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Schreiner versus Schreiner: A Contest of Value

Corinne Sandwith

Summary

This article seeks to establish the aesthetic criteria in terms of which certain texts gain access to the South African literary canon while others are excluded. I have attempted to identify the aesthetic which has resulted in the valorisation of Olive Schreiner's *Story of an African Farm* over her earliest completed novel *Undine*, and hope, thereby, to begin to distinguish the literary values which have informed the construction of the South African canon as a whole.

Opsomming

Hierdie artikel het ten doel die bepaling van kriteria vir die estetiek waarvolgens sekere tekste toegang verkry tot die Suid-Afrikaanse literêre kanon, terwyl ander uitgesluit word. Die oogmerk is om die estetiek te identifiseer wat tot die valorisering van Olive Schreiner se *Story of an African Farm* gelei het eerder as die valorisering van haar eerste voltooide roman, *Undine*. Sodoende word gehoop om die literêre waardes te begin onderskei wat die konstruksie van die Suid-Afrikaanse kanon in die geheel ten grondslag lê.

The period between 1950 and 1970 in South African literary history has been identified as the historical moment during which a South African literary canon started to emerge.[1] Taking its cue from current theory which seeks to challenge existing canonical orthodoxies, the present study looks at the respective fates of two texts in this period namely, Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* (1883, 1986) and the little-known *Undine* (1929), and is an attempt to identify the aesthetic criteria which have resulted in the exclusion of *Undine* from the canon of South African literature. This article seeks to establish the literary specifications in terms of which certain texts are excluded and others embraced, and thereby begin to formulate broader questions about the literary values which have informed the construction of the South African canon as a whole. In order to do this, I have looked at critical texts in which comparisons are made between the canonised *Story of an African Farm* and the almost-completely neglected *Undine*. I am chiefly concerned with evaluations of the excluded text and

the criteria which emerge, and I have confined myself to the books which were published during the period in question.[2]

Apart from the early reviews which appeared in both the British and the South African press upon the novel's posthumous publication in 1929, there was little sustained critical interest in *Undine* and in addition to a second edition published in 1930, the novel was never republished.[3] Like *From Man to Man* (1926), *Undine* was first received by a reading public that had already been introduced to *The Story of an African Farm* as well as to Schreiner's general literary and political reputation. The consequence was that *Undine* received comment which tended to stress its immaturity in relation to her other work.[4] Much of the criticism which was subsequently produced, either formed part of early surveys of South African literature, or was to be found in the numerous biographies written about Schreiner during the period.

An example of this kind of biography-cum-literary criticism is Vera Buchanan-Gould's *Not Without Honour: The Life and Writings of Olive Schreiner* (1948). Written in response to what Buchanan-Gould describes as the paucity of literature on Schreiner and her work (this book being the only one then in existence besides Cronwright-Schreiner's biography written in 1924), this study seeks to reaffirm Schreiner's value in a different age and for a different audience. It is a study rooted in a fascination with the writer's psychology, and continual attempts are made to relate incidents in Schreiner's personal life to events portrayed in her fiction. In keeping with her desire to confirm Schreiner's reputation as a notable woman writer, Buchanan-Gould is, for the most part, highly appreciative of Schreiner's fiction.[5] Although she tends to make greater claims for the power of *African Farm*, she sees each novel as worthy of separate and sustained attention, and consequently makes no attempt to rate the novels on a scale of value as other critics have tried to do. Buchanan-Gould describes *Undine* as Schreiner's earliest attack on the restrictions and conventions placed on women in Victorian society, and identifies Schreiner's interest in questions concerning "the nature of God, the meaning of life and the relationship of the sexes" (1948: 43). She praises the autobiographical early chapters of the novel, and regards Schreiner's descriptions of Africa as "powerful and timeless in their appeal" (p. 45). For her, Schreiner's attempts at imaginative recreation of the English landscapes in *Undine* are, in contrast, derivative and implausible:

> Her attempts at local colour in this part of the story are tedious and unconvincing, strongly contrasting with that gripping realism and solidarity of her descriptions of Africa, which are of unsurpassed magnificence. The vastness, the freedom, the elemental beauty of the solitary Karoo are indelibly portrayed elsewhere in her writings, perhaps because these qualities existed in the mind and heart of Olive

> Schreiner herself; but this chapter opens with a sugary and insubstantial picture of social life as it is to be found in the yellowing pages of many a second-rate Victorian novel.
>
> (Buchanan-Gould 1948: 42)

