesture. Karen Blixen's hunting
as an act of love (described uncritically by Dinesen) finds an eerie echo in Jacobus Coetzee's shooting of Africans (described ironically) as mystical communication, when he proclaims that, "The gun is our mediator with the world . . ." (79). Thus Coetzee's fiction exposes the violent, imperialist and masculinist aspect of Dinesen's ethic. There is also a similarity in the relation between Isak Dinesen and Karen Blixen, J.M. Coetzee and "Jacobus Coetzee," whose name suggests he is at least an ancestor, if not an alter ego of his author. However, Coetzee's depiction of his ancestor/alter ego is more critical and self-aware than is Dinesen's of her fictionalized self.

There is less double meaning in Lessing's and Gordimer's explication of the themes of communication and connection. For Lessing's white characters the blacks are inscrutable and unreachable. Gordimer's white main characters long and strain for sorority or fraternity; they are blocked not so much by their mental and emotional limitations as by the politics of South Africa. Thus, more and more, politics, legislation and history become the focus of her fiction.

The ambiguous, self-divided position of the white girl or woman in colonial society is, then, the implicit theme of the women's writing and writing about women that began with Olive Schreiner. The female characters in these books are internal battlegrounds in which the conflicts of African colonial society are played out, and also meeting places where illicit relationships between the races can develop. "I wanted to be . . . the bridge between," writes Magda in her diary. "I am the place
where something has occurred," is Rosa Burger's epigraph. In their search for the female self, these writers discover the violent history of their countries. That these identity quests are not only stories of the self, but stories of national and geographical identity or the lack thereof is shown by the titles: *The Story of an African Farm*, *Out of Africa*, *The Children of Violence*, *In the Heart of the Country*. The title *Burger's Daughter*—that is, the daughter of Lionel Burger, but also the daughter of the *burger*, the citizen—indicates Gordimer's concern with the larger inheritance of the Southern African girl-child, a concern which Olive Schreiner first embodied in her orphaned, landless Lyndall. Lyndall and the characters who come after her do not partake of the power and riches, the mastery of the male colonist. They are curiously unimplicated in the violence of colonialism: Lyndall is fatherless; Waldo is the son of a kindly, victimized worker; Martha Quest's father is dreamy and incompetent; Rosa's father is an idealized revolutionary, an enemy of the state. Karen Blixen is a generous and enthusiastic but failed farmer who may rule and hunt as a kind of honorary male, but who identifies with the ruled and hunted through her female vulnerability.

As Stephen Gray suggests in *Southern African Literature: An Introduction*, these writers in the liberal tradition portray the white failure to connect with black Africans and to take root in African soil. But they go beyond a portrait of alienation; their female characters are symbolically freed of the psychological limitations of the dominating male, freed of the
barriers that a gun, a land deed, and a safe full of gold pose to love, understanding and equality. These characters generally fail in their quest to build a modest bridge between the white and black worlds, which is not surprising given their ambiguous position in the white world and their equivocal participation in the black world. Nor is it surprising that they generally fail to live free and fruitful lives as they venture—actually or symbolically—from the oppressive protection of the white fortress into the indifferent or actively hostile territory of the Africans. Lyndall's quest for personal freedom is suicidal; Waldo returns to the farm to die of sorrow. Rebekah, in one of the most optimistic endings of any of these books, adopts a half-caste child and begins her own farm. But the economic realities of farming doom Karen Blixen's rural paradise. Mary Turner wills her own death at the hands of Moses, her black servant and virtual lover. Martha Quest constructs an imaginary city of harmony on the veld, which she is forever unable to recreate in Salisbury or London. Helen Shaw escapes on a ship to Europe. Rosa finds a form of joy in prison. Maureen Smales runs blindly toward a helicopter, no longer caring whether it belongs to the white or black armies. And Magda withdraws into her farm house, choosing to die "here in the petrified garden, behind locked gates, near my father's bones" (In the Heart of the Country 138).

As Stephen Gray and other critics have pointed out, setting in white Southern African fiction symbolizes the alienation of the characters. The African land rejects its colonists; drought
is a prevalent metaphor, whereas rain—which in Africa means growth and life—is used ironically to emphasize the sterility of the whites. When the long drought in *African Farm* breaks, rain and greenness herald death. In *The Conservationist*, rain comes in a flood which sweeps away symbols of white power as it gives symbolic rebirth to black Africa. The titles of two novels by André Brink, a South African whose work is very similar to Gordimer's, show how general is the imagery of drought and storm in white Southern African literature: *A Dry White Season* (1978) and *Rumours of Rain* (1979).

Sheila Fugard's *A Revolutionary Woman* (1983), the story of an activist teacher in the time of Gandhi, set in Schreiner's Karoo, invokes Schreiner's imagery and even Schreiner herself, upon whom the heroine seems to be modeled. Fugard's novel, although flawed by overwriting and repetition, reinforces the "African Farm" themes and imagery, offering further proof of Schreiner's continuing influence.

As white South African literature becomes more politically radical, in step with the resistance movement and its violent suppression by the government, the writers discover in the pattern of imagery inherited from Schreiner (who only gave form to the dreams and fears already present in the white-settler psyche) the symbols of revolution. This symbolism, apparent in Brink, Coetzee and Lessing, is most developed in Gordimer. Throughout her fiction she has pursued the image of white South Africa as a graveyard, connecting dryness and sterility with decadence and death. Black South Africa, oppressed and
repressed, is the buried body that threatens, or promises, to rise up—to inundate and destroy, or to revive and fertilize—the country of the whites.

A related symbolic pattern emerging in this literature is that of the heroine as Eve, who, tainted by her white blood, by her inherited position of privilege, is barred from the black African paradise. The Eve metaphor, which is developed most clearly in Lessing, but reverberates in the work of the other writers, is a figurative version of apartheid, that barrier against the blacks which becomes, finally, a trap in which the whites are caught. What is for Lessing the psychic wall of apartheid becomes for Gordimer a social and political wall in a South Africa in which it is officially forbidden to enter the black Townships and Locations, or to have intimate relationships on equal terms with non-white people.

We can trace a gradual shift in focus in the "African Farm" literature from Schreiner to Gordimer. Schreiner's almost exclusively white world, in which colonial violence is directed at white women and children, and only implicitly at blacks, is transformed in Gordimer's fiction into a divided world which the alienated, guilty whites long to reunite: through love and understanding (The Lying Days, A World of Strangers, 1958) or violent revolution (The Conservationist, July's People) or both (Burger's Daughter and A Sport of Nature). As South African history boils to what may be its final crisis, the metaphors of drought and flood, the buried body, and white Eve, which in Schreiner and even in Lessing are symbols of vague unease and
unfocused guilt, take on concrete political meaning. Black characters, who are largely absent in Schreiner and two-dimensional in Lessing, more fully developed in Dinesen but still a backdrop for the white heroine, become more central in Gordimer, Brink and Coetzee. Black history and culture, which were present to some extent in the work of the earlier writers, but only in terms of the white characters' development, become major themes.

Yet the attempt to break down apartheid in white fiction of the nineteen-seventies and eighties has occurred at a time when the physical and ideological gulf between the races has increased because of political and military repression on the part of the government, and movements toward autonomy within the black community, such as Black Consciousness. Thus while progressive white South African writers may be far ahead of their government in envisioning the shift of power from white minority to black majority, they can do no more than follow behind the black community. It is impossible for white writers to speak for or guide their countrymen; they remain impassioned and endangered observers. In his work on Gordimer, Stephen Clingman has chronicled her attempt to surmount the growing barriers between the races by means of increasingly radical imaginative strategies. However the subtext of her recent work—the theme which she cannot allow herself to be fully conscious of if she is to continue to write—is the impossibility of transcending racial identity.
In my conclusion I examine changing representations of blackness in the "African Farm" writers, using their short stories, which, because they do not focus so exclusively on the growth of the white heroine as the Bildungsromane do, contain fuller descriptions of black-white relationships. I also look briefly at two non-white women writers, Bessie Head (Maru, 1972) whose work contains interesting references to Schreiner, and Miriam Tlali (Amandla, 1980), who ignores white characters and white literary references to focus on contemporary black urban life and the struggle for freedom.

Except for the mention of Head and Tlali, whose fiction presents points of comparison and contrast with the work of Schreiner, Dinesen, Lessing and Gordimer, I have excluded black African literature from this thesis. The literature that began with Olive Schreiner's *African Farm* explores the white African psyche. The landscape and native inhabitants are depicted from the perspective of the European settler as essentially alien. The writers of this literature have little in common with their black African counterparts, whose point of view, culture, history and concerns are quite different. Rowland Smith, who characterizes violence as endemic to South African literature as it is to South African history, emphasizes the different treatment of violence in black and white fiction. Whereas in black fiction police brutality is "a constant, daily reality," most white writers "have remained observers" ("Allan Quartermain to Rosa Burger: Violence in South African Fiction" 177-178).
The gulf between black and white South African literature is evidence of the power of apartheid to create what are for the most part separate cultures. Black South African writers tell an urgent, angry tale of oppression and resistance, for which they have most often employed the genres of autobiography, the short story and poetry. They have had little access to mainstream publishers, not to mention the educational system or the cultural establishment. In the current political climate they rely increasingly on oral performance.

Because of their potential mass audience within the country they are perceived by the authorities as more dangerous than white liberal writers in English, who have a much smaller and less politically explosive readership. Serious black writers, therefore, have usually been suppressed: censored, imprisoned, exiled or killed; several have taken their own lives.¹⁴ There is, then, no counterpart in black South African literature to the leisurely, introspective novels of the safe, privileged and isolated white minority. And the post-independence literature of black Africa in general has a different agenda, different models, styles and preoccupations than that of white colonial Africa. To take one example, the Kenyan novelist Ngugi wa Thiong'o underscores the gulf between his African experience and vision of his country and Dinesen's expatriate, colonial vision when in Homecoming he criticizes her racist attitudes.
Of the four women writers, Gordimer comes closest to breaking through the barriers of literary apartheid, although she cannot fully escape her alienated status as a white South African. Influenced by black writers and theorists (such as Chinua Achebe and Frantz Fanon) she is now attempting to bridge the gap between white colonial and African literature, as Schreiner, Dinesen, Lessing, and Gordimer herself, have bridged the gap between colonial and metropolitan literature by bringing African colonial experience into the mainstream of Anglo-American fiction. Gordimer's fiction, then, is extending, and perhaps concluding (for she will probably be one of the last white South African, as opposed to Azanian, writers) the work that Schreiner began in *The Story of an African Farm*.

It is notable that even the more radical white fiction of the seventies and eighties continues to refer to and reinterpret Schreiner. Gordimer's *Conservationist* and *July's People*, Coetzee's *In the Heart of the Country* and *Life and Times of Michael K*, Brink's *Rumours of Rain* and *A Chain of Voices*, and Sheila Fugard's *A Revolutionary Woman* return to the "African Farm" as the microcosm of colonial society in which violence characterizes the relations between settler and land, master and servant, man and wife, parent and child. In these novels as in Schreiner's the colonized land takes revenge on the settler, symbolizing the latent power of the oppressed Africans who rise up to reclaim their farm, their country.
Notes - Introduction

1 Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar pursue this line of thought in The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination, their point of departure being Harold Bloom's theory of "the anxiety of influence." They argue that in women's literature influence is benign rather than fraught with jealousy against the father-figure, as Bloom claims for male writers. (Gilbert and Guber 46-53; Bloom, The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry).

2 The ideas of a continuous women's tradition is pursued in Gilbert and Gubar, as well as in Elaine Showalter, A Literature of their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing, Patricia Meyer Spacks, The Female Imagination; and Ellen Moers, Literary Women.

3 Showalter sees Schreiner as an exemplar of early British feminist literature.


5 African Farm, wrote Woolf, has the "astounding vividness" of the Bronte novels, but "it has the limitations of those egotistical masterpieces without a full measure of their strength."

6 Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's Heat and Dust, set in India, is an interesting companion piece to the novels of Lessing and Gordimer, for it is about the relation of the post-colonial daughter (literally the step-granddaughter) to her colonial fore-mother, as well as about the difficult position of the rebellious woman settler caught between her allegiance to her own culture and race and her attraction to the other. The contemporary narrator of Jhabvala's novel is a writer who gains access to the colonial India of her great-aunt through her great-aunt's writing (her letters) while she records in her journal her own love affair with India—and following her ancestress, with an Indian. Her quest parallels Lessing's and Gordimer's reinterpretations of Schreiner and Dinesen through their autobiographical characters. The title of Jhabvala's selected stories, Out of India (1986), is further evidence of the parallels between her work and that of the African writers.

7 Martin Swales, The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse; Jerome H. Buckley, Season of Youth: the Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding.
In "The Small Personal Voice" Lessing describes Children of Violence as in the nineteenth-century realist tradition. In the "Author's Notes" to the Four-Gated City she describes the novel as a Bildungsroman in the German tradition (655). In What Happened to Burger's Daughter Gordimer discusses Burger's Daughter in terms similar to Lessing's discussion of The Four-Gated City in "The Small Personal Voice." Various reviewers and critics have analyzed Children of Violence, The Lying Days, and Burger's Daughter as Bildungsromane.

Marianne Juhl and Bo Haken Jørgensen, in Diana's Revenge: Two Lines in Isak Dinesen's Authorship, see the theme of woman's freedom as central in her work, citing the powerful Artemis/Diana imagery in Out of Africa.

Gordimer, for one, has expressed her admiration for Turbott Wolfe (in "Living in the Interregnum" 24). Clingman points out that Gordimer is fond of quoting Plomer's statement in Turbott Wolfe that the so-called native question, "isn't a question. It's an answer" (The Novels of Nadine Gordimer 6). He sees Plomer as the second major influence on her work after Schreiner.

Brink's Rumours of Rain, about an Afrikaner industrialist whose secure world is gradually destroyed by the defection of his mistress and son to the opposition, has strong similarities to the plot of Gordimer's The Conservationist. Brink, from the perspective of a male and an Afrikaner, is essentially writing the same book as Gordimer, following the lead of her early work, and of such anglophone predecessors as Schreiner, Plomer and Lessing.

I have excluded the East African Elspeth Huxley, whose Flame Trees of Thika (1959) is to my mind a relatively minor contribution to the stories of an African farm. A recent novel set in white-settler Kenya, Louisa Dawkins' Natives and Strangers (1985), a more progressive update of Huxley, echoes the themes of identification and exile in the "African Farm" texts, but does not add to these texts. I have also excluded the South Africans Pauline Smith and Sarah Gertrude Millin. Smith's collection of stories The Little Karoo (1925) and novel The Beadle (1926) do not go beyond an appreciative portrait of Boer folk life. Millin, best known for God's Stepchildren (1924) was a prolific and influential minor novelist who was an apologist for racism. The work of these writers contributes little to the portrait of colonial Africa from a women's perspective painted by Schreiner, Dinesen, Lessing and Gordimer. I have also excluded Alan Paton; while his Cry the Beloved Country (1948) awakened an international reading public to the plight of South Africa's blacks, it now reads as overly sentimental, patronizing and irrelevant, with its message of Christian charity and resignation. In contrast to Gordimer's
literary evolution, which is linked to conscious political evolution, Paton's outdated liberalism has lost touch with the current political realities; as a result he has not developed as fully as a writer.

As to the question of why I have not included other writers, other texts, I have limited myself to writers of significance and international stature who treat their subject seriously, critically, and from personal knowledge. I exclude writing about Africa by eminent strangers, travelers, and sojourners, such as Joseph Conrad, whose *Heart of Darkness* (1902) of course haunts all white writing about Africa; Graham Greene (*The Heart of the Matter*); Margaret Laurence (*The Tomorrow Tamer*); V.S. Naipaul (*A Bend in the River*), and many other European, American and Commonwealth novels and stories.

To take one example of a well-known non-white South African novelist, Alex La Guma, who was born in 1925 in a "coloured" section of Capetown, suffered imprisonment, house arrest and banning until his escape from South Africa in 1966. All of his novels, from *A Walk in the Night* (1962) to *The Time of the Butcherbird* (1981) have been published outside South Africa; the people about whom and for whom he wrote cannot read him. (See "Alex La Guma, The Generation of Marginal Fiction" in JanMohamed, *Manichean Aesthetics*.) Other writers who were exiled and banned in the post-Sharpeville era were Can Themba, Nat Nakasa, Lewis Nkosi and Ezekiel Mphahlele; Nakasa committed suicide abroad while Themba and La Guma have died.
Chapter Two

Olive Schreiner: Eve Divided

The Story of an African Farm

Olive Schreiner's African farm is inimical to the personal and creative flowering of her autobiographical heroine and hero. Hostility is embodied in the cruel desert land of the Karoo, as well as in the farm's Boer mistress, Tant' Sannie, and its British exploiter, Bonaparte Blenkins. Cunning and deceit, enforced by the whip and the property deed, prevail over fairness and trust. Schreiner does not deal directly with the violence of the white invader against the African people, as her successors have done. Instead she focuses on the violence of the settler culture against its own children, in particular its female children. Both Lyndall and Waldo are, essentially, female characters whose victimization, rebellion, and final punishment are based on their gender. Their orphaned, property-less status removes them from adult protection and renders them exploitable. Waldo's artistic sensitivity and Lyndall's iconoclasm threaten the conventional order, and consequently the two are ruthlessly suppressed. Clearly these characters are versions of the young author herself; Schreiner indicts colonial South Africa by portraying its destructive effects upon her own growth and talent.

Schreiner's starting point in The Story of an African Farm was her own childhood. She was oppressed by her English mother's narrow Calvinism, which her German father, gentle but
weak, did not oppose. Olive Emily Albertina (grimly named for her three dead brothers) was a strong-willed and imaginative child who very early formulated her own ideas in opposition to her parents, especially to her cold, tyrannical mother. Her atheism and sympathy for the Afrikaners were to some extent a reaction against her mother's militant Nonconformism and hardly less militant assumption of English superiority. One of the worst episodes in Olive's childhood was her being severely beaten for uttering the Afrikaans exclamation, "Ach!" (First and Scott 48). Her feminism, as evidenced in the character of Lyndall, was a complex response to her mother and to both the personal and political circumstances of her childhood in the colonies that Britain was consolidating by force in Southern Africa.

Born in 1855, Olive was the ninth of twelve children, seven of whom survived; her early childhood was spent on remote mission stations on the frontiers of the colony. When Olive was twelve her family was dispersed as a result of her father's dismissal from his missionary post for corruption and incompetence. Olive lived with her older sisters and brothers, one of whom took her to the recently opened Diamond Fields, and she worked intermittently as a governess on Boer farms in the Karoo and other parts of the Cape Colony. The Story of an African Farm, Olive Schreiner's first published novel, was begun in 1875 and finished in 1881 when she left South Africa for the first of several sojourns in England.
Rodney Davenport, describing the political context of the novel, writes:

It would have been hard for Olive Schreiner, after a childhood spent in mission stations, not to be aware of the emerging racial tensions of Southern African society, especially during the 1870s, that period of major confrontation and frontier war. She had to move from the farm at Ratel Hoek during the war of 1877 ("Olive Schreiner and South African Politics" 103).

It was a period of white expansion into black territories, violent confrontation between Africans and Europeans, and territorial conflict between the British and the Afrikaners. *African Farm* does not deal directly with these racial and ethnic tensions; it is an autobiographical novel which focuses on the inner lives of the two main characters, but there is an undercurrent of violence and rebellion which is perhaps one of the reasons why South African critics continue to see it as a central text, even the central text in their literature.¹

Schreiner's best recent biographers, Ruth First and Ann Scott,² interpret politics in the novel thus:

The European frontier society insulated itself from the indigenous society but internalized the violence it used against it; hence the violence of Bonaparte and Tant' Sannie's behaviour. . . . Olive was writing . . . about what colonialism did to whites, and in her novel the children are both symbol and expression of that system and its consequences (97).

Lyndall (as well as Rebekah, the heroine of *From Man to Man*) takes her name from Olive's mother, Rebecca Lyndall. She is an idealized version of the young author, but also of her unhappy mother. As the clever and ambitious Rebecca Lyndall could not escape her fate as a domestic tyrant with too many
children, in an alien and hostile land, so Lyndall, for all her fire and brilliance, cannot escape her woman's fate, and so Olive Schreiner feared that she would not escape hers. The orphan Lyndall's origins are mysterious; she is described as a spirit of the moonlight, "golden," "ethereal," and "elfin," as a bewitched princess trapped on the surrealistically horrific ostrich farm and as an Undine: part human, part fairy. Her heroine's magical origin reflects Schreiner's view of herself as a child: she was an alien spark of imagination and intellect fallen among sadistic "philistines," as she called her countrymen.\(^3\)

Schreiner's first novel, an immature autobiographical work published posthumously, was called Undine.\(^4\) Lyndall, like its heroine, Undine, is described metaphorically as a supernatural creature out of her element, but bound to the natural world by her human soul, which is represented by Waldo, her male counterpart, companion, alter ego. Whereas she is of the air, he is of the earth; he represents her bond to the soil, rocks and animals of the farm she tries to leave behind. Actually it is the dark, stocky, wild-looking Waldo rather than the delicate, ethereal Lyndall who more resembles the young Olive; it is through Waldo's reading and thinking that Schreiner traces her own painful, laborious struggle to educate herself.

The use of the Undine metaphor, the name Waldo, and the pseudonym "Ralph Iron" under which Olive Schreiner first published African Farm indicate her reading up to that point. She was influenced by German and English Romanticism and
American Transcendentalism (Ralph Waldo Emerson) as well as Herbert Spencer, Charles Darwin, and John Stuart Mill, which—through Waldo—enter the plot of African Farm. Waldo discovers a box of books and reverently begins to read Mill's Political Economy. The book is a door which opens onto a new world, and which is then shut forever when Tant' Sannie excoriates the "devil's book" and Bonaparte Blenkins ceremonially burns it (113-14).

Schreiner's critics have recognized the importance of books in her novel. For Stephen Gray, Mill, Darwin, Emerson and Spencer "set up such antipathies within the fabric of the novel that part of its liveliness is derived from her attempts to resolve them into a total whole" (Southern African Literature 149). For First and Scott, this attempt at resolution through Spencer's idea of the unity of Nature leads to Lyndall and Waldo's disturbing and unconvincing embrace of death (59-60).

These comments indicate the central role of books in African Farm, which in turn reflects their importance to the author: as a substitute for school, conversation, even friends.

Because Schreiner read so few books, we can see the influence of those she did read. For instance, the Bible influenced her prose style, which is sonorous, rhythmic, and tends to repeat refrains, as in this passage from African Farm:

At last came the year of the great drought, the year of 1862. From end to end of the land the earth cried for water. Man and beast turned their eyes to the pitiless sky, that like the roof of some brazen oven arched overhead. On the farm, day after day, month after month, the water in the dams fell lower and lower, the sheep died in the fields . . . (44).
We also know that she read Dickens; certainly there are Dickensian caricatures, such as Bonaparte Blenkins, and Schreiner's use of the child's point of view is also Dickensian (as well as Romantic). The influence of Dickens is apparent in her sentimentalization of Lyndall's death. There are also strong similarities between *African Farm* and *Wuthering Heights* (especially the relationship between Lyndall and Waldo), as well as *The Mill on the Floss* (Waldo's religious crisis, the character of Lyndall) and *Jane Eyre* (Lyndall again, but more particularly the cruel treatment of the orphan children), although there is no evidence that Schreiner had read the Brontës or George Eliot.  

Olive Schreiner, like Waldo, escaped from the brutal, stifling atmosphere of her household into scientific study and mystical contemplation of her natural surroundings. In the nominally masculine, but essentially sexless character of Waldo, Schreiner represents that aspect of intellectual and artistic development which she prefers to see as androgynous, whereas in Lyndall she represents the specific problems of the rebellious and ambitious female. The linked development—and shared fate—of the two characters form a tragic portrait of the self-divided female artist. Lyndall is beautiful, eloquent, and courageous; Waldo is an original thinker and natural artist who is granted the greater freedom and opportunity of the male. Yet divided as they are into two characters, they are both incomplete, and both too weak to survive the world's cruelty. Lyndall is restless and discontented; her feminist anger is unfocused. She cannot realize her ambitions because she is female, and so looks to her
male counterpart Waldo to create, to act, to achieve what she cannot. Waldo mediates between Lyndall and the world, between the ideal and the real. He is like Undine's human soul, only Schreiner has translated the Undine myth into feminist terms: Lyndall is a woman who tries to enter the male-dominated patriarchal world. Like Undine, both she and her male "soul" Waldo are doomed.

Lyndall and Waldo's relationship interestingly prefigures the platonic relationship that Schreiner was to have with Havelock Ellis. Lyndall says to Waldo:

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 . . . are mere bodies to me; but you are a spirit . . . (210).

Waldo is a persecuted earthbound spirit, a scientist, inventor, philosopher, and artist, whose crude wood carvings express his yearning visions. However, he is a disconcertingly weak character who is exploited, even tortured by the villains of the novel. His surviving work of art is, fittingly, a gravepost for his father (a kindly German who resembles Olive's father). Although he, in contrast to Lyndall, has the opportunity to make his own way in the world outside the farm, in the end he returns crushed and disillusioned by the world's cruelty. When Lyndall is reabsorbed, Undine-like, into the supernatural element, Waldo too lets go his tenuous hold on life and follows her. The author tries to comfort the reader, and herself, with the (Spencerian) suggestion that out of the death and suffering of these individuals grows the collective life of nature. But even this is undercut by the counter-suggestion that the belief in a
spirit that lives on in nature is but another pipe dream that helps to dull the pain of living in "the cankered little kingdom of the tangible" (291).

The character of Lyndall carries Schreiner's feminist message, Waldo her artistic message. Together they embody the ingredients that Schreiner felt had formed her own personality. In Lyndall she tries to give shape to her strong mother's proto-feminism. Waldo has the weakness, the passivity that she feared she might have inherited from her father; through him she also represents the intellectual hunger that found little sympathy in her family, and that, logically for her time and place, she objectified as male. But the artist-intellectual is bound to a woman's body, as Waldo is portrayed as bound to, dependent upon Lyndall, and so unable to survive in male-dominated society.

In the "Lyndall" chapter, the thematic center of the novel, this female dilemma is expounded upon at length, with great wit as well as anger. The sixteen-year-old has returned to the farm radicalized by her experience of a girls' school. In a much-quoted monologue that is fresh still, she damns female education.

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 space a human soul can be crushed?' (sic, 185).

She concludes that women will not progress until they are given education and work with which to achieve independence from men, that love will be impossible until sex is freed from the marketplace. She analyzes the disastrous effect of the damming of
women's power within the family. In fact the core of Schreiner's influential nonfiction work, *Woman and Labour* (1911), including its rhetorical style, is here in the "Lyndall" monologue, an indication of how little Schreiner's ideas or rhetoric developed--and of how *African Farm* anticipated the feminist aesthetic and ideology of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁶

For all its eloquence, Lyndall's speech is bitter: emancipation is a concept for the future: she has been born too early to benefit from her own vision. Her melodramatic end is an expression of Schreiner's pessimism about her own future as an ambitious but psychologically shaky "New Woman" of the late nineteenth century.⁷ Lyndall enters into an illicit affair, less out of desire, it would seem, than to make a point of defying society's strictures. Characteristically, when she finds that she is pregnant, she refuses to marry the man, because she does not love him and does not want to compromise what remains of her freedom. She bears her child alone, and after a vaguely defined but obviously willed illness (reminiscent of Catherine's in *Wuthering Heights*), she follows her baby into death. To pursue the Undine metaphor, one could say that Lyndall is a woman with a male soul, who is claimed by her sexual destiny and thus destroyed. Significantly, Lyndall's childhood idol is Napoleon. With conscious irony she compares her own dim prospects to his illustrious if tragic career, citing the story of his defeat and exile with bitter relish:
It is a terrible, hateful ending . . . and the worst is, it is true. I have noticed . . . that it is only the made-up stories that end nicely; the true ones all end so (48).

We are meant to see her as a failed Napoleon. Not only is she orphaned, penniless, poorly educated, and trapped in an obscure corner of the world, but she is also a woman, who will be defeated by her own body.

Another metaphor that Schreiner uses for Lyndall's plight is the story of Sleeping Beauty. Described as a "princess" when she returns to the farm, she complains: "There is not room to breathe here; one suffocates" (183). She feels imprisoned in the malevolent Tant' Sannie's claustrophobic house on the sleepy farm in an empty, barren land. She cries out to be "awakened," "delivered," by the prince in whom she does not believe:

I will do nothing good for myself nothing for the world, till someone wakes me. I am asleep, swathed, shut up in self; till I have been delivered I will deliver no one (196).8

But when her lover comes to take her away it is only an ironic rescue. And the farm—her bewitched kingdom—does not awake. As in the fairy-tale metaphor, a pattern of sleep and dream imagery is used ironically to underline the contrast between fantasy and reality, dream and waking life.9 The novel's first paragraph describes the farm in the moonlight. The moon transforms the ugly house and stunted garden into a place of possibility: "it quite etherealized the low brick wall that ran before the house and which enclosed a bare patch of sand and two straggling sunflowers" (35). Lyndall, "who belonged of right to the moonlight," (36) is awakened by the
wonderful flood of white light, which has fantastically transformed her setting, until the punishing Southern sun again reveals its bleakness.

For Waldo the desert is not bleak and barren but populated with dreams and visions, the longest of which is "The Allegory of the Hunter," a long meditation on the quest for the unattainable set in the blue mountains which are his horizon: his land of imagination. The image of claustrophobia which is so strongly associated with Lyndall does not apply to Waldo, who feels at one with the natural world and his own body. Claustrophobia and confinement are for Schreiner descriptive of the female condition, which her artist, Waldo, is not bound by. He is, however, symbolically bound to his female counterpart, Lyndall.

The opposition between what Schreiner's characters can imagine and the circumstances which bind them is powerfully carried by the ironic use of nature. The farm suffers under a great drought, which is finally broken by a storm which marks Lyndall's death. The life of the farm is symbolically connected to hers, its long drought ending only with her death. As the world flowers and greens in the wake of the rains, Waldo lies down to sleep, and to die. This savage use of the images of fertility, joined now with the images of sleep and dreams, reinforces the message that the land—the farm, the colony, Africa, perhaps the world—is antipathetical to her young characters' flowering. The symbols of continuity: green crops, children, and property, exclude Lyndall and Waldo.
Stephen Gray traces the negative use of natural imagery from Schreiner to Lessing and Gordimer, and to white Southern African literature in general. He argues convincingly that, . . . the literature of this kind has as a basic tenet the theme that its characters do not--cannot--belong. We are confronted with a coherent and continuous stream of fiction that is about permanently alienated beings . . . who are not part of, and can never be part of, a land which offers them no harmonious, sympathetic growth (151).

In addition to natural imagery, Schreiner uses the secondary characters in African Farm to emphasize the isolation of Lyndall and Waldo. There are few characters in the novel, which underlines our sense of the heroine's and hero's possibilities as strictly, defeatingly limited. In particular, Schreiner uses the other two women characters to exemplify the choices open to Lyndall. Her cousin Em embodies all that Schreiner's heroine rejects of conventional womanhood; kind-hearted, but plain, dull and unimaginative, she uncomplainingly accepts her lot. Although she too is cruelly used and disappointed in love, she survives to inherit both Lyndall's cast-off admirer, Gregory Rose, and the farm itself. It is Em's line rather than Lyndall's which will continue.

Schreiner's other female character, Tant' Sannie, is a caricature of the evil step-mother. She is a bundle of gross appetites, a devourer of men, a grotesque earth goddess--an argument, in fact, for Lyndall's contention that women's power will be perverted if wholly directed toward the domestic sphere. Nevertheless, as an embodiment of traditional female power over children, husband and home, she thrives. Significantly, Schreiner gives her a strong, colorful voice. She exclaims:
There's nothing like being married. . . . If a woman's got a baby and a husband she's got the best things the Lord can give her; if only the baby doesn't have convulsions. As for a husband it's very much the same who one has. Some men are fat and some men are thin; some men drink brandy, and some men drink gin; but it all comes to the same thing in the end (293).

Interestingly then, Schreiner does not dismiss Sannie as a loathsome villainess, but rather admires her and uses her to satirize the other, weaker characters. For the reader, her brutal common sense is a refreshing antidote to the melodramatically rendered Lyndall and the often pathetic Waldo. Tant' Sannie's comic voice is strongly reasserted at the end of the novel (as in her speech to Em, quoted above), while the story of Lyndall and Waldo teeters toward bathos. In Tant' Sannie, Schreiner presents an alternate vision of feminine power which is not entirely negative, but which excludes the heroine. The defeat of Lyndall is contrasted with the qualified success of the other characters, through whom Schreiner offers the alternative vision of the rewards of conformity. Em and Tant' Sannie are stronger, more enduring, and even more admirable in their fashion than Lyndall. They represent practicality and continuity: the homely qualities that Schreiner admires in the life of the farm.

The male characters serve similarly as colonial types and role models, mostly negative, for Waldo. The villain, named Bonaparte in a parody of Lyndall's idolization of Napoleon, is an unscrupulous British colonist come to South Africa to make money by the easiest, that is, the most dishonest and exploitative means. Old Otto, Waldo's German father, is an anachronistic peasant whom Blenkins destroys. Gregory Rose is a
naive, fresh-faced Englishman who callously breaks Em's heart, but whom Schreiner educates and reforms through his self-sacrificing love for Lyndall. The bizarre device of his adopting a woman's disguise to nurse Lyndall through her last days has a feminist message: he must be feminized to become a complete person. Gregory's androgyny also reinforces the androgynous connection between Lyndall and Waldo. Finally, Waldo's Stranger, a mysterious European exile, both lures Waldo toward and warns him against the culture of the metropolis, reflecting Schreiner's ambivalence about going abroad, and prefiguring her own intercontinental wandering.

Through the predicament of Lyndall, the rebellious colonial woman, and Waldo, the colonial artist, Schreiner depicts her own situation as a rejected and alienated daughter of colonial Africa. Her own landlessness, the break-up of her family, and her situation as a governess and housekeeper for others fueled her feminist anger and sparked her sympathy for the less powerful, that is, non-white and non-British segments of South African society. Her work experience gave her first-hand knowledge of Afrikaners, whom her mother had denigrated—but Olive lived among them as an outsider, a stranger. In *African Farm*, she describes Boer farm life with detachment, through Lyndall's English eyes. For example, the description of a traditional wedding, from Lyndall's point of view, is appreciative but uninvolved; Lyndall watches her neighbors cavort but declines to participate. Her attitude toward everyone except Waldo is of one who has cut her bonds to society, who has, in
her mind, already left. (We will see this attitude again in the early heroines of Lessing and Gordimer.) Her search for freedom has driven her from other people; preoccupied with her own fate she cannot consider the related fates of others. In a sense, finally, her death is a fatal withdrawal into self: "I am asleep, swathed, shut up in self; till I have been delivered I will deliver no one."

Lyndall rejects the traditional feminine roles represented by Em and Tant' Sannie, but is left with the time-honored role of the fallen woman, the outcast and victim. Rejected, she also rejects: the British colonists, the Boer settlers, and the native Africans as well. For the heroine's and hero's detachment from the white communities is also evident in the references to blacks in the novel. Lyndall and Waldo view the black people among whom they live as strange, sometimes repulsive, domesticated animals. Lyndall argues passionately for women's emancipation with no thought for the rights of the African men and women who live in semi-slavery on the farm. Waldo makes no connection between his own suffering and humiliation as a hired worker and that of the African laborers, except insofar as he identifies with all dumb suffering creatures.

The important exception is Waldo's fascination with the San, or Bushmen paintings which survive on the rocks of the farm, long after the artists themselves have been hunted down. Compare his imaginative empathy for the San with a typical description of a "Kaffir" servant. Here is Waldo speaking about the Bushmen:
It was . . . one of these old wild Bushmen, that painted those pictures there. He did not know why he painted but he wanted to make something so he made these. He worked hard, very hard, to find the juice to make the paint; and then he found this place where the rocks hang over, and he painted them. To us they are only strange things, that make us laugh; but to him they were very beautiful.

. . . He used to kneel here naked, painting, painting; and he wondered at the things he made himself . . . . Now the Boers have shot them all, so that we never see a yellow face peeping out among the stones (49-50).

This is a description of a black woman:

She was a sullen, ill-looking woman, with lips hideously protruding. . . . She muttered in broken Dutch . . . shook her head sullenly . . . grunted a negative, and fanned the flies from her baby (87).

