

*Graves with a View:  
Atavism and  
the European History of Africa*

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THE HISTORY OF colonialism is the history of claims on the land, of settlement by colonists and the consequent ejection of “natives,” all enforced by imperial administrative and legal practice. It involves *physical* line-drawing of numerous varieties (of, for example, national, urban, municipal, and regional boundaries, limits of mining claims and prospecting rights, fences around homes, farms, and factories) and equally numerous *abstract* line-drawings (between right and wrong, legal and criminal) and line-drawings that classify human beings by race, class, gender, age, and sexuality. This essay concerns itself with the line-drawing of history itself (the way memory and myth trace narrative lines from a notional “in the beginning” to the here and now) and with the consequent problems facing postcolonial societies in writing their own history. In particular, I attempt to show how certain white colonists’ graves in Africa—both actual and fictional—and the narrative treatment of those graves lay physical and symbolic claim not just to parts of Africa but to the notion of *being* African; they create “Africa” by creating an “African” history.<sup>1</sup>

It is something of a truism that while a sense of teleological history first emerges in the Western imagination about the time of the European Renaissance, it was the nineteenth century that first exhibited widespread anxiety about its own historicity. In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Hegel draws the distinction between *res gestae* and *historia* (60) and declares that only those cultures which have produced “subjective annals” actually have an “objective history” (61). This claim inevitably leads to his privileging of literate cultures and hence to the dismissal

of “Africa” as being without history (91-99). While a Hegelian attitude legitimates European authority, Francis Fukuyama’s declaration that history has ended suggests that just at the time when African authority might be seen finally to be legitimated (with the passing of the last European-ruled African nation), the post-Hegelian view sees nothing to legitimate. In the face of this dual refusal of legitimacy, postcolonial writers of African history might perhaps take consolation from this essay’s attempted deconstruction of European atavism; if we look at the making of the grave-sites of Cecil Rhodes, Olive Schreiner, and Denys Finch Hatton into historical markers, we actually see a process that counters Enlightenment Europe’s alleged attitudes towards history.

In line with the Hegelian rationale, Dan Jacobson, in his 1970 Introduction to the Penguin edition of Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm*, poses as a problem the specific lack of settler history in South Africa: “A colonial culture is,” he writes, “one which has no memory”, that is, “a vital, effective belief in the past as a present concern, and in the present as a consequence of the past’s concerns” (7). He then goes on to describe how at the age of eight or nine he climbed to the summit of Buffelskop with his parents to see Schreiner’s grave. He describes both the view from the grave and his own reactions:

The view beneath was of a red and brown expanse stretching flat to the horizon on all sides, interrupted only by stony kopjes like the one on which we were standing, and by the glint of water from a half-empty dam that was shaped like a thumbnail and looked no bigger than a thumbnail, too, from the height we were at. I can remember how impressed I was by the sunscorched aridity and solitude of the scene; and also how obscurely creditable or virtuous I felt our own presence there to be. (9)

Jacobson’s description and response, mediated by his own memory and inherited affection for Schreiner, resonate with the notes struck by Schreiner herself in her descriptions of the inhospitable Karoo landscape with its “sunscorched aridity and solitude” and the consequent sense of creditability and virtue. There seems to be a shared way of seeing<sup>2</sup> that endows the Karoo with a historically questionable “emptiness,”<sup>3</sup> which in turn leads to a quasi-Romantic subjective response. Furthermore, in both Jacob-

son and Schreiner, through the latter's choice of burial place, we see how colonial discourse—however anticolonialist it may be—makes claims on the land by creating memory and hence history. The grave allows a sense of continuity to extend from 1894 (when Schreiner picked out the site), to 1921 (the year of her reinterment), through the 1930s (the period of the young Jacobson's visit), to the 1970s and Jacobson's Introduction, and now to this essay.

Jacobson's reference to colonial society as a society without memory, like Hegel's notion of Africa's lack of history, or, following Hegel, Fukuyama's definition of the end of history, can be interrogated on the grounds of ethnocentrism. His comment is thus a complicated one, because, as a Jewish exile from South Africa, Jacobson's position is essentially anti-ethnocentric, critical of colonialism and apartheid. However, he still seems to be operating from much the same premises as Derrida discerns in Levi-Strauss's "The Writing Lesson": that a non-literate society is assumed to be lacking history, hence is not anxious about the lack, whereas European colonizers by virtue of literacy and of coming from a place where they were accustomed to history *are* anxious about *their* lack and actively go about remedying it. This essay argues against Lévi-Strauss's mixture of Hegelian and Rousseauian logic: in using what Hegel might have seen as "atavistic" beliefs in the return of ancestors or of God/gods, black resistance to white discursive power is similar to the way in which white settlers wrote an "atavistic" history through their graves, marking the very landscape itself in a gesture at least as potent as marking the page.<sup>4</sup>

