

**“PLACING” THE FARM NOVEL:
SPACE AND PLACE IN FEMALE IDENTITY FORMATION IN
OLIVE SCHREINER’S *THE STORY OF AN AFRICAN FARM*
AND J.M. COETZEE’S *DISGRACE***

S.J. Smit

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXTUALIZATION

1.1 Space, place, identity

Given its unique history and the diverse ideological meanings attached to it, the concept of a farm in South Africa represents a geographical, social and cultural construct; as such, a suitable space in which to explore the interaction between individual and context as a process of identity formation. Farm and land are significant spaces/places/localities¹ in the Southern African context, particularly with regard to the colonial past and the present implications for land reform. According to a report in Beeld (2002), since 1994 there has been a yearly increase in the assault and murder of farmers and arguably, also the subsequent abandonment of farms due to fear and insecurity. According to Crang (1998:22), the link between people and landscape is manifested by the way people relate to, shape and are shaped by the landscape. The landscape becomes a “bank of cultural memories” of past and present practices and knowledge and can therefore be interpreted as a “palimpsest” – a representation of the sum of repeated “erasures, accretions, anomalies and redundancies over time”. Drawing on this idea, I would suggest that the representation of the farm in the conventional South African farm novel has also been subjected to larger processes of development, dissolution and replacement in accordance with changing social, political and economical contexts.

One of the foremost implications of imperialist intervention in Africa and other territories together with the appropriation of vast expanses of land by settlers, was that the impression of “owning” the land was created and promoted. Land was allocated according to the laws of the colonists, disregarding the customs of the original inhabitants. Amongst the indigenous tribes of Southern Africa, specifically the Khoikoi, land was used equally by all for hunting and grazing and the idea of transferring land to an individual for exclusive use was alien to them (Coetzee,

¹ In this study, I shall refer to ‘place’ as a specific location associated with the culture and identity of its inhabitants and therefore subjected to processes of appropriation, while ‘space’ will refer to a more general orientation towards one’s physical and geographical surroundings, also represented in literature.

1996:131). With this appropriation in mind, Crang (1998:11) posits that it is necessary to reconsider conventional perceptions regarding land and ownership within the context of a postcolonial landscape, as some prevailing ideas are remnants inherited from imperialism. In principle, land is part of nature and belongs to everyone, but most areas of land have been subjected to extensive human intervention and possession, such as urbanization, the creation of fields, and the planting of crops. Consequently, the ownership and allocation of land has become part of legal and societal mechanisms functioning within a larger socio-historical framework.

1.2 The farm in South Africa

To the South African settler and farmer, the term “farm” means more than a cultivated area of land used for growing crops or keeping animals; it represents a personal space. Traditionally, the farm in South Africa consisted of a micro-society which was able to subsist on its own produce and thereby function as both an ecological and social unit. However, due to changing social and political structures, this traditional concept of the farm has gradually become obsolete. Ampie Coetzee (1996:133) points out that the word ‘farm’ or ‘*plaas*’ does not exist in Xhosa, and probably not in most of the indigenous or “black” languages of South Africa – only words like ‘ifama’ or ‘iplasi. This would suggest that if the word does not exist, at least not without definite circumscription, it could be regarded as representative of an implicit Western ideology. The farm therefore comes into being through the existence of and interaction between social and cultural dynamics. Historically, the South African relationship with nature and the “land” has been metaphysically laden and integrated with the stories people tell about themselves and their history. Ampie Coetzee (1996:133) points out that in the past “historians have created the construct that the beginning of land was the beginning of the Afrikaner”. In the South African context especially, the term is interlinked with the discourse on land and ownership and needs a new definition, as the old term is ideologically suspect and representative of the hierarchy and power of the colonial past.

1.3 The farm novel and the (anti-)pastoral tradition

The so-called *plaasroman* or farm novel refers to a genre of fiction in which the farm setting functions as a central point of orientation in the formation of identity. The Afrikaans *plaasroman* became a dominant genre of South African fiction during the 1920s amidst fears of a wilting *boere-nasie* (nation of Afrikaner farmers), and responded to a rising phenomenon exploited by some Afrikaans novelists of the time who posited a “renewal of the peasant order based on the myth of the return to the earth” (Coetzee, 1988:79). Although these farm novels differed in structure and thematic approach, the distinguishing characteristic of this genre was that it adhered to the pastoral mode. The pastoral ideal identified itself with notions reminiscent of “Old World farming” (Coetzee, 1988:65), which entailed the portrayal of the farm as a complex spatial unit – simultaneously being a dwelling place and an economic concern. All the creatures on the farm, in particular the members of the family who owns the farm by law, participate in sustaining the economy of this micro-society. In turn, the farm owns its inhabitants in the sense that they owe the land their devoted labour and undivided loyalty. The farm dwellers are obligated to the farm, not only for their livelihood, but also ultimately for their lives. Therefore, however absolute his ownership, the farmer still has duties to the land, to his heirs, to the honour of his forbears and also to the ecology of the farm as part of nature.

In accordance with the myth of the pastoral ideal, the pastoral farm novel² portrays life on the farm in a way which, from a present-day perspective, may seem idealised and sentimental, but which functions to foreground the farm dweller’s existential experience of the farm space, thereby imbuing the farm with spiritual meaning. The farm becomes a site laden with memories of the past; a palimpsest on which the insecurities, longing, and losses of the farm dwellers are inscribed. The pastoral farm novel therefore represents the farm in a spirit of nostalgia, which also celebrates the farm space as a point of mediation between the wilderness of lawless nature and the wilderness of the cities (Coetzee, 1996:133). Examples of such pastoral farm novels are DF Malherbe’s *Die Meulenaar* (1926) and CM van den Heever’s *Groei* (1933), *Somer* (1935) and *Laat Vrugte* (1939). For the most part, these novels depict

² In this dissertation, the term “pastoral farm novel” will refer to the type of Afrikaans farm novel which was predominant in the 1920s and 1930s.

authority to be rooted in patriarchy and white hegemony whereby the farmer becomes a “mediator between past and future generations” (Coetzee, 1988:109); a motif which is sustained by the farm novel’s preoccupation with the transience and evanescence of human existence.

Coetzee (1988:109) identifies this narrative of the pastoral farm novel as a journey toward “lineal consciousness”. This refers to the ideological assumption of ownership based on the notion of the farm as being appropriated and earned by birthright - the “blood, sweat, and tears” of generations of family labour. This idea is also expressed by Crang (1998:7), who suggests that landscapes may be intentionally shaped by people to carry meanings which express their beliefs and ideologies. In this way, the farm becomes an area of land inscribed with the signs of this lineage, such as the cultivated soil, and the bones of the forefathers in the earth. Interestingly, Afrikaner-families were accustomed to bury their relatives in a small family cemetery on the farm. This custom is often depicted in the farm novels of D.F. Malherbe and C.M. van den Heever and can be said to symbolise the Afrikaner’s psychic entrenchment with the soil of the hereditary land.

As a dominant genre of Afrikaans fiction, the farm novel functioned within the broader discourse representing the Afrikaners’ relationship to South Africa through their relationship to the land. As such, the farm novel is a manifestation of the relationship between history and literature that positioned the farm as a source of meaning and could be seen as an attempt to reaffirm identity: “land equalled identity, identity equalled meaning” (Coetzee, 1996:138). Within the early 20th century context, traditional perceptions perpetuated by the farm novel therefore justified colonial history by propagating the concept that the land was a wild, untamed expanse of nothingness before being cultivated by a generation of farmers. Furthermore, both J.M. Coetzee (1988:106) and Ampie Coetzee (1996:135) assert that this was achieved by omitting notions of black labour and the dependence upon it, from the text, as the representation of the dispossessed would dispel the romantic ideals of African (colonial) space.

The pastoral farm novel therefore naturalized the farm by integrating it with the land, and in turn historicized this land by inscribing it with the stories and labour of several

landowning generations. As Coetzee (1988:106) suggests, it could therefore be suggested that the farm novel performed the ideological function of providing “transcendental justification for the ownership of land”, a transcendence deeply rooted in the premise of the South African pastoral, namely servitude to the land through birthright and honest labour. The traditional, pastoral farm novel genre in fiction is therefore problematic, not only in its ideologically laden portrayals of space and identity, but also in its denial of (pre)-colonial history.

Though pertaining to different historical contexts, the settings of the farms in Olive Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) and J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace* (1999) both evoke tension between tradition and progress or transition. Whereas the pastoral farm novel relies on tradition and notions of Old World farming in its creation of stereotypes, especially pertaining to the so called farm dweller, *The Story of an African Farm* scrutinizes this stereotype through an overt anti-colonial stance that is exemplified by the novel’s preoccupation with the spiritually oppressive effect of social and intellectual stasis. Moreover, *Disgrace* -as a culmination of the contemporary reworked farm novel - deviates from these stereotypes even more markedly and erodes the balance between tradition and progress. The opposition between tradition and progress in both *The Story of an African Farm* and *Disgrace* relates to the female protagonists’ quest for self-affirmation as well as their struggle to adapt to a changing ontological landscape and as such, links up with postcolonial notions of place and displacement and its effects on female identity formation.

1.4 Female identity and the postcolonial crisis of displacement

Place refers to the way in which one orientates oneself within space and is therefore important in the formation of a cultural and personal identity. Processes of female identity formation is to a great extent culturally-determined, as cultural constructs and practices affect the way in which women perceive themselves and their position in relation to a specific place. Ashcroft (2001:125) suggests that colonization disrupts one’s sense of place and imposes feelings of displacement and alienation on the colonized as well as the colonizer. In this sense, postcolonial displacement refers to the separation from a place specifically associated with one’s natural cultural or

spiritual affinity. As a result, the displaced feel a sense of alienation from and longing for the concept of 'place' and personal identity.

The representation of the experience of displacement by so-called 'free-settlers' is an important aspect of this dissertation and is manifested by the protagonists, specifically the female protagonists, who in both novels have to contend with the turmoil of a society adjusting to change and transition. However, even though the farm as a site of displacement is a significant anti-pastoral theme in both novels, it is important to note that in the traditional Afrikaans farm novel, the farm is strongly associated with a sense of place and belonging, which is jeopardized when the farm dweller's existence on the farm is threatened.

Both *The Story of an African Farm* and *Disgrace* represent the constant epistemological struggle of the 'free settler' to determine her place and make sense of the ontological landscape of the African continent. However, the farm in *Disgrace* transcends the restrictive spatial and ideological (colonial) boundaries depicted in Schreiner's farm, by accommodating change as a solution to the colonial impasse of land and space. Instead, it becomes a place of transition and presents the possibility of personal growth at the cost of relinquishing former ideals. Space in *The Story of an African Farm* and *Disgrace*, and the way in which characters orientate themselves within this space, comprises a crisis of identity that erodes a valid and active sense of the self. Existential dislocation results from their struggle to determine their place in the ontological African landscape. In both novels, the female protagonists resist the patriarchal terms of history and manifest clear signs of alienation in the tendency to seek alternative, differentiated identities; they subvert cultural constructs informed by imperialism and patriarchy in an attempt to assert their dissociation with these oppressive power structures. *Disgrace* furthermore contests whether identity can still be considered absolute or unyielding in a postcolonial³ context.

³ Postcolonialism should be regarded in terms of an ongoing process which has occurred and is occurring in different places at different times. Postcolonial literature includes texts written in countries where communities and groups have been marginalized by imperialist powers and where the literature produced challenges the legitimacy of any kind of colonization.

1.4.1 *Olive Schreiner's "The Story of an African Farm"*

In *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) Olive Schreiner presents a dystopian image of colonial life on an isolated South African farm. It is depicted as a parochial settlement in the Karoo, representative of the inherent ideological and social circumscriptions of the time. Life on the farm represents a constant struggle to survive and contend with the forces of nature. Although the farm seems hostile and self-absorbed, the Karoo landscape is imbued with ethereal and mysterious qualities which influence Waldo especially, to experience a sense of oneness with nature. Schreiner therefore foregrounds the relationship with nature rather than the relationship with the (owned) land. By attributing the former with pantheist characteristics, nature is contrasted with the general disjunction of colonial society. The novel structurally and thematically reflects the discontinuities of early colonial life and mimics the stultifying narrowness, idleness, ignorance, and greed of colonial society as Schreiner's farm functions as a microcosm for the colonial milieu. Typical of the anti-pastoral mode, Schreiner's farm, like the rest of the colony, is overtly presented as being an "anti-garden" (Anthony, 1999:4), associated with emptiness, desolation, barrenness, and the absence of God. According to Anthony, 1999:4) the novel, depicting life on an African farm, may therefore be termed anti-pastoral - it is unable to meet the obligations of the pastoral mode as it consciously subverts notions of the rural idyll, thereby resisting the ideological idealization of the farm landscape.

Within a postcolonial context, *The Story of an African Farm* suggests the European inability to represent and adapt to a landscape threatening to disrupt the Eurocentrically-constructed perception of Africa. Coetzee (1988:9) attributes this to the "failure of the listening imagination to intuit the true language of Africa...an inability to conceive a society in South Africa in which there is a place for the self". This failure to construe and construct the "self", foregrounds the idea of displacement and colonial angst due to existential alienation and the inability of characters to adapt to the demands of a colonial society in transition. The problematization of colonial identity is reflected in the identity formation of the female protagonist, Lyndall, who intensely opposes all that the farm (and therefore colonial society) symbolizes. In being represented as an intelligent and freethinking individual, Lyndall gives a voice to the oppressed female as well as oppression of the spirit.

Despite being overtly anti-pastoral and intent on representing the historical reality of the farm, Schreiner's novel still comprises some undertones inspired by pastoral ideals, the most obvious being Waldo's affinity with nature and the extent to which the farm is situated "outside history, outside society" (Coetzee, 1988:4). However, these undertones do not render Schreiner's novel any less dystopic, especially in its critique of colonial culture.

1.4.2 J.M. Coetzee's "*Disgrace*"

Disgrace (1999) is a bleakly realistic, anti-pastoral farm novel in which Coetzee explores the disjunctive position of the (white) South African who is still caught in the vice-like grip of the colonial past. Coetzee's uncompromising portrayal of the current socio-political situation relays social commentary through role-reversals in personal relationships across the divides of age, gender, and race (Gräbe, 2001:141).

J.M. Coetzee's reworking of the farm novel subverts the nostalgic idealization of landscape. Instead the landscape of the farm and its surroundings are depicted as being barren, "poor" and "exhausted" (Coetzee, J.M. 2000:64). The novel contextualizes the white / black relationship to land informed by the socio-political situation of the past and the present. Furthermore, the farm is situated in a "history of conflict" (Marais 2001:36): the farm's geographical locale, the Eastern Cape, invokes a history of frontier wars waged on the issue of land (Cornwell, 2003:43). *Disgrace* thereby situates the reader on the historical frontier. The novel is thematically preoccupied with the implications of culpability, the consequences and legacy of colonization. This is further emphasized by the novel's concern with the ideas of shame, guilt and disgrace which presents a fictional dilemma as critique of Western attitudes to responsibility and betrayal (Graham, 2002:4).

The thematic denouement of the novel concerns the fate of two women, the male protagonist David Lurie's student Melanie and his daughter Lucy who are both left exposed and vulnerable when they are sexually exploited and raped respectively. Tension is created by juxtaposing Lurie's assumed "seduction" of Melanie, which is permissible in his opinion, with Lucy's brutal rape by 'others'. This discrepancy between similar crimes exposes the typical patriarchal/colonial perception of the 'other'. *Disgrace* also foregrounds the alienating consequences of estrangement

between 'self' and 'other' through Lurie's (and by implication the reader's) inability to adapt to a post-apartheid and postcolonial society. According to Gräbe (2001:138), *Disgrace* redefines the "ugly reality of general criminal behaviour, when the narrator's transgression is mirrored by the brutal rape of his daughter by three black men". The novel therefore suggests that the occurrence of sexual assault is informed by the power relations of patriarchy and contextualised within a (colonial) history of female oppression and debauchment.

The dystopic qualities of the farm in *Disgrace* as well as the reversal of roles illustrate the displacement of the characters and their subsequent bewilderment with regard to their "place" (or identity) in the South African reality. In the wake of her rape, Lucy's existential angst and displacement are especially severe and her refusal to disclose her suffering becomes part of her "strangeness, her alterity" (Bethlehem, 2002:22). I will argue that Lucy's decision to remain on the farm is a pragmatic decision based on a changed value system which posits her attempt to reinstate the self by accepting responsibility and rejecting the "safety" of white, patriarchal hegemony. For her, as for the reader, it remains a matter of choice.

As a reworking of the farm novel, *Disgrace* exposes the reader to a radically different ethical perspective on situations in the context of post-apartheid South Africa from the familiar rendition. This reversal, together with the unresolved ending, exasperates the reader who does not realize that she / he is a protagonist in the novel who must negotiate her / his own identity accordingly. The thematic and formal concerns of the novel adhere to postmodernist expression with regard to the dissolution of boundaries and the postcolonial⁴ concerns of rewriting "history" or master narrations.

1.5 Relevant questions

Given the aforementioned context, important questions in relation to this project are:

- 1. What are the characteristics of the pastoral mode and how are they represented in the South African context?**

⁴ This focus of dissertation will be overtly concerned with the postcolonial approach, as its socio-political preoccupations are very applicable to the context of this study.

2. **How does the farm novel as a “place” in both the traditional/colonial concept and in a re-written postcolonial version, contribute towards female identity formation within the South African and postcolonial literary context?**
3. **How does *The Story of an African Farm* contribute towards the formation of female identity with regard to space and place?**
4. **How does Coetzee present/create an additional dimension to the anti-pastoral tradition in *Disgrace* by subverting and transcending concepts of space and place in the construction of female identity?**

1.6 Thesis

This dissertation investigates how Olive Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm* and J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*, in different ways and degrees, rewrite and transcend the pastoral farm novel tradition by rejecting and subverting the inherent ideological assumptions and pastoral values exemplified by this genre. Postcolonial and postmodernist practices of rewriting, parody and subversion inherent to the anti-pastoral farm novel are foregrounded to indicate that traditional perceptions of reality informed by colonialism have become obsolete and inappropriate. Specific focus is given to the role of space and place in the identity formation of the female protagonists and its conceptualisation in a postcolonial society. Furthermore, this study indicates how the farm novel as genre has been reworked in the subversive process, specifically with regard to the dialectic between progress and tradition, so as to reflect on a postcolonial and feminist perspective.

1.7 Aims of study

1. To determine the characteristics of the pastoral mode and examine its representation in the South African context.
2. To explore the concept of the farm novel as a “place” in both the traditional/colonial concept and in a re-written postcolonial version, and how

this contributes towards female identity formation within the South African, postcolonial literary context.

3. To determine how *The Story of an African Farm* as an anti-pastoral novel contributes towards the formation of female identity with regard to space and place.
4. To study Coetzee's presentation/creation of an additional dimension to the anti-pastoral tradition in *Disgrace* by subverting but also transcending concepts of space and place in the formation of female identity.

1.8 Methodology

Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* and J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* are analyzed in terms of narrative dynamics such as plot, structure and ontological implications. Accordingly, this dissertation will firstly draw on a literary-critical approach to examine how *The Story of an African Farm* and *Disgrace* embody, problematize and subvert the vision of the pastoral farm novel tradition. The pastoral tradition is conceptualised as a convention and concepts involved in the discussion of this analysis, namely place, displacement and female identity formation, are defined and discussed within the context of postcolonial and postmodernist⁵ re-vision and re-writing as well as the texts themselves. Secondly, a philosophical-ethical reading will be integrated with an analysis of the chosen texts to underline an important theme in both novels, *viz* the disjunctive effect a society lacking in ethical responsibility has on the human psyche.

According to Ampie Coetzee (2000:xiv), a literary text does not only consist of the social and political formations within which it was written or to which it directly or indirectly refers, but it also creates constructs out of the given formations. Van der Merwe (2001:162) posits that fiction presents the reader with a history of events as well as a history of ideas. As such, the literary text becomes a palimpsest inscribed

⁵ Theoretically, the postmodern is concerned with modes of being – the “ontological dominant” (McHale, 1987:10) – and as such, interrogates the nature of truth and reality. Postmodernism and postcolonialism therefore interrelate as both concepts are typified by a questioning stance toward commonly accepted notions from which our conception of the world is constructed

not only with the context (socio-historical, political, ideological etc.) from which it was created, but also with the context of the reader. Thereby, the literary text becomes interwoven with the creation of history, implicating history as being subjective documentation open to interpretation. In accordance with postcolonial and postmodernist approaches that problematize the credibility of historical knowledge, history should therefore not be seen in terms of discrete episodes forming a homogeneous whole, but instead as “fractured, subjective, and above all *textual*” (Green & LeBihan, 1996:112). As such, literature, and therefore also the pastoral farm novel, should be approached as a discourse manipulated through and by a culture’s power struggles. Accordingly, the pastoral farm novel (text) can be perceived as a literary response to a period of radical change at the turn of the twentieth century (context) that led to the creation of the largely white-owned commercial farms that have presently again become sites of uncertainty and conflict.

CHAPTER 2:

LANDSCAPE AS CULTURAL CONSTRUCT WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO THE 'PLACE' OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN FARM

In a rapidly changing world of expanding horizons and dissolving boundaries, places are no longer clear or determinants of our identity. According to Carter, Donald & Squires (1993:vii), notions of identity and location are continually questioned by a postcolonial context in which traditional presumptions of cultural identity, firmly located in particular places associated with “stable cohesive communities of shared tradition”, have increasingly been disrupted and displaced. However, it cannot be disputed that places still play a potentially important role in the symbolic and physical dimensions of identity formation. Before this process can be examined more closely, the concepts of space, place and identity as well as the relation between them, need to be defined and contextualised within a postcolonial framework.

2.1 Space and place

Postcolonialism is concerned with the notion of space as a “multidimensional entity” (Darian-Smith, Gunner & Nuttall, 1996:2) encompassing social, cultural and territorial dimensions. Space refers to the physical, but also the ontological and epistemological dimensions in which all living things exist. Space can be conceptualised as a text upon which histories and cultures are inscribed and interpreted. Carter, Donald & Squires (1993:xii) posit that it is “not spaces which ground identifications, but places”. *Space* becomes *place* by being named and conceptualised – we orientate ourselves within space through place. Therefore, place is space that has been invested with meaning and significance. However, this does not mean that universality should be ascribed to space and particularity to place, even though it seems perfectly logical to assume that human experience begins with space and then proceeds to place.

Casey (1996:14) posits that places are not merely “apportionings” of space, but that place also exists independently from space and that it has its own essential structures

and modes of experience. Like space, place can be experienced multidimensionally: psychically as well as physically, also culturally, historically and socially. Casey (1996:25, 31) furthermore points out that places are also informed by experiences and histories, even languages, thoughts and memories. Places can be inscribed with power and ideological meaning through spatial demarcations or structures and buildings with symbolic meaning, such as fences or monuments. A fence – or in this case a farm - is a boundary that excludes and includes: those included are owned by the boundaries they created, and they own the land within the boundaries while those excluded become the marginalised. As Ampie Coetzee (1996:136) points out, “Land is ownership” and ownership (albeit appropriated), is synonymous with power.

Ashcroft (2001:125) suggests that it is perhaps when space is “least *spatial*” that it becomes most identifying; place, more so than space, is therefore almost inextricably linked with notions of belonging. Place is in a continual and dynamic state of formation, a process of over-writing and erasures intimately bound up with the culture and identity of its inhabitants. Ashcroft (2001:156) proposes place to be, above all, the result of habitation, a consequence of the ways in which people inhabit space – “particularly that conception of space as universal and uncontestable that is constructed for them by imperial discourse”.

2.2 Relationships to place

Crang (1998:107-111) draws on ideas about ‘sense of place’ from Martin Heidegger’s reworking of phenomenology, and identifies three themes on the relationship to place: intentionality, the idea of essences, and the nature of life and knowledge. With regard to intentionality, Crang (1998:108) differentiates between the intended object and the material thing, postulating that human intentions determine the ways in which objects function and acquire meaning in everyday life. He (Crang, 1998:108) also applies this concept to place which implies that places should not only be seen as a set of accumulated data, but also as a product of human intentions.