Of course Waldo's admiration for the dead Bushman contrasts unfavorably with the author's marked lack of sympathy for living black people, and is reminiscent of more recent South African paean's to the Bushmen, who no longer pose a threat to white settlement. However, it shows that Waldo the artist can transcend the racialism of his society, as Schreiner herself was able to do in later life, as we shall see in the discussion of From Man to Man. At this point, she does not make explicit the link between the colony's antipathy to feminism and creativity on the one hand, and its oppressive racial policies on the other. But it is quite striking that the only artist Waldo identifies with was indigenous, non-white, and was hunted almost to extinction by white settlers.

It is only in the writing of Doris Lessing and Nadine Gordimer that the discontent of Lyndall and Waldo is named and defined as specific to their alienation as Europeans in Africa, victims of the very colonial system that ostensibly exists to
protect their privileges as whites. Nevertheless, in Schreiner we can find strong implications of the critique of white settler society made by her successors. Schreiner's South Africa is philistine, materialistic, and virulently anti-intellectual, with the strong undercurrent of violence which pervades all unequal relationships. Children as well as native servants are beaten into obedience and kept ignorant. They have no protection from sadistic tyrants like Bonaparte Blenkins who rule them in the guise of loving relatives or kind masters. In this context, Lyndall's fierce feminism and Waldo's atheism and evolutionism are attacks on the divinely ordained inequality of races, sexes and cultures which justifies the white colonial system. As Lyndall asserts in her monologue, speaking for women, but also by implication for children, for governesses, for household servants, farm laborers—and San artists: "We bear the world and we make it" (193).

From Man to Man

An early title for The Story of an African Farm, according to Elaine Showalter, was "Mirage: A Series of Abortions," a title which succinctly expresses the pessimism of the novel.  

Schreiner's South Africa is a sterile place in which youthful dreams and progressive aspirations die an unnatural death.

Fitting as it might have been, Schreiner herself did not follow her heroine and hero into an early grave. She lived until 1920, producing several works of nonfiction, stories, and one more major novel, From Man to Man, which, uncompleted, remained unpublished until 1926.
From Man to Man is a little-read work, generally considered inferior to African Farm. Begun at about the same time as African Farm it was added to and revised over Schreiner's lifetime. The result is a patchwork of autobiography, melodrama, scientific and philosophical speculation and feminism. The reader will probably find tedious such sections as the author's fifty-page version of the evolution of civilization. Nevertheless, From Man to Man is an underrated novel which is saved by its wonderful heroine Rebekah. Rebekah is a much rounder and more complete character than Lyndall or Waldo. Whereas Lyndall and Waldo are idealized and schematic representations of different aspects of Schreiner's young self, Rebekah is an autobiographical character who grows and changes along with her creator. Specifically, Rebekah shows us how Schreiner herself became conscious of the connections between sexual and racial injustice in South Africa.

In order to understand the changes in Schreiner's ideas let us first look briefly at her career following the publication of her celebrated first novel in England in 1883, when she was twenty-eight. For a short period, until her return to South Africa in 1889, she became part of a loosely organized intellectual group and political movement whose ideas were to remain an influence upon her. William Morris, Eleanor Marx, Havelock Ellis and Edward Carpenter espoused a romantic socialism based more on spiritual and cultural change than economic transformation. They considered sexual freedom and freedom for women particularly important avenues to social change. This climate
of opinion reinforced Schreiner's already strong interest in feminism and sexuality.16

Schreiner sets out her feminist ideology in the influential *Woman and Labour* (1911). The two main arguments of this non-fiction work are, one, that women cannot be men's intellectual and creative equals as long as they are denied productive work; and two, that the feminine qualities of altruistic love and maternal sacrifice can redeem brutal and exploitative patriarchal society.

The notable feature of *From Man to Man*, which is in direct contrast to the alienation at the heart of *African Farm*, is Rebekah's inner power to blossom within the social confines which bind her. Her intellectual and spiritual growth embrace those around her, starting with her family. Most importantly, Rebekah's plight as a woman gives her empathetic insight into the plight of the other oppressed group in her society: the black Africans. And her personal realization is shown to have ramifications outside herself, to have, in fact, implications for change in South Africa.

The widening of Rebekah's vision is a result of the widening of her author's political experience. After her return to South Africa Schreiner became an active opponent of ethnic and racial inequality. First she launched an attack on Cecil Rhodes for his annexation of "Rhodesia."17 During the Anglo-Boer War she allied herself with the Afrikaners against the British. As a consequence, she was ostracized and for a period interned. Subsequently, she took up the cause of racial inequality,
attacking the increasingly discriminatory policies of the self-governing South African colonies, which in 1910 became the Union of South Africa.18

Thus in her later life, spent mostly in South Africa, Schreiner extended her feminist critique to other forms of social exploitation. In the nineteen-tens in England she took up a last unpopular cause, that of pacifism during the First World War. Until her death she exercised her eloquent voice and pen in the service of her widening sympathies. She seems to have tried in her ever-uncompleted last novel to synthesize her diverse ideas, to weld them into a moving artistic unity. "This book is going to be awfully outspoken;" she wrote to Havelock Ellis in 1884, "An African Farm was nothing to it. . . ." (Letters 33). But in spite of her success as an orator and essayist she was simply not able to achieve a unified novelistic vision. Her considerable personal problems, in particular her conflicts about her own role as a woman, her simultaneous attraction to and fear of sexuality and motherhood, confuse and unbalance her fiction. In From Man to Man as in African Farm there is great tension between ideal and real womanhood, tension which, if it were better controlled, would deepen and enrich the novel. As it is, the author's self-division and confusion glare through her text, damaging the realism of its plot and characters.

The best example of this process in From Man to Man is Rebekah's idealized platonic attachment to Mr. Drummond, which takes place on an impossibly spiritual plane, in contrast to her unhappy marriage, which is portrayed with powerful realism.
Rebekah's need for a Mr. Drummond reflects Schreiner's own entrapment in idealized, distant, sexually frustrated relationships with Havelock Ellis and the man whom she married at thirty-nine, Samuel Cronwright-Schreiner. Schreiner also writes her ambivalence about motherhood into the novel. Her lifelong fear of and desire for a child were encapsulated in the birth of a daughter when she was forty, who died within a day. From this experience, added to the memory of the death of her baby sister Ellie, springs the both morbid and glorified view of maternity that is so prominent an element in *From Man to Man*.

This is to offer an explanation as to why Olive Schreiner was unable to extricate herself from this novel, and was unable to write another. It is not to say, however, that *From Man to Man* is without merit or interest in spite of its unevenness. In its worst parts it is an ambitious failure whose visible scaffolding is a fascinating and poignant subtext. In its best parts, chief among them "The Prelude--The Child's Day" (which significantly was written in one piece as a self contained story) the author succeeds in twisting the strands of autobiography and social message into the thread of poetic realism.

"The Prelude" begins with this sentence: "The little mother lay in the agony of childbirth." The "little mother" of the story is Rebekah's mother, but clearly she also represents the grown-up Rebekah (who will have four sons and several miscarriages), Olive Schreiner's mother, Rebecca Lyndall, and Olive herself. The book is jointly dedicated to Olive's dead baby sister and to her dead daughter. Thus the author attaches to
the character of Rebekah a mournful web of autobiographical meanings.

The little mother of the novel gives birth to twins, one dead, one live. The five-year-old Rebekah appropriates the stillborn twin as a fantasy daughter-self. Here in starker symbols is the African Farm theme of the fertile dream world of the child fighting to flourish in the sterile actual world of the adults. Through a series of dreams, games and stories involving the stillborn baby, Rebekah sketches her own identity as a South African child of the late nineteenth century. The symbols of this divided identity are the treasured possessions she arranges around the baby. These include an alphabet book, talisman of intellectual liberation, which is opposed to the silver thimble and paper of needles, signifying traditional feminity. The bushman stone, symbol of the ancient African culture which haunts the heroine and author (as it haunted Waldo in African Farm), is set against a cut-out of Queen Victoria from a cigar box, symbol of the conquering British empire.

The novel develops directly from this image of Rebekah lining up her symbolic treasures around the baby's corpse. From Man to Man is the story of Rebekah's attempt to preserve each aspect of herself without being destroyed by its opposing quality: intellectual ambition versus womanliness, and Africa versus England. The thematic oppositions in African Farm are here depicted with greater clarity. Lyndall's female dilemma: the choice between Sannie and Em or the fallen woman; Waldo's artistic dilemma: the choice between the philistine culture of the colony or the near-extinct culture of the hunted-down San.
Rebekah's first vehicles of self-expression are dreams and oral stories; later she turns to scientific theories and written fiction. In her first dream she is "the little Queen Victoria of South Africa": still a child, a female and a colonial, she is now a figure of power. In this fantasy she lives on a lush British isle in a child-size house equipped with library, microscope, and mud for building—all the requisites of intellectual inquiry and creativity.

As a reader of *African Farm* might predict, she wakes to the dry, hot, deathlike real world of South Africa: "All about lay the parched yellow grass, and the little dried peach trees, with their shrivelled leaves . . ." (58). It is important, however, that drought, that dominant image of *African Farm*, is only the starting point of *From Man to Man*. The death of her dreams will not be the death of Rebekah. Her revery over the dead baby is broken by the wail of the live twin, Rebekah's sister Bertie, whom she will continue to mother and protect throughout the novel. The grown-up Rebekah maintains her secret inner life within the confines of her outer life as an exploited wife and harassed mother. The melodramatic saga of the seduction and fall of Bertie, and the stereotypical tragedy of Rebekah's marriage—punctuated by the miscarriages of her daughters—surround but do not obscure the other story of Rebekah's mental life. The rather preposterous fictional events of the novel act as a counterpoint to the heroine's mental development. By means of the interaction between the inner and outer stories Schreiner develops and at least partially resolves the symbolic oppositions set out explicitly at the beginning of the novel in
book and thimble, stone and Queen Victoria cut-out.

The adult Rebekah's secret life takes place in a tiny study partitioned off from her children's bedroom in her house in Capetown. Like the treasures in her childhood fantasy, its sparse furnishings are mainly talismanic: a microscope, fossil specimens, her old schoolbooks, translations from the classics, an edition of Darwin, an atlas, a statuette of Hercules, a print of the Madonna, and some notebooks in which she writes sporadically. These are objects from her childhood and womanhood, from Africa and from Europe. The idealized Mother is enshrined along with the Greek hero, perhaps to symbolize the Herculean task of a lone female thinker. There is a path worn into the carpet where she paces round and round as she thinks. Her situation is delineated with realistic detail:

Tonight she drew the book towards her. It was four months since she had opened it... When last she wrote she had been sitting up for a night, to make poultices for her boy who had bad earache, and, between whiles as he slept, she had written (177).

Rebekah's motherly concerns—checking on the sleeping children, darning socks—weave in and out of her philosophical speculations. Nor are these practical concerns purely distractions from her mental activity; rather her philosophy seems to be shaped by her experience as a wife and mother. The interior monologue begun above with the poultice making, for example, builds to this condemnation of social Darwinism:

You say that, with your guns shooting so many shots a minute, you can destroy any race of men armed only with spears; but how does that prove your superiority, except as the superiority of the crocodile is proved when it eats a human baby, because it has long teeth and baby has none? (222).
Thoughtfully, Rebekah rejects the "scientific" justification for imperial might with an argument based upon her protective feelings toward her children. Significantly, this is her first anti-colonial statement.  

The heroine's maternalism (whose patronizing tone we should see in the context of racial views of her time, and thus make some allowance for) reaches its climax near the end of the novel when she adopts the daughter of her husband and the black servant girl. This section of *From Man to Man* refers to the novel's beginning, when the child Rebekah imagined that she adopted her baby sister. Rebekah tells her children a story in which she describes her superior attitude toward the Africans when she was a child, harking back to her early fantasy of being "little Queen Victoria of South Africa":

I always played that, I was Queen Victoria and that all Africa belonged to me, and I could do whatever I liked. It always puzzled me when I walked up and down thinking what I should do with the black people; I did not like to kill them . . . and yet I could not have them near me. At last I made a plan. I made believe I built a high wall right across Africa and put all the black people on the other side, and I said, 'Stay there, and, the day you put one foot over, your heads will be cut off.'

I was very pleased when I made this plan, I used to walk up and down and make believe there were no black people in South Africa; I had it all to myself (435).

But gradually, she tells the children, she came to identify with black women, who impressed her with their bravery and depth of emotion, so that "they were mine and I was theirs, and the wall I had built across Africa had slowly to fall down" (438).

Schreiner's image of building and tearing down an imaginary wall of apartheid is a powerful and prescient one, which emerges
realistically from her heroine's intellectual and emotional development. It is at this point where Rebekah/Schreiner's feminism widens to embrace social and racial equality. Rebekah's adoption of Sartje is an acknowledgement of the furtive but widespread sexual exploitation of black women by their white masters. Furthermore, by taking responsibility for Sartje as the child of her husband and by loving her as a daughter, Rebekah undermines the racial separation upon which the African colonial system is based. It is important here that she rejects the Queen Victoria role that had attracted her as a child. As she has matured, that female symbol of imperial might has lost its potency for her. It has been replaced by an allegorical figure of struggling Humanity as a powerful woman whose feet are fettered and buried in the desert sand. When Humanity learns to use her strong arms and hands to free her feet, she will be able to walk to the green mountains for which she yearns. (We should be reminded here of the "Allegory of the Hunter" in African Farm, set in a similar landscape of desert and distant peaks, but much more rarefied and abstract, and more negative in its vision.)

The allegorical figure is a bold feminist answer to the complacent, motherly white queen whose statues and portraits adorned each corner of her empire. The five-year-old who in the beginning of the novel held four beloved symbolic objects which she could not reconcile has finally chosen between Queen Victoria and the Bushman stone. In terms of the second opposition, that between the thimble and the book--traditional feminity and the masculine province of learning--she has found
her own, female and maternal, intellectual path. In an often sentimental and "matronizing" tone and at too great a length, Olive Schreiner, like Rebekah breaking down the wall between the races, breaks down some of the imaginative walls of her time: masculine superiority, racial superiority, the patriarchal family, and the idea of empire.

Employing the device of story-telling, Rebekah completes her imaginative identification with the colonized Africans. She asks her children to imagine the invasion of earth by a technologically superior species who systematically destroy the comparatively "savage," "primitive" human civilization and kill or enslave the "inferior" human race. But the humans survived, "learnt all the terrible white-faced strangers had to teach, and we worked for them. We worked . . . and we waited . . ." (423). Clearly Schreiner is on the brink of suggesting an organized revolt of the colonized humans against the "white-faced strangers," a step which, however, she was not historically placed to do more than imply. As she tells her children, "The dream ends there." In any case, her autobiographical heroine has imaginatively traveled in another direction from the dead-end reached by the colonial children in *African Farm*. Certainly much of the disillusionment in *African Farm* is repeated in *From Man to Man*, as are its images of sterility and claustrophobia. However, most of its tragedy—not to say melodrama—is given to Rebekah's sister Bertie; the uncompleted plan of the novel has her a prostitute in Cape Town dying of venereal disease, lovingly nursed through her last days by Rebekah.
Rebekah herself, on the other hand, almost flourishes in the tiny room-of-her-own where she studies, dreams and most important, writes. Her powerful vision counters the images of sterility and enclosure, and on a small scale she manages to bring her dreams to fruition. She ends her sexual relationship with her husband, finds an intellectual soul-mate in Mr. Drummond, breaks her ties to white society by adopting Sartje, and begins to teach her children radically new values. According to Schreiner's husband, the ending of the novel would have Rebekah living alone with her children on her own farm (506).

Olive Schreiner's unfinished novel, From Man to Man, is formally inferior to her acknowledged masterpiece, The Story of an African Farm. However its rather melodramatic plot and lengthy philosophical excursions do connect on the thematic level. Through the outward drama and interior debate that characterize her heroine's life, Schreiner was able to dissolve the seemingly insoluble contradictions that defeated Lyndall and Waldo in African Farm, and so hampered her own development as a woman and writer. This is apparent even in the different use of metaphor in the two novels. Lyndall is depicted in rather strained terms as Sleeping Beauty, Napoleon, and Undine, who is so emblematic of her self-division. Rebekah is depicted, more realistically for an autobiographical heroine, as a story-teller and writer. Most important of all, whereas in African Farm the autobiographical heroine is in effect split into female, Lyndall, and male, Waldo, Rebekah integrates male strength into her image of herself (Hercules and the Madonna). She fantasizes
about being a man who protects and cares for her pregnant female self:

She felt the great freedom opened to her, no place shut off from her, the long chain broken, all work possible for her, no law to say this and this is for woman, you are woman; she drew a long breath and smiled an expansive smile (226).

*From Man to Man* is a visionary novel which imaginatively breaks down the walls which in real life limited its author. Rebekah brings down the wall which the "little Queen Victoria of South Africa" built to keep the Africans out of "her" country. She even brings down the symbol of Queen Victoria by replacing her with the half-free, half-fettered female figure of Humanity. By championing both her fallen sister Bertie (whose abnormally small feet echo Humanity's useless limbs) and Sartje, the half-caste daughter of a white master and a black servant, she fights for both sexual and racial equality in the colony.

Lyndall's successor Rebekah does not solve all of her conflicts; notably she is not allowed a sexual relationship with Mr. Drummond, because, presumably, she respects the marriage vows which her husband has repeatedly broken. She settles for a life of celibacy and intellectual communion. Schreiner grants Rebekah children, and a place to write; eventually the room of her own becomes a farm of her own—the African farm, the piece of Africa which Lyndall and Waldo were denied.
Notes - Olive Schreiner


2Ruth First and Ann Scott in *Olive Schreiner* combine a feminist and Marxist-oriented approach to the writer, thus synthesizing the two main attitudes toward Schreiner: one, that she is a woman's writer, two, that she is a South African writer. Their main sources are Schreiner's *Letters*, Samuel Cronwright-Schreiner's biography, which although biased made use of sources to which only he had access, and Marion Friedman's psychoanalytic biography.

3In a letter to Havelock Ellis, Schreiner called South Africa "a whole nation of lower middle-class Philistines, without an aristocracy of blood or intellect or muscular labourers to save them!" (1890, *Letters* 183). The phrase was picked up by Doris Lessing to characterize white Rhodesians.

4Schreiner must have come across either La Motte Fouque's *Undine* or a reference to the German tale.

5The young Schreiner is known to have read few novels and I have not been able to find any reference to *Wuthering Heights* or *Jane Eyre* in her letters, or any indication by her biographers that she had read these novels. However the parallels, particularly with Emily Brontë's novel, are so striking as to fall just short of provable evidence. There are several admiring references to George Eliot (e.g. *Mill on The Floss*, 1885; *Letters* 82), but none that suggest that she had read Eliot before writing *African Farm*.

6For a historical view of Olive Schreiner as an early feminist novelist see Elaine Showalter, "The Feminist Novelists," in *A Literature of their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*. She writes that, "The confused aspirations and dreams and the claustrophobic femaleness of the feminist aesthetic are most suggestively embodied in the life and works of Olive Schreiner. . . . In her ambivalence, her self-deception, her psychosomatic illnesses, we can read the distress signals of a transitional generation" (194-95). Grouping Schreiner with British writers, Showalter does not consider the colonial component, and this is a serious lack in her analysis.
7Lyndall is a forerunner of the educated, financially independent, sexually emancipated "New Woman" celebrated by (mostly male) writers of the 1890s. But her attempt at emancipation points up the gap between the model and the reality; Schreiner's own life similarly reveals the strains in the New Woman ideology.

8This quotation from an early letter of Schreiner's shows that Lyndall's confused desire to be "delivered" is like her author's: "But no one will ever absorb me and make me lose myself utterly, and unless someone did I should never marry" (Letter to Mrs. Cawood, 1878, Letters 4-5).

9Elaine Wilson in "Pervasive Symbolism in The Story of an African Farm" discusses the pattern of sleep and waking imagery, concluding too simplistically that the farm is the unawakened world of childhood and the world outside symbolizes the awakening of adulthood.

10However Lyndall's contemptuous description of Gregory Rose as "a man-woman" (197) is indicative of the contempt that Schreiner often showed for women, another sign of her own conflict about sex roles. She wrote to Ellis: "please see that they bury me in a place where there are no women. I've not been a woman really . . ." (1888, Letters 142).

11For instance, Laurens van der Post, The Lost World of the Kalahari and other books, whom Doris Lessing has memorably criticized for projecting the white man's fantasies onto Africans.

12Showalter 199. I have not been able to confirm this elsewhere.

13The novel has been widely dismissed and neglected. Even in First and Scott's excellent biography it is barely mentioned. It was out of print from the 1920s until 1982, when Virago Press republished it. Doris Lessing dismisses the novel ("Afterword to The Story of an African Farm" 112). Dinesen and Gordimer do not discuss it.

14Schreiner began From Man to Man in 1873, took a manuscript of the novel with her to England in 1881, and, as her letters show, worked and worried over it for the rest of her life. According to her husband the title comes from a sentence of John (Lord) Morley: "From man to man nothing matters but . . . charity" (Introduction by S.C. Cronwright-Schreiner, From Man to Man 495).

15In a sign that the novel has begun to be reassessed, Laurence Lerner in "Olive Schreiner and the Feminists" describes Rebekah as a unique heroine, who does "the truly radical thing for a defiant woman," which is to survive (75). He writes:
"Rebekah is a woman of strong sexual feeling, and strong emotional dependence; at the same time, she is competent, self-reliant and capable of learning independence. She is Amelia and Becky combined, she is Jane Eyre deprived of the conventional novel plot—she is exactly the kind of woman the feminist novel needed" (79).

For a description of these early British socialists and Schreiner's place among them see Sheila Rowbotham, *Women, Resistance and Revolution*.

Having been an early admirer of Rhodes, she became a fierce opponent. The nonfiction *Political Situation* (1896), written with her husband, and her novel *Trooper Peter Halket* (1897) were direct attacks on his policies in Rhodesia.

She broke with the South African women's suffrage movement because black and coloured enfranchisement was not part of their program. She joined her brother W.P. Schreiner, a liberal M.P., to fight unsuccessfully for black rights in the constitution.

Cronwright was a South African farmer and lawyer, younger than she, who, going so far as to take her name and subordinate his career to hers, sympathized with her politics and supported her writing. They did however spend long periods apart, ostensibly because of Olive Schreiner's health.

She wrote "The Prelude" in Italy in 1888. As she described it, "... suddenly, in an instant, the whole of this little Prelude flashed on me... it's a picture in small, a kind of allegory, of the life of the woman in the book!!" (Letter to Mrs. Francis Smith, 1909, *Letters* 291).

As Showalter points out, contemporary feminists adapted the theory of social Darwinism to claim that women were more highly evolved, spiritually and morally, than men (185-86). Schreiner develops this very argument in her novel, an example of contradictions in her evolutionary theory which echo other ideological contradictions in her writing.

As well as an introduction to the first edition of the novel, Cronwright-Schreiner wrote a precis of what he thought the intended ending was to be, based on his wife's notes and outline. This postscript is reprinted in the Virago Press edition (505-07).
Chapter Three
Isak Dinesen: Eve as Adam

Out of Africa

The young Danish bride Karen Blixen discovers her persona in the highlands of Kenya: benevolent mistress, fearless lion hunter, and finally, the consummate story-teller Isak Dinesen. She approaches Africa as a European, as a woman, and as a future writer; these three determinants of her memoir Out of Africa combine in a pattern quite different from that of Olive Schreiner's novel The Story of an African Farm.

First of all, Isak Dinesen undeniably writes as a European settler; she emigrated in 1913 at the age of twenty-eight to what was then the Protectorate of British East Africa to manage a coffee farm owned by her family in Denmark. Large tracts of fertile land were being made available to white settlers, while the Kikuyu, Masai and other tribes were being confined to reserves and, through the imposition of taxes, forced to work for wages on the white farms. The settlers of the time were largely wealthy and upper-class. The Karen Dinesen who emigrated to East Africa to marry her Swedish cousin, Bror Blixen, came less out of love for her profligate and libertine husband (she had been in love with his brother) than, one suspects, for the opportunity of becoming Baroness Von Blixen-Finecke, and even more for the opportunity of escaping the narrow horizons of a woman of her class in Denmark. Added to these reasons was the fact that her father had explored America as a young man, and it was this romantic image of him that she preserved after his
suicide when she was a child.¹ For several reasons, then, she was prepared to fall in love with the beautiful and not inconsequential chunk of the East African highlands (6,000 acres) that she soon became sole mistress of, when Bror made it clear that he was more interested in his love affairs in town than in the running of the farm. Before they separated and later divorced he gave her syphilis, of which she was never fully cured. She rarely mentions her husband in Out of Africa. This indirect reference is one of the few: "Our real trouble was that we were short of capital, for it had all been spent in the old days before I took over the running of the farm" (228).

The Baroness Blixen, as depicted in her memoir, evinces the classic colonial qualities of the beloved and revered mistress of scores of black servants and laborers whose fate hangs upon hers. Furthermore, the black characters are idealized and distorted to fit the author's fantasy of herself; they are described as beautiful wild creatures akin to the animals and the landscape, and as noble savages or "true aristocrats," according to Dinesen's ideal of feudal Northern European society. However, her portrayal of Africa is not quite so schematic or simple. The complexity and interest come, in my opinion, from her status as a woman. Living in Africa freed her from the restrictions of upper-middle-class Danish society, so that she was able to create the self which matured into one of the most admired writers of our century.

As depicted in her letters and in Judith Thurman's definitive biography, the young Karen is a personality too large for the small stage of her life in Denmark. She is bursting
with talent and intensity that those around her find unnerving and unnatural in a young woman. She writes plays for family theatricals and sketches out gothic tales, most of which will remain undeveloped until she returns from Africa to become Isak Dinesen. In short she is a frustrated female artist who goes to Africa in search of the autonomy and power of the male artist. In East Africa her strong personality comes into its own. The physical, psychological and financial difficulties of Karen Blixen's life in Kenya call upon qualities which are traditionally male: physical courage, skill in hunting, egotism, self-sufficiency, and authority. As evidenced in her letters the real Karen Blixen was often ill, lonely, and prostrate with sorrow, when, for instance, her lover Denys Finch-Hatton would leave after one of his brief, intermittent visits. But her life in Africa gave her the freedom to imagine herself as she would have liked to be, and to live up to that image to a large extent. Thus the African colony offered her something of what the "wilderness" has traditionally offered young men: an opportunity to recreate her life on her own terms, and an opportunity for heroism. She writes in the beginning of Out of Africa: "The views were immensely wide. Everything that you saw made for greatness and freedom, and unequalled nobility" (15).

Inevitably she mythologizes her experience in the typical colonial way in which the focus is on the European hero or heroine for which Africa is a backdrop, and the Africans are, at best, a supporting cast, at worst, part of the fauna. Her book begins, "I had a farm in Africa . . . ." Kenya is described in the past tense as if now that the writer has left it it no
longer exists. Karen Blixen is Adam, and Africa was her Eden. In a typical example, she describes a herd of buffalo approaching as if they "were being created before my eyes and sent out as they were finished" (23).

However, the sensitivity with which she portrays the land and people modifies—although it cannot redeem—her racism and ethnocentrism. This sympathy comes from her identification with the "primitive" world. What attracts her to the Africans is not her shared sense of oppression—as in Schreiner—but her shared sense of their nobility and of the fragility of their position. As a memoir, *Out of Africa* is suffused with the tragedy that threatens from the beginning and finally overtakes the heroine when her farm fails. The Baroness' doom is seen as akin to that of the Kikuyu and Masai, whose superior but anachronistic way of life is doomed by modern society. She, like them, does not fit her time, and subsists, as she portrays the Africans subsisting, on the bread of her ideals, her emotions, and above all, her imaginative conception of herself. So Dinesen's sense of the precariousness of her undertaking in Africa, and of the persona that she has created there, enables her to impart a sense of the precariousness of the native cultures, the wild country and animals of East Africa during the process of colonization in the nineteen-tens and twenties.

Dinesen identifies with the animals she hunts, evincing a particular affinity for the lions. Shooting lions with Denys Finch-Hatton was, she writes, "a declaration of love" (102). She attributes to animals, most obviously the fawn Lulu, but
even to herds of elephants and elands, human motivations and characteristics.

Similarly she focuses upon human misfits and eccentrics. Kamante, for instance (who shares a chapter with Lulu), has "the arrogant greatness of soul of the real dwarf, who, when he finds himself at a difference with the whole world, holds the world to be crooked" (34). Kamante's arrogance helps to inspire the proudly eccentric character that Karen Blixen was to assume as Isak Dinesen. She places herself and her friends, such as Berkeley Cole and Denys--who, following the Baroness' predilection for the "natural aristocracy," are upper-class Englishmen--in the category of those who are at a difference with the modern world and hold the world to be crooked. Her expatriate Englishmen are European versions of the Masai warrior and the Kikuyu chief. She dismisses the later, more middle-class immigrants as crass money-grubbers who turned Africa into "a business proposition." The author and her select group of Europeans share a special affinity with the Africans, which she explains by the natural sympathy between "the true aristocracy and the true proletariat of the world" (146). With this paradox she attempts to erase the contradictions of her own position as defender of the Africans while being, in the words of her biographer "one of the greatest feudal overlords of the country" (Thurman 128).

Dinesen is aware of the irony of her position; she points out that the so-called squatters, that is the original inhabitants of "her" land, probably regard her as "a sort of
superior squatter on their estates" (19). She often conveys her admiration for the Africans, as in this characteristic statement: "The discovery of the dark races was to me a magnificent enlargement of all my world" (24). In a sensitive summary of the history of East Africa, she suggests that the Kikuyu sold as slaves displayed an ironic resignation toward their tormentors. She imagines them saying, "You are here on our account. You exist for our sake, not we for your sake" (111). Similarly she describes how the Somali women make of their absolute dependence on men a celebration of Amazon-like strength:

These daughters of a fighting race went through their ceremonial of primness as through a great graceful war-dance; butter would not melt in their mouth, neither would they rest until they had drunk the heart's blood of their adversary; they figured like three ferocious young she-wolves in seemly sheep's clothing (139).

In this passage she imaginatively strips away the assumed submissiveness of the Somali women to reveal their inner dynamism. She must surely have felt that beneath her own "prim" exterior was a similar elemental strength, a strength, in fact, that Africa revealed to her by offering a unique challenge to her courage and self-reliance.

It is also significant that in ending her chapters, Dinesen usually gives the Africans the last word, a device which often reflects ironically on the exploits of her white characters. For example, at the end of the "Visitors to the Farm" section, an old man asks if Denys and Karen can see God in their airplane. To their non-committal answer he replies, "I do not know at all why you two go on flying" (172).
Thus Dinesen is alive to the ironies of white power in Africa to a degree which was strikingly unusual among the settlers in British East Africa in the nineteen-twenties, who fought strenuously to entrench white supremacy. On one hand, the Baroness Blixen, with characteristic noblesse, takes her privileged position for granted, which safely allows her to sympathize with her dependents. On the other hand, she knows that she herself is hostage to the precarious financing of her farm, her raison d'être in Africa. She was frustrated by her dependence on her family's money, on the price of coffee, and finally, on the good will of the banks. It is partly through her own situation that she empathizes with the Africans who have lost their own land and must serve inferior masters. As her own plight worsens, Karen Blixen becomes painfully aware that her "male" role of farmer, law-giver and hunter is self-created, has been willed into being by her own power of artifice. Increasingly her power of artifice takes over and transforms the bitter reality; in this process we witness the emergence of the storyteller Isak Dinesen, who is in a sense born out of Karen Blixen's debacle.

Dinesen's critics respond to different elements of her remarkable self-transformation. Robert Langbaum's seminal study, *The Gayety of Vision*, establishes *Out of Africa* as a pastoral romance. Patricia Meyer Spacks in *The Female Imagination* emphasizes that Dinesen's archetype is female: the ideal self image that she generates is one based on connection,
relationship, and love. Her writer's imagination "preserves the female vocation of loving as part of the artist's vocation: to see, to recognize, to shape" (389). Abdul R. JanMohamed in Manichean Aesthetics concentrates on Dinesen's experience as a "stranger," who living among the Africans was divested of her original identity and freed to choose a new one:

... disintegration becomes the basis for a reconstruction of a more complex personality and a more profound social relationship with the natives.... Dinesen's experience as a stranger is a genuinely liberating one that profoundly augments the superficial license provided by the privileges of a colonial society: the freedom not to give a damn for conventions pales in contrast to the freedom from a prefabricated self (54-55).

The central metaphor in Out of Africa is the Biblical Creation. Isak Dinesen loves the Africans, the mountains, the rain, the lions and elephants as if they were her children, aspects of herself. The author is not only Adam but God as well; or perhaps Karen Blixen is Adam and Isak Dinesen is God. When she and Denys fly over the plains in his airplane she feels toward the herds of animals below "as God did when he had just created them, and before he commissioned Adam to give them names" (167). When she writes an account of the life of one of "her" Kikuyu, it is as if she has created him anew by immortalizing him on paper. She describes the man's wonder and gratitude:

Such a glance did Adam give the Lord when he formed him out of the dust, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul. I had created him and shown him himself: Jogona Kanyagga of life everlasting (92).

Jogona Kanyagga, evidence of the power of the written word, becomes Isak Dinesen's work of art.
In JanMohamed's perceptive analysis, whereas Dinesen transforms the consciousness of the Africans by introducing them to the written word, she is in turn influenced by the mythic consciousness, the metonymic connections, the oral traditions, of their preliterate society. Adopting the role of the dreamer, she admits into her tale the freedom of the magical and mythical. She writes:

The thing which in the waking world comes nearest to a dream is night in a big town, where nobody knows one or the African night. There too is infinite freedom: it is there that things are going on, destinies are made round you, there is activity on all sides, and it is none of your concern (71).

As God-artist Dinesen is dreaming the farm; at one point she writes, "I must call in fresh forces, or the farm will run into a bad dream, a nightmare" (105). In the end she loses the farm but keeps the dream of the farm: her story.

In *Out of Africa* there is no syphilis, no miscarriage, no bitter divorce from Bror Blixen, no rupture with Denys, no attempted suicide, none of the despair which Judith Thurman describes as surrounding her last weeks in Africa (246). There is violence and death but they are aesthetically transformed and integrated into the story which the author depicts as unfolding before her in a connected series of marvelous characters and entertaining adventures. It is a collection of beautiful vignettes, remembered in a seemingly casual, random way, but which are actually carefully crafted, fixed in time, made perfect. The voice of the narrator-heroine is controlled and detached. Karen Blixen's coffee farming was but the raw material for Isak Dinesen's refined, crystallized story. In
this version, even Denys' death in a plane crash figures as a tragic event which fittingly marks the heroine's departure from Africa. It is with a majestic sense of an ending that the loss of her farm is marked by the deaths of her friends Chief Kinanjui, Denys, and earlier, Berkeley Cole, about whom she writes: "An epoch in the colony came to an end with him" (158). These remarks together with other vignettes, such as the story of Emmanuelson (141-46), the tragedian who walks into lion country, illustrate her sense of tragedy suffusing and ennobling her life; Karen Blixen, like Emmanuelson, is an actor, who consciously assumes her tragic role, and so rises above her mundane problems. Dinesen uses the metaphor of the theatre for artistic metamorphosis, as in this description of a night-time Ngoma or dance: "The fire made the dancing place a stage of the first order, it collected all the colours and movements within it into a unity" (120). It is this artificial unity of the stage that she borrows to order and unify her own story.

To pursue the emphasis on artifice, there are several allusions to The Thousand and One Nights, which suggest that Dinesen sees herself as Scheherezade, who defeats evil and escapes death by means of her charm, wit, audaciousness and art. She describes how in the evenings she would sit "cross-legged like Scheherezade herself" (159). Scheherezade represents here the woman artist who triumphs over her circumstances by sheer imaginative power, who saves her life by means of her stories, as Dinesen by means of her stories salvaged her life from the wreck of her African farm.
Dinesen compares flying over Africa in Denys' plane to Prince Ali being carried by the Djinn in one of Scheherezade's tales; by viewing the world from a great height, she achieves "the full freedom of three dimensions," concluding, characteristically, that "now I understand everything" (167-8). That sublime perspective she attempts to impart in *Out of Africa*.

**Shadows on the Grass**

The view in *Shadows on the Grass* is substantially the same; only some seventy pages long, it is a kind of Afterword to *Out of Africa* in which she tells something of what happened to "her" Africans after she left Kenya. The dream has dimmed, the rich colors grown faint; the dramatis personae have receded into the distance and the farm into the realm of fiction. Yet in this sequel to the *Out of Africa* myth certain people and incidents, certain aspects of her lost life in Africa stand out in the author's memory, which gives her second memoir different emphases. First, she focuses on her Somali head servant, Farah Aden, who had recently died, as a central figure. She begins the book with a vision of Farah, calling him "the doorkeeper to all of [my memories]," "a part of myself," her amputated right hand. She writes that "Farah and I had all the dissimilarities required to make up a unity" (281-83). Farah emerges as her double, her Waldo; he, not Denys or Bror or Berkeley, is her male half and alter ego. Farah comes to represent for her Africa itself, which she sees as having complemented and completed her unfinished personality. As we shall see,
Lessing's and Gordimer's female main characters also have their Waldos, their platonic friends who inspire and complete them, and who represent for them some aspect of Africa.