In fact, finding the right way to write the landscape on the page—that is, a way legible to imperial eyes—was difficult. J. M. Coetzee in his study of the pastoral in South African writing shows how the physical landscape of South Africa resisted the sorts of pastoral representation European eyes had grown accustomed to. He nonetheless points to the importance of the sublime in the European tradition and the possibilities for sublimity of the South African landscape, and concludes that "the politics of expansion has uses for the rhetoric of the sublime" (62). The engraving of the words "Your hinterland is there" on Rhodes's

statue, halfway up the slopes of Table Mountain, perhaps illustrates his point.<sup>5</sup>

One of the features of Schreiner's landscape in *African Farm*, however (which makes that novel in Coetzee's view an "anti-pastoral" one), is that it lacks the necessary prospect from which to view the expansiveness of its potentially sublime vistas. Her representation of the African farm is a relentlessly negative one with the point of view firmly fixed in the level plain, not elevated to a prospect. Coetzee suggests that this thoroughly negative presentation of a landscape that Schreiner herself loved should be read as "a figure in the service of her critique of colonial culture" (66) in virtue of its contrast to Old World farms: "Whereas in the Old World model the farm is naturalized by being integrated with the land, and in turn historicizes the land by making the land a page on which the generations write their story, Schreiner's farm is an unnatural and arbitrary imposition on a doggedly ahistorical landscape." In fact, Coetzee's notion of the "Old World model" may be rather loosely totalizing (Wuthering Heights versus Thrushcross Grange or Talbothays Dairy versus Flintcomb-Ash); but so, it appears, was Schreiner's, whose representation of a rural background for the young Peter Halket<sup>6</sup> seems closer kin to Beatrix Potter than Emily Brontë or Thomas Hardy.

The point is that there is a clear contrast between the anti-colonialist representation of an ahistorical landscape and Schreiner's actual historicization of that landscape through her grave, which shares its grandiose way of seeing, an "over-looking" that both sees all and neglects to see, with her one-time friend and political enemy Cecil Rhodes rather than with her prospectless character Waldó, whose death is so much an absorption into nature that the chickens are left perching on him at the end of *African Farm* (300). The grave at the summit of Buffelskop offers a perfect physical prospect, lying in wait it seems for Cronwright<sup>7</sup> or Jacobson to come along and finish the painterly/political task before the land can be thoroughly claimed for and as history.<sup>8</sup>

So, while Schreiner's published work is distinctly anti-colonialist and her status as a woman in some ways makes her a victim of colonialist patriarchy, her grave, nonetheless, lends

itself to a reading by imperial eyes. It may appear unfair thus to link Schreiner and Rhodes, the latter the very epitome of the imperialist and a man who left his physical mark on Southern Africa in many more ways than in his grave. It seems to me, however, that the similarity of the two final resting-places overrides Rhodes's and Schreiner's political differences and suggests an ultimately shared attitude towards themselves as Europeans in Africa and African history. That the making of the grave-sites into historical markers involves a kind of atavism which counters Enlightenment European attitudes towards history adds a further ironic twist to their implanting themselves in Africa.

That Rhodes's chosen site "imposing and dominant" (Stead 4), which he called "The View of the World," was known as "The Home of the Spirit of My Forefathers" and was already the burial-site of the Matabele ruler Mzilikazi (though Mzilikazi's presence there has its own history of violence) makes his burial not just a writing over of African history but suggests a profoundly similar notion of history in both the "savage" mind and the "civilized."<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Stead (whom we need to treat with some caution on this matter)<sup>10</sup> even records Rhodes's "very quaint" and "childlike" belief that he would return to the earth after his death and "be able to recognize and converse with those who had gone before, and that both he and they would have the keenest interest in the affairs of this planet" (Brantlinger 190). This may not quite be an attempt to set himself up for ancestor-worship, but it comes remarkably close.

In his book *Rule of Darkness*, Brantlinger's chapter on "Atavism and the Occult in the British Adventure Novel" analyzes a mode of writing in late Victorian England which he calls "Imperial Gothic" and which

combines the seemingly scientific, progressive, often Darwinian ideology of imperialism with an antithetical interest in the occult. Although the connections between imperialism and other aspects of late Victorian and Edwardian culture are innumerable, the link with occultism is especially symptomatic of the anxieties that attended the climax of the British empire. (227)

Further, Brantlinger suggests that the intrusion of the occult is an indication of a sense of the failure of Christianity and of faith

in Britain's future. If we accept his thesis, we might see both Rhodes's and Schreiner's graves as compensatory moves for other failures of personal and social natures, symptomatic of the anxieties attending their achievements. The two graves, then, might be seen to represent some final success and fixity, and while we might read Schreiner's more generously as symbol of her belonging *to* the land whereas Rhodes's resists any reading but of ownership *of* the land, both nonetheless assume vast acreages in prospect.