In accordance with her contention that Schreiner's handling of the African sections of her novel is far superior to her fictional presentations of the English landscape and social setting, Buchanan-Gould praises Schreiner's depictions of the ox-wagon journey, the Kimberley mining camp, and the natural surroundings. Vivid and detailed descriptions which bear the "stamp of reality" (1948: 46), as well as adherence to "psychological truth" (p. 50), become positive terms in Buchanan-Gould's evaluation of the novel. Schreiner's style is described as powerful and mature, and frequent comparisons with other nineteenth century British authors (Dickens, Eliot and Charlotte Brontë, for example) reveal a desire to establish *Undine* as an important novel within this tradition.

Buchanan-Gould is critical of Schreiner's portrayal of men in *Undine,* but sees this as being characteristic of most women novelists, including George Eliot. At times, she argues, the novel is susceptible to an "overstrained romanticism" (p. 45) (by which she means the more implausible elements of the plot), but in contrast to much of the criticism of *Undine*, Schreiner is not considered open to the charge of sentimental or melodramatic exploitation of scenes of pathos. Instead, Buchanan-Gould (1948) argues, Schreiner's technique is subtle and understated, leaving much unsaid.

Like Buchanan-Gould, J.P.L. Snyman (1952) also prefers *The Story of an African Farm*. In a study entitled *The South African Novel in English*, Snyman observes: *"Undine* has most of the weaknesses which mar *An African Farm* and lacks most of its great qualities" (1952: 19) and he sees little reason for sustained critical attention. The weaknesses which *Undine* shares with *African Farm* are structural incoherence and inconsistent characterisation. After a brief description of what is to him "an everyday plot", he continues:

> Olive Shreiner has little skill in plot construction and she fails frequently in the development of the action in this book. Its smooth development is marred by a number of incidental narratives, such as the stories of the nurse and the interlude with the young digger at Kimberley. The theme of the book is similar to that of *An African Farm*: an exceptional and gifted young girl is brought into contact with the cruelty of everyday life and the subsequent results are traced and analysed. The author is concerned mainly with the mind of her principal character and hardly seeks to justify the inconsistency of her actions. While Undine is persuaded in her own mind that a marriage to George Blair is the solution to her problem, she seeks no social or biblical justification - and yet the reader is tacitly given to understand

> that she is a girl of high moral principles. As in *An African Farm*, the achievement of *Undine* should not be sought in logical or reasoned plot and circumstance. Olive Schreiner's characters do not conform with any recognised patterns; she strives to reflect the actions and thoughts of men as they appear to her in real life.
>
> (Snyman 1952: 19-20)

What is interesting about Snyman's analysis is that it represents one of the earliest attempts to account for Schreiner's divergence from standard European models of plot construction and characterisation (something which was to be taken up more seriously by critics like Jean Marquard (1976), Graham Pechey (1983) and Sally-Ann Murray (1992)).[6] Accordingly, in his discussion of *African Farm*, these departures from recognised models are defended on the grounds of the novelist's preoccupation with character over plot and her desire for truthful representation. The same argument is brought to bear on what Snyman sees as the apparently formless, and at times inconsistent, *Undine*.

Once again *Undine* is seen to fall short of the achievement of *African Farm* in the area of characterisation and plot development: according to Snyman, the novel's subsidiary characters are briefly sketched and incomplete, and lack the "strength and force that characterise Waldo and Em" (1952: 20). Furthermore, despite its own weaknesses, the plot of *African Farm* is unquestionably superior to *Undine* which "lacks cohesive argument" (p. 20). He goes on to argue that Schreiner's approach to *Undine* is more objective and detached in comparison with *African Farm*. Here, Snyman appears to approve of Schreiner's autobiographical investment in her characters (characters as aspects of her own personality) arguing that *Undine* is less personal and therefore less "candid" (p. 20).

For Snyman, apart from "a number of great passages" (the requirements of "greatness" are not defined here), the novel lacks overall merit and is marred by elements of sensationalism. Schreiner's "passionate expression" is praised, but her story-telling ability is said to be weakened by a youthful lack of restraint. In consequence, Snyman sees little value in a continuing interest in *Undine* and finds it regrettable that Schreiner's wish for the novel to remain unpublished, was ignored. For him, both *From Man to Man* (1926) and *Undine* (1929) are essentially reworkings of the themes explored in *African Farm* (1986) and the resulting recurrence of certain passages coupled with the fact that neither novel was revised by the author, are to him, further support for his view that the novels should not have been published.