The other element of the original memoir which stands out in *Shadows on the Grass* is her New Year's lion hunt with Denys, which episode she lovingly retells in such mystical language as this: "a lion hunt . . . is an affair of perfect harmony, of deep, burning mutual desire and reverence between two truthful, undaunted creatures, on the same wavelength" (305). The glorification of hunting lions who often pose no immediate threat to herself or the people on her lands is a defense of her predatory relationship with Africa. The mystique of the hunt, brought by the upper-class settlers from Europe, took on grand—even grotesque—proportions in a country that abounded in large game. Hunting for trophies, as Karen Blixen and her friends did, was a quintessentially colonial activity, embodying the settlers' careless aggression toward the land. J.M. Coetzee describes the gun as the instrument of the colonist's perverse love of Africa; this is borne out in Isak Dinesen's loving descriptions of lion killing.

However, with typical self-criticism, Dinesen follows her paean to lion-hunting with a disclaimer that shows how sensitive she is to the moral, and for her, aesthetic, issues raised by big game hunting. She writes

> When I first came out to Africa I could not live without getting a fine specimen of each single kind of African game. In my last ten years out there I did not fire a shot except in order to get meat for my Natives. It became to me an unreasonable thing,
indeed in itself ugly or vulgar, for the sake of a few hours' excitement to put out a life that belonged in the great landscape. . . . But lion-hunting was irresistible to me; I shot my last lion a short time before I left Africa (306).

The contradiction between, "... I did not fire a shot except . . ." and, "... lion hunting was irresistible to me" is a telling example of what seem to be contradictory views of herself as ecologist and hunter. This passage can be explained perhaps by Dinesen's vision of herself as a godlike figure, possessed of the complementary powers of creation and destruction, of nurturing and killing. Certainly Dinesen's statements about hunting exemplify her complex attitude toward her role in East Africa. While she defends the colonial ideology, the civilizing mission, she remains sensitive to the problems it creates for the Africans and their land. This pervasive ambivalence, rather than weakening the fabric of her work, strengthens it, gives it depth and humanity.

Dinesen and Schreiner

Out of Africa was partly inspired by The Story of an African Farm, as Dinesen writes in her introduction to Schreiner's novel, but African Farm does not seem to have directly influenced her ideas or style. She read the novel in Denmark before going to Africa, using it as a springboard for her romantic imagination: "The world of the book had lived on . . . in the mind of the reader, and had grown and propagated there" (Introduction to The Story of an African Farm v). The aspects of the novel that remained important to her are the
description of landscape and the atmosphere, not the depressing plot and despairing characters, whom, in fact, she sees in the rosier light of her own heroic vision. Dinesen's version of *African Farm*, then, reflects her own more positive view of a white woman's possibilities in colonial Africa.

In spite of Dinesen's homage to Schreiner, the relation between them is one of contrast. Karen Blixen found in Africa the freedom to recreate herself as Isak Dinesen. In her memoir she achieves a magnificent distance from her own troubles and tragedies and the troubles and tragedies of "her" Africans. Isak Dinesen triumphs over the raw material of Karen Blixen's story to create a beautiful and romantic tale of Eden in which the author-protagonist is both Adam and God. However, it was the plight of Karen Blixen, the woman searching for a role and a voice, that sensitized her to the plight of the colonized Africans, and led in turn to her strong identification with them. This gives the memoir the insight and depth to make it more than a European's romantic fantasy of Africa. Thus she can describe herself as "a squatter" on the farm that she acknowledges really belongs to her African laborers, although she cannot surrender her hard-won power and prestige as lady of the manor. To escape this dilemma she adopts a maternalistic stance: "these people are my children and I must help and protect them." This colonial maternalism is similar to the position that Rebekah takes in *From Man to Man*; and it is a result of much the same process: Karen Blixen like Rebekah is awakened and sensitized to the problems of the Africans by her related problems as a woman.
But the aesthetic processes of the two writers are quite different. Karen Blixen's identification with others translates into the idea that the farm, its people and animals are a world of the author's creation, her dream, her fiction. Through art she perfects her imperfect reality, completes her incomplete story. Her medium is the short story; even Out of Africa is structured as a series of overlapping incidents and anecdotes, some (in "From an Immigrant's Notebook") no longer than a paragraph. This form gives her control, allows her to keep her distance, to maintain her gravely humorous, philosophical, slightly blase tone: "This is just a good tale, one that might have entertained Denys by the fire," she seems to be saying.

Olive Schreiner, in contrast, writes in the Preface to African Farm that she refuses to perfect her imperfect reality, to complete her incomplete story. She sets out to write as a realist who "sadly . . . must squeeze the colour from his brushes and dip it into the grey pigments around him. He must paint what lies before him" (28). Of course Olive Schreiner does not exactly paint what lies before her. Like Isak Dinesen she also distorts the reality of Africa to tell her own story. The major difference between the two writers, though, is that Olive Schreiner's novels explore and illuminate their contradictions.

In her Preface Schreiner describes two methods by which "human life may be painted": "the stage method" reorders reality into a satisfying, but false, artistic whole. The other method,
"the method of the life we all lead," reflects the disorder, the illogic, the incompleteness of real life. Schreiner concludes that, "The canons of criticism that bear upon the one cut cruelly upon the other" (27). Clearly, her method is the latter, the "realistic" method, while Dinesen's might be characterized as the former, "the stage method." And they should be evaluated, as Schreiner says, by different criteria.

Out of Africa and Shadows on the Grass reflect Dinesen's education and reading; the literary influences upon her writing were different from the books which influenced Schreiner. Dinesen was educated at home by governesses and female relations. She read widely, and her real education, as she saw it, came as did Schreiner's from books. A strong early influence was the literary critic Georg Brandes, whose essays introduced her to Shakespeare, Shelley, Heine—and Nietzsche, for whose thought she felt an affinity throughout her life.  

Her heroic ideal of the person who actively embraces his fate—seen in Out of Africa in characters from Kamante to Denys to Karen Blixen—was clearly influenced by Nietzsche (from whom she took the epigraph to Out of Africa). She also retained her love of Shakespeare, identifying with his tragic heroes as well as with the strong women in the comedies who assume male roles and male powers. Africa for her was like one of Shakespeare's enchanted woods in which a woman can become a man, or more precisely, have the best of both sexes.

Schreiner's theatrical metaphor is an apt description of Dinesen's artistic stance. Her vantage point is the god-like
view from Denys' airplane, from which the world is a timeless, comprehensible, and very lovely pattern. Her voice is that of the ancient, all-knowing tale spinner. Olive Schreiner's vantage point, on the other hand, is that of the ant who lives out its life on a mound of sandy Karoo soil, under the oppressive glare of the South African sun. The narrator's voice is difficult to separate from that of the autobiographical characters, who are depicted as valiantly but fruitlessly living out their insignificant and obscure lives in an insignificant and obscure corner of God's creation. They are the butt of a cruel joke that only God might find humorous—if he exists, which they increasingly doubt.

Thus the pain, alienation and tragedy that are unacknowledged in Dinesen's story are the central facts of Schreiner's story. Whereas Dinesen's autobiographical heroine tries to ignore the dimly sketched historical and economic forces that do in fact defeat her, Schreiner's characters, who view life from the bottom, are acutely conscious that they are victims of history, economics and politics. They analyze, and agonize over, the ideological currents that even on their remote farm swirl over them.

Dinesen depicts the brutality of the colonial system, but dissociates herself from it; her farm is free from the evils of colonialism and she herself has flourished under the system which gives her near-absolute power over thousands of acres of land and hundreds of lives. In contrast, Schreiner's white protagonists are shown to be stunted and ultimately destroyed by the brutality of the colonial system of which they are part.
Her heroine and hero are alienated from birth; they are parentless and landless in a society based upon the inheritance of the family farm; they are introspective and intellectual, impractical and unconventional in a narrow-minded, anti-intellectual, materialistic and dogmatically religious society. In short, whereas Dinesen's African farm is Paradise, Schreiner's African farm is Purgatory, and her heaven is an ideal which is unattainable even in dreams—or fiction. Consequently, while Dinesen is content with the view from heaven, Schreiner's ant-like characters struggle to escape their sandy patch of soil.

This difference is partly based on the different circumstances that prevailed in their respective societies. Schreiner's Cape Colony of the eighteen-sixties and seventies, with a much longer history of white settlement, was a more rigid society, strongly influenced by the conservative and religious rural Afrikaners whom she portrays with the mixed feelings of an outsider. Dinesen's East Africa, not even a colony when she first arrived, was a country of outsiders, a loose collection of individuals in search of their unique visions in what they liked to think of as a virgin land, newly created for them. It was for the white settler a freer, more open, and more peaceful land than the South African colonies with their history of conflict between Dutch and British, blacks and whites. Even the landscape and climate of the East African highlands is less oppressive than the desert Karoo which Schreiner chose as her representative South African landscape.
Another cause of Dinesen's and Schreiner's different aesthetic responses to Africa lies of course in their biographies. Dinesen embraced Africa as a foreigner and as an adult, seeing it as a place and situation which offered her a heroic role, a new, autonomous identity. In late middle age she looked back upon her years there as a lost, golden time. Schreiner, having been born in inauspicious circumstances in South Africa, quite naturally longed to escape to England, which might offer her more opportunities as a writer, an intellectual and an activist. It is not surprising that her view of Africa is more realistic, more critical than Dinesen's, and her ideas more radical. This critical, radical bent was only reinforced in an England which, while it was stimulating, did not fulfill a fantasy, the way Africa did for Dinesen. What Schreiner saw and did and read in England reinforced her feminism, developed her incipient socialism, and increased her knowledge of psychology. She directed her new awareness of self and society back into her native South African milieu, as we have seen in *From Man to Man*, in which she advocated fundamental changes in the organization of society as a solution to the problems of women, and by extension of other oppressed groups.

In conclusion, Schreiner in *The Story of an African Farm* addresses the dilemma of the female artist much more explicitly than does Dinesen in *Out of Africa*. The female pride that is apparent in Dinesen's description of Somali women--and in her own independence--is in Schreiner a passionate concern, explicated and defended at length. In contrast to Dinesen's
comparison of herself to Scheherazade, the cunning and victorious female storyteller, we have in Schreiner a shattering portrait of the artist as victim. Whereas Dinesen's artist-heroine identifies with and takes inspiration from an Africa of noble natives and grand vistas, Schreiner's characters identify with an Africa of dumb, suffering, and extinct creatures. The two writers provide alternative visions—and alternative fictions—for Doris Lessing and Nadine Gordimer.
Isak Dinesen identified strongly with her aristocratic father Wilhelm, whose pastoral *Letters from the Hunt* (1889) was a model for her own work. Even his contraction of syphilis, which was the presumed cause of his suicide when she was ten, seemed to prefigure her own destiny. (See Thurman 27-29).

Although his point is well taken that Dinesen, unlike most other white settlers, absorbed much from African culture, JanMohamed overlooks the autobiographical component that facilitated this exchange. Dinesen had a predisposition for the mythic over the empirical, the medieval over the modern, etc. Her romantic identification with her aristocratic father as opposed to her more bourgeois mother is evidence of this.

For a description of Dinesen’s early reading see Thurman 50-51.

"Equitare, arcem tendere, veritatem dicere": To ride, to shoot with a bow, to tell the truth ("On the Thousand and One Goals," *Thus Spake Zarathustra* 171). Dinesen’s choice of this epigraph emphasizes the theme of hunting, and by extension the predatory and dominating attitude of the settler in *Out of Africa*. 
Chapter Four
Lessing and Gordimer:
Two Contemporaries and a Problematic Inheritance

Doris Lessing has traveled such a surprising number of aesthetic and ideological routes that it is easy to forget how close her early work was to Nadine Gordimer's. In a 1986 statement, Lessing acknowledges that, "our careers have been very twined together. . . . I think we have a great deal in common in fact" (interview with Eve Bertelsen, Journal of Commonwealth Literature 135).

Gordimer, in a 1979 interview, speaks admiringly of Lessing's ability to change and grow, while noting the early links between their work. In Gordimer's words:

Doris Lessing—always searching, always on her way to something new and different, what a range of intelligence, her every book a blow at artistic complacency. The Golden Notebook I consider her masterpiece.

The first part of Children of Violence, Martha Quest, has some very striking similarities with my first novel, The Lying Days, which I wrote at the same time. Not because we influenced each other--I don't suppose we'd heard of each other; the similarities had to arise--there was such a similarity of development and experience between us where and when we grew up. In another sense those early novels complement each other, I like the idea of a literary patchwork, novel by novel, poem by poem, by different writers, mapping out an era, 'a continent' more and more thoroughly. No one writer can do it. (Interview with Johannes Riis, Kunapipi 25).

For Gordimer, then, the two writers are products of similar Southern African societies in the same era, who, together with other Southern African writers of the time (she mentions Dan Jacobson) "[map] out an era, 'a continent.'" When she speaks of
"a similarity of development and experience" she implies the closer connection of shared sex and race, and shared political sympathies for the left and for black nationalism which emerge in their early autobiographical Bildungsromane, as well as in their stories of the same period.

Gordimer does not acknowledge that the closest bond between them was their shared material and attitudes as women writers. The category of women writers and the related issue of feminism are areas which both Lessing and Gordimer have downplayed or tried to avoid. Lessing made her most cogent statement on the matter in her 1971 Preface to *The Golden Notebook*, in which she voices her disappointment that the book was reduced to "a useful weapon in the sex war" (8), that its larger issues, its overall plan were obscured in the minds of her readers and critics by that aspect which seemed to be "a trumpet for Women's Liberation" (9). As she writes in the Preface, the novel "was written as if the attitudes that have been created by the Women's Liberation movements already existed" (9); that is to say, it takes feminism for granted. Again, "Of course this attempt ["to give the ideological 'feel' of our mid-century"] assumed that that filter which is a woman's way of looking at life has the same validity as the filter which is a man's way . . ." (11).

In effect Lessing does not want to be characterized as a women's writer (that is to say, limited, reduced); she would like the fact that she writes as a woman to be taken for granted, as it is for male writers. Nadine Gordimer also
refuses to be limited to "women's issues." In the 1975 Introduction to her Selected Stories, she writes that she never felt disadvantaged or isolated because of her sex, and that in any case, "all writers are androgynous beings" (11). In several interviews, she has gone so far as to dissociate herself from the feminist movement, which she criticizes as irrelevant both to her personally and to the present South African situation. In 1974 she stated that, "In South Africa Women's Liberation scarcely exists . . . the basic issue for people concerned with liberation is the liberation of black people, male and female" (letter, quoted in Betty M. Fradkin, "Olive Schreiner--An Opposite Picture" 75). In 1981 she said, "I feel that if the real battle for human rights is won the kingdom of . . . feminine liberation follows" (Interview with Susan Gardner, Kunapipi 105). Gordimer pursues her critique of the women's liberation movement in Burger's Daughter, in which the white middle-class feminists are shown to be out of touch with the problems facing non-white women; their goal of sisterhood is depicted as absurd in a society in which all black people lack basic human rights.

Despite her criticism of bourgeois feminism in South Africa, Gordimer is not anti-feminist; the female characters in her fiction learn to define themselves independently of men, partly through their commitment to the black liberation struggle. Thus they find themselves, they become liberated in the feminist sense, through commitment to what Gordimer sees as the larger cause.
Dorothy Driver, in her study of "The Politicisation of Women" in Gordimer's fiction, argues for an implicitly feminist reading. Specifically, she says, "Gordimer's continuing concern with the position of white women in a colonial, racist society is . . . evident both in the ways that she explores women's sexuality and . . . exploits sexual development in her presentation of political development" (35). Gordimer sets up "a reverberating metaphorical relation between sexism and racism" (37). She explores the relation between sex and power, and by extension, the public and private spheres in South Africa. As Driver shows, however, the equation of sexism and racism is far from simple; Gordimer refuses to let the white woman off the hook as a fellow victim; she insists not on women's passivity, but on their shared responsibility, their collusion in racism.

It is over this issue that Gordimer challenges Olive Schreiner, that her relationship to the mother novel, *African Farm*, becomes problematic. She criticizes Schreiner for her blindness, her lack of proportion in putting women's equality before racial equality. She grudgingly allows her her feminism in the context of "her restless, self-searching years in England and Europe," but goes on to say that:

... in the South African context where she always felt herself to belong, and to which she always returned, the feminist issue withers in comparison with the issue of the voterless, powerless state of South African blacks, irrespective of their sex. It was as bizarre then . . . as it is now . . . to regard a campaign for women's rights--black or white--as relevant to the South African situation. Olive Schreiner seems not to have seen that her wronged sense of self, as a woman, her liberation, was a
secondary matter within her historical situation. Ironically, here at least she shared the most persistent characteristic of her fellow colonials: that of discounting the priorities of the real entities of the life around her, while believing she was performing an act of protest against colonial racist thinking ("Review of Olive Schreiner: A Biography by Ruth First and Ann Scott" 17-18).

Essentially Gordimer sees Schreiner's feminism as neurotic, as both ego- and ethno-centric. The vehemence of her language (for instance the use of the word "bizarre" to describe Schreiner's position) signals her identification with the earlier writer. She impatiently and unfairly scolds her for not rising above her problems as a woman, for not providing a better model.

These comments were written in 1980, after she had, presumably, rethought her attitudes toward Schreiner as a result of the First and Scott biography. Her urgent, emotional, and specific criticism of Schreiner is quite different from the rather vague appreciation she wrote in 1961: "The Story of an African Farm is . . . the sort of novel we can hope is to come . . . it takes us away to nothing more limited than the mystery of life itself" ("The Novel and the Nation in South Africa," 49). Whereas in 1961 she had been content to overlook the letter of Schreiner's work in favor of its spirit, in 1980 she judges it more harshly. Her reevaluation is partly the result of her political radicalization during that time span, but it is also evidence of the need to redefine her relation to the mother-writer as she matures and changes.

Lessing too has recently modified her view of the mother-writer by discounting the feminism in Schreiner's novel. In 1980 she said that,
the least important part, I think, is the feminism which is, as it were, the intellectual motivation. She was bitterly conscious of the position of women in the nineteenth century. While she was fighting this particular battle all her life, and fighting it well, she was also preoccupied all the time with other things (Interview with Michael Thorpe, Kunapipi 99).

Lessing's and Gordimer's recent comments seem to echo Dinesen's claim that while, "Lyndall is the champion of woman's rights... no freedom and no equality of women could have helped her against the fatal forces within her own nature which bring her... to her early, lonely grave (Introduction to The Story of an African Farm ix). However, while Dinesen reads Schreiner's feminism as a distraction from the tragic truths at the heart of the novel, Lessing's and Gordimer's objections are political.

Gordimer's criticism and Lessing's downplaying of Schreiner's feminism are in part a denial of the "women's" component that readers and critics have been perhaps too eager to find in the work of all four writers, most obviously in Lessing, but also in Gordimer and Dinesen. The point is that in these writers gender and sexuality interact with natural and social setting, with politics, history and myth. The heroine draws the strength to think independently, to rebel against convention, from her very position of weakness, of irrelevance in the power structure. She is in a sense outside the brutal pact between white male ruler and black male ruled.

Lyndall claims innocence as a victim of this arrangement; Karen Blixen claims innocence as one who can make her own, more beneficent pact. Lessing's and Gordimer's heroines are forced
by history to recognize that they cannot plead either Lyndall's or Karen Blixen's versions of innocence. They are enmeshed in a guilty attraction/repulsion to Africa; as white females they are victims of the colonial system who are not permitted to identify, to suffer with their fellow victims: the blacks. They are safeguarded from the physical suffering of Schreiner's characters, from hunger and the whip, but at the same time cut off from the life around them. Their privileged status alienates them, forcing them to acknowledge a responsibility which the social and political conditions of apartheid increasingly prevent them from acting upon.

Lessing and Gordimer have employed quite different personal and artistic strategies to deal with this dilemma. One has only to compare Burger's Daughter with Lessing's The Good Terrorist (1985) to see that in recent years the two writers have in effect traded ideological places. Whereas Gordimer's portrayal of communist revolutionaries in South Africa is sympathetic, even idealized, Lessing's portrayal of the far left in Britain is a vitriolic attack on misguided "terrorists."

Nonetheless, as Gordimer has noted, their early work has "striking similarities"—which came not from temperament or intellectual affinity, but rather from shared circumstances as colonial women writers in Southern Africa at mid-century. Both Lessing and Gordimer recognized that the situation—and their situation—were intolerable, recorded this fact in their fiction, and, like Schreiner and Dinesen, envisioned new social orders.
Lessing and Her Precursors

Doris Lessing's situation as the daughter of English colonists in the still wild, sparsely settled Southern Rhodesia of the nineteen-thirties closely resembles both that of Karen Blixen in East Africa two decades earlier and that of Olive Schreiner in South Africa in the late nineteenth century. The magnificent highveld setting of Lessing's African fiction has more in common with Blixen's soaring hill country than with Schreiner's oppressive desert plain. In Lessing as in Blixen we find that collection of eccentric characters who come to full bloom in the freedom and isolation of the colony. On the other hand, Lessing follows Schreiner's emphasis on social conditions and colonial politics.

In the following passage in which she describes the colonial society of her youth, Lessing first seems to echo Dinesen, then quotes Schreiner, and finally speaks for herself as "a child of the invaders":

. . . every one had left a safe and narrow rut of a life out of a sense of adventure and a need to widen horizons, for a country to them wild and often dangerous. It cannot be said that they were a cultivated or wide-minded people, for most fitted Olive Schreiner's definition of the South Africans of her time as 'a nation of petty bourgeois philistines.' . . . The children and grandchildren of these invaders condemn their parents, wish they could repudiate their own history. But that is not so easy (Forward to Lawrence Vambe, An Ill-fated People: Zimbabwe Before and After Rhodes xvi-xvii).
This last statement about the reluctant inheritors of colonial history and colonial power (note that the whites did not relinquish power in Zimbabwe until 1980) is a useful summary of the major theme in Doris Lessing's African fiction. Furthermore, as we shall see, the theme of colonial inheritance and personal responsibility continues to play a part in her recent "space fiction."

Like Schreiner and Dinesen, Lessing is cognizant of the pre-settler history of the corner of Africa which her white characters inhabit. As in the other two writers, her white characters come to see themselves through the prism of black history: as squatters on land that is not theirs by right—as invaders. In *Martha Quest*, as in *African Farm* and *Out of Africa*, the white heroine lives on a vast tract of land worked by recently displaced black tribespeople. In her isolated colony, the young heroine has the freedom to develop ideas and roles which fall outside the conventions of her mother society, be it lower-middle-class England or upper-middle-class Denmark. She is awed and inspired by the alien landscape, history and culture which she discovers around her; however she is confused and guilt-ridden about her position as an invader in Africa. Lessing, who from her mid-twentieth-century vantage point is psychologically and politically more sophisticated than her two forebears, develops these conflicts more fully.

*Martha Quest*, portrayed with critical irony, is herself painfully self-conscious and self-critical, ironically aware of the gap between her ideal vision of herself and the muddled
reality. The important feature that Martha shares with the heroines of Dinesen and Schreiner is her special position as white but female: on the one hand, autonomous and powerful, on the other, subject to men and male institutions. Karen Blixen was the white feudal mistress of a black village. The Baroness' autonomy, nevertheless, was undermined by financial pressure from her family in Denmark, her contracting syphilis from her husband, and her emotional dependence on the sporadic appearances of her lover. In short, she was undermined by her sex. Fortunately, however, the consciousness of her own precariousness gave her empathetic, if "matronizing," insight into the dispossessed Kikuyu and Masai who would otherwise form a mere backdrop to the larger-than-life heroine.

Olive Schreiner's autobiographical heroines also create themselves, but in oppressive rather than splendid isolation. They are victims of harsh parental figures and of the more rigid and repressive, longer-established South African society. Consequently, unlike Karen Blixen, Lyndall looks longingly to Europe as the home of intellectual freedom. Her felt oppression—-as young, female, intellectual, and through Waldo, artistic—first drives her to become a fierce feminist and then by consequence a fierce opponent of the existing social order. Rebekah begins to identify as a woman with her black maid; she accepts responsibility for her husband's child and teaches her sons and adopted daughter to question white supremacy. Lyndall's personal rebellion evolves into Rebekah's strongly argued opposition to colonial ideology. Whereas Dinesen simply
disregarded any elements of white Kenyan society that might have cramped her eccentric, aristocratic style (for instance the post-World War I business-oriented middle-class settlers), Schreiner struggled in her life and art to influence the future of her native South Africa.

Doris Lessing's heroine, like Karen Blixen, imagines herself as Adam in Eden, but, like Lyndall and Rebekah, she also feels oppressed by her family and by the intellectual limitations of colonial life. Like Schreiner's heroines she turns her experience into a critique of racism and imperialism. For example, when Martha imagines a city on the veld in which whites and blacks live in equality and harmony, she bars most of the whites of her acquaintance from her Utopia because of their racism and narrowmindedness. Martha, like Schreiner's autobiographical characters, idealizes England and longs to leave Southern Africa. Of course, when finally in London, Martha yearns for her African farm. If Lyndall had escaped to England as her author had, Schreiner would probably have portrayed her as similarly lost and divided. It is evident from the nightmarish portrait of Rebekah's sister Baby Bertie as a kept woman in London that Schreiner had negative feelings about England ("How the Rain Rains in London," Ch. XI of From Man to Man). Martha, like Karen Blixen and Rebekah, comes to identify with black Africans and to see herself as their defender. Her idealism is deflated, however, both by the author and by the self-conscious, cynical heroine herself (who in this respect resembles Schreiner's Lyndall).
Following quite consciously in Olive Schreiner's footsteps, then, Doris Lessing portrays her heroine from the perspective of her own era, and of her particular experience of pre-war and wartime Africa and post-war England. Born Doris Tayler in Persia in 1919, she was the daughter of a lower-middle class English couple who, physically and spiritually traumatized by World War I, sought a new life in the British colony of Southern Rhodesia. Lessing has noted that her relationship to her parents was similar to Olive Schreiner's in that both writers had idealistic, unworldly fathers who were unsuccessful in practical terms, and capable, ambitious but domineering mothers ("Afterword to The Story of an African Farm" 108). Similar too was their families' financial insecurity; from the time that they arrived on their land in the district of Banket in 1925, the Taylers were always about to make their fortune in maize, tobacco or minerals, and "get off the farm." In fact, their farm was heavily mortgaged and unprofitable, and the Taylers remained for twenty years in the pole and thatch house that had been built to last a few seasons--a house that Lessing loved and has returned to several times in her writing.

Like Olive Schreiner, Doris Lessing was a solitary, creative child who spent her time roaming the large farm and wild veld. Unlike Schreiner, though, Lessing was able to read widely in English and European literature, history, politics, economics and psychology. Although she was sent to school, she describes it as a negligible part of her education. She left school at fourteen, worked as an au pair in Salisbury, then
moved back to her parents' farm to write. At eighteen she took another job in town, soon after made a hasty marriage—like Martha's—and had two children. During the war, she, like Martha, was active in a local communist group; she divorced, remarried a German communist (Lessing), and had a son with him. At the age of twenty-nine she left Rhodesia with her youngest son and her first novel, *The Grass is Singing*, which was published in 1950.

Lessing's childhood and journey from obscurity in Southern Africa to fame as a writer in London follow the pattern of Schreiner's early career: a rather wild childhood, an idiosyncratic education, rebellion against her mother, the achievement of a measure of independence through traditionally female governess-like jobs, becoming a writer in isolation and then bursting upon the British literary scene. However, unlike Schreiner, Lessing has been able to sustain her literary output: by the end of 1986 she had published over twenty-five books: novels, stories, nonfiction, drama and poetry. Furthermore, in contrast to Schreiner's unhappy, indecisive state of not belonging in either England or South Africa, Lessing has lived in London since 1949. Her decision to live in England, although not completely voluntary because she was banned from returning to Rhodesia or South Africa, seems to have been less traumatic and ambivalent than it was for Schreiner. Her nineteen-fifties fiction and nonfiction (that is, *Going Home* and *In Pursuit of the English*, 1960, about her experience of post-war London) paint a bittersweet exile's portrait, in which the damp grey poverty of London is contrasted with the memory of African sky
and sun. But gradually the vivid portrayal of her African youth in her early fiction is replaced by a nostalgic, increasingly symbolic use of the African setting and theme in her fiction of the sixties and seventies, which is set mainly in England.

Ideologically the early Lessing has much in common with Schreiner. Although she has refused to be labeled as a feminist or women's writer, her novels, like Schreiner's, have been read eagerly as feminist documents. The critique of female education, marriage and motherhood is as strong an element of Lessing's early writing as it is of Schreiner's; however Lessing shows more systematically how the position of women relates to larger social issues. Schreiner, in keeping with her time, was a champion of justice and equality within a rather vague socialist framework. Lessing, who came of age in the nineteen-thirties, was influenced by the better defined and more comprehensive ideology of communism. By her own reckoning, she was a communist, "emotionally if not organizationally," from 1942, and a Party member from 1945 to 1956 ("The Small Personal Voice" 20). Along with many other intellectuals she left the Party because she was disillusioned by Stalinism, but she remained loyal to the communist ideal. In her 1957 writer's manifesto, "The Small Personal Voice," she declares her commitment to a Marxist-humanist world view and to realistic fiction which springs from that world view. She takes as her model the nineteenth-century European novel in which, she says, the writer speaks not only in his individual voice, but also as spokesman and interpreter of his society. She declares her own theme to
be the relation between the individual and the collective, giving as her example the *Children of Violence* series.

The five-volume sequence which begins with *Martha Quest* is an autobiographical series in which the events of Martha's life—from her childhood to her marriages and political activity—are portrayed as representative of her sex, nationality and generation. Lessing's problem in these novels is to strike a balance between three levels of character and plot: the personal or individual, the typical or representative, and the archetypal or mythic. Lessing creates in *Martha Quest* a humorous, critical heroine who is bemused by the discovery that her feelings and actions are largely a function of her place and time, and further determined by the constraints of her female sex and human nature. This last archetypal level corresponds to Lessing's interest in psychoanalysis, and particularly in Jung, which became important in her fiction of the sixties, to be replaced in the seventies by an interest in the middle-eastern mystical philosophy of Sufism, then by a more idiosyncratic vision of human evolution in the setting of the rise and fall of cosmic empires.

The tipping of the balance in Lessing's fiction from the realistic—individual and social—to the archetypal level is illuminated if not explained by the correspondences between her African fiction and Dinesen's. Lessing, like Dinesen, imposes her vision on an African setting that, as she has moved away from it in time and space, has become more nostalgic and mythical. In a 1971 review of Dinesen's African memoirs,
Lessing criticizes her feudal notions, but admires her disdain for feminine conventions and her ability to create a noble if essentially mythical world ("A Deep Darkness"). Significantly, she shares Dinesen's nostalgia for a lost world in which white settlers were few and the traditional native way of life had not yet been destroyed. Essentially she is enthralled by the Dinesen myth, even though it is aristocratic and reactionary according to her political views. Certainly the affinity that Lessing feels for Dinesen reveals an ambivalence in the ex-communist author and her autobiographical heroine Martha Quest which has interesting repercussions in Lessing's later fiction.

In respect to Lessing's nonfiction, Going Home has relevant echoes of Out of Africa. In the following passage Lessing, like Dinesen, regards Africa as the material of fantasy: "It is still uncreated. . . . A magnificent country, with all its riches in the future. Because it is so empty we can dream. We can dream of cities and a civilization more beautiful than anything that has been seen in the world before" (13-14). Lessing's book, like Dinesen's, is structured around anecdotes, dialogues and memories, but whereas Dinesen's seemingly casual ordering of events is actually an artful, poetic reconstruction, Lessing's organization seems to follow the actual journal of her trip home. It is an extended piece of journalism, full of facts and political commentary as well as the author's impressions and memories. Lessing's Dinesenesque nostalgia in Going Home is tempered by her trenchant critique of "Partnership" in the white-dominated Federation.
Although it is not clear if Lessing had read *Out of Africa* before she wrote *Martha Quest*, she certainly did read *The Story of an African Farm* as a young girl, and it deeply influenced her early work. This is most apparent in *Martha Quest*, which seems to have been inspired by and even to be modeled on *African Farm*, and contains several allusions to Schreiner. In 1968, Lessing published "Afterword to *The Story of an African Farm*," in which she discusses the novel's influence on her in terms which echo Dinesen's Introduction to Schreiner's work:

I read the novel when I was fourteen or so, understanding very well the isolation described in it. . . . This was the first 'real' book I'd met with that had Africa for a setting. Here was the substance of truth, and not from England or Russia or France or America, necessitating all kinds of mental translations, switches, correspondences, but reflecting what I knew and could see. And the book became part of me, as the few rare books do (98-99).

She dismisses the plot, acknowledging that *African Farm* is not a conventionally good novel. Instead she lauds it as an original "mixture of journalism and the Zeitgeist and autobiography that comes out of a part of the human consciousness which is always trying to understand itself. . . ." (99). This is not only a good characterization of Schreiner's novels, but also an accurate description of Lessing's own fiction, which is a similarly ambitious and original attempt to explain human character and its determinants.

*The Grass is Singing*

The critical and commercial success of Lessing's first novel *The Grass is Singing* mirrored the reception of Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm*. Its central character Mary Turner
is a negative version of Martha Quest, Karen Blixen and Lyndall; she is without their beauty and brains, their artistic or intellectual ambitions. Mary's models—the ideal images against which she measures her own dissatisfactions—are from Hollywood films and romantic fiction rather than poetry, philosophy and science. But she experiences the same gap between fantasy and reality that Lyndall and Martha feel. As Lessing narrates, "There seemed to be no connexion between the distorted mirror of the screen and her own life; it was impossible to fit together what she wanted for herself, and what she was offered" (46).

Lost to the imagined delights of the town, marooned on her farm—as Lyndall and Martha are—she too feels a prisoner oppressed by hostile emanations from the land, especially, as in Schreiner, by the terrible heat. Mary Turner, in fear and loathing of the farm and its black laborers ("always so close to their lives but also so cut off" 102) is the opposite of Karen Blixen, who embraces every aspect of life on her farm. When Mary's husband falls ill she, like Karen Blixen, takes over the farm, but unlike the heroine of Out of Africa who works alongside her employees, entering into their joys and sorrows, the resentful Mary takes pleasure only in pitting her will against the recalcitrant "boys." Whereas Karen Blixen welcomes the personal relation with her dependents, Mary is terrified of it, taking refuge behind the sjambok. But giving into her hatred by striking Moses mysteriously brings her closer to him; her exercise of power is actually a loss of control which puts her into her servant's power.
From this point Mary is obsessed with Moses. As she loses her grip on the farm and her house, the landscape is increasingly described as savage and menacing. In the last chapter the ironic use of nature so characteristic of white African fiction beginning with Schreiner is evident. It is at the end of the dry season. After a serene and gorgeous dawn the sun rises brutally, drawing the color from the sky and flattening the landscape. Mary's disturbed imagination paints the setting of her death: "the sky shut down over her, with thick yellowish walls of smoke growing up to meet it" (204). Moses is an instrument of terrible nature: "And then the bush avenged itself; that was her last thought. The trees advanced in a rush, like beasts, and the thunder was the noise of their coming" (217). At the moment of her death come the life-giving rains, as they do in *African Farm*.

Mary's violent end follows the pattern of Lyndall's and Waldo's peaceful but unnatural deaths, as Mary's aspirations are theirs in debased form. As they are, she is trapped in a setting and situation which inevitably destroys her. *The Grass is Singing* is a gripping, tightly structured if overwritten realistic novel, which borrows the authority of T.S. Eliot's *Waste Land* to connect Mary's tragedy with a larger statement about the spiritual inadequacy of Western culture--here symbolically defeated by Africa: "In this decayed hole among the mountains/ In the faint moonlight, the grass is singing/. . . . Then spoke the thunder" (from the novel's epigraph). Lessing makes use of the imagery of heat and dryness to symbolize white
discontent and alienation in her other African fiction as well, including the *Children of Violence*. Martha Quest is born in October, the month in which Mary Turner dies, the month of veld fires and tense expectation of the promised rains. Nadine Gordimer pursues the symbolism of drought and rain in *The Conservationist*, in which the African dead, borne on the flood waters, rise to claim their land. Lessing and Gordimer both explore the relation between white mistress and black servant in their short fiction, while Gordimer takes this theme to its logical conclusion in *July's People* in which Maureen Smales becomes a dependent in the tribal village of which her servant July is Chief.

