Nature Bound by the Body: Humans and Nature in Olive Schreiner's Story of an African Farm

Erin Pelletreau

KEYWORDS: The Story of an African Farm, Olive Schreiner, Nature, Society, Gender, Colonialism, Landscape

ABSTRACT

In my paper I am trying to answer the question: does Lyndall have to die in Schreiner's novel Story of an African Farm in order to achieve unity with nature? I argue that the definition of nature that Hannah Freeman introduces leaves the heroine, Lyndall, with only one option: death. I draw on Raymond Williams to define “nature” as a complex idea with varied definitions. I then use Karl Marx and Jason Moore to discuss how some critics may disagree with Freeman and argue instead that nature and humans are already unified. I suggest that the moon in the novel complicates their version of “the web” by equalizing nature and human-made objects, but favoring some humans over others. In opposition to Freeman's argument that humans are not together with nature, I suggest that it is not that humans themselves are unnatural. Rather, the restrictions humans impose on each other limit a person's ability to connect with nature and even other people.

REFERENCES


The opening paragraphs of The Story of an African Farm present the depressive bleakness and monotony of the local landscape, which serves as background and allegory for the turbulent fates of Lyndall and Waldo. Interestingly, the narrative contains a number of proto-Africaans words, which add local colour, but by no means make this novel regional. The South African plain has the same metaphysical qualities as the vast and gloomy Egdon Heath in Thomas Hardy's fiction. Other men when I am with them, whether I love them or not, they are mere bodies to me; but you are a spirit; I like you.’ [177]. The Healing Imagination of Olive Schreiner: Beyond South African Colonialism. Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts, 1989. Burdett, Carolyn. But Olive Schreiner has woven a story out of spiritual questioning, and discovered some singular connections and exceptional insights along the way. There i “Was it only John, think you, who saw the heavens open? The dreamers see it every day.” There is good material to excerpt as food for "The Story of an African Farm" is a novel narrating episodes from the lives of three children as they grow up on a farm in South Africa: through dreamy yet visceral prose, the reader learns of Waldo's spiritual unrest, Lyndall's fierce and far-reaching ambitions, and of the stolid Em, who is. sweet but no fool. The narrative is evocative in its description of a different time and place and a unique culture. But "The Story of an African Farm" is a mess. Schreiner does not have a single character embody all the roles and positions of women;
using three women characters, Schreiner successfully captures the whole spectrum of possibility for women of the time. These three characters, with their different attitudes and relationships with men, embody Showalter's three stages of women novelists... The Extraordinary Olive The several uses of the olive tree, Olea europaea L., have long been recognized and celebrated by human civilization. Olive trees have been cultivated since prehistoric times in Asia Minor, and introduced with human migration and trade throughout the Mediterranean and Europe, into Africa, and eventually into New Zealand and North America.