The second principle is concerned with “essences and authenticity”. Crang (1998:108) argues that the essence of a thing refers to that characteristic which

essentially defines the object. Place therefore signifies more than a unique collection of things - a place possesses a unique spirit which implies that people experience place beyond the physical or sensory in that they can feel an attachment to the spirit of a place. It can therefore be suggested that to have and to know your place is an essential part of being human. If the meaning of place extends beyond the visible and evident into the realms of emotion and feeling, then literature may be a possible way in which people can express these meanings. As such, the pastoral farm novel became a vehicle for expressing the early 20th century Afrikaner's attachment to the farm as circumscribed space. If place therefore has an essential quality, can people experience place differently or is the essence of a place universal in that there is only one true or authentic relationship to place? The pastoral valorising of the rural Afrikaner in the early 20th century is a good example of how an exaggerated concern for the preservation of authenticity distorted certain values to further Afrikaner Nationalist ideology.

In the final instance Crang (1998:109) refers to Heidegger's contention that the human condition is not a rational, free-floating state but that the human subject only becomes able to think and act through "*being-in-the-world*". Therefore, as humans cannot be perceived as separate from the world, identity formation starts from our position in the world. Since we are always engaged with the world, our knowledge of the world is based on places as centres of our "care" (our intentions and attentions) about the world (Crang, 1998:109). We have different types and levels of care for different things at different times. Drawing on this approach, Crang (1998:110) suggests that we make sense of the world through the materials at hand, and that objects cannot be studied independently of their context. Our experience of place is therefore unified or holistic.

Crang (1998:110) refers to the work of Gaston Bachelard (1958 – *The Poetics of Space*) who claims that the way in which we perceive space shapes our understanding of the universe: as such, we have *inside* and *outside* relationships to places – not only in terms of physical perspective, but also in terms of "experiential relationships and types of knowledge". Instead of viewing places as rationally constructed catalogues of information, inside relationships to place, in which memory and the imagination play a role, serve as sites for organising experience. To this end, Relph (1976: *Place*

and Placelessness as referred to in Crang, 1998:110) defines four different types of space produced by different relationships to places: “pragmatic” spaces organised by bodily situation, e.g. left, right, up or down; perceptual space organised through intentions and centred on us as observers; existential space that is informed by cultural structures which attribute our perceptions with social meaning – for example the literary work and finally, cognitive space relating to the abstract modelling of spatial relationships, e.g. through maps or atlases.

2.3 Place and culture

As I have argued above, people encounter places, perceive them, and invest them with significance so that places become metaphorically and metonymically linked to identities (Field & Basso, 1996:11). People therefore have an affective or emotional relationship with place, as having a sense of belonging is important to all human beings. However, having a sense of place or belonging extends beyond the idea of location, as people do not simply locate themselves, but define themselves through their sense of place. Crang (1998:103) points out that place represents a set of cultural characteristics that imply something not only about where you live but also who you are, i.e. your identity. Identities are as much defined as by who we are *not* as by who we *are*: identity is not merely ascribed to individuals, but can be seen at group and national levels where people are often united due to beliefs of common ancestry or experience. These common traits create a sense of “lived connection” (Crang, 1998:103) whereby people and places are bound together.

Difference depends on which things are regarded as significant, and may be defined by ethnicity, language, religion and cultural practices, thereby creating binaries of belonging (‘self’) and not belonging (‘other’). Identity is therefore founded on differentiation and is often territorially delimited – people are both defined by where they live and they in turn define place. Crang (1998:60) points out that identity is neither solely voluntary nor naturally given, but that the categorization of people is a political process which often involves defining “taken-for granted natural, unquestionable categories”. As was the case with Afrikaner Nationalism, deciding

what defined belonging had political consequences, and denied the subordinate 'other' the right to shape their own identities.

The nature of the link between land and identity can vary according to the context in which it is constructed. In South Africa, colonialism, and later Afrikaner nationalism, provided the context in which a strong emotive bond between the white settler and the land, or more specifically, the farmer (*boer*) and the farm, was established. In literature, the relationship between land and identity is approached differently during different socio-historical contexts, which would suggest this relationship to be - to some extent at least - ideologically motivated. For the purpose of this study, ideology will be broadly related to worldview as a constellation of ideas which can be derived from the writing of an author produced both intentionally and unintentionally.

2.3.1 Cultural identity

Ethnic nationalism identifies culture with a space and the space with a people, forming a circular logic whereby one's right to belong to a space is seen as dependent on possessing the culture that is also used to identify the territory. Cultural identity is therefore often territorial – the space or place with which a culture is associated becomes imbued with ethnic and / or nationalist ideas, forming a potent combination of blood and soil (Crang, 1998:162). As such, Nationalism is constitutive of identity in that it is a manifestation of a general human need to control space and express identity. However, territorial identification is a specific historical process, rather than a universal need that works through specific political and cultural mechanisms. According to Crang (1998:165), the first is concerned with the linkage of people despite spatial distance in an "imagined community". This entails a sharing of identity among (formal) equals and creates a shared dimension in which each person believes others are doing likewise. An imagined community is therefore sustained by the belief that it exists, and in this sense it links up with the idea of intentionality. Secondly, Crang (1998:163) looks to the dimension of time in "invented traditions" in which national identity relies upon shared history as ground for commonality and for defining the characteristics of the people. However, it is not the actual relationship to shared history that is important, but rather the idea of *pastness*. The quest for authentic national cultural identity often results in efforts to reconstruct a lost national ethos belonging to an ideologically constructed idealised past.

Crang (1998:2,103) maintains that the world, spaces and places are interpreted and used by people and that these places then help to perpetuate culture. In that way, patterns of interaction and behaviour are very often place-specific. Ideas, practices and objects form cultures, which in turn form identities through which people recognize themselves and others. Spaces and places are therefore deeply involved in shaping and maintaining cultures and identities; they provide an anchor of shared experiences that can either bind people together or alienate them.

2.3.2 Landscape as cultural construct

Landscapes are created by different people in different places through a process that 'shapes' a landscape into characteristic forms or cultural regions. Culture is a political and contested construct that means different things to different people in different places. Different groups might therefore attribute completely different meanings to the same places. In this way, power and meaning are written onto the landscape. Crang (1998:14) suggests landscapes to develop through time and the spatial diffusion of culture, thereby encompassing "a collective shaping of the earth over time". As dynamic sites for identity formation, landscapes serve to create and naturalize the histories and identities inscribed upon them, thereby simultaneously hiding and exposing social and historical formations. Through the cultural processes of imagining, seeing, historicizing and remembering, geographical territory is transformed into a culturally defined landscape.

Landscapes are the products of culture and in turn, produce cultures through time. Like cultures, landscapes reflect a society's beliefs, practices and technologies as well as the way in which these interrelate. Crang (1998:22) maintains that culture is not always organically created and can be invented, promoted or imposed onto the landscape. The settler landscape is an example of the process during which non-indigenous cultures adapted to a new land with an alien landscape and in turn shaped and re-shaped the landscape through various cultural preferences and agglomerations.

Landscapes record change over time as cultures evolve, in the process leaving their own distinctive traces which accumulate into a palimpsest. According to Crang (1998:22), a palimpsest implies a landscape shaping and being shaped by its inhabitants, becoming a bank of cultural memories and residues of past practices and

knowledge. Landscapes may therefore be read as culturally constructed texts illustrating the values through which societies are organised. The shaping of the landscape provides a context that expresses social ideologies perpetuated and supported through the landscape. Colonialism shaped the South African landscape through exclusion, segregation and division, culminating in apartheid. Thereby, exclusion and conflict became symptomatic of the South African landscape, foregrounding the link between land and identity.

2.3.3 The national landscape

Nations attribute certain characteristics to landscapes, thereby creating national landscapes. Larsen (1997:284) posits landscapes to be the products of nation-building, a process of belonging which involves a redefinition of territory and identity that often amalgamate into a national identity, a construct encompassing both individual and collective identity. In this transitional process, the national landscape is fundamental to the formation of national identity. Larsen (1997:286) suggests three ways in which the national landscape contributes to national identity: Firstly, the national landscape gives unity to people and place; secondly, it provides people and place with a common origin; and thirdly, the national landscape naturalises this origin.

As such, Larsen (1997:287) suggests the national landscape to serve several ideological functions: it tends to present the unity between people and place as a historical destiny instead of a complicated and unpredictable process of fragmentations and interventions; it often disguises the actual conflicts and contrasts within the national setting, particularly the fact that nations are mostly the products of the breakdown of older structures; and, in naturalising the national identity, the landscape removes change and choice from the definition of what national identity should entail and instead positions it as being absolute. Consequently, the national landscape separates national identity – and therefore also individual and collective identity – from history (Larsen, 1997:288).

In the South African context, the farm was constitutive of the national landscape idealised by the Afrikaner. As such, the farm was ascribed with Afrikaner nationalist characteristics which turned it into a symbol of Afrikaner identity. The ideological

function of this process was to construct a valorised version of the landscape - the “farmscape” – and transform it from a geographical location into a symbolic space.

2.3.4 *The farm in South Africa*

As an almost archetypal way of South African habitation, the farm is a site where the modalities of space, place, culture and identity come together in a concrete form. Traditionally, the farm is a site associated with pastoral ideals which possess strong cultural valency. The South African farm has also always been closely associated with ideology, particularly Afrikaner nationalist ideology. As such, the South African farm is also a manifestation of the link between land, ideology and identity as well as a site for conflict over ownership and the symbolic value of land. Van Wyk Smith (2001:19) posits that the farm has also always had strong ambivalent undertones and has been associated with tension and contradiction; and within context of the post-1994 farm murders and the Zimbabwean land crisis, also with vulnerability, insecurity and fear. Van Wyk Smith (2001:20) regards the farm as “an icon of White South Africa’s fragile domicility and haunting complicit” and “a nexus of promise and menace, eden and demon” (2001:25). This ambivalent iconology of the farm could suggest a type of postcolonial unconscious; a vague but repressed awareness that the land has been taken away from its original inhabitants. The suppressed history of colonial conquest and occupation therefore manifests itself in the form of a subconscious unease and guilt (Viljoen, 2004:108).

2.4 The colonization of Place

The appropriation and subsequent domination of place in its various dimensions was a prominent feature of colonialism. Colonialism aimed to rationalise space by subdividing it according to proportions and rational divisions. Various ways of constructing space and place disrupted or regulated colonized societies’ sense of place. Ashcroft (2001:125) lists the most prominent perceptions of space as the development of modern mapping, the expropriation and subversion of pre-existing native histories through naming, the emergence of the discipline of geography and the conceptual separation of space and time. Colonialism gained control over the spatial reality of colonial societies by mapping abstract space on to appropriated territory and

dividing up land according to methodical principles and rational logic. This act of appropriation disrupted the societies' sense of place and imposed feelings of displacement and alienation on the colonized as well as on those who moved to the colonies. So complete was this reorganization and reconstruction of the lived environment of different groups into the political, economic and cultural boundaries of colonial space, that the "concept and experience of 'place' could be the one discourse of postcolonial life most resistant to transformation" (Ashcroft, 2001:124).

In colonial, pre-apartheid South Africa, physical contestation over land between imperial invaders and indigenous inhabitants was inextricably linked with culturally different spatial concepts about the lived-in environment. Colonialism emphasised the division of land in accordance with models drawn from industrialized and capitalist Europe: subsequently, separate areas were allotted with exclusive functions, such as forestry, game reserves and farming. These Eurocentrically-conceived notions, as well as the disregard for indigenous inhabitants from whom land was appropriated, clashed radically with African ideas of flexible land use and multi-purpose common land. The result was that residential, commercial, agricultural and industrial space became racially determined and controlled, as exemplified by the apartheid system.

2.4.1 Postcolonial displacement and the erosion of identity

The transformation of notions of place and what it means to belong is also applicable to notions of displacement or what it means *not* to belong. Displacement and its implications for the displaced is a major feature of postcolonial writing. Ashcroft (2001:155) does not necessarily perceive displacement as a feeling, because any "sense' of placelessness" is just as much constructed as identity itself. Displacement is therefore the area in which the postcolonial crisis of identity comes into being: a valid and active sense of self becomes eroded by dislocation and destroyed by cultural denigration (Ashcroft, Griffith & Tiffen, 1989:9).

Feelings of displacement can be manifested in forms of behaviour that occur as a consequence of colonization. In *The Story of an African Farm* and *Disgrace*, displacement is manifested through the female protagonists' ambivalence or conflict about cultural or political affiliations, their crisis in self-image and their search for

existential rootedness. The postcolonial literary context can therefore examine places as sites of power struggles and 'places' displacement as a manifestation of histories of annexation, absorption, and resistance. However, within a postcolonial context displacement also has transcendental potential in that it subverts and interrogates imperial cultural formations, thereby encouraging the development or recovery of self and place.

2.4.2 Female identity

A feminist perspective on identity formation indicates an analogy between the relationships of men with women and those of the imperial power with the colony. Categories of perceived racial and gender difference were conceived from the position of white western man. In many societies women were (and still are) relegated to the position of 'other' by being marginalized and metaphorically colonized, a position they shared with the colonized whom were subjected to the politics of oppression and repression. Moreover, Anne McClintock (1995:6) posits that colonized women had to negotiate not only the gendered imbalances of their relations with their own men, but also the oppressive and exploitative hierarchical rules that structured their relations with imperial men and women. However, as a site of the contradictory relationships of gender and race, colonial women were also confined within this process. According to McClintock (1995:6), marital laws, property laws, land laws and patriarchy bound these women in gendered patterns of disadvantage and frustration. This concept is clearly illustrated by Lyndall's position in *The Story of an African Farm*.

Crang (1998:65) suggests that the colonizer's treatment of the land echoed the treatment of women and that often a presupposed sexualised identity was attributed to indigenous females. McClintock (1995:24) argues that women served as mediating and threshold figures by means of which men oriented themselves in space as agents of power, rationality and knowledge. As such, colonized lands were sexualised and feminised and as the "Dark Continent", Africa was associated with deviant or uncontrolled sexuality that needed to be controlled. Crang (1998:71) suggests that this need for control of the colonial mentality was a projection of the European fear of that which was perceived as the polar opposite of the European male. Consequently, the immensely popular adventure novels of colonial times, such as those by Rider

Haggard, portray the heroic white male European protagonist mastering the untamed wilderness of a feminised land in which women are figures of both desire and fear. These effects were achieved by attributing the landscape with feminine traits, such as comparing mountains to the shape of women's breasts, and depicting female characters as forces of possible instability and chaos. Crang (1998:72) consequently argues that these novels used the feminised landscape to create a stage where rational, masculine characters could act and appropriate both the land and female identity.

* * *

Drawing on the notion of the interrelationship between text and context discussed in the section on Methodology in Chapter 1, the following chapter shall situate the South African pastoral farm novel within the broader context of the pastoral tradition. I shall also trace the role of female identity in the evolution of the anti-pastoral farm novel within the South African socio-historical context.

CHAPTER 3:
GENRE AND GENDER: THE PASTORAL AND ANTI-PASTORAL
TRADITION IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN FARM NOVEL

That is what sets him apart: the two farms behind him, his mother's farm, his father's farm, and the stories of those farms. Through the farms he is rooted in the past, through the farms he has substance.

Coetzee, *Boyhood*:22

3.1 Defining the pastoral

The earliest definition of "pastoral" is attributed to a work that portrays the life of shepherds in a traditional manner ("Pastor" is Latin for "shepherd"), the term is also extended to works dealing with country or rural life in general. The pastoral is among the oldest and most universal of literary forms, stretching back to the third century B.C. to the work of the Greek poet Theocritus, whose poems represented the lives of Sicilian shepherds. Virgil later imitated Theocritus' pastorals, and established an enduring model for all subsequent writers in this form in his Latin *Eclogues* (Murray, 1986:111 and Abrams, 1987:127). Consequently, Abrams (1987:127) defines the pastoral as an "elaborately conventional poem" that expresses a "nostalgic image of the peace and simplicity of the life of shepherds and other rural folk in an idealised natural setting".

However, a definition of pastoral poetry entails more than just simply dealing with the conventional activities of shepherds or rural folk and the beauties of rural life. Murray (1986:112) also asserts that classic poets often also described pastoral life in terms of a lost, mythical golden age, an allusion which Christian pastoralists applied to the Garden of Eden and human life before the Fall. Murray defines this "golden age" as a time in the history of the world when men lived in a state of perfect contentedness, innocent of evil tendencies and free from cares and troubles. In more recent times the term "pastoral" has been expanded to refer to any work in which simple and complicated life is contrasted to the advantage of the former - "which envisions a withdrawal from ordinary life to a place apart, close to the elemental

rhythms of nature, where a man achieves a new perspective on life in the complex social world” (Abrams, 1987:128).

Klopper (1990:28) characterises the pastoral as extolling country life and portraying it in idealistic and nostalgic terms associated with the qualities of simplicity and virtue. Essentially, the pastoral shows the authentic rural landscape as being on the verge of disappearing – translating the nostalgia for simple values into a general lament for lost innocence and simplicity, with the implication that things must once have been different. In Olive Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm*, this nostalgia takes the form of “thoughts that run far out into the future and back into the past” (Schreiner, 1998:169), a cognizance of a past (landscape) unscathed by colonial conquest.

The pastoral tradition originated in Europe, but was *related* to the context of the African landscape during and after the period of colonization of Southern Africa as an attempt to interpret and familiarise a landscape that was alien and threatening to the European settler identity. The pastoral tradition also had to be *adapted* to its function as survival mechanism for preserving colonial (and later Afrikaner) identity. The South African pastoral therefore reconstructed the pastoral vision in order to apply it to the colonial landscape and experience. According to Coetzee (1988:6), the South African pastoral manifested itself in a longing for an idealised social stability based on a peasant order of an “organic mode of consciousness”. This implied generations of farmers toiling on the family farm as transitory embodiments of enduring bloodlines stretching back into a mythicised and lost past. Coetzee (1988:6) posits that these naïve and essentially conservative notions on which the South African pastoral was based, owe much to the “great country house of the English Tory tradition”, as well as that of “Romantic earth-mysticism of *Blut und Boden*⁶ Germany”, a tradition which was drawn upon strongly in the work of C.M. van den Heever. The pastoral inclination in South Africa was therefore a Eurocentrically-conceived cultural construct, receptive to strains of European reaction to social, political and historical change.

⁶ Blood and Land

Coetzee (1988:76) points out that the Great Depression of the 1920s provoked alarm about rural depopulation all over Europe and resulted in a nostalgic campaign for a return to the land. Essentially, (European) pastoralism resembles a form of classic peasant social organization which, according to Coetzee (1988:71), allows the life of the (extended) family and the self-sustaining economy of the farm to be closely integrated. Production is used mainly for household purposes or barter, while money is only used to acquire that which cannot be provided by the farm - social mechanisms therefore function to counteract rather than encourage extremes of wealth and poverty. The people also experience a mystical attachment to nature as well as strong bonds between them and the soil. Furthermore, authority is patriarchal and hierarchical while cultural homogeneity is strongly encouraged. Classic peasantry therefore forms the basis from which pastoralism in Europe and consequently Southern Africa, was conceived and adapted.

3.2 The South African pastoral: origins and assimilation

This study is based on the assumption that the South African pastoral was influenced by two prominent strains of European literary reaction to a changing social, economical and political climate during the first part of the 20th century, namely the English and German pastoral traditions.

The nostalgia for country life and the yearning for a classic peasant social organization were manifested in the English novel in the years up to 1939. These novels expressed a longing for a return to the land in the wake of industrialisation, which resulted in major economic and technological changes and more pronounced distinctions between rural and urban ways of life. According to Klopper (1990:22), the overall transformation of social and economic patterns created wide-scale unemployment, destitution and political unrest. Consequently, the popular English novel of the time expressed pastoral yearnings together with disillusionment with social change. A good example of such a novel would be Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891). Whereas pre-1880s small farming was seen as simply one possible way of life among many, a combination of mechanisation and restrictive legislation forced small tenant farmers and farm labourers off the land and into

factories where poor conditions prevailed (Coetzee, 1988:76; Klopper, 1990:22). The changed socio-economic climate therefore resulted in the small-farming lifestyle to be nostalgically looked upon as a dying way of life from a rural past which needed to be conserved and celebrated.

British pastoral values were also evident in the policy of Imperialism. Gail Ching-Liang Low (1993:188, 192) maintains that late Victorian Imperialism promoted a culture of masculinity which in turn, advocated a pastoral idyll exemplified in bold depictions of “life on the frontier” of the colonies. This manifestation of the pastoral was especially prevalent in colonial adventure novels, such as those by Rider Haggard. According to Ching-Liang Low (1993:193) the pastoral form functions within the framework of the poetics of empire by disowning imperial culpability for the destruction and disownment of indigenous cultures through its suggestions of lost innocence and nostalgia. The pastoral was therefore used to inscribe notions of development, civility and growth on a landscape that was created by colonial narrative.

Coetzee (1988:76) contends that literature promoting a peasant rural order and a return to the land was most prevalent in Germany, especially the Germany of the period between the World Wars. The German pastoral manifested itself through the *Bauernroman*, which was conceptualised by the rise of cultural pessimism amongst middle-class intellectuals and an accompanying rejection of the culture of the metropolis. The socio-economic hardships of the 1920s (as a result of the Great Depression) and the Nazist *Blut und Boden* policy, which advocated a return to the bucolic, also functioned to promote the idealisation of the rural lifestyle. Like many of the early Afrikaans farm novels, the *Bauernroman* pursued the ideals of benign patriarchy, instinctualism and cultivation of the soil as a quasi-religious act in a society free from capitalistic relations, subject only to “natural” law (Coetzee, 1988:76).

In *White Writing* (1988), Coetzee traces transitional socio-economic strains in South Africa similar to those in Europe, such as industrialization, the rise of capitalism and overall economic expansion, that resulted in an exodus from the *platteland* to towns and cities. In reaction to this, the South African pastoral therefore followed two

topographies: on the one hand it envisaged a return to a peasant social order as utopian programme, an approach that relied on the German *Bauernroman* tradition and was especially prevalent in the early Afrikaans farm novel. On the other hand, the South African pastoral identified itself with an English tradition of nostalgic pastoral celebration, a tradition more concerned with the remembrance of the old rural values than the implementation thereof (Coetzee, 1988:76). This tradition manifested itself in early English South African literature, especially the farm novels of Pauline Smith and the landscape poetry of the Scottish-born Thomas Pringle, whose poetry assimilated “the details of the African landscape into a familiar European schema” (Klopper, 1990:29).

To the Victorian mind, the colonization of new lands posed various physical and psychological threats –“abysses, cliffs, swamps and sands, not only of the southern lands it was colonizing, but of its own psyche” (Darian-Smith, Gunner & Nuttall, 1996:3). This notion of Africa as an empty, potentially devouring and overwhelming space prevailed into the early 20th century, but was integrated with the South African pastoral, which romanticised Africa as a huge, empty space outside history; older than prehistoric times. The South African pastoral set out to humanise and tame the barren, inhospitable wilderness through containment and domestication, thereby creating a garden cultivated through human toil and asserting it against vices such as decay and degeneration, usually associated with the city.

The South African pastoral attitude towards nature resembled that of European Romanticism. Coetzee (1988:87) suggests that many of the feelings of “cosmic identification and engulfment” associated with the relationship between farmer and farm (as embodiment of “contained” nature), originally could be attributed to the Romantic relation of man to wilderness. Klopper (1990:28) also maintains that within the Romantic context, the pastoral acquires a specifically religious overtone through its association with the Edenic existence where man lives close to the beneficent influence of a spiritual presence. Crang (1998:46) suggests that Romantic visions of landscape are usually informed by the social context of the day and seeks the majesty of nature in an attempt to transcend the merely human. Accordingly, the pastoral idyll divides the world into a realm of significance (nature, country, the farm) and a realm of chaos (the city).

As a reactionary cultural construct, the South African pastoral had as its central issue the preservation of the values of a (Dutch) peasant rural order which identified (British) capitalism as principal enemy of the old ways (Coetzee, 1988:5). On a social, economical and political level, historically significant conflict was situated as being between the Boer/Afrikaner and the Briton while black-white conflict was disregarded and contextualised as being insignificant.