The problematic aspect of *The Grass is Singing* is the total lack of characterization for Moses; the instrument of Mary's death, the avenger of the stolen land, is himself a blank whose motivations remain unfathomable. Gordimer and J.M. Coetzee, whose *In the Heart of the Country* also examines the power of the servant over the mistress on an isolated farm in an arid land—share Lessing's difficulty in creating adequately developed black characters. Nevertheless the white characters in their novels at least attempt to imagine what their black counterparts think and feel. Furthermore, in *The Conservationist* and *July's People* Gordimer gives the reader what glimpses she can of black characters among themselves, free of the interpretation of the white central character. But Lessing does not provide even oblique scenes of black people: as Lorna Sage sees the problem in *The Grass is Singing*:
To explain Moses, to write him out, might well be to white him out. . . . But then again, to leave him blank, in a book so conscious of the oppressive function of silence, is deeply embarrassing. What this dilemma reveals is a vital problem in Lessing's writing. How much can one represent? How much, that is, can one find others in oneself, in experience, imagination and language? In short . . . Lessing the writer is encountering her settler's problem, and hasn't found a solution (Doris Lessing 27-28).3

The embarrassing silence in the text, the disturbing hole in the story caused by the absence of Moses as a character, not only flaws The Grass is Singing but also indicates a problem in Lessing's subsequent fiction, particularly her novels. The "settler's problem" of how to represent the African other as a subject rather than an object--a reservoir of the whites' desires and fears--is an unresolved issue that partly explains her abandonment of African subjects. Early in her career she described the frustration she encountered, the dead end she felt she had reached in writing about southern Africa. The color bar was an issue that the writer could not avoid, and could not transcend; furthermore, it had all been said before--and better--in the context of class divisions in nineteenth-century European literature.4 In Lessing's words from Going Home: "In writing this I am conscious of a feeling of fatigue and sterility which is what I have to fight against as soon as I set foot in white Africa" (17). This feeling of fatigue and sterility pervades Martha Quest.

Martha Quest

The epigraph to Part One of Martha Quest is from Olive Schreiner: "I am so tired of it, and also tired of the future
before it comes." Martha is fifteen and ready to leave her parents' farm; Lessing's novel begins, in fact, at the point in African Farm when Lyndall returns from school, full of bitter experience and dread of the future. Martha, like Lyndall, has outgrown the farm. Lessing writes: "She repeated the incantatory names of childhood like a spell which had lost its force. . . . For everything had shrunk for her" (31). The spacious sky and windswept landscape "caused her only the prickling feeling of claustrophobia" (9). Compare Martha's feelings to Lyndall's:

She looked about among the old familiar objects; all was there, but the old self was gone. 'What are you noticing?' asked Em. 'Nothing and everything. 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).

Not all Martha's emotions about the farm are negative, however. Lessing, like Schreiner, is ambivalent about the African land. She describes it as breathtaking, liberating, alive with wonderful creatures, and is particularly rhapsodic about the wide highveld sky. She writes: "... the land travelled endlessly, without limit, and faded into a bluish haze, like that hinterland to the imagination we cannot do without" (9). The ambivalent descriptions of nature in Martha Quest echo one of Schreiner's essays, "South Africa's Spell," in which she weighs the pros and cons of the bush versus the city, South Africa versus Europe: "There's no room there. . . . It's so free here," argues the South African, while the European is appalled by the vast, empty African landscape.

The magnificent natural vistas in Martha Quest, like the distant mountains in African Farm, signify a country of the
imagination, an Africa unencumbered by human complications. Dinesen's descriptions of the view from Denys' airplane have a similar significance in *Out of Africa*. But whereas Dinesen tries to maintain that view from the heavens, to avoid coming down to earth, as it were, Schreiner and Lessing keep their characters embroiled in realistic dilemmas. Nevertheless, they gaze longingly toward the mountains and sky, which symbolize that ideal country which they imagine must exist somewhere. Lessing writes: "[Martha] looked . . . across the veld to the Dumfries Hills, and refashioned that unused country to the scale of her imagination" (17). Later she refers to "that ideal landscape of white cities and noble people which lay over the actual vistas of harsh grass and stunted trees like a golden mirage" (35). Martha's ideal country is an intellectual terrain, peopled by poets, novelists and rebellious thinkers, from Shelley and Whitman to Engels, whom she reads "as if they were a confirmation of some kind of exile" (221). Like Lyndall and Waldo, Rebekah and Karen Blixen, Martha constructs an inner world in which she attempts to connect an imported intellectual structure to her immediate setting. It is this inner world of dreams and fantasies that Martha calls her "lodestone," her "conscience." As the narrator notes ironically, it is a country from which one cannot be exiled because it does not exist.

Martha has a sense of exile not only from the intellectual capitals of Europe and America, but also, and more profoundly, from the Africa she inhabits in the ambiguous role of white settler. If Martha's ideal city is a "golden mirage," then
hardly more real is the colonial town which is "so lightly scratched on the surface of the soil that one could see the veld by . . . looking down to the end of the street . . ." (221).

In *Martha Quest* as well as in Lessing's other African novels and stories the white heroine is unable to connect with Africa and Africans—much as E.M. Forster's *Fielding* tries but is unable to connect with India and Indians. The figure of the impenetrable and often actively hostile native, who inhabits an equally hostile "dark continent," exemplified in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, is a "given" of white colonial literature, including the work of Schreiner, Dinesen, Lessing, Gordimer and Coetzee. The European liberal's search for connection exemplified in Forster's *A Passage to India*, is a refinement of the heart of darkness theme, and the basis for the realistic fiction of Southern Africa that begins with Olive Schreiner, reaching its culmination, and probably its final form, in Nadine Gordimer.

Lessing's *Heart of Darkness* is *The Grass is Singing*, in which Mary Turner seeks and finds—one might say she creates—her death at the hands of Moses. Lessing's first collection of stories, *The Old Chief's Country* is her *Passage to India*. *Martha Quest*, like *The Story of an African Farm* and *Out of Africa*, focuses on individual self-discovery. The colony of Southern Rhodesia is a setting for Martha's own drama, but one which in contrast to Dinesen's challenging, magical, ultimately benign Kenya is disturbing even in its beauty, inducing in the white heroine unease and guilt. The land and native characters
which form a backdrop to the autobiographical drama of Lyndall and Waldo in *African Farm*, while less well defined than in Lessing's novel, induce similar feelings of alienation and vague guilt. Whereas Karen Blixen feels that she *belongs*, Lyndall, Waldo and Martha profoundly do not.

Of course Karen Blixen's belonging is problematical, although she is reluctant to acknowledge that the country with which she feels a mystical bond also isolates and finally rejects her. In *Out of Africa* she wonders, "If I know a song of Africa . . . does Africa know a song of me?" (64). Martha is aware from the start that Africa is unlikely to know a song of her. "The farm," writes Lessing, "lay about her like a loved country which refused her citizenship" (31). So she turns, like Waldo, to her books--to that country of the mind from which one cannot be exiled.

As the novel begins, Martha is reading Havelock Ellis on sex; while waving the book like a red flag in her mother's face, she establishes her identification with the intellectual rebels of the past--including through Ellis his friend Olive Schreiner. Martha's relationship to books, however, is more complicated than Waldo's or Rebekah's. For Martha as for her predecessors books are talismans, keys to the other world beyond the farm. But whereas Schreiner's characters have an almost religious awe of the few books that come into their possession, Martha in the nineteen-thirties, is swamped with books, steeped in literature, and in possession of more knowledge than she can use. Martha's problem is that she knows more than she can understand; her
intellect is more developed than her experience. As Lessing writes:

She was, in fact, suffering from the form of moral exhaustion which is caused by seeing a great many facts without knowing the cause for them, by seeing oneself as an isolated person, without origin or destination (182-83).

Martha, unlike Waldo, has the benefit of Freud and Marx, the literature of the Great War and the already mythical twenties. In contrast to Karen Blixen, who essentially rejects contemporary European thought—and even insofar as she can, contemporary history—Martha struggles to place her own situation in historical context:

And from all these books Martha had gained a clear picture of herself, from the outside. She was adolescent, and therefore bound to be unhappy; British, and therefore uneasy and defensive; in the fourth decade of the twentieth century, and therefore inescapably beset with problems of race and class; female, and obliged to repudiate the shackled women of the past. She was tormented with guilt and responsibility and self-consciousness; and she did not regret the torment . . . (14-15).

Martha is more self-aware than Lyndall, but for all her sophistication she is helpless to prevent herself from falling prey to a modern version of Lyndall's misfortune. The irony that is such a marked feature of the novel revolves around just this point.

Martha, like Lyndall, is portrayed as being vulnerable because she is a woman; Lessing, like Schreiner, provides negative stereotypes of femininity for her heroine to reject. Mrs. Van Rensberg, the fat, complacent mother of eleven, plays the role of Schreiner's Tant' Sannie; from Martha's point of view she is a repulsive and frightening specter of what could
happen to her. "I will not become like that," Martha promises herself, looking at the older woman's swollen, veined legs. Marnie Van Rensberg, who is Martha's age, plays the role of Em in African Farm: the conventionally feminine girl who is a foil to the rebellious heroine. Martha, like Lyndall, vehemently rejects Marnie's preoccupation with marriage; it is not surprising however that Martha, like her precursor, becomes a young mother in the next volume—and further betrays her own and Lyndall's ideals by marrying a civil servant.

The role of Waldo (and Rebekah's Mr. Drummond) is played by Joss Cohen, a young Jewish intellectual who inspires Martha's belief in atheism, socialism, and racial equality. Unlike Schreiner, however, Lessing acknowledges a sexual current between heroine and hero; Martha is disturbed and constrained by Joss Cohen's response to her appearance. She is an incipient but confused feminist, who demands to be taken seriously as an intellectual equal, but nevertheless cultivates a stylish, provocative look. Lessing, then, replaces the mythic identification between Lyndall and Waldo with a realistic portrayal of the difficulties created by Martha's indentification with Joss. Following Lyndall and Waldo, Martha and Joss do not actually have a sexual relationship, but it is significant that Martha's first lover is a Jew. Adolph is a social outcast in the Sports Club, and Martha is seen to be breaking a taboo by sleeping with him. As well as a surrogate Joss, he is also, perhaps, a surrogate black man.
As in Schreiner and Dinesen, the personal dissatisfactions of Lessing's heroine lead her to make a wider social critique. Martha's sensitivity to her treatment as a woman increases her awareness of other forms of hypocrisy and unfairness in the community. For example, it is after an encounter with Joss, in which she has resented being patronized as a pretty girl, that she has an intuition of apartheid that goes beyond her heretofore purely intellectual understanding of the problem. As Lessing describes Martha's revelation:

... the fact was, she could not remember a time when she had not thought of people in terms of groups, nations, or colour of skin first, and as people afterwards. ... Martha could feel the striving forces in her own substance: the effort of imagination needed to destroy the words black, white, nation, race, exhausted her, her head ached and her flesh felt heavy on her bones (56).

Martha reaches a deep emotional and physical understanding of the divisions in the colony, and she now begins to identify with the black Africans, who have been invisible to her. But the language of this long visionary passage betrays Martha's—and Lessing's—reliance on foreign literary conceptions to define her relation to her setting. For instance, the influence of D.H. Lawrence is painfully obvious in the following sentence:

And each group, community, clan, colour, strove and fought away from the other, in a sickness of dissolution; it was as if the principle of separateness was bred from the very soil, the sky, the driving sun; as if the inchoate vastness of the universe, always insistent in the enormous unshrouded skies, the enormous mountain-girt horizons, so that one might never, not for a moment, forget the inhuman, relentless struggle of soil and light, bred a fever of self-assertion in its children (56).
The message of the passage, that Martha is breaking out of the white settler cast of mind with its rigid certainties, is belied by the style. Martha/Lessing projects her conception of colonial society onto the "vast," "inchoate," "inhuman" landscape—as Martha projects her fantasy of the ideal city onto the "harsh," "empty" veld (as Schreiner and Dinesen similarly project their respective conceptions of Africa onto what they see as the empty, unclaimed, unformed land).

Although the sentence quoted above implies the impossibility of transcending apartheid, Martha begins to try. When she sees a procession of black prisoners handcuffed together, "She marched, in imagination, down the street, one of the file, feeling the oppression of a police state as if it were heavy on her . . ." (184). But she feels powerless to alleviate anyone's suffering, least of all her own:

'And what now?' demanded that sarcastic voice inside Martha, and it answered itself, 'Go out and join the Prisoners' Aid Society,' Here she sank into self-derisory impotence . . ." (184).

Martha's self-deprecating, even destructive sense of humor is different from anything we find in Schreiner or Dinesen; faced with the sight of handcuffed prisoners Rebekah would almost certainly have joined the Prisoners' Aid Society that Martha ridicules. Karen Blixen would have charmed the Governor into releasing the prisoners and then offered them squatting rights on her farm. Martha's very different reaction of "self-derisory impotence" is connected to her historical sense of herself as one of the "Children of Violence." This refers to
the generation who through their parents' memories must relive
the nightmare of the First World War and half-willingly find
themselves swept up in the holocaust of the Second World War.
For Martha, as a child of white settlers, the legacy of violence
also includes the colonization of Africa: a situation which she
was born into, deplores, and by virtue of her skin privilege,
colludes in. She tries to escape the land with its weight of
ambivalent associations and her parents with their weight of
disturbing memories by migrating to the capital. Lessing's
irony is broad here as she describes Martha's youthful optimism:
"And a door had closed, finally; and behind it was the farm and
the girl who had been created by it. . . . She was a new
person, and an extraordinary, magnificent, an altogether new
life was beginning" (92). After a few weeks of blissful self-
delusion, Martha, against her conscious will, absorbs the war
hysteria that grips the town's youth. It is the winter of 1938,
and the promise of comradeship, glory, and death beckons the
young men of the colony. Martha herself cannot resist the
frantic dancing, drinking and marrying that characterizes these
months.

Here Lessing's presentation of Martha as a historical type
becomes very clear; she was born in the aftermath of the First
World War to a father broken and obsessed by his experience in
the trenches. Images of no-man's land, exploding shells, rats
and mud, are almost as real to Martha as if she had seen them
herself (as, according to Lessing's belief in the collective
unconscious, she has). Martha's young womanhood as chronicled
in Books Two to Four of the *Children of Violence*, is lived in the shadow of the next war, which, far from the actual carnage, she vividly suffers at second hand. When in *The Four-Gated City*, she finally arrives in England, it is not the pre-war "Home" that her mother has sentimentally described to her, but the bleak, bomb-scarred and threadbare London of the nineteen-forties. At the end of *The Four-Gated City*, Martha dies on a remote island in the Hebrides, among a colony of survivors of World War Three.

As this pattern asserts itself in the novels, the figure of Martha the unique individual is superseded by Martha the historical type and, in the last volume, by Martha the archetypal Woman of the Century. The second through fourth novels of the series seem hurriedly, rather sloppily written, as if the author had been impatient to get through the necessary narration in order to make her ideological points and remarks on character types and group dynamics. *The Four-Gated City* is similarly flawed, but more compelling and original in its exploration of the middle-aged Martha's relation to the mass mind.

It is in the first two volumes of the series, *Martha Quest* and *A Proper Marriage*, that Lessing best integrates the autobiographical, typical, and archetypal aspects of her characters and story. Martha's father, for instance, is more than a portrait of the author's father and a representative of his war-scarred generation, he is also a unique and lively fictional character. Lessing's mother, on the other hand, exerts a malevolent, almost supernatural power over Martha which tends to unbalance the text's realism.
The episode of Martha's first dance is the best example of how Lessing merges the different elements of character and significance. Martha works round the clock sewing a long, glamorous white dress, as if under a spell in which she has assumed the role of The Young Girl Going to Her First Dance. Martha, writes Lessing, "did not know this aloof, dream-logged girl who turned a brooding face under the curve of loose blonde hair" (83). Transfigured by this "ancient role," she is endowed with the power to escape from childhood, to be "set free".

With her characteristic irony, Lessing sets Martha's glowing anticipation against the disappointing actuality of the dance at the Van Rensbergs' house. Martha's fantasy is quickly deflated by reality: the shadowy lover of whom she has been dreaming turns out to be an uncouth and ordinary neighbor. Furthermore, Mr. Van Rensberg Senior breaks into Martha's revery and brings her down to earth by addressing her as a representative of the British community. He calls Martha to account for British chauvinism, hypocrisy and brutality against the Boers. Martha responds by ingenuously defending equal rights for all races. Finally, in an expression of hostility as much for Martha's "British arrogance" as for her provocative virginity, her escort carries her outside into the mud and kisses her. Her white dress spattered with red mud is an obvious metaphor for her symbolic loss of virginity, which includes the shedding of romantic illusion and the initiation into adult political realities. Significantly, it is after this dance that Martha awakes from the stupor of inaction that has
kept her on the farm, throws off the weight of her parents' dreams, and begins the next phase of her life: in town.  

In *Martha Quest* as in *African Farm* and *Out of Africa*, the images of sleep and awakening, dreams and nightmare, are prominent symbols of self-discovery, the imagination and its limits. Mrs. Quest is "a witch" or "the eternal mother, holding sleep and death in her twin hands . . . like a baneful figure in the nightmare in which she herself was caught"(31-32). Struggling to keep Martha locked in the sleep of childhood, she transfers her own nightmares to her daughter. On the autobiographical level are echoes of Schreiner's antagonism toward her mother--along with her fear of reliving her mother's life. Martha, like Lyndall, Waldo, and Rebekah (who foregoes her sleep in the pursuit of knowledge) fights to stay awake, that is, to question authority, to think for herself. In town she barely sleeps, partly because she is afraid of her dreams. Thus for Lessing's and Schreiner's young characters sleep is deadly and dreams are threatening as well as liberating. Lessing and Schreiner are more pessimistic about the possibilities of the imagination than Dinesen, who in *Out of Africa* embraces her dream wholeheartedly.  

In Lessing's later fiction her characters do embrace, use, and become their dreams, but Martha's goal is awakening. In the African volumes of the *Children of Violence* Martha awakes to an understanding of herself and her place in the world, of her historical role, through her identification with the black
Africans—who are themselves realizing their power, awakening to freedom. Martha expresses her identification with the blacks, as well as her rebellion against white settler mores, by joining a communist group whose stated aim is black revolution. Here Lessing is quite sarcastic, at the expense of her own youthful idealism, about the effectiveness of the small all-white group which has no contact with the blacks it proposes to lead into a brave new post-colonial world. (As Eileen Manion notes, Lessing depicts the communist cell as elitist, hierarchial and authoritarian, in fact as "the mirror image of the colonial authorities," "Transcendence Through Disorder" 212.) As the group's political contradictions and interpersonal conflicts come to the fore, in A Ripple from the Storm and Landlocked, Martha's only desire is to escape the colony from which she has become irrevocably alienated. Her identification with the blacks, from the start problematic, is revealed as shallow and narcissistic, too tenuous to build a new life upon.

It is notable that in Lessing, the most historically conscious and politicized of the three writers considered so far, the blacks are least vivid and most subordinate to the white heroine's story. In contrast, in Dinesen, who is the most conservative, ahistorical writer of the three, the black characters are much more fully drawn and more important in the heroine's story. Perhaps it is the case that within her mythic framework Dinesen is freer to describe her secondary characters vividly, whereas Lessing's depiction of character is constrained by the messages and preconceptions with which her fiction is
weighted. Schreiner's characters fall somewhere in between: they are not representative historical types as Lessing's are, nor are they free of didactic content as are Dinesen's. Schreiner delights in making her "bad" characters colorful and humorous, and while her black characters are often negative stereotypes, they have more life than Lessing's one-dimensional creations. It is only Nadine Gordimer who extends realistic character portrayal to Africans, although her point of view has been increasingly limited by the legal and social barriers of apartheid.

In Martha Quest, then, Lessing maintains the fine balance between realism and symbolism; Martha the archetype emerges from Martha the funny, dreamy, sensitive child with intuitions of dissolution and utopia. Martha in her roles of poetic historian and spokeswoman for the human race is only a credible heroine insofar as she remains the mundane, specific Martha. When in The Four-Gated City Martha loses her specificity to become a mouthpiece for Lessing's apocalyptic messages, the fiction ceases to be believable; but in Martha Quest at least, Lessing's tendency to generalize is kept in check by the demands of the realistic genre.

Because Martha is an autobiographical heroine, her quest is implicitly artistic and literary; her struggle to create an identity, to find a balance between freedom and commitment, is depicted in terms of perception rather than activity. This is one function of Martha's inner world, her visions on the veld; as an adolescent female she has insight without power; she is a
passive observer and critic; what she creates is intangible. Throughout the series she internalizes rather than acts, transforming history into imaginative experience.

Martha illustrates Simone de Beauvoir's theory of the young girl as a being who, outwardly passive, has a rich inner world. In the very conflict between her fantasies of power and her lack of scope for action in the real world lies her possibility for intellectual and creative growth—at odds with society. ("The Formative Years," in The Second Sex). Lessing's depiction of Martha's quintessentially female perception of war is brilliantly convincing; unable to fight or make political decisions, she suffers war as a nightmare, as schizophrenia, as hostility between lovers.

Martha's Africa undergoes the same kind of inner transformation into symbol, into country of the mind. It is distorted to reflect Lessing's messages, which have less to do with the real problems of colonialism than with the twentieth-century female psyche. The black characters are ciphers, whose main function is to reflect Martha's feeling of entrapment and powerlessness, as well as her hopes for freedom. The brutality of the colonial system is depicted as a reflection of a world mad with war. The malaise that afflicts "Zambesia," Lessing's imaginary Southern African colony, is a reflection of the general malaise afflicting the old empires of Europe. Thus the realistic depiction of female coming-of-age under colonialism is already in Martha Quest subjugated to Lessing's larger plan.
To *Shikasta* and Beyond

With *Martha Quest* Doris Lessing began her five-volume *Children of Violence* series; with *Shikasta* (1979), twenty-eight years later, she began another very different series of novels. *Canopus in Argos: Archives* also consists so far of five novels: *Re: Colonized Planet 5, Shikasta* (1979); *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four and Five* (1980); *The Sirian Experiments* (1980); *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8* (1982); and *Documents Relating to the Sentimental Agents in the Volyen Empire* (1983).

Between *Martha Quest* and *Shikasta* Lessing wrote several versions of Martha in Africa between the wars and in wartime. In *The Golden Notebook* (1962), widely acknowledged as her masterpiece, Lessing reinterprets the autobiographical material of *The Children of Violence* from the perspective of the heroine's subsequent emigration to England, loss of faith in the Communist Party, and reluctant commercial success as an "African" writer. *The Golden Notebook* governs and clarifies, condenses and illuminates, the story which fills up three comparatively plodding volumes of *The Children of Violence*.

In *The Four-Gated City* (1969), the formal distinctions which so successfully govern and clarify the content of *The Golden Notebook* are broken down, and out of the chaos, Lessing's characters issue prophecies. In the world she depicts in this apocalyptic fiction, there is no time for the slow working of political change; the only hope is a mystical conversion, to transcend in an evolutionary leap our altogether bleak historical circumstances.
In the symbolic fantasy *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1975), Lessing again experiments successfully with the fictional form that she had taken as given in *Martha Quest* and her other early novels and stories. The narrator of *Memoirs* is a version of the aging Martha Quest, while her younger self Emily is another incarnation of the adolescent Martha. On the autobiographical level Lessing works out and heals the painful relationship with her mother that so marks and debilitates Martha Quest. (Lessing's use of her mother's name, Emily, works similarly to Schreiner's use of her mother's name, Rebecca Lyndall, for her heroines.)

Significantly, Emily and the narrator inhabit a post-World War Three London which parallels Martha Quest's post-World War One Africa and post-World War Two London. The narrator passes between this imaginary post-catastrophe London and the inner or psychic world which is represented as a series of rooms beyond the walls of her flat. At the end she magically reintegrates the characters into the realm of her imagination—which is also the mythic realm of the shared unconscious—when she and her surrogate children walk through the wall into the other world beyond. So, in *Memoirs*, as well as working through some unresolved personal material, Lessing finds a distinctive form in which to represent that conjunction of the personal and social, archetypal and historical which has been her major preoccupation. It is important that *Memoirs* is an artist parable: whereas Martha is an artist who does not admit she is one, an artist who is denied the chance to create, the unnamed
narrator of *Memoirs* is clearly a writer figure. *Memoirs* is a novel about the interconnections between the imagination and the real world, as such it is Lessing's most dense and sophisticated formal vehicle, realized in some of her best writing.9

The next Martha figure, and the one who most resembles the adolescent heroine of *Martha Quest*, appears in *Shikasta*. Lessing's first attempt at what she calls "space fiction" is an incongruous and strained mixture of documentary, allegory, realism and fantasy whose gaps and rough edges point to some of the contradictions in her political and aesthetic ideology since the writing of *Martha Quest* and "The Small Personal Voice," her left-wing humanist-realist credo. The equilibrium between the personal, social and archetypal levels that Lessing set out as her aim in "The Small Personal Voice" and largely achieved in *Martha Quest* is in *Shikasta* quite unbalanced.

The greatest ideological problem in *Shikasta*, to which its formal problems are tied, is Lessing's attitude toward colonialism; the subject of the novel is the colonization of the Earth-like planet by a benevolent superior race, who far from being represented as invaders or destroyers, as we might have expected from Lessing's earlier fiction, are depicted as wise and even godly creatures who attempt to alter the course of human history for the better. Correspondingly the Shikastans or humans are represented as ignorant, unruly savages who must be civilized. The mission of the Canopean empire is to help the more primitive races evolve to its own high level, not only of technology, but also of ethics. This is an uneasy echo of the
slogans of British imperialism, to which Lessing surely should be sensitive, but which she leaves unresolved.¹⁰

In *From Man to Man* Olive Schreiner uses the hypothetical example of colonizers from another planet in order to illustrate the cruelty and injustice of the forced imposition of technologically advanced European culture on a less technologically advanced but as fully human native culture. In *Shikasta* Doris Lessing surprisingly takes the side of the colonizers against the native people, and even more surprisingly, she seems unaware of the irony of her position, despite the fact that a subplot in her novel is the trial of the European ex-colonial powers by the young people of the Third World (with whom the narrator sympathizes). How can we account for these contradictions in the novel? Essentially Lessing's space fiction magnifies the ideological contradictions that existed from the beginning in her African fiction of the nineteen fifties. In her early fiction, she concentrated on the dilemma of the white settler at the expense of fully-realized black characters; in *Shikasta*, this preoccupation with the colonists rather than the colonized is taken to its logical extreme. Another explanation is the tipping of the balance from the historical to the archetypal; thoroughly disenchanted with human history, Lessing tries to leap beyond it. So Lessing the communist and humanist has become Lessing the prophet and mythmaker, and the myth she has chosen to warn and instruct her puzzled readers is both disconcerting and telling in relation to her earlier themes.
In a further ambiguous connection between white-settler Africa and the colony of Shikasta, the novel is dedicated to "... my father, who used to sit ... outside our house in Africa, watching the stars. 'Well,' he would say, 'if we blow ourselves up, there's plenty more where we came from!'" Lessing seems to have come around to her father's radical conservatism and fatalistic reliance on the mysterious forces beyond human control.

However, although in the space fiction she is no longer explicitly concerned with the junction of personality, class and the historical moment upon which her fiction had been based, one of the, for us, lucky contradictions which fractures the scheme of the Canopus series is that there are realistic characters and topical analyses which creatively undermine what one can only term the novels' imperialist message. Thus the "Trial" section of Shikasta consists of the detailed, historically precise documentation of European imperialist exploitation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Lessing uses Rhodesia, in fact, as a text-book example of the ravages of British rule. Lessing's concern here is to illustrate the recurring patterns of human history in the hope that the cycle of exploitation and war can be broken. However, by shifting her hopes for regeneration from the human to the cosmic and metaphysical arena, she creates problems which her fiction cannot resolve. Lessing's replacement of "evil" colonialism with "good" colonialism is necessarily unconvincing in light of her earlier work. What is intriguing, though, is that she reinterprets rather than
abandons her earlier themes and motifs, among which is the theme of female coming-of-age in an unstable colonial society.

Lessing recreates the young Martha Quest in the character of Rachel, an endearing, articulate heroine from whose point of view we witness many of the extraordinary events of *Shikasta*. For a time she lives in the Arab quarter of a North African city where she is, like Martha Quest, a member of the privileged white minority; therefore she is a "colonist" within the planetary colony of Shikasta. As do the other white heroines of Lessing, Schreiner and Dinesen, Rachel identifies with the African women and through them comes to understand her own position as different (white, middle-class, European) and as similar (young and female).

As in *Martha Quest* and the African stories, and similarly in Isak Dinesen, the young girl's experience of the African others is rendered in vivid sensual detail which reinforces her attraction to and sense of exile from their world. Rachel keeps a diary about her life in the North African slum. Thus we are allowed direct access to her thoughts, unlike Martha's, which are filtered through the often sarcastic hindsight of the older, wiser narrator-author. Rachel writes:

Fatima calls me into the cubbyhole she shares with the three older children, and she takes down her best dress from a hook in the mud wall. It is a dark blue dress, of a soft cloth, very worn. It smells of Fatima and of her perfume, heavy and languishing. The dress has beautiful embroidery on it in lovely colours. Fatima made the dress and did the embroidery. This dress is a big thing in her life. (240).
Wearing Fatima's dress, Rachel is dressed up as a bride by her Arab neighbors to act out their fantasy of political and economic power; in the process she sees herself through their eyes: as both an instrument of power and a sex object. As she records the incident in her diary:

[Yusuf] pretends I am his bride. It is funny and sweet. As if everyone is forgiving everyone for something. I say to them, cross, that all this is silly because I have no intention at all of getting married. But I am quite wrong to say it, because it is a sort of game. They are making an alternative event. A Possibility. Their lives are so narrow. They have so little. So here is this spoiled western girl Rachel. But they like her really. But they have to manage her. And after all, she might marry Yusuf, who knows! Strange things do happen! ... A romance! But of course they don't believe this for a moment. And so it is a sort of acted-out possibility, no hard feelings. It was a feast. Vegetable stew and meat-balls. They hardly ever eat meat... .

There I sat, all dolled up, a sacrificial calf. It was a lovely meal. I adored it. All the time I was furious. Not at them. At the awfulnes of this poverty. At Allah. At everything (240-41).

Rachel, the rich white outsider who yet lives among the poverty-stricken North Africans and empathizes with their struggle to create moments of beauty and possibility, is ultimately alienated, set apart, guilty. Like the other Lessing heroines beginning with Martha, Rachel passes from empathy to anger to impotent despair in the face of the poor and oppressed. But Rachel, speaking in her own voice, not filtered through an ironic narrator, participates in the lives of others and even in her own life, more wholly than the self-concerned, self-critical Martha is allowed to do. While Lessing's larger statement about colonialism—the story of Shikasta and Canopus—is vague and contradictory, the "small personal voice" of Rachel is clear and fresh.
This is surely a criticism which can refer to Lessing's earlier fiction; her individual voices and their particulars ring true, whereas her generalities are often in danger of losing touch with reality, of losing coherence. It is most notably in *The Golden Notebook* that the human condition, the position of woman, the clash of political ideologies in our century, and the crisis of the novel are successfully subsumed within the story of Anna, the ex-communist woman writer from Africa. One of the great strengths of *The Golden Notebook* is its structure of the writer's diaries. This novel, unlike the *Children of Violence* books, recognizes that it is about writing; *Martha Quest*, on its strong autobiographical level, is about becoming a writer, yet Lessing does not allow Martha writership. As Nicole Ward Jouve (to whom I am indebted for exploring this point) explains, it is a writer's autobiography with the writing erased ("Of Mud and Other Matter--*The Children of Violence*"). *The Golden Notebook* with its divisions into Anna's various voices, Rachel's first person journal in *Shikasta*, *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, told in the first-person voice of an artist/writer, and even *The Marriages between Zones Three, Four and Five*, narrated by a chronicler, with its subtext on the theme of story-telling, are all concerned with the process of their telling. They are writer's stories, concerned with language and form, which remind us that much of Lessing's fiction--to its detriment--is not properly cognizant of itself as literature, does not bring the subtext of the writer or artist character to the surface of the text. (Lessing's neglect of style is related
to this problem; she writes best when she is most conscious of the literary subtext in her fiction.)

While Shikasta is one of the most disjointed of Lessing's novels, she is somewhat more successful in subsequent volumes of the Canopus series, in which she focuses more clearly on a central female character: for instance Al·Ith in The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four and Five, and Ambien II in The Sirian Experiments. Both of these space-fiction novels treat, among other subjects, colonialism—from the point of view of a woman caught in the middle, with allegiances to both sides. The ageless Ambien II, a high-level colonial bureaucrat, has more power and authority than Martha Quest, but she too sees herself as a pawn of historical forces, caught between her alliance with the rulers and her sympathy for the subjects. In The Sirian Experiments as in her African fiction, Lessing's interest is in the guilt and responsibility of the colonist rather than in the personalities of the colonized, who, although they are thematically central, are portrayed as minor players in the protagonist's dilemma.

In Marriages Al·Ith of Zone Three is a civilizing agent in the more barbaric Zone Four, at the same time absorbing from that Zone some of the primitive vitality that is lacking in the attenuated atmosphere of her own Zone. Al·Ith's story conveys two messages: that the cross-fertilization of cultures leads to healthier societies, and that there is a hierarchy of civilizations. This latter point is clearly illustrated by the numbered Zones through which the characters descend in order
ultimately to rise. *Marriages* is one of the more accessible of Lessing's space fiction novels, employing as it does a simple mythic structure that revolves around a romantic-sexual attraction to one's opposite. Its ideas can be taken as representative of the other five novels in the series.

It is tempting to compare the picture of evolution in *Marriages* and by extension the Canopus series with Schreiner's evolutionary theories in *From Man to Man*. Schreiner, while critical of the excesses of colonialism, defends a hierarchy of civilizations: the Europeans should patiently work to bring the Africans up to their level, recognizing their common humanity. This was an enlightened if unremarkable position for her time. Lessing, who has borne witness to the extraordinary excesses of "civilized" Europe during this century, still, in her later fiction, approves of an evolutionary hierarchy of societies, the agent of which is an enlightened form of colonialism. She has even moved backward, so to speak, having retreated to her current position from a more radical Marxist critique of European hegemony and the inequities of colonialism.

Lessing's ideological retreat is particularly striking in comparison to Nadine Gordimer's career: Gordimer, living in the heart of the last colonial society in Africa--privileged, but cut off from the heart of events, from the future, by her white skin--has not only borne witness to injustice, but also has advocated and tried to realize in her fiction a free black state from which she would probably be excluded. Although she is always aware of the actual and imaginative limitations that her
skin color and background impose, her value system has subtly shifted from white to black, European to African.

Olive Schreiner's empathy with other races and cultures went farther than most other European thinkers and writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Isak Dinesen took Schreiner's hesitant rapprochement a significant step further by welcoming African people along with their perspective, values, symbols and language into her imagination. Karen Blixen the colonist took far more from Kenya in terms of culture and civilization than she gave, important as her presence seems to have been for the Africans who knew her. Her character and imagination were profoundly enriched by her experience as a white settler; Out of Africa is a tribute to the land and people which acknowledges her debt. Doris Lessing pays no such tribute, acknowledges no such debt to Africa. In fact her relationship to the white-settler Africa of her youth is the most problematical of the group; her African fiction is characterized by gaps, evasions and inconsistencies that only become more prominent in her colonial space fiction.11

The Problem of "Exile" in Lessing's Fiction

The absence of Moses—Lessing's unwillingness or inability to portray the black character who plays such a key role in her first novel—continues to weaken her African and colonial fiction. Rebecca O'Rourke suggests that,
The problems of what to represent and how, which increasingly come to dominate Lessing's fictions, are arguably grounded in the problem of how, as a white settler, to represent the relation of oppression: the internal and external dimensions of her situation as exile, both within and when distant from 'her' country ("Doris Lessing: Exile and Exception" 22).

Lessing has written that, "All white African literature is the literature of exile--not from Europe, but from Africa" ("Desert Child"). One can see from Martha Quest that from an early age Lessing felt exiled from Africa, cut off from the roots of African life by the situation of white settlerdom. She was unable to overcome her alienation, which colors all her writing about Southern Africa. Mary Turner, like Conrad's Kurtz, walks into the murderous embrace of the bush. Martha's tentative good intentions toward the Africans are ridiculed by the narrator as misguided and ineffectual, if not positively harmful. (For example, in A Ripple From the Storm the one black member of Martha's communist cell is a police spy.) One of the lessons that Martha learns is that she can make no effective political or personal contact with the black majority, in spite of her sympathy for their cause. In the Children of Violence as in The Grass is Singing the blacks are for the most part a missing presence, a hole in the text which Martha fills with images of her own desire for liberation.