A comparison of the narrative treatment of the graves reveals further similarities. Ruth First and Ann Scott narrate the reinterment of Schreiner both movingly and critically, using Cronwright-Schreiner's biography as chief source. They pick out a number of moments where Cronwright-Schreiner actively mythologizes in his account of the burial: he saw a large eagle that he "could not remember having seen before"; to him it was "like the Bird of Truth from *African Farm* welcoming them to Olive's last resting-place"; and in his speech over the sarcophagus he said that "nature now seemed to him almost visibly permeated by Olive's spirit" (332). First and Scott see in Cronwright's reading/writing of the scene his making of Olive into a "child of nature," through which he could "contain his basic disapproval of her 'strange and incredible' personality" and see her "absorption in nature" as a symbol of her "inability to produce, or be part of the 'real' world" (332). However, they record without comment Cronwright's thanking the African workmen for having carried her coffin—appropriate, he said, "because she had always been their champion." Although this is a gesture towards recognizing the labour that is overlooked by the pastoral tradition, the African workmen still remain nameless, while Schreiner is written into history through the literature of England, a verse from *In Memoriam* (332).

In Stead's account of the burial of Rhodes, the huge labor of carrying Rhodes's body from the house in Muizenberg where he died, thence to Groote Schuur in Cape Town, and thence well over a thousand miles to the Matopos is erased by Stead's repeated use of the passive voice:

With an energy worthy of the founder of their State, a road *was constructed* from Bulawayo to the summit of the Matopos. Along this,

followed by the whole population, the body of Mr. Rhodes *was drawn* to his last resting-place. The coffin *was lowered* into the tomb, the mourners, white and black, filed past the grave, and then a huge block of granite, weighing over three tons [but alone at the scene in possessing individual agency!], sealed the sepulchre from all mortal eyes. (192; emphasis added)

Two photographs, from Cronwright's edition of Schreiner's letters and Stead's *Last Will and Testament* further emphasize the point. Beneath a picture of the anonymous African workmen carrying Olive's coffin up Buffelskop (the gradient is steep) appears the caption: "Olive Schreiner's body nearing the very summit of Buffel's Kop (5,000 ft.), 13th August, 1921" (facing page 370). Stead's photograph of "The Scene at the Burial of Mr. Rhodes" has an equally labour-erasing caption: "The coffin is being lowered into the tomb, and the picture shows the slab, weighing three tons, which covers the coffin" (191).

Cronwright-Schreiner and Stead are clearly responding to a particular contemporary moment (and I do not wish to impugn the sincerity of their mourning), but it is a moment of balanced forces with glances both to past history and history to come, and their writing of the graves writes them into history at the expense of the indigenous population. The private response to the loss of someone loved is not finally separable from the public ceremony. It seems legitimate, therefore, to treat the two men's accounts equally as public documents, even though the two ceremonies do not appear equally public.

In the case of Schreiner's grave, we have already seen in Jacobson's Introduction how it lends itself to readings by people other than the circle of her family and intimate friends, and we see later that Etienne van Heerden treats this public record as still potentially disruptive. In the meantime, it remains to be pointed out that although First and Scott critique Cronwright's original "text," they do so on private rather than public grounds, that it was his way of "contain[ing] his basic disapproval of her 'strange and incredible' personality" (332). They do not offer the reading I am suggesting of settlers' graves representing the final claim on the land and therefore history of that land; that their being committed into the ground represents a commitment to the land that makes them a part of the land, hence both

African and natural, innocently there and very difficult to erase or escape from.

That same process of making African, natural, and innocent occurs with Karen Blixen's representation of the life, death, and burial of Denys Finch Hatton. Unlike Rhodes and Schreiner, Finch Hatton lives on in nothing but memory, memoir, and memorial; he has no mines, no scholarships, no farms, no books to his name. To be sure, Errol Trzebinski has devoted a full-scale biography to him, and Robert Redford—an unlikely, but telling, casting-choice for an English aristocrat—turned him into a Hollywood symbol (though we are never sure of what exactly), but without Blixen it is difficult to imagine him taking a place in history as an individual.

In Finch Hatton, then, I would contend that we have the most overt case of myth-making, and it is therefore interesting to consider the cultural effects of this myth-making—for this reason: whereas Rhodes and Schreiner would have left considerable marks on the history of their time and ours even without their grandiose graves with a view and are thus relatively easy to assess in terms of their *actual* cultural legacy, the effect of Finch Hatton's memorialization is of necessity less material, hence harder to assess, but more insidious.

Part of the problem is posed by his—and Blixen's—aristocracy. Rather than belonging to either of the two rising Victorian groupings represented by Rhodes and Schreiner—the openly capitalist bourgeoisie or the intellectual class—Finch Hatton belongs, at least in Blixen's representation of him, not only to a class—the aristocracy—but to a class-*order* of the past, the rural, quasi-feudal order. *Out of Africa* (which has always been a difficult book to categorize), and to a lesser extent *Shadows on the Grass*, may best be seen as an extended example of pastoral elegy in which Finch Hatton becomes the scholar-pilot whose death is a synecdoche for the death of the ideal farm.