Quoting Njabulo Ndebele (1990), A.E. Voss (1991:65) posits that

...’the South African pastoral’ as ‘a way of writing’ expresses ‘a way of perception that was studiously cultivated into a way of life’, dependent on ‘black labour’, yet refusing to acknowledge either its humanity or ‘the legitimacy of its political claims based on that labour’.

According to Green & LeBihan (1996:129) the ideology of a text is revealed through its gaps and omissions. The omission of the black man from the South African pastoral is especially conspicuous in the genre’s portrayal of labour. Honest labour is a prime premise of the pastoral; a virtuous peasant ideal through which the transcendental *right* to own land is acquired. By portraying labour to be a predominantly white domain, the Imperialist notion that “those who make best use of the earth deserve to inherit it”, was propagated. The black man, women and child therefore belong to an insignificant background, their only relevance being their subservient obedience to the system of white patriarchal hegemony. Consequently, the South African pastoral translates questions of justice and power into questions of legal succession and personal relations between masters and servants (Coetzee, 1988:11).

3.2.1 *The anti-pastoral tradition in South Africa*

Deviations from the pastoral – the anti-pastoral – only became established as a genre in Afrikaans and English fiction in South Africa during the latter half of the 20th century. Generally, these novels manifest an anti-pastoral stance by reconsidering and questioning Eurocentrically-conceived ideas and by acknowledging the existence of a South African identity within the context of an austere African landscape. The first and probably most prominent foil to the preconceptions of the South African pastoral is *The Story of an African Farm*, written by Olive Schreiner, which the

novelist Coetzee (1988:4) refers to as the “great antipastoral writer in South Africa”. Coetzee furthermore suggests that rather than interpreting Schreiner’s farm as a realistic representation of a Karoo sheep farm, one should read *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) as vehicle for Schreiner’s critique of colonial culture. The novel could be considered autobiographical in its resistance to white male dominance and in its appreciation of nature as posited by Schreiner’s mystical vision of the Karoo landscape. *The Story of an African Farm* was thematically and structurally ahead of its time, especially as the farm novel tradition was not yet established at the time when this novel was written. The novel’s modernist approach to space and place foregrounds the Conradian modernist preoccupation with Africa as a huge, empty, vast, impenetrable space, “where the wilderness takes root once again in men’s hearts” (Coetzee, 1988:30). This novel does not conform to the conventions of the pastoral or traditional Afrikaans South African farm novel, but confronts the reader with a bleak, disillusioned portrayal of life on the farm and parallels it to life in early-colonial society. This unconventional, disenchanting approach to reworking the farm novel, is epitomised in J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace* (1999) in which a dystopic farm forms a point of orientation for exploring the white dilemma in post-apartheid South Africa from a postcolonial perspective.

3.3 The pastoral farm novel

Essentially conservative and retrospective, the South African pastoral mythesises and idealises the time of the forefathers as an exemplary age of steadfast feudal values which should be preserved if social stability is to be maintained. The pastoral ideal was therefore seen as the solution to the question of how the white man should live in Africa.

However, the pastoral genre was much more prevalent in Afrikaans literature of the first half of the 20th century, and provided the contextual framework from which the Afrikaans farm novel was conceptualised. The South African pastoral was related to the plight of the *boerevolk* and as a mode of literary production in interaction with its historical context, functioned as a vehicle of reassurance and identity formation for the white displaced settler.

The social change and upheaval that characterised early 20th century South Africa was the result of various transforming socio-economic patterns which began in the 19th century. According to Wenzel (2000:93), the discovery of diamonds (1867) and gold (1886) initiated an enormous transformation of South African society that altered the role of agricultural activity. The growth of the mining industry had three primary consequences for South African agriculture: it led to land speculation, forcing farmers off the land; it created urban areas around the mines almost overnight; and it led to a shift from wool to food production as the focus of an increasingly commercialised agriculture. Wenzel (2000:1993) furthermore points out that at the turn of the century droughts, pestilence and the dislocations of the Anglo Boer war had begun to create a class of poor, landless Afrikaners who increasingly had to abandon farming and turn to the growing cities to earn their living. This rapid process of urbanisation continued into the 1920s and 1930s, when economic depression and falling wool prices further strained farmers. Wenzel (2000:46) suggests that as many farmers were forced off the land into the cities by economic forces, legislation and agricultural policy consequently favoured the consolidation of large, white-owned farms.

As the former subsistence economy that was predominantly dependant on rural production changed into an economy geared towards industrialised capitalist production, old certainties were destroyed, old world views and moralities destabilised and men and women were forced to adapt their values and ideas to totally new relationships, and ways of life.

Faced with this turbulent period, Afrikaans novelists such as C.M. van den Heever and D.F. Malherbe responded by either celebrating the memory of the old rural values or by proclaiming their durability by elaborating schemes for their preservation. These novelists tracked the forces of change to their origin in history and society (such as capitalism, the Jew and the Englishman or "*Engelsman*") and posited these forces to be the cause of the Afrikaner's predicament. However, these texts consisted of elements which belonged to the larger discourse out of which a specific community would arise - that of the land and the farm (Coetzee, A. 2000:55). The early South African story about land and the farm was therefore overtly preoccupied with issues

such as land ownership, the acquisition of ownership by means of production and labour, family, subservience to the patriarchal order, economical hardships and the threat of losing the land. Ampie Coetzee (2000:59) claims that because of the struggle associated with acquiring and keeping land, land had to remain the property of the family, and as such the concept of ownership became central in the attribution of identity and meaning. As such, the early farm novel can be regarded as an aspiration to establish the farm as source of meaning which structured the relationship of the farm dweller to nature, to labour, to family and *volk* and also to God.

The farm novel has been a recurrent literary form since the nineteenth century in Afrikaans and English writing in South Africa and it has been consistently revisited and revised in the literature of both languages. According to Larsen (1997:288), literature plays a fundamental role in creating the vision of the national landscape and in making it serve an ideological function. Ampie Coetzee (1996:126) argues that an investigation into the consistent return of this kind of narrative in South African literature should not aim to trace the farm novel's evolution or development, but rather attempt to interpret the instances in which the farm novel reappeared and examine the constructs it created. Accordingly, early canonised (mostly Afrikaans) narratives in which land, the farm and life on the farm provide more than just a background to the plot, should be interrogated as ideological reflections on the political and social reality of South Africa at the time.

In keeping with the socio-political climate of the times, the farm novel emerged as a recognised genre in Afrikaans literature during the 1920s and 1930s. These early farm novels had strong pastoral underpinnings and as such, postulated a cosmic connectedness between the Afrikaner and the land. The pastoral farm novel thereby became a vehicle for relating the concept of ownership to the ideology and identity of the Afrikaner class of landowners. Van Wyk Smith (2001:18) claims that the pastoral farm novel “thematized the nexus of the ‘boer’ [farmer] and his ‘plaas’ [farm] as a timeless icon of national and numinous identity, not only validating an unquestioned right to land but expressing also the very soul of the Afrikaner’s being”.

3.3.1 The farm as spatial construct

The typology of the pastoral farm novel conceptualises the farm as a spatial construct which attributes the farm space with meaning and significance. According to Van Coller (1995:25), this is done by identifying the farm as an idyllic space that contrasts with the degenerative morality of the city; while as a feudal space, the farm functions as a self-subsisting hierarchy of social and economical structures. Van Coller (1995:25) maintains that the pantheist characteristics ascribed to the farm situate it as a site for characters' struggles with fate and universal human dilemmas, which identify the farm as both a mythical and religious space.

In the pastoral farm novel, the farm becomes an extension of family life and national culture – an inalienable space that provides the context for determining sameness ('self') and difference ('other'). Van Coller (1995:25) points out that the pastoral farm novel also portrays the farm as a patriarchal space in which lineage and patriarchal figures and their values are dominant. It is therefore also an extension of the family heritage – what Van Coller (1995:1995) terms a “historical space” - inevitably linked to the history of the Afrikaner nation. In the pastoral farm novel, space is usually constructed through the descriptions of an auctorial narrator who can attribute the farm with religious, mythical, idyllic and also patriarchal characteristics. Space is often used as a concept for expressing the finite nature of human existence, but also longing and contrast, such as between the farm (stability) and the city (chaos). Though these texts often reveal the idyll to be under threat, the farm remains a meaningful space, laden with memories of a prosperous past.

3.3.2 Spatial coordinates

Viljoen (2004:113-115) identifies nature, the traditional family nucleus, labour and the representation of the 'other' as prominent spatial coordinates in the pastoral farm novel and relates them to the construction of space and identity. By using these spatial coordinates as conceptual framework, the next section will examine how the spatial reconstruction of nature, the traditional family nucleus, labour and the representation of the 'other' in the pastoral farm novel are conceptualised and related to place and identity, thereby revealing the farm as source of meaning. However, as in the case of the anti-pastoral farm novel, spatial constructs can also have a deconstructive function, that destabilizes the farm as source of absolute meaning.

3.3.2.1 Nature

Nature is a prominent thematic element in both the pastoral tradition and the farm novel. Nature is invested with meaning by associating it with pureness, growth and life; but nature can also be destructive and as such can be portrayed as an ominous and unknown force. The meticulous descriptions of nature in the South African pastoral genre usually inscribe nature as part of the meaning of the farm. The South African pastoral relationship with nature thereby becomes a source of thought and morality (Coetzee, A. 2000:70). In the farm novel, nature is closely identified with the ebb and flow of human existence.

The beauty of nature and the region as well as natural cycles, such as the coming and going of the seasons, are often foregrounded by the narrator, and can be seen as an attempt to make nature part of the meaning of the farm. In accordance with the pastoral tradition seasons and nature tend to be synchronous with the emotions of the characters. As such, summer is often associated with life and growth, autumn with decline in natural and human forces, winter with death and barrenness and spring with rebirth and rejuvenation. Drawing on notions of European Romanticism, the pastoral farm novel relates to feelings of cosmic identification between man and nature and parallels it to the relationship between the farmer and his farm. The deeper meaning of nature is reflected by the processes of maturity and growth and the passing away of time and life. However, the forces of nature (e.g. droughts) could also affect the farm's economic profitability adversely, thus threatening ownership. Accordingly, forces of nature can position the farm as a contested space, usually manifested by themes of material and psychological insecurity and loss (Coetzee, A. 2000:62-72; Viljoen, 2004:112).

3.3.2.2 Traditional family nucleus

The traditional family-nucleus is a key element in the preservation of the pastoral idyll represented by the early farm novel. Thematically, these texts suggested that to ensure the survival of the nation and its ideals, the upkeep of the family as a morally functional unit had to be cultivated. Accordingly, the pastoral farm novel also pointed out those elements that could threaten the preservation of family values, such as the unyielding patriarchal father, strife over inheritance, dispute between fathers

and their children and husbands and wives, and the stepmother-figure bringing about contention and separation between fathers and sons.

Two prevailing identity constructs exist in the pastoral farm novel: that of the settled older generation, depicted as believers, trusting in God, struggling with the forces of nature and the unknown; and the younger generation, seemingly less stable, depicted as being more unsure and full of strange yearnings (Viljoen, 2004:114), like Lyndall and Waldo in *The Story of an African Farm*. The ideal family unit is put forward to be presided over by a benign but firm patriarchal father-figure. Typically, the patriarch's wife is portrayed as a subservient and devoted care-giver, often only present through her actions of looking after her husband and children. Female characters are therefore usually relatively insignificant with regard to the thematical denouement of the plot; their only function being their prescribed structural role, such as wife, mother, daughter or romantic interest (Coetzee, A.2000:75-76).

3.3.2.3 Labour

As a spatial coordinate, labour is closely linked to land, nature and also race. The pastoral farm novel usually contains several poetical narrative descriptions of labour and its merits: labour is therefore presented as being a honourable and virtuous enterprise. According to Ampie Coetzee (2000:78), these descriptions of labour are often used to create atmosphere and rhythm in the text. Labour is celebrated as a life-giving force and a means of conquest over nature (Viljoen, 2004:113), but also as a means of expressing love and gratitude a way in which ownership can physically be inscribed on the land. Thereby, labour is ascribed with redeeming qualities and the ability to prevent moral decay amongst individuals but also amongst the Afrikaner nation (“*volk*”) as a whole. Labour therefore became a transcendental prerequisite for land ownership – and it is within the context provided by labour that the notion of race becomes an irrefutable but problematic presence in the pastoral farm novel (Coetzee, A. 2000:81).

3.3.2.4 Black ‘other’

Coetzee (1988:5) maintains that the South African pastoral had to deny the colonial history of dispossession and disownment by omitting the truth about black labour, because acknowledging the black serf's toil would threaten the position of the white

man as Africa's new heir. The depiction of the black 'other' in the pastoral farm narrative is "embarrassing and difficult", because if it is acknowledged that the black man performs labour, it would imply that he too is entitled to stake a claim to the land – moreover, land that belonged to *his* forefathers. Space in the pastoral farm novel is therefore racially marked.

Viljoen (2004:114) points out that the social distance between white masters and black labourers is expressed in the social distance between the farmhouse and the labourers' houses, as well as the fact that labourers are not included in the social gatherings and festivities of their masters. Instead, their presence belongs to the background of the text. The pastoral farm novel enforces silence about the black labourer in two ways: it either reverts to omitting the presence of black labour from the text, whereby the black man or woman becomes a "shadowy presence flitting across the stage now and then to hold a horse or serve a meal" (Coetzee, 1988:5), or makes use of patronising racial stereotypes in the depiction of black characters. Ampie Coetzee (2000:83) suggests that black labourers are often portrayed as being "jolly" and prone to clownish behaviour and as such, they only "exist" to create "comic relief" in the text; or, as Viljoen (2004:114) points out, they are depicted as possessing dark powers, which only emphasise their "otherness". The farm labourer and the black character were thereby inscribed within specific roles into the pastoral farm novel and readers' consciousness. So even when the black labourer is present in the pastoral farm novel, he / she remains silent - without voice and without identity.

3.4 Identity formation and the (anti)-pastoral farm novel

The above-mentioned spatial coordinates ascribe meaning to the farm space, thereby positioning the farm as a site constitutive of identity, because without land – or so the pastoral farm novel suggests – identity will be lost. Loss and the threat of loss is a prominent theme in the pastoral farm novel: the security of the farm (and therefore also identity) is almost always under threat. In this way, feelings of insecurity and uncertainty were linked to identity formation in the pastoral farm novel. This was reflective of the identity crisis experienced by the Afrikaner at the time.

Ampie Coetzee (2000:87) suggests that the prominent farm novel writers saw themselves as educators and intellectual leaders in search of a steadfast Afrikaner identity. The succession of farm novels during the 1920s and 1930s was therefore an attempt at reaffirming identity, because identity implied meaning and solidity in a time of uncertainty, change and transition. However, the pastoral farm novel could not come to terms with the societal disruptions, primarily because meaning was sought in continuity with the past (Coetzee, 1996:138). It could therefore be argued that where the pastoral farm novel sought to *reflect* a reality based in the past, the anti-pastoral farm novel, specifically Coetzee's *Disgrace*, seeks to *construct* a reality based in the present. Whereas meaning in the pastoral farm novel is confined to constructs of identity and history, the anti-pastoral farm novel's quest for meaning seeks to transcend identity and history and is suffused with ontological uncertainty. Within a postmodern and postcolonial context, the anti-pastoral farm novel could therefore be said to resist absolute meaning by deconstructing the interconnectedness between land and identity hypothesised by the pastoral farm novel.

Closely linked with the concepts of land and identity in the pastoral farm novel is the custom of inheritance, which entails that every son of a farmer has, by birthright, a share of the paternal farm. In order to create a link between land and identity, the pastoral farm novel established a bond of natural right between the farm and the man who inherits it from its "founders"; a bond that cannot exist in the same sense between a farm and its mere purchaser. The value of the farm is therefore not only established in financial terms, but also transcendently, whereby conflict over ownership becomes a conflict between natural right and historical forces (Coetzee, 1988:84). The myth of natural right is founded on the premise of the forefathers paying for the farm in blood, sweat and tears, not in money:

...they hack it out of primeval bush, they defend it against barbarians, they leave their bones behind in its soil. Inherited ownership of the farm therefore becomes a sacred trust: to alienate the farm means to forsake the bones of the ancestors. (Coetzee, 1988:85.)

The pastoral farm novel postulates that land ownership – ownership in legal terms as well as legitimate natural right – is acquired by inscribing the land with one's imprint. The farm becomes a palimpsest on which the legacy of the dispossessed "natural"

owner is forcibly erased and overwritten with that of the farmer and his lineage. However, the natural right that was established by the founding fathers is not a given and must be re-established in each generation through diligent stewardship over the land. Furthermore, the farm must also be loved with a devotion that resembles a marital bond, not so much between the farmer and the farm as between the farmer and his lineage (Coetzee, 1988:85, 86). This love towards the farm had to be qualified by landownership that implied a realization of the self not as individual, but as the transitory embodiment of a lineage.

Postcolonialism reveals the notion of natural right to ownership through lineage and servitude to the land as an ideological construct which stands in conflict with the historical reality of land appropriation. Without a bond of natural right to link the self to the land, identity becomes destabilised. Consequently, the anti-pastoral farm novel questions the assumption that identity should be based on land and scrutinises the influence of historical forces on identity formation. The farm becomes a politicised space and instead of providing transcendental justification for ownership, birthright becomes contested.

3.4.1 Reconfiguring the farm novel in a postcolonial framework

The postcolonial context promulgates a change in traditional perceptions of reality. These altered perceptions are manifested not only in societal norms, but also in literature. With regard to the farm novel, Ampie Coetzee (2000:110) posits that the discourse has remained the same (i.e. concerned with land, ownership and power structures), but that the utterances have changed. These adaptations use rewriting, parody and subversion to question the system of values perpetuated by the pastoral farm novel. The farm is subjected to processes of reduction, transformation and deconstruction. In *The Story of an African Farm* the farm is suggested to be the site of a giant's grave, which is a metaphoric indication of a disruptive presence buried in the farm's history; while *Disgrace* proposes alternatives to the traditional history and theology of the farm by positioning it as a "foundational icon" (Van Wyk Smith, 2001:29).

Whereas identity in the pastoral farm novel relies on uniformity and sameness in order to facilitate the construction of the "self" and the 'other', the anti-pastoral farm

novel breaks away from set identities by problematizing and revising conventional notions of what identity entails. Instead of contemplating the farm as a site of identity, the anti-pastoral farm novel instead utilises the farm as a site for the dissipation of traditional (female) identity constructs. This is also done through the subversion of fears central to the ideology of the pastoral farm novel – such as the fear of the agrarian lifestyle passing away and the fear of losing the land – by allowing those exact fears to transpire. In *The Story of an African Farm* the pastoral idyll is undermined by revealing it never to have existed in the first place, while in *Disgrace*, land is lost to the ‘other’ and white patriarchal hegemony becomes emasculated.

The postcolonial context opens the pastoral farm novel up to various analyses and interpretations, thereby positioning it as a genre open to alternative rewritings. To facilitate a reworking of a prominent genre in the South African literary canon, the anti-pastoral farm novel relies heavily on the key aspects of the pastoral farm novel. The anti-pastoral farm novel juxtaposes the central characteristics of the pastoral farm novel with the postcolonial reality by integrating these characteristics – in its reworked form - into the text for the purpose of subversion: “(p)ostmodernism signals its dependence by its *use* of the canon, but reveals its rebellion through its ironic *abuse* of it” (Hutcheon, 1988:130). As a prominent genre in the South African literary canon, the farm novel has undergone significant development since the 1920s, ranging from loyalty to resistance and contestation. The pastoral farm novel or of the 1920s and 1930s can be seen to reflect the ideologies of self-appropriation associated with the South African farm. The anti-pastoral farm novel, however, resists and subverts these ideological underpinnings, thereby rethinking notions of space, place and identity.

3.5 Female identity: feminism and the (post)colonial context

The evolution of feminism within the realms of social and literary theory has resulted in the emergence of a new, alternative female identity in a postcolonial context. As Green and LeBihan (1996:228) maintain, the term “feminism” in the current social climate, evokes a diversity of viewpoints and definitions as different historical periods, different sexual orientations, different cultural identities and different social

classes all influence what is meant by the term. However, a broad definition of feminism implies that it is a social movement which aims at fighting female oppression and achieving equal rights for women. Morris (1993:1) defines feminism as “a political perception based on two fundamental premises: (1) that gender difference is the foundation of a structural inequality between women and men, by which women suffer systematic social injustice, and (2) that the inequality between the sexes is not the result of biological necessity but is produced by the cultural construction of gender differences”. Feminism is therefore a “consciously held ideology” (Morris, 1993:5) directed at changing power relations (which structure all areas of life) that assist in maintaining the primacy of masculine authority and power. The preoccupations of feminist criticism are relatively similar to those of postcolonial theory, as both oppose those power structures conceived and held in place by imperial and patriarchal cultural formations.

An important aspect of the feminist agenda relevant to this study is as the cultural production and propagation of gender stereotypes. The modernist writer Virginia Woolf, who was an eminently influential thinker of early 20th century feminism, recognized that old stereotypes about women’s inferiority were largely held in place by economic factors and that the female gender was perceived as the opposite of the male gender. Knellwolf (2001:196) points out that Woolf pursued a practical approach to the evaluation of gender roles and expressed herself in a style that subverted the possibility of maintaining firmly defined views.

Germaine Greer’s elaborates on this theme in her book *The Female Eunuch* (1971), a pioneering work that analyses the ways in which cultural conventions and stereotypical modes of thought deprive women of the means of developing their own potential. Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics* (1971) scrutinizes the ways in which representations of gender and sexuality reflect contemporary stereotypes of women’s inferiority. Knellwolf (2001:198) posits that Millett not only exposes the misogyny of culturally privileged literary works, but also traces the reasons for this bias to definitions of literary value.

Second wave feminists also challenged the social construction of the ideal women in canonical texts written by both men and women. As Green and LeBihan (1996:231)

contend, women were constrained by their stereotypical sexual representation in literature and the media. In their influential feminist book, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar suggest as a result of breaking with the restrictive definitions of gender, women in the 19th century had to deal with an internalised sense of guilt and resentment when they asserted themselves similar to the experience of Lyndall in *The Story of an African Farm*.

In order to justify their struggle to break away from the biologically-grounded stereotypes of femininity, most feminists welcomed the idea of gender being socially constructed. Binary conceptions of gender were deconstructed in a radical critique and replaced by an understanding of gender difference which expressed itself in different subject positions, separated from biological criteria. McClintock (1995:7) contends that one of the most valuable and enabling tendencies of recent feminist theory has been its insistence on the separation of sexuality and gender and the recognition that gender is as much an issue of masculinity as it is of femininity. Postcolonialism foregrounded politically inspired critiques of culture and society and as such, the study of how perceived categories of difference affect women's lives has presently evolved into post-feminism.

3.5.1 South African feminism

In the past, the deep inequalities that characterized South African society caused divisions amongst the population in terms of race, sex and class, thereby opposing the emergence of any unified or organised women's movement. In the South African context, the concerns of feminism therefore face various complexities and contradictions rooted in a history of social, racial and economic inequalities. Clayton (1989:2) asserts that any notions of a unified "sisterhood" in South Africa are challenged by the marked difference that generally still exists between white and black women socially, financially and politically. These discrepancies that exist between the experiences of white and black women are paradoxically manifested by the practice in which white women's liberation is bound up with low-income domestic servitude of black women in white homes. Generally, black women are furthermore affected by the strict paternalism of African traditions that relegate them to inferior status. However, white women have also been oppressed by patriarchal structures. Clayton (1989:3) maintains that white women in South Africa have been

subjected to many of the internal and external difficulties inherent to the social norm of the nuclear family and often have to contend with various forms of discrimination that is the result of the way in which women are often still perceived and stereotyped.