Doris Lessing criticism has recently begun to focus more on the holes and contradictions in her fiction, than on its narrative, thematic and symbolic unity, as had previously been the case. Jenny Taylor sets the tone of Notebooks/Memoirs/Archives: Reading and Rereading Doris Lessing by these remarks about the Children of Violence:
... the resources [of the conventions of nineteenth-century realism and the liberal-humanist world view] cannot 'transcend' the experience of dissolution, exile and displacement which they represent, despite the implied totalizing sweep of the narrative (Introduction, 5).

In the same volume Nicole Ward Jouve pursues the problem of the gap between the realistic form of the *Children of Violence*, with its particularized psychological and social landscapes, and what comes to be its dominant theme of the impersonal nature of the self. The text "chooses to ignore that it is informed by detachment rather than rootedness. It claims to be inclusive when it is exclusive. Like its heroine, it chooses exile. . ."

(103). Jouve claims that, "The novels as they proceed become aware of something false, a vacuity, which is the falsity of their own fictional mode" (130).

As these critics demonstrate, the text claims an inclusiveness and logical progression that it does not possess. Although it is on one level a *Bildungsroman* the main character is given no childhood; she begins as a disgruntled adolescent and, skipping maturity, ages into a sage. Martha cannot really be said to grow along with her years: she does not achieve anything, nor does she learn very much, although we are told that her mind has expanded beyond the shell that is the individual called Martha.

Part of the disjunction in the *Children of Violence* can be explained by its publishing dates: 1952 to 1969. The first two volumes, which do form a coherent pair, were written in Lessing's early years in London, while she was a Communist Party member. *A Ripple from the Storm*, which is largely taken up with
Rhodesian left-wing politics, was published soon after Lessing had left the Party, which explains the cynicism and sarcasm with which she describes Martha's group. *Landlocked* was published three years after the *The Golden Notebook*, which had blown open the *Bildungsroman* form for Lessing. By *The Four-Gated City* Lessing had abandoned the realist ideology which informed *Martha Quest* and *A Proper Marriage* and is best represented by "The Small Personal Voice."

Lessing's idea of who Martha is and what she represents changes during the course of the novel series; more fundamentally, Lessing's idea of what a novel is seems to have changed during the writing of *Children of Violence*. The level at which the novels best cohere is the archetypal, mythic level, which consists of several symbolic image patterns. Most of Lessing's critics have been encouraged by these motifs to read the *Children of Violence* as an organic work. But whereas they stress the growth imagery of trees and plants or the ideal city on the veld which finally becomes London, the imagery of rooms and houses seems to lead in a different direction: toward exile rather than integration. In contrast to the schematic, broadly outlined characterization in the books, interiors are highly particularized and lovingly described. From the first powerful image of Martha's childhood pole-and-thatch house (which Lessing has described in *Going Home* as her own parents' house) until Martha takes root again in the multi-level Coldridge house in London one senses that Martha/Lessing is looking for a home, or trying to get back home. Certainly she is always leaving home.
Several of the critics I have quoted point, rather vaguely, to Lessing's "exile" as the root of the problems in her fiction. If by the principle of exile that informs her texts we mean her eager emigration to Britain, where she has lived apparently contentedly and indubitably prolifically for almost forty years, then the geographical condition of exile does not in itself explain her work. If by exile we mean alienation and marginalization, mixed with the outsider's skepticism and independence of mind, plus the ex-believer's sense of betrayal, then we come closer to explaining Lessing. Examining the ways in which the characters in her African fiction are alienated and marginalized, or "exiled," the most important categories are sex, race, colonial status, and left-wing politics.

Martha is marginalized as a female: the highly defined sex roles of Lessing's white-settler society confine her to a passive, frivolous position, while her inner self, the part of her that responds to poetry and ideas, is buried, waiting to be reawakened. It is by her involvement in a secret political group that she finally extricates herself from respectable colonial society. Yet Martha the rebel is also a marginal figure; her group is regarded with suspicion by the whites, is irrelevant to the blacks and "coloureds" who are the ostensible objects of its schemes, and furthermore, is cut off from the real action of a world at war outside the colony.

It is the issue of Lessing's politics as they affect the theme of exile in her fiction that has been least examined by her critics, despite her evident preoccupation with joining and
especially with leaving the Communist Party in the last three volumes of the *Children of Violence* and in *The Golden Notebook*. British communists in the nineteen-fifties were marginalized, divided, and made bitter with betrayal by the revelations of the Stalinist death camps, crowned by the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956. It is Lessing's profound disillusionment with left-wing politics in Britain, that, as reflected in her African fiction, sets its ironic and often despairing tone. Her post-*Golden Notebook* fiction is in large part an escape from politics—in its subjects (the world of nonrational experience) and its forms (a rejection of the social-psychological realism that was connected to her communist-humanist ideal).

To summarize, then, Lessing's autobiographical characters are alienated as women in male-dominated society, as whites in Africa and colonials in Britain, as communists in Rhodesia and ex-communists in London. The web of "exile" in her fiction vies with Olive Schreiner's in its complexity, and indicates some of the strengths—such as daring and originality—and weaknesses—such as ideological and formal confusion—that their texts share. Dinesen, in contrast, is simpler. She found in "exile" from Denmark her freedom; she found in "exile" from Kenya the will to recreate her lost Eden. Nadine Gordimer has chosen yet another road, that of fighting exile, of trying to overcome in her fiction her marginal status as a white in a South Africa on the verge of revolution. In contrast to the disillusionment with contemporary history that overshadows Lessing's fiction, Gordimer's fiction has been closely informed by the recent
history of South Africa; her work has been nourished by the political issues, racial conflicts, tragedies and hopes of her society.

To pursue this comparison of the four writers in formal terms, Schreiner's novels eschew seamless form in the interests of honesty and authenticity; their narrative inconsistencies, changes of voice and mode reflect the process of their creation. From Man to Man in particular reveals the lengthy struggle of its composition: Schreiner's attempt to incorporate her changing ideas, plus, perhaps, her fear of finishing it. Isak Dinesen, in contrast, succeeds in realizing the seamless unity between theme and form that did not interest Schreiner. Dinesen, while ostensibly writing autobiography, makes it clear that she is actually telling a story—of adventure, daring, beauties and marvels—and the reader is not to expect anything that might mar the tale. Thus one does not feel cheated that she has edited out certain unpleasant facts and unflattering details. Even if one knows the subtext, the "real" story of Karen Blixen, one is not conscious of gaps, discontinuities or disruptions in the "fictional" text.

What then makes Doris Lessing a more difficult and problematic writer than Schreiner or Dinesen—or Gordimer, who faced with many of Lessing's problems, such as the lack of access to black consciousness, deals more directly, more truthfully with race? It is partly a refusal to be self-conscious about language and form. When she is so, as in
The Golden Notebook and The Memoirs of a Survivor, she writes masterpieces. In The Golden Notebook Anna confronts her writer's demons, the interface between autobiography, history and fiction, her cynicism and unbelief, and her own exile and detachment. Children of Violence, in which the issue of writing is buried, is a weaker work.

What Lessing has said—and left unsaid—about her African colonial heroines and their relation to their history and culture invites comparison with her close contemporary Nadine Gordimer, who despite the biographical parallels with Lessing, and despite the similar content of their early work, has become a strikingly different writer.
1Michael Thorpe, in Doris Lessing's Africa, notes the connection between Lessing and Schreiner, writing that "... Martha Quest seems to take up the thread where Schreiner dropped it in The Story of an African Farm ..." (58). However Thorpe does not develop this idea; nor have any other critics. The connection between Lessing and Dinesen does not seem to have been noticed at all by Lessing's critics.

2Lessing has written about her parents and childhood in "Afterword to The Story of an African Farm," "My Father," and Going Home. I have taken other biographical information from Dorothy Brewster, Doris Lessing and Michael Thorpe, Doris Lessing's Africa.

3In a 1980 interview Lessing justifies her portrayal of Moses by saying that, "With the anonymity I tried to sum up how the white people would see someone like this because they wouldn't see him very much as an individual at all." But she goes on to admit that, "... I wrote The Grass is Singing in Rhodesia as a white person and my contact with the blacks as equals was just nonexistent" (Interview with Michael Thorpe, Kunapipi 102).

4Lessing makes these comments in Going Home (17-20), noting the social-historical parallels between white-settler Africa and pre-revolutionary Russia, and suggesting that those wishing to understand Rhodesian or South African society should read Anna Karenina. In a recent interview she reiterates these views (Interview with Eve Bertelsen, Journal of Commonwealth Literature 148).

5I have not been able to locate the source of this quote, perhaps it is a paraphrase.

6Eve Bertelsen discusses Lessing's use of the Sleeping Beauty myth, in which Martha is not only "the active quester," but also "the enthralled princess" ("Doris Lessing's Rhodesia" 33-34). This is part of her argument that there are "competing discourses" in Children of Violence.

7Frederick Karl was one of the first critics to recognize that the blacks represent Martha's emerging self in her quest for personal freedom ("Doris Lessing in the Sixties: The New Anatomy of Melancholy" 25).
Martin Green offers an intriguing reading of Memoirs as a colonial novel, seeing it as an inverted adventure story about the end of the British empire, an ironic "last recapitulation" of Robinson Crusoe, (The English Novel in the Twentieth Century, 199-202).

Patricia Merivale writes that, "Doris Lessing has written an artist-parable with an antiphonal structure yielding a self-reflexive text. . . . It is an allegory of the way memory and experience are summoned to flesh out the creative concept thrust upon an author: the characters thus created 'live' for the length of the book, and then 'return' to the transcendental world of the imagination" ("Neo-Modernism in the Canadian Artist Parable," 203-4).

William Plomer quotes the great imperialist Cecil Rhodes as declaring, "I would annex the planets if I could" (Cecil Rhodes, 165).

Thus I cannot agree with Katherine Fishburn's claim that in Shikasta Lessing has "fully realized the dialectical possibilities inherent in science fiction" (The Unexpected Universe of Doris Lessing 56).

For example, Mary Ann Singleton, The City and the Veld; Roberta Rubenstein, The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing; and Ellen Cronan Rose, The Tree Outside the Window. Betsy Draine, in Substance Under Pressure, attempts the more complex approach of seeing Lessing's fiction as an evolving dialectic of forms.
Chapter Six
Nadine Gordimer: Eve Bears Witness

In *Martha Quest* and subsequent novels, Doris Lessing rewrote Olive Schreiner's *Story of an African Farm*, extending the subject matter of the mother novel to include twentieth-century events and ideas. Lessing enlarged upon Schreiner's incipient, still largely implicit connection between sexual and racial inequalities in colonial Africa. However, she also shared some of the social factors and attitudes of Isak Dinesen; in spite of her political radicalism, she maintained an attitude of British superiority which was revealed in her space fiction.

Nadine Gordimer, a native South African four years younger than Doris Lessing, has built her fiction firmly upon Schreiner's realism and progressive politics, while pursuing, in original directions, Isak Dinesen's romantic-mythic vision of Africa. Of the four writers, Gordimer has produced the largest body of fiction dealing with Africa. She is South Africa's most important white writer. Whereas Lessing's reputation seems increasingly to rest upon her earlier novels, from *The Grass is Singing* to *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, Gordimer's literary stature has grown with each new novel. In the fifties and sixties she was little known outside South Africa—in contrast to Lessing's wide popularity during that period. But Gordimer's novels of the seventies and eighties, including *The Conservative*, *Burger's Daughter* and *July's People*, have attracted international acclaim.
In short, having begun as a proficient but conventional writer with an apparently provincial subject of limited interest, she has emerged as the major fictional voice of what is in effect the last African colonial society, whose continuing existence is of growing international concern. Reviewers like to compare her to Turgenev, Tolstoy and Chekhov. Perhaps her increasing authority as a writer, stems, as did theirs, from the inherently dramatic subject of a ruling class threatened, exposed, and beckoned, by revolutionary change. Like Chekhov, Gordimer focuses on the everyday situation, the banal conversation, and her characters' introspection to show how they internalize and personalize historical moments that in a sense move forward without them, that exclude them. Like Tolstoy she rejects serfdom/white supremacy, but remains an aristocrat by virtue of her white skin. Like Turgenev she is alienated from czarist Russian/apartheid South Africa, but also by virtue of her background is somewhat estranged from the world outside her native borders.¹

Unlike many white English-speaking writers from Southern Africa, who chose or were forced to emigrate to Britain, and unlike most black South African writers, who have been censored, imprisoned, exiled or killed, Nadine Gordimer has been able to continue to live and write in her own country, and thus to chronicle for her growing body of readers both the mundane details and high tragedy of life in South Africa. However, she wisely does not purport to speak for the nonwhite majority in her country. Her fiction centers on the Johannesburg she
inhabits; most of her central characters are white, English-
speaking, middle-class professionals, predominantly but not
exclusively female, from whose point of view she interprets the
larger society.

Her early stories and her first novel in particular deal
directly with her own childhood in a Witwatersrand mining town,
and her youth in Johannesburg. She was born in Springs in 1923.
The daughter of Jewish immigrant parents, she seems to have led
the protected, comfortable life of a white girl in a small
town.\(^2\) Except in *The Lying Days* and a few of her stories
Gordimer has not been concerned much with Jewishness. However--
and this is evident in her first novel--being Jewish must have
set her apart as a child, and thus must have helped to give her
the partial outsider's, the critic's, view of white South
African society that she shares with Schreiner, Dinesen and
Lessing. Schreiner was a self-proclaimed outsider almost from
birth; a mistreated, misunderstood female child whose family
disintegrated, who was without property or means, she remained a
courageously independent social critic of everything from sexual
mores to international policy. The Danish Dinesen was an out-
sider in a British territory, a situation which was underlined
for her in the jingoistic climate of the First World War. She
also arrived in British East Africa during a period when all of
the settlers were in effect outsiders: adventurers, loners,
romantics in an unknown country--and she cherished this view of
herself and her friends. Doris Lessing arrived at her outsider
status mainly through politics, but also as a result of the
critical cast of mind she seems to have had even as a child, based perhaps on an early sense of herself as a writer and a concomitant sense of intellectual isolation.

Gordimer also had an early sense of herself as a writer and has spoken of an intellectual isolation similar to Lessing's and Schreiner's. For Gordimer as for Schreiner and Lessing, books guided her critical perception of her surroundings. She has described how she "expropriated" British literature to serve her own setting and situation, how Pepys, Burton, George Eliot, D.H. Lawrence, and E.M. Forster, freed from "the dead weight" of their tradition, guided her intellectual quest. She found *A Passage to India*, with its emphasis on the complex personal relations between "the hollowness of the Haves and the strength-without-power of the Have-nots" the best novel about colonialism, while the heroine of *Middlemarch*, Dorothea Brooke, was her favorite female character. Lawrence encouraged her to look beyond the "genteely-hypocritical" provincialism of white South Africa, and to seek the truth through her senses. Not surprisingly, Gordimer was influenced by many of the same books as Lessing. *The Lying Days*, like *Martha Quest*, betrays an early interest in D.H. Lawrence, who was a model for aspiring artists trying to break free of middle-class taboos.

Nevertheless, it was the very act of writing that politicized her, Gordimer has claimed. She began writing as a child, publishing her first story at fifteen, her first volume at twenty-seven. She remembers:
So it was that I didn't wake up to Africans and the shameful enormity of the colour bar through a youthful spell in the Communist Party, as did most of my contemporaries with whom I share the rejection of white supremacy [e.g. Doris Lessing], but through the apparently esoteric speleology of doubt, led by Kafka rather than Marx. And the 'problems' of my country did not set me writing; on the contrary, it was learning to write that sent me falling, falling through the surface of 'the South African way of life' (Leaving School - II, 63-64).

Gordimer has been much more reticent about her private life than about her writer's life. She was apparently a less rebellious and more conventional child than were the other three writers. She was set apart from other children however by what her mother claimed was a serious heart condition. She was forbidden physical activity and even taken out of school: a situation which could only have reinforced her loneliness and her sense of difference. John Cooke, in The Novels of Nadine Gordimer, argues convincingly for a subtext in her novels of the theme of "the mother's house" which originates in Gordimer's overly sheltered, repressed childhood. This half-hidden underlying pattern in her fiction calls to mind correspondences with the oppressive mother-figures of Schreiner and Lessing, Tant' Sannie and Mrs. Quest, who clearly resemble Rebecca Schreiner and Emily Tayler.

Although unlike the other writers Gordimer attended university, she describes herself as essentially self-educated (as did Schreiner, Dinesen and Lessing), claiming that "I've had little formal education really" (Interview with Jannika Hurwitt, Paris Review 88). She stresses her intellectual aloneness.
The whole existential aspect of life was never discussed. I, of course, approached it through books, thought about it on my own. It was as secret as it would have been to discuss my parents' sex life. It was something so private because I felt that there was nobody with whom I could talk about these things, just nobody (Interview with Jannika Hurwitt, Paris Review 92-93).

Gordimer's statements correspond with Lessing's recent description of her childhood:

You must remember that I was stuck in a very provincial place with no one to talk to. I had no one at all to discuss anything with. When I say no one, I mean no one. I was reading quietly there by myself and I was reading the most extraordinary collection of writers... I think I was influenced much more by a kind of largeness of attitude, which is what you find in 'great literature', which was the opposite of anything around me (Interview with Michael Thorpe, Kunapipi 99).

A year at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg seems to have done for Gordimer what London did for Schreiner and the Salisbury communists for Lessing: introduced her to the society of intellectuals, artists and left-wing political activity. Like Lessing she made her first trip to Europe and America at thirty (when she was already an established writer); unlike Lessing, going abroad made her realize that "home was Africa" (Interview with Jannika Hurwitt, Paris Review 87).

The salient characteristic of Gordimer's life, then, as compared with the lives of the other three writers, has been its emotional and geographical stability. She writes with a well-thought-out ethical stance from an omniscient, detached George Eliot-like center of consciousness.
In contrast, Olive Schreiner's intellectual and psychological crises enter prominently into her writing, enriching but ultimately inhibiting her creativity. Isak Dinesen's illnesses and stormy love affairs are conspicuous by their absence in her memoir, as she elaborately writes around them, magically transforming the pattern of real life into art. Doris Lessing's troubled heroines live precariously on the emotional and psychic frontiers; their quests reflect her own intellectual restlessness and deep skepticism.

Olive Schreiner spent much of her adult life traveling between South Africa and England, unable to fully belong in either society; her sense of alienation is translated into themes of entrapment and escape, the disinherited child, and Undine. Isak Dinesen's sojourn in East Africa was a living dream from which she awoke to write a fantasy of Eden and its loss. For Doris Lessing and her characters, life in Southern Africa ended when she emigrated to Britain. Gordimer, who has traveled widely and lived briefly in Europe and America, has always returned to the Johannesburg area where she grew up. She says simply, "To go into exile is to lose your place in the world" (Interview in The New York Times).

The faithful rendering of her "place in the world" has lent her fiction authenticity and resonance; her writing has an historical sweep that is lacking in the other authors. Her novels and most of her stories are historically specific: each is linked to a significant moment in post war South African chronology. This was not at first obvious because, particularly
in her early work, public events were buried in private concerns; history was interpreted through—and partly obscured by—the parochial concerns of her characters. A thoughtful reading of her work, however, shows that from the beginning Gordimer has treated her country's racial politics as the determining factor in her characters' lives. Her work is a study of the white psyche in its relation to black Africa, a portrait of a ruling class gradually losing its grip, wracked by self doubt and guilt, presented with opportunities for altruism and even heroism, and finally, faced with its own extinction. As if inspired by the extraordinary history which it has so closely followed, her fiction has become more sophisticated both formally and ideologically. Certainly art and politics, style and ideology are closely connected in her work, as she penetrates more and more deeply beneath the surface of South African society.

The Lying Days

The Lying Days is Gordimer's Martha Quest, her equivalent of The Story of an Africa Farm. Like these novels it is clearly autobiographical, but it is characteristic of her greater objectivity and detachment that, whereas Lessing's and Schreiner's novels are painfully close to the real lives of their authors, The Lying Days differs from the biography of its author in several significant respects. First of all the young heroine, Helen Shaw, is a WASP, to whom Jewish culture is alluring but alien. Too, she is weaker, more indecisive and impressionistic
than one imagines her successful young author to have been. All in all, Gordimer, unlike Schreiner and Lessing, calculatedly distances herself from her protagonist, even though she has Helen narrate the novel in the first person. Schreiner and Lessing both use the third person voice for narration, probably to impose a measure of objectivity on their stories. The relation between Isak Dinesen and Karen Blixen is of course a different one, for Dinesen uses autobiography as a mask for fiction.

Compared to Karen Blixen, Lyndall or Martha Quest, Helen Shaw is a muted and cautious heroine. Where they are extraordinary, strong-willed, and rebellious, she is ordinary, passive, and obedient. At first she eagerly embraces her parents' values and only gradually, almost involuntarily, turns against them. If she is less dramatically self-destructive than Lyndall or Martha, she is also more malleable in the hands of people (her lover Paul, for instance) and events. She is a comparatively colorless character, then, who takes on the hues of her time and place; Gordimer uses Helen's impressionable personality to portray the influence of the social climate upon character. Many of her characters are such barometers of specific conditions and attitudes, observers rather than actors. They do not pit themselves heroically against obstacles and injustice; rather they find themselves compelled to act in particular ways by their situation. In this respect Gordimer's characters resemble Lessing's social types. Helen, like Martha, also has the writer's attributes of watchfulness and
perceptiveness, and the knack for translating the historical moment into private terms.

The Lying Days, like Martha Quest and the mother novel, The Story of an African Farm, is on one level a literary autobiography of the young author. Books are tremendously important, even talismanic, to the intellectually isolated, largely self-taught characters. Waldo treasures his John Stuart Mill, Martha waves Havelock Ellis like a red flag. The literary allusions in The Story of an African Farm, From Man to Man, Out of Africa, Martha Quest and The Lying Days indicate the different intellectual influences at work on the characters, and are a vehicle for the authors' literary autobiography. The allusions tell us as well in what literary context each author intends us to read her book.

In her Preface to African Farm Olive Schreiner addresses herself to the appreciative but somewhat puzzled reactions of her first readers. She tries to explain her method by defining what it is not. It is not "the stage method" of the well-made play, but rather "the method of the life we all lead," in which, "when the curtain falls no one is ready. When the footlights are brightest they are blown out; and what the name of the play is no one knows" (27). It is not "a history of wild adventure," for, "such works are best written in Piccadilly or in the Strand. . . ." (28), but rather a work of realism, the like of which the author herself had never encountered, for which she had none but negative models.
Schreiner's next allusions are to the Bible: to harsh passages beloved of Calvinists but terrifying to an imaginative young child. Waldo lies awake repeating, "For wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat." He cries "in agony," "Oh, God, God! save them!" (37). Waldo decides he "hates God" and turns from His Book to the book of the world, to science. His finding of a hidden box of books is a climactic scene in which Schreiner draws a battle line between religion and atheism, that is, between ignorance and cruelty on the one side, learning and ethics on the other. In accordance with the logic of the novel, ignorance triumphs savagely over learning, and the murder of Waldo's spirit begins. The door that Mill's political economy opens for Waldo is slammed shut by the Bible-quoters and book-burners, while Schreiner makes it clear which side she is on.

In the section concerning Lyndall's education Schreiner draws another battle line: between the spurious learning provided by a girls' finishing school and the genuine knowledge gained from free reading and experience. In these sections about Waldo's reading and Lyndall's education, Schreiner discriminates between harmful and valuable learning, coming down firmly on the side of natural history, social science, and newspapers rather than the authoritarian instruction provided by religion and school, which is meant to instill fear and passivity. An enquiring, independent mind armed with objective knowledge was her ideal. Much of African Farm is taken up with the defense of this position against the dominant forces of
conformity and bigotry which in the end destroy Lyndall and Waldo. Nevertheless her characters achieve a moral victory, which is also their young author's: by writing *African Farm* she freed herself from the intellectual repression of her society. And through her success abroad she was able to live Waldo and Lyndall's dream of finding a community of like minds.

Through the character of Rebekah in *From Man to Man* Schreiner vindicated the doomed characters of *African Farm*. Rebekah's story is very much a history of thought; the central image in the novel is her tiny study, from which her mind roams into the remote past and possible future. Schreiner lovingly names her books: the science primers, translations from the classics, and Darwin. They are her cultural lifeline, her reminder that in spite of her physical isolation she belongs to a community of scholars in whose invisible company she sets down her own thoughts.

For Isak Dinesen, who, after all, freely chose her isolated life in British East Africa, the relation to books was different, less fraught with feeling; while she and her friends treasured the books—mostly classic fiction and poetry—that they had brought from Europe, she took most delight in the opportunity her situation offered to imagine her own tales. Masking her erudition, she preferred to present herself as a storyteller in the oral tradition. The view of herself that she presents in *Out of Africa* is of an artist freed from the bonds of European culture, who, in contrast to Schreiner's desperately bookish colonials, embraces the new world around her. Dinesen
likes to imagine herself as Scheherezade, spinning stories for Denys in the firelight; her deeper affinity was to the woman who told tales to save her life. *Out of Africa*, written in a time of despair in Denmark, did perhaps save the author's life, and certainly gloriously preserved her lost life in Africa.

Turning to Doris Lessing, we find that books play a similar role for Martha Quest as for Schreiner's characters. Martha defines herself and her world by means of her voracious reading in psychology, sociology and history, as well as poetry and fiction. But, more deeply than Schreiner, Lessing explores the conflict between what Martha learns through European books and the African colonial world she inhabits. Martha is constantly puzzled and disappointed by life, which does not accord with her imagination. She also feels the frustration of knowing and understanding through books more than she has experienced, so that when she does experience something for herself it seems strangely secondhand. Martha—in stark contrast to Karen Blixen's sense of wonder—is profoundly bored by Africa.

While the references in *Martha Quest* are mainly to Olive Schreiner and romantic poetry, in *The Grass is Singing* Lessing makes use of Eliot's imagery of sterility to symbolize white colonial life, while rain-thunderous, destructive, and renewing—represents the latent power of blackness. Lessing's allusions to *The Waste Land* warn the reader that her novel is modern, threatening, iconoclastic and apocalyptic. It is a dramatic cautionary tale of madness and murder, which, as *African Farm* did for Schreiner, established the reputation of its author as an angry young woman.
One can compare Lessing's choice of Eliot to preside over her first novel to Gordimer's choice of Yeats to preside over hers. The title and epigraph of *The Lying Days*, which clearly announce her theme of growth and disillusionment, are taken from Yeats:

> Though leaves are many, the root is one;  
> Through all the lying days of my youth  
> I swayed my leaves and flowers in the sun;  
> Now I may wither into the truth ("The Coming of Wisdom with Time").

First, one notes the difference in tone between the apocalyptic young Eliot and the wise, mellifluous Yeats; second, the need of both authors to validate their fictions with reference to the great poets of English literature. This is especially interesting in Gordimer's case, because one of her novel's subthemes is the irrelevance of English literature to Helen's life in Africa. (After *The Lying Days* the epigraphs and literary allusions in Gordimer's novels become more political and more African.)

The next allusion in *The Lying Days* is to English children's stories and European fairy tales, which the eight-year-old Helen compares unfavorably with the real-life fairy tale of Africa. Helen's sense of wonder at the African world around her is similar to Karen Blixen's; for Gordimer and Dinesen, unlike Schreiner and Lessing, the light, colors and smells of Africa are more real than the images and concepts of an imported literature.

In the first of a series of related scenes in the novel, Helen, emboldened by curiosity and desire, ventures into the exotic, forbidden Africa which surrounds the white enclave. In
this first scene the child breaks the boundary of her segregated cocoon by walking the few yards from her house at the Atherton Mine compound to the Native Stores. It is a bizarre and magical New World; in Helen's words:

I felt for the first time something of the tingling fascination of the gingerbread house before Hansel and Gretel, anonymous, nobody's children, in the woods (21).

She is both charmed and repelled by the vivid bazaar with its strange-smelling food, mysterious medicines, and crush of sweating humanity. It is a stimulating, sensuous world in which her imagination and body come alive in a new way. Seen through eyes already jaundiced by her parents' admonitions, however, the "Mine boys" are also sinister, "filthy," and "disgusting."

Shocked and stirred by the sight of a man urinating, she retreats to her parents' world: the protected, antiseptic white world of tea, lavender water, and freshly ironed tennis clothes.

This scene at the Stores, which is one of many such scenes in Gordimer's fiction, sensualizes, romanticizes and even mythicizes blackness, in a way which Schreiner and Lessing do not, but which is reminiscent of Dinesen. The relationship between white and black characters in Schreiner and Lessing is basically that of mistress and servant. The black partner in this equation remains a cipher, a shadow with only enough flesh to act out his or her limited role in relation to the white protagonist. In Isak Dinesen, while we must take the mistress-servant equation as given, the black characters are nevertheless allowed a life of their own. They are not pitiable or guilt-inducing as they are so often in Schreiner or Lessing, but
rather possessed of pride, nobility and beauty which the whites respect and envy. The black characters in Gordimer are similarly attractive. They are usually described as beautiful in face and body, and as possessed of confidence, strength and humor which are the envy of the white protagonists. In Gordimer as in Dinesen and the other writers, the non-white characters remain secondary; however their symbolic role as double or alter ego becomes increasingly important as one moves chronologically through her fiction.

In *The Lying Days* the part that blackness plays in the heroine's development is shared by the related symbols of sensual redemption: the sea and sex. Blackness, sex and the sea are symbolically connected in this novel; each is a medium through which Helen discovers her deepest self and gradually becomes free of the artificial limits and sterile values of the Mine.7

The small girl's titillating first foray into blackness is a stone dropped into the still pond of life on the Mine; the smooth water quickly closes over the disturbance and Helen is again the model Mine daughter. Unlike Lyndall and Martha she moves obediently through childhood and early adolescence. A precocious and dutiful only child, she becomes "quite one of" her parents' set. She notices little outside the confines of the world defined by white Atherton. The black miners' strike is an occasion for buttered scones at the manager's house. World War Two passes, unremarked upon, except that a fund-raising dance provides the occasion for her first long dress.
At this stage, Helen exemplifies Simone de Beauvoir's theory of the conflicts of girlhood, in which the young girl, torn between her desire to be an active subject and the rewards of being a passive object, is offered powerful "inducements to complicity."

It is at this stage that de Beauvoir contrasts the roles offered to girls and blacks: because of their relatively disadvantaged status vis-à-vis white males, both groups have incentives to question and rebel, to set themselves against the established order. But white girls, unlike blacks, are offered a privileged place, albeit that of a passive object, within the hierarchy, which tempts them to collude in their own exploitation. (De Beauvoir's comments highlight the conflicts inherent in the white girls' and women's identification with blacks in all the texts under consideration.)

When Helen is seventeen, the dull pattern is fatally disturbed by her trip to the coast. She undergoes an abrupt sexual awakening that is also emotional and intellectual. She enters a secret, forbidden area of experience which, like the Native Stores of her childhood, again churns up the smooth surface of her life. As Helen explains:

And I understood that almost all of my life at home, on the Mine, had been . . . conducted on a surface of polite triviality that was insensitive to the real flow of life that was being experienced, underneath, all the time, by everybody (76).

Now bent on understanding that "real flow of life," she returns to study English literature at the university. Literature exposes the paucity of white South African culture, which is neither European nor African. As Helen complains:
But in nothing that I read could I find anything that approximated to my own life; to our life on a gold mine in South Africa. . . . The patches of towns, with their flat streets, tin-roofed houses, main street and red-faced town hall, "Palace" or "Tivoli" showing year-old films from America. We had no lions and we had no art galleries, we heard no Bach and the oracle voice of the ancient Africa did not come to us, was drowned, perhaps, by the records singing of Tennessee in the Greek cafes and the thump of the Mine stamp batteries which sounded in our ears as unnoticed as our blood (96-97).

Literature, however, speaks to Helen's secret core, the "real flow of life" that she has begun to enter:

Only what was secret in me, did not exist before my mother and father or . . . life in our milieu, leaped to recognition in what I read. . . . Out of poetry and the cabbalistic accident of someone's syntax came the cold touch on my cheek: this. You (97).

At this point, Helen in her quest for self-understanding and independence begins to resemble Lyndall, Waldo and Martha in her doubt, rebellion, and sexual curiosity. Gordimer's heroine, like Schreiner's and Lessing's, is influenced by books from abroad which encourage and validate her intellectual and moral rebellion against the white Southern African milieu; literature helps her to find herself, but at the same time serves to alienate her from Africa. Gordimer, like Schreiner and Lessing, uses the metaphor of awakening from a kind of bewitched sleep: "We were all like sleepers, coming awake from a long lull of acceptance" (161).

Helen's resemblance to Lyndall and Martha is further marked by the appearance of her "Waldo," who also has an uncanny resemblance to Martha's Joss Cohen. Helen's male mentor and guide is, like Joss, a Jewish intellectual, called Joel Aaron.
Unlike Joss, but like the original Waldo, he is more ideal than real. Male, Jewish, poor, intellectual, left-wing, self-realized, Joel is everything that Helen wants to be, except black, although (as in Lessing) his Jewishness serves as a kind of blackness which both lures Helen and causes her to remain physically aloof. Thus, as in Schreiner and Lessing, heroine and hero are confined to a platonic friendship, one which nurtures the heroine without threatening her still fragile sense of self.

It is significant to the pattern of symbolism in the novel that Joel was raised at the Native Stores, and present at the scene of Helen's early foray into black territory. Now he introduces her to the "sharper, warmer, ruthlessly honest life" of the intellect, and to a city culture which opposes what she feels to be the empty, hypocritical society of the Mine. Of course Helen's journey from the Mine to the City (underlined by the divisions of the text into "The Mine," "The Sea," and "The City") is not without its disappointments and ironies. In this Helen again resembles her fictional predecessors. The Bohemian set that she embraces is revealed to be as shallow and hypocritical as her parents' tennis playing set. "Marcel's Cellar," for example, is a caricature of Bohemian Paris, where the Johannesburg young escape the "neon and air-conditioned unreality" of their lives to ape "the miserable, nihilistic cafe life of the dispossessed exile" (224-225; an ironic reference to Helen's growing sense of exile?). They flirt with liberal attitudes and derivative unconventionality before settling down
to "the real business of having babies and bridge afternoons . . . . the fluctuations of the stock exchange and the relative merits of Buicks and Cadillacs" (160). Gordimer's sarcasm for the Johannesburg youth echoes Lessing's attack on the youth of Salisbury and similar social satire of the white bourgeoisie in Schreiner and Dinesen.

Despite her disillusionment, Helen, through her physical and intellectual explorations in the city, touches the pulse of real feeling and enters consciously into the stream of real events. The novel becomes historically specific, dates and politics important. After the victory of the Afrikaner Nationalist Party in 1948, Helen's tentative, mostly indirect contacts with black people are gradually cut off. The chill in the national climate slowly chills her passionate love affair, based as it is on vicarious connection with the black clients of her social-worker lover. The apartheid politics of the new government subtly impinge upon the personal freedom and outlook of the privileged whites and the increasingly unprivileged non-whites. As Helen describes it:

... it was only very slowly, as the months and then the years went by, that the moral climate of guilt and fear and oppression chilled through to the bone, almost as if the real climate of the elements had changed, the sun had turned away from south Africa, bringing about actual personality changes that affected even the most intimate conduct of their lives (256).

It is now that Helen truly loses her innocence--the ignorance that allowed her to munch buttered scones as the striking mine-workers went hungry. It is only when the walls between the races are reinforced that she realizes the extent of her own
interdependence with the blacks. In Gordimer, as in Schreiner, Lessing, and Dinesen, this identification alienates the heroine from her own society and creates a conflict of identity which she begins to resolve by redefining herself in opposition to white (male) colonial values, in accordance with an African perspective.

Thus Helen begins a friendship with a black woman, a fellow student who she meets in one of the last non-segregated bathrooms in Johannesburg, until, as happened soon after, blacks were barred from the university. In her own lostness Helen identifies with Mary Seswayo's cultural confusion, only to realize, finally, how great are the barriers which separate them. Through Mary's isolation in the white world of the university, Helen perceives her own isolation in Mary's world, and finally the irrelevance of the imported high culture of the university in Mary's Africa. Helen narrates:

... I had an almost physical sensation of being a stranger in what I had always taken unthinkingly as the familiarity of home. I felt myself among strangers; I had grown up, all my life, among strangers: the Africans, whose language in my ears had been like the barking of dogs or the cries of birds.