In “hero-izing” both farm and Finch Hatton, Blixen creates a kind of utopian African feudal order. I write “utopian” with a lower-case “u” to retain its literal sense of “no-place,” a sense that should reveal the silences of the text about the *actual* place of the Karen Coffee Company, geographically, and in terms



of the world economic order. The Ngong Hills were not “no-place”; they were somebody *else’s* place inhabited by, among others, Masai and Gikuyu people who were *displaced* until they became squatters on what they had always considered their own land in a process similar to the proletarianization of South African blacks.<sup>11</sup> The farm was willy-nilly a part of colonialist capitalism, not the kind of organic local feudal order Blixen projects. This is not to say that *Out of Africa* ignores economics<sup>12</sup>—though the movie again tellingly does—but that it presents Blixen living *as if* she could ignore it.

All of this seems to confirm at least two of Raymond Williams’s arguments. First, the pastoral is a tradition which tends to erase the violence of economic relations and the harshness of labor conditions; it is precisely that violence and harshness which builds the country-house and its lifestyle, represented in *Out of Africa* by Berkeley Cole’s insistence on the finest glassware to drink his breakfast champagne from when out shooting animals (184). Secondly, that the pattern of power relations whereby city capital dictates what goes on in the country is repeated in colonial and neo-colonial situations where the metropole calls the tune in the colony.<sup>13</sup>

In the tradition of pastoral, *Out of Africa* hides these power relations, but it does so all the more beguilingly because it appears so guileless—the subjectivity of the whole memoir makes it difficult to see the object relations involved as part of a system at all, and the generosity of the subjectivity makes it difficult to see them as exploitative.

For instance, if we look at Blixen’s very moving account of Finch Hatton’s death and burial, we find writing full of mystification and mysticism. Part of the mystification is the result of Blixen’s omission of the fact that she and Denys had quarrelled,<sup>14</sup> part is more standard colonialist stuff: the assumption that there will be “boys” to carry your coffins for you, or aping Stead’s style, that your coffins can *be* carried for you. The mysticism occurs throughout: Blixen suggests that Finch Hatton knows he is going to crash his plane, making that event—possibly caused by inexperience or even plain cramp, making it hard for Finch Hatton to cope with vicious air currents—into some-

thing fated;<sup>15</sup> after the crash, when Blixen and her friend Gustav Mohr are searching for the grave-site Denys had picked out, not only does the cloud lift, but it lifts when they are at the very site they have been looking for; when the “boys” begin digging the grave, Blixen becomes aware for the first time of an echo, an echo she promptly endues with life—“It answered to the strokes of the spades, like a little dog barking” (304); sometime after the burial, Blixen witnesses a cockerel biting off the tongue of a chameleon and reads that as a “sign” and a “spiritual answer” from “Great powers” that “This was clearly not the hour for coddling” (315); after Blixen left Africa, she learned that some lions had been seen on Finch Hatton’s grave and concluded that “It was fit and decorous that the lions should come to Denys’s grave and make him an African monument” (308).<sup>16</sup> Blixen’s phrasing in this last example plays interestingly on what one might call the “natural heraldry” of the lions, as if nature recognizes Finch Hatton’s noble lineage. In contrasting these lions with the heraldic lions on Nelson’s column (“made only out of stone”), Blixen not only links Finch Hatton to the grand memorials of British history, but even elevates her lover above the admiral. The grammatical ambiguity of “and make him an African monument” is also striking: does Blixen mean that the lions turned Finch Hatton (“him” as direct object) into an African monument; or does she mean that they made one *for* him (indirect object)? Either way, we see again the way in which the European presence is naturalized as African; the former reading effects that naturalization even more thoroughly and explicitly than the latter.

Blixen’s writing is imbued with the melancholy charm of the elegy and is frequently wonderful in more than one sense. While it is perhaps unfair to give it Brantlinger’s label of “Imperial Gothic,” Finch Hatton would nonetheless prove a fitting hero for “Imperial Gothic” fiction.<sup>17</sup> Blixen is quite explicit in seeing both Finch Hatton and Berkeley Cole as exiles not just from England but from their rightful heroic time, placing Berkeley Cole as a character out of Dumas’s *Vingt ans après* and Denys as an Elizabethan courtier. Of the pair, she writes: “No other nation than the English could have produced them, but they were examples

of atavism, and theirs was an earlier England, a world which no longer existed" (184); she goes on to suggest that the "particular, instinctive attachment which all Natives of Africa felt towards Berkeley and Denys . . . made me reflect that perhaps the white men of the past . . . would have been in better understanding with the coloured races than we, of our industrial age, shall ever be" (186). Thus does Blixen use a nostalgic, innocent reconstruction of a class order to reconstruct a nostalgic, innocent, pre-industrial, racial one.<sup>18</sup>

A hard-nosed interpretation of Finch Hatton would see the other memorial to him that Blixen describes—a bridge at Eton—as placing him in a Tom Brown-ish tradition of the English public schoolboy assured of his own superiority both home and abroad, one of the Blues who ruled Blacks,<sup>19</sup> or a type of Forster's English character who has not really grown up and whose feelings have not been allowed to develop fully.<sup>20</sup> Even Errol Trzebinski's generally fawning biography suggests that he had something of a "Peter Pan" complex,<sup>21</sup> and one is reminded of another phrase of Brantlinger that "Africa was a place where English boys could become men and men could behave like boys with impunity" (190).