A determining factor in the development of feminism in South Africa has been the interrelation between the socio-political aspirations of women and the historical South African context. Driver (1988:9) asserts that in the South African colonial situation, the imperial ideals of masculinity and femininity were particularly sharply polarized. Accordingly, Driver (1988:10) maintains that even though the challenges posed by the (South African) colonial context did create women of initiative and capability⁷, women still had to fulfil traditional feminine roles which perpetuated the notion of 'woman' as a

sign in a signifying system that is intent upon creating and reproducing a set of ideal divisions...between culture and nature, the civilized and the uncivilized, masculinity and femininity, rationality and irrationality, divisions upon which patriarchal discourse depends...

Women were therefore compelled by the patriarchal and imperialist system to perpetuate certain crucial dichotomies that restricted women to the social spheres related to family and home. Whitlock (1996:75) maintains that the emphasis of colonial discourses on the idea of female domesticity, reflected the gender constraints of Victorian society and furthered the notion of colonized land as "domestically pastoral centres of social stability".

Nineteenth-century feminists in South Africa, such as Olive Schreiner, were aware of the restrictions imposed on them by the patriarchal structures of colonial society. According to Clayton (1989:42), these feminists were overtly influenced by the liberalism of 19th century feminist thought and as such, were preoccupied with the problem of individual self-development and fulfilment by focussing on the question of natural rights. However, as with Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* (1883),

⁷ Driver (1988:10) suggests that the polar opposites of masculinity and femininity did appear to break down under the concept of *frontierswoman*, made popular in the 19th century by the autobiographical adventure stories of female writers such as Lady Ann Barnard. However, as Driver (1988:9) points out, this breakdown only occurred at a superficial level as these autobiographies were often still constructed along the masculine model of opposites.

these Victorian British feminist concerns were refracted through a colonial culture and integrated with a vision of the South African landscape.

Historically, South African women often have been obligated to forgo their socio-political aspirations in order to meet the social expectations of their time. In a situation rather particular to South Africa, a large percentage of (white) women perpetuated rather than opposed female oppression for the sake of maintaining the *status quo*. According to Giliomee (2003), Afrikaner women were fundamental to the establishment and preservation of a militant and racially exclusivist Afrikaner nationalism through their acquiescence to subordinate the cause of female liberation for the sake of Afrikaner nationalist ideals. Ironically, Afrikaner women thereby subjected themselves to severe discrimination and categorization. Similarly, black women were expected to prioritise the fight for social liberation over that of gender discrimination.

According to Miller (1998:118), white supremacist ideology of the apartheid era constructed black women⁸ as inferior and subservient. Black women were furthermore in the position of being doubly-colonized – by (black and white) male dominance as well as white economic and social dominance. However, black women in South Africa have a strong history of opposition and have played an important role in effecting social change. Nuttall (1994:51) asserts that black women have tended to use autobiography as a means of asserting an autonomous self in a racist and sexist society

With regard to resistance writing by white women, Nuttall (1994:51) maintains that the central concern in their writing was to construct an anti-apartheid identity that defied white patriarchal hegemony. Their work often deals with the confinement that white women's lives have been subjected to because of their race and gender and, according to Visel (1988:39) displays an awareness of the power and guilt they share with white oppression. The work of Nadine Gordimer, for example, explores the subject of the privileged white woman whose worldview and concept of self is

⁸ As the female protagonists in the selected texts are white, for the purpose of this study the focus will be predominantly on female identity formation of white women in the colonial / postcolonial South African context.

destabilized when she is forced to confront her own lack of historical and self-understanding through political action and personal relationships with the 'other'. Accordingly, in *July's People* (1981), Nadine Gordimer subverts the foundations on which white (female) identity in apartheid South Africa is constructed. In Antjie Krog's volume of poems, *Lady Anne* in (1989), Krog interrogates her own subject-position as a white Afrikaans woman writer in the politically turbulent South Africa of the 1980s. Nuttall (1994:52) suggests that more recently, resistance writing by white Afrikaans women has focussed on sexual as well as political emancipation.

In the past, many women writers felt compelled to write about apartheid and its repercussions and consequently, "there has been little space to explore, in a less spiky, and a more rich and wholesome way, what it is that is distinctive, apart from apartheid, about the place they write about" (Nuttall, 1994:52). This was suggestive of an underlying hesitation to encourage feelings of 'belonging' towards a place bound up with a socio-political context these writers could not comply with. More recently, however, writing by South African women has started to contribute towards the formation of a more unified feminist movement by focussing on the reassessment and rewriting of history together with the conceptualisation of an authentic (female) South African identity.

As such, a unified feminist movement in the current South African context would entail the forging of different narrative strategies appropriate for a multicultural situation. It is therefore of considerable importance that South African feminism avoids "totalising strategies which eradicate difference and presume the unity of concepts like the 'third world woman, the 'black woman', and the 'white woman' (Viljoen, 1996:65), as previously marginalised voices have a significant role to play in the interrogation of the discourses of power in South Africa.

3.5.2 Post-feminism

The main focus of post-feminism is concerned with equality on political and personal levels for all women. Unlike more extreme forms of feminism which aim to overturn the present social system, post-feminism prefers to work within the system and to reform it where necessary through equal rights laws, especially areas like politics,

employment and education. Ideally this aim would entail an approach that is flexible, inclusive and tolerant about women's choices.

Current (post)-feminist theory in South Africa tends to remould and redirect traditional feminist preoccupations in a postcolonial and South African context through a historical revision of the ideological definition and control of female identity perpetuated by South Africa's colonial past. Like Lucy in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*, women must therefore reclaim their feminist identity by realising their own hard-earned power by rejecting notions that they are always victimised, helpless and unable to defend themselves without the intervention of a (patriarchal) state.

* * *

The subsequent chapters will examine how Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* and J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* can be regarded as anti-pastoral farm novels that rewrite, repudiate and subvert the ideological assumptions and pastoral conventions traditionally exemplified by the pastoral farm novel genre in South Africa. Specific focus will be given to the conceptualisation of space and place in tracing the identity formation of the female protagonists in a (post)colonial context.

CHAPTER 4:
DISPLACEMENT AND THE REPRESENTATION OF FEMALE IDENTITY
FORMATION IN OLIVE SCHREINER'S *THE STORY OF AN*
AFRICAN FARM

4.1 Contextualization

Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) is a realistic interrogation of what it meant to be both colonized and colonizer in a Victorian and African world. As such, Schreiner foregrounds the various critical contradictions and limitations of imperialism, thereby exposing the problematic relation between race, gender, power and resistance that has haunted South Africa's past and present (Casey, 1998:vii). *The Story of an African Farm* was among the first South African novels to raise the issues of gender inequality and oppression of the spirit. Moreover, as Van Wyk Smith (1990:31) contends, the novel was also the first of its kind to voice the beginnings of a deep doubt about the right to land. This doubt is suggested by the way in which the main protagonists' keenly developed existential awareness is inextricably tied-up with the landscape and its history.

As the title suggests, the novel relates the story of the lives of the various inhabitants of a farm situated in the barren Karoo landscape. However, despite the tranquil, almost bucolic title, Schreiner has no intention of portraying settled rural life. Instead, the farm and its inhabitants function as a socio-economic and historical unit - a microcosm of colonial society that conveys the destructive power of social repression on the human psyche. The novel begins with three children growing up on a sheep farm, namely Waldo, the son of the farm's German overseer; Em, the stolid but kind stepdaughter of Tant' Sannie, the farm's Boer owner; and Lyndall, Em's spirited and rebellious orphan cousin. As the plot traces the three friends' journey into adulthood, various conflicts are enacted both internally and externally. Em is forsaken by her melodramatic fiancé when he falls in love with the beautiful Lyndall. Waldo struggles with his boundless yearning for spiritual fulfilment, knowledge and human companionship, while Lyndall's disillusionment with colonial and patriarchal society increases and spurs her struggle to create an authentic life for herself. However,

Lyndall's quest for self-fulfilment fails and she dies shortly after giving birth outside of wedlock.

In the Preface to the Second Edition, Schreiner conceptualised *The Story of an African Farm* as the outcome of the artist "painting what lies before him" (1998:xiv). Gorak (1992:54) attributes this to the fact that Schreiner wanted to offer the British press and public a new and realistic image of African colonial life, an image much different from that of an untamed land filled with wild beasts and bloodthirsty savages offered by the writers of colonial adventure fiction. Instead, Schreiner's novel presented an unexplored moral realm that offered rich opportunities for moral and political digression – a farm peopled with skewed versions of traditional pastoral figures: Waldo, a philosophical but existentially isolated Shepard; Lyndall, a distorted version of the Pure Woman and embodiment of the 'new woman' of the South African landscape; Em, a homely but unattractive farm girl with bleak prospects for finding a husband worthy of her kind nature; and Tant' Sannie, a fat and greedy farmer (Gorak, 1992:54). It was therefore with a keen awareness of the ramifications of British Imperialism coupled with an overt desire to rebel against the *status quo* of white male dominance that Schreiner wrote *The Story of an African Farm*.

Structural elements in *The Story of an African Farm* are integral to the thematic preoccupations exemplified by the novel. The narrative voice in *The Story of an African Farm* assumes many tones – each representing a different socio-ideological perspective. Holloway (1989:85) points out that by echoing predominant attitudes of the day through characters such as Tant' Sannie and Blenkins, the narrative perspective exposes colonial South African society's general lack of critical self-awareness and juxtaposes it with more enlightened norms inherent in the narrative perspectives of Waldo and Lyndall.

Structurally, the text is divided into two parts. The first part relies overtly on a realistic depiction of plot and event, dramatic action, almost exaggerated characterization and a comical and satisfying closure as represented by the villainous Bonaparte Blenkins' downfall. In Part Two, however, the plot turns inward, becomes more concerned with the human psyche and focuses on the main protagonists

existential isolation and agony. It lacks event and action and offers an unresolved, almost disjointed closure with both the main protagonists dead.

Van Wyk Smith (1997:134) suggests that the structural difference between these two parts introduces a powerful contrastive symbology into the narrative that correlates with the two different ways in which the farm is perceived by moonlight and daylight. By moonlight, the farm appears mysterious, dreamlike and ethereal; but by daylight, the farm is perceived as harsh, unforgiving, deromantized and glaringly “real”. Like the farm by daylight, the second part reveals the futility of material and spiritual quests within a narrow colonial society.

The structure of the novel is furthermore marked by the insertion of different genres into the larger fictional structure, such as “Times and Seasons” (the foreword to Part Two), the French stranger’s “allegory of truth”, letters, various lyrical sequences as well as Lyndall’s long “feminist” monologue. Holloway (1989:86) contends that this method of “stylistic heterogeneity” serves to foreground certain thematic and social imperatives. The sequence in the novel called “Times and Seasons”, for example, serves the functional purpose of consolidating and developing in a lyrical and condensed form, Waldo’s progression from childhood to adolescent awareness:

And so, it comes to pass in time, that the earth ceases for us to be a weltering chaos. We walk in the great hall of life, looking up and around reverentially. Nothing is despicable – all is meaningful; nothing is small – all is part of a whole, whose beginning and end we know not. The life that throbs in us is a pulsation from it; too mighty for our comprehension, not too small. (103.)⁹

Holloway (1989:87) suggests that by tracing Waldo’s development in a different fictive key, his sensitive and individualized perceptions are related to the worldview of the novel’s author, Olive Schreiner.

⁹ In this chapter, page numbers in parenthesis will refer to SCHREINER, Olive. 1998. *The Story of an African Farm*. Mineola, NY. : Dover.

4.2 Ideological issues and criticism

According to feminist critic Elaine Showalter (1991:195), Olive Schreiner's life was marked by various paradoxes, the most obvious being that though being a feminist and maternal spirit, she despised being a woman and never pursued motherhood. Showalter (1991:195) asserts that through "her ambivalence, her self-deception, her psychosomatic illnesses", Schreiner embodied the transitional nature of her time. As such, a prevailing sense of emotional and spiritual claustrophobia is a central image in her work – especially in *The Story of an African Farm*. To an extent, the novel is an autobiographical expression of Schreiner's emotional pain and conflicts rooted in her personal history of familial and romantic relationships. As such, Schreiner's physical and emotional experience can be traced to the personalities and fates of Waldo, Lyndall and even Em. Monsman (1991:67) suggests the outspoken Lyndall to be a projection of Schreiner's outward manner of relating to the world, while the brooding Waldo is a projection of her inner, questioning nature. Schreiner's novel therefore attempts to speak out against the self-absorbed supremacy of white male patriarchy through the character of Lyndall, who already as a young girl pledges "to hate everything that has power, and help everything that is weak" (51). Like Schreiner, Lyndall identifies with the exploited and the oppressed and her continuous attempts to discover her essential self, suggests the "psychic dislocations of all the novel's dispossessed people" (Van Wyk Smith, 1990:32).

Even though *The Story of an African Farm* is a seminal South African novel, Holloway (1989:77) points out that critical opinion generally regards the work at best as a "flawed masterpiece". In terms of structure, the novel is mainly criticised for having an underdeveloped plot, characters that are not fully drawn and for lacking in organic unity. These 'weaknesses', however, can probably be related to Schreiner's personal experiences and philosophical beliefs as well as the realities of the colonial life she wanted her novel to depict.

Present-day criticism has sometimes judged Schreiner's work for having racist and imperialist undertones. Despite being well ahead of her time with respect to her ideas about gender, race, class and colonialism, criticism against Schreiner faults her for placing the plight of the colonized in South Africa secondary to the liberation of

women within capitalist, patriarchal society; as well as for failing to acknowledge that these colonial structures of oppression functioned within the wider context of imperialism. Such judgements might be rather severe, as one cannot separate the text from Schreiner's immediate context. Anthony (1999:6) contends that in 1883, the most immediate issue for Schreiner from her own limited experience probably was not the illegitimacy and coercive nature of land ownership or the issue of black labour, but rather – in displaced form – the oppression of the female and the oppression of the spirit. As such, *The Story of an African Farm* does provide keen insights into the roles, pressures, conflicts and yearnings of both women and men trapped in the colonial structures of patriarchal, capitalist society.

When *The Story of an African Farm* was published in 1883, it established Schreiner as a leading figure in the feminist movement of the time. Bolin (1993:4) points out that during the Victorian period especially, evangelicalism and imperialism were among the most prominent expansionist movements of the time, and as such, the long practiced ideas in Western culture of patriarchal Christianity and Eurocentrism prompted the majority of people to accept the supremacy of white males as absolute. In this respect, Schreiner's work therefore subverted long-established notions of what women should look and act like, thereby destabilizing preconceptions of women as domestically inclined with little or no concern about issues outside their immediate environment.

As John Kucich (2002:81) points out, later feminist movements criticized Schreiner's work for its harsh fictional stereotypes of women, the idealization of female self-sacrifice and her preoccupation with guilt and expiation. However, Kucich (2002:81) criticizes such interpretations of Schreiner's work for not considering the prevalent social, cultural and psychological phenomena. Showalter (1991:197) posits Schreiner's fictional world to be obsessed with "femaleness grown monstrous in confinement", as her female characters are often grotesquely fat and/or ugly as in the case of Tant' Sannie and Em. Showalter (1991:197) does, however, attribute Schreiner's tendency to parody womanhood to her neurotic compulsive temperament and suggests it to exemplify the complex female psychology of a generation.

According to Anthony (1999:4), *The Story of an African Farm* fails to represent the yearning for the rural idyll and is oblivious to the pastoral concepts of benign feudal relations and honourable toil. Thematically and structurally, it refuses to look back to “the time of the forefathers as an exemplary age when the garden of myth became actualised in history” (Coetzee, 1988:4). Instead, the novel situates the farm (and by implication also the Cape Colony), “outside history, outside society” (Coetzee, 1988:4), thereby foregrounding the impossibility of a nostalgic idealisation of the farm inherent to the pastoral mode.

By drawing on topographic and structural representations of space and place, the interrelationship of characters with the social historical and cultural context as well as the conceptualisation of female identity, this chapter will therefore indicate that *The Story of an African Farm* cannot meet the obligations of the pastoral mode and could therefore be conceptualised as an anti-pastoral farm novel.

4.3 Representations of space and place

Scherzinger (1990:29) posits the pastoral to be a dominant motif in South African literature that often represents the rural environment of the Karoo as a nostalgic and idyllic setting. However, Scherzinger (1990:29) points out that even though the idealised Karoo landscape does have a sense of harshness about it, that very quality is usually incorporated into the pastoral motif. This is also the case in *The Story of an African Farm*: even though Schreiner foregrounds the rural scene as being harsh and uncompromising, the language of the passages that describe the Karoo is undeniably poetic and attributes the setting with mythical and even metaphysical qualities:

The full African moon poured down its light from the blue sky into the wide, lonely plain. The dry, sandy earth, with its coating of stunted karoo bushes a few inches high, the low hills that skirted the plain, the milk bushes with their long, finger-like leaves, all were touched by a weird and almost oppressive beauty as they lay in the white light. (1.)

Schreiner’s Karoo is therefore an ethereal landscape that, according to Monsman (1991:52), unites nature and universe and is transformed into a “bleak inner place of

self-discovery". Furthermore, Scherzinger suggests that Lyndall's ambition at the end of her life to reach the blue koppie in the distance is an example of Schreiner's belief in the healing and pure qualities of nature. Schreiner's vision therefore both conflicts and complies with the pastoral motif as the farm is represented as a hostile and stifling place while the landscape is imbued with pantheist characteristics.

4.3.1 Topography and structure

In *The Story of an African Farm*, the typological structuring of space invests the farm with meaning and destabilizes the spatial constructs inherent to the pastoral farm novel. Instead of conceptualising the farm as an idyllic space, Schreiner's farm is represented as a spatially isolated, parochial settlement that embodies repressive provinciality, authoritarianism and irrational traditionalism. As a physical and spiritual locale, the farm is attributed with characteristics that imply loneliness and desolation, while the buildings on it reflect "the fierce sunlight, until the eye ached and bleached" (4), thereby also suggesting life on the farm to be harsh and unforgiving. J.M. Coetzee (1988:64) uses the terms "indifferent, empty, desolate, barren, wide, vast, monotonous" to describe the farm, suggesting the farm setting to embody "the absence above all of a personal God". The farm can therefore be said to represent a spiritual and existential void.

In the pastoral farm novel, the degenerative morality of the city is contrasted with the utopian wholesomeness of the farm. *The Story of an African Farm*, however, conceptualises both the farm and the city to be corrupt and therefore also dystopic. Initially, both Waldo and Lyndall long to escape from the stifling constraints of the farm to the freedoms and material possibilities of the city. However, when they manage to leave the farm, they are disillusioned when they discover that life in the city is not much different from life on the farm - it reproduces the same relationships of power that exist on the farm, but only on a larger scale. Consequently, the feudal values traditionally ascribed to the farm by the pastoral farm novel are satirised, as it is the uncaring and greedy Tant Sannie who is the feudal landowner. Anthony (1999:6) maintains Schreiner's farm to be a "static model of feudal relations" that seeks to reproduce - and ultimately destroy - its inhabitants by opposing change.

In *The Story of an African Farm*, the landscape is attributed pantheist and metaphysical qualities and becomes a setting for Lyndall and Waldo's dreams, aspirations and existential dilemmas. However, as a microcosmic unit of social and economic structures in colonial South Africa, the farm is contrasted with nature and the landscape and instead associated with greed, ignorance and cruelty. Thereby, the farm becomes a spiritually oppressive space. In contrast with the pastoral farm novel's representation of the farm as an extension of family life and national culture, Schreiner's farm lack familial values and any notion of belonging.

Though Otto attempts to establish a degree of kinship amongst the inhabitants of the farm, his failure to do so (as exemplified by his death) suggests the intolerance and apathy that characterize life on the farm. Moreover, as an isolated territory outside history, the farm resists the idea of national culture and belonging, thereby positioning Schreiner's farm as an ahistorical space.

The pastoral farm novel portrays the farm as a patriarchal space, thereby foregrounding patriarchal values and the notion of lineage. In *The Story of an African Farm*, however, the concept of male domination is parodied as the farm is ruled over by the domineering, "man-eating matriarch" (Coetzee, 1988:9). Tant Sannie, whose masculine authority even resists Bonaparte Blenkins's attempts to become patriarchal master to the farm. Patriarchal gender norms are further emasculated and subverted by the good-hearted Otto's meekness and naivety, his son Waldo's docile and passive nature and the androgynous Gregory Rose's cross-dressing. Nevertheless, the farm still functions within the paradigms of patriarchal hegemony and as such, the female characters are bound to its conditions. During an impassioned conversation with Waldo on the position of women in society, Lyndall asserts that women

enter the world little plastic beings, with so much natural force, perhaps, but for the rest – blank; and the world tells us what we are to be, and shapes us by the ends it sets before us. To you it says – *Work*; and to us it says – *Seem!* To you it says – As you approximate to man's highest ideal of God, as your arm is strong and your knowledge great, and the power to labor is with you, so you shall gain all that human heart desires. To us it says – Strength shall not help you, nor knowledge, nor labor. You shall gain what men gain, but by other means. And so the world makes men and women. (135.)

Schreiner therefore uses Lyndall's feminist struggle as a vehicle to interrogate the legitimacy of the patriarchal system. Anthony (1999:6) suggests that Lyndall's disempowered state is not only a consequence of her being female, but also a result of being landless¹⁰. Lyndall's criticism against patriarchal privilege is therefore also motivated by the fact that she is not a landowner, and as such, dispossessed.

4.3.2 Spatial coordinates

In *The Story of an African Farm*, the spatial coordinates discussed in Chapter 3 are reconfigured within an anti-pastoral framework, thereby invalidating the pastoral farm as source of absolute meaning.

4.2.2.1 Nature and animals

As in the pastoral farm novel, nature is a prominent thematic element in *The Story of an African Farm* associated with pureness and growth, but also with vastness and inhospitability. However, whereas the pastoral farm novel inscribes nature as part of the meaning of the farm, in Schreiner's novel the corruptness of the farm is juxtaposed with the innocence of nature. Coetzee (1988:65) maintains that Schreiner's farm has a "split nature", comprising of its setting in nature and of the bigotry, hypocrisy and greed associated with town. As a consequence of this coexistence of aspects of nature and town on the farm, "it is impossible to live an integrated life upon it" (Coetzee, 1988:65). In the novel, nature and its cycles function as metaphors for the flux of human existence and as indicated earlier, in the chapter titled "Times and Seasons", the chronography of time in nature is correlated with Waldo's spiritual development. Therefore, in thematical aspects pertaining to nature, *The Story of an African Farm* does have undertones of South African pastoralism; but whereas the South African pastoral places nature within the religious context of an Edenic existence, Schreiner's depiction of nature – especially Waldo's relationship with nature - seems to have been influenced by paganism and as such, can be seen as a reflection of Schreiner's religious free-thinking.

Animals do not really function as a significant thematic element in *The Story of an African Farm*, but Schreiner does parallel animal suffering and pain with human

¹⁰ Anthony (1999:7) maintains that in *The Story of an African Farm*, power is not only linked to maleness but also to landownership – Waldo is male but he is also landless and therefore powerless.

suffering and pain and correlates it to the injustices of the colonial system. In a letter to Lyndall, Waldo recalls that when the black ox became too exhausted to move forward, the transport rider

took out his clasp knife, and ran it into the leg of the trembling ox three times, up to the hilt. Then he put the knife in his pocket, and they took their whips...From the black ox's nostril foam and blood were streaming on the ground. It turned its head in its anguish and looked at me with its great starting eyes. It was praying for help in its agony and weakness, and they took their whips again. The creature bellowed out, loudly. If there is a God, it was calling to its Maker for help. Then a stream of clear blood burst from ox's nostrils; it fell onto the ground, and the wagon slipped back. (195.)

Anthony (1999:6) points out that Waldo's experience of the transport rider's cruel treatment of the ox (195) is similar to his own brutal beating at the hands of Bonaparte Blenkins. The parallel between these two incidents is suggestive of the unethical conduct and abuse of power that were often a consequence of colonialism. The ox therefore becomes a metaphorical site upon which human cruelty and spiritual degeneration are inscribed. Schreiner does, however, not relate the image of the black ox to the position of black Africans but rather generalises it to apply to the eradication of the individual spirit in the colonial context.