Snyman observes that the great achievement of *African Farm* lies in its "human interest" (1952: 4) which is to be found chiefly in the principal

characters. He describes the novel as a statement of Schreiner's thoughts on religion and as a challenge to a bigoted society, and merit is found in her sensitive and powerful presentation of women's oppression. What gives the novel unity (and this, according to Snyman, is the requirement of great art) is the Karoo farmstead which, instead of providing merely a background to the events portrayed, actually becomes part of the action. Much of the success of the novel, then, seems to lie in its powerful embodiment of the South African setting. He concludes: "This novel breathes the spirit of the veld and is certainly the truest reflection of the Karroo atmosphere in South African fiction" (1952: 10).[7]

D.L. Hobman's *Olive Schreiner: Her Friends and Times* (1955) is an attempt at a full-length study of Schreiner and her work which again has at heart an interest in Schreiner's personality - her "complex character" and "raging inner conflict" (Hobman 1955: vii). Hobman is critical of Schreiner's skill as a writer of fiction and dismissive of her novels, finding more value in Schreiner's other work - particularly her analysis of women's position in *Woman and Labour* (1911), which she regards as "one of the noblest books which have appeared in defence of feminism" (1955: 62) and which had a profound influence on her own relationship with the women's movement.

According to Hobman, Schreiner is too self-absorbed to become a great writer of fiction, and her characters bear too close a resemblance to herself. What Snyman regards as an advantage, is seen by Hobman as a disadvantage:

> Olive Schreiner was never an objective writer. She was too much swayed by her own emotions, too little able to emerge outside herself and not sufficiently detached, ever to become a great novelist.
>
> (Hobman 1955: 55)

In her discussion of *The Story of an African Farm*, she is critical of both plot and character arguing that Lyndall is no more than a mouthpiece for Schreiner's most cherished opinions, yet, the novel "radiates some mysterious quality" (Hobman 1955: 50) which accounts for its continuing power. In looking at the reasons for the novel's early success in late nineteenth-century Britain, she suggests that Schreiner successfully tapped into the common doubts and desires for truth characteristic of her age, and that it is therefore, the philosophical aspects of the novel more than anything else which struck such a chord among British readers in the late nineteenth century.

According to Hobman (1955: 58), *Undine* is even less successful than

African Farm. She argues that "[*Undine*] is, as might have been expected, an immature and very ill-constructed book with a distinctly novelettish flavour". Apart from the interest provided by aspects of "the author's lifelong philosophy" which are contained in the novel, the descriptions of childhood memories, and passages depicting the Kimberley diamond mines, she finds little of merit in the novel.

Compared with the studies dealt with so far, *Olive Schreiner: A Study in Latent Meanings* by Marion Friedman (also published in 1955) takes a slightly different approach to Schreiner's writing, and is another example of the general obsession with Schreiner's psychology and personal experience. Friedman investigates the relationship between Schreiner's personality and her material and makes out a case for certain key repetitions which point to various preoccupations which Schreiner was attempting to work through in her fiction. For Friedman (1955: 1), "*Undine* is undeniably poor stuff" and bears close investigation solely as an indication of Schreiner's early psychological concerns. Friedman is critical of what is to her an improbable plot and an equally improbable protagonist. Moreover, "the suffering is unskilfully contrived: the machinery creaks" (1955: 3). As a novel, therefore, *Undine* is considered of little value. Furthermore, Friedman is inclined to go along with the idea, that due to the fact that she decided not to publish *Undine*, Schreiner herself regarded *African Farm* as a second and better expression of what she had been struggling to articulate in *Undine* (the repetition of material in *An African Farm* is also thought to provide support for this claim).

In contrast to Friedman's sharp dismissal, Johannes Meintjes (1965) in *Olive Schreiner: Portrait of a South African Woman* argues for the continued appreciation of Schreiner's earliest completed novel:

> As a novel *Undine* is of considerable interest, quite apart from being the forerunner of a classic, and it should at least be re-issued in a paperback edition. In it Olive Schreiner broaches her main topics and themes and one is aware of a strong resemblance in the book as a whole to the two others. Surprisingly *Undine* is structurally a better novel than *An African Farm*. It never reaches the same heights, but it is knitted more closely, flows more evenly, and the tendency to ramble is more controlled. As the work of an eighteen-year old girl it is truly astonishing.
>
> (Meintjes 1965: 33)