Blixen's romantic idealization of Finch Hatton makes him into a figure like Rupert Brooke's "The Soldier," whose dust not only enriches some corner of a foreign field,<sup>22</sup> but makes it "for ever England" (Silkin 76). It is extraordinary that that is the case two decades after Wilfred Owen had exposed "The old lie: Dulce et decorum est / Pro patria mori" (Silkin 178), and even more extraordinary when we consider that Brooke's poem already feels anachronistic when read against Hardy's "Drummer Hodge." Here Hodge—"the music-hall comedian's term for the boorish, comic, country bumpkin" (Johnson 141)—is shovelled in "uncoffined" not into any recognizable field (of battle, play or farm) but into the strange and empty Karoo "veldt" (Silkin 75-76). Hodge's assimilation into the flatness of this land has more in common with Waldo's becoming his own cairn in *African Farm* than with any of the graves with a view of Rhodes, Finch Hatton, or Schreiner, and it points not only to the class implications of the claiming of natural grandeur for the graves, but to

the very notion of “England” itself. The England that fought the Anglo-Boer war was one consisting of unmarked generic “Hodges” used by big-name politicians, mine-owners, and power-brokers to make their mark on the land. No doubt such exploitation is always a feature of war, but that the same “England” can still be romanticized in Finch Hatton indicates a sad failure to recognize its violence.

Although Brantlinger links the occultism of “Imperial Gothic,” via a citation from Adorno, to fascist politics (245), a link that the underlying violence of Blixen’s romanticization of Finch Hatton supports, the occult is perhaps more commonly associated with resistance than with control. In late Victorian England and America, the occult could be marshalled as a resistance strategy to dominant ideology, notably by feminists, socialists, and abolitionists,<sup>23</sup> but, more importantly for the purposes of this paper, the occultism of indigenous African practice has fairly consistently been used in opposition to European colonialism and the fascist-style administrations that that depended on.

Such opposition has not always been successful or even recognized, but if we return to South Africa again, we find a momentous event involving ancestral beliefs shaping the history and landscape of the Xhosa people at the very time when Schreiner was a young child and moving from one mission station to the next in the British defined Eastern Cape Colony. Colonialist and subsequently apartheid history of the cattle-killings of 1856-57 read them either as a kind of “mass-suicide,” almost as if the Xhosa were reacting purely to internal impulses not to external pressure, or as a plot against the colonial authorities (Switzer 71). Current attitudes, particularly following the work of Jeff Peires, see the cattle-killing as an act, in part at least, of cultural resistance. Les Switzer points out that for “most believers, the cattle-killing movement was their last hope to preserve the old way of life” (71). What is interesting is that what looks like an unadulteratedly “African” response—based on the prophecy that the Xhosa ancestors would return to allow the creation event (uHlanga) to be repeated—is affected by Western traditions; whilst the first prophets of uHlanga saw it incorporating all people, Xhosa and non-Xhosa, “settler antagonism . . . soon

prompted the believers to declare that whites were not eligible to enter the promised land (they had killed the son of God)" (Switzer 70). In other words, it is not only Xhosa beliefs which drive the movement; Christian beliefs too are used as a kind of prototype of "liberation theology" against the colonial powers.<sup>24</sup>

Uses of such resistance feature in fiction also from the colonial period through the apartheid era, with two notable appearances in Schreiner's *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* and Percy Mtwa and Mbongeni Ngema's *Woza, Albert!* In Schreiner's polemical novella, Trooper Peter is visited by a mysterious stranger—"a Jew of Palestine" (21)—who gradually makes Peter aware of the indefensibility of the British slaughter in Mashonaland. Finally, Peter, whose name alone associates him with Christ's disciple, enacts the ultimate Christian sacrifice by freeing a Shona captive due to be lynched the next day and dying in his place. His body remains, unmarked except by a make-shift cairn (133), "lying under the little tree, with the red sand trodden down over him, in which a black man's and a white man's blood were mingled" (131). Schreiner's book is a direct attack on Rhodes's policies and strategies and excoriates a world where brutal capitalism hides behind the rhetoric of Christianity and improving civilization.