4.2.2.2 Traditional family nucleus

The pastoral ideal of the family as morally functional unit is subverted in *The Story of an African Farm* through its representation of a disparate and disjunctive 'family' consisting of the selfish Tant' Sannie, her stepdaughter Em and Em's cousin Lyndall; with Otto and Waldo as overseers to the farm. Tant's Sannie has no relationship with either Otto or the children and is only interested in maintaining her authority by disciplining them with emotionally and physically abusive means into submission. The impossibility of a cohesive 'family unit' on the farm is exemplified by the death of the caring and paternal Otto, as well as Bonaparte Blenkins's "parody of all the roles of male dominance", such as overseer to the farm, schoolmaster, preacher, and even as "Waldo's Old Testament God personified" (Monsman, 1991:63). Moreover, with the exception of the submissive Em, the female characters in the novel (Tant' Sannie and Lyndall) do not adhere to the concept of female subservience presented in

the pastoral farm novel. *The Story of an African Farm* therefore undermines the pastoral notion of the traditional patriarchal family as a morally cohesive unit.

4.2.2.3 Labour

Whereas the pastoral farm novel foregrounds (white) labour as a means of gratifying servitude to the land, labour and the depiction thereof does not feature prominently in *The Story of an African Farm*. Instead, the farm is associated with idleness and sloth. Schreiner does, however, create a link between labour and the soul-consuming exploitation inherent to the colonial master-servant relationship when Waldo suggests in his letter to Lyndall that one may “work, and work and work, until you are only a body, not a soul” and that ultimately “grinding, mechanical work” turns men into “beasts” (193). Schreiner nevertheless fails to fully extend the terms of colonial exploitation and dispossession to that of race, and as such, to black labour.

4.2.2.4 Black ‘other’

The portrayal of the black ‘other’ in *The Story of an African Farm* resembles that of the pastoral farm novel. In Schreiner’s novel, space is also presented as being racially marked and according to McClintock (1995:271),

Schreiner gives her African characters no agency beyond the colonial narrative. The black servants are reflector figures, casting light or shadow on the white people, their imaginations wholly absorbed in the colonial drama, assisting the white’s comings and goings . . . They facilitate plot, but only as vehicles, not as agents.

Anthony (1999:8) points out that despite the fact that Schreiner mentions the presence of “kaffirs” 72 times in the novel, in no instance do they achieve the role of characters of even minor relevance - the African with the most significant part is Tant’ Sannie’s servant who is portrayed as being just as “stupid and heartless” (Coetzee, 1988:65) as her mistress. Furthermore, the Africans are ascribed strictly defined roles of social inferiority and as such, have no identity or voice – they either utter incomprehensible, savage sounds or laugh sardonically, and only speak to translate their white masters’ words.

However, as children, Lyndall and Waldo become aware of the repressed history of displacement and eradication of the landscape's indigenous inhabitants:

It was one of them, one of those old Bushmen that painted these,' said the boy, nodding toward the pictures – 'one who was different from the rest. He did not know why, but he wanted to make something beautiful' . . .

'He used to kneel here naked, painting, painting, painting; and he wondered at the things he made himself,' said the boy, rising and moving his hand in deep excitement. 'Now the Boers have shot them all, so that we never see a little yellow face peeping out among the stones.' (14.)

Even though Schreiner does equate colonization with unsettlement, she does not follow through with relating it to the predicament of black Africans in colonial South Africa. Anthony (1999:8) asserts that Schreiner's portrayal of the black 'other' points to her inability to interrogate the problematic connection – in terms of powerlessness – between the landless whites on the farm and the dispossessed "kaffirs".

The aforementioned spatial coordinates therefore resist traditional conceptions of the farm posited by the pastoral farm novel. Even though Schreiner's novel is in some regards informed by the pastoral tradition, *The Story of an African Farm* adapted the pastoral tradition to the reality of the South African colonial context, thereby transcending pastoral constructs of place and (female) identity. As an anti-pastoral novel, *The Story of an African Farm* contextualises landownership as a determinant of power, thereby foregrounding the link between landlessness, dispossession and displacement.

4.4 Anti-pastoral implications in a postcolonial framework

The Story of an African Farm portrays a society in transition, threatened by the subsequent destabilization of a rural ethic on which they have depended for so long. Holloway (1989:81) contends that *The Story of an African Farm* is structurally and thematically preoccupied with representing various instances of "discontinuity" - consequently, the novel depicts the disparate and disjunctive nature of life in colonial South Africa by foregrounding the stultifying narrow-mindedness and provincialism

of colonial society. Holloway (1989:81) suggests that for Schreiner, this notion of discontinuity represented a very suitable paradigm for her experience of colonial life.

Another prominent theme that foregrounds the text's orientation towards the discontinuous is that of strangeness and alienation. The figure of the stranger is a recurring motif in *The Story of an African Farm* and is embodied by both the nameless character who arrives and passes without any explanation as well as the settled characters themselves. Historically, the settled characters are newcomers to the land - products of colonial conquest and occupation, while the indigenous inhabitants experience estrangement from their home soil as a result of being subjected to the colonizing processes of 'othering' and marginalization. Pechey (1983:69) contends that in the "polyglot mix" they make up, the inhabitants of the farm remain, over wide areas of interaction, strangers to each other - "speakers of mutually unintelligible languages". This theme of strangeness and alienation links up with that of emptiness and silence, especially pertaining to the African landscape: both Lyndall and Waldo seek what J.M. Coetzee (1988:8) refers to as "a dialogue with Africa, a reciprocity with Africa, that will allow...an identity better than that of visitor, stranger, transient". However, the landscape of rock and stone does not reciprocate, and as such, *The Story of an African Farm* can be conceptualised as a "literature of [the] empty landscape" (Coetzee, 1988:9).

The Story of an African Farm subverts the pastoral custom of inheritance, as it is Em who inherits the paternal farm. Furthermore, by the end of the novel, all of the farm's original white inhabitants have died or left the farm, and only the self-sacrificing Em and melancholic Gregory Rose remain. According to Waterman (1997:58), Em's proposed union with Gregory Rose at the end of the novel symbolises a continuation of the farm's "*mise-en abyme* of pain and loss".

The monotony of the flat, colourless farm landscape in *The Story of an African Farm* is broken only by a "small, solitary kopje" (1) which Schreiner describes as "a heap of round ironstones piled one upon the other, as over some giant's grave" (1). Anthony (1999:3) asserts that the reconfiguration of the landscape as a mythically laden repository for the dead, functions as a sense-making mechanism in the context of colonial South African fiction. Anthony (1999:3) contextualizes the figure of the

“giant” as “a totem of several myths that have operated since the imperial enterprise first took to the antipodean corners of the earth”. As such, the giant symbolised an “otherness” that was beyond assimilation into the Western unconscious; a symbol that asserted itself as the emblematic shadow of the colonised. According to Anthony (1999:3), this shadow thereby provided justification for the violent and oppressive colonial order insofar it suggested the ever-present threat of the slumbering giant rising from his sleep; i.e. the “native other”; who one day might turn on his master. Similarly, the “giant” in *The Story of an African Farm* still haunts the farm’s inhabitants at the foot of the koppie: Waldo speculates on the mystical presence of the koppie and admits that as a young child, he “always looked at it and wondered, and [I] thought a great giant was buried under it” (13). The figure of the giant in colonial South African fiction can therefore be said to represent the order of the repressed; an unrelenting reminder to author and reader of “the failure of the historical imagination” (Coetzee, 1988:9). Anthony (1999:4) furthermore asserts the giant’s grave in *The Story of an African Farm* to be a dystopic emblem that situates the farm as an anti-garden – a vision that contrasts with that of pastoral art of the farm as “garden” (Coetzee, 1988:4). As such, the giant’s grave represents an objectless, existential terror - a concept that, according to Gorak (1992:70), became a recurring theme in South African settler literature.

Gorak (1992:69) asserts that Schreiner was among the first South African writers to articulate an existential colonial angst, or the expression of what Wilhelm (1979: 65) describes as “the soul’s timeless quest for truth, but modified by the particular dilemma of the nineteenth-century soul, which needed to move out of the confining guilts of a punitive theology to the freer air of a new philosophical or artistic synthesis”. This existential angst can be seen to suggest the need for transcendence of the colonial “self” and correlates with Schreiner’s belief that the African landscape challenges the settler to experience alternative human responses, thereby creating “new human types” (Gorak, 1992:70).

4.5 The interrelationship of characters with context

In *The Story of an African Farm*, the interrelationship between characters and the social, historical and cultural contexts constitute processes of identity formation through which the novel examines the alienation and displacement of the unsettled settler in colonial South Africa. Throughout the novel, the various characters' interaction with context is interlinked with role reversals - across the divides of age and gender - that either supports or opposes the social structure of patriarchal and colonial authority.

In *The Story of an African Farm*, the reversal of roles between male and female characters redefines both masculinity and femininity, thereby subverting culturally-accepted norms regarding the social position a man or woman should occupy. According to Waterman (1997:45), Schreiner exposes the socially-constructed nature of not only gender, but by extension also the social fictions that form the basis for patriarchal authority and imperialism. As such, Waterman (1997:45) maintains that Tant' Sannie is representative of patriarchal power, while as a descendant of Dutch settlers she also represents well-established colonial authority. In the novel, Tant' Sannie is ascribed masculine traits, such as her physically large, imposing physique, her fierce temper and propensity for violent behaviour which she exerts on everyone from servants to suitors. Moreover, her seeming eagerness to get married is indicative of her greedy desire to increase her wealth and power. Tant' Sannie therefore assumes a dominant and masculine role and can be seen as a proponent of patriarchal and colonial power structures. Tant' Sannie's character is complemented by that of Bonaparte Blenkins, who approaches marriage exactly the same way as Tant' Sannie. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the character of Bonaparte Blenkins functions as a parody of patriarchal power and is depicted as being domineering, self-absorbed and manipulative. Monsman (1991:61) claims that Blenkins's character is suggestive of the possibilities of evil within hypocrisy, and both Otto and Waldo fall victim to his sadistic and mean-spirited nature. Furthermore, "as an example of hyper-masculine authority" representative of the "English/Irish colonial settler in South Africa" (Waterman, 1997:47), Blenkins functions as an "ironic metonymy for South African frontier society" (Monsman, 1991:61), with regard to his rigid patriarchy and also as a "racial caste system". Ironically, Blenkins's self-acclaimed superiority regarding his

lineage, wealth and social position is exposed as being based almost entirely on myth. Monsman (1991:60) asserts that Blenkins and Tant' Sannie are fundamental to the novel's representation of the dominance-submission dynamic representative of the destructive presence of power.

The German overseer Otto is depicted as an androgynous character, a kind and compassionate man who falls victim to the autocratic patriarchal system personified by Tant' Sannie and Blenkins. Waterman (1997:48) suggests that even though he does have a position of authority on the farm, his child-like and feminine characteristics prevent him from exerting his influence. Even when he is unjustly dismissed from his position as overseer by Tant' Sannie and Blenkins, he submits to their authority – “He never thought of entering a protest against the loss of his goods: like a child he submitted, and wept’ (52). According to Waterman (1997:49), Otto's humanism is firmly grounded in his religious beliefs – but his gullibility and uncritical religious beliefs also prevent him from opposing the system of patriarchal and colonial oppression.

Otto's son, Waldo, possesses similar characteristics to his father; consequently, he is also subjected to child-like suffering and powerlessness. Waterman (1997:51) suggests that Waldo also displays masochistic tendencies, and when he is falsely accused by Blenkins, he says nothing to defend himself, thereby conforming to a submissive, feminine role. Waldo's inherently passive and inhibited nature is both paired and contrasted with Lyndall's more masculine, assertive temperament. Van Wyk Smith (1997:138,139) maintains that Waldo is strongly associated with the earth and as such, intuitively sensitive to forces and presences that lie outside Victorianism's positivist boundaries. Moreover, as Waterman (1997:51) contends, Waldo displays a desire to challenge his perceptions of the world through alternative forms of knowledge, such as the text on political economy. Waterman furthermore (1997:51) points out that unlike his father, Waldo does display religious scepticism and can therefore be said to resist the patriarchal power of European expansionism in the late 19th century. During his travels in search of a better life than that on the farm, Waldo is endlessly victimized and exploited, which causes him to conclude that “If the world was all children I could like it; but men and women draw me so strangely, and they press me away, till I am in agony” (198). Despite his child-like and feminine

traits, Waldo stands in opposition to the system of patriarchal and colonial dominance as he does engage in ideological critique, albeit only on an intellectual level.

Anthony (1999:11) suggests that Schreiner uses Waldo's death to interrogate and resolve the terms of his existence. In being landless and powerless, Waldo's future would have been one of toil and labour, but his death situates him "outside the ache of history" (Anthony, 1999:11). By extension, Waldo's socio-historical position as dispossessed is romanticized, situating him as the eternal pastoral peasant figure.

As the "quintessential maternal, bovine woman" (Bolin, 1993:6), Em is another character that is paired and contrasted with Lyndall. She represents the feminine stereotypes of submission, emotionality and sacrifice and as a child, she is often bullied by Tant' Sannie. Unlike Lyndall, she reverts to passively aggressive behaviour, such as crying or pounding on the door instead of resisting authority directly. After Lyndall's death, she agrees to marry Gregory Rose, thereby submitting to his authority and relinquishing her hereditary legal right to the farm.

In the novel, the melodramatic Gregory Rose is represented as a feminized servant, specifically with regard to his relationship with Lyndall. Initially, Rose tries to manifest his masculine/imperialist role and treats Em as a piece of property when they become engaged. However, he relinquishes his masculine role, assuming a more feminized, subservient role when he falls in love with Lyndall. Waterman (1997:56) maintains that Rose's marriage proposal to Lyndall represents the first step towards gender-reversal, as he offers his love as a form of service and submission. Staying true to his word, later on he even goes as far as to dress like a woman in order to nurse the dying Lyndall. As her nurse, he follows her orders and devotedly cares for her until she dies, never to have discovered his secret. Thereby, Schreiner satirizes masculine and Victorian ideals of romantic heroism. According to Waterman (1997:58), Rose's transvestism foregrounds the socially-constructed nature of gender, and as such, can be seen to destabilize patriarchal and colonial constructs of identity. After Lyndall's death, however, Rose reverts to his performance of masculinity in his role as Em's husband and new master to the farm.

In *The Story of an African Farm*, character interaction with the social, cultural and historical contexts manifested by the farm constitute the “subjectless process of colonial history” (Pechey, 1983:73) and suggests that social transformation cannot take place until those in power behave more humanely.

4.6 Female identity formation

As the central character in *The Story of an African Farm*, Lyndall embodies Schreiner’s attempts to transcend the limitations of female stereotype and marginalization. As a child, Lyndall is outspoken and openly resistant to what she perceives as unjust. Waterman (1997:53) suggests that already early in life, Lyndall realises that in order to gain power and advance in the world, she will have to gain knowledge, and she pledges that “When I am grown up...there will be nothing I do not know” (11). Even at a young age, Lyndall is cynical about the adult world and shows remarkable insight with regard to social conditions. As a young woman, her ability to look at ideological systems critically rouses her aspiration to subvert the system that oppresses her. When she leaves the farm to see the world and attend school, she soon discovers just how entrenched patriarchal dominance is in the structure of colonial society. She also becomes aware of the prescribed nature of a woman’s position in patriarchal society and knows that her good looks will enable her to marry a rich man and thus be economically secure for life. Lyndall knows that doing so would imply that she would have to submit to society’s rules and norms - but she refuses to be dominated or indebted.

Waterman (1997:54) suggests that even though Lyndall detests those who yield power, she also admires power from her position as the subaltern. Although Napoleon is her hero, she is able to correlate patriarchy with imperialism and understands that if Napoleon had been born a woman, “he would have risen; but the world would not have heard of him as it hears of him now – a man great and kingly” (138). Anthony (1999:7) points out that Lyndall deconstructs her own power by always measuring it against the established power system of maleness – her identity formation is therefore strongly informed by her awareness of the nature of power as it applies to women, as well as her own powerlessness.

Barsby (1989:32) argues that Lyndall's different relations with Waldo, Gregory Rose and the mysterious stranger who is the father of her baby, "illustrates the fluid nature of sexual identity". In relation to Rose, she assumes an aggressive and stereotypically masculine role, agreeing to marry him only if he is willing to serve her and expects nothing in return. Towards the father of her child to whom she is attracted because he is "strong" (178) and the first man she ever feared, she adopts a more feminine and child-like position. In contrast with the concept the reader has of the astute Lyndall at this stage, during their meeting the stranger regards Lyndall in diminutive terms as being a "Poor little thing...only a child. However, Lyndall's most significant relationship is with Waldo. Barsby (1989:32) asserts that with regard to Lyndall's relation with Waldo, the very notion of a sexual identity is absent. Lyndall comments 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 beings that think. Other men when I am with them, whether I love them or not, they are mere bodies to me, but you are spirit. (154.)

The relationship between Lyndall and Waldo therefore transcends the constraints of the male/female dichotomy. Through the relations between Lyndall and these three men, Schreiner redefines masculinity and femininity and contextualises it as a process whereby a person is placed (and places him- or herself) in social reality.

Lyndall's resistance to the social system takes the form of her retreat from the farm – an act through which she attempts to negotiate between that what society expects of a woman and her refusal to accept such a position. Lyndall decides to leave the farm with her stranger and during their flight, gives birth to a baby at a roadside inn. The child only lives for two hours and Lyndall falls mortally ill after going out in the rain to visit her baby's grave. On her deathbed, Lyndall reproaches herself for being a "weak, selfish, erring woman" (214). At this stage, only death offers the possibility of transcendence, as Lyndall realises that the suffering endured by those who resist a dominant patriarchal society is worse than death; and she dies defeated, exiled and dispossessed. According to Anthony (1999:8), Lyndall's death must be seen as a "compensatory gesture in the face of a profound awareness of loss and lack".

Scherzinger (1991:30) notes a resemblance between Lyndall and Thomas Hardy's Tess character in that both complete – in various permutations - the pastoral female's rite of passage exemplified by sacrifice and submission. Lyndall falls pregnant and gives birth to a child that dies shortly after; she encounters (and opposes) societal structures of prejudice and dominance; she falls in love but is forsaken by her lover; she suffers extensive physical and mental hardship and is finally sacrificed in death. Scherzinger (1991:33) does, however, point out that Lyndall deviates from the traditional pastoral female as she is never presented as being innocent or pure. Instead, Schreiner depicts her as being intelligent and freethinking – traits seldom emphasized in the pastoral female. Furthermore, in Lyndall's death, Schreiner manages to undermine the pastoral ethic, as the mythical "blue mountain" (217) becomes merely "low and brown, covered with long waving grasses and rough stones" (218). Scherzinger (1991:34) asserts that thereby, the pastoral ideal of the pure woman is undermined, giving way to a far more credible approach more consistent with a feminist objective.

* * *

The Story of an African Farm was one of the first South African novels that articulated the intimate connection between self-definition and the social, political and historical environment. Despite being bound to the conventions of the pastoral, Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* transfigures the pastoral farm within the context of South Africa's colonial realities of oppression, dispossession and estrangement. As such, the discontinuous and disjointed nature of colonial life is emphasized through representations of space and place as well as (female) identity formation. Schreiner's farm is depicted as a dystopic setting that blurs time and history in order to foreground a psychological investigation into the effects of imperialism on the human psyche.

CHAPTER 5
**SUBVERTING THE PASTORAL: THE TRANSCENDENCE OF SPACE AND
PLACE IN FEMALE IDENTITY FORMATION IN J.M. COETZEE'S
*DISGRACE***

5.1 Contextualization

J.M. Coetzee's novel *Disgrace*, deemed controversial by critics and readers alike, confronts the reader with the stark realities of the South African context - with regard to its history, socio-political complexities and ironies - and comments strongly on the failure of human sympathy as a consequence of colonialism and apartheid. The plot is focalised through the consciousness of the authorial narrator and protagonist David Lurie, a professor of modern languages who has an illicit affair with one of his students, Melanie Isaacs. This leads to his dismissal and subsequent decision to take "refuge" at his daughter Lucy's smallholding¹¹ in the Eastern Cape where they are attacked and Lucy brutally raped. The novel is centred on Lucy's enigmatic response to her ordeal and fate and David's (and possibly the reader's) astonishment at the choices Lucy makes. The novel offers a rather bleak apocalyptic vision of gender roles, racial relationships and family relations in post-apartheid South Africa; it expresses the socio-political tensions pertaining to the South African landscape in terms of personal relationships. Therefore, even though the events that are portrayed appear to be realistic, the verisimilitude of their representation is not the purpose of their portrayal.

The title of the novel - "*Disgrace*" - is a term that has allegiance with the words "shame", "dishonour" "scandal" and "humiliation" - concepts associated with the main protagonist, David Lurie, as well as the social, cultural and historical contexts represented in the novel. "Disgrace" is the term David uses to Bev Shaw when he refers back to the repercussions of his exploitative affair with his student Melanie, when he explains that he was "Not just in trouble. In what I suppose one would call

¹¹ Even though the novel defines Lucy's land as a "smallholding", for the sake of my argument I will refer to it as a "farm", as Lucy does cultivate the land, thereby inscribing it. Also, the difference between these two concepts is merely technical (a smallholding constitutes a smaller area of land than a farm).

disgrace” (85)¹². David also perceives Lucy’s rape and resulting pregnancy and powerlessness to help her during the attack as a disgrace – “Lucy’s secret, his disgrace” (109). Furthermore, “disgrace” is not a word of independent standing and is the partner and opposite of the word “grace”: David’s “fall from grace”, which begins with his public dishonour, is a prominent theme in the novel.

The word “grace” is also used in the context of “*coup de grace*” (bringing an end to suffering), as David mentions when he sees the dogs being shot by the three assailants: “One dog, shot through the chest, dies at once, another, with a gaping throat-wound, sits down heavily, flattens its ears, following with its gaze the movements of this being who does not even bother to administer a *coup de grace*” (95). According to Azoulay (2002:35), this is the same *coup de grace* David feels he was denied by the university’s humiliating inquiry, as he would have preferred to be “put against a wall and shot. Have done with it” (39). Ironically, David instead becomes the “administrator” of *coup de grace* to the destitute dogs at the animal clinic. He also encourages Lucy to claim her own redemption by leaving the farm, shedding her guilt and avenging her rapists by reporting them to the police. But as Lucy’s behaviour indicates, she does not believe in redemption by *coup de grace*.

5.2 Ideological issues and criticism

Since *Disgrace* was published in 1999, responses to the novel have varied from being interpreted (and criticised) as a conservative and even racist portrayal of life in post-apartheid South Africa to being regarded as a representation of white South Africans’ compulsory acceptance of their own marginality and insignificance in the “new” South Africa. Salman Rushdie criticises *Disgrace* for being overly bleak and pessimistic. He contends that even though the novel ...”unquestionably fulfils the first requirement for a great novel” in being able to create ...”a dystopia that adds to the sum total of the imagined worlds at our disposal” the novel does not ...”shine a light upon darkness, but merely becomes part of the darkness it describes” (Rushdie, 2003:339-340).

¹² In this chapter, page numbers in parenthesis will refer to COETZEE, J.M. 2000. *Disgrace*. London : Vintage

Critical opinion on the novel has predominantly taken two routes: the novel is either judged in terms of its direct represented reality which contributes to a politicized debate on conditions in South Africa; or it is analysed in terms of a sophisticated ethical framework and thereby judged in terms of an intellectual position which is suggestive of certain indirect ethical implications. Heyns (2002:58) argues that neither reading does justice to the novel and criticizes the latter approach for abstracting the text “into what purports to be a timeless realm of ethical values”. On the other hand, Heyns (2002:58) claims a “’political’ approach” would over-simplify the text by too readily assessing it “in terms of a presumed reader response that is uninformed by any generic expectation”. Therefore, conceptualising the novel only as a statement on post-apartheid South Africa would disregard the novel’s integral concern with issues beyond that of the contemporary political situation in which the novel’s characters find themselves, as well as the complex relation of these issues to each other and with ‘reality’.