Meintjes (1955: 35) notes her many "brilliant sketches of minor characters", her use of personal experience which lends authenticity to the events portrayed, and the skill and power of her story-telling ability. Due to its inconsistencies, and exploratory ambience (something which, Meintjes argues, reflects the novelists own uncertainties), *Undine* remains the work

of a young writer. The story itself is regarded as "incongruous, melodramatic and even pedestrian" (1955: 35) and despite Meintjes's willingness to give the novel serious attention, the relative superiority of *An African Farm* remains unquestioned:

> That Olive Schreiner put *Undine* aside and dismissed it from her mind is not surprising. It was a literary exercise which merely touched on the subjects she wished to tackle. Having completed it, she plunged into work on *An African Farm* which was to be so immensely superior to its predecessor.
>
> (Meintjes 1955: 35-36)

Ridley Beeton (1973) is concerned to correct what he regards as a too hasty rejection of *Undine* by Hobson and Friedman. He argues that despite its immaturities, the book has undoubted merit and, quoting a passage in the novel in which the narrator describes Undine's natural surroundings and her responses to them, he concludes that "a work which contains writing of the quality of [this] extract hardly deserves such sweeping dismissal" (Beeton 1973: 29). Schreiner is praised for her satirical presentation of some of the minor characters, and for her spare and humorous style. Nevertheless, for Beeton, "the book [is] undeniably riddled with weaknesses and gaucheries; it is not a first-class work of fiction by any means" (p. 30). He goes on to criticise Schreiner's use of contractions such as "'twas" and "'tis" (which he acknowledges might have been excluded in a final revision) and again cites a passage from the novel, this time to show its immaturity. He then turns from this somewhat insubstantial criticism of the novel to a comparison between Schreiner's portrayal of the English and African settings in *Undine* and reaches a conclusion similar to that of Buchanan-Gould:

> A large section of the novel (I am thinking mainly of the part set in England) is unrealistic, melodramatic and dull. The writer at such times seems to have lost her gift for graphic and precise description; when set beside her very assured evocations of Africa, the rendering of England seems permeated by her ignorance.
>
> (Beeton 1973: 30)

According to Beeton, Schreiner's style in *Undine* lacks the imaginative force and integration evident in *African Farm*, particularly in Schreiner's atmospheric evocations of the Karoo. Furthermore, the character of Undine is found to be implausible and the other principal protagonists even more so. Although acknowledging certain praiseworthy features in the novel, Beeton clearly affirms the status of *African Farm* as the greater work. However, exactly what it is that sets *African Farm* apart from *Undine* remains vague and undefined: "A strangely inconsequential but persistently attractive"

novel (Beeton 1973: 19), *African Farm* has a force and a genius which enables it to transcend its own artistic incompetencies. The great merit of the t 's thought to lie in Schreiner's powerful but sparing evocations of atmosphere, her descriptive mastery, the embodiment of values within the novel's particular vision of life rather than "tedious tract-writing" (p. 21), and the centrality of the local setting as a determinative element of the story. Interestingly, in Beeton's case, authorial detachment is regarded positively, and for this reason, the character Em is regarded as a "near-perfect creation" (Beeton 1973: 21). In keeping with the general emphasis on realism, the novel is said to become contrived when the character, Lyndall, engages in lengthy moralising and the organic unity of the novel is said to suffer at these points.[8]

Vladimir Klima (1973), a non-South African critic, has less investment in *African Farm* as the text which marks the establishment of an independent national literature in South Africa. According to him, although much less attention has been paid to *Undine* in comparison with *African Farm*, "*Undine* remains a very significant source for those who wish to get acquainted with Olive Schreiner's literary beginnings as well as with her youthful 'radicalism'" (Klima 1973: 19). His verdict on the comparative value of *Undine* and *African Farm* would strike many as unusual:

> *Undine* deals more deeply with topical questions, and in particular, with the rapid social changes going on in the period of the origin of the novel. *The Story of an African Farm* is basically a picture of the past life in a "quiet corner", of the life that is disappearing not to come back again. Although both novels include some romantic elements, *The Story of an African Farm* seems to be more romantic and consequently more dated; this impression does not result from the quantity of romantic elements but from the way in which they are related to the essence of the novel. Generally speaking, in *Undine* they are more readily acceptable than in *The Story of an African Farm*.
>
> (Klima 1973: 19-20)

It would seem that, to Klima (1973) it is not romance elements *per se* which weaken the plot, but how well these have been made to cohere with the text as a whole. In keeping with his socialist position, Klima places value on in-depth social analysis and challenge of the status quo. Schreiner is praised for her critical view of English upper middle class society but ultimately, to Klima, she is an artist who is interested in psychological realities rather than economic ones. Perhaps not surprisingly, Klima is also one of the first critics to comment on Schreiner's presentation of South African blacks in *African Farm*. He notes that the main characters are all whites and that the African and Hottentot servants occupy a marginal position in the novel. He

is also one of the first critics to recognise that when Schreiner claims to present Africa on its own terms, and not as a product of colonial mythologising, she is presenting a white South African perspective.