And this feeling seemed to transmute itself (perhaps by a trick of the heat, altering the very sensibility of my skin) to the feeling Mary must have, trying to oppose the abstract concepts of her books against the overwhelming physical life crowding against her. What a stranger it must make of her. A stranger to herself. And then again how slight, how stupid, how useless it must all seem, how impossible to grasp, the structure of the English novel, the meaning of meaning, the elegance of exchanges between Beatrice and Benedict--with the woman making mealie porridge over the fire, the man carefully preserving the dirty bit of paper that is his pass, the children playing for a few years before they become nursegirls and houseboys (186-87).
The crisis for Gordimer's heroine comes during the general strike when Helen is caught in the midst of a riot in a black township. What appalls her most is her own lack of involvement, her inability to act in any way as she watches numbly behind the rolled-up windows of a car: "It happened around me, not to me. Even the death of a man; behind a wall of glass . . ." (351).

As can be predicted from the other authors, Helen's loss of innocence—the knowledge of her own passive complicity in evil—forces her to leave Africa for Europe. But before embarking upon her exile the bewildered and disillusioned Helen re-encounters Joel Aaron, who is en route to the new country of Israel in search of his destiny. In the voluptuous setting of the seaside resort, they confess their love: "... I talked to him as I have never talked to any living being: as I have talked to this pen and this paper. ... Joel took away from me the burden of my ego ..." (357). Sea, sex, and her memory of the Native Stores again work their magic, and through the Waldo-like figure of Joel, Helen's connection to South Africa is symbolically renewed. In the last image of the novel, a phoenix rises from the ashes, while black children sing in the night; Helen vows to return to Africa:

Whatever it was I was running away from—the risk of love? The guilt of being white? The danger of putting ideals into practice?—I'm not running away from now because I know I'm coming back here (367).

The contrived ending of The Lying Days does not resolve the issues Gordimer has raised for her heroine. The central problem is summed up in a metaphor that resonates throughout
Gordimer's fiction (and is only resolved some six novels and eleven years later in *The Conservationist*). The image is of white South Africa as having "a picnic in a beautiful graveyard where the people are buried alive under your feet" (358). The image of the buried black body, the theme of a white South Africa haunted by the black living dead, is at the heart of *The Lying Days*.

At this symbolic level Helen's quest is to resolve her psychic apartheid, to integrate the buried "black" aspect of herself. For Helen, blackness is connected to the "real flow of life" which is "Underneath" the "surface" of the white Mine compound and the white city; the imagery of blackness is connected to the imagery of water, and to sex, knowledge and growth. Joel, who is a Jew rather than a WASP, and who grew up at the Native Stores, helps Helen make contact with blackness. That he is male gives him the freedom of movement, the autonomy, that Helen does not feel she can claim for herself. Again through the vehicle of a man, this time her lover Paul, she makes symbolic emotional and sexual contact with blacks. However, when the apartheid laws become more strict in the years following the 1948 election, Helen and Paul's love affair is gradually destroyed. When the prohibition on sex between people of different races is enforced, Helen and Paul feel that their own privacy has been invaded, and they can no longer make love.

Thus Helen's private, internal movement toward integration is set against the public, external movement toward the hardening of segregation. Just as Helen begins to overcome her
psychic apartheid, in practical terms she is increasingly barred from contact with the black world. This leads to her increasing alienation, not only from her parents, the university and Paul—but also from part of herself. In the non-realistic, almost visionary ending of the novel, Gordimer attempts to heal Helen's alienation, to resolve the conflict between the themes of integration and segregation. But it is a patently unrealistic ending that reflects the intangible, problematic nature of connection for Helen, for South Africans, and for Gordimer as a writer.

The Conservationist

"Come to think of it all the earth is a graveyard, you never know when you're walking over heads--particularly this continent, cradle of man . . . (The Conservationist, 141-42).

In The Lying Days Helen moves from an innocent acceptance of the established order of white supremacy to an intuitive understanding of apartheid. Just as her inner barriers start to come down, the public barriers go up in the form of the Afrikaner Nationalist government's consolidation of apartheid. By the end of the novel she is shut off, divided from the buried black part of herself. However in the last pages of the novel is a turning point, which opens a path for Helen and for Gordimer's subsequent characters. Helen finds Joel Aaron again, and what is buried begins to rise to the surface. The sea, symbol of self-knowledge for Helen, is reinvoked. Gordimer uses the metaphor of the shifting seabed, its rocks turning over to reveal "new worlds." Connected to the chilling simile of South
Africa as a white picnic-ground over a black graveyard, the singing children and the image of the phoenix signal the rising up of the buried blacks: rising up in every sense of the word from coming to consciousness to armed revolution.

It is only on this symbolic level that Helen's alienation—and South Africa's—can be healed, that she—and it—can be made whole. The problem of the white heroine or hero's identification with her or his black counterpart in an era of increasing segregation, her attempt to connect, to redeem herself in the eyes of the blacks, becomes the central concern of Gordimer's fiction.

The image of the buried black body is pursued in stories such as "Six Feet of the Country" (1957). The subject of the white character's fearful foray into black territory is taken further in each of Gordimer's subsequent books. In "The Smell of Death and Flowers" (1957) the young heroine joins a protest march to a black location. No longer isolated behind glass, as was Helen, she feels her terror warm to fellow feeling as she makes eye contact with the people watching her. This story also has a symbolic sexual dimension; the narrator is fascinated by the white protest organizer's relationship with her Indian husband, which seems to the girl to be the concrete culmination of her own timid eye contact with another race.

In Occasion for Loving (1963) the theme of the black self is confronted more boldly, for the Lyndall-Waldo, Helen-Joel relationship is now between the white protagonist, Jessie, and a black painter, Gideon. Set during a period of de facto
liberalization in the late fifties when white liberals made overtures to black artists and intellectuals, this novel explores the limits of good intentions. When Gideon inevitably repudiates her as a "white bitch" Jessie tries to bridge the gap between his position of vulnerability and her position of safety by risking that safety; she removes herself from the protection of white society by committing an act of "terrorism." As in The Lying Days and "The Smell of Death and Flowers," the heroine's act of commitment, which breaks through the stalemate built up in the plot, occurs at the end of the story. It is not logically connected to what has gone before, but is rather a jump forward, a glimpse of what is possible.

Gordimer further commits her characters to the cause of black revolution in A Guest of Honour (1971) which is set in a newly independent African country. The white Colonel Bray chooses between two black leaders and loses his life in what is portrayed as continuation of the independence struggle. Significantly, the action continues after Bray's death, which is presented as his contribution to the process of change in Africa. Gordimer allows the white characters in this novel to escape the guilt and alienation that beset her earlier characters by placing them in a situation which offers an opportunity for heroism. In another connection between sexual and political involvement, Rebecca, the main female character, is Colonel Bray's lover. In the important section of the novel that takes place after Bray's death, Rebecca picks up his standard, as it were, choosing the violent, vibrant new Africa
of independence over a safe but sterile Europe. Her trip to Europe is represented as a nightmarish journey into a dead culture: Gordimer's Switzerland is a ghastly caricature in which the banks stand for soulless affluence, and the ubiquitous ticking clocks for the meaningless marking of time in a place where nothing is going to happen. Earlier in the novel Bray's life in England is similarly described as like "an interesting death cult; to wake up there again would be to find oneself acquiescently buried alive" (130).

The theme of the buried body culminates in one of her best and most important novels, *The Conservationist* (1974), in which a white industrialist and weekend farmer is haunted by the murdered black man buried on his land. When the land is flooded, the body rises to symbolically claim his patrimony, with an allusion to the African National Congress rallying cry, "Africa! May it come back!"

One of Gordimer's most perceptive critics, Stephen Clingman, describes Gordimer's use of symbolism in *The Conservationist* and other novels as an attempt to transcend her growing isolation from black life as official apartheid hardened, as the Black Consciousness movement excluded whites from the historical process—as South African society became more polarized and violent revolution came closer. Using the theories of Pierre Macherey and Frederic Jameson, Clingman writes that "there is a whole domain of South African life which objectively speaking belongs to the 'unconscious' of her fiction—that repressed black world of which . . . Gordimer's fiction cannot be directly aware" ("Writing in a Fractured
Society: the Case of Nadine Gordimer" 168). He describes the continual "return" of this repressed world in her fiction and her compulsion to "address" it. Borrowing Jean-Paul Sartre's idea of the writer's "virtual public," as distinct from the actual reading public, Clingman suggests that Gordimer writes on behalf of the black majority in her country. Although it does not in fact read her books, it is this virtual public who is her implicit arbiter and judge, and whose implicit demands she endeavors to address. In effect, then, she writes for the future, when her virtual public will achieve its freedom. Clingman is left with the paradox that,

... as a condition of social fracture in South Africa has become more emphatic, and oppression has intensified, so too has Nadine Gordimer, in response to a virtual public increasingly divided from her and a future ever more radical in its implications, become ever more radically attuned to the demands which these embody. ... The narrower Gordimer's actual access to an oppressed black world and to the cause it represents, the more radical is her response to represent the justice of that cause" (171-72).

Clingman's theory is supported by some of Gordimer's statements about whom she is writing for. For instance, she has said that she writes "as if [she] were already dead," with no thought for an audience: "I have none ...." ("'A Story for This Place and Time'" 102, 108). While this may be a sensible attitude for any writer, it is also a measure of her lack of access to the majority of readers in her own country. She discusses the marginality of whites in South African culture and her consequent lack of imaginative access to some areas of black experience, concluding that white writers can at least explore the areas of conflict where contact occurs between the races.
She says:

... unless we can make out a case for our being accepted and we can forge a common culture together, whites are going to be marginal, because we will be outside the central entities of life here. To a large extent we are now. But there's still that area of conflict which is from an artistic point of view fruitful. But when that is gone, if we are not integrated, if we have not cut loose from the colonial culture..." (she ends in mid-sentence; "'A Story for this Place and Time'" 106).

Gordimer, then, who is the most rooted of writers, who has said, "To go into exile is to lose your place in the world," is yet prey to the symptoms of exile that haunt Schreiner, Dinesen, and Lessing. As a white writer she is exiled from the black majority in her country, who Clingman claims are her true public; she is published and read mostly abroad, in London, New York, and Paris, far from the people she writes of—and even if indirectly—to. Although she has lived all her life in South Africa, it is in one sense not her country; there are areas of life there that are alien to her, and people who perceive her as alien to them. Her fiction is acutely aware of these issues. Her writer's imagination seems to stretch its limits in order to delineate as fully and as deeply as possible the arenas where white meets black: in the ironies of the master-servant bond, clandestine sex, revolutionary politics, or perhaps only in dreams. Often the relationship is unacknowledged by the participants; often it is forbidden, as in sex, or hidden, as in underground politics.

Thus the image of the black body buried in the white-ruled land—or in the white unconscious—is so powerful a pattern in
Gordimer's work. It is also a powerful expression of the contradictions of racial identity in all four writers.\textsuperscript{10} Gordimer, who is most "at home" in Africa, engages most deeply in the problems of white female identity; she is the most honest about the ways in which she and her characters cannot be at home in a black land.

As she digs deeper beneath the white surface of her country toward the buried body of black culture, her writing reflects her deepening engagement by becoming less alienated, even though alienation is still its major subject. \textit{The Lying Days}, for example, is marred by an ending that seems false and contrived; its image patterns and ironic contrasts are overstated, its historical-political commentaries imposed on the text. Gordimer tells the reader that Helen has grown up (she uses the metaphor of the construction of a building), that she has discovered her true love in Joel (who suddenly appears like Prince Charming), and that she has made a commitment to the black cause (she hears black children singing) and a decision to return home (Helen makes a pledge to this effect).

By \textit{The Conservationist}, Gordimer's method, her style and form, have changed markedly. This is in part a result of her political evolution. As she stated in 1979: together with \textit{Occasion for Loving}, "\textit{The Late Bourgeois World} really marks the end of what I had to say about white liberalism in South Africa" (Interview with Johannes Riis, \textit{Kunapipi} 20). In \textit{The Conservationist}, which deals with exile on a more profound level than the explication of the liberal dilemma in her earlier work,
she succeeds in overcoming some of her own detachment or alienation as a writer. Her method is an apparently rambling, but actually carefully structured interior monologue which includes remembered and imaginary conversations between the central character, Mehring, and his absent mistress, his absent son, his black farm manager, and finally, the murdered man himself. The social and historical background of the characters are encompassed in Mehring's interior monologue, not provided in external commentaries. For the non-white characters whom Mehring cannot see objectively as independent from himself, Gordimer provides realistic third-person descriptions, which undercut Mehring's point of view while providing a wider context.

On the symbolic level Gordimer uses the African Farm pattern of drought, and flood, sterility and ironic fecundity. When the rains come, Mehring begins to lose control of "his" land, "his" people—and his family, his thoughts, his memories, his future. Around Mehring, who views the farm as another dark, mysterious woman to conquer, like his "gypsy" mistress and the Portugese girl, the associations between sex and death accumulate. Finally the land, in the person of a muddy-complexioned "coloured girl," takes him to its hostile, possibly murderous, bosom. Mehring's disoriented state at the end of the novel makes what exactly happens to him unclear. Unlike Helen's obtrusive, too neat summation at the end of The Lying Days, Mehring's end in The Conservationist is ambiguous, and in fact depicted as ultimately irrelevant.
At the same time as the rising of the waters signals the destruction of Mehring, and the white Southern African power structure that he represents, it signals renewal, even resurrection, for black Southern Africa. While the body of the murdered black man is a Christ symbol, its significance is political rather than religious. The connections between the Resurrection and the revolution are apparent in the following descriptions of the body and the farm:

... all the farm has flowered and burgeoned from him, sucking his strength like nectar from a grass straw—(237).

But violence has flowered after seven years' drought, violence as fecundity, weathering as humus, rising as sap (243).

Finally at the funeral of the unknown man:

There was no child of his present, but their children were there to live after him. They had put him away to rest, at last; he had come back. He took possession of this earth, theirs; one of them (252).

The Biblical imagery and language of The Conservationist call to mind Schreiner's use of such imagery and language in African Farm. By means of refrains Gordimer brings the subtext of resurrection-revolution to the surface. She again uses this technique, along with interior monologue and remembered or imaginary dialogues, in Burger's Daughter. One important refrain in Burger's Daughter, which refers to the children's inheritance from their fathers, and the children leading the fathers, is prefigured in The Conservationist. Mehring's son Terry rejects his father's life of accumulation and domination;
he refuses to fight in Namibia (where, we are reminded, his forefathers killed 19,000 Hereros)—and in a related gesture, refuses his father's aggressive form of heterosexuality. Terry's hippiedom is an accusation of Mehring, who says to him, "I know what you say when you don't speak, sitting there with your body in its penitent's rags for all the sins of the fathers" (133). He reminds Terry that the farm will be his someday—"It all belongs to you. It will all belong to you" (142-43)—and that he won't be able to escape the guilt and responsibility of ownership.

In *The Conservationist* Gordimer brings together the themes, imagery and refrains of white Southern African literature beginning with Schreiner. Her achievement is to transpose them into a black African perspective, bringing to the surface the buried black body that is the subtext not only of her early work, but of all of the Schreiner-inspired white literature of Africa. The theme of inheritance which began with the landless orphans, Waldo and Lyndall, and continued in Lessing's landed white settler children ("They try to repudiate the past, but that is not so easy") is given new meaning in *The Conservationist*, in which the disinherited black Africans symbolically rise up to claim their inheritance, flooding and fertilizing the sterile, drought-stricken land of the whites. In *Burger's Daughter* Gordimer explores yet another variation on the complex theme of inheritance in the pre-revolutionary Southern African context.
Burger's Daughter

In *Burger's Daughter* (1979) Gordimer returns to the subject of her first novel twenty-six years earlier: female coming of age. The plots of the two novels are quite similar. Helen Shaw comes of age with the coming to power of the Afrikaner Nationalists; her resulting political disillusionment precipitates her personal disillusionment and creates contradictions that force her to examine the premises of her life, to journey from South Africa in search of self. Rosa Burger comes of age during the treason trials and suppression of communism in the fifties and sixties. She too rebels against her parents, explores new ways of living, and leaves for Europe.

Sex is subversively linked with blackness in *Burger's Daughter* as in *The Lying Days*. Rosa like Helen is sensually attracted to black people and their culture. Like other Gordimer characters she has a black alter ego. However, the parameters of this novel are different. For one thing, Rosa is the daughter of a prominent communist; her rebellion against her parents and their kind, her reason for leaving South Africa, her attraction and commitment to black people are much more complex than are Helen's in *The Lying Days*. Not surprisingly, *Burger's Daughter*, which is ideologically and thematically more sophisticated, is also more formally complex than Gordimer's first novel.

Helen's straightforward first-person narration of *The Lying Days* reflects the limits of her perception: an intelligent, sensitive, middle-class girl, she is born into sheltered
"normality"; her stages of growth follow a predictable pattern. The political crisis for liberal English-speaking South Africans intervenes, crystallizes her personality, and sets the pattern of her future. In Burger's Daughter, as in Gordimer's previous novels, the determining public and political events are filtered through private interpretation: the focus is on the inner experience of the protagonist. But in this novel, Gordimer uses her most complex time scheme and narrative structure, which reflect both Rosa's superior political understanding and her more complicated circumstances. Gordimer has said about Burger's Daughter that "style really grew out of content" ("A Story for this Place and Time" 109). It is written in spare, precise prose, less discursive than the style of The Lying Days, more concentrated and allusive.

Gordimer uses point of view as a major structuring device. There are two voices and three levels of narration in Burger's Daughter. Typically, an event is narrated from the limited point of view of a third person; Rosa retells it in the first person; finally she confesses the deeper truth of that same event. So there are levels of interpretation, of truth in fact. Rosa's actions are usually not what they appear; they are interpreted differently from the limited points of view of her friends and the police surveillance, for instance. Furthermore, there are other layers of pretense, as in Rosa's pretended love for Noel de Witt, which, she confesses, was in fact love.

The use of dashes to punctuate dialogue conveys the sense of conversation set within the flow of memory. It is not always
easy to tell who is speaking, but this too is congruent with the sense of Rosa speaking essentially to herself, speakers and listeners in her conversations being dead or unreachable. This sense of a refrain in Rosa's mind in her prison cell is reinforced by phrasal refrains in the text (a device which Gordimer used in *The Conservationist*): "Now you are free. . . . Now you are free . . . now he is dead! Dead!" (62-63). Or, "There is more to it. More than you guessed . . . more than I knew or wanted to know. . . . Still more to it than you knew" (63).

Gordimer describes her technique in *Burger's Daughter* as an extension of realism dictated by the subject:

> It's to get increasingly at what is really there. I suppose it comes about through finding that if you are drilling straight ahead, so to speak, you are constantly slipping and glancing off what is in the person, off the true center of their motivation and the conglomeration of circumstances and inherited attitudes that make up the inner personality (Interview with Stephen Gray, *Contemporary Literature* 265).

She presents Rosa, then, as a "conglomeration of circumstances and inherited attitudes." The "true center of [Rosa's] motivation," however, remains elusive, obscured finally by that complex of circumstances and attitudes that Gordimer so carefully builds around her character. The novel's epigraph is from Claude Levi-Strauss: "I am the place in which something has occurred," which again emphasizes the indirect explanation of Rosa's character. Rosa recounts what has occurred to and around her in an attempt to answer the question, "Who am I?" That this question is never conclusively answered, that Rosa remains mysterious, is to some extent a failing of the novel. However, when at the end Rosa is purposely withdrawn by the author, who
replaces her first person narration with the voice of a third person, we must allow that Gordimer is making a statement about the ultimate privacy of a public personality.

Gordimer explains her use of voice and point of view in the novel as an attempt to describe the life of a political activist hidden under "layers of protective colouring," and divided into "compartments." She states:

Rosa, who is herself a girl like any other girl... has roles imposed upon her by her mother and father; underneath those roles there's her own... So there are three roles somehow to be conveyed by the same character. It came to me, when I was pondering the book, since she was someone who had so much imposed upon her from the outside; since these were people who lived with layers of protective colouring in order to carry out what they thought was their purpose in life; since it has been my own experience, knowing people like that that there are infinite gradations of intimacy... Life lived in compartments, well, how do you approach somebody like that? And so the idea came to me of Rosa questioning herself as others see her and whether what they see is what she really is. And that developed into another stylistic question--if you're going to tell a book in the first person, to whom are you talking? "'A Story for this Place and Time'" (108).

Thus she invented Conrad and Katya as representatives of completely different modes of living, against whom Rosa tests, questions, explains and justifies her own, finally coming at the end of the book to address her father, Lionel.

Judie Newman suggests that the theme of the buried body in The Conservationist is carried into Burger's Daughter in the character of Rosa, whose personality we unbury as we read through the layers of interpretation surrounding her, and as she unburies/discovers herself ("Prospero's Complex: Race and Sex" in Nadine Gordimer's Burger's Daughter).13
The book begins with a third-person description of fourteen-year-old Rosa Burger with others waiting at the doors of the prison where her mother is detained; the book ends fourteen years later with a description of some of the same people waiting at the doors of the same prison where Rosa Burger is now detained. We know the dates of the arrests, which are historically significant, as are the month and year in which Rosa was born. Rosa's dates, anniversaries and festivals are those of the strikes, arrests and trials of the South African Communist Party, of which her parents were, first, leading members and, later, celebrated martyrs. Lionel, a doctor, and Cathy, a union organizer, were married the week of a great miners' strike on the Witwatersrand. And so the family history continues, through the Mineworkers' Union strike trial, her father's acquittal and rearrest, the legal dissolution of the Communist Party in 1950, the Treason Trial of 1957, and the underground operations of the nineteen-sixties, during which period her father was arrested again, to die in the third year of his life sentence. While the main characters are fictional, the public events are historical; they are chronicled at length, in fact checked with Rosa by Lionel's biographer. But these incontrovertible facts, these dates which form the Burger family album, only begin to answer Rosa's question of "Who am I?" She considers the political history in the long monologues in which she addresses three people who are close to her, or addresses herself through them, in an attempt to reach beyond the facts,
the illustrious or notorious dates (depending on one's political perspective) to the inner meaning of events, to the private relationships of a public family.

To this purpose, then, she presents three perspectives of the opening scene outside the prison. First, in an objective third person voice, Rosa describes herself at the prison gates: in her school uniform, with unwashed hair and prominent ears. She then describes herself through the eyes of one of her parents' comrades as a brave young heroine "dedicated to the struggle." (Here are echoes of Martha Quest's or Anna Wulf's irony about the left-wingers and her own relationship to them.) Rosa then switches to the more subjective first person:

When they saw me outside the prison, what did they see?

I shall never know. It's all concocted. I saw--see--that profile in a hand-held mirror directed towards another mirror... It's impossible to filter free of what I have learnt, felt, thought, the subjective presence of the schoolgirl. She's a stranger about whom some intimate facts are known to me, that's all (13-14).

She goes on to list the "intimate facts" about her schoolgirl self which, if they do not reveal the elusive truth, at least connect the public Rosa with a private one; the "courageous heroine" is a child like other children, for whom Cathy Burger is Mom: "Dear Mom, Hope you are all right. Dad and I are fine..." reads the note she has smuggled inside to assure her mother that Lionel has not yet been arrested, along with an old eiderdown given her by her Afrikaner grandmother. Another private fact is that Rosa is menstruating:
The internal landscape of my mysterious body turns me inside out, so that in that public place on that public occasion . . . I am within that monthly crisis of destruction, the purging, tearing, draining of my own structure (15-16).

Rosa's first person description is almost surrealistic; it is certainly symbolic: the great studded door, the banal note with a hidden meaning, her grandmother's quilt, and the menstrual cramps are like ritualistic elements in an initiation ceremony, in which with one hand Rosa assumes her parents' activist mantle, while clutching in the other hand the talisman of her Afrikaner tribal roots. Her dual inheritance is underscored by her full name, which is Rosa Marie: for the communist revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg and her grandmother Marie Burger.

From the shape of the novel which begins and ends at the prison, it seems to be a memoir or confession spoken in the prison cell where Rosa has chosen to embrace her fate as Burger's daughter. As she says at the end of Part One, which is addressed to Conrad, "I may have been talking to a dead man, only to myself" (210). Within this circular shape, Gordimer tells a story of rebellion, self-doubt, mixed allegiances, and escape that is an ironic twist on *The Story of an African Farm*, *Martha Quest*, and her own *Lying Days*. *Burger's Daughter* stands in a similar relation to *The Lying Days* as *From Man to Man* does to *African Farm*. It also harks back to certain romantic elements of *Out of Africa*.

Rosa, like Helen Shaw, rebels against her parents and the order they represent—-but only after their deaths. For her as for Helen sexual love is subversive in undermining her
allegiance, in this case, to the Cause. Like Helen and the other heroines, Rosa dreams of going abroad to find her freedom, and she succeeds for a time. But this plot of the heroine seeking self-fulfillment beyond the narrow round of an oppressive colonial society is turned on its head in *Burger's Daughter*. Whereas Lyndall and her heirs turn their personal struggles into the progressive politics of feminism, socialism and racial equality, Rosa is trapped by her inherited commitment to the politics of revolution. So to free herself she must start by abandoning that commitment. Instead of turning outward to the blacks or looking for solidarity with other women, Rosa turns inward to try to find the self that has been subordinated to her family and the Cause.

Gordimer has recounted her fascination with the children and grandchildren of South African communists, who, instead of revolting against their parents' beliefs and way of life, "simply took up the torch" in "a relay race of generations" ("'A Story for this Place and Time'" 100). *Burger's Daughter* explores the limits of that commitment, by making Rosa "defect" from her family. "Defect" is Rosa's word (first used on page 264 and repeated several times), and it points up the dilemma of her quest for liberation: that she can only become free through betrayal and flight. As John Cooke observes, "By putting [Rosa's] defection in such stark terms, Gordimer makes her strongest statement of the need, whatever the consequences, of a child to claim a life of her own" *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer* (81).
When the burden of being Burger's daughter is lifted after her father's death in prison, Rosa becomes a private person, hiding from, cutting her ties with the comrades. She retreats to her hippy friend Conrad's cottage, which, hidden on an overgrown estate scheduled for demolition, does not officially exist. There she undergoes a kind of psychoanalysis: she regresses and accuses, justifies and confesses the secrets of the Burger house. She tells Conrad:

I was struggling with a monstrous resentment against the claim—not of the Communist Party!—of blood, shared genes, the semen from which I had issued and the body in which I had grown. I stand outside the prison with an eiderdown and hidden messages for my mother. . . . Two hundred and seventeen days . . . while the witnesses came in and out the dock condemning my father. My mother is dead and there is only me, there, for him. Only me. My studies, my work, my love affairs must fit in with the twice-monthly visits to the prison, for life, as long as he lives—if he had lived. . . . I have no passport, because I am my father's daughter. People who associate with me must be prepared to be suspect because I am my father's daughter. . . . And now he is dead! . . . and I knew I must have wished him to die; that to exult and to sorrow were the same thing for me (62-63).

"Now you are free" is the refrain of this section, as Rosa learns from the feckless Conrad how to be selfish and irresponsible, how to be the child she never was. ("I don't give a fuck about what's 'useful,'" Conrad tells her, "... When I feel, there's no 'we,' only 'I'" 52). But Rosa, full of compromising knowledge, cannot fully relax her guard or speak completely truthfully to anyone; her full confession is made to the Conrad who went missing in a sailboat on the Indian Ocean, whom she tells: "There is more to it. More than you guessed or wormed out of me in your curiosity and envy . . ." (63).
Her first attempt to defect, Rosa tells the absent Conrad, was out of love for Noel de Witt, a political prisoner with whom, ironically, she had been made to act the role of fiancée in order to pass messages from her father. It was her secret anguish at having to hide her real feelings under a politically expedient lie that began to alienate her from her parents. When the young man went into exile abroad, Rosa secretly tried to obtain a passport to follow him; but unsuccessful, because of course she was Burger's daughter, she was left to nurse her furtive, resentful love.

Sex in other Gordimer fiction is portrayed as a social or political act through which the heroine sheds her aloneness and enters into a wider relationship of which her lover is only the representative or catalyst. This is akin to Out of Africa in which Karen Blixen's love affair with Denys Finch-Hatton is in part an expression of her love affair with Africa. In Schreiner, the sexual relationships of Lyndall, Rebekah and Bertie bring only pain and death (although at least Rebekah is allowed the compensatory joys of motherhood). Schreiner's heroines express their connection to the public, male world through platonic identification with idealized male figures. Lessing is basically cynical about sexual relationships; for Martha Quest, like Schreiner's characters, marriage and pregnancy are traps, men are mostly disappointing and unreliable. Although Martha is given a male intellectual mentor, Joss Cohen, her relationship with him is more ambivalent than Lyndall's with Waldo or Rebekah's with Mr. Drummond. Helen
Shaw's relationships are less diagrammatic, falling somewhere in between Dinesen's romance, Schreiner's platonic communion, and Lessing's realistic sexuality.

Rosa has three love affairs, plus an essentially platonic friendship with Conrad which echoes the non-sexual intimacy of Lyndall and Waldo. As Rosa tells Conrad, "And you know we had stopped making love together months before I left, aware that it had become incest" (70). Conrad is Rosa's pretend brother, who helps her defect from the Burger house; "Baasie," the black foster brother of her childhood, is "the voice from home" who effects her return. Rosa's affair with Bernard Chabalier in France is gloriously sexual, physically and emotionally liberating. But to remain there, to take up the role of Chabalier's mistress, would be to lose her freedom, she decides.

The novel is an exploration of the meaning of freedom. At first Rosa finds freedom in the release from her family—the freedom to be private and self-concerned. But she is also "free to understand" how much she has lost by being Burger's daughter. Emerging from the fervid intimacy of Conrad's cottage to seek the greater freedom of anonymity, she rents a faceless flat, takes a job in the office of an investment banker, and witnesses the "free," nonpolitical death of a white tramp on a park bench. This event like her later encounter with a mad old woman in France, reminds Rosa that nowhere is one free from suffering.

"To be free is to become almost a stranger to oneself:" Rosa says "the nearest I'll ever get to seeing what they saw outside the prison" (81). Throughout the novel there is a counterpoint between "freedom" and "prison." Rosa returns to
the image of her self as a child outside her mother's prison, to her farcical prison love affair with Noel de Witt, and to the memory of her father in prison. It is in Rosa's memory of Lionel's last public speech in court before he was sentenced that the refrains of "prison" and "freedom" come together, are presented not as opposites but as complements. Lionel Burger, about to be condemned to a life sentence, holds the courtroom spellbound for two hours as he exercises his last right to free, public speech; he justifies the aims and means of the Communist Party and the African National Congress, ending with an attack on the state's concept of guilt and innocence: "I would be guilty only if I were innocent of working to destroy racism in my country" (27). Thus the condemned man pronounces moral judgement on those who condemned him. After the sentence is pronounced, "There was a split second when everything stopped; no breath, no heartbeat, no saliva, no flow of blood except her father's... He alone... gave off the heat of life" (28). Condemned to life in prison he is paradoxically powerful, vital and free.14

Elsewhere in the book Rosa is scornful and ironic about her father's ever-hopeful old comrades, typified by the Terblanche family who have subordinated their lives to the future victory which has receded from them year by year, as their efforts and sacrifices have ended in failure: more restrictive laws, greater repression, the entrenchment of the white power structure. Almost sneering, she comments with some of Martha Quest's irony: "There is nothing but failure until the Future is achieved" (125). Rosa confronts the Terblanche daughter--her counterpart--
with the bleak record of their parents:

--And you'll go inside. Like them. You'll come out. Like them--(125).

I looked at her, inciting us. --What conformists: the children of our parents--(127).

Clare Terblanche scoffs at "bourgeois freedoms," but Rosa applies for a passport: a life of her own, abroad. "I don't know how to live in Lionel's country" she cries (210). She is torn between her father's ideals of freedom and her own need to be free of him. She is tempted by the "warm breast" of Mrs. Terblanche, to which, "one can come home again and . . . go to prison" (114). She is tempted even more by the proud and gorgeous Winnie Mandela figure, Marisa Kgosana, for whom, like Lionel, freedom and prison are not a dichotomy. Rosa meets her in a department store: "I'm just back from the Island [the prison on Robben Island]--. How splendidly she made the trip. . . . She doesn't have to find a solemn face, acknowledge the distance between the prison and the cosmetic counter" (136). Marisa Kgosana, like Lionel Burger that day in court, is vital and free; as Lionel did she casts a magnetic, physical spell, to which Rosa responds as to a revelation:

To touch in women's token embrace against the live, night cheek of Marisa, seeing huge for a second the lake-flash of her eye, the lilac-pink of her inner lip against the translucent-edged teeth, to enter for a moment the invisible magnetic field of the body of a beautiful creature and receive on oneself its imprint . . . this was to immerse oneself in another mode of perception. As near as a woman can get to the transformation of the world a man seeks in the beauty of a woman. Marisa is black; near, then, as well, to the white way of using blackness as a way of perceiving a sensual redemption, as romantics do, or of perceiving fears, as racialists do. In my father's house the one was seen as the obverse of the other,
two sides of false consciousness. . . . But even in that house blackness was a sensuous-redemptive means of perception. Through blackness is revealed the way to the future. . . . I felt it in Marisa's presence, after so long . . . (134-35).

This passage is the strongest evocation of the meaning of blackness for the white characters in the novels, not only of Gordimer, but also of Dinesen, Lessing (and indirectly, of Schreiner, whose identification with blackness is hidden or buried). Seen from very close range, Marisa is described as a beautiful night "creature," a collection of surfaces on which light and color play—as a natural object (lake, lilac) or force (magnetic field). This evocation of a black woman is reminiscent of Dinesen's descriptions of Masai warriors and Somali girls as beautiful natural objects, as one with the animals and landforms of Africa. Rosa, like Karen Blixen, connects with "Africa" through her romantic vision of Marisa. And by extension she connects with a deeper, freer, more authentic part of herself, which, as she notes, is the inspiration for her political commitment to her parents' and Marisa's vision of the future: "Through blackness is revealed the way to the future. . . ."15

Marisa, the essence of blackness, has her opposite in Brandt Vermeulen, the essence of "whiteness" in the South Africa of the novel: he is cold, clever, dissimulating, hypocritical, cruel, violent—and powerful. Rosa goes to him to bargain for her passport. Whereas Gordimer's descriptions of black characters are invariably sympathetic and often admiring, the white characters, except for the Burgers, are found wanting in various ways, ranging from being weak and unattractive to evil.
Vermeulen, the "enlightened Afrikaner," is a wholly sinister character, made more villainous by his engaging manner and cultured taste. In crossing his threshold Rosa enters for the first time the world of power and privilege which her father disowned. She knowingly consorts with the enemy, turning to her own advantage his need to justify apartheid; if the government can afford to allow Burger's daughter her political rights, it will provide evidence the "liberalization" is working, and that the regime has nothing to fear.

As were previous characters, Vermeulen is characterized by his surroundings; his house is one more stage in Rosa's movement from that legendary house of her father, to Conrad's fairy-tale cottage, the characterless office block, the dull shabby house of the white communists, and the warm, crowded house of Marisa's cousin in Soweto. Brandt's house is described in more detail than the others; these details, together with extensive quotations from his political philosophy are recorded in the third person with little authorial comment or response from the polite, enigmatic Rosa. The "New Afrikaner" is thus led to incriminate himself:

On one of the walls of this house an oil of heroic proportions: the visitor's eye matched to it a number of others in the room. All were composed radially from figures which seemed flung down in the centre of the canvas from a height, spread like a suicide on a pavement, or backed up against a wall, seen from the sights of the firing squad. Brandt Vermeulen was evidently a patron of the painter (181).

'What we are doing here may frighten the world, but what is bold and marvelous is always a little terrible to some . . .' (186).
When Rosa recounts her visits to Vermeulen in the first person, her distaste for and horror of the man are more clearly expressed:

He gave me an informal luncheon-type address on the honourable evolution of Dialogue, beginning with Plato . . . and culminating in 'the Vorster initiative,' the dialogue of peoples and nations. With me he was self-engaged in that responsibility on the human scale; for him his afternoons with Rosa were 'Dialogue' in practice.

Others, less fastidious-minded than he, pursue the human scale in the rooms supplied with only the basic furnishing of interrogation, winning over enemies brought out of solitary confinement to stand on their feet until they drop, kicked, beaten, doused and terrorized into submission (194).