Instead, Heyns (1002:58) proposes considering *Disgrace* in terms of its narrative dynamics such as plot and ontological implications that, as a fictional event, is comparable to other works of fiction. Accordingly, this chapter will draw on a literary-critical approach to examine how *Disgrace* - as a postcolonial and postmodern fictional event - embodies, problematizes and subverts the vision of the pastoral farm novel tradition.

However, a philosophical-ethical reading of *Disgrace* is useful when considering a major theme in the novel, namely the consequences of a lack of ethical action and responsibility in society. In this regard, Marais, in his article *The possibility of ethical action: J.M. Coetzee’s ‘Disgrace’* (2000:59), postulates that the novel appears to suggest that both post-apartheid and apartheid society are / were inherently defined by an absence of ethical action. Consequently, the political changes that have come about in South Africa in recent years “have not affected the base of sociality, that is, the way in which the individual conceives of his/her relations to his/ her fellow human beings” (Marais, 2000:59). Marais attributes the absence of a social ethical framework to the failure of the text to represent the ‘other’, thereby implicating the processes of reading and writing as “states of extreme passivity in which the subject is exposed to the other without being able intentionally to assume the other” (2000:63).

Disgrace can therefore be said to depict a failure on the part of both reader and writer to instantiate the 'other', but simultaneously, the novel self-consciously suggests the ethical possibilities of literary writing.

One of these possibilities seems to be to engage the reader – especially the reader belonging to the imagined community of South African readers – with contemporary South African reality and exposing him/her to a seemingly unconventional ethical perspective on familiar socio-political dilemmas.

In a later article titled *Very morbid phenomena: "Liberal Funk", the "Lucy-syndrome" and J.M. Coetzee's 'Disgrace'*, (2000) Marais counters politicized responses to the novel which "reduce heterogeneous political, social and literary positions to the simplistic oppositions of race politics" (2001:32). Instead, he approaches *Disgrace* as a reworking of the *plaasroman* that draws on the tradition's anxieties about the rights of (white) ownership, but within a post-apartheid context. Marais (2001:33) asserts that even though the novel's representation of Lucy's violation and her subsequent reaction, does interrogate race-relations in South Africa, the *manner* in which Coetzee poses these questions "warns against answers that fall within those simplistic dualisms (Europe : Africa, colonizer : colonized and white : black) that shaped the apartheid era and which persist in the post-apartheid period". *Disgrace* therefore destabilizes the dualisms that informed the ideology of the pastoral farm novel. According to Cornwell (2002:314), by focussing on the characters' response rather than on the attack itself, Coetzee seems to be dramatizing just how radical a transformation South Africans may be required to undergo, both individually and as a society, in order to recover a sense of the "grace" that has been absent in South African reality for such a long time.

Van Coller (2003:55) discerns an intertextual relation (whether it be intentional or not) between the pastoral farm novel and the postmodern / postcolonial farm novel, as the latter echoes certain common traits of the former in its presentation of typical motives, situations, character and ideas. J.M. Coetzee first manifested his preoccupation with the farm novel tradition and its ideological underpinnings in *In the Heart of the Country* (1976). This novel deconstructs the romantic pastoral prototype of the farm novel tradition through its portrayal of a lonely and desolate farm through

the narrator Magda, a lonely spinster suffocated by an environment of intellectual and spiritual drought. As an anti-pastoral farm novel, *Disgrace* elaborates on this theme and challenges the pastoral farm novel's "dream topography" (Coetzee, 1988:6) of the family farm ruled by the patriarch, inscribed – with the help of the invisible labour of black hands – as a legacy of power and ownership to be inherited and cultivated in perpetuity.

Instead, the farm is portrayed as a contested space inscribed with a history of violence and dispossession – a dystopia. *Disgrace* questions the validity of the pastoral, or as David Lurie calls it, "the old ländliche way of life" (Coetzee, J.M. 2000:113) in post-apartheid South Africa by exposing it as a cultural construct associated with a history of patriarchal and colonial domination. Therefore, in parallel with the previous chapter in which Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* was examined as an anti-pastoral novel conceptualised in a colonial context, this chapter will consider *Disgrace* as a postcolonial novel in the context of its subversion, inversion and parody of the pastoral tradition through representations of space and place, characters' interaction with context and female identity formation.

5.3 Representations of space and place

The physical location of the farm in *Disgrace* – the Eastern Cape border – situates the farm at the frontier of conflictual contact. As a liminal space, the border is a point for a meeting of difference and a locale of hybridity. Farred (2002:16) perceives the border as a permanent presence in J.M. Coetzee's literary landscape and configures the border as:

that point on a nation's psychic and geographical map where it encounters itself in relation to others, from which it understands itself as Self and Other, where its identity is affirmed, its landscape crisscrossed and its resistance to others tested.

The Eastern Cape border has been a prominent site of historical conflict between white colonists and the indigenous black population. Since the 18th century, the region has been associated with resistance against colonial invasion, strife over livestock and boundaries, and most notably, disputes over control of land. Gareth

Cornwell (2003:43) points out that ironically, Salem¹³ – the name of the area on the Eastern Cape border where Lucy’s smallholding is situated – means “peace”. According to Cornwell (2003:43), the contradictory implications of this is intensified by the fact that Salem is not an invented place but a real one, with much historical and symbolical significance as it is in the Salem-region where nine Frontier Wars were fought in the 19th century between the British and the Xhosa people. In *Disgrace*, the farm’s location serves to foreground the “inescapable presentness of this past” (Cornwell, 2003:44), thereby positioning it as a threatening and potentially dangerous space where the ‘self’ encounters the ‘other’.

Petrus cautions David that the farm can be “dangerous” (64) but also not dangerous at the same time: “Everything is dangerous today. But here it is still all right, I think” (64). According to Azoulay (2002:38), this movement between time and place emphasises the historical moment at which the balance of power relations shifts in relation to place. The danger posed by the farm depends on the specific circumstances and hierarchies of race, gender, and authority. The farm in *Disgrace* is therefore a site where the issues of race, racism and race relations are not only most entrenched, but also most resistant to change. In the novel, the features of the Eastern Cape landscape become submerged with the psyches of the characters. Gunnars (2004:12) perceives the landscape in terms of opposites: “alien and familiar, personal and foreign, hostile and safe” while Farred (2002:17) notes that the landscape and the main protagonist share an unwillingness to yield to change.

5.2.1 Topography and structure

As in the case of the pastoral farm novel, the typological structuring of space in *Disgrace* invests the farm with meaning, which in turn exposes the attributes traditionally ascribed to the farm space as representative of colonial and patriarchal power structures. *Disgrace* can therefore be seen to “destabilize” the spatial constructs created by the pastoral farm novel.

¹³ Interestingly, ‘Salem’ is also the name of the town that functions as setting for Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible* (1953), based upon the witch trials held in Massachusetts during 1692. Cornwell (2003:44) suggests that in both instances, the name probably had a religious implication and embodied the hope for God’s blessing and protection in the face of dangers threatening the survival of the townsfolk.

Whereas the pastoral farm novel conceptualises the farm as an idyllic space and contrasts it with the city, the farm in *Disgrace* is inherently dystopic: isolated, alienating and dangerous, while the city is represented as being more of a neutral space. According to Van Coller (2003:64), *Disgrace* parodies the pastoral farm novel: it is not the child leaving the farm for the freedoms of the city, but instead the father leaving the city to seek refuge on his daughter's farm. Though initially the natural rhythms of life on the farm have a harmonising effect on David's discordant life, his life, and that of his daughter, are thrown into disorder as a result of the attack, which situates the farm as a site of chaos and turmoil.

In the novel, the term "country ways" changes its meaning almost every time it is repeated. Barnard (2003:205) suggests this is indicative of the "brutal new pressures" the old "country ways" are subjected to in the South African context of the novel. While pondering on the cruelty of Petrus's sheep having to spend their last days tied-up, David relates so-called "Country ways" (125) to "indifference" and "hardheartedness" (125). He further contends: "If the country can pass judgement on the city, then the city can pass judgement on the country too." (125.) The time-honoured associations between the "country" and the "city" are therefore undermined, and it is no longer plausible to equate the city with progress and the country with simplicity and tradition. The farm in the novel is conceptualised as what Petrus calls "forward-looking" (136) and is juxtaposed with the retrospective nature of the pastoral tradition.

Disgrace also satirises the feudal values traditionally ascribed to the South African pastoral, as it is Petrus, a black man, who takes over from his white mistress to become the feudal landowner. Thereby, he is in fact making Lucy "part of his establishment...a tenant on his land" (203, 204). Furthermore, in contrast to the pantheist characteristics often ascribed to the farm in the pastoral farm novel, *Disgrace* confronts the reader with a starkly realistic portrayal of the South African situation. The farm in *Disgrace* is therefore neither a mythical nor religious space, but rather functions as a sort of "refuge" (64) from David's initial disgrace. After the rape, the farm becomes a site for existential displacement, but ultimately, also a site for the transcendence of "self" - a "transcendental" space. Linking up with concepts of "self", *Disgrace* refutes the idea of the farm being an inalienable space providing a

context for determining sameness and difference. Instead, the farm in *Disgrace* is presented as an alien and impenetrable space – “a foreign land” (197), in which the protagonists (and the reader) are forced to renegotiate presupposed notions of ‘self’ and ‘other’.

Disgrace subverts the fixed and codified structure of interracial social relations associated with the pastoral farm novel by exploring social relations and interactions between white and black by means of what Barnard (2003:210) refers to as “sociolinguistic issues...in a context of profound social transformation”. It is also significant that the most difficult adjustments in perspective that the novel’s white characters’ have to make are expressed in terms of linguistic competence or failure. The novel’s most critical moment of linguistic failure is exemplified by David’s distressed thoughts when he is locked in the lavatory, powerless to help his daughter and unable to understand what their assailants are saying:

He speaks Italian, he speaks French, but Italian and French will not save him here in darkest Africa. He is helpless, an Aunt Sally, a figure from a cartoon, a missionary in cassock and topi waiting with clasped hands and upcast eyes while the savages jaw away in their own lingo preparatory to plunging him into their boiling cauldron. (95.)

David’s failure to articulate his experience in any other terms but that of the most cartoonish colonial stereotypes, links up with what J.M. Coetzee (1988:9) refers to as “the failure of the listening imagination to intuit the true language of Africa...an inability to conceive a society in South Africa in which there is a place for the self”. This suggests that it is only by stepping “outside” the self - a self that has been constructed by the paradigms of the colonial past - that one can intuit an alternative identity more suitable to the South African context.

The pastoral farm novel conceptualises the farm as a patriarchal space, ruled over by a dominant patriarchal figure, but *Disgrace* challenges these traditional patriarchal terms. The white male protagonist, David, though extensively implicated in the structures of modern patriarchy, fails in the role of patriarchal “master”. At the beginning of the novel he feels inferior and “out of place” (4) in his profession while on the farm, both his daughter and Petrus resist his authority. Instead, David becomes

the “right-hand man to a woman who specializes in sterilisation and euthanasia” (91), while it is the former “servant” Petrus who becomes the “new” patriarch. However, despite the novel’s subversion of patriarchal hegemony, as a female character, Lucy is forced to submit to the patriarchal terms instituted by Petrus.

5.3.2 *Spatial coordinates*

The spatial coordinates in *Disgrace* deconstruct and subvert the farm as source of absolute meaning

5.3.2.1 *Nature and animals*

Thematically, descriptions of nature and the region are used to foreground the barrenness and bleakness of the landscape. These descriptions can be seen to be suggestive of the psychological landscape that permeates the novel. The physical landscape, described by David as “Poor land, poor soil...Exhausted” (64) can also be seen as bearing the inscriptions of South Africa’s history of colonial exploitation and dispossession.

Another spatial coordinate that exists in relationship with nature is that of animals. Animals, specifically dogs, are a multivalent thematical element in Coetzee’s writing. His use of dogs poses ontological questions about the overlap between human and animal, while dismantling conventional dualisms of human/animal, and life/death. In Coetzee’s *The Lives of Animals* (1999), the narrator argues against the killing and mistreatment of animals for human purposes, comparing animal existential awareness to human knowledge of death: “The knowledge we have is not abstract...but embodied” (Coetzee, J.M.1999:32). The narrator furthermore suggests that this idea of “embodiedness” (32) is exactly what connects our living existence as humans to that of animals: “To be alive is to be a living soul. An animal – and we are all animals – is an embodied soul”... (33). Aside from functioning as vehicles for David’s character development (which will be considered in more detail further on in this chapter), the dog-figure in *Disgrace* is strongly associated with bodily suffering, the threat of shame, the prospect of redemption and the passage to and from death.

In South Africa, attitudes toward dogs have a racialised colonial history. During apartheid, so-called ‘white-owned’ dogs as well as police dogs were attributed the

social function of guarding and protecting not only white property and boundaries, but on a metaphorical level, also the apartheid system. In *Disgrace*, the seemingly senseless killing of the dogs by the attackers therefore has symbolic significance "in a country where dogs are bred to snarl at the mere smell of a black man" (110) and can be said to constitute "revenge" (110). Analogous to conventional social attitudes, the pastoral farm novel rendered dogs and other animals as property; as beings in service of human purposes. *Disgrace* examines many ethical issues in connection with the way humans treat animals, such as animal-slaughter, vegetarianism, and the practice of euthanasia. The dogs in *Disgrace* are mostly unwanted and unloved; Woodward (2001:104) suggests that in lacking intentionality and creativity, these dogs tend to be "ciphers", embodying issues rather than functioning as subjects. As such, the dog-figure in *Disgrace* is representative of disruptive presences that challenge accepted ethical beliefs that exist within society: *Disgrace* seems to suggest that when animals merely serve a society's purposes that society might struggle to improve the immediate social relations in which it finds itself. Accordingly, Coetzee represents animals as creatures that suffer human inflicted captivity, pain, or death, thereby creating an affinity between attitudes toward animal living and dying and human living and dying.

5.3.2.2 *Traditional family nucleus*

The traditional family nucleus, a key element in the preservation of the pastoral idyll, is undermined in *Disgrace* through the portrayal of a dysfunctional, disjunctive family unit, consisting of a father with dubious morals and his lesbian daughter. The loss and dissolution of family life and the break-up of the traditional familial bond are important themes in the novel. The pastoral notion of the family as a morally functional hierarchy is therefore undermined. David struggles to fulfil the role of father and views it as a "rather abstract business" (63). Splendore (2003:157) suggests that Coetzee's use of the negative father figure – "the debunking of the Myth of the Father" - suggests the failure of the fantasy concerning origins and belonging propagated by the pastoral farm novel. Furthermore, whereas the portrayal of female characters in the pastoral farm novel is relatively one-dimensional, Lucy is portrayed as a complex, multi-dimensional character whose identity formation is a central theme of the novel. Lucy can also be seen as the antithesis of the pastoral female: she is very assertive, she opposes her father's interfering ways and resists traditional gender

stereotypes. Whereas the pastoral female is often portrayed as a doting care-giver to her husband and children, Lucy is single and a lesbian, initially only a care-giver to dogs and ultimately, mother to an unborn child fathered by her rapist.

5.3.2.3 *Labour*

As the pastoral farm novel interlinks the concept of labour to land, nature and race; the portrayal of labour is an important element of the pastoral genre. However, in *Disgrace* the concept of labour is de-emphasised as it is approached rather perfunctorily and never really *described* or integrated with the plot. Labour is also underplayed by relating it to more domestic tasks such as feeding the dogs or tending the garden. Consequently, the pastoral notion of labour and servitude as transcendental prerequisites for land ownership is undermined.

5.3.2.4 *Black'other'*

In *White Writing* (1988), Coetzee locates in the genre of the farm novel an anxiety about the rights of white ownership in the colonial context, an anxiety that is revealed through the portrayal of black labour. Therefore, contrary to the way in which the pastoral farm novel obscures the relation between the black 'other' and labour, *Disgrace* acknowledges this link almost matter-of-factly, thereby suggesting the possibility that the black man is entitled to stake his claim to the land – which is exactly what happens in the novel. Petrus himself points out his contribution to the running of the farm when he replies to David “I look after the dogs and I work in the garden” (64), and when Petrus and David are overseeing Lucy’s market stall, David admits to himself that “Petrus is in fact the one who does the work, while he sits and warms his hands” (116).

To David, Petrus personifies the prototypical peasant-figure: “If there is such a thing as honest toil, then Petrus bears its marks...A peasant, a *paysan*, a man of the country” (117). According to Marais (2001:34), *Disgrace* reveals the place of black labour through the foregrounding of (race) relations on the farm. The novel inverts the traditional racially determined master-slave relationship, as it is David who assists Petrus in the performance of tasks, instead of the other way around: “Petrus has emptied the concrete storage dam and is cleaning it of alga. It is an unpleasant job. Nevertheless, he offers to help.” (119.) David acknowledges the “historical

piquancy” (77) of the situation, which is exemplified even more when Petrus requests David to help him fit a regulator. While doing so, David realises what Petrus expects of him: “Petrus needs him not for advice on pipefitting or plumbing but to hold things, to pass him tools – to be his *handlanger*, in fact” (136).

Petrus’s claims to authority and ownership ascribe him with a voice and with an identity; he is no longer just “an old-style kaffir” (140) or a “good old chap” (140), but a “co-proprietor” (62) who uses questionable methods to get what he wants. Therefore, *Disgrace* presents the reader with a “new world” (117) in which racially marked role divisions and stereotypes such as those promulgated by the pastoral farm novel, have become obsolete.

The aforementioned spatial coordinates situate the farm in *Disgrace* as a subversive space constitutive of new, differentiated identities. The legacy of the “pastoral” farmer and his lineage is erased and overwritten with the legacy of the formerly dispossessed, thereby establishing the farm as a site of both social transformation and upheaval. Accordingly, *Disgrace* resists traditional ideologically-laden definitions and implications of the term “farm”. Shortly after his arrival on the farm, David describes Lucy as “A frontier farmer of the new breed. In the old days, cattle and maize. Today, dogs and daffodils.” (62.) Lucy also refutes the traditional definition of what a farm is and what it means to farm when she declares ““Stop calling it *the farm*, David. This is not a farm; it’s just a piece of land where I grow things”” (200). In resisting the ideological implications of the term, Lucy opens the farm up to new definitions and interpretations, free from the constraints of the colonial past.

5.4 Anti-pastoral implications in a postcolonial framework

As a postcolonial text, *Disgrace* inverts the pastoral notion of the custom of inheritance, thereby undermining the transcendental link the pastoral farm novel created between land and identity. There is no paternal farm; instead the farm belongs to Lucy while her father is only a visitor. While David is troubled by the idea of not leaving something of himself behind when he dies, his daughter Lucy leaves “clear prints” (62) on the land, thereby submerging her existence within its history. The

notion of the bond of natural right that exists between the paternal farm and those who inherit it in *Disgrace* is applicable to the new black farmer and his lineage, which will include Lucy's hybrid child - "a child of this earth" (216). Petrus resembles the traditional patriarchal figure in every way, and in the course of the novel, he builds himself a new house (signifying his new status) which "cast[s] a long shadow" (197). The farm is thereby re-instated as a site of paternal rule and "lineal consciousness" (Coetzee, 1988:4), but by a black man. Furthermore, Lucy has to "owe" her right to remain on the farm and "pays" in terms of her right to land, her freedom, and her dignity. She explains to her father: "They see me as owing something. They see themselves as debt collectors, tax collectors." (158.) Thereby, the conflict between natural right and historical forces is, at least on a superficial level, resolved.

Disgrace destabilizes the pastoral farm novel's hierarchical structuring of space through role reversals across divides of age, gender and race and signals the irreversible changes in the lives of the characters. Petrus's role changes from that of labourer or "dog-man" (64) to that of "bywoner", and from there develops to that of co-owner and neighbour, and ultimately to that of owner. Inversely, the main protagonist David, falls into "a state of disgrace", experiences a decline in social and economic status and becomes a "dog-man". Role reversals in *Disgrace* present the reader with "mirror-like juxtapositions" (Graham, 2002:12) that create disturbing likenesses between self and others and between self and darker self, thereby subverting colonial power structures. However, Ina Gräbe (2001:142) notes that it is significant that the role reversals in the novel are mostly brought about by incidences of abuse that "happen[s] every day, every hour, every minute...in every corner of the country" (98). The situation is made even more complex by the fact that the narrator has himself been guilty of transgressive and unacceptable behaviour. As such, the novel resists any positive outcome the socio-political equalisation process it depicts could have had by linking it to violence and a lack of social responsibility.

Loss, fear, guilt, sacrifice and retribution are important themes in *Disgrace* that are manifested physically, psychologically and emotionally in the lives of the characters: Lucy is "prepared to do anything, make any sacrifice, for the sake of peace" (208), and at the end of the novel, David performs a sacrificial gesture by "giving up" the dog, thereby reaffirming his ethical responsibility. Furthermore, the threat of losing

the land – and therefore also one’s sense of self – alluded to by the pastoral farm novel, becomes a reality in *Disgrace* when Lucy concedes to sign the land over to Petrus and become a “tenant...’A *bywoner*” (204) on land which she owned. According to Barnard (2003:221) the word “*bywoner*” has humiliating connotations that imply indebtedness and poverty.

Disgrace therefore implies that old structures have remained intact, even if the roles within it have been reassigned along racial lines. But it is the rape of Lucy – “the price [she] has to pay for staying on” (158) - that is the epitomy of loss and sacrifice and the ultimate annihilation of the pastoral idyll. According to Crang (1998:69), the colonial mindset categorized black male sexuality and desire as deviant, uncontrolled and threatening, especially when directed at white women. Therefore, the rape of a white woman by a black man is representative of a subconscious fear that possibly informed many of the ideologies of colonialism and apartheid.

5.5 Interrelationship of characters with context

In his Jerusalem Prize Acceptance Speech (1987), Coetzee remarked that the “deformed and stunted relations between human beings that were created under colonialism and apartheid have their psychic representation in a deformed and stunted inner life”. In *Disgrace*, this notion is made apparent through the portrayal of characters’ interrelationship with their social, historical and cultural context. This interrelationship between characters and context constitutes processes of identity formation through which the novel examines the alienation and estrangement that result from the divorce of ‘self’ from ‘other’ (Taylor, 1999:25). Both David and Lucy experience emotional displacement and disorientation, but it is Lucy especially who is able to attain the transcendence of self that is necessary for both personal and social change.

Initially, the impression is created that David Lurie is a self-absorbed and unsympathetic individual. His social relations are suggestive of his existential dissociation: he has had two failed marriages and is a sexual opportunist who abuses his position as university professor, he lives in estrangement from family and friends,

and he seems susceptible to outdated and prejudiced attitudes towards race and gender.

The reader is introduced to David during one of his weekly visits to the prostitute Soroya. The fact that he seeks “affection” (p2) from a prostitute is suggestive of both his subconscious desire for companionship and meaningful relationships as well as his emotional incapability to fulfil this need. This failure is exemplified even more when he instigates an affair with one of his students. Coupled with his egotistical determination to be faithful to his own “temperament” (2) as “a servant of Eros” (52), he seduces Melanie Isaacs who proves to be both a compliant and a reluctant sexual partner. David himself describes their second sexual encounter on Melanie’s part as “Not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core” (25) and admits to himself that it was “a huge mistake” (25). Nevertheless, he continues his affair with her, believing against his better judgement that “there might, despite all, be a future” (29). Cornwell (2002:315) points out that David’s persistence in pursuing Melanie, despite of her initial passivity and his knowledge of her immaturity, is indicative of how his self-centredness deludes him into believing that a “relationship” exists when it is not the case. Consequently, the relationship he believed existed between them is exposed as a projection of his arrogance and self-preoccupation. Cornwell (2002:315) argues that this “failure of mutuality, of empathy, of imaginative identification” that typifies David’s initial behaviour also constitutes the thematic preoccupation of the novel. As it is suggested that Melanie is coloured,¹⁴ David’s affair with her can furthermore be contextualised as being informed by the relations of power, gender and race; thereby referring to the colonial history of sexual exploitation of black women by white men.