The contradictions inherent in much of this early critical appraisal reveal the inevitably contested nature of literary evaluations. Certain aesthetic criteria do, however, emerge. *Undine* is seen to fall short of Great Art and hence canonical enshrinement chiefly due to its lack of realism: plot, character and setting are all assessed in terms of their access to "truth". The plot of *Undine* is frequently described as unconvincing and contrived, and hence unrealistic. Similarly, the characters are regarded as implausible and inconsistent. Here, the stress on verisimilitude demands faithful adherence to psychological truth, and "full" characters are favoured over caricatures (unless they are thought to reach "Dickensian" heights). Furthermore, merit is ascribed to detailed descriptions of place and social setting.

In contrast to *The Story of an African Farm*, and in keeping with the general tendency to valorise realist forms, *Undine* is frequently criticised for being melodramatic. In a discussion of theatre in the nineteenth century, Raymond Williams (1980), describes the gradual decline in critical esteem of melodramatic forms. According to Williams, melodrama which was initially a vehicle for more radical forms of social protest, became associated with "sensational exaggeration", and hence, inferior art:

> Melodrama, which in its own way had got nearest to the crisis of the dislocated, turbulent and cruel society, became, in the end, no more than sensational presentation and then, inevitably, a mode to be patronised or mocked.
>
> (Williams 1980: 138)

Feminist re-evaluations of the form have extended Williams's point, indicating how feminised forms like melodrama have been devalued in terms of the dominant masculinist literary aesthetic. Feminists have, accordingly, read such forms in a more positive light.[9]

Much has been made of Schreiner's passionate expression, as well as her imaginative recreation of setting, and a vision of life which embodies eternal verities. Here, value is placed on the Romantic notion of art as the revelation of the poet-novelist's inner life and Romantic transcendence of the specifics of time and place is frequently sought after. In this regard, *African Farm* again surpasses *Undine*.

A rather obvious point concerns the structure of the novel itself. *African Farm* has frequently been charged with faulty plot construction due to unrelated digressions which interrupt the smooth development of the plot and, apart from one or two exceptions, *Undine* is generally said to suffer

from the same weakness. (What appears to lift *African Farm* from structural incoherence, is the unity provided by the Karoo farm.) What emerges then, is a concern in aesthetic evaluations with unity, order and formal integration in the text: the autonomous work of art that transcends history and politics.

Ubiquitous references to Schreiner's masterful evocations of the Karoo in *African Farm*, indicate that what is equally important in the determination of its (South African) literary excellence is a firm location of the novel in the local setting. A useful comparison is Nina Baym's (1979) investigation of American literary criticism and the values which it embodies, where she identifies a comparable desire for "local colour" in the evaluation of American literature. Due to a desire to assert their literary (and, of course, political) independence from Britain, emphasis is placed on the rendering of a distinctly American reality. Similarly, in his concern with the invention of the Canadian canon and the literary values which inform its construction, Robert Lecker (1990) identifies the valorisation, and hence canonisation, of those texts which embody something peculiarly Canadian. This he relates to a need to establish an independent national literature. In these terms, literature is seen as an expression and verification of "national self-consciousness" (Baym 1979: 658).[10]

Although the formation of a uniquely South African canon independent of Britain, was imperative to the development of a national literature in South Africa, critical criteria derived from the metropole were still used in the evaluation of South African texts. In Schreiner's case, much of what was regarded as a weakness in her fiction, was simply a deviation from recognised literary models of nineteenth-century British fiction. What appears to emerge in the criticism with which this study is concerned, however, is a preoccupation with realistic and graphic description of and rootedness in the *local* landscape, and it is my contention that much of *Undine*'s failure to reach canonical bliss is related to the fact that just more than half of the novel is set in England. Schreiner's *From Man to Man* (1926), I would argue, has suffered a similar fate for the same reason. As Lecker suggests, this bias in favour of "local colour" can usefully be related to the desire to establish an independent national literature.