It is a measure of the longevity of Southern Africa's pain that nearly a century later Percy Mtwa and Mbongeni Ngema should produce an almost identically motivated strategy in *Woza, Albert!* Instead of an attack on Rhodes and the mowing down of Shona and Ndebele "rebels," *Woza Albert!* attacks the hypocrisy of white South Africa claiming to be a Christian state when mowing down demonstrators at such places as Sharpeville and Soweto. The play imagines what would happen were Christ ("Morena") to return to contemporary South Africa and shows his daily-increasing anger and outrage at the treatment of black South Africans. Morena is killed while walking across the water from prison on Robben Island, but rises again on the third day in the very graveyard where Zulu Boy (still nameless after all these years) has now got a job as caretaker. In a final scene blending Christian mythology and traditional African beliefs, Zulu Boy persuades Morena to raise the heroes of South Africa's liberation struggle

from the dead. Performances of *Woza, Albert!* would normally be followed by the singing of “Nkosi sikelel’ iAfrika” and by the chant and response “Mayibuye!” (“Let it return”), “iAfrika.” In *Woza, Albert!* Christianity, the belief in ancestors’ continued presence beyond the grave, memory, and history all come together. The narrative line of colonialist history, a chain of white writing of and on the land, is thus challenged by the resurrection/insurrection of African “ghosts.”

The struggle necessarily continues after the formal removal of apartheid: in his autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom*, Nelson Mandela resurrects an idyllic rural African landscape in recalling his birth-place and early childhood in Qunu in the Transkei. He reclaims this landscape which had been marked already, some seventy years earlier, by the colonialist exploitation of the effects of the cattle-killing, and re-presents his “authentic” place of origin as a kind of framing device in his own history; Mandela recounts, for instance, how, on his release from jail, a visit to his mother’s grave brought home to him the contrast between the past and the present: “When I was young, the village was tidy, the water pure, and the grass green and unsullied as far as the eye could see. Kraals were swept, the topsoil was conserved, fields were neatly divided. But now the village was unswept, the water polluted, and the countryside littered with plastic bags and wrappers” (506). And in his moving peroration Mandela again recalls that time of childhood when he felt that he was “free to run in the fields near my mother’s hut, free to swim in the clear stream that ran through my village, free to roast mealies under the stars and ride the broad backs of slow-moving bulls” (543). Clearly, the weapon of memory can be wielded in any number of ways in writing the land.<sup>25</sup>

If we return for one last time to Schreiner’s grave on Buffelskop, for instance, we can see that Etienne van Heerden’s practice in the story “The Resurrection of Olive Schreiner” is more in line with Mtwā and Ngema’s act of cultural disruption than it is with Cronwright’s attempt at stabilization; it looks less to past history and making Schreiner an African memorial than to the future in which she might be a potentially unifying force, breaking the racial impasse of apartheid.

While researching the Schreiner documents in Cradock public library—what more clear emblem of the official repository of history-as-writing and writing-as-history?—van Heerden’s narrator reflects back to his childhood and the violence surrounding a visit to town by the prime minister. Son of an English-speaking mother and Afrikaner father, the narrator stages a symbolic resurrection of Schreiner. Together with his friend Willempie, son of the laborer Windpomp killed in the story, he steals Schreiner’s bones from the sarcophagus on top of Buffelskop, weaves them together with wire, dresses them in an old dress of his mother’s and erects the entire effigy on a “cross . . . made from old fencing-droppers and a sawn-down telephone pole” (180). The whole process is conceived of as an act of rebellion—resurrection as insurrection again—driven by a confusing array of motives: the narrator’s identification with his “brave ancestors, the Rebels, who would not bow before the British Empire” (179); the town librarian’s declaration that “Olive understood this country. She could unite. She could write life back into the country” (166); and the narrator’s and Willempie’s sense of grief and outrage at the death of Willempie’s father at the hands of the local white civil defence force commando.

The unifying purpose of their rebellion is undercut by reminders of the terrible divisions in South African society, and its efficacy is obviously in question. Van Heerden emphasizes the weakness of their gesture by making Schreiner’s skeleton “not complete: one arm was—crazily—only shoulder and hand with fingerbones” (180). Nevertheless, the story ends back in the Cradock Library with a reassertion of “Olive Schreiner” as written, available, and potentially unifying history, still a presence:

What can I say?  
*Thy voice is on the rolling air,*  
*I hear thee where the waters run,*  
*Thou standest in the rising sun . . . ?*  
 Yes, that too. (183)<sup>26</sup>

Postcolonial Africa (including the “new” South Africa) clearly has a history—that sense of Jacobson’s of the past being an integral part of the present; and its graves—whether unknown or grandiose—are markers both of violence and of sacrifice. But

here at the “end of history” what future is there for a “new” African history? In the same way that it is possible to re-write the statute books and still not remove *de facto* apartheid,<sup>27</sup> even a re-writing of history texts, with the inclusion of oral history and so on, may not be adequate to re-order the dominant way of seeing embodied there by the statue of Rhodes on the backside of Table Mountain and enshrined in his “View of the World” at the top of the Matopos.