David’s obsolete attitudes about racial propriety are manifested in the way he approaches his relationship with Petrus. This relationship proves to be especially problematic and his attitude towards Petrus develops from being slightly patronizing to outright hostile as he comes to suspect his compliance in the attack on Lucy. David is acutely aware of the divide between their worlds and is frustrated by the problem of

¹⁴ On p18 of the text, David describes Melanie as “the dark one”, while on p53 a member of the committee of inquiry (herself a woman of colour), refers to the “long history of exploitation” of which the “incident” is part.

finding a suitable language in which to engage with him across cultural and historical divides. Jacobs (2000:102) contends that the question of finding a language to articulate Petrus's complicity in the attack becomes subsumed into a larger cross-cultural articulation in which Lurie's values are inverted and subverted.

David's strained social relations are exemplified by his relationship with his daughter. While staying with her, he finds it difficult to understand her choice of a simple life, hoping that "it is only a phase" (64). Despite his slightly condescending attitude towards her lifestyle, he conceitedly "approves" (89) of her independent lifestyle and ability to fend for herself. He ignorantly categorizes her as a "solid countrywoman, a boervrou" (60) and finds it "[c]urious that he and her mother, cityfolk, intellectuals, should have produced this throwback, this sturdy young settler. But perhaps it was not they who produced her: perhaps history had the larger share" (61). Cornwell (2003:49) maintains that David's categorizing of his daughter as a latter-day frontier farmer, a "frontier farmer of the new breed" (62), indicates his (and also possibly the reader's) determination to situate her (and her smallholding) in the context of an ongoing frontier history. This suggests that even though the socio-political context might have changed, the historical and economical determinants to landownership have remained the same.

David and his daughter's relationship are put to the ultimate test by Lucy's brutal rape and David's incomprehension of her subsequent reaction and choices. She refuses to inform the police about the rape and when she discovers she's pregnant, she decides to keep the child and accept the terms of Petrus's proposal. Lucy therefore does exactly the opposite of what David (and also the reader) expects her to do, and his dismay leads to various arguments between them. Interestingly, Lucy's refusal to incriminate her rapists parallels David's refusal to confess his shame in public when his affair with Melanie becomes known. Jacobs (2000:101) suggests that this silence is indicative of the larger pattern of reversals in the novel and compounds both David and Lucy's disgrace.

Even though the emotional turmoil David experiences in coming to terms with Lucy's decisions - especially her decision to keep her unborn child and marry Petrus - is

indicative of genuine fatherly concern, it is also suggestive of his insensitive misreading of Lucy and her situation. Within this context, Cornwell (2002:316) suggests that David disapproves of what he perceives to be Lucy's "abject capitulation to brute force" and interprets her behaviour as simply reinforcing the cycle of domination and exploitation that defines the history of South Africa. Lucy, however, views her decisions to be pragmatic and appropriate to the post-apartheid context.

Ironically, even though David fails to realise this, his "affair" with Melanie can be compared to the rape of his daughter with regard to the interrelationship between gender, power and race. However, as Cornwell (2002:319) points out, the two incidents are not identical as there is no evidence that Melanie is permanently damaged by the liaison with David. Furthermore, without detracting from the baseness of David's treatment of Melanie, the seduction mainly amounted to exploitative behaviour and bad judgement, while Lucy's rape was an intentional act of violence that involved extreme psychological and physical subjugation.

David does eventually accept the inevitability of the direction that both his and Lucy's lives are taking. At the end of the novel, when he comes across her working in the garden, he is astounded by the "beauty" (218) of Lucy as the perfect picture of pastoral innocence¹⁵:

She is wearing a pale summer dress, boots, and a wide straw hat. As she bends over, clipping or pruning or tying, he can see the milky, blue-veined skin and broad, vulnerable tendons of the backs of her knees: the least beautiful part of a woman's body, the least expressive, and therefore perhaps the most endearing.

Lucy straightens up, stretches, bends down again. Field labour; peasant tasks, immemorial. His daughter is becoming a peasant...

The wind drops. There is a moment of utter stillness which he would wish prolonged for ever: the gentle sun, the stillness of mid-afternoon, bees busy in a field of flowers; and at the centre of the picture a young woman, *das ewig Weibliche*, lightly pregnant, in a straw sunhat. A scene ready-made for a Sargent of a Bonnard. City boys like him; but even city boys can recognize beauty when they see it, can have their breath taken away. (217, 218)

¹⁵ This image of Lucy may allude to Wordsworth's five "Lucy Poems", composed between 1798 and 1799. These were "Song", "Strange fits of passion I have known", "She dwelt among th'untrodden ways", "Three years she grew in sun and shower" and "A slumber did my spirit seal"(Anstey, 1990:107). These poems display an overt concern with the themes of love, loss, and grief.

Despite the pastoral aesthetics of this vision, the brutal reality is that it has been enabled by Lucy's rape and subsequent surrender to Petrus. Cornwell (2003:50) suggests that, though steeped in irony, this scenario is suggestive of a utopian gesture towards the restoration of the pastoral mythology. Furthermore, the ironic potential of this pastoral idyll is intensified by the reminder that it is more applicable to artistic portrayals of the European landscape than it is to the reality of post-apartheid South Africa. Nevertheless, it should also be noted that the wholesome beauty David is able to ascribe to this scene, is also indicative of his eventual acquiescence to Lucy's choices, which initiates "a new footing, a new start" (218) to their relationship. As Splendore (2003:159) suggests, *Disgrace* is also the story of a father and daughter who are at first separated and distant in their way of relating to the world, but grow closer through a recuperation of certain "familial" values.

The plot traces the various incidents and situations suggestive of David's disorientation, such as his inability to fulfil his self-ascribed intellectual vocation. David admits that "he has no respect for the material that he teaches" (4) and sulkily regrets his demotion from the canonical Romantic literature to which he has devoted his professional life, to a more practical, skills-based paradigm for tertiary education in post-apartheid South Africa. *Disgrace* critiques the relevance of a Western Romantic heritage in contemporary South Africa by tracing David's increased awareness of the inappropriateness of his seemingly useless education because of the inability of his literary and intellectual pursuits to make sense of the world he inhabits: "his proposed Romantic oeuvre, a chamber opera on Byron's last adventure, has become a travesty, a comical thing of a monotonous plunking banjo, a plaintive refrain and a crippled dog wailing in sympathy" (215).

Furthermore, David's expulsion from university for having improper relations with a student, the assault on his daughter and her subsequent refusal to incriminate her rapists and decision to marry Petrus, all serve to intensify his existential dislocation. As a result of these events and despite his recalcitrant insistence that "he is too old too heed, too old to change" (209), David undergoes changes, particularly regarding his view of the value of animals' lives. When David begins to assist Bev Shaw at the local animal clinic where unwanted and ailing animals, predominantly dogs, are put down, his "whole being is gripped by what happens in the theatre...He is convinced

the dogs know their time has come” (143). As a result, David develops a gradual consciousness for suffering and death as concrete, rather than intellectual or abstract concepts. According to Tremaine (2003:594), David also realises the possibility that all living creatures possess a foreknowledge of impending death and the shame that accompanies it. Consequently, he takes on the role of “escorting” these creatures to the table where they are dispatched of, and also to the incinerator where they are disposed of. He thereby becomes “a dog-man: a dog undertaker; a dog psychopomp; a *harijan*” (146). It can therefore be argued that David develops a conscience or “embodiedness”: an unselfish awareness of other beings’ suffering and disgrace as well as a desire to amend it. The dog-figure in *Disgrace* therefore contributes to David’s character development. Tremaine (2003:605) suggests that the dog David gives up represents his spiritual self, his emotional longings, and the possibility of grace. It therefore constitutes an act of “letting go”, a sacrifice for the sake of reconciliation between himself and his disgrace.

5.6 Female Identity Formation

With regard to Lucy, the most controversial incident in the novel also has the greatest impact on Lucy’s conceptualisation of her identity in relation to the social, historical and cultural context of post-apartheid South Africa.

Lucy is only introduced to the reader at the second stage of the narrative when David arrives at her smallholding. From the outset it is clear that Lucy’s life and attitudes are in many ways the opposite to those of her father’s, perhaps in defiance of the authoritative influence he had over her when she was younger. In contrast with her middle-class upbringing in the city has, she has turned away from her parents’ values to become a small-scale farmer and keeper of dog-kennels, a lesbian who has chosen to live alone, independent of male authority.

With his arrival on the farm, David muses on how content Lucy seems to be with her rustic lifestyle: “Now here she is flowered dress, bare feet and all, in a house full of the smell of baking, no longer a child playing at farming but a solid countrywoman, a *boervrou*...Dogs and a gun, bread in the oven and a crop in the earth” (60). Lucy’s

identity is therefore inextricably linked to her land and as such, she is associated with the ethos of the pastoral farm novel: “She is here [on the farm] because she loves the land and the old, *landliche*¹⁶ way of life.” (113.) Lucy is therefore described in terms that inevitably link her to the colonial past of South Africa – but without the colonizer mindset. In fact, Lucy seems to represent a postcolonial solution to the problem created by colonization and its’ aftermath. Horrell (2001:27) suggests that at this point in the novel, Lucy can be read as a sign of white hope, secure in her position on the land without complying with the arrogance of patriarchal colonialism. However, Lucy’s painful process of personal growth only begins once her ideals are brought into dispute when she is brutally gang-raped.

The assault forms part of the larger pattern of reversals that characterizes the novel’s subversion of the pastoral farm novel tradition. For both the reader and her father, Lucy’s behaviour after the rape is shrouded in obscurity and she insists that what happened to her “is a purely private matter” (112). Although Lucy may appear as the helpless victim of a situation beyond her control, she embodies values of resistance to or even subversion of the existing order. Marais (2001: 35) asserts that Lucy’s behaviour is a manifestation of her desire to transcend the cycle of domination and counter domination that determines the course of the farm’s history. Accordingly, Lucy’s dissociation with the determinants of power and authority is reflected in her personal relationships, most notably in her relationship with Petrus. Marais (2001:36) asserts that Lucy describes her relationship with Petrus in neutral terms that are “ostensibly divested of power”, referring to him as her “assistant” (62) and “co-proprietor” (62). She furthermore refuses to “order Petrus about” (114) since “[h]e is his own master” (114). However, the relationship between Lucy and Petrus is placed in the context of a history defined by the culturally-conferred and subjective relationship between (white) master and (black) servant; (European) colonizer and (African) colonized. Furthermore, as Marais (2001:36) points out, the backlash to this history of domination and conflict is played out on the smallholding.

As such, Lucy’s rape can be seen as an “assertion of power” (Marais, 2001:36) on the part of the rapists, whereby she – as historical antagonist - is brutally forced into a

¹⁶ In the text, the word is spelled without the German umlaut.

position of “Subjection. Subjugation” (159). *Disgrace* thereby foregrounds the issue of (white) culpability as a consequence of violent colonization and political oppression. In this regard, Horrell (2002:25) argues that it is on and through the body of Lucy that the terms for white South Africa’s “remembering;” of past injustices are manifested. However, the “inscription of guilt” (Horrell, 2002:26) on Lucy’s body does not necessarily imply that her passivity is a plea for white subordination. Instead, by placing the bodies of women – first Melanie’s and then, to a more severe extent, Lucy’s - as sites for the inscription of power, *Disgrace* foregrounds the implications of gender and race.

Coetzee therefore seems to suggest that the old patriarchal order is just being duplicated in the new dispensation and as such, it can be inferred that for the most, women have remained marginalised and subjugated. Therefore, as in the past, gender and race have remained prominent determinants of power and dominance in the South African context. Marais (2001:37) interprets Lucy’s passive behaviour as being suggestive of her refusal to remain in this oppositional position that the rapists forced her to occupy at the time of the rape. Thereby, she is also subverting the terms of colonial history which would have her perpetuating instead of terminating the cycle of domination and counter-domination that typifies the past and present South Africa.

However, there is also a more practical side to Lucy’s decision to remain on the farm and accept Petrus’s conditions: The rape has damaged her psyche and will remain in her consciousness for the rest of her life and wherever she goes – leaving the farm will change nothing. Moreover, Lucy feels that if she leaves the farm she will accept “defeat” (161), something she refuses to do. She also knows that if she wishes to remain on the land and live in peace with her neighbours, she will have to comply with whatever conditions she has to face. However, as Cornwell (2002:318) points out, Lucy’s decision to form a sort of “clan alliance with an erstwhile enemy” should probably be interpreted on an allegorical level, as in the reality presented by the text, Petrus has proven himself to be untrustworthy and even if he could be trusted, his patronage would provide no real guarantees of security. As such, Cornwell (2002:318) suggests that Coetzee employs the allegorical mode in an otherwise realist text to encourage the (South African) reader to acknowledge the repercussions of “white historical sin” and contemplate the sacrifices needed to enable national healing

and reconciliation. This links up with Coetzee's viewpoint (concerning the adjustment of white South Africans to the new dispensation), expressed in an interview conducted shortly after *Disgrace* won the 1999 Booker prize, in which he stated that "at the deepest level, many still haven't understood or accepted that life cannot go on as it did before".

Despite the fact that the rape can be seen as the consequence of "history speaking through [the rapists]" (156), Lucy views her experience at an intensely personal level and consequently she carries the burden of her rapists' hate as well as its inscription of shame. Horrell (2002:29) suggests that it is this shame that primarily prevents her from reporting the crime "in this place, at this time...This place being South Africa." (112.) Lucy's identity as a white South African woman in post-apartheid context therefore implicates her in the conditions that predetermined the attack on her. During an argument with her father she insists on the incomprehensibility of the situation to him: "you don't understand what happened to me that day...you think you understand, but finally you don't. Because you can't". (157.) According to Cornwell (2002:319), David here functions as the figure of both the novelist and the reader, therefore this admittance on Lucy's part is suggestive of the incapability of communicating the experience of the 'other'. During an argument with her father, Lucy assertively manifests her independence by criticizing her father's patronizing and selfish attitude:

You behave as if everything I do is part of the story of your life. You are the main character. I am a minor character who doesn't make an appearance until halfway through. Well, contrary to what you think, people are not divided into major and minor. I am not minor. I have a life of my own, just as important to me as yours is to you, and in my life I am the one who makes the decisions. (198.)

Like Susan Barton in *Foe* (1986), Lucy lays claim to her authenticity as "author" of her own story, thereby also suggesting a desire to rewrite history in a new context. Therefore, despite her seeming helplessness in the face of events beyond her control, Lucy stands out as the character that not only actively makes (ethical) choices for her life, but also assumes responsibility for these choices.

Through her action of becoming a mother against her choice and also the improbable member of a patriarchal African family, she assimilates the 'other' into her identity. Consequently, Lucy is forced to relinquish the life she knew and start "at ground level. With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, nor rights, no dignity...like a dog"(205). Splendore (2003:161) suggests that Lucy places herself on the same level as those deprived of everything by history. Thereby, she manifests her love for Africa, a love that Coetzee, in his Jerusalem Prize Acceptance Speech of 1987, qualifies as a "desire to embrace Africa, embrace the body of Africa; and...being embraced in return by Africa" (Coetzee, 1992:96).

As a new, postcolonial brand of "settler", Lucy acknowledges the determining power of past over present and accepts her "place in the scheme" (216), independent from white (male) hegemony. Barney (2004:23) suggests that Lucy is representative of a "profound ability to adjust, however painfully, to the new racial relations after apartheid's end". This ability underscores her function as mediator between David and the deprived, destitute 'other' as embodied not only by the dogs, but also by people such as the mentally retarded rapist, Pollux. According to Splendore (2003:159), Lucy provides a form of salvation for her father (and the reader) by showing him another side of life, "this other unfamiliar world" (71) that compels him to respect life and develop compassion.

With regard to Lucy's identity formation, Coetzee's view on women takes on an enigmatic slant: it cannot be denied that to some extent, Lucy's choice does seem to suggest a return to the patriarchal fold exemplified by the pastoral tradition. However, despite her pain and extensive sacrifices, Lucy's decision to remain on the farm does enable her to experience personal growth - albeit at the cost of personal freedom. She chooses life and forgiveness over hate and fear, thereby suggesting a higher level of ethics through which transcendence of the self becomes possible. The postcolonial implications of Lucy's conduct therefore entail a renegotiation of her feminist identity in a context of sympathetic identification with other beings.

* * *

As an anti-pastoral farm novel, *Disgrace* reconfigures the "farm" within the context of the new post-apartheid South African reality by subverting the structures of space

and place postulated by the pastoral farm novel. As part of its ideological underpinnings, the pastoral farm is laden with memories of a prosperous past, while the farm in *Disgrace* is a historically contested space in which the consequences of colonialism and apartheid are brought to the fore. South African pastoral notions of the farm as an extension of cultural and national identity are thereby undermined. Representations of space and place in the novel conceptualise the pastoral ideal to be a mere “sentimental yearning” (J.M. Coetzee, 1997:200), for a “dying enterprise” (121), thereby suggesting that the farm cannot become a pastoral refuge in a context lacking human sympathy and ethical action.

CHAPTER 6:
CONCLUSION: INTERPRETATION AND CONTEXT

And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

T.S. Eliot, *Little Gidding*

In a postcolonial context, orientations toward place still play an integral role in the symbolic and physical dimensions of identity formations. Places are dynamic entities that are intimately bound up with the culture and identity of its inhabitants. As a consequence of the way in which we inhabit space, place can be conceptualised as a text in continual state of formation upon which histories and cultures are inscribed and interpreted. Colonialism inscribed a discourse of appropriation and domination onto the colonized landscape, thereby gaining control over spatial reality and its representation. The occupation of space therefore became determined and controlled by patriarchal and colonial power structures that situated colonial space as a site of power struggles, annexation and resistance - thereby eroding identity and imposing feelings of alienation and displacement not only on the colonized, but also the colonizer.

The nature of one's relationship with a particular place is therefore a determinant in processes of self-definition and identity formation. People invest places with meaning and significance and in turn define themselves through their sense of place – as such; places encompass certain cultural characteristics that imply something about our cultural and individual identity. Identity is therefore founded on categories of belonging and differentiation, whereby those who are perceived as 'other' are defined in subordinate terms and subjected to categorization and marginalization.

Spaces and places therefore shape and maintain cultures and identities and are often sites of territorial identification and exclusion. Landscape can be seen as a cultural construct that transforms a geographical location into an ideologically circumscribed symbolic space.

In the South African context, the farm was inscribed with nationalist ideologies and pastoral ideals that situated the farm as an “icon of Afrikaner identity symbolizing the heroic struggle against the wilderness” (Viljoen, H. & Van der Merwe, C. 2004:10). As a manifestation of geographical, social, historical and cultural processes, the concept of the farm in South Africa foregrounds the link between land, ideology and identity, it can be conceptualised as a text inscribed with the discourse on land and ownership. As such, the farm is also inscribed with the suppressed history of colonial appropriation and occupation that situates the farm as a site of contradiction and contestation.

The pastoral tradition is defined by a sentimental yearning for a lost time in history when men lived simplistically and in harmony with the elemental rhythms of nature; free from troubles, complications and corrupt tendencies. The South African pastoral reconstructed this vision accordingly and adapted it to the African landscape and colonial experience. The South African pastoral therefore endeavoured to humanise and tame the vast, inhospitable wilderness through literary representations of containment and domestication, thereby creating a division between the innocence of nature (including country-life and the farm) and the corruptness of the city.

During the early 20th century, the South African pastoral genre was integrated with the discourse on land and the farm – a discourse that was overtly preoccupied with the issues of attaining landownership and the threat of losing the land as a result of social change and transition. The pastoral farm novel therefore transpired as a literary response to a period of radical change, and as such, is a manifestation of the relationship between history, literature and culture whereby meaning was ascribed to the farm in an attempt to reaffirm Afrikaner identity. Within early 20th century context, these farm novels perpetuated patriarchal colonial history by appropriating the right to ownership and inscribing the farm with the signs of white labour and lineage.

The postcolonial context conceptualises traditional perceptions of reality inspired by colonialism as obsolete and inappropriate – accordingly, the anti-pastoral farm novel uses the postcolonial / postmodernist practices of rewriting, parody and subversion to

destabilize the values and ideologies perpetuated by the pastoral farm novel, thereby rethinking notions of space, place and identity.

In Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* and J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*, the farm as site of (post)colonial displacement relays an important anti-pastoral theme. In both novels, the spatial constructs inherent to the pastoral farm novel are destabilized while the attributes traditionally ascribed to the farm are exposed as ideologically laden and representative of colonial as well as patriarchal power structures. The spatial reconstruction of nature, the traditional family nucleus, labour and the depiction of the black 'other' together with the representation of the characters' interaction with context and female identity formation, reconfigure the farm within a postcolonial and anti-pastoral framework and subvert the pastoral farm as source of absolute meaning. However, the construction of spatial coordinates in *The Story of an African Farm* does, to an extent, resemble that of the pastoral farm novel, especially with regard to depictions of nature and the representation of the black 'other'.

The Story of an African Farm depicts the "metaphysical habitation of the wasteland landscape of the Karoo" (Van Wyk Smith, 1990:31) that discloses the colonial discourse of taming and being tamed, possessor and possessed. The novel's subtext is riddled with doubt and anxiety about the settler's appropriated right to land, as suggested by the black man's function as "node of doubt and displacement that invades all the lives on the farm" (Van Wyk Smith, 1990:31). Coetzee (1988:66) contends the novel to be anticolonial in its assertion of the alienness of the European culture in Africa and its conceptualisation of life on the farm as an unnatural life of fallacy – "a living death".

Ironically, the female protagonist Lyndall only achieves a transcendental awareness of "possibilities of knowing and being" (Van Wyk Smith, 1997:139) outside the confines of patriarchal power, in death. *The Story of an African Farm* thereby exposes the true nature and spirit of colonialism to be domination – not development – "its driving force a question of economics, not a burning desire to spread civilization" (O'Connell, 1989:39). Colonialism is therefore conceptualised as an inherently anti-pastoral pursuit and as such, the farm as pastoral haven is revealed as an unattainable colonial myth.

J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* reconfigures *The Story of an African Farm* in the context of an apartheid consciousness. The novel traces the nature, implications and repercussions of colonially imposed power structures through an inversion and reversal of the terms of ownership and hegemony in relation to the South African farm. As such, David and Lucy are forced to renegotiate the conditions of their position and residence in a 'new' dispensation. Horrell (2001:31) argues that these terms are negotiated through the (female) body of Lucy that functions as a site for "the transfer of ownership and the inscriptions of pain on (white) flesh that must, eventually, bring restitution". The burden of shame and guilt is integrated with Lucy's flesh through rape, and her child will stand as embodiment of this inscription.

To an extent, Lucy's fate therefore relocates the pastoral woman's rite of passage in the contemporary South African context, in that subservience and sacrifice are her only options if she wishes to avoid becoming another victim of criminality. As such, *Disgrace* offers no resolution to the crisis of the farm in South Africa – instead, the structures of power and patriarchal authority posited by the South African pastoral remain intact, the only adjustment being the race of its proponents.

As Gräbe (2001:141) asserts, *Disgrace* offers a "devastating critique on the current South African situation" where a history of violent conflict is still being played out. Like *The Story of an African Farm*, *Disgrace* is suggestive of an anxiety about the credibility of the pastoral in a context where the tradition's foundational underpinnings - namely peace, simplicity and social stability - have been jarringly absent.

For both Lyndall and Lucy, the price of transcendence amounts to sacrifice and submission, and for Lucy, is exemplified in her potential for compassion and forgiveness. Thereby, the South African farm novel is opened up to the possibility of *relinquishment* - not only of land, but also of former ideals, privileges and identity constructs – whereby *grace* may be attained and once again integrated with the peopled landscape.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Note on the Bibliography

1. To simplify reference elsewhere, where relevant, entries in the bibliography give the original publication date first, then the date of the edition used in this dissertation.

Primary texts

COETZEE, J.M. (1999) 2000. *Disgrace*. London : Vintage. 220 p.

SCHREINER, Olive. (1883) 1998. 2nd ed. *The Story of an African Farm*. Mineola, NY : Dover Publications. 233 p.

Secondary works

ABRAMS, M.H. 1987. *A glossary of literary terms*. 4th ed. Japan : CBS Publishing. 220 p.

ANON. 2002. Plaasmoorde. *Beeld* : 12, Des. 9.