In identifying the aesthetic which has operated in the valorisation of *African Farm* over *Undine*, thus establishing the criteria according to which certain texts are able to gain access to the South African canon, the following literary values have been distinguished: a preoccupation with realist over romantic or melodramatic forms, a concern with artistic unity and structural coherence, a bias in favour of art which is the expression of the inner life of the artist, and perhaps most importantly, a valorisation of fiction which is firmly grounded in the local South African setting. The

question which remains is: to what extent does this conservative aesthetic persist in residual form in constructing a new South African canon?

Notes

1. Here, I am indebted to the study by Doherty (1989), in which he investigates the emergence of English Studies in South Africa.

2. Some of the newspaper reviews and journal articles which were published during this period include: Beeton, D.R., Olive Schreiner and Realism, *Trek* 12(8), 1948; Bernstein, E., The Tempest that was Olive Schreiner, *Forward March*, March 1955; Davidson, B., In Memory of Olive Schreiner, *The New Statesman*, 26 March 1955; Dyer, Marie, Olive Schreiner's Liberalism, *Reality* 2(5), 1970; Friedman, M., Citizen of the World, *Forum* 3(12), 1955; Gregory, R.M., Olive Schreiner, *Bluestocking* 23(1), 1955; Heard, Raymond, Olive Schreiner and Death, *English Studies in Africa* 2(1), 1959; Herman, Louis, Olive Schreiner (1855-1920), *Quarterly Bulletin of the South African Library* 9(3), 1955; Laredo, Ursula, Olive Schreiner, *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 8 (December), 1969; Paton, A., Olive Schreiner: The Forerunner, *Forum* 4(1), 1955; Plomer, W., Olive Schreiner: Her Life and Ideals, *The Listener*, 24 March 1955; Webster, M.M., Strange Genius, *Forum* 3(12), 1955.

3. For information concerning the publication history of *Undine*, see S.C. Cronwright - Schreiner's "Introduction" to *Undine* (1929). See also Ruth First and Ann Scott, *Olive Schreiner* (1989).

4. Two of these contemporaneous reviews are reprinted in *Clayton* (1983a). They are Hartley, L.P., Review of *Undine*, The Saturday Review, 23 March 1929 and an anonymous review in *The New Statesman*, 20 April 1929. The others are listed in the bibliography, namely an anonymous review in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 7 March 1929, another anonymous review, Olive Schreiner's First Novel: A Wonderful Girl's Tale with a Strange History in *The Star*, 29 March 1929 and Sylvia E. Pankhurst. *Olive Schreiner's First and Last Book* in *Everyman*, 14 March 1929.

5. The weaknesses inherent in Buchanan-Gould's (1974: 104) account have been noted by more recent biographers and critics. See, for example, Ridley Beeton's (1973) assertion that in her desire to do Schreiner justice, Buchanan Gould is guilty of excess: "The eulogies are so frequent and occasionally so exasperatingly uncritical that they become frankly tiresome".

6. See Jean Marquard (1976), Graham Pechey (1983) and Sally-Ann Murray (1992).

7. It is interesting to note Snyman's (1952) final verdict on *African Farm* which illustrates both his conception of South African literature as simply an extension of the British canon, and his colonial reliance on standards of literary excellence defined in the metropole:

> As South Africans we are inclined to overestimate the value of *An African Farm* because it happens to be the most famous book in South African English fiction .... To gain a true picture of the place of this book in English literature it is advisable to remember that this great South African novel is dismissed summarily in a footnote in standard literary textbooks.
>
> (Snyman 1952: 10)

8. Elaine Showalter (1978) has identified the sexist bias of Victorian periodical reviews in which literary criticism was based on traditional stereotypes of male and female attributes. The sexist aesthetic informing Beeton's argument and much of the early Schreiner criticism is an area of investigation which needs attention.

9. See, for example, the re-assessment of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1986) in Elaine Showalter (ed.).

10. Robert Lecker (1990) has identified realism as the defining feature of the Canadian canon and links this with a desire for the verification of national consciousness:

> Because the institution is fundamentally narcissistic, it wants clear, mirrorlike images of itself and what it sees: the stuff of which representational realism is made - and most canonised Canadian literature - is made. Realism confirms the school's position in space and time. It says: you are fixed, concrete, authoritative. You exist. Your unwarped image means truth.
>
> (Lecker 1990: 662)

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