It is significant that Rosa is female and that Brandt is male. He examines her as a connoisseur of beautiful things, idly noting the "painterly contrast" between her "coolie-pink" dress and the "greeny-bronze" lights of her skin (181). Fascinated with what she represents, he adds Rosa to his collection. As she puts it, "There I was, final proof of his eclecticism--sitting, at last--in his house beside the torso with the transverse vagina [another of his grotesque works of art]. . . (193).

The images of violence that characterize Vermeulen culminate in a final horrifying, almost surreal vision of pain and cruelty. A black man is beating a donkey:

I didn't see the whip. I saw agony. . . . Not seeing the whip, I saw the infliction of pain broken away from the will that creates it, broken loose, a force existing of itself . . . gone beyond the control of the humans who have spent thousands of years devising it (208).

In the elemental torture of the donkey by its desperate, brutalized master she sees "the sum of suffering" in her
country, which she, caught between pity for the donkey and for
the man, is helpless to stop. It is then that she admits, "I
don't know how to live in Lionel's country."

Part Two of the novel takes place in "Katya's country," the
French Riviera. Katya is Lionel's first wife, and Rosa address
this part of her memoir to her. Gordimer's evocation of the
South of France is of marvelous light, grace, sensuality and
openness (like the Sea section of The Lying Days). Even the
architecture displays for Rosa the "innocence and security of
being open to all lives around . . . " (224), in contrast to the
secrecy and insecurity of her life in South Africa. Freed from
the burden of being Burger's daughter, unafraid, unfettered,
Rosa dedicates herself to pleasure, she comes into full aware­
ness of her physical being. Gordimer's France is a place in
which--always in contrast to South Africa--people are in harmony
with their beautiful surroundings, with the living history of
their architecture. (Compare this to the description of the
Rand in The Lying Days.)

However her role as "the little Rose," Bernard Chabalier's
mistress, is slightly unreal. She is struck by the mixture of
triviality and desperation in the lives of Katya and her aging
friends. As a woman, she fears their fate: to be an abandoned
mistress whose life, once she is no longer young and pretty,
will be a collection of mementoes. As Gordimer said about this
part of the book, ". . . Katya, running away from political
suffering, has simply postponed what is coming" ("'A Story for
this Place and Time'" , 111).
So Rosa in her love affair with France remains peripheral, a tourist, an outsider, just as she is cast in the tangential role of "the other woman" in her affair with a married professor. Although Rosa's Europe is warm, sensual, and organic—in contrast to Rebecca's cold, dead, mechanical Europe in *A Guest of Honour*—both Europes are unreal, irrelevant museums. Thus Rosa, like Rebecca and Helen, is drawn back to South Africa, to the prison that is her home. Rosa, committed by birth to the opposition, decides that "no one can defect."

In fact the whole pattern of the novel, from its beginning outside the prison gates, suggests that Rosa will meet the fate of her parents. Her sojourn in the South of France is portrayed as a dream, full of delight, but insubstantial. Rosa is greatly tempted to assume the identity offered her in France, which would fit her for ordinary happiness. As she tells Katya, "Bernard Chabalier's mistress isn't Lionel Burger's daughter; she's certainly not accountable to the Future . . ." (304). But Rosa, like a heroine in classical tragedy, cannot separate her individual destiny from the Future which from the beginning has cast a shadow over the pages of the story.

In the third and last movement of the novel, Rosa's return to South Africa, the tragic pattern reasserts itself; the final stage of the drama is enacted, or rather, intoned. For Rosa herself, in spite of her monologue to Lionel, recedes as an individual character so that the resolution of her story is interpreted through other eyes.

After the Soweto uprising of 1976, Rosa is arrested in a sweep of political activists. Before that, however, her story
breaks down into a series of short documents; that is to say, the story of Rosa as an individual ends with her return to South Africa. The author presents third-person descriptions of Rosa's known activities from the points of view of both the security police and her friends. She attends a treason trial. She has a conversation with a Soweto parent. A black students' pamphlet is reproduced. There is a description of a prison visit with Rosa which echoes the first prison scene in the book. And finally a letter from Rosa to Katya:

It bore the stamp of the Prisons Department in Pretoria, but this aroused no interest in the handsome postman who stopped in for a pernod when he delivered the mail, because he could not read English and did not know where Pretoria was . . . . there was a reference to a watermark of light that came into the cell at sundown every evening . . . something Lionel Burger once mentioned. But the line had been deleted by the prison censor. [Katya] was never able to make it out (361).

That is our last communication from Rosa, from the ironic distance of the postman and the censor. As Rosa is removed from our view, by her arrest and the suspected activities that led up to it, by the political crisis of 1976-77, by her assumption of the Burger mantle, we are reminded of her question to herself in the first pages: "When they saw me outside the prison, what did they see?"

Rosa Marie Burger, who has tried to free herself from the responsibility inherited from her parents, is reclaimed by her family: at the end of the book she passes into myth, becomes a public figure whose motivations we cannot penetrate. Rosa addresses her father in the language of slogans and "catch-phrases" (her word) which take on the cadence of a chorus in
Greek tragedy; these repeated phrases rise in volume in the last pages. The chorus, which has been in the background, comes to the fore with oracular pronouncements from the catechism of the faithful:

No one can defect.
I don't know the ideology:
It's about suffering.
How to end suffering.
And it ends in suffering. Yes it's strange to live in a country where there are still heroes. Like anyone else, I do what I can (332).

Our children and our children's children. The sins of the fathers; at last the children avenge on the fathers the sins of the fathers. Their children and children's children; that was the Future, father, in hands not foreseen (348).

These last sentences are a reference to the Soweto children, who, ignoring the directives of their elders (including the ANC and the Communist Party), took the revolution into their own hands. By asserting the power of the children over the fathers, is Rosa claiming her own independence from her elders? Has she—as Lionel and Marisa did, but in her own way—paradoxically found freedom in prison? Freedom is the novel's main refrain. Prison is the main recurring image, the setting for puberty, love, death—and finally for freedom? For clearly Rosa finds herself, ends her quest, at the end of the novel. For the first time she is described as girlish, as looking like a fourteen-year-old (her age at the beginning of the novel). Rosa's girlish look could imply that she has surrendered her adult will to her parents' cause. She paints scenes of France from memory, which implies regret for the life she could have led there. On the other hand, she might have reclaimed her childhood by acting—like the Soweto children—of her own
volition, by returning to Lionel's and Cathy's prison on her own terms. Although the ending is equivocal, we are asked to concede the possibility that Rosa has found contentment in what appears to be a perverse renunciation of ordinary happiness. As Gordimer has said about Rosa, "she returns to South Africa because that is where she believes she is most fully alive" (What Happened to Burger's Daughter 20).

In the context of the novels of Olive Schreiner, Rosa's heroism reminds one not of the foredoomed Lyndall, whose bright fire of rebellion is quickly extinguished, but rather of Rebekah, whose candle burns through the long nights in her study/cell where she created a free space within the severe constraints of her married life in Capetown. Rosa's prison cell, fitted with a makeshift desk and easel, is reminiscent of Rebekah's tiny study. Gordimer's heroines, as versions of herself, are primarily witnesses and recorders—like Rebekah, they are survivors. Except for Rosa, whose role of witness is passed on to other women, Gordimer's heroines must survive to finish their stories. Doris Lessing's heroines too are survivors and recorders; Martha Quest and the narrator of Memoirs of a Survivor weather the fire storms of the future to document the aftermath of nuclear catastrophe.

Gordimer's explanation of her novel's theme echoes Lessings' description of Children of Violence twenty years earlier, as that of the individual conscience in relation to the collective. Gordimer has said about Burger's Daughter: "The theme of my novel is human conflict between the desire to live a personal, private life and the rival claim of social
responsibility to one's fellow man—human advancement" (What Happened to Burger's Daughter 23). With Burger's Daughter, Gordimer has caught up with Lessing's theme of the inner conflicts of a woman communist in Southern Africa. Gordimer's novel is also comparable—in skill, formal complexity and ambitiousness of subject—to Lessing's masterpiece, The Golden Notebook (whereupon she abandoned historically and autobiographically specific subject matter). In Burger's Daughter, then, Gordimer meets the political radicalism and grasp of public events that was so marked in the Lessing of the fifties and sixties. Gordimer tries to arrive at "what's really there" through a collage of narrative voices and levels of interpretation reminiscent of Lessing's technique in The Golden Notebook. Both works explore the interface between private and public, personal and political, by untangling the various threads of one woman's life, revealing both what is unique and what is historically typical in her personality and decisions.

The memoirs and novels considered so far are all to some extent autobiographical. Burger's Daughter is the least directly so, but the most profoundly concerned with the relation between truth and fiction. First of all it is fictionalized history. Lionel Burger is a free but recognizable version of Bram Fischer, a prominent Afrikaner lawyer and communist who was imprisoned for life. Secondly, Gordimer's novel is a history of the South African political opposition from 1946, the year of the Burgers' marriage, to 1977, when Rosa was imprisoned. The main events of the characters' lives are marked by historical milestones from the 1946 miner's strike, the coming to power of
the Afrikaner Nationalists in 1948 (when Rosa was born), the Treason Trial of 1957, the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, to the Soweto riots in 1976, which coincide with Rosa's return to South Africa. The documentary aspect of Burger's Daughter, together with Gordimer's frequent (and mostly unattributed) quotation from banned sources, are a way of smuggling the forbidden discourse of the Communist Party, ANC, Black Consciousness Movement and black students' organizations into the South African novel.

The political element of Burger's Daughter deepened when during the writing of the novel Gordimer was overtaken by real events. She has said that:

... you must remember that Soweto overtook me while writing that book. This is what I think is so interesting about writing--how closely connected you are, not in a journalistic way, but inescapably connected with events. ... Rosa would have come back to South Africa; that was inevitable. There would have been a different ending, though, without the Soweto riots. But that shows how there is a logical pattern to what is happening here (Interview with Stephen Gray, Contemporary Literature 269).

That is to say, the logic of history and the logic of fiction are similar. In any case, Gordimer's statement shows how she consciously transforms history into fiction, how she works within the parameters of real events, recent events which have scarcely had time to jell, to be "objectively" interpreted by historians.

Because of the novel's fidelity to history it ran into trouble with the South African censors. In What Happened to Burger's Daughter, Gordimer recounts the banning and subsequent
unbanning of the novel. She uses this postscript to the publishing history of the book to publicize the absurdities and inequities of the censorship regulations, which, she argues, selectively free the work of some white writers while suppressing the work of most black writers in an attempt to divide the literary community.

A last aspect of the novel to consider is the autobiographical element. Obviously, Gordimer does not have much in common with Rosa, or with most of the other characters. It is in the theme of the allure of defection versus the obscurer compensations of commitment that Gordimer seems to be making a personal statement. She may not be in imminent danger of imprisonment, like the communists she portrays, but with each new volume of fiction, and with her essays and speeches, she skates ever closer to the danger of being silenced; the situation for white radicals like herself is becoming ever more untenable. Burger's Daughter is on one level her own statement of commitment to remain in South Africa, with all the sacrifices, conflicts and danger that decision entails.
Notes - Nadine Gordimer

1Conor Cruise O'Brien pursues these comparisons in his review of Burger's Daughter, "Waiting for Revolution," concluding that Gordimer is "living and working in a culture that is closer to nineteenth-century Russia than it is to the contemporary West," and that in her writing "the conditions of South African life have produced a glorious anachronism" (27).

2I have taken the biographical details from Robert F. Haugh, Nadine Gordimer as well as from Gordimer's own essays and interviews, in particular her revealing Paris Review interview in 1983. Of the four writers Gordimer's personal life seems least relevant to her fiction, but one might note that she married young and subsequently divorced, like Lessing, and now lives with her husband of many years; between them they have three children.

3For instance, Gordimer has written that, "Growing up in a gold-mining town in South Africa as a member of a white minority, to begin with, my particular solitude as an intellectual-by-inclination was so complete that I did not even know I was one . . ." (Introduction to Selected Stories 11).


5The information on Gordimer's literary influences is taken from her essays: "Leaving School--II," "A Writer in South Africa," and "Notes of an Expropriator".

6Interestingly, as Christopher Heywood has shown, one of Lawrence's models was Olive Schreiner ("Olive Schreiner's Influence on George Moore and D.H. Lawrence").

7Alan Lomberg traces the metaphors in the novel, which he sees as being "built on a pattern of water imagery linked by an underlying notion of rhythm, music and the blood"("Withering Into Truth: The Romantic Realism of Nadine Gordimer"). He does not however link these symbols of sensual self-discovery to the exploration of blackness or to Helen's political awakening.

8Gordimer pursues the parallels between the two meanings of "superficial" by describing Atherton as "the superimposed Africa . . ." (146). This parallels Lessing's description of Salisbury as "lightly scratched on the surface of the soil . . ." (Martha Quest 221).
Gordimer's words are, "He had come back" (163), which she has described as an allusion to "Afrika! Mayibuye!" (Interview with Stephen Gray, Contemporary Literature 268).

For instance, Abdul R. JanMohamed sees Gordimer's use of myth in The Conservationist as "reminiscent of Isak Dinesen's use of mythic consciousness to transcend the opposition between self and other" (124).

Rowland Smith notes that, "A feature of white, English-language fiction of the seventies is the repeated use of the internal monologue or interior debate in novels whose protagonists are obsessed with power, ownership and identity. . . . By turning inward, to the psychology of derangement, the authors try to make an implicit comment on the present" ("The Seventies and After . . ." 197).

Gordimer herself mentions the "resurrection" theme of the novel, explaining "There's a suggestion of something that has been planted, that is going to grow again" (Paris Review interview 114). Her extensive use of Zulu religious poetry as epigraphs reinforces the religious-political or inspirational message.

Newman finds specific images of the buried body in Burger's Daughter: in the scene in which Rosa and Claire find a used sanitary napkin (129), and in the scene between Rosa and "Baasie" in which Rosa tries to "bury" him (322).

Stephen Clingman points out that in Lionel's speech and elsewhere in the novel Gordimer reproduces the verbal and written statements of such banned activists and writers as Bram Fischer, Steve Biko, Joe Slovo, Marx and Lenin (The Novels of Nadine Gordimer 186-87). These quotations are another example of Gordimer's blending of documentary and fiction in Burger's Daughter.

Gordimer is critical of the appeal of blackness for whites: "I think the sensuous-redemptive thing is dangerous," but she acknowledges feeling something of it herself ("'A Story for this Time and Place!'" 112).

It is fitting to use Georg Lukács' terminology of critical realism (i.e. the hero[ine] as representative type in whose individual situation the conflicts of a society and period are most clearly mirrored) to describe Lessing's and Gordimer's novels, for both writers have been influenced by the Marxist critic.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion: From the "African Farm" to Azania

*Burger's Daughter* is the last "African Farm" text, that is, the last story of a white heroine set in white-ruled Africa. The end of the novel, which describes the Soweto students' uprising and the paradoxically triumphant sorority of the jailed revolutionaries, anticipates a black-ruled Azania in whose literature the theme of the white colonial heroine's dilemma will be obsolete and irrelevant. In the two novels published after *Burger's Daughter*, *July's People* and *A Sport of Nature* Gordimer tests her pre-revolutionary heroine in revolutionary conditions: Maureen Smales is found wanting, while Hillela Kgomani participates in the new order.

Gordimer's imaginative engagement with postcolonial realities is paralleled in the other major white writers in her country, Brink and Coetzee, in whose recent novels there is a similar shift of focus from white-determined issues to black-determined issues, and from white characters to non-white characters. Fiction, which anticipates history, is rehearsing the new society which, struggling to be born in *Burger's Daughter*, triumphantly unfurls its flag in *A Sport of Nature*. The ceremonial birth of Azania is witnessed by Hillela, who, resplendent in her West African robes and headdress, has a place of honor beside the new Prime Minister's wife, a Winnie Mandela figure who resembles Rosa's friend and comrade Marisa Kgosana.

Finally, we turn from this vision of Gordimer's Africanized white heroine to the black women writers who are the successors
of Schreiner, Dinesen, Lessing and Gordimer. Bessie Head and Miriam Tlali are the major female voices in black Southern African fiction. Appropriately, Head's novel *Maru* has direct links with Schreiner, whom she too claims as a foremother. Head's critical identification with Schreiner indicates that her heritage is still present and can yet be of use in the literature of Southern Africa.

Tlali's novel *Amandla*, on the other hand, does not admit of white reference points. It is set in the tumult of Soweto in 1976 which shaped the ending of *Burger's Daughter*. But in contrast to Gordimer's indirect account of these significant events (which as a white she was unable to witness) Tlali's account is that of an impassioned witness. Although the main actors and speakers in her story are the boys and young men who, without organized leadership, take control of the people's struggle, she uses her female point of view to depict the complementary role of the Soweto women--mothers, grandmothers, wives and girlfriends--during the crisis.

Using this outline of the shift of focus in recent fiction from the white-dominated microcosm of the "African Farm" to the independent nation of Azania, I begin by summarizing the "African Farm" material through the lens of four short stories by Schreiner, Dinesen, Lessing and Gordimer which directly treat the white heroine's relationship with a black character. The sharper focus and larger grain of the short fiction provides a more incisive picture than do the novels, which treat the heroine's overall development, of the relationship between the
white colonial girl or woman and, in the case of these stories, the black man who is portrayed as her antagonist: her victim and attacker.

"Dream Life and Real Life"

Schreiner, Dinesen, Lessing and Gordimer have all made extensive use of the short story form. Schreiner published three volumes of the poetic short fictions which she termed "dreams," "visions," and "allegories," in addition to several realistic stories. For Schreiner, who after the early success of African Farm spent the rest of her life trying to complete From Man to Man, stories, along with essays and speeches, seem to have been a more manageable form. It is significant that the wonderful "Prelude" or "Child's Day" which she added to From Man to Man in 1888 was conceived and written "in a flash" as a self-contained text which is an illuminating miniature of the larger work. Its clarity of language, its tight structure and spare symbolic images make "The Child's Day" more compelling than the novel as a whole, as it sets out Schreiner's theme of divided identity in sharp, clear motifs. A much earlier story, "Dream Life and Real Life," functions similarly as a coda for The Story of an African Farm, throwing into relief the conflicts of that novel.¹

"Dream Life and Real Life" is the story of the short life of Jannita, an orphaned Danish girl who is indentured to a brutal Boer farmer. She is, then, a white child, like Lyndall
and Waldo, who is mistreated, as they were, by a white master
and mistress, and who dreams, as they do, of a beloved lost
father. The point at which Jannita's story enriches *African
Farm* is where it raises to the surface the suppressed element of
Lyndall and Waldo's oppression: their alienation from the black
laborers and "coloured" servants who are their partners in
suffering. *African Farm* provides few glimpses into the lives
and emotions of the non-white characters, but such scenes are
remarkable for the mutual hostility of the black and white
characters. Schreiner's negative portrayal of non-whites is
rationalized by their antagonistic attitude toward the
victimized whites. This antagonism is most obvious in the scene
in which the house servants laugh gleefully when loyal Old Otto
is driven from the farm by Bonaparte Blenkins.

Schreiner's depiction of racial hostility is even more
pointed in "Dream Life and Real Life," in which Jannita is
tricked and killed by a fellow servant. First Dirk the Hotten­
tot steals one of the goats for which she is responsible; then
the Boer farmer beats her for her lapse, with the Hottentot's
whip. That night, aching and hungry, she is inspired to run for
freedom by the sight of a spring buck bounding in the moonlight:
"Away, away, away! I—I also!" she cries (23). The next night
Jannita is awakened in her hiding place in the rocks by the
Hottentot, a Bushman and an English navvy who are roasting the
stolen goat. When she overhears their plan to raid the Boer
farm and murder the family in their beds, she runs to warn her
master. The members of the family hear her cries and save themselves, but Jannita is killed by the three criminals. In the last sentence, the moon, which had guided the girl to freedom and then back to servitude, now shines on "a little new-made heap of round stones" (48). The Englishman, to whom the girl appealed as a fellow white to spare her life, is at least haunted by the murder (as is the Bushman); Dirk the Hottentot, however, is immune to pity.

The opposition between "dream life" and "real life" in the story, between the fantasy of freedom represented by the spring buck leaping in the moonlight and the actuality of servitude with its pain, hunger and powerlessness, prefigure these themes in African Farm. The metaphor of the hunted animal in African Farm is even clearer here, as well as the child's identification with wild creatures and the inanimate forms--moon, rocks, and plants--which shelter and succor her. This makes the lack of sympathy between Jannita and Dirk all the more striking. The girl's readiness to give her life to save the farmer who beats and starves her is further evidence of Jannita/Schreiner's confused loyalties. Caught between the identity of servant and master, that is between the opposing camps of black and white, she is damned by both. Schreiner's analysis--that the girl's worst enemy is not the master but the fellow servant (that is not the white but the black)--implies that the real conflict is between the races: Jannita's ultimate loyalty is to the whites, in spite of her mistreatment.
The violence that indirectly kills Lyndall and Waldo in *African Farm* is in "Dream Life and Real Life" explicit; the hostility of the arid land, cruel sun and unfeeling natives, that is, the hostility of Africa to the white settler, is here manifest in Dirk's treatment of Jannita; Schreiner's orphan children, who lie outside the protection of the white laager, are undefended targets for the blacks' rage against their own dispossession and forced servitude.

"Kitosch's Story"

The violence of the African farm depicted in Schreiner's story also disrupts the pastoral world of Dinesen's farm. The accidental deaths of two black children, Denys' plane crash, along with disease, fire and financial collapse, destroy the "real life" of Karen Blixen's farm, transforming it into the "dream life" of Isak Dinesen's *Out of Africa*.

In terms of structure, her anecdotal African memoirs are more like a unified story sequence than a novel. Looking at the book as a series of stories, as in fact the author has invited us to do with her divisions and subtitles, reveals some of the tensions of the farm, by helping us to focus less on the overpowering figure of Blixen/Dinesen and more on the numerous black characters who people her book.

*Out of Africa* is divided into five sections, each of which contains several tales. The fourth section, "From an Immigrant's Notebook," consists of thirty-two entries: short stories, parables, fables, and reflections, ranging from a few sentences to a few pages. The four-page "Kitosch's Story," the longest
piece in this section, is notable for its depictions of white brutality against the black man, a subject which is not directly treated elsewhere in Out of Africa. The story is buried in a section where Dinesen seems to have filed her miscellaneous material which did not quite fit within the pattern of the text, material which would have disrupted it. Although there is a surprising amount of violence and death in Out of Africa, it is presented as apparently random, or as mysteriously fated; it is not malicious, no one is at fault. But the human bloodshed and the considerable animal bloodshed in the memoirs point to an underlying strain of danger and cruelty in Dinesen's Eden. What she makes of the incident described in "Kitosch's Story," which obviously disturbed her, is characteristic of her strategy for presenting painful events in a positive, ennobling light.

Kitosch, the servant of a white settler, was accused by his master of riding the settler's horse, and for this offense tied up, flogged severely, and left to die. The white court found the settler innocent of murder on the grounds that Kitosch had lost his desire to live and so had willed his own death. Dinesen presents these facts in the tone of one who is in obvious sympathy with the black man; thus the reader expects her to be critical of the court's findings. But Dinesen in fact embraces the court's verdict, using it to portray Kitosch's death as a heroic assertion of free will, as the only act of dignity available to him under the circumstances.

Dinesen's making of Kitosch into a tragic hero has the effect of deflecting responsibility from the man who beat him to death for a minor infraction. Also, her celebration of the
individual's will, making his death an assertion of freedom, has the effect of deflecting blame from the colonial society with its system of human exploitation. Finally, her empathy with Kitosch has the effect of deflecting the question of her own guilt, as the feudal mistress of the hundreds of "squatters" on her own farm.

Lessing and Gordimer

The Lessing and Gordimer stories, in contrast, are studies of white guilt—and black anger. Rather than Schreiner's dream or allegorical mode, or Dinesen's adaptation of the traditional oral tale, they employ the spare form of the modern short story, which focuses on a central moment with its attendant image or symbol into which character and action are compressed, from which meanings and connections radiate. Whereas in a novel one expects some kind of resolution, a story is resonant with meaning that the writer is not necessarily called upon to resolve. Its central image can be one of contradiction.

In their short stories Lessing and Gordimer solve some of the thematic, structural and stylistic problems of their novels. For example, in Lessing's novels the individual, typical and archetypal dimensions of character do not always mesh. She solves this problem in The Golden Notebook by means of the formal strategy of having her heroine self-consciously break her life into the black, red, yellow and blue notebooks, within the unifying structure of the golden notebook. The short story offers her another formal strategy for depicting the interaction of the personal, political and mythic within one character or
situation. The epiphany which is the focus of many of her stories is a moment of poetic intensity in realism, in which the ordinary is revealed as numinous—in which there is a momentary unity between the natural and supernatural, the realistic and romantic, the typical and archetypal, the historical and universal.

The epiphany, then, is a moment of unity and transformation; it opens doors; it suggests possibilities. As such Nadine Gordimer uses it to imaginatively overcome the barriers between the races that are a central problem in her fiction. In her stories the epiphany is often a moment of contact between a black and white person in which a range of social possibilities is envisioned, in which the future is made manifest. The story form also seems to have helped Gordimer to find satisfactory endings for her fictions. In her early novels, such as The Lying Days and Occasion for Loving, the endings are artificial; they do not arise logically out of the text. In the later novels, The Conservationist, Burger's Daughter, and July's People, she allows the endings to be ambiguous; they embody rather than resolve the dilemmas posed by the texts. This strategy, which is relatively recent in her novels, has been apparent in her stories from the beginning of her career. She often lets the central event or encounter of a story carry the burden of meaning, imagery and symbolism, thus freeing the last sentences for (often ironic) reflection.

Whereas the compressed form of the short story aids Gordimer in terms of structure, it aids Lessing in terms of style. In her stories she is forced to choose words more
carefully, to tighten her prose, to be more aware of language, which in her novels is too often workaday, flat, repetitive and awkward.

"The Old Chief Mshlanga" and the Myth of White Eve

"The Old Chief Mshlanga," published one year before Martha Quest, is not only one of Lessing's best stories but also a paradigm of her autobiographical African fiction. It is a key text in the "African Farm" literature, a story which summarizes the major themes and motifs of all four writers, within the unifying metaphor of White Eve. More directly than Martha Quest, it is about the encounter between white and black.

The story's eleven pages have a novelistic time range, as the central character grows from early childhood to late adolescence. Through its pattern of literary allusion Lessing depicts her female character as reader and artist in the African colonial setting, thus "The Old Chief Mshlanga" is Lessing's equivalent of "The Child's Day," filling the gaps of childhood and writership in Martha Quest's story.

The first section, narrated in the third person, places the small white girl in the setting of the farm and veld, which for her is obscured by the images of English poetry and European fairy tales:

... the Northern witch, bred of cold Northern forests would stand before her among the mealie fields, and it was the mealie fields that faded and fled, leaving her among the gnarled roots of an oak, snow falling thick and soft and white ... it was the veld that seemed unreal: the sun was a foreign sun, and the wind spoke a strange language.
The black people on the farm were as remote as the trees and the rocks. They were an amorphous black mass . . . faceless, who existed merely to serve . . . (11-12).

An arrogant little Chieftainess, or "Nkosikaas" as she is called by inferiors, she carelessly commands and torments the black people on the farm. Neither they nor farm nor veld are real to her, lost as she is in the rhythms of an alien language, the images of an alien literature.

In the second section of the story the small girl is an adolescent; the narrative voice changes from the third to the first person, mirroring the increase in the protagonist's self-awareness. The terse sentences lengthen and take on a solemn pastoral cadence. Lessing is building up to an epiphany; time slows, and for a moment, stops:

One evening, when I was about fourteen, I was walking down the side of a mealie field that had been newly ploughed, so that the great red clods showed fresh and tumbling to the vlei beyond, like a choppy red sea; it was that hushed and listening hour, when the birds send long sad calls from tree to tree, and all the colours of earth and sky and leaf are deep and golden (12-13).

Redolent of Lawrence, Hardy and Wordsworth, this and similar passages reflect the influence of literature on the narrator and her author. Even the incident announced by the passage—an unexpected but fateful meeting, a mysterious glimpse into another mode of life that will change her own—is a pattern from Hardy or Wordsworth. Yet the description of nature also shows that the narrator is seeing her African setting in a new way; she is looking outward to the world around her rather than inward to a private world of books.
It is the magic time of twilight. The girl meets the first black man whom she cannot ignore, because he does not immediately step aside from the path "in respect for my passing." He is Chief Mshlanga, the hereditary ruler of the land now owned by her father. A proud and dignified figure, it is he who exacts courtesy from "the little Nkosikaas" (whose title now seems absurd). In the light of her encounter with the Chief, the girl begins to question her family's right to the land, and the legitimacy of white-settler rule. She says:

Not long afterwards I read in an old explorer's book the phrase: "Chief Mshlanga's country." It went like this: "Our destination was Chief Mshlanga's country, to the north of the river; and it was our desire to ask his permission to prospect for gold in his territory."

The phrase "ask his permission" was so extraordinary to a white child, brought up to consider all natives as things to use, that it revived those questions, which could not be suppressed: they fermented slowly in my mind (14).

The encounter with Chief Mshlanga has opened her eyes to the black reality of Africa. With this new vision, the images of storybook England begin to drop from her eyes. Says the girl:

When I saw a native approaching, we offered and took greetings; and slowly that other landscape in my mind faded, and my feet struck directly on the African soil, and I saw the shapes of tree and hill clearly (14).

The images from English literature may be alien to the Southern African landscape, but its patterns are not alien to the experience of the white settler child. Lessing builds a simile between her character's progressive social awareness and the poem she was reading at the beginning of the story,
Tennyson's "Lady of Shalott." Imprisoned in her tower by a mysterious curse, the Lady of Shalott watches the world in a mirror and weaves its scenes into a tapestry. "Half sick of shadows," she is drawn from her mirror to the window for a glimpse of Lancelot, glorious in the sun, riding to Camelot. The mirror cracks, the tapestry comes undone, and she dies, floating down the river to Camelot. Like the Lady of Shalott, Lessing's white African girl breaks her enchantment, turning from a pallid, secondhand picture of England, to a vibrant and tangible Africa. As Lessing quotes in the beginning of the story, "Out flew the web and floated wide;/The mirror crack'd from side to side" (Tennyson 11. 115-16).

In the third section of the story, now fascinated by the "slow intimate dance of landscape and men," she trespasses onto Government land, "which had never been cultivated by white men," to visit the reserve where the Chief and his son, her family's cook, still govern their village. She discovers a new country:

I had entered a completely fresh type of landscape. It was a wide green valley, where a small river sparkled, and vivid green water-birds darted over the rushes. The grass was thick and soft to my calves, the trees stood tall and shapely (16).

Alone in this Edenic country which has remained untouched by white men, she has a second epiphany, this time a premonition of supernatural terror; suddenly she perceives the land as hostile and menacing, as if she has disturbed "something old and evil, something dark and big and angry." The village itself is peaceful, orderly, and prosperous, with goats grazing on lush grass, huts "lovingly decorated" with geometric patterns, and a
branch of the river "lying like an enclosing arm" to protect the settlement. But the girl is received by the Chief with polite displeasure. She knows that she should not have come:

... there was now a queer hostility in the landscape, a cold, hard, sullen indomitability that walked with me, as strong as a wall, as intangible as smoke; it seemed to say to me: you walk here as a destroyer. I went slowly homewards, with an empty heart: I had learned that if one cannot call a country to heel like a dog, neither can one dismiss the past with a smile in an easy gush of feeling, saying: I could not help it, I am also a victim (19).

Her premonition of destruction is fulfilled; Chief Mshlanga and his people are removed to facilitate white settlement. The girl makes a last visit to the site of the village to find it now in ruins.

Rather than merely an embryonic version of the African volumes of *Children of Violence*, "The Old Chief Mshlanga" is in a sense a fuller and clearer account of the dilemma of the white settler girl/woman. It trenchantly develops the central issue of the conflict between her role as "little mistress" and her identification with the Chief and his people. Yet as a story rather than a novel, its bones do not need to be fleshed out with the realistic details of the girl's life. Lessing does not even judge it necessary to give her character a name. The story bears instead the Chief's name, thus making him—and what he represents, proud but dispossessed black Africa—the ironic center of the story. His fate determines the girl's, whose namelessness stresses her secondary role. As a representative type, she corresponds not only to Martha Quest but to all Lessing's white African characters as well as to the "African Farm" protagonists of Schreiner, Dinesen and Gordimer.
The split in the heroine's consciousness engendered by English and European literature, with which the first section of the story is concerned, recalls "The Child's Day," in which young Rebekah is divided between Queen Victoria and the Bushman stone, English and African culture. Lessing's description is even closer to Gordimer's description of the pernicious influence of English fairy tales on Helen's perception in The Lying Days. The change of heart which the narrator undergoes in "The Old Chief Mshlanga" also corresponds to the changes which Rebekah and Helen make in their attitudes toward Africans. Lessing's character's claim that, "... this is my heritage too; I was bred here; it is my country as well as the black man's country; and there is plenty of room for all of us..." (15) is very much like Rebekah's decision to take down her imaginary wall shutting out black Africa, and Helen's hesitant embrace of blackness. This pattern in Lessing's story also corresponds to Karen Blixen's identification with Africa, her attempt to make the country her own. In each of these texts the white heroine is ultimately rejected by an indifferent or hostile land.

The imagery of Eden in Lessing's story is also reminiscent of Dinesen, but whereas in Out of Africa the heroine discovers the blissful freedom and creative power of Adam, in "The Old Chief Mshlanga" she discovers herself as "a destroyer." Lessing's heroine plays the role of Eve, whose trespass onto black land is mysteriously instrumental in expelling the Chief and his people from their paradise. By reaching out to them she
transgresses the rules of apartheid, for which she is punished by becoming alienated from both the false Eden of the whites, which is based on ignorance of African history and culture, and the true Eden of the blacks, which her visit metaphorically despoils.

As we have seen, this myth of the white heroine as Eve expelled from the African garden operates in all the "African Farm" texts. For Lyndall and Waldo to seek knowledge, whether intellectual or carnal, is a dangerous act of rebellion for which they are expelled from the farm. Schreiner's ostrich farm in the desert is an ironic garden of Eden, which blooms only at the end of the novel, when Lyndall and Waldo have been destroyed.

In From Man to Man the Eve myth is more complex, as Rebekah's stance moves from arrogant innocence, in which she claims the African garden as her own, to a painful fall from grace, as she acquires knowledge and experience. Finally she reclaims the garden—in the form of a farm for herself and her children—after having realized that she must share it with the Africans.

The myth of Eden is an explicit metaphor in Out of Africa, in which Karen Blixen as Adam, and by extension Isak Dinesen as God, recreates Paradise in Kenya. But with the loss of her Paradise Blixen becomes more like Eve than Adam; in her weakness, in her mortality, she is more female than male. It is specifically as a woman that she enters into the suffering of the Africans and comes to empathize with them, although, as
"Kitosch's Story" shows, she is unwilling to acknowledge her own
guilt as settler and mistress.

Dinesen's use of the Eden myth raises the question of what
role the blacks play in this white colonial model of Africa. In
one sense they are part of the garden's fauna, created for
Adam's use and pleasure, named by him as Blixen names "her"
animals--and "her" Africans. In another sense the original
inhabitants of the whites' garden are, like Adam and Eve,
expelled, thus casting the white settlers (and Blixen herself)
in the Satanic role of invader and destroyer. There emerges in
Dinesen and in the other texts a conflict between the whites'
vision of Africa as their paradise, complete with black servants
to perform their labors, and the vision of Africa as a pre-
colonial black paradise destroyed by whites. Lessing's "Old
Chief Mshlanga" exposes the contradictions inherent in these
opposing visions, illustrating how untenable is White Eve's
position.

"The Old Chief Mshlanga" illuminates the Eve myth in the
Martha Quest novels as well. Throughout Children of Violence
Martha pursues her vision of Paradise, beginning with her Ideal
City on the veld, continuing through her belief in the socialist
New Jerusalem, and then her inward journey set in the four-gated
city of London. Martha finally finds Eden on a remote island in
the North Atlantic, among the survivors of the Third World War;
it is from this reduced society that a new world will be born,
suggests Lessing.
The myth of Creation, Fall and the quest for a new Paradise is a central theme in the Canopus series, and apparent too in the search for wholeness or reintegration in The Golden Notebook and Memoirs of a Survivor. That search for the Ideal City, the primal unity of self, society and nature, is the positive side of the Eve myth in Lessing. The negative side of the quest is the theme of alienation and exile, symbolizing the heroine's expulsion from the Garden. Martha the quester is always leaving a phase in her life, always rejecting a set of discredited ideals, as she leaves parents, friends, lovers, husbands, children, houses and countries. Lessing's later fiction provides more evidence for her belief that alienation is the inevitable concomitant of the quest for ideal unity. Al'ith, the heroine of The Marriages Between Zones Three Four and Five, successfully completes her marriage, that is, her quest to integrate the opposing aspects of two zones in the interests of mutual evolution. But (like Undine) she emerges as an alien in both the zones of her birth and of her marriage; the end of the novel finds her pursuing a lonely quest (which resembles Schreiner's "Allegory of the Hunter") to reach the rarefied heights of Zone Two.