ANTHONY, Loren. 1999. Buried narratives: masking the sign of history in *The Story of an African Farm*. *Scrutiny 2: issues in English studies in Southern Africa*, 4(2):3-15.

ANSTEY, Sandra, (ed). 1990. *William Wordsworth: selected poems*. Oxford : Oxford University Press. 176 p.

ASHCROFT, Bill. 2001. *Postcolonial transformation*. New York, NY : Routledge. 240 p.

ASHCROFT., GRIFFITHS. & TIFFEN. 1989. *The empire writes back: theory and practice in Post-colonial literatures*. London : Routledge. 245 p.

AZOULAY, Ariella. 2002. An alien woman/a permitted woman: on J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*. *Scrutiny2: issues in English studies in Southern Africa*, 7(1):33-41.

BACHELARD, Gaston. (1958) 1983. *The poetics of space*. Translated from the French by Maria Jolas. Beacon Press : Boston. 241 p.

BARNARD, Rita. 2003. J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* and the South African Pastoral. *Contemporary literature*, 44(2):199-224.

BARSBY, Christine. 1989. Olive Schreiner: towards a redefinition of culture. *Pretexts: studies in literature and culture – boundaries and race*, 1(1):19-36. Winter.

BETHLEHEM, Louise. 2002. Pliant/compliant; grace/*Disgrace*; plaint/complaint. *Scrutiny2: issues in English studies in Southern Africa*, 7(1):20-32.

BOLIN, Bill. 1993. Olive Schreiner and the *status quo*. *Unisa English studies*, 31(1):4-8. Apr.

CARTER, E., DONALD, J. & SQUIRES, J. 1993. Introduction. (In Carter, E., Donald, J. & Squires, J. eds. *Space and place: theories of identity and location*. London : Lawrence & Wishart. p vii-xv.)

CASEY, Edward. 1996. How to get from space to place in a fairly short stretch of time: phenomenological prolegomena. (In Feld, S. & Basso, K.H. eds. *Senses of place*. Santa Fe : School of American Research Press. p. 13-54.)

CASEY, Kathy. 1998. Note to *The Story of an African Farm*. Mineola, NY : Dover Publications. p. iii-vii.

CHING-LIANG LOW, Gail. 1993. His stories? Narratives and images of imperialism. (In Carter, E., Donald, J. & Squires, J. eds. *Space and place: theories of identity and location*. London : Lawrence & Wishart. p 187-219.)

CLAYTON, Cherry. 1989. Introduction. (In Clayton, C. ed. *Women and writing in South Africa: a critical anthology*. Marshalltown : Heinemann. p 1-9.)

CLAYTON, Cherry. 1989. Olive Schreiner: paradoxical pioneer. (In Clayton, C. ed. *Women and writing in South Africa: a critical anthology*. Marshalltown : Heinemann. p. 41-59.)

COETZEE, Ampie. 1996. My birthright gives me a servitude on this land: the farm novel within the discourse on land. *Journal of literary studies*, 12(1):124-142.

COETZEE, Ampie. 2000. 'n Hele os vir 'n ou broodmes: grond en die plaasnarratief sedert 1595. Pretoria : Van Schaik. 156 p.

COETZEE, Ampie. 2001. 'They all went down to Gomorrah': an episode in the demise of the Afrikaner. (In Van der Merwe, C.N., ed. *Strangely familiar: South African narratives in town and countryside*. Cape Town : Content Solutions. p. 141-160.)

COETZEE, J.M. 1987. Jerusalem Prize Acceptance Speech. (In Atwell, D. ed. *Doubling the point: 1992*. Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard UP. p. 96-99.)

COETZEE, J.M. 1988. *White Writing: on the culture of letters in South Africa*. Johannesburg : Radix. 193 p.

COETZEE, J.M. 1998. *Boyhood: scenes from provincial life*. New York, NY : Penguin. 166p.

COETZEE, J.M. 1999. *The lives of animals*. Princeton N.J. : Princeton UP. 127 p.

- COETZEE, J.M. 1999. South Africa prize winner. *Newsweek* : 8 Nov. 72.
- CORNWELL, Gareth. 2002. Realism, rape, and J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*. *Critique: studies in contemporary fiction*, 43(4): 307-321.
- CORNWELL, Gareth. 2003. *Disgraceland*: History and the humanities in frontier country. *English in Africa*, 30(2):43-68.
- CRANG, Mike. 1998. Cultural geography. London : Routledge. 206 p.
- DARIAN-SMITH, K., GUNNER, L. & NUTTALL, S. 1996. Introduction. (In Darian-Smith, K., Gunner, L. & Nuttall, S. eds. Text, theory, space: land, literature and history in South Africa and Australia. London : Routledge. p. 1-19.)
- DRIVER, Dorothy. 1988. 'Woman' as sign in the South African colonial enterprise. *Journal of literary studies*, 4(1):3-20. Mar.
- ELIOT, T.S. 1959. Four quartets. London : Faber and Faber. 59 p.
- FARRED, Grant. 2002. Back to the borderlines: thinking race *Disgracefully*. *Scrutiny2: issues in English studies in Southern Africa*, 7(1):16-19.
- FIELD, Steven & BASSO, Keith. 1996. Introduction. (In Field & Basso eds. Senses of place. Santa Fe : School of American Research Press. p. 3-11.)
- GILBERT, Sandra & GUBAR, Susan. 1979. The madwoman in the attic. New Haven : Yale UP. 719 p.
- GILIOME, Hermann. 2003. The rise and fall of Afrikaner women. [Available on the Internet:] <http://www.litnet.co.za/seminarroom/afwomen.asp> [Date used: 24 Okt. 2003].
- GORAK, Irene, E. 1992. Olive Schreiner's colonial allegory: *The Story of an African Farm*. *Ariel: a review of international English literature*, 23(4):53-71.
- GRÄBE, Ina 2001. Writing as exploration and revelation: experiencing the environment, whether local or global, as envisioned by different role-players in J.M. Coetzee's latest novels. *Journal of literary studies*, 17(3/4):120-144. Dec.
- GRAHAM, Lucy. 2002. "Yes, I am giving him up": sacrificial responsibility and likeness with dogs in J.M. Coetzee's recent fiction. *Scrutiny 2: issues in English studies in Southern Africa*, 7(1):4-13.
- GREEN, Keith & LEBIHAN, Jill. 1996. Critical theory and practice: a coursebook. London : Routledge. 336 p.
- GUNNARS, K. 2004. A writer's writer: two perspectives. *World literature today*, 78(1):12.

- HARDY, Thomas. (1891) 1993. *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. Hertfordshire : Wordsworth Editions. 356 p.
- HEYNS, Michiel. 2002. 'Call no man happy': perversity as narrative principle in *Disgrace*. *English studies in Africa*, 45(1):57-65.
- HOLLOWAY, Myles. 1989. Thematic and structural organization in Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm*. *English in Africa*, 16(2):77-89.
- HORRELL, Georgina. J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*: one settler, one bullet and the 'new South Africa'. *Scrutiny2: issues in English studies in Southern Africa*, 7(1):25-32.
- HUTCHEON, L. 1988. *A poetics of postmodernism: history theory, fiction*. New York, NY : Routledge. 258 p.
- JACOBS, J.U. 2000. Writing reconciliation: South African fiction after Apartheid. (In Auetsa conference papers. Bloemfontein : University of the Orange Freestate. p89-104.)
- KLOPPER, D. 1990. Politics of the pastoral: the poetry of Thomas Pringle. *English in Africa*, 17(1):21-59, May.
- KNELLWOLF, C. 2001. The history of feminist criticism. (In Knellwolf, C. & Norris, C. eds. *The Cambridge history of literary criticism*, Vol. 9: twentieth – century historical, philosophical and psychological perspectives. Cambridge : Cambridge UP. p.193-205.)
- KUCICH, John. 2002. Olive Schreiner, masochism, and omnipotence: strategies of a preoedipal politics. *Novel – a forum on fiction*, 36(1):79-109. Fall.
- LARSEN, S.E. 1997. Landscape, identity and literature. *Journal of literary studies*, 13(3/4):284-302.
- MALHERBE, D.F. (1926) 1939. *Die Meulenaar*. Bloemfontein : Nasionale Pers. 198 p.
- MARAIS, Mike. 2000. The possibility of ethical action: J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*. *Scrutiny 2: issues in English studies in Southern Africa*, 5(1):57-63.
- MARAIS, Mike. 2001. Very morbid phenomena: liberal funk, the "Lucy-syndrome" and *Disgrace*. *Scrutiny 2: issues in English studies in Southern Africa*, 6(1):32-38.
- McCLINTOCK, Anne. 1995. *Imperial leather: race, gender and sexuality in the colonial contest*. London : Routledge. 449 p.
- McHALE, BRIAN. *Postmodernist fiction*. 2nd ed. London : Routledge. 264 p.
- MILLER, Arthur. (1953) 1992. *The Crucible*. Oxford : Heinemann Educational. 134 p.

- MILLER, Margaret. 1998. Forms of resistance: South African women's writing during apartheid. *Hectate: an interdisciplinary journal of women's liberation*, 24(2) : 118-144.
- MONSMAN, Gerald. 1991. Olive Schreiner's fiction: landscape and power. New Brunswick, NJ : Rutgers UP. 201 p.
- MORRIS, P. 1993. Literature and feminism. Oxford : Blackwell. 217 p.
- MURRAY, Patrick. 1986. Literary criticism: a glossary of major terms. New York, NY : Longman. 186 p.
- NUTTALL, Sarah. 1994. Women to read. *Die Suid-Afrikaan*, 49:51-53.
- PECHY, Graham. 1983. *The Story of an African Farm*: colonial history and the discontinuous text. *Critical arts: a journal for media studies*, 3(1):65-77.
- SCHERZINGER, Karen. 1991. The problem of the pure woman: South African pastoralism and female rites of passage. *Unisa English studies*, 29(2):29-35.
- SHOWALTER, Elaine. (1977) 1991. A literature of their own: from Charlotte Brontë to Doris Lessing. Princeton : Princeton University Press. 2nd ed. 378 p.
- SPLENDORE, Paula. 2003. "No more mothers and fathers": The family sub-text in J.M. Coetzee's novels. *Journal of Commonwealth literature*, 38(3):149-162.
- TAYLOR, Jane. 1999. The impossibility of ethical action (review of *Disgrace*). *Mail & Guardian*, 23-29 July:25.
- TREMAINE, Louis. 2003. The embodied soul: Animal being in the work of J.M. Coetzee. *Contemporary literature*, 44(4):587-612.
- VAN COLLER. H.P. 1995. Die Afrikaanse plaasroman as ideologiese refleksie van die politieke en sosiale werklikheid in Suid-Afrika. *Stilet*, 7(2):22-31.
- VAN COLLER, H.P. 2003. Die gesprek tussen C.M. van den Heever se werk en enkele moderne S.A. romans. *Literator*, 24(1):49-68. Apr.
- VAN DEN HEEVER, C.M. (1935) 1982. Somer. 2nd ed. Pretoria : Van Schaik. 147 p.
- VAN DEN HEEVER, C.M. (1939) 1970. Laat vrugte. 13de dr. Pretoria : J.L. van Schaik. 272 p.
- VAN DER MERWE, C.N. 2001. The farm in Afrikaans fiction: the history of a concept. (In Van der Merwe, C.N., ed. *Strangely familiar: South African narratives in town and countryside*. Cape Town : Content Solutions. p.161-186.)
- VAN WYK SMITH. 1990. Grounds of contest: a survey of South African English literature. Kenwyn : Juta. 153 p.

VAN WYK SMITH, M. 1997. "He was master of the world at last": language, gender and power in *The Story of an African Farm*. (In Auetsa conference papers. Potchefstroom : PU for CHE. p. 133-143.)

VAN WYK SMITH, M. 2001. From "Boereplaas" to Vlakplaas: The farm from Thomas Pringle to J.M. Coetzee. (In Van der Merwe, C.N., ed. *Strangely familiar: South African narratives in town and countryside*. Cape Town : Content Solutions. p. 17-35.)

VILJOEN, H. & Van der Merwe, C.N. 2004. Introduction. (In Viljoen, H & Van der Merwe, C.N. eds. *Storyscapes: South African perspectives on literature, space and identity*, p. 1-20).

VILJOEN, Hein. 2004. Land, space, identity: the literary construction of space in three Afrikaans farm novels. (In Viljoen, H & Van der Merwe, C.N. eds. *Storyscapes: South African perspectives on literature, space and identity*, p. 107-123.)

VILJOEN, Louise. 1996. Postcolonialism and recent women's writing in Afrikaans. *World literature today*, 70(1):63-72, Winter.

VISEL, Robin. 1988. A half-colonization: the problem of the white colonial women writer. *Kunapipi*, 10(3):39-45.

VOSS, A.E. 1991. The Waning swain: prolegomena to South African pastoral. *English studies*, 34(2):65-75.

WATERMAN, David. 1997. Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm*: power, gender and age. *English studies in Africa*, 40(1):43-62.

WENZEL, J. 2000. The pastoral promise and the political imperative: the plaasroman tradition in an era of land reform. *Modern fiction studies*, 46(1):90-113.

WHITLOCK, Gillian. 1996. A 'white-souled state': across the 'South' with Lady Barker. (In Darien-Smith, K. & Nuttall, S. eds. *Text, theory, space: land, literature and history in South Africa and Australia*. London : Routledge. p. 65-77.)

WILHELM, Cherry. 1979. Olive Schreiner: child of Queen Victoria; stories, dreams and allegories. (In Auetsa conference papers. Durban : University of Durban-Westville. p. 64-70. July.)

WOODWARD, Wendy. 2001. Dog stars and dog souls: The lives of dogs in *Triomf* by Marlene van Niekerk and *Disgrace* by J.M. Coetzee. *Journal of literary studies*, 17(3/4):90-119.

Sources consulted but not cited

ADLER, Michelle. 1996. 'Skirting the edges of civilization': two Victorian women travellers and 'colonial spaces' in South Africa. (In Darien-Smith, K. & Nuttall, S.

eds. Text, theory, space: land, literature and history in South Africa and Australia. London : Routledge. p. 83-96.)

CARTER, Paul. 1996. Turning the tables – or grounding Post-colonialism. (*In* Darien-Smith, K. & Nuttall, S. *eds.* Text, theory, space: land, literature and history in South Africa and Australia. London : Routledge. p. 23-33.)

COETZEE, J.M. In the heart of the country.

DAYMOND, Margaret. 1988. Black South African women and the writing of autobiography: Lily Moya, Noni Jabavu and Ellen Kuzwayo. p. 31-50.

DAYMOND, Margaret. 1996. Introduction. (*In* Daymond, M. *ed.* South African feminisms: writing, theory, and criticism, 1990-1994. New York, NY : Garland Publishing, Inc. p. xii-xliii.)

HOLST PETERSEN, Kirsten. 1991. South Africa. (*In* King, B. *ed.* The Commonwealth novel since 1960. London : Macmillan. p. 125-141.)

JACOBSON, Dan. 1971. Introduction to *The Story of an African Farm*. Hammondswoth : Penguin. p. 7-23.

KISACK, Mike & TITLESTAD, Michael. 2003. Humility in a godless world: shame, defiance and dignity in Coetzee's *Disgrace*. *Journal of Commonwealth literature*, 38(3):135-147.

MAGEZIS, J. 1996. Women's studies. London : Hodder & Stoughton. 228 p.

MARAIS, Mike. 1996. Colonialism and the epistemological underpinnings of the early English novel. *English in Africa*, 23(1):47-65.

MARAIS, Mike. 1996. The hermeneutics of empire: Coetzee's post-colonial metafiction. (*In* Huggan, G. & Watson, S. *eds.* Critical perspectives on J.M. Coetzee. Houndmills : Macmillan Press. p. 66-81.)

MORLEY, David. & ROBBINS, Kevin. 1993. No place like *Heimat*: images of home(land) in European culture. (*In* Carter, E., Donald, J. & Squires, J. *eds.* Space and place: theories of identity and location. London : Lawrence & Wishart. p. 3-32.)

PARKER, Kenneth. 1996. J.M. Coetzee: the Postmodern and the Post-colonial. (*In* Huggan, G. & Watson, S. *eds.* Critical perspectives on J.M. Coetzee. Houndmills : Macmillan. p. 82-106.)

SHOWALTER, E. 1981. Feminist criticism in the wilderness. (*In* Lodge, D. *ed.* Modern criticism and theory: a reader. London : Longman. p. 331-351.)

SHOWALTER, E. (*ed.*). 1986. The new feminist criticism: essays on women, literature and theory. London : Virago.

STIEBEL, Lindy. 1997. Imagining Africa's margins: land in Rider Haggard's African romances. (*In* Auetsa conference papers. Potchefstroom : PU for CHE. p. 93-110)

STOTESBURY, John, A. 1990. The function of borders in the popular novel on South Africa. *English in Africa*, 17(2):71-88.

WATKINS, Susan. 2001. Twentieth-century women novelists: feminist theory into practice. Houndmills : Palgrave. 218 p.

WATSON, Stephen. 1996. Colonialism and the novels of J.M. Coetzee. (*In* Huggan, G. & Watson, S. eds. *Critical perspectives on J.M. Coetzee*. Houndmills : Macmillan. p. 13-36.)

“Placing” the farm novel: Space and place in female identity formation in
Olive Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm* and J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*

S.J. Smit Hons. B.A.

Dissertation submitted for the degree Master of Arts at the North-West University

Supervisor: Prof. M.J. Wenzel

May 2005

Potchefstroom

OPSOMMING

Die plaas in Suid-Afrika is 'n teenstrydige ideologiese konsep wat geassosieer word met die pastorale ideale en hieragiëe van die koloniale verlede sowel as vrees en onsekerheid. Die voorstelling van die plaas in die Suid-Afrikaanse plaasroman word onderwerp aan omvattende prosesse van ontwikkeling, ontbinding en vernuwing wat ooreenstem met veranderde sosio-historiese kontekste. Die bydrae wat die plaasroman tot dusver gelewer het in die konsepsualisering van ruimte, plek en identiteit binne die Suid-Afrikaanse en postkoloniale literêre kontekste, moet dus nagespoor en in verband gebring word met die pastorale tradisie asook die mutasies en afwykings wat binne dié tradisie voorkom. Hierdie studie ondersoek tot watter mate, asook die wyse waarop *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) deur Olive Schreiner en *Disgrace* (1999) deur J.M. Coetzee as antipastorale plaasromans, die pastorale plaasroman tradisie herskryf en transendeer deur die verwerping en ondermyning van die pastorale waardes wat die plaasroman genre tradisioneel onderskryf. Dié studie gaan spesifiek fokus op die rol van ruimte en plek in die identiteitsvorming van die vroulike hoofkarakters asook die konsepsualisering daarvan binne 'n postkoloniale samelewing.

Sleuteltermes

plaasroman; Afrikaanse plaasroman; pastorale tradisie; anti-pastorale; grond; ruimte; plek; verplasing; identiteit; vroulike identiteit; identiteitsvorming; kolonialisme; postkolonialisme; koloniale literatuur, postkoloniale literatuur, Suid-Afrikaanse konteks; *The Story of an African Farm*; Schreiner, Olive; *Disgrace*; Coetzee, J.M.

ABSTRACT

The farm in South Africa is an ideologically laden but also ambivalent concept, associated with pastoral ideals and the hierarchy of the colonial past; but also with fear and insecurity. The representation of the farm in the South African farm novel has been subjected to larger processes of development, dissolution and replacement in accordance with changing socio-historical contexts. Accordingly, the farm novel's contribution to the conceptualization of space, place and identity within the South African and postcolonial literary context, needs to be traced and related to the pastoral tradition as well as its mutations and deviations. This dissertation investigates how Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) and J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999) as anti-pastoral farm novels, in different ways and degrees, rewrite and transcend the pastoral farm novel tradition by rejecting and subverting the inherent ideological assumptions and pastoral values exemplified by this genre. Specific focus is given to the role of space and place in the identity formation of the female protagonists and the conceptualization thereof in a postcolonial society.

Keywords

farm novel; Afrikaans farm novel; pastoral tradition; anti-pastoral; land; space; spatiality; place; displacement; identity; female identity; identity formation; feminism; colonialism; postcolonialism; colonial literature; postcolonial literature; South African context; *The Story of an African Farm*; Schreiner, Olive; *Disgrace*; Coetzee, J.M.

Acknowledgements

Financial assistance offered by the National Research Foundation (NRF) is hereby gratefully acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions reached in this study are those of the author and should not be ascribed to either the NRF or the North-West University.

Thanks are due to my husband, MJ Marais and my parents for emotional support, as well as to MJ and Richardt Strydom for their valuable intellectual input.

Special thanks to Prof. M.J. Wenzel for her patience and guidance.

Notes on the text

Stylesheet

The stylesheet used reflects the requirements set out in *Handleiding vir Nagraadse Studie* (North-West University. 2004. Potchefstroom Campus) and *Handleiding vir Bibliografiese Styl* (North-West University. 2004. Potchefstroom Campus).

Table of contents

Opsomming en sleuteltermes	i
Abstract and keywords	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Note on the text	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction & contextualization	1
1.1 Space, place & identity	1
1.2 The farm in South Africa	2
1.3 The farm novel and the (anti-) pastoral tradition	3
1.4 (Female) identity and the postcolonial crisis of displacement	5
1.4.1 Olive Schreiner's " <i>The Story of an African Farm</i> "	7
1.4.2 J.M. Coetzee's " <i>Disgrace</i> "	8
1.5 Relevant questions	9
1.6 Thesis	10
1.7 Aims of study	10
1.8 Proposed methodology	11
Chapter 2: Landscape as cultural construct with specific reference to the South African farm	13
2.1 Space and place	13
2.2 Relationships to place	14
2.3 Place and culture	16
2.3.1 Cultural identity	17
2.3.2 Landscape as cultural construct	18
2.3.3 The national landscape	19
2.3.4 The farm in South Africa	20
2.4 The colonization of Place	20
2.4.1 Postcolonial displacement and the erosion of identity	21
2.4.2 Female identity	22
Chapter 3: The pastoral and anti-pastoral tradition: the case of the South African Farm	24
3.1 Defining the pastoral	23
3.2 The South African pastoral: origins and assimilation	26
3.2.1 The anti-pastoral tradition in South Africa	29
3.3 The pastoral farm novel	30
3.3.1 The farm as spatial construct	33
3.3.2 Spatial coordinates	33
3.3.2.1 Nature	

3.3.2.2	Traditional family nucleus	
3.3.2.3	Labour	
3.3.2.4	Black Other	
3.4	Identity formation and the (anti-)pastoral farm novel	36
3.4.1	<i>Reconfiguring the farm novel in a postcolonial framework</i>	38
3.5	Female identity: feminism and the (post)colonial context	39
3.5.1	<i>South African feminism</i>	41
3.5.2	<i>Postfeminism</i>	44
Chapter 4:	Displacement and the representation of female identity formation in Olive Schreiner's <i>The Story of an African Farm</i>	46
4.1	Contextualization	46
4.2	Ideological issues and criticism	49
4.3	Representations of space and place	51
4.3.1	<i>Topography and structure</i>	52
4.3.2	<i>Spatial coordinates</i>	54
4.3.2.1	Nature and animals	
4.3.2.2	Traditional family nucleus	
4.3.2.3	Labour	
4.3.2.4	Black Other	
4.4	Anti-pastoral implications in a postcolonial framework	57
4.5	The interrelationship of characters with context	60
4.6	Female identity formation	63
Chapter 5:	Subverting the pastoral: the transcendence of space and place in female identity formation in J.M. Coetzee's <i>Disgrace</i>	66
5.1	Contextualization	66
5.2	Ideological issues and criticism	67
5.3	Representations of space and place	70
5.3.1	<i>Topography and structure</i>	71
5.3.2	<i>Spatial coordinates</i>	74
5.3.2.1	Nature and animals	
5.3.2.2	Traditional family nucleus	
5.3.2.3	Labour	
5.3.2.4	Black Other	
5.4	Anti-pastoral implications in a postcolonial framework	77
5.5	Interrelationship of characters with context	79
5.6	Female identity formation	84
Chapter 6:	Conclusion	90
Bibliography		94