## NOTES

- 1 My attempt is similar to Said’s examination of the discourse of Orientalism—“a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (3)—and to Mudimbe’s conclusion in *The Invention of Africa* that discourse on Africa has been dependent on Western thought.
- 2 I use this phrase as an allusion to Williams’s work, not just because it seems appropriate and accurate in itself, but also because the arguments Williams makes in *The Country and the City* underpin much of my reading in this essay—that the tradition of pastoral literature has tended to erase the real nature of economic exploitation.
- 3 See Crais: “The Vacant Land: the Mythology of British Expansion in the Eastern Cape, South Africa”; Pratt 43-67.
- 4 For Derrida’s discussion of “A Writing Lesson,” see especially *Of Grammatology* 97-140. Derrida’s whole argument in *Of Grammatology* seems relevant to this essay in its questioning of the “civilized”/“savage” binarism (among others), in its insistence on the violence of writing, and in its extension of the notion of “writing” beyond the act of making legible marks on a page.
- 5 Or one might think of the early Zionist slogan pertaining to a similarly arid landscape—“A land without people for a people without land.”
- 6 See Schreiner, *Trooper Peter* 7-8; or the “fantasy England of constant tea-parties, snowfalls and woodland” (First 93) of her first novel *Undine*.
- 7 First and Scott point to the fact that while Cronwright may have ignored or been highhanded with regard to some of the directives of Olive’s will, he was assiduous in carrying out her wishes regarding the burial (330-32). The suggestion that he wrote himself into history with her also arises in the phrase used by some of Olive’s close women friends regarding his “autobiography of his wife” (First 20).
- 8 The process of establishing a vantage point and then claiming the land below it by writing is compressed in the work of the Victorian travel-writers working in the “Lord-of-all-I-survey” mode identified by Pratt. She has pointed out how the Victorians opted for “a brand of verbal painting whose highest calling was to produce for the home audience the peak moments at which geographical ‘discoveries’ were ‘won’ for England” (201). Pratt also plays interestingly on the multiple associations of the “prospect” through that word’s cognate in the verb “to prospect” (61). She shows how John Barrow’s description of the Cape presents landscape from an aesthetic prospect in such a way as to stress its mineral prospects and its future prospects as colonizable.
- 9 In retaining these terms, I am again recalling Lévi-Strauss, and to some extent my comparison of non-rational belief is in line with his transvaluation of them:



beliefs are “preferences . . . denoting a kind of wisdom which savage races practised spontaneously and the rejection of which, by the modern world, is the real madness” (123); rather than reverse the binarism, however, my aim is to collapse it.

- 10 Stead is an interesting intermediary here as he was both a close ally of Schreiner on the issue of prostitution, and such a close friend and admirer of Rhodes that he was at one point chosen by Rhodes as an executor of his will. Stead’s fame as pioneering editor (of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and *The Review of Reviews*) and social campaigner is matched by the notoriety of his belief in the spirit world. Closely associated with various occultist movements around the turn of the century, Stead anticipated the tabloid journalism of our own day by publishing interviews with the dead (see Brantlinger 247-49).
- 11 One of the myths of white occupancy of the land that *Out of Africa* ought to have given the lie to is the myth of white farming’s greater efficiency, productivity, and profitability, and the “natural” evolution of a capitalist agriculture in the first place. The underdevelopment of rural Africa has been described by numerous historians (see Palmer and Parsons); Keegan and van Onselen, through the Wits Oral History Project, have shown how the capitalization of South African farming did not come about through some sort of natural selection process whereby the fittest white farming techniques survived, driving peasant and pastoralist to extinction. Rather, the creation of a capitalist South African agriculture depended on massive government intervention through legislation, advantageous economic incentives, and the development of infrastructure in the service of big capital, all underpinned by military and police power. Those farms that were most highly capitalized and seemed to be models of “progressive” farming were not necessarily the most efficient or even profitable (see Keegan: *Rural Transformation*, esp. ch. 4: “Interventions of the capitalist state and the development of the arable highveld”) and were either playthings of the very rich (“objects of conspicuous consumption” [Keegan 115]) or else, like the fictional farm in Gordimer’s *The Conservationist*, a tax write-off.
- 12 See esp. 275-82.
- 13 This is the subject of the last two chapters of *The City and the Country* 278-306. It is perhaps apposite to note that Schreiner went to England to get *African Farm* published, and that Blixen chose to write in English rather than her native Danish or the farm’s lingua franca Kiswahili. The “Africa” of both writers, however it is represented, is all too easily apprehended by the metropolitan audience as “merely exotic” (Williams 288), not as part and parcel of an economic order.
- 14 See Thurman 233-34 and 246; Pelensky 117-18 and 127; Trzebinski 434-35.
- 15 For the cause of the crash, see Trzebinski 446. For the idea of its being fated, see also Trzebinski 440-41, where she quotes Beryl Markham’s claim that “both Arap Ruta, her personal servant, and Tom Campbell Black, her flying instructor, had strange premonitions” (440, 443). Blixen records that “This was the only time that I asked Denys to take me with him on his aeroplane that he would not do it” (297). If Finch Hatton really did know, as Yeats imagines Major Robert Gregory knowing, that he would “Meet [his] fate / Somewhere among the clouds above” (Yeats 69), then one has to ask about the “fate” of Kamau, “his own boy,” who also died in the crash. According to Blixen, he “was terrified of flying” (298), anyway; his silence is perhaps the most eloquent example of the violence of the European versions of Africa mentioned in this essay.
- 16 In light of my subsequent discussion of specifically war-related elegies, it is also interesting to speculate whether or not Blixen had Horace and/or Wilfred Owen in mind when she wrote, “It was fit and decorous.”