With a different emphasis, Gordimer too employs the myth of the white heroine as Eve in the black Garden. In The Lying Days she uses the image of South Africa as a white Paradise, built over the graves of displaced and exploited blacks. In The Lying Days and subsequent fiction she develops the parallel image of black South Africa as the true Eden, from which the whites are
alienated in their privileged but sterile enclaves. These ideas are spelled out in *Burger's Daughter*, in which blackness is "redemptive," in which Rosa tries and rejects the false Paradise of the French Riviera to find redemption in a South African jail. In *Burger's Daughter* communism is a religion, its adherents inspired by the vision of the ideal society of "the Future." To Rosa, her father's house was a version of that future Paradise: a house pervaded with the love and shared commitment of the faithful of all races. She leaves that house when her father dies, to begin her quest for a personal, private paradise. But she ultimately rejects the ideal of a private paradise, choosing instead to reclaim or recreate the lost paradise of the Burger house in prison.

If *Burger's Daughter* is the apotheosis of the myth of Eve in this literature, *July's People* is its ironic epilogue. Maureen, the refugee from the white city, is welcomed into the African Garden, only to find that she can't endure living in it; in her desperation she flees July's sanctuary for a world that probably no longer exists.

"Is There Nowhere Else Where We Can Meet?"

Gordimer explicitly connects the metaphor of the false Paradise with the image of the cemetery. The last sentence of Lessing's "Old Chief Mshlanga" prefigures the motif of the buried black body in Gordimer's fiction. The girl narrates:
The settler lucky enough to be allotted the lush warm valley (if he chose to cultivate this particular section) would find suddenly, in the middle of a mealie field, the plants were growing fifteen feet tall, the weight of the cobs dragging at the stalks, and wonder what unsuspected vein of richness he had struck (21).

Lessing's settler exploits the "richness" of the land nourished by the corpse of the Chief's village. Gordimer's white South Africans are confronted by the rising of the buried body as blacks reclaim their birthright. In a key early Gordimer story, "Is There Nowhere Else Where We Can Meet?" (1947) she begins to envision the revolution, long before it had entered into her novels. As she explains in the Introduction to her Selected Stories:

... a short story is a concept that the writer can 'hold', fully realized, in his imagination, at one time. A novel is, by comparison, staked out, and must be taken possession of stage by stage; it is impossible to contain, all at once, the proliferation of concepts it ultimately may use. ... A short story occurs, in the imaginative sense. To write one is to express from a situation in the exterior or interior world the life-giving drop—sweat, tear, semen, saliva—that will spread an intensity on the page; burn a hole in it (15).

Gordimer's description of the conception of her stories echoes Schreiner's description of the conception of "The Child's Day" as coming upon her "in a flash." Gordimer's story "Is There Nowhere Else Where We Can Meet?" also harks back to Schreiner in its plot. In contrast to Dinesen's Kitosch and Lessing's Chief Mshlanga, who achieve nobility through passive suffering at the hands of their white oppressors, Gordimer's anonymous black man—like Schreiner's Hottentot in "Dream Life and Real Life" attacks a white woman. Gordimer's treatment of
racial violence, however, is more complex than Schreiner's depiction of Africans as brutes; the subject of "Is There Nowhere Else Where We Can Meet?" is an implicitly sexual and paradoxically loving racial encounter, which presages Rosa's searing encounter with "Baasie" in Burger's Daughter.

The two figures are isolated in a silent rural landscape whose cold smoky air and grey sky are described as sea-like. The ragged man and well-clad woman pass dreamily until he suddenly confronts her, grabbing for her handbag and parcel. She grapples with him, inexplicably ecstatic:

... he snatched at the skirt of her coat and jerked her back. Her face swung up and she saw the waves of a grey sky and a crane breasting them, beautiful as the figurehead of a ship (19).

When he finally gains possession of the handbag and parcel she is flooded with "a sudden relief"—like a sexual release—after which she finds herself back on the safe familiar road of (white) houses and gardens. Sweat, which is here symbolic of semen, soaks her clothes. Hesitating at the gate of the first house, she decides not to call the police. "Why did I fight?" she asks herself, "Why didn't I give him the money and let him go?" (20). Having colluded in their encounter—having struggled with him joyfully—she cannot now betray him or her feelings about him to the authorities.

Whereas Lessing's white girl in "The Old Chief Mshlanga" turned away from the Edenic black village like "a destroyer," Gordimer's character turns away from the whites' gate "like an invalid," her power diminished. She has had an intimate,
shaming confrontation with black poverty and desperation ("His red eyes, and the smell and those cracks in his feet . . .") 20). More profoundly, she has shocked herself by grappling with the man: as an equal, as an adversary, and as the title of the story implies, as a lover. In the dream-like atmosphere of the story the white heroine encounters her black double, her alter ego, her animus, her platonic lover, her Waldo. He emerges from the landscape and is reabsorbed by it, like an emanation of the African land. He is associated, in the arid winter scene with its stinging dry air and veld fires, with water: the sea-grey sky, and "the life-giving drop--sweat, tear, semen, saliva--that will spread an intensity on the page; burn a hole in" the story of the white African heroine.

For Gordimer, finally, moves beyond the alienation of Lessing's, Dinesen's and Schreiner's White Eve exiled from the African Garden. In the rising up of the buried bodies, in the violent encounter between white and black, she envisions the New Jerusalem: Azania, in which blacks take their rightful place as leaders, and whites are freed of their centuries-old guilt.

On the Black African Farm: July's People

In her novels from A Guest of Honour to Burger's Daughter, Gordimer develops a radical vision of Africa in which her characters increasingly define themselves in the context of the black liberation struggle. In July's People she takes the next step of setting events in the immediate aftermath of a South African revolution. In this novel the classic relationship of
white mistress and black servant undergoes an ironic reversal, as Maureen Smales and her family take refuge in the village headed by their ex-servant, July. In a reversal of the situation of the black person who must leave his or her village for a confusing new city life at the mercy of white employers, Maureen finds herself disoriented and helpless in July's village; her children, who adjust more quickly to their new roles, become strangers to her. Maureen is an ordinary white middle-class woman, without Rosa Burger's heroic stature; when faced with the new order her main emotion is anxiety. When at the end of the novel she runs blindly toward the sound of a helicopter, no longer caring which army it belongs to, or whether its soldiers will attack or rescue her, she is running away from unbearable uncertainty, toward some kind of resolution of her situation, even if that resolution is death.

The ending of *July's People*, "she runs," is quite different from the contrived ending of *The Lying Days*, which it echoes: "I'm not running away," Helen claims somewhat insincerely, en route to Europe. Maureen's flight is also reminiscent of the ending of *The Grass is Singing*, in which Mary Turner runs into the bush where she knows Moses is waiting to kill her. However in *July's People* the African bush is not the heart of darkness, as it is in Lessing's novel: a projection of white fears and violent imaginings, peopled by faceless savages who are instruments of the white death wish. July's village is depicted as an orderly rural society with a well-established structure.
and guidelines for behavior. It is a realistic African setting to which the members of the Smales family adjust with varying degrees of success. In this setting they have no power (even their gun and truck, which they jealously guard as instruments of authority, are taken from them). Except for some practical engineering skills that Maureen's husband shares with the villagers, the Smales and their fantasies are irrelevant to the inhabitants of July's remote hamlet.

In *July's People* the focus of white African fiction has finally moved away from a white protagonist who has been granted, by the colonial government or the independent white regime, the power to determine the lives of black people, to impose his or her vision upon Africa. The setting of the "African Farm" has been replaced by the African farm that preceded and will outlast white settlement. In *July's People* the white literary concept of the "African Farm" is confronted by the true African farm. In *July's People* the blacks are no longer victims, no longer servants, thus making Maureen, the familiar figure of the white mistress, into an anachronism: she is an actress without a supporting cast, whose role is obsolete. In Maureen, Gordimer tests the traditional white African heroine of the liberal novel and finds her wanting; the Future will be created without her, or in spite of her.

In a 1983 essay Gordimer describes life in contemporary South Africa as an "interregnum . . . not only between two social orders but between two identities. . . ." ("Living in the Interregnum" 22). She writes that "in the eyes of the black
majority which will rule Azania, whites of former South Africa will have to redefine themselves in a new collective life within new structures" (21). According to this view, to continue to write within the white African tradition that began with The Story of an African Farm, which tried to deal realistically and sympathetically with black Africans from within the perspective of white colonial hegemony, is no longer relevant. The white African heroine who continues to play Lyndall's and Rebekah's, Martha's and Helen's role of identifying with the black people from the safety of her white authority is, like Maureen Smales, anachronistic. On the other hand, when there is no white power structure with which she is judged to be in collusion, perhaps she will no longer be psychologically divided between the white and black worlds, no longer alienated from both societies. When the black majority—her symbolic submerged self—is free, perhaps she will be free as well.²

Maureen Smales, then, seems to be the final version of the female protagonists who began with Lyndall; her former world has been destroyed and she is lost in the new world being created by the revolution. She is described at the end of the novel as like an animal in the wild; stripped of all emotional ties and social responsibilities, she is concerned solely with her own survival. Maureen, along with July, is now "free," but for her it is essentially a negative state.

To see July's People as in many respects a postscript to The Story of an African Farm is to see some of the thematic and symbolic patterns of Schreiner's novel expressed in their final
form. If Maureen is Lyndall, July is Waldo, the alter ego with which the female protagonist has a close but nonsexual relationship, the male figure with whom she identifies, who acts out her fantasies of achievement and is a spiritual or intellectual guide. Like Lyndall with her Stranger, Maureen has little rapport with her husband; *July's People* follows the striking pattern in these novels of dividing male characters into either sexual partners or intellectual-spiritual companions. Lyndall's Stranger is a disturbing figure whose role is confined to sex; when with her pregnancy he threatens to become part of her life, Lyndall flees from him. This pattern is repeated in *From Man to Man*, in which Rebekah's purely physical relationship with her husband, who is characterized as an intellectual inferior with gross appetites, suffers in comparison to her cerebral communion with Mr. Drummond.

Despite Isak Dinesen's greater sexual sophistication—the result of her age, experience, and milieu—there is in *Out of Africa* and in her letters a marked split between the selfish, relatively incompetent and unintelligent Bror Blixen, with his gross sexual appetites, and the godlike Denys Finch-Hatton. While we are given to understand that Karen Blixen's relationship with Denys has a sexual component, he is depicted as above all a great friend: her listener, teacher and companion in adventure.

Lessing replicates this pattern in *Martha Quest*, with Joss Cohen as Waldo, while Martha's sexual encounters are inconsequential and unsatisfactory. In all the five
Children of Violence novels only Martha's Lawrentian affair with Thomas in Landlocked stands out as deep and fulfilling; her mainly non-sexual relationship with Mark Coldridge in The Four-Gated City is an example of the continuing attraction of the Joss or Waldo figure for Lessing.

One of the main correspondences between Martha Quest and The Lying Days is Helen's friendship with her Jewish Waldo, Joel Aaron, whom she finally admits that she loves when he is safely on his way to Israel. Gordimer, however, breaks the split between sex and intellect in her male characters. Her depiction of sexuality is generally much more positive than in the other writers; it is a vehicle for communion and knowledge, symbolically connected to her heroines' explorations of blackness. There are, though, several black Waldo figures in Gordimer's novels, for which there is a precedent in Dinesen. When in Shadows on the Grass Dinesen reconsiders the Out of Africa material, Farah, her Somali head servant, co-manager, confidant, bodyguard and adviser becomes a more central character. Her closest African friend, upon whom she depended as on no one else, white or black, he reappears in the role of guide and interpreter, who mediated between her and Africa; she calls him the gatekeeper to her memories.

In Lessing as in Schreiner there are few significant black characters—which is somewhat surprising in view of the political message of most of her African fiction. Her female protagonists' encounters with black men are confined to the mistress-servant relationship; Lessing's emphasis is on the
whites' misunderstanding of blacks. Moses in *The Grass is Singing* is more a force of nature than a character, an embodiment of Africa, as Farah is, but without Farah's individuality.

In *The Conservationist* Gordimer too uses an undifferentiated black alter ego to embody Africa for her white protagonist. But in *Occasion for Loving* and *Burger's Daughter* the black men with whom the heroines identify as Lyndall identifies with Waldo are realistic characters. In *Burger's Daughter* Rosa and "Baasie" have a close, sibling-like relationship in childhood, deepened by the death of Rosa's biological brother. Their estrangement as adults is symptomatic of the forces which separate whites from blacks in South African society. When they meet again their mutual antagonism is their only emotional outlet; their ability to wound each other is a kind of love. It is "Baasie" who calls Rosa back to South Africa and going to jail is her way of settling her score with him. On this level, "Baasie" is Rosa's conscience, as Waldo is Lyndall's soul; thus the inspirational aspect of *Burger's Daughter* parallels the spiritual aspect of *African Farm*.

In *July's People* one can say that Dinesen's Farah comes into his own. The authority that he holds in *Out of Africa* and *Shadows on the Grass* is now explicit, as his fond but condescending mistress finds herself in the position of supplicant, her implicit dependence on his skill and loyalty now openly expressed. Also openly expressed in *July's People* is the angry power of the black majority, which has simmered under the
surface in her other texts. Even in Schreiner the black characters are angry; their hostility is apparent in their readiness to take advantage of any weakness in their white masters. In Dinesen the blacks are portrayed as loyal retainers, whose primitive strength is barely concealed; her Somali women and Masai warriors are like her lions: noble, free creatures whose savagery is not threatening. In Lessing blacks are portrayed mainly as victims, with whom the heroine, who also sees herself as a victim of her circumstances, identifies; it is only in *The Grass is Singing* that Moses rises to take his bloody revenge.

Throughout her fiction Gordimer develops the image of the rising of the buried bodies from the South African graveyard as a metaphor for the black revolution. Her cemetery metaphor exists in the earlier writers in less direct forms. For example, the prevailing image of sterility in *African Farm*, coupled with Schreiner's emphasis on the natural and human prehistory of the Karoo with its relics of the extinct San culture, suggests that the Karoo is a vast graveyard. Dinesen, in the less sanguine moments of her memoir, mourns the destruction of East Africa by white civilization. In "The Iguana" she uses the example of the iguana, whose luminous coloring turns dull grey in death, as a symbol for the loss of beauty when wild things are taken out of their living context. She quotes the hunter as saying, "I have conquered them all, but I am standing amongst graves," concluding that, "in a foreign country and with foreign species of life one should take measures to find out
whether things will be keeping their value when dead" (Out of Africa 181).

In Lessing and Gordimer the land becomes actively hostile, the storms in The Grass is Singing and The Conservationist echoing the destructive rains of African Farm. The theme of the failed farmer in Schreiner, Dinesen, Lessing and Gordimer (and similarly in Elspeth Huxley) is another way that the land manifests its hostility in this literature: by rejecting the imposition of the settler. The atmosphere of claustrophobia that (with the exception of Dinesen) characterizes these texts, in which the protagonists paradoxically feel confined by the vast spaces around them, comes in part from the hostile emanations of the land.

The white characters' awareness that the land to which they own the deed is not really theirs reaches its culmination in July's People, in which the African farm no longer belongs to the whites, who now work the land alongside the blacks--and eat its fruits on sufferance. The theme of claustrophobia also culminates in July's People, in which Maureen inhabits her hut like a prisoner his cell.3

In African Farm Schreiner connects the patterns of sterility and claustrophobia with pessimistic metaphors of sleep, dream and awakening; the later writers continue to develop these connected metaphors. As Schreiner does, Lessing uses dreams and reveries as a vehicle of knowledge for her characters, whose dreams are like a window into the rich world of the unconscious. However, despite their rich dream-time her
characters often sleep very little. In *Martha Quest* sleep is a spell spun around Martha and her father by the witch-like Mrs. Quest in order to keep her family weak and will-less. *Martha Quest* is, like *African Farm*, a novel of awakening, in which awakening brings disillusionment.

Dinesen tacitly acknowledges that the real world can be grim and disillusioning; it is partly because of this knowledge that she concentrates on dream, fantasy and illusion. Schreiner's and Lessing's dichotomy between fantasy and reality is not operative in her fictional world, which ignores realistic limitations. *Out of Africa* abounds with the metaphors of myth, dream and the theatre; it glitters with artifice, as does all of Isak Dinesen's story telling, as does the persona of Dinesen herself.

It is only in Gordimer that awakening is desirable, positive and fulfilling. *The Lying Days* is a story of awakening to sensations and emotions of all kinds, from the sexual to the political. Although it is ostensibly a story of disillusionment too, of "withering into the truth," Helen's disillusionment with the conformist world of the Mine and the fake Bohemianism of the City leads her toward profounder awakenings. As each chapter of her life closes (following the novel's divisions into Mine, Sea and City) a new door opens onto a larger, more authentic world. In general, Gordimer's novels stress opening rather than closure, reawakening rather than disillusionment. Even Rosa's circular journey follows this pattern. Her opportunities for self-knowledge, happiness and achievement seem to open out as
she moves in stages from her parents' house to the beauty and freedom of Katya's France, but it is in the completion of the circle, in her decision to return to her parents' house—to prison—that she finds true freedom; it is in that (en)closure that she finds fulfillment.

However, in *July's People* the fundamentally optimistic pattern of Gordimer's fiction seems to end. For Maureen, now that the unimaginable has happened, there are no more possibilities. She is truly trapped; her final breaking out is no awakening but rather the blind, frantic bid of the cornered animal.⁴

**A Sport of Nature: Azania Unfurled**

In *July's People* Maureen tries to read the one book she has brought with her into the bush (Manzoni's historical novel *I Promessi Sposi*). As Gordimer describes,

> But the transport of a novel, the false awareness of being within another time, place and life, that was the pleasure of reading, for her, was not possible. She was in another time, place, consciousness; it pressed in upon her and filled her as someone's breath fills a balloon's shape. She was already not what she was. No fiction could compete with what she was finding she did not know, could not have imagined or discovered through imagination (20).

Maureen's attitude toward literature goes back to Helen Shaw's—as she herself seems to be an older version of Gordimer's first heroine. She was, for example, a Mine daughter like Helen, in a town like the one in which Helen (and Gordimer) grew up. For Maureen in *July's* village, as for Helen in the *Native Stores*, the reality of Africa is more fantastic, more mind-stretching, than any fiction. Near the end of
July's People, Gordimer explains Maureen's disorientation in terms which echo Helen's in the beginning of The Lying Days: "The real fantasies of the bush delude more inventively than the romantic forests of Grimm and Disney" (160).

"She was already not what she was": Maureen is offered the possibility to transform herself, to become a new person. She confronts her past. She is forced--in the novel's central relationship--to redefine her connection with July. But she fails; unlike her children (who soon learn to treat July with new respect) she cannot flourish in the new society.

Maureen and Helen, the good middle-class South Africans, obedient daughters and at least grudgingly loyal wives, who observe the liberal decencies in their relationships with their black inferiors, are dead-end heroines for Gordimer. In Hillela Kgomani she introduces an altogether new type: the "sport of nature," who is not subject to the emotional ties, the laws of behavior, or finally, the failure of imagination, which bind and limit Maureen and Helen. As Gordimer has explained, the character of Hillela is an attempt to imagine a white South African woman who can survive, even flourish, in revolutionary conditions. She has said about the novel:

Looking around me over my long life in South Africa, it somehow seemed to me ironic that sometimes very unexpected people are the ones who prove adequate to the situation.

I've seen so many wonderful people fail at it, particularly people who are in some way liberally committed--who do not go beyond liberalism. But somebody like Hillela can sometimes see in an instinctive way that so many of these other ways of dealing with the situation--the political ways--just don't work, and can find her own way (Interview in The New York Times Book Review, May 3 1987, 22).
Not completely successful as a realistic character, Hillela is a visionary character, a symbolic figure through whom Gordimer tries to bridge the gulf, fill the "interregnum" between present and future. Her name, for the Jewish leader Hillel, which is associated in the novel with her Zionist grandfather, reinforces her prophetic role. Hillela has interesting correspondences with Lessing's visionary heroines, Al'Ith for instance. This is not surprising because *A Sport of Nature* has Utopian elements.

As a fictional vehicle, this novel carries Gordimer further than she has yet gone in depicting a positive future: a happy ending for her heroine as well as for the South African independence struggle. Hillela triumphs because she does not belong, because she does not conform, because she is a selfish, amoral law unto herself. Abandoned by her parents, raised by well-meaning but uncomprehending aunts, she follows her missing mother's example of flouting middle-class morality by loving forbidden, that is nonwhite, men. Sexual freedom is her road to revolution. Beginning with her friendship with a "coloured" boy, which alienates her from the white community, she is radicalized by her love for the fictional ANC leader Whaila Kgomani. She avenges Whaila's death by her marriage to a powerful West African general and statesman, with whom, finally, she watches the flag of Azania unfurl over "Whaila's country."

The autobiographical aspect of this apparently not very Gordimer-like heroine is worth considering. Through all of her main characters, especially the women, Gordimer presents aspects of herself and makes personal statements. Through Rosa she
affirms her own commitment to remaining in South Africa as witness, and increasingly, as activist. Through Maureen she rejects the good liberal daughter in herself, this message being reinforced by the parallels between Maureen and the more nakedly autobiographical Helen. Through Hillela she signals her disassociation with what she sees as the dead values of the past, imaginatively reinventing a new personality to fit a new country.

A Sport of Nature takes as its reference point Burger's Daughter. The young Rosa even makes a brief appearance, and Lionel is mentioned along with the historical heroes of the revolution, as if Gordimer, by creating the Burgers, has actually made them part of South African history. But Hillela's situation is strikingly different from Rosa's. She is a free agent; she does not have to fight her way through the maze of family and political loyalties which bind Rosa, for she begins with no emotional or ideological baggage. If Rosa is still struggling out of "the mother's house," to follow John Cooke's thesis, Hillela has no mother's house. The oppressive mother who had weakened and deformed all of Gordimer's heroines to some extent—who was modelled after Gordimer's own mother—is here a fantasy of liberation. Hillela's mother is a woman who threw up marriage and motherhood in the affluent suburbs to run away with a Portuguese night-club dancer.

Clearly Hillela is not a fully realistic character; she is not bound by the laws of verisimilitude that determine Helen's or Rosa's or Martha's fates. She is evidence of her author's
frustration, not so much with the limits of the realist genre, but with the political stalemate for whites in South Africa, which limits what Gordimer can realistically depict in terms of a hopeful future.

However, while Hillela does not resemble Gordimer's previous characters, she does resemble Schreiner's Lyndall, for whom personal freedom and specifically sexual freedom was a key to a revolutionary new social-political order. Lyndall, selfish, rebellious, and unethical by the standards of her community and contemporary society, was also "a sport of nature," a harbinger of Schreiner's feminist-socialist Utopia. An interesting parallel between Lyndall and Hillela is Hillela's Waldo: Sasha, her (white) cousin/adopted brother/lover. He is a lonely, tormented, idealistic youth, whose mainsprings are his lifelong love for Hillela and his commitment to the revolution. After several spells in prison he becomes a political refugee. Intensely loyal and self-sacrificing, thoughtful and sensitive, he not only resembles Waldo, but also plays a similar role in Hillela's life to Waldo's role in Lyndall's: she is the woman of action, while he is her conscience, her suffering soul. On the text's symbolic level, Hillela and Sasha, the famous emigrée and the anonymous jailed revolutionary, work together to help bring about Gordimer's Utopia: the independent nation of Azania.

Replanting the "Petrified Garden": Recent Developments in Southern African Fiction

The mythic level of A Sport of Nature is a conscious attempt on Gordimer's part to transcend the still considerable
obstacles to the Future. It is a technique she has used before, most notably in The Conservationist. Yet she is dismissive of J.M. Coetzee's use of allegory, accusing him of trying to distance himself from history and politics (in "The Idea of Gardening," Review of Life and Times of Michael K). Actually, Gordimer's own need to envision a future unfettered by present limitations necessitates a fiction unfettered by the limitations of realism; she uses the symbolism of revolution and Utopia for some of the same reasons that Coetzee writes allegorical fiction. Furthermore, as the work of other Southern African writers shows, oblique, poetic, archetypal and visionary modes are perhaps the most logical ways to express the inner meaning of a bleak and tormented history in which the seeds of hope are buried. Athol and Sheila Fugard, André Brink and Bessie Head all to some extent go beyond conventional realism in their quest to illuminate the Southern African situation by representing the reality below the surface of events. These writers develop the metaphors we have found in Schreiner, Lessing and Gordimer: of drought, sterility, the graveyard, fertilizing rain/blood, plant growth and the rising of the buried bodies, and of White Eve alienated from the African garden.5

It is in Coetzee's fiction that these image patterns characteristic of the "African Farm" literature which originated with Schreiner are most visible, are dealt with most starkly and skillfully. Magda's story, In the Heart of the Country, is the extreme form of the stories of Lyndall, Waldo and Rebekah, of Karen Blixen, Martha Quest, Helen Shaw and Rosa Burger.
Coetzee's image of white South Africa as "the petrified garden, behind locked gates, near my father's bones," resonates through the "African Farm" literature. Coetzee's purposely vague nineteenth-century setting fits Schreiner's period; the isolated desert setting of his farm strongly resembles hers, as does its mood of boredom, loneliness and parental oppression. As in Schreiner and Lessing, the domestic claustrophobia is intensified by the terrifying freedom of the enormous, empty landscape. Magda writes: "Here in the middle of nowhere I can expand to infinity just as I can shrivel to the size of an ant. Many things I lack but freedom is not one of them" (50).

Unlike the disinherited Lyndall and Waldo, who live on sufferance on Tant' Sannie's land, Magda, as the mistress of her farm, has the power of Adam to name and order her world according to her imagination. But in her near-complete isolation her power is meaningless; her freedom drives her mad. Her garden in the wilderness—like Helen's and Mehring's—is a graveyard, but unlike Helen's vision of the whites picnicking on black graves, Magda's graveyard contains the bones and is peopled by the ghosts inherited from her own Afrikaner people. This, finally, is what she has inherited from her father: a garden of sand and stones (like Schreiner's Karoo farm), in which "God has forgotten us and we have forgotten God;" an Eden (like Dinesen's farm), in which, "Everthing is permitted. . . . Nothing is punished" (135); a graveyard and a prison (like Gordimer's South Africa), which has "petrified" behind its "locked gates".
Like the girl in "The Old Chief Mshlanga," like Rebekah, Martha and Gordimer's political activist heroines, Magda too has a quest: "the medium, the median that is what I wanted to be! Neither master nor slave, neither parent nor child, but the bridge between, so that in me the contraries should be reconciled!" Magda tries to make contact with black Africa using her own body as a bridge; like Lessing's Mary Turner she enters into a real or imaginary sexual relationship with her black servant. As in The Grass is Singing this profound transgression against the father, this version of Eve's transgression against God and Adam, ends in violent discord, in madness and death.

In the Heart of the Country, Dusklands and Waiting for the Barbarians deal directly with the violence which characterizes the colonial relationship, and which erupts sporadically in the "African Farm" texts from Schreiner to Gordimer. In the women's texts this violence is most often directed toward the white, usually female, characters in the form of a hostile land and physically threatening black men. The white women characters who try to connect with Africa are punished with sentences that range from alienation and exile to imprisonment and death. Although as whites they are the implied agents of colonial violence, they rarely perform violence against Africans; they are victims caught between the white and black communities, pronounced guilty by both sides. Like Eve they are guilty by default, and like Eve essentially powerless. In fact the authors' choice of metaphors—Undine, the Lady of Shalott, and
Eve—reinforces their heroines' traditional female strategies of self-sacrifice, or self-destruction, as exemplified in Lyndall's pregnancy and what was in effect her suicide, in Martha's masochistic marriages, and Mary Turner's death wish.

But Magda's real or imagined murder of her father is an example of the active revolt that surfaces in the more recent texts by Coetzee and Gordimer, and has antecedents in the revolutionary tradition of the female Bildungsroman from Jane Eyre to Wide Sargasso Sea, from African Farm to Martha Quest. Magda's taking up arms against her father, who in part represents the white male power structure of colonized Africa, is an act of revolution which enables her to recreate the world of his farm on her own terms; with the death of her father the patriarchal hierarchy of father, daughter and servants crumbles, and a new equality is established among Magda, Hendrik and Anna (although Coetzee's new order is ironic, elusive, and phantasmagorical, in contrast to Gordimer's unironic, ostensibly realistic vision of equality in A Sport of Nature).

Magda's freedom is frightening because she lives in an "interregnum," to borrow Gordimer's word, between the old order of the white fathers and the new order of the blacks, which she has helped to bring about. Her farm is haunted by the ghosts of South African history and the violent possibilities, the passionate promises, of its future, which she will not share. Her state is not unlike Rebekah's, or Rosa Burger's, whose prison cell with its echoes of her father's prison cell is another version of Magda's locked garden near her father's bones.
In The Heart of the Country is the Coetzee text which best illuminates the "African Farm" literature. "The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee," in which the hunting of human beings is described as baldly as the hunting of animals, exposes the myth of the white hunter which Dinesen, among others, promotes. In Waiting for the Barbarians, his South Africa becomes a nonspecific generalized setting for the decay of an imperial order, when the liberal opposition is tortured along with the "barbarians" who are the inevitable inheritors of the colonized country. In Life and Times of Michael K (1984), which Gordimer criticized for its focus on "those who ignore history, not make it" ("The Idea of Gardening" 3), Coetzee portrays the turmoil of a white South Africa in dissolution through the eyes of one of the victims; a retarded, brain damaged or traumatized young "coloured" man whose trek to the Karoo farm where his mother was born echoes Schreiner. Michael K reclaims the abandoned land by replanting it, and when he is driven from the farm by, successively, the guerrillas and the army, he makes plans to return with more seeds.

This damaged, disinherited son who replants the African Farm is reminiscent of Waldo, who was also a passive revolutionary. However, Michael K's blackness exemplifies the trend in white Southern African literature for black characters to play a greater role, to move from the hidden center of the texts to their acknowledged center.6

Andre Brink, whose A Dry White Season and Rumours of Rain covered the familiar Gordimer country of the anguished choices
of white liberals, moves more directly into black history in *A Chain of Voices* (1982). In that novel black and white narrators piece together a portrait of slave society in the last century which culminates in an organized revolt. In *The Wall of the Plague* (1984), Brink focuses on a "coloured" woman emigree who, torn between her European and African identities, ultimately chooses blackness.

As black South Africans fight to reclaim their country, the response of politically sympathetic white writers seems to be a conscious and unconscious yielding of fictional territory to black characters. And more importantly, the South African story is passing back into the hands of the non-white people who have long been obscured and distorted by white writers. Blacks are reclaiming their land imaginatively as well as physically, as the recent fiction of such writers as Miriam Tlali, Mtutuzeli Matshoba (*Call Me Not a Man* 1979) and Njabulo S. Ndebele (*Fools* 1983) attests.

As we await the new literature of an independent South Africa in which blacks may freely publish, it remains to be seen whether the characters, imagery and ideas of Schreiner's *Story of an African Farm*, which have so marked the colonial African literary consciousness from Dinesen to Gordimer, Coetzee and Head, will continue to influence new writers such as Miriam Tlali, whose insider point of view and documentary style of social realism seem quite different from the alienation, introspection, and more self-consciously literary style of Schreiner and her successors. However, Tlali's political content, the
didactic commentary presented through her characters' discussions and speeches, is not alien to Gordimer or Lessing, who use the same technique, or to Schreiner, who was as unafraid to make an ideological point in her fiction as she was unafraid to take a political stand on the major issues of her day.

It is in the novels of Bessie Head that we find the most suggestive references to Schreiner and to the "African Farm" literature in contemporary black African fiction. Head inhabits the Southern African "interregnum" as no other black or white writers do. Born in South Africa, she is the illegitimate daughter of a white woman and a black man. Her mother was incarcerated in a mental hospital for the disgrace of bearing a mixed-race child. Thus in Head's background is a real-life version of the madwoman-in-the-attic motif which we have traced from Charlotte Brontë through Doris Lessing. Head, who was raised by a "coloured" family, and worked as a journalist in South Africa, lived in rural Botswana until her death in 1986. She, like Lessing, was forbidden to return "home."7

Head's early novels, When Rain Clouds Gather (1960), Maru (1971) and A Question of Power (1974), while set in Botswana, have as much in common with white as with black African literature.8 They are non-realistic, introspective works, whose subject is the tortured identity of a woman caught between two cultures, trying to find a foothold in traditional Africa, and more profoundly, trying to keep her sanity and to survive. Significantly, she has compared her situation to Schreiner's:
"I have much in common with Olive Schreiner—I too have a pioneering role as she did. . . . I'm caught between the times Africa was not independent and when it was. She had similar tendencies" ("Bessie Head: Exile and Community in Southern Africa" 52-53).

Head makes her most direct literary allusions to Schreiner in *Maru*, which is the story of Margaret Cadmore, an outcast Bushman or "Masarwa" girl. The term "Masarwa," we are told, can also mean "coloured" or of mixed race; clearly Head is making a parallel between the girl's low, outsider status among the Batswana, and her own situation there.

The Schreiner figure in *Maru* is Margaret's foster-mother, a white missionary teacher and artist (who gives the girl her own name). Margaret becomes a teacher and artist like her foster-mother, having absorbed her lessons and surpassed her. Her pictures infuse village life with the "vitality" of Bushman culture, projecting the soul of a "faceless, voiceless, almost nameless" people whom the Batswana enslaved as the whites enslaved the blacks. In an echo of one of Lyndall's feminist speeches in *African Farm*, "We bear the world and we make it," Margaret's pictures proclaim: "We are the people who have the strength to build a new world!" (107-08).

In the relationship between Margaret and her foster-mother, Head alludes to her own relationship with her mother's tribe, and also to her relationship with her literary mother, Olive Schreiner. Head, like Margaret, learns from and then moves beyond the art of her white "foster-mother." Finally, when
Margaret marries Maru, the hereditary king of the Batswana village, she becomes symbolically integrated into black Africa. It is a marriage, like those which end Plomer's *Turbott Wolfe* and Gordimer's *A Sport of Nature*: a mixed union which symbolizes a Utopian future in which racial and tribal distinctions will be submerged in the creation of "a new world." In this new Africa the "petrified garden" will be replanted, and white or "Masarwa" Eve will be readmitted into the black Eden.
Notes -- Conclusion

1 According to the dedication one of Schreiner's earliest stories, "Dream Life and Real Life" was first published in 1881.

2 Judging by Louisa Dawkins' Natives and Strangers, which is set during and after the transition to black rule in Kenya, the white ex-colonial heroine is still beset by the conflicts of the past. At the end of Dawkins' novel the African-born Marietta reluctantly decides to emigrate to England.

3 Gordimer makes this equation on pages 88 and 104.

4 In a further ironic twist on Schreiner (as well as Dinesen and Lessing who generally follow her in their depiction of black characters as part of nature) Gordimer describes Maureen as becoming brutish and animal-like, in contrast to the civilized mien of the villagers.

5 Athol Fugard's play The Road to Mecca (1985), set in Schreiner's Karoo, is yet another recent work that seems to refer back to Schreiner. His aging female artist is a Schreineresque figure who is ostracized as a madwoman by her community but nevertheless gives shape to her vision of "Mecca" by adorning the "petrified garden" with her sculpture.

6 In Foe, Coetzee's version of Robinson Crusoe, the black character, Friday, returns to the mute, hidden position of "a puzzle or hole in the narrative" (121). In a twist familiar from the "African Farm" stories, the female narrator, Friday's mistress and guardian, begins to feel that she is his slave (147). The novel ends with a dream sequence in which the author dives into the wreck of the castaways' ship in search of the buried truth about "Cruso," Susan, and especially the tongueless Friday, who unlike the white characters has no story of his own.

7 Biographical information is taken from "Bessie Head: Exile and Community in Southern Africa."

8 In The Collector of Treasures (1977) and A Bewitched Crossroads (1984) Head had begun to speak for the Batswana, to tell their story, thus aligning herself more clearly with the black African literary mainstream.
Works Cited and Selected List of Works Consulted

Primary Sources


---. *Seven Gothic Tales*. New York: Smith and Haas, 1934.


Secondary Sources


Rosowski, Susan J. "The Novel of Awakening." The Voyage In. 49-68.