- 17 As an aristocratic sportsman, he exhibits a certain heroic “manliness,” meeting (in part at least) two out of the three requirements Brantlinger identifies as the characteristics of Imperial Gothic (230). Blixen represents him as outside the pale of “ordinary” colonial life, and suggests that his success as a safari-organizer was due to his skill as a tracker and hunter—skill that suggests “individual regression or going native”; furthermore, his flying gives him opportunities for “adventure and heroism” that Imperial Gothic sees as diminished in the modern world (Brantlinger 230).
- 18 In fact, Blixen’s comment re the “Natives” affection for Finch Hatton should be modified by the fact that their nickname for him meant “To tread upon” (see Pelensky 102; Thurman 127; Trzebinski 210).
- 19 See Mangan, esp. the essay by Kirk-Greene 179-201.
- 20 See Forster: “It is not that the Englishman can’t feel—it is that he is afraid to feel. He has been taught at his public school that feeling is bad form” (5). Thurman describes Finch Hatton as having “an almost morbid aversion to emotional demands” (246).
- 21 Passim: see, e.g., 234-35 or 428.
- 22 Or like Brooke himself: both born in 1887, they had similar public-school and Oxbridge educations, and earned reputations for style and good looks that made them attractive to men as well as women. More fundamentally, it is their “fields” that connect them: the memorial to Finch Hatton at Eton bears the motto “Famous in these fields and by his many friends much beloved” (*Out of Africa* 307); the connection between Eton’s fields of play and England’s fields of battle is a well-established one, but I find the link between those two and the field of the ideal rural England (a field that unlike the Karoo veld has “corners”) irresistible. The connection hammers home the point that the pastoral mode is anything but transparent in its representation of a “natural” landscape.
- 23 Owen points out the various connections between spiritualism and dissenting religion, socialism, and abolitionism; he contends that “women’s rights formed an integral, although not dominant part of the progressive spiritualist programme” (27) and that “Victorian mediumship was a form of protest and dissent which predated ‘political’ awareness” (240). Similarly, Braude draws attention to “spiritualism’s association with abolition” (29) and contends that “Spiritualism held two attractions that proved irresistible to thousands of Americans: rebellion against death and rebellion against authority” (30).
- 24 See also Crais, ch. 10, “Empire and the Ancestors.” Crais points out that the symbolism of the prophetesses’ dreams “stressed, if only implicitly, the pre-colonial order and the return to the beginning of time,” but goes on to say that “the prophecies seamlessly incorporated symbols of Christian eschatology”; that incorporation makes the movement “a case in which the essentially conservative teachings of evangelical-mission Christianity were subverted into an ideology of resistance” (207). Peires stresses that it is a misconception to see the cattle killing as a “pagan reaction” (as colonialist historians had tended to do); instead, the movement was, according to Peires “one which combined Christian and pre-Christian elements fused under the heroic leadership of the expected redeemer, the son of Sifubasibanzi, the Broad-Chested One” (123).
- 25 Mattera uses the phrase “Memory is a weapon” (151) in his autobiographical account of Sophiatown in the 1950s, in which he recalls a period of heterogeneity and uninhibited cultural expression. While my essay has concentrated on rural rather than urban landscape, it seems pertinent to point out that Mattera’s romanticization of Sophiatown and of his own gangsterism evinces another kind of nostalgia, another memorial reconstruction of relative innocence in a less viciously complicated age.

- 26 Although it is a "crazy" sort of leap, van Heerden's qualified fictional optimism in the face of the violence of apartheid matches the qualified optimism of Albie Sachs, maimed by a car-bomb in Maputo in 1988. Like van Heerden's fictional Schreiner skeleton, Sachs was left without an arm but amazingly without bitterness, imagining only "soft vengeance" in an idealistic culture of gentleness and love where the rule of law is not a weapon exploited by rulers and lawyers. I mention Sachs because of his violent dis-arming and his disarming of violence, and because in *The Soft Vengeance of a Freedom Fighter* one of the key ancestral ghosts he brings back is Ruth First: she who most impressively resurrected the rebel Schreiner, but who paid for her own rebellion against apartheid with her own life, assassinated in a letter-bomb attack.
- 27 See Sachs's caution that a Bill of Rights might "simply be a means of entrenching white privilege" (165